

**For Immediate Release**

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## **EXCEPTIONAL COLLECTION OF ITALIAN RENAISSANCE BRONZES TO BE OFFERED AT CHRISTIE'S IN DECEMBER**

**The Beit Collection of Early Italian Bronzes**  
**Thursday, 7 December 2006**



**King Street** – Christie's announce that they will offer *The Beit Collection of Early Italian Bronzes* as part of the auction of *Important European Furniture, Sculpture, Carpets and Works of Art* on 7 December 2006. This collection of 62 Italian bronzes was assembled by renowned philanthropist and Golden Age collector Alfred Beit (1853-1906) and his brother Sir Otto Beit, 1<sup>st</sup> Bt. (1865-1930) and offers a unique glimpse into one of the most exceptional collections of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is expected to realise a collective total in the region of £1.5 million.

Donald Johnston, Director and Head of the Sculpture Department at Christie's, London: *'Alfred and Otto Beit are written in history as two of the most prolific and discerning collectors of the last 150 years. As one of the richest families in Britain, they were able to collect without compromise as demonstrated by the exceptional collection of bronzes to be offered at Christie's in December. This collection includes one of the most impressive groupings of 16<sup>th</sup> century Italian bronzes ever presented to the market, and provides an opportunity for both collectors and institutions to acquire for themselves an Italian Renaissance bronze with exceptional provenance.'*

Leading the collection is a bronze figure of a gladiator by one of the leading sculptors of the Renaissance, Andrea del Briosco, called Riccio (1470-1532). Born in Trento in 1470, Riccio moved to Padua where he was taught by Bartolomeo Bellano (*circa* 1440-1496), who had himself been an assistant of Donatello. A contemporary of Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael, Riccio is written in the history of the Italian Renaissance for his astounding ability with bronze sculpture. He is most famous for casting small bronze figures in an antique style, as in the present example *illustrated right*. Measuring 30.8cm in height, the model of a gladiator exemplifies the artist's outstanding ability with its delicate, detailed surface and a figure of bustling, vibrant form. The model of a gladiator is expected to realise £700,000-1,000,000. A figure of a rampant satyr attributed to Riccio and measuring 26.3 cm in height will also be included. Cast in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, the present example would originally have been presented with another figure of a satyr attached to the present beast in an erotic manner. The model has suffered from the prudish views of preceding generations as the second satyr is missing. It is expected to realise £200,000-300,000.



Further highlights include a bronze figure of Morgante, the most famous dwarf in the Court of the Medici in the 16<sup>th</sup> century who is famously said to have fought a monkey to the amusement of Duke Cosimo I. Cast in the workshop of Giambologna in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, it is expected to realise £3,000-5,000. A late 15<sup>th</sup> century bronze figure of David from the workshop of Bartolomeo Bellano (*circa* 1440-1496), who had worked as an assistant to Donatello, carries an estimate of £7,000-10,000 and a bronze figure of Neptune attributed to Tiziano Minio (d.1552) is expected to realise £30,000-50,000. The auction will also offer a selection of more functional bronzes, all cast at the request of noble patrons and including salt cellars, inkwells, a writing casket, bells, quill holders and oil lamps. A late 16<sup>th</sup> century Venetian doorknocker, measuring 32.4 cm in height and decorated with decadent and impressive swirls of character, carries an estimate of £25,000-35,000 while a bronze footed wine-cooler dating to the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century is expected to realise £30,000-50,000.



Alfred Beit (1853-1906) was described by his friend Julius Wernher as *'a joyous, lusty fellow of extraordinary goodness of heart and very great business ability, compared to whom we are Philistine.'*

He was born in Hamburg, Germany and moved to Amsterdam at the age of 18 where he was employed by a firm of diamond merchants. In 1875, he made his first visit to South Africa where he was to amass a fortune through mining diamonds and gold. Alfred Beit entered into partnership with Wernher and moved to London, where he had a mansion built by Eustace Balfour in Park Lane and acquired Tewin Water, a stately home in Hertfordshire. Both Beit and Wernher used their wealth to amass art collections at a time when many of the great European Collections were being dispersed. With the guidance and advice of renowned scholar Dr. Wilhelm von Bode (1845-1929), who was Director General of the Berlin Museums and who also advised Julius Wernher, Beit amassed an exceptional collection of paintings and Italian bronzes. He died childless at the age of 53 and left to charity the exceptional sum of £2 million – the equivalent to approximately £140 million today.

The principal beneficiary to Alfred's estate was his brother Sir Otto Beit, 1<sup>st</sup> Bt. (1865-1930) who continued to add to the collection of paintings and Italian bronzes while administering the vast Beit Trust, which had received over half Alfred's bequest and worked to promote education, transport and communication in central and southern Africa. Sir Otto was succeeded by his son Sir Alfred Lein Beit, 2<sup>nd</sup> Bt. (1903-1994) who served with the R.A.F. during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War before settling in South Africa. Strongly opposed to the racist policies that were being introduced by the Nationalist government, Sir Alfred moved to the impressive Russborough in County Wicklow, Ireland which became home to one of the Europe's most impressive private art collections and the headquarters of the Alfred Beit Foundation. In 1986 and 1987, Sir Alfred donated the majority of the collection to the National Gallery of Ireland. Sir Alfred died childless in 1994 and prior to her death in 2005, Lady Beit donated the collection of early Italian bronzes to the Alfred Beit Foundation in order that they might secure the future of Russborough.

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*Images available on request*  
*Visit Christie's at [www.christies.com](http://www.christies.com)*

**Notes to editors:**

- Highlights from *The Beit Collection of Early Italian Bronzes* will be on public view at Christie's New York from 14 to 19 October 2006 and at Christie's King Street from 3 to 6 December 2006.

- In December 2006 Christie's will host a week of auctions dedicated to classical collecting categories and including an impressive selection of old master paintings and drawings, European furniture, sculpture, tapestries and important clocks. All works of art will be on public view before going under the hammer between 5 and 8 December. See [www.christies.com](http://www.christies.com) for further details.

- In 2005, Christie's Furniture and Sculpture Sales in London realised a total of £37,200,488 million (\$65,993,666/ €54,870,720) establishing a 70% market share over the nearest rivals.