

For Immediate Release

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CONNOISSEUR'S COLLECTION OF MASTER DRAWINGS TO BE OFFERED AT CHRISTIE'S IN DECEMBER

Master Drawings from the Oppé Collection
Tuesday, 5 December 2006



King Street – Christie's announces the auction of *Master Drawings from the Oppé Collection* at King Street, London on 5 December 2006. Assembled by renowned scholar and connoisseur Paul Oppé (1878-1957), this group represents one of the last great 20th century collections of old master drawings to remain in private hands and includes a diverse selection of approximately 120 lots with individual estimates ranging from £150 to £600,000. The auction will present a fascinating glimpse of the treasures available on the British Art market in the early 20th century and will offer works by Dutch, Flemish, Italian, British and Spanish artists including Agostino Carracci, Paolo Veronese, J. R. Cozens, Francesco Guardi and the Tiepolo family.

The auction is led by *El Toro Mariposa – The Butterfly Bull*, a fantastically surreal drawing by Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes (1746-1828) which is expected to realise £400,000-600,000.

El Toro Mariposa – The Butterfly Bull by Francisco José de Goya y Lucientes (1746-1828) illustrated right is from an album of drawings dating from the artist's period of voluntary exile in Bordeaux towards the end of his life. While most of Goya's studies at this time were of French subjects, the present example is an exception with its dreamlike Spanish subject; a fantasy bull appears to be suspended beneath grotesque faces set with butterfly wings. The composition is the perfect expression of Goya's reputation as the first truly modern artist with a surrealism that prefigures Odilon Redon and a searching line that anticipates the young Picasso. One of the most impressive drawings by the artist to come to the market in recent years, it is expected to realise £400,000 to £600,000.



Paul Oppé acquired his first watercolour by John Robert Cozens (1752-1799) in 1909, and went on to own more than 140 examples. He established himself as an authority on the artist and his catalogue raisonné, published in 1952 after a lifetime of work, remains the key text on Cozens. The auction in December will offer *View of the Galleria di Sopra above Lake Albano* which is expected to realise £30,000-50,000 illustrated left. This bold and

vibrant watercolour portrays the Galleria di Sopra, a road built by Pope Urban VIII to link his summer palace in Castel Gandolfo with Albano. The Pope had several viewing points created along the route in order that people may admire the view in transit, and the present work depicts one of these dramatic locations.

A further highlight of the auction is *Mercury, Venus, Cupid, Saturn and other figures* by Paolo Caliari, il Veronese (1528-1588), a series of figure-studies by the great Italian master. Centre-left at the bottom of the page is the mark of Sir Joshua Reynolds, in whose collection the drawing once belonged. Acquired by Oppé at a London auction house for

10 shillings, this loose, impulsive gathering of figure sketches is estimated to realise £200,000-300,000 *illustrated below left*. Oppé's held a great love of landscapes and caricatures which form the greater part of the collection. *The Dwarf pointing to the right*, a fine example of a caricature by Agostino Carracci (1557-1602) *illustrated top left page 1* will be offered at the sale with an estimate of £50,000-70,000. Drawn in connection with the painting *Fête Champêtre* now in the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Marseilles, this playful depiction in red chalk is thought to have been executed in the first half of the 1580s when Carracci was in his early 20s. It demonstrates the artist's instinctive ability to convey vitality and character in broad strokes of chalk.

The auction will also offer a number of drawings with more widely accessible estimates, including two study drawings of figures by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696-1770), one of the greatest Italian artists of the 18th century, which are offered together with an estimate of £1,500-2,500, and three study drawings of a faun, a man and a boy by the same hand (offered as one lot - estimate: £2,500-3,500). *A landscape with trees and a walled park* by Wenceslaus Hollar (1607-1677) is expected to realise £4,000-6,000 and *The Madonna and Child* by Alonso Cano (1601-1667), a preparatory drawing for a wood sculpture now in the Museum of Granada Cathedral, carries an estimate of £1,500-2,000.



Paul Oppé (1878-1957) was a renowned scholar and a respected connoisseur, described by Kenneth Clark as 'a born collector' who had 'an eye for quality and a considerable gift of analysis.' Having attended St. Andrew's University at the age of just 16, he went on to Oxford where he took a double first in Greats. In 1905 he joined the Board of Education and, with the exception of two periods at the Victoria and Albert Museum, the second time as Deputy Director, and war service on the Ministry of Munitions, he remained a Civil Servant until his retirement in 1938. He started to collect drawings in 1900 while still at Oxford when they could be acquired at little cost (in 1910 he bought 17 watercolours by Francis Towne for 25 shillings, including the artist's two masterpieces of *The Source of the Arveyron*). Over the following decades he patiently and diligently assembled a significant collection of some 3,000 works. According to Kenneth Clark, 'A battered portfolio on a green baize table had an irresistible fascination for him and it is easy to picture his dark, Disraelian head bending intently over a bundle of drawings, till a sardonic smile indicated that some rarity had escaped the auctioneer's attention.'

It was the field of 18th and early 19th century British drawings that Paul Oppé was best known to the public, publishing more than 30 articles and books on various aspects of the subject and regularly exhibiting works from his collection. The British drawings, numbering more than 3,000, were acquired by Tate Britain in 1996 and now form a major part of the gallery's holdings of works on paper. The scope and quality of Oppé's collection was recognized in the year after his death by an Exhibition held at the Royal Academy.

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Images available on request
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Notes to Editors:

- 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 for further details.