

For Immediate Release

1 November 2006

Contact: Matthew Paton

020.7389.2965

mpaton@christies.com

BOTTICELLI, BELLOTTO AND RUBENS LEAD CHRISTIE'S DECEMBER SALE OF IMPORTANT OLD MASTER PICTURES

Important Old Master Pictures
Thursday, 7 December 2006 at 7pm

London – Christie's evening sale of *Important Old Master Pictures* in London on 7 December 2006 will include a diverse offering of Dutch, Flemish, French, German, Italian and Spanish pictures including works by a number of Western art's most revered artists including Botticelli, Guardi, Rubens and Tiepolo. The auction builds on the success of this year's international sales of Old Master Pictures which have realised a total of £93 million to date. The December auction is expected to realise in the region of £25 million.



A leading highlight of the sale is *The Madonna and Child* by Sandro di Filipepi, known as Botticelli (circa 1445-1510), one of the most prominent and influential artists of the early Renaissance (estimate: £1,500,000-2,500,000). Most recognised for his masterpiece *The Birth of Venus*, the majority of Botticelli's paintings are religious scenes. Having trained under Filippo Lippi (circa 1406-1469), Botticelli painted with a sense of relief and dimension that carried forward his teacher's advances in Western art. A beautiful and striking painting which sensitively portrays the thoughtful Mary with the infant Christ, the present work displays the aesthetic magnetism for which the artist is so renowned. This painting is one of many which entered British collections during the 19th century and, having passed through the collection of Cyril

Flower, Lord Battersea (1843-1907) it was acquired by Sir Thomas Merton, K.B.E. (1888-1969), a trustee of the National Gallery and notable collector of Renaissance pictures. It is one of four works being offered from the Merton Collection, which includes a pair of portraits by Bartel Beham (1502-1540) and *The Madonna and Child*, a devotional panel by the Master of Apollo and Daphne (active in the late 15th century).

A further highlight of the sale is an exceptional painting by Pieter Breughel II (1564/5-1637/8), *The Battle between Carnival and Lent* (estimate: £2,500,000-3,500,000). One of the most recognised of all subjects painted by the Breughel family, this is one of only two examples universally accepted as autograph and the only one to remain in private hands. This work portrays the contrast between the season of Carnival, known for excessive drinking, eating and dancing, and the season of Lent, ruled by fasting and penitence, with each season represented by a character. Lent is a nun wearing symbols of the Church and followed by an entourage of people performing acts of



penitence while Carnival is a man riding a beer barrel, a roasting spit held forward as a lance with a trail of revellers following on.

An outstanding pair of views by Bernardo Bellotto (1721-1780) will be offered together at the sale (estimate: £3,000,000-4,000,000). *The Temple of Antoninus and Faustina in the Roman Forum* and *The Roman Forum with the Temple of Castor and Pollux* are painted from a very similar position and offer an entertaining view of 18th century tourists viewing the famous landmarks. The pair was bought by



Patrick Hume, a Berkshire landowner, in 1773 from the widow of Consul Smith, the most important patron of Bellotto's uncle and teacher, Antonio Canal, Il Canaletto (1697-1768). A rediscovered pair of views of Rome by Gaspar van Wittel, called Vanvitelli (1652/3-1736) will also be offered in the sale. *Rome, the Castel Sant'Angelo and the apse of San Giovanni dei Fiorentini*; and *Rome,*

the Ponte Rotto with the Aventine Hill beyond are recorded in an inventory of 1719 as having been acquired by Jacques de Matignon, Comte de Torigny and duc de Valentinois (1689-1751) who went on to rule Monaco after the death of his wife as Jacques, 1^{er} Grimaldi. This exceptional rediscovered pair of paintings has been in the possession of the family of the present owner since the beginning of the 20th century and is expected to realise £300,000-500,000.

A further highlight is a magnificent oil sketch by Sir Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). *Saint Michael subduing Lucifer* (estimate: £1,200,000-1,800,000) is a study for a sculpture at the Premonstratensian church of St. Michael's Abbey in Antwerp, the resting place of the artist's mother and brother. The principal statue at the altar of the church was flanked by a number of white alabaster sculptures 2.25 metres high, including that of Saint Michael subduing Lucifer. Made by Hans van Mildert (1588-1638), a friend of Rubens, the sculptures are now all in St. Trudo Church in North Brabant, Holland. The present oil sketch is a study for a sculpture and presents a three dimensional quality with loose, flowing brush-strokes. Saint Michael, the warrior angel, stands dominantly over a reclining Lucifer, a thunder bolt in his hand ready to deliver a punishing blow.



The Martyrdom of Saint Lawrence by Jusepe de Ribera (1591-1652) is one of the finest examples of the artist's work to appear at auction in recent years (estimate: £1,000,000-1,500,000). Ribera was born in Spain but moved to Italy as a young man where he absorbed the influence and style of the recently deceased Caravaggio. The present work, which measures 206 x 155 cm, illustrates Ribera's masterful ability with intense light and contrasting shade, and demonstrates an exceptional ability in technique. Saint Lawrence was an early martyr of the church, executed on a grill in Rome in 258 AD. The present work depicts the Saint as he is prepared for his fate, his robe having been removed and subtle flames apparent in the background as he looks to heaven with open hands.

Haarlem Church with market sellers and elegant company promenading, a newly discovered painting by Gerrit Berckheyde (1638-1698), is expected to realise £300,000-400,000. Together with Jan van der Heyden, Berckheyde is considered to be the greatest Dutch painter of townscapes in the 17th century and his depictions of his home town, Haarlem, are the most highly regarded. The present work shows the fish market and the north transept of St. Bavo's Cathedral with the town hall apparent in the background. A set of four paintings by Jean-Baptiste Van Mour (1671-1737), the principal precursor to the Orientalists, are a further highlight of the auction. Van Mour was born in Valenciennes and moved to Istanbul in 1699. He remained there for most of his days and is best remembered for his portrayals of life in the Ottoman Empire. *Armenian women embroidering*, *Armenian women drinking coffee*, *an Armenian interior with a lord and his favourite* and *Greek soldiers merrymaking* are offered together with an estimate of £180,000-220,000.



Further highlights of the sale include a selection of paintings by Francesco Guardi (1712-1793) led by *The Punta della Dogana, Venice, the Giudecca and the Redentore beyond* (estimate: £600,00-800,00), and *The Stoning of Saint Stephen* by Giandomenico Tiepolo (1727-1804) commissioned in 1754 by Abbot Christoph Balbus for the Benedictine Abbey at Schwarzach (estimate: £400,000-600,000).

The auction will also present selected works of art from the collection of the late Professor René Küss, a prominent French surgeon and collector of both Old Master and Impressionist paintings. The collection includes works by Cranach, Fragonard, Panini, Rubens and Tiepolo and offers a number of sketches and rare subjects. Highlights include *Ill matched lovers* by Lucas Cranach II (1515-1586) (estimate: £100,000-150,000), *Landscape with a farm* by David Teniers the Younger (1610-1690) (estimate: £30,000-50,000) and *La porta del Dolo* by Francesco Guardi (1712-1793) which carries an estimate of £60,000-80,000.

#

Images available on request
Visit Christie's on the web at www.christies.com

Notes to editors:

- The day sale of Old Master Pictures on Friday 8 December will be available through Christie's innovative live bidding system **Christie's LIVE®**, offering collectors and enthusiasts around the world the opportunity to bid while enjoying the look, sound and feel of the sale from their personal computer. The auction will include approximately 150 Dutch, Flemish, French, German, Italian and Spanish paintings from the 14th through to the 19th centuries, with estimates ranging from £5,000 to £80,000.
- Christie's has an unrivalled expertise in the field of Old Master Pictures, and hold major auctions of Important Old Masters twice a year in both London and New York. Christie's also hold regular sales of Old Master Pictures in the more regional markets of France, Italy, Holland, Spain and Christie's South Kensington.
- In 2005, Christie's International Old Master Department achieved annual sales of £127.5 million / \$230.8 million, reaffirming their position as market leaders in both the Old Master Picture and Old Master Drawing categories, with a 53% market share over the nearest competitor in the Old Master category as a whole.
- 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.