

For Immediate Release

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DISTINCTLY RUSSIAN



Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovskii, *St Isaac's on a frosty day*,
(estimate: £1,000,000-1,500,000).

Important Russian Pictures

30 November 2004

London – This Autumn Christie's will present an exceptional selection of Russian art, objects and silver of the highest quality in two sales, *Important Russian Pictures* on 30 November and *Russian Works of Art and Important Silver and Gold* on 30 November and 1 December.

The *Important Russian Pictures* sale on 30 November 2004 will be led by a director with more than 20 years experience in the Russian field in London, New York and Geneva. The sale will consist of approximately 340 lots, predominantly from the period 1800-1920, and is expected to fetch in the region of £8 million. A top highlight of the *Important Russian Pictures* sale is Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovskii's *St Isaac's on a frosty day*, an extremely rare treatment of an architectural subject by the artist and an excellent example of his mature work (estimate: £1,000,000-1,500,000). St Isaac's Cathedral, named after St. Isaac of Dalmatia, the saint on whose name-day St. Petersburg was founded, was built over a period of forty years. The towering dome in Aivazovskii's canvas, gilded with over 100 kg of gold, provides an artificial light source whose rays are diffused by the palpably frosty atmosphere.

St. Petersburg is also the setting for a work by the celebrated equestrian artist Nicholas Egorovich Sverchkov, *Emperor Alexander II and Kaiser Wilhelm I in a carriage with a view of the Peter-Paul Fortress, St. Petersburg* (estimate: £200,000-250,000). Famed for his anatomically correct portraits of horses that were used as breeding standards, Sverchkov rarely tackled historical subjects. This painting, dated 1873, demonstrates the warmth of relations between uncle and nephew, and by implication, their Empires, marking the political *entente* between the two countries.

The *Important Russian Paintings* sale boasts an impressive selection of important works by Il'ia Efimovich Repin including a *Study of a family portrait*, an oil on canvas dated 1905 (estimate: £350,000-450,000). This work features members of Repin's family in the artist's apartment at the Academy of Arts in St. Petersburg where he was director and Head of the School of Fine Arts. The painting was exhibited at the 34th Wanderers Exhibition in Moscow and St. Petersburg in 1906. ***Portrait of Nikolai Evreinov, 1915 (estimate: £100,000-150,000), Repin's portrait of the prominent Russian playwright was exhibited in the 44th Wanderers Exhibition in 1915-16 and was one of a series of portraits the artist made of leading cultural figures of the time.*** A later work, *The Attack with the Red Cross Nurse*, is an oil on canvas dated 1917 (estimate: £250,000-350,000) and shows Repin returning to the socially-relevant and 'useful' art with which he had established his reputation as the leading figure of the critical realist school. It is possible that the work was painted as part of a series of patriotic canvases depicting events from the First World War, that were sold to raise funds for the Russian cause.

A major attraction of the sale is a highly important selection of Russian works which were in the collection of S.A Beilitz, an extremely discreet and well respected member of the small group of dealers who dominated the Russian art market in Paris after the Second World War. Beilitz enjoyed privileged contacts with art historians, critics and Russian museums and Beilitz is probably the only Russian dealer, living outside the Soviet Union, to be mentioned in the Fedorov-Davydov monograph on Levitan and the Repin monograph by Grabar. Beilitz never learnt to speak French, relying heavily on his wife for contact with the outside world, other than the Russian art sphere. Following her death, he left Paris after donating a portrait of Tolstoy by Pasternak and a watercolour by Briullov to the Louvre, and was befriended by a young couple. In Beilitz's company the couple were introduced to Russian art and over the years acquired his entire collection, a selection of which is offered for sale.

Highlights of the collection include Vasilii Dmitrievich Polenov's *View of Nazareth*, 1882 (estimate: £45,000-55,000), Viktor El'pidiforovich Borisov-Musatov's *Caucasian landscape, Shepherds tending a flock at night*, 1895 (estimate: £110,000-160,000), Henrikh Ippolipovich Semiradskii's *A travelling merchant in ancient Greece* (estimate: £100,000-120,000), Isaak Il'ich Levitan's *Woodpiles in*

the forest (estimate: £55,000-75,000) and Konstantin Alekseevich Korovin's *A Ballerina at her toilette* (estimate: £90,000-110,000).

Two important works by Vasilii Ivanovich Surikov are offered. *Portrait of Il'ia Repin, a water colour painted in 1882* (estimate: £10,000-15,000) is highly prized for being a painting by one great Russian master depicting another (estimate: £10,000-15,000). *Study of a Strelet's wife for the painting 'The morning of the Streltsi's execution', 1880* (estimate: £100,000-150,000) is a remarkable work that conveys both the horror of death and the tragic nature of one of the most crucial periods in Russian history. The subject of the picture comes from the Petrine age and reflects one of the episodes in the struggle for the throne between Peter the Great and his sister Sophia, the conclusion of which was the defeat of Sophia and the Streltsi who supported her. Recently discovered in the United States, this study was previously illustrated in Kemenov's book covering the major Surikov works as 'whereabouts unknown.'

Vasilii Dmitrievich Polenov is represented by a number of important works in the sale including *The Herzegovian on lookout, 1876* (estimate: £100,000-150,000). The same year as this work was painted, Polenov joined the army as a volunteer to assist the Serbians in the fight against Turkish oppression. His impressions of this war, illustrated with his drawings and paintings, were published in the magazine *Pchela* after his return to St. Petersburg at the end of 1876. The painting is being sold from the collection of Leo Maskovskii, who left Russia during the Revolution and acquired an important collection of Russian paintings in the Baltic countries in the 1920s. A number of important landscape paintings from the master Ivan Ivanovich Shishkin are offered in the sale, including *Sandy Coast* (estimate: £300,000-400,000).

The sale of Important Russian Pictures also includes a selection of literature. The most notable is a set of volumes of Nikolai Ivanovich Kutiepor's *Grand Ducal and Tsarist Hunting in Russia, an historical study, St. Petersburg, 1896-1911* (estimate: £50,000-70,000). Rarely found in a set, the three volumes offered trace the history of the Imperial hunt from the 10th to the 16th century, during the reigns of Tsars Mikhail and Aleksei, and parts of the period from the end of the 17th century until the 19th century.

The distinctive and stylized nature of Russian stage design is showcased by an exceptional work by Bakst, *Stage Design for the Sleeping Princess, Act 2 'The Garden of King Florestan'* (estimate: £80,000-120,000), his design for Act II of Tchaikovsky's ballet *The Sleeping Beauty*. This particular stage design was created for the performance of the Ballet Russes at the Alhambra Theatre, London in 1921. Bakst created five scenes and numerous costumes for the London debut.

The *Russian Works of Art and Important Silver and Gold* sales will be held on 30 November at 3:30 p.m. (Russian Works of Art) and 1 December 2004 at 10:30 a.m. (Important Silver and Gold). The highlight is a selection of French silver-gilt from the magnificent service made for Grand Duke Michael Pavlovitch by Martin-Guillaume Biennais and Jean-Charles Cahier, Paris, 1820 (estimate: £350,000-500,000). The service was commissioned by Grand Duke Michael Pavlovitch for his magnificent Russian neoclassical palace, designed by Carlo Rossi at a cost of some nine million roubles, and now the home of the State Russian Museum in St. Petersburg.

Press Preview

A press preview will be held on Friday 26 November. Please call 020 7389 2664 to RSVP

Russian Sales at Christie's

The Russian department was established at Christie's in the late 1970s in Geneva (the last Geneva sale was held in 1994). London sales were first held in the early 1980s. More recently Christie's has held annual sales of Russian Works of Art and Pictures., two in New York (April and October) and one in London (November).

Christie's holds the world auction record for a Russian work of art with \$9.6 million achieved for the Fabergé Winter Egg (April 2002). Christie's also set World auction records for two single-owner sales of Fabergé: The Forbes Collection, which was sold in April 2002 for \$5.9 million, and the Kazan Collection, which realized \$4 million in April 1997. Christie's holds the world auction record for a Russian painting, for Ivan Konstantinovich Aivazovskii's *View of Constantinople* (sold for £721,650), and for Fabergé, with a carved hardstone model of a street painter which sold for £831,650, both established in November 2003.

In 1990 Christie's was the first international auction house to facilitate a significant acquisition by The State Russian Museum, Leningrad, St. Petersburg. Christie's international team continues to develop such relationships with prospective buyers.

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