

For Immediate Release

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RUSSIAN ART WEEK AT CHRISTIE'S IN LONDON

24-27 November 2008

London – Christie's will present their bi-annual series of exhibitions and auctions dedicated to Russian art from 24 to 27 November in London. *Russian Art Week* will offer important Russian paintings and works of art, a fine selection of Russian Silver including a unique soup tureen in the form of a battle ship, selected icons celebrating the Byzantium, leading examples from the Russian book revolution and some of the finest Russian lacquer ever offered at auction.

RUSSIAN ART

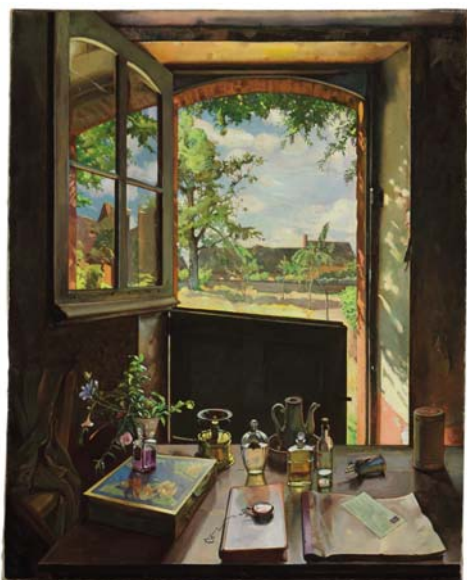


A leading highlight is the vibrant *Still life with watermelons* (estimate: £1,500,000-2,000,000) by Natalia Goncharova (1881-1962) which is from the artist's most daring period and the result of her experiments with Cézannism. The painting has not been on the market for the last 45 years. In *Still life with watermelons* Goncharova arranges fruits and berries around a bright tablecloth that is printed with a large leaf pattern, which gives the impression that this is not a still life, but an actual watermelon growing in a vegetable patch. The main "character" of the painting is a graphic work depicting a theatre scene, with initials M.L. The sheet occupies the whole of the central part of the painting; it is so important that the rest of the still life could easily be considered to be a frame for it.

A collection of works by Ivan Pokhitonov (1851–1924) provides an insight into the life of the artist and his family. Given by the artist's son to the present owner, the group includes intimate portraits of some of the individuals who played an important role in Pokhitonov's family life, such as Ivan, *The Red Army Soldier* (estimate: £20,000-30,000) who, according to family legend saved the artist's life. The collection also includes a number of miniature landscapes such as the snow-covered *The artist's garden at Trou-Louette, Liège* (estimate: £30,000-50,000).

Baranoff-Rossiné's (1888-1944) *Self-portrait with brush*, 1907, (estimate: £450,000-650,000) exemplifies the artist's life-long experiment with colour and style and his constant assimilation and development of his contemporaries' techniques. The face is reminiscent of the works of Isaac Brodsky (1884–1939), while the squares on his shirt are set in lines in a manner similar to that of Vladimir Burliuk (1886–1917). Baranoff-Rossiné had exhibited with both artists at the beginning of the century and was undoubtedly influenced by their works.

The Arrangement by Aleksei Harlamoff (1840-1922) is an exceptional work from his popular series of Italian gypsy girls arranging flowers (estimate: £700,000-900,000). Harlamoff was a talented portraitist whose subjects included Tsar Alexander II. By the 1880s, he focused on painting children and peasant girls, often using his own daughter as a sitter. The natural beauty and innocent charm of these works were met with great acclaim.



Following the successful sale of *The Somov Collection* at Christie's London last November, the forthcoming auction will include Konstantin Somov's (1869-1939) exquisite *Open door on a garden* (estimate: £500,000-700,000). This work is the culmination of Somov's experiments with combining the genres of still life and landscape; in particular the challenge of rendering interior and exterior space.. Formerly part of the *The Somov Collection* which realised £6,320,150 in November 2007, *Open door on a garden* is a sublime example of the artist's *oeuvre* painted in his distinctive and vibrant palette.

The auctions in November will also include a selection of works by Russian Post-War and Contemporary artists. For the first time works by artists including Oleg Tselkov, Ernst Neizvestny, Evgeny Rukhin and Vladimir Weisberg will be included.

In 1960 Oleg Tselkov created a collective figure with a bald head and mask-like face. He called his characters the Alien tribe; faces that appear to surface from a nightmare or come out from the pages of an anti-utopian novel. Executed in a particularly intense palette of colours, these face portraits emerge before the viewer from a poisonous pink, green or purple haze, as seen in this variation of *Collector and collection* (estimate: £50,000-70,000).



RUSSIAN WORKS OF ART

Christie's will present at auction a magnificent and unique silver soup tureen in the shape of a fourteen gun warship which was commissioned by Catherine the Great and which represents one of the most important pieces of 18th century Russian silver to survive to this day. For over a century this magnificent piece of Russian silver has been owned by the Castaways' Club, a private club for former Royal Navy Executive Officers. Made by Zacharias Deichman in St Petersburg in 1766 and applied with Catherine the Great's initial, it is one of two known in this size and form by this maker, while two smaller examples from the same service are also recorded.



The only other tureen of a similar size and weight (roughly 300 ounces) as the one offered in November is the example in the Central Naval Museum, St Petersburg. Notes in the Museum's file written in 1867 and 1885 clearly imply that the Museum's tureen was from a set of tureens given to the Black Sea Fleet, with additional serving pieces added by the great Russian naval commander, Admiral Feodor Feoderovich Ushakov (1744–1817). The Black Sea Fleet, which was to have its own Admiralty based in Kherson, was only officially established by Prince Potemkin, Grand Admiral of the Russian Navy, after his annexation of the Crimea in 1783. It would seem entirely possible that these extraordinary tureens, made in 1766, were originally ordered by the Empress for the St Petersburg Admiralty and then transferred on her order, or more probably that of the Grand Admiral, for use by the Black Sea Fleet.

On April 22, 1787 the Empress set out from Kiev by river on an historic visit to the newly annexed Crimea. Eight days later she was joined at Kremenchuck by the Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II of Austria. On May 13, 1787 they visited Kherson, the ship

building centre founded nine years before by Potemkin and then the home of the Black Sea Admiralty. A contemporary official mentions in the Russian equivalent of the English Court Circular, that Prince Potemkin held a dinner in their honour and to celebrate the Black Sea Fleet. At this dinner for over 80 guests part of the meal was served in '13 or 14' large tureens in the form of warships. This direct association with two of Russia's greatest heroes, Potemkin and Ushakov, and with one of the major events of Catherine the Great's reign, combined with their remarkable design and workmanship, make these extraordinary tureens perhaps the most important and imaginative pieces of 18th-century Russian secular silver to survive.

The sale will also include an extremely fine collection of Russian lacquered objects. Probably the best collection in Great Britain, the majority are from the highly prized Lukutin factory (1820–1904) and are beautifully decorated with genre scenes, landscapes and portraits. The phenomenal quality of the collection is of a standard rarely seen at auction.

Following the successful sale in June 2008 of the collection of items belonging to Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich the Younger, a further selection of items with the same provenance will be offered this season. Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich the Younger (1856–1929), first cousin of Tsar Nicholas II, was one of the most powerful and outspoken members of the Romanov dynasty. He was the Supreme Commander of the Russian Armed Forces at the beginning of the First World War. The selection for sale includes the original gold-mounted Order of St George, 4th Class (estimate: £40,000–60,000), awarded to the Grand Duke at the beginning of his long military career, and his St George swords of different patterns, including one decorated with diamonds, 1913 (estimate: £150,000–200,000).

ICONS AND ARTEFACTS FROM THE ORTHODOX WORLD

The sale will pay homage to Byzantine Art and its legacy in Russia and Greece. Including more than two hundred lots, the sale offers many exquisite and rare pieces of museum quality, spanning almost over the entire Orthodox Art production from the 4th to the early 20th century.

A magnificent 6th-century architrave made of limestone is among the earliest objects in the sale (estimate: £180,000–240,000). The carved decoration, a roundel with Christ's initials and the apocalyptic 'A' and 'ω' flanked by birds and extensive leafy patterns, is masterfully executed. This architectural element would have been supported by columns placed on slabs, creating an upright ensemble that separated the sanctuary from the nave.



A 10th-century image of **St. George**, made of bone, is typical of Middle Byzantine production. Boldly and skillfully carved in high relief, portrayed half-length in three-quarter view, this figure stands at the threshold between the classical and traditional Byzantine styles (estimate: £75,000-95,000). A three-layered sardonyx cameo from the 11th century with a representation of the Mother of God Orans (in prayer), possibly from Constantinople, conveys the visual ideals of Comnenian-dynasty art (estimate: £75,000-95,000).

Depicting the doctrine of **Christ's Incarnation**, either through his individual portrait, with his Mother, in a Deisis, or events from his life, was central to the production of icons. A Cretan panel *circa* 1400 narrates in great detail the Story of the Nativity (estimate: £200,000-300,000). Episodes derived from the Canonical and Apocryphal Gospels surround the Mother of God and the newborn Jesus. Moreover, incorporated in the composition are images taken from everyday life, for instance the bucolic scene at the lower right corner.



The ever-favourite subject of the **Mother of God and Child** is amply represented in the sale by a wide selection of images in a variety of materials and sizes, both from Russia and Greece. One of the most impressive is the monumental Muscovite icon of the Tikhvinskaya, late 15th century, traditionally executed with subdued colours that underline its profound character, it is easy to see why this image has such a captivating effect on beholders (estimate: £200,000-300,000).

An impressive icon of **St. Nicholas** *circa* 1500 follows the strict theological canons and is rendered with deep, sophisticated colours on gold ground. Probably Russia's most beloved saint, also called the Miracle-Worker of Myra, he is portrayed in Episcopal garments, while the story of his life unfolds in the pictures around him, thus enabling the viewers to learn about his deeds even if they were unable to read (estimate: £180,000-220,000).

No sale of Orthodox art would be complete without an icon of **St. Vladimir**, the grand prince of Kiev who converted to Byzantine Christianity in 988 and baptised the Kievan Rus. The masterly executed portrait of the elderly saint dating from 1895 is complemented by an impressive silver-gilt and cloisonné enamel oklad with the mark of Ivan Tarabrov (estimate: £40,000-60,000).

RUSSIAN BOOKS

Lissitzky's rare early masterpiece *Chad Gadya* was among the first Russian avant-garde works to be condemned during Stalin's era and most of the 75 sets originally made were destroyed. Much of Lissitzky's early output is connected to book production: notably cover designs and illustrations for children's publications. But *Chad Gadya* marks the turning point in a journey that would ultimately see Lissitzky radically redefine the appearance of the printed book in the 20th century and Christie's is proud to offer one of the remaining original sets on the 27 November (estimate: £28,000-35,000).



Alexandra Exter, like many artists who read avidly, was keen to illustrate the books she liked most. From 1932 onwards Exter collaborated with the calligraphist Guido Colucci to produce works in which painting and writing harmonised completely. In 1942 Exter painted seven original gouaches for Villon's *Lais*, a poetical work of outstanding quality and innovation that introduced new themes and vigour to Medieval literature – much as the avant-garde ideas expounded by Exter reinvigorated art in the 20th century. This illuminated manuscript including the 7 original gouaches will be offered with an estimate of £ 20,000-30,000.

Sales calendar:

Monday 24 November

Russian Works of Art

Tuesday 25 November

Icons and Artefacts from the Orthodox World

Wednesday 26 November

Important Russian Art, Evening Sale

Thursday 27 November

Russian Pictures, including Post War and Contemporary Art

Valuable Russian Books and Manuscripts