

For immediate release
22 November 2006

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WORTHY CORRESPONDENCE - E-MAIL REVEALS A £300,000 RENAISSANCE MASTERPIECE

Important Silver
Thursday, 30 November 2006

King Street – A superb Renaissance wine Cup which has spent the best part of the last century sitting unrecognized in a darkened show-case surrounded by minor Chinese export porcelain is set to realise up to £300,000 when it is offered at Christie's sale of *Important Silver* on 30 November 2006. A routine e-mail enquiry sent by a Portuguese client alerted specialists to the existence of this previously unrecorded enamelled and gold-mounted crystal cup, which will be offered with an estimate of £200,000-300,000. Surviving in remarkable condition, the cup was acquired by the family of the present owner *circa* 1920 and has lain undisturbed in a vitrine in a private residence ever since.

Anthony Phillips, International Director of the Silver Department at Christie's: *"In nearly forty years I cannot recall a mounted Renaissance crystal object of such exceptional quality and in such untouched, almost pristine, condition appearing on the auction market. When I first saw the images of this cup, sent via e-mail from a European client, I just stared at the screen in total disbelief. I was absolutely stunned. It was clear that I was looking at what was almost certainly an unrecorded early 17th century German masterpiece. When I saw it 'in the flesh' for the first time, I was astounded by its sheer beauty and how the goldsmith, the enameller and the hardstone cutter had combined to produce a Renaissance work of art of the highest quality."*

Subsequent research has revealed the existence of a very similar cup which is recorded in the earliest inventory of the Schatzkammer in the Residenz Museum in Munich drawn up in 1730, where it has been displayed ever since. Such are the similarities between the cups that they were most probably created in the same workshop and, in all probability, for the same

commission. The Munich cup is slightly larger than the newly discovered example, has a clear quartz faceted body and has a more aggressive dragon handle. Such is the quality of the craftsmanship that it is likely that the cups were made for a Royal patron *circa* 1600-1610 in South Germany and, quite probably, in Augsburg, one of the wellsprings of the German Renaissance.

The body of the cup to be offered at Christie's is amber-coloured and boat-shaped with an outer faceted quartz body with a polished glass interior, the colour deriving from what appears to be a layer of amber lacquer sandwiched between. The exterior rims of both cups are mounted with raised enamel hunting scenes while the interiors are enamelled in a different technique with further hunting scenes. The handle of each is formed as a snarling dragon with green enamel body and red enamel eyes, his front claws gripping onto the rim of the cup and his rear claws and tail resting on the enamel mount below. The head of the Munich example is blue and that of the present example green while both their backs are set with rough polished glass in the manner of a baroque pearl again apparently over amber. The similar hunting scenes on both cups may indicate that they were intended for use as an early and very regal form of stirrup or hunting cup.

It would be difficult to imagine a greater contrast to this Renaissance cup than another highlight of the sale which must surely qualify as the greatest piece of Anglo-Russian silver ever made. This, the Ascot gold cup, then known as the Emperor of Russia's Plate, was designed by the celebrated sculptor, Edmund Cotterill, made by the leading London silversmith, Robert Garrard in 1851 and paid for by the Russian Emperor Nicholas I (1796-1855).

Weighing some 915 ounces and nearly three feet (90 cm.) long, this racing prize is in the form massive wine-cistern applied at the front with the Russian Imperial arms and surmounted by a finely modeled and cast scene of figures in a sled being attacked by wolves, in the genre style favoured by painters such as Nikolai Egorovich Sverchkov. The Latin inscription on the cup translates as '*Nicholas Emperor of all Russia, established a prize for an equestrian contest, remembering Ascot races, at which he himself had been present as a guest of Queen Victoria in June 1844.*' The Emperor continued to pay for the cup, re-named in his honour,

till, not unnaturally, the outbreak of the Crimean war in the spring of 1854. The race was won by Mr. Campbell's, Woolwich and his remarkable prize was subsequently acquired by the 2nd Earl of Strafford (1806-1886), a descendent of whom is now selling it. It is expected to realize £300,000-500,000.

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Images available on request
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Notes to Editors:

- Christie's hold regular sales dedicated to Silver at salerooms around the world, including London, New York, Paris and Amsterdam. Christie's have held significant market share of the Silver market for the last 7 years, and realized over £10.6 million worldwide in the first 7 months of 2005, with close to half of this figure sold in London.

- The auction of *Portrait Miniatures, Objects of Virtu and Selected Silver* at Christie's South Kensington on 28 and 29 November 2006 will offer a fabulous array of over 700 lots. A highlight of the sale will be around 150 small-collectible items from the Albert Collection, one of the largest silver collections amassed by a collector over thirty years. Examples include a selection of picture-back t-spoons, nutmeg graters, scent bottles, tipstaff and tape measures, all of superb quality and in good condition (estimates range from £300 to £1,000). In addition, a wonderful variety of silver to suit all pockets and tastes also features ranging from domestic pieces to more decorative items, such as candlesticks and striking centrepieces alongside more unusual examples such as 18th and 19th century Russian silver. Further highlights include two large private collections of Vesta cases, including a silver and enamel sentry box example (estimate: £2,000-3,000) alongside vinaigrettes, snuff boxes and enamelled cigarette cases. While a selection of decorative, mainly 19th century silhouettes include examples by John Miers, John Field and Augustin Edouart (estimates range from £200-500) in addition to a striking enamel portrait by Christian Frederick Zincke (estimate: £600-800) and a portrait of Duc d'Aumont B François Dumont (£700-900).