

For Immediate Release

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FOUND IN AN ATTIC IN FRANCE:

REDISCOVERED MASTERPIECE BY TIEPOLO - LOST FOR OVER 200 YEARS – GOES ON PUBLIC VIEW AT CHRISTIE'S



Important Old Master and British Pictures Evening Sale

Exhibition: 28 November to 2 December 2008 at Christie's, 8 King Street, London

Auction: 2 December 2008 at 7pm, Christie's, 8 King Street, London

London – Christie's announce that they will offer a lost work by the great Italian master Giambattista Tiepolo (1696-1770) at the evening auction of *Important Old Master and British Pictures* on 2 December 2008 in London. One of the most exciting and extraordinary discoveries of recent years, it was found in the attic of a French château where it had been hidden by the grandparents of the present owners due to the semi-naked subject. The present work is previously unpublished and is probably from a series of pictures commissioned by Empress Elizabeth of Russia (1709-1762).

Never before seen in public, the painting will be exhibited at Christie's from 28 November to 2 December, and will be offered at auction on the evening of 2 December where it is expected to realize £700,000 to £900,000. The public exhibition leading up to the sale will also present the opportunity to view two masterpiece views of Venice by

Canaletto (1697-1768) which are expected to realise a combined total in excess of £7 million; a little known and highly important portrait of a Tahitian Princess by John Webber, R.A., which has been consigned by the descendants of the last Queen of Tahiti and which is also unseen in public for over 200 years (estimate: £800,000-£1,200,000); and an extraordinary and rarely seen early 14th century depiction of the Madonna and Child by Segna di Bunaventura (active between *circa* 1298-1331) (estimate: £800,000-£1,200,000).

Richard Knight, International Director of Christie's Old Master Department and Paul Raison, Director and Head of Old Master Pictures at Christie's, London: *The appearance of this unpublished picture by Giambattista Tiepolo represents one of the most exciting and extraordinary rediscoveries of recent years. The painting has lain untouched in the same private collection for over 200 years, and as a result it remains breathtakingly similar to the way it would have been immediately after it left the artist's easel. Private collectors are attracted to rare, rediscovered paintings offered in untouched condition. At Christie's in recent years, we have seen three extraordinary paintings emerge from country houses and sell for strong prices; Ludovico Carracci's 'Salmacis and Hermaphroditus' which realised £7.4 million in July 2006, Jan Lieven's 'Head of an Old Man' which sold for £2.15 million in December 2007 and Jean-Antoine Watteau's 'La Surprise' which realized £12.4 million in July 2008. We look forward to showing this unseen work to the public from 28 November to 2 December and to welcoming international collectors to the auction on the evening of 2 December.'*

Tiepolo's international reputation was firmly established by 1750 at which time he received the significant commission to paint the ceiling frescos of the New Residenz Palace in Würzburg. In the late 1750s, the artist received a grand commission from Empress Elizabeth of Russia (1709-1762), daughter of Peter the Great and a great patron of the arts, who commanded a series of works which are likely to have been destined for the newly completed Winter Palace.

It is widely believed that this series included *Portrait of a lady with a Parrot* (now in The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford) and *Portrait of a lady with a mandolin* (now in the Detroit Institute of Arts). A third likely work from the series is *Portrait of a young lady wrapped in fur* which is lost and only known from a pastel by the artist's son Lorenzo, now in the El Paso Museum. There are striking similarities in format, style, composition and colour scheme between these three works and *Flora*, the rediscovered picture to be offered at Christie's, and it seems likely that the four paintings together form the series commissioned by the Empress of Russia. A letter from F.M. Tassi to the wealthy collector Count Carrara di Bergamo on 15 December 1760 stated that; *'Tiepolo is now working on some half-length female figures a capriccio for the Empress of Russia; one could not find anything more beautiful, more vivacious, more refined.'*

Portrait of a lady as Flora presents the figure of an alluring young woman, partly covered with drapery, her left breast exposed and her left arm holding a bunch of flowers against her body. Her hair is decorated with flowers, and her head, slightly turned, returns the

viewer's gaze with a piercing, searching intensity. Together with the three works mentioned above, it is likely that these paintings represent an allegory of the senses or of the four seasons.

The early history of the painting is not known. It is uncertain whether the series ever arrived with Empress Elizabeth of Russia; she died in 1762, and Tiepolo moved to Madrid in the same year having been commissioned by King Charles III of Spain to paint a fresco in the Throne Room of the Royal Palace. *Portrait of a lady as Flora* is known to have been in the same French château since at least the 18th century, and was discovered recently in its attic by the present owners whose grandparents had considered the picture too risqué and had hidden it away from view.

Giambattista Tiepolo (Venice 1696-1770 Madrid) is recognised as one of the greatest artists of 18th century Italy. He built on the distinguished artistic tradition of Venice founded by Bellini, Titian, Tintoretto and Veronese. By 1750, his international reputation was firmly established and he received the significant commission to paint the ceiling frescos of the New Residenz Palace in Würzburg, which he completed with the assistance of his son, Domenico. On his return to Venice, Tiepolo found himself in the favour of international royalty and nobility, and he soon became renowned around the courts of Europe. In 1762, Tiepolo arrived in Spain having been commissioned by King Charles III of Spain to paint a grand ceiling fresco for the Throne Room of the Royal Palace in Madrid. The artist's work impressed the King, and Tiepolo stayed in Madrid painting further frescos in the palace until his death in 1770.

Elsewhere at the auction, two masterpiece views of Venice by Canaletto (1697-1768) are expected to realise a combined total in excess of £7 million. Believed to have been commissioned in 1738 through the artist's agent Consul Smith, whose own collection of the artist's works was sold to King George III, the paintings have since passed by family descent and are offered for sale for the first time (separate press release available).

A further highlight of the auction will be a little known and highly important portrait of a Tahitian Princess which has been consigned by the descendants of the last Queen of Tahiti and which is expected to realise £800,000 to £1,200,000. *Poedua, daughter of Oreo, chief of Ulaietea, one of the Society Isles* by John Webber, R.A. (1751-1793) is the least known of three recorded versions of the portrait by Webber (the other two versions are in the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich and the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra). This is the first great portrait of a woman of the Pacific and the prototype for all the portrayals of the fabled women of the south seas that would follow, a subject most famously portrayed just over a century later in Gauguin's celebrated Tahitian paintings (separate press release available).

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About Christie's

Christie's is the world's leading art business with global art sales in 2007 that totaled £3.1 billion/\$6.3 billion. This marks the highest total in company and in art auction history. For the first half of 2008, art sales totaled £1.8 billion / \$3.5 billion. Christie's is a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service and expertise, as well as international glamour. Founded in 1766 by James Christie, Christie's conducted the greatest auctions of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, and today remains a popular showcase for the unique and the beautiful. Christie's offers over 600 sales annually in over 80 categories, including all areas of fine and decorative arts, jewellery, photographs, collectibles, wine, and more. Prices range from \$200 to over \$80 million. Christie's has 85 offices in 43 countries and 14 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Los Angeles, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Tel Aviv, Dubai, Hong Kong and Zurich. Most recently, Christie's has led the market with expanded initiatives in emerging and new markets such as Russia, China, India and the United Arab Emirates, with successful sales and exhibitions in Beijing, Mumbai and Dubai.