

For Immediate Release
Tuesday 17 May, 2011

Press Release

CHRISTIE'S

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**DISCOVERED:
UNRECORDED 17TH CENTURY MASTERPIECE**
BRONZE MYTHOLOGICAL FIGURE SUPPORTING THE GLOBE
BY ADRIAEN DE VRIES

**EXPECTED TO BECOME THE MOST VALUABLE
EARLY EUROPEAN SCULPTURE SOLD AT AUCTION
WHEN IT IS OFFERED AT CHRISTIE'S IN JULY**



London – Christie's announce the recent discovery of a previously unrecorded 17th masterpiece by the Dutch master of Mannerist sculpture Adriaen de Vries (1550-1626): a bronze *Mythological Figure Supporting the Globe*, which is estimated to realise between £5 million and £8 million when it is sold in *The Exceptional Sale of Decorative Arts* on 7 July 2011. Dating to 1626, this is possibly the last fully autograph work executed by the artist, presenting the pinnacle of his sophisticated skill. Discovered in 2010 on a routine Christie's valuation, this bronze - which measures 43 inches (109cm) high - stood unrecognised for at least 300 years atop a fountain in the centre of an anonymous European castle's courtyard, a location depicted in an engraving dating from *circa* 1700.

Donald Johnston, Christie's International Head of Sculpture: *"The appearance of this unrecorded masterpiece by Adriaen de Vries - one of the most important and avant-garde sculptors of the late Mannerist period - is a hugely significant discovery which provides an unprecedented opportunity for lovers of both old master and modern sculpture. A unique work of exceptional beauty and superb provenance, 'Mythological Figure Supporting the Globe' has the potential*

to become the most valuable piece of early European sculpture ever to be sold at auction. It is truly extraordinary that such a monumental work is not recorded in any literature on the artist – a situation which was only possible due to its remote location in an aristocratic collection for so many centuries.”

The current world auction record for European sculpture was set in 2003 when Christie’s sold a parcel-gilt and silvered bronze roundel depicting Mars, Venus, Cupid, and Vulcan, Mantuan, *circa* 1480-1500, for £6.9 million. Prior to that, the most valuable early European sculpture was *The Dancing Fawn*, the most recent work by de Vries to be auctioned, which was sold to the Getty for £6.8 million in 1989. Thought to date to *circa* 1615, it is smaller than the bronze offered today and was neither signed nor dated.

Having trained as a goldsmith before working with Giambologna in Florence, Pompeo Leoni in Milan, and finally for Rudolf II in Prague, de Vries is one of the most fascinating sculptors of his era. Originally working in the meticulous style of Medici Florence, his style evolved, particularly after he was released from the strictures of the imperial court in Prague and he began working on a series of monumental sculptures for private clients.



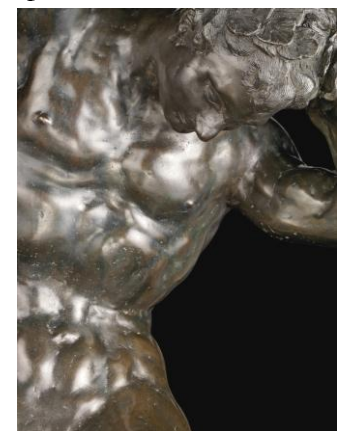
De Vries developed a highly distinctive and impressionistic style in his later years, as did other artists such as Michelangelo, Titian and Rembrandt. His later style reflects his growing interest in the blurring of outlines and the play of light on the surface of his bronzes and it gives these works an immediacy that is lacking in many of the highly finished works he produced for the imperial court. It is this combination of



a strong overall sense of form combined with the expressive modeling of surface details that makes these late works appear so modern. In his abstraction of the human form de Vries can be said to parallel the work of his contemporary, El Greco, who also discarded many of the conventional artistic canons of the Renaissance and Mannerist periods.

Inspiring modernist masters, the influence of de Vries on 20th century sculpture:

The arresting and dynamic stance of this male figure illustrates the remarkably modern surface handling of de Vries’ late works which mark him as an earlier precursor of avant-garde sculptors of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, from Rodin to Brancusi, Giacometti and Modigliani. The vigorous modeling of this sculpture moves away from the refined crisp clean lines of the artist’s early work, powerfully capturing the vitality of the subject’s movement, in an impressionistic and raw manner. Unlike most other bronzes which are cast in multiples, de Vries is one of the only sculptors working in bronze who almost exclusively used the direct lost wax process, which means that his works are almost always unique.



It is only in recent years that the direct inspiration of de Vries on Auguste Rodin (1840-1917), which had often been observed, was clearly confirmed when a relief of *Les Forgerons*, cast by Rodin, was discovered actually to be a copy of de Vries’s *Vulcan’s Forge* of 1611, and not an original composition by the French sculptor. This is a clear illustration that de Vries was literally centuries before his time. The present bronze *Mythological Figure Supporting the Globe* represents the apogee of this movement towards a new expressionism and shows exactly why de Vries was so admired by sculptors of the late 19th and 20th centuries.

Notes to Editors

Adriaen de Vries was born in the Hague and probably trained as a goldsmith in his native city before travelling to Florence. He is recorded in the studio of Giambologna, court sculptor to the Medici, in the 1580s and later assisted Pompeo Leoni with the High Altarpiece for the Escorial, outside Madrid. By 1593 he had travelled to Prague where he executed a large bronze group of *Mercury* and *Psyche* for the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II (Paris, Musee du Louvre), and two of his best-known works were for large, multi-figure fountains for the Maximilianstrasse in Augsburg.

In 1601 de Vries appears to have returned to Prague when he was appointed *Kammerbildhauer*. He was principally employed by Rudolf II until the latter's death in 1612 and, although he was a member of the household of Rudolf's successor, Matthias, he did not receive any commissions from the new emperor and began working for private patrons.

The most significant among these was the great military commander Albrecht van Wallenstein (1583-1634). Born to an impoverished branch of an old noble family, Wallenstein became a soldier, and allied himself with the Hapsburg Holy Roman Emperors. A charismatic figure, his armies would eventually become such a powerful force in the 'Thirty Years' War that the emperor feared Wallenstein was plotting to overthrow him and Wallenstein was eventually charged with treason and assassinated.

However, before this untimely end, Wallenstein had a meteoric rise, accumulating land and becoming successively an imperial count palatine (1622), a prince (1623), Duke of Friedland (1625) and Duke of Mecklenberg (1627). To emphasise his rising social status he became a patron of the arts and built the Wallenstein Palace in Prague (1623-30), a magnificent structure built around four courtyards which was meant to rival Prague Castle itself. It remained in the family until 1945, and today houses the Czech Senate, while the riding school houses part of the National Gallery.

Part of the palace complex included formal gardens and for these Wallenstein commissioned Adriaen de Vries to create a series of statues. These were later looted by the occupying Swedish forces and were taken to Sweden where they remain at Drottningholm Palace, the private residence of the Swedish royal family. Created over a number of years, these bronzes represent perhaps the last important commission executed by de Vries before his death. To underline the erudition of the patron, the bronzes are based on classical subjects such as the *Laocoon*, *Venus* and *Adonis* and *Neptune*, and the modeling of each is highly impressionistic. Although there is, to date, no documentary evidence to prove that the present figure was also commissioned by Wallenstein, the subject, style and the date all suggest that this could also have been destined originally for the Wallenstein Palace in Prague.