

Press Release

CHRISTIE'S

For Immediate Release

10 May 2011

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RUSSIAN ART AT ITS BEST

ILYA REPIN'S MASTERPIECE *A Parisian Café* TO BE OFFERED AT AUCTION FOR THE FIRST TIME

NEWLY DISCOVERED FABERGÉ IMPERIAL PRESENTATION SNUFF-BOX



London – Ilya Repin's magnificent *A Parisian Café* will lead Christie's forthcoming Russian sale, which will take place on Monday 6 June in London. Painted in 1875, the work depicts a lively French café scene and represents a daring deviation from Repin's celebrated Russian subjects. The picture was exhibited at the 1875 Parisian salon and is extensively recorded in the literature on the artist. It was acquired by the present owner's grandfather, who was personally acquainted with Repin, in 1916 and appears now on the market for the first time in almost a century. It will be offered with an estimate of £3-5 million.

The sale will also include Repin's Parisian sketch-book (estimate: £150,000-250,000), which contains over 120 exquisite drawings, including more than 70 preparatory sketches for *A Parisian Café*. Four more lots of Repin's preparatory works for *A Parisian Café* will be offered after the sketch-book. For more information on these lots, please refer to the dedicated press release.



Repin's masterpiece is complimented by outstanding paintings by Petr Nilus and Boris Grigoriev as well as charming works by Ivan Shishkin, Alexandre Benois and Nikolai Bogdanov-Belsky. A group of 12 Russian Post-War works from the collection of Dionysios Kostakis will also appear at auction for the first

time. *Paying a visit* (estimate: £150,000-200,000) is one of the finest examples of Russian 19th century genre painting to appear at auction.

In 1892, Ilya Repin wrote to Pavel Tretyakov, the most significant collector of Russian art in the country's history, praising the work of his former pupil:

"What a marvelous little thing is Nilus's 'Paying a visit'. How well this old lady is painted! Her face against a yellow wall. How subtle, truthful and powerful it is – a wonderful work!" Ilya Repin, writing to Pavel Tretyakov on 27 February 1892

Lovingly preserved in a private collection for almost a century, the painting depicts an elderly woman, who is knocking on the doors of wealthy houses requesting 'sympathy'. The work was exhibited by Nilus, a committed member of the Itinerant society, in 1892, garnering the artist significant praise.

Sleeping beauty is a ballet of the utmost significance in the history of both the Ballets Russes and Alexandre Benois, whose delightful stage and costume designs for a production will also be offered this June (8 lots; estimated from £2,000-3,000 to £8,000-12,000). Commissioned from Tchaikovsky by I. A. Vsevolozhsky, director of the Imperial Theatres, the first performance of *Sleeping Beauty* took place on 3 January 1890 at the Mariinsky Theatre in St Petersburg. The production's success helped to spark a revival for the ballet which enjoyed a fresh wave of popularity. Benois proved wildly susceptible to the work's charms; his enthusiasm and affection for this particular ballet was such that he once managed to see it six times in one week.



Boris Grigoriev's *The monk* is an outstanding and important example of the artist's work from his most highly sought-after period: the early 1920s. Grigoriev painted *The monk* (estimate: £300,000-500,000) in 1922 while resident in France, deriving inspiration from rural Brittany and Normandy. Soon after its completion, the work was shipped to America for exhibition at the newly opened, now legendary, The New Gallery, New York. Sold by the gallery's founder and director James Rosenberg to Dr Phoebus Levene in 1923, this striking painting has remained hidden in two private American collections from that moment until the present time.

Painted a year earlier in Latvia, Nikolai Bogdanov-Belsky's *The Schoolroom* depicts twelve attentive children (estimate: £200,000-300,000). Bogdanov-Belsky was renowned for painting pastoral scenes and had a particular affinity for capturing the universal pastimes of childhood. His canvasses, many of which reflect an idealisation of contemporary life, proved immensely popular and were much admired and imitated in the Soviet era.

The **Russian Art** sale will offer 18 Russian Post-War and Contemporary works, including twelve works formerly held in the famous George Costakis collection. George Costakis (1903-1990), the grandfather of the present owner, assembled one of the most important collections of Russian Avant-Garde and Nonconformist art. In the 1960s Costakis's Moscow apartment was a hub of the contemporary art scene. When the collector left the Soviet Union for Greece in 1977, leaving a large part of his Avant-Garde collection to the State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, the remainder of the Avant-Garde works and the Nonconformist works travelled with him. The Avant-Garde works were sold to the Greek state in 2000 and now form the core of the State Museum of



Contemporary Art in Thessaloniki. The Nonconformist works remained in his family collection. The group is highlighted by Oscar Rabin's 1961 untitled oil (estimate: £40,000-60,000) and Mikhail Shvartsman's striking *Ieratura* (estimate: £40,000-60,000).

RUSSIAN WORKS OF ART

The afternoon session of the sale is devoted to Russian works of art, featuring more than 40 works by Fabergé, many with Russian Imperial provenance. Leading the selection is a rare and highly important three-colour gold and guilloché enamel Imperial presentation snuff-box by Fabergé (estimate: £300,000-500,000, lot 108), given to Charles Robert Carrington in 1894 to commemorate his attendance at the funeral of Emperor Alexander III and the wedding of Emperor Nicholas II. The snuff-box is a rare example of the earliest Fabergé snuff-boxes presented by Emperor Nicholas II at the beginning of his reign. Fifteen of the nineteen presentation snuff-boxes supplied by Fabergé during the reign of Nicholas II have either appeared on the market or are accounted for in important collections. The discovery of a documented, but previously unknown, snuff-box is therefore particularly significant. The present box was entered into the Imperial Cabinet's ledgers on 28 December 1894 with a cost of 3,060 roubles, making it one of the most expensive Imperial presentation snuff-boxes. Lord Charles Robert Carrington was Lord Chamberlain to Queen Victoria between 1892 and 1895 and it was this appointment that brought him to St Petersburg in 1894. Carrington later presented the snuff-box to his third daughter's husband, Lieutenant-Colonel William Legge, 7th Earl of Dartmouth (1881-1958), known from 1891-1936 as Viscount Lewisham, upon his departure for the front in November 1915. The snuff-box has descended in the family to the present owner and has never appeared on the auction market.



Further Fabergé highlights include two rare works from a European private collection. An exceptional silver-mounted, bowenite and guilloché enamel barometer, by Fabergé's head workmaster Henrik Wigström, was last seen on the auction market over two decades ago, when it was sold at Christie's (estimate: £120,000-180,000, lot 105). A large and impressive silver presentation mantel clock, by Fabergé's workmaster Julius Rappoport, is a particularly fine example of the commissions Fabergé received from the regiments of the Russian Imperial Guard. The clock was presented to Major-General Prince Nikolai Urusov (1860-1912) by his comrades in the Life Guard Dragoons from 1879-1907 (estimate: £120,000-180,000, lot 260).

A further highlight by Fabergé is a silver coupe-à-bec (estimate: £60,000-80,000, lot 192) presented to Axel Kullberg by Dr. Emanuel Nobel (1859-1932), the Swedish oil magnate and one of Fabergé's most important clients. According to the memoirs of Francois Birbaum, Fabergé's senior master craftsman from 1893, 'E. Nobel...was so generous in his presents that at times it seemed that this was his chief occupation and delight. Orders were constantly being made for him in the [Fabergé] workshops...'

The works of art session features two monumental porcelain vases produced by the Imperial Porcelain Factory in St. Petersburg during the period of Alexander II (1855-1881). Many of these vases were decorated with copies of important Old Master or nineteenth-century paintings. A smaller number of grand vases were manufactured during the period of Alexander II and, by the 1860s, most were intended primarily as exhibition pieces at international expositions. On rare occasions, commanding vases were still commissioned as palace pieces.

Standing over 1.5 meters tall, lot 113 (estimate: £400,000-600,000) was one such vase, likely commissioned as a grand presentation gift, as suggested by its commanding size and its reputed provenance. An accompanying manuscript, dated 1889, details that the vase was given by Emperor Alexander II to Queen Olga of Württemberg. It is decorated after an original work, by the nineteenth-century Belgian genre artist Basile de Loose (1809-1885), depicting young pupils reading to their teacher. The scene was copied onto the vase by the Imperial Porcelain Factory's master painter, Mikhail Kriukov in 1866.



Lot 163 (estimate: £300,000-500,000) is painted with a portrait of Inigo Jones (1573-1652) after Anthony Van Dyck (1599-1641). The portrait of Jones, the first significant British architect of the Modern period, was most probably painted from life as part of Van Dyck's work on the *Iconographia*, an anthology of engraved portraits of his celebrated contemporaries. The original painting was in the collection of the Imperial Hermitage at the time the vase was manufactured and was copied by the Imperial Porcelain Factory's painter, A. Saveliev in 1861. This portrait of Inigo Jones was part of the illustrious collection of Sir Robert Walpole (1676-1745), the first Prime Minister of Great Britain. In a sale arranged by James Christie, Empress Catherine II purchased the finest paintings from the Walpole collection, including the portrait, from Walpole's grandson in 1779.

Further porcelain highlights include two rare and important tureens from the Dowry Service made for Grand Duchess Catherine Pavlovna (1788-1819) (estimate: each £60,000-80,000, lots 304 and 305). The service was given as a wedding present by Emperor Alexander I to Catherine Pavlovna, daughter of Emperor Paul I, and her husband Wilhelm I, King of Württemberg (1781-1864).



An extensive selection of silver is highlighted by an important silver and enamel Imperial presentation charger, made by the firm of Sazikov, suppliers to the Russian Imperial Court (estimate £180,000-220,000, lot 233). The charger was presented in 1883 to Emperor Alexander III (1845-1894) and Empress Maria Feodorovna (1847-1928) by the nobility of the city of Smolensk, one of Russia's oldest cities. It was likely presented on the coronation day of Alexander III in 1883, as it was the custom for visiting provincial dignitaries to present the Emperor with such chargers in a traditional ceremony held in the Kremlin.

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