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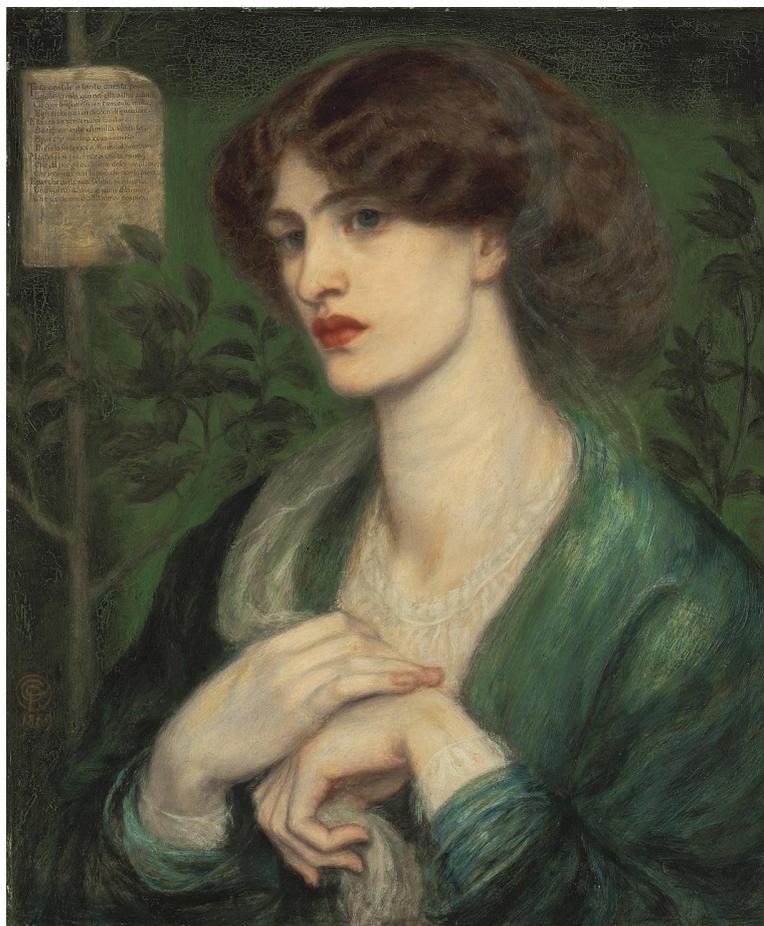
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## REDISCOVERED MASTERPIECE:

ROSSETTI'S TENDER PORTRAIT CAPTURING A  
GREAT PRE-RAPHAELITE ROMANCE LEADS CHRISTIE'S *VICTORIAN  
& BRITISH IMPRESSIONIST ART SALE* IN MAY 2012

- **FINEST OIL PORTRAIT BY DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI TO BE SEEN AT AUCTION FOR 25 YEARS**



**London** – Christie's announce the rediscovery of an exceptional and previously unpublished portrait by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882) which will be offered at the sale of *Victorian & British Impressionist Art* sale on 31 May 2012 in London. *The Salutation of Beatrice*, 1869, is a rare portrait in oil of Rossetti's greatest muse Jane Morris, and is expected to realise between £1 million and £1.5 million, *illustrated above*. This work has been in a private Scottish collection for the past century and has only been referred to in a private letter from Rossetti to Jane, written in 1869. Jane is a pervasive presence in Rossetti's later work as is his wife Lizzie Siddal in his early watercolours and drawings; her features are integral to Rossetti's later oeuvre.

### Comment: Peter Brown, Director, Victorian Pictures:

*“Dante Gabriel Rossetti is one of the most important artists of the Victorian age. Christie’s is honoured to be in the exceptionally rare position of offering the finest oil portrait by the artist to come to auction in over 25 years. ‘The Salutation of Beatrice’ offers discerning international collectors - who seek works of outstanding beauty, rarity, quality, and importance - the chance to own a work which not only encompasses each of these essential attributes but also reflects a great Pre-Raphaelite romance. This work is also a testament to the deep and inspiring love Rossetti had for Jane Morris, wife of William Morris.”*

Born in 1839, the daughter of an Oxford stable hand, Jane Morris came to the attention of the Pre-Raphaelite circle in the summer of 1857 when Rossetti and his entourage of followers descended on the town to paint murals in the new debating chamber at the Union. Struck by her unusual beauty and statuesque form, Rossetti asked her to sit for his mural, and even at this stage they seem to have been mutually attracted. As Rossetti was already engaged to Lizzie Siddal, Jane married one of his followers, William Morris, in 1859. She was never really in love with Morris, having married him at least in part for his wealth and social position. When Lizzie died from an overdose of laudanum in February 1862, probably taking her own life in a fit of depression, the stage was set for a renewal of intimacy between Jane and Rossetti.

One of the most famous romances of the British Victorian age, their affair lasted from the late 1860s until about 1875. Much about the relationship remains obscure, and Jane herself destroyed vital evidence by burning most of her lover's letters for the years 1870-77. Although the present painting has never been published it is documented in Rossetti's correspondence to Jane Morris, now in the British Library. Embargoed for fifty years after Jane's death, these letters became available for study in 1964, and have since been published twice. In a letter of 21 July 1869, when Jane was suffering from unspecified ill-health, had gone with her husband to take the mineral waters at the central German resort of Bad Ems. 'I want much to get the little Beatrice I was doing from you finished', Rossetti wrote. Beatrice Portinari was the Florentine girl who represented the ideal of spiritual love for the great Italian poet Dante (1265-1321). His love for her is celebrated in prose and verse in *La Vita Nuova*, and a sonnet from the *Vita Nuova* is included in the top left corner (*illustrated right*):

*My lady looks so gentle and so pure  
That the tongue trembles and has nought to say,  
And the eyes, which fain would see, may not endure.*



Dante dominated the intellectual life of the artist's father, Gabriele Rossetti, an Italian political refugee who held the post of Professor of Italian at King's College, London. The boy was named after his father's hero and he himself was obsessed with the figure of Dante, publishing translations of the *Vita Nuova* and other works in his *Early Italian Poets* (1861) and illustrating the poet's life in numerous paintings. Dante's meetings with Beatrice, whether on earth or in heaven, were a never-ending source of interest to Rossetti, inspiring a number of paintings from the early 1850s until his death in 1882.

Offered alongside the Rossetti is Lord Frederic Leighton's (1830-1896) *Bacchante* of 1892 depicting a female reveler clad in ivy leaves and a tiger skin gazing with affection on a pet fawn (estimate £1.2 million - £1.8 million) *illustrated right*. Painted towards the end of Leighton's career, and three years before his famous *Flaming June*, it evokes the ideal of classical beauty to which the artist aspired. Painted on a magnificent scale, and preserved in its original frame, it has been unseen at auction since 1974, when it entered the Forbes Magazine Collection.



Further important highlights of the sale include *In a Rose Garden* by Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema, O.M., R.A. (1836-1912) (estimate £400,000-600,000) *illustrated left*. In 1888, Alma-Tadema created a sensation at the Royal Academy when he chose as his subject *The Roses of Heliogabulus*, in which he depicted the debauched Roman Emperor smothering his court in petals released from an awning above. Two years later he created a comparable subject in a lighter hearted vein, which nevertheless enabled him to paint each petal with astonishing finesse.

Two girls play with roses cascading onto a marble bench, into which is set a bronze depicting the ancient manufacture of scent. The Mediterranean shimmers, while to the left, through the rose bower, a brilliant shaft of sunlight illuminates the background and casts a dappled shade.

Also on offer is *A Winner at Epsom* by Sir Alfred James Munnings (estimate: £500,000-800,000) *illustrated right*. Epsom, a racetrack with 350 years of history and home of the Derby and The Oaks, had captivated Munnings as early as 1913 when he was first invited there to paint alongside a fellow artist. The allure never ceased. He captured all features of Epsom from the hop-pickers and gypsies to the saddling and unsaddling of horses. Only once did he paint a horse actually racing. The scene of unsaddling in the winner's enclosure was obviously dear to Munnings' heart as he experimented with the moment on numerous occasions. He once said that Epsom expressed the true meaning of the term *The Races*. *A Winner at Epsom* is a wonderful example of Munnings' signature equine portraiture. The horse is beautifully defined, but Munnings' keen knowledge of equine disposition and his portraitist's eye for detail has captured the winner's exhaustion. In addition to the lathered coat, the horse's nostrils are extended and blowing and the ears are held back and loose. Even the horse's eye expresses its weariness. This ability to articulate the 'language' of the horse is one of Munnings' key qualities and makes him a virtuoso of equine art.





A rare depiction of Florence Nightingale studied from life by Jerry Barrett (1824-1906) will also be offered. *The Mission of Mercy: Florence Nightingale receiving the Wounded at Scutari*, illustrated left, shows Florence Nightingale in the Barrack Hospital at Scutari, the scene of her heroic endeavours to improve the medical treatment of the British Army engaged in the Crimea and is expected to realise between £30,000 and £50,000. A larger version of this painting is in the National Portrait Gallery, London.

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*Images available on request*

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### **Notes to Editors:**

**Auction:** *Victorian & British Impressionist Art* – 31 May 2012 at 2.30pm

#### **About Christie's**

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*\*Estimates do not include buyer's premium. Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer's premium and do not reflect costs, financing fees or application of buyer's or seller's credits.*