CHRISTIE’S PROUDLY SPONSORS
HOUGHTON REVISITED: THE WALPOLE MASTERPIECES FROM CATHERINE THE GREAT’S HERMITAGE

LANDMARK EXHIBITION RETURNS SIR ROBERT WALPOLE’S CELEBRATED COLLECTION OF OLD MASTER PAINTINGS TO ITS ORIGINAL SETTING AT HOUGHTON HALL IN NORFOLK FROM 17 MAY TO 29 SEPTEMBER 2013

London - From 17 May to 29 September 2013, the magnificent art collection amassed by Great Britain’s first Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole, will be reassembled in its original home of Houghton Hall for the first time in over 200 years. The most celebrated British collection of the 18th century, it was acquired in 1779 by Catherine the Great in a landmark private sale negotiated by James Christie, founder of Christie’s. The core of the collection went on to adorn the Hermitage in St. Petersburg.

Christie’s is proud to sponsor Houghton Revisited which will include paintings from the English, French, Italian, Flemish and Spanish schools, with masterpieces by Van Dyck, Poussin, Albani, Rubens, Rembrandt, Velazquez and Murillo. The public exhibition will see all of the paintings hung in their original positions in the State Rooms, precisely recreating the collection’s splendour.

Houghton Hall, now the family seat of Sir Robert Walpole’s direct descendant, the 7th Marquess of Cholmondeley, is considered one of the country’s finest Palladian houses. The Hall was designed to house Walpole’s prized collection of Old Master paintings, and the magnificent interiors and furnishings designed by William Kent are also still intact.
Steven P. Murphy, CEO of Christie’s: ‘We are proud and honoured to be sponsoring this exhibition and applaud the efforts of everyone who has been involved in this hugely ambitious and exciting project.

"The Walpole Collection is legendary and one of the greatest endeavours of art collecting. It is also part of Christie’s history having been sold to Catherine the Great by our founder, James Christie, in 1779 in what remains one of the most significant private sales of all time. As we see a significant cultural shift with more and more people globally engaging with art, at all levels, this exhibition acts as inspiration to all those who admire art and who curate these wonderful objects. Christie’s in proud to be a part of the history of the Walpole Collection once again.”

In 1778 James Christie was asked by George, 3rd Earl of Orford, grandson of Sir Robert Walpole, to value his grandfather’s celebrated art collection. A number of options had been explored, including a proposal by John Wilkes, the Member of Parliament for Middlesex, that the collection be acquired by the nation and housed in the British Museum (the National Gallery was not founded until 1824). In a letter to Walpole’s lawyer, James Christie wrote: "If the Minister had a mind to immortalize himself I could put him in the way to do it effectually by causing this collection to be purchas’d at the expense of the publick and Building a Room at the British Museum for their reception. I would undertake that it would be the means of bringing all the Foreigners of Taste from different Parts of the World to see them and it would most undoubtedly correct the Taste and qualify the Judgements of our Modern Artists.”

In 1779, with no public funds forthcoming and Catherine the Great eager to acquire the collection, James Christie negotiated its sale for a total of £40,500. The collection of approximately 200 paintings sailed to Russia on the frigate Natalia and, despite rumours of shipwreck amidst heavy seas it arrived safely in St. Petersburg.

The sale represented arguably the most significant art transaction since Oliver Cromwell instructed an auction of the Royal Collection following the execution of Charles I in 1649. It secured the international reputation of James Christie who had founded Christie’s 13 years before in London, a city booming both culturally and commercially, and who had already earned great prominence having sold Property of H.R.H. The Princess of Wales, mother of George III, six years earlier. His success was to continue as he built the foundations for the company which is known today, and which has since overseen the transfer of many of the world’s most celebrated art collections and works of art.

Christie’s has worked closely with museums and public art institutions throughout its history and continues to support initiatives which increase public access to works of art. Other major initiatives in the United Kingdom in 2013 include sponsorship of the National Gallery’s ‘Masterpiece Tour'; 'The Arts Council Collection Partnerships' supported by Christie’s; and ongoing work as national sponsor of The Public Catalogue Foundation.

HOUGHTON REVISITED: The Walpole Masterpieces from Catherine the Great's Hermitage
http://www.houghtonrevisited.com/

Dates: 17 May – September 2013
Booking: Advance Tickets can be booked at http://www.houghtonrevisited.com/tickets/ or by calling 01603 598 640
About Christie's

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 has since conducted the greatest and most celebrated auctions through the centuries providing a popular showcase for the unique and the beautiful.

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