

CHRISTIE'S

PRESS RELEASE | GENEVA
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE | Wednesday, 08 October 2014

EMPRESS EUGENIE'S *FEUILLES DE GROSEILLIER* BROOCH TO CROWN GENEVA'S MAGNIFICENT JEWELS AUCTION THIS FALL



Geneva – On November 11, 2014 Christie's Geneva is honoured to present Empress Eugenie's *Feuilles de Groseillier brooch*, which has not been seen at auction for over 125 years.

The French Crown Jewels once constituted one of the largest jewellery collections in the world, but very few examples in original condition survived to this day. It is therefore extremely rare for a jewel of such historic importance to be offered for sale.

The *Feuilles de Groseillier brooch*, part of one of the most beautiful *parures* of the 19th century, was commissioned by Empress Eugenie to Bapst Jewellers in 1855. It is designed as a cluster of three openwork currant leaves centering upon a larger cushion-shaped diamond, suspending three detachable articulated *pampilles*, set throughout with old mine-cut diamonds. Of exquisite design, this jewel is a stunning example of the exceptional quality of the creations of Bapst Jewellers. This fabulous historic jewel is estimated at CHF 1,900,000-2,900,000 / \$2,000,000-3,000,000.

Born into a family of ancient Spanish nobility in 1826 in Granada, Eugénie de Montijo married Emperor Napoleon III in 1853. A woman of great elegance, beauty and charm, she was a leader of

European fashion and assembled a large collection of jewels, mostly commissioned from Bapst Jewellers, Court Goldsmiths for generations and safe keepers of the French Crown Jewels. Empress Eugenie favoured Alfred Bapst's subtle creations, in particular his foliage designs suspending *aiguillettes* or *pampilles* of which the present brooch is an iconic example.

The *Parure de Feuilles de Groseillier* comprised a *guirlande*, worn as a necklace; a *tour-de-corsage*, worn directly on the dress and a *devant-de-corsage* brooch. In 1870, at the fall of the Second Empire, Empress Eugenie and her husband

Napoleon III moved to England, leaving behind most of the Crown Jewels. 17 years later, the French government conducted a 12 day-auction, from May 12 – 23, 1887 where all the belongings of the French Royal Family were offered for sale, including the jewellery. Several of the larger pieces were broken up prior to the auction so the stones could be sold individually. The *guirlande* was sold as 8 parts of lot no. 11 and the present brooch was acquired by Tiffany & Co., who was the largest buyer at this legendary auction.

A few decades later the *Feuilles de Groseillier brooch* was gifted by the Metropolitan Opera of New York as a tribute to the famous opera singer Madame Lucrezia Bori (1887-1960). A Spanish soprano, who had sung at La Scala in Milan, Madame Bori made her debut with the Metropolitan Opera in 1910 singing the title role of Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*. During 20 seasons at the Met, she appeared 654 times, performing the leading roles in 39 operas. Her immense contribution to the Metropolitan Opera and famous portrayals of Mimi in *La Bohème* and Violetta in *La Traviata* led her to be the first performer elected to the Board of Directors of the Metropolitan Opera Association.

On the night of her farewell gala, on 29 March 1936, the *Feuilles de Groseillier brooch* was presented to Madame Lucrezia Bori by Mrs. Vincent Astor, on behalf of colleagues of the Metropolitan Opera Board and a large group of friends and admirers. A devoted member of the Board of Directors, Madame Lucrezia Bori continued to work actively for the Metropolitan Opera until her death in 1960 and in her will, she bequeathed the brooch to the Metropolitan Opera where it has been exhibited since.



Empress Eugenie by Franz Xaver Winterhalter, 1853

GENEVA MAGNIFICENT JEWELS

Auction:

Four Seasons Hotel des Bergues, 33 quai des Bergues - Geneva
Tuesday 11 November 2014

Viewing:

Four Seasons Hotel des Bergues, 33 quai des Bergues - Geneva
Friday 07 November 10am – 6pm
Saturday 08 November 10am – 7pm
Sunday 09 November 10am – 6pm
Monday 10 November 10am – 6pm
Tuesday 11 November 10am – 12pm

PRESS CONTACTS:

Alexandra Kindermann | +41 79 101 4196 | akindermann@christies.com
Beverly Bueninck | +33 6 77 85 16 81 | bbueninck@christies.com

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