

CHRISTIE'S

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CLASSIC WEEK

The Maria Fitzherbert Jewel

The Exceptional Sale, 6 July 2017



London – On 6 July 2017, Christie's will offer *The Maria Fitzherbert Jewel* in *The Exceptional Sale* as part of Christie's Classic Week. The gold locket, which contains a portrait miniature of King George IV by the celebrated artist Richard Cosway, is one half of a pair. The other locket contained an image of the King's secret and illegal wife, Maria Fitzherbert and was worn by the King on his deathbed, before being buried with him at Windsor Castle. The surviving half of the pair, *The Maria Fitzherbert Jewel* (estimate: £80,000-120,000), has passed down through descent directly from Maria Fitzherbert and offers an important insight into this most private relationship. The pair of miniatures were each contained within diamond-set lockets and faced with sections cut from a diamond, known as a 'portrait diamond'. When Maria died seven years after the King she was holding a portrait miniature by Richard Cosway, possibly *The Maria Fitzherbert Jewel*, in her own hand. Despite the tumultuous nature of their relationship, Maria Fitzherbert is considered the only woman George IV ever truly loved and provides a rare glimpse into the love story of George IV and his beloved Maria Fitzherbert.

GEORGE IV & MARIA FITZHERBERT

George IV, the then Prince of Wales, is thought to have met Maria Fitzherbert at the opera around 1780. Sensing an unwillingness to enter into a liaison with him, in 1784 the prince took the drastic decision to stab himself in the chest and, swathed in bloody bandages, told Maria that he would kill himself unless she would be his wife. She could not hold out against this moral blackmail and consented – although they both knew that their marriage would be illegal, as she was a Roman Catholic. Despite three acts of parliament preventing a legitimate marriage, the couple eventually married in a secret ceremony at Maria's house in Mayfair in 1785. For Maria, they were man and wife but to the world George IV was a bachelor prince with a constitutional duty

to father an heir. Nine years after the secret marriage, George IV was given a powerful inducement to wed his cousin, Caroline of Brunswick and the government had undertaken to pay off his enormous debts on the day he wed. His marriage to Caroline soon came to an end and George IV and Maria were reunited but George IV's wandering eye placed a strain on the relationship and they parted for good in 1811.

RICHARD COSWAY AND GEORGE IV

George IV was Richard Cosway's most important patron whose favour won the artist numerous important commissions from both the Royal Family and the British aristocracy. Cosway was appointed Principal Painter to his Royal Highness the Prince of Wales in 1785 and his roles included being the artistic advisor for Carlton House and surveyor of George IV's art collection. Throughout his lifetime, George IV commissioned almost fifty miniatures from the artist, which he presented as gifts to members of his family and mistresses. The portraits contained within *The Maria Fitzherbert Jewel* and its corresponding locket were commissioned by George IV and the settings were made by the court-appointed Jewellers and Silversmiths, Rundell Bridge and Rundell.

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Notes to Editors

Christie's Classic Week is a series of sales spanning the Decorative Arts and Sculpture, Antiquities, Old Master & British Paintings and 19th Century Art from 5 to 13 July 2017.

About Christie's

Christie's, the world's leading art business, had global auction, private and digital sales in 2016 that totalled £4 billion / \$5.4 billion. Christie's is a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service and expertise, as well as international glamour. Christie's offers around 350 auctions annually in over 80 categories, including all areas of fine and decorative arts, jewellery, photographs, collectibles, wine, and more. Prices range from \$200 to over \$100 million. Christie's also has a long and successful history conducting private sales for its clients in all categories, with emphasis on Post-War & Contemporary, Impressionist & Modern, Old Masters and Jewellery.

Christie's has a global presence in 46 countries, with 10 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Dubai, Zürich, Hong Kong, and Shanghai.

**Estimates do not include buyer's premium. Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer's premium and are reported net of applicable fees.*

Images available on request

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