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A LIFE'S DEVOTION: THE COLLECTION OF THE LATE MRS T.S. ELIOT



London – Christie's is proud to offer *A Life's Devotion: The Collection of the Late Mrs T.S. Eliot* on 20 November 2013. This great British collection is borne from one of the greatest love affairs in literary history; that of T.S. Eliot (1888–1965), who is among the most important figures in 20th century literature, and his second wife Valerie Eliot (1926–2012). Containing outstanding examples of **Portrait Miniatures, Early British Drawings, Modern British Art, Victorian & British Impressionist Art, Modern Prints, Jewellery** and **English Furniture**, the collection is testament to Mrs Eliot's connoisseurship. Valerie Eliot's life's devotion was determined when the young Valerie Fletcher heard a recording of Eliot's *The Journey of the Magi* in her Yorkshire classroom. Upon hearing this poem by one of the major poets of the time she declared that she would marry him – and so she did. Mrs Eliot worked as the poet's secretary at Faber & Faber and eventually married him in 1957. Her schoolgirl admiration developed into a love that continued long after his death. Her life was dedicated to a single cause – her husband and preserving the legacy of his writing.

After several years of working together and a loving, happy marriage, Valerie was entrusted upon his death to edit the unpublished correspondence of one of the greatest literary figures of the 20th century. She made this her life's work and such was T.S. Eliot's prolific correspondence this work continues today. It was the popularity of Eliot's *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, which was made into the hit West-End musical *Cats*, which enabled Valerie to amass one of the finest collections of British art to come to the market in generations.

Comment: Orlando Rock, Deputy Chairman, Christie's Europe: "Christie's is delighted to be entrusted with the collection of the late Mrs T.S. Eliot. Valerie's devotion to her husband helped her form a particularly enlightened collection of British art which she knew he would have applauded and cherished. Compiled over 20 years, the collection encapsulates the history of British art from Hilliard to Freud via Gainsborough, Spencer, Moore and Bacon; and includes quintessentially English sea and landscapes by Constable, Turner, Atkinson Grimshaw and Lowry. Valerie Eliot's legacy as a collector and passionate supporter of the arts is continued by Old Possums Practical Trust, a charitable organisation she established to support literary, artistic, musical and theatrical projects and organisations. The proceeds from the sale of her collection will ensure the important work of the trust continues."

PORTRAIT MINIATURES

This important collection of over 200 Portrait Miniatures tells the story of the evolution of British portrait miniature painting, from its inception in the 16th century to the mid-19th century, after which the art form experienced a decline with the invention of photography. Mrs Eliot's collection contains examples from each major stage in the history of portrait miniatures, beginning with

Nicholas Hilliard, court painter to Queen Elizabeth I, and his contemporary **Isaac Oliver**. An example by Isaac Oliver,

A young gentleman, holding his hand to his chest (estimate: £40,000-60,000, *illustrated left*) displays

Hilliard's influence over the French miniature painter in the depiction of dress and the use of Hilliard's 'wet-in-wet' red curtain background. The full-length portrait of

Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, formerly in the collection of King Charles I, showcases Oliver's superior talent as a cabinet miniature painter (estimate £300,000-500,000).

One of the most prolific miniature painters of the 18th century, also represented in the collection, is **John Smart**. The stunning portrait of Mrs Thomas Lewin (estimate: £30,000-50,000, *illustrated right*) demonstrates his genius in the depiction of fabric and creating an almost photographic likeness of his subjects. Other artists of the Georgian heyday include royal miniaturist **Richard Cosway, R.A.** with a portrait of a young Princess Charlotte (estimate: £8,000-12,000) and **John Downman** with a superb portrait of the Countess of Tyrconnel (estimate: £20,000-30,000).

The collection encompasses works by the most accomplished miniature painters from the 16th to the mid-19th century and highlight Mrs T. S. Eliot's connoisseurship in this relatively unknown field.

BRITISH DRAWINGS & WATERCOLOURS



The group of British drawings and watercolours which form part of this collection are all notable examples of the work of many of the leading British artists of the 18th and 19th centuries, including **Boys, Callow, Constable, Cotman, Cox, Ehret, Gainsborough, Girtin, Palmer, Sandby** and **Turner**. They range from quite modest works on paper, which are nevertheless fine examples, to being amongst the finest drawings and watercolours to come to the market in recent years. Collectively they demonstrate the deep interest and understanding that

Mrs T. S. Eliot had for this field and mark her as a collector of considerable insight and sensitivity.



John Constable's drawing of *Helmingham Dell, Suffolk* executed in 1800 is arguably one of the finest drawings by the artist to have appeared on the market in recent years. It is one of the very few dated drawings from this period and although a highly finished drawing in its own right, its continuing importance to the artist is demonstrated by the fact that it served as the basis for at least two paintings and three oil studies by the artist all executed many years later, in 1825 and 1830. That this sheet has always been highly regarded is evident from its distinguished provenance and when it last appeared on the market twenty years ago, its appearance caused a significant stir and a record sum for the artist was realised (estimate: £300,000 -500,000, *illustrated previous page left*).

Mrs Eliot's collection features three works by **Turner**, arguably the most poetic of watercolourists. Two are vignettes; *The Wreck* (estimate: £120,000 – 180,000, *illustrated right*) and *The memorial to Byron, Scott and Moore* (estimate: £60,000 – 80,000). Both works were created to illustrate poems and such work must have given Turner enormous satisfaction as he believed that painting and poetry were intimately connected. *The Wreck* illustrated a poem by Edward Howard, included in Charles Heath's 'The Keepsake', the most popular magazine of the period. The other vignette, *The memorial to Byron, Scott and Moore*, was the result of a commission by perhaps Turner's greatest patron, Walter Fawkes. It served as a frontispiece for six further illustrations of specific lines taken from the work of Walter Scott, Lord Byron and Thomas Moore.



An elegant oval portrait of *Elizabeth, Duchess of Buccleuch*, by **Thomas Gainsborough**, is one of only a handful of pastels by the artist and was executed whilst Gainsborough was living in the fashionable resort of Bath (estimate: £80,000 – 120,000, *illustrated left*). There is a sense of informality and immediacy in the present work, partly conveyed by its small scale and partly by its format, a feigned oval, which brings the sitter up close to the viewer, and partly through the medium of pastel. This informality underlines the fact that this work, and other pastels he created in this period, were not formal commissions but personal gifts to the sitter from the artist. A larger pastel portrait of the Duchess of Marlborough, from the same group as the example from the Mrs Eliot collection, sold in Christie's New York in January 2013 for £1.5 million.

MODERN BRITISH ART

Spanning the 20th century, the Eliot collection of Modern British Art features works by many of the most significant artists of the including **Moore, Hepworth, Piper, Wyndham Lewis, Bacon, Freud** and **Lewis**. A self-portrait by **Sir Stanley Spencer R.A.** is one of only 13 he ever painted (estimate: £200,000 – 300,000, *illustrated right*). In his self-portraits, the artist was always honest and uncompromising in recording the changes in his features as well as his feelings about himself, demonstrating a commitment to an unstinting realism. This self-portrait, painted in 1957 at Cliveden View, the small cottage in Cookham that Spencer made his home when he returned from his years in Glasgow, had only recently been finished when the artist was invited to open the village bazaar, after the cricketer Dennis Compton had to cancel because he was unwell. Spencer agreed and also donated the painting for auction at the bazaar, where it was sold for £11.



The internationally recognisable work of **Laurence Stephen Lowry R.A.** provides an ever popular and very human glimpse into daily British life – predominantly in the north of England – between the 1920s and 60s; drawing largely on the artist's own environment. *Deal Sands* by Lowry is a classic beach scene painted during the height of the artist's career (estimate: £150,000 – 250,000). It depicts an optimistic scene of figures at leisure on the beach at Deal, Kent, in the years immediately following the Second World War. Men, women, children, and dogs line the water's edge, and Lowry uses his signature palette of blue, red and ochre yellow against a white background to describe the figures and the row of houses in this seaside town.



A selection of drawings and sculptures by **Dame Elizabeth Frink R.A.** express the artist's understanding and love of animals that was shared by Mrs Eliot. Frink had a particular affection for horses and dogs, with both species contributing significantly to her output as a sculptor. *Lying Down Horse*, conceived in 1978, is one of the most important and sensitive depictions of a horse by Frink (estimate: £80,000 – 120,000, *illustrated above*).

As the artist recalled, 'we had a horse of our own in France. It used to be out grazing all night and in the heat of the day we brought it into the stable to lie down, where I could observe it carefully. I think there is something beautiful about a horse lying down.'

Further highlights include *The Cathedral, Hackwood Park*, by **Sir Winston Churchill, O.M., R.A.** (estimate: £200,000 – 300,000). Churchill stayed at Hackwood Park as the guest of Sir William Berry, First Baron Camrose, a wealthy newspaper proprietor who had bought the estate to entertain friends, and to whom he gave the painting. Churchill only gave his works as gifts to his friends and hosts, and such provenance of the painting and its subject matter can give a fascinating glimpse into the world of politics and society as seen through the eyes of one of the most important inhabitants of the 20th century.

MODERN PRINTS

Highlighting the selection of prints within the collection is *Returning to the Trenches* by **Christopher Richard Wynne Nevinson** (estimate: £50,000-70,000), made in 1916 during the First World War. Although Nevinson accepted Futurist principles, and was indeed author of the *English Futurist Manifesto*, he never agreed with its tenet, 'We glorify war, which for us is the only hygiene of the world'. In *Returning to the Trenches* instead of reveling in this 'glory', Nevinson combines cubist and futurist techniques to portray man as a mere extension of the war machine and thus part of an impersonal and inglorious affair. The



group of individuals become a collective 'dynamic' force marching in relentless uniformity, emotionally detached from the metronomic routines of war. After being appointed an official war artist in 1917, Nevinson's art gradually turned towards realism as he found cubo-futurist techniques wholly inadequate to accurately portray the true horrors of war. *The Temples of New York*, a drypoint made three years later in 1919, demonstrates this shift (estimate: £5,000-7,000). Executed on Nevinson's first visit to New York it depicts

the spire of Grace Church, Broadway on East 10th Street, surrounded by skyscrapers, contemporary temples to capital.

The collection includes fine prints by contemporaries of Nevinson: **Henri Gaudier-Brzeska**, **Augustus John**, **Edward Wadsworth**, **David Bromberg** and **Sybil Andrews**. Contemporary British artists are well represented with works by **David Hockney** and **Elisabeth Frink**. Also included is a fine colour aquatint by **Henri Matisse** *Marie-José en robe jaune* (estimate: £40,000-60,000), as well as prints by **Joan Miro**, **Marc Chagall** and **Edouard Manet**, amongst others.

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PUBLIC EXHIBITION:

Saturday 16 November: 2.00 pm - 5.00 pm
Sunday 17 November: 12 noon - 5.00 pm
Monday 18 November: 9.00 am - 4.30 pm
Tuesday 19 November: 9.00 am – 8.00 pm

AUCTION:

A Life’s Devotion
The Collection of the Late Mrs T.S. Eliot
London, King Street
Wednesday, 20 November 2013

Exhibition of Highlights, New York
Constable, Gainsborough, Girtin and Turner
1-4 June 2013

Exhibition of Highlights, London
28 June - 2 July 2013

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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.

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