

CHRISTIE'S

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HELEN OF TROY BY ANTONIO CANOVA

ON THE MARKET FOR THE FIRST TIME

~ A gift from the artist over 200 years ago ~

Christie's Old Masters Part I Sale, London 6 July

During

CLASSIC WEEK



Property of The Londonderry Heirlooms Settlement
Antonio Canova (Possagno 1757-1822 Venice)
1816-17 Bust of Helen
marble

19¼ in. (50.2 cm.) high; 24½ in. (62.2 cm.) high, overall
Estimate: £2.5 million-4 million

London – A celebration of the iconic Greek mythological figure Helen of Troy, *Bust of Helen*, is a masterpiece in marble, created between 1816 and 1817, by the Italian titan of neo-classical sculpture Antonio Canova (1757-1822) which will be a highlight in the *Old Masters Part I Sale* on 6 July, during *Classic Week* London (estimate: £2.5 million - 4 million). Offered by the Trustees of The Londonderry

Heirlooms Settlement, *Helen* presents a unique opportunity to the market, having been given by Canova over 200 years ago to Robert, Viscount Castlereagh, British politician and statesman (1769-1822, later 2nd Marquess of Londonderry), in recognition of Lord Castlereagh's efforts to secure the return of works of art to Italy at the end of the Napoleonic Wars; the bust has subsequently passed by descent to the present owners. Having only been exhibited twice – most recently more than 25 years ago at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, in *Canova – Ideal Heads*, 1997 and previously at the Royal Academy of Arts, London in their 1972 show *The Age of Neo-Classicism*, 1972 – this bust will be on public view in Hong Kong from 24 to 28 May and New York from 10 to 14 June, before returning to London for the *Classic Week* pre-sale exhibition in London, on view from 1 to 6 July. The auction of this remarkable work coincides with the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.'s dedicated exhibition *Canova: Sketching in Clay* (11 June – 9 October), following the bicentenary year of the artist's death in 2022.

Donald Johnston, Christie's International Head of Sculpture commented: *"In addition to its obvious aesthetic appeal, the Londonderry bust has the added significance that it was a personal gift from the artist to Lord Castlereagh in recognition of his efforts to secure the return of works of art to Italy at the end of the Napoleonic Wars, which Canova deemed to have been crucial. There has been increased interest in Neo-classical marbles over the last five to eight years and Antonio Canova is widely considered to be the most important sculptor of the period. The authorship, the composition and the history of the bust will all be immensely appealing to masterpiece collectors as well as traditional sculpture buyers."*

AN IDEAL COMBINATION: Canova and Helen – A Collector's Dream

One of the greatest proponents of European marble carving, **Antonio Canova**, was an undisputed master both in his compositional talents and in his ability to translate those compositions into marble. *Bust of Helen* exemplifies the artist's skill in portraying exquisite beauty with remarkable realism, presenting the viewer with the subject's flawless glowing skin, flowing hair and an overriding air of timeless elegance.

'The face that launched a thousand ships', **Helen of Troy** has been celebrated throughout art and literature for thousands of years. The bust of Helen of Troy forms part of Canova's series of 'Ideal Heads', largely created in the latter part of his career. These heads are recognised as a distinct group within his oeuvre and, as such, were the subject of the afore-mentioned exhibition of the same name at the Ashmolean Museum, in which the present bust was included.

Helen, being offered on 6 July at Christie's in London, is unequalled in the personal significance it held for the artist himself; a meaningful gift, it provides a direct connection to the artist and a rare insight into Canova, the man.

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