

# CHRISTIE'S

## THE ART PEOPLE

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# THE COLLECTION OF A DISTINGUISHED SWISS GENTLEMAN



**London** – Started in the 1920s and lovingly assembled over 75 years by several generations of a venerable old Swiss family of entrepreneurs and physicians, *The Collection of a Distinguished Swiss Gentleman* will be offered for sale in London on 8 July 2015. Comprising 152 lots, spanning Old Master Paintings, Silver, early religious Sculpture, Antiquities, Porcelain and Manuscripts, the collection has remained in the family's beautiful home on the shore of Lake Zurich until recently. The collection is expected to realise in excess of £1.5 million.

The first generation of collectors were drawn to art as a way to complement and enhance their professional and personal life. The second generation - twice awarded the Prize of the Swiss Schiller Foundation for his lyrical poetry and prose - strove to create a haven of tranquillity as well as intellectual and artistic stimulation in his home. The focus of his search was in fine Swiss and German objects from the late Gothic to the Baroque. He was friends and acquainted with the directors of prominent museums, in particular the Bavarian National Museum, and distinguished dealers during the pre- and post-war periods, as well as with experts and collectors. All of them contributed to the unique character of this veritable *Kunstkammer* of Northern European art.

In an essay of 1968, this collector wrote: *'Collecting presupposes living, as Hölderlin has written, "man lives poetically". By making my home a place for collecting and poetry, I have endeavoured to bring spiritual forces into equilibrium, to harmonise spirit and senses and thereby to fulfil a conviction of the inwardly centred person that is rather neglected in this period of extreme specialisation. This was not a stunt, but rather, I would suggest, an act of therapy for living, inspired by art.'*

## Highlights include:

### OLD MASTERS



*A girl in a white blouse* by Jean-Honoré Fragonard (1732-1806) is thought to have been auctioned in Paris in 1776, as the pendant to the *Head of a Turk* by Nicolas-Guy Brenet; it was then unseen by scholars for over a hundred years until it re-emerged in London in 1988 (estimate: £120,000-180,000/ €170,000-250,000, *illustrated left*). The painting follows Fragonard's celebrated series of *figures de fantaisie*, dating from the end of the 1760s. Like the fantasy portraits, it combines loose, bravura brushwork with telling characterisation, and pays homage to Rembrandt, whose rich earthen palette, golden lighting and deep human sympathy Fragonard reinvents with brio. It shares its size and format with a whole series of bust-length

depictions of pretty girls in which Fragonard specialised throughout the 1760s and 1770s. Here, Fragonard has studied a real sitter, capturing both her appearance and her spirit, conveying the gentle tenderness in her eyes and imbuing her flesh with the warmth and pliancy of life. Judging from the simplicity and directness of its presentation and the effortless accomplishment of its execution, *A Girl in a White Blouse* dates from the mid-to-late 1770s.

*An elegant man, traditionally identified as Charles II, on horseback with his hunting party and dogs, Westminster and Old Saint Paul's beyond*, by Dirk Stoop (*circa* 1618- *circa* 1686), was acquired by the grandfather of the present owner over 30 years ago (estimate: £25,000-35,000/ €35,000-49,000, *illustrated right*). Around 1661 Stoop departed for Portugal, becoming Court painter to the Princess Catherine of Braganza, following her entourage to London after her marriage with King Charles II (1630-1685) in 1662. Stoop remained in London, painting royal portraits, topographical landscapes and hunting scenes, until 1665. The present painting can be dated to within the English period of the artist, and shows a *capriccio* view of London before the Great Fire of 1666, where much of the City including Old Saint Paul's was destroyed. It has been suggested that the elegant gentleman on horseback is Charles II, returning from the hunting grounds in Greenwich.



### SCULPTURE



Acquired 65 years ago, a parcel-gilt polychrome wood relief of the *Annunciation*, *circa* 1510, is attributed to Daniel Mauch (1477-1540), the finest master of his generation working in Ulm (estimate: £40,000-60,000/ €56,000-84,000, *illustrated left*). This sculpture exemplifies the artist's careful use of the reflective property of the smooth wood, creating harmony with the differential of textures, and in the Italianate elegance of the Virgin's features. Mauch's earliest authenticated work is from the same year: an altar depicting the Holy Family in the Chapel at Bieselbach of 1510, compares closely to the present Annunciation, particularly in the figure of Zebedee on the proper left wing of the altar. The Virgin's sweet and graceful face, slightly tilted and with the hint of a smile, is seen in a number of the artist's

finest works, such as in the altar at the Stadtkirche Geislingen and in the limewood Madonna in the Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf.



A beautifully carved wood figure of a putto was made for Stift Admont in Austria and is attributed to Joseph Stammel (1695-1765) who worked at Admont Abbey from 1726 until his death in 1765 (estimate: £30,000-50,000, *illustrated left*). In 1865, much of the abbey was destroyed by fire and this figure is believed to have remained at the abbey until that date. Presumably it was part of the decoration of one of the rooms too badly damaged to be saved but somehow the present figure survived and made its way into private ownership. Stammel was the son of a Bavarian sculptor but studied in Italy from 1718-25. His work represents a conflation of the Austrian tradition of wood carving and the Italian baroque with its sense of drama. Stammel produced 16 large sculptures, two reliefs and 68 busts for the interiors of the library at Admont Abbey, which is now the largest monastic library in the world. The interiors are executed in a typical Austrian rococo style, decorated largely in white and gold with frescoed ceilings in an array of pastels. Among these, he is most famous for *The Four Last Things* - Heaven, Hell, Death and The Last Judgement. The allegorical significance of the present figure is unclear now that it is no longer in its original context, but the depiction of the jewel casket underfoot may refer to the vanity of worldly goods.

## SILVER

This rare German parcel-gilt silver *nef* has the mark of Tobias Wolff from Nuremberg, *circa* 1610 (estimate: £100,000-150,000/ €140,000-210,000, *illustrated right*). The *nef*, from the old French *la nef* 'a ship', first came into use in the 13<sup>th</sup> century as a drinking vessel and developed over centuries into a more useful receptacle, first as a dining implement and later for salt before becoming purely ornamental, although still intended to be used on the dining table. The nef represented a *tour de force* for the silversmith as craftsmen as well as being one of the most important pieces of silver plate in a Princely or Royal collection.



A German silver-gilt *windmill cup*, mark of Hans Rühl, Nuremberg, *circa* 1610, with later Dutch tax mark was acquired over 60 years ago (estimate: £30,000-50,000/ €42,000-70,000, *illustrated left*). The windmill cup was the most popular of the silver wager cups produced from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century until the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. The foot of the cup is in the form of a windmill and is designed so that it cannot be put down until its contents are emptied. The bowl of the cup is usually divided into horizontal bands and decorated with engraved strap-work and flowers, sometimes including drinking-songs, names or monograms. Taking turns, one drinker blows into the pipe, sending the sails of the windmill in motion. The aim is to empty the cup before the sails of the windmill stop moving. The hands of the clock are the next part of the game. The drinker spins the hand of the clock and where it lands indicates a figure from one to twelve. Some authors suggest that this designates the amount to drink if the cup is not drained in time. Others propose the unfortunate drinker must offer his fellow drinkers as many drinks as the hand indicated. This example was bought from the legendary Rüttschi Sale at Stuker's in Berne in 1954, previously been kept and exhibited at the Kunsthau Zurich, and one of the most important single owner sales ever held in Switzerland. Alfred Rüttschi (1868-1929) originated from a traditional Swiss family of entrepreneurs in the silk industry and was one of the leading Swiss collectors of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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