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RENAISSANCE PERFECTION – A REDISCOVERED DRAWING BY ANDREA DEL SARTO TO BE OFFERED AT CHRISTIE’S

Old Master Drawings

Christie’s King Street, 5th July 2005

King Street – Christie’s sale of Old Master Drawings on 5 July is to offer a rediscovered work by



Andrea del Sarto, the last great Florentine artist of the High Renaissance. *Head of St Joseph*, a study for a picture now in the Pitti Palace, Florence, is a work of exceptional quality and condition, drawn on an imposing scale. It is expected to realize in excess of £1.5 million. The provenance goes back to Sarto’s celebrated pupil, the artist and biographer Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574). The drawing is one of the last by Sarto to remain in private hands, the finest and certainly the most significant to be offered to the market for 70 years. While a photograph from the 1920s had alerted scholars to the existence of this work, its whereabouts have been a mystery. The work has reappeared after more than 50 years in a private Swiss collection. Inspection has revealed a drawing on the reverse of the sheet that is previously unpublished and entirely unknown to scholars.

Noël Annesley, Honorary Chairman of Christie’s UK and auctioneer for the sale, said *‘In a half century that has seen the appearance on the market of extraordinary drawings by many of the world’s most brilliant draughtsmen, Andrea del Sarto has been conspicuous by his absence. So the reappearance of this, one of his largest and finest sheets, offers a truly once in a lifetime opportunity for museums and collectors. The old man’s head, with his tousled hair, is captured with a startling realism and tenderness that set Sarto apart from his contemporaries.’*

Andrea del Sarto (Florence 1486-1530), the son of a Florentine tailor, began his training as an apprentice to a goldsmith. However, his talent for drawing rapidly emerged and he soon moved to the workshop of Piero di Cosimo. In 1508 Sarto became an independent artist, sharing his studio with his friend and contemporary Francabigio. He absorbed the artistic influences of the Florentine careers of Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo and Raphael, and soon became the leading painter in the city, receiving commissions from religious orders, individual collectors and above all the Medici family. In 1518, with his reputation spreading, Sarto was summoned to the

court of François I, King of France. He returned to Florence in 1519 and resumed his intensely busy career, which was cut short by his death from the plague in 1530 at the age of only 44.

The drawing to be offered at Christie's is a study for the head of Saint Joseph in the altarpiece of the *Holy Family* now in the Pitti Palace, Florence. This work was commissioned directly from Sarto by Zanobi Bracci in about 1523. The drawing shows the head of Saint Joseph in a startlingly realized study fully developed in a subtle combination of black and red chalk, with a secondary drawing below it in which Sarto revisits the subject with Saint Joseph's eyes open. The *verso* shows two studies of legs in red chalk, an unpublished addition to Sarto's works which was unknown save for a misleading reference in an 18th century footnote.

The first known owner of the drawing was the artist and biographer Giorgio Vasari who was one of Sarto's pupils. Vasari was the first 'modern' collector of drawings, and is most famous for his *Lives of the Artists*, perhaps the earliest work of modern Art History and Criticism. He assembled a collection of drawings by notable artists from the 14th Century to his own time and arranged them in albums with distinctive decorative frames drawn around the mounts, as can be seen in the *Head of Saint Joseph*. Throughout the *Lives of the Artists* Vasari refers back to his own collection of drawings, often using it as a source of comparative information.

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Notes to editors:

Christie's holds sales of Old Master Drawings in London, New York and Paris. The following are the top 3 prices realized for Old Master Drawings at Christie's:

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| 1. | 4 th July 2001 | Michelangelo, <i>The Risen Christ</i> , London | £8,143,750 |
| | | World Record Price for an Old Master Drawing at Auction | |
| 2. | 7 th July 2001 | Leonardo da Vinci, <i>Horse and Rider</i> , London | £8,143,750 |
| | | Equal World Record Price for an Old Master Drawing at Auction | |
| 3. | 13 th December 1996 | Raphael, <i>Study for the Head and Hand of an Apostle</i> , London | £5,281,500 |
| | | World Auction Record for a Drawing by Raphael | |