

POETIC MASTERPIECE UNVEILED: BURNE-JONES PAINTING LAST SEEN OVER 110 YEARS AGO TO BE OFFERED AT CHRISTIE'S IN MAY



London – Revealed to the public for the first time in over 110 years, *Hero* by Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones, Bt., A.R.A., R.W.S. (1833-1898) will be offered in Christie's sale of *Victorian & British Impressionist Art* on 31 May 2012. This painting has exceptional provenance having been bought by Burne-Jones's most loyal and perceptive patron, a wealthy Scottish merchant and sometime Member of Parliament for Glasgow, William Graham. The painting has been passed down in Graham's family to the present day and is expected to realise £220,000-320,000.

Comment: Peter Brown, Director, Victorian Pictures:

"It is so unusual to be able to present any unknown masterpiece of Victorian art, let alone two in one sale. Christie's are delighted to offer this striking work by Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones, which has been in a private collection for over a century, and unexhibited since 1899. The picture displays the sophisticated connoisseurship of William Graham, its first owner, and the artist's strong sense of design. Preserved behind glass in its original frame, it retains the freshest impasto."

In Greek mythology Hero was a priestess of Aphrodite at Sestos, on the shores of the Hellespont. Her lover, Leander, lived at Abydos, a town on the opposite, Asian, side, and at night would swim across the water to join her, guided by a beacon which she lit. One stormy night he was drowned, and Hero, in despair, threw herself into the sea. The story is told by the Greek poet Musaeus and by Ovid in his *Heroides*, a source which often provided Burne-Jones with subjects. The picture shows Hero lighting her beacon with dead leaves, the dark blue background suggesting the depths of night. Burne-Jones repeated the figure in a painting entitled *The Marsh Marigold*, but there she is shown in broad daylight, wearing a yellow dress and picking flowers in a spacious meadow.

This painting is highly characteristic of Graham's taste, being a little off-beat, and full of poetry and intense feeling. It seems to have appealed to his widow too since it was not included in the historic four-day sale of his pictures that took place at Christie's in April 1886, nine months after his death. Retaining the picture, it was lent by Mrs. Graham to Burne-Jones's memorial exhibition at the New Gallery in the winter of 1898-9, and has been unseen since.

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