

CHRISTIE'S

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COMTE AND COMTESSE NIEL COLLECTION: A SHARED PASSION ON 16 APRIL 2012 AT CHRISTIE'S PARIS



Paris – Christie's is proud to announce the sale of *Comte and Comtesse Niel*, a *shared passion* which will take place in Paris on 16 April 2012. Featuring nearly 130 lots the collection includes furniture, silver, arms, prints, books, old master paintings and sculpture. The collection is a testimony to the Comte and Comtesse Niel as passionate collectors of French art with royal provenance from the second half of the 18th century and is expected to realise between €1 million and €1.5 million.

ROYAL CONNECTIONS

The Comtesse Niel, born Victoire Gasquet James, was one of the four heirs of both her mother Elizabeth Bleeker Tibbits Pratt's immense New York Pratt banking fortune and her father Amedee de Gasquet James' equally large New Orleans fortune. During her childhood, the Comtesse, her parents and siblings led a Henry Jamesian existence moving from grand house to grand house in France and America. However, in 1911, after the Comtesse's father died, her mother married the Grand Duke of Mecklenburgh-Schwerin, Raymond Abel de Libran.



In 1921 the Comtesse married the Comte de Niel and settled into married life at No. 44 Avenue Gabriel. In the early fifties they began to collect and study books, pictures, souvenirs, bibelots and furniture that had once been owned by the French royal family in the latter half of the 18th century. Examples of this furniture will be offered at auction including a Louis XVI royal "Bergère", *illustrated left*, estimated to fetch between €80,000 and €120,000. Created during the third quarter of the XVIIIth century, this chair was brought to Elizabeth's castle in Compiègne. Also on offer is a Louis XV writing

case made during the middle of the XVIIIth century (estimate: €40,000-60,000), *illustrated right*. These rare and precious survivals of the revolution and republic were discovered with the help of the leading antique dealers of the post-war era such as Cailleux, Fabius and Wildenstein. The objects were obtained from other collectors, as well as from the descendants of aristocratic families, and discovered in the sale rooms of the time.



From 1954, the couple began to give generously to the royal palace of Versailles; they were celebrated for refusing to lend any part of their collection preferring to donate royal pictures, furniture and works of art outright. Treasures made for and belonging to Madame du Barry, Marie Antoinette and Louis XV which had disappeared during the Revolution now found their way back to the palace for which they had been originally destined. Over the years the Comte and Comtesse became by far the most important patrons of Versailles and other public collections in France.



Amongst the highlights in this sale are two landscapes by Hubert Robert (1733-1808), *Deux vues de la Fête de la Fédération*, 1790, which are estimated between €80,000 and €120,000, illustrated above. A portrait by Nicolas de Largillière (1656-1746), *Portrait de Jean de la Fontaine* is estimated between €30,000 and €50,000.

After the Comtesse's death in 1962, the Comte continued to bequeath important pieces until his death in 1966. He donated *Portrait of Baron de Breteuil* by Mosnier to the Louvre in 1963, as well as a bird cage once owned by Madame du Barry and a table delivered by Domanock for Marie-Antoinette to Versailles in 1966.

This unique collection of fine and decorative arts with royal provenance was created in an era of unequalled connoisseurship in France and in America and which also saw the forging of both the Frick and the Wallace Collections.

Sale: Monday 16 April 2012 at 4 pm

Exhibition: Friday 13 and Saturday 14 April from 10 am to 6 pm and Monday 16 April from 10 am to 12 noon.

Christie's: 9 avenue Matignon, 75008 Paris

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Images and catalogue available on request

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About Christie's

Christie's, the world's leading art business, had global auction and private sales in 2011 that totaled £3.6 billion/\$5.7 billion. Christie's is a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service and expertise, as well as international glamour. Founded in 1766 by James Christie, Christie's has since conducted the greatest and most celebrated auctions through the centuries providing a popular showcase for the unique and the beautiful. Christie's offers over 450 auctions annually in over 80 categories, including all areas of fine and decorative arts, jewellery, photographs, collectibles, wine, and more. Prices range from \$200 to over \$100 million. Christie's also has a long and successful history conducting private sales for its clients in all categories, with emphasis on Post-War and

Contemporary, Impressionist and Modern, Old Masters and Jewellery. Private sales totaled £502 million / \$808.6m in 2011, an increase of 44% on the previous year.

Christie's has a global presence with 53 offices in 32 countries and 10 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Dubai, Zürich, and Hong Kong. More recently, Christie's has led the market with expanded initiatives in growth markets such as Russia, China, India and the United Arab Emirates, with successful sales and exhibitions in Beijing, Mumbai and Dubai.

**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.*