National Maritime Museum announces appeal to acquire two major works by George Stubbs

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The National Maritime Museum, London announced today (13 August 2013) a £1.5m appeal to acquire two oil paintings, *Kongouro from New Holland* and *Portrait of a Large Dog*, by the celebrated British artist George Stubbs (1724–1806).

The museum has already secured £3.2million from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and £200,000 from the Art Fund which will go towards the acquisition of the works as well as much-needed conservation work and a public programme which will bring these remarkable works to the widest audience possible.

Due to their significant place within British history and artistic culture, the paintings have been put under an export bar while the appeal is mounted to save them for the nation. Should the appeal be successful they will initially go on display in the Queen's House, Greenwich in 2014.

The paintings (both of which are oil on panel measuring 24¼ by 28½ ins) were commissioned by the gentleman-scientist Sir Joseph Banks following his participation on Captain James Cook's first Pacific voyage of 'discovery' (1768–71) aboard HMS Endeavour. Stubbs was the pre-eminent animal painter of his day and is now widely appreciated as an eighteenth-century European master. His paintings of the kangaroo and dingo are the most significant artistic productions directly related to Cook's seminal voyage, and the earliest painted representations of these iconic animals in Western art. They were first exhibited together in London in 1773 and have remained in the UK ever since.

Exploration is a particularly rich area of collection for the National Maritime Museum, which already holds many objects relating to Cook's voyages, including works by William Hodges (1744–97), who was appointed by the Admiralty to record the places discovered on Cook's second Pacific voyage (1772–75); and the highly-regarded portrait of Cook by Nathaniel Dance (1775–76), which was also commissioned by Banks and was displayed along with the paintings of the kangaroo and dingo in his house in Soho Square, London.

Lord Sterling, Chairman of Royal Museums Greenwich, said "We are delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Art Fund have formally backed our bid to purchase the works with very generous grants totalling two-thirds of the required funds. This is a fabulous kick-start to our campaign. Royal Museums Greenwich has a once in a lifetime opportunity to complete the acquisition of these two remarkable paintings which will enhance immeasurably the Museum's role in engaging audiences worldwide with the story of exploration."

Carole Souter, Chief Executive of HLF, said: "No one captures the movement and magic of animals better than George Stubbs. These two paintings form an extraordinarily important part of the James Cook voyage of 'discovery' story. Heritage Lottery Fund believes they are an integral part of our seafaring nation's multi-layered heritage, and we hope that our grant of just over £3million, along with contributions from other funding partners, will enable them to be acquired by the National Maritime Museum. I'm particularly pleased that plans are already taking shape for the less fragile of the pair – Kongouro – to go on tour to a number of other venues with connections to Captain Cook, so it can be seen and enjoyed by as many people as possible."

Stephen Deuchar, Director of the Art Fund, said “I cannot think of a better home for these two outstandingly important works by Stubbs than the National Maritime Museum, whose collection covers the important interrelationship between art, science and exploration. We are delighted to be supporting both the acquisition and education plans for these paintings, helping audiences to engage with a key episode in the history of exploration. I urge everyone to support the museum in the final leg of their appeal.”

The museum’s bid to acquire the paintings is supported by the Royal Society and by Sir David Attenborough, who said “I had the privilege of working with the National Maritime Museum when it staged the exhibition of the paintings made on Cook’s Second Voyage and I greatly admired the way it cared for paintings and other artefacts. Its Cook collections, are, of course, of world importance and I have no doubt that these two Stubbs paintings should be placed among them.”

Culture Minister Ed Vaizey said: “Temporary export bars have been instrumental in ensuring many of our national treasures, like these two striking paintings by Stubbs, stay here in the UK where they can be enjoyed by all. I’m delighted that the Maritime Museum, the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Art Fund have joined forces in a campaign to save them for the nation and hope that the necessary funds can be raised to secure them for the museum.”

The public can donate to the appeal via mobile phone by texting STUB35 to 70070, online via JustGiving or in person at the museum. Visitors to the museum can also see the paintings, which are on public display in the Sammy Ofer Wing throughout the fundraising campaign.

Futher information

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