Garden Museum acquires Portrait of a Black



This enigmatic painting was acquired with the support of the Heritage Lottery Fund, Art Fund and the Royal Horticultural Society.

The portrait will go on display at the museum in spring 2013 after the completion of restoration work.

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>
> - Alan Titchmarsh

Alan Titchmarsh MBE VMH DL, Trustee of the Garden Museum, said: "This picture, rich in content and wonderfully executed, is a great addition to the Garden Museum's collection, reflecting, as it does, the diverse and complex history of gardening. It's a tremendously evocative portrait which for me.

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A heroic image

Portrait of a Black Gardener, dated to 1905 by Wendy Baron, is unique as a heroic image of gardening. Gilman, Sickert's friend and rival, was a radical figure in British art before the First World War and this picture demonstrates his skill with the brush - but also with the spade; he was a pioneer of Letchworth Garden City.

It is also a key painting in the story of how black people have been presented in British art. It is one of the first portraits in which a non-white person is painted alone and as a proud full-length. The picture is an enigma - we would love to know who the model might have been - but its display in a public collection means we can begin to unravel its mysteries.

Harold Gilman

Harold Gilman, born 11 February 1876, was a founder member of the Camden Town Group, along with Walter Sickert. Trained at the Slade with Spencer Gore and Wyndham Lewis, Gilman was an important figure in this short lived but influential movement in the early 20th century.

Wesley Kerr, Chair of the HLF London Committee, said: "Pensive, poised, poetic. This compelling and powerful portrait of a black gardener briefly resting amidst terracotta pots before the next task is an important acquisition which the Heritage Lottery Fund is proud to support.

"Great news for the unique and ground-breaking Garden Museum and its main partner in the purchase, the Royal Horticultural Society. People from many backgrounds have played an immense and dignified part in the horticultural, agricultural and labouring history of the UK, the USA and the Commonwealth. Harold Gilman’s enigmatic picture from a century ago will help to tell hundreds of stories to tens of thousands of people."

Elizabeth Banks, RHS President, on the acquisition: "I’m delighted that the RHS has been able to support the Garden Museum in its acquisition of this rare and important work of art."