Stubbs’s kangaroo and dingo paintings saved for the nation

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The National Maritime Museum is delighted to announce that the Eyal Ofer Family Foundation will donate £1.5m to help enable the museum to acquire two 18th-century oil paintings by the celebrated British artist George Stubbs (1724-1806). The donation will help save these paintings for the nation and bring these remarkable works to the widest possible audience.

The paintings, *Kongouro from New Holland* and *Portrait of a Large Dog*, are vitally important visual records of Captain James Cook’s first epic Endeavour voyage of discovery (1768-1771) and represent the first depiction of an Australian kangaroo and a dingo in Western art. They were first exhibited together in London in 1773 and have remained in the UK ever since.

Both paintings were privately owned until they were sold in late 2012 to a buyer outside the UK. Due to the significance of their place in British history and artistic culture, they were put under an export bar in January 2013 while an appeal was mounted to save them for the nation. That export bar elapses today. Thanks to this donation, along with significant funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), the Monument Trust, the Art Fund and the public, the appeal has met its target and the paintings will remain in the UK as part of the permanent collection of the museum.

Exploration is a particularly rich theme for the National Maritime Museum, which already holds unrivalled collections relating to Cook’s three great voyages. The acquisition of these works will greatly enhance the museum’s world class art collection and its educational work with schools and families. They will also be central to the Museum’s commemoration of the 250th anniversary of Cook’s Endeavour voyage in 2018.

The works will initially go on display in the historic Queen’s House, part of the National Maritime Museum, in summer 2014. The foundation’s donation, in addition to supporting the acquisition of the paintings, will also enable the re-presentation of the gallery space in the Queen’s House in which the kangaroo and dingo, together with other works of art that document and explore the theme of exploration, will be displayed. This is the first of a series of projects designed to enhance the seminal Queen’s House by Inigo Jones in time for its 400th anniversary in 2016. In recognition of this generous donation, the gallery space will be named the Eyal Ofer Gallery.

Lord Sterling of Plaistow, Chairman of the Royal Museums Greenwich, said: "Through this generous donation from Eyal Ofer, the National Maritime Museum has been able to secure these wonderful works of art for the nation. The support has enabled us to have not only 'Saved our Stubbs' but also to rejuvenate the Queens House at the National Maritime Museum which will house the first exhibition of these paintings in the Eyal Ofer Gallery."

Sir David Attenborough said: "Exciting news that these two pictures, so important in the history of zoological discovery, are to remain where they were commissioned and painted."

Culture Minister Ed Vaizey, who placed the export licence deferral on the pictures in January, added: "This is great news and a perfect example of our cultural export licence system working to help keep a wonderful part of our cultural heritage in this country where it belongs, while also ensuring that the original seller of the works does not lose out.

Thanks to the incredible generosity of Eyal Ofer, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Monument Trust, the Art Fund and the public, these strange and wonderful paintings will be available to be enjoyed, free of charge, by everyone for generations to come."

Eyal Ofer said: "I'm delighted that this donation helps secure two such important paintings for the National Maritime Museum and the country. My family has a long connection with this great maritime institution and these paintings are a landmark in Britain's history of maritime exploration and Captain Cook's voyages. I look forward to seeing them being discovered, enjoyed and studied by as wide a public audience as possible."

Carole Souter, Chief Executive of HLF, said: "These are very special paintings which form an important part of the story of James Cook's voyages. We are delighted that our Heritage Lottery Fund grant of just over £3m has underpinned other philanthropic giving and enabled the paintings to be acquired by the National Maritime Museum. Plans are already underway to enable the less fragile painting *Kongouro* to tour a number of places with links to Captain Cook so that as many people as possible get to see and enjoy it."

Stephen Deuchar, Director of the Art Fund, said: "Helping secure great works of art for public collections is why the Art Fund was founded over 110 years ago so we're thrilled to have played a part in making this great acquisition happen. We're also proud to be supporting the interpretation project that will accompany their display at Greenwich and beyond, illuminating the adventures of Captain James Cook, a key figure in the nation's history. Thanks to the generosity of the art-loving public, the collective support of the HLF and other funding bodies and the Eyal Ofer Family Foundation, these important works by George Stubbs are here to stay."

Eyal Ofer is an international shipping and real estate magnate. Through his London-based Zodiac Maritime, he operates one of the largest fleets flying the Red Ensign in the UK.

The Eyal Ofer family has a long tradition of philanthropy in the UK and overseas. Eyal Ofer's father, Sammy Ofer KBE, was a major supporter of the National Maritime Museum (the Sammy Ofer Wing opened in 2011) and the restoration of the Cutty Sark in Greenwich (opened in 2012). Eyal Ofer himself has continued that philanthropic tradition, supporting numerous other projects including the new building programme at Tate Modern and the Royal Row Barge Gloriana for Her Majesty's the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

Through this donation from the Eyal Ofer Family Foundation, Eyal Ofer aims to provide continuity to his family's legacy of charitable giving and to reinforce the importance of maritime heritage in the UK.

Notes to editors

Royal Museums Greenwich incorporates the National Maritime Museum, the Royal Observatory Greenwich, the 17th-century Queen's House and Cutty Sark. Royal Museums Greenwich works to illustrate for everyone the importance of the sea, ships, time and the stars and their relationship with people. This unique collection of attractions, which form a key part of the Maritime Greenwich UNESCO World Heritage Site, welcomes over 1.5 million British and international visitors a year and is also a major centre of education and research. For more information visit the Royal Museums Greenwich's website.

The Eyal Ofer Family Foundation is a philanthropic foundation established to continue the charitable giving of Eyal Ofer's family in support of the arts, culture, education and the humanities. In July 2013, the foundation made a £10million donation to the Tate Modern in London as part of the Tate's new building programme.

The Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art, helping museums to buy and show great art. Over the past 5 years they have given £26m to help museums and galleries acquire works of art for their collections, and placed hundreds of gifts and bequests, from ancient sculpture and treasure hoards to Old Master paintings and contemporary commissions. We are independently funded, the majority of their income coming from over 100,000 members who, through the National Art Pass, enjoy free entry to over 220 museums, galleries and historic houses across the UK, as well as 50% off entry to major exhibitions. To find out more about the Art Fund and the National Art Pass, visit the Art Fund's website.

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The paintings (both of which are oil on panel measuring 24¼ by 28½ in) 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 18th-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.

The 17th-century Queen's House, designed by Inigo Jones, was the first Classical building in England – it is known for its perfectly proportioned Great Hall, original marble floor and beautiful Tulip staircase. Now part of Royal Museums Greenwich, the Queen's House is a Grade I listed building of unique architectural importance and forms an important part of the UNESCO Maritime Greenwich World Heritage Site. The house has featured in many films and television shows, including Sense and Sensibility and the recent big screen adaptation of Sherlock Holmes. Visitors to the Queen's House can see highlights from the National Maritime Museum's fine art collection, including: Turner's largest oil painting, The Battle of Trafalgar; famous portraits of former Greenwich residents Henry VIII and Elizabeth I; and exquisite examples of the work of the van de Veldes.

Further information

Royal Museums Greenwich: Sheryl Twigg, Press & PR Manager on 020 8312 6790, email: stwigg@rmg.co.uk or Jenny Stewart, Senior Press Officer on 020 8312 6732, email: jstewart@rmg.co.uk.

Brunswick Group: Richard Meredith, Partner on 020 7404 5959, email: rmeredith@brunswickgroup.com or Charlie Potter, Director on 020 7404 5959, email: cpotter@brunswickgroup.com.