Ben Uri art museum acquires portrait by Soutine

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La Soubrette (Waiting Maid), c. 1933, is of international importance and has been acquired by private treaty through Sotheby's, thanks to a £193,000 Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) grant and almost equal support from the Art Fund and the V&A Purchase Grant Fund. In addition, many philanthropists from the UK, Europe and the USA have also contributed and share Ben Uri's vision of ever strengthening its internationally renowned museum collection, and ensuring the painting is saved for London and the nation. The important acquisition – which has taken over 15 months to complete – follows on from Ben Uri's discovery and acquisition in 2010 of the lost but now celebrated Jewish Crucifixion 'Apocalypse en Lilas, Capriccio', painted in response to the Holocaust by Marc Chagall in 1945.

Sue Bowers, Head of Heritage Lottery Fund London, said: "HLF is delighted to help enhance the Ben Uri's collections through this acquisition and support of activities that will open up the collections to the wider public, including the 'Art in the Open' education programme, accessible to 25,000 schools nationally. This grant will bring an internationally important work of art to London audiences of all ages and beyond."

Stephen Deuchar, Director of the Art Fund, said: "Chaim Soutine is increasingly understood as a truly major figure in the development of European Modernist painting, and this work is a fine example of what made Soutine's practice so distinct and important. We're delighted to have been involved in this acquisition for Ben Uri, and applaud their efforts to show and champion the work of this great artist."

Janet Davis, Head of the V&A Purchase Grant Fund, added: "We are delighted to have helped Ben Uri to add this powerful example of Soutine's work to its collection, where it will play a strong role".

The portrait will be an important new acquisition for Ben Uri – The Art Museum for Everyone / The London Jewish Museum of Art. The museum, which focuses on Identity and Migration through art, will now house the first Soutine portrait of a working figure in uniform, and only the second Soutine portrait and sixth Soutine painting, to enter a public collection in this country. Other Soutine's in the UK include one portrait at the Courtauld, four landscapes at Tate Britain, and the other at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh.

About La Soubrette (Waiting Maid)
La Soubrette (Waiting Maid) is a compelling example of Soutine's figurative work from the late 1920s and early 1930s. Focusing on a single subject in an unadorned background, the painting depicts an anonymous domestic maid dressed in the uniform of her profession. Soutine's tactile brushwork creates a direct engagement with his subject, underlining the maid's individuality rather than reducing it, yet her pinched face and downcast eyes express weariness and a certain submission. The portrait belongs to a period in the early 1930s when Soutine turned away from the hotel staff and cooks of his earlier portraits and towards the domestic staff of bourgeois country estates. Although less figuratively contorted and less confrontational in character, it shares a number of stylistic, thematic and compositional devices with his earlier celebrated Pastry Cooks series, particularly the focus on a working-class figure in a service profession, and the contrast of the ruddy face against the white of the uniform.

Soutine's significance to British and American painting cannot be understated. His importance to artists as various as De Kooning, Pollock, Dubuffet has been much discussed, while his substantial influence in Britain on the later 'School of London' group, which included Francis Bacon (most recently illustrated by the 2011 exhibition, 'Soutine and Bacon' held

at Helly Nahmad Gallery New York curated by Esti Dunow and Maurice Tuchman – see catalogue essay 'Soutine Mania in Post War British Art' by Martin Hammer), as well as Lucian Freud, Frank Auerbach and Leon Kossoff is widely acknowledged; and continues to be felt today in the work of painters such as Jenny Saville, currently exhibiting at Modern Art, Oxford.

La Soubrette is a significant addition to Ben Uri's important collection of work by émigré artists and to its growing collection of work by other artists associated with the École de Paris. Most notable is Marc Chagall, for which the museum's scholarship of this period enabled the acquisition of one of Chagall's most important Jewish Crucifixions from 1945, acquired at auction in Paris in 2010, as well as Sonia Delaunay, Isaac Dobrinsky, Henri Epstein, Michel Kikoïne, Chana de Kowalska, Jacques Lipchitz, Emmanuel Mané-Katz, Elie Nadelman, Jules Pascin and Issachar Ber Ryback.

About Ben Uri
Ben Uri was the under-bidder last month for the 35,000 sq ft building, which currently houses the Design Museum on Butlers Wharf by Tower Bridge on London's South Bank and continues its urgent search for an appropriate building to show the 1,300 strong renowned collection and its wide programming of temporary exhibitions, national schools learning modules, art and wellbeing alongside artists and community development initiatives.

La Soubrette will be unveiled to the public in a special exhibition at Ben Uri's current gallery in 108a Boundary Road, off Abbey Road, in St John's Wood, NW8 0RH from 4 to 28 October.

David Glasser, Executive Chair of Ben Uri, said: "This is a stunning addition to the collection and sits comfortably alongside the world-class examples acquired by Ben Uri over the past decade including seminal works by Marc Chagall, George Grosz, Max Liebermann, David Bomberg, Sir Jacob Epstein and Mark Gertler. Our huge thanks go to the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Art Fund, the V&A Purchase Grant Fund, Sotheby's, the family of the late Mrs Andrew Best, and all our wonderful patrons from this country and abroad who together share our vision and have made this major acquisition possible.

"Without these institutions and supporters Ben Uri could not sustain its impact across local, national and international landscapes. This important acquisition adds another compelling reason for Ben Uri to be located in the centre of London's gallery milieu to maximize access from all around us."

Note to editors

Ben Uri website

The Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art, helping museums to buy and show great art for all to enjoy. Over the past five years, the Art Fund has given £24m to help 227 museums and galleries acquire over £195m of art for their public collections. The Art Fund is funded by over 90,000 members who own a National Art Pass, which gives free entry to over 200 museums, galleries, historic houses and castles across the country as well as 50% off many major exhibitions. Find out more about the Art Fund and the National Art Pass at Art Fund website. The press office can be reached on 020 7225 4888 or media@artfund.org.

The **V&A** Purchase Grant Fund is a government fund that helps regional museums, record offices and specialist libraries in England and Wales to acquire objects relating to the arts, literature and history. It was established at the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in 1881 and continues to be part of its nationwide work. The annual grants budget, currently £750,000, is provided by Arts Council England (ACE). Each year, the Purchase Grant Fund considers some 200 applications and awards grants to around 100 organisations, enabling acquisitions of over £3million to go ahead.

Visit the V&A website.

Further information

Head of Collections, Sarah MacDougall, sarahm@benuri.org.uk or David Glasser, davidg@benuri.org.uk / 07880 736 081.