# Fitzwilliam Museum set to acquire Poussin masterpiece

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In collaboration with the Art Fund and almost £1million in donations from members of the public and charitable organisations, the £3,021,000 HLF grant will enable not only the acquisition, but will also involve outreach work.

Supporters of the Fitzwilliam Museum gave a total of £692,000 including significant funds from Friends of the Fitzwilliam. As well as giving a grant of £100,000, the Art Fund also raised funds through contributions from nearly 3,000 members, bringing in an additional £142,000. The Museum and the Art Fund are grateful for the support of a number of trusts and foundations.

These hugely generous donations and grants mean that the Fitzwilliam Museum can now take advantage of an extraordinary opportunity provided by HM Government’s Acceptance in Lieu scheme to acquire the painting for £3.9m instead of its market value of £14m.

The acquisition of the painting for the nation has received resounding support throughout the campaign, not least that of the National Gallery where it has been on display for the majority of the campaign, and will remain until 11 November. Thereafter it will be moved to Cambridge and be exhibited in the Fitzwilliam Museum’s Octagon Gallery from early December.

Dame Jenny Abramsky, Chair of the Heritage Lottery Fund, said: "Extreme Unction is an extraordinarily moving and beautiful Old Master which has influenced generations of artists. However, it's not just about aesthetics and we were impressed with the Fitzwilliam and Art Fund’s dynamic fundraising campaign and their desire to seize the moment and secure the painting on behalf of the nation. Combining these factors meant the Heritage Lottery Fund was unanimous in awarding a grant of over £3million which will give an immense boost to the museum’s prospects of acquiring this painting."

David Scrase, Acting Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum, commented: "We are extremely grateful to the thousands of individuals and the many charities and organisations that have given so generously to this campaign. We would like especially to thank the Art Fund for their vital early encouragement, the National Gallery for their support, and the Heritage Lottery Fund for ultimately making it all possible. Now this masterpiece will be available to all, transforming our existing collections at the Fitzwilliam. We are absolutely thrilled."

Dr Stephen Deuchar, Director of the Art Fund, said: "Once again I have been delighted by the generosity of the public and, in particular, of Art Fund members who stepped forward to safeguard this masterpiece and bring it into the public domain. We also applaud the HLF's immense commitment to the campaign and for contributing so decisively to its success. Thank you to all those who made this possible - including Nicholas Penny and the National Gallery for supporting the appeal through a special display of the work in London. Above all, many congratulations to the Fitzwilliam Museum for securing this most important acquisition for the nation."

The painting is currently owned by the 11th Duke of Rutland's 2000 Settlement. Robert Holden Ltd, London Fine Art agents, have been instrumental in the transaction.

**Notes to editors**

The Masterpiece: commissioned in Rome by Poussin's friend renowned connoisseur Cassiano dal Pozzo, Extreme Unction (c. 1638-40) depicts a dying man being anointed with oil in accordance with the rites of the early Roman church. To enhance the realism of the scene, Poussin drew on his extensive study of the art and artefacts of classical antiquity to represent the costumes, setting, and the structure of the painting itself, with the figures disposed frieze-like across the composition. This classicising tendency went on to make an inestimable impact on Western art.

Today, the sobriety and control of Poussin's paintings can seem difficult, or remote, to audiences. But in Extreme Unction subject and style are so perfectly aligned that Poussin's stark, lyrical, line, and controlled play of light and shadow bring out the full depth of emotion that marks this momentous scene. Through the rhythmic beauty of the composition and passages of resplendent, often joyous, colour, Poussin allows us to contemplate and engage with the most natural and inevitable of events in human existence: the passage from life to death.

Nicolas Poussin (1594 – 1665) was the greatest French painter of the 17th century. He initially studied painting in Paris and then moved to Rome at the age of thirty. In the following decades his renown across Europe grew, and save for a brief spell in the service of the King of France, Poussin made his home in Rome permanently.

The Fitzwilliam Museum, founded in 1816, is the principal museum of the University of Cambridge, with collections exploring world history and art from antiquity to the present day. It houses over half a million objects from ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman artefacts, to medieval illuminated manuscripts, masterpiece paintings from the Renaissance to the 21st century and outstanding collections of applied arts, ceramics, coins, and Asian arts. Welcoming over 400,000 visitors a year, the Fitzwilliam presents a wide ranging public programme of major exhibitions, events and education activities, and is an internationally recognised institute of learning, research and conservation.

The Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art, helping museums and galleries across the UK to acquire great works of art and develop their collections, and encouraging the public to make the most of all there is to see. Over the past five years they have given £24m to enable over 200 museums, from ancient sculpture and treasure hoards to Old Master paintings and contemporary commissions, and supported a range of programmes which bring art to wider audiences. We also work with collectors to help place gifts of art in suitable museums and galleries. We are independently funded and the majority of our income comes from 95,000 members who, through the National Art Pass, enjoy free entry to over 200 museums, galleries and historic houses across the country as well as 50% off most major exhibitions.

HM Government's Acceptance in Lieu Scheme (AIL) is administered by Arts Council England and allows people to offer items of cultural and historical importance to the State in full or part payment of their inheritance tax, capital transfer tax or estate duty. The scheme is currently among the most important means of acquiring important works of art and cultural objects for public ownership. Once accepted, they are distributed to museums, galleries and public archival depositories throughout the UK. The Scheme offers clear tax benefits to owners and ensures that major cultural objects remain in the UK for the enjoyment of everyone.

**Further information**

HLF Press Office: Katie Owen, Senior Media Manager. Phone: 020 7591 6036, email: katieo@hlf.org.uk.

Fitzwilliam Museum Press Office. Phone: 01223 332 941, email: fitzmuseum-press@lists.cam.ac.uk or visit the Fitzwilliam museum website.

Art Fund: Caroline Hunt, Press Relations Manager. Phone: 020 7225 4804, email:chunt@artfund.org or visit the Art Fund website.

For more information on HM Government's Acceptance in Lieu scheme, please visit Acceptance in Lieu website.