Rare 17th century Baroque tables saved for the nation

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These cultural treasures had an export bar placed on them and their acquisition ensures that they will remain in the United Kingdom for display in Edinburgh and London. Both tables will be on initial display at the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh from 20 June to 30 September 2012.

The acquisition has been possible with generous funding from the Art Fund, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the National Museums Scotland Charitable Trust, the Friends of the V&A and the Horn Bequest.

Sir Angus Grossart, Chairman of the Trustees of National Museums Scotland, said, “This acquisition greatly enhances our already significant international important collections of European art and design. We are delighted that both tables will go on immediate display at the National Museum of Scotland this summer. One of the tables will then be displayed in four major new permanent art and design galleries which are currently being developed. We have highly ambitious plans to strengthen our collections and displays and have created an ambitious agenda which will be confirmed by a number of future additions.”

The tables came up for auction in July 2011, but a temporary export bar was placed on the objects by Culture Minister Ed Vaizey, providing time to raise money to keep the items in the country. The ruling followed a recommendation from the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest, administered by the Arts Council of England. National Museums Scotland and the V&A acquired the tables for the national collections in May 2012.

Martin Roth, Director of the V&A, said: “These tables are of exceptional importance. Although the V&A collections are rich in earlier Italian furniture, the table we have acquired will be a valuable addition to our 17th century offer and its military subject matter depicting warring Turkish and European forces will allow us to present visitors with a wider geographical understanding of Europe at this time. It is intended for display in our new, refurbished Europe 1600-1800 galleries, due to open in 2014.”

The tables were made in Venice between 1685 and 1688. The marquetry tops, signed by Lucio de Lucci, depict scenes of war, almost certainly that between Venice and the Ottoman Empire for control of the Greek Peloponnese. The marquetry employs a decorative veneer of ebony, rosewood, walnut and fruitwoods with ivory, stained horn, pewter. The boxwood bases are attributed to the celebrated sculptor Andrea Brustolon (1662-1732), described as ‘the Michelangelo of wood’ by Balzac in the 19th century, about the time these tables came to Britain. They are exceptional examples of the exuberance of the Baroque era.

The tables may have been made for the commander of the Venetian forces during the 1680s, Doge Francesco Morosini. They were acquired by the 5th Duke of Buccleuch in 1833 and remained at Dalkeith Palace until sold by the 8th Duke in 1971.

Lord Inglewood, Chairman of the Reviewing Committee, said: "These magnificent tables are exceptional examples of 17th-century Italian Baroque furniture, something that is under-represented in this country. They are undoubtedly of

great interest to the history of taste and collecting in 19th-century Britain."

Stephen Deuchar, Director of The Art Fund, said:, "We're delighted to have been involved in keeping these exquisite works of furniture in the UK and on view for future generations to enjoy."

Colin McLean, Head of the Heritage Lottery Fund Scotland, said: "By working together, cultural organisations north and south of the border have stopped these outstanding tables from leaving the country. They can now be enjoyed by may thousands of visitors to the V&A in London and the National Museum of Scotland where their magnificent marquetry opens a window to the European history of their time."

Marina Vaizey, Chairman of the Friends of the V&A, said: "The Friends of the V&A were delighted to have been able to contribute our largest-ever grant towards a single acquisition. These superb tables are outstanding exemplars of the finest Italian Baroque design and craftsmanship at its exuberant best."

Breakdown of funding:

National Museums Scotland acquisition includes:

- £125,000 from the Art Fund (£250,00 in total)
- £125,000 from the Heritage Lottery Fund
- £60,000 from National Museums Scotland Charitable Trust
- £57,950 from National Museums Scotland purchase grant

V&A acquisition includes:

- **£**175,000 from the Friends of the V&A
- £125,000 from the Art Fund (£250,00 in total)
- £17,856 from the Horn Bequest

Total cost: £735,900

Notes to editors

1. About the V&A: The V&A is the world's leading museum of art and design with collections unrivalled in their scope and diversity. It was established to make works of art available to all and to inspire British designers and manufacturers. Today, the V&A's collections, which span over 2000 years of human creativity in virtually every medium and from many parts of the world, continue to intrigue, inspire and inform. In December 2012, the V&A will open its Furniture Gallery, providing for the first time, a dedicated home for the Museum's renowned furniture collection. Europe 1600-1800 is the largest gallery refurbishment in the V&A's phase two of FuturePlan, its second 10 year phase of restoration and redesign to create beautiful and contemporary new settings for the V&A's collections. The project will see the complete redisplay and reinterpretation of seven galleries containing some of the most magnificent and elaborate works of art and design in the V&A collections. The galleries are expected to open in 2014.

2. The Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest is an independent body, serviced by Arts Council England, which advises the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on whether a

cultural object, intended for export, is of national importance under specified criteria. Where the Committee finds that an object meets one or more of the criteria, it will normally recommend that the decision on the export licence application should be deferred for a specified period. An offer may then be made from within the United Kingdom at or above the fair matching price.

3. About the Art Fund: The Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art, helping UK museums and galleries to buy, show and share art. Over the past 5 years, the Art Fund has given £24 million in grants for purchase and also supported a range of projects and programmes aimed at helping more people enjoy art. It is independently funded by 90,000 supporters who purchase a National Art Pass, costing from £50 which gives free entry to over 200 museums, galleries and historic houses across the country as well as 50% off major exhibitions. Media contact 020 7225 4888, media@artfund.org

4. About Arts Council England: Arts Council England champions, develops and invests in artistic and cultural experiences that enrich people's lives. We support a range of activities across the arts, museums and libraries – from theatre to digital art, reading to dance, music to literature, and crafts to collections. Great art and culture inspires us, brings us together and teaches us about ourselves and the world around us. In short, it makes life better. Between 2011 and 2015, we will invest £1.4billion of public money from government and an estimated £1billion from the National Lottery to help create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country.

Further information

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