HLF gives lead support to Ashmolean’s campaign to save Manet portrait

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Since launching the campaign in February, the Ashmolean has also been awarded a significant grant from The Art Fund of £750,000, along with £200,000 of gifts from individuals and The Friends of the Ashmolean.

The painting has been sold to a foreign buyer for £28.35million but, under a private treaty sale, with tax remission it can be purchased by an approved UK public collection at the greatly reduced price of £7.83million. The Ashmolean has until 7 August 2012, before the export bar ends, to raise the remaining £980,000 to acquire the painting. The portrait is a preparatory study for *Le Balcon* (1868–9) now in the Musée d’Orsay - one of the key images of the Impressionist movement. Having previously been exhibited only once since it was painted, it is currently on display in the Museum’s Impressionist Gallery

Carole Souter, Chief Executive of Heritage Lottery Fund, said: “This study of a young woman in repose is extraordinary: luminous, beautiful, a real masterclass in brushstroke technique. The Heritage Lottery Fund is pleased to be playing a significant role in helping the Ashmolean secure Manet’s *Portrait of Mademoiselle Claus*, particularly as it is unlikely that a work of this calibre will become available again at such a competitive price. We hope the museum succeeds in its campaign to keep the painting in this country and look forward to seeing it used to help more people learn about the Impressionist movement.”

Stephen Deuchar, Director of the Art Fund, said: “Manet’s *Mlle Claus* is a beautiful, beguiling and exceptionally important painting: it really must remain in this country and on public view. So we’re delighted to be supporting the Ashmolean Museum’s public appeal with a major Art Fund grant – indeed one of our largest ever – and would urge other individuals and institutions to follow suit if they possibly can.”

Manet was one of the greatest painters of the 19th century and his influence on the art world continues today. John Singer Sargent, who bought *Portrait of Mademoiselle Claus* at Manet's studio sale in 1884, was described as a disciple of Manet, and without his example, Sargent’s portraits would have been very different. From the 1880s until the First World War, most progressive portrait painters were strongly influenced by Manet's work: Wilson Steer, Walter Sickert, Henry Tonks, Sir John Lavery, Sir William Orpen. Roger Fry's exhibition of 'Manet and the Post-Impressionists' (1911) firmly established Manet's reputation as the painter of modern life. Fry emphasised the purely pictorial qualities of Manet's art, but the social and psychological aspects were equally important to later artists such as Stanley Spencer and Lucian Freud.

Artist, Jenny Saville, said: “Manet is one of those Greats, like Leonardo, Rubens, Picasso, and latterly Freud, whose work is a reference point to which you continually refer or have in the back of your mind, when painting. For me, it is his ability to capture the spirit behind the face and his radiant use of paint, as mostly demonstrated with the colour white, that has had such an effect on my figurative work.“

The Ashmolean is the country’s most visited museum outside London, with over 1 million people visiting per year. If acquired by the museum, *Portrait of Mademoiselle Claus* will be the focus of a broad range of public events and activities, as well as a special touring exhibition to museums across the UK, attracting a greater and more diverse

audience to see the painting and to learn more about its wider cultural and historical significance.

Dr Christopher Brown CBE, Director of the Ashmolean, said: “We are extremely grateful to the HLF for their lead support and to The Art Fund and individual donors for their generosity. We are delighted with the remarkable amount of public support, which the campaign has received so far. Since it has been on display, we have organised a series of workshops with schools, curator-led talks and lectures, which have been most popular with all age groups. This has helped us to develop a number of exciting plans for the future that include touring the painting and placing it at the heart of our learning programme. If you have not already seen it I urge you to do so. This is a unique opportunity for a British museum to acquire this important work. If we are successful, it will transform the Ashmolean’s holdings of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist art, making Oxford one of the leading centres for the study of 19th-century French painting, for students, scholars and the wider public.”

Culture Minister, Ed Vaizey, said: “The Ashmolean is now tantalisingly close to being able to acquire this exceptional painting thanks to the generosity of the many people who have contributed directly, or through the Heritage Lottery Fund and The Art Fund. The museum has also been able to take advantage of tax breaks that will help them buy the painting at a greatly reduced price. I would like to offer my wholehearted support for the public appeal; if anyone is in a position to contribute, they will be helping to enrich the lives of visitors to the Ashmolean for countless generations to come.

Notes to editors

The Ashmolean Museum

Founded in 1683, the Ashmolean is Britain’s oldest public museum and possibly the oldest museum in the world. In 2009 it reopened following a £61million redevelopment. The new Ashmolean building, designed by award-winning architect Rick Mather, has received universal acclaim and numerous awards. Although completely invisible behind Charles Cockerell’s neo-classical façade, the Rick Mather building has provided the Museum with 100% more display space and the facilities to launch a major exhibitions programme. The Ashmolean is now the most visited museum in the country outside London.

The Art Fund

The Art Fund is the national charity which helps museums and galleries to buy, show and share art for the enjoyment of all. Over the past five years, the Art Fund has given over £24million towards art of all kinds, from Old Masters to new media, and supported a range of programmes which share and show art to wider audiences, including the national tour of ARTIST ROOMS, the Art Fund Prize for Museums and Galleries, and Art Guide, a pioneering smartphone app offering the most comprehensive guide to seeing art in the UK.

Edouard Manet (1832-1883)

Portrait of Mademoiselle Claus

The portrait is a preparatory study for *Le Balcon* (1868–9) now in the Musée d’Orsay - one of the key images of the Impressionist movement. Initially inspired by the sight of people on a balcony, during a summer spent in Boulogne-sur-Mer with his family in 1868, *Le Balcon* famously draws on Goya’s Majas on a Balcony painted around 1810. It is also an important example of Manet’s work from the late 1860s onwards when he began to focus his attention on his family and close friends. The portrait’s subject is Fanny Claus (1846–77), the closest friend of Manet’s wife Suzanne Leenhoff. A concert violinist and member of the first all-women string quartet, Fanny was one of Manet’s favourite sitters.

The export bar

On 8 December 2011the Culture Minister Ed Vaizey placed an export bar on *Portrait of Mademoiselle Claus*. The ruling follows the recommendation of the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest, administered by Arts Council England. The committee has recommended that the export decision be deferred on the grounds that the portrait was of outstanding aesthetic importance and of outstanding significance for the study of French painting of the second half of the 19th century and in particular the work of Manet, one of the leading Impressionist painters of the period.

Private treaty sales

Items which have been granted conditional exemption from capital taxation - Inheritance Tax (IHT), Estate Duty (ED) or Capital Gains Tax (CGT) - can be purchased by private treaty by a body listed in Schedule 3 of the Inheritance Tax Act 1984 (which includes most public museums, galleries and archives in the United Kingdom): at a price which is beneficial to the public purchaser.

Further information

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