

Angela Kauffman paintings worth £1.5 million at risk of leaving UK

Press release

A temporary export bar has been placed on A Pair of Group Portraits of Mr and Mrs Joseph May and their Children by Angelica Kauffman



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- Export bar is to allow time for a UK gallery or institution to acquire the painting
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A Pair of Group Portraits of Mr and Mrs Joseph May and their Children, dating to 1780, is at risk of leaving the UK unless a buyer can be found.

Worth £1.5 million, the two paintings portray a family separated by gender – making them unprecedented in Kauffman’s work, in which families are normally depicted together. Her known collection of 800 pieces shows no other evidence of this format, which is an exceptional phenomenon both in Kauffman’s work and European art of the late eighteenth century.

Arts Minister Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay said:

Angelica Kauffman was one of just two female founding members of the Royal Academy. These fascinating portraits are highly unusual for the period, depicting an eighteenth-century family separated by gender. I hope that a buyer comes forward so that they can remain in the UK, and so that we can continue to learn more about these exceptional works of art.

The minister’s decision follows the advice of the [Reviewing Committee on the

Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest] (<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/supporting-collections-and-cultural-property/reviewing-committee#section-1>). The committee agreed that the paintings had an unusual and purposeful composition, and noted that the female group and its allusion to the Virgin Mary was especially beautiful.

Committee Member Professor Mark Hallett said:

Angelica Kauffman was one of the most important painters working in late eighteenth-century Britain and this is an especially interesting example of her output. Though the artist is justly celebrated for her subject pictures, Kauffman's portraits are equivalently complex and ambitious in character. This double portrait of the May family, in which Mary May is pictured with her daughters, and Joseph May with his sons, is extremely unusual in splitting up its male and female subjects in such a direct way. At the same time, Kauffman's adept handling of composition ensures that the two pictures elegantly complement each other. As well as having a powerful aesthetic appeal, the paintings offer a sensitive pictorial meditation on parental and sibling relationships, and on the different stages of childhood. For all these reasons, they make a powerful contribution to our understanding of Georgian portraiture.

The committee made its recommendation on the grounds that the departure of this pair of paintings from the UK would be a misfortune because of their outstanding significance for the study of eighteenth-century portraiture.

The decision on the export licence application for the paintings will be deferred for a period ending on 24 July 2022 inclusive. At the end of the first deferral period owners will have a consideration period of 15 Business Days to consider any offer(s) to purchase the pair of paintings at the recommended price of £1.5 million (plus VAT of £300,000 which can be reclaimed by an eligible institution). The second deferral period will commence following the signing of an Option Agreement and will last for four months.

ENDS

Notes to editors

1. Organisations or individuals interested in purchasing the pair of paintings should contact the RCEWA on 0845 300 6200.
2. Details of the paintings are as follows: Angelica Kauffman (1741–1807) Mary May (1745–1824) with her daughters Maria Emilia, Louisa and Sophia Margaret and Joseph May (1730–1796) with his sons Joseph (born 1767), Thomas Charles (1772–1837) and John (1775–1856), 1780 Oil on canvas Framed: 144.5 x 176.5 cm
3. Provenance: Commissioned by Joseph May (1730-1796), for Hale Park, Hampshire; By descent through his daughter Elizabeth by his second

marriage, who married Robert Maxwell of Islandmore, Croom, Co. Limerick in 1842; By descent to their daughter-in-law, Mrs. E. Maxwell, Dublin; G.B. Smith; His sale (probably on behalf of Mrs. Maxwell), Christie's, London, 15 May 1886, lots 87 and 88; Purchased by McLean for £173.5s and £63 respectively; By descent to Mr. and Mrs. Keld Fenwick, Sudbury, Suffolk; Mr. John Lecky, London, 1995; Thence by descent to the present owner.

4. The Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest is an independent body, serviced by Arts Council England (ACE), which advises the Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport on whether a cultural object, intended for export, is of national importance under specified criteria.
5. [Arts Council England](#) is the national development agency for creativity and culture. Its strategic vision in [Let's Create](#) is that, by 2030, England should be a country in which the creativity of everyone is valued and given the chance to flourish and where everyone has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences. ACE invests public money from the government and the National Lottery to support the sector and deliver the vision. Following the [Covid-19 crisis](#), ACE developed a £160 million Emergency Response Package, with nearly 90 per cent coming from the National Lottery, for organisations and individuals needing support. It is also one of the bodies administering the government's unprecedented £1.96 billion Culture Recovery Fund.

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