

Cozens's greatest masterpiece at risk of export

- Greatest British watercolour of the 18th century is at risk of being lost abroad
- Export bar placed on late 1780s work *The Lake of Albano and Castel Gandolfo* by John Robert Cozens
- Artist described as “the greatest genius that ever touched landscape” by John Constable

The painting is considered by many to be the greatest British watercolour of the 18th century and is at risk of being lost abroad unless a buyer can be found to match the £2.9 million asking price.

John Robert Cozens (1752 – 1797) was a British painter of watercolour landscapes and one of the most respected artists of his generation. His works are widely regarded as the most innovative and beautiful watercolours of the century. Cozens's works were evocative and deeply romantic, with atmospheric effects and illusions that had a deep influence on the later Romantic vision of landscapes found in the works of Turner, Girtin and Constable, who referred to him as “the greatest genius that ever touched landscape”.

Between 1776 and 1779 Cozens spent time in Italy and Switzerland where he drew Italian and Alpine views. The severe composition of *The Lake of Albano and Castel Gandolfo* creates an intense atmosphere with Cozens's technique on full display in this important work.

Culture Secretary Jeremy Wright said:

This stunning masterpiece by Cozens is said to be the greatest British watercolour of the 18th century, and we want this important piece of our nation's artistic history to remain in the UK.

I hope that a buyer can be found so ‘*The Lake of Albano and Castel Gandolfo*’ can be put on public display to be admired and inspire the next generation of landscape artists.

The Lake of Albano and Castel Gandolfo has twice reached a record price for a work by Cozens at auction. Its sale in 2010 for £2.4 million was the highest price paid for any 18th-century British watercolour until now.

The Minister's decision follows the advice of the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest (RCEWA). The Committee noted that this was Cozens's best work, both in terms of its quality and in relation to the story of British watercolour painting.

The RCEWA made its recommendation on the grounds of the work's importance for the study of John Robert Cozens and the development of the national school of

watercolour painting in Britain.

RCEWA member Aidan Weston-Lewis commented:

Cozens often endowed the celebrated sights of the Roman Campagna with an intense sense of poetic nostalgia, and this evocative view of Lake Albano – one of his favourite motifs – is a particularly moody and atmospheric example. Detail and local colour give way to a grander vision of landscape forms shadowed by clouds and enveloped in films of vapour.

This watercolour has twice broken the auction record for a work by Cozens, and is justifiably heralded as one of the supreme achievements of 18th-century British watercolour painting.

The decision on the export licence applications for the painting will be deferred until 20 September 2019. This may be extended until 20 January 2020 if a serious intention to raise funds to purchase it is made at the recommended price of £2,900,000.

ENDS

Notes to editors

.1. Organisations or individuals interested in purchasing the watercolour should contact the RCEWA on 0845 300 6200.

.2. Details of the watercolour are as follows:

John Robert Cozens (1752-97), The Lake of Albano and Castel Gandolfo, c. 1785. Watercolour. 433 x 620 mm. Thomas Lawrence's monogram collector's mark lower left, TL (Lugt 2445). Condition: Generally good, as recently conserved; some evidence of touching up to small areas of damage/scratches in sky above trees to left.

Provenance:

Sir Thomas Lawrence, PRA; his sale Christie's 20-21 May 1830 (first day, lot 45; 'The Lake of Albano'), bt. Colnaghi, 1.2s.6d.; bt. c. 1858 by G.W.H. Girtin (catalogued as 'Lake Albano with Castel Gandolfo. Sunset'); by descent to Thomas Girtin (1874-1960) (author with C F Bell of JRC catalogue raisonné); to his son Tom Girtin (1913-91); his sale, Sotheby's 14 November 1991 (104) (£179,131 record for the artist); bt. Ian Craft; his sale Sotheby's 14 July 2010 (60) (£500,000 – £700,000 est., £2,393,250 paid, record for any 18th century British watercolour).

.3. The Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest is an independent body, serviced by The Arts Council, 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.

.4. The Arts Council champions, develops and invests in artistic and cultural experiences that enrich people's lives. It supports 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.

www.artscouncil.org.uk