

# Exceptional Sargent painting worth over £7.5 million at risk of leaving UK

- The export bar is to allow time for a UK gallery or institution to acquire the work
- Exceptional painting is considered a contender for Sargent's finest portrait of a male sitter

Worth over £7.5 million, an outstanding three-quarter length portrait of Arthur Ramsay, the 14th Earl of Dalhousie is at risk of leaving the country unless a UK buyer can be found to save the work for the nation.

The Earl of Dalhousie is hugely significant to the study of John Singer Sargent's impressive legacy. Most widely known for his famous Portrait of Madame X, the international artist – who spent most of his life in Europe and whose resting place is in the UK – had an important role in the wider art, history and culture of the period and this piece set the stage for Sargent's fame on both sides of the Atlantic.

Dating back to 1899, the portrait coincides with the founding of psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud. As a result, The Earl of Dalhousie is considered exceptional for its portrayal of Arthur Ramsay's character and provides a fascinating look at aristocratic masculinity, uncertainty, and imperial doubt at the time.

Arts Minister Lord Parkinson of Whitley Bay said:

John Singer Sargent was, as the National Portrait Gallery's exhibition of 2015 rightly noted, 'the greatest portrait painter of his generation'. He continues to inspire artists, academics, and audiences to think more deeply about ourselves, our history, and the human condition – with Julian Barnes's *The Man in the Red Coat* just one example of the creative impulses he continues to spark.

There is still so much we can learn from this outstanding portrait of the 14th Earl of Dalhousie, painted in the UK at the transition between the 19th and 20th centuries. It would be a huge loss if this piece were to leave the country. I sincerely hope that a UK buyer can be found to save the work for the nation.

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 agreed that it is a fascinating picture on many levels and that this was one of Sargent's finest male portraits.

Committee Member Christopher Baker said:

Sargent's *The Earl of Dalhousie* evokes a brilliant transitional moment in British portraiture, being late Victorian in date but strikingly modern in appearance. The artist injected a new dynamism into such paintings; he had a profound knowledge of both the grandest traditions of portraiture and recent innovations and combined here a nod to the achievement of Van Dyck (in terms of pose and setting) with energised, bravura brushwork and incisive characterisation. Such skills were to prove irresistible to a generation of British patrons.

Dalhousie was a Scottish aristocrat and his portrait is one of the finest of all Sargent's studies of male subjects; an image of hauteur perhaps tinged by uncertainty, it is a coming of age painting, created when the subject turned twenty-one, and, as recent research has shown, it was paid for by his tenants. Outstanding aesthetically and in terms of the study of the art and culture of the period, it would be a profound misfortune if this scintillating work were not secured for a British collection.

The Reviewing Committee made its recommendation on the grounds that the painting's departure from the UK would be a misfortune because it was of outstanding aesthetic importance and it was of outstanding significance for the study of Sargent's work and the wider art, history and culture of the period.

The decision on the export licence application for the painting will be deferred until 3 March 2022. 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 painting at the recommended price of £7,617,360 (plus VAT). The second deferral period will commence following the signing of an Option Agreement and will last for six months.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

1. Organisations or individuals interested in purchasing the painting should contact the RCEWA on 0845 300 6200.
2. Details of the painting are as follows: A painting by John Singer Sargent representing Arthur George Maule Ramsay (1878–1929), the 14th Earl of Dalhousie, in front of double pillars and plinth. The painting is in oil paint on canvas and measures 150.7 x 102.2 cm. The work is in very good condition with the unusual benefit that it has not been lined, preserving the surface and texture of Sargent's distinctive brushwork.
3. Provenance: Arthur George Maule Ramsay, 14th Earl of Dalhousie (1878–1928), the sitter. Thence by descent until its sale in 2021.
4. 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.

5. 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](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk)