

# Exceptionally rare Renaissance roundel at risk of export

- UK institutions intending to acquire the artefact will have four months to come forward
- Outstanding piece in exemplary condition depicts Venus Roman goddess of Love

Culture Minister Caroline Dinenage has deferred the export of an exceptionally rare Italian roundel created in Mantua more than 500 years ago.

The richly decorated roundel, valued at £17 million, has been expertly crafted from bronze and is in exemplary condition despite its significant age with vibrant silvered features and mercury gilding. Although the artist is not known, experts reviewing the artefact believe it was created by at least two sculptors of significant talent.

Venus, the Roman goddess of Love, is depicted on the roundel surrounded by her lover Mars, husband Vulcan and son Cupid. The mythological references in the design, and the quality of the relief, reveal the sophistication of the patron and the artist's understanding of the classical past.

The roundel is larger, more complex and more refined than other examples produced in Mantua at the same time which are currently in British collections. The decision to defer the export will give a UK buyer the opportunity to acquire the exceptional piece.

Caroline Dinenage, Culture Minister, said:

This piece is a stunning combination of myth and mystery. I hope a UK buyer can be found so that researchers can reveal its secrets and the public can see this striking design on display.

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 the size and unique composition made roundel extremely technically interesting, as well as an object of outstanding beauty.

Stuart Lohead, RCEWA Committee member, said:

Of an exceptional size and of the highest possible quality this beguiling gilt and silvered bronze roundel represents the best of a highly sophisticated and intellectual humanist circle of artists and patrons active in Northern Italy in the late 15th to early 16th century.

Yet many of its secrets are still to be revealed. While it shows

clear links to Mantegna and Donatello, it is hoped that further study might reveal who designed and produced it and for whom and therefore contribute to advancing knowledge of the period.

The remarkable craftsmanship, aesthetics and mystery of this sculpture is captivating and its export from the United Kingdom and subsequent loss to the nation would be a misfortune.

The RCEWA made its recommendation on the grounds that, as well as being breath-taking in both beauty and grandeur, the roundel was significant for the study of North Italian bronze sculpture in the late 15th century and the history of English collecting in the mid-18th century when it first arrived in Britain.

The decision on the export licence application for the roundel will be deferred until 27 September 2021. This may be extended until 27 March 2022 if a serious intention to raise funds to purchase it is made at the recommended price of £17,000,000 plus VAT of £3,400,000.

Offers from public bodies for less than the recommended price through the private treaty sale arrangements, where appropriate, may also be considered by the Minister for Digital and Culture. Such purchases frequently offer substantial financial benefit to a public institution wishing to acquire the item.

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Notes to Editors

1. Organisations or individuals interested in purchasing the roundel should contact the RCEWA on 0845 300 6200.
2. Details of the roundel are as follows: A roundel depicting Venus, Mars, Cupid and Vulcan Partially gilded and silvered bronze with a deep brown/black patina Dia. 42 cm Italian, probably Mantuan, c.1480-1500
3. Provenance: Almost certainly owned by George Treby III (c.1726-1761), and then by descent within the Treby family of Plympton, Devon until 2003; sold at Christie's London, Important European Furniture, Sculpture and Tapestries, Thursday 11 December 2003, lot 20; and then by descent until 2019; purchased by the current owner.
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.