

Painting of 18th century cricketers at risk of leaving the UK

- Export bar is to allow time for a UK gallery or institution to acquire the painting
- West is famed for The Death of Nelson and this painting shows the evolution of cricket from a rustic to noble sport during the 1700s

The Cricketers (Ralph Izard & Friends) by Benjamin West is at risk of leaving the country unless a buyer can be found.

The Cricketers shows five wealthy American men playing cricket, possibly at Kew, while visiting the UK to study in the 1700s.

The painting is regarded as one of the most important works depicting early cricket and shows that by the 1750s the sport had evolved from the rustic game played in the 1720s to one taken up by the aristocracy.

West is best known for his work The Death of Nelson which shows the great British naval hero Lord Nelson on the deck of his ship, Victory, at the Battle of Trafalgar.

Arts Minister Stuart Andrew said:

Cricket is enjoyed by millions of people across the world and this fascinating painting tells the story of the rise of the sport during the 18th century.

It is a wonderful and rare depiction of the early development of one of our most loved games. I hope a buyer comes forward to save the work for the nation so we can give it another innings in the UK.

The Minister's decision follows the advice of the [Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest](#).

The Committee noted that the painting came at a crucial period of the development of cricket as an elite sport and it was a rare depiction of an early game of cricket. The Committee also suggested that identifying the background to the painting, would be an interesting research avenue and would add to its historical importance.

Committee Member Professor Mark Hallett said:

Together with its interest as a sporting painting, West's picture is notable for being a rare group portrait of young colonial Americans in England. This kind of work, known as a 'conversation piece', was more commonly commissioned by British aristocrats to

mark their Grand Tour through Italy. Here, however, the format is repurposed to fit the needs of a group of wealthy American friends who were studying in Britain in the early 1760s.

The Cricketers powerfully demonstrates the extent to which these men were happy to identify themselves with what was often described as the 'mother country'; some twelve years later, however, their world and their allegiances were to be thrown into flux by the American Revolution. West's picture, made in his mid-twenties and one of the very first he produced on arriving in London in 1763, also illustrates the developing talents of an artist who was to enjoy great fame later in his career, and who became the second President of the Royal Academy of Arts in 1792.

The Committee made its recommendation on the grounds that the painting is of outstanding significance to the study of Britain's relationship to America in the 18th century.

The decision on the export licence application for the painting will be deferred for a period ending on 13th April 2023 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 painting at the recommended price of £1,215,000. The second deferral period will commence following the signing of an Option Agreement and will last for three months.

ENDS

Notes to editors

1. Organisations or individuals interested in purchasing the painting should contact the RCEWA on 0161 934 4317 .
2. Details of the painting are as follows: Benjamin West, The Cricketers, 1763 Oil on canvas, 99.1 x 124.5 cm A conversation piece showing five young colonial Americans, when students in England. The sitters are traditionally identified as the brothers Andrew and James Allen, of Pennsylvania; Ralph Wormeley, of Virginia; and Ralph Izard and Arthur Middleton, of South Carolina. All sons of wealthy, influential colonial American families, they are shown outdoors, at leisure playing cricket. The picture commemorates their shared experience in the 'mother country' and captures a world soon to be fractured by American revolutionary politics, in which the sitters took opposing sides.
3. Provenance: By descent in the family of Andrew Allen, one of the sitters, acquired in 2021 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 (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. They have set out in their strategic vision in Let's Create that by 2030 they want England to be a country in which everyone's

creativity is valued and given the chance to flourish and where everyone has access to a remarkable range of high-quality cultural experiences. ACE invest public money from the Government and The National Lottery to help support the sector and to deliver this vision. Following the [Covid-19 crisis](#), the Arts Council developed a £160 million Emergency Response Package, with nearly 90% coming from the National Lottery, for organisations and individuals needing support. They are also one of the bodies responsible for administering the Government's unprecedented Culture Recovery Fund.