

Press release: Rare 16th century painting of Spanish Armada at risk of export

- Miniature shows Queen Elizabeth I watching the naval battle
- Artwork is one of few contemporary depictions of the Spanish Armada

An exceptionally rare painting depicting the defeat of the Spanish Armada, a naval campaign widely regarded to have changed the course of European history, is at risk of being deported from the UK unless a buyer can be found to match the asking price of £210,000.

Minister for Arts, Heritage and Tourism Michael Ellis has placed a temporary export bar on the 'The Spanish Armada in the Year 1588', by an unknown artist, to provide an opportunity to keep it in the country.

Depictions of the Armada, with the inclusion of its leading historical figures, are exceptionally rare. Experts believe the painting was produced in around 1600, within a generation of the event.

It shows Queen Elizabeth I watching the naval engagement, accompanied by Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. This reflected her personal intervention during the military campaign, when she rallied her troops through a speech at Tilbury.

In 1588 Philip II of Spain sent an 18,000 strong invasion force of 130 ships to England with the intention of overthrowing the Protestant Queen Elizabeth I and restoring Catholic rule. The defeat of the invading fleet has long been held as one of England's greatest naval victories, which increased the monarch's popularity and encouraged a new sense of patriotism in the country.

Experts believe that the work reflects a Dutch style of painting from this period, and may have been commissioned by an English patron with Dutch connections. It is signed in the lower right corner with an unverified artist's monogram (signed 'V.H.E').

Michael Ellis, Minister for Arts, Heritage and Tourism, said:

Although the Spanish Armada is one of the defining conflicts in England's naval history, contemporary depictions of it are exceptionally rare. This beautiful miniature commemorates one of the most celebrated events of Elizabeth I's reign and it is essential that we do our best to save this piece for the nation.

Little is known of the painting's whereabouts until it was sent on long-term loan to the Rijksmuseum, the Museum of the Netherlands, between 1975 and 1995.

There are only two miniature paintings known that represent the Armada events.

The decision to defer the export licence follows a recommendation by the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest, administered by The Arts Council. They made their recommendation on the grounds that the miniature is an exceptionally rare representation of a pivotal and celebrated event in national history, and is key to the study of European marine art and the event itself.

Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest member Peter Barber said:

This vibrant miniature is one of the earliest and most vivid depictions of an episode of crucial importance for the history of England. That it is the work of a Flemish artist and shows the role played by Dutch ships, additionally underline the Armada's European-wide significance. Yet, familiar though the overall story may be, the miniature includes many intriguing details that need further investigation, such as the prominence given to the ship and arms of the commander of the English forces, Lord Howard of Effingham.

There can be few items more justly called a 'national treasure' and it needs to be retained in this country so that it can be further studied and enjoyed.

The decision on the export licence application for the painting will be deferred until 13 December 2018. This may be extended until 13 March 2019 if a serious intention to raise funds to purchase it is made at the recommended price of £210,000 (plus VAT of £6,600).

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

Notes to editors

1. Details of the painting are as follows: Unknown artist, Monogrammist VHE (presumed Netherlandish School), The Spanish Armada off the Coast of England, Variousy dated, c.1590-1600, and 1600-10, probably 1600-05, Gouache heightened with gold, within gold framing lines on panel; signed lower right with the artist's monogram: V/HE, and inscribed upper centre: SPAENSCH E ARMAD/INT IAR 1588 (Spanish Armada in the year 1588) in black. It is framed in a plain black Dutch-style frame with gold inner band, measuring 208mm x 410mm.
2. [Download](#) an image of the painting.

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.