

UK buyer sought for rare Roman painting

- Incredibly rare painting dates to 1510s and is one of the most significant surviving works by Peruzzi
- Export bar is to allow time for a UK gallery or institution to acquire the work and ensure further research

An extraordinarily rare painting depicting the nativity is at risk of leaving the country unless a UK buyer can be found to save the work for the nation and enable additional study.

To protect the painting from this risk, an export bar has been placed by the Government, enabling researchers to better understand the work within a British context given its significant history.

Worth over £460,000, The Nativity by Baldassare Tommaso Peruzzi is one of a few surviving paintings by the artist and is particularly notable for its daring use of dark tonalities and its dramatic side lighting, pre-empting works by highly influential artists such as Raphael and Parmigianino.

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 RCEWA agreed that this was an extraordinarily rare painting, noting that few works by Peruzzi survived and almost none were outside Italy.

A highly-esteemed and versatile artist, Peruzzi's talents ranged from theatre design to architecture, with this piece exemplifying many of the innovations taking place in Roman painting in the early 16th century.

Culture Minister Caroline Dinenage said:

This is a beautiful and fascinating work, providing us with an invaluable insight into Roman paintings of the early 16th century. Given the rarity of a painting by Peruzzi and the amount we have to learn from this piece, I hope a UK buyer can be found so this work can be studied and enjoyed for years to come.

Committee Member Christopher Rowell said:

Peruzzi's rare evocation of the Nativity by night was painted in Rome in the second decade of the sixteenth century, when great artists like Raphael were experimenting with dramatic compositions and light effects. Long attributed to Raphael's pupil, Giovanni Francesco Penni, it was identified as a Peruzzi in the 1940s by the British Museum's considerable scholar of Italian drawings, Philip Pouncey, who owned the painting and reattributed no less than 110

drawings to Peruzzi, who was one of his favourite draughtsmen. Painted on panel, the picture is in remarkably good condition. The price seems very reasonable for a painting of this date and exceptional quality and RCEWA hopes that it will remain in Britain, where it offers scope for further research into the innovations of Roman painting around 1515 and into twentieth-century British connoisseurship of Italian art by Philip Pouncey and his distinguished contemporaries.

The RCEWA made its recommendation on the grounds that its departure from the UK would be a misfortune because it was of outstanding significance for the study of early-16th-century painting in Rome and its provenance in relation to British connoisseurship

The decision on the export licence application for the piece will be deferred until 22 October 2021. This may be extended until 22 April 2022 if a serious intention to raise funds to purchase it is made at the recommended price of £463,317.

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. Such purchases frequently offer substantial financial benefit to a public institution wishing to acquire the item.

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 work are as follows: Baldassare Thomasso Peruzzi (1481–1536) The Nativity, c. 1515 Oil on panel, 100.6 x 76.4 cm Support: The panel is formed of a large single board with two further strips of wood on each side. Paint and ground: Significant abrasion and old woodworm exit holes over much of the surface have been filled and retouched, with some discolouring especially noticeable at the edges and lower part of the panel. The unfinished left-hand edge is visible, with some small paint losses. Diagonal scratches emanate from the centre of the bottom edge. Age craquelure affects several areas of the painting, but this is secure.
3. Surface coating: discoloured and uneven varnish with some matt areas. Frame: carved gilt frame in good condition. Provenance: Casa Vai, Prato; The Sebright Collection, Beechwood, (as Giovanni Francesco Penni); sold at Christie's, The Sebright Heirlooms, 2 July 1939, lot no. 117; sold at Christie's, 18 January 1946, lot no. 72, (45 guineas, to Scharf), by whom sold to: Philip Pouncey [1910–90]; private collection, and thence by descent
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.