

Press Release

For Immediate Release

London | +44 20 7293 6000 | Mitzi Mina | [mitzi.mina@sothebys.com](mailto:mitzi.mina@sothebys.com)  
Leyla Daybelge | [leyla.daybelge@sothebys.com](mailto:leyla.daybelge@sothebys.com) | Matthew Weigman | [matthew.weigman@sothebys.com](mailto:matthew.weigman@sothebys.com)  
Jamie Penaloza | [jamie.penaloza@sothebys.com](mailto:jamie.penaloza@sothebys.com)

Sotheby's London to Offer a Historic Georges Jacob Table,  
Designed and Immortalized by the Artist Jacques-Louis David,  
And the Shah of Persia's Remarkable Golden Elephant Clock, in the Sale of

## **Treasures, Princely Taste**

An Exceptional Selection of Rare and Important  
Furniture and Decorative Arts of Noble Provenance



**SOTHEBY'S LONDON** will hold its third **Treasures, Princely Taste** auction on 4<sup>th</sup> July, 2012. The sale will comprise an outstanding selection of rare and important furniture, silver, *objets de vertu* and tapestries, many with aristocratic provenance and each displaying the remarkable qualities of princely taste. The centrepieces of the sale are a historic gilt-bronze-mounted table by Jacques-Louis David (est. £200,000-300,000), which appears in a painting by David in the collection of the Louvre Museum, and the Shah of Persia's golden elephant automaton clock, an 18<sup>th</sup>-century, British-made technical marvel and a dazzling sight (est. £1-2 million). The sale comprises 42 lots, which are estimated to realise a total in excess of £12 million.

**Mario Tavella, Sotheby's Deputy Chairman, Europe,** comments: *"Each of the masterpieces in this, our third offering of 'Treasures, Princely Taste', has its own compelling story to tell. In the case of the table designed by Jacques-Louis David, its history is recorded for posterity in a painting in the Louvre which communicates not just its sophisticated craftsmanship, but the extraordinary partnership between one of France's greatest 18<sup>th</sup> Century ébénistes and one of the greatest painters of the day. The extraordinary Shah of Persia's Elephant Automaton, was created specifically to redress the yawning trade balance between Britain and China. All the works we have selected reflect connoisseurs' continued demand for the very finest pieces at the top-end of the market. Many of these spectacular and meticulously sourced works have aristocratic provenances, and represent the very pinnacle of the decorative arts of their era."*

### **SALE HIGHLIGHTS**



**A gilt-bronze-mounted mahogany table “À l'Antique” designed by Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825), attributed to Georges Jacob (1739-1814), Louis XVI circa 1785-89 (est. £200,000-300,000).** This exceptional table appears in David's famous painting *Les Licteurs rapportent à Brutus les corps de ses fils* of 1789, in the Louvre (pictured below). David designed and commissioned various pieces of furniture to use in his paintings. These were executed by the

prominent Parisian cabinet-maker, Georges Jacob, who crafted the chairs for Marie-Antoinette's *laiterie* at Rambouillet. The table can be considered as one of the most important precursors of what would be defined as the “Empire style”. A brass plaque inside the pedestal tells that the table was left to David's great granddaughter by David's grandson, Jules David Chassagnol.

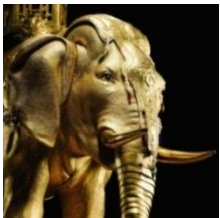


**The Shah of Persia's Elephant Automaton Clock – A George III paste-set ormolu musical automaton clock, circa 1780, signed by Peter Torckler (est. £1-2 million).** This magnificent automaton clock (illustrated on page 1) of a rare and impressive scale stands over one metre tall and was most probably acquired by Naser al-Din Shah of Persia (1831–96) in London in the 1890s. The Shah had been mesmerized by similar clocks he saw while visiting Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild at Waddeson Manor in 1889. It typifies the intriguing and inventive objects produced in London by skilled British craftsmen in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and would have originally been destined for the Chinese market. Promoted by the East India Company, such objects played a key role in lessening the trade deficit between Britain and China and were articles of tribute in Chinese society, where gifts flowed through the official hierarchy, passing through the system to superiors and eventually, the Emperor. Similarly ornate elephant figures were frequently found throughout the Chinese Imperial Palaces and a large number remain in the Palace Museum, Beijing. The iconography of an elephant supporting a vase on its back forms the auspicious rebus *Daping Jingxian*, or *Daping Youxian*, representing the message of Peace and Harmony.



#### **Catherine wheel**

Every three hours the major automaton elements run simultaneously including the rotating pineapple and a jewelled Catherine Wheel with counter-rotating components.



#### **Moving Ears and Trunk**

The highlight of this piece's movement is when the elephant comes to life. The ears flap, its trunk rotates and its swishes, as its blue-and-gray painted eyeballs move from side to side. These movements can also be initiated by pulling a cord at the rear left foot of the elephant.



#### **“East Meets West”**

The pagoda-carrying elephant is auspicious in China, and here the craftsmen fused East and West by including a figure of Atlas supporting sphere engraved with the zodiac, as well as seated Chinese figures which support the corners of the base of the clock.



**Jewelled Clock Face** The clock face is signed by Peter Torckler and is surrounded by an intricately chased naturalistic base. The flower heads remove to expose the winding holes for the clock and automaton movements.



A pair of important gilt-bronze-mounted *Sèvres* soft-paste porcelain vases, almost certainly supplied by the *marchand-mercier* Dominique Daguerre, the mounts attributed to Pierre-Philippe Thomire (1751-1843), *circa* 1788-1790 (est. £600,000-1,000,000). This magnificent pair of vases is exceptional in both form and decoration. The rare sky-blue colour was developed specifically for Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette by the Royal Manufacture of Sèvres, during the king's building and decoration of his Rambouillet estate. The design is by celebrated Parisian *marchand-mercier* Dominique

Daguerre, who was the chief supplier to the court of Louis XVI, while the finely cast and chased gilt-bronze mounts can be almost certainly attributed to Pierre-Philippe Thomire, the renowned *bronzier* who made pieces for Louis XVI's bedchamber at Compiègne and for Marie-Antoinette's apartments at Versailles.

A George III 12-inch diameter *Selenographia*, *circa* 1797 (est. £200,000-300,000). John Russell R.A., who patented this "moon globe" in 1796, was a highly successful society portraitist, Royal Academician and painter to King George III and the Prince of Wales. Russell had a passion for astronomy and was so "stricken by the beauty of the Moon" that he devoted considerable time to observing, mapping and drawing it. This *Selenographia* apparatus accurately depicts the Moon, while a small globe of the Earth demonstrates the oscillations of the Moon in relation to the planet. The globe was first purchased by George O'Brien Wyndham, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Earl of Egremont (1751-1837), who also had an interest in science. The Earl's mistress, "Mrs Wyndham", was also a lady of great scientific repute and for whom much scientific equipment was purchased, so it is possible that it may have been purchased with her in mind. Only a few examples of *Selenographia* globes are known to have survived, and are currently held in prominent science museums in London, Oxford and Madrid as well as other private collections.



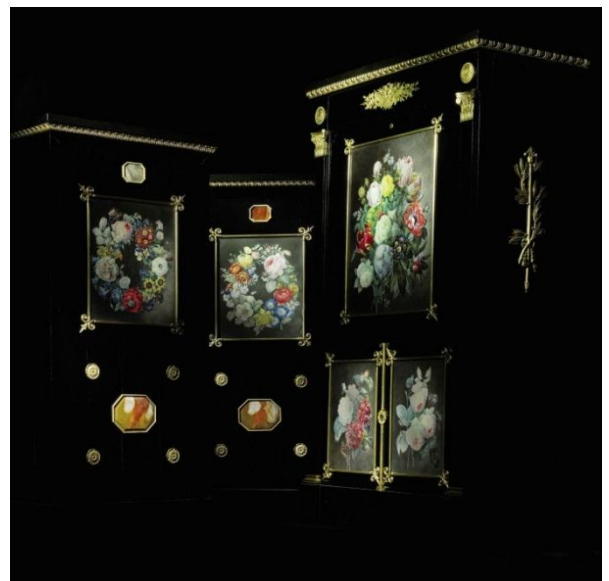




**“Le Vase Anacréon”** – A very large copper, silver and silver-gilt vase, designed by Émile-Auguste Reiber for Christofle, Paris, 1873 (est. £400,000-600,000). Lavish praise was given to Christofle at the Vienna World Exposition of 1873, during which this monumental “Anacreon Vase” stood proudly at the centre of Christofle’s exhibition. The immense 147.5 centimeter-high vase includes a Greek inscription of odes by the Greek lyric poet Anacreon (582-485 BC), who is chiefly remembered for his verses eulogizing love and wine. The combination of gold and silver on the vase’s beautiful coppery/bronze-coloured ground was achieved by laying different metals upon one another to produce the effect of inlay. This remarkable vase was no doubt the pride of Christofle and its director, Henri Bouilhet, as it

prominently appears in a 1910 portrait by Louis-Édouard Fournier of Bouilhet with his son.

A gilt-bronze-mounted ebony, *bois citronnier* and amaranth inlaid *secrétaire à abattant ensuite* with a pair of *cartonniers* by Jacob-Desmalter each with inset floral watercolour paintings signed by E. Panckoucke, *Restauration, circa 1825* (est. £250,000-500,000). This visually stunning and rare set of furniture was almost certainly an important and specific commission by a member of the French royal family in the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The set comprises a *secrétaire* and pair of *cartonniers* constructed in precious and exotic materials to



spectacular effect, including ebony embellished with exquisite gilt-bronze mounts, and panels of agates and watercolour paintings on vellum. The Duchesse de Berry is its most likely royal commissioner, due to her interest in collecting furniture made from exotic materials in the latest fashion; her love of botany and her connection with the painter Ernestine Panckoucke, whose paintings embellish these pieces; and the Duchesse’s well-documented commissions to Jacob-Desmalter, the firm established by Georges Jacob’s son, who was Napoleon’s favourite cabinet-maker. Furthermore, the frieze drawer of the *secrétaire* is mounted with the Duchesse’s coat-of-arms amongst military trophies.



A gilt-bronze and patinated-bronze ink stand, by Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier, Louis XV, *circa* 1735 (est. £200,000-300,000). This *encrier* is a perfect early example of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Rococo vogue, of which artist Juste-Aurèle Meissonnier was a pioneering and influential figure. Meissonnier worked on commissions for King Louis XV and for major noble families such as Louise-Françoise de Bourbon, the mother of the Duc de Bourbon;

and for Louis II de Rochechouart, the Duc de Mortemart. Meissonnier almost certainly captured a leaf in a mould as the starting point for creating and shaping the inkwell, using the complex “lost wax casting” technique, or *cire perdue*, to create the *coquille*, water and leaf motifs. The resulting harmonious orchestration between the rough shell, simulation of water falling, finely chased leaves, rockwork in high relief and bold smooth scrolls reflect its magnificent quality and inventiveness.

The sale also features **five exceptionally rare masterpieces of 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Century silver** from a European princely family, which originally formed part of the collection of **Fernando II, King of Portugal**. Three of the pieces have the King’s cypher and a fourth was recorded as his property in the 1882 exhibition in Lisbon. Dom Fernando was a connoisseur who built a wonderful collection at the Palacio des Necessidades. He displayed much of his 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century Portuguese



silver in his study and two of the lots offered for sale are shown in photographs of his magnificent display cabinets. The highlight of the collection is a magnificent silver gilt flagon (centre), from the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, estimated at £80,000-120,000, which is engraved beneath with the royal cypher “F” and is richly decorated with a flamboyant grotesque ornament similar to that which first re-appeared in Italy at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, inspired by the wallpaintings in Nero’s Palace, the Domus Aurea.

A Flemish Renaissance tapestry, “David Receives Bathsheba and the Departure of Uriah”, from the story of David, Brussels, probably after Jan Van Roome (fl. 1498-1521), first quarter 16<sup>th</sup> century, circa 1515-1525 (est. £300,000-500,000). The tapestry has been cherished by generations of aristocratic families, having been owned by Don Gonzalo Maria de Ulloa y Ortega-Montañés (1833-1882), the 9<sup>th</sup> Count of Adanero; inherited by his brother, the Marquis of Castro-Serna, Madrid; thereafter by the Viscount of Roda, Madrid, circa 1930, and has been since been passed on by descent. Woven in silk and wool, the 408 centimetre-high by 406 centimetre-wide tapestry depicts the Biblical scene of David receiving Bathsheba and the departure of Uriah (Samuel 2, 11-12). Alternating sections of floral and fruiting grapevine trails frame the depiction, and the reverse retains a section from the original lining bearing the printed stamp of the Castro-Serna family.



A Swiss parcel-gilt silver drinking cup in the form of a lark, Nicholas Matthey, Neuchâtel, late 17<sup>th</sup> century (est. £200,000-250,000). This ancestral drinking cup of the von Lerber family is in the form of a skylark, a charge of the family coat-of-arms which is emblazoned in full on the cup's base, and was presented to the Weavers' Guild in Berne, Switzerland by a cousin of the von Lerbers, and intended to be drunk from at guild festivities. It is believed that the cup left the von Lerber family in 1896 and it was acquired by its next owners, the renowned collectors Henry (Heinrich) Budge and his wife, Emma. In 1937 their collection was sold at auction and the skylark cup was purchased by the Swiss National Museum, which has since retained the cup.

A magnificent silver and silver-gilt mounted pewter, brass, copper, mother-of-pearl and stained ivory inlaid *Boulle* marquetry chessboard attributed to the Johannes Mann (1679-1754) and Emanuel Eichel (1690-1752) Workshop, Augsburg, 1720-30, the porcelain pagoda figurines as kings and queens, and chess pieces in mother-of-pearl and aventurine glass (est. £200,000-300,000). The chessboard comes by repute from Frederick Augustus III (1750-1827), Elector of Saxony, who according to family tradition presented it as a gift to Comte Louis Gabriel du Buat-Nançay in 1772. Chessboards and other board games were an integral part of



princely treasuries and *Kunstkammern*. They were also an indispensable part of the collector's cabinets of the Baroque age. This set epitomises the German penchant for *Kunstkammer* objects in precious materials, executed to the highest standards. It reflects the interests and passions of its illustrious original owner and the enthusiasm for *Chinoiserie* and the exoticism of the East. The delicate engraving and charming pictorial marquetry on this chessboard are virtuoso examples of the *Boulle* technique as practised by Augsburg craftsmen.

**A gilt-bronze-mounted *pietre dure* and ebony frame, Florence, Galleria dei Lavori, late 17<sup>th</sup>/early 18<sup>th</sup> century (est. £150,000-200,000).** The frame, which features colourful *pietre dure* ornament, comes from the Galleria dei Lavori which produced a similar frame for the wedding of the Grand Duke Giangastone de'Medici in 1697. The ornamental motifs are entirely characteristic of the style of Giovanni Battista Foggini, who was the head of the Grand Duke's workshops. The frame is representative of the dominant style in Florence between the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and is characterised by the sinuous movement of the scrolling, the foliage and the flowers of its ornament, in which the dark ebony, gilt-bronze and the many colours of the *pietre dure* are the constant elements.



\* Estimates do not include the buyer's premium.

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