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**Poussin Painting at risk of export**

A painting by Nicolas Poussin, depicting the moment the infant Moses trampled Pharaoh’s crown, will be exported overseas unless a matching offer of £14,000,000 is made. Culture Minister Ed Vaizey has placed a temporary export bar on the work in the hope that a UK buyer can be found in the time allowed.

The subject of the painting is rare and derives from Flavius Josephus’s *Antiquities of the Jews.* It tells the story of Thermutis (the childless daughter of Pharaoh) who adopted the infant Moses so he would become Pharaoh’s successor. When Pharaoh placed a crown on the infant’s head the child *“in a puerile mood….trod upon it….which seemed to bring along with it an evil presage concerning the kingdom of Egypt.”* The sacred scribe present immediately went to slay the infant, however Thermutis snatched the child away to safety.

The painting was bought by the 5th Duke of Bedford at the sale of the incomparable Orléans collection in London in 1798, and has remained at Woburn Abbey in Bedfordshire ever since.

Culture Minister Ed Vaizey took the decision to defer granting an export licence for the painting following a recommendation by the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest (RCEWA), administered by Arts Council England. The RCEWA made their recommendation on the grounds that it was of outstanding aesthetic importance, and that it was of outstanding significance for the study of Poussin’s art.

The painting has a tremendous, albeit austere, beauty – perhaps more so than any other painting by the artist in collections accessible to the British public. Of the 30 or so paintings by Poussin in UK galleries and museums, none are quite so insistently severe in either their colouring or composition and the painting therefore offers the opportunity for additional insight into the study of the hugely influential painter dubbed *"the springboard for the greatest French artists from David to Matisse".*

Culture Minister Ed Vaizey said:

“It would be a terrible shame if this dramatic work by Poussin was to be moved abroad permanently. I hope that a UK buyer can be found and that the painting remains here in the UK where it can be enjoyed by the British public.”

Aidan Weston-Lewis from the RCEWA said:

“With its frieze-like composition and frozen gestures and expressions, no picture better expresses Poussin’s position as the arch-classicist of seventeenth-century European painting. It is above all in its chilly austerity, reminiscent of a Greek tragedy, that its greatness lies.”

The decision on the export licence application for the painting will be deferred for a period ending on 22 April 2014inclusive. This period may be extended until 22 October 2014inclusive if a serious intention to raise funds to purchase the painting is made at the recommended price of £14,000,000. Offers from public bodies for less than the recommended price through the private treaty sale arrangements, where appropriate, may also be considered by Mr Vaizey. 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 painting should contact RCEWA on 0845 300 6200.
2. An image of the work can be downloaded from <http://www.flickr.com/photos/thedcms/12102929284/>
3. Details of the painting are as follows:

Nicolas Poussin 1594 – 1664  
*The Infant Moses trampling Pharaoh’s Crown*

c.1645/46

Oil on canvas, 101 x 144cm

1. The Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art and Objects of Cultural Interest is an independent body, serviced by Arts Council England, which advises the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on whether a cultural object, intended for export, is of national importance under specified criteria.
2. Arts Council England champions, develops and invests in artistic and cultural experiences that enrich people’s lives. Between 2010 and 2015, it will invest £1.9 billion of public money from government and an estimated £1.1 billion from the National Lottery to help create these experiences for as many people as possible across the country. www.artscouncil.org.uk

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