Fundación Arte y Mecenazgo

CÍRCULO ARTE Y MECENAZGO

THE ENGLISH COLLECTOR

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CaixaForum Madrid & Barcelona

The English collector. An evolution of taste.

David Linley
Chairman of Christie's United Kingdom

Thank you for that wonderful introduction, I am honoured to have been asked to speak to you all today.

[Image 1 - *Charles John Crowle*, c.1761-62, Pompeo Batoni (1708-87), Louvre, Paris]

I grew up surrounded by beautiful objects collected by my ancestors and am still inspired by masterpieces of art and exquisite furniture. Collecting for me is being able to bear witness to the best of the past by placing it in a contemporary context so that both the past and present can be understood better. I collect and make objects that tell stories that are designed to be kept and admired, passed down from generation to generation, often encasing the past in a new form, inspired by history.

In my role as a furniture maker and chairman of Christie's I meet people every day who are as passionate about collecting as I am and it is interesting to see the same characteristics in connoisseurs at our auctions today as in the young men who embarked on the grand tour centuries ago. Great collectors make history. By conserving masterpieces they ensure that the next generation continues to study and promote our cultural heritage. England has a great tradition of pioneering collectors, from monarchs to merchants, and it is on this subject, the English collector, that I would like to speak to you about today.

[Image 2 - *King Henry VII*, 1505, Unknown Flemish Artist, NPG, London]

While most of Europe was busy employing the arts in the service of religion the Tudors were among the first to harness the power of art to serve the crown and the aristocracy. Henry VII, who seized back the English crown in 1485, was known as a frugal King in all aspects except his court. While his people may have suffered outside the palace walls the King enjoyed the delights of the master of revelries and the flattery of the court painter within. He saw the need to promote his image through art not just by commissioning portraits but by expanding his collection, unrivalled in England at the time.

[Image 3 - *Saint George and the Dragon*, c.1506, Raphael (1483-1520), NGA, Washington]

It included Raphael's *St George and the Dragon*, possibly given to the monarch by the Duke of Urbino and probably the first important work of Italian art to reach British shores.

[Image 4 - *King Henry VIII*, c 1537, Hans Holbein, The Younger, Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection.]

[C*ardinal Wolsey*, Hans Holbein, The Younger, Ipswich Museum]

When Henry VII died in 1509 he left behind two great collectors in his successor, Henry VIII, and his chaplain, Cardinal Wolsey, whose hard work and cunning saw him quickly rise through the ranks to become the King's Lord Chancellor. As the son of a butcher it was perhaps his humble beginnings that led him to spend his wealth so lavishly once he had earned it. His chapels were lined with gold plate, his chambers with tapestries and his cloaks with furs. This ostentation rubbed off on the young King Henry who embraced his position of patronage by commissioning paintings and works of art from Italian, French and Flemish painters and master craftsmen. This attracted Hans Holbein, one of Europe's foremost painters to the court.

[Image 5 - *The Tribuna of the Uffizi*, 1772-78, Johann Zoffany (1733-1810), The Royal Collection]

Holbein arrived from Basel in 1526 bearing a letter from Erasmus to Thomas More which explained: *'Here the arts are freezing, he is coming to England to scrape some angels [gold coins] together.'* Ten years later he became the King's official painter and soon enjoyed the patronage of almost a third of the peerage. This demand for portraits demonstrates just how much English attitudes towards art had changed. Although the first instinct was always to self-promote the aristocracy also recognised the importance of the name of the artist, a man whose skills were seen to be desirable as a result of the King's patronage. Portraiture became the foundation of the newly established English taste but Henry's collecting went beyond that. He was also a great collector of objects in gold, silver and precious stones. His love for these enamelled, finely carved and detailed pieces is one that is echoed in royal commissions through the centuries, from Zoffany's attentive portraits to Fabergé's exquisite eggs.

[Image 6 - *Queen Elizabeth I 'The Ditchley portrait'*, 1592, Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, NPG, London]

Henry's daughter, the formidable Elizabeth I, did not commission many works of art but her myth was so great that it created an industry out of her image. Adoring courtiers would present her with portraits but she remained disinterested in art. When the French art dealer Nicolas Houel attempted to sell the Queen a group of paintings, including works by Dürer, she refused them. Her most significant contribution to England's culture of collecting was what has been described as the *'country house boom'*, a spate of building never seen before in England, by encouraging her courtiers, heads of the country's most landed families, to build palaces in which to receive her all over the country. These grand new homes had to be filled with the finest art and furniture and the trend caused a rage of collecting among the nobility. At the forefront was the Queen's minister, Sir William Cecil, Lord Burghley of Burghley House.

[Image 7 - *Burghley House*, Stamford, Lincolnshire]

Burghley House is a fascinating example of various styles of European architecture condensed into one English country house. William Cecil was undoubtedly his own architect and incorporated his taste in every part of the building. When Cecil began work on the house, in 1555, English architecture was influenced by designs from Italy, the Low Countries and France. The amalgamation of these styles represents the current attitudes

towards collecting, the aristocracy's magpie attraction to works of beauty from all over the world reflected in the windows, the wrought iron gates and the incongruous obelisk.

[Image 8 - A Punch Party, 1760, Thomas Patch (1725-1782), Dunham Massey, Cheshire]

The rapacious spirit of collecting art and objects from different cultures and attitudes evolved so that it wasn't confined solely to government ministers. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the English taste for acquisition culminated in the grand tour. It was ostensibly an opportunity for noble families to educate their sons by sending them to study art and architecture and mingle with learned men. As Dr Johnson said, *'all our religion, all our arts, almost all that sets us above savages, has come from the shores of the Mediterranean'*. However once freed from their parents' control, they tended towards the more base delights of Mediterranean life as demonstrated in this picture by Thomas Patch. Many saw the trip as an opportunity to fill their homes with what must have seemed at the time as cutting edge as any contemporary art in London, New York or [Madrid / Barcelona] today.

[Image 9 - *Castle Howard*, North Yorkshire, designed by Sir John Vanburgh
Holkham Hall, Norfolk, designed by William Kent & Lord Burlington.]

Britain emerged from the wars of Louis XIV as the richest country in the world and the aristocracy spent lavishly on grand villas and art with which to fill them. Sometimes art was bought to fill a newly built house like Castle Howard in Yorkshire and sometimes it was the motivation for building a new home, such as Holkham Hall in Norfolk, fit to house the splendours of Rome.

These houses were symbols of good taste as well as wealth and status, marking for posterity their owners' position in society, their art collections representing erudition and experience. The aristocracy, raised on a diet of classics, saw themselves as successors of the Roman senate, safe keepers of a golden age of art and learning.

[Image 10 - *Triumph of Bacchus and Ariadne*, detail from the Farnese Ceiling, 1597-1608, Annibale Carracci, (1560-1609), Palazzo Farnese, Rome]

Their taste in art was influenced by guides written by fellow English connoisseurs living in Rome. Earlier collectors had to rely on a network of contacts whereas now the grand tourists were often met straight off the boat, so to speak, in an English coffee house in the Piazza di Spagna. These were often artists or architects who wrote guide books and whose nose for business ensured they received handsome commissions, acting as middlemen in negotiations for works of art. They encouraged the collection of artists such as Annibale Carracci and Guido Reni whom they saw as heirs to Renaissance masters such as Raphael.

[Image 11 - *Lamport Hall*, Northamptonshire.]

One of the most prolific collectors was Sir Thomas Isham, 3rd Baronet, of Lamport Hall, Northamptonshire. He arrived in Rome in 1677 and bought 20 paintings over a year including originals by Salvator Rosa, Filippo Lauri and Giacinto Brandi and a number of copies after Raphael, Reni, Domenichino, Guercino, Poussin and Cortona.

[Image 12 - *Heaven Room & Hell Staircase*, 1697, Antonio Verrio (1636 -1707), Burghley.]

Another influential collector was John Cecil, 5th Earl of Exeter whose collection can still be found at the aforementioned Burghley House today. As well as Rome he visited Lucca, Padua and Florence where he paid court to the Grand Duke Cosimo III of Tuscany. Such was the rarity of English visitors that the Duke presented him with a magnificent ebony pietra dura cabinet made in the ducal workshops. While in Florence he also bought two enormous works by Luca Giordano, *The Rape of Europa* and *The Death of Seneca*, and commissioned a further 13. He continued to collect throughout Bologna, Venice and Genoa. Once back in England, Cecil commissioned Antonio Verrio to decorate a suite of rooms at Burghley, including his masterpiece, the Heaven Room.

The Heaven Room was a vision of classical mythology; one 19th century guidebook described the murals as *'Gods and Goddesses disporting themselves as Gods and Goddesses are wont to do…'* Though works of flat art, these paintings transform the drama into three dimensions with trompe l'oeil architecture and convincing movement in the figures, the gods taking over the entire room and providing a spectacle as impressive today as it must have been for the 18th century visitor. Cecil's chosen imagery shows a desire to use collecting as a means to elevate one's spirit as well as status, placing himself in the metaphysical sphere and literary tradition at the same time.

And so from heaven, down to hell!

Verrio's last commission at Burghley was to paint the ceiling over the main staircase. The mouth of hell is depicted as the enormous gaping mouth of a cat with the souls of the damned being tortured within.

[Image 13 - *James Caulfield* 4th Viscount Charlemont, c.1753-56, Pompeo Batoni (1708-87), Yale Centre for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection.]

After the chocolate box bible scenes and the endless views of Venice and Rome, the most significant images of the grand tour are undoubtedly the portraits by Pompeo Batoni of the grand tourists themselves. Batoni started as a painter of classical scenes but quickly realised the market for painting portraits of the young aristocrats, who wished to boast of their erudition and acquisitions, was more lucrative. The sitter would traditionally be surrounded by fragments of antiquities with glimpses of classical landscapes in the background, allusions that would identify the young man as a scholar-connoisseur. His portrait of Viscount Charlemont in a ¾ length pose shows the development of the painter's 'swagger' style.

[Image 14 - *Thomas Dundas*, 1763, Pompeo Batoni (1708-1787), Aske Hall, Richmond, Yorkshire.]

An even more ostentatious style was reached with Batoni's famous image of Thomas Dundas, painted in 1763, where a cast of the *Laocoön* and the *Apollo Belvedere* can be seen in the background. By this time Batoni had monopolised the genre and country houses all over England were being filled with these images of pomp and supposed scholarship.

[Image 15 - *Chatsworth House*, Derbyshire.]

The 18th century saw a second country house boom as growing trade links with the rest of the world meant a great shift in social status among the upper and middle classes. Magnificent buildings such as Chatsworth and Blenheim Palace rose up out of England's countryside and the passion for art collecting never abated and the establishment of auction houses such as Christie's meant that it was even easier for a gentleman to assemble a world class collection without leaving the country.

[Image 16 - *Christie's Auction Room in 18th Century.]*

As the French Revolution hit Paris, the centre of the international art market moved to London. James Christie held his first auction in London in 1766, from his Great Rooms in Pall Mall. London was a prosperous and vibrant city in the 18th century, thanks to an increase in international trade and a flourishing interest in art and literature. It was a city where artists, men of letters and wealthy collectors could meet socially. James Christie, who was not himself an expert in all areas of art, found that among his many acquaintances he was always able to find a specialist to help him assess the works of art which passed through his hands. Before the official establishment of the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square in 1838, London was home to very few cultural institutions and exhibitions. Christie's, with its wealth of displays of fine art from Old Masters to contemporary artists, became a kind of prototype of a national gallery, where people knew they could come and view some of the world's finest works of art without having to bid or pay an entrance fee.

[Image 17 - *Sir Robert Walpole*, 1741, after Carle Van Loo (1705-1765), The British Museum, London.]

No man is more representative of the 18th century trend for collecting as Sir Robert Walpole, Britain's first Prime Minister and the man behind Houghton Hall in Norfolk and its impressive art collection.

[Image 18 - *Houghton Hall*, Norfolk.]

As well as being one of the finest country houses in Britain, Houghton Hall is distinctive for having been designed and built as the setting of an art collection.

[Image 19 - *Houghton Hall Interior*, Norfolk.]

This collection included works by Old Masters such as Rubens, Poussin, Rembrandt and Velázquez. Walpole's passion for collecting led him to travel to Europe's great sights and centres, pursuing the finest and rarest works of art and, in doing so, securing his place in history alongside such great collecting families as the Barberini and Giustiniani of Rome and, at a push, the Medici of Florence.

[Image 20 - *Houghton Hall*, Carlo Maratta Room, Norfolk.]

Walpole was a great patron of Carlo Maratta and dedicated an entire room of Houghton Hall to his works. This whole-hearted admiration for Italian art made him a pioneer in Britain, his passion for the baroque distinguishing him from the staid collections of other

great estates and attracted the attention of diplomats and representatives of foreign courts long after Walpole's death in 1745. One of these was Alexey Musin-Pushkin, Russian Ambassador, who informed Catherine the Great about Robert's son Horace's intention to sell the collection. This caused much debate at the time as members of parliament urged their government to save the paintings for the country's own collections. However the plea was not heard as what seemed like a 'trifling' sum of £40,550 for Catherine the Great was still too steep for the nation.

Once installed in the Hermitage the collection attracted so many visitors that, in the 1830s, it was opened to the public and the paintings still hang there today.

Funnily enough, on a recent trip to Balmoral, I noticed something from the Hermitage that ended up there: a sign listing Catherine the Great's "Rules for the Hermitage", including my favourite, *'Do not sigh or yawn, neither bore nor fatigue others'*!

[Image 21 - *Horace Walpole*, 1757, after Sir Joshua Reynolds.]

The purchase of the collection was a triumph for Catherine but a great loss for England and particularly Horace Walpole. He would recover however and make a name for himself as a collector in his own right. He is most famous as the architect of Strawberry Hill, a neo-gothic masterpiece just south of London that he described as *'a small capricious house... built to please my own taste and, in some degree, to realise my own visions'*. He was interested in the age of the Tudor and Jacobean courts or what he described as '*the first era of real taste in England*'.

[Image 22 - *Strawberry Hill*, Richmond, London.]

Before settling on the gothic style of a late medieval English castle, still highly unusual for the period, he considered going for a more Venetian style of *palazzo* and even thought about incorporating elements of Chinese and Turkish architecture.

[Image 23 - *The Gallery at Strawberry Hill*, 1781, Thomas Sandby, The V&A, London.]

His eclectic taste is demonstrated throughout the building and his collection - as one historian wrote *'every apartment is a museum; every piece of furniture is a curiosity'*. Walpole did indeed see it as a museum but his collecting tastes were very different to those of his father. Whilst Robert Walpole favoured parable and allegory, Horace sought the curious and the exotic. For Horace a museum was *'a hospital for everything that is singular'*, and indeed it was singularity and provenance that ruled above all in his collection.

Among the more esoteric items bought at obscure provincial auctions from dealers dubbed 'nicknackitarians' were Cardinal Wolsey's hat and the hair of Mary Tudor. This proclivity for odd things is perhaps not an entirely alien concept to many of today's collectors. In other ways, however, his collection was also quite traditional. He went on the grand tour from 1739 to 1741 and began collecting roman antiquities followed by miniatures and painted enamels. Portraits, including some by Joshua Reynolds, Peter Lely, Holbein and Van Dyck, dominated the collection along with ceramics, very much in keeping with the taste of the time. Walpole clearly delighted in being the latest on a long list of English collectors and with his private printing press he ensured that both his own and his father's

collections were recorded for posterity, along with a history of painting in England, a Vasari-esque account of leading artists that still forms the basis of English art history today.

[Image 24 - *Soane Museum Interior*, London.]

Of course no talk on the English collector would be complete without mention of Sir John Soane, master architect and avid collector of all things classical. Primarily an antiquarian his collection was an act of preservation rather than self-aggrandisement. He was fascinated by the past and tried to cram as much of it as possible into his house, from the various artefacts of antiquity to the Pompeian red of his walls. He also had an extensive collection of contemporary prints and paintings, notably Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress* and three Canalettos. In 1833 Soane negotiated an act of parliament to preserve the house and collection for the benefit of 'amateurs and students' of architecture, painting and sculpture which came into effect upon his death in 1837. Today it remains almost exactly as Soane left it - complete with candlelit evenings on the first Tuesday of every month – and proves invaluable to generations of students who pass through its narrow hallways in search of the past.

[Image 25 - *Samuel Courtauld.]*

This desire to conserve works of art for future generations was shared by two other great English collectors of their day, Samuel Courtauld and Viscount Lee of Fareham, founders of London's Courtauld Gallery.

The Courtauld gallery holds some 520 paintings and over 7,000 drawings, as well as a vast number of prints and sculptures, ranging from 1300 to 1970. Despite its clear chronological coherence it is not the result of one systematic collector's acquisitions but was formed through a series of gifts by some of the principal collectors of the late 19th and 20th centuries.

[Image 26 - *Courtauld Gallery*, Somerset House, London.]

Samuel Courtauld, a successful chemicals and textiles merchant, was primarily a collector of old masters until 1917 when he saw the Hugh Lane collection of Impressionist paintings on display at the National Gallery. He saw them as a powerful renewing force in western art and it was this subjective response, rather than a wish to defer to the critics of the time or to defined museological principles, that drove Courtauld's collecting. Soon after, he established a fund for the acquisition of modern French paintings. This gift secured many of the National Gallery's most impressive works including Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* and Seurat's *Bathers at Asnières*.

[Image 27 - *Bathers at Asnières*, 1884, Georges Seurat (1859 – 1891), National Gallery, London.]

Between 1922 and 1929 Courtauld amassed a private collection of staggering quality with works such as Cezanne's *Still Life with Plaster Cupid*, Renoir's *La Loge* and Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, rapidly establishing himself as a major figure in the growing international art market.

[Image 28 - *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère,* 1882, Edouard Manet (1832-1883), Courtauld Gallery, London.]

His commitment to modern art and artists was unequalled in England at the time and, over the years, the Courtauld Institute of Art and its unrivalled collection have both proved invaluable to the study of art history.

[Image 29 - *Dairy Art Centre,* London.]

There are still many collectors today who embody the spirit of the great English collector, from the latest descendant at Houghton Hall to Frank Cohen and his contemporary art collection in a disused milk depot in Bloomsbury. Lord Cholmondley at Houghton played an instrumental part in *Houghton Revisited*, an exhibition of the original collection of paintings loaned back from the Hermitage to be re-hung in their original setting this year. He has also collected and commissioned monumental works of contemporary sculpture for the grounds at Houghton including Richard Long's *Full Moon Circle* and *Skyspace* by James Turrell, impressive works that continue to both challenge and enhance their historic surroundings.

Similarly Frank Cohen, who stores his collection in two large purpose-built warehouses in Wolverhampton, collects international art from the late 1970s to today. His latest project sees him partnering with Nicolai Frahm to open the Dairy Art Centre in London that will challenge the traditional idea of a gallery or museum with the inclusion of a bar, outdoor cinema and a programme of performances from among the likes of Koons and Cindy Sherman.

The Prince of Wales is another example of a contemporary collector giving new life to a historic collection at Clarence House while, going back to the wonderful Burghley house, the descendants of Cecil are similarly engaged in dusting off some of their finest paintings and hanging them for the world to see.

Today's collectors fill their country houses, or in Cohen's case their warehouses, just as the grand tourists would have done two centuries ago, believing that, instead of preserving a collection perfectly as it was when it was first assembled, one should constantly add to it, providing a home for important works of modern and contemporary art. Though they might jar with the portraits of lords and ladies already present on the walls, they are necessary records of our time, just as important as any swagger portrait or bible scene.

[Image 30 - *Waddesdon Manor*, Buckinghamshire]
[*Perceval,* Sarah Lucas, Waddesdon.]

A prime example of this is the Rothschild collection at Waddesdon Manor which holds regular exhibitions of contemporary art. Its permanent collections include sculptures by Sarah Lucas and Angus Fairhurst, of a horse and gorilla respectively, as well as paintings by Lucian Freud and David Hockney. Most recently it presented *House of Cards*, an exhibition of contemporary sculpture, in partnership with Christie's, curated around a single picture in the Waddesdon collection, the newly acquired *Boy Building a House of Cards* painted in 1735 by Chardin. The preservation of Waddesdon Manor is an on-going project for the Rothschild collection which has just completed the building of Windmill Hill, a beautiful piece of architecture intended to house the Rothschild archives. It will be open to the public and will support various philanthropic ventures.

These additions to the house and the constant programme of exhibitions testifies to the Rothschilds' dedication to constantly enlivening and adding to their collection, at the same time supporting contemporary artists and harking back to age-old traditions of the English collector.

[Image 31 - *Aynhoe Park*, Oxfordshire.]

In other places the spirit of the grand tour and the curiosity of Horace Walpole is very much alive.

At Aynhoe Park, a magnificent Palladian house in Oxfordshire, James Perkins, a veteran of the British music industry, continues to fill his house with plaster casts of classical sculpture, skeletons of extinct animals as well as contemporary art and photography. Many of the casts in the collection were intended for the 'cast courts' of such illustrious institutions as the Victoria & Albert Museum, a veritable heaven for any scholar of antiquity who wished to study the art of Greece and Rome in London. The interior of the house was designed by Sir John Soane around 1800 and the architect-collector is a clear influence on Perkins's taste. His fascination with antiquity manifests itself all over the house from the imposing plasters on the cantilevered stone staircase to the many pieces lining the shelves of the library. As with Soane, Perkins is not afraid of mixing old with new, juxtaposing modern design with ancient marbles collected on his many travels as surely as a grand tourist would have proudly positioned his booty to complement his Chippendale furniture.

Conclusion

And so we have seen how English taste has remained constantly curious over the centuries, seeking out the finest works of art from all corners of the globe in order to conserve, educate and ultimately define the self. This tradition continues today with the younger generations that pass through Christie's, the future Walpoles and Courtaulds feeding a very English appetite for art.

Art lives through its collectors and this great tradition is an extremely important one. I hope that I have inspired you to go forth and collect, enjoying art as it ought to be and ensuring its appreciation for centuries to come.

[CaixaForum Madrid and CaixaForum Barcelona, September 18th and 19th, 2013]

DAVID LINLEY

David Linley was appointed Chairman of Christie's UK in December 2006. In this role he is responsible for leading the Chairman's office in the United Kingdom, and working with Christie's specialists on developing the business and client relationships both in the UK and internationally.

David Linley originally joined the Board of Christie's in a non-executive capacity in February 2005. His evolved appointment reflected his growing interest in, and knowledge of, the art market and marked a desire to further develop his career after more than twenty years working solely for his own business.

David Linley has achieved international renown for his company, LINLEY, which designs and manufactures furniture, upholstery and accessories of the highest quality. David established the business in 1985 focusing on the production of bespoke furniture for individual commissions. Appropriately, the launch of David's business took place at Christie's King Street 20 years ago.

David Linley's passion for the arts was nurtured at school in Bedales, which is renowned for its emphasis on arts and crafts. From 1980-82, he studied at Parnham House School for Craftsman in Wood.

David has written numerous books and lectured around the world at venues including the V&A Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, the LA County Museum of Art, the Dallas Museum of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago and many other leading American institutions.

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