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## Selected Group of Victorian and Edwardian Masterpieces To Lead Sotheby's London December Sale

- Major Burne-Jones Portrait Of His Wife, Georgiana, Offered For Sale For First Time In Its History--
- Tissot Painting Of Artist's Adored Partner, Kathleen Newton--
- Poetic Winter Landscape By Millais--



*A Winter's Walk (Promenade dans la neige)* by James-Jacques-Joseph Tissot, est. £800,000-1,200,000\*

SOTHEBY'S SALE of Victorian and Edwardian Art, on **Thursday, December 16, 2010**, will open with *Masterpieces*, fourteen lots comprising a carefully selected group of paintings and watercolours from private collections, estimated to bring in the region of £3million. In the wake of the extraordinary price recently achieved for Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema's *The Finding of Moses* at Sotheby's in New York (\$35.92m / £22.26m), Sotheby's auction will afford collectors the opportunity to acquire exemplary pictures by Tissot, Burne-Jones, Millais, Atkinson Grimshaw, Godward and

Holman Hunt, among others. Tender portrayals of two women, namely a portrait of Burne-Jones' wife Georgiana and an evocation of winter in the form of Tissot's adored partner and favourite model, Kathleen Newton, reveal biographical details about the lives they shared together.



*Portrait of Georgiana Burne-Jones* by Sir Edward Coley Burne-Jones comes to auction by direct descent from the sitter. Estimated at £400,000-600,000, it is being offered for the first time in its history. The hauntingly beautiful portrait of the artist's wife, with their two children Margaret and Philip in the background, was begun in 1883 and then worked on at intervals. Neither exhibited in Burne-Jones' lifetime, nor shown at the memorial exhibition held at the New Gallery in 1898-99 – presumably because it was regarded as too personal a document for public display – the painting was left to Margaret after the death of her mother in 1920. On Margaret's death in 1953, it was subsequently passed through three further generations of the descendants of Edward and Georgiana Burne-Jones. The Burne-Jones had married in 1860, when Georgiana was twenty years old and Edward twenty-seven. The portrait therefore shows her after

twenty-three years of married life. Georgiana's strong character was imbued with a moral quality, and she was stalwart in her loyalty to friends and family, standing by and supporting her husband in spite of his craving for female attention. A woman of artistic sensibility, Georgiana could engrave wood blocks, sing and play the piano, much to her husband's delight. She frequently served as a model for Burne-Jones in his imaginative subjects and among her greatest achievements was the two-volume biography of her husband that she wrote after his death. In it, she writes with truthfulness and candour without ever betraying any of her friends. Although not conventionally beautiful, her appearance often invoked rapturous descriptions from those who loved her, with attention drawn to her quiet clear grey eyes. The solemnity of her expression in the portrait, coupled with an unflinching gaze, may be regarded as indicating – as Burne-Jones' great grand-son Lance Thirkell said of it – 'something of the unhappiness of being the artist's long-suffering wife, which he perhaps did not see when he was painting it'. Burne-Jones had intense relationships with other women and whether in his heart he acknowledged these transgressions, the portrait was undeniably intended as a token of his love for Georgiana. The book Georgiana holds is unambiguous as a coded message of love on the part of the artist for his wife, but it also points to a possible admission of his failings as a husband. John Gerard's *Great Herball, or Generale Historie of Plantes* – published in 1857 – is held open to show an illustration of the heartsease or pansy, while resting on the page is a blue flower of the same plant. According to the traditional language of flowers, the heartsease is regarded as symbolical of loving thoughts and memories, and of undying affection, even if with associations of sadness and loss.

*A Winter's Walk (Promenade dans la neige)* by James-Jacques-Joseph Tissot shows Kathleen Newton, who was the artist's adored partner and frequent model from about 1877 through to the time of her death from tuberculosis at the age of twenty-eight in 1882 (pictured on front page). Painted circa 1878, the picture celebrates Kathleen's radiant beauty as she engages the viewer in a direct, confident and inviting gaze, a slight smile emanating across her red lips. Swathed in a fur wrap and with her hands immersed in a muff, she is dressed in the most fashionable clothes of the day. Tissot sought to capture Kathleen's fragile beauty in a series of intimate paintings produced in the late 1870s and early 1880s, works that stand in sharp contrast to the large-scale social subjects that he painted on first settling in London. Here, a wistful mood is introduced as if Tissot is intimating the imminent decline in Kathleen's health. Her porcelain pale skin is emphasised by the white of the snow, while the scarlet lining of her black bonnet enhances the redness of her lips and the delicate pink of her cheeks. Symbolical interpretations of a time of year had been a subject for artists since antiquity and it was particularly popular among both French and English artists during the decade in which the present work was painted. *A Winter's Walk (Promenade dans la neige)* is estimated at £800,000-1,200,000.



A further winter subject to feature predominantly among the selection is *Christmas Eve* by Sir John Everett Millais, one of the artist's most evocative landscape paintings. It depicts the garden and western façade of the fifteenth century Murthly Castle in Perthshire, the seat of Sir Archibald Douglas Stewart, 8<sup>th</sup> Baronet of Murthly. There is a pervading sense of silence, stillness and tranquility as the evening draws in and the last glow of the sunlight reflects from the castle's windows. Millais was committed to establishing himself as a major force in Victorian painting, and the present work was his first snowy landscape. The light is crisp and clear, and close examination of the myriad tones and colours of the snow demonstrates how accomplished an

artist he was. The tracks in the snow are the only signs of recent human activity, and a group of rooks have descended to forage on the lawn. The painting conveys the symbiotic harmony between man and nature, with the romantic medieval castle integral to the landscape. *Christmas Eve* was painted from a wooden hut during a cold winter amid the snow in the grounds of Murthly. Unlike the idyllic landscapes that formed the background of Millais' earlier Pre-Raphaelite paintings, the present work – estimated at £300,000-400,000 – depicts untamed nature in its most atmospheric state.

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\*Estimates do not include buyer's premium