

## A PRESENT FROM SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL TO VIVIEN LEIGH

A Still Life of Roses picked from his Garden at Chartwell  
Set to be Unveiled for the First Time Tomorrow  
Alongside a Painting by Vivien

The paintings will be on  
public exhibition from  
17 July–11 August

Ahead of Sotheby's sale  
of the Personal Collection  
of Vivien Leigh on  
26 September

Revealing the little-known story of the friendship between the  
Prime Minister and legendary star of *Gone with the Wind*



SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL, *Roses in a Glass Vase*, Estimate £70,000–100,000



Winston Churchill in his studio at Chartwell. *Roses in a Glass Vase* can be seen hanging on the wall beside him.

**“Whenever I feel particularly low or depressed I look at those three rosebuds. The thought and the friendship in the painting is such a great encouragement to me... and I have the determination to go on.”**

Vivien Leigh

## SUNDAY, 16 JULY 2017

A still-life of roses by Sir Winston Churchill, given to screen-legend Vivien Leigh, will be unveiled for the first time at Sotheby's in London tomorrow (17 July 2017). Never seen in public before, the painting reveals the little-known story of the deep and long-lasting friendship between the Prime Minister and the legendary star of *Gone with the Wind*.

Depicting flowers picked from Churchill's beloved garden at Chartwell, his country home in Kent, *Roses in a Glass Vase* was gifted to Vivien in 1951, during a midnight supper hosted by Churchill on the birthday of Leigh's husband, Sir Laurence Olivier. Churchill's flower paintings were given only to those dearest to him, with other recipients including his youngest daughter Mary.\*

Leigh treasured the present so greatly that the work hung on the wall opposite her bed. She loved flowers and collected other artists' flower paintings too, including Jacob Epstein's *Peonies* (est. £1,500–2,000) and Matthew Smith's *Flowers in a Vase* (est. £10,000–15,000), included in Sotheby's sale. Fittingly, on Churchill's 90th birthday Vivien sent him a bouquet as a gift.

Although best known for his landscape paintings, Churchill was also a master of the still life genre, and his flower paintings held a deeply personal resonance. The flowers Churchill grew at Chartwell, his own private corner of England, were hugely important to him, and he drew myriad inspiration from the mallows, nasturtiums, tulips, daffodils and roses that filled the flowerbeds. The house itself was often filled with masses of flowers, and when driven indoors by the English weather, Churchill settled down to paint the floral groups that adorned the house.

**“Churchill’s gift of a still life of roses to Vivien speaks volumes about the respect and regard he felt for her. Theirs was not a passing acquaintance, but a friendship that endured for more than twenty years. He inspired her to begin painting and it is poignant to think that they shared a mutual solace in an activity where they found a refuge from all the trials and tribulations of daily life.”**

Frances Christie, Head of Sotheby's Modern & Post-War British Art Department

Estimated at £70,000–100,000, the painting is now set to be one of the star lots in Sotheby's sale of Leigh's personal collection on 26 September 2017. It will be sold together with a photograph of Winston Churchill in his studio at Chartwell, showing *Roses in a Glass Vase* hanging on the wall beside him.

Churchill was not the only painter in this friendship however, as revealed through further lots discovered in Leigh's collection. Alongside a copy of Churchill's book, 'Painting As a Pastime', can be found a never-before-seen painting of an Italian landscape by Leigh herself, and her artist's bag. It seems that Churchill himself inspired Leigh to pick up a paint brush. Please find more information on page 3.

\**Magnolia*, a flower painting given by Churchill to his daughter, Mary Soames sold for £698,500 at Sotheby's London in December 2014 (est. £100,000–150,000)

**An exhibition of highlights is on view at Sotheby's 34-35 New Bond Street until 11 August 2017.**

**Full auction preview open 22-25 September 2017.**

**Click [here](#) for a separate press release with further details of the sale.**

**Download images [here](#)**



Vivien Leigh painting at an easel in the garden.

## VIVIEN THE ARTIST

In 1950, a year before Vivien received *Roses in a Glass Vase*, she was the recipient of another gift from Churchill, an inscribed copy of his book, 'Painting as a Pastime' (est. £1,500-2,000). A meditation on painting, this book espouses the therapeutic benefits of making art.

Vivien was a passionate collector and patron, and more than twenty artworks from her private collection are included in the sale, including works by William Nicholson, Harold Gilman and John Piper. As she travelled the world – to Australia, to Ceylon (Sri Lanka), to Algiers in the midst of World War II, and to Hollywood – she took her favourite paintings with her to adorn the walls of her hotel and theatre dressing rooms.

However, Churchill and 'Painting as a Pastime' clearly inspired Vivien to paint as demonstrated by one of her own works, a delightful Italian landscape (est. £200–300) included in the sale, alongside her canvas artist's bag containing a wooden box with oil paints and a travelling folding easel (est. £800–1,200).



VIVIEN LEIGH. *Italian Landscape*. Estimate £200–300

## LEIGH & CHURCHILL'S FRIENDSHIP

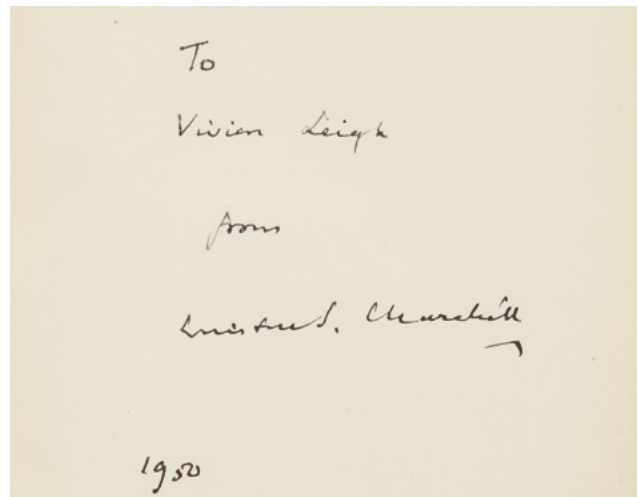
Leigh and Churchill first met in 1936, when they were introduced by British film producer Alexander Korda on the set of the film *Fire Over England*. Vivien was a little-known actress at the time and Churchill an established Parliamentarian more than twice her age, but this was a start of a friendship that would last for thirty years, until Churchill's death in 1965.

### “By Jove, she’s a clinker!”

Winston Churchill on Vivien Leigh

Churchill was a great fan of cinema, and of Vivien Leigh's work in particular. On the release of *Gone with the Wind* in London in 1940, Churchill, by then Britain's wartime Prime Minister, stayed up until 2am watching the film. And, when *Lady Hamilton* was released the following year, this became Churchill's all-time favourite film. He is said to have watched it countless times in 1942 during weekends spent at Ditchley Park, a friend's Oxfordshire home where he retreated to for safety during the war, much to the frustration of his fellow guests.

During his later years, Churchill had his own private cinema installed at Chartwell, and *Lady Hamilton* remained a firm favourite, once again received the most viewings. It is likely Churchill himself had originally proposed to Korda the idea of making a stirring war-time film about Nelson and Lady Hamilton with Leigh and Olivier starring in the leading roles.



SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL. *Painting as a Pastime*, inscribed "To Vivien Leigh from Winston S. Churchill, 1950"

**“Painting is a friend who makes no undue demands, excites no exhausting pursuits, keeps faithful pace even with feeble steps, and holds her canvas as a screen between us and the envious eyes of time or the sultry advances of decrepitude. Happy are the painters, for they shall not be lonely. Light and colour, peace and hope, will keep them company to the end, or almost to the end, of the day.”**

Sir Winston Churchill, *Painting as a Pastime*, 1921-22

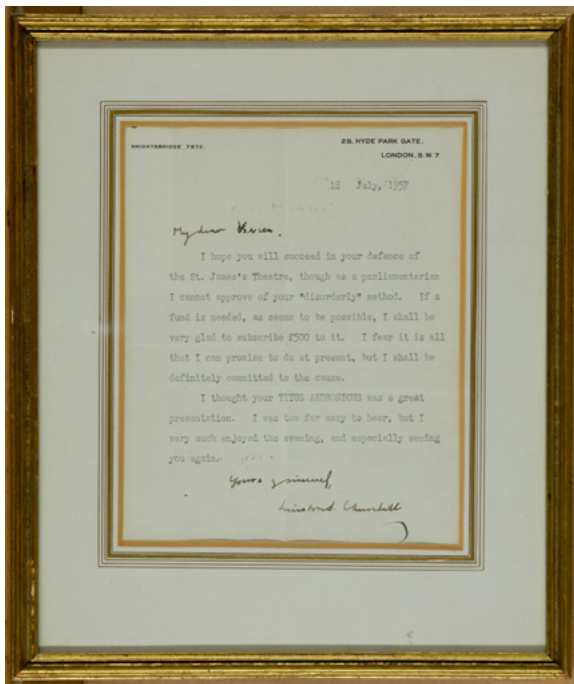
## ST JAMES'S THEATRE

Vivien's friendship with Churchill ran deeper than many people knew, as attested to by a letter included in the sale dated 18 July 1957 (est. £2,000–3,000), in which Churchill secretly promises to donate money to St James's Theatre, which Vivien was trying to save at the time. She had made an impulsive and staunch defence against the theatre's demolition in the House of Lords a week earlier, on 11 July, and was promptly escorted out, an event which garnered front page headlines.

Though Churchill was unable to publicly support Vivien, in his letter he offers to donate £500 to the cause and – with a barely concealed chuckle of admiration – admonishes her: *"I hope you will succeed in your defence of St. James's Theatre, though as a parliamentarian I cannot approve your disorderly method... I shall be definitely committed to the cause"*.

Vivien's great personal attachment to the theatre, and her insistence on maintaining it for the sake of England, saw her march along Fleet Street and the Strand with Athene Saylor, another actress, ringing a hand bell to draw attention to a sandwich board she was wearing, which featured a written protest about the theatre's demolition. In an interview many years later, Saylor recalled Vivien saying that she would go to a restaurant and everybody would look at her, but if she walked down the middle of the street with a placard, nobody took the slightest bit of notice.

Vivien's actions prompted fun cartoons which are included in the sale: from Giles, "Vivien, dear, repeat after Larry: I will be a good girl and come straight to rehearsals. I must not join protest makers on the way. I must not call the House of Lords and wake everybody up..."; inscribed, 'With best wishes / from Giles' (est. £800–1,200, illustrated below right), and, from Osbert Lancaster, I THINK IT'S A MEMBER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS PROTESTING AGAINST THE DEMOLITION OF VIVIEN, signed and dated, Osbert '57 (est. £400–600, illustrated below left).



SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL. Typed letter signed, to Vivien Leigh, 28, Hyde Park Gate, London, 18 July 1957



**Notes to editors:**

For further background please see Hugo Vickers' biography, 'Vivien Leigh' (Hamish Hamilton, 1988)

**Press Contacts:**

**London** +44 (0)20 7293 6000

Matthew Floris [matthew.floris@sothebys.com](mailto:matthew.floris@sothebys.com)

Rosie Chester [rosie.chester@sothebys.com](mailto:rosie.chester@sothebys.com)

**New York** +1 212 606 7176

Darrell Rocha [darrell.rocha@sothebys.com](mailto:darrell.rocha@sothebys.com)

**News & Video:** [www.sothebys.com/en/news-video.html](http://www.sothebys.com/en/news-video.html)

**Twitter:** [www.twitter.com/sothebys](http://www.twitter.com/sothebys)

**Instagram:** [www.instagram.com/sothebys](http://www.instagram.com/sothebys)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com/sothebys](http://www.facebook.com/sothebys)

**Snapchat ID:** sothebys

**YouTube:** [www.youtube.com/SothebysTV](http://www.youtube.com/SothebysTV)

**Weibo:** [www.weibo.com/sothebyshongkong](http://www.weibo.com/sothebyshongkong)

**WeChat ID:** sothebyshongkong

Sotheby's has been uniting collectors with world-class works of art since 1744. Sotheby's became the first international auction house when it expanded from London to New York (1955), the first to conduct sales in Hong Kong (1973), India (1992) and France (2001), and the first international fine art auction house in China (2012). Today, Sotheby's presents auctions in 10 different salesrooms, including New York, London, Hong Kong and Paris, and Sotheby's BidNow program allows visitors to view all auctions live online and place bids from anywhere in the world. Sotheby's offers collectors the resources of Sotheby's Financial Services, the world's only full-service art financing company, as well as the collection advisory services of its subsidiary, Art Agency, Partners. Sotheby's presents private sale opportunities in more than 70 categories, including S|2, the gallery arm of Sotheby's Global Fine Art Division, and two retail businesses, Sotheby's Diamonds and Sotheby's Wine. Sotheby's has a global network of 80 offices in 40 countries and is the oldest company listed on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE).

\*Estimates do not include buyer's premium. Prices achieved include the hammer price plus buyer's premium and are net of any fees paid to the purchaser where the purchaser provided an irrevocable bid.

Images are available upon request

Browse sale catalogues, view original content, stream live auctions and more at [www.sothebys.com](http://www.sothebys.com), and through Sotheby's apps for iPhone, iPad, Android, Apple TV and Amazon Fire