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Sotheby's to Offer *La Belle Ferronnière* Famous Painting Sparked Debate That Has Endured for Nearly a Century



Follower of Leonardo da Vinci, probably before 1750, *Portrait of a Woman, Called 'La Belle Ferronnière'*,
21 5/8 by 17 1/8 in., 55 by 43.5 cm (est. \$300/500,000)

Portrait of a Woman was at the center of a trial that nearly brought
The world's foremost art expert to his knees,
And inspired a new book just last year

On 28 January 2010, Sotheby's New York will offer a painting that has been at the center of one of the art world's most heated debates for over eighty years: **Portrait of a Woman, Called "La Belle Ferronnière"** by a Follower of Leonardo da Vinci (est. \$300/500,000*). Depicting a lady in three-quarters profile, the portrait is another version of a composition in the Louvre, now believed to be by either Leonardo or one of his pupils, depicting Lucrezia Crivelli, a mistress of Ludovico Sforza, the Duke of Milan. Since the widely publicized 1929 slander trial of the art world's

foremost international expert, Sir Joseph Duveen, *La Belle Ferronnière's* attribution has been fiercely contested, raising questions of connoisseurship, authenticity, and the role of science in art history in the 21st Century. The picture's intricate story has fascinated readers for decades; the trial was closely followed by *Time* and *New York Times* readers in the 1920s and is today the subject of a recently published book, *The American Leonardo: A Tale of Obsession, Art and Money*, written by John Brewer. After decades out of public view, *La Belle Ferronnière* will be exhibited at Sotheby's Los Angeles office on 13 January and at Sotheby's New York galleries beginning 23 January 2010.

La Belle Ferronnière was given as a wedding gift in 1920 to Harry Hahn, an American serviceman during World War I, and his French bride, Andrée. Given by Andrée's godmother, the painting was believed to be by Leonardo, and had been authenticated by a French art expert, who was, however, not an Italian Renaissance expert. After returning home to Kansas City, the Hahns endeavored to sell the picture, with a supposed deal in place to sell it to the Kansas City Art Institute for the princely sum of \$250,000. Sir Joseph Duveen was recognized as the art world's leading dealer, and helped craft such famed American collections as those of Andrew Mellon, John Pierpont Morgan, Sr., and John D. Rockefeller Jr. When, on 17 June 1920, a *New York World* reporter, having heard of the sale of a Leonardo picture, phoned Duveen in the middle of the night for a comment, the venerable art connoisseur declared it was surely a fake. Thus began the battle over the 'Hahn Leonardo.' After the deal with the Kansas City Art Institute as well as others fell through, Andrée Hahn sued Joseph Duveen for slander and damages of \$500,000, claiming that Duveen's comments were not only false, but designed to drive the picture from the market in his quest for control of the art market.

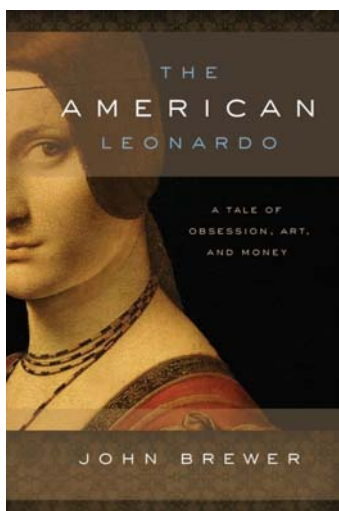
In 1929, Andrée Hahn's suit against Duveen came to trial in New York State Supreme Court. While the Hahns aimed to affirm their attribution to Leonardo, Duveen argued that not only was the Hahn's picture not by the Renaissance master, but it was in fact a later copy. Duveen, who had rallied a series of highly-respected experts to corroborate his opinion, expected a handy victory; however, as the trial began, it became clear that the jury was not in his favor. The American jury had little patience for European experts who offered their superior "eyes" as proof of the painting's attribution and could provide little concrete evidence. At the trial's conclusion, the jury was unable to reach a decision, voting nine to three in favor of the Hahns. Sir Joseph Duveen settled out of court before a retrial began, paying Andrée Hahn \$60,000.

The settlement did little to change the market's opinion of the authenticity of the Hahn's picture, however. Duveen continued to dominate the international art market, and the picture was locked away in a bank vault. In 1946, Harry Hahn published his own account of the trial, *The Rape of La Belle*, in which he lambasts Duveen's 'lust for power' and vengeful attack on the picture. While several private sale attempts were made throughout the second half of the twentieth century, none were successful and the work disappeared from public view.

The debate over the picture's authorship has, however, persisted to present day. In 1993, *La Belle Ferronnière* was examined by a leading Leonardo expert, who concluded that while the painting was not by Leonardo, it did in fact have age, and suggested that it dated to the first half of the 17th Century. Recent scientific analysis of the pigments used confirms that conjecture and suggests the work was painted by a French artist, or someone using French materials, before 1750. Such findings are enticing, for they suggest that after over eighty years, *La Belle Ferronnière* may finally emerge not only from the shadow of Leonardo da Vinci, but from close to a century of controversy and critical neglect.

OLD MASTERS WEEK

NEW YORK 23-29 JANUARY 2010



As part of the 2010 Old Masters Week in New York, Sotheby's will host a lecture by John Brewer, author of *The American Leonardo, A Tale of Obsession, Art and Money* on Monday, 25 January at 6:30pm. The lecture will be followed by a Book Signing and Reception at 7:30pm. To attend, please call the Press Office on 212 606 7176.

Sotheby's January 2010 Old Masters Week Sale Schedule**

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| 27 January, 10am | <i>Old Master Drawings</i> |
| 28 January, 10am | <i>Important Old Master Paintings</i> |
| 28 January, 2pm | <i>Old Master Paintings and Sculpture</i> |
| 29 January, 10am | <i>Important European Terracotta and Bronze Sculpture from the Arthur M. Sackler Collections</i> |
| 29 January, 2pm | <i>Old Master and 19th Century European Art</i> |

**All exhibitions will open to the public Saturday, 23 January 2010

*Estimates do not include buyer's premium

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