

Fitzwilliam Museum set to acquire Poussin masterpiece as joint £3.9m fundraising campaign with the Art Fund succeeds

- Substantial HLF grant ensures campaign success
- Almost £1 million in donations from the public and charities
- Thousands see painting during National Gallery display



Nicolas Poussin (1594 – 1665), *Extreme Unction*, oil on canvas, 95.5 x 121cm

A campaign by the **Fitzwilliam Museum** and the **Art Fund** to raise £3.9m to enable the museum to acquire Nicolas Poussin's masterpiece *Extreme Unction* (c. 1638-40) has reached a successful conclusion with the help of a substantial grant of £3,021,000 from the **Heritage Lottery Fund** (HLF) for the acquisition and outreach work, and almost £1m in donations from members of the public and charitable organisations.

Supporters of the Fitzwilliam Museum gave a total of £692,000 including significant funds from Friends of the Fitzwilliam. As well as giving a grant of £100,000, the Art Fund also raised funds through contributions from nearly 3,000 members, bringing in an additional £142,000. The Museum and the Art Fund are grateful for the support of a number of trusts and foundations.

These hugely generous donations and grants mean that the Fitzwilliam Museum can now take advantage of an extraordinary opportunity provided by HM Government's Acceptance in Lieu scheme to acquire the painting for £3.9m instead of its market value of £14m.

The acquisition of the painting for the nation has received resounding support throughout the campaign, not least that of the National Gallery where it has been on display for the majority of the

campaign, and will remain until 11 November. Thereafter it will be moved to Cambridge and be exhibited in the Fitzwilliam Museum's Octagon Gallery from early December.

The Museum has ambitious and innovative plans to exhibit the painting in its permanent galleries and in the context of temporary exhibitions over the coming years. It also plans to develop a touring exhibition project in collaboration with galleries and museums across the country, so that this remarkable work can be seen and enjoyed in the context of collections nationwide. In tandem with these displays, the Museum will stage talks and seminars, and create a series of digital resources which will contribute in significant ways to the understanding and appreciation of the painting. *Extreme Unction* will enhance the Museum's existing programme of learning and outreach in unparalleled ways; in particular, it will resonate with the universality of its central theme – the marking of the passing from life to death. The HLF grant includes £79,250 towards this work.

Dame Jenny Abramsky, Chair of the Heritage Lottery Fund, said: "*Extreme Unction* is an extraordinarily moving and beautiful Old Master which has influenced generations of artists. However, it's not just about aesthetics and we were impressed with the Fitzwilliam and Art Fund's dynamic fundraising campaign and their desire to seize the moment and secure the painting on behalf of the nation. Combining these factors meant the Heritage Lottery Fund was unanimous in awarding a grant of over £3 million which will give an immense boost to the museum's prospects of acquiring this painting."

David Scrase, Acting Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum, commented: "We are extremely grateful to the thousands of individuals and the many charities and organisations that have given so generously to this campaign. We would like especially to thank the Art Fund for their vital early encouragement, the National Gallery for their support, and the Heritage Lottery Fund for ultimately making it all possible. Now this masterpiece will be available to all, transforming our existing collections at the Fitzwilliam. We are absolutely thrilled."

Dr Stephen Deuchar, Director of the Art Fund, said: "Once again I have been delighted by the generosity of the public and, in particular, of Art Fund members who stepped forward to safeguard this masterpiece and bring it into the public domain. We also applaud the HLF's immense commitment to the campaign and for contributing so decisively to its success. Thank you to all those who made this possible - including Nicholas Penny and the National Gallery for supporting the appeal through a special display of the work in London. Above all, many congratulations to the Fitzwilliam Museum for securing this most important acquisition for the nation."

The painting is currently owned by The 11th Duke of Rutland's 2000 Settlement. Robert Holden Ltd., London Fine Art agents, have been instrumental in the transaction.

***Extreme Unction* will remain on display at the National Gallery in London until Sunday 11 November 2012.**

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Notes to Editors

The Fitzwilliam Museum: Founded in 1816 the Fitzwilliam is the principal museum of the University of Cambridge, with collections exploring world history and art from antiquity to the present day. It houses over half a million objects from ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman artefacts, to medieval illuminated manuscripts, masterpiece paintings from the Renaissance to the 21st century and outstanding collections of applied arts, ceramics, coins, and Asian arts. Welcoming over 400,000 visitors a year, the Fitzwilliam presents a wide ranging public programme of major exhibitions, events and education activities, and is an internationally recognised institute of learning, research and conservation. www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk.

Heritage Lottery Fund: Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported over 30,000 projects, allocating £5 billion across the UK. Website: www.hlf.org.uk.

The Art Fund: The Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art, helping museums and galleries across the UK to acquire great works of art and develop their collections, and encouraging the public to make the most of all there is to see. Over the past five years we have given £24 million to enable over 200 museums, from ancient sculpture and treasure hoards to Old Master paintings and contemporary commissions, and supported a range of programmes which bring art to wider audiences. We also work with collectors to help place gifts of art in suitable museums and galleries. We are independently funded and the majority of our income comes from 95,000 members who, through the National Art Pass, enjoy free entry to over 200 museums, galleries and historic houses across the country as well as 50% off most major exhibitions. For more information please go to www.artfund.org.

HM Government's Acceptance in Lieu Scheme (AIL): The scheme which is administered by the Arts Council England allows people to offer items of cultural and historical importance to the State in full or part payment of their inheritance tax, capital transfer tax or estate duty. The Scheme is currently among the most important means of acquiring important works of art and cultural objects for public ownership. Once accepted, they are distributed to museums, galleries and public archival depositories throughout the UK. The Scheme offers clear tax benefits to owners and ensures that major cultural objects remain in the UK for the enjoyment of everyone. For more information please go to <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/supporting-museums/cultural-property/tax-incentives/acceptance-lieu/>

Nicolas Poussin (1594 – 1665) was the greatest French painter of the 17th century. He initially studied painting in Paris and then moved to Rome at the age of thirty. In the following decades his renown across Europe grew, and save for a brief spell in the service of the King of France, Poussin made his home in Rome permanently.

The Masterpiece: commissioned in Rome by Poussin's friend renowned connoisseur Cassiano dal Pozzo, *Extreme Unction* (c. 1638-40) depicts a dying man being anointed with oil in accordance with the rites of the early Roman church. To enhance the realism of the scene, Poussin drew on his extensive study of the art and artefacts of classical antiquity to represent the costumes, setting, and the structure of the painting itself, with the figures disposed frieze-like across the composition. This classicising tendency went on to make an inestimable impact on Western art.

Today, the sobriety and control of Poussin's paintings can seem difficult, or remote, to audiences. But in *Extreme Unction* subject and style are so perfectly aligned that Poussin's stark, lyrical, line, and controlled play of light and shadow bring out the full depth of emotion that marks this

momentous scene. Through the rhythmic beauty of the composition and passages of resplendent, often joyous, colour, Poussin allows us to contemplate and engage with the most natural and inevitable of events in human existence: the passage from life to death.

Poussin's Appeal: Poussin initially painted for a relatively small, but hugely enthusiastic, group of patrons, but by the 18th century collectors throughout Europe were clamouring to buy his pictures. Viscount Fitzwilliam himself was one, though later scholarship proved that his would-be Poussin was a copy. The Duke of Rutland was more fortunate, and his purchase in 1785 of Poussin's series of Seven Sacraments – then among his important works to be seen in Rome - caused a sensation in England. Their acquisition was heralded as a coup for the nation, and when the series was exhibited at the Royal Academy it was visited by King George III himself.

From the 18th century onwards, painters, scholars and connoisseurs have evaluated the importance of the Rutland series by comparison with a later group of the same subject, painted in 1644-48 and now in the collection of the Duke of Sutherland, on long-term loan to the National Galleries of Scotland. Most critics, from Sir Joshua Reynolds on, have consistently judged the first, Rutland, series to be the finer of the two; *Extreme Unction*, in particular, has been singled out as the most intelligently constructed and beautifully painted of all the Sacraments. The set of Sacraments is no longer complete: one, *Penance*, was destroyed by fire in 1816, *Baptism* was sold around 1939 and is now in the National Gallery of Art, Washington and *Ordination* was sold in 2011 to the Kimbell Art Museum, Forth Worth, Texas.