

May 2017

## Lucky token hidden by Venetian artist Rosalba Carriera discovered after nearly 300 years

An 18th-century good-luck token has been found hidden inside Rosalba Carriera's pastel *A Personification of Winter* by Royal Collection Trust's conservators. One of the artist's finest works, *Winter* was produced around 1726 for Joseph Smith, a British merchant, art collector and dealer who lived in Venice and acted as agent to many artists, including Carriera and, most famously, Canaletto. Sealed inside the frame between the pastel's wooden support and canvas liner, the token came to light during conservation of *Winter* for display in Royal Collection Trust's exhibition ***Canaletto & the Art of Venice*, opening at The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace on 19 May.**

Just 4.2 cm x 3.3 cm in size, the token is in the form of a print of the three Magi and was clearly placed there by Carriera to protect the fragile pastel on its journey to its new owner. In the 18th century these tiny prints, known as *santini* ('little saints'), were kept in prayer books or clothing as affordable and portable devotional objects. Rosalba Carriera, a very devout woman, is known to have been particularly fond of images of the three Magi, whose association with arduous journeys made them appropriate guardians for her works. Similar tokens have been found attached to other pastels by the artist.

In a letter to a friend in Florence on 3 December 1729, the Venetian nobleman Pier Caterino Zeno described Carriera's devotion to the Magi: 'Once she gave me a certain portrait to send to my brother in Vienna, and she gave me a little card of the three aforementioned adoring Magi; and said that to these she entrusted the safe outward journey of the portrait; adding that whenever such little images had accompanied her pictures, they had always arrived safely.'

Rosalba Carriera was one of the most celebrated women artists of her day. Her pastels were highly admired by 18th-century European collectors, and prominent foreign visitors to Venice and Grand Tourists were eager to sit for portraits by her. The soft, velvety texture of pastel was particularly suited to Carriera's sensual personifications such as *Winter*, portrayed as a young woman with a fur wrap slipping from her shoulders.

In 1762 the young monarch George III purchased virtually the entire collection of Joseph Smith, including *Winter*, which was among Smith's most prized possessions. Thanks to this single acquisition, the Royal Collection contains one of the finest groups of 18th-century Venetian art in the world, including the largest collection of works by Canaletto. *Winter* hung in George III's bedchamber at Buckingham House (later Buckingham Palace) alongside Carriera's pastel of *Summer*.

Clara de la Peña McTigue, Royal Collection Trust's Head of Paper Conservation, said, 'The conservation of pastels is a very delicate operation, as the pigment surface of these works is so fragile. When we carefully removed the frame, we became very excited when we noticed a small piece of paper in the narrow space between the pastel's support and the canvas, and suspected it might be one of Carriera's tokens.'

Rosie Razzall, Royal Collection Trust's Curator of Prints and Drawings, and the exhibition's co-curator, said, 'It was only during conservation treatment that the print came to light. It's incredible to think that it was put there by Carriera herself nearly 300 years ago to protect the work from ill fortune and has remained undiscovered until now.'

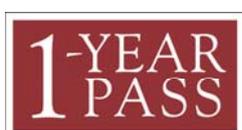
**Ends**

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***Canaletto & the Art of Venice* is at The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace, 19 May – 12 November 2017.**

**The accompanying publication, *Canaletto & the Art of Venice*, by Lucy Whitaker and Rosie Razzall is published by Royal Collection Trust, price £29.95.**

**Visitor information and tickets for The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace: [www.royalcollection.org.uk](http://www.royalcollection.org.uk), T. +44 (0)30 3123 7301.**



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### **Notes to Editors**

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Admission to The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace is managed by The Royal Collection Trust, a registered charity in England and Wales (1016972) and in Scotland (SCO39772).

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