

## COUNT VOLPI DI MISURATA TO SELL CONTENTS OF ROMAN PALAZZO AT SOTHEBY'S LONDON

### *Important 18th century French, Italian and German Furniture to be sold by auction on 16th December*

OUTSTANDING furniture from the Roman Palace of Count Volpi di Misurata will be offered in its own catalogue prior to its sale at Sotheby's in London on Wednesday, December 16, 1998.

The Volpi Collection includes a group of around 50 pieces of important 18th century French, Italian and German furniture which once decorated the magnificent interiors of the Palazzo Volpi at 21 via del Quirinale in Rome, one of the city's most beautiful palaces. The furniture was put into storage more than 25 years ago where it has remained until now.

Count Giovanni Volpi di Misurata is the son of the late Count Giuseppe Volpi, a diplomat and Italy's leading industrialist. By far the most capable Venetian of the 20th century and often referred to as the 'last Doge', Giuseppe Volpi founded SADE which supplied electricity to Northern Italy in 1903; CIGA Hotels in 1907; negotiated the Italian-Turkish peace treaty in 1912; founded Venice's mainland industrial harbour in 1917; was finance minister (1925-28); Chairman of the Venice Biennale, for which he invented the first film festival in 1932 and the Italian Confederation of Industry. Count Volpi was buried in Venice's pantheon, the Frari basilica, by wish of Pope John XXIII.

The Volpi Collection is representative of a life-style that drew worldwide admiration throughout the 20th century. Count Volpi's parents were a pillar of society both in Rome and Venice where they held annual balls in their palaces. Cole Porter, the Mitfords, Jean Cocteau, Winston Churchill, The Duke and Duchess of Windsor, Cecil Beaton, Orson Wells and Maria Callas were among those who attended Count Volpi's glittering parties.

Palazzo Volpi in Rome was built in the 17th century by the architect Alessandro Specchi, whose work includes Rome's famous Spanish Steps. It overlooks the city and the once royal gardens from its 15,000 square feet of terraces spread on five floors. The palace fell into disrepair after the Second World War but was later restored to its former magnificence by Count Volpi's mother, Nathalie, in 1951.

Highlight of the collection are two pairs of Genoese carved giltwood sofas, made in around 1740-1744 for the Gilded Gallery of Palazzo Carrega Cataldi in Genoa. One of Italy's most sumptuous rococo interiors, the Gilded Gallery was richly decorated with elaborate stucco-work, panelling, mirrors, consoles and seating furniture, all typifying Genoa's aquatic theme and including mermaid, scallop- shell and dolphin motifs.

Each sofa has a shaped-padded back within a reeded ribbon-tied frame, a carved mermaid on each side-rail, scrolled arms on stylised dolphin supports and masks centering the seat-rails. Each pair is estimated at £50,000-80,000.

Three identical pairs of armchairs each comprises two mid-18th century German or Austrian carved giltwood and Beauvais tapestry-covered armchairs. The bold carving of the frames and the out-scrolling arms are typical of North German seat furniture made for the main Residenzen in Berlin and the palaces of Postdam. The Beauvais tapestry covering each piece is woven with scenes from La Fontaine's Fables after drawings by Jean-Baptiste Oudry. Each pair is estimated at £50,000-80,000.

The Volpi collection also includes a pair of Louis XVI carved giltwood, gilt-bronze and bronze athéniennes, one of them stamped with the initials of Adrien-Pierre Dupain engraved in reverse in the form of a circle. The pair is estimated at £70,000-100,000.

The Athénienne, a vase and cover on a tripod, was conceived in 1773 by J.H.Eberts, editor of the "Monument du Costume". It derives from a painting by the French artist J.B Vien, La Vertueuse Athénienne, which shows a Greek girl sacrificing at a tripod of the same form.

The athénienne had several functions: with its lid in position it could be used as a perfume burner or, without it, as a plant-stand or a wash-stand basin.

A stunning pair of rare Roman Baroque carved giltwood and painted stands supporting unicorn heads, shows the influence of Bernini's extravagant and naturalistic style. Each stand supports a unicorn head with a flowing mane and horn. The pair is estimated at £40,000-60,000.

Also on offer is an unusual carved suite of seat furniture in the Renaissance revival style, each piece covered in needlework tapestry woven by S.A.R. Madame la Duchesse de Berry, the mother of Henri V, Conte de Chamborde. Known as the Berry salon suite and reputedly made for a Jardin d' Hiver or conservatory , it is comprised of eight chairs, four armchairs, a canapé, a further round canapé and a footstool, all covered in needlework showing a collection of flowers in different shades of colour on a yellow ground. The suite is estimated at £20,000-30,000.

A fine mid-18th century South German commode in the manner of the leading German Rococo architect and designer Cuvillies is estimated at £40,000-60,000.

The remainder of the Volpi Collection is comprised of Régence consoles and Italian and French armchairs and torchères.