

First Minister chooses Howson painting for his Christmas card



Peter Howson's Artaban to benefit four charities and add to £148,000 already raised

The legend of Artaban – the fourth wise man, who arrived at Bethlehem too late to celebrate the birth of Christ – is the basis for a specially commissioned artwork by Peter Howson that will grace the front of the First Minister's 2013 charity Christmas card.

The artwork, which shows Artaban following the star to the holy town, will feature on the latest in a series of the First Minister's charity Christmas cards that have raised more than £148,000 for good causes through sales of the original paintings and limited edition prints.

The artwork will be sold at auction in the New Year, with the proceeds shared between the Children's Hospice Association Scotland; CLIC Sargent; Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund and Combat Stress, the charity chosen by the artist. Each charity will also be given a series of limited edition prints to help their own fundraising efforts.

The artwork was unveiled in front of Mr Howson and representatives of the charities at an event in Prestwick at Malcolm Sargent House, the holiday home run by CLIC Sargent for young people and their families who are coping with cancer. Earlier this year, the First Minister officially opened the home's playroom.

The unveiling comes days after a major exhibition of Peter

Howson's work – called A Life – opened in London's Flowers Gallery in Cork Street.

The First Minister said:-“The legend of Artaban, or the fourth wise man, is based on a novel by Henry van Dyke. It tells the tale of a Persian scholar who, delayed by helping the vulnerable, follows the star to Bethlehem but arrives just too late to herald the birth of the Christ child. Thirty years on in Jerusalem, at Passover, Artaban is still searching.

“Now an old man, he parts with the last of his three gifts to Jesus – a sapphire, a ruby and a pearl – to save a young girl from slavery. However, in a dying vision, Artaban is comforted that his devotion to the distressed has secured him entrance to the kingdom of heaven. The story reminds us that hope, faith and self-sacrifice are at the centre of the order of things.

“Arteban it is a hugely appropriate work for my 2013 Christmas card that will benefit four very deserving organisations – Children's Hospice Association Scotland; CLIC Sargent; Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund and Combat Stress.

“I am very grateful to Peter for donating this outstanding painting. As you might expect, it's a typically powerful image – unmistakably Howson – and I am sure it will go on to make a significant figure for these four very good causes at auction next year.

“Since we launched the charity Christmas card initiative in 2007, sales of artwork and prints have raised a substantial amount – more than £148,000 – for charities across Scotland. I am confident that, with such an iconic artist providing the image this year, we'll have another fantastic result for these excellent organisations.”

Andrew Cameron, Chief Executive of Combat Stress said:-“On behalf of the hundreds of Scottish Veterans supported by Combat Stress, we would like to thank the First Minister and

Peter Howson for choosing Combat Stress to benefit from these cards. Their support will help us to change the lives of those Veterans who need dedicated mental health care.

“For most of us, the realities of war are far removed from our everyday lives. It means a great deal for a war artist like Peter Howson, who served in the Royal Highland Fusiliers and bore witness to the horrors of war in Bosnia and Kosovo, to support us. Peter Howson and the First Minister are signalling, in a very personal way, the importance of specialist treatment for Veterans suffering psychological wounds from their service.”