

Secret Scottish colourist still life discovered

A rare portrait by the leading Scottish Colourist artist, George Leslie Hunter, that was found to have a secret still life painting hidden on the reverse has fetched £21,760 at auction.

Hunter painted his patron, the businessman and author John Ressich, around 1930 for an exhibition of portraits in Glasgow the following year.

The “important” portrait was acquired by Ressich and passed through generations of his family for almost a century before a small tear in the backing paper revealed the second work on the reverse.

The rare 25 x 20in oil on canvas, signed “L Hunter”, went under the hammer at Bonhams’ Scottish Art Sale in Edinburgh, where it was sold to a bidder in the auction room amid interest from collectors “far and wide”.

May Matthews, Managing Director of Bonhams Scotland and Head of the Scottish Picture Department, said: “This remarkable double canvas painting commanded competitive bidding in the room.

“It was all very exciting and I’m sure the family will be delighted with the result, as are we.”

The hidden still life came to light after a family member took

the portrait off the wall in their home in East Lothian for a valuation. The backing paper was later removed fully by experts to uncover the painting of tulips and fruit, which can be dated to 1929-30.

May, who made the discovery, said: "John Ressich was a businessman, journalist and author who was a supporter of Hunter and his fellow Scottish Colourists S.J. Peploe and J.D. Fergusson.

"Hunter entered the portrait into the exhibition in Glasgow in 1931 and it then became part of Ressich's own collection.

"It hasn't been on public display since 1931 and the painting on the back was forgotten about until a few months ago when the family took it off the wall and noticed a tear in the paper – and colour shining through it.

"It had been passed from one branch of the family to another, all the while with this backing paper on the back, never knowing about the tulip still life on the reverse.

"I had the pleasure of taking the backing paper off and it was like Christmas. It was brilliant."

Hunter was one of the four stars of the Scottish Colourist school of art, along with Peploe, Fergusson and FCB Cadell.

Born in 1877 in Rothesay on the Isle of Bute, he died in 1931, not long after his exhibition.

He embarked on an ambitious series of portraits in 1930 as he did not want to be solely associated with still life painting.

His portrait of Ressich attracted widespread praise for its "excellent likeness".

Ressich supported the Colourists throughout their careers, not only buying their work but organising exhibitions, introducing them to collectors, travelling with them and encouraging them

to believe in their pursuit of bringing Modernism to Scottish Art.

His descendants, who sold the painting, said: "We've had this portrait on the wall for decades. We never would have guessed that there was a still life on the other side."



PHOTOS courtesy of Saltire News



Wm. M. Turner
1. Glencliff House
Hawke's Bay
8.12.7
1885
JESSE VAN PLEAVE
23.7.57

26



