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Italy proffers plan to settle dispute over Met's artifacts

ROME – Italy has proposed loaning important antiquities to New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art if the institution will turn over several prized artifacts. The offer was aimed at ending a dispute over cultural treasures that Italy claims were illegally removed from the country and which now are in foreign collections, including that of the Met. Italian Culture Minister Rocco Buttiglione sent the proposal to the museum last month, said Maurizio Fiorilli, a lawyer for the Italian state.

Metropolitan spokesman Harold Holzer said the museum has yet to receive Italy's proposal. "We will not be commenting

until it has been received and reviewed," he said.

Fiorilli spoke on the sidelines of an antiquities trafficking trial of two Americans in Rome, a case that highlights Italy's aggressive campaign to regain artifacts from its Etruscan, Roman and other ancient civilizations. Marion True, a former antiquities curator of the Getty Museum, and art dealer Robert Hecht are accused by Italian prosecutors of knowingly dealing in stolen art. Both True and Hecht have denied wrongdoing.

According to Fiorilli, the Italian proposal was discussed

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Above: Karl Schmidt's 1915 oil-on-board triptych titled *Tall Trees of California*, comprised of three hinged and framed panels measuring 30in wide by 14in high overall, won the blue ribbon in Treadway-Toomey's recent 20th Century Art & Design auction. Estimated at \$6,000-8,000, it outran all other entries to cross the finish line at \$120,000 (all prices quoted include a 20 percent buyer's premium).

Dark horse

The catalog cover for Treadway-Toomey Galleries' 20th Century Art & Design auction, held Dec. 4 in Oak Park, Ill., showcased what was considered the sale's most valuable piece: a Tiffany Studios memorial landscape window estimated at \$90,000-120,000. While the lot reached the upper end of its target, fetching \$114,000, it had to settle for second place in a sweepstakes bagged by an unlikely contender: a Karl Schmidt triptych that raced to \$120,000 against a \$6,000-8,000 estimate. The price it achieved represents a world auction record for the painter's work.

Schmidt (1890-1962), a native of Worcester, Mass., spent much of his life in California. He was especially well known for his landscape and marine paintings, and created the oil-on-board triptych *Tall Trees of California*, a depiction of billowing, saffron-hued clouds and splashes of aquamarine sky, in 1915.

Gallery owner Don Treadway remarked after the sale, "Nothing is more riveting at an auction than runaway bidding on an unexpected piece. And nothing is more subjective than the way someone views a work of art. Because art can evoke such a visceral reaction, it's impossible to predict what will happen on any given (auction) day."

Treadway-Toomey Galleries' next 20th Century Art & Design auction will be held on March 5 at John Toomey's Oak Park gallery.

Contact: (513) 321-6742, (708) 383-5234, www.treadwaygallery.com



Above: This rare 19th century overture/piano forte-format music box, whose rosewood case is inlaid with boule, ivory, mother-of-pearl, brass and enamel, will be offered with a \$20,000-30,000 estimate in an early April auction at Garth's. It was made by Nicole Frères, a French company known for its fastidious approach to crafting musical mechanisms. Their music boxes feature a plentitude of comb teeth to render a more luxuriant and fully orchestrated sound, with less "air" between the notes.

Encore!

Fresh to the market examples of mechanical music machines from the collection of the late Edward and Florence Hutchins have been received by Garth's for a 600-800-lot specialty sale to be held in early April at their auction gallery in Delaware, Ohio. Garth's president, Jeff Jeffers, describes the spring event as being a "great opportunity in which to showcase (the Hutchins') passion and drive, and offer music box aficionados a chance at the gavel."

Among the many superior items in the Hutchins collection is a Regina model 35 parlor music box with leaded- and stained-glass door. It plays 1 1/2in diameter metal discs and has a clock that activates the music mechanism every half hour. The lot comes with a certificate of authenticity from the Regina Music Box Co.

Another Regina rarity in the sale is a Corona model 33, with original red mahogany finish and acid-etched glass doors. It accommodates up to 50 27/32in diameter metal discs at a time.

Many charming musical novelties are found in the collection, such as carved Black Forest whistlers, whistling-bird automata in cages, singing-bird boxes and musical snuff boxes, including some by F. LeCoultre.

Other consignors have added large Currier & Ives folios, Victorian furniture, including a turtle-top dog table; hanging parlor lamps, garden trains and many other desirable antiques to the sale's inventory. Additional information will appear soon on Garth's website: www.garths.com. Real-time Internet bidding will be available during the event through eBay Live Auctions.

Contact: (740) 362-4771

Grand jury charges couple with defrauding museum

LOUISVILLE, Ky. – An Alabama man who headed a Louisville historical weapons museum was indicted Jan. 26 on federal charges that he bilked the museum's founder out of millions by lying about the cost of some antique firearms. Michael K. Salisbury, 50, was charged with fraud, federal tax evasion and money laundering for inflating the prices of weapons bought by the museum's founder and primary financial

backer, Owsley Brown Frazier.

At the same hearing, Salisbury's wife, Karen Cruse Salisbury, 46, was indicted on identical charges, according to the U.S. Attorney's office in Louisville. The Salisburys are from Owens Crossroads, Ala.

Michael Salisbury was initially hired by Frazier – a well-known Louisville-area corporate executive and philanthropist – to acquire antique

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Bonhams & Butterfields increases buyer's premium

NEW YORK – Bonhams & Butterfields has announced an increase to the lowest tier of its buyer's premium rate, effective immediately. The new premium applying to hammer prices on fine art, furniture and most collectibles is now 19 1/2 percent up to and including \$50,000. No change has been made to the middle or top tier of the company's buyer's premium structure, with a 15 percent premium continuing to apply to that portion of the hammer price between \$50,001 and \$100,000; and 10 percent on the remainder. Previously, the rate applying to hammer prices up to \$50,000 had been 17 1/2 percent.

The company's Motor Car, Fine Wine and Antique Arms & Armor auctions will now adhere to a revised premium rate as well. At these particular sales, a 17 percent buyer's premium will be payable on hammer prices to \$100,000; 10 percent on the excess.

The 2006 change represents the only buyer's premium adjustment that has been made since Bonhams acquired Butterfields from eBay Inc., on July 31, 2002.

Peale's portrait of Washington brings record \$21.3 million

NEW YORK – On the heels of a record-setting year, Christie's entered 2006 on a high note, with a Jan. 20-21 series of sales ringing the register at \$42 million. The medley of high-end antiques, furniture, silver, fine and folk art from several distinguished collections was crowned by Charles Willson Peale's 1779 portrait of George Washington, which sold for \$21,296,000 (inclusive of 20 percent buyer's premium to

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Firing on all cylinders:
Bertoia Auctions built on its winning momentum with a \$2.2 million Toy Feast



Gotcha covered:
Quilts from John Saul Antiques headlined Fisher's New Year's Day auction

