

CHRISTIE'S

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A MASTERPIECE BY JOHN FREDERICK LEWIS: *The Bezestein Bazaar of El Khan Khalil, Cairo* to lead Christie's *Orientalist Art* Auction this June in London



John Frederick Lewis, *The Bezestein Bazaar of El Khan Khalil*, 1872, 115x88cm
Estimate: £3,000,000-5,000,000

London – Christie's London dedicated auction of *Orientalist Art* on 18 June 2020 will be led by John Frederick Lewis' (1805-1876) masterpiece *The Bezestein Bazaar of El Khan Khalil, Cairo* (estimate £3 – 5 million). One of the last few important works by the artist remaining in private hands it depicts Cairo's most desired Bazaar. The painting will be unveiled during Christie's Islamic Art Week at the end of March and sold along with approximately 40 Orientalist works during Luxury Week in June in London.

Arne Everwijn, Christie's Senior Specialist European Art: "*The Bezestein Bazaar of El Khan Khalil, Cairo is one of the largest paintings by John Frederick Lewis to come to auction as well as one of the last of this calibre remaining in private hands. Christie's is the undisputed market leader for paintings by Lewis, holding the world record price for the artist at auction, as well as six of the top ten prices for the artist at auction. We are thrilled to be presenting this important work to the international market.*"

Orientalist Art or Orientalism

Orientalism is the vision of the East by artists of the West. European painters of the 19th century — from England, France and Germany especially — visited the areas we now know as the Near East, Middle East and North Africa, and depicted what they saw in wide-eyed admiration. Their paintings and works on paper tapped into a growing fascination with travel and far-off, exotic lands, which had previously been beyond the comprehension of the average Londoner or Parisian.

The painter

John Frederick Lewis (London 14 July 1804-15 August 1876) was an English Orientalist painter. Yet unlike his other artistic contemporaries who made the traditional Orientalist pilgrimage, Lewis spent a decade in Egypt. The years spanning 1840-51 found the artist firmly entrenched in Arab life. Dressed in native garb and at ease with the language, he easily disappeared into the crowd to observe and sketch for hours, later building up his oil compositions in his studio. His very careful and loving representation of Islamic architecture, furnishings, screens, and costumes set new standards of realism, which influenced other artists.

The painting

The Bezestein Bazaar of El Khan Khalil, Cairo was painted in 1872 in Lewis' studio in Walton-on-Thames, close to Hampton Court Palace in Surrey. This celebrated composition - a stunning visual spectacle of a traditional Egyptian souk or marketplace - stands as a sort of artistic memoir of a life-long passion for Egypt, based on numerous sketches of people and places he encountered.

Soon after the opening of the Royal Academy exhibition in 1874, when the work was publicly exhibited for the first time, it is recorded that a collector from Glasgow made a private offer to buy the present work for the then generous sum of 10,000 gns. - an offer however stridently refused by the painting's first owner, David Price.

The district of Khan el-Khalili, home to a vast network of markets, was one of the most important trading centers in Cairo. Also known as the Turkish bazaar during the Ottoman period, the complex dates back to the fourteenth century when it was built by the Emir Djaharks el-Khalili in the heart of the Fatimid city in medieval Cairo.

The market Lewis has depicted is in fact the great Ghuriyya market, the main cloth market of Cairo and a southern extension of El Khan Khalili. Named after the ruling 16th Century Sultan Al-Ghuri. In contrast to his earlier market scenes that emphasized smaller compositional groups or individual portrayals of merchants, the present composition is his grandest and most animated depiction of the interior of a bazaar. A long

narrow structure with vaulted ceilings, the market is defined by rows of stalls where merchants display their fine silks and fabrics.

From the intricately patterned fabrics to other decorative embellishments such as the hookah and the bowl of freshly cut fruit, Lewis lavishes his attentions on the exquisite dress and shop trinkets. The degree of detail achieved is not surprising due to his immense personal collection of objects, instruments and clothing which he brought back to England for use as studio props.

Even more remarkable is his ability to attain compositional balance between the figures and the architectural space. Originating in the high and narrow walls, strong perspective lines recess down the corridor and sharply converge at the opposite sunlit entrance - an innovative pictorial device that accentuates the length of the cavernous bazaar. Lewis played with light like a magician delving into the complexities and patterns created by the dappling sunlight.

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Notes to Editors

In 1993 Christie's offered Orientalist art from The Forbes Collection in a dedicated auction, selling 100% and went on to establish various-owner standalone sales for Orientalist Art between 1998 and 2009 and latterly offer works alongside 19th Century European Art sales, reintroducing a dedicated sale in April 2019.

Christie's holds Orientalist auction records for:

Jean-Léon Gérôme
John Frederick Lewis
Frederick Arthur Bridgman
Henri Emilien Rousseau
David Roberts

About Christie's

Christie's, the world's leading art business, had auction sales in 2019 that totalled £4.5 billion / \$5.8 billion. Christie's is a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service and international expertise. Christie's offers around 350 auctions annually in over 80 categories, including all areas of fine and decorative arts, jewellery, photographs, collectibles, wine, and more. Prices range from \$200 to over \$100 million. Christie's also has a long and successful history conducting private sales for its clients in all categories, with emphasis on Post-War & Contemporary, Impressionist & Modern, Old Masters and Jewellery.

Alongside regular sales online, Christie's has a global presence in 46 countries, with 10 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Dubai, Zürich, Hong Kong, and Shanghai.

**Please note when quoting estimates above that other fees will apply in addition to the hammer price - see Section D of the Conditions of Sale at the back of the sale catalogue.*

**Estimates do not include buyer's premium. Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer's premium and are reported net of applicable fees.*

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