

Tekst 7

The Madonna of the Pinks

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I am not particularly nationalistic so far as works of art are concerned. If, as expected, Tessa Jowell, the Secretary of State for Culture, announces later this week that the Government is to defer the export of the lovely Raphael, Madonna of the Pinks, so that funds can be assembled to match the bid by the Getty Museum in Los Angeles, I won't myself be rattling the collecting tin.

The picture was painted in Florence in about 1507-8 just before Raphael left to start work at the papal court in Rome, when the Eternal City was again, briefly, the centre of the world in terms of artistic endeavour. But the Madonna of the Pinks was not a papal possession and when it turned up in a sale in Rome in 1853 as part of a collection of 74 paintings, the fourth Duke of Northumberland bought the lot and the Raphael has remained to this day 19.

Of course, Britain at the time was immensely wealthy, and probably only British dukes, as opposed to the Continental variety, could afford such a bold purchase. I don't know whether the Victorian duke was an owner of prosperous coal mines situated under his Northumberland acres, but it seems 20. Substitute oil for coal and one can see that the Getty Museum, financed by the J. Paul Getty oil fortune, founded in Oklahoma, is in a way quite similar as an art buyer to the fourth Duke of Northumberland exactly 150 years ago. Faced with the inevitability of this slow movement of great works of art around the world, reflecting the pull of power and wealth, are there special reasons why we should 21 this picture in this country?



It was originally displayed at Alnwick Castle in Northumberland as a true Raphael, but the scholars of the time had their doubts and it was relegated to being hung in a corridor. Neglected for more than a century, the picture was finally recognised for what it was in 1991 by a curator from the National Gallery. It was lent to the National Gallery in London and has hung there ever since.

22 the museum feels that it has a moral right to hold on to the picture, and recalls that, at the time of its rediscovery, it was promised that, if the painting were ever sold, it would be offered first refusal. But if it wants to keep the picture, it will have to raise £29m to match the Getty.

Unquestionably, the Madonna of the Pinks is a masterpiece. The National Gallery says that it is acknowledged as one of the greatest paintings in the world and that it has become one of the best-loved among its visitors. But if one then goes on to say that the National Gallery is 23 Raphaels, with nine examples hanging on its walls, the response is that context is all.

For, at the same time as the fourth Duke of Northumberland was buying his pictures

in Rome, the government of the day – the enlightened government of the day – considered that Raphael stood at the pinnacle of Western art and that the National Gallery should make 24 a priority. Hence today's unrivalled collection. And hence the claim that "no more appropriate context could be imagined for this jewel-like masterpiece which so beautifully encapsulates a moment of maternal delight."

Indeed context can enhance the pleasure of viewing great works of art. Anybody who saw the Picasso and Matisse exhibition at the Tate Modern gallery in London last summer will have been struck by how the pairing of the works of the two masters added considerably to the experience.

But then I turn to the Getty Museum and see that it possesses only a Female Figure attributed to Raphael, a Young Man in Red designated as circle of Raphael, a Holy Family after Raphael, together with a study and two drawings which are undoubtedly by the master. This makes me think that, frankly, the value of The Madonna of the Pinks is much greater to the Getty than it is to the National Gallery. If it is to move, the Los Angeles museum is 25.

Is this a hopelessly unpatriotic and

careless attitude towards the nation's artistic heritage? Not quite. As Britain's museums have scarcely any resources of their own with which to finance acquisitions, they must use the utmost care in deciding when to appeal for funds on a large scale for a particular purchase. At the same time, they would almost certainly have to turn to the Heritage Lottery Fund, which is cautious in advancing large amounts which would end up in the hands of a private vendor.

I think the National Gallery should overcome its disappointment, accept that it cannot keep The Madonna of the Pinks and wait for another masterpiece to become available which would 26 an evident gap in the British national collection.

Goya, for instance, is woefully under-represented in Britain. The National Gallery has the terrific Duke of Wellington painted in Spain during the Napoleonic Wars, and bought in 1961 with help both from the government and from the Wolfson Foundation. It also possesses three other paintings acquired in 1896 and a sketch, but no more. No doubt I shall be told that, nowadays, great Goyas never come up for sale. I would certainly bang the drum for 27.

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Kies bij iedere open plek in de tekst het juiste antwoord uit de gegeven mogelijkheden.

1p 19

- A an undisputed masterpiece
- B in the family's ownership
- C out of Britain's reach
- D something of a mystery

1p 20

- A doubtful
- B ironic
- C irrelevant
- D likely

1p 21

- A refuse to have
- B strive to keep
- C welcome

1p 22

- A After all,
- B Then again,
- C Thus
- D Yet

1p 23

- A careless about its
- B hardly short of
- C quite happy with its

1p 24

- A acquisitions of the artist's work
- B exhibitions of Western art
- C improving its reputation
- D research into the Madonna of the Pinks

1p 26

- A create
- B disguise
- C make good
- D reveal

1p 25

- A a disappointing choice
- B a more secure location than most
- C as good a destination as any
- D just one museum among many eager to buy

1p 27

- A the Duke of Wellington
- B the nation's heritage
- C the purchase of one