

National

Maltese *gradenza* fetches world record price at auction

Duncan Barry

A Maltese chest of drawers (*gradenza*) fetched a world record hammer price of €100,000 during the auction on Sunday at the Sliema residence of former Prime Minister George Borg Olivier. The auction, by Obelisk Auctioneers, included the late Prime Minister's personal belongings as well as private entries. The chest of drawers belonged to a private collector and did not form part of the Borg Olivier collection.

When contacted, the buyer, who preferred to remain anonymous, confirmed it was a world record price, recalling that some time ago there had been another *gradenza* sold in Guernsey, Channel Islands to a foreign bidder for around €60,000.

Auctioneer Pierre Grech Pillow of Obelisk said: "This is the second item that has fetched a record price during one of our auctions. A 17th century painting of St John the Baptist in the Wilderness by Jeronimo Jacinto D'Espinosa had sold for another record price of €116,000."



Heritage Malta to decide which items to purchase from buyers

Claudia Calleja

Heritage Malta can take up to two months to evaluate which items from former Prime Minister George Borg Olivier's auction it plans to buy for the national collection.

A team of experts will be evaluating the auctioned items in terms of their artistic, ethnic and historical value before Heritage Malta exercises its pre-emption rights over the belongings of the former premier who saw Malta through its independence from the British in 1964.

Heritage Malta chairman Joe Said explained that the law allowed the national heritage agency the right of preference to buy auctioned items, of national value, at hammer price within two months of their sale.

Heritage Malta was trying to carry out this evaluation exercise as quickly as possible, however, decisions had to be taken carefully.

He referred to a comment posted on timesofmalta.com by a man who claimed he recognised a painting he had sold 11 years ago on the list of items labelled as having belonged to the former Nationalist Prime Minister, who died in 1980.

The auctioned objects were divided into two lists: one contained items belonging to Dr Borg Olivier and his wife, and the other listed different objects.

When contacted, auctioneer Pierre Grech Pillow from Obelisk Auctions admitted the item men-



This piece of heat shield and mission patch flown on Apollo 13 was presented to former premier George Borg Olivier by three American astronauts. It sold for €2,200. Photo: Darrin Zammit Lupi

tioned may have been placed in the wrong list.

However, he insisted that during the auction itself the distinction was made very clear to bidders.

The auction was held at the late Dr Borg Olivier's 19th century house in Sliema on Sunday. In all, it included 307 items, 250

of which belonged to Dr Borg Olivier's family, who parted with possessions but kept all the family documents, personal items and photographs, as well as a silver collection.

Dr Borg Olivier's personal walnut desk was sold to Labour MP Anton Refalo for a winning bid of €25,000.

A boost for children

Whether children have simply had a bad day or they're going through a difficult period in their lives, they too may need brightening up from time to time.

A San Ġwann toy shop has come up with a way of putting a smile back on their faces with a new educational service called Cheer Up, in which an animation team will convey positive messages through song, puppetry, sketches, storytelling and other activities.

The service, by the toy shop Once Upon A Time, will be offered for events such as school outings, hospital visits, children's parties, shows and concerts.

Director Roberta Agius said Cheer Up "represents a ray of hope and a positive outlook". For "happy" children, she said, it would simply be another form of entertainment and fun, and for those who may be sad because of a momentary setback, such as a failed exam, the energy of

the activity would do them a world of good. As for those facing a more difficult situation, such as the separation of their parents, bullying at school or serious illness, the animation team would be emphasising positive, uplifting messages.

Cheer Up is for all ages: "One to three year olds will be fascinated with the colours, music and puppets, four to six year olds will understand certain concepts of bullying, friendship, family and so on, whereas seven to 10 year olds will hopefully listen to the positive messages and make them their own."

The service is going to be launched as a free, end-of-school celebration this Friday at the Ta' Qali picnic area from 6 to 10 p.m., with an invitation extended to all educators, parents and children. Scout and guide groups, Catholic organisations, bands and so on are welcome to participate. Call 7999 3226 for more information.

Producers to appeal judgment

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"No matter how tumultuous the relationship of the couple was, extensive use of vulgar, obscene and blasphemous language that exalts perversion, vilifies the right to life... makes fun of the suffering of women in the Holocaust, and reduces women to a simple object of sexual satisfaction... cannot be used."

Meanwhile, the producers of the play have said they disagreed with the judgment and would be preparing to file an appeal. They had already stated that if they exhausted all local court proceedings they would take the issue to the European Court of Human

Rights. Classification board chairman Theresa Friggieri, who had come under fire for her decision last year, preferred not to comment.

The two-actor play is about a couple struggling to deal with the loss of their child, so much so that they engage in perverse acts and thoughts to escape reality.

The court refused to watch the play, so like the board it relied on the script to base its judgment. The producers had argued the play must be watched to be understood, adding its message was a positive one.

The court also found that the producers were not denied a right to a fair trial.