

MASTERPIECE BY REYNOLDS TO GO ON PUBLIC VIEW FOR FIRST TIME IN 85 YEARS



Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792), *Cupid and Psyche*, 1789, oil on canvas, 140 x 168 cm
before and after conservation

The Courtauld Gallery is proud to unveil Sir Joshua Reynolds's late masterpiece *Cupid and Psyche* after major conservation. It forms the centrepiece of the Gallery's new temporary display ***The Courtauld Collects! 20 Years of Acquisitions*** on view from **17 June to 19 September 2010**.

The painting entered The Courtauld Gallery under HM Government's Acceptance in Lieu Scheme in 2004. It had been in the same private collection since 1923 and its condition had deteriorated. Ernst Vegelin, the Head of The Courtauld Gallery, remarked: 'The painting hadn't been seen in public for over 80 years. The canvas had buckled and had started to detach from its stretcher, and the composition was obscured behind many layers of heavily discoloured yellow varnish.' The cleaning of works by Reynolds is notoriously difficult, given his use of experimental media and techniques, but painstaking conservation lasting three years has now revealed the full subtlety of Reynolds's achievement.

The story of Cupid and Psyche tells how the god Cupid is enraptured by the beautiful mortal Psyche and makes love to her in his palace at night so as to hide his true identity. The following evening Psyche secretly creeps into her lover's bedchamber where she finds him asleep. However, Cupid is awoken by a drop of oil which spills from her lamp. Enraged he flies away and it is only after a series of arduous trials that the lovers are reunited.

Cupid and Psyche was one of three large history paintings which Reynolds exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1789. At that time the Academy occupied the premises at Somerset House which, since 1990, have been home to The Courtauld Gallery. Reynolds was the Academy's founding president and in 1789 he was a senior artist at the height of his fame. *Cupid and Psyche* met with great acclaim and the free and confident manner of its execution and graceful composition were much admired by contemporary reviewers.

The painting makes rich references to the art of the past, including the 16th century Italian artist Correggio. However, it also reveals Reynolds's deep interest in nocturnal effects. He owned Rubens's celebrated *Landscape by Moonlight*, now also at The Courtauld, and used it as an example of night lighting in one of his celebrated Academy discourses. Reynolds was an advocate of painting by candlelight as a 'practice very advantageous and improving to the artist'.

Cupid and Psyche caught the attention of the Prince of Wales who commissioned the miniaturist Henry Bone to make a miniature copy. The original remained unsold in Reynolds's lifetime but it was the highest priced lot in the artist's studio sale selling for 230 guineas to the collector Samuel Rogers in 1802.

The Acceptance in Lieu Scheme

Cupid and Psyche was accepted in settlement of £420,000 of tax. HM Government's Acceptance in Lieu Scheme celebrates its centenary this year. The Scheme allows pre-eminent works of art to enter public collections in settlement of Inheritance Tax. It is now the single most important means by which museums and galleries in the United Kingdom are able to add to their collections.

The Courtauld Collects! 20 Years of Acquisitions **17 June to 19 September 2010**

This special summer display presents a selection of works of art acquired by The Courtauld Gallery since it moved to Somerset House twenty years ago. The Courtauld Gallery is sometimes described as a 'collection of collections' and has grown historically through the generosity of private individuals who have endowed it with the remarkable collections which they formed. This grand tradition of philanthropy, initiated by Samuel Courtauld in the 1930s, still survives and continues to extend and enhance The Courtauld Gallery's world-famous collections.

The display includes watercolours by Turner, Constable and others from the collection bequeathed in 2007 by the late Dorothy Scharf. Other works to be shown include a portrait of Gian Lorenzo Bernini; a drawing by Ingres (once owned by Samuel Courtauld); a rare 18th century pastel by John Russell showing one of the porters of the Royal Academy at Somerset House, sculptures by Degas and Rodin; two oil sketches by Georges Seurat; and works by Sir Anthony Caro and Richard Long.

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- Supported by:** The Finnis Scott Foundation
- Location:** The Courtauld Gallery, Somerset House, Strand, London WC2R 0RN
Tel. +44 (0)20 7848 2526, fax. +44 (0)20 7848 2589,
www.courtauld.ac.uk
- Opening hours:** Daily 10 am to 6 pm, last admission 5.30 pm
- Admission:** Included in admission to permanent collection:
Adult: £5.00, concessions: £4.00.
On-line booking www.courtauld.ac.uk/tickets
Free admission: Mondays 10 am to 2 pm, except public holidays, at all times for under 18s, full-time UK students and unwaged
- How to get there:** The Courtauld Gallery is situated in the North Building of Somerset House, which has entrances from the Strand and the Victoria Embankment. Mainline trains to Charing Cross, Waterloo or Blackfriars; underground stations Temple (District and Circle lines), Covent Garden (Piccadilly line) and Charing Cross (Northern, Bakerloo and Jubilee lines); buses 6, 9, 11, 13, 15, 23, 77a, 91 and 176 to Strand.
- Access:** The Gallery is wheelchair accessible, with level access to most areas and a lift to all floors. Assisted ramp access is available for Room 1.

For further information and images, please contact:

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