

“Who bids most?” The sale of Charles I’s Art Collection

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20 March 2006

Author of a recent work on the subject, Jerry Brotton believes that the sale was not as tragic as Wren and Walpole claimed. Art and politics were inextricably intertwined. The sale took place at Somerset House and was attended by crowds; the Spanish and French ambassadors were also present. In all 1300 works of art were for sale, including works by Titian, Raphael and Mantegna. Dr Brotton claimed that, far from being a tragedy, the sale heightened artistic appreciation in England. Many buyers acquired works of art in order to keep them in the country. The sale was a financial failure, raising only £134,000. Many questions were asked, from Gerald McLean about valuations, from Anne Somerset about the fate of the equestrian statue of Charles I and from Peter Barber about the King’s creditors. Simon Thurley pointed out that tapestries had to be retained for Hampton Court and Whitehall, which were inhabited by the Lord Protector. While Jerry Brotton claimed that the sale led to ‘a democratisation of the arts’, Edward Chaney asserted that all the best works of art went abroad.