Leading contemporary photographers donate major works to help save the fox talbot archive

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Group To Open Sotheby's London Photographs Sale

Photographs, dating from the early 19th century to the current decade, will make a welcome return to Sotheby's in London when the Company stages a 148-lot sale on 7 May 2014.

Simone Klein, Sotheby's Head of Photographs, Europe, commented: "Featuring works by established names and shooting stars, and with estimates starting at £2,000, the auction will appeal to collectors looking for exceptional examples of photography, specifically images that beguile and seduce the viewer for all the reasons that have made this medium an art form in its own right."

The sale opens with a 16-lot selection of generously donated photographs by leading contemporary photographers in support of the Bodleian Library's campaign to save the personal archive of William Henry Fox Talbot. The bid to acquire the archive of Fox Talbot's life and work was launched by the institution in 2012, in an effort to preserve a major record in the history of photography. With this gesture, these photographers pay homage to the father of photography on paper and of the art they are exponents of. Hiroshi Sugimoto (b. 1948) has donated two works, neither of which has ever been released onto the market before. Talbotized 011, 2012 (illustrated left), and Talbotized 004, 2012,are each estimated at £6,000-8,000. Bouquet de Fleurs dans une niche, 2006 (illustrated right), by Guido Mocafico (b. 1962) is a stunning still life that references the genre championed by the 17th-century Dutch Old Masters. Photographs by Nadav Kander, Candida Höfer, Massimo Vitali, and Martin Parr are amongst the distinguished line-up.

The auction continues with a selection of daguerrotypes and early paper photographs, including works by Charles Nègre and Roger Fenton. Two sublime seascapes by Gustav Le Gray (1820 – 1884) come to the market from a Private European collection. Brick au clair de lune, 1856/57 carries an estimate of £15,000-20,000 (illustrated left), and Phare et jetée du Havre, 1856/57 is estimated to bring £20,000. Both albumen prints, this latter photograph is exceedingly rare; only one other copy is known to exist, in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

An album of 44 photographs by John Beasley Greene of Egypt and Algeria, 1852-1856, captivate the viewer by their sheer modernity. Audacious framings and an ambitious treatment of light make Greene's views some of the most radical in early photography. Compositions constructed around the single line of the horizon, such as the spectacularly minimalist view of an island in the Nile (illustrated right), contrast with tightly filled images without any reference of scale, for instance a dense view of a waterfall in Algeria. In just four years, Greene created an incredibly vast photographic oeuvre; a student of Gustave Le Gray, he was also one of the rare American artists to adopt the paper negative process with great mastery. The majority of his output depicts the land and documents the monuments in Egypt, Algeria and Nubia from his expeditions as an archaeologist in the 1850s. Acquired in Paris, this album, estimated at £100,000-150,000, was assembled by its first owner who may have become personally acquainted with John Beasley Greene in 1853

Camille Silvy (1834 – 1910), a pioneer of early photography and one of the greatest French photographers of the 19th century, is represented in the sale with Studies on Light: Fog, London, 1859, estimate £20,000-30,000. Working under the patronage of Queen Victoria, Silvy was one of the first exponents of 'street photography'. This albumen print is one of his two most famous photographs. Silvy employed stylistic innovations in his technique and here he has manipulated the glass negative before printing.

CENTRE: Otto Steinert (1915 – 1978) is one of the most important German avant-garde post-war photographers. Five vintage silver prints are on offer, including Paar Diploid, 1956, estimated at £8,000-10,000.

RIGHT: An important group of 14 photographs by Horst P. Horst (1906 – 1999) from a Private German Collection, each of them in pristine condition, features a series of well-known images, including Carmen Face Massage, New York, 1946, estimate £4,000-6,000.

LEFT: A rare photograph by Helmut Newton (1920 – 2004) distils the characteristics which make his work inimitable – strong black and white contrasts of tone, fashion, a sense of mystery, and, of course,

seduction. Maitresse et Chauffeur, Paris, 1976 is estimated to bring £10,000-15,000.

Richard Avedon (1923 – 2004) is first and foremost known as a fashion photographer. Avedon/Paris, 1978, his portfolio of 11 photographs, was published to coincide with Avedon's acclaimed retrospective at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and contains the most glamorous images of his early fashion photography.

One of the museum's first exhibitions dedicated to a living photographer, the retrospective's first two galleries included all the works in this portfolio. Quintessentially French in their aesthetic, the photographs show the most famous models of the 1940s and 1950s at leisure in Paris: jumping over puddles, roulette, dressed in the most coveted couture clothing by the celebrated French fashion houses of the day, including Dior. Estimated at £120,000-180,000, these seminal examples of post-war fashion photography provided a much needed dose of glamour, adventure, luxury and pleasure.

From the Collection of the late Stanley J. Seeger comes a unique oversized print by Robert Mapplethorpe (1946 – 1989), one of the great masters of art photography and currently the subject of a retrospective exhibition at the Grand Palais in Paris. Dan S., 1980, estimated at £40,000-60,000, is a highly stylised black and white nude that condenses Mapplethorpe's search for aesthetic perfection.

The gems amongst the contemporary photographs in the sale include Untitled, 2007 by Adam Fuss (b. 1961), a unique silver print photogram (developed without a negative) estimated at £25,000-35,000 (illustrated on page one).

Three photographs by Peter Beard (b. 1938) take Africa as their subject. Rothschild's Giraffes, 1966/2008 is a unique silver print with collage, watercolour, tempera paint and ink, and is estimated to bring £50,000-70,000 (illustrated left).

Robert Polidori's (b. 1951) fascination with Versailles began after winning an exclusive contract to document the restoration of the 17th-century palace in the mid-1980s, and
for more than 25 years he has been photographing the interior. Cabinet interieur de Madame Adeleide, Château de Versailles, France, 1986, estimate £12,000-18,000, and Aile du Nord – 1er étage, Château de Versailles, France, 1985, estimate £12,000-18,000 (illustrated right), are meditations on preserving the past, with a concentration on surface textures, intensities of colour and the quality of light.

Massimo Vitali (b. 1944) provides a modern-day commentary on man's presence in nature. His large scale beach photographs are infused with a bleached Mediterranean light which allows his figures to stand out. Animaletti 2, 2004, is estimated at £20,000-25,000 (illustrated left). The sale closes with a photograph by Ahmet Ertug (b. 1949), produced in 2013. Hagia Sofia, estimated at £25,000-35,000, depicts the interior of the former mosque.

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