

The Houghton Revisited "Miracle" Breaks Attendance Records

Written by Australian Business

NEW YORK, LONDON and ST. PETERSBURG, Russia, Sept. 15, 2013 /PRNewswire/ -- The "Houghton Miracle" exhibition that engineered the return of crown jewels of the State Hermitage Museum in Russia for the first time in over 200 years to its original home at Houghton Hall, in Norfolk, England, has broken all records and expectations for attendance outside London. While early estimates anticipated 30-40,000 visitors, attendance has nearly surpassed 100,000 and will likely top 150,000 thanks to the 24 November extension by overwhelming popular demand.

Houghton Revisited represents one of the most important art exhibitions Britain has ever seen and a feat of curatorial collaboration between Russia and the UK that the art world thought impossible. BBC4 has produced a special film on the exhibition with detailed footage of major Russian museum treasures. The exhibition reassembles in its original setting for the first time the magnificent art collection created by Britain's first Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole (1721-1742). The collection, one of Europe's most celebrated, was later sold by his heirs to Empress Catherine the Great of Russia to pay estate debts in a deal engineered by Christie's Founder, James Christie, and closed by

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Russia's
Ambassador in 1779.

The art world has three visionaries to thank for the Houghton Miracle, the Marquess of Cholmondeley, State Hermitage Museum Director Dr. Mikhail B. Piotrovsky and Curator Thierry Morel

Both logistics and fund-raising for the exhibit were immense and the coordination and efforts of these three made the exhibition possible. The genesis of the exhibition came from French-born curator Dr.

Thierry Morel

. Morel proposed the idea three years ago to Houghton Hall resident and Walpole's direct descendent,

David George Philip Cholmondeley

, 7th Marquess of Cholmondeley and Lord Great Chamberlain of England

, who gave Morel his blessing to approach the Hermitage. To the absolute astonishment of the art world, State Hermitage Museum Director, Dr.

Mikhail B. Piotrovsky

not only agreed to allow the core of its collection to return to the UK but also recently extended the loan to 24 November in a magnanimous gesture given the Hermitage Museum's imminent 250

th

Anniversary in 2014. Among other firsts, major Russian museums collections and curatorial staffs joined with UK curators to complete the undertaking.

The collection involved a massive international security operation and unparalleled logistics to transport the treasures and transform the private residence temporarily into a public museum. UK curators were dumbstruck when the Hermitage Museum paintings arrived flawlessly from their Russian curators in original boxes complete with the original family seals from 1779 in tact.

Exhibition Curator Thierry Morel noted the paintings "seemed to fly back onto the walls" according to the original architectural plans preserved at Houghton Hall.

"It was always a thought at the back of my mind to do this, but I never dreamed it would be possible. I am deeply grateful for the extraordinary generosity, courage and trust extended to us by State Hermitage Museum Director Dr. Mikhail Piotrovsky," said the 7th Marquess of Cholmondeley. "I hope that everyone will come to see the exhibition as it is unlikely to happen again," added the marquess.

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"The Houghton 'Miracle' is in my opinion, the single most important exhibit anyone can see, anywhere!" said Peter L. Schaffer, President of the Hermitage Museum Foundation (USA). "We are very pleased to have been able to help reunite Catherine the Great with Sir Robert Walpole and to celebrate their shared love of this collection of masterpieces."

"The Hermitage Museum Foundation (USA) is thrilled to have supported *Houghton Revisited* and exhibition curator Dr. Thierry Morel, a member of our board, since the earliest inception of the project. The exhibition is a truly monumental achievement and a fitting prelude to the Hermitage Museum's 250th anniversary in 2014," said Foundation Chairman Paul Rodzianko.

The show includes over 70 paintings, drawings and magnificent silver from the collections of the Hermitage, Pushkin Museum, Moscow and other Russian museums; the V&A and the British Museum, London; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York and the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and loans from private collections from a total of 17 institutions.

Houghton Hall is the family seat of Sir Robert Walpole's direct descendent, the 7th Marquess of Cholmondeley. It was designed by the most gifted architects of the day, Colen Campbell and James Gibbs, to house Walpole's renowned art collection. Houghton is one of the best-preserved historic houses in the world and the magnificent interiors and furnishings designed by William Kent are still intact. Such a reconstruction of a legendary collection within its original setting has never been attempted before and has captivated the critics and public alike.

The exhibition's lead sponsor is BP. Other major sponsors of the *Houghton Revisited* exhibition

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include BP, Christie's, the Oracle Capital Group and the Hermitage Museum Foundation (USA), among others.

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For tickets: <http://www.houghtonrevisited.com>

To download the stunning, 3D high definition **Houghton Revisited App** visit iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/houghton-revisited/id660913212?mt=8>

For further background on *Houghton Revisited*:

<http://www.christies.com/features/houghton-revisited-masterpieces-from-the-hermitage-3566-3.aspx> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b038md6s> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-norfolk-22439230> <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/95114352-ff80-11e2-b990-00144feab7de.html#axzz2dq8YAxA2>
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