

An auction to remember

By Marika Azzopardi

Walking into this grand old house, one gets a feeling of yesteryear, a taste of Sliema's heyday. One cannot but recall days of elegant socialising, exclusive parties and fine dining around richly clad tables of glittering silver and shimmering crystal. Being invited into such a house, one of a handful of its kind still standing in Sliema's rapidly changing setting, is productive to some reminiscing about the past when Sliema was the haven of the local aristocracy.

Purchased six decades ago, it has, for the past two generations, been the home of the late Marquis Anthony Zammit and the late Marchioness Bibiana nee Pace Asciak. The heirs of this particularly rich estate have instructed the entire immovable content to be sold off at an auction being held late next October. The auction promises to be one of the most interesting and important to be organised in these past years.

The list of items being put up for auction is impressive and includes an incredible collection of master paintings of Maltese and foreign Caravaggesque artists ranging from the 15th through to the 19th Century. Furniture items originate from the 17th through to the 19th Century. Other collectables include silver, china, fine porcelain, arms and militaria.

Speaking to the heirs of this rare estate provides some insight into the origins of this beautifully rich collection of art. "The Marchioness Bibiana nee Pace Asciak was the brains and the passion behind all of this. She adored art, loved to play the piano and favoured the finer things in life. The collection of art was begun by the parents of her husband the Marquis Anthony Zammit but since he was an only son, the daughter-in-law Bibiana, was held in high favour. She was the one who saw this house for the first time, the minute it came up for sale and took the initiative of viewing it and placing a deposit to purchase it for her parents-in-law who, at the time, lived a short distance away. Then, once they moved in together, she took it upon herself to increment the art collection, slowly and surely, through important purchases made from notable auctions of important family homes."

And so, the collection, partly owed to inheritance, partly through intelligent purchases, grew to what it is today. The house is still decorated in the way she originally wanted it. Auctioneer Pierre Grech Pillow of Obelisk Auctions, who has been assigned the responsibility of this unique auction says, "I have been very impressed by what I have seen in this house. During the process of listing and examining the artefacts, we made some big discoveries in the realm of the art world. Some paintings will surely excite the interest of the international market as well as Maltese heritage. This house, built in the early 1900s has been the perfect setting for such a collection which includes over 100 old masters as well as an impeccable and rare 17th Century Maltese chest of drawers. Then again the Maltese and European silver is also of high value. Admittedly, the heirs found it extremely hard to make the final decision to auction off this collection because it is all of immense beauty and rarity."

Viewing: Saturday 22 to Friday 28 October from 10am – 8pm, Saturday 29 and Sunday 30 from 10am – noon.

Auction: Saturday 29 and Sunday 30 October from 2.30pm onwards. For further information call 21472156/99498836; email pgp@obeliskauctions.com or visit <http://obeliskauctions.com>

