

Egypt demands Christie's halt auction of King Tut statue

June 11 2019, by Samy Magdy



This image released by Christie's on Tuesday, June 11, 2019, shows a 3,000-year-old stone sculpture of the famed boy pharaoh Tutankhamun at Christie's in London. Egypt is trying to halt the auction of the sculpture of Tutankhamun at Christie's in London. The Foreign Ministry issued a statement late on Monday saying Egyptian authorities demand the auction house provide documents

proving the artifact's ownership. (Christie's via AP)

Egypt has tried to halt the auction of a 3,000-year-old stone sculpture of the famed boy pharaoh Tutankhamun at Christie's in London, while the auction house said its sale was legal.

The statue—a brown quartzite head depicting King Tut—is scheduled to be auctioned off in July, and could generate more than \$5 million, according to Christie's.

The artifact features King Tut's full mouth with slightly drooping lower lips and almond-shaped eyes.

For many, King Tut is the ultimate symbol of ancient Egypt's glory. Howard Carter discovered the pharaoh's nearly intact tomb in 1922 in the Valley of the Kings, located on the west bank of the Nile River in Luxor. The site was packed with the glittering wealth of the 18th Dynasty, which ruled from 1569 to 1315 B.C., and yielded some of Egypt's most famous treasures.

In a statement late on Saturday, the Egyptian foreign ministry said that it had demanded the auction house provide documents proving the statue's ownership, and that it reached out to British authorities and the U.N. culture and education agency "to stop the sale procedures" for it and other Egyptian objects included in the lot.

It added that Egypt has the right to the statue based on its current and previous laws.

Mostafa Waziri, chief of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, told The Associated Press on Tuesday that Christie's has not answered their

requests yet.



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He said he believes that the head belongs to King Tut, but it was not

found in the tomb in the Valley of the Kings.

"This head is not one of the 5,398 pieces that were found inside the tomb," he said.

According to a 1983 law regulating the ownership of antiquities, any ancient artifacts found in the country are considered state property, "with the exception of antiquities whose ownership or possession was already established at the time this law came into effect."

Egypt has long sought to bring home antiquities it considers state property. Waziri said that in the past two years thousands of artifacts smuggled or taken out of Egypt illegally have been repatriated.

Christie's meanwhile defended its sale process.

It said in a statement that the statue, which has been well published and exhibited in the last 30 years, is sold from the Resandro Collection, one of the world's most renowned private collections of Egyptian art.

The collection includes marble heads dating from ancient Rome, a painted wooden Egyptian coffin, and a bronze Egyptian cat statue.

"The present lot was acquired from Heinz Herzer, a Munich-based dealer in 1985. Prior to this, Joseph Messina, an Austrian dealer, acquired it in 1973-74 from Prinz Wilhelm von Thurn und Taxis, who reputedly had it in his collection by the 1960s," Christie's said.

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