



NATIONAL TRUST FOR SCOTLAND MEDIA RELEASE

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FYVIE MOTHER AND DAUGHTER REUNITED AFTER 100 YEARS

A family estrangement lasting more than a century has ended after a portrait always intended to hang at Fyvie Castle has been put on display by conservation charity the National Trust for Scotland.

The glamorous portrait of Lorna Marsali was commissioned in 1913 by her grandmother Lady Leith of Fyvie from a family friend, the acclaimed painter Philip Alexius de László.

It had been intended to be hung at Fyvie Castle, adding to its impressive collection of family portraits, including the famous portrait of Colonel William Gordon by Batoni. Unfortunately, Lorna's marriage in 1916 to an Army captain was deemed unsuitable and she was estranged from her family which meant the portrait did not make it on to the walls of the castle. Instead, the piece remained in Lorna's own family, where it likely graced the walls of Fishleigh House and Thorpe Mandeville Manor where she resided throughout the 20th century, before passing to her granddaughter.

National Trust for Scotland Curator for the North East Vikki Duncan said: "When the opportunity came to bring this painting back to Fyvie Castle and hang it where it had been intended, I was intrigued and set out on a path to explore the past.

"After more than 100 years, the painting is a wonderful asset to Fyvie Castle and it is lovely for us to see mother and daughter reunited after so long.

"Although imposing and elegant, Fyvie was still a family home, and we know that family relationships can be complex. It seems that Lorna and her mother Ethel were, eventually, able to reconcile their differences. By placing their portraits together, within the immediate family grouping, it highlights a tale of love, loss and reconciliation that resonates with us all and illustrates that the stories of the past are still very relevant today.

"The charity is very grateful for the support of our generous funders who made this homecoming possible."

The painting was purchased at auction in 2020 with support from Art Fund and the National Fund for Acquisitions.

Hazel Williamson, National Fund for Acquisitions Manager, said: "We are really delighted to support the acquisition of this beautiful portrait of Lorna Marsali by the acclaimed artist Philip Alexius de László. Finally, the portrait will be returned to the home for which it was intended, enabling the National Trust for Scotland to reunite the Leith family at Fyvie Castle."

Philip Alexius de László, a famous socialite portrait painter of Hungarian origin, was active at the beginning of the 20th century and painted members of the royal families and the aristocracy in Britain and all over Europe. Continuing in the style of John Singer Sargent, at the turn of the century he rubbed shoulders with the literary and intellectual world in England as well as in France.

His paintings are rarely to be found in museums and the portraits he produced are generally jealously kept in families. This painting, although catalogued, had been considered “whereabouts unknown” by the de Laszlo Archives Trust.

About Lorna Marsali: Lorna was born in 1893 to Ethel-Louise Forbes-Leith and her husband, Sir Charles Rosdew Burn who adopted his wife’s surname when she inherited Fyvie Castle from her father, Alexander Lord Leith of Fyvie. Lorna Marsali spent much of her childhood in the family castle of Fyvie in the North East of Scotland. It was in 1913 that Lady Leith of Fyvie, Lorna Marsali’s grandmother, Marie-Louise, commissioned the portrait from a family friend, the Society painter, de Laszlo. The painting was destined to be hung at Fyvie but it never did....until now.

Eager to be useful when the war of 1914 broke out, she enlisted as a volunteer nurse at Studely Knowle in Devon, her father’s former family home which had been turned into a hospital. It was during this mission, already considered daring by her family, that she fell in love with Captain Frederick Conyers-Lang. She created a scandal with him by eloping and getting married in London in 1916 against the advice of her family. Unfortunately the marriage was not a happy one.

In 1933, then a mother of two, more strong-willed than ever, she divorced Lang and remarried the same year another soldier, Colonel George Prior. Passionate about racehorses and horsemanship like many of the women of her rank, she decided to settle in her country estate of Fishleigh House to escape the hectic life of London. Upon the death of her husband, she moved to Thorpe Mandeville Manor where she died in 1975.

Due to the estrangement from her family, this painting never returned to Fyvie but passed, by descent, to Lorna’s grand-daughter who put the painting up for sale at auction. The sale of the portrait connected cousins who did not know of one another’s existence – helping to resolve a family rift.

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The National Trust for Scotland is the conservation charity that over 90 years has saved, maintained and shared many of the country’s most loved places, rich with history, heritage, nature and culture. The charity celebrates Scotland’s heritage and with more than 100 places in its care, there’s a place for everyone to love.

The National Trust for Scotland relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work of caring for the natural and built heritage that people from Scotland and across the world all love, ensuring its future for everyone to enjoy.

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The National Fund for Acquisitions, administered with Scottish Government funding by National Museums Scotland, contributes towards the acquisition of objects for the collections of museums, galleries, libraries and archives throughout Scotland. Find out more about the work of the National Fund for Acquisitions on the National Museums Scotland website: www.nms.ac.uk/nfa.

About Art Fund - Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art. It provides millions of pounds every year to help museums to acquire and share works of art across the UK, further the professional development of their curators, and inspire more people to visit and enjoy their public programmes. In response to Covid-19 Art Fund has made £2 million in adapted funding available to support museums through reopening and beyond, including Respond and Reimagine grants to help meet immediate need and reimagine future ways of working. Art Fund is independently funded, supported by the 130,000 members who buy the National Art Pass, who enjoy free entry to over 240 museums, galleries and historic places, 50% off major exhibitions, and receive Art Quarterly magazine. Art Fund also supports museums through its annual prize, Art Fund Museum of the Year. In a unique edition of the prize for 2020, Art Fund responded to the unprecedented challenges that all museums are facing by selecting five winners and increasing the prize money to £200,000. The winners are Aberdeen Art Gallery; Gairloch Museum; Science Museum; South London Gallery; and Towner Eastbourne www.artfund.org