LOT 91
PROPERTY FROM THE COLLECTION OF J.E. SAFRA
GIOVANNI PAOLO PANINI
PIACENZA 1691 - 1765 ROME
ROME, THE PANTHEON, A VIEW OF THE INTERIOR TOWARDS THE PIAZZA DELLA ROTONDA
signed with initials and dated at the foot of the column lower right: I.P.P. 1732
oil on canvas
46 7/8 by 38 3/4 in.; 119 by 98.4 cm.

ESTIMATE 3,000,000-5,000,000 USD
Lot Sold: 5,317,000 USD

PROVENANCE
Perry B. Cott, Chief Curator of the National Gallery, Washington, 1956-69;
With Agnew's, London, by 1972;
With Wildenstein, New York;
From whom acquired by a private collector in 1973;
By whom anonymously sold, London, Christie's, 9 July 1999, lot 79, where acquired by the present owner.

LITERATURE
H. Olsen, Italian Paintings and Sculptures in Denmark, Copenhagen 1960, p. 20;
F. Arisi, Gian Paolo Panini, Piacenza 1961, p. 145, cat. no. 92, reproduced fig. 145 (with incorrect provenance and as dated 1734);
F. Arisi, Gian Paolo Panini e i fasti della Roma del ’700, Rome 1986, p. 340, cat. no. 219 reproduced (with incorrect provenance and as dated 1734);
F. Arisi, Gian Paolo Panini, Soncino 1991, p. 86 under cat. n° 25;
F. Arisi, Giovanni Paolo Panini 1691-1765, exhibition catalogue, Piacenza, Palazzo Gotico, 15 March-16 May 1993, p. 38;
E. P. Bowron et al., Italian Paintings of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. The Collections of the National Gallery of Art Systematic Catalogue, Washington 1996, p. 193, note 9;
‘Rapporto dipinti antichi’ in Giornale dell’Arte, n° 187, April 2000, p. 23 illustrated.

CATALOGUE NOTE
This is the earliest dated view by Panini of the interior of the Pantheon in Rome. The work is in excellent condition and is a wonderful snapshot of figures marvelling at the spectacular construction around them, in much the same way as they do today. Panini offers us a broad spectrum of the social tapestry of Rome in 1732: the spirited figures include soldiers, clergymen, mendicants and other people at prayer, all dwarfed by the ancient Roman temple. As is typical of Panini’s great works, the meticulously observed architecture, particularly the Corinthian capitals, is bathed in the warm and inviting glow of Rome’s afternoon light.

The Pantheon is a remarkable building. It was commissioned by Marcus Agrippa during the reign of the Emperor Augustus, and was later rebuild by the Emperor Hadrian circa 126 AD. Originally a Roman temple, since the seventh century it has been used as a Catholic church, officially known as Santa Maria dei Martiri but in fact more commonly referred to as Santa Maria Rotonda or just the Pantheon. The coffered concrete dome remains to this day the largest unreinforced concrete dome in the world, and at its centre is an unusual opening, known as an oculus, through which light streams into the church, as seen here. The oculus was used with some frequency in Roman and Byzantine architecture; aside from allowing sunlight in it also meant rain could cool the interior during the summer months.

Several Italian kings and queens are buried in the Pantheon, as well as the painters Raphael and Annibale Carracci. Panini painted several other views of the interior of the Pantheon but all of them post-date the present work, and not all of them are signed and dated. The inclusion of the figure seen here peering in through the oculus in the roof introduces a note of humour. A signed version of similar size, with an identical vantage point and which shows the light streaming in through the roof at the same angle as in the present work is in a private collection in Milan.1 A horizontal treatment of the view, which cuts off the uppermost section of the ceiling, is taken from a very similar point as the previous work and is in a private collection in Rome; it is neither signed nor dated.2 A signed and dated view from 1734 today in a New York private collection differs from the present work as it omits the Corinthian columns of the foreground and is painted from almost directly in front of the entrance.3 A much larger canvas of a similar view as the present work and whose provenance was confused with the present picture by Arisi (see Literature), is in the Statens Museum for Kunst in Copenhagen.4 A broadly similar, signed and dated version from 1735 was sold, London,
Sotheby's 16 March 1969, lot 84 (now in the Liechtenstein Museum, Vienna). Two further treatments of the views, the first in the National Gallery of Art (Kress Collection), the second in the Cleveland Museum, signed and dated 1747, both omit the Corinthian columns.5

Panini often based his figures on drawings he kept with him. In the present work, the figure standing in the middle of the church, wearing white with a black coat around his waist recurrs in the aforementioned Washington version, and is based on a drawing in the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin (fig. 1).

2. Ibid., p. 341, cat. no. 220, reproduced.
3. Ibid., p. 341, cat. no. 221, reproduced.
4. Ibid., p. 349, cat. no. 236, reproduced.
5. Ibid., p. 373, cat. no. 283, reproduced; and p. 419, cat. no. 374, reproduced.

Fig. 1

Giovanni Paolo Pannini, Standing figure of a Priest, Red and black chalk, 18.8 x 10 cm., Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin, Inv. KdZ 17583 c.
Photo: Joerg P. Anders.