

**KIMBELL ACQUIRES JEAN SIMÉON CHARDIN'S *THE CUT MELON* (1760)**

*One of the artist's most important paintings, which remained in legendary private collections until now, to go on view to the public Thursday, May 22*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

May 21, 2025

FORT WORTH, TX—The Kimbell Art Museum announced today the acquisition of *The Cut Melon* by Jean Siméon Chardin. Dated 1760, *The Cut Melon* has long been recognized as one of the artist's most remarkable paintings—rare in its oval shape and exemplifying Chardin's mastery at its peak. The painting will be on view beginning Thursday, May 22, 2025, in the Kimbell's Louis I. Kahn Building.

"It is no secret that we have long hoped for a great Chardin still life for the Kimbell, where the artist's visual poetry would be so at home in the museum's galleries. We are ecstatic to have now acquired a Chardin still life of such beauty and quality," said Eric Lee, director of the Kimbell Art Museum. "*The Cut Melon* is one of the great masterpieces of eighteenth-century French painting and will be cherished by the Kimbell and loved by its visitors for generations to come."



At almost two by two feet (57 x 51.5 cm), the still-life painting features an interplay of rounded forms, with a focus on a bright orange slice of cantaloupe balanced over the open cut of the melon below. A reed basket heaped with peaches, their skin rendered in shades of yellow, pink, and red, rests close to the melon. At left stand two corked bottles of liqueur and two pears. Anchoring the composition at right, behind the basket of peaches, is a white ceramic pitcher decorated with flowers, and its basin, similar to those seen in other Chardin still lifes. In front of the basket are three small greengage plums. This sophisticated assemblage of simple fruits and vessels is placed on a shallow marble table with a bowed, beveled edge.

The rare oval format—Chardin used it again only a few times—amplifies the curving shapes within *The Cut Melon*. Through a nuanced manipulation of light and color, Chardin creates an uncanny sensation of weight and volume for each of the painting's depicted elements but at the same time gives an impression of lively buoyancy. Rigorously structured, the composition nonetheless seems effortless and unstudied. Each object invites touch—the glistening surface of the dark glass bottles, the taut skin of the pears, the soft luscious flesh of the melon, and the velvety peaches. The curved handle of the bulbous

pitcher is positioned toward the viewer, as if to be grasped. Chardin's remarkable half-light—like that of a late afternoon—transfixes the enchanting scene. This masterful painting, with its beautifully balanced palette and ineffable technique, ranging from fluid to dry touches of the brush, calls to mind the words of Chardin's astonished admirer Denis Diderot: "Such magic cannot be fathomed."

Joining the Kimbell's *Young Student Drawing* (c. 1738), *The Cut Melon* enables the museum to display the two genres in which Chardin excelled and which he elevated in the estimation of the French Academy: still-life and genre painting. It complements the Kimbell's select holdings of French still-life painting, including the recently acquired *Still Life with a Bowl of Strawberries, Basket of Cherries, and Branch of Gooseberries* (1631) by Louise Moillon and *Still Life with Mackerel* (1787) by Anne Vallayer-Coster, whose work was inspired by the great master Chardin.

Since it was first shown, *The Cut Melon* has been treasured by a succession of artists and connoisseurs. Its first owner was Jacques Roëttiers, goldsmith to the French king. Purchased in the early nineteenth century by the painter François Marcille, who assembled a renowned and unsurpassed collection of eighteenth-century French paintings, it passed to his son Camille and in 1876 was acquired by Baroness Charlotte de Rothschild, an arts patron and gifted watercolor painter, in whose family it remained until acquired by the Kimbell Art Foundation. Preserved in these private collections, *The Cut Melon* is in an excellent state of conservation.

The painting was created as a pendant to *The Jar of Apricots* (1758), also an oval painting, which now resides at The Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. The pair were exhibited at the annual Paris *Salon* in 1761. An almost identical version of *The Cut Melon* in the Louvre is not considered to be an autograph work of the master but is attributed to the "Atelier de Chardin" (studio of Chardin).

#### PROVENANCE

Jacques Roëttiers [1707–1784], Paris, by 1761 (with its pendant, *The Jar of Apricots*); by descent to his son, Alexandre-Louis Roëttiers de Montaleau [1748–1808], Paris, (with its pendant, *The Jar of Apricots*), 1784; (anonymous sale, *Catalogue de Tableaux*, Paillet and Delaroche, Paris, 19 July 1802 (30 Messidor an 10, 1st day of sale), lot no. 25 (with its pendant, *The Jar of Apricots*); purchased by Guillaume-Jean Constantin [1755–1816], 1802 (with its pendant, *The Jar of Apricots*); possibly by descent to his son, Amédée Constantin [1795–1836] (with its pendant, *The Jar of Apricots*), Paris, 1816. Purchased by François-Martial Marcille [1790–1856], Paris, probably from the Constantin family, between 1816 and 1830 (with its pendant, *The Jar of Apricots*); by descent to his son, Camille Marcille [1816–1875], Paris, 1856 (with its pendant, *The Jar of Apricots*); (his posthumous sale, hôtel Drouot, Paris, 6–7 March 1876, lot no. 16); (purchased by Stéphane Bourgeois [1838 or 1839–1899], Cologne), on behalf of the

Baroness Charlotte de Rothschild [1825–1899], widow of Baron Nathaniel de Rothschild [1812–1870] Paris, 1876; by descent to her grandson, Baron Henri James Nathaniel de Rothschild [1872–1947] Paris, 1899; by descent to his heirs, 1947; (Christie’s sale, *Maîtres anciens: Peintures –Sculptures*, Paris, 12 June 2024, lot no. 5); purchaser failed to complete sale; returned to above owners; purchased by Kimbell Art Foundation, 2025.

In June 2024, the painting was offered for sale by Christie’s, Paris, setting a world record for a painting by Chardin. The Kimbell Art Museum was the underbidder. The auction sale of this lot did not go forward when the successful bidder did not complete the transaction; the Kimbell purchased *The Cut Melon* directly from the descendants of the Rothschild family in 2025.

#### **ABOUT JEAN SIMÉON CHARDIN**

Jean Siméon Chardin (1699–1779), whom Denis Diderot famously acclaimed as “the great magician” in tribute to the artist’s seemingly effortless compositions that invite poetic reveries for their humble subjects, was the leading exponent of both still-life and genre painting in eighteenth-century France. Chardin elevated the stature of these “lesser” categories of painting in the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture in Paris, to which he was accepted in 1728 as “skilled in animals and fruit.” Earning esteem for his still lifes of game and kitchen scenes, he expanded his repertoire to figural genre scenes, often featuring maidservants and children. Elected Academy treasurer in 1755, he was also in charge of hanging the pictures in the annual Salons, where his own innovative works received great acclaim. By the 1750s and 1760s, Chardin returned to painting still life. Chardin expert Pierre Rosenberg, former director of the Musée du Louvre, has observed that it is “the voluptuousness, tenderness, and the gravity which set Chardin apart and place him in the ranks of the great painters.” Rosenberg has called *The Cut Melon* and its pendant “among the finest of this period of Chardin’s career.” After his death in 1779, Chardin fell into relative obscurity, but by the mid-nineteenth century was “rediscovered” by connoisseurs and collectors—and especially artists—who were sensitive to his exceptional skills in manipulating light, color, and composition. Among the legions of later artists Chardin’s work inspired were Édouard Manet, Paul Cézanne, and, more recently, Lucien Freud. Writers have been equally inspired by Chardin, including Marcel Proust who references the painter numerous times in his groundbreaking masterpiece *In Search of Lost Time*.

#### **SUPPORT**

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**VISITOR INFORMATION**

Admission to the museum's permanent collection is always free. Admission to special exhibitions is half-price all day on Tuesdays and after 5 p.m. on Fridays.

The Kimbell Art Museum is open Tuesdays through Thursdays and Saturdays, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; Fridays, noon–8 p.m.; Sundays, noon–5 p.m.; closed Mondays, New Year's Day, Juneteenth, July 4, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. For general information, call 817-332-8451.

**ABOUT THE KIMBELL ART MUSEUM**

The Kimbell Art Museum, owned and operated by the Kimbell Art Foundation, is internationally renowned for both its collections and its architecture. The Kimbell's collections range in period from antiquity to the twentieth century and include European masterpieces by artists such as Fra Angelico, Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Bernini, Velázquez, Vigée Le Brun, Monet, Cézanne, Picasso, and Matisse; important collections of Egyptian and classical antiquities; and the art of Asia, Africa, and the Ancient Americas.

The museum's 1972 building, designed by the American architect Louis I. Kahn, is widely regarded as one of the outstanding architectural achievements of the modern era. A second building, designed by Italian architect Renzo Piano, opened in 2013 and now provides space for special exhibitions, dedicated classrooms, and a 289-seat auditorium with excellent acoustics for music. For more information, visit [kimbellart.org](http://kimbellart.org).

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**PRESS IMAGE**

[Download the press image here.](#)

**IMAGE CAPTION**

Jean Siméon Chardin, *The Cut Melon*, 1760, oil on canvas. Kimbell Art Museum

**FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

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