



Paintings and furniture on display at Obelisk's 18th century palazzo in Attard. Most of the items will go under the hammer during an auction being held this month.



# Independence Day table under the hammer

Duncan Barry

The table on which George Borg Olivier signed the instrument granting Independence to Malta in 1964 is to be auctioned.

The table, owned by the Delia family, is in the iconic photo taken at ix-Xaghra, Floriana showing the then Prime Minister gleefully waving the document to the crowd in the presence of Duncan Sandys, Minister at the Commonwealth Relations Office, and the Governor of Malta Sir Maurice Dorman.

It will go under the hammer at the new gallery of Obelisk Auctions in Mdina Road, Attard, a newly refurbished 18th century palazzo originally used as an antiques shop and now turned into a state-of-the-art auction house.

Malta achieved its independence on September 21, 1964, after intense negotiations with the United Kingdom, led by Dr Borg Olivier.

A member of the family of Carmelo Delia (1890) and Sons, Steve Delia, said: "At the time, government officials were looking for a table of a specific height and size, scouring through most of the local furniture-making companies. We

happened to have the right specific table to be used for the historic moment. It was lent to the government and remained the property of the Delia family until this day... until it was offered up for auction."

Estimated bidding will start between €10,000 to €15,000.

The table will be among an outstanding collection of other private entries including Old Master paintings and drawings by, among others, Giuseppe D'Arema, *Bottega* of Mattia Preti, Caravaggesque school, Rocco Buhagiar, as well as 19th-century religious paintings, modern works of art and, last but not least, a rare 17th-century Maltese chest of drawers on five bun feet.

Auctioneer Pierre Grech Pillow said it was "a dream come true, and even more so, since the first auction at the palazzo will include the Independence Day table used by Dr George Borg Olivier. From an early age I dreamt of this project, and now I am about to fulfil my dream."

In what Mr Pillow says is a first for Malta, the auction house will be holding regular free seminars on restoration, gilding and caring for antiques. More than 200 people have already booked for the first seminar to be held next month.

"It is a very exciting project that we are undertaking and I cannot wait for our doors to be opened to the public," he said.

The palazzo will host the firm's offices, galleries, exhibitions and auction rooms. The main gallery will have a multi-purpose function as it will also be used for lectures and seminars. In addition it is planned that outdoor cultural activities will be held in the palazzo's courtyard and gardens.

The palazzo will also provide a wonderful 18th century context for the exhibition and display of the finest pieces on auction. It will have other rooms for bargain hunters.

A number of private art and antique collectors as well as Heritage Malta had purchased most of the lots auctioned off at the residence of the former Prime Minister in Sliema last June. Dr Borg Olivier's personal desk had been sold for €25,000 to a private buyer.

Viewing for the auction is from today week, until Wednesday, April 13 between 10 a.m. and 8 p.m., while the auction itself will take place over two days, Thursday, April 14 and Saturday, April 16, starting at 2.30 p.m. on both days.



The iconic picture of George Borg Olivier waving the instruments of independence next to the table that is to go under the hammer at Obelisk's new auction gallery.