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Photo call – Thursday 18 September at 11.30am at the National Gallery of Scotland.

NATIONAL GALLERY OF SCOTLAND HOSTS THE PENNY WEDDING

The National Gallery of Scotland is delighted to announce the acquisition of *The Penny Wedding* by Alexander Carse. The acquisition has been made in keeping with the National Galleries of Scotland's declared policy of strengthening the national collection of Scottish art. The painting has been on loan to the National Gallery since 1972 and this purchase ensures that the Gallery now possesses one of the two most important works by Carse in public museum ownership, matched only by *The Village Ba' Game (1818)* in the McManus Galleries in Dundee. It was purchased at Bonham's Scottish Sale on 29 August through the agency of Bourne Fine Art for £151,725 (£120,000 hammer price).

A younger contemporary of David Wilkie, Carse (about 1790-1843) is still a relatively undocumented artist whose vital contribution to the portrayal of old Scottish pastimes and the development of Scottish genre painting continues to be underrated. Although distinctively Scottish, Carse's *Penny Wedding* is clearly indebted to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Dutch and Flemish paintings of peasant weddings which he possibly knew from reproductive engravings. Like these Old Master predecessors, Carse filled his composition with all sorts of humorous narratives. On the right of the picture two farmers or shepherds are gorging themselves on ham, while a third pulls down his bonnet to say grace. Behind them a pair of men are bickering over their voluntary contributions as the hat is passed round.

The Penny Wedding is one of Carse's most ambitious and elaborate exercises in social genre. It was launched to the public at the British Institution in 1819 while the artist was living in London. That same year Wilkie showed his own composition on an identical theme at the Royal Academy, a picture commissioned by George IV when Prince Regent and now in the Royal Collection. In spite of its relative naivete by comparison with Wilkie, Carse's iconic *Penny Wedding* provides a crucial link between David Allan's late eighteenth-century illustrations of Scottish manners – the Gallery has an Allan watercolour (1795) on the same theme –and the internationally celebrated genre paintings of Wilkie. Carse evidently revelled in the raucous merriment and boisterous vitality associated with this distinctively Scottish custom whereby guests defrayed the costs of the wedding feast and any surplus was used to set up the couple in their new home.

Michael Clarke, Director of the National Gallery, said “*The NGS faces many competing calls on its acquisition funds and of course at the moment we face the huge challenge of raising funds for the Bridgewater Titians. However, it is essential that we maintain our commitment to our national school of painting. We recently acquired major works by the Glasgow Boys from the McIntosh Patrick collection. Now we have bought this fascinating celebration of Scottish social customs from the earlier part of the nineteenth century. We shall continue to search out the best in historic Scottish art as and when it becomes available.*”

For further information please contact the National Galleries of Scotland Press Office on 0131 624 6325/6247/6332 or pressinfo@nationalgalleries.org.

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