

Vekselberg Wins Fake Painting Case

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Christie's is insisting that the painting is authentic, but "no masterpiece."

LONDON — Auctioneer Christie's should return the sum of £1.5 million (\$2.4 million) paid by businessman Viktor Vekselberg for a painting that was probably fake, a British High Court judge ruled.

Justice Newey concluded that the painting, "Odalisque," which shows a nude woman asleep on a bed, was probably not painted by Russian artist Boris Kustodiev.

The judge ruled Friday that Christie's had not been negligent, but should return the money paid for the work to Avrora Fine Arts Investment, a firm run by Vekselberg, the Press Association reported.

"It follows that Avrora is entitled to cancel its purchase of the painting and recover the money it paid," the judge said.

Kustodiev, who lived from 1878 to 1927, was much better known in Russia than outside,

the judge said, adding one art expert had suggested Kustodiev was "to the Russians what Lawrence Stephen Lowry is to the English in terms of affection in which he is held."

Vekselberg's company bought the painting at a Christie's auction in London in 2005.

The work had been described in the sale catalogue as "one of the best examples of Kustodiev's idea of the provincial merchant class," and displayed the inscription "B. Kustodiev — 1919."

But Avrora took legal action against Christie's when an art dealer expressed doubts that the painting was genuine.

An expert called by Christie's thought the painting was authentic, although "not one of Kustodiev's best works."

Christie's lawyers insisted that "Odalisque" was authentic and the auction house could not be blamed if the painting was no masterpiece.

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