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Sotheby's to Proceed With Sale of 'Stolen' Russian Painting

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Sotheby's office on New Bond Street, London.

The international auction house Sotheby's said on Sunday it would proceed with the auction in London next week of a painting by a famous Russian artist that the Russian authorities have said was stolen.

Russia's Interior Ministry said on Saturday that "Evening in Cairo" by Ivan Aivazovsky had been stolen in 1997 from a private collection in Moscow, and that the Russian branch of Interpol had asked British police to block the auction.

But Sotheby's said it had found no record of the painting in databases of stolen art, including one distributed by Russia's Culture Ministry.

Ivan Aivazovsky, who lived between 1817 and 1900, was a prominent Russian-Armenian artist of the Romantic school noted for his landscapes and seascapes.

The 1870 painting is listed as a lot on the website of Sotheby's, with an estimated value

of £1.5-2 million ($2-$3 million), as part of a collection of Russian pictures due to be sold in London on June 2.

Russian media reported that the painting was purchased in the 1940s by the Nosenko family, who were part of the Soviet ruling elite. The Sotheby's website lists the work's provenance as being in the collection of N.I. Dedov.

Sotheby's said on Sunday that the Nosenkos were the family who claimed the painting was stolen.

"Sotheby's offering of Aivazovsky's 'Evening in Cairo' on 2 June 2015 will proceed with the agreement of both the Nosenko family and the consignor," the company said in a statement e-mailed to Reuters.

"The family is happy to sell the painting via Sotheby's offering on June 2 and our consignor agrees this as well. The identity of the consignor remains confidential. They acquired the painting that is in our sale in good faith in 2000."

Reuters was unable to contact the Nosenko family. No one at the Russian Interior Ministry was available for comment Sunday.

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