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Are antique owners ready for the new laws on ivory sales?

In 2019 the Government will introduce its new law for banning the sale of ivory in the United Kingdom.

This has already and will without doubt in the future affect the values of antique ivory items in the United Kingdom. The new law intends to totally ban the sale of ivory regardless of age. There are however some exemptions to the new law which are:

- 'Items with only a small amount of ivory in them. Such items must be comprised of less than 10% ivory by volume and have been made prior to 1947!'

Items such as this George III satinwood and inlaid tea caddy with an ivory escutcheon would be exempt under the new law, if containing less than 10% of ivory by volume.

- 'Musical instruments. These must have an ivory content of less than 20% and have been made prior to 1975 (when Asian elephants were added to CITES).'

Pianos, violin bows, guitars and other musical instruments would be exempt under the new law, if made before 1975 and less than 20% ivory.

- 'Rarest and most important items of their type. Such items must be at least 100 years old and their rarity and importance will be assessed by specialist institutions such as the UK's most prestigious museums before exemption permits are issued. In addition, there will be a specific exemption for portrait miniatures painted on thin slivers of ivory and which are at least 100 years old.'

This 18th century miniature on ivory would be exempt under the new law as would this fine 18th century Anglo-Indian Padauk and ivory inlaid desk, on the grounds that they are the most important of their type, subject to exemption permits.

- 'Museums. Commercial activities to, and between, museums which are accredited by Arts Council England, the Welsh Government, Museums and Galleries Scotland or the Northern Ireland Museums Council in the UK, or the International Council of Museums for museums outside the UK.'

This fine pair of early 18th century German carved ivory figures of a lady and gentleman would be exempt if accredited by the above institutions.

More overleaf...



George III satinwood and inlaid tea caddy



18th century miniature on ivory



18th century German carved ivory figures of a lady and gentleman

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Will this make ivory items worthless?

Under the new laws, this 19th Century carved ivory figure of a fisherman and the 19th Century Chinese puzzle ball could not be sold by a retailer, or by private treaty, or at auction, or for any financial gain in the United Kingdom.

Having spoken to many antique dealers and auctioneers around the country, it is apparent that hammer prices being achieved for ivory pieces at auction have fallen dramatically. For instance, a 19th century ivory chess set that would have fetched between £600 – 800 at auction in the past, would now only fetch £120 hammer price. After the new law is passed this same chess set would be deemed worthless as it cannot be sold.

In view of the change in the laws for selling ivory, collectors and owners of antique ivory items may wish to review their current values and re-adjust their insurance cover. It will still be possible to gift items made from ivory without committing an offence.

The new laws are due to come in to effect in mid-2019. For more information please visit: www.gov.uk/government/news/government-confirms-uk-ban-on-ivory-sales

Sources: www.gov.uk/government/news/government-confirms-uk-ban-on-ivory-sales

Published 3 April 2018. Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Ministry of Defence, and The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP



19th century carved ivory figure of a fisherman



19th century Chinese puzzle ball



19th century ivory chess set

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