

Contact: Capucine Milliot (Christie's Paris) + 33 (0)1 40 76 84 08 cmilliot@christies.com
Matthew Paton (Christie's London) + 44 20 7389 2965 mpaton@christies.com

NATURAL HISTORY

7th April, 2009

The natural history sales organized for the past three years by Christie's in Paris have become an international benchmark in the field. The first event in 2007 generated in excess of one million euros and set 12 world records, while the second sale in 2008 brought in 2.2 million euros setting 11 new world records. The triceratops skeleton, which reached a price of €592,250, was particularly memorable. Christened Cliff, it is now part of the permanent collection of the famous Museum of Science in Boston, one of the largest scientific centres in the world, attracting more than a million visitors per year.

With a selection of over a hundred unique lots, the third year promises to have new surprises in store.

Better than a museum bestiary, here are rare scenes of prehistoric life

More than simple skeletons of megafauna which disappeared tens of millions of years ago, this sale presents truly exceptional scenes of fossilized prehistoric life.

One of the most terrifying pieces is without a doubt the giant jaw of the *carcharodon megalodon* shark. This oldest of carnivorous sharks could reach up to 13 metres in length. The reconstructed cartilage jaw has 168 fossilized teeth and measures 2.20m high when open (estimate around €150,000).

A complete sabre-toothed tiger skeleton (23.5 to 53 million years old) is in the process of hunting an *oreodont*, the natural herbivorous prey of this impressive carnivore. Only three major museums in the world possess a complete skeleton: the Los Angeles County Museum, the National Museum of Natural History, Washington DC, and the American Museum of Natural History, New York City (estimation: €80,000-120,000).



Sabre-toothed tiger skull
Estimate: €30,000-50,000



Set of stick insects
Estimate: €500-800



Agates shaped like eyes
Estimate: €3,000-5,000

A Cave Bear, *Ursus spelaeus*, is displayed in a dynamic position which shows the animal fishing for salmon (estimation: €20,000-25,000). Older still (115 million years old), a fossil slab nearly 2m long shows the last moments of a predator fish (*Ammiidae Calamopleurus sp*) devouring its prey (the fish *Ichthyodectidae Cladocyclus sp*). Never has a comparable piece been found in the world since a discovery in the 17th century, by Portuguese naturalist Joao da Silva Feijo, at a Brazilian site from where this same fish came.

We then move from the Cretaceous to the Jurassic period (203 to 135 million years ago) with the skeleton of an *Ophtalmosaurus*, (164 to 144 million years old), a marine reptile resembling a dolphin from the *ichtyosaur* family (illustration opposite). It will be displayed in a museum style and mounted in three dimensions. Its name comes from one of its features. It has the largest eyes of all marine species – a diameter of 23cm – while a whale's eye measures on average 15cm (estimate around €180,000).



Last but not least in this section devoted to uncommon scenes from prehistoric life, the most touching is undoubtedly the dinosaur nursery. This clutch of nine *Psittacosaurus* babies with their mother is dated 65 to 135 million years old. The burial of this family, a very rare scene to find intact, probably resulted from some cataclysmic event, like a landslide or volcanic eruption (estimate: €150,000-200,000).



dinosaur nursery
 nine *Psittacosaurus* babies + their mother
 (65 to 135 million years old)
 estimate: €150,000-200,000



giant shark jaw
carcharodon megalodon
 estimate: €150,000-180,000



sabre-toothed tiger
 hunting an *oreodont*
 (23.5 to 53 million years old)
 estimate: €80,000-120,000

Return to the curiosities cabinet

Natural history is a way of escaping the prevailing uniformity, not just the preserve of scientists and the initiated. It is an opening into a world in which collectors become knowledgeable through their capacity to be curious.

As well as coloured minerals, fantastical animals and other astonishing insects, the 2009 sale will include a botanical section. *Pyrophyte* plants (which need fire to reproduce) along with their descriptions are housed in two display cases, evoking the sense of a natural history museum (estimate: €5000-8000); a sense shared with a collection of framed herbariums put together in the 19th century (estimate: €3,000-5,000) along with a palm leaf, a spectacular fossil more than 2m high testifying to vegetation which disappeared 50 million years ago (estimate: €20,000-30,000).

This fantastical universe is populated by trilobites – the most ancient marine animals as they appeared 542 million years ago and disappeared 251 million years ago – (estimate from €1,000 to €9,000), urchins, sea sponges (illustration opposite), (estimate: €1,000-1,500), star fish, crabs and shellfish (from €800). Crabs of all shapes and colours presented in a display case (estimate: €4500-5000) rival the beauty of an enormous fossilized giant clam weighing 58kg.



This acts as a reminder that the giant clam is the largest shellfish currently protected in the world (estimate: €8,000-12,000).

Between animal and vegetal, an elegant display case presenting five stick insects stands out (estimate: €500-800).

Classified as a National Treasure in Madagascar, the *Aepyornis* egg, from the bird which became extinct in the 17th century, is also very sought after when it is intact. One in particular was sold for €84,250 at the previous session. This one is estimated at €10,000-15,000.

Recognized as a gemstone similar to opal since 1981, *ammolite*, a precious material from the shells of *ammonite*, offers hints of violet, green, red and yellow. In order to make more beautiful what nature has already created to be extraordinary, this magnificent intense coloured *ammonite* has been mounted on a solid silver base (estimate: €60,000-80,000).

The mineralogy section, including very fine objects such as a 50cm-high citrine obelisk, also holds its share of curiosities, including a rare pair of agates naturally shaped like eyes, called "*Porteno gaze*" (estimate: €3,000-5,000).

The sale's headline lots will be on show from Monday, 9th February at Christie's – 9, Avenue Matignon – 75008 PARIS -

Exhibition: 4th, 5th, 6th April

Sale: 7th April, 2009

Images and catalogues available on request

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