

CHRISTIE'S

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LOST JAPANESE MASTERPIECE REDISCOVERED IN A DRAWER

LEADS JAPANESE ART FROM ANTIQUITY TO THE PRESENT
IN CHRISTIE'S SALE OF

***ASOBI: INGENIOUS CREATIVITY &
CERAMICS FROM THE BERNARD LEACH COLLECTION***

AT SOUTH KENSINGTON, OCTOBER 2013



South Kensington – Christie's is proud to announce the rediscovery of an important Japanese hanging scroll-painting, *Jigoku dayu* [Hell Courtesan] by the eccentric yet brilliant artist Kawanabe Kyosai (1831-89) (estimate: £300,000-500,000, *illustrated above*). Believed lost for over half a century and known only from two black and white images taken in 1911 and 1942, the painting has been found in remarkable condition in a drawer and is being offered from a private collection in the sale of ***Asobi: Ingenious Creativity & Ceramics from the Bernard Leach Collection*** at South Kensington on 15 October 2013, during Frieze week. The auction as a whole comprises approximately 250 lots spanning antiquity to contemporary works. Highlighting the visual appeal, accessibility and relevance of Japanese art to contemporary collecting tastes, this dynamic sale presents a rich and varied array of opportunities for established and new collectors. With estimates ranging from £500 to £500,000, the auction is expected to realise in excess of £2 million.

An exciting rediscovery, the whereabouts of the Hell Courtesan [*Jigoku dayu*] by Kawanabe Kyosai has been a mystery since it was last sold at auction in Copenhagen in 1942. It is now known to have passed by descent to the present vendor having been acquired at the sale by a private collector who then kept it in a drawer, resulting in the absolutely pristine condition of this work.

This painting is one of a group of six works sold in the 1942 auction – including *Two crows on a branch above Asakusa at dawn* (estimate: £ 50,000-70,000, *illustrated right*) – which were formerly owned by the British architect Josiah Conder (1852-1920), who went to Japan in 1877 as part of the Meiji modernisation program. He taught architecture and urbanism at what would become Tokyo University and worked for the Ministry of Engineering. The architect had a special relationship with Kyosai, the artist who executed the present painting, giving him a Western anatomical book from which Kyosai copied skeletons. Not only did Conder socialise and study painting with the artist, he was with Kyosai when he finally passed away, entering the realm that he had so vividly depicted in life.



Prior to entering Conder's collection the Hell Courtesan painting was also owned by the British surgeon William Anderson who worked in Japan and was a major early collector of *ukiyo-e*, whose collection of over 3000 items entered the British Museum; it was later published in Conder's 1911 book on Kyosai. Conder's daughter married a Danish man, giving a possible explanation as to how these Japanese paintings came to be auctioned in Copenhagen in 1942

Kawanabe Kyosai (1831-89), a prodigiously gifted and celebrated artist, dominated the latter half of 19th century Japanese painting as decisively as Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) had its first half. Also famed for his love of sake, Kyosai possessed an intense, relentless energy that left a stamp on every image he touched; he exhibited a trenchant wit; and turned his attention to an overwhelming plethora of subjects and formats. A prolific artist, he was drawn to paint the Hell Courtesan a number of times, with seven versions published. This particular painting, although its whereabouts unknown, was acknowledged in the British Museum exhibition on Kyosai in 1993 as the most technically accomplished of all of these.

This painting's fascinating provenance further extends to a letter by Kyosai's daughter, the full translation of which accompanies the work, certifying the painting as a genuine version, responding to Conder's concern that a number of fakes were already in circulation. Dated 1890, it states that the picture was ordered by a "man in the Yoshiwara."

The present picture is based on a kabuki play entitled *Jigoku Ikkyu banashi* [the Story of Ikkyu and Jigoku], adapted from a piece of comic literature and performed in 1865. Ikkyu Sojun (1394-1481), the son of an emperor and 47th abbot of the great Zen temple Daitokuji, was one of the most venerable and eccentric priests in the history of medieval Buddhism. According to the plot, Ikkyu enters a brothel and meets the ironically-named courtesan Jigoku ["Hell"]. As he dances with brothel inmates Jigoku peeps from behind a screen and to her astonishment sees that Ikkyu's comely entertainers have shrivelled to their bare bones. The vision vanishes when she rejoins the group. The moral: beneath even the most glittering facade lurks inevitable death. Jigoku finds enlightenment with this graphic demonstration of human impermanence. In the present painting, Ikkyu is shown dancing riotously atop the shamisen-strumming skeleton of a brothel entertainer. A sumptuously-robed geisha standing before a screen turns to look over her shoulder at the spectacle. Tiny skeletons, vivid against a dim background, dance with abandon around the woman; with two peeping under her hemline.

Examples of further highlights which reflect the overall breadth and depth of the sale include:

CERAMICS FROM THE PERSONAL COLLECTION OF BERNARD LEACH



The sale features 137 lots of ceramics, drawings and etchings from the personal collection of Bernard Leach which have been hidden away in an attic in St. Ives since the artist passed away in 1979. **Bernard Leach** (1887-1979) is renowned as the father of British studio pottery and leader of the revival of traditional handmade pottery in England. He was a prolific writer on pots and philosophy, fostering strong links between Eastern and Western ideas. After living in Japan and China, he returned to England and established the Leach pottery in St. Ives in 1920 with his friend and fellow potter, Shoji Hamada.

The collection is led by a rare and early albarello dated 1912 which is decorated in blue, green, yellow and orange metallic oxides on a white crackled tin-glazed ground with bands of stylised leaf and foliage, it is signed *BL 1912* on the base and is in excellent condition (estimate: £20,000-30,000, *illustrated above*). The wealth of ceramics offered includes a bottle vase decorated in a *tenmoku* glaze with incised willow tree designs to the front and the reverse, which is impressed *BL* and *St. Ives* seals (estimate: £6,000 – 8,000) and a vase with slightly inverted rim, decorated in blue and red glaze on a crackled cream ground incised with stylised vine-leaf and grape motifs, incised *BL* to the bottom of the body (estimate: £5,000 – 8,000). The collection also features etchings by Leach with personal inscriptions such as *Wind in a Tree*, 1913 (estimate: £1,500-2,000, *illustrated right*).



A rare group, it features unique study pieces from Leach's early days in Japan and also pieces given to him by other potters, including a stoneware jug decorated in a green salt glaze with diagonal combed strokes around the body by **Shoji Hamada** (1894-1978) (estimate: £2,000-3,000), and a bowl with a tapered rim decorated in a bronze glaze, R seal inside of the foot-ring, by **Lucie Rie** (1902-1995) (estimate: £3,000-5,000, *illustrated left*), alongside works by **Michael Cardew** (1901-1983) and **William Marshall** (1923-2007). This is a unique opportunity to acquire works from this remarkable potter's personal collection, many of which he actually used on a daily basis.



ANTIQUITY

A *Haniwa* model of a Horse dating to the late Kofun period (6th-7th century) is offered from a European collection; it is reputed to have been in the collection of the world renowned 20th century sculptor Alberto Giacometti (estimate: £30,000-50,000, *illustrated right*). *Haniwa* are low-fired ceramic sculptures which are found buried within earthen mounds and are supposed to have been associated with ritual practices. Standing 82.5cm.tall, it is modelled from reddish clay as a standing horse with bridle, with its mane tied in a knot at the forehead, the surface of reddish pottery. Similar examples with a saddle are in the collection of Tokyo National Museum.

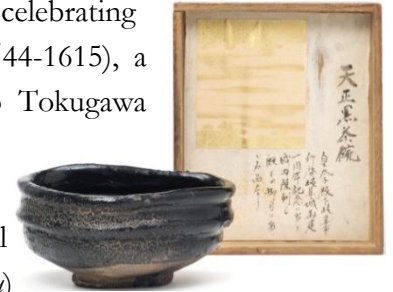


THE TEA CEREMONY

The performance of *Chado* (the 'way of tea') is a highly refined ritual requiring a number of specialised utensils, all which can be considered works of art in their own right. A *Mino* ware, Oribe Clog-shaped *Chawan* [tea bowl], from the Momoyama – Edo period (early 17th century), decorated in a thick black iron glaze, is a wonderful example of an element of Japanese aesthetic taste whereby natural irregularities which can occur

during the creation of a piece are celebrated, rather than absolute perfection of form often found in Chinese ceramics (estimate: £50,000-70,000, *illustrated below*).

Sen no Rikyu (1521-91) revolutionised the aesthetic of the tea ceremony by celebrating accidental flaws as an aspect of creative spontaneity. Furuta Oribe (1534/44-1615), a famous general of samurai status who served Hideyoshi and the first two Tokugawa shoguns both as warrior and as Grand Tea master, succeeded his master Rikyu and went a step further, introducing intentional irregularities that were the result of willful manipulation. The present so-called “clog-shaped” bowl corresponds to what contemporaries described as Oribe’s “warped” (*bizumitaru*) aesthetic. Triangular instead of round, the contours of the bowl have been worked so as to appear random. The wares associated with Oribe’s taste come from kilns in his native Mino region. The smooth lava-like glaze on this bowl has one contrasting side pulled into dramatic bumps. The bottom is a symphony of ‘mistakes’ including the potter’s messy fingerprints, which would seem to greet and caress the user’s own hand centuries later, reminding us that we are part of the great historical continuum inherent in every object we touch.



SCREENS



Exemplifying the beauty and elegance which makes Japanese screens so sought after is a pair of Momoyama-early Edo period (16th-17th century) *Fusuma* [sliding doors] with pine trees (estimate: £150,000-200,000, *one of the two sides illustrated left*). *Fusuma* are constructed of wooden frames and covered with layers of paper on both sides. The panels slide along grooves at the top and bottom of the door frame and function as doors and room dividers. The earliest reference to paintings on sliding doors in Japan comes in the 8th century in the *Shonsonin* records from 762. Although no paintings survive from the Heian period (894-1185), many literary and pictorial references suggest that paintings on sliding doors were popular interior decorations in architecture employed for the palaces and residences of courtiers. Most extant *fusuma* paintings date from 15th century onwards and were executed in ink, with bright colours against gold background.

CERAMICS



This sale presents the first important Kakiemon square tile, Edo period (late 17th century), to come to the market outside of Japan (estimate: £150,000-200,000, *illustrated left*). Decorated in iron-red, green, yellow, blue and black enamels with *Oryu* [dragon with wings] in a red-lined circular panel, with *botan-karakusa* motifs in the four corners and five square and rectangular feet on the reverse. A similar example is in the collection of Tokyo National Museum; similar examples with *danryu* [dragon in round shape] are in the collections of Fukuoka Prefectural Museum of Art, Seikado; Bunko Art Museum, Kurita Museum and the renowned collection of Mr Tanakamaru Zenpachi.

MODERN & CONTEMPORARY

Modern highlights include an abstract oil on canvas painting by an artist associated with the Gutai movement, Chiyu Uemae (1920 -) *Untitled*, executed in 1969 (estimate: £50,000-80,000, *illustrated below left*). Considered the most influential avant-garde collective in Japan during the postwar era, the Gutai group was



legendary in its own time. It explored new art forms combining painting, performance and interactive environments, producing some of the most exuberant works in the history of Japanese and international avant-garde art. Bringing the sale right through to the present day, dynamic **Contemporary** works include an extraordinary glazed slip-cast porcelain piece by Shigekazu Nagae, *Forms in Succession # 7* (estimate: £8000-10,000, *illustrated right*). Nagae works in porcelain using a pioneering technique of slip-casting and firing, creating unpredictable yet elegant forms previously



unthinkable in the medium of porcelain clay. Also included are works by other contemporary artists working with a range of materials including metalwork and glass. A painted ceramic from 2012, *Utopia Comes from Dystopia*, by Takashi Hinoda (b.1968) (estimate: £4,000-6,000, *illustrated left*). Collected internationally, Hinoda's chimerical work draws inspiration from manga, anime and American comics and he works in what he terms "2.5 dimensions". His work has drawn comparisons with that of Takashi Murakami, resulting in a joint exhibition *Takashi+2: East Meets East Takashi Murakami and Takashi Hinoda* at the Casa Nova Gallery, Santa Fe, New Mexico in 2006.

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Images available on request

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About Christie's

Christie's, the world's leading art business, had global auction and private sales in the first half of 2013 that totaled £2.4 billion/ \$3.68 billion. In 2012, Christie's had global auction and private sales that totaled £3.92 billion/\$6.27 billion making it the highest annual total in Christie's history. Christie's is a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service and expertise, as well as international glamour. Founded in 1766 by James Christie, Christie's has since conducted the greatest and most celebrated auctions through the centuries providing a popular showcase for the unique and the beautiful. Christie's offers over 450 auctions annually in over 80 categories, including all areas of fine and decorative arts, jewellery, photographs, collectibles, wine, and more. Prices range from \$200 to over \$100 million. Christie's also has a long and successful history conducting private sales for its clients in all categories, with emphasis on Post-War and Contemporary, Impressionist and Modern, Old Masters and Jewellery. Private sales totaled £465.2 million (\$711.8 million) in the first half of 2013, an increase of 13% on the previous year, and for the third successive year represents the highest total for the period in both company and art market history.

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**Estimates do not include buyer's premium. Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer's premium and do not reflect costs, financing fees or application of buyer's or seller's credits.*

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