

Press Release

CHRISTIE'S

佳士得香港有限公司

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***CHRISTIE'S TO OFFER RARE COLLECTION OF CLOCKS FOR THE
CHINESE MARKET FROM
THE NEZU MUSEUM COLLECTION***

***One of the Most Significant Collections of Chinese Market Clocks
Found Outside the Palace Museum Collection in Beijing***

***Magnificent Clocks for the Chinese Imperial Court from the Nezu Museum
Christie's Hong Kong
May 27, 2008***

Hong Kong – Christie's is pleased to announce that it has been entrusted with the sale of an important collection of fifteen rare and captivating 18th century clocks made for the Chinese market from the Nezu Museum in Tokyo. Undoubtedly one of the most significant collections of clocks of this type outside the Palace Museum collection in Beijing, this collection will present collectors the opportunity to acquire exceedingly rare examples of the fascinating clocks that were appreciated and treasured by the emperors of China. Examples of Chinese market clocks at auction are extremely rare, and this sale marks the first time that so many superlative examples are being offered for sale at one time. This extraordinary collection is being offered as it lies outside the main mission of the Nezu Museum's focus of Japanese art. The proceeds of the sale, estimated between US\$3.5 -5 million, will benefit the museum, which is currently undergoing extensive renovations and is expected to re-open to the public in Fall 2009.

Magnificent Clocks for the Chinese Market from the Nezu Museum Collection

This outstanding collection will appeal not only to those interested in rare clocks and automata and in Imperial Chinese works of art, but also to a broader range of collectors who will appreciate the opportunity to acquire eye-catching works of art of museum quality.

Among the magnificent clocks offered is an Imperial Chinese ormolu, silver, enamel, paste-set and soapstone musical automaton ‘elephant’ clock from the Guangzhou workshops, Qianlong Period, circa 1790 (*detail image left*, estimate: HK\$2,000,000–3,000,000 (US\$260,000 – 390,000)). Featuring a truly dazzling embellished base, skilfully modelled decoration, and an elaborately bejewelled soapstone elephant figure, this clock’s splendid workmanship is typical of the Guangzhou workshops at the end of the 18th century.

Also of note is a superb Imperial Chinese ormolu, enamel and paste-set musical automaton ‘jardinière’ clock from the Guangzhou workshops, Qianlong Period, circa 1790 (estimate: HK\$2,500,000–3,500,000 /US\$320,000–450,000). With its exquisite enamels accentuated by the countless colourful paste-gems, this clock is extremely ornate in its decoration and represents the finest craftsmanship of the period produced in China. It draws viewers in with its relatively simple, but mesmerizing, automata features. Music plays and as European figures parade along the base of the clock, while in the jardinière a flowerhead spins.

Among the most charming clocks in the collection is an exceptional Imperial Chinese ormolu, glass and paste-set musical automaton ‘acrobat’ clock from the Guangzhou workshops, Qianlong Period, circa 1790 (estimate: HK\$1,500,000–2,000,000/ US\$190,000 – 260,000). On every hour, music plays and a pair of doors opens to display a figure of an acrobat turning on a wire. At the base of the clock there are several coloured glass rods which revolve to almost hypnotic effect.

Displaying one of the most complicated automata seen in this collection is a highly important Imperial Chinese ormolu, enamel, and paste-set musical automaton ‘singing birds’ clock from the Guangzhou workshops, Qianlong Period, circa 1790 (estimate: HK\$4,500,000 – 6,500,000 /US\$580,000 – 830,000). Each hour provides a captivating performance, with a dizzying number of moving parts – so many, in fact, that it is difficult to capture all the activity at once. In the front, curtains rise and behind them a pair of dancing figures is revealed. There is a *qilin* with a moving head, revolving trees, spinning whirligigs, and all the same time the side panels show water features with leaping carp. At the end of the “performance,” birds move and chirp while a flower spins above their heads.

Of note among the English clocks offered in this sale is a fine George III period ormolu, enamel and paste-gem set musical automaton clock by Henry Borrell (estimate: HK\$4,500,000–6,500,000/ US\$580,000 – 830,000), the pair to a clock sold by Christie's in 2001. When the music plays, a shutter rises at the front of the clock to reveal sailing ships in motion. Among the Swiss clocks offered is an enamel mounted portico clock of a similar design to an example in the Palace Museum, Beijing (estimate: HK\$1,200,000–1,500,000 /US\$150,000 – 200,000). Also acting as a jewel box, this clock has a mirror concealed in the base alongside a musical mechanism.

Imperial Clocks of Elaborate Design & Captivating Automation

Whether made in China or Europe, clocks for Imperial China were distinguished by their magnificence. These timepieces rank among the most extravagant clocks ever made, their elaborately designed cases, musical functions, and multiple moving parts were intended to impress their audiences. The cases – generally of highly decorative ormolu – were greatly embellished, frequently with brightly coloured enamels and paste gems. These rich decorations were matched with equally elaborate and involved mechanical elements that represented the most advanced technology of their day. Typical features include musical movements and multiple automata – with some clocks having so many diverse moving parts that the viewer is unable to see all the active parts of the clock at the same time.

Of the fifteen clocks from the Nezu Museum collection on offer, thirteen have musical mechanisms and twelve have automata. Although captivating, such clocks were not merely amusements, they were important status symbols and used the most advanced technology of their time.

From Luxurious Commodities to an Integral Part of Life in the Imperial Court

Clocks were a luxury commodity in 18th century Europe – and remained so until the advent of their mass-production. However, in China at this time, their exclusivity was considerably magnified. Timepieces were initially given as gifts by European missionaries in the hope of establishing their presence in China by winning favours at court. During the Qing dynasty, foreign governments and high officials commissioned increasingly innovative clocks with automata and music boxes as tribute to the emperors of China. Most combined both Chinese and Western decorative elements. In many instances, the automata and music work were the prominent features of the clocks, with the timepiece only a secondary element.

An Imperial interest in clocks generated a greater national appreciation for the art form. Both the Kangxi (r.1662–1722) and Qianlong (r.1736–1795) emperors were enthusiastic collectors of clocks and watches. Indeed, both wrote odes to the ‘self-sounding bells’ (*zimingzhong*)

which gave them so much pleasure. A Jesuit priest, Valentin Chalier, writing at the outset of Qianlong's reign estimated that there were already more than 4,000 examples at the Imperial court, and it has been said that in all Quarters of the Forbidden City clocks could be heard chiming throughout the day. Timepieces became an exceedingly integral part of court life, with clocks determining the exact time that formal ceremonies should take place.

The most successful exporters of timepieces to China were the English and the Swiss, and the Nezu museum collection includes examples from both countries. Chinese manufacture was centred on the large port city of Guangzhou, which benefited from well-established trade links with the West. Craftsmen there had access to European clocks – they quite probably assembled and repaired many of the imports – and the European influence on Chinese-made clocks is easily seen. Guangzhou makers favoured elaborately painted enamel panels and brilliant paste gems, decorative techniques they adopted from the Europeans and then made their own. Of the fifteen clocks in the Nezu collection, most were made in Guangzhou during the late Qianlong period.

Auction: *Magnificent Clocks for the Chinese Imperial Court* May 28
from the Nezu Museum

Viewing: Christie's, 8 King Street, London February 23-27
Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre May 22-26

About the Nezu Museum

The Nezu Museum in Tokyo was founded in 1940 by Kaichiro Nezu Sr. The core of the museum's collection consists of Asian works of art, particularly Japanese Chinese, and Korean art, assembled by the founder during his lifetime. The museum's collection includes works of art from different periods and across categories including paintings, calligraphy, sculpture, ceramics, textiles, archaeological materials, and more. At present, the museum's collection numbers more than seven thousand objects, seven of which have been designated Japanese National Treasures. Eighty-seven pieces have been labelled Important Cultural Properties, and ninety-six as Important Art Objects. Currently undergoing extensive renovations including a new building with extensive galleries, the Museum is expected to re-open to the public in Fall 2009.

<http://www.nezu-muse.or.jp/>

About Christie's

Christie's is the world's leading art business with global auction sales in 2007 that totaled £3.1 billion/\$6.3 billion. This marks the highest total in company and in art auction 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 conducted the greatest auctions of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, and today remains a popular showcase for the unique and the beautiful. Christie's offers over 600 sales 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 \$80 million. Christie's has 85 offices in 43 countries and 14 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Los Angeles, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Tel Aviv, Dubai and Hong Kong. Most recently, Christie's has led the market with expanded initiatives in emerging and new markets such as Russia, China, India and the United Arab Emirates, with successful sales and exhibitions in Beijing, Mumbai and Dubai.

*Estimates do not include buyer's premium

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