

For Immediate Release

15 February 2008

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**JAPANESE AND KOREAN ART AT CHRISTIE'S NEW YORK PRESENTS
MOST VALUABLE WORKS OFFERED IN THE CATEGORY**



A Highly Important Wood Sculpture of Dainichi Nyorai
Kamakura period (1190s), attributed to Unkei (d. 1223)
estimate: \$1,500,000-2,000,000

**Japanese and Korean Art
18 March 2008**

New York — Commencing the Asia Week sales at Christie's in New York, the March 18 auction of *Japanese and Korean Art* will present some of the most valuable works ever offered in the category. A newly discovered wood sculpture of Dainichi Nyorai, the supreme Buddha, attributed to the sculptor Unkei, is the most valuable work ever offered in the category (estimate: \$1.5 - 2 million). Other highlights are two paintings by Park Sookeun, the most sought after Korean master, and a collection of approximately 45 lots of Japanese swords, sword fittings and helmets from The Metropolitan Museum of Art will be sold with no reserve. With over 450 lots, the sale expects to realize in excess of \$7 million U.S. dollars.

Thought to be the work of Unkei, the seated figure of Dainichi Nyorai, the supreme Buddha of the esoteric pantheon, is preserved in fine condition. Unkei was one of the greatest carvers of the early Kamakura period (1190s), who received the title of *hojin*, the highest rank an artist could achieve. Dainichi is classified as a Buddha, and here he is presented as a

Bodhisattva in princely regalia. Made of Cyprus wood, he sits on lotus position, with hair piled in a high topknot and wearing the crown and jewelry of royalty. The deity forms a distinctive hand gesture, called “knowledge fist:” his left hand forms a fist with the index finger pointing up and grasped by his right hand.

Katsura Yamaguchi, International Director of Japanese and Korean Art said, “Christie’s is honored to be offering this remarkably rare and newly discovered seated figure of Dainichi Nyorai, believed to have been made by Unkei, who is regarded as the master carver of the early Kamakura period.”

The statue is believed to have come from a temple during the Meiji period (1868-1911) when the government officially adopted Shinto as the state religion. Upon leaving the temple, it was a part of a prominent family collection in the northern part of the Kanto region. The statue’s existence was unknown until it was later sold to a Buddhist dealer and bought by the current owner. Suspecting the figure was hollow inside, the owner approached the curator at the Tokyo National Museum and it was discovered by X-rays that the figure contains three dedicatory objects, sealed inside the torso for over 800 years.

The three objects, a wood five-stage pagoda, crystal ball supported by a bronze stand, and a crystal five-stage pagoda, represent Buddhist symbols and are tied together with bronze wire. The wooden plaque is likely to be inscribed with the date of the dedication and the name of the temple or donor, as well as the sculptor’s identity.

Other highlights from the Japanese section of the sale include an early 19th century hanging scroll by Chobunsai Eishi, *Beauty writing a poem on a fan*, arguably one of the most beautiful paintings of the period (*illustrated right*, estimate: \$200,000-250,000). Depicting a courtesan seated on a mat, and poised to inscribe a poem, this elegantly composed painting is a very popular subject. A 16th - 17th century gold-leaf screen of horses in a stable reflects the wealth and power of Japan’s increasingly important warrior class (estimate: \$400,000-600,000). This beautiful pair of six-panel screens of gold and gold-leaf on paper has amazingly survived intact.



KOREAN ART



Park Sookeun
Mother, child and two women
estimate: \$500,000-600,000



Park Sookeun
Coming home from market
estimate: \$400,000-500,000

Leading the group of 20 Korean modern and contemporary paintings are two of the most important works by Park Sookeun to appear at auction. Heakyum Kim, Specialist of Korean Art comments, “Park Sookeun is the most important and well-recognized Korean artist of the twentieth century. His paintings are very rare on the market, approximately 400 paintings were made in his short lifetime, and Christie’s is honored to be offering two exquisite paintings.” Christie’s holds the current auction record for the artist with *Seated woman and jar*, 1962, which realized \$1,239,500 in March 2004.

Americans stationed in Seoul during the 1960s appreciated Sookeun’s work, and the paintings offered in the sale were bought for approximately thirty dollars a piece. *Mother, child and two women*, 1964, (estimate: \$500,000-600,000) and *Coming home from market*, 1965, (estimate: \$400,000-500,000) portray the artist’s unassuming and simplistic trademark renderings of figures wearing traditional Korean clothing.

Other notable paintings from named collections include Kim Whanki’s *White porcelain jar and plum tree* from the collection of Frieda Kittay Goldsmith of Palm Beach (estimate: \$180,000-220,000 U.S. dollars), and six paintings titled *Scholar’s accouterments (Ch’aekkori)* from the late 19th century come from a New York collection (estimate: \$32,000-35,000).

The sale offers a strong selection of ceramics ranging from the classical to contemporary. Examples of blue and white porcelain from the Choson period (18th century) include an ovoid jar painted with bamboo (*illustrated below*, estimate: \$50,000-60,000), and a circular dish



with a phoenix flying amidst the clouds (estimate: \$35,000-45,000). Contemporary ceramics include a stoneware triangular Punch'ong type vase by Yoon Kwang-cho, decorated with geometric lines and made in 2002 (estimate: \$3,000-3,500).

An exciting group of 45 lots of swords, sword fittings, and helmets from The Metropolitan Museum of Art will be sold at no reserve. A highlight amongst the group is a *Kawari Kabuto*, an eccentrically shaped helmet resembling a butterfly, from the 18th century (estimate: \$20,000-30,000).

Auction: *Japanese and Korean Art*

18 March at 10:00

Viewing: Christie's, 20 Rockefeller Plaza, NY

14 – 17 March

Note: \$ denotes U.S. dollars

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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