

For Immediate Release

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**CHRISTIE'S CHINESE WORKS OF ART UNVEILS
GILT-BRONZE FIGURES AND JADE TREASURES**

Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art

19 March 2008

New York – On March 19 Christie's series of three sales devoted to the arts of China will offer a range of important sculpture, ceramics, furniture, snuff bottles, and imperial textiles. Two single owner sales will start the day, beginning with *The Imperial Wardrobe: Fine Chinese Costume and Textiles from the Linda Wrigglesworth Collection* and *The Meriem Collection, Part II: Important Chinese Snuff Bottles* (separate releases available). The day will conclude with *Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art*, which will offer over 370 lots and expects to realize in excess of \$11 million.

The *Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art* sale features amongst its highlights, two rare and important gilt-bronze figures. An elegant figure of a seated *bodhisattva* is among the finest extant Five Dynasties/Liao gilt bronzes, and represents either an incarnation of Avalokitesvara (Guanyin), the most popular and venerated Buddhist deity of the period, or Maitreya, the 'future Buddha' (*illustrated left*, estimate: \$1,000,000-1,500,000). The figure's unusually large size, excellent quality of casting and complex treatment of the drapery and headdress make it one of the finest luxury commissions technically attempted in the 10th or 11th century. Another highlight is a remarkably well-preserved large gilt-bronze figure of Manjusri, the embodiment of the Perfection of Wisdom (estimate: \$1,000,000-1,500,000).



Shown here wielding a sword and grasping the stem of a blue lotus, the figure balances martial power with languor and grace.

A painted grey stone stele of the seated Buddha from the Tang dynasty (7th – 8th century) is remarkable for several unique features (estimate: \$250,000-350,000). Departing from the strict hieratic frontal formality, the figure's head is turned slightly to his proper right, and the left hand conceals two lively curlicues of either a flower-stem or the robe-hem. The sole of one foot is also half revealed by edge of the hem, rather than being concealed and the pierced holes through the flaming mandorla is extremely rare.

A rare large dark green jade figure of a water buffalo (17th – 18th century) is being offered from the Estate of Leona M. Helmsley (*illustrated below*, estimate: \$400,000-600,000). Jade



figures of buffalos have traditionally been prized in China, the beast being associated with strength, prosperity and tranquility. A small number of museums such as the Asia Art Museum of San Francisco; the Royal Ontario Museum; the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Chinese Imperial Collection, hold such rare examples of jade buffalo, distinguished for their impressive size, naturalistic portrayals and fine carving.

Ceramics highlights include an important Longquan celadon “Kinuta” vase of the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279) (*illustrated below*, estimate: \$800,000-1,200,000). This important vase was once in the possession of Matsudaira Fumai (1751-1818), a renowned tea master and daimyo of Izumo province who amassed an extensive and highly regarded art collection. The vase is a superb example of the kind long revered by connoisseurs in China and Japan for its thick, translucent, ideal bluish-green glaze — a difficult shade to procure. The vase is also quite rare for its crisply modeled dragon-fish handles, rather than the more commonly seen phoenix-shaped handles, and for its imposing and unusually large size.



A large blue and white moon flask is a testament to the craftsmanship of the potters at the imperial kilns during the Qianlong reign (estimate: \$500,000-600,000). The large size, shape, richness of cobalt blue, and decorative scheme of floral scroll all add to its overall rarity. An underglaze red and blue-decorated ‘apple’-form water pot is an example of the experimentation at the imperial kilns under the rule of the Kangxi Emperor (estimate:

\$200,000-300,000). Firing underglaze-copper-red is very difficult, requiring precise control of the heat and kiln atmosphere. Similar waterpots of this exact shape and painting style from important collections have been published, with comparable examples in the Palace Museum, Beijing, and the Shanghai Museum.

A selection of early pottery figures in the sale are highlighted with a massive chestnut and cream-glazed pottery figure of a Bactrian camel made to go in the tombs of the Tang elite in the first half of the 8th century (estimate: \$150,000-250,000). Known as the “ships of the desert” along the Silk Route, camels were essential modes of transport and symbolic of the cosmopolitan and luxury goods brought to the Tang capital. A very similar example to the one offered in the sale can be found at the Tokyo Museum. A rare blue, amber and cream-glazed pottery figure of a young girl belongs to a distinctive group of figures which have broader child-like faces in contrast to the oval faces seen in the majority of the Tang sancai ladies (estimate: \$150,000-180,000). The figure is further distinguished by her sensitively rendered face and charming hairstyle, and the extensive use of cobalt blue.

Auction: *Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art*

19 March at 2:30

Viewing: Christie's Rockefeller Galleries

14-18 March

Note: \$ denotes U.S. dollars

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*Estimates do not include buyer's premium

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