

## **For Immediate Release**

February 22, 2006

Contact: Bendetta Roux            212.636.2680            broux@christies.com

### **SPLENDID MIRSKY COLLECTION HIGHLIGHTS INDIAN AND SOUTHEAST ASIAN ART SALE**

#### **Indian and Southeast Asian Art March 30, 2006**

**New York** – The final day of Christie’s Asian Art series will offer *Indian and Southeast Asian Art*, with the classical art offered in the morning and an afternoon sale devoted entirely to *Modern and Contemporary Indian Art* with its own catalogue (see separate release). The collecting field of traditional Indian and Southeast Asian works of art continues to gain momentum as collectors from other categories find their way into the serene and powerful worlds of Khmer or Chola sculpture. A superb collection of this kind, astonishing in its breadth and beauty, is The Alfred E. Mirsky Collection sold to benefit the Graduate Student Program of The Rockefeller University, which will lead the sale, along with property from various other private collections, as well as some unusual pieces that are being de-accessioned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Alfred Ezra Mirsky (1900–74) was one of those rare collectors blessed with great scientific acumen and a discriminating taste for the rare and beautiful. Professor Mirsky was a pioneering biochemist whose scientific accomplishments were matched by a profound interest in art and archaeology. His collection included Greek sculpture, Chinese paintings and pottery, Islamic pottery and especially Indian and Southeast Asian sculpture. Extraordinary for its sophistication, the collection combined pieces of great rarity and exceptional beauty. In accordance with the wishes of Dr. Mirsky and his wife Sonya, the proceeds from the sale of this collection will support the university’s graduate student program.

The Mirsky collection includes a fine black stone figure of Buddha seated on a lotus throne touching the Earth with his right hand (estimate: \$30,000-50,000), from Bihar in North-eastern India and dated to the 9<sup>th</sup> century, during the Pala



period. Relatively small in size and of remarkable refinement, it exemplifies all the virtues of Pala sculpture that became a stylistic prototype for successive developments across the Himalayas and Southeast Asia. It has softly rounded features and elegant drapery, with a long Buddhist inscription on the reverse. A rare head of a deity from Champa, Vietnam (estimate: \$40,000-60,000), also dating to around the 9th century, displays a characteristic square jaw, full lips and elaborate tiered headdress. The most striking piece of the group is a head of Brahma or Mahesha, a manifestation of Shiva (estimate: \$100,000-150,000). Four heads are Brahma's primary iconographic feature, yet all heads also bear the Third Eye, a characteristic attribute of Shiva. In the context of Khmer sculpture, no other examples bearing this latter feature appear to be published. All faces are very finely polished, with hauntingly lifelike expressions.



From a private collection is a red sandstone figure of a Dancing Devi, India, Madhya Pradesh, early 12<sup>th</sup> century (estimate: \$200,000-300,000), a tour de force in sculptural virtuosity. By the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the sculpture of Central India had culminated in a highly expressive and suggestive style and the present celestial woman is a superb example. Her dramatic *prishthasvastika* pose, taken from the idioms of classical Indian dance, is further emphasized by the necklaces and festoons gracing the contours of her body and capturing the essence of movement. The combination with a fruit-bearing tree, her fertile touch causing the vegetation to respond in kind, is a popular symbol of fertility.



A gilt and silvered bronze *Umamaheshvara*, India, Orissa, 16<sup>th</sup> century (estimate: \$50,000-70,000), shows a finely cast four-armed Shiva seated in 'Royal Ease' on a lotus throne. Holding an axe and deer in his upper hands, Shiva is supporting Parvati on his left leg. Both deities are wearing dhotis and are bedecked with jewelry and crowns inset with headstones.

The sale is rounded off by a fine selection of Himalayan art, spanning from gilt bronzes, to Tibetan thangkhas and ritual objects.

**Auction:** Indian and Southeast Asian Art

March 30 at 10 a.m.

**Viewing:** Christie's Galleries at Rockefeller Center

March 24 – 29

**Christie's Education** is offering *Buddhist Art Part I*, a series of six evening classes on the origins and terrestrial transmission of Buddhist art. For more information please contact Christie's Education on 212.355.1501

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*Images available on request*

*Visit Christie's Web site at [www.christies.com](http://www.christies.com)*

More information about Christie's sale of *Indian and Southeast Asian Art* can be found on [www.christies.com](http://www.christies.com). All lots from the sale can be viewed online along with full catalogue descriptions on Lotfinder®, which also allows clients to leave absentee bids. [www.christies.com](http://www.christies.com) provides information on more than 80 sale categories, buying and selling at auction, complete auction results, and Christie's international auction calendar.