

*For Immediate Release*

*March XX, 2003*

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**CHRISTIE'S TO OFFER THE COLLECTIONS OF RENAISSANCE MAN  
RUSSELL B. AITKEN (1910-2002)**

*April 3 & 4, 2003*

*New York – On April 3 and 4, Christie's New York will offer much of the outstanding and eclectic collection of Russell B. Aitken (1910-2002), a larger-than-life character of patrician upbringing who sought adventure and excellence in each of his many life pursuits. These sales follow the tremendously successful sale of the Russell B. Aitken Collection of Wildfowl Decoys which was 100% sold in January with the top lot, an extremely rare pintail drake decoy by Elmer Crowell, realizing a world record price of \$801,500. While Aitken excelled in many endeavors—ranging from artist and photographer, to big-game hunter and outdoorsman, to collector and philanthropist—his unwavering passions were art, sport and nature. Aitken's collections of African, American Indian and Oceanic Art, arms and armour, military artifacts, medals and decorations, wildlife and sporting art, and one of the most significant private collections of sporting books are just what one would expect from this renaissance man.*

***Russell B. Aitken***

*Russell B. Aitken lived during the golden age of American outdoorsmen, hunting and fishing across great expanses of wilderness and his safaris, hunting trips and shikars took him across five continents. A figure Hemingway might have borrowed from real life, Aitken was a photographer, teacher, writer, artist, collector and marksman and he amassed awards and honors representing an extraordinary range of accomplishments. Examples of his art are included in the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Cleveland Museum of Art. He was the author of more than 300 articles in national sporting and natural history magazines. He received the Medal of Honor of the Adventurers Club of New York and the Medal of Honor of the Campfire Club of America. In 1949, he was named "High Gun" meaning he was the best skeet shooter in the U.S. As Director of Gunnery at the Yuma Air Field*

*he personally trained 32,000 pursuit pilots and aerial gunners during World War II. Mr. Aitken's was equally active and generous as a philanthropist and was an early benefactor of the World Wildlife Fund, Ducks Unlimited, the National Audubon Society and the Wildlife Conservation Society. At the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where he was an honorary trustee for ten years, two rooms of armor are named for him, and the Bronx Zoo's seabird colony is also named for him.*

*The Russell B. Aitken Collection of African, American Indian and Oceanic Art  
April 3, 2003 (SEE SEPARATE RELEASE)*

*Russell B. Aitken's collection of African, American Indian and Oceanic art, collected mainly in the 1930's is a collection of lost masterpieces. The sale will offer more than 100 objects, most of which have not been seen in public since 1954 when 17 major pieces were loaned to the Brooklyn Museum for the exhibition Masterpieces of African Art.*

*Among the many highlights from the collection are a superb Bambara antelope dance headdress, Chi'wara (estimate: \$40,000-60,000), and a 19<sup>th</sup> century figure of a Yoruba horse and rider (estimate: \$60,000-80,000). Both of these pieces had been part of the seminal MOMA exhibition, African Negro Art, in 1935.*

*One of the most important objects in the sale is a magnificent Fang male reliquary figure, eyema byeri, Northern Fang, Ntoumou (estimate: \$250,000-350,000), with an oozing patina of oil that was formerly in the renowned collection of New York magazine editor Frank Crowninshield. Several impressive masks were also acquired from the Crowninshield collection. A highlight is the beautiful and rare Baule mask representing the moon (estimate: \$60,000-80,000), acquired from the most famous of all tribal art dealers, Charles Ratton in Paris.*

*An important 16<sup>th</sup> century Benin bronze plaque (estimate: \$180,000-220,000) formerly in the collection of General Pitt-Rivers, Dorset, England is another remarkable highlight. The plaque depicts the figure of an Oba cast in high relief standing with a bird staff in the left hand.*

*The Russell B. Aitken Collection of Wildlife Art and Sculpture  
April 3, 2003 and select works on May 22, 2003*

*Aitken's passion for art and natural history reverberates in his collection of wildlife art and sculpture. Among the many highlights of this sale are Audubon prints, Antoine-Louis Barye bronzes, Carl Rungius bronzes and paintings and modern decorative bird carvings by artists such as Jack Franco and Eldridge Arnold. Aitken hunted alongside most of the legendary artists in the collection and acquired many of the works directly from the artists.*

*Big Horn Sheep, a rare bronze (only 12 were cast) of a ram by Carl Rungius (estimate: \$50,000-70,000) and N.C. Wyeth's The Frontiersman (estimate: \$100,000-150,000) will be offered in*

*Christie's May 22 sale of Important American Paintings, Drawings and Sculpture. All other works will be sold in the April 3 sale including a world-record pair of Alaskan moose antlers, bagged by St. George Littledale, England's top big game hunter, who presented them to John Guilles Millais, who then embellished them with superb drawings of North American game and birds (estimate: \$10,000-15,000). Among the many splendid Barye bronzes are Le Général Bonaparte (estimate: \$12,000-18,000) and Guerrier tartare arrêtant son cheval (estimate: \$12,000-18,000). The modern bird carvings include examples by Eldridge Arnold, Larry Barth, Don Briddell and Jack Franco.*

*The Russell B. Aitken Collection of Silver Trophies, Vintage Firearms, Antique Arms and Armour, Militaria and the Sporting Library with Related Material  
April 4, 2003*

*Aitken's lifelong fascination with Napoleon is reflected in his militaria collection and the most important objects in this particular collection relate to the Restoration period and the Second Empire. Highlights include a rare musketeer's helmet of the 2<sup>nd</sup> company of Mousquetaires de la Maison Militaire Du Roi, 1814 model (estimate: \$9,000-13,000) and an officer's helmet and cuirass of the Cent-Gardes, personal bodyguards to Napoleon III, 1855 model (estimate: \$10,000-15,000).*

*The Aitken library contains many of the most significant big-game hunting related books of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries led by the Karamojo Bell archive, a nearly complete collection of Walter D. M. Bell's drawings and manuscripts (estimate: \$40,000-60,000). Bell (1880-1951) was one of the most successful elephant hunters of all time and became known as Karamojo Bell after an enormous unexplored area in Uganda in which he hunted during long safaris that took several months each. The expansive Aitken library also includes important books of natural history, travel and exploration, arms and armor, literature and art including two copies of John James Audubon's octavo Quadrupeds of North America (estimate: \$3,000-5,000 each), Orme's Oriental Field Sports (estimate: ) and Foreign Field Sports (estimate: ) and a fine selection of Napoleona.*

*Auction: The Russell B. Aitken Collection of African, American Indian and Oceanic Art April 3 at 10 a.m.*

*The Russell B. Aitken Collection of Wildlife Art and Sculpture April 3 at 2 p.m.*

*The Russell B. Aitken Collection of Silver Trophies, Vintage Firearms, Antique Arms and Armour, Militaria and the Sporting Library with Related Material April 4 at 10 a.m.*

*Viewing: Christie's Galleries at Rockefeller Plaza*

*March 29-31, April 1-2*

***The Russell B. Aitken Collection of Sporting Guns will be on exhibition at Holland & Holland in New York from March 26-April 2 and will be sold at Christie's London on May 13.***

Additional information about Christie's sales of *The Russell B. Aitken Collection* can be found on [www.christies.com](http://www.christies.com) closer to the sale date. All lots from the sales 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.

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*Images available on request*

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