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**CHRISTIE'S TO OFFER UNPARALLELED PRIVATE COLLECTION OF
RUSSIAN, ORIENTALIST & 19th CENTURY ART IN APRIL**

*The Collection of Ambassador Charles R. Crane
April 24, 2006*

“I believe the next century is going to see the Slavs making great contributions to the culture of the world and that these contributions are not going to be wanting in a strong spiritual quality.”

*-Ambassador Charles R. Crane (1858-1939)
(December 15, 1914)*

New York – Christie's is honored to offer The Collection of Ambassador Charles R. Crane on April 24. This extraordinary collection of 42 works was collected over several decades and is the result of Ambassador Crane's discerning eye and the incredible ethnic consciousness concerning Russia, China, the Middle-East and the Slavic states that he developed during his years as a diplomat throughout those regions. This sale offers collectors, connoisseurs and scholars alike a glimpse into the mind and aesthetic sensibilities of this remarkable collector and is a rare opportunity to present the private art collection of a complex and interesting man, a collection that has remained intact over 65 years since his death.

CHARLES R. CRANE: DIPLOMAT & PHILANTHROPIST

Ambassador Charles R. Crane (1858-1939) led a colorful, dynamic career as a man of international diplomacy and philanthropy. Over the course of his career he held a number of important diplomatic positions in various countries throughout Asia and Russia, and was a noted philanthropist who endowed schools, colleges and research institutions, established scholarships, organized and funded relief efforts, and supported artists, writers, journalists and intellectuals the world over.

Ambassador Crane's love of travel began in 1877 when under his doctor's orders he traveled to England for rest and treatment for a case of malaria. As he recuperated, he extended his time abroad and traveled to Egypt, Syria, and Turkey. Upon his recovery Crane continued to travel throughout the region and by 1939 he had traveled to lands spanning from Czechoslovakia, to Bulgaria, Albania, Greece, Turkey, Russia, China, Uzbekistan, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Egypt, Basra and Muscat among others. His travels resulted in numerous connections and friendships, and

coupled with his extensive knowledge of these distant and exotic lands, Crane was a natural candidate for a variety of diplomatic positions.

Crane served as a diplomatic envoy under President Wilson in a number of capacities including a 1915 appointment as the only American delegate to a commission under the Advancement of Peace Treaty between Russian and the United States and a 1917 appointment to the Root Mission, a goodwill commission consisting of ten delegates sent to Russia. In 1919 he led the King-Crane Commission in gathering information from the communities within the dissolving Turkish Empire and in 1920 he was appointed the United States Minister to China.

PATRON OF THE ARTS

*In addition to a distinguished career in foreign service, Crane was a passionate supporter of the arts. His well-documented patronage of Alphonse Mucha, the most important Czechoslovakian artist of all time, spanned over two decades. It was because of Crane's financial generosity that Mucha was able to complete the grandest achievement of his career – an impressive series of twenty large panels entitled *The Slav Epic*. In 1920, Mucha duplicated a panel from the series, *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia, 1861* for his patron (Lot 25).*

*Crane's patronage of artists was not limited to Mucha, however. Crane became a close friend to Nicholas Roerich and in 1922 commissioned *The Rostov Monastery* (Lot 23). Crane was also an important patron to Vasilii Vereshchagin, Prince Pavel Trubetzkoy, Fedor Zakharov, and Georgii Gabashvili, commissioning works from these artists and others, and in some instances even supporting their extensive travels.*

THE COLLECTION OF AMBASSADOR CHARLES R. CRANE: RARE TREASURES & IMPORTANT WORKS

*Leading Ambassador Crane's collection is a reduced version of Alphonse Mucha's *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia* (illustrated left, estimate: \$1,500,000–2,500,000) from the monumental series of 20 paintings entitled *The Slav Epic*. A grand tribute to the profound spirit, history and mythology of the Slavic people, Mucha's *The Slav Epic* depicts important moments in Czech national history and the history of the other Slav nations. *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia, 1861* is arguably the most famous of the all the panels in the epic and depicts a tremendous turning point in Russian history. In 1920, the present lot was painted by Mucha in New York and was delivered to Ambassador Crane with a personal note from the artist. It is singular in that it is the only panel from *The Slav Epic* that Mucha reproduced as a completed painting.*

*The collection also features two extraordinary works by Georgii Gabashvili, who painted under the pseudonym "Gigo Gabaev" and is widely known as one of the most famous artists of the Republic of Georgia. *The Bazaar in Samarkand* (illustrated left, estimate: 400,000–600,000) was commissioned by Ambassador Crane during a 1891 trip to Tbilisi and is one of four versions the*

artist painted of this famous market in front of the Shir Dar Madrasa at the Registan Square in present-day Uzbekistan. Another large-scale painting showing a similar scene, but at a different angle, is currently in the collection of the Georgian National Museum, Tbilisi. *Pond at Lab-i-Hauz in Bukhara* (estimate: \$350,000–500,000) depicts a large panoramic view of Lab-i-Hauz Plaza – a favorite summertime retreat of the Bukhariots visiting the 16th century mosques and madrasas. This fascinating scene certainly made a strong impact on Ambassador Crane who commissioned Gabashvili for this painting as well.

Russian Orthodox Monastery at Mount Athos (estimate: \$200,000–300,000) is an incredibly rare scene of Mount Athos on the peninsula of Halkidiki in Macedonia, Greece. The subject of the painting, Aghion Oros or “Holy Mountain” is the heart of the Orthodox Church and has been the center of Orthodox monasticism since the end of the first millennium. Little is known about the artist, Jan Vochoc, though some evidence shows that he may have been a priest during the time this painting was executed. It is not, however, the artist, but the subject of this remarkable work that is so intriguing to scholars and collectors.

Other important works include *Meeting at the Steps of a Temple Gateway, Muttra* (estimate: \$250,000–350,000), a wonderful example of Edwin Lord Weeks’ Indian period; *Two Dervishes in Turkistan* (estimate: \$150,000–250,000), an extraordinary work by Vasilii Vereshchagin that wonderfully represents the artist’s diverse body of Orientalist work; and *Landscape on the Island of Bréhat* (estimate: 250,000–350,000) a work by Boris Grigoriev, a work inspired by the artist’s travels along the French coast.

OTHER HIGHLIGHTS

A fine selection of porcelain, books and works of art is also featured in this sale. Among the highlights is a Russian porcelain tea service decorated with a traditional Russian folk pattern (estimate: \$15,000–20,000); an illuminated 19th century Qur’an manuscript (estimate: \$2,000–3,000); and two 18th century Russian icons depicting the Mother of God of Korsun (estimate: \$4,000–6,000) and the Mother of God of Vladimir (estimate: \$1,500–2,500).

Auction: The Collection of Ambassador Charles R. Crane
Viewing: Christie’s Rockefeller Plaza Galleries

April 24
April 12–23

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