

For Immediate Release

10 April 2003

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**CHRISTIE'S HONG KONG TO OFFER SUPERB CLASSICAL CHINESE
PAINTINGS AND CALLIGRAPHY**

*Fine Classical Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy
The Imperial Sale
6 & 7 July 2003*

Hong Kong – Christie's Hong Kong will offer a superb selection of works by renowned Chinese artists in the Fine Classical Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy Sale and The Imperial Sale to be held on 6 and 7 July.

A Rare Handscroll of a Woodblock Print of an Iron Tablet

The highlight of the Fine Classical Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy Sale on 6 July is an extremely rare and important handscroll consisting of an imprint made in the early Ming dynasty (1368-1644) from the wood block model of an iron tablet given to the Tang general Qian Liu (852-932) by the last Tang emperor Zhaozhong (r.889-907), joined together with the rarest of calligraphy (Estimate: HK\$3,000,000-4,000,000/ US\$377,100-516,100). The iron tablet was engraved with text lauding the achievements of Qian, and also serves as a special reprieve to Qian, pardoning him from all punishment including the death penalty.

This handscroll has a very interesting and significant background. The first Ming emperor Hongwu (reigned 1368-1398) wanted to reward his generals on the establishment of the Ming Dynasty and requested that Qian's descendant bring the tablet into court so that it can be viewed. After seeing the original, the Emperor Hongwu ordered a wood block model to be made of the iron tablet. The present imprint was made in the early Ming from the wood block model of Qian Liu's iron tablet.

This imprint is followed by a letter written in running script calligraphy ('caoshu') by Qian Shu (?-988), the grandson of Qian Liu and the last King of Wuyue before they capitulated to the Song in

978. Qian Shu excelled in calligraphy and was particularly famed for his caoshu. There is only one other piece of calligraphy by Qian Shu extant, and this is an official document with four characters and a signature by Shu, now housed in the Zhejiang Museum, China. The present letter is thus the only complete piece of calligraphy by Qian Shu extant. A second piece of calligraphy, a letter by the great Northern Song politician and philosopher, Zhu Xi (1130–1200), is joined in this handscroll. There is a total of twenty-three Song colophons and include a line of appreciation by one of the most important connoisseurs of Chinese paintings and calligraphy, Jia Sida (1213–1275). While very rare paintings and calligraphy seen or collected by Jia often bear his seal, this may indeed be the only example where his own calligraphy is seen. There was originally a second piece of calligraphy by Qian Shu which carries four characters and a signature and is now in the Zhejiang Museum, mounted together with the present scroll. The Zhejiang Museum piece has been physically examined and compared with the present one by experts from Christie's, the Zhejiang Museum, Shanghai Museum, and Beijing Palace Museum. It was concluded that all evidence such as the ink, paper, calligraphic style and signature confirms that the two scrolls do indeed form an original whole. Moreover, some of the colophons on the Zhejiang scroll are copied from the originals on this scroll.

Masters of the 10th and 11th Century

A handscroll, *Rain and Mist over the Spring River* attributed to the Northern Song painter, Zhao Lingrang (11th Century) is another gem in the sale (Estimate: HK\$2,500,000–3,500,000/ US\$322,600–451,600). Painted in a soft and impressionistic style, one is compelled to travel along the paths weaving in and out of this moist spring landscape shrouded in mist. This is the third extant work by Zhao, the other two housed in museums in the United States, and has been recorded and discussed in various writers and connoisseurs throughout the ages.

Another very important painting is *Waiting for the Ferry*, attributed to the Five Dynasty master Guan Tong (10th century) (Estimate: HK\$500,000–700,000/ US\$64,500–90,300). This scroll is very comparable to *Evening in the Summer Hills* in the Taipei Palace Museum in every manner. It carries a separate scroll of colophons by distinguished connoisseurs and collectors.

Great Ming Masters

The Ming master Tang Yin (1470–1523) is represented by his album of poems written in running script calligraphy (Estimate: HK\$600,000–800,000/ US\$77,400–103,200). The album comprises three poems composed by Tang and written on ten leaves. The brilliance of Tang's calligraphy, often thought to be second to his mastery in painting, is revelled to the full.

Dong Qichang (1555–1636) writes in the styles of Song masters Huang Tingjian and Mi Fu in his calligraphy handscroll, noting that he was trying out a new brush made of chicken feather. This scroll had been in the collection of Wu Hufan, who wrote an index, a colophon, the titleslip, and

affixed a total of seven of his seals on the scroll (Estimate: HK\$150,000–200,000/ US\$19,400–25,800).

An album of forty-one leaves fully illustrates Zheng Xie's (1693–1765) calligraphic skills (Estimate: HK\$400,000–500,000/ US\$51,600–64,500). The album includes calligraphy in standard, running and cursive scripts, and the first leaf is perhaps the most gripping. This is a circular poem composed in the Han dynasty, comprising forty-nine phrases of three characters each, going through twenty-seven 'tunes'. The poem expands from an epicentre and forms a circular 'dish' form.

The sale also features four spectacular pieces by the Ming master Shen Zhou (1427–1509). The hanging scroll of Landscape after Li Cheng (Estimate: HK\$400,000–500,000/ US\$51,600–71,000) is one of those rarities – Shen Zhou painted with delicate and refined brushstrokes, as compared to his usual bold and carefree style. The mounting to this piece carries inscriptions by many important Qing collectors and connoisseurs. The small handscroll of Landscape of Jinshan (Estimate: HK\$300,000–400,000/ US\$38,700–51,600), executed with ink on paper, is an intimate depiction of an actual landscape that Shen described as the impression he formed on his first visit. In contrast, the larger handscroll of Pavilion on Tianchi is, as stated clearly in Shen's own inscription, an imaginary landscape painted to express the literary feelings of the artist (Estimate: HK\$2,000,000–2,400,000/ US\$258,100–309,700). The handscroll of Jiecai (mustard leaves) is a small painting of a vegetable (Estimate: HK\$800,000–1,000,000/ US\$103,200–129,000). The lengthy inscription in large running script calligraphy that follows the picture not only displays Shen Zhou calligraphic mastery, but is yet another expression of the artist's literary talents. This fable of Jie as written by Shen certainly parallels those by Aesop in its humanity and subtle moral undertones.

Also of the Ming are seven pieces by Wen Zhengming (1470–1559), four pieces of calligraphy and three paintings. The hanging scroll of Rain over the Summer Hills records an outing of Wen with his close friends and brother (Estimate: HK\$400,000–500,000/ US\$51,600–64,500). The scroll comes with a specially made box in jichi mu, carved into the shape of a bamboo with the title inlaid in mother-of-pearl.

Qing Dynasty Painters

The collaborative efforts by Wang Hui (1632–1717) and Yu Zhiding (1647 – after 1713) results in a set of twelve continuous scrolls depicting a Birthday Celebration (Estimate: HK\$1,200,000–1,800,000/ US\$154,800–232,300). The meticulous lines used by Yu in painting the figures, and the careful and strong brushstrokes used by Wang Hui for the landscapes, mark out this exceptional piece which measures over six metres in length and almost two metres high as a masterpiece, one that is rarely ever created or seen in the market.

Other significant works by Wang Hui (1632-1717) offered included *Hills and Streams with Pine and Bamboo* (Estimate: HK\$500,000-600,000/ US\$64,500-77,400), and *Travellers in a Snowy Forest in the Style of Wang Wei* (Estimate: HK\$850,000-1,000,000/ US\$109,700-129,000).

Yun Shouping's (1633-1690) consummate skill in painting flowers is revealed to the full in the massively long floral handscroll that he painted in 1666 (Estimate: HK\$1,800,000-2,000,000/ US\$232,300-283,900). While light colours are used simply, the scroll shines with a brilliance and liveliness, and surely ranks as one of Yun's best. It also carries collectors' seals of important 19th century connoisseurs and collectors.

The Imperial Sale

The Imperial Sale on 7 July includes important pieces of paintings and calligraphy that were recorded in the *Shiqu Baoji* (Catalogue of Paintings and Calligraphy in the Qing Imperial collection), and many bearing the collection seals of Qing emperors such as Qianlong emperor (r. 1736-1795) and/or Jiaqing (r. 1796-1820). The most important is perhaps the landscape handscroll by Xia Gui (12th-13th century) (Estimate: HK\$3,000,000-3,500,000/ US\$387,100-451,600), himself a court painter of the Southern Song. There is a poetic inscription on this painting by the Qianlong emperor, and it bears the full set of eight of his seals – marking it out to be of the highest standard. Subsequent emperors, Jiaqing and Xuanton (r. 1909-1911), also placed their seals on this piece.

Other pieces bearing the complete set of five Qianlong collection seals include the hanging scroll of *Orchid and Bamboo* by Wen Zhengming (on which Qianlong again inscribed his own poem) (Estimate: HK\$400,000-600,000/ US\$51,600-77,400), and the handscroll of the *Tianma fu* (Ode to the Heavenly Stallion) (Estimate: HK\$250,000-300,000/ US\$32,300-38,700), written in running script calligraphy after *Mi Fu* by Dong Qichang (1555-1636). A second piece by Dong Qichang, also collected by Qianlong and recorded in the *Shiqu Baoji Xubian*, is the album of *Two Odes – Farewell and Dancing Crane* (Estimate: HK\$1,300,000-1,500,000/ US\$167,700-193,500). Since it came into the Qing imperial collection, it carries an inscription by the Qianlong emperor, and is bound in a Qing imperial yellow brocade with a pair of confronting dragons around a flaming pearl pattern.

Pieces of calligraphy by emperors and members of the royal families of the Ming and Qing, include the spectacular, anonymous set of nine scrolls, of a birthday poem composed by sixteen princes, five of them sons of Qianlong, nine of them grandsons, and the remaining two great grandsons. The poem was jointly composed and presented by the sixteen princes to commemorate Qianlong's seventieth birthday, and is written on an imperial yellow ground silk painted with a dragon amongst clouds pattern in gold and silver (Estimate: HK\$500,000-600,000/ US\$64,500-77,400).

Pre-sale Exhibitions:

<i>Taipei</i>	<i>12 - 13 April</i>	<i>Taipei Metro</i>
<i>Beijing</i>	<i>25 - 26 June</i>	<i>New Otani Hotel</i>
<i>Hong Kong</i>	<i>4 - 6 July</i>	

Auctions: Fine Chinese Classical Paintings and Calligraphy 6 July at 5:00 pm
The Imperial Sale (including 26 lots of paintings) 7 July at 10:30 am

More information about Christie's sale of Fine Classical Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy and The Imperial Sale can be found on 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 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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