

For Immediate Release

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Contact: Victoria Cheung 852.2978.9919 vcheung@christies.com
Carrie Chow 852 2978 9966 cchow@christies.com

**EXCEPTIONAL IMPERIAL CHINESE WORKS OF ART
OFFERED AT CHRISTIE'S HONG KONG**

***The Imperial Sale
Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art
7 July 2003***



*An exceptional and highly important group of twelve personal seals of the Kangxi Emperor
Kangxi period (1662-1722)
Estimate on Request*

Hong Kong – An exceptional selection of Chinese Imperial works of art, including an extremely rare group of twelve personal seals of the Kangxi Emperor (1662-1722), will be offered at Christie's Hong Kong on 7 July 2003.

Anthony Lin, Chairman of Christie's Asia, said: "With increasing demand for Imperial ceramics and works of art, Christie's Hong Kong will hold another sale on the Imperial theme in July. The sale will provide a very good opportunity for seasoned and new collectors to acquire exquisite items of the highest quality and rarity."

The main theme of the Imperial Sale revolves around the most enlightened and longest serving Manchu emperor, Kangxi (1662-1722). His rule was underpinned by political stability and prosperity, and Imperial patronage, spurred on by the Emperor's curiosity in new technology,

spawned a new era of innovation in the arts. Among the Imperial items on offer is a spectacular complete set of extremely rare seals, known as the Peiwen Zhai seals, that once belonged to Emperor Kangxi. Recent research by scholars at the Beijing Palace Museum has revealed that this whole set of twelve is documented in the Baosou (Concourse of Treasures) which listed all significant seals in the Imperial collection, whereas only three seals – also recorded in the same publication – are today preserved in the Beijing Palace Museum. Unlike official and commemorative seals that were used to authorise state papers and edicts, these seals were used personally by Kangxi's own hands to mark his personal writings and compositions, and his favourite paintings in the Imperial collection. This complete group is of immense cultural and historical importance as it provides a rare private insight into the literary mind of the Emperor who was known to be a studious man and evidently a defender of Confucian ideals. The Peiwen Zhai seals prove to be one of the most important works of art ever offered at auction from the Kangxi period (Estimate on request).

Other prized pieces from the Kangxi period include a rare massive twelve panel soapstone embellished screen, known as a weiping, from a private American collection. Previously in the collection of John Wanamaker of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, a successful department store owner in the second half of the 19th century, and a well-known philanthropist and collector of fine antiques and furniture, each panel of the screen measures over 3 metres high and 56 cm. wide. The carved hardwood panels are decorated with finely and intricately worked soapstone panels. One side of the screen depicts innately Chinese scenes of the Daoist immortals and scholars among landscapes. The reverse side is similarly decorated with soapstone but the theme is almost entirely of European-subjects among Western architecture, showing visual perspectives differentiating foreground and background, a technique which was undoubtedly introduced to artists of the Kangxi court by the Jesuits who established themselves under the auspices of the Imperial workshops in the Forbidden Palace. When this screen was published in 1928, John Wanamaker noted that it was 'made as a gift from a Premier to an Emperor'. From its craftsmanship, which is suggestive of the Palace Workshops (Zaobanchu) and numerous symbolism of longevity, it is highly probable that the screen was commissioned by Kangxi possibly as a birthday gift to a high official (Estimate: HK\$8,000,000–10,000,000/ US\$1,025,000–1,282,000).

One of the great innovations of the Kangxi period is the set of Eight Treasures from the scholars' table, the well-known peachbloom-glazed vessels known as ba da ma, the 'Great Eight Numbers', which rank among the most sophisticated and distinguished Imperial ceramics of the Kangxi period. Each vessel of varied subtle red tones is offered separately including a laifu zun, an elegantly shaped vase simplistically decorated with three raised bow lines around the narrow neck (Estimate:

HK\$2,200,000–2,500,000 / US\$286,000–325,000); a ‘chrysanthemum’ vase (Estimate: HK\$400,000–600,000 / US\$52,000–78,000); and a water-pot known as a ‘Taibo zun’, shaped after a wine vat and named in honour of the famous Tang dynasty poet, Li Bai, who was famous for his partiality to wine (Estimate: HK\$220,000–280,000 / US\$28,600–36,400).

Another prized Kangxi porcelain on offer is a famille rose falangcai bowl bearing the four characters Kangxi Yuzhi mark, ‘Made by the Imperial Command of Emperor Kangxi’, brilliantly enamelled with flowers of the Four Seasons against a ruby-red ground (Estimate: HK\$3,000,000–4,000,000 / US\$390,000–520,000). The bowl is one of the earliest example of famille rose enamelling, a decorative technique that was pioneered during the Kangxi reign which later developed to its full fruition during the subsequent Yongzheng and Qianlong periods.

No Imperial sale is complete without items from the Qianlong period such as the magnificent Mughal-inspired flawless white jade water-coupe. One of the best white jade carvings from the Imperial Workshops of the Qianlong reign, this precious water-coupe is formed by well polished, translucent, thin lobed sides; adroitly carved with a ram’s head on one side forming the handle, the foot of the vessel is ingeniously carved as a large acanthus leaf (Estimate on request). Emperor Qianlong became fascinated with jade carvings from Hindustan, where a number of jades were sent as tributes to the Qing court, and he commissioned the Imperial Workshops to produce numerous carvings in similar style. The Mughal style ceremonial sword with its characteristically curved white jade handle is an example of such work (Estimate: HK\$350,000–450,000 / US\$45,500–58,500).

Luxuries that were produced for Qianlong in the Imperial workshops at Canton include two brilliantly designed paste-encrusted musical clocks, the first detailed with a soapstone elephant (Estimate: HK\$700,000–900,000 / US\$91,000–117,000); and the other with a pagoda (Estimate: HK\$1,800,000–2,200,000 / US\$234,000–286,000).

The Chinese ceramics and works of art section of the sale also includes items that are equally stunning. The large blue and white meiping vase and cover (Estimate on request), dated to the Yuan dynasty (1276–1368) is among the most beautifully painted early blue and white meipings shaded with inky-blue cobalt depicting scrolling peonies. Another great rarity is a floral decorated cup in the doucai palette and technique from the Ming dynasty Chenghua period (1465–1487). Formerly in the Percival David Foundation (PDF), London, the pair to this bowl remains today as an important reference and connection to its past (Estimate: HK\$2,500,000–3,500,000 / US\$325,000–455,000).

A collection of rare archaic bronzes will be offered in the sale, including an important bronze food vessel, known as a gui, from the Western Zhou dynasty (circa 1100–771 BC) which was formerly from the Qing palace collection (Estimate: HK\$200,000–300,000 / US\$26,000–39,000); and a wine vessel, zhi, also from the same period cast with curious pairs of protruding ox horns above pairs of eyes known as taotie (Estimate: HK\$220,000–280,000 / US\$28,600–36,400).

Pre-sale Exhibition:

<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>	

Auction: The Imperial Sale, Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art, 7 July at 10:30 am and 2:00 pm

More information about Christie's Imperial Sale and Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art 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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