

For Immediate Release

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**EXCEPTIONAL IMPERIAL PAINTINGS HIGHLIGHT CHRISTIE'S
CLASSICAL CHINESE PAINTINGS SALE IN HONG KONG**

Fine Classical Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy

The Imperial Sale

25 & 26 April 2004

Hong Kong – An extremely important and large Imperial handscroll of Emperor Qianlong's Review of the Grand Parade of Troops and a very rare 10th Century banner from the Dunhuang caves highlight Christie's Hong Kong Spring sale of classical Chinese paintings on 25 and 26 April at the JW Marriott Hotel. An important group of paintings and calligraphy from a European Chinese family collection will also be a highlight of the sale.

Imperial Paintings

The Imperial Sale to be held on 26 April includes two important court paintings, The Review of the Grand Parade of Troops (Estimate on request), and The Imperial Autumn Hunt at Mulan (estimate: HK\$4,000,000–6,000,000/ US\$516,000–774,000). Both scrolls were painted for the Qianlong Emperor, and serve as invaluable historical records as well as representative examples of court paintings of the time. The Review scroll records the first Grande Parade of Troops at Nanyuan (South Park) that took place in the fourth year of Qianlong's reign (1739). The painting was commissioned in 1746 when Qianlong ordered a group of court painters headed by Jin Kun (active circa 1662–1746) to paint and record this first Review. The result was a set of four large handscrolls, each describing scenes of the Review which took place over several days. Each scroll carries a lengthy inscription in standard script calligraphy by a Qing court official describing the events and scenes depicted.

The set was recorded in the Qing imperial collection catalogue, Shiqu Baoji Xubian, and the whereabouts of only two scrolls of this set is known, Scroll Two, in the Beijing Palace Museum, and Scroll Three, the present scroll included in the spring sale. Scroll Three measures some 68 x 1550 cm. and describes the Emperor Qianlong actually reviewing the troops once formed. It is almost identical to Scroll Two, which details the formation and arrangement of troops, but without the presence of the emperor. The parade involved some twenty thousand people, and

every detail is captured, included all the dress, armoury, banners and the intricate accoutrements of the soldiers. Each facial expression is distinct, and very vibrant colours are used to enliven the picture. The Italian Jesuit painter, Lang Shining (G. Castiglione, 1688-1766) also painted Qianlong reviewing his troops on this first occasion in a large hanging scroll now in the Beijing Palace Museum, and that portrait is almost a mirror image of the miniature in the present scroll.

The Imperial Autumn Hunt at Mulan is another very long handscroll, but does not carry with it any inscription, signature or seal (estimate: HK\$4,000,000-6,000,000/ US\$516,000-774,000). It describes the autumn hunt that took place almost every year at Mulan, a tradition handed down since the first Qing emperors. The scroll describes a procession that travels to the royal hunting grounds, where animals (in particular deer) are rounded up for the emperor to hunt. Seen in the painting is an emperor on a galloping stallion, bow strung and about to shoot his prey. Qing Court paintings specialist Nie Chongzheng of the Beijing Palace Museum wrote about this piece, and concludes after studying the scroll that it is without doubt a court painting of the Qianlong period (retaining its original imperial mounting). While the emperor was not portrayed with physical or facial exactitude, it was the Emperor Qianlong. In Nie's opinion, this might have been a very finely tuned draft for another project on a grander scale, such as the other set of four handscrolls of the Hunt at Mulan now housed in the Musee Guimet, Paris.

A European Chinese Family Collection

In the Fine Classical Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy sale on 25 April, an interesting and important group of forty-eight paintings from a European Chinese family collection, will be featured. In this eclectic collection, there is a group of twelve hanging scrolls of calligraphy, by artists from the Ming to the early Qing, including Wen Zhengming (1470-1559), Wen Peng (1498-1573), and rare pieces from Xue Yi (1563-1642) and Gui Zhuang (1612-1673). The group was certainly painstakingly formed and will be offered as one lot (estimate: HK\$610,000-760,000/ US\$78,700-98,100).

The collection also includes a set of twelve hanging scrolls by Hua Yan (1682-1756), painted to honour Wang Jun on his seventieth birthday, and depict Wang's Yansu Garden (estimate: HK\$3,600,000-4,800,000/ US\$464,500-619,000). Painted near the end of Hua Yan's life, this may be the largest surviving work by the artist. Another piece by the Ming master, Wen Zhengming, was painted in honour of Hua Yun on his departure from the Wu district to another official posting (estimate: HK\$600,000-800,000/ US\$77,400-103,200). The scroll has been inscribed by contemporaries of Wen, including Wen Jia, Wang Shou, Peng Nian, and others who were all present at the farewell party.

A Banner from the Dunhuang Caves

Also on offer is a rare 10th Century banner from the Dunhuang caves which depicts a standing bodhisattva outlined in yellow against a red background (Estimate on request). Zhang Daqian obtained this from Dunhuang during his stay there, and records that it came from cave 17, the secret chamber that was fortuitously discovered in 1900. It is not known when or why cave 17, constructed off the corridor to cave 16, was built or sealed with its invaluable artefacts. Sir Aurel Stein, the British-Hungarian explorer, came to Dunhuang on news of this discovery and in 1907 went away with trunks of invaluable artefacts, mainly now housed in the British Museum. When compared with dated pieces in the Stein collection, it is evident that the present banner must form part of a group of such banner paintings.

An Album of Ten Leaves

An important and highly interesting album is also included in the sale. There is a total of ten leaves, nine round fan leaves and one album leaf (estimate: HK\$2,400,000–2,800,000/ US\$309,700–361,300). The great connoisseur and collector Wu Hufan (1894–1968) attributed the first leaf to the famous Tang artist Li Sixun (653–718). It certainly dates to at least the Song, as there is not only a Northern Song imperial collector's seal on the painting, but it also carries with it a corresponding leaf of a poetic inscription by Zhao Yan. Zhao was one of several important connoisseurs who vetted paintings, and commissioned to write on them by the Yuan Princess Dachang (ca. 1283–1331). The remaining leaves also all dated to the Song and Yuan, and no wonder that Zhu Yizun (1629–1709) wrote *Jigu Jingqi* (Ancient Wonders) as the frontispiece to this album.

Pre-sale Exhibitions:

Shanghai	10 – 11 April	The Westin Shanghai
Beijing	13 – 14 April	The St. Regis Beijing
Taipei	17 – 18 April	Fubon Life Assurance Building
Hong Kong	23 – 24 April	JW Marriott Hotel

Auction:

Fine Classical Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy, 25 April, 12:30 pm

The Imperial Sale (including 20 lots of classical paintings), 26 April, 10:30 am

More information about Christie's Fine Classical Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy and 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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