

For Immediate Release

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**EXCEPTIONAL EARLY MING BLUE AND WHITE CERAMICS AND
QING DYNASTY POLYCHROMES TO BE OFFERED AT CHRISTIE'S IMPERIAL
SALE IN HONG KONG**

The Imperial Sale

Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art

26 April 2004

Hong Kong – As a sign of a strengthening Chinese art market in Hong Kong and greater demand from the Mainland, Christie's Hong Kong is to hold their highest value Chinese works of art sale this Spring season. The Imperial Sale to be held on 26 April at the Marriott Hotel will include a selection of highly important blue and white ceramics of early Ming period as well as superbly enamelled polychrome wares of the Qing dynasty that were specially made at the Imperial workshops in Beijing.

“The market for Chinese Art has become highly selective in recent years and this is reflected by items that we have selected for auction with greater emphasis being placed on quality and rarity,” said Pola Antebi, Director of the Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art Department at Christie's Hong Kong. “The recent interest in early Ming blue and white ceramics on the auction market is particularly notable. This area has been largely undervalued over the last ten years, eclipsed by high prices for early Qing ceramics recently. It's satisfying to see a greater demand for early Ming wares that complement high prices commanded by polychromes of the early Qing period,” Ms Antebi remarked.

A blue and white Yongle period (1403–1425) floral-lobed ‘dragon’ brushwasher of exceptional rarity is among the highlights this season (estimate: HK\$15,000,000–20,000,000/ US\$1,900,000–2,500,000). One of only two known examples of its type, this scholar's vessel would have taken pride of place on the Emperor's desk. The unusual ceramic form with its fluted sides was inspired by lacquer wares of the Song and Yuan dynasties (10th–14th century) that were greatly appreciated at the time. It is decorated with a total of twelve dragons: as

coiled dragon medallions, one on each of the ten-lobed sides; a lively descending dragon chasing a 'flaming pearl' on the interior and a similarly portrayed dragon on the underside base. This form of decoration is an ostentatious display of an exclusive motif restricted for use by the Emperor as a symbol of his Universal Rule, and an assertion of imperial authority.

Apart from the use of dragons as the main decorative element, traditional auspicious motifs also appear on ceramics such as flowers of the four seasons and sprays of fruit, both symbolising abundance. These are painted on a blue and white hexafoil bowl of the Xuande period (1426–1435), formerly from the Manno Art Museum collection (estimate: HK\$3,000,000–4,000,000/ US\$390,000–520,000). Another conventional decorative theme on ceramics is the combination of the pine, bamboo and prunus, which together forms what is known as the 'Three Friends of Winter', and in this instance is seen expertly painted on a large bowl of Xuande period (estimate: HK\$5,000,000–7,000,000/ US\$650,000–900,000). The 'Three Friends' are representing longevity (pine); nobleness and purity (bamboo); and youth and eternal Spring (prunus).

Even in the Qing period, floral symbols closely followed those of an early tradition such as the yellow-ground peony bowl bearing the Kangxi Yuzhi mark (1662–1722) (estimate: HK\$3,000,000–5,000,000/ US\$390,000–650,000). Made by the Imperial order of the Kangxi emperor as indicated by the four-character reign mark, the peony design symbolises immense wealth and an elevated hierarchical status. Expertly executed, the enamels used were pioneered by ateliers who worked in Imperial workshops that were established on the orders of Emperor Kangxi, and situated within the Forbidden Palace. Enamelling on ceramics were taken to its zenith in the subsequent Yongzheng and Qianlong reigns. An example of Imperial quality workmanship is the magnificent blue-enamelled 'landscape' bowl of the Yongzheng period (1723–1735) (Estimate on request). Emulating landscape paintings of the Five Dynasties and Song dynasty paintings (10th–13th century), the bowl is brilliantly painted in gradated vibrant blue to pale blue tones to depict a panoramic view of a river-landscape featuring monumental rocky cliffs with a waterfall emptying into the near-distance, an island hamlet by a winding foot-bridge, and two fishing boats sailing on shallow currents. Three examples of similarly decorated bowls are in museum collections: the Beijing Palace Museum, Taipei's National Palace Museum, and the Free Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., and the present bowl is the only example in private hands. Its rarity and excellent workmanship are both qualities that the current market seeks. As such this bowl will cause much excitement as it is expected to reach the highest price in this season's sale.

Such a tranquil scene differs from the flamboyant style of the Qianlong period (1736–1795) as can be seen on the Tibetan-style famille rose ewer (estimate: HK\$3,000,000–4,000,000/ US\$390,000–520,000) with its dense lotus scroll pattern on a turquoise-ground, complete with a

dragon-handle and a phoenix spout. Its shape replicated the more austere Tibetan originals made of wood that were used for the storage of yak milk or wine. Qianlong himself was known to have been a devout follower of Tibetan Buddhism, and his many Buddhist advisors at Court included his close friend, Zhangjia Hutuketu (Rol-pa'i rdo-rje, 1717-86). Despite Qianlong's religious fever, however, the Tibetan-style ewer probably served as a sumptuous decorative object and its distinctive shape, a reminder to the Emperor of its religious connotations.

The Works of Art section also feature strongly this season to include a white jade 'dragon' seal that once belonged to Emperor Qianlong (estimate: HK\$2,800,000-3,500,000/ US\$370,000-450,000) which was carved to celebrate his 80th birthday in 1790. The seal bears the six characters: Bajing maonian zhi bao, 'A Treasure commemorating the advanced age of eighty', and was no doubt greatly prized by Qianlong who regarded his long life as a divine blessing. Also offered is a finely embroidered twelve-symbol 'dragon' robe of the Qianlong period (estimate: HK\$500,000-700,000/US\$65,000-90,000); a superbly carved polychrome lacquer ingot-shaped tiered box also dated to the Qianlong period (estimate: HK\$3,000,000-4,000,000/ US\$390,000-520,000) and a jadeite censer and cover, carved of the finest translucent apple-green stone, dating to the late Qing period (estimate: HK\$5,500,000-7,000,000/ US\$710,000-900,000).

Notes to Editors

Pre-sale Exhibitions:

New York	18 – 24 March	Christie's New York
Singapore	2 – 3 April	Grand Hyatt Singapore
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 – 25 April	JW Marriott Hotel

Auction:

The Imperial Sale, Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works, 26 April 2004, 10:30 am at the JW Marriott, Hong Kong

More information about Christie's 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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