

Press Release

CHRISTIE'S

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**RARE AND ICONIC PORTRAIT BY XU BEIHONG TO LEAD 20TH
CENTURY CHINESE ART SALE AT CHRISTIE'S HONG KONG**



(Left)
Xu Beihong (1895-1953)
Portrait of a Lady
Oil on canvas
136.5 x 98 cm.
Painted in 1939
Estimate: HK\$20,000,000-25,000,000/
US\$2,564,100-3,205,100

(Right)
Xu Beihong with *Portrait of a Lady*

20th Century Chinese Art
27 May 2007

Hong Kong – One of the most iconic and significant portraits by Chinese master Xu Beihong, alongside signature pieces by some of the most celebrated Chinese artists, will be offered at Christie's Hong Kong 20th Century Chinese Art sale on 27 May. Representing milestones in the development of Chinese art history, these superb pieces are destined to draw tremendous interest from international collectors.

In this Spring auctions series, Christie's Hong Kong will introduce a real-time multi-media auction service Christie's LIVE™, becoming the first international auction house in Asia to offer fine art through live online auctions. Christie's LIVE™ enables collectors around the world to bid from their personal computers while enjoying the look, sound and feel of the sale.

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Xu Beihong (1895-1953)

The star lot of the sale, *Portrait of a Lady*, is an important large-scale work by Xu Beihong (1895-1953) executed during his Southeast Asia period (estimate: HK\$20,000,000-25,000,000/ US\$2,564,100-3,205,100).

Ever since his first visit to Singapore in 1925, Xu had kept a close connection with the overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia. Soon after the Sino-Japanese War broke out, Xu moved to Singapore. During his stay, he produced extraordinary portraits for well-known members of the Chinese community there.

The present work is one of two monumental portraits produced during this period, and arguably one of the most iconic portraits by the artist ever to appear on the market. Another work, *Portrait of Governor Thomas*, now resides in the permanent collection of the National Museum of Singapore. Xu donated proceeds from these works to help fund China's war effort, adding historical significance to this piece.

The graceful Cantonese woman in the painting, Jenny, was a close friend of the vice consul of Belgium in Singapore, who commissioned Xu to create this work. Dressed in the long *cheongsam* fashionable in the 30s, the sitter reclines in a rattan-backed rocker unique to Southeast Asia and is wreathed in soft light from the window.

Painted in 1939, *Portrait of a Lady* best exemplifies the unrivalled style of Xu and the depth of his artistic achievement. While applying Western Realist technique to paint with rigorous attention to the details, Xu skillfully adopts the Eastern aesthetic approach in capturing the emotions and glamour of this elegant lady. This unmistakable combination of artistic elements captivates viewers with its lively yet lyrical appeal. More significantly, this allows Xu to break through the tradition and cliché of the European portrait. A new type of Eastern beauty fully distinct from both the Chinese and Western traditions at the time is brought to this exceptional canvas.

Wu Guanzhong (born in 1919)

Wu Guanzhong reached his first peak in the creation of oil painting in the 60s and 70s. He successfully infused resplendent and colourist expression of Western oil with the freewheeling, vibrant appeal of traditional Chinese ink-wash.

Painted in 1973, *Scenery of Northern China* (estimate on request) is the most outstanding and only piece by Wu available in private hands that depicts the vast landscape of Northern China. Positioning the view from a high vantage point, Wu captures the vividness and imposing presence of the nature of his mother country. Snowy peaks, pines, roaring waterfalls and the Great Wall are well featured and testify Wu's skill at structuring a complex composition from multiple perspectives.



Nature and landscapes have clearly been a central theme in Wu's work. Also on offer is his *Scenery of Guilin* (estimate: HK\$2,500,000-3,000,000/ US\$320,500-384,600). Wu travelled extensively throughout China to search for subjects which best represent the cultural hallmarks of both the northern and southern regions. Under his brush, the diversity, poetic ambience and wordless beauty of the Chinese landscape come alive before the viewer's eyes.

Flowers in the Mountain (estimate: HK\$1,800,000-2,200,000/ US\$230,800-282,100) is one of Wu's rare works that took on the theme of fruit and flower. In fact, flowers are a testament to the difficult circumstances which Wu went through at the time. Under Wu's vibrant brushstrokes, the subject appears particularly delicate and charming.

A Large Haul (estimate: HK\$3,000,000-4,000,000/ US\$384,600-512,800) depicts fish writhing and jumping as they are being caught. This vigorous scene perhaps suggests the artist's own eager determination to achieve further artistic breakthrough. At the same time, the rich fishing ground symbolizes bounteous prosperity and Wu's confidence in his career.

Zao Wou-Ki (Zhao Wuji, born in 1921)

Using abstraction to re-interpret the spirit of nature in traditional Chinese landscape painting, Zao Wou-ki forged a very distinctive style that meticulously combines elements of Eastern and Western art. Inspired by ancient Chinese bronzes and oracle-bone inscriptions, Zao began exploring abstraction in 1953 through a series of superb early works that have since become an



important milestone for his career. *Le cité se reveille* (estimate: HK\$6,000,000-8,000,000/ US\$769,200-1,025,600) is a prime example imbued with suggestive and calligraphically-derived symbolic emblems. The exquisite and well-matched colour brings about an expansive space of imagination, in which motion and energy find harmony. The work is also reminiscent of the sense of the intimate dialogue between men and nature suggested by China's ancient literati painters.

Zao's later works including *14.12.59* (estimate: HK\$5,000,000-8,000,000/ US\$641,000-1,025,600), and *15.10.63* (estimate: HK\$4,500,000-6,200,000/ US\$ 576,900-794,900) are all lovingly crafted works featuring a red tonal palette. With a practiced and flowing brushwork purely his own, Zao expresses the depth of his feeling for China. *14.12.1959* and *15.10.63* are in fact a revelation of the "vividness and harmonious energy" so often alluded to in Chinese culture. Around this time, Zao also began to scrape paint from the canvas with the brush's wooden handle to create fine lines in the midst of the broad strokes of the pigment. The result is an enchanting textural beauty that vibrantly illustrates his different moods and inner thoughts. His rough and imposing brushwork spreads across the surface in a burst of energy and strength.



14.12.59



15.10.63

Chu Teh-Chun (Zhu Dequn, born in 1920)

Chu Teh-Chun's abstract works are not merely an expression of symbolic shapes, but more a kind of lyricism reflecting the artist's deep feeling and source of inspiration. From the free and evocative spaces of his paintings, one easily imagines mountain landscapes, waterfalls and gushing springs. In *La saule est ombre* (estimate: HK\$1,500,000-2,000,000/ US\$192,300-256,400), *Subtilite Hivernale* (estimate: HK\$1,500,000-2,000,000/ US\$192,300-256,400) and *No. 116* (estimate: HK\$800,000-1,200,000/ US\$102,600-153,800), the strong and agile inky black lines moving across the canvas are reminiscent of classical calligraphy's cursive script, and the strong and flowing movement in Chinese *gongfu* sword work. These works construct a union of refinement and energy that can always be found in classical Chinese art.

Sanyu (Chang Yu, 1901-1966)

Subjects familiar to Chinese intellectuals became the vehicles for Sanyu's inner feelings and ideals. His works often seem as much poetry as art, speaking in pure and moving voices with all the clarity of verse. Typically, Sanyu's subjects appear in clear outlines against spacious backgrounds, and through choice of subject and the structuring of space, Sanyu's work enters the expansive realm of the imaginative, freehand style of Chinese painting. On offer is his exceptional work *Pink Rose in a White Vase* (estimate: HK\$2,000,000-4,000,000/ US\$256,400-512,800).



Lin Fengmian (1900-1991)

After Lin moved to Shanghai, he became more interested in Beijing Opera. The fabulous costumes, figures and stage effects became inspirations for many of his works. In the present piece on offer, *Chinese Opera Figures – Autumn River* (estimate: HK\$1,000,000-1,800,000/ US\$128,200-230,800), Lin managed to seize one particular moment of this play and translate it into an artistic expression by using simple swift lines and geometric patterns of colour.

T'ing Yin-Yung (Ding Yanyong, 1902-1978)

Presented in the sale are the integral pieces representing the artistic development of T'ing, including a double-sided work *By the Lake & Three Riders* (estimate: HK\$650,000-850,000/ US\$83,300-109,000) and *Composition & Portrait of a Woman* (estimate: HK\$650,000-850,000/ US\$83,300-109,000). In these creations, one can observe T'ing's astounding skills in creating works with line, whether executed by a brush or a knife.

Yun Gee (Zhu Yuanzhi, 1906-1963)

Dancing Beauties (estimate: HK\$1,400,000-1,800,000/ US\$179,500-230,800) features highly unusual colour and composition. Repeated parallel brushstrokes build up dimensional human figures and movements, injecting this work with a strong sense of an ancient and mysterious Oriental character.

Another two highly distinctive and representative works by Yun Gee will be offered: *Spring in the Brooklyn Botanic Garden* (estimate: HK\$800,000-1,200,000/ US\$102,600-153,800) illustrates New York in late winter or early spring, with the bright clear moon standing against the botanical gardens; *Shadow of the Searchlight* (estimate: HK\$900,000-1,200,000/ US\$115,400-153,800) metaphorically suggests the artist's search for his identity and role as a Chinese artist.

Ju Ming (Zhu Ming, born in 1938)

On offer also is a selection of distinctive and important *Taiji* sculptures by Ju Ming. These masterpieces date from as early as the 1970s. Each work in the Series captures the essence of not only the physical movement but also the calmness which are at the heart of practicing Taiji. Highlights include *Taiji Series - Big Sparring* (estimate: HK\$4,500,000-5,500,000/ US\$576,900-705,100 - *illustrated right*) and *Taiji Series- Starting Stance* (estimate: HK\$1,600,000-2,400,000/ US\$205,100-307,700).



Pre-sale Exhibitions:

Singapore	Grand Hyatt Singapore	27 - 28 April
Shanghai	Portman Ritz-Carlton Hotel	12 - 13 May
Beijing	The Ritz-Carlton Beijing	15 - 16 May
Taipei	Fubon Life Assurance Building	19 - 20 May
Hong Kong	Convention & Exhibition Centre	25 - 26 May

Auction:

20th Century Chinese Art, 27 May 2007, 1:30pm

Convention Hall, Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre

About Christie's

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