

Press Release

CHRISTIE'S

佳士得香港有限公司

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**MASTERWORK BY LI KERAN TO TAKE CENTRE STAGE IN
CHRISTIE'S HONG KONG MODERN CHINESE PAINTINGS SALE**



Li Keran (1907-1989)
All the Mountains Blanketed in Red
Scroll, mounted and framed
Ink and colour on paper
131 x 84 cm.
Dated autumn, September 1964
Estimate on request

Fine Modern Chinese Paintings

28 May 2007

Hong Kong – An impressive selection of works by leading Chinese artists including Li Keran will be offered in the *Fine Modern Chinese Paintings* sale at Christie's Hong Kong on 28 May. The works on offer will amaze art collectors with their exceptional quality and captivating themes. Also included in the sale are paintings of impeccable provenance from private collections.

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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The star lot of the sale is *All the Mountains Blanketed in Red* by Li Keran (1907–1989) (Estimate on request, Lot 1088). From 1962 to 1964, Li produced a series of seven paintings that took on the theme of ‘All the mountains are blanketed in red and forests are totally dyed’, a phrase from Mao Zedong’s (1892–1976) poem *Chang Sha (To the Tune of Spring Beaming in a Garden)*. Each of them is distinctive in terms of views, arrangement and size. The present lot, *All the Mountains Blanketed in Red* painted in September 1964, is a particularly large and resplendent example amongst these exceptional pieces and is expected to arouse furious bidding from collectors worldwide.

Li Keran inevitably felt the impact of Mao Zedong, first Chairman of the People’s Republic of China. After Mao came to power, the country had entered into a new era with an atmosphere of joy. The tremendous momentum in Mao’s poems greatly attracted artists of the time. In the 1960s, in particular, Mao’s poetry played a crucial role in the content of Chinese painting, and Li was wise to incorporate it into his work.

Unlike other artists’ works at the time, *All the Mountains Blanketed in Red* does not depict the landscape of Chang Sha as described in the poem, but a combination of the various beautiful views that the artist had come across in his long and extensive journeys since 1954. He skillfully combined the light effect in Western art and the “left blank” practice in Chinese painting to produce landscape with highly-flavored three-dimensionality.

Li used an unparalleled amount of vermilion, mapping out the composition in thick dark ink before applying the red pigment. The darkness of the ink serves as a foil for the brightness of the vermilion, recalling the graceful lacquer ware of the Han Dynasty. With this unique technique, Li vividly illustrated the grandeur and weight of the mountains which embody a sense of volume. Different gradations of red pigment were used to enhance the depth and distance between the magnificent peaks.



Also on offer are *Landscape* (Estimate: HK\$600,000-800,000/ US\$77,000-103,200, Lot 1179, *illustrated left*) and *Lady* (Estimate: HK\$800,000-1,000,000/ US\$103,200-129,000, Lot 1178) by Zhang Daqian (1899-1983). The paintings came from Chen Xiaoshan, the daughter of Cai Peizhu (*circa* 1900-1990) who was Zhang’s student. In the 1940s, Zhang frequented Wuhan during his trips where he was entertained by Ms. Cai with great respect. As an appreciation for her hospitality, Zhang gave her these two paintings and even signed on *Lady* a note of dedication to her daughter. This period is regarded as the prime era for Zhang when most of his representative works were created.

Qi Baishi (1863-1957) was famous for his lively depiction of village life. Born in a farming family, he started herding the buffalo since he was very young. His grandmother even hung a bell around his neck to keep animals away from him. Such memories, sweet and constantly recurring in Qi's mind, are reflected in his paintings. *Mountain Village* (Estimate: HK\$1,500,000-1,800,000/ US\$193,500-232,300, Lot 1005) on offer exudes the beauty and tranquility of the simple life in mountain areas. Qi painted this work after moving to Beijing city as a reminiscence of his childhood.



Highlights of the sale also include works by Gao Qifeng (1889-1933). Upon his return with his brother Gao Jianfu (1879-1951) from studies in Japan, they found the Spring Slumber Art Studio to advocate the new art movement in early 1920s known as *Lingnan School*. Facing heavy criticism from the Chinese art scene at the time, they were however unshaken in their devotion to art education.



In Gao's *Horse and Fallan Leaves* (Estimate: HK\$1,500,000-2,000,000/ US\$193,500-258,100, Lot 1069) and *Fox in the Moonlight* (Estimate HK\$600,000-800,000/ US\$77,400-103,200, Lot 1068, *illustrated left*), a sense of loneliness is exuded through the animals' eyes. Gao injected a human sentiment into the animals to re-interpret the feeling of a warrior after the war. The two subjects can be seen as a metaphor of the artist himself.

Of particular note are works from *Gu Feng Ge Collection* presented in the sale and comprising 35 masterpieces from the grandson of Huang Menggui (1885-1965), including 17 paintings and calligraphy by Xu Beihong (1895-1953). In fact, it was Huang who introduced Xu to the Singapore community and made Singapore one of the major collection centres for Xu's paintings.

In 1925, upon finishing his Master degree at Columbia University, Huang went to Paris for research and met Xu at the Chinese Embassy. As China was suffering from political and social instability during that period, Xu faced financial difficulties with his scholarship fund. Admiring Xu's talent, Huang offered his help to the artist by suggesting Xu exhibit his works in Singapore where his brother would assist.

Being patrons of Xu, Huang's brothers were also primary collectors of the artist's works. *Horses Drinking* (Estimate: HK\$5,000,000-6,000,000/ US\$645,200-774,200, Lot 1123) and *Eagle* (Estimate: HK\$1,000,000-1,500,000/ US\$129,000-193,500, Lot 1122) were especially dedicated to Huang Menggui. After Xu finished *Eagle*, Huang Menggui was very impressed by the bird's spirit and read



aloud a poem describing the vision of an eagle soaring high in the sky. Xu then immediately wrote down the poem, inscribed, signed and added both his own and Huang's seals to it. This poem, *Calligraphy*, is on offer in this sale as well (Estimate: HK\$150,000-200,000/ US\$19,400-25,800, Lot 1121).

Sun Duoci (1912-1975) was Xu's student from 1929. Impressed by Sun's talent, Xu became infatuated with her. In 1938, Xu invited Sun's family to move to Guilin with him, and later even published in the newspapers a notice announcing his separation from his wife. However, Sun's family strongly opposed this relationship and decided to move to Zhejiang instead. *Letter to Sun Douci* (Estimate: HK\$500,000-700,000/ US\$64,500-90,300, Lot 1129) was sent by Xu from Singapore during his exhibition to express his sadness at the abrupt end of this relationship. Sun received the letter but returned it without opening it. Xu, disappointed, finally left the letter with Huang's family.

Equally noteworthy are 69 paintings and calligraphy from the collection of *Chun Feng Cao Tang* owned by artist Yang Shanshen. Most of the pieces on offer are works by Yang's master Gao Jianfu. Through their paintings, the Gao's Brothers demonstrated the importance of solid sketching as the foundation of their eloquent skills. They were also fond of observing thoroughly the insects and animals in order to depict them in great detail. In *Spiders* (Estimate: HK\$250,000-300,000/ US\$32,300-38,700, Lot 922), the slow but elegant movements of a spider under the alluring light of the full moon come alive.



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 - 27 May

Auction:

Fine Modern Chinese Paintings, 28 May 2007, 2:00pm
Convention Hall, Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre

About Christie's

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