

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact:

Gillian Leung +852 2978 6736

gleung@christies.com

Kate Swan Malin +852 2978 9966

kmalin@christies.com

Yvonne So +852 2978 9919

yso@christies.com

The Wonders of Heaven and Earth: Christie's Spring Sale unveils the Mystique and Poetry of Chinese Paintings

Hong Kong - Christie's Hong Kong will hold its Spring sale of *Fine Chinese Modern Paintings* and *Fine Chinese Classical Paintings and Calligraphy* on May 25th and 26th at the Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre. Showcasing over 300 rare and exceptional works from the masters, these sales are valued in excess of HK\$80 million. The *Fine Chinese Classical Paintings and Calligraphy* sale will feature works from the 13th to 19th Century (late Qing period), which embody the essence of classical Chinese literature, philosophy, history and religion. The *Fine Chinese Modern Paintings* sale will present exceptional works from the late Qing to the modern period, by masters such as Zhang Daqian, Qi Baishi, Fu Baoshi, Xu Beihong and Li Keran, as well as a distinct selection of works by contemporary artists. A dazzling array of works from various schools and unique and creative works from the contemporary arena make this sale one that is not to be missed.

FINE MODERN CHINESE PAINTINGS

Monday, May 25, 2009 - 10:00 am

Christie's *Fine Modern Chinese Paintings* sale on May 25 will present exceptional works from the late Qing to the modern period, by masters such as Zhang Daqian, Qi Baishi, Fu Baoshi, Xu Beihong and Li Keran, as well as a distinct selection of works by contemporary artists. Representing various schools and unique and creative works from the contemporary arena, this sale covers a wide range of styles, genres and subject matter that reflect the phenomenal changes in China in the last two centuries.

Qi Baishi (齐白石), Qigong (启功)



The Namu Amitabha Buddha and Calligraphy (a set of three scrolls, mounted and framed, ink and colour on paper; Estimate: HK\$4–5 million/ US\$516,100 - 645,200) is a triptych that brings together two of the foremost traditional artists of 20th Century China – Qi Baishi and Qi Gong. Qi Baishi began figure painting at the young age of eight. Friendly with Daoist priests in his village, he painted religious murals and worked as a carpenter and a sculptor for the temple.

This early experience enhanced his artistic oeuvre and creativity, as well as his understanding of this popular genre. Qi Baishi painted the present lot in the spring of 1937. The artist's depiction may seem unorthodox for the subject matter, but Qi's ability to convey the essence of Buddha with a few strokes demonstrates his familiarity with the form. He created an original image that is highly personal yet conveys the spirituality of Buddha. In his characteristic naïve style, what normally would be an austere and divine expression of Buddha becomes distinctly amicable and personable. Accompanying the painting is an excellent calligraphy couplet by Qi Gong, whose

writing perfectly complements Qi Baishi's style of painting. During a visit to Hong Kong, Qi Gong was said to have seen this particular painting by Qi Baishi and was so moved by it that he felt compelled to write this couplet to match it. The present lot offers the combined excellence of both masters in depicting this important religious subject.

***Flowers and Insects* (Four album leaves, mounted and framed, ink and colour on paper; Estimate: HK\$3.5- 4 million / US\$451,600 - 516,100)**



This album, originally a set of seventeen leaves, demonstrates Qi Baishi's skilled techniques, which features fine brushwork and meticulous details. Simple in form but not in technique or idea, the album is the result of Qi's skill in working from direct observation of nature. The forms are vivid and lifelike not only in subjective representation but also in spirit. Qi Baishi's ability to capture the essence of the form of living things and their spirit is what sets this master apart from the rest. Dedicated to Yang Gongshu (1896-1978), this present lot was a gift from Qi Baishi to the couple Yang Gongshu and Yue Manyong. Yang was the oldest son of Yang Du (1874-1931), a politician and a native of Xiangtan, Henan, as was Qi Baishi. Devoted to the industrial development of China, Yang returned to China after studying and working in Germany, to hold the post of Secretary-General of the National Resources Commission. He later became an acquaintance of Chinese pharmaceutical entrepreneur Yue Daren (1877-1947). As a result of Yue's introduction, in 1925 Yang married Yue Manyong, who was the sister of Yue Songsheng (1908-1968), thirteenth-generation owner of Tong Ren Tang, the famous Chinese pharmaceutical enterprise. Active in literati circles, Yue Manyong studied *ci* poetry from Qiao Dazhuang and was close to painter Qi Baishi.

Zhang Daqian (张大千)



***Misty Sunset* (Scroll, mounted and framed, ink and colour on paper; estimate: HK\$2.5–3million/ US\$322,600-387,100)**

This painting was acquired directly from Zhang Daqian by the collector who was an acquaintance of the artist for many years.

The poem inscribed on the painting recalls Zhang's longing for China after moving to Argentina. Even though the poem was composed by the artist in the 1950s, it was not until thirty years later that he inscribed it onto this painting for the first and only time. Zhang did not do so earlier to avoid attaching any potential political meaning to his painting. Zhang was a pioneer in integrating Western artistic expressiveness into the restrained nature of Chinese landscape painting. His acclaimed splashed ink technique is masterfully exemplified in this painting and enlivens the composition with an abstract illusion of spatial depth. The composition appears to be fresh, as if only painted yesterday. The image that seems to come alive reveals the shadowy shapes of hillside huts beneath the mist, at the same time concealing them within the mountains. The artist's deep appreciation of Nature fires the viewer's imagination and draws the viewer into the painting.

Li Keran (李可染)



***Sunset after Rain*, Li Keran (Scroll, mounted and framed, ink and colour on paper; estimate: HK\$ 1.8 – 2.2 million /US\$232,300 - 283,900)**

Li Keran's landscape paintings reveal his experience of Western realist art and Chinese brush and ink painting. His hallmark style of using layered ink technique (*jimo fa*) that he acquired after the 1950's, makes his landscapes rich in texture, emotions and perspective, creating light on paper that glows and contrasts with the dark black ink of the surrounding mountains. Painted in the 1970s' and published in the fifth issue of *Collection of Chinese Calligraphy and Painting*, this work was displayed at the Exhibition of Fine Works of

Traditional Chinese Painting Masters which was held at the Li Keran Art Museum of Xuzhuo, Jiangsu in September, 1999. From his observations of landscapes and through his cultivation of the mind and of his art, Li presents the genuine beauty of nature with his brush, inspiring truer and more beautiful artistic interpretations.

Xu Beihong (徐悲鸿)

A highlight of the Modern Chinese Painting includes six works from the collection of Mr. Jacques Reclus: *Sketch of Jacques Reclus* by Xu Beihong, *Yaks* by Wu Zuoren, *Landscape and Flowers* by Xiao Shufang, *Shrimps and Lychees* by Qi Baishi.



Jacques Reclus (1894-1984) was born in Paris, France, coming from a long line of family of intellectuals and revolutionaries, including renowned geographer Elisee Reclus (1830-1905). The young Reclus went to China in the 1920s and took up teaching positions at universities in Beijing, Kunming, and Shanghai. Known for his kindness and eloquence in the Chinese language, Reclus was widely recognised for his contribution as an educator. Reclus married Huang Shuyi in 1939. A lover of Chinese culture, he struck up deep friendships with

Qi Baishi, Xu Beihong, Wu Zuoren and Xiao Shufang, and had many paintings personally dedicated to him (lots 693 to 698 in this sale). ***Sketch of Jacques Reclus (scroll, mounted and framed, charcoal on paperboard; estimate: HK\$900,000-1.2 million/US\$116,100-154,800)*** is a prime example of the close friendship between Reclus and Xu Beihong, who called Reclus as "my dear friend" in this sketch. According to Reclus' daughter Magali Reclus, Xu had stayed with the family briefly and the two families remained in close contact since then. *Sketch of Jacques Reclus* is an exceptional portrait of Reclus that features the artist's skilful draftsmanship and is a fine example of Xu working in his early Western academic style, with realism being a key feature.

FINE CHINESE CLASSICAL PAINTINGS AND CALLIGRAPHY

Tuesday, May 26, 2009 - 10:00 am



Shitao (石涛)

This sale presents valuable works by Chinese masters from the 13th to 19th century, including a rare album of ten leaves ***Scholars and***

***Landscapes* by Shitao (estimate: HK\$5 – 6 million / US\$645,200 – 774,200).** A descendant of the Ming royal family, Shitao spent his life

travelling to China's renowned mountains, studying calligraphy and painting, and reinterpreting techniques with a vigorous and free style of his own. His artistic maturity reached its peak through his landscape paintings when, since middle age, he spent most of his life roaming the great Huangshan Mountains, becoming familiar with every single grass

and tree, and becoming completely attuned to Nature. His works, lively and unrestrained, reveal a profundity and ingenuity that cover the full range of Nature, from “sky to earth.” His use of space, light, proportion and the layout of every tree, river and rock approaches the richness and wonder of nature with a Zen sense of Creation, untouched and pure.

Through his delicate depiction of the layers of peaks, ancient pines twisting through, and the rolling clouds above Huangshan Mountain, the viewer senses his deep sense of his love for the landscape. By employing a bird’s eye view yet filling the eye with details, he captures the spatial vastness of mountains and rivers but also draws himself and his friends into the landscape. Symbolic of the reclusive lives led by people of leisure at the end of the Ming dynasty, one senses a tinge of regret in the characters. Although a monk, Shitao’s paintings reveal a man rich in feeling and passionate about nature.



Jiao Bingzhen (焦秉贞)



***Emperor Kangxi’s Expedition to Southern China* by Jiao Bingzhen (colored silk scroll, handscroll; estimate: HK\$1.2 – 1.5 million/US\$154,800-193,500)**

Most of the handscrolls of the court painting academies of the Qing Dynasty depict emperors, queens and scenes documenting the emperors’ tours, campaigns, hunting, dinner parties, celebrations and other important events of the Dynasty. In an effort to appease the conflicts between the Manchu and the Han people, between the ruling class and working class, and to win over the gentry in Southern China, Emperor Kang Xi (Xuan Ye), made six inspection tours to Southeastern China from the 23rd to 46th years of Kangxi Period (1664 – 1707). Beginning from Beijing, the tours took him to Jiangsu via Shandong, where he travelled south on rivers to Suzhou, Nanjing, Hangzhou, and in his most distant travel, even crossed Qiantang River to Shaoxing. Court painters were ordered to commemorate these historic journeys in brush and ink.

Jiao Bingzhen, a royal court painter and an official in the ruling period of Emperor Kangxi serving in the inner court, was famous for figure, landscape and flower paintings.



During his service in the royal court, he learned Western painting skills from the European missionaries who taught oil painting at court, absorbing Western techniques of shade and light and perspective. As a result, his works integrate traditional strokes of Chinese paintings with a Western sense of perspective, proportion and light and shade, giving them a remarkable realism. This highlight is a depiction of the majestic scenes of Emperor Kangxi’s inspection tours to southern China, where we can observe the Western perspective technique skilfully applied with meticulous strokes and rich colours. The rivers are alive with boats, the waters still and quiet, the streets bustling with activity within the rows of houses. As is customary even now with political imagery, Jiao painted a flattering scene—he emphasizes the fertility of the land and the prosperity of the empire with his rich green palette and detailed and organised composition.

Chen Hongshou (陈洪绶)

The sale will present to our collectors two time-honoured items collected by the Crown Prince Aschwin de Lippe: ***Lady with Attendants* by Chen Hongshou** and the ***Lake and Woods* by**

Gong Xian. Aschwin de Lippe was a member of the former German Jena Royal family and he was especially fond of medieval sculptures from India and paintings from ancient China. Upon his retirement in 1973, he became Honorary Curator of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Throughout his academic and collecting career, he published numerous articles and works on Indian and Chinese art, making remarkable contributions.



Chen Hongshou: *Lady with Attendants* (Hanging scroll, ink and colour on silk; estimate: HK\$1 – 1.2 million/US\$129,000-154,800).

The achievements of Chen Hongshou have a special significance for the period between late Ming and early Qing Dynasties. In the last days of the Ming Dynasty he was first a student at the Imperial College at the Palace; when the Ming Dynasty fell, he became a monk and made a living by selling paintings. He was a master painter of figures, landscape and wildlife. In his early years he studied painting under Lan Ying and borrowed from Li Gonglin and other masters of the Tang and Song Dynasty to form a school of his own style. During the reign of Chong Zhen, he was ordered by the Emperor to copy the figures of emperors from successive dynasties, giving him a rare chance to master his artistic skills. In this work, elegant ladies are portrayed in a somewhat exaggerated manner, as ladies of leisure but with a slightly ironical and satirical twist. With a rich decorative tone and finely honed lines reminiscent of wood-carvings, the artist shows his independent spirit by deliberately departing from the realism that is all the rage during his time.

Gong Xian (龚贤)



***Lake and Woods* (Hanging scroll, ink on paper; estimate: HK\$300,000-400,000/US\$38,700-51,600)** is another work from the collection of Crown Prince Aschwin de Lippe. The artist Gong ranked first among the eight top-rated artists in Nanjing in the early Qing period, and was the most accomplished. A master painter of landscape, he learned from Dong Yuan, Mi Fu, Wu Zhen and Shen Zhou. As he attached great importance to Nature, most of his paintings are scenes in and around Nanjing. He further advanced his technique by employing heavy ink and vigorous strokes to depict the grandeur of mountains and rivers with overlapping shades of colours, creating a unique style of gravity and beauty. This work impresses with the painter's vision of wonderment yet infused with tranquillity and a naturalistic sense of reality that is not mediocre; as if he seeks the extraordinary out of the ordinary. Gong's clever use of ink, with all its nuances, creates a contrast between black and white, real and imaginary, light and shade. Together with powerful strokes, his technique contributes to a depth and brilliance to the painting, yet ironically conveyed through a lyrical, tranquil scene that liberates the mind and body.

Tang Dai (唐岱) and Zhang Ruo'ai (张若霁)



Fans, rich in cultural connotation and closely connected with Buddhist culture, have long been a part of Chinese culture. Since ancient times, men of letters have been writing poems and painting on fans, shaping the traditional artistic form of fan calligraphy and painting – an indispensable element in traditional Chinese calligraphy and painting. Fan painting and calligraphy began during the Yongle period of the Ming Dynasty. Given the small size and particular shape of the fan, and the demanding requirements of

materials, it is usually very difficult for artists to master the art. To encapsulate lofty concepts and intricate subject matter into the tiny space of the fan further requires the artist to have a well-planned design before he begins. Against the backdrop of such challenges, this *set of ten folding fans with Tang Dai's painting and Zhang Ruoai's calligraphy* (estimate: **HK\$500,000 - 700,000/ US\$64,500 - 90,300**) is truly a cultural and artistic treasure sought after by collectors the world over.

Tang Dai served as Minister of the Interior during the Kangxi period but he was a highly accomplished painter. The Emperor Kangxi even bestowed the enviable title of the nation's highest-ranked painter on him, and dedicated a poem to his painting *Thousand Mountains in the Setting Sun*. "The paintings of Tang appeal to me, for my frequent and untiring quest, their underlying messages remain to be further explored", "Placed between such blurred boundaries, who can tell the difference between one matter from another?". A master of landscape painting, Tang painted with unhurried and rounded strokes, a skill common among artists of the Song Dynasty.

During his lifetime, **Zhang Ruo'ai** was an expert in calligraphy and painting as well as art appreciation. Taking up the legacy of renowned Ming Chinese landscape painter Wang Guxiang and wildlife painter Zhou Zhimian, Zhang's paintings of landscapes and wildlife are highly acclaimed in authoritative publications such as *Shiqu Treasured Arts, Annals of Calligraphy and Painting of Calligraphers and Painters of the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties, Bixiaoxuan Collection of Calligraphy and Painting*, and others. This fan, painted on its front with landscape by Tang Dai and calligraphy by Zhang Ruo'ai, is delicate in both technique and artistic sensitivity.

High-resolution IMAGES and captions can be downloaded here:

<http://shikmyipog/2009/20Christie/20Hong/20Kong/20Spring/20Auctions/Chinese/20Classical/20Paintings/20and/20Chinese/20Modern/20Paintings/>

The CATALOGS for these sales are available online:

Fine Chinese Classical Paintings & Calligraphy: http://www.christies.com/cCatalogues/index.aspx?Sale_ID=22527&cCatParameter=cCat/2527/03/01

Fine Chinese Modern Paintings: http://www.christies.com/cCatalogues/index.aspx?Sale_ID=22526&cCatParameter=cCat/2526/03/01

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Auctions:

Fine Modern Chinese Paintings

Monday, May 25, at 10am

Fine Classical Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy

Tuesday, May 26, at 10am

Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre

Previews:

Taiwan

Saturday to Sunday, May 16-17

Fubon Life Assurance Building

Hong Kong

Friday to Monday, May 22-25

Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre

Fine Chinese Modern Paintings

Friday May 22- Sunday May 24

Fine Classical Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy

Friday May 22- Monday May 25

About Christie's

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