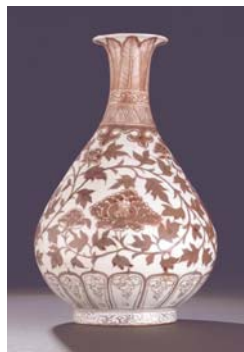


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EXCEPTIONAL IMPERIAL CHINESE CERAMICS AND WORKS OF ART TO BE OFFERED AT CHRISTIE'S HONG KONG SPRING AUCTIONS



The Imperial Sale

Important Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art

30 May 2006

Hong Kong - In commemoration of 20 years in Hong Kong, Christie's forthcoming Spring *Imperial Sale* will be dedicated to the celebration of Chinese Art.

Pola Antebi, Senior Vice President and Specialist Head of the Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art Department at Christie's, said: "This year also marks the 10th anniversary of the Imperial Sale which was first held in the Spring of 1996 and has continued to be an immensely successful and highly anticipated sale over the past ten years. We expect this year's sale to be another great success."

Amongst the highlights will be highly important pieces selected from the Song (960-1279), Yuan (1279-1368), Ming (1368-1644), and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties. Taking the centre-stage is a magnificent early Ming

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underglaze copper-red pear-shaped vase decorated with a peony scroll from the Hongwu period (1368-1398) (Lot 1248, Estimate on Request). This is the only copper-red vase of the Hongwu period in perfect condition to be offered at auction in more than 15 years.

The vase was originally inherited by a Scottish couple who used it as a lamp stand and did not know of its importance until they had seen a related example in a museum. When Christie's London sold the vase in 1984, it realised a price £421,200 (US\$367,500); then a record price for a Far Eastern work of art sold at Christie's (*see Notes to Editors*). It is expected that the vase will break another auction record this season. Ceramics with underglaze copper-red decoration are very rare as copper mineral is known to be notoriously difficult to control during the firing process, resulting in a grey or almost colourless design. The failure rate was so high that the Jingdezhen potters had to plead with officials to reduce the order as requested by the Court. The peony vase on offer is one of those rare successes where the pattern is expertly executed and the colour, an attractive crush raspberry-red tone, is evenly distributed. As the potting of the neck is narrow and thin, many bottle vases of this shape have their necks repaired, or even top part of their necks replaced, but the present vase is extraordinarily in fine condition.

One of the rarest pieces from the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) is an extremely rare blue and white hexagonal vase from the Qianlong period (1736-1795) (lot 1238, Estimate HK\$4,000,000-6,000,000/ US\$520,000-770,000). This vase of elegant and slender baluster form is known to have been a shape designed by the famous superintendent of the Imperial kilns at Jingdezhen, Tang Ying (1682-1756), and specifically made to commemorate Emperor Qianlong's birthday. The auspicious theme is suggested by the lively upright dragons, each holding in their front paws a 'Shou' character symbolizing longevity. The vase comes from collection of Evelyn Annenberg Hall whose collection was 100% sold recently at Christie's New York in March 2006.

The literati enjoyed tremendous prestige and freedom during the Song dynasty (960-1279); the early Song emperors were among the most enlightened rulers of China, and had adopted a new philosophy known as neo-Confucianism. In Confucian ideology music was regarded as one of the accomplishments of learned men, and Confucius himself was a talented player of the *qin*, a seven-string flat musical instrument made of *wutong* wood. In the Spring auction, there will be great excitement generated by a newly re-discovered Northern Song Palace *qin* (lot 1233, Estimate: HK\$2,800,000-3,500,000/ US\$360,000-450,000) which was last seen by the preeminent *qin* specialist from the Beijing Palace Museum in 1955; at the time, the *qin* was in the hands of a private collector and it had since disappeared. The *qin* is inscribed on the interior with the characters, *Kaibao Wuchen*, which reveals that it was made in the 9th year (968 AD) of the first Song Emperor, Zhao Kuangyin, whose reign title is known as Taizu (r. 960-976). The *qin*'s name, *Yuting Qingyun*, 'Pure Harmony of the *Yun* Palace', was probably given sometime during the Northern Song period, and its seal mark *Yushu Zibao*, 'Treasures of the Imperial Library', indicates that it was originally in the Song Imperial collection.

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Other highlights from the sale include an extremely rare blue and white jar from the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368) (lot 1384, Estimate: HK\$7,000,000-9,000,000/ US\$900,000-1,200,000) exquisitely painted to depict a continuous landscape scene of pine trees, flowering prunus, and bamboo. These images form a theme known as the 'Three Friends of Winter': the upright pine remains green throughout the year; the bamboo bends but does not break; and the plum defies winter, blossoming in isolation and flowering in wind and snow. This theme was a powerful symbol of Confucian virtue, and emerged in literati paintings during the Yuan period under Mongol rule when Chinese scholars went into seclusion and abstained from official court life. On ceramics the painting on this jar is one of the earliest depictions of the 'Three Friends' before the imagery found popularity in the later Ming and Qing dynasties.

An important blue and white jar from the Chenghua period (1465-1487) (lot 1387, Estimate on Request) is painted with an autumn floral scene subtly detailed with two insects in flight. Ceramics from the Chenghua period were highly prized as early as the late Ming dynasty 17th century when the scholar Shen Defu (1578-1642) wrote, "Among the porcelains of the present dynasty... the Xuande ones were once deemed the most precious but recently their supremacy has been taken over by the Chenghua pieces". It is not surprising that Chenghua ceramics are greatly revered since prodigious amount of care and expense went into their production. Whilst it cost 8,000 ounces of silver a year to produce ceramics in the Yongzheng reign (1723-1735), in the Chenghua reign it was a staggering tens of thousands of ounces of silver each year to fund porcelain production.

Obviously no expense was spared by the Qing Court in the Qianlong period (1736-1795) in the production of decorative items such as the extremely rare pair of cinnabar lacquer floral-lobed boxes each containing smaller internal boxes to suit the Emperor's fastidious taste (lot 1281, Estimate: HK\$2,000,000-3,000,000/ US\$260,000-380,000); an elaborately carved Rococo-style *zitan* pudding-stone inset table screen, to grace among the Emperor's other Occidental designs (lot 1282, Estimate: HK\$1,000,000-1,500,000/ US\$130,000-190,000); a kesi panel with the Sanxing, Three Star Gods, a traditional theme for hanging in the Palaces (lot 1264, Estimate HK\$3,000,000-4,000,000/ US\$390,000-510,000); and a pair of cloisonné enamel peacock-form censers and covers, for the Emperor's amusement of these exotic birds that roamed in the gardens of the Yuanmingyuan (lot 1283, Estimate: HK\$2,000,000-3,000,000/ US\$260,000-380,000).

The market for Chinese works of art has grown rapidly in the last few years with a large number of new collectors entering the market. Among the most notable Chinese works of art to be offered this Spring are a bamboo brushpot carved to depict the 'Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove' and inscribed with the maker's mark, Gu Jue, dated to the Kangxi period (lot 1226, Estimate HK\$3,000,000-4,000,000/ US\$390,000-510,000); an important *huanghuali* table-chest top carved with dragons formerly from the Renaissance Museum, California, dated to the Ming Wanli period (1573-1619) (lot 1232, Estimate HK\$3,000,000-4,000,000/ US\$390,000-510,000); and a large cloisonné enamel bottle vase (lot 1558, Estimate HK\$400,000-600,000/ US\$52,000-77,000) which once belonged to Sir George Des Voeux, Governor of Hong Kong, 1887-1891.

Notes to Editors:

The Hongwu underglaze copper-red vase (lot 1248) has previously been sold 3 times and the dates and prices achieved are listed below:

- Christie's London, 10 April 1984, lot 208
Sold for £421,200 (US\$615,000)
- Sotheby's Hong Kong, 17 May 1988, lot 12
Sold for HK\$17,050,000 (US\$2,280,000)
- Christie's Hong Kong, 5 November 1997, lot 901
Sold for HK\$22,020,000 (US\$2,860,000)

Pre-sale exhibitions:

Singapore	14 - 15 April	Grand Hyatt Singapore
Tokyo	24 - 25 April	Park Hyatt Tokyo
Shanghai	10 - 11 May	The Westin Shanghai
Beijing	13 - 14 May	St. Regis Beijing
Taipei	20 - 21 May	Fubon Life Assurance Building
Hong Kong	26 - 29 May	Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre

Auctions:

The Imperial Sale, 30 May 2006, 10:30am

Important Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art, 30 May 2006, 2:00pm

Convention Hall, Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre

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Images available upon request

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