

Press Release

CHRISTIE'S

佳士得香港有限公司

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**CHRISTIE'S HONG KONG TO OFFER EXCEPTIONAL IMPERIAL
CHINESE WORKS OF ART IN THE SPRING AUCTIONS**



An important and extremely rare early Ming blue and white basin
Yongle period (1403-1425)
Estimate: HK\$12,000,000-18,000,000/US\$1,600,000-2,300,000

The Imperial Sale

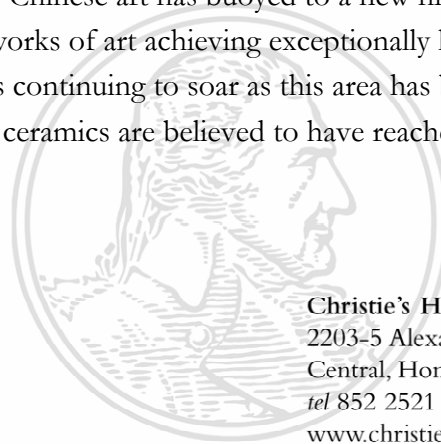
Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art

Fine Chinese Jade Carvings from the Tianhe Shanfang Collection

30 May 2005

Hong Kong – An exceptional selection of Chinese Imperial works of art, ceramics and jade carvings from the Tianhe Shanfang collection will be offered at Christie's Hong Kong Spring auctions on 30 May 2005.

Pola Antebi, Senior Vice President and Head of the Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art Department at Christie's said: "The market for Chinese art has buoyed to a new high over the last year with prices for rare ceramics and superb works of art achieving exceptionally high prices at auction. We see the demand for Ming ceramics continuing to soar as this area has been undervalued over the past years, whereas Qing polychrome ceramics are believed to have reached their premium."



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“We are also pleased that Christie’s, for the first time, will stage the auctions at the internationally-renowned Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre. It will provide greater space for collectors to view the treasures in full grandeur.”

Christie’s Hong Kong will offer a selection of very rare early Ming dynasty blue and white ceramics in the forthcoming sales. One of the rarest pieces on offer in *The Imperial Sale* is an important and extremely rare early Ming blue and white basin of the Yongle period (1403-1425), expertly rendered in the finest cobalt blue to depict auspicious fruit and flowers (estimate: HK\$12,000,000-18,000,000/ US\$1,600,000-2,300,000). The basin is unusually large; an object of this size would have required expert potting skill in order to maintain its shape during the firing process which probably accounts for their limited production. The present example is only one of three bowls of this type in private collections to have appeared at public auctions, whilst few are in prized collections in the Beijing Palace Museum, Taipei’s National Palace Museum and the British Museum. This ‘fruit spray’ basin is much admired by collectors for its lustrous glaze, fine body material, superb painting quality, and perfect condition.

Among other early Ming blue and white ceramics on offer is an exceptionally rare jar bearing a Xuande mark and of the period (1426-1435) from the Robert Chang Collection. Expected to fetch in excess of HK\$10,000,000/US\$1,300,000, this jar is painted with two mythical dragons striding confidently on the exterior rounded body. Xuande marked jars rarely come up at auction and this example decorated with an extremely rare pattern can only be compared to two others, one in the collection of the Palace Museum, Beijing and the other in Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Also included for auction is a large barbed-rim charger decorated with bunches of grapes growing on vines, a motif that was introduced to China probably from the Middle East through maritime trade (estimate: HK\$3,000,000-4,000,000/ US\$390,000-510,000).

Qing dynasty ceramics continue to be a dominant force in the current market, and Christie’s has chosen a special group of Qing ceramics that were ingeniously made to imitate other materials, tantalizing the eye of the viewer. These Imperial novelty pieces were produced during the zenith of the Qing dynasty 18th century when innovative ideas abound and potters at Jingdezhen were supremely confident in supplying top quality ceramics for amusement of the Court. One example is a magnificent pair of famille rose *fabua*-style jars and covers from the Qianlong period (1736-1795), (estimate: HK\$10,000,000-15,000,000/ US\$1,300,000-1,900,000). These jars represent the ultimate refinement of a decorative technique that appears first in the Ming dynasty produced by the kilns in Shanxi province, and was later adopted by the Imperial kilns at Jingdezhen. This unique style of decoration originated in cloisonné enamel on metalwork that was popular during the early Ming 15th

century. On ceramics, the technique involved constructing a basic pattern of raised lines demarcating the overall design and then filling in the areas with different glaze colours. The Qianlong jars on offer, in this instance, are designed with raised outlines to depict egrets, variously in flight and wading in water amidst half-submerged stalks of lotus blooms and large leaves all against a bright blue-enamel ground giving them an unrivalled jewel-like quality.

An example of a ceramic vessel purposely copying cloisonné enamel can be seen in a small censer of the Qianlong period (estimate: HK\$2,800,000-3,500,000/ US\$360,000-450,000). At first sight, this exquisitely painted censer looks deceptively like metalwork but the gilding and colours are in fact enamels painted on a ceramic body. The ceramic form also replicated cast bronzes such as the Qianlong archaistic form *gu*-shaped vase (estimate: HK\$1,200,000-1,800,000/ US\$150,000-230,000). The shape of this unusual vessel with its wide trumpet mouth is taken from Shang dynasty (1600-1100 BC) ritual bronze vessels but the ceramic copy is unmistakably Qing dynasty in taste with its distinctive trigram motif on the mid-section. A ceramic box enamelled to imitate books bound with silk brocade is an opulent example of a group of objects made for the Emperor as 'play things' (estimate: HK\$200,000-300,000/ US\$26,000-38,000). The box was most probably used as a scholar's object for Qianlong's study and bears the *Leshang Tang* hallmark. The *Leshang Tang* name was a title given to a compilation of poems that were composed by Qianlong in his youth, and it is apt that the ceramic form serves as a reminder of the Emperor's literary work.

A man of immense scholarly talents, the Qianlong Emperor took much pride in scholastic pursuits, and the Imperial spinach-green jade 'double-dragon' seal from the Tianhe Shanfang Collection is the epitome of the Emperor's preoccupation in such matters (estimate: HK\$4,000,000-6,000,000/ US\$520,000-770,000). Carved with the four characters *Wanquan Zhuangbao*, 'Treasure of the Wanquan Retreat', it was recorded that Qianlong commissioned the seal to mark an occasion when his own research uncovered certain omissions in the Palace Records that led the Emperor to identify a small village northwest of Beijing as that of a place named *Wanquan Zhuang*.

Much of Qianlong's tradition was emulated by his son Emperor Jiaqing, and is most clearly reflected in the Imperial white jade 'double-dragon' seal carved with the six characters, *Zhou Jia Yan Xi Zi Bao*, 'A Treasure in auspicious celebration of a sixtieth birthday' (estimate: HK\$3,000,000-4,000,000/ US\$390,000-510,000). The 'dragon' seal is very much in keeping with the style of Qianlong's own seals, and this particular Jiaqing example is one of the last seals of the Jiaqing reign when it was commissioned to celebrate the Emperor's 60th birthday in 1819. Obviously both Qianlong and Jiaqing Emperors followed closely their illustrious predecessor, Emperor Kangxi, whose personal seals are extremely rare, and a pair of soapstone material is being offered (estimate: HK\$1,000,000-1,500,000/ US\$130,000-190,000). The seal chops are carved with the characters: *Sanwu Jinyou*, 'The

three voids and nine districts', and *Rijing Yunshen*, 'As brightly reflected as the sun and extensive as the clouds'; both these phrases embody the aspirations of the high-minded Emperor in adopting Confucian ethics and working to maintain peace for the nation.

Extraordinary scholar's objects in the *Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art* sale include a group of fine bamboo carvings from the Dexinshuwu Collection assembled over the last 20 years. Among the highlights is a spectacular bamboo brushpot carved with minute details to depict travelers in a mountain landscape, and signed by the master carver, Gu Jue, who was active in the late 17th century Kangxi period (estimate: HK\$1,000,000-1,500,000/ US\$130,000-190,000); and a fierce looking bamboo Zhong Kui, the legendary subjugator of demons who is portrayed overseeing his charge although seemingly unaware of two further mischievous imps behind his back, one drinking wine from a ewer as the other playfully climbs into Zhong Kui's large empty boot (estimate: HK\$450,000-600,000/ US\$58,000-77,000).

Pre-sale Exhibitions:

Shanghai	Portman Ritz-Carlton	May 9 – 10
Beijing	St. Regis Beijing	May 12 – 13
Taipei	Fubon Life Assurance Building	May 21 – 22
Hong Kong	Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre	May 27 – 29

Auction:

The Imperial Sale, May 30 at 2:00pm
Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art, May 30 at 3:00pm
Fine Chinese Jade Carvings from the Tianhe Shanfang Collection, May 30 at 5:00pm
Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre

More information about The Imperial Sale, Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art, Fine Chinese Jade Carvings from the Tianhe Shanfang Collection can be found on 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. 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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