

**For Immediate Release**

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**DECORATE YOUR TABLE WITH CHELSEA GARDENERS**

**Six small rare 18<sup>th</sup> century Chelsea porcelain figures of gardeners to be offered at Christie's London and to be on public view during an 18<sup>th</sup> century Chelsea porcelain exhibition at Christie's South Kensington (23-25 May 2007)**

*British Ceramics*

15 November 2007

*The Chelsea Garden: An Exhibition of Chelsea Botanical Porcelain from Private Collections*  
23-25 May 2007

Christie's South Kensington

**London** – Six small 18<sup>th</sup> century Chelsea porcelain figures of gardeners are to be offered for sale in the *British Ceramics* sale at Christie's South Kensington on 15 November 2007. Rare to the market,



they were made by the celebrated Chelsea porcelain factory in the 1760s and are thought to have been used as table decorations. They will be on public view for the first time during a Christie's South Kensington exhibition entitled *The Chelsea Garden: An exhibition of Chelsea botanical porcelain from Private Collections* (23-25 May 2007), timed to coincide with the RHS Chelsea Flower Show.

These six lively, amusing figures of gardeners were made by the Chelsea porcelain factory in the 1760s and are just over two inches high, hand-painted and applied with miniature flowers around the base. Three of the gardeners are modelled scything grass; another raking; one pushing a wheelbarrow and a further pushing a roller (estimate: £500-1,200 each). They are thought to have been used in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as table decorations, where they would have been included in fantasy landscapes forming table centrepieces. Sugar was seen as a great luxury in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century, and as a result extraordinary confections were created by wealthy household cooks to impress guests with their sugared desserts. To do so in an amusing way was very much the fashion of the period.



In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century the Chelsea porcelain factory was at the forefront of producing luxury porcelain fantasies, capturing the imagination of Royalty, the aristocracy and rich patrons. On the Continent factories were already producing dishes in the shape of fruit or animals, and the Chelsea factory mimicked this. Small 'boxes' and tureens made in the form of lemons, apples or melons began to appear alongside tureens for savoury vegetable dishes in the shape of asparagus, artichoke or cauliflower. Dishes were also made in the form of leaves or flowerheads.

Chelsea was founded by the French Huguenot Nicholas Sprimont in 1744, moving to purpose-built premises in Chelsea in around 1749, to what is now Lawrence Street, close to the then pleasure gardens at Ranelagh. The factory was inspired by the leading Continental factories of Sevres and Meissen; from Sevres came the style of extremely refined delineated flower-painting; while Meissen gave inspiration for moulded forms, and a looser style of flower-painting. Oriental forms were also used. In time Chelsea became famous for its botanical decorations with bouquets of blooming roses, scattered butterflies and insects appearing on the creamy white porcelain. Botanical prints from many sources were copied to provide flower designs. Since the factory was not far from the Chelsea Physic Garden, Sir Hans Sloane is credited for allowing the decorators to copy from his famous collection of botanical prints including the artist Georg Dionysius Ehret among others.

A more direct inspiration also existed. Chelsea itself had long been famous for the quality of its gardens, being full of market gardens and orchards. Therefore, the local environment and local produce combined with exotic imports and well-informed aristocratic patronage combined to create unique inspiration for the decorators at the factory.

Around fifty stunning 18<sup>th</sup> century botanical Chelsea porcelain examples will feature at an exhibition at Christie's South Kensington from 23 to 25 May 2007 entitled *The Chelsea Garden: An Exhibition of Chelsea Botanical Porcelain from Private Collections*, coinciding with the RHS Chelsea Flower Show. Featuring rare and beautiful botanical plates and dishes produced in the 'Hans Sloane' style, other pieces include boxes and tureens shaped as fruit and vegetables, and dishes moulded with flowers and garden blooms.



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Images available on request

Visit Christie's website at [www.christies.com](http://www.christies.com)

**CHRISTIE'S SOUTH KENSINGTON**

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**Notes to Editors:**

***The Chelsea Garden: An Exhibition of Chelsea Botanical Porcelain from Private Collections***

**Public Viewing:**

Wednesday 23 May 9:00 am - 05:00 pm

Thursday 24 May 9:00 am - 05:00 pm

Friday 25 May 9:00 am - 12:00 pm