

Contact: Victoria Cheung 852.2978.9919 vccheung@christies.com
Dick Lee 852.2978.9966 dlee@christies.com

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CHRISTIE'S HONG KONG PRESENTS OUTSTANDING CLASSICAL CHINESE PAINTINGS AND CALLIGRAPHY IN SPRING SALES



Fine Classical Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy, 29 May 2006

The Imperial Sale, 30 May 2006

Hong Kong – Christie's Hong Kong, celebrating its 20th anniversary this year, will offer a superlative selection of works by esteemed Chinese masters in its *Fine Classical Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy* Spring sale on 29 May. Among the 207 lots on offer, a special group of 21 works including rare Imperial court paintings will be sold in *The Imperial Sale* to be held on the following day.

Among the highlights are remarkable works by Wang Meng and Ni Zan, two of the four great masters from the Yuan Dynasty. *Brewing Tea* by Wang Meng (1308-1385) depicts layered mountain ranges in dense, complexly textured strokes, applied with great verve (Lot 609, estimate: HK\$6,000,000-8,000,000/ US\$774,200-1,032,300). There are no more than eleven extant works by Wang Meng. *Brewing Tea* is the only piece available in the market, making it exceedingly scarce. The other ten pieces by Wang are now housed in the National Palace Museum in Taipei, the Palace Museum in Beijing, and the Shanghai Museum.

In contrast to the sophistication and refinement of Wang Meng's work, *Bamboo* by Ni Zan (1301-1374) demonstrates the beauty of simplicity through a few simple strokes in monochrome black (Lot 602, estimate:

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HK\$3,000,000-4,000,000/ US\$387,100-516,100). This work also features two inscriptions on its mounting by a famous Qing collector Liang Zhang-ju (1775-1849).

Of particular note among the works to be featured in *The Imperial Sale* is a group of five finely rendered rubbings of Buddhist images outlined in gold (Lot 1294, estimate: HK\$2,500,000-3,000,000/ US\$326,000-381,000). These images were originally from a set of seven commissioned by the Qianlong Emperor in 1777. Taken from the pictorial tiles of stone steles at the seven stupa, or Buddhist shrines in Bei Hai, the Buddhist figures are etched in gold paint. Appearing in gilt calligraphy at the top of each are abstruse Buddhist eulogies in Han, Manchurian, Mongolian, and Tibetan texts. The images were presented by the emperor to the Bolin Temple where, by 1921, only five had survived the upheavals of the era. The Bolin Temple abbot at the time copied the text written by the Qianlong Emperor – “Stone Stele Inscriptions of the Seven Stupas”. These Buddhist images constitute an important page in the history of religious art in the Imperial palace collection.

Lohans, a breathtaking long-scroll painting, was given the inscription in a beautiful clerical script style by Song Ke, a renowned calligrapher from the early Ming Dynasty (Lot 1293, estimate: HK\$6,000,000- 8,000,000/ US\$770,000-1,000,000). The origin of this piece can be traced to no later than the Yuan Dynasty since only sixteen sages were honored in portraits of Arahants (enlightened beings in Buddhism) prior to the mid-Northern Song period.

Exceptional paintings and calligraphy from the Imperial collection of the Qing Emperors have become highly sought after among collectors. Taking the centre-stage of the sale is *Immortals Playing Chess* by Qiu Ying (circa 1495-1552), a highly acclaimed master from the Ming Dynasty (Lot 1215, estimate on request). This work on offer was recorded in the *Shi Qu Bao Ji (Catalogue of Qing Palace Works)* during the golden age of the Qianlong Period. Qiu Ying is famed for his magnificent depictions of landscapes, pavilions, towers, and human characters in deep greenish-blue. In this handscroll, he applied rich colours with great precision in order to resemble as closely as possible the style of Zhao Qianli, a highly reputed landscape artist from the Song Dynasty. Two literati playing chess are vividly portrayed, while light breezes brush the willow fronds, and women are waving fans or plucking lotus leaves beside a pond. Wen Zhengming, Qiu's fellow and also one of the four great artists of the Ming Dynasty, was captivated by the peace and serenity that the work emanates and hence he added an inscription to the painting in small standard script.

Equally splendid is *Swallows Returning in Spring* by Wen Zhengming (1470-1559) (Lot 1208, estimate: HK\$2,500,000-3,000,000/ US\$322,600-387,100). This exquisite work was in the collection of the Qing Emperors and was also recorded in the *Shi Qu Bao Ji (Catalogue of Qing Palace Works)*. Whilst primarily portraying landscape, Wen produced floral still lifes in free style as well. This heavily coloured scroll depicts peach blossoms and swallows, tinged with white against a cream-coloured silk fabric, giving a vivid and lifelike touch to the images. Flowing calligraphy in the running script style at the end of the scroll presents the poem *New Swallows*, the final line of which, “...but wishing to see the new swallows every year” adds a timeless lyricism to the work.

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Of the four great masters from the early Qing Dynasty, Wang Hui (1623-1717) displayed the most lively and incisive brushwork. *Landscape after Zhao Mengfu* is one of his most sensational scroll paintings, measuring ten meters long (Lot 628, estimate: HK\$2,000,000-2,500,000/ US\$258,100-322,600). It was executed during the artist's prime in pursuit of the achievements comparable to earlier masters.

Colophons by Song Scholars (10th-13th Century) on the Seal Script Calligraphy by Xu Changsi features inscriptions added through different generations since the Song Dynasty, revealing the work's provenance and history (Lot 588, estimate: HK\$6,000,000-7,000,000/ US\$774,200-903,200). The longer commentaries that follow were appended later by Li Zuoxian and Zhang Congyu. This work is a gem of rare and exceptional calligraphic art featuring the calligraphy of the great Confucian Zhu Xi (1130-1200).

Rubbings of stone inscriptions have always been highly coveted by both artists and collectors. *A 12th Century Rubbing of Wan Xizhi's Seventeen Tie*, or Volumes of the Seventeen Missing Lines, is believed to have been taken from *shuang-gou* (double outline) calligraphy executed by a Tang Dynasty calligrapher (Lot 1209, estimate: HK\$800,000-1,000,000/ US\$110,000-130,000). It was owned by Mi Fu during the Northern Song dynasty who removed a portion of the volume in trade for a painting, thus the missing seventeen lines. This volume of rubbings was produced on gold foil paper employing the *chan-yi*, or "cicada wing" technique using light-toned ink, and is a classic example of Song Dynasty rubbings. Prior to its appearance, scholarly opinion held that the only extant copy was to be found in Japan in the collection of Nakamura Fusetsu. This volume is destined to arouse furious bidding among avid collectors of stone-stele rubbings.

Bamboo by Zheng Xie (1693-1765) is a scroll painting of 2.21 meters high (Lot 672, estimate: HK\$1,200,000-1,500,000/ US\$154,800-193,500). This is an unusually imposing and grand work, though it also exudes elegance and refinement in its natural and graceful manner. It was on loan for an exhibition in the Tokyo National Museum in 1963.

Pre-sale exhibitions:

Singapore	14-15 April	Grand Hyatt Singapore
Shanghai	10-11 May	The Westin Shanghai
Beijing	13-14 May	St. Regis Beijing
Taipei	20-21 May	Fubon Life Assurance Building
Hong Kong	26-28 May	Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre

Auction:

Fine Classical Chinese Paintings and Calligraphy, 29 May 2006, 9:30am

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

Convention Hall, Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre

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