

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Christie's Hong Kong to Offer Important Private Collection of  
Rhinoceros Horn Carvings from the Songzhutang Collection**

*Important Chinese Rhinoceros Horn Carvings from the Songzhutang Collection*

Christie's Hong Kong

May 27, 2008

**Hong Kong** – Christie's announces that it will offer *Important Chinese Rhinoceros-Horn Carvings from the Songzhutang Collection* on May 27 in Hong Kong. This collection, passionately collected over several decades, offers 30 rare and important examples of rhinoceros horn carvings and is one of the finest known private collections of this treasured and honored art form. Long prized for medicinal and mystical powers, rhinoceros horn material was extremely precious and expensive to obtain, making carvings such as those presented in this collection difficult to acquire and rare to commission. Examples surviving to the present day are considered extremely scarce and highly sought-after. This sale offers a singular opportunity for collectors to acquire a work of art that for centuries has been considered among the most valued in China. It also allows a wider audience the opportunity to witness the beauty of this art form and to learn of its place in the history of China. Part of the proceeds from this special collection, expected to realize US\$5,000,000 – 7,000,000, will benefit the **Songzhutang Foundation** and its work to aid poverty-stricken school children in the northwestern regions and remote mountainous areas of Mainland China.

**Important Chinese Rhinoceros Horn Carvings from the Songzhutang Collection**



Rhinoceros horn carvings are among the rarest and most precious of ancient Chinese works of art, and this collection offers 30 exceedingly fine, museum-quality examples, each unique in its design and execution. The examples offered in this collection span a range of forms, motifs and techniques, and include signed works

from this art form's pre-eminent master carvers. Among the rich repertoire of subject matter are landscapes and figures, plants and insects, fish and birds, as well as scenes from daily life, plays on auspicious subjects, and themes taken from literary works of the time.

Among the highlights offered is a generously sized and exquisitely carved cup illustrating a scene described in the *Preface to Scholarly Gathering at the Orchid Pavilion* written by the great calligrapher Wang Xizhi (*illustrated on previous page*, estimate: HK\$ 3,000,000 - 4,000,000 / US\$ 380,000 – 500,000). An elegant and refined work, this cup features images of tall mountains, lush vegetation, an exquisite pavilion and scholars engaged in various scholarly activities, which together create a strong three dimensional story. The figure of Wang Xizhi (AD 307-365) is seen writing in the Orchid Pavilion, while several scholars engage in activities around the cup - some admiring the bamboo grove, others reciting poems under beneath pine trees. The figures are carved with great attention to detail: facial features are clearly discernible and expressions are vivid and animated. On the face of a cliff, in carved running script, is the phrase "*Lush woods, slender bamboo and winding stream*," inspired by the *Preface*. Also seen is the square seal with the surname of the carver, Fang Hongzhai, who was active from the late Ming to the early Qing dynasty and is known for extremely refined and detailed works, and whose work is found in the Palace Museum in Beijing. Very few rhinoceros horn carvings adopt such a theme as it involved numerous figures, elaborate scenery, and an extremely complex composition, therefore requiring superior carving skills. Above all, such a composition required an extraordinarily large rhinoceros horn of fine quality, making this example not only rare, but true masterpiece with great artistic value.



Of particular note in this collection is a Ming dynasty, 17<sup>th</sup> century vessel fashioned in the form of a large inverted lotus leaf (*illustrated left*, HK\$ 4,000,000 - 5,000,000 / US\$ 500,000 – 700,000). The material used in this work is smooth and lustrous, with a fresh and elegant design that shows great animation. It is skillfully rendered and highly naturalistic flora and fauna including a butterfly in flight. The interior

features a lively image of a Praying Mantis climbing over a long bladed leaf. The up-bending stem of the large lotus leaf has been hollowed out to form a spout, with the narrow channel connected to a hole in the base of the vessel so that liquid can be poured through it. The vessel bears the maker's sealmark *Zhi Sheng*, the style name of You Kan, considered

perhaps the greatest carver of the period. This cup, formerly in the E.T. Chow Collection, is exceptional in its superb quality, naturalistic detail and subject-matter.



Also of note is a rare rhinoceros horn figure of a *Budai* (*illustrated right*, estimate: HK\$ 3,000,000-4,000,000 / US\$ 380,000 – 500,000). The monk *Budai*, also known as the Laughing Buddha, is depicted seated amidst the spreading loose folds of his robes, his chest and large belly exposed, clutching in his right hand a tasseled rosary while five laughing boys clamber up his body.

The sale also includes a large libation cup with a dragon motif from the Qianlong period (*illustrated right*, estimate: HK\$ 3,000,000-4,000,000 / US\$ 380,000-500,000). This enormous cup of archaic bronze form has a beautifully contoured interior, and depicts thirty-nine lively *chi*-dragons of various sizes and shapes climbing around the sides and over into the interior of the vessel.



#### Images are available at

<http://cshk.myftp.org/Rhinocero%20Horns/>

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| <b><u>Auction</u></b> | <b><i>Important Chinese Rhinoceros Horn Carvings from the Songzhutang Collection</i></b> | May 27, 2008    |
| <b><u>Viewing</u></b> | New York: Christie's New York, Rockefeller Plaza                                         | March 14-17     |
|                       | Hong Kong<br>Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Center                                  | May 22-24, 2008 |

#### **About Christie's**

Christie's is the world's leading art business with global auction sales in 2007 that totaled £3.1 billion/\$6.3 billion. This marks the highest total in company and in art auction history. Christie's is a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service and expertise, as well as international glamour. Founded in 1766 by James Christie, Christie's conducted the greatest auctions of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, and today remains a popular showcase for the unique and the beautiful. Christie's offers over 600 sales annually in over 80 categories, including all areas of fine and decorative arts, jewellery, photographs, collectibles, wine, and more. Prices range from \$200 to over \$80 million. Christie's has 85 offices in 43 countries and 14 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Los Angeles, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Tel Aviv, Dubai and Hong Kong. Most recently, Christie's has led the market with expanded initiatives in emerging and new markets such as Russia, China, India and the United Arab Emirates, with successful sales and exhibitions in Beijing, Mumbai and Dubai.

\*Estimates do not include buyer's premium  
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