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Christie's Hong Kong Presents Imperial Masterpieces in May

Two Important Sales Presents Collectors with the Finest Treasures of Imperial China

The Imperial Sale, May 27

Elegance & Artistry: Treasures from a Private Collection, May 27

Hong Kong – Christie's will offer an array of rare masterpieces made for the Imperial court this May in Hong Kong during the annual Spring sale series. Two auctions encompassing some of the finest and rarest Imperial Works of Art will be presented during the day-long series of Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art auctions on May 27: *The Imperial Sale* and *Elegance and Artistry: Treasures from a Private Collection*, a single-owner collection of five remarkable Imperial masterpieces.

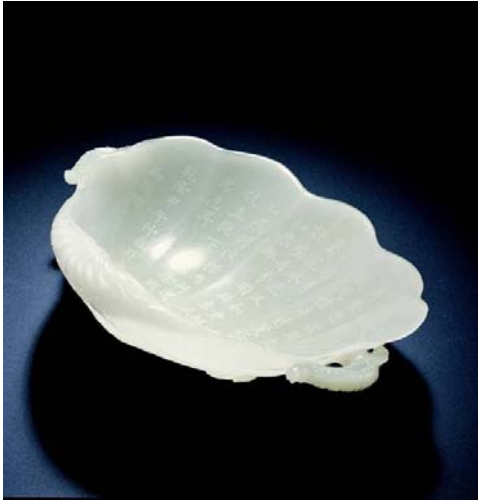
Elegance & Artistry: Treasures from a Private Collection

In conjunction with Christie's Hong Kong *Imperial Sale* on May 27, Christie's will offer a single owner collection of five superlative works of art in *Elegance and Artistry: Treasures from a Private Collection*. Each unique piece offered in this special collection is exemplary for its superb quality and rarity, making this a not-to-be-missed event during a day of sales devoted to the splendours of Chinese Imperial Ceramics and Works of Art.



Leading the collection is **an exquisite 17th century Mughal-style inscribed white jade cup carved in the form of a delicate shell inscribed with a date corresponding to 1774** (*image left, estimate upon request*). The Chinese Emperor Qianlong (1736-1795) was renowned for his patronage of the arts and appreciation of fine objects, and Mughal jade carvings from what is now northern India were among those objects that most appealed to him.

The Emperor displayed these jades in some of the most important palaces in the Forbidden City including the Palace of Heavenly Purity, the Hall of Mental Cultivation, and the Palace of Longevity. He was not simply a passionate collector, however, as he also enjoyed studying works of art and composed prose and poetry in honour of his most prized examples. In fact, seventy-four works of Qianlong's recorded prose and poetry commemorate jades from western lands, and on the emperor's instructions, a number were inscribed directly onto the pieces themselves.



This beautiful cup exemplifies the qualities that the Qianlong Emperor admired in Mughal jades. The stone itself is extremely fine, the design is elegant, and the skill of the lapidary who created it is exceptional. In the emperor's inscription (*image left*) he makes clear that he cannot decide if the shape of the cup resembles an up-turned lotus leaf or a shell, and he likens its overall appearance to the moon reflected on the water. The choice of a gardenia blossom to provide the base on which the cup rests is also appropriate to the colour and texture of the jade. The emperor

remarks upon the skilful carving, which although in very low relief, gives a clear impression of three-dimensionality. Qianlong could feel no surface changes with his fingers, but his eyes could see the layers of decoration. The western lapidaries were also famous for the fact that their carving was so well finished that no trace of the lathe remained, and the emperor repeats the myth that they carved jade using water.

Seeing this exquisite cup one can well understand the final line of the emperor's poem: *'I am simply unable to suppress the desire to gaze upon it repeatedly'*.

Also of note from this special collection is **an extremely rare and superbly enamelled pair of turquoise ground *famille rose* vases**, Qianlong sealmarks and of the period (1736-1795) (*estimate upon request*). *Famille rose* vases of this form, which is inspired by ancient jade *cong*, are exceptionally rare – only three other examples appear to have been published, the present vases being the only pair and the only examples in ground turquoise.

Majestic Treasures Abound in Christie's Imperial Sale

Among the many highlights offered in the various owner *Imperial Sale* is a **superb Imperial blue and white 'Dragon' vase**, Qianlong six-character sealmark and of the period (1736-1795) (*image right, estimate upon request*). A seemingly identical hexagonal vase can be found in The Palace Museum,



Beijing. It is recorded that the emperor Qianlong was very pleased with both the colour and the painting of this style of the vase; it is also recorded that the vase was specially made to commemorate an Imperial birthday.



An important early Ming copper-red-decorated *kendi* ewer from the Hongwu Period (1365-1398) (*illustrated left, estimate upon request*) is an important and fascinating piece in the history of Chinese ceramics in the 14th century and is among the sale's most anticipated offerings. An exceedingly rare example of the Chinese potter's art, it is one of a relatively few Hungwu underglazed red *kendi* to be preserved in international

collections. While underglazed-red vessels were not uncommon in the Yuan and early Ming dynasties, its scale of production did not increase greatly in the following centuries, unlike that of blue and white porcelain. This was largely due to a number of technical difficulties encountered by potters since copper as a colourant was volatile, and in effect produced an unpredictable range of shades from rich red to brownish grey. Notwithstanding, many of the very finest underglazed-red-decorated porcelains appear to have been made in the early Ming dynasty, during the Hongwu period.

Also of note is a rare Imperial gilt-bronze 'Dragon' temple bell dated to the 8th year of the Emperor Qianlong, corresponding to 1743 (estimate: HK\$10,000,000-12,000,000 / US\$1,300,000 – 1,500,000), a rare and exquisite Imperial cloisonné enamel ice-chest from the Qianlong period (1736-1797) (estimate: HK\$3,500,000-4,500,000 US\$460,000 – 580,000), and a rare portrait of the Daoguang Emperor, the sixth Qing dynasty emperor who reigned from 1820 to 1850 (estimate: HK\$3,000,000-5,000,000 / US\$ 390,000 – 650,000).

Auction:

Chinese Ceramics & Works of Art Sales:

Tuesday, May 27

<i>Magnificent Clocks for the Imperial Chinese Court from the Nezu Museum</i>	10am
<i>Elegance and Artistry: Treasures from a Private Collection</i>	11am
<i>The Imperial Sale</i>	11:15am
<i>Important Chinese Rhinoceros Horn Carvings from the Songzhutang Collection</i>	2:30pm
<i>Important Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art</i>	3:15pm

**Note times are approx.*

Viewing: Christie's, Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre

May 22-26

Travelling Exhibition Schedule

Select highlights from Christie's Hong Kong *Chinese Ceramics & Works of Art* sales will be on tour in the following cities this Spring: Beijing (April 24-25); Shanghai (April 27-28); Taipei (May 17-18); Hong Kong (May 22-25)

Exhibition schedule is subject to change.

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****IMAGES can be downloaded here:**

<http://cshk.myftp.org/Imperial%20Sale%20%26%20Elegance%20and%20Artistry/>