

For Immediate Release
13 May 2004

Contact: Jill Potterton 020.7752.3121 (jpotterton@christies.com)

A PEACEABLE KINGDOM

The Leo Mildenberg Collection of Ancient Animals
27 October 2004



An Egyptian faience hippopotamus, Dynasty XI-XII (2040-1783 B.C.), 5 in. (12.8 cm.) long
Estimate: £150,000-250,000

London – Christie’s is delighted to announce the sale of a remarkable private collection devoted exclusively to ancient Egyptian, Near Eastern, Greek and Roman animals or representations thereof. Meticulously amassed by the late Leo Mildenberg over more than 40 years, the collection, comprising approximately 1,200 animals in various materials – bronze, gold, stone, terracotta and faience – some sculptural, amultic or worn as jewellery, is expected to fetch up to £2.5 million.

Leo Mildenberg (1913–2001) – was a renowned numismatist, collector and philanthropist. Born in Kassel, Germany, Mildenberg studied Ancient History and Semitic languages at the University of Frankfurt until being forced out by the Nazis in 1933. His first stop was Leipzig and from there he went to Estonia, where he received his doctorate. In the winter of 1941, he was sent with many others to a Russian prison camp in Kazakhstan where he met his future wife, Elsie Brunner, a Zurich. In 1947, the couple, with the assistance of the Red Cross, fled the camp for Switzerland. Leo Mildenberg's experiences of Nazi Germany were later reflected in his collecting habits – all animals joining his collection had to be free, peaceful and spirited.

Leo Mildenberg began collecting animals during the 1950s when he joined the venerable Bank Leu in Zurich; within a few years he had set up a specialist numismatic department which later became the leading auction house in the world for ancient coins. By the 1970s, the collection has grown into a veritable zoo and, in 1981, Leo Mildenberg held his first public exhibition at the Cleveland Museum of Art. From there the collection travelled extensively throughout the United States, Israel and Europe – fourteen cities across three continents. In addition, four publications and a children's story inspired by some of the animals grew out of this collection.

Christie's historic auction will not only give curators and collectors an opportunity to view this outstanding collection in its entirety for the last time but also a chance to acquire one of these superb and much loved pieces. And with estimates ranging from £500 to £250,000, there really is something for everyone.

Sale Highlights

Several of the most prized animals in the collection were given their own names reflecting Leo Mildenberg's passion and affection for particular pieces. One such example is "Hubert", possibly the finest Middle Kingdom faience hippopotamus in private hands. In terms of both an animal sculpture and in the masterful drawing applied to its surface, a cross-eyed butterfly caught in the focus of a greedy frog, "Hubert" is unexcelled. Acquired in Paris in the 1970s, this exceptional piece has been exhibited around the world and is expected to fetch £150,000–250,000.

Another unique lot is "Julius", a large duck lamp – truly a monument to Imperial Roman bronze-casting skills, ingenuity of design, and sense of humour (estimate: £40,000–60,000). While the duck form was not uncommonly used for vessels and indeed lamps in classical antiquity, this piece is believed to be unique in its size and composition. Its hollow

cast has an opening in the middle of its back for pouring in oil while a comic mask in the top of its tail cleverly frames the wick hole.

“Ferdinand” stands out by far from the herds of known bronze Apis bulls that have survived from Egyptian antiquity. Probably made in Memphis during Dynasty 26 (664–52 BC), a high point in art production of Egypt’s Late Period, this bull strides forward in classic style wearing a solar disk and royal cobra on his head. In superb condition, “Ferdinand” is expected to realise £40,000–60,000.

Further highlights include “Omar” the leopard, named after the film star, Omar Sharif. This small, but spirited and exceptionally rare Sumerian figurine contrasts with a wonderfully elaborate fish plate, measuring almost ten inches in diameter, making it one of the largest known examples in existence. While most fish plates are decorated with perch, this one has a squid, an octopus, two mackerels, an electric ray and three shrimps.

Leo Mildenberg was described by museum colleagues as “...trusted advisor, generous supporter, and dearly loved friend of two generations of archaeologists, numismatists, curators and collectors”.

###

Email images available on request

###

Notes to Editors:

Exhibition of Highlights from the Collection:

Christie’s, 20 Rockefeller Plaza, New York: 4–7 June

Christie’s, 9 Avenue Matignon, 75008 Paris: 4–8 October

Auction View: *Christie’s London: 22, 24–26 October*

“A Peaceable Kingdom”, the fourth volume of the Leo Mildenberg Collection will be published by Philipp von Zabern, Mainz am Rhein in October 2004.

###

