

## For Immediate Release

May 29, 2009

Contact: Sung-Hee Park spark@christies.com 212.636.2680

## CHRISTIE'S NEW YORK TO OFFER FIVE CENTURIES OF BOTANICAL BOOKS IN JUNE



John Hill, *The Vegetable System*, London, 1773-1786 Estimate: \$200,000-300,000

"The botanical artist finds himself at once and always in a dilemma: is he the servant of Science, or of Art? There can, I think, be no doubt that he must learn to serve both masters."

- Wilfrid Blunt, 1950

## Important Botanical Books June 24, 2009

New York – Christie's is pleased to present the sale of *Important Botanical Books* on June 24 featuring many of the most significant medicinal herbals and fine illustrated botanical books from the 15th through the 19th century. Over 200 works, including many of the most celebrated in the history of the field, document the development of the scientific and artistic studies of plants throughout these four centuries. What distinguishes these works from other scientific books are the quantity, and

outstanding quality, of illustrations they contain, from the earliest woodcut illustrations of the 15th century to the many extensive of hand-colored illustrations of the 18th and 19th centuries. The present collection comprehensively reveals the development of the simultaneous pursuit of artistic representation and scientific accuracy.



The sale features the earliest printed herbal to include a series of plant illustrations: the *Herbarium Apulei*, Rome, circa 1481-82 (*image left*-estimate: \$50,000-70,000). This is the only copy to appear at auction since an imperfect copy was sold in 1955. This book was one of the most widely used, and most practical, remedy books of the middle ages. It describes 131 plants, giving a multitude of prescriptions for maladies, ranging from madness, paralysis, dysentery, fertility, stomach ache and ulcers, to antidotes for various poisons. Of similar rarity is Macer Floridus's *De viribus herbarum carmen*, Milan, 1482 (estimate: \$30,000-50,000). Though not illustrated, it is considered the first printed herbal, with poems describing the medicinal and dietary properties of 77 herbs.

The Renaissance saw an immense increase in botanic study and publication. Perhaps the most celebrated botanical work ever printed, Leonhard Fuchs's *De historia stirpium*, Basel, 1542 (estimate: \$60,000-80,000) provided the first comprehensive study of plants and opened up the field to broader, and more specialized, study. The sale includes a superb copy of the first edition in a contemporary binding, as well as a copy of the first German edition, published one year later, and several pocket editions that were intended for use in the field.

Within a short period, botanical texts were being published throughout Europe. Notable contributors and contemporaries of Fuchs to the advancement of botany included in the sale are Hieronymus Bock's *De stirpium commentariorum libri tres*, Strassburg, 1552, (estimate: \$8,000-12,000) and Otto Brunfels's *Herbarum vivae eicones ad naturae imitationem*, Strassburg, 1531-36 (estimate: \$12,000-18,000), and the next generation of scientists, from the great Flemish botanist Rembert Dodoens to Italy's Pietro Andrea Mattioli. Mattioli's translations of the classical texts of Dioscorides became the most widely disseminated botanical books of the period. Perhaps the most renowned edition, Vincenzo Valgrisi's 1568 Venetian edition, is included in the sale in very rare colored state (*image right*- estimate: \$12,000-18,000). Perhaps even



rarer are two of the original wooden blocks used to print the illustrations in this edition.



Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, botanical illustration reached new heights of lavishness and precision. Elizabeth Blackwell was a pioneering figure, being among the first women to publish color-plate books of such fine execution and beauty. Blackwell's *A Curious Herbal*, London, 1737-39, (*image left-* estimate: \$15,000-20,000) records numerous unusual plants from around the world and was undertaken to pay off the debts of her husband, whose London printing-house had been ruined by rival printers. Some 20 years later began publication of John Hill's *The Vegetable System*, London, 1759-86, (*image on page 1-* estimate: \$200,000-300,000) a monumental work containing over one thousand two hundred hand-colored engravings. Not only is it the largest botanical publication of the eighteenth century, it is also of great scientific importance, being the first to give in the vernacular a comprehensive treatment of the plant kingdom and to adopt the

Linnaean system. The tradition established by publications such as Hill's was carried into the nineteenth century. Regional and focused studies of specific plants were made, such as Francesco Manuel Blanco's *Study of the Flowers, Fruits and Trees of the Philippines, Flora de Filipinas*, Manila, 1880-83, (estimate: \$30,000-40,000) that contained nearly 500 chromolithographs. The sale of *Important Botanical Books* illuminates the great eras of botanical illustration and discovery, where science and natural beauty entwined.

Auction: Important Botanical BooksJune 24 at 10 amViewing: Christie's Rockefeller GalleriesJune 20-23

## **About Christie's**

Christie's, the world's leading art business had global auction and private sales in 2008 that totaled £2.8 billion/\$5.1 billion. 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 70 offices in 30 countries and 10 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Dubai and Hong Kong. More 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

###

Images available on request

E-catalogue available at http://www.christies.com/eCatalogues/index.aspx?Sale\_ID=22117&eCatParameter=eCat/2117/03/01

Visit Christie's Web site at www.christies.com