

For Immediate Release

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MONUMENTAL JAPANESE GUARDIAN SCULPTURE FLANKS MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY KOREAN ART

**Japanese and Korean Art
September 21, 2006**

New York – Christie's, market leaders for Japanese and Korean Art, will organize their bi-annual sale devoted to Japanese and Korean Art on September 21. Besides offering works of art of all traditional collecting segments such as ceramics, scrolls, arms and armor and prints, the Japanese section of the sale will be headed by a fabulously impressive and rare 13th century wood sculpture of a Guardian (estimate on request). Highly collectible, because of size and affordability, a substantial group of netsuke will also be offered. The Korean portion's focal point, apart from ceramics, will be modern and contemporary art, including very 'en vogue' and sought after artists such as Kang Ik-joong, Hoon Kwak and Byun Chonggon.

Kei School Guardian

The monumental and rare sculpture depicting a fierce Kei-school guardian (Kamakura period, 13th century) (estimate on request), was made as one of a pair of guardians standing watch on either side of the entrance gate of a Buddhist temple. Derived from ancient Indian origins, in Japanese such pairs are called Ni-o (literally 'two kings') and always consist of an *Un* (with closed mouth) and an *Ah* (with open mouth) figure. Typical of these guardian statues is the fierce scowl, and the menacing power of the strong, semi-nude bodies. Originally this figure of *Un* held an attribute, a single-pronged weapon known as a *vajra*, or diamond. This weapon transferred the quality of the hardness of diamonds to him, enabling him to destroy any potential evil force directed at his temple. Ni-o were integral to the design of an open-air temple gate and were intended to survive the elements over long periods of time. By the mid-11th century sculptors had perfected a carving method known as *Yosegi-tsukuri*, whereby individual elements of the statue were carved from cypress and assembled via the hollow joined-block technique. This method is well suited to creating oversize

figures such as this one and enables the artist to convey a sense of kinetic, pent-up energy. Also offered is a large wood figure of a Standing Kannon (*Avalokiteshvara*), showing the aesthetic of physical bulk and imposing presence typical of early Heian sculpture (10th/11th century) (estimate: \$120,000-180,000).

Netsuke and the Property from the Estate of Donna Gustin Taggart

Netsuke, one of the lovely examples of the functional turned into the beautiful, play an important role in the sale. Nearly 150 of them will be offered, of which a large part belonged to Donna Gustin Taggart of Washington, D.C. Mrs. Gustin Taggart started collecting netsuke in the early 1950's, first buying examples in and around Washington, later adding Japan, France and England to her collecting territory. She was a highly respected collector and on friendly terms with other renowned netsuke connoisseurs of her time such as Raymond Bushell and Julius Katchen, both of whom corresponded and exchanged netsuke with her. Apart from the absolutely charming variety and depth of the collection, Mrs. Gustin Taggart also kept meticulous accounts of her collecting activity, adding one more layer of history and interest to the items offered for sale. Among the highlights of the Gustin Taggart group is a delightful Edo period wood netsuke carved as a seated rabbit, by Naito Toyomasa of Tamba (1773-1856). The hair is carved with fine lines and the eyes are inlaid with dark horn (estimate: \$7,000-9,000). The group also features delightful examples from the Kyoto school, Nagoya school and Asakusa school of carvers, in wood, ivory and stag antler.

Also noteworthy in the Japanese section are a suit of armor with a Saiga-School helmet, Edo period (18th century) (estimate: \$50,000-70,000), exhibited in the seminal Osaka exhibit in 1988 celebrating the 400th anniversary of Kishiwada Castle; and a delicate hanging scroll, *Beauty writing a letter*, circa 1789-92 by Katsukawa Shunsho (estimate: \$60,000-80,000).

Korean Ceramics

Korean ceramics invariable provide a highlight moment of the sale and this auction is no exception. The portion is led by a beveled blue and white porcelain jar, Choson period (18th century) (estimate: \$250,000-300,000). Modeled in eight facets, the jar is painted in underglaze cobalt blue on four opposite facets with autumn grasses and flowers and with four dragonflies between plants. The transparent glaze of blue hue evokes an elegant sheen. Another porcelain jar from the same period (estimate: \$150,000-200,000) is of ovoid form, painted with two delicate flower sprays, and finished with a glossy transparent glaze. A precious small inlaid celadon jar from the Koryo dynasty (13th century) (estimate: \$50,000-60,000) is inlaid in white and iron slip with demi-lune panels of chrysanthemums.

Modern and Contemporary Korean Art

Already riding the high wave of the current interest in Asian contemporary art, Korean art is quietly making its way up into the ranks of the much sought-after and the fashionable. Modeled by an artistic education in Europe or America, while being true to their Eastern soul, many contemporary Korean artists effortlessly appeal to Western aesthetics and many of them have become rapidly famous and in demand. The sale offers a very strong group of modern and contemporary Korean art, all works very reasonably estimated and bound to attract international interest. Of the artists offered, Byun Chonggon (b. 1948) is undoubtedly one of the brightest stars. Graduated from Chung-Ang University in Seoul and the Arts Students League in New York, and presented in major solo exhibitions in Asia and America, Chonggon currently lives in New York. In his work, he mixes traditional Korean imagery with New York views and morphs into the true East/West artist. The sale includes *Antonin Dvorak Concerto in B minor, op.104* (estimate: \$60,000-70,000), oil and mixed media on cello. Another Korean artist living and working in the U.S. is Hoon Kwak (b.1941) who is based in Los Angeles. He studied at Seoul National University and California State University and had exhibitions around the world, including in San Francisco, Sydney, Seoul, New York and Beijing. *Tea Bowls*, 2003, is a monumental canvas (66 x 55 in.) which somehow perfectly combines the contemporary with Korea's strong tradition in ceramics. Also offered will be two works by Kang Ik-joong (b. 1960), *Happy Buddha 07102-2000* (estimate: \$6,000-8,000) and *Happy World 07101-2006* (estimate: \$15,000-20,000). Ik-joong's works are part of prestigious museum collections such as the Whitney Museum, New York; the Ludwig Museum, Cologne; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles and the Leeum Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul. Park Sookeun, Korea's most famous modern artist, will be presented in the sale with a part of his least well-known artistic oeuvre: prints. These works on paper are great vehicles to again emphasize the simplicity and gentle directness of Sookeun's work. Often only consisting of a few lines or shapes, some more geometric, some more figurative, these prints have a charm all their own and provide the Sookeun collector with a super opportunity to acquire works by the master at a fraction of the price of his paintings. Many of the prints refer directly to themes Sookeun also used in his paintings – an example is *Two Seated Figures* (estimate: \$1,000-1,500).

Auction: Japanese and Korean Art

September 21 at 10 a.m., 2 p.m. and
approximately 4.30 p.m.

Viewing: Christie's Galleries at Rockefeller Center

September 15 - 20

About Christie's

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and 16 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Los Angeles, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Tel Aviv and Hong Kong. Most recently, Christie's has led the market with expanded initiatives in emerging markets such as Russia, China, India and the United Arab Emirates, with successful sales and exhibitions in Mumbai, Dubai and the branded sale in Beijing. In 2005 Christie's annual global sales increased 38% to \$3.2 billion, the highest total in company history and propelling the auction house into global market leadership.

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Images available on request

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More information about Christie's sale of *Japanese and Korean Art* can be found on www.christies.com. All lots from the sale can be viewed online along with full catalogue descriptions on Lotfinder®, which also allows clients to leave absentee bids. www.christies.com provides information on more than 80 sale categories, buying and selling at auction, complete auction results, and Christie's international auction calendar.