

CHRISTIE'S

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Christie's Proudly Presents

***Slave and Lion* by Xu Beihong**

A Remarkable Treasure of National History

The Highest-Estimated Asian Artwork Ever Offered at Auction



XU BEIHONG (1895-1953)

Slave and Lion

signed and dated in Chinese (lower left)

oil on canvas

123.3 x 152.8 cm. (48 1/2 x 60 1/4 in.)

Painted in 1924

Estimate: HK\$350,000,000 – 450,000,000

US\$45,000,000 – 58,000,000

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Hong Kong - Christie's is proud to offer *Slave and Lion*, a magnificent national treasure of museum quality, by Chinese Modern master Xu Beihong (1895-1953). As one of the most influential artists of the 20th Century, he paved the way for Chinese Realism and pioneered modern art education in China. The work carries an estimate of HK\$350,000,000 – 450,000,000/ US\$45,000,000 – 58,000,000, the highest estimated Asian artwork ever offered at auction. Following the previous world records set by Christie's for Su Shi's *Wood and Rock* and Sanyu's *Five Nudes*, the sale is an ongoing testament to Christie's ability in sourcing the most important Asian Art masterpieces. The painting is a ground-breaking example of the artist's thematic creations, and signifies a watershed moment in modern Chinese art history. In order to underscore the historical significance and influence of this work, *Slave and Lion* will be presented in an exclusive single-lot evening sale, immediately after the conclusion of the 20th and 21st Century Art Evening Sale in Hong Kong.

Francis Belin, President, Asia Pacific, commented "We are privileged to be offering this exceedingly rare work which holds great cultural significance. The sale of this museum-quality masterpiece marks a monumental moment in auction history and continues Christie's tradition in offering the greatest masterworks of Chinese Modern art. As the leading highlight of our Spring season, it joins a formidable line-up of Asian and Western masterpieces, sourced by the strength and unparalleled expertise of our market-leading team here in Asia".

- **A National Treasure:** Xu Beihong is one of the **most important artists of Chinese Realism**, and the **founder of modern art education in China**. *Slave and Lion* was painted at **the height of his creative output**, and is regarded as one of his **most significant and signature creations**. It marks a crucial milestone and is widely considered **one of the most important oil paintings in Chinese art history**. It was previously sold at Christie's Hong Kong in 2006 for HK\$53,880,000, a record at the time for a Chinese oil painting.
- **A Groundbreaking Work of Xu Beihong's Thematic Paintings:** *Slave and Lion* (1924) is the first thematic work in Xu's oeuvre. Later creations such as *Tian Heng and His Five Hundred Followers* (1928-1930), *Behind Me* (1931-1933), *Yugong Yishan* (1940) are all inspired by the pioneering nature of *Slave and Lion*, and collectively blazed the trail of revolution and innovation in modern Chinese art, reinforcing the tremendous historical value of this work.
- **Xu Beihong's Largest Oil Painting Still in Private Hands:** The artist's thematic oil paintings are **extremely rare on the market and no more than six have ever appeared in history**.
- **In Praise of Humanity and Compassion:** The story behind *Slave and Lion* originates from ancient Roman mythology and Aesop's Fables - the slave who tried to run away was captured by his master, and thrown into the Colosseum to be executed by the lion. However, to everyone's surprise, the lion recognised the slave and did not attack him. It transpired that the slave had removed a thorn stuck in the lion's paw during transportation. The moving account paved way for the slave and lion to be set free. The story serves to praise the essence of humanity and our intrinsic nature towards compassion and redemption for all.
- **Patriotism and Revival of the Chinese Nation:** The lion in the painting is wounded and in need of help, yet remains dignified, righteous and proud - **a symbol of the Chinese people's spirit**. The slave stands fearless in the face of danger, a display of defiance and vigour, he is a **an emblem of the nation**. In this masterwork, Xu Beihong elevates the simple allegoric tale about repaying kindness to a portrayal of national strength, resilience and fortitude, uplifting the country's spirits with the hopes of reviving the nation.
- **Spirit of the Lion:** Xu Beihong frequently uses the lion to **exemplify his faith in the nation's rise**. A ferocious creature with a calm character, and is hence regarded as the 'King of all Animals.' The artist has created dozens of majestic paintings depicting the lion throughout his life, including important works such as *Lion's Roar*, *Wounded Lion* (1938), *Join Forces in Tokyo* (1943) and more.

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- **Renowned Provenance:** The study on paper of this painting is from the same year and now resides in the Xu Beihong Memorial Museum in Beijing. The painting has been featured in numerous important publications: *Xu Beihong: A Master of Chinese Art* (Xu Beihong Memorial Museum, Beijing); *Xu Beihong in Nanyang* (Singapore Art Museum); It was also included in the landmark exhibition of 【Xu Beihong in Nanyang】 in Singapore Art Museum.



A Sketch of *Slave and lion*, painted in 1924. 47.5 x 63 cm.
Xu Beihong Memorial Museum

NOTES TO EDITORS

Public Preview (by appointment - infoasia@christies.com):

Beijing | 24 – 25 April | No. 82 Jinbao Street, Dong Cheng District

Shanghai | 28 – 29 April | Ampire Building, No. 97 Yuanmingyuan Road

Hong Kong | 21 – 24 May | Convention Hall, Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, No.1 Harbour Road, Wanchai

Single Lot Standalone Evening Auction:

Hong Kong | 24 May | Convention Hall, Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, No.1 Harbour Road, Wanchai

Other notable auction records for Asian Art achieved at Christie's in recent years

Su Shi, *Wood and Rock*, price realised: HK\$463,600,000

Chen Rong, *Six Dragons*, price realised: HK\$378,706,146

A Highly Important Imperial Embroidered Silk Thangka, price realised: HK\$348,440,000

Sanyu, *Five Nudes*, price realised: HK\$303,984,992

A Highly Important And Extremely Rare Wucai 'Fish' Jar And Cover, price realised: HK\$213,850,000

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About Christie's

Christie's is a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service and international expertise. Founded in 1766 by James Christie, Christie's has conducted the greatest and most celebrated auctions through the centuries providing a popular showcase for the unique and the beautiful. Christie's offers around 350 auctions 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 \$100 million. Christie's also has a long and successful history conducting Private Sales for clients and online sales are offered year-round across all categories. Christie's global presence is spread across a network of international salerooms and 61 representatives and offices. Christies.com provides detailed articles and videos on the objects offered for sale alongside the latest advances in digital viewing tools to make Christie's accessible to all.

Private Sales are an integral and complementary part of Christie's global business and in 2020 contributed \$1.5 billion (£1.2 billion), a record year for the platform at Christie's and an increase of 84% YoY. Christie's Private Sales offers a seamless service for buying and selling art outside of the auction calendar. From fine and decorative arts to jewellery and watches, our specialists will use Christie's global network to help shape your collection, connect you with the right people and broker a sale. In addition, the Private Sales team hold regular curated exhibitions around the world. Christie's founder James Christie regularly offered Private Sales, most notably the sale in the 18th Century of the magnificent art collection amassed by Great Britain's first Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole to Catherine the Great of Russia which formed the core of Russia's Hermitage collection.

Private Sales – Our Best Kept Secret...<https://www.christies.com/privatesales>

**Please note when quoting estimates above that other fees will apply in addition to the hammer price - see Section D of the Conditions of Sale at the back of the sale catalogue.*

**Estimates do not include buyer's premium. Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer's premium and are reported net of applicable fees.*

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