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CHRISTIE'S HONG KONG TO SHOWCASE 800 YEARS OF IMPERIAL CHINESE ART IN THE AUTUMN SALE

Dragon & Phoenix – 800 Years of Patronage
Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art
1 November 2004

Hong Kong – A myriad of rare and precious Chinese ceramics and works of art will be showcased by Christie's Hong Kong this Fall on 1 November 2004 at the JW Marriott Hotel.

“Recent record trends and prices seen at Christie's Hong Kong indicate that an increasing number of bidders, not just from Mainland China, but noticeably around the region, with Taiwan leading the way, have renewed collecting interest at the top of the market. The special theme sale celebrating 800 years of Chinese art is a response to the broadened interest shown in the last two years, where works of great provenance and quality have exceeded expectations,” said Anthony Lin, Chairman of Christie's Asia.

The Chinese Art sales this Fall are divided into two sale catalogues. The first sale will feature an especially dedicated theme: ‘*Dragon and Phoenix - 800 Years of Patronage*’, comprising 120 lots ranging from classical paintings, ceramics to works of art. This unique sale is selectively compiled with not just visual imageries of these mythical creatures in mind but its purpose is to convey a message of how symbols were transmitted, simulated and inextricably linked to tradition and culture through eight centuries of Chinese art history. From the perspective of patronage, it illustrates the prevailing Chinese practice of looking to antiquities for new inspiration, and innovatively adapting traditional decorative styles and themes to suit the shifting changes of politics and tastes. Many works of art produced during of the Ming and Qing dynasties were influenced from earlier periods, particularly from the Song dynasty (960-1279) which is known as the ‘Golden Age’ of Chinese Art. From amongst the Song highlights this season is a highly important Cizhou *meiping* vase (estimate: HK\$10,000,000-15,000,000/ US\$1,300,000-1,900,000). The vase is still in perfect condition, and is carved on the exterior with peony blooms which are symbolic of wealth and nobility. These flowers are one of the

earliest depictions of peonies on ceramics with its stylistic rendition of floral blooms borne on an undulating stem that were popularly copied throughout the Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties.

A good example of transformation of motifs is a rhinoceros horn carved in the form of a wine vessel with a C-shaped handle and an elongated spout, and dated to the late Ming dynasty 17th century (estimate HK\$1,800,000-2,000,000/ US\$240,000-260,000). The exterior of this ewer is carved in shallow relief with motifs that first appeared on earlier bronze wine vessels of the Shang dynasty (1600-1100 BC). However, in this instance the appearance of the dragon and phoenix are distinctively Ming in style even though their sinuous angular bodies betray vestiges of their Shang ancestry. The dragon and phoenix motifs of the Ming period are typified by an exquisite blue and white brushwasher of the Yongle period (1403-1425) (Estimate on Request). Thinly potted with ten lobes, the interior of the brushwasher is painted in vibrant sapphire-blue tones with a lively ascending dragon opposing a downward swooping phoenix with its long tasselled tail trailing behind. This extremely rare 'dragon and phoenix' brushwasher has been carefully treasured by an Asian collector for the last forty years; it is the only existing example in private hands and the first of its type on the auction market.

Another rare ceramic on offer is a Tang-style celadon-glazed amphora of the Qing dynasty Yongzheng period (1723-1735) (estimate: HK\$5,500,000-6,500,000/ US\$710,000-830,000). Its graceful shape is modelled after similar water vessels from the Tang period (618-907), elegantly framed by a pair of perfectly-balanced handles, each emerging on the rounded shoulder to form a dragon-head with its mouth grasped onto the vase's mouth rim. This vessel is unusually large for the period since it is generally regarded that Emperor Yongzheng himself had a preference for small objects. This taste, however, was not shared by his son the Emperor Qianlong whose desire for the exotic was renowned, and epitomised by his choice in the sumptuous designs of his imperial palaces such as the Yuanmingyuan. The power in which the dragon is portrayed on an apple-green-glazed lantern vase undoubtedly displays Qianlong's personal predilection for bold and fanciful decorations (estimate: HK\$4,000,000-5,000,000/ US\$520,000-640,000). However, there are items from the Qianlong period that are of a simple design such as the large white jade baluster vase and cover (estimate: HK\$8,000,000-10,000,000/ US\$1,100,000-1,300,000); its refined form and purity of the stone are both accentuated by its undecorated, expertly polished surfaces.

The *Dragon and Phoenix - 800 Years of Patronage* auction also includes 24 pieces of classical Chinese paintings and calligraphy.

Christie's *Fine Ceramic and Works of Art* sale will also prove equally exciting with a selection of quality lacquer wares on offer including a large carved three-colour lacquer baluster vase from the Qianlong period (estimate: HK\$1,000,000-1,500,000/ US\$130,000-190,000). Densely carved with flowering lotus and archaic phoenix-heads, the vase was once in the possession of Lady MacDonald and Sir Claude Maxwell, who was a British ambassador to China during the twilight years of the Qing dynasty. It was the irreplaceable Lady MacDonald who, whilst out riding,

spotted two soldiers carrying water in the vase and instructed them to send it to her residence; the vase was subsequently sent to London where the couple retired.

Another rare re-appearance is the magnificent gilt-bronze esoteric Buddhist figure of Vidyaraja, Ming Wang ('Bright King'), dated to the Ming dynasty 15th century (estimate: HK\$12,000,000-14,000,000/ US\$1,600,000-1,800,000) which was first sold at auction in Paris in 1904. One of the most puzzling of esoteric Buddhist Art is the identification of the numerous manifestations of Buddhist deities, and the present sculpture is no exception. Identified as one of the five deities known as the 'Bright Kings' they were thought to have mystic knowledge, and represented power and victory over sentient passions and desires. These mythic figures were ascribed with the power of protecting humans against evil spirits by Buddhist monks as early as the 13th century. Cast with its six muscular arms radiating from the body, three fierce-looking faces and standing superbly balanced on a *falun* (Buddhist Wheel of the Law), it is undeniably an awe inspiring deity. Its powerful sculptural form and large size credit this gilt-bronze as one of the most important metalwork of the Ming period.

Aside from Buddhist works of art, included in the Fall highlights are secular objects that were made with simple wishes for things auspicious. These include a very rare famille rose baluster vase of the Qianlong period (estimate: HK\$5,500,000-6,500,000/ US\$710,000-830,000), designed with bats in flight above waves breaking against a rocky boulder, forming the rebus: *Furu donghai*, 'May one's fortune be as vast as the Southern Seas'; and a large famille rose baluster vase, Qianlong period, decorated with numerous boys at play in celebration of the Qing Ming Festival (estimate: HK\$7,500,000-9,000,000/ US\$960,000-1,200,000); this 'Hundred Boys' theme augur abundant sons and wealth.

Pre-sale Exhibitions:

Taipei	16 – 17 October	Fubon Life Assurance Building
Shanghai	20 – 21 October	Portman Ritz-Carlton Hotel
Beijing	23 – 24 October	The St. Regis Beijing
Hong Kong	29 – 30 October	JW Marriott Hotel

Auctions:

Dragon & Phoenix – 800 Years of Patronage, 1 November at 10:00 am

Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art, 1 November at 12:00 noon & 2:00 pm

JW Marriott Hotel, Hong Kong

More information about Christie's Dragon & Phoenix – 800 Years of Patronage, and Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art sales 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.

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