

**For Immediate Release**  
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**MEISSEN MASTERPIECES**  
**EXQUISITE AND RARE PORCELAIN MODELS FROM THE ROYAL HOUSE OF**  
**SAXONY TO BE OFFERED AT CHRISTIE'S LONDON**



**British and Continental Ceramics**  
**Christie's King Street**  
**Monday, 18 December 2006**

**London** – A collection of four 18<sup>th</sup> century Meissen porcelain masterpieces are to be offered for sale in London on 18 December 2006 in the *British and Continental Ceramics* sale. This outstanding Meissen collection includes two white porcelain models of a lion and lioness (estimate: £3,000,000-5,000,000) and a white model of a fox and hen (estimate: £200,000-300,000) commissioned for the Japanese Palace in Dresden together with a white element vase in the form of a ewer (£10,000-15,000).

*“The porcelain menagerie was an ambitious and unparalleled project in the history of ceramics and the magnificent size of these models is a testament to the skill of the Meissen factory,”* said Rodney Woolley, Director and Head of European Ceramics. *“The sheer exuberance of these examples bears witness to the outstanding modelling of Kirchner and Kändler. The opportunity to acquire these Meissen masterpieces from the direct descendants of Augustus the Strong is unique and we are thrilled to have been entrusted with their sale,”* he continued.

The works of art have been recently restituted to the heirs of the Royal House of Saxony, the Wettin family. Commenting on the Meissen masterpieces, a spokesperson for the Royal House of Saxony said: *“The Wettin family has worked closely, and over many years with the authorities to achieve a successful outcome of the restitution of many works of art among which are these four Meissen porcelain objects, commissioned by our forebear Augustus the Strong. This has only been possible since the unification of Germany in 1989 and has been an emotional journey for us all. Our four Meissen models have been housed in the Zwinger in Dresden, which has the largest collection of Meissen porcelain. While we are not in a position to retain these works of art in our family, we are however pleased that further examples of the same models remain in the Zwinger and on view to the general public.”*

The most celebrated member of the Royal House of Wettin was Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony and King of Poland, one of the most important patrons of the arts in the Baroque era. In 1730, he formulated the plan to fill the upper floor in the newly refurbished Japanese Palace in Dresden with imposing porcelain models of birds and animals to be housed alongside his vast collection of Asian and other Meissen porcelains. This ambitious project was conceived only twenty years after the Meissen factory discovered the means of making ‘true’ porcelain or *white gold*. The factory had little experience of making sculptural objects and certainly no large porcelain sculptures on this scale had ever been attempted anywhere in the world.

Johann Gottlieb Kirchner was initially entrusted with the task of creating the porcelain menagerie. A talented sculptor, he had been employed by the Meissen factory during the earliest years of production, parted company in 1728 only to be reappointed in June 1730, specifically because of his experience with the new medium and large-scale pieces. His work was in the traditional Baroque taste and his aim, to represent human attributes reflected in nature, was in marked contrast to the work of his fellow sculptor Johann Joachim Kändler, who was inspired by direct observation of nature. Broadly speaking Kirchner was responsible for the creation of the mammals while Kändler modelled many of the ornithological specimens. After Kirchner was dismissed from Meissen in 1733, Kändler created the majority of the porcelain models commissioned for the Japanese Palace. He became one of the most important porcelain sculptors in 18<sup>th</sup> century ceramics.

The stars of the sale are the exquisite white models of a lion and lioness, to be offered as a single lot, modelled by Kirchner, *circa* 1732. Of all the animals in the celebrated porcelain menagerie, it is the lion and lioness that have been imbued with the regal qualities that were seen as so desirable by their patron. Exceptionally large in size, each white glazed animal was fired in its entirety. The difficulties associated with the firing of these magnificent beasts made an enameled firing too risky; like many of the animals and birds in the Royal menagerie they had been left in the white. The firing and construction of these large models was fraught with difficulties which explains the firing faults in these impressive models. Eight examples of each of these magnificent white Meissen lion and lionesses are recorded as being ordered for the Japanese Palace in Dresden by Augustus the Strong, Elector of Saxony and King of

Poland. Today, two examples of each lion and lioness remain in the Zwinger with only a few others known to be in private hands or in institutions across Europe and America.

The imposing larger than life Meissen white model of a fox and hen, *circa* 1732-3, scholars have variously attributed the model to both JG Kirchner and JJ Kändler. Again it was made for the Royal menagerie. This stylized figure is designed to be seen from any angle and includes a replacement part made by the Meissen factory in the 1950s. Two further models of the same subject remain in the Zwinger. The Meissen white element vase in the form of a ewer, *circa* 1741, is a fine example by JJ Kändler. The decorative scene relates closely in style and technique to the Swan Service. The Rococo design in this example represents water through the iconography of shells, waves, stylized dolphins, bulrushes and the god Neptune. Again, examples of the white porcelain element vase can be found in the Zwinger collection.

The Soviet occupation of East Germany after the Second World War resulted in the Royal House of Saxony fleeing their property and becoming refugees within West Germany. Absolutely everything was left behind. Their personal possessions collected through the generations were either looted, confiscated by the Soviet occupying forces or later recovered from various castles by the East German State and housed in various museums. Following the unification of Germany in 1989, the heirs of the Royal House of Saxony and the State of Saxony reached a comprehensive settlement over the restitution of Wettin property in 1999. Since then, the heirs of the Royal House of Saxony have devoted considerable energy and time to locating their family heirlooms. In every case, when pieces were restituted, the Royal House of Saxony has negotiated a settlement with the State of Saxony which allowed the State to retain for their museums a considerable amount of exquisite works of art of both historical and art historical importance.

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### **Notes to Editors**

Christie's is the world market leader in British and European ceramics. Christie's holds major ceramics sales in London, New York and Paris and holds many world auction records. Christie's have offered six examples from the important Meissen porcelain menagerie since 2002, four from Longleat (2002 London sale) and two models of herons (2005 Paris sale). Christie's holds the world auction record for Meissen porcelain. In 2002 a Meissen fox from Longleat realized £1,051,650. This world record was surpassed in 2005 at Christie's when two models of herons in Paris realized €5,612,000 (£3,731,980).