

# CHRISTIE'S

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## CHRISTIE'S TO OFFER THE COLLECTION OF ROBERT HATFIELD ELLSWORTH

DISTINGUISHED ART DEALER, CONNOISSEUR AND COLLECTOR IN MARCH 2015

- The Largest Private Collection of Asian Art Ever to Appear at Auction
  - Worldwide Exhibition Tour Starts November 21 in Hong Kong
- Total Sales of 2,000 Objects to be Sold in Live Auctions and Online Only



*Robert H. Ellsworth  
in Anhui Province, China, 1995*



*Above: A view from Robert Hatfield Ellsworth's 22-room apartment on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan, where the scholar and collector lived surrounded by Asian art and objects, and where he hosted clients and friends for lavish events*

*"This is the best business in the world for me.  
You never get bored, you never have to retire... Life is always interesting."  
– Robert H. Ellsworth*

**Hong Kong/ New York** – Christie's is honored to announce it has been entrusted with the sale of the **Collection of Robert Hatfield Ellsworth**, the distinguished American scholar, dealer and collector of Asian Art who passed away in August 2014. Widely recognized throughout Asia and the Americas for his ground-breaking role in the study and appreciation of Asian Art, Mr. Ellsworth was a distinguished connoisseur who opened new arenas of collecting to Western audiences and built a successful business purveying the very finest works of art to his generation's foremost collectors. His personal collection of over 2,000 items was assembled over a lifetime and widely recognized as the most important grouping of Chinese, Japanese, Indian, Himalayan and Southeast Asian sculpture, paintings, furniture and works of art. To celebrate this exceptional collection and the generous and benevolent man behind it, Christie's is

organizing **free public exhibitions and a special five-day series of auctions and online-only sales** to be held during Asian Art Week at Christie's New York in **March 2015**. A global tour of highlights from the collection kicks off November 21 in Hong Kong, and will continue to stops throughout Asia and Europe prior to the New York sales.

### **About Robert Hatfield Ellsworth**

Few individuals have made such an invaluable contribution to the study and appreciation of Asian art in the West than Robert Hatfield Ellsworth. Embracing ancient bronzes and Ming furniture, fine jade, Modern Chinese painting, and Himalayan, Indian, and Southeast Asian works of art, Ellsworth was fully immersed in every facet of the Asian art historical canon. His prolific contributions to Asian art mark him as one of the last true connoisseur-dealers, an icon of scholarship, personal magnetism, and cultural philanthropy. Among his accolades, Ellsworth was made **an honorary Chinese citizen** in recognition of his scholarship, philanthropy and cultural preservation efforts, and was named an honorary consultant and curator of the **Beijing History Museum** and the **Museum of Fine Arts in Hoffeei**, near Huangshan.

Born in New York in 1929, Mr. Ellsworth displayed an unwavering curiosity and devotion to objects from a young age. As a child he collected Chinese postage stamps and as a teenager, he began 'flipping' Asian objects he collected for a handsome profit. Ellsworth's dealing garnered him a sizable personal collection; at just nineteen years old, he was already selling snuff bottles to the **Montreal Museum of Fine Arts**.

After architectural training at the Franklin School of Professional Arts, and further studies in Bern and Lausanne, he returned to the United States from Europe in 1948 and went to work for antique dealer Frank Stoner, whose firm specialized in English and German ceramics, and through Stoner, he met the Asian art dealer **Alice Boney**, who took on Ellsworth as a protégé and, ultimately, dear friend.

In her Park Avenue apartment, Boney greeted visitors wearing luxurious silk robes and antique jade jewelry — a habit Ellsworth himself later adopted. Mr. Ellsworth's own Fifth Avenue apartment was a testament to his mentor's vision of the connoisseur-dealer: Asian art melded so effortlessly into the surroundings that buying and selling become a refined, even pleasurable experience. Using works from her own collection, Boney taught her pupil how to identify the marks of date, value, and beauty that made collectors eager to possess one of her objects.

During a brief stint in the United States Army in the early 1950s, Ellsworth took advantage of his stationing in Honolulu, Hawaii, to re-start his career in the field of Asian art. When he returned to New York in 1960, Ellsworth partnered with the New York dealer James Goldie. Their gallery, Ellsworth & Goldie, offered traditional English furniture and decorative art alongside works of Asian art. When Goldie retired in 1970, Ellsworth took the business solo, moving to a historic townhouse on East 64th Street before purchasing the Fifth Avenue apartment that would become his home and gallery.

Ellsworth's career as an independent dealer fortuitously coincided with the opening of relations between China and the West and his business grew as trade increased. Although he had visited Hong Kong regularly for nearly thirty years — the collector also kept an apartment in the Kowloon district — he was thrilled at the opportunity to discover the riches of Mainland China. He was the first American art dealer to visit the newly opened China, giving him unparalleled exposure to the best in Chinese art and antiquities.

Later in his career, Robert Ellsworth came to build a reputation as a passionate preservationist of some of China's most important cultural heritage sites. In 1992, the collector made his first visit to Huangshan, an area in the Anhui province, and undertook the restoration of a beautiful and decaying family temple called **Baolunge**, which was constructed during the Ming Dynasty. He recognized the importance of continued preservation efforts throughout China, and became a staunch advocate for the many cultural heritage sites under threat from development and dilapidation. He established

the **Chinese Heritage Art Foundation in Hong Kong** to amass a donor base to support future heritage projects across the country.

While Mr. Ellsworth is well remembered for his remarkable discoveries within Chinese art, the collector's connoisseurial eye also extended to the arts of India, the Himalayas, and Southeast Asia. Notably, in 1981, he acquired nearly 1,500 works from the renowned collection of J.R. Belmont, known as the ***Pan-Asian Collection***, from which several works will be on view and offered in the sales.

### **About The Collection**

The sumptuous interior of Mr. Ellsworth's own 22-room Manhattan residence displayed the collector's obsession with Asian art — as well as his signature elegance and *joie de vivre*. Fine Chinese furniture and sensual Indian bronzes mingled effortlessly with the best in Western design and decoration. His apartment became a gathering place for clients, academics, and members of the international *bon ton*. It was a unique, glamorous world of commerce and pleasure, the product of a decades-long journey in fine art.

**CHINESE FURNITURE:** Ellsworth was one of the first Westerners to champion the beauty of Chinese furniture, foreseeing the popularity of sleek, minimalist interior design in the late twentieth-century. His love of Chinese furniture grew throughout his career and culminated in the landmark 1971 text, *Chinese Furniture: Hardwood Examples of the Ming and Early Ch'ing Dynasties*. Dedicated to Alice Boney and illustrated with many works from his personal collection, the book has become the standard reference for dealers and collectors.

A true scholar as well as a connoisseur, he continually revised his methods of dating and identification as the category of Chinese Furniture grew in popularity. After Brooke Astor funded a new Chinese courtyard at New York's **Metropolitan Museum** in 1977, Ellsworth gifted two hardwood wardrobes, a three-drawer alter coffer, and four chairs incised with calligraphy to the new space.

In 1982, the collector returned to Hawaii to catalogue the Chinese furniture collection of the **Honolulu Academy of Arts**, one of the primary centers for the study of Asian furniture in the United States. Fourteen years later, he collaborated on a special Chinese-English catalogue of the collection of **Mimi and Raymond Hung**, which included fine examples of Classical Chinese Furniture.

**INDIAN, HIMALAYAN, AND SOUTHEAST ASIAN ART:** Robert Ellsworth developed a reputation for identifying overlooked Himalayan and South Asian masterworks, and carefully restored many of these pieces to their former glory. The collector regularly collaborated with leading connoisseurs in the field, including **Connie Mangskau**, the legendary Thai dealer who proved invaluable in honing Ellsworth's eye for Southeast Asian and Khmer sculpture.

Ellsworth's reputation as a dealer and purveyor to the most prominent names in art gave him a distinct advantage in acquiring exceptional pieces of Himalayan and South Asian origin, including the collection of J.R. Belmont. This assemblage included prime examples of Himalayan painting, South Indian bronzes of the Chola and Vijayanagara periods, and Khmer sculpture, was disseminated to clients including **John D. Rockefeller III** and the financier Christian Humann.

In 1981, Humann's collection was offered for sale as the *Pan-Asian Collection*, and Ellsworth was able to reacquire many works of Himalayan, Indian, and Southeast Asian art for himself, which came to stand proudly alongside those of Chinese and Western origin. Ellsworth placed one of his most beloved pieces, a Tibetan seated Mahasiddha, in his bedroom, and each morning enthusiastically greeted the bronze as if it were a friend.

**MODERN CHINESE PAINTINGS:** Mr. Ellsworth's greatest scholarly contribution to Asian art was his reevaluation of Modern Chinese painting, a period covering the 19th and early-20th centuries that had been largely ignored by critics and academics. Ellsworth revived an entire field of art historical scholarship and created an entirely new category in collecting. He became the first individual to assemble a comprehensive holding of paintings by the great Modern Chinese masters, and pushed art historians to concede that Chinese painting had not simply 'ended' in 1800.

Throughout the 1960s, Ellsworth continued to expand his collection of Modern Chinese works, acquiring a substantial batch of 19<sup>th</sup> century paintings he believed warranted further scholarship. At one point, Ellsworth's collection of Modern Chinese art grew to nearly 500 works, the largest assemblage outside of China. With a trove of paintings at his disposal, Ellsworth recognized that 19<sup>th</sup> century Chinese painters were actually the forerunners to the bold, energized compositions found in the twentieth century. In 1987, he revealed the results of his decades-long investigation into Modern Chinese painting in *Later Chinese Painting and Calligraphy: 1800–1950*, a groundbreaking multi-volume project. *Later Chinese Painting and Calligraphy* revitalized an entire art historical period, shedding new light on works that had been previously ignored by curators and collectors. In 1985, Ellsworth donated some 471 works of later Chinese painting and calligraphy to New York's Metropolitan Museum, a testament to the collector's belief that his source material should be available to everyone.

**ENGLISH AND EUROPEAN FURNITURE AND DECORATIVE ARTS:** An entire sale day will be dedicated to a 'treasure trove' of English furniture, fine and decorative arts from Robert H. Ellsworth's home from his primary residence located on Fifth Avenue, New York. His collection reflects his discerning and distinctive eye for harmoniously living with Asian and Western art.

*Cataloguing and complete details of the Collection of Robert Hatfield Ellsworth will be announced in January 2015.  
Please see attached caption sheet for touring highlights.*

**Auctions and Online-Only Sales:** March 2015 at Christie's Rockefeller Center

**Global Tour Dates and Locations:**

- Hong Kong: 21 – 25 November, Hong Kong Convention Centre
- Shanghai: 6 – 11 December, Christie's Galleries at Ampire House
- Tokyo: 11 – 12 December, Christie's Galleries
- London: 15 – 19 December, Christie's King Street
- Beijing: 15 – 20 December, Christie's Galleries at the Imperial Club
- New York: March exhibition, Christie's Rockefeller Center

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**About Christie's**

Christie's, the world's leading art business, had global auction and private sales in the first half of 2014 that totaled £2.69 / \$4.47 billion, making it the highest half year total in Christie's history. 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 has since conducted the greatest and most celebrated auctions through the centuries providing a popular showcase for the unique and the beautiful. Christie's offers around 450 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 its clients in all categories, with emphasis on Post-War & Contemporary, Impressionist & Modern, Old Masters and Jewellery. Private sales in the first half of 2014 totalled £498.9 million (\$828.2 million).

Christie's has a global presence with 53 offices in 32 countries and 12 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Dubai, Zürich, Hong Kong, Shanghai, and Mumbai. More recently, Christie's has led the market with expanded initiatives in growth 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. Sales totals are hammer price plus buyer's premium and do not reflect costs, financing fees or application of buyer's or seller's credits.*

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