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MASTERPIECES IN MINIATURE: ANCIENT ENGRAVED GEMS

FORMERLY IN THE G. SANGIORGI COLLECTION



EXQUISITELY ENGRAVED CLASSICAL GEMS FROM THE ESTATE OF THE COLLECTOR GIORGIO SANGIORGI

New York – Christie's is pleased to announce **Masterpieces in Miniature: Ancient Engraved Gems Formerly in the G. Sangiorgi Collection** on April 29, 2019, during the Classic Week series of sales. Spanning the Classical world from the 16th century B.C. to the 4th century A.D., the sale comprises 40 lots of the most sought-after and captivating gems still in a private collection. Enchanting collectors and connoisseurs alike, this is one of the most important of private collections in history, this sale offers timeless artifacts that unlock a window into the early 20th century.

Giorgio Sangiorgi (1887-1965) was a renowned collector, dealer, and scholar in ancient, medieval, and Renaissance Art. He amassed most of his collection in early to middle years of the 20th century. The entire collection was recently published by the renowned gem scholar Sir John Boardman and Claudia Wagner. The sale features arguably the 40 best gems from the collection. In addition to their superb quality and rarity, many gems boast important provenance, with many originating from the renowned collection of nobleman and politician, George Spencer, the 4th Duke of Marlborough.

G. Max Bernheimer, International Department Head of Antiquities, remarked: "Many are without question true masterpieces of the gem engraver's art, some world-renowned, rivaling the best works of the major arts of every other medium, and are assuredly the most important group to appear at auction in over a generation."

Highlights from the Masterpieces in Miniature sale to include:

The Roman black chalcedony intaglio portrait of Antinous is a gem that carries an old and prestigious provenance. Previously in the Marlborough collection (1765-1875) and sold at Christie's in London in 1875, this gem is one of the finest in existence. The 4th Duke of Marlborough wrote that it was "of incredible beauty," making it the highlight of the most extraordinary collection of ancient gems ever assembled still in a private collection. The exceptional quality of the engraving has led many to proclaim this gem to be the finest surviving portrait of Antinous in existence in any medium. Superbly engraved on this sizeable black chalcedony gem is a portrait of the bust of Antinous, who drowned in the Nile in 130 A.D. while traveling in Egypt. It is said that Antinous, who was the young favorite of Emperor Hadrian (76-138 A.D.), perhaps even intentionally drowning to counter a prophecy in order to save the Emperor's life. In his honor, Emperor Hadrian founded a new city on the east bank of the Nile, Antinoopolis, and esteemed Antinous as a hero and a God, throughout the Empire. His memory was honored in festivals, poems, hymns, and temples, including the Imperial Villa at Tivoli.



ROMAN BLACK CHALCEDONY
INTAGLIO PORTRAIT OF ANTIPOUS
CIRCA 130-138 A.D.
ESTIMATE: USD 300,000 – USD 500,000

Roman and Greek artists mastered the art of engraving to extraordinary levels, with each carved gemstone telling a unique story. In ancient society, the primary objective of engraved gems and ring stones was to serve as a personal signature or a seal of identification. Elite members of society possessed multiple gems for the various roles they held in society. **A Roman amethyst intaglio with a portrait of Demosthenes** is another masterpiece in the collection and is one of the most important gems to survive from antiquity. To the right of the bust, in small neat letters is the inscription "of Dioskourides," the artists signature. Dioskourides was named the chief gem engraver for Emperor Augustus (63 B.C.-14 A.D.). According to ancient literature, Dioskourides sculpted the Emperor's signet ring, a portrait of Augustus himself, and his successors used it for signing personal and imperial documents. Recognized through the Renaissance and into the modern era as the greatest gem engraver of the Roman world, Dutch Renaissance painter Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) saw the gem between 1600 and 1608 while visiting Rome, recording the inscription in his itinerary. The gem was deeply admired for the quality of craftsmanship, exceptionally deep engraving, and identifying signature.

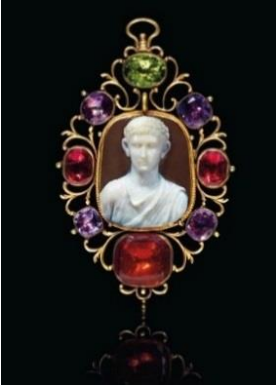
A Roman Sardonyx Cameo with a draped bust of Julio-Claudian Prince is another exceptional piece, which was once part of the Marlborough collection (1765-1875). This impressive two-layer sardonyx, white on brown, is sculpted with a frontal bust in extremely and unusually high relief. The cameo is mounted as a pendant in a gold frame, the ensemble further set into an elaborate openwork gold mount embellished with gems, including peridot, garnets, and amethysts.

The Greek gold ring with Herakles is made with the finest 24-karat Greek gold. The scene of Herakles on the bezel is expertly chased as the hero stands tall in triumph. The pose was likely derived from a sculptural prototype and is similar to another gold ring currently in the Getty Museum (No. 76, Boardman, Intaglios and Rings).

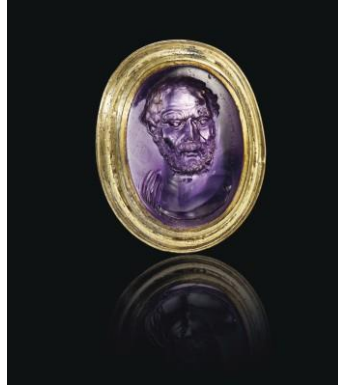
The Roman Sardonyx Cameo of Medusa set as a pendant in an antique gold mount is another gem from the Marlborough collection (1765-1875). According to art historians, Martin Henig and Helen Molesworth, the head of Medusa was perhaps "the most ubiquitous subjects employed for cameos" during the Roman period. When used in jewelry it was thought to have protective properties to the wearer.

To learn more about engraved classical gems, please visit [our collecting guide](#).

SELECT HIGHLIGHTS:



A ROMAN ONYX CAMEO WITH A DRAPED BUST OF A JULIO-CLAUDIAN PRINCE
CIRCA EARLY 1ST CENTURY A.D.
ESTIMATE: USD 150,000 – USD 250,000



A ROMAN AMETHYST INTAGLIO WITH A PORTRAIT OF DEMOSTHENES SIGNED DIOSKOURIDES
CIRCA LATE 1ST CENTURY B.C.
ESTIMATE: USD 200,000 – USD 300,000



A GREEK GOLD FINGER RING WITH HERAKLES
CLASSICAL PERIOD, LATE 5TH – EARLY 4TH CENTURY B.C.
ESTIMATE: USD 30,000 – USD 50,000



A ROMAN SARDONYX CAMEO OF MEDUSA
CIRCA 1ST CENTURY A.D.
ESTIMATE: USD 30,000 – USD 50,000

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About Christie's

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Alongside regular sales online, Christie's has a global presence in 46 countries, with 10 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Dubai, Zürich, Hong Kong, and Shanghai.

**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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Images available on request

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