

For Immediate Release

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Christie's Hong Kong 2012 Spring Sale of Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art presents:

Masterpieces of the Enameller's Art from the Mandel Collection

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James Christie Room, Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre



Hong Kong – Christie's will present a spectacular array of masterpieces in cloisonné enamel from the Mandel Collection as part of its upcoming Spring Sale of Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art, to be held on 30 May 2012 at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre. Comprising 30 lots with a total estimate of over HK\$40 million/US\$5 million, the collection consists of beautiful cloisonné enamel works from the Qing dynasty (17th/18th century), and mostly from the Qianlong period (1736-1795). Cloisonné is an ancient form of metalwork that involves inserting enamel paste made from tinted ground glass into a network of bent copper wire cells soldered onto a bronze or copper surface. When fired at low temperature, the enamel fuses to the body of the object, which is then applied with gold for added brilliance. Magnificent yet delicate, intricate and structured, these works of art exemplify the technical brilliance of craftsmen at the time, while revealing the aesthetic sensitivity and cultural symbolism of the

period. This selection was carefully assembled by American collectors Dr Samuel and Annette Mandel, and features a wide range of Imperial decorative and ceremonial items. For the connoisseur of Chinese cloisonné works, this collection offers a rare opportunity to acquire a group of extraordinary masterpieces with impeccable provenance.

Rarity in pairs

Leading the sale is a pair of magnificent cloisonné enamel caparisoned elephants from the Qing period (18th century) (*illustrated above, estimate: HK\$4,000,000-6,000,000/US\$518,000-777,000*). Admired for its strength, wisdom and longevity in Buddhist religion, the elephant figure was often found in the halls and throne rooms throughout the Imperial palaces. The pair in this sale is made in mirror image, each draped with a harness decorated with a dragon against a background of *myi* clouds, jagged rocks and raging waves, and each carrying a square vase on a gilt bronze saddle. In addition to their superb quality, these figures have a prestigious provenance which includes the Winston Churchill Estate (by repute), Greek shipping magnate Aristotle Onassis and the Estate of renowned opera singer Maria Callas. A pair of similar elephants is known to be at the Forbidden City, flanking the throne in the hall where the Emperor received his officials and the Empress Cixi summoned ministers to audiences during the reigns of Tongzhi and Guangxu.

Another pair of exquisite animals is the very rare peacock censers from the Qianlong period (1736-1795) (*illustrated right, estimate: HK\$3,000,000-5,000,000/US\$385,600-643,000*). Peacocks were prized by Emperor Qianlong, who derived great pleasure in watching them in the gardens at court. The luminescent colours and intricate patterns of cloisonné is the perfect medium to replicate the bright colours and resplendent feathers of this beautiful bird, which is modelled perfectly in enamelled shades of turquoise blue and red here. Likely used for ceremonial purposes, this pair is all the more valuable because incense burners in the form of peacocks are extremely rare and seldom come to auction.



Continuing on the theme of auspicious creatures is a large pair of “Hundred Deer” vases, *zun*, of the Qianlong period (1736-1795) (*illustrated left, estimate: HK\$1,800,000-2,500,000/US\$231,400-321,000*). The motif of the ‘hundred deer’ dates back to the middle Ming period (late 16th to early 17th century), and the idea of the deer and their young being protected from hunters by Imperial decree was a theme appreciated by Emperor Qianlong. On the current pair of vases, the deer, symbolising career advancement and long life, are joined by cranes, symbolising longevity.

Apart from animal figures, the Chinese fascination with foreigners often led to stylised and whimsical depictions of the human figure of a foreigner in Chinese works of art. This feature can be seen in a very rare pair of foreigner pricket candle holders of the Qianlong period (1736-1795) in this collection (*illustrated right, estimate: HK\$2,500,000-3,500,000/US\$321,000-450,000*). Two figures of foreigners dressed in elaborately decorated vests covering their rounded bellies are on bended knee, smiling and supporting a drip pan. The current pair had been exhibited in 2007 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.



The cloisonné enamel censer: a balance of beauty and form



An example of the fine balance of beauty and form is the Chinese censer, illustrated by the large Imperial cloisonné enamel archaistic vessel and cover *Fangding*, with a Qianlong four-character mark and of the Qianlong period (1736-1795) (*illustrated left, estimate: HK\$4,000,000-6,000,000/US\$514,000-770,000*). Based on the shape of ancient bronze vessels from the Zhou dynasty (1046 BC-256 BC), this work features motifs from both ancient times (*kui* dragons and *taotie* masks) and the 17th/18th century (Buddhist lions, scrolling chrysanthemums and the phoenix). The juxtaposition of archaic and contemporary decorative elements shows how craftsmen integrated the old and the new in ever creative ways. The present lot is

especially important because of its rare large size and its Imperial provenance, indicated by the Qianlong reign mark.

Another censer, the Imperial tiered censer and cover of the Qianlong period (1736-1795) is truly a magnificent work of art (*illustrated right, estimate: HK\$4,000,000-6,000,000/US\$518,000-777,000*). Multi-tier cloisonné censers of octagonal shape and of this large size are very rare and were mostly used by the Imperial court, where a pair of censers with similar shape, size and tiers was recorded at the emperor's steps up to the throne in the Palace of Heavenly Purity of the Forbidden City. These censers were not just for



decoration; they were also used by the Imperial household as charcoal-burning braziers for additional heating during the cold Beijing winters. Heating commenced on the first day of the 11th lunar month - 'Stove Lighting Day' -- and each member of the household was allocated an amount of fuel based on their rank.

Auspicious creatures and divine symbols



The colours and intricacy of cloisonné enamel lend themselves to lively depictions of both real and mythical creatures. In addition to the lots featured in pairs above, the rare large fishbowl (Qianlong period 1736-1795) is also a splendid example of animal motifs (*illustrated left, estimate: HK\$2,500,000-3,500,000/US\$321,000-450,000*). Set in a luscious landscape filled with fruit trees, waterfalls and flowers, the deer and cranes on the exterior are joined by red carp and a range of crustaceans and fish on the inside. The motifs are clear: the exterior symbolises a long and happy life, and the interior symbolises purity and clarity.



In contrast, more ferocious creatures such as the eagle, dragon and mythical beasts are featured in a champion vase and cover of the Qing dynasty (17th/18th century) (*illustrated right, estimate: HK\$1,200,000-1,800,000/US\$154,000-231,400*). The champion vase was conceived as a trophy and dates back to the Han dynasty (206 BC- 220 AD).

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IMAGES available for download:

<http://cshk.myftp.org/2012/%20Spring%20Christie's%20Hong%20Kong%20Auctions/WOA/RELEASE/Mandel%20Collection/Images/>

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Christie's Hong Kong Spring 2012 Auctions Schedule

APRIL	
Christie's Hong Kong Office Viewing Gallery	
Saturday, 21 April	Wines
MAY	
Public viewing begins on 24 May	
Hong Kong Convention & Exhibition Centre	
Friday, 25 May	Wines
Saturday, 26 May	Wines
	Asian 20 th Century & Contemporary Art (Evening Sale)
Sunday, 27 May	Asian 20 th Century Art (Day Sale)
	Asian Contemporary Art (Day Sale)
	Wines
Monday, 28 May	Chinese Classical Paintings and Calligraphy
Tuesday, 29 May	Chinese Modern Paintings
	Jewels
Wednesday, 30 May	Masterpieces of the Enameller's Art from the Mandel Collection
	The Imperial Sale
	Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art
	Watches

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