

CHRISTIE'S 佳士得

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IMPERIAL CHINESE PORCELAIN TREASURES FROM A DISTINGUISHED AMERICAN COLLECTION

CHRISTIE'S HONG KONG PRESENTS 14 PIECES OF IMPERIAL PORCELAIN FROM THE EARLY MING TO THE MID-QING PERIOD

Hong Kong – On November 27, 2013, Christie's Hong Kong will present *Imperial Chinese Porcelain: Treasures from a Distinguished American Collection*, as part of its autumn auctions of Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art. Comprising 14 pieces and estimated to realize in excess of HK\$55 million (US\$7 million), this group of porcelain spans from the early Ming to the mid-Qing periods and represents some of the best monochrome as well as *doucai*, *famille rose* and iron-red decorated polychrome wares produced during the Ming and Qing dynasties.



Leading the sale is a **very rare carved apple-green enamelled 'dragon' lantern vase with a Qianlong impressed six-character seal mark and of the period (1736-1795)** (*Sale 3265, Lot 3207, Estimate: HK\$18,000,000-25,000,000/US\$2,400,000-3,200,000; Illustrated Left*). The vase is magnificent not simply for its large size, but for its exceptional decoration and successful portrayal of the power of the imperial dragons which encircle its sides. The five-clawed dragon, the most potent symbol of imperial majesty, is depicted on the vessel in carved relief.

The carving on the vase is crisp and consummately skillful. The decorator has created multiple planes within the low-relief, allowing different parts of the decoration to overlap, and giving the dragons added vitality. The enamel on the vase is intense in colour but applied to the biscuit-fired body of the vessel, producing a richness that enhances the contours of the design. This is particularly evident on the bodies of the dragons, where the scales exhibit clarity of form and texture, allowing these magnificent dragons to encircle the vase emanating vitality and power.

A very rare *tianbai*-glazed *anhua*-decorated 'pomegranate' bottle vase, *yuhuchunping*, from the Yongle period (1403-1425) (*Sale 3265, Lot 3211, Estimate: HK\$8,000,000-12,000,000/US\$1,100,000-1,500,000; Illustrated right*) is another notable piece in the collection. The production of white-glazed porcelain during the Yongle period achieved technical virtuosity, distinguished by the very fine white body clay and luminous white glaze, which earned the name *tianbai* or 'sweet white' glaze. The pear-shaped vases (*yuhuchunping*) from the Yongle reign represent the most elegant manifestation of this classic form and this vase in particular is potted to perfect proportions and symmetry.



The sophistication of the production of white-glazed porcelain during the Yongle period of the Ming dynasty may be attributed to the Emperor's personal fondness for white vessels. It is recorded that in the 4th year of his reign (AD1406), the Yongle Emperor received a jade bowl as tribute from the Muslim ruler of a Western state. The Emperor returned the bowl, however, with a message that the Chinese porcelain he used every day was so pure and translucent and therefore there was no need for him to use jade bowls. This white-glazed vase would have additional appeal to the Emperor with its auspicious decorations of flowering and fruiting pomegranate branches. The motif of a ripe pomegranate bursting to expose its seeds, is symbolic of *liukai baiji*, 'Pomegranate revealing one hundred sons', or *qianzi tongmo*, 'One thousand sons within the same generation', conveying the wish for numerous sons.



Another highlight in the collection is a **fine and rare copper-red and underglaze-blue decorated ‘apple-form’ water pot, Kangxi mark and period (1662-1722)** (*Sale 3265, Lot 3206, Estimate: 7,500,000-9,500,000/US\$970,000-1,200,000; Illustrated left*). With a deep interest in ceramics, the Kangxi Emperor took active measures to rebuild and develop the imperial kilns in Jingdezhen after he came to the throne. As early as the 1670s, painting on porcelain in underglaze copper-red had been rediscovered. Not content with contemporary techniques, potters kept exploring new styles. One of the most successful endeavours was painting formal designs using very fine outlines, as seen on this water pot. It is important to note that firing underglaze copper-red is very challenging, demanding precise control of heat, kiln atmosphere and air circulation, as well as careful preparation of the copper pigment. The most notable qualities of this vessel are seen in the well-executed penciled floral designs, and the bright raspberry tone of the copper-red, which is closely related to peachbloom glaze.

A very rare *doucai* and *famille rose* basin dating to the Qianlong period (1736-1795) is also of notable interest (*Sale 3265, Lot 3214, Estimate: HK\$3,800,000-5,500,000/US\$500,000-710,000; Illustrated right*). During the Yongzheng period, *famille rose* enamels had first been incorporated into the *doucai* palette. Their range of transparent, translucent and opaque colours, stand in strong contrast to the cobalt blue contours, creating an unprecedented visual interplay, which is rich in colour and texture. During the Qianlong period, the production of *doucai* wares was taken to new heights, with more elaborate designs that required advanced level of painting and enamelling. The basin is a perfect example that testifies to such technical dexterity and artistic sophistication. The outlines of the design were meticulously painted in underglaze blue with a very complex but well-balanced composition; *famille rose* enamels were then painstakingly filled in with great precision, and the addition of gilt highlights, which were new to the *doucai* palette, further provides the colourful and much textured picture with greater resplendence. No other identical example appears to have been published to date.



The sale also includes a **pair of rare iron-red decorated ‘dragon and phoenix’ jars and covers, with Daoguang iron-red six-character seal marks and of the period (1821-1850)** (*Sale 3265, Lot 3213, Estimate: HK\$4,000,000-6,000,000/US\$520,000-770,000; Illustrated left*). The jars are painted in gradated tones of iron red with details picked out in gilt, creating an elaborate visual effect. Adding to their rarity is the retention of their original covers, also similarly painted with pairs of dragons and phoenix. The combination of dragon and phoenix on each jar is symbolic of imperial unity, with the dragon representing the emperor and the phoenix representing the empress. This suggests that this pair of exquisite jars was possibly commissioned as a wedding gift to the emperor.

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IMAGES of select highlights are [available here](#)

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of 13% on the previous year, and for the third successive year represents the highest total for the period in both company and art market history.

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