

Skinner Auction – Autumn 2010

The ‘Asian Works of Art’ sale at Skinner in Boston on 3 and 4 December 2010 was their most successful Asian art auction to date, making a total of US\$5.8 million, and their second-highest auction total ever realized (94 per cent sold by lot; 99 per cent by value). This result reflects the explosion in the market for Chinese paintings and works of art.

According to Tianyue Jiang, one of the experts in charge, increased publicity in China, an emphasis on Chinese material, and very conservative estimates have drawn large numbers of Chinese bidders, who attend in person or participate by telephone or Internet; more than 60 per cent of the lots sold went to Chinese clients. Internet bidders, some of them new clients in China, accounted for 46.5 per cent of the lots sold, while around 40 per cent sold to clients in the saleroom. It was an international crowd, but most of the top lots went to buyers from China; the remaining 12.5 per cent sold to bidders on the telephone from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore and elsewhere. More than 80 per cent of the 1,719 lots offered were Chinese, the remainder being Japanese, Korean, Indian and Himalayan. The non-Chinese works did not elicit the same level of interest.

This sale was notable for the selection of paintings from a couple of private collections, a first for Skinner’s. Several sold for many times their estimates. The top lot, an album that includes ten leaves depicting landscapes and six of calligraphy by 20th century master Zhang Daqian, painted on the occasion of the late collector P. Y. Wang’s 80th birthday, sold for US\$1.227 million



Blue-and-green landscape
By Zhang Daqian (1899-1983), 1953
Colours on paper
41.9 x 36.2 cm
Skinner Inc.’s ‘Asian Works
of Art’ sale, Boston, 3 and 4
December 2010, lot 1360
Price: US\$424,000
(estimate US\$1/1,500)

to a fairly new collector from China bidding on the telephone (lot 1367; estimate US\$6/8,000). The underbidder, also a private collector from China, came in person to inspect the album. Wang, who invested in and reorganized the Land Bank of China in the early 20th century and was known as the ‘Gold King’ of Shanghai, left the bank at the time of the Japanese occupation and eventually joined his four sons, who were all established in the US. His grandchildren were the consignors.

Other paintings from his collection also sold very well, including a blue-and-green landscape painting by Zhang dated 1953, which another collector from China bought for US\$424,000 (lot 1360; estimate US\$1,000/1,500) and a painted fan by Wu Hufan sold for US\$88,875 (lot 1394; estimate US\$800/1,000). Paintings from the family collection of the late Shen Baozhen were also very successful. An album dated 1936, comprising works by Xu Beihong, Wang Yachen and Huang Binhong fetched US\$154,050 (lot 1359; estimate US\$1,000/1,500).

Although Chinese porcelain and works of art were not as sought after as the paintings, a Yongle period gilt-bronze image of the bodhisattva Manjushri was acquired by a US dealer for US\$65,175 (lot 969; estimate US\$10/15,000). It would no doubt have done better with more complete provenance information. A large sea-green jade carving of a mythical animal also fared well, bringing US\$50,363 (lot 1030; estimate US\$15/20,000).

Margaret Tao

Nagel

Nagel’s ‘Fine Asian Art’ sale series on 4-5 November 2010 netted a total of €13.3 million (85 per cent sold by lot [Chinese section]; 52 per cent sold by lot [Japanese section]; 170 per cent sold by value). The sales were dominated by interest in Chinese objects, many of which were consigned from European collections and which mainland Chinese buyers are

now seemingly intent on bringing back home. A selection of archaic bronzes was offered, but it was a Northern Qi Buddhist marble votive stele, from an old south German collection, that fetched the highest price at €505,400 (lot 1008; estimate €60/100,000).



Stele
China, dated 553
Marble
H. 69.2 cm
Nagel’s ‘Fine Asian Art’ sale, 5
November 2010, Stuttgart, lot 1008
Price: €505,400 (estimate €60/100,000)

Waddington’s

Canadian auction house Waddington’s held its ‘Asian Art’ sale on 13 December 2010, making a total of CA\$2.8 million, representing a sell-through rate of 70 per cent. The two-session sale featured works from all over Asia, but was particularly strong in Chinese ceramics, works of art and paintings, offering more than 400 lots in these categories. The cover lot and highlight was a 17th century rhinoceros



Cup
China, 17th century
Rhinoceros horn
12.2 x 15.5 cm
Waddington’s ‘Asian Art’ sale, 13
December 2010, Toronto, lot 355
Price: CA\$893,750
(estimate CA\$40/60,000)

horn libation cup carved with the ‘hundred boys’ motif. It went to a Hong Kong dealer for CA\$893,750 after intense bidding both in the sale room and on the telephones (lot 355; estimate CA\$40/60,000). The cup had been purchased in Toronto at a church yard sale for only one Canadian dollar during the early 1980s.