

EDITORIAL

THIS IS OUR THIRD special edition dedicated to Malaysia. The first in 1982 and the second in 2007 marked the 25th and 50th anniversaries of the country's independence respectively. For this third focus, our team of writers from Australia to Great Britain has contributed a range of features highlighting the nation's wealth of arts and crafts.



The national crest of the Federation of Malaysia



Location map of Malaysia and neighbouring countries

My fourth son Robin Markbreiter, Executive Editor, and I have been collecting antique silver for many years, so we are delighted that the cover article for the *Arts of Asia* January–February 2012 issue is “Malay Silverware”. This overlooked subject, illustrated with over forty colour photographs, is explored by Raimy Ché-Ross, an independent researcher, writer and accredited translator based in Kuala Lumpur and Canberra. The author writes, “Prized for its dignified simplicity and elegant form, adored for its irresistible tactile appeal, antique Malay silverware has an enchanting, almost bewitching, quality. Traditionally, Malay silverware was produced by court ateliers for aristocratic consumption and appreciation. Royal patronage meant no expense was spared, and princely demands expected nothing less than perfection.”

I must also acknowledge the assistance of my longtime friends and contributors P.K. Fong, M.Sc. in Journalism from Columbia University (1974–1975) and Senior Editor for Tourism Malaysia (2003–2007), and Lucien de Guise who holds an MA in Islamic Art and History from Oxford University. A year ago I had a conversation with Mr Fong about arranging

a special edition on Malaysian art. He has done an extremely professional job preparing this issue's Foreword and coordinating the six splendid Malaysian articles.

Mr Fong also provided interesting background information concerning Malaysia, some of which I am happy to share with *Arts of Asia* readers here. A federal constitutional monarchy comprising thirteen states and three federal territories, Malaysia became a sovereign nation in 1957. Its paramount ruler or *Yang di-Pertuan Agung* (king) is elected for a five-year term from among the hereditary sultans of the states. The Malaysian government is regulated by Parliament comprising two houses: the House of Representatives, to which members are elected once every five years, and the Senate, to which members are nominated. The executive functions of the government are carried out by the cabinet led by the prime minister. The current prime minister in Malaysia, Dato' Seri Najib Abdul Razak, came into office in April 2008. The political entity which has been in power since Independence is the Barisan Nasional (National Front) coalition representing numerous race-based parties.

The 2010 census of population in Malaysia recorded 28.3 million people comprising Malays and indigenous tribes (55 per cent), Chinese (30 per cent), Indians (10 per cent) and various minority ethnic groups (5 per cent). Islam is the official religion but freedom of worship is allowed under the federal constitution. This diversity has seen the flowering of Malaysia's places of worship, colourful festivals and food. A Malaysian custom during major festivals is the “open house”, when practitioners of the various religions open their doors to visitors all day. Thus, people of different races visit to wish each other *Gong Xi Fa Cai* during Chinese New Year, *Selamat Hari Raya* during the Muslim New Year, and *Happy Deepavali* during the Hindu Festival of Lights. Many of Malaysia's public holidays relate to cultural festivals though some are observed only in certain states; for example, the birthday of the respective state sultans.

In terms of land size, Malaysia covers 329,847 square kilometres. Its borders are with Thailand and Singapore in West or Peninsular Malaysia. Over in Borneo, it shares frontiers with Indonesia and Brunei in East Malaysia. Its sea boundaries are with Vietnam and the Philippines. The Straits of Malacca between Sumatra and Peninsular Malaysia is a major passageway for maritime trade.

Among the fascinating Malaysian subjects featured in the January–February 2012 issue are the Qur'an, wood carvings of hornbill, *ikat* and brassware. Dr Annabel Teh Gallop, Head of the Southeast Asian section of The British Library, is an expert on Malay and Indonesian manuscripts, letters, documents and seals, and the art of the Islamic book in Southeast Asia. As explained in her article, “The Art of the Malay Qur'an”, the finest Qur'an manuscripts in the Malay Peninsula were created in the northeastern states of Terengganu, Kelantan and Patani. She writes, “It is from Terengganu that we find the most brilliant illuminated Qur'ans in the whole of Southeast Asia, exuding a jewel-like radiance, with truly virtuosic decorative details, painted in rich hues and adorned with copious amounts of gold, executed with precision and finesse”. Surprisingly, these religious-inspired artworks have remained mostly hidden for centuries, being ignored in foreign writings on the Malay world and survey of Malay arts.

Lucien de Guise until recently was Head Curator of the Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia (IAMM), one of the rare museums that feature Islamic works from Southeast Asia. Shown in his article on the museum's Malay World gallery are examples of old Malay gold and silver coins, jewellery, belt buckles, modesty plates, calligraphic batik, weapons (swords,

spears and *keris*), wood prayer screens and gilded furnishings. Lucien's second article is dedicated to *ikat* (to tie or to bind), a Malay word that has been embraced by the global lexicon. Lucien says, "There are few creative fields in which the Malay Peninsula has ever had mastery over the rest of Southeast Asia. The *ikats* of the Malay Peninsula's East Coast states falls into this category, being among the finest ever created."

Heidi Munan has studied the material culture of Sarawak for over forty years; I am therefore confident readers will truly enjoy her article on wood carvings of hornbill. The rhinoceros hornbill is revered by most native peoples of Borneo as a harbinger of fortune, power and success in war; it is also associated with the underworld. In Borneo the painstakingly carved and painted representation of the bird are highly valued in Iban society, and elevated on a ceremonial pole to symbolise success in war.

Rounding off the special features is Mr Fong's "Malay Brassware", a very old form of metal craft and an integral part of the local handicraft heritage. Artisans have produced unique brass items for many purposes including jewellery, musical instruments and weapons of war, besides mundane functional objects such as utensils and other kitchenware for daily home use.

In addition, I am delighted to publish "Xu Beihong: Pioneer of Modern Chinese Painting" by Fangfang Xu, the daughter of Xu Beihong (1895–1953). This article, on one of China's most loved and revered artists, coincides with a comprehensive exhibition organised by the Denver Art Museum in collaboration with the Xu Beihong Memorial Museum in Beijing (on view at Denver from October 30th, 2011 through January 29th, 2012).

Dr Masako Watanabe, Senior Research Associate, Department of Asian Art at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, also writes on her special exhibition "Storytelling in Japanese Art" at The Met in New York from November 19th, 2011 through May 6th, 2012. Her article demonstrates the rich cultural tradition of illustrated tales in Japan during the 12th–19th century. The exhibits include rare and unique Japanese handscrolls, albums, books, hanging scrolls and screens through loans from the Spencer Collection of the New York Public Library and other local New York collections as well as The Met's holdings.

Readers often want advice on buying art and antiques, so I commissioned Bangkok-based collector Paul Bromberg to prepare an article on this subject. He said, "For a renowned shopping city such as Bangkok, it is quite remarkable how little has been written in English about the Thai capital's flourishing antiques market". Paul's article, "A Brief Guide to the Bangkok Antiques Market", provides a general overview of the current market, a guide to the key areas where antiques are sold, an introduction to some established dealers, and some tips to assist antique buyers safely negotiate their way through a purchase in Bangkok.

John Cunningham's article "China and the Fine Wine Market", published in the November–December 2011 issue, was warmly appreciated by those *Arts of Asia* subscribers who are wine connoisseurs, collectors and enthusiasts. The Hong Kong International Wine & Spirits Fair hosted in the first week of November 2011 by the Hong Kong Trade Development Council was a resounding success and in this part of the world the level of demand and overall interest in fine wine is at an all-time high. Exclusively for our magazine, John's second article discusses "China and the Bordeaux Wine Trade".

On November 10th, Robin was invited to a special dinner in London, hosted by Michael and Johnny Goedhuis along with Asia House at 63 New Cavendish Street, for Chinese



Johnny and Michael Goedhuis along with Asia House hosted a dinner for Chinese Contemporary artist Xu Lei and Château Mouton Rothschild



Lord Rothschild and Chairman of Sotheby's, Henry Wyndham, the auctioneer to raise funds for a Chinese contemporary ink painting show

contemporary artist Xu Lei and Château Mouton Rothschild. During the evening Robin had the pleasure of meeting artist Xu Lei, Sotheby's Chairman Henry Wyndham, Dr Clarissa Gräfin von Spee (Curator at The British Museum), Lord Rothschild, Baroness Philippine de Rothschild, Jean-Pierre de Beaumarchais, Julien de Beaumarchais de Rothschild, the Chinese Ambassador His Excellency Liu Xiaoming, Zair J. Vama, General Group Manager at HSBC Holdings plc, and *Arts of Asia* contributor Dr Wang Tao, Senior Lecturer in Chinese Archaeology at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London.

There was an exhibition of six paintings by Xu Lei, the artist selected for the 2008 Château Mouton Rothschild wine label. During the three-course dinner, created by The Eight Over Eight Executive Chef Neil Witney, sixty guests were served Château Mouton Rothschild Premier Grand Cru Classé Pauillac 1990. Towards the end of the evening, Henry Wyndham conducted an auction to raise funds for an education programme and exhibition of Contemporary Chinese ink paintings in June 2012 at Saatchi Gallery, which will then



Baroness Philippine de Rothschild, Roddy Gow and Jean-Pierre de Beaumarchais at Asia House in London on November 10th, 2011



Wesley E. Kirkholm, Tuyet Nguyet and Robert Kleiner at the V&A Shop where *Arts of Asia* was prominently on display



Michael Goedhuis, Johnny Goedhuis, James Wang, the Chinese Ambassador His Excellency Liu Xiaoming and painter Xu Lei



Robin Markbreiter won a holiday for two at The St. Regis Bangkok. AAL Project Director Jessica Curtis and Chairman Max Rutherford

travel to Asia House for the month of July.

In November 2011, Asian Art in London entered its 14th year and continued to assert itself as a key fixture on the international art calendar. Welcoming dealers from abroad to participate for the first time, the event has seen a surge of international interest from buyers, curators and collectors alike.

The much anticipated annual Gala Party held at the Victoria and Albert Museum was once again a spectacular event with Taiko drummers welcoming over five hundred guests. I am seen with my friends, snuff bottle dealer Robert Kleiner and faithful subscriber Wesley E. Kirkholm, at the V&A Shop where *Arts of Asia* magazines were on display and for sale. Wesley owns a full set of *Arts of Asia* magazines (almost 250 copies in excellent condition) as he has subscribed continuously ever since our rare January–February 1971 issue. He was impressed when I mentioned that an extensive run of *Arts of Asia*, 1972–2010, approximately 150 copies, sold for US\$8750 (estimate US\$2000) at Freeman's Auctioneers & Appraisers in Philadelphia, USA on September 10th, 2011. Besides provid-

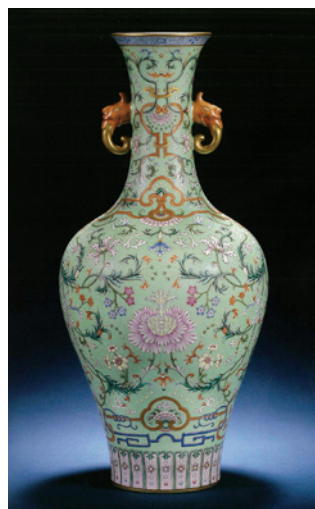
ing a wealth of reading material, at US\$59 per copy, with possibly an US\$8 average price at purchase, preserving your *Arts of Asia* in your library has become a solid investment. I would like to point out that a selection of back issues can still be purchased directly from our www.artsofasia.com website!

Max Rutherford, Chairman of Asian Art in London, said in his welcome speech, "London plays host to an important art market and the arrival of key international galleries has strengthened the already dynamic Asian art scene". This year's winner for the most exceptional works of art in the two-dimensional category was Carlo Cristi for a mid-7th century Central Asian polychrome silk fragment; and Rossi & Rossi Ltd won the three-dimensional category for a bronze Buddha Sakyamuni. Robin was the surprised and happy winner of an exclusive holiday for two in Bangkok courtesy of The St. Regis Hotels & Resorts. He will be bringing his wife Nancy and I am sure they will be pampered.

There was a buoyant atmosphere throughout Asian Art in London and encouraging reports of sales. Within days of



Stuart Marchant, Richard Marchant and Shugo Inoue displaying the Bertil Högström Collection of Kangxi blue and white porcelain



Imperial vase sold at Bonhams for £9,001,250, the highest priced Asian artwork in London in 2011



Christian Deydier awarded Commandeur dans l'ordre du Mérite National by French president Nicolas Sarkozy

opening, Eskenazi in Mayfair had sold all but two of the fourteen elegant pieces of Chinese *huanghuali* furniture from a private collection. Prices ranged from £40,000 to over £1 million. All the pieces will be returning to mainland China.

In Kensington, Marchant sold several items from their exhibition, "The Bertil Högström Collection: Kangxi Blue and White Porcelain (1662–1722)". Priced from £4500 to six figure sums, they went to collectors from America, Europe and China.

Lively and competitive bidding took place throughout the London auctions with record-breaking peaks being reached. Christie's concluded its Asian sales with a combined total of £28.6 million. While at Bonhams, world records were broken for intro and netsuke at the Harriet Szechenyi Collection of Japanese Art sale, raising £4.6 million. Also at Bonhams, an 18th century Qianlong period imperial Chinese vase sold for more than £9 million, further boosting the capital's reputation as a key destination for Asian art buyers. Headlining the sale at Sotheby's a large famille-rose landscape dish with Yongzheng mark sold for £1,049,250 after a dramatic four-way telephone bidding battle.

Fine Art Asia 2011, held from October 3rd to 7th at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, was greatly valued by both local and international visitors. The fair provided a unique showcase for Asian and Western art, antiques, Modern and Contemporary art, and fine jewellery. The organisers said, "Attended by 19,800 visitors from all over the world, the fair presented five thousand superb works of art, exhibited by more than one hundred leading Asian, European and American galleries, and recorded sales of HK\$375 million, an increase of 17% over 2010". This underlines Hong Kong's vital role as the hub of art in Asia and in the global art scene.

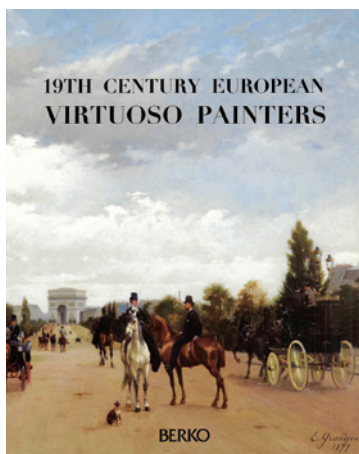
Christian Deydier said, "With the recent increase in the number of very important and passionate collectors of Chinese antiquities coming from mainland China, I feel it is now especially meaningful to exhibit in China, so I have decided to take part at Fine Art Asia for the first time". At the fair he had the privilege to offer thirty ancient Chinese bronzes from Frank Arts, a collector from Belgium. Christian explained, "During the past twenty years, Mr Arts has gathered with a passion some exceptional treasures, amongst them pieces coming from major international collections such as those of C.T. Loo, J.T. Tai and Dr F. Vannotti. Some of the objects are already well known having been recorded in important publi-



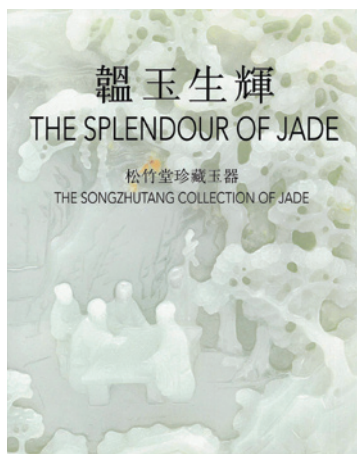
Joyce Liang, a leading Hong Kong dealer of rare museum-quality Chinese archaic bronze vessels, at her Hollywood Road gallery

cations and included in major Chinese art exhibitions held in the Fleming Museum and the Rietberg Museum." One third of the pieces sold to European collectors, another third sold to Hong Kong collectors and five examples went to mainland Chinese collectors. I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mr Deydier for his award of the Commandeur dans l'ordre du Mérite National by French President Nicolas Sarkozy on October 12th, 2011.

Joyce Liang also specialises in museum-quality Chinese archaic bronzes. When I visited her impressive gallery at 123 Hollywood Road she brought out a group of rare ritual bronzes to show me. At the Autumn New York sales of Chinese works of art in September 2011, Joyce spent around US\$2 million on ancient Chinese bronzes, including a very important archaic bronze tripod *jue* wine vessel for US\$902,500 (estimate US\$40,000–60,000) from Christie's. Joyce said, "I took them for my own collection, because they are truly original, as Ming ceramics are really developments of Shang in shape and pattern. More Asians are gravitating towards Shang because those examples have greater depth in history than Ming porcelain." Joyce also explained that over the last two years, ancient Chinese bronzes have increased in value by 50 per cent and bronzes under HK\$400,000 have now doubled in price. Even so, she believes that Chinese bronze ritual vessels are reasonably priced compared with Chinese paintings and ceramics.



19th Century European Virtuoso Painters by Patrick and Viviane Berko. James Tissot (1836–1902), *Portrait of A Young Lady*, oil on canvas, 92 x 64 cm



The Splendour of Jade by Thomas T. Fok. White jade boulder deeply undercut with hills and forest in accordance with its natural lines, Qianlong period, height 19.5 cm



Joyce said, “The value is not just for the beauty of the bronze object, but also for the historical inscription. Today, collectors from mainland China have a new level for pricing bronzes and it is becoming difficult for old collectors to bring themselves to buy at the current levels. To be a successful dealer you need knowledge so you can buy and sell at the right time. You also need to carefully study the China market. In China there are not enough areas for investment so this is one of the reasons why Chinese art has risen quite rapidly in price. Bronzes are not widely auctioned in China because of provenance issues. However, collectors are allowed to buy bronzes overseas and import them into China. I am able to obtain the official stamps and import license.”

TEFAF Maastricht will celebrate its Silver Jubilee when it opens at the MECC (Maastricht Exhibition and Congress Centre) in the southern Netherlands from March 16th–25th, 2012. In the twenty-five years since The European Fine Art Fair was founded in 1988 it has established itself as the finest event of its kind in the world.

After visiting TEFAF in 2011, Robin came up with the idea of arranging an exciting tour to Europe in March 2012 for thirty members of The University of Hong Kong Museum Society—with the highlight being the 25th Anniversary celebrations of TEFAF. The tour was fully subscribed two days after announcing the itinerary, which also includes visiting historical sites and museums in Berlin, Luxembourg, Aachen, Brussels and Amsterdam. Robin and Friends of the Museum Society would like to thank Ben Janssens, Chairman of TEFAF’s Executive Committee, for extending invitations to attend the exclusive VIP Preview on March 15th, 2012. Robin will be on hand to introduce prominent gallery owners and exhibitors, providing an excellent opportunity for members to be informed about the finest quality objects at the fair.

Exhibiting once again at TEFAF, Patrick and Viviane Berko said, “Art lovers, amateurs, neophytes or just admirers of the virtuosity of the painters of the 19th century will be ‘filled with joy’ by our latest publication, *19th Century European Virtuoso Painters*, which is available in English and Chinese versions. The foreword is written by Mr Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council.”

The 19th century was one of the richest periods in the history of art, thanks not only to the wealth of painters with great technical ability, but also to the variety of schools (Neoclassicism, Romanticism, Orientalism, Academism, Realism and the Pre-Raphaelites to name but a few). The Berkos from Belgium bring beauty and enchantment to our world through the publication of their splendid cloth-bound hard-

back volumes with colour dust jacket, size 30 × 24 cm, 540 pages, 600 colour illustrations, and 350 artists’ biographies.

Another book deserving mention here is *The Splendour of Jade*, published by Thomas T. Fok and designed by Rosanne Chan of CA Design, along with English text by Humphrey K.F. Hui and photography by Gilles Lorin. The cloth-bound hardback book showcases 162 jades—from a *bi* disc dating to the Neolithic period to a Qianlong brush pot. Between the years 2003 to 2005, part of Mr Fok’s collection was on loan for display at the Hong Kong Museum of Art, and in 2008 another part was loaned to the Art Gallery and Museum, University of Hong Kong. He hopes that his new book will enable him to introduce his collection of jade treasures to an even wider audience.

I thought readers would enjoy, in a general way, the following extract from Thomas Fok’s foreword: “Jade first caught my fancy when, at the age of seventeen, an elderly friend presented me with a small naturalistically carved cat laying on a leaf of 4.5 cm in length. Being ignorant of jade at the time, I was under the impression that jade should be green, and the gift appeared to be of an ordinary piece of stone with no significance. Later, however, I was enlightened by a friend that those green species are termed jadeite while those in white like the piece in question is called nephrite, and both are jade. In fact, the nephrite carvings have enjoyed a longer history than jadeite and have been a part of our culture. I further learned that the configuration of the small cat on a leaf conveys the meaning of the traditional maxim, ‘Be assured of upholding your possessions or profession.’”

2011 has been a truly remarkable year for Sotheby’s where the company’s revenues in Asia at the time of writing exceeded US\$1 billion (HK\$7.8 billion)—the first time ever—an important milestone in the history of Sotheby’s Asia. During the year over 7800 lots were sold, including a group of exceptional Chinese paintings in which twenty-five magnificent Zhang Daqian masterpieces from the famous Mei Yun Tang Collection were sold for US\$87.3 million (HK\$680 million). Taking just over one hour, the auction also set a world record for the great painter.

I wish to congratulate Kevin Ching, Chief Executive Officer of Sotheby’s Asia, for building a successful team. His colleagues compliment him for being an inspirational leader with boundless energy and, most importantly, the trust and confidence from bidders and consignors from within and outside the region. What many readers may not know is that Kevin Ching is an accomplished photographer with a keen eye for his surroundings. I enjoyed receiving his signed copy of



Kevin Ching, Chief Executive Officer of Sotheby's Asia, and his new book, *Existence*, with over one hundred black and white photographs

Existence featuring over one hundred black and white photographs revealing the essence of people, often on the edge, and their lives. If you appreciate the photographs of the revered American Diane Arbus, who died in 1971 at the age of forty-eight, you will surely enjoy Kevin's insightful work.

The following extracts come from Kevin's introduction for his new book: "We exist for no pre-determined reason or purpose and the same applies for all living forms. . . Life is not founded upon high philosophical purpose. Our natural fear of death turns life into a matter of survival, soon reduced to a routine and a necessity. We all instinctively strive to live better and pray that we will go in peace when our time is up. . . We are all tortured throughout our lives by exhaustion and a sense of helplessness, alas, often accented by loneliness and sadness. Earthly pleasures come as mere distractions from the perpetual pain inflicted by guilt and shattered dreams."

My longtime friend Jean Schaefer, President of Flying Cranes Antiques Ltd, states with passion, "No home should be without a collection of Imari fish plates to enhance the dinner table on the occasions when *ceviche* hors d'oeuvres or sumptuous fish entrées are served". Her gallery will present an exhibition and sale of rare 19th century Imari porcelain fish plates in a multitude of sizes and shapes. These plates will be on view and for sale from November 14th through January 31st in Gallery 58 at The Manhattan Art & Antiques Center.

The Imari fish plates and platters bear the traditional palette of the ware's rich cobalt blues, iron reds, greens and gilt. The various designs and motifs provide a striking contrast against the whiteness of the porcelain. Since the 1700s and 1800s, American and European homes were often designed to display Japan's great Imari porcelain garnitures on their mantelpieces and imposing Imari palace vases along their winding staircases. This trend continued into the 20th century.

Before closing my Editorial for this special January–February 2012 issue, I wish to announce that Christie's Hong Kong Autumn 2011 auctions realised a combined total of HK\$2.85 billion (US\$366 million) across twelve sales of paintings, wine, jewels, watches and works of art. These results bring the season total for Christie's Asia to HK\$3.025 billion (US\$389 million) and the 2011 full year results to HK\$7.04 billion (US\$904 million), including the Forever auctions in Beijing as well as mid-season wine sales.

François Curiel, President of Christie's Asia, said, "Led by Asian contemporary and 20th century art, jewellery and watches, Chinese classical and modern paintings and calligraphy, as well as Chinese works of art and wine, our 50th sale season in Hong Kong saw great participation from Asia (87%), with 73% of the buyers coming from Greater China. Sixty-nine works of art sold for more than US\$1 million, the



A massive "Catch of the Day" 19th century Imari porcelain fish platter, 22 x 15.5 inches, from Flying Cranes Antiques Ltd



Altfield Gallery welcomes the auspicious Year of the Dragon by putting on display a collection of striking 19th century Tibetan rugs, which includes a group with dramatic dragon designs

same number as in 2010. Strong prices were obtained for works by Zao Wou-Ki (born 1920), Cui Ruzhuo (born 1944), as well as diamonds, 19th century watches made for the Chinese market, and Qing ceramics. The market is price-aware and hungry for well-curated sales offering the best works of art, appropriately estimated."

For the auspicious Year of the Dragon (commencing on January 23rd, 2012) Altfield Gallery will be putting on display a collection of striking Tibetan rugs, which include a group of dramatic dragon design. For the Chinese people, the dragon is a powerful symbol of courage, able to ward off evil and protect wealth. One of the strongest and most auspicious of symbols, the dragon's protective energy is harnessed by capturing its image on textiles and carpets. These sacred rugs from Tibet were owned by the Tibetan elite, who used them to sit on and also to cover their luggage on long journeys. They demonstrate a wide range of diversity, creativity and modernity in their design.

I want to warmly thank all my friends and *Arts of Asia* readers around the world for their positive support in 2011, which has been a record year for our magazine. Whichever your zodiac sign, I wish you a very happy, healthy and successful Year of the Dragon.



Tuyet Nguyen

TUYET NGUYET Publisher & Editor