EDITORIAL

IT WAS IN June 2009 that our discussions started with Dr James C.S. Lin, Assistant Keeper of Applied Arts at the Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge, regarding the museum’s landmark exhibition of rare Chinese imperial tomb treasures from the Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220). This special event in Cambridge (on view until September 30th, 2012) coincides with the 2012 Summer Olympic Games.

For the benefit of our worldwide readers, Dr Lin has written the following three paragraphs as a brief introduction to the main subjects of this issue:

“Tomb treasures from the Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220) are finally coming to Cambridge, England, after many years of planning and preparation. It is the first time that the Fitzwilliam Museum has organised such a large-scale international exhibition of Han material and the objects are the best ever exhibited outside China. Just like other exhibitions, the process was full of drama but I am very grateful to the friends and colleagues who were involved with this project.

“The Han dynasty, without a doubt, is the most important period in Chinese history. Its ideology of the afterlife, the pursuit of immortality and the obsession with jade have strongly influenced modern China, as can be seen through this exhibition. The objects on display were carefully produced for the owner’s daily use or burial. They were gathered from different sources and workshops and were buried with their owners for the afterlife. Thankfully they survived tomb looting and after two thousand years they are displayed in front of the audience.

“I would like to thank Arts of Asia for providing this opportunity to promote the exhibition. The exhibition forms part of the Cultural Olympiad and also marks the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relationship between China and the United Kingdom. This exhibition will help visitors to understand how modern-day China was shaped. Cultural exchange occurred during the Han period and, two thousand years later, it will happen again through this exhibition at Cambridge.”

It has been a pleasure working with Dr Lin and his colleagues at the Fitzwilliam Museum. I wish to thank him, Professor Dame Jessica Rawson and Dr Lukas Nickel, as well as all the distinguished authors who have contributed stimulating and insightful articles for our May–June 2012 issue.

Robin Markbreiter, Arts of Asia Director/Executive Editor, is an active participant of The University of Hong Kong Museum Society and is always happy to assist his fellow members. The visit to The European and Fine Art Fair (TEAF) was a high point of the Fitzwilliam Museum Society’s “An Art Fair to Remember” tour (March 10th–22nd, 2012), which took in the cities of Berlin, Brussels and Amsterdam to visit museums, art galleries, palaces, castles and cathedrals. The group saw wonderful architecture, enjoyed shopping and dining at “Michelin Star” restaurants. Robin was delighted to take his friends to TEAF, the world’s finest art and antiques fair, showcasing a range of treasures to celebrate its Silver Jubilee.

Giving group tours at art fairs in Hong Kong is something Robin has done before, such as at Fine Art Asia 2011 held in the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre. However, bringing thirty collectors from the Far East to Maastricht for TEAF’s Private View on March 15th required months of careful arrangement and planning. On March 16th and 17th, Robin gave guided tours to see Asian and Western antiques, modern and classical paintings, works on paper, and jewellery which, of course, was especially popular with the ladies. When his enthusiastic group admired items on display, gallery owners gave helpful explanations and answered questions.

On March 14th the fair received a special visit from Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands, who was escorted around the venue by Willem, Baron van Dedem, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of The European Fine Art Foundation. Her Majesty was also introduced to Ben Janssens, Chairman of TEAF’s Executive Committee, and members of the vetting committees who ensure the authenticity of exhibits. Every Museum Society member commented that visiting TEAF was a memorable experience. They were thrilled with the world-class art and made quite a number of significant purchases. Some of their favourite stands was Landau Fine Art of Montreal showing works by Le Corbusier, Alberto Giacometti, Joan Miró and Pablo Picasso, just to name a few artists represented. The star attraction was Reclining Figure: Curved by Henry Moore. The unique black marble 144 cm figure weighing 600 kg and dating from 1977 was sold by Moore to an American private collector and has never been offered for sale on the open market before. Priced in the region of US$35 million, it is one of the British sculptor’s greatest pieces.

TEAF exhibitors were genuinely impressed with the group’s appreciation of both Asian and Western art, as well as their good taste. Bonnie Kwan Huo, President of the Museum Society, said, “I have received many great compliments about the TEAF trip. Thank you very much for taking our members to the fair for three days. Many of our members enjoyed your charming company, kind introduction to various galleries, meeting Chairman Ben Janssens and other dealers.” Linda Chan also deserves credit for organising the trip with meticulous attention to details.
Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands visited TEFAF’s Silver Jubilee, where she was escorted by Willem, Baron van Dedem, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of The European Fine Art Foundation.

Reclining Figure: Carved, unique black marble, dating from 1977 by British sculptor Henry Moore (1898-1986), was the star attraction at TEFAF and priced in the region of US$35 million at Landau Fine Art.

Michael Goedhuis invited all the members of The University of Hong Kong Museum Society to attend “INK – The Art of China”, the exhibition he is curating at the Saatchi Gallery in London.

From March 18th to 20th, the group spent three full days in Brussels (Belgium) where the high light was a private view of the famous Japanese Tower and the Chinese Pavilion constructed by King Leopold II. On arrival in Laeken, Robin introduced Miriam Lambrecht, Head of Department, Curator of the Collection of India and Southeast Asia at The Royal Museums of Art and History (RMAH) in Brussels, and Nathalie Vandeperre, Curator of the Far Eastern Department, China-Japan-Korea, Museums of the Far East. The Japanese Tower houses collections of Japanese 17th and 18th century ceramics, while the Chinese Pavilion displays 17th and 18th century Chinese porcelain and furniture. These will be covered in the Arts of Asia July–August 2012 issue featuring six expertly written articles on the collections of the RMAH. It will also be our publication’s special 250th Edition.

Professor Puay-peng Ho, Director at the School of Architecture, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, and Professor Thomas Coomans of Leuven University brought the group to visit two buildings by architect Victor Horta, one of the earliest initiators of Art Nouveau. They also went to Musée Horta, the architect’s former house, which represents one of the most remarkable pioneering works of architecture of the end of the 19th century. It was interesting to see the strong influences of chinoiserie and japonisme in Horta’s design and decoration.

I have so many fond memories of Asia Week in New York where I would meet friends and attend art activities. Arriving directly from Brussels, Robin went on my behalf this year. Young and full of energy, he visited over thirty galleries, the major auctions, as well as museums and two art fairs. By his account it was the busiest New York Asia Week in years and probably the most successful as combined sales for Asian art were reported to have exceeded US$170 million.

Henry Howard-Sneyd, Chairman of Asia Week New York 2012, said: “Almost every significant art form and country in Asia was represented, often in depth, across the city. The dealer participants reported consistent visitor traffic throughout, with many saying that they had sold better than last year. The auctions reported record high prices in many categories with New York maintaining its ranking among the top-selling centres of the world.”

This time Robin met many collectors and curators who were in town looking for good acquisitions. James Lally sold over 75% of the items in his exhibition “Silver and Gold in Ancient China” and was pleased to announce that the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington DC purchased a rare Sogdian parcel-gilt silver fluted cup dating to circa 700 AD. Director Julian Raby announced that “the Freer Gallery of Art is proud to be acquiring this cup which will be reunited with a Sogdian bowl also from the Kempe Collection”.

Carlton Rochell, who specialises in Indian, Himalayan and Southeast Asian art, said, “It has been one of the most successful shows for us to date, with over thirty top-quality works of art selling to at least four American and international museums, as well as to private collectors from around the world. We have seen unprecedented numbers of people here at the gallery, many of whom we have met for the first time. Asia Week New York continues to be the premier destination for museums, collectors and dealers worldwide, and we were thrilled to be a part of it.”

At Kapoor Galleries one of their distinguished clients flew from India in his personal jet to view the exhibition prior to its official opening and purchased over a dozen important Indian paintings. Sunet Kapoor commented, “We have had tremendous interest and kind praise from collectors, curators and colleagues for the high quality works on display”.

Carol Conover of Kaikodo was happy to report that the
Ben Janssens, Chairman of TEFAF’s Executive Committee, was presented with a copy of Celebrations!, a book of photographs taken by Museum Society members.

Yvonne Choi, Vice-Chairman of the Museum Society, and Patrick Berko, specialist in European paintings of the 19th and early 20th century.

Miriam Lambrecht and Nathalie Vandeperre were presented gifts at the Chinese Pavilion in Brussels.

The Museum Society members in front of Musée Horta, the architect’s former house. Victor Horta (1861–1947) is one of the important names in Art Nouveau architecture.
Mingei Arts Gallery will show Japanese bamboo art at the Brussels Oriental Art Fair.

Jaqueline Simcox, specialist in Asian textiles, will bring to Masterpiece London 2012 an imperial Qianlong silk kesi (tapestry) wall hanging woven with two five-clawed dragons confronting a shou character for long life.

Sandra Whitman will be exhibiting Tibetan tiger rugs at Myrna Meyers Gallery.

gallery sold several of their most important classical Chinese paintings to American cultural institutions. Other works of art, in the six and seven-figure category, sold to American, Chinese and European collectors.

John Eksenazi said, “I have had a very successful week. Many of my good clients came back and the general mood has been buoyant, and we noticed many European buyers were in town. We also detect a strong interest from Far Eastern collectors venturing outside of the Chinese art market.”

Eric Zetterquist was very pleased to have sold over half of his exhibition in the first four days of Asia Week. He remarked, “The most notable sale was a guanyao celadon vase made for the imperial court in the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279). I was delighted to meet many new collectors.”

I know Arts of Asia readers like to be informed about upcoming special art events. As space in this Editorial is limited it is not possible to mention them all, but please do spend time to study the attractive advertisements in the magazine. In the meantime, here is a useful list of three important art fairs taking place in Hong Kong so collectors may save the dates and follow up by viewing the websites I have provided:

Asia International Arts & Antiques Fair, Kowloon Bay International Trade & Exhibition Centre, Hong Kong, May 25th to 27th, 2012 (www.aiaa.com.hk);

International Antiques Fair, Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, May 28th to 30th, 2012 (www.iaf.com.hk);

Fine Art Asia 2012, Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, October 4th to 7th, 2012 (www.fineartasia.com).

Georgia Chrischilles, founder and organiser of the Brussels Oriental Art Fair (www.boaf.be), is delighted to return to the Grand Sablon (June 6th to 10th, 2012) for the eighth year. Mingei Arts Gallery had a successful show at the 2011 fair. This year their exhibition highlights the talent of great artists of bamboo art from the Edo period to contemporary. The works were created for ikebana, the art of flower arrangement, and were particularly appreciated by tea ceremony masters. The Brussels Ancient Art Fair’s 10th special edition will also take place over the same dates at the Grand Sablon, with sixteen major ancient art dealers. To learn more about the participating galleries and the works being shown visit www.boaf.be. These exciting events are well worth attending.

The Olympia International Fine Art and Antiques Fair (www.olympia-art-antiques.com), June 7th to 17th, promises a line-up of 180 dealers selling a wider range of disciplines than any other art and antiques fair. Whether you are a dealer, seasoned collector, first time buyer or an interiors enthusiast, the fair provides the best choice in London if your budget is £100 or £1 million. A range of dealers, new and returning to Olympia, will be enriching the choice available in a variety of categories including 20th century design, contemporary, 18th and 19th century English furniture, Asian and tribal art, ceramics, carpets, silver and jewellery.

Masterpiece London (www.masterpiecefair.com) is once again set to thrill collectors and new enthusiasts across the globe when it returns for its third year, to the South Grounds of The Royal Hospital Chelsea, London SW3, in 2012. Hailed by Oprah Winfrey as an event with “an exciting and diverse range of quality and beautiful things” and described by Sir David Tang as “at the premier end of all the fairs”, Masterpiece London showcases the best of the best in art, antiques and design from around the world. The eight day event will take place from June 28th to July 4th (with a Preview on Wednesday June 27th).

Thomas Woodham-Smith, Chairman of Masterpiece London, said, “In a year where the international spotlight shines brightly on London, exciting plans are in the pipeline to ensure Masterpiece London 2012 is bigger and better than ever. It is guaranteed to wow everyone from the established aficionado to the curious newcomer.” A significant number of dealers at the fair offer Asian art, such as Jacqueline Simcox who will be bringing a large imperial Qianlong silk kesi (tapestry) wall hanging woven with five-clawed gold dragons.

If you are planning to be in London why not also make a visit to Paris? Sandra Whitman, specialist in antique and old carpets, will be exhibiting at Myrna Meyers Gallery, 11 rue de Beaune, Paris 75007, within the Carré Rive Gauche, a unique concentration of antique dealers and art galleries in the heart of the 7th arrondissement of Paris, between Saint-Germain-des-Prés and the Musée d’Orsay, and facing the Louvre.

The title of the exhibition is “Du sauvage au serein—Tapis tibétains de la collection de Sandra Whitman”, with Vernissage on May 31st. The show runs from June 1st–3rd, but the rugs will remain in the Myrna Meyers Gallery through July 7th. The focus will be tiger design rugs, and rugs with a strong Buddhist connection, primarily open field and geometrics with a few lotus carpets.

Returning to Hong Kong, I am delighted to report that Zurich Asia’s rare stamps auction established a world record for a 1941 Dr Sun Yat Sen inverted centre $2 black and blue New York print stamp. Selling for HK$2,415,000 (US$310,000),

On March 2nd, 2012, Robin attended The Hong Kong Art Craft Merchants Association Spring Dinner and Inauguration Ceremony for the new President Mr Shiyuan Liu who takes over from Henry Chong after many years of sterling service at the helm. Also at this special event were Executive and Supervisory Committee Members James Wong, K.Y. Ng, Martin Fung, Cecil Xin, David W.S. Choi and William Chak.

Ms Addy Lam would like Arts of Asia readers to know that Lam & Co. has a new space at 2/F, IZI Building, 151 Hollywood Road. From May 24th to June 1st, she presents an exhibition of early Chinese stone sculptures to coincide with Christie’s Spring 2012 auctions in Hong Kong. She says, “I love early sculptures and we already had three exhibitions in the last year around the same time as the Sotheby’s, Christie’s and Bonhams auctions. We have many serious collectors and dealers from the USA, Europe, Japan, Taiwan and China, and we plan to schedule regular exhibitions of beautiful early Chinese ceramics and sculptures. We have been lucky to find some wonderful stone collections from Taiwan and Japan, especially the Longmen Caves stones.”

“A Jewelled World” is the title of Susan Ollemans’ exhibition at Altfield Gallery, May 11th to 21st, 2012. She returns to Hong Kong with jewellery and related items from China, Cambodia, Thailand, Burma and India. From India there will be fine examples of Mughal jewellery inset with precious diamonds, rubies and emeralds, enamelled on 24 carat gold and made for the princely houses of the Muslim north.

Finally, I would like to congratulate Judith Dowling for her appointment as Director of Asian Works of Art at Skinner Inc., a prominent American auction house for antiques and fine art. According to Karen Keane, CEO of Skinner, “Judith has a long and well-deserved reputation as one of the leading experts in East Asian art in New England, and indeed, worldwide. We are delighted to welcome her to Skinner.” With more than twenty years as an expert in Asian art, Judith will be able to attract and bring to auction a wide variety of material—especially Japanese and Korean art, in addition to Chinese art and antiques.

These days I keep hearing from many parts of the world how Asia’s arts and antiques are in strong demand. Arts of Asia looks forward to covering the latest events for our readers.