ASIA WEEK in New York

TUYET NGUYET and ROBIN MARKBREITER

WE CHECKED into our guest rooms on March 11th at the friendly Loews Regency New York, which is well-known as a “power” breakfast destination for the city’s businessmen. The hotel is conveniently located on Park Avenue and we started our Asia Week coverage by walking around the block to visit Orientations Gallery and Robyn Turner Gallery. Our friends Susan Tsof and Robyn Turner were in fine form and warmly welcomed visitors at their joint exhibition of Japanese and Chinese works of art. Susan offered late Edo and Meiji period silver, cloisonné enamels, lacquer and other beautiful works of art made by talented Japanese artisans. Robyn, a longtime dealer of Qing dynasty Chinese jades and snuff bottles, told me she has been working especially hard to find pieces for her exhibition, including a group of small white jades from the Gerald Malina Collection. Her pebble snuff bottles were superbly detailed and we particularly admired a 19th century white jade snuff bottle finely carved with a standing phoenix. Robyn has found that the prices for quality Asian art remain high and it is difficult for buyers to find bargains.

London dealer John Eskenazi offered great Buddhist and Hindu sculpture at the gallery of Adam Williams Fine Art Ltd. Johnny’s annual exhibition was met with enthusiasm from museum curators and private collectors who appreciate his impeccable taste. A beautiful 9th century early Angkor period grey-green bronze figure of Prajnaparamita from the Northwest region of Cambodia appealed to an American private collector. An American museum acquired a northwestern Indian sandstone figure of Kamadhenu. Sales also included another Khmer piece, a limestone figure of Vishnu dating from the Pre-Rup style of the mid-10th century, and a Pala period 9th–10th century stone sculpture of seated Padmapani from Bihar in eastern India.

With no time to rest, in the evening we visited the local galleries of Erik Thomsen LLC Asian Art at 44 East 74th Street, Kaikodo at 74 East 79th Street, and Koichi Yanagi Oriental Fine Arts at 17 East 71st Street.

The following morning we made our way to the Fuller Building on 57th Street to view Asian art among the galleries. We also returned in the evening to attend opening receptions from 6–8 pm. At Danon gallery Roberto and Enzo Danon showed a stunning collection of nine silk and metal “dragon” carpets from the mid-18th century made in the imperial workshops of Xingiang, valued at US$1.8 million. We asked Roberto how he goes about selecting the best carpets and his reply was from the heart: “These are things that cannot be explained. Carpets speak to me but there are some rational aspects to consider in making a selection such as beauty, rarity, colour and design, workmanship and condition. There are some pieces that you love completely and others that you love less.”

At Alan Kennedy Ltd the exhibition of Chinese Ming dynasty badges and Sino-Tibetan textile rarities included a Chinese late 13th century Shakayamuni Buddha silk tapestry (kesi). Alan’s asking price was US$1 million and explained that two similar examples with seals are in the National Palace Museum in Taipei. The highlight at Mika Gallery was a 12th century hanging scroll of Mitsuakasu Bosatsu (bodhisattva), part of the Album of Buddha Images from the Kongoe Mandala, which once belonged to Ganshoji temple in Kumamoto. We also met Japanese specialist Carole Davenport who had an impressive pair of Japanese screens depicting saddled samurai ready for combat.

We enjoyed getting to know Grata Somaré and Leonardo Vigorelli. In 1993 this wife and husband team opened Dalton Somaré Gallery, initially dealing in early Nepalese and Tibetan art. In the 1980s Mr Vigorelli travelled extensively in Nepal and Tibet. Before becoming an art dealer he was curator of the Ethnographic department at the Civic Museum of Bergamo. Since 2001 the gallery has been located in a Renaissance building at Via Borgonovo 5 in Milan. Over the years their interest of Asian art has deepened and the gallery also deals in early Hindu and Buddhist Indian art as well as gold jewellery and works of art from Indonesia.

Not only was J.J. Lally & Co. the most crowded during the opening receptions, the gallery was the most successful in terms of items sold. Collectors responded positively to Chinese ceramics and works of art from the collection of Dr and Mrs Marvin L. Gordon. An American collector told us that for some time he and his wife have been looking to buy a good Yuan dynasty Longquan celadon dish and were delighted to purchase an example at Jim Lally’s that was decorated with a freely incised lotus bloom in a wide central medallion. Jim is widely recognised as one of the top Chinese art dealers in town. His gallery was full of red dots as over 60 per cent of the collection sold at the opening.

The Arts of Pacific Asia Show took place at a new venue across from the Empire State Building. Organisers Bill Caskey and Elizabeth Lees said the opening night was as crowded as last year. With the cancellation of The International Asian Art Fair, the Arts of Pacific Asia Show featuring sixty-eight booths was a main attraction during Asia Week. Exhibitors came from the United States, Europe, China and the Far East, showcasing all forms of Asian art.

S. Marchant & Son’s immaculate booth prominently located at the front of the fair featured Chinese taste jade, imperial mark and period porcelain and works of art. Richard P. Marchant feels that the present economic downturn with its distractions and depressive effect could make one lose direction. “Nevertheless Stuart and I at S. Marchant & Son believe the present situation offers opportunities for the discerning collector. Chinese people are industrious, creative and their art is amongst the best in the world. Perhaps double-digit increases in their economy will not be achieved, but I feel certain that growth will be maintained.”

Erick R. Schiess and his company, Jadeestone, offer fine Asian art, appraisal and consulting in Portland, Oregon. He presented lovely Chinese works of art including jade snuff bottles that were reasonably priced. Erick also showed us his selection of glass snuff bottles as well as a fine 18th century carved jade coiled dragon pendant, 8 cm diameter, which was acquired by a Chinese-American family in the 1930s.

Jean and Clifford Schaefer, the owners of Flying Granes Antiques Ltd, specialise in antique arts of Japan. They present the best in Meiji art, including a wealth of rare Japanese pieces worked in bronze, alloys, cloisonné and silver created by masters in their fields. Jean and Clifford said, “This year is a time for serious reflection and now is a good time for us all to counteract today’s turmoil and concentrate upon life’s gifts. Gathering the best in Meiji art has been almost impos-
Tuyet Nguyet with Susan Tosc of Orientations Gallery in New York

White jade snuff bottle, Robyn Turner Gallery

Enzo and Roberto Danon showed mid-18th century imperial “dragon” carpets

Alan Kennedy next to a rare Chinese late 13th century Shakyamuni Buddha silk tapestry

12th century hanging scroll of bodhisattva, Mika Gallery

Japanese specialist Carole Davenport stands in front of her impressive samurai screens

Grata Somaré and Leonardo Vigorelli, the owners of Dalton Somaré Gallery in Milan

Yuan dynasty Longquan celadon dish, J.J. Lally & Co.

S. Marchant & Son’s immaculate booth of Chinese imperial mark and period porcelain and works of art

Erick Schiess presented Chinese works of art including jade and snuff bottles

Japanese circa 1900 silver punch service, Flying Cranes Antiques Ltd

Min-Zheng Veneau and Mostafa G. Hassan, the owner of Imperial Oriental Art
sible for a considerable time now. We have been most fortunate. In our galleries we have a treasure-lode of rich Meiji art.” They showed an extraordinary Japanese circa 1900 silver punch service comprising of kiku-form double-walled punch bowl with ladle, twelve handled cups and large, partly hampered circular tray on four bracket feet. The entirety is modelled in high relief with detailed sakura blossoms and branches. Each piece is marked with silver plaque, pure silver and maker’s name, Yokohama-based silver company Konoike. We have not seen a more beautiful example and the service is ideal for grand entertaining.

Mostafa G. Hassan of Imperial Oriental Art and his charming assistant Min-Zheng Veneau posed for their photograph in front of a large Chinese imperial Sanxing cloisonné rectangular panel with a carved zitan wooden frame. Made during the Qianlong reign the panel is finely enamelled to depict the triad Sanxing the “Three Stars” in a mountain landscape gathered beneath a pine tree and growing bamboo branches with Lu-xing “God of Prosperity” standing beside a young servant offering a tray of peaches to Shou-Lao “God of Longevity” and Fu-xing “God of Happiness”. This important cloisonné panel and a pair of cloisonné enamel and gilt-bronze 11th-10th century BC archaic tripod wine ewers with original covers were formerly in a New York private collection.

It is always a pleasure to see Cédric Curien from Marseille in France as he makes an elegant presentation of selective works of art. He is a specialist and expert member for Chinese and Japanese art for Chambre Nationale des Experts Spécialisés in Paris. Cédric was generous in explaining the intricacies of his special pieces so we could learn from his knowledge. We wished him the best for a successful show.

Japanese art dealer Kazuo Kuwabara, the owner of Oriental Treasure Box, regularly travels to Japan to collect Japanese antiques, such as lacquer boxes and figures, ceramic, pottery and porcelain, cloisonné enamel vases, netsuke, inro, okimono and ivories, and fine metal works of art. His traditional Japanese collection includes bamboo baskets, Tansu and other Japanese furniture. At the show he met new clients and sold to visitors from France.

Alan Scott Pate is a leading authority of antique Japanese dolls (ningyo). He offered highest quality examples from the Edo period with additional select pieces from the Meiji and Taisho eras. Each piece was thoroughly described, such as the 19th century Bunraku-style puppet of a monkey performing the Sambaso. In addition to articles featured in a variety of magazines, Alan Pate has published two books, NINGYO: The Art of the Japanese Doll (Tuttle, 2005), and Japanese Dolls: The Fascinating World Of Ningyo (Tuttle, 2007).

On March 14th the Asian Art Dealers of the Upper Eastside NY (AADUE-NY), a group of sixteen antique and contemporary art dealers, joined together to hold their inaugural open house from noon to 8 pm. We managed to visit over half of the galleries during our time in New York. Pierre Durand and Conor Mahony invited us to see selected ink paintings by Zeng Xiaojun at The Chinese Porcelain Company, and when we walked into the gallery we were immediately attracted to a rare and important 7th century figure of a standing Buddha from Vietnam, 44 cm high. According to Mr Mahony the owner in France did not really want to sell, so it was a very good opportunity for collectors interested in Buddhist art to purchase a beautiful and significant piece. The depiction of the historical Buddha, Shakamuni, bears a combination of two mudras: the vitarkamudra which represents the exposition of the law and the abhavanamudra symbolising the gesture of calling for discourse. It is worked in hammered sheet gold over a resin core and bears precise and refined facial features. The difficulty of working sheet gold in the repoussé manner as opposed to a solid metal indicates the level of superb craftsmanship of which the Vietnamese sculptors were capable.

Joan Mirviss and Jiyoung Koo are the official organisers of the inaugural AADUE-NY event. At Joan B. Mirviss, Ltd nearly fifty new works by celebrated Japanese ceramic artist Kawase Shinobu (born 1950) were for sale. The exhibition titled “Flowering Waves of Celadon” was the artist’s second solo show outside of Japan. KooNewYork featuring exciting new works by the internationally acclaimed ceramic artist Lee In-chin (born 1957) made their debut. Expanding on his characteristic new forms and wood-firing traditions, these refined black and white wares mark a significant departure from his widely admired textural, unglazed ceramics. Large vintage black and white photographs by leading Korean photographer Bae Bien-U (born 1950) depicting the sea, rocks, volcanic hills and pine trees were also on view.

Shiva Nataraja (The Lord of the Dance) is a well-known sculptural symbol of India and popularly used to represent Indian culture. It depicts Lord Shiva as the cosmic dancer who performs his divine dance to destroy a weary universe and make preparations for Lord Brahma to start the process of creation. The 94.6 cm tall Chola period 12th century bronze example at Art of the Past, Inc. is an iconic image of Shiva dancing in an aureole of flames and comes from Tamil Nadu in South India where it is a main deity in temples. In spite of the international financial crisis, Subhash Kapoor’s impressive gallery exhibition demonstrated that he is still confident and willing to offer his clients important pieces.

We visited Cynthia Volk, Gallery Manager at Berwald Oriental Art, who said over half their exhibition of Tang pottery vessels sold, bringing confidence to the art market. Her impression was that there were fewer important collectors in town this year and “it would be nice if the major auction houses in New York held their sales at a time that does not conflict with TEFAF in Maastricht”.

On March 15th we returned to the Arts of Pacific Asia Show and went straight to see Mrs Keum Ja Kang, President of Kang Collection Korean Art. Founded in 1981, it is the foremost Korean art gallery in the United States specialising in Korean paintings, calligraphy and objects from the Three Kingdoms period to the present. Mrs Kang received her MA in Far Eastern Art History from Columbia University, and also holds a BA in Western Art History from Seoul National University. She frequently serves as a consultant to leading museums for whom she verifies the authenticity of Korean objects and paintings. Eldest son Peter and Alison, wife of second son, are also part of the family business.

Maria Kang enjoyed exhibiting in New York for the first time and plans to return next year as she likes the new venue and met many interesting people. Maria is passionate about Chinese scholars’ items and works of art since they offer great diversity for collecting. She holds a Masters degree in Chinese art from the School of Oriental and African Studies at London University and for a young dealer she already has refined taste in art.

We would like to congratulate Peter Hardt and his attractive bride Li Hong on their recent December 2008 marriage in Thailand. Having met last year in Germany and been inseparable ever since, they were very happy and looked cute together in their matching long-sleeve shirts. Galerie Peter Hardt, run by Peter and his son Tobias, serves the needs of private collectors and museums throughout the world with quality antiquities from Southeast Asia.
Cédric Curien, Chinese & Japanese art member, Chambre Nationale des Experts Spécialisés, Paris

Japanese art dealer Kazuo Kuwabara, the owner of Oriental Treasure Box

Robert Capriccio and Alan Scott Pate, an authority on antique Japanese dolls


Joan Mirviss with Kawase Keiko and Japanese ceramic artist Kawase Shinobu

Jiyoung Koo with Phyllis Kempner from the Society for Asian Art, and David Stein

Bronze Chola Shiva Nataraja, Art of the Past, Inc.

Gallery Manager Cynthia Volk at the exhibition of Tang pottery vessels, Berwald Oriental Art

Keum Ja Kang (centre), President of Kang Collection Korean Art, with Alison and Peter

Maria Kang’s display included scholars’ works of art and rare Tibetan gilt-bronzes

Tuyet Nguyet with Southeast Asian art dealer Peter Hardt and his Chinese wife Li Hong

16th century gilt-bronze figure of a scholar, The Asian Art Studio, Inc.

Sotheby’s Asian art specialist Philippe Delalande (centre), Nader Rasti (left) and Christopher Knapton
Clare and Michael Chu of The Asian Art Studio, Inc. had a successful show selling Chinese works of art, especially jades and snuff bottles. Although their volume of sales was not as high as last year they were still very pleased that they came to New York to meet collectors and dealers. Their 38.1 cm high 16th century gilt-bronze figure of a scholar, provenance Charles V. Swain and John Fell Ruckmann of Philadelphia, attracted a lot of attention from Chinese buyers.

Nader Rasti of Knapton & Rasti Asian Art said, “I do not understand why dealers and collectors did not buy more at this show as there are wonderful objects available at reasonable prices. Instead they waited for the Christie’s auctions and spent a lot of money for works with provenance from the Sackler Museum. The estimates were low to start with but people ended up bidding much higher. Buyers were after the Sackler name but the Chinese pieces we are offering at this show also have very good provenance and are beautiful quality.”

March 16th and 17th were spent visiting galleries and special exhibitions around town. We attended “Arts of Japan: An Exhibition by the Japanese Art Dealers Association” (JADA) held at the Fletcher-Sinclair Mansion/Ukrainian Institute. During the three-day exhibition the six JADA members recorded strong sales of US$2.8 million, and works on reserve as the exhibition closed had aggregate prices of US$325,000.

It was a pleasure to spend over one hour with Mr Leighton R. Longhi, President of JADA. He said, “We decided to do this exhibition from scratch on December 16th, 2008 at one of our regular group meetings. Since The International Asian Art Fair would not take place in 2009 we decided JADA should do a joint show and it only took three months to prepare. JADA formed as a result of Sotheby’s closing its Japanese department when there was a stronger focus on contemporary art in general. Our group realised that we should come together to concentrate on traditional Japanese art and antiques. This current exhibition shows that there is still great Japanese art available. It is a unique exhibition of first-class pieces and we have had many museum directors coming in saying this is a stunning exhibition.” One of the exhibition highlights, which had offers from three parties, was a late Momoyama period pair of six-panel folding screens attributed to Kano Jinnoju, Tale of Heike: Battles of Ichinotani and Yasuhama. The screens were purchased by an American collector from Mr Longhi.

Erik Thomsen sold a wonderful pair of Edo period 18th century Hasegawa School six-panel folding screens, Flowering Wisteria, ink, mineral colours, gofun and gold leaf on paper, 164.5 x 368.4 cm each. At the show the highest price was over US$1 million for screens from Leighton Longhi. The lowest priced item on offer was a Japanese print from Sebastian Izzard LLC Asian Art for US$3000. Mr Longhi said, “There really was something for everybody and we want to show people that wonderful pieces are available. We are trying our best to keep the quality up as we feel we have to fulfill the roles of providing the highest quality Japanese art. The market for high-quality art remains solid, despite the current economic climate. It was rewarding to find such a strong response to great works and the on-going commitment of serious collectors and institutions.”

At the Fuller Building we saw works from India, the Himalayas and Southeast Asia at Carlton Rochell Asian Art. We noticed two sets of Cambodian 12th century copper alloy finials, both of which sold. The set of Vajrasattva and Tantric Sakti was very rare, heights 45.7 cm and 47 cm. Jeffery Cline and William Knospe, owners of Kagedo Japanese Art, showcased late Meiji and Taisho metalwork, lacquers and cloisonné enamels in their exhibition “Arts of Imperial Japan”. Jeffery feels these works of art deserve much more appreciation as “professional pride and competition between artists at exhibition brought standards of craftsmanship and quality of unequalled levels. Few realise today that during the early 20th century a pair of inlaid and chased silver vases of high quality cost the equivalent of a fine house in the best quarters of Kyoto or Tokyo.”

Beatrice Lei Chang of Dai Ichi Arts, Ltd, in business for eighteen years, presented a special exhibition of ceramic platters by contemporary Japanese artists such as Shigemasa Higashida, Toshibasada Wakao and Rosanjin Kitajiri. She feels the platters in this exhibition are feasts for the eyes, the soul and the spirit. Also included was a group of 14th to 16th century stoneware vessels with natural ash glaze. We bought an unusual and colourful enameled sake cup from Beatrice.

Asiantiques organised the exhibition and sale of “Chinese Qing Dynasty Glass Treasures: A Selection from the Gradent Collection” for Asia Week in New York and will include two subsequent venues in Chicago and Hong Kong. While the exhibition only encompass a small part of the Gradent Collection, it includes many fine and valuable pieces of Qing glass, a number of which were exhibited at the Lowe Art Museum. Illustrated is an 18th century transparent sapphire blue glass mallet vase decorated with two dragons, one pink and the other white, and scrolling clouds. This piece belonged to Charlotte Horstmann, the late art dealer in Hong Kong that we knew well even before Arts of Asia magazine was founded forty years ago.

Prior to establishing Leiko Coyle Asian Art in 2004, Leiko Coyle spent a decade living and studying in South Asia where she developed a passion for Himalayan art, particularly works from Tibet and Nepal. She said, “I have always been intrigued by the ancient cultures of these areas and the history of their spiritual traditions. A year ago I took up permanent residence in New York where I have a gallery space on the Upper East Side close to Sotheby’s. The majority of my objects come from private collections and the selection changes on a regular basis.”

We met Leon and Karen Wender of China 2000 Fine Art at their spacious new gallery and office. They looked relaxed and comfortable at the location, only a few streets from Sotheby’s. Leon said, “I think we operate in a space that is unlike anywhere else in New York. We invite our clients and friends here and try to do things in a refined way. This is where we can have art, intellect and business all mixed together.”

March 18th was our last day to visit dealers in New York as well as the final day of the Arts of Pacific Asia Show and we went back for a third time for our scheduled interview with organisers Bill Caskey and Elizabeth Lees: “Yes, we are happy with the new venue and have decided to stay here and have reserved the dates for 2010. Most of the exhibiting dealers like this new location and building, and prefer being here rather than the armory. We added an extra day without raising the prices. We do not know the booth rates for next year but are hoping it will be much the same as this year. The current rate is US$55 per square foot. Our smallest booth rent is US$7150. The largest booth of some 440 square feet rents for US$21,000. The attendance on the opening night was much the same as last year. The attendance has been good and there were lots of visitors who came to this show for the first time. The idea of the extra day was to make the fair run closer to the auction dates. The International Asian Art Fair has stopped and from our expe-
JADA members Erik Thomsen and Judith Dowling, and Leighton R. Longhi, President of JADA

Cambodian 12th century copper alloy finials, Carlton Rochell Asian Art

Jeffery Cline of Kagedo Japanese Art presented imperial metalwork, lacquers and cloisonné enamels

Beatrice Lei Chang and ancient Japanese stoneware vessels

18th century blue glass mallet vase, Asiantiques

Leiko Coyle specialises in Himalayan art, particularly works from Tibet and Nepal

Karen and Leon Wender of China 2000 Fine Art at their new gallery

Bill Caskey and Elizabeth Lees, Arts of Pacific Asia Show organisers

David Cole at the Orientations Gallery booth of Japanese art

Thomas Murray offered art from Indonesia, the Himalayas and Japan

Jeffrey Burrell (left) and exhibitors Gretchen and Mark Walberg

Peter Rosenberg of Vallin Galleries with glazed pottery spirit figures

Grace Paramaspry displayed South Indian and Sri Lankan objects

Stuart and Barbara Hilbert, The Jade Dragon

Joel Frankel at his gallery exhibition of paintings by Wan Qingli (right)
rience it will be very hard to restart it.

“Dealers who were successful at this show included Flying Cranes Antiques Ltd, Judith Rutherford, Nicholas Grindley, The Asian Art Studio, Inc. and Jon Eric Riis. However over the last four months we have never seen a time where collectors have been more concerned about spending their money. There has been fear in the financial market and people are afraid to buy. Buying has been much more conservative, however we are still optimistic and the economy has started to turn the corner. Overall it has been a good result considering the economic conditions and we have received positive feedback from the surveys that exhibitors have completed. We are happy with the venue as the location is more central and upscale. The building is clean and has a wonderful lobby and entrance. We are on the eleventh floor and have good light. Facilities in the building are much improved and there is climate controlled air-conditioning which is good for visitors, exhibitors and the artwork.”

At Orientations Gallery, Susan Tosk and David Cole sold an imperial silver vase by Meiji period court artist Unno Shomin. It is pure silver with the imperial crest applied in solid gold. The vase has inscribed on the base a dedication dated 1915 to the prime minister. Susan and David also sold cloisonné to two new collectors and prefer this venue as it is cleaner and brighter. They were happy that their enthusiastic collectors came to see them and felt visitors to the fair enjoyed coming to look at beautiful artworks in the show.

Thomas Murray is a regular exhibitor at the Arts of Pacific Asia Show in New York and San Francisco. His spacious booth combined objects from different cultures, such as an ancient female ancestor from the Indonesian island of Sulawesi, an 18th century Portuguese textile, and masks from the Himalayas and Japan. First time exhibitors Mark Walberg and his wife Gretchen from Philadelphia offered antique porcelain, jade, silver, cloisonné, snuff bottles, ivory, bronze and lacquer from China, Japan and Korea. They sold 15th to 20th century Chinese jade carvings up to the US$13,000 range. Mr Walberg told us he has admired Arts of Asia for many years and is very happy with the responses from his advertisements in the magazine.

Since 1940, Vallin Galleries have been purveyors of fine Chinese and Asian art and antiques. Peter L. Rosenberg is the second generation owner of the business started by his mother, Josephine. The galleries featuring ceramics, furniture, sculpture and textiles, attract museum curators, art dealers, serious collectors, as well as interested beginners. Peter says, “While part of the pleasure of this profession comes from finding and presenting exceptional material, the greater pleasure comes from welcoming to the gallery people who are serious collectors or people who are just dipping their toe into the water for the first time.”

Grace Paramaspy, the owner of Jazmin Asian Art based in Singapore, specialises in Indian and Asian antiques. In her booth she had mostly South Indian stone pieces and Sri Lankan objects, notably a Jain sculpture purchased from Sotheby’s London in 2000. She also presented 18th to 19th century Tanjore paintings, the best one priced at US$16,000. Walking around the fair she did not see many pieces with red dots, but felt exhibitors tried hard to make good displays. If they failed to sell it was because of the bad time in New York as America was in deep recession. Like her, some exhibitors did not really want to participate in New York but felt the show must continue. Therefore they made an effort to give support and if they broke even at the fair then it was considered a success.

Stuart and Barbara Hilbert of The Jade Dragon are always cheerful and have a positive outlook. Stuart said, “This Arts of Pacific Asia Show has the best quality Asian art of all the fairs I have participated over the last 37 years. There are so many strong dealers here such as S. Marchant & Son and Imperial Oriental Art. The current economic climate has meant that people here brought their very best pieces for sale. As a dealer I am pleased to walk around the booths and see that we have raised the standard of the show. It is noticeable that the lower end dealers have been dropped. If this sort of quality of Asian art was available two years ago they would sell very well.”

Our final destination during Asia Week in New York was E & J Frankel Ltd to attend the exhibition opening of paintings by Dr Wan Qingli which expressed his concern with the environment and its inhabitants. Prices of the scholar-artist’s works ranged from US$6000 to US$37,500. Joel Frankel said, “The art market should not be based on what several billionaires can pay. Works of art are worth what the general public can pay for them. What is real is what the public feels.”

Just before printing the Arts of Asia May-June 2009 special edition we were delighted to receive the following summary of New York Asia Week from Mr James Lally, the respected leading dealer of Chinese art in America:

“In response to your request for my opinion and comments on the recent New York Asia Week, I am glad to say that I was very encouraged by the strong prices and healthy turnover in nearly every category of the market for ancient Chinese works of art. At J.J. Lally & Co. we were very fortunate to have the opportunity to exhibit and offer for sale Chinese ceramics and works of art from the collection of Dr and Mrs Marvin Gordon. The Gordons’ collection, focussed primarily on ceramics of the Song dynasty, was a model of good old-fashioned connoisseurship, carefully formed over thirty years. As soon as the catalogue appeared, we immediately received calls and visits from serious collectors and museum curators from all around the world. As of this moment nearly 85 per cent of the catalogue has been sold, and we have a list of disappointed potential buyers eager to acquire comparable items, if such can be found.

“The Chinese art auctions at Sotheby’s and Christie’s both achieved very strong results in nearly every category from archaic jades and bronzes to later porcelains and furniture. There were more buyers in attendance from mainland China than ever before, and bidders from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan were battling with European and American buyers for the best lots.

“In my view the Chinese art market’s response to the international financial crisis was not a retreat, rather it was a ‘flight to quality’. As anyone who has been seriously involved in the Chinese art market for the past decade understands, real quality remains in very short supply and the strong results of the New York Asia Week shows that demand for fine Chinese art and antiques continues to grow, both inside China and around the world.”

We agree with Jim’s assessment that highest quality works of art will always find buyers, but due to the financial crisis collectors were more reluctant to make purchases this year. Despite offering high quality objects, dealers sold less than they had hoped. Even among the most established galleries and fair exhibitors, commercial activity tended to be in smaller amounts, for lesser objects, suggesting that collectors are still indulging their penchant for collecting, but in a more restrained manner than in years past. Dealers also felt major collectors from abroad had not made the trip to New York as they preferred to wait for market conditions to improve.