EDITORIAL

WELCOME TO the July–August 2008 Arts of Asia which is by now (Monday June 2nd) already compiled and ready for the presswork of Paramount Printing, the leading and exclusive Hong Kong company whose work for us is under our own supervision in the factory for two weeks of production time. The only thing missing one week from printing is my own Editorial. I have been writing them regularly since 1970, and many of our international readers tell me they find them most informative and enjoyable. Their encouragement drives my family and I to continue to publish ever better issues.

For the subjects and distinguished knowledgeable contributors to the July–August 2008 magazine you will see the full information on page 3 of the magazine. I am sure you will find the cover as gorgeous as I do. The lacquer is by the late Japanese artist Takahashi Setsurō (1914–2007). The artist’s picture appears on page 39 and his works are featured in a solo exhibition at the Museum für Lackkunst (Museum of Lacquer Art) in Münster, Germany (see the article by Dr Monika Kopplin on pages 39–47). Seen above is a photograph taken at the exhibition’s opening ceremony.1 From left to right are Dr Helmut Roedder, member of the board of directors of BASF Coatings AG; Mrs Toshie Yokoyama; Dr Monika Kopplin, curator and director of the Museum für Lackkunst; Mrs Kazue Takahashi; Mr Mitsuhiro Tera, director of the Toyota Municipal Museum of Art; and Mr Masahiro Aoki, co-organiser of the exhibition. Takahashi Setsurō was a true artist dedicated to lacquer design.

For this museum issue, which spans the Asian art world, the initial four main articles are devoted to Japan, with special attention to the 19th and 20th centuries. They are followed by two individual and unusual articles on Korea. These feature the importance of Korean headwear, Shamanistic paintings and amulets in Korean culture which are amongst facets of that nation which deserve understanding by our readers. As does Late Edo and 20th century Japanese painting, the beautiful lacquer work of Takahashi Setsurō (who only died quite recently at 93 last year) and the influence of Art Deco, through to the Bauhaus, on our first article, the Tokyo Metropolitan Teien Art Museum and its beautiful gardens. Once seen as a futuristic modern building, it is now a historic heritage site, featuring the designs of René Lalique amongst other famous Western interior decorators from the 1925–1940 period.

This special edition also contains the second of our new series on 21st Century Artists. The article on Chang Xugong’s work is written by internationally recognised contemporary Chinese art critic Mr Feng Boyi from Beijing.

As usual Arts of Asia provides invaluable information of Asian art news and trends, including Saleroom News reports on Christie’s New York and Sotheby’s Hong Kong record auctions. In the Collectors World coverage we include an article by Iside Carbone on the exhibition of masterpieces from China’s Han to Tang periods held in Venice courtesy of Palazzo Strozzi and Arts Exhibitions China. The second Collectors World article is by Hong Kong Museum of Art Chinese paintings curator Mr Szeto Yuen-kit highlighting works by Hong Kong landscape painter Huang Bore (1901–1968). The artist’s Sketches of Xiqing ( Sai Kung) are especially endearing to me as from 1962 to 1982 I lived in our beautiful and then secluded landscape garden with my husband, four sons, dogs, chickens, ducks and pigeons at Coral Tree Cottage, Sha Ha near to Tai Mong Tsai, another coastal village in Sai Kung author Szeto Yuen-kit mentions in his article.

On April 24th I took a four and a half hour flight from Hong Kong International Airport to the new Beijing Capital Airport. Upon arrival I went straight to the Kerry Centre Hotel, where I would be staying, to preview the China Guardian’s 15th Anniversary Auctions which were being held on several floors. I had been present at their inaugural Beijing auction fifteen years ago, as well as at their 10th Anniversary celebrations in July 2003. China’s leading auction house, over the last five years it has developed as the local interest in collecting Chinese art has grown dramatically.

Many international collectors and dealers also came to Beijing to show their support of China Guardian. My friends Leon Wender and Mr K.Y. Ng and his wife Maria joined me on a visit to the Forbidden City to see the newly renovated empress rooms. We entered through the North Gate or Gate of Spiritual Valour which took us through to the Imperial Flower Garden, which was designed in the early Ming dynasty primarily for the empress and ladies of the court. In my son Robin’s photograph we are seen within the beautiful gardens and rockeries.2 I can highly recommend readers to see the Palace collections and walk through the amazing and massive courtyards.
On April 25th we were amongst over 900 domestic and international VIPs invited to attend the China Guardian 15th Anniversary Celebration Banquet at China World Hotel. During the evening China Guardian Chairman Chen Dongsheng welcomed honoured guests and warmly thanked them for their support. Mr Chen is also the Chairman and CEO of Taikang Life Insurance Co., Ltd, a nationwide life insurance company. Established in 1996, his company has 160,000 employees and 10 million clients. In December 2004 this company’s total assets reached RMB40,096 billion.

Special guests from Hong Kong were Chinese painting collectors Mr Victor Lo and Mr Linus W.L. Cheung. They are photographed with the President of China Guardian Auctions Co., Ltd Mrs Yannan Wang. She was thrilled that although people are extremely busy they made a special point to come for the company’s most important sales featuring 6000 lots with twenty-six auction catalogues. One of the most exciting categories was Qing dynasty imperial zitan furniture. Hong Kong furniture dealer Hannah Chiang explained that of the thirteen lots offered, eight had been collected by his family over the last twenty years. Imperial zitan pieces usually achieve the highest prices for Chinese furniture and Hannah and I are seen together at the preview with Hong Kong collectors Dr Frank Chan and his wife Mrs Winnie Chan. Twelve pieces of furniture sold, and amongst the highlights were a Qianlong period zitan waisted side table and a rare Yuanningyuan style zitan three-railing bed, for RMB31,360,000 and RMB32,480,000 respectively.

China Guardian holds two auction series (Spring and Autumn) every year in Beijing. For the Spring 2008 auction series they were able to present exquisite works and achieved a total transaction volume of over RMB993 million which is the best performance in the company’s fifteen year history.

Yannan Wang said, “We are lucky the market is very good. Even though it is our 15th Anniversary celebrations, if the market is not good the clients would not consign their pieces. As the market has been strong and it coincided naturally with our celebrations, we worked extra hard to make it successful. For example Classical Chinese paintings would not have reached such high prices without continuous good work over the last four years. We offered ancient Chinese paintings fifteen years ago, but four years ago we separated out Classical Chinese paintings into a special category, as we have good collectors and experts supporting us.”

The highest price among the works for Chinese painting and calligraphy was Ferrying a Crane by Yun Shouping, which sold for RMB36,960,000. Chrysanthemum in Bottle by Zhu Da was also auctioned for a notable RMB31,360,000. Over the last five years there have been more rich people in China and many have taken advice to buy Chinese art for enjoyment and investment. Having been able to make money quite quickly, these people now want to own a piece of Chinese culture. Chinese painting is an area that enjoys great attention and enthusiasm from Chinese collectors, an indication that this market is stable and likely to expand. On the whole buyers of Chinese paintings are now more mature and works by Qi Baishi, Li Keran and Fu Baoshi have increased significantly in price, especially when there is absolutely no doubt over authenticity. Therefore quality paintings with reliable provenance or from established collections are highly sought-after.

The sale of porcelain and works of art did well, making over RMB220 million. Yannan Wang said, “We have not seen a collection of Chinese ceramics like this at our auction before. It is the strongest collection we have had in recent years and there was active bidding. We are very pleased that
collectors have confidence in us and bought."

The total transactions for Chinese oil painting, sculpture and Chinese photography at auction was RMB248 million. Notable strong results were *Hotted No. I*, a series of five paintings by Liu Xiaodong, making RMB37,120,000 and *Homeless Furniture* by Wang Huaiqing which sold for RMB28 million. Zhang Xiaogang’s *Blood Line Series—Childhood* fetched RMB9,520,000 and Chen Yifei’s *Duet* was auctioned for RMB8,960,000.

China Guardian’s new Contemporary Porcelain Works of Art and Contemporary Works of Sculpture Art special auctions also received encouraging results, with the volumes of the two auctions amounted to over RMB24 million. It took two years to gather the best works from the artists for these auctions, who are mostly art professors at major universities in China. The Yixing teapots were by established Chinese artists with recognised prices and received a lot of interest from Taiwanese and Chinese collectors who are already familiar with their works. The jade works were by artists regarded as the top modern carvers in China.

This whole year China Guardian will be celebrating its 15th Anniversary. For the next auction in early November 2008 the company will publish a book to highlight their achievements over the last five years. They are currently working on some ideas and finalising the line-up of collections for sale. Yannan Wang summed up by saying, "The key to China Guardian’s success is our persistence in quality and good practice in a market that is challenging. I did not expect the results to be so outstanding. It is beyond my expectations. The future for Chinese art looks bright, especially for Chinese paintings, and I expect more and more people will like it and want to collect. Chinese painting has a very deep foundation and broad appeal in China. We are in a very good leading position with local and international contacts. We have an extremely strong market share having built up the company over the last fifteen years. There is so much growth happening in China now and we have our hands full."

It was a pleasure to meet representatives and owners from top international contemporary art galleries such as Marlborough Fine Art and Goedhuis Contemporary at the inaugural Hong Kong International Art Fair. This city has firmly established itself as the destination for art fairs in Asia. After a year in development the contemporary art fair was held at the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre from May 14th–18th, 2008. It was a popular event with thousands of visitors from the city and around the world going to see works presented by over one hundred galleries.

Seen from left to right in our photograph taken at the opening ceremony are fair organisers Tim Etchells, Magnus Renfrew and Charles Merewether; together with representatives from lead sponsor Lehman Brothers, Francine Kittridge and Jasjit S. Bhattal, Chief Executive Officer, Asia-Pacific. Fair Director Magnus Renfrew believes this event will bring enormous vitality and interest to Hong Kong and the region. The tax situation in Hong Kong also makes it a very good place to do business. He said, “For many successful international art fairs there is a tax benefit. We are very keen to develop the level of interest for both Western and Asian art in Hong Kong.” Dr Charles Merewether, the fair’s Advisory Group Chairman, is an art historian, writer and curator. He said, "The galleries here are good and have participated at exhibitions. The artists they represent are recognised in both commercial and non-commercial shows. We worked quite closely with the galleries to discuss the good works they bring to this event and we have sufficient experts with experience working in the contemporary art field. I have over thirty years experience and like Western contemporary art we need to also apply good judgment for Chinese contemporary art.”

Marlborough Fine Art’s spacious stand provided a chance for Hong Kong collectors and art students alike to see major works by Francis Bacon, Lucian Freud, Pablo Picasso and Fernando Botero. Of special interest to see as studies from the artists’ hands were maquettes in bronze by Aristide Mailol, Henry Moore and others, and a painting by Fernand Leger, a close friend of the Swiss/French artist and architect Le Corbusier. Marlborough Fine Art presented me with their catalogue “Memorial Exhibition: A Tribute to Chen Yifei 1946–2005” who I had the pleasure to meet when he passed through Hong Kong. Marlborough showed major romantic realist paintings by Chen Yifei such as the 2002 oil on canvas *Beauty with Fan*.10

Half of the fair exhibitors were from Hong Kong and I particularly enjoyed visiting the stand of Anna Ning Fine Art. Anna was happy to show me works by famous contemporary Chinese artists such as Jiao Xing Tao and Yue Min Jun. Her company was founded in 2005 as an exclusive private gallery and art consultancy. She is dedicated to promoting and exhibiting contemporary Chinese art by both established and emerging artists. She applies a rigorous selection procedure to ensure that the highest quality artworks from China are shown to a wider international audience.11

Finally I am delighted to inform my worldwide readers,
especially those living in New York City, that Erik Thomsen Asian Art has moved to a new gallery at 44 East 74th Street.\textsuperscript{12} Erik Thomsen offers an array of magnificent Japanese art treasures such as screens, painted scrolls, bamboo art, ceramics and lacquer. He grew up in Japan and was the first Westerner invited to apprentice to a Tokyo gallery twenty-five years ago. I particularly like the way Erik has always focused on works made for the Japanese market according to Japanese aesthetics and taste.

Today, Erik Thomsen enjoys special access to important new work coming on to the market thanks to his long associations with the most influential Japanese sources for the best pieces. From September 19th to November 21st he will hold a special exhibition of contemporary Japanese ceramic sculptures by Sueharu Fukami. This will be the first important exhibition in his new gallery and a catalogue will be produced for this show.

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\textbf{\textit{TUYEYI NGUYEI Publisher \& Editor}}
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