Pictured above are the major authors of this special edition on the Cernuschi Museum. One of the oldest museums in Paris, inaugurated in 1898, the Musée Cernuschi is the second largest Asian museum in France, the fifth largest in Europe, and holds great significance for the works it contains. Specialising in Asian art from China, Japan and Korea, the museum’s important collection consists of some 12,500 objects of art and archaeology.

THE 19TH CENTURY was a golden age for the intrepid traveller to explore new shores outside the “Grand Tour” of Europe and to return to their homeland with exotic artistic treasures. An excellent example of these adventurers is the Italian-born economist, Henri Cernuschi (1821–1896), who after arriving in America travelled on westwards to Asia. He became one of the first collectors in France to amass a vast and important collection of Chinese and Japanese art. When the wealthy financier died in 1896 he bequeathed his mansion and entire collection of Asian art to the City of Paris.

After completing its refurbishment and reopening its doors to the public once again, visitors have been able to view a vast collection of different objects on display in the museum’s 3200 square metres of exhibition space. I am confident that this important Arts of Asia issue will entice readers to visit the Cernuschi Museum and to discover art from ancient times right up to the 20th century—with paintings by famous Chinese artists like Zhang Daqian (1899–1983), Wu Zuoren (1908–1997), Walasse Ting (1928–2010), Lin Fengmian (1900–1991), Wu Guanzhong (1919–2010) and Che Tehchun (born 1920).

Selected for the cover of the July–August 2011 issue is the Cernuschi Museum’s imperial Yongle mark and period (1403–1424) bodhisattva. This impressive gilt bronze stands 137 cm tall and is one of the many precious works in the collection. A similar gilt bronze statue of comparable size and iconography is at the Beijing Capital Museum.

For the July–August 2011 number, Executive Editor Robin Markbreiter has prepared special reports on The European Fine Art Fair in Maastricht and Asia Week New York 2011. They include his photographs and interviews with art fair organisers, dealers, collectors and experts. This issue also features up-to-date reports on auctions held around the world, and two book reviews: Textiles and Dress of Gujarat, and Philippine Ancestral Gold.

As early as the late 17th century through to the 19th century, merchants from such diverse countries as England, the Netherlands, America, Spain, Denmark and Sweden set up “factory” communities in the ports of Canton, on the south coast of China, and Shanghai. Paintings for export captured the strictly supervised activities of the foreigners, who were tolerated by the Chinese for the sole purpose of commerce. Appropriately, I would draw readers’ attention to Maria Mok’s article on the Hong Kong Museum of Art’s prized collection of China Trade paintings.

Before moving on to recent activities in Beijing and Hong Kong, I would like to warmly thank Gilles Béguin for playing...
an important role in the preparation of this commemorative July–August 2011 edition, before his retirement as Director of the Cernuschi Museum. Last year on September 27th, I was delighted to welcome him and Monique Crick, Director of the Baur Foundation–Museum of Far Eastern Art in Geneva, Switzerland, to my offices in Hong Kong. We had an enjoyable lunch together and during our discussions Gilles Béguin outlined the articles for this unique edition.

On a personal note I am grateful to all the museum authors for their great efforts writing in English rather than their own French language. We look forward to their future contributions on Asian art in France. A very special thanks goes to Charlotte Lanciot (Musée Cernuschi), Perrine Latrive (Parisienne de Photographie) and Roger-Violet for invaluable assistance in supplying attractive illustrations, and Paris-Musées for ordering a large quantity of magazines.

From April 28th to June 27th, 2011, the exhibition “Contrast and Harmony: Selected Vanity Cases and Chinese Furniture of Liangyi Museum” was held at the Palace Museum in Beijing. The nineteen pieces of Chinese wooden furniture and 111 Western-style purses and cosmetic containers on view belong to Hong Kong collector Peter Fung, who attended the official opening with Tracy Wong, Curator of Liangyi Museum. The exhibition attracted plenty of interest and it was the first time vanity cases were on show at the Palace Museum, which is considered to be the premier museum of China.

However, in the morning of Monday May 9th, Tracy Wong received the shocking news that a burglar broke open at least one display case and took nine items, including Peter Fung’s favourite powder compact of ovoid shape designed by Jean Schlumberger for Tiffany, circa 1950–1960. Two of the nine objects were found with slight damage on the museum grounds, but the other seven were gone. Four have since been recovered, however the Tiffany compact is one of the missing three items.

During a press conference in Beijing on May 11th, the Palace Museum apologised to Curator Wong. There was also a televised confession by the burglary suspect, who said that while visiting the famous museum as a tourist on Sunday eve-

ning, he had suddenly decided to rob it and stayed behind as others left the complex. This was a major embarrassment for the Palace Museum, which houses an extensive collection of artwork and artefacts built upon the imperial collections of the Ming and Qing dynasties. Despite the loss, Peter Fung decided to continue the temporary exhibit and sent additional art items to Beijing because he wanted to show his support to the Palace Museum and the country.

On May 12th, 2011, Alice King, Director of Alisan Fine Arts, celebrated her company’s 30th anniversary with an exhibition of works by Wei Ligang, Wei Qingyi and Zhang Jianjun at Asian Cultural Council Hong Kong. The event was officiated by Lady Ivy Wu, Vice Chairman, Friends’ Committee, Asian Cultural Council Hong Kong. The ACC is a non-profit organisation which supports outstanding professionals in the visual and performing arts for programmes of experimental education in the United States. It has funded more than six thousand individuals since its establishment in New York by John D. Rockefeller 3rd in 1963.

Back in 1981 Alice King opened Alisan Fine Arts as one of the first professional galleries in Hong Kong and began to present works by mainly Chinese ink artists, to introduce a genre that was not well known outside China. Thirty years later the situation is very different, which illustrates the kind of vision that Alice had back then. In 2000, the French government awarded her the Chevalier de la Legion d’honneur for her major contribution in promoting Chinese ink works around the world, through many exhibitions and projects.

In her opening remarks, Michelle Vosper, Director of Asian Cultural Council Hong Kong said, “All three artists in the exhibition create in the traditional medium of Chinese ink and brush and are seeking a contemporary expression for this ancient art form. They also share the experience of spending an extensive period of time in the US on Asian Cultural Council programs. The exhibition juxtaposes works created before their travel abroad together with new pieces from 2010 and 2011.” Alice King was touched by the attention from friends, colleagues and artists who came to the event. After being in the art business for many years, to quote Alice, she knows “what makes the heart sing”.

Sir Gordon Wu, Lady Ivy Wu, Alice King, Kenneth Fung and Nelly Fung at Alisan Fine Arts’ 30th anniversary exhibition held at Asian Art Council Hong Kong

Curator Tracy Wong and collector Peter Fung at the opening for “Contrast and Harmony: Selected Vanity Cases and Chinese Furniture of Liangyi Museum”, held at the Palace Museum in Beijing, China
Also on May 12th, I had the pleasure of meeting Prince Philipp of Liechtenstein, Chairman of the Board of Trustees for LGT Group Foundation. He asked me to come to Liechtenstein Global Trust’s Hong Kong offices at Two Exchange Square which have spectacular views of the harbour and the International Commerce Centre, Hong Kong’s tallest building. Prince Philipp was in town to celebrate LGT’s 25th anniversary in Asia; but when we sat down in the conference room he felt most at ease talking about his family’s background which originated from Vienna, and the treasures in the Liechtenstein Museum.

The Principality of Liechtenstein was established within the Holy Roman Empire in 1719. Occupied by both French and Russian troops during the Napoleonic wars, it became a sovereign state in 1866 and joined the Germanic Confederation in 1815. Liechtenstein became fully independent in 1866 when the Confederation dissolved. Until the end of World War I, it was closely tied to Austria, but the economic devastation caused by that conflict forced Liechtenstein to enter into a customs and monetary union with Switzerland.

Prince Philipp said, “Our family lived mostly in Austria and Prague, which is today the Czech Republic. We moved to Liechtenstein in the 1920s and at that time it was one of the poorest countries in Europe. Liechtenstein literally means shining stone as it is built on an area of white stone dating back to the 11th century. My family had a skill for business and we have been successful in finance. Liechtenstein offers a low and easy to understand tax rate of 18 per cent and has a liberal government. If a country has a reasonable and simple tax rate then it is attractive for entrepreneurs. We are located in Central Europe, between Austria and Switzerland, and the population is around 35,000. We were the only country in Europe that has maintained its borders for two hundred years. During World War II both Switzerland and Liechtenstein remained neutral, so we left alone.”

The Liechtenstein Museum houses one of the world’s largest and most important private collections of masterpieces from the early Renaissance to the Baroque, including paintings by Rubens, Rembrandt and van Dyck. Prince Philipp explained, “The collection is something to be cherished and maintained. My elder brother Prince Hans-Adam II feels that the scope of our collecting should continue to complement the areas that we already have in our collection. Of course I also enjoy art and feel collectors should discover for themselves what they like. Lots of people come to offer objects to us, but the final decision always rests with my brother although there are people who give advice. If you look at our acquisitions over the years, a large part has been through private collections, although some have come from auctions.” The Badminton Cabinet was purchased by Prince Hans-Adam II for the museum at Christie’s London in December 2006 for £19,045,250 (US$36,662,106), breaking its own record price of £8.5 million established at Christie’s in July 1990. It is the most valuable piece of furniture in the world. In the future I hope to visit the museum.

Since the last time I wrote in the May–June 2011 issue there have been extraordinary prices achieved for Asian works of art, not only in Hong Kong, but also in Europe. At Nagel’s 665th Auction of Asia Art, which ended on May 7th, 2011 in Stuttgart, record sales of nearly Euro 20 million were achieved. This is the highest sales figure for a special auction of this kind in Germany, and the individual results were equally spectacular. The highlight of the sale was a finely carved red sandalwood table from the Qianlong period (1736–1795), which sold for Euro 1.33 million.

Finally, I wish to congratulate Van Ham Fine Art Auctions of Cologne and Managing Director Markus Eisenbeis on their May 13th, 2011 world record sale for the Indonesian painter Raden Saleh’s (1811–1880) oil on canvas, Last Resort. It depicts the dramatic scene of a horse and rider leaping through the air in the foreground of an untamed wilderness. With an estimate of Euro 400,000 it eventually made a sensational price of Euro 1.95 million. At the time of writing this is the highest bid accepted in 2011 for Van Ham, and the highest bid accepted for a 19th century painting in its fifty years history.

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