EDITORIAL

PUBLISHERS around the world, like everyone else, are concerned about the international financial downturn. It is well known that newspapers and magazines have been suffering from significantly lower advertising as large corporations have slashed their marketing budgets. Subscriptions continue to shrink due to cannibalising from the internet. However, we at Arts of Asia are still full of optimism and confidence that our material is unique, fulfils a need, and is inherently valuable to our readers.

This March–April 2009 edition, coinciding with Asia Week 2009 in New York, will be of great interest to our international subscribers. For this important number we have prepared fascinating articles from a wider range of subjects and countries appealing to the greatest possible audience. I am confident you will be impressed by the extensive material written by expert contributors. In particular, I draw readers’ attention to Hoi Trinh’s article “Bhutan Celebrates the Coronation of King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck” on pages 82–91. Hoi Trinh is a Vietnamese-born, Australian human rights lawyer. He completed his Master of Studies at Magdalen College, Oxford University, in 2002, where he befriended the then Crown Prince of Bhutan who was crowned on November 6th, 2008 as the 5th King of the Wangchuck dynasty. This unique article gives an up-close account of the colourful events throughout the royal celebrations.

However, as much of the world is finding ways to cope with the current economic crisis, there is a great deal of anxiety about what the future holds. This has resulted in a number of changes at Asia Week 2009 in New York. For example, it is extremely disappointing that The International Asian Art Fair, formerly scheduled for March 2009, has been cancelled. Founded in 1996, this New York fair attracted the leading dealers of Asian art and established itself as one of the important events for collectors from around the world. Unfortunately costs for taking part at the fair have become a major concern, especially for exhibitors faced with the expenses involved in shipping objects, insurance, booking hotels and travelling to New York from overseas. Here is the official statement from the organisers, Anna and Brian Haughton:

“Due to the present global economic situation we have regrettably taken the decision to cancel The International Asian Art Fair for 2009. The fair was scheduled for the 11th–15th March at The Park Avenue Armory, Park Avenue at 67th Street, New York City. Many of the dealers who had contracted to take part are not in a position to go forward in the current climate and as such we have decided a fair would put an untenable strain on their resources. We hope to be able to re-launch the fair in 2010 and look forward to working with our exhibitors again.”

The cancellation of The International Asian Art Fair has prompted sixteen prominent dealers from New York City and around the world to band together to present museum-quality Asian art exhibitions in their galleries as well as in other locations during Asia Week. “Asian Art Dealers of the Upper East Side–New York” (AADUE–NY) will hold their first annual jointly organised series of coordinated exhibition openings on 14th March, 2009 (Saturday) from 12 pm through 8 pm.

Jiyoung Koo and Joan Mirviss, official organisers of this exciting event, have informed Arts of Asia that visitors will “be able to see first-hand, superb works of art, beautifully displayed and scholarly presented, all available for purchase. Spanning more than four thousand years of history up through the present, these diverse exhibits will include paintings, sculpture, ceramics, calligraphy, prints, metalwork, lacquer, textiles and photography. The Asian art market remains strong and vital on the global stage, despite the current economic climate. Now, it is even more critical that serious art dealers make themselves and their collections available on a more intimate basis. The goal of each of the AADUE–NY members is to offer top-quality, well-researched and documented Asian art in a comfortable and expanded environment without the frenzy and timing pressures inherent in an art fair or auction. Each participant is a dealer of long standing and a leader in his or her field. The range of expertise spans the fields of Chinese, Indian, Himalayan, Southeast Asian, Japanese, Korean and Persian art.”

Art of the Past, one of the AADUE–NY members, will be presenting “Darshan: Paintings from the Collection of Subhash Kapoor” in their gallery at 1242 Madison Avenue (between 89th and 90th Street) from March 12th to May 12th. The name for this exhibition is a Sanskrit term (meaning sight) in relation principally to glimpsing the divine. The fifty-one paintings in this exhibition have been collected by Subhash Kapoor over a period of thirty-five years and provide a useful survey of Indian painting. They begin with an example from the well-known Bhagavata Parana series, dated
London dealers Eskenazi Limited have decided not to have an exhibition in New York during Asia Week 2009. Although they will be greatly missed, we look forward to seeing their much anticipated exhibition of Oriental works of art in 2010 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the opening of their gallery in London.

I am confident Arts of Asia readers will enjoy the special exhibitions at galleries in the Fuller Building, 41 East 57th Street, such as Danon, J.J. Lally & Co. and Carlton Rochell Asian Art. From March 12th to April 30th, Danon introduces one of its most highly-valued collections: nine carpets with the dragon motif woven in silk, copper, silver and gold threads, made in the imperial workshop of Xingjian and Peking during the Qianlong reign (1735–1795). The nine carpets will be on view in New York uniquely for Asia Week prior to their exhibition in the Museum of Oriental Art, Rome.

J.J. Lally & Co. will exhibit Chinese ceramics collected by Dr and Mrs Marvin L. Gordon from San Francisco. The focus of the Gordon Collection is the ceramics of the Song dynasty (960–1279). Celadons are a favourite of mine, and a masterpiece in the collection is a small vase carved with peony scroll decoration under a translucent green glaze, which was produced at the famous Yaozhou kilns in the 11th century. The largest of the Gordons’ ceramic pieces is a 30.8 cm high Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) wine jar1 painted in dark brown over a cream-coloured ground with songbirds amidst bamboo canes, formerly owned by the Dutch collector Frederick Knight. A scholarly catalogue, with each item illustrated in colour, will be published well in advance of the exhibition’s opening on March 12th.

Carlton Rochell is pleased to announce his Spring 2009 exhibition “Art from India and Southeast Asia” at his gallery in the Fuller Building, from March 14th to 27th. During this time the gallery will display and offer for sale some thirty-five master works from India, the Himalayas and Southeast Asia, many of which hail from important private collections in the US and Europe. I have chosen to illustrate an impressive 66 cm high 14th century copper alloy with gilding head of Buddha2 from Sukhothai. Readers who would like to visit this region in Thailand will find useful tips and travel information in Julian Harding’s “Letter to the Editor” published in this issue’s Correspondence on page 12.

John R. Berwald’s exhibition at his elegant gallery at 5 East 57th Street will include beautifully potted glazed vessels made during the Tang dynasty (618–907). John says he would like to share his knowledge and passion about glazed Tang potted vessels, and would also be happy to discuss what he sees as important collecting opportunities in the “new market” reality. He feels there are unique Asian artworks to be acquired now at reasonable prices. Among the twenty pieces in the exhibition are particularly fine blue-glazed earthenware vessels that were dipped, splashed and painted in a manner that was pure Tang innovation. John says, “The blue glaze was created using both domestic as well as an imported type of cobalt that arrived in China at great expense from Central Asia, the cost ensuring that it was rarely used and reserved for specially ordered pieces.” A ribbed candlestick, of a Middle Eastern metal form, is exceptional in size (height 30.7 cm),6 modelling and the highly controlled application of the lead-based glazes. His Tang sancai blue-glazed quatrefoil dish, length 17.2 cm, illustrates the potter’s flambéoyant technique.7

In their townhouse gallery at 44 East 74th Street off Madison Avenue, Erik and Cornelia Thomsen will exhibit a collection of thirty recently acquired items featured in their
annual spring catalogue “Japanese Paintings and Works of Art 2009”. This exhibition of classic Japanese art focusing on screens and paintings as well as tea ceramics, baskets and gold lacquers, opens on March 12th and runs through May 15th. Illustrated is Wisteria and Pines by Bamboo Fence, a pair of six-panel folding screens (one shown), mineral pigments on gold leaf, Edo period, 18th century, 164 × 369 cm.

At E & J Frankel Ltd, 1040 Madison Avenue at East 79th Street, scholar/artist Wan Qingli (born 1945) has created twenty landscapes and seascapes showing his concern for endangered species such as polar bears, penguins and seals in their disappearing environments in the United States. Trained under the great artists Li Keran and Lu Yanshao, Professor Wan is Director of the Visual Arts College of the Baptist University in Hong Kong. His first one-man show was held at E & J Frankel Ltd in 1985. The current exhibition and sale runs from March 19th to May 4th.

Robyn Turner Gallery and Orientations Gallery are delighted to return for their 3rd annual joint exhibition and sale at Helmsley Carlton House, 680 Madison Avenue at 61st Street. The show will run by appointment from March 12th to 20th. Collectors may call 413-512-0157 or 212-772-7705 to attend. Robyn Turner will be showing a small collection of jade elephants from an East Coast collection along with various jade animals from Ming (1368–1644) to Qing (1644–1911). In addition she will be offering several groups of jade scholarly items including scholar’s rocks. Orientations Gallery will be featuring Japanese ceremonial objects, many commissioned for Imperial presentation. Owner Susan Tosi will also be exhibiting at the Arts of Pacific Asia Show and is pleased that “the show has justly received recognition this year as the premier event of New York Asia Week”. Featured in their display will be exquisite works by Meiji period imperial court artists, notably cloisonné enameled by Namioka Sosuke (1847–1910) of Tokyo.

In Philadelphia, Samuel T. Freeman and Company will hold its Fine and Decorative Asian Art Auction on March 16th. They are particularly happy to present a collection of Asian art and scholar’s objects from Alice Boney (1901–1988) by way of Pittsburgh. Freeman’s Asian Art Department will also feature a wide variety of objects: ceramics, ivory, bronze, jade, textile and especially fine furniture and scholar’s objects. Pictured is a pair of Qing dynasty huanghuali round-corner tapering kanggan cabinets.

Chieftown Auction (HK) International Limited is proud to announce that despite the economic crisis it is satisfied with the results of their Hong Kong auctions which ended at 8 pm on December 1st, 2008. Transactions exceeded HK$200 million and the overall sales rate was 65%. The highlight of the auction was a Yuan dynasty ink on paper scroll painting (50 × 33 cm) by Chinese artist Ni Zan which sold for an unexpected high price of HK$18.92 million.

It was a pleasure to attend the official opening of “Silk Road in Ningxia” on December 12th, 2008 held at the University Museum and Art Gallery, jointly presented by The University of Hong Kong and the Ningxia Cultural Relics
Bureau. On display until March 15th, 2009 are over one hundred artefacts reflecting the rich cultural facets of Ningxia from the Northern Wei (386–534) to Ming dynasties. The exhibition is sponsored by The University of Hong Kong Museum Society and Michelle International Transport Company Limited. Seen in the "Arts of Asia" photograph are Mr Thomas Yuen, Managing Director of Michelle International Transport Company Limited; Mrs Margaret Chan, Chairman of The HKU Museum Society; Ms Tao Yufang, Deputy Director of the Ningxia Cultural Relics Bureau; Professor P.K.H. Tam, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, HKU; Mr Wei Zhong, Deputy Director of the Ningxia Cultural Relics Bureau; and Mr C.T. Yeung, Museum Director of the University Museum and Art Gallery.13

A record number of 239 dealers will exhibit at The European Fine Art Fair (TEFAF) when it takes place at the Maastricht Exhibition and Congress Centre in the Netherlands from March 13th to 22nd, 2009. New exhibitors will strengthen existing areas of the fair. An entirely new section called TEFAF Design will bring in leading international specialists in 20th century design and applied arts. This will increase the number of sections to seven. The Oriental and Asian dealers exhibiting are Blitz Chinese Ceramics & Works of Art, Cohen & Cohen, Michael Goedhuis Ltd, Martyn Gregory, Robert Hall, Ben Janssens Oriental Art Ltd, Katie Jones, Littleton & Hennessy Asian Art Ltd, Marcel Nies Oriental Art, Priestley & Ferraro, Vanderven & Vanderven Oriental Art Ltd, Kunstzaken A. Vecht, Axel Vervoort, and Jorge Welsh.

British dealers Cohen & Cohen, specialists for thirty-five years in Chinese Export porcelain, are bringing their very finest pieces to Maastricht. Michael and Ewa Cohen will be offering an array of animal figures including Asian cows and Meissen-inspired pugs. Michael says, "This is the first time Chinese Export animal porcelains of this calibre have been offered for sale at Maastricht. We expect a very enthusiastic response to this exceptional event." Noteworthy from the James E. Sowell Collection is a pair of charming and rare Kangxi biscuit porcelain ewers in the form of monkeys holding a peach, circa 1710, heights 14 cm.14 Another highlight is a circa 1770 Qianlong boar’s head tureen and cover,15 length 39.5 cm. It is modelled after European faience and delifware examples, which were popular among collectors on the Iberian peninsula.

I am confident readers will enjoy the article by Professor Yayoi Kawamura in this issue, "Reflection on Namban Lacquers in Spain: collection and use" on pages 92–105. At the time of writing this Editorial I welcomed to my offices Mr Yoon-soo Chun, a director of Chinese Art Research & Consulting, and Bukchon Art Museum in Korea, who presented me with a copy of East Asian Lacquer16 published by Bukchon Art Museum. It is a book which introduces and provides detailed information of lacquers of best quality from China, Japan and Korea all together for the first time. I was particularly interested in the article "Enduring Beauty: The Artistic Development and Achievement of Carved Lacquer in Chinese History" by Zhang Rong, Associate Researcher at the Palace Museum in Beijing.
Reproduced from the wedding invitation of Qian Qian Hao and Ronald Chak. The calligraphy, from a poem in the Book of Odes, was translated by Mr K.Y. Ng as follows: “Guanguan”, chirped the mate-courting waterfowl on the islet in the river; A modest and fine lady is someone a gentleman would like to marry.

Over six hundred guests attended at the Grand Ballroom, InterContinental Hong Kong, November 27th, 2008.
One of the happiest occasions I attended last year was the wedding of William and Priscilla Chak’s son Ronald to beautiful Qian Qian Hao. I have known William for over thirty years since he was a young apprentice at the Hollywood Road gallery of his old master, Mr Wong Ying Ho. With the support of his wife Priscilla, they have become leading art dealers with many important mainland Chinese collectors as their clients. I am sure *Arts of Asia* readers and friends of the Chaks will enjoy seeing photographs of the event on my final Editorial pages.

The wedding banquet for over six hundred guests took place at the Grand Ballroom of the InterContinental Hong Kong Hotel on Thursday November 27th, 2008. It was the same evening Christie’s held a cocktail reception for their Autumn 2008 Hong Kong auctions (the Saleroom News report appears on pages 122–123) so many important collectors and dealers were in town. The who’s who of the Chinese art world came to the wedding to give their best wishes to the young married couple and their families.

Qian Qian Hao, the bride, studied the violin for five years at the prestigious Johns Hopkins University. She has a Masters degree in music, achieving the level where she can perform as a soloist at concerts. Ronald Chak, the groom, graduated with a degree in finance from the University of Maryland and was working in banking. The Chaks are delighted that Qian Qian and Ronald have both decided to work full-time for the family Chinese antiques business.

Guests on my table included dealers Roger Keverne, Richard Littleton, James Hennessy, John Berwald, David Priestley, and John Axford from Woolley & Wallis Salisbury Salerooms. During the delicious banquet dinner served with free-flowing red and white wine, we exchanged amusing stories about the Chaks and the art world. The memorable night ended with speeches by Andrew Foster, Christie’s Asia President, followed by Kevin Ching, Sotheby’s Asia Chief Executive. The first heartfelt speech was delivered in English, and the second much longer speech in Cantonese/Mandarin was a real crowd pleaser. It was a truly unique occasion where auctioneers, specialists, dealers, collectors, museum curators, Chak’s family and friends came together and really enjoyed each other’s company. All of us at *Arts of Asia* want to warmly congratulate the Chaks and wish Qian Qian and Ronald much happiness.

William and Priscilla Chak would like me to announce that after two years searching for a venue for their International Antiques & Arts Expo, they settled on the World Trade Hotel in Taiyuan, Shanxi province. They explained that Shanxi province has the richest owners of coal mines in China and they enjoy collecting art. Some of them have become regular buyers for the top lots at auctions in Hong Kong. The new fair has six Chinese partners and will occupy 21,000 square feet on the third and fourth floors of the five-star hotel. The plan is to welcome fifty exhibitors to join the event (June 11th–14th, 2009 with preview on June 10th), where dealers will have the opportunity to meet serious collectors.

On Tuesday January 20th, 2009 I watched Barack Obama become the first African-American President of the United States. It was a historic moment that I could not miss. Seen on my TV in the early hours of the morning, the sea of happy faces cheering for Barack Obama during his inauguration as the 44th President was inspiring. Two million people went to the National Mall in Washington DC as President Obama represents a renewed hope in American leadership and that dreams do come true. His breakthrough in American politics proves that anything is possible in the land of the free. My hope is that America will bounce back by repairing its financial institutions and injecting government spending to stimulate the economy. The recovery is likely to take time and be challenging, as the erosion of wealth and jobs is now very deep. Surely, rebuilding America to its glory can be achieved if President Obama’s government shows the will that was expressed in his inaugural speech.

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