

# Report from New York

Several lots at Sotheby's Chinese painting sale on 3 June 1986 generated flurries of active bidding and sold substantially above the estimates to produce a total sales figure of a reasonable US\$738,650, representing 81 of the 157 lots offered. Attendance was fairly sparse with absentee bidding predominating. According to Sotheby's Arnold Chang, the Chinese painting market in the United States continues to be extremely specialized with few relatively sophisticated buyers despite steadily increased interest over the past decade. A new collector entering into today's market could make a tremendous impact.

An impressive misty landscape hanging scroll by Wen Zhengming (lot 12), dated 1546 and with a second inscription by the artist dated 1557, had been bought in at

Sotheby's June 1985 sale where it had a higher presale estimate (US\$40,000/60,000); at this second offering, it was purchased by an American museum in a telephone bid for US\$45,100 (estimate US\$25,000/35,000), with strong competitive bidding. Lot 19, a handscroll, dated 1566, of a monk meditating in the woods by the mid sixteenth-century artist Qian Gu doubled the high estimate to sell for US\$31,900, again to a telephone bidder.

A colourful and animated painting (lot 28) of the traditional Chinese Buddhist subject of 'bodhisattvas cleaning a white elephant by the professional painter Ding Yunpeng and with lengthy later colophons on the mounting was disputed by several bidders before Robert Ellsworth won out over a private bidder for US\$55,000

*Landscape*, dated 1546  
By Wen Zhengming (1470-1559), Chinese  
Ink on paper  
Height 66 cm, width 32 cm  
Sotheby's sale, 3 June 1986, lot 12  
Price: US\$45,100

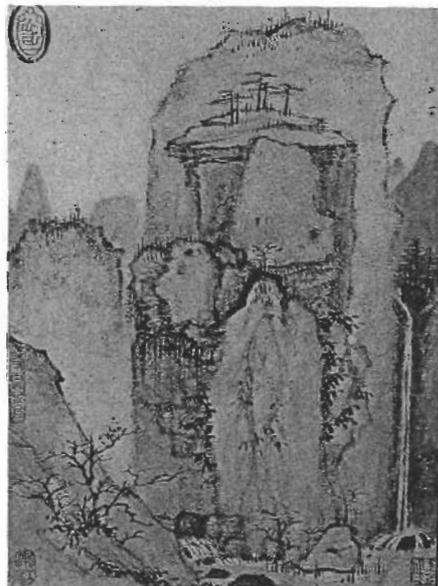
*Sweeping the Elephant*, dated 1604  
By Ding Yunpeng (1547-c. 1628), Chinese  
Ink and colour on paper  
Height 125.7 cm, width 49.5 cm  
Sotheby's sale, 3 June 1986, lot 28  
Price: US\$55,000



(estimate US\$35,000/45,000); it is said that the painting will be donated to an American museum. A number of the following lots remained unsold, including works by Dong Qichang, Chen Yuansu and Sheng Maohe, and Chen Hongshou.

Disappointing to Sotheby's was the relative lack of enthusiasm for an album of landscapes and calligraphy by the Anhui master Hongren (lot 57), considered by some to be the best work in the sale. It sold within the estimate for US\$49,500 to the West Coast dealer Jung Ying Tsao. It included four landscapes in ink and colour, six in ink and nine accompanying leaves of calligraphy in *xingshu*. The same dealer also purchased a set of four hanging scrolls of Dong Qichang's calligraphy of the famous Song dynasty prose-poem *Ode on the Red Cliff* (lot 31) for US\$17,600 (estimate US\$20,000/30,000).

A handscroll after Huang Gongwang's *Fuchun Mountains* by Wang Yuanqi (lot 66), documented as formerly in the imperial collections, sold at the high estimate for US\$30,800. A dramatic spate of bidding evolved around another work originating from the court, the imposing *Portrait of Hu Er Cha Ba, Imperial Bodyguard of the First Rank* (lot 90), dated 1760 and one of a set of fifty portraits commissioned by the Qianlong emperor to be presented to his loyal bodyguards. It bore an inscription in Chinese and Manchu and while the torso and hand of the bodyguard were probably painted by apprentices, the face was obviously by the hand of a master trained in the Western style, possibly by Guiseppe Castiglione (Lang Shining). Estimated at US\$20,000/25,000, the painting touched off a battle between a telephone bidder and a bidder represented by Sotheby's Sandy Carroll, with Mrs Carroll finally winning the lot for US\$115,000.



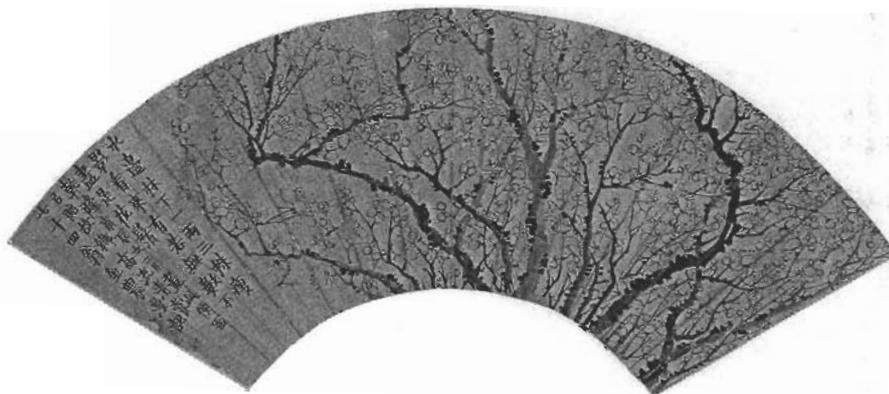
Christie's sale on 4 June of Chinese paintings saw little more saleroom activity than Sotheby's sale of the previous day. Once again, much of the purchasing was by dealers, with private collectors constituting only a minor presence. As in the Sotheby's sale, just over half (96) of the total lots offered (172) were sold for a total of US\$793,000, with three lots sold after the sale. Few paintings seemed to spark much enthusiastic response and several of the major paintings were bought in, such as an ink and colour landscape by Shen Zhou (lot 12, estimate US\$30,000/40,000), a handscroll entitled *Travellers in Mountains and Rivers* by Wu Bin (lot 31) — which had aroused considerable interest before the auction but was bought in at US\$48,000 (estimate US\$75,000/90,000) — and *Landscape after Huang Gongwang* by Dong Qichang (lot 34, estimate US\$30,000/40,000).

One leaf from an album of landscapes and calligraphy  
By Hongren (1610-64), Chinese  
Ink and colour on paper  
Height 18.7 cm, width 12.7 cm  
Sotheby's sale, 3 June 1986, lot 57  
Price: US\$49,500

Of the earlier paintings, an anonymous fourteenth-century handscroll, *Sixteen Lohans*, sold together with an eighth- or ninth-century calligraphy of a Buddhist sutra (lot 1A&B) within the estimate for US\$44,000. The London dealer Paul Moss was the successful telephone bidder for a stately piece of calligraphy by the Song dynasty emperor Lizong (lot 4), the final bid of US\$26,400 exceeding the estimate (US\$15,000/18,000).

A long (over 22 metres) handscroll of large cursive script by the Ming master Zhu Yunming (lot 14) sold to a New York collector for US\$143,000, over double the high estimate of US\$70,000. However, of the five lots by Wen Zhengming, only one, lot 17, sold, perhaps because of the current availability of this artist's work on the market. The successful lot, a calligraphy handscroll with a small landscape painting, was sold

*Plum Blossoms*, dated 1760  
By Jin Nong (1687-1764), Chinese  
Ink on paper  
Height 17 cm, width 52.5 cm  
Christie's sale, 4 June 1986, lot 80  
Price: US\$7,700



Detail of *Large Cursive Calligraphy*, dated 1519  
 By Zhu Yunming (1460-1526), Chinese  
 Ink on paper  
 Length 2,244.5 cm, height 47 cm  
 Christie's sale, 4 June 1986, lot 14  
 Price: US\$143,000

*Portrait of Hu Er Cha Ba, Imperial Bodyguard of the First Rank*  
 Chinese, dated 1760  
 Ink and colour on silk  
 Height 200 cm, width 100 cm  
 Sotheby's sale, 3 June 1986, lot 90  
 Price: US\$115,500

*Gentlemen Appreciating Paintings*, dated 1943  
 By Fu Baoshi (1904-65), Chinese  
 Ink and colour on paper  
 Height 109.2 cm, width 62 cm  
 Christie's sale, 4 June 1986, lot 148  
 Price: US\$63,800

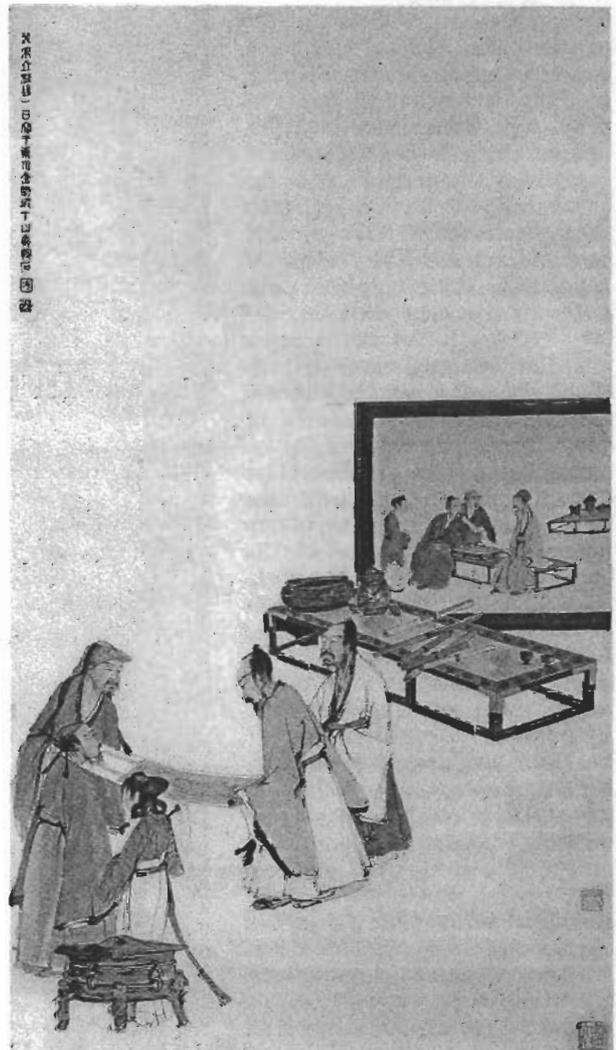
within the estimate to Robert Ellsworth for US\$13,200. The same collector/dealer purchased a long and narrow hanging scroll by Song Xu, *Landscape after Wang Meng* (lot 28), dated 1592, for US\$30,800, well above the high estimate of US\$22,000.

A large monochrome painting of geese and reeds by Bada Shanren (lot 60) with an inscription on the mounting by Zhang Daqian exceeded the estimate (US\$30,000/40,000) for US\$45,100 and a landscape by Shitao (lot 62) brought in US\$41,800 (estimate US\$35,000/45,000).

Paul Moss once again was pitted against Robert Ellsworth for a lively ink and colour genre scene by Hua Yan (lot 77), which finally sold to the latter bidder for US\$33,000, just above the estimate. The scene depicted country people enjoying themselves under the shade of a large tree and was attractive in its playful use of line and wash. Lot 84, a portrait by Huang

Zeng of Wang Guyuan in his mountain retreat, proved to be an exciting 'sleeper'. Considerable discussion arose concerning the nine colophons surrounding the painting and the bidding rose to US\$24,200, over three times the high estimate, finally selling to Mr Ellsworth. Another work that provoked interested bidding was a fan painting of plum blossoms by Jin Nong (lot 80) (who, incidentally, wrote one of the colophons on Huang Zeng's painting); it sold for almost twice the high estimate for US\$7,700.

Of the modern paintings offered, lot 148 by Fu Baoshi created quite a stir; a stunningly plotted composition of scholars viewing paintings in front of a low table or bench behind which stood a painted screen basically mirroring the composition in front, it was purchased by a New York collector for US\$63,800 (estimate US\$35,000/50,000) against several underbidders.



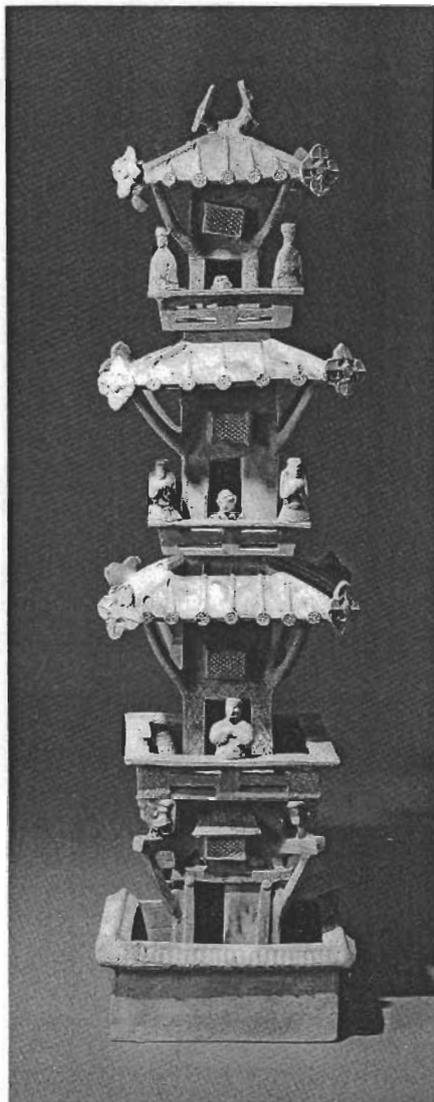
At Sotheby's 4 June sale of Chinese ceramics and works of art, confident, brisk and even occasionally truculent bidding produced healthy results. Of the 254 lots offered, 60 per cent were sold for a total of US\$1,594,750. Throughout the sale, new young collectors seemed to be most interested in the sculptural works.

Early in the sale, lot 10, a four-storeyed Han dynasty model of a tower with figures on balconies, large florettes at the corners of each roof and latticed projecting windows sold for nearly double the high estimate. Several bidders were interested but most dropped out after bidding reached US\$60,000. George Lee of Tokyo finally acquired it for the Matsuoka Museum for US\$84,700. Strong bidding continued for Yue ware and the early wares, with 88 per cent of the lots finding buyers at prices close to or within the estimates.

Of the Tang dynasty wares, Mr Lee purchased a *sancai*-glazed vase with an ovoid body moulded with elaborate quatrefoil floral appliques (lot 36) for US\$71,500 (estimate US\$70,000/90,000).

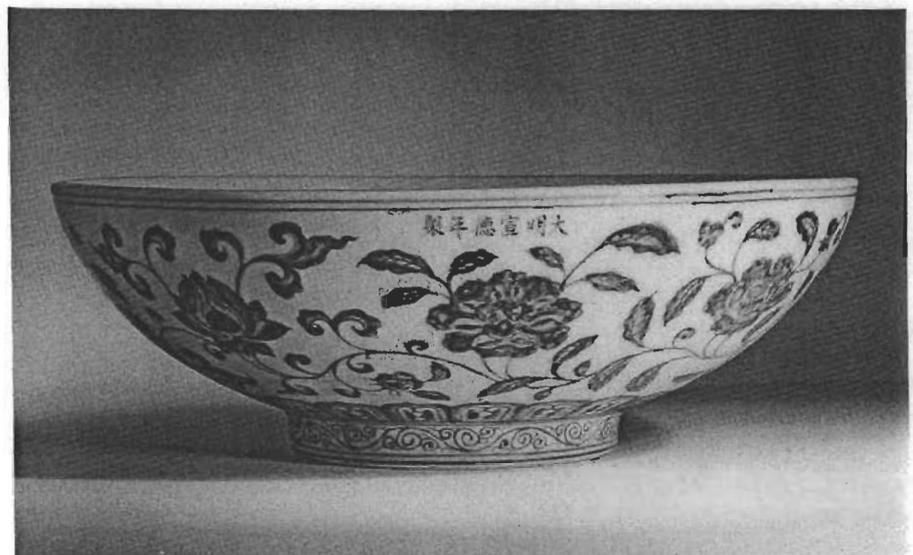
Ming dynasty wares, with few exceptions, sold well, usually within or just above the estimates. A handsome Xuande mark and period blue-and-white fruit bowl (lot 104) was bought by Eskenazi for US\$52,250, just above the estimate. Two large yellow-and-green-glazed pottery figures from the Louise C. Morgan Collection both sold above the estimates to P.C. Lu — the first (lot 127) for US\$40,700 (estimate US\$20,000/30,000) and the companion piece (lot 128), with the same estimate, for US\$47,300. The last lot of the morning session, a pair of Kangxi period fishbowls decorated in underglaze red and blue (lot 150) were purchased for Matsuoka at US\$19,800, within the estimate.

An interesting assemblage of Han and Tang dynasty tomb sculptures opened the afternoon session. An indication of the active interest in sculptural figures was the strong bidding for a Tang dynasty pottery figure of a plump court lady with a well-modelled face (lot 167) that sold to a private collector for US\$35,200, well above the estimate of US\$14,000/18,000. The highest price of the entire sale was US\$506,000 (estimate US\$400,000/600,000) paid by Mr Ellsworth for a Tang dynasty model of a horse (lot 180), the second highest price on record for a Tang horse. The same figure had been sold in London in July 1978 (lot 45) for the then record price of £120,000, US\$228,690 at 1978 exchange rates. Auction room rumours had the piece going to a major American museum. With the exception of two *sancai* pottery figures (lots 181 and 182) that did not sell, the remaining lots of Tang *sancai*-glazed figures sold within the estimates to buyers who included Eskenazi, Christian Deydier and China House of Arts.

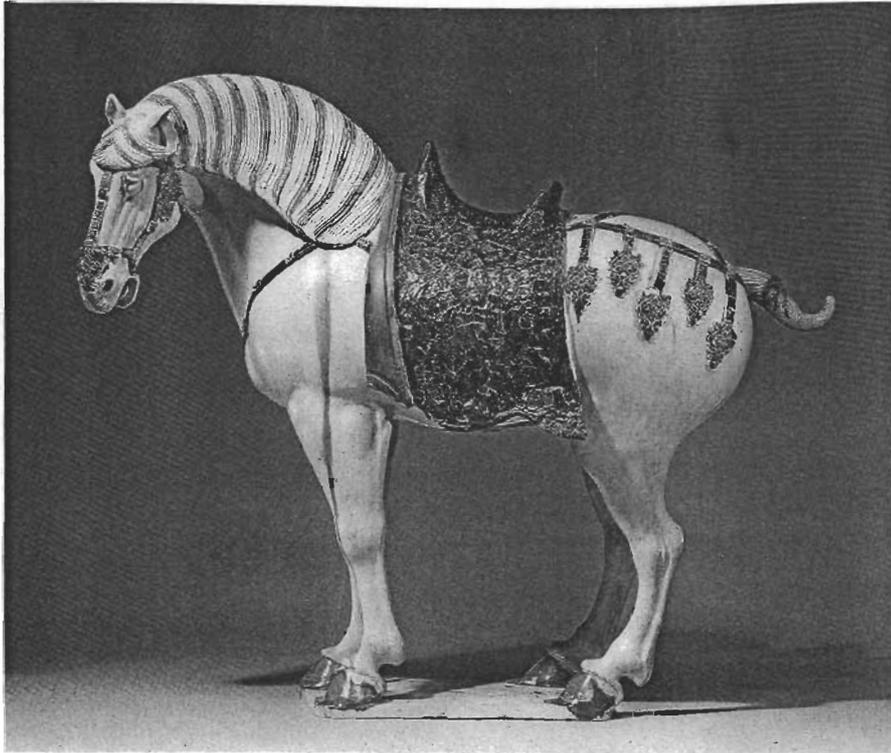


Glazed pottery figure  
Chinese, Ming dynasty (1368-1644)  
Height 114.3 cm  
Sotheby's sale, 4 June 1986, lot 128  
Price: US\$47,300

Green-glazed model-of tower  
Chinese, Han dynasty (206 BC-AD 220)  
Height 144.8 cm  
Sotheby's sale, 4 June 1986, lot 10  
Price: US\$84,700



Blue-and-white fruit bowl  
Chinese, Xuande mark and period (1426-35)  
Diameter 28.6 cm  
Sotheby's sale, 4 June 1986, lot 104  
Price: US\$52,250



Bronze incense holder  
Chinese, Western Han dynasty (206 BC-AD 23)  
Height 9 cm  
Christie's sale, 5 June 1986, lot 58  
Price: US\$71,500

*Sancai*-glazed pottery figure of a Ferghana horse  
Chinese, Tang dynasty (618-907)  
Height 64.8 cm  
Sotheby's sale, 4 June 1986, lot 180  
Price: US\$506,000



Bronze *jue*  
Chinese, Shang dynasty (16th-11th century BC)  
Height 16.5 cm  
Sotheby's sale, 4 June 1986, lot 191  
Price: US\$27,500



Gilt bronze dragon-head handle  
Chinese, Han dynasty (206 BC-AD 220)  
Length 15.9 cm  
Sotheby's sale, 4 June 1986, lot 258  
Price: US\$38,500

Only ten of the thirty-one lots of archaic bronzes were sold. A Shang dynasty *jue* (lot 191), thinly cast and of small size reached the most unexpected price of the sale, selling to Christian Deydier, with Robert Ellsworth the underbidder, for US\$27,500, over nine times the high estimate of US\$3,000. Two other Shang dynasty *jue*, lots 194 (estimate US\$20,000/25,000) and 196 (estimate US\$10,000/15,000), failed to find buyers. A well-known and well-documented bronze *qilin* from the Six Dynasties period (lot 205) fetched US\$18,700 (estimate US\$12,000/15,000). Another lot that well exceeded the presale estimate was a Song dynasty basin (lot 220A) cast in relief with a large pair of fish, waterfowl, flowering plants and lotus lappets on the interior and four boys reclining amidst scrolling vegetation on the cavetto; it was purchased by a private American collector, with Eskenazi the underbidder, for US\$13,200 (estimate US\$5,000/7,000).

Early jades fared well, many selling above the estimates, including a Tang dynasty phoenix and young (lot 227), acquired by P.C. Lu for US\$14,300, over double the high estimate. Of the Tang silver and gold, three-quarters of the twenty lots found buyers. Sotheby's Mrs Carroll bid successfully on behalf of a client for a Han dynasty gilt-bronze dragon-head handle (lot 258, featured on the catalogue cover), which sold for US\$38,500, below the estimate of US\$40,000/60,000; perhaps the piece did not produce the anticipated enthusiastic response because it was a fragment.

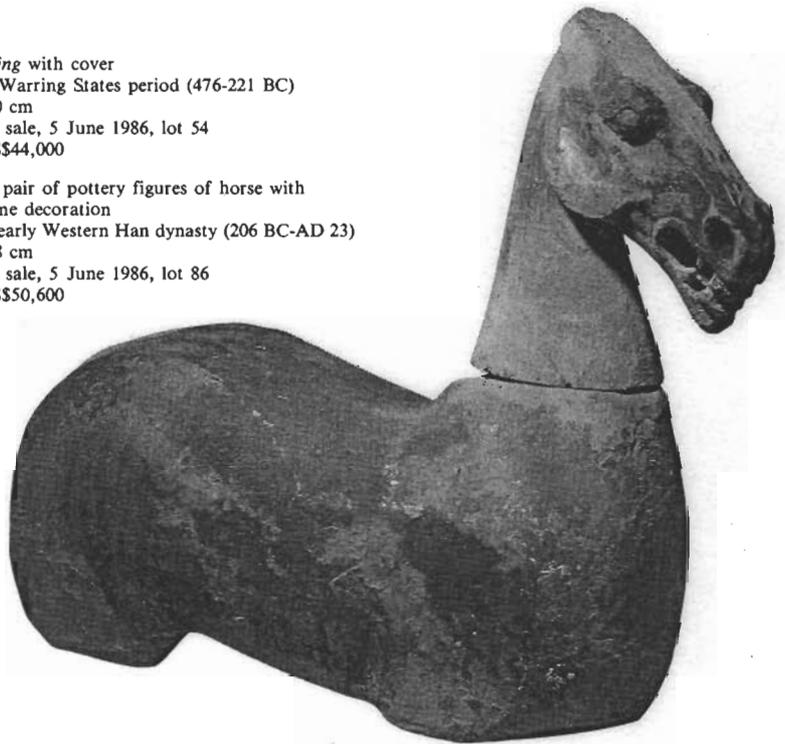
Christie's two-session sale of Chinese ceramics and works of art was held the following day and although it was well attended by American and international dealers, private collectors were notably few in number. Isolated lots achieved good prices but a general shortage of top-quality items meant that the more typical lots simply did not sell, especially the furniture and later jades. 47 per cent of the 418 lots found buyers, for a total of US\$1,288,375.

The morning session opened with fifteen lots of Neolithic wares, of which one collector, Mrs Heeramaneck, bought four pieces. Early jades went well and briskly, with 70 per cent of the lots sold. About half of the bronzes found buyers, dealers Ellsworth, Eskenazi and Hartman being among the successful bidders. A Warring States period bronze *ding* and cover (lot 52), which had been bought at Sotheby's in 1982 for US\$80,000, was sold for US\$33,000, within the current estimate; the new price reflects the availability on the market of this type of object. Mr Ellsworth bought a more elaborate *ding* of the same period (lot 54), with openwork legs and finial and an unusually colourful patina, for US\$44,000 (estimate US\$35,000/40,000). The highest price for a bronze, at more than double the high estimate, was for an unusual Western Han inlaid incense holder, modelled as a fanciful horned feline creature (lot 58); it sold for US\$71,500. Of the Han funerary ceramics, lot 86, a pair of legless monumental pottery horses, sold for the surprising price of US\$50,600 (estimate US\$20,000/30,000).



Bronze *ding* with cover  
Chinese, Warring States period (476-221 BC)  
Height 20 cm  
Christie's sale, 5 June 1986, lot 54  
Price: US\$44,000

One of a pair of pottery figures of horse with polychrome decoration  
Chinese, early Western Han dynasty (206 BC-AD 23)  
Height 48 cm  
Christie's sale, 5 June 1986, lot 86  
Price: US\$50,600



The highest price of the entire sale was for a *circa* twelfth-century wooden figure of Guanyin (lot 119). Described as the 'property of a Princeton gentleman' and formerly owned by C.T. Loo, it was acquired for a Japanese buyer at US\$93,500, far above the US\$15,000/18,000 estimate. Another sculpture to do well was a limestone head of a youthful Buddha (lot 114), from the Northern Qi or Sui dynasty. The fragment, which had been featured on the catalogue cover, sold to Tony Derham for US\$49,500 (estimate US\$30,000/35,000). Half of the 28 lots of Tang ceramics were sold, all within a comfortable range of the estimates with good examples selling well, such as a figure of a beauty holding a ewer in the shape of a goose (lot 129), which sold for US\$33,000 (estimate US\$25,000/35,000).

Song ceramics did not do quite as well, with only 40 per cent of the sixty-nine lots finding purchasers. A private collector, Mr Hochstadter, bought a rare Cizhou baluster vase (lot 158), with overall incised decoration in high relief covered with an ivory glaze. Although in a much degraded condition, the scarcity of this type resulted in brisk underbidding and a final price of US\$55,000, almost ten times the high estimate. One of the best buys of the morning was a very fine Northern Song Ding ware shallow bowl carved with lotus blossoms (lot 184); it was purchased by Robert Ellsworth for US\$26,400, well below the US\$40,000/50,000 estimate.

Ming ceramics were presented in the afternoon session, and those in the lower and middle price range sold easily. Lot 274, a blue-and-white saucer dish with the highest estimate among the Ming wares (US\$60,000/80,000) did not find a buyer. Qing wares produced the second good buy of the sale with a Yongzheng carved celadon moon flask (lot 353) selling to a New York collector for US\$24,200 (estimate US\$28,000/25,000).

Roberta Huber and Linda Kramer



Limestone head of Buddha  
Chinese, c. 570  
Height 23.5 cm  
Christie's sale, 5 June 1986, lot 114  
Price: US\$49,500

Wood figure of seated Guanyin  
Chinese, Song dynasty (960-1127)  
Height 59 cm  
Christie's sale, 5 June 1986, lot 119  
Price: US\$93,500

# Orientalations

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Cover: *Boshanlu*  
Southern Chinese, c. 1st century BC  
Asian Art Museum of San Francisco

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