

international events

Chinese Export has its day in New York

■ Healthy selling rates for Frelinghuysen collection and mixed-owner offering



Kate Hunt
reports
£1 = \$1.48

Chinese export art does not wield the same financial clout at auction as Imperial art. But as *Christie's New York (25/20/12% buyer's premium)* strong annual outing of Chinese export art in January showed, it has a solid trade and private following.

Buyers largely hail from the US, UK, Europe and Latin America, although Chinese collectors are drawn to quality enamelled ceramics. Established Western buyers secured the lion's share of Christie's highlights in the two export sales that formed part of Christie's Americana week and coincided with the *New York Ceramic Fair and Winter*

Antiques Show.

In contrast to the much publicised dip in selling rates by lot witnessed during London's major Chinese sales, Christie's export outings were notable for their high take-up rates by volume.

The \$889,200 (£600,800) Peter H.B. Frelinghuysen Jr Collection of Chinese Export Porcelain on January 24 racked up an 87 per cent selling rate. The previous day, a 123-lot, mixed-owner assemblage of Chinese export that shared a catalogue with American furniture, silver and folk art took \$1m (£675,675), with an 89 per cent selling rate.

New Jersey-based former US congressman Peter Frelinghuysen Jr was an inveterate collector and long-time friend of the late dealer David Sanctuary Howard, the greatest 20th century scholar

of Chinese armorial porcelain.

Although Frelinghuysen was a well-known figure in the Chinese export world, Christie's Becky MacGuire said prior to the sale that few had been aware of the extent of his collection.

The catalogue introduction by David Howard's wife, Angela, explained that Frelinghuysen's holding was shaped by values close to his heart: history and heritage. The assemblage included porcelain made for George Washington, American Eagle Fitzhugh designs, armorial and dated pieces, ceramics that reflected historical events, naval battles, political

alliances and, of course, China's trade with the West.

Foremost was one of the most iconic Chinese exports work of art of all: a Hong bowl, pictured here. The bowl in this collection depicted the bustling Canton waterfront with its junks and European factories (hongs) flying the Dutch, British and Swedish flags. The bowl dated to c.1785.

Hong punchbowls are more commonly 12-14in (30-25cm) in diameter, making this an unusually large example at 16in (41cm). On the day, a US private buyer secured it at \$85,000 (£57,430) against



Above: this c.1785 Hong bowl topped the Peter Frelinghuysen collection selling for \$85,000 (£57,430) at Christie's on January 24.

Left: a massive pair of Yongzheng/early Qianlong jardinières (one shown) fetched \$120,000 (£81,080) and headlined Christie's mixed-vendor sale on January 23.



Left: a smattering of Chinese export porcelain also featured in *Sotheby's (25/20/12% buyer's premium)* mixed-discipline Americana auction on January 20-21. It included this small size, 10¼in (25cm) diameter political punch bowl painted with portraits of Lord Mansfield and John Wilkes and the slogan *Wilkes and Liberty* that was part of a 34-lot consignment from the Collection of Ann and Philip Holzer. It doubled expectations to take \$13,000 (£8785).

The most expensive Export porcelain lot of the sale was a 12in (30cm) high, famille rose covered tureen formed as a goose, dating from c.1780 that realised \$130,000 (£87,840) against predictions of \$150,000-250,000.

Millon spread their wings

AUCTIONEERS **Millon** are opening a new auction house in Brussels next month. It will be situated in the heart of the antiques district at Bodenbroek 8A, leading off the Place du Grand Sablon, where auction house Pierre Bergé also have their Brussels base.

Millon's new space, named Le Forum, kicks off on Friday, March 16 with an open evening followed by a valuations

weekend, with the first sale devoted to Design scheduled for April 21.

Alexandre Millon described the new initiative as "not some run of the mill company development but a natural progression of our identity", adding: "Half of the Millon group have Belgian roots." The Brussels saleroom will have a new team headed up by **Stéphane Cauches**, **Bruno Ract-Madoux** and

Left: the team at Millon, from left to right, Bertrand Leleu, Bruno Ract-Madoux, Alexandre Millon and Stéphane Cauches, preparing for the new challenge in Brussels.



interest from five telephone bidders, and four buyers in the room.

Among the quirkier entries in the collection and a design that must have appeared odd subject matter to the Chinese porcelain decorators of the day was a 9¾in (25cm) golfing plate, probably based on a pair of golfing prints.

The plate, previewed in ATG No 2020, dated to c.1800 and depicted pink- and blue-jacketed golfers swinging their clubs in the sand.

Only two other Chinese ceramics are known with golfing decoration, both punch bowls, the last of which made \$15,000 at Christie's New York in January 2009. The plate here attracted interest from the golfing fraternity but was hammered down to a US dealer at \$26,000 (£17,570).

The mixed-vendor sale on January 23 offered a slightly different focus of material and included more decorative porcelains, enamelled birds and animals, China trade paintings, dinner services as well as armorial ceramics.

Among the areas of Chinese export art appreciated as much by Chinese buyers as Westerners are the quality enamelled ceramics, such as the massive pair of Yongzheng (1723-35) or early Qianlong period (1736-95) famille rose jardinières that topped the sale, pictured here.

The skillfully painted 2ft ¼in (62cm) wide jardinières with their Buddhist lion-mask handles consigned from an estate would have been as likely to be found in a Chinese palace as in a grand European country house in the 18th century. They were contested in the room and on the telephone eliciting a winning \$120,000 (£81,080) bid from a private European buyer.

An Asian institution rather than a Westerner secured a second quality enamelled consignment from this estate: a large pair of 2ft ¼in (62cm) high famille rose jars and covers dating to c.1745 painted to one side with a court lady and to the other with a scene from *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. One cover was a later Samson factor replacement. The pair made \$55,000 (£37,160).

in Brussels

Bertrant Leleu, and the étude will feature sales based around 25 different disciplines and collecting fields.

Some match areas of strength in their Paris rooms, such as Art Nouveau and Deco, tribal art and comic strip art, but they will also be adding themed sales under titles like *L'Univers de L'homme* or *Dans le boudoir de Madame*, events where you will be able to find wines and cigars in the first instance or perfume bottles and vintage fashion in the second.

Mixed results for select repackaged Masterworks

ACCOMPANYING Sotheby's extensive series of Old Master paintings and drawings sales in New York last month (see last week's *Art Market*) was a very small sale of furniture and objects in the auctioneers' *Masterworks* category.

This was the first New York staging of a relatively new format, which has already been held in London under the *Treasures* heading, that takes European furniture and objects across the disciplines. The distinguishing characteristics are that they are provenanced items of some rarity and value that might appeal to a cross-section of buyers on the basis of being works of art in their own right as well as a cabinet, a clock, or a silver service.

By definition, therefore, these sales tend to be fairly small and select – the January 27 auction featured just 15 lots – and with estimates ranging from a low of \$80,000-12,000 up to a high of \$600,000-900,000, this was no bargain hunter's ensemble.

It proved to be a selection with mixed appeal. Nine of the lots changed hands, but the six that failed included the highest estimated, a three-piece garniture of violet ground Sèvres porcelain vases mounted in ormolu that was commissioned by Louis XV as a prestigious gift for his minister Jean Baptiste Machault d'Arnouville on his retirement.

All this kept the selling rate by lot to 64% and by value to 63% or \$2.3m (£1.55m).

The sale's best-seller at \$400,000 (£270,270) proved to be the pair of English-made coromandel lacquer and japanned serpentine commodes pictured here. Attributed to Pierre Langlois, the French émigré ébéniste, they have

japanned carcasses and are veneered to the top, front and sides with panels of coromandel lacquer that would have been imported from southern China. They would also originally have boasted ormolu mounts to the sides and feet that are now missing.

They are thought to have been commissioned by Francis Seymour Conway, 1st Marquis of Hertford, for Ragley Hall in Warwickshire, where they remained until sold by his descendants at Christie's in 1921. In the 1990s, after several others changes of ownership, they entered the collection of Edmond and Lily Safra, a lavish assemblage that has been the object of a number of saleroom dispersals, most recently last autumn when Sotheby's New York held a mammoth four-day, six-catalogue auction that totalled \$45.9m (including premium).

The Ragley Hall commodes left the Safra collection earlier, however, being sold in 2005. Offered here from a subsequent vendor, an unnamed private collector, they sold at the lower end of a \$400,000-600,000 guide, going to a US dealer.

A set of four, early 18th century, French tapestries, each measuring approximately 10ft 7in x 8ft 7in (3.2 x 2.6m) and woven in the Gobelins factory in Paris from 1718-20, were estimated at the same level. Together they took \$380,000 (£256,755).

This set related the story of Daphnis and Chloe and the design had been painted by Philippe Duc d'Orleans (1674-1723) when he was Regent of France during Louis XV's minority. The Duc ordered the tapestries and installed them in the Palais Royale.

No fewer than three of the masterworks were elaborate 18th century



Above: Cartel clock – \$55,000 (£37,160) at Doyle.

French clocks and of these the best seller, much in line with current trends, was a George III ormolu musical clock mounted with coloured pastes that had been made in England for export to China. The 20½in (52cm) high timekeeper had a number of replaced elements, including the dial and hands, the finial, the lower feet and the upper backplate, but still made \$310,000 (£209,460), selling, like so many of these export clocks, to an Asian collector.

Another Louis XV period clock proved to be the best seller in the furnishing element of **Doyle's 25/20/12% buyer's premium** sale in New York on January

25. A 3ft 10in (1.17m) high, gilt-bronze rococo-cased cartel clock signed *Furet à Paris* to the enamel dial had some missing, replaced and re-gilt elements to the branches of the case and cracks to its dial, but also an attractive \$8000-10,000 guide. It ended up overturning that to sell to a buyer based in France for \$55,000 (£37,160).

At just under 450 lots, Doyle's sale was a much larger and wider-ranging affair than the Masterworks auction. It totalled just over \$1.3m (£878,380) hammer, with selling rates of 84% by value and 93% by value.

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Anne Crane



Above: one of a pair of coromandel lacquer commodes that led Sotheby's Masterworks auction on January 27 on \$400,000 (£270,270).

international events

Things look good for BRAFA in 2012

IN the bathroom of a chic Brussels hotel, there are framed effigies of two national heroes – Tintin and Snowy are hanging above the bidet. Yet somehow the Belgians make it look stylish.

A silly point perhaps, but it's this irreverent, understated sense of innate style that defines Belgium's largest art and antiques fair, *BRAFA*, the *Brussels Antiques and Fine Arts Fair*, which was held for the 57th time from January 21-29 and seems to be going from strength to strength.

Held in the enormous Tour & Taxis exhibition site on the Willebroek canal, there is a palpable sense of pride in this event around the city, not something that can be said for many fairs elsewhere.

However, Belgium is known as a rather tough nut to crack for foreigners, and some non-native dealers point out that Belgian collectors are often slow burners in building close relationships with dealers and require sustained nurturing. Perhaps this is the reason why, for a fair that is geographically so close to the UK, only four UK-based dealers exhibited this year – **Finch & Co**, **Mullany**, **Whitford Fine Art** and **Aktis Gallery**, all based in London.

Although there is also a smattering of exhibitors from across continental Europe and the US, as you would expect, the vast majority of the 122 exhibitors are from France and Belgium. The whole fair has a definite Franco-Belgian flavour,



Left:
Composition, 1955-60, by Geer van Velde (1898-1977), 6ft 4in (1.62m) square, which was sold for a six figure sum by **Aktis Gallery** at BRAFA.

with a strong presence of early European sculpture and works of art, as well as tribal art and antiquities staged on dramatically lit stands.

But it's a varied mix, with an increasing number of art dealers, from Old Masters to Contemporary, mixed with jewellery, decorative arts, silver, Asian art, carpets and tapestries, 20th century design and, of course, some comic strips. Period furniture is a little thin on the ground, and

this certainly isn't the place for traditional English furniture.

Around 40,096 people visited this year, the highest on record. They are predominantly Belgian and French, but with a fair few German and Dutch too, along with British, Italian, Russian, Spanish and a few serious American collectors and curators. This is a very knowledgeable crowd of buyers, serious academic collectors and trade buyers along with some knowledge-hungry amateurs. And most are here to buy, not just look.

Quality was felt to be a little higher in 2012 than in previous years and it was the top-quality stock, rather than more average pieces, that were finding buyers, albeit selling slowly at times.

This was the first ever fair for London-based **Nicholas Mullany** of **Mullany**, a collector who recently turned dealer and specialises in haute époque works of art, furniture and pictures from 1300-1700. Nicholas was full of praise for *BRAFA* and described it as a very successful fair for him, observing that "those who visit *BRAFA* are sophisticated, educated

Eclectic Eurantica

THE Belgian fairs circuit continues next month with the 31st staging of *Eurantica* for a ten-day run in hall 5 of the Brussels Expo from March 23-April 1.

Known for its eclectic mix, the fair features 120 Belgian and foreign exhibitors offering furniture, paintings, antique weaponry, silver, jewellery, textiles, oriental works and more with all works being vetted by the Eurantica Selection Committee.

This year the focus will be on the 20th century, focusing on the avant-garde and the rise of design and there will be a special area at the fair given over to vintage design.

www.eurantica.be

Deborah Charles

serious collectors and institutions who insist on high-quality objects with good provenance". He plans to return next year.

Mullany's sales included an early 17th century Italian walnut "Madia" credenza, 5ft 8in (1.75m) wide, from Emilia Romagna, which was previously in a Belgian private collection for over 300 years. It sold for €85,000.

Also sold, and pictured in *ATG* No 2023, was a c.1450 Burgundy limestone sculpture of the 2ft (60cm) high *Vièrge de Calvaire*, with original polychrome, which sold for €105,000.

Notable sales of modern art included **Galerie Taménaga's** sale of a Marc Chagall painting on the first evening, for more than €700,000, and **Mayoral Galeria** of Barcelona's sale of *Suceso* (2007) by Spanish painter Juan Genovès, priced at €145,000.

Phoenix Ancient Art from Geneva sold several of their antiquities, among them an Egyptian hard limestone figure of Rementyou, from the Ramses II or III period (c.13th-12th BC), at €290,000.

Anna Brady



Above: at BRAFA, **Nicholas Mullany** sold this Italian credenza for €85,000 at BRAFA.