

Chinese bronzes & cloisonné

The highest single price posted in the regions during the autumn series of Asian art sales was the £380,000 bid at **Duke's (25% buyer's premium)** in Dorchester for a monumental Sino-Tibetan gilt bronze devotional figure of Tara broadly dated to the Qing period.

Standing 2ft 5in (72cm) high, she is modelled seated on a lotus-leaf base with beaded borders, the face and headdress retaining a large proportion of the original polychrome decoration.

According to the family, this impressive gilt-bronze left Russia after the Revolution and then remained with the family in London. The estimate had been £30,000-50,000.

Catalogued as 'early Qing or later', a cloisonné Tibetan-style ewer took £190,000 at Duke's on December 8. Standing 8in (20cm), vessels such as this – inspired by earlier kundikas with lotus scroll ornament following early Ming cloisonné vessels – are believed to have been produced for Buddhist altars in the palaces and temples of Beijing and Chengde, where the Qing court had its summer retreat. It had been estimated at £3000-5000.

'Palace loot'

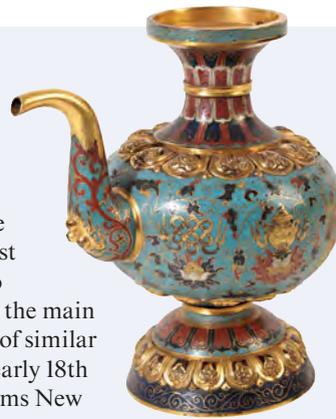
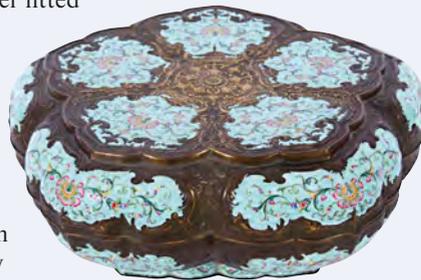
The sale at **Lyon & Turnbull** on November 5 was topped at £40,000 by a 6½ x 5in (17 x 13cm) Qing cloisonné plaque mounted on a later fitted wooden stand. One side was enamelled with a pair of birds perching on a flowering tree against a navy blue ground; the reverse depicted a walled garden surrounded by water with hills and a pagoda.

It came for sale from a Scottish collection with a handwritten letter from an ancestor suggesting it "was originally

in the Imperial Palace and looted by the Anglo-Franco troops in 1859 [sic]".

Cloisonné table screens are relatively uncommon and most published examples appear to have Daoist subject matter as the main theme. A comparable plaque of similar size and dated to the 17th or early 18th century was offered in Bonhams New York in September 2021, selling as part of property from the foundation established by New York collector Asbjorn Lunde (1927-2017) at a more modest \$3500 (£2700).

A good example of 18th century Beijing enamel topped **Keys' (20% buyer's premium)** sale in Aylsham on November 24. This 18in (39cm) diameter petal form gilt metal box set with panels of turquoise enamel was not in perfect condition (part of the iron red Qianlong mark to the base was missing in an area of loss) but it was a rare shape and size. A Chinese buyer fought off the London trade to buy it at £40,000 (estimate £1000-1500).



Above left: Qing cloisonné Tibetan-style ewer – **£190,000** at Duke's.

Above right: Sino-Tibetan gilt bronze devotional figure of Tara – **£380,000** at Duke's.

Left: cloisonné table screen – **£40,000** at Lyon & Turnbull.

Far left: petal-form gilt-metal box set with panels of turquoise enamel – **£40,000** at Keys.



Poignant piece of palace art

This Qing bronze fragment, **right**, measuring a substantial 19in (47cm) across, was once part of a magnificent sculpture of a crane that adorned an imperial palace. Similar models, symbols of noble character and longevity, still reside outside the Hall of Supreme Harmony in the Forbidden City – models that were commissioned by the emperor Qianlong in 1744. They could function as incense burners with the white smoke exiting by the beak.

This probably 18th century head, with a patina suggesting it was displayed outside, carries an old collector's

label stating it was taken 'From Summer Palace Peking, October 1860'. Objects removed by French and British soldiers during the sacking of the Yuan Ming Yuan or Old Summer Palace at the end of the Second Opium War have a particular resonance in China today and are valued by more than mere aesthetics. When offered by **Clarke's (18% buyer's premium)** in Semley, Dorset, on December 29-31 with a guide of just £80-120, it sold at **£3800**.

Bronze high point

The relatively short reign of the Ming emperor Xuande (1425-35) was considered a high point in the production of bronze works of art. Such was the reverence for these wares that a large number of bronzes made during the 17th and 18th centuries have honorific apocryphal marks to their base.

This example, **left**, with its carved hardwood stand measuring 8in (20cm) across, is one of a group of Qing censers made in imitation of Song dynasty prototypes. With a four-character Xuande mark, it emerged for sale with a brief catalogue description and an estimate of £200-300 at Liskeard, Cornwall, firm **Clarks (21% buyer's premium inc VAT)** on January 1. It got the new year off to a flying start when sold at **£38,000**.



Japanese works of art

Japanese antique ivories have been gradually disappearing from the catalogues of prominent dealers and major auction houses but good examples are still being sold in the regions. Two very fine carvings were offered by **Stride & Son (18% buyer's premium)** in Chichester on December 17.

Estimated at £400-600 but sold online at £9800 was a netsuke by Rakueisai, a talented Tokyo netsuke carver who was a pupil of Eirakusai Tomotada. This is a version of his best known work depicting General Gentoku, one of the three heroes of Han, riding his steed through the Dankei torrent. The source of this netsuke is thought to be a double-page spread from the *Ehon shaho bukuro* (Bag of sketching treasures).

Several examples are known including one in the V&A and another sold at Bonhams for £5000 (part of a group lot) in 2011.

Sold to an online bidder via thesaleroom.com was a Meiji okimono depicting the mountain woman Yamauba and the young Kintaro, the Japanese hero known for his great feats of incredible strength, that she raises after he is found abandoned in the Ashigara. Monkeys play at their feet.

At over 12in (30cm) high, this Tokyo school carving is relatively large and full of the detail that connoisseurs have long appreciated. A decade ago, before the cloud of international ivory legislation, it might have commanded £20,000.

Here it was guided at £800-1200 and brought £6500 on thesaleroom.com.



Above: two views of a netsuke of General Gentoku by Rakueisai – **£9800** at Stride & Son.



Above: two views of a Tokyo school ivory okimono of Yamauba and Kintaro – **£6500** at Stride & Son.



Marvellous moriage

This Japanese cloisonné casket bears the mark for the Ando Company of Nagoya.

Much of the firm's success was based on the technical innovations introduced by the master Kawade Shibataro (1856-c.1921), one of the four great masters of Japanese cloisonné along with Namikawa Yasuyuki, Namikawa Sosuke and Hayashi Kodenji.

Kewade's most important contribution to this golden age of Meiji cloisonné was *moriage* (piling-up). This painstaking technique, involving the building up layers of enamel to produce a three-dimensional effect, can be seen to good effect on this box that was offered for sale at **Andrew Smith & Son (21% buyer's premium)** in Alresford, Winchester, on December 15.

Sold in its original silk-lined box with the maker's label, it was estimated at £250-300 but sold at **£7000**.

Jades

The outstanding jade offered in the regions in the October-December period was this pale celadon teapot and cover (**right**) that came for sale at **Duke's**



in Dorchester on December 8 from a Dutch private collection where it had been since the 1980s.

With its compressed circular body, chrysanthemum knob and C-scroll handle it bears outward similarities with a handful of other hugely valuable vessels, including the imperial white jade example sold for £1.75m by Woolley & Wallis in 2011.

However, although bearing a four-character mark of Qianlong to the base it is probably not of the period. The stone was described as "extremely pure stone with a soft polish and the colour fading to white". It was estimated at £15,000-25,000 and bidding rose to **£65,000**.

Beastly pebble

Mallams' (25% buyer's premium) November 24-25 Asian & Islamic Art Sale in Cheltenham was topped by a much earlier handling jade. This tactile Tang-style pebble carving (**below**) with greyish green and russet markings soared well above its top estimate of £1000 before selling to a UK phone bidder at **£11,500**. Carved as a mythical, reclining lion-like beast, it was dated to the late Ming period.



Jumbo price despite the condition

Early Japanese porcelain models of animals are very rare, and this elephant form koro, **below**, c.1700, offered for sale as part of the **Woolley & Wallis (25/12% buyer's premium)** Japanese works of art sale on November 22, appears to be unrecorded.

Measuring a massive 15in (38cm) across, the large pachyderm is modelled standing four-square, its trunk curled to the right and a gentle expression on its face. A cover with a double row of apertures for the smoke to escape allows it to function as a censer.

Once possibly covered in a cold-painted decoration, the base is inscribed with lines of calligraphy possibly the names of the worshippers at a temple who commissioned the piece for local community use. Similar inscriptions appear to the Sonobe Shinto shrine in 1692.



This elephant, from a private collection in Suffolk, shared the same thick, bluish glaze and deep firing faults with a 2ft 4in (70cm) model of a seated deer sold by the auction house in June 2000 from the collection of Lord and Lady Broughton, 3rd Baron Fairhaven of Anglesey, in Cambridge. It had made £11,500.

The W&W elephant, with its obvious condition issues, was guided at £1000-2000 but did much better, selling at **£24,000**.