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Sotheby's To Offer An Important Wucaï 'Fish' Jar And Cover

The Jar and Cover are being sold by
The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore,
To Benefit The Asian Art Acquisitions Fund

Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art Sale on
12 September In New York



NEW YORK, July 2012; Sotheby's Fine Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art Sale on 11 and 12 September 2012 will include **An Important Wucaï 'Fish' Jar And Cover, Jiajing Mark And Period**. Fish Jars and covers from the Jiajing period are among the most remarkable imperial porcelain creations of the Ming Dynasty because of their free-spirited Daoist imagery. This piece is consigned by The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore and is being sold to benefit the Asian Art acquisitions fund. It is estimated to fetch \$500/700,000.

The Jiajing Emperor is perhaps best known as a staunch supporter of Daoism. He spared no expense in construction projects and ceremonies associated with Daoist worship. Fish

jars such as the present example offer a positive, idealized message, that was very different from some more traditional Daoist imagery that featured images of deities, and symbols of immortality. The carefree life of the fish portrayed on these jars stands in stark contrast to the ritualized formality that would have been experienced by the Chinese emperor in his daily life.

Traditional *wucaï* jars are decorated with five colors, which is what the term *wucaï* literally means. This jar however, includes a sixth – the rich orange that has been used on the body of the fish. While most jars of this type have been separated from their covers, jars complete with covers are in the collections of major institutions including the Palace Museum in Beijing, the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, the Asia Society, New York, and The Musee Guimet in Paris, which has a pair. There appear to be only two or three complete examples remaining in private hands. Jars without covers can be found in the Shanghai Museum and a number of museums in Japan.



This Wucai ‘Fish’ Jar and Cover is one of two jars and covers, from the collection of Henry Walters, now housed in The Walters Art Museum in Baltimore. The collection was started by William Thompson Walters and his wife Ellen who began by acquiring European and Asian works of art during the period of the American Civil War. From artists, dealers and exhibitions throughout France, Switzerland, Italy and England, William and Ellen began building the collection that would become the Walters Art Museum that survives today. This collection was significantly enhanced by William’s son Henry whose collecting covered many disciplines including Egyptian, Greek and Roman Antiquities, Old Master paintings, and 19th and 20th century works of art; he also made significant additions to his father’s collection of Chinese Imperial porcelain. Henry Walters opened the collection to the public as the Walters Art Gallery in 1909 in Baltimore, Maryland, where it is still on display, having been bequeathed to the city. The collection now stands at over 32,000 works. Since the museum has two Wucai ‘Fish’ jars and covers, the present jar and cover has remained in storage, and has not been on view since the 1920s.

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