

ESKENAZI

ESKENAZI TO HOLD A REVELATORY EXHIBITION OF CHINESE ART OF THE 5th AND 6th CENTURIES

SIX DYNASTIES ART FROM THE NORMAN A. KURLAND COLLECTION

2 to 25 November 2017



From 2 to 25 November 2017, Eskenazi will hold an exhibition of art and sculpture of the Six Dynasties (220 to 581 AD), a transformative, turbulent and once neglected period of Chinese history. The exhibition features 38 works from the collection of Norman A. Kurland, a renowned American film and television agent, who has collected and studied the art of the period for four decades, assembling the most important group of its type in private hands.

The first exhibition at Eskenazi dedicated solely to the art of the period, the catalogue is the largest ever published by the gallery and is set to become an invaluable reference for students of the subject. It includes a comprehensive essay by Annette Juliano, Professor of Asian Art History at Rutgers University, New Jersey, and a leading scholar in the field. Further works from the Collection of Norman A. Kurland will be presented by Eskenazi in November 2018.

The exhibition is a rare opportunity to see a diverse range of art and objects from the Six Dynasties (220 to 581 AD), a period of great upheaval after the Han Dynasty (206 BC to 220 AD) fragmented and collapsed into rival kingdoms. During this period, despite the political turmoil, art, poetry and religion flourished, and trading channels including the 'Silk Route' brought numerous new ideas, imagery and raw materials into China. Highlights include exceptional Buddhist sculptures in gilt bronze and stone, amongst them examples from 5th and 6th century cave temples initiated under Imperial patronage and unsurpassed in their ambition. The exhibition also features glazed earthenware jars, bronze openwork plaques, and an astounding array of terracotta tomb figures of people and animals; these open a window into daily life at the time and show musicians with a variety of instruments, a merchant's camel carrying supplies and his stock of silk, and a dog feeding on a hunk of meat.

The exhibition coincides with the 20th anniversary of *Asian Art in London* (2 to 11 November), the annual event that unites London's Asian art dealers, major auction houses and societies in a series of selling exhibitions, auctions, receptions and seminars.

An exceptionally rare highlight is a pair of monumental limestone hands holding a reliquary, originally from the imperially sponsored Buddhist cave temples of Xiangtangshan, the greatest cultural achievement of the Northern Qi dynasty (550 to 577 AD). Measuring 36.6 cm in height, and probably belonging to a figure of Kashyapa, Buddha's oldest disciple, the origin of the hands was confirmed relatively recently; for many years they were erroneously published as of the Tang (618 to 907 AD) and subsequently even the Song period (960 to 1279 AD). Their true source was confirmed by the *Xiangtangshan Caves Project*, a research initiative led by the University of Chicago, which published the sculpture in their catalogue and database in 2010.

A remarkable painted marble stele also of the Northern Qi period, sensuously carved and rich in Buddhist iconography, illustrates the renewed influx of culture and ideas coming from India, Central and West Asia at the time. This sculpture, with its central figure of a pensive deity, holds a particular resonance for the collector as it formed the subject of his MA thesis at SOAS, University of London, in 2010. A further highlight is a rare gilt-bronze figure of Avalokiteshvara (Guanyin) of the late Northern Wei period (386 to 535 AD). Its inscription states that it was commissioned '*On the twenty-third day of the third month of the first year of the Xiping reign (corresponding to 516 AD) by 'the devoted Buddhist disciple Wang Ermu'.*

Among the terracotta tomb figures in the exhibition are two magnificent painted horses from the Northern Qi period (550 to 577 AD). Conveying a great sense of movement, they were likely intended for a member of the ruling elite. The horses are shown with elaborate trappings, including studs, pendants and buckles, and still carry extensive remains of gilding. From the same period is an impressive and powerfully-built figure of an ox, an animal used during the Six Dynasties not just for agriculture, but also to pull the chariots of the rich and the aristocracy. This example wears a halter and has ornate decorations across its back suggesting that it depicts an ox with a ceremonial function.

Norman A. Kurland started collecting in the 1970s. Attracted by the grace and immediacy of the art of the Six Dynasties, he realised that he could build a comprehensive collection, outstanding in quality, if he limited himself to the timeframe set by the period. In the 1980s, he met Giuseppe Eskenazi from whom he bought many of the items in the present exhibition and who eventually persuaded him to add Buddhist sculptures to his collection. In an interview for the exhibition, Norman describes "*...artworks that I think are gloriously beautiful, and which kept me going intellectually and artistically since the mid-1970s.*" Aside from collecting, Norman is a renowned literary agent who worked with a host of highly rated films and television shows; his agency represented the scriptwriters of, among others, *Cheers*, *Frasier*, *Will and Grace*, *Magnum PI*, *The X-Files*, *Scrubs*, *NCIS* and *Two and a Half Men*. He was also the agent responsible for the scripts of box office hits including *Romancing the Stone*, *The Bodyguard* and *The Big Chill*. Norman retired in 2002 to become Senior Advisor to the President of the J. Paul Getty Trust in London (2002 to 2006). Having earlier graduated from both Princeton and Harvard, he has since earned three Master's degrees; two from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and one investigating 'Buddhist Art: History and Conservation' at The Courtauld Institute of Art, London, in 2015. He was a Trustee of the National Museums Liverpool (2007 to 2014).

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Eskenazi Ltd is widely recognised as one of the world's leading galleries for Chinese works of art and its exhibitions are always eagerly awaited for the rarity and beauty of the objects offered. The family business was founded in Milan in 1923 and the Eskenazi name has since become synonymous with expertise in this area. Giuseppe Eskenazi, who has been head of the business for over fifty years, has an unrivalled reputation for his knowledge and love of the subject and clients have included over eighty of the world's major museums as well as private collectors. Visit www.eskenazi.co.uk for further details.

Location: Eskenazi Ltd, 10 Clifford Street, London W1S 2LJ

Opening hours during exhibition:

Monday to Friday	09.30 - 17.30
Saturday, 4 November	10.00 - 17.00
Sunday, 5 November	10.00 - 17.00
Monday, 6 November	09.30 - 20.30
Saturday, 11 November	10.00 - 13.00
Saturday, 18 November	10.00 - 13.00
Saturday, 25 November	10.00 - 13.00

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