



A russet-skinned white jade model of a recumbent horse, Qianlong

NADER RASTI

Rasti Chinese Art is dedicated to inspiring audiences with the best antique Chinese, Japanese and Islamic works art available on the market today as well as exceptional works of contemporary fine art by some of Asia's most notable artists. The artists that the gallery represents share a timeless literati aesthetic, no matter the chosen medium be it photography or ink on paper.

Previously, founder Nader Rasti worked as Director of the Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art department and auctioneer at Christie's, London before co-founding Knapton Rasti Asian Art in London in 2000 and establishing Rasti Chinese Art in Hong Kong in 2013. The gallery is known for its specialisation in Chinese jade and hardstone carvings. With its critical curation, original research, and scholarship, Rasti Chinese Arts annual calendar of exhibitions mounted and catalogues published are highly anticipated by collectors, curators and scholars.

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COULD YOU RESUME FOR US YOUR PARCOURS SINCE CHRISTIES IN LONDON TO YOUR GALLERY IN HONG KONG ?

I left Christie's in the summer of 2000 and set up Knapton Rasti Asian Art with my partner Christopher Knapton who also worked at Christie's and then Spink. We opened a gallery in the summer of 2001 on Kensington Church Street where we held our first catalogued exhibition in November of 2001. This was our introduction to the international market and we had a nearly sell-out exhibition. Many of the pieces from that November exhibition are now in various major museums in America and collections worldwide, from Hong Kong and Taiwan to the Middle East.

Subsequently with our annual exhibitions, we quickly built up a strong client base, where we advised and built collections for various collectors, particularly in the areas of Ming dynasty ceramics, Chinese jades and sculptures.

In 2003, we moved into a more private two-floor off-street office/gallery space in St James's, around the corner from Christie's King Street, where our business became more private in nature and we operated on an by-appointment basis. We participated in The Ceramics Fair in London, The International Asian Art Fair in New York, amongst other shows. We also held private exhibitions in New York and were featured in The International Herald Tribune and The New York Times. By around 2006 mainland Chinese clients were becoming increasingly active in the market and we began showing at art fairs in Hong Kong and China. I moved to Hong Kong in 2009 and travelled back and forth from London. Knapton Rasti Asian Art held its last exhibition in London in 2013 and I founded Rasti Chinese Art in Hong Kong the following year.

DO YOU REMEMBER THE VERY FIRST PIECE THAT YOU BOUGHT?

It is difficult to remember the first object I bought as a dealer. However, I do recall that we had attended a small auction which included a few very good jade pieces. We were able to outbid another major London dealer which surprised a few people in the room as the prices we paid were high for the time.

EVERY YEAR YOU TAKE PART IN THE FINE ART ASIA FAIR IN HONG KONG, HOW WAS THE LATEST EDITION ? DID INTERNATIONAL COLLECTORS ATTEND THE FAIR OR WAS IT MAINLY A CHINESE PUBLIC ?

Strict entry regulations for foreigners have been in place in the last two years due to the pandemic so the annual Fine Art Asia fair in autumn had been reliant on the local population. Fortunately, I have clients who purchase from me regularly from my catalogues without having to view the pieces in person. I feel that it is crucial to produce catalogues, especially during these times, so that collectors can see fully researched objects. I am hoping that the entry restrictions will be relaxed by the middle of next year.

YOU FEATURED THE KIRKNORTON COLLECTION RIGHT ? CAN YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT THIS SPECIAL COLLECTION AND THE MAN WHO LIKE YOU REMAINED UNDER THE SPELL OF HONG KONG ?

The Kirknorton Collection was built by a British lawyer who moved to Hong Kong in 1968 and has remained here since. In the 1970's he began buying Chinese works of art, but was drawn to smaller jade carvings, particularly animals, an area I specialise in. The collection was built almost entirely from the 70's to the early 90's. In 1995 this collection was shown at Carter Fine Art and catalogued by Brian Morgan, a



A black and white jade carving of a boy playing 'blind man's bluff', Song/Jin dynasty



A large painting on silk of a Central Asian equestrian hunter, Early 16th century

very well respected jade connoisseur from the famous Bluett & Sons dealership. I first met the collector in 2006 when, as Knapton Rasti Asian Art, we were exhibiting at the International Antiques Fair in Hong Kong, where he purchased a jade animal carving from us - the one and only jade he bought since the early 1990's. We kept in touch over the years and I provided updated valuations for the collection. Early this year he asked me to exhibit the collection. Amongst the objects, there are several iconic pieces which have been extensively published and were previously from other renowned collections.

OVER THE YEARS, YOU HAVE INCREASINGLY SHOWN CONTEMPORARY ART THAT ENGAGES IN DIALOGUE WITH CLASSICAL ARTWORKS FROM CHINA'S PAST. HOW DO YOU SELECT YOUR ARTISTS ?

My foray into contemporary art was by accident, although my wife and I have been collecting for some time. In around 2014, I was having dinner with Hugh Moss, the dealer/collector of Chinese works of art, snuff bottles and paintings, who had become an ink painter himself under the name of The Master of the Water, Pine and Stone Retreat, having been taught by several 20th century ink masters such as Liu Dan and Zeng Xiaojun. I suggested to him to hang a few paintings on my booth at an art fair I was exhibiting at in Hong Kong as they complement well the works of art. I hung up eight paintings on my booth and they were sold-out before the fair even opened! From then on, I became Hugh's agent. I decided to show more artists, including Daniel Eskenazi and Zeng Xiaojun, whose works engage with the literati tradition. My contemporary exhibition was titled 'Dealers as Artists'. As time went by, I added other artists such as Zhao Meng, a ceramicist, Wang Mensheng and Shao Wenhuan, whose works are in important collections

and museums.

FINE ART ASIA WAS ALSO HOSTING AN NFTS EXHIBITION THIS YEAR, WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT NFTS? CAN THEY COMBINE WITH ANCIENT ART ?

Please don't ask me about NFT! I don't understand anything that can be included as art when one can't touch it or look at it first hand - whether it is antique or contemporary. Perhaps I am old fashioned, but I feel there is too much emphasis placed on investment these days and not enough on the love of collecting.

THE MARKET HAS ITS UPS AND DOWNS. HOW DO YOU STAY ON TOP AT ALL TIMES?

There are always ups and downs in the market. I always try to stay focused on what I believe in and not be influenced by other people. I tend to buy for the future, rather than the present. It may take more time, but it is my job to convince clients why an object or a field is undervalued and under-appreciated. The other problem, particularly for Chinese art, is the number of fakes. I try to keep up with the latest copies in my field. Although everyone makes errors of judgement from time to time, it is a great lesson when it hits one's pocket.

IS THERE MUCH IN THE WAY OF LEGISLATION AND LAWS THAT REGULATE ASIAN ART? ARE THERE ANY INDUSTRY RULES?

There are many regulations. One example is objects that were illegally excavated and released into the market. Also, each country has its own rules and regulations regarding the value of an object that can be exported or restrictions on the sale of objects of certain materials such as ivory. The latter is, unfortunately, an area which has been used for political gain to the

detriment of many collectors of Japanese and Chinese ivories, not to mention European objects from the Renaissance period. I believe one cannot retrospectively punish objects that have been made hundreds of years ago and that are historically important. Most museums have ivory objects in their collections.

DO YOU EVER HAVE ANY REGRETS ABOUT THE ARTWORKS YOU HAVE SOLD OR EVER WISH YOU HAD KEPT A HOLD OF THEM YOURSELF?

As a dealer, I aim to advise my clients as best I can. Of course over the years, I have regretted letting go of many objects especially if I have had a personal affinity towards them. Oftentimes, I also try to buy back certain pieces. I never regret selling things that a client has later sold for exponentially more – actually, it is satisfying when this happens because it means I have provided sound advice. At the same time, I do have objects that I sold offered back to me. I have been lucky to have wonderful things pass through my hands on more than one occasion, such as a marble head of a luohan that was published in my 2019 catalogue. I believe we are only temporary custodians of these works of art so I enjoy them while I have them.

WHAT'S YOUR ADVICE TO SOMEONE WHO IS STARTING TO COLLECT?

My advice is to buy the best you can – don't feel that you are paying over the odds as good objects will always retain and gain value in time. Buy from a trusted source with a good reputation and specialist knowledge and find a reputable specialist dealer in the area you are interested in for advice, even on objects being sold at auction. This way, you can build a strong collection.

