

THE COLLECTION OF
**ROBERT HATFIELD
ELLSWORTH**

錦瑟華年—安思遠私人珍藏

PART II
CHINESE FURNITURE,
SCHOLAR'S OBJECTS
AND CHINESE PAINTINGS
WEDNESDAY 18 MARCH 2015

AUCTION CODE AND NUMBER

In sending absentee bids or making enquiries, this sale should be referred to as FANNY-11419

AUCTION RESULTS

US: +1 212 703 8080
UK: +44 (0)20 7627 2707
christies.com

CONDITIONS OF SALE

This auction is subject to Important Notices and Conditions of Sale.

ALL LOTS SOLD WITHOUT RESERVE

所有拍品均以無底價出售

AUCTION

Wednesday 18 March 2015
at 10.00 am (lots 101-195) and 2.00 pm (lots 201-355)
20 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, NY 10020

VIEWING

Wednesday	11 March	10.00 am – 8.00 pm
Thursday	12 March	10.00 am – 8.00 pm
Friday	13 March	10.00 am – 8.00 pm
Saturday	14 March	10.00 am – 8.00 pm
Sunday	15 March	10.00 am – 5.00 pm
Monday	16 March	10.00 am – 8.00 pm
Tuesday	17 March	10.00 am – 8.00 pm
Wednesday	18 March	10.00 am – 8.00 pm

AUCTIONEERS

Hugh Edmeades (#1171526)
Andrew McVinish (#1379272)
Charles Antin (#1406288)
Leila De Vos Van Steenwijk
(#2006124)
Adrien Meyer (#1365994)
Tash Perrin (#1039052)
William Robinson (#2017522)
Gemma Sudlow (#2016494)

ENQUIRIES

New York +1 212 636 2000
ellsworth@christies.com

CATALOGUES

New York +1 800 395 6300
London +44 (0)20 7389 2920

View catalogues and leave bids
online at christies.com

[60]

These auctions feature CHRISTIE'S LIVE®

Bid live in Christie's salerooms worldwide. Register at www.christies.com

CHRISTIE'S

ROBERT HATFIELD ELLSWORTH

CHINESE FURNITURE, PAST TO PRESENT

CURTIS EVARTS

In the late 1980s, when the iconic collector/dealer Robert Hatfield Ellsworth was approached by a group of novices for advice about forming a collection of Chinese furniture, his unanticipated response was, "Stay away from it, it's too problematic!" Fortunately, our naive enthusiasm was not dampened, and Ellsworth followed with support of our effort to establish a small private museum, and also took a seat on the advisory board of the Classical Chinese Furniture Society. Throughout those years, we were welcomed at his home, not only in New York, but also his country retreat in Connecticut where he also kept a few of his favorite pieces of Chinese furniture; I also met him several times at his flat in Kowloon during his frequent visits to Hong Kong in the early 90s. Of those who had the opportunity to know him, few would deny his complex and, at times, Dionysian nature; nor would they deny his generosity. It remains to marvel at the endeavors and achievements of one who kindled the passions of so many Chinese furniture lovers.

Ellsworth's interests and expertise were far ranging; Chinese furniture was but one—yet also one of long-standing association. In 1970, he sealed a position in the field with the most authoritative publication of the time: *Chinese Furniture: Hardwood Examples from the Ming and Early Ch'ing Dynasties*. Later, he was involved with the development of the Astor Chinese Garden Court at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which opened in 1981; the selection, style, and placement of the furniture, which had been supplied by him, remains an inspiration to countless visitors from all over the world. In 1982, he organized an exhibition at the Honolulu Museum of Art and authored the catalogue *Chinese Hardwood Furniture in Hawaiian Collections*.

Throughout the late 80s and early 90s, it seems that other areas of interest commanded his attention; nonetheless, he staged a comeback in 1996 as the author of *Chinese Furniture: The Hung Collection*, wherein he reassessed earlier ideas based upon the great flux of material that had since surfaced. This was

followed by the exhibition and catalogue, *Essence of Style: Chinese Furniture of the Late Ming and Early Qing Dynasties* (1998). His final work, volume II of *Chinese Furniture: The Hung Collection*, was released in 2005. Such a specialized body of work is unparalleled in Ellsworth's other areas of expertise. In respect to his prominence in the field, the Christie's sale of Chinese furniture from the Ellsworth estate provides an opportunity to review his cumulative work in the broader breadth of the field's past to present development.

It was just prior to Ellsworth's birth in 1929 that the first western publications on Chinese furniture had appeared, including works by Roche (1921), Cescinsky (1922) and Dupont (1926), which reflected the early interest of European collectors in lacquer furniture. In 1944, Gustave Ecke, having resided in China from 1922-1948, published the first work on hardwood furniture, *Chinese Domestic Furniture*. Shortly thereafter, George Kates, who had also lived in Beijing from 1933-1941, published *Chinese Household Furniture* (1948); two years earlier he organized a furniture exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum with thirty-five examples gathered in China. An exhibition at the LA County Museum held from 1942-1946 also comprised furniture brought back by Westerners compelled to leave China due to the turmoil of war. Other

major players at that time included the Drummond Brothers who resided in Beijing from 1928-1948 and engaged in the trade of antiquities. Charlotte Horstmann was a neighbor there, and Ecke was also a close acquaintance. (Seventeen pieces illustrated in Ellsworth's publication boast Horstmann, Ecke, and Drummond provenance.) In 1946, after returning to America, the Drummond Brothers Collection—including thirty-four pieces of antique Chinese furniture—was exhibited at the Baltimore Museum of Art.

It was just one year after those Brooklyn and Baltimore exhibitions that Ellsworth, at the age of seventeen, was taken in by Alice Boney—recognizing a young talent with a keen eye for Asian art who was eager to learn. Boney was a prominent dealer of Asian art in New York, and one of the earliest to handle Chinese furniture. Hawaiian collector Henry Kramer recalled that it was shortly after their meeting that the two traveled together to Honolulu, where the antiquities market was active with the wares belonging to ex-pats returning from China—and where they also discovered a number of *huanghuali* pieces at the gallery of Robert Ansteth. Not long afterwards, Ellsworth spotted a *huanghuali* couch bed (Fig. 1) at Transorient, a gallery the Drummonds had recently established on the Upper East Side; he introduced the bed to Alice, who immediately acquired it and kept it to the end of her life in 1988. She bequeathed it to Ellsworth, and a few years later he, again, found a new home for it in the *Hung Collection*. In those early years, he also passed along to Alice a black lacquer tapered cabinet with colorful inlays (Fig. 2). Several decades later when this remarkable piece resurfaced at auction, Ellsworth was instrumental in re-acquiring

Figure 1. A Rare *Huanghuali* Three-Railing Bed, *Luohanchuang*, Ming dynasty, 16th century. Provenance: Robert and William Drummond; Alice Boney, acquired in 1949; Robert Hatfield Ellsworth, acquired in 1989; Hung Collection. Sold at Christie's Hong Kong, 1 December 2009, lot 1932.

圖一：明 黃花梨素圍子羅漢床
來源：杜拉蒙兄弟 (Robert and William Drummond) 收藏；1949年愛麗絲·龐耐 (Alice Boney) 收藏；1989年安思遠 (Robert Hatfield Ellsworth) 收藏；洪氏珍藏；2009年12月1日香港佳士得拍賣 (拍品編號1932)。



it for the *Hung Collection*. His first publication was dutifully dedicated to Alice Boney, and also featured a dozen pieces from her collection; he also often acknowledged deep gratitude towards her for his early cultivation.

Ellsworth returned to Hawaii for military service in the early 50s, not long after Gustave and Betty Ecke were relocated there from China. Ecke, having been appointed Director at the Honolulu Academy of Arts, arranged an exhibition of Chinese furniture in 1952. Involvement on Ellsworth's part is unclear, but when he returned in 1982 to organize an exhibition with local collectors, he dedicated it to Gustave Ecke (1896-1971), and in the catalogue's preface, posthumously thanked Gustave for years of help and friendship.

In 1960, Ellsworth formed a partnership with James Goldie and operated as Ellsworth & Goldie, Ltd. During a visit many years ago, James recalled discovering a *huanghuali* canopy bed in Los Angeles and recommending it to Bob for purchase. However, Bob did not care for it; it was missing two central posts and decorative panels, a loss that was obviously apparent with empty mortises in the frame. Shortly thereafter, the piece turned up on display at a major institution as part of a group loaned by a prominent collector for a small (and little known) Chinese furniture exhibition in 1965. Reminiscing decades later, Ellsworth picked up the story in the *Hung Collection* catalogue, noting that carved elements had also been removed from the bed to suit the taste of Western collectors at the time and that it was eventually removed from the exhibition due to the losses and modern alterations. Such are the typical thorny problems with Chinese furniture, which Ellsworth had forewarned, and which—with experienced eyes—can often be detected.

During these years, Ellsworth began to frequent Hong Kong in search of treasures with dealers such as Mr. Ma at Great Wall. Eventually he formed a close working relationship with Hei Hung Lu, who recalled "...Few people concentrated on classical Chinese furniture. I knew good pieces and quality, and I was confident that I could sell them. Bob was my connection to the American market..."

Western interest in "classical" Chinese furniture continued to swell. The Philadelphia Museum of Art had opened their Chinese furniture galleries, which included a fine *huanghuali* canopy bed acquired from Ellsworth in 1961 (Fig. 3); shortly



Figure 2. A Very Rare Embellished Black Lacquer Round-Corner Tapered Cabinet, *Yuanjiaogui*, Ming dynasty, 16th century. Provenance: Robert Hatfield Ellsworth; Alice Boney, Tokyo; Lee Yu-Kuan (Sammy Lee); The Arthur M. Sackler Collection; The Hung Collection, 1994. Sold at Christie's Hong Kong, 27 May 2009, lot 1814.

圖二：明 黑漆鑲嵌圓角櫃
來源：安思遠 (Robert Hatfield Ellsworth) 收藏；東京愛麗絲·龐耐 (Alice Boney) 收藏；李汝寬 (Sammy Lee) 收藏；阿瑟·塞克勒珍藏 (Arthur M. Sackler Collections)；1994年洪氏珍藏 (Hung Collection)；2009年5月27日香港佳士得拍賣 (拍品編號1814)。

thereafter, a bulletin of the museum's hardwood furniture collection was published. In 1966, the Chinese furniture galleries at the Nelson-Atkins Museum were opened; this collection was largely formed by Lawrence Sickman, another legendary figure who had also lived in Beijing during the 1930s. Newly created collections of Chinese furniture were also appearing in a number of other museums throughout North America, which also stimulated the enthusiasm of private collectors.

Within this ethos of interest and activity, Ellsworth seized the opportunity to consolidate the most recent knowledge and combine it with his hands-on expertise in his commanding publication of 1970, *Chinese Furniture: Hardwood Examples of the Ming and Early Ch'ing Dynasty*. The catalogue objects were drawn from Ellsworth's own collection as well as those from recently established collections in museums and with private individuals.

In the Introduction, Ellsworth summarized the historical development of Chinese furniture, and like others he



Figure 3, Six-Post Canopy Bed, Artist/maker unknown, Chinese, Ming dynasty (1368-1644), 16th century, Asian hardwood (huanghuali); red pine, 77 1/4 x 81 1/2 x 47 1/2 inches (196.2 x 207 x 120.7 cm), Seat: 18 1/2 inches (47 cm), Philadelphia Museum of Art: Purchased with Museum Funds, 1961.

圖三：明十六世紀黃花梨六柱架子床；77 1/4 x 81 1/2 x 47 1/2吋 (196.2 x 207 x 120.7公分)，座高18 1/2吋 (47公分)；費城藝術博物館於1961年以博物館基金購入。

expounded upon the history of the chair—a popular subject of the time. These included Louise Hawley Stone, curator of the Royal Ontario Museum and the author of *The Chair in China* (1952), and C. P. Fitzgerald, who followed later with *Barbarian Beds: The Origin of the Chair in China* (1966). In more recent times, archeological discoveries and related studies have abounded, and new evidence of sitting customs that migrated with the transmission of Buddhism and other foreign influences provides a much clearer picture of the mat-to-chair-level transformation that occurred over several centuries. Ellsworth participated in a Chinese furniture symposium held in 1991 in Beijing, where he presented an interesting paper by Wu Tung (unable to attend) on chair-level seating that existed in Japan before the Tang dynasty. Apart from source of impulse, it is also recognized that the elevated seat neatly coincided with Confucian principles of hierarchy and status that had long been established in China.

Ellsworth, who also had a discerning eye for antique Western furniture, astutely noted the Chinese influence in 18th century European furniture design. His publication also included a compelling series of images depicting an 18th century Queen Anne armchair juxtaposed with a *huanghuali* southern official's armchair (Fig. 4). He was not the first to draw attention to the Asian influence that permeated European decorative art throughout the late 17th and 18th centuries; but even so, it remains a delicate subject, yet to receive the attention it deserves in the historical accounts of European furniture design. Equally interesting is the transmission of Western-style decoration to China; recent attention has been drawn to French gold-decorated papers which were especially sought out by the Kangxi and Yongzheng Emperors, who employed the richly patterned motifs on a broad range of decorative furnishings for the Palace. From ancient times to present, there has existed a continuous ebb and flow of cultural impressions that cross, compound and blend across the world.

The dating of Chinese furniture was also of interest to Ellsworth, and a good deal of his introductory material was daringly devoted to the subject. In 1960, two groups of miniature wooden furniture were discovered in excavations of late Ming period tombs near Shanghai—providing important evidence of contemporary furniture forms. Ellsworth was the first to publish these findings in the West. He also drew from the form of one of the excavated chairs evidence to date a set of four *zitan* chairs with calligraphic inscriptions by Ming dynasty scholars, which was later sold to a major institution. Over the years, however, his conjectures unraveled with well-founded evidence from Wang Shixiang and others; now the chairs are generally thought to be works of the Qing dynasty, and the inscriptions quite possibly carved during the 19th century.

In the 1996 *Hung Collection* catalogue Ellsworth admitted, "Hasty conclusions will, no doubt, cloud the picture for years to come, but time and common sense will eventually clarify the scene." He also realized "the most important conclusion I have reached since I began my research is that a great proportion of the furniture that I—and other people—had published and sold as Ming is likely to be fifty to one hundred years later than Gustave Ecke, George Kates, and Lawrence Sickman believed it to be." Over the last two decades, an abundance of dateable evidence has surfaced; now it is much clearer that the dating of Chinese furniture cannot be viewed from stylistic development alone.