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LOT 1953

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**AN EXTREMELY RARE AND IMPORTANT IMPERIAL COURT OIL PAINTING OF
HA GUOXING ATTRIBUTED TO IGNATIUS SICHELBARTH (1708-1780)
QING DYNASTY, QIANLONG PERIOD, NO LATER THAN 1776**

oil on fibre paper

the bust portrait depicting a commanding officer of the Qing empire, with a full-frontal war-weathered face, naturalistically rendered with fine wrinkles, prominent cheekbones, and a long pointed beard, donning a fur-lined hat marked by a red bead and a peacock feather

with a single-eyed plume, danyan hualing, dressed in a deep purple coat with a blue collar and cuffs, all against a bluish grey background, the top right corner inscribed vertically in Chinese with twelve characters Yuan Canzan Dachen Xi'an Tidu Ha Guoxing ('Ha Guoxing, former councillor to the government and chief commander of Xi'an') and in Manchu on the left, the top left corner of the back attached with a yellow slip, inscribed with eleven characters Pingding liang Jinchuan gongchen xiang di shiliu ('The sixteenth painting from the series of meritorious officials who contributed in conquering the two Jinchuan [the major and minor]')

70 by 54 cm., 27 5/8 by 21 1/4 in.

ESTIMATE 6,000,000-8,000,000 HKD

PROVENANCE

Acquired in Heidelberg, Germany, early 1980s.

CATALOGUE NOTE

The Imperial Court Oil Portrait of Hui Bannerman Ha Guoxing
Hajni Elias

During the reign of the Qianlong emperor (1736-1795) 280 compositions of bannermen portrait paintings were made which were stored in the Ziguangge (Hall of Purple Splendour). Ziguangge, a two-storey pavilion on the Western shores of the Central Lake in Zhongnanhai, located west of the Forbidden City, was where Qianlong received envoys from foreign nations and where he gave banquets to celebrate the victories of his ten military campaigns. It was also an important hall where war trophies such as banners and weapons were displayed and paintings depicting the emperor's meritorious banner officers as well as battle scenes were hung.

While the present portrait of the Hui (ethnic Muslim minority) Bannerman Ha Guoxing belongs to this special group of paintings, commissioned by the emperor to honour his most high ranking military officers, it is especially distinctive because it is a bust portrait in oil on paper and not the traditional ink on silk. In fact, this painting is the first of its kind to be offered at auction, with only a few examples of related paintings in oil known and published; see six in total included in the exhibition *Bilder für die 'Halle des Purpurglanzes'*, Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst, Berlin, 2004, cat. nos. 12-17.

China had no indigenous tradition of oil painting. It was a technique introduced by European Jesuit artists such as Giuseppe Castiglione (1688-1766), Jean-Denis Attiret (1702-1738) and Ignatius Sichelbarth (1708-1780) working in the Qing court. These Western artists often collaborated with Chinese court painters in the Painting Academy and produced works together. However, while foreigners at the Chinese court experimented with different materials, Chinese painting principally continued in the tradition of ink and water that had been employed for centuries. Oil paintings did not gain much popularity and remained closely associated with the work of the Jesuit artists. Indeed, three of the six known oil portraits referenced above are attributed to Father Attiret (*ibid.*, pls. 12-14), with the remaining three thought to be joint collaborations between European and Chinese court painters (*ibid.*, pls. 15-17). While it is known that Qianlong did not particularly appreciate oil painting and that he tried to persuade Attiret to switch to water colours, there is an oil portrait of him, in the Palace Museum, Beijing, illustrated in *The Complete Collection of Treasures of the Palace Museum. Paintings by the Court Artists of the Qing Court*, Hong Kong, 1996, pl. 74. Three further oil portraits, one of Empress Xiaoxian, one of the Imperial Honourable Concubine Huixian and the third of the Imperial Concubine Wan, from the Qing court collection and still in Beijing, are published *ibid.*, pls. 50, 52 and 53, all

attributed to the work of Jesuit artists. From this it is evident that oil paintings were accepted by Qianlong as a means of producing life-like portraits.

While the painter of the present work remains anonymous, the modelling of Ha Guoxing's face is intense and naturalistic, especially his eyes which are penetrating and full of expression. The portrait is in the European style and is most probably by the hand of a Western painter. Dr. Hartmut Walravens has studied Qianlong's bannermen paintings in depth and suggests that it may be the work of Ignatius Sichelbarth who was an accomplished artist and had worked closely with Attiret. This theory is further supported by an imperial decree issued in the 28th year of Qianlong's reign (1763) noting that portraits of fifty meritorious bannermen are to be painted by Jin Tingbiao, while Ai Qimeng is to paint on white silk. The facial features and details of the clothes are to be painted in the *falangcai* (famille-rose) palette. Jin Tingbiao (? – 1767), also called Shi Kui, from Wu Cheng (present day Zhejiang province) was born into a painter's family and was especially skilled at painting figures, landscape flowers and birds. In 1757, during Qianlong's second southern inspection tour, he presented his work to the emperor for which he received great praise. He was invited to join the Palace Workshop to become a court painter the same year. Ai Qimen was the Chinese name for Ignatius Sichelbarth who travelled from Bohemia to China in 1745 and started working in the court under Attiret and Castiglione upon his arrival. He was a talented artist, especially in painting figures and animals in the Western tradition of painting. He died in Beijing in 1780.

Another interesting aspect of the present painting is that its sitter, Ha Guoxing, is well known from a full size portrait executed in ink and colour on silk, formerly in the collection of Baroness Irene von Oertzen and later sold at Christie's Hong Kong, 3rd December, 2008, lot 2502 (**illustration?**). To have an oil portrait as well as an ink painting of the same person extant to the present is very unusual and has significant historical importance. Comparing the oil portrait with the hanging scroll it is clear that in the latter the face has been copied from the bust portrait and the garments and paraphernalia added in the traditional style. European naturalism was combined with Chinese style figure representation. According to Dr. Walravens, it is known that the portraits of the meritorious officers of the Qianlong campaigns were created in three stages. It appears that the oil paintings were done first, with the bannermen called to the capital and sketched by missionary painters. These preliminary sketches were then made into finished oil paintings. The next step may well have been handscrolls or albums which gave the complete figures in a smaller scale and included the eulogies. The last step was the life-size, full length portraits with both Chinese and Manchu eulogies written separately and mounted on top of the portraits.

Ha Guoxing was eulogized by Qianlong himself at the end of the military campaign in the two Jinchuan areas (the Greater and Lesser Jinchuan) with the words: 'the Hui living on the Central Plains are renowned for their gallantry, and the Ha clan is a major Hui group displaying considerable military prowess. When conquering Zanla (the Lesser Jinchuan) Ha Guoxing played a key role in seizing several strategic points. Unfortunately he died of illness before the military campaign concluded successfully. Dated to the Spring of the *bingshen* year of the Qianlong reign (equivalent to 1776).' Ha, who died in 1773, belonged to a noted military family from Hebei province. He passed the highest military examination and became a *wu jinshi*. He served in several capacities and distinguished himself especially in the war against Burma. It was during the Jinchuan campaigns that he fell ill and passed away before the victorious conclusion of the military actions. (Taken from the emperor's eulogy and translated from Manchu by Dr. Walravens.)

For further reading on the history of bannermen portrait paintings see Nie Chongzhen, 'The Newly Discovered Bannerman Paintings of Yisamu from Ziguang Pavilion', *Imperial Peking. The Last Days*, Sotheby's, London, 2007, pp. 112-113. A number of life-size scroll paintings of meritorious officers have been sold in our rooms; see a painting, attributed to Sichelbarth and Jin Tingbiao, depicting Bannerman Cemcukjab, sold in these rooms, 8th April 2011, lot 2819; and another of Bannerman Zha Er Shan sold in our London rooms, 13th May 2009, lot 136. According to Nie there are only two paintings remaining in Chinese museums, both can be found in the collection of the Tianjin Museum, one of Bannerman Kelabatuluayuxi who pacified Xi Yu and one of Bannerman Feng An who was the deputy

commander of Chengdu and led the troops to pacify the two Jinchuan, in the same campaign as Ha Guoxing.