



Fine Japanese Art (JAP0621)

Fri, 4th Jun 2021

Viewing:

You may view objects in this auction in our gallery from 25 May to 4 June, 2021. We are open Monday to Friday from 10 AM to 6 PM CET, as well as by appointment. On the day of the sale, the preview will be open from 10 AM to 1 PM. FFP2 masks are required.

Lot 126

Starting price: €7500

Estimate: €15000

AN IMPORTANT GILT AND LACQUERED WOOD FIGURE OF A RAKAN

Japan, 17th – early 18th century, early Edo period (1615-1868)

The graceful, long-waisted figure is shown seated in padmasana, his richly decorated monastic robe worn around his torso, draped over both shoulders and falling in graceful folds below the legs as if draped over an edge, a kesa covering the left shoulder, the neck creased and the slender face well cast with crisp features set in a contemplative expression.

HEIGHT 70 cm

Condition: Traces of use and old wear as expected, some touchups, age cracks and losses. Generally in very good condition, commensurate with age, and better than most lacquered and gilt wood statues of this size and period.

Provenance: Ancient French Private Collection "F". Thence by descent within the same family. A copy of an image showing the living room of the family mansion, with the present figure as a centerpiece, dating from c. 1900, is accompanying this lot.

Rakan, also known as Luohan in Chinese or Arhat in Sanskrit, is the 'Destroyer of the Passions'. They vary in numbers between 16 and 108 and were depicted in Japanese art from the 8th century onwards.

As Buddha's apostles, Arhats were first mentioned as sixteen in the Mahayanavataraka which was translated into Chinese in AD 437 and later also into Japanese. A full transcript of these sixteen names was given in AD 653 by the pilgrim monk Xuan Zang with the additional two that were probably adopted by the end of the 10th century, these being the Arhats who tamed the Dragon and the Tiger representing Eastern and Western directions respectively.

There are only few surviving examples of gilt-lacquer figures of Arhats dating to the early Edo period, making the present statue exceptionally rare. The superb carving and imposing style is related to that of two gilt-bronze figures of Luohan dated to the Chinese Song dynasty and sold at Christie's Hong Kong, 1 October 1991, lot 1668. Another related Chinese figure of a Luohan is illustrated by Hajek, Chinesische Kunst in Tschechoslowakischen Museen,

Prague, 1954, no. 115. All of these figures - Japanese and Chinese - share a similarity in the fluid execution of the drapery and the almost portrait-like naturalism of the facial features.

The discovery of some forty clay figures of Luohan at the Lingyan Temple in China, dated to the Song period, but of smaller size, is recorded by Wenwu 1994:3, pages 76-82. In their animated gestures, quality of portraiture and the treatment of the fluid folds of drapery at the front, they also bear resemblance to the present figure.

Auction comparison:

Compare with a closely related bronze figure of a Luohan from the Song Dynasty, sold at Christie's Hong Kong, Important Chinese Ceramics and Works of Art, 30 November 2016, lot 3233 (**sold for 34,140,000 HKD** - c. 3.5 million EUR). Also compare with a smaller wood head of an Arhat, Japan, Edo period, which has lost all of the lacquer and gilding, from the collection of Yves St. Laurent, sold at Sotheby's Paris, Pierre Bergé: From one Home to Another, October 30th 2018, lot 33 (**sold for 20,000 EUR**).