

# ESKENAZI

## RARE CHINESE SCULPTURES TO TAKE CENTRE STAGE AT ESKENAZI

**Chinese sculpture c. 500–1500**, an exhibition devoted to rare masterpieces of Chinese sculpture, will be held by Eskenazi Ltd at 10 Clifford Street, London, from **15 October to 15 November 2014**. Also on show will be **Waterfalls, rocks and bamboo**, an exhibition of eight new works by Li Huayi (b. 1948), the celebrated contemporary master of Chinese ink painting (*see separate release*).

The exhibitions will open on the same day as *Frieze London* and *Frieze Masters*, and also run concurrently with the 17<sup>th</sup> *Asian Art in London* (30 October to 8 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.

**Giuseppe Eskenazi** said: "This year's annual exhibition is probably the finest and most comprehensive sculpture show that we have ever held. This is an area once viewed as decidedly esoteric and mostly of interest to museums, but it has now entered the mainstream for an increasing number of determined, international collectors. We look forward to welcoming visitors to the gallery during the exhibition in October and November."

**Chinese sculpture c. 500–1500** consists of twenty-two works from that thousand-year period, almost all with a strong connection to Buddhist worship and many of which have not been seen in public for decades. The sculptures are in materials such as stone, gilt bronze and wood. Some were carved into the walls of caves, others adorned large halls in temple complexes and yet others may have been placed on small domestic altars for private devotion. All the items have established provenance, distinguished previous owners including Adolphe Stoclet (1871–1949), Martin Månsson (1880–1952) and André Carlhian (1883–1967).

A highlight of the exhibition is the hugely impressive painted and gilt-wood seated Avalokiteshvara (Guanyin), mid 11<sup>th</sup> to mid 12<sup>th</sup> century (*fig 5*). Measuring 1.75m in height, it is an undisputed masterpiece of Chinese Buddhist sculpture, probably the finest example of such a figure remaining in private hands and of comparable quality to the best in any museum. It dominates its surrounding space with benign authority. Known in the West since 1932, it was in a French collection until recently. Also from a French collection, that of the noted antiques dealer and decorator André Carlhian (1883-1967), comes a rare pair of painted and gilt-wood standing bodhisattvas of the same date, wearing elaborately carved draperies and imbued with subtle movement, as if in conversation with one another (*fig 6*).

The earliest sculpture in the exhibition is a sandstone head and shoulders of Buddha, mid to late 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, originally carved into the wall of one of the cave temples at Yungang, Shanxi province (*fig 1*). Their construction was ordered by Wencheng (reigned 452–465), an emperor of the Northern Wei Dynasty, in recompense for the persecutions of Buddhism initiated by his predecessor Tai Wudi, and is reckoned to be the first great imperially sponsored Buddhist undertaking in China. In more recent times, from the 1930s onwards, this particular sculpture remained in a Japanese collection for over seventy-five years.

Quite different in feeling is a freestanding stele carved out of creamy-white marble, inscribed with a date in the Northern Qi period corresponding to 553, depicting the meeting of the Buddhas of the past and the present, Prabhutaratna and Shakyamuni (*fig 2*). This is a key moment of the *Lotus Sutra*, one of the most influential texts in the Mahayana version of Buddhism that was to spread across China.

The gilt-bronze sculptures range in date from the 5th to the 15th century. A standing figure of Avalokiteshvara, known as Guanyin in China, dated to 651 in the Tang dynasty (618–907) was acquired by one of the greatest of all 20th century collectors, Adolphe Stoclet, in 1911 (*fig 3*). It is especially important as it bears an inscription stating that it was commissioned by the Gaozong emperor giving thanks that the people's prayers were answered to end a plague and seventy days of drought. A seated figure of the *luohan* (Buddhist 'worthy') Pindola, of 15th century date, is both a superb example of Chinese artistry in metalworking at that time and, with its long inscriptions in Tibetan, evidence of the strong influence exerted by Tibetan Buddhism on the faith in China, from the 14th century onwards (*fig 4*).

The illustrated catalogue accompanying the exhibition includes two informative essays: one by the noted scholar of Chinese sculpture, Edmund Capon, for thirty-two years the Director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney, on the evolution of Buddhism in China; the other, by Sarah Wong, provides an overview of the depiction of luohans in Chinese sculpture and their position in the Buddhist pantheon.

**About Eskenazi:**

Eskenazi Ltd is widely recognised as one of the world's leading galleries for oriental 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.

**Location:**

Eskenazi Ltd, 10 Clifford Street, London W1S 2LJ

[www.eskenazi.co.uk](http://www.eskenazi.co.uk)

**Opening hours during exhibition:**

Monday to Friday, 9.30 am to 5.30 pm

Saturday 18 & Sunday 19 October, 10am to 5pm

Saturday 25 & Sunday 26 October, 10am to 5pm

Saturday 1 & Sunday 2 November, 10am to 5pm

Saturday 8 & Saturday 15 November, 10am to 1pm

**For further information and images, please contact:**

**Matthew Paton:** [info@patonarts.com](mailto:info@patonarts.com) / +44 (0)7711 112425