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John Keats 03 9508 9900
John.Keats@sothebysaustralia.com.au

Sarah Carroll 03 8416 5999
SCarroll@3dm.com.au

A Singular Vision

The David Clarke AO Collection of Australian Art, Auction in Sydney 28 April



AH XIAN, BORN 1960, *China, China – Bust 53* (1999). Estimate \$80,000-120,000

A sculpture by one of Australia's most internationally renowned contemporary artists is to be offered at Sotheby's Australia's auction of *The David Clarke AO Collection of Australian Art* on 28 April 2015 in Sydney.

Ah Xian, the Chinese born Australian permanent resident has achieved national and international critical and popular acclaim for his distinct and highly articulated porcelain busts that combine traditional techniques with a contemporary edge.

Born in Beijing, Ah Xian travelled to Australia in 1989 as a visiting artist at the Tasmanian School of Art, Hobart. Stranded by the events of Tiananmen Square, he sought asylum here, settling in Sydney with his brother and fellow artist Liu Xio Xian. In the alienation of exile, Ah Xian found a degree of cultural solace in historical national traditions, expanding his painting practice in the late 1990s to incorporate traditional Chinese decorative arts, often working in his native country.

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In the breakthrough *China China* series, naturalistic porcelain busts (life casts of family and friends) are decorated with all-over images and patterns variously drawn from brush paintings, ceramics (especially blue and white wares) and textiles. This concept creates a mismatch of form and surface that animates the faces in surprising, even surreal conjunctions: willow trees on the eyes, for example, or mountains on the forehead. More broadly and significantly, it effectively illustrates the tension of displacement between Ah Xian and his native and adopted homelands, or between the interior self and public face. The *China China* series was shown at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney and in 2002 the exhibition *China Reconfigures: The Art of Ah Xian* was shown at the Asia Society, New York. In 2001 Ah Xian was the recipient of the National Gallery of Australia's inaugural National Sculpture Prize and in 2009 he won the final Clemenger Contemporary Art Award from the National Gallery of Victoria.

Sculptures by Ah Xian rarely appear for sale, with only 5 recorded as ever being offered for auction. In August 2009, Sotheby's Australia sold *Human, Human (Bust 5)* (2002) for \$180,000 against a pre-sale estimate of \$80,000-100,000.

Other significant sculptures from *The David Clarke AO Collection of Australian Art* include Clement Meadmore's *Start Up* 1999 (estimate \$60,000-80,000, lot 12) and *Boa* (2006) by Bronwyn Oliver (estimate \$120,000-160,000, lot 27).

'Sotheby's Australia is honoured to be entrusted with *The David Clarke AO Collection of Australian Art* and to share the passion of such an eminent Australian,' said Geoffrey Smith, Chairman of Sotheby's Australia. 'David Clarke's diligence, patience and connoisseurship and his focus on procuring only the finest examples available is reflected in the exquisite sculpture by Ah Xian, *China, China – Bust 53*'.

AT A GLANCE

AH XIAN, BORN 1960

China, China – Bust 53 (1999)

cast porcelain with hand-painted underglaze decoration

38 x 40.7 x 18 cm

Estimate \$80,000-120,000

The David Clarke AO Collection of Australian Art, lots 1-43 | Estimate \$4,035,000-5,605,000

Important Australian Art, lots 44-111 | Estimate \$5,043,000-6,711,000

Auction at InterContinental Sydney, 117 Macquarie Street, Sydney, 28 April 2015, 6.30 pm

Total estimate \$9,078,000 to \$12,316,000

Exhibition in Melbourne, 41 Exhibition Street, Melbourne, 15-19 April, 10 am to 5 pm

Exhibition in Sydney, 30 & 34 Queen Street, Woollahra, 23-28 April, 10 am to 5 pm

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