



five Questions



Mee-Seen Loong is director of INKstudio and Ink Institute, and ex-vice chairman of Sotheby's.

INKStudio will be taking part in *Asia Week New York* (from March 13-21). inkstudio.com/cn

1 How did you get your start as a dealer?

I started working at Sotheby's in 1976 and stayed for over 40 years so that's my indentureship or start as a dealer. Chinese ceramics, works of art and contemporary Chinese ink paintings are my area of focus. A person I admire in the business would have to be James J Lally, ex-president of Sotheby's New York. He was the finest Chinese art dealer in the US until he retired, known

by his nickname 'The Golden Tiger' in Hong Kong art circles.

2 What challenges are facing the trade?

The slowdown of the mainland Chinese art buying activities has caused a steep decline in revenues for the market. The uncertainties of the financial and political situation in China and Hong Kong has the market trending towards caution and conservatism, with the buyers pursuing only the best material, leaving the lower and middle market flat. It is a buyers' market at the moment.

3 What is one great discovery you've made?

The 18th century famille rose peach vase, Yongzheng Mark and period, sold at auction for \$5.34m in 2002 to Alice Cheng who gifted it to the Shanghai museum. I first saw a snapshot of it as a lamp, tried to reach the owner, Ambassador Ogden Reid, every day, for two months. When it was finally inspected and secured by my colleague Joe Yang, we found that it had been mercifully, skilfully mounted without

being drilled and therefore in mint condition, the reign mark intact. We sent it to Hong Kong for auction. By karma the consignors sat right next to the buyer. After the auction I had a superb copy made by a master ceramicist, refitted it with the original fixtures and presented it to the consignor as a wonderful example of 'new lamp for old'. As I write this I happened to be in Shanghai and visited the museum this morning, December 9, 2024, and paid homage to the magnificent 'lamp'.



4 What is one item you couldn't do without?

My Issey Miyake pleats black backpack. I like the Issey Miyake aesthetic and styling in their clothes, but better still, their practicality. I travel so much and find it reassuring to be able to toss clothes into a suitcase and know that they will be ready to wear without having to iron. The Miyake backpack has the iconic look but I find it indispensable as a daily 'helper' as it frees up my arms when I am walking around taking pictures or when I have to pull luggage or need to hold a piece of artwork and it can even look elegant when carried like a regular handbag. I had never ever used a backpack until I discovered the Miyake interpretation because it looked cool.

5 Desert island drink of choice?

Fresh coconut juice splashed with hopefully some vodka from bottles washed ashore.

Left: the 18th century famille rose peach vase, Yongzheng Mark and period, now in the Shanghai museum.

represent its subject in a conventional manner, as photography could fulfil that role.

His paintings (which he called "rhythmical expressions in line and colour") were heavily influenced by other European artists such as Pablo Picasso, Gino Severini and Henri Matisse, whom he met in Paris in 1912. This encounter was a defining moment for him, and until the end of his life, he kept the remains of a cigarette Matisse had given him.

Haunting work

It is perhaps a sign of progress that many young people would be more likely to associate gas masks with fetish clubs rather than Blitz spirit. A striking self-portrait shows Henry Arthur Riley (1895-1966) in his ARP (Air Raid Precautions) uniform complete with mask.

He saw active service during the First World War, but when the Second World War broke out he was in his mid-40s and too old to be called up. This haunting work is offered for £35,000.

During the war, the ARP was responsible for the issuing of gas masks, pre-fabricated air raid-shelters, the upkeep of local public shelters, and the maintenance of the blackout (patrolling the streets to ensure that no light was visible). During and after air raids they doused incendiary bombs with sandbags and helped rescue people, administer emergency

first aid, search for survivors, and help recover bodies.

Forgot to eat

From 1925-30, Phyllis Dodd taught part-time at Walthamstow Technical College. In 1928, she married the artist Douglas Percy Bliss (1900-84). They set up home at 65 Sandcroft Road, Lambeth, above a sausage factory. The meaty fumes from below came up through the floorboards. They continued to work alongside each other, exhibiting together at Derby Art Gallery in 1947.

Dodd was a perfectionist and as a result, domestic life nibbled into her time for painting. As a student she painted with such focus that she often forgot to eat, to the extent that this absent-minded starvation made her quite ill. Commenting on her life as a housewife she said: "When there is dust on the stairs, I cannot settle down to painting."

This arresting self-portrait is offered for £3500.

Dodd had a successful 90th-birthday show at the Hatton Gallery, Newcastle, 1989; and a retrospective at the public gallery, Derby, in 1995. She tackled one last canvas in 1985, a portrait of Godfrey Meynell. In 1992 she became totally blind. She died aged 96 in May 1995, the year of a show of her work at the Newport Museum and Art Gallery, south Wales. ■

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