LOT 640
PROPERTY FROM THE MELLON FAMILY COLLECTION
A VIEW OF THE HONGS AT CANTON
QING DYNASTY, CIRCA 1820

oil on canvas, depicting a panorama of the waterfront at Canton, with the European-style factories of the Spanish, American, British and Dutch, each flying their respective flags, the foreground with sampans, junks, skiffs and a small white sailing boat flying the Union Jack, all moored in the placid waters of the Pearl River, gilt-wood frame

18 x 23  1/2 inches
Height 18 in., 45.7 cm; Width 23 in., 58.4 cm

ESTIMATE 30,000-50,000 USD

PROVENANCE
Berry Hill Galleries, New York (stamped on frame).
Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon, and thence by descent.

CATALOGUE NOTE
The rapid pace of development along the Canton waterfront signals the city’s economic and cultural significance to the Western communities residing there. Its changing outline was well chronicled and captured by both Western and Chinese artists. This wealth of documentation provides the means to place the present painting within a specific time frame. The painting depicts features that place it after 1815 when the powerful East India Trade Company paid to
update their facades as seen in the columned balcony, large windows along the upper story and pediment roof but before the devastation of the ‘Great Fire’ of 1822. Winds carried the flames from a small bakery a mile and half away and within 36 hours had left the waterfront in ruins. For further reading on this topic see Patrick Conner, The Hongs of Canton, London, 2009, p. 73 and pp 89-103.

A painting nearly identical to the present in the Sze Yuan Tang Collection is illustrated in Patrick Conner, Paintings of the China trade, The Sze Yuan Tang Collection of Historic Paintings, Hong Kong Maritime Museum, Hong Kong, 2013, pl. 2, and again in op.cit. pl. 2.42. Two closely related views were sold in these rooms, the first of the same hongs but a slightly earlier view, 22nd January 2016, lot 1153 and the second painting of the same view as the present example but painted on copper from from the Elinor Gordon Collection, 23rd January 2010, lot 54.