

## A Chance for Lesser Asian Stars to Shine

BY STAN SESSER

**THE MARKET FOR CHINESE ART** has been booming for several years now, but this year's big week of Asian exhibits and auctions in New York will spotlight some lesser-known rising stars, with works from Indonesia, Japan and ancient realms of Southeast Asia drawing attention.

The artworks will be at 18 cultural institutions, five auction houses and 34 galleries and dealers. The shows begin next Saturday and end March 28. The auction houses hope to sell more than \$100 million of Asian works, many to Asian buyers coming over from their home countries. "There's no other event in the world that comes close to the critical mass that this week offers," says Carlton Rochell, a gallery owner and chairman of the Asia Week planning committee.

While the exhibits focus on traditional art, the rapid emergence of Asian artists on the contemporary scene isn't being ignored. Almost simultaneous with Asia Week, Asian Contemporary Art Week will feature, among other things, cutting-edge Japanese contemporary art at the Japan Society, "Bye Bye Kitty: Between Heaven and Hell in Contemporary Japanese Art."

Among Asia Week's more than 10,000 works on display, the 55-year-old Asia Society has scored a coup for its museum, with a display of a 15th-century manuscript version of "The Shahnamah," the epic Persian poem also known as the Book of Kings. In

finely detailed paintings, more than 30 miniatures depict both mythical and historical tales of rulers, including battles, love scenes and hunts. The book's owner, London's Royal Asiatic Society, has unbound the volume for conservation work, so visitors can see all the paintings.

Christie's is putting up for display and then auction the rare "Emaciated Siddhartha," a figure from the third or fourth century depicting a fasting Buddha. His torso reveals his ribcage, and his cheeks are sunken, conveying the message of mastery of mind over body.

From the kingdom of Gandhara, which is present-day Pakistan and Afghanistan, "this is the quintessential image in Buddhism of Prince Siddhartha on his way to enlightenment," says Hugo K. Weihe, Christie's head of Indian and Southeast Asian art. Christie's expects the piece will bring \$10 million.

Oil paintings on sheets of zinc by the contemporary Indonesian artist Agus Suwage will sell for considerably less than that—between \$15,000 and \$55,000. A common theme in his work is the appearance of skeletons: One self-portrait depicts the artist's head next to a skull. Tyler Rollins, whose gallery is displaying 10 Suwage works, says that unlike Europe, the U.S. has been missing out on Indonesian art, which he calls one of the strongest Asian art markets outside India and China.

To see all of this, organizers of Asia Week promise a more coordinated event than in past years, with a downloadable, 88-page guide for visitors.



**A CHAIR**, top, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art show, 'The Emperor's Private Paradise: Treasures from the Forbidden City'; above left, a detail from 'Emaciated Siddhartha,' at Christie's; above right, a page from 'The Shahnamah,' at Asia Society.