



## Asia Imagined

### In the Baur and Cartier Collections

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In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it was fashionable to collect 'curios', objects so named because they aroused 'curiosity'. Imaginatively decorated and made from different materials, some of which are still underappreciated, these exotic objects from China and Japan fascinated Westerners. They stimulated a fad for Asia, captivated art lovers, and had a profound influence on the graphic arts in Europe. This beguiling period kindled a passion for collecting in Alfred Baur (1865-1951) and for creation in Alfred Cartier (1841-1925) and his three sons, Louis (1875-1942), Pierre (1878-1964), and Jacques (1884-1941). While the pieces fashioned in Asian style by the Maison Cartier are generally known, their historical and cultural context is not, thus the idea arose of bringing these fine creations together with the collections of the Baur Foundation, Museum of Far Eastern Art, based in Geneva. As one leafs through the pages, *Asia Imagined* slowly becomes apparent, like a treasure hunt. Diamond-studded pagodas and pavilions, busy scholars beneath the starry sky, nacreous moonlight scenes, shimmering phoenixes, jade dragons, and multi-coloured cherry blossom-like gems depict an imaginary land. The Cartier magic has its effect. Side-by-side with the creations of the Parisian jeweller, the imperial porcelains, lacquerware embellished with precious metals, embroidered silks, jades, colored enamels, netsuke, sword hilts, and prints belonging to the Baur Foundation give their version of the marvels of China and Japan and install a unique dialogue, offering an exceptional opportunity to view two of the world's most outstanding collections.

**Estelle Niklès van Osselt** is a sinologist. She studied Asian arts and archaeology at universities in Geneva, London, and Beijing. Today an assistant curator at the Baur Foundation, Museum of Far Eastern Art, she previously worked for the Guy & Myriam Ullens Foundation Collection and Ullens Center for Contemporary Art (UCCA) in Beijing. **Pascale Lepeu** is the curator of the Cartier Collection. **Song Haiyang** is a researcher at the Palace Museum of the Forbidden City, Beijing.