



gallery

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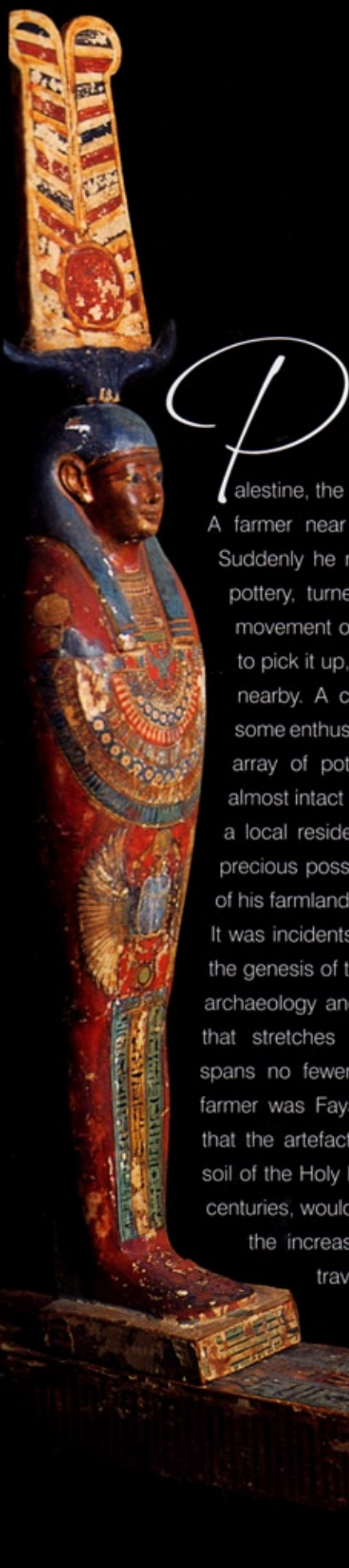
To visit the Barakat Gallery in London is to travel the world in the hands of Sufian Barakat, whose family have a long tradition of collecting and selling antiquities from all corners of the globe.

time travel

the **barakat gallery**
takes collectors around
the ancient world



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COURTESY OF THE GALLERY



Palestine, the early years of the 20th century. A farmer near Hebron is tilling his fields. Suddenly he notices a piece of decorated pottery, turned up to the surface by the movement of his ploughshare. He stoops to pick it up, then notices more fragments nearby. A closer look, accompanied by some enthusiastic digging, reveals a whole array of pots, some broken but others almost intact - rare survivals of a time when a local resident buried some of his most precious possessions in a forgotten corner of his farmland.

It was incidents like this which proved to be the genesis of the Barakat family's interest in archaeology and antiquities, a phenomenon that stretches back over 100 years and spans no fewer than five generations. The farmer was Fayad Barakat, and he realised that the artefacts he had released from the soil of the Holy Land, where they had lain for centuries, would prove attractive souvenirs to the increasing number of pilgrims and travellers to the region. Soon the Barakats opened a small

shop in Jerusalem, specialising in local antiquities and offering advice and guidance to specialists in ancient history and casual visitors alike.

From that tiny seedling a mighty oak has grown. Today the name of the Barakat Gallery is synonymous with the display and sale of top quality ancient art, reinforced by an expertise and experience that is hard to match. With galleries in both Beverly Hills and London, and a presence in most of the world's important art buying centres, the legacy of those first discoveries in distant Palestine has proved to be enduring and revelatory.

The London gallery is located on Brook Street, in the city's highly select Mayfair area. I go there to meet Sufian Barakat, the youngest member of the Barakat dynasty, to take on what must be the daunting role of continuing the family tradition and reputation for top-flight expertise in their field. Relaxed and approachable, he asks me what I would like to do - sit and talk in his office, or chat whilst looking around the gallery. There is, of course only one answer - it must be the gallery, or rather galleries, for there are several floors ranged in the elegant 19th century building, each level housing a different period or geo-cultural zone. Collectively they amount to one of the world's most magnificent collections of ancient art.

First stop, the lift. At the push of a button we head up and a few seconds later emerge in Ancient Greece and Rome, surrounded on all sides by the epic and the exquisite. The quality of the objects on display is remarkable and impossible to take in at first. There are huge statues and ornately carved entablatures, fabulous mosaics, intricately worked bronze lamps and breathtaking glassware. A bewildering variety of objects, that one would need years to understand and appreciate them all. Yet Sufian seems to know each piece

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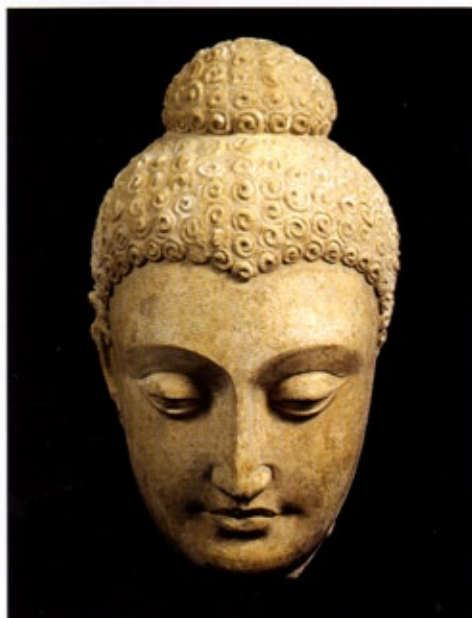
Main picture: Sufian and Faye Barakat stand in front of the Brook Street Gallery.

Right: Sculpture of an Ibis in bronze and wood from Egypt dating from 664 BC - 525 BC. The ancient Egyptians pioneered the creation of what a modern would term 'multi-media' works of art, as the wood and bronze components of this ibis demonstrate. In keeping with all animal sculptures created in ancient Egypt, this example captures the essence of the ibis which, for the ancient Egyptians, was the embodiment of one aspect of Thoth, the god of wisdom. 21.9 cm high x 10.2 cm wide x 22.9 cm depth.

Left: A sculpture of Ptah-Soker-Osiris, circa 304 BC - 200 B.C.

Right: Fragment of a painted panel, circa 2040 BC - 1640 BC. 68.6 cm high.





Clock wise from bottom left

Tang terracotta horse with detachable saddle. Circa 7th century AD - 8th century AD. The great influence of the horse throughout the history of China cannot be underestimated. During the Tang Dynasty, the adoration of the horse can be seen in burial art. Horse models excavated from mausoleums of the period are among the most splendid works of Chinese art. In sculpture, painting, and literature, horses were glorified and revered, believed to be relatives of dragons. This impressive, large sculpture of a horse still retains much of its original white pigment and has a removable saddle with engraved details. This saddle appears to have once been painted orange and would have once supported a sculpted rider, 64 cm.

Wooden Ming Dynasty sculpture of the Laughing Buddha from China, circa 1368 AD - 1644 AD. This depiction of the Buddha does not actually represent the historical figure of the Sakyamuni, but one of his disciples known as Pu-Tai, who was a fat wandering Zen monk who was considered a man of good and loving character. The tradition persists that rubbing the prominent belly of the Laughing Buddha brings good luck and longevity. 73.0 cm high.

Head of a Buddha from Afghanistan circa 100 AD - 300 AD. The artists of Gandhara were the first to represent the Buddha in his human form, as opposed to a symbol such as his footprint. This gorgeous head is a reminder of an ancient civilisation that helped spread the teachings of enlightenment throughout the heart of Asia. 33.7 cm high.

Gandhara stone head of a Bodhisattva from Afghanistan/Pakistan circa: 100 AD - 300 AD.

Head of a Bodhisattva from Afghanistan/Pakistan, circa 100 AD - 300 AD. In the Buddhist religion, Bodhisattvas are souls who have attained enlightenment and no longer need to reincarnate, but forsake nirvana and choose to come back in order to alleviate the suffering of others. This Gandharan stucco sculpture of the head of a Bodhisattva reveals that these spiritual beings were celebrated even then, as Buddhism began to spread from India eastwards. This head was likely once attached to a body, the whole of which probably stood in a niche on the exterior of a stupa or shrine.

Khmer Sculpture of the Buddha from Cambodia circa 1200 AD - 1300 AD. The Buddha rests upon a stylised lotus throne, or padmapitha, a symbol of his divine birth and total purity, posing in the Bhūmisparśa mudra, or 'gesture of touching the earth.' This mudra portrays the Buddha taking the earth as witness; it is a gesture of unshakable faith and resolution. 20 cm high.

Bronze Shang Dynasty yan steamer with inscription from China, circa 250 BC - 1100 BC. Bronze working is believed to have developed in China without the influence of outside cultures around 2000 BC. This utensil would have been a treasured possession and have been interred to facilitate cooking meals in the afterlife - it was created to steam eternally, ushering the deceased into the next world.





intimately, darting from one to the other and regaling me with tales of how they were acquired, what their special features are, why they are especially important or interesting.

I begin to appreciate the level of service the gallery provides, and ask Sufian how he sees his family's role with their clients, of whom there are some 500 in total. "The relationship is absolutely central to what we do, and in fact we're a bit like an adoption agency", he grins. "We nurture our clients, educating and advising them in art history, archaeology, or in whatever direction their collecting interests take them. We aim to offer the complete package, and we can be quite strict - we even make them do homework!"

Back into the lift. Up we go again, this time bound for the Orient. Fabulous Japanese and Chinese figures and objects greet me

as I emerge from behind the sliding doors. The recent vogue among the chattering classes for filling their homes with Oriental décor and art is given short shrift by Sufian. "We're definitely not in the game of interior design. And I can sort out the domestic trophy hunters from the real collectors within seconds".

We move across to an extraordinary collection of polychrome Tang warhorses, made in terracotta, dating from the seventh or eighth century AD and complete with riders. Sufian explains how the mounted figures are unique and different, with each representing a different cultural or ethnic group from along the Silk Route, the great trade conduit that connected China to much of the known world beyond its own extensive borders. This leads us to

Sufian and Faye Barakat on the Chinese floor at the Brook Street Gallery.



a discussion about the universality of art.

"People are the same everywhere, their brains work in similar ways. We can see this with craftsmen in many different geographical parts of the world. Their

responses to similar sets of environmental conditions are often so close, with the same techniques and motifs emerging in Central America as in Africa, for example."

Another floor, another region of the world. The lift is like a time machine, traveling the world and transporting us back thousands of years, one minute to the temples of the Egyptian pharaohs, then next to the court of the Song dynasty Chinese emperors. With over 1000 items on display, all of them meticulously inventoried and most - although not all - for sale, my mind turns to the thorny subject of fakes and forgeries. Sufian laughs - "97 per cent of what I see is fake!" he exclaims, "and I've watched forgers develop their skills and techniques over the years. Their execution and artistry can be superb, and some are now collectible in their own right". However proficient they might be, I cannot help thinking that they would need to get up very early in the morning to sneak one past Sufian.

After an early childhood in Jerusalem, Sufian moved to the United States with his family when he was six years old. "I made my first sale at 11, and used to hang out in the gallery so I could be with my Dad. I guess it seemed natural that I would eventually play an ever greater role in the business, but I was never forced to. I wanted to do it." After several years spent in Paris studying

art history, Sufian is now running the galleries with his father. Together they help clients develop and enjoy their collections, and indeed advise some of them on the establishment of museums and galleries of their own.

As we chat, there is a stir downstairs and word comes up that Sufian's father Fayeze has just arrived. Like Sufian, he divides his time between the States, Europe and the Middle East, and when we met he was about to embark on an extensive trip to the Far East and Australia. Fayeze is something of a legend in his own time. He has written evocatively about his experiences as a collector, and in particular about his motivation and passion for ancient art. For him, the pieces with which he has grown up are symbols of civilisation and a potent link between past and present. The key is to understand their individual personalities, to hear their 'voice' through an appreciation of the craftsmanship and energy invested in them.

Once the connection is made with a particular object, it can be a difficult thing to give up. Sufian tells me about how three decades ago his father tried to buy an ancient small green hippopotamus in Egypt. He was outbid, and the piece went elsewhere. However, he never forgot the hippo, and when it recently reappeared for sale, he finally managed to buy it. It has since given him huge satisfaction, because he had felt a connection with it and for 30 years it was the 'one that got away'.

With so many pieces in the gallery of the highest quality and not a price tag in sight, I began to think that the old maxim 'If

you have to ask the price, you can't afford it' might hold sway here. But I would be wrong. With just £50 in my pocket, there would be something for me in the Barakat Gallery, and it is clear that Sufian and Fayeze would extend the same level of expert service to me as they do to their 'big guns'. They deal on a daily basis with many different types of collectors, from multinational corporate investors to small-time clients interested only in a very narrow range of objects. "We always work hard to get to know our customers", adds Sufian, "supporting and guiding them as they go through different phases in their collecting". Just as I begin to feel that I might be getting to grips rather better with the vast array of objects on display, Sufian comes up with a test. We are now in the world of the ancient civilisations of Central and South America, and clasping a painted terracotta vessel by its ear-like handles, he asks me what I think it is for. The only clue he gives is that it is a Mayan piece. Knowing the Mayan penchant for gruesome sacrifices, I say; "Blood, it was

Facing page

Gandhara cosmetic palette originating from Afghanistan/Pakistan, circa 100 BC - 300 AD. The ancient civilisation of Gandhara thrived in the region encompassing modern northeastern Afghanistan and northwestern Pakistan. Carved out of schist, this cosmetic palette is a marvellous example of the type. In medium relief, a mythological scene has been carved into the surface of the small dish. A hippocampus, the mythical sea creature based on the seahorse, carries a human figure upon its back. A Gandharan beauty once ground cosmetic pigment on the surface of this palette before applying them to her face many centuries ago.

Below left: Globular flask with zoomorphic loop handles from Egypt, circa 664 BC - 404 BC. This faience flask is lentoid in shape. It is decorated in relief at the shoulder with a floral pattern designed as a broad collar. Its thick neck is decorated with three torus-like mouldings above which is an incised, triangular pattern. The neck widens toward the top and flares out so that the mouth of the flask is set within a broad, everted lip. The form of the neck, with its decoration, and of the mouth and lip are intentionally designed to evoke a papyrus umbel. There is a head of an ibex affixed to each side of the shoulder, connected to the neck by means of struts. 17.8 cm high.

Below right: Corinthian style Aryballos from Egypt, circa 664 BC - 525 BC. This miniature vessel is a spherical aryballos widely used as a container for oil in the Late Archaic and Early Classical Periods of Greek history. Such vessels are indebted to forms created earlier in terracotta by Corinthian potters who introduced the spherical shape in imitation of fruit. These aryballoi not only held precious unguents and balms used as cosmetics by wealthy Greeks, but also pure olive oil with which athletes in the Olympic and other games bathed.





Clock wise from right
Sculpture of a standing Were-Jaguar in jade from Mexico in the Olmec style originating from between 900 BC - 600 BC. The Olmecs were one of the oldest and richest civilisations ever to inhabit the Americas. Their artistic influences and religious traditions were absorbed and adapted by the many diverse cultures that followed them. This jade sculpture represents the more intimate spectrum of Olmec art. This work is a personal, private idol that would have once stood upon an altar in a temple or palace structure. 21.0 cm high x 7.9cm wide.

Pre-Columbian vessel with a sculpted head in the Toltec style from Soconusco, Guatemala, circa 1000 AD - 1200 AD. Pottery vessels of this type with their distinctive orange hues and shiny surfaces are known as plumbate-ware. During the height of the Toltec civilisation, plumbate works were produced at only one place: on the Pacific slope of the Soconusco region in modern Guatemala. 18.4 cm high.

Toltec head effigy vessel from Soconusco, Guatemala, circa 1000 AD - 1200 AD. This sturdy plumbate vessel has retained its beautiful orange hue and sculptural detail. Although such works were commonly sculpted in the form of heads, this vessel is unique because it depicts an elderly woman. Only the heads of god and men, or sometimes animals, were traditionally represented. 13.3 cm high x 10.5 cm wide.

Stirrup Vessel dating from the 1st - 6th century AD from the northern coast of Peru. This Moche stirrup vessel has a drum-shaped body, from which emerges the head of a jaguar. Does this represent a god? Perhaps the figure depicts a priest disguised by a mask in the midst of a sacrificial ceremony. 19.7 cm high x 7.6 cm wide x 15.2 cm depth.

Olmec sculpture of a man in stone from Mexico, circa 900 BC - 300 BC. The facial features of this sculpture are characteristic of Olmec art. The slightly down turned lips are thought by scholars to depict a shaman in the midst of transfiguration. Standing with his arms held forward, like a feline preparing to pounce, this figure exhibits the unique blend of human and animal elements that is a hallmark of the Olmec style. Given the size of this work, it is likely that it once served as a personal idol to be worshipped in the private confines of a palace or residence. 17.1 cm high.



Right: Sufian Barakat standing in front of a bust of King Ptolemy II from Egypt, circa 285 BC - 246 BC. This majestic head, probably depicting Ptolemy II (reigned c. 283 - 246 BC), is a superb example of this Egyptianising style, reminiscent of works from the Golden Age of the New Kingdom. Only the naturalistic curves of the cheeks betray the Greek influence. 60.0 cm high.

Below: Sufian and Faye Barakat surrounded by antiquities from China.

used for blood-letting." Sufian smiles. "It was actually designed for drinking chocolate at important ceremonies. But it's much more than that. It has a rattle, and also an aperture to allow sound to pass around and through it, so it also served as a musical instrument." Armed with this 1500 year old piece of multi-media equipment, I give it a try. The rattle rattles, and my voice resonates around the inside of the vessel, just as the Mayan craftsman had designed it to do all those centuries ago. The vital energy of the piece fills the room, bringing home to me the nature of this connection to the art of the past that has sustained five generations of the Barakat family. □

