

The Barakat Gallery

By Morgan Davis

Perhaps the most precious pair of shoes on Rodeo Drive is a humble pair of sandals in the Barakat Gallery. Made of papyrus in the Sinai sometime between 3,200 to 3,300 years ago – a time when only nobility wore sandals – the little shoes suggest the princess who must have worn them proudly.

The Barakat Gallery is a collection of genuine museum-quality artifacts offered among the wood, lucite and shimmering elegance of Rodeo Drive. Here are objects that were meticulously preserved for the journey through the centuries, perhaps as offerings to the dead, in respect to their religious subject matter. Or, perhaps, simply because of their aesthetic value. The humid odor of ancient tombs lingers upon the artifacts, treasures kissed with the dust of the civilizations that created them.

There is a sense of grace, beauty, and life of times gone by – an energy of the people who created these works evoking inspiration in my being and the disparity of the life we live today. Images of another way of life in which time was spent to create art to live throughout the ages and remind us of the true spirit of mankind.

The Barakat Gallery specializes in pieces that reflect the religion or myth of different ancient cultures, but includes art objects from all periods of history. The collection reflects the enthusiasm for eclectic antiquities of its owner, Faye Barakat. He is of the fourth generation of a family world-renowned for its collection of ancient art of the Middle and Near East.

Admitting that he became "saturated" with the biblical and classical treasures of the Middle East, Barakat began to concentrate on other ancient periods. His studies have covered the Neolithic period of 6000 BC to the Renaissance of the 17th century.

Ancient sculptures of mythological gods include a bronze figure of Ishtar holding a solar disk, a Babylonian piece from 900 to 700 BC; a silver sculpture of Jupiter, god of lightning, from the Roman period of art, dating from the first to third century AD, found in Hebron, Israel; and a terra-cotta plaque of Astarte, goddess of fertility, discovered in Syria, dating from 2100 to 1700 BC.

A three dimensional representation of Alexander the Great, in marble, shows the young hero's sensual lips smiling sweetly and was sculpted after his death, 150 to 200 AD. The piece is valued at \$1 million, as is a pure gold hair net of the Hellenistic period. Also, among the collection of antiquities in the gallery is a stone lintel depicting a menorah dating from the Second Temple period. Several priceless Islamic documents that rival the Dead Sea scrolls, and the earliest copy of the bible in the world.

Less costly items include oil lamps, seals, amulets, icons, necklaces, coins, and jewelry pieces of which range as low as \$50.

The centerpiece of Barakat's coin collection is a set of silver coins, "Shekels of Tyre," displaying the profile of Melqart (Hercules). Found in Jerusalem, they are the same types of coins of which 30 pieces were paid to Judas for betraying Christ.

"I take a certain pride in my collection of ancient glass," Barakat says simply. From the period 1600 BC to 1200 AD, glass was considered precious and most jewelry was made of it, he says. In addition to ancient necklaces made of glass beads, the gallery houses an array of glass vessels that were preserved in tombs untouched for centuries. There is a hand-cut piece of glass that dates to the time of Moses.

Barakat's grandfather, who had extensive landholdings used as vineyards near Jerusalem, realized the historic and aesthetic value of ancient art. As his fields were plowed, workers often unearthed tombs rich in remnants from the past. His grandfather encouraged the workers to bring him the pieces and he would recompense them.

The Barakat family is one of the oldest families in the world that have been suppliers of archaeological artifacts and coins to Museums, corporations, investors and collectors all around the world.

"For the last 20 years, my interest in life has only been collecting and studying antiquities," says Barakat. He speaks of a personal relationship to each of the pieces in his collection, a sense of humanity reaching out to humanity across the boundaries of time.

"I believe that art conveys a message and I constantly search for that message. Each piece is dear and I would not part with it unless I was sure I was selling it to the right person."