

Pre-Columbian Art

By Faye Barakat

THE BARAKAT GALLERY A CATALOGUE OF THE COLLECTION VOLUME II

When I opened a gallery devoted to ancient art in the heart of the most modern city in the world, I knew I was facing a challenge. Los Angeles is the metropolis of the future and the Barakat Gallery focuses on the treasures of the past. In the Holy Land, where my family has done business for generations, artifacts have a context that people understand – they seem a logical part of the landscape, footnotes to the history of the place. In Los Angeles, I was warned, the precious relics of the past would lose their meaning amidst all the neon and asphalt. What I understood when I came here, and what the continued success of the Barakat Gallery has proven, is that fine antiquities radiate a tangible aura of experience – something I call Energy – that makes them beautiful and meaningful in any setting. Energy is the intrinsic magnetism that accumulates around an object through the ages. It has to do with where the object has been, who made it, who used it, who touched it or admired it as we can still do today. A certain sensitivity is needed to perceive Energy, but if an individual possesses the gift, then an artifact becomes a link, a pathway directly back to an earlier time, to other lives, maybe not completely known or understood, but definitely real. I had always been attracted to Biblical and Classical antiquities for this reason, but nothing in my previous experience prepared me for the surprising, exotic, intimate, and sometimes barbaric world that Pre-Columbian art reveals.

It was inevitable for me to fall under the powerful spell of Meso-American antiquities. West Coast collectors assembling important holdings of Pre-Columbian art for decades, and there was great potential to build a truly remarkable collection from what was still in private hands. But when I first came to Beverly Hills, the art of the New World was exactly that for me – new. Pre-Columbian was terra incognita, an unexplored part of the fascinating realm of the past. I felt like a conquistador standing on the edge of an unknown continent – awestruck, excited, and determined to discover its farthest boundaries. As I was exposed more and more to Pre-Columbian pieces of high quality, my enthusiasm began to increase without limits. I responded to the incredible Energy of the art, to its vitality, its mystery, to its strength, even to its humor. Assembling a major representative group of Pre-Columbian art works became first a passion with me, then an obsession. The result of that obsession – of four years of scholarship, acquisition and appreciation – is what this catalogue is meant to share.

It is a catalogue I believe, like no other. In addition to the photographs, the necessary information about what an object is, how it fits in culturally and chronologically, is there. The data is offered in good faith – it is accurate to the very best of my knowledge and is supported by available records and by the opinions of many experts in the field. However, one thing that formal study of Pre-Columbian art has taught me, is that almost everybody has a different outlook on the topic. The scholarly exploration of Ancient Meso-America is still a relatively new discipline, and contradictions of opinion abound

about where pieces originated, what they were used for and what they mean. A very large part of what we know is based on speculation, but that is always the case with antiquities.

Imagination must fill in the gaps. I accept that there may be inaccuracies, and I trust that people with other opinions will be happy to share them with me. None of these things, of course, set this work apart from others of its kind. However, accompanying each object is a short paragraph – an expression, a musing – about how the artifacts strike me personally, about their aura, their Energy. I have held each and every one of these pieces in my hands and I have responded to it in an analytical and frequently personal way. I have felt the lifeblood of vanished cultures surging through the creative endeavors they have left behind, and it is as if the artworks themselves were alive and capable of speech. These few lines are statements about the impression an artwork inspires, reflections on the mood a piece evokes, and in no way attempt to be the last word on an object's history or presence. Every person perceives Energy slightly differently, and the text here is merely a means of allowing the reader to view each artifact in a new light.

One final word. This is a commercial catalogue, a permanent record of a transient collection of art treasures. Pieces will find new homes and others will be acquired. I am passionate about the past, but I am also generous about it. I feel it is there to be shared, part of the collective experience of the entire human race. The main purpose of this volume is to make the pleasure that Pre-Columbian art gives available to a wider audience. If it achieves that goal, then I will have successfully met my challenges.

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