

A Look at the Barkat Collection

From Neolithic to Renaissance to 17th - Century Fine Art

RODEO DRIVE & THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE

When Bruce Zuckerman, director of the archaeological research collection of the University of Southern California, first discovered the Barakat Gallery, he realized he had unearthed a real find.

"There is nothing commonplace about any of the antiquities on display," explains the professor about his initial foray into the unusual gallery located in Beverly Hills' Rodeo Collection. Zuckerman deems Barakat's ancient art objects "antiquities that rival the great museum collections of the world...a collection as rare and special as the antiquities of which it is composed."

The art objects to which Zuckerman refers would boggle just about any mind – art scholars and layperson's alike. They range from the Neolithic era through the Renaissance to the 17th century. The collection could be the most extensive to be found in this part of the world.

"We really don't have many ancient art dealers here on the West Coast,"

says Dr. Selma Holo, director of the Fischer gallery and the Museums Studies program at USC. The former curator of the Norton Simon Museum says, "It's not like being in London where you can just walk down the street and run into these people. We are lucky to have the Barakat Collection."

Holo, impressed by the quality of objects that Faye Barakat has brought to Southern California, is looking forward to showing off some of the collection at a Fisher Gallery exhibit June 4 to July 2. She and a half-dozen student curators have selected eight pieces of the Barakat Collection to be on view along with other important art works from the Getty Museum, Yale University and the USC archaeological collection in a show called "The Fusions of the Hellenistic World."

"The objects we are borrowing from Faye Barakat make a point about the impact of the Greek and Roman work on the Ancient East," says Holo. She comments that the point of the upcoming exhibit is to "show what the world was like before Alexander the Great went through – around the fourth century BC – and then what it was like afterward, up until the second or third century. All we really have to judge by are the material remains, the pieces of art."

Once the exhibit is mounted, the Fisher Gallery will be transformed so that "you will be able to have a sense of what the ancient world was, where Alexander started and what the extent of his journey was," says Holo. Giant maps covering the central gallery will give

viewers a sense of place, tracing the boundaries of Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Israel and extending as far afield as India.

The dramatically lit exhibition room will feature indigenous objects, some "that look very Greek and others that show the melding of Greek and Roman cultures," says Holo.

For instance one piece from the Barakat collection, a "nicely sculpted head of Roman Emperor Vitellius," perfectly illustrates the latter, according to Holo. Another exhibition selection, borrowed from Barakat, is a beautiful ancient menorah from Syria.

"It (the candelabrum) relates to the ancient Jewish tradition," explains Holo. "It shows the fighting against Hellenism, where the Greco-Roman influence would show images of human beings. The Jewish tradition of the Second Commandment denies the right to use graven images."

To show that the Greek and Roman influence was very active as far away as Sinai, Barakat has lent the Fisher Gallery a piece called the Leda and the swan. The small structure of unpainted stone, based on an ancient Greek myth, suggests one of three things says Holo.

"Either the Greek and Roman settlers brought this little sculpture with them or artisans from Greece and Rome came and settled down and did work in the Sinai or the native artisans started working in the Greek and Roman tradition. This piece is very interesting in that it raises lots of questions"

Barakat's contribution to the Fisher Gallery makes up about a quarter of the entire exhibit. All of these pieces, along with many of the others to be found in the Barakat Gallery in the Rodeo Collection, are part of a new full-color catalogue introduced by the Gallery's owner. Although published at \$150 a piece, Faye Barakat has set a price of \$30 for the beautiful book. It contains some 320-color plates, and is elegantly hardbound, covered in light brown cloth with gold foil detailing. This is the first of what will eventually be a three-volume set, with the other two volumes set for publication in 1986 and 1987.

According to Barakat, "The contents of the catalogue represent examples of the different periods of antiquities and the materials that were used. There's not an element used in antiquity that isn't going to be found here." He feels this is the most important publication on this subject available. "Although the catalogue will serve a commercial purpose, it will also be a great art reference book for every major library and every major art collector," says Barakat.

Why has this ancient art collector gone to such great lengths, and to such great expense, to create a catalogue of this caliber?

The answer is best described in one passage of the catalogues introduction: "In order to share with present and future generations who are seeking a link with an ethnic bond, or merely to touch the lives of others with a sense of beauty and truth of the ages, I have collected and now make available these wonderful works of art which not only may be viewed, but touched, viewed, and possessed. In this way, I hope I may repay the enormous debt to my benefactors, and yet bring to man my share of the contribution to his awesome heritage of beauty, wisdom and spiritual history."