

Not Just Any Old Stuff!

An Interview with Fayeze Barakat,
The Barakat Gallery, Beverly Hills, California



Fayeze Barakat

EDITORS' NOTE Barakat was born in Hebron and managed his family's antiquities business in Jerusalem before opening the Barakat Gallery in 1982.

COMPANY BRIEF Opened in 1982, the Barakat Gallery is the current treasure trove for a fifth generation, family-owned and -operated business founded in Jerusalem more than 100 years ago. The gallery offers discerning collectors a wide array of museum-quality antiquities and works of art, specializing in pieces from the ancient Chinese, African, Asian, classical Greek and Roman, and pre-Columbian cultures, as well as a line of original jewelry.

You are considered one of the largest collectors of ancient art in the world. How did you get into this business?

As a matter of fact, I grew up in the business. My father and grandfather were antiquities dealers in Jerusalem. When I came to the United States 20 years ago, I brought a very large collection of biblical and Egyptian antiquities with me. I sold the majority of them.

The purpose of my immigration was to learn more about the different cultures of the world. So, when I came to the United States, I started learning about Mesoamerican cultures, and I assembled, through the years, one of the largest pre-Columbian collections in the world. Other than the pre-Columbian collection, I may have the largest collection of African art, which features pieces from more than 50 tribes.

Is there a particular culture that is in vogue right now?

The Chinese pieces are becoming quite popular. But the African, pre-Columbian, and ancient works are still very popular too. I would say that the highest level of interest is generated by the Egyptian, Greek, and Roman works. We have coins, objets d'art, statues, and jewelry from those cultures. In fact, we have more than 25,000 coins, covering a span of nearly 2,000 years, from 600 B.C.



Assyrian inscribed brick with a dedication to Shalmaneser III
Dated circa 858–824 B.C.
Dimensions: 14.5" (36.8 cm) × 14.5" (36.8 cm)
From Mesopotamia



Late dynastic period bronze sculpture of a cat
Dated circa 600–500 B.C.
Height: 5.4" (11.4 cm)
From Egypt



Gandhara stucco head of the Buddha
Dated circa 2nd–3rd century A.D.
Height: 16" (40.6 cm)
From Afghanistan

to about 1200 A.D. In addition, I have artifacts made out of bronze, silver, and gold, as well as marble objects from these different periods.

Collectors must come from all over the world to see your pieces.

It's true. I do have an international roster of clients, so my business is not limited to California. However, Rodeo Drive is a tourist attraction, so it is a prime location for my gallery. In assembling my collections, I've traveled all over the world, but dealers also know of me and approach me if they have something they think I might want to buy.

When did you begin selling jewelry?

More than 40 years ago, we found loose ancient jewelry in tombs. I started assembling them and forming them into jewelry for the modern woman. Now I also incorporate ancient beads, coins, amulets, seals, and scarabs into the pieces, but the focus of the jewelry is often still a coin. So it's a unique line. I pride myself on having the finest collection of jewelry of this type.

Which of your collections is your favorite?

My personal favorite is the Chinese collection because it is the latest collection that I have formed, and I am very excited about it. It includes jewelry and works of art that cover all the different dynasties, starting from the Neolithic Age to the late Ming Dynasty. Most of these pieces were brought out of China before the Chinese government restricted the export of such items. I acquired most of them from private collections, auctions, and private dealers.

You're also a collector of Russian icons, aren't you?

Yes, I do have several hundred Russian icons dating from the 16th to the early 19th centuries.



*Pre-Columbian gold tarantula sbamanic pendant
Dated circa 500 A.D. to the time of conquest
Dimensions: 5.5" (14.0cm) high, 420 grams
From Costa Rica (Panama Border)*

The art and antiques industry must be filled with people who sell, and even manufacture, fakes. Do you certify the authenticity of your pieces?

Yes, indeed. I certify the authenticity of every work of art I sell in the gallery. In most instances, we do scientific tests on the items to prove the age of the pieces or, in some cases, when they were last fired. For clay items, we use a thermo-luminescence test. For organic

material, we use a carbon 14 test. But, because I have handled thousands of these items, I have developed a feel for them, so I can authenticate most of the pieces by eye.

Can you pass on that expertise to your son, who now works with you?

Each time I acquire an item I try to explain to him what to look for. I teach him how to use the magnifying glass and the microscope to detect natural formations of crystals on the surface of the item, and I explain to him the difference between simulated patina and natural patina.

You must have quite a storage problem. What do you do with all of your extra pieces?

I have a warehouse, and I have a lot of things at my home too. In addition, I have a storage facility on the premises. So the items we aren't featuring in an exhibition go into storage.

This must tie up a tremendous amount of cash.

That is the nature of the antiquities business. I'm rich in objects, but always cash poor.

Do you have a favorite piece, or one you wouldn't sell at any cost?

I offer every item for sale because I want these pieces to end up in museums, so everybody can benefit from them. At times, I get very excited when I acquire an important item, and I enjoy it as long as I can. But the whole purpose of dealing in antiquities and works of art is to act as a medium, bringing these items to the general public. So there's no item that I would keep for myself. ●



*T'ang Dynasty painted terracotta sculpture of a horse with a detachable saddle
Dated circa 618-906 A.D.
Height: 26.25" (66.7 cm)
From China*

*Roman marble vase
Dated circa 1st - 3rd century A.D.
Height: 24.5" (62.2 cm)
From Mesopotamia*

*Roman bronze sculpture of a lar with inlaid silver eyes
Dated circa 1st-2nd century A.D.
Height: 6.25" (15.9 cm)
From the Mediterranean*