



Pre-Columbian Art

as a dealer in fine antiquities, I am often asked, "what sort of art do you recommend as a sound investment?"

The answer to the question is, "buy what you love." All art of fine quality is a good investment. One should buy what delights his or her senses and stimulates the imagination. Fine art is like a good marriage—it should provide daily pleasure, be full of constant surprises and offer the thrill of rediscovering your initial attraction over and over again.

The ultimate pleasure of a private collection

The value of a work of art will be there no matter who owns it. The happiness it brings should be something very personal, a joy that is one's own.

Often the questions persist. Many are a little uncertain of their tastes. Like food: sometimes they want French and other times they crave Chinese. People sometimes ask for guidance, and they occasionally ask what I myself collect these days.

The answer to that question: Pre-Columbian art. It's a lively kind of art, very human, a vibrant mirror of the cultures that created it. Almost every Pre-Columbian artifact is endowed with a distinct personality, as if it were alive and could speak about where it had been and what it had seen.

by Faye Barakat





Pre-Columbian Art

It is an art that evokes strong emotions. On the face of a ceramic tomb figure from West Mexico we might read laughter and joy, or perhaps grief, anger, even quiet contemplation.

We feel a kinship with the sculpture because we have experienced such moods ourselves, and unlike certain great cities and civilizations, these feelings have not vanished from the earth with the passage of centuries. Pre-Columbian meets all my personal criteria for collecting: it is exciting to the eye, warm to the touch, and it sends the imagination traveling on exotic journeys of discovery.

Meso-American antiquities are a relatively new passion for me. For almost my entire life I have been fascinated by the beauty and mystery of the past, but until perhaps 20 years ago, my attention was focused on the Old World of Biblical and Classical antiquities. I would become enthusiastic about a new facet of the past—coins, terra cottas, glass, bronzes—and would learn everything possible about it. Enthusiasm would become passion, passion obses-

sion, and I would strive to build the most perfect collection possible. Once satisfied that I had done my best, it would be time to move on to

explore another aspect of antiquity. The art of the New World was exactly that for me—new. Perhaps it was inevitable that I should fall under its powerful spell. West Coast collectors had been assembling important holdings of Pre-Columbian art for decades, so there was great potential to build a truly remarkable collection from what was still in private hands.

Following the rule, “Buy What You Love,” my collection has included some magnificent touchstones of ancient American culture. Some of these I kept and others I sold to clients and collectors, but only when I was certain that they would love an object as much as I did.

As the collection grew, a formal catalog became necessary. The result of four



years of scholarship, acquisition and appreciation, it documents over 300 treasures from throughout the New World. Accompanying each photographed artifact is infor-



Previous page, top: “Anthropomorphic Axe-God Pendant,” late period IV (circa 100-500AD). From the Guanacaste-Nicoya zone of Costa Rica. Height: 7 inches. Previous page, bottom: “Modeled Jaguar Vessel,” late period VI (circa 1200-1400AD). Height: 9½ inches.

This page: “Mayan Cylinder Vessel,” dated late classic period (circa 500-900AD). From El Salvador. Height: 9½ inches; “Gold Crocodile,” dated circa 1100 to the Conquest. From Costa Rica. Height: 4¼ inches.

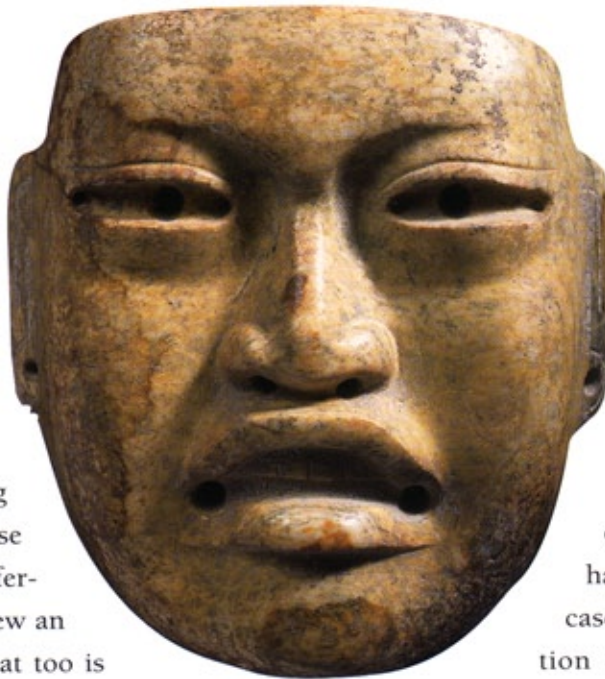




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mation about where and when it was made and a short paragraph—an expression, a musing—about each piece. These few lines are statements about the impression an artwork inspires, reflections on the mood it evokes. They are a means of sharing the pleasure I take in these magnificent creations, of offering a reader the chance to view an object in a new light. For that too is part of being a good collector; the joy should be personal, but not necessarily secretive. When you take pride in an artwork, when you truly love it, be prepared to share its beauty.

While gathering these superb works, I realized that this may be the last golden age for collecting Pre-Columbian art. Legitimate sources for such



artifacts are now mostly limited to existing collectors in North America and Europe. Reputable dealers do their best to discourage illegal traffic in antiquities from South America. Still, from the 16th century through the middle years of our own, certain visionary collectors have acquired and in many cases preserved from destruction splendid examples of Pre-Columbian art. Many of these pieces are now coming on the market, perhaps for the final time before they pass into public collections. While

I wholeheartedly support the egalitarian approach of the museums, which make art available to everyone, there is no museum that is open at the odd hours when one stands among his or her own treasures and delights in a wonderful swirl of emotions.



This is perhaps the ultimate pleasure of being a private collector—the doors never close. *The Barakat Gallery is located at 405 N. Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills. Call (310) 859-8408.*

Top: "Olmec Stone Mask," dated early classic period (circa 900-500BC). From Mexico. Height: 7³/₄ inches.
 Below, right: "Royal Mayan Whistle," dated late classic period (circa 550-850AD). From Yucatan. Height: 5¹/₂ inches.
 Bottom, left: "Galo Polychrome Female and Male Figures," dated early period V (circa 500-800AD). From the Guanacaste-Nicoya zone of Costa Rica. Heights: 11¹/₂ and 12¹/₂ inches.

