

BY MAUD DAWSON

PIECES OF THE PAST

Compared with the vast, echoing recesses of the British Museum or the Metropolitan, the Barakat Gallery is unimposing — even modest. Although it is part of the posh Rodeo Collection, a swank, sunlit atrium on Rodeo Drive, the gallery is almost shoebox-sized, a slender, marble-floored rectangle bordered on one end with red-velvet drapes, on the other with glass windows, and flanked with mirror-backed shelving.

Where similarities to museums begin is with what those shelves contain: a collection of antiquities from different periods and cultures ranging from 6,000 B.C. to the 17th century. Round brass bulbs train on chrome cases teeming with ancient coin pendants on white-velvet necks, diminutive bronze figurines, and terra-cotta vessels. Closed-circuit TVs rest near artful wall arrangements composed of religious icons and Plexiglas rods draped with smooth, stone beads of every color. As the surprising strains of pop and country/western tunes emanate from the intercom system, the crucial difference suddenly becomes apparent: These artifacts are for sale.

Fayez Barakat, the proprietor of this store, is a member of a family



ROMANO-EGYPTIAN PLASTER
FUNERARY MASK
DATED A.D. 100-200

"He is a surprisingly contemporary citizen. We gaze at the face and think, 'I know that man, I've seen him somewhere...'"



ROMAN SILVER SCULPTURE OF
THE GODDESS APHRODITE
DATED A.D. 100-300
FOUND IN SYRIA

"The beauty of the goddess is reflected in the craftsmanship, in the silver," says Mr. Barakat.

GROUP OF TERRA-COTTA
BILBIL VESSELS
DATED TO THE LATE BRONZE
AGE (1500-1250 B.C.)
FOUND IN ISRAEL

"Though modest in appearance, these terra-cotta vessels bear the imprint of invisible hands."





**MAGNA GRAECIAN
POLYCHROME TERRA-COTTA
SCULPTURE AND VASES
DATED 400-200 B.C.
FROM CANOSSA, ITALY**

"These ladies still carry their original colors: rich, warm pinks and blues."



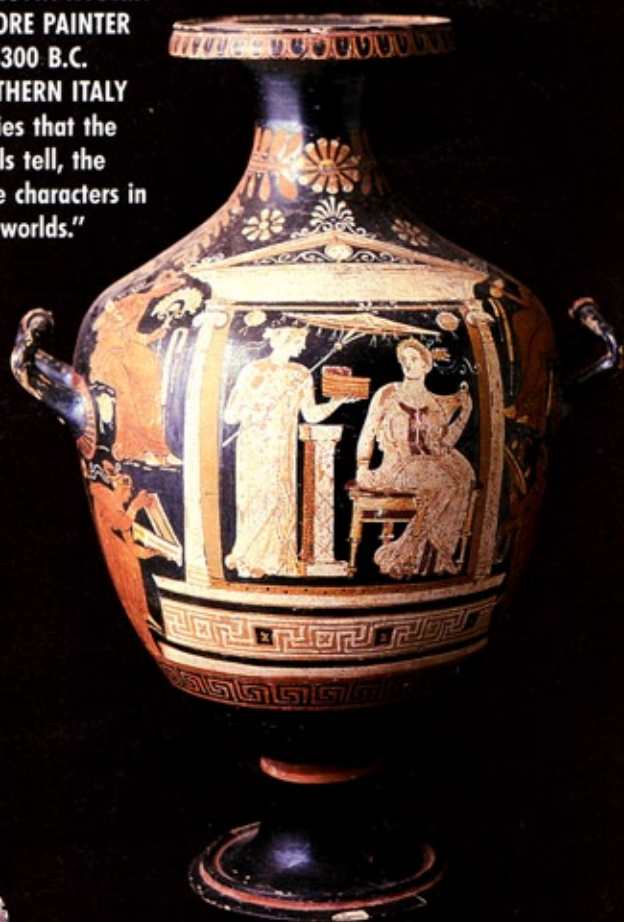
**SAND-CORE GLASS
AMPHORISKOS
DATED 600-400 B.C.
FOUND IN HEBRON**

"Looking at ancient glass is like looking at the ocean. The patterns are never the same twice, and the colors are forever changing."



**APULIAN TERRA-COTTA HYDRIA
BY THE BALTIMORE PAINTER
DATED 400-300 B.C.
FOUND IN SOUTHERN ITALY**

"I love the stories that the painted vessels tell, the interactions of the characters in their small worlds."



**LATE-ROMAN MARBLE
SCULPTURE OF VENUS
DATED A.D. 300-400
FOUND IN JORDAN**

"She is quite flirtatious for a goddess. She shows us the apple she won for being the fairest; she is both friendly and seductive."

that owns four galleries. In addition to the one in Los Angeles, there are two in Jerusalem, and one on historic Rachel's Tomb Road in Bethlehem. According to Mr. Barakat, together they make the Barakat family the largest dealers of antiquities in the world.

The first Barakat store opened almost 80 years ago in Jerusalem, originally with stock that catered to tourists in search of a quaint souvenir. At that time, the more valuable collectibles were kept among the family members, who found many of them on the land they owned and were well-known for their collection of ancient Middle Eastern art. Mr. Barakat's own interest in antiquities began at the age of 5 on the day he was playing in the family vineyards and found a Roman coin — "and since that day, you know, I'm crazy about it," he says with a laugh.

And what advice does Mr. Barakat give to budding collectors? Mr. Barakat says:

"Visiting a major museum, people usually find certain subjects in that museum that fascinate them. And I think my tip to any new collector is to pursue the field or the period or the culture, you see, that he feels he is capable of communicating [with] . . . That's the best way: to pursue a genuine interest that's totally subconscious, the energy in that art that relates to you at that phase of your life." He adds:

"Art itself is a level of awareness, and beauty is in the eye of the beholder. There are certain beautiful things that may be seen as being ugly by others, and certain ugly things that certain people can see great beauty in . . . A genuine object has an aura and a personality." **PC**



**ROMAN BRONZE HANDLES IN
THE SHAPE OF LION HEADS
DATED A.D. 100-300**

"These were probably attached to a great wooden chest. We can only guess what treasure it might have contained that it required such ferocious guardians."



**TEOTIHUACAN-STYLE STANDING
STONE FIGURE**

**DATED A.D. 200-600
FROM GUERRERO, MEXICO**

"Though not tall, this figure projects a massive and powerful strength. The stone radiates a compact, tangible magic."



**ROMAN BRONZE OIL LAMP IN
THE FORM OF A HORSE
DATED A.D. 100-300
FOUND IN ALEXANDRIA**

"What a pleasure it is to see something so practical be beautiful as well."

