

BYGONE EMPIRES



Neo-Sumerian Bust of Gudea
Origin: Mesopotamia
Circa: 2200 BCE to 2100 BCE

11.4
— 18.6. 2019

OPENING TIMES: MONDAY-SATURDAY,
10 AM-6PM OR BY APPOINTMENT

BYGONE EMPIRES

ART FROM VANISHED CIVILISATIONS,

3000 BCE – 1500 CE

11 APRIL – 18 JUNE, 2019

BARAKAT LONDON



One speech was heard from him showing a spirit not utterly degraded, when to the insults of a tribune he answered, "Yet I was your Emperor." Then he fell under a shower of blows, and the mob reviled the dead man with the same heartlessness with which they had flattered him when he was alive.

–**Tacitus on the overthrowing of Emperor Vitellius**

For as yourselves your empires fall, And every kingdom hath a grave.

–**William Habington, from Nox Nocti Indicat Scientiam**

My name is Ozymandias, king of kings: Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!

–**Percy Bysshe Shelley**

LONDON – On the 11th of April as Britain persists with its tortuous attempts at Brexit, Barakat will open an exhibition that may also serve as a pointed *memento mori*. Drawing on the immense Barakat Collection of ancient art, 'Bygone Empires' assembles an extraordinary group of twelve objects - some grand, some modest - from vanished empires, sometimes revealing uncanny and unexpected refractions of political power, hubris and the fate of civilisations. Curated by the gallery's new directors Janis Lejins and Isobel Lister, the show aims to rediscover, re-engage and reactivate Barakat's diverse collection of ancient art for new audiences, young and old.

The star of the show is an alabaster bust of what is thought to be Gudea, ruler of Lagash. One of the earliest portraits in human history (c. 2144-2124 BCE). Gudea is one of the first rulers in the world to deal with climate change, when his Mesopotamian city state was grappling with the dire socio-economic effects of a protracted drought and over-farming their land in the Fertile Crescent. Other highlights of the show include a portrait bust of the ill-fated Roman emperor Vitellius (first century CE), a monumental head of a Chinese bureaucrat from the Tang Dynasty (619-907 CE), and a Bactrian axe head (1200 - 900 BCE) used by warriors in the region now known as Afghanistan and Pakistan. The most recent object in the show is a stone sculpture from the Taino (c. 1500 CE), an essentially vanished indigenous people of the Caribbean, 619-907 CE encountered by Columbus and decimated by Western colonisation and disease within a generation.

The show officially opens exactly (to the day) 1401 years since the death of Emperor Yang of Sui and the fall of the Sui Dynasty in China. Emperor Yang is generally considered by historians to be one of the worst tyrants in Chinese history and the reason for the Sui Dynasty's relatively short rule (581-618 CE). The emperor's hubristic and repeated failed military campaigns, coupled with increased taxation to finance these wars, caused civil unrest and ultimately led to the downfall of the dynasty.

As Barakat Gallery Directors Janis Lejins and Isobel Lister comment:

We are two 27-year-olds who think the new generation of art dealers should be looking at our time and how art of different periods connects to it. On 11 April - the day before the UK is scheduled to leave the EU - we are witnessing what are arguably the death throes of the British Empire, and we see the work in this exhibition as relevant to our present moment. Whether in antiquity or today, art has always been political. We are displaying pieces that portray the end of empire, the first ruler in history to deal with climate change, good and bad government, fallen heroes and utter tyrants. These pieces are able to speak to us across time and are activated by an appreciation of their nuanced contexts.

For a full press release detailing individual works in the show, [please click here](#).

For the imagery [please click here](#)

2

NOTES FOR EDITORS 'Bygone Empires' contains twelve items, with the earliest piece dating from c.3000 BCE. All pieces exhibited in the show are able to be searched against the Art Loss Register. Barakat Gallery is a fifth-generation family business, founded in Jerusalem at the end of the 19th century. Barakat now operates galleries in London, Hong Kong, Seoul and Los Angeles.

Barakat London directors Isobel Lister, formerly of Hauser & Wirth, and Janis Lejins, a graduate of the Royal College of Art, share the aim of making the gallery's rich collections accessible to new audiences, young and old, and connecting ancient art with contemporary culture. Over the course of 2019, they will be re-launching Barakat London and renovating its Mayfair townhouse, with the aim of creating a project space on the ground floor to present a changing programme of exhibitions, as well as spaces on the upper floors housing the gallery's extensive collection of ancient art. One floor will focus purely on Chinese antiquities. Another will be dedicated to Faye Barakat's paintings.

**BIOGRAPHICAL
NOTE ON
FAYEZ BARAKAT**

Barakat is owned by Faye Barakat. Born in 1949 into an old farming family, Barakat was exposed to ancient art at a very young age. The family owned vineyards in the Hebron Hills in Palestine and villagers ploughing the fields would often unearth tombs. Rather than discarding the artefacts, as was often the case at the time, his grandfather preserved pieces and intermittently took some to the marketplace, along with the family's produce, selling them to foreign tourists. Barakat, meanwhile, spent his formative years working alongside British archeologist Kathleen Kenyon, developing skills in the basic principles of field archeology, and he would later apply his passion to studying under renowned Middle Eastern scholars and archaeologists Nelson Glueck and William Dever. His interest, in particular, was in ancient coinage, though he would become a fervent student of whatever new period of art took his interest.

"For me to be able to connect to Emperor Constantine at the age of seven, after being told a coin I found was about 1,700 years old, simply blew my mind," he says in a 2010 interview of finding his first coin, by accident, on the way to school. "I became

such an avid lover of history at an early age.” He turned down an opportunity to study medicine and joined the family business, helping to build it up across multiple locations in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. For the past 50 years Barakat has presided over the meteoric expansion of the gallery from a small shop in a Jerusalem Souq to a unique world-class collection and dealership with a global reach.

Barakat’s early collections were classical, biblical, Egyptian and Mesoamerican, or pre-Columbian, art. The latter, in what emerges as a theme in his life story, was influenced by a chance meeting with the late American film director, screenwriter and actor John Huston, who would come to be a good friend and ultimately influence Barakat’s decision to set up his first overseas gallery in Beverly Hills in 1983. Barakat had already opened in Amman, Jordan, in 1973, while galleries in London (2003) and at the Emirates Palace (2008), Seoul (2016) and Hong Kong (2017) would come much later.

“California’s proximity to Mexico, its closeness to South and Central America and the availability of the material in Los Angeles that I was able to purchase and to trade in and to learn about,” are among the reasons listed by Barakat for the move to the US. However, in Jerusalem, Barakat had already begun to amass an impressive clientele list that included notable 20th-century artists such as Pablo Picasso, Marc Chagall, Salvador Dali and Andy Warhol. It was a chance meeting with Picasso that Barakat has credited with his interest in African art, following their first encounter when Barakat was in his teens and Picasso was visiting the family gallery with the mayor of Jerusalem.

Barakat, has also experienced his own share of tragic events with cancer robbing him of his first wife in 2009 just under two years after it claimed his son. When his wife first became ill, he would often retreat to a studio where he would paint into the early hours of the morning. It was the first time he had sat in front of a blank canvas since his teenage years, when that first chance meeting with Picasso had inspired him to paint regularly. Today, irrespective of where he is in the world, he paints nightly. As the galleries become increasingly self-reliant, Barakat is winding back on a gruelling schedule that has seen him travel every month between homes and galleries around the world and focusing on his paintings. As a personal gesture toward the continuum of art as part of human experience, Barakat hangs one of his works in every show at the gallery.

3

Barakat Gallery

58 Brook Street Mayfair London W1K 5DT
Opening hours: 10 am - 6pm, Monday - Saturday

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BYGONE EMPIRES

ART FROM VANISHED CIVILISATIONS,

3000 BCE – 1500 CE

11 April – 18 June, 2019

Full Press Release and List of Works

Sui Pair of Glazed Terracotta Military Officers (581-618 CE) and Tang Large Stone Sculpture depicting the Head of a Civic Official (619-907 CE)

Fittingly, given the doomed military exploits of Emperor Yang of the short-lived Sui Dynasty in China, the show features a pair of **Sui glazed military officers** (which were traditionally included in a burial procession). Sui figures are relatively rare and identifiable by their yellow/amber glazing, which was unique to the dynasty. These Sui pieces are a type of Chinese art known as 'mingqi' a term that refers to objects specifically created for interment in the tombs of elite individuals in order to provide for their afterlife.

Whilst historians deride Yang of Sui as a tyrant, they generally regard the Tang Dynasty that followed [619-907CE] as a high point in Chinese civilisation, and a golden age of cosmopolitan culture. Here the Sui pieces are juxtaposed with the **monumental sculptural head of a Tang bureaucrat** – a large fragment of a head that was once part of a much larger sculpture of a civic official. We can assume from the stature of this work that it likely stood outside as part of the spiritual road leading up to a mausoleum. 1

While it might seem odd to picture such a powerful empire immortalising their government bureaucrats in stone, especially on such a grand scale, when we consider the importance of such civil officials in the daily life of the empire, their significance becomes clear. With over two million inhabitants in greater Chang'an, the capital of the Tang, the governance of this city alone would have demanded an extensive network of civil servants, not to mention the numerous distant provinces of that comprised the greater Empire. In order to remove power from the hands of wealthy aristocrats and warlords, the Tang created a class of scholar officials to govern their lands, enacting the will of the Imperial Court throughout China. Rigorous examinations ensured that only the most qualified individuals were able to serve this crucial position. The official wears a tall cap with a chinstrap that marks his status. Today, this head is a stunning testament to the wealth and luxury of the Tang Dynasty, a golden age of Chinese culture made possible in part through the work of such officials.

Sumerian Door Catch, marble, 2700 - 2500 BCE

Continuing this theme of the bureaucracy required to maintain empires are pieces from what is widely regarded as the first human civilisation. Sumer was an ancient civilisation founded in the Mesopotamian region of the Fertile Crescent, the territory situated between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Known for their innovations in language, governance, architecture and the arts, as well as for developing agriculture and cities, Sumerians are considered by many historians to be the creators of civilisation. The oldest piece on display in this show is a **marble Sumerian door catch dated from 2700 - 2500 BCE**. With a grid of three registers, the catch features an intricate carving of 11 individual figures and perhaps represents the agricultural cycle of ancient Sumer. In the lower register we see three figures herding livestock, above them are five men who are transporting grain and what appears to be food stuffs. In the top register the scene depicts six men and women in what appears to be a banquet.

Sumerian & greater Mesopotamian culture is credited with the invention of writing, the concept of measuring time (e.g. 60 seconds and minutes and the 24-hour day) and the evolution of the first city state. Banquet scenes, common on the reliefs of this period, follow a sort of "grammar" with a specific meaning, nowadays difficult to decipher. Although seen across the Sumerian world, the scenes vary iconographically and stylistically according to the choice of individual artists. Ritual banquets took place in temples, sometimes after a military success or maybe as part of ceremonies celebrated at the beginning of the New Year to ensure fertility. All the people, including the sovereigns, participated in these festivities, where the divinities were supposed to be present as well. Bas reliefs referring to these banquets generally show a feasting couple. As all human beings of the same sex look almost identical in Sumerian art, the social status of the couple on this door catch cannot be defined - although the dignity of the banqueting figures of our relief and the garment worn by the woman suggest a noble rank or a religious function. Crucially what these three scenes show is a cross-section of society from farm to transport to table, all the elements of civilisation. Indeed, this scene could be described as the birth of civilisation: it depicts group organisation, distribution of labour, - a supply chain, and the enjoyment of the fruits of labour.

Clay Nail with Ten-Line Cuneiform Inscription, c.2100 - 2000 BCE

Next to the door catch is an incongruous Clay Nail bearing a Ten-Line Cuneiform Inscription (c.2100 - 2000 BCE) which was produced by the city state of Lagash in the far south of Sumer. The state's patron god was named Ningirsu, and it was the duty of the ruler to ensure that the temple of this god - called E-ninnu - was kept in good repair. This inscription, translated by a renowned Sumerian scholar, the late Professor Wilfred George Lambert, records the fact for posterity:

*For Ningursu
mighty warrior of
(the god) Enlil
Gudea
ruler of Lagash
produced everything appropriate
built for him
E-ninnu
his shining Imdugud bird
and restored it.*

2

The Imdugud-bird was a mythical creature: a lion with an eagle's head, and, according to Sumerian scholars, was often used as a strange metaphor in referring to temples. This nail would have been placed in a hole in the temple wall with the head showing on the surface so that when repairs were necessary, as was often the case since sun-dried bricks were used, the fired nail would be taken out and read, thus perpetuating the memory of the ruler who had it put there.

Bust of Gudea, alabaster, c. 2144–2124 BCE

A matter of meters away is the show stopper. An extraordinary alabaster bust of what appears to be the ruler of Lagash, Gudea, himself. Gudea, ruler of the state of Lagash in Southern Mesopotamia from c. 2144–2124 BCE. He filled a power vacuum created after the Akkadian empire lost control over southern Mesopotamia in part due to what many now regard as the earliest example of societal collapse due to climate change. The region suffered over 300 years of drought which was exacerbated by untenable farming and irrigation practices. This king does not wear a crown: ruling at a time of social unrest, Gudea styled himself as a shepherd/priest and sculptures depict him wearing a simple shepherd's cap. Today he may be seen as the first leader to successfully deal with the fall-out of climate change and effectively address the resulting instability. He distributed wealth and social welfare, and styled himself as a cooperative leader, presenting himself less as a god and more as a man of the people. This extraordinarily rare bust, which has been reattributed, may be among the most significant pieces in the entire Barakat collection. It is one of a small handful of depictions of the ruler which are known. What is particularly remarkable about this sculpture is the high degree of verisimilitude of the facial features. This does not seem to be a generic

depiction of Gudea but instead a realistic portrait of him, different to all the other known statues of Gudea, which follow the typical styles of royal portraiture in the ancient world where rulers were depicted as formal and idealised. This might suggest that this bust might well be an earlier or template piece from which the handful of similar diorite sculptures housed at the Louvre and Metropolitan museums were carved. The British Museum, despite its riches, holds a fractured and not firmly attributed, portrait of the leader. Meanwhile the notable nuances, asymmetry, and facial features on display in the Barakat portrait may lead some to suggest that this not just an ancient masterpiece but potentially one of the very first realist portraits in the history of mankind.

Monumental Bust of Emperor Vitellius – 30 – 200 CE

A few feet from Gudea we fast forward over two thousand years and are confronted by a monumental **bust attributed as the Roman Emperor Vitellius** (15 - 69 CE). In a year of Roman civil war known as the Year of the Four Emperors, Vitellius' rule only lasted eight months from 16 April 69 - 22 December 69. Posthumous texts deride Vitellius as self-indulgent, and an obese glutton, eating banquets four times a day and feasting on rare foods he would send the Roman navy to procure. Yet this is not overtly evident in the features of the bust here, leading some to suggest that this may portrait may have been taken from life, before his downfall led writers to destroy his reputation. Vitellius ruled for less than a year once he realised his support was waning, Vitellius prepared to abdicate in favor of Vespasian but was preemptively executed in Rome by Vespasian's soldiers on 22 December 69. Poignantly Tacitus reports Vitellius' final moments:

One speech was heard from him showing a spirit not utterly degraded, when to the insults of a tribune he answered, "Yet I was your Emperor." Then he fell under a shower of blows, and the mob reviled the dead man with the same heartlessness with which they had flattered him when he was alive.

Hellenistic Marble Head of Alexander the Great - 300 to 100 BCE

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Offsetting Vitellius in both scale and stature is a relatively diminutive **bust of the legendary Alexander the Great**. Alexander was born in Pella, Macedonia in 356 BCE and took the throne at the age of 20. He spent most of his ruling years on an unprecedented military campaign through Asia and northeast Africa and by the age of thirty, c. 336, he had one of the largest empires of the ancient world. Undeclared in battle, Alexander is widely considered one of history's most successful military commanders. Alexander's ambition barely outlived him - he died age 32 in Babylon in 323 BCE, the city that he planned to establish as his capital. In the years following his death, civil wars tore his empire apart, resulting in the establishment of several states ruled by the Diadochi, Alexander's surviving generals and heirs.

Incised Bronze Vase with battle scene featuring King Kilij Arslan I - 1100 - 1200 CE

Reflecting on the idea of empires rising and falling on the backs of overly ambitious campaigns and personalities, the exhibition presents another small but extraordinary object: an incised metal pot that memorialises the victory of King Arslan I - the Persian ruler who repelled the first wave of crusaders. Kilij Arslan, meaning "Sword Lion" (c.1079 - 1107 CE), was the Seljuq Sultan of Rûm from 1092 CE until his death in 1107 CE. Arslan had ruled the Sultanate during the time of the First Crusade in 1101 CE and was infamous for the way he was able to repel the repeated attacks of the crusaders. Following the crusades, Arslan I decided to move towards the East. In 1107 he conquered Mosul, but he was defeated by Mehmed I of Great Seljuq at the battle of Khabur river. Having lost the battle, Kilij Arslan died trying to escape across the river - almost a thousand years on in the same region we remain unable to come to terms with the heinous reality of war and intractable disputes over holy lands.

Bactrian Bronze Axe Head - 1200 - 900 BCE

Bactria or **Bactriana** was a historical region in Central Asia covering a region that straddles modern-day Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and parts of Northern Pakistan. Probably used in battle, this relatively small, ornately curved bronze axe head (1200 - 900 BCE) evokes a world where cultural conquest demanded a physical proximity and personal accountability

- it meant physically confronting the person whom you intended to subjugate. Whilst the grace and beauty of this axe-head stand as a testament to the skill of metallurgists and passion of the warrior-artists who lived and bore arms in Bactria over three thousand years ago, it also reminds us of the brutal reality of human conflict.

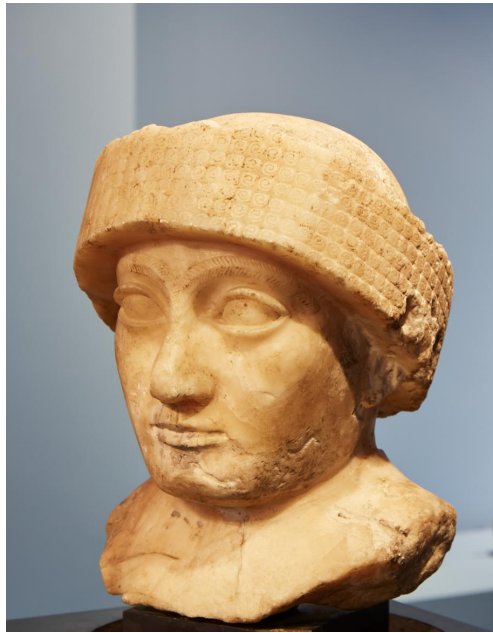
Taino stone sculpture of a Zemi – 1500 CE

Next to the axe is an enigmatic stone carving made by the Taino - a relatively rarely talked about indigenous people of the Caribbean who, at the time of European contact in the late fifteenth century, were the principal inhabitants of most of Cuba, Hispaniola, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, the Bahamas and the northern Lesser Antilles. Population estimates vary a great deal, from a few hundred thousand up to 8,000,000. Taino spirituality centred on the worship of Zemís - A Zemí is a spirit or ancestor and they were often embodied by the carved idols like the one featured in this show. After their first interaction, Columbus described the Taínos as a noble and kind people. Writing in his In his diary:

*They traded with us and gave us everything they had, with goodwill ... they took great delight in pleasing us ...
They are very gentle and without knowledge of what is evil; nor do they murder or steal...Your Highness may believe that in all the world there can be no better people ... They love their neighbours as themselves, and they have the sweetest talk in the world, and are gentle and always laughing.*

Despite Columbus' glowing review, on their subsequent voyage the Spanish demanded tribute from the Taíno on the island of Hispaniola. According to Kirkpatrick Sale, each adult over 14 years of age was expected to deliver a hawk's bell full of gold every three months, or when this was lacking, twenty-five pounds of spun cotton. If this tribute was not brought, the Spanish cut off the hands of the Taíno and left them to bleed to death. The Taino also had no resistance to Old World diseases, notably smallpox. So in less than thirty years it is estimated between 80% and 90% of the Taíno population died and the Taino culture with it.

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Bust of Gudea
Mesopotamia
c. 2200–2100 BCE



Door Catch
Mesopotamia
c. 2700–2500 BCE



Sui Pair of Glazed
Terracotta Military Officers
China
581–618 CE



Monumental Bust of
Emperor Vitellius
Roman
c. 30–200 CE

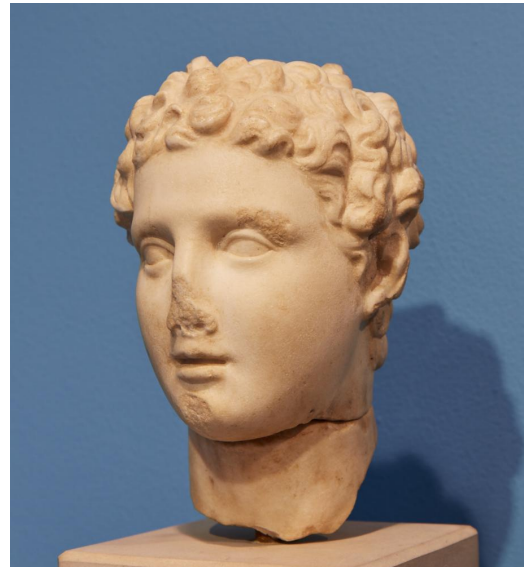
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Bronze Axe Head
Bactria
1200–900 BCE



**Inscribed Vase with
battle scene featuring
King Kilij
Arslan I**
Levant
c.1100–1200 CE

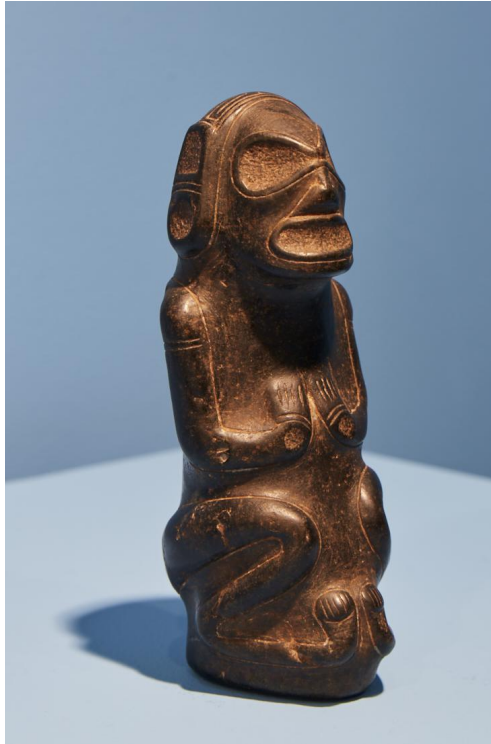


Alexander the Great
Greece
323–31 BCE



**Tang Large Stone Sculpture
Depicting the Head of a
Civic Official**
China
618–907 CE.

BYGONE EMPIRES



Taino sculpture of a
Zemi
Dominican Republic
1200–1500 CE



Bronze Hand Holding Dagger
Mediterranean
300BCE–100 CE



Clay Nail with Ten-Line
Cuneiform Inscription
Mesopotamia
c. 2200–2100 BCE