

TRADERS *of the* LOST ARTS

Art lovers are now juxtaposing their Antony Gormleys with ancient Greek artefacts, their Balloon Dogs with Byzantine statues – and, reports Catherine Milner, antiquities dealers are finding new ways to woo and wow them. Portrait by James Winspear



James and Gregory Demirjian, co-presidents of Ariadne Gallery in Mayfair, with (from far left) a 3rd-2nd century BC Greek marble head of Aphrodite, £2m, 3rd-1st century BC south Arabian alabaster and shell stele, £90,000, c50 BC Roman marble portrait of a patrician, £180,000, and 4th century BC Greek marble statue of a youth, £150,000



“**T**he old is the new new,” says Dr Glenn Lacki, director of Mayfair’s ancient Greek art gallery Kallos. The contemporary art boom, he explains, has encouraged interest in other eras of art – including the most ancient. Now, new antiquities collectors are vying with institutions and specialists to possess beautiful relics from lost civilisations, a move that is seeing meteoric prices for certain pieces at auction, and dealers not only opening chic new showrooms, but also exhibiting alongside contemporary galleries at top international art fairs.

Antiquities cover the largest period, broadest geography and most diverse cultures, embracing objects dating from the dawn of civilisation in the Middle East, Egypt, Europe and the Mediterranean basin up to around 1000 AD. The variety is almost

infinite both in material and shape, from monumental sculpture to exquisite jewellery, glassware, ceramics and metalwork, including fine pottery and engraved gems. While this has traditionally been a stable market, rising steadily and largely unaffected by the peaks and troughs seen in other areas of the art market, the past decade has seen auction hammer prices soar above estimates. In December 2010, for example, a Roman marble portrait bust of Antinous, the young lover of the Emperor Hadrian (pictured on final page), sold at Sotheby’s New York for a vertiginous \$23.8m, against an estimate of \$2m-\$3m, while a 4,300-4,400-year-old Egyptian limestone statue of Sekhemka, inspector of the pharaoh’s scribes, sold for almost £16m at Christie’s in 2014, against an estimate of £4m-£6m. The most expensive antiquity ever sold at auction, the Guennol Lioness, an 8cm-high, 5,000-year-old Mesopotamian stone statuette of a lion-headed figure, sold for \$57.2m in 2007 – just under the \$58.4m





Clockwise from left: a room in Daniel Katz's Mayfair gallery with neoclassical marble sculptures, 1st century BC-1st century AD Egyptian diorite head of a priest, £245,000 from Daniel Katz, Kallos

Gallery, Mayfair, with (centre) 540-520 BC Greek ceramic dinos by the Ribbon Painter, £1.75m, 700-330 BC Egyptian faience amulet of Duamutef, son of Horus, €15,000 from David Ghezlbash Archéologie

paid for the orange Balloon Dog by Jeff Koons, which sold at Christie's in 2013, the highest hammer price for a living artist.

Dealers have responded to the new breed of collector with a raft of stylish specialist galleries that have opened in the past year in London's Mayfair. Gone are the "by appointment only" signs and air of entering Ole Worm's cabinet of curiosities; these new galleries rival boutiques such as Agent Provocateur or Alexander McQueen in their slick design, and are forming a new artistic quarter in the area.

Daniel Katz, one of London's pre-eminent sculpture dealers, has a new gallery (pictured above), twice the size of his last one, on Hill Street off Berkeley Square, which until last year was the headquarters of contemporary art gallery Blain Southern. Carefully positioned halogen lights accentuate the ghostly shimmer of a 2,000-year-old diorite-stone sculpture of an Egyptian priest (£245,000, pictured top right), casting shadows onto the *au courant* dove-grey walls. A few paces away stands a 1957 bronze frog by Eduardo Paolozzi (£225,000). This juxtaposition appeals to a new type of collector who likes to "mix things up", says Katz. "Those who collect Peter Doig might also now collect impressionist drawings – and antiquities."

In the same building is the first London outpost of Ariadne, the prestigious New York antiquities dealer. Co-presidents Gregory and James Demirjian (pictured on previous pages), who took over the business from their father Torkom, are surrounded by faded beauties from the ancient world. A pensive-looking Aphrodite (£2m) from 3rd-2nd century BC Greece – so finely sculpted it rivals, they claim, that carved by the greatest of Attic sculptors, Praxiteles – contrasts with the haunting face of a south Arabian stele (£90,000; both pictured on previous pages) from around the same time, whose severe geometry and gimlet eyes look so startlingly contemporary it could sit as comfortably with works by Pablo Picasso or Sarah Lucas as with Old Master paintings. "The Aphrodite is an exceptionally rare and important work of art," says James Demirjian. "The sensitive carving of her coiffure blows one away."

Around the corner, near Grosvenor Square, Charles Ede is in an elegant new

A raft of stylish galleries have opened in the past year. Gone is the air of entering Ole Worm's cabinet of curiosities – these rival boutiques in their slick design



gallery (pictured overleaf) double the size of its previous establishment in Brook Street.

Meanwhile, to the south, Rupert Wace Ancient Art has moved from an upper floor in Old Bond Street to a sumptuous five-storey townhouse in St James's – near Christie's.

Not only are these new galleries bigger than the treasure troves of yesteryear, they evince a new spirit of openness. Salon-style gatherings are held at Kallos (pictured above) – the one-year-old gallery in Davies Street, a beacon of Zen-like minimalism owned by Baron Lorne Thyssen-Bornemisza, philanthropist and son of celebrated art collector Baron "Heini" Thyssen-Bornemisza. Topics have included Beauty, Sex and Desire in Classical Athens, and Science, Medicine and Society in Ancient Greece and Today. They are attended by a mix of sheikhs, financiers, lawyers and other contemporary art collectors, as well as classicists, and some have proved so popular people have been turned away.

Kallos Gallery (*kallos* in ancient Greek means "beauty") glimmers with ancient sparklers showcased as luxury items on a floc of marble and polished plaster. Gold coins



(£2,500-£400,000) sit in a black velvet-lined wall cabinet, contrasting with statement pieces such as a bronze Corinthian helmet (£950,000) on a plinth. A pair of exquisitely crafted heavy gold Lion Head bracelets (£550,000) from the 4th century BC are visible in the round, protected on two sides by glass.

The presence of antiquities dealers is also increasingly being felt at fairs that have usually been associated with contemporary art and design. PAD London had its first antiquities exhibitors in 2013: David Ghezlbash, a Paris-based dealer, and Gordian Weber Kunsthandel from Germany. In 2014, they were joined by one of the world's leading antiquities specialists from

New York and Geneva, Phoenix Ancient Art. Meanwhile, Rupert Wace and Cahn International provided the only antiquities presence at the Frieze Masters fair in 2013, but in 2014 they were joined by Ariadne.

In contrast to contemporary art, a storied past is key to the allure of antiquities for new collectors: the thought that you can cradle in your hand a 3,000-year-old alabaster kohl jar (£3,500 from Rupert Wace), from which an Egyptian princess might have applied her make-up, or drink from a glass beaker (£12,500 from Charles Ede, pictured overleaf) that might have adorned the banquet table of an Anglo-Saxon nobleman. "For new collectors, buying such objects can act as a bridge into an era of history," says Ghezlbash. His gallery currently has small blue and black faience amulet (€15,000, pictured left) depicting Duamutef, son of the Egyptian god Horus, and a bronze and electrum sceptre summit (€28,000) depicting Horus as a falcon, both from Egypt's Late Dynastic period, c700-330 BC.

These stories are often brought to life by today's collectors, who present their ancient artefacts in dramatic new ways. Patrick Newman, chief executive of London-based mining company Greenland Rare Earth Projects, collects Roman, Greek and Byzantine



Clockwise from left: Charles Ede in Mayfair, with (centre) a c664-30 BC Egyptian wood and bronze ibis, recently sold. 5th-6th century AD Anglo-Saxon glass beaker, £12,500 from Charles Ede. c130-138 AD Roman marble bust of Antinous, sold for more than \$23.8m at Sotheby's New York in 2010

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sculpture and uses a number of techniques to make his works look more arresting. A classical sculpture of the goddess Aphrodite is positioned on a turntable embedded with a voice-recognition system, so that he only has to call her name and the sculpture starts turning. “I want to evoke the story of the beautiful courtesan Phryne – the model for the Aphrodite of Knidos – who at her notorious trial in ancient Athens turned and disrobed for the judges,” he says. Newman also collects Greek coins; a particular favourite is a 1,200-year-old example embossed with a picture of Empress Irene of Athens. “She was a pretty extraordinary woman,” he says. “She was chosen to be empress in a bridal beauty parade, but her story ends with her having her son’s eyes gouged out, and it is said there followed an 11-day eclipse.”

Newman buys from a mixture of auction houses and dealers, and displays these coins on a special light box on the wall above the drawers in which they are stored, which magnifies them to a metre in diameter. “Traditionally you would just pull out a drawer and look at these things alone, but this allows me to share them with friends,” he says. “It teases the brain into thinking it is seeing the prototype of a Renaissance tondo.” This new influx of collectors has, for a number of years, been competing with museums and specialist collectors. Katz says that private collectors now regularly outgun museums in the buying stakes. “Ten years ago we sold 90 per cent to museums and 10 per cent to private clients. Now it’s 40 per cent to museums and 60 per cent to individuals.”

“But although there are many wonderful things still in circulation, collectors must be cautious because of forgeries,” says Judith Nugée, former head of the antiquities department at Christie’s and now director of antiquities consultants Hornsby + Nugée. “There are lots of upsides to collecting – you just have to follow certain golden rules. Ownership history stretching back to the 18th or 19th century, for example, or a known find context will increase the commercial value of an antiquity significantly, not only because it offers reassurance on authenticity, but also legality.”

And due diligence can pay big dividends. In December 2010, a Roman marble funerary urn dated to the 1st



Roman marble bust of Marcus Aurelius, sold for £99,000; 25 years later, it came back to Christie’s New York, where it made just over \$2m.

But scouring salerooms is not the only way to unearth a treasure – some get lucky with good scholarship and a metal detector. The Portable Antiquities Scheme encourages finders to declare and record objects found in the ground, be they humble fragments with next to no commercial value (albeit rare) or magnificent gold or silver masterpieces.

In some cases, the finders are entitled to keep their discoveries and are at liberty to sell them. One such discovery was the Crosby Garrett helmet, a ceremonial Roman cavalry helmet found in Cumbria, which was deemed to be the property of the finder. The helmet was sold at Christie’s South Kensington in October 2010 for £2m. Where antiquities are concerned, fortune favours the curious. ♦

century AD was offered at Christie’s in London as part of The Barratt Collection – from Crowe Hall, Bath – with an estimate of £7,000-£10,000. One dealer secured it for £445,250, presumably competing against other bidders who had also done their homework and discovered that it had been published in the 18th century in Piranesi’s folio of urn engravings. Three months later it was on offer at the TEFAP Maastricht art fair for €1.2m, selling to collector Christian Levett, portfolio manager at Moore Capital, for a reported €1m.

Levett has collected more than 1,000 works in the past 15 years – and built the Museum of Classical Art in Mougins, France. It opened in June 2011 and juxtaposes ancient statues and artefacts with neoclassical and later works inspired by antiquity by such artists as Rubens, Picasso, Chagall, Cézanne, Degas, Henry Moore, de Chirico, Marc Quinn and Antony Gormley. “It’s getting increasingly difficult in the antiquities world for dealers and auction houses to find great, well-provenanced pieces, while they have no problem selling them,” says Levett. “This is because there are new museums opening in emerging countries and wealthy new collectors are entering the market all the time and sending pieces further around the globe.”

Inevitably this means that the pool of top objects for sale at any one time is shrinking and competition is getting fiercer. In July 1987, Christie’s sold a collection of antiquities assembled by the Hon James Smith Barry on his Grand Tour in 1776. One of the lots, a

ANCIENT CHIMES

Ariadne Gallery, 6 Hill St, London W1 (020-3053 9559; www.ariadnegalleries.com). **Cahn International**, +4161-271 6755; www.cahn.ch. **Charles Ede**, 1 Three Kings’ Yard, London W1 (020-7493 4944; www.charlesede.com). **Christie’s**, 020-7839 9060; www.christies.com; next auction June 4, New York. **David Katz**, 6 Hill St, London W1 (020-7493 0688; www.katz.co.uk). **David Ghezlbash Archéologie**, 12 Rue Jacob, 75006 Paris (+331-4633 6481; www.davidghezlbash.com). **Frieze Masters**, Regent’s Park, London NW1 (020-3372 6111; www.friezemasters.com); October 14-18. **Gordian Weber Kunsthandel**, Gertrudenstrasse 29, 50667 Cologne (+49221-257 6087; www.gordian-weber-kunsthandel.com). **Hornsby + Nugée**, 01273-846 860; www.hornstynugee.com. **Kallos Gallery**, 14-16 Davies St, London W1 (020-7493 0806; www.kallosgallery.com). **PAD London**, Berkeley Square, London W1 (+331-5330 8520; www.pad-fairs.com); October 14-18. **Phoenix Ancient Art**, 6 Rue Verdaine, 1211 Geneva (+4122-318 8010; www.phoenixancientart.com). **Rupert Wace Ancient Art**, 19 Crown Passage, London SW1 (020-7495 1623; www.rupertwace.co.uk). **Sotheby’s**, +1212-606 7000; www.sothebys.com; next auction June 3, New York.

CHARLES EDE: JOSH DANIEL KATZ: GALLERY; CHRISTIE’S: KALLOS GALLERY & STEVE WARRIAM