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# Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art Newsletter

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Spring 2019 Volume 3

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Above: Banquet relief of Zabdibol and family. Palmyra. Second half of 2nd century A.D. (after 148). Purchase, 1902 (02.291).

## Greetings!

It has been an extraordinarily busy year for us in the Department. The most exciting development was the opening in March of our special exhibition, *The World between Empires: Art and Identity in the Ancient Middle East*. The exhibition was brilliantly co-curated by Michael Seymour and Blair Fowlkes-Childs and is accompanied by an excellent and beautiful catalogue as well as an array of interesting programming throughout the run of the show. The press has been overwhelmingly positive, and all of us in ANE could not be more pleased and proud. Many congratulations to Michael and Blair!

In addition, the plans to reimagine and reinstall our permanent galleries have gained serious momentum over the past few months so the entire department is hard at work, together with the Design Department, on a conceptual plan. We are grateful to Yelena Rakic for managing the project and keeping our work on track. Also, I am thrilled to report that the proceeds of this year's *NoRuz at The Met Gala*, in celebration of the Persian New Year, went to our gallery project so we are off to an excellent start and give our heartfelt thanks to the NoRuz at The Met Committee for their very generous support.

As always, the primary work of the Department centers around documenting and caring for our collection and archival materials—an ongoing responsibility that is skillfully and thoughtfully led and guided by various departmental colleagues, in particular Yelena Rakic, Daira Szostak, Anne Dunn-Vaturi, and Henry Colburn. Their efforts and dedication represent exemplary museum practice and will also make the project of re-imagining and renovating our permanent galleries in the near future a much easier and more creative endeavor.

There is a lot more to report so I hope that you enjoy this year's Newsletter and that you continue to join us for events and gatherings throughout the upcoming year!

With my warmest wishes,  
Kim

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THE  
MET

## Now On View

*The World between Empires: Art and  
Identity in the Ancient Middle East*  
Through June 23, 2019

# *The World Between Empires: Art and Identity in the Ancient Middle East*

Co-curated by Michael Seymour and Blair Fowlkes-Childs

March 2019 saw the opening of the Department's new special exhibition, *The World between Empires: Art and Identity in the Ancient Middle East*. The exhibition, held in the Tisch Galleries (Gallery 899) will run through June 23. It examines the period, roughly 100 B.C.–A.D. 250, during which the Roman Empire in the west and the Iranian Parthian Empire in the east competed for control of the Middle East and its trade routes. However, the empires themselves form only the backdrop to the main story: the exhibition's real subject is how the cultural, religious, and even personal identities of people and communities in the region that formed the edge of the two empires were expressed through art.

Following a journey along ancient trade routes across the Middle East, the exhibition begins in southwestern Arabia and their caravan routes famous for spice and incense, moving north through Nabataea, Judea and the Phoenician cities of the eastern Mediterranean coast before crossing east through the Syrian Desert and ending in Mesopotamia, a journey through cities such as Petra, Jerusalem, Sidon, Baalbek, Palmyra, Hatra, and Babylon. The regions and cities through which the show travels each had distinctive traditions but were also deeply interconnected, and their art often reveals the ways in which they influenced one another. Michael Seymour, Assistant Curator, and Blair Fowlkes-Childs, Research Associate, worked together to organize the exhibition, combining their backgrounds in the art of ancient Mesopotamia and of Roman Phoenicia and Syria respectively. In formulating the exhibition's themes and narrative, they drew on scholarship that over the past two decades has transformed our understanding of the Middle East in the Roman and Parthian period, bringing out local perspectives on the culture, religion, and art of multiple communities across the region.

In recent years, there has been substantial damage to several of the iconic archaeological sites featured in the exhibition – including Palmyra and Dura-Europos in Syria and Hatra in Iraq – as well as in Yemen, and to some of the region's most important museums through looting, armed conflict, and deliberate destruction. These events and responses to them are discussed alongside the ancient material, aiming to provide visitors with a sense of how the Middle East's ancient cultural heritage has been affected, and how these events have played a role in ongoing humanitarian crises. Interviews with three archaeologists were filmed for the exhibition and are on view in one of the galleries. Michel Al-Maqdissi, formerly Director of Excavations and Archaeological Studies at the Department of Antiquities of Syria and currently a researcher at the Musée du Louvre in Paris, and Michał Gawlikowski, Professor Emeritus at the University of Warsaw and former director of the Polish Archaeological Mission in Palmyra, provide their perspectives on the situation in Syria and particularly at Palmyra. Zainab Bahrani, Edith Porada Professor of Ancient Near Eastern Art and Archaeology at Columbia University in New York, contextualizes the current situation in Iraq within the context of the last three decades. All offer their thoughts on the significance of the destruction and on current responses, and discuss ideas for the future.



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## The World Between Empires



Left: Video installation still from *Conversations on the Destruction of Cultural Heritage in Iraq and Syria* with Zainab Bahrani, Michel Al-Maqdissi, and Michał Gawlikowski.

Opposite top: Statuette of standing nude goddess. Babylon. 1st century B.C. – 1st century A.D. Musée du Louvre, Paris.

Opposite bottom: Portrait of a Woman holding a spindle and distaff. Palmyra. ca. 50–150 A.D. Purchase, 1901 (01.25.1).

The exhibition depends on extraordinary loans from twenty lenders in the United States, Europe, and the Middle East. In particular, the Department of Antiquities of Jordan, the Lebanese Directorate General of Antiquities, and the Israel Antiquities Authority and Israel Museum, have been critical partners, as have institutions including the Musée du Louvre, the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, the Yale University Art Gallery, and the Cincinnati Art Museum. Other loans come from much closer to home, and we have been fortunate to benefit from the collegiality and generosity of our colleagues in the Department of Greek and Roman Art.

We are also extremely grateful for the generous support of multiple sponsors. The exhibition is made possible by Dorothy and Lewis B. Cullman. Additional support is provided by the Gail and Parker Gilbert Fund and the Ruddock Foundation for the Arts, the Malcolm H. Wiener Foundation, and Douglas Kulick, and the catalogue is made possible by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. The exhibition's accompanying symposium, held on March 28–29 and featuring leading international scholars on the Roman and Parthian Middle East, was supported by the Macaulay Family Foundation, and the Peral Ehrlich Fund helped fund the *MetFridays – The Destruction of Memory* program, held on April 12.

Exhibitions such as this involve colleagues from across the museum, as well as a huge commitment from those in the Department, most especially Daira Szostak and Anne Dunn-Vaturi. Blair and Michael would like to thank Visiting Committee members, Friends, and volunteers in the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art, as well as colleagues in other departments including Exhibitions, Design, Objects Conservation, Textile Conservation, Registrar, Counsel's Office, Imaging, Digital, Education, Watson Library, Buildings, Development, Security, Marketing and External Relations, Merchandising, and Publications and Editorial. All have contributed enormously to *The World between Empires*. Finally, sincere thanks to Dan Weiss, President and CEO, Max Hollein, Director, Quincy Houghton, Deputy Director for Exhibitions, and Kim Benzel, Curator in Charge of ANE, whose constant support and encouragement throughout made this ambitious project possible.

## More ANE at The Met



### *Oliver Beer: Vessel Orchestra*

July 2, 2019 – August 11, 2019  
The Met Breuer, Floor 5

In partnership with the Modern and Contemporary Department, MetLiveArts has commissioned London-based artist, Oliver Beer (b. 1985) to create a site-specific sound installation using various vessels from The Met's encyclopedic collection. Seven of the thirty-two hollow objects selected for the ensemble belong to ANE, including our iconic storage jar decorated with mountain goats from Gallery 402.

*Vessel Orchestra* will debut at The Met Breuer on July 2, 2019, and starting July 3, live performances by a diverse group of musicians will accompany the exhibition.

For more information about programming, please visit:  
<https://www.metmuseum.org/events/programs/met-live-arts/oliver-beer-landing>

The world premiere of *Vessel Orchestra* for The Met Breuer is made possible by Cynthia Hazen Polsky and Leon B. Polsky.

Top: A similar installation by the artist at the Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, London, UK, on view from January 12 – February 16, 2019.

Bottom: Storage jar decorated with mountain goats. Central Iran. ca. 3800–3700 B.C. Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1959 (59.52).





Left: Orthostat relief: winged human-headed lion, Syria, Tell Halaf (ancient Guzana), ca. 9th century B.C., Rogers Fund, 1943 (43.135.4).

Right: Rayyane Tabet, *Orthostates*, 2017 -, charcoal on paper.

## *Rayyane Tabet / Alien Property*

October 30, 2019 – January 18, 2021

Ancient Near Eastern Art, Galleries 400-402

Kim Benzel and Clare Davies, curators

This timely exhibition pioneers a new approach to connecting ancient and contemporary art using four stone reliefs in the Museum's collection from the 9th century BC site of Tell Halaf in Syria and a series of works by Lebanese artist Rayyane Tabet that directly respond to the reliefs. *Alien Property* emphasizes processes of fragmentation and re-unification and links these to both the archaeological remains and the people caught up in the longstanding violence affecting societies in the region. It highlights how cultural artifacts have been leveraged—on the one hand, to draw attention to the plight of people caught up in violence, and on the other, to occlude them from broader political narratives. These entangled histories converge in the story of The Met's connection to Tell Halaf and its artifacts.

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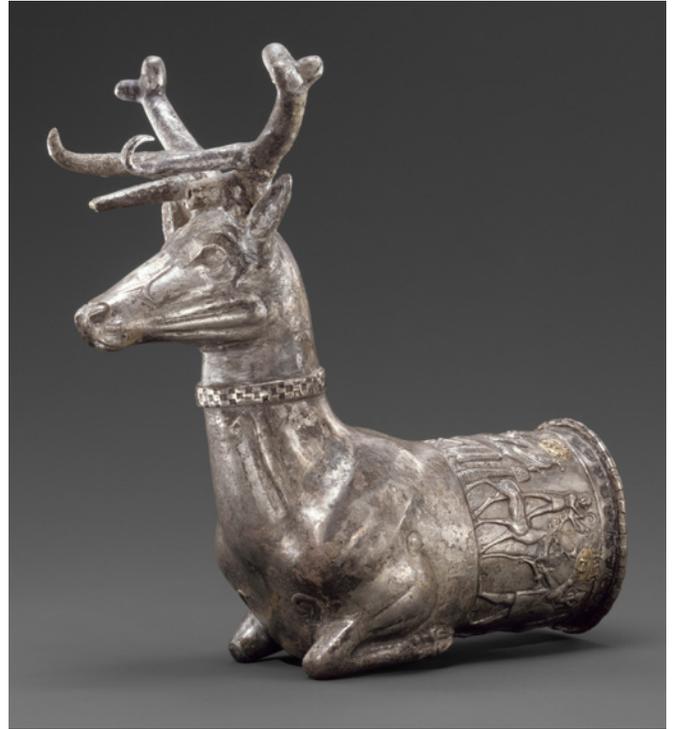
# ANE Collection On The Road

## Musée du Louvre

The Department is lending a significant number of objects to the major loan exhibition, *Forgotten Kingdoms: From the Hittite Empire to the Arameans*, on view at the Musée du Louvre from May 2, 2019 to August 12, 2019. The stag vessel pictured to the right is included in the exhibition, and coincidentally was also the focus of an article by Theo van den Hout in the most recent volume of the Metropolitan Museum Journal (v. 53, 2018). You may download a copy at the following link: [http://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/van\\_den\\_Hout\\_Metropolitan\\_Museum\\_Journal\\_v\\_53\\_2018?Tag=&title=&author=Theo van den Hout&pt=0&tc=0&dept=0&fmt=0](http://www.metmuseum.org/art/metpublications/van_den_Hout_Metropolitan_Museum_Journal_v_53_2018?Tag=&title=&author=Theo%20van%20den%20Hout&pt=0&tc=0&dept=0&fmt=0)

For further information about *Forgotten Kingdoms*, you may visit the Musée du Louvre's exhibition page: <https://www.louvre.fr/en/expositions/forgotten-kingdoms-from-hittite-empire-aramaans>

Right: Vessel terminating in the forepart of a stag. Central Anatolia. ca. 14th–13th century B.C., Gift of Norbert Schimmel Trust, 1989 (1989.281.10).



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## Textile Museum of George Washington University

We will also contribute two stuccoes to an exhibition at the Textile Museum of George Washington University. *Woven Interiors: Furnishing Early Medieval Egypt* will be on view from August 31, 2019 to January 5, 2020.

For more information about the show, please see the exhibition page: <https://museum.gwu.edu/woveninteriors>

Left: Wall decoration with pomegranates in palmettes. Ctesiphon, Mesopotamia. ca. 6th century A.D., Stucco, Rogers Fund, 1932 (32.150.21).

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# Educational and Outreach Initiatives



## From the Northwest Palace to the Northeast US: A Workshop on Assyrian Reliefs in New England and New York (May 17-18, 2019)

Together with Sean Burrus, Mellon Curatorial Fellow at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art (BCMA), Sarah Graff is organizing a workshop in May 2019 on relief panels and fragments from the Northwest Palace at the Assyrian capital of Nimrud in Iraq. These reliefs make up the foundation of the ancient collections in nearly two dozen museums across the northeastern United States. While several previous digital initiatives have made progress in connecting reliefs in far-flung collections, presenting early digital reconstructions, and sharing related resources, much work remains to be done along these lines. The workshop is intended as a first foray into exploring the possibilities of networked and innovative forms and formats for this vast body of research, with the ultimate goal of creating transformative approaches to presenting and sharing information on the Northwest Palace.

The May 2019 workshop will be attended by 25 professionals from northeastern US institutions with Northwest Palace reliefs, including museum curators and academics as well as information scientists and specialists in digital humanities. We anticipate that this will be the first in a series of annual meetings and workshops dedicated to sharing information and ideas on how to study the Northwest Palace reliefs as an ensemble.

ANE's collaboration with Bowdoin is made possible through the generosity of the Ruddock Foundation for the Arts.

Above: Relief panel. Nimrud, Mesopotamia. ca. 883–859 B.C. Gift of John D. Rockefeller Jr., 1932 (32.143.4).

## Johns Hopkins/SAIS Practicum: “Engaging Middle Eastern Diaspora Communities: 10 Takeaways from Innovative Museum Programs in North America and Europe”

During the 2018-2019 academic year, Sarah Graff served as research director to a group of students at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) participating in the SAIS Women Lead Practicum Program. The topic of the practicum, developed by Sarah and the practicum director Dr. Kent Davis-Packard, focuses on surveying and analyzing outreach efforts initiated by museums in western Europe and North America to connect their collections of cultural heritage from the Middle East with members of the Middle East diaspora. The practicum is especially focused on efforts to reach women in this community, who often play pivotal roles in conserving and protecting cultural heritage on an unofficial level. This is the first survey of such programs to be conducted, and the results will be shared with all institutional participants in order to guide the formation of best practices and learn from each others' efforts.



Above: Syrian Empowerment Mentor Retreat, December 2018.

### Syrian Youth Empowerment Mentor Retreat

On December 2, 2018, a group of about 30 members of the group Syrian Youth Empowerment (SYE) held their mentors retreat at The Met. The group supports Syrian students applying to colleges outside of Syria through peer mentoring; this is their third year in existence and their first in-person meeting as a group. The afternoon was dedicated to tours focusing on Syrian cultural heritage in the departments of Medieval, Islamic, and ancient Near Eastern art, led by curators from all three departments. Members of the group reported that the event had strengthened their determination to “navigate our heritage in a more meaningful way” as an integral part of their work facing the substantial challenges confronting their community. We hope that this initial event will lead to greater connectivity with these members of the diaspora and their extensive networks in the future.

The SYE mentor retreat was made possible by the generosity of the Ruddock Foundation for the Arts.

## Educational and Outreach Initiatives



### MetFridays – Met Perspectives: Art and Borders

This program is part of a biweekly series that invites Met curators, researchers and educators to lead timely conversations with objects from across the Museum’s collection, connecting them to current events.

On March 8, three talks surrounding the theme of “Art and Borders” were presented within the context of Ancient Near Eastern, Medieval, and the American Art. From the Ancient Near Eastern perspective, Anne Dunn-Vaturi, the Hagop Kevorkian Research Associate in the ANE department, discussed the Assyrian empire and its Northeastern frontier. The Zagros Mountains are a natural barrier that have traditionally provided the boundary between cultural and political entities. From the ninth century B.C. onward, Assyria expanded its borders far beyond the northern plains. Assyria’s rivalry with Urartu engendered significant preoccupation with the northern Zagros. The relief fragment (pictured below) with two Assyrian soldiers, each leading a horse, walking along the bank of a river, was part of an extensive program depicting foreign military campaigns in the great Southwest Palace at Nineveh. Based on Sennacherib’s annals mentioning the small state of Ukku, potentially loyal to Urartu, this group of reliefs has recently been identified as his fifth campaign to the mountainous region abutting Assyria’s northern border.

Above: Anne Dunn-Vaturi leading a Met Perspectives tour on Art and Borders in the Ancient Near Eastern Art galleries.



Please join us for our upcoming  
Met Perspectives tour and discussion:

#### May 17: Art and Inequality

5:30 – 6:00 pm in Gallery 401, Raymond and Beverly Sackler Gallery for Assyrian Art, Floor 2.

For more information, you may visit: <https://www.metmuseum.org/events/programs/met-tours/met-perspectives>

Above: Relief fragment: cavalrymen along a stream in mountainous terrain. Nineveh, Mesopotamia. ca. 704–681 B.C. Gift of John D. Rockefeller Jr., 1932 (32.143.16).

## Research Initiatives and Partnerships



Above: Archival photographs of the de-installation of the Human-headed winged lion (lamassu), September 10, 1957. The winged lion and bull were on view in the Great Hall at the entrance of the Greek and Roman galleries from 1933 to 1957. According to the Met's Annual Report published in October 1958, "They have now been re-erected in a more suitable location in the two galleries at the extreme north end of the Museum and are being incorporated in an architectural setting in keeping with their character." These galleries were located in the Egyptian wing where a new installation of ancient Near Eastern Art was in preparation to be opened in 1960.

### Research on the History of the ANE Department

This past year Yelena Rakic, Associate Curator, has continued her ongoing research on the history of the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art at the Met and its collection. This spring, she has two opportunities to share this research. On April 24, she gave the annual Yadgar family lecture at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine. Titled, "Collecting the Ancient Near East: Discovery and Display of the Past" this talk explored the history of collecting objects from the Middle East from the nineteenth century onwards. It considered the role of American museums in the formative period of Near Eastern Studies and their persistent relevance into the current day. On May 17, she will participate in a workshop on the reception of ancient Near Eastern art at Northwestern University and the University of Chicago organized by Ann Gunter and Jean Evans. Her presentation will explore the history of the Met's ancient Near Eastern art collection within the context of an ever-expanding encyclopedic museum. Also, Kim Benzel, Curator in Charge, will participate in a round-table discussion of the Ancient Near Eastern gallery renovation plans the following day. They expect this workshop to be a timely opportunity to engage with colleagues on this topic.

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## Research Initiatives and Partnerships

### Provenance Research Exchange Program

Anne Dunn-Vaturi is representing The Met at the German/American Provenance Research Exchange Program (PREP) for museum professionals this year. The cohort met in Dresden (March 17-22) and will meet again in Washington D.C. (October 21-26) to think strategically and collaboratively about WWII-era provenance research in art museums. The primary goal of the program is to create an exchange network of art museum professionals, and of experts in research institutions that support museum work.

Anne wrote a blog about her provenance research, *Looking for Ancient Art Owners*, published this May as part of The Met web feature celebrating the 20th Anniversary of the Washington Principles: <https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/provenance-research-resources>

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### Survey and Excavation at Al-Hiba, Dhi Qar Province, Iraq

We are pleased to report that ANE resumed its collaboration and co-sponsorship of excavations at the site of Tell al-Hiba, ancient Lagash, which includes a survey of the surrounding area. This initiative marks the return to a site that was excavated by Dr. Donald P. Hansen of the IFA/ NYU in partnership with ANE/Met from 1968 through 1990. The current phase of the Al-Hiba project is being carried out by an international team led by Dr. Holly Pittman of the University of Pennsylvania, who has been issued a five-year permit. The first season began on March 1 and ended on April 30, 2019. There was no participation on the part of ANE staff this first year, only financial support given through The Adelaide Milton de Groot Fund, in memory of the de Groot and Hawley families, but we expect that at least one member of the Department will join the Penn team in each of the next four years.

Tell al-Hiba, ancient Lagash, is located 24 km east of Shatra in Dhi Qar Province. The mound measures approximately 3600 m in length by 1900 m in width at its largest extent. The city of Lagash was one of three major cities—Girsu (Telloh), Lagash (Tell al-Hiba), and Niġin (Tell Zurghul)—in the ancient city-state of Lagash. Lagash controlled a fertile countryside that consisted of multiple ecological zones. Additionally, its location at the head of the Persian Gulf allowed it to fully engage with regional trade networks, which brought in metal ores, precious stones, and other materials and products unavailable on the southern alluvium.



Occupation at Tell al-Hiba spans millennia. Ceramics of the Ubaid period from secondary contexts indicate that settlement existed around Tell al-Hiba at least by the fifth millennium BC. Habitation at the site continued during the Uruk, Jemdet Nasr, and Early Dynastic periods. The settled area reached a maximum extent of ca. 600 ha during the second half of the Early Dynastic Period (ca. 2600–2300 BC).

We are extremely excited to be partnering with Penn at a site that occupies such an important place in the history of Iraq, as well as within our Department. Stay tuned for reports and updates!

Above: The administration building in the excavations in Area C at al-Hiba, Iraq, 1970-71.

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## Research Initiatives and Partnerships

Right: Maltai Rock Reliefs. The rock reliefs at Maltai are associated with the northern canal system built by the Assyrian king Sennacherib (r. 704-681 B.C.) to carry water to his capital city Nineveh. Located in remote mountainous area, these reliefs were sculpted into cliffs, some 200 m above the plane level, on the bank of the river Rubar Dohuk, opposite the town of Ma'altaya, about 70 km north of Mosul, in what is today Iraqi Kurdistan © MMM.



## Mapping Mesopotamian Monuments

ANE has made a commitment, beginning next year, to support a different yet timely type of fieldwork—both through funding and through the participation of an ANE staff member. We look forward to partnering with our close colleagues at Columbia University for this project.

*Mapping Mesopotamian Monuments* presents a topographical survey of the standing historical monuments and architecture in the region from Iraqi Kurdistan and Southeastern Anatolia (Turkey) to Southern Iraq. A work in progress, this monument survey covers all historical periods from ancient to modern. It includes ancient Mesopotamian rock reliefs carved into the cliff faces of the mountains, early Christian churches and monasteries, early Islamic, Ottoman and twentieth century architecture and monuments. The ever-growing database of images invites you to explore the multiple layers of the rich historical landscape of Mesopotamia.

Envisioned and directed by Dr. Zainab Bahrani of Columbia University, the basis of the survey is an on-going field project that assesses the condition of monuments, maps their locations and records them with digital techniques in order to provide a record and to facilitate future preservation work across this region. Working with the directorates of antiquities of Iraqi Kurdistan and Baghdad since 2013, the project team has already documented much of the Dohuk, Erbil and Suleymaniyyeh/Sleman regions in Iraqi Kurdistan. They have also worked in several areas in Southeast Turkey, documented monuments in the Diyarbakir regions, and were the last team on site to document Hasankeyf, before the recent flooding of that site that has required relocation of monuments and historical buildings.

One important area of focus of the team's work has been the rock reliefs of Iraqi Kurdistan and Southeastern Turkey, which span the period between the start of the Early Dynastic era, c. 2900 BC, to the Parthian era in the 2nd century AD. The team has studied these sculptures in situ, in the context of the landscape, assessed their conditions and documented them thoroughly.

The MMM team is composed of archaeologists both from Columbia University and colleagues from Iraq, and beginning next year, will include a member of our Department.

MMM's work reaches past the realms of academia, actively seeking to engage people with their heritage while ensuring its conservation for future generations. For more information on the project, visit:

<https://mcid.mcah.columbia.edu/art-atlas/mapping-mesopotamian-monuments>

## Research Initiatives and Partnerships



Above: Hackathon participants hard at work.

### Met x Microsoft x MIT

This past December, The Met teamed up with Microsoft and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) for a two-day hackathon. The objective of the session was to explore and develop ways in which global audiences could interact with The Met's collection by using artificial intelligence (AI).

Over the course of the two days, The Met, Microsoft, and MIT teams convened in small groups to develop design concepts and prototypes. Microsoft contributed its group of engineers and its AI platform, MIT contributed a select group of faculty and students, and The Met contributed curatorial and digital staff as well as researchers.

ANE's own Kim Benzel participated in Gen Studio, a team which focused on developing ways to creatively and visually navigate and interact more deeply with The Met's Open Access collection, while drawing new relationships and perspectives on visual connections between cultures globally and the production of individual artworks.

For more information about the hackathon, you may visit our website: <https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met/policies-and-documents/open-access/met-microsoft-mit>

For additional reading: <https://www.metmuseum.org/blogs/now-at-the-met/2019/artificial-intelligence-machine-learning-art-authorship>

# Fellows

We are thrilled to have three Fellows working in the Department this year, working on a wide range of topics. They presented their research at a Fellows Colloquium held on Friday March 22, 2019, entitled *Bridging Eurasia*. Abstracts can be found at the following link: <https://www.metmuseum.org/-/media/files/events/programs/fellowship-program/colloquia-abstracts>.

## Betty Hensellek

This year Betty Hensellek, the Sylvan C. Coleman and Pam Coleman Memorial Fund Fellow in the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art, continued work on her doctoral dissertation titled “The Age of the Polychrome Kaftan: a Sartorial System of first millennium Central Eurasia.” Her project aims to understand why a novel and unique outer garment was embraced by diverse communities across Central Eurasia in the second half of the first millennium AD. In her first year as a fellow, she completed two chapters making sense of the kaftan’s social function at the banquet and at the hunt respectively. This year she is working towards the completion of a chapter on the kaftan worn in burial. For this chapter she is working closely with colleagues in the department of Textile Conservation to study three kaftans from the northern Caucasus in The Met’s collection. She will travel to regional museums in the northern Caucasus (Russia) in late summer for the study of comparative material.

Another project she is currently working on in collaboration with conservator Jean-François de Lapérouse re-evaluates a Sasanian silver plate (57.51.19) in The Met’s collection. This plate has what she believes are early 20th-century Russian modifications. The aim of this project is to illuminate the multifaceted lives of this object through art historical studies, provenance research, and technical and scientific analyses. Over the summer 2018, she traveled to the State Hermitage Museum as well as museums in the trans-Ural region for further research on this project. She hopes that this research will finally materialize into a co-authored article manuscript by this coming autumn.

This spring Betty joined the museum’s first excavation season at Dandanakan, which is located west of the present-day city of Mary in Turkmenistan. The excavation is co-directed by Martina Rugiadi, associate curator in the department of Islamic Art at The Met, and Paul Wordsworth, a research fellow at the University of Oxford. Dandanakan is most well known as a medieval city, but a region of the site also has earlier Parthian and Sasanian occupation.

Forthcoming publications to appear in 2019 are “Banqueting, Dress and the Idealised Sogdian Merchant” (essay in an edited volume, Oxbow Books); “A Sogdian Drinking Game at Panjikent” (*Iranian Studies*); “Sogdian Fashion” and “Banqueting in Sogdiana” (exhibition essays, Freer[Sackler]).



Top: A detail of an inside lower hem trim on one of the kaftans from the northern Caucasus. ca. 8th century A.D. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1996 (1996.78.1).

Bottom: Betty studying a Sasanian silver hunting plate (Fletcher Fund 1934 (34.33) in the department of Objects Conservation. She is indeed wearing a blouse that she made with the plate’s imagery embroidered on the front.

## Liat Naeh

Liat Naeh, Andrew W. Mellon Fellow, joined the ANE department in January 2019. Liat's work is driven by seeking the idiosyncratic features of Levantine artistic practices and ideology in an age of global exchange, building on her interests in the art, archaeology, and religion of the Bronze and Iron Ages Levant, the greater Mediterranean, and the ancient Near East. In addition, she researches the affinity between Levantine text and image, and the historiography of ancient Near Eastern archaeology and museology. In 2018, she graduated from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, where her PhD dissertation focused on unique bone-inlaid boxes found in southern Levantine elite tombs during the Middle Bronze Age, analyzed as a case study for Egyptian-Levantine cultural connections and the development of local Levantine art. During her PhD studies, Liat was a Visiting Scholar at Columbia University, New York, and Fribourg University, Switzerland. In 2017, her article entitled "In Search for Identity", which revisited Iron Age Levantine ivories, won the Sean W. Dever Memorial Prize for best student paper in the field of Syro-Palestinian or biblical archaeology. Before the Met, Liat held fellowships at the Bard Graduate Center in New York, and the W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research in Jerusalem, and was a visiting lecturer at Leipzig University, Germany.

Currently, Liat is focusing on her book project, *The Ivory Throne of the Levantines*. In ancient Near Eastern and Levantine traditions, thrones were objects that connected the realms of the divine with monarchy on earth. Rather than being a symbolic trope, in the Levant, the act of sitting on a throne was considered performative, transforming gods and mortals into de facto kings. Being at the focal point of the royal audience, thrones were platforms for visual messages conveyed by the ruler – divine and human – to gods, court, subjects, and foreign visitors. Surprisingly, very little information about full-sized thrones exists today, creating a discrepancy in our understanding of local royal ideology and cult practices in the ancient Levant. Now – for the first time – ivory fragments excavated in both past and new archaeological excavations from modern-day Israel and Palestine enable the reconstruction of full-sized ivory thrones used by the Levantines. In many ways, such reconstructions are based on the Met's encyclopedic collections. Chief among these collections are the Ancient Near Eastern Art Department's assemblages of ivories belonging to furniture, including the 2nd millennium BCE Pratt ivories, and the 1st millennium BC ivories from Nimrud and Arslan Tash, which illuminate the materiality and iconography of the Levantine ivory thrones as part of a nuanced, prolonged evolution of local designs throughout the 2nd and 1st millennia BC, set against the backdrop of continuous foreign exchange.

Moreover, Liat's co-edited volume entitled *The Ancient Throne: The Mediterranean, the Near East, and Beyond, 3rd Millennium BCE–14th Century CE* has been accepted for publication by the Austrian Academy of Sciences Press.



Top: Liat studying ivories from Nimrud and Samaria at the Harvard Art Museums this past February.

Bottom: Furniture element carved in the round with the head of a roaring lion, Nimrud, Mesopotamia, ca. 9th–8th century B.C. Rogers Fund, 1962 (62.269.1).

## Henry Colburn

Henry Colburn is the Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellow in Ancient Near Eastern Art. Before coming to the Met in September 2018, he taught at the University of Southern California and the University of California, Irvine, and held fellowships at the Harvard Art Museums and the Getty Research Institute. At Harvard, he worked on the exhibition “Animal-Shaped Vessels in the Ancient World: Drinking with Gods, Heroes, and Kings,” which opened in the fall of 2018 and featured several Met objects (including the rhyton pictured to the left), many of which he discussed in his contribution to the exhibition catalogue.

While at the Met, his primary responsibility is to work towards the reinstallation of the permanent galleries, especially by providing expertise on the ancient Iranian art in the collection. To that end, he has written several new essays for the Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, and has researched objects in the collection ranging from prehistoric pottery to Parthian coins. The results of this research have already appeared in many web labels, and it will play a significant role in the design of the gallery renovations.

In addition to his curatorial work for the department, he has maintained an active research profile. This past year he gave lectures at the Harvard Art Museums (“Achaemenid Persian Silver: Notes on the Fungibility of Meaning”) and the University of California, Irvine (“The Achaemenid Empire and Africa”). He also co-authored an article on the ‘Parthian shot’ motif in Near Eastern and Mediterranean art, from the Urartians to the Romans, and published an entry on the Kharga Oasis in Egypt for the *Encyclopaedia Iranica*. His first book, *Archaeology of Empire in Achaemenid Egypt*, is now in press in the series *Edinburgh Studies in Ancient Persia*.



Top: Rhyton terminating in the forepart of a wildcat. Iran. ca. 1st century B.C. Purchase, Rogers Fund; Enid A. Haupt, Mrs. Donald M. Oenslager, Mrs. Muriel Palitz and Geert C. E. Prins Gifts; Pauline V. Fullerton Bequest; and Bequests of Mary Cushing Fosburgh, Edward C. Moore and Stephen Whitney Phoenix, by exchange, 1979 (1979.447a, b).

Middle: Jar with geometric designs. Central Iran. ca. 5300-4300 B.C. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Lester Wolfe, 1960 (60.61.3).

Bottom: Drachm. Iran, ca. A.D. 78-110, Bequest of Joseph H. Durkee, 1898 (99.35.2960).

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## Staff Picks

As a way to become acquainted with some of the ANE staff, they discuss their personal affinities with works from our collections in this new newsletter feature.

### Man and dog

Lea St-Arnaud-Boffa, Associate for Administration

As I explored gallery 406, an intriguing miniature caught my eye. Measuring 2 3/4 inches tall, the figurine depicts a bearded man with his arm around a canine companion seated beside him. Despite the familiar and relatable scene portrayed, this object also raises many curiosities: Why would one chose to create this small figurine? Who is the man? Who is the dog? Might this have been an object used for protection, worship, or a child's toy?

Contrary to my first impressions, the figure is not carved of stone or made of clay, but cast in bronze, which indicates that this was an object of great importance and its maker intended it to be well preserved. Although we are not entirely sure how the Mesopotamians would have cast such a bronze figurine, their technique may not have been much different that the lost-wax technique sculptors still use today. Upon further research, I discovered that the symbol of the dog appears in many Babylonian stamp seals, and most likely represents the deity Gula, the goddess of healing.

The iconography of the goddess of healing as a dog figure makes perfect sense to me. We know that pets, and especially dogs, produce in humans many health benefits, one of which is the release of oxytocin, colloquially referred to as the love or cuddle hormone. As I continue to learn about the art of the ancient Near East, I will keep a curious eye out for other canine figures and their interactions with humans.



Above: Man and dog. Mesopotamia. 7th century – 6th century B.C. Rogers Fund, 1939 (39.30).



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### Bowl

Daira Szostak, Collections Specialist

As a Collections Specialist, one would expect me to know the departmental holdings pretty well, but on occasion I make an excellent discovery in our department's own storeroom. I owe my most recent find to Henry [Colburn, Mellon Curatorial Fellow]. He submitted a request to look at ceramic pieces, and one was a bowl from late 1st millennium Iran (66.205.2). It is stored on its rim, and upon flipping it, I was totally captivated by the design within the interior. It depicts a rider on horseback, seated in reverse, drawing his bow backwards while practicing the famed "Parthian shot."

Left: Bowl. Northwestern Iran. ca. late 1st millennium B.C. Gift of Mehdi Mahboubian, 1966 (66.205.2).



Left to Right: Furniture support: female sphinx with Hathor-style curls. Anatolia, probably from Acemhöyük. ca. 18th century B.C. Gift of George D. Pratt, 1932 (32.161.46).

Furniture support: female sphinx with Hathor-style curls. Anatolia, probably from Acemhöyük. ca. 18th century B.C. Gift of Mrs. George D. Pratt, in memory of George D. Pratt, 1936 (36.70.8).

Furniture support: female sphinx with Hathor-style curls. Anatolia, probably from Acemhöyük. ca. 18th century B.C. Gift of George D. Pratt, 1932 (32.161.47).

Furniture support: female sphinx with Hathor-style curls. Anatolia, probably from Acemhöyük. ca. 18th century B.C. Gift of Mrs. George D. Pratt, in memory of George D. Pratt, 1936 (36.70.1).

## Pratt Ivories

Liat Naeh, Andrew W. Mellon Fellow

Among my most-beloved treasures of the Ancient Near Eastern galleries are these four brightly colored and gilt sphinxes, made of ivory. Reconstructed by Elizabeth Simpson as an ivory throne, we assume the sphinxes were functional, rather than sculptures per-se. Yet, in our galleries, they are transformed into objects of fascination, arresting with their multiple, near identical, mirroring reflections. Their individual biographies come to light only through careful observation: the differences in their coloration, which may have been altered by each sphinx's archaeological context; the minute idiosyncrasies of their four sets of blank eyes, once inlaid, and ever-so-slightly variations of their four Mona Lisa-like smiles. True sphinxes, they have guarded their secrets for many years: being part of the Pratt collection, not much was known about their origins. This changed, however, as scientific excavations suggested that they hail from the 18th century B.C. palace of Acemhöyük, Anatolia, and with that questions emerged about how they had made their way to The Met.

# About the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art

The Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art presents works of art from around 8000 B.C. to the advent of Islam in the seventh century A.D. and from across the entire Middle East, Iran, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. We are passionate about the culture of this vital and vibrant region of the world and work to promote and to preserve its foundational and irreplaceable heritage.

In addition to its staff, the Department benefits from the expertise of visiting research and curatorial Fellows and a dedicated team of volunteer guides, as well as the invaluable support and guidance of its Visiting Committee and the Friends of Ancient Near Eastern Art and Ishtar Society members.

It is a challenging time for our field both in the United States and in the Middle East. We are deeply grateful to our community and to all who support and promote the art and culture of the ancient Near East. This work has never been more important.

Below: Department of Ancient Near East staff, December 2018. Photo Credit: Monica Eisner.



## Staff

Kim Benzel, *Curator in Charge*  
Sarah Graff, *Associate Curator*  
Yelena Rakic, *Associate Curator*  
Michael Seymour, *Assistant Curator*  
Anne Dunn-Vaturi, *Hagop Kevorkian Research Associate*  
Blair Fowlkes-Childs, *Research Associate*  
Daira Szostak, *Collections Specialist*  
Shawn Osborne, *Principal Departmental Technician*  
Monica Eisner, *Assistant Administrator*  
Lea St-Arnaud-Boffa, *Associate for Administration*

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### **Membership & Contact Information**

For information regarding upcoming programming,  
or to recommend someone to join The Friends of  
Ancient Near Eastern Art, please contact:  
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