
Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art Newsletter

Spring 2020 Volume 4



Department of Ancient Near
Eastern Art Staff and Fellows,
February 2020.
Photo by Eileen Travell

Greetings from all of us in the Department, along with our fervent hopes that you and your families are healthy and safe. Since our last newsletter, the world has changed immeasurably. Despite the uncertainty that marks this moment (or perhaps because of it), we decided that it is important to maintain as much normalcy as is possible. This includes staying connected with you, as well as continuing to keep you informed of our activities as we forge ahead to the future.

As I write this, I am feeling extremely proud that 2019 was such an extraordinary year for us in ANE, the highlights of which you can read about in the pages ahead. I am ever grateful to my colleagues in the Department for their brilliance and dedication and thus feel all the sadder that we cannot be physically together at work as usual. However, we are continuing our work from home and are managing to be surprisingly productive, as you can see by our weekly Digital Dispatches and the recent Curator's Cut. New ideas for a new reality!

While you will get a good sense from this Newsletter of what had been happening in the Department up until COVID-19 struck, the one project that we had hoped to report about in more and more detail over the next several months is the reimagining and renovation of our permanent galleries. A feasibility study was conducted last summer and completed in the fall by the architectural firm of Cooper Robertson, and we recently presented our conceptual approach to Max Hollein, our Director, and Andrea Bayer, our Deputy Director, both of whom were extremely enthusiastic and encouraging. We just got the good news that the gallery project might remain on the books, albeit with a reduced scope and budget and on a delayed timetable. We are hopeful that we will be able to move forward and will keep you updated when we know more about what lies ahead for all of us at The Met.

In the meantime, please stay safe and know that you are in our thoughts. With our warmest wishes,
Kim

THE
MET 150

Community Outreach Initiatives

by Sarah Graff

Museums are powerful forces in creating culture. To borrow a phrase from the leaders of the Berlin Museum for Islamic Art's visionary program *Multaka: Museum as Meeting Point*, "museums are places of memory where past and present meet." Since December 2016, it has been an increasingly important focus of the Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art to identify and develop outreach and engagement initiatives in response to the urgent geopolitical crises affecting the Middle East. I have been primarily responsible for these initiatives under Kim Benzel's leadership and with Lea St-Arnaud-Boffa's assistance, along with the early and steadfast support of Sue Evans. I have identified the following goals for these initiatives:

1. activating the collection through multiple perspectives, including those not often found at The Met;
2. connecting people with art that is meaningful for their identities;
3. building bridges to The Met for diverse communities in the New York area, in order to develop the museum as a shared public space.

While these are visitor-focused principles, the outcome of these interactions is also of great benefit to the curatorial work of the ANE department. On a fundamental level, engaging with a larger discourse outside our own department revitalizes our work and ensures it remains culturally significant. Engagement is not simply outward-focused—meaning, engaging visitors in our collections—but also reciprocal. As curators, we also engage with the world beyond the museum, where the objects in our collection serve important functions and take on new lives. We have learned a great deal from this work already, much of which is directly relevant to the planned renovation and reinstallation of the permanent galleries.

Jewish Community Outreach: FreiMet

While religious Christian groups are among the most frequent visitors to the galleries of ancient Near Eastern art, the same cannot be said for Jewish groups despite close cultural connections to the region. Since spring 2018, I have been collaborating with Gene Steinberg, Executive Director of Freidom (formerly Off The Derech Meetup/OTD Meetup), a social group comprised of former members of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community in the NYC area, in a program called FreiMet. Members of the group attend weekend tours led by myself, during which they explore themes connected with the Hebrew Bible through objects in the ANE collection. Freidom members have made remarkable connections between the culture in which they were raised and the ancient past and have developed new confidence through sharing their cultural knowledge in the space of the galleries. As FreiMet continues, I will work with the group to develop pathways for sharing their perspectives, which bear witness to the survival of tradition and the complexity of change and adaptation.

During the period in which The Met is closed, FreiMet gatherings will be held using private online platforms. The first online meeting took place in late March. We held a lively discussion on cylinder seals, using Yelena Rakic's 82nd & Fifth web feature on an Akkadian cylinder seal as a starting point from which to explore the balance between order and chaos depicted on the seal.

Workshop for Syrian Youth

Young people experiencing displacement frequently serve as the bridge between their elders and the culture of their new home. On April 17, 2018, a group of young people from Syria who have recently resettled in New Haven visited the museum with their mentor, the artist Mohamad Hafez. The group enjoyed tours of the ANE and Islamic galleries, followed by a lunch and career roundtable, and finishing with an art-making workshop. None of the young visitors had come to The Met before, and all were surprised to find the art of Syria—both ancient and more recent—so well represented in our collection. Many were eager to come back, and to bring their families with them. Additional workshops for displaced young people would deepen and extend the bridges between The Met and their communities, and ideally would also provide opportunities for these young people to connect with others in similar situations.

Below: Students visited the galleries for a tour and discussion during the day-long workshop.



Intertwined Journeys: Narratio Fellows at The Metropolitan Museum of Art

In collaboration with Ahmed Badr of Narratio, Professor Brice Nordquist of Syracuse University, and the Northside Learning Center, in Syracuse, NY, The Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art hosted an afternoon of storytelling last July. The storytellers were the inaugural cohort of Narratio Fellows, resettled refugee writers and artists from across the world between the ages of 17 and 21. Drawing inspiration and provocation from objects in The Met's collection, Fellows engaged in questions of belonging, displacement, ownership, and preservation through poetry. The fellowship concluded with a celebration of the deep-rooted connections between art and humanity, at which the Fellows recited their poems in the grand space of the Assyrian Relief Court in front of a packed and enthusiastic audience of invited guests and museum visitors.

On the morning of July 30, 2019, we greeted the Narratio Fellows on the iconic steps of the Met. It was for many their first time visiting the museum.

With the generous help of our colleagues Darcy-Tell Morales and Elizabeth Perkins in Education, we began the visit with an icebreaker activity in the Assyrian Relief Court as a way to get to know each other, but also to become more familiar with the grandiose space in which they would be performing the following day.

An exhibition of photographs documenting the Fellows' work was on view at Syracuse University's Community Folk Art Center in January 2020. Here at The Met, we hope to display special labels in the permanent galleries with excerpts from the Fellows' reflections and links to audio performances of their poems. By maintaining the connection between the Fellows and their objects, perspectives presented in our galleries.

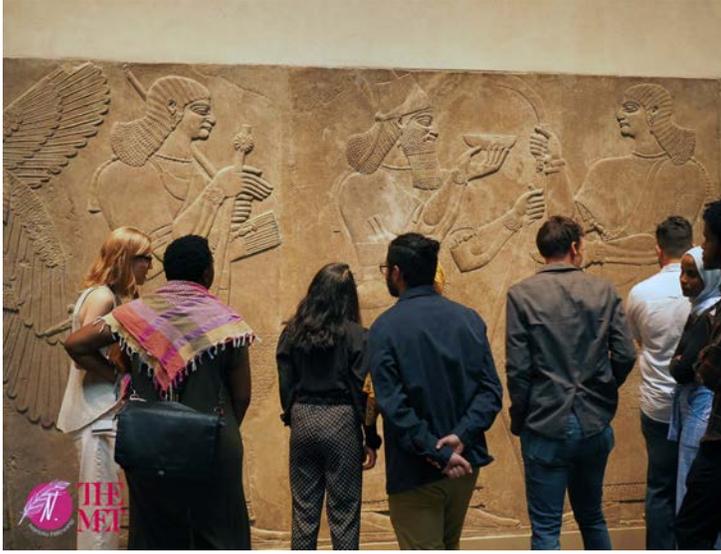
During the pandemic crisis, we are working to create an online feature bringing together recordings of the Fellows reciting their poems with images of the objects they chose, along with photos from the summer 2019 event.



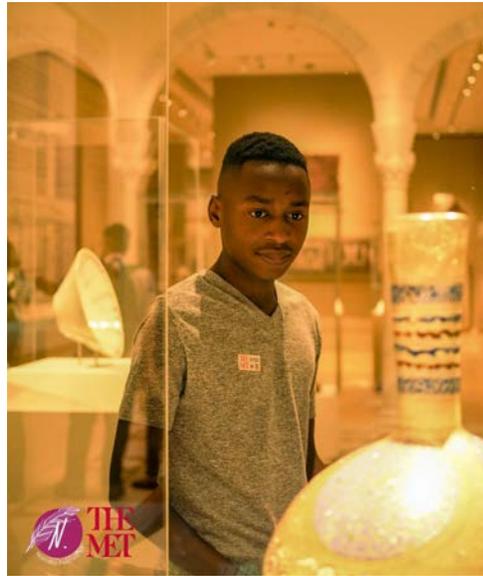
Pictured, from top left to right: Adiba Alam, Eid Ahmed, Brice Nordquist, Gemma Cooper-Novack, Elang Basadi, Istarlin Dafe, Nurallah Alawsaj, Ahmed Badr, Jamal Oromo, Abshir Habseme, Ibraheem Abdi, and Muhammad Musaab. The Fellows not pictured are Nidaa Aljabbarin, Fidaa Aljabbarin, and Khadija Mohamed.

All photos in this section are by Edward Grattan.

Community Outreach Initiatives



The Fellows learning about the Assyrian reliefs during the first visit to the Museum.



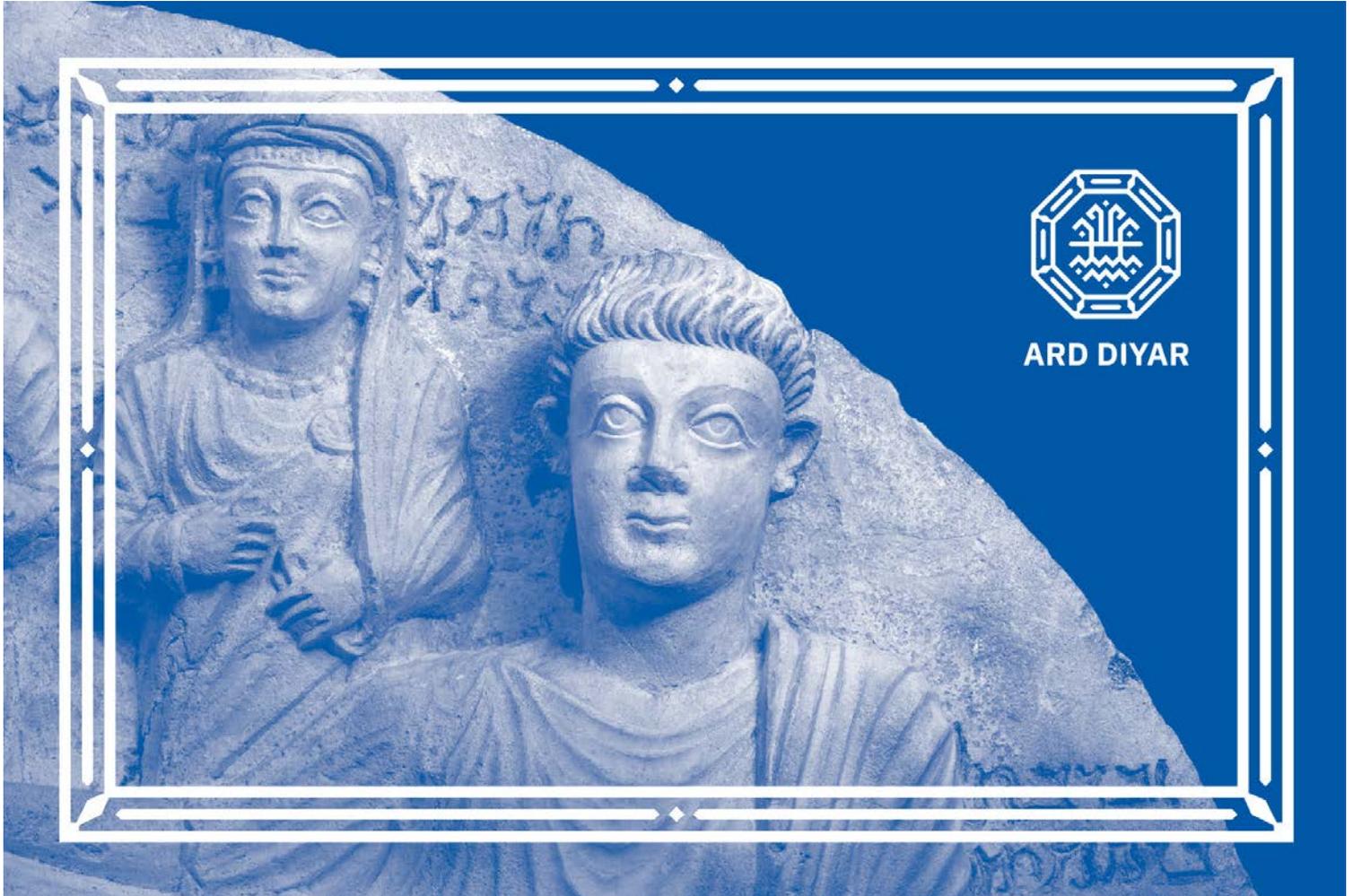
Left: Fellow Khadija Mohamed admiring the object that inspired her spoken word performance in the ANE galleries. Right: Fellow Abshir Habseme observing a glass vessel during a tour led by Courtney Stewart, Senior Research Assistant, Islamic Art.



Narratio founder Ahmed Badr giving opening remarks and introducing the Fellows.

Ard Diyar

Design by Starting Now.



Ard Diyar, “the courtyard,” is a reference to the gathering place within the historic houses of cities like Aleppo and Damascus, where guests are welcomed, and families come together. Co-founded with humanitarian activist George Batah, Ard Diyar presents a series of invitation-only events hosted at The Met on a regular basis to explore specific topics in cultural heritage with members of Middle Eastern diaspora communities in the New York area. At the start of the event, guests visit the galleries for ancient Near Eastern art to see a particular area of the collection, which forms the basis for the discussion that follows. After moving to a classroom space, a dialogue between two speakers sets the stage for a larger discussion.

The first Ard Diyar event, held on November 20, 2019, focused on questions of identity around the historical figure of Zenobia, queen of Palmyra, and Palmyra itself, which was a culturally distinctive city that unfortunately rose to prominence

recently through the violent destruction of its ancient monuments in 2014. In the discussion, participants spoke honestly about their struggles and conflicts related to defining their identities. A recurring theme was the appreciation for heritage that only comes after one has lost that original connection, taken for granted by those still living in their homelands. However, the other side of the coin is the creative resilience engendered by the experience of diaspora, in which cultural heritage, such as that held in the collections of ancient Middle Eastern art at The Met, can play a role in rebuilding identities and communities. The overwhelmingly positive response to the first Ard Diyar event suggests an urgent need for this engagement work. We look forward to continuing with future gatherings when abatement of the pandemic crisis allows for in-person meetings. In the meantime, we will host an online happy hour event to stay in touch with the group.

ANE at The Met

Please note: While The Met is temporarily closed to help fight the spread of COVID-19, all events and programming are canceled through July 1, 2020. As a result, the events listed below are postponed. Some events have already been rescheduled; we will provide updates on others as soon as they become available.

Making The Met

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

At the center of the programming surrounding the 150th anniversary of the Museum is *Making the Met, 1870–2020*, a major exhibition using objects from the collection to explore the museum’s history from its foundation to the present day. The exhibition is a unique collaborative project that draws on collections and expertise from across the entire museum, and we are delighted that Ancient Near Eastern Art is represented in three of its sections. Two gold belt buckles feature in a “*Kunstkammer*” installation that focuses on J. Pierpont Morgan as an important collector and donor of the early twentieth century. A section titled “Collecting through Excavation” contains ancient Near Eastern objects from several excavations including ivories from Nimrud, stuccoes from Ctesiphon, and stone sculpture from Nippur, alongside excavated material from four other curatorial departments. Finally, two of The Met’s four reliefs from Tell Halaf have moved from the *Rayyane Tabet / Alien Property* exhibition to appear in a section devoted to the museum’s activities during World War II.

Making the Met, 1870–2020 was scheduled to open March 30 to August 2, 2020 but will be postponed and extended accordingly once the Museum reopens.

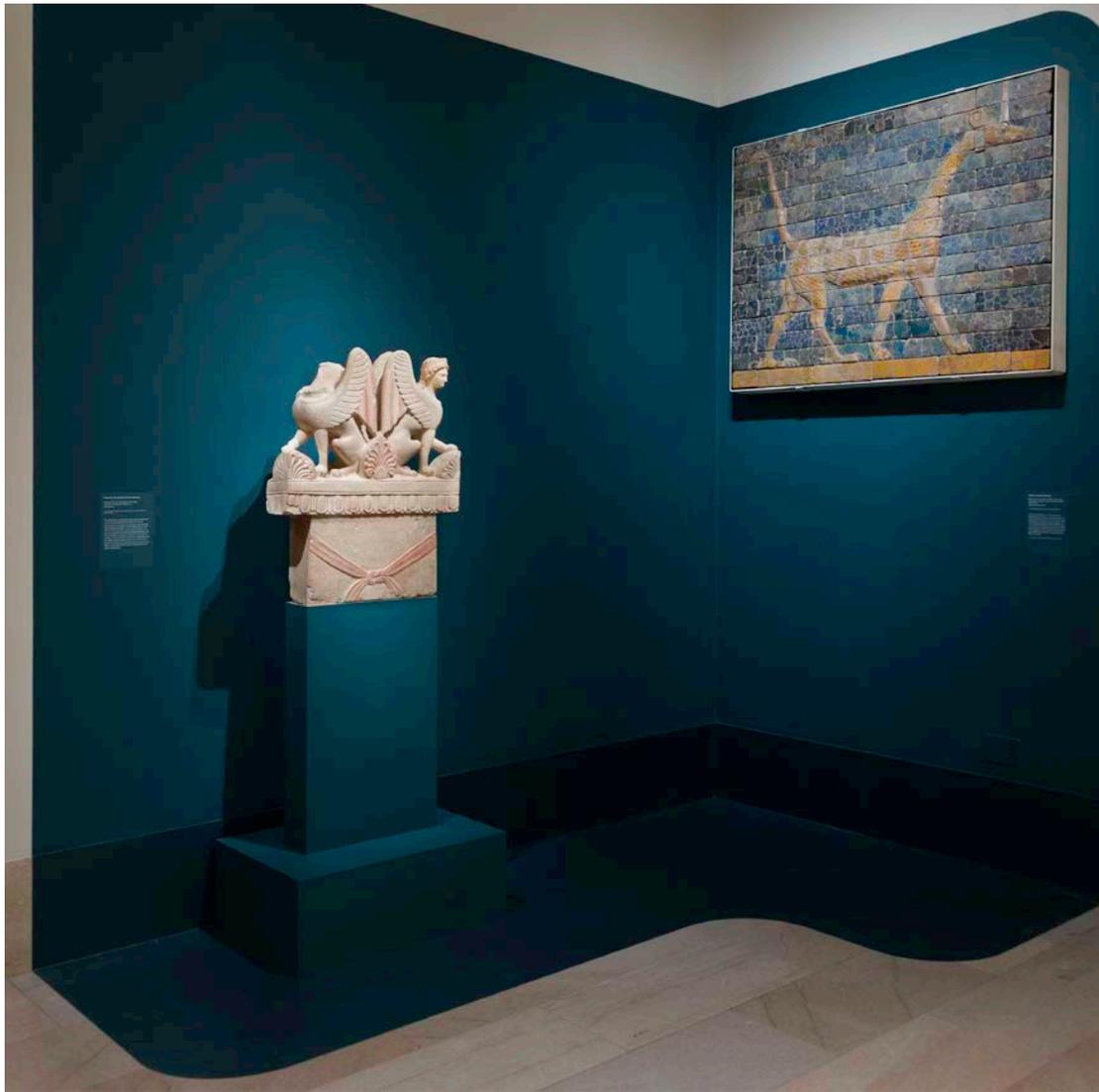


MetFest Symposium: Shifting Perspectives on Art and Museums

Yelena Rakic will be participating in an event highlighting the Met’s 150th anniversary, the symposium “Shifting Perspectives on Art and Museums.” Intended to reflect on the museum’s first 150 years and its way forward, the symposium will consist of six papers presented by Met curators and conservators with guest experts moderating discussions. Topics will focus on how global currents in art history shaped The Met, how the Museum’s understanding of art shifted throughout its history, and how it has played a vital role in making art and culture available to the public. Yelena’s paper is titled *Collecting the Ancient Near East*.

“Shifting Perspectives on Art and Museums” was originally scheduled to take place on Friday, June 5, 2020, as part of the Met’s 150th Anniversary Celebratory Weekend, but is being rescheduled.

Belt adornment with an eagle and its prey, Central Asia (Parthian or Kushan), ca. 1st–2nd century A.D., Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917 (17.190.2055).



View of the *Crossroads: Mythical Beasts* installation featuring the Panel with *mushhushshu* dragon, Mesopotamia, Babylon (modern Hillah), ca. 604–562 B.C., lent by the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin, VA Bab 4757 (L.1995.48.1). © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Crossroads

The ANE Department is participating in *Crossroads*, a series of three exhibitions connecting multiple departments within The Met that opened on March 5, 2020. At three prominent locations within the Museum—“crossroads” where major paths intersect—new installations examine the idea of cultural interconnectedness. An installation titled *Mythical Beasts* in the space where ANE, Islamic, and Cypriot galleries converge brings together four fantastic creatures from these three collections. Their forms represent the syntheses of motifs from distant and divergent sources with meanings that evolved as they traveled. On view to represent the powerful monsters of the ANE is the molded glazed brick panel from the Ishtar Gate in Babylon, which shows a *mushhushshu* dragon, on long-term loan from the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin. We are deeply grateful to our colleagues in Berlin, especially Nadja Cholidis, Lutz Martin, and Sonja Radjukovic, for making it possible to include this iconic object in the installation, and equally thankful to Barbara Damgard Cates for her generous support of the project. *Mythical Beasts* will be on view throughout The Met’s 150th anniversary.

Praise for *The World Between Empires*



Statuette of standing nude goddess,
Mesopotamia, Babylon,
1st century B.C.–1st century A.D.,
Musée du Louvre, Paris, AO 20127.

In last year’s ANE Newsletter, we featured our major international exhibition, *The World Between Empires: Art and Identity in the Ancient Middle East*, curated by Michael Seymour and Blair Fowlkes-Childs. Below are some of the consistently enthusiastic press highlights that came in after the Newsletter was sent out, including the milestone that Holland Cotter included the exhibition in his Best of 2019 list. Congratulations once again to Michael and Blair!

Following a very positive public and critical reception at the time of the exhibition, we are delighted that *The World between Empires* was named in 2019 year-end lists by both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. For the *New York Times*, Holland Cotter wrote, “The most innovative historical show I saw last season . . . It took the classic ancient-art-survey model . . . and filtered it through 21st-century realities. Several of the sites considered — Palmyra and Dura-Europos in Syria, Hatra in Iraq — have in recent years been subject to campaigns of ideology-driven destruction, disasters that the show addressed directly and throughout.” For the *Washington Post*, Philip Kennicott wrote that the exhibition “was fundamentally a lesson in mental geography . . . creating a rich picture of cultural exchange and aesthetic diversity. But its larger lesson was about the habitual mental map many Westerners carry of this region, as a middle space, trapped between larger historical forces. In fact, there was nothing peripheral about these lands, and this exhilarating show made it clear that while Rome was a cultural center, it was by no means the sole author of art and history in this part of the globe.”



Rayyane Tabet performing “Dear Victoria” during the *Rayyane Tabet / Alien Property* exhibition Press Preview on October 30, 2019. Photo by Madison Voelkel / BFA.com.

Praise for *Rayyane Tabet / Alien Property*

Towards the end of 2019, we also opened a smaller exhibition, installed within our permanent galleries, titled *Rayyane Tabet / Alien Property*, which made *Hyperallergic*’s Best of 2019 list. A collaboration between Kim Benzel of ANE, Clare Davies of Modern & Contemporary Art, and the artist Rayyane Tabet, the exhibition will be on view through January 2021, and perhaps beyond that due to The Met’s COVID-19 current closure. It features approximately 20 works of art, including Tabet’s charcoal rubbings of the ancient reliefs; four of the ancient reliefs themselves that are part of The Met collection; Tabet’s 2017 work *Genealogy*; the famed Neo-Hittite “Venus” unearthed at Tell Halaf and on loan from the Pergamon Museum in Berlin; and archival material drawn from both the artist’s personal possessions and The Met’s archives. Presented together, these works, and related materials, illuminate how cultural artifacts have helped expose audiences to the richness of the ancient world, as well as having been leveraged either to draw attention to the plight of people caught up in cycles of violence or to exclude them from broader political narratives. The exhibition will ultimately ask viewers to consider these entangled, complex histories in relation to present-day conversations about the evolving role of encyclopedic museums. Tabet’s series of charcoal rubbings, *Orthostates 2017-ongoing*, were acquired by The Met on the occasion of the exhibition (for more on this work, see *Acquisitions* sections below).

“What makes this exhibition really special is the personal history woven into the tale, demonstrating that history from Syria, and elsewhere, is often treated as a detached form of knowledge gathering by foreigners, but the realities are more complicated, sometimes sinister, and almost always less philanthropic than they’re presented to be.” Hrag Vartanian, *Hyperallergic* (Best of 2019)

ANE at The Met

“With its intimations of an ancient-to-contemporary dialogue; its continual movements from flat to relief to fully sculptural work; and its many doubles, decoys, red herrings, and temptations to jump to the wrong conclusions . . . [the] exhibition, while cogent, is also complex, polyvocal, and deeply striated, like history itself. Both literally and conceptually, there are numerous ways into the exhibition. Many of the interconnections among objects and narratives are up to viewers to discover on their own. But to the great credit of Tabet, Benzel, and Davies, ‘Alien Property’ does not shy away from proposing ideas, pursuing arguments, or taking positions. The notion that archaeological objects are safer in Western museums is false, as it was for the seated figure and several of the orthostats. Art history must be reconfigured, treated not as a fixed body of knowledge but as a set of narratives in flux.” Kaelen Wilson-Goldie, *Art Forum*

“The core of this fascinating show, [. . .] is not the artifacts, it’s the artist’s inventive partial reconstruction of the frieze. Charcoal rubbings of thirty-two carvings (housed in Paris, Baltimore, Berlin, as well as in New York) are arranged to represent their original placement on the palace exterior. These rough, dark imprints render the imagery—of mythological creatures, hunters, and trees—shadowy and semi-abstract, an apt visual metaphor for the frieze’s history and the mystery of its missing elements.” Johanna Fateman, *New Yorker*



Rayyane Tabet, Kim Benzel, and Clare Davies at the Rayyane Tabet / Alien Property exhibition opening reception on October 30, 2019. Photo by Madison Voelkel / BFA.com.

Acquisitions

Persian Travelogue: A Diary of a Journey through the Region of Fars

In 2019, our Department acquired an illustrated Persian manuscript, written in the 1830s. It is thus much newer than the vast majority of the objects in our collection, yet it is also an important addition to our collection, both because it allows us to display monuments and rock reliefs in Iran in our galleries, and because it shows how nineteenth century Persians saw the remains of the ancient past.

The manuscript recounts a journey taken by Louise de la Marnierre, the French tutor to the Qajar princes, through south-western Iran. Accompanied by a scribe, an artist and a donkey, she visited the Achaemenid and Sasanian sites of the region, with a view towards documenting them for a Persian audience. The result is a fascinating, sometimes uncanny document, whose depths we have only begun to plumb.

We currently have two major goals for the manuscript. The first is to integrate it into the design of our new galleries. This is a bit of a challenge, since every illustration would enhance our galleries in important ways, but we can only display one at a time. Thus, we need to determine where and how it will be most valuable.

The second goal is to publish the manuscript in a book that gives the interested reader everything they need to understand and appreciate this unique object, as well as make it available to scholars. To that end, we have assembled a team of experts to study and publish the manuscript, including Maryam Ekhtiar (curator of Islamic art at The Met), Betty Hensellek (a history of art graduate student at Cornell and former Sylvan C. Coleman and Pam Coleman Memorial Fund Fellow at The Met), Navid Zarrinal (a graduate student in Iranian studies at Columbia), Anne Dunn-Vaturi (our provenance researcher in the Ancient Near Eastern department) and Henry Colburn (Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellow).

Photography of the entire manuscript, including the covers and flyleaves, was completed in the fall. Navid is currently at work on the translation, and Betty and Henry are studying the illustrations. Maryam, who discovered the identity of Madame de la Marnierre very early in the project, has been studying the historical background of the manuscript. She has also found a second copy of the manuscript, without illustrations, in the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris, which we believe may be a draft of ours. She is currently investigating the connection between them. Our hope is for the manuscript to be published in time for the opening of our redesigned galleries.

We were able to acquire this unique and wonderful object through the generosity and support of the Friends of Ancient Near Eastern Art and The Ishtar Society, to whom we are extremely grateful.



Persian Travelogue: A Diary of a Journey through the region of Fars, Iran, A.D., 1838, Purchase, Friends of Ancient Near Eastern Art and The Ishtar Society Gifts, 2019 (2019.116).



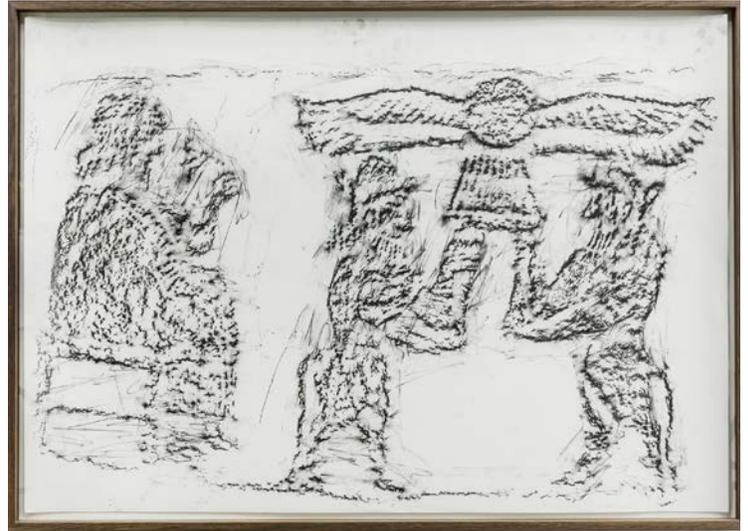
Rayyane Tabet's *Orthostates*

Orthostates is composed of 32 charcoal rubbings made by the artist from the basalt fragments of a 10th-9th century B.C. Neo-Hittite frieze. The original ancient orthostats, or stone reliefs, depict scenes of flora and fauna, everyday life and mythical beings. They belong to a larger series of 194 basalt and limestone orthostats uncovered in 1911 at the site of Tell Halaf in today's Syria by Baron Max von Oppenheim. Segments of the frieze have since been lost, destroyed, or dispersed across Syria, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States; four of the ancient stone orthostats belong to The Met and are displayed in the Ancient Near East galleries.

This sequence of charcoal rubbings represents the artist's quixotic efforts at re-uniting and re-staging the frieze. Ultimately, Tabet's efforts are not directed at creating a copy or substitute that possesses the completeness and coherence of the original frieze. Instead, his mission lies in assembling the combination of (positive) impressions and (negative) absences that constitute its present-day existence.

For now, *Orthostates* remains an open-ended piece. In keeping with the work's conceptual underpinnings; the series may be expanded in the future to include rubbings made of orthostats in the British Museum, as well as museums in Aleppo and Deir ez-Zor, Syria.

The acquisition represents the first joint acquisition between the Departments of Ancient Near Eastern Art and Modern & Contemporary Art. We are exceedingly thankful to our VC member, Friend, and Volunteer Josephine Berger-Nadler and to the estate of Hernie Jo Barth for making it possible for us to acquire Tabet's work.



Installation view of Rayyane Tabet's *Orthostates* in Gallery 402.
© The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Rayyane Tabet, *Orthostates*, 2017–ongoing [*Orthostat #170a*], Purchase, Bequest of Henrie Jo Barth and Josephine Lois Berger-Nadler Endowment Fund, 2019 (2019.288.1-32; full series).

ANE on the Road



A Wonder to Behold at the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World

A Wonder to Behold: Craftsmanship and the Creation of Babylon's Ishtar Gate opened at ISAW on November 6, 2019. The Department lent 8 objects to the exhibition, including one of our Babylonian lion panels, which is featured in promotional material and graces the cover of the catalogue.

To find out more about the show, please visit:

<https://isaw.nyu.edu/exhibitions/ishtar-gate>

Panel with Striding Lion, Mesopotamia, excavated at Babylon (modern Hillah), 604-562 B.C., Fletcher Fund, 1931 (31.13.2).

Furusiyya at the Louvre Abu Dhabi

The Department lent our Sasanian plate depicting the king hunting rams to the Louvre Abu Dhabi for their show titled *Furusiyya: The Art of Chivalry between East and West*.

For further details about this exhibition, please visit:

<https://www.louvreabudhabi.ae/en/Explore/exhibitions/furusiyya-the-art-of-chivalry-between-east-and-west>



Plate with king hunting rams, Iran, said to be from Qazvin, ca. 5th-6th century A.D., Fletcher Fund, 1934 (34.33).



Mesopotamia: Civilization Begins at The Getty Villa

The Getty opened *Mesopotamia: Civilization Begins* on March 18th. The show features three highlight objects from our collection: the other Babylonian lion panel, a sculpture of Gudea, and the bronze head of a ruler.

For more information, please visit:

<https://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/mesopotamia>

Panel with Striding Lion, Mesopotamia, excavated at Babylon (modern Hillah), 604-562 B.C., Fletcher Fund, 1931 (31.13.1).

Friends of Ancient Near Eastern Art Paris Trip, Summer 2019



During this time of isolation, we are reminded of what a privilege it is to travel and recall our intimate Friends and Visiting Committee excursions last June to Paris—a trip that will not be forgotten. Highlights included: a visit to Louvre Lens, the Louvre Museum’s exquisite satellite located near the border with Belgium; a tour of l’Institut du Monde Arabe followed by a Moroccan lunch at Restaurant Le Ziryab, located atop the institute; a curator-led overview of the Louvre’s exhibition *Forgotten Kingdoms: From the Hittite Empire to the Arameans*, followed by a closed, private gallery tour of the permanent Near Eastern Antiquities galleries led by our treasured colleague Ariane Thomas; and cocktails in the garden at the home of his highness, Prince Ayn Aga Kahn. Delicious wine and company were enjoyed throughout!

The Department had hoped to plan a trip to London this coming October for the opening of the V&A exhibition *Epic Iran*, but we will monitor the current environment to see if that trip is possible. Regardless of the short term, we look forward to planning more Department of Ancient Near Eastern Art adventures for you and our supporters in the future!



Top to bottom: Above from Left: Matt Quam, Ina Sarikhani, Marielle Pic, Kim Benzel, Ariane Thomas, Beth Jacobs, Erika Sauer, and Josephine Berger-Nadler after a private tour of Le Louvre’s Near Eastern Antiquities galleries.

Matt Quam, Kim Benzel, and Josephine Berger-Nadler at L’Atelier de Marc Meurin at Louvre Lens.

Beth Jacobs in front of Kevork Mourad’s *Time Immemorial* at l’Institut du Monde Arabe.



International Initiatives and Partnerships



Installation view of Wafaa Bilal's participatory installation *168:01* at MoMA PS1. Photo by Kim Benzel.

Wafaa Bilal Iraqi Book & Library Project

In 2017, after much discussion, the Department came to the decision that the space used as the library would be served better as an area dedicated to fellows and visiting researchers. In contrast to other departmental libraries at the Met, the majority of the books housed in ANE belonged to Watson Library and since it is so easy to check books out online and have them delivered to the office we felt these books would be better placed back in Watson where library users could have direct access to them. Working closely with Watson staff and in particular Museum Librarian, John Lindaman, a process to survey all the books before they were returned to Watson was initiated. Because a number of the books existed in multiple copies Watson decided they would not keep all of the copies. The question and challenge were what to do with the duplicate books. In a circuitous, but fortuitous sequence of events, the Department was able to donate the books to a worthy cause. They will find a new home at the Iraqi National Museum in Baghdad thanks to Wafaa Bilal.

Wafaa is an Iraqi-born artist and associate professor in the Department of Photography and Imaging at Tisch School of the Arts. He first approached the Department in June 2018 to collaborate on one of his projects that required the 3D scanning of a *lamassu*. Our Imaging team performed the scanning on our human-headed winged lion sculpture in January 2019. In the process of arranging this work, we got to know Wafaa better and learned about his efforts to restore the libraries of the University of Baghdad, where 70,000 books were destroyed in the 2003 invasion. His participatory installation, titled *168:01*, appeared as part of the *Theater of Operations: The Gulf Wars 1991-2011* exhibition at MoMA PS1 this past winter. The blank white books were slowly replaced by patrons procuring actual books from the artist's wish list. The Department was thrilled to find a responsible way to dispense with the books in our former library through channels that Wafaa had already established. We provided him and his librarian with a list of available books in March 2019. The 45 boxes of books finally shipped to a storage facility on December 18, 2019. They await the transfer to their final destination. We hope that people visiting the Iraqi National Museum will benefit from this collection for generations to come.

Provenance Research Project

Anne Dunn-Vaturi was part of the 2019 cohort of the German/American Provenance Research Exchange Program (PREP) for museum professionals. The participants met twice for a week-long program about World War II era provenance research: in Dresden (March 17–22) and in Washington, D.C. (October 21–26). The latter meeting was the conclusion of the three-year program, so the 2017-2018 alumni joined the group at the end of the week.

Anne's presentation "Tracing the Invisible" at the Washington, D.C. colloquium was about the recording of provenance-related marks in the TMS database. During the PREP concluding session, she confirmed The Met's participation in the Second International Provenance Research Day on April 8, 2020, an event initiated last year by the German association Arbeitskreis Provenienzforschung e.V. Gallery talks scheduled on that day at The Met Fifth and The Met Cloisters were cancelled as a result of COVID-19; however, #DayofProvenanceResearch was widely celebrated digitally, notably through blog posts.

The primary goal of PREP is to create a network of art museum professionals, and of experts in research institutions that support museum work. A LISTSERV allows participants to further the goals of the program through the exchange of new ideas and information relating to provenance research. Finally, resources from PREP will be accessible through the Getty Research Institute website.

Anne also participated in a Provenance roundtable at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City (January 23-24, 2020). First, she talked about the *Möbel Aktion Asiatisches*, the main category for looted Near Eastern art and antiquities in Paris, between 1942–1944, transferred to the Nazi task force, the *Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg* (ERR). Secondly, she described the C.T. Loo and Frank Caro archives kept in the Musée Guimet (Paris) where she conducted research in July 2019. At least two objects in the Ancient Near Eastern Art collection (1995.67.2 and 3) were previously in the possession of this famous dealership, active in Paris and New York.



Parthian vessel purchased in 1965 from C.T. Loo & Cie, Paris by Gordon Bunshaft, New York. Northwestern Iran, ca. late 1st millennium B.C.–early 1st millennium A.D., From The Collection of Nina and Gordon Bunshaft, Bequest of Nina Bunshaft, 1994 (1995.67.2).

University of Babylon Conference

Sarah Graff was invited to present a paper at the annual conference of the College of Arts at the University of Babylon in Hillah, Iraq on April 17-18, 2019. Her talk introduced the collection of the ANE Department to an audience of faculty and students from the University. Colleagues were especially interested in learning more about the gold jewelry from Dilbat now in the Met's collection, as the site of Dilbat is currently being excavated under the direction of University of Babylon Professor, and former ANE Department Fellow, Dr. Haider Almamori. Sarah was pleased to visit the excavation, as well as the sites of Babylon and Borsippa, with Dr. Almamori and colleagues from the universities of Kufa and Babylon. She extends her sincere gratitude to the academic community for their warm hospitality, with special thanks to Dr. Almamori and his family.



Haider Almamori, Sarah Graff, and Riam Hussain Abid (Kufa University) at the site of Dilbat.

Fellows

Henry Colburn

Henry Colburn is still the Andrew W. Mellon Curatorial Fellow, and he continues to work on the reinstallation of the permanent galleries. He has focused primarily on the Iranian objects in the collection, ranging from Chalcolithic painted pottery to Sasanian stuccos, as well as everything in between. A selection of this material was installed in Gallery 406 this past year, in part as a test of some ideas we are considering for the reinstallation of the galleries. He has written more than 250 descriptions of Iranian objects for the museum's website, and he is also coordinating the publication of our newly acquired illustrated Persian manuscript.

In addition to his work on the collections, he has also made archival discoveries. Notably, this past summer he came across a letter by Joseph Upton, a curator in the Near Eastern department from 1932 to 1947, discussing some inscribed Achaemenid silver vessels he had seen in Iran. One of these vessels was later acquired by The Met in 1947. Upton's letter shows that when he first saw the vessel in 1932 it was already inscribed, meaning that the inscription is probably not a later forgery, as has been suggested. Publication of this discovery is underway.

Henry also continues to lecture and publish on a variety of topics. This past year he gave a seminar at Harvard on Achaemenid Egypt, and lectured at Columbia's Seminar for Iranian Studies ("Drinking Like a Persian: The Archaeology of Achaemenid Drinking from Egypt to Gandhara"), UCLA ("Persian Kings and Egyptian Gods: Religious Innovation in Achaemenid Egypt"), and at a recent Met Fellows Colloquium ("How to Get a Persian Rock Relief into a Museum"). His first book *Archaeology of Empire in Achaemenid Egypt* was published by Edinburgh University Press in November, and his latest essay "The Canon of Ancient Iranian Art: From Grand Narratives to Local Perspectives," appeared in January.



From top
View of Gallery 406.
© The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Lobed bowl with a royal inscription, Iran,
ca. 465–424 B.C., Rogers Fund, 1947
(47.100.84).

Pinar Durgun

While at the Met, Pinar is working on “The Art of Eating and Drinking” chapter of her book, where she questions whether Hittite art is distinct from earlier Anatolian visual traditions by studying Anatolian vessels in the collection. One of her goals is to re-evaluate how disciplinary categories and chronological divides have affected the ways in which we understand long-term traditions in visual and material culture of Anatolia. Her book *Art of Ancient Anatolia: Makers, Objects, and Contexts* is going to be a resource for students, for art historians, and for the general reader interested in ancient art works and ancient Anatolian people who created them. During her time at the Met, Pinar collaborated with Federico Carò from the Scientific Research Department in conducting XRF analyses on three seemingly unexciting Anatolian metal bowls, which turned out to be *almost* perfect bronze alloys (~85% copper and ~15% tin, and some trace elements such as lead and arsenic due to surface conditions). “Never judge a book by its cover, never judge a metal vessel by how corroded and simple it looks,” is going to be the unofficial title of this research.

Pinar’s goal to make information easy to access has resulted in another project: *A Handbook for Teaching about the Ancient World*. This is an edited volume in the format of a cookbook, where any educator can replicate the hands-on activities (“recipes”) in their classroom. This book is planned to come out before the start of the next academic year as an open access resource.

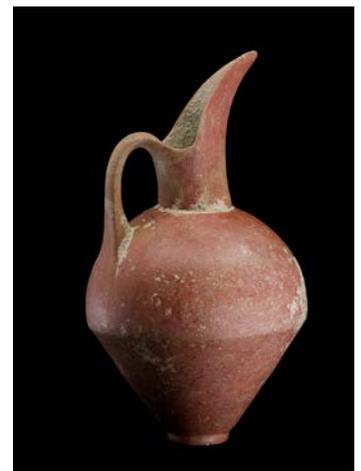
When Pinar is not in the classroom, in the field, or in a museum, she is at a historical cemetery somewhere in New England admiring gravestones.

Below, from top:
Spouted jar, Northwestern
Anatolia, ca. 2700–2400 B.C.,
Anonymous Gift, 1963
(63.45.1).

Spouted vessel,
Anatolia, ca. 17th–16th
century B.C., Gift of George
Zacos, 1969 (69.5).



Pinar studying the Early
Bronze Age gold ewer from
central Anatolia, February
2020. Photo by Monica Eisner.





Jacob Stavis examining
Achaemenid seals, February
2020. Photo by Monica Eisner.

Jacob Stavis

Jake Stavis, the Hagop Kevorkian Curatorial fellow, has recently completed his doctoral dissertation, “The Formation of Achaemenid Art: Beyond Iconography and Attribution.” Considering issues of style, historiography, and art historical categorization, the project examines how scholars have “invented” a history of Achaemenid art, and proposes new methods for interpreting that corpus, looking beyond anthropocentric theories of empire still dominant in the field. While at the Museum, he completed two chapters: one examines the Achaemenid idea of Babylon, as demonstrated through glazed brickwork from Susa and Tol-e Ajori, while the other reconsiders the Bisotun relief of Darius as it relates to a longer history of landscape monuments in the Near East.

While his dissertation focuses on site-specific monuments, Jake is also interested in other portable media. He is concurrently working with the Met’s collection of Achaemenid stamp and cylinder seals, updating their TMS records for new web labels and examining some of the more unusual examples, looking for parallels to assess their iconography, production, and in a few cases, authenticity.

About the Department



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. We are deeply grateful to our community and to all who support and promote the art and culture of the ancient Near East.

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

Staff

Kim Benzel, *Curator in Charge*

Sarah Graff, *Associate Curator*

Yelena Rakic, *Associate Curator*

Michael Seymour, *Assistant Curator*

Anne Dunn-Vaturi, *Research Associate, Provenance*

Daira Szostak, *Collections Specialist*

Shawn Osborne, *Principal Departmental Technician*

Monica Eisner, *Assistant Administrator*

Lea St-Arnaud-Boffa, *Associate for Administration*

Membership & Contact Information

For information regarding upcoming programming,
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