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Specialty: Ancient Near Eastern Archaeology and Islamic Arts

What will be the highlights of your booth at the Biennale?

I will have a very rare siren-shaped double "Amlash" vessel dating from the 9th to the 7th century B.C. It's a small double vase in the form of two hybrid birds or sirens with disc-shaped mask, protruding beak-like nose, and tiered headdress corresponding to the neck of the vessel. There is an additional small bird figurine at their junction and they have a common tail that serves as the vessel's pouring spout. This type of orange-colored pottery is characteristic of the late 2nd, early 1st millennium production of the province of Gilan, in northwest Iran and more specifically of the Kaluraz region. These elaborate zoomorphic or anthropomorphic vessels were designed for ceremonial purposes. A stylistically-related vessel in the form of a large female figure from the same culture entered the collections of the Louvre museum in 2013. Only a few other examples of bird- or siren-shaped vessels are known and this double type is even more exceptional. I will also have a free-standing alabaster sculpture of a striding man from 2nd to 1st century B.C. The small sculpture has many striking features such as a striding posture, quite unusual for freestanding figures of this type, detailed decoration of his garment and anatomy (for example, the rather muscular arms), and expression. All these characteristics point to the work of a great sculptor, probably commissioned by a high-ranking personality of the Sabean or of a neighboring kingdom, of whom it might have been a "portrait."

I will also have a beautiful calligraphic tile of scrolling blossoms and little white birds with a stylized Kufic inscription in the lower border. This tile was part of a larger frieze of which about



twenty other tiles are known, in both private and public collections around the world, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Louvre, and the Victoria and Albert Museum. The frieze originally decorated the tomb of the sufi shaykh Abd al-Samad at Natanz, built by the vizier Zayn al-Din Mastari and completed in the spring of 1308.

What makes an exceptional object in your view?

An object that crosses time without running out of fashion, and an object that questions you, that operates a shift of your view on the world and that does so by reaching to your emotions before your intellect.

What is your biggest challenge as a gallerist nowadays?

One is resisting moving in a district where art dealers tend to be more and more replaced by designer clothes and shoes stores. Our gallery is actually the only survivor on our street. More importantly, I feel that my main challenge is to promote an enlightened vision of Islamic civilization, the image of which suffers a lot nowadays from religious dogmatism and fundamentalism on one hand, and from biased prejudices on the other. I want to help bring a deserved light on the too-little-known ancient near-Eastern civilizations and cultures. ✦



Lustrated calligraphic tile, Il-khanid dynasty, shrine of Abd al-Samad (founded in 1308 A.D.), top, and alabaster figure of a man holding a hooved quadruped, South Arabian art, 2nd-1st century B.C., above.