

GREGG BAKER

Gregg Baker Asian Art established in London in 1985 specialises in Japanese art. From January 2021 we will be located in Brussels and open by appointment only. Our mission is to promote the beauty and versatility of Japanese art focusing on antique Japanese screens, early Buddhist sculpture and classical works of art. With over 35 years of experience in traditional Japanese art, the gallery also carries works from the post-war era, presenting abstract painting, sculpture and calligraphy by leading Japanese artists of the mid-20th century, an important area of Japanese art which is currently being rediscovered by art lovers across the globe. We hold regular exhibitions at the gallery and participate in several international art fairs which include TEFAF Maastricht, Frieze Masters and Asian Art in London. The gallery is instrumental in building collections for an international clientele, as well as finding works for institutions and museums in Great Britain, U. S. A., Netherlands, Germany, France, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates and Japan. In an effort to raise awareness of Japanese art, Gregg Baker lectures to students of the British Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum, SOAS (University of London), Sotheby's Institute of Art and Christie's Education, sharing his passion for this iconic art form with an ever-widening audience.

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WHEN AND HOW DID YOU BECOME A COMPLETE JAPANOPHILE?

I first became infatuated with Japan in the late 70's when I was working as a sales clerk at Christie's King Street London. I then went on to work for one of the leading dealers in Japanese art circa 1979 and eventually lived in Japan for a short time in the early 80's. The single most influential experience was the Great Japan Exhibition at the Royal Academy in 1981 I was completely hooked after seeing that.

YOU OPENED YOUR FIRST GALLERY IN 1985 AND YOU HAVE BEEN BASED IN LONDON EVER SINCE. HOWEVER YOU RECENTLY MADE YOUR BREXIT, RIGHT? WELCOME TO BRUSSELS! PLEASE TELL US ABOUT THIS DECISION AND YOUR NEW LOCATION. WHAT'S THE FUTURE PLAN FOR THE GALLERY? ANY OTHER PROJECTS YOU WANT TO DEVELOP?

Yes, I opened my first gallery in Brooke Street Mayfair straight after my return from Japan in 1985. After 35 years of the pressures of running a gallery, I have decided it's time for something new and with the changes going on the world just now, I looked at many options before choosing Brussels but eventually it was the city which made the most sense for me for several reasons. Firstly most of my clients are based in Europe and with the uncertainty of what Brexit might bring, I wanted to remain easily accessible to them. I also wanted a large space in which to display my pieces at a reasonable cost and real-estate in Brussels is very reasonable when compared to Paris and London as well as being perfectly located between the two. Lastly I want to work in a different way and therefore from now on, we will be open by appointment only, giving Virginie my fiancée and I more time to prepare future exhibitions and enjoy the continental life style.

Detail of Shaka Nyorai
Japan, 13th/14th century,
Kamakura Period
Gilt-wood, crystal inlays



HOW HAS THE ASIAN ART MARKET EVOLVED SINCE 1985?

In the early 80's there was much more dealer to dealer trade and the market for Japanese art was just coming of age due to the economic boom in Japan. Since then, things have become far more sophisticated and more focused on the collector with quality being very important. There has also been the rediscovery of Japanese artists who were working in the middle of the last century and this has become a whole new sector of the market and an important new facet to my own business.

IN THIS CRISIS CONTEXT, HOW DO YOU SEE THE FUTURE? WILL THE DIGITALIZATION HELP INVOLVING A YOUNGER AUDIENCE INTO ASIAN ANTIQUE ART SCENE?

The crisis has been a very important learning curve for us. It has proved to me that we can work in a different way and that people are becoming more and more comfortable buying directly from the website, especially when working with a reputable dealer. This will certainly make it much easier for young collectors to access pieces without the somewhat foreboding experience of entering a high-end gallery.

YOU HAVE PARTICIPATED IN MANY ART FAIRS, HOW IS YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH THEIR ONLINE EDITION? WHAT WAS YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH TEFAF NEW YORK ONLINE?

As you say I'm a veteran of the art fair and have participated in countless fairs since the mid 80's. To discuss a piece with the dealer, see it in the flesh and be able to handle it is irreplaceable. However we are only at the beginning of the online experience and we did have a surprising amount of enquiries from the TEFAF New York edition.



DID YOU NOTICE NEW COLLECTORS TURNING TO ART AS AN INVESTMENT?

Honestly I despise the concept of art being an investment. However I do unfortunately think it is here to stay. That said, I believe the true collector simply buys things because they love them and they realise they will gain far more from a wonderful piece of art which truly touches them than they ever will from making money out of it.

DO YOU COLLECT MANY OF THE PIECES YOURSELF, OR DO YOU SEE THEM ALL AS ITEMS TO SELL?

Yes of course I have many pieces which are not for sale. A dealer is simply a collector who can't afford to keep everything. If Virginie had her way, we would never sell another thing!

CAN YOU GIVE US AN ANECDOTE OR TWO REGARDING UNUSUAL PURCHASES OR SALES?

One of my first international fairs was held in Santa Monica in 1993. A gentleman came along and wanted to buy a screen which I had on show. It was an expensive object for me at that time (around \$20,000) but I didn't know him and he had no means to pay for it there and then, yet wanted to take it away with him. After checking with a few colleagues, I was told he was good for the money and I placed the screen in to the back of his Mercedes, balanced on the headrests and off he went. It turned out he was Bill Clark, founder of the Clark Centre for Japanese Art and Culture who later donated his collection valued at over \$25m to the Minneapolis Institute of Art! We became good friends after this and he continued to buy from me for many years.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO SOMEONE WHO IS STARTING OUT COLLECTING ASIAN ART?

Find a dealer you feel comfortable with, spend time asking questions and learning from him. Buy from your heart and buy the very best you can afford.

