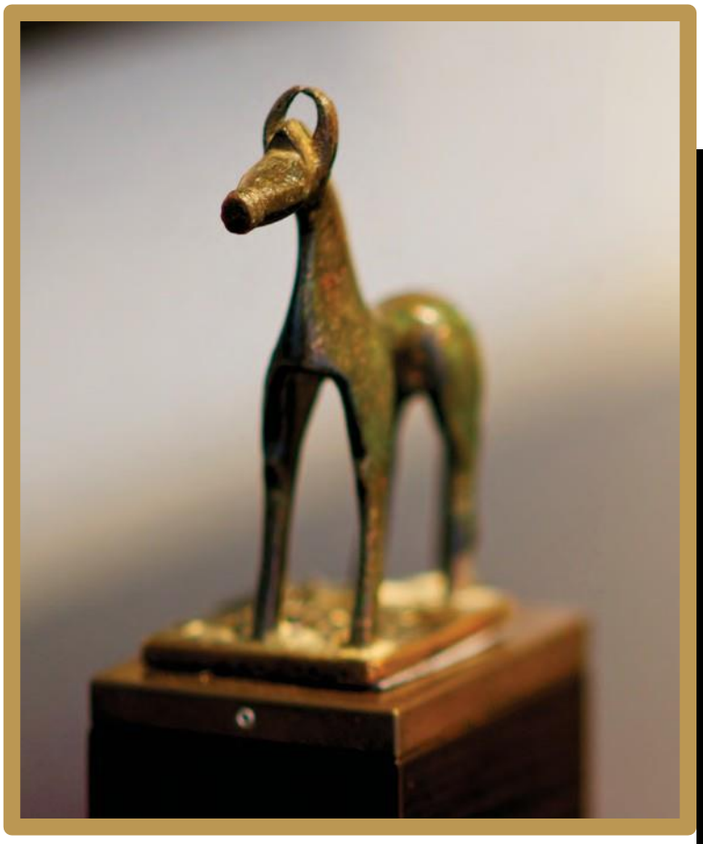
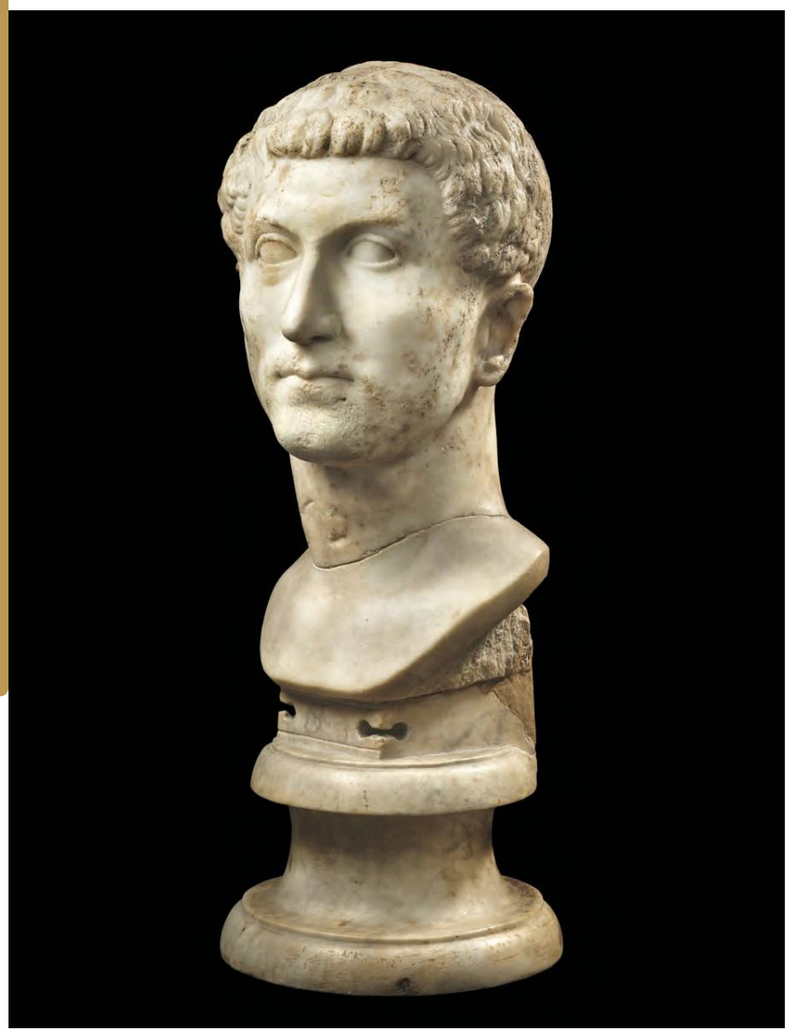


left: Bronze geometric horse votive, 8th century BC, Kallos Gallery
©Alan Howard and Kallos Gallery

below: The Roman bust of a young aristocrat, Ariadne Gallery
©Ariadne Gallery



agrees: "Most people think of antiquity collectors as fuddy duddy older men, but it's actually much more diverse than that."

Georgiana Aitken, head of antiquities at Christie's, which moved its antiquities department back to King Street from South Kensington earlier this year, gives her take on the increased interest: "It's a small market, but where you see a marked increase in the prices that antiquities fetch is with an object that has the golden combination of being an amazing object, having amazing provenance, and being very rare".

From a financial point of view, antiquities are a safe bet. "If you chart the price progression of various segments of the art market during the 2008 economic crash, you find that modern and contemporary art crashed by 40 per cent, Old Masters dipped slightly, fine furniture dipped slightly, and antiquities rose. So there's a very compelling and time-proven evidence that antiquities at the top end are impervious to economic crashes, wars and so on, because you're talking about a finite number of pieces that are extremely rare in perfect condition, and that are highly priced," Thyssen explains.

Take the example of a very rare Egyptian statue that was estimated at £4-6 million at Christie's Exceptional Sale in July. It was the only antiquity but proved to be the star lot, selling to a private collector for an astounding £15.5 million, and proving that the penny is starting to drop for an undervalued market.

"i want to use the gallery to bring people together around cultural heritage issues, as well as to try and move the debate forward. That's important"

"Even the contemporary artists themselves buy antiquities, which I think says something," says Demirjian.

For Thyssen and Demirjian, Mayfair was the only option for their respective new galleries: "Let's face it, London is the centre of the art world, no matter what anybody says. It's not New York, it's not Paris, it's London," says Thyssen.

And with an increased interest and a gathering of expertise, London could well be turning into the centre of the antiquities world as well.

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