

NEWSGRAM

News in brief from the Conservation Center

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In Memoriam: Ralph Minasian (1927-2017)

Remarks by Dr. Norbert S. Baer on the occasion of and a service in remembrance of the life of Ralph Minasian and the opening of Armenia! at The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

THE ROOM WAS VIRTUALLY EMPTY WITH ONLY A FEW MILK CRATES containing architectural fragments on the floor. One of several such former treasure troves located in New York and London, its contents had been consigned to Sotheby Parke-Bernet for sale at auction as the property of The Hagop Kevorkian Fund: “Highly Important Oriental Manuscripts and Miniatures; Highly Important Rugs and Carpets; Fine Oriental Miniatures, Manuscripts and Printed Books; Important Continental Porcelain and Pottery; Fine Ancient and Islamic Glass” once on view on Madison Avenue or Bond Street before sales, now dispersed.

I had been asked by Richard Ettinghausen to go to The Morgan Manhattan Storage facility on Third Avenue to give a cost/benefit estimate as to whether an effort to conserve, i.e., restore and reassemble, the fragments would be cost effective when the lot was to be consigned to the PB-84 secondary auction venue. There to guide me was Ralph Minasian, for many years the Assistant to Hagop Kevorkian and later the operating officer of the Fund. It was the beginning of a beautiful friendship based in New York rather than Casablanca and Brazzaville.

For many years, the Institute of Fine Arts had received vital support for its programs in Ancient Near East and Islamic Art and Archaeology from the Kevorkian Fund. When the plan to rescue the Conservation Center from the Basement and Cellar of the Duke House, relocating it to 14 East 78th Street was proposed, the Fund offered leadership funding. Thus began the arduous process of getting something built at NYU, where it seemed that the Second Avenue Subway provided the construction schedule model. For five years, the project moved forward at its own leisurely pace, culminating in a dedicatory Symposium in 1983. At all times, Ralph was a key advocate, urging the Administration to sharpen its focus on 78th Street.

While always interested in the work of the Conservation Center, in particular, the teaching, research, and fieldwork associated with archaeology, the Fund now supported faculty teaching and research and an innovative Archaeological Field School that prepared students for their participation in the Institute's Excavations. This engagement was made manifest by Ralph's faithful attendance at the presentations given by returning students at the beginning of each new school year. This was not *pro forma*, but rather a



Chan House opening reception, September 30, 1983, with Ralph Minasian (left); Michael Forstl, lead architect; and Stephen Chan

keen response to the substance of the work completed, as demonstrated by an unsolicited personal gift creating the annual RDM Prize for an outstanding conservation project with preference given to archaeological artifacts. To date, five prizes have been awarded with several of the recipients in attendance today. He truly cared for our students and respected their skill and dedication. Of course, he had ample opportunity to monitor the professional progress of many of them as a frequent visitor to the Objects Conservation Department of the Museum where many had found employment.



Recipients of the RDM Prize:
Brian Castriota '14
Annika Finne '16
Rebecca Gridley '17
Soon Kai Poh '19
Sarah Mastrangelo '18
(photo courtesy K. Martin)



Dr. Baer and Mr. Minasian, President, Hagop Kevorkian Fund

A friendship formed midlife is not unlike an incomplete mosaic uncovered in stages in the field. While the overall theme may be clear, only portions are revealed. So, a conversation over a standup espresso at Sant Ambroeus on Madison Avenue might trigger a recollection of an event, a personality, or an object. My mention of the superb mosque lamps in the Gulbenkian Museum revealed an afternoon in which he had accompanied Hagop Kevorkian to the Paris apartment of Calouste Gulbenkian; would there were a transcript of that conversation! Similarly, one day, when responding that I had lectured on paper production, he spoke about cotton lintners and his time as a cotton broker. An illness brought some remembrances of his service as a medical assistant, TEC 5 US Army during and after WWII.

A significant expansion of our conversations came after Dee Arabian opened a restaurant in Forest

Hills where traditional Armenian “pizza” was a feature of the menu. Now we could have extended conversations bemoaning the state of politics in the Near East, the state of politics in the U.S., and the state of politics at NYU and the Met. Of course, every conversation included a review of his son Steven’s activities, initially in “authentic football,” with Ralph as coach, then Steven in college, then a period as a manager at Ferrara’s on Grand Street and, ultimately, service in the U.S. Navy, the latter without comment and absolute discretion. Most important were the adventures of his wife Norma working at the school in Great Neck and then adjusting to the work of retirement. Of course, the extended family, the beloved sister retired to Arizona, various nephews, nieces, and grandchildren made clear that he was the *Padrone* in its warmest sense.

In an age of mega-foundations with large, highly paid staffs, how

do we account for the wide international influence and significance of a small foundation with a narrow range of interests and a single, singular operating officer and a tiny one room office on Northern Boulevard and a basement office on Evergreen Lane? To steal the words of Christopher Wren’s son inscribed at St. Paul’s Cathedral, “If you seek his monument look around”—look at *Armenia!*, look in the reinstated Islamic Collections, and look in the auction and exhibition catalogues in the Watson Library.

Dr. Norbert S. Baer
Hagop Kevorkian Professor
of Conservation



In 2008, the Kevorkian Fund provided funding for the transport and installation for this Armenian khatchkar in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, a special long-term loan from the State History Museum of Armenia (photo courtesy of the MMA)

“ARMENIA” WILL BE ON VIEW AT THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART FROM SEPTEMBER 22, 2018 THROUGH JANUARY 13, 2019



Attending the memorial (L to R) Michele Marincola '90, Soon Kai Poh '19, Peggy Ellis '79, Rebecca Gridley '16, Dr. Norbert S. Baer, Hannelore Roemich. Soon Kai and Rebecca are both recipients of the RDM Prize. (photo courtesy S. Higby)