

## Who Bought the Guennol Lioness?

December 6, 2007 by CultureGrrl

The above headline is a shameless tease, because I don't know the answer...yet. But I do know **CultureGrrl** readers are fascinated by the subject, because you've been hitting my previous two posts about the tiny, exquisite limestone carving ([here](#) and [here](#)) in record numbers today, making me Number Four, at this writing, on the Guennol **Google**-search hit parade.

**Harold Holzer**, senior vice president for external affairs at the Metropolitan Museum, assured me that his institution had nothing to do with this purchase. It had seemed reasonable to suppose that the Met might have been interested, because of its previous displays of the object and its [recent winning bid](#) on another Elamite object. But the copper figure of a horned hero, sold by the Albright-Knox Gallery, cost a pittance (\$3.18 million) compared to the \$57.16 million for the 3¼-inch limestone carving, which was in **Duccio** territory, price-wise. A museum can only stretch so far.

**Jerome Eisenberg**, director of New York's Royal-Athena Galleries, said that he didn't know the identity of the ultimate buyer, but he did know that the buyer's agent, who had been bidding from the back of the salesroom, was "a minor dealer from London," who was familiar to Eisenberg.

New York ancient art dealer **Robert Haber**, who had bid on behalf of the Met for its earlier purchase, told me that the identity of the person who bagged the lioness has been the subject of "tremendous, wild speculation" and was the "best-kept secret that has occurred in our area." Haber added:

**It really is an incredible seachange in the world of ancient art. This area is finally getting its due, as a profoundly interesting area to collect in....This is a magnificent piece. It represents an appreciation within the world of ancient art that there are great variations in quality between the ordinary material and exceptional masterpieces.**

Not to mention the fact that the market will pay a premium for pieces with known provenances that go back far enough to keep repatriationists at bay.

Meanwhile, Christie's held its own antiquities sale today. [That auction](#) made \$7.24 million, compared to Sotheby's \$64.96 million the day before.

But then Sotheby's sale would have made only \$7.8 million, were it not for the star lot.

Eisenberg also observed that prices at both auctions were "absolutely obscene," going for three or four times their estimates. He said that his own sales volume has "doubled in the last year," with collectors entering the antiquities field from Russia and the Middle East, as well as from the worlds of hedge funds and real estate investment.

"In June," he said, "I sold an object for well over \$1 million to a real estate investor from California who had never bought an antiquity before."

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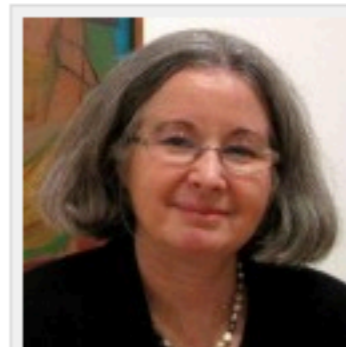


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**CULTUREGRRL** (Lee Rosenbaum) is the artworld's award-winning "best blog."

I'm a veteran cultural journalist and lecturer with many pieces in the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times* and major art magazines. I've been a cultural contributor on New York Public Radio (WNYC and WQXR) and provided arts commentary on NPR [[Read More ...](#)]

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