

Q&A with Barbara Israel

Tell us about your professional journey? What inspired you to pursue a career in this field?

I stumbled upon my current field by sheer chance. It all began when we purchased a house in the country. Shortly after, I learned about an estate in Long Island selling numerous statues, sparking my interest in acquiring one for our garden. Little did I anticipate purchasing all 40 statues in a single day, with the intention to resell them. The concept wasn't alien to me; both my grandmothers adorned their gardens with statuary and benches. Moreover, my background in studying ornament styles at the NY School of Interior Design acquainted me with the world of antiques. However, at that moment, I didn't envision turning this endeavor into a career.

What challenges have you faced in a typically male-dominated industry, and how have you overcome them?

At no point have I perceived this industry as being male-dominated or viewed being female as a disadvantage. The primary hurdle in selling antique garden ornamentation has been persuading fellow dealers at shows to take the field seriously. My initial experience at the Winter Antiques Show in 1994 was challenging, with numerous comments from vendors and dealers critiquing the pieces I had brought. However, instead of being discouraged, I was motivated to prove them wrong. When I was first moved to the center of the show, my neighbor shouted, "Get that dirty stuff out of here" as I was setting up, I remained undeterred. Recognizing that garden ornamentation had been esteemed historically by the likes of the kings of France and England, I was determined to demonstrate its value in the landscape.



What woman has been a trailblazer in the industry and has helped bring scholarship, expertise, and visibility to a particular field?

Joan Mirviss has done an amazing job creating a market in Japanese prints and ceramics.

What perspectives do women bring to art dealing?

Perhaps a woman's attention to detail might interest her more in the extensive research that an object can inspire.

What advice would you give to women looking to enter the art field, and how can you best support the next generation?

Have a second income! I can't think of any one piece of advice, though I would share the mistakes I made and resultant knowledge in hopes that I can help others avoid the same pitfalls.