Arthur J. Burke, Esq. C89, W89

Art Burke, a member of the Loren Eiseley Society, recently shared with us some of his reasons for being involved with the Museum, even as an out-of-towner.

How and why did you first get involved with the Penn Museum?
I have enjoyed the Museum since I was a student at Penn—or actually even before that, growing up in Philadelphia when my parents would take me there. I didn’t major in anthropology or archaeology, but I was always interested in history and antiquities. I would visit frequently during my time as an undergraduate. It was a wonderful place to spend time after class, and just wander around and look at the amazing artifacts.

Although you live in New York, you continue to be really active with and generous to the Museum. What does that mean to you, and why is the Penn Museum special to you?
The Museum has an amazing collection but it’s not just a place for artifacts; it also supports an ongoing mission of research and various expeditions that are in the field today. To me, it’s a fascinating and rare institution, and I am very supportive of it for those reasons. There are not a lot of places in America that combine a research mission with such a wonderful collection. The Museum is a very unusual and unique place, so I’m happy to do whatever I can to support it.

Why do you think it’s so exciting to be part of the Penn Museum right now?
This is really a time of change at the Museum. I sense a lot of enthusiasm and energy with the new Director and the new capital campaign. So, although it’s always been a wonderful institution with a mission that goes back over a hundred years, it now seems like there’s a real effort and a lot of support from the University to take that mission to the next level.

Do you have a favorite object or exhibition from the Museum?
There’s a wonderful Gandharan artifact in the Asian collection. It’s a Buddha figure but it shows the influence of Greco-Roman sculpture. It shows the Greek influence on Buddhist culture that dates back to Alexander the Great’s conquests in Central Asia in the 4th century BCE. This interesting and unusual confluence of cultures makes the Buddha a really fascinating object.