Ralph Minasian and the Hagop Kevorkian Fund

THE PENN MUSEUM’S EXTRAORDINARY PARTNERS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Founded in 1887 to house the finds from the first U.S. expedition to Mesopotamia, the Penn Museum’s history of excavation and discovery in the Middle East is extensive both temporally and geographically, continuing through the present day and encompassing a wide range of sites across the region. Among the philanthropic partners whose support has backed this extraordinary history, the Hagop Kevorkian Fund stands alone.

Established in 1953 by the Armenian archaeologist and connoisseur of Middle Eastern art Hagop Kevorkian, the fund that bears his name has had a profound impact educating the American public about the extraordinarily rich cultural heritage of this region, which saw the first settlements, gradual expansion of settlements into towns and cities, and the beginnings of the urbanized culture we experience today. Ralph Minasian, who passed away in November 2017, was President of the Roslyn, New York-based Kevorkian Fund for 25 years, and the small number of museums and educational institutions fortunate to work with him lost not only one of their most loyal and longstanding supporters but also an invaluable advisor and dear friend.

The Museum’s relationship with Hagop Kevorkian began in 1914, continuing through Ralph Minasian and the Kevorkian Fund to the present day. Every aspect of the Museum’s mission is encompassed in this partnership: collections, exhibitions, excavations, publications, and public lectures. In total, 99 objects in the Museum’s collection were gifted or acquired through Mr. Kevorkian. In the 1950s, Kevorkian Fund support made possible the Museum’s Iranian archaeology program, funding excavations at the site of Hasanlu led by Dr. Robert Dyson, Jr., and its subsequent publications. Following Mr. Kevorkian’s death in 1962, Ralph Minasian and the Kevorkian Fund trustees continued his legacy of support: creating a visiting lectureship in Iranian art and archaeology, which brought a distinguished line up of international speakers to the Museum for over 40 years; establishing the Hagop Kevorkian Fellowship in Ancient Near Eastern Art, and a prize for the best senior thesis on the archaeology of the ancient Near East; and even supporting new offices and a lab space for the Museum’s Near East Section.

In its new Middle East Galleries—which showcase its Kevorkian-funded excavations and the work of countless Kevorkian scholars—the Penn Museum is honored to continue the legacy of Hagop Kevorkian, Ralph Minasian, and the Kevorkian Fund trustees, deepening understanding of the rich cultural heritage of the Middle East for school children, for students, for scholars, for local, national, and international visitors, at a time when a greater understanding of the region has never been more urgently needed.