PREHISTORIC TITANS: ‘JULIASAURUS’ IN DIALOGUE WITH MARKET GIANTS

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The landscape of collecting practices has considerably shifted over recent decades. Once the domain of Old Masters and contemporary art, the global market has embraced rare collectables as a serious part of the global auction and commercial gallery ecosystem. New categories have emerged from automotive to fashion, watches to a new kind of rare masterpiece: dinosaur fossils.

These prehistoric wonders now command prices that rival some of the world’s most celebrated works of art, evolving into a blue-chip collecting category.

While names such as Sue and Stan have dominated discourse over recent decades, a new specimen from David Aaron has entered the conversation - ‘Juliasaurus’, a spectacular Late Jurassic predator comparable to these market marvels in both rarity and scientific significance.



'Juliasaurus', Late Jurassic Period (154-142 million years ago). Image courtesy David Aaron gallery

The Evolution of the market

What was once considered an area of interest reserved for experts in the field of palaeontology and dinosaur enthusiasts, dinosaur fossils burst onto the auction scene in 1997 with a landmark sale that would go on to change the fossil landscape forevermore.

Milestone moments that have shaped the dinosaur fossil landscape in recent decades include:

'Sue' the Tyrannosaurus Rex: Sold in 1997 for US$8.3 million, 'Sue' was the catalyst for the fossil market stamping its mark on the global auction and collecting industry. This specimen proved that fossils with high degrees of completeness and credible provenance could command seven-figure prices, establishing natural history as a premier asset class. 'Sue' was purchased by the Field Museum in Chicago, along with a consortium of supporters, and remains on permanent display at the museum to this day.

Auctioned just four years after the hit film Jurassic popularised dinosaurs in mass media, 'Sue' was the starting point for the booming fossil market witnessed today.



'Sue' the Tyrannosaurus Rex. Image credit: © Field Museum

'Stan' the Tyrannosaurus Rex: In 2020, an imposing predator named 'Stan' shattered records with a US$31.8 million sale signalling a major shift in the value and pace of the fossil market. This sale demonstrated an unprecedented global appetite for top-tier prehistoric specimens. 'Stan' went on public display at the Natural History Museum Abu Dhabi in November 2025.



'Stan' the Tyrannosaurus Rex. Image credit: Spencer Platt/Getty Images

'Apex' the Stegosaurus: Reaching a staggering US$44.6 million in 2024, the sale of 'Apex' at Sotheby's New York set the record for the most expensive dinosaur fossil in history. Purchased by Citadel founder Ken Griffin, the sale was exceptional due to the completeness and scientific importance of the fossil and the collector's desire for the impressive American dinosaur to remain in the United States.

Following the sale Griffin arranged for 'Apex' to go on display at the American Museum of Natural History on a multi-year loan. Griffin provided support for the display and research of the fossil, setting an example for how the philanthropic community can engage with the natural history sector.

The sale of 'Apex' redefined the pinnacle of the market, cementing the "blue-chip" status of dinosaur fossil collecting.



'Apex' the Stegosaurus. Image credit: © Sotheby's

'Juliasaurus': Rarity, completeness, and discovery

Unearthed in the renowned Morrison Formation of Wyoming in 2020, 'Juliasaurus' is a 154-million-year-old carnivorous theropod that holds the potential for scientific breakthrough. Standing at 6.2 meters long and weighing approximately 600 kilograms, this theropod predates its distant relative, the Tyrannosaurus Rex, by roughly 90 million years.

What places 'Juliasaurus' on par with specimens like Sue and Apex? A combination of factors:

Exceptional completeness - 'Juliasaurus' is a remarkably complete specimen, which is one of the primary drivers of value and scientific importance in the fossil market.

Potential for scientific discovery - Initial palaeontological analysis noted similarities to the *Allosaurus* or *Marshosaurus* species, however the unique anatomy of 'Juliasaurus' suggests it may represent an entirely new dinosaur species or new genus of an existing species. Research to be undertaken during the presentation of 'Juliasaurus' at Hollytrees Museum aims to determine its exact place in the evolutionary tree of carnivorous dinosaurs.

Rigorous provenance - 'Juliasaurus' is accompanied by impeccable provenance documentation verifying the discovery location, preparation of the fossil and palaeontologist reports.



'Juliasaurus', Late Jurassic Period (154-142 million years ago). Image courtesy David Aaron gallery

Private collectors supporting public science

Through the sale and subsequent public display of 'Juliasaurus', among other specimens, David Aaron has championed a model where private acquisition supports public collections, display and discovery. Upon acquiring 'Juliasaurus' the owner made it clear that they would like the fossil to be displayed and made available for research purposes.

'Juliasaurus' is now on display at the Hollytrees Museum in Colchester, UK, where it will remain through November 2027.

The partnership allows for the first-ever scientific research to be undertaken on the fossil. As 'Juliasaurus' undergoes further study over the coming years we await to see if the specimen will mark the next breakthrough in our understanding of the prehistoric world.



'Juliasaurus', Late Jurassic Period (154-142 million years ago). Image: David Owens, courtesy David Aaron gallery