

FIGURE OF A MAN

Egyptian, ca. 2345-2160 B.C.

Wood and pigment

Height: 55.7 cm

Reference: 12240



During the Old Kingdom, private statuary in both stone and wood was intended solely for use in a funerary context. Statues were placed in the serdab, or tomb chapel, or adjacent to the burial, providing a place for the ka to reside should anything happen to the physical body of the deceased.

This beautifully carved wooden figure depicts a man in a conventional striding pose; he advances his left leg with arms at his sides, fists clenched around a cylindrical object, perhaps a rolled cloth. He wears a short, curled wig, painted black. The brows and eyes, which dominate the face, are also painted. Heavy lines rim the eyes, extending at either end into truncated cosmetic lines and pronounced inner canthi. Furrows extending from the nose and bracketing the mouth heighten the expressive appearance of the face.

In contrast to the statue's posture, its nudity and form are rather more remarkable. The man's body is extremely long and slender, with negligible muscular definition. Although the chest, knees, and navel area are all softly modeled, the arms and legs seem almost sticklike, especially in profile. The prominent bone structure of the knees and the creases of skin surrounding the joints are rendered with particular proficiency. Wooden statuary was seldom carved from a single piece of wood; the feet and, as in this case, the arms, were typically produced separately and attached with dowels. The head and eyes appear unusually large in comparison to the elongated limbs and extremely narrow waist. These features are hallmarks of the so-called Second Style of Old Kingdom sculpture, developed at Saqqara near the end of the Fifth Dynasty.

Wooden figures were a particularly popular medium for the Second Style, with multiple images often produced for an individual, who was typically depicted at different ages, in different attire, or with different insignia.⁵ In some instances, examples from the late Old Kingdom,

particularly those carved in the Second Style, show the deceased naked. According to Egyptian artistic convention, children, slaves, and laborers were generally the only individuals represented in the nude; why certain officials of the Old Kingdom chose such a portrayal remains unclear. Given that in most cases figures were made in both naked and clothed versions, it would seem that nudity held additional, perhaps religious or funerary, meaning

PROVENANCE

Ex Belgian private collection

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