

## GREEK BRONZE STATUETTE OF A DWARF OR OF A DANCING PYGMY

Greek, 1st century B.C. - 1st century A.D.

Bronze

H: 5.7 cm

Reference: 18943



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The figure represented is mainly characterized by his small size, due to his too short legs, and by the negroid features of his face: he is a dwarf or a Pygmy (during the Hellenistic period, images of Pygmies, who are ethnic dwarfs, are treated in the same manner as pathological dwarfs). His legs are spread apart, the right one moving forward, as if he were jumping or dancing. The left arm is raised and the hand is placed close to the ear, as if imitating the gesture of someone wanting to hear something better or asking to repeat a sentence. In his other hand (the right arm is lowered to the thigh), this small figure holds a spherical object, which may be identified as a ball.

Despite its unusual proportions (the legs and, to a lesser extent, the arms are too short and muscular compared to the size of the chest and head), the anatomy of the body and head is extremely elaborate and perfectly modeled: he is gifted with very athletic musculature while his probable African origin is indicated by the flat face, pug nose and full lips. His short, curly hair is held back by a twisted crown that encircles his head: two bumps just above the forehead may be small horns.

The proportions of the figurine are characteristic of representations of dwarfs from Antiquity. Although the ancients did not have the scientific means to explain the varied malformations known under the term dwarfism, they were able to feature the most obvious external aspects: disproportionate members, too large head, flat face, prominent stomach and buttocks, spine malformation, etc.

The general posture, which is that of a juggler or a dancer, recalls the vivacity of many depictions of Hellenistic Greek or Roman dwarfs, as they certainly would have been seen in the streets of large ancient cities such as Alexandria, Antioch, Athens or Rome.

This statuette is part of the large family of grotesques, a term that designates objects, generally of small size and of ranging artistic quality, that exploit physical deformations and human diseases to create a caricature-like effect and amuse the viewer, rather than imitating reality. Images of men or, rarely, of women and children, of old people, dwarfs, Africans, the obese or emaciated, etc, the repertoire of grotesques is extremely diverse.

### CONDITION

A solid cast bronze statuette, whole and in excellent condition; the surface of the metal is covered with a beautiful even green patina. A long pointed cone was soldered to the head of the figure; the bottoms of the feet are flat, but they do not guarantee the balance of the piece. It is therefore possible that the figurine was not conceived as a simple isolated statuette and that it belonged to a more complex group, like a support, a tripod or a candelabrum, the exact nature of which it is imp.

### PROVENANCE

Ex-American collection, acquired before 1980.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY

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On dwarves in ancient times, see:

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