

MONUMENTAL HEAD OF APHRODITE

Greek, 4th - 3rd century B.C.

Marble

H: 38.7 cm (15.24 in)

Reference: 3235



This impressive marble head was part of a monumental statue, a highly venerated image of a Greek goddess. Because of its size and availability of marble blocks, the head, most probably, was carved from two large pieces of stone (this is indicated by the shape of the back of the head, showing an almost straight surface prepared to join the second half which was carved separately). The condition of the sides and the back – a missing piece on the proper lower right side of the hair, two holes in the hair on each side by the ears, and a third hole at the back seemingly corresponding to one on the proper left side – suggests that the head damaged in antiquity was repaired about the same time.

The monumental size and remarkable artistic quality of this work – which is a perfect example of the Greek artistic canon from the end of the Classical period and the beginning of Hellenism – plead in favor of an interpretation as an image of a goddess rather than as a portrait of a private citizen. The woman is represented young, the quality observed in the distinct lack of wrinkles; with her pensive expression and idealized features, which recall those of numerous female heads of this period. The perfectly oval face has harmonious proportions of the forehead, nose, and chin; and the clear delineation of the eyebrows above the almond-shaped eyes. The long, elegant neck marked by the “rings of Venus” is slightly turned to the left. The centrally-parted hair is organized in undulating curls that are then pulled back: this wavy strands of the hair treated by both the sculpting and incising the stone create a beautiful chiaroscuro effect, which is contrasting with the smooth modeling that characterizes the skin of the face.

The top of hair, the surface of which is barely modeled, was probably completed by a plaster element or could be just left unfinished if a diadem or wreath in precious metal (gold, gilded bronze) was added to complete the image of the goddess. Among the goddesses, the one whose iconography is closest to this work is certainly Aphrodite, but

one can also look to Artemis or Hera.

As for the type, one can also compare this sculpture to the head of Hygieia (the goddess of health) by Skopas from the Temple of Athena at Eleusis (Athens, National Museum, which is a little older, ca. 395-350 B.C.), or to the works of other master sculptors of the late 4th century, such as Praxiteles. For example, his famous Aphrodite of Knidos and the Brauron Artemis are close stylistic parallels.

CONDITION

Surface weathered and covered with encrustation (especially on the proper right side of the neck and face); damaged are the lower eyelid of the proper right eye, tip of nose, lower lip, and chin; chips in places; three holes indicating ancient repair of the back of the head.

PROVENANCE

Ex- Nicolas Tano collection, acquired circa 1950;

Ex- Henri Philippe Pharaon collection, Beirut (1901-1993), acquired prior to 1972;

Ex- Sleiman Aboutaam collection, Beirut, acquired in the early 1980s.

PUBLISHED

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EXHIBITED

MARBLE MANIA 2017

PAD 2017

FRIEZE 2017

TEFAF 2017

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