



Venus of Villetaneuse

César

On display

Title/Description: Venus of Villetaneuse

Artist/Maker: César

Born: 1962

Measurements: h. 1065mm (max) x w. 315mm (max)

Accession Number: RLS 26

Production Place: France

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Born in Marseille of Italian parents, César Baldacchini (usually known simply as César) found early fame in the mid 1950s with a series of exhibitions in Paris featuring welded sculpture that combined elements of human, animal and insect forms. At the same time (establishing a protean pattern that was to characterise his subsequent career) he produced a number of relief-like works that were more abstract than figurative.

Partly from necessity, his early work consisted of found metal scraps welded and cast together, an approach that caused César to be identified with *L'Art Brut* in France and with the international trend of Assemblage in general. However, in a forged and welded work such as *Relief*, of 1959 (RLS 23), it is clear that César is seeking to coax his battered metal components into arrangements of calculated beauty. In *The Round File*, of 1960 (RLS 24), César exploits qualities of loss and decay, an attitude that was given fuller expression in a series of female figures executed between 1959 and 1968, and to which the forged and welded *Venus of Villetaneuse* belongs. Here, order and dissolution, beauty and horror, find extraordinary coexistence in a female form that seems to have more to do with primeval earth goddesses than the classical goddess of love. There is obvious irony in the title, referring, as it does, to both the foundry where the sculpture was made and to such prehistoric works of art as the Venus of Willendorf.

With *Venus of Villetaneuse* and similar sculptures, César was working in a mode well-established in Europe, and whose practitioners included Germaine Richier and Jean Ipousteguy in France, Lynn

Chadwick and the young Eduardo Paolozzi in Britain, and Marino Marini in Italy. Their work, although different in many ways, speaks of loss and despair, a mood in keeping with the political and social tensions of the 1950s.

Graham Beal, 1997

Entry taken from *Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection* 3 volume catalogue, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997).
