



Unusual marble female figure

Not on display

Title/Description: Unusual marble female figure

Born: 3200 c. BC - 2000 c. BC

Object Type: Figure

Materials: Marble

Technique: Carving, Incising

Measurements: h. 216 x w. 75 x d. 20 mm

Accession Number: 341

Historic Period: Early Cycladic (c. 3200-2000 BC), 4th Millennium BC, 3rd millennium BC

Production Place: Cyclades, Europe, Greece

Cultural Group: Early Cycladic

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

This very unusual intact marble sculpture is made in a style that is reminiscent of others of the third millennium BCE in the Aegean. However, its unique features raise a suspicion that the object in question may be a modern fake.

Its angular features place it late within the sequence of 3rd millennium sculpture. It is very flat, and the strange thickened area running round the edges of the torso is difficult to explain. However, certain features that are important in Early Cycladic sculpture, such as the folded arms, and the pubic triangle, along with the head thrown back sporting only a nose, are present. The folded arms are strangely represented, with a single thickened area running across the torso, but a second, very poor incision below this indicates the second arm. The pubic triangle is indicated at the top with a very poor incision, while the sides are formed by the edges of the strange thickened area. The bulbous lower legs are very hard to parallel, but the feet are quite similar to other late examples. The neck is surprisingly broad, and the head more rounded than many late examples.

The unique features make one question the authenticity of the object. However, a modern forger might be more likely to try to make a fake that follows the most prized examples very closely, rather than an odd object like this that would be bound to stand out. So perhaps this is indeed a real third millennium artefact, if so probably one of the last produced in the 'folded-arm figurine' sequence. It is a salutary lesson in the damage that the esteem for such objects in the modern world has done for our understanding of them. [1] [2]

Michael Boyd, April 2022

[1] Gill, D.W.J. & C. Chippindale, 'Material and intellectual consequences of esteem for Cycladic figures'. *American Journal of Archaeology* 97 (1993), 601-59.

[2] Renfrew, C., M. Marthari & M.J. Boyd, 'The curse of looting: the scourge of Cycladic archaeology', in *Cycladic Society 5000 years ago*, eds. N.C. Stampolidis & I.G. Lourentzatou (Museum of Cycladic Art, 2016), 117-23.

Further Reading

Broodbank, C., *An Island Archaeology of the Early Cyclades* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

Marthari, M., C. Renfrew & M.J. Boyd, *Early Cycladic Sculpture in Context* (Oxbow Books, 2017).

Provenance

Acquired by the Sainsbury Family in 1965. Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
