



Standing female figure

On display

Title/Description: Standing female figure

Born: 0200 c. BC - 0300 c.

Object Type: Figure

Materials: Earthenware, Pigment

Measurements: h. 502 x w. 240 x d. 130 mm

Accession Number: 406

Historic Period: Proto-Classic period (200 BC-AD 300), 2nd century BC, 3rd century

Production Place: Mesoamerica, Mexico, Nayarit, The Americas

Cultural Group: Nayarit

Credit Line: Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1978

Ceramic figures from Nayarit and Jalisco have been divided into several sub-styles (Long, 1966; von Winning, 1974a) including the 'San Sebastian Red' sub-style, of which this figure is an example. These can be among the most dramatic sculptures from ancient Mesoamerica, with massive forms and enormous feet creating a sense of monumentality. The head is typically elongated, with extremely prominent ears and an open mouth displaying teeth. The rather spindly arms of this figure, also a common feature of the style, provide a startling contrast to the rest of the body.

This female figure wears a wrap-around skirt with a vertical band of geometric designs, perhaps representing a woven textile. She wears a hairband, nose-ring and armbands. Hairbands (*rodete*) are still worn by indigenous women in parts of Guatemala and Mexico (Leyenaar, 1981: pl.6, figs. 52, 54-5, 60, 165). However, the small mantle over her arm is a type most often seen on male figures in West Mexican ceramics.

In contrast to Colima ceramics, where women are not a frequent subject, they feature prominently in the corpus of Nayarit art, both individually and as part of male-female pairs. Gallagher (1983: 28) has suggested that the frequency of these depictions may support archaeological and ethno-historical evidence suggesting a social system based on bilateral lineages and a relatively high status for women (see Weigand, 1974; Brand, 1971: 638).

Joanne Pillsbury and Ted. J. J. Leyenaar. In: Steven Hooper (ed.). 1997. Catalogue to the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection. University of East Anglia.

Provenance

Purchased by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury from Ernst Ascher, Paris in 1949.

Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1978.
