



Fragment of a figure

On display

Title/Description: Fragment of a figure

Object Type: Figure, Sculpture

Materials: Ceramic, Paint, Terracotta

Measurements: h. 294 x w. 270 x d. 113 mm

Accession Number: 625

Historic Period: Formative (early) period (1200-900 BC)

Production Place: Mesoamerica, Mexico, Puebla, The Americas

Cultural Group: Olmec style

Credit Line: Purchased with support from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1975

Some of the finest of the large hollow ceramic figures in the Olmec style are reported to be from the site of Las Bocas in Central Mexico, from where this piece is likely to have come. However, little scientific excavation has been conducted in the area to confirm and clarify the contextual relationships of the works. Figures from Las Bocas and from other related sites are characterised by their animation; this is in strong contrast to much ancient Mesoamerican free-standing anthropomorphic sculpture, which has a tendency towards standardised poses with an emphasis on rigid, frontally-orientated compositions.

These whiteware figures are often marked by an unusual sense of movement and torsion, with the legs spread and arms raised in gestures of unknown significance. In this example, the hand is raised to the back of the elongated head. The top of the head has been broken off, but on the back of the lower part there is a diamond-shaped perforation. Details of the face, such as the pupils of the eyes, are marked by heavy incision and black pigment. The figure is broken at the waist, but the position of the lower body may have been similar to that of no. 697.

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

Provenance

Possibly from Las Bocas in Puebla.

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia from Edward H. Merrin Gallery, New York in 1975 out of funds provided by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury.
