

DRAPED FEMININE STATUE

ROMAN, 1ST-2ND CENTURY AD

MARBLE

BASE RESTORED IN THE 18TH CENTURY

HEIGHT: 158 CM.

WIDTH: 60.5 CM.

DEPTH: 41 CM.

PROVENANCE:

FORMER EUROPEAN COLLECTION SINCE THE 18TH CENTURY BASED ON THE RESTORATION TECHNIQUES. FORMERLY IN THE COLLECTION OF ART TRADER FRANÇOIS ANTONOVICH. THE WORK WAS EXHIBITED IN HIS GALLERY FROM THE 1980S ACCORDING TO VARIOUS ACCOUNTS.



This elegant, life-sized statue represents a feminine body draped entirely in thick cloth. Under the folded fabric, a body with a very specific stance can be glimpsed. The left leg,

slightly bent, is supporting it, while the free right leg is noticeably bent and the position of the foot, held back from the cylinder of the body, indicates that it is simply grazing the ground and not bearing any weight. This placement of the legs and distribution of the body weight, called *contrapposto*, creates a tilt of the hips — here, the left hip is thus higher than the right — as well as a reverse tilt of the line of the shoulders. This weighting creates a twist of the body, which takes the shape of an ‘S’, giving the work a sense of movement.



The left arm, which is missing its hand, is placed along the body, slightly bent. It is also covered by the folded cloth, a large swathe of which falls under the forearm in tubular folds. The right arm is folded over the torso, swathed in the fabric, and the hand is gripping a piece of material over the left breast, most likely to reposition it. That is certainly what the crisscrossing folds over the chest and, more generally, the silhouette, indicate.



The particularly detailed garment seems to be made up of two layers: the first is a long dress with vertical tubular folds, the chiton, which is covered by a long, thick mantle, the himation, a rectangle of woolly fabric draped around the body and secured without fastenings.

In some places, the drapery has a “wet” effect and seems to cling to the young woman’s skin, particularly her right leg. All of the

fabric appears silky, showing the sculptor’s delicacy and dexterity.



While this entire feminine silhouette and particularly the folds of the garment offer a multitude of details and an extremely lifelike portrayal, that is not the case of the feet, which are barely individualised. Only the front parts and the toes emerge from the drapery and are placed in different positions on a small round base. The lower part, differentiated from the rest of the feminine figure by a sizeable break, is actually posterior, because it was restored in the 18th century. This restoration work was still well done, however, as it adopts the ancient style, as well as the different elements of the clothing. As well as the choice of the gorgeous marble, which enabled the sculptor to showcase their artistic skills, the work is sublimed by a very lovely patina, which attests to the passing of time.



Although the statue is headless, it is quite easy to imagine the entire statue, as it belongs to a well-known type, that of the Large Herculaneum Woman, the large-scale version of a smaller example known as the Small Herculaneum Woman. This statuary type is named after a Roman copy found in the ancient theatre of Herculaneum in 1711 and currently conserved at the archaeological museum in Dresden (Ill. 1). The sculpture is based on a Greek original, now lost, created in the 4th century BC by the workshop of the famous sculptor Praxiteles. The iconography of the body, very popular under the Roman Empire, hardly varied: the young woman is represented standing, draped in a chiton and a himation, placing her weight on one leg with the other slightly bent, while one arm is held over her chest. There are, however, variants in the representation of the faces. The “melon” hairstyle, though, is

always the same. The features are more or less idealised depending on the patrons’ wishes. There is also a veiled variant, for which one swathe of fabric is simply placed atop the back of the head and falls down the shoulders. This is the case of two Parisian examples (Ill. 2 and 3).

These sculptures were generally placed in public places, in honour of their models, and represented important women from the local elite. They could also be found in a funerary context, as is the case for the sculpture at the National Archaeological Museum in Athens (Ill. 4). The head would thus probably have been dressed with thick, plaited sections of hair, all converging at the back of the head and gathered into a thick chignon, as for the head at the Louvre (Ill. 5). This type was quite popular, as several similar statues are known to us and conserved in western museums such as the Louvre (Ill. 6) and the British Museum, with its Hellenistic example (Ill. 7).

Comparatives:



Ill. 1. Statue of a woman of the Small Herculaneum Woman type, Roman copy after a Greek original from the 4th century BC, marble, H.: 181 cm. Archaeological museum, Dresden, inv. no. Hm 327.

Ill. 2. Statue of the Small Herculaneum Woman type, Roman, 2nd century AD, marble, H.: 175 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, Ma 1043.1.



Ill. 3. Plaster cast of a statue of the Large Herculaneum Woman from the Roman period, 19th century, H.: 206 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, Gy 0280.

Ill. 4. Funerary statue of the Small Herculaneum Woman type, copy based on a Greek original dated to 300 BC, marble, H.: 175 cm. National Archaeological Museum, Athens.



Ill. 5. Head of a woman of the Small Herculaneum Woman type, 1st half of the 2nd century AD, marble, H.: 42 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. Ma 4921.



Ill. 6. Statue of a woman of the Small Herculaneum Woman type, Roman, 2nd century AD, based on a Greek original from the 4th century BC, marble, H.: 169 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, Ma 1779.

Ill. 7. Statue of a woman of the Small Herculaneum Woman type, Hellenistic, 4th-3rd century AD, based on a Greek original from the 4th century BC, marble, H.: 86.5 cm. The British Museum, London, 1816,0610.316.