

CINERARY URN

ROMAN, 1ST CENTURY BC – 1ST CENTURY AD
MARBLE

HEIGHT: 54.5 CM.

WIDTH: 50 CM.

DEPTH: 36.5 CM.

PROVENANCE:

*IN THE COLLECTION OF ATTILIO
SIMONETTI, ROME, BEFORE 1925.
ACQUIRED FROM THE FORMER BY
JOSEPH AND ERNEST BRUMMER
(1883-1947 AND 1891-1964 RESPECTIVELY),
PARIS AND NEW YORK, ON 5 NOVEMBER
1925.*

*IN THE PRIVATE COLLECTION OF
GEORGE G. BOOTH, AMERICAN PRESS
BARON, ACQUIRED FROM THE FORMER
ON 15 MARCH 1926.*

*IN THE COLLECTION OF THE
CRANBROOK ACADEMY OF ART,
BLOOMFIELD HILLS, MICHIGAN, FROM
1926 TO 1972 (INV. NO. 1926.5).
SOLD AT SOTHEBY'S PARKE-BERNET,
NEW YORK, THE CRANBROOK
COLLECTION, 2-5 MAY 1972, LOT 338.*



This superb, ovoid, lidded urn is sculpted from fine-grained marble and is in a very good state of preservation. The sculpted decoration, mainly ornamental, that adorns the urn gives a general impression of measure, technical mastery and balance. That sense of balance resides in the mirror effect between the lid and the body of the urn, which meld together to form ovoid-shaped contours, while the decorative elements resonate harmoniously. The contours of the lid converge towards a large knob in the shape of a pine cone. The lid is exquisitely decorated with a series of large, radiating gadroons, the thinnest ends of which point towards the top of the urn. The lip, in relief and decorated with an egg and dart motif, is attached to two lateral handles with volutes and coils animated by stylised plant and floral motifs. Under the lip, the body of the urn is divided into two parts. The first comprises two horizontal ornamental levels, one rhythmised with short incisions that form rectangles and the other with a frieze of motifs resembling intertwining plant scrolls. These tendril-like motifs, which are punctuated with small, carved circles and bordered by horizontal strips, are in the middle of the composition and add to the overall dynamism of the sculpted decoration. Similarly to the lid, the decoration on the lower part of the body is made up of a series of bordered gadroons, which point, in this instance, towards the short, circular foot of the urn.

The urn does not bear the epitaph of the deceased, which was undoubtedly made separately and placed in close proximity. Given the care and precision with which this object was crafted, we may suppose that the



deceased person for whom it was made enjoyed a relatively high social status. The material of funerary urns varied depending on the position occupied by the deceased within society. While gold was used for the urns of emperors, those of other members of society were made from silver, bronze, marble, ceramic, glass or lead depending on their means. The delicacy of the sculpted decoration also contributes to the refinement of this cinerary urn. Some urns are plain, while others exhibit a sculpted decoration, which can be abstract, as is the case here. The urns preserved at the Museo Gregoriano Profano (ill. 1), the Museo Pio-Clementino (ill. 2) and the Louvre (ill. 3) display similar gadroons, also bordered, arranged symmetrically and divided by a horizontal, ornamental band. Some urns display figurative decoration, such as the urn of Novia Clara (ill. 4). From the Roman Republic, cremation was a more common funerary practice than inhumation and *columbaria* (ill. 5), structures with wall niches for urns, proliferated, often serving whole communities. Cinerary urns could also be placed on individual funerary altars.



Roman cinerary urns perpetuated the tradition of Etruscan and Greek urns, inheriting the structural codes that governed those earlier productions such as egg and dart motifs and pine cones, which adorn our object. The pine cone is in no way an oddity in the funerary context in which it occurs here.



From the end of the Republic and in the early days of the Roman Empire, cinerary urns were often surmounted by pine cones, which is also the case of an urn from the Via Appia (ill. 6). Pine cones are eminently linked to cremation. Their general shape is similar to that of a flame and, in practical terms, they were used to kindle fires, further clarifying the analogy. More broadly speaking, pine cones are closely associated with death. As well as appearing in the iconography featured on urns, they could also be used to decorate funerary objects such as *cippi* (columns or stelae that were used as markers). While we know of many examples of urns with gadroons and urns with pine-cone-adorned lids, the combination of both decorative features seems unique. We may, then, suppose that this crowning pine cone from the Roman period was not part of

the original lid, but was added later. The refinement of the decoration and the light, ochre-grey patina attest to the age of our superb example.



This urn is from the collection of Attilio Simonetti (1843-1925), a Roman painter and collector who founded the Galleria Simonetti (ill. 7) in 1880. Our cinerary urn was purchased in 1925 by Joseph (1883-1947 - ill. 8) and Ernest Brummer (1891-1964 - ill. 9), two of the founders of the famous Brummer Gallery in New York (ill. 10). The urn was not at the Brummer Gallery for long, as it was sold, on 15 March 1926, to the American press baron George Gough Booth (1864-1949 - ill. 11), who founded the Cranbrook Community, an educational complex made up of several establishments including an art academy and a museum, at the beginning of the 20th century. The urn was listed in the art collection of the Cranbrook complex before being sold at an auction held by Sotheby's in May 1972. A large part of the collection had to be sold that year due to a financial crisis affecting the Cranbrook Community as a whole.

Comparatives:



- Ill. 1. Cinerary urn, marble, 1st century BC, H.: 42 cm. Museo Gregoriano Profano, Vatican, inv. no. 10548.Ill.
2. Cinerary urn, marble, 1st century AD, H.: 46 cm. Museo Pio-Clementino, Vatican, inv. no. MV 2489.o.o.



- Ill. 3. Urn with lid, Roman, 1st century AD, marble, H.: 55 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. Ma 5217.
Ill. 4. Cinerary urn with lid, inscribed with the name of Novia Clara, marble, 1st century AD, H.: 52 cm. The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, inv. no. 23.180.



- Ill. 5. Vigna Codini *columbaria*, Rome, built between the Augustan and Tiberian periods (1st quarter of the 1st century AD).



Ill. 6. Octagonal cinerary urn, marble, 1st century BC, discovered along Via Appia, Rome.

Provenance:

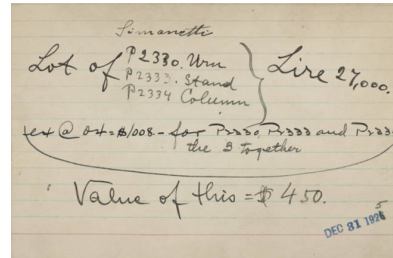
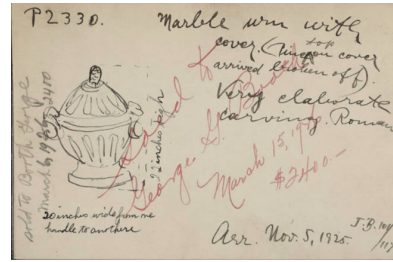


Ill. 7. Attilio Simonetti (1843-1925).



Ill. 8. Joseph Brummer, ca 1925, personal digital records given to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 2016.

Ill. 9. Ernest Brummer in Egypt, personal digital records given to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1980.



Ill. 10. Brummer Gallery inventory sheet, 5 November 1925 - inv. no. P2330, from The Brummer Gallery Records, digital archives given to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 2016.



Ill. 11. George Gough Booth, ca 1910-1920.