

HEAD OF A DIGNITARY

EGYPTIAN, NEW KINGDOM, 18TH DYNASTY, CIRCA 1550-1292 BC.
GRANODIORITE

HEIGHT : 18 CM.

WIDTH : 19 CM.

DEPTH : 17 CM.

PROVENANCE :

*FORMER PRIVATE COLLECTION OF OLIVIER
LE CORNEUR (1906–1991) SINCE THE
1930S–1940S, BASED ON THE MOUNTING
TECHNIQUE.*

*PROBABLY MOUNTED BY KICHIZO INAGAKI.
GIVEN SHORTLY BEFORE HIS DEATH TO HIS
FRIEND JEAN-PIERRE MARTINO (1930–
2022).*

*PASSED DOWN BY INHERITANCE TO MR.
ANTOINE DE SAINT PHALLE AND KEPT IN HIS
COLLECTION UNTIL 2026.*



This superb male head, carved from a fine-grained dark stone, has a triangular face framed by a short, rounded wig, its locks rendered by fine wavy striations radiating slightly outward from the crown of the skull. A particularly crisp horizontal

line marks the lower edge of the wig above the forehead and covers the tops of the ears. Beneath it, our male figure wears a second wig, whose individual tubular locks are fairly clearly visible, falling vertically and leaving the ears exposed. The face, whose surface erosion makes reading its features particularly difficult, nonetheless shows a fairly classic construction: a broad forehead, slightly arched eyebrows rendered in relief, almond-shaped eyes with clearly drawn eyelids and strongly marked, downturned canthi, and finally full cheeks and a square jaw treated in fairly full volumes. The mouth can only be guessed at, though two small hollows on either side, marking the corners, are still discernible. The ears, with rather elongated lobes, are absorbed into the mass of the wig. Finally, the rather slender neck extends elegantly from the head. The break at this point indicates that the piece was not originally conceived as a self-contained portrait head, but that it in fact belonged to a larger statue, possibly a block statue, such as the superb block statue of Amenhotep in the British Museum (ill. 1).

The wig is an essential element of this sculpture. The highly regular treatment of the locks, combined with this rounded form enveloping the head, belongs squarely to the repertoire of private, non-royal sculpture of the New Kingdom; it is, in fact, a civilian male wig. The "double wig" was one of the most popular male

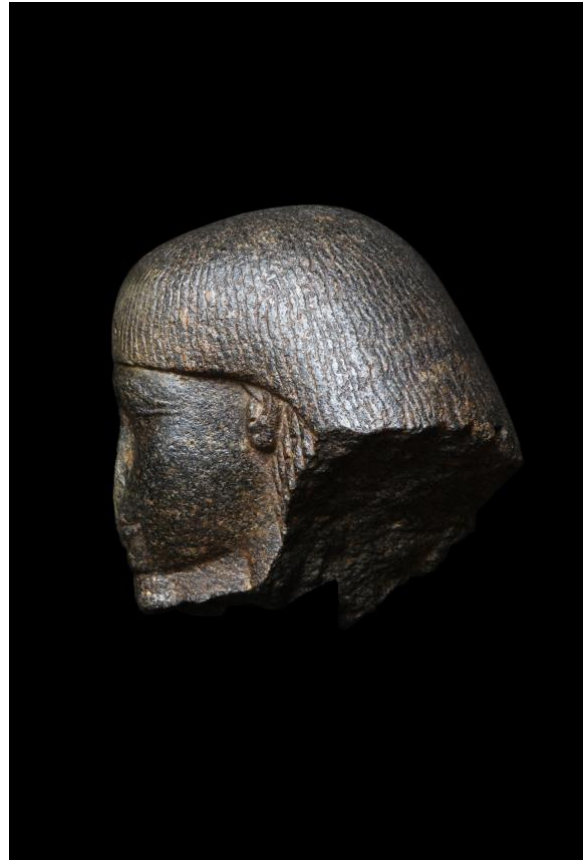


hairstyles of the reign of Amenhotep III. A series of portraits of men and officials from the 18th Dynasty is known to display this same desire to render this highly structured yet naturalistic coiffure (ill. 1–8). During the New Kingdom, more elaborate hairstyles for men and women, incorporating curls and braids, began to be preferred over the simple, traditional coiffures of the Old and Middle Kingdoms.



In general, wigs in ancient Egypt were almost entirely reserved for the elite because of their value. Even when wigs were made from inexpensive materials such as plant fibres, the sophisticated craftsmanship required to make them was costly. We can therefore infer that our head most likely portrays a high-ranking individual. This individual cannot, however, be identified, for two

reasons: first, the inscription that usually accompanies such sculptures and allows for identification is missing here; second, ancient Egyptian production was stereotyped and non-individualised.



It is this very standardisation of canonical forms that allows us today to place this work within a precise chronology. Given the number of surviving heads of the same type, several examples now held in prestigious collections around the world show very strong similarities to our head. This is notably the case with a head at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (ill. 2), which, being carved from the same material — granodiorite — displays the same polish and the same facial features. The same softness of the flesh is also found in a very fine example sold at Christie's in 2011 (ill. 3), as well as in a comparable

example at the Musée du Louvre (ill. 4) and two superb heads at the Met in New York (ill. 5 and 6). Two further examples are slightly more "complete," retaining the neck and part of the bust and shoulders: one at the Brooklyn Museum (ill. 7) and the other at the British Museum (ill. 8).



The stone used here is a dark igneous rock, quarried at Aswan and in the eastern Wadi Hammamat. In Egyptian production, granodiorite was used chiefly for official stelae and major epigraphic documents, owing to its hardness and durability. This hardness also allows for a superb polish, which can be observed on the surface of our head as well as on the wig. Such a polish is characteristic of Egyptian sculpture in hard stones, highlighting the smooth treatment of the

volumes while allowing the craftsman to display the full extent of his skill.

Before entering our collection, this head belonged to the Parisian dealer Olivier Le Corneur (1906–1991). A friend and associate of the celebrated dealer in African art Jean Roudillon, Le Corneur most likely acquired this piece in the 1930s or 1940s, as suggested by the style of its wooden base, very close to those produced by Kichizo Inagaki (ill. 9). The Japanese base-maker, born in 1876 and died in 1951, was the son of a lacquer craftsman renowned at the imperial court.



He settled in Paris in 1906; the city, then the world capital of the arts, was experiencing a genuine enthusiasm for Japanese and Japanese-inspired works. At the request of dealers, Inagaki, being

highly skilled in woodworking, made bases for archaeological, African, and Oceanic pieces, recognisable in particular by their refined woodwork and finishes that reveal coloured veining. Olivier Le Corneur later gave this head to his friend, the actor Jean-Pierre Martino (1930–2022 — ill. 10), shortly before his death. Martino, in turn, passed it down by inheritance to his theatrical godson, Antoine de Saint Phalle.



Comparatives :



III. 1. Block statue of Amenhotep, Egyptian, New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III, circa 1390–1352 BC, granodiorite, H.: 74 cm. London, The British Museum, inv. no. EA.632.

III. 2. Head of an official, Egyptian, New Kingdom, mid-18th Dynasty, probably reign of Amenhotep III, 1391–1353 BC, diorite, H.: 16.5 cm. Los Angeles, LACMA, inv. no. 51.15.2.



III. 3. Head of an official, Egyptian, New Kingdom, late 18th Dynasty, circa 1400–1390 BC, granite, H.: 17 cm. Sold at Christie's New York, "Antiquities," 9 June 2011, lot 44.

III. 4. Male head, Egyptian, New Kingdom, late 18th Dynasty, probably reign of Amenhotep III, circa 1330 BC, granodiorite, H.: 26 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre, inv. no. E 15568.



III. 5. Male head, Egyptian, New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, probably reign of Amenhotep III, circa 1386–1347 BC, quartzite, H.: 13 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 66.99.32.

III. 6. Head of an official, Egyptian, New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III, circa 1386–1347 BC, granodiorite, H.: 12.5 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, inv. no. 66.99.27.



III. 7. Head and bust of an official wearing the double wig, Egyptian, New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, circa 1390–1352 BC, red granite, H.: 11.5 cm. New York, Brooklyn Museum, inv. no. 86.226.28.

III. 8. Male head, Egyptian, New Kingdom, 18th Dynasty, reign of Amenhotep III, circa 1390–1352 BC, limestone, H.: 11 cm. London, The British Museum, inv. no. EA.2339.

Provenance :



III. 9. Kichizo Inagaki (1876-1951)

III. 10. Jean-Pierre Martino (1930-2022)