

# TORSO OF A MAN

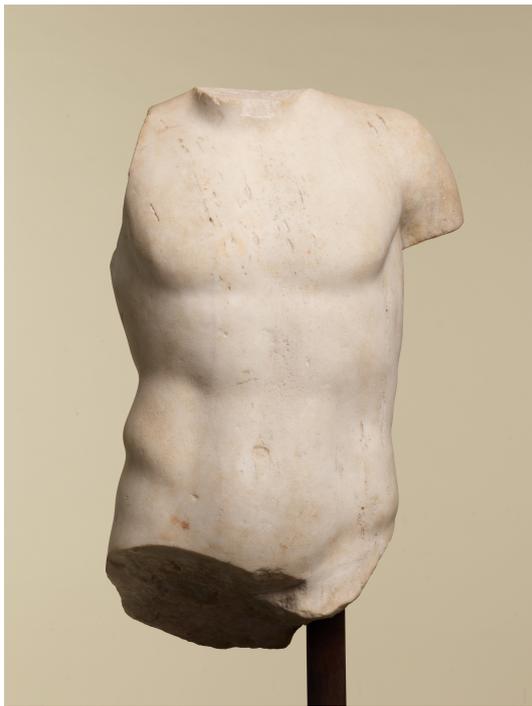
ROMAN, 1<sup>ST</sup> - 2<sup>ND</sup> CENTURY AD  
MARBLE

HEIGHT: 58 CM.

WIDTH: 37 CM.

DEPTH: 29 CM.

*PROVENANCE:  
IN A EUROPEAN COLLECTION FROM THE  
17<sup>TH</sup> - 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY, JUDGING BY THE  
RESTORATION TECHNIQUES.  
IN THE COLLECTION OF THE AMERICAN  
ACTOR WILLIAM "BILLY" HAINES AND  
HIS PARTNER JIMMIE SHIELDS,  
BRENTWOOD, LOS ANGELES,  
THEN IN A PRIVATE COLLECTION,  
PURCHASED WITH THE HOUSE AND  
GROUNDS IN 1974.*



Sculpted from white marble, this sublime Roman torso embodies the aesthetic ideal espoused in antiquity, offering the athletic representation of a man with perfectly balanced proportions. The sculptor paid particular attention to realism and to the rendering of the flesh, the surface of which is practically palpable. The left shoulder, the only one preserved, stands out through its

powerful yet delicate moulding, its muscles having been rendered with great finesse.



This well-defined shoulder creates a fluid transition with the ribcage, which is imposingly broad. The prominent pectorals are firmly defined and separated by a vertical line that runs down the body to the carved navel. The abdominal muscles are arranged through a rigorous sequence of horizontal and vertical lines, a direct reference to the classical canon of Greek antiquity. This highly accurate visual grid accentuates the vivacity of the body and further idealises the model, all while maintaining a certain anatomical realism. The iliac bones are particularly distinct, forming a 'V' and further contributing to the athletic appearance of our torso. The back displays full curves and supple transitions between the muscles and hips. The buttocks, rounded and firm, attest



to a keen observation of the body in tension. A lateral hollow on the right buttock indicates the contraction of the muscle, a lifelike detail that reveals the sculptor's mastery. The position of our torso, with the model's hips canted up to his right, indicate that the sculpture follows the fundamental principle of *contrapposto*, inherited from Greek sculpture in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. The asymmetrical distribution of the weight of the body causes a subtle twist of the pelvis, giving the whole body a posture of animated ease wherein it forms an 'S'.



The fine-grained white marble used for this sculpture exhibits a subtle ochre patina, a sign of its age. There are a few traces of erosion, which show that it was exposed to the air, but these in no way alter the quality of the work. Carved directly from a block, the torso showcases the artist's exceptional technical mastery and detailed knowledge of human anatomy and proportions, apparent in the muscles, shadows and shapes, which are rendered with remarkable accuracy. There is evidence of ancient interventions on the left shoulder, the neck and the pelvis. The shoulder bears the trace of an assembly system, accompanied by a light peripheral

polish; a lighter polish is visible on the neck and under the buttocks, probably to facilitate the addition of a head and limbs. The work was, in fact, restored and completed by various elements in the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century (ill. 1), as was often the case for artworks discovered during that period, when there was a distinct taste for restored ancient sculptures. Today, no modern elements have been preserved, giving the work a particularly precious material authenticity.



Our sculpture is completely in line with classical iconography, founded on an idealised representation of the human body that celebrated strength, beauty and physical mastery. This type of torso traditionally evokes athletes, certain gods and heroic figures from mythology. In the absence of specific attributes, it is plausible that this could be the representation of an athlete. Adopting the proportional canons established by Polykleitos, the work directly draws on the heritage of classical Greek art, the models of which established the principles for a balanced, harmonious representation of the body and its shapes. It displays the anatomical precision and subtle *contrapposto* characteristic of sculptures

inspired by Polykleitos. By its sculpting and shapes, the torso is particularly similar to the *Diadoumenos* (ill. 2) and *Doryphoros* (ill. 3), two of Polykleitos' emblematic creations. The *Diadoumenos* distinguishes itself by softer shapes, while the *Doryphoros* exhibits firmer muscles, without ever falling into exaggeration. Our work dates to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD. In that period, sculptures adorned public spaces such as temples, fora and even private villas and were intended to honour mythological and real figures. Sculptures were symbols of power and perfection, meant to inspire and to celebrate human and divine greatness. Our piece can be compared to the torso of a *Doryphoros* preserved at the Louvre (ill. 4), the torso of a man – probably Heracles – at the Banca Nazionale del Lavoro (ill. 5) and the sculpture of a fighter also preserved at the Louvre, which displays many stylistic similarities (ill. 6).

The history of our sculpture is also remarkable. It belonged to the American actor William “Billy” Haines (1900–1973) and his partner Jimmie Shields (1905–1974 – ill. 7). Haines, who starred in silent films and the very first talking films, became one of the most influential decorators and designers of the Hollywood elite. Living openly with Shields in very conservative times, his refusal to publicly deny their relationship spelled the end of his acting career. The couple founded an interior design and antique negotiation business that would define the “Hollywood Regency” style. They were keen collectors who furnished their interiors with a blend of English furniture, Chinese curios and antiques. Our sculpture, exhibited in their garden in Brentwood, Los Angeles (ill. 1), was displayed with restorations from the 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> century. It then passed into a private collection, having been acquired along with the property in 1974.

## Comparatives:



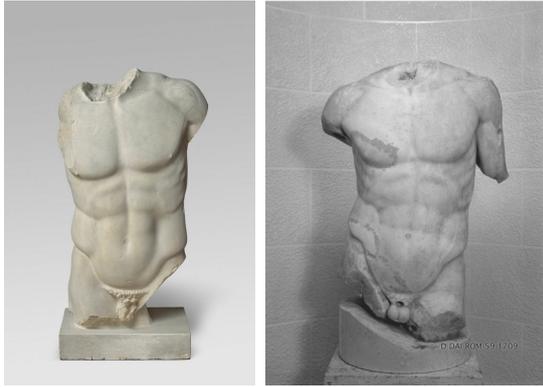
Ill. 1. Photograph of the sculpture in the garden of William Haines and Jimmie Shields' old home.



Ill. 2. The Farnese Diadoumenos, Roman, 1<sup>st</sup> century AD after a Greek original from the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, marble, H.: 149 cm. British Museum, London, inv. no. 1864,1021.4.



Ill. 3. Doryphoros, Roman after a Greek original by Polykleitos, 79 BC, marble, H.: 2 m. Museo archeologico nazionale di Napoli.



Ill. 4. Male torso of a Doryphoros, Roman, end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC–beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, marble, H.: 94 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. Gy 0865.

Ill. 5. Torso of a man (probably Heracles), Roman, 1<sup>st</sup>–2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, marble, H.: 105 cm. Banca Nazionale del Lavoro, Via del Corso, inv. no. 28638.



Ill. 6. Statue of a fighter, Roman, 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, marble, H.: 186 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. MR 96.

### Provenance:



Ill. 7. Portrait of William "Billy" Haines (1900–1973) and his partner Jimmie Shields (1905–1974).