

Daniel Katz Gallery

ANTIQUITY TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY



William Turnbull (Dundee 1922 - London 2012)

Aphrodite

Bronze with a green and brown patina

188 cm (74 in.) high

Signed with an initial, dated and numbered on the base 1/4 (T) 58

Turnbull was a Scottish sculptor, painter and printmaker. He studied at the Slade School of Fine Art, London, from 1946 to 1948, before spending two years in Paris. On his return to London he shared a studio with Eduardo Paolozzi, with whom he exhibited at the Hanover Gallery in 1950. Turnbull's reputation grew with the generation of British sculptors acclaimed at the Venice Biennale of 1952. He pursued a lauded career with many international exhibitions, including a retrospective at the Tate in 1973, a major exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery in 1995 and an indoor/outdoor retrospective at Yorkshire Sculpture Park in 2005.

By 1958, the year *Aphrodite* was made, Turnbull, then in his mid-thirties and acknowledged as one of the finest artists of his generation, was known for his heads and totem-like figures, as well as his striking monochromatic paintings.

Standing directly on the floor and approximately of human height, this arresting work allows a physical relationship between sculpture and viewer. Taking its name from ancient history and made of bronze with a textured surface, *Aphrodite* was inspired by pieces such as the archaic Greek *Hera of Samos* in

the Musée du Louvre, Paris (marble, c. 570 BC). The corrugation of the body gives the impression of pleated clothing, as in the Greek statue, and it is also reminiscent of the fluting on Greek columns. The upper element suggests a load carried on the head; it is finely balanced on the rounded head of the column. Turnbull's sculptures between 1958 and 1962 consist of two or more separate elements stacked one on top of the other and standing on the floor. The artist wrote that one reason for using this multi-part 'totemic' mode was to 'prevent a human reference from interfering with the sculpture's formal autonomy'. Turnbull always took a close interest in the casting process and patinated most works himself.

In conversation with the artist for the Waddington Galleries 1998 exhibition on 6 May 1998, Colin Renfrew discussed Turnbull's later reworking of Aphrodite in an edition of six produced in 1984. He asked Turnbull about the original piece, which was cast in an edition of four in 1958: "Perhaps you could remind us about the earlier work Aphrodite (1958)? Both of them have got a quality of balance, which is one of the things in your work that I hugely admire. You had a work in your Serpentine show a couple of years ago, Tall Balance (1992), which was amazingly poised, rather as the head on Aphrodite is. It brings out something about the human form: this terribly delicate balance by which we're always keeping ourselves upright". Turnbull replied, "There are certain images which seem to stay in the memory. I have always been picking off things which relate to this type of image: when you see people carrying things on their head. I remember seeing an image of somewhere in the West Indies where there was a man walking along the beach and he had this long thin coffin balancing on his head. This image, every time I see it, seems to act as a trigger: it excites me, I seem to respond to it". Renfrew continued, "Now, just remind us one of the sources of that Aphrodite. We were mentioning the Hera of Samos in the Louvre because in your first Aphrodite one really felt its presence", to which Turnbull responded, "I think I made the egg shape first, and then had the idea of having it up high. And at that time the corrugation served two purposes. First, I was very aware of column lightness: the impression was quite different from as if it were just absolutely solid. The other was that by using bits of cardboard, bits of paper and bits of corrugation, I could stick it on the plaster and pull it away. This was a matter of trying to use, within a conceived structure, an accident happening, so that you had the choice to say: 'Yes, I like it, leave it'. It bypassed the stage of just working out of knowledge or will - and instead you were not finding something, finding sculpture, rather than making it. It was all very much in the process".

Exhibitions

Exhibited:

- Turnbull, Marlborough-Gerson Gallery, New York, 1963, cat. n. 14
- William Turnbull, Sculpture and Painting, Tate Gallery, London, August - October 1973, cat. 43, illus. p. 41
- William Turnbull: Sculptures 1946-62, 1985-87, Waddington Galleries, London, October - November 1987, cat. n. 14
- Scottish Art since 1900, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, June - September 1989; touring to Barbican Art Gallery, London, February - April 1990, cat. n. 338, p. 167
- Sculpture in the Close: an exhibition of the works of William Turnbull, Jesus College, Cambridge, June - July 1990, cat. 8
- The Sixties art scene in London, Barbican Art Gallery, London, March - June 1993, p. 68 - Bronze Idols and Untitled Paintings, Serpentine Gallery, London, November 1995 - January 1996, n. 19
- William Turnbull: Sculpture and Paintings, exhibition catalogue, Waddington Galleries, London, 1998, p. 10
- Blast to Frieze: British Art in the 20th century, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, September 2002

- January 2003; touring to Les Abattoirs, Toulouse, February - May 2003, pl. 122

- William Turnbull: Paintings 1959-1963 Bronze sculpture 1954-1958, exhibition catalogue, Waddington Galleries, London, 2004, cat. 19

Literature:

Literature:

- D. Sylvester and P. Elliot, William Turnbull: Sculpture and Paintings, 1995, p. 35 (book published to accompany the exhibition Bronze Idols and Untitled Paintings, Serpentine Gallery, 1995-1996)

- A. Davidson, The sculpture of William Turnbull, The Henry Moore Foundation, 2005, cat. 88