

The 'Guennol' Rhinoceros

Roman, possibly Egypt.

Hadrianic Period, 76-138 A.D.

Black Marble

L: 26cm

An extraordinarily fine carving of a male Indian rhinoceros in dense black marble. It is fragmentary, broken off at the muzzle and at the top of the legs. The ears are gone and only the proper left eye is preserved, deeply incised and staring. Any evidence of a horn has been lost with the asymmetric break of the snout. The carving emphasises the large volumes of the mammal with a gentle nuchal hump above the lowered short neck. The heavy flesh is gathered into four distinctive and pronounced concentric rings of folds articulating the compressed neck (three behind the stumps of the ears and one in front) that is dropped from the shoulder. Sharp vertical flesh folds delineate the contours of the fore and rear legs from the top of the shoulders and rump. These meet another horizontal skirting flesh fold along the base of the body.

The sculptor has focused their efforts on the telling contours and gently swelling volumes, with only a formal stylistic approach to the heavy ‘draping’ of the flesh that distinguishes the animal as a rhinoceros. These flesh folds give the figure an armoured appearance, distinctive for the Indian rhinoceros. An incised groove runs along the spine, from the nuchal hump to just short of the rump. Here one would expect instead a spinal ridge under the heavy flesh. Birds are often seen to perch here in the wild. Perhaps it is the slightly formalist sculptural approach that has allowed this incised sculptural license.

Exhibitions

‘Pagan and Christian Egypt from the First to the Tenth Century A.D.’, January-March 1941, Brooklyn Museum, New York.

Brooklyn Museum since 1951.

‘The Guennol Collection’, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1969-1970. Loan Number: SL.69.82.39.

Literature:

The Notable Art Collection Belonging to the Estate of the Late Joseph Brummer Part I, Parke-Bernet Galleries Inc., New York, April 20, 21, 22 & 23, 1949, Lot 33.

The Guennol Collection of Mr & Mrs Alastair B. Martin, Exhibition Catalogue, Metropolitan Museum, 6th November 1969 – 4th January 1970, No. 49.

The Guennol Collection, Volume I, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975, pp. 41-45.

David Aaron Ltd, 2023, No. 11.