

Basic Detail Report

**Title**

Bronze Head of a Black Woman

Artist

Constantin Brancusi

Date

1926

Dimensions

head: 15 1/4 (lips to hair ornament) x 6 7/8 in. (38.7 x 17.5 cm); with base: 26 in. (66 cm); base: 13 7/8 in. (35.3 cm)

Medium

bronze, marble, and limestone

Classifications

Sculpture

Credit Line

Partial gift of Thomas T. Solley and partial purchase with funds from the Libbey Endowment, Gift of Edward Drummond Libbey, and with funds from the Florence Scott Libbey Bequest in Memory of her Father, Maurice A. Scott

Object number

1991.108

Published References

Brummer Gallery, *Brancusi*, New York, 1933, no. 39 (another version).

Giedion-Welker, Carola, *Constantin Brancusi, 1876-1957*, New York, 1959, p. 69, pl. 19.

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Hunter, Sam, "The Maremont Collection", *Art International*, vol V, 5-6, June-August 1961 (pp. 34-41, 45), repr. p. 35.

Svensk-Franska Konstgalleriet, Fautrier-Malningar, *Brancusi-Skulptur*, Stockholm 1961. repr. fig. 30 and cover.

Jianou, Ionel, *Brancusi*, 1963, p. 109 (pl. 58 of another version).

Brancusi, Masteri delle Cultura, 46, Fratelli Fabri, Milan, 1966, repr. fig. XII.

Geist, Sidney, "Letters to Editor," *Art Bulletin*, XLVII, no. 3-4, Sept.-Dec. 1966, pp. 462-463.

Spear, Athena Tacha, "A Contribution to Brancusi Chronolgy," *Art Bulletin*, XLVIII, no. 1, Mar. 1966, pp. 48-59, fig. 8.

Spear, Athena Tacha, "Letters to Editor," *Art Bulletin*, XLVII, no. 3-4, Sept.-Dec. 1966, pp. 465-468, p. 468.

Geist, Sidney, *Brancusi, a Study of the Sculpture*, New York, 1968, no. 167A.

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, *Constantin Brancusi, 1876-1957: A Retrospective Exhibition*, New York, 1969, p. 128.

Geist, Sidney, *Brancusi, The Sculpture and Drawings*, New York, 1974, no. 179b.

Rush, Richard H., *Investments You Can Live with and Enjoy*, Washington DC, 1974, p. 106, repr.

Kunsthau Zurich, *Constantin Brancusi. Der Kunstler als Fotograf seiner Skulptur. Eine Auswahl 1902-1943*, Karl M. Lipp, Munich, 1976, p. 46, repr. fig. 21.

Sidney Janis Gallery, *Brancusi and Mondrian*, New York, 1982, fig 15.

Varia Radu, *Brancusi*, International Publications, New York, 1986, p. 164.

Hulten, Pontus, Natalie Dumitresco, Alexandre Istrati, *Brancusi*, New York, 1987, no. 160a.

Bach, Friedrich Teja, *Constantin Brancusi: Metamorphosen plastischer Form*, Cologne, 1987, no. 225a, p. 484, repr.

"Calendar," *Burlington Magazine*, vol. 134, no. 1077, Dec. 1992, p. 841.

The Toledo Museum of Art (ed.), "Constntin Brancusi's Blond Negress I", *A Members Bimonthly Newsletter*, Oct.-Nov. 1992. repr.

The Toledo Museum of Art, *Annual Report* July 1, 1991 - June 30, 1992, verso front cover, repr. front cover (col.).

The Toledo Museum of Art, *Toledo Treasures*, Toledo, 1995, p. 167, repr. (col.).

Miller, Sanda, *Constantin Brancusi. A survey of his Work*, Clarendon Press, London, 1995, pp. 150-151.

Stiles, Gloria J. and Mary Jo Mermer-Welly, "Children Having Children: Art Therapy in a Community-based Early Adolescent Pregnancy Program," *Art Therapy: Journal of the American Association*, vol. 15, no. 3, 1998, p. 172, fig. 9.

Berkowitz, Roger M., "Selected acquisitions made by the Toledo Museum of Art, 1900-2001," *Burlington*, vol. 143, no. 1177, April, 2001, p. 262, fig. XVII (col.)

McMaster, Julie A., *The Enduring Legacy: A Pictorial History of the Toledo Museum of Art*, Superior Printing, Warren, OH, 2001, repr. (col.) p. 45.

Toledo Museum of Art, *Toledo Museum of Art Masterworks*, Toledo, 2009, p. 315, repr. (col.).

Exhibition History

New York, Brummer Gallery; Chicago, The Arts Club of Chicago, *Brancusi*, 1926-1927.

New York, The Museum of Modern Art, 1953 [exhib. title unknown].

New York, Staempfli Gallery, *Brancusi*, 1960.

Chicago, Illinois Institute of Technology, *The Maremont Collection at the Institute of Design*, 1961, no. 127.

Washington, D.C., Gallery of Modern Art, 1964, no. 146.

Comparative References

See also Giedion-Welcker, Carola, *Constantin Brancusi, 1876-1957*, New York, 1959, p. 69, pl. 19.

See also Jianou, Ionel, *Brancusi*, 1963, p. 109, (pl. 58 of another version).

See also Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, *Constantin Brancusi, 1876-1957: A Retrospective Exhibition*, 1969, p. 128.

See also Varia, Radu, Brancusi, New York, 1986, p. 164.

Collections

Sculpture

Label Text

Though it is made by one of the most celebrated European Modernist sculptors, this work presents a complex set of historical and cultural issues through its perpetuation of racial stereotypes. According to Constantin Brâncuși, the sculpture was inspired by his memory of an unidentified woman of African descent whom he saw in 1922 at a colonial exposition in Marseilles, France. Such expositions showcased the cultures of France's colonies, but functioned to justify and celebrate the so-called "civilizing mission" of French colonialism. Brâncuși's French title for the sculpture uses a word for a Black woman (négresse) recalling a racist trope going back to the 17th century that objectifies, exoticizes, and sexualizes Black female bodies. Brâncuși further complicates how we experience this sculpture by defying, or denying, expectations of skin color through his use of polished bronze. The medium determined the "blonde" of the sculpture's title (the first version, carved in alabaster, is titled White Negress). Typical of his pioneering minimalizing style, Brâncuși distilled his subject into essentials. She is suggested by the spare but bold rendering of hair and prominent lips—the latter feature often used in racist caricatures of the time. The oval head and topknot are reminiscent of African masks from cultures in Gabon and Côte d'Ivoire. Brâncuși and many Modernist artists of the early 20th century appropriated African imagery, admiring what they saw as the simplified, "primitive" aesthetic of tribal objects, but viewing the people who made them through a colonial, ethnocentric lens.

Not On View