

COLNAGHI



Head of a Veiled Woman

Etruscan, late 4th-early 3rd century B.C.

Terracotta

Height: 22 cm; 8 ½ in.

Provenance:

Galerie Segredakis, Paris, 1952;

From whom purchases by M. Descrieres, 1952;

Gifted by the above to the previous owner in the 1950s;

Thence by descent until 2017.

French cultural property passport 189054.

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This incredibly rare life-size Etruscan terracotta head, which once perhaps stood in its complete form in a sanctuary, is an exceptional example of the sophistication of Italic artists, who at this time began to fuse native traditions with ones imported from Greece.

She is depicted wearing a veil, which covers her hair with the exception of the front, where thick, curly hair, centrally parted, flows down around the sides of the head. Beneath the veil, an elaborate headband decorated with round rosettes is visible. The face is round and symmetrical, with no indications of age beyond a classicizing youthfulness. The slightly curved brows meet at the long, straight nose. Her deep-set almond-shaped eyes are hooded under heavy lids, with pupils and irises incised. Her full mouth is held slightly open. It is clear that many details of the head were worked by free hand rather than made in a mould. For example, the decorative florets on the headdress seem to have been modelled separately and then attached, while the remnants of incision visible in the locks of hair indicate a sculptor worked the clay while it was wet before a final firing process.

The closest comparable example is an Etruscan terracotta statue of a woman which entered the collection of the Metropolitan Museum, New York in 1916 (Acc. no. 16.141). Both examples possess similar full, oval-shaped faces, and the rosettes on the hairband of both are so close that it is possible that they came from the same mould. From this close parallel, it is possible to extrapolate more about the original appearance of the present head. She probably wore a mantle and was richly decorated in jewellery, including necklaces moulded in terracotta and possible further attachments made of glass or gold. The distinctive style of this head, in particular the style of the headband, indicate it is likely from a city called Lavinium, an Etruscan site eighteen miles south of Rome. This head offers insight into one of the cultures that would come to shape the visual language of Republican Rome over throughout the following two centuries.

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A fragment from a larger statue. Original surface with remnants of pigment. Unrestored.

Comparanda:



Etruscan terracotta statue of a young woman, height: 75 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (16.141)