

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



A Group of Six Masks

Greek, Hellenistic Period
ca. 3rd-2nd century B.C.

Terracotta
various sizes, of heights between
4cm and 15 cm

Provenance:

Dr. Franz Haniel (1883-1965) collection, Germany; thence by descent.

Exhibited:

On loan to the Staatliche Antikensammlungen und Glyptothek, Munich, 1966-1972.

On loan to the Archaeological Collection of the University of Zurich, 1973-2020.

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(a)

(b)

(c)

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(d)



(e)



(f)

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The present group of six terracottas take the form of masks, representing figures related to the ancient theatrical genre of Comedy and the god Dionysos, comprised of three plaques in the form of satyrs (a-c), an applique of a New Comedy slave (d), one of a New Comedy courtesan, called a *hetaira* (e), and one of Dionysos himself (f). Two of the satyrs, (a) and (b), preserve piercings at the top of their heads for suspension. In Greece, from as early as the Archaic period (6th century B.C.) down through the Classical, Hellenistic, and Roman, terracotta votives in the form of masks were offered at sanctuaries and buried in graves. Some of these small terracotta sculptures were originally appliques for larger pieces of funeral furniture, the wooden structures of which have since decomposed. Others were sculptures of entire figures, while some were representations of masks alone.

Two of the present examples are identifiable as stock characters from New Comedy plays, a genre invented in Greece in the 4th century B.C. at the beginning of the Hellenistic period. The three satyrs are typical of the comically grotesque followers of Dionysos, known from representations that span nearly every artistic medium in the ancient world, including the so-called satyr plays that typically followed the performance of a cycle of tragedies at festivals honoring the god Dionysos.