

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

Frank Dobson, R.A.
(London 1886 – 1963)

Female torso

Chalk and coloured crayon
52 x 34.5 cm. (20 ½ x 13 ½ in.)

Provenance:
The Artist's Estate;
Goldmark Gallery, Uppingham.



Dobson always looked to the human form, mostly nude and female, for his source material and always worked from life. Like many sculptors, drawings were always a vital part of the creative process for Dobson. Though they hold their own as unique objects, they were not produced to stand alone: as Dobson himself explained in the late 1930s, 'my attitude to drawing has been governed by the fact that I was drawing to get information which would help me to make sculpture'.¹

Female torso likely relates to the torso made of Portland stone now in the Tate (fig. 1), which dates to 1933. The rounded and sensual hips are typical of Dobson, as is the sense of motion indicated by the contrapposto thighs. The simplified form and flowing lines reflect Dobson's knowledge of non-Western art and European modern masters, though of course the figure itself is derived from the Medici Venus (fig. 2). The use of orange and purple crayon gives the torso a warmth and amplify the idea of a woman in her prime.



Fig. 1, Frank Dobson, *Torso*, 1933, Portland stone, H 67 cm, Tate



Fig. 2, Roman 2nd century AD after Praxiteles, *Medici Venus*, marble, Altes Museum, Berlin

In his own day, Dobson was considered one of Britain's greatest sculptors, with Clive Bell calling *Cornucopia* 'the finest piece of sculpture produced by an Englishman since – since I don't know when' and Roger Fry describing his output as 'pure sculpture'. And yet, from his death in 1963 until today, Dobson has to some extent been overshadowed by international titans such as Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth. Thankfully, in recent years the

¹ Frank Dobson, 'Drawings for the Mural at the Canadian Pavilion' in *Empire Exhibition*, Glasgow, October – November 1938, n.p.

importance of his highly original vision has come to be increasingly recognised and lauded, with the strength and simplicity of his forms pleasing to the modern eye, as witnessed by the intense interest in Dobson's *Female Torso* (fig. 2) of 1926, which appeared on the auction market in 2021.



Fig. 3, Frank Dobson, *Torso*, 1926, carved sandstone, H 41 cm, Private Collection