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Est. 1760



Head of a Panther

South Italian Greek or Etruscan,
ca. Late 5th century B.C.

Terracotta

height: 15.2 cm; 6 in.

Provenance:

Collection of Mr. Robert Laurent (1890-1970), by 1956;
sold to Dr. Otto J. Brendel, while both Laurent and Brendel taught at Indiana
University, 1942-1956;
Collection of Dr. Otto J. Brendel;
By descent, Collection of Mrs. Cornelia Foss.

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The most arresting feature of the present head of a panther is the open mouth with teeth individually and prominently articulated. It is carefully modeled, with the eyes rendered with heavy lids and incised pupils. The whiskers and wrinkles of the snout are deliberately indicated, as are tufts of hair emanating from inside the ears. Another notable feature is the stippling of the surface especially evidence on the forehead between the ears, done while the clay was still soft and evidently indicating the spots of the feline's fur. These would have been accentuated with color in the original condition of the piece. There are scattered patches of a white slip or wash throughout the head, most noticeably at the top and sides, as well as within the proper left ear. Other pigments would have been added on top of this white layer. The overall freshness of the sculpture is due to the free working of the head while the molded but not yet fired clay was still malleable.

The hollow head has been filled with plaster at the back break to facilitate its modern mounting: the open mouth reveals a hollow inside, suggesting that the head could conceivably been a waterspout gargoyle. The use of terracotta lion heads as gargoyles is well attested in Magna Grecian architectural sculpture.

This large terracotta head was always considered by its distinguished previous owner, Professor Otto Brendel, to be an Etruscan work, but more recent scholarship has placed it within the coroplastic tradition of the South Italian Greek cities. The original purpose of the sculpture is not entirely evident. It could be argued that the piece is a votive or comes from an architectural setting such as a pediment or, as mentioned, a waterspout. The head may be compared to marble examples of Hellenistic and later creations. For a relatively complete marble panther, recently bequeathed to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, see accession no. 2021.40.1 (no. 2 below). Two notable Etruscologists, Dr Mario Iozzo: Director of the Florence Archaeological Museum and Professor Richard De Puma: University of Iowa, Emeritus, and author of the recent comprehensive Etruscan volume of the Metropolitan Museum of Art (2013), were

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consulted regarding this piece, both of whom suggest that the sculpture might well be South Italian Greek rather than Etruscan.

Comparanda:



1. Hellenistic Greek Marble Head of a Panther, ca 3rd-2nd century B.C. (Private Collection, USA, ex Mr. A. T. Ganasoulis Collection, Petra, Greece, prior to 1906)



2. Monumental Marble Statue of a Panther, ca. (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, accession number 2021.40.1)

COLNAGHI

Est. 1760



3. A Roman Marble Head of a Panther, 1st-2nd century A.D. (Private Collection, USA, ex Sotheby's New York Antiquities June 7, 2007, lot 79; ex Charles L. Morley Collection, New York, acquired 1943)