

Lot 50



Auction Modern | Post War | Contemporary | Galerie Thomas | The Jagdfeld Collection

Date 03.12.2025, ca. 18:37

Preview 28.11.2025 - 16:18:00 bis
01.12.2025 - 16:19:00

TURNBULL, WILLIAM
Dundee/Scotland 1922 - 2012

Title: Metamorphic Venus.

Date: 1981.

Technique: Bronze, brown patina.

Measurement: 53 x 32.5 x 6 cm. On a wooden base. Total height: 58 cm.cm.

Notation: Artist's signature, dated and numbered verso lower right: T (circled) 81 5/6.

Number: 5/6.

Provenance:

- Private collection, London (directly from the artist)
- Waddington Custody Galleries, London
- Private collection, Southern Germany (acquired from the previous owner in 2014)

Exhibitions:

- Galerie Kutter, Luxembourg, 1983

Literature:

- Davidson, Amanda A.: The Sculpture of William Turnbull, Hertfordshire, 2005, cat. rais. no. 206, ill.

- Turnbull's reduced formal language claims universal symbolic validity and spiritual radiance
- The work emphasizes the simplicity of form and the natural quality of the material

Paris - London

Completely detached from cultural, geographical and historical boundaries, William Turnbull's work unfolds in the transition between archaic and modern formal language. The Scottish artist is regarded as one of the most important artists of post-war Britain. As a teenager, he already worked as a draughtsman in a newspaper publishing house and became acquainted with illustrators and comic artists. As a result, he cultivated a view of art early on that did not differentiate between high and low, progressive and primitive. During the Second World War, he served in the Royal Air Force and did not officially study at the Slade School in London until 1946. In Paris, where he moved in 1948, Turnbull moved in the circle of the Surrealists and came into contact with Alberto Giacometti, Constantin Brancusi and

Jean Hélion, whose sculptural work provided him with important artistic impulses. Back in London, Turnbull joined the 'Independent Group' in 1950, which included Richard Hamilton and Eduardo Paolozzi. By incorporating trivial culture such as advertising and mass media into the concept of art, it marked the beginning of British Pop Art.

Sculptural essence

Despite his open-mindedness towards contemporary tendencies, Turnbull always maintained an independence from trends and stylistic appropriations and turned to simple forms from prehistoric times and art traditions outside the Western world. Inspired by Japanese aesthetics, he strives for beauty in the simplicity of form in order to express the natural nature of the material used. Through the reduction of form and balanced symmetrical proportions, Turnbull emphasises the intrinsic value of bronze, stone and wood. These materials have a timeless quality, particularly in their connection to the prehistory and early history of mankind. Turnbull's almost spiritual search for the essence in every object leads him to the earliest evidence of culture and civilisation, which he encounters in the British Museum, among other places. Based on the universal validity of their formal language, his sculptures also appear like anthropological archetypes.

While in the 1960s he took up influences from gestural abstraction, colour field painting and Hard Edge, in the 1970s Turnbull returned to the reduced forms of his abstract, stylised figures and objects, which he retained until the end of his life.

Masculinity and femininity of the 'Metamorphic Venus'

Turnbull created totem-like columns, masks, heads or idols, but also horse heads and sculptures reminiscent of primitive tools or cult objects. Due to the symbolic, metaphorical quality of the works, the changing relationship between form and content is a central artistic concern: "I have always been very interested in metamorphosis.

Ambiguity can give a picture a broad frame of reference. It creates cross-references between something that looks like an object and something that looks like a picture. For me, in making sculpture, there is always this tension between sculpture as object and sculpture as image." (William Turnbull quoted from exhib. Cat. William Turnbull - Sculpture and Paintings, London, Waddington Galleries, 1998, p. 5) 'Metamorphic Venus' (1981) also illustrates the transformative potential in the relationship between a concrete object and the ideal values attached to it. Due to its radical simplification, the figure of Venus is ambiguous, resembling more of an arrowhead or spearhead. While a primitive tool is initially recognisable in the brown patinated form, delicate lines and faintly suggested internal shapes denote anatomical details of Venus: a vertical ridge gives the face on the 'shaft piece' profile, two bud-like protrusions in the centre of the protruding body can be identified as breasts, while an incised 'T' separates the abdomen from the legs. Fine lines characterise the hands and feet. With the reference to 'Venus', Turnbull links the ancient fertility motif with the Roman goddess of love, the symbolic embodiment of beauty. At the same time, the form unites opposites of 'body' and 'technology' that are deeply rooted in cultural history, which in turn point to binary concepts of femininity and masculinity, nature and culture.

Bettina Haiss

Estimate: 60.000 € - 80.000 €

