

OSBORNE SAMUEL

MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY ART

Armitage, Kenneth (1916-2002)



***Standing Figure*, 1954**

Bronze

Estate of the artist record an edition of 6
80.5 x 19 x 12 cm. (31 ⁵/₈ x 7 ¹/₂ x 4 ⁵/₈ in.)

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Provenance:

Beth Schaefer Gallery, New York
Artcurial, Paris, 24 October 1996
Connaught Brown, London (purchased at the above)
Private Collection, UK (acquired from the above 30 October 1997)
Osborne Samuel, London

Exhibited:

New York, Bertha Schaefer Gallery, catalogue not traced, another cast exhibited, March / April 1956
'Kenneth Armitage: sculpture & drawings; S W Hayter: paintings & engravings; William Scott: paintings', the British Pavilion at the XXIX Venice Biennale 1958, organised by the British Council (14 June - 19 October 1958), essay by Herbert Read, cat. no. 8.
'Kenneth Armitage, S W Hayter, William Scott', exhibition organised by the British Council, tour of the Venice Biennale Exhibition, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Paris (22 November - 21 December 1958), essay by Herbert Read (text in French), cat. no. 8.
'Kenneth Armitage, S W Hayter, William Scott', exhibition organised by the British Council, tour of the Venice Biennale Exhibition, Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels (7-29 March 1959), essay by Herbert Read (text in French), cat. no. 8.
'Sculptuur en tekeningen van Kenneth Armitage en schilderijen van William Scott', exhibition organised by the British Council, based on the Venice Biennale Exhibition, Museum Boijmans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam (3-30 June 1959), essay by Herbert Read (text in Dutch), cat. no. 8.
'Stanley W. Hayter: Gemälde und Graphiken; William Scott: Gemälde; Kenneth Armitage: Skulpturen und Zeichnungen', exhibition organised by the British Council, tour of the Venice Biennale Exhibition, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, Cologne (10 January - 8 February 1959), essay by Herbert Read (text in German), cat. no. 8.
'Stanley W. Hayter: Gemälde und Graphiken; William Scott: Gemälde; Kenneth Armitage: Skulpturen und Zeichnungen', exhibition organised by the British Council, tour of the Venice Biennale Exhibition, Kunsthau, Zürich (April-May 1959), cat. no. 8.
'Kenneth Armitage: a retrospective exhibition of sculpture and drawing, based on the XXIX Venice Biennale of 1958', Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (July-August 1959), essay by Alan Bowness, cat. no. 17.

Literature:

Tamsyn Woollcombe (ed.), Kenneth Armitage: Life and Work (Much Hadham/London: The Henry Moore Foundation, in association with Lund Humphries, 1997), KA 50.
James Scott and Claudia Milburn, The Sculpture of Kenneth Armitage (London: Lund Humphries, 2016), ill. p. 103, no. 50.

'Sculpture should express a liking for ordinary unheroic people who are not idealised in any way. People are funny; their bodies and actions having teasing and tantalising forms ... obstinate lovable lumps of flesh continually falling short of their aspirations. In this attitude of life I express something beyond my own nature, something more general about the human predicament. I don't seek an idealised form of perfection or what is sometimes called grace. Grace makes an object remote and unattainable.' - Kenneth Armitage

By 1954, Armitage was poised to move into the next stage of his career. He had exhibited with success at the Venice Biennale in 1952, alongside Adams, Butler, Chadwick, Clarke, Meadows, Paolozzi and Turnbull. The following year, he built a foundry at Corsham Court, with Meadows, enabling him to experiment with casting his own work. Armitage's sculpture was being sold internationally, and in March 1954 the Bertha Schaefer Gallery opened a solo exhibition in New York, where his bronzes were described as 'impressive', 'natural and convincing',¹

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Amid this, and within the increasingly confident evolution of Armitage's group sculptures, *Standing Figure* (1954) appears strikingly anomalous. Unlike the composite figures, it has a lightness stemming from the voids created by its arms hanging perpendicular to its shoulders. The figure's singularity, in fact, endows it with a quiet magnetism. Far larger than the hand-sized Cycladic figurines that may have inspired it, it stands gaunt, head angled quizzically.

Armitage had studied the British Museum's Egyptian and Cycladic collections as a student, and would retain an interest in the frontality of Egyptian sculpture throughout his life. There is cross-currency, too, with the sculpture of William Turnbull, who was likewise, albeit briefly, a teacher at Corsham. Armitage's *Standing Figure* echoes Turnbull's heads, from the 1950s and later, whose impassive flatness – in common with Cycladic sculpture, as well as Picasso – is relieved only by dots, dashes or wedges. And while the gently incised surfaces of *Standing Figure* imply antiquity, they also parallel those of ceramic vessels made by James Tower, an artist friend at Corsham, with whom Armitage shared his first exhibition at Gimpel Fils. These are concerns common to sculpture of the decade. What is remarkable, however, is Armitage's skilful orchestration of their effect, subordinating their impact to his own creative voice.

„ *New York Times* review (1954), quoted in James Scott and Claudia Milburn, *The Sculpture of Kenneth Armitage* (London: Lund Humphries, 2016), p. 40.



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