Statue - Diana

Object: Statue

Place of origin: London (made)

Date: 1778 (made)

Artist/Maker: Nollekens, Joseph Frans, born 1737 - died 1823 (maker)

Materials and Techniques: Carved marble

Museum number: A.5-1986

Gallery location: Sculpture, Room 22, The Dorothy and Michael Hintze Galleries, case NWAL

Public access description

This marble statue of Diana the Huntress was intended for the sculpture gallery at the 2nd Marquess of Rockingham's country seat, Wentworth Woodhouse, in Yorkshire, but seems not to have been taken there until after his death in 1782 and was never actually displayed. Diana is shown in the act of shooting her bow. Her dramatic pose, running forward and twisting her head round to take aim, is actually derived from an early 17th-century bronze statuette of Cupid, of which Nollekens made four drawings.

Joseph Nollekens was one of the most successful sculptors in England in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, particularly of portrait busts and church monuments. This figure is unusual in being an ideal work intended for a sculpture gallery, a new type of setting for sculpture in England, probably partly inspired by the displays of antique marbles in Rome. Nollekens had spent the 1760s in Rome, where he had not only studied ancient sculpture but had also built up his own reputation as an artist, acquiring a number of English patrons, such as Charles Townley and Lord Yarborough. On his return to England he became the leading sculptor in London, and was quickly overwhelmed with commissions. One of his former studio assistants, J. T. Smith, was to write a vituperative biography of the sculptor after his death, in which he condemned him as a miser, ridiculing his odd personal habits and the squalor in which he lived. However, he admitted that Nollekens worked exceptionally hard, and that his portrait busts in particular were unrivalled.

Descriptive line

Marble statue, 'Diana', by Joseph Nollekens, British, 1778

Physical description

The huntress goddess Diana is shown, with the crescent moon in her hair, running forward, here right foot in the air, but turning to her left to look back and fire her bow (most of which is missing). A tree trunk supports the main mass of the figure. She is clad in a classicizing knee-length robe and wears sandals. The supporting marble strut between her arms has not been removed.

Dimensions

Height: 124 cm with pedestal, Width: 57 cm, Depth: 57 cm, Weight: 206 kg figure, Weight: 138 kg base

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Object history note

One of four statues of goddesses executed for the 2nd Marquess of Rockingham between 1776 and 1778. These were originally in Lord Rockingham's house in London, but were brought to Wentworth Woodhouse, near Rotherham, Yorkshire after his death in 1782. Sold at the disposal of the Wentworth Woodhouse collection held at Christie’s, London, 15 July 1986, lot 85 and purchased by the Art Institute of Chicaco. The licence required by the Art Institute of Chicaco to export the Diana was withheld by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Minister for the Arts following an objection being lodged to its export. The figure was subsequently purchased for £97,707.50 from the Art Institute of Chicago, in 1986.

Historical significance: No comparable free-standing sculpture of a mythological subject had been carved by an English sculptor before.

Historical context note

Its intended position was for the projected sculpture gallery at Wentworth Woodhouse, but instead was probably placed in the family house in the late 18th century.

URL

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O67429/diana-statue-nollekens-joseph-frans/