



Mediterranean Sculpture I (Orphic Dream)

Jean Arp

On display**Title/Description:** Mediterranean Sculpture I (Orphic Dream)**Artist/Maker:** Jean Arp**Born:** 1941**Object Type:** Sculpture**Materials:** Terracotta**Measurements:** h. 382 x w. 150 x d. 260 mm**Accession Number:** 45**Historic Period:** 20th century**Production Place:** France**Credit Line:** Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

Perhaps best known for his work as a sculptor Jean (or Hans) Arp was a leading figure of the Dada and Surrealist movements. He exercised considerable influence on the methods and forms of twentieth-century art, first through his pioneering experiments in random and automatic techniques, and subsequently through his development of biomorphic abstraction. Early in his career he collaborated extensively with his wife, Sophie Taeuber, producing works that combined random and geometric form. During the late 1920s they followed different artistic paths, and by 1932 Arp had developed the essential characteristics of his sculpture: rounded, sensual forms that allude to the human figure, geological features and microscopic organisms.

After 1937 Arp and Taeuber collaborated once again, and it is possible that re-engagement with his wife's ideas prompted him to reconsider his curvilinear formal vocabulary. Their wooden sculptures of the late 1930s feature simple organic forms, incised or sliced in arbitrary fashion, characteristics that Arp rigorously exploited in Mediterranean Sculpture I. For this the artist has taken a vertical ovoid shape, flattened the top and bottom, and cut a long convex segment from one side. By these simple actions the work presents very different faces to the world, depending on the vantage-point of the viewer: mutely asymmetrical from one aspect, geometrically pure from another, organically inscrutable from a third. Thus when Arp reduced his means to a bare minimum (and he was never to approach such simplicity again) the result is one of surprise and variety. He produced a white marble version, and a bronze in an edition of three (Giedion-Weicker, 1957: no).

Entry taken from Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Collection 3 volume catalogue, edited by Steven Hooper (Yale University Press, 1997).

Provenance

Acquired by the Sainsbury Family in 1959. Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.
