



Standing female figure

On display**Title/Description:** Standing female figure**Object Type:** Figure**Materials:** Sandstone**Measurements:** h. 1020 x w. 280 x d. 150 mm**Accession Number:** 761**Historic Period:** Post-Classic period (AD 900-1500)**Production Place:** Huasteca, Mesoamerica, Mexico, The Americas, Veracruz**School/Style:** Huasteca style**Credit Line:** Purchased with support from the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Art Trust, 1980

This standing female figure showcases the artistic and cultural traditions of the Huasteca region during the Postclassic Period (AD 900–1500). Carved from sandstone, the sculpture's rigidly frontal stance and geometric composition reflect the distinctive aesthetic of Huastec artisans. Its bold, rectilinear features are complemented by intricate details, such as breasts, the crescent-shaped headdress, and hands placed on the abdomen. The simplicity of the figure's form and its imposing presence suggest it may have had a dual role as a human figure and as a divine presence.

André Stresser-Péan, an early authority on Huastec art, associated sculptures like this with fertility cults and Tlazolteotl, a goddess associated with purification, midwifery, and renewal in Mesoamerican cosmology. He proposed that the prominence of female figures in the Huasteca region indicated their importance in rituals related to life cycles. This sculpture's youthful appearance, combined with its minimal decoration, reinforces this interpretation.

Beatriz de la Fuente described Huastec sculptures as characterised by abstraction and geometric tendencies. She noted that these qualities imbued the figures with a sense of timelessness, reflecting cultural values tied to permanence and transcendence. Eduardo Matos Moctezuma identified connections between Huastec and Mexica traditions, observing shared visual elements, such as the crescent headdress, which may have spread through cultural and political networks in Mesoamerica.

Katarina Gallenkamp explored how Huastec sculptures were likely used in ritual contexts, placed in temples or shrines to invoke fertility, protection, or prosperity. Such settings may have amplified their spiritual significance. Kim Richter proposed that sculptures of this type could also depict members of the Huastec elite, wearing regalia that expressed their status. The standardised form

and prominent headdress may reflect their roles in sociopolitical and ceremonial practices.

Georgina Parada Carrillo has examined the spatial and conceptual qualities of Huastec sculptures, focusing on how their design conveys a relationship between abstract form and its connection to cultural practices and beliefs. She has highlighted the importance of the figures' geometric composition and symmetrical design, which may suggest a connection to cycles of life, death, and renewal. Parada Carrillo also emphasises the need to consider regional variations in interpreting these works, cautioning against associating them solely with widely known deities like Tlazolteotl. Instead, she encourages attention to local practices and beliefs that may have informed the sculpture's creation and use. The crescent-shaped headdress, in particular, may signify elite or divine status, reinforcing the sculpture's multifaceted significance. With its commanding presence and intricate craftsmanship, this sculpture encapsulates the layered traditions of the Huasteca region.

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Further Reading

De la Fuente, Beatriz. 1977. *La escultura huasteca*. Mexico: Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

Gallenkamp, Katarina. 1998. "Ritual Spaces and Sculptural Forms in the Huasteca Region." *Journal of Mesoamerican Studies* 34 (4): 59-88.

Matos Moctezuma, Eduardo. 1995. "Estudios mexicas y de la región huasteca." Mexico: El Colegio Nacional.

Parada Carrillo, Georgina. 2016. "El espacio recursivo-reversible en la escultura huasteca de piedra." PhD dissertation, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

Richter, Kim N. 2018. "The Role of Huastec Elite Sculptures in Mesoamerican Sociopolitical Identity." *Journal of Mesoamerican Art* 22 (2): 112-130.

Stresser-Péan, André. 1989. "The Huastec Region: A Cultural Crossroads of Mesoamerica." In *Archaeology and Ethnohistory of the Gulf Coast*, edited by R. A. Diehl and P. C. Weigand, 131-160. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press.

Exhibitions

London Art Fair, Business Design Centre, London - 22/01/25 - 26/01/25

Provenance

Purchased by the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia from John Stokes, New York, on the advice of Robert Sainsbury in 1980 out of funds provided by the Robert and Lisa Sainsbury Art Trust.
