LOT 17
SOLD BY ORDER OF THE 12TH DUKE OF NORTHUMBERLAND AND THE TRUSTEES OF THE NORTHUMBERLAND ESTATES
A MARBLE STATUE OF APHRODITE, ROMAN IMPERIAL, CIRCA EARLY 1ST CENTURY A.D.

after a Greek original of circa 430-420 B.C., the goddess standing in a majestic and graceful attitude, and wearing high-soled sandals, long diaphanous chiton leaving her right shoulder bare, and long cloak falling from her left shoulder in deeply pleated folds, her oval face with parted lips and large wide-set eyes, the wavy hair parted in the center, bound in a broad braided diadem, and flowing in a long tapering tress down the nape of neck; restored in marble: part of proper right earlobe, tip of nose, both forearms with attributes, small parts of drapery, and other minor areas
203.2cm., 80in. high
ESTIMATE £4,000,000-6,000,000 GBP
Lot Sold: 9,378,500 GBP

PROVENANCE
Cardinals Paolo Emilio Cesi (1481-1537) and Federico Cesi (1500-1565), garden of the Palazzo Cesi on the Janiculum, Rome, acquired prior to 1550;
Robert and James Adam (1728-1792 and 1732-1794), Rome and London (Christie’s, London, March 1st, 1773, lot 51 (Antique Statues in Marble, p. 15);
Sir Hugh Percy, 1st Duke of Northumberland (1714–1786), Syon House, Middlesex, acquired from the above;
by descent to the present owner until the present day, Syon House, Middlesex

LITERATURE
Ulisse Aldroandi, Tutte le statue antiche, che in Roma in diversi luoghi, e case particolari si veggono, p. 124, in Lucio Mauro, Le antichità della città di Roma, Venice, 1562
Giovanni Battista de Cavalieri (Cavalleriis), Antiquarum statuarum Urbis Romae, Rome, 1585, pl. 25
George James Aungier, The History and Antiquities of Syon Monastery, the Parish of Isleworth, and the Chapelry of Hounslow, London, 1840, p. 117
Christian Hülsen, Die Römische Antikengärten des XVI. Jahrhunderts, 1917, pp. 4, 22 (no. 71, fig. 12), 38
Frederik Poulsen, Greek and Roman Portraits in English Country Houses, Rome, 1923, pp. 16-17, fig. 13
Arachne, no. 51650 (http://arachne.uni-koeln.de/item/objekt/51650)

CATALOGUE NOTE
From Classical Greece to Imperial Rome
The present statue was carved in the early decades of the Roman Imperial era and stands as one of the most faithful and complete replicas of a now lost figure of Aphrodite, which was executed in Greece in the second half of the 5th century B.C., at the height of the Classical period of Greek art. Only one other replica, found twelve years ago in Pozzuoli near Naples, has come to light with its original head (Valeri and Zevi, op. cit., 2005, cat. no. IV.5, pp. 85-98). It is virtually the twin sister of the present statue. Equally close to the Greek original is a headless statue in the Munich Glyptothek (L.E. Baumer, “Vorbilder und Vorlagen,” in Acta Bernensia, vol. 10, Bern, 1997, no. G 3/2, p. 95, pl. 5,2). Several other figures belonging to the same type (called the “Syon-Munich type” in German art-historical nomenclature), either headless or fitted with alien or modern heads, can be found in public collections (e.g. Copenhagen, Louvre, Formia, and Epidauros). The overwhelming majority of these figures show slight variations and departures from the Greek original, both in their pose and arrangement of the drapery. One example was even carved as a portrait statue of a Julio-Claudian princess in the guise of Aphrodite (A. Giuliano, Catalogo dei ritratti romani del Museo Profano Lateranense, Rome, 1957, pp. 29f., cat. no. 32, pl. 20. 21; http://arachne.uni-koeln.de/item/objekt/21378). Until very recently, the head of the Syon Aphrodite was considered to be a later addition. The discovery of the Pozzuoli example proves beyond doubt that the head of the Syon statue is original to the body.
The Cesi Collection

The statue is first recorded with certainty in the late 16th Century, as it stood in the garden of the (no longer extant) Palazzo Cesi in Rome, on the northern slope of the Janiculum near the Basilica of Saint Peter. An engraving published by Cavalleriis in 1585 identifies it as “Agrippina, Marci Agrippae filia, ibidem” (“Agrippina, daughter of Marcus Agrippa, in the same place” [i.e., as the statues illustrated previously, “in the Cesi garden”]) and demonstrates a clear attempt at rendering the highly specific coiffure of the Syon statue. Aphrodite is depicted without her current restored arms, which are 18th-century additions. The figure engraved in Cavalleriis has been variously identified with a torso now in Copenhagen (Hülsen, op. cit., 1917, p. 123), and with a statue fitted with an alien portrait head of Lucilla in the Capitoline Museum (H.S. Jones, ed., A Catalogue of the Ancient Sculptures Preserved in the Municipal Collections of Rome. The Sculptures of the Museo Capitolino, Oxford, 1912, p. 283). These identifications can no longer be accepted.

The Cesi collection was assembled by two brothers, Cardinals Paolo Emilio Cesi (1481-1537) and Federico Cesi (1500-1565). Born into the provincial Umbrian elite, they were eager to compete with the Roman nobility for status and evidence of learning and taste. Their open-air museum became a major center of attraction for art lovers in general and Dutch artists in particular, such as Martin van Heemsckerck, who drew several views of the garden, including many of its antiquities, and Henrick van Cleef III, who painted a detailed panoramic view of the Palazzo Cesi and its garden (see M. van der Meulen, “Cardinal Cesi’s Antique Sculpture Garden: Notes on a Painting by Henrick van Cleef III,” Burlington Magazine, vol. 116, January 1974, fig. 27, and J.D. Hunt, Garden and Grove: The Italian Renaissance Garden, London, 1986, fig. 15).

Where in Rome the statue was found and when the Cesi acquired remain unknown. Textual evidence appears to point to a date of acquisition no more precise than sometime in the first half of the 16th century. The statue is most probably the same one Ulisse Aldro(v) saw on a visit to the Cesi gardens circa 1550, the description of which he published about six years later: “Entrando in questo giardino si trova à man dritta presso al muro una Agrippina intiera in piè vestita à l’antica e posta sopra una antica base. E bellissima statua, ma non ha braccia. Fu questa Agrippina figliuola di M. Agrippa, e di Iulia figlia d’Augusto perche furono molte Agrippine.” (“As one enters this garden, to the right against the wall there is a complete standing [figure of] Agrippina set on an ancient pedestal. It is a very beautiful statue, but it does not have arms. [One should note that] this Agrippina was the daughter of Marcus Agrippa and Julia, the daughter of Augustus, because there were many Agrippinas” (Aldroandi, op. cit, 1526, p. 124).

Also unknown is the location of the statue immediately following the dispersal of the Cesi collection, which started in earnest in 1621/1622, when Ludovico Ludovisi (Pope Gregory XV from 1621 to 1623) acquired about 100 sculptures from the family. In 1720, several of the Cesi antiquities were purchased by Pope Clement XI for the Capitoline Museum. Various other marbles went into the Albani collection. The remainder was dispersed on the Roman art market in the mid to late 18th Century (Hülsen, op. cit., 1917, p. 10, and G.B., Waywell, The Lever and Hope Sculptures, Berlin, 1986, p. 25).

James and Robert Adam

After almost 200 years, during which the Syon Aphrodite must have either remained in the Cesi Collection or sojourned in one or more of the great antiquities collections of late Renaissance and Baroque Rome, the statue resurfaced in 1773. It can be tentatively identified with a statue offered in the sale of the collection/inventory of British architects and dealers Robert and James Adam. The Christie’s auction of 25-27 February and 1-2 March 1773 was organized to help fund the brothers’ project to build the Adelphi Buildings, a row of terrace houses in neoclassical style in central London. James “was the more committed collector and dealer, buying in Italy most of the sculptures listed in the sale catalogue of 1773” (I. Bignamini and C. Hornsby, Digging and Dealing in Eighteenth-Century Rome, New Haven and London, 2010, p. 225, adding that he purchased antiquities from the collections of Cardinal Passionei, and some that had once been in the Massimi, Furietti, and Barberini collections).

The Syon Aphrodite most likely coincides with lot 51 in the fourth-day session of the 1773 sale: “The Empress

The Duke of Northumberland probably purchased “Livia” in the sale—most likely, as we will see why, on the advice of the Adam Brothers—together with at least one other statue, lot 51 in the fifth-day session: “The Consul Scipio, with his consular robes, and a volume or roll in his hand, in the action of speaking in the Senate House, of Grecian Workmanship, and exquisitely fine, Ft 7 In 9” [236 cm].

The Great Hall at Syon House

A month or two after Christie's Adam Brothers sale, in the Spring of 1773, four statues, two male and two female, including Aphrodite (a.k.a. Livia) and Scipio, were set on tall pedestals in the Robert Adam-designed Great Hall at Syon House, the Duke of Northumberland’s house in Middlesex (E. Harris, The Genius of Robert Adam, London, 2001, p. 341, note 10; Archives of Alnwick Castle, Sy.U/I/2/W1-71). Three-quarters of a century later, they were still described by an antiquarian as “Scipio Africanus, Livia, Cicero, and a priestess” (George Aungier, The history and antiquities of Syon Monastery, the parish of Isleworth, London, 1840, page 117.). The same author adds that they were “dug out of Herculaneum and Pompeii,” most likely an assumption on his or the owner’s part, based on the much publicized discoveries around Mount Vesuvius at the time.

Construction of the Great Hall along Robert Adam’s plans had started in 1760/61. In 1768 the four pedestals were still not fitted with the four casts of ancient "consular statues," which the Duke had initially envisaged for his neo-classical interior. James Adam, who was acting as the Duke’s dealer and agent in Italy, realized and conveyed to him that they were simply too expensive to manufacture (E. Harris, op. cit., 2001, p. 66 and 341, note 13). The use of the four ancient marbles statues, therefore, was an afterthought within the design of the Great Hall. They were selected for their size (slightly more than 2m each) and in at least two cases, for their subject ("consular statues" wearing togas), which corresponded to the Duke’s initial wishes. Within this group of latecomers, the two female statues were convenient additions, meant to supplement and enhance their male counterparts standing opposite them across the Hall.

A Scholarly Oversight

In the 19th century, at a time when European scholars were actively assessing Britain’s riches in ancient sculpture, the Comte de Clarac did not include engravings of the four Syon statues in his Musée de Sculpture. Adolf Michaelis, the pioneering re-discoverer of Britain’s antiquarian collecting past and author of Ancient Marbles in Great Britain, published in English in 1889, also never saw or even referred to the Syon statues. The fact that they were missing from Clarac’s and Michaelis’ nearly exhaustive corpora was both a sign of, and further cause for their neglect.

In 1923, Frederik Poulsen meticulously recorded three of the ancient statues at Syon, but since the scope of his work only covered portraits, he paid little attention to the figure of Aphrodite: "The so-called Livia has a modern head, copied from that of the Agrippina the Elder in the Capitoline Museum, and placed on an antique statue" (Poulsen, op. cit., 1923, pp. 16-17). His figure 13, a small grainy photograph in which the head is hard to see, is the only one ever to be published by scholars. Unlike the three other ancient statues at Syon, which were well illustrated by Poulsen, Aphrodite was not reproduced as a line drawing by Salomon Reinach in his Répertoire de la sculpture grecque et romaine, vol. V, 1924, p. 534, which may have further contributed to her
falling into relative oblivion. From then on, it was simply assumed that the head was a cleverly grafted replacement carried out by a skillful eighteenth-century restorer. This was probably due in part to the presence of a fine fracture beneath the neckline, and also to the fact that no scholar had inspected the head in person following Poulsen’s pronouncement. Even the archaeologists who so thoroughly published the Pozzuoli Aphrodite still assumed that the head was new (Valéri and Zevi, op. cit., 2005, p. 87, note 278). The only published reference to the head being ancient and never broken, a discovery apparently first made by Sascha Kansteiner after examining the statue in person, appears in a footnote to an article published in a Romanian journal in 2013 (Kansteiner, op. cit., 2013).

We are grateful to Adriano Aymonino, of the University of Buckingham, for sharing with us the important contribution he made to the history of the decoration of the Great Hall at Syon House on pp. 99-101 of his doctoral dissertation, entitled Aristocratic splendour: Hugh Smithson Percy (1712-1786) and Elizabeth Seymour Percy (1716-1776), 1st Duke and Duchess of Northumberland. A case study in patronage, collecting and society in eighteenth-century Britain (to be published by Yale University Press).