

GEORGES HILBERT (1900 - 1982)

Jackal or Fox of the Sands

Vosges granite
Signed and dated on the base: Hilbert 25
H. 30, W. 61, D. 13 cm

Provenance

Private French collection

Bibliography

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Académie des beaux-arts on June 25, 1975 to recognize M. Georges Hilbert, elected as a member of the Sculpture Department, replacing Claude Grange), Institut de France, Paris, 1975.

- *Georges Hilbert, sculptures*, Galerie Daber, Paris, April 18 to May 10, 1975.
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" . . . in black granite, his jackal [is] hunting for prey. I don't know what's to be most admired—the ardent character he displays or the ideal form that the artist has given him. I think, in fact, that the two complement each other and that the sober, dynamic lines, the architectural aspects, the balance of the various elements, and the overall fluidity could not be better expressed than in this rich black stone with its hard, brilliant surface."[1] (journal *Minerve*, May 1927, p. 249, reproduction)

By the middle of the 1920s, Georges Hilbert was widely recognized as a talented artist. Born in 1900 at Nemours in Algeria, he was the son of a veterinarian. He frequently accompanied his father on his rounds and developed a deep affection for animals and a fascination for their anatomy. After a brief time at the fine arts school in Oran, he was admitted to the École des Arts Décoratifs in Paris and then into the École des Beaux-Arts there, where he was awarded a prize for animal anatomy and began experimenting with stone, which would become his favorite medium. He frequently used the paths of the Jardin des Plantes as his studio, as had his predecessor Antoine-Louis Barye. He was close to Mateo Hernadez and Joseph Bernard, two sculptors who, like him, worked in hard stone and direct carving; he was also close to François Pompon, with whom he shared an interest in stylization and elegant

forms.

At the beginning of the 1920s, he came to know the poet and art critic Emmanuel de Thubert, the founder of the journal *Douce France* and president of the eponymous movement of sculptors using the method of direct carving. Hilbert joined this group and participated in their exhibitions alongside Louis Nicot, Georges Saupique, Ossip Zadkine, Joachim Cost, and François Pompon. In 1925, he collaborated with them on a bas-relief that was part of a larger work titled *Pergola de la Douce France,*[2] which was shown at the Exhibition of Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris; he received a gold medal for this work. That same year, at the age of only 25, he participated for the first time in the Salon d'Automne, where he showed this *Jackal*.[3]

The jackal—whose name comes from the Sanscrit *srgāláh*, "the howler"—is a canine of the plains and forests and is known as an excellent hunter. This one is, clearly, a golden jackal. This iconographic choice testifies to Georges Hilbert's great interest in Egyptian art. One of the animals that were greatly respected and mummified in ancient Egypt, the jackal occupies an important place in Egyptian mythology. The great god of the dead, Anubis, is depicted with the features of a jackal; he presides over embalmings and accompanies the souls of the dead to the after-life. In later years, Hilbert sculpted a desert fox, [4] also associated with the Egyptian gods Anubis and Seth, as well as a hyena. [5]

Hilbert presents this jackal in the process of hunting, indicated by the low line of his belly, his intense forward look, and his pinned back ears. The movement depicted here is rare in this sculptor's work; he usually presented his animals as static and hieratic, like the animals in Egyptian art. The balance of anatomical accuracy and synesthetic stylization captures the animal's nobility. He "does not copy nature or, rather, he does not copy the model"[6] and "through singular forms, carefully observed and considered, he manages to convey the very idea of the stag or of the panther."[7] His "vision is expressed clearly and frankly, without embellishment or apology."[8] The back of the work is left unfinished, indicating that it may have been intended to stand against a wall.

Formal simplicity is inherent in his choice of granite, a hard stone. Hilbert worked on site and made a number of study drawings and initial models in soft stone. Then he went on to work through direct carving in limestone, granite, or marble. "At times he even brought the block of granite to the site so that he could work directly in front of his model."[9] In order to get the correct size of the animal, he would count the bars of the cage in the Jardin des Plantes.[10] Hilbert frequently used black granite for his work, such as for his 1927 *Peccary*, [11] held in the New York Metropolitan Museum and his *Seated Chimpanzee* (location unknown).[12]

Over the course of his career, Georges Hilbert did several jackals in various materials; one in mahogany was shown in 1928 at the Arden Gallery in New York in the show "Sculptures in “taille directe”, Drawings," and in 1932, the national fine-arts museum in Algiers acquired a *Jackal* in bronze.[13] A further *Jackal Running*, 1956, done in wood, was shown at the Daber gallery in Paris in 1975 as part of the show "Georges Hilbert, Sculpture."

The year after he did this *Jackal*, Hilbert began showing works in the Salon des Tuileries and the Salon des Indépendants and participating in many shows elsewhere in France and Europe. In 1928 he was awarded the Blumenthal Prize, which gained him recognition in the United States, and that same year, his show at the Arden Gallery was a big success. Recognition in Asia and South America soon followed. Private collectors and large American museums, such as the Met and the Natural History Museum in New York, began acquiring his work. In 1931, he joined the "Groupe des Douze" ("The Group of Twelve"); he was also a member of the Groupe des animaliers and was associated with the Compagnie des Arts Français.[14] His work was bought by museums in France and elsewhere in Europe, and he received a variety of important commissions. In 1973, he became a member of the Academie des Beaux-Arts and was awarded the Grand Prize in Sculpture from the Société des Artistes Français [15] and the Edouard-Marcel Sandoz Prize for his life's work.

[1] J. S. "Georges Hilbert and Direct Carving," *Minerve*, May 1927, p. 249, reproduction.

[2] He did the sculpture *The Wild Horse* for the statuary group for the *Pergola de la Douce France*, installed in 1935 in Etampes. Arsène Alexandre, "La sculpture à l’exposition," *La Renaissance de l'art français et des industries de luxe*, October 1925, p. 445.http://www.paris-artdeco.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Pergola-dEtampes.pdf

[3] At the 1925 Salon d'Automne, he showed a *Jackal* (625) and a *Cormorant* (626).

[4] The Daber gallery showed a bronze version of the 1927 *Desert Fox* in Paris as part of the exhibition "Georges Hilbert, Sculpture."

[5] A *Spotted Hyena* in black granite was shown at the 1926 Salon des Tuileries (1033).

[6] J. S. "Georges Hilbert and Direct Carving," *Minerve*, May 1927.

[7] Dubois, Patrice, "Hilbert le sculpteur de vivant," *Revue des Artistes Français* , 1983.

[8] Georges Cheyssial, *Discours prononcés* . . . 1975.

[9] Martin, Alain, "Un grand artiste méconnu: Georges Hilbert, Premier sculpteur animalier de notre temps," *L'Algérianiste,* December 1977.

[10] According to the memories of the artist Jacques Coquillay.

[11] Georges Hilbert, *Peccary*, 1927, granite, 43.2 x 58.2 x 22.9 cm, Metropolitan Museum, New York (28.214).

[12] Reproduced in Dubois, Patrice, "Hilbert, Le sculpteur du vivant," in *Revue des Artistes Français* (previously published in the journal *Eléments* de January/February 1983), n°15, July 1983.

[13] Alazard, Jean, *Catalogue des peintures et sculptures exposées dans les galeries du Musée national des Beaux-Arts d'Alger*, Librairie Henri Laurens, Paris, 1936.

[14]http://opac.lesartsdecoratifs.fr/fiche/compagnie-des-arts-francais-1

[15] For his *The Otter* in the Salon des Artistes français in 1973.