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Denis Mitchell (1912 - 1993)

Oracle,1955

P1093

Signed, inscribed and dated on underside of base

Nigerian Guarea Wood, given to the artist by Barbara Hepworth

PROVENANCE

With Hazlitt Holland-Hibbert, London

Private collection

£ 78000

LITERATURE

Exhibition catalogue, Festival Exhibition of Sculpture by Denis Mitchell, Swansea, Welsh Arts Council, Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, 1979, n.p., no. 42, illustrated.

Exhibition catalogue, St Ives 1939-64: Twenty Five Years of Painting, Sculpture and Pottery, London, Tate Gallery, 1985, p. 204, no. 178, illustrated.

J. Halkes, exhibition catalogue, Denis Mitchell: Drawings, Paintings, Sculpture 1932-1992, St Ives, Penwith Galleries, 1992, pp. 38-39, no. 44, illustrated.

P. Curtis and C. Stephens (eds.), exhibition catalogue, Barbara Hepworth: Sculpture for a Modern World, London, Tate Britain, 2015, pp. 88, 89, 191, fig. 82.

EXHIBITION

London, A.I.A. Gallery, Denis Mitchell: Sculpture, February 1957.

Bristol, Arnolfini Gallery, Denis Mitchell, Sculpture: John Plumb, Paintings, March - April 1967, no. 19.

Bath, Festival Gallery, Denis Mitchell: Sculpture 1950-1978, April - May 1978, no. 3.

Swansea, Welsh Arts Council, Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Festival Exhibition of Sculpture by Denis Mitchell, October - November 1979, no. 42.

London, Tate Gallery, St Ives 1939-64: Twenty Five Years of Painting, Sculpture and Pottery, February - April 1985, no. 178.

St Ives, Penwith Galleries, Denis Mitchell: Drawings, Paintings, Sculpture 1932-1992, June - August 1992, no. 44.

London, Flowers East, Denis Mitchell: Sculptor, 1993, no. 59.

Brighton, Gardner Arts Centre, Denis Mitchell Sculptor: A Life of Art, October 1993, no. 32.

Swansea, Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Denis Mitchell: Sculpture, March - June 1994, no. 24.

ARTIST'S BIOGRAPHY

Denis Mitchell grew up in Swansea, where he took evening art classes before moving to Barnoon, St Ives in 1930 to set up a market garden with his brother. After working various jobs such as tin mining and fishing, Mitchell became assistant to Barbara Hepworth in 1949, the same year he co-founded the Penwith Society, of which he was chairman from 1955-7. Whilst under Hepworth's tutelage Mitchell developed an uncompromising love of pure form and by the late 1950s, had already exhibited many accomplished works in wood, stone and slate relief.

Mitchell moved on from Hepworth's studio in 1958, that same year he executed his first bronze sculpture. It was Mitchell's discovery of the sand-cast bronze technique that solidified his creative process, for it imposed a satisfying simplicity on his evolving repertoire of abstract forms. The grueling task of endlessly re-carving and working a rough bronze cast, allowed him time to engage with the formal and conceptual progression of his ideas.

In 1960 Mitchell became a part-time teacher at the Penzance Grammar School and then later at Redruth School of Art. During this time the artist's reputation as a sculptor grew and in 1967 he gave up teaching altogether to devote himself entirely to his own work.

After viewing the artist's solo show at Marjorie Parr Galleries in 1969, Patrick Heron commented 'Mitchell is the only important British sculptor, junior to Moore and Hepworth, who has never deserted the carved or hand-cut form as the sole vehicle of expression. A sculpture by Mitchell is not a geometrically definable concept. On the contrary, a Mitchell is a form, usually a single rather than streamlined form, enclosed as it were a single skin or surface which weaves and bends and buckles and stretches in a way so subtle, physically and dimensionally that it can still only usefully be likened to organic form…'

Denis Mitchell won the Arts Council Award in 1966. He was made a member of the Board of Governors, Plymouth Art College in 1973 and of the Falmouth School of Art 1977. Between 1957 and 1993 various exhibitions of Denis Mitchell's work were held at the Waddington Galleries, London, Bianchini Gallery, New York, Deborah Sherman Gallery, Chicago and the Penwith Gallery, St Ives, among others. The artist's work was included in the Tate Gallery St Ives' opening Exhibition in 1993 and more recently exhibited there for his solo show 'Ascending Forms' in 2005. Examples of Mitchell's work can still be found in the permanent collection of Tate St Ives.