

On view March 17 – June 20, 2021



Unknown Artist (Greek)

The Sutton Place Hercules, ca. 1st Century BCE

Marble

Private Collection; L2021:13.3

Gazing with purpose from beneath the trophy pelt of his defeated quarry, this marble bust likely depicts Macedonian King Alexander the Great in the canonical guise of the Greek hero Hercules (Heracles) wearing the head of the Nemean Lion, the prize from his first mythic labor. The titular reference to Sutton Place names the unlikely location where the bust was found and excavated in 1984, by a gardener at Sutton Place in Surrey. Initially believed to be an eighteenth or nineteenth century copy due to layers of attempted restoration, the stunning late Hellenistic history is now revealed as a fragment of a larger sculpture depicting the infamous King as the heroic demigod. Hellenistic sculpture traditionally dates from 323 BCE, marking the death of Alexander the Great, to 30/31 BCE, and can be identified by a sumptuous naturalism, the perfection of a trend developed by Greek sculptors for centuries. Expressive posture, anatomical realism, and intricate detail—such as the whirls of hair adorning Alexander’s head—define the classical style, bringing characters from mythology and history to life even 2,000 years later.

Extra Resources

Bust on view in 2020 VR exhibition at the European Art Fair (TEFAF), produced in collaboration with [Art Ancient Gallery, London](#) and [White Crow Projects](#).

Journals document [the groundbreaking exhibition](#) and [the discovery of the bust](#) at [Sutton Place](#), a grand Renaissance-style estate built in 1525 by a courtier of King Henry VIII.