

Kent Academic Repository

Full text document (pdf)

Citation for published version

Gill, David W J (2020) Context matters: the fragmentary gifts of Werner Nussberger. *Journal of Art Crime*, 24 . pp. 73-77. ISSN 1947-5934.

DOI

Link to record in KAR

<https://kar.kent.ac.uk/89112/>

Document Version

Publisher pdf

Copyright & reuse

Content in the Kent Academic Repository is made available for research purposes. Unless otherwise stated all content is protected by copyright and in the absence of an open licence (eg Creative Commons), permissions for further reuse of content should be sought from the publisher, author or other copyright holder.

Versions of research

The version in the Kent Academic Repository may differ from the final published version.

Users are advised to check <http://kar.kent.ac.uk> for the status of the paper. **Users should always cite the published version of record.**

Enquiries

For any further enquiries regarding the licence status of this document, please contact:

researchsupport@kent.ac.uk

If you believe this document infringes copyright then please contact the KAR admin team with the take-down information provided at <http://kar.kent.ac.uk/contact.html>

David W. J. Gill

Context Matters **“The Fragmentary Gifts of Werner Nussberger”**

In 1981 Werner Nussberger of Baden, Switzerland presented to the J. Paul Getty Museum over 6000 fragments of pottery, with some additional pieces of sculpture in 1982. This could, at first glance, appear to have been a generous act directed at a museum seeking to build up its collections. It should be noted that multiple fragments can come from the same pot and it is therefore unclear how many individual pieces are represented. Not one of the pieces seems to have had any indication of a previous history.

Among Nussberger’s fragmentary gifts in 1981 were some fragments of an Attic red-figured phiale mesomphalos signed by Douris (inv. 81.AE.213). In 1985 12 further fragments were purchased from Galerie Nefer (“European art market”) (inv. 85.AE.18.1–9, 85.AE.185.1–3; Walsh 1986, 191, no. 44; Robertson 1991). There was a further acquisition in 1988, and in 1992 several additional fragments were placed on loan by an anonymous individual. Marion True recalled that the Getty had tried to acquire fragments from those who held them: Frida Tchachos, Robin Symes, Fritz Bürki, Robert Hecht and Herbert Cahn. The phiale appeared in the photographic archive seized from the warehouse facility of Giacomo Medici (Felch and Frammolino 2005), and as a result it was returned to Italy along with a number of other acquisitions (Gill and Chippindale 2007; Godart and De Caro 2007, 110–11, no. 24; Gill 2018).

This was not the only Nussberger gift that has raised concerns with the Italian authorities. Maria A. Rizzo has drawn attention to the fragments from a plate attributed to Phintias (and originally to Euthymides) that were presented in 1981, and then supplemented by fragments purchased from Galerie Nefer in 1985 (inv. 81.AE.206.A; 85.AE.332; Walsh 1986, 190, no. 37; Saunders 2014, 193, fig. 11). Graffiti on the plate suggest that it had been placed in an Etruscan tomb. A similar donation pattern was observed for the fragments from a single kalpis attributed to the Kleophrades painter (inv. 81.AE.206; 85.AE.188, 85.AE.339.1–8, 85.AE.342.1–2; Walsh 1986, 192, no. 52). The kalpis itself is seen as significant in the study of the development of Attic red-figured pottery (Robertson 1992, 133–34, fig. 136; see also Lissarrague 2000). Fragments of a stamnos attributed to the Kleophrades painter were donated by Nussberger in 1981, and fragments purchased from Galerie Nefer in 1986 would also appear to come from the same stamnos (inv. 81.AE.220, 86.AE.547; Walsh 1987, 161, no. 8).

The Etruscan graffito on the Phintias plate indicated that it had come ‘from the tomb’ is one that is found on other Nussberger gifts from 1981 (Saunders 2014). Indeed, there is a possibility that they were found in the same Etruscan tomb. For example, fragments from an Attic red-figured calyx-krater attributed originally to the Altamura painter (by D. von Bothmer)—and now to the Syleus painter (by J.R. Guy)—were supplemented by purchases from Galerie Nefer in 1985, 1986 and 1988, as well as by two fragments placed on loan by Robin Symes (inv. 81.AE.219; 85.AE.335.1–6, 86.AE.737.6,

88.AE.[27 or 31]: Walsh 1986, 192, no. 57; Walsh 1989, 111–12, no. 16; Saunders 2014). A third piece with the Etruscan funerary phrase *suthil* is an Attic red-figured hydria attributed to the Berlin painter. Again the first fragments were given by Nussberger in 1981, and further pieces were purchased in 1985 and 1986 from Galerie Nefer, and additional fragments from an unnamed source in 1998 (inv. 81.AE.206.D.1968–2008, 85.AE.195.1, 85.AE.336.1–3, 86.AE.566.1–2, 98.AE.29.1–8: Kotansky, Manchester, and Frel 1985, 76–78, figs. 1–10; Walsh 1986, 191, no. 42; Saunders 2014, 192, fig. 9; Padgett 2017, 396, no. BN38; Saunders 2017, 114, fig. 9). A further fragmentary hydria attributed to the Berlin painter (and originally to the Kleophrades painter), and without funerary inscription, was donated by Nussberger in 1981 with further fragments sold to the museum by Galerie Nefer in 1985 and 1986 (inv. 81.AE.206; 85.AE.344; 86.AE.483.56; 86.AE.483.58: Walsh 1986, 192, no. 54; Padgett 2017, 392, no. BN12).

This emerging pattern of fragments donated by Nussberger and additional pieces sold by Galerie Nefer is illustrated by a series of other pieces:

- Attic black-figured dinos attributed to the Kyllenios painter showing a gigantomachy (inv. 81.AE.211 (81 fragments); 85.AE.194.1–9, 85.AE.343; 86.AE.735: Moore 1985; Walsh 1987, 189, no. 31).
- Attic black-figured segment cup (inv. 81.AE.199.49; 85.AE.334: Walsh 1986, 190, no. 34).
- Attic black-figured Panathenaic amphora (inv. 81.AE.203; 85.AE.333.1–3: Walsh 1986, 190, 35; Zisa 2000).
- Attic red-figured oinochoe attributed to Douris (inv. 81.AE.206; 85.AE.341.1–3: Walsh 1986, 191, no. 43).
- Two Attic black-glossed kantharoi with masks showing Dionysos, and attributed to Onesimos (inv. 81.AE.195; 85.AE.323.1–2: Walsh 1986, 191, no. 46).
- Attic mule's head rhyton attributed to the Brygos painter (inv. 81.AE.216.A; 85.AE.327.a; 86.AE.564: Walsh 1986, 191, no. 49).
- An Attic red-figured stamnoid psykter attributed originally to the Brygos painter and now to the Foundry painter (inv. 81.AE.217; 85.AE.337.1–4: Walsh 1986, 192, no. 56). This was one of a pair that 'were probably from an Etruscan votive context' (Williams 2017, 166).
- Two Attic astragaloi attributed to Syriskos as potter (inv. 81.AE.216; 85.AE.186.1–2; 85.AE.329.1–2: Walsh 1986, 192, no. 58).
- A terracotta footbath (inv. 81.AE.196; 85.AE.420.1–2; 86.AE.553: Walsh 1986, 190, no. 40).

Most of Nussberger gifts were potsherds, but there were also several fragments of a sixth century BC Greek marble funerary monument showing a male figure reclining on a *kline* with some trace of red paint surviving (inv. 81.AA.193; 81.AA.194.2-27; 82.AA.123.1-4; 85.AA.419.1-5; 86.AA.545.1-3: Walsh 1986, 180, no. 3; Walsh 1987, 159, no. 1). He presented a total of 31 fragments in three batches in 1981 and 1982, and pieces were added in 1985 and 1986 from Galerie Nefer ('European art market').

The review of fragments could continue, but there appears to be a consistent pattern emerging: Nussberger donated fragments in 1981 and then further pieces were sold to the Getty in 1985 (and later) by Galerie Nefer. It should be noted that the connecting links between the two sets of fragments were made soon after the acquisitions in 1985 and placed in the definitive museum record (Walsh 1986). It should be observed that Nussberger was married to Frida Tchachos, the owner of Galerie Nefer. The aim of the sale of further fragments to the Getty was to assist with the completion of the pot. This raises some further issues. As the breaks appeared to be fresh, were the pots deliberately broken before the pieces were donated to the Getty (as Marion True had observed: Watson and Todeschini 2006, 212)? Where are the remaining missing fragments? Are dealer or collectors sitting on fragments in the hope that at some future point they will be able to sell them to the Getty for a profit? Have all the connections between the Nussberger gifts and the Galerie Nefer purchases in the Getty been made? Will there be connections with fragments held by other museums, collectors, and galleries?

This paper brings into focus the way that some have seen pottery fragments as peripheral to the

discussion about cultural property (Cuno 2008, 22; see also Gill 2009; Gill 2020, 138). Fragments have been donated to semi-complete pots that have in turn been handed back to Italy, such as the amphora attributed to the Berlin painter that was returned by New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art (Padgett 2017, 391, no. BN3; Gill 2020, 138–39). Cuno's discussion of the topic drew on Harvard's acquisition of some 200 pot fragments once owned by J. R. Guy (Paul 1997).

Should the Getty recognise the role of Nussberger and Galerie Nefer in the handling of recently surfaced fragments and agree to the return of the complete series to Italy, perhaps after the objects have been conserved at the Getty's expense? The role of Galerie Nefer may also deserve further investigation as it was a source for other fragmented pots such as the Onesimos cup and the krater attributed to the Berlin painter that were returned from the Getty Museum (Williams 1991; Sgubini 1999; Padgett 2017, 395, no. BN29; Saunders 2017, 116, fig. 11; Gill 2020, 164–65). These examples point to other individuals who supplied material to add to the fragmentary cup and krater. When and how did they acquire the fragments? While Nussberger appears to have been party to a complex strategy to encourage the Getty to buy pieces to add to fragmentary pots that the museum had already acquired, Nussberger does not appear to have been alone in adopting such an approach.

References

- Cuno, J. 2008. *Who Owns Antiquity? Museums and the Battle over our Ancient Heritage*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Felch, J., and R. Frammolino. 2005. "Getty had Signs it was Acquiring Possibly Looted Art, Documents Show". *LA Times* September 25, 2005.
- Gill, D. W. J. 2009. Electronic Review of James Cuno, *Who Owns Antiquity? Museums and the Battle Over Our Ancient Heritage* (Princeton University Press, 2008). *American Journal of Archaeology* 113: 104.
- . 2018. "Returning Archaeological Objects to Italy". *International Journal of Cultural Property* 25: 283–321.
- . 2020. *Context Matters: Collating the Past*. ARCA.
- Gill, D. W. J., and C. Chippindale. 2007. "From Malibu to Rome: Further Developments on the Return of Antiquities". *International Journal of Cultural Property* 14: 205-40.
- Godart, L., and S. De Caro (eds.). 2007. *Nostoi: Capolavori ritrovati. Roma, Palazzo del Quirinale, Galleria di Alessandro VII, 21 dicembre 2007 - 2 marzo 2008*. Rome: Segretariato Generale della Presidenza della Repubblica.
- Kotansky, M., K. Manchester, and J. Frel. 1985. "A Fragmentary Hydria by the Berlin Painter". In *Greek Vases in the J. Paul Getty Museum*, vol. 2: 75-78. Malibu: J. Paul Getty Museum.
- Lissarrague, F. 2000. "A Sun-struck Satyr in Malibu". In *Periplous: Papers on Classical Art and Archaeology Presented to Sir John Boardman*, edited by G. R. Tsetskhladze, A. J. N. W. Prag, and A. M. Snodgrass: 190–97. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Moore, M. B. 1985. "Giants at the Getty". In *Greek Vases in the J. Paul Getty Museum 2*, Occasional Papers on Antiquities, vol. 3: 21–40. Malibu: J. Paul Getty Museum.
- Padgett, J. M. (ed.). 2017. *The Berlin Painter and His World: Athenian Vase-painting in the Early Fifth Century B.C.* New Haven: Princeton University Art Museum.
- Paul, A. J. 1997. "Fragments of Antiquity: Drawing upon Greek Vases". *Harvard University Art Museums Bulletin* 5: 1-87.
- Robertson, M. 1991. "A Fragmentary Phiale by Douris". In *Greek Vases in the J. Paul Getty Museum 5*, edited by M. True, Occasional Papers on Antiquities, vol. 7: 74-98. Malibu: J. Paul Getty Museum.
- . 1992. *The Art of Vase-painting in Classical Athens*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Saunders, D. 2014. "An Amazonomachy Attributed to the Syleus Painter". In *Athenian Potters and Painters*, edited by J. Oakley, vol. 3: 187–96. Oxford: Oxbow.
- . 2017. "The Distribution of the Berlin Painter's Vases". In *The Berlin Painter and his World: Athenian Vase-painting in the Early Fifth Century B.C.*, edited by J. M. Padgett: 107-31. New Haven: Princeton University Art Museum.
- Sgubini, A. M. M. 1999. *Euphronios epoiesen: un dono d'eccezione ad Ercole Cerite*. Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider.
- Walsh, J. 1986. "Acquisitions/1985". *The J. Paul Getty Museum Journal* 14: 173-286.
- . 1987. "Acquisitions/1986". *The J. Paul Getty Museum Journal* 15: 151-238.
- . 1989. "Acquisitions/1988." *J. Paul Getty Museum Journal* 17: 99-166.
- Watson, P., and C. Todeschini. 2006. *The Medici Conspiracy: the Illicit Journey of Looted Antiquities from Italy's Tomb Raiders to the World's Great Museums*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Williams, D. 1991. "Onesimos and the Getty Iliupersis". In *Greek Vases in the J. Paul Getty Museum 5*, edited by M. True, Occasional Papers on Antiquities, vol. 7: 41-64. Malibu: J. Paul Getty Museum.
- . 2017. "Beyond the Berlin Painter: Toward a Workshop View". In *The Berlin Painter and his World: Athenian Vase-painting in the Early Fifth century B.C.*, edited by J. M. Padgett: 144–87. New Haven: Princeton University Art Museum.
- Zisa, F. 2000. "Frammenti di Anfore Panathenaiche Arcaiche al J. Paul Getty Museum". In *Greek Vases in the J. Paul Getty Museum*, vol. 6: 55–78. Malibu: The J. Paul Getty Museum.