

An exceptional, large and unique carved bas relief wall panel by  
Sylva Bernt (1910 - 1995)

£120,000



REF: 5304

Height: 279 cm (109.8")

Width: 200 cm (78.7")

Weight: 414 kg

## Description

Comprising six carved Caen limestone panels depicting an overall scene of ship-making and navigation. Signed 'S. BERNT' bottom left.

Paris, circa 1957

Provenance: Designed for a private mansion in Neuilly-sur-Seine, entirely decorated by André Arbus. These panels documented in situ in *Ensembles mobiliers*. Vol. 17, 1957. Paris: Bibliothèque de l'Image, 2005, pl. 37

Condition: Old restoration to the corner of the top right panel. Otherwise in wonderful original condition

Dimensions of individual panel: Height 139.5cm, Width 100cm, Weight 69kg

The decoration, which depicts boat building and navigation, is inspired by ancient mythology typical to Bernt's repertoire. Her skill and artistry are exemplified by her ability to capture a sense of movement and dynamism in such shallow carving and clearly she took inspiration from Neo-Assyrian bas reliefs. This work offers a modernised interpretation of those sculptures.

Sylva Bernt was an Italian sculptor and, like many female artists of the 20th century, did not gain the attention that many of her male peers did, despite her extraordinary talent. As a result, we know less about her than we'd like.

However, we do know that her career accelerated after her introduction to architect and furniture designer, André Arbus, at the Venetian home of their mutual friend Guido Cadorin in 1952. Following their initial meeting, Bernt was invited by Arbus to collaborate on the interiors of the Bretagne ocean liner (1951-52), creating a large stone altar in direct carving for the ship's chapel.

Bernt soon after relocated to Paris and, while continuing to pursue personal work from her studio on Avenue du Maine, became the practitioner, close friend and muse of Arbus. Bernt carried out some of the ornamental sculptural elements that played a significant role in Arbus' highly collectable furniture designs, as well as in his interiors.

Later in his life, Arbus considered himself primarily a sculptor and architecture and design were secondary pursuits. Although the sculptors Vadim Androusov and Henry Parayre also made mounts and sculptures for Arbus' designs, Bernt is considered the strongest inspiration in Arbus' turn towards sculpture towards the end of his career.

Bernt and Arbus' collaborations include private commissions, such as the construction of Jean-Marie Terrin's villa in Aix-en-Provence (1955), and also large official commissions such as the decoration of the Viêt Nam (1952) and Pasteur (1961) transatlantic liners and the Grand Salon of the Palais des Consuls of the Chamber of Commerce of Rouen (1955-56), of which clear similarities can be drawn to our panels. Bernt's output is considered highly collectible, and these panels are an important example of her work.