

Basic Detail Report

Female "Venus" figurine

Date

23rd-21st century BCE

Primary Maker

Unidentified artist

Medium

Earthenware

Description

This standing female "venus" figurine has a conical, hooded, helmet-like hairstyle, with facial features roughly indicated by incised lines. The figure stands with arms bent at the elbows and resting at waist level. Except for the face, the entire figurine is covered with burnished red slip. The figure's right leg is broken. Valdivia Phase III (Ecuador) Valdivian anthropomorphic figurines were hallmarks of the Valdivia Phase cultures in Ecuador for nearly two millennia, beginning around 3500 BC. These figurines are usually found intentionally broken or mutilated, often decapitated or with damaged faces, and are frequently found discarded in general site refuse with no apparent intent to preserve them for long-term use. Possible functions for these figurines may include a role as aids in shamanic religious or healing practices mediated by hallucinogenic drugs, as found in many contemporary lowland Amazonian cultures. Botanical sources of such hallucinogens are common in Ecuador, and include the San Pedro cactus (*Trichocereus pachanoi*), coca (*Erythroxylum* spp.), nightshade (*Datura* spp.), tobacco (*Nicotiana* spp.), leguminous trees (*Adenanthera* spp. and *Mimosa* spp.), a member of the nutmeg family (*Virola* spp.), *Banisteriopsis* spp., *Psychotria* spp., and holly (*Ilex* spp.). In modern ethnographically known cultures, spirits are called up by a shaman to reside temporarily in anthropomorphic figurines during a variety of rituals, but depart from the figurine at the end of the ritual, leaving the figurine spiritually "vacant," and therefore of no further use. Because so many of these figurines are female, many with prominent breasts, some obviously pregnant, it has also been proposed that they may have served as fertility and/or fecundity symbols, charms, or tokens. Reference: Peter W. Stahl (1986): "Hallucinatory imagery and the origin of early South American figurine art" in *World Archaeology* 18(1): pp. 134-150.

Dimensions

4 5/8 × 1 9/16 × 13/16 inches (11.7 × 4 × 2 cm)