

ART ANCIENT



GOGOTTE

Sandstone concretion
c. 300,000 - 30 million years before present
42 x 21 x 63 cm

PROVENANCE

Found in the sand dunes of Fontainebleau, 1989-1994.

A magnificent example of a gogotte formation composed of thick swirls and folds of sparkling sandstone. Discovered in the pure Oligocene sand dunes of Fontainebleau, France, and formed between 30 million and 300,000 years ago.





Natural Sculptures

The incredible, almost otherworldly appearance of gogottes may easily be mistaken for the work of a most talented artist. In fact, these sandstone sculptures are entirely natural in origin. They have been found in multiple locations but those from Fontainebleau, such as the present example, are the most remarkable. Thirty-five million years ago, a sea covered what is now the forest of Fontainebleau, and dunes of exceptionally fine and homogenous sand formed. As silica-rich water filtered through this sand, it turned into stone. The flow of water finely modelled the sandstone into the aesthetic concretions we now know as gogottes. These are rare and are only found sporadically several metres deep into the ground. They owe their sparkling white appearance to the extreme and unmatched purity of the Fontainebleau sand, sometimes reaching a composition of 99.9% silica. Each of them is unique - a masterpiece slowly fashioned by the hands of Nature.

The intriguing name of "gogotte" was coined by French geologist Claude Guillemin (1923- 1994), who was inspired by the children's book series Babar the Elephant. In one of the books, a group of monsters called Gogottes are shown hiding behind rocks. These rocks reminded Guillemin of the sandstone concretions from Fontainebleau, and the name stuck.

The striking forms of gogottes have fascinated their beholders for centuries. They have inspired many artists, such as the French surrealists or the English sculptor Henry Moore, who owned his own example. The Sun King himself, Louis XIV, admired these natural artworks and kept them in his gardens at Versailles, where they can still be admired today. Gogottes can also be found in some of the world's leading natural history museums, notably the Smithsonian Institution, Houston Museum of Natural Science and the Natural History Museum in London.



1 Location of Fontainebleau.

2 Gogotte photographed in situ, Fontainebleau. Credit: Thierry Guéguen.