

ART ANCIENT



BRONZE ARM OF DIONYSUS

Graeco-Roman, 1st century BC - 1st century AD
Cast bronze
H. 10 cm

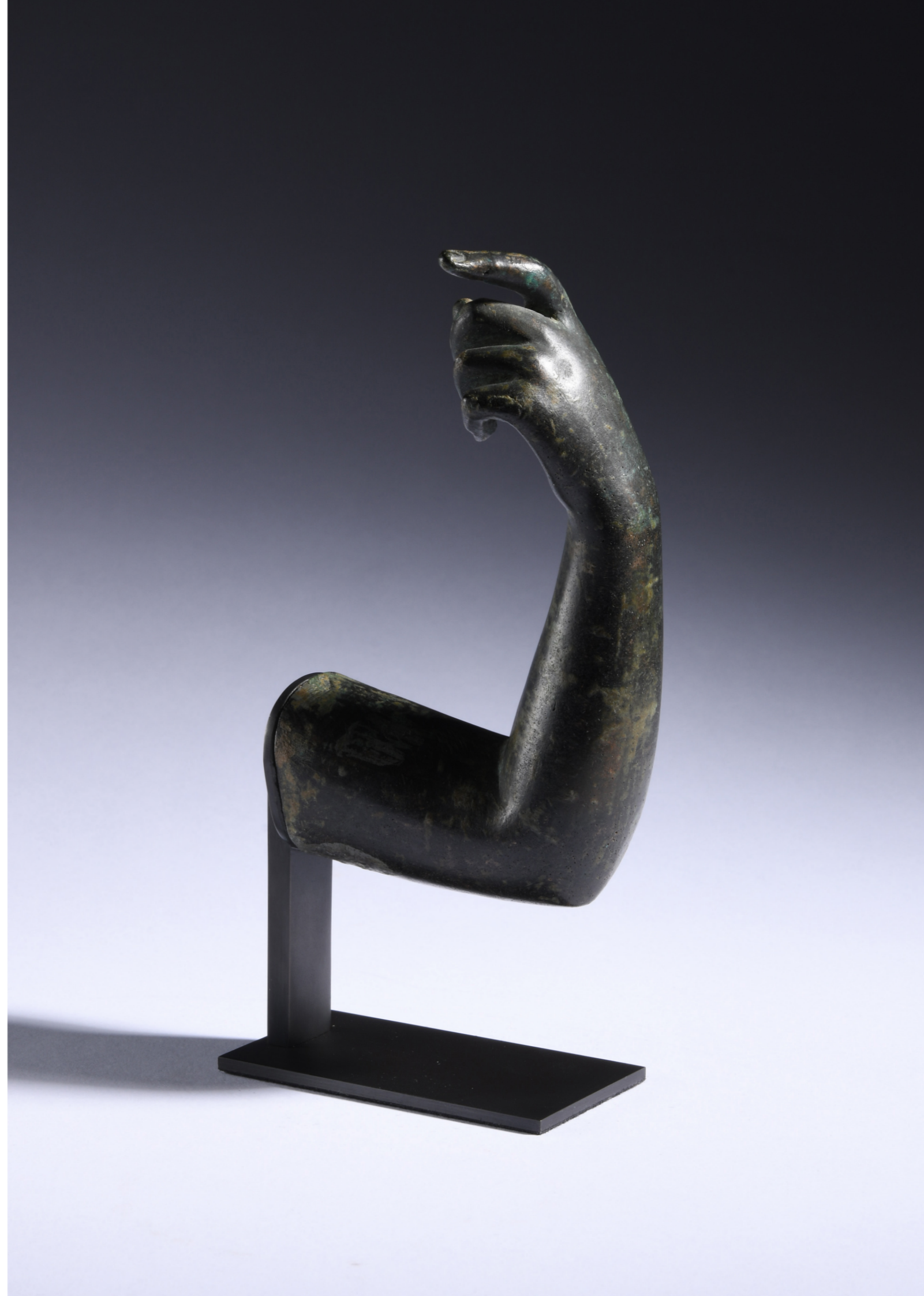
PROVENANCE

Private collection, Europe, acquired prior to 1980; thence by descent

Antiquities, Christie's, London, 1 October 2015, Lot 71

British private collection, acquired from the above

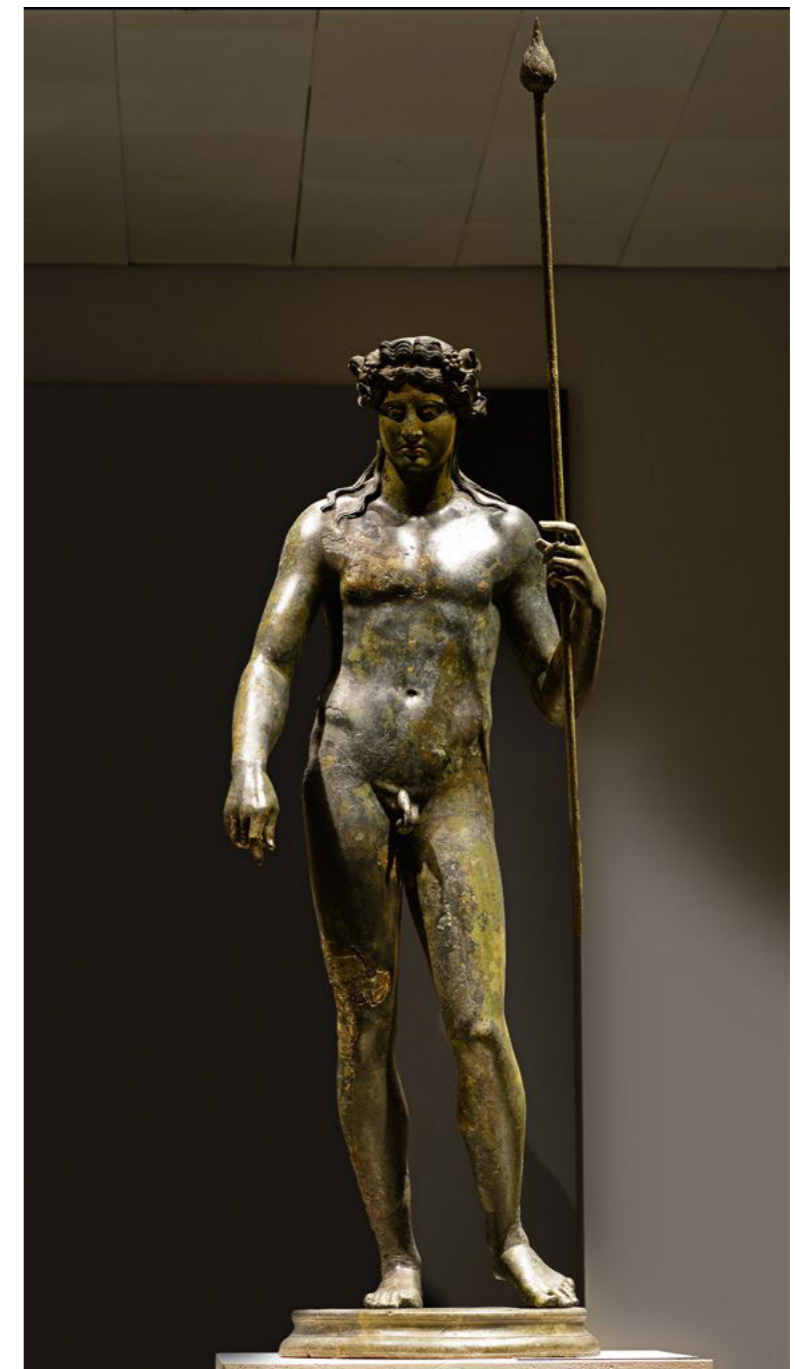
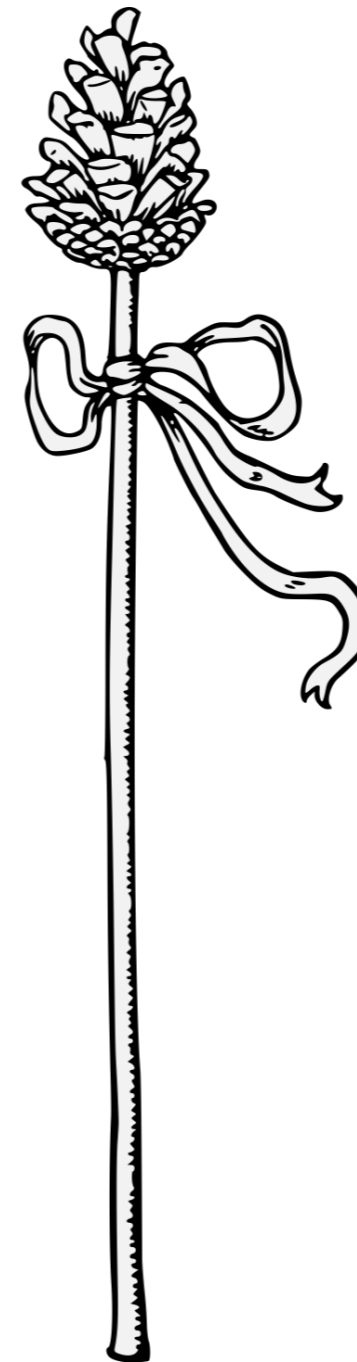
A finely modelled left arm of a bronze statuette, bent at the elbow with hand poised to hold a thyrsus, identifying the depicted as the Olympian god of wine and revelry - Dionysus.



The God of Wine and Revelry

The ancient Greeks and Romans had a long history of making statuary in bronze, and thousands of images of gods, heroes, athletes, statesmen and philosophers filled temples and sanctuaries throughout antiquity. Their method of lost-wax casting enabled the creation of hollow, but monumental, and large-scale statues, as well as finely cast statuettes, such as one the present example was originally from.

As the god of revelry and excess, vegetation and fertility, the depiction of the Olympian deity, Dionysus, often transcends the boundaries between order and chaos, and the mortal and the divine worlds, making him a favoured subject in both the Greek and Roman artistic canon, and often seen in bronze statuary. Indeed, the present arm has been identified by classical scholar, archaeologist and curator, Denys Haynes (1913-1994) as likely belonging to a statuette of the deity. The soft, fleshy modelling suggests the youthfulness of Dionysus, while the hand is perhaps poised to have once held a thyrsus - the ivy-covered wand, or staff topped by a pinecone and often seen in depictions of the god. This exact arm posture can be seen in the renowned Tiber Dionysus, found in the River Tiber in 1885 during the construction of the Ponte Garibaldi in Rome. In antiquity, the thyrsus was a symbol of prosperity, fertility and hedonism, associated with Dionysus and carried during Hellenic festivals and religious ceremonies by his devotees.



1 (left) Line drawing of a Thyrsus, a staff topped with a pinecone.

2 (right) Tiber Dionysus, Roman, c.117-138 AD, Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome.



'I, the son of Zeus, have come to this land of the Thebans... so that I might be a deity manifest among men... fitting a fawn-skin to my body and *taking a thyrsus in my hand*, a weapon of ivy.'

Dionysus' opening monologue in Euripides' *The Bacchae*, Lines 1-25.

