



BEN NICHOLSON

(Denham 1894 - 1982 Hampstead)

Helmos. December 1963.

Wood relief, painted.

Signed, dated and titled on the reverse: Ben Nicholson / dec 63 / (Helmos).

78 x 78 cm.

Provenance: Private collection Switzerland. Exhibition: Basel 1968, Ben Nicholson, Galerie Beyeler, April - 15 June 1968, no. 36 (with ill.; with label on the reverse). In 1957 Ben Nicholson married the young German photographer Felicitas Vogler. One year later, the two moved to the Lago Maggiore in the Swiss Brissago. This move, as well as the marriage with Vogler, triggered a new phase in Nicholson's work. Their first home in the village of Ronco, outside of Ascona,

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was small and most of the works made there are drawings. Soon, however, he began to work on small carved reliefs, and the shift from the works in England is immediately evident. Inspired by the Swiss landscape, Nicholson ventured into a new direction, away from the still life and returning to the abstract relief. He titled these reliefs after Italian and Greek locations. The names he chose had no reference the place of production—they were given only after completion. Instead, they refer to a location Nicholson connected with a specific atmosphere or experience that the work recalled. Nicholson visited Greece and the Aegean Sea for the first time in April 1959 and returned for three more trips in the 1960s. In St. Ives, Cornwall, where Nicholson and Hepworth had settled shortly before the outbreak of World War II, Nicholson had been fascinated by the local prehistoric sites, where history, legend, religion, and folklore commingle to infuse the region with elusive suspense and mystery. Nicholson termed his later reliefs, including the work offered here, as "primitive reliefs". They evoke a primordial time with landscapes that bear traces of millennia within themselves. Produced in 1963, "Helmos" shows Nicholson's employment of a sparse composition of formal elements. Every line, every angle and every geometrical shape has been worked out with precision. The exact lines are surgically incised in the recessed relief layers and subdivided into various trapezoids. The present work is a wonderful example of Nicholson's artistic production from the 1960s. In "Helmos", Nicholson's ambitions with the relief medium are combined into a work of restraint and delicacy with a balanced composition in subtle colours.

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