



106

**Incised slab with an abstract female figure and animals**

*Alabaster*

*H. 35.3 cm (13<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> in.); W. 18.5 cm (7<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> in.); Thickness 1.6 cm (5/8 in.)*

*Syria, Mari, TH97, 154*

*Early Bronze Age, early third millennium B.C.*

*Museum of Deir ez-Zor, Syria 19088*

Under an altar dedicated to the goddess Ninhursanga dating to about 2300 B.C., a pit containing fifty objects was discovered. They included this unique stele, which may have been used in the cult and which the excavator considered to be one of the oldest finds in the pit.<sup>1</sup> On one side the stele shows elements of a female body arranged in a facelike design that calls to mind René Magritte's painting *The Rape*.<sup>2</sup> Across the top between parallel zigzag lines are two bands of triangles, all but four of which are hatched. Two large eyes that can be read as breasts, formed from concentric circles, are incised below eyebrows that join in

the center as the single line of the nose. A circle suggests the end of the nose or a navel. Above and on either side of a schematic triangle of the mouth or pubic triangle are stylized birds and ibex flanking plants. Two bands of hatched triangles like those at the top of the stele form the groundline for four of the ibex.

Similar schematic representations of the female form are found only on stone figurines from the Levant, the Aegean area, and western Anatolia (see cat. no. 180). PC

1. Fortin 1999, p. 284.

2. Mundy 2001, p. 279, fig. 269.