

# MAKONDE SCULPTURE

November 25 1969 – February 1970



1 h.9"

*SOLD.*

2 h.9½"

*SOLD*

3 h.11"

*SOLO*

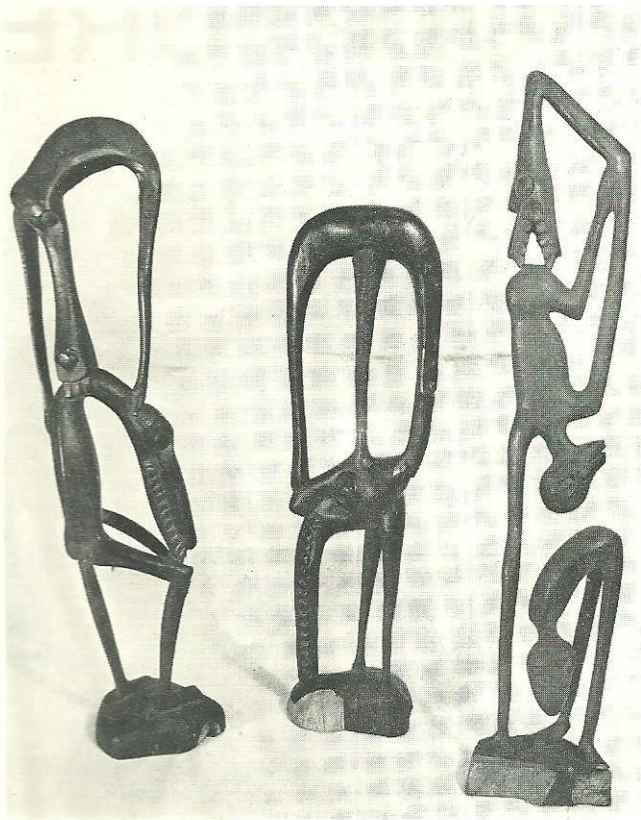
4 h.13½" *SOLD*

**Grosvenor Gallery**

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5 h.23½"

1724

VAT 533

6 h.20½"

1740

VAT 548

7 h.25¼"

SOLD



8 h.19"

1767

VAT 567

9 h.17¼"

1730

VAT 539

The most positive and uninhibited of all our East African contemporary artists are perhaps the Makonde sculptors of Tanzania. Their work is a vigorous comment on the human story of life and death in a tribal setting. It is also a direct response to the artists' new urban surroundings. . . . Here is a daring victory of the so-called African savage over the polite existence of the modern art-school trained artist. A close study of modern Makonde sculpture will reveal latent seeds of an artistic renaissance in East Africa. To the traditional Makonde artist, art was a spiritual way of life and a means of projecting his ideas of beauty and life. But the traditional art that was once restricted only to rigid religious rites of tribalism has now found its new liberating force and energy in modern young Makonde sculptors. . . .

E. P. Njau

*The Directors of the Grosvenor Gallery would like to acknowledge the help given by Professor Walter Battiss, Mr. Luca Scacchi Gracco and Mr. E. P. Njau in making this exhibition possible.*

## MAKONDE SCULPTURE

Makonde sculpture has within recent years developed into one of Africa's most surprising new arts, due to the unusual combination of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic forms based not only on folklore and religious myths but chiefly on the creative imagination of highly individual and uninhibited artists.

The African art of the past that attracted the European artists Picasso, Braque, Matisse and Pechstein gave 20th century art a primitive twist that still persists in certain areas of art. Recently I sent photographs of Makonde sculpture through Daniel Henri-Kahnweiler to Picasso who showed a lively interest in the new shapes. It is obvious that the new aesthetic of the 20th century has led to a deeper understanding and appreciation of African art. The old aesthetic based on classical Greek and Roman art could hardly be used to measure or evaluate the very unusual qualities of African art so often described by puzzled anthropologists rather than art critics as barbaric, crude, distorted and erotic.

The value of African art is its absolute honesty in revealing even in excess the physical aspects of men, animals and mythical creatures. These elongations and distortions of limbs, breasts and genitals house the ancestral spirits of the tribes and the powers that animate them and sex unlike that in European Christian art has no shame but is a manifestation of power.

Who are the Makonde and where do they live and produce their art?

The Makonde live south of Zanzibar and Dar-es-Salaam on a plateau on the southern border of Tanzania and Cabo Delgado in Mocambique through which the Rovuma river runs.

For those who have become accustomed to modern developments of African Negro art in West Africa down to the Congo it is a great surprise to find an African people who are not Negro but Bantu living not on the West but on the East Coast of Africa, south of the Equator, producing an art of such dynamic quality and with new conceptions that appear strikingly original.

The Makonde usually prefer to live in small groups away from other tribes and have acquired an undeserved reputation for fierceness and unfriendliness. Their isolation on the remote Makonde plateau has protected their art from foreign influences longer than anywhere else along the East African coast.

In such rare isolation little is known of their reputed secret societies with ritual and ceremony in which sculptured figures play their part. How much now remains of traditional sculpture used in puberty rites is difficult to tell for today the Makonde plateau is an area disturbed by Frelimo terrorists.

According to the Makonde Myth of Creation the first man was a sculptor who carved the first woman from a tree and who overnight came to life as the ancestral mother.

Art is a very important part of Makonde culture, and many artists in the vicinity of Dar-es-Salaam have been tempted to carve for the tourist market, resulting in multiples of popular forms.

Fortunately some of these artists take absolutely no notice of traditional art or tourist demands and strike out along their own original lines. Others again produce surprising new forms of art stemming from very personal uninhibited interpretations of traditional forms, such as the enormous ears, the rabbit teeth, the physical malformations they have observed for themselves.

Samaki is the name of one of the greatest of the Makonde sculptors who generally work in hard ebony, but there are other sculptors of equal importance. They do not sign their works so that styles and subjects separate the best from a great deal of anonymous art. For instance the fish is seldom carved in Makonde sculpture but there is a carving of a fish-spirit 28 inches high by Samaki whose name in Swahili means fish.

The serpent-spirit is an important subject of Makonde art often shown in unison with women. From the serpent-spirit have come the abstract curves and coils of much Makonde sculpture. Carvings representing the magician or sorcerer are common for magic is one of the principal themes of this art.

An important aspect of Makonde sculpture is its lack of monotonous repetition. New subject matter is constantly being absorbed and personal styles make for great variations in the technique developed in respect of the black ebony wood.

One is constantly surprised by the daring of the sculptor for this absolute confidence in his talent produces works of unusual rhythms and beauty. Eclectic elements are assimilated with the few remaining traditional ones and a satisfying synthesis results. The art is thus constantly coming alive with new surprises and unexpected solutions.

The exhibition of Makonde sculpture at the Grosvenor Gallery is important for a number of reasons but chiefly because London is introduced to a richly-endowed African art about which little is known and an art that promises so much for the future.

A few years ago I discovered three remarkable carvings in the Ivy Collection in Pretoria. I was told they came from Makondeland and the name on a label said "Samaki". These works were so astonishingly different from the Makonde carvings for the tourist trade that I had seen before that I took every opportunity to come in to look at them. They were marked N.F.S. (not for sale) but ultimately I came to possess them. This enabled me to show them to other artists who had never seen Makonde art of such remarkable vitality before. For all of us it was an important new discovery. Finally the publication of the book "Modern Makonde Sculpture" written by J. Anthony Stout with a Foreword by E. P. Njau (Kibo Art Gallery Publications, Nairobi, Kenya) made us familiar with numerous examples of the best Makonde sculpture.

Walter Battiss



10 h.20 $\frac{1}{4}$ "

1768  
VAT 568

11 h.22 $\frac{3}{4}$ "

1745  
VAT 552

12 h.19"

1733  
VAT 542



13 h.19 $\frac{1}{2}$ "

1728  
VAT 537

14 h.19 $\frac{1}{4}$ "

1744  
VAT 551



1712  
VAT 524

15 h.10½"

16 h.11"

17 h.12¼"

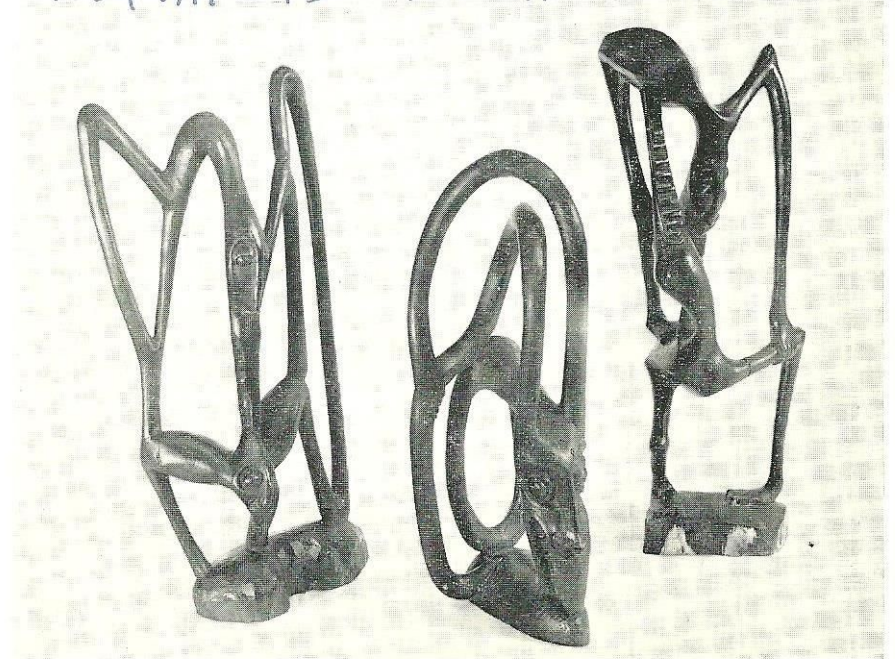
Sold

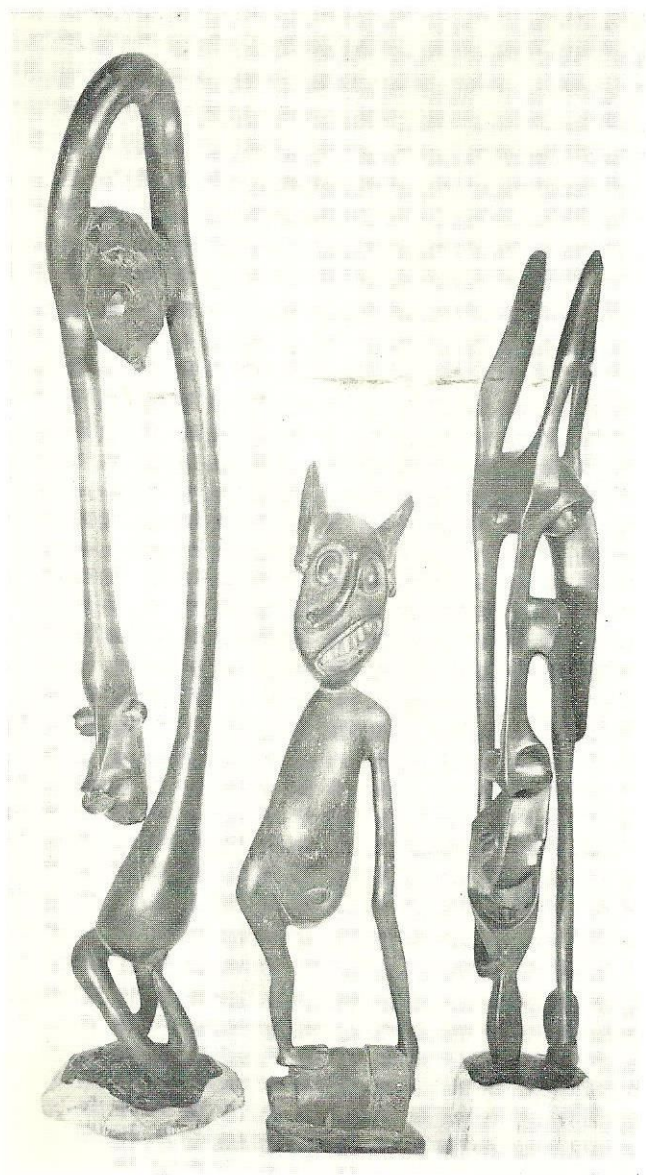
1754  
VAT 558

18 h.15½"  
1734 VAT 543

19 h.13¾"  
1756 VAT 559

20 h.16¾"  
1757 VAT 560





21 h.38½"  
1760  
VAT 562

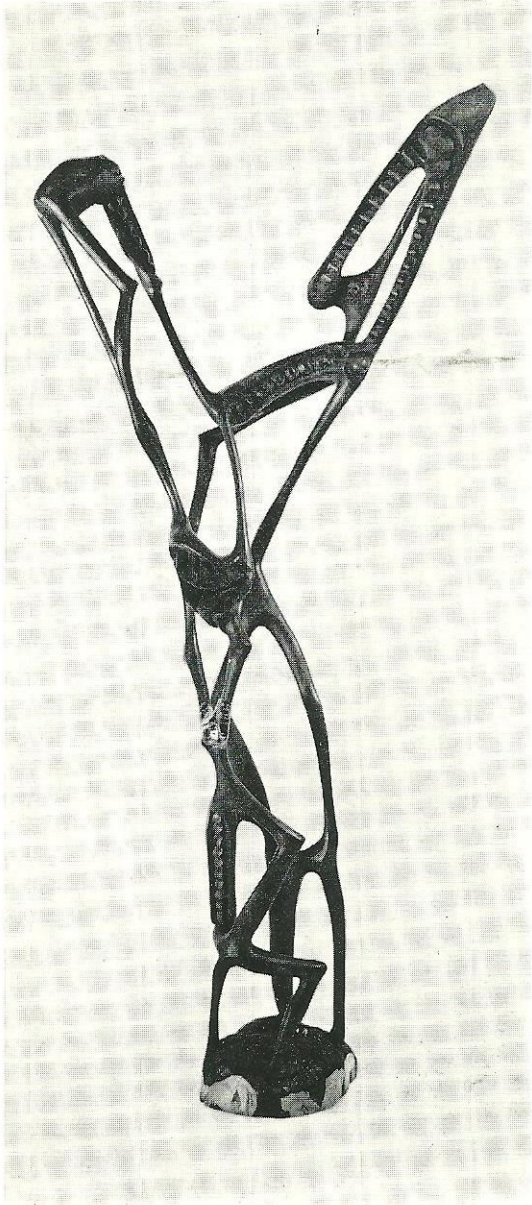
22 h.24"  
1750  
VAT 556

23 h.31½"  
1759  
VAT 561

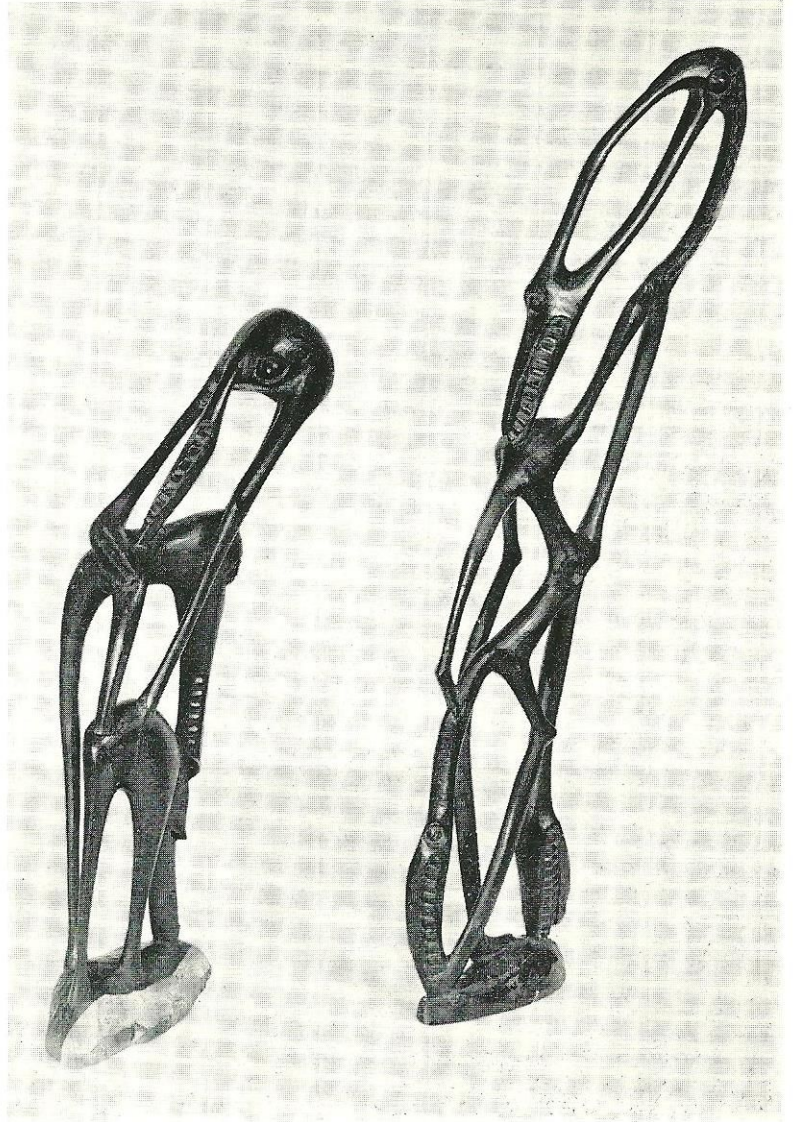


24 h.35"  
1761  
VAT 563

25 h.22"  
1738  
VAT



26 h.47"  
1786  
VAT 584



27 h.20½"  
1727  
VAT 536

28 h.27"  
1722 ?  
VAT



39 h.19 $\frac{3}{4}$ "

1719  
VAT 529

40 h.13 $\frac{3}{4}$ "

1720  
VAT 530

41 h.25"

1748  
VAT 555



42 h.22"

1737  
VAT 546

43 h.18"

1729  
VAT 538





1772  
SOLD

44 h.17"

45 h.13 $\frac{3}{4}$ "

46 h.16 $\frac{1}{2}$ "

SOLD

1769

1715

SOLD

SOLD

VAT 569

VAT 526

47 h.11 $\frac{1}{4}$ "

48 h.11 $\frac{1}{4}$ "

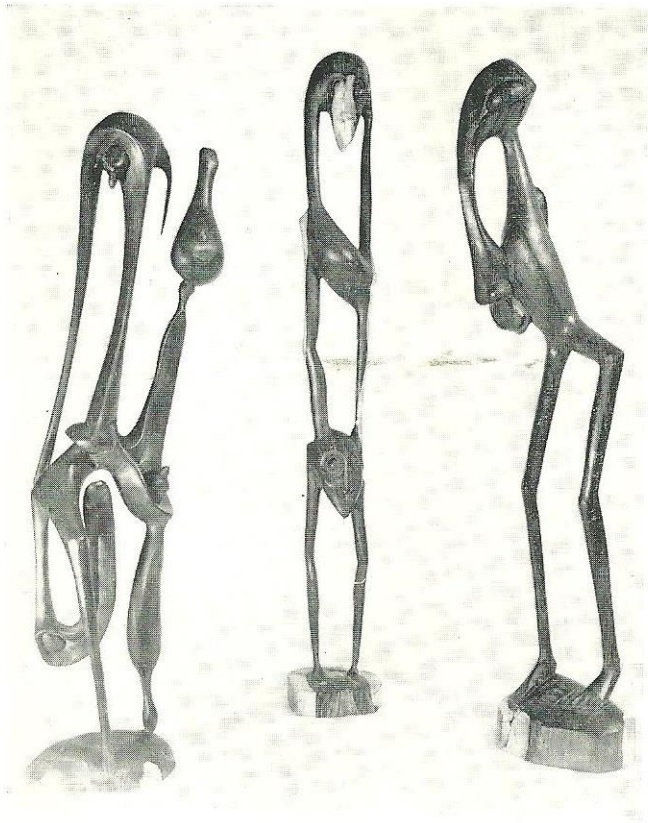
49 h.12"

1742

1764

1773 VAT 572





50 h.22½"

1746  
VAT 553

50 h.25½"

1747  
VAT 554

52 h.24½"

1723  
VAT 532

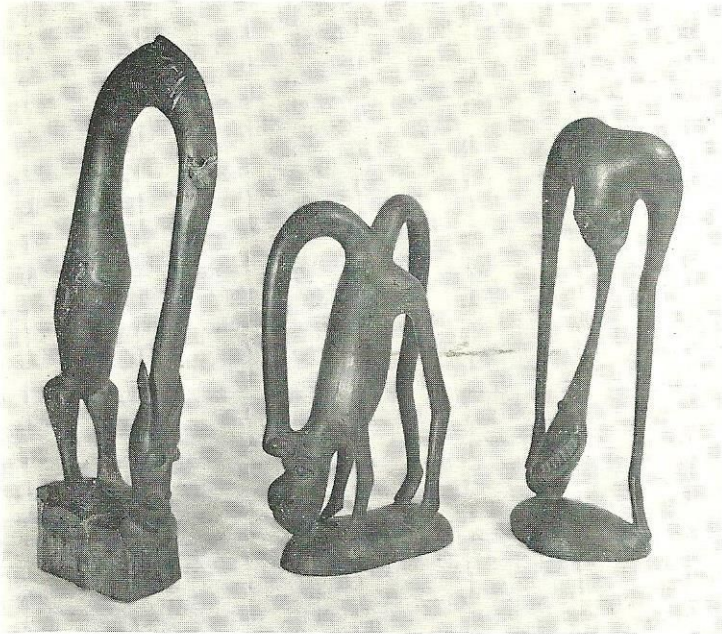


53 h.16½"

1765  
VAT 565

54 h.18"

1731  
VAT 540



1775  
VAT 574

55 h.17 $\frac{1}{4}$ "

56 h.12"

57 h.14 $\frac{3}{4}$ "

1778  
VAT 577

SOLD  
1776  
VAT 575

58 h.13 $\frac{1}{2}$ "  
1741 VAT 549

59 h.13"  
1771 VAT 571

60 h.15 $\frac{1}{2}$ "  
1762 VAT 564





61 h.21"

62 h.21½"

63 h.17¾"

1717  
VAT 527

1718  
VAT 528

1777  
VAT 576



64 h.14½"

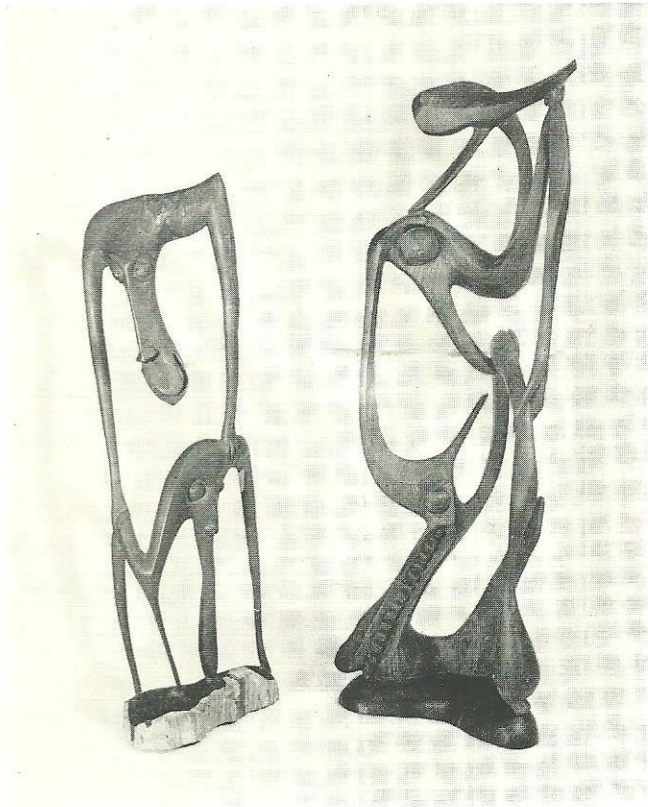
65 h.19¾"

66 h.17"

1770  
VAT 570

1732  
VAT 541

1714  
VAT 525



67 h.20"

1751  
VAT 557.

68 h.24"

1726  
VAT 535.



69 h.11½"

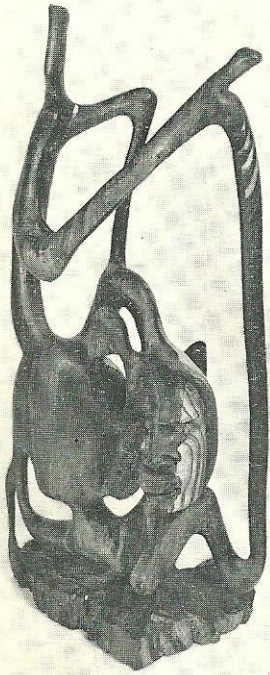
SOLD  
1716

70 h.23"

1739  
VAT 547

71 h.18"

1743  
VAT 550



72 h.21½"

1725

VAT 534



73 h.21"

1774

VAT 573



74 h.18¾"

1736

VAT 545



75 h.16"

1735

VAT 544