5. GUARDIAN AND WHORE. 17th to the 19th Century

The Cult and its Defamation

While the production of Venus statues decreased in Italy in the 17th century, it began to rise sharply in the Netherlands. In the 18th century, the center of production moved to France, which at the time had become the main European political and cultural power.[1] The total production of Venus statues did increase during these two centuries, but this was solely the result of territorial expansion, the spread of a new lifestyle to all the countries of Transalpine Europe. Stone or bronze statues became a common part of the decoration of elite residences in all countries of the Western Europe, but they are mostly only modifications of types known from the 16th century. They are by vast majority only the work of craftsmen, and we encounter excellent works of art only on rare occasion. The reason for this qualitative change lied also in the fact that ancient statues to Renaissance artists were always primarily a tool used to master the anatomy of the human body. This approach finally culminated in a tendency to eliminate the content of works inspired by ancient myths, including depictions of Venus. As Luba Freedman wrote: *never again in later centuries would autonomous representations of the Olympians in painting or in sculpture be considered among the masterpieces of Western art, as the sixteenth century works of art had been. The zeal for their creation came to its inevitable end.*[2]

86. Jacques Jonghelinck, h. 176 cm, bronze statue of Venus, ca. 1563-1570.

[1] Cf. K. Bender, *The Iconography of Venus, 3.1: The Venus of the Low Countries* (s.l.: Lulu Com 2010); K. Bender, *The Iconography of Venus, 2,1: The French Venus* (s.l.: Lulu Com 2020).

[2] Luba Freedman, *The Revival of the Olympian Gods in Renaissance Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 244.

In this context, public exhibits of the naked Venus took on a whole new meaning. We can demonstrate this with the example of a bronze statue of the naked Venus which stands in the Royal Palace in Madrid in the "Salón de columnas/ Hall of columns", one of the most significant official spaces of the palace, where the most essential audiences sat and state ceremonies were held (**86**). This is the only proof of the exhibition of an early modern monumental statue of Venus in a space designated for state representation. The naked ancient goddess was not exhibited so that visitors could revel in her charming curves; it was there for them to acknowledge fully the absolute power and exclusive position of the Spanish king. In Spain, where the influence of Catholic censorship was the strongest, the creation, import, exhibition and ownership of lascivious depictions was banned. This does not naturally mean that such depictions of naked women inspired by ancient mythology ceased to be produced or purchased; their ownership merely became an attribute of the social elite. It was their privilege to choose not to respect that which others (i.e. the vast majority of the population) were forced to strictly adhere to. Special rooms called "sala reservada" were set up in the residences of the Spanish kings and the highest aristocracy, and entrance to them was strictly controlled. In these rooms, the works of art that censors had banned were displayed. This institution began in the early 17th century and the tradition continued on until 1833.[3]

The statue of naked Venus mentioned above found its way to the Spanish royal court basically by coincidence. It was a part of the collection of the seven planetary deities and Bacchus on a barrel, which was created by Antwerp sculptor Jacques Jonghelinck, who had been trained in Italy.[4] The statues were created from 1563 to 1574 as an order by the sculptor's older brother, who was the banker and renowned art collector Niclaes Jonghelinck. In 1584, a collection of statues fell into the possession of the city of Antwerp, which exhibited them on the most prestigious site in the city, the Groote Marckt. The planetary deities stood on pedestals next to one another before the town hall, and Bacchus was placed at the center of the square. The fame of this series of sculptures is evidenced by the fact that in 1586, when the statues were still in Antwerp, Philips Galle published a series of engravings that he created after the statues in the greatest of detail.[5] Venus is characterized by a richly decorated diadem; she is naked but has a cloth covering her loins, similarly to all the other previous planetary gods, whose genitals are covered. The goddess has a stern expression and looks up to the heavens, and her idealistic character was probably emphasized by an attribute. She holds a short stake in her hand as if to hide it, and therefore it was perhaps an arrow of love which she has taken from Amor.

Antwerp was conquered by Spain in 1585 and Jonghelinck's statues of the planetary deities were subsequently handed over to the property of the Spanish king. In 1647, they were transported to Madrid, where they were placed in the royal palace in the "pieza ochavada", an octagonal hall where King Philip IV exhibited the most

---

[3] Cf. Javier Portús Pérez, "Displaying the Nude in Spain 1550-1834:The Sala Reservada," in *Splendor, Myth, and Vision: Nudes from the Prado* eds. Thomas J. Loughman et al. (Williamstown MA: Clark Art Institute, 2016), 50-66.

[4] Cf. Arie Pappot and Lisa Wiersma, "Jacques Jonghelinck: Bronze Sculptor of the Low Countries in the Sixteenth Century," *Sculpture Journal* 26, no. 1 (2017), 69-82.

[5] Venus: London, The British Museum 1862,0712.312.

valuable works of his collection. The hall was a part of the spaces for audiences and was intended to amaze visitors in the richness of its painting and sculptural decorations, which were dominated by copies and variations of ancient statues. A model for the architecture and function of the hall was the famous "Tribuna" in Florence's Uffizi.

The way in which the hall was perceived at its time is seen in the painting "Queen Mariana of Spain in Mourning" from 1666.[6] The queen is sitting in the Hall of Mirrors, past which the octagonal hall is visible with an alcove with a bronze statue of Luna (Diana) from Jonghelinck's collection, which is naked like Venus, with the exception of a shroud over her shoulders. The author of the painting is Velázquez's pupil, Juan Bautista Martínez del Mazo, who used the environment to characterize the queen in the portrait and the new political situation in Spain after the death of her husband Philip IV, i.e. a year before the creation of the portrait. The queen dowager became regent in place of the child successor to the throne, who is depicted in the background surrounded by ladies of the court. Her status of queen is indicated by the throne on which she sits and the view of the adjacent hall with the statue of Luna (Diana). This characterizes the subject of the portrait by evoking the moon, which is appearing after sunset, which was an allusion to her status as queen dowager. Simultaneously, the bronze statue of a naked woman points to the ancient Roman empire and hints to the global power ambitions of the Spanish sovereign.

The old palace of the Spanish kings burned down in 1734 and today's palace was built in its place in the mid-18th century. Today, the series of ancient gods of Jacques Jonghelinck is divided into two of the most important public premises of the new palace – Mercury, Jupiter, Saturn and Mars stand in the "Salón del trono / Throne Hall," while Neptune and the female planetary deities, Venus and Luna (Diana), are exhibited in the "Salón de columnas." In their new home, the statues of Venus and Luna (Diana) were not a part of the collection of planetary deities, but perceived independently. The ceremonial context into which the statues are included does not allow visitors to perceive them as naked women. The nakedness of Venus and Luna (Diana) was not intended to evoke erotic ideas during the royal audiences, banquets and other social events, but held significance as a reference to the ancient imperial tradition. This applies to the majority of naked Venuses that decorated the public areas of European aristocratic residences in the 17th and 18th centuries. However, in the recesses and quiet areas of palace parks, statues of Venus could take bear a different significance. Nonetheless, paintings by Peter Paul Rubens, Antoine Watteau and other artists who depict statues of Venus in this environment show that they were perceived only as a decoration without any deeper significance.

Another example of a radical reinterpretation is the Venus column in front of residences of English aristocrats, with which the cult of Venus in the English milieu culminated. In 17th century England, Venus was still an evil sorceress told of in the medieval legend of the ring. *Once more I will relate out of Florilegus, ad annum 1058, an honnest historian of our narration, because he telleth* [the tale of Venus and the misplaced wedding ring] *so confidently, as a thing in those days talked of all Europe*, Robert Burton wrote in his best-selling work published by the author first in 1621 and issued in five other releases until the mid-17th century. After this introduction, he retells the tale by

[6] London, National Gallery NG2926.

William of Malmesbury, and closes with the following statement: *Many such stories I find in several authors to confirm this which I have said.*[7]

Despite the prejudice and critique from church circles, statues of Venus nonetheless brought great social prestige and became an important part of the aristocracy's image, primarily when they originated in the ancient epoch. During his trip through Italy in 1613-1614, Thomas Howard, 2nd Earl of Arundel and Surrey gathered together a remarkable collection of antiquities, forming the first large-scale ancient collection in England.[8] After his return to London, he ordered life-sized portraits of himself and his wife to be made by Daniel Mytens. Both portraits depict the married couple in their home in London's Strand, and the collections that we see in the vista behind them define their social status. The wife is on the ground floor with a view of the garden, and behind her is a room with paintings depicting ancestors – the role of the wife was to care for the house and ensure the continuity of the family. The husband is depicted one floor above on the "piano nobile". Behind him is a room with ancient statues – the role of the master of the house was to ensure the position of the family, whose prestige is heightened by the collection of ancient statues. In the portrait, Lord Arundel is pointing a staff at a statue of the Medici Venus type, as this goddess held "first place" in the self-representation of the English aristocracy in the 17th century (**87**).[9]

87. Daniel Mytens, Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel, oil on canvas, c.1618.

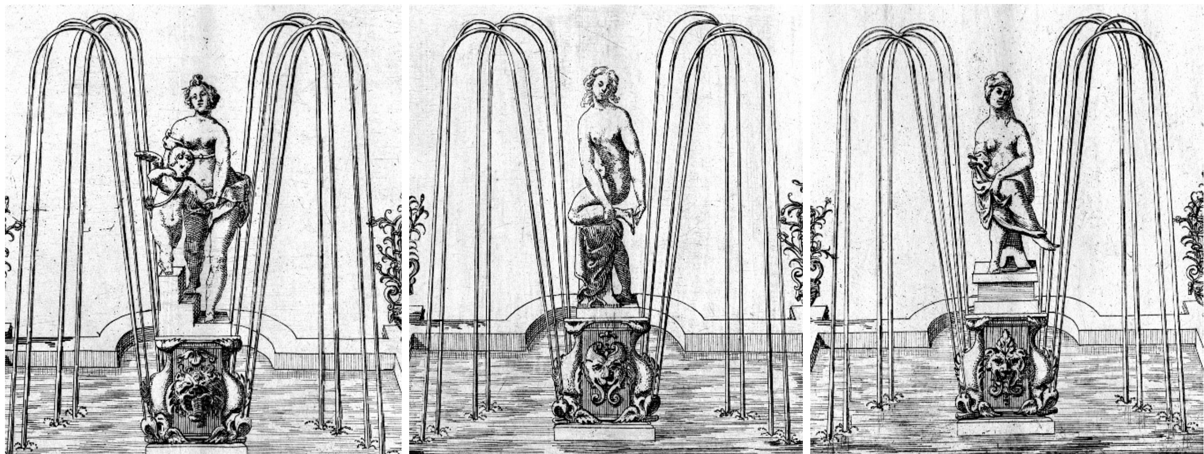
[7] See Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (New York: Dent, 1964), III, 47-48.

[8] Cf. Caroline Vout, *Classical Art: A Life History from Antiquity to the Present* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 143-144.

[9] London, National gallery NPG 5292.

Lord Arundel is joined in his admiration of antiquity by Philip Herbert, 4th Earl of Pembroke, who had remodeled his family's Wilton House near Salisbury in the classicist Palladian style after a design by Inigo Jones and his aid John Webb.[10] We have an idea of the reconstruction and modification of the manor's garden thanks to a unique collection of graphic pages by Isaac de Caus from around 1640, which reproduce the proposed architectonic designs. The first graphic page gives a general view of the manor garden with the very first French parterre on English soil. Perpendicular to the garden façade of the Wilton house was a broad path with right-angled flower beds on either side with figural fountains at their middle. The collection of graphic pages also contained depictions of four fountains with figural decorations, which correspond to the schematically drawn statues in the general overview.[11]

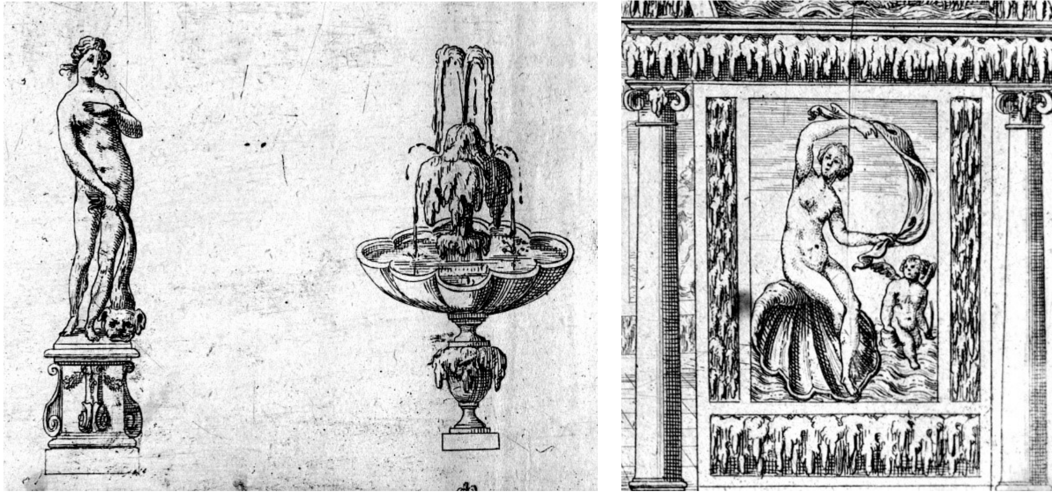
In front of the house there were four fountains, Venus with Amor were on the left below (**88**), and Cleopatra with a serpent was at the top of it. Venus removing a thorn from her heel was on the right (**89**), and a sitting Venus, drying herself at the top (**90**). A statue of Venus with a dolphin was located in the water parterre (**91**), and a relief with Venus on a seashell with Amor was placed before the entrance to one of the planned grottos (**92**). Statues of Venus, which were the work of local sculptor Nicholas Stone, clearly dominated the park's decoration.[12]



88. Isaac de Caus (left), group sculpture of Venus and Cupid on the fountain in Wilton House Park, engraving, c.1640.
89. Isaac de Caus, statue of Venus pulling a thorn from her heel on a fountain in Wilton House Park, engraving, c. 1640.
90. Isaac de Caus (right), statue of Venus seated and drying herself, on a fountain in Wilton House Park, engraving, c. 1640.

---

[10] Cf. Jens-Arne Dickmann, "Lord Pembrokes design to form a School of Sculpture – Erwerb, Aufstellung and Fuktion von Antiken in Wilton House während des 17. und 18. Jhs.," in *Antikensammlungen des europäischen Adels im 18. Jahrhundert als Ausdruck einer europäischen Identität,* eds. Dietrich Boschung and Henner Hesberg (Mainz am Rhein: Von Zabern, 2000), 115-129.
[11] Isaac de Caus, *Hortus Penbrochianus. Le jardin de Vuilton* (London, c.1640), 1. Cambridge, Trinity College.
[12] See David R. Coffin, "Venus in the Garden of Wilton House," *Notes in the History of Art* 20 (2001), 27.



91 (left). Isaac de Caus, sculpture of Venus and the Dolphin, engraving, c. 1640.
92 (right). Isaac de Caus, relief of Venus on a shell with Cupid, engraving, c. 1640.

After the French park was transformed to the English style, the statues were moved to the manor's interior, where they were seen in 1751 by Richard Cowdry. In his guide to statues at Wilton House, he writes that in the "Basso Relievo Room" there were four statues in life size: *Venus picking a thorn out of her foot, a Cleopatra with Caesarion, her son by Julius Caesar … Venus holding a shell in her right hand, her left hand has hold of the tail of a dolphin. Venus and Cupid. He is begging for his shaft of arrows.*[13] Venus pulling a thorn from her foot and Venus with Cupid correspond to the statues drawn by Caus in the parterre in front of the garden's frontispiece; the Venus with dolphin were also transferred from the water parterre to the interior. Today these statues of Venus are located in the new garden before the manor houses.[14]

English King Charles I had managed to keep up with the monarchs on the continent in the collection of antiquities. After his execution in 1649, Protestant English monarchs ceased to partake in these activities, and the initiative in this field was taken by prominent English aristocrats. "Grand tours" throughout the continent and culminating in Rome significantly raised the prestige of ancient statues among the English aristocracy, and from the mid-17th century became a part of the education of young English aristocrats.[15] Henry Peacham included a chapter "Of Antiquities" into the second edition of his manual on etiquette which he dedicated to Sir William Howard, Lord Arundel's son.[16] According to this manual, a gentleman had to have knowledge of ancient statues for two reasons. For one, they were generally regarded in high society as valuables that bring prestige to the owner, and they were used in the works of poets, painters, and architects, the works of which were ordered by gentlemen, who should know how to assess them. In his extensive chapter on antiquities, Peacham makes no mention of the naked Venus, who was paradoxically

[13] See Richard Cowdry, *A Description of the Pictures, Statues, Busto's, Basso-relievo's, and Other Curiosities at the Earl of Pembroke's House at Wilton* (London J. Robinson, 1751), 104-105.
[14] Coffin, *Venus in the Garden*, 27-28 obr. 3.
[15] Cf. Malcolm Baker, "La consommation de l'antique: Le Grand Tour et les reproductions de sculpture classique," in *D'après l'antique,* eds. Jean-Pierre Cuzin et al. (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2000), 69-77.
[16] See Henry Peacham, *The Compleat Gentleman* (London: Francis Constable, 1634), chapter 12.

the pride of every collection. Ancient statues of the naked Venus were a matter that was unsuitable to be written about in a book on etiquette, despite the fact that everyone knew they were the most sought-after collector's item and one of the reasons why young and old aristocrats attended viewings of collections. The painting by Richard Cosway from 1775, which is dominated by statues of Venus, is a caricature revealing the prosaic reason for their popularity. The enthusiastic visitors are all old gentlemen, two of which have one hand thrust deep into their pockets, a detail which is surely not coincidental.[17]

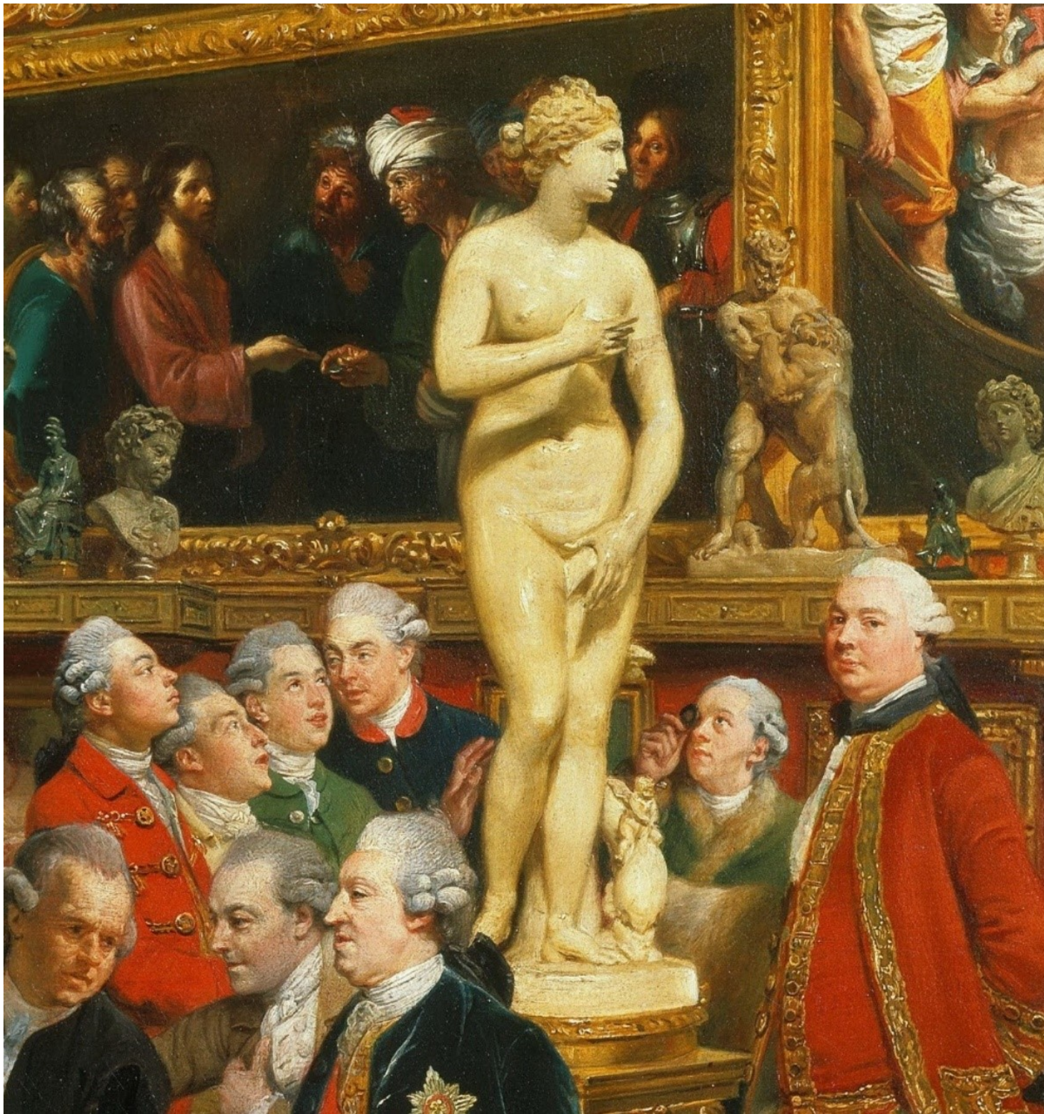
The role of naked Venus statues in the travels of English aristocrats to European galleries is seen in the group portrait of 1715 in the Tribuna of the Uffizi, which depicts visitors in the company of three statues of this type.[18] This is the very first depiction of the Tribuna, and therefore we do not know if the placement of the statues corresponded to reality; nonetheless, the concept of the painting is based on the contrast between the clothed young men and the ancient statues of naked women. The main figure is Sir Andrew Fountaine, who is leaning nonchalantly on the Venus Victrix (**47**), which was located in the Vatican's Belvedere in the 16th century. On the image, we see her in a restored state with an apple in her hand (**46**). In the center is the Medici Venus as one of Sir Andrew's friends points at her knowledgeably (**17**). Both of these statues have been mentioned previously; however, on the right is Venus Ourania, which we have not yet mentioned in this context despite the fact that it was a very famous statue in its time. It is first documented in 1656 in the Palmieri collection in Bologna, and from there travelled to the Medici collections in the following year.[19] Venus Ourania and Venus Victrix were later transferred from the main hall of the Uffizi to a different site, and this hall is now dominated by the Medici Venus.

On the famous painting of 1772 – 1777 depicting the Tribuna of the Uffizi is a statue of the Medici Venus on the right as a group of connoisseurs crowd around behind her to view her backside (**93**).[20] As Tobias Smolett wrote in 1766: *the back parts especially are executed so happily, as to excite the admiration of the most indifferent spectator*.[21] In another painting by the same painter, we see Charles Townley in the middle of his London collection, which is today the pride of the The British Museum in London.[22] In reality, antiquities were placed throughout Charles Townley's house in London in Park Street; concentrating them in one small room was a hyperbole used by the painter to give the impression that the residence was overflowing with ancient statues. At the center in an honorable position is the Townley Venus, a Roman version after the Greek original from the 4th century BC (Venus of Arles type). [23] The next Roman Venus made

---

[17] Towneley Hall Art Gallery & Museums. Cf. Viccy Coltman, *Classical Sculpture and the Culture of Collecting in Britain since 1760* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 159–190.
[18] Giulio Pignatta, Sir Andrew Fountaine and Friends in the Tribune, oil on canvas, 1715, Norwich Castle Museum and Art Gallery NWHCM: 2008.249 (on loan from a private collection, 2008).
[19] Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of the Classical Sculpture 1500-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), no. 88.
[20] Windsor, Royal Collection RCIN 406983.
[21] See Tobias Smolett, *Travels Through France and Italy*, 2 (Dublin: Robert Johnson, 1766), 75, cf. John Rigby Hale, "Art and Audience: the Medici Venus, c. 1750–c. 1850," *Italian Studies* 31, no. 1 (1976): 45-48.
[22] Towneley Hall, Art Gallery and Museum PA/OAL 120.
[23] Marble, 213 cm, London, The British Museum 1805,0703.15. Cf. Brian F. Cook, *The Townley Marbles* (London: British Museum Publications, 1985), 23-4, fig. 22.

after a Greek Hellenistic original stands at the fireplace, which is a reconstruction by English sculptor Nollekens.[24] Both statues were found in 1775 in Ostia, and their acquisition was mediated by Sir William Hamilton, who identified both statues as Venuses; Townley hesitated as to whether the smaller statue was a Venus or another figure, and identified the larger as Libera or Ariadne.



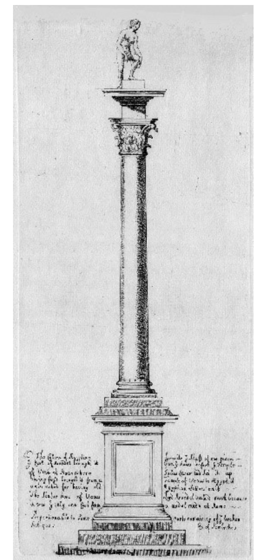
93. Johann Zoffany, Tribune in the Uffizi, oil on canvas, 1772-1777 (detail).

One of the largest English collections of ancient statues was located at Wilton House and created by Thomas Herbert, 8th Earl of Pembroke (1654-1732).[25] In his celebration of Venus, Thomas Herbert was linking himself to his grandfather, Philip Herbert, the 4th Earl of Pembroke, whose French garden with Venus statues was discussed above. The description of his residence written by Richard Cowdry in 1751 reveals the motivation for creating this collection and the reason why it was Venus who dominated it. In the description, we find that *in the court, before the grand front of the house, stands a column of white Egyptian granite, out of the Arundel collection … Mr.*

[24] Marble, 107 cm., London, Bristish Museum 1805,0703.16. Cook, *The Townley Marbles*, 20, 22, fig. 19.
[25] Cf. Dickmann, *Lord Pembrokes design*.

Evelyn bought it for the Earl of Arundel at Rome, where Julius Caesar had set it up before the temple of Venus Genetrix. The statue of Venus, standing on its top, Lord Arundel valued much, because it was the only one from a model made at Rome, proportionable to some parts remaining of the broken antique. This column was never erected since it fell in the ruins of old Rome, till set up here with the Corinthian capital and base of white marble … On the lower fillet of this column are five letters … being read after the manner of the eastern tongues from the right hand to the left, and having the proper vowels supplied, make ASTARTE, the name by which Venus was worshiped among ancient nations of the east." [26]

The column of Egyptian granite from the 3rd century with an Italian statue of Venus from the second half of the 16th century in Giambologna's style, of which Cowdry wrote extensively, was located until the beginning of the 19th century before the main façade of the manor (**94**). In its time, it was one of the most significant sights of Wilton House, which is evidenced by numerous mentions of it in literature from the 18th and 19th centuries; a detailed drawing of a column with a statue of Venus from 1724 and an engraving from 1731 has also been preserved (**95**).[27] At some point between 1758 and 1769, Venus was made even more visible at Wilton House via the purchase of a copy of the Medici Venus. This was a significant acquisition, as a whole page was devoted to it in a guidebook from 1769.[28]



94 (left). The main facade of Wilton House with a column of Venus, engraving, 1782 (detail).
95 (right). Cary Creed, Venus Column in Wilton Park, engraving, 1731.

Exhibiting the naked Venus on a column before an aristocratic residence was a highly uncommon act. At the same time, the English had a much more reserved attitude towards Venus and female nakedness than on the continent. In the guidebook to the Wilton House collections from 1769, the James Kennedy felt the need in the introduction to provide a thorough justification of the nakedness of ancient Greek

[26] Cowdry, *A Description*, 1-2. Cowdry also noted the aforementioned relief of Venus drying her hair by Antonio Lombardo at the Wilton House (ibid., 114).
[27] See Ruth Guilding, *Marble Mania: Sculpture Galleries in England 1640-1840* (London: Sir John Soane's Museum, 2001), no. 23.
[28] James Kennedy, *A New Description of the Pictures [...] and other Curiosities at the Earl of Pembroke's House at Wilton* (Salisbury: E. Eaton, 1769), 11-12.

statues.[29] He assumed that the nakedness of the ancient statues would be understood incorrectly, and therefore explains it with both an aesthetical argument (i.e. the effort to display the beauty of the human body's anatomy) and a note on varying climactic conditions, the difference in cultural habits, and finally a reference to ancient Greek philosophy, which in Kennedy's words fundamentally refused obscenity and lasciviousness.

For Venus to become a dominant element of an English aristocratic residence in the 17th and 18th centuries, there had to be a substantial reason. It is not the assumption of the author of this book that Venus's traditional connection to the garden and nature in general was the reason, as is suggested by David R. Coffin.[30] There is nothing written about this in the commentary on Wilton House of the time, and on the contrary it emphasizes the political dimension of Venus and her link to ancient Rome. The tenth publication of the guide to the manor from 1784 begins by stating that Wilton is an ancient town which in Roman times was called Ellandunum. In all probability, the Venus in Wilton House was also meant to emphasize this tradition. Readers of the guidebook learned the same about the column of Venus from Cowdry's description in 1751: *this column supported anciently the statue of Venus Genetrix, and had been set up by Julius Cæsar before the temple of that Goddess, from whom he claimed to be descended***.** *That Caesar had brought them from Egypt, where they had been erected to the oriental deity Astarte, the same with the Grecian Venus.*[31] Local guides evidently presented Venus on the column as a statue that originated in Caesar's temple in Rome, and therefore Alexandre de La Rochefoucauld noted: *A column of blue granite on which is the beautiful Venus Julius set in the temple of Venus Genetrix in Rome*.[32] What was important about the Venus on the column was not her patronage over nature, but her link to Julius Caesar and ancient Rome.

This connection was wholly fictitious and purposefully construed. Antiquities made their way to Wilton House in 1678 under Thomas Herbert, 8th Earl of Pembroke. The import of the ancient column may have also theoretically involved John Evelyn, with whom the column was later associated. However, John Evelyn is renowned for his highly detailed diary entries, and would have almost surely mentioned the ancient and almost ten-meter-high column at least in passing.[33] During his stay in Italy, Evelyn met with Thomas Howard Arundel in Padua in 1645 and later in 1646, just before Arundel's death. At the time, Arundel was an exile on his death bed, and could not have very well planned such a logistically complex action as the transport of an ancient column from Rome to England must have been. His descendants did not collect antiquities, nor did they look after the famous collection in London. In 1654, Evelyn visited Wilton House, but made no mention of the column or statue of Venus on this occasion either. We can also rule out the fact that the column with Venus may have

---

[29] Kennedy, *A New Description*, x-xi.

[30] David R. Coffin, "Venus in the Eighteenth-Century English Garden," *Garden History* 28, no. 2 (Winter 2000): 173.

[31] See George Richardson, *Ædes Pembrochianæ: A New Account and Description of … Antiquities and Curiosities in Wilton-House* (Salisbury: Wilton &c., 1784), 4.

[32] See Norman Scarfe (ed.), *Innocent Espionage. The La Rochefoucauld Brothers' Tour of England in 1785* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1995), 186.

[33] Cf. John Evelyn, *The diary of John Evelyn*, 1-6., ed. Esmond S. De Beer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959).

stood in Arundel's residence in London's Strand.[34] The reason this legend arose was likely due to the need to defend this revolutionary novelty, i.e. the column with Venus, by pointing out that it was in fact nothing new; a column had stood one hundred years earlier outside the London residence of the famous courtier to King James I and Charles I. John Evelyn may have made his way into the story because he was famed as a royalist.

The majority of columns in English parks originate in the 18th century and the statues that were placed on them depicted English rulers or members of the royal family.[35] In this century, England became a dominant colonial superpower with global ambitions, and ancient Rome served as its model. Thus, Venus probably did not stand on the column at Wilton House as one of the gods of the Olympian Pantheon, but as the progenitress of the Roman nation and the mother of Aeneas, from whom Roman emperors derived their origin. Statues of Venus and Cleopatra (the last Egyptian female pharaoh and Caesar's lover) that decorated the fountain in the parterre of the garden held a similar significance. In this context, it should be mentioned that the engraving of the garden's layout from around 1640 mentioned above shows two more fountains following those of Venus and Cleopatra, which had a central column with the royal family, linking the whole residence with the English monarchy. Thanks to references to antiquity, visitors should understand Wilton House as a second Rome, which was emphasized by a gate in the style of a triumphal arch from 1758-1762 (which still stands today), on which a lead copy of an equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius from Rome's Campidoglio was placed.[36]

The column with Venus in front of Wilton House may not have been the first to be erected in England. Richard Boyle, 3rd Earl of Burlington, who took a total of three "grand tours" from 1714 to 1719, presented himself in a similar manner. Boyle was famed as an "Apollo of the Arts," as he was active also as an architect and won merit for promoting classicist Palladian architecture in England. He had a Dorian column with a copy of the Venus Medici erected around 1720, which he likely designed himself, in the park of his Chiswick House residence in 1727-1729. The column with statue can be seen on a drawing by William Kent from around 1730.[37] The column was originally located in an important place in the park, where six straight paths of varying lengths came together. Since 1801, it has formed the center of the rose garden. The Dorian column that Lord Burlington selected in place of the canonical Corinthian column defined the Venus placed upon it as the patroness of rulers and warriors, the mother of Aeneas and progenitress of Caesar.[38]

A significant change took place in the 18th century in the placement of ancient statues and copies of them in connection with the creation of the English landscape garden, in which the formal French-style organization was replaced with idealized

---

[34] See Roy Strong, *The Artist & the Garden* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 47-52.

[35] See David R Coffin, *The English Garden: Meditation and Memorial* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 206-219.

[36] Cowdry, *A Description*, 86. The triumphal arch was originally located south of Wilton House, and was transferred to its present location in 1801.

[37] Chattsworth 26 A/23, Cf. Cinzia Maria Sicca, "Lord Burlington at Chiswick: Architecture and Landscape," *Garden History* 10, No. 1 (Spring, 1982): fig. 12.

[38] See Toby Barnard and Jane Clark, eds., *Lord Burlington: Art, Architecture and Life* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1995), 138-139.

nature. The statues in this new environment hold an equally important place, but they do not stand in rows or in the middle of flower beds as in French-type gardens. On the contrary, they are placed in the landscape, which can evoke ancient myths or directly refer to famous passages of ancient literature. Inspiration for English parks was drawn from the idyllic ancient landscapes of Claude Lorrain, Nicolas Poussin and, most significantly, Gaspard Dughet, a part of which were also temples and statues. The ancient circular temple of Vesta in Tivoli, which was placed on the edge of a cliff to allow it to dominate the surrounding landscape, was a common theme. The first temple of Venus in an English landscape park was built by architect John Vanbrugh and can be found in the park of Stowe House, the author of which was Charles Bridgeman. The structure was built around 1721 as the very first of a rich repertoire of smaller buildings in this park. It was a small Ionic monopteros, a circular shrine with a colonnade lacking a cella, making the copy of the Medici Venus inside visible from afar. The way the statue was staged in the tholos at Stowe was meant to evoke the Cnidian temple which housed Praxiteles's famous statue. The original statue has since been lost, but a gilded replica of the Medici Venus was placed back on the pedestal in 2000.[39]

Another shrine to Venus was built by Colen Campbell at Hall Barn, Buckinghamshire around 1725 in a style similar to Stowe. It was also an open tholos, but in Dorian style; inside it was a copper copy of the Medici Venus statue.[40] In the 1730s, a shrine to Venus was built in Garendon Park and designed by the builder himself, Sir Ambrose Phillipps of Garendon, an amateur architect. This was an Ionian-style tholos with a cella, which housed a now-lost statue of Venus.[41] Monopteroi with statues of Venus played an important role during the expansion of the English landscape park to the European continent at the end of the 18th century. The tradition continued on into the 19th century; however, they began to take on a wholly different significance than in the previous century. They no longer carried an imperial message, but the builders only demonstrated their conservative attitude in this way.

In England in the second half of the 18th century, there is also evidence of a radically different attitude towards the ancient goddess. The man who pioneered the defamation of Venus, her temples and statues was Sir Francis Dashwood (from 1763 Lord le Despencer), who parodied Stowe's park and its temple of Venus at his residence in West Wycombe, Buckinghamshire.[42] The temple of Venus is in line with the north façade of the manor, by which the builder emphasized its significant position in his self-representation. A monopteros designed by John Donowell in 1748 was placed on the hill and modified later by Giovanni Niccolò Servandoni with the help of Maurice-Louis Joliveta (**96**). Inside it was originally a copy of the Medici Venus, which was replaced by a copy of the Venus de Milo during the reconstruction of the damaged

---

[39] Copies of the famous statue in the Uffizi in Florence were a common attraction of English manor parks in the 18th century, cf. Wendy Frith, "Sex, Gender and Politics: The Venus de Medici in the Eighteeenth Century Landscape Garden," in *Sculpture and the Garden,* ed. Patrick Eyres and Fiona Russel (London: Routledge, 2006), 71-84.

[40] See Johann Wilhelm von Archenholtz, ed., *The British Mercury Or Annals of History, Politics, Manners, Literature, Arts Etc. of the British Empire*, 2 (Hamburg: Hoffmann, 1787), 339.

[41] See Mark Girouard, "Ambrose Phillipps of Garendon," *Architectural History* 8 (1965): 28 and fig. 5.

[42] Cf. Michael Symes, "Flintwork, Freedom and Fantasy: The Landscape at West Wycombe Park," *Buckinghamshire Garden History* 33 (2005): 1-30.

monument in 1982, the author of which was the prominent architect of post-modern classicism Quinlane Terry. Anyone viewing the shrine from afar will understand its connotations; it stands on a hill, and under it is an oval entrance to Venus's parlour. The architectural framing of the entrance evokes spread legs, emphasizing the fact that the entrance imitates the female vagina. The shrine and Venus parlor were linked to a collection of lead statues in the meadow before them. These statues have not survived, but we know they were at least partially of an erotic nature. A contemporary witness, John Wilkes, commented on this eccentric project in a metaphorical but wholly unambiguous manner.[43]

96. John Donowell, Temple of Venus and Venus's Parlour, West Wycombe Park, c.1748 (repaired 1982).

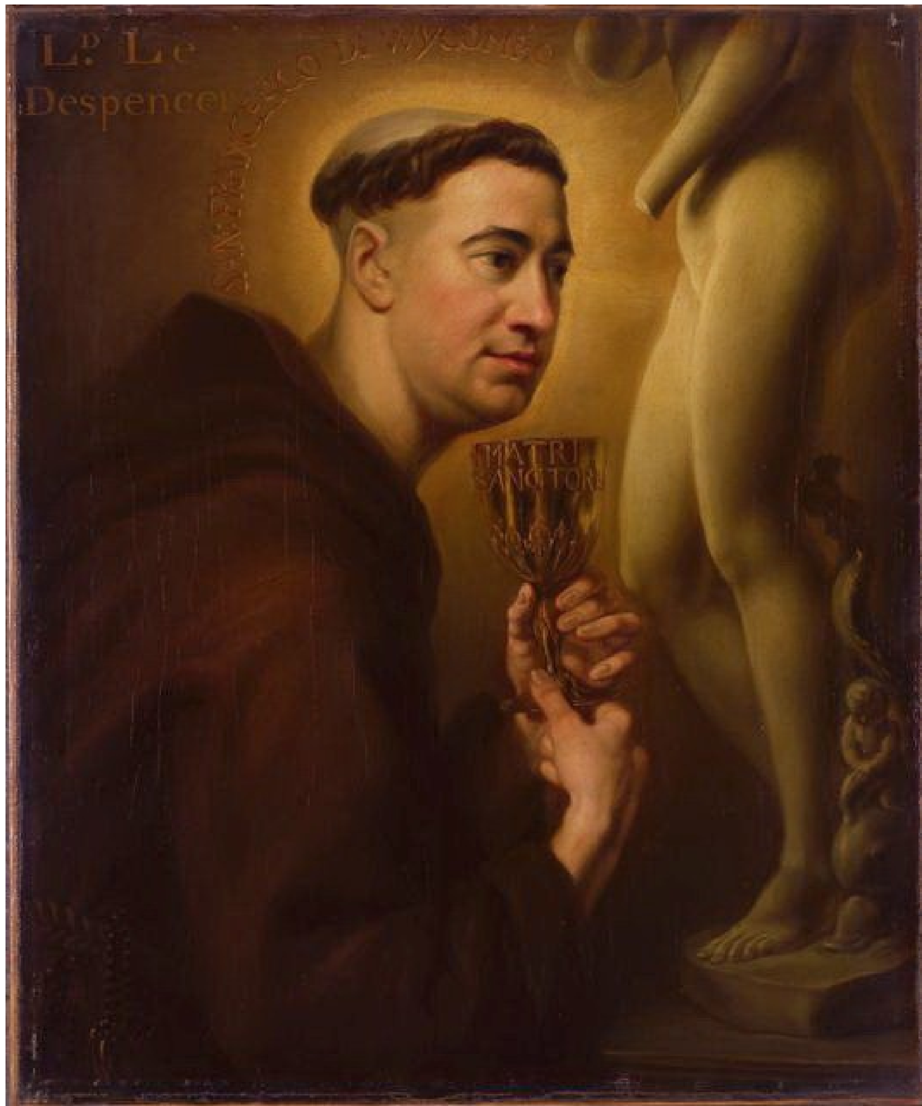
Dashwood was one of the founders of the "Society of Dilettanti" (1734), which in the terminology of the time was an association of art admirers.[44] Its members introduced Italian opera to England, founded the Royal Academy of Arts, and financed scientific expeditions to research ancient monuments in Greece. Members of this elite club associated love for knowledge and art with an anticlerical lifestyle and unrestrained indulgence in wine and sex. In 1742, the members had their portraits painted by their court painter, George Knapton (**97**). Francis Dashwood had himself

---

[43] See John Wilkes, "Curious Description of West Wycombe Church etc," in: *The New Foundling Hospital for Wit. Being a Collection of Several Curious Pieces, in Verse and Prose*, eds. Earl of Chesterfield, et al.. (London, 1768), 44: "the entrance to it is the ſame entrance by which we all come into the world, and the door is what ſome idle wits have called the door of life."

[44] Cf. Bruce Redford, *Dilettanti: The Antic and the Antique in Eighteenth-Century England* (Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, 2008).

depicted as a Franciscan monk, “San Francesco de Wycombo”, praying with a chalice in his hand with the inscription “Matri Sanctorum” (the Mother of Saints). However, in place of the Virgin Mary on the altar before him is a copy of the Medici Venus statue, the ancient origin of which is emphasized by her missing hand. In addition, the missing hand has revealed Venus’s clearly illuminated genitals, which are placed just before Daschwood’s eyes as the central point of the parody of the Christian ritual.[45] The painting was hung from 1742 to 1757 in London’s King’s Arms Tavern, a club room of the “Society of Dilettanti,“ of which Dashwood was a founding member. This room was publicly accessible, and visitors could view the painting when members of the club were not holding meetings.[46]



97. George Knapton. Sir Francis Dashwood praying to the Venus Medici, oil on canvas, 1742.

[45] See Redford, *Dilettanti*, 63-64. Cf. Jason M. Kelly, “Riots, Revelries, and Rumor. Libertinism and Masculin Association in Enlightenment London,” *Journal of British Studies* 45 (2006), 759-795.
[46] See John Wilkes, *A Select Collection of the Most Interesting Letters on the Government, Liberty, and Constitution of England*, 2 (London: J. Almon, 1763), 37. Cf. Wilkes, *Curious Description*, 44.

In 1764, Dashwood had a variation of this portrait painted by William Hogarth, which he later had made into an engraving, allowing it to be disseminated.[47] The painting is a parody of the Renaissance St. Jerome Adoring the Crucifix painting by Agostino Carracci (1580-1585). In it, Dashwood is depicted kneeling in a grotto, and in place of the bible before him is an erotic novel by Nicolas Chorier ("Elegantiae Latini sermonis"); in place of a "memento mori" skull is a carnival mask, and Christ on the cross has been replaced by a statuette of a naked woman with her legs spread as Dashwood looks fixedly at her vulva. Another engraving from 1763 called "The Secrets of the Convent" shows Francis Dashwood dressed in a monk's frock, kneeling once again before an altar with a statue of the Medici Venus.[48] The right page of the open book on the altar reads "PRECES VESPERIVE" – evening vespers, anti-religious prayers revealed by the text on the left page, "VOX IN DEUM CONTUMELIOSA" – a voice abusive towards god. On the wall at top is Cicero's lamentation over the depravity of morals "O TEMPORA O MORES."[49] Ovid's hymns, a popular drinker's songbook of the time, lies on the floor.

The "convent" was the ruin of Cistercian Medmenham Abbey on Dashwood's manor, where he met with his friends. There they drank copious amounts of alcohol, parodied Christian rituals, and indulged in sexual orgies with prostitutes. The unconcealed pagan-like activities of these "monks" in Medenham Abbey was general knowledge at the time.[50] Despite its scandals, which were tolerated among the highest English social class, the "Society of Dilettanti" established itself as a prominent European institution that supported the development of art and science, especially classical studies. A condition for membership in the "Society of Dilettanti" was to take part in a grand tour and possess an intimate knowledge of antiquities. The Medici Venus on portraits of Dashwood was not only an allusion to his libertinism, but also to his erudition and classical education. Veneration of Venus in the 18th century in England overlapped with the onset of Venus's depreciation, which culminated in 20th century art.

The Absence of Venus

In 1764, Johann Joachim Winckelmann published his book "History of the Art of Antiquity," which was justifiably welcomed as a revolutionary novelty.[51] Before this German scholar, there were only histories of artists and lists of works of art; on the very first page of his work, however, Winckelmann writes that the target of his research is the essence of art, upon which the individual fates of given artists have very little influence. The subjects of his investigation were not artists or works of art, but rather an abstract concept – art and its history. Winckelmann was evidently attempting

---

47 William Hogarth, oil on canvas, 1764, Private Collection, England, and engraving: London, The British Museum 1868,0808.4138.

48 London, The British Museum 1868,0808.4373.

49 Cicero, *In Catillinam*, 1.1.2.

50 See Horace Walpole, *Memoirs of the Reign of King George,* 3,1, ed. Derek Jarrett (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 114.

51 Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums,* eds. Adolf H. Borbein et al. (Mainz: Von Zabern, 2002). Cf., for example, Katherine Harloe, *Winckelmann and the Invention of Antiquity. History and Aesthetics in the Age of Altertumswissenschaft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

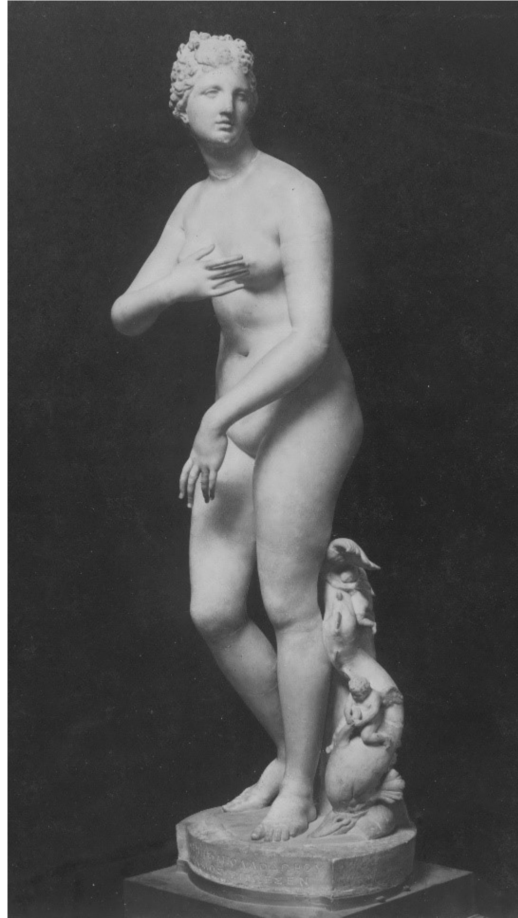
to identify a need that everyone sensed but was unable to define, and find the path to fulfilling it. He discovered that it was possible to enter a painting, and anyone could become a statue, and therefore we are surrounded by as many worlds as there are paintings and statues. Winckelmann thus created a revolutionarily new method of communication with a work of art, which is so widespread today that few realize its relative novelty and dependence on history. From Winckelmann on, viewers no longer needed to understand a work of art; they do not need to understand everything it depicts – it is enough for them to identify with it and let themselves be influenced by it as Winckelmann was influenced by ancient statues.

Nascent civil society enthusiastically welcomed this "history of art", which was created by the son of a cobbler from Stendal, as a new and democratic tool to adopt a world over which the aristocratic elite had hitherto held a monopoly. Statues have owners, but art history belongs to everyone, to the whole of humankind. Winckelmann demonstrated that anyone could identify with a work of art regardless of social class, nationality or religion. Every reader of his "History of the Art of Antiquity" held a ticket to the world of art, and anyone could enter into publicly exhibited ancient works of art, find themselves in them, and use them to perfect themselves. The fact that art can change a person for the better is colorfully described using the example of the Apollo Belvedere. Winckelmann loved this statue above all, despite the fact that it was not his property, and he had to visit the Cortile del Belvedere to look at it. *In gazing upon this masterpiece of art,* wrote Winckelmann*, I forget all else, and I myself adopt an elevated stance, in order to be worthy of gazing upon it. My chest seems to expand with veneration and to heave like those I have seen swollen as if by the spirit of prophecy, and I feel transported to Delos and to the Lycian groves, places Apollo honoured with his presence – for my figure seems to take on life and movement, like Pygmalion's beauty.*[52]

However, Winckelmann had created a history of art that omitted the depiction of women and thus of Venus as well. In his approach to art, a revolutionary novelty was associated with extreme patriarchal conservatism. In his extensive work, we find detailed analyses of naked ancient statues depicting men; however, we only find a very short passage dealing with depictions of the female body and Venus. At the same time, Winckelmann acknowledges that Venus was depicted in ancient sculpture more often than other goddesses. He also writes that she was the only goddess to be depicted naked. Winckelmann does not evaluate statues of ancient Venuses from an aesthetic perspective; he reserves this for depictions of men, as in his words only male bodies can be dubbed beautiful.[53] He explained the general admiration for the Medici Venus in Florentine Uffizi gallery by her age (**98**). According to him, it was nearing maturity: *Like a rose that after a beautiful dawn, unfolds at sunrise – steps from the age that, like a fruit not fully ripened, is hard and slightly tart, as shown in her breasts, which are already more developed than those of tender maidens.*[54] In Winckelmann's words, other Venuses do not captivate viewers like this statue, as the others depict mature women. This is also the reason in his mind that they were taller than the Medici Venus. Winckelmann claims that women are beautiful only while they still resemble young men; thus, a woman's beauty is in essence male beauty.

---

[52] Winckelmann, *Geschichte der Kunst*, 780. English translation H. F. Mallgrave.
[53] Winckelmann 1968, 216.
[54] Winckelmann, *Geschichte der Kunst*, 286. English translation H. F. Mallgrave.



98. Medici Venus, Roman marble version of the Hellenistic original.

Winckelmann's evaluation of ancient art was linked to his homosexual orientation, and therefore he was attracted to statues depicting maturing boys and thus also tolerated statues of young girls, in whom both female and male traits were combined.[55] This, however, is not essential here – what is important is that his theses were keenly accepted and no one took offense at his male chauvinism. Winckelmann was aware of the eccentric nature of his misogynist view of the visual arts and therefore presented it as a result of scientific analysis that anyone else could verify. In his words, the dominant position of the naked male body in the visual arts was a exactly provable fact, and to justify it he founded a wholly new scientific discipline – art history. He was the very first to approach the development of art in a systematic and complex manner. He understood the creation of an artistic canon, which in his view formed the basis for all other art, as a result of the interaction of a unique combination of favorable geographic, historical and social circumstances.

Winckelmann not only knew Latin authors, but Greek authors as well, which was uncommon at the time. Despite this fact, he initially had only a vague idea of the ancient visual arts; he was uninterested in contemporary art and had no idea at all of Greek art throughout his life. Nonetheless, he had already written his first and authoritatively written work "Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture" before he moved in 1755 from Dresden to Rome, where he at least had

[55] On Winckelmann's homosexuality cf. Alex Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 47-50, 201-216.

the opportunity to systematically study ancient Roman statutes.[56] At the time, the culmination of world art was generally linked to ancient Rome, an idea which Winckelmann strongly refuted, and adopted the idea from ancient Roman authors that the visual arts had culminated in Athens in the 5th century BC as the starting point for his research. He took from Greek literary tradition both the thesis of the freedom of the Greeks, which differed them from the surrounding barbarians, and the thesis claiming that the reason for the blossoming of art was individual freedom.[57]

This reached its absolute peak during the Athenian democracy of the 5th century BC, which its primary representative, Pericles, confidently claimed in an authentic testimony. In it, he also summarized the patriarchal stance of the time towards women in a memorable sentence: *It will be much for your honour not to recede from your sex and to give as little occasion of rumour amongst the men, whether of good or evil, as you can.*[58] Men clearly dominated Athenian democracy, and therefore in Winckelmann's mind the male nude rightly became the primary means of expression and central theme of the visual arts of the time. For Winckelmann, classical Greece was not only an aesthetic ideal, but an ethical one as well; it was a perfect realization of the thoroughly patriarchal organization of society.

From ancient literary tradition, Winckelmann not only adopted the idea that Roman art was derived from Greek art, but also the characteristics of style development. In Pliny's "Natural History," he read that while beauty, sublimity and magnificence had been the primary goal of artists in the 5th century BC, the times from Alexander the Great onward were dominated by realism, i.e. depictions of people in all their random irregularity.[59] According to Winckelmann, this was an attribute of the anti-art that wholly prevailed in ancient Rome and to which Bernini subscribed in the Europe of the 17th century, leading sculpture into a "dead end." According to Winckelmann, extreme subjectivism dominated this sculptor's work, as he was imitating what he saw in his sculptures. It was a fragment of reality, which was by its very essence random, and therefore could not have general validity.

The next danger of art that did not adhere to ancient models was arbitrariness: *Modern artists, some of whom have not become familiar with antiquity … have depicted not only feelings found in nature but also ones not found there. The tenderness of a seated Venus in marble in Potsdam, by Pigalle of Paris, is in a state of feeling such that from her mouth, which appears to be gasping for air, water seems to be about to run out, and the reason for this is that she should look as though languishing with desire.*[60] The statue that Winckelmann was mocking was a Venus created in 1748 by a famous French sculptor in several variations. In its time, it was a work famous throughout Europe, as French King Louis XV had had an enlarged version of it ordered as a diplomatic present for Prussian King Frederick the Great. Today, a copy of it is located in a park in Potsdam while the original is in Berlin (**99**).

---

[56] Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und der Bildhauerkunst* (Dresden: Walther, 1756).

[57] Locus classicus: Longinus, *De sublimitate*, 44.

[58] Thukydides, 2.45.2. English translation T. Hobbes.

[59] Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 35.153, cf. also 36.16, and 36.21, and 24.

[60] See Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Kleine Schriften*, ed. Walter Rehm (Berlin: W. De Gruyter, 1968), 159. English translation D. Carter.

99. Jean-Baptiste Pigalle, Venus, h. 188 cm, 1748, marble copy in Sanssouci Park, Potsdam.

Winckelmann took a strong stance against the way in which Venus was depicted by Giambologna and his successors in the second half of the 16th century. These depictions were characterized by a realistic presentation of the anatomy of the female body, and so the goddess had come down to earth among people. Her divinity was expressed only via improbable poses, which often looked like acrobatic performances. Winckelmann's authority did in no way weaken this strategy's popularity among viewers, which is not surprising. Although he permanently influenced thought concerning art, he had only a minimal impact on the artistic creation of his time.[61]

The Rise of Prudery

The artistic era dubbed neo-classicism began around 1770 and lasted until around 1840. It is considered as the last return to the ancient tradition in Western culture in which the Olympian gods, including Venus, came once again to the forefront of interest. Abbé Géraud de la Chau published a monograph devoted to Venus, the goal of which was to help artists depict her.[62] Swedish sculptor Johan Tobias Sergel arrived in Rome in 1767 at the same time that Winckelmann happened to be murdered in

[61] See Daniela Gallo, *Modèle ou mirroir? Winckelmann et la sculpture néoclassique* (Paris: Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2009).
[62] Géraud de La Chau, *Dissertation sur les attributs de Vénus* (Paris: de Prault, 1776). Cf. Pierre-Henri Larcher, *Mémoire sur la déesse Venus* (Paris 1776).

Trieste, evidently at random. In regard to the perception of female beauty, Sergel was Winckelmann's exact opposite. The sculptor lived a rather exuberant life in the "Eternal City," which is evidenced by his pornographic drawings. Venus's erotic character is celebrated in the statues he created after his return to Stockholm in 1779, in which he revived the traditional types of the Venus Callipyge (**100**) and Venus Anadyomene (**101**).

100 (left). Johan Tobias Sergel, Venus Callipyge, h. 150 cm, marble, 1780.
101 (right). Johan Tobias Sergel, Venus Anadyomene, h. 147 cm, marble, 1785.

The "tabooization" of public displays of female nudity and the demonization of Venus that characterized Renaissance Europe became even stronger during neo-classicism, and this stance also affected Sergel. Neoclassical artists distanced themselves from the frivolity of rococo and presumed that depictions of Venus should carry serious messages. On the sculptural group of Mars carrying away the fainted Venus, the marble version of which is in Stockholm, Sergel presented the goddess as a tragic figure.[63] In place of the all-powerful female ruler of the world, he depicted her as a lamentable woman with her head and arms hanging down passively as she is

[63] H. 93 cm, 1804, Stockholm, Nationalmuseum NMSk 1113.

saved by Mars after being injured by Diomedes on the battlefield beneath Troy.[64] Sergel created the plaster model in Rome towards the end of his eleven-year stay there between 1773 and 1778, adapting the ancient sculptural group of Paetus and Arria for the new statues.[65] Inspiration was taken from Homer's Iliad, in which the goddess is presented outside the framework of her common erotically-charged context.[66] However, the text of the Iliad itself did not inspire Sergel directly; he drew inspiration from a list of suitable motifs for the visual arts compiled by Comte de Caylus.[67] In the Iliad, Ares is Aphrodite's brother; however, Caylus writes about them as "lovers," and thus Ares's hand on Venus's breast may have had an erotic meaning in Sergel's sculptural group.[68]

Sergel introduced the depiction of living, sexually attractive women into traditional schemes inspired by ancient sculpture. His approach stands out when we compare his Venuses to the one created by Charles Dupaty. In 1810, this French sculptor created a heavy-handed allegory, and its overabundance of content neutralized the erotic nature of the depiction of the naked female body.[69] The cosmic dimension of the goddess is expressed in her gaze up to the heavens and the fact that she is holding a torch in her right hand, pointing it downward over the globe of the heavens at her feet. A pair of kissing doves sits on the globe, making it clear that the goddess is initiating cosmic love with her torch. The benignity of her results is expressed by the gesture of the left hand, which is pressed to her breast to squeeze out milk, an attribute of her status as the mother-provider. The statue was exhibited at the Salon of 1812, and was accompanied by a no less heavy-handed text.[70]

Antonio Canova, who came from Venice to Rome in 1780 (one year after Sergel's return to Stockholm) was the most famous neoclassical sculptor. Canova's most famous Venus today is the marble statue from 1804-1808, which depicts Pauline Borghese, the sister of Napoleon Bonaparte, as the goddess (**102**).[71] The sculptor depicted her reclining seductively on a sofa with the upper half of her body unveiled, holding an apple. In Rome, Pauline was famed for her unrestrained lifestyle, which she embraced via her own sculptural portrait, the theme of which she chose herself. Canova had wanted to depict her as Diana, but Pauline insisted on Venus. It is important to note that the statue was designated only for intimate friends, who were allowed to view it only by the light of a torch.[72]

---

[64] Göteborg, Göteborgs Konstmuseum Sk. 369. Cf. Guillaume Faroult et al., eds., *L'Antiquité rêvée. Innovations et résistences au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Beaux-arts éditions, 2010), no. 106.
[65] Haskell and Penny, *Taste and the Antique*, no. 147.
[66] Homer, *Iliad*, 5.131-430.
[67] See Anne Claude Philippe comte de Caylus, *Tableaux tirés de l'Iliade, de l'Odysée d'Homère et de l'Énéide de Virgile. Avec des osservations générales sur ce costume* (Paris: Tilliard, 1757), 38-39.
[68] Homer, *Iliad*, 5.358; Caylus, *Tableaux tirés de l'Iliade*, 39.
[69] Paris, Jardin des Plantes.
[70] See Pierre Sanchez and Xavier Seydoux, eds., *Les catalogues des salons,* 1 (Paris: Echelle de Jacob, 1999), 240. Cf. *Lucretius,* 1.1-5.
[71] Cf. Anna Coliva and Fernando Mazzocca, eds., *Canova e la Venere Vincitrice* (Milan: Electa, 2007); Maria Anna Flecken, *Die Geburt der modernen Venus: Antonio Canovas Paolina Bonaparte Borghese* (Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2015).
[72] See Christopher M. S. Johns, *Antonio Canova and the Politics of Patronage in Revolutionary and Napoleonic Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 115-117.

102. Antonio Canova, Pauline Borghese as Venus, h. 92 cm, marble, 1804-1808.

The predecessors of statues of reclining Venuses that we know from the sculpture of the 17th and 18th centuries are found in Venetian paintings of sleeping Venuses inspired by ancient sepulchral sculptures on the lids of sarcophagi depicting deceased Roman women as sleeping Venuses. Canova's statue was commissioned by Prince Camillo Borghese, who married Napoleon's sister in 1803. This circumstance may have affected the concept of the statue, as the House of Borghese came from Siena, i.e. Tuscany, where the Etruscans dwelled in the ancient epoch. With his portrait, Canova may have been defining the French princess's new identity, which reached back to Etruscan antiquity via her husband. The lids of Etruscan sepulchral urns, which Canova may have known from Florentine collections or publications, depict semi-reclining figures that correspond in great detail to the statue of Pauline Bonaparte. On them we find two pillows, on which the Etruscan woman rests her right elbow, supporting her head in an elegant pose just like Pauline Borghese.[73] The hyper-realistic depiction of the pillows and bed is an important component of the work, as together with the portrait elements of the face they create a contrasting counterpart to the idealized body.

Canova created several variations of the ancient Venus, the most famous of which is the "Venus Italica/ Italian Venus" from 1804-1812 (**103**).[74] The statue was created in the same historical context as Canova's Perseus with the head of Medusa. In 1798, Napoleon had the most famous statue of the Vatican's collections, the Apollo Belvedere, taken to Paris as a spoil of war. The most famous ancient statue in Florence, the Medici Venus, succumbed to the same fate in 1802. Canova created statues that were welcomed by the Italian cultural public as a replacement to the ancient originals, which were returned to their original homes after Napoleon's fall in 1815. However,

---

[73] See Giuseppe Pavanello, ed., *Canova e l'antico* (Milan: Electa, 2019), 111-114, 322.

[74] Cf. Hugh Honour, "Canova e la storia di due Veneri," in *Palazzo Pitti: La reggia rivelata,* eds. Gabriella Capecchi, et al. (Florence: Giunti 2003, 193-209.

the circumstances of the creation of these two statues differed. The sculptor did not create Perseus based on a specific order, and the pope bought the statue after the Apollo Belvedere was taken away in order to place it on the empty pedestal where the Apollo had stood. According to the original arrangement with Louis I of Etruria, Canova was to create a copy of the Medici Venus, which was intended to replace the stolen original.[75] However, the sculptor did not keep his promise. This was also evidently due to the fact that, during a detailed study of the cast of the Medici Venus, the sculptor realized that the statue had been so poorly restored that it would have to be radically modified.

103. Antonia Canova, workshop, Venus Italica, h. 175,3 cm, probably 1822-1823, variant of marble first executed 1810.

The sculptor later made an agreement with the ordering party, Maria Luisa, the wife of Louis I of Etruria, ruling regent after his death, that he would create his own version of the statue for Florence in addition to a copy of the Medici Venus. Ultimately,

[75] The Kingdom of Etruria was created in 1801 as a successor state to the Grand Duchy of Tuscany.

the sculptor only finished his version of the statue and sent it to Florence; in the meantime, however, the Kingdom of Etruria had been dissolved and annexed to France, and thus the work was paid for by Napoleon. It may have been Giovanni Degli Alessandri, director of the Uffizi, who negotiated Napoleon's payment, and therefore he presented the Venus Italica as a replacement for the Medici Venus. Nonetheless, when Canova visited the Uffizi and found that his Venus Italica had been placed on the empty pedestal where the Medici Venus had stood, he insisted it be placed on another pedestal to make it clear that this was his own version. Today, the Venus Italica is located in Florence's Palazzo Pitti; other versions of it exist and differ only in certain details.

The number of Canova's versions of the Medici Venus shows that the work was very positively received at the time, there was a great demand for it, and it was imitated soon after it was completed.[76] Canova's success stemmed from the fact that he adhered to the ancient model only loosely. The Venus Italica was larger than the Medici Venus, its hairstyle is different and inspired by the Capitoline Venus and, most importantly, it holds clothing to the body in order to cover the loins and one breast. Another tool emphasizing Venus's chastity is her turned head. Canova evidently adopted the motif of a half-naked woman looking backwards from another very famous statue, the Venus Callipyge. [77] This statue's backward glance has an erotic undertone, which Canova was surely aware of. In addition, the turn of the head on his statue is even more distinct – Venus is no longer looking off to the side, but straight backwards as in Renaissance adaptations of the Venus Callipyge. The viewer must thus ponder why she is covering her breasts and loins before someone, who is behind her as she looks backwards at him or her. The sculptor's ostentatious disinterest in the depicted story shows that his Venus is more similar to statues made by Giambologna than ancient models. Furthermore, Canova has suppressed the relationship to the ancient Venus by replacing the obligatory vessel of water with a chest, which has no direct relation to any mythical story. It is simply a woman covering her nakedness, [78] and it was also perceived in this way by Canova's friend, Quatremère de Quincy, who was aware of the inconsistency of such a concept.[79]

Contemporary commentaries show that the Venus Italica was much more attractive and feminine to people of the time than the Medici Venus. In her they saw the perfect expression of the panicked fear that a woman has of being seen by someone naked. In 1812, i.e. shortly after the statue was put on display in the Uffizi in Florence, Italian author Ugo Foscolo wrote in a letter to Isabella Teotochi Albrizzi: *When I saw this divine work of Canova, I had to sit down nearby immediately … I sighed with a thousand desires, for really, if the Medici Venus is a most beautiful goddess, this is a most beautiful woman.*[80] The exceedingly erotic perception of the Venus Italica evidently surprised the

---

[76] Cf. Christian M Geyer, "Die Venus von Salvatore de Carlis für König Max I. Joseph," *Münchener Jahrbuch der Bildenden Kunst, Dritte Folge* 62, 2011 (2013): 261-271.

[77] Cf., for instance, Johns, *Antonio Canova and the Politics of Patronage*; Paola Mangia, *Canova: Artists and Collectors, a Passion for Antiquity* (Roma: De Luca, 2009), 102-104.

[78] See Antonio Canova, *Scritti*, eds. Hugh Honour and Paolo Mariuz (Rome: Salerno, 2007), 473.

[79] See Antoine Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy, *Canova et ses ouvrages* (Paris: Le Clere, 1834), 137-138.

[80] Ugo Foscolo, *Epistolario 1812-1813* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1949), 177-178.

sculptor, as he abandoned the motif of the clothing held close to the body in another version from 1817-1820 (Hope Venus), which showed a more unveiled goddess.[81]

104. Thorvaldsen, Venus, h. 160.8 cm, marble, 1813-16.

---

[81] Leeds, Leeds Art Gallery SC.1959.0021.0003.

Canova had only one competitor among his contemporaries – Bertel Thorvaldsen, who began work on his Venus in 1804-1805.[82] The definitive version, which did not differ greatly from previous ones, was created between 1804 and 1816 (**104**). It does not depict Venus born from the sea or bathing, but the goddess who has taken off her clothing to be victorious in the Judgement of Paris. In her raised right hand, she holds an apple, a symbol of victory, and holds her clothing in her lowered left hand. The statue is more all'antica than Canova's in that the goddess is completely naked. Just like ancient statues, it also has a closed composition, the formal and ideological center of which is formed by the apple that Venus is looking at. Thorvaldsen's contemporaries therefore celebrated him as an artist fulfilling Winckelmann's program to revive modern sculpture via a return to ancient models.[83] In reality, however, Thorvaldsen adhered much more strictly to the anatomy of the human body than ancient statues in comparison to Canova.

Thorvaldsen's Venus not only points towards the future and the realistic sculpture of the 19th century, but also to medieval tradition. The posture of Thorvaldsen's Venus evokes depictions of the Virgin Mary in scenes of the Annunciation.[84] Just like the Virgin Mary, his Venus's head is humbly bowed as she leans to one side, her body forming an S-shaped curve. The posture indicates the surprise and respect that the Virgin Mary expressed to the messenger sent by God. Thorvaldsen's Venus evidently influenced the creation of Canova's Venus from the Hope collection, which is more naked and thus more in the manner of the ancients. The position of the hands of Canova's Venus is closer to the Medici Venus, as its raised hand is also touching the breast. Thorvaldsen was aware of the fact that complete nakedness is a tool via which depictions can be shifted to a more ideal level. This is clearly evidenced by a statement made by Thorvaldsen that was recorded in 1829 by Karl Viktor von Bonstetten.[85] Thorvaldsen's contemporaries, who preferred him over Canova, emphasized the fact that, contrary to the Italian sculptor, he did not view nakedness as the goal of his work. Thorvaldsen commented on the matter unambiguously – he had learned to depict nakedness according to ancient Greek models, but it was only a tool for him to celebrate Christ and the apostles.[86] As might be expected, Thorvaldsen had no sympathy for Canova's erotic sculptural portrait of Pauline Borghese which he saw during a visit to the sculptor's studio in 1804.[87]

Neoclassicism differed from the Italian Renaissance not only in its pan-European dimension, as the return to ancient art took place in a wholly different social context, which was marked by prudery. For example, the monumental statues of

---

[82] Paris, Louvre R.F. 3334.

[83] Cf. Lars Olof Larsson, "Zwischen Depression und Neugeburt: Johann Tobias Sergel und Bertel Thorvaldsen in Rom," in *L'Europa e l'Arte italiana,* eds. Max Seidel et al. (Venice: Marsilio, 2000), 517-529.

[84] See David Bindman, *Warm Flesh, Cold Marble: Canova, Thorvaldsen and Their Critics* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 96-97.

[85] Karl Viktor von Bonstetten, *Briefe an Friederike Brun*, 2 (Frankfurt, 1829), 269: (Thorwaldsen) "erzählt, dass wenn sich die Mädchen ausziehen, in ihm das Gefühl erwacht; sind sie aber ganz entkleidet, so ist er von jedem Fehler gegen die Kunst so ergriffen, dass er nur das Kunstgefühl empfindet. Die schönsten Formen begeistern sein Genie, da dann alle niedrigen Triebe schweigen."

[86] See Bindman, *Warm Flesh, Cold Marble*, 155.

[87] See Bindman, *Warm Flesh, Cold Marble*, 11.

Adam and Eve created in 1490-1495 by Tullio Lombardo for the sepulcher of the Doge Andrea Vendramin in the prominent Venetian Basilica of Santi Giovanni e Paolo had to be taken down.[88] Pope Gregor XVI (1831-1846) had the Standing Venus relocated from the Cortile del Belvedere to the Vatican storeroom, despite the fact that her nakedness had already been covered with plaster undergarments. The end of the 18th and beginning of the 19th century was a revolutionary era marked by efforts towards fundamental political reforms and a purely rational view of the world uninhibited by tradition, and was dubbed the enlightenment. Nonetheless, the depiction of nakedness, which was one of the most characteristic attributes of the artistic culture of the ancient Greeks and Romans, was not tolerated as it was in 16th century Italy or especially 18th century France. The fact that the bourgeoisie, who condemned the aristocratic art of the previous epoch, had begun to prosper contributed to this. A typical example of the concept of the nude can be found in the Venus painted by Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres between 1808 and 1848 after Botticelli's Venus.[89] Ingres's goddess is similarly abstract; she does not imitate true anatomy, nor does she capture any event, and her perfectly smooth body is wholly impersonal and asexual, accentuating her symbolic significance.

As a rule, only heroic male nudes or wholly sterile female nudes were tolerated in the neoclassicist style. The prudishness of the time is documented in a painting by American painter Raphael Peale, who was renowned for his trompe l'oeil paintings, the goal of which was to confuse and entertain the viewer.[90] His painting from 1822 is a copy of the generally known painting at that time of Venus Anadyomene by James Berry from 1772, which was a typical demonstration of rococo frivolity.[91] The fact that the painting depicts Venus is revealed only by the title "Venus Rising from the Sea—a Deception," as only the goddess's hand and leg can be seen. The painter covered her nakedness in his tromp l'oeil painting with a scarf pinned in two places to a ribbon leading across the upper edge of the image. The painting suggests that someone has hastily and tentatively covered the immoral image to prevent it from offending. This covering naturally accentuates the nudity, and the image has the very opposite effect than the one intended. Peale points to this aspect in the object used to cover the nakedness – men and women of the time wore scarfs around their necks, i.e. on their bodies. The racy nature of the humorous drawing stemmed from the fact that Venus's nakedness had been hidden by an intimate article of clothing.

The Venus of British neoclassicist sculptors, the most prominent of which was Joseph Nollekens, did not differ from continental versions building upon the tradition of 16th century Italian art, primarily that of Giambologna and his pupils. The "Marine Venus" relief created by John Deare in Rome in 1787-1790 and signed in Greek, as was common at the time, stands out thanks to its refined erotic nature.[92] The goddess is playing with the whiskers of a sea monster, on which she comfortably sits, while

---

[88] See Anne Markham Schulz, *The History of Venetian Renaissance Sculpture, ca. 1400-1530* (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2017), 235.

[89] Chantilly, Musée Condé M726.

[90] Kansas City, MO, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art 34-147. Cf. Lauren K. Lessing and Mary Schafer, "Unveiling Raphaelle Peale's Venus Rising from the Sea--a Deception," *Winterthur Portfolio* 43, no. 2-3 (Summer, 2009): 229-259.

[91] Dublin City Gallery, the Hugh Lane.

[92] Los Angeles, John P. Getty Museum 98.SA.4. Cf. Faroult, *L'Antiquité rêvée*, no. 102.

accompanied by an Amor with a lit torch as another Amor fires an arrow of physical desire. Nollekens, Deare and other neoclassicist sculptors worked for British aristocrats; however, female nakedness was not initially tolerated in the public exhibition halls of Victorian England (1837-1901). This is demonstrated by the fate of painter William Etty, who made no effort to hide the fact that he painted naked women according to live models, a fact which scandalized the audience of his time.[93]

In the 1840s and mainly 1850s, the naked Venus appeared in British exhibitions only on rare occasion.[94] In this context, an exhibition of one of the most famous statues of Venus created in the 19th century, the work of Welsh sculptor John Gibson, was held. In his time, he was highly successful, a fact which was evidenced by his membership in a total of twelve European academies. Gibson worked in Rome, where he studied under Canova and Thorvaldsen; here he also created a statue of Venus in 1833 for British politician, philanthropist and one of the greatest art collectors of the era, Joseph Neeld.[95] Venus holds an apple, characterizing her as victor. This attribute did not refer so much to her victory in the Judgement of Paris as it did to her victory over vice, which is seen in the concept of the statue and the tortoise at her feet. Venus's expression is grave, her head is humbly tilted to the side, and she looks upwards, elements by which the sculptor emphasized her spiritual character.[96] Although her free leg is bent, the goddess stands upright like a saint; her hip is not skewed to one side as is the case among ancient models. She is naked, but her loins are chastely covered with a cloak. It had been known since the Renaissance that the tortoise at her feet characterized the goddess as the patroness of virtuous women. This was Venus Verticordia, whose mission it was to turn women towards virtue.

In 1851-1856, Gibson created a replica of this statue of Venus for Liverpool industrialist Robert Preston and his wife (**105**).[97] This version was covered with wax polychrome; the apple and tortoise are golden, and Venus has blue eyes, yellow hair, red lips and a rosy complexion. The statue in Gibson's Roman studio became an attraction for art lovers visiting the Eternal City. The sculptor exhibited it in a way that was common in the studios of art celebrities of the time. The statue was covered with a cloth veil, and the visitors sat in chairs placed in a row. A servant then unveiled the statue, allowing visitors to reflect on it in a quiet and calm manner.[98] In 1862, Gibson's painted statue of the goddess was exhibited at London's International Exhibition together with two other polychrome statues by Gibson in a pavilion evoking an ancient temple, which was also richly polychromed (**106**). The name, sculptural concept and architectural presentation of Gibson's Venus was meant to emphasize her spirituality,

---

[93] Cf. Sarah Burnage et al., eds., *William Etty: Art & Controversy* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2011).

[94] See Alison Smith, *The Victorian Nude: Sexuality, Morality and Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 90.

[95] Today Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum. Cf. John Hussey, *John Gibson R. A. The World of the Master Sculptor* (Birkenhead: Countyvise, 2012), 125-131.

[96] See Elizabeth Eastlake, *Life of John Gibson, RA, Sculptor* (London: Longmans, Green,1870), 210-211: "The expression I endeavoured to give my Venus was that spiritual elevation of character which results from purity and sweetness, combined with an air of unaffected dignity and grace."

[97] Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery 7808. Cf. Smith, *The Victorian Nude*, 121–124; Michael Hatt, "Transparent Forms. Tinting, Whiteness and John Gibson's Venus," *Sculpture Journal* 23, no. 2 (2014): 185-196.

[98] See Anna Frasca-Rath, *John Gibson & Antonio Canova. Rezeption, Transfer, Inszenierung* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2018), 162.

but critique at the time condemned its vulgarity, which was surely due at least in part to the polychrome.

105. John Gibson, The Tinted Venus (Venus Verticordia), marble sculpture, h. 176 cm, 1851-1856.
106. William England, The Tinted Venus by J. Gibson, photograph, 1862.

In ancient Greece, statues were also polychrome, a fact which archeologists discovered at the end of the 18th century.[99] Quatremère de Quincy was the first art historian to defend the theory of the colorfulness of Greek statues, and Antonio Canova also began to experiment with polychrome in his work.[100] Gibson became acquainted with polychroming statues during his stay in Canova's studio, but used this technique for the first time in 1837 on a statue of Amor, which is located today in a private collection.[101] Gibson did not intend for the polychrome applied to Venus to give her a stronger semblance of a living being, as sculptors did in the second half of the 19th century.[102] On the contrary, and as he himself stated, he intended to emphasize Venus's relation to ancient sculpture and evoke an impression of the goddess's presence.[103] Nonetheless, critics of the time claimed that the polychrome prevented them from seeing the virtuous goddess – in their eyes, the color evoked immodesty, and a polychrome statue of a naked woman was unacceptable for them. Gibson's critics not only faulted his statue for its naturalism, but also paradoxically for its classicism and inanimateness, which was due to the fact that statues referring to

---

[99] Cf., for example, Philippe Jockey, *Le mythe de la Grèce blanche* (Paris: Belin, 2015); Bourgeois, Brigitte, and Violaine Jeammet, "Les paradoxes de l'invention de la polychromie antique au XIXe siècle," in *En couleurs. La sculpture polychrome en France 1850-1919,* ed. Edouard Papet (Paris: Musée d'Orsay, 2018), 151-156.

[100] See Bindman, *Warm Flesh, Cold Marble*, 120-135

[101] Frasca-Rath, *John Gibson*, 146-158.

[102] Cf. Karina Türr, *Farbe und Naturalismus in der Skulptur des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts. Sculpturae vitam insufflat pictura* (Mainz: Von Zabern, 1994), 20.

[103] Eastlake, *Life of John Gibson*, 211-12. Cf. Elisabeth S. Darby, "John Gibson, Queen Victoria, and the Idea of Sculptural Polychromy," *Art History* 4, no. 1 (March 1981): 46.

ancient mythology, both white or polychrome, were beginning to lose vogue.[104] Nonetheless, Gibson's polychrome statue of Venus was a success. Despite (or perhaps thanks to) the critique of his "Tinted Venus", collectors began to take interest in the work and today it has been preserved in a total of six replicas created by Gibson himself.[105]

The reception of Gibson's statue on the continent is evidenced by the "Venus with Golden Hair", which was exhibited in 1863 by Charles Auguste Arnaud at Paris's "Salon of the Venuses" as the hall had been dubbed for the number of paintings depicting this goddess. The statue was purchased by Emperor Napoleon III together with paintings of Venuses by Cabanel and Baudry, which aroused the greatest interest in the general public.[106] In a review, Théophile Thoré-Bürger emphasized the fact that the marble was polychromed in ancient Greek style, i.e. with skin-color complexion and golden hair (today no traces of polychrome have remained on Arnaud's statue). The polychromed Venus, which was the very first of its kind in French sculpture, heightened the effect of the statue, which had evidently been created according to a live model. Studio practice also manifested itself in the fact that Venus is holding a lock of her hair in her hand, which is raised high in the air. Arnaud used this lock of hair on the final statue to replace the rope that his female model held onto to allow her to stand motionless in this position. Camp sharply criticized this type of statue exhibited at the Paris Salon: (these) *nymphs, bacchantes, Venuses and also philosophers assume the most violent postures, indulging in the most unnatural contortions to place before the viewer's eyes precisely what he doubtless has no wish to see*.[107] Arnaud was still working on the statue since 1859, when the press of the time wrote about the plaster model and still unfinished marble statue that it was neither a virtuous Venus nor an overly feminine Astarte, but a Venus of our times.[108] In its concept, the statue foreshadows the 20th century.

[104] Francis Turner Palgrave, *A Handbook to the Fine Art Collections in the International Exhibition* (London: Macmillan, 1862), 89: "Serious as the subject claims to be, I confess it is difficult to think of Nolleken's Venus, Canova's Venus, Gibson's Venus, everybody's Venus, with due decorum, – one fancies a healthy modern laugh would clear the air of these idle images, – one agrees with the honest old woman who preferred a roast duck to all the birds of Heathen."
[105] Frasca-Rath, *John Gibson*, 254.
[106] H. 210 cm, Compiègne, Château RF 424.
[107] Maxime Du Camp, "Le salon de 1863," *La revue des deux mondes* (15th June, 1863): 907-908. English translation W. Vaughan – F. Cachin.
[108] Henrys, "Gazette du Palais" *L'illustration* 35, (7th January, 1860): 10: "C'est bien la Vénus de notre âge."