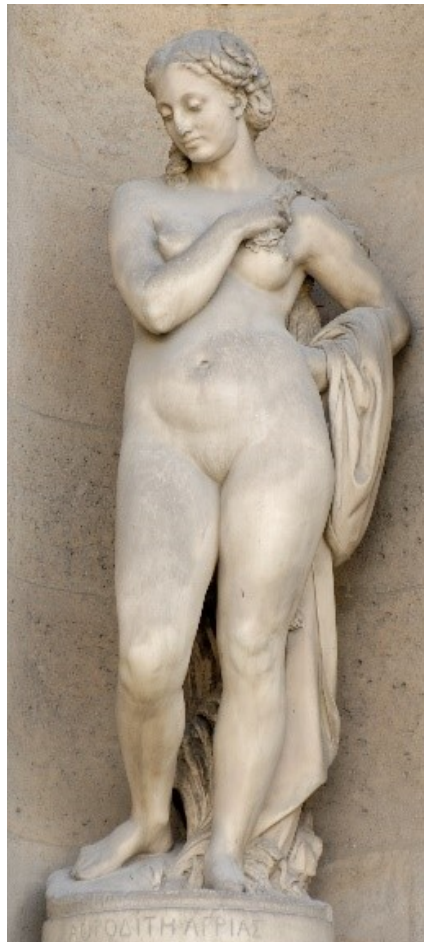


6. ICON AND VICTIM. Mid 19th Century to the Present

“Venus of our Time”

The tradition of depicting the naked Venus, which was introduced in the 4th century BC by Praxiteles, continued on to a limited degree even in the 20th century, but often in a radically different form. Decently coquettish eroticism of neo-classical Venuses was the norm in academic art until the mid-19th century. The new image type that replaced it, whose roots go back to Giambologna, is characterized by fully developed female curves and a posture expressing solid moral principles. A representative example of the production of the time is the statue of Aphrodite made in 1859 by Georges Clère, whose teacher was the famous François Rude. Clère was also in high demand in his time and his ancient goddess was received favorably. In his concept, Aphrodite is a young villager, and he has completely replaced her ancient posture and stylized anatomy with the study of a live model (107).¹



107. Georges Clère, Rustic Aphrodite, marble statue, 1859.

¹ For models cf. Susan Waller, *The Invention of the Model. Artists and Models in Paris, 1830-1870* (London: Routledge, 2016).

The goddess is holding a non-ancient attribute, a cob of corn, and is standing in an unharvested wheat field. The ancient goddess is indicated only by the Greek inscription "Rustic Aphrodite." According to the generally widespread racial theories of the time, the unsurpassable level of ancient art was a result of the ancient Greek lifestyle, a part of which was physical exercise and spending time in the open air. This explained why Greek men were muscular and Greek women were beautiful. Their bodies were symmetrical and said to be perfectly proportionate as we see them on classical Greek statues. These theories were explicitly racist. In his influential essay "Essai sur l'Inégalité des Races Humaines" published in 1853, Joseph Arthur de Gobineau wrote the following about Europeans: *Not only are these peoples more beautiful than the rest of mankind, which is, I confess, a pestilent congregation of ugliness; not only have they the glory of giving the world such admirable types as a Venus, an Apollo, a Farnese Hercules ... the Europeans are the most eminent, by their grace of outline and strength of muscular development.*²

The cult of the beautiful and healthy body gained intensity in France after the country's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, when national regeneration via a return to Mediterranean roots, athletics and spending time in the sun became a highly current topic.³ The vast majority of artists at the time agreed that the goal of depicting Venus must be a goddess "of our times," not only beautiful, but also strong and exceedingly healthy and vivacious. There were of course great differences between individual artists. Explicit eroticism is characterized by Auguste Rodin, for whom ancient sculpture was an important source of inspiration, which was typical for the French culture of the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century.⁴ In his art, however, Rodin never adhered to ancient conventional schemes and worked primarily according to live models, which is evidenced by his many studies of Venus. He dealt with this topic intensely in connection to his "Gates of Hell" work inspired by Dante's epos. It remained unfinished despite the fact that he worked on it from 1880 until his death in 1917. He planned to put Venus over the doors to the right of the statue of the Thinker. He depicted her differently than was customary in antiquity, and also interpreted her in a wholly different manner. Primarily, however, he had a relationship with the statue that was different from ancient sculptors.

Rodin depicted Venus in various poses, the inspiration for which he gained from his female models, who were also usually his lovers. The model for his statuette from around 1888 was the model Adèle Abruzzeti, which is visible at first sight from her slim, limber body that nonetheless shows full female curves.⁵ For Rodin, working on a female nude was primarily an opportunity for erotic contact with the model with whom he worked and thus appropriated. In his mind, the statue was primarily meant to express the fact that the depicted woman would have willingly accepted the sculptor's erotic advances and satisfied his physical needs. The sculptor was convinced that ancient sculptors had approached the depiction of Venus in the same manner.

² See Joseph-Arthur, comte d Gobineau, *Essai sur l'Inégalité des Races Humaines*, 1 (Paris: F. Didot frères, 1853), 179-180.

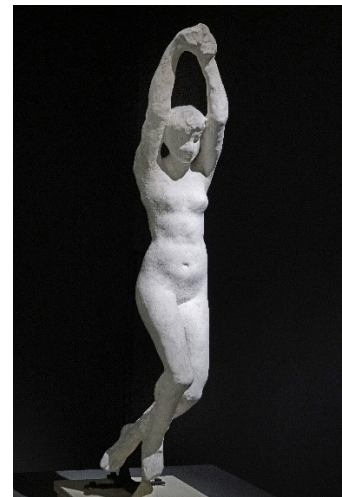
³ Cf. Athena S. Leoussi, "From Civic to Ethnic Classicism: The Cult of the Greek Body in Late Nineteenth century French Society and Art," *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 16, no. 3-4 (September - December 2009), 393-442.

⁴ Cf. Richard Warren, *Sex, Symbolists and the Greek Body* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019).

⁵ Paris, Musée Rodin S 02898.

Proof of this is found in Paul Gsell, who published interviews with Rodin in 1911 before the sculptor's death. He once remained in Auguste Rodin's studio late into the night, and the sculptor showed him a small ancient version of the Medici Venus in the light of a lamp in order to bring it to life. By doing so, he intended to show Gsell that it had been *moulded by kisses and caresses*.⁶ Ancient sculptors naturally never approached statues of Venus in such a way; for them, these statues were primarily the visualization of an inaccessible goddess.⁷

In 1914, Rodin created the sculptural decoration for the dramatisation of Pierre Louÿs' decadent novel "Aphrodite," staged at the Théâtre de la Renaissance in Paris (108). In it, the sculptor created a statue based on the dead body of the courtesan with whom he played a perverse love game. He represented her *in the violent attitude in which he saw her in his dream, to create from the corpse the statue of the Immortal Life*.⁸ Rodin enlarged one of the nudes created for his "Gate of Hell" for the theatrical production (109). The only statue, which Rodin himself named Aphrodite, had nothing in common with the ancient Venuses. If we wanted to find an ancient pattern for Rodin's Aphrodite, it would be the famous ancient statue type of Marsyas hanging by his arms to be flayed.⁹



108 (left). Scene of Pierre Louÿs' play "Aphrodite"
(in the centre, Rodin's life-size plaster statue, lost), photo, 1914.
109 (right). Auguste Rodin, Aphrodite, plaster created around 1888
and enlarged by Henri Lebossé around 1914.

French sculptor Raoul Lamourdedieu, who was influenced at the time by Rodin, called his statue "Modern Venus."¹⁰ The "modernity" lied in the fact that the sculptor had depicted the anatomy of a specific female model who had not assumed an ancient pose. Lamourdedieu exhibited his work with success at the Salon of 1908; the author of the catalogue did not mind that the sculptor had emphasized his

⁶ Auguste Rodin, *Rodin on Art and Artists*, conversations with Paul Gsell, translated by Romilly Feden (New York: Dover, 1983), 21.

⁷ Cf. Cf. Jaś Elsner, *Roman Eyes: Visuality and Subjectivity in Art and Text* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 115-117.

⁸ Louÿs 1896, 366.

⁹ Cf. Pascale Picard, ed., *Rodin: La lumière de l'antique* (Paris: Gallimard, 2013), 148, 172.

¹⁰ Charles Saunier, *The Salons of 1908*, 2 (Paris: Goupil & Cie, 1908), 2, pl. after p. 36.

adherence to the model, and on the contrary said the following of this ostentatiously non-ancient and temporal Venus: *this woman has beauty which is for all time*.¹¹ He only marveled at the fashionable clothing that had fallen to the goddess's feet, by which the sculptor intended to put an even greater emphasis on the modern element.

The most famous modern Venus is also the most famous work of sculpture by painter Pierre-Auguste Renoir.¹² The bronze statue of 1913 is removing her clothing to reveal her well-built body with wide hips, promising healthy offspring, which had already been used by Clère to characterize the goddess (110). Renoir's Venus is holding an apple, a symbol of victory, in her outstretched hand. The goddess gained the apple in the beauty contest which Paris presided over, which is the theme of the relief on the statue's pedestal. Renoir planned to place the statue in the "Shrine of Love" in the garden of his Provence residence "Les Collettes" in Cagnes. German sculptor Peter Christian Breuer also conceived his statuette as a modern Venus around 1911; his goddess is presented as a concerned mother, and she reaches down towards Amor, who has been stung by bees and turns his head away from her rebelliously.¹³ The topic may have simply represented the anguish of a young mother with a mischievous son if not for the fact that both are naked and an arrow is lying on the ground.¹⁴



110. Pierre-Auguste Renoir, realized by Richard Guino, Venus Triumphant, bronze, 1913.

After the years of deprivation and destruction during the First World War in Western culture, a desire for the carefree prosperity of the never-ending "Gilded Age" and nostalgia for the classical tradition in the visual arts distinctly intensified, a fact which we can observe also in avantgarde artists such as Pablo Picasso.¹⁵ Sculptural

¹¹ Saunier, *The Salons of 1908*, 35.

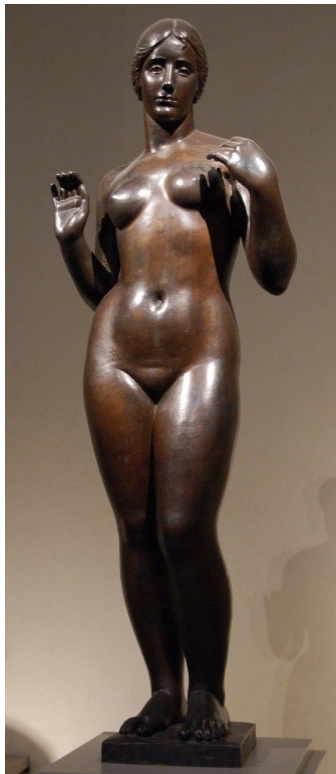
¹² See Paul Haesaerts, *Renoir, Sculptor* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1947), no. 6.

¹³ Ca. 1911. Münster, private collection. Cf. Bloch, Peter, Sibylle Einholz, and Jutta Simson, eds., *Ethos und Pathos: Die Berliner Bildhauerschule 1786-1914* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1990), 57, no. 41.

¹⁴ An enlarged bronze version of this sculptural group created in 1915 has been exhibited in Berlin's Greek park Köpenick since 1925, cf. Sibylle Einholz, *Peter Breuer (1856-1930): Ein Plastiker zwischen Tradition und Moderne*. Phil. Diss. (Berlin: FU Berlin, 1984), no. 57.

¹⁵ Cf. Enrique Mallen, *Pablo Picasso: Aphrodite Period 1924-1936* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2020).

work came once again to the forefront, in which Aristide Maillol won recognition. Maillol was venerated in the interwar period as the greatest living French sculptor. Maillol's monumental statues radically abandoned the dynamism and melancholy expressiveness typical for works by Auguste Rodin from the turn of the century. On the contrary, his statues took a programmatic stance against the chaos of modern life via their static nature and positive energy.¹⁶ Maillol exhibited his "Venus with Necklace" in Paris in 1928, but selected the mythical name for the statue only to give it greater esteem (111).¹⁷ According to the artist's own words, it was the result of many years of searching, which began before the war (in 1910) with a very similar statue called "Summer". Standing by the torso of one replica of the ancient Venus Esquilin (15), Maillol claimed that he had never been interested in the content of ancient statues, and was inspired exclusively by their perfect timeless shapes.¹⁸ Maillol's goal was to create perfectly designed statues; their postures are calm and do not express any emotion, and their expressions are serene. This is not, however, a return to the abstract and timeless nature of neo-classical statues; the surface of Maillol's statues always gives a lively and wholly specific impression.¹⁹ This is why he did not hesitate in wholly removing the illusion of reality by creating various versions of Venus's torso lacking a head, arms or legs next to complete versions of Venus; however, even these incomplete figures give off a lively impression.



111. Aristide Maillol, *Vénus au collier*, h.75.3 cm, bronze, 1918-1928.

¹⁶ Cf. Kenneth E. Silver, ed., *Chaos and Classicism: Art in France, Italy, and Germany, 1918-1936* (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2010), 17.

¹⁷ See Ronald Alley, *Catalogue of the Tate Gallery's Collection of Modern Art Other than Works by British Artists* (London: Tate Gallery, 1981), 466-8.

¹⁸ See Henry Frère, *Conversations de Maillol* (Genève: Cailler, 1956), 186.

¹⁹ See Judith Cladel, *Maillol, sa vie, son oeuvre, ses idées* (Paris: B. Grasset, 1937), 83.

The term torso for a sculptural depiction of a person without a head and limbs came into use in Italy in the mid-16th century in connection with a fragment of a marble statue of a man in the Vatican collections regarded as Hercules sitting on a lion (Torso Belvedere).²⁰ The idea, however, already existed – a bronze statuette of a naked woman from the end of the 15th century was found with her arms removed in order to liken her to ancient statues, which were usually discovered in incomplete states.²¹ While the torso during the Renaissance was an imitation of an ancient work, we find it for the first time in Rodin's work as a tool to negate imitation as such.²² In 1875-1877, he created a statue of a male torso without a head or limbs, and in 1900 completed his famous statue of a walking man without arms or a head.²³ In Maillol's work, the torso played an important role, as it was the basis of his creative process.²⁴ The torso itself may have been the sculptor's goal, as he was not interested in circumstantiality, which he saw to be represented not only by the limbs, but also the head. His goal was to depict the essence of the human body and its ideal, embodied by the torso, from which all movement of the human body arises.²⁵ This was also why he belonged to those who were not bothered that the ancient Venus de Milo statue had no arms. In Maillol's view, the depicted action only drew attention away from the beauty of this statue's shapes.²⁶

Maillol's uncompromising classicism was an exception among the authors of modern Venuses in the 20th century, but not unique. Leon Indenbaum, similarly to Georges Clère mentioned above, named his 1925 statue "Rustic Venus."²⁷ The sculptor was a member of the famous Parisian school and in the same year created and successfully exhibited a marble statue at the Salon, which he simply dubbed "a reclining woman." At first glance, the "Rustic Venus" looks like a well-built and self-contented villager, but at the same time advocates ancient tradition. Indenbaum hailed from today's Belarus, and began to study in the studio of Antoine Bourdelle immediately after his arrival to Paris in 1911, where he remained until 1919. Similarly to Rodin, Bourdelle was strongly influenced by antiquity and kept both ancient statues and books on ancient sculpture in his studio.²⁸ The pose of Indenbaum's Venus, with her head supported by her hand and one leg over the other is strikingly similar to the ancient statues of deceased Roman women characterized as Venus via the revealed upper half of the body (42-43). It also shares one other detail – the cloth that is thrown over the thigh and which covers the loins. Indenbaum could have come to this design independently of ancient Roman sculptors; he had dealt with the theme of a reclining figure for a long time and named a similar plaster statue from 1922 "Figure."²⁹

²⁰ Cf. Christa Schwinn, *Die Bedeutung des Torso vom Belvedere für Theorie und Praxis der bildenden Kunst vom 16. Jahrhundert bis Winckelmann* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1973), 1, 36.

²¹ Wien, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Kunstammer 5600. Cf. Werner Schnell, *Der Torso als Problem der modernen Kunst* (Berlin: Mann, 1980), 20-21.

²² Schnell, *Der Torso*, 25-67.

²³ "Torso", 1875-1877, Paris, Petit palais; "L'homme qui marche", bronze, ca. 1900, Musée Rodin.

²⁴ See Pierre Camo, *Aristide Maillol* (Paris: Nouvelle revue française, 1926), 8.

²⁵ Frère, *Conversations de Maillol*, 273.

²⁶ Cladel, *Maillol*, 141.

²⁷ See Adolphe Basler, *Indenbaum* (Paris: Le Triangle, ca 1933), pl. 4.

²⁸ Cf. Claire Barbillion et al., eds., *Bourdelle et l'Antique: Une passion moderne* (Paris: Paris Musées, 2017).

²⁹ Cf. Basler, *Indenbaum*, pl. 2.

However, the fact that he named his statue after Venus may be proof that he was aware of its links to ancient tradition.



112. Gerhard Marcks, Thüringer Venus, h. 177 cm, bronze, 1930.

When sculptors of the 20th century decided to depict Venus, they did not usually strive for timeless beauty as Maillol did, but rather to depict a goddess localized in time and place. Therefore, we encounter “American,”³⁰ “Australian,”³¹ “Ukrainian,”³² “Nordic”³³ and other Venuses – the list is vast, as the series of statues is essentially endless. Probably the most famous of these national goddesses is also the oldest, the “Thüringer Venus” by Gerhard Marcks from 1930 (112).³⁴ The sculptor adopted not only the gestures from ancient tradition – like Renoir’s Venus, the goddess is also holding an apple in her outstretched right hand, which could, however, be Eve’s apple.

³⁰ Albino Manca, 1942-1943. Tertenia, Museo Civico d’Arte Moderna “Albino Manca.”

³¹ Rayner Hoff, 1926, Art gallery of the New South Wales. Cf. Anna Carden-Coyne, *Reconstructing the Body: Classicism, Modernism, and the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 243, fig. 5.6.

³² Mykola Shmatko, 1993, sculptor’s collection.

³³ Elena Surovtseva, 1988. Moscow, Tretyakov Gallery.

³⁴ Cf. Günter Busch, ed., *Gerhard Marcks: Das plastische Werk* (Frankfurt: Propyläen Verlag, 1977), no. 204.

With her left hand, she lifts up a lock of her hair, which has characterized the newly-born Venus emerging from the waves since antiquity. The differentiation of the free and supporting leg, which is typical for Venuses in ancient tradition, is only subtly suggested in Marcks's statue; the figure stands firmly in stride so that her robust frame with wide shoulders and full breasts stands out. Her wide face is also individualized, and she has graceful but irregular features with slightly slanted eyes, a large nose and a pointy chin. She does not look excessively noble or smart, but, on the contrary, agreeable and likeable, like a good-hearted "girl next door" that we can recognize even years later. Statues depicting Venus as a devoted mother are conceived in a similar manner. Gerhard Marcks created also a similar sculptural group as the aforementioned work by Peter Christian Breuer; the woman is also leaning over a boy, but the action is different, as Venus teaches Amor to fire a bow.³⁵ In this sculptural group, Venus is dressed in simple clothing, and in this case the goddess in no way differs from the average woman in 1952, when the sculptural group was created.

The negative version of the realistic depiction of the modern Venus was selected by the greatest of all modern Italian sculptors, Arturo Martini, who is little known outside of Italy as a consequence of his engagement in Mussolini's political regime. Martini was aware of the fact that Western sculptural tradition, which was rooted in antiquity, was definitively coming to an end in his era.³⁶ He attempted to overcome this alienation of the public and sculpture through spontaneity, i.e. the coherence of depicted themes, the unpretentious nature of their concept, and formal imperfection inspired by folk art. He experimented with technique while returning to a traditional Italian material, pottery, for which he took inspiration from Etruscan statues that were a sensational discovery of Italian archeology of the time. For Martini, the Etruscan statues, which did not adhere to classical Greek canon, were an alternative version of African ritual mask art discovered by French avantgarde artists.

The sophisticated classical form and myth was replaced with naivety, playfulness and folk tales full of fantasy but lacking any philosophical ambitions. Martini adopted the title of the statue, "Venus of the Ports" of 1932 (113), from a painting by Mario Sironi from 1919.³⁷ The scene on the painting is of a port and an inbound vessel, and a woman in summer clothing exhibiting her drooping breasts stands on the pier. She is a wholly forgettable woman, who waits for sailors in every port, which is expressed by the fact that she has no face; her blouse is formed by old newspapers which no longer interest anyone. Martini's naked Venus is a disinterested prostitute who does not care in the least what she looks like.³⁸ She has taken a comfortable seat and is almost semi-reclining. Her mouth is open as she props her head up with her hand, making her features grotesquely misshapen. Her status is also indicated by what she sits upon, i.e. a fragment of an old mooring, which like her has evidently discarded and thus lies upside down on the pier.

³⁵ See G. Marcks, *Venus and Amor, 1952*, Bremen, Gerhard Marcks Stiftung. Cf. Rudolf Blaum et al., *Gerhard Marcks und die Antike* (Bremen: Gerhard Marcks-Stiftung, 1993), 40.

³⁶ Arturo Martini, *La scultura lingua morta e altri scritti*, ed. Mario De Micheli (Milan: Jaca Book, 1982), 116.

³⁷ Combined technique, 98 X 73,5 cm, Milano, Casa Museo Boschi - Di Stefano. Cf. Silvia Bignami, ed., *Mario Sironi: Venere dei porti* (Milan: Skira, 2000).

³⁸ Treviso, Museo Civico "Luigi Bailo."



113. Arturo Martini, Venus of the Ports, h. 115 cm, terracotta, 1932.

"Venus in Furs"

*My company was charming. Opposite me by the massive Renaissance fireplace sat Venus; she was not a casual woman of the half-world, who under this pseudonym wages war against the enemy sex, like Mademoiselle Cleopatra, but the real, true goddess of love. She sat in an armchair and had kindled a crackling fire, whose reflection ran in red flames over her pale face with its white eyes, and from time to time over her feet when she sought to warm them. Her head was wonderful in spite of the dead stony eyes; it was all I could see of her. She had wrapped her marblelike body in huge fur and rolled herself up trembling like a cat.*³⁹ Thus begins the famous novel "Venus in Furs" by Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, after whom the sexual deviation known as masochism was named. In the book, Venus is the alter ego of a sadomasochistic dominatrix, an icy merciless woman with a heart of stone. Her fur coat implies that the beautiful and unmoving marble surface hides an animalistic sexual desire. Venus thus represents an even greater danger than meets the eye. Von Sacher-Masoch simultaneously points out her *white eyes*, which evoke a classical statue, an object of indubitable and universal admiration.

³⁹ Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, *Das Vermächtniß Kains. Erster Theil. Die Liebe. Zweiter Band* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1870), 121–368. English translation W. Vaughan – F. Cachin.

The hero of the novel "La Vénus d'Ille" expresses himself similarly concerning the ancient bronze statue of the goddess, which an admirer of the statue proudly showed him in the south of France: *Disdain, irony, and cruelty could be read on this face, which was nonetheless incredibly beautiful. In fact, the more you gazed at this admirable statue, the more you experienced a painful feeling at the way such marvellous beauty could be allied with the absence of any sensibility. "If the model ever existed," I said to Mr. De Peyrehorade, "and I doubt that Heaven has ever produced a woman such as this, how I pity her lovers. She must have taken great pleasure in making them die of despair. There is something ferocious in her expression, and yet I've never seen anything so beautiful."*⁴⁰ The plot of the novel, which was written by accomplished expert of ancient culture Prosper Mérimée, was inspired by the aforementioned medieval legend on the statue of Venus and the ring. The beautiful Vénus d'Ille statue kills, and according to general opinion is the embodiment of the devil and is therefore ultimately melted into a church bell, which, however, continues to do harm.

"Venus in Furs" and "Vénus d'Ille" do not express the personal opinions of the authors of these works on the ancient goddess. The first of a series of famous literary works from the 19th century on seductive statues of Venus that destroy men is the novella entitled "Marble Statue" by Joseph von Eichendorff.⁴¹ In it, Venus was an evil and mortally dangerous demon, but the ancient statue that depicted her was an unsurpassable aesthetic example. The 19th century's attitude towards Venus was ambivalent; the condemnable depiction of a naked woman was the very thing that raised fascination. In late antiquity, Christian authors primarily attacked Venus, who tempted with her beautiful appearance and sexual attraction only to destroy the individual in question.

The concept of Venus as a mortally dangerous monster lived also in the medieval myth of the unhappy Tannhäuser.⁴² The most famous version of the myth was the opera of the same name by Richard Wagner according to the composer's own libretto that premiered in Dresden in 1845. At the beginning of the opera, the hero turns away from Venus, whom he had planned to replace with the Virgin Mary, but fails to break the magic of the evil demon. Charles Baudelaire, one of the few French admirers of the German composer, summarized the transformation of the ancient goddess into a demon in his essay "Wagner and Tannhäuser" in 1869: *No longer does she inhabit Olympus or the shores of some sweet-smelling archipelago. She has withdrawn into a cavern, admittedly magnificent, but illuminated by fires other than those of the kindly Phoebus. In going underground Venus has come nearer to hell, and, no doubt, on the occasion of certain abominable solemnities she goes and pays regular homage to the Archdemon, prince of the flesh and lord of sin.*⁴³

⁴⁰ Prosper Mérimée, *Colomba. La Vénus d'Ille. Les âmes du purgatoire* (Paris: Magen et Comon, 1841), 300-301. English translation A. Brown. Cf. Günter Grimm, "Prosper Mérimées tödliche Frauen oder 'Die Venus von Ille' und ihr Vorbild aus Melos," *Antike Welt* 30 (1999): 577-586.

⁴¹ Joseph von Eichendorff, "Das Marmorbild," in *Frauentaschenbuch für das Jahr 1819*, ed. Caroline de la Motte-Fouqué (Nürnberg: J. L. Schrag, 1818), 555-595. Cf. Robert Velten, *Keusche Madonna – verführerische Venus: Die Frauen in Eichendorffs Marmorbild* (Münster: Universität Münster, 2012).

⁴² Heinrich Heine, *Neue Gedichten* (Hamburg, 1844), 111-128.

⁴³ Charles Baudelaire, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gaillmard, 1961), 1219. English translation P. E. Charvet. Cf. Sylvie Thorel-Cailleteau, "Aphrodite wagnérienne ou la leçon de classicisme," *Revue de littérature comparée* 309 (2004): 37-54.

The “updating” of the medieval attitude towards Venus in the 19th century was without a doubt strongly influenced by the fact that she had begun to appear in public space, which drew resistance from the middle class, for which hypocritical morals and obligatory social conventions were typical. As a consequence of revolutionary changes, all the privileges of the elite including the visual arts, which had until then been designated exclusively for their private consumption, slowly began to become generally available to all. In the centuries prior, the aristocracy had lived behind the walls of their residences, which were suddenly toppled. Statues and paintings that hitherto had been hidden away from the lower classes became readily accessible, which must have shocked the bourgeoisie. Such a confrontation naturally led to scandals, which is illustrated in a famous case of a common girl, Susan Flood, who converted to the ultraconservative movement dubbed the “Plymouth Brethren” in the 1860s. The girl had gone with her relatives to visit London’s Crystal Palace, which had been moved to Sydenham after the Great Exhibition ended in 1851. In the statue gallery, the naked statues outraged her to such a degree that she began to knock one statue after another over with the handle of her umbrella until she was stopped by the police. The girl returned triumphantly to her community in Devonshire, where she proudly told of her victory: “*In the very temple of Belial.*”⁴⁴

Private parks and gardens opened their gates to all who bought tickets, but such a visit may have been highly frightening for commoners. Another notable example comes from Stuttgart, where William I, King of Württemberg built his summer residence, Rosenstein. The king had a weakness for statues of naked women. He gradually ordered the creation of all of the most famous exemplars from antiquity until the present; these decorated the interiors and the garden of Rosenstein Palace, the most famous English landscape park of its time in southwestern Germany.⁴⁵ According to a guide from 1856, a whole set of eight of the most famous statues of naked Venuses were exhibited together in the park.⁴⁶ The citizens of Stuttgart were hardly prepared for such a concentration of nakedness and sharply criticized these statues, which is documented in a lithograph from 1855, which shows an old married couple draped in layers of clothing and standing before a statue of the naked Venus (114). The expressions on their faces and gestures clearly show what they think of this copy of the Medici Venus that they have suddenly happened upon. The statue belonged to a series created by a local artist, Ludwig Hofer, who studied from 1823-1838 in Rome under Thorvaldsen.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ See Edmund Gosse, *Father and Son* (Portsmouth NH: W. Heinemann, 1907), 161.

⁴⁵ Cf. Bernhard Maaz, “Das Alte am Neuen und das Neue im Alten. Die Erwerbungen zeitgenössischer Skulpturen durch König Wilhelm I. von Württemberg als Spiegel individueller Interessen und zeittypischer Tendenzen gegen Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts,” *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Vereins für Kunstwissenschaft* 67 (2013): 128-129.

⁴⁶ See Karl Büchele, *Stuttgart und seine Umgebungen für Einheimische und Fremde* (Stuttgart: K. Aue, 1858), 277.

⁴⁷ The statue survived the destruction of the park during the Second World War but is now lost, cf. Patricia Peschel, *Der Stuttgarter Hofbildhauer Johann Ludwig von Hofer* (Stuttgart: Hohenheim Verlag, 2009), 200-201.



114. Outraged Citizens/"Empörte Bürger," lithograph, c.1855.



115. Honoré Daumier, lithograph, 1850.

The public's attitude towards statues of naked Venuses was not always unified. The most liberal of cities was Paris, where no one was scandalized by such statues in the mid-19th century; on the contrary, the statues became proof of the modernity of this world metropolis and a symbol of a new era. The lithograph of 1850 by Daumier shows an old married couple in exactly the same situation as on the lithograph from Stuttgart, but the reaction to the statue is wholly different (115). The old woman sighs as she

looks at the copy of the Medici Venus: “No matter what one says, old things are always beautiful”. The old man counters dryly: “Yes, my dear, but only in marble.” On Daumier’s lithograph entitled “The Connoisseur” from 1864-1865, a smaller-than-life plaster copy of the Venus de Milo holds a central position.⁴⁸ She stands on a table next to other books and works of art, and the room is completely full of images and antiques. The old man in the painting in the middle of the round frame and the young satyr characterized by pointy ears depicted as a sculptural bust on the right are carefully gazing along with the art lover, who sits comfortably in his chair. It is clear from the smile on his face that owning the statuette brings him great pleasure. The Venus de Milo is placed so that her dynamic posture stands out, and she faces the statuette’s owner; however, she looks down at him from above, from the ideal world of art, youth and beauty. The fact that their gazes have met even more accentuates the collector’s passivity and unsightliness. His face is creased, his hair thin, and the features of his elderly face are almost caricature-like.

Although the copy of the ancient statue of Venus forms the central point of the collector’s study in Daumier’s graphic, there is an unsurpassable void between it and the collector. On the contrary, nakedness had become a common part of the modern Parisian world. The first erotic daguerreotypes depicting live female models appeared in the middle of the 1840s, and in 1854 Auguste Bruno Braquehais created a series of six studio photographs which showed naked women confronted with a smaller-scale plaster replica of the Venus de Milo. One of them has a composition similar to that of Daumier’s later graphic, but the art connoisseur has been replaced by a naked woman, who is not looking at the plaster statuette of Venus, but looks coquettishly back at the viewer while showing off her naked body. The ancient statue was intended to elevate the photograph to a work of art. This, however, was unnecessary, as the distinguished critic Ernest Lacan commended the photograph but denounced the plaster cast as a visually intrusive element.⁴⁹

The focal point of artistic production in the 19th century explicitly shifts from the statues that only monarchs and the aristocratic elite could afford to paintings that became generally available in bourgeois society. French painting of the third quarter of the century demonstrates the transformation of artists’ attitudes and the public towards the depiction of naked women and Venus. What audiences in Paris, the most liberal metropolis in the world at the time refused to accept was clearly demonstrated in the scandals linked to paintings by Gustav Courbet. His work “La baigneuse” was groundbreaking, and caused a scandal at the salon in 1853. A portly half-naked woman is standing on the wooded bank of a river and raising her hand at a sitting woman, who is also gesticulating. The meaning of the communication between the women is unclear, and Courbet’s intent was primarily to create an unidealized depiction of live models.⁵⁰ The work was viewed as a provocation and mockery of traditional

⁴⁸ E.g. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art 29.100.200. See Jean-Pierre Cuzin et al., eds., *D’après l’antique* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2000), no. 249.

⁴⁹ See Ernest Lacan, “Études d’après nature. M. B. Braquehais,” *La Lumière* 37 (16. septembre, 1854), 147.

⁵⁰ Courbet, *La baigneuse*, 1853, Montpellier, Musée Fabre 868.1.19. Cf. Dominique Massonnaud, *Courbet scandale: Mythes de la rupture et Modernité* (Paris: Harmattan, 2003).

depictions of the naked bathing Venus. Critique of the time claimed that the author had originally intended to name the image "La Venus Courbet."⁵¹

The program of transformation of the goddess into a real woman, i.e. a "Venus of our times," which she came to be known as, culminated in Courbet's painting dubbed "L'Origine du monde / The Origin of the World" from 1866.⁵² This painting depicts only a female torso without a head, arms or legs, which was an explicit reference to the plaster cast of the ancient female torso that was an essential teaching tool in art studios of the time. The female genitals, which had been omitted in depictions of the naked female body since the times of Praxiteles's Cnidia, were displayed by Courbet from a closeup perspective and in full detail, revealing the fact that they are slightly swollen. This was a parody of the ancient model, as what had been censured now became the primary theme of Courbet's painting.⁵³

In Courbet's works or Manet's Olympia of 1863, the ancient Venus was replaced by a "girl next door," as this was a characteristic trait of the world in which they lived and one they wished to record in their paintings exactly as they saw it. At the center of these changes were women and sexuality, and therefore the greatest scandals were caused by paintings of naked women. Around the mid-19th century, the process focusing on equality between men and women began, fundamentally transforming society. In 1866, John Stuart Mill was the first member of the British Parliament to make a strong call for women's voting rights and in 1869 published a revolutionary essay defending gender equality, "The Subjection of Women." However, these revolutionary social transformations also had a darker side, which was the general prevalence of prostitution. This evoked panic in society, which began fully to acknowledge the power of sexuality and its potentially destructive effects. One of the manifestations of this panic was the birth of a new word – pornography – which came into use at the time for virtual prostitution, i.e. obscene images, which began to spread like wildfire.⁵⁴ Everyone knew about pornography, brothels, and prostitution but it was unsuitable for artists to make so much as a mention of its existence.

Liberalization in the depiction of female nakedness evoked obstinate resistance from conservative circles, and ancient statues of the naked Venus once again came to the forefront of the public discussion that arose on the subject. The contradicting reactions that statues of Venus evoked in men and women are expressed in the German caricature depicting tourists staring aghast at the Medici Venus (116). The confused visitor turns to his wife with the following words: "What do you think about that, mum? Does a decent girl have to be so pretty?"⁵⁵ The caricature by Linley Sambourne

⁵¹ Nadar (G. F. Tournachon), *Nadar jury au Salon de 1853. Album comique de 60 à 80 dessins coloriés* (Paris: J. Bry aîné, 1853), no. 300: "S'il est vrai qu'il ait eu un instant la pensée d'intituler sa baigneuse la Vénus Courbet, il fait qu'il soit perfidement et cruellement conseillé."

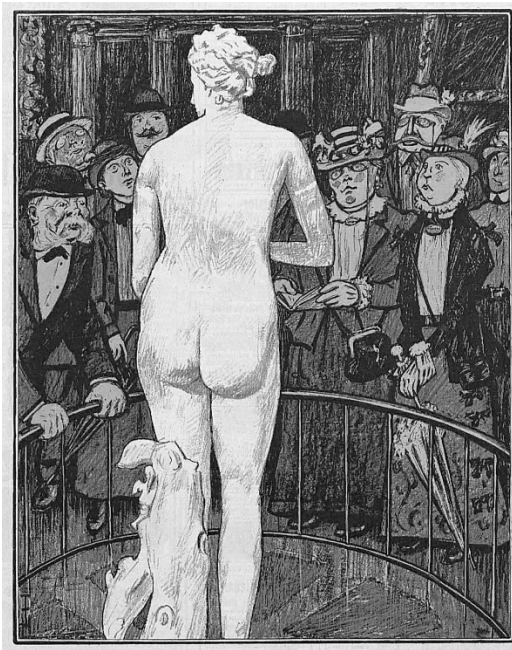
⁵² Paris, Musée d'Orsay, RF 1995 10. Cf. Thierry Savatier, *Origine du monde Histoire d'un tableau de Gustave Courbet* (Paris: Bartillat, 2006).

⁵³ See Peter Brooks, "Storied Bodies, or Nana at Last Unveil'd," *Critical Inquiry* 16 (1989), 22. The revolutionary nature of this painting is evidenced by its subsequent history – the work was first publicly exhibited in 1988, but since then has become a magnet for a score of exhibitions and permanent displays in Paris's Musée d'Orsay, joining its collections in 1995.

⁵⁴ Cf. Chantelle Thauvette, "Defining Early Modern Pornography: The Case of Venus and Adonis," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 12, no. 1 (Winter 2012), 26-48.

⁵⁵ *Simplicissimus* 4 (1899), 292.

also places the viewer in the Uffizi in Florence, where the treasurer of the Royal Academy J. C. Horseley stands dressed in women's clothing as he gesticulates disapprovingly towards the statue of the Medici Venus, which is looking back at him with scrutiny (117).⁵⁶ The caricature is titled "The Model 'British Matron';" Horseley, in female garb, asks in offence: "Oh dear! Oh dear! Who could ha' sat for THAT?" Horseley was an infamous mouthpiece for those who opposed the depiction of women in art and a sworn opponent of art made according to live female models. In the spring of 1885, he sent a letter to the *Times* called "A Woman's Plea," which he signed as a "British Matron;" his identity, however, was later revealed.⁵⁷



116 (left). Thomas Theodor Heine, *Before the Medici Venus*, 1898.



THE MODEL "BRITISH MATRON."
Mr. Horseley, R.A. (as the M.R. Matron). "Oh dear! Oh dear! Who could ha' sat for THAT?"

117 (right). Linley Sambourne, *The Model 'British Matron,'* 1885.

In Wilhelmine Germany, the so-called "Lex Heinze," a law named after Berlin pimp Gottfried Heinze, who became a symbol of the immorality of the time, excited great outrage among intellectuals and artists.⁵⁸ The law from 1900 was initiated by the emperor himself and banned pornography with a punishment of up to one year of imprisonment and a fine of up to 1,000 marks.⁵⁹ The perpetual problem, however, is that the boundaries of pornography can never be defined in exact terms. Where does art end and pornography begin? It was for this very reason that caricaturists used ancient statues, including both of the most famous Venuses, to mock this law. In the caricature entitled "Homerian laughter. Classical statues on the absurdity of Lex

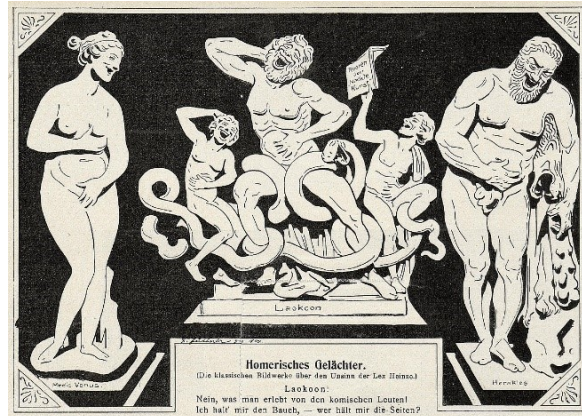
⁵⁶ *Punch* (24 October 1885), 195.

⁵⁷ *The Times* (20 May 1885), cf. Alison Smith, *The Victorian Nude: Sexuality, Morality and Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 227-229.

⁵⁸ Cf. Gustav Eberlein, "Die Lex Heinze von Standpunkt des bildenden Künstlers," in *Das Buch von der Lex Heinze ein Kulturdokument aus dem Anfange des Zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*, ed. Otto Falckenberg (Leipzig: Staackmann, 1900), 32-33.

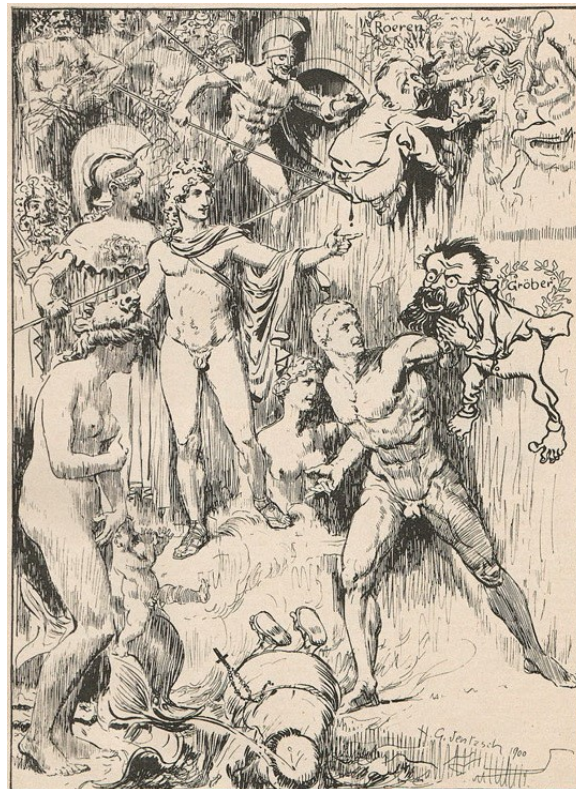
⁵⁹ Cf. Christina Templin, *Medialer Schmutz: Eine Skandalgeschichte des Nackten und Sexuellen im Deutschen Kaiserreich 1890-1914* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2016).

Heinze," the Medici Venus and the other ancient statues are doubled over with laughter (118). Laocoön is saying "Oh my, what one lives to see from these comical people. My sides are splitting – who will hold my pages?" while looking at a newspaper with the headline "Roeren on 'naked art'", which his son holds before him.



118. Franz Jüttner, Caricature on Lex Heinz with Venus de Medici, 1900.

In a similar caricature called "The Revenge of the Gods," the Medici Venus is once again on the left, and an inscription is found below the text: *Due to Lex Heinze, Roeren and Gröber dream that the gods will bring them to justice in a hall of the Vatican museum in Rome (119)*. Deputies of the Reichstag, Adolf Gröber and Hermann Roeren, who were engaged in promoting Lex Heinze, are being punished in the caricature's Vatican collections because the clergy was highly involved in the campaign against pornography. In the caricature, the clergy is represented by a monk, who has fallen head first into water as Venus's Neptune spits more onto his head.



119. Ferdinand von Reznicek, Caricature on Lex Heinz (detail), 1900.



120 (left). Ferdinand von Reznicek, Caricature of Lex Heinz with Venus de Milo, 1900.

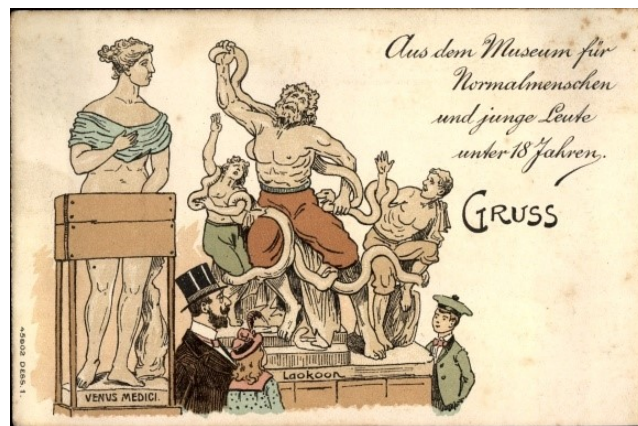


121 (right). Caricature on Lex Heinz, 1900.

The sublime nakedness of the ancient statues stands out in confrontation with a pig, a traditional embodiment of impure earthliness. The pig snaps at the Venus de Milo: “Ugh! How can someone walk around without bristles?” (120). The caricature dubbed “Lex Heinze in practical use” depicting German police officers destroying plaster statuettes of ancient Venuses evokes the atmosphere of ancient cities after the onset of Christianity (121). A number of the caricatures pointed to the absurdity of the law by depicting the dressing of ancient statues. The postcard of the Venus de Milo in her underwear bears the inscription: *Lex Heinze. The lady Venus has until now unfortunately gone without her necessary undergarments. In contemporary fashion, we see today the wholly unashamed lady of Medici* (122). A different postcard with this statue’s breasts covered by a shawl and her loins boarded up with planks bears the inscription: *Greetings from the museum for normal people and youth under the age of 18* (123). The message of their drawings was that the generally admired ancient statues of Venus of the time were an irrefutable argument against the puritanical criticism of nakedness in art. These images are characterized by the fact that the caricaturists assumed that their audience would recognize the Medici Venus and the Venus de Milo to which they were referring to.



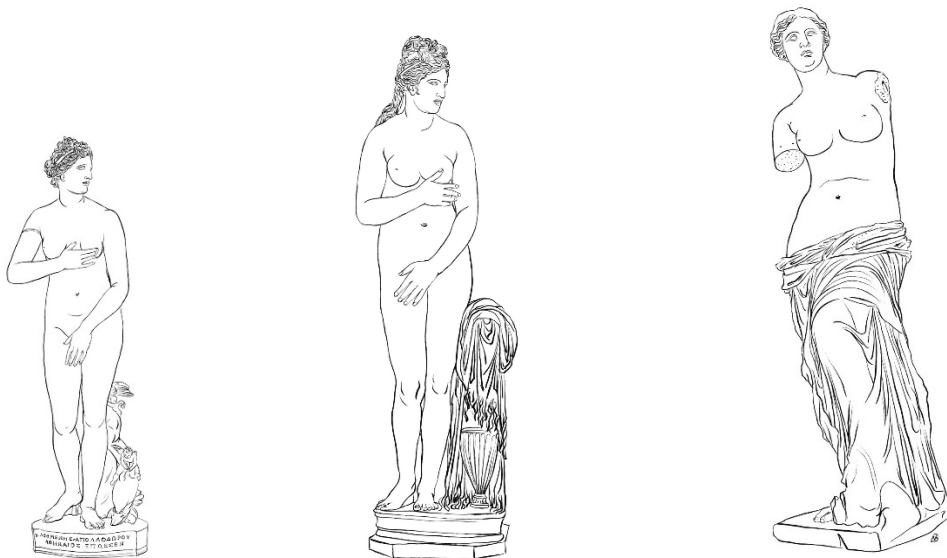
122 (left). German postcard with the dressed Venus Medici, circa 1900.



123 (right). German postcard with the boarded up Venus Medici, circa 1900.

Icon

Why Medici Venus, Capitoline Venus or Venus of Melos? To what do these ancient statues owe their worldwide fame? It is certainly no coincidence that these ancient statues were closely associated with the modern states. In the 18th century, the Venus de Medici was undoubtedly the most famous, successfully presenting the Grand Duchy of Tuscany as cultural superpower (124). The statue was located since 1575 in the Rome's Villa Medici. However, it was moved to Florence in 1677 by Cosimo III, Grand Duke of Tuscany, allegedly upon pleas by Pope Innocent XI, as it raised a scandal.⁶⁰ The erotic appeal was also the reason, besides artistic mastery and venerable origin, why ancient statues of Venus became the object of political manipulation. From beginning to present, the ancient statue of Venus has been closely linked to the state because it depicted a naked woman, thus in an erotic context. The enormous potential of this emblem was already recognized by Roman emperors beginning with Augustus, whose tradition was followed in post-ancient Europe by the Pope, the rulers of Medician Florence, French Kings or Napoleon Bonaparte. The last-mentioned ruler had an eminent interest in this glorified statue and finally managed to have it moved to Paris in 1803, which was celebrated in a bronze medal depicting Medici Venus and his portrait.⁶¹



124 (right). Medici Venus, h. 135 cm, 1st century BC version of the Hellenistic original.

125. Capitoline Venus, h. 193 cm, The Roman marble version of the Hellenistic original.

126 (left). Venus de Milo, height 204 cm, Greek marble version from 125-100 BC after the Greek original from the end of the 4th century BC.

One of the best-preserved ancient statues is the Capitoline Venus, which in its time was also the subject of intensive diplomatic negotiations (125). It differs from the relatively small Medici Venus in its height and the fact that instead of the usual dolphin, it has a hydria, water vessel, cast-off clothing, and attributes of the bath,

⁶⁰ Cf. Stijn Bussels, "Da' più scorretti abusata. The Venus de' Medici and its History of Sexual Responses" in *The Secret Lives of Artworks: Exploring the Boundaries Between Art and Life* eds. Caroline Van Eck et al. (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2014), 38-55.

⁶¹ Romain Vincent Jeuffroy, 1805-1815. E. g. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum NG-VG-1-3115.

evoking the birth of the goddess from the sea foam. The way the statue looks, however, is not as important as its placement in Rome's Campidoglio (the ancient Roman Capitol), the symbolic center of the Eternal City of which it has become an emblem. For this reason, Napoleon had the statue also taken to France. He made it the pride of the Louvre, yet another proof of the fact that Paris had definitively replaced Rome in the role of the metropolis of the Western world. The statue triumphantly returned to the Roman Campidoglio museums after Napoleon's fall in 1816. The Medici Venus had already returned to Florence one year earlier.

The political use of the ancient statue of Venus in the 20th century illustrates the Venus of Cyrene, which promoted the entry of occupying troops into foreign territory and subsequently served to celebrate its "liberation." When Italian soldiers found a Roman marble version of the Hellenistic Aphrodite in 1913 in Cyrenaica, Libya, it was used to legitimize the Italian occupation of Libya, which had taken place two years prior. Thanks to its high aesthetic quality and depiction of female nakedness, the statue evoked the interest of the international public, and was thus highly useful as a reminder that North Africa had once been a part of the ancient Roman Empire, a fact which Mussolini's Italy built upon. The statue was taken to Rome, where it stayed until Libya gained its independence. After long diplomatic negotiations and two legal disputes, the Italian state gave the statue back to Libya in 2008, where it was lost without a trace in 2013, probably destroyed as the result of the country's civil war.⁶²

The choice of a particular specimen of Venus statue was essentially random. It could theoretically have been any of those that survived. Some, however, were better suited to a political career; it all depended on the particular circumstances. From the 19th century, the brightest "star" was the Venus de Milo (126), and the reasons were obvious. In neoclassicism, the prestige of ancient Greek statues grew distinctly, and they began to be valued more greatly than Roman statues. This was caused by the cult of Greek art initiated by Winckelmann, but also by the fact that there were less Greek statues than Roman ones and it was more difficult to find them. Already in the second decade of the 19th century, a race had begun among European powers to collect them. In 1812, Bavarian crown prince Ludwig I acquired the sculptural decoration of the pediments of the Temple of Athena Aphaia in Aegina; in 1816, the British Crown purchased sculptures from Lord Elgin that had been imported from the Parthenon in Athens, a treasure which Napoleon had also attempted to acquire. In 1821, the Louvre in Paris finally acquired an ancient Greek statue of Aphrodite, which was found a year earlier on the island of Melos.⁶³

Thanks to this acquisition, which was made by the most prestigious museum of the time, this exemplar of the ancient statue of Aphrodite became the center of the cultural public's attention and has remained there to this day. The emphasis of the Greekness of the statue manifested itself in its name – the Venus de Milo – which stresses the location in which it was found, while the Medici Venus celebrates its

⁶² Cf. Alessandro Chechi, "The Return of Cultural Objects Removed in Times of Colonial Domination and International Law: The Case of the Venus of Cyrene," *Italian Yearbook of International Law* (2008): 159-181.

⁶³ Cf., for example, Dimitri Salmon, *La Vénus de Milo: Un mythe* (Paris: Gallimard – Réunion des musées nationaux, 2000); Elisabeth Prettejohn, *The Modernity of Ancient Sculpture: Greek Sculpture and Modern Art from Winckelmann to Picasso* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), 73-95.

modern owner. The statue in the Louvre, however, continued to bear the prestigious title of Venus despite the fact that it depicted the Greek Aphrodite. In accord with the new emphasis on the originality of ancient statues and the positive evaluation of statues' fragmentary nature as a guarantee of authenticity, arms were never added on to the Venus de Milo. This made the statue into an enigma, similarly to Mona Lisa's smile, which was something the general public loved, as it gave them something to ponder as the groups of tourists stopped for a moment with their tour guides to view the statue.

The fame of the Venus de Milo was solidified by academic studies written by prominent French art historians shortly after the statue's placement in the Louvre. Based on the head turned to the right and the drapery lying mostly on this side of the statue, Antoine-Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy assumed that Mars had stood next to her and the sculptural group was meant to celebrate the victory of peace over war. He attributed the statue to Praxiteles's circle and dated it to the mid-4th century BC.⁶⁴ Comte de Clarac agreed with the dating, and also attributed the statue to Praxiteles or his workshop.⁶⁵ The value of ancient statues in the eyes of the public even today still depends on whether they are mentioned in ancient literary sources; therefore, Clarac linked the Venus de Milo with Pliny's claim that Praxiteles had created a naked Aphrodite for Knidos and a clothed one for Kos. Because Pliny does not state whether the statue for Kos was completely veiled or only in part, Clarac hypothesized that the Venus de Milo is a copy of Praxiteles's clothed goddess. Toussaint-Bernard Éméric-David assumed that the statue depicts a nymph of Melos, the personification of the island, but contrary to previous scholars dated it to an older epoch, i.e. the period between Phidias and Praxiteles.⁶⁶ All three scholars agreed that the statue in the Louvre came from classical Greece and was thus an equally valuable counterpart to the Elgin Marbles.

After losing the Franco-Prussian War in 1870, the Venus de Milo became a beauty in distress, a symbol of France as a cultural superpower threatened by brutal enemies. French sculptor Emmanuel Frémiet, who gained fame with his statues of gorillas/kidnappers of women, created a wax statue of a gorilla abducting the Venus de Milo. The gorilla represented the Prussian aggressor and the statue Alsace, which Prussia had torn away from France.⁶⁷ The statue has since been lost, and all we know is that the sculptor sent it to be auctioned in New York in 1872. In the English caricature by Frederick Barnard from 1880, the same ancient statue was used in the opposite sense. It served to mock France's military impotence.⁶⁸ The goddess, whose lover was the god of war Ares, the Roman Mars, is depicted on the caricature with the modern anti-Mars. The goddess is depicted by the gigantic statue in the Louvre, and her

⁶⁴ Antoine Chrysostome Quatremère de Quincy, *Sur la statue antique de Vénus, découverte dans l'île de Milo en 1820* (Paris: Debure frères, 1821).

⁶⁵ Frédéric comte de Clarac, *Sur la statue antique de Vénus Victrix découverte dans l'île de Milo en 1820* (Paris: P. Didot, l'ainé, 1821).

⁶⁶ Toussaint-Bernard Éméric-David, *Histoire de la sculpture antique* (Paris: Charpentier, 1853), 189-234.

⁶⁷ See Truman Howe Bartlett, "Emmanuel Frémiet," *The American Architect and Building News* 32 (1891), 115: "Some people were wicked enough to affirm that it was a skit on the English, because of their fame in buying so many fine works of art, and so seldom producing them."

⁶⁸ *The Illustrated London News* (January 17th, 1880). Cf. Caroline Arscott and Katia Scott, *Manifestations of Venus: Art and Sexuality* (Manchester: Manchester University, 2000), 7-9.

mythical lover by the small figure of a French soldier, who looks up at her with a dull-witted expression on his face.

At the end of the 19th century, German-French antagonism manifested itself in classical archeology. A prominent world authority on ancient sculpture, Munich professor Adolf Furtwängler, raised the idea that the opinions of the French scholars on the Venus de Milo were wrong.⁶⁹ He subjected the statue, which was so highly loved by the French, to crushing criticism, which still remains valid today and the statue is thus thought by the scholarly community to be a late eclectic work from around 100 BC. Furtwängler's concept dominated thanks to the authority that German classical archeology won in the second half of the 19th century through its large-scale excavations in the Eastern Mediterranean, systematic classification of archeological material in museums, and its complex approach summarized in the German term "Altertumswissenschaft", i.e. the study of the ancient world. However, the scientific reevaluation of the Venus de Milo never affected the statue's popularity, and it remains to this day one of the greatest magnets of the Louvre in Paris, and citations and paraphrases of it appear in every generation of modern art.

The negative approach of experts towards the Venus de Milo in the 20th century was thanks to the fact that they devoted their attention almost exclusively to her artistic form and her development. In recent years, however, research in the field of classical archeology has begun to intensely study those who commissioned the statues, and thus the famous Paris statue has once again come to the center of scholars' attention. The reconstruction of the historical circumstances that the statue reacted to has helped us understand why the statue continues to fascinate the broad cultural public today. The conscious return to the artistic form of the 5th and 4th centuries BC, which was the primary trait of the Venus de Milo, was a reaction to the radical change in the political, social and economic conditions of the time in which the statue was created. In the Hellenistic epoch, a radical infiltration of cultures and economies took place and changed the world in which the Greeks lived. Syncretism manifested itself in everything, e.g. the spread of non-Greek fashion and non-Greek motifs, styles and ideas in the visual arts and architecture. The identity of the Greeks quickly began to erode in the Hellenistic epoch, and nothing was as it had been before. Greek communities began to defend themselves against this through political conservatism and visual arts that returned to the past, proof of which is the Venus de Milo.⁷⁰

Thus, French scholars emphasizing the bonds between the Venus de Milo and classical art were just as correct as was Adolf Furtwängler's criticism, which placed the creation of the statue to the very end of the Hellenistic epoch, when the development of Greek art had already exhausted its possibilities. The admiration of the modern public, which is experiencing something very similar to that of the Hellenistic Greeks, is also wholly reasonable. Today we are also vexed by the fact that nothing is in its proper place and that we are losing our understanding of the outside world. The

⁶⁹ Adolf Furtwängler, *Meisterwerke der griechischen Plastik. Kunstgeschichtliche Untersuchungen* (Leipzig: Giesecke & Devrient, 1893), 599-655; Adolf Furtwängler, *Masterpieces of Greek Sculpture. A Series of Essays on the History of Art*, translated by Eugenie Strong (London: W. Heinemann, 1895), 367-401.

⁷⁰ See Rachel Meredith Kousser, "Creating the Past: The Venus de Milo and the Hellenistic Reception of Classical Greece," *American Journal of Archaeology* 109, no 2 (April 2005): 227-250; Andrew Stewart, *Art in the Hellenistic World: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 19-20.

Venus de Milo's missing arms forcefully remind us of the fact that the past is irretrievably lost, and we will never know exactly what this statue said to the audience of the time. The Venus de Milo's dynamic posture and clothing, which in the following moment will fall down from her hips, is simultaneously in harmony with the feeling of a radically transforming present. The refined eroticism and aesthetic and technical perfection of the Venus de Milo predestined this statue to become an icon of a disappearing old world, in which a sophisticated power elite with a conservative worldview set the tone.

20th-century advertising reinforces the aura of celebrity in ancient statues of naked Venus by emphasizing their perfection, eternal beauty and exclusivity.⁷¹ The most famous ancient exemplars – the Medici Venus and Venus de Milo – appear again and again; the stereotypical repetition of one and the same sculptural type heightens advertising potential because it strengthens the aura of its fame. Statues of Venus most often appear in advertisements for perfumes, in which the image and text emphasize the fact that, just like Venus, no one can resist the perfume and women can use it to find and keep a man for good. They also appear often in advertisements for female undergarments, but the sex-appeal of ancient statues of Venus came to be used to sell anything from home furnishings and clothing to various services and cars. In 1929, the Lincoln automobile is presented as a similarly perfect masterpiece.⁷² The fragmentary state of the Venus de Milo makes it possible to emphasize that the advertised product is lacking nothing. In the phone's advertisement, on the other hand, the presence of the Venus de Milo draws attention to the fact that the famous statue could also use the device because it is "hands-free."⁷³

Statues of the Medici Venus and Venus de Milo and other works of art take on the role of the promoter to make sales, thus making the themes of statues into a mass-produced and sellable commodity, which is available in all price categories and designs that aim to fit the needs of customers. Because these depictions have become a commercial commodity, the law of the market is at play here, and only the meaning that surpasses other products will win recognition within this strong competition. This situation is documented and simultaneously criticized by a statue by Russian artist Alexander Kosolapov, who has lived in New York since 1975. His bronze cast of the ancient Venus de Milo statue has the head of a rabbit, and her naked body is covered with commercial logos: Gazprom, Marlboro, Coca Cola, McDonald's.⁷⁴ The topic of the works of art is often not the famous statue itself, but lesser-size copies of it that tourists take back from their travels. The fact that Venus statue has reached today's audience via the world of industrial production and services has fundamentally affected the way in which she is perceived. Thanks to Venus statue, the viewer not only accepts anything, but can also require anything; this is due to the fact that Venus statue has been torn from its cultural context and stripped of all content, and thus it must be filled with wholly new meanings.

The tremendous prestige of depictions of Venus was reflected also in the feminist movement. On 10 March 1914, Mary Richardson attempted to destroy

⁷¹ See Karelisa V. Hartigan, *Muse on Madison Square* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2002), 65-78.

⁷² *L'illustration* (October 19th, 1929).

⁷³ American advertisement for a "hands-free" telephone, 1963. General Telephone and Electronics.

⁷⁴ Bunny Gazprom, bronz, 209 cm, private collection.

Velázquez's famous painting of the Rokeby Venus because it was considered to be a national treasure – a Venus of the whole British nation, despite the fact that it had made its way into London's National Gallery only several years prior, in 1906.⁷⁵ *I have tried to destroy the picture of the most beautiful woman in mythological history as a protest against the government for destroying Mrs Pankhurst, who is the most beautiful character in modern history*, Richardson said in her official statement in 1914.⁷⁶ She revealed the reason, which she failed to speak of in 1914, in an interview in 1952: *I didn't like the way men visitors to the gallery gaped at it all day.*⁷⁷ The actions of feminist activists feature depictions of Venus as a patriarchal idol, a symbol not only of the oppression of women but also sexual minorities. In the 1920s, Claude Cahun together with her lover Marcel Moore used ancient statues of Venus to create *a photomontage that argues against idealization, or any other fixing of human characteristics by removing individual idiosyncrasies.*⁷⁸

In 1962 in New York, Niki de Saint Phalle, dressed in the uniform of a Napoleonic officer, shot at bags filled with paint placed on a plaster cast of the Venus de Milo, creating red and black stains on the statue.⁷⁹ By doing so, she was protesting the violence committed against women. The Venus de Milo was also the subject of a feminist protest in the bloody video by Jillian Mayer from 2011 called H.I.L.D.M.A. The abbreviation, which stood for "How I Lost My Darn Arms," was a reference to an abbreviation written by Marcel Duchamp under his reproduction of the Mona Lisa, to whom he added a moustache. Duchamp's abbreviation L.H.O.O.Q. was a phonetic transcription of a vulgar French term for the feminine sexual urge. In the video, Mayer, who is covered in white paint, appears in the position of the Venus de Milo; first she tears off one of her arms, then bites off the other; the ideal of beauty is transformed into a bloody torso. The author and main heroine spoke clearly about the meaning of the film: *It is a critique on beauty. Venus de Milo knowingly rips her arms from her torso as a notion of self-sacrifice in order to seek beauty and worldly admiration. By making the gesture of arm removal a choice for Venus, the ideal form of Western beauty becomes empowered.*⁸⁰

Victim

When modern artists exceptionally returned to the ancient statue of Venus, they often did so only to mock her. This trend began in the second half of the 19th century. In his poem titled *Venus Anadyomene* from 1870, Arthur Rimbaud cruelly parodies the traditional visual type. The final verses upend not only the traditional concept of Venus, but the traditional method in which connoisseurs who admired her from behind looked at these statues. *And that whole body moves and extends its broad rump*

⁷⁵ London, National Gallery NG2057. Cf. "The Nation's Venus," *Daily Express* (March 11th, 1914).

⁷⁶ See Midge Mackenzie, ed., *Shoulder to Shoulder: A Documentary* (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 261. Cf. Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude. Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality* (Routledge: London 1992), 34.

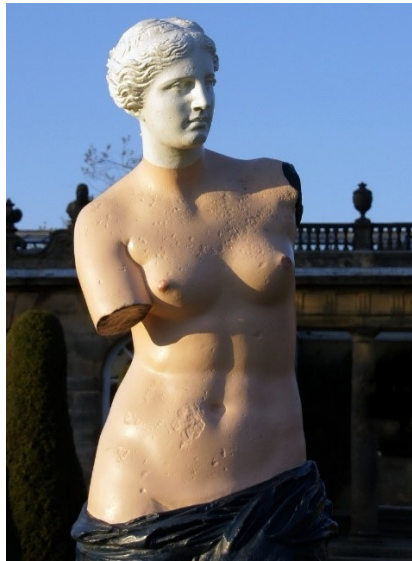
⁷⁷ Nead, *The Female Nude*, 37 (*Star*, February 22nd, 1952).

⁷⁸ See Jennifer L. Shaw, "The Figure of Venus. Rhetoric of the Ideal from Cabanel to Claude Cahun," in *Venus as Muse. From Lucretius to Michel Serres*, eds. Hanjo Berressem et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 71.

⁷⁹ Camille Morineau, ed., *Niki de Saint Phalle* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2014), 102.

⁸⁰ See Amanda McCorquodale, "Jillian Mayer: Artist Chews Off Her Own Arms For Art," *Huffpost* (Nov 30, 2011), https://www.huffpost.com/entry/jillian-mayer-artist-chews-off-arms_n_1121366

*hideously beautiful with an ulcer on the anus.*⁸¹ One of the earliest and most interesting parody is a drawing by Van Gogh created between October 1886 and January 1887, which depicts a plaster copy of the fragment of an ancient statuette of Venus, which served as the holder for his top hat.⁸² Van Gogh made drawings after ancient casts in 1885-1888 during his stay at the academies in Antwerp and Paris, where he visited the studio of the historical painter Fernand Cormon. There he was most captivated by the plaster casts of Venus, and most often drew the cast to which he ultimately added the top hat.⁸³ The main idea lied in the contrast between the small ancient statuette and the large top hat, between a work of art of great prestige and a banal object characteristic of the modern age.



127. René Magritte, *Shackles of Copper*, coloured plaster sculpture, 1936.

Ancient statues of Venus were a favorite theme of surrealist artists, as these embodiments of beauty and perfection were preserved as fragments without heads, arms or legs, which elicited Freudian interpretations and provocative manipulations. A torso without any intervention by the artist was a surreal artifact; it was enough merely to point this out, and René Magritte did this in one of his first surrealist works – a lesser-than-life-size plaster statuette of the Venus de Milo modified in the 1930s (127).⁸⁴ Magritte colored the statue, but left the head white, emphasizing the connection with the famous marble original. He painted it from the head down with a

⁸¹ English translation W. Fowlie revised by S. Whidden.

⁸² Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation) d36V/1962r. Cf. Marije Vellekoop et al., *Vincent Van Gogh Drawings, 3. Antwerp and Paris, 1885-1888* (London, Lund Humphries, 2001), no. 267. This was likely to have been a humorous drawing; similarly to other painters, he also contemplated the idea of making extra money by selling his drawings to magazines, cf. Vellekoop, *Vincent Van Gogh Drawings*, 19-20. However, he created only several drawings, none of which he sold. His Venus with the top hat is likely to have been one of these attempts.

⁸³ Once in the Arenberg Gallery, Brussels, today known only from a photograph (Jean De Mot, "L'Aphrodite d'Arenberg," *Revue Archéologique* 2 (1903), pl. 10). Van Gogh also kept a small collection of plaster casts in his apartment, which included a cast that was very similar to the one that so strongly caught his attention in Cormon's collection.

⁸⁴ See Cuzin, *D'après l'antique*, no. 257; David Sylvester, *Magritte, mit einer Einführung von Michel Draguet* (Cologne: Parkland Verlag, 2009), 240, 256-261.

skin-like color and denoted the nipples in pink, painting the clothing dark blue. The surfaces where the arms have been broken off are painted black, contrasting with the hint of naturalism; the artist used the same color for the pedestal. He exhibited one of the many versions of this statuette that he created throughout the years in 1936 at an exhibition in the Charles Ratton Gallery in Paris. For the occasion, Magritte sent André Breton a letter asking for him to name the statuette. Breton called it “Les menottes de cuivre / Copper Handcuffs,” extending the colors to include the one linked to the planet Venus. The handcuffs in the statue’s name refer both to the refusal of constrictive classical traditions, but also to sado-masochistic fantasies, which was a cliché of the surrealism movement.

Ancient statues of Venus are referenced in the painting “La représentation” from 1937, the title of which suggests that surrealistic works do not depict what is most important. The image is a fragment of a naked female body, of which we see only the abdomen, loins and a part of the thighs.⁸⁵ The painting is placed in an atypical frame, which copies the curves of the hips and thighs, giving it the semblance of a key hole. It is as if the viewer’s eye is pressed up to this key hole, through which he sees a naked woman; however, his expectations are disappointed, because there is in fact nothing to see. The woman’s crotch is unnaturally smooth, and there is no naked woman beyond the key hole – only an ancient statue.

The first version of the painting “La représentation” is captured in a photograph from 1937, in which Irène Hamoir holds the painting in a rectangular frame in front of her so we see under the painted torso the legs of the living woman, as if they were a continuation of the painted legs.⁸⁶ This even more accentuates the fact that the painting does not depict what the viewer is expecting. The next semantic layer of the painting and its title lies in the fact that this segment of the female body is not a depiction of it, but a depiction of a depiction. What Magritte painted was not the body of a naked female model, but a plaster cast which he had on view on a wardrobe in his apartment in Brussels, rue Esseghem 135, and his friends knew the cast well. It was an important part of his abode, and therefore appears on a photograph of the artist by Roland d’Ursel from around 1950 (128).

This cast appears at the beginning of the 1930s in a whole score of Magritte’s works evoking classical tradition and timelessness. However, this is a sophisticated game of “hide-and-seek” that was typical for the artist. Although this artefact endorses the tradition of ancient statues of Venus with smooth loins, it is a cast of a live female body.⁸⁷ Such casts were used commonly at art schools as a tool of instruction on the anatomy of the female body, and therefore it is lacking a head or limbs. Its crotch was modified, and the cast thus combines the shapes of a real female body with the ancient artistic convention; Magritte took notice of this surrealistic detail. In 1927 Magritte painted three shrinking hollow casts of female torsos inserted into each other, he repeatedly returned to the theme and in 1949, he used this motif in a painting

⁸⁵ Rene Magritte, *La Représentation*, 1937, Edinburgh, The Scottish National Gallery Of Modern Art GMA 3546. Cf. Sylvester, *Magritte*, 238-240.

⁸⁶ See Lisa Lipinski, *René Magritte and the Art of Thinking* (London: Routledge, 2019), fig. 3,4.

⁸⁷ See Sylvester, *Magritte*, 263.

“Delusions of Grandeur.”⁸⁸ Magritte was a painter, but in 1967 came to the decision to create a statue during a conversation with his agent Alexander Iolas. He had a bronze version of his painting created; he did not, however, live to complete the statue in Verona. The illusion of the size of the statue stands out even more thanks to the fact that the viewer can look inside the hollow casts (129).⁸⁹



128 (left). Roland d’Ursel, René Magritte in his Brussels apartment, photograph circa 1950.
129 (right). René Magritte, *La Folie Des Grandeurs* (Delusions of Grandeur), bronze, 1967.

Surrealist photographer Man Ray worked intensively with casts of ancient statues of Venus during his stay in Paris, where he settled in 1921.⁹⁰ The most famous work from this large series of provocative manipulations is “Venus restaurée / Venus restored,” which Man Ray began to work on at the end of the 1920s. In 1936, he photographed a hollow plaster cast of the torso of the Venus de Medici, which he bound with rope; in 1971, he transformed the photograph into a three-dimensional object (130).⁹¹ By doing so, the artist challenged cultural tradition, which is seen in the title, which can be understood ironically as the opposite of what has taken place. The appearance of the statue did not come closer to the original state but, on the contrary, moved farther away from it. At the same time, the artist also challenged the concept of authorship. The artist self-ironically linked himself to a number of replicas of the original work, which began with an ancient Roman copy of a Greek statue and

⁸⁸ René Magritte, *Delusions of Grandeur II*, 1948, Washington D.C., Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden Collection 66.3199. See Sylvester, *Magritte*, 128-133.

⁸⁹ See Antonia Boström, ed., *The Fran and Ray Stark Collection of 20th-Century Sculpture at the J. Paul Getty Museum* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2008), no. 13.

⁹⁰ Cf. Adina Kamien-Kazhdan, *Remaking the Readymade: Duchamp, Man Ray, and the Conundrum of the Replica* (London: Routledge, 2018).

⁹¹ Cf. Arturo Schwarz, *Man Ray, 60 anni di libertà. Man Ray, 60 ans de libertés. Man Ray, 60 Years of Liberties* (Paris: E. Losfeld, 1971), no. 73.

continued on with the creation of a plaster cast of it, by figuratively binding the shapes of the statue with a rope and then multiplying his work *ad infinitum* through photography. In any case, the binding of Venus's torso in rope created a mysterious object. It is important that it was not merely a capricious improvisation – Man Ray had already created a ready-made called “The Enigma of Isidore Ducasse” in 1920. It was a sewing machine wrapped in a brown blanket, and a photograph of it was published in the first edition of “La révolution surréaliste” magazine on the first page of the surrealist manifesto, which emphasized the role of dreams in this artistic movement. Ray threw away the objects after they were photographed, but he later reconstructed this ready-made as well.⁹²



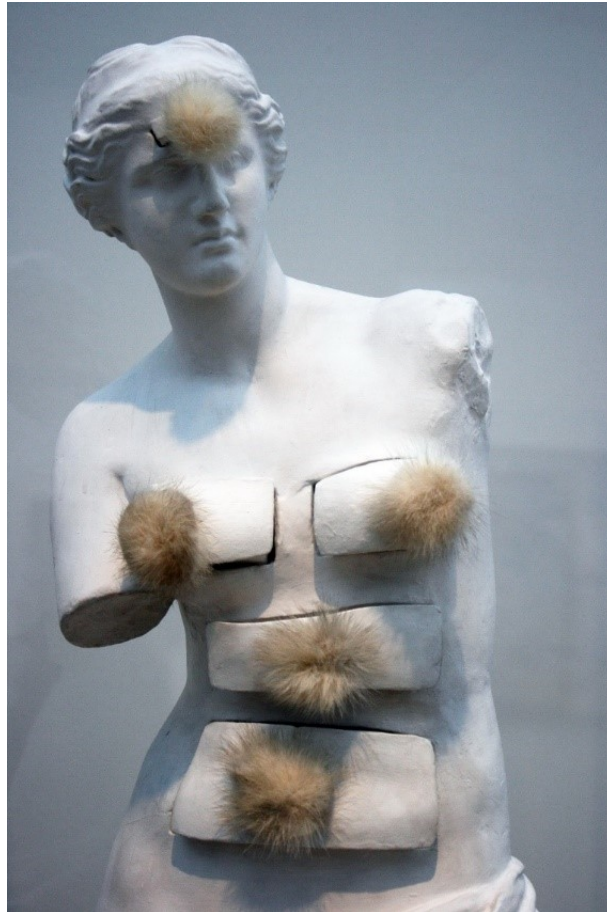
130. Man Ray, Venus restaurée / Venus restored, photography, 1936

Isidore Ducasse was the common name of the author known as Comte de Lautrémont, author of “Les Chants de Maldoror”, which was greatly admired by surrealists. The work writes the following of a young man named Mervyn: *He is as handsome ... especially as the fortuitous encounter upon a dissection-table of a sewing machine and an umbrella!*⁹³ The surrealists were fascinated with the randomness and absurdity of these phrases, which, however, could be related to human sexuality. This created a central point in the work of Sigmund Freud, which was the primary inspiration of surrealists. The umbrella can be understood as a metaphor for the penis and the visualization of the male principle; the sewing machine represents the woman and the

⁹² 1972, London, Tate T07957.

⁹³ Comte de Lautrémont (Isidor Ducasse), *Les Chants de Maldoror* (Bruxelles 1874), 290. English translation G. Wernham.

dissection table the marital bed. “Venus restaurée” is thus enriched to include another level – Venus is restored to her original form in the way she exists in the male subconscious. This Venus is a male fetish, an object of sexual desire, which men simultaneously fear and therefore need to subjugate and enslave. Ray’s “Venus Restored” in this regard is typical for the surrealists’ provocatively misogynistic attitude. The perfect ancient form and exalting theme with a remarkable tradition intertwines in Ray’s photograph with the sadistic earthly idea of a bound naked female body with severed limbs.



131. Salvador Dalí, Venus de Milo with Drawers, h. 98 cm, plaster, 1936.

In the 1930s, Salvador Dalí began to work intensively with ancient statues of Venus for the same reason and with the same intent. His “Venus de Milo with Drawers” overshadowed other works and became an icon of the surrealist movement (131).⁹⁴ In Dalí’s own words, he was inspired by Marcel Duchamp. It was perhaps thanks to Duchamp that a lesser-than-life-size plaster copy of the Venus de Milo made its way into Dalí’s new apartment in Paris at 101bis, rue de la Tombe-Issoire, which Duchamp often visited. Dalí drew drawers on the cast at the beginning of 1936, but it was Duchamp again who began work on implementing this typical “assisted ready-made” project. Dalí furnished the drawers in the plaster cast of the Venus de Milo,

⁹⁴ Cf. Francesco Miroglio, “Marcel Duchamp and Salvador Dalí: The Eroticism Between Sculptures and Ready-made,” *Avant-garde Studies* 3 (Spring – Summer 2018), 1-22.

which parodied the modern obsession with functionality, with tufts of fur in place of the knobs, which was meant to evoke erotic stimulation.

Dalí may have added the tufts of fur to the drawers after 1936; however, drawers in the human body had already appeared in Dalí's paintings and drawings at the beginning of the 1930s. Dalí perhaps understood them as a metaphor for the secrets hidden within the human body and mind. According to him, Sigmund Freud had discovered that there are "hidden drawers" within each of us.⁹⁵ The drawers are placed in the forehead of Venus de Milo and breasts so the tufts of fur cover her nipples – the next two drawers are located on her bare abdomen and one is on the lifted knee covered with cloth. Dalí intended to present the depiction of the naked woman from the ancient epoch in the way that it was interpreted by post-ancient Europe, which made depictions of nakedness into a taboo.⁹⁶ By doing so, the ancient goddess with smooth crotch evoking her inaccessibility had been suddenly and forcefully opened. However, we must not forget that works of surrealism always strive towards impossibility, and thus interpretations of them can never be final.

Surprisingly, "Venus de Milo with Drawers" was not exhibited in May 1936, at the exhibition in Paris's Ratton Gallery, where Magritte's aforementioned version of the Venus de Milo was exhibited. The first presentation of Dalí's modified cast of the Venus de Milo was held in the rue de la Tombe-Issoire on 19 June 1936, but only for the artist's friends; its next private exhibition was held in 1939. Hundreds of exemplars of this work have been created in various colors; the statue, however, was not publicly exhibited until 1979. In 1964, Dalí sold his exemplar and agreed to the creation of a bronze cast that was painted white. For the occasion, he created a new version of the Venus de Milo in life size and other variations on the statue's theme, including a bust of the Venus de Milo, which had an ear instead of a nose and a nose instead of a left ear.

We encounter manipulation with the Venus de Milo from the time before Salvador Dalí, and there are so many of them at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century that they can be seen to form their own independent artistic genre.⁹⁷ American artist of French origin Armand Pierre Fernandez (Arman) dealt with this theme systematically since 1963, vertically cutting through casts of ancient statues of the Venus de Milo and putting all kinds of objects (propellers, musical instruments, cogwheels) in the panels that this cutting produced.⁹⁸ Danish artist Bjørn Nørgaard also specialized in the Venus de Milo.⁹⁹ In 2005, he held an exhibition titled "Venus Spejler Spejler Venus / Venus mirrors mirrors Venus" in the Danish National Art Gallery (Statens Museum for Kunst). Seven casts of the Venus de Milo were exhibited in the gallery in various situations: bending over, wrapped up, deformed by the addition of various objects, burned, equipped with lightbulbs and locked in a cage, and locked blindfolded in a cage with barbed wire and holes allowing the viewer to look inside. In 2009, he carried out his first exhibition of "Recycling Art" with a cast of the Venus de Milo in a container for plastic recycling.

⁹⁵ See Gilles Néret, *Salvador Dalí, 1904-1989* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1996), 44.

⁹⁶ See Robert Descharnes, *Dalí de Gala* (Lausanne: Edita, 1962), 164.

⁹⁷ Cuzin, *D'après l'antique*, 432-499.

⁹⁸ Paris, Rue Jacques-Callot. Cf. <http://www.armanstudio.com/>

⁹⁹ Cf. <https://www.bjoernnoergaard.dk/>

Michelangelo Pistoletto has also systematically worked with the statue of Venus, and first exhibited his “Venere degli stracci / Venus of the Rags” in 1967 (132). The very title of the work is an allusion to the conventional naming of various ancient statues of Venus, and the author used it to express his ironic distancing from Italian cultural tradition. The sculptor used a concrete copy of the neoclassical Venus with an apple by Bertel Thorvaldsen, which was sold as a garden ornament. He placed it directly facing a pyramid of various-colored rags. The viewer thus sees the statue from behind, which is another ironic reference to the veneration of the ancient statue of Venus, which connoisseurs have enjoyed viewing from behind since antiquity. Nevertheless, the viewer has to ask, what is Venus doing by the pile of rags? It looks like she is entering it, only to turn into worthless refuse the next moment. However, what is most important about Pistoletto’s work is the contrast between the concentrated whiteness and perfect shapes of the sculpture and the distracting pile of colourful and shapeless rags, between the admired work of art and the rubbish that nobody cares about. This statue of Venus stands on the border of sense and nonsense. This precarious position is characteristic of ancient statues of Venus in today’s world and our existence in general.



132. Michelangelo Pistoletto, Venus of the Rags (Venere degli stracci), first installation 1967.

Return of the Goddess



133. William Turnbull, *Aphrodite*, h. 190.5 cm, bronze statue, 1958.

In the 20th century, some artists attempted to rethink ancient myths in order to be nearer to their protagonists.¹⁰⁰ British sculptor William Turnbull was the first post-ancient artist to attempt to make an approximation of Venus's divinity. His statue looks like a prehistoric statuette deforming the female anatomy beyond recognition (133).¹⁰¹ Such archeological finds had been ironically dubbed "Venuses" since the 19th century, as they were the opposite of ancient Greco-Roman Venuses. However, Turnbull named his statue *Aphrodite* to make it clear that this was a modern version of the ancient Greek goddess. This *Aphrodite* from 1958 is made up of a column and an ovoid formation balancing on its rounded top. The statue evokes the goddess in that it is as tall as a person and is remotely reminiscent of the human form with some sort of head and body. The viewer has the impression that the two sections are not related to one another and can be divided at any time, which is an important message that the statue conveys. The momentary balance that connects the ovoid formation with the column is accentuated as an important aspect of divinity. The instability of

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Judith E. Bernstock, "Classical Mythology in Twentieth-Century Art: An Overview of a Humanistic Approach," *Artibus et Historiae* 14, no. 27 (1993), 153-183.

¹⁰¹ See Amanda A. Davidson, *The Sculpture of William Turnbull* (London: Lund Humphries, 2005), no. 88.

the connection between both parts of the statue is not a trait of divinity, which must be static, eternal and perfect but is fully determined by our imperfection. People can neither see nor comprehend a deity; they can only come near it in mystical exaltation, which lasts for only a moment, during which both parts of Turnbull's statue form a whole. In the next moment, the ovoid structure will fall from the column and the person will lose contact with divinity. The deity will naturally continue to exist; only the person ceases to sense it.

In Turnbull's mind, an important aspect of divinity is its incomprehensibility thanks to the limited nature of human perception and understanding. Turnbull is not interested in the deity; he is fully devoted to himself and analyzes the way in which he perceives the world and how he thinks about it. The sculptor was also in no way religious, and deities themselves were of no interest to him. He did not try to convey through his sculptures what deities are and what their relationship to humans is. He limited himself to the analysis of an extreme situation in which a person is confronted with something he or she cannot understand, as it is something that transcends him or her. Turnbull was interested in Aphrodite because she represented something exceedingly important, something people have been intensely involved with for millennia without reaching any final conclusions. Turnbull was not interested in the world, but in man, who tries to tear away the binds to the material world and step out of the stream of time in order to think about him or herself and the world.

For Turnbull, Aphrodite was an idol, which he began to devote himself to in 1955. One year later, he created a statue that looks the same as the aforementioned Aphrodite, but named it "Sungazer."¹⁰² This confirms the theory that Turnbull was not primarily interested in deities, but man's relationship to god. On this statue, the ovoid object placed vertically on the column suggests a head tilted backwards. The statue refers to North American shamans, who purposely blinded themselves by staring into the sun, strengthening their inner vision and the spiritual aspect of their existence. The statue was shown at an exhibition in Whitechapel Art Gallery that was groundbreaking for English art titled "This Is Tomorrow," which is seen to be the beginning of pop art in England. However, Turnbull did not at all intend to capture the lifestyle of the time, but on the contrary the timelessness that was embodied by idols, which were the beginning of the development of the visual arts. For him and the members of the "Independent Group" to which he belonged, no progress in the visual arts existed. Prehistoric artifacts are not only as inspiring as works created in his own time - they could even be more "modern" thanks to the fact that they speak to the contemporary viewer much more intensely. Turnbull was inspired by cultic objects of the stone age, archaic Greece or Egyptian mummies. These works have been taken out of their original religious context, but their forms have maintained the ability to evoke sublime secrets. Turnbull's aim was to create statues that continued on in the tradition of the oldest works of art but were simultaneously a part of the modern world.

The combination of the vertical column and horizontal ovoid object on top of it, which is the primary feature of Turnbull's Aphrodite from 1958, is also characteristic for a number of his other statues, which he created from 1956 to 1962. Their names point to objects ("Ancestral Totem"), figures from ancient myths ("Janus," "Prometheus," "Pandora," "Agamemnon," "Oedipus"), but also explorers and

¹⁰² Davidson, *The Sculpture of William Turnbull*, no. 74.

adventurers (“Cortez,” “Columbus,” “Magellan”), who managed something that their contemporaries thought to be impossible. Turnbull always created a statue first and then gave it a name. In the 1980s, Turnbull returned to the totems that he had devoted himself to in the 1950s. He depicted Aphrodite in the same way as in 1958 on only one other occasion.¹⁰³ In his new series, Venuses have more compact forms, in which their anatomic details are denoted by various protuberances, depressions and grooves.¹⁰⁴ It is not clear whether these statues are intended to evoke the Greco-Roman goddess or prehistoric statues of women also conventionally called Venuses.

Variations of the Venus de Milo by one of the greatest contemporary American artists, Jim Dine, are a striking part of the present world. A group of three gigantic bronze statues of Venus have been located in New York on Sixth Avenue since 1990. Dine also simultaneously created marble versions of them in larger-than-life size.¹⁰⁵ At the beginning of his artistic career in the 1960s, the artist radically deviated from the tradition of the fine arts by depicting everyday objects such as parts of clothing, home furnishings and other attributes of the daily life of the modern person. Similarly to artists like Andy Warhol, inconspicuous inanimate objects formed the center of his attention, although he never considered himself to be a member of the pop art movement, which always approached these objects in an aloof manner just as creators of advertisements would.

For Dine, even the most ordinary things were always animate and in the mid-1970s he logically came to paint according to live models. At the end of the same decade, he had a fated encounter with the Venus de Milo, which he described many times over, making the story now generally known. He bought a miniature replica of the famous statue that was being sold at the Louvre as a souvenir for tourists, and in 1977-1978 incorporated it into his still-lives. The painting “My Studio # One: The Vagaries of Painting ‘These are sadder pictures’” from 1978 is dominated by empty bottles, among which are various objects such as rubber boots, a gourd, an onion, a plaster cast of a human hand, a skull and also a statuette of the Venus de Milo.¹⁰⁶ At the time, he also used the replica as a symbol of fleetingness.¹⁰⁷ The statuette still has a head in the painting, but soon lost it, as Dine noted. *I knocked the head off and eventually started making my own version, because it was too personal otherwise. But, it’s like the heart, or the Pinocchio, or the bathrobe. It’s mine. It’s one of my icons.*¹⁰⁸

The Venus de Milo was one of the artist’s fetishes, which linked the things that meant something to the author such as the aforementioned heart, bathrobe or Pinocchio, but also the skull, owl and raven. In his sculptural group in Ottawa, he placed Venus and a large heart in mutual reference to one another.¹⁰⁹ The author’s appropriation of the Venus de Milo manifested itself not only in the fact that he broke

¹⁰³ Davidson, *The Sculpture of William Turnbull*, no. 231.

¹⁰⁴ Davidson, *The Sculpture of William Turnbull*, no. 199.

¹⁰⁵ “The Grove, Uppsala,” Frankfurt, Dresdner Bank. Cf. Cuzin, *D’après l’antique*, no. 267.

¹⁰⁶ Oil on canvas, Minneapolis, MN, Walker Art Center 1982.167.

¹⁰⁷ See Collette Chattopadhyay, “A Conversation with Jim Dine,” *Sculpture* 30 (2011), 35: “I originally used the Venus de Milo because I was making still-life paintings and looking at memento mori. I thought that the cast of this classical sculpture would look great in a still-life.” Cf. Marco Livingstone, “Jim Dine et le mariage de Vénus,” in Cuzin, *D’après l’antique*, 468-70.

¹⁰⁸ Chattopadhyay, *A Conversation with Jim Dine*, 35.

¹⁰⁹ Bronze, h. 214 cm, Ottawa, The National Gallery of Canada 39706.

off her head, but also that he radically simplified her perfect shapes, making his variations look more like a spontaneous improvisation. The artist's fetishes are also linked by the fact that they are usually generally known motifs of artistic work that have been sanctified by tradition.

Dine was intensely interested in psychoanalysis and saw the Venus de Milo and other icons of international visual arts as a part of a global collective subconscious. In his mind, the Venus de Milo was one of the most significant constants of our world, and therefore he intentionally simplified its forms for it to be more similar to prehistoric statuettes of Venus. The historical dimension of his version of the Venus de Milo is also suggested in his bronze sculptural group called "The Stew." Dine's Venus de Milo stands in a pot next to a statue of a Christian female saint with a symbol of a heart on her chest, which suggests the intertwining of the ancient and medieval embodiment of love.¹¹⁰ He emphasized this ever-present and varying nature of this idol, which in no way affects its essence, by constantly modifying his versions of the Venus de Milo, refusing to depict her even once in an identical manner. He doubled or tripled his versions of the statue in the Louvre, or combined them with common objects. He sat his version of the Venus de Milo in a real chair or placed her on an old vertically standing shovel, which formed her protective shield.¹¹¹ He began to express the general validity of his private version of the Venus de Milo via monumental proportions and a rough surface and patina, making the statues look aged (134).



134. Jim Dine, *Looking Toward the Avenue*, bronze sculptures (427, 550, 700 cm), 1990.

¹¹⁰ Private collection, cf. Livingstone, *Jim Dine et le mariage de Vénus*, 469 fig. 4.

¹¹¹ Cuzin, *D'après l'antique*, no. 265.



135. Jim Dine, Cleveland Venus, bronze statue, h. 1127 cm, 2003.

The first of a long series of versions of the famous statue was created by Jim Dine in 1983 in life size.¹¹² This series culminated in 2003 in his gigantic Venus for the city of Cleveland (135). On the corner of a functionalist skyscraper by architect Michael McKinell, a feature reminiscent of an ancient column stands out from the building. On

¹¹² Venus in Black and Gray, private collection.

it stands Dine's torso of Venus without a head or arms, which is the largest statue of the goddess ever created. The statue was constructed using traditional lost-wax casting methods; the artist's ceramic 66cm-high model was enlarged to its gigantic dimensions with the help of computer technology. The effect of the statue is strengthened by its integration and architecture, which Dine emphasized with a caramel-colored patina matching the walls of the building. The purpose of the statue was determined by the function of the building, which serves as a courthouse, as it stands above its entrance – the statue is meant to evoke the ancient roots of modern law and civilization in general. In terms of size, the Cleveland torso of Venus will probably never be surpassed. It will also probably remain the culmination of the purported patriarchal vision of the world embodied by the torso of Venus, on which the critique of the feminist movement was focused. In the so-called "second wave" of feminism, the primary demand was a woman's right to her own body.¹¹³ The statue of the naked Venus came to be understood as a patriarchal demonstration of the attainability of women and the legitimization of sexual terror. Dine's statue was bitterly condemned as a memorial to women who had been not only stripped and raped, but also tortured and killed; as the celebration of the criminal acts that men commit on women.¹¹⁴

Ancient statues of Venus also appeared in a criminal context on the television screens in millions of households in the third season of the series "Twin Peaks" by David Lynch and Mark Frost aired in 2017.¹¹⁵ In the Black Lodge, a unique place outside human time and space, the main hero of the series, special agent Dale Cooper meets with the doppelganger of a girl, Laura Palmer, whose death he is investigating. A plaster cast of the Medici Venus is placed behind Laura's chair. The statue is turned as if the goddess wants to look at her. In a certain way, Laura is Venus's reincarnation. The visual type of the ancient goddess used in the series is characterized by erotic attraction suggested by her nakedness and her aloofness, which is suggested by one hand covering her breasts and the other covering her loins. Beauty, attraction and reserve were also traits of Laura Palmer. Cooper sits in a chair, and next to it is a copy of a lamp from the world expo in 1939 in the form of Saturn. This may indicate that Dale Cooper is the reincarnation of Saturn, the Greek Cronus, who created Aphrodite by cutting off his father Uranus's penis and throwing it into the sea. The goddess was born from his severed member and stepped out of the sea foam onto the shore, similarly to the way in which the body of the murdered Laura Palmer appeared on the bank of the river in the series. Is Dale Cooper thus Saturn, who created Laura Palmer as the second Venus by revealing the secret of her sexually motivated murder?

Objections can be made to this interpretation, as plaster casts of Venus appear in the Twin Peaks series in other contexts, and therefore clearly have a more general meaning. We find them in the hallway leading to the Black Lodge. In the second season

¹¹³ Cf. Margaret Walters, *Feminism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, 77-88).

¹¹⁴ Anonym, "Venus for the Rest of Us," *Cleveland Magazine* (March 1st, 2004): "a larger-than-life female double amputee, decapitated and half-clothed, just doesn't say beauty, femininity and justice. Instead, she makes me think about the mutilated corpses, usually female, that dominate TV crime dramas ... Viewed from all angles, it becomes obvious that a more appropriate name for our sculpture would be 'Venus de Victim.'" See <https://clevelandmagazine.com/in-the-cle/commentary/articles/venus-for-the-rest-of-us>

¹¹⁵ Cf. Franck Boulègue, *Twin Peaks: Unwrapping the Plastic* (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2017), 78-80.

in 1990, viewers could see the Venus de Milo here, and in the third season in 2017 it was the Venus of Arles; in both cases, however, they were statues of naked women with the top half of their bodies unveiled and lacking arms, and they were always placed at the end of the hallway. Whatever their significance, it is clear that they were linked to the primary theme of the series, i.e. doppelgangers who exist at the same time in various dimensions. The cast of the ancient statue is in essence a doppelganger in and of itself. Each plaster cast is a double of both the original statue and the figure that the statue refers to. Each copy, modification or recycling of an ancient statue potentially draws into the present not only the original and everything it referred to in its time, but also the creator and era in which the copy was made, fundamentally determining its significance.



136. Michal Gabriel, *The birth of Venus*, h. 96 cm, plaster composite, 2011-2012.

Multiplication is also the central theme of the sculpture “Birth of Venus,” created by Czech sculptor Michal Gabriel in 2011-2012 (136). Gabriel’s Venus is a real woman, the portrait of a well-known personality from the sculptor’s city. So, how did Gabriel get the audience to think that his statue depicts Venus? There are no classical allusions in her beautiful facial features, proportions or posture. The only ancient feature is the absence of genitals, a standard part of academic female nude without any deeper meaning. Gabriel is well aware that a quote from an ancient statue of Venus will not impress anyone. Today’s viewers usually cannot see an ancient statue even if it is right in front of them. In Western culture, ancient works of art and mythical stories have been rendered meaningless by endless reproduction to the point that we have almost lost the ability to perceive them. On the contrary, we view repetitions and transformations themselves intensely. They are attributes of virtuality on which our existence is based. Virtuality surrounds us from all sides; it helps us and threatens us.

In Gabriel's group statue, the virtuality surrounding us has become a metaphor for the birth of Venus. In the virtual world, we turn into omnipotent gods, but at the same time, we lose ourselves. Gabriel's Venus walks forward self-confidently and from under her hands grows an endless line of other goddesses. However, she never breaks away from the floor from which she was born. The infinite number of identical Venuses which grow around deny the uniqueness and existence of the central figure. Gabriel has opened a gateway with his group statue, allowing the transition from one dimension to another, but every gateway is an entrance and an exit. It can lead to divinity, which exists here and now, but it works just as well in the other direction. From corporeality and being, it can get to incorporeality and emptiness. Michal Gabriel based his depiction of the birth of the ancient goddess on our contemporary lifestyle. On our daily routine and our fears. This Venus is born from a floor that we walk upon. It is an analogy of the flat sea surface from which the goddess was once born. She exists only as a program, but thanks to it, she is a goddess whom we may encounter at any time.