

Hypothetical reconstruction of antique sculptures in colour

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Our aesthetic perception concerning antique sculptures is enormously influenced by fading and dropping of pigments. The fragility of pigments makes it almost impossible to transmit the antique idea of coloured sculptures to those recipients who see themselves confirmed in their preconceptions about a monochrome-white antiquity.

Due to the strong presence of this monochrome manifestation of antiquity in mass media such as cinema films, series, video games and advertising, the acceptance of reconstructions of antique sculptures in colour is accordingly very low. Mario Bloier (2017) draws attention to the fact that even scientists are not immune to the power of “romantic images of the past” and of “beloved iconic images”.

The problem is profound. Not only that the risks will highly create an untrue image of the ancient world, it provokes fundamental changes in the aesthetic perception.

A hypothetical reconstruction of antique sculptures in colour can help to clarify this complex problem, since the taste of both, of the aesthetic effect and the antique colour are discussed. By means of colour reconstructions the essentials of *mimesis* are reflected not only on behalf of its well-known form but especially by the painting.

As a result colours have an enormous relevance for the interpretation of sculptures, or how Vinzenz Brinkmann (2017, p. 27) describes: “Color greatly increases the ‘legibility’ of a figure.” For example, Clarissa Blume (2015) explains that colours in Hellenism could be *local phenomena*: black was used only in Egypt for larger surfaces, in Italy earth tones were preferred and in Canosa even violet has a special status, while generally different pink and blue tones dominate the fashion, as for example in Fig. 1. This means that colours are not only a reflection of the epoch but also of site-specific traditions. Therefore, an art historical classification of contemporary aesthetic can help to create hypothetical reconstructions of antique sculptures in colours and accordingly illustrate the symbolic or mimetic function. Blume (2010, p. 255) writes in her conclusion, that “We should therefore not make it our sole aim to reconstruct the original polychrome appearance of the objects. The insights gained through the examination of polychrome decoration can also advance stylistic research, as well as

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allowing these sculptures to be interpreted more precisely with reference to cultural and social history. Colour does have a story to tell.”

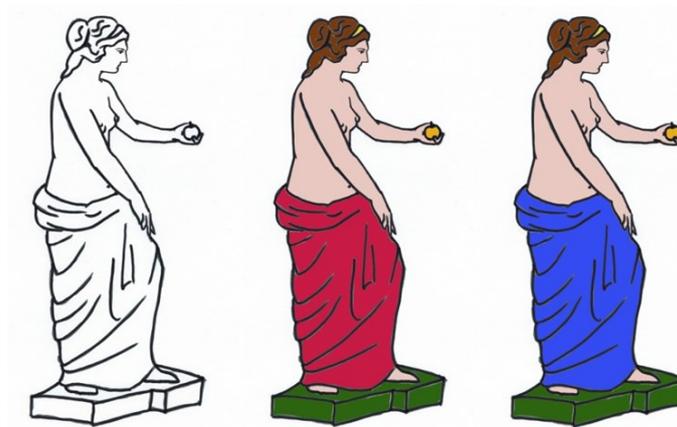


Fig. 1. Reconstruction of Venus de Milo by Adolf Furtwängler in colour (© K. Mann)

Due to the fact that hypothetical reconstruction in colour does not intent to illustrate an “authentic” image of an historical object, it would in fact generate an idea of *Zeitgeist*. This method could also be used to create coloured models of antique sculptures whose original colour version do not longer exist.



Fig. 2. Reconstruction of Venus de Milo in colour (© K. Mann)

Therefore, hypothetical reconstructions are of interest for those ancient sculptures, which are very important for our cultural memory, such as the Laocoon group, the Apollo Belvedere or the Venus de Milo.

History of Greek paintings, whose artistic innovations accompanied by political or social change, help us to obtain important conclusions concerning today’s reconstruction of antique sculptures in

colour. In this case it seems important to focus on new colours, theory of colours, modern painting techniques and painting styles, in order to get an idea of polychromy in the ancient world. Particularly remarkable are the differences between layer-painting and mixed-colour technique; these must be clearly marked reconstructing antique sculptures in colour. For example, it is essential to characterize the six-colour technique (layer-painting) on reconstructions of archaic sculptures where only the lower layer of colour can be identified. In this sense hypothetical reconstructions are enormously important, to avoid irritating impressions. It should be noted that each decision for a particular colour has an immense influence on the aesthetic effect and statement of the sculpture.

Digital Reconstruction Models should be preferred to casts (Fig. 2) in order to create variants of antique sculptures in different colours, thus to illustrate clearly the hypothetical character of the suggestion.

With this method, it is also possible to show modifications, for example by choosing a particular hair colour. The decision-making becomes even more complex through diverse possibilities of cloth colours, which communicate with the selected hair colour, like Fig. 3. Therefore, it is indispensable by hypothetical reconstruction of antique sculptures to involve the contemporary colour theory in order to make a selection.

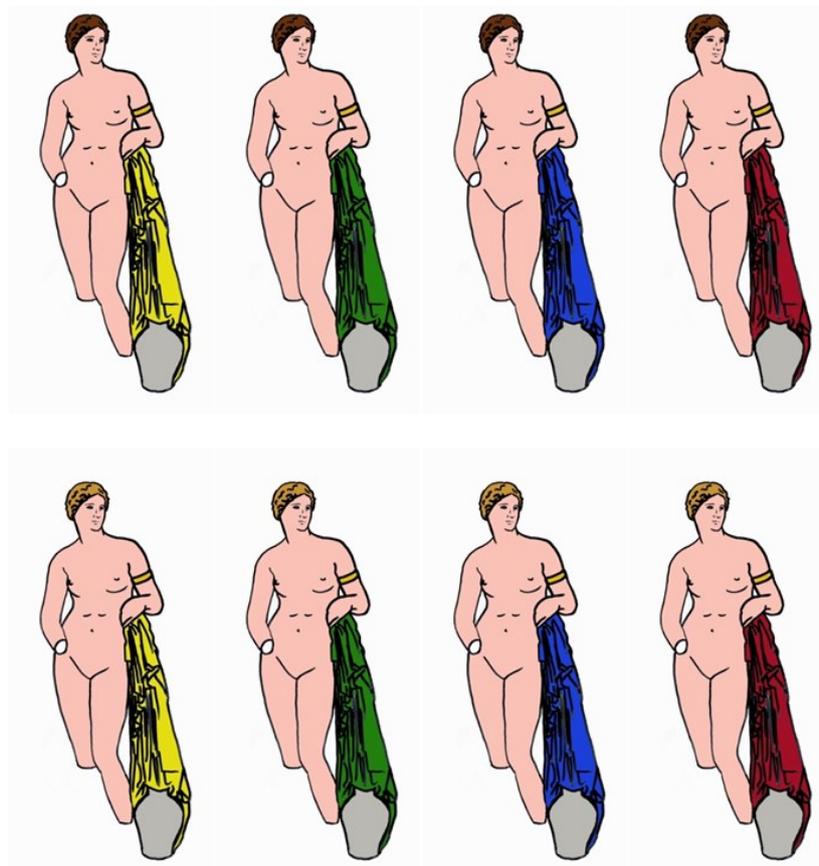


Fig. 3. Reconstruction of Aphrodite of Knidos in colour (© K. Mann)

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