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Erotic Works of Genius

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Erotic Works Of Genius

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INTRODUCTION

Erotic art or pornography?

"That which is pornography to one person is the laughter of genius for the other."

— D. H. Lawrence

The term 'Erotic Art' is muddied by a miasma of ambiguous terms. Art and pornography, sexuality and sensuality, obscenity and morality are all involved to such an extent that it seems almost impossible to reach an objective definition, which is not unusual in the history of art. How is it possible to speak of erotic art?

This much is certain: the depiction of a sexual activity alone does not raise a work to the nobility that is erotic art. To identify erotic art only with its content would reduce it to one dimension, just as it is not possible to distinguish artistic and pornographic depictions only by describing their immoral contents. The view that erotic works are created solely for sexual arousal and so cannot be art is erroneous as well. Does the creative imagination brought to erotic art distinguish it from pornography? Yet pornography is also a product of imagination. It has to be more than just a depiction of sexual reality, however, or who would buy it? Günter Schmidt states that pornography is "constructed like sexual fantasy and daydreams, just as unreal, megalomaniacal, magical, illogical, and just as stereotypical." Erotic daydreams – they are the subject of erotic art as well. Those making a choice between art and pornography may have already decided against the first one. Pornography is a moralising defamatory term. What is art to one person is the Devil's handiwork to another. The mixing of aesthetic with ethical-moralistic questions dooms every clarification process right from the start.

In the original Greek, *pornography* means 'prostitute writings' – that is, text with sexual content – in which case it would be possible to approach pornography in a free-thinking manner and equate the content of erotic art with that of pornography. This re-evaluation would amount to a rehabilitation of the term.

The extent to which the distinction between art and pornography depends on contemporary attitudes is illustrated, for example, by the painting over of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel. Nudity was not considered obscene during the Renaissance. The patron of this work of art, Pope Clement VII, saw nothing immoral in its execution. His successor, Paul IV, however, ordered an artist to provide the *Last Judgment* with pants!

Another example of the difficult relationship between society and erotic art is the handling of the excavated frescos of Pompeii which were inaccessible to the public until recently. In 1819, the Gallery of Obscenities was established in the Palazzo degli Studi, the future National Museum where only people of mature age and known high moral standards had access to the locked room. The collection changed its name to Gallery of Locked Objects in 1823. Again, only those with a royal permit were able to view the exhibited works. The reactionary wave after the unrest in 1848 also affected the erotic collection of the museum. In 1849, the doors of the Gallery of Locked Objects were closed forever. The collection was transferred to a still further removed section of the museum three years later, with even the doors leading to that area being bricked up.

Not until 1860, when Guiseppe Garibaldi marched into Naples, was reopening of the erotic collection even considered. The name of the collection was then changed to the Pornographic Collection. Over time, many objects were removed from this collection and returned to the normal exhibits. The history of the Gallery thus provides an overview of the mores of the last three centuries. Not every age is equally propitious for the creation of eroticism and its associated matters. It can even become its confessed enemy. For example, the libertine environment of the Rococo period created a very favourable atmosphere for eroticism and erotic art. Erotic art, however, is not only a reflection of achieved sexual freedom; it can also be a by-product of the suppression and repression with which eroticism is burdened. It is even conceivable that the most passionate erotic works were created not in spite of, but rather because of, the cultural pressures on sexuality. In nature, the instinct-controlled sexuality of animals is not erotic. In eroticism, however, culture uses nature. Whereas sexuality

as an imperative of nature – even in humans – is timeless, eroticism is changeable: as culturally conditioned sexuality, it has a history.

Eroticism thus would have to be understood as a socially and culturally formed phenomenon. In which case, it is the creature of moral, legal, and magical prohibitions, prohibitions which arise to prevent sexuality harming the social structure. The bridled urge expresses itself; but it also encourages fantasy without exposing society to the destructive dangers of excess. This distance distinguishes eroticism from sexuality. Eroticism is a successful balancing act that finds a precarious equilibrium between the cold flow of a rationally organised society – which in its extremes can also cause the collapse of the community – and the warm flow of a licentious, destructive sexuality.

Yet, even in its tamed versions, eroticism remains a demonic power in human consciousness because it echoes the dangerous song of the sirens – trying to approach them is fatal. Devotion and surrender, regression and aggression: these are the powers that still tempt us. The convergence of desire and longing for death has always played a big part in literature.

Insofar as eroticism consists of distance and detours, the fetishist constitutes the picture-perfect eroticist. The fetishised object, in its fixed, tense relationship with what is immediate, is more significant to the fetishist than the promise of fulfilled desires represented by the object. The imagined body is more meaningful than any real body.

Collectors are eroticists as well. While the lecher or debaucher is active in real life, the collector lives with a chaste heart in a realm of fantasy. And is it not true that the chaste heart can relish the delights of vice even more deeply and thoroughly than the unbridled debaucher?

Distance permits freedom. Art, too – which can also represent a fetishistic production for the artist – affords freedom. It affords the freedom to play with fire without being burned. It appeals to the eye; it allows toying with sin without having actually sinned. This freedom through distance can be noted when observing the different reactions of viewers when looking at sex magazines and works of art: have you ever seen the viewer of a porn magazine smile? A quiet cheerfulness, however, can be observed frequently in viewers of works of art, as if art brings forth an easing of the compellingly sensual. Those, however, who in a derogatory manner pronounce a work of art pornographic prove nothing more than that they do not have any appreciation of what is artistic in the object depicted. Turning away in disgust does not necessarily have to be a characteristic of a special morality. Such people have a non-erotic culture. Eduard Fuchs, the past master of erotic art, whose books were accused of being pornographic during his lifetime, considered eroticism the fundamental subject of all art: sensuality is said to be present in any art, even if its objective is not always of a sexual nature. Accordingly, it would almost be a tautology to speak of 'erotic art'.

Long before Fuchs, Lou Andreas-Salomé had already pointed out the true relationship between eroticism and aesthetics: "It seems to be a sibling growth from the same root that artistic drive and sexual drive yield such extensive analogies that aesthetic delight changes into erotic delight so imperceptibly, erotic desire so instinctively reaches for the aesthetic, the ornamental (possibly giving the animal kingdom its ornament directly as a bodily creation)." Once, when Picasso, in the evening of his life, was asked about the difference between art and eroticism, his pensive answer was: "But – there is no difference." Instead, as others warned about eroticism, Picasso warned about the experience of art: "Art is never chaste; one should keep it away from all innocent ignoramuses. People insufficiently prepared for art should never be allowed close to art. Yes, art is dangerous. If it is chaste, it is not art."

Viewed with the eyes of a moral watchdog, every type of art and literature would have to be abolished. If spirit and mind are the essence of humanity, then all those placing the mind and spirit in a position opposed to sensuality are hypocrites. On the contrary, sexuality experiences its true human form only after developing into eroticism and art – some translate eroticism as the art of love. Matters excluded from the civilising process assert themselves by demanding a medium that is spiritually determined, and that is art. It is in art that sexuality reaches its fullest bloom, which seems to negate all that is sensual in the shape of erotic art.

Pornography is a judgmental term used by those who remain closed to eroticism. It is assumed that their sensuality never had the opportunity to be cultivated. These culturally underprivileged people – among them possibly so-called art experts and prosecuting attorneys – perceive sexuality as a threat even when it occurs in an aesthetically-tempered format. Even the observation that a work has offended or violated the viewpoints of many still does not make it pornographic. Art is dangerous! Works of art can offend and injure the feelings of others; they do not always make viewers happy. After all, is it not the duty of art to annoy and to stir things up? The bottom line: the term pornography is no

longer in keeping with the times. Artistic depictions of sexual activities, whether they annoy or please, are part of erotic art. If not, they are insipid, dumb works, even if harmless.

Eastern societies in particular have known how to integrate the sexual and erotic into their art and culture. Chinese religion, for example, entirely free of western notions of sin, considers lust and love as pure things. The union of man and woman under the sign of Tao expresses the same harmony as the alternation of day and night, winter and summer. One can say – and rightly so – that the ancient forms of Chinese thought have their origins in sexual conceptions. *Yin* and *yang*, two complementary ideas, determine the universe. In this way, the erotic philosophy of the ancient Chinese also encompasses a cosmology. Sexuality is an integrated component of a philosophy of life and cannot be separated from it. One of the oldest and most stimulating civilisations on earth thus assures us through its religion that sex is good and instructs us, for religious reasons, to carry out the act of love creatively and passionately. This lack of inhibition in sexual matters is mirrored in art from China.

The great masters of Japan also created a wealth of erotic pictures, which rank equal with Japan's other works of art. No measure of state censorship was ever able to completely suppress the production of these images. Shungas (Images of Spring) depict the pleasures and entertainment of a rather earthly world. It was considered natural to seek out the pleasures of the flesh, whichever form they took. The word 'vice' was unspoken in ancient Japan, and sodomy was a sexual pleasure like any other.

In India, eroticism is sanctified in Hindu temples. In Greece, it culminates in the cult of beauty, joining the pleasures of the body with those of the mind. Greek philosophy understood the world as interplay between Apollo and Dionysus, between reason and ecstasy.

Only Christianity began to view eroticism in a context of sin and the world of darkness, so creating irreconcilable differences. "The Devil Eros has become more interesting to man than all the angels and all the saints," a tenet held by Nietzsche, which would probably find no sympathy in Far Eastern Japan: Eros was never demonised there. In fact, that which Nietzsche lamented in the West never did occur in Japan, nor in many other Eastern cultures. "Christianity," in Nietzschean words, "forced Eros to drink poison."

In Western Europe, erotic depictions were banished to secret galleries. The floating, transitory world was held in chains, and only with great difficulty was science able to free sexuality from prejudices and association with sin. It is therefore no wonder that sexology developed wherever the relationship between sexuality and eroticism was especially ambivalent or troubled. Our cornucopia of a colourful, erotic world of images and objects shows that Eros can be an all-encompassing and unifying energy. These items provide an opportunity to steal a glimpse of an essential, human sphere – usually taboo – through the eyes of many artists with a continuously changing point of view.

Unlike pornography, which often lacks imagination, erotic art allows us to partake in creative joy. Even if some of the pictures seem strange to us, or even annoy and force us to confront taboos, we still should open ourselves to that experience. Real art has always caused offence. Only through a willingness to be affronted can this journey through the geography of pleasure also be profitable, namely in the sense that this fantasy journey enriches our innermost selves. The humour evident in many works of erotic art is only accessible to those who can feel positive about claiming the erotic experience.

This book invites you to take a special journey, one that will open up a vista of pleasures and desires. An abundance of images and objects from art as well as cult present eroticism and sexuality as the universal, fundamental subject. By opening ourselves to the origins in a variety of cultures, some of them strange, we may enrich our own culture as well... The many and varied points of view encountered in this work demonstrate the multifarious aspects of sexuality. It reveals that nothing is more natural than sexual desire; and, paradoxically, nothing is less natural than the forms in which this desire expresses itself or finds satisfaction.

Items long hidden in the vaults of public museums and galleries of private collectors can be seen in this book. Many of these pictures and objects were forbidden in a western society which was less open to sexuality and anything associated with it. So they grant us a rare and therefore more fascinating glimpse of what is part and parcel of human nature.

Pictures of the pleasures of the flesh, in this book, promise a feast for the eyes, albeit a distanced pleasure. Yet, is not the essence of eroticism that it should be just beyond reach?

Aspects of the cultural history of humankind can help to extend the limits of tolerance by helping to expand the viewer's opinion. They can liberate minds from clichés, which may occupy our fantasies and imagination today, but hopefully not after this book has been read.

– Hans-Jürgen Döpp

1

From Prehistory and Primitive Forms to Antiquity and the Perfection of the Body

Art has dealt with sexuality since its prehistoric beginnings. Though their purpose remains obscure, small Palaeolithic sculptures of women make up some of the earliest evidence of human existence, such as the so-called *Venus of Laussel* (see no. 2), whose stylised body with exaggerated hips and breasts have led to interpretations as a fertility figure and to her being named after the goddess of love. Much later on, the Minoan civilisation of ancient Crete created similar figures including tantalising statuettes such as the *Snake Goddess* (see no. 4). While more naturalistic than her prehistoric counterpart, the figure's feminine attributes were still emphasised. Like her predecessors, the Snake Goddess's function is unknown — even her identity as a goddess is uncertain.

Succeeding the Minoans in the Mediterranean, the Ancient Greeks developed a virtual cult of the body, particularly the male body. Their admiration of athletic prowess was reflected in their many idealised representations of nude young men. In the Archaic period life-size nude marble statues called *kouroi* marked the graves of youthful warriors. Polykleitos' later sculpture, *Doryphoros* (see no. 27), based on his mathematical set of ideal proportions rather than actual bodies, showed the evolution of such figures into purely aesthetic expressions.

Although Ancient writers discussed many famous Greek paintings, no actual works have survived. Decorated ceramics, offering a wealth of erotic subjects and information on the culture that created them, are the primary surviving form of two-dimensional art from the time. The Greek practice of pederasty, in which an older man attached himself to a beautiful youth as a form of mentorship, was often depicted on vases, such as those by the Triptolemus Painter and the Brygos Painter (see no. 19). Patriarchal Greek society had little room for female sexual agency; females in Greek erotic scenes were usually prostitutes or deities. The beauty of Praxiteles' fourth century B.C. *Aphrodite of Knidos* (see no. 38), the most famous sculpture of classical Antiquity, became a tourist attraction for the island and, according to Pliny, won the love of a man who attempted intercourse with it.

Drama and emotion characterised the Hellenistic phase of Greek art, as in the highly sensuous *Barberini Faun* (see no. 56). Part goat, his unfiltered sexuality and drunken allegiance to Dionysos highlight his animal nature. The famous *Vénus de Milo* (see no. 60) was a graceful representation of Aphrodite showing the Hellenistic ideal of female beauty. As with nearly all free-standing Greek sculpture after the Archaic period, what survives today are largely Roman copies of the Greek originals.

In Italy, the Etruscans adapted many Greek ideas into their own culture, which offered considerably more status to women. Etruscan sarcophagi often depicted a man and woman together as a couple, and decorations in Etruscan tombs sometimes featured paintings of explicit or suggested sexual activity.

Their successors, the Romans, also respected and imitated many aspects of Greek culture. As more Roman art survived than Greek, we thus have more erotic scenes, particularly in painting. Excavations in Pompeii and Herculaneum have revealed the rich sexual culture of the Romans, often humorous in nature as in the depictions of Priapus, cursed with an eternal erection. Brothels often had erotic advertisements and interior decorations. Homosexual themes were not uncommon; the Warren cup depicted two male couples in coitus, and sculptures of Antinous, Emperor Hadrian's young lover, abounded. Despite a tradition of realism, Roman depictions of bodies followed the Greek methods of idealisation. The classical model of Greece and Rome became the ideal of art and culture for centuries to come.

1. Anonymous, *The Venus of Willendorf*, 30,000-25,000 B.C.E.
Limestone with red polychromy, h: 11.1 cm.
Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna (Austria).

2

2. Anonymous, *Venus of Laussel*, c. 20,000-18,000 B.C.E.
Limestone, 54 x 36 x 15.5 cm.
Musée d'Aquitaine, Bordeaux (France).

3

4

3. Anonymous, *Reclining Female Figure*, Naxos (?) (Greece), 2,400-2,300 B.C.E.
White marble, 36.8 x 11.3 x 3.2 cm.
The Menil Collection, Houston (United States).

4. Anonymous, *Statuette of a Snake Goddess*, c. 1,600-1,500 B.C.E.
Gold and ivory, h: 16.1 cm.
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (United States).

5

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7

5. Anonymous, *The Cosmic Union of Geb and Nut* (detail from an Egyptian papyrus), c. 1,025 B.C.E.
Vignette, 53 x 93 cm.
The British Museum, London (United Kingdom).

6. Anonymous, *Skyphos with an Erotic Group* (detail), c. 1 C.E.

7. Anonymous, *Sarcophagus of a Couple from Cerveteri*, c. 520-510 B.C.E.
Painted terra-cotta, 111 x 194 x 69 cm.
Musée du Louvre, Paris (France).

Though their civilisation flourished alongside that of the Greeks, our limited understanding of Etruscan language and culture has left a veil of mystery over the people who lived in Italy before the Roman Republic. Their art was strongly influenced by that of the Greeks, as evidenced by this terracotta sarcophagus with its echoes of the style of the Greek Archaic period. In Etruscan sculpture, however, we find more lively subjects, like this couple, animated in their easy affection for each other. Like so much of Etruscan art, this is a funerary piece, designed for placement in one of the elaborate tombs the Etruscans carved out of the soft volcanic bedrock of central Italy. It reveals the Etruscan view of the afterlife: an eternal party, where men and women would lounge at a banquet, enjoying good food, drink, and the company of their loved ones.

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8. Anonymous, *The Sounion Kouros*, c. 600 B.C.E.
Marble, h: 305 cm.
National Archaeological Museum of Athens, Athens (Greece).

9. Anonymous, *Kleobis and Biton*, Apollo Sanctuary, Delphi, c. 610-580 B.C.E.
Marble, h: 218 cm.
Archaeological Museum of Delphi, Delphi (Greece).

Kleobis and Biton are life-size statues that were found in the sanctuary at Delphi. An inscription identifies the artist as coming from Argos, on the Peloponnesus. The sculptures' origin in Argos links them to the mythical twins Kleobis and Biton. These young men from Argos were said to pull a cart a full five miles in order to bring their mother to a festival dedicated to the goddess Hera. In return, Hera granted the men what was seen as a great gift: a gentle death while sleeping. The brothers fell asleep after the festival and never woke up. Their great strength, devotion to their mother, and their early deaths were memorialised in dedicatory statues offered at the great sanctuary at Delphi, according to the historian Herodotus. These statues, which may be those described by Herodotus, are close in date to the Dipylon Head and share the same Egyptian style and decorative, incised details.

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10. Anonymous, *The Kritios Boy*, Acropolis, Athens, c. 480-470 B.C.E.
Marble, h: 116 cm.
Acropolis Museum, Athens (Greece).

11. Anonymous, *Kouros*, known as *Apollo from Tenea*, c. 560-550 B.C.E.
Marble, h: 153 cm.
Glyptothek, Munich (Germany).

12. Anonymous, *Kroisos*, Anavyssos, c. 525 B.C.E.
Marble, h: 193 cm.
National Archaeological Museum of Athens, Athens (Greece).

13

13. Euaichme Painter, *Man Offering a Gift to a Youth*, c. 530-430 B.C.E.
Athenian red-figure vase.
Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (United Kingdom).

14

14. Anonymous, *Man and Ephebe Having a Conversation*, c. 420 B.C.E. Red-figure dish (detail).
Musée Municipal, Laon (France).

15

15. Euphronios, *Ephebes at the Bath*, c. 1500-505 B.C.E.
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin (Germany).

16

16. Anonymous, *Satyr Playing the Flute*, beginning of the Common Era.
Attican Plate.

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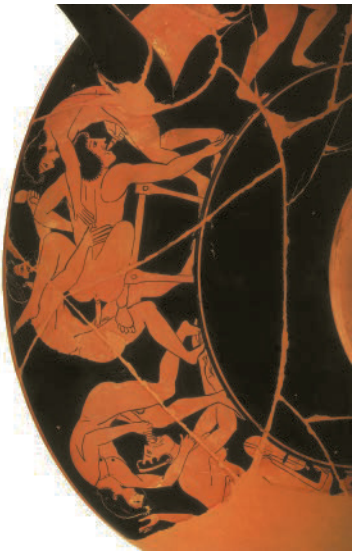

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17. Triptolemus Painter, *Attican cup.*
Museo Nazionale Tarquiniese, Tarquinia (Italy).

18. Anonymous, *Scene of Debauchery*, 510-500 B.C.E.
Red-figure cup.

19

19. Brygos Painter, *Erastes Soliciting an Eromenos.*
Attican cup.
The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (United Kingdom).

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20. Anonymous, *The Battle Between the Lapiths and the Centaurs*,
West Pediment, Temple of Zeus, Olympia, c. 470-456 B.C.E.
Marble, h: 330 cm.
Archaeological Museum, Olympia (Greece).

21. Anonymous, 470 B.C.E.
Bronze. Athen.

22. After **Myron**, *Discobolus*, c. 450 B.C.E.
Marble, h: 148 cm.
Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome (Italy).

In Myron's Discobolus, *we see the human form freed from the standing, frontal pose of earlier statues. Here, the artist is clearly interested not only in the body of the athlete, but in the movement of the discus thrower. His muscles tense and strain in preparation for his throw, his face focused on his activity. While the pose, with the arms forming a wide arc, is revolutionary, the piece is still meant to be viewed from the front. It would not be until the following century that artists began to conceive of sculpture that could be viewed from all sides.*

23. Anonymous, *Dying Warrior*, Corner Figure, East Pediment,
Temple of Aphaia, Aegina, c. 500-480 B.C.E.
Marble, h: 185 cm. Glyptothek, Munich (Germany).

Greek temples often featured large sculpture decorating the pediment, the triangular space under the eave of the roof. The first examples of pedimental sculpture show that the early artists were not adept at filling the awkward triangular space with a cohesive composition; the figures in the corners were shrunk to a diminutive scale in comparison to the central figures. However, in this pediment group from the end of the Archaic period, the sculptors showed new skill in conceiving the composition. The central figures, not shown, engage in lively battle, lunging and parrying with swords and shields. One archer crouches to take aim, his low position allowing him to fit into the smaller space toward the corner of the pediment. The Dying Warrior next to him fills that corner, the angle of his falling body perfectly fitting into the smallest part of the pediment. A single, cohesive narrative is thereby created across the triangular space, telling the story of a battle fought by local heroes.

22

MYRON

(Active during the first half of the 5th century B.C.E.)

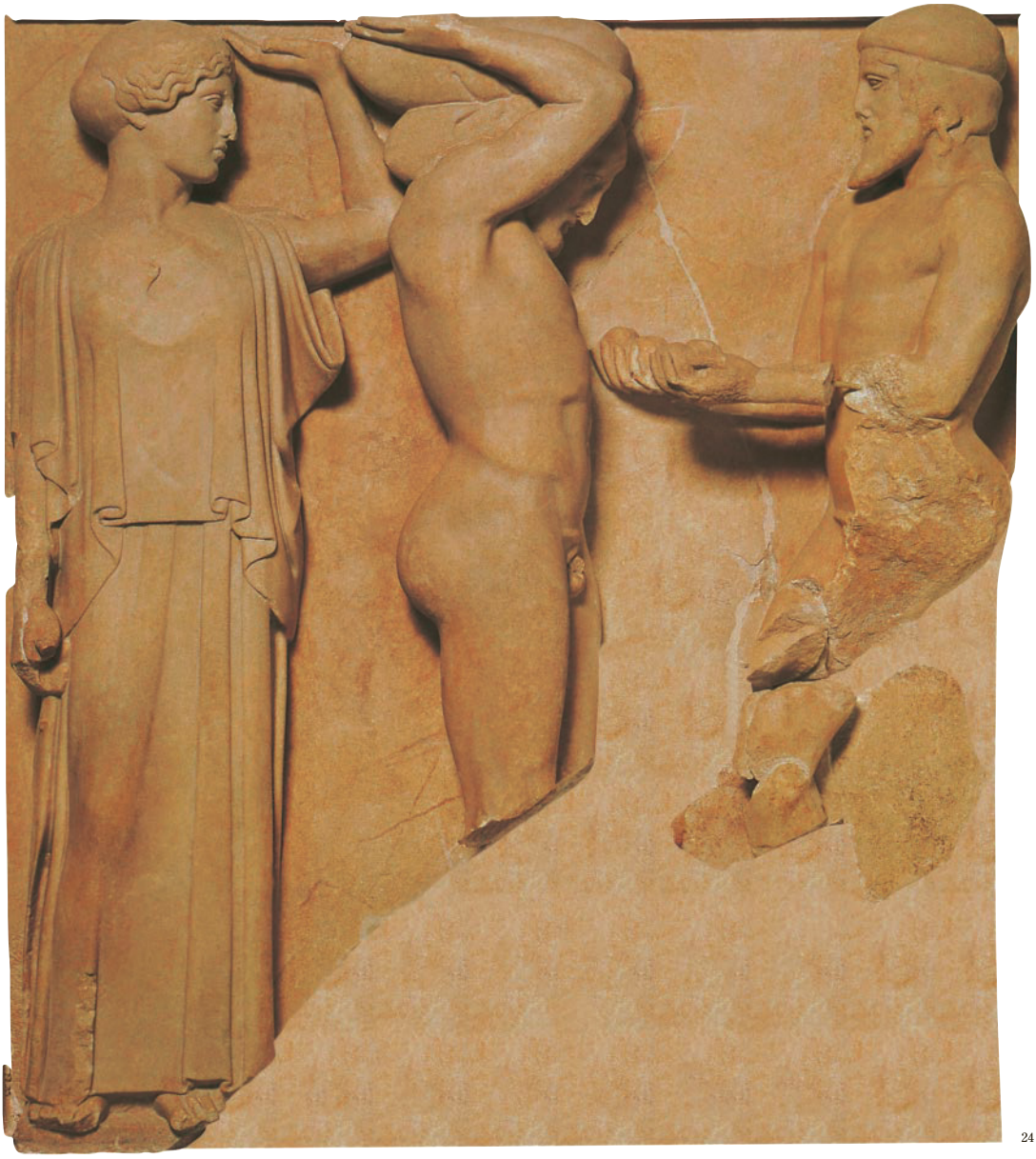
Mid-fifth century B.C.E. Greek sculptor, Myron worked almost exclusively in bronze. Though he made some statues of gods and heroes, his fame rested primarily upon his representations of athletes, for which he proved revolutionary by introducing greater boldness of pose and a more ideal rhythm. His most famous works, according to Pliny, were a cow, Ladas the runner, who fell dead at the moment of victory, and a discus-thrower, *Discobolus* (see no. 22). The cow seems to have earned its fame largely by serving as a peg on which to hang epigrams, which tells us nothing of the animal's pose. Of the Ladas, there is no known copy; we are fortunate, however, in possessing several copies of the *Discobolus*. The athlete is represented at the moment he has swung back the discus with the full stretch of his arm, ready to hurl it with all the weight of his body. His face is calm and untroubled, but every muscle in his body is focused in effort.

Another marble figure, almost certainly a copy of a work of Myron's, is a Marsyas eager to pick up the flutes Athena had thrown away. The full group is copied on coins of Athens, on a vase and in a relief representing Marsyas as oscillating between curiosity and fear of Athena's displeasure. His face of the Marsyas is almost a mask; but from the attitude we gain a vivid impression of the passions affecting him.

The ancient critics say of Myron that, while he succeeded admirably in giving life and motion to his figures, he failed in rendering the mind's emotions. To a certain degree this agrees with the existing evidence, although not perfectly. The bodies of his men are of far greater excellence than the heads.

He was a somewhat older contemporary of Phidias and Polykleitos.

23



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24. Anonymous, *Heracles Receiving the Golden Apples of the Hesperides from the Hand of Atlas while Minerva Rests a Cushion on his Head*, East Metope, Temple of Zeus, Olympia, c. 470-456 B.C.E.
Marble, h: 160 cm. Archaeological Museum, Olympia (Greece).

This metope, or square component of the frieze of the temple, is from the Temple of Zeus at Olympia, the largest and most important structure of the first half of the fifth century. Together, the metopes of the Temple of Zeus told the story of the twelve labours of Heracles. Each metope showed one of his labours, or tasks. This metope shows the eleventh labour, the apples of the Hesperides. Heracles was told he had to steal apples belonging to Zeus. He met up with Atlas, who had to hold up the world for all of time. Atlas said he would get the apples for Heracles if Heracles would hold the earth for him. In the scene shown, Atlas has returned with the apples, and Heracles must figure out how to get Atlas to take back the weight of the world. Athena stands behind Heracles, gently helping him hold his burden.

25

CALLIMACHUS

(Active between c. 432 – c. 408 B.C.E.)

An ancient sculptor and engraver, Callimachus was nicknamed "*katatxitechnos*" – "the perfectionist." He left behind no writings, but we know his life through the works of Pausanias and Vitruvius, although today certain of their accounts seem doubtful. It is known that he contributed to the decoration of the Erechtheion. For this temple he created, among other things, a magnificent golden lamp, above which was mounted a bronze palm branch, which trapped the smoke. Several beautiful sculptures were also ascribed to him: a group of Lacedemonian dancers and a statue of the seated Hera made for the Heraion of Plataea. What characterises Callimachus more than anything else is his painstaking attention to detail; hence the nickname. Purportedly, he was the first to use a drill for shaping marble. He modelled his work on the tradition of the old masters and pioneered the Archaic style.

Callimachus also has a place in the history of architecture. He is considered the inventor of the Corinthian capital. According to the legend told by Vitruvius, he got the idea while looking at the acanthus blossom wrapped around a basket which had been placed on a child's tomb.

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25. Anonymous, *Leda and the Swan*, copy after a Greek original created by **Timotheus**, first half of the 5th century B.C.E.
Marble, h: 132 cm.
Musei Capitolini, Rome (Italy).

26. Anonymous, *Aphrodite, type Venus Genitrix*, Roman copy after a Greek original created by **Callimachus**, end of 5th century B.C.E.
Marble, h: 164 cm.
Musée du Louvre, Paris (France).

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POLYKLEITOS

(Active during the 5th century B.C.E.)

Polykleitos was a contemporary of Phidias, and in the opinion of the Greeks his equal. He made a figure of an Amazon for Ephesus regarded as superior to the Amazon of Phidias made at the same time; and his colossal Hera of gold and ivory, which stood in the temple near Argos, was considered worthy to rank with the Zeus of Phidias.

It would be hard for a modern critic to rate Polykleitos so high, for reasons of balance, rhythm, and minute perfection of bodily form, the great merits of this sculptor, which appeal less to us than they did to the fifth century Greeks. He worked mainly in bronze.

His artistic activity must thus have been long and prolific.

Copies of his spearman (*Doryphoros*) and his victor winding a ribbon round his head (*Diadoumenos* (see nos. 29 & 32)) have long been recognised in galleries. While we understand their excellence, they inspire no enthusiasm; they are fleshier than modern athletic figures and lack charm. They are chiefly valuable for showing us the square forms of body affected by Polykleitos, and the scheme he adopted, for throwing the body's weight (as Pliny says of him) onto one leg.

The Amazon of Polykleitos survives in several copies (see no. 44). Here again we find a certain heaviness, and the Amazon's womanly character scarcely appears through her robust limbs.

The masterpiece of Polykleitos, his Hera of gold and ivory, has of course totally disappeared. The Argos coins give us only the general type. Ancient critics reproached Polykleitos for the lack of variety in his works. We have already observed the slight variety in their attitudes. Except for the statue of Hera, which was the work of his old age, he produced hardly any notable statue of a deity. His field was narrowly limited; but in that field he was unsurpassed.

27. Anonymous, *Doryphoros*, Roman copy after a Greek original created by **Polykleitos**, c. 440 B.C.E. Marble, h: 196 cm. The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis (United States).

28. Anonymous, *The Tyrannicides Harmodius and Aristogeiton*, Roman copy after a Greek original created by **Critios**, c. 477 B.C.E. Marble, h: 195 cm. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples (Italy).

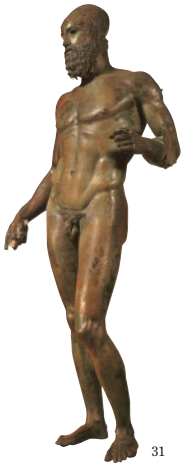
Harmodius and Aristogeiton Metal was a valuable commodity in the ancient world, so sculptures made of bronze or other metals were often eventually melted down by a conquering nation or a successive ruler who did not care for the art of his predecessor. For that reason, few large-scale bronze sculptures survive from Antiquity. Romans, however, had a taste for Greek art, and copied many of their bronze sculptures in stone, the material preferred by Romans. Often, the bronze original has since been lost, and the Roman copies are all that survive. Such is the case with this group, Roman copies in marble of two Greek sculptures in bronze. The subjects are Harmodius and Aristogeiton, lovers who together conspired to murder the political tyrant, Hippias. They lost their nerve and killed his brother instead, but were revered as heroes by Athenians who believed them to have murdered the tyrant. Statues of the two were erected in their honour in the Athenian Agora.

29

29. Anonymous, *Diadoumenos, the Young Athlete*, copy after a bronze original created by **Polykleitos**, c. 430 B.C.E.
Marble, h: 186 cm.
National Archaeological Museum of Athens, Athens (Greece).

Polykleitos is one of the best-known sculptors of the fifth century B.C.E., known especially for his athletic dedications, such as this one. The figure binds his hair with a tie in preparation for sport. His clothes rest next to him on a low branch, since Greek athletes exercised in the nude. Polykleitos' Doryphoros, or Canon, sought to illustrate the ideal male figure. In the piece shown, we see the same proportions the sculptor established with his Canon, and the same attention to anatomical realism. The Polykleitan ideal is a heavy, muscled, somewhat stocky body, especially in comparison to the more gracile figures of the next century.

30



31

30. Anonymous, *Apollo*, known as *Apollo Parnopios*, copy after a Greek original created by **Phidias**, c. 450 B.C.E. Marble, h: 197 cm. Staatliche Museen, Kassel (Germany).

Apollo was the god of music, poetry, medicine, archery, and prophecy, and was always shown as young and beautiful. Here, he has the idealised body of a young male athlete. The naturalism of his anatomy, with its sculpted muscles and graceful movement, is expressed through the relaxed, contrapposto stance. His expression is thoughtful but emotionless. This classic fifth-century B.C.E. statue type is transformed into Apollo by the addition of the elaborately curled long hair, and his attributes, the bow and laurel wreath, which he would have held in each hand.

31. Anonymous, *Riace Bronze B*, Roman copy after a Greek original created by **Phidias**, c. 450 B.C.E. Bronze, h: 197 cm. Museo Nazionale, Reggio Calabria (Italy).

A sunken treasure, this bronze statue was pulled from the sea, having been lost in a shipwreck in Antiquity. Ironically, its loss in the sea resulted in it being one of the few bronze statues to survive from Antiquity, since it was never melted down for its valuable metal. The warrior is one of a pair that has been attributed to the fifth century B.C.E., or High Classical Period. In this piece we can see the ideals of High Classical period sculpture fully realised. At the same time realistic and idealistic, the sculpture shows a lifelike, but perfect, body, each muscle articulated, the figure frozen in a relaxed, life-like pose. The solid, athletic body reflects the ideal of a young athlete, although this figure represents an older warrior, who once would have held a spear and a shield. The nudity of the figure also alludes to the athlete, who in Greece would have practised or competed in the nude, and also to the mythical hero, a reminder that the man represented here was no ordinary warrior, but a semi-divine hero, an appropriate offering for one of the great sanctuaries of the Greek world.

PHIDIAS

(Athens, c. 488 B.C.E. – c. 431 B.C.E.)

Son of Charmides, universally regarded as the greatest of Greek sculptors, Phidias was born in Athens. We have varying accounts of his training. Hegias of Athens, Ageladas of Argos, and the Thasian painter Polygnotus, have all been regarded as his teachers.

The earliest of his great works were dedications in memory of Marathon, from the spoils of the victory. On the Acropolis of Athens he erected a colossal bronze image of Athena, visible far out at sea. Other works at Delphi, at Pellene in Achaea, and at Plataea were appreciated; among the Greeks themselves, however, the two works of Phidias which far outstripped all others – providing the basis of his fame – were the colossal figures in gold and ivory of Zeus at Olympia and of Athena Parthenos at Athens, both of which belong to about the middle of the fifth century.

Plutarch gives in his life of Perikles a charming account of the vast artistic activity that went on at Athens while that statesman was in power. For the decoration of his own city he used the money furnished by the Athenian allies for defence against Persia. "In all these works," says Plutarch, "Phidias was the adviser and overseer of Perikles." Phidias introduced his own portrait and that of Perikles on the shield of his Parthenos statue. And it was through Phidias that the political enemies of Perikles struck at him.

It is important to observe that in resting the fame of Phidias upon the sculptures of the Parthenon we proceed with little evidence. What he was celebrated for in Antiquity was his statues in bronze or gold and ivory. If Plutarch tells us that he superintended the great works of Perikles on the Acropolis, this phrase is very vague.

Of his death we have two discrepant accounts. According to Plutarch he was made an object of attack by the political enemies of Perikles, and died in prison at Athens. According to Philochorus, he fled to Elis, where he made the great statue of Zeus for the Eleans, and was afterwards put to death by them. For several reasons the first of these tales is preferable.

Ancient critics take a high view of the merits of Phidias. What they especially praise is the ethos or permanent moral level of his works as compared with those of the later "pathetic" school. Demetrius calls his statues sublime and at the same time precise.

PRAXITELES

(Active between c. 375 – c. 335 B.C.E.)

Greek sculptor, Praxiteles of Athens, the son of Cephissodotus, is considered the greatest of the fourth century B.C.E. Attic sculptors. He left an imperishable mark on the history of art.

Our knowledge of Praxiteles received a significant contribution, and was placed on a satisfactory basis with the discovery at Olympia in 1877 of his statue of *Hermes with the Infant Dionysos*, a statue that has become world famous, but which is now regarded as a copy. Full and solid without being fleshy, at once strong and active, the *Hermes* is a masterpiece and the surface play astonishing. In the head we have a remarkably rounded and intelligent shape, and the face expresses the perfection of health and enjoyment.

Among the numerous copies that came to us, perhaps the most notable is the *Apollo Sauroktonos*, or the lizard-slayer (see no. 33), a youth leaning against a tree and idly striking with an arrow at a lizard, and the *Aphrodite of Knidos* of the Vatican (see no. 38), which is a copy of the statue made by Praxiteles for the people of Knidos; they valued it so highly they refused to sell it to King Nicomedes, who was willing in return to discharge the city's entire debt, which, according to Pliny, was enormous.

The subjects chosen by Praxiteles were either human or the less elderly and dignified deities. Apollo, Hermes and Aphrodite rather than Zeus, Poseidon or Athena attracted him. Under his hands the deities descend to human level; indeed, sometimes almost below it. They possess grace and charm to a supreme degree, though the element of awe and reverence is wanting.

Praxiteles and his school worked almost entirely in marble. At the time the marble quarries of Paros were at their best; for the sculptor's purpose no marble could be finer than that of which the Hermes is made.

32

33

32. Anonymous, *Male Torso,* in the style of the *Diadoumenos,* copy after a bronze original created by **Polykleitos**, c. 430 B.C.E.
Marble, h: 85 cm.
Musée du Louvre, Paris (France).

33. Anonymous, *Apollo Sauroktonos,* Hellenistic copy after a Greek original created by **Praxiteles**, 4th century B.C.E.
Marble, h: 149 cm.
Museo Pio Clementino, Vatican (Vatican).

34

LYSIPPOS

(c. 395 – c. 305 B.C.E.)

The Greek sculptor, Lysippos, was head of the school of Argos and Sicyon in the time of Philip and Alexander of Macedon. His works, some colossal, are said to have numbered 1500. Certain accounts have him continuing the school of Polykleitos; others represent him as self-taught. He was especially innovative regarding the proportions of the human male body; in contrast to his predecessors, he reduced the head size and made the body harder and more slender, producing the impression of greater height. He also took great pains with hair and other details. Pliny and other writers mention many of his statues. Among the gods he seems to have produced new and striking types of Zeus, the Sun-god and others; many of these were colossal figures in bronze. Among heroes he was particularly attracted by the mighty physique of Heracles. The *Heracles Farnese* of Naples, though signed by Glycon of Athens, and a later and exaggerated transcript, owes something, including the motive of rest after labour, to Lysippos. Lysippos made many statues of Alexander the Great, and so satisfied his patron, no doubt by idealising him, that he became the king's court sculptor; the king and his generals provided numerous commissions. Portraits of Alexander vary greatly, and it is impossible to determine which among them go back to Lysippos.

As head of the great athletic school of Peloponnese, Lysippos naturally sculptured many athletes; a figure by him of a man scraping himself with a strigil was a great favourite of the Romans in the time of Tiberius; it has usually been regarded as the original copied in the *Apoxyomenos* of the Vatican (see no. 46).

35

34. Anonymous, *Diomedes*, c. 430 B.C.E.
Marble, h: 102 cm.
Glyptothek, Munich (Germany).

35. Anonymous, *Hermes Tying his Sandal*, Roman copy after a Greek original created by **Lysippos**, 4th century B.C.E.
Marble, h: 161 cm.
Musée du Louvre, Paris (France).

36

SKOPAS

(Active during first half of the 4th century B.C.E.)

Probably of Parian origin, Skopas was the son of Aristander, a great Greek sculptor of the fourth century B.C.E. Although classed as an Athenian, and similar in tendency to Praxiteles, he was really a cosmopolitan artist, working largely in Asia and Peloponnesos. The existing works with which he is associated are the Mausoleum of Halicarnassos, and the temple of Athena Alea at Tegea. In the case of the Mausoleum, though no doubt the sculpture generally belongs to his school, it remains impossible to single out any specific part of it as his own. There is, however, good reason to think that the pedimental figures from Tegea are Skopas' own work. They are, unfortunately, all in extremely poor condition, but appear to be the best evidence of his style.

While in general style Skopas approached Praxiteles, he differed from him in preferring strong expression and vigorous action to repose and sentiment.

Early writers give a good deal of information on the works of Skopas. For the people of Elis he made a bronze Aphrodite riding on a goat (copied on the coins of Elis); a *Maenad* at Athens, running with head thrown back and a torn kid in her hands, was ascribed to him. Another type of his was Apollo as leader of the Muses, singing to the lyre. The most elaborate of his works was a great group representing Achilles being conveyed over the sea to the island of Leuce by his mother Thetis, accompanied by Nereids.

Jointly with his contemporaries Praxiteles and Lysippos, Skopas may be considered to have completely changed the character of Greek sculpture; they initiated the lines of development that culminated in the schools of Pergamum, Rhodes and other great cities of later Greece. In most modern museums of ancient art their influence may be seen in three-fourths of the works exhibited. At the Renaissance it was especially their influence which dominated Italian painting, and through it, modern art.

37

36. Anonymous, *Meleager*, copy after a Greek original created by **Skopas**, c. 340 B.C.E.
Marble, h: 123 cm.
Arthur M. Sackler Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge (United States).

37. Anonymous, *Athenian Tombstone*, c. 340 B.C.E.
Marble, h: 168 cm.
National Archaeological Museum of Athens, Athens (Greece).

38

39

40

38. Anonymous, *Aphrodite of Knidos*, copy after a Greek original created by **Praxiteles,** c. 350 B.C.E.
Marble. Museo Pio Clementino, Vatican (Italy).

39. Anonymous, *Aphrodite of Knidos*, Roman copy after a Greek original created by **Praxiteles**, c. 350 B.C.E. Marble, h: 122 cm.
Musée du Louvre, Paris (France).

40. Anonymous, *Crouching Venus*, Roman copy after a Greek original created in the 3rd century B.C.E.
Marble, h: 96 cm.
Musée du Louvre, Paris (France).

41

41. Anonymous, *Dionysos and Ariadne* (detail from the *Derveni Krater),*
c. 340-330 B.C.E.
Copper, h: 91 cm.
Archeological Museum, Thessaloniki (Greece).