

Press release

March 23 – June 18, 2007

Napoléon Hall



Anonymous, Reproduction of the head of *Aphrodite of Knidos*, known as the *Kaufmann Head*, 2nd century B.C., after a work created by Praxiteles around 360 B.C., Marble, Musée du Louvre
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This exhibition is organized by the Louvre and the Réunion des Musées Nationaux.

It is made possible by F. Marc de Lacharrière (Fimalac).



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PRAXITELES

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The first Greek sculptor to dare to represent the female nude in monumental statuary, Praxiteles today remains one of the most celebrated artists of antiquity. His renown alone would be ample justification for the presentation of a monographic exhibition dedicated to his oeuvre. However, the difficulties raised by archaeological exploration necessitate a refinement of this approach: although the exhibition is organized with the aim of offering, to the highest extent possible, a survey of Praxiteles' career as a sculptor, it is above all an invitation to focus on the marks left on the history of art by this elusive figure, in order to arrive at a better understanding of Praxiteles and his art.

The exhibition brings together for the first time the largest possible number of works in marble and bronze that can fairly be claimed to be characteristic of his style, so as to allow visitors to contemplate the various images, placed in historiographic perspective, that have been given of this great master over the centuries, from antiquity to the present, thus illuminating a Praxiteles sometimes idealized, often imagined, and whom we hope in the end to have rediscovered.

No major exhibition devoted to Greek and Roman statuary has ever been presented in France, despite its importance in the development of Western artistic forms, although two recent European events applying a monographic approach to an ancient artist have shown how this might be done: an exhibition dedicated to Polykleitos was presented in Germany (Liebighaus, Frankfurt, 1990) and a large body of works were assembled in Italy in order to represent the career of Lysippos (Palazzo delle Esposizioni, 1995). Following upon these previous successes, and emboldened by the honor of holding within its collections a large number of marble works (all recently restored) that have been associated, either closely or distantly, with Praxiteles, the Louvre could thus organize, by supplementing this sizable core derived from its own collections with around 100 works loaned by several other European museums, an exhibition designed to celebrate the esteemed creator of works as illustrious as the *Aphrodite of Knidos*, *Apollo Sauroktonos (The Lizard-Slayer)* and the *Eros at Thespieae*.

Furthermore, the opportunity to present such an exhibition is particularly of interest at this time due to the debates which have arisen within Praxitelean studies during the last two decades. Taking as their basis the seminal analyses of A. Furtwängler and W. Klein, more recent researchers have occasionally refuted certain attributions thought to be definitive, but have also proposed new ones, thus creating areas of contention which are underscored by the exhibition, as contributing to an overall appreciation of the importance of Praxiteles.

Exhibition curators:

Alain Pasquier, Curator in Charge, Department of Greek, Etruscan and Roman Antiquities, musée du Louvre, and Jean-Luc Martinez, Chief Curator, Department of Greek, Etruscan and Roman Antiquities, musée du Louvre.

The translation into Greek of this exhibition's didactic panels was made possible thanks to the generous sponsorship of the Lambrakis Foundation.

A voyage through time, from the 4th century B.C. to the present, this exhibition seeks to rediscover Praxiteles and is organized into six sections, each of which corresponds to a period in history during which the influence of the artist is particularly present. Apart from its scientific perspective, the exhibition also serves as an introduction to Greek sculpture, an area with which most Westerners have at least passing familiarity but often limited real knowledge.

In order to bring to the forefront the multi-faceted field of Praxitelean studies, the rotunda was selected as the setting for a bronze Aphrodite, of the same type as the *Aphrodite of Knidos*, in its main lines bearing Praxiteles' footprint, as well as several display cases presenting ancient books and coins. This confrontation illustrates the two poles, less contradictory than is commonly thought, between which our knowledge of Praxiteles oscillates: legend and history. The bronze Aphrodite, a modern work cast in the 16th century under the direction of Primaticcio, embodies the image, the idea of Praxiteles handed down through generations of European artists, as the inventor of a statuary type whose importance no longer needs to be demonstrated: the female nude. The numismatic and literary sources presented in the display cases are the only surviving and reliable historical records that we may use to supplement our understanding of the sculptor, since virtually all of his works fell victim to the ravages of time or the vicissitudes of history.

I - Praxiteles Rediscovered

The inscriptions and the sources allow us to state with confidence that Praxiteles was born in Athens, into a family forming a genuine dynasty of sculptors. However, what we know of his later life is cobbled together from just a few anecdotes, as told by various Greek or Latin sources, in which legend often takes precedence over history. This is the case for his intimate relations with Phryne, the celebrated courtesan who was also, it is said, one of his models. Praxiteles probably lived between 400 and 330 B.C., reaching the height of his career as a sculptor around 360 B.C. While most of Greek monumental sculpture consists of bronzes, Praxiteles preferred to work in marble—two-thirds of his creations were marble pieces—and he was a veritable genius in this material, responsible in large measure for the widespread fame of the startlingly white Paros marble. This first section of the exhibition seeks to focus on the “original” works by the artist, in other words works that date from the known period of activity of Praxiteles and his school. Two works in marble shown here, positively identified as dating from the 4th century B.C., are today considered as bearing the marks of his style: the *Mantineia Base (Monument to Leto and Her Children)*, a bas-relief decorating the base of one of the master's sculptures, and a badly damaged head, larger than life scale, representing an Artemis, recently identified by G. Despinois and which has seriously unsettled the received perception of the artist, questioning former certainties. This piece may in fact be the head of the *Artemis Brauronia* spoken of by Pausanias and which, prior to this discovery, we had thought of as corresponding to the same statuary type as the *Diana of Gabies*, the perfect embodiment of Praxitelean style as it is generally understood.

II - In Search of Praxiteles: Considering Several Types Represented in the Texts, Coins and Reproductions

To the great fortune of archaeologists and art historians, the Romans were quite enamored of the work of Praxiteles. This fascination inspired them first to bring back to Rome a certain number of his works to populate their forums, palaces and gardens. But this plunder soon proved inadequate to keep pace with demand. Roman artists therefore began to create copies of the most renowned statues. These Roman copies, which greatly furthered our appreciation of Greek sculpture, constitute the majority of the works on display in the exhibition. For certain Greek models, the exhibition includes a number of marble works reproducing the same subject, thus providing a unique opportunity to compare and contrast these copies. This approach is particularly enlightening when applied to statuary types that we may attribute to Praxiteles by virtue of evidence derived from the sources, such as the *Apollo Sauroktonos*, the *Resting Satyr* and the *Aphrodite of Knidos*, the first female nude in Greek monumental sculpture and for this reason the most celebrated statue of antiquity. The fundamental issue raised here and developed throughout the remainder of the exhibition is that Praxitelean style is difficult to pin down. By studying the copies, through comparisons, and by investigating other sources, researchers strive to recognize the specific characteristics that best reflect the lost original.

III - In the Manner of Praxiteles: Hellenistic and Roman Creations Inspired by the Master

Beginning in the 3rd century B.C., Praxiteles' influence on later sculptors was considerable, but Greek and Roman artists did not limit themselves to making reproductions of the master's works. Drawing inspiration from his style, they began to sculpt in the manner of Praxiteles, borrowing only certain characteristics, combining them with their own stylistic touches, resulting in statues offering a mere echo of the master's style. Four groupings allow visitors to better appreciate this new development in the appreciation of Praxiteles, each raising a specific issue in the quest to rediscover his art: *Diana of Gabies* (female heads

inspired by Praxiteles), *Eros of Centocelle* (classical recreations), works by Pasiteles and Stephanos (the Praxitelean style in Rome), and the *Apollino* (creations inspired by Praxiteles and classical models).

IV - Praxiteles Imagined

Leaving antiquity behind, this section of the exhibition deals with Praxiteles in modernity and the question of the modern history of ancient works, in other words the narrative of their rediscovery, reception and restoration. Although Primaticcio created an Aphrodite of the same type as the *Aphrodite of Knidos*, he, like all his contemporaries, knew nothing of Praxiteles. If it was during the 17th century that connections were established between the marble fragments and ancient literary texts, the major turning point for studies of ancient art only occurred in the 18th century.

Six works, produced between the 16th and the 19th centuries, further our understanding of how an ancient marble statue can give rise to one in the Mannerist, Classical, Neoclassical or Academic style. The “contamination” of the original marble by the style of the period, as had already been the case for the creations inspired by Praxiteles in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, demonstrates to what extent there is no direct connection in modern times with the style of Praxiteles. These recreative restorations reveal a Praxiteles who, with the benefit of hindsight and recent studies, we can now consider as misunderstood or idealized. And the success, in the 19th century, of the story of Phryne probably represents the crowning touch completing this fantasy vision of the artist. Over and above the tantalizing legend, it is the influence of this popular theme on archaeologists which is particularly of interest: Phryne became the most celebrated woman in Paris, and researchers tirelessly sought to identify which of the marble heads sculpted by Praxiteles, according to the sources, bore a portrait of the courtesan.

V - The Contested Career of Praxiteles: A 19th Century Debate

This fifth section attempts to reconstitute Praxiteles’ career as imagined in the 19th century, notably by A. Fürtwangler. During this period, it was considered that the activity of an artist was chiefly to be divided between works of youth and those of maturity. For Praxiteles, the first category would include, for instance, the *Venus of Arles*, the *Pouring Satyr* or the *Dresden Artemis*; the second would encompass works such as the *Olympia Hermes*, the *Sardanapalus*, as well as a series of works representing the Muses.

This broad categorization and generous approach to attribution are contested by today’s scholars of ancient art. The presentation within the exhibition of the majority of the known copies of the works mentioned above offers the potential to enrich studies of these different statuary types, all of which share the same predicament, namely whether or not they should be included within the oeuvre of Praxiteles.

VI - Current Research Topics: The *Satyr of Mazara del Vallo* - A new attribution ?

The exhibition closes with the paradoxical presentation of a work which, although spectacular and beautiful, does not seem to be rightfully attributed to Praxiteles. However, in keeping with the concept of the exhibition, also shared by its catalogue, which is to attempt a synthesis of all that is known about Praxiteles, it was deemed important to present to the public the most recent case debated by scholars studying Praxiteles, that of the *Satyr of Mazara del Vallo*. This bronze, dragged to the surface in pieces by fishermen from this Sicilian village in 1997, is considered by Paolo Moreno, the curator of the Lysippos exhibition in 1995, to be an original work by Praxiteles. His attribution is nevertheless quite far from being accepted by all specialists.



Left : Anonymous, Artemis, called Diana of Gabies (detail), 1st century A. D. , after a work created around 300 B.C., marble, musée du Louvre © Musée du Louvre / D. Lebéé – C. Déambrosis



Right : Anonymous, Apollo Suaroktonos (The Lizard-Slayer) (detail), 1st century A. D., after a work created by Praxiteles around 350 B. C., marble, musée du Louvre © Musée du Louvre / D. Lebéé – C. Déambrosis

Related events and publications



Anonymous, *Aphrodite*, called the *Aphrodite of Arles*, 1st century B.C., after a work created by Praxiteles (?) around 370 B.C. (?), Marble, Musée du Louvre © RMN / H. Lewandowski

Visitor information

Place

Napoleon Hall, Musée du Louvre

Press opening

Tuesday, March 20, 2007, from 2:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Hours

Open daily except Tuesdays from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., and until 10 p.m. on Wednesdays and Fridays

Admission fees

Admission to the *Praxiteles* exhibition only: €9.50

Admission to permanent collections + *Praxiteles* exhibition: €13 before 6 p.m.; €11 after 6 p.m. on Wednesdays and Fridays

Free admission for youths under 18, the unemployed, and holders of the "Louvre Jeunes", "Louvre Professionnels", "Louvre Enseignants", "Louvre Etudiants Partenaires" or "Amis du Louvre" cards.

Further information

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www.louvre.fr

Publications

- Exhibition catalogue, co-published by Musée du Louvre Editions and Somogy, 456 pages, about €39.

The catalogue was produced thanks to the generous support of the J. F. Costopoulos Foundation.

- Exhibition album, co-published by Musée du Louvre Editions and Somogy, 48 pages, €8.

- *100 chefs-d'oeuvre de la sculpture grecque*, by Alain Pasquier and Jean-Luc Martinez, co-published by Musée du Louvre Editions and Somogy, 224 pages, about €25.

- *Tanagras*, Conference proceedings edited by Violaine Jeammet, co-published by Musée du Louvre Editions and Editions Picard, 300 pages, about €30.

- *La Grèce antique* (for children 10 years and older) by Juliette Becq, co-published by Musée du Louvre Editions and Hachette Jeunesse, 48 pages, €14.50.

Audioguide for the exhibition

Presentation of the exhibition by the curators.

Available in French, English and Spanish. €.

Special evening event, Friday, March 30 at 7 p.m.

Conversation with Jean-Luc Martinez and Alain Pasquier, the curators of *Praxiteles*, within the exhibition.

Events in the Auditorium du Louvre

Made possible by the ALEXANDER S. ONASSIS PUBLIC BENEFIT FOUNDATION.

Stage play: *Le Banquet* by Plato (conceived, adapted and directed by Juliette Deschamps), International symposium: "Artists in Greek Antiquity: The Limitations of the Monographic Approach", Art films, from March 9 to May 16.

Interactive educational mini-exhibit: "Understanding Form"

An interactive mini-exhibit focusing on the bronze casting of the *Satyr of Mazara del Vallo*, a work presented in the last section of the *Praxiteles* exhibition, will be installed near the permanent collections, in Salle Saint-Louis (mezzanine level of the Sully Wing).

The aim of this multimedia installation is to underscore the major role played by lighting in the perception and appreciation of a work of art, thus demonstrating that the way in which a work is lit suggests its own interpretation. A video screen will display to visitors sample lighting schemes by several specialists, illustrating different possible readings of the same sculpture. In addition, visitors will be allowed to touch the exhibit and the casting will be accompanied by reduced scale and detail versions of its head to facilitate a comprehensive tactile appreciation.

This casting as well as the modular lighting system have been graciously provided and installed by iGuzzini, the company having developed the concept of the mini-exhibit. A leader in technical and architectural lighting, iGuzzini has worked on a number of museum projects throughout the world. For the Louvre, the company created the lighting of the Apollo Gallery, the Salle du Manège and the Pavillon des Sessions.