

TORSO OF APHRODITE OF KNIDOS

ROMAN, *CIRCA* 2ND CENTURY AD
MARBLE

HEIGHT: 78 CM.

WIDTH: 35 CM.

DEPTH: 23 CM.

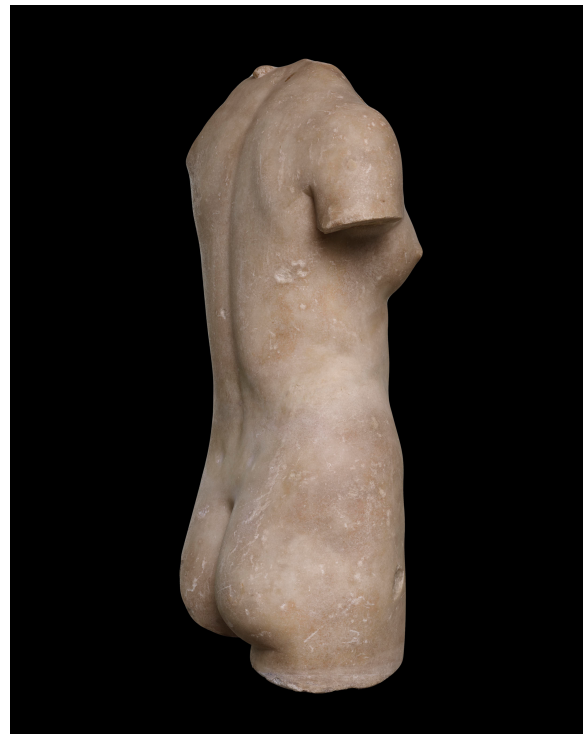
PROVENANCE:
FORMERLY IN THE COLLECTION OF
COMMANDER PAUL-LOUIS WEILLER
(1893-1993).



This elegant torso represents Aphrodite, Greek goddess of love and beauty, known to the Romans as Venus. Born from sea foam, the deity was widely represented in the Greek then Roman worlds as the symbol of femininity and sensuality.

Our magnificent, life sized sculpture alludes to the mythological scene in which the nude goddess was surprised bathing. The sculptor was able to showcase the deity's elegant curves through the slight forward tilt of her bust and the tilt of her hips, characteristic of contrapposto. The harmonious proportions are particularly striking, with fine shoulders,

small, round, closely spaced breasts, a slight waist and widening hips forming a perfect balance.



The positioning of her left shoulder enables us to infer that the goddess's arm was raised to the side, while her right shoulder, which is lower, dovetails with the beginning of an arm that undoubtedly lay along her body. A small excess of flesh between her right breast and shoulder attests to the sculptor's desire for realism, as do the very slight creases to either side of the neck, intricately depicting her collarbones. Her very smooth abdomen, which has a barely perceptible line running down the middle, as well as her navel, fully carved and portrayed in depth, again display the artist's technical mastery. The pubis is not represented in detail, but we may infer



that the goddess was shielding it with one of her hands. The fold of her groin is, however, clearly visible upon her right leg, which, judging from the position of the bust, was the goddess' supporting leg.

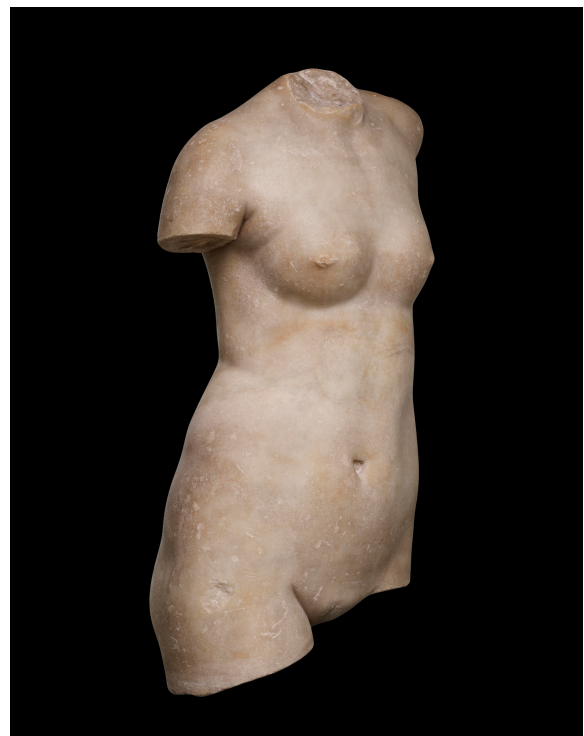


Her back, once again most elegantly sculpted, displays a line carved vertically down the middle, following the general curve of the body. Both shoulder blades subtly stand out and bring our sculpture to life by giving the shoulders a sense of movement. Two small dimples mark the small of the goddess' subtly muscled back. Her buttocks, perfectly round and delicately shaped, are separated by a deep furrow, while a slight fold is visible to the right, representing the transition between buttock and thigh. At the very top of the back, at the junction with her neck, the remnant of a lock of hair is just visible. The goddess' hair was undoubtedly up in an elegant chignon, from which some thick locks of curly or wavy hair would have escaped. Narrow shoulders, slightly contracted muscles, a small bosom, a slight, delicate waist, an ample pelvis and the curve formed by her back are just a few details used by the artist to illustrate the beauty and

sensuality of the female body. All the femininity and sensuousness inherent to the goddess of love and beauty emanate from her spellbinding, elegant form.

Our elegant Venus was inspired by a Greek original sculpted by the Athenian sculptor Praxiteles in the 4th century BC: the Aphrodite of Knidos, one of the most renowned models in antiquity. It was the first representation of a female nude.

In keeping with ancient tradition, Praxiteles is said to have crafted two statues of Aphrodite, each with perfect proportions, one clothed and one nude. The first was purchased by the city of Kos, while the second was chosen by the inhabitants of Knidos to adorn the goddess' sanctuary in which, by way of a second door, it could be observed from all angles.



The Aphrodite of Knidos model was thus a figure of the nude goddess having finished her bath, standing, dropping her garment over a vase placed on the ground. Her folded right arm holds a cloth, while her left hand shields her sex in a gesture traditionally interpreted as modest. The position of the

shoulders of our magnificent sculpture leave very few doubts as to the arrangement of the arms, as does her bosom, which seems to be sculpted along the same horizontal line. Consequently, as for the complete examples of Praxiteles' work, the movement of the arms only slightly — or not at all, in some cases — impacts that of the breasts, which stay at the same level, contrary to anatomic reality. Moreover, the contrapposto sets the left leg in motion while the right is immobile, as is the case for all the other known examples of the Aphrodite of Knidos (ill. 1-3). Furthermore, the movement of the shoulders, sloping forwards slightly, gives her a delicately stooped posture.

As it enjoyed immense popularity, we know several examples of this work, despite the fact the original is now lost. In his work *Natural History*, Pliny the Elder (Book XXXVI, 6, 9) wrote that the statue was not only the sculptor Praxiteles' most beautiful, but also the most beautiful in the world. Incidentally, Pliny added that the statue was "*visible from every angle*", which explains why our Aphrodite's back and buttocks are so well shaped.



The white marble in which our Aphrodite is sculpted is gorgeously polished, not to mention a very delicate milky colour, giving her a youthful appearance. The choice of this very fine grained marble bestows upon the goddess an incomparable sensuality and grace. The very light patina on the marble distinguishes itself as a major testament to the passing of time.

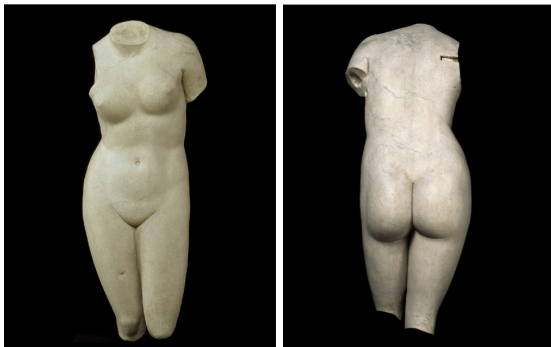


Our superb torso of Aphrodite was once in the collection of Paul-Louis Weiller (1893-1993), aviation hero during the First World War and businessman thereafter (ill. 4). Behind the biggest aeroplane engine construction business in Europe, he also created airlines that would shortly be nationalised to become Air France. As a Jewish Alsatian, he fled France for Cuba and Canada during the Second World War. Upon his return, he became a great patron of the arts, namely contributing to the restoration of the Palace of Versailles, establishing a ballet company, supporting many artists and actors and amassing a sizeable collection of more than 750 artworks. In 1965, he was elected to the Académie des Beaux Arts. Upon his death,

his collection would be sold twice, in 1998 and 2011.

According to original documents signed by Paul-Louis Weiller (ill. 5), the torso was fitted to a marble base in about December 1948 and seen by Jean Charbonneau, curator at the Musée du Louvre, at Paul Louis Weiller's residence in March 1948. In a letter addressed to the latter, the curator marvelled at the quality of the sculpture and expressed his satisfaction at seeing such a work remain in France (ill. 6).

Comparatives:



Ill. 1. Torso of the Aphrodite of Knidos, Roman, Imperial period, 2nd century AD, marble, H.: 121 cm. Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. Ma 2184.



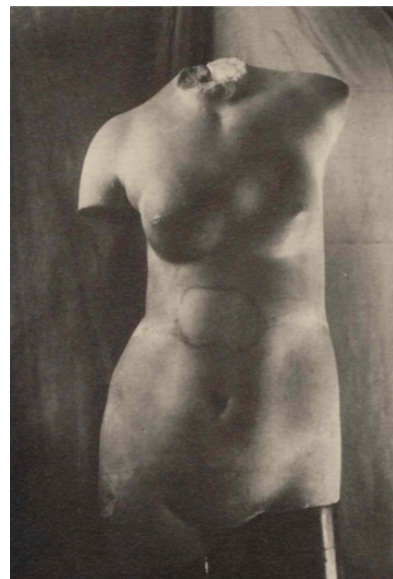
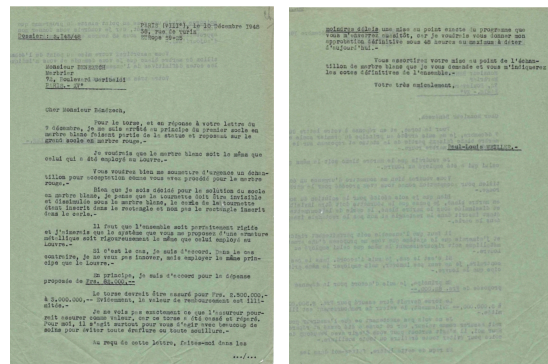
Ill. 2. "Belvedere Venus", Roman, 1st-2nd century AD, marble. Museo Pio Clementino, Vatican, inv. no. 4260.

Ill. 3. Statuette of Aphrodite, of the Aphrodite of Knidos type, Roman, 1st-2nd century AD, marble, New York, The MET, New York, inv. no. 42.201.8.

Provenance:



Ill. 4. Paul-Louis Weiller, photograph taken on the occasion of his election to the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Paris on 24 February 1965.



Ill. 5. Letter from Paul-Louis Weiller to Mr Benezech, stonemason, dated 10 December 1948, accompanied by a photograph of the work on its old wooden base.

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 MUSÉES NATIONAUX
 CONSERVATION

Musée du Louvre
 21, Quai du Louvre
 (Bureau sous le guichet de Peintures-Arts)
 Téléphone :
 Opéra 82-19 - 11 - 12

le 15 mars 1948

Monsieur,

Grâce à
 l'obligeance de Monsieur Nascetta
 et à l'aimable accueil de
 Monsieur Jean Vincent, j'ai
 pu admirer les deux marbres
 antiques que vos orgues récemment
 installés chez vous. Et m'est
 rarement arrivé, au cours d'une
 carrière déjà longue, de voir
 deux œuvres d'art d'une telle
 qualité se rencontrer au

moment où le même
 caractère monumental et à
 la fois de cheval que la
 perspective d'un bel escalier
 de pierre. Et la pierre
 soignée et travaillée
 d'harmonie avec une atmosphère
 naturelle dans le climat

du grand salon, à l'a part
 d'explorer les faits les plus
 les plus raffinés de l'histoire.

Peu de temps, Monsieur, l'indivisible
 de la Louvre qui vont aux
 yeux d'art autant qu'à
 leur heureux possesseur : je
 me souviens de vous
 Monsieur de mon privilège
 que j'ai passé en compagnie
 du cheval et de la bête et
 de moi dire la joie que j'ai
 de savoir que d'un de l'autre
 restaurant en France. Aujourd'hui
 je suis un homme de ma profession
 à la fois de la révol, le vent

les chefs d'œuvre qui il admire,
 de l'effort qu'ils firent
 dans le cercle de ceux qui
 lui sont confiés. Et il
 est le plus plus que d'autres
 propices au rêve.

Je vous prie de
 recevoir, Monsieur, l'assurance
 de nos sentiments les
 plus élevés.

J. Charbonneau

Ill. 6. Handwritten letter from Jean Charbonneaux, curator at the Musée du Louvre, addressed to Paul-Louis Weiller, dated 15 March 1948.