


Rocks, Paper, Memory: Wendy Artin's Watercolor Paintings of Ancient Sculptures

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ROCKS, PAPER, MEMORY

WENDY ARTIN'S WATERCOLOR PAINTINGS OF ANCIENT SCULPTURES

APHRODITE

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This exhibition includes many images of the goddess Aphrodite. The earliest of the statues depicted in Artin's paintings is the [Ludovisi Throne](#), a relief of the early 5th century BC showing a clothed Aphrodite rising out of the sea from which she was born.

Nude and seminude images of the goddess Aphrodite first became popular in the mid-4th century BC. They often seem to depict the goddess in the act of bathing—and of being surprised at her bath—but they are also associated with her mythical birth from the sea. One of the most famous such images in antiquity was a painting by the Greek artist Apelles, known as the [Aphrodite Anadyomene](#) (Aphrodite Rising from the Sea). An ancient description of the painting says that it shows how the goddess "grasping her dripping hair with her hands, ... wrings the foam from the wet locks" (*The Greek Anthology V*, trans. W. R. Paton [Cambridge, MA 1918] 16.178). Numerous small statuettes and reliefs of a standing or crouching [Aphrodite holding her hair](#) are thought to have been indirectly inspired by this painting.

Similar images show Aphrodite putting on a necklace or binding up her hair. Made of bronze, marble, faience, or terracotta, these statuettes would have been appropriate as offerings to the goddess or as marriage gifts. Included in the exhibition are a number of such objects from Roman Egypt, including two bronze statuettes, a [faience plaque](#), and a [plaster mold](#) for making terracotta figurines; also included is one example of such a terracotta figurine, not from Egypt, however, but from Seleucia-on-the-Tigris in Iraq. This figure type is also represented by Artin's painting of a [marble statuette from Rhodes](#).

Another famous seminude image of Aphrodite was the [Venus de Milo](#), an over-life-sized marble statue of the 2nd century BC, apparently set up in a Gymnasium on the island of Melos; among other things, Aphrodite was the divine protectress of young men. The [head of Aphrodite](#) may have come from a broadly similar statue.

Wendy Artin and Christopher Ratté in Dialogue

<p>Aphrodite</p> <p>CR: Let's talk about Aphrodite. The figure type represented by the statuette from Rhodes that you used to illustrate one of Heaney's poems is known as the Aphrodite Anadyomene—Aphrodite Rising from the Sea. The conventional interpretation of her gesture is that, having just emerged from the sea from which she was born, she is wringing the water out of her hair. You pointed out to me that this is</p>	<p>not the way most people would do that (they would gather their hair into a single skein and use both hands to wring it out, like a towel). What do you think she is doing?</p> <p>WA: There are other images of Aphrodite Anadyomene where she appears more convincingly to be wringing out her hair. Here, unless she is planning to sit with her arms up in an uncomfortable position until her hair air-dries, it looks unlikely that that is what she is doing.</p>	<p>For a painter, she is gracefully occupying a nicely rectangular shape of space, which eliminates the typical repetitive triangle made by the head and shoulders. But being a classical statue, it is unlikely that the sculptor simply asked her to stay in that fairly odd pose... To me, she looks like she is somewhat demurely displaying or making an offering of her hair.</p> <p>More of the dialogue</p>
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This website was created in conjunction with the interdisciplinary exhibition *Rocks, Paper, Memory: Wendy Artin's Watercolor Paintings of Ancient Sculptures*, presented by the Kelsey Museum of Archaeology in summer and fall 2015. The exhibition, curated by Christopher Ratté, reflects on inspiration, emulation, and realism in ancient and contemporary art; it features a series of watercolor paintings of ancient Greek and Roman sculptures, created by Wendy Artin, an American artist who lives in Rome. These stunning pictures are displayed alongside ancient objects from the Kelsey Museum's collection; the show also includes other aspects of Artin's work, such as figure paintings and Roman landscapes.

The central piece of the online exhibition is a series of large-scale paintings representing the Parthenon frieze, a band of relief sculpture, running around the wall of the Parthenon temple in

Athens. The subject of the frieze is a long procession, consisting of a cavalry parade; toward the head of the parade are men and women bearing offerings or leading animals to sacrifice. The desktop version of the website displays all six of these life-size watercolors as a continuous band, while in a real gallery space they could not be placed on the same wall.

Another unique project highlighted in the exhibition is a group of small-scale paintings created for *Stone from Delphi*, a limited-edition volume of poems by Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney. Wendy Artin was commissioned to produce a series of pictures to accompany the book, and she chose to make watercolor paintings of ancient sculptures of gods and heroes featured in Heaney's poems. Original paintings in the series are presented here, including those reproduced in the book and several that have not been previously published.

The exhibition at the Kelsey Museum showcased Wendy Artin's paintings in the context of ancient sculptures, figurines, and coins from the museum's permanent collections. The online version of the exhibition takes a further step, placing some of the watercolors in direct dialogue with ancient objects. The website also features an essay written in a form of dialogue between the curator and the artist. To mimic a printed article, and to further emphasize the horizontal movement of the Parthenon frieze, the dialogue is presented as a horizontal sequence of columns of text (desktop version); it includes hyperlinks to related paintings and objects. Each of the theme pages is also accompanied by an excerpt from the dialogue.

The Rocks, Paper, Memory website was conceived and implemented in house. It is fully responsive and targets diverse audiences, including art lovers, students, and scholars.

Credits:

Exhibition curator: Christopher Ratté

Artist: Wendy Artin

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