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Marcantonio Raimondi, *Crouching Venus*, c. 1509

Picturing Venus in the Renaissance Print

The Hunterian Art Gallery, University of Glasgow

9 March – 29 June 2014

Exhibition Portfolio

This exhibition and its accompanying catalogue present the results of a programme of research, *Medial Translations in Renaissance Art*, conducted by Genevieve Warwick (University of Edinburgh), funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council and undertaken in collaboration with the Hunterian Art Gallery. It is concerned with the representation of ancient sculpture in Renaissance print-making, and thus with a doubled act of artistic translation, across time and across medium. For developments in the art of printmaking occurred at the same historical moment as the discovery of many of what would become Europe's most celebrated antiquities. The exhibition focuses on the historical proximity between the print and antique revival, to consider the role of the print as a central means of both interpreting and disseminating a new-found visual knowledge of antique figural forms. This is further complicated, in many instances, by the recollection of paintings after the most celebrated antique statuary, in which the graven black and white lines of a print seek to translate not only the volumes of three-dimensional sculpture but also the colours of paint. The exhibition focuses on the figure of Venus as one of the most copied antique forms both in Renaissance painting and printmaking, and whom artists widely understood as the embodiment of beauty in art.

This portfolio is intended to complement and extend the research presented in the catalogue in bringing together a record of the exhibition text panels and the sequence of the display with installation shots. Following an introductory section concerned with the proliferation of plaster casts after antiquities, and with printmaking techniques in Renaissance Europe, the exhibition grouped the prints that formed the core of the display under three main themes:

- artistic definitions of beauty bound up in the figure of Venus
- the figure of Venus as an exemplar of a Renaissance art of citation and imitation based on the artistic canons of antiquity
- the recourse to ancient figurations of Venus in the instruction of artists in the nascent art academies of Early Modern Europe.

<http://www.gla.ac.uk/hunterian/visit/exhibitions/exhibitionarchive/picturingvenus/>

Picturing Venus

This exhibition explores the image of the ancient Roman goddess Venus (known as Aphrodite to the Greeks), who features prominently in Renaissance art as a symbol of female beauty. The selection focuses on engravings, mainly from Italy 1500-1600, in which we see artists designing idealised human figures based on ancient sculpture.

Engraving developed as an art-form in the mid-15th century, at about the same time as the invention of printing with moveable type. The expanding market for books meant an increase in production and a lowering of the price of paper. This gave a stimulus to the makers of printed images, whether the cheap hand-coloured woodcuts sold at Christian shrines or the more expensive engravings that some great artists made as a commercial exploitation of their studio imagery.

Renaissance artists were significant buyers of these prints, which they acquired to extend their knowledge of figure drawing, composition and stories from the Greek and Roman world. These images show how the archaeological focus of artists working around 1500 established Venus as the idealised embodiment of beauty in the female nude. Venus Rapidly became the emblem of art itself.

Crouching Venus

Mid- 19th-century cast of a Hellenistic sculpture of c. 250 B.C.
plaster

Glasgow School of Art, established in 1845, has an impressive collection of casts of antique sculpture and architectural ornament which formed an important component of early museums and art schools. In Glasgow, as in earlier academies, it was necessary to show proficiency in 'drawing from the antique' before moving on to drawing from life or modelling.

The Crouching Venus, the original of which is sometimes attributed to a Bithynian sculptor called Doidalsas, appears in Marcantonio's engraving of c.1509.

Lent by Glasgow School of Art



Venus: Art and Beauty

The ancient Roman goddess Venus, known as Aphrodite in Greek, was among the earliest as well as the most enduring of archaic divinities. Her first manifestations are as a fertility goddess whose worship was thought to vouchsafe plenitude. From this evolved her identity as the goddess of love and desire. This was embodied in representations of the life-size female nude made by classical Greek sculptors in the period c.500-350 B.C. These idealised figures were understood as forms of perfected beauty in art, and were widely imitated by Roman sculptors in the period 200 B.C. – 100 A.D. Thus Venus came to denote the beauty of art, transforming her viewer into an art-lover. Renaissance printmakers used the well-known poses of ancient Venus statues to signal a figure of great artistic beauty in their work.



Albrecht Dürer (Nuremberg 1471-1528)

Adam and Eve, 1504

engraving

Dürer was among the first to construct human figures using ideal proportions derived from ancient sculpture. Here he applied his classical knowledge to the Bible story (Genesis 3), in which the serpent tempts Eve with an apple from the Tree of Knowledge. The figures resemble marble sculptures of the gods Apollo and Venus rather than naked flesh. His very original and influential idea was that the first man and woman were divinely beautiful since they were created by the hand of God.

GLAHA 3491 McCallum bequest,1948

Hans Baldung Grien (Schwäbisch Gmünd 1484/5-1545 Strasbourg)

Adam and Eve, 1519

woodcut

In 1503, aged 18, Baldung joined Dürer in Nuremberg, and managed the workshop during his master's second visit to Italy, 1505-7. A comparison of the two reveals the much greater extent of Dürer's assimilation of classical ideas from Italy. Baldung's woodcut is a more overtly erotic image than Dürer's *Adam and Eve* engraving. Although the statuesque Eve has the body of the goddess Venus, Baldung's focus is on human psychology rather than ideal proportions.

GLAHA 120 McCallum bequest, 1948

Marcantonio Raimondi (Bologna c.1480–1527/34)

Mars, Venus and Eros, 1508

engraving

This early work is one of a small group signed with a monogram MAF, and dated. It reveals that before he moved to Rome c.1509, Marcantonio was an accomplished artist who had studied ancient sculpture. In addition this work closely follows Dürer, especially his *Hercules* of c.1498–9 (Holl. 63). The seated figure of Mars echoes the famous ancient marble, the 'Belvedere Torso', which inspired figures in Michelangelo's *Battle of Cascina* cartoon, which Marcantonio may have seen in Florence on his way to Rome.

GLAHA 241 McCallum bequest, 1948

Master of the Die (fl. c.1532–33)

Venus Wounded by the thorns of a Rose, 1532

engraving

Antonio Salamanca (1478–1562) published many prints with Roman subjects and his shop on Rome's Campo de' Fiori was a centre of learned conversation. This print shows an episode from the Latin poet Ovid's story of Venus and the mortal Adonis, who was killed by a boar he was hunting. As she mourned, Venus wandered, cutting her bare foot on a white rose, which her blood stained red. That flower has become an emblem of love's power to hurt as well as delight.

GLAHA 10154 W.R. Scott bequest, 1940

Hendrik Goltzius (Mülbracht 1558–1617 Haarlem)

Venus, Bacchus and Ceres, 1595

engraving

Goltzius was extremely successful, his work in demand throughout Europe, not least with the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II in Prague, who owned the silver plate from which this exquisite work was printed. It is inscribed with an ancient motto, from the playwright Terence: Without Ceres and Bacchus Venus grows cold. It remains good advice: food and wine are necessary if Venus is to retain her love-giving power.

GLAHA 228 McCallum bequest, 1948

Imitating Venus

As the measure of female beauty in art, the forms of Venus inherited from antiquity became the touchstone of ideal beauty throughout the Renaissance. Ancient sculpture had represented Venus in a series of poses that became canonical – crouching, seated, or standing with her weight on one leg, her arms shielding her body – and these were widely imitated by Renaissance painters and printmakers who rendered her from a succession of viewpoints. They further embellished the theme of her beauty in art by ornamenting her femininity with flowers, lush gardens and verdant landscapes, or through a counterpoint with heroic male nudes and sweetly playful cupids. The artistic skill and beauty of a print was seen to lie in its ability to translate the visual effects of painting and sculpture into the inky black lines of an engraving.



Giovanni Jacopo Caraglio (Verona c.1505–1565 Krakow) after Rosso
Fiorentino; (Florence 1494–1540 Fontainebleau)

Venus, 1526

engraving

Caraglio's set of 20 prints of the Olympian gods were best-sellers, engraved from drawings by the fashionable artist Rosso Fiorentino. According to myth, Venus was born from the sea. Standing on a shell, she appears to come forward as she wrings the salt water from her hair. Buyers of Caraglio's prints would have recognised in this lively image of the goddess's birth an archetypal image invented by the ancient Greek painter Apelles and known as the *Venus Anadyomene* (Venus rising).

GLAHA 40023 Purchased, 1993, with support from the Art Fund and the
National Fund for Acquisitions

Marcantonio Raimondi (Bologna c.1480–1527/34)

Crouching Venus, c.1509

engraving

Venus is shown in the pose of a famous Hellenistic statue of c.250 B.C., represented here by a plaster cast. The striding Cupid figure, also based on an ancient sculpture, also appears in Marcantonio's *Mars, Venus and Eros*. Various marble versions of the statue were available for study by artists in early 16th-century Rome, including one in the Royal Collection and currently on loan to the British Museum. It was possibly that statue, with its head intact, that Marcantonio saw in Rome.

GLAHA 10134 W.R. Scott bequest, 1940

Marcantonio Raimondi (Bologna c.1480–1527/34) after Raphael (Urbino 1483–1520 Rome)

The Judgement of Paris, c.1517–1520
engraving

Raphael's scholarly interest in ancient Roman culture was often reflected in designs he made for prints. Based on a sarcophagus relief, the Judgement represents the moment of human weakness which led to the Trojan War. Faced with three goddesses Juno, Minerva and Venus, the Trojan prince Paris, awarded the golden apple to Venus, in the *contraposto* pose of the Medici Venus. Empowered by the goddess of love, he then seduced Helen, wife of Menelaus, a central theme of Homer's *Iliad*.

GLAHA 6745 W.R. Scott bequest, 1940

Marcantonio Raimondi (Bologna c.1480–1527/34) after Raphael (Urbino 1483–1520 Rome)

Venus after her Bath, c.1516-20

engraving

According to myth, Venus was born from the sea and so images of her bathing naked are central to her story. These two engravings reproduce pictures designed by Raphael in 1516 for a bathroom (*stufetta*) in the Vatican apartments of Cardinal Bibbiena. The pose of the figure to the left is based on an ancient sculpture known as the 'nymph alla spina' in the Uffizi, Florence. The action is altered to fit the context with Venus drying her foot.

GLAHA 10142 W.R. Scott bequest, 1940

Agostino Veneziano (Venice c.1490–c.1540 Rome)
After Raphael
Venus and Eros, 1516
engraving

Like *Venus after her Bath*, this print is based on one of Raphael's frescoes in Bibbiena's *stufetta*. This print is dated the same year as the commission, which shows that engravers rapidly exploited Raphael's latest imagery. It illustrates the text of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* X, 525-528, in which Cupid embraces Venus and accidentally grazes her breast with one of his arrows, causing her to fall in love with the mortal, Adonis. Venus's figure is adapted from a Roman marble, now in the Vatican.

GLAHA 10138 W.R. Scott bequest, 1940

Attributed to Jan Muller (Amsterdam 1571–1628) after Hendrick Goltzius
Venus and Cupid, c.1588–1600
engraving; trial proof

This unrecorded, possibly unique, Mannerist print shows Venus and Cupid reclining in an embrace. Deriving from the ancient marble sleeping nymph known as the Ariadne, in the Vatican collections, the image is related to a lost drawing by Hendrick Goltzius after Michelangelo/Pontormo's design for Venus reclining with Cupid. Like his master Goltzius, Muller made stylish prints on ancient subjects for the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II in Prague. For specially privileged collectors, Muller sometimes created rare prints, which he left unfinished as a demonstration of his virtuoso technique.

GLAHA 7350 W.R. Scott bequest, 1940

Unknown Italian engraver after Marcantonio

Venus, Cupid and Minerva from the Judgement of Paris, c.1520–30
engraving

This print copies the group of Minerva, and Venus and Cupid from Marcantonio's *Judgement of Paris* engraving. Its function was presumably to provide artists with a nude figure, seen from more than one angle, as an aid to drawing. It is evidence of the extraordinary success of the *Judgment of Paris* engraving and of Raphael's influence over successive generations of artists.

GLAHA 10147 W.R. Scott bequest, 1940

Unknown Italian engraver after Titian (Pieve di Cadore 1480/85–1576 Venice)
Venus and Adonis, c.1573
engraving

This engraving is a commercial exploitation of Titian's *Venus and Adonis*, painted in 1553 for King Phillip II. Venus, with one leg hanging down, was taken from the figure of 'Psyche' in an ancient relief which Titian may have known from an engraving such as that shown nearby. The engraver added Latin verses which point the moral of the tale, as well as a small scene illustrating Adonis's death, which is not present in Titian's original.

GLAHA 7687 W.R. Scott bequest, 1940

Pieter van Sompel (Antwerp c.1600–1643 Haarlem) after Peter Paul Rubens
(Siegen 1577–1640 Antwerp)
Erichthonius in his Basket, c.1630
engraving

Rubens explored this theme in two paintings. The engraving's inscription reveals that Rubens used this mythological subject to explore expression in ancient sculpture. Erichthonius was entrusted as a baby to the daughters of Cecrops, each of whom is modelled on the work of a Greek sculptor: Myron was famous for the faces of his figures, Lysippos beautiful shoulders, Praxiteles the finest eyes. Nobody, Rubens adds, could make a statue speak. The daughter to the far right is based on the 'Medici Venus'.

GLAHA 9152 William Hunter bequest, 1783

Agostino Veneziano (Venice c.1490–c.1540 Rome)
after Giulio Romano (1499–1546)
Venus and Eros, c.1520

In ancient and Renaissance poetry, landscape is often the evocative setting for a love story. In this erudite engraving, Venus, with one leg hanging down, is based on an alabaster relief of Amor and Psyche, the original of which was well known among Renaissance artists. The same ancient relief was used by Titian for the goddess in his *Venus and Adonis* painting. Possibly, Titian owned an impression of this print from Raphael's circle, and used it as reference for the ancient relief.

GLAHA 10151 W.R. Scott bequest, 1940

Venus in the Art Academy

With the emergence of academies for the instruction of novice artists during the Renaissance, drawing after figurines as well as full-size sculptures became the means of training visual memory in the imitation of the ideal forms of antiquity. Drawing after plaster casts taken from Roman sculptures became commonplace in artistic training and indeed has continued to some extent to the present day as evidenced by the Crouching Venus cast from the Glasgow School of Art. The increasing popularity of printed images played a key role in the circulation of the ideal forms of antique sculpture across Europe. Prints as well as casts served artists both in the academy and in the studio as the reproducible means of diffusing a canon of perfect classical forms. The prints show artists learning by copying after plaster casts and figurines, including Venus, in order to train themselves in the forms of classical beauty before turning to the imitation of nature.



Battista di Parma (active Parma 1587)
after Jan van der Straet (Bruges 1523-1605 Florence)
The Practitioners of the Fine Arts, 1587
engraving

A copy of a famous print by Cornelis Cort, this work reproduces a drawing by Stradanus, who gave anatomical demonstrations at the Accademia del Disegno in Florence. Using allegory, it reveals the practices of the first official academy, which opened in 1563. High up, masters are creating public art; below, boys learn to draw, with a statue of Venus on the table to the right. The goddess is for students to draw from, but is also essential as an emblem of beauty.

GLAHA 6054 W.R. Scott bequest, 1940

Pier-Francesco Alberti (Borgo San Sepolcro 1584–1638 Rome)

The Painters' Academy

engraving, c.1615

This image may represent Rome's Academy of St Luke (founded 1593). Various aspects of the painter's art are represented. To the left, boys are receiving their initiation to drawing the human figure; in the centre, an expert demonstrates geometry; students are also studying perspective and anatomy. On a shelf behind, a small selection of casts, including a torso of Venus, illustrates the importance of sculpture as a source of good design and inspiration from the antique.

GLAHA 52161 Purchased from Christopher Mendez, 1971

William Hogarth (London 1697-1764)
Analysis of Beauty Plate I, 1752
engraving

Made to accompany his treatise for artists, the *Analysis of Beauty Plate I* is concerned with didactic methods and with the attitudes of British society, which praised ancient art in an uncritical way. It is set in the yard of John Cheere (1709– 1787), a statuary who churned out casts of ancient sculptures for the gardens of the nobility. The centrepiece, of course, is the 'Medici Venus', which was by then the best known of all ancient statues.

GLAHA 16096
Acquired by exchange from Glasgow University Library, 1980