

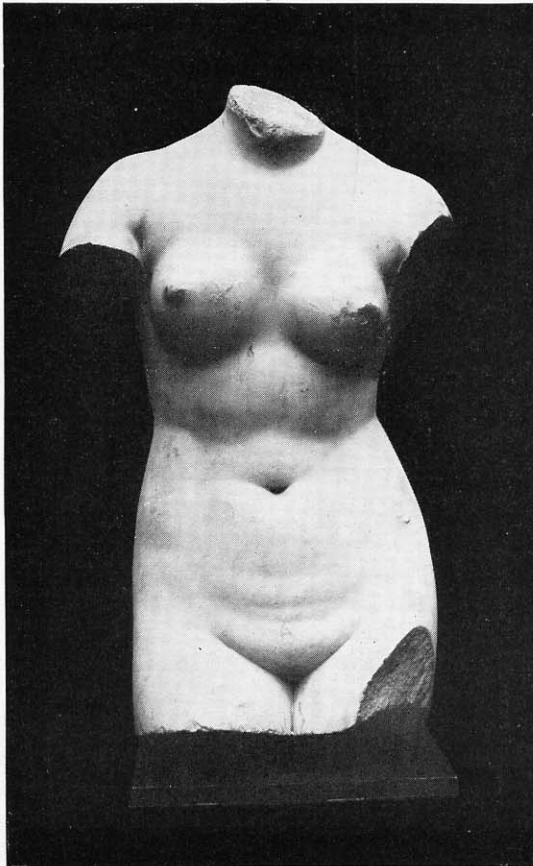


BULLETIN OF
THE DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS
of the City of Detroit

Vol. V

MAY, 1924

No. 8



APHRODITE TORSO. GREEK
CITY APPROPRIATION, 1924

SIGNIFICANT GREEK TORSO ACQUIRED

In the Parthenon the Greeks created the most perfect building which has ever been constructed. But these ancients esteemed their painting as their greatest Fine Art, while later generations have tended to point to sculpture as their most typical artistic expression. Between the years 600 and 323 B. C., the date of Alexander the Great's death, Greek sculpture proper had its rise, attained perfection, as far as was within human power, and already had caught the germs of decline. Pheidias, perhaps the greatest of all sculptors, lived in Greece in the Fifth Century B. C. To his charge Perikles, the great ruler of those golden days, gave all public works of artistic character. Citizens and artists worked for the glory and beautification of the State. If any criticism of such work is warranted, it is that there appears a certain coldness, a lack of the human and of individuality, that which makes daily life so interesting in the living.

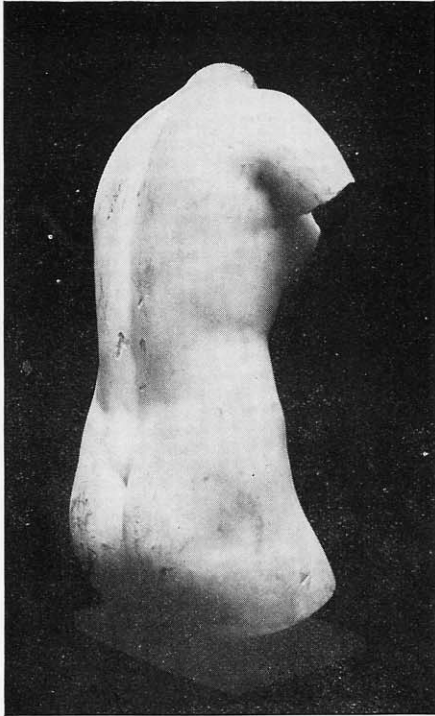
Everything in the Fifth Century B. C., was of the "State." The Fourth became that of the "Individual." No longer were the Greeks satisfied with heroic deities, nor with the distinctly physical athletes of Myron or Polykleitos. Nor was it enough that the figures conformed to an arbitrary, geometric scheme imposed from without.

Praxiteles realized that the human body is perhaps the most beautiful

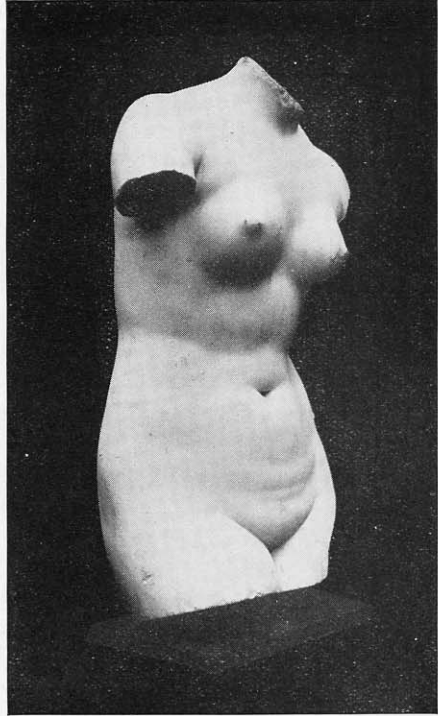
organism in existence but also, more than that, a living sentient combination of the physical, mental and emotional. And so his sculptured figures are usually at ease, the flesh with its tremor of life, the eyes expressive of real feeling. After that Lysippos, instead of making figures seven heads high, said that man appears taller than he actually is. Therefore, the sculptor should represent man as he seems to be, about eight heads high.

The Detroit Institute of Arts has recently acquired a most significant classical sculpture of this later age. It is a female torso in marble, in an excellent state of preservation with patina that is very lovely in part. It was purchased from a collection of the Count of Estourmel, of the Chateau of Oygaldes near Marseilles, where it had long existed. This marble is beautiful for many reasons. The surfaces are soft; the curves are pleasing. The undulating contours reveal a subtle play of lights and shadows which melt into each other imperceptibly. The proportions are perfect. The marble is translucent as are Greek marbles in contrast with the Italian. It has the granular consistency of the Greek Island marbles, particularly of the Parian. The surface is better preserved in the lower than in the upper part of the torso.

The figure is relaxed as in various subjects which Praxiteles carved,



APHRODITE TORSO.



GREEK IV-III CENTURY. MARBLE

such as the "Marble Faun," the "Hermes," his "Apollo Sauroktenos" and the "Venus of Cnidus." In fact, the figure shows distinct similarity to the last mentioned in the bend of the body, but reversed left for right. In Praxitelian figures the weight was ordinarily supported on one leg, the other left free and relaxed. The arm on the other side of the body would also help in the support, resting on some accessory such as the trunk of a tree. From the delicate turn of this Venus torso some such arrangement appears likely.

There are two slight bosses on the

legs, indicating perhaps that a support touched the figure at one point or that drapery covered the lower part of the body. Both of these elements, though no longer evident, may have formerly existed. The small neck suggests a proportionally small head with the hair probably in a rather closely bound coiffure, for no traces of falling locks are to be seen on the shoulders. This, the depression at the base of the neck in front, the breasts and the general attitude of the torso resemble the Cnidian Venus which also had a support against one side of the figure

and drapes falling about the limbs. The arms and hands may have been placed as in several Venuses, of the Naples Museum. In that series the right hand touches the left breast while the left is lower, before the body.

The type is said to have analogies with the Fourth Century Cyrene Venus in the Terme, a marble copy after a bronze that may go back even to Euphranor. The Esquiline Venus in the Conservatori collections, Rome, with porpoise and vase support at the side, is a Third Century example of perhaps even closer resemblance. The torso in Detroit is evidently not copied after a bronze. It seems to be Greek, late Fourth Century or Third Century B. C., at

the latest, in the manner of a well known type. It is fine in conception, exceptional in technique and of rhythmic posture.

The figure has all the dignified beauty of the greatest Greek manner, the grace and individuality of the later days with none of the coldness of the Fifth Century, nor the triviality of the later times. One of those rare creations which inspires and becomes lovelier the more it is seen, it is among the finest Greek marbles in America and one of the most significant additions to the permanent collections of the Art Institute, for which it was purchased from the appropriation given by the City of Detroit.

R. P.

FOUNDERS SOCIETY PRESENTS A JOHN SLOAN

The genre picture, dealing with the little incidents of every day life has always been held in high esteem. It holds the mirror up to nature and reveals a peculiarly human aspect of the time in which it was produced. To Teniers, Van Ostade and Jan Steen, all excellent painters of the Lowlands of the seventeenth century, we are indebted for a portrayal of the bouyant and frolicsome spirit of the common people at play.

The satiric brush of Hogarth pointing out the folly of his time found scant appreciation in his day, but Time, which has a judgment over which our opinions have no control, has given this painter a pre-

eminent place among his English contemporaries of the eighteenth century.

Nearer our own time, we recall the belated recognition of Daumier, whose keen observation and incisive portrayal of human nature blinded his contemporaries to the artistic value of his work.

If American art of our time has a parallel to these able genre painters of the past, it is John Sloan, who puts his finger on the heart throbs of humanity in the highways and byways of a metropolitan city. He is interested in the common people, their environment and the conditions under which they live, and in



"McSORLEY'S BAR." JOHN SLOAN
PRESENTED BY DETROIT MUSEUM OF ART FOUNDERS SOCIETY

his walks among them he sees a bond of brotherhood in the give-and-take of the great human family, and this he points out in his incisive way without moralizing and without bitterness. The deep humanity of his portrayal is tinged with humour, in which he laughs with his subjects rather than at them. He pokes fun at the foibles and follies of human nature, but he tempers it by a gentleness born of kindred emotions. Mr. Sloan's mellowed experience in the field of illustration was the best preparation he could have had for his painting. It colored his viewpoint of life with sympathetic understanding and at the same time

made him extremely proficient in the portrayal of types.

Mr. Sloan is a man of strong convictions, but tolerant. His belief in self expression amounts almost to a creed. The President of the Society of Independent Artists, he no more believes that all of the two thousand works in that exhibition are good than you or I; but he believes that the public can best learn to appreciate art by choosing between good and bad exhibits for themselves instead of having someone else choose for them.

In the purchase of "*McSorley's Bar*" for the permanent collection of the Museum, the Detroit Museum

of Art Founders Society has added another important work to its large list of benefactions. In these days of constitutional restraint the subject may appear outré and bizarre. It is neither. And to disabuse the partisan mind of any affront they may see in it, it antedates the Eighteenth Amendment by a considerable lapse of time. It is one of the few available early works of John Sloan, which possesses that fresh instinct for life so characteristic of his works. There is wit in this picture, but the satiric sting is absent. It is a gentle wit, recording human frailty, but tempered with sympathetic understanding. At the time when this work was painted such scenes were a commonplace. The dark back room, the mahogany bar with foot rail, the refrigerator storage of free lunch, the clutter of theatrical handbills, chromos, plaster casts, souvenirs and other clusters of bric-a-brac, which form the background of this picture are typical of these congregating places of men.

Sloan adroitly peoples this commonplace world with a few well chosen habitués (poignant character studies all)—human beings, which all ages will understand. Apart from the graphic portrayal of a now supposedly extinct social institution, there is a compelling beauty in the unity of so much extraneous subject matter and the fine tonality in which

the scene is enveloped. It is a low toned picture, but in the beautiful registry of light and shadow, in the graduation of tone from the white accents of the shirtsleeved barkeep and the aproned waiter about which the composition centers, to the half shadowed patrons on the outskirts, there is much beautiful color. It is a well thought out conception that retains the happy faculty of seeming a momentary and accidental incident of every day life. And in this spontaneity lies a great part of its charm.

Mr. Sloan writes of the place pictured: "‘McSorley’s Old House at Home’ on Seventh Street east of Third Avenue is standing today as it has since some time in the 1850’s. It was run by John McSorley until his death at 87 years in 1910, and since that time by his son William, in strict accord with his father’s ethics. Nothing but ale was ever sold over this bar;—no beer, no mixed drinks, no ‘drunks.’ A place where the world seems shut out, where there is no time, no turmoil. Had all American saloons been of this kind, no Eighteenth Amendment would now be driving us to ‘hard liquor.’ I hope that Detroit will enjoy this record of New York’s temperance days. McSorley’s Ale House was the temple of temperance."

C. H. B.

ADDRESS OF PRESIDENT RALPH H. BOOTH

ON THE OCCASION OF THE LAYING OF THE CORNERSTONE OF THE
DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS, APRIL 29, 1924



LAYING THE CORNERSTONE OF THE NEW BUILDING OF THE
DETROIT INSTITUTE OF ARTS, APRIL 29th, 1924.

Ralph H. Booth, President of the Arts Commission of the city of Detroit,
Laying the Cornerstone.

Our city has achieved first place in industry and an enviable place in wealth. We are here today to crown these accomplishments by laying the corner stone of this building which shall testify that our true ambition is not mechanical production only. This but supplies the opportunity with which we shall gather around us the finer things to which we aspire, and give tangible evidence to the world that Detroit is a city of enlightenment and progress, where we claim the best that civilization offers in order that our own lives may be fuller, and richer, and contribute to the true betterment of future generations.

It is the lasting quality of art that appeals to us today. Art survives everything else. If this building proves to be a great work of art it will be preserved by an intelligent race throughout the ages and will grow in appreciation and value with the years.

Commerce, industry and governmental activities, such as those that supply protection and comfort, do not typify our real purpose. We are justly proud of our police and fire departments, our hospitals, rapid transit, of our paved streets, and pure water, but these minister only to the comforts and needs of civilization.

Our spiritual and religious life is a higher and finer thing and it is for this life "worth while" that we seek the higher plane.

In the middle ages the arts were fostered by the church and prevailed within the cloistered walls of monasteries. In the Renaissance, art flourished because of the patronage of princes and kings, who in most cases suppressed the masses of the people.

Today, we represent a free people building for themselves a great free Institute of Fine Arts to complete this beautiful Centre of Arts and Letters. Shall we desire better evidence that the day is already here when art will function by and for the great masses of the people?

It is often said that art is a luxury, but this is a mistaken view. Art is also a utility. Education in art will rebound to the solid interests of a people. We go to Paris to buy beautiful things, and Parisians make beautiful things, because they breathe an atmosphere surcharged with artistic spirit. However, we will lose the utility if we center our thought exclusively upon it. We must hold to the ideal of beauty, keeping beauty to the front and the useful and the substantial will follow.

Today we know art as a necessity. It is necessary as applied to production of things for sale. Art education for the consumer is of great importance, because in the education of taste it becomes a matter of economy. Too often there is a mistaken tendency to rate things by money value alone.

In addition to the practical necessity for art, there is the spiritual necessity. Art is necessary to the most hard-working life, which must have the mental and spiritual stimulus found in color and form, in music and in books. To this must be added "Art for Art's Sake." The pure aesthetic pleasure is so desirable as to now be regarded a necessity. Man must enlarge his nature beyond the material or man will die. "Man cannot live by bread alone."

Enjoyment and appreciation of the beautiful is a common heritage of the race—a gift in all of us to be cultivated.

In behalf of the Arts Commission of Detroit, representing all the people, I lay this cornerstone of the Institute of Arts with the promise that this building shall stand for the democracy of art, and the aim will be to bring the best in art nearer and nearer to the life of every citizen.