



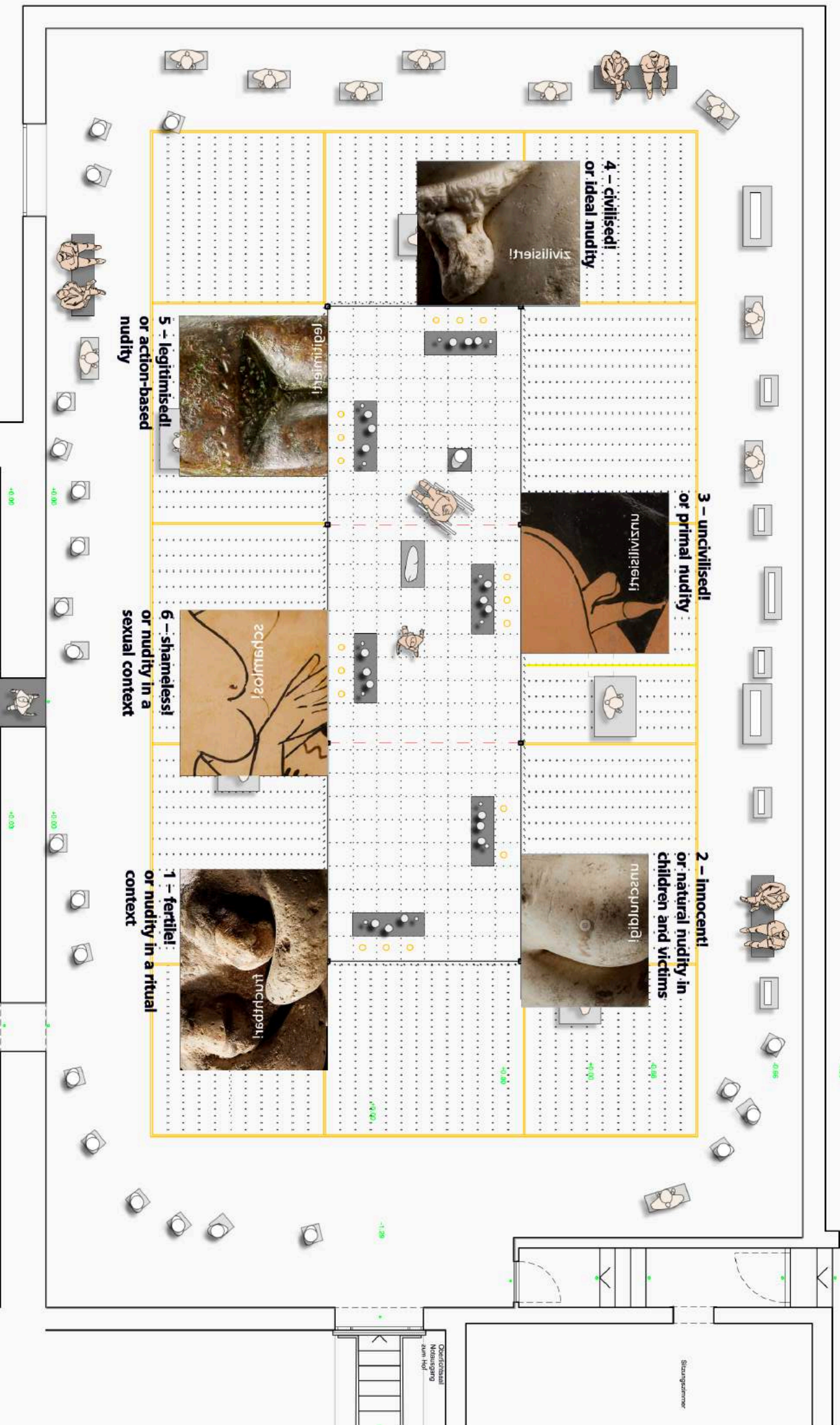
naked!

The art of nudity

Ausgang
Hof
-1.00

Sitzgebmee

Oberstahl
Nebengang
zum Hof



Saal 01

Spiegel-Tunnel

-0.00

-0.00

-0.00

-1.20

Introduction

Museum censorship?

Images of naked humans, gods and heroes were omnipresent in the ancient cultures and particularly in Greek art. More than half of our Greek statues are partially or fully naked. In the history of art of more recent eras, too, the artistic nude became perhaps the most important constant. Thanks to the popularity of the subject, nudity eventually became generally accepted as a valid form of artistic expression. But have we now reached a turning point? As a result of last year's #MeToo debate and, even prior to that, of a growing awareness of the need to protect women and children from excessive sexualisation, there has been increasing criticism and censorship of unrestrained depictions of the human body. And not only that – even historical works of art are now being reassessed. In an act of overzealous self-censorship, some museums have voluntarily taken the unprecedented step of taking down pictures by old masters that show nudity or have covered the statues of naked gods and goddesses in their antiquities collections. Very recently, the censorship of artistic nudes on social media has earned some disapproving comments. The Little Mermaid of Copenhagen, a statue that has been photographed millions of times, was even removed from a Facebook post because of its nudity. What once seemed artistic and natural is now being perceived as “exposed” and “indecent”. How will we deal with nudity in the future? Will we be forced, before long, to cover exposed body parts on all our statues and vase paintings? It will not go that far, of course, but we would like to use this exhibition to raise a basic question, which has rarely been asked so bluntly before: why were ancient sculptures so often naked?

Why naked?

Depictions of nudity are as old as art itself. There are only a few cultures, such as Islam, where the depiction of a (naked) body is taboo; in the ancient Mediterranean cultures represented at our Museum, however, the naked body is a dominant motif in works of art. There are many reasons why the human body is so often shown either partially or fully naked and they are directly dependent on changing ideals and contexts. The nude images from the early cultures of the Orient and Greece mainly depicted female nature and fertility deities with disproportionately large breasts, bellies and pelvic areas. In archaic and classical Greece, however, male nudes were predominant. The naked, well-proportioned male physique symbolised civilised man and the heroic gods. Because of its more pronounced sexualisation, however, the female body remained covered for a long time. Depictions of mortal women in the nude are therefore only found in erotic images that circulated in private and behind closed doors.

Besides these depictions intended to encourage (male) voyeuristic curiosity, there were also images where nudity made completely different and often negative statements. Both in Egypt and in the Near East, and later in Greece and Rome, prisoners and enemies or marginalised groups such as slaves and the poor were depicted naked in order to expose them to derision. Their nudity emphasised their helplessness and vulnerability and stressed the humiliation of their fate.

There were thus many and sometimes diverging reasons for depicting nudity in ancient sculpture; some religious, some social and political. Depending on the context and date of the image, nudity can signify invincibility or defencelessness, naturalness or immorality.

This special exhibition is therefore divided into the following six areas:

fertile! – nudity in a ritual context

innocent! – natural nudity in children and victims

uncivilised! – primal nudity

civilised! – ideal nudity

legitimised! – action-based nudity

unashamed! – nudity in a sexual context

Aphrodite of Knidos

Roman marble copy of the statue created by Praxiteles around 340 BC

Reconstruction from plaster casts taken from a torso at the Vatican and a head at the Louvre

This is the earliest full female nude in Greek monumental sculpture. The goddess has shed her clothes to take a bath. The viewer thus becomes, as it were, a voyeur. When put on display at Aphrodite's sanctuary of Knidos, the statue caused quite a scandal – and subsequently became a tourist attraction!

Nudity in the ancient cultures

Nudity in the culture of ancient Egypt

In Egyptian culture, nudity signified, first and foremost, a "lack of status", because an Egyptian's social rank was defined by dress. As a consequence, children, like foreigners and enemies, were depicted naked, since they had no status (yet). The same applied to dwarfs, as well as to farmers and workers, particularly since physical labour was generally performed without clothes.

On the other hand, of course, nudity also played an important role in eroticism. Whilst naked girls on the handles of toiletries pointed to female allure, funerary statuettes of naked women, the so-called concubines, also referred to the ability to bear children. From a later period come amulets showing couples making love and depictions of men with oversized penises, emphasising their virility.

Nudity was also widespread amongst the gods. Much as in secular images of children, child gods such as Harpocrates and Shed were depicted naked. As a dwarfish god of fertility and household protector, Bes was also often shown in the nude. Foreign deities such as Qedeshet, the goddess of love, were depicted without clothes, as were deities linked with conception and birth, such as Geb, Nut and Min.

Nudity in the art of the ancient Near East

Depictions of naked bodies are amongst the oldest and most widespread motifs in ancient Near Eastern art. Thousands of stone and terracotta figurines have survived from all periods and areas of the ancient Near East. Depictions of female nudity predominate; images of naked men or couples are much rarer. Because of their wide spatial and chronological distribution, the variety of archaeological contexts and the difficulty in linking the images with any of the preserved written records, proposing a general interpretation for these depictions is an extremely complex task.

However, if we look for a common denominator for all these figurines, beyond the simple fact that they are depicted naked, we see that very many of them have voluptuous body shapes, full breasts and wide hips, and sometimes a particularly prominent vulva. The highlighting of these body parts allows us to conclude that the main emphasis was female fertility.

Nudity in the art of Greece

In the art of Greece, the naked body was omnipresent. Even as early as the Stone and Bronze Ages, idols depicted the recognisably naked bodies of goddesses. The art of the 9th and 8th centuries BC also distinguished men from women by their nudity. The first monumental statues in Greece were created around 700 BC, most of which can be classed as so-called *kouroi*, free-standing nude male youths. The anatomy of *kouroi* did not emphasise any individual features but served to exemplify an ideal norm. The well-trained young bodies of these youths symbolised combat-readiness and self-control: traits that are of benefit to the community. In art, this ideal was also translated to the world of the gods. It is in the perfection of their naked bodies that the power and heroic nature of gods and heroes becomes evident.

Because women were only ever seen fully clothed in public, their bodies, on the other hand, were more sexualised than those of men and therefore remained taboo in the Classical period for a long time. Accordingly, reputable female citizens and respectable goddesses were initially never depicted naked. It was only non-Greek legendary figures such as the Amazons, wild natural daemons, prostitutes, or women that had been victimised that were shown in light clothing or completely naked. In the case of the latter, their nakedness emphasised their helplessness. In the 4th century BC the sculptor Praxiteles dared to create a large sculpture of one of the Olympian goddesses completely in the nude, causing quite a stir. After that, naked women's bodies also became part of the repertoire of monumental sculpture, although largely limited to depictions of Aphrodite. Moreover, showing Aphrodite's exposed body was legitimised by the theme of the image, since the goddess was almost always depicted whilst bathing or performing her beauty care regime. It was not until the last three centuries BC that statues of Aphrodite could also be "gratuitously" naked, showing off her body in a provocative manner, whilst the repertoire of erotic imagery was at the same time extended to other female figures such as maenads.

Nudity amongst the Etruscans and Romans

The Etruscans were very relaxed about nudity. Having maintained close cultural and commercial contacts with Greece since the 6th century BC, they had adopted the Greek tradition of doing sport whilst completely naked. In contrast to the Greek custom, Etruscan women were also allowed to take up sport. As a consequence, there are numerous Etruscan images and sculptures in the round depicting naked men and women engaged in physical activities. Even erotic scenes were permissible, for instance in funerary painting.

In the Roman world, however, public nudity was frowned upon; the only people sometimes glimpsed naked were prostitutes, actors in bawdy street performances, or slaves and prisoners, whose public exposure was intended to humiliate them. The correct Roman attire for sports activities, meanwhile, in contrast to the Greeks and Etruscans, was the loincloth. There were thus very clear rules in Rome about displaying one's body. However, prestigious works of art in public spaces were viewed quite differently, and Romans would have encountered artistic nudity practically everywhere they turned. Vast numbers of Greek statues of naked heroes and deities were copied in Rome and put on display in both private and public contexts. Some rather daring combinations were even chosen by wealthy Romans as funerary monuments; their own portrait heads were fitted to copies of statues of naked gods and goddesses, to signify their hope of posthumous heroisation. However, these memorial statues were not seen by strangers, since they were placed in closed private funerary chambers. The same can be said of a vast number of images of erotic

subjects that were displayed on walls in private houses or circulated on portable objects such as ceramic oil lamps.

Thematical Areas

1 – fertile! or nudity in a ritual context

The earliest prehistoric figurative depictions, so-called idols, represented the body in a highly stylised and disproportionate form, and usually naked. The people of these early cultures used such idols to honour rather indistinct female nature and fertility goddesses. Accordingly, the figures emphasised the parts of a woman's body that were important for conceiving and giving birth: her pelvis, her breasts and her sexual organs. In historical periods, more importance was attached to showing the clothed body, because attire served to define the social status, gender role and importance and function of the deity or person depicted. However, as the original, natural state of the human being, nudity continued to play an important role in ritual and art. As well as the female body, the male body was also of significance to the worship of fertility deities. Images of the Greek fertility god Priapos, for example, show him naked and emphasise his phallus.

Free standing or hanging objects

Base of a wooden coffin with a depiction of the sky-goddess Nut

Egypt, Late Period, 7th/6th centuries BC (BSAe 1147)

The goddess Nut, endowed with full breasts and wide hips and with a large pubic triangle, gave birth to the stars and the sun every day/night. As the goddess of regeneration, she also afforded protection to the deceased and helped them go through their rebirth in the afterlife.

Female mummy mask made of stuccoed canvas

Egypt, Early Middle Kingdom, around 2000 BC (BSAe 1239)

The exposed breasts of this individually designed female mummy mask perhaps alluded to the sky-goddess Nut and her association with fertility and with rebirth in the afterlife.

Marble statuette of the Ephesian Artemis

Asia Minor, Roman, around AD 100 (BS 280)

Artemis was worshipped as a fertility goddess in the city of Ephesus in Asia Minor. This statuette is a miniature copy of the pillar-like cult image. The organs shaped like pouches and arranged in several rows around the chest of the goddess are not her breasts but represent bulls' testicles affixed to the statue, symbolising the life-giving force of nature.

Showcase 1

1. Female clay statuette

North-eastern Syria (Tell Halaf), 5th millennium BC (BS 392)

The idols of the so-called Halaf Culture, which spread throughout northern Mesopotamia and northern Syria, are amongst the earliest human depictions. The naked female figure, with a particular emphasis on full breasts, hips and thighs, and thus on female fertility, was characteristic of the culture.

2. Female clay statuette

Syria, late 3rd millennium BC (Bo 131)

Figures of women touching their breasts were widespread throughout the Near East. They were dedicated as fertility symbols at temples or were used in domestic cults.

3. Female clay statuette

Northern Iran, 1000 – 800 BC (BS 337)

This “steatopygous” (“characterised by protuberant buttocks”) statue type originated from northern Iran and depicted highly abstract female bodies with exaggerated secondary sexual characteristics, in this case the hips.

4. Clay plaque with a female figure

Mesopotamia, 2nd millennium BC (on loan from private Swiss owner)

This clay plaque shows a ubiquitous motif in ancient Near Eastern art: a naked woman holding her breasts. The image is usually associated with Inanna/Ishtar, the goddess of sex, fertility and also of war.

5. Clay plaque with a female figure

Syria, clay, early 1st millennium BC (BS 333)

The plaque, which has been cast from a mould, is of a type that was mainly used in the late 2nd millennium BC in Syria, now generally known as “Astarte figurines”. The cult of this goddess, who shared some traits with the Babylonian goddess Ishtar, was widespread throughout the Levant. She was mainly a goddess of love and fertility.

6. Copper pin with a head in the shape of an ithyphallic man

Southwestern Iran (Susiana), late 4th millennium BC (Bo 129)

Most pins of this type have been found in graves. The exaggerated penis emphasises male fertility and probably symbolised life-sustaining and procreative force. It could also have been used as an amulet to ward off evil.

7.-8. Two female Cycladic marble idols

Cyclades, 2500 – 2300 BC (BS 215 and Hess 1)

These so-called Cycladic idols had their heyday in the mid-3rd millennium BC. Though male figures have also survived, depictions of naked women with their arms crossed over their bellies predominate. Their nudity and full, albeit abstract, forms suggest that they were somehow associated with female fertility.

9. So-called “concubine of the dead” made of blue faience

Egypt, Middle Kingdom, post 2000 BC (BSAe 1257)

10. Wooden paddle doll

Egypt, Middle Kingdom, around 2000 BC (on loan)

11. Clay figure of a “concubine of the dead”

Egypt, Second Intermediate Period, around 1650 BC (BSAe III 27138)

These stylised depictions of the naked female body emphasise the pubic triangle. Placed in both women’s and men’s graves, such figures can be seen as either fertility guarantors or as ladies of pleasure.

12. Clay figure of a woman on a throne

Tarentum, early 4th century BC (BS 1943.197)

Such figurines were intended as grave goods. They may have symbolised the deification of deceased women, returning, as their nudity perhaps suggests, to an unspecified mother goddess or goddess of nature.

13. Steatite knucklebone

Roman, 1st century AD (BS 1209)

The knucklebones of cloven-hoofed animals were used in Antiquity for games of dice. This man-made knucklebone bears a depiction of Eros and a knucklebones player on one of the narrow sides and a goddess with her legs spread apart on the front. Perhaps this die was used in a ritual to foretell somebody's future in love and life or to predict the conception and birth of a child.

14. Clay figure of a so-called Baubo

Egypt, Roman, c. 2nd century AD (BSAe III 05410)

This Baubo dates back to a mystery cult from the Greek city of Eleusis. Baubo was a companion of Demeter, whose daughter Persephone had been kidnapped by Hades, the god of the underworld. Baubo cheered up the grieving Demeter by telling lewd jokes and by exposing her vulva! Such figures can be seen in the context of fertility and protective spells.

15. Clay figure of an actor in the role of Priapus

Egypt, Roman, c. 2nd century AD (BSAe III 6444)

Priapus, cursed by Hera with an oversized penis, was the son of Aphrodite and Dionysos. Accordingly, Priapus figures were usually equipped with a massive, separately manufactured, red-painted phallus. Placed in orchards and vineyards, they acted as lucky charms for bumper harvests.

2 – innocent! or natural nudity in children and victims

We are all born naked! Nudity is an original state of naturalness, purity and innocence. That is why in ancient art the children of gods and mere mortals alike were usually depicted in the nude, regardless of the action or context portrayed. The Greeks also paid particular attention to the older boy on the verge of adulthood. He combined the child's original state of innocence and carefreeness with the ideal of the educated "good and beautiful" man. Youthful gods such as Apollo therefore tended to be depicted at that age and usually in a state of complete nudity. For the same reason, there was no incongruity in Eros, the god not only of love but also of physical desire, appearing as a young boy. His ubiquitous nudity and childlike appearance referred to the purity and innocence of love in its original state.

It is striking that slave children were also often shown naked: in a sense, they too were innocent, because they were born unfree and their fate was therefore "naturally" given. At the same time, their nakedness symbolised their defencelessness and vulnerability.

Free standing objects

Eros and Psyche

Roman copy based on a Greek work dating from the early 1st century BC

Skulpturhalle plaster cast of a group of marble statues at the Capitoline Museums in Rome

Eros, the god of love, and Psyche, the embodiment of the soul, are shown kissing; she is semi-naked and he is completely nude. The childlike appearance and nudity of the figures signify the purity and innocence of the soul and of love.

Torso of Apollo Sauroktonos (= "The lizard-killer")

Early Roman copy of a work by Praxiteles c. 350/40 BC

Praxiteles has depicted the creative god as a young boy nonchalantly leaning against a tree, lying in wait for a lizard. His nudity suits both his young age and his identity as the god of creativity, who is always identifiable in ancient depictions by his slightly androgynous beauty.

Funerary stela of a poet

Greece (Boeotia), c. 440 BC

A young slave brings a lyre to his deceased master, who was apparently a poet and singer. In Greek art, servants were usually depicted as naked young boys. In this context, nudity also signifies defencelessness and therefore alludes to the low status of a slave in general.

Relief of a funeral banquet

Asia Minor (Cyzicus), around 350 BC

The heroised deceased is shown reclining on a banquet couch. He is accompanied by his wife, sitting at the end of the couch, and a servant pouring wine into a bowl. As usual in ancient images of servants, the latter is depicted completely naked.

Lycian funerary stela

Asia Minor (Lycia), around 170/50 BC

The chubby body shape of the two naked children indicates that they are babies. Their mother must have died very early, perhaps while giving birth to them? However, the children have remained linked with her; the large butterfly they are playing with can be seen as symbolising their mother's soul.

Torso of a Niobid

Italy (Palestrina), around 380 BC

This torso of a naked youth on his knees may have depicted one of the sons of Niobe who has just collapsed. The 14 children of Niobe were shot and killed by the arrows of Apollo and Artemis, who had decided to punish their mother for her pride. Nudity in this case points to the defencelessness and victimhood of Niobe's children, who had played no part in their mother's hubris.

Showcase 2

1-2. So-called pataikoi in green and blue faience

Egypt, Late Period, 6th – 4th centuries BC (BSAe Me 74 and 77)

These so-called pataikos figures (dwarfish gods of protection) were used as amulets to ward off evil. In accordance with their childlike size, pataikoi, like children, are depicted naked.

3. Bronze figure of a seated Harpocrates with sidelock of youth

Egypt, Late Period, 6th – 4th centuries BC (on loan)

4. Bronze figure of a pacing Harpocrates

Egypt, Ptolemaic, 2nd century BC (on loan)

In Egypt art, child-gods like Harpocrates, a god of protection ("Horus the child"), were depicted naked, as was generally the case with images of children.

5. Amulet made of green faience depicting the trinity of Isis, Harpocrates and Nephthys

Egypt, Ptolemaic, 3rd century BC (BSAe 981)

The tablet shows the naked Harpocrates in the middle, with his mother Isis and his sister Nephthys on either side. Charged with the power of the invincible child-god Harpocrates, the tablet served as an amulet to ward off evil.

6. Grinning dancing dwarf made of steatite

Egypt, 12th Dynasty, early 2nd millennium BC (on loan)

Much like depictions of children and of exotic foreigners, dwarfs or Pygmies, who had been brought to Egypt from Central Africa, were shown in the nude. Our dwarf performs a dance whilst clapping along with the rhythm. Such dwarfs served as jesters at the court of the pharaohs.

7. Drinking vessel with Eros figures

Greece (Attica), around 470 BC (Kä 426)

Both sides of the vessel show the naked god of love flying down. In one image he is adorning a couple (who are not visible) with a ribbon of fabric, the other picture shows him delivering a love potion.

8. Group of clay figures: Ganymede being carried away by Zeus in the form of an eagle

Greece, around 140 BC (AME 3)

Zeus falls in love with the beautiful Trojan prince Ganymede and, in the form of an eagle, abducts him to serve as a cupbearer to the Olympian gods. Ganymede's nudity is intended to highlight both the androgynous beauty and the innocence of this still-young boy.

9. Clay figurine of a seated Eros

Canosa (Apulia), 2nd century BC (BS 487a)

Here sits the babyish Eros without a care in the world. The bright colours, traces of which have survived, are typical of terracotta figurines from Hellenistic Canosa.

10. Clay figures of Eros and Psyche

Myrina (Asia Minor), 1st century BC (Kuhn 40)

Psyche (= the soul), only half clothed, kissing the fully naked Eros (= love) next to a herm that would have been displayed at a crossing. Psyche, the young princess, became immortal through her marriage with the god of love.

11. Fragment of a marble sarcophagus with Eros and Psyche

Asia Minor, Roman, around AD 200 (BRE.M. 35)

Eros was very often depicted on Roman sarcophagi. Images of Eros paired with Psyche (the embodiment of the soul) were particularly popular. The bonding of love and the soul, with the added connotations of immortality, made the motif extremely well suited to funerary art.

3 – uncivilised! or primal nudity

People of the ancient civilisations admired nature for its creative power whilst fearing it for its unpredictable violence. The Greeks saw the primal forces of nature embodied in numerous male and female daemons, and in wild hybrid creatures such as satyrs, centaurs and similar beings. They were naked, like animals, and driven by their instincts and urges, but also exhibited creative and artistic talents. These wild creatures inhabited a parallel world in the eyes of the civilised Greeks, who, in contrast, harnessed their urges and refined their natural talents for the benefit of cultural and civilised advancement. And, of course, the savages afforded wonderful opportunities for artists to create imaginative and exhilarating images. The train of followers of Dionysus, the wine god, was a particularly popular motif: satyrs with phalli and maenads dancing ecstatically had an eroticising effect. Like these wild creatures, barbarians and enemies were also portrayed in the nude in the Mediterranean cultures. Here too, nakedness symbolised their primitive, i.e. uncivilised status, in stark contrast to the heroic nudity of the cultivated Greeks.

Free standing or hanging objects

Satyr and hermaphrodite

Roman copy of an Hellenistic sculpture dating from the late 2nd century BC

Skulpturhalle plaster cast of a marble statue at the Dresden Skulpturensammlung

A wild satyr has attacked what he thinks is a maenad. He has not (yet) realised that the victim of his lust is not female, but rather an hermaphrodite. The Greeks used the libidinous satyrs to populate a kind of parallel universe that contrasted with the actual ideal of the civilised, sexually restrained Greek man.

Leaning satyr

Early Roman copy of work by Praxiteles c. 360/50 BC

This satyr is nonchalantly leaning against a pillar with his left hand on his hip. Like all satyrs, he is completely naked save for a panther's hide slung around him like a sash. Not much of the original wild nature of these daemons has survived in this work by Praxiteles.

Seated maenad

Roman copy after a Greek work c. 140 BC

This maenad from the retinue of the god of wine originally belonged to a group sculpture that also included a satyr inviting the maenad to dance with him. The maenad's cloak only covers her legs, leaving her upper body exposed; a cloak would only be a hindrance when dancing. The beauty touches her sandal with her right hand, a popular erotic gesture in ancient Greece.

Torso of a sleeping hermaphrodite

Roman copy from 2nd century AD of a Greek work from 2nd century BC

Hermaphrodite stemmed from the union between Hermes and Aphrodite. Like satyrs and maenads, he was a daemon of nature who roamed the countryside in his natural, naked state. To illustrate his bisexuality, the artists had no other option but to depict this intersex figure naked.

Relief of Giants

Rome, around 100 BC (Lu 248)

The Giants were the sons of Gaia, or Mother Earth. They represented the elemental and chaotic force of nature, on which the Olympian gods were only able to impose order by defeating the

Giants. As wild creatures, the latter were also depicted naked, with wild shocks of hair and sometimes with serpent-shaped legs. They fought the gods using stones or even whole trees – but to no avail.

Showcase 3

1. Clay figure of a captive

Egypt, Prehistoric, mid-4th millennium BC (BSAe SSOM 924)

The captive is shown with his hands tied behind his back. His most striking feature is his bulging codpiece or jockstrap, which was an undergarment that only covered the penis. Such figures were believed to have powers to ward off evil, since the enemy depicted was shown by his nakedness and his bonds to have been defeated.

2. Clay figure of an enemy

Egypt, New Kingdom, 13th century BC (BSAe 1135)

This stylised figure of a naked enemy with his hands and feet tied behind his back bears an ink inscription: “Heftj”, or “enemy”. Such figures were ritually destroyed in the belief that this would defeat the real enemy (something similar to voodoo magical traditions).

3. Clay stela of the god Bes

Egypt, Roman, 1st–2nd centuries AD (BSAe 0928)

Stela depicting the dwarf god Bes with a plumed headdress. He is brandishing a knife above his head. He is naked and surrounded by Egypt cobras.

4. Bowl bearing depictions of Dionysus and two Bacchae

Etruria, made at ancient Falerii in the mid-4th century BC (Zü 387)

Whilst the wine god Dionysus is shown half-clothed, the female servants at his side are completely naked apart from their sandals. Despite the fact that Dionysus’ companions are standing still in this image, they represent the volatile elemental force of nature.

5. Vessel for mixing wine bearing an image of a satyr working a wine press

Greece (Attica), around 480 BC (BS 482)

As followers of Dionysus, satyrs are not just shown when intoxicated, they also carry out certain tasks necessary to attain a state of intoxication, as in this case, where a satyr is shown pressing grapes to make wine. The painter has depicted the wild creature’s hanging penis very distinctly and has given him a thick horse’s tail.

6. Handle of a bronze cauldron with images of a satyr and a maenad

Etruria, 4th century BC (Zü 61)

The Etruscans had an uninhibited attitude towards nudity. Accordingly, their images show competing athletes or nature daemons in their natural state of nakedness, as this example of a satyr and a maenad shows. Their arms, stretched out towards each other, complete the shape of the handle.

7. Clay figure of a seated flute-playing Silenus

Greece (Boeotia), around 450 BC (Bo 21)

8. Bronze figure of Pan playing a set of panpipes

Greece (Arcadia), late 5th century BC (BS 1961.231)

9. Ivory figure of Silenus with a wineskin and beaker

Greece (Attica ?), early 4th century BC (BS 618)

10. Bronze centaur

Etruria, around 570 BC (BS 1906.145)

This ensemble combines three different hybrid creatures that were admired and feared as nature daemons. As befits their wild and primal nature, they are all depicted in the nude. Even in roughly worked figures such as these, the sexes tend to be clearly recognisable.

Small showcase 3a

Chalice-shaped crater bearing images of Marsyas and Olympus

Apulia, around 360/50 BC (on loan)

This vase painting is a combination of several naked figures. The centerpiece shows the clearly aroused satyr Marsyas teaching his pupil Olympus to play a double flute. Young Eros places a crown on love-struck Silenus' head, whilst Aphrodite, Eros' mother, looks on with interest. Meanwhile, the music has inspired a maenad to perform a kind of striptease dance. Pan, recognisable by his goat's feet, can be seen prancing in the left-hand bottom corner.

4 – civilised! or ideal nudity

The highest status was accorded to the naked body, and, in particular, the naked male body, by the Greeks. Both youthful heroes and fatherly gods were usually depicted naked. The presentation of their bodies pointed to their perfection whilst at the same time alluding to their invincibility and thus immortality. In this context, scholars of antiquity speak of "heroic nudity".

From the late 8th century BC onwards, Greek athletes were completely naked when competing in sports, because clothes were simply perceived as a hindrance. This did not cause any public offence, since women were banned from watching, both during training and contests. Images of athletes in training and competition were ubiquitous on vases and in reliefs and statues. The athletic aspect of physical training was not an end in itself, since fit and healthy young men can also perform well in other life circumstances. That was why warriors were also shown in the nude; nudity was an heroic attribute. Idealised thus, the male nude became a predominant theme in classical art.

Free standing or hanging objects

Doryphoros ("Spear-Bearer")

Roman copy of a statue by Polykleitos c. 440 BC

Skulpturhalle plaster cast of a marble statue in the National Archaeological Museum in Naples

In his Spear-Bearer, the sculptor Polykleitos perfected his canon of proportions of the body: each of the body parts is in a precise relation to the size of the body as a whole. The proportion of the head to the body, for instance, is one to seven-and-a-half; of the hip, one to five; the foot, one to six; the nose and penis, one to thirty, etc.

Diadumenos

Early Roman copy after a statue by Polykleitos c. 420 BC

The second-best-known work of Polykleitos, after the Doryphoros, shows a hero (probably Paris) knotting a victor's diadem around his head, having won a competition. Here, the heroic nudity of an immortal figure and the ideal nudity of an athlete were combined to form a perfect body.

Torso of a "Diskophoros"

Roman copy after a statue by Polykleitos c. 450 BC

The older term "Diskophoros" (= "Discus-Bearer") was based on an erroneous reconstruction of this early work by Polykleitos. It probably originally depicted the Attica national hero, Theseus. Without their attributes, it is difficult to distinguish between sculptures of athletes and those of gods.

Statue of a god in the style of the "Diskophoros" of Polykleitos

Rome, around 50 AD

This Roman recreation of the Polykleitos prototype shows a much rejuvenated and almost boy-like god whose pubic hair has not yet developed.

Torso of a bronze statue of a ruler

Roman work from 2nd century AD

This Roman (?) statue probably once bore the head of a ruler. The first ruler to have himself depicted in the nude was Alexander the Great. The reason why he chose to have a naked statue is obvious – by appearing in heroic nudity, the ruler wished to be worshiped like a god.

Muscle armour

Southern Italy (Metapontum?), around 450 BC

This armour once covered the upper body of its wearer like a second skin. It allowed a warrior to appear to his enemies like a naked, invincible hero, whilst still protecting him.

Fragment of a limestone relief

Tarentum, 3rd century BC (BS 240)

Of course, Greek warriors would never have attacked their enemies in the nude. It was in the arts that a different and idealised reality was conjured up, where nudity made a Greek warrior look much more heroic.

Torso of Heracles

Roman copy from 2nd century AD of a Late Hellenistic statue

This massive torso was part of a colossal statue of Heracles, as shown by the skin of a lion wrapped around his shoulders. The hide was Heracles' only item of clothing. In ancient sculptures, the paragon of Greek heroism is hardly ever depicted other than in heroic nakedness, which shows off his perfect, muscle-packed body.

Showcase 4

1. Clay statuette of a naked warrior brandishing a Syrian axe

Syria (Orontes region?), early 2nd millennium BC (BS 340)

The main characteristics of this Syrian figure are the emphasised male genitals and the weapon in the form of a so-called Syrian axe with window holes. This combination indicates that it probably

depicts a warrior god. This is an early predecessor of the Greek images of gods in heroic nudity.

2. Bronze figure of a kouros

Greece, around 530 BC (Kä 501)

From 700 BC onwards, the first sculptures in the round were created in Greece. They show free-standing youths (kouros). The statues present the whole male anatomy in complete nudity. The athletic naked body subsequently became a symbol of the active aristocrat. Some of these kouros statues were of colossal size, but many small copies were also made, like this example.

3. Limestone figure of a youth

Cyprus, around 530 BC (Me 53)

This fine limestone figure imitates the Archaic kouros-type sculpture. Although this youth is clad in a garment that reaches down to his ankles, his anatomy is as obviously visible as it is in the naked kouros.

4. Vase with a depiction of Zeus and Ganymede

Greece (Attica), painted by Hermonax around 460 BC (BS 483)

Zeus is attempting to kidnap the young Ganymede who is shown playing with a hoop. Both are wearing no more than loose-fitting cloaks that leave their bodies exposed. The erotic intentions of the father of the gods are emphasized by both his own heroic nakedness and Ganymede's innocent nudity.

5. Lekythos with a depiction of Ajax about to commit suicide

Greece (Attica), around 460/50 BC (BS 1442)

Ajax was a tragic hero of the Greeks at Troy, who decided to take his own life after a quarrel over the weapons of his fallen friend Achilles had spun out of control. The image shows him kneeling in front of his upright sword, upon which he will fall. His heroic nature is emphasised, even in his last moments, by his nakedness.

6. Marble torso of an heroic statuette

Hellenistic marble copy from the period around 100 BC based on a work by Polykleitos from around 440 BC (Lu 230)

This work is of outstanding quality. The torso alone shows off the perfect athletic male body. Originally, the complete work is highly likely to have depicted the "best" of the Greek heroes, Hercules.

7. White-ground lekythos with a depiction of a heroised deceased

Greece (Attica), around 450/40 BC (Kä 414)

White-ground lekythoi were used in funerary rites. The deceased young man is shown in heroic nakedness, which is further emphasized by his discarded boots, helmet and weaponry.

8. Wine bowl with depictions of pentathletes

Greece (Attica), painted by Duris around 490 BC (Kä 425)

Seven athletes in total are shown performing the pentathlon, which includes the disciplines of jumping, running, discus and spear throwing as well as wrestling. All the athletes are naked. Only the attendants and the flute players, who would have set the pace for the jumping, are clothed.

9. Vase bearing a depiction of two athletes

Greece (Attica), around 450/40 BC (BS 485)

Two naked athletes are scrubbing themselves with strigils. The small servant boy in the middle, who is also shown naked, differs from the two athletes in that he has been given certain individual traits. In this case, however, this is not a positive thing. In the minds of the classical Greeks, the ideal norm was of higher value than individuality.

10. Bronze figure of a discus thrower

Greece, around 200 BC (BS 513)

11. Bronze figure of a pugilist

Greece, second half of the 3rd century BC (Kä 510)

In ancient Greece, both track and field athletes and heavy athletes trained and competed fully naked. The slightly staged poses of the two bronze figures highlight the beauty of the naked athletic body.

12. Pair of wrestlers made of limestone

Egypt, First Intermediate Period, around 2000 BC (on loan)

This small sculptural group shows two naked wrestlers intertwined. Long before the Greeks, the Egyptians performed both craftwork and sports naked and this was reflected in their works of art. Depictions of wrestlers were particularly popular in the funerary art of the Middle Kingdom. This pair of figures was inspired by such images.

13. Bronze figurine of a dwarf with an oversized penis

Egypt, Alexandrian, 2nd/1st centuries BC (Me 7)

What a contrast to the ideal body! By creating such misshapen figurines, an artist deliberately thwarted the prevailing aesthetic ideal of the "good and beautiful" body. The oversized genitals are particularly striking, since these are usually very discretely proportioned in the idealized figures!

5 – legitimised! or action-based nudity

Save for fertility goddesses, depicting naked women was always more problematic than depicting naked men. Whilst naked gods and athletes oozed power and heroism and naked satyrs alluded to the original state of nature, images of naked women were sexually charged. They represented so-called sacred prostitutes or *hetairai* at wild banquets. There was, however, another category of depictions of naked women where their nudity was legitimised by the subject matter. These include images of women carrying out their beauty regimes in the privacy of the women's baths. Examples have been found on Egyptian and, later, Greek and Roman toiletries, such as unguent bottles or mirrors. You cannot wear clothes, after all, when taking a bath. The goddess Aphrodite, born from the foam of the sea, also emerged from a "bath" as she took her first steps and therefore obviously had to appear in the nude in images of the story. In the 4th century BC, with his Aphrodite of Knidos, Praxiteles introduced the motif of the bathing goddess of love into monumental sculpture. The then completely novel erotic vibrancy of the statue turned it into a veritable icon in the history of art.

Free standing objects

Venus de' Medici

1st century BC recreation of Praxiteles' Aphrodite

Skulpturhalle plaster cast of a marble statue in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence

This statue is a version of the one created by Praxiteles in the 4th century BC of the goddess of love about to take a bath (as seen in the introduction room). Compared to earlier versions, this one is slightly more bashful, with Venus inadvertently covering both her pubic area and her breasts.

Torso of an Aphrodite of Knidos

Roman copy from 1st century AD after the statue by Praxiteles c. 340 BC

This torso was part of one of many Roman copies based on Praxiteles' Aphrodite of Knidos. On display in the sanctuary at Knidos, this statue was the first-ever monumental female nude, which gave her a global fame that still resonates today.

Running female hunter (Callisto?)

Roman marble copy of a Greek bronze statue around 450 BC

As suggested by the quiver hanging from her shoulder, this statue depicts a huntress from the retinue of Artemis, possibly Callisto. Her vigorous movements have caused part of her attire to slip, allowing the artist to give us a flash of her breasts. This was a popular device used by artists at a time when the naked female body was really (as yet) taboo in large sculpture.

Showcase 5

1. Bronze mirror with a handle in the shape of a naked girl

Egypt, New Kingdom, 15th century BC (BSAe SSOM 0049)

In Egypt, and later in Greece and Rome, the handles of toiletries or cosmetic spoons very often came in the shape of enchanting naked girls. They allude to the sphere of eroticism that is linked with make-up and with personal grooming in general.

2. Quartzite bust of a lady of the court

Egypt, New Kingdom, around 1300 BC (on loan)

The lady's breasts are covered by fine drapery that reveals more than it conceals. Like the later Greek sculptors of the Classical period, the Egypt creator of this statue knew how to make a woman's body seem naked despite being clothed.

3. Lekythos with a depiction of young Pan taking a bath

Southern Italy (Paestum), painted by Asteas around 340/30 BC (on loan)

Depictions of children's baths are not very often found, which makes this vase painting all the more special. It shows quite a large, rather effeminate child (judging by its horns, obviously a young Pan) sitting on a water basin. The servants, probably two nymphs, have also shed their clothes, as is usual at the baths.

4. Fragment of a clay impression

Tarentum, early 3rd century BC (Lu 154)

This medallion is an impression from a mould that probably served as a pattern template for dec-

orations on metal vessels. It shows a half-naked woman performing her ablutions. The little Cupid may indicate that this is a bride preparing for her wedding night.

5. Bronze relief mirror with a bathing scene

Rome, early 2nd century AD (AME 101)

This relief, taken from a mould, shows two naked women standing beside a water basin, into which the lady on the right is pouring scented oil. The pillar, in the form of a statue of the naked Aphrodite, suggests that the bath is taking place in a sacred context. Ritual cleansing could perhaps be seen as a way of getting closer to the goddess who rose from the sea.

6. Marble statuette of Aphrodite Anadyomene (= "rising [out of the sea]")

Greece, 1st century BC (Kä 222)

In Hellenism, the naked Aphrodite became an extremely popular motif. The depictions show her bathing or, as is the case here, drying her hair after she has risen out of the sea. She is shown either completely naked or with a cloak around the lower half of her body.

7. Clay figure of a Venus with two Cupids

Asia Minor (Lydia?), Roman, around AD 200 (BRE.Tc 314)

This figure is one of a group of Imperial period Venus statuettes that came from a sanctuary in western Asia Minor. The bodies are presented in rigid frontality but individualized with toiletries and fashionable hairstyles. They probably represent the donors themselves, who would have hoped to gain favour in love and life from their tutelary deity.

8. Ceramic vessel in the shape of a bathing Aphrodite

Greece (Attica), 4th century BC (AME 19)

This small bottle with its figurative decoration would certainly have contained oil to nourish the skin. The decoration shows Aphrodite rising out of the sea foam just as she did on the day she was born: naked. She is squatting in an oversized open shell whilst a small Eros has her cloak or towel ready for her to dry herself off.

9. Clay figure of a bathing woman

Tarentum, around 300 BC (Kä 305)

Even elegant ladies had to kneel when taking a bath in Antiquity, to make it easier for their helpers to douse them from water jars. In Hellenistic art, Aphrodite is also often shown squatting in her bath. It is quite possible that this bathing lady, too, with her pinned-up hair, was meant to represent the goddess of love.

6 – shameless! or nudity in a sexual context

Whilst the nude images in all the previous showcases evoked natural or idealised states, this case displays examples of erotic nudity, which served to satisfy (mostly male) voyeuristic curiosity. Sexually motivated depictions of women or couples were quite rare in the early cultures or were representations of so-called sacred prostitutes. Not fully understood, the phenomenon of sacred prostitution involved sexual acts performed in a cult context, though the erotic aspect was secondary to the ritual aspect. Actual prostitutes are found on Attic vases from the late 6th century

onwards. The so-called hetairai were popular companions at men's banquets. They provided entertainment and were also available for sexual favours. This was in stark contrast to the ordinary female citizens, who always appeared completely honourable and chaste. Other groups of erotic figures, such as Hellenistic depictions of satyrs and maenads, again formed a kind of parallel universe that contrasted with the real world aspired to by the educated Greek, who – in theory at least – practised self-control even in his sexual conduct. The fact that reality in the matrimonial bedroom was different can be seen from pornographic images of couples which were widely circulated on ceramic oil lamps, mainly in the Roman period.

Free standing objects

Aphrodite Kallipygos (= "Venus of the beautiful buttocks")

Roman copy based on a Greek statue, around 100 BC

Skulpturhalle plaster cast of a marble statue at the National Archaeological Museum in Naples

This figure, one of the most provocative in Greek sculpture, was created by an unknown Late Hellenistic artist. His goddess of love unabashedly shows off her exposed buttocks. Her back has become her front, so-to-speak, and the viewer becomes part of the ensemble – unthinkable in classical art.

Showcase 6

1. Erotic group made of clay

Crete, 2000 – 1500 BC (Bo 224)

Clay images of women, men, or groups of figures have been found in large numbers in the so-called peak sanctuaries in Crete, where they served as votive offerings. This depiction of a couple making love was undoubtedly intended to celebrate fertility.

2.-3. Painted limestone tablets with depictions of a naked woman

Egypt, 5th – 3rd centuries BC (BSAe III 6393 - 6394)

In Lower Egypt (Nile Delta, Naucratis) such votive tablets, showing a naked woman standing in an alcove, were used as offerings in various fertility ceremonies or put on display in the home as fertility guarantors.

4. Limestone figurine with oversized phallus

Egypt, 5th – 3rd centuries BC (BSAe III 5385)

This figure of a young adolescent with a sidelock of youth could represent Harpocrates. Like the tablets with naked women, figures like this, with oversized, erect penises, were used in various fertility ceremonies in Lower Egypt.

5. Female harpist with a phallus made of faience

Egypt, Roman, 1st century BC – 1st century AD (on loan)

A seated man would have been positioned to the left of this fragment. However, the only part that has survived is his oversized penis between his partner's legs. The woman's rapture is expressed in her playing of the harp.

6. Bronze relief from a mirror

Greece, early 4th century BC (on loan from the Museum zu Allerheiligen, Schaffhausen)

Actually on the back of the mirror, this image shows a courting couple in high relief. Both are half naked and the man has his hand on the woman's breasts. This probably represents a newly wedded couple, perhaps the wine god Dionysus and Ariadne.

7. Pitcher with a depiction of Dionysus' and Ariadne's wedding

Apulia, second quarter of the 4th century BC (BS 1496)

As was only presumed in the case of the last artefact, this image does indeed depict the god Dionysus and Ariadne on their wedding night. Such depictions were used to celebrate the happiness that is associated with a loving union. The erotic tension is accentuated by the naked bodies.

8. Wine bowl with scenes from a banquet

Greece (Attica), around 470/60 BC (Kä 415)

Four men in total are semi-reclining on cushions, stripped to the waist and drinking copious amounts of wine. Young naked hetaerae are keeping them company. Their confident body language suggests that they are more than mere prostitutes and are able to entertain their clients with their witty conversation.

9. Wine bowl with lewd erotic scenes

Greece (Attica), painted by Onesimos around 490 BC (BS 440)

Here, a banquet has degenerated into lewd sex games. On one side we see a man irreverently grabbing a more mature and slightly overweight hetaera by her hair to subdue her, whilst another reveller approaches the bent-over woman from behind.

10. Wine bowl (so-called eye-cup) with a depiction of two hetaerae

Greece (Attica), around 520 BC (Kä 401)

A naked hetaera is painted between each of the two pairs of eyes. One of the women is shown dancing naked, the other is coquettishly putting on a boot.

11. Ceramic oil lamp with a depiction of Leda and the Swan

Roman, 2nd/3rd centuries AD (BS 1921.901) The sexual act between the Aetolian princess and the swan was often depicted in Antiquity. Such images did not outrage or irritate anybody at the time. After all, the swan was none other than the father of the gods, Zeus, who seduced his victim of love, Leda, in the form of a swan to father the beautiful Helen.

12. Ceramic oil lamp with erotic scene

Roman, 1st century AD (BRE. 401)

Depictions of couples performing a sexual act in various different positions are often found on oil lamps. They circulated in the private sphere and probably satisfied the sexual curiosity mainly of men.