

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

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GREEK MINISTER OF CULTURE ANNOUNCES EXHIBITION AT NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

WASHINGTON, D.C. October 1, 1987 - In conjunction with her visit to the National Gallery of Art today, Her Excellency Melina Mercouri, Minister of Culture of Greece, announced a forthcoming exhibition of 67 Greek works of art from the 9th to the 5th centuries B.C. which will be seen in Washington, D.C. and then travel to Kansas City, Los Angeles and Boston.

Highlighting the development of the human figure in early Greek art, the exhibition will open at the National Gallery of Art Jan. 31, 1988. Widely known through use as illustrations in the major handbooks of Greek art, the majority of the objects will be on display for the first time outside Greece.

In discussing the exhibition with J. Carter Brown, Director of the National Gallery, Minister Mercouri said: "It gives us great pleasure to share an important chapter of the cultural legacy of Greece with audiences in the United States. The fact that many of the objects will be leaving our homeland for the first time demonstrates our commitment to fostering understanding between our cultures."

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The exhibition includes objects from the Geometric period (9th and 8th centuries B.C.), the Orientalizing period (7th century B.C.), the Archaic period (6th century B.C.) and the Early Classical period (5th century B.C.) documenting the evolution of a Greek humanistic spirit and a new attitude about the human form as the subject of illustration. The first representations of mankind in Greek art are silhouetted stick figures illustrating scenes of mythology or stories told in the Homeric poems the Iliad and Odyssey. Later objects bear witness to the increasing ability of Greek artists to depict naturalistic movement and lifelike proportions of the human body.

J. Carter Brown observed: "This exhibition provides an opportunity to observe the treatment of the human figure during a critical formative period in world art. The trends illustrated by the objects led to the flowering of Greek Classicism, which has functioned as the basis for the Western aesthetic of art throughout history. We are delighted by the generosity of the Greek people in making these works of art available to be seen in the United States."

Mostly made in the principal city-state of Athens, the marble, bronze and terracotta sculptures and painted vases in the exhibition come also from other major centers of the Greek world and from the great Pan-Hellenic sanctuaries of Olympia and Delphi. The exhibition has been selected from the permanent collections of four museums in Athens and many regional Greek museums.

The oldest object is a painted clay centaur, a creature that is half man, half horse, made in the late 10th century B.C. in the town of Lefkandi (north of Athens). It is widely considered the most accomplished artistic creation of the Greek Dark Ages, the period after the decline of Mycenaean culture. The bronzes include an unusual statuette of a running Spartan girl athlete. Painted vases in the exhibition feature a range of

human depictions from schematic stick figures to naturalistic youths skillfully rendered in black-figure and red-figure styles. One famous example made by the potter Gorgos is a drinking cup, which carries a poignant red-figure drawing of a kneeling youth holding a hare.

While present in many forms throughout the exhibition, the emphasis on the perfection of youth is perhaps best illustrated by the inclusion of several marble kouroi, statues of idealized young men standing upright, and korai, female versions of the same, from the Acropolis. Commissioned to mark the graves of deceased youths or to pay homage to Greek gods or goddesses, this 6th and 5th century B.C. statuary progressed from early experiments in representing the human form to a mastery of the ability to make the figures look lifelike.

The exhibition is organized by the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and the Ministry of Culture and Sciences of Greece. After its Washington showing (Jan. 31 to June 12, 1988), The Human Figure in Early Greek Art will travel to the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

A fully illustrated color catalogue will accompany the exhibition, featuring essays by well-known western and Greek scholars: Evelyn Harrison on stone sculpture, Maria Pantou on Geometric art, Martin Robertson on vase painting, Theodora Karagiorga on bronzes, R. V. Nicholls on terracottas, Alan Boegehold on the life and society of the period, Ioannis Touratsoglou on the first and second Greek colonizations, and Despina Picopoulou-Tsolaki on the art of the Greek dark ages.