

THE GREEK MIRACLE

Classical Sculpture from the Dawn of Democracy

The Fifth Century B.C.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART AND THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

TO PRESENT LANDMARK EXHIBITION

OF CLASSICAL SCULPTURE FROM FIFTH-CENTURY B.C. GREECE

KRITIOS BOY AMONG OBJECTS TO BE LOANED FOR FIRST TIME

WASHINGTON, D.C., June 4, 1992 -- J. Carter Brown, director of the National Gallery of Art, and Philippe de Montebello, director of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, today announced that their institutions will present an unprecedented exhibition of the finest examples of original sculpture from fifth-century B.C. Greece, the golden age that transformed the history of Western art. The exhibition is made possible by Philip Morris Companies Inc.

The objects selected for The Greek Miracle: Classical Sculpture from the Dawn of Democracy, The Fifth Century B.C. include twenty-two pieces, most of which have never left Greek soil, and eleven more from Europe's leading museums. They represent the great sculptural innovations and achievements in the depiction of the human form that followed the birth of democracy in Athens 2,500 years ago. Among the icons of fifth-century B.C. sculpture in the exhibition are the Kritios Boy, Contemplative Athena, Cavalry from the Parthenon Frieze, and Nike

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National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. 20565 • November 22, 1992–February 7, 1993

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 10028 • March 11–May 23, 1993

The exhibition is made possible by Philip Morris Companies Inc.

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(Victory) Unbinding Her Sandal.

Organized by the National Gallery of Art in collaboration with The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Ministry of Culture of the Government of Greece, the exhibition will be at the National Gallery, November 22, 1992 through February 7, 1993, and at the Metropolitan Museum, March 11 through May 23, 1993.

The announcement was made during a live satellite press conference hookup between the National Gallery of Art in Washington and the Záppion exhibition center in Athens, attended by political and cultural leaders in both countries. Videotaped statements by Greek Prime Minister Constantine Mitsotakis and Chief Justice of the United States William H. Rehnquist were presented. Among those who made live statements were, in Athens, Minister of Culture Anna Psarouda-Benakis and, in Washington, Katerina Romiopoulou, director of antiquities, Ministry of Culture of the Government of Greece, and Lynne Cheney, chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

"We are extremely grateful to the government of Greece for lending us these national treasures," said J. Carter Brown. "They have made it possible for more visitors from the United States and the world to gain a better understanding of the revolutionary developments in the arts and humanities that flourished with the birth of democracy in Greece 2,500 years ago and had a major and lasting impact on Western society and culture."

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According to Philippe de Montebello, "As examples of the unsurpassed level of creative genius achieved in the fifth century B.C., these majestic works represent a crucial stage in the development of all Western art. Works such as these are nothing less than classical icons that have established a pattern of beauty and proportion that can be traced throughout the history of art."

The exhibition is the premiere event in the United States commemorating the 2,500th anniversary of the birth of democracy, traditionally reckoned by classical scholars and historians from the date of the reforms of the Athenian statesman Kleisthenes in 508/507 B.C. A related exhibition, The Birth of Democracy, celebrating the anniversary of these ancient Athenian constitutional reforms, will be presented in March 1993 at the National Archives in Washington, located across Constitution Avenue from the National Gallery.

George Knox, vice president, public affairs programs, Philip Morris Companies Inc., said, "We are proud to support this milestone exhibition that offers such an unprecedented cultural experience to the American public and that presents works of pivotal importance to the development of western art."

The Greek Miracle includes 33 bronze and marble sculptures. Twenty-two of them are from Greek museums including, in Athens, the National Archaeological Museum, the Acropolis Museum, the Agora Museum, and the Kerameikos Museum, as well as the

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archaeological museums in Olympia, Eleusis, and Samos. Four sculptures were also selected from the Louvre in Paris; three from the Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung; two from The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; one from the Glyptothek in Munich; and one from the British Museum, London.

The art of fifth-century B.C. Greece was marked by a series of major changes in sculptural style, which led to one of the seminal artistic expressions of Western civilization. In a period when democracy flourished, Greek sculptors focused on man and his relationship to the gods and the natural forces of the world around him, achieving what has been considered an ideal or classic image of the human figure. The bronzes and marble sculptures in this exhibition reveal the progressive stages of this artistic development.

Throughout the sixth century B.C., in a style known as archaic, Greek artists sought to achieve a naturalistic representation of the human figure. The exhibition begins with a celebrated kouros, which illustrates the final stage of this endeavor: the forms of the body convey a sense of volume and naturalism, but nonetheless the figure is still frozen in the canonical stance of the archaic kouros, fully frontal, the arms at the sides, the left leg forward, with the weight equally on both feet.

The Kritios Boy (c. 480 B.C.) is considered the piece that broke with the archaic canon and its rule of frontality. He is

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the first figure to move into the same space as the viewer. The subtle shift of weight achieved by the lifted right hip and the sense of motion suggested by the slightly turned head are major steps in the direction of a freely moving figure and fully naturalistic style, making this figure a key piece in the development of style in the fifth century.

The relief of the Contemplative Athena (c. 470 B.C.), originally found on the Athenian Acropolis, shows the goddess leaning on her spear with her head bent forward as she looks intently at the stele. The long folds of her garment, a long woolen peplos, follow her stance rather than falling vertically as gravity demands. The subject of the relief is not known, but the sense of sadness and introspection so beautifully conveyed are hallmarks of the new style.

The lessons of the early classical period came to fruition just after the middle of the fifth century B.C. with the Parthenon, the major architectural monument of the high classical style. The fragments of the frieze of the building in Athens include beautiful examples of this most subtle and glorious moment in art. The depth of the carving of the relief Cavalry from the Parthenon Frieze (442-438 B.C.) is only 2¼ inches at its maximum, yet the artist has managed to place riders in three different planes overlapping one another. A subtle but compelling rhythm of near repetition and slight variation unites the entire frieze but is especially clear in this section showing

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the horses. The relief Nike (Victory) Unbinding Her Sandal (c. 410 B.C.), from the frieze of the balustrade of the Temple of Athena Nike on the Acropolis, reveals a figure poised to bare her feet, perhaps to walk on holy ground as she approaches the goddess Athena. She maintains her delicate balance by furling her wings behind her. The pattern of folds of the transparent drapery harmonizes with Nike's body, helping to further the illusion of balance. The creator of this personification of victory had a long-lasting impact on later Greek sculptors.

The marbles and bronzes were selected by exhibition guest curator Diana Buitron-Oliver, a well-known and widely published scholar of Greek and Roman art and archaeology who is a professorial lecturer at Georgetown University in Washington. The Greek coordinator for the exhibition is Katerina Romiopoulou, director of antiquities, Ministry of Culture of the Government of Greece. Carlos A. Picón, curator in charge of the department of Greek and Roman art at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, is coordinating the exhibition in New York.

The exhibition catalogue will include extensive color photography, with multiple views of each object in the show and entries by Buitron-Oliver. Essays have been written by Olga Alexandri, director of the National Archaeological Museum; Peter Kalligas, director of the Acropolis Museum; novelist and scholar Robertson Davies of Massey College, Toronto; and Jerome J. Pollitt of Yale University. Other essayists are Angelos

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Delivorrias of the Benaki Museum, Athens; Daniel Iakouou of the University of Thessalonika; and Vassilis Lambrinodakis and Olga Palagia of the University of Athens. The Greek-born writer and former correspondent in Athens for the New York Times, Nicholas Gage, wrote an introduction for the catalogue.

An exhibition brochure and an audio-visual presentation will be produced by the National Gallery for its exhibition visitors. Plans are also underway for a scholarly symposium and a series of public lectures to be held during the exhibition in Washington.

In return for the loans from Greece, the two American museums will lend more than seventy major paintings from their permanent collections for an exhibition opening in December 1992 at the Ethniki Pinakothiki (National Gallery) in Athens. The exhibition, From El Greco to Cézanne: Three Centuries of Masterpieces from the National Gallery of Art, Washington, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, will include some 35 old master paintings from the Metropolitan and a similar number of French impressionist and post-impressionist paintings from the National Gallery.

Philip Morris Companies Inc. began support of the arts in 1958. Since then, the company has developed one of the most comprehensive corporate cultural programs. Through its broad spectrum of sponsorship, Philip Morris promotes contemporary and multicultural visual and performing arts as well as major international exhibitions and tours. The Greek Miracle is the

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fifth exhibition to be supported by Philip Morris at the National Gallery and the third at the Metropolitan Museum. The Age of Sultan Süleyman the Magnificent (1987) was presented at both institutions. Other exhibitions supported by Philip Morris at the National Gallery were Albert Bierstadt: Art and Enterprise (1991-1992), Kazimir Malevich, 1878-1935 (1990), and Treasures from the Fitzwilliam Museum: The Increase of Learning and Other Great Objects (1989), and at the Metropolitan Museum, The Vatican Collections: The Papacy and Art (1983).

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