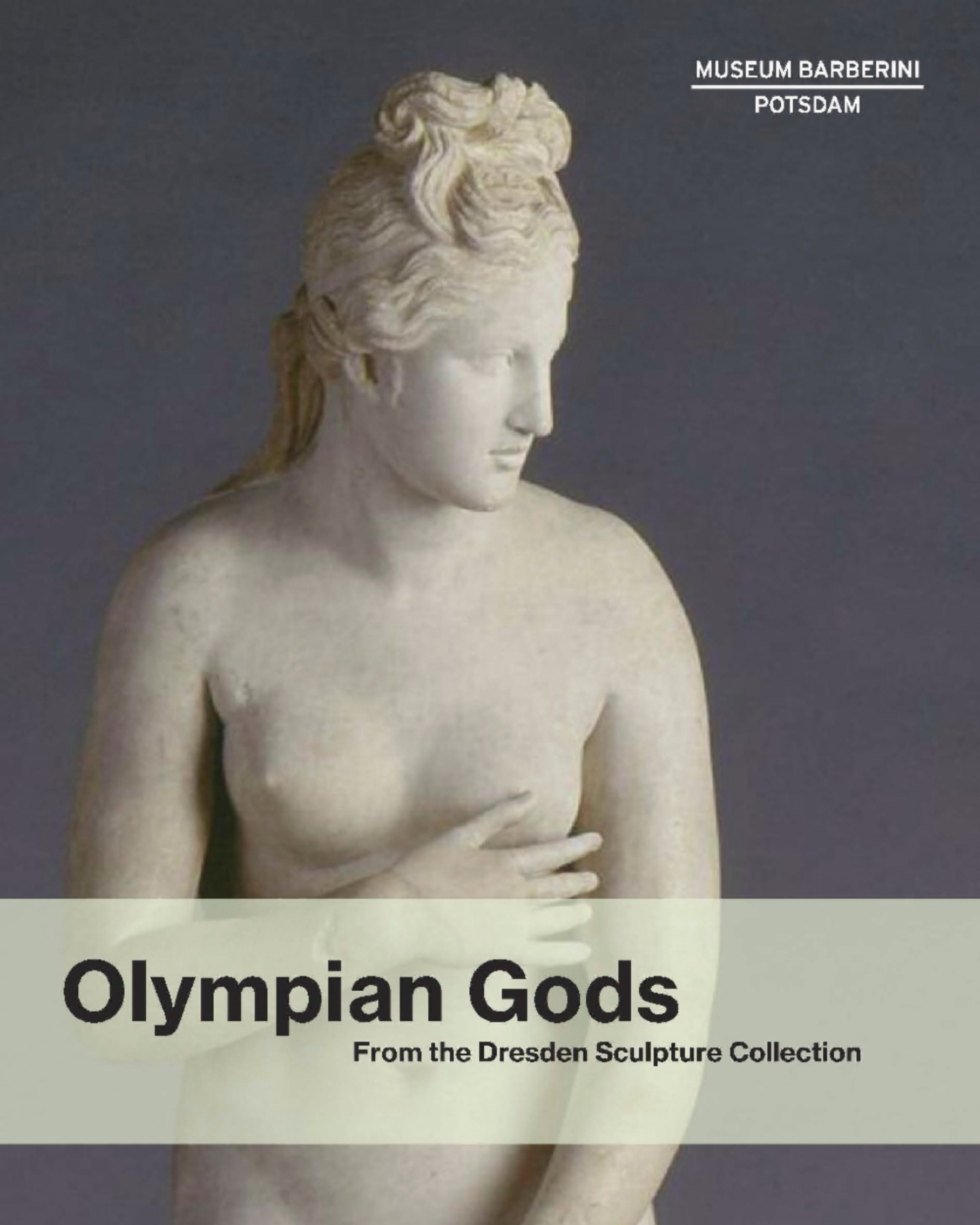


MUSEUM BARBERINI  
POTSDAM

A marble bust of a woman, likely a goddess, with her hair styled in an elaborate, curly updo. She is shown from the chest up, with her right hand resting on her left breast. The sculpture is set against a dark, solid background.

# Olympian Gods

From the Dresden Sculpture Collection

Olympian

# Gods

From the Dresden Sculpture Collection

Exhibition and Catalog  
Kordelia Knoll and Saskia Wetzig  
with Michael Philipp

With contributions by  
Björn Christian Ewald  
Kordelia Knoll  
Saskia Wetzig

Barberini Studies  
Edited by  
Stephan Koja, Michael Philipp  
and Ortrud Westheider



Museum Barberini in cooperation with the  
Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden

MUSEUM BARBERINI  
POTSDAM

Staatliche  
Kunstsammlungen  
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# Foreword

Ortrud Westheider, Director of the Museum Barberini, Potsdam  
Stephan Koja, Director of the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister and the Skulpturensammlung (until 1800)  
of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden

The finely wrought statues of ancient Greece were a reminder of the presence of the gods. They symbolized power and an idealized beauty. When sculptors copied Greek models in the Roman imperial period, their sculptures exuded an aura of learnedness and erudition. The grace and dignity of these works may still be felt today. The Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden hold one of the most important collections of ancient sculptures in Germany.

From this extensive collection, the Museum Barberini has selected sculptures that represent the most important Greek gods of the Mount Olympus, including statues so well known that—like the Dresden Zeus—they are known by their current location. These outstanding works show how Greek statuary developed over the centuries, depict tales from ancient mythology, and demonstrate the ways in which the gods were represented. The exhibition *Olympian Gods: From the Dresden Sculpture Collection* showcases these statues and explores the myths that surround them, with the aim of bringing their stories alive for visitors today.

Augustus II the Strong—elector of Saxony, king of Poland and grand duke of Lithuania—founded the Dresden Skulpturensammlung (sculpture collection), which assembled gods, heroes, and paragons of virtue at his court. He received the bust of Ares (cat. 12) and the herm of Hermes (cat. 45) as gifts from the king of Prussia, Frederick William I. After nearly 300 years these works have now found their way back to Potsdam. On their return to Dresden, they will be placed in their permanent home in the refurbished Semperbau.

Conceived in partnership with the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, the exhibition continues a collaboration which began with generous loans for the exhibition *Behind the Mask: Artists in the GDR* and continued with *Gerhard Richter: Abstraction*, a show cocurated by the Gerhard Richter Archive and the Museum Barberini.

Together with Marion Ackermann, director of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, we would like to thank Kordelia Knoll and Saskia Wetzig for conceiving this project. Michael Philipp, the coeditor of this catalog, has developed the exhibition for the Museum Barberini. We extend our thanks to Kordelia Knoll, who has been head of antiquities at the sculpture collection for many years, and to her colleague Saskia Wetzig for their catalog contributions, as well as to Björn Christian Ewald for his introductory essay in the catalog, which is the second volume in our *Barberini Studies* series.





Let us begin our singing  
from the Helikonian Muses  
who possess the great and holy mountain  
of Helikon  
and dance there on soft feet  
by the dark blue water  
of the spring, and by the altar  
of the powerful son of Kronos; [...]  
and walk in the night, singing  
in sweet voices, and celebrating  
Zeus, the holder of the aegis, and Hera,  
his lady  
of Argos, who treads on golden sandals,  
and singing also  
Athene the gray-eyed, daughter of Zeus  
of the aegis,  
Phoibos Apollo, and Artemis  
of the showering arrows,  
Poseidon who encircles the earth in his arms  
and shakes it,  
stately Themis, and Aphrodite  
of the fluttering eyelids, [...]  
and all the holy rest of the everlasting  
immortals.

Hesiod, *Theogony* 1–21

# Aphrodite, Lover of Smiles

## 8 *Statue of Aphrodite, Capitoline Type*

Second half of the second century CE

Coarse-grained pale yellow marble, height 187 cm

Acquired in 1728 from the collection of Flavio Chigi, Rome

Inv. no. Hm 308

Lit.: Dresden Bildwerke II, cat. 33

If what one loves is beautiful, does it become ugly if that love turns into hate? For the ancient Greeks, the two categories of beauty and love were embodied by the goddess Aphrodite, who was called Venus by the Romans. Few other ancient divinities are still as familiar to us today as the goddess of love, fertility, and beauty. Her name is often used for beauty and wellness products; in the *Homeric Hymns* she is called “smile-loving Aphrodite.”<sup>1</sup>

Aphrodite is sometimes said to be the daughter of Zeus and Dione, but according to the better-known myth of her birth she was created from the sea foam that gathered around Uranus’s severed genitals after they had fallen into the sea; the Greek *aphros* means “foam.” After emerging from the roaring waves completely naked (cat. 36), Aphrodite eventually reached the island of Cyprus. The chaste, radiant Aphrodite with a “finely crafted crown / of lovely gold”<sup>2</sup> on her head became a much-admired epitome of beauty: the woman of everyone’s dreams. Surprisingly perhaps, she was married to Hephaestus, the ugly god of blacksmiths, to whom she was not always faithful. She was said to have had numerous affairs with mortals and gods, which produced a number of children, including Harmonia from her liaison with Ares; Hermaphroditus from her relationship with the messenger of the gods, Hermes; and Aeneas, the legendary founding father of Rome, who was the son of Anchises.

For better or for worse, most gods and humans, with very few exceptions, were under her spell. Even the great Zeus succumbed to her charms. It was Aphrodite who created the power of love and the wish to be loved, thus determining the actions of all those who were happily or unhappily in love, the lovers and the haters. She was supported by Eros, the god of love, by Anteros (requited love), Pothos (sexual longing), Himeros (uncontrollable desire), and finally Peitho (persuasion).

But even Aphrodite was not immune to heartbreak. After a boar had killed her beautiful lover Adonis, she was so grief-stricken that she made red flowers grow from his blood as a sign of her torment. Some traditions name these anemones, but other flowers, such as the pheasant’s eye (*Adonis annua* in Latin), have also been associated with this myth. By bringing love into the world, the goddess also brought suffering and pain. The Trojan war was the result of a beauty contest in which Aphrodite emerged victorious over Hera and Athena. The bribe she paid to the adjudicator, Paris—the abduction of the beautiful but already married Helen—is also testimony to the sacrifices that Aphrodite’s merits required. From the seventh century BCE onwards, there have been representations of the goddess of love in all genres of art. Around 340 BCE, the Attic sculptor Praxiteles created a sculpture that showed her completely naked, the Aphrodite of Knidos. Since then artists have represented this most beautiful of all goddesses in many different shapes and poses, depicting the female nude as seductive, coquettish, vivacious, shy, or virtuous (cat. 37, 38). The Dresden statue also emphasizes Aphrodite’s

physical charms—even though, or perhaps precisely because, the naked goddess tries to cover her breast and pudendum and shyly averts her gaze.

Love, beauty, seduction, and desire, but also deception, rivalry, and revenge—everything was embodied in the figure of Aphrodite. Yet she was above all the goddess of sensual, sexual love and consequently of procreation—something which is indispensable to the continued existence of the human species.

SW

<sup>1</sup> *Homeric Hymns* 5.16.

<sup>2</sup> *Homeric Hymns* 6.7–8. and 6.19.





