

# An Analysis of the Origin and Evolution of the Image of Venus

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**Abstract:** Venus, the goddess of love and beauty, is a very common image in Western painting. Its image can be traced back to the source of human history. In different eras, artists are happy to use her image to create art, to bring the beauty of Venus come with different definitions. By exploring the origin of the image of Venus, analyzing its evolution in different periods and different artists, and exploring the practical significance and influence of the evolution of Venus. The image of Venus is constantly changing with the passage of time and dynasties, and her image has become richer and fuller in this evolution.

**Keywords:** Venus, Artistic image, Evolution, Beautiful.

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## 1. The Origin of the Image of Venus

The image of Venus can be traced back to the source of human development, when she tried to highlight the symbolic sculpture of female reproductive characteristics. Such features can be found in the Venus de Dongshanzou statue found in Liaoning, China, and the Venus de Willingdorf statue found in southern Austria. Their faces, features and limbs are almost ignored. Instead, they emphasize and exaggerate the parts related to reproduction, such as the chest, abdomen and hips. Such an image of Venus for the modern aesthetic, not beautiful, even ugly. Why did the primitive people create this image?

In the early matrilineal period of primitive society, living conditions were harsh, and the abundant reproduction of life was particularly important for a tribe. Due to the lack of scientific cognition, people do not understand the role of male in reproduction, so people maximize the prominence and exaggeration of the corresponding organs representing female reproduction. This figure has become a primitive totem worship, and people believe that such images can bring them supernatural power. These sculptures were probably the tools of witchcraft in ancient times. Seeing such images gave people the confidence to conquer nature without fear. At that time, the primitive ancestors valued her functional rather than aesthetic function.

## 2. Venus in Ancient Greece and Rome

During the ancient Greek period, art developed and evolved for about 650 years and reached an unprecedented height. Venus also evolved from a symbolic and symbolic image in the primitive period into a female image designed to imitate the real world. Ancient Greek art and its mythology are inseparable. As the embodiment of beauty and wisdom, Venus's image bears all the expectations for female beauty in ancient Greece. She has perfect body proportion, dignified and bashful beautiful face, and is full of divinity. These characteristics can be seen in sculptures such as the Venus de Milo, Aphrodite of the Needles, the Venus de Medici and the Venus Bathing.

Venus of Milo is the most representative image of Venus in Ancient Greece. The Venus de Milo originally had her upper left arm extended above her head, holding an apple, and her

right arm naturally hanging down, holding her skirt. Later, she lost her arms in the war, so she is also called the "Goddess of broken arms". She was graceful, natural, soft, dignified, with neither joy nor sorrow in her face. Her image was powerful and haunting, full of divinity.

Ancient Roman art followed the ancient Greek art tradition of pursuing "true beauty". But compared with the ideal beauty of ancient Greek art, the latter is more individualistic and secular. As the image representative of female nude beauty, the image of Venus lost the soft beauty and elegant divinity of the ancient Greek period. In the art trend of the Roman period, the noble and quiet female image evolved into the image of pleasing and enchanting people, and became a tool to satisfy the male sensory enjoyment.

## 3. The Invisibility of the Medieval Period

If works of art are divided into two categories: visual representation and pictorial experience, then the art of ancient Greece and Rome belongs to the former, while the art forms of the Middle Ages tend to the latter. People abandoned the beauty of the representation of the real world in place of symbols with spiritual symbols. The purpose of medieval art was to serve religion. Christianity forbade all sexual desire as a sin, even for beautiful, sexually attractive women who were tortured and tortured by witches.

The image of Venus represents a perfect woman, noble and romantic, and there is no lack of amour. This image is not allowed in the Christian world. She becomes a member of the "evil" and suffers various humiliations and sacrifices. Under such a background, Venus, an artistic image, disappeared in the countries where Christianity prevailed in the Middle Ages. Instead, it was a rigid image with no obvious features and very symbolic Madonna.

## 4. A Renaissance Image of Venus

The history of art has always alternated between visual representation and pictorial experience. The arrival of the Renaissance heralded the revival of the art form of perfect visual representation in ancient Greece and Rome. In this context, the image of Venus, the goddess of love and beauty, also appeared in the world and became one of the artist's

favorite subjects. The image that had been sleeping for thousands of years was revived again. Undoubtedly, culture will be precipitated. After experiencing the reproductive worship image in the primitive society, the sacred and elegant ideal beauty in the Greek period, the vulgitized beauty in the Roman period and the disappearance of the Middle Ages, the image of Venus in the Renaissance was sexy and charming. It is also sacred and solemn, with the elegance and calmness of classicism; But also the deep introspection of medieval Christianity; It has the human charm and natural beauty of the Renaissance.

Botticelli was a Florentine painter in the 15th century. In his work *The Birth of Venus*, the image of Venus is impressive with her beautiful face, confused and sad eyes. Botticelli's image of Venus perfectly combines the depiction of reappearance with the depiction of the spiritual world. "What I see is what I get" as a depiction of the spiritual world can be seen in prehistoric paintings, Egyptian art and medieval paintings, where painting is not just to be appreciated, but to transfer one's beliefs and replicate them in the depiction of everyday life. Botticelli's Venus also inherited this power, and the large shell on the sea indicates the birth of Venus in the Aegean Sea. The figure on the left of the picture indicates that the wind god sent her to the shore. The figure on the right of the picture alludes to the spring God, who welcomed her in a hurry and covered her with a golden dress made of stars in the sky. The swirling flowers indicate romance and beauty. The painting was painted by a distant brother of the Medici family, the ruler of Florence. The client believed that the painting contained a mysterious power to inspire people, and that the beautiful woman would imbue his brother with the same good character. But for a young man this power is based on a wonderful sensory experience. Botticelli's Venus has musical shapes and lines; A pair of slightly amber eyes stare ahead, her long blonde hair like a waterfall behind her, floating in the wind, but can not hide her sexy figure. The fixed classical ideal schema of the ancient Greek period helped Botticelli to realize this wonderful sensory experience. Under the influence of humanism, Botticelli's image of Venus not only possesses the elegance and silence of classicism, but also inherits the deep introspection of medieval Christianity, and tries to study and analyze the visual form.

Giorgione's "Sleeping Venus" is also a very outstanding artistic image in the Renaissance. With the awakening of self-awareness, the image gradually evolved to pay more attention to the object of objective existence, and began to pay attention to the surrounding nature in addition to the human itself. The Venus in Giorgione's image is no longer confused and reserved in Botticelli's works, but her plump and soft naked body runs across the whole picture, harmoniously echoing the tranquil grassland and hills, forming an ideal world of leisure and elegance. Giorgione's image of Venus from the myth into the nature, god, human and nature into one. The original shape of Giorgione's Venus comes from a woman whom the artist deeply admires. Under the artist's subjective beautification, the woman lies so relaxed, leisurely and unconcerned, with a relaxed and natural posture and a serene expression. It can be said that Giorgione's image of Venus is undoubtedly far-reaching, Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, Velazquez's *Venus Dressing to the Mirror*, Goya's *Naked Maha*, Manet's *Olympia* and other works are deeply influenced by it.



Figure 1. Sleeping Venus by Giorgione

## 5. Venus of Many Schools of Art from The 17th to The 19th Centuries

After hundreds of years of evolution, the human body images of the Renaissance have become very perfect. The natural vitality and subjective emotions cannot be tamed by reason. Due to the paranoid pursuit of reason and beauty, the female body under the artists' works has become a perfect image beyond visual representation. The pioneers explored different artistic styles, with an emphasis on light and color, deliberately at the expense of the classical style of harmony, serenity and softness, and the masters' laws of "natural beauty." Ingres's paintings take beauty to an eerie level, showing a woman with an impossibly soft, long spine, an easily curved neck and thighs so smooth that she resembles a plesiosaur, or a special female breed bred for pleasure. It can be said that the female images of this period are full of the tendency of pleasing the audience. Classical tastes changed, and in this context, the image of Venus, representing the female nude, changed again. The 17th-century *Venus Dressing to the Mirror* is the best example of this evolution.

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Although drawing nudity was frowned upon in Spain at the time, this was not the case in other countries. In Italy, a large number of nude images from the Roman period are well preserved. These beautiful nudes, full of pagan flavor, were probably the source of inspiration for the artist. According to historical records, Velazquez traveled to Italy in 1648. There he saw a sculpture called "The Borgecai Family Intersex" and was deeply attracted by it. It is called intersex because from the back one can see the soft curved back and the rich buttocks, while from the front one can see that it is a man. Such a curved back is exactly the same as the back of Venus in "Venus in Front of the Mirror". Therefore, it can be inferred that the

image of Venus in "Venus in Front of the Mirror" is the product of the author adding other artistic images and softening them.

The old image was given new life by the artist. After her metamorphosis, she became a living modern man without any divine nature. Here, the image of Venus evolved into a lazy beautiful woman, and we can even find the model herself from historical records. According to historical records, we can know that the first owner of Venus in Front of the Mirror was the son of the Chief minister of the King of Spain -- the Marquis Elich. It has been hypothesized that the model in Venus in Front of the Mirror was the lover of the Marquis of Elich, and this theory is partially supported by an actress named Damiana, who was particularly fond of black sheets, like the ones in Venus in Front of the Mirror. The deliberately blurred features in the painting have sparked speculation that they reflect the poor skin condition of actors and courtesans at the time, and that the rough depiction of Venus's face helped the artist better focus attention on Venus's beautiful nude body.

At that time, the Spanish royal family and dignitaries quietly collected a large number of nude paintings, they like Velazquez's "Venus in front of the Mirror" hanging in mansions and bedrooms to add spice, at this time the image of Venus as a symbol of women for people to enjoy. The king of Spain, for example, had a large collection of paintings by Rubens and Titian, which were drawn from classical myths and the Bible and depicted naked men and women as fat and fleshy. In contrast, the Venus in Velazquez's painting is more life-like, like a modern figure who seems to get up and walk away at any moment. So how did Velazquez achieve this lifelike effect? He painted the thick, realistic sheen of a woman's back in layers of lead white. Adding subtle color variations, reds, yellows, grays and lots of blue tones all help bring Venus's skin to life. Compared with other parts of the painting, the artist deliberately made rough treatment, reflecting the back and buttocks more delicate, make the picture more realistic, which is also the usual processing technique of Velazquez.

Images will accumulate and evolve over time. In Venus in Front of the Mirror, the image of Venus is not created out of thin air. We can see the shadow of Venus images drawn by many old masters. Starting from Venus Sleeping by Giorgione, the image of Venus relying gradually became popular with people. The image of Venus in Urbino painted by Giorgione's younger brother Titian was deeply influenced by the image. She moved the background indoors, and the image of the maid in the distance contrasted Venus' charm and added a sense of worldliness to her. In spite of this, Venus, painted by a Venetian painter at that time, also looks very similar to Venus in the Mirror, which can be regarded as the source of inspiration for Velazquez's image of Venus. The image of the reclining Venus has endless charm and vitality, and in the late 18th century, Goya used it again in his famous masterpieces, The Naked Maha and the Clothed Maha.

From the above example, we can see that the evolution of the image of Venus in the 17th and 18th centuries, the historical background, the cultural background, the artistic works of other artists, the social atmosphere and the patriarchal perspective all have an impact on the evolution of the image of Venus. It can be said that the evolution of the image is closely related to the environment in which it is located.



Figure 2. Venus in Front of the Mirror by Velazquez

## 6. Images of Venus since the 20th century

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, with the development of science and technology, the renewal of philosophical ideas, social trends of thought and cultural storm swept all aspects of the human world. In the process of constant turbulence, destruction and re-creation, the traditional Western aesthetic system since ancient Greece gradually collapsed. Artists searched for a new way out of art, prehistoric art, Oriental art, primitive art and other art forms emerged one after another in this period.

In this context, the image of Venus appeared again in the paintings of Manet, the spiritual leader of "Impressionism". In his work Lunch on the Grass, the image of Venus appears candid and real, compared with the pure female body depicted by the favored salon painters of the time, which seems more pornographic and hypocritical.

Olympia is another of Manet's works, which depicts the image of a prostitute and takes its name from the Mount Olympia in Greek mythology. The holiness and beauty of the sacred mountain are in strong contrast to the image of the prostitute. Openly teasing the tradition, blaspheming the classics and trample on the aesthetic taste of the public have become an important language of art since then. In terms of the choice of models and composition, this painting is very similar to many images of reclining Venus mentioned in this paper, especially Venus in Front of the Mirror and Maha in the Nude. The evolution of the image has both striking similarities and subtle changes. It keeps evolving with many factors in the form of spiral. Manet's Venus is so magnanimous, real and bold teasing make the image of Venus more rich and complete.

The 20th century is an era of image reproduction and dissemination. Internet and new media technology bring a large number of images to our attention. We can easily obtain any information we want to know about the works of art. The image is no longer the product of the elite to enjoy the entertainment, it has become like the graphic information symbol, in the form of a variety of images in the brand posters and promotional media. Artists and image workers use borrowing, appropriation, irony and other means to give the image of Venus a new connotation.

Since the image of Venus was born in ancient times, it has experienced the artistic changes of ancient Greek art, ancient Roman art, Byzantine art, Renaissance, Baroque art, Rococo art and the 19th century until today. Her artistic image has been constantly evolving with The Times, and each evolution has brought a profound color to the history of art. The beauty of Venus is immortal.



**Figure 3.** Lunch on the Grass by Edouard Manet

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