



# Female marble sculpture with folded arms

Goulandris Master

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## Not on display

**Title/Description:** Female marble sculpture with folded arms

**Artist/Maker:** Goulandris Master

**Born:** 2700 c. BC - 2400 c. BC

**Measurements:** h. 276 x w. 86 x d. 40 mm

**Accession Number:** 342

**Historic Period:** Early Cycladic II (c. 2700-2400 BC), 3rd millennium BC

**Cultural Group:** Keros-Syros

**Credit Line:** Donated by Robert and Lisa Sainsbury, 1973

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This stylised female figurine is a product of the Cycladic islands in Greece. Made around four and a half thousand years ago, it has suffered some damage: it is broken at the neck, the arms, and the knees. The lower legs are still missing; the other parts have been put back together using modern conservation techniques. Interestingly, the surface patina on the body above and below the break at the arms is the same, whereas on the head it is different: this indicates that the head was in a slightly different environment (buried in the ground before discovery) than the body: perhaps the body was broken in recent times, an accident during the looting by which this object came to light.

Like many Cycladic figurines, this one has a very characteristic form: the head has a distinctive 'lyre-shape', meaning that it is elongated, with a rounded chin, and with a distinctive flare at the top. The nose is indicated in relief, but other features, such as arms and legs, are shown by incision or grooves. Such figurines are characteristically female (male counterparts are rare): here the breasts are barely shown, but the pubic triangle is an indication of sex.

Some features on such figurines were shown using paint rather than sculpture, and in this case there may be traces of paint preserved, very faintly, at the forehead and on the back of the head, probably representing hair. There may even be an eye on the right side of the face.

Scholars have in the past tried to discern the 'hand', ie distinctive stylistic traits, of individual craftspersons or, perhaps, workshops [1]. This object is actually a classic example of one of the best defined of these groups (the so-called 'Goulandris Master', now better, and slightly more technically, the Kavos sub-variety) although, rather strikingly, one made up almost entirely of objects without a good archaeological context (ie, looted objects). Recent scholarship has moved away somewhat from attributing individual pieces to specific persons or 'masters' [2]: the reproduction of style in the past need not involve the mind of a single individual (pottery styles were replicated for centuries) and the level of skill or artistry in creating Cycladic figurines may have been over-emphasised [3]. The traits present in this figure that allow us to attribute it to the Kavos sub-variety are the shape of the head, the steeply sloping shoulders, thin arms, the proportions of the body, and the lack of spine at the rear.

Michael Boyd, March 2022

[1] Pat Getz-Gentle, *Personal Styles in Early Cycladic Sculpture* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2001).

[2] Colin Renfrew, 'Early Cycladic sculpture: issues of provenance, terminology and classification', in *Early Cycladic Sculpture in Context*, eds. M. Marthari, C. Renfrew & M.J. Boyd (Oxbow Books, 2017), 1-12.

[3] Yiannis Papadatos and Epaminondas Venieris, 'An experimental approach to the manufacture of Cycladic-type figurines with folded arms: preliminary observations', in *Early Cycladic Sculpture in Context*, eds. M. Marthari, C. Renfrew & M.J. Boyd (Oxbow Books, 2017), 483-90.

TO-BE-REPLACED-WITH-A-GAP

Quantities of slender, statuesque figures were carved from white marble on the Cyclades islands, in the Aegean archipelago, in the third millennium BC. Was anything more beautiful ever created? And yet when these figures first appeared on the market in the nineteenth century, they were thought ugly and barbaric.

Robert and Lisa Sainsbury loved these mysterious (usually female, sometimes pregnant) relics from the early Bronze Age, and this is among the more complete pieces in their considerable collection. Only the nose is carved; other facial features were painted, as is shown by traces of pigment.

Rodin owned two such figures. Others had a huge impact on Modigliani and Giacometti. During the second world war Picasso showed writer André Malraux a Cycladic figure in his Paris studio and pondered upon the unknown maker and a creative impulse linking them together. He said: "Nothing's left of his life; nothing's left of his kind of gods; nothing's left of anything. Nothing. But this is left because he wanted to make a piece of sculpture."

Ian Collins, journalist and writer

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## **Further Reading**

C. Broodbank, *An Island Archaeology of the Early Cyclades* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

M. Marthari, C. Renfrew & M.J. Boyd, *Early Cycladic Sculpture in Context* (Oxbow Books, 2017).

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## **Provenance**

Acquired by the Sainsbury Family in 1961. Donated to the Sainsbury Centre, University of East Anglia in 1973 as part of the original gift.

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