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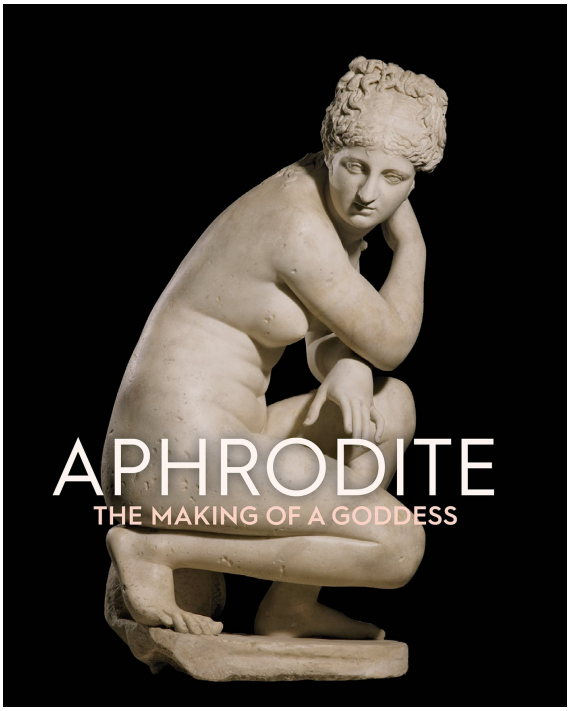

Aphrodite

The Making of a Goddess

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Liam McNamara

Peter A. Thompson

Jennifer Sliwka

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- **A global and historical journey through mythology:** The catalogue doesn't just show pretty statues — it traces Aphrodite's entire history, from her ancient cult beginnings in Cyprus over 3,000 years ago through her evolution in Greek and Roman religions and into Renaissance and modern art. You'll see how her story and image transformed and why she remains culturally influential today
- **Extensive and rare objects spanning millennia:** Featuring more than 200 objects, the catalogue brings together an extraordinary range of material — including sculptures, bronzes, gems and terracottas — from Cyprus, Greece and Italy, with pieces dating from c.1400 BCE to the 21st century. Many of these are rarely exhibited outside their home countries and reveal diverse artistic traditions tied to Aphrodite's mythos
- **Loans from world-class collections:** The catalogue will include prestigious loans — such as celebrated classical statues and masterpieces on loan from institutions like the Royal Collection and the Louvre — offering visitors the chance to see icons of Aphrodite/Venus alongside ancient cult objects
- **A fresh perspective on love, beauty and desire:** By bringing together myth, religion and art, the catalogue prompts readers to think about how ideas of love, beauty and desire have been constructed and re-interpreted across cultures — making it both visually captivating and intellectually engaging
- Published to accompany the Ashmolean's major exhibition: *Aphrodite: The Making of a Goddess*, running from October 2026 to April 2027

Step into the world of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, beauty, and desire – later worshiped by the Romans as Venus. Today she is thought of as a symbol of passion and beauty, but her story is far older and more complex. This catalogue explores Aphrodite's beginnings on the island of Cyprus, where she was worshiped as an all-powerful goddess over 3,000 years ago, and traces her journey through the Greek and into the Roman world, where she became Venus.

This book reveals how, over the centuries, Aphrodite evolved into an iconic figure symbolizing love and beauty as her myths and images flourished – inspiring art, literature, and imagination from the Renaissance to the present day. Illustrated with more than 200 extraordinary objects – from sculpture and bronzes to gems and terracottas from Cyprus, Greece, and Italy, dating back from around 1400 BCE to the 21st century – this catalogue uncovers the making of a goddess whose legacy still shapes our ideas of love and beauty today.

Anja Ulbrich has been the A.G. Leventis curator of Cypriot Antiquities at the Ashmolean since 2009. She studied Classical Archaeology, Ancient History and History of European Art at Heidelberg University, Germany, and completed an MPhil in Classics (Greek archaeology) at the University of Cambridge, where she encountered and became fascinated with Cypriot archaeology. **Liam McNamara** is Keeper (Senior Curator) of the Department of Antiquities and Lisa and Bernard Selz Curator for Ancient Egypt and Sudan at the Ashmolean Museum. He is Associate Professor of Egyptology and a Governing Body Fellow at Wolfson College.**Peter A. Thompson** is Assistant Curator of Classical Archaeology at the Ashmolean Museum and Assistant Lecturer in Classical Archaeology at St John's College. He is also a Classical Archaeology Fellow and PhD Candidate in Archaeology and the History of Art at New York University. In his role at the Museum, Peter carries out various curatorial and research duties relating to the Museum's collections of archaeological material from the ancient Greek and Roman worlds**Jennifer Sliwka**, PhD was the Keeper of Western Art at the Ashmolean Museum and Professorial Fellow at Balliol College at the University of Oxford. She left in September 2025 after being appointed Director of the Picture Gallery of the Kunsthistorisches Museum. Before joining the Museum in September 2023, she worked at The National Gallery, The Victoria & Albert Museum and The British Museum. For over 10 years, she also taught a collaborative MA in Theology & the Arts between the National Gallery and King's College London.







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