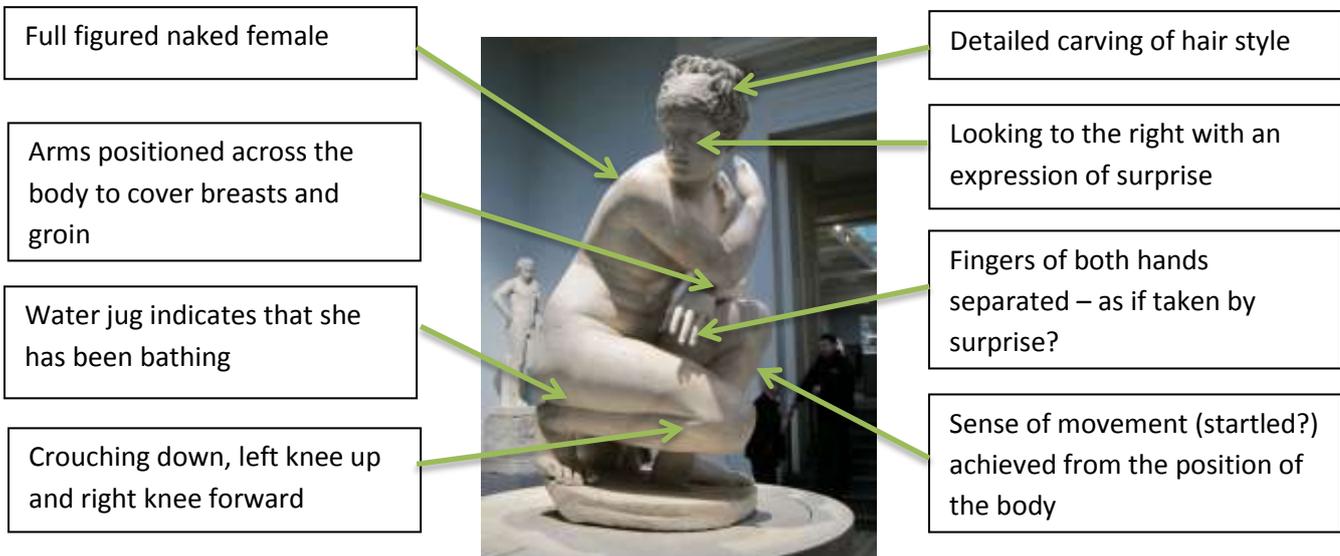


## Marble Statue of a Naked Aphrodite Crouching at her Bath



Marble statue, height 1.12m, British Museum

- Different angles of viewing reveal different aspects of the sculpture, need to walk around it to view from all angles – there is something of importance from each viewing angle
- Arms held slightly awkwardly against the body
- Anatomically realistic

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### Description

A sculpture carved from a single block of marble. It depicts a naked woman, crouching down and holding her arms across the front of her body as if to cover her nakedness. The voluptuous figure is portrayed with anatomical accuracy and with a sense of movement given by the posture, particularly the turning of the head. Facial features are carved very distinctly as is the hairstyle.

### Interpretation

This is a Roman statue from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. The British Museum website describes it as a version of an original from Hellenistic Greece.

The exhibit card for the sculpture describes the scene that is portrayed “the goddess Venus is surprised as she bathes, her water jar resting under her left thigh”. It continues “Like many Greek sculptures of the Hellenistic period, the original statue was designed to create an interplay between artwork and viewer or, in this case, voyeur ... each of the four viewpoints presents a strikingly different aspect of the naked goddess. Tantalisingly none is fully revealing”.

As Flynn (1998 p43) notes in the Roman period “enthusiastic emulation of Greek culture ensured the continuing centrality of the three dimensional body”.

## Evaluation

Typical of later Hellenistic sculptures (and their Roman copies) this sculpture exhibits a harmonious balance of the human form. The two legs and arms are shown in different positions and planes, the head and torso in different directions, but all counterbalance each other and give a sense of movement to the whole sculpture. The body is rendered with anatomical accuracy.

According to the British Museum website, it was in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC that Praxiteles made a “life-size naked statue of Aphrodite .... and subsequent Hellenistic sculptors created several new types of nude Aphrodite figures that further emphasised the sexual nature of her cult .... previously only male statues had been naked”.

As stated on the website, Aphrodite’s actions in trying to cover her nakedness with hands and arms, actually draws the viewer’s eyes to the sexual areas– although as previously noted, none are fully revealed.

This sculpture has also been copied over the years, a 1702 version by John Nost the Elder is displayed in the Victoria and Albert Museum (photo on the right).



**405 WORDS**

## References

Flynn, T. (1998) *The Body in Sculpture*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson

## Web References

[http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight\\_objects/gr/m/marble\\_statue\\_of\\_aphrodite.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/gr/m/marble_statue_of_aphrodite.aspx)