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Disarmed: The Story of the Venus de Milo

By Gregory Curtis



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In the spring of 1820, on the Aegean island of Melos, an unsuspecting farmer was digging for marble building blocks when he unearthed the statue that would come to be known as the Venus de Milo. From the moment of its discovery a battle for possession ensued and was won, eventually, by the French. Touted by her keepers in the Louvre as the great classical find of the era, the sculpture gained instant celebrity—and yet its origins had yet to be documented or verified.

From the flurry of excitement surrounding her discovery, to the raging disputes over her authenticity, to the politics and personalities that have given rise to her mystique, Gregory Curtis has given us a riveting look at the embattled legacy of a beloved icon and a remarkable tribute to one of the world's great works of art.



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Disarmed: The Story of the Venus de Milo By Gregory Curtis Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In 1820 on the island of Melos, a young French naval officer and a local farmer discovered the hulking halves of an armless statue. The Venus de Milo has since graced car advertisements, adorned matchboxes and inspired artists from Dali to Jim Dine. Former Texas Monthly editor Curtis simply chalks up the Venus's omnipresence to its timeless beauty, and he impressively details an era when the statue seemed "less like a thing than an event." Relating how the French returned to Melos just in time to intercept a Russian boat bearing their treasure away, Curtis dismisses the mythic "fight on the beach" in which the Venus supposedly lost her arms; she had been found without them. Inspired by Johann Winckelmann's theories of Greek art, the Louvre's officials insisted on dating their acquisition to the classical age, rather than to the Hellenistic period of artistic decadence. Hence, the inscribed base that attributed the work to the Hellenistic sculptor Alexandros was conveniently "lost" for a time. For his part, Curtis ventures that the Venus once stood in the niche of a Greek gymnasium and held an apple, symbol of Melos and of the debate that launched the Trojan War. But more compellingly, his sense of a good anecdote revives the myriad characters (often shown among the 21 illustrations) who furiously debated the statue's origin, identity and even placement in the Louvre as late as the 20th century. Such scholars exuded "an enthusiasm for the statue, almost a gratitude for its presence in their lives." This enthusiasm, Curtis's work suggests, is what museum-goers maintain and contemporary critics too often forget; his judicious book may push them to remember.

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From [Booklist](#)

The Venus de Milo receives throngs of admirers every day in the Louvre, her white marble luminescent, her pose enigmatic since no one knows the position her missing arms once took. Every bit as iconic as the *Mona Lisa*, this powerful Greek statue has elicited far less modern research. This combination of ubiquitousness and invisibility inspired Curtis to take a fresh approach to the deliciously convoluted tale of the stone goddess' discovery by a French naval ensign on the unlovely Aegean island of Melos in 1820, and all the anxious and nefarious wrangling, debate, and controversy that followed, including the convenient disappearance of an inscribed base that attributed the statue not to one of Greece's golden age sculptors, as claimed, but rather to a "nobody" working in the civilization's declining years. His pleasure in his complex subject palpable on every sparkling page, Curtis parses nineteenth-century Europe's fervor for all things classical, provides gossip profiles of amazingly eccentric officials and scholars, and, finally, renews our appreciation for a masterpiece as beautiful as it is mysterious. *Donna Seaman*

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Review

"Fresh, full of adventure, conflict, and a sense of discovery." —*The Baltimore Sun*

"Masterful. . . . Entertaining. . . . Interesting and anecdote-filled. . . . A meaningful contribution to the legend of the stony seductress." —*Minneapolis Star Tribune*

"Lively and engaging. . . . Readable and enlightening. . . . Filled with striking and compelling characters." —*The Dallas Morning News*

"Absorbing. . . . Enormously entertaining. . . . Curtis is a writer of generous wit, who packs his book with delicious portraits of the scholars, writers, artists and politicians who contributed to the mythologizing of the Venus de Milo." —*San Jose Mercury News*

“Fascinating. . . . Reads like a mystery.” –*The Washington Post Book World*

“Part thriller, part art history, part rumination on the Greeks. . . . Curtis writes faster and better than just about any academic art historian.” –*Newsweek*

“Absorbing. . . . Enormously entertaining. . . . Curtis is a writer of generous wit, who packs his book with delicious portraits of the scholars, writers, artists and politicians who contributed to the mythologizing of the Venus de Milo.” –*San Jose Mercury News*

“An engaging and engrossing book. It makes one want to head right off to Paris, to that long gallery in the Louvre, and have a look again.” –Larry McMurtry

“Curtis does a solid job of presenting art history as narrative non-fiction, moving the statue swiftly across many epochs and giving a taste of what it meant to each.” –*Chicago Tribune*

“Fascinating, scholarly, surprising, and extremely entertaining.” –Jan Morris

“Gripping. . . . [Curtis] disassembles each argument with the cranky urgency of a contemporary critic. And when he’s cleared the marble dust he takes his own crack at telling Venus’s story.” –*Forbes FYI*

“A memorable, fascinating, thrilling book. In vivid prose based on research of great integrity, he makes us see new depths beneath the statue’s beauty. He has created a work that will endure in your memory like the statue itself.” –Robert A. Caro

“In this colorful history of the statue and the riddles surrounding her, Curtis breathes warm life into this icon of female inscrutability.” –*Men’s Journal*

“I found **Disarmed** completely compelling. After a while, I started to think that the book would wind up getting, via a single sculpture, to everything—and it very nearly does: art, sex, politics, religion. It’s even, for me, in an oblique way, about war and “disarmament.” What a subtle, clever, nuanced work.” –David Shields

“Riveting. . . . Brisk and brilliant. . . . Highly readable, well-researched and even passionate. . . . Lush, learned, and surprisingly entertaining. . . . A stunning debut.” –*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

“**Disarmed** will be a startling book for readers expecting a dutiful art history lesson about a statue. It is instead a fiery and eccentric story, in whose pages all sorts of unforgettable characters fight for possession not just of the Venus de Milo herself, but of the tranquil, eternal, maddeningly elusive ideal of human perfection she represents.” –Stephen Harrigan

“Sparkling. . . . Deliciously convoluted. . . . Curtis . . . renews our appreciation for a masterpiece as beautiful as it is mysterious.” –*Booklist*

“A fascinating tale admirably told.” –Rosamond Bernier

“Lively and engaging. . . . Very readable and enlightening. . . . Curtis’s story is filled with . . . striking and compelling characters.” –*The Trenton Times*

Users Review

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Kelli Ross:

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Van Gee:

A lot of people always spent their own free time to vacation or even go to the outside with them friends and family or their friend. Are you aware? Many a lot of people spent many people free time just watching TV, or playing video games all day long. In order to try to find a new activity here is look different you can read a book. It is really fun to suit your needs. If you enjoy the book that you just read you can spent the entire day to reading a book. The book Disarmed: The Story of the Venus de Milo it is extremely good to read. There are a lot of folks that recommended this book. They were enjoying reading this book. In case you did not have enough space to bring this book you can buy often the e-book. You can m0ore easily to read this book from your smart phone. The price is not very costly but this book offers high quality.

Alan Durham:

The book untitled Disarmed: The Story of the Venus de Milo contain a lot of information on it. The writer explains her idea with easy means. The language is very straightforward all the people, so do definitely not worry, you can easy to read that. The book was compiled by famous author. The author brings you in the new age of literary works. You can easily read this book because you can read more your smart phone, or program, so you can read the book inside anywhere and anytime. In a situation you wish to purchase the e-book, you can start their official web-site in addition to order it. Have a nice learn.

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