

Re: That Classic White Sculpture Once Had a Paint Job

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- *From:* "A." <AmericanWoman_2009@xxxxxxxxx>
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"Jack Linthicum" <jacklinthicum@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx> wrote in message
<news:1192368443.068430.242290@xx>

Another example of judging a society and culture by the remnants we have found, not realizing that the bold works of statues and buildings were not always gleaming white marble but painted like the boldest of op art. Classical art was apparently not white bare and austere but gaudy and even in bad taste.

Would have been a good post if you'd left out your subjective viewpoint at the end.

October 14, 2007
Close Reading
That Classic White Sculpture Once Had a Paint Job
By MILES UNGER

THE 18th-century scholar Johann Winckelmann coined the memorable phrase "noble simplicity and quiet grandeur" to describe the qualities he admired in ancient Greek and Roman statues, which in his time were thought to have been created in gleaming white marble or unadorned bronze. So ingrained was this notion of austere, monochromatic ancient sculpture that it came as a shock when in the 19th century newly unearthed masterpieces showed traces of their original pigment.

The spare, unadorned forms associated with the word classical – and imitated by centuries of artists – were actually an accident of time that obscured their original, often garish coloring and gilded accessories.

One of the signal moments in this rediscovery was the excavation of the Temple of Aphaia on the Greek island Aegina in 1811. Obvious on

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the pediment sculptures, depicting mythical battle scenes, were traces of red paint used to mimic oozing blood, as well as peg holes that once held the warriors' bristling arsenal. There's nothing like a bit of gore to dispel any notion of "quiet grandeur," or a quiver full of gold-tipped arrows to mock the idea of "noble simplicity."

The archaeologist Vinzenz Brinkmann and a team of investigators have subjected numerous ancient statues to a thorough examination, using both chemical analysis and observation under raking and ultraviolet light. This has allowed them to recreate what the works must have looked like when they first emerged from the studio more than 2,000 years ago.

"Gods in Color: Painted Sculpture of Classical Antiquity," an exhibition at Harvard's Arthur M. Sackler Museum, displays more than a dozen reconstructions of Greek and Roman sculptures based on their work. Even for those who knew that the ancients tinted their statues, the effect is startling. Placed alongside original works from the Sackler's collection, these reconstructions seem bright and brassy, vulgar and almost childlike in their high-key color and frilly detail.

The figure of the Trojan archer (about 490–480 B.C.) depicted here came from the Temple of Aphaia and probably represents Paris, son of King Priam of Troy. His abduction of Helen precipitated the Trojan War, and it was Paris who killed Achilles, the greatest of the Greek warriors, by shooting an arrow into his unprotected heel. As an archer who slays his enemies from a distance rather than in hand-to-hand combat, Paris is viewed as something less than heroic.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/10/14/arts/design/14unge.html?ref=arts>

http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2007/10/14/arts/20071014_CLOSE_GRAPHIC.html