

# Late Classical and Hellenistic Periods

by Sophia



## WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson covers the Late Classical and Hellenistic periods and the political context, unsettling war, and artistic changes that coincided at this time. You will learn about:

1. [Period and Location: Late Classical and Hellenistic Periods](#)
2. [Politics, Art, and Change](#)
3. [Aphrodite of Knidos](#)
4. [Hermes and Dionysus](#)
5. [Nike of Samothrace](#)
6. [Aphrodite of Milos](#)
7. [Dying Gaul](#)
8. [Gallic Chieftain](#)



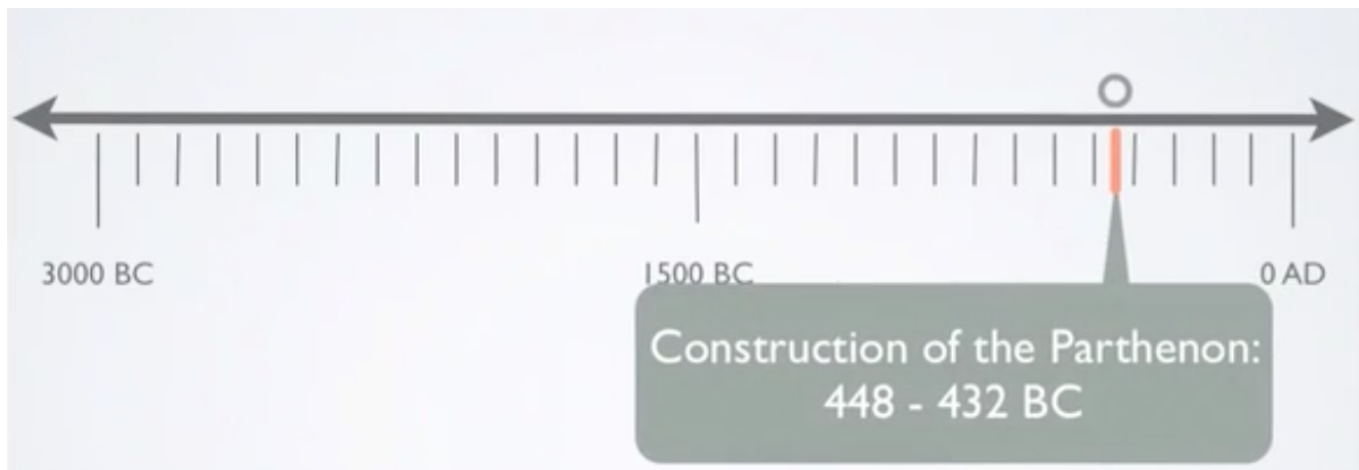
## BIG IDEA

The art of the Late Classical and Hellenistic periods saw changes in the artistic style from idealized and composed to more dramatic and sensual.

## 1. Period and Location: Late Classical and Hellenistic Periods

The Late Classical and Hellenistic periods extended from 400 BCE to around 30 BCE, from the time of the Peloponnesian War to the conquering of Greece by Rome. This lesson covers the geographical region of ancient Greece.

This timeline highlights the period that this lesson covers:



## 2. Politics, Art, and Change

The Golden Age of Athens was short-lived. Soon after the completion of the Parthenon, Pericles died from the plague, and Athens found itself at odds with Sparta.

The Peloponnesian War was fought between Athens and Sparta, two Grecian city-states. Athens eventually lost the battle in 404 BCE. This huge loss, as well as an outbreak of the plague, pushed Athens into a period of decline.

The Classical period corresponds to this decline. At the same time, there was a shift in artistic style. Male nudes were quite common and more than acceptable, while the female nude was actually seen as low-class. But artists were beginning to challenge these ideas.

## 3. Aphrodite of Knidos

The artist, Praxiteles, shook up the Grecian world in 350 BCE with the first known depiction of a female nude in history, or at least the first in the art of Greece. It's called the Aphrodite of Knidos.

Below is a Roman copy of Aphrodite of Knidos. Note that this is only a copy, not the original.





**Aphrodite of Knidos by Praxiteles (image shown is a Roman copy)**

**350 BCE (Late Classical)**

**Marble**

This sculpture depicts the goddess Aphrodite emerging from or entering a bath. Someone has surprised her and she grabs a towel and uses her hand to cover herself. This depiction of the nude female form in Greek sculpture is typical of Late Classical and Hellenistic art and represents a dramatic change from the Archaic period, when women were depicted fully clothed while men were nude.

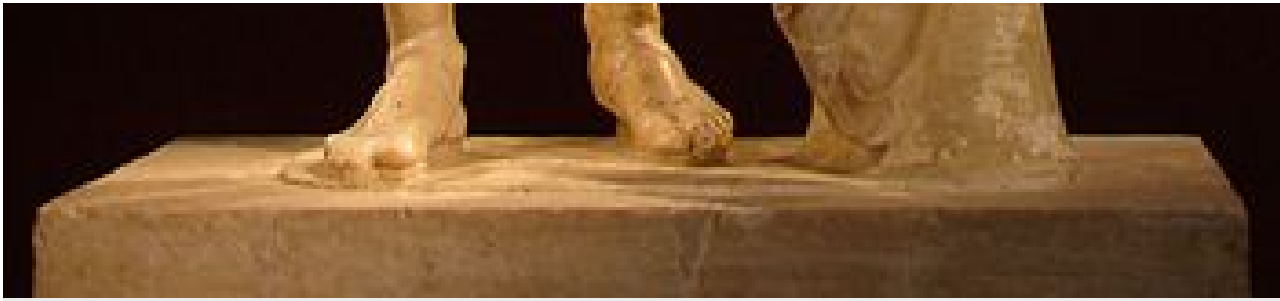
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## 4. Hermes and Dionysus

Subject matter began to change as well. Artists began to depict more intimate and relaxed characters.

Speaking of relaxed pose, below is a sculpture of the god, Hermes, with the infant god, Dionysus. This sculpture shows a much more exaggerated representation of the contrapposto pose.





Hermes and the Infant Dionysus (attributed to Praxiteles)

340 BCE (Late Classical)

Marble

In the sculpture above, Hermes actually has to support himself by leaning on the tree stump. The figure, while idealized, is less athletic in build than what we see in works such as the Doryphoros, by Polykleitos. There is a more youthful appearance. The sculpture was originally attributed to the artist Praxiteles, due to its stylistic qualities. But it's now believed that this may, in fact, be a Roman reproduction of an earlier work by Praxiteles.



#### DID YOU KNOW

Reproductions of artwork are actually quite common.

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## 5. Nike of Samothrace

The artist Lysippos was important because of his depictions of athletes and great warriors in more naturalistic poses. He is considered a key artist in transitioning from the Late Classical to Hellenistic style, where we see more dramatic sculptural poses.

Take, for example, this image below of Nike of Samothrace.



**Nike of Samothrace**  
**190 BCE (Hellenistic)**  
**Marble**

Notice the sense of movement in this sculpture, which is intensified by:

- The dramatic folds of the cloth
- The contrasting light and dark areas

- The figure jutting forward as the wings extend backwards

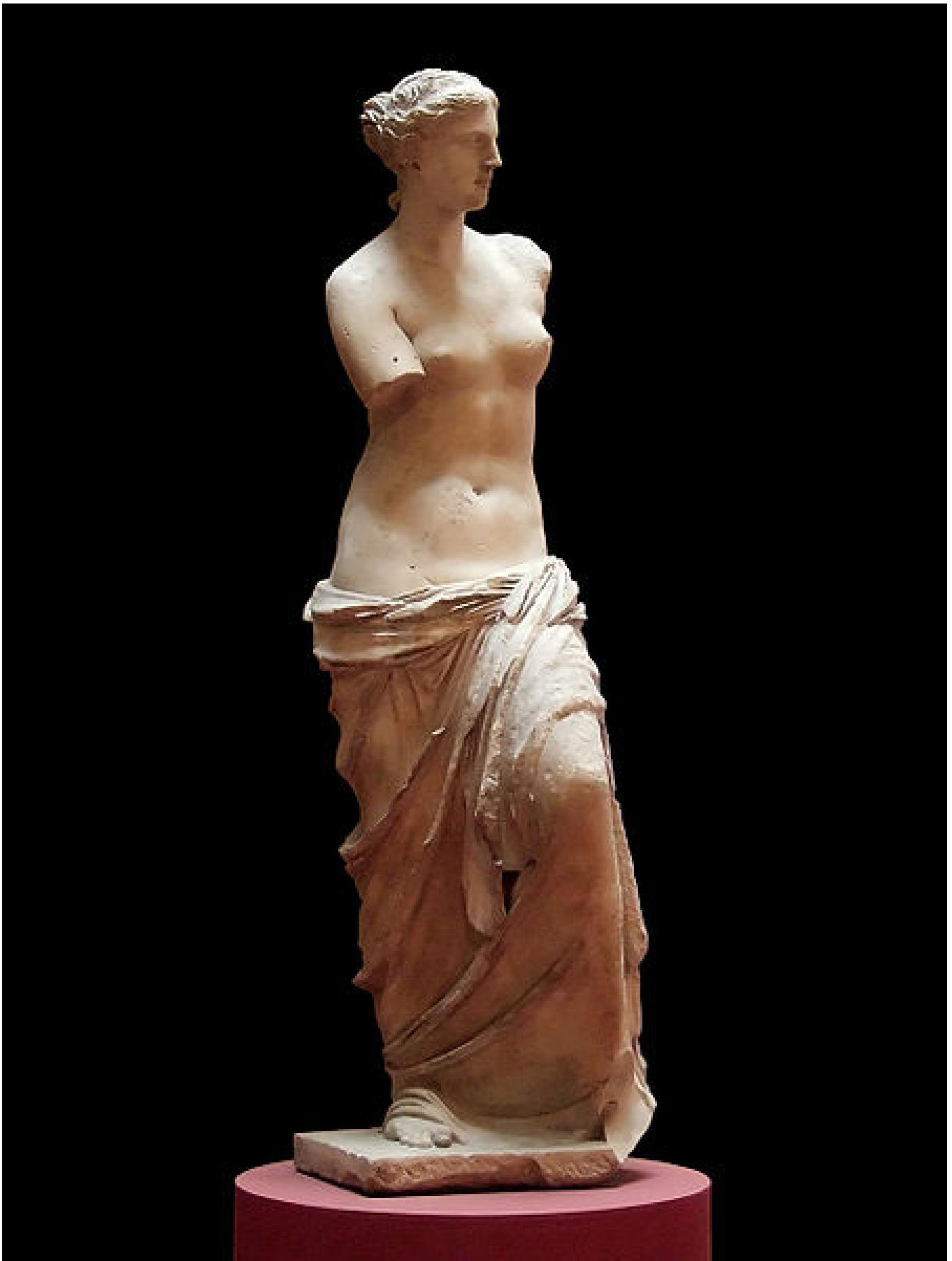
It is this lack of restraint that we see as a common design element in Hellenistic art.

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## 6. Aphrodite of Milos

Below is the Aphrodite of Milos—or Venus de Milo, as it's commonly known:





Aphrodite of Milos (also known as Venus de Milo)

150–100 BCE (Hellenistic)

Marble

This work of art is interesting in its apparent combination of stylistic elements. At first glance, it calls forth the central nude depictions of Late Classical artists, such as Praxiteles. But the way the cloth is rendered is characteristic of the Hellenistic period in its dramatic folds and in the way it seems to almost be slipping off her body.

## 7. Dying Gaul

The Gauls, or Celts, were a tribe of people who originally settled in the central regions of Europe. It wasn't until they were constantly pushed further and further out of Europe that they settled into the regions we associate with them today—Great Britain and Ireland. They were considered barbarians, as were all non-Greeks.

Take a look at this image of Dying Gaul.



Dying Gaul (Roman copy of original bronze)

220 BCE (Hellenistic)

Marble (original: bronze)

This artwork is interesting both for its naturalistic depiction of its subject and for the dignity of the depiction of his death. It seems to suggest a level of respect on the part of the artist for his bravery, even in defeat. This is a

Roman copy of an original bronze.

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## 8. Gallic Chieftain

The idea of a noble death is also seen in this sculpture of the Gallic Chieftain Killing Himself and His Wife.



Gallic Chieftain Killing Himself and His Wife

Gallic Chieftain Killing Himself and His Wife

230–220 BCE (Hellenistic)

Marble

An image such as this, in its time, would have been understood to reflect a certain degree of nobility in how the chieftain would rather see his wife dead than sold into slavery. He would rather take his own life than surrender. An image such as this seems to imply a level of admiration for these barbarians, as the Greeks would call them. This is a drastic change in attitude from the metope sculptures of the Parthenon.



## SUMMARY

Politically and artistically, things were changing during the Late Classical and Hellenistic periods. In this lesson, you learned about the **period and location of the Late Classical and Hellenistic periods**. In doing so, you also learned about **politics, art, and change** during this time.

Many works of art were explored in this lesson: **Aphrodite of Knidos, Hermes and Dionysus, Nike of Samothrace, Aphrodite of Milos, Dying Gaul, and Gallic Chieftain Killing Himself and His Wife**. These works are important in that they give us a glimpse of the changing characteristics of art during this period. It was the first time that women were being portrayed nude, and this was a big deal. Artwork and the details seemed to become more dramatic and sensual.

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