Portrait of a Lady:
A New Statue at the Yale University Art Gallery

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Both Greek and Roman societies judged men and women by certain standards. Women were expected to be modest, chaste, and reserved; these values determined her level of respect from family and peers. These personal moralities are central not only in the written traditions of the ancient world but also in its portraiture. Hellenistic and Roman portraits of women typically show them in canonical modes connected to certain traits, so that the images would be easily understood as commentary on life-style and disposition. The Gallery’s recent acquisition (fig. 1) is a perfect example of such a portrait; it follows a scheme known to scholars as pudicitia and asserts a strong visual statement about the decorous and modest character of the woman shown. She stands in a self-contained pose, her body enveloped by rich garments and one arm bent so that the hand is near the face. This type was a popular option for images of women, not only in freestanding statuary but also in relief sculpture, beginning in the eastern Mediterranean around the second century B.C. and spreading west. It continued to appear through the second century A.D., though with decreasing regularity after the early Imperial period.

In creating a late Hellenistic or Roman portrait, artists chose from a variety of standard body types, most of which were loaded with meaning from centuries of dissemination. A woman might be shown as Aphrodite, even nude or seminude, and the image would be interpreted as a statement about the woman’s beauty and charm. Hellenistic examples frequently display less concern for individual appearance, so that even statues designed as portraits tend toward idealization. In the Roman period, statues tended to be strongly personalized, often including a contemporary fashion hairstyle. Exceptions appear in the Greek East, where patrons and sculptors maintained strong ties to Hellenistic traditions.

There are several variations of the pudicitia statue type, though all carry the same connotations when chosen for a portrait. Some versions shift the weight to the opposite leg and/or reverse the position of the arms. The arrangement and treatment of the drapery sometimes also varies. The new Yale statue is a high-quality example of the so-called Braccio Nuovo type, named for a statue in the Vatican Museums, in Rome (fig. 2). In this type, the edge of the mantle falls in front of the body, crossing over the left wrist and creating a long diagonal line that accentuates the figure’s elegant stance.

The Gallery’s new statue was acquired at Sotheby’s in New York in December 2007. It came from a private owner in France and had stood in a garden there since being
purchased from London antiquities dealer Robert Kime, who had acquired it at a Sotheby’s auction in England in 1987. Certain restorations, particularly the right arm, suggest that the statue was in a European collection by at least the nineteenth century, when such techniques were common.

The slightly over life-size marble statue, six feet tall, portrays a woman in a frontal pose with her weight primarily on her right leg, her left leg bent and set slightly forward. She wears a long dress (chiton) covered by a mantle (himation) and thin-soled shoes of soft leather. True to the pudicitia scheme, the left arm crosses in front of the torso.

Fig. 1 (opposite). Figure of a Woman, Roman, 1st century B.C.—early 1st century A.D. Marble, 77 1/8 x 30 3/4 x 18 1/8 in. (198 x 77 x 46 cm). Yale University Art Gallery. Purchased with the Ruth Elizabeth White and Leonard C. Hanna, Jr., B.A. 1913, Funds, 2007.207.1

Fig. 2 (above, left). Statue of a Woman, Braccio Nuovo type (right hand and head restored), Roman, late 1st century A.D. Marble, h. 6 ft. 9 7/8 in. (2.08 m). Vatican Museums, Rome, Braccio Nuovo 23

Fig. 3 (above, right). Photoshop reconstruction of fig. 1
enveloped in layers of drapery. The original right arm would have been bent so that the hand was near the chin, possibly grasping the mantle that is drawn up over the head (fig. 3). The mantle is notable for its fringed edge, carefully and skillfully carved. Such fringe is a distinctive and individualizing element; fringed garments were worn by both men and women in antiquity and were associated with Hellenistic royalty and the luxurious East. The closed shoes are another specific feature, a distinctive fashion element of metropolitan Rome. Since we lack the inscription that originally would have accompanied this statue on its base, we must rely upon such iconographic clues in discussing its identity and context.

The carving on the Gallery’s statue is exceptionally fine, showing great sensitivity to contrast in texture and detail of drapery. In typical Hellenistic-style sculptural fashion, the lines of the heavier chiton are visible beneath the thinner mantle overlay. The complex patterns of folds and creases balance the compositional lines and stabilize the figure. The face is idealized, the hair brushed back in waves from a central part. It recalls images of Greek goddesses and suggests a strong Classical tradition, such as existed in the Greek East even into the Roman era.

Although largely complete, the statue has undergone several repairs and restorations. These treatments are now being studied to determine an appropriate plan for conservation and display. As mentioned above, the right arm is obviously restored. The marble limb may have been crafted in the eighteenth or nineteenth century, specifically for the restoration, or it may have been borrowed from another ancient statue. The long-sleeved garment on this arm suggests that, if ancient, it comes from a statue of a male barbarian. A round marble plug conceals the dowel used to attach the arm, and the seam where the arm joins the body was later filled with epoxy resin.

Other areas of the statue, including the chin and two fingers of the left hand, were also restored in marble. There are significant repairs to the neck and surrounding drapery, with fragments of marble pieced together and the joins covered with epoxy resin. The nose, upper lip, and left pointer finger are restored using epoxy; some or all of these restorations were likely added by Robert Kime as the 1987 Sotheby’s catalogue seems to show the nose and part of the upper lip missing, with a dowel hole for a previous restored nose visible. There is a large chip missing from the proper-right cheek, and another large loss on the back of the head (the latter was never repaired because the statue probably would have stood against a wall or in a niche, so that the back would not have been visible). Two holes in a broken area on top of the head indicate another restoration (now missing). The statue stands on a new marble base. The surface is covered with gray-black dirt and green moss as well as iron oxide stains, a condition that is a result of the statue standing outside. The 1987 Sotheby’s catalogue shows that it was already in a similar state then, suggesting that the object had already been in a collection and displayed outdoors for many years prior to 1987. Extensive cleaning and conservation will take place during the 2008–9 academic year.

After treatment, the pudicitia statue is certain to become a highlight of the Gallery’s collection. Surrounded by divine and mythological statues, portrait heads and busts, and other objects of ancient art, it will speak elegantly to the visitor of sculptural style and portrait traditions during the late Hellenistic and early Roman eras. Scholars, faculty, and students will examine the significance of its type, costume, and probable context, while nonspecialists will be drawn to the quality of its carving and the elegance of its composition. We at the Yale University Art Gallery look forward to seeing the statue through its course of conservation, from which we expect it to emerge as a spectacular example of ancient portraiture.

2. See, for example, the statue of Kleopatra from Delos in Smith, *Hellenistic Sculpture*, 84, fig. 113. On Hellenistic grave reliefs, see Ernst Pfohl and Hans Möbius, *Die ostgriechischen Grabreliefs I–II* (Mainz am Rhein, Ger.: Philipp von Zabern, 1977–79), 138–48, nos. 413–51.


5. When fringed cloaks are mentioned in ancient literature, the cloak is often purple or crimson and the fringe gold, e.g. Ovid, *Met.* 2.734, 531. One instance of a very similar fringed mantle appears on the famous Hellenistic bronze dancer (the so-called Baker Dancer) owned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York (inv. no. 1972.118.93). For such garments worn by men, with their connotation of luxury, see Christopher Hallett, *The Roman Nude: Heroic Portrait Statuary 200 BC–AD 300* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 132–36.


7. It is evident, despite the restorations to the neck and surrounding drapery, that the head does belong to the statue. Making statues of a single block became particularly desirable in the early Roman period and later; see Smith et al., *Aphrodisias II*, 30.