



BENJAMIN PROUST

FINE ART LIMITED

LONDON

DORYPHOROS  
TORSO

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DORYPHOROS

OR

POLYKLEITOS

CANON



# DORYPHOROS TORSO

Roman Art, 1st-2nd century AD

Italian marble

HEIGHT 64 cm WIDTH 39 cm DEPTH 23 cm

## PROVENANCE

Collection of Mr G.D., Cannes, France,  
at least from 1942 and then by descent until 2014



FIG. 1

Mister G.D. in the garden of his  
property in Cannes taken in 1942.  
The torso visible on the left.

## COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

Haskell, Francis and Penny, Nicholas. *Taste and the Antique, The Lure of Classical Sculpture 1500-1900*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1981

Moon, Warren ed. Polykleitos, *The Doryphoros, and Tradition*. Madison and London, The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995

Prettejohn, Elizabeth. *The Modernity of Ancient Sculpture, Greek Sculpture and Modern Art from Winckelmann to Picasso*. London and New York, I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2012

Sheard, Wendy Stedman. *Antiquity in the Renaissance*. Northampton, Massachusetts, The Smith College, Museum of Art, 1979

Stewart, Andrew. *Greek Sculpture, And Exploration*. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1990



## POLYKLEITOS OF ARGOS

POLYKLEITOS OF ARGOS, in the eastern Peloponnesus was, with Phydias, the most important sculptor from ancient Greece, active circa 450-420 BC. Little is known about Polykleitos other than he was famous for his masterly bronze sculptures of young athletes. He is considered one of the great innovative and influential sculptors of Antiquity, and was the sculptor who best represented the idea of constructing the ideal human figure. He executed two cult images of Zeus and Hera, and a figure of Hekate, in his home town of Argos and also won the city's commission for a series of votive or commemorative statues of victorious athletes. About twenty works have been attributed to Polykleitos but none of the originals have survived and we know his work only through copies. The Doryphoros (FIG. 2), otherwise known as the Spear-Bearer, is his most famous sculpture and is considered his masterpiece. Other well known works include the Diskophoros and the Diadoumenos.<sup>1</sup>

FIG. 2  
Doryphoros, 1st century BC  
Minneapolis Institute of Arts,  
inv. 86.6





## THE CANON

POLYKLEITOS EXPLAINED the creation of the ideal human figure in a book. Both the book and the sculpture are known as the “Canon”. The book was the first artist treatise of its kind designed for general circulation among professional artists. Its aim was to offer solutions to problems of design that had long preoccupied sculptors and which had not been subject to theoretical analysis before.<sup>2</sup>

A statue of a spear-bearer, The Doryphoros, was only identified in 1863 by Karl Friedrichs as the Canon.<sup>3</sup> In the canon or “rule” Polykleitos created a system based on simple mathematical formula in which the human body was divided into measured parts that all related to one another. The essence is a measured antithesis of weight bearing and balancing leg, between rest and movement. It proposes a system with which to apply symmetry on the human sculpted form, which made the sculpture seem far more natural than had ever been achieved before. He came to this ideal figure through a mathematical formula that has since been lost.

## THE CHIASTIC PRINCIPLE

THE DORYPHOROS is a representation of the perfectly proportioned male body. He stands in contrapposto pose with his weight on his right leg, which is balanced by his left arm holding a spear. The left leg is bent and relaxed and is balanced on the other side by the straight arm. The head is turned right towards the weight-bearing leg. This pose affects the whole body, shoulders, elbows, hips and knees are no longer on a horizontal axis, but are shifted correspondingly upward or downward. This balance between tension and relaxation in the depiction of the human body is also called the Chiastic principle or Chiasmos stand. The term derives from the Greek letter *chi*, which is formed by two crossing lines, one straight, and one curved. The entire balancing system is revealed if we visualize imaginary diagonal lines across the body at key points. We can visualise lines passing through the ankles and shoulders slanting downward from right to left, through the knees and hips the lines move the opposite way.<sup>4</sup> (FIG. 3)

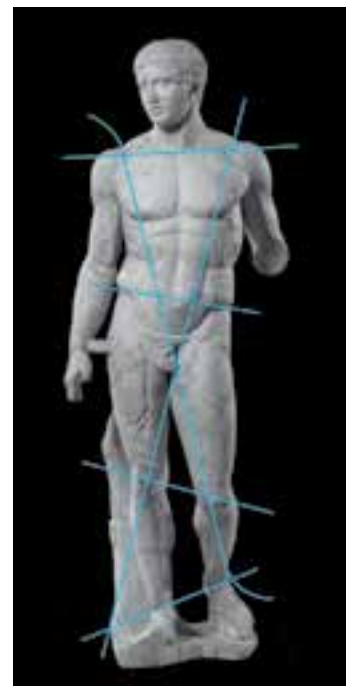


FIG. 3  
Polykleitos Chiastic principle





## THE DORYPHOROS

THE ORIGINAL STATUE of the youthful athlete Doryphoros was cast in bronze. As it unfortunately no longer survives, our knowledge of the physical appearance of the Doryphoros is based on Roman copies. After Rome absorbed Greece into its empire around 146 BC the Romans became increasingly fascinated by Greek culture and traditions and were impressed by their wealth and style. At the time Rome was awash with bounty taken from Greece and Greek art became much in demand. Educated and wealthy Romans desired works of art that evoked Greek culture. Roman sculptors started making marble and bronze copies of the most popular Greek sculptures to supply the market. By the 2nd century AD the demand for Greek copies was enormous and these Roman copies were considered works of art in their own right. The exceptional Minneapolis Doryphoros (FIG. 2) dating from 120-150 BCE is one of the few almost intact copies remaining; another is a marble copy in the Museo Nazionale in Naples (FIG. 4). An amazing basalt example of a Doryphoros torso is to be found in the Uffizi gallery in Florence (FIG. 5), and another particularly high quality marble torso is to be found in the Staatliche Museen, Berlin.<sup>5</sup>

FIG. 4  
Doryphoros, late 2nd to  
1st century BC  
Museo Archeologico  
Nazionale si Napoli, inv. 6011

FIG. 5  
Basalt Doryphoros torso  
Florence, Uffizi Gallery, inv. 308







## NOTES

- 1 Stewart, Andrew. *Greek Sculpture, And Exploration*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1990, pp. 160-163.
- 2 Pollitt, J.J. 'The Canon of Polykleitos and Other Canons' in *Polykleitos, The Doryphoros, and Tradition*. Ed. Warren G. Moon. Madison and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995, pp. 19-20.
- 3 Haskell, Francis and Penny, Nicholas. *Taste and the Antique, The Lure of Classical Sculpture 1500-1900*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1981, p. 118.
- 4 Tobin, Richard. 'The Pose of the Doryphoros' in *Polykleitos, The Doryphoros, and Tradition*. Ed. Warren G. Moon. Madison and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995, pp. 52-65.
- 5 Hallett, C.H. 'Kopienkritik and the Works of Polykleitos' in *Polykleitos, The Doryphoros, and Tradition*. Ed. Warren G. Moon. Madison and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1995, pp. 121-161.



## PHOTOGRAPHIC CREDITS

FIG. 2 Minneapolis Institute of Art,  
Bridgeman Images

FIG. 3 © Carli-d

FIG. 5 Gabinetto Fotografico Beniculturali,  
Uffizi Gallery

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