



# National Gallery of Art

## Office of Press and Public Information

Fourth Street and Constitution Avenue NW  
Washington, DC  
Phone: 202-842-6353 Fax: 202-789-3044  
[www.nga.gov/press](http://www.nga.gov/press)

Deborah Ziska  
Chief Press Officer

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
June 3, 2011

CONTACT:  
Anabeth Guthrie  
(202) 842-6804  
[a-guthrie@nga.gov](mailto:a-guthrie@nga.gov)

For more information and  
publicity images, visit  
[www.nga.gov/press](http://www.nga.gov/press)

**IMPORTANT ROMAN STATUE *CAPITOLINE VENUS*  
LEAVES ROME FOR SECOND TIME SINCE 1797;  
OFFICIALLY ON VIEW AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART, WASHINGTON,  
JUNE 8 TO SEPTEMBER 5, 2011**

**Presentation of Sculpture Is First Act of New Sister Cities Relationship;  
Mayor of Rome to Announce *Dream of Rome* Project**

Washington, DC—The famed *Capitoline Venus*, one of the best-preserved sculptures to survive from Roman antiquity, will be officially presented in the grand West Building Rotunda of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, when the Mayor of Rome Gianni Alemanno inaugurates it on June 7; it remains on view until September 5. Due to an early installation, visitors to the Gallery will be able to see ***A Masterpiece from the Capitoline Museum, Rome*** beginning June 4. The *Capitoline Venus*, which measures approximately six feet six inches in height, derives from the celebrated *Aphrodite of Cnidos* created by the renowned classical Greek sculptor Praxiteles around 360 BC. It has only left Rome on one other occasion—when Napoleon seized it in 1797 (it was returned in 1816).

"We are thrilled to offer this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see the *Capitoline Venus* outside of Rome," said Earl A. Powell III, director, National Gallery of Art, Washington. "The *Venus* will feel right at home in our West Building Rotunda, which was designed by John Russell Pope and was based on the Pantheon in Rome. The Gallery has a long and rich relationship with the people and culture of Italy."

"The first trip of the *Capitoline Venus* outside Italy in almost 200 years marks the unique friendship between our two capitals and our two nations. It also witnesses the longstanding cooperation between Italian cultural institutions and the National Gallery of Art," said Giulio Terzi di Sant'Agata, Ambassador of Italy to the United States.

"It will truly be an honor to be at the National Gallery of Art to celebrate, through the millennial history and culture of our city, the achievement of an ideal bridge between Italy and the United States, and between their two capitals, Rome and Washington, DC," said Mayor Alemanno. "In particular, it is a true privilege to have the opportunity to show one of the greatest Roman masterpieces: the *Capitoline Venus*, an extraordinary work of art that is crossing the ocean for the first time to bear witness to the strong alliance and a new season of cooperation between the Capitoline Museums and this splendid Gallery. This alliance will allow both to further enrich their already extraordinary and priceless cultural offerings. The *Dream of Rome* project opens here and it is my hope that it will also return with a major closing event."

-more-

Preceding the official opening on June 8, Mayor Alemanno of Rome and Mayor Vincent C. Gray of Washington, DC, will sign, at another location, a proclamation signifying the newly formed sister city relationship of the two world-capital cities.

### **Exhibition Organization, Support, and *The Dream of Rome***

The exhibition is organized by Roma Capitale, Sovrintendenza ai Beni Culturali–Musei Capitolini, and the National Gallery of Art, with the partnership of the Knights of Columbus and the Embassy of the Republic of Italy, Washington.

"The Knights of Columbus has been actively involved in cultural exchange between the city of Rome and the United States for nearly a century and is very pleased to be able to help to continue that exchange and further the relationship between Rome and the United States through this exhibit at the National Gallery of Art in our nation's capital city," said Supreme Knight Carl Anderson.

The exhibition is part of *The Dream of Rome*, a project initiated by the mayor of Rome to exhibit timeless masterpieces in the United States from 2011 to 2013. It is also part of Italy@150, a series of events and activities around Washington and in the United States to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Italy's unification, under the high auspices of the Italian president, Giorgio Napolitano.

### **The Capitoline Venus**

The *Capitoline Venus* is a significant descendent of the first, revolutionary statue of this type, the renowned *Aphrodite of Cnidos* by Praxiteles. With the Cnidian Venus, Praxiteles introduced a new subject to the history of art: the large-scale, freestanding, fully nude female. This type of image became known in modern times as a "Modest Venus" (*Venus pudica*) because the goddess attempts to cover her nakedness. The *Capitoline Venus*, as a full-scale female nude statue, derives from the Cnidian Venus, but her pose is reversed, the hairstyle is more elaborate and, unlike her predecessor, she covers her nakedness with both arms rather than just one. The hydria next to her is a vessel for water, perhaps alluding to bathing or Venus' birth from the sea. The expert carving of the figure endows the hard marble with the appearance of soft flesh and has made the *Capitoline Venus* one of the most admired and frequently copied of all Roman antiquities.

Unearthed in Rome in the 1670s, the *Venus* was buried beneath a large garden where it was found in the remains of an ancient building, according to a 17th-century account. The statue was intact except for the nose, some fingers, and one hand that had broken off and has been reattached. In 1752 the *Venus* was given to the Capitoline Museum by Pope Benedict XIV. The sculpture remained in the museum until 1797 when it was taken to France by Napoleon, who had invaded northern Italy a few years earlier. In 1816, the year after Napoleon fell from power, the sculpture was returned to the Capitoline Museum, where it has remained until this occasion.

Americans traveling in Europe in the 19th century included writers and artists who drew inspiration from works of art they saw in museums there. Mark Twain's visit to the Capitoline Museum in 1867 prompted him to write a short story, "The Capitoline Venus." Even before going to Rome, Twain probably knew of the sculpture from its photograph in Nathaniel Hawthorne's very popular novel, *The Marble Faun*, published in 1860. Both Twain and Hawthorne would also have been familiar with the *Greek Slave* (1844) by the American sculptor Hiram Powers. The *Greek Slave* toured the United States to enthusiastic crowds from 1847 to 1848. A version is now in the collection of the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington.

A donation made in 1471 marked the beginning of a new function for the buildings on the Capitoline Hill, reflecting the rising interest in the artistic legacy of Roman antiquity. In that year Pope Sixtus IV transferred to the Capitoline four ancient bronze sculptures from the Lateran Palace, then the principal papal residence. In 1537 Pope Paul III commissioned Michelangelo to relocate another sculpture from the Lateran to the plaza in front of the Palace of the Senators: the monumental bronze equestrian statue of Emperor Marcus Aurelius. The sculpture had escaped destruction during the Middle Ages because it was then believed to represent Constantine, the first Christian emperor.

Michelangelo was also charged with reorganizing the area, known as the Piazza del Campidoglio. He designed new facades for the Palaces of the Senators and Conservators, completed after his death in 1564. To balance the Palace of the Conservators, he conceived a matching building, the New Palace, which was finished in 1667. Together, these buildings constitute the Capitoline Museum. The last element of Michelangelo's masterpiece of urban planning, the Piazza, was completed only in 1940 under Mussolini, but adheres largely to the original design. Despite the centuries of construction, most of Michelangelo's original plans for the site were implemented.

In the 16th century the Capitoline collections increased dramatically through the acquisition of newly excavated works and donations, such as the ancient works of art given by Pope Pius V with the intention of "purging the Vatican of pagan idols." The Palace of the Conservators became so crowded with sculpture that the magistrates found it difficult to carry out their official duties. In the later 17th century, many of the works were transferred to the recently completed New Palace, which also houses major 18th-century acquisitions such as the *Capitoline Venus*. Since then, the Capitoline Museum has continued to expand its holdings, making it one of the world's great collections of Roman antiquities.

### **General Information**

The National Gallery of Art and its Sculpture Garden are at all times free to the public. They are located on the National Mall between 3rd and 9th Streets at Constitution Avenue NW and are open Monday through Saturday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The Gallery is closed on December 25 and January 1. For information call (202) 737-4215 or the Telecommunications Device for the Deaf (TDD) at (202) 842-6176, or visit the Gallery's website at [www.nga.gov](http://www.nga.gov). Follow the Gallery on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt](https://www.facebook.com/NationalGalleryofArt) and on Twitter at [www.twitter.com/ngadc](https://www.twitter.com/ngadc).

Visitors will be asked to present all carried items for inspection upon entering. Checkrooms are free of charge and located at each entrance. Luggage and other oversized bags must be presented at the 4th Street entrances to the East or West Building to permit x-ray screening and must be deposited in the checkrooms at those entrances. For the safety of visitors and the works of art, nothing may be carried into the Gallery on a visitor's back. Any bag or other items that cannot be carried reasonably and safely in some other manner must be left in the checkrooms. Items larger than 17 by 26 inches cannot be accepted by the Gallery or its checkrooms.

###