

Unknown. Of original: Myron  
(Roman. Of original: Greek)

*Discobolus*

C. 1st Century A.D. Original: c. 5th Century B.C.

Marble. Original: Bronze

H: 61" (155cm)

Roman National Museum

Rome, Italy

## Myron, *Discobolus*, c. 460-450 B.C.

Myron's *Discobolus*, or Discus Thrower, (alternatively spelled *Diskobolos*) was an Early Classical Greek bronze sculpture, originally created between 460 and 450 B.C. The sculpture is known from descriptions written by ancient authors and the marble Roman copies it inspired, the first and most notable of which is the one found at the Villa Palombara on the Esquiline Hill, dubbed the *Discobolus Palombara*.<sup>1</sup>

The sculpture is the epitome of Early Classical Greek sculpture. Created originally using a method known as lost-wax bronze casting, it is a superb demonstration of *symmetria*, the use of balance and due proportion in form and pose (not to be confused with *symmetry*.)<sup>2</sup>

The *Discobolus* was as famed in antiquity as it is today, and spawned many Roman copies. Many of these marble copies have been discovered over the years. However, torsos of these copies were not initially recognized. One was restored incorrectly as a gladiator in the eighteenth century, another was “restored first as an Endymion blinded by the beauty of the moon and then as a fearful Niobid”, and a third found in 1775 was restored as a sculpture of Diomedes.<sup>3</sup>

It was writings from ancient authors like Lucian of Samosata who helped identify the artwork.<sup>4</sup> In his piece *Philopseudes*, he writes:

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<sup>1</sup> Haskell, Francis, and Nicholas Penny. *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture 1500 - 1900*. Reprint ed. (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1982), 199.

<sup>2</sup> Mattusch, Carol C. *Greek Bronze Statuary: From The Beginnings Through the Fifth Century B.C.* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988), 149.

<sup>3</sup> Haskell, Francis, and Nicholas Penny, 199-200.

<sup>4</sup> Haskell, Francis, and Nicholas Penny, 199.

“Are you not speaking of the diskos-thrower,” I said, “who bends down in the pose of one making his throw, turning toward the hand that holds the diskos, and slightly bending the other knee, as if to straighten up with the throw?”

“Not him,” he said, “for that diskobolos of whom you speak is one of the works of Myron.”<sup>5</sup>

This descriptive passage written in dialogue aptly describes the pose of Myron’s *Discobolus*.

The first marble copy of the *Discobolus* discovered was the *Discobolus Palombara*, found on March 14th, 1781 at the Villa Palombara on the Esquiline Hill.<sup>6</sup> A decade later, in 1791, two more copies were found at Tivoli, one of which was acquired for the Vatican, and the other, notably inferior, for Charles Townley. A third copy was discovered in April of 1906 “in the ruins of a Roman Villa at Tor Paterna in the royal estate of Castel Porziano.”<sup>7</sup> Both the Tor Paterna *Discobolus* and the *Discobolus Palombara* would end up in the Museo Nazionale Romano, in Rome.

In 1894 Walter Pater wrote that the sculpture embodied “all one had ever fancied or seen in old Greece or on Thames’ side, of the unspoiled body of youth”<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the *Discobolus* is considered “the first case of an antique statue attaining enormous fame the the same time as being considered as a copy”<sup>9</sup>

The *Discobolus* (the *Discobolus Palombara* in particular) was such an admired sculpture that Adolf Hitler “pursued [it] with the same passion that Napoleon had devoted to acquiring the

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<sup>5</sup> Mattusch, Carol C., 146.

<sup>6</sup> Haskell, Francis, and Nicholas Penny, 199.

<sup>7</sup> Haskell, Francis, and Nicholas Penny, 200.

<sup>8</sup> Haskell, Francis, and Nicholas Penny, 200.

<sup>9</sup> Haskell, Francis, and Nicholas Penny, 200-1.

*Venus de' Medici.*"<sup>10</sup> It was sold to him on May 18th, 1938 for five million lire by Galeazzo Ciano, the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, to the dismay of Giuseppe Bottai, the Minister of Education. It arrived in Germany on June 29th, 1938, and was displayed in the Glyptothek in Munich until it was returned to Italy on November 16th, 1948.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Haskell, Francis, and Nicholas Penny, 200.

<sup>11</sup> Haskell, Francis, and Nicholas Penny, 199.



Unknown. Of original: Myron

(Roman. Of original: Greek)

*The Townley Discobolus*

C. 2nd Century A.D. Original: c. 5th Century B.C.

Marble. Original: Bronze

66.5" x 41.3" x 24.8" (169cm x 105cm x 63cm)

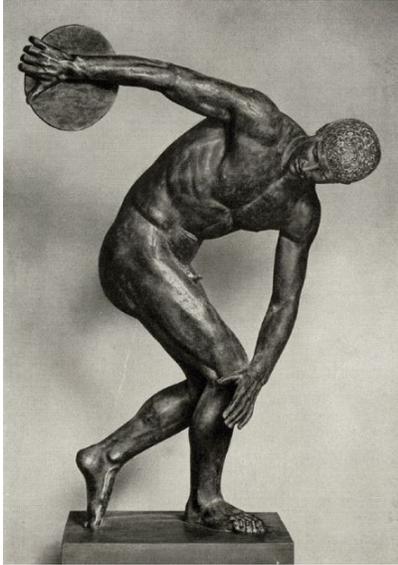
The British Museum

London, England

The *Townley Discobolus* is considered inferior to the *Discobolus Palombara* “chiefly because its head did not belong and was wrongly turned (a fact which Townley’s friend Richard Payne Knight reluctantly admitted, but which the British Museum tried to deny).” However, casts of the *Townley Discobolus* were widely available, and the sculpture was on open display at the British Museum, as opposed to the *Discobolus Palombara*, which was kept hidden away by its initial owners, the Massimo family.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Haskell, Francis, and Nicholas Penny, 200.



G.E. Rizzo. Of original: Myron

(Of original: Greek)

*Discobolus of Myron*

Early 20th Century A.D. Original: c. 5th Century B.C.

Plaster cast. Original: Bronze

H: 66.5" (169cm)

Roman National Museum

Rome, Italy

Soon after another *Discobolus* sculpture was discovered at Tor Paterna in April 1906, it was used as the basis for a cast made by G.E. Rizzo. Rizzo's cast combined feet cast from the *Townley Discobolus*, an arm cast from a version in Casa Buonarroti, Florence, and a head "from the moulds of the Villa Palombara version made a century earlier by the French because Prince Lancellotti had not permitted Rizzo to make new casts."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Haskell, Francis, and Nicholas Penny, 200.



Unknown. Of original: Naukydes  
(Unknown. Of original: Greek)

*Cast of the Standing Discobolus*

?1872 A.D. Original: c. 420-400 B.C.

Plaster cast. Original: Bronze

70.8" x 36.6" x 19.7" (180cm x 93cm x 50cm)

Royal Academy of Arts

London, England

The term 'Discobolus' was also used as a name for other sculptures, although it referred to "standing figures folding a discus, but not stooping to throw it." One such sculpture was identified by Ennio Quirino Visconti as the Discobolus of Naukydes of Argos (now alternatively referred to as the *Discophoros* to avoid confusion), as mentioned by Pliny the Elder. Although it was "greatly admired and extensively reproduced... its fame was to be eclipsed by the replicas of the *Discobolus* with which it is so easily confused"<sup>14</sup>

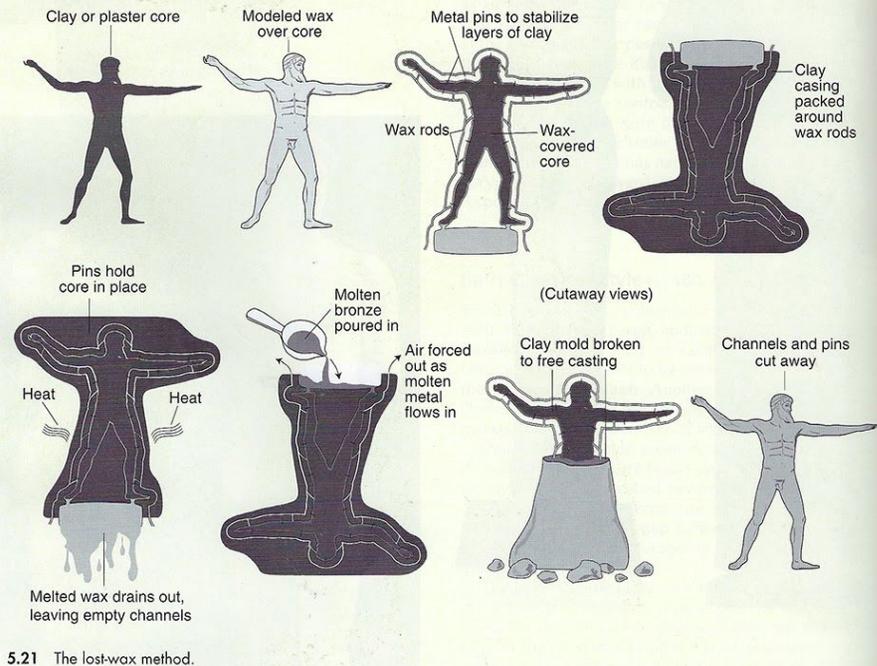
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<sup>14</sup> Haskell, Francis, and Nicholas Penny, 200.

MEDIA AND TECHNIQUE  
The Lost-Wax Process

In casting bronze by the **lost-wax** method (also known by the French term **cire-perdue**), the artist begins by molding a soft, pliable material such as clay or plaster into the desired shape and covering it with wax. A second coat of soft material is superimposed on the wax and attached with pins or other supports. The wax is then melted and allowed to flow away, leaving a hollow space between the two layers of soft

material. The artist pours molten bronze into the mold, the bronze hardens as it cools, and the mold is removed. The bronze is now in the shape originally formed by the "lost" wax. It is ready for tooling, polishing, and the addition of features such as glass or stone eyes and ivory teeth to heighten the organic appearance of the figure.



*Diagram of the Lost-Wax Process*

from *Art Across Time, Vol. 1: Prehistory to the Fourteenth Century*

The original Greek *Discobolus* was a bronze statue created using a method known as the lost-wax method; the artist molds a soft material like clay or plaster into the desired shape and covers it with wax, and then applies a second coat of soft material over the wax. The wax is melted away, creating a hollow mold between the two layers of soft material, into which the artist pours molten bronze. Once the bronze cools and hardens, the mold is removed, and the bronze is tooled, polished, and given additional features.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Adams, Laurie Schneider. *Art Across Time, Vol. 1: Prehistory to the Fourteenth Century*. 4th ed. Vol. 1.0 (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education, 2010), 146.



Unknown

(Greek)

*Artemision Bronze*

c. 450 B.C.

Bronze

H: 82.3" (209cm)

National Archaeological Museum

Athens, Greece

The *Artemision Bronze*, alternatively referred to as *Zeus*, or *Poseidon* in reference to the ongoing debate of the identity of the subject, is an excellent example of what an original surviving Early Classical Greek bronze sculpture looks like. It also provides an insight as to what the surface of the original *Discobolus* may have looked like.



Unknown. Of original: Myron  
(Roman. Of original: Greek)

*Marsyas*

c. 130 C.E. Original: c.450 B.C.E.

Pentelic marble. Original: Bronze

H: 62.6" (159cm)

Vatican, Lateran 225

Rome, Italy.

This sculpture of *Marsyas* is another example of a marble Roman copy of a Myron bronze original.



Unknown. Of original: Polykleitos  
(Roman. Of original: Greek)

*Doryphoros*

Unknown. Original: c. 440 B.C.

Pentelic marble. Original: Bronze

H: 83.5" (212cm)

National Archaeological Museum

Naples, Italy

Myron was a contemporary of Polykleitos, the artist known chiefly for creating the *Doryphoros*. In his lost treatise the *Canon*, the same title he called his *Spear Bearer*, Polykleitos illustrated his belief that “the application of consistent measurements, *symmetria*... was a means of achieving beauty.”<sup>16</sup> Pliny the Elder, comparing Myron to Polykleitos, writes “Myron was, it seems, the first to enlarge upon reality, being more prolific [or having more specified proportions: *numerosior*] in his art than Polykleitos, and being more attentive to symmetry [or to the correspondence of the parts: *symmetria*].”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Adams, Laurie Schneider, 150.

<sup>17</sup>Mattusch, Carol C., 149.

## Bibliography

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