

Introduction

One of the most famous statues from antiquity, the life-sized bronze

Diskobolos by Myron, now lost, is known only through Roman marble copies, and only one still has the ancient head. Roman copyists, working in marble, generally added a tree trunk for support, since the weight of the figure otherwise rests entirely on the ankles. The identification of the artist's name is based on a discussion of Myron by Pausanias in his *Guide to Greece* 5.112-20, written in the mid-2nd c. A.D. (some 600 years after the time of Myron). The artist came from Eleutherae, on the border between Attika and Boeotia, but his home seems to have been Athens itself. Our cast copies the best known ancient example, the "Discobolo Lancelotti," Museo Nazionale delle Terme, Rome (Italy). Marble. H. 1.53 m. (5 ft.) Inventory no. 126371. Copies and variants exist in multiple collections. One, in the Capitoline, preserving only the torso, has been restored as a gladiator. Other works by Myron included a famous bronze cow ("ageladas," in Greek, the name of Myron's teacher) and a group of Athena forbidding Marsyas (a satyr) from picking up a flute.

Iconography and Style

The term Diskobolos means "discus thrower", and in this figure we see an

idealized young adult male athlete. The figure is essentially two-dimensional: from any but a frontal view, the statue is hard to understand and even unrealistic. Such compositions are typical of the Severe Style in Greek sculpture (ca. 480-450 B.C.); compare the well-known bronze original of Zeus or Poseidon from Cape Artemision. Such two-dimensional works may have been meant to be seen only from the front, as if they were meant to stand in front of a wall. The Diskobolos is shown in an active pose, at the moment where he has drawn the discus all the way back, frozen at the instant just before he unwinds and launches into making his cast. The pose of the body with its inclined torso and bent knees resembles the letter W, which fits into a larger U-shaped curve formed by the position of the arms. Such a pose emphasizes the *potential* motion of the man, rather than the actual act of throwing, which will follow. In fact, the pose is a vertical version of what an actual discus throwing would look like winding up for the throw: his body more upright and the arm stretched out horizontally. Thus, the artist has tilted the torso vertically flat so we can appreciate the torsion in the pose. The turn of head and downward look of eyes make it impossible for us to see the facial expression - instead, the sculptor was concentrating on the suppressed

energy of the pose. Like many Severe figures, the athlete wears his hair in a short cap of curls and slightly wavy locks. Over his forehead, notice the two small bumps: they reproduce the two points from which Roman copyists measured the dimensions of the figure in order to make an accurate replica of the prototype (in this case, another marble sculpture, since a bronze original was not copied in this manner). In their houses and public buildings, the Romans tried to select sculptural types that were appropriate for the area: thus we can imagine a home for the Diskobolos and related figures in an exercise yard (*palaestra*) or a gymnasium, where men exercised in the nude - just as our figure does.

Another artist, Naukydes, did a *diskobolos* toward the end of the 5th c.; this sculpture is radically different, for the athlete stands still, before he begins winding up for the throw.

Select Bibliography - Diskobolos

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Diskobolos by Naukydes, ca. 420-400 B.C.

For more information...

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DISKOBOLOS OF MYRON

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