



Anonymous, *Venus Arising from the Sea*, 1875–99, earthenware, 21.9 x 13.8 x 24.5 cm, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts.

This nineteenth-century ceramic sculpture, entitled *Venus Arising from the Sea* (1875–99), attests to the long tradition of representations of Venus, the Roman goddess of love and beauty, in Western art. According to Roman mythology, Venus, who is associated with aspects of female sexuality such as motherhood and fertility, came to be associated with Rome’s imperial power. In *Venus Arising from the Sea*, Venus emerges from a seashell, alluding to the myth that she was

born of sea foam. She is presented as a bare-breasted figure kneeling with her arms open, perhaps pushing away the surrounding conch shells. Meanwhile, cupids play beneath her among ocean waves. The artist's skill in creating dynamic texture and shape is evident in the scalloped edges of the seashell, the detailed sculpting of Venus's hair and the energetic, rolling waves. The viewer's gaze becomes fixated on her monumental presence. The draped wet cloth circling her nude body hints at her sexual allure, which is a traditional element of artistic depictions of Venus.

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