

You Look Marvelous!

There are only two months until beach season, as every magazine seems to remind us this time of year. Whether you need to drop pounds or pack on muscle, you'll find inspiration among works of art that deal with the pursuit and glorification of bodily perfection.



GALLERY 212

The Wedding of Peleus and Thetis (1636)
by Peter Paul Rubens

Oh, that Rubens's ideal body type were still the rage. The voluptuous nude figure at center right is Venus (Aphrodite), goddess of love and beauty. Seated at the banquet table, she has just received a golden apple inscribed "To the Fairest," which has touched off an argument among the goddesses, each of whom feels entitled to the prize. The apple and the resulting ruckus were the doings of Eris, goddess of discord, in revenge for being the only deity of Greek mythology not invited to this wedding. (Who wants discord at a party after all?) This small but sumptuous work is really a sketch for a much larger painting that was part of a group of works commissioned for one of the royal palaces in Spain.



GALLERY 201

Woman at Her Toilette (c. 1875) by Berthe Morisot

Woman at Her Toilette (c. 1875) by Berthe Morisot Spring is the season of weddings, garden parties, and other festive occasions, all of which require looking your best. Sometimes getting ready is half the fun. In the intimate setting of her dressing room, this young woman is engrossed in her beauty regime. In soft, feathery strokes of pink, blue, white, and gray, the artist created the perfumed and rarified atmosphere of a boudoir.



GALLERY 124

***Maternity Figure* (mid/late 19th century).
From the Democratic Republic of Congo; Luluwa**

You can travel 'round the world, but there's no escaping standards of physical beauty. With its large head, gracefully elongated neck, muscular calves, and sturdy feet, this figure of a woman cradling an infant exaggerates Luluwa conventions of idealized beauty and artistic representation in order to glorify motherhood. The figure is further embellished by raised scarification patterns, some of which have specific meanings; for instance, the double-wave line on the forehead symbolizes the double heartbeat of a mother and the baby in her womb. This delicate sculpture was made for a member of Bwanga Bwa Cibola, a ritual association among the Luluwa dedicated to the aid of women who have lost children during pregnancy or in infancy.



GALLERY 166

***Dressing Table* (1750/70). From the United States,
Salem, Massachusetts**

For the 10-minute makeup routine, the bathroom sink and medicine cabinet mirror suffice. But nothing can replace the glamour and indulgence of an old-fashioned dressing table. Normally found in the bed chamber, dressing tables contained tools of grooming such as combs, brushes, powders, ribbons, pieces of lace, and patch boxes. The usually blocky design of many Boston-area dressing tables of the period is tempered here by the lively, exuberant outlines of the skirt and side aprons and the elegant cabriole legs.



GALLERY 155

***Relief of a Fallen Warrior* (2nd century A.D. Roman.)**

Six-packs abs, obliques, this guy has them all. The muscles of his well-developed torso contract and flex as the collapsing warrior reaches toward a wound on his back. Greek art exerted a strong influence on the Romans, and they often copied Greek statues. In this case, a Roman sculptor, inspired by a figure carved on the shield of the great gold and ivory cult statue of Athena that stood in the Parthenon on the Acropolis in Athens, lifted his subject out of its original context—in which it appeared with Amazons and other warriors—and used it as a single figure on a decorative relief panel.



GALLERY 155A

***Kohl Container in the Shape of a Palm Column.* From
Egypt, New Kingdom, late Dynasty 18 or 19, 1400–1225 B.C.**

It's something that women, from Nefertiti to Liz Taylor, have always known. For instant mystery and allure, line your eyes with black. In ancient Egypt women—and men—applied kohl, a black cosmetic, to their eyes with a thin rod. The vessels in which kohl was stored were sealed with stoppers made of linen and wax. The shape of this container recalls a palm column, a traditional element of Egyptian architecture.