

# STATUE OF VENUS

### North Terrace

The statue of Venus by Canova stands in the North Terrace plantation close to the entrance to Government House. It is carved from Cararra marble and is placed on a pedestal of Sicilian and Kapunda marble. The sculptor of the figure of Venus is not known. The pedestal is the work of the local firm of monumental masons, Fraser and Draysey.

The statue was presented to the City of Adelaide by W.A. Horn on the condition that it be placed in a position where it “would be free from the attacks of larrikins”. It was originally sited on North Terrace opposite the Guard House at the entrance to Government House. It was unveiled on 3 September 1892 by the Mayoress, Mrs F.W. Bullock.

William Austin Horn was one of a number of exceedingly wealthy South Australian nineteenth century gentlemen and benefactors. Horn’s wealth was generated by mining and pastoral ventures. He was a shareholder of the Wallaroo mines and later of the Broken Hill Proprietary Company. As was usual with such men, Horn participated in public life. He represented South Australians in Parliament, funded scientific expeditions, published his own books of verse and generously donated art to the City and collections to the Museum. Although Horn never held an academic degree he was apparently interested in the Classics. This would explain his donation of three statues to the City of Adelaide. All three statues were replicas of Classical sculptures, namely the Athlete, Hercules and Venus.

Horn’s donation of all three statues reveals what he considered appropriate and worthy. His taste in sculpture, at the end of the nineteenth century was considered by one Adelaide paper to be not the currently fashionable style, but nevertheless a beautiful work. It is interesting to compare Horn’s taste with the avant garde artistic and architectural movements happening elsewhere in the world at the time, i.e. Art Nouveau and the Chicago School in the USA. Adelaide City Council in gratefully accepting the statue, was accepting its donated first work of public art. Horn donated the statue with the aim of educating a public he believed was not sufficiently interested in such matters. It was a generous act on his behalf but an action in keeping with his notions of his status in the community.

Venus was moved from its original location in 1930 when the Council carried out a remodelling of the northern side of North Terrace between Kintore Avenue and King William Street. The statue was moved to a new site on North Terrace between the Museum and the Public Library where it remained until 1965. It was moved to make way for the fountain that now occupies the site. It was intended that the new location should be in front of the Art Gallery but the Gallery was not keen to have the statue there. It was perceived to be old-fashioned. It was placed approximately halfway between the National War Memorial and King William Street, opposite Goldsbrough House.

The Adelaide sculpture is a copy of one of the two famous Venus’s by the Italian sculptor, Antonio Canova (1757-1822). Canova was a neo-classical sculptor who worked in highly polished marble and is considered to be the finest neo-classical sculptor of the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century, Canova’s work was frequently copied.

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The subject of the sculpture, the goddess Venus was an appropriation by the Romans of the Greek goddess, Aphrodite, the goddess of love and fertility. Renaissance treatment and representation of Venus softened her licentious reputation. This statue is a copy of Canova's second statue of Venus and depicts a chaste and extremely modest, nude Venus holding a towel-like robe. Kate Weston, writing about Adelaide's statues in the 1920s claimed that "Canova did much to rescue the sculptor's art from the exaggerations and mannerisms of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, leading it back to dignity and an appreciation of the beautiful, rather than the great."

*The Advertiser* in an article describing the opening ceremony wrote that the statue was exceedingly beautiful and although not a style of sculpture favoured by today's sculptors, represents one of the brightest and purist inspirations of the Italian master who created the original. The Venus is described as "a model of delicate grace and perfect form". The statue was evidently not popular with all Adelaide residents. The paper describes the views of one man (as the views of a Philistine) who wrote to Horn stating that the public display of an 'indecent' statue was inappropriate. The paper noted that the statue was the first to adorn the parks of Adelaide, and much gratitude was expressed to William Horn. The article continued:

The placing of noble sculptures in the open air enables an appeal to be constantly and effectively made to that innate sense of beauty which especially needs to be awakened and kept alive in a community almost exclusively absorbed by money-making occupations. There is yet to be evoked in these lands such an unselfish passion for art as will refine and elevate our national character, and everything is to be welcomed which contributes to that end.

Weston, K.H. *The Statuary of Adelaide*, 1920-1, Held in the MLSA; City of Adelaide, *City of Adelaide Reference Book*, Corporation of the City of Adelaide, Adelaide, 1983, p 114; *The Advertiser*, 5 September 1892, p 4; Bede Nairn and Geoffrey Searle, (eds.), *The Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Melbourne University Press, South Australia, 1983, vol 9, 1891-1939, pp 367-8; Richardson, Donald *Made by Man*, Cheshire Publishing Limited, Melbourne, 1971, p 133; City of Adelaide correspondence, Director of Corporate Services to Mr. A. Lidums, 3 July 1990.

The text in this Information Sheet was copied from the **City of Adelaide Heritage Study**, October 1990, Volume Two, part of a review of the City of Adelaide Plan 1986-1991. The photographs contained in this Information Sheet are a selection of those held by Heritage Services, in digital format.

The property described in this Information Sheet is included in the Register of State Heritage places.  
A heritage listing does not mean or imply right of access by the public to such properties.

*The heritage related Principles of Development Control as well as the Precinct specific objectives and Principles of Development Control are contained in the Adelaide (City) Development Plan. These should be referred to in whole when contemplating any development.*

*Further information on the Heritage Incentives Scheme, an initiative of Council to sponsor timely and appropriate conservation action is available upon request of the Customer Service Centre.*

