

## Venus Stoned

*The 'Venus' of Willendorf*

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**Meet the artists:** Unknown prehistoric human

**Meet the subject:** 'Venus' of Willendorf

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*The 'Venus' of Willendorf (continued)*

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## *The 'Venus' of Willendorf (continued)*

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### **Meet the artist:** Unknown prehistoric human.

Humans began creating art about 80,000 years ago, but images of humans only show up between 30,000 and 40,000 years ago. Some of the oldest works of art were found in the Germany. The one such figure dates to some 40,000 years ago. The particular mountainous region is located southeast of the higher mountains of the Black Forest.

### **Meet the subject:** 'Venus' of Willendorf

The tiny statuette of a rudimentary naked woman, approximately 30,000 years old, was discovered in the Austrian village of Willendorf in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Referred to as "The Venus," the female figure is an 4 ½ inches tall. It was found on August 7, 1908, by a workman during excavations at a paleolithic site. It is carved from an oolitic limestone (not local to the area) and colored with red ochre. The figurine is now in the Naturhistorisches Museum in Vienna, Austria.

The museum describes it as "the most popular and best-known prehistoric representation of a woman worldwide." Lacking detailed limbs, hands and feet, and with no facial features at all, it has an emphasis on the breasts and pubic area, which has caused scholars to believe it may have had a function that related to fertility.

### **Meet the artist:**

Paleolithic artists created what may be called 'portable art' since these pieces are generally of a small-scale — a logical size given the nomadic nature of Paleolithic peoples. Museum commentators add that, "despite their diminutive size, the creation of these portable objects signifies a remarkable allocation of time and effort. As such, these figurines were significant enough to take along during the nomadic wanderings of their Paleolithic creators." The figure is believed to have been carved during the European Upper Paleolithic, or "Old Stone Age."



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*The 'Venus' of Willendorf (continued)*

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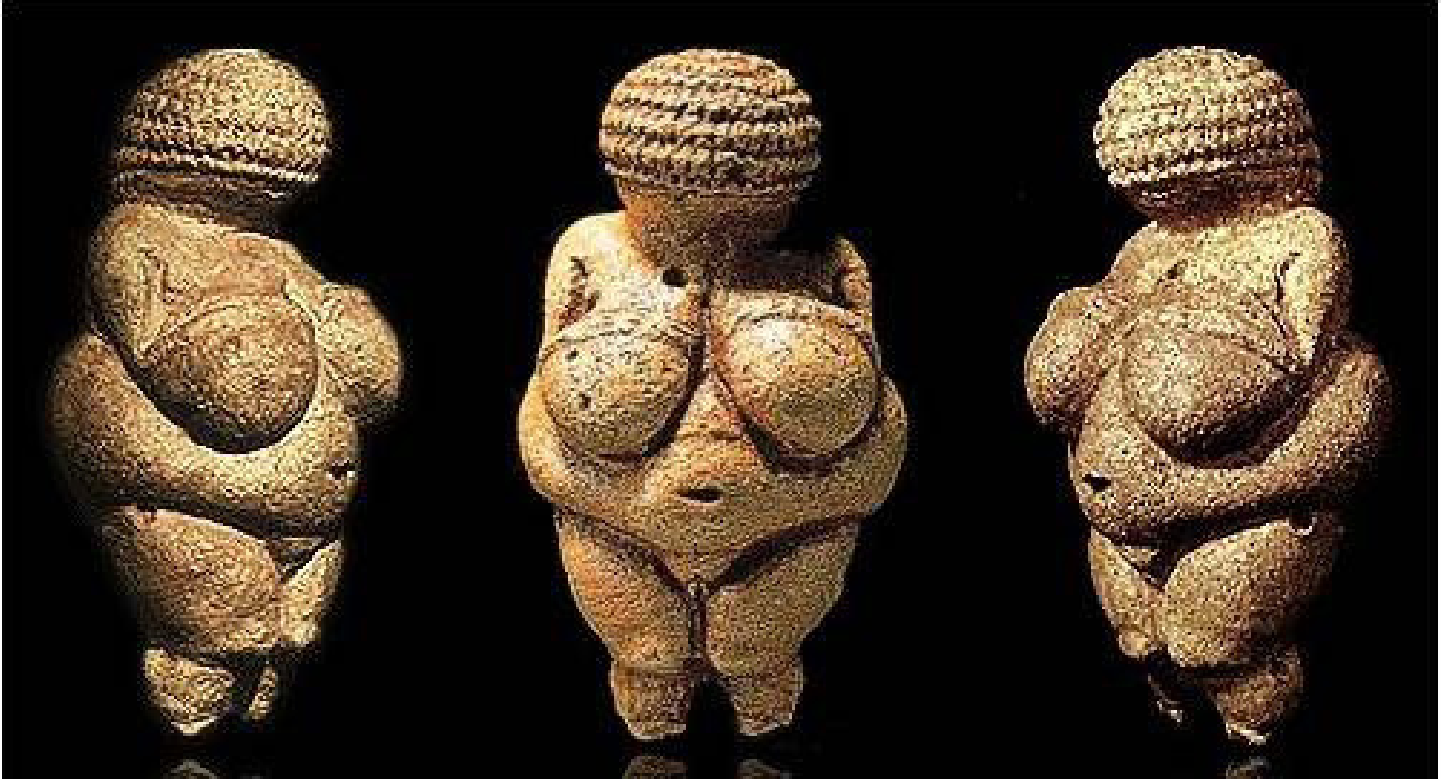


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## Curious fact:

The so-called Venus figurines found in Europe, date from between about 40,000 BCE and 10,000 BCE. They have been found at sites all over Europe and as far afield as Siberia. Given that the creators of these carvings were separated by 30,000 years and hundreds of kilometers, it is remarkable that so many of them share the same traits.

*Note: **BCE** (Before Common Era) and **BC** (Before Christ) mean the same thing – ‘previous to year 1 CE’ (Common Era).*

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## The 'Venus' of Willendorf (continued)

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### More info-bites:

- Similar sculptures are traditionally referred to in archaeology as “Venus figurines”, due to the widely-held belief that depictions of nude women with exaggerated sexual features represented an early fertility fetish, perhaps a mother goddess.
- There is absolutely no evidence that the Venus of Willendorf shared a function similar to the Greek goddess. However incorrect the name may be, it has endured, and tells us more about those who found her than those who made her. Male archeologists’ perspectives have colored the stone’s history and interpretations since its discovery.
- An anthropologist has suggested that — by modern standards — the figurine “could be seen as bordering on the pornographic.” *Interesting perspective, eh? Guess that’s “eye of the beholder.”*

### How was it done:

The Venus of Willendorf is carved out of oolithic limestone and is tinted with red ochre. Red ochre consists of silica and clay owing its color to iron oxide. The use of ochre is particularly intensive: it is not unusual to find a layer of a previously occupied (Stone Age) cave floor impregnated with a purplish red to a depth of eight inches. The coloring is so intense that practically all the loose ground seems to consist of ochre. One can imagine that the early humans regularly painted their bodies red, dyed their animal skins, coated their weapons, and sprinkled the ground of their dwellings, and that a paste of ochre was used for decorative purposes in every phase of their domestic life. We must assume no less, if we are to account for the veritable mines of ochre on which some of them lived... —Leroi-Gourhan, A. 1968. *The Art of Prehistoric Man in Western Europe*. London: Thames & Hudson, p. 40.

### Want to learn more?

Read more at [https://www.ancient.eu/Venus\\_Figurine/](https://www.ancient.eu/Venus_Figurine/)

### Watch videos on YouTube:

Chatty discussion of Venus of Willendorf (4 ½ minutes)

Link: <https://smarthistory.org/venus-of-willendorf/>