The Modern Ancient Greeks

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| ***GREEK WOMEN AND MODELISM***  ***BY ADRIAN VRETTOS & JANET MCGIFFIN***  *Adrian Vrettos is a field archaeologist whose work takes him to café-bars where he observes his fellow Athenians whom he calls “The Modern Ancient Greeks.”*  *Janet McGiffin is author of the four-book historical fiction series about the 8th Century Byzantine Empress Irini of Athens who poisoned her way to the throne of Constantinople. Janet can be reached through her website at* [*janmcgiffin.com*](https://janmcgiffin.com/)*.*  *This article appears in Matt Barrett’s* [*greecetravel.com “The Modern Ancients”*](https://www.athensguide.com/journalists/articles/modelism.htm) |
| I LOVE the ancient Greek female form - in whatever modern shape it appears now on the streets of Athens. This is a lengthy visual delight for Modern Ancient Greek males, including myself. Especially in spring. Most of my friends prefer long, thin, almost boyish-looking women such as can also be viewed in showcases at the Cycladic Museum.  Other friends prefer hour-glass figures with narrow waists like those stone statues that can be viewed at the museum in Knossos where they are usually armed with a couple of snakes. A few friends have a preference for the well-rounded female form such as their marble forebears that are draped in marble cloaks at the National Archaeological Museum on Pattission Avenue in Athens.  Following my scientific training, I decided to classify these shapes; so after hours of painstaking investigation at museums and outdoor cafés, I have drawn up a new classification system. It's called Modelism, with its accompanying Pre-Modelism, Late Pre-Modelism, and Post-Modelism.  Confused? Allow me. Since in Greek pre-history there were no high-circulating magazines or television media, our forebear artisans moulded figurines and carved statues and stuck them up in public places to symbolise their ideal/idol female form. This I term “Pre-Modelism” since it precedes the present-day model, who drapes herself casually in public places and to whom my eyes are subjected every day.  The Pre-Modelistic Period, dated before 3000 BC, is thought to be a matriarchal society where women held the Authority. Women were depicted as the fertile givers of life, like a ripe fruit. Clay figurines of goddesses such as Demeter and Cybele, found all over Greece and Asia Minor, are either completely unclothed or semi-so, seated on thrones. Cybele has lions at her side. Probably these sculptures were made by women.  Following this came the Minoans, circa 2000 BC, again a celebration of female form and power. Their clay forms and images depicted on walls were wearing the fashion of the day; octopus-themed attires, where tentacles stretched upwards enfolding the breasts. This represented a strong link with the energy of the sea, often regarded as a strong feminine element, which takes the female gender in many languages including Greek (i thalassa).  Later on, in my Late Pre-Modelistic period (also known as Post Pre-Modelism or Statuism), ancient Greece moved into a patriarchal society. Women started to lose their status along with their shapely characteristics as can be seen in the Cyladic era at 1653 BC, give or take a couple of hundred years. The female models began to change dramatically into a stylised geometric form with straight masculine lines rather than the curves and waves of the feminine. At the Cycladic Museum, you can see the streamlined figures, almost asexual, with no facial features except for a triangular nose. Some suggest this could portend a subtle shift of power.  By classical Greek times, women had lost the game entirely because the most common figures of beauty were of 15-18 year old males. Women were still around to a lesser degree and their voluptuous beauty and sexuality were still celebrated but not exclusively. The Romans upheld the fashion set by the classical Greeks. But, by the time we get to the Byzantine era from the 3rd to the 15th century AD, women had completely lost their sexuality and shape and were covered with layers of clothing to hide their "sinful" bodies. And the Renaissance, well actually, the Renaissance never really hit Greece, so we will omit those centuries from my theory.  Back to our modern Grecian maidens in the present Modelism period or Neo-Modelism. This is characterised by the Cycladic female form colliding and merging with the much-favoured classical Greek male, *kouroi,* of 500 BC, i.e thin, angular women who very often look like young men.  For some odd reason, the fertile womanly shapes that still abound in Athens (Pre-Modelism) have taken a back seat in fashion to Neo-Modelism. My theory is that homosexuality is not as acceptable in modern Greece as it was in ancient Greece, so the male-driven society has deputised women in place of their young warrior males. Is this equality or manipulation?  Sound the alarm! Young women these days are starving themselves to fit into this new trousers role. Did ancient Athenian women overstuffed themselves to conform with the model of Artemis or Athena? Luckily there are Modern Ancient Greek women who are only lightly touched by today's fashion and who celebrate their womanhood with acceptance and joy. This I call Post-Modelism and it is what I embrace.  Link to [Adrian’s other articles:](https://muckrack.com/adrian-vrettos)  And more in Matt Barrett’s [Athens Guide](https://www.athensguide.com/journalists/index.htm) |