

# FREUD & EROS

A guide for amateurs



FREUD MUSEUM  
LONDON

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# FREUD & EROS

Love, Lust and Longing

FREUD MUSEUM LONDON

Exhibition 22 October 2014 – 8 March 2015

Guest Curator: Dr Janine Burke

Exhibition includes commissioned sculpture by Jodie Carey, and works by Edmund de Waal, Rachel Kneebone and Hannah Collins

FREUD MUSEUM  
LONDON







*161*  
**FOREWORD**  
Carol Seigel

*181*  
**FREUD AND THE POWER OF EROS:  
ART, PSYCHOANALYSIS AND MARTHA BERNAYS**  
Dr Janine Burke

*1161*  
**THE SCIENTIST IN LOVE:  
ON THE CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN MARTHA BERNAYS  
AND SIGMUND FREUD 1882-1886**  
Michael Molnar

*1221*  
**LIST OF OBJECTS**  
Dr Janine Burke

*1341*  
**FREUD AND EROS:  
CONTEMPORARY ART AT THE FREUD MUSEUM LONDON**  
Jamie Ruers and Carol Seigel





# FREUD AND THE POWER OF EROS:

## Art, Psychoanalysis and Martha Bernays

Dr Janine Burke

I must always have an object to love.  
Freud to Jung. (1)

In the late 1890s while writing *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Sigmund Freud became an art collector, developing an obsession with antiquity, beauty, myth and archaeology that led him to amass a brilliant private museum of over two thousand statues, vases, reliefs, busts, fragments of papyrus, rings, precious stones and prints. In Freud's study, every available surface was crowded with exquisite objects.

Eros, the god of love, the winged messenger of desire, is, apart from the Egyptian god Osiris, one of the best represented deities in Freud's collection. Freud acquired a variety of examples of Eros, both large and small figurines, as well as an array of phallus amulets from Etruscan to Roman times. He also had statuettes of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, pleasure and sensuality who was at times regarded as the companion of Eros, at others as his mother. Freud declared 'language has carried out an entirely justifiable piece of unification in creating the word "love" with its numerous uses...In its origin, function and relations to

sexual love, the "Eros" of the philosopher Plato coincides exactly with the love-force, the libido of psychoanalysis.' (2)

Freud identified Eros as the basic life instinct. Civilization itself is 'a process in the service of Eros' and its evolution is 'the struggle between Eros and Death, between the instinct of life and the instinct of destruction, as it works itself out in the human species.' (3) Freud respected Eros as 'the preserver of all things.' (4) Eros was a positive and cohesive social force whose purpose was to 'form living substance into ever greater unities, so that life may be prolonged and brought to higher development.' (5)

Mythologically, Eros is an ancient figure, a powerful and mysterious force, arising at the formation of the world. Hesiod's *Theogony*, written in the 8th -7th BC, provides the earliest reference to Eros. The *Theogony*, a genealogy of the gods, tells the Greek creation story. Eros is represented as neither male nor female but a self-generated being who emerges following the appearance of Chaos (*khaos*:emptiness, vast void, chasm), Earth and the underworld of Tartarus. Eros is described as 'fairest among the deathless gods, who unnerves the limbs and overcomes the mind and wise counsels of all gods and all men within them.' (6)

Sexual identity begins with Eros and a veritable frenzy of reproduction follows his arrival. Chaos gives birth to Darkness and Night. Earth gives birth to 'starry Heaven' (or Ouranos, the sky god) who is her companion, 'equal to herself, to cover her on every side, and to be an ever-sure abiding-place for the blessed gods.' (7) Then Earth and Heaven give birth to a variety of divine and natural forces. As the art historian and archaeologist Maxime Collignon notes, 'Eros has no clearly defined story of his own which is capable of plastic representation' but is an 'impulse which brings about the union of living beings and ensures the continuance of life, rather than the sensuous love-god of later days.' (8)

The ancient Greeks configured Eros as lust - swift, urgent and overwhelming. (9) In the sixth century BC., Sappho writes,

Eros makes me tremble yet again  
sapping all the strength from my limbs;  
bittersweet, undefeated creature -  
against you there is no defence (10)

Freud developed his views about Eros in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), *The Ego and the Id* (1923), *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxieties* (1926d [1925]) and *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930). Libido is the energy 'of those instincts which have to do with all that may be comprised under the word "love"...the nucleus of which is...sexual love with sexual union as its aim.' (11)

Freud sought a balance between love and lust, life and death in his reading of Eros. Freud relished dichotomies, proposing dualistic theories about human behaviour and culture.

He positioned Eros as a 'life instinct' in opposition to a 'death instinct', speculating that 'these two instincts were struggling with each other from the very first.' (12) In *Civilization and its Discontents*, Freud commented that 'eternal Eros will make an effort to assert himself in the struggle with his equally immortal adversary.' In 1931 Freud added the sentence, 'But who can foresee with what success and with what result?' (13) By then, the Nazi Party had gained so many seats in the Reichstag it was the second largest party in Germany.

But while Freud developed revolutionary theories about sexual urges that determined the destiny both of civilization





The sexy and confident *Aphrodite* (Cat no 11) also from Tanagra, may have stood on a shelf or in a niche. Even poor households had artworks of deities which were honoured in private religious rituals. Hellenistic sculptors transformed the great cult statues of the Classical era into what Maxime Collignon has memorably described as 'diminutive monuments.' (22) Sensual and powerful images of Aphrodite permeated the visual culture of the Hellenistic world leading Rachel Meredith Kousser to suggest these images gave concrete form to an emerging ideal: individual fulfillment through love. (23)

Freud respected Eros, 'the preserver of all things.' (24) Eros aroused desire, for people and for objects. When Plato suggested that love and desire are directed at 'what you don't have, what isn't there, and what you need', Freud, connoisseur of beautiful things, recognised the urge. (25) The statues of Eros were objects of desire he had to possess. Not only do they epitomise Classical civilization and the brave new ideas Freud developed in relation to it but, equally, they are items of pure aesthetic pleasure. Freud's entire collection can be viewed as a representation of desire: his need to constantly acquire more demonstrates a longing which is never assuaged.

Freud collected around seventeen phallus amulets, mostly Roman but also Egyptian, Etruscan and Japanese. Freud detested conservative attitudes that designated the genitals as 'objects of shame...and even disgust' while in earlier civilizations 'they were the pride and hope of living beings; they were worshipped as gods.' It made him reflect that in 'the course of cultural development so much of the divine and sacred was ultimately extracted from sexuality that the exhausted remnant fell into contempt.' (26)

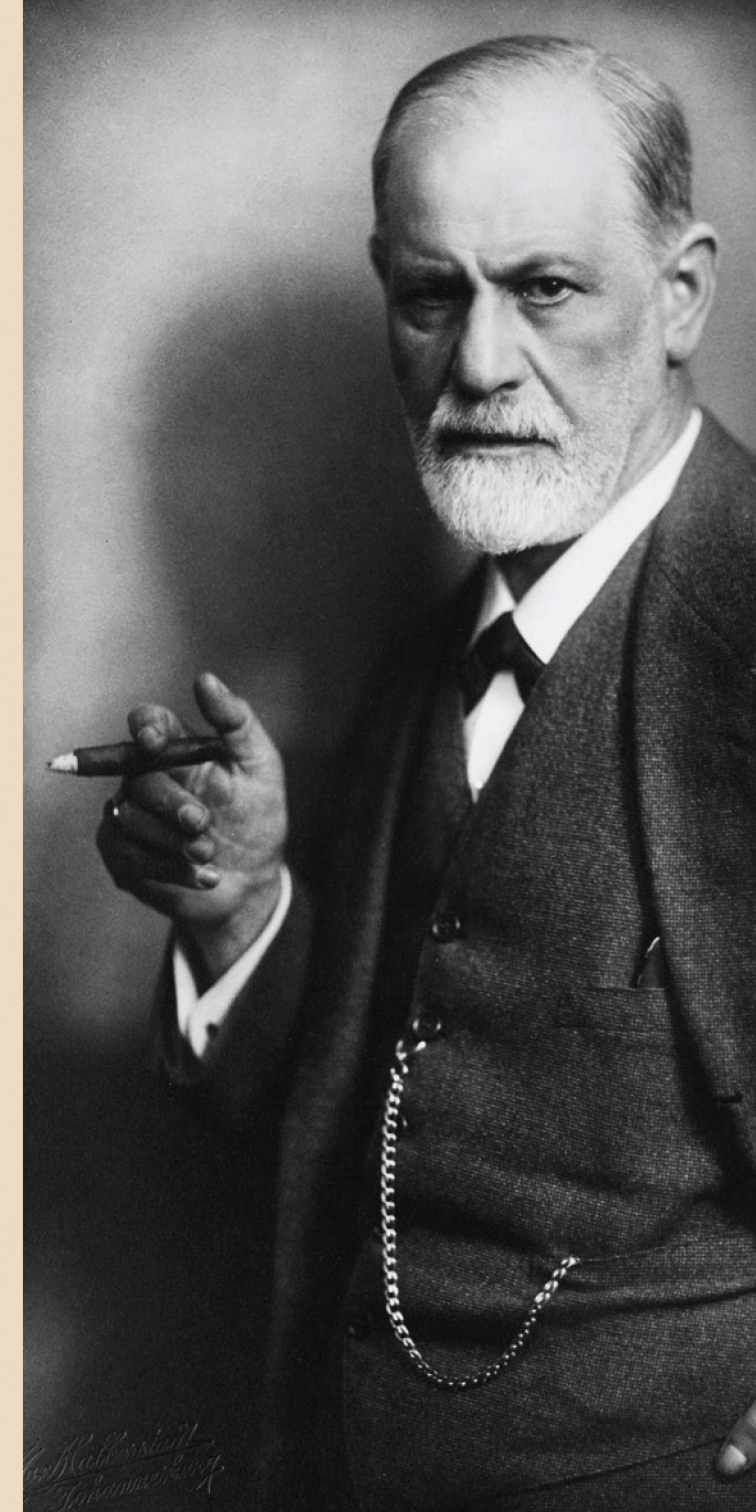
Freud had a French translation of Richard Payne Knight's *A Discourse on the Worship of Priapus*. (27) Knight was a kindred spirit. In 1786, he published a breathtakingly bold account of the ancient reverence for Eros and Priapus. Knight, a classical scholar, was an antiquarian with a vast collection

which he bequeathed to the British Museum. Poor Knight. *A Discourse* 'so shocked the sensibilities of the higher classes of English society' as well as 'the various ministers and denominations of the Christian world' that he felt obliged to suppress all the copies he could lay his hands on. (28) The illustrations of phallus amulets in Knight's book may have encouraged Freud to seek out similar examples. *A Discourse* includes works resembling *Fist and Phallus Amulet* (Cat no 20) and *Phallus Amulet with Man-Bull Face* (Cat no 22).

While Freud believed that Priapus 'stood for permanent erection, a wish fulfillment representing the opposite of psychological impotence', the god also signified good luck. (29) To the Greeks, Priapus was a minor rustic deity while to the Romans, he was a protective fertility god. Statues of Priapus placed in gardens and on farms, and often quite crudely carved of wood, were a common feature of the countryside.

The phallus amulets were good luck charms and had no erotic connotation. Portable talismans sewn into clothes or worn as bracelets, they offered magical protection from harm and the phallus was believed to have an apotropaic power to avert and overcome evil influences. Freud's collection represents different types of *fascinum* (Latin: fascination, enchantment). The winged phallus (Cat no 17) was very common during the Roman era while amulets with larger loops (Cat no 26) were attached to bracelets or necklaces and worn by women to propitiate fertility. Roman boys were given the amulets to wear but not girls. Perhaps the larger public life afforded to boys in Roman society increased the opportunities for hazards or perhaps girls were regarded with less esteem.

In his study in Vienna, Freud displayed six of his Eros statues (Cat nos 1, 2, 3, 5, 6 and 7) near one another in a crowded glass cabinet where he could see them as he sat in his chair conducting an analysis. While Freud listened to





# LIST OF OBJECTS

Dr Janine Burke



## 1. EROS

Greek, Hellenistic period, probably from Myrina, western Asia Minor (modern Turkey) c.150-100 BC.  
Terracotta, h.42.2cm x w.17.5cm x d.16.8cm. (excl base)

LDFRD 3880.

Collection Freud Museum London.

This spectacular figure is a major work in Freud's collection. The youthful god is shown with one foot lightly touching the earth. While traditionally Eros is associated with a bow and arrow, this *Eros* may have held a musical instrument such as a lyre.

*Eros* is depicted as a handsome adolescent and charmingly seductive, referring to love's illusions, its blindness. But his joyful vitality, conveyed by his light stance, raised arms and wings stretched in full flight, symbolise the rapture and energy of love's awakening.

*Eros* comes from the ancient city of Myrina which was halfway between Smyrna and Pergamon. The area is now part of Turkey. In the early 1880s, many treasures were excavated from a necropolis on the site. Some of the finest terracotta figures of the late Hellenistic and Roman periods were discovered there. The haul by the French School at Athens found its way to the Louvre while many other antiquities, pillaged by the locals, surfaced in the marketplaces of Athens and Paris.

Freud's *Eros* is superior to similar examples in the Louvre. He bought it in September 1934, four years after publishing *Civilization and its Discontents*, his final essay testifying to the power of Eros.

## 2. EROS

Greek, Hellenistic period, probably from Myrina, western Asia Minor (modern Turkey) c.150-100 BC.  
Terracotta, h.13.5cm x w.11 cm x d.5cm. (excl base)

LDFRD 3898.

Collection Freud Museum London.

The god wears a *pilos*, a conical travelling hat made of felt or leather, over which is draped a *chlamys* which he opens to reveal his genitals. The mantle has traces of orange and red paint.

The site of Myrina was discovered at the mouth of the river that was the ancient Pythicos. Between 1880-1882, excavations by the French School at Athens brought to light about four thousand tombs, dating from the last two centuries BC.

Winged figures, often of Eros, were a specialty of Myrina. While they might be included in a tomb, many were bought for the decoration of private homes.







**22. PHALLUS AMULET with Man-Bull Face**  
Roman.  
Bronze.  
LDFRD 3205.

The amulet is decorated with a man-bull face, bull's ears, bull's horns above the head plus a loop, two phalluses and testicles beneath. In Greek mythology, Zeus, the king of the gods, took the form of a bull to carry off Europa to Crete where she became its first queen. Taurus, Latin for bull, is the name of the constellation Zeus placed in the sky to commemorate his metamorphosis.



**23. BULL'S HEAD AMULET**  
Roman.  
Bronze.  
LDFRD 3434.

The bull and its horns were regarded as symbols of masculine strength, lust and fertility in many ancient cultures - Egyptian, Minoan, Greek and Roman.



**24. PHALLUS AMULET**  
Egyptian, Late Period 747BC - 332 BC.  
Faience.  
LDFRD 4693.

Faience is a fine tin-glazed pottery on a delicate, pale, buff earthenware body which is often green. The name derives from Faenza in northern Italy.



**25. STANDING MAN WITH ERECT PHALLUS**  
Etruscan (?).  
Metal.  
LDFRD 4678.



**26. PHALLUS WITH LARGE LOOP**  
Roman.  
Bronze.  
LDFRD 3438.



**27. PHALLUS WITH RAM'S HEAD**  
Japanese.  
Ivory.  
LDFRD 3409.

The ram (a male sheep) is a symbol of virility in many cultures. In Japan, phallus worship has continued. Each spring in the village of Komaki, near Nagoya, a large wooden phallus is carried in procession through the streets to bring fertility and ensure a good harvest.



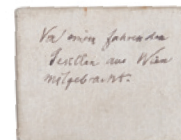
**28. MARTHA BERNAYS. EMBROIDERY. C.1884.**  
Collection Freud Museum London.

In 1883, Freud asked Martha to embroider two 'Votive panels' for him which he hung above his desk at the Vienna General Hospital. A friend had told Freud that the French proverb, 'En cas de doute abstiens-toi [If in doubt, abstain]' was derived from Augustine of Hippo, the Early Christian theologian and philosopher. Perhaps the proverb served as a caution for Freud in the long years of his betrothal.



**29. WEDDING RING AND MATCHBOX. 1886.**  
Collection Freud Museum London.

Freud's ring (which he wore on the third finger of his right hand) was engraved with Martha's name and their wedding date, 13 September 1886. En route to Wandsbek, Hamburg, for the wedding, Freud carried the ring in a matchbox. He inscribed the lid with the words, 'Brought by a travelling journeyman from Vienna.' ['Von einem fahrenden Gesellen aus Wienmitgebracht.']



## FREUD MUSEUM LONDON

The Freud Museum London was the final home of Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, and his daughter Anna, pioneer of child psychoanalysis. It was here at 20 Maresfield Gardens that the Freud family settled in 1938 after escaping from Nazi persecution in Austria. The Museum houses Sigmund Freud's library, personal papers and his collection of antiquities. The centrepiece of the house is Freud's study. Here, among the book-lined walls and classical objects, you will find his original and now iconic psychoanalytic couch.

### FREUD & EROS: LOVE, LUST AND LONGING

22 October 2014 – 8 March 2015

Full details of exhibition and public programme at [www.freud.org.uk](http://www.freud.org.uk)

#### Exhibition

Guest Curator: Dr Janine Burke

Museum Director: Carol Seigel

Museum Curator: Sophie Leighton

Assistant Curator: Bryony Davies

Installation: Francisco da Silva and Daniel Bento

Art Assistant: Jamie Ruers

Exhibition Design: Karolina Urbaniak

Art works by Jodie Carey (Artist in Residence), Edmund de Waal, Rachel Kneebone and Hannah Collins

#### Freud Museum Collection

Photographs Karolina Urbaniak

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### LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Cover: Phallus with Ram's Head

Page 4: Martha Freud and Sigmund Freud, 1886, Wedding portrait

Page 7: close-up of Venus, Roman, c.40 AD

Page 8: Bull's Head Amulet, Roman

Page 12: Aphrodite, Greek, c.230 BC

Page 13: Sigmund Freud, 1932

Page 14: Martha Freud, c. 1925

Page 16: Hanukkah Lamp, Northern France or Germany, 13th century

Page 21: Martha and Sigmund Freud, 1911

Page 22: Freud's study in Vienna, 1938

Page 34: Phallic amulet with clenched fist, Roman

Page 35: Remember that we sometimes demand definitions for the sake not of content, but of their form, Rachel Kneebone, 2014

Page 36: And Speech, Edmund de Waal, 2013. Photograph: Mike Bruce

Page 39: Sigmund Freud, c.1935

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*Handwritten text in a cursive script, likely Hebrew or Yiddish, appearing on the right edge of the page.*



*Freud and Eros: Love, Lust and Longing* explores Sigmund Freud's revolutionary ideas on love and the libidinal drive through an innovative combination of works from Freud's own art collection, his writings and letters, contextualised with works by contemporary artists.

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