

Babs Reingold: After Venus Debuts at the Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg with Never-Before-Seen Works

An acclaimed local artist explores gendered power and human resilience through a provocative dialogue between Paleolithic "Venus" figurines and modern women's bodybuilding.



Babs Reingold. *After Venus: Three Graces*, 1993. Oil and modeling paste on canvas. 8 x 8 inches. Courtesy of the artist and the Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg.

St. Petersburg, FL – This summer, **The Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg** presents ***Babs Reingold: After Venus***, a pivotal exhibition on view from May 16 through August 30, 2026. The exhibition features a collection of large-scale drawings, monotypes, and encaustic collages — many of which have never been publicly exhibited — by the acclaimed multidisciplinary artist Babs Reingold (American, b. Venezuela, 1954).

Based in St. Petersburg, Reingold is celebrated for her use of unconventional, tactile materials—including tea-stained silk organza, human hair, and rusted metal—to create visceral works. Her practice is deeply informed by her own history of poverty and displacement, themes she weaves into a broader commentary on the social inequities that shape our perception of the self. In *After Venus*, she uses repetitive labor, organic textures and art historical appropriation to reflect on the body and agency.

Centered on the *After Venus* series, the exhibition draws inspiration from Upper Paleolithic-era “Venus” figurines, notably the *Venus of Willendorf* (c. 30,000 BCE). To provide historical context, the installation includes select objects from the museum’s permanent collection that examine the evolution of these enigmatic figures. Among these is a *Fertility Idol* (Iranian, 14th–13th Century BCE), whose abstracted, symbolic form predates classical definitions of beauty, and a *Red-Figure Column Krater* (Greek, 440–430 BCE). The latter depicts Amazons, the mythic warrior women of antiquity, serving as an ancient precursor to Reingold’s interest in the gendered power of muscularity.

From 1990 to 1998, Reingold delved into the world of women’s bodybuilding, finding a sense of empowerment in the chiseled bodies of female weightlifters. These figures stand in striking contrast to the soft, curvilinear, feminine ideals exemplified by works like the museum’s *Torso of Aphrodite* (Roman, c. 100–200 CE). By juxtaposing the smooth marble of the goddess with the hyper-defined musculature of modern women athletes, Reingold investigates how human bodies are policed and regulated, expressing a woman-centered strength that challenges traditional male-dominated narratives of art history.

“The *After Venus* pieces have been stored in my studio for over 30 years,” says artist Babs Reingold. “Revisiting this early work with a fresh eye has been an insightful experience. The Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg curates a truly global collection, offering a unique opportunity to bridge my contemporary vision with ancient artifacts. This adds a profound layer of historical context to the female figure, and I am thrilled to finally share this series in its entirety with the public for the first time.”

By pairing prehistoric symbols with modern athleticism, the exhibition challenges binary notions of “masculine” strength and “feminine” softness. Reingold’s work suggests that power is not a gendered trait but a human one, reclaimed through discipline and the rejection of societal expectations.

“The policing of bodies has become more blatant than ever: from racial stereotyping to the cultural pressures that have led to looksmaxxing to attacks on trans rights,” shares Katherine Pill, Senior Curator of Contemporary Art at the Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg. “The women of *After Venus* present an unabashed, quite literal, physical strength that is deeply inspiring. I am indebted to Babs for sharing this work with the Museum of Fine Arts.”

As a master with a variety of materials, Reingold uses silk and rust to create a dialogue between the ethereal and the industrial. *After Venus* serves as a journey through the evolution of the female form, demanding that viewers look closer at how identity is constructed and controlled. The exhibition unfolds as a sensory narrative where the boundary between the ancient and the contemporary dissolves, leaving a profound impression of our shared history and the ongoing struggle for bodily autonomy.

Babs Reingold: After Venus is funded in part by the City of St. Petersburg and the Margaret Acheson Stuart Society. For more information, visit mfastpete.org.

About Babs Reingold

Reingold creates sculptures, drawings, and installations focusing on the environment, standards of beauty, and poverty. Her work is in the permanent collections of the Newark Museum, NJ; Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg, FL; Burchfield Penney Art Center Museum, Buffalo, NY; Leepa Rattner Museum of Fine Art, Tarpon Springs, FL; Hillsborough Community College, Tampa, FL; and Savannah College of Art and Design, GA. Reingold has an MFA in painting from SUNY-Buffalo and a BFA from Cleveland Institute of Art. Reingold currently resides in St. Petersburg, Florida.

About the Museum of Fine Arts St. Petersburg

The Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg (MFA) has an encyclopedic collection of art from around the globe and across the centuries, with almost 5,000 years of civilization represented in thousands of objects extending from antiquity to the present. The collection includes works by Georgia O'Keefe, Claude Monet, Berthe Morisot, Auguste Rodin, Kehinde Wiley, Jacob Lawrence, and many others, as well as ancient Greek and Roman, Asian, African, Art of the Americas, and Native American art. The museum's photographic collection is one of the largest and most well-respected in the Southeast. The museum's rotating exhibition galleries feature a diverse selection of temporary exhibitions from all over the world, as well as exhibitions curated from the museum's extensive collection. In addition to its robust exhibition program, the MFA engages the community through exciting public programs and events and serves students through youth programs and a partnership with the Pinellas County Schools system.

Media Contact:

Carrie Olin Elliott, Director of Marketing & Communications

celliot@mfastpete.org

727.896.2667 ext. 234

The Museum of Fine Arts, St. Petersburg

255 Beach Drive NE,

St. Petersburg, FL 33701

mfastpete.org