Aimee Hinds, "Entry on: Barbie® Goddess Series (Series): Barbie® Doll as Aphrodite by Mattel, Inc. , Linda Kyaw ", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1063. Entry version as of November 15, 2026.

Mattel, Inc. , Linda Kyaw

Barbie® Goddess Series (Series): Barbie® Doll as Aphrodite

United States (2009)

TAGS: Aphrodite Venus





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Barbie® Goddess Series (Series): Barbie® Doll as Aphrodite
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	Worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2009
First Edition Details	Mattel, *Barbie® Doll as Aphrodite*, 2009.
Official Website	barbie.mattel.com (accessed: August 12, 2020).
Genre	Collectables*, Dolls*
Target Audience	Young adults (on the box Mattel suggest that this doll is for adult collectors, which they define as those aged 14 and up)
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Creators

Mattel, Inc. (Company)

Logo retrieved from Wikipedia, public domain (accessed: January 11, 2022).

Mattel Barbie

Originally launched in 1959, Barbie was founded by businesswoman, inventor, and co-owner of Mattel, Ruth Handler as an opportunity for girls to play with dolls that allowed them a wider range of imaginative roles, in line with the range of toys available to boys at the time. From the early 1960s, Barbie has had over 200 careers to date.

Source:

barbie.mattel.com (accessed: January 27, 2020).

Prepared by Aimee Hinds, University of Roehampton, aimee.hinds89@gmail.com



Linda Kyaw

Linda Kyaw has been Product Design Manager at Mattel since 2015. Before that, she was an Associate Designer and Face Designer for Mattel. She has an Associate of Arts from the Fashion Institute of Design and Marketing. Kyaw has designed a wide range of dolls, including Goddess Series (2008-2010) and Barbie as Cleopatra (2010), as well as some of the recent Dolls of the World dolls and the Birthday and Holiday Wishes dolls.

Source:

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Linkedin profile (accessed: August 7, 2020).

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Additional information

Summary

This collector's edition doll depicts Barbie as Aphrodite. The doll was the second of the Goddess Series, which is comprised of Athena, Aphrodite and Medusa (the other dolls are also surveyed in this database). Both the text that accompanies the dolls and their costumes suggests that the series is fashion focused, rather than trying to produce authentic versions of the mythological figures it represents. The doll is distinct from the Goddess of Beauty doll, which is a generalised version of both Venus and Aphrodite presented specifically as a classically inspired doll (barbie.mattel.com, accessed August 7, 2020). Aphrodite is presented, through motifs of waves, curls and shells, as a goddess from and of the sea.

Unlike the other two dolls in this series, Barbie as Aphrodite is not bedecked with silver and gold to signify her heavenly status. Despite this, the box features the doll with a backdrop of a clam shell and a water effect, clearly referencing Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*, as well as ancient imagery of Aphrodite with clam shells and helping to contextualise her as the ancient Greek goddess. The information provided with this doll is, as with the Medusa doll, rather lacking in detail. The blurb on her box does not elaborate with details or variations on the mythology like the Athena doll.

The text on the box reads:

"Among the favorite stories of ancient Greek mythology is that of the beautiful goddess Aphrodite. Born from the foam of the ocean waves, she was whisked to the shores of a shell. Soon after her birth, Zeus – the supreme ruler of the gods and goddess of Mount Olympus – married her off to Hephaestus, the smith god. But the goddess of love and beauty was partial to glamour and fun; and she loved and was loved by gods and mortals alike.

The alluring tale of the lovely Aphrodite inspires a wonderful re-interpretation. Barbie® doll as Aphrodite wears a flowing gown of aquamarine silk shantung decorated with white and mauve ruffles. The golden hairstyle features waves and curls inspired by the sea. Softly gleaming faux mother-of-pearl embellishes the jewelry suite. Ancient myth and contemporary fashion combine to create a magical doll."

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Analysis

The least obviously mythical in presentation of all the Goddess Series dolls, Barbie as Aphrodite lacks the visual motifs to clearly identify her as the Greek goddess. The design has prioritised the story of her birth: she wears a real coral necklace and earrings, and her hair is curled at the front to resemble waves. Her dress, which is low-cut and split from the knee with a wide fish-tail, is sea-green and features ruffled and beaded accents which look like sea foam and seaweed. The feminine design of her costume is typical of the Goddess Series, ensuring that Barbie's womanliness is maintained despite elements of the character which may negate it. In this case, the recognisable nudity of ancient depictions of Aphrodite would be unsuitable, not only because it would not be suitable for children but also because Barbie's own nudity does not express her intended gender as well as her clothing can, again because the nude doll (Barbie must necessarily be nude sometimes as she is designed to change outfits) must be appropriate for children.

This doll illustrates the difficulties with relating mythology to children, as the lack of imagery which is both suitable for children and representative of Aphrodite makes this doll difficult to present as an instantly recognisable figure. The fashion equivalent of sea-foam therefore provides both a visual link back to Aphrodite's mythology and a suitable way of presenting that mythology to children, as well as bypassing most of the sexual elements of Aphrodite's character in favour of her more romantic elements through her costume, which has touches of sensuality but is ultimately a dreamy, romanticised outfit. The avoidance of Aphrodite's sexual side is also present in the way the box text skirts around some of her famous myths and exploits, including the origin of the foam she was born from (Ouranos' detached genitals; Hesiod, *Theogony* 178-206), and her infidelity against Hephaestus, most famously with Ares (detailed in Homer's *Odyssey* 8.265-367). The doll here is - in contrast to the ancient Greek Aphrodite - rather chaste, and seems to conflate the Greek Aphrodite with the Roman Venus, who, particularly in the early Imperial period, took on a much more maternal role; Cyrino (2010: 130-131) highlights how Venus, rather than Aphrodite, is the dominant figure in terms of expressing love, sex and desire in reception. Given that it is likely to be later receptions that have influenced this doll's design, the conflation is unsurprising (and not unique; the same thing is more explicitly seen in the Goddess of Beauty doll which is a representation

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of both). So, if the doll represents Venus rather than Aphrodite, it is easier to understand why she is clothed, and this resolves some of the tension between the doll as a representation of an eroticised goddess that is also a toy, the audience of which includes children.

The focus on fashion in the presentation of Aphrodite in the doll allows for the commercialisation of Aphrodite in a way which is not easy should she be presented in a more 'traditional' (for example, in recognisably ancient dress) way, especially given that this doll is the follow up to such a version (the Goddess of Beauty from 2000). Arguably, this doll (as well as the Athena doll, which has an earlier precedent in the Goddess of Wisdom doll, also 2000) reflects the changing perception of Greco-Roman mythology, and a willingness to allow for flexibility within reception. As this doll and the others in the range are collectors' items and not meant to be played with, the costume is a crucial element of the doll as a product. The costume completes the image of Aphrodite as a figure of idealised beauty, fulfilling Barbie's feminine branding, but her slightly sexy elements distinguish her from the playable toy dolls, aimed solely at children. In commercial terms, this allows the doll to appeal to the wider audience of collectors, including adults, without breaking away from Barbie's recognisability.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aphrodite Venus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Femininity Gender Gender expectations/construction Gender, female Girls Religious beliefs Romance Water

Further Reading

Barbie, *About Barbie* (accessed: January 27, 2020).

Barbie, *Barbie Doll as Aphrodite* (accessed: January 27, 2020).

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Barbie, *Goddess of Beauty Barbie Doll* (accessed: July 29, 2020).

Cyrino, Monica S., *Aphrodite,* London: Routledge, 2010.

Milnor, Kristina, "Barbie® as Grecian Goddess™ and Egyptian Queen™: Ancient Women's History by Mattel®", *Helios* 32.2 (2005): 215–233.

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