

[Cf. Hephaestus1.0131_Thorvaldsen.htm](#)



Venus, Cupid
and Mars in
Vulcan's Forge
after
Thorvaldsen,
Early 19th
Century Carved
Shell Cameo
Brooch

\$795

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★★★★★ 28

Reviews

Delightful and very intricately carved Georgian or early Victorian shell cameo depicting Venus, Cupid and Mars in Vulcan's forge. This rare scene of assembled deities from classical mythology is based on a marble bas-relief by Danish neo-classical sculptor, Bertel Thorvaldsen circa 1814. Soon after this an intaglio with this subject was engraved by Luigi Pichler and impressions of the gem were made by Paoletti around 1830. Most subsequent versions carved in shell seem to follow Pichler's gem from these impressions.

The scene depicts Venus, the goddess of love and desire with her husband, Vulcan (Hephaestus), the gifted, if not exactly dashing god of metalworking and the forge, fire and volcanoes. This unlikely union was engineered by Zeus (Jupiter), who really wanted Venus for himself, but felt that it was better to see her married to the steady-as-you-go smith god than openly conducting love affairs with other gods and mortals under his very nose. Not that this deterred Venus from having liaisons. Here she sits, half-draped, with her symbolic doves at her feet, while Vulcan toils over his anvil, forging arrows for her son, Cupid (Eros) who stands next to her. As she quenches an arrow in a bowl, she casts a sly glance in the direction of her athletic-looking lover, Mars (Ares), god of war. He is standing casually on the right, hand on hip, wearing only his helmet. Poor Vulcan is probably unaware of anything amorous going on between them. Meanwhile Mars and Cupid playfully swap weapons: Mars has one of Cupid's arrows and Cupid is holding the spear belonging to Mars. It is no accident that the arrow held by Mars is pointing towards Venus.

This is not a large cameo, which makes the detail packed into this complex scene, with its four tiny figures and their special attributes, all the more amazing. The background

shell has a high polish. Apart from slight rubbing to Mars' helmet at the edge, the carving is overall very crisp. There is a fine internal line across the upper part of the shell seen in strong light and a couple of other shorter lines faintly seen when held to light, but overall condition is very good for the age. The setting is not marked and has not been tested, but is probably gold plated, as there is a dark mark on the back of the frame where the surface of the metal appears to have been filed. The brooch fastens securely with a tube hinge, pin and curly 'c' clasp.

Exquisitely carved and extremely wearable, this cameo would make a fine addition to a collection. The subject is hard to find, especially in this quality. It measures approximately 37mm x 30mm or 1 7/16" x 1 3/16" overall, including the frame.

Item ID: RL-00291

Gender: Female, *Age Group:* Adult, *Color:* White / Brown / Gold, *Size:* 1 7/16 x 1 3/16 inches