

Reaction of dr. Annine E. G. van der Meer on article **World famous Siberian Venusfigurines 'are NOT Venuses after all'** in the Siberian Times of 18 February 2016.



Dr. van der Meer is the Dutch author on a book about Venus Art: *The Language of MA the primal mother. The evolution of the female image in 40,000 years of global Venus Art*, The Hague, 2013, with 1300 full colour images of Venus Art all around the world in 591 pages. In the following this title is shortened into LOMA. The Siberian Venus figurines are pictured in LOMA on pages 80-85 88 96-97 100.



Content of the article in black; reaction of dr. van der Meer in blue.

I welcome the new research on Siberian Venus figurines. And I am happy with the beautiful pictures in the article just mentioned. But I do not approve the interpretation of the Siberian researchers.

The article:

New groundbreaking research shows that a celebrated collection of prehistoric Venus figurines are - in fact - a fashion show of ordinary people of all ages from some 20,000 years ago.

This sacral art depicts not normal people. It was known already since the research of the famous Russian archaeologist dr. Zoia A. Abramova (1960, 1995) en dr. Marina Gvozdover (1989) that a number of Venus figurines from Mal'ta and Buret showed decorations and in some case overalls or parka's. (LOMA p. 84, 94). IN the US it was Elisabeth Barber who phocused on the 'string of textile revolution' in which women used needle and thread (1991,

1994). Olga Soffer continued research on this path (2007, 2008; LOMA 70-94). This is not new. **The point is that this art is NOT depicting normal human beings, children or even teenagers.**

Close microscopic inspection reveals them as being far from idealised female forms. Picture: Hermitage Museum.

These are semi-realistic and semi-abstract figurines, they are used multifunctionally but have a specific symbolic function.

And a striking new light has been cast on the Mal'ta and Buret figurines - found from the 1920s to the 1950s by the Angara River close to Lake Baikal in modern-day Irkutsk region. Notably, the research disputes the widely-held belief that some of the figures are nude.

This is not true, earlier Russian research made clear there were decorations and in some cases clothing on these Siberian Venus figurines.

There were many attempts to understand the idea of these figurines, and their symbolism, she said. 'And there were many interpretations. We decided to pay more attention to some material things, to study the surface, to understand how these figurines were made.

This is the viewpoint of the New Archaeology: measuring, weighing, looking through microscopes to discover every detail, but by going too much into detail, missing the headlines of the subject, missing the symbolic function.

The New Archaeology in the field of archaeology was constructed by Peter Ucko, Ian Hodder and Lynn Meskell in the US and others. It was a critical reaction on the viewpoint of Abramova, Gvozdover, Marija Gimbutas and James Mellaart and others in the sixties of the last century. Gimbutas discovered two sides in Venus Art. In her view the full female body with exaggerated bodyparts (semi-realistic but not realistic normal female forms) stood for the life giving quality. On the other hand the stiff and sticklike oblong forms stood for death and rebirth; it was the way people expressed the soul side of the person, who passed away and would live in the afterlife (LOMA division in interpretation 36-41, 70-72).

Yet the most unexpected result was that we saw traces on the surface of the figurines that were not spotted earlier, as they are not visible to the naked eye, due to the ravages of time. These traces showed more details of clothes than we had seen previously: bracelets, hats, shoes, bags and even back packs.'

Great this microscopic research; but we already knew this. I did not know that there were also shoes and in one case a backpack. This is new for me.

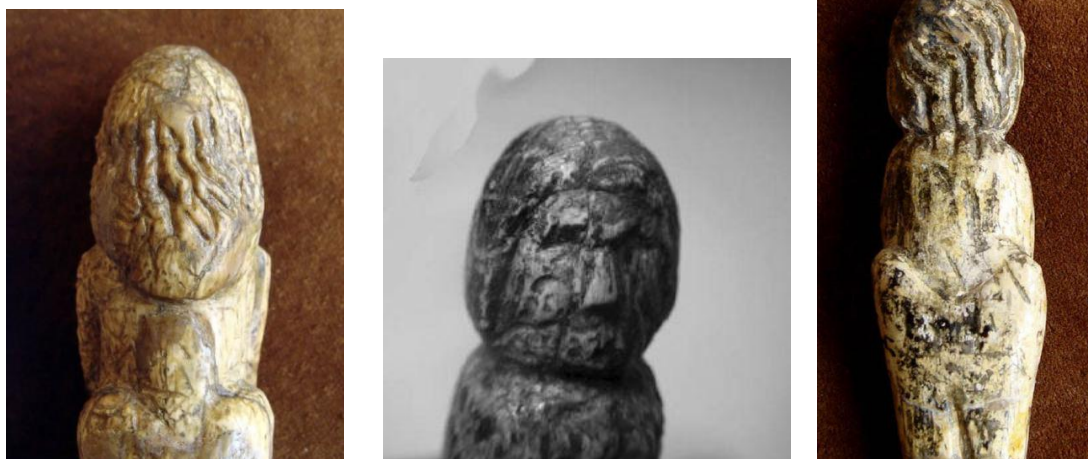
This approach allowed us to reveal many interesting new details and review some ideas about these sculptures,' she said. 'Previously, there had been different approaches to the classification of these figurines, but the basic was a division into 'dressed' and 'naked'.



In my research I found that the basic division was not 'dressed' and 'naked' but 'full and rubensque' and 'stiff and sticklike'. See comments above about the symbolic significance of fullness and stiffness, the generative and regenerative forces of the divine feminine, of life itself.

Our research showed that all of them are more or less 'dressed'. We saw the different types of hats, hairstyles, shoes and accessories which were depicted with thin lines. The ancient masters used different techniques to highlight the different materials - fur, leather, and decorations.

The naked body can show decorations, as other naked Venuses do, wearing round head covers, belts, string skirts and bracelets on their naked bodies.



On the figurines 'we can also see the bags and in one case a traditional back pack with two straps. 'The figurine is probably showing a teenager. It has not so much detail, and it is not clear if this is male or female, yet the proportions of bodies show that this is definitely a teenager.

The idea that this figurine pictures real children of even real teenagers, seems absurd to me. The sticklike figurines are a kind of 'soul house', perhaps for children or teenagers, but more probable is that these picture the family-members who passed away. Their souls continued to live in their soul houses which in arctic cultures were guarded close to the fire near the hearth, the centre of all human activity.

All the figurines were found within the living facilities of ancient settlements, some of them even in ritual places in the home: they were covered with mammoth scapula bone or sprinkled with ochre.'

The place where the figurines were found, proves that they had a ritual function, specially because they were sprinkled with red ochre.

So why did the ancient people make these figurines? 'There is no clear answer as to the purpose,' she said. There can be a lot of allegations, but no one gives irrefragable answer.

According to Harald Floss (2010) and Harald Haarmann (2009) these abstract and stiff and sticklike figurines represented the ancestor spirits who were present close to the hearth. (LOMA 71-72 n 95). Harald Haarmann asserts that with the Tungus in de Altai these sticklike figurines still represent protective ancestors spirits (LOMA 83 n 150). In Siberia itself the Ket are still making specially **female figurines** which for their female ancestors who passed away and who guard and protect the living from their place close to the fire (LOMA 247 n 24). Esther Jacobson mentions also the Evenki and Chukchee from the Altai (1993, LOMA 247 n 20). Modern anthropological research states that these figurines still are made by many nature peoples, whether they hunt and assemble food from nature directly or farm (LOMA 248). They have multifunctional purpose but most of all are used for spiritual needs.

What we can say for sure is that these realistic details of clothes, accessories, hairstyle clearly show that ancient masters made the figurines of some real people, maybe their relatives (*who passed away*). I strongly doubt that these were the images of abstract goddesses or spirits' in the sense often used to understand so-called Venus depictions.

The sticklike depict spirits and are therefore semi-abstract and sticklike (LOMA 41 70).

Some of the figurines are just work pieces, to the finished works. In other words, they are prototypes and 'this allowed us to reconstruct all the steps in their creation.



Some 'prototypes' show sacral body positions in which normal women of realistic persons are not depicted because it is a sacral position. I found with others that there are 13 general bodypositions which are found from Western-Europe, via Central Europe into the Central Russia and Siberia. The rather full Siberian Venus figurines show postures of 'hands on belly' (pregnancy or dea-gravida posture) and 'hands on breasts' (dea nutrix-posture). These are the postures of the divine feminine, Venus postures. This is the reason they cannot be normal women.

Besides not all of the figurines show women: there are also children, teenagers both male and female. Of course, after getting some answers, we now have a lot of new questions.

In the last picture I see red ochre on the fertile parts of the feminine body; an important symbol. I also see on the sticklike dead masks.

My definition of **Venus Art** is: Venus Art is art of the primal mothers. It is sacral, pre-christian and mostly feminine art of prehistoric and indigenous tribes which has as central themes life, death and new life (LOMA 45 248). Life-giving female organs are significantly enlarged. Animals and human beings come from the mother's womb, they are part of Venus Art; the masculine is depicted in connections with the feminine giving of life and is part of the annual cycle.

The system symbols is ancient and does occur globally. It presents an intercultural cohesion in which symbolic characteristics remain repeated over thousands of years and large geographical areas. This visual language displays a striking consistency and continuity.

Dr. Annine van der Meer, The Netherlands, 22 Februari 2016