

infrastructure assures that gay and lesbian creativity will not be constricted by hostile or indifferent outsiders.

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NUDE IN ART, THE

As an art form the monumental nude was perfected by the Greeks in the fifth century B.C. It was, and remains, one of the major vehicles for the realization of the concept of beauty in art. Commonly the nude is automatically equated with the female nude, despite the relatively recent origin of this predominance.

Classical Antiquity and the Middle Ages. The beginning of the sixth century B.C. saw the realization of the Dorian concept of the nude youth in the *kouros* type. Only later, toward the middle of the century, did the female counterpart, the *kore*, appear. Developing in the Ionic sphere, the *kore* is finer, lighter, and—clothed. The male statues, conveniently termed Apollos, are the primordial expression of the young male body, forming an essential component of the art of ancient Greece from the Archaic period until the end. Stemming from a society in which young men regularly exercised naked, in the *gymnasium* and at athletic competitions, they incarnate the most cherished ideals of the Greeks. The flowering of the male nude in Greek art (sixth–fifth century B.C.) was situated during the period in which the pederastic institution was at its

height. Moreover, the depiction of homosexual relations in Greek vases occurred mainly between 570 and 470 B.C., constituting, together with statuary, the fullest repertoire of nudes surviving from classical antiquity.

A radical break took place in the Hellenistic period, in which large monarchies replaced the earlier city-states. Formed in association with the city-state tradition of citizen participation, the classic ethos of earlier times became increasingly less satisfying and less relevant for the average Greek. Women demanded more personal freedom, while at the same time seeking to bind men to their family duties. New phenomena, including the growing Stoic flight from the world, a contrasting Epicurean quest for creature comforts, sophisticated cosmopolitanism, and the rising mystery cults, made their appearance. In this atmosphere, it is not surprising that pederasty lost its sociocultural centrality, becoming more and more a matter of personal preference. In the fourth century B.C. themes of female beauty and heterosexual love made their way into poetry. The appearance and increasing popularity of the nude Aphrodite symbolized the considerable social and psychological changes. Sculptors sought to endow their figures with human passions: joy, sorrow, anger, despair. The development of the male nude shows a tendency to polarization, so that the figures are either too virile or too effeminate.

In the Middle Ages the male nude underwent a kind of etherealization. The Crucified Christ is a symbol of suffering, passion, abnegation, and death. The contrast with classical antiquity could scarcely be greater.

The Renaissance Tradition. The Renaissance rediscovery of the ideas and values of antiquity created an inexhaustible source for artistic creation. The male nude body claimed a central place and, especially in fifteenth-century Florence, reclaimed its status as an aesthetic object; in this climate outstanding figures were

created, studied, and judged. Several factors contributed to this development. First is the relation between the male body and architecture, which goes back to the Greeks. They were the first to develop post-and-lintel architecture based on the archetype of the male body. The vision of the male body as an architectural form depended on a system of proportion. The male body, with its clear relationships among the various component parts, can itself be viewed as a kind of post-and-lintel architecture. The nude *David*, as seen in works by *Donatello* and *Michelangelo*, was popular for another reason. Thanks in large measure to the advocacy of *Ficino*, ideas of Platonic love came to be cherished in Florentine artistic and intellectual circles during the late fifteenth century. Even Greek love enjoyed a certain popularity among the elite. The mitigation of legal prosecutions for sodomy was for a time an enabling factor.

During the following century the female nude gradually came to predominate. The first artists to give the female nude pride of place in their work were the early sixteenth-century Venetian painters. These artists preferred a recumbent *Venus*—simultaneously vulnerable and inaccessible—to a standing *David*. The nude female body was easily assimilated to the soft contours and valleys of a verdant landscape, where each part readily flows into another. At this same time, *Venice* pioneered in launching the tradition of the independent landscape, one that is not simply a foil for the figures. Moreover, courtesans, who were important in the social and economic life of the Adriatic city, probably played an ancillary role: the *Venus*s may be regarded as idealized versions of them. Three underlying factors contributed to the success of the female nude in Venetian painting. First, nudes symbolized the city's independence from the church. In comparison with neighboring lands, the Venetian republic was openly refractory with regard to the power of the church. Significantly, this type of

erotic painting flourished also in conjunction with a similar spirit of independence of kings and princes with regard to the church. North of the Alps, *Lucas Cranach* in Germany and the School of *Fontainebleau* in France depicted female nudes in this political context. Secondly, for the elite these female nudes symbolized privileges not shared with the common people. Finally, the female nude was popular because their male counterparts had come to be regarded as suspect. The artistic presentation of suspect sexual preferences was something that even the most powerful rulers could not countenance, certainly not after the onset of the rigorism of the Reformation and Counterreformation. For reasons of state *Venice* had its own intolerance of deviant sexuality; the earliest mass campaign against sodomy is documented in the archives of the Adriatic city. These factors help to explain an epochal development: the identification of the female nude with the erotic itself. This predominance even allowed occasional presentation of scenes of female–female eroticism, as in the scenes of *Diana at the bath*—but only at the behest of male patrons.

Baroque, Rococo, and Neo-Classicism. In seventeenth-century art the male nude retained a major role in the form of models for the training of artists in the academies. Male models were more readily obtainable than female ones. In compositions intended for sale, however, the female nude gradually became universal as a symbol of freedom and pleasure (eroticism and sensuality). The art market, which had attained maturity in this period, seized every opportunity to promote genres: still life, landscape, portraiture, the nude. In this context the female nude became ever more common throughout western Europe.

The rococo was a style that was particularly susceptible to erotic fascination with the female body. The very creation of the rococo has been hailed as a female achievement: women painted,

purchased, and collected more than ever before, as earlier in the Hellenistic period women had gained more importance in society. Toward the end of the eighteenth century there occurred a break in costume history, which J. C. Flügel characterized as the "Great Masculine Renunciation"; this change entailed a drastic reduction of decorative exuberance in male attire. The male abandoned all claims to beauty in exchange for a clothing code of "sobriety." The wish to be seen was transformed into a wish to see. Exhibitionism became a female privilege.

Nonetheless, there were some attempts to rehabilitate the male nude. Johann Joachim Winckelmann, the homosexual archeologist who was also an influential herald of Neo-classicism, cultivated his personal preference for the male body, making it the hallmark of a whole artistic movement—though the male nude had lost its earlier symbolic value. An effort was made to give it a new significance, resulting in nude statues of such figures as Voltaire and Napoleon, but with little success. After 1800 the nude portrait statue became an academic cliché. Nineteenth-century artists drew the male nude during their studies, but mostly chose the female nude as the major subject of their mature work. Painters such as Hans von Marées who emphasized the male nude were exceptional.

Toward the Present. In the twentieth century both the rise of abstract art and of photography tended to discourage a revival of the male nude. Through their tacit voyeurism, photographic nudes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries usurped the erotic function that had previously been reserved to the fine arts. One exception was the erotic work of the American painter Charles Demuth, which included all-male nude bathhouse and beach scenes.

Outside the realm of art, other trends, such as dress reform, nudist colonies, body building, and sun bathing, contributed to a renewed appreciation of the

beauty of the human body. The Nazi idealization of beautiful, healthy, and "pure" bodies fit with the claim that classic Greek beauty reached its full perfection in the Nordic race. Earlier, some of the first photographs of the male nude, such as those of Wilhelm von Gloeden, had appeared in the budding homosexual press of Germany. A highly ambiguous relationship existed between the Nazi male ideal and homosexuality.

Pop art of the 1950s and the counterculture of the sixties renewed interest in the nude male body. But the male body returned as a focus of artistic interest only in the 1970s, stimulated in part by the international homosexual movement. Also, feminism and the ever more numerous women artists became a major factor. Especially in photography the male nude served as a fount of inspiration. Yet even in the twentieth century the male nude caused uneasiness. The guardians of public morality regard the penis, however artfully it is presented, as more threatening than the vagina. And frontal male nudes are less acceptable than female ones.

The interest of lesbian artists in the female body is as yet insufficiently demonstrated. If they wish to give expression to their own sexuality, lesbians must first secure the necessary financial and social means. After the end of World War II women became somewhat more comfortable with investigating their own sexuality and giving it artistic value. Leonor Fini's surrealism underlines the way female desire tends not to be as passionate and outspoken as male lust. Lesbian artists who do not simply use their sexual nature as a source of inspiration, but employ it as a central focus of their work, remained the exception in the early eighties. Images of nude women could be interpreted by men—and by feminists as well—as soft-core pornography specially produced to give pleasure to the consumers.

In general the domination of the female nude began in the sixteenth century as part of a "sexualization" of the

nude as an object of enjoyment. The female nude in the art of the last four centuries was viable precisely because it was an icon of male desire. With male nudes the matter is different: those that are erotic (though not openly so) seem to have flourished in periods that may be regarded as **homosocial**—classical Greece, early Renaissance Florence—or under the umbrella of trends that had a definite homoerotic aspect—Winckelmann's circle, early twentieth-century homosexual emancipation, and elements of the German right that overlapped with National Socialism.

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