

THE VENUS PARADOX

EDITED BY
Loukia Loizou Hadjigavriel
Myrto Hatzaki
Demetra Theodotou Anagnostopoulou

This book was published in conjunction with the exhibitions
THE VENUS PARADOX
THE VENUS PARADOX – THE CONTEMPORARY GAZE
held at the A. G. Leventis Gallery, Nicosia, from 28 September 2017 – 18 January 2018.

MEDIA SPONSORS:



EXHIBITION

GENERAL COORDINATORS:

Loukia Loizou Hadjigavriel and
Demetra Theodotou Anagnostopoulou

CURATORS:

THE VENUS PARADOX

Loukia Loizou Hadjigavriel and Myrto Hatzaki

THE VENUS PARADOX – THE CONTEMPORARY GAZE

Demetra Theodotou Anagnostopoulou

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN AND SUPERVISION:

Nayia Savvides

EDITING:

Georgia M. Panselina (Greek) and Alexandra Pel (English)

ADMINISTRATION:

Despina Georghiou Hadjinicolaou

TRANSLATION:

Despina Pirketti

EXHIBITION GRAPHICS / BRANDING:

Appios Communications

WORKS TRANSPORTATION, COORDINATION AND INSTALLATION:

Move Art, Greece
PPS Worldwide Moving, Cyprus

TECHNICAL WORKS:

Charalambos Charalambous and Iacovos Papantoniou

LIGHTING:

Iacovos Papantoniou

CATALOGUE

EDITORS:

Loukia Loizou Hadjigavriel, Myrto Hatzaki and
Demetra Theodotou Anagnostopoulou

TEXT EDITING:

Alexandra Pel

ADMINISTRATION:

Despina Georghiou Hadjinicolaou

GRAPHIC DESIGN:

Appios Communications

LAYOUT:

Apostolos Socratous

PRINTING:

Cassouliides Masterprinters

Cover inspired by:

ITALIAN SCHOOL

The Venus de' Medici, 18th or 19th century (after an antique model)
Copper alloy, h. 158 cm
The Pittas Collection: Mythology

ISBN: 978-9963-732-26-5

© A. G. Leventis Gallery, Nicosia, 2017
Unauthorised reproduction, republication or duplication of any of the essays or illustrations of this book,
in whole or in part, is strictly prohibited without the A. G. Leventis Gallery's prior written consent.



10__LENDERS TO THE EXHIBITION

13__CONTRIBUTORS

17__CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

ANASTASIOS P. LEVENTIS

19__DIRECTOR'S NOTE

LOUKIA LOIZOU HADJIGAVRIEL

21__PREFACE: INTRODUCING *THE VENUS PARADOX*

LOUKIA LOIZOU HADJIGAVRIEL

MYRTO HATZAKI

29__INTRODUCTION

JACQUELINE KARAGEORGHIS

37__VENUS, VENICE AND CYPRUS

PETER HUMFREY

45__EMULATING VENUS: BEAUTIFYING THE BODY
IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE

JILL BURKE

51__PICTURING THE GODDESS OF LOVE IN
ELIZABETHAN POETRY

EFTERPI MITSI

59__'MY VENUS STILL HAS SOMETHING NEW':
JOHN BLOW'S *VENUS AND ADONIS* ON THE
ENGLISH LYRIC STAGE

BRUCE WOOD

69__'COSPETTO! CHE BELLA COSAI!': BOUCHER'S
TRIUMPH OF VENUS

COLIN B. BAILEY

79__'VENUS RISES, AND DANCES A PASSACAILE':
THE GODDESS OF LOVE AND 18TH-CENTURY
BALLET

MOIRA GOFF

87__ART INTO NATURE: PYGMALION AND THE
VICTORIAN IMAGINATION

ALISON SMITH

97__THE MODERN VENUS: GODDESS OR WHORE?

ANTHEA CALLEN

107__WORK ON FORM: *VENUS ANADYOMENE* IN
MODERN POETRY

SEBASTIAN GOTH

115__CATALOGUE OF WORKS

215__QUOTATION SOURCES

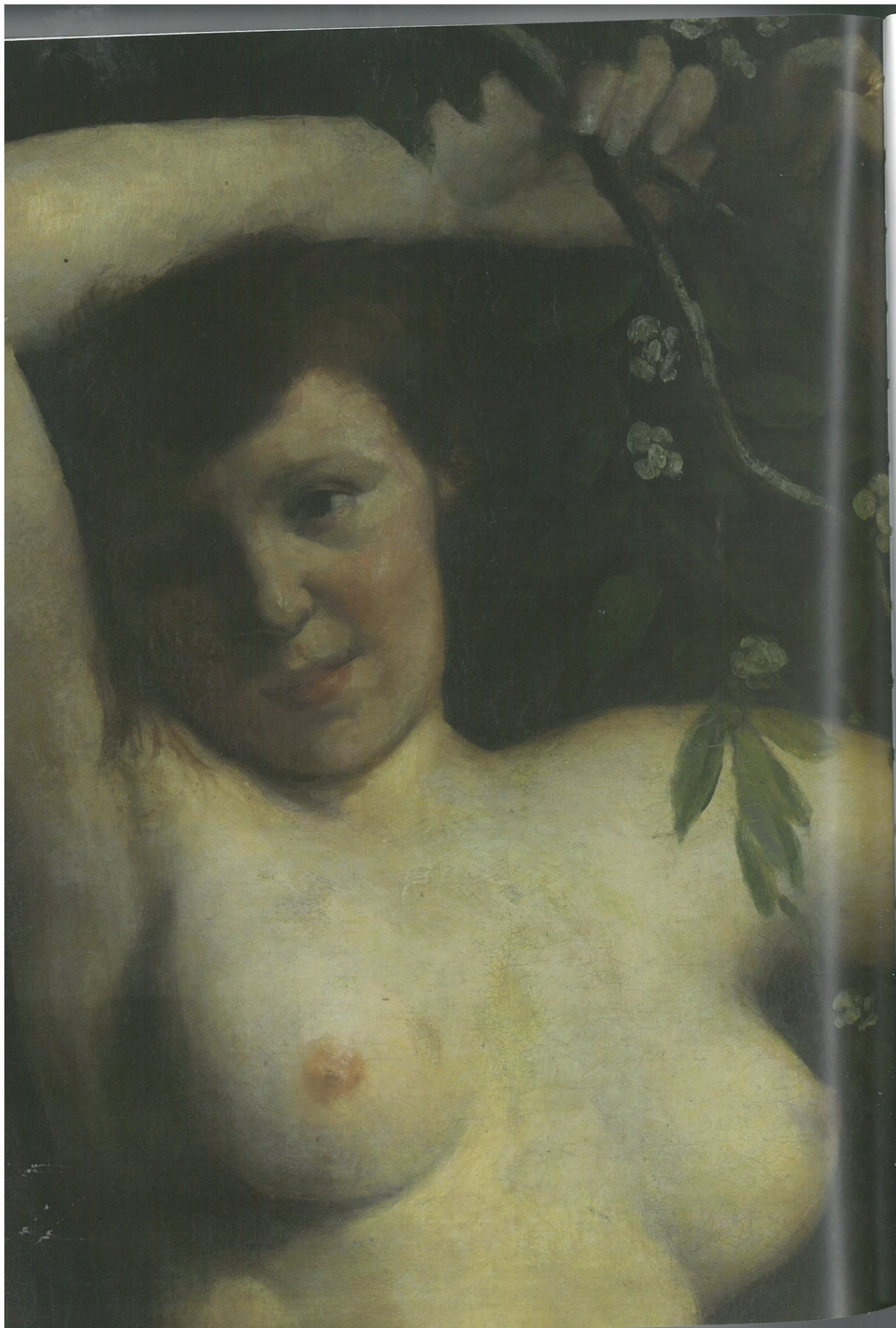
216__LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS AND ILLUSTRATION
SOURCES

___APPENDIX INSERT

THE VENUS PARADOX –

THE CONTEMPORARY GAZE

DEMETRA THEODOTOU ANAGNOSTOPOULOU



By **Anthea Callen**

Professor Emeritus of the Australian National University and Professor Emeritus of Visual Culture,
University of Nottingham, UK

In a lithograph of 1864 Honoré Daumier used the popularity of the Paris Salon nude to symbolise the hypocrisy and moral bankruptcy of Louis-Napoleon's Second Empire (1852-1870; fig. 1).¹ His caption has two bourgeois women bemoaning the excessive number of female nudes on display: '— Still more Venuses this year... always Venuses!... as if there were any women built like that!...' Born from sea spume, Venus is of course the Greek mythological goddess of love: *par excellence* the tasteful symbol of French Second Empire depravity. In addition to Daumier's cartoon, in this essay I will explore the contradictions between morality and obscenity in the later 19th-century artistic nude with reference to work by Alexandre Cabanel, Édouard Manet, Edgar Degas, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Pierre-Auguste Renoir.

In Daumier's caricature the two bourgeois women are invited to compare themselves to the Salon ideal of naked female beauty and find themselves wanting. The cartoon assumes a male viewer since the bourgeois women's reaction to the Venuses makes them the humorous object of a knowing male gaze. Looking was active and identified with a masculine social position; it conferred power on the bearer of the look, assigning to him the capacity to decipher and thereby control the object of his gaze. The cultivated male gaze both produced and consumed meaning. Daumier was by no means a lover of feminism or female emancipation himself, and the female gaze he encoded in his bourgeois women was material, biological: rooted in the body (as against the mind), it thus lacked the requisite distance, the necessary impartiality to engage intellectually with the Venuses at a cultural level. Paradoxically, in their untutored naivety, Daumier's women spectators 'see through' the cultural rhetoric clothing artistic nudity in the garb of civilised decency that allowed erotic paintings like Alexandre Cabanel's *Birth of Venus* (fig. 2) to pass as publicly acceptable — a case of the emperor's new clothes. Comparing these representations to their own bodies, Daumier's bourgeois women take these naked Venuses literally ('...as if there were any women built like that!...'). Daumier thus exposed the artifice of the academic nude. He invited his audience to acknowledge the hypocrisy of their classicising veneer, which was also exposed by the radical new realism of the modern Venus in Manet's work of 1863.

As ever, Daumier's intervention was astute and timely. In 1863 the Paris Salon had been dubbed the 'Salon of the Venuses' due to the large number of alluring nudes on show, and notable among these was Cabanel's luscious Rococo-esque *Birth of Venus*. It was purchased from the Salon by no less than Napoleon III himself for his personal collection. The painting embodied precisely those ideals of academic art — the careful modelling, delicate colours, silky 'licked' brushwork and mythological subject matter — bemoaned by Daumier's bourgeois women as artificial. For Daumier these 'ideals' were synonymous with the debauched tyranny of the Second Empire, its political oppression cloaked in decadent frivolity. Émile Zola likewise attacked the facile artificiality of Cabanel's *Venus* when Napoleon showed his painting at the 1867 Paris Exposition Universelle:

NUDE WITH FLOWERING BRANCH (detail)
See p. 203
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

The Modern Venus: Goddess or Whore?

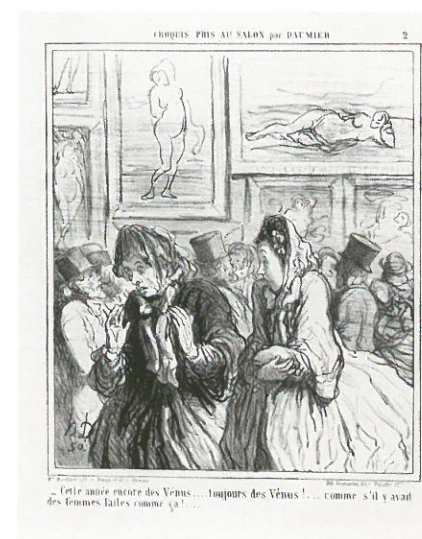


Fig. 1
Honoré Daumier, plate 2 of *Croquis pris au Salon par Daumier*, 1864, lithograph in black on white wove paper, The Art Institute of Chicago: William McCallin McKee Memorial Endowment, 1953.603; Daumier Register 3440; Deltail 3440 II/II; Hazard-Deltail 1560.



Fig. 2
Alexandre Cabanel, *The Birth of Venus*, 1863,
oil on canvas, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Take an antique Venus, the body of any woman whatsoever drawn according to the sacred rules, and, lightly, with a powder puff, dab colour and powder on the body; there you have Monsieur Cabanel's ideal [...] The ladies swoon, the gentlemen keep a reverent demeanour [...] The goddess, drowned in a sea of milk, resembles a delicious courtesan [*lorette*], not of flesh and blood – that would be indecent – but made of a sort of pink and white marzipan.²

The women who, according to Zola, were taken in by and 'swooned over' Cabanel's *Venus* were apparently a different species to those portrayed by Daumier. Yet all were deemed prey to their emotions, succumbing to their bodily reactions.

The growing medicalisation of the female anatomy by mid-century in France construed woman as wholly subject to her reproductive organs, a theory that by the late 1870s found new expression in Jean-Baptiste Charcot's hysteria diagnosis.³ It is therefore no coincidence that both Daumier and Zola drew on medical metaphors in their construction of the response of female spectators to viewing representations of women's nude bodies.⁴ The spectacle of Venuses in the Paris Salons in the 1860s coincided not just with this process of medicalisation, but with the problematic emergence of the assertive 'New Woman', serving to highlight contentious issues of modern feminine subjectivity and female agency. The spread during the Second Empire of both unregistered 'clandestine' prostitutes and of venereal disease posed a serious threat to the health of the nation and to its heredity.

At the root of this problem lay sexuality: more specifically female sexuality, since bourgeois codes of sexual regulation focussed not on the apparently invisible normative heterosexual practices of men, but rather on female deviance. Unregulated female sexuality posed a moral, medical and hygienic threat to youth and to the *honnête femme*, as well as to the structures of the bourgeois family itself.⁵ As Jill Harsin has argued:



Fig. 2
James Cabanel, *The Birth of Venus*, 1863,
oil on canvas, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Take an antique Venus, the body of any woman whatsoever drawn according to the sacred rules, and, lightly, with a powder puff, dab colour and powder on the body; there you have Monsieur Cabanel's ideal [...] The ladies swoon, the gentlemen keep a reverent demeanour [...] The goddess, drowned in a sea of milk, resembles a delicious courtesan [*lorette*], not of flesh and blood – that would be indecent – but made of a sort of pink and white marzipan.²

The women who, according to Zola, were taken in by and 'swooned over' Cabanel's *Venus* were apparently a different species to those portrayed by Daumier. Yet all were deemed prey to their emotions, succumbing to their bodily reactions.

The growing medicalisation of the female anatomy by mid-century in France construed woman as wholly subject to her reproductive organs, a theory that by the late 1870s found new expression in Jean-Baptiste Charcot's hysteria diagnosis.³ It is therefore no coincidence that both Daumier and Zola drew on medical metaphors in their construction of the response of female spectators to viewing representations of women's nude bodies.⁴ The spectacle of Venuses in the Paris Salons in the 1860s coincided not just with this process of medicalisation, but with the problematic emergence of the assertive 'New Woman', serving to highlight contentious issues of modern feminine subjectivity and female agency. The spread during the Second Empire of both unregistered 'clandestine' prostitutes and of venereal disease posed a serious threat to the health of the nation and to its heredity.

At the root of this problem lay sexuality: more specifically female sexuality, since bourgeois codes of sexual regulation focussed not on the apparently invisible normative heterosexual practices of men, but rather on female deviance. Unregulated female sexuality posed a moral, medical and hygienic threat to youth and to the *honnête femme*, as well as to the structures of the bourgeois family itself.⁵ As Jill Harsin has argued:



Fig. 3
Édouard Manet, *Olympia*, 1863,
oil on canvas, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

The definition of the clandestine was far hazier than that of the inscribed prostitute, and as the century wore on the clandestine came to overshadow the *fille soumise*, to the point that a leading abolitionist would write, with conscious irony, that a clandestine prostitute was simply any woman who had not been registered yet.⁶

The mythological figure of the goddess of love was a metaphor for modern transgressive feminine sexuality. Pampered and sanitised, the *Venus* of Cabanel fuses the academic purism of Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres with a throwback to the Ancien Régime: the erotic decadence of French court Rococo in the manner of François Boucher or Jean-Honoré Fragonard. Thus Cabanel's treatment gives an aura of respectability to his modern 'courtesan', whose seductive powers threatened to undermine French manhood. Increasingly popularised during the Second Empire in its decadent reflection of the pre-revolutionary era, the Goncourt brothers were among the first to revive modern interest in French Rococo. As we shall see, the nudes of Renoir were equally indebted to this revival.

In that same year, 1863, Manet's infamous *Le déjeuner sur l'herbe* [*Luncheon on the Grass*] (Paris, Musée d'Orsay) was rejected by the official Salon Jury as obscene. He exhibited it instead to great notoriety at the 1863 Salon des Refusés. Manet depicted a thoroughly contemporary naked woman, the model for whom, Victorine Meurent, was well-known in Parisian artistic circles, ensuring she was no anonymous 'type'. He dispensed with all the conventions associated with mythology in general and Venus in particular, despite depicting an overtly sexualised scene in which the woman has clearly removed the clothes displayed beside her. Accompanied by a chemise-clad female bather in the background and in the foreground two equally recognisable fully clothed gentlemen,⁷ she sits unabashed, gazing boldly out at the spectator and thus implicating him in her brazen nakedness.⁸ Manet refused to embellish his nude in the tasteful polished style of the academic Cabanel;

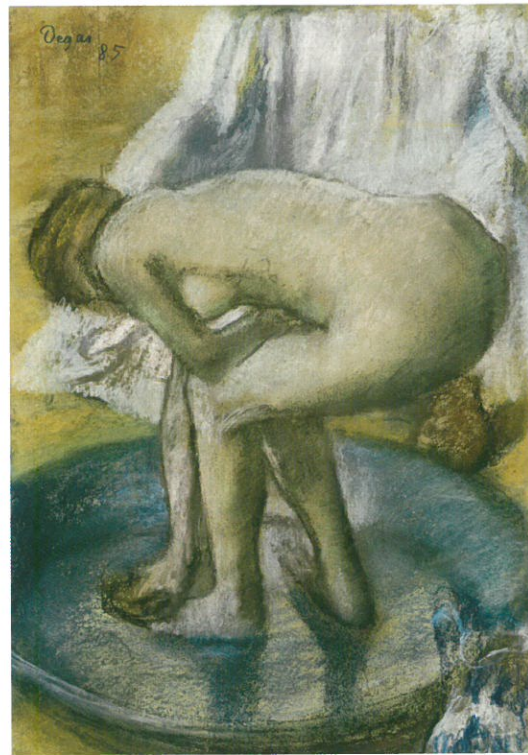


Fig. 4
Edgar Degas, *Woman Bathing in a Shallow Tub*, 1885,
charcoal and pastel on light green wove paper,
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

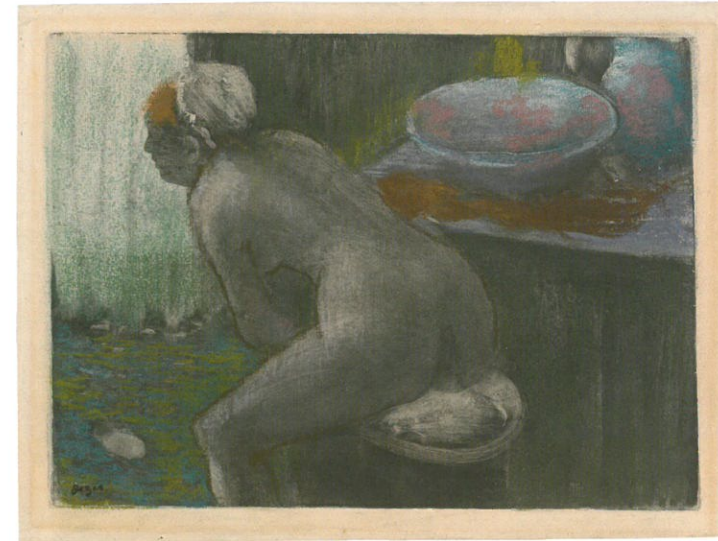


Fig. 5
Edgar Degas, *Woman at her Toilette*,
1880-1885, pastel on monotype,
The National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

indeed he affirmed the candour of his subject matter by his bluntly direct handling and crude frontal lighting.

Although painted in that same year, Manet did not exhibit his reclining 'Venus' figure, the *Olympia* (fig. 3), until 1865, when, in an attempt to avert a repeat of the scandalous 1863 Salon des Refusés, the official jury accepted it for exhibition. Here Manet again combined his direct, unmodulated painting style with a flattening frontal light; the resulting figure was characterised as a 'playing card': without nuanced shading or modelling she appeared starkly similar to a popular print rather than high art. Again, Victorine Meurent stares out at us. Such an active female gaze like that in Manet's two paintings implied not just female agency but female sexual agency as associated with prostitutes. Her direct gaze challenged propriety, suggesting woman might not be the submissive vessel required of dominant sexual mores. Indeed, as the rise of clandestine prostitution proved, women were taking the illicit sexual economy into their own hands, marketing their bodies independent of male laws and constraints.

Significantly in this respect, Manet's *Olympia* was deemed to have an 'unhealthy' yellow pallor. Her 'crudely' painted flesh – unlike the blended rosy-cream tints of Cabanel's lusciously powdered *Venus* – was considered symptomatic of the fallen woman, the courtesan she did indeed represent. In medico-social terms, then, the *Olympia*'s flesh evoked pathological connotations of syphilis, the hereditary disease most feared by the bourgeois *gentilhomme*, whose patrimony it put at risk due to his own double standards of sexual behaviour. Thus like Daumier, Manet attacked Second Empire moral hypocrisy. His *Olympia* flouted public decorum: from the Salon wall she sat upright and stared boldly out at the assumed male spectator, effectively her next client – the donor of the huge bouquet of flowers held by her black maid.⁹ Where Manet's *Olympia* draws attention to her genitalia by covering them with her hand – in the manner of a *Venus Pudica* – Cabanel's *Venus* thrusts forward her 'air-brushed' pubis region at the viewer's eyelevel. Laid invitingly supine, her raised arms expose her full breasts while shielding her eyes in a tantalising



display of mod
is unchallenge
simultaneously
mons veneris –
and the inner f

Dega
engage in priva
tubs: the mod
Uffizi Gallery) tr
such as Degas
bather pastels
modernises its
representing a
pastel and her
of *fin-de-siècle*
over monotype
washing her ge
with the Moral
the practice of
aimed at reduc
inspection for s
des Moulins: T
Paris the equat
denoted femini
and public heal
treatment to the



Fig. 4
Edgar Degas, *Woman Bathing in a Shallow Tub*, 1885, charcoal and pastel on light green wove paper, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

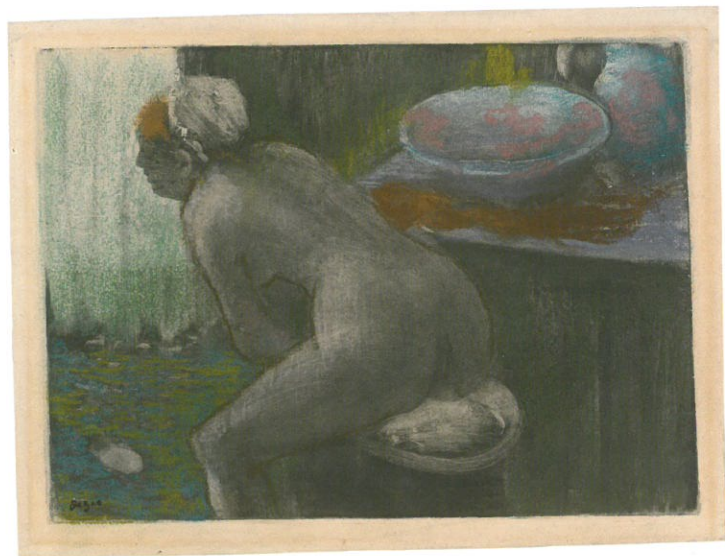


Fig. 5
Edgar Degas, *Woman at her Toilette*, 1880-1885, pastel on monotype, The National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

indeed he affirmed the candour of his subject matter by his bluntly direct handling and crude frontal lighting.

Although painted in that same year, Manet did not exhibit his reclining 'Venus' figure, the *Olympia* (fig. 3), until 1865, when, in an attempt to avert a repeat of the scandalous 1863 Salon des Refusés, the official jury accepted it for exhibition. Here Manet again combined his direct, unmodulated painting style with a flattening frontal light; the resulting figure was characterised as a 'playing card': without nuanced shading or modelling she appeared starkly similar to a popular print rather than high art. Again, Victorine Meurent stares out at us. Such an active female gaze like that in Manet's two paintings implied not just female agency but female sexual agency as associated with prostitutes. Her direct gaze challenged propriety, suggesting woman might not be the submissive vessel required of dominant sexual mores. Indeed, as the rise of clandestine prostitution proved, women were taking the illicit sexual economy into their own hands, marketing their bodies independent of male laws and constraints.

Significantly in this respect, Manet's *Olympia* was deemed to have an 'unhealthy' yellow pallor. Her 'crudely' painted flesh – unlike the blended rosy-cream tints of Cabanel's lusciously powdered *Venus* – was considered symptomatic of the fallen woman, the courtesan she did indeed represent. In medico-social terms, then, the *Olympia's* flesh evoked pathological connotations of syphilis, the hereditary disease most feared by the bourgeois *gentilhomme*, whose patrimony it put at risk due to his own double standards of sexual behaviour. Thus like Daumier, Manet attacked Second Empire moral hypocrisy. His *Olympia* flouted public decorum: from the Salon wall she sat upright and stared boldly out at the assumed male spectator, effectively her next client – the donor of the huge bouquet of flowers held by her black maid.⁹ Where Manet's *Olympia* draws attention to her genitalia by covering them with her hand – in the manner of a *Venus Pudica* – Cabanel's *Venus* thrusts forward her 'air-brushed' pubis region at the viewer's eyelevel. Laid invitingly supine, her raised arms expose her full breasts while shielding her eyes in a tantalising

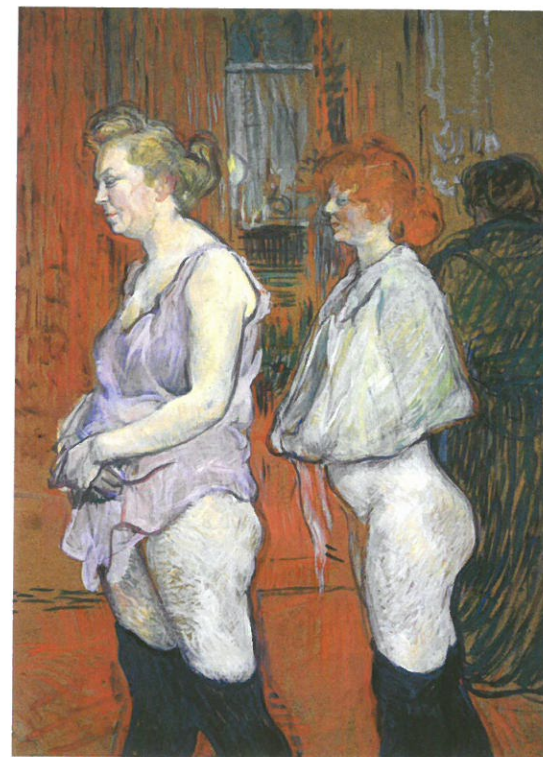


Fig. 6
Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *Rue des Moulins: The Medical Inspection*, 1894, oil on cardboard, The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

display of modesty. In contrast to *Olympia's* confrontational gaze, the viewer's ogle here is unchallenged and even encouraged by the little staring Cupids flying above her; yet simultaneously Cabanel erased her sexuality by obliterating the split (pudendal cleft) in the *mons veneris* – literally 'mound of Venus' – that announces the start of the outer *labia majora* and the inner female genitalia. His *Venus* is sexually available yet unsexed.

Degas produced hundreds of images of women and water, his brothel nudes engage in private ablutions, and his disreputable 'Venuses' rise out of their cheap flat tubs: the modern shell of the mythical sea-borne *Venus* from Botticelli (c. 1485; Florence, Uffizi Gallery) to William-Adolphe Bouguereau (1879; Paris, Musée d'Orsay). In works such as Degas' *Woman Bathing in a Shallow Tub* (fig. 4), which was exhibited with other bather pastels at the last Impressionist exhibition in 1886, his sensual medium evokes and modernises its 18th-century Rococo usage while subverting its feminine associations in representing a *fille soumise* (a registered prostitute). The frivolous eroticism associated with pastel and hence with the aristocratic Ancien Régime takes on a darker hue in the context of *fin-de-siècle* anxiety over venereal contagion. Degas made the link explicit in his pastel over monotype print *Woman at her Toilette* (fig. 5), which shows a prostitute on a bidet washing her genitals. In 'Maisons de Tolérance' – brothels whose inmates were registered with the Moral Police and thus 'tolerated' despite prostitution being illegal for women – the practice of washing between clients was made a requirement for reasons of hygiene aimed at reducing venereal contagion. Such women were also subject to regular medical inspection for signs of disease, an event movingly portrayed by Toulouse-Lautrec in *Rue des Moulins: The Medical Inspection* (fig. 6). Thus in Second Empire and Third Republican Paris the equation of *Venus* and water added up to more than harmless mythology: it also denoted feminine hygiene and thence the relationship between prostitution, the Moral Police and public health.¹⁰ Completing the circle, women found to be diseased were transferred for treatment to the Paris Women's Hospital – Charcot's La Salpêtrière.



Fig. 7
Louis-Ernest Barrias, *Nature Unveiling Herself before Science*, 1899, polychrome stone, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Fig. 8
Late 19th-century pornographic photograph,
private collection.

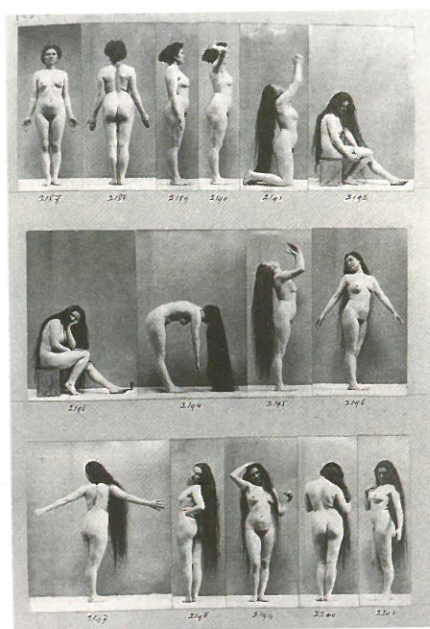


Fig. 9
Paul Richer, 'Female Morphology: Sou Gicquel
(31 years)', plate nos 2187-2201, 1909,
École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris.

What we are witnessing here is the very porous fluidity of the visual and discursive boundaries between medico-sexual pathologies, hereditary disease, moral policing, scientific observation, aesthetic pleasure and erotic titillation. That these apparently divergent discourses came together in the scrutiny of the naked female body is entirely predictable, since woman was a key disempowered site and expression of male agency. Identified with 'nature', as such woman was the proper subject of scrutiny for both art and science. Louis-Ernest Barrias' highly acclaimed sculpture commission for the new Faculty of Medicine in Bordeaux, a first version from 1893, *Nature Unveiling Herself before Science* is emblematic of this porosity. The 1899 polychrome stone second version is now in the Musée d'Orsay in Paris (fig. 7), while a 1902 replica in white marble is appropriately located in the foyer of the Paris Faculty of Medicine.¹¹ How different to the unveiling the women undertake in Toulouse-Lautrec's *Rue des Moulins* (fig. 6), where instead of submissive Nature exposing her elegant bosoms before the discerning male scientist, disenchanted female sex workers are required to hitch up their chemises, 'unveiling' to medical scrutiny their abused genitalia.

The intersecting narratives of medicine, art and erotica are similarly figured from the medical side in the work of Dr Paul Richer, assistant to Charcot at La Salpêtrière and future Professor of Anatomy at the Paris École des Beaux-Arts.¹² Following his research with Charcot into female hysteria, Richer (also a sculptor) began in the 1890s to publish in the field of artistic anatomy. Adopting modern scientific and anthropological methods that included the use of photography and comparative measurement as 'objective' records, he began to seek modern artistic ideals of male and then female anatomical perfection. Just as veils/chemises were entailed in exposing the female body to view in Barrias and Toulouse-Lautrec, Richer often used masks (worn too in medical photography and by 'artistic' models for supposed anonymity in photographic nude shots) as well as his female subjects' hair to simultaneously veil and titillate in a wholly unscientific manner. Masks were associated with the sexually *risqué* masked balls held at the Paris Opera, as depicted by Manet in his 1873 *Masked Ball at the Opera* (Washington, DC, National Gallery of Art). Perhaps unselfconsciously deploying the erotic tropes of women's hair and seductive masks circulated widely in pornographic photographs (fig. 8), Richer made no attempt to disguise in his narrative sequences of 'statistical' photographs his own pleasure in big, long hair (fig. 9).¹³

Seductive hair returns us to the Rococo Revival: luscious hair, hair flowing like water, is a feature of many nudes, including Renoir's *Blonde Bather* (1881; Williamstown, MA, Clark Art Institute, fig. 10). Here, Impressionist techniques and modern life merge with a Rococo goddess. Painted when Renoir was travelling in Italy and inspired by ancient Roman and Italian Renaissance art, still French Rococo is central. Renoir's modern seaside Venus was probably modelled by his mistress, Aline Charigot: her prominent wedding ring gave some probity to the subject, although they married only in 1890. Rococo artists and their painting methods underwent a major revival after a long period of disfavour following the French Revolution of 1789. Significantly, in 1852 – the year the Second Empire formally began – the Louvre acquired its first Boucher since the 18th century. The Goncourt brothers, Jules and Edmond, took up the cause of pre-revolutionary art, and in 1856 began publishing essays that would result in their volumes on *L'art du dix-huitième siècle*, completed in 1875. Published in 1880,¹⁴ the four-plate colour print by Jean-François Janinet after Boucher's *Toilette of Venus* (fig. 11) has remarkable compositional affinities with Renoir's *Blonde Bather*; the painter's feathery style and brilliant colour were also indebted to Boucher's techniques. His small *Reclining Female Nude Seen from the Back* (cat. no. 71) in the A. G. Leventis Gallery in Nicosia takes up this theme, the warm serpentine curves of the figure contrasting with the cool sea-blues that evoke the spume-born goddess.



Fig. 8

19th-century pornographic photograph, private collection.

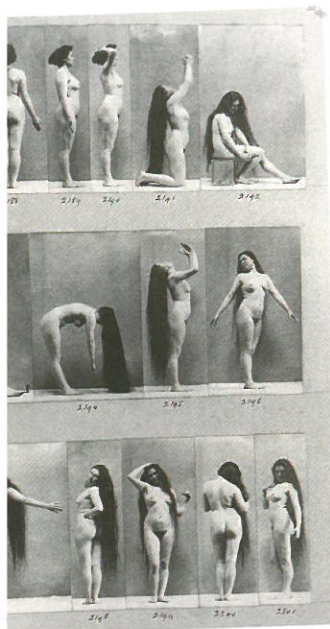


Fig. 9

Richer, 'Female Morphology: Sou Gicquel (31 years)', plate nos 2187-2201, 1909, École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris.

What we are witnessing here is the very porous fluidity of the visual and discursive boundaries between medico-sexual pathologies, hereditary disease, moral policing, scientific observation, aesthetic pleasure and erotic titillation. That these apparently divergent discourses came together in the scrutiny of the naked female body is entirely predictable, since woman was a key disempowered site and expression of male agency. Identified with 'nature', as such woman was the proper subject of scrutiny for both art and science. Louis-Ernest Barrias' highly acclaimed sculpture commission for the new Faculty of Medicine in Bordeaux, a first version from 1893, *Nature Unveiling Herself before Science* is emblematic of this porosity. The 1899 polychrome stone second version is now in the Musée d'Orsay in Paris (fig. 7), while a 1902 replica in white marble is appropriately located in the foyer of the Paris Faculty of Medicine.¹¹ How different to the unveiling the women undertake in Toulouse-Lautrec's *Rue des Moulins* (fig. 6), where instead of submissive Nature exposing her elegant bosoms before the discerning male scientist, disenchanted female sex workers are required to hitch up their chemises, 'unveiling' to medical scrutiny their abused genitalia.

The intersecting narratives of medicine, art and erotica are similarly figured from the medical side in the work of Dr Paul Richer, assistant to Charcot at La Salpêtrière and future Professor of Anatomy at the Paris École des Beaux-Arts.¹² Following his research with Charcot into female hysteria, Richer (also a sculptor) began in the 1890s to publish in the field of artistic anatomy. Adopting modern scientific and anthropological methods that included the use of photography and comparative measurement as 'objective' records, he began to seek modern artistic ideals of male and then female anatomical perfection. Just as veils/chemises were entailed in exposing the female body to view in Barrias and Toulouse-Lautrec, Richer often used masks (worn too in medical photography and by 'artistic' models for supposed anonymity in photographic nude shots) as well as his female subjects' hair to simultaneously veil and titillate in a wholly unscientific manner. Masks were associated with the sexually *risqué* masked balls held at the Paris Opera, as depicted by Manet in his 1873 *Masked Ball at the Opera* (Washington, DC, National Gallery of Art). Perhaps unselfconsciously deploying the erotic tropes of women's hair and seductive masks circulated widely in pornographic photographs (fig. 8), Richer made no attempt to disguise in his narrative sequences of 'statistical' photographs his own pleasure in big, long hair (fig. 9).¹³

Seductive hair returns us to the Rococo Revival: luscious hair, hair flowing like water, is a feature of many nudes, including Renoir's *Blonde Bather* (1881; Williamstown, MA, Clark Art Institute, fig. 10). Here, Impressionist techniques and modern life merge with a Rococo goddess. Painted when Renoir was travelling in Italy and inspired by ancient Roman and Italian Renaissance art, still French Rococo is central. Renoir's modern seaside Venus was probably modelled by his mistress, Aline Charigot: her prominent wedding ring gave some probity to the subject, although they married only in 1890. Rococo artists and their painting methods underwent a major revival after a long period of disfavour following the French Revolution of 1789. Significantly, in 1852 – the year the Second Empire formally began – the Louvre acquired its first Boucher since the 18th century. The Goncourt brothers, Jules and Edmond, took up the cause of pre-revolutionary art, and in 1856 began publishing essays that would result in their volumes on *L'art du dix-huitième siècle*, completed in 1875. Published in 1880,¹⁴ the four-plate colour print by Jean-François Janinet after Boucher's *Toilette of Venus* (fig. 11) has remarkable compositional affinities with Renoir's *Blonde Bather*; the painter's feathery style and brilliant colour were also indebted to Boucher's techniques. His small *Reclining Female Nude Seen from the Back* (cat. no. 71) in the A. G. Leventis Gallery in Nicosia takes up this theme, the warm serpentine curves of the figure contrasting with the cool sea-blues that evoke the spume-born goddess.

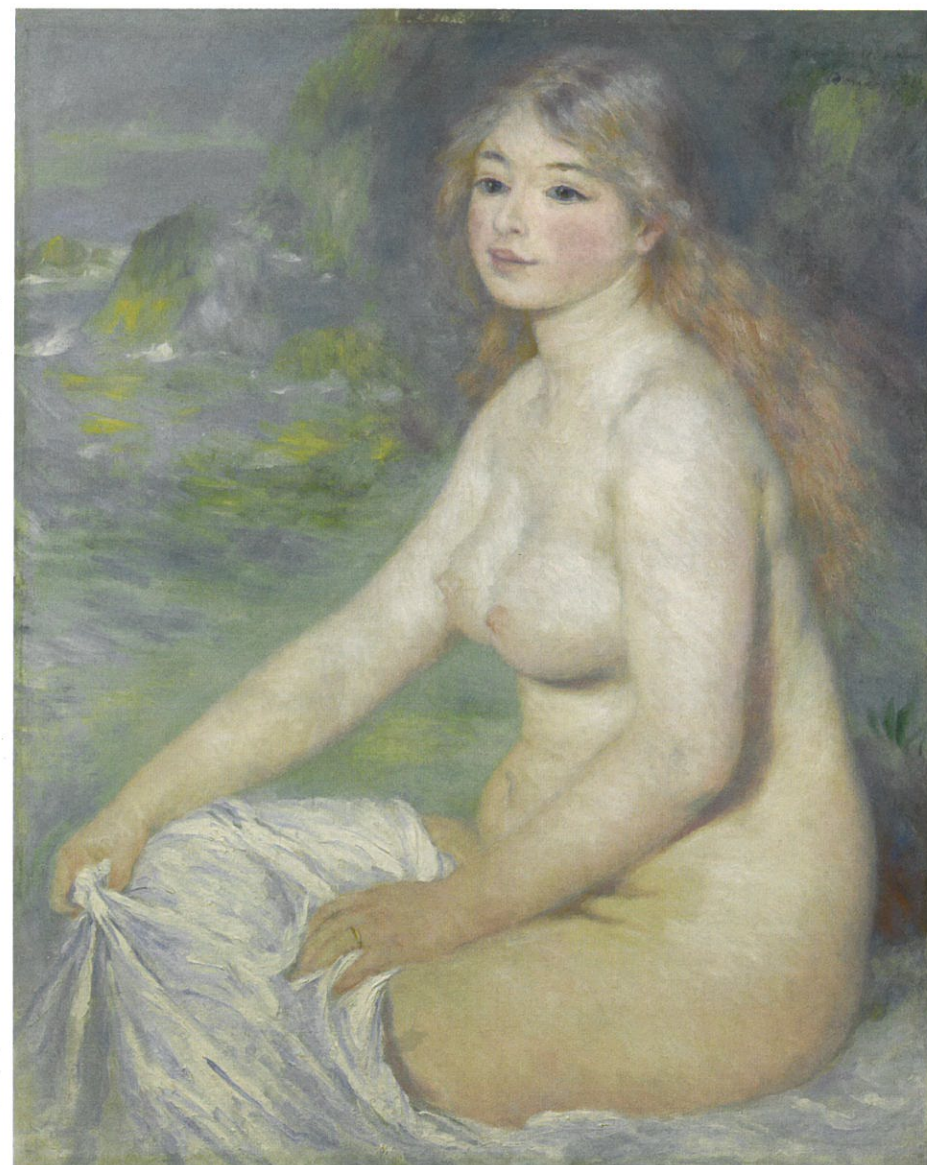


Fig. 10

Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *Blonde Bather*, 1881, oil on canvas, The Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, MA.



Fig. 11

Jean-François Janinet, after François Boucher's *Toilette of Venus*, 1783, etching and wash-manner engraving printed in colour from four plates, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, DP336497.

The erotic excesses of the Ancien Régime with its seductive goddesses, revived in the Second Empire, were again the delight of Third Republican audiences, coinciding with the struggle for women's rights and growing state fears for the nation's future moral and sexual health.¹⁵

Notes

- 1 Plate 2 of *Croquis pris au Salon par Daumier*, 1864. Lithograph in black on white wove paper, 243 x 209 mm (image); 356 x 269 mm (sheet). The Art Institute of Chicago: William McCallin McKee Memorial Endowment, 1953.603; Daumier Register 3440; Deltell 3440 II/II; Hazard-Deltell 1560.
- 2 'Prenez une Vénus antique, un corps de femme quelconque dessiné d'après les règles sacrées, et, légèrement, avec une houppie, maquillez ce corps de fard et de poudre de riz; vous aurez l'idéal de M. Cabanel [...]. Dès lors, la foule est conquise. Les femmes se pâment et les hommes gardent une attitude respectueuse [...]. La déesse, noyée dans un fleuve de lait, a l'air d'une délicieuse lorette, non pas en chair et en os, – cela serait indécent –, mais en une sorte de pâte d'amande blanche et rose.' Émile Zola, 'Nos peintres au Champ-de-Mars', Paris 1867, in his *Écrits sur l'art*, Paris 1991, pp. 177-187.
- 3 Much ink has been spilled over Charcot, women and hysteria; the key texts are Georges Didi-Huberman, *Invention of Hysteria: Charcot and the Photographic Iconography on the Salpêtrière*, transl. Alisa Hartz, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004, and Deborah Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France: Politics, Psychology and Style*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989, chapter 5 and *passim*. See also Nadine Simon Dhouailly, *La leçon de Charcot*, exhibition catalogue, Musée de l'AP-HP, Paris 1986; Elizabeth Bronfen, *The Knotted Subject: Hysteria and its Discontents*, Princeton 1999; Sander Gilman (ed.), *Hysteria beyond Freud*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.
- 4 For a recent discussion, see my essay 'The Female Spectator of Modern Art and the Spectacle of Medicalized Femininity', in Kathryn Brown (ed.), *Perspectives on Degas*, London: Routledge/Ashgate, 2016, pp. 73-93.
- 5 See especially Alain Corbin, 'Commercial Sexuality in Nineteenth-century France: A System of Images and Regulations', in C. Gallagher and T. Laqueur, *The Making of the Modern Body*, Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1987, pp. 209-219.
- 6 Jill Harsin paraphrasing the pro-Abolitionist Yves Guyot, *Études de physiologie sociale. La prostitution*, Paris: G. Charpentier, 1882, p. 152, in *Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-century Paris*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985, p. 241.
- 7 The male figure on the right was based on a combination of Manet's two brothers, Eugène and Gustave Manet. The other man is based on his brother-in-law, a Dutch sculptor named Ferdinand Leenhoff; see Nancy Locke in Paul Hayes Tucker (ed.), *Manet's Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, Cambridge 1998, pp. 5-14. The Musée d'Orsay entry notes Manet's classical sources: 'Manet was paying tribute to Europe's artistic heritage, borrowing his subject from the *Concert champêtre* – a painting by Titian attributed at the time to Giorgione (Louvre) – and taking his inspiration for the composition of the central group from the Marcantonio Raimondi engraving after Raphael's *Judgement of Paris*'; http://www.musee-orsay.fr/index.php?id=851&L=1&tx_commentaire_pi1%5BshowUId%5D=7123, accessed 25 Oct 2016.
- 8 For an analysis of the nude's gaze as less determined, see Carol Armstrong's essay 'To Paint, to Point, to Pose', in Tucker (ed.), *Manet's Déjeuner*, pp. 93-111.
- 9 On both Gustave Courbet and Paul Cézanne likening Manet's *Olympia* to a playing card or an Épinal print (first cited by art critic Albert Wolff in *Le Figaro* [1 May 1883]), see Michael Doran (ed.), *Conversations with Cézanne*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, p. 234, note 21; see also Françoise Cachin, Charles S. Moffett and Juliet Wilson Barea, *Manet, 1832-1883*, exhibition catalogue, Grand Palais, Paris, and Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1983, p. 247.
- 10 See the discussions in Anthea Callen, *The Spectacular Body: Science, Method and Meaning in the Work of Degas*, London and New Haven 1995, especially chapters 1-3 and 5.
- 11 Barrias' 1899 original in polychrome is in the Musée d'Orsay, and there are smaller-scale replicas in plaster and marble; there was also an edition in bronze in six different sizes produced by Susses Frères. See the entry in the Musée d'Orsay online catalogue: http://www.musee-orsay.fr/fr/collections/catalogue-des-oeuvres/notice.html?no_cache=1&nnumid=2016.
- 12 Paul Richer was elected to the Chair of Anatomy at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1903. His publications include studies on hysteria and with Charcot on medical diagnosis in art; he first published on artistic anatomy in 1890.
- 13 Paul Richer's photographic archive and his research records for an ideal 'natural' female anatomy for artists are conserved in the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts Archives in Paris. See A. Callen, 'The Body and Difference: Anatomy Training at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris in the Later Nineteenth Century', *Art History* 20/1 (March 1997), pp. 23-60; and Philippe Grunchev, *Le Grand Prix de Peinture. Les concours des prix de Rome de 1797 à 1863*, Paris: École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, 1983. On the rise of pornographic photography of women and its meanings, see Abigail Solomon-Godeau's important essay, 'The Legs of the Countess', *October* 39 (Winter 1986), pp. 65-108.
- 14 Edmond de Goncourt and Jules de Goncourt, *L'art du dix-huitième siècle*, Vol. 1, Paris 1880, p. 191; the print is far more subdued in colour than the original oil painting of 1751 (New York, Metropolitan Museum), which the print version also reverses: the orientation of Venus in the Janinet is the same as that in the Renoir. The Boucher was painted for his patron, Mme de Pompadour, Louis XIV's mistress.
- 15 For additional discussion of the Republican recuperation of the 'feminine' in the 1890s, see A. Callen, 'Renoir: The Matter of Gender', in J. House (ed.), *Renoir, Master Impressionist*, exhibition catalogue, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane 1994, pp. 40-51. On the moral imperative and the rise of eugenics in later 19th-century France, see especially Fae Brauer, 'Introduction', in F. Brauer and A. Callen (eds), *Art, Sex and Eugenics: Corpus Delecti*, Aldershot and London, 2008, pp. 1-34.

A VENUS (detail)

See p. 192

The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

THE VENUS PARADOX