

OBJECTIFIED

The Female Form and the Male Gaze

The predominance of the female nude in European and American art from the early modern and modern periods begs many questions. Beyond being a motif for expressing the human experience, the nude embodies—literally and figuratively—assumptions, customs, and values of both the artists who create such works and the viewers who admire them.

This exhibition questions how and why men have felt entitled to gaze upon the female form. Some works are examples of that entitlement and its origins and consequences, while others call it out for scrutiny. Almost all of these works were created by male artists for primarily male patrons, and those that were not critique this gender imbalance. Each of these works reflects both the relationship between artist and model and between viewer and image, as well as the general relationship between men and women as objects of beauty, possession, and commodification.

Each label poses questions for the viewer to consider what they see in the art, as well as in the reflection of their own gaze.



Johann von Halbig (German, 1814–1882)

Bathing Nymphs, 1867

Carrara marble

Purchased with monies from the Unrestricted Development Fund, MU (80.218)

Made for an American patron in a Neoclassical style, this sculpture captures a voyeuristic moment. Two nymphs, surprised at their bath, turn to face an unseen intrusion while modestly raising their clothes. Ironically, their gestures and props have the effect of drawing the viewer's attention to the features their modesty compels them to conceal. The work's naturalism and visual appeal are heightened by the luminous Carrara marble that glistens like droplets of water on skin. What messages are communicated by this depiction of modesty overcome by voyeurism, or its display in the household of a wealthy collector?



Hendrick Goltzius (Netherlandish, 1558–1617)

After a design by Bartholomaeus Spranger

(Netherlandish, 1546–1611)

Mars and Venus, 1588

Engraving

Museum purchase (63.37)

Prints like this one were issued in multiples intended for mass consumption, unlike the original drawing or painting on which it is based, which would have been viewed by only a few highly-educated elites. As a court artist to the Holy Roman Emperor, Spranger was certainly expected to represent subjects from Classical mythology, considered scholarly and refined. But the choice of this particular subject—the lusty affair between Mars and Venus—and the image’s overt sexuality compel us to ask why Goltzius recreated it in a medium meant for a much wider viewership than the original design. What does that say about how broadly ideas about eroticism and voyeurism were shared across multiple levels of society?



Antoine Ansiaux (Belgian, 1764–1840)
Alexander, Apelles, and Campaspe, 1831
Oil on canvas
Gilbreath-McLorn Museum Fund (86.25)

This painting depicts the legend of Campaspe, the favorite concubine of Alexander, who 'gave' her like a gift to the painter Apelles. The artist had fallen in love with Campaspe while she modeled for a portrait. This subject was popular among Western European painters, because it both conveys the power and nobility of their art as well as flatters patrons for their generosity. Why else might it have been so popular?



All' Ill.^{mo} Sig.^{re} Pr.^{re} Col.^{le} Il Sig.^{ro} March. nicolò Maria Pallavicino

*Questo Giudizio di Paride, illustra opera del nobilissimo Dipintore Cavalier Carlo Maratti, non dovea
 de' suoi dipinti per di lui dono, ed essendo suo, et appartenente propriamente al di lui Palazzo, oggimai con ingiusto
 perche' ad un solo di dipinto, non offrendo Considera, ch' egli per anni, ed anni in un' opera, quanto V.S. Ill.^{ma} all' incanto, Valore, come
 perche' di dipinto, non offrendo Considera, ch' egli per anni, ed anni in un' opera, quanto V.S. Ill.^{ma} all' incanto, Valore, come
 e non potesse essere, che la stessa cosa nel nobilissimo di lui Palazzo, oggimai con ingiusto perche' ad un solo di dipinto, non offrendo
 Considera, ch' egli per anni, ed anni in un' opera, quanto V.S. Ill.^{ma} all' incanto, Valore, come*

*certamente nel pubblicarsi alle stampe portare, in fronte altro nome, se non quello di V.S. Ill.^{ma} Imperocchè glori-
 cedere dipintore, non dice oggi, nell'uscire di mano, se questo foglio, cambia dipintore. E basterebbe l'opere opera del Maratti
 A V.S. Ill.^{ma} perche' di dipinto, non offrendo Considera, ch' egli per anni, ed anni in un' opera, quanto V.S. Ill.^{ma} all' incanto, Valore, come
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 Considera, ch' egli per anni, ed anni in un' opera, quanto V.S. Ill.^{ma} all' incanto, Valore, come*

Con gr.^{ia} San. P.^{re} et Reg.^{ie} Christ.^{us} Roma, con lic. de' Sup.^{ri} Roma, con lic. de' Sup.^{ri} Roma, con lic. de' Sup.^{ri}

Giovanni Girolamo Frezza (Italian, 1659–after 1741)
 After a painting by Carlo Maratti (Italian, 1625–1713)
The Judgment of Paris, ca. 1708–1741
 Engraving
 Museum purchase (76.8)

An origin story for the Trojan War, the Judgment of Paris refers to the ill-fated beauty contest in which Paris of Troy chooses Aphrodite over Hera and Athena. As a reward, Aphrodite bestows on Paris the most beautiful woman in the world, Helen. But, she is already the wife of Menelaus of Sparta. Helen’s abduction or willing flight with Paris – versions of the myth vary – set in motion events that led to the epic war between the Greeks and Trojans, and ultimately to Troy’s destruction. Why do these themes of beauty, possession, and danger resonate so strongly with later audiences?



Otto van Veen (Netherlandish, 1556–1629)
Zeuxis and the Five Women of Kroton, ca. 1575–1625
Brush and oil sketch on paper
Museum purchase (79.77)

This sketch represents a story about the ancient painter Zeuxis of Kroton (modern Crotone), who was renowned for images that were deceptively realistic. In order to portray the legendary beauty Helen of Troy, Zeuxis painted an idealized figure drawn from the features of five maidens of the city, none of whom could possess all aspects of perfect beauty. The drawing shows the artist working at his easel, while the models are arranged in various poses for the artist's and viewer's enjoyment. Why would this obscure tale from antiquity inspire later European artists, and what does it suggest about male conceptions of female beauty?



Raptus Proserpinæ.

Johann Jakob Frey I (Swiss, 1681–1752)
Raptus Proserpinæ (The Rape of Proserpina), 1746
Engraving

Gift of Jeffrey B. Wilcox (97.5)

The history of European art is rife with representations of so-called 'heroic' rape, in stories from mythology, history, and contemporary experience. Here, in a print after a famous sculpture by Gianlorenzo Bernini, Pluto, the god of the Underworld, abducts Proserpina and forces her to be his wife. The daughter of the goddess of harvest Ceres, Proserpina emerges for part of each year to bring spring and summer; but her annual return to her captor/ husband brings fall and winter. What do stories like these say about the relative importance and value of men versus women? And how does their continued popularity in Western art aestheticize, eroticize, and thus normalize violence against women?



Max Klinger (German, 1857–1920)

Cassandra, ca. 1895

Bronze and marble

Gift of Museum Associates (79.95)

In the Trojan War epic, the life of Cassandra unfolds as a series of tragedies of gender-based exploitation and violence. Apollo grants her the gift of prophecy in exchange for sexual favors; but, when she reneges on her promise, the god curses her by causing her predictions never to be believed. After the fall of Troy, Ajax the Lesser rapes her in the temple of Athena, and Agamemnon takes her as a concubine, a spoil of war. What does this figure communicate about expectations for women who are victims of abuse and trauma?

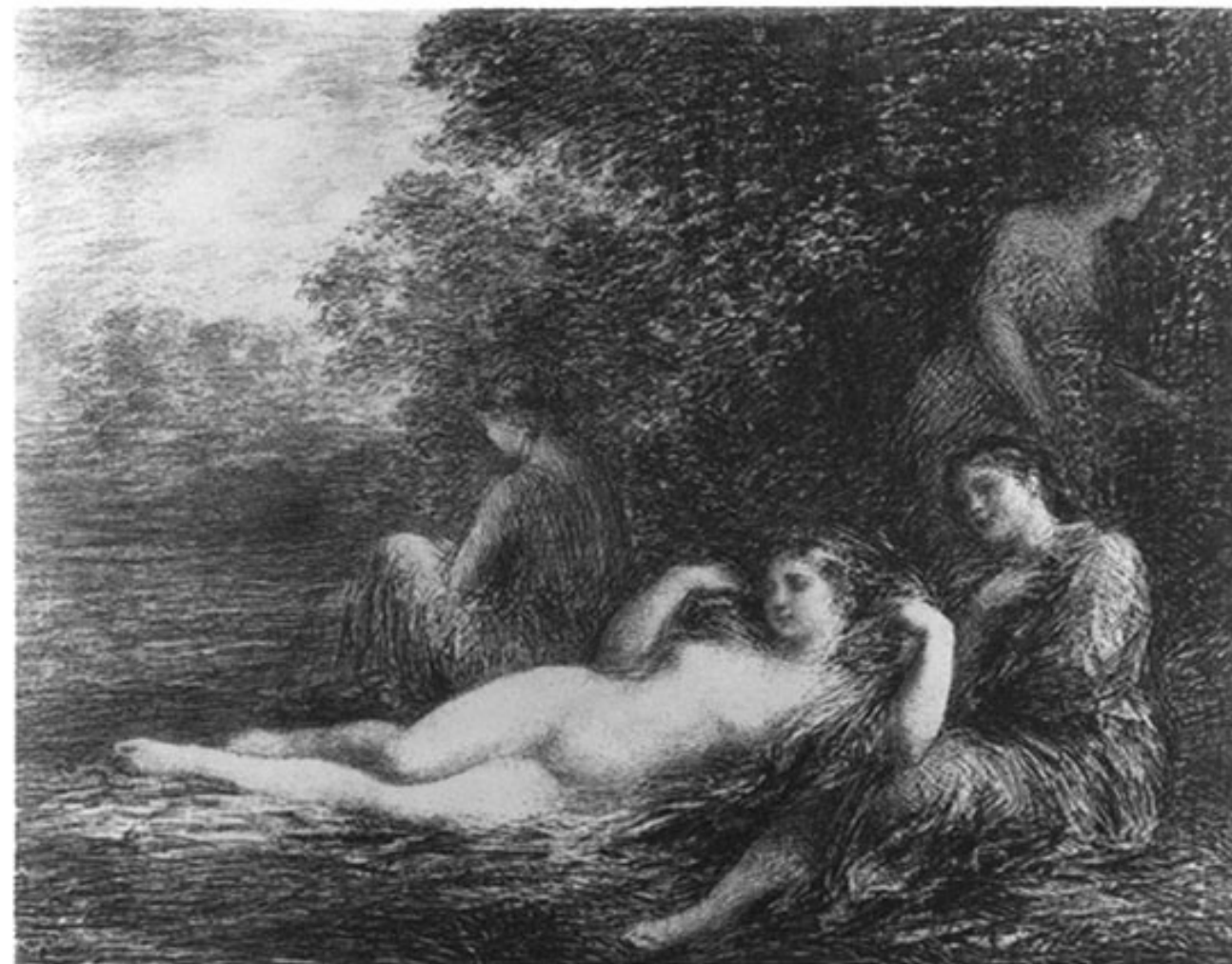


Linda maestra!

Francisco de Goya (Spanish, 1746–1828)
Linda Maestra! (Pretty Teacher!), plate 68 from the
 series *Los Caprichos (The Caprices)*, 1799 (later edition)
 Etching, aquatint, and drypoint

Gift of Mrs. Renato Monaco in memory of Alexander and Elsa Mohr (91.294.63)

This image of two nude women riding a flying broom is one of several references to witchcraft in Goya's series of eighty surreal and satirical prints titled *Los Caprichos (The Caprices)*. The caption *Linda Maestra! (Pretty Teacher!)* is in jest, as it refers to the old witch, not to the voluptuous figure behind her. In order for the joke to be funny, Goya relies on long-held standards of physical beauty and an enduring theme of prizing youth over age. What does the persistence of this kind of humor reveal about Goya's culture as well as our own?



Henri Fantin-Latour (French, 1836–1904)

The Bathers, 1898

Lithograph

Museum purchase (65.183)

The seemingly innocent and ordinary subject of women bathing – both indoors and outdoors – became a prevalent motif in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this scene, concern for privacy is indicated by the standing figure looking back over her shoulder into the forest. Ironically, the nude dominating the foreground is laid out entirely for the viewer's secret gaze. What does this irony suggest about issues of privacy and illicit voyeurism? Would an artist depict men in the same manner?



Katherine Sherwood (American, b. 1952)
Blind Venus (for G), 2018
 Acrylic and mixed media on recycled linen
 Gilbreath-McLorn Museum Fund (2018.7.1)

This work reinterprets one of the most famous nudes in the history of art, the *Venus of Urbino* by Italian Renaissance master Titian (see image reproduced here). In place of the head of the idealized beauty, Sherwood represents the face and hair with numerous overlapping medical scans of her own head and brain. She also renders this Venus incapable of returning the gaze of the viewer by signaling her blindness with a white cane. The red on the cane indicates that she also has significant hearing impairments. The work is itself painted on the backs of repurposed teaching reproductions of great works of art; the artists' names identifying each work are readily visible. As part of a series of large-scale images in which Sherwood, a female artist, reinterprets famous eroticized nudes portrayed by males, she uses brain scans and other medical images to emphasize internal substance and disability rather than external form and idealized beauty. What other differences do you notice between Sherwood's and Titian's images, and what ideas do these differences suggest?



Titian (Italian, ca. 1488-1576)
Venus of Urbino, ca. 1534-1538
 Oil on canvas
 (Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi)



22/40 "WHISTLER" Red Grooms 76

Red Grooms (American, b. 1937)

Whistler, from the series Nineteenth-Century Artists, 1976

Etching

Purchased with the aid of funds from the National Endowment for the Arts
(80.205.1)

Each of these prints portraying famous late nineteenth-century artists (James McNeill Whistler, Contantin Guys, Gustave Courbet, and Edgar Degas) tells a sort of art-historical inside joke. Each artist created well-known images of eroticized female figures. By reintroducing the artist into the frame Grooms underscores the lasciviousness of each portrayal and its production. How does revealing and emphasizing the hidden gaze of the (male) artist change the way we perceive his work?



Red Grooms (American, b. 1937)

***Guys*, from the series *Nineteenth-Century Artists*, 1976**

Etching

Purchased with the aid of funds from the National Endowment for the Arts
(80.205.2)

Each of these prints portraying famous late nineteenth-century artists (James McNeill Whistler, Contantin Guys, Gustave Courbet, and Edgar Degas) tells a sort of art-historical inside joke. Each artist created well-known images of eroticized female figures. By reintroducing the artist into the frame Grooms underscores the lasciviousness of each portrayal and its production. How does revealing and emphasizing the hidden gaze of the (male) artist change the way we perceive his work?



22/40 "COURBET" Red Grooms 76

Red Grooms (American, b. 1937)

Courbet from the series *Nineteenth-Century Artists*, 1976

Etching

Purchased with the aid of funds from the National Endowment for the Arts
(80.205.3)

Each of these prints portraying famous late nineteenth-century artists (James McNeill Whistler, Contantin Guys, Gustave Courbet, and Edgar Degas) tells a sort of art-historical inside joke. Each artist created well-known images of eroticized female figures. By reintroducing the artist into the frame Grooms underscores the lasciviousness of each portrayal and its production. How does revealing and emphasizing the hidden gaze of the (male) artist change the way we perceive his work?



Red Grooms (American, b. 1937)

Degas from the series Nineteenth-Century Artists, 1976

Etching

Purchased with the aid of funds from the National Endowment for the Arts
(80.205.3)

Each of these prints portraying famous late nineteenth-century artists (James McNeill Whistler, Contantin Guys, Gustave Courbet, and Edgar Degas) tells a sort of art-historical inside joke. Each artist created well-known images of eroticized female figures. By reintroducing the artist into the frame Grooms underscores the lasciviousness of each portrayal and its production. How does revealing and emphasizing the hidden gaze of the (male) artist change the way we perceive his work?



Thomas Hart Benton (American, 1889–1975)

Study for Susanna and the Elders, 1937

Oil on canvas

Lent by Tom and Carman Duvall


Benton made this highly finished study in preparation for a larger painting (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco) of the Old Testament tale of Susanna and the Elders (Daniel 13). Also displayed here is a letter Benton wrote to a former owner of the study, written seventeen years after he painted it; in the opening paragraph (transcription provided), the artist recalls a lasting impression of the model who posed for the study. By choosing to depict Susanna, a victim of voyeurism and gender inequality, Benton is making a commentary about the sexual exploitation of women. What commentary is evident in his letter describing the model?

Thos. H. Benton
3616 Belleview Ave.
Kansas City 2, Missouri

Nov 1st - 54

Dear Bert Granet —

Now, and in spite of Bob Schiffer's vagaries, I know what you've got. It's the study I made of that delightful hillbilly girl (a true Ozark product, gone wrong,) who became the motif for 'Susannah' — my boy — what a skin, what a blood pulsing skin, — just enough yellow in the belly to make the ~~the~~ "TITS" look pink — We don't find models like that anymore. — Anyhow you've got the original study —

And I'll tell you, now, what to do with it — Go out and buy yourself a sliver of pure beeswax — it comes in lozenges like this →  Period. Break the lozenge up into small particles. (Period) [as small as you can] (Should have been, in the other, ~~done~~, period) and then add about twice as much pure (rectified) turpentine [your drug store] in a glass jar. Put the glass jar with the wax and turpentine in a double boiler

Excerpt from a letter from the artist Thomas Hart Benton to Bert Granet, a former owner of this painting.

Nov 1st, 54

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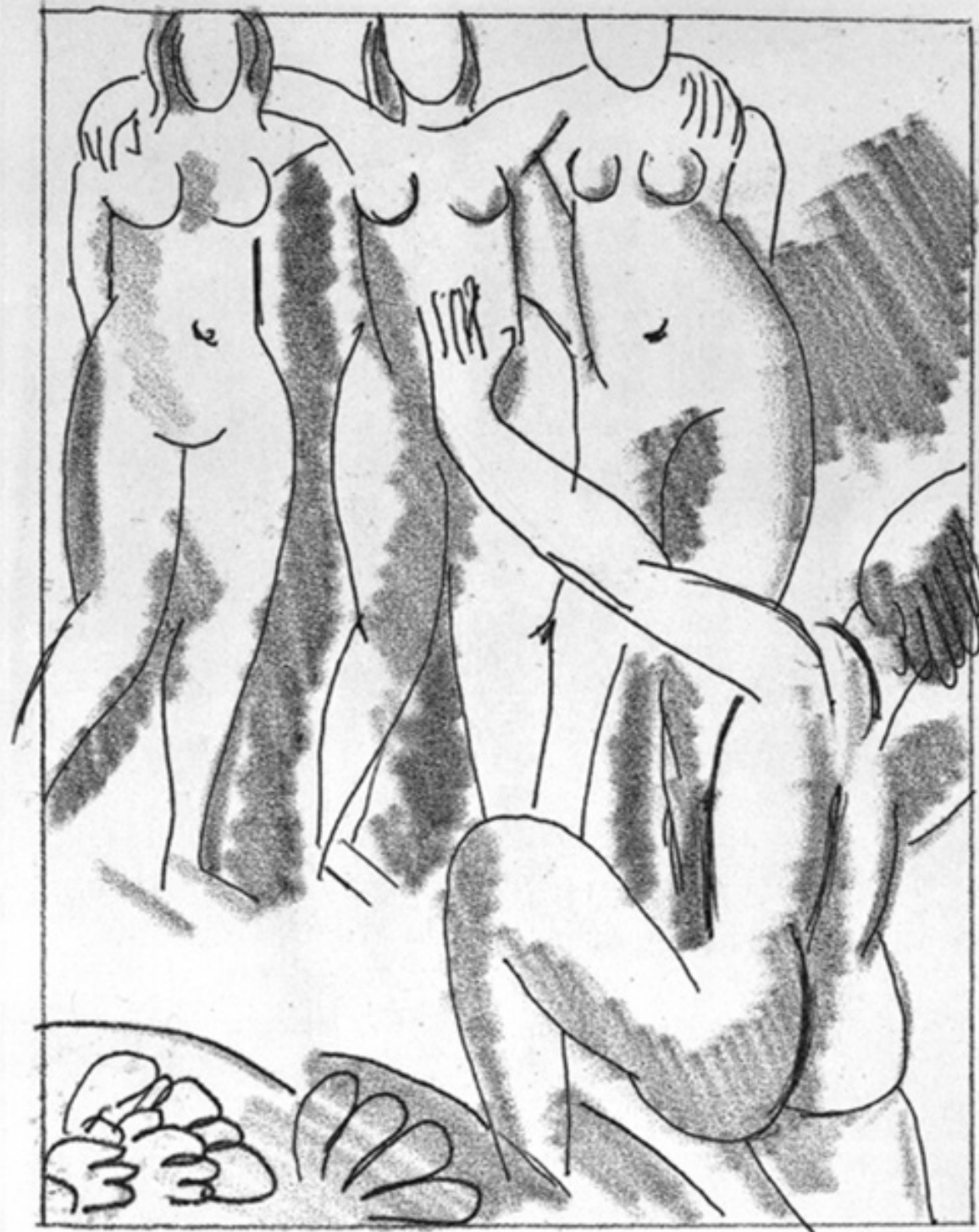
Kenneth Hayes Miller (American, 1876–1952)

Surprised by the Hunt, 1918 (?)

Oil on canvas

Gift of Dr. Harry B. Cohen (82.440)

This scene could be interpreted as a modern version of the classical myth of Diana and Actaeon. According to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the hunter Actaeon stumbles upon Diana and her entourage of nymphs bathing in a spring. In anger for violating her privacy, the virginal goddess transforms Actaeon into a deer. He flees in fear, and his own hounds chase and kill him. What is the moral of this myth, and how is the viewer – violating privacy in the same manner as Actaeon – implicated in its message?



Henri Matisse (French, 1869–1954)
The Episode of Nausicaä, from the series of illustrations
 for *Ulysses* by James Joyce, 1935

Soft-ground etching

Gift of Museum Associates (92.79.4)

In the *Odyssey*, the epic upon which James Joyce's *Ulysses* was loosely based, Nausicaä finds a shipwrecked, naked Odysseus and provides both clothing and an introduction to her father, King Alcinous, who helps Odysseus finally return to Ithaca. In Joyce's retelling, Nausicaä is transformed into Gerty MacDowell, who notices the protagonist Leopold Bloom watching her at the beach. She teases him by exposing her legs and underwear, while Bloom pleasures himself. How does Matisse's illustration correspond to and deviate from these literary versions?



Pablo Picasso (Spanish, 1881–1973)

Untitled, 1971

Etching

Gift of the Student Fee Capital Improvement Committee, University of Missouri
(92.7)

Based on a monotype by Edgar Degas that Picasso owned, this etching shows two seated prostitutes displaying their breasts and genitalia for their customer, possibly Degas himself. Picasso's reputation as a womanizer is legendary; aged 61, he told his 21-year-old mistress, "For me there are only two kinds of women: goddesses and doormats." Despite his exploitation of his wives, mistresses, and countless anonymous women for his art, Picasso is upheld as a modern genius, firmly ensconced in the canon of Western art history. How much are we willing to ignore in the face of historical figures with such iconic status as Picasso?



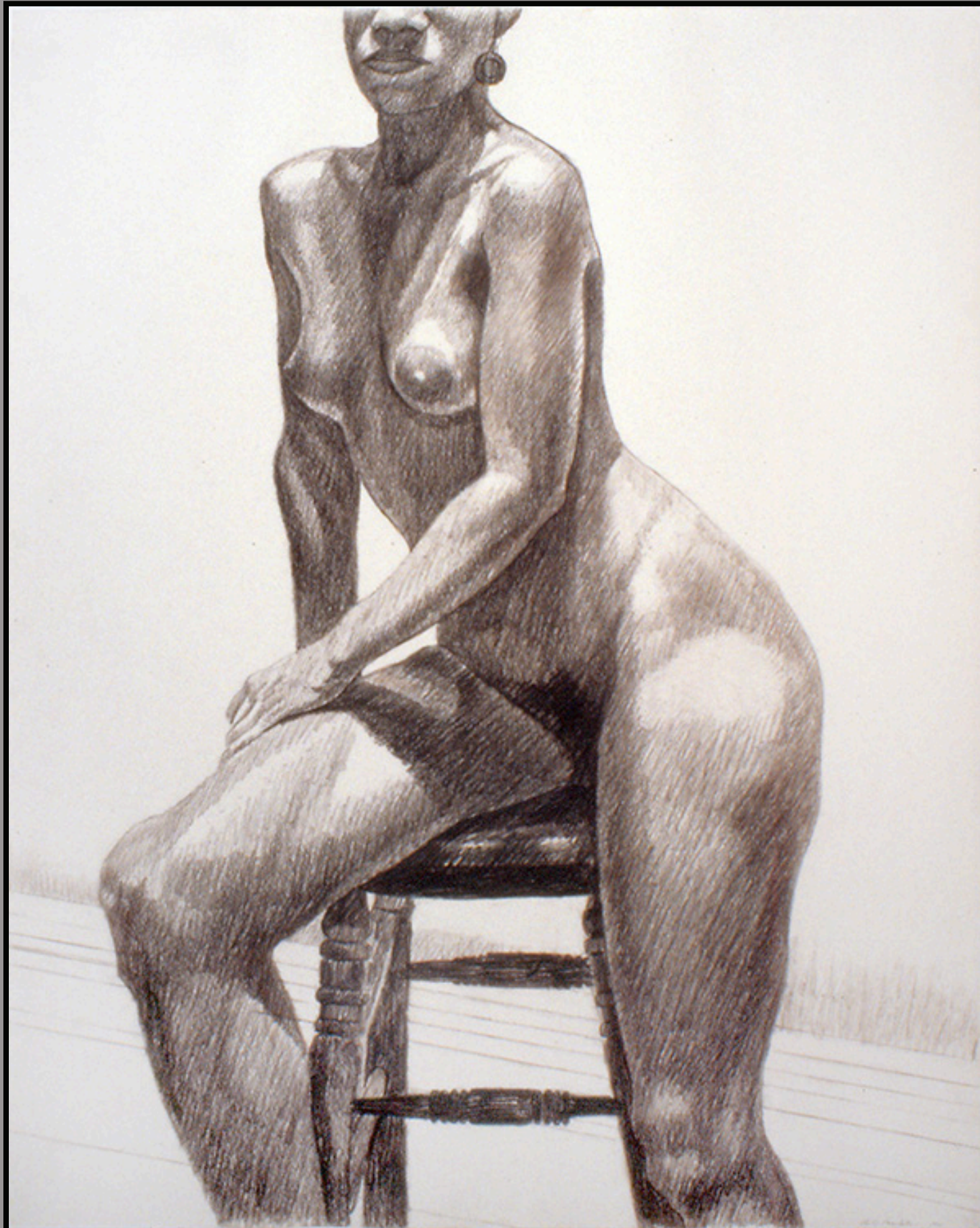
Jan De Ruth (American, 1922–1991)

Duo, 1963–64

Oil on linen

Gift of Mr. Frederick Altman (81.269)

Jan De Ruth published a how-to text for painting the female nude in 1967, derived from lessons from his long career as both an artist and teacher. Although he titled his book *Painting the Nude* generically, all of the more than one hundred illustrations of works by him or historical artists are images of the female form, except for one that is a diagram of his recommended layout of colors on the palette. He illustrated *Duo* in his book, because the composition is instructive, juxtaposing two female figures, one dressed and one nude. What are possible meanings of their contrasting poses, attitudes, and connections to the viewer?



Philip Pearlstein (American, b. 1924)

Model on Stool, 1984

Brown conté crayon on paper

Museum purchase (94.6)

Pearlstein has dedicated most of his career to the study of the nude. His style is regarded as an objective—even clinical—form of hyper-naturalistic representation, a rejection of traditional idealization of the body in Western art. Yet, his impersonal depictions are necessarily loaded with meaning due to his choices of subject, pose, vantage point, and composition. How do we as viewers relate to a figure whose face, especially her gaze, and lower legs are unseen, cut off at the top and bottom edges of the paper?



Sigmund Abeles (American, b. 1934)

Nude in Bed, 1978

Lithograph

Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Frederick P. Nause (80.1)

In this erotically charged print, the setting and the figure's languid and suggestive pose imply post-sexual intimacy. Some could consider this charmingly romantic due to the presumed closeness of the artist and model; for others the model's apparent unawareness of being studied in this context could be threatening, potentially transgressive of willing consent. How do you interpret this image?