

EUROPEAN EROTIC ART

PETER WEBB

1 Titian Venus & Adonis 1553 POESIE –art as the creation of beauty and excitement. That art could of course be beautifully and excitedly erotic, and his paintings are some of the finest examples ever made. The most celebrated living artist in Europe. For Philip II of Spain, like Titian a great lover of beauty and of women. Based on Roman poet Ovid's accounts of mythology, the loves of the gods, stories which have fascinated artists and writers from antiquity onwards. Painted over a period of twenty years, (1550s-60s) and kept by Philip in different palaces. The National Gallery brings them together in one room for the first time. An essential visit for anyone who loves art.

After a night of love-making, Adonis leaves Venus for hunting with his dogs. She wants him to stay with her, and fears for his safety in the hunt. He is killed by a boar. We can imagine the night of love-making preceding. Titian in letter to Philip that her body and buttocks were especially carefully painted.

Eroticism (eros=love Greek) has been described as the philosophy of love, but the finest art of eroticism can also find its expression in the wider parameters of sexual excitement. It is not to be confused with pornography (porne=harlot Greek) which is solely concerned with arousing sexual appetite.

2 Botticelli Birth of Venus 1484

3 Pompeii Birth of Venus 1st century AD

4 Greece Diana of Ephesus
Greece Venus of Milo

5 Roman Apollo Belvedere
Michelangelo David 1505

6 Roman Apollo Belvedere restored
Michelangelo David with fig leaf

- 7 Masaccio Adam & Eve Brancacci Chapel Florence 1450
Before and after cleaning
- 8 Prehistoric Venus of Willendorf c.30,000 BC
Celtic Scheele Na Gig Kilpeck Herefordshire early medieval
- 9 Celtic Scheele British Museum 12th century George Witt bequest
1865 My efforts.
- 10 Greece Bes
Pompeii Ceres
- 11 Romano-British Cerne Abbas Giant, Wiltshire, fertility figure
- 12 Japan phallic celebration - Kanamara-Matsu Festival
I shall discuss Erotic Art of Europe where a fascination with sexual
imagery inspired some of the greatest art-works. Non-European
sexual imagery has been much more concerned with fertility
rituals, a fascination of its own and in need of a separate
discussion.
- 13 Greece plate couple BM
Pompeii couple
- 14 Greek plate multi-sex 7th-4th century BC
- 15 Greek plate man & youth 4th century BC British Museum
- 16 Bacchus & Cupid Roman plus Narcissus
- 17 Orestes & Pylades 10th century Greece plus Jupiter &
Ganymede 200 AD Roman
- 18 Michelangelo Jupiter & Ganymede 1553
- 19 Rubens Jupiter & Ganymede 1611
- 20 Emperor Hadrian & male lover Roman fresco
- 21 Warren Cup, Roman, British Museum, silver an expensive gift,
superbly crafted and in very good condition, maybe as a gift from
one man to another.

22 Warren Cup details

23 Caravaggio Cupid Victorious 1505

24 Leonardo copulation drawing Queen's Collection 1493

"I expose to men the origin of their reason for existing." 1493

25 Pompeii Venus and Mars. Aphrodite (Greek) and Venus (Roman) - the Goddess of Love has been seen as the prime source of inspiration for erotic art and literature.

Veronese Venus and Mars 1570

26 Botticelli Venus and Mars Nat Gall 1487

27 Frans Floris Venus and Mars 1550 Most Renaissance erotic art is classically inspired and is Italian. An example of Italian influence on Northern European erotic art.

28 Carlo Saraceni Venus and Mars 1600

29 Bronzino Venus Cupid Folly & Time. Nat Gall. 1545

Commissioned by Duke Cosimo Medici for French King I.

"Of frigid and passionate perfection." Veils painted over until mid 20th century. Transience of the pleasures of love.

Cupid & Venus embrace in a far from maternal way.

Pleasure scatters roses over them. Jealousy appears to the left and Deceit with her scaly serpent's body threatens from the right. Yet the beautiful bodies of Venus, Cupid and Pleasure hold the attention.

30 Velazquez Rokeby Venus National Gallery 1655

31 Titian Venus and the Organ Player 1527

"When Titian was mixing rose madder,

His model posed nude up a ladder.

The position to Titian suggested coition,

So he nipped up the ladder and 'ad 'er."

32 Titian Venus of Urbino 1538. Not Venus but a married woman with marriage chest at back. Displays herself as part of the marriage contract. Painted for husband.

- 33 Manet Olympia 1865 Salon outcry. Napoleon III struck it.
- 34 Cabanel Birth of Venus 1865 same salon. Napoleon bought it.
- 35 Titian Danae and the Shower of Gold 1553 Nat Gall
First of Poesie series. Daughter of King of Argos. Oracle tells him her son will kill him. So he keeps her in a tower. Jupiter shower of gold. Bright eyes, parted lips. Her son Perseus kills her father.
- 36 Rembrandt Danae & the shower of gold Saskia 1636
- 37 Rembrandt the French Bed 1646
- 38 Correggio Jupiter and Antiope 1546
Giulio Romano Jupiter and Olympia Mantua Palazzo del Te 1525
- 39 Titian Rape of Europa 1562. Nat Gall. Jupiter as a beguiling white bull visits maidens on sea shore. Europa garlands his horns and jumps on his back. Titian shows the helpless girl carried off on the terrifying sea journey by the bull. Wonderfully observed bemused expression on the bull feigning innocence as he carries off Europa to Mount Olympus watched by cupids.
- 40 Leonardo Leda and the Swan 1505
- 41 Michelangelo Leda and the Swan 1520, copy of a lost work.
- 42 Boucher Leda and the Swan 1750
- 43 Boucher Mlle O'Murphy 1755 Mistress of Louis XV.
- 44 Goya Maja Clothed and Maja Nude 1805
"Said the Duchess of Alba to Goya,
Remember that I'm your employer.
So he painted her twice,
Once clothed to look nice,
And once in the nude to annoy her."

45 Fragonard The Swing Wallace 1770

“Bishop pushing the swing of this gorgeous creature,
and me looking up her skirts.”

46 Courbet Origin of the World 1866 For a Turkish Ruler.

Landscape could slide across and hide the image. Went missing for fifty years in spite of being a famous image. Great mystery. Came to light when French poet died and it was put up for sale. Bought by the Musee D’Orsay in the 1990s as an important image in French art by an important French artist, in spite of some objections.

47 Beardsley Lysistrata Aristophanes 1898 Women refuse sex with husbands to object to being subserviant, in classical world, with contemporary significance for Victorian England, though also with a strong hint of humour from Beardsly.

48 Rodin Eternal Idol 1889

Rodin The Kiss 1886

49 Magritte Rape 1934 Surrealism, Freud’s Interpretation of Dreams. A rich new dimension for erotic art.

50 Dali Gala as Leda 1944

Dali Two Seconds before waking from a sexual dream 1949

51 Hans Bellmer The Doll 1948 Tate Modern. Fascination of reimagining a woman’s body.

52 Leonor Fini Sphinx Regina 1954 Felt that Surrealism was too male-oriented. Sphinx her self-projection. Sexuality of beautiful nude young man asleep and vulnerable to the Sphinx, representing the power of women. Does she caress him or strangle him?

53 Leonor Fini the Lovers 1960 All sexualities embraced by Fini, here lesbian lovers.

54 Picasso The Lovers 1905
Picasso Artist and Model (Self-Portrait) 1903

55 Picasso Raphael & La Fornarina 1968

50 David Hockney Peter getting out of Nick's pool 1965
David Hockney The Room Tarzana 1966
California ideal for Hockney the voyeur, used to his early life in a suburb of Bradford., and now able to embrace his homosexuality.
Peter Schlesinger his Californian lover.

57 Allen Jones Female Furniture 1966. Playful celebration of women in the world of Pop Art though attacked by feminists at Tate for promoting violence against women

58 PW The Erotic Arts 1975, 1988 with Brancusi Princess X 1916

59 David Hockney An Erotic Print 1974

60 Allen Jones Navaho blanket 1974

61 Lucien Freud Man & Dog plus Woman with Lion tapestry. Love of skin and flesh. After fight with a taxi driver, he rushed home to paint his wonderful bruised face. Gives his sitters a dignity in their obvious vulnerability.

62 Francis Bacon Francis Dyer plus Nude couple. Man as an animal leaves his track like insect slime. Relationship with George Dyer was tender but violent. His celebration of their erotic relationship.

63 Tom Wesselman Great American Nude 1966 US Pop Art.

64 Miguel Berrocal Couple 1990 You can take it to pieces and put it back together, involving yourself in the sexual activity.

65 Judy Chicago The Dinner Party 1979 Brooklyn Museum, NY. Place settings are vaginas for 39 women written out of the historical record. Traditional accomplishments – textile weaving china painting, opposed to male-dominated arts. Only one black woman.

Roberta Smith in NY Times : “Historical importance and Social significance may be greater than its aesthetic value”

Hilton Kramer : “It reiterates its theme with an insistence & vulgarity more appropriate to an advertising campaign than to a work of art”. Highly influential.

66 Judy Chicago The Dinner Party, Virginia Woolf

67 Sylvia Sleigh Portrait of Philip Golup 1971 A Woman’s image of a beautiful nude man to balance the male artist’s imaging of female nudes. All her sitters are nude men from among her circle of friends. Admirer of Leonor Fini. Rokeby Venus (Velazquez) has become a man. Mirror reflection.

68 Cindy Sherman Number 58 -1989, plus Untitled Mannequin figure 1992. All her images are photographic self-portraits in various disguises, playing various roles, often from films or magazines, or combinations of body parts of herself and others reassembled in the manner of Surrealist art. Bellmer one of her favourite artists. National Portrait Gallery show last year.

21st century – Conceptual Art, Performance Art, Post-Modern Art- Eroticism seems more prevalent now in cinema and theatre. But look to the future.

./

