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**THE PAINTED NUDE**

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## INTRODUCTION

Art over centuries has constantly extended its boundaries to encompass new perspectives of its subject. One phenomenon which has had a broadening effect on art history in the last two decades is the historical discovery of women artists. The achievements of women in art have been badly neglected in the past and it is only recently that there has been a re-evaluation of the merits and skills of women artists both in the past and at present. The re-discovery of women's achievements has forced a recognition of the distortions that sexual bias has imposed upon the creation and interpretation of art in our society. It has led to corrections in traditional and historical ways of seeing art. An area that distinctly outlines sexual bias and the way in which the re-evaluation of women in art has exposed this bias is that of the nude in art. I have chosen to discuss the nude in painting because of its socially and sexually explosive nature and because as a painter it is a subject that I have explored extensively in my practical work for the past three years. There is no doubt that the female body has been used excessively in painting and indeed in all our visual culture and that the male nude is seen less often in either painting or other visual media.

The first chapter discusses the nude and what it came to symbolise with the upsurge of the Christian church from the thirteenth century onwards. With this growth came a limiting of women's social freedom and a misogynous attitude towards women. This attitude was supported strongly by theological argument. The Adam and Eve story cast women in the role of the temptress and sinner. For the Gothic and medieval church she was a model of bestiality. This image of women carried through to the Renaissance period and was accompanied by a return to the legendary and mythological figures of classical ages. Female figures of Goddess-worshipping culture such as Venus







were borrowed by male artists and portrayed in their paintings as fantasy subjects. Susannah, Delilah and Bathsheba were all examples of women portrayed by men as temptresses and personifications of human weakness. The male figure on the other hand took on the image of virtue and strength. He was a figure of powerful activity. The only female figure who embodied the virtues of wisdom and justice and to some degree redeemed the sins of the others was The Virgin Mary. She is as extreme in her virtues as Eve is in her faults. Both are equally inhuman.

I have not included the art of classical Greece and Rome in part because the classical artifacts which remain are largely sculptural but also because their primary features are dealt with in the discussion of Renaissance art which drew heavily on classical influences.

The second chapter discusses the fact that even though biblical subjects had become much less popular by the eighteenth century the Eve character remained constant in depictions of the female nude. She was no longer always ashamed of her nakedness but she was still a figure of sexual temptation. She was often asleep or lowered her eyes to the gaze of the spectator and if she did meet the spectator's eye her expression was one which implied an invitation to desire. The male nude remained the active figure. While man was associated with culture, woman was with nature. While man made art the woman posed as his model and while the woman was a sex object and temptress the man was aroused by her availability and yet remained the innocent party as it was the female who had provoked this in him.

The nude in painting is a focal point for many presentations. Unconscious sexual attitudes of different cultures can be reflected in each culture's interpretation and use of it. However, we must also ask ourselves how accurate these images are when it comes to their ability to reflect male and female roles and relationships in



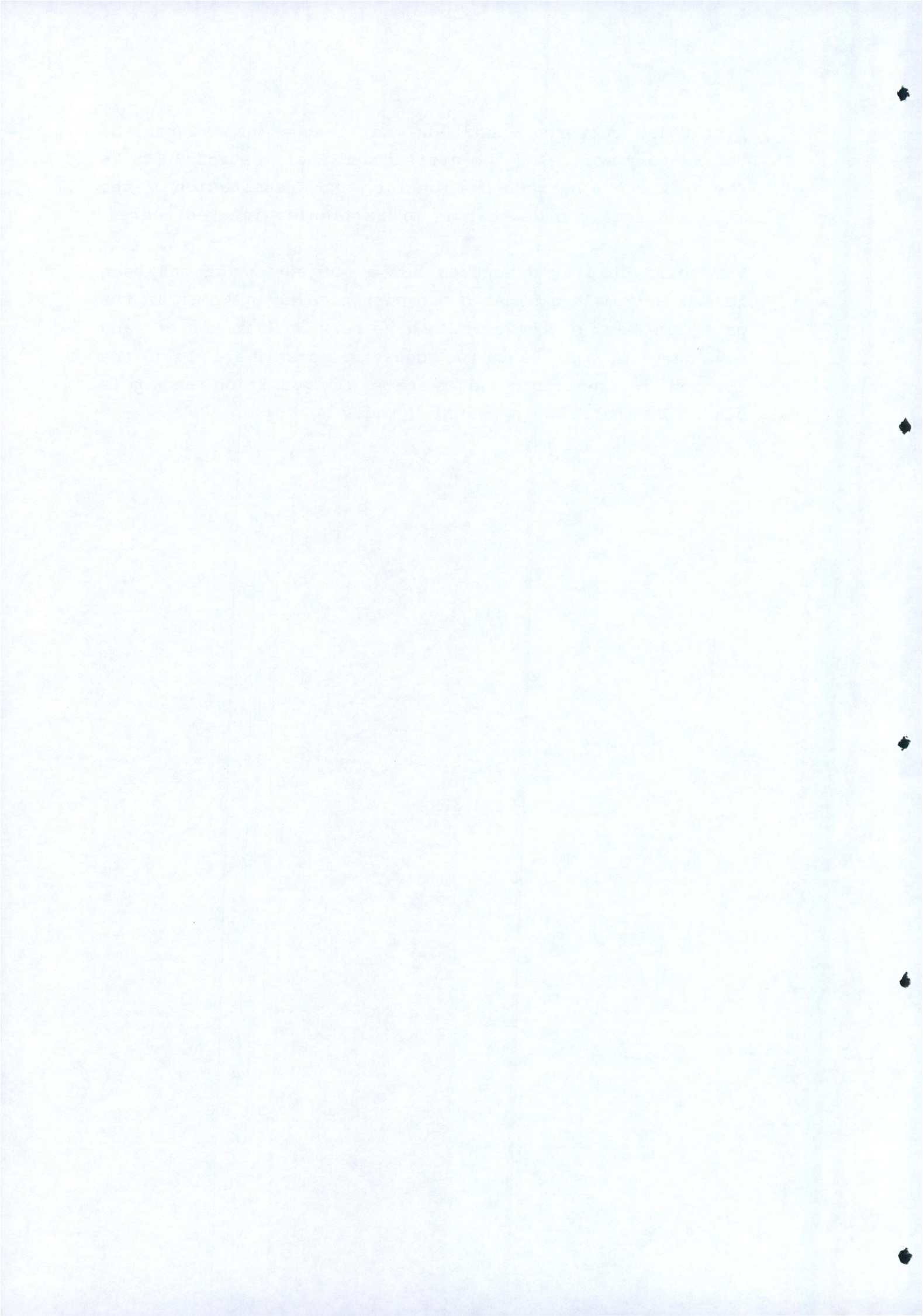




particular cultures - and how many images instead reflect the fantasy worlds of the artists and their patrons? It is the difference between the function and presentation of the male and female nude that is of particular interest here.

The third chapter discusses how a subject which has been for so long male dominated has been handled by women in the past, how many of these women have been lost in history and how only in the last two decades women have felt the freedom to redirect and restate the position and role played by the nude in painting today.







Nakedness and Nudity are complex subjects, subjects which are capable of provoking extreme and contradictory responses. Generally we think of nakedness as simply having no clothes on. But when we think of nude we immediately associate it with a form of art. In the world of art the nude has been long considered an essential study. For painters, the naked figure has always been of utmost importance as part of their training as artists. Today it is still an important discipline at most art schools.

In Europe cultures have grown and have been built upon different and often conflicting philosophies. Conflicts between cultures and indeed within them, are clearly highlighted by the difference in attitude of each to the naked human body. From early Christian times to the present day the nude has been used extensively in painting as a symbol of love and hate, anger and guilt, sorrow and joy, ecstasy and sin.

Judeo - Christian beliefs hold that God created man in his own image and they rejoice that they are cast in the likeness of the creator.

**'God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it .... And they were both naked, the man and his wife and were not ashamed.'**

**(47, Book of Genesis)**

Hence for thousands of years they have supposed the body a measure of ideal form. However, as the plot in the story of Adam and Eve unfolded it became the story of original sin. Satan tempted Eve with the fruit from the forbidden tree, Eve tempted Adam with this fruit and they both ate. The first result of having eaten the fruit of the tree of knowledge was an acute awareness of their nakedness and they were ashamed.







'Lord God called unto the man and said unto him, "Where are thou?" and he said, "I heard thy voice in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked and I hid myself"

Unto the woman God said, "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow thou shalt bring forth children, and thy desire shall be thy husband and he shall rule over thee"

(47, Book of Genesis)

The naked body became a symbol of sin, guilt and grief and in particular the naked body of the woman.

This is very true of Christian art of the Gothic period. This period spanned roughly the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries. Our visual record of it is predominantly in the form of book illustrations. The subject matter of gothic painting is almost exclusively religious and the naked figure is found usually in representations of the last judgement and the torments of hell. The stories of Adam and Eve, Susanna and Bathsheba were all subject matter for painters on stained glass windows and illuminated books and manuscripts.

In one manuscript which is dated 1230 - 1240 from Paris a painting which imitates the style of stained glass windows depicts the expulsion from paradise. Here a fully clothed agent of God holding a sword, casts Adam and Eve out of the garden. The naked figures of Adam and Eve, though they pay little heed to human anatomy are amazingly expressive. Both figures make gestures with their hands to cover their awkward and vulnerable bodies. Eve bows her head, gesticulating with one hand to cover the genitals and the other to cover her face. Adam however is shown looking back towards the angel and the angel's gaze seems to be directed towards him. The angel holds out a hand which touches Adam's shoulder. Eve runs ahead, her whole body a twisted symbol of shame. It was Eve after all who instigated the sin.









FIG. (i)



FIG. (ii)







Hell was a subject frequently depicted by the gothic painters. In a painting by Di Bartolo Hell: Punishment for Sinners (fig i) 1393, naked bodies and demon figures are depicted in typical gothic fashion. Masses of damned bodies are suffering at the hands of savage demons. They are naked, bloated and are receiving their just desserts for their sinfulness on earth. Their nakedness is the ultimate symbol of their guilt. It is an image of the torment of sinful human flesh.

Later into the Gothic period images of the naked body appeared less often, particularly images of the nude female. When she appeared she did so as an image of sexuality. Human sexuality was revealed as a source of anguish. The image of the female nude was therefore permitted if and only if she was getting her just punishment for the sin of her sexuality.

In an anonymous painting from a Swiss school, 1473, called The Martyrdom of Saint Agatha (fig ii), a female nude hangs in the centre of the painting, her two arms bound to a wooden stake above her head. She is surrounded by five men, two of them mutilating her naked body. The mutilation of the breasts, because of their potential as a symbol of sexuality, is particularly important.

Very often in stories of the female martyrdom there are scenes where the victim is stripped of her clothing. Although this ritual was seen as a necessary part of the debasement of the female martyr it is obvious that it has been recorded in this painting in a lustful manner. There were, of course, other portrayals of the naked body in depictions of the crucifixion and the Virgin and Child where the infant Jesus sometimes appeared naked. These figures, however, were nude to a different degree.

For Medieval painters there were four acceptable symbolic types of nudity. Firstly there was the state of nudity in which man was born into the world. There was a state of nudity which symbolised a renouncement of worldly goods.







Another was a symbol of purity and truth and the fourth was symbolic of lust and self indulgent sin.

By the 15th century the depiction of the nude and the artist's approach to painting had taken a different turn in the art of the Renaissance. He no longer thought of man as such a humble observer of God's greatness but as the proud expression of God himself on the earth. The naked body became a symbol of man's energy, strength and potential for perfection. Themes such as truth, beauty, purity and power ran through painting of this era. Man became glorified through the naked male. Women became objects of fantasy through the female nude. Religion and biblical themes remained a major subject for Renaissance painters but mythological figures also became very popular. Nakedness was no longer a symbol of guilt or sin but rather a symbol of energy and control. This was true almost exclusively of the male nude. Fertility and sexuality were portrayed extensively through the female nude. Early Renaissance painters however did carry traditions through from Gothic art. Many subjects remained the same but began to be dealt with in a different way.

In Masaccio's painting The Fall (fig iii) (1425 - 27) the early Renaissance painter uses the naked figures of Adam and Eve in the ever popular subject of the expulsion from the Garden of Eden. There is a lot more emphasis placed on the anatomical correctness of the figures. In sure strokes, Masaccio catches the anguish and haste of the departure of each from the garden by displaying their naked bodies to us. The woman's sexuality was the cause of the expulsion from the garden and therefore it is Eve who covers her genitals with one hand and her breasts with the other. Adam however covers his face more from the sight of what caused the sin than from a feeling of guilt. John Berger in 'Ways of Seeing' when referring to Adam and Eve nudes states that:







'During the Renaissance the narrative sequence disappeared and the single moment depicted became the moment of shame. The couple wear fig leaves and make modest gestures with their hands. But now their shame is not so much in relation to one another as to the spectator.

Later the shame becomes a kind of display' (4, pg 49)

In Masaccio's The Fall the nudes have become more aware of us in their guilt and humiliation. They have become aware of being seen. This awareness of the audience remains strong from now on in the painting of the nude.

In Primavera (fig iv), a painting by Botticelli, the body of the woman is put on display in a depiction of the semi-religious, semi-fantastic world of Greek mythology. It is in the garden of Venus, where the goddess stands framed by green bushes. On her right Zephyr, the March wind reaches to grab hold of Chloris, who is naked like the earth in Winter. She tries to escape from the grip of Zephyr but fails and reappears clothed by flora, transformed by Spring. Venus draws our attention by a gesture of her right hand towards her son Cupid who is ready to strike, with his arrows, one of the three graces. Mercury, the armed guardian of Venus's reign, wards off clouds that threaten to disturb the spring procession. Botticelli was a member of the Medicean Circle. In Primavera the female nude characterises things in nature. The woman is seen as emotional, nurturing and intuitive. The three graces display effectively all aspects of the nude female body. They are passive subjects, graceful and surrendering. They contrast greatly with the male figure of Cupid to their left. With one hand placed on his muscular hip, he is a picture of energy and strength. His body is strong and sturdy, very unlike the flimsy portrayal of the bodies of the three graces. His whole character is one of activity whereas those of the women are passive. The active male/passive female is a stereotype found in the painting of the nude during this period. The female nude is an









FIG. (v)



FIG. (iii)



FIG. (iv)







object of sexuality for man's enjoyment. The fact that this painting was commissioned for the bedroom of Lorenzo the Magnificent's son as a marriage present reinforces this idea. Botticelli creates for his own pleasure and for the pleasure of his male patrons an image of woman as an erotic, receptive and passive creature available for man's enjoyment.

When we speak of the male nude as a symbol of activity and creativity there is no artist who has glorified the male nude in this way as much as Michelangelo. He was one of the greatest protagonists of human beauty and yet remained a Christian. He worked through a time when certainties were dissolving. He used the naked human body to depict all subjects, from the glory of its form when created, to its humiliation at the last judgement, returning to its power and perfection in the resurrection. Never have such incredible attempts been made at the portrayal of the male nude as the ultimate form of beauty as in the painting of the Sistine Chapel. In the panel The Creation of Adam the over-riding impression is that of the perfect strength and harmony which exists between man and his creator. Even in The Last Judgement (fig v), although great despair is depicted in the masses of naked figures and damned souls, the male body of Christ is placed in the bright central zone. He is an amazing figure of power. He is isolated in spite of the fact that his mother sits by his right side. She is a passive female figure with her head bowed and her hands raised humbly in a gesture of modesty while her whole being is overshadowed by this giant male dominator beside her.

This image of woman is brought to higher levels in the use of the female nude by painters like Giorgione. There is a typical example of it in his painting of the Sleeping Venus (fig vi). She lies horizontally across the canvas surrounded by a landscape. Her nudity is seen as her "natural" state in such a setting. She is a symbol of







sexuality, of fertility. She faces her audience, her eyes closed offering no objection to the gaze of the spectator. She is offered to the male spectator by the painter as an object of desire. The positioning of her body has nothing to do with comfort, it is positioned so as it can be displayed to the male to its full extent. The erotic placing of her hand on her genital region is also a promise of her potential to satisfy male desire. The recumbent pose of the female nude is mirrored time and time again in Titian's painting. In Giorgione's rendering of the nude Venus she is alone, in nature. However, in Titian's Venus with the Organ-Player (fig vii) there is the presence of another man - the organ player. Once again he plays an active role, is fully clothed and is allowed gaze at the body of Venus. The spectator is not threatened by the presence of this man. Venus pays him no heed. She gives idle attention instead to a pet dog. This dog is of course no threat to the spectator and so he is allowed to continue to think of her as his.

A subject which has been portrayed by numerous painters is that of Susannah and the Elders (fig viii) and very successfully so by Tintoretto. Here the titilating experience of spying on the object of desire is explored. Susannah is a voluptuous blonde and any feeling of guilt on our or the elders part for spying on her is removed by the fact that Susannah is accused of vanity by the placing of a mirror into which she looks at herself. Susannah thus objectifies herself for us.

I refer to the spectator as being a man because for a woman to relate to the female nudes which I have discussed she would have to relate to the position of the woman in the paintings. This position is without exception one of passivity and objectification. For most women this is not an altogether pleasing experience. For the male, the experience is different. He may relate to an image of







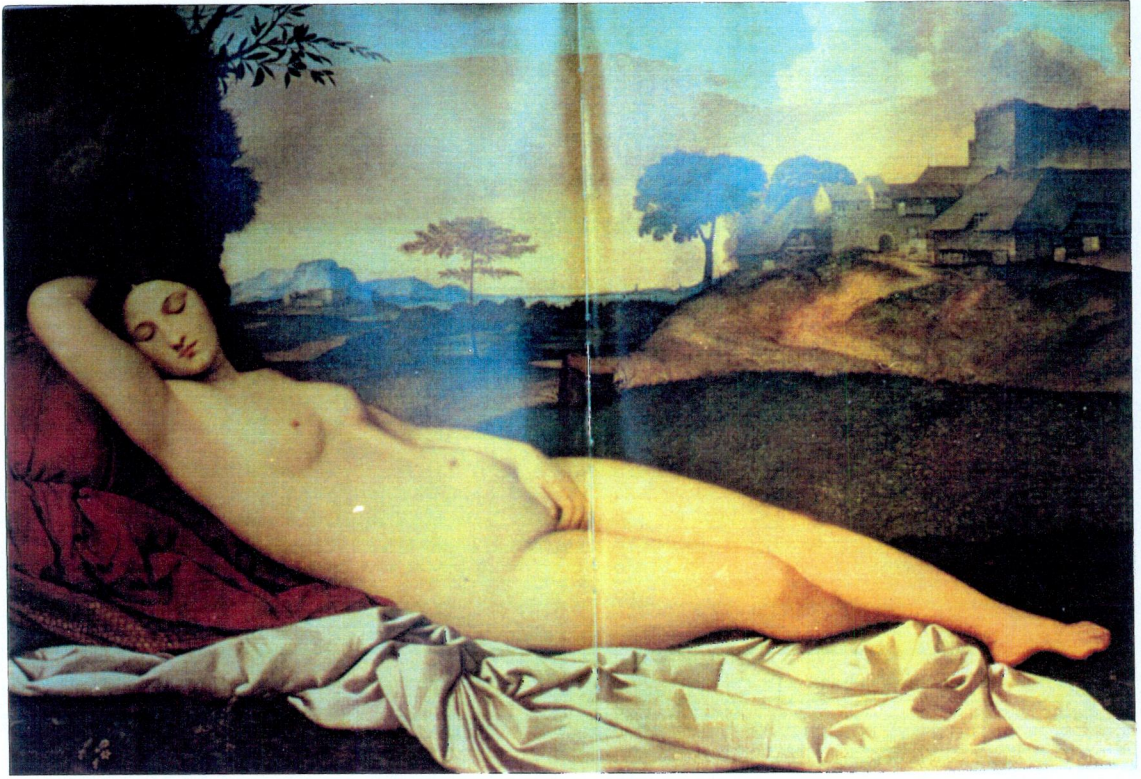


FIG. (vi)

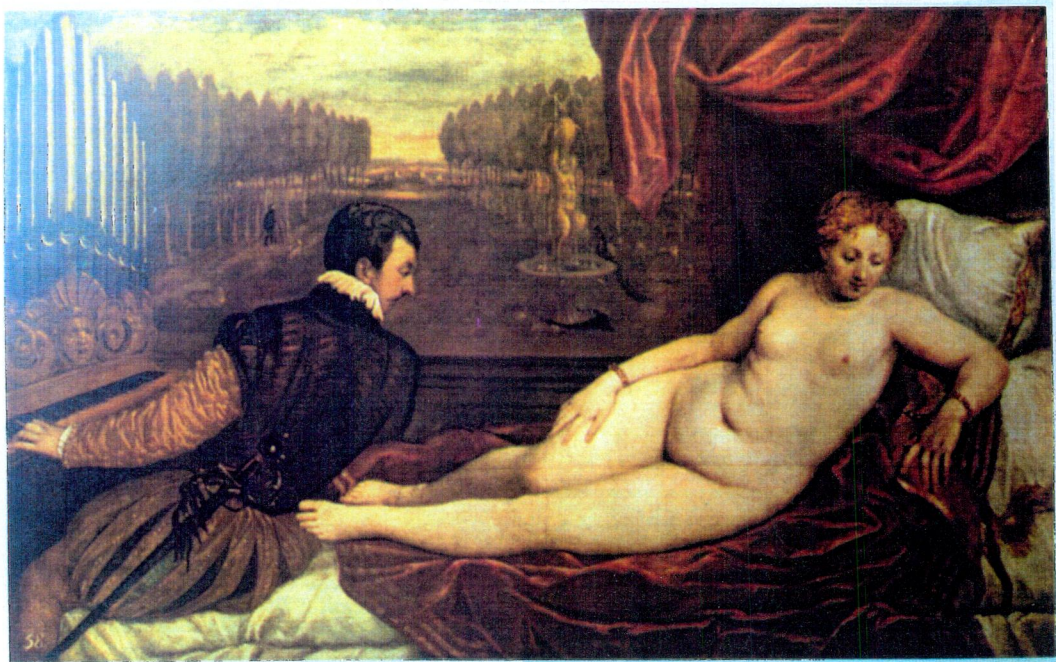


FIG. (vii)







power and activity and feel satisfied when he turns his gaze to the female nude that she exists for his pleasure.

This expression of the male and female nude is not a characteristic solely of the Renaissance period. As we will see, it travelled with the nude in painting through times of upheaval and development and remained surprisingly unchanged throughout.







"In the average European oil painting of the nude the principal protagonist is never painted. He is the spectator in front of the picture and he is presumed to be a man"

(4, pg 54)

When the nude female body is presented it is very often presented as a spectacle of sexuality and the painting seems to send out an invitation to voyeurism. As in Tintoretto's Susannah and the Elders the nude woman is often oblivious of the fact that there is a spectator. The painter uses this device so that the spectator can enjoy the woman's nakedness and fantasize about possessing it without being challenged in any way by her.

When the painter Jean-Auguste Ingrés presented the female nude he made every attempt to make the spectator comfortable with his voyeuristic tendencies. He very often presented the nude female sleeping so that the woman is seen to abandon self consciousness and shame. Therefore, the man can shift his voyeuristic guilt onto the woman as she has seduced him - he is not to be blamed. His painting The Turkish Bath (fig ix) is an example of another of his methods of inviting voyeurism. Numerous female nudes are painted on a circular canvas. The round-shaped canvas and the way in which Ingrés painted the nude women strewn across its surface, literally falling off at each end, creates the strong impression that we are looking in on and only catching a glimpse of the whole scene. We see it as if through a keyhole or as a reflection in a mirror. The central figure turns her back to us. The faces that we do see are painted with similar expressions of sensuality and submission. The nude bodies are posed in passive positions. Each one or all are available to the potential male spectator as objects of desire. On looking at this painting again, its whole surface filled with submissive female nudes - its whole being becomes absurd, a world of







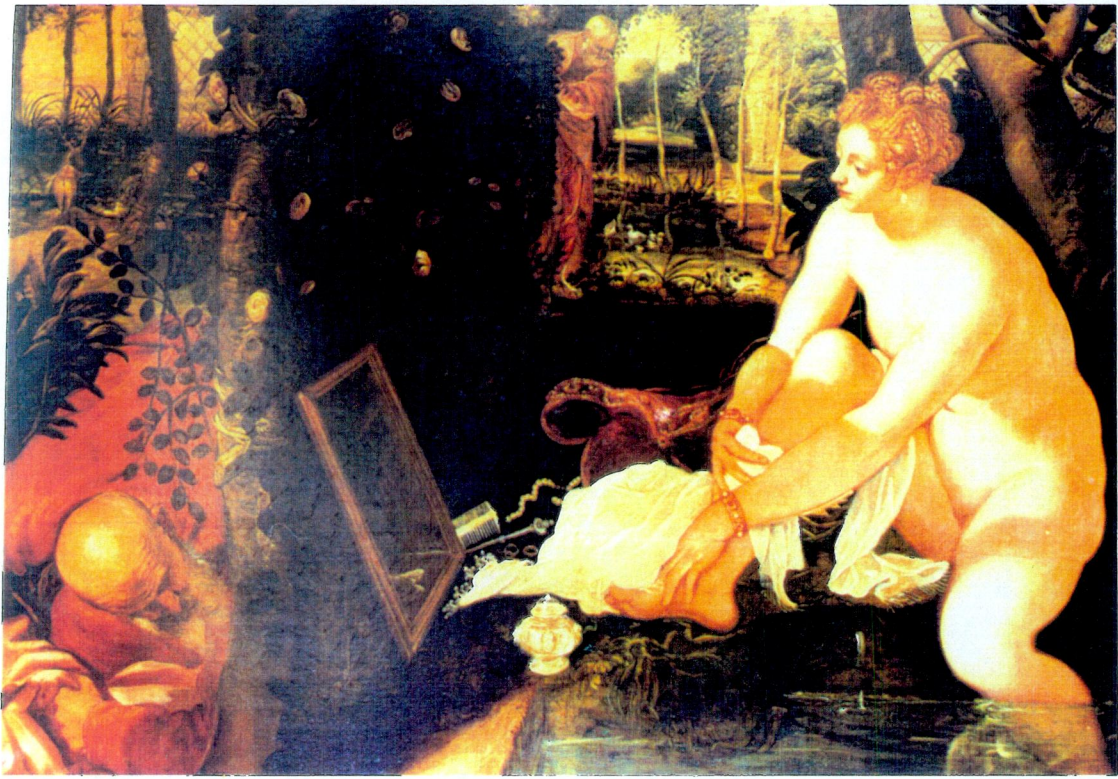


FIG. (viii)



FIG. (ix)







fantasy created by a man where the woman plays the role of the pleasure object.

This subject of male fantasy runs strongly through the painted nudes of Auguste Renoir. Renoir's nudes are a visual extension of his attitude towards women and the role he felt they should play in society.

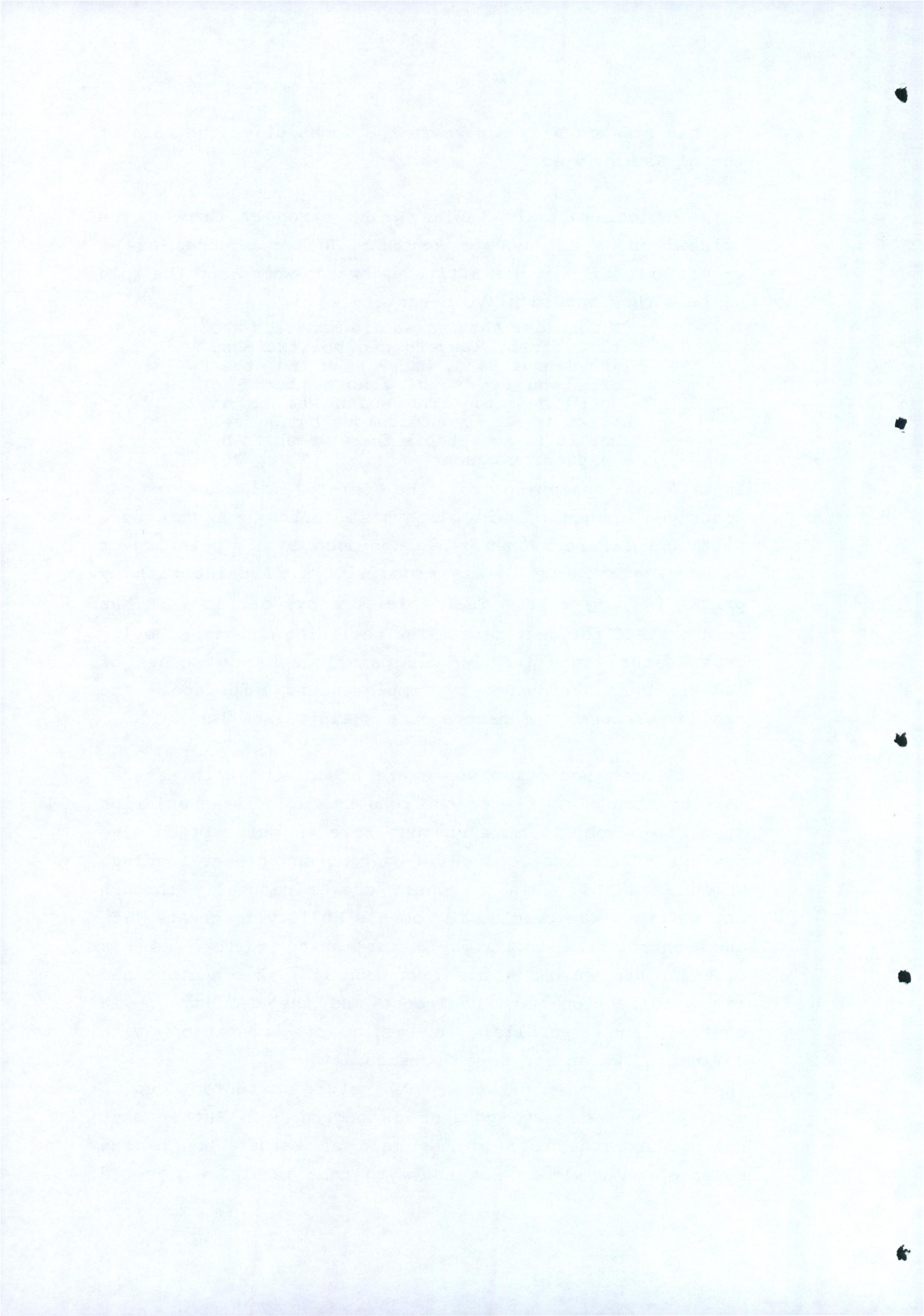
**'I consider that women are monsters who are authors, lawyers and politicians, like George Sand, Madam Adam and other bores who are nothing more than 5 - legged beasts. The woman who is an artist is merely ridiculous but I feel that it is acceptable for a woman to be a singer or dancer.'** (7, pg 26)

In all his paintings of the female nude Renoir has portrayed images of his misogynist fantasy of what were fitting roles for women. His approach to his painting of women is summed up in his proud remark **"I paint with my prick"** (44, pg 95). The 'male potency' of his work has been praised for centuries. The reclining and the sleeping nude feature regularly in his paintings as do scenes of nude bathers surrounded by complementary landscape - the subject of women and nature once again raises its head.

In all known societies women are associated with nature, more so than men. One of the reasons for this association stems from women's more obvious role in the reproductive process - menstruation, child-bearing and breast feeding. Women from the beginning could create naturally through childbirth. Man reacted to women's ability to create life and control its source by establishing culture as his creation and enforcing his laws upon it. This culture and its predilection with dominance and the need to be in control runs parallel to man's pre-occupation with dominating woman and woman's sexuality.

The identification of woman with nature is rooted deep in myth where the earth goddess is paired with Father Sky, noting that the role of the male as Father Sky is the superior one. It is not the myth that is to be objected







to, however, as much as the way in which these figures such as Venus, the goddess of love have been adopted by male painters and transformed into sexual objects for their own and their patrons' satisfaction. The naked woman in the landscape was a very popular image in the work of painters like Manet and Gauguin.

Manet in Déjeuner Sur l'Herbe sets up a perfect example of the woman/nature and the man/culture relationship. In this painting three figures dominate the foreground - two clothed men and one nude woman. Manet's nude returns the spectator's stare without the slightest feeling of unease. In this respect she was unique. Manet's nudes were among the first of that period to challenge the male gaze by not lowering their eyes in the expected manner. Guilt cannot be projected upon her as her stare relays to us that she is not ashamed of her nakedness. However, although she does return our stare her pose and expression is passive and silently portrays her as an available object of desire. A second female semi-nude in the background is another example of the nymph-like image of the woman in nature. It is implied that the woman is comfortable in her nude state in nature. She is but another sight, another object to be admired in the landscape.

The men, on the other hand, who are both clothed, remain separated from the landscape both physically and emblematically. They are figures of rationality. The woman can also be seen to act as their muse, a sensual stimulant - simply another of man's inspirations in the landscape.

Gauguin was a painter who continuously depicted in his paintings the idea of woman being in their 'natural' state when naked in their surroundings. His Tithitian women are products of the exotic flora that surrounds them. The colour of their skin and the curves of their bodies echo the natural configuration of the landscape in which they are painted. In his painting Te Aril Vahine (woman with







mangoes) a reclining nude in the foreground is an icon of fertility, the same fertility that is seen in the vivid greens, yellows and reds in the flora around her. She is an image of sensuality, the same sensuality that is present in the blue of the sea behind her. She is an creature of instinct which is a quality inherent in the animal that looms among the trees nearby. The fruit beside her is another obvious symbol of her sexuality, soft and luscious. She is everything 'natural'.

The view that woman's creativity is natural and instinctual has been used continuously by male critics to explain the lack of any great female artists. Man's creativity on the other hand is artificial, it is cultural and most importantly it surpasses nature. Time and time again paintings like those already discussed by Manet, Gauguin and many others echo this point of view. It is a point of view which has been reinforced by centuries of paintings in which certain roles have been 'bestowed' upon the woman, and is highlighted today in photography, film making, advertising and pornography.

In his highly acclaimed book The Nude, Kenneth Clark discusses the nude in art under chapter titles such as Apollo, Venus I, Venus II and so on. In a chapter entitled 'Energy' he discusses in depth the male nude using paintings by Michelangelo, Rubens and Raphael which portray the male nude as an athlete, a fighter and a victor. In the chapter 'Ecstasy' it is the painting of the female nude which dominates the pages. The fact that a book which has been described as a notable contribution to aesthetics as well as to art history identifies the male nude with energy and female nude with ecstasy is in itself a clear demonstration of the roles imposed upon the female nude and the male nude in painting - the man as a power symbol, the woman as a symbol of anonymous sexuality.



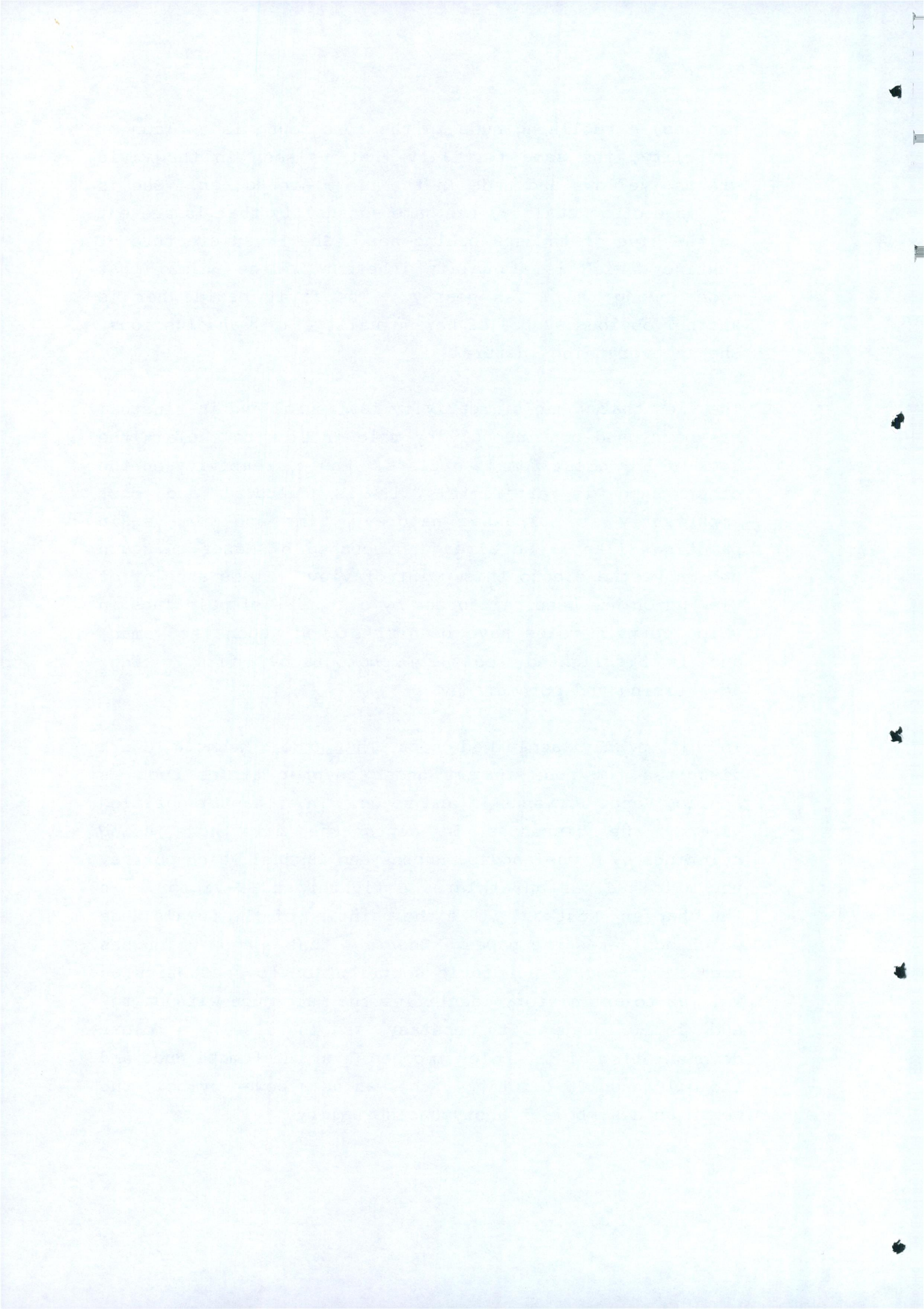






FIG.(x)

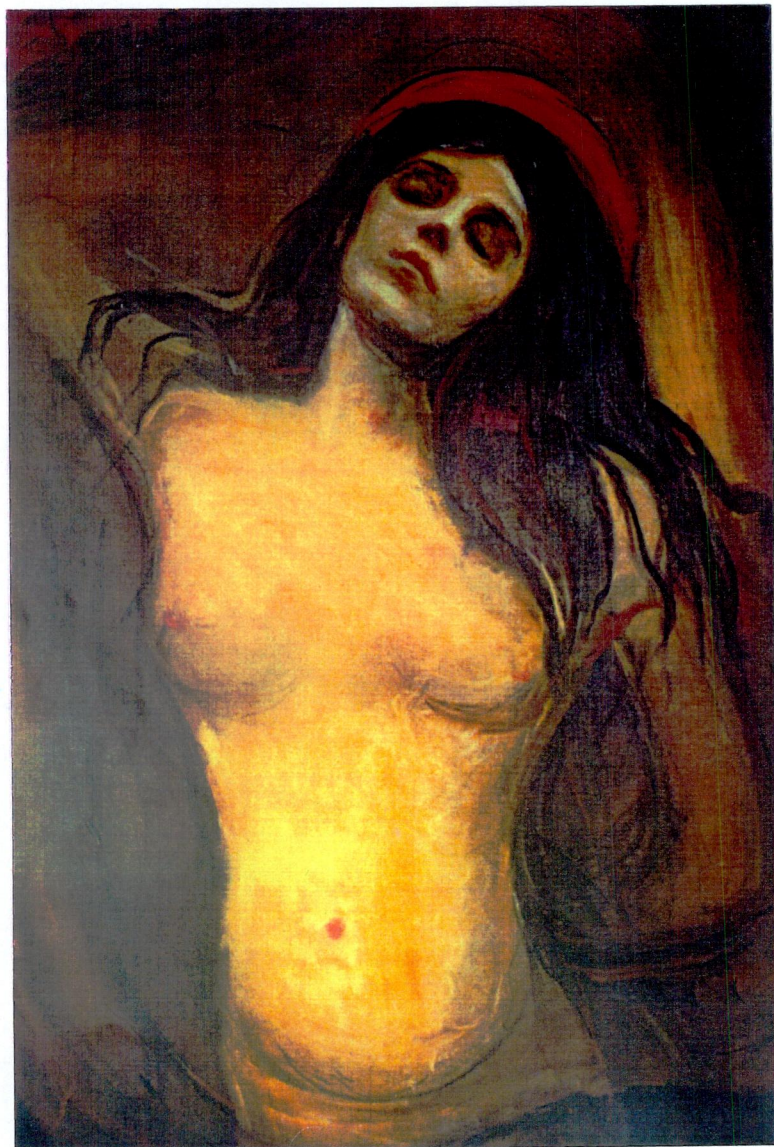
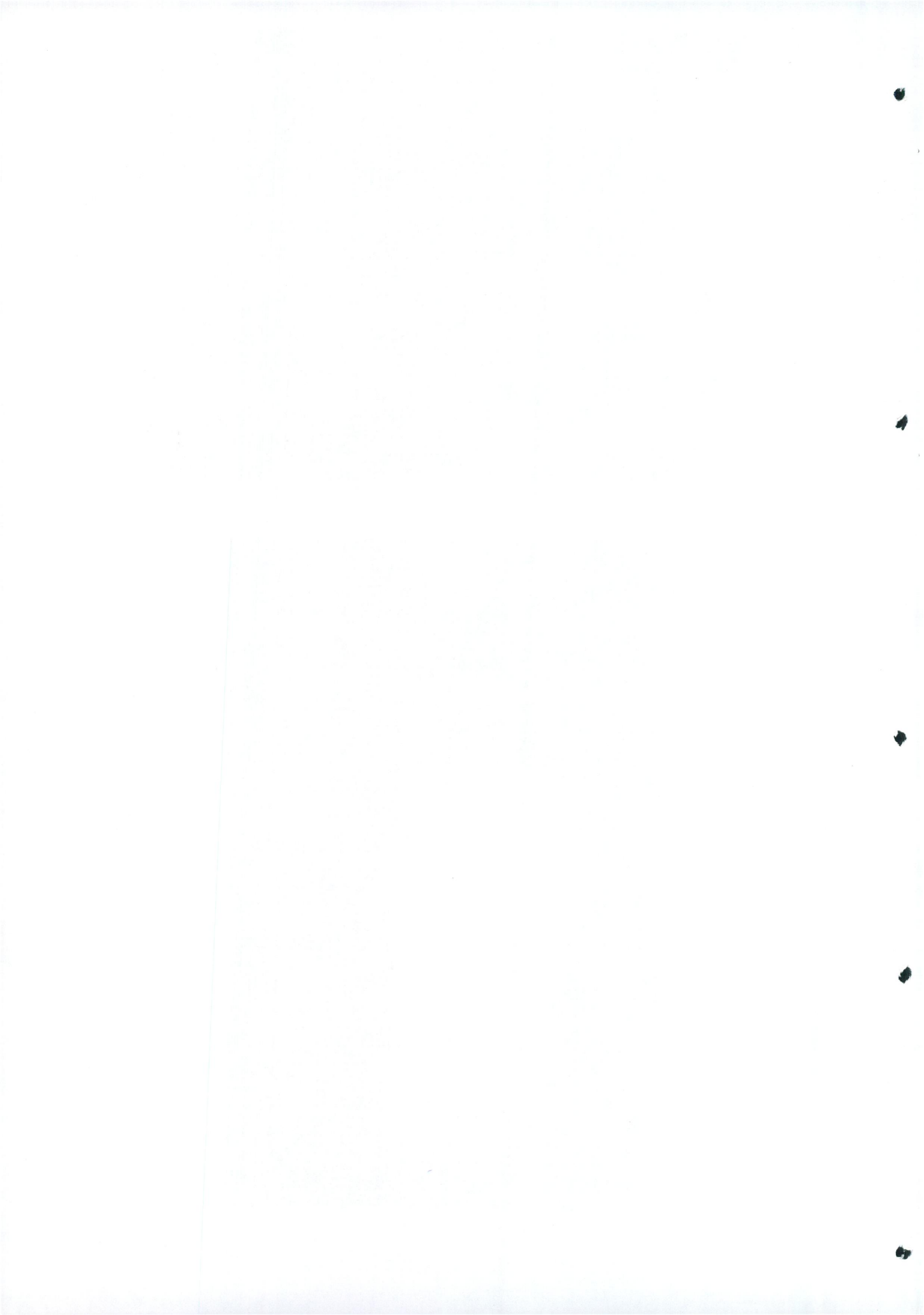


FIG.(xi)







Though the male has been eroticized to some extent in some depictions of the male nude; where he swoons in a state between ecstasy and pain (for example in certain depictions of the crucifixion and martyrdom of other religious figures) it bears no comparison to the degree in which the female nude has been fetishized and rendered as nothing more than a sex object.

In Edvard Munch's paintings the use of the female nude as an icon of sexuality is blatant. In his paintings and prints of the Madonna (fig xi) the female is desirable, truncated, erotic and oblivious to the spectator. With her wild hair, her eyes closed and her head thrown back she becomes a strong symbol of dangerous sexuality. Her body swoons, her sexuality is uncontrolled - she is a threat to man. Woman's sexuality and the freedom to express it openly has been controlled by moral, religious and social means for centuries in our society. Open display of female sexuality has been restricted and classed as evil by men who see it as a threat to their power. This threat has surfaced in some nude painting but in most it has been fought and controlled by devices which are used in painting, whereby women's bodies are rendered passive and powerless.

Two painters who have been particularly recognised for their erotic portrayal of the female nude are Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele. Klimt's female nudes are figures of sexual abandon. They often sleep and if their eyes meet the spectators it is with a gaze of sensual pleasure and lust.

In Gill Sanders book The Nude (a new perspective) Klimt's nudes are discussed in accompaniment to an advertisement for an eau de toilette for men which uses one of Klimt's drawings of a nude female with the caption "To his fragrance she surrenders" (fig xii). He states that -

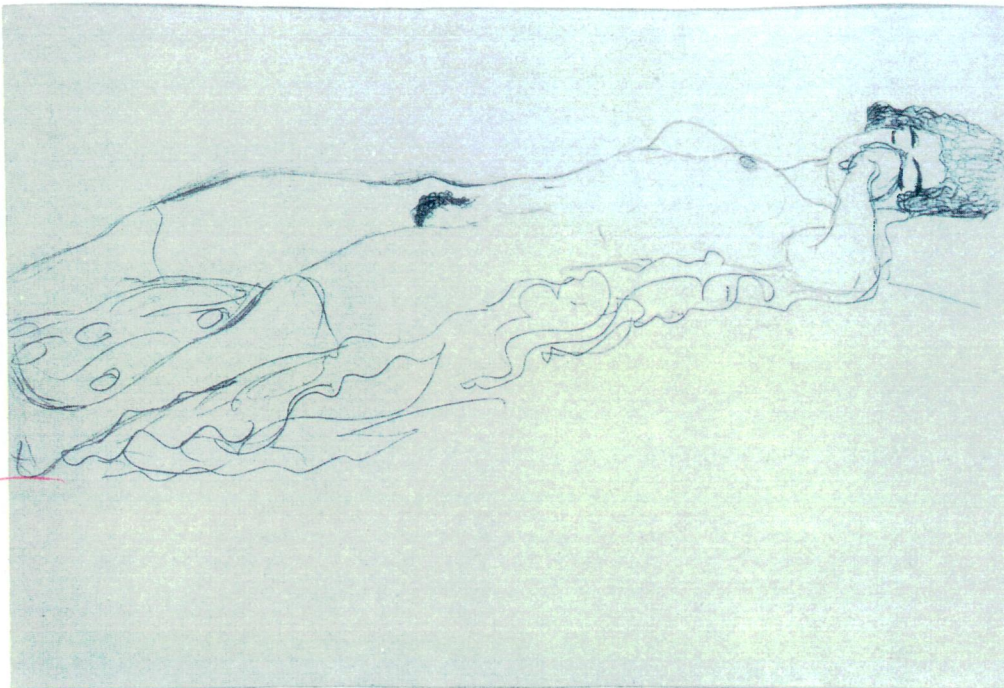
**'Klimt's nudes are displayed erotic and inviting, in sensual abandon with legs splayed. Sensuality and an acquiescent**







**BELAMI.**  
**TO HIS FRAGRANCE. SHE SURRENDERS.**



*Gustav Klimt. Nu couché avec main gauche sur le visage. 1912-1913*



**BELAMI.**  
**AN EAU DE TOILETTE FOR MEN.**







receptivity are represented as female virtues. Here underscored by an advertising copy, the woman is a passive and vulnerable victim of male power and sexual domination. The image becomes a celebration of rape'

(44, pg 42)

This collaboration of Klimt's nude and an advertisement highlights the use of the female nude as a fantasy object for men. The woman is as much a consumer product as the artificial fragrance is.

Schiele was heavily influenced by Klimt especially in his earlier work. He painted both male and female nudes extensively during his short career as an artist. However, his figures are less romanticized than those of Klimt. Their skin is marked and their bodies angular and thin. Yet they are full of intense sensuality and desire. He also painted several nude self-portraits. His female nudes, like Recumbent Nude are full of the anguish of lust and sexual pleasure. So too, however, are his portrayals of the male nude and indeed he depicts himself in a similar fashion in his self-portraits. Schiele wrote;

'I believe that man must suffer from sexual torture as long as he is capable of sexual feeling' (49, pg 37)

The sexual torture he speaks about is evident in his obsessive painting of both male and female nudes. Schiele did not only deal with sexuality in his portrayal of the opposite sex he was also able to identify with and express sexuality through images of the male body. In this respect he was unique. He portrayed anguish, pain and pleasure with an urgency that is present in all his nudes, male and female alike. For Schiele sexuality is a human subject where both men and women are active, passive and almost always obsessed.

In Chapter 1 the presence of a man in paintings of the female nude was discussed. Titian's Venus with the Organ Player was an example of the role played by the man in the presence of a nude female. It was also discussed in this



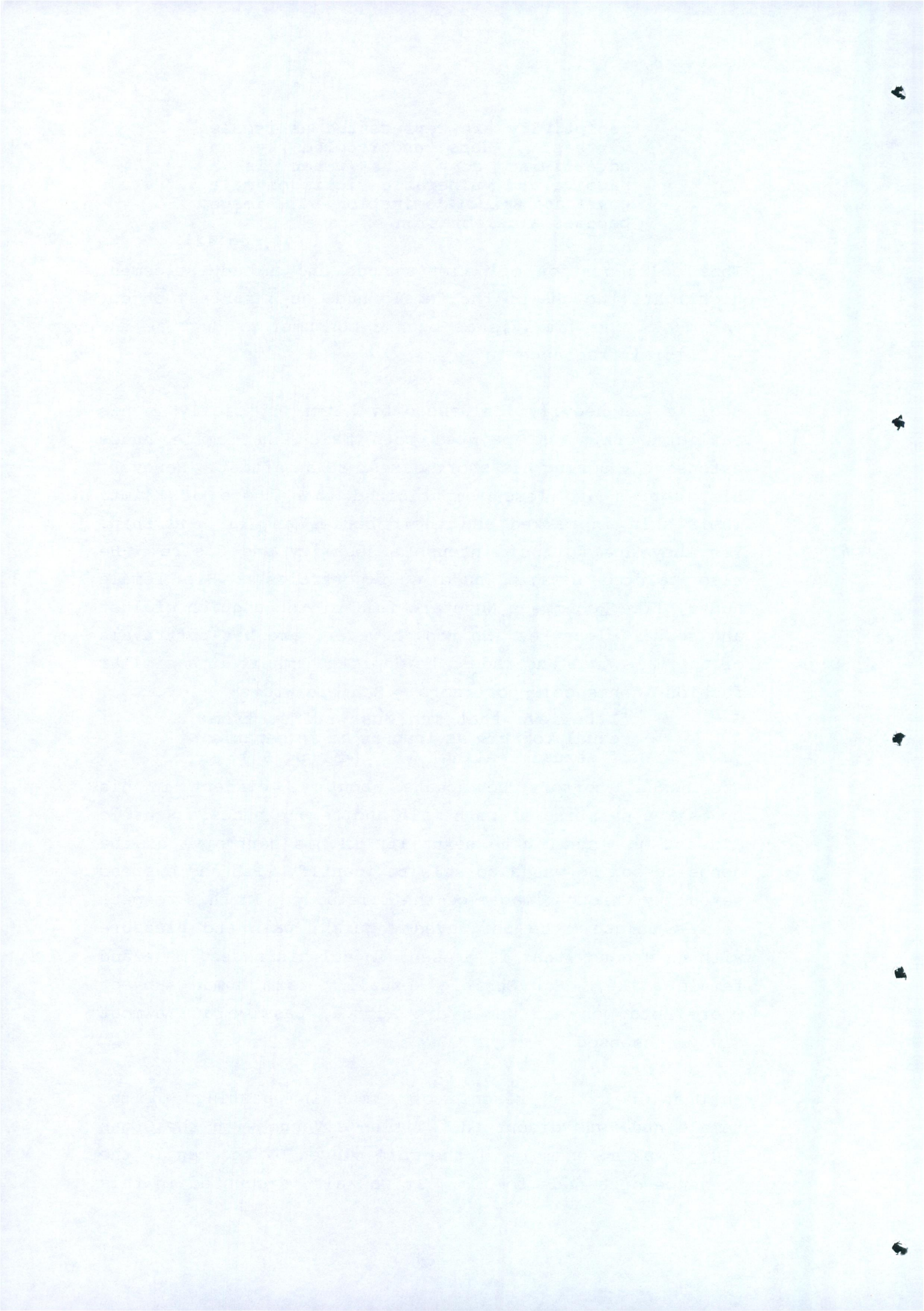






FIG. (xiii)



7



chapter with regard to Manet's painting Dejeuner sur l'Herbe. This clothed man/nude female relationship is carried a stage further when we investigate the artist/model relationship. Two artists who regularly painted themselves in the presence of their female models were Matisse and Picasso. Picasso once said -

**'I try to do a nude as it is. If I do a nude people ought to think; it's a nude not Madame Whatsit'  
(my emphasis) (44, pg 74)**

He prefers his nudes to be anonymous. He painted the female nude obsessively and woman, her body distorted, is reduced to a simple sex object, particularly in his later work. His attitude to the female nude is clearly defined in his series of etchings The Sculptor and his Model. In the first the artist like an antique God sits gazing at the torso he has just sculpted with a reclining nude by his side. Her body is twisted on its side in an erotic display. She is not part of the relationship which exists between the artist and his work. She is merely his prize, passive and yielding to his desires. The relationship is similar in Modèle couché et Sculptures. The artist once again gazes at his sculpture while the female model lies across his lap. She is sleeping and anonymous. He is large and dominating. The female nude remained the main subject matter of Picasso's work until his death in 1973. No painter has so continuously abstracted and mutilated the female form in his work as he has.

Matisse, who also worked obsessively with the female nude claimed that;

**'For me nature is always present. As in love, all depends on what the artist unconsciously projects on everything he sees. It is the quality of that projection, rather than the presence of a living person that gives an artist's vision its life'. (44, pg 112)**

This statement is as good as an admission that for him woman as an object of art or of love is no more than an







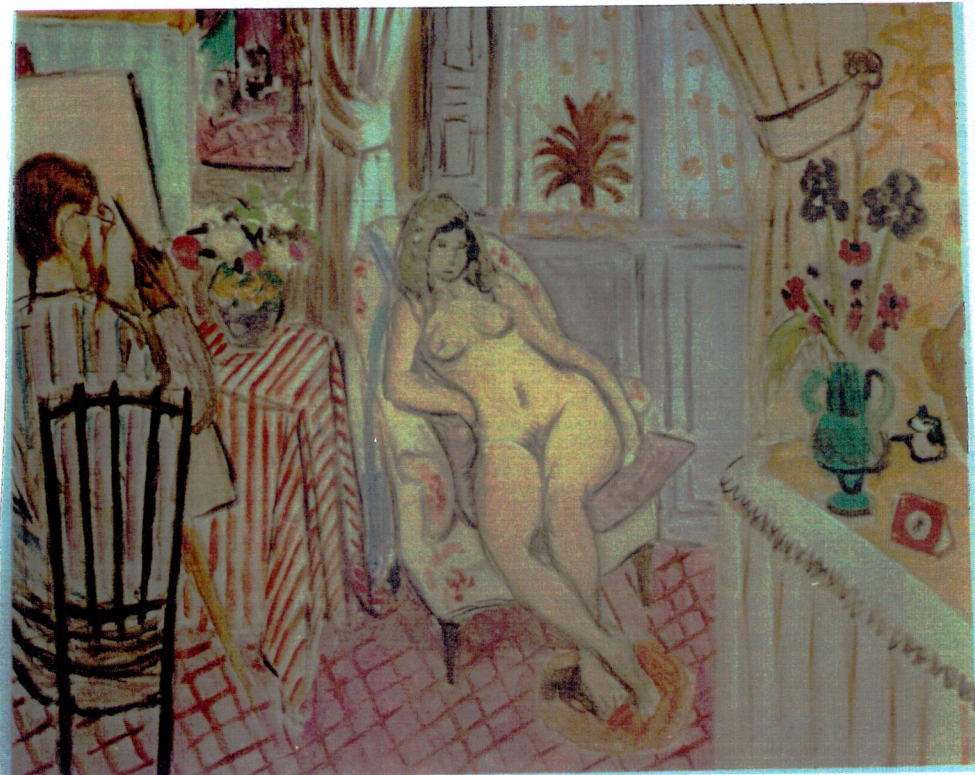


FIG. (xiv)

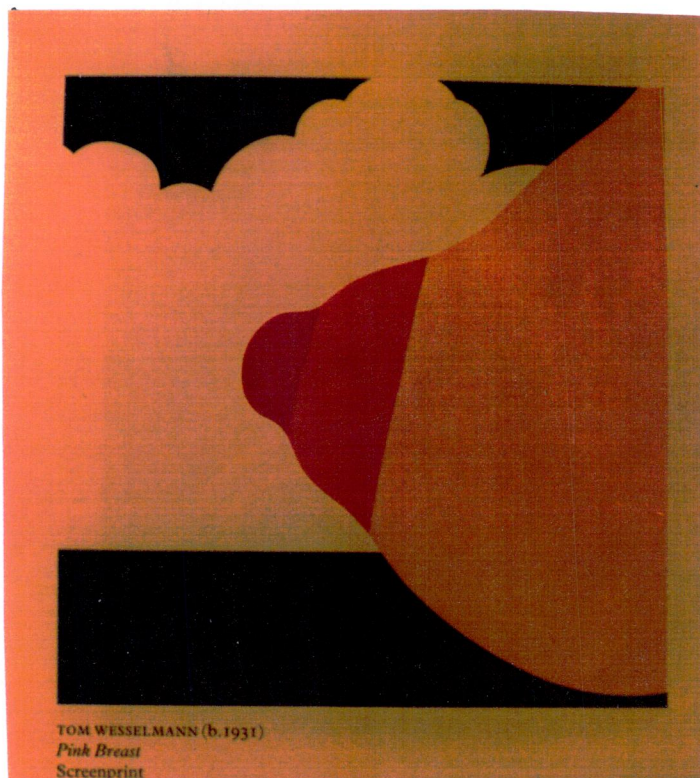


FIG. (xv)







anonymous item onto which he as an artist or as a lover can project his fantasies. In his painting The Artist and his Model (fig xiv) the female nude in the centre of the painting is indeed the passive item onto which he the active artist projects himself. She is the subject of art and he is the creator who will transform her.

Some male painters have in their work to some extent started to challenge this long term attitude to the female nude. The painter Tom Wesselmann has attempted to make obvious the way in which the female body has been abused in the past and today as a consumer product. In his paintings he regularly reduces the woman's body to a series of sexual tokens - the mouth, the breasts and the pubic area. There is a danger however that these paintings, such as Pink Breast (fig xv), rather than being seen as a criticism of the way in which the woman was and is portrayed can be seen as a continuation of the portrayal of woman as an anonymous sex object.

Because art itself has been a male domain historically, the same holds true for its female nudes. For centuries women have been alienated from images of their own bodies because these images have been presented to them by men who have portrayed the female nude as an erotic spectacle. This is not to say that women cannot 'appreciate' these images of the nude as much as men; but for the woman the experience of being a spectator to an image of her own sex as portrayed by a man is not always as straight forward. For the woman there is a discomfort in the identification that she makes with her own nude image. It is this discomfort that women painters in the past, (those who have been recorded in Art history) and today were and are dealing with in their own portrayals of the nude.







In 1971 Linda Nochlin wrote an essay entitled: Why have there been no great women artists? (34)

Her answer to the question was simple - women have been denied an education as artists.

In the past there were two main ways of studying to become a painter. The first of these was to work in an artist's studio from adolescence onwards and to learn the trade from the bottom up. From the sixteenth century onwards if one was to become a painter it was necessary to study painting in an academy. At these academies history painting was of vital importance. It involved subject matter taken from biblical and classical myths. The students were taught the skills necessary to produce these paintings. Neither of these ways were open to women. Painting was not considered a suitable career for women to pursue. Because of a lack of classical training it was not possible for women to reach the required standard, particularly the standard of the history paintings as they had never had the opportunity to draw from the naked body. It wasn't until the middle of the nineteenth century that women were allowed entry into art academies. Even then, all women students followed a different course to men. Female students were allowed to draw from the naked male model under the condition that the model wore bathing drawers and a cloth nine feet long and three feet wide which was to be worn over the drawers. Even for young men from the lower classes to whom the academies were not an option there was another path available. By learning a craft or skill they could then graduate into fine art. This was another path closed to women. For these reasons the woman who became recognised as a painter became a great exception. Painters like Lavinia Fontana, Artemisia Gentileschi, Rose Bonheur and Angelika Kauffmann are such examples. In Germain Greer's book The Obstacle Race she dedicated a chapter to Artemisia Gentileschi underneath the heading "The Magnificent Exception" (21 pg 189) which, for her time and considering







the difficulties she encountered along the way, she of course was.

The history of women painters however is not just a story of talented women who struggled in a man's domain under the persecution of envious male artists. If men were to have persecuted and excluded women they could have been making obvious their own insecurity. If they had done so the achievements of women artists might have come to light much sooner. A woman painter had a lot more to fear of vain praise than of brutal criticism. By patronising her with praise and flattery man disarmed her - sharp criticism might well have had the opposite effect. The art historian Vasari is an example of this way of dealing with women artists. When writing about the works of women painters he adopted a flattering tone which was not present when he was dealing with male painters. When he wrote about Safonisba Auguissola for example he was more interested in her as a prodigy of nature than as an accomplished artist.

Young female artists who had had no professional training were hungry for the approval of the professionals. This left them vulnerable to this false praise which was more humiliating and damaging to their work than anything else. There are several known female artists who continued to work under these disadvantaged conditions and of course countless more who are still unknown to us today. When speaking of woman's struggle in the artistic field one name immediately springs to mind. She lived an aggressive and exposed life and she never gave up her struggle for independence. She was Artemisia Gentileschi.







## GENTILESCHI

Artemisia Gentileschi was one of the great painters of the seventeenth century. For centuries several of her paintings have been mis-attributed to other male painters. She was born in 1593, and in 1610 at the age of seventeen produced the painting Susanna and the Elders (fig xvi). Scholars, however, have been divided in their attribution of the work between Artemisia and her father Orazio Gentileschi. The painting is inscribed - 'Artmetia/Gentileschi F/1610' on the lower left hand side. Even so Orazio was presumed to be the real painter on the grounds that the woman artist at seventeen was far too young to produce such an accomplished work. It wasn't until 1968 that a man called Ward Bissell established Artemisia's birthdate as 1593 and attributed Susanna and the Elders to her on stylistic grounds. In 1977 scholars in Los Angeles re-affirmed that the date on the painting was indeed 1610 and in Brooklyn in the same year it was established that the signature and date on the painting were an original part of it. Therefore, after much questioning the authenticity of Susanna and the Elders was proved and attributed to its rightful author. This painting confronts us with an unusually accomplished performance for such a young artist. However, it is the treatment of the theme of Susanna and the Elders that must at the end of the day convince us that it has to be an original by Artemisia Gentileschi. Like most portrayals of the Susanna theme the painting presents to us the moment of the return of the two elders to the garden to seduce Joachum's wife. It is the pose of the nude Susanna however which differs greatly from the way she is usually portrayed. The distinction can be clearly seen if we compare it with Tinteretto's painting of the same theme, discussed in chapter one. In Gentileschi's the whole poise of her body and particularly the positioning of her arms changes the image of Susanna from a sexually available object to an emotionally distressed woman. The







vulnerability and discomfort of Susanna forms the central theme of the painting and not the elders' anticipated pleasure. It is the rejection of the elders' seduction that is depicted and so the imagined consequence is not as in Tintoretto's version, a scene of seduction but rather one of rape.

Gentileschi also excluded the lush garden which is usually part of the scene and instead placed Susanna on a stone seat with the elders leaning behind. This eliminates any sense of comfort in the garden. This biblical story was distorted by the early Christian Church who named Susanna as they did Eve, the devil's temptress. It was taken up with relish by artists from the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as an excuse to display the female nude while at the same time the female can be blamed for her immorality. It is clear that this interpretation of the theme has prevailed because most artists and patrons have been males who instinctively identify with the elders rather than with Susanna. Gentileschi instinctively rejected this prevailing treatment of the theme. The simple fact that she was female explains her treatment of Susanna.

There is another event in Gentileschi's life which can be related to her execution of the theme. She was allegedly raped by a colleague of her father's in 1611. The man was put on trial and was acquitted and Artemisia gained the reputation of a wanton woman - a reputation which has persisted to this day. The powerful portrayal of Susanna as an innocent and vulnerable victim could well have arisen from personal experience of a similar situation. Historians who have recorded Artemisia Gentileschi's reputation have, one after another, repeatedly slandered her character, putting her rape and abandoning of her husband down to her own fault and have continued to debase her in her work itself. In Germaine Greer's book The Obstacle Race she quotes one critic as describing her masterpieces in Palazzo Pitti in 1822 as a '**dreadful**







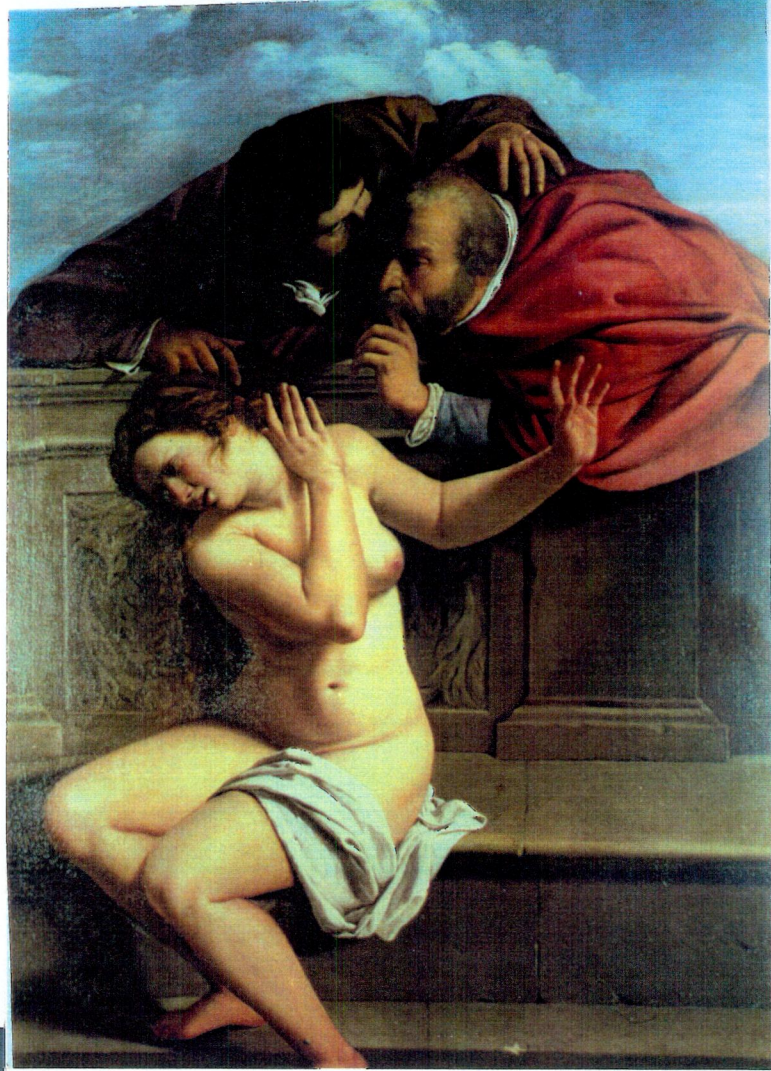
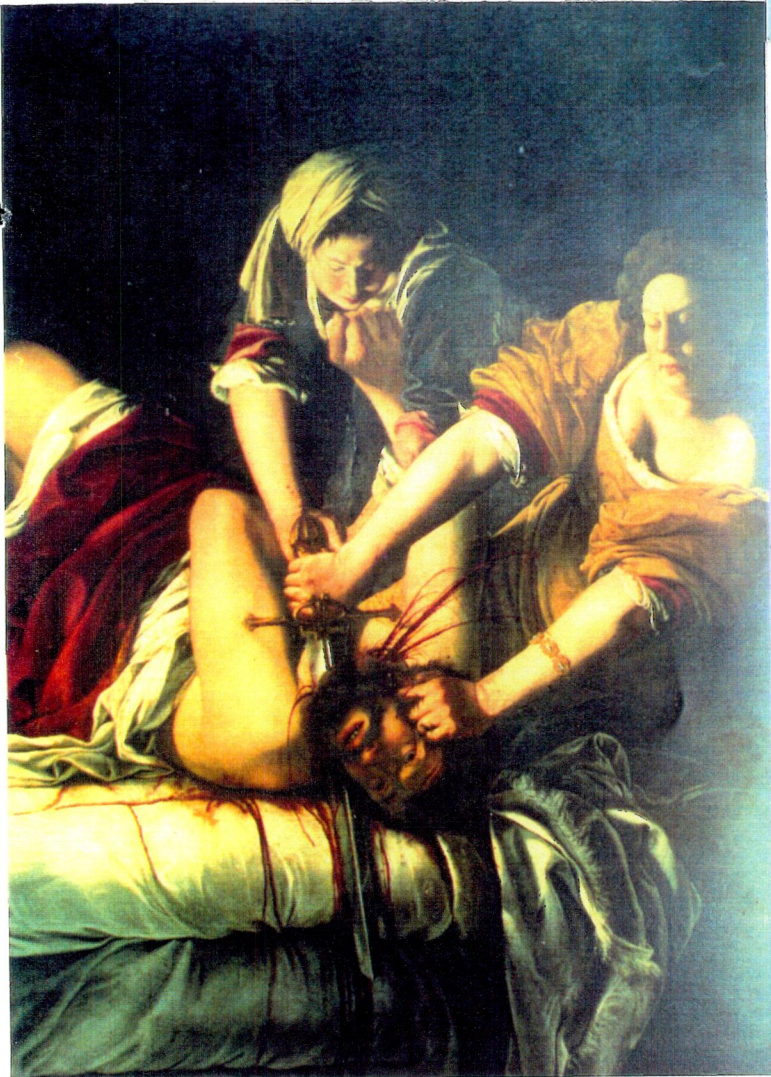
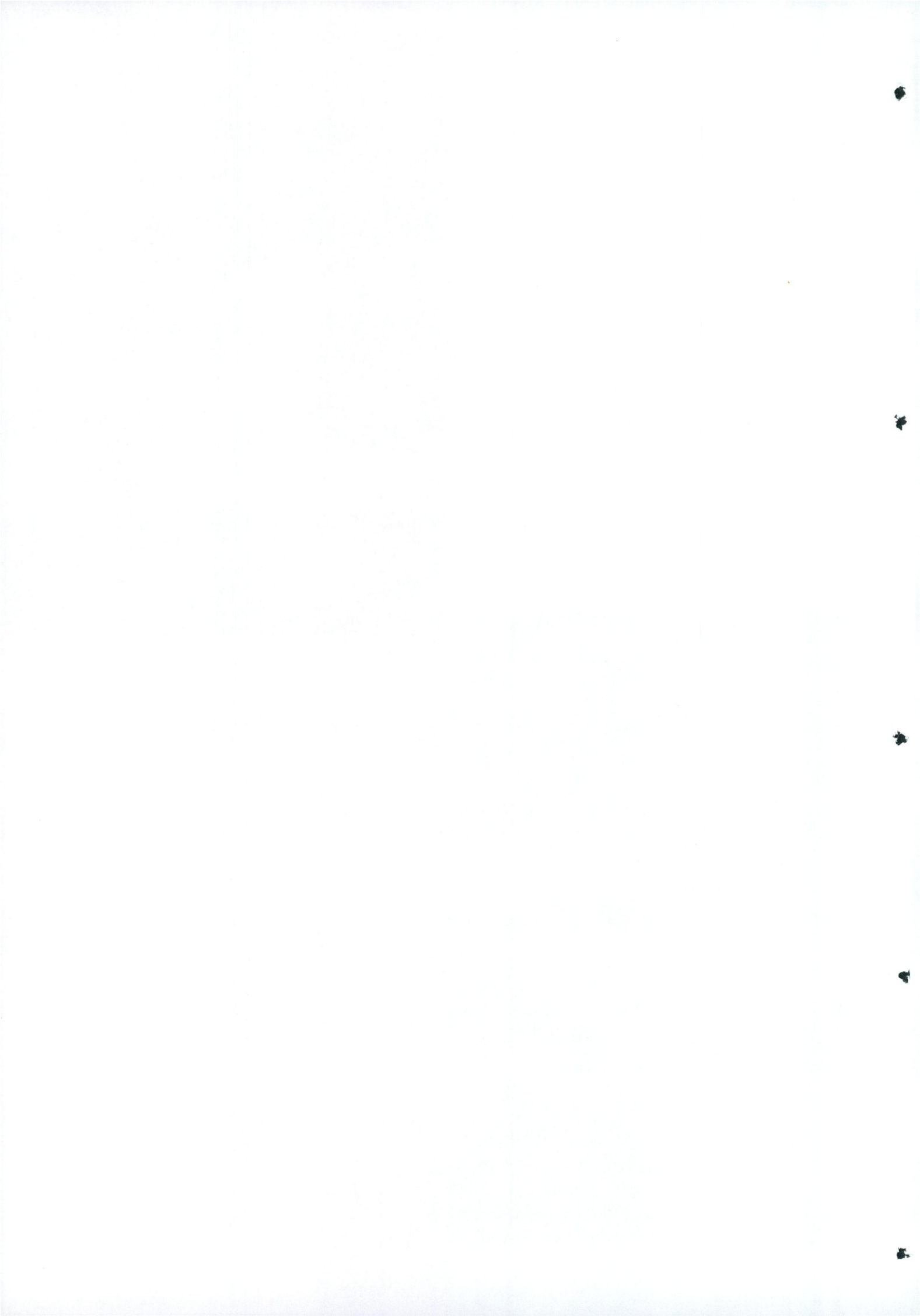


FIG. (xvi)









picture' and 'a proof of her genius and of its atrocious misdirection'. (21, pg 189) It is the painting Judith Beheading Hologernes. In its composition the focal point is the sword which hacks at the man's neck. When compared with Caravaggio's portrayal of the same theme it is void of decorative effect. All the tension is focused on the central act of decapitation. As in another painting by Gentileschi Judith and her Maidservant the women are figures of moral courage and carry out their deeds while remaining calm.

Today we see Artemisia Gentileschi as an exception to all the rules. She rejected the conventional stereotypic female role for a revolutionary one. Her approach to painting was unique. However, the price she paid for her individuality was high. In her lifetime and up to the present day her reputation as a person and an artist has been ravaged by a conventional and discriminatory society. She fought a long, hard battle for her place as an artist in a male dominated field, a battle which continues to the present day, and although its momentum has increased in more recent times, it is a long way from a satisfactory conclusion.

There have been many cases of mis-attribution of paintings in history. Perhaps one of the more well known of these was that of a portrait painting Mademoiselle Charlotte du Val d'Ognes (fig xvii). In 1922 it was purchased by the Metropolitan Museum in New York and was believed to be a David. It was described as "a perfect picture, unforgettable". It was also said that it was unusually informative for a David portrait. It is indeed a beautifully informative painting of a female artist who sits by a window. She and her drawing board are bathed in the light which enters through this window. However there has never been any mention made of an exhibit of this painting by David and one of the entries made which might relate to this painting appears under the name Constance







Marie Charpentier. In 1951 it was admitted by the Metropolitan that this painting might not be a David at all. Professor Sterling of the Metropolitan who had up to this found the painting so pleasing now found that it had cleverly concealed flaws. Finding out that the painting was feminine seemed to upset him further.

**'Its poetry, literary rather than plastic, its very evident charms and its cleverly concealed weaknesses, its ensemble made up from a thousand subtle artifices all seem to reveal the feminine spirit' (28, pg 64)**

The painting remained attributed to David until 1977. Sterling's statement is a clear example of the sexual bias which exists in the art world. His association of "weakness" within the feminine spirit and feminine art is an extension of the Eve syndrome which still affects ways of seeing and thinking today.

Very little is known about Constance Marie Charpentier. there has been little investigation of her other works and until there is, her personality and achievements as an artist will remain a mystery.

A painting by Césarine Davin-Mirvault Portrait of Antonio Bartolones Bruni was also mis-attributed to David until 1804 when Georges Wildenstein proved that it had to be a Mirvault because of the unusual posture of the subject's body. He sits, his body in profile with legs crossed and his head turned so as his face is seen frontally, illuminated by the light source. It was without doubt identified as a portrait by Mirvault. She was born in 1773, was a student of painting and established her own school of painting and drawing which was attended by many pupils. These are just two examples of fine female artists whose works and personalities were lost to the revered personality of David. However, the re-attribution of these paintings to their true painters has had only one major effect; a loss in the value of the paintings. Because the paintings, which were once regarded as masterpieces, had been discovered to have been executed by virtual unknowns









Pl. 16 Constance Marie Charpentier *Mademoiselle Charpentier*

FIG. (xvii)

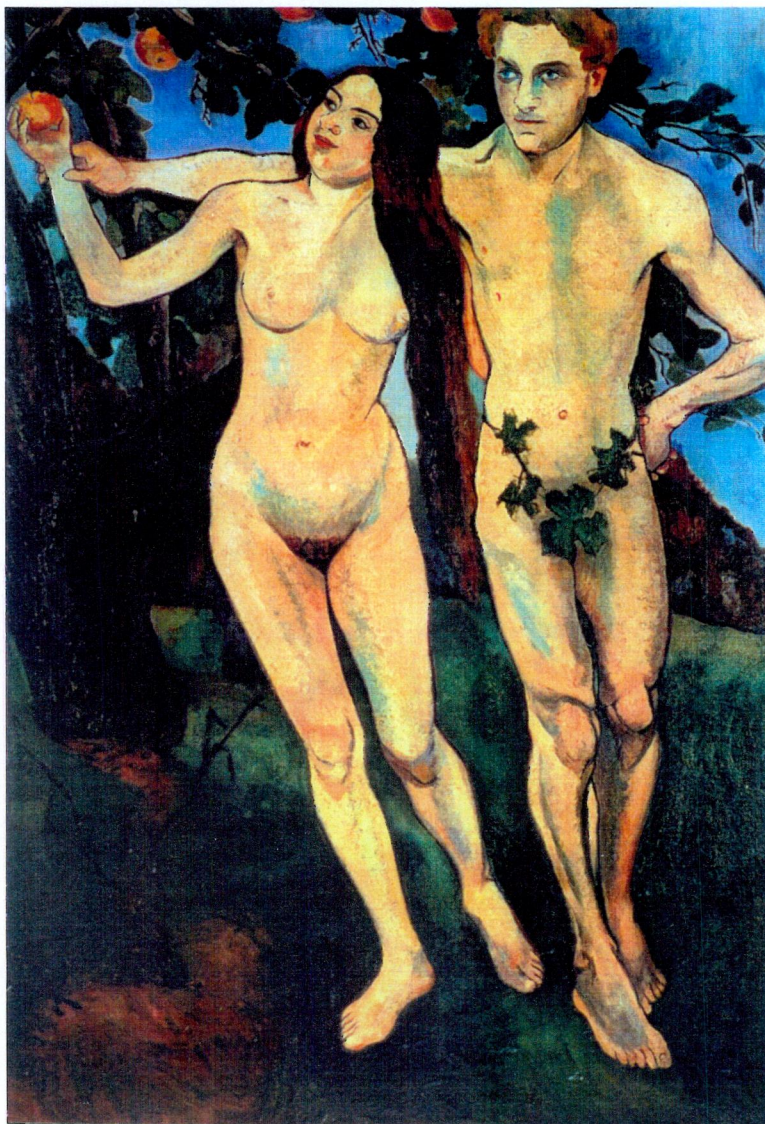


FIG. (xviii)







they slipped into the background. Because these eighteenth century works were painted by women and because these women painters were marked with the stigma of imitation, the aesthetic and commercial value of the works depreciated. The woman's individuality became a sign of failure to imitate properly.

One female painter who was accepted by her male contemporaries was Susanne Valadon (1865 - 1938). She has been named the best French woman painter. She was greatly admired by painters such as Degas, who described her paintings as 'hard', 'graceful' and 'malign (21, pg 142). Although she was impressed by much of the work of Renoir, Degas and Gauguin she retained her individuality and her boldness of execution. Being accepted by the male dominated art world did not feature as one of her ambitions as an artist. Her son Maurice Utrillo was enormously influenced by her work. In her painting Adam and Eve (fig xviii) her female genius is evident. Her rendering of the female body is sensuous and yet it has a strength and solidity in its heavy contours. There is an assertive sexuality in both figures and they are unashamedly naked, despite the foliage which decorates Adam's groin. They are bodies of substance. Both the male and female naked bodies are depictions of sexual vitality. They are void of sentimentality or idealisation. The uncompromising courage which is evident in her execution of her naked bodies is the same courage which enabled her to work and flourish as an artist. Susanne Valadon also dealt extensively with the male nude in paintings like Les Lanceurs de Filets. She turned to the subject with vigour and uniqueness and yet her paintings often reflect the relative social roles of men and women. However, she was undoubtedly an exception in her time and apart from Alice Neel is the only woman artist to have dealt seriously with the male nude until about thirty years ago.







Frida Kahlo was born in 1910. At the age of fifteen she was involved in a street car accident which crushed her pelvis and spine. From then on she lived in nearly constant pain, undergoing thirty five operations. It was after the accident that she began to paint. One of her main ambitions was to have a child by Diego Rivera. She married him when she was nineteen. In her painting she remained independent of her husband's style but the subject matter of her work was built around her deep love for him, a depth of love which he seemed incapable of returning. Her life of physical pain, her husband's unfaithfulness and recurring miscarriages were the subject matter for much of her work. The result was a collection of intense paintings, powerful because of their disturbing honesty. Germaine Greer speaks of her in her book;

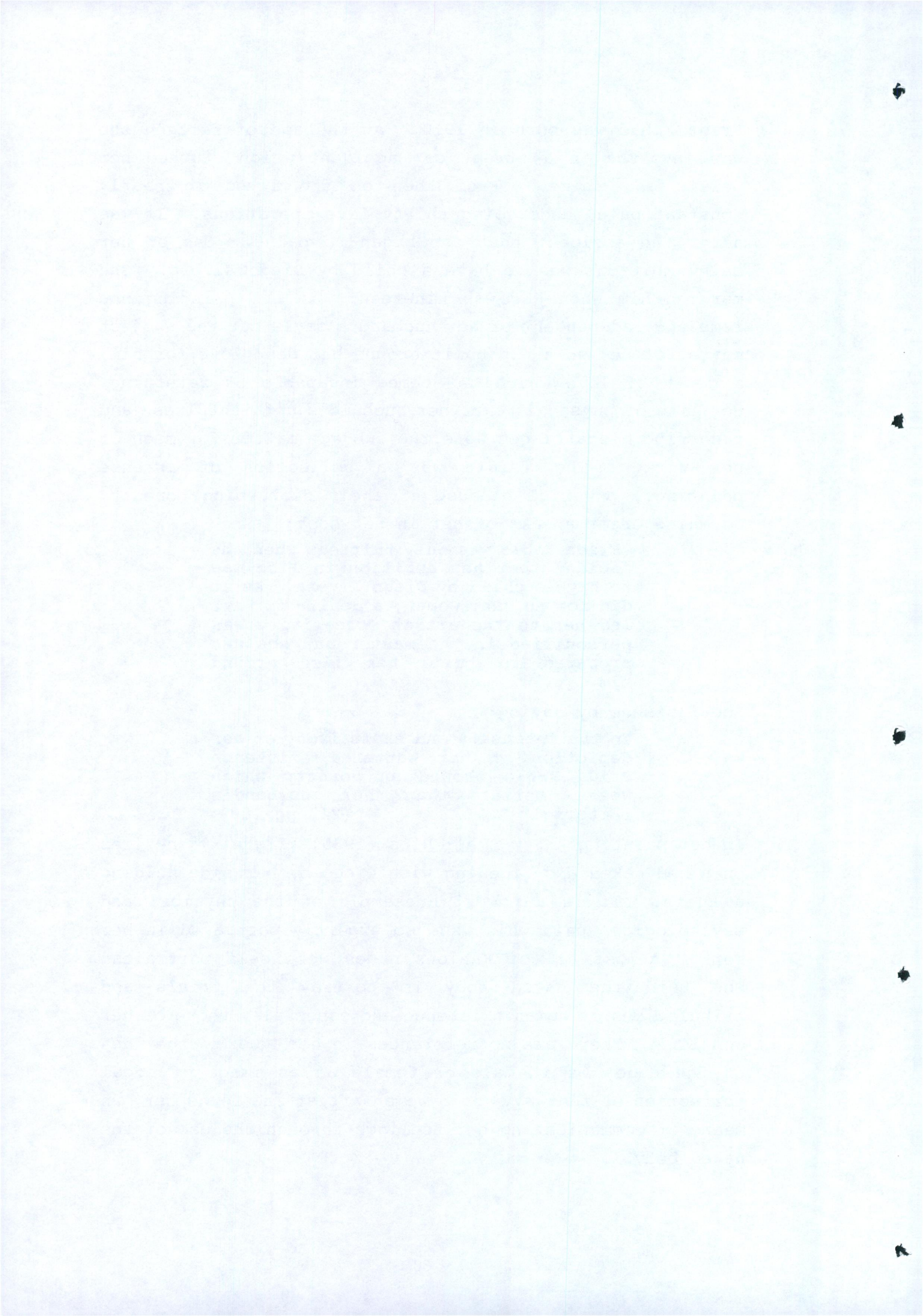
**'Frida Kahlo was only thirteen when she decided that her ambition in life was to have a child by Diego Rivera. As it did for so many women, a desire for art led her to the artist; creativity was personified in the master and she was prepared to build her life around him.....'**

She finishes by saying;

**In the intensity and sharp irony of her depiction of her battered existence Frida Kahlo showed an honesty which wears better than her husband's rhetoric' (21, pg 189)**

In her painting A Few Small Nips (1935) (fig xix) she lies on a bed naked and bleeding with Diego by her side holding a knife. It is a powerful example of the physical and psychological pain which she so expertly portrayed in her work. Almost all of Kahlo's nudes were self portraits. She used the naked body to portray the trials and tribulations of human existence and especially those of her own life. There are no references in her work to the idea of the nude, be it male or female as an image of ideal perfection or fantasy. As a woman artist she found her own means of communicating her feelings through the use of the naked body.





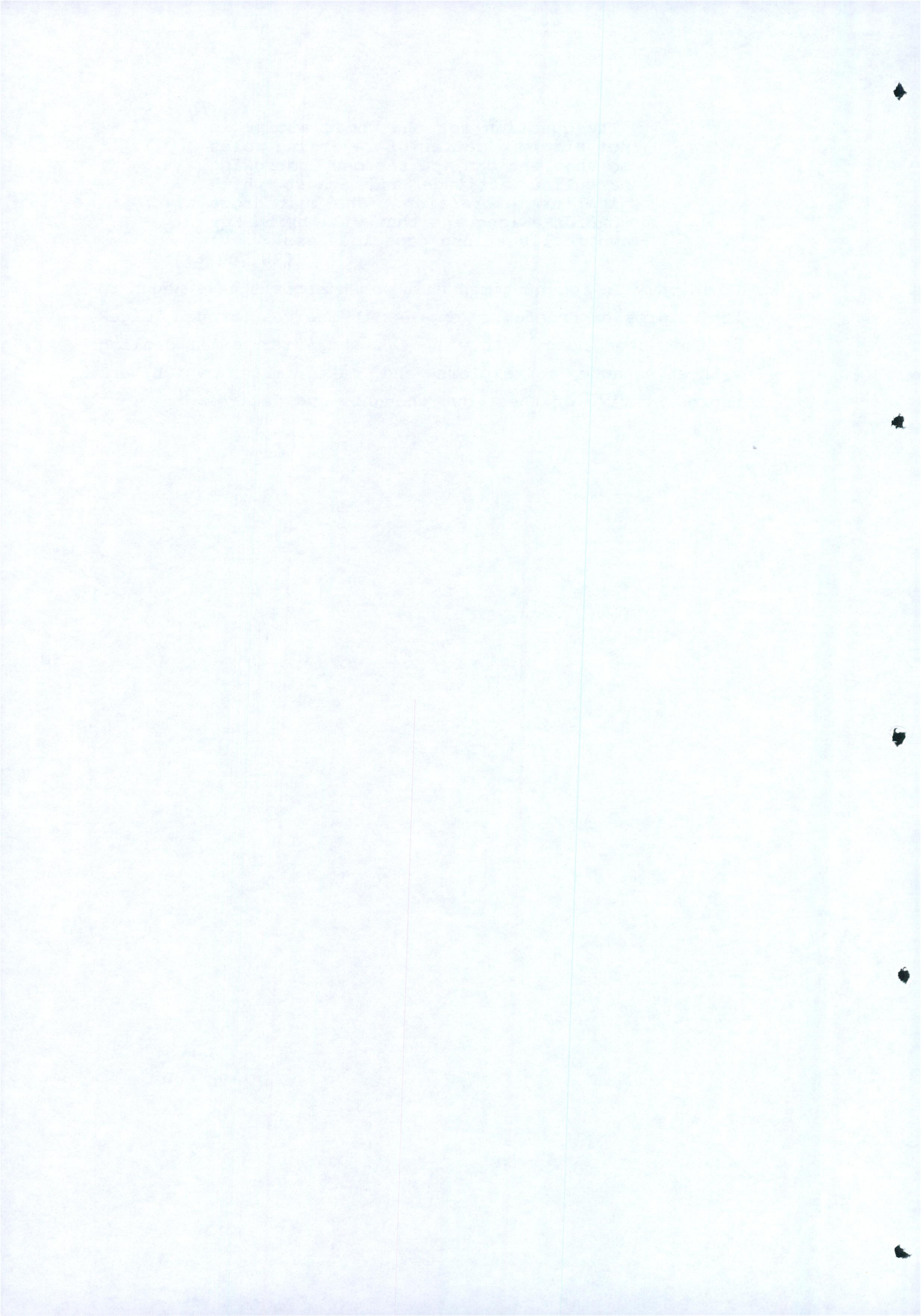


'The question for the woman artist is not simply a matter of reversing roles so that she can ape the man, borrowing masculine attitude and images which give them expression. She must grope towards a language that will bring her own feelings into consciousness'

(28, pg 64)

It is only in recent times that women artists have begun to feel a greater freedom to express themselves through images of the naked body. It will take time for women dealing with the nude to explore and make images which are representative of their own thoughts and desires.







## WOMEN'S IMAGES OF MEN

In Ways of Seeing John Berger tells us that -

'Women are depicted in quite different ways from men - not because feminine is different to masculine but because the ideal spectator is always assumed to be male and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him' (4, pg 64)

In Marcia Pointon's recent book Naked Authority she challenges Berger's assertion that 'men act and women appear'. She finds fault in the way he generalises on the subject of male and female social roles and their roles as nude figures in art -

'..... the series of premises with which the chapter opens and which propose woman's social presence as defining 'what can and cannot be done to her', have aroused surprisingly little criticism even though it is upon this sequence of grotesque generalisations that the subsequent discussion of "the category" of the nude in European oil painting is predicated' (41, pg 16)

His statement 'men act and women appear' (4, pg 46) is indeed striking as a generalisation but unfortunately it is relevant to a large percentage of relationships between men and women and also to the relationship of women to themselves.

Women for centuries have been forced to relate to images of their own sex which have been created by men. In our society men have been free to look at and comment openly on women whereas if a woman was to do so on men she would be seen as brazen or shameless. It was therefore very interesting when the tables were turned by an exhibition of women's art including several depictions of the nude male. Men were forced to look at images of their own sex as portrayed by women. The exhibition brought forth a sea of hostile reactions, received large numbers of visitors and unprecedented media coverage. It was called 'Women's Images of Men' and was opened in London on October 4th 1980. Thirty five women artists exhibited their work. The







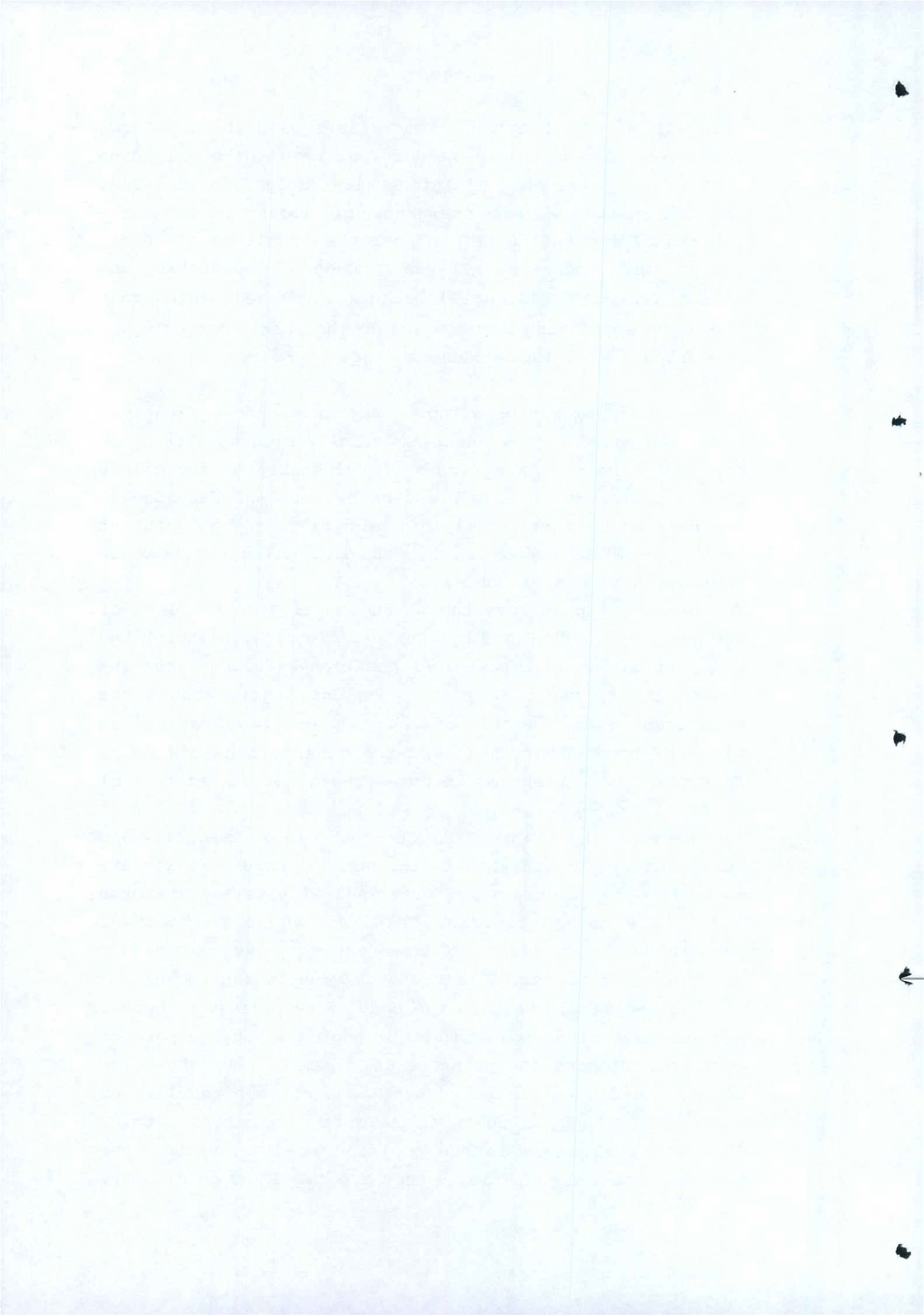
male was their subject but the artists used the male nude to explore topics which extended far beyond the male nude as flesh. It was an exhibition which brought three issues to the surface - the emergence of women artists, the rebirth of figurative art and the use of art as a vehicle for political comment. It was accused of '**scratching and biting savagery**' (28, pg 3) because it caused panic among those who were being scrutinised in the work - men were not comfortable with the sudden reversal of roles.

Deborah Law, in her painting of a couple, shows firstly a young man naked with a young woman fully clothed sitting on his lap. The man is a figure of vulnerability who clings to his partner with an expression of fear and dependence. His body is thin and frail, his head rests on the shoulder of the woman who supports him. She is a solid figure whose expression is one of concern.

In the second painting, the woman who sits on the lap of her partner is naked and her partner clothed. Although the woman is in the most powerless position by being naked and seated on the man's lap, it is he once again who is the more passive and fearful of the couple. She cradles him with one hand on his head and the other around his back. This time her expression is more tragic and his is full of fear.

In this painting the man takes on the role of passivity and vulnerability. What then is the woman's role? It is very much that of the comforter, which almost always transforms her into a mother figure. This happens in the case of Deborah Law's painting to some extent. We can almost immediately compare the role of the young woman to that of the Blessed Virgin holding the body of her dead son. Other artists have also shown images of the male body in passive positions without the presence of a female. By absenting women, man can be placed in positions of vulnerability on their own without a woman to take on the maternal role. Thus men are placed in the position to which women have been subject for centuries - they are naked and on display.







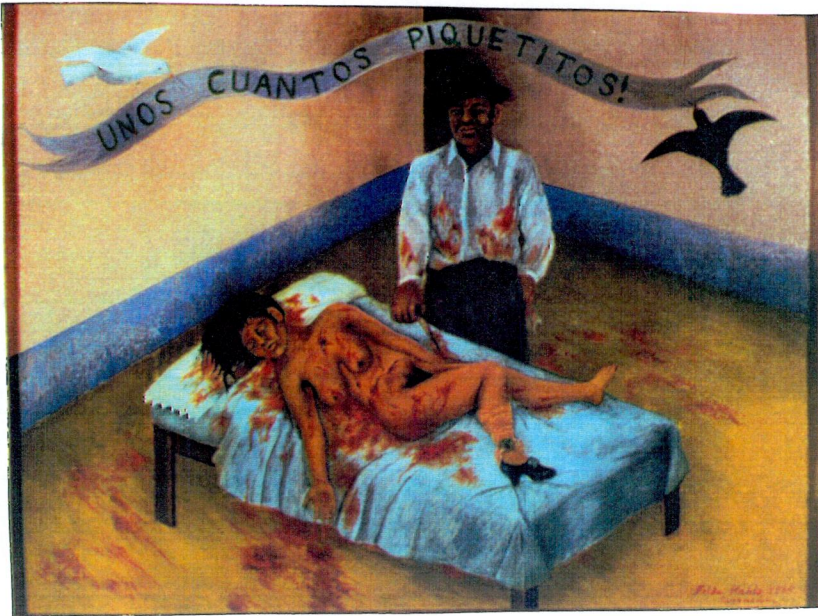


FIG. (xix)



52 Elena Samperi, *Madonna*, 1979

FIG. (xxi)

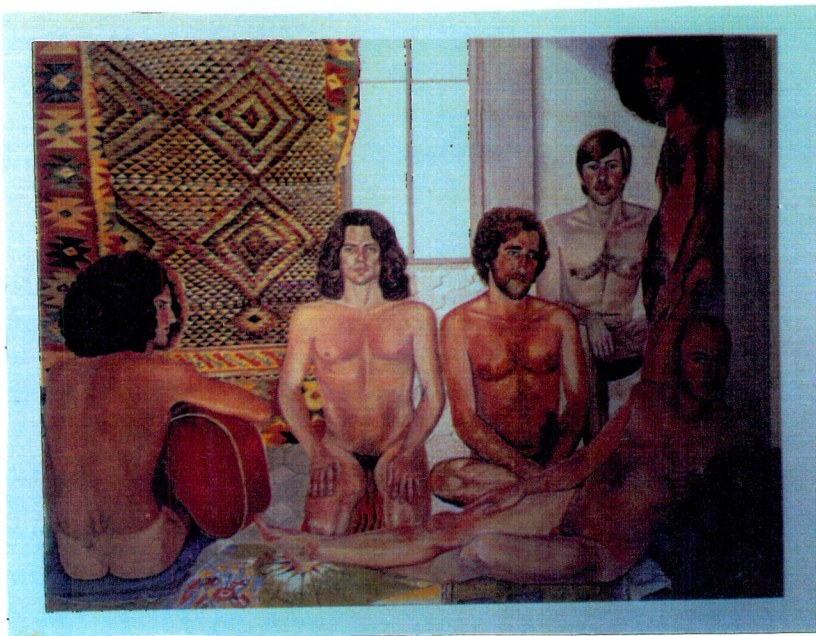


FIG. (xii)



51 Jenni Wittman, *Untitled*, oil on board, 1978

FIG. (xx)







In Jenni Wittman's painting (fig xx) a young man sits on an armchair. He is clothed to the waist and endowed with an erect penis. His eyes cannot be seen behind his glasses and his right leg is severed below the knee. The obliteration of his eyes leaves the man void of personality and the amputation of his leg renders him both helpless and unreal. His mutilation is executed coolly by the artist. Amputation and blinding are also symbols of castration. It was paintings like this which caused uproar and accusations of man-hating and penis-envy and yet painters like Picasso were happy to distort and draw attention to the female body and in particular the female breasts and genital region without the blinking of an eyelid. It is worth noting that the same painters when dealing with the penis treated it with great care and depicted it as a powerful tool.

The portrayal of the female nude as an object of male fantasy has been discussed in the work of Ingrés, Renoir, Klimt and others. Women artists have also indulged in fantasy in their portrayals of the male nude. It is inevitable that both men and women will express in their art, fantasies and desires which have been engendered in both by a sexist society. In women's art the re-occurrence of the invalided man is the result of a reaction by women to unequal power relations between the sexes. **'Men divide women into Madonnas and whores while women explain, excuse and shrug off the indignities they suffer at the hands of men by characterising them as helpless little boys.'**

(28, pg 69) Male and female relationships are unequal and therefore women's images of men in art reflect these inequalities.

**"Most men at one time or another have suffered fears of sexual inadequacy and the actual embarrassment of premature ejaculation - and do not want to be reminded of these tortures. As a concept 'penis envy' tells us more about male castration anxieties and fears of sexual incompetence than it does about women's sexual identity"**







The artist Alexis Hunter in her painting Considering Theory shows a woman in conflict with the phallic serpent. The painting is an attack on those who have restricted and stifled woman's individual expression. Painters like Eileen Cooper celebrated motherhood by showing the woman active rather than passive as a mother. The mother as a powerful figure dominates her paintings. She depicts their nurturing role and portrays the woman as a creator. She is powerful in nature and in her nakedness.

In Madonna by Elena Samperi (fig xxi) the adult male is depicted as an infant viciously suckling on the breast of a woman. This painting met with an outcry from critics who accused the artist of 'female bitchiness' and hatred of men. The painting is a statement about the nurturing which the woman offers to the physically and emotionally dependent man who returns it with spite and disrespect. Critics accepted that the show 'Woman's Images of Men' exposed two important truths - that women were under-represented in the art world and that women's different social experience brings a different experience to their art. Beyond this their reactions to the exhibition differed greatly. Some saw the artists as being sympathetic to men while others claimed that the work was a savage attack on them. They praised the work which they saw as sympathetic, seeing tenderness and compassion as feminine qualities. It was the presence of the penis depicted openly and the presence of humour and anger in the work that the critics found difficult to accept as they were characteristics in art which they considered 'unfeminine'.

Another exhibitor Jacqueline Morreau uses the naked body extensively in her painting. She has worked to re-interpret myths and to re-state the positions of characters like Eve and Pandora who have been depicted as sources of sin and evil in the past. Morreau depicts roles which have been distorted by history and reinstates women in positive





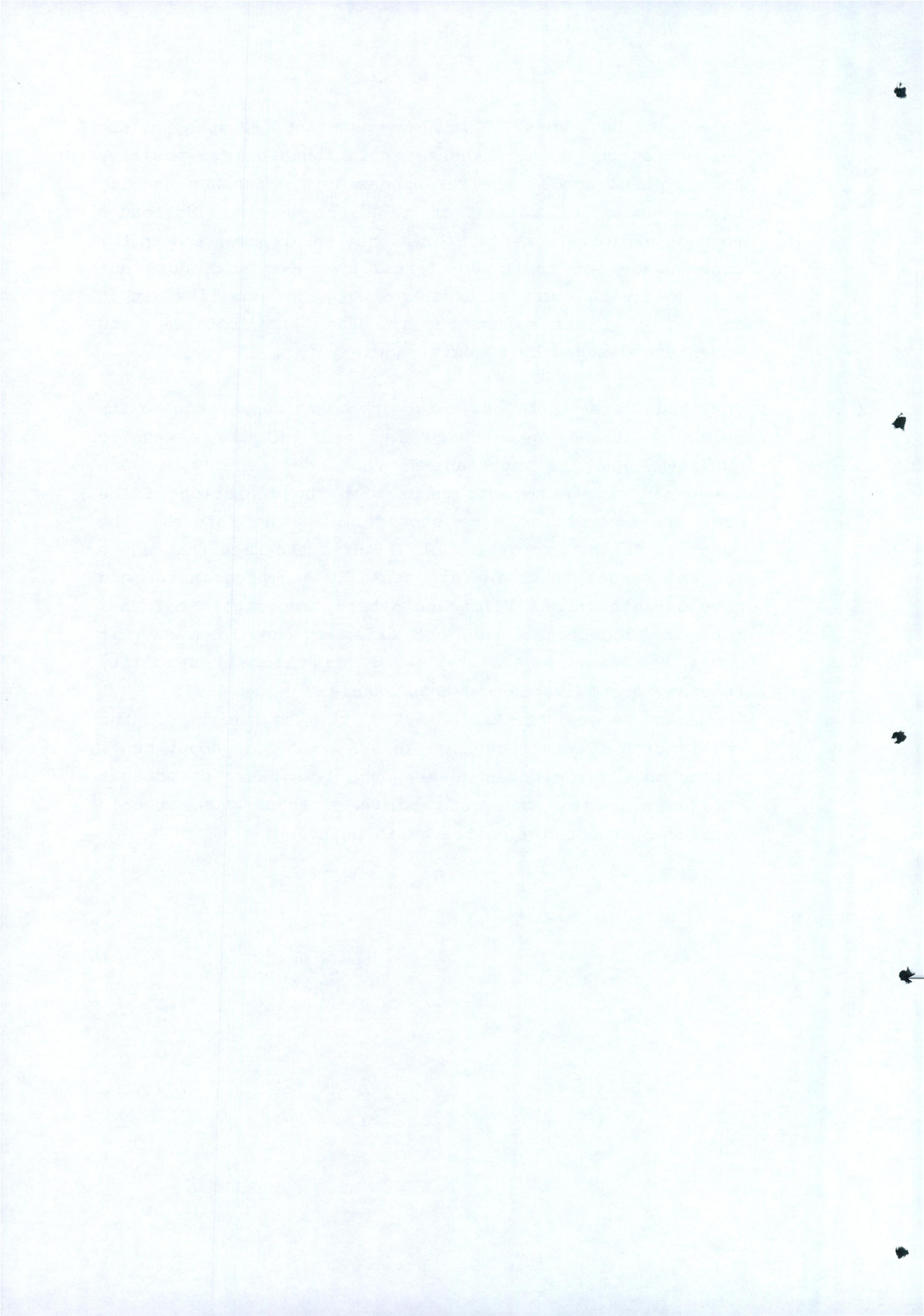


roles in her work. In her painting Persephone she celebrates the mother/daughter relationship as a positive and powerful bond. The Persephone myth which has usually been reduced to scenes of rape, however in Morreau's version explores women's ambivalence towards men and to the consequences of their own fertility. Her work does not only deal with woman's hardship. In paintings like Within the Apple II she emphasises the fact that both men and women are damaged by a sexist society.

The issue here is not how this work bears comparison to its male orientated antecedents in terms of its aesthetic quality. What is important is that now, finally, we can see women try to come to terms with the depiction of the nude and how it might or should be in the future. The reaction to the exhibition highlighted the fact that while violent sexual fantasies are socially accepted in men and have outlets in sex films and other pornographic material the same acceptance does not exist in any form when it comes to female sexuality. Assertive female sexuality remains inconceivable and unspeakable.

'Women's Images of Man' marked the beginning of the realisation that although we know a good deal about men's attitudes towards women we are much less aware of women's attitudes towards men and are taken aback when women's attitudes are openly portrayed in painting.







## CONTEMPORARY WOMEN ARTISTS

The painter Sylvia Sleigh has constantly struggled with the problems of the use of the male nude in her work. In her larger-than-life painting Double Image the male nude is painted with his back to us and his frontal image is reflected in a mirror. His body hair is exactly and intensely rendered with singular brush strokes. He returns the stare of the spectator. A judge attempted to ban the picture from a New York exhibition in the mid-seventies. In Michael Gill's book Images of the Body he states that

**'Sleigh's purpose in painting the opposite sex was to celebrate it in a gentle and humanistic manner, quite the contrary to the intention of Picasso, many of whose paintings of women were meant as a violent attack on the traditional veneration of female beauty and ideal form'**

(20, pg 32)

In her painting The Turkish Bath (fig xxii) her portrayal of nude men is passive and is contrary to the usual active portrayal of the nude male. They are lazy and relaxed creatures. Yet in contrast to Ingrés Turkish Bath, Sleigh's nudes are painted as individuals rather than sex objects.

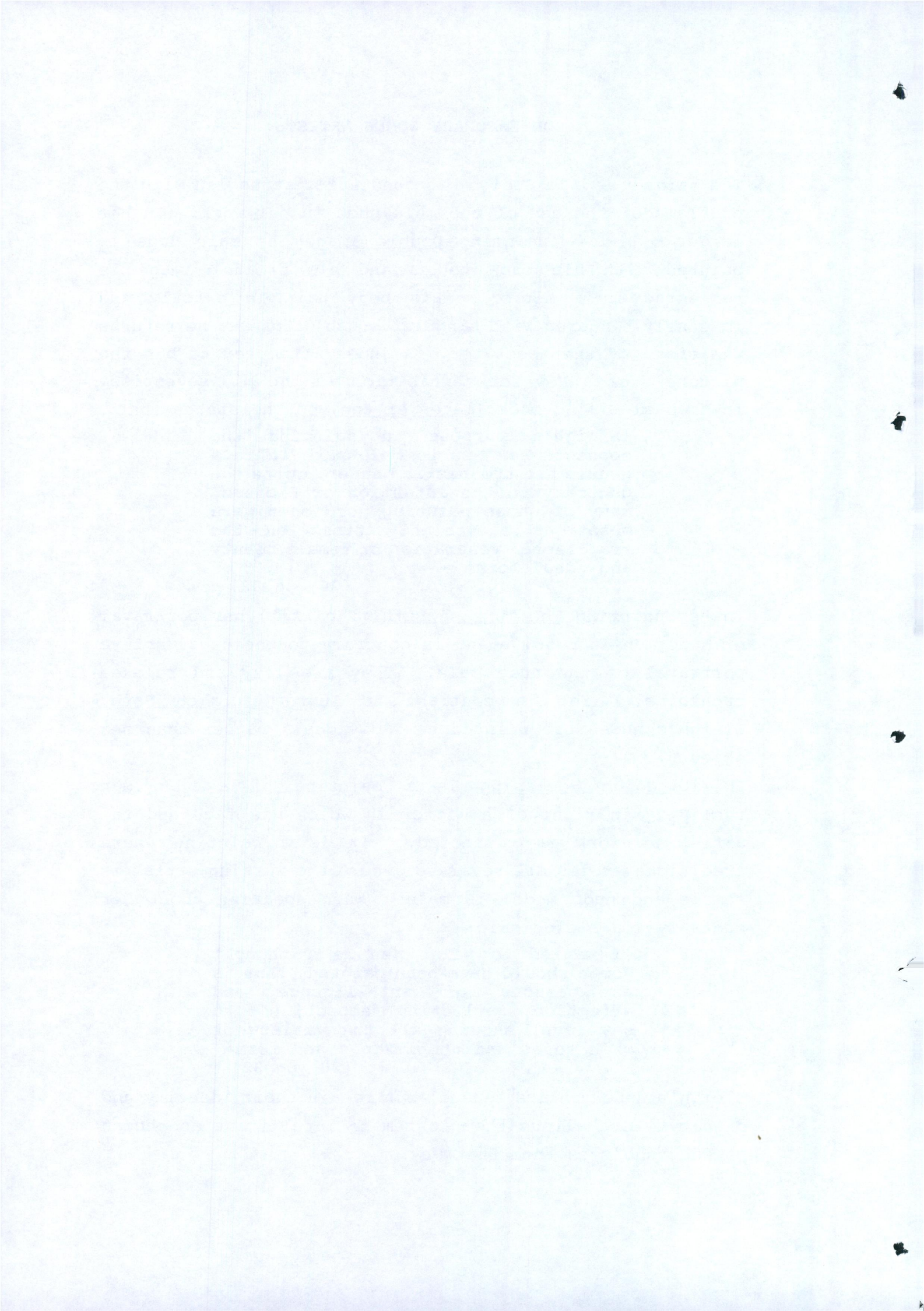
Philip Golub Reclining is a painting of a nude man reclining in front of a mirror in which his face and the artist at work is reflected. It is a painting where traditional roles are reversed, where the working artist is female and nude model is male. When speaking about her nudes Sylvia Sleigh said;

**'I wanted to paint men as I thought women should have been painted, that is as persons of intelligence and affection, reflecting respect, not to say love, showing all the variety of skin tones and complexions and form'**

(20, pg 32)

Sleigh's nude men are sensual but retain their identity and dignity. She allows them to remain intelligent and human because she sees them that way.







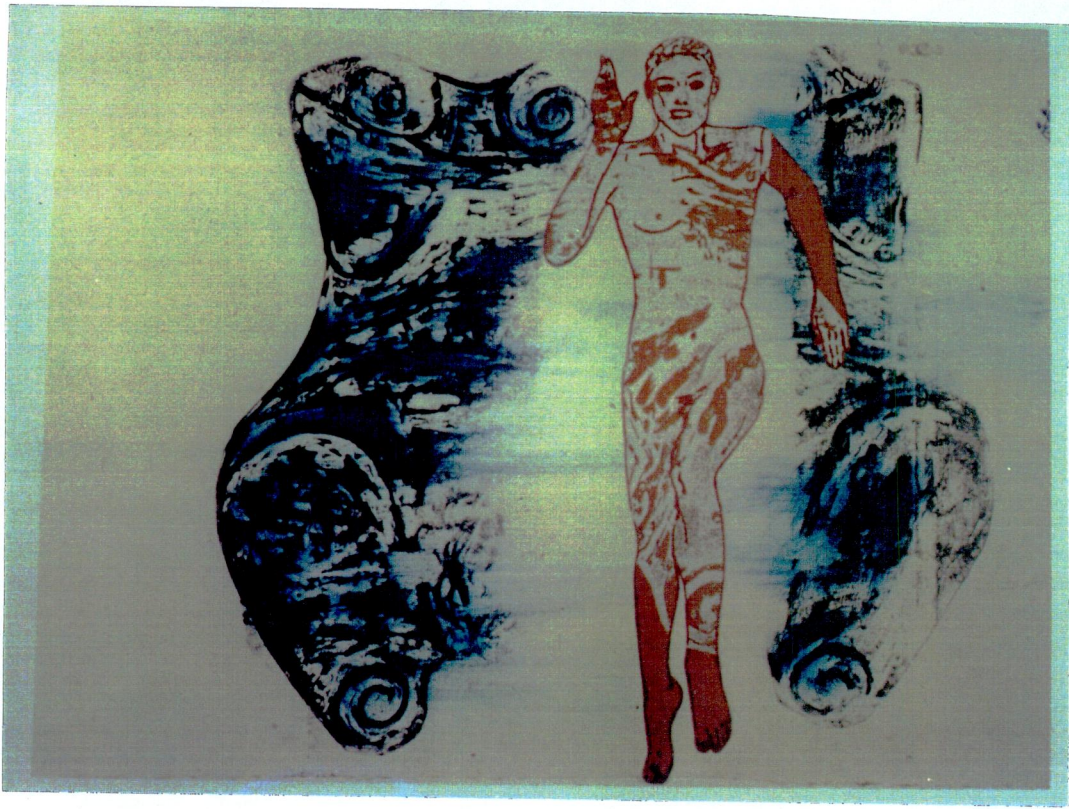


FIG.(xxiii)

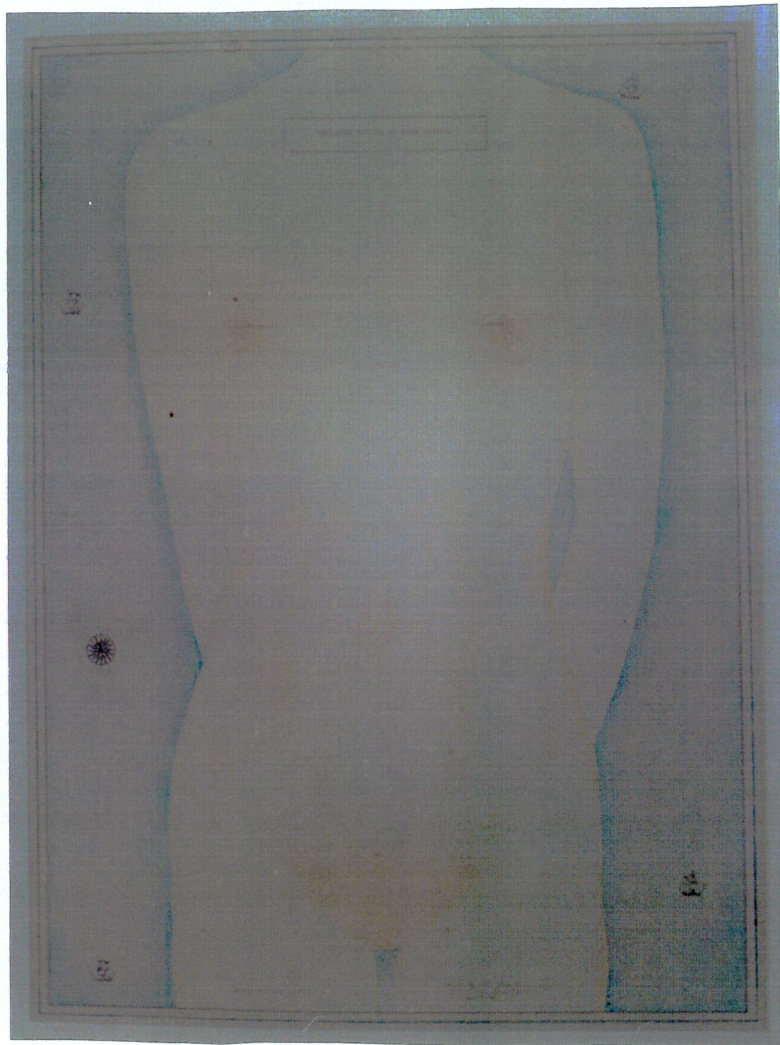


FIG.(xxiv)







In 1974 Nancy Spero decided that 'woman' would be the subject matter of her future works. She started to create images of women for the female spectator as well as for the male. Her women are energetic and powerful. She works on strips of paper which can extend to 33.5 metres long. She began with images of torture which in her later works have become images of victory. In The Rebirth of Venus (fig xxiii) she uses two contradictory images of woman. The active female athlete running towards us gloriously and the severed figurine of a prehistoric Venus which is heavy and static. Venus is reborn and has control of her own body. It is a rejoiceful image not only for women but for humanity.

**'We think back through our mother if we are women. Masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice'**

(28, pg 64)

Women artists have been at the disadvantage of there being an absence of tradition and code from which they could borrow to depict their thoughts and feelings. Women today are striving to re-represent the female from the experience of being a woman. The Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin held a series of five exhibitions from September 1990 to March 1991. One of these artists, Kathy Prendergast, redraws the female body as a map. In works like Enclosed World in Open Spaces (fig xxiv) she maps the woman's body with the intimacy and care that only comes from knowledge of that body. Alice Maher rejects conventional representations of the woman. She depicts the woman energetic and fighting through fields of contradictory influences, religious and historical, drawing from personal experience of a rural and catholic Ireland and all the taboos that exist within it. In Celebration Robes religious and historical bias against women is challenged. Women were barred from wearing sanctified robes because they were considered unclean during menstruation and after childbirth. In Celebration







Robes Alice Maher creates a new robe which celebrates this 'uncleanness'. Her work is mostly large scale and her use of colour and the figure is energetic and dramatic.

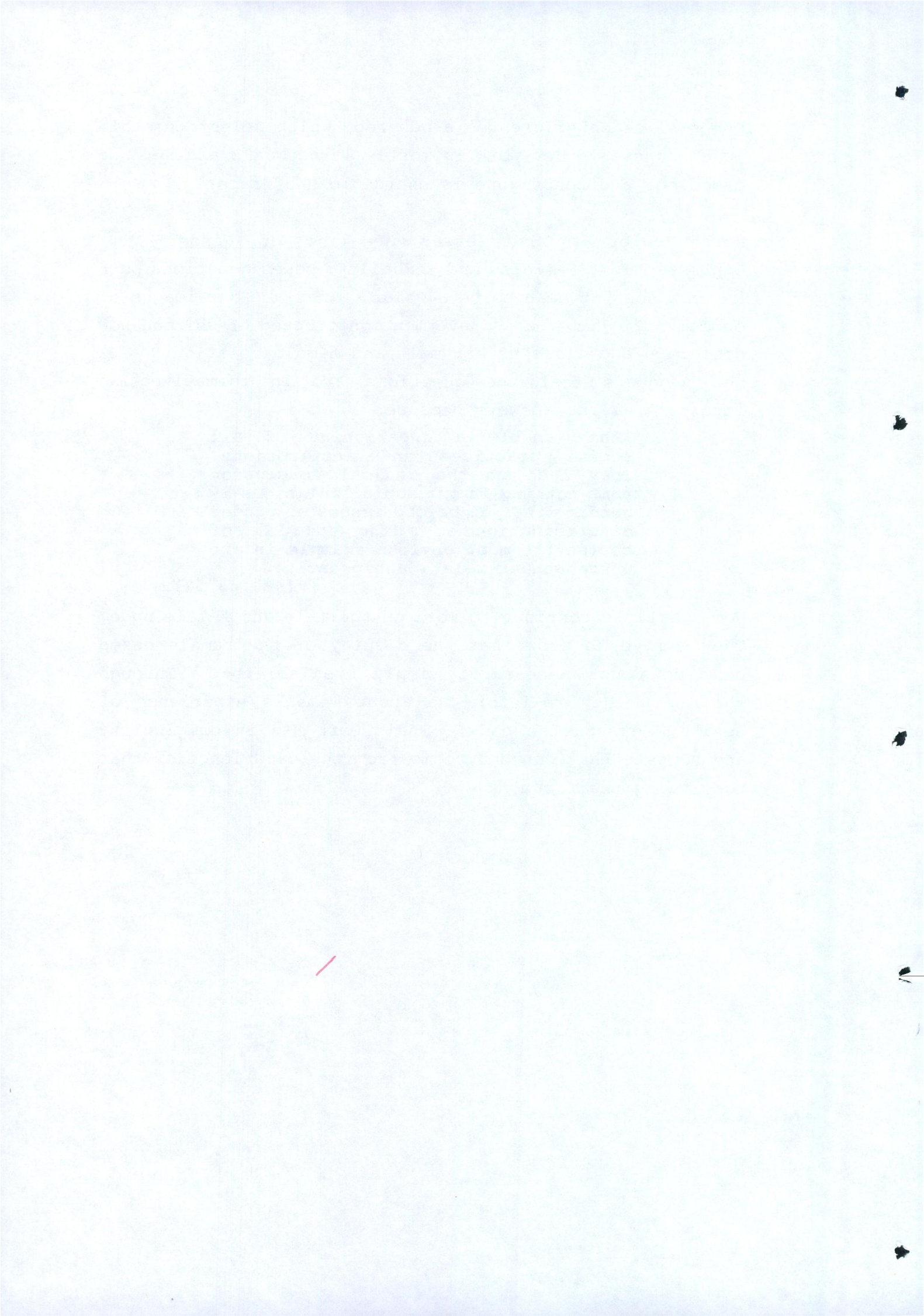
Joan Fowler in her essay Speaking of Gender .... Expressionism, Feminism and Sexuality, poses questions such as what does it mean to be a woman? What are our images of ourselves? What images have men constructed of us? and how does race and class effect male and female relations? She suggests that the questions are in themselves as important as the answers because

**'they enable a questioning of all social practices and institutions. They lead to the radical conclusion that nothing in our social relations is gender free, or beyond issues of gender discrimination .... The nude is of course the most obvious example in art where gender relationships arise.'**

(48, pg 57)

Woman artists continue to work on the male and female nude. They strive to show that the display of the female naked body does not necessarily imply availability. Through their art they re-inform us about women's experience of desire, sex and the body. Their work has an originality and honesty that can only come from the experience of that body being their own.







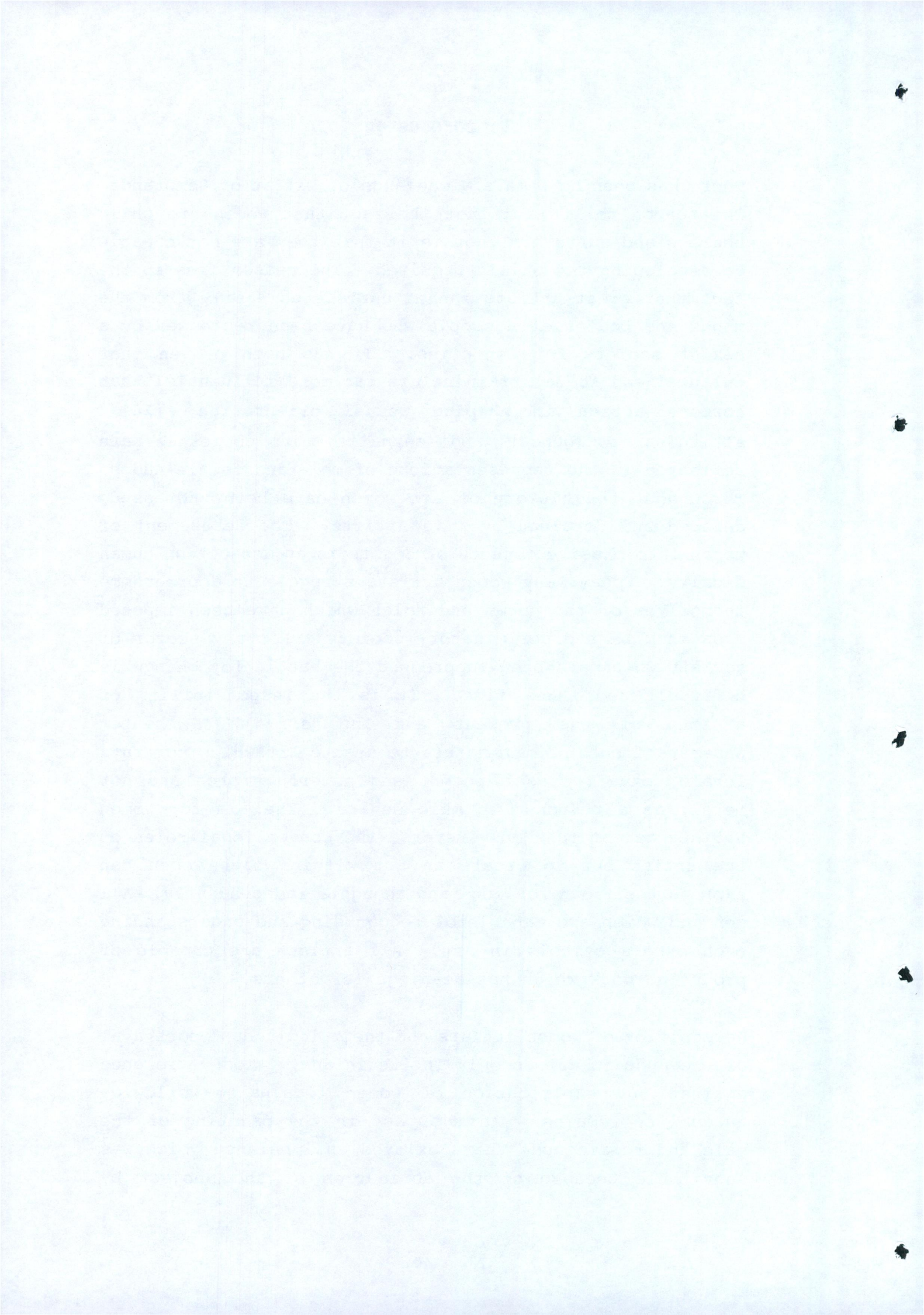
## CONCLUSION

There has been no female Michelangelo, Titian or Rembrandt. The reason for this is not the fact that women are child bearers and nurturers, nor is it that they are not capable of developing the skills required. The reason lies in the fact that great artists cannot surface so easily from the minds and bodies of a people who have been repressed by a sexist society for centuries. It has been proven that **cultural and social training are far more influential than hormone action in shaping sexual orientation. (26)**

Attitudes to gender and sexuality in societies are reflected in the representations of male and female nudes. Throughout the history of art women have been undressed, defaced and devalued by male artists. The debasement of women into passive objects of desire is an assault on human dignity. Today many women artists struggle to deprogramme themselves of the norms and roles which have been imposed upon them by a discriminatory society. For any sector of society which has been suppressed the battle for change is difficult and takes time. It is the responsibility of artists of the present and future with a better understanding of human nature to create art which portrays female sexuality as a potent and powerful force and not merely as a response to male desire. The aim for women artists is not to simply reverse the conventional roles of the artist but to create an art within which women can express their own feelings and thoughts independently. All men and women are capable of recognising and understanding each others symbols in art. All artists are capable of producing work which has meanings for others.

Recognition of women artists and their individual portrayal of the nude in art is only in its infancy. Today violence against and exploitation of women remains - worldwide inequality remains. In the past in the painting of the male and female nude there existed an imbalance which was inevitable because of the domination of the subject by

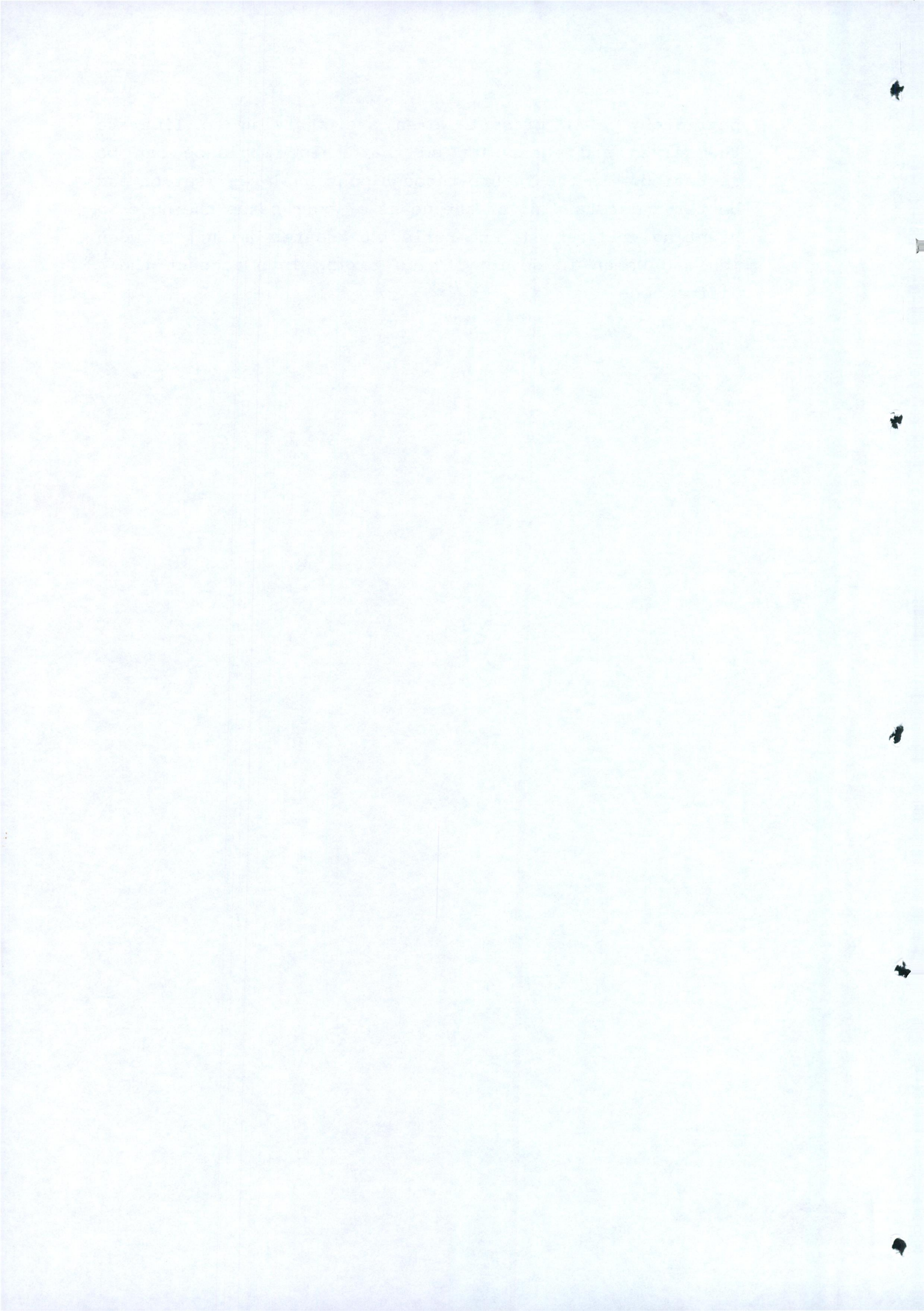






patriarchy. At present women are striving to liberate themselves and their art so that this imbalance can be rectified. In the future through continual realisation and better understanding of the needs of both sexes the nude in painting will rebuild and reflect a greater balance between men and women in society while taking into account their differences.







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