

The Reclining Nude



Giorgione

Sleeping Venus c1510

The painting, one of the last works by Giorgione, portrays a nude woman whose profile seems to follow that of the hills in the background. Giorgione put a great deal of effort into painting the background details and shadows. The choice of a nude woman marked a revolution in art, and is considered by some authorities as one of the starting points of modern art. The painting was unfinished at the time of his death. The landscape and sky were later finished by Titian, who later painted the similar Venus of Urbino.

Underlying erotic implications are made by Venus's raised arm and the placement of her left hand on her groin. The sheets are painted in silver, being a cold colour rather than the more commonly used warm tones for linens, and they are rigid looking in comparison to those depicted in similar paintings by Titian or Velázquez. The landscape mimics the curves of the woman's body and this, in turn, relates the human body back to being a natural, organic object.



Titian

Venus of Urbino 1538

The *Venus of Urbino* depicts a nude young woman, identified with the goddess Venus, reclining on a couch or bed in the sumptuous surroundings of a Renaissance palace. It hangs in the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence. The figure's pose is based on Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus* (c. 1510), which Titian completed. In this depiction, Titian has domesticated Venus by moving her to an indoor setting, engaging her with the viewer, and making her sensuality explicit. Devoid as it is of any classical or allegorical trappings – Venus displays none of the attributes of the goddess she is supposed to represent – the painting is unapologetically erotic.

The Venus stares straight at the viewer, unconcerned with her nudity. In her right hand she holds a posy of roses whilst she holds her other hand over her genitals. In the near background is a dog, often a symbol of fidelity. Titian contrasts the straight lines of the architecture with the curves of the female form, and the screen behind Venus bisects the painting, a large-scale division that is mitigated by unifying elements such as the use of colour and the floral patterns of the couch, cassoni, and background tapestries.



Sleeping Venus 1520

Girolamo da Treviso



Venus, Love and a Satire 1553/4

Bronzino



Sleeping Venus 1625

Artemesia Gentileschi

The Italian artist, Gentileschi, learnt her trade in her father's workshop. She visited England, along with her father, summoned to the court of Henry VIII. *The Sleeping Venus* is testimony to her assimilation of the lessons of Venetian luminism.



Velasquez

Rokby Venus c1650

The work depicts the goddess Venus in a sensual pose, lying on a bed and looking into a mirror held by the Roman god of physical love, her son Cupid. The painting is in the National Gallery, London.

Numerous works have been cited as sources of inspiration for Velázquez. Girgione's *Sleeping Venus*, (c. 1510) and Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1538), were the main precedents. In this work, Velázquez combined two established poses for Venus: recumbent on a couch or a bed, and gazing at a mirror. She is often described as looking at herself on the mirror, although this is physically impossible since viewers can see her face reflected in their direction. This phenomenon is known as the Venus effect. In a number of ways the painting represents a pictorial departure, through its central use of a mirror, and because it shows the body of Venus turned away from the observer of the painting.



Borghese Hermaphrodite

Hellenic, Roman copy



Boucher

Miss O'Murphy 1751

Contemporary and modern historiography concur in identifying Marie-Louise O'Murphy as the very young model who posed for the *la Jeune Fille allongée* (the lying Girl), also known as *l'Odalisque blonde* (the Blonde Odalisque), of François

Boucher, a painting famous for its undisguised eroticism, dating from 1752. Two versions of this painting have survived, both conserved in Germany, one in the Alte Pinakothek at Munich and the other in the Wallraf-Richartz Museum at Cologne. Boucher, at the height of his fame, had made a specialty of these deliberately licentious nudes, represented in lascivious poses outside a mythological context. Casanova relates that he found her "a pretty, ragged, dirty, little creature" of thirteen years in the house of her actress sister. Struck by her beauty when seeing her naked, however, he had a nude portrait of her painted, with the inscription "O-Morphi" (punning her name with Modern Greek ὀμορφη, "beautiful"), a copy of which found its way to King Louis XV, who then asked to see if the original corresponded with the painting.



Goya

***Maja Desnuda* 1792**

La Maja Desnuda was "the first totally profane life-size female nude in Western art" without pretense to allegorical or mythological meaning. The identity of the Majas is uncertain. The most popularly cited models are the Duchess of Alba, with whom Goya was sometimes thought to have had an affair, and Pepita Tudó, mistress of Manuel de Godoy. Neither theory has been verified, and it remains as likely that the paintings represent an idealised composite. The paintings were never publicly exhibited during Goya's lifetime and were owned by Godoy.



Ingres

***Grande Odalisque* 1814**

Commissioned by Napoleon's sister, Queen Caroline Murat of Naples.

Ingres portrays a concubine in languid pose as seen from behind with distorted proportions. The small head, elongated limbs, and cool color scheme all reveal influences from Mannerists.

When the painting was first shown in the Salon of 1819, one critic remarked that the work had "neither bones nor muscle, neither blood, nor life, nor relief, indeed nothing

that constitutes imitation". This echoed the general view that Ingres had disregarded anatomical realism.



Manet

***Olympia* 1863**

Manet's 'notorious' painting shows a nude white woman ("Olympia") lying on a bed being brought flowers by a black servant. Olympia was modelled by Victorine Meurent. Olympia's confrontational gaze caused shock and astonishment when the painting was first exhibited because a number of details in the picture identified her as a prostitute. The French government acquired the painting in 1890 after a public subscription organised by Claude Monet. The painting is on display at the Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

What shocked contemporary audiences was not Olympia's nudity, nor the presence of her fully clothed maid, but her confrontational gaze and a number of details identifying her as a demi-mondaine or prostitute. Some of the details that indicated Olympia as a prostitute include the orchid in her hair, her bracelet, pearl earrings and the oriental shawl on which she lies, symbols of wealth and sensuality. The black ribbon around her neck, in stark contrast with her pale flesh, and her cast-off slipper underline the voluptuous atmosphere. "Olympia" was a name associated with prostitutes in 1860s Paris.

Unlike other artists, though, Manet did not depict a goddess or an odalisque but a high-class prostitute waiting for a client.

In contrast to the smooth idealized nude of Alexandre Cabanel's *Birth of Venus*, also painted in 1863, *Olympia* is a real woman whose nakedness is emphasized by the harsh lighting.

"The Olympia is often compared to Cabanel's *Birth of Venus*, for the latter is a far more sexually appealing work, despite its mythological guise... It is evident Manet's demythologizing of the female nude was foremost a timely reminder of modern realities. The majority of critics attacked the painting with unmitigated disgust...: "What is this odalisque with the yellow belly, ignoble model dredged up from who knows where?" [And] "The painter's attitude is of inconceivable vulgarity."



Alexandre Cabanel

***Birth of Venus* 1863**

Cabanel's erotic imagery, cloaked in historicism, appealed to the propriety of the higher levels of society. Art historian and curator Robert Rosenblum wrote of the work that "This Venus hovers somewhere between an ancient deity and a modern dream"; he described "the ambiguity of her eyes, that seem to be closed but that a close look reveals that she is awake ... A nude who could be asleep or awake is specially formidable for a male viewer".



Bouguereau

***The Wave* 1896**

Like a modern day Venus rising from the waves, Bouguereau's pneumatic, classical subject turns her head and smiles at the viewer as a large ocean wave breaks at her side. The polished, traditional technique of academic realism creates an image that is coy and sentimental yet strangely interesting more than a century after this style of painting fell out of fashion.



Renoir

***Reclining Nude* 1883**

Nudes and the grand tradition of classical art preoccupied Renoir in the 1880s. In this painting, he paid homage to Ingres's *Grande Odalisque* (Musée du Louvre, Paris), although he transformed Ingres's cool courtesan into a healthy, pink-cheeked girl, and the harem into an Impressionist landscape reminiscent of the

Channel coast.



Gauguin

Manao tupapau (The Spirit of the Dead Watches) 1892

The subject of the painting is Gauguin's young native wife Teha'amana (called *Tehura* in his letters), who one night, according to Gauguin, was lying in fear when he arrived home late: "... motionless, naked, belly down on the bed: she stared up at me, her eyes wide with fear, '... Perhaps she took me, with my anguished face, for one of those legendary demons or specters, the *Tupapaus* that filled the sleepless nights of her people."

'In this rather daring position, quite naked on a bed, what might a young Kanaka girl be doing? Preparing for love? This is indeed in her character, but it is indecent and I do not want that. Sleeping, after the act of love? But that is still indecent. The only possible thing is fear. What kind of fear? Certainly not the fear of Susannah surprised by the Elders. That does not happen in Oceania. The tupapau is just the thing... According to Tahitian beliefs, the title *Manao tupapau* has a double meaning... either she thinks of the ghost or the ghost thinks of her.'



Matisse

Blue Nude 1907



Matisse

Aurore 1906-07

Matisse painted the nude when a sculpture he was working on shattered. He later finished the sculpture which is entitled *Reclining Nude I (Aurore)*.

Matisse shocked the French public at the 1907 Société des Artistes Indépendants when he exhibited *Blue Nude (Souvenir de Biskra)*. The *Blue Nude* was one of the paintings that would later create an international sensation at the Armory Show of 1913 in New York City.

The painting, which may be classified as Fauvist, was controversial; it was burned in effigy in 1913 at the Armory Show in Chicago, to where it had toured from New York. In 1907 the painting had a strong effect on Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso, partially motivating Picasso to create *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. Version O)*.

When *Blue Nude* was publicly exhibited soon after it was painted, it became the source of controversy that involved issues of race, race relations, and colonialism. Complaints by critics and viewers that the race of the figure in *Blue Nude* could not be identified, complicated the issue of "the Other." The ability to identify "the Other" was crucial to the mindset of colonizers, and a major aspect of the colonization programme.



Modigliani

Nu Couché 1917

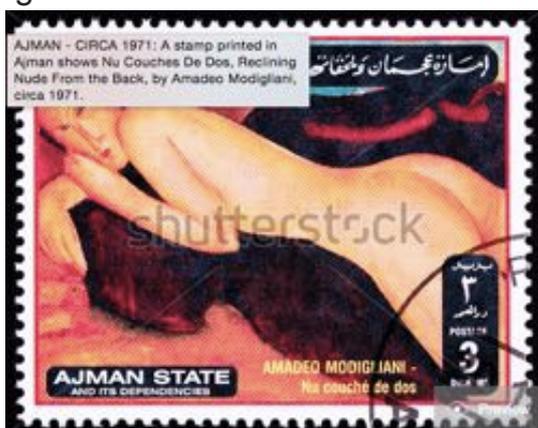
One of Modigliani's most widely reproduced and exhibited paintings.

The painting realized \$170,405,000 at a Christie's New York sale on 9 November

2015, a record for a Modigliani painting and placing it high among the most expensive paintings ever sold.

It is believed to have been included in Modigliani's first and only art show in 1917, which was shut down by the police. Christ's lot notes for their November 2015 sale of the painting observed that this group of nudes by Modigliani served to reaffirm and reinvigorate the nude as a subject of modernist art.

The Guardian art critic Jonathan Jones notes that Modigliani continues the tradition of Titian's Venus of Urbino. That tradition of glorifying the human body infuses the sexuality of Modigliani's nude, reinvented a decade before by the paintings of Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse. Jones remarks that Modigliani was a religious artist and his religion was desire.



stamp

Modigliani



Reclining Nude 1919

Kirchner

In 1905 Kirchner was among the founders of an idealistic artistic brotherhood in Dresden called The Bridge (Die Brücke). Inspired by the intensity of Vincent van Gogh's vision of nature, Paul Gauguin's arbitrary colour, and the expressive distortion of the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch, these young artists and others developed a powerful style now known as German Expressionism. This nude embodies the Expressionist ideal - brilliant, exaggerated colour; a deliberate roughness of texture; and the freshness of a sketch retained in the finished work.



Beckmann

***Reclining Nude* 1929**

Reclining Nude recalls the long-standing tradition of associating the female body with the timeless ideals of beauty. The stark nature of the model's pose and distorted form, however, are more modern updates on this classical idea.

World War I was the decisive event in Max Beckmann's career. The slaughter and suffering that he witnessed at the front, where he served as a medical orderly, and his subsequent nervous breakdown drastically changed his outlook and, by extension, his work. Discharged from the army, Beckmann soon started to produce a series of shockingly new paintings reflecting what he described in a letter from the front as "life's unspeakable contradictions." Unflinching and brutally direct.

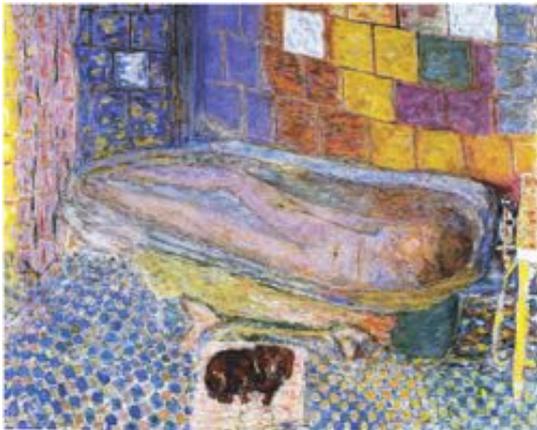
Masterfully painted, this work shows Beckmann's vehement handling of pigment laid down in broad slabs of colour and in dark, chiseling contours. Although the picture's theme is related to the countless reclining female nudes of art history, from Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1538) to Francisco Goya's *Naked Maja* (c. 1798-1805) to Edouard Manet's *Olympia* (1863), Beckmann has injected it with a pronounced unsettling quality. This is the nude stripped of its idealizing veneer and depicted as the object of blatant and disquieting erotic impulses. The woman's body is shown through the distorting lens of the viewer's intense desire. The torso is unnaturally compressed and reduced to a pair of huge, bulging breasts. So dominant is this feature, in fact, that the woman's head seems overshadowed, no more than a perfunctory afterthought, and oddly discontinuous with the rest of the figure. From the abbreviated torso, the figure's limbs—the thighs and arms inordinately long—sprawl in different directions. Despite the lush handling of paint and the beautifully sketched still life on the lower right, there seems to be more than a hint of aggression in the unabashed emphasis on the woman's breasts and in the ostentatious splaying of the figure.



Valadon

***Reclining Nude* 1928**

Suzanne Valadon posed as a model for the artists Renoir, Degas, and Toulouse-Lautrec before she began painting herself in 1893. While she favoured still-lives and portraits, Valadon is best known for her painting of female nudes—a subject rarely chosen by women painters at the time. The reclining nude in the present painting confronts the viewer through her gaze and proximity to the picture plane, yet she obscures her body, crossing her legs and covering her breasts. The pose evokes gestures of modesty associated with classical Antique sculpture.



Bonnard

***Nude in a Bath and Small Dog* 1941-46**

The three late bathtub paintings are widely considered the culmination of Bonnard's career. Returning to the image of immersed bathing in a 1925 painting, the artist makes what had been, in part, tomblike into something closer to a shrine--suggesting not only mortality but also the commemoration and celebration of things carnal. (In fact, Marthe died in 1942, while *Nude in the Bath and Small Dog* was in progress.) The figure of Marthe--whose likeness appears in some 380 of Bonnard's works--is at once iconic in a grand, distant way and an all-too-proximate fleshy substance, both peacefully floating and seeming to dissolve. The bathroom tiles form a iridescent screen that glitters and sparkles brilliantly.

Bonnard gives us a new view of themes as ancient as myth: the nude female at her toilette; the view in a mirror; the intimacy of space and time. Bonnard started laying in the first strokes of color in 1941 for what became his final great version, the five-foot wide: *Nude in Bath and Small Dog* . Marthe died in 1942. The

painting was completed in 1946. Bonnard passed away in 1947. My favorite aspect of this painting, now in the permanent collection of the Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh, is the fact of the dark, glowing, reddish shape of the basset hound on the small perfect rectangle of pale pinks, yellows, and whites. The square-on orientation of the small rug and the dog resting on the rug anchors this element within the composition in space. As the viewer moves around, looking at the painting (from the right, from the left, from the center), the entire composition appears in flux, except for the dog on the small rug. The perfect vertical and horizontal edges remain steady. And the dog's eyes follow our movements, she (I sense the dog is female, but perhaps I'm mistaken) stares directly out at the viewer; or, no, the dog's eyes are dark, as if the animal stared at a mystery beyond a view into our everyday reality. The dog appears identical in breed, coloring, shape, size, even to the pose it takes on the small towel, as the obviously beloved pet who anchors the image in the mirror in *Dressing Table and Mirror (La toilette au bouquet rouge et jaune)* from c. 1913.



Sleeping Venus 1944

Delvaux

Delvaux's work combined classical perfection with an erotic and troubling atmosphere. The sensuousness of *Sleeping Venus* is set against its oppressive night-time setting. Delvaux later explained that it was painted in Brussels during the German wartime occupation and while the city was being bombed. 'The psychology of that moment was very exceptional, full of drama and anguish', he recalled. 'I wanted to express this anguish in the picture, contrasted with the calm of the Venus'. Though never an official Surrealist, Delvaux was associated with the Belgian group around Magritte.



Chac Mool 9th.c



Moore 1929

Chacmool is the term used to refer to a particular form of pre-Columbian Mesoamerican sculpture depicting a reclining figure with its head facing 90 degrees from the front, supporting itself on its elbows and supporting a bowl or a disk upon its stomach. These figures possibly symbolised slain warriors carrying offerings to the gods. Moore's reclining figures, such as the 1929 Reclining Woman, were influenced by Chac Mool figures,



Moore working

Henry Moore with Reclining Figure and Mask, c.1930
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Moore

Reclining figure



Moore

Recumbent Figure 1938

Moore believed that because the subject was so well known and understood he did not have to represent his reclining figures naturalistically; instead the subject afforded him the opportunity to experiment with 'formal ideas':

"I want to be quite free of having to find a 'reason' for doing the Reclining Figures, and freer still of having to find a 'meaning' for them. The vital thing for an artist is to have a subject that allows [him] to try out all kinds of formal ideas – things that he doesn't yet know about for certain but wants to experiment with, as Cézanne did in this 'Bathers' series. In my case the reclining figure provides chances of that sort. The subject-matter is given. It's settled for you, and you know it and like it, so that within it, within the subject that you've done a dozen times before, you are free to invent a completely new form-idea."

Moore carved his first reclining figure around 1924, but took up the subject with greater seriousness in 1929 and it became his most frequently recurring subject. In 1947 Moore accounted for his preference for the reclining figure, stating:

"There are three fundamental poses of the human figure. One is standing, the other is seated, and the third is lying down ... of the three poses, the reclining figure gives most freedom compositionally and spatially. The seated figure has to have something to sit on. You can't free it from its pedestal. A reclining figure can recline on any surface. It is free and stable at the same time. It fits in with my belief that sculpture should be permanent, should last for eternity. Also, it has repose, it suits me – if you know what I mean."



Parthenon sculpture



Moore

Reclining Figure 1963-65
(Unesco building, working model)



Jean Arp,

Sculpture to be Lost in the Forest Forever 1932



Picasso,

Nude, Green Leaves and Bust 1932



Grand Nu Couché 1942

Picasso



Reclining Nude and Man With Mask 1973

Picasso

A beautiful, opulent woman is voluptuously sprawled out in deep sleep, watched over by a man. Picasso was a master in his treatment of desire as an artistic theme. In *Nu couché et homme au masque* (Reclining nude and man with mask) the made-up woman with long, varnished fingernails of somewhat threatening nature is being observed, strictly speaking, by one man with three faces: the bearded youth with a penetrating gaze and an eye in his forehead reminiscent of the giant Cyclops Polyphemus, casts a shadow which does not seem to be made by his own head. In it we recognise a classical Greco-Roman profile. The mask the youth is holding up shows the wrinkled face of an old man. Could this be meant by the then 88-year-old Picasso as a reference to himself, to someone who is in fact young but concealed behind a façade of old age? This interpretation is suggested by the assurance of the scant lines delineating the figures and the drawing that feels as though it was dashed off in a single unhesitating gesture.



Picasso

Reclining Nude on a Blue Divan



Freud

Benefits Supervisor Sleeping 1995



Benefits Supervisor, detail

A portrait of Sue Tilley, then weighing about 127 kilograms (280 lb), a Job Centre supervisor. Tilley is the author of a biography of the Australian performer Leigh Bowery titled *Leigh Bowery, The Life and Times of an Icon*. Tilley was introduced to Freud by Bowery, who was already modelling for him. Freud painted a number of large portraits of her around the period 1994–96, and came to call her "Big Sue". He said of her body "It's flesh without muscle and it has developed a different kind of texture through bearing such a weight-bearing thing".