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"Coloured Nude": Fetishization, Disguise, Dichotomy

Charmaine A. Nelson

A Thesis
in
The Department
of
Art History

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

March 1995

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ABSTRACT

"Coloured Nude": Fetishization, Disguise, Dichotomy

Charmaine A. Nelson

Representations of black female bodies in western art defy easy categorization. Situated as "other" within colonial discourse, the represented black female body has historically undergone a double fetishization on the basis of a perceived sexual and racial lack. Dorothy Stevens' Coloured Nude (1933) is symptomatic of this unique fetishization, a state which is indicative of the positioning of "Black Woman" as dichotomous to idealized white womanhood. Representations of black women in Canadian painting in the 1930's locate white artists' fascination with the black subject as exotic "other". While the highly praised Coloured Nude (1933) situated "Black Woman" as sexually aggressive, exotic and unnatural, an exploration of contemporaneous female nudes reveals the frequent controversy over innocuous white female nudes and the dismissal of alternative constructions of black female nudes. These racialized museum practices were informed by a double standard of propriety which turned on the race of the subject.

To Barbara Elaine and Maxwell Barrington Nelson
Mom and Dad

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ABBREVIATIONS

AEAC	Agnes Etherinton Art Centre, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario
AGO	Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, Ontario
AGT	Art Gallery of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario (changed to Art Gallery of Ontario in 1965)
BAG	Beaverbrook Art Gallery, Fredericton, New Brunswick
CNE	Canadian National Exhibition, Toronto, Ontario
HH	Hart House, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario
NGC	National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario
OSA	Ontario Society of Artists

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Since the Renaissance, the nude has been established as the paradigm by which professional attainment in artistic skill has been measured.¹ Prior to the eighteenth century, the male body was the primary subject of representation within western art. But during the nineteenth century, it was the female nude which rose to a place of prominence.² The systematic exclusion of women from mainstream art education (and the study of the human figure) has historically disqualified them from participation in the most revered genres of academic painting. Genres such as history painting were premised upon an artistic knowledge of the human body. These exclusionary practices were manifested within the patriarchal ideals of active male artistic genius and the passive female muse. According to Marcia Pointon,

Woman can thus be understood in representations to signify not only the objectified female body that

¹ Marcia Pointon Naked Authority: The Body in Western Painting 1830-1908 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 12

² Abigail Solomon-Godeau "Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation" Art History 16:2, 286

constitutes Art but also the very creativity through which it comes about and which is male. The popularity of the Pygmalion story with nineteenth-century artists in a period when discourses of creativity were especially powerful has not gone unnoticed.³

Constructed as either the nude or the naked within art historical discourse,⁴ the female body has developed an integral specificity which is linked temporally to patriarchal ideals of woman, womanhood, beauty, femininity and female sexuality within western society. The naked, the more recent and historically offensive of the two categories, is situated within the realm of the sublime within which obscenity and violence could be aesthetically enjoyed. Defined by a social specificity and "uncontained" sexuality, the naked disturbs socially sanctioned norms of sexual propriety.

The female nude is a disguised generalization of feminine beauty constructed for the male sexual gaze. The female nude is the visual embodiment of the idealization of feminine beauty. Pointon believes that the represented female body,

...functions not as a category with clear parameters but as a form of rhetoric. It is the way the body functions in the grammar of representation, invoking ideologies of the body and its economy, that is significant rather than its erotic power as estimated by any particular viewer, or its pose, or the extent of its covering.⁵

In psychoanalytical terms the female nude is a fetishized

³ Pointon, 14

⁴ These concepts first defined by Kenneth Clark (*The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* Pantheon, 1957) have subsequently been developed by T.J. Clark (*The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and his Followers* Thames and Hudson, 1985) and Lynda Nead (*The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* Routledge, 1992) using social art history and psychoanalytical methodologies respectively.

⁵ Pointon, 14

female body which disguises the female lack of the phallus in order to placate the male sexual gaze. This fetishization is necessitated by the male subject's reaction of fear/desire to the sexual otherness of the female body. Woman's sexual lack is perceived as a threat of castration - the splitting of the centred male subject.

The definition of the nude within art historical discourse, based upon sexual fetishization, eurocentric norms of beauty and the construction of the man/woman, culture/nature dichotomy, forecloses discussion of race. Similarly, the naked has been defined as a social contextualization of the white female body, thus race and colour are superseded by class and gender.⁶

Art historical discourse has a blatant disregard for race as a powerful signifier of difference. Within western art practice, race has mediated the representation of male and female subjects marking the boundaries between the oppositional construction of white and black bodies.⁷ Within

⁶ T.J. Clark's discussion of the female body as nude and naked in the text "Olympia's Choice" The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art Of Manet and His Followers (1985) is based primarily on issues of class. Clark reads Olympia's nakedness as a result of her social specificity as a prostitute, he fails to connect the presence of the black maid with Olympia's sexualization. While Sander L. Gilman proposes in his article "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Towards an Iconography of Female Sexuality in the Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine and Literature" (Critical Inquiry 12: 204-242), that the western tradition of depicting black and white women within the same frame was enacted to produce a projection of the black woman's deviant sexuality onto the white body, Clark reads the presence of the black maid as a marker of Olympia's class within the hierarchy of prostitution.

⁷ I shall not expand a discussion on the similarities and differences between the oppositional constructions of black male bodies to the white male representations at the centre. Nevertheless, I acknowledge the importance of this project and its connection to my study. The exhibition and publication Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1994) pursues this very case. Similar to the construction of the black female body, the black male has historically been represented as "other" to the white male subject. Images of the black male body are similarly bound up with perceptions of the black man within a slave society. Stereotypes positioned black men as sexually deviant and sexually aggressive and it was a "natural" assumption that black men would pursue sexual relations with the white woman just as the black woman was perceived as directing her sexual aggression towards the white man. These perceptions were based upon the eurocentric hierarchization of beauty, and lead to the slaughter of black men through the horrific practice of lynching. Lynching symbolizes the extreme pathologization of the black male body, and the white subject's fear of difference. The act entailed the hanging and mutilation of the black male body; in particular the penis was severed from the body and displayed in the black man's mouth. This symbolic

colonial discourse, blackness has been linked to aggressivity, sexual deviance and evolutionary inferiority, while whiteness, linked to purity, righteousness and superiority, has been normalized through a purposeful invisibility. Therefore, the nude and the naked, defined solely in terms of the white female body, are inadequate to address the complexity of the black woman's experience as colonial subject.

The intersection of race and sex in the black female body is the juncture where renewed discussions of the nude and the naked must begin. Black women are neither simply women nor are they simply black, rather their sex and race are inextricably bound together, combining to situate them as the ultimate "other" to the centred white male subject within colonial discourse. Black feminist theories are necessary to a revisiting of these eurocentric concepts. Valerie Smith demonstrates how these concepts,

...proceed from the assumption that black women experience a unique form of oppression in discursive and nondiscursive practices alike because they are victims at once of sexism, racism and by extension classism, (to attempt a separation of race from sex)...erases the specificity of the black woman's experience, constituting her as the point of intersection between black men's and white women's experience.⁸

Homi K. Bhabha locates the importance of race and sex within a eurocentric dynamic of colonial power. Bhabha

act of mutilation and horror was rooted in the desire to protect idealized white womanhood.

⁸ Valerie Smith "Black Feminist Theory and the Representation of the 'Other'" Changing Our Words: Essays on Criticism, Theory, and Writing by Black Women (London: Rutgers University Press, 1989) 47

demonstrates how,

...the construction of the colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse demands an articulation of forms of difference - racial and sexual.⁹

The Freudian concept of the fetish is projected into post-colonial discourse through Bhabha's theorization of the colonial stereotype as fetish. He posits that the anxiety associated with the male subject's fear/desire of the female's sexual lack is replicated in the white subject by a lack of similarity in skin/race/culture. Mediated by a white lens, "Black Woman" is the result of a double fetishization which seeks a reformulation of sexual and racial otherness. Bhabha theorizes that,

The fetish or stereotype gives access to an "identity" which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defense, for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it.¹⁰

This double fetishization has resulted in a complex identity which can not be contained by the narrow eurocentric definition of the nude and the naked within art historical discourse. "Black Woman" cannot simply be slotted into either category, rather her "otherness" is revealed within the simultaneity of the nude and the naked in artistic representations of the black woman's body.

⁹ Homi K. Bhabha "The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism" *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* ed. Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha and Cornel West (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990) 72

¹⁰ *ibid*, 80

This thesis seeks to explore the dialectical construction of "Black Woman" within twentieth-century Canadian art practice as a continuation of the racist legacy of western art historical discourse. Dorothy Stevens' Coloured Nude (1933) (plate 1) will be used to locate the pathologization of the black female body as it is manifested within the colonial stereotype of Jezebel.¹¹

Though black and white female identity is constructed as dichotomous through the representational practices of the female bodies, it is also enforced by the museums' historical power to sanction art as truthful, objective and universal. This dichotomization positions white woman as object/nature and black woman as animal/Nature to the centrality of the white male subject.¹² Patricia Hill Collins expands upon the dichotomization,

As objects, white women become creations of culture-in this case, the mind of white men-using the materials of nature-in this case, uncontrolled female sexuality. In contrast as animals Black women receive no such redeeming dose of culture and remain open to the type of exploitation visited on nature overall. Race becomes the distinguishing feature in determining the type of objectification women will encounter. Whiteness as symbolic of civilization and culture is used to separate objects from animals.¹³

¹¹ The biblical story of Jezebel was applied to the black female slave whose sexuality and procreative abilities were public affairs controlled by white slaveholders. The stereotype located the black woman as a sexually aggressive deviant who was always willing to copulate with any and all men.

¹² This "object" and "animal" distinction is proposed by Alice Walker in "Coming Apart" You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich) 52

¹³ Patricia Hill Collins Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment (New York: Routledge, 1991) 170

While Dorothy Stevens' overtly sexualized representation of "Black Woman" in Coloured Nude was being praised as an outstanding achievement in figure painting, the most innocuous contemporary white female nudes were being censored from exhibitions across Canada. This oppositional behaviour turned on the race of the female subject. An examination of black and white female nudes contemporary to Coloured Nude, by Canadian artists John Russell, Edwin Holgate, Bertram Brooker, Liliias Torrance Newton, Prudence Heward, Lawren P. Harris and international artists Max Weber and Alexandre Archipenko will situate Coloured Nude as a painting comfortably along the continuum of the european tradition of the exoticization of the black female body.

Operating within the realm of the beautiful, the disguised white female nude in western art practice has been a tool for the visualization of idealized white womanhood. However, black nudes as the sublime, required no such mediation; black skin was the ultimate sign of sexual deviance allowing overtly sexualized images to remain in the realm of art as natural and essential representations of black women. Accordingly, the represented black female body, stands at the border between art and pornography, breeching the social boundaries of sexual propriety. Within colonial discourse, blackness affords the artist the license to invest an overdetermined sexuality in the represented body; what is offensive or pornographic for the white body being deemed

natural and essential to the black. Dorothy Stevens' Coloured
Nude locates this perception of black women as sexually
licentious, aggressive and deviant in its overtly sexualized
representation of the black female body.

CHAPTER 2

THE NUDE IN CANADIAN ART PRACTICE

Canadian artists traditionally emulated established European models to validate their art within the youthful art community. However, early Canadian landscape painting was decidedly more progressive than figure painting which adhered strictly to nineteenth-century european prototypes.¹ Throughout the twentieth century, female nudes were targeted for censorship across the country. But this protective action was directed solely towards representations of white female bodies. As female nudes participated in the construction of white womanhood and white female sexuality, these paintings were cautiously monitored in an effort to protect idealized white womanhood and to police the arbitrary divide between art and pornography.

In 1931 Bertram Brooker called the Canadian art community puritanical² and over fifteen years later Louis Muhlstock

¹ This is partially due to the focus on landscape as essentially Canadian within the discourse of nationalism.

² Bertram Brooker "Nudes and Prudes" Open House (Ottawa: Graphic Publishers Limited, 1931)

deemed the lack of artistic freedom to be the result of an "excess of prudery."³ But what these artists failed to recognize was that this conservative behaviour was singularly directed towards the representation and display of the white woman's body.

Art society members, museum curators and exhibition jurors have occupied the role of protector of the ideals of high art. However, the museum community was not merely enforcing the hierarchy of the fine arts but sanctioning western ideals of race and sexuality by participating in the construction and perpetuation of a eurocentric womanhood. As such this thesis points up the constitution of black women as "other" by the artistic community at the centre, within the sphere of visual representation. In this case the centre is plural as it is composed of white male and female artists and museum practitioners alike, all situating black female identity as fixed through a eurocentric distortion of racial and sexual difference manifested in representation.

Since art and artists function within the greater social sphere, the meanings created within art circulate with other socially produced meanings. Art as a source of meaning, constructs, reflects, and perpetuates sanctioned social codes which in turn construct identity. As such, representations of the female body participate in the deployment of female identity and ultimately female sexuality.

³ Louis Muhlstock "An Excess of Prudery" Canadian Art V:2, Christmas-New Year, 1947-48

Historically, western thought has considered identity as a fixed, homogeneous entity, thus marginalizing a multiplicity of voices through its definition and positioning of the "other." The imperial histories of european nations have imprisoned the colonial subject within the boundaries of claustrophobic stereotypes. However, according to Stuart Hall, "...we should think instead of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation."⁴

The writings of Jacques Derrida cautioned that the act of reading should include absences as well as presences, what is not spoken, written, or made visible becoming just as important as what is. Major absences echo throughout the censorial history of female nudes in the Canadian museum community. What is not said about the nude is that race and sex were both mitigating factors of censorial action, since it was white female nudes that have historically been censored by the Canadian museum community. Museums were not just protecting art from pornography, but were also protecting the purity of white womanhood from the deviant sexuality of non-woman: "Black Woman".

The Canadian museum community, whether sanctioning or censoring white female nudes, also participated in the construction of whiteness. As Ruth Frankenberg illustrates,

⁴ Stuart Hall "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" Identity: Community, Culture, Difference ed. Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishart,) 222

...whiteness refers to a set of locations that are historically, socially, politically, and culturally produced and, moreover, are intrinsically linked to unfolding relations of domination.⁵

The paradigmatic nature of whiteness within colonial discourse provided and continues to provide, a protection to white women not afforded to black women. Since the white woman's sexual identity is constructed within white female nudes, the museum enacted censorship as a mechanism which controlled the levels of socially allowable sexuality. But the identity of the white woman is not only constructed in her presence and absence but in her "other," "Black Woman." Given its dichotomous nature, black female identity represents the vices that are absent in the white woman, while similarly the purity, innocence and culture of the white woman are seen as unattainable to the black woman. Accordingly, an examination of either speaks to the supposed voids, good or bad, in the other. The absence of paternalistic concern for the construction of black female identity within the display of black female nudes is demonstrative of the dialectical construction of identity within colonial discourse, predicated as it is on the articulation of racial and sexual difference.

The museum is a powerful colonial institution which has historically functioned with racially biased processes of selection. Eurocentric ideological biases racialize the visual language, display policies and inevitably the meanings which

⁵ Ruth Frankenberg White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991) 6

art creates. The museum has located itself as the site of universality, Truth and objectivity. However, the legacy of this western institution is one of racist and sexist exclusions as it has participated in the construction of oppositional identities within colonial discourse.⁶

When a museum displays a visual representation, that object becomes sanctioned as art. Similarly, the identity encoded within that art work is canonized as possessing Truth. The Canadian museum community, in its validation and censorship of female nudes, has historically participated in the social construction of black and white female sexuality as dichotomous within colonial discourse. At the same time this oppositional construction reserved the realm of the beautiful for the white female body, it positioned the black female body within the sublime. Picture for one outlandish moment a "raceless," colourless female body constructed as highly sexual. If this sexualized body was white it would be deemed pornographic, but if this sexualized body was black it would be embraced as an essentially truthful representation of the "Black Woman."

If a painting is recognized as an organization of signs which do not merely reflect but produce meanings when read by a viewer,⁷ then the represented black female body in western

⁶ Annie Coombes "Museums and the Formation of National and Cultural Identities" The Oxford Art Journal 1988, 11:2

⁷ Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981) 119

art is a construction whose goal was to de-womanize, and de-humanize the black woman in order to facilitate her violation under slavery. According to Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock,

Art is not a mirror. It mediates and represents social relations in a schema of signs which require a receptive and preconditioned reader in order to be meaningful. And it is at the level of what those signs connote, often unconsciously, that patriarchal ideology is reproduced.⁸

These meanings carry a historical weight and this preconditioned reader comes to expect certain constructions to be represented as truthful reality within art.

Censorship, Controversy and White Female Nudes

Among the white female nudes considered to be controversial at the time were John W. Russell's A Modern Fantasy (c.1927) at the Canadian National Exhibition of 1927 and Edwin Holgate's Young Woman (c.1930) and Nude in the Open (c.1930) at the Group of Seven exhibition (1930).

Bertram Brooker's Figures in the Landscape (1931) was censored from the Ontario Society of Artists Show (March 1931). And Lillias Torrance Newton's Nude in the Studio (1933) was censored from the Canadian Group of Painters show (November 1933). However, censorship was not reserved solely for Canadian art works. Max Weber's Contemplation (c. 1927) and Retirement (c. 1927) and Alexandre Archipenko's The Bather

⁸ ibid

(c.1927) were also withdrawn from the International Exhibition of Modern Art assembled by the Société Anonyme (April 1927).

Although most of these exhibitions were held at the Art Gallery of Toronto, it is important that their significance not be underestimated. In all incidents involving the AGT, autonomous selection procedures were implemented by hanging committees representing the individual cultural body. The selection of the pictures exhibited was not carried out by the AGT Exhibition Committee. Rather, the art works were selected by the independent groups participating in each particular exhibition, with the AGT staff intervening only in what they perceived to be crucial situations.⁹ As such, this censorial practice does not merely represent the conservative nature of a single institution, but the extensive critical practice of a national culture.

These distinct incidents all share a central commonality. In each case the reason for controversy rests with the artists' perceived deviance from the tradition of the white female nude in western art. Lack of allegorical disguise, nature's canopy or womanly "innocence" were central to their controversial reception. These transgressions often resulted in the labelling of the offensive paintings as naked as opposed to nude. In all cases, however, the result was the perception of immoral, offensive or dubious content within the criticized paintings.

⁹ Letter, from Fred Haines to J.B. Holden, May 22, 1930

Toronto society artist John Russell's nude at the C.N.E. exhibition of 1927 created major controversy with the Toronto viewing public. In the catalogue produced for the event, Russell's canvas, listed as #175, was titled A Modern Fantasy (plate 2) and was on sale for \$1500.¹⁰ The painting so offended the public that it sparked extensive newspaper coverage in newspapers across the country.¹¹

Russell was not alone in the controversy. Critics also protested the display of George Drinkwater's canvas of nudes Paola and Francesca. In particular, the critics found fault with the pose of Russell's reclining nude and with the "raw" colour scheme of the Drinkwater painting. An article in The Toronto Evening Telegram cryptically suggested the hanging committee's replacement by the Exhibition's livestock officials, envisioning the new and superior committee as ascribing to the traditional construction of the nude.

If any nude were to pass their observation, it would have to be of that kind handled by the great men of the past. If, lacking any apparel, it submerged the corporeal in the spiritual, and dressed its subject in either the delicate or strong human emotion, the Midway men would say, 'Let her hang'.¹²

Toronto art collectors were more receptive to Russell's painting, recognizing the centrality of the human form within

¹⁰ Catalogue of Fine, Graphic, and Applied Arts and Salon of Photography: Canadian National Exhibition August 27-September 10, 1927

¹¹ For example, articles were published in the Winnipeg Tribune, Niagara Falls Review, and the Sydney Nova Scotia Record. Coverage spanned over two months in the major Toronto papers: The Toronto Star, The Toronto Mail and Empire, The Toronto telegram and The Globe.

¹² "'Circus' Pictures at Exhibition People say Nudes Poor Taste" The Evening Telegram September 3, 1927, 8

western art. One perceptive collector commented that,

In continental cities nothing would be said about them and no person would be at all surprised. Our people are not used to it and some of them may have been taken aback.¹³

This statement acknowledged the distance between European and Canadian figure painting, positioning Canada as regressive and conservative within the context of western developments. As would be expected, Russell's painting received a warm reception with a European audience. A Modern Fantasy had been earlier exhibited in Paris at the spring salon of the Société des Artistes Francaises. The work was granted the premier place of importance in its display, the highest honour that was afforded a painter.¹⁴

A Modern Fantasy's reclining female nude, reportedly occupied an entire wall. Russell's painting allegedly attracted the most viewers and the most outrage. According to The Toronto Daily Star, the throngs were divided between deliberately avoiding or obsessing over the painting.¹⁵

While exhibition officials denied the impact of the two notorious canvases on the box office's increased sales, The Toronto Daily Star reported that an estimated forty thousand more people would visit the exhibition, possibly due to the

¹³ "See Nothing Shocking About Russell Nude" The Toronto Star Daily September 12, 1927, 2

¹⁴ "'False Standards' Affect Press, Says 'Modern Fantasy' Artist; John Russell Comes Home" The Evening Telegram September 6, 1927, 24

¹⁵ "Human Form Divine Shock To Art Exhibit" The Toronto Daily Star September 6, 1927, 5

"daring pictures."¹⁶ At the close of the Exhibition, the art gallery documented record attendance and receipts, selling twenty thousand art catalogues,¹⁷ with an extra edition being printed for sale.¹⁸

Born in Hamilton, Ontario, John Wentworth Russell received his artistic training in New York and Paris. At the time of the exhibition, the expatriate artist considered himself to be "decidedly European."¹⁹ The critical Toronto public seemed unmoved, even offended by Russell's claim to Europe, noting the inscription of "Paris" beside his signature on the canvas as a sign of his beguilement by the European city.²⁰ Commenting on the controversy Russell stated that,

False standards exist - cheek is what counts. Art is but an expression of the age in which we live - a revolutionary one to-day. Let the world quiet down and the art will do likewise.²¹

In this statement Russell observed the sociological function of art by linking the state of his art to the state of the world. Russell's reply reveals his knowing provocation of the prudish Toronto art community. By Canadian standards his nude

¹⁶ "Box Office Rush at 'Ex' Art Gallery Not Due to Nude Art, Says Official" The Toronto Daily Star September 3, 1927, 17

¹⁷ "Records are Gayly Smashed at the Exhibition of 1927" The Toronto Star Daily September 12, 1927, 27

¹⁸ "Line-up Crowds Art Gallery Many Pictures are Sold" The Evening Telegram September 6, 1927, 21

¹⁹ "False Standards Grow, a Toronto Artists Finds" The Toronto Daily Star September 7, 1927, 3

²⁰ "'Circus' Pictures at Exhibition People Say Nudes Poor Taste" The Evening Telegram September 3, 1927, 8

²¹ ibid

had enough "cheek" to incite controversy.

Among the throngs of objectors was a collective of women's organizations of the city (including both local and provincial councils) who lodged a formal complaint with the President of the C.N.E., J.J. Dixon. These women,

...did not think the Exhibition was the proper place for such pictures to be shown, where children and adolescent youth and scoffing and sneering people with no artistic sense could pass in for a dime.²²

A report in The Toronto Daily Star claimed that Mr. Dixon was equally upset, agreeing with the protestors that it was problematic that the "suggestive" paintings were in a forum where they could be seen by people, "who lack any artistic appreciation and see only the sensual."²³ Dixon also commented that the hanging committee was composed of artists who had judged the paintings solely on artistic not moral worth. He went so far as to state that to him one of them was, "...the picture, not of a nude but of a naked woman,"²⁴ concluding that a more rigid censorship would be employed in future C.N.E. art exhibitions.²⁵

The women protestors reiterated Dixon's belief, stating that they did not object altogether to the nude, but rather to the "sensuous" nature of the ones in this particular

²² "Women State Protest Over 'Nudes' at Fair" The Toronto Daily Star September 9, 1927, 22

²³ "Exhibition to be Wary of Nudes Hereafter" The Toronto Daily Star September 10, 1927, 4

²⁴ ibid

²⁵ "Art's Art in Gallery Nudes are Fine Art" The Toronto Star Daily September 14, 1927, 2

exhibition. These comments point up the distinction being made, once again between the nude and the naked, a particularly contentious issue within the Canadian art community.

Russell's A Modern Fantasy also attracted the displeasure of prominent Toronto artist Lawren S. Harris. Writing about Russell's nudes, Harris commented that,

Standards vary, in some places they don't even exist. What is proper for a bar-room may not be suitable for a public gallery, what is familiar to a physician may be shocking to a layman, and what has no degrading effect on a saint may mislead some poor sinner. Even to the pure, many things may be impure.²⁶

John Russell was not the only Canadian artist whose painting of a nude caused alarm. Edwin Holgate exhibited two white female nudes which were subject to personal and written complaints throughout all of 1930.²⁷ The paintings entitled Young Woman and Nude in the Open (both c. 1930) were exhibited at the AGT during the April 1930 exhibition of the Group of Seven. Particularly fervent and insistent opposition was forwarded via letters from a Toronto lawyer named J.B. Holden,²⁸ who wished to, "...protect the integrity of the Art Gallery as a cultural centre and the morals of the youth who are making use of it as a means of education."²⁹

²⁶ Lawren S. Harris "The Nudes at the C.N.E." The Canadian Forum 8: 85, 391-92

²⁷ Brooker, 95

²⁸ AGO Library, ltrs. file, H-Miscellaneous (1930), partial series

²⁹ Letter, from J.B. Holden to Fred Haines, May 30, 1930

The letters were forwarded to gallery curator, Fred Haines who tried to convey the integral nature of the tradition of the nude in western art to Mr. Holden.³⁰ In a follow up letter Holden quickly responded,

I understand, of course, that painting of the nude has always been regarded as one of the fine achievements in painting, as you point out, but you surely will admit that there are nudes and nudes, and I hope the time will never come when the public of this country will assist artists in the production of pictures such as those under discussion which as I stated in my first letter I regard as inartistic and vulgar in the highest degree, and unfit for public exhibition.³¹

While J.B. Holden may have been unique in his outspoken objection to Edwin Holgate's nudes, the circumstances of the John Russell controversy of 1927 demonstrates that he was likely not alone in his opposition to Holgate's paintings.

Edwin Holgate's Interior (c.1933) (plate 3) and Nude (c.1930) (plate 4) of the same period, are probably reflective of the nature of the two nudes exhibited at the AGT.³² Both of these nudes, conservative in nature, draw heavily upon the western tradition of the white female nude. Young Woman and Nude in the Open, though probably equally demure, were destined for the puritanical protests levied against Russell's A Modern Fantasy, due to the whiteness of the female nudes.

In some cases the protests against immoral female nudes

³⁰ Letter, from Fred Haines to J.B. Holden, May 7, 1930

³¹ Letter, from J. B. Holden to Fred Haines, May 16, 1930

³² The location of Young Woman and Nude in the Open is unknown.

were internal, being launched by gallery officials or art association hanging committees. Bertram Brooker's Figures in the Landscape (plate 5) unanimously accepted for the 59th O.S.A. exhibition by the hanging committee in 1931, had already been hung when it was mysteriously removed from the walls of the AGT.³³ Once again the morality of the work was in question. According to Augustus Bridle, noted Toronto art critic, "...Figures in the Landscape...caused more of a brief furore at the Gallery than...John Russell's nude at the C.N.E."³⁴

The painting was banished to the cellar and the proposed catalogue reproduction was also terminated. Journalist Guy S. Cunliffe reported that,

...an officer of the Artists Society had been approached by an official of the Art Gallery who urged that the painting be replaced by some other 'less dubious' work.³⁵

Brooker probably expected and deserved the support of the members of the Group of Seven, with whom he had been closely linked throughout his artistic career. However, Arthur Lismer, acting as director of the children's art programme at the AGT, was fingered as instrumental in the censorship of Brooker's

³³ Guy S. Cunliffe "Nude Painting Sent to Cellar as Artists' Exhibition Opens Creating First-Rate Mystery" Toronto Mail and Empire March 7, 1931

³⁴ Augustus Bridle "Brooker's Nude was Crated by Decision of Majority" Toronto Star March 14, 1931,
8

³⁵ ibid

work.³⁶ It would appear that several Group of Seven members at this juncture, entrenched in the nationalist discourse of the landscape as essentially Canadian, resisted or opposed the promotion of figure painting, some more than others (note the aforementioned article by Lawren S. Harris).

Writing about the atmosphere in which Figures in the Landscape was censored, Brooker stated that,

These lies which made it appear that the picture was crowded out of the show because it was not good enough aesthetically to compete with the other pictures, prevented me from making public statement at the time. Had I done so I could easily have been accused of trying to get publicity for myself, for I was accused of that in print at the time, although I had not uttered a word for publication.³⁷

Figures in the Landscape is a representation of two white female bodies in a stylized landscape. The extremely close proximity of the work crops both women at the shoulders, thereby erasing their specificity and limiting the depiction of their natural surroundings. The absence of faces and therefore individuality, positions these women firmly within the realm of the nude. Though this painting was censored due to its "dubious" nature, the fact that these women are represented from behind actually de-sexualizes the image through an exclusion of the genitalia and breasts.

Ironically, Brooker's painting was controversial precisely because of his elimination of individuality. Gallery

³⁶ "'Nudes in Landscape' Cause Art Dispute" Toronto Star March 7, 1931

³⁷ Brooker, 98

officials suggested that, "...Mr. Brooker's effort aroused hostility because little enough of the heads were shown to make the work practically a study of torsos."³⁸

Brooker's sharp foregrounding of the female figures leaves little space for the inclusion of the traditional *raison d'être* of the western female nude. His unique construction minimizes the landscape and eliminates allegory. Brooker's minimalistic study erases the space for traditional disguise. For as much as these nudes represent a generalized construction of female sexuality, this image moves away from the tradition of the disguised white female nude.

Allegory, traditionally was the *raison d'être* for the female nude in western art. It provided a means to "higher" intellectual contemplation while making available an unimpeded female sexuality. Nature has also been used as a canopy to mediate the representation of the white woman's body and to elevate it beyond any potentially worrisome references to contemporary life and society.³⁹ Donald Buchanan's article, quoted below, points up the extent to which Canadian art practice was informed by these traditions. What Buchanan so aptly called "sentimental figures," were the allegorical nudes that were so widely accepted. But if the figure was not "veiled in a wistful aurora," or was without the "great

³⁸ "Nudes in Landscape Cause Art Dispute" Toronto Star March 7, 1931

³⁹ Beatrice Farwell Manet and the Nude: A Study in Iconography in the Second Empire (New York: Garland Publishing, 1981) 242

outdoors as a canopy," Buchanan noted the "taboo" that was sure to follow. Figures in the Landscape suffered this fate.

While an art gallery official asserted that the painting was removed because of the lack of space and the large number of submissions, friends of the artist and a member of the selection committee privately maintained that the painting was removed because it was "too suggestive" and had the potential for a shocking effect on children. Brooker felt that,

The men who removed his painting from the Art Gallery walls to "save" the children were futilely trying to protect them from a monster they themselves had created, and were in fact strengthening by their very action.⁴⁰

Traces of this controversy resurfaced in the events prior to the Final Group of Seven show in 1931. In a letter to life-long friend Lionel LeMoine FitzGerald in August 6, 1931, Brooker wrote, "I have been working on another nude and will probably have it finished (for the Group Show), but whether the Group fellows will want to accept it, I don't know."⁴¹ In the end, strained by the shadow of this incident, Brooker submitted his Still Life (c.1931) and The St. Lawrence (1931) (plate 6) for display.

The censorship of Lillias Torrance Newton's Nude in the Studio (plate 7) was also linked to a perceived deviance from western figure painting tradition. The painting was taken out of the premier Canadian Group of Painters Show in November

⁴⁰ Dennis Reid Bertram Brooker 1888-1955 (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1973) 19

⁴¹ Letter, from Brooker to FitzGerald, August 6, 1931

1933 at the AGT. After the jury had accepted and hung the painting, the governors of the gallery made them take it down, stating as their reason the woman's nakedness as opposed to nudity. Newton considered pulling her other entries (three portraits) from the exhibition, but capitulated since they were already on display.⁴² In an interview about the incident, Newton stated,

There was the most terrific rumpus about it because then, Lawren Harris and Prudence Heward, who were on the committee, said that they'd made a protest about it you see, and I was mad and I said we can take all the others out too. Well they were already hung and they couldn't take four paintings off the wall.⁴³

The painting represented a Russian model in the artist's studio. Posed in front of a chair and easel, the woman glances off to the side with one hand draped across her chest and the other on her hip. The board's decision was based upon the "offensive" presence of the green slippers on the woman's feet but also objected to the fact that the model was Russian and not Canadian.

In terms of the woman's nationality, one would wonder what was so disturbing about a "foreign" model since no such complaints were made about Dorothy Stevens' or Prudence Heward's frequent use of black female models. The objection to the "foreignness" of the white model points up the art community's dilemma over the use of a model who though

⁴² Dorothy Farr Lilias Torrance Newton 1896-1980 (Kingston: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 1981) 16

⁴³ Interview, Lilias Torrance Newton by Charles Hill, National Gallery of Canada Archives, September 11, 1973, tape #2

"foreign," could not be legitimately exoticized and remain within the boundaries of art. The Russian model was still white, her colour demanding that her sexuality be mediated by a certain reverence. While the Canadian art community did not react adversely to the representation of "exotic" black female "nudes," they were offended not by a painting of a naked woman, but a painting of a naked white woman.

Even though the woman's pose was not erotic or openly sexual the presence of the green slipper's made her a "real" woman. She could not be mistaken for Venus, a pixie, a nymph or any other allegorical creature. Donald W. Buchanan pinpointed the source of upset in his article Naked Ladies published in Canadian Forum,

Sentimental figures, ones that seem symbolic or of a purely academic study can be accepted. Naked women are also wholesome if they have the great outdoors as a canopy. But be once disarming and natural and simply paint a model naked in a studio, let the figure be not veiled in a wistful aurora, or let her be not poised alone in a wilderness of rocks and distant forests, be standing solid and fleshly, like a Renoir maid-servant, and then taboo-you are out and in the basement.⁴⁴

It was the presence of the green slippers which disrupted the veil of allegory traditionally viewed as integral to the construction of the white female nude in western art. What the slippers denoted was the worldliness of the represented female body, denying the viewer access to the tradition of

⁴⁴ Donald W. Buchanan "Naked Ladies" The Canadian Forum April 1935, 15:175, 273

allegorical disguise.⁴⁵ Lillias Torrance Newton's Nude in the Studio is a representation of a woman in a studio. Newton did not create an imaginary site with an fanciful mythology. It is this realism, applied to the white woman's body, that disturbed the art community.

The negative response to Lillias Torrance Newton's Nude in the Studio parallels the critical backlash against Edouard Manet's Déjeuner sur l'herbe (1863) (plate 8), exhibited in the Salon des Refusés in 1863. Marcia Pointon demonstrates that,

Manet's Déjeuner sur l'herbe interrogates the symbolic function of women in the organisation of the world through pictorial representation and in so doing renders allegory problematic.⁴⁶

Déjeuner sur l'herbe challenged long established rules about how nudity could be represented. Within the tradition of western art, the human body required allegory or an indication of moral self-awareness to mediate nudity. Allegory was a necessary proprietary disguise, which privileged the mythological, moving it beyond the mundane societal reference. Manet challenged the rules by disrupting allegory's place within the convention of the represented female body.

Part of the disruption of allegory is the presence of cast-off clothing in the painting. Both the clothing in

⁴⁵ Edouard Manet's use of slippers in his Olympia (1863) incited similar controversy. In both cases the slippers position the represented figures firmly within their respective contemporary societies, disrupting allegory and recalling the social and biological body.

⁴⁶ Marcia Pointon "Guess Who's Coming to Lunch? Allegory and the Body in Manet's Déjeuner sur l'herbe" Naked Authority: The Body in Western Painting 1830-1908 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 113

Déjeuner sur l'herbe and the green slippers in Nude in the Studio direct the viewer towards, "...the importance of clothing as a persistently subversive language with its own grammatical imperatives."⁴⁷

Clothing, in covering the body, conceals its ambiguities, negotiating the space between the biological and the social, the inside and the outside, the self and the "other." Allegory aids in the construction of the nude as a controlled, contained body by disguising the social and biological qualities of the body.

The presence of clothing recalls the social body as a body with physical needs and biological functions. The clothing in Déjeuner sur l'herbe and Nude in the Studio was not the classical drapery of allegorical nudes, but contemporary, socially specific symbols which contextualized the female body. As Pointon has noted,

The presence of cast-off clothing problematizes the status of the body as nude and thus also problematizes the body as an allegorical site...the presence of cast-off clothing points up the instability of the body as sign.⁴⁸

The green slippers in Nude in the Studio function in the same way. This is why the woman in this painting was deemed naked not nude.

If one compares the connotations of naked and nude, the gulf between the two words becomes apparent. Naked implies a

⁴⁷ ibid, 119

⁴⁸ ibid, 121

lack of clothing, the state of being unarmed and defenceless and devoid of concealment or disguise. While the term nude has a much more peaceful, self-assured, "natural" meaning. In The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form (1957) Kenneth Clark made the distinction between the naked, that which is "huddled and defenceless" and the nude, the "balanced, prosperous and confident manifestation of the ideal." Clark felt that the term naked carried connotations of embarrassment, while the nude signified a poised, confident state of undress in which the body was re-formed. Part of this re-formation was allegory as disguise. But clothing disrupts the timeless quality of allegory as a contemporary symbol of the social body.

Clothing recalls the process of dressing and undressing. As such the viewer of Déjeuner sur l'herbe and Nude in the Studio can deduce that at some point the unclothed women have removed their clothing and posed for the image. This process which involves time, the before and after, disrupts the iconic nature of the traditional allegorical nude.

The woman in Nude in the Studio is unquestionably posed. There is nothing natural about her body positioning. As such Newton's painting reveals the process of becoming the nude. Here the represented female body is naked not nude because her image recalls the process of undressing. Allegorized nudes do not undress, they are always already nude, invariably composed and predestined in their nudity. The painting presents the artist's model not an allegory, and in so doing represents an

actively involved female subject who through her disrobing, subsequently controls her sexuality and its accessibility. Pointon reveals this representation as problematic since, as with Manet's unclothed woman in Déjeuner sur l'herbe, "She was not constructed naked but made herself so by the removal of her garments."⁴⁹

Censorship was not reserved for female nudes produced in Canada. In April 1927 the AGT hosted an International Exhibition of Modern Art, assembled by the Société Anonyme under the direction of their president Katherine Dreier. Four white female nudes were censored from this exhibition: Max Weber's Contemplation, Retirement and an untitled picture as well as Alexandre Archipenko's The Bather.

Toronto was not the International Exhibition's first venue. The show had opened at the Brooklyn Museum on November 18, 1926. From there it travelled the Anderson Galleries, New York, and the Albright Art Gallery, Buffalo before its conclusion in Toronto.⁵⁰ That Contemplation, Retirement, and The Bather appeared in the catalogue published by the AGT, evidenced the unproblematic nature of the pictures south of the border and the hastiness of their withdrawal once in Toronto.

According to Bertram Brooker, Miss Dreier had overseen

⁴⁹ ibid

⁵⁰ L.R Pfaff "Lawren Harris and the International Exhibition of Modern Art: Rectifications to the Toronto Catalogue (1927), and Some Critical Comments" Canadian Art Review 11:1-2, 80

the hanging of the exhibition, but upon returning to the gallery the same evening for the private opening, she found that works by Weber and Archipenko had been removed in the interim.⁵¹

Though a local report noted that, "...the exclusion of these nudes may not be an instance of prudery,"⁵² additional comments, directed specifically at the Weber nudes, suggested sexual and racial motivations for their censorship. The report continued,

These that the censor has consigned to the coal regions are physical...They are readily identifiable as women...One of Weber's nudes, "Contemplation" might win a prize in a Hottentot beauty contest.⁵³

Weber's Tranquility (1930) and Gesture (1921) are probably indicative of his submissions for this particular exhibition. (plates 9-10) The "Hottentot" physiognomy of the Weber nudes is also evident in Archipenko's female studies. During his career Archipenko created several art works, both two and three dimensional, which bear the name The Bather. A cement sculpture (1912) (plate 11), two pencil studies (1919 and 1921 respectively) (plates 12 and 14) and a lithograph (1921) (plate 13) all represent robust, full-figured women. The "offensive" bodies of these women, similar to that of the censored Max Weber nudes, locates the reason for their

⁵¹ Brooker, 94

⁵² "Paintings of Nudes Consigned to Cellar" The Toronto Daily Star April 4, 1927, 22

⁵³ ibid

censorship.

Historically, western human sciences used Hottentot women in an attempt to locate a pathological source for black sexual deviance. More importantly, the Hottentot woman came to represent the perception of evolutionary inferiority of black women in general, and the negroid race as a matter of course. (see Chapter 5, The Construction of "Black Woman") As such this article points up the western perception of the black woman's sexual deviance as being manifested in a specific, representable, physical body.

The Weber and Archipenko nudes were not offensive because they depicted the "anatomical irregularity" of the Hottentot physiognomy, but because they dared to construct this body, not for a black but for a white woman. Though this imagery seemed essentially appropriate for the representation of black women, when applied to the white woman, it was foreign and offensive. Idealized white woman, with a pure, innocent sexuality had to be protected from the ramifications of such representations.

"Coloured Nude" and Other Dark Girls

Since the censorship of white female nudes was supposedly enacted to protect children from the dangers of sex and sexuality, we must ask why these museum officials were not similarly concerned with the potentially disruptive impact of Dorothy Stevens' Coloured Nude on the minds of these same

children.

Displayed in the 53rd annual exhibition of the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, Coloured Nude was widely praised as an outstanding achievement in figure painting. It was largely agreed that,

The skilful handling of the pose, the high quality of draughtsmanship, the rich chocolate color and its varying tones in light and shadow, combine to elevate this work to a position of first importance.⁵⁴

That this overtly sexualized representation of the female body was praised rather than censored was due to the nude's blackness. Dorothy Stevens' was a Canadian artist from an upper class background. Born in Toronto in September 2, 1889, Stevens, like many Canadian women of similar background, received her artistic training at the Slade School of Art in London and the Colorossi Studio and the Grande Chaumière in Paris.⁵⁵ Though an established etcher and portraitist, a large portion of her career was devoted to figure studies of black subjects, particularly women and children. Possessing the money to travel, Stevens' was one of many Canadian artists who participated in the Gauguinesque trend of travelling to the tropics in search of exotic subject matter.⁵⁶

Painting in Haiti and the Virgin Islands, she

⁵⁴ Canadian Homes and Gardens December, 1932, 42

⁵⁵ W.A. McKay The MacMillan Dictionary of Canadian Biography (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1978) 794

⁵⁶ The article "Canadian Painters Devoting More Attention to Tropics" in the May 12, 1951 Toronto Globe and Mail, names the following artists as participating in this trend: Yvonne McKague Housser (Jamaica), Cleve Horne (Morocco), Isabel McLaughlin (Bermuda), Leonard Brooks, York Wilson, Jack Bush, Gordon Macnamara, Walter Yarwood (Mexico), Gladys Montgomery (Barbados), Pauline Harris (Trinidad).

concentrated on figure studies of the "natives." Stevens seems to have associated black people with an exoticism which was manifested in their physical difference from the white subject, perceived as the norm. While doing on the spot sketches of children at the Simpson's department store during a exhibition in 1950,

...she barked at the management, 'I'm sick and tired of all these dough-faced Aryan kids! Can't you get me some coloured kids? Negro or Chinese kids? Kids with character and eloquence in their eyes.'⁵⁷

This statement reveals the extent to which Stevens perceived the visible diversity of people of colour through a romanticized voyeuristic gaze.

The fact that alternative representations of black women, such as Prudence Heward's Dark Girl (1935)⁵⁸ (plate 15) and Hester (1937)⁵⁹ (plate 16) or Lawren P. Harris's Negress (1937)⁶⁰ (plate 17) were met with open hostility or quiet neglect, demonstrates the extent to which an oppositional sexuality was demanded from representations of black women. Though these three works are not without their problems, they transgressed the stereotypical boundaries of the represented

⁵⁷ Lisa Ramzey "You Splash Plenty of Color Around" Maclean's Magazine July 1, 1950

⁵⁸ Canadian Group of Painters Exhibition, January 1936, AGT

⁵⁹ Canadian Group of Painters Exhibition, November 1937, AGT and January 1938, Art Association of Montreal

⁶⁰ 66th Annual Ontario Society of Artists Exhibition, March 1938, Toronto and 60th Annual Royal Academy of Arts Exhibition, November 16 - December 16, 1939, Montreal (exhibited as Decorative Nude)

black female body in various ways.

For example, all of the works cling to the "jungle" image of the black woman as Nature through their subtle or not so subtle reveal of exotic foliage. But they also possess qualities which challenged stereotypical beliefs of black female identity.

Harris's Negress, with her poised posture and dignified composure, claims a self-possession uncharacteristic of the formulaic nature of such works. Similarly, Heward's Dark Girl and Hester depict the black female subject with emotions unusual to such representations. Natalie Luckj writes that,

The full impact of the originality of her depiction of black women as vulnerable, suffering human beings can be measured by the openly hostile critiques of Dark Girl and Hester. The latter...became the focus of harsh, even racist, commentaries which pointed to the lack of idealized beauty or fashionable exoticism. Comparison with paintings of black women by such contemporaries as...Dorothy Stevens...demonstrates the distance between acceptable, conventional representation and Prudence's portrayals of Hester and Dark Girl.⁶¹

In particular, Dark Girl was given back-handed praise when it was called "a masterfully ugly figure" in a report in The Toronto Star Daily.⁶²

The "vulnerability" of these women results from the creation of a caste system, which always entails the notion of relative degrees of power. The black women represented in Dark Girl and Hester appear powerless in the full glare of the

⁶¹ Natalie Luckj Expressions of Will (Kingston: Agnes Etherington Art Centre, 1986) 65

⁶² "Many Gaze Calmly at Picture Exhibit" The Toronto Star Daily, January 4, 1936, 17

empowered voyeuristic gaze. However, Heward resisted the fetishization of the black body through representation which reveals rather than disguises or idealizes sites of difference. In both images the texture of the hair is realistically portrayed, not hidden as in Coloured Nude and not stylized as in Negress. The white artist's desire to reformulate, contain or obliterate sites of blackness results in the racial fetishization of the black female body. Accordingly then, the presence of racial specificity undermines the white viewers' desire to control the otherness of the black woman's body through an erasure or containment of her difference.

The construction of the body, face and the gaze is also transgressive in Negress, Hester, and Dark Girl. In particular, it is not coincidental that Dennis Reid referred to Heward's Dark Girl as, "...one of the most memorable of Canadian portraits."⁶³ All three images operate as such, being representations of particular women not types. This specificity, along with the unidealized bodily construction situates these representations within the realm of the female naked. As such each is an individual woman, not a fixed homogeneous construction which stands for "Black Woman." While the bodies of Heward's Hester and Dark Girl could be described as unflattering (in relation to prevailing contemporaneous ideals of the female nude) with their flattened breasts and

⁶³ Dennis Reid A Concise History of Canadian Painting (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988) 194

stomach rolls, the body of Harris's Negress reflects a normalcy which similarly divorces it from the tradition of exoticization.

The gazes of the women in Heward's representations reflect a woeful melancholy, while Harris's Negress stares off to the side in an introspective nature. In all three cases a decisive move is made away from the invisible or complicit gaze generally linked to the visualization of the stereotyped black woman.

The aforementioned differences in the representation of black women in Negress, Hester and Dark Girl, account for their timid or hostile reception by the Canadian art community. The attempt to deviate from the stereotypical norm of representing black women as exotic and available sexuality as portrayed in Coloured Nude, resulted in these negative responses. Similarly, the critical response and censorship of white female nudes is a result of the oppositional standards of propriety which were enforced in the Canadian museum community.

CHAPTER 3

MULTIPLE DISGUISES

The notion of disguise enters this discussion in more than one way: through the actual disguise of the represented female body, and through the presence of the artist who, though not visually represented, is disguised within the representation of the "other." According to Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock,

Woman is present as an image but with the specific connotations of body and nature, that is passive, available, possessable, powerless. Man is absent from the image but it is his speech, his view, his position of dominance which the images signify.¹

It is in this way that white male artists have traditionally situated themselves within their representations of woman as "other." But this practice has not been exclusive to white men. In the same way that artists like Gauguin had projected an active male artistic and sexual identity onto his depictions of Tahitian women, Dorothy Stevens' projected an idealized white womanhood onto her representation of the black

¹ Parker and Pollock, 116

woman in Coloured Nude. In as much as Coloured Nude speaks about the stereotyping of black female identity, it also situates white female identity, since ultimately, the representation of the "other" always locates the self.

The Sublime and the Beautiful

When men represent woman it historically has been in terms of her difference, her not-man, not-phallus, her lacking and otherness.² Within the representation of the black female body, this not-man and not-phallus is accompanied by a not-woman and not-white otherness. White female nudes in western art have been created as sexual objects in their construction for the male gaze. But the tradition always strove to keep the white body within the realm of the beautiful. The beauty of the nude was defined by the artist's level of control over the female body. Lynda Nead demonstrates that,

...one of the principle goals...has been the containment and regulation of the female sexual body... to seal orifices and to prevent marginal matter from transgressing the boundary dividing the inside of the body and the outside, the self from the space of the other.³

Thus, the white female nude, securely positioned within the realm of the beautiful, was defined by the control and limitedness of the woman as contained matter or nature. The female body became the female nude through the power of the

² Liam Hudson Bodies of Knowledge: The Psychological Significance of the Nude in Art (London: Weindenfeld and Nicolson, 1982) 17

³ Lynda Nead The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality (London: Routledge, 1992) 6

artist to discipline the eye of the viewer.

The black female body, as the artistic manifestation of the Jezebel, was oppositionally placed as existing within the realm of the sublime. The Kantian notion of the sublime is characterized by the unbound, uncontrolled and limitless nature of the subject. Within the western aesthetic tradition, obscenity in art could be enjoyed within this realm. In this way, the sublime was marked by a powerful and violent kinetic viewing experience. Positioned within this realm, depictions of the black female nude resulted in deliberately eroticized and sexualized images which pushed the limits of artistic propriety.

The white female naked was also experienced as the sublime. Manet's Olympia (1863) (plate 18) is a fitting example. Olympia was in part offensive to her viewing public because of her specificity. Her portrait-like face, class and occupation positioned her as a "real" woman. Her contextualization then, is what made her naked and thus offensive. She was seen as uncontainable, pushing beyond her bodily borders. She was no longer within the realm of the beautiful. A courtesan removed from her allegorical disguise, she transgressed the boundaries of propriety, walking the tight rope between art and pornography.

Adding to the offensive nature of Olympia was the presence of the black servant. In western art, the representation of black and white women in the same frame has

historically denoted the transference of a sinister "black" sexuality onto the purity of the white woman. Therefore the black maid is a symbol of the carnality and filth of the white prostitute. As such, Olympia spoke to the racist belief in the sexual deviance of all black women.⁴ According to Linda Nochlin,

...the notion that the black servant somehow enhances the pearl beauty of her white mistress...a strategy employed from the time of Ingres, in an Orientalist mood, to that of Manet's Olympia, in which the black figure of the maid seems to be an indicator of sexual naughtiness."⁵

But the severe objections to Olympia were also based upon, "...her unashamed awareness of the spectator's desire."⁶ Quite simply, Olympia's gaze thwarted the tradition of the voyeuristic male viewer. Equally disruptive, was Manet's representation of woman as actively aware of, and in control of, her own sexuality.

Olympia re-directs the viewers' gaze back towards themselves, making it clear that at the same time as she is aware of being watched, she is also the watcher. Olympia then, reveals her knowledge of her own sexuality. As she is a courtesan or prostitute, this sexuality is not available free of charge. It is for sale, and she will decide when and if it

⁴ This was quite obvious in the newspaper caricatures that were published of Olympia. Several unflattering depictions represented the black maid as a "Mammy," emphasizing her size and burlesquing her features. Picasso went so far as to reconstruct Olympia as a black woman with an exaggerated "Hottentot" physiognomy.

⁵ Linda Nochlin "The Imaginary Orient" The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society (New York: Harper and Row, 1989) 49

⁶ Gill Saunders The Nude: A New Perspective (Cambridge: Harper and Row Publishers, 1989) 25

is sold to the viewer. Olympia's self possession shatters the elaborately constructed fantasy of the courtesan as Desire.

Dorothy Stevens' Coloured Nude displays the unbound quality of the sublime but not in the same way as the white female naked. While Olympia was sublime in part because her, "...look was a provocation and her body [was] laid out for inspection at the morgue,"⁷ the represented black female body in Coloured Nude was sublime in her embodiment of the Kantian sense of limitlessness as is displayed in her overt sexualization. It is in this way that the represented black female body, experienced as the sublime, is equated with pornography. Patricia Hill Collins believes that,

The treatment of Black women's bodies...may be the foundation upon which contemporary pornography as the representation of women's objectification, domination, and control is based.⁸

There are several main areas to consider when analysing the construction of the female body as beautiful or sublime. Most important are the presence and absence of hair, the positioning of the body within the landscape, and the construction of the body itself.

Western artists have manipulated the use of hair to construct their images as beautiful or sublime, nude or naked.

⁷ T. J. Clark The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers (London: Thames and Hudson, 1985) 133
In other words, Olympia was sublime in her ugliness. Her body was uncontainable in the sense that the contemporary viewer could not read its physical boundaries. She was described as decomposing and possessing an ambiguity that was perceived as ugly.

⁸ Collins, 168

The selective presence and absence of hair in Coloured Nude is a reflection of the black woman's positioning within the realm of the sublime in western art, as it is in direct opposition to the traditional representation of white female nudes. Traditionally white female nudes were depicted without body hair. According to Charles Bernheimer,

The convention of omitting female body hair from the painted image...contributes to the representation of female submission by eliminating the hint of animal passion and physical desire suggested by hairy growth.⁹

In this way the presence of bodily hair signifies a base sexuality and urgent carnal desire within the black woman. Beyond this the presence of underarm and pubic hair participates in the black woman's exclusion from the categories of feminine and woman since, "...pubic hair...may hide the lack of the phallus but is somehow too close to being that lack, which is why it cannot be shown."¹⁰ But the type of hair that has been historically present for its compliance with the fetishizing gaze is absent from Coloured Nude: the hair of the head, bound within a red scarf. White female nudes have traditionally been painted with a profusion of tresses which envelope the body. This type of hair, acting as a phallic symbol, has in the Freudian sense calmed the male fear of castration. Therefore the black woman's lack of head hair declares her "otherness" through a concealment of her

⁹ Charles Bernheimer Figures of Ill Repute (Cambridge: Howard University Press, 1989) 105

¹⁰ Clark, 136

difference to the idealized state of white woman's beauty.

Furthermore, the phallic nature of the white woman's hair is something that cannot be naturally duplicated by the black woman. The tight curly, kinky texture of black hair is not conducive to long lengths and free flowing movement. The eurocentrism of this fetishistic site is revealed as it circumscribes the boundaries of western beauty, which, outside of artistic license (as in the stylized hair of Lawren Harris's Negress) remains unattainable to the black woman.¹¹

The black woman's positioning on, as opposed to within, the landscape is also indicative of her uncontrolled, sublime nature. White female nudes have been historically represented harmoniously within the landscape as woman in nature. Constructed as metaphors for nature, white women were often modelled by the artist with the same stylistic method as rocks or trees. This practice emphasized the patriarchal notion of women as natural beings, matter to be formed by male activity.

Historically, western society has feminised nature constituting it as dichotomous to a masculinized culture. According to Nicholas Green, "In the process, both masculinity and femininity were worked up and fixed through a series of parallel identifications and oppositions."¹² White women were believed to be physiologically closer to nature, the

¹¹ Such observations throw into question the universalizing nature of psychoanalysis through a location of the eurocentric and patriarchal nature inherent in the positioning of the white subject as the norm.

¹² Nicholas Green The Spectacle of Nature: Landscape and Bourgeois Culture in Nineteenth-Century France (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990) 147

implication being that women were pure, innocent, and irrational matter. White men, on the other hand, were perceived as rational and intellectual.

Within this discourse, culture as the masculine realm controlled nature, the feminine realm. Just as man was capable of civilizing and regulating nature, women were perceived as another natural bastion for men to govern and mould. The artistic motif of the white woman in nature, locates woman as a sexualized extension of the natural world, situating white female sexuality as natural, pure and above all, within the control of white men. In this way, nature or woman is inscribed and defined by the masculine genius operating within the cultural realm.

The tradition of white woman's depiction as harmonious with nature is continued within Edwin Holgate's Nude in a Landscape (c. 1930) (plate 19). The represented white woman becomes a metaphor for the land, symbolizing male dominance over the natural realm. Modelled with the same strength as her natural surroundings, the contours of her body echo the delineation of the land. She is presented as peaceful and comfortable within her environment.

Dorothy Stevens' Coloured Nude participates in the oppositional positioning of black female sexuality as uncontained Nature. In contrast to the tradition of white female nudes, the body in Stevens' Coloured Nude is sharply foregrounded as woman *beyond* nature. The represented black

female body is not within the landscape and does not act as a complimentary extension of the landscape. Rather, the stage-like placement of the black woman's body on this "faked tropical landscape", plays up the colonial perception of black female sexuality as beyond limits. The represented black body is not within nature but separate and apart from it. "Black Woman" is constructed as sexual spectacle for the white viewer.

In terms of its construction, the body of the represented black woman in Coloured Nude fits within the realm of the sublime. In pose, the black woman in Coloured Nude opens up her body to the sexual gaze by lifting her clasped hands above her head, an act which reveals her breasts as it simultaneously creates the seductive contour which runs from head to ankle. This gesture defies gravity in order that, paradoxically, the viewer may "feel" the weight of the enlarged, pendant breasts. The pose is deliberately sexual, highlighting the rounded contours of the female form. Similar to Jean-Léon Gérôme's Slave Sale at Rome (c.1884) (plate 20) and the reverse of his Roman Slave Market (c.1884) (plate 21), this pose has been handed down through western artistic discourse within the realm of the female nude as a symbol of the availability of saleable flesh.¹³ In this way the body positioning of the black woman acts as an invitation for the

¹³ See, for example, Linda Nochlin, "The Imaginary Orient" The Politics of Vision: Essays on Nineteenth-Century Art and Society (New York: Harper and Row, 1989) 44-5

sexual gaze as it simultaneously evokes the historical power dynamics of master/slave, owner/commodity within European and North American slave practice. This gaze transcends mere vision registering a physicality as the viewer is positioned to sample and handle the represented body as though provided with a tactile evidence of the female body. This pose also creates a centred, safe, distant and privileged space for the viewer from which to observe the "other." Kenneth Little explains that,

Having an experience of the exotic other...is a matter of controlling the otherwise heterogeneous world 'out there' by gaining a vantage point and forming a perspective in order to make authoritative sense of what one sees. It...is a matter of 'standing back' to take a look and to extend and control the length of the gaze that today produces a technical kind of certainty as reliable already-made spectacle.¹⁴

This authoritative vantage point is also constructed through a manipulation of the gaze and face of the represented black female. The black woman in Coloured Nude invites a voyeuristic gaze since her closed eyes, cast in shadow, allow the viewer the freedom to examine her body without fear of interruption or confrontation. Because the black female is depicted in a standing pose, the closed eyes do not connote sleep as a state of unconsciousness, but a deliberate blinding of the female gaze which yields the privilege of the undisturbed sexual pleasure to the male viewer. In this way

¹⁴ Kenneth Little "On Safari: The Visual Politics of a Tourist Representation" The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses ed. David Howes, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press) 157

the black female is represented as soliciting the male sexual gaze both through sexualized pose and by her permissive expression.

The shadow cast across the face of the woman in Coloured Nude dismisses the possibility of specificity. The woman depicted is not an individual but stands for "Black Woman" in general. In this way, the generality of the face connotes a nude since, "In art, the face...determines whether the body portrayed is perceived in universal terms, or as that of a specific individual."¹⁵ The black female body in art was nude because she was constructed as a generalized vision to represent all black women in a way that, "...transcends historical and social existence, and is a kind of cultural disguise."¹⁶

The construction of "Black Woman" situates the iconic potential of visual representation through which, according to Sander Gilman, individuality is dissolved by, "...the use of a model which synthesizes our perception of the uniformity of the groups into a convincing homogenous image."¹⁷ The represented black woman in Coloured Nude is an icon, the individual realities of black women being overridden by an incessant mythologization through the negative associations

¹⁵ Hudson, 13

¹⁶ Nead, 16

¹⁷ Sander L. Gilman "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Towards an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine and Literature" Critical Inquiry 12: 204

with gender, sex and race. She represents "Black Woman" as she is, according to Gilman, "...composed of fragments of the real world, perceived through the ideological bias of the observer [artist]." ¹⁸

Devices that Disguise

Contrary to the construction of the black female body, the western tradition of the white female nude has historically developed many devices to locate the source of the sexual gaze within the male viewer. In this way, the white female, though read as sexual object, is released from all responsibility for the origination of the sexual gaze.

In particular, there are three deliberate devices which have been employed to depict the white female nude: first, in the unconscious state of sleep; second, her construction as completely ignorant of the viewer's presence; and third, the use of allegory.

Within patriarchal western art practice, woman has been historically constructed as passive, an act which invites voyeurism by allowing an unimpeded access to the female body. Saunders notes that,

Consequently a common device in representations of the nude female is to show her sleeping...Alternatively, she may avert her gaze or hide her eyes or turn away from the viewer so that her face is not seen. ¹⁹

¹⁸ ibid

¹⁹ Saunders, 24

This device preserves the "innocence" of the female by externalizing the source of the sexual gaze. A sleeping woman, unaware of her bodily appearance and the viewer's presence, cannot be purposefully seductive or flirtatious. She is not controlling an active sexuality and is therefore not guilty of immorality. (plates 22-23)

This motif is linked to the late nineteenth-century romanticized vision of woman as invalid within bourgeois culture. A sickly woman was fashionable, as she epitomized feminine passivity and inactivity. But she also represented virtuous sacrifice for love, since according to Bram Dijkstra, a woman's death served as "...a validation of the warm life of masculine achievement."²⁰ Since women who displayed healthy vigour or activity were deemed improper, many women deliberately cultivated a sickly appearance. Upper class white women shunned the outdoors to avoid activity and sunshine, refraining from participating in events or exhibiting attributes that were coded as masculine. Meanwhile starvation was employed to achieve the appropriately frail disposition.

This "cult of invalidism" positioned frailty and sickness as signs of femininity, delicacy and breeding. The fairy-tale of Sleeping Beauty was popular within this climate as it represents woman as preserved in a virginal state within the prison of a sleep/death. Socially, a man with an invalid

²⁰ Bram Dijkstra Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-De-Siecle Culture (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1986) 28

wife was recognized as being able to support "helpless elegance." Dijkstra reveals how,

...death as the ideal state of submissive womanhood had become such a staple of the later nineteenth-century imagination that many males could barely look upon a sleeping woman without imagining her to be virtuously dead.²¹

The proliferation of paintings of sick, dead and sleeping white women locate a social status and economic privilege. In the nineteenth century, only women of a certain class and race had the luxury of choosing not to eat or labour for purely aesthetic purposes. This indulgence was not extended to black women, barely out of slavery. Thus, white bourgeois women represented passive sensuality that enabled the male gaze as it preserved female virtue and innocence for the white woman.

The meanings produced serve to perpetuate stereotypes of women as inactive in order to enforce control over woman's sexuality and thereby her value within kinship exchange and as reproducer. Gill Saunders points out how,

[u]ncontrolled female sexuality is seen as bad because it threatens the foundation of male dominance (male ownership of women is even now enshrined in many of our laws and judicial attitudes), and so women have been consistently presented, in words and images, as innately passive.²²

But at the same time, a woman's passivity makes her susceptible to the male displacement of sexual guilt back onto the female body since, "...their nakedness is regarded as a

²¹ ibid, 60

²² Saunders, 22

culpable incitement to male lust...'the woman tempted me'."²³
Thus, the sleeping motif serves three main purposes: the enabling of the voyeuristic male gaze, the preservation of white female sexuality as "innocent" and the displacement of male sexual guilt to the female source. Historically, the sleeping motif has been popular within western art as it reinforces patriarchal beliefs in woman's essentially passive nature.

Edgar Degas is famous for his use of the second device frequently employed in his images of women within the domestic sphere. Degas' women, busy at their toilette with bent heads and hair in face, are not aware of the viewer's gaze and are therefore not responsible for it. This aversion, minimization or exclusion of the female face makes individuality impossible and thereby creates a generality which protects white female identity. It is in this way that the white woman can appear chaste, pure and devoid of sexual knowledge and intention while still allowing the male viewer the sexual enjoyment of her body. (plates 24-29)

Though Degas' nudes depart from the traditional construction of contrived sexuality, debunking the academic nude, they actually reinforce the tradition of voyeurism. According to Saunders, Degas' nudes,

...resist display, turn their backs, seem unaware of the possibility of observation, unlike the traditional nude who may close her eyes or turn her head but yet manage to

²³ ibid, 23

display her body to advantage for the viewer to enjoy.²⁴ The poses are unposed, active and imperfect often deleting breasts and genitalia as the traditional focus of the female nude. But this absorbed activity enables the voyeuristic gaze, making the viewer a spy privy to the private acts of a naked woman.

This elimination of traditional sites of female sexuality creates a feeling of detachment and invasiveness. The gaze is that of a viewer who cannot quite gain total enjoyment from what is being seen. After all, a voyeur does not get the best seat in the house. The limited and distorting perspectives, created by the abridged access, performs an erasure or minimization of the white female sexuality represented. The traditional signs of female sexual availability are deleted thereby preserving the sanctity and autonomy of the represented figure.

The practice of depicting the white female nude as asleep or unaware have historically been coupled with allegory. The white female nude's *raison d'être* within the realm of the beautiful in art was allegorical or mythological. Parker and Pollock demonstrate how,

[i]n nineteenth-century Salon art the (white) female nude appeared in many guises, as nymph asleep in woodland glades, as Venus raised upon the waves, as shipwrecked and unconscious queen,²⁵ (plates 30-33)

²⁴ ibid, 25

²⁵ Parker and Pollock, 116

These disguises kept the white female nude contained within the realm of art, releasing her from all sexual responsibility for the scopophilic gaze of the male viewer. For it was not the specificity of a particular woman which allowed the sexual gaze but Venus, a sea-nymph, or another other-worldly creature happily removed from reality.

Historically women have been perceived as empty vessels to be filled up with male thought and fantasy in order to create "iconic representations for veneration or emulation."²⁶ The female body was perceived as malleable, to be invested with male desires. Because these images were iconic, their investment with sexual or masculine attributes was not problematic, since an allegory is not a real woman but the embodiment of male fantasy.

Ingres, as one of the pioneers of the sexualized white female nude, used allegory to provide the male viewer of the early nineteenth century with the opportunity to indulge in the pure voyeuristic pleasure of the uncontested male sexual gaze. (plate 34) This was a carefully constructed imagery which, according to Beatrice Farwell, remained strictly within the boundaries of propriety since,

...Ingres nude seems somehow to have submitted, in her defenceless nudity, to a superior will. The sin involved is not that of the maiden, but rather that of the fantasizing mind that stripped her.²⁷

²⁶ Marina Warner Monuments and Maidens (Atheneum: New York, 1985) 82

²⁷ Farwell, 37

CHAPTER 4

GOING BANANAS: JOSEPHINE BAKER AND "COLOURED NUDE"

The construction of and juxtapositions within Coloured Nude are also indicative of a racist colonial legacy. Western art practice has had a tradition within which, "...the association of women with nature, by the juxtaposition of woman with fruit, has...overt sexual meanings."¹ This device was used in Gauguin's Tahitian Women with Mango Fruits (1899) (plate 35) in which a woman's breasts appear nestled above a basket of fruits, symbolizing the availability of the woman's breasts and the fruits to quench the sexual appetite of the male viewer.²

Similarly, in Coloured Nude the figure's full breasts are juxtaposed with the phallic shape of the bananas. Besides affecting connotations of sexual availability, this juxtaposition evokes the combination of nudity, blackness and

¹ Parker and Pollock, 119

² Linda Nochlin "Eroticism and Female Imagery in Nineteenth-Century Art" Women, Art and Power: and Other Essays (New York: Harper and Row, 1988) 139-41

animal nature perfected by the black female dancer, vaudevillian and Folies-Bergère star Josephine Baker (1906-1975). Baker's performances endorsed a fascination with genitalia and buttocks through her exploitation of the white eroticization and fascination with the black body.³

In particular, Coloured Nude can be connected to Baker's outrageously successful "banana act" first performed at La Folie Du Jour in Paris 1926-27.⁴ (plate 36) This particular performance linked the black woman to abundant Nature as a site of animalistic behaviour. Lynn Haney describes the performance thusly,

The highlight of the show occurred when a vast iron cage, egg shaped and painted gold, gradually descended from the lofty ceiling of the house to the level of the orchestra. As its gate opened horizontally, Josephine was revealed standing on a giant mirror. She wore only three gold bracelets on her upper arm and a girdle of rhinestone-studded bananas around her hips. Looking like a Delaunay painting come to life, a visual blur of legs and arms, Josephine danced the Charleston. The bananas trembled like Jell-O on a fork. Then the cage closed over her and she was pulled slowly up again into the distant dome of the theatre.⁵

It was Baker's blackness which made a "scandalous" performance seem "natural." Combined with the animalistic movements of her body, the result was a deliberate emphasis of the bodily parts which the white viewer found most compelling, repulsive and intrinsic to the black physiognomy.

³ bell hooks Black Looks: Race and Representation (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1992) 64

⁴ Lynn Haney Naked at the Feast: A Biography of Josephine Baker (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1981) 99

⁵ ibid

During her "banana act" Baker first entered the stage backwards on hands and feet imitating the movements of a monkey. On stage a black man sang and played the drums and a white explorer lay sleeping beside a river. All this was performed against a backdrop of the African Jungle. Phyllis Rose elaborates,

...Baker started dancing and set the bananas in motion, like perky, good-natured phalluses. She danced, miming sex. She offered herself, withdrew the offer, offered again, drew back again and burst into laughter. It was her savage dance...⁶

Baker's overtly sexual dance linked her sexuality as a black woman to animalistic qualities. A blatant connection between black female sexuality and animal behaviour was forged by her imitation of a monkey's movements, the jungle staging and the cage that encapsulated her.

There are many crucial links between Josephine Baker and Dorothy Stevens' painting. Besides the obvious use of the phallic bananas in Coloured Nude, Dorothy Stevens' staged landscape, reminiscent of the theatre backdrop in front of which Josephine Baker would have performed, displays black female sexuality as performance.

But the link between Josephine Baker and the represented black female body in western art is not all imaginative since Baker was a focus of artistic attention in Paris. Baker was viewed as a "primitive" presence which intersected the western artists' "discovery" of African art. As Phyllis Rose suggests,

⁶ Phyllis Rose Jazz Cleopatra: Josephine Baker in her Time (New York: Doubleday, 1989) 97

Josephine Baker's body should be understood as one of many African "objects" which suddenly seemed beautiful to a Parisian avant-garde whose enthusiasm for African art had been developing for two decades.⁷

At the Beaux-Arts, Baker posed for Picasso, Van Dongen and Foujita and was also represented by Henri Laurens and Alexander Calder.⁸ (plate 37) These representations of Baker sought to capture what the white public viewed as her deviant sexuality. Baker's blackness gave her the power simultaneously to arouse, titillate and frighten the white audience. This fear/desire of blackness is evident in contemporary white artists' use of African masks to inspire a sense of trepidation in the white viewer. More specifically, Rose points out how the use of African imagery by artists like Picasso called upon,

...an association between female sexuality and blackness which exists from a white perspective. He had alluded to it before-crudely-in his 1901 parody of Manet's Olympia, in which the reclining odalisque is redrawn as a black woman. Female sexuality and the black were for Picasso visual analogues.⁹ (plate 38)

For example, Picasso's Les Femmes d'Alger (1907) (plate 39) conflates prostitution, blackness and deviant sexuality. Mediated by the "primitive" African masks, sexuality is represented as a dangerous pleasure, a Freudian site of simultaneous fear/desire. Sex, represented as "black," carried with it all of the connotation of deviance, aggression and

⁷ ibid., 43

⁸ Haney, 67

⁹ Rose, 43

danger.

Baker became an internationally renowned super-star. With the success of her "banana act" the fruit became a symbol of her stardom as dolls of her in her banana costume were sold to children in the streets of Paris. Similarly, a hair wax product was introduced which allowed women to imitate her straight sleek coiffure. But it was not Baker's attire or hairstyle that mediated her astounding success but her blackness. Baker was responsible for the 1920's trend in which upper class white women, abandoning their parasols, covered themselves in walnut oil and sunned themselves in search of colour.¹⁰

Dorothy Stevens' juxtaposition of the black woman's body with the bananas, the staged tropical setting and the evocative pose, evoke the stereotype of black female sexuality as it was deliberately manifested by Josephine Baker who came to symbolize the "...violent darkness of African woman."¹¹

¹⁰ Haney, 67

¹¹ ibid

CHAPTER 5

THE CONSTRUCTION OF "BLACK WOMAN"

"Black Woman" has historically been defined as,

...a woman of inordinate strength...less of a woman in that she is less "feminine" and helpless, she is really more of a woman in that she is the embodiment of Mother Earth, the quintessential mother with infinite sexual, life-giving, and nurturing reserves. In other words she is Superwoman.¹

Central to the development of the stereotypical construction of the black woman as Jezebel was her role and status within slavery, since it is through this oppressive institution that the convention of the chronically promiscuous black woman has been imprinted on the consciousness of western society. The colonial practices of slave labour, as well as the circumstances surrounding the auction, breeding and punishment of slaves operated with utter disregard for gender and sex.

Slavery and Jezebel

The slave owner's ultimate goal was to extract as much

¹ Michele Wallace Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman (New York: Warner Books, 1980)

labour as possible from the slave woman without damaging her reproductive capacities. This led to deliberate gender erasure in the structuring of labour. Female slaves worked side by side with male slaves in the fields from before sunrise until after dark, only to return to the slave quarters where their nightly duties of producing cloth and thread would be taken up.

The physically taxing nature of the black woman's labour set her apart in bodily appearance from the cultivated frailty of the ideal white woman. When Sojourner Truth gave her famous speech "Ar'n't I a Woman?" at a Women's Rights Convention in 1851, she bared her muscular arm while asking that question. Aida Hurtado argued that the reply to such a question, "might not have been obvious even though she had borne thirteen children."² Hurtado insists that the answer to Sojourner Truth's question, "...involves defining woman,"³

The white women in the room did not have to plough the fields, side by side with Black men, and see their offspring sold into slavery, yet they were clearly women. Sojourner Truth had worked the fields, and she had borne children; but she was not a woman in the sense of having the same experiences as the white women at the meeting.⁴

Female slaves could also be put to work in the Big House. But in both cases the inadequacy of the clothing provided and

² Aida Hurtado "Relating to Privilege: Seduction and Rejection in the Subordination of White Women and Women of Color" Signs 1989, 14: 840

³ ibid

⁴ ibid

the type of labour caused an "improper" amount of flesh to be exposed. Slave women were generally forbidden to wear pants and their dresses were often in a state of such ruin as to render them close to naked. Most of the time,

Bondswomen were exposed because of the nature of their work. Female slaves on rice plantations worked in water with their dresses "reefed up" around their hips, exposing their legs and thighs. Similarly many female field hands worked with their skirts pinned up to keep them out of the mud, and house servants pulled up their skirts to wash and polish floors.⁵

Immediately the conspicuous lack of clothing of the black woman set her apart from the respectable white woman who was layered with clothing and never,

...exposed even her legs or arms to public view without arousing the ire of her husband and the contempt of her community. The slave woman's body, however, commanded no such respect...that which was private and personal became public and familiar.⁶

The practices of auction, breeding and punishment also brought the intimate affairs of the female slave into the public realm. The practices of auction objectified the black woman's body so that, "...white men did not have to look at pornographic pictures of women because they could become voyeurs of Black women on the auction block."⁷ The procedure of auction dictated that female slaves be publicly stripped and that the auctioneers and potential buyers be given the

⁵ Johann David Schoepf Travels in the Confederacy (Philadelphia: Campbell, 1911) 147

⁶ Deborah Gray White Ar'n't I a Woman?: Female Slaves in the Plantation South (New York: WW Norton and Company, 1985) 32

⁷ Collins, 168

opportunity to handle (or more appropriately fondle) prospective slaves in an attempt to determine their reproductive capacities. Thus since the procreation of new slaves was predominantly the black woman's burden,⁸ it was not uncommon for the black woman to be forced to endure gynaecological examinations at which the physician was accompanied by prospective buyers. Since western society generally associated, "...public nudity with lasciviousness, this exposure of the slave woman's body led to an...equating of the black woman with promiscuity."⁹

Slaves were not considered to be human but chattel. As such white slave owners systematically bred black slaves as if they were no more than another farm animal. The body structure and physical health of slaves were used to measure the black woman's potential to bear children and thereby increase the master's holdings and wealth. Hip-span, bone structure and breast size were all evaluated to determine the reproductive capacities of the female slave:

These slaves were forced to perform sexually in front of masters and overseers. This act was sometimes viewed as sexually arousing so that after the performance with the slave male, the Black woman was often repeatedly sexually abused by the master and the overseer.¹⁰

⁸ If any man impregnated a black woman the child's status would be that of the slave woman. Contrarily, the child of a white woman and a black man would attain the free status of the mother. In this way, the black woman shouldered the burden of the continuation of the slave population.

⁹ White, 32

¹⁰ Sylvia Witte Vitale "A Herstorical Look at Some Aspects of Black Sexuality" Heresies 1981, 3: 4

The punishment of black women under slavery often carried sexual connotations as well. Black women, perceived as masculine because of their labour within the "male realm", received punishments that were equivalent in ferocity to that of male slaves, but unique in application to their sex. These public punishments witnessed the black woman stripped naked before she was tortured. White male overseers often derived sexual pleasure from the brutal punishments visited on naked black female flesh as a cathartic act of sexual aggression:

Consequently, many slave women were driven and beaten mercilessly, and some received respite only in return for sexual submission. To a white man a black woman was not just a worker who needed prodding, but also a female capable of fulfilling his sexual desires. For this reason a fine line existed between work related punishment and rape, and an overseer's lust might yield to sadistic rage.¹¹

The material reality of the black woman within slavery set her firmly outside of the western ideals of womanhood. When her sexual exploitation as "breeder" of new slaves and sexual victim of the white man was coupled with her physical and mental strength, the result was an identity constructed to suit western norms, which anchored black women with an aggressive and insatiable sexuality - the Jezebel.

Pathologization: Enter the "Sciences"

¹¹ Jacqueline Jones Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and the Family from Slavery to Present (New York: Basic Books Inc., Publishers, 1985) 14

The Jezebel stereotype was equally developed within the realm of nineteenth-century human sciences. The human sciences were full participants within colonial discourse and were, as Anita Levy has demonstrated,

... 'colonialist' and 'imperialist' in that they were fundamentally concerned with managing 'disruptive' populations such as the working class, colonial peoples, and women, and were deeply involved in writing the subjectivity of the other of class, race and sex.¹²

It is through these discourses that a dichotomy was established between the good white woman and the bad black woman. African women were deemed "bad" because, "...they exhibit(ed) female sexual features so overdetermined as to make them 'masculine'."¹³ But overdetermined by whose standards? In order to make such claims, scientific standards had to be set in place. Sander Gilman insists that,

...a paradigm was needed which would technically place both the sexuality and the beauty of the black in an antithetical position to that of the white. This paradigm would have to be rooted in some type of unique and observable physical difference; they found that difference in the distinction they drew between the pathological and the normal in the medical model.¹⁴

In this way the African physiognomy was defined as evolutionarily inferior to the unquestioned eurocentric norm.

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the colonial stereotype as

¹² Anita Levy *Other Women: The Writing of Class, Race and Gender, 1832-1898* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) 107

¹³ *ibid*, 69

¹⁴ Gilman, 212

fetish, when read through the specificity of the black woman's body reveals the ambivalent projections of fear/desire as they are revealed in the horrific violation of black women such as Sarah Bartmann or Saat-Jee. (plate 40) Otherwise known as the Hottentot Venus, Saat-Jee was one of many black women imported from South Africa via the European Slave Trade.¹⁵ Saat-Jee was publicly displayed naked throughout London to curiosity seekers who were, "...amazed and affrighted by the sight of her naked body with its enlarged buttocks and elongated genital flap."¹⁶ The Hottentot female, her physiognomy easily distorted, became the icon of the antithetical nature of all black people as they were oppositionally positioned against whites. In as much as Saat-Jee was reduced to her sexual parts, she was used as a, "...sexual object similar to how women are represented in contemporary pornography."¹⁷

By way of countless "scientific" texts, observations of the Hottentot females' genitalia were said to reveal "primitive" deformities. The Hottentot woman was seen as possessing a hypertrophy of the labia, named the "Hottentot Apron," an overdeveloped clitoris and a nymphae caused by manipulation of the genitalia. In regard to the clitoris, the black woman was thought to possess an abnormally large hood or

¹⁵ Michele Wallace "Modernism, Postmodernism and the Problem of the Visual in Afro-American Culture" *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* ed. Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha and Cornel West (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1990) 45

¹⁶ Stephen Gould "The Hottentot Venus" *Natural History* 1982, 91: 20-27

¹⁷ Collins, 169

prepuce which when linked to the male foreskin was read as a sign of her masculinity, deformity and bi-sexuality. Since the Hottentot had come to represent all black people and especially women, "...the black female was widely perceived as possessing not only a "primitive" sexual appetite but also the external signs of this temperament - "primitive" genitalia."¹⁸ In this way the black woman was defined as degenerate through a pathologization of her physiognomy. The eventual death, dissection and display of Saat-Jee's genitalia at the Musée de l'homme in Paris is a haunting and painful reminder that even in death the black female was not accorded the same respect afforded to the white female.¹⁹

Many european "scientists" contributed to this belief in the pathology of the black woman's sexuality. Buffon, in a pseudo-scientific travel journal, wrote that black women's sexual deformity lead them to copulate with apes.²⁰ In a major essay in the Dictionnaire des sciences medicales (1819) J.J. Virey wrote about the "primitive" state of the physiology and physiognomy of the Hottentot woman.²¹ Havelock Ellis' Studies in the Psychology of Sex (1905) attempted to create an

¹⁸ Gilman, 213

¹⁹ ibid, 216
As of 1985, with the printing of Gilman's article, Saat-Jee's genitalia was still being displayed in Paris.

²⁰ ibid, 212

²¹ ibid

absolute scale of objective beauty which of course ranged from the paradigm of white europeans to black people.²² De Blainville (1816), Cuvier (1817), A.W. Otto (1824) Johannes Muller (1834), William H. Flower and James Murie (1867), and Luschka, Koch and Gortz (1896) all performed autopsies on Hottentot females.²³ This preoccupation with the bodies of black women was linked to the knowledge that,

If their sexual parts could be shown to be inherently different, this would be a sufficient sign that the blacks were a separate (and needless to say, lower) race, as different from the Europeans as the proverbial orangutan.²⁴

In this way, the bodies of black women were perceived as holding the key to the ultimate and all encompassing inferiority of black people. The "scientific" accounts used the "...female to secure racial boundaries from which the "primitive" female deviates not from a lack of female features, but from an excess of them."²⁵ The word excess is the key since, Bhabha has demonstrated that the currency and repeatability of the colonial stereotype hinges on the construction of an identity which, "...must always be in excess of what can be empirically proved or logically

²² ibid, 218

²³ ibid, 216

²⁴ ibid

²⁵ Levy, 71

construed."²⁶

While the black woman was defined as embodying all that was not feminine, she also served as a warning to white women as she represented the controlled sexuality within them. While the definition of black women within the tradition of western sciences positioned them as the undesirables, it has simultaneously acted to highlight the desirability of the "norm" -the sexually pure white woman.

²⁶ Bhabha, 71

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The black woman, already deemed sexually insatiable and pathologically deviant, needed no disguise to mediate her sexualization within the realm of the nude. Her disguise was the colour of her skin. "Blackness" as a marker of difference and inferiority released western artists from all obligations to contain the sexuality, the Nature, of the black female in representation. Known throughout colonial discourse as sexually degenerate, it was not improper for the western artist to portray the undisguised black female body as soliciting the sexual gaze of the male viewer. Contrarily, any such image of the white female would have crossed out of fine arts and into the realm of the pornographic.¹

The social contextualization of the subject determined what was considered obscene and for whom. For the black woman,

¹ Here, for example, I would like to propose that if Manet had placed a look of compliance rather than confrontation on to the face of *Olympia* (1863), that the painting would have been dismissed as pornographic. It was *Olympia's* ambivalent expression which saved her from this fate. Traditionally within western art, a naked white woman, marked by the specificity of her face and body, could not be constructed as soliciting the male sexual gaze. This act would implicate the white woman as sexually desirous and remove the painting from the realm of *Desire* without the mediation of an allegorical disguise.

highly sexualized representations in art were merely seen as "truthful" depictions of an essential inferiority. It is in this way that the black female body in art is within the realm of the naked and came to be depicted as sublime in its abundance of unrestrainable sexuality and Nature. Thus the black female body in western art is represented simultaneously as the nude and the naked: Nude in its "every-woman" generalization and naked in its unbound sublime sexualization.

The black female body in art has been submitted to a fetishizing vision. If the fetishized nude is, "...an extreme example of the female body distorted for male fantasy and gratification,"² then the black female body in art is the ultimate example. The black female body fulfilled the male sexual desire for control in two ways; first through her sexual "otherness" as woman, and second through her racial and colour "otherness" as black. But it is the combined power of these two markers of social location which has allowed western artists to construct the black woman outside of the societal boundaries of propriety.

As has been demonstrated, there are some central differences in the construction of Dorothy Stevens' Coloured Nude which would, in the white female, have been unacceptable. Specifically, the absence of hair on the head and the presence of pubic hair on the black body have been established as devices which go against the accepted norm of the white female

² Saunders, 72

body. These markers have had a historical place in the pacifying or thwarting of the male sexual gaze. But their absence and presence in the black woman is not problematic.

I propose that this is due to the fact that the entire body of the black woman has become a fetish; the represented black female body is not merely fetishized but fetish. In her double lack of male sex and white skin, the black woman is the quintessential "other." Irremediably removed from the paradigm of white manhood or even the secondary categories of white womanhood or black manhood, her entire bodily presence is a constant reminder of her lack, and as such must be manipulated to remove the threat of her difference. It is in this way that the fetish can be perceived in the traditional Freudian sense as a lack of the phallus, but also in the sense of a lack of similar skin/race/culture within the concept of the colonial stereotype as fetish proposed by Homi K. Bhabha. The black woman in Coloured Nude is a fetish in that,

[t]he fetish or stereotype gives access to an "identity" which is predicated...on mastery and defense, for it is a form of multiple and contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it...The scene of fetishism is also the scene of reaction and repetition of primal fantasy - the subject's desire for a pure origin that is always threatened by its division,³

Since the characteristics of the stereotype of Jezebel were located primarily in the depiction of her sexual body, Jezebel's natural translation within artistic representation

³ Bhabha, 80

was the black female body. Representations of the black woman's body in western art have produced and perpetuated the colonial ideals presented in the human sciences, historically embodying the dichotomous standards created for the white and black woman.

Though colonial stereotypes were developed simultaneously across all disciplinary boundaries in western thought and culture, it is western art that has left what is perhaps the most naturalized evidence of the west's deliberate construction of black people as essentially degenerate. This naturalization has been effected through the "silence" of visual language, which within western art historical discourse has been promoted as being objective and universal.

The black woman's body represents the ultimate deviation from the western desire for the singular subject of "pure" origin. Thus her image, as a threat to wholeness, must be controlled. The control that western artists have developed is instituted by way of an extreme sexualization which when accompanied by generalization creates a fixed and homogeneous signification of all black women as sexually deviant animals.

Western artists have simultaneously constructed the black woman's body as nude and naked through a distortion of the material and physical circumstances of her chattel status within slavery as well as the obsessive "scientific" pathologization of the black woman's body.

The nude and the naked, discussed as universal categories

by art historians, are specific to class, race, sex, gender, age, sexual orientation and all other markers of social specificity. The black woman's identity, deliberately constructed as inferior within racist paradigms by white scholars, cannot simply be read within the confines of a language developed for the white female body. Rather the legacy of the oppression and violation of black women due to the intersection of race and sex, must be central in our reading. It is in this way that, Homi K. Bhabha believes,

...the point of intervention (will) shift from the *identification* of images as positive or negative, to an understanding of the *processes of subjectification* made possible (and plausible) through stereotypical discourse.⁴

Art is a powerful social tool that conditions our vision of ourselves and each other. Western artists have historically used representations of black people to establish boundaries, mapping out territories for the self and the "other". This thesis is an attempt to situate the manifestation of colonial discourse in visual processes as they were and are, to this day, active in the representation of black women.

⁴ *ibid.*, 71

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in the Thirties exhibition (31 January 1975 - 4 January
1976) two cassettes

PLATES



Plate 1

Dorothy Stevens
Coloured Nude, 1933



Plate 2

John Wentworth Russell
A Modern Fantasy, c. 1927



Plate 3

Edwin Holgate
Interior, c. 1933



Plate 4

Edwin Holgate
Nude, c. 1930



Plate 5

Bertram Brooker
Figures in the Landscape,
1931



Plate 6

Bertram Brooker
The St. Lawrence, 1931



Plate 7

Lilias Torrance Newton
Nude in the Studio, 1933



Plate 8

Edouard Manet
Déjeuner sur l'herbe, 1863



Plate 9

Max Weber
Tranquility, 1930



Plate 10

Max Weber
Gesture, 1921



Plate 11

Alexandre Archipenko
Bather, 1912



Plate 12

Alexandre Archipenko
Bather, 1919



Plate 13

Alexandre Archipenko
Bather, 1921

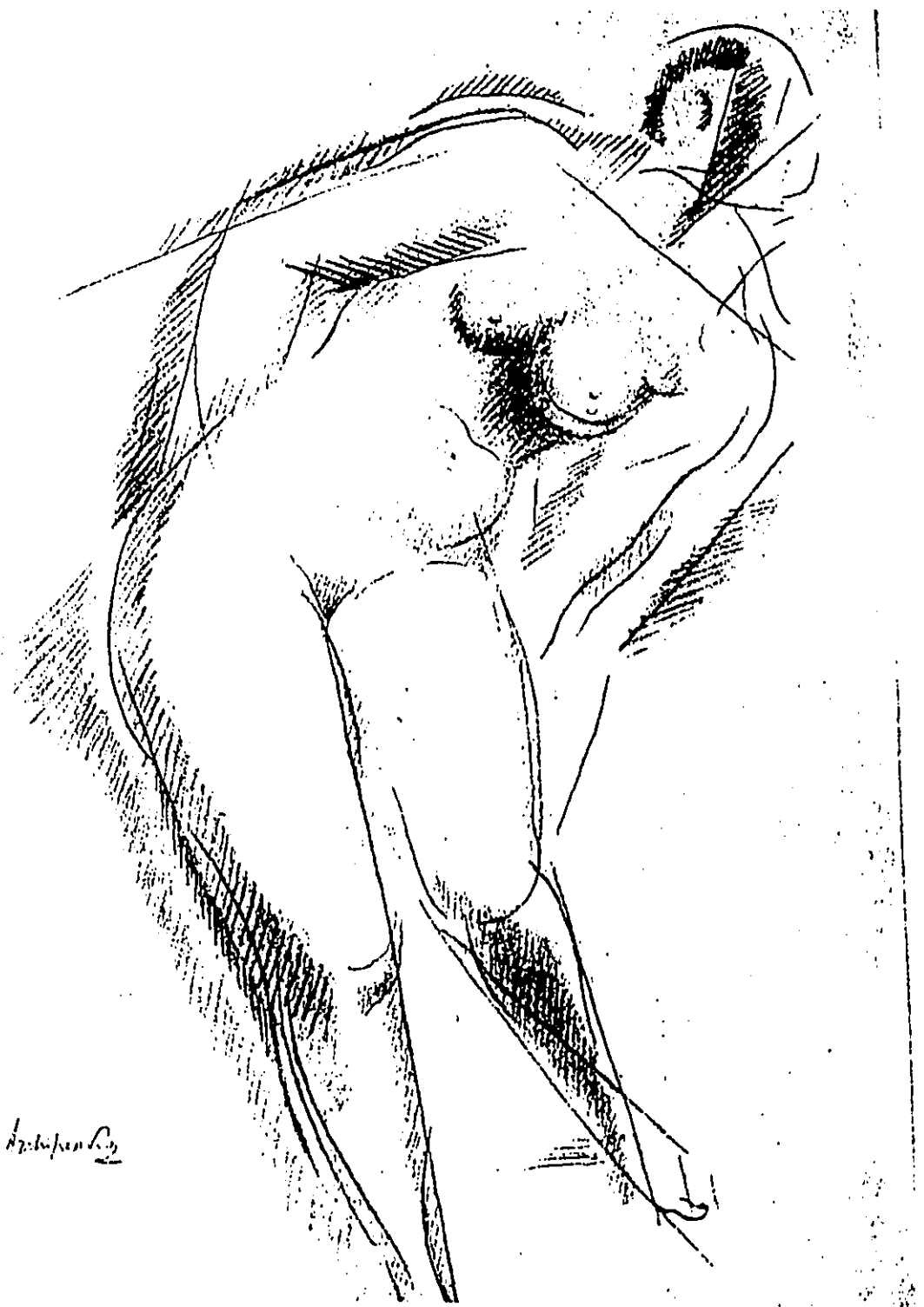


Plate 14

Alexandre Archipenko
Bather, 1921



Plate 15

Prudence Heward
Dark Girl, 1934



Plate 16

Prudence Heward
Hester, 1937



Plate 17

Lawren P. Harris
Negress, 1937



Plate 18

Edouard Manet
Olympia, 1863



Plate 19

Edwin Holgate
Nude in a Landscape,
c. 1930



Plate 20

Jean Leon Gerome,
Slave Sale at Rome,
c. 1884



Plate 21

Jean Leon Gerome
Roman Slave Market,
c. 1884



Plate 22

Theodore Chasseriau
Sleeping Bather by a
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Plate 23

Randolph Hewton,
Sleeping Woman, 1929



Plate 24

Edgar Degas,
*Woman Bathing in a Shallow
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Plate 25

Edgar Degas,
The Tub, 1886



Plate 26

Edgar Degas,
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Plate 27

Edgar Degas,
Woman in a Tub, c. 1885-86



Plate 28

Edgar Degas,
The Morning Bath, c. 1885



Plate 29

Edgar Degas,
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Plate 30

Alexandre Cabanel,
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Plate 31

William Bouguereau,
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Plate 32

Randolph Hewton,
Decoration, c. 1931



Plate 33

Frederick S. Challener,
Dusk, 1901



Plate 34

Jean-Auguste-Dominique
Ingres, *Venus Anadyomene*,
1848

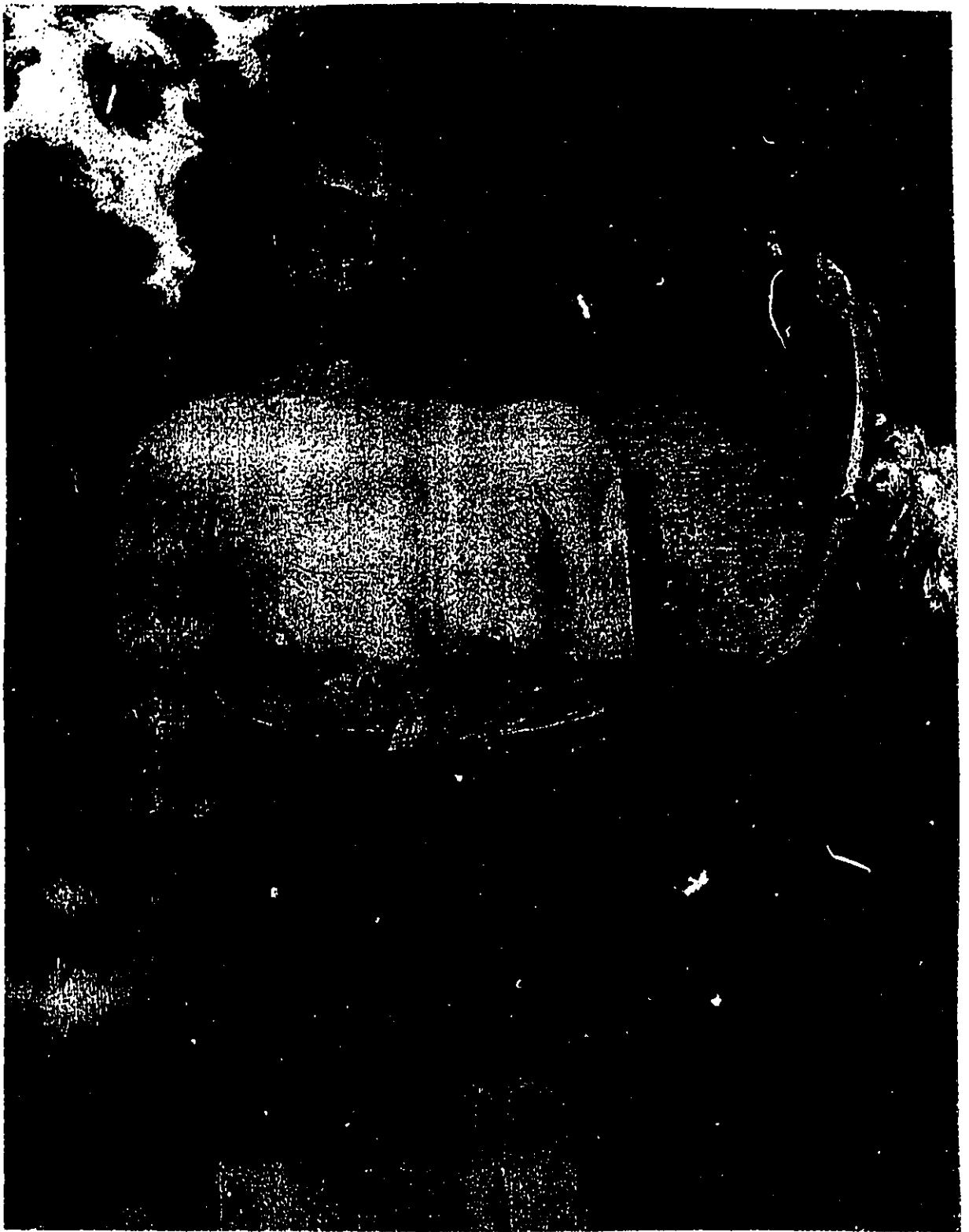


Plate 35

Paul Gauguin,
*Tahitian Women with Mango
Fruits*, 1899



Plate 36

Josephine Baker



Plate 37

Josephine Baker

Picasso

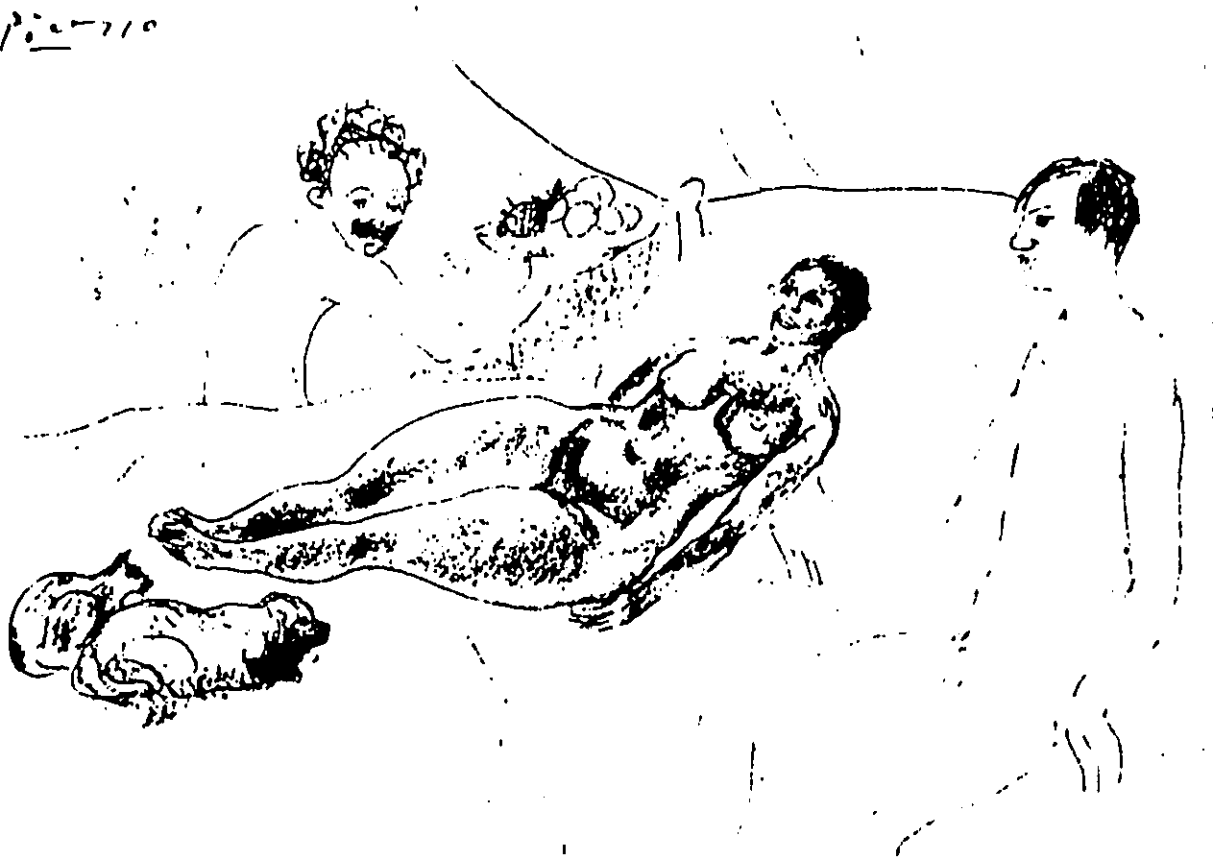


Plate 38

Pablo Picasso,
Olympia, 1901



Plate 39

Pablo Picasso,
Les Femmes d'Alger (O Version O),
1907

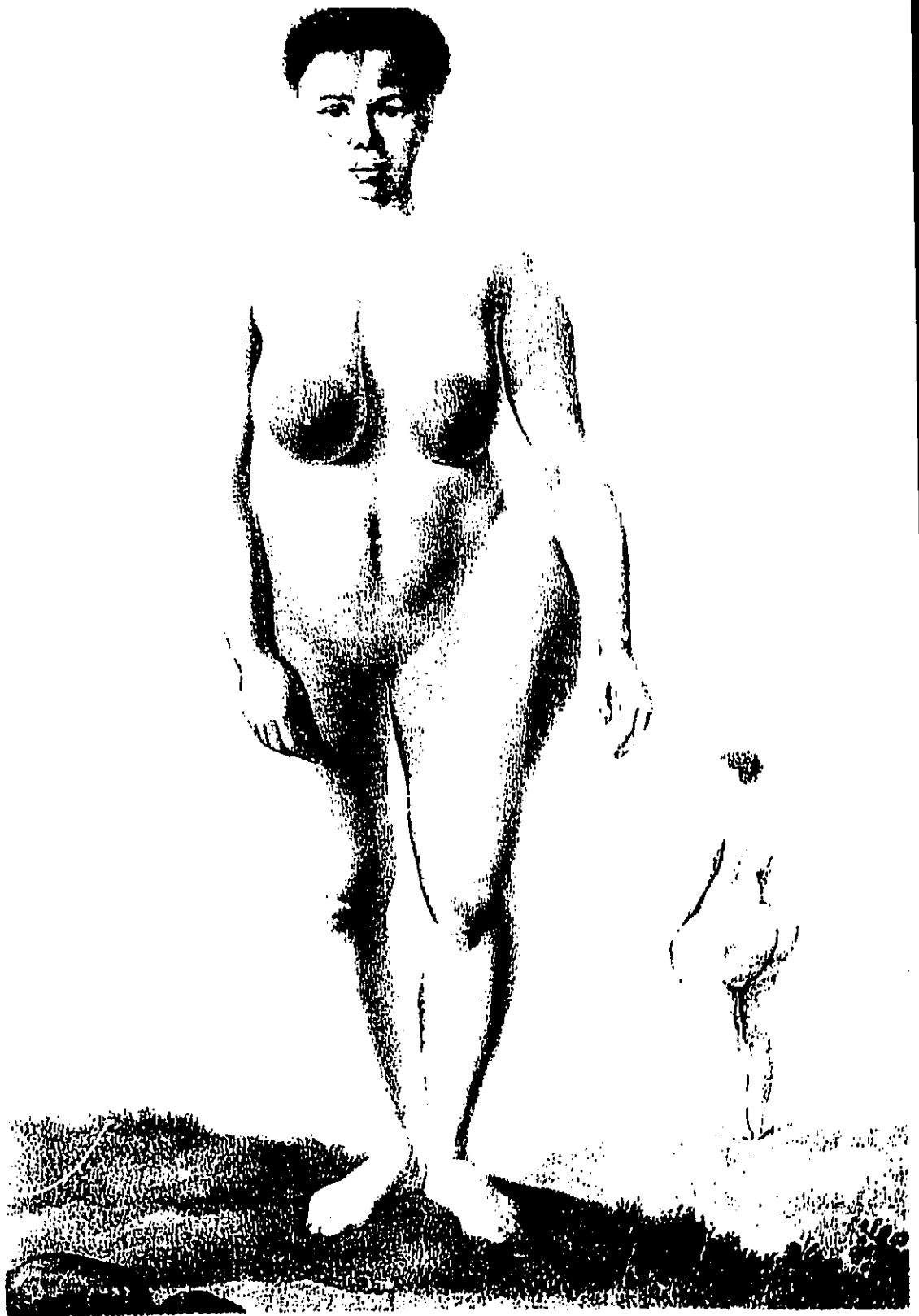


Plate 40

Leon de Wailly,
Saartjie Baartman,
Hottentot Venus, 1815