

Portfolio &

ART NEWS ANNUAL

NO. 3

*Literature * Theater*

*Music * Science*

& the Visual Arts



NEW IDEAS MADE VISUAL

Portfolio &

ARTNEWS ANNUAL



NO. 3

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Paule-Marie Grand



Germaine Brée



Pierre Klossowski

tinuing interest in "total environment; sensory and symbolic" have helped give him the insight necessary to interpret the transcendentalist paintings of Ad Reinhardt... Paule-Marie Grand, noted French archeologist of European prehistory and wife of the distinguished critic André Chastel, is also a critic in her own right; she lives in the midst of the Paris art world, from which springs the special knowledge she brings to her essay on Alberto Giacometti.

Poets on the Other Muses

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Continuing *Portfolio's* practice of presenting original works of literature, either unpublished or untranslated, are these eight specially-commissioned poems, embodying their authors' response to a visual form—whether the classic beauty of Antinous or the mobile features of Jimmy Durante. The distinguished poets represented are: Louise Bogan, Kenneth Burke, Babette Deutsch, Irving Feldman, Robert Lowell, Adrienne Rich, James Schevill and W. D. Snodgrass.

The New Theater of France

BY GERMAINE BRÉE

96

The newest and most vigorous theater in the world today has arisen in the little theaters of Paris, where a group of irreverent innovators have rudely questioned every premise on which the success of the French drama had been built. Equally distinguished as a literary critic and teacher, Germaine Brée has been Chairman of the Department of Romance Languages and Russian at New York University since 1956. Her perceptive and scholarly books on Proust, Gide and especially the most recent one, on the late Albert Camus, have kept her "on top of" the French literary scene and of one of its most exciting postwar developments—the avant-garde "anti-theater" led by Beckett, Ionesco and Genêt.

The Falling Nymphs

BY PIERRE KLOSSOWSKI

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The progressive destruction of the very idea of the Nude in art as a "legend of the female body" remains one of the baffling by-products of the development of the modern temper. Though not yet as well-known in America as in France, Pierre Klossowski, French novelist and critic (and brother of the painter Balthus), has been much praised in France for the polished and allusive style which he now brings to American readers in his essay on the decline of the Nude in modern painting. His most recent novels, *Le Bain de Diane* (1956) and *La Révocation de l'Edit de Nantes* (1959), both contain passages describing his highly personal response to painting.

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THE FALLING NYMPHS



Pierre Paul Renoir, *La Fuite en Egypte*, 1881.
Museum of Modern Art, New York

"We shift and bedeck and bedrape us,
Thou art noble and nude and antique."
—Swinburne: *Dolores* (1866)

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Of the classic Nude's precipitous fall from grace within the last century of painting there can hardly be doubt. For the total chronology Swinburne's lines could serve as a sort of Planck's Constant. They would have seemed, to a Renaissance contemporary of the Giorgione-Titian *Venus*, almost suspiciously effusive; he would, in any case, have emphasized "antique" and slurred over "noble." To the Neo-Classic legatee of the Renaissance, Ingres, they would have come closer in spirit. And they express almost precisely the sentimental Victorian erotics of Ingres' true heirs, the titillators of the official Salon—Gérôme, Bouguereau, Henner, Zorn. But nobody can imagine the Swinburnian triple effusion applied to the proletarian buttocks and purely occupational divestment of Degas or Toulouse-Lautrec, much less to the psycho-neurotic attenuation of Modigliani or the pseudo-Gothic shame of Nolde and Kokoschka.

Yet these very contradictions are implicit in the longer history of art as it pertains to the Nude. The following study deals with only the last century, while history begins with that celebrated earliest of all Nudes, the prehistoric *Venus* of Willendorf, who is all breasts and buttocks in eloquent, exclusive symbolism of fertility. Now all talk of Falling Angels or a Decadence of the Nude may well be simply a shortsighted infatuation with the brief historical scale of our own and recent time. For everything here has been here before. Caligula's and Nero's Rome stressed the Lolita-ish aspects of the pubescent, and the hermaphroditic, Nude, as have recently Balthus and Klee. Medieval Christianity saw nudity as Adam and Eve saw it: a badge of shame. The barbaric sophistication of polyglot artists working in the sixteenth-century Ecole de Fontainebleau permitted them Dianas embracing stags, among other oddities no more congruous than the riotous personal demons of Salvador Dali or the irrational super-photography of Magritte. Those marvelously quadrangulated anatomies drawn daily in the hundreds by the ubiquitous Baroque master, Luca Cambiaso, dissect movement as well as shape of the Nude, as if they were prophecies of Marcel Duchamp's unclothed robot in her eternal downward steps.

Perhaps only one characteristic of the past century's Nude had not been seen before: the steady class distinction. Prostitutes, yes; these obviously have been the subject of moral or pseudo-moral causeries for hundreds of years. But never before the servant girls and tired *femmes de concierge*, the over-muscled laundresses and Pascin's shopgirls in animal guise. It is almost as if Karl Marx had here insisted on a new iconography as a symbol of class warfare. Whatever the causes, here are the results.

A.F.



Paul Klee: *A Notorious Hermaphrodite*, 1899, pencil drawing

'Still aspires to interpret form'



Aubrey Beardsley: *Enter Herodias*, 1893, woodcut illustration for Oscar Wilde's *Salome*

'Fin-de-siècle nostalgias, hermaphroditic obsessions'

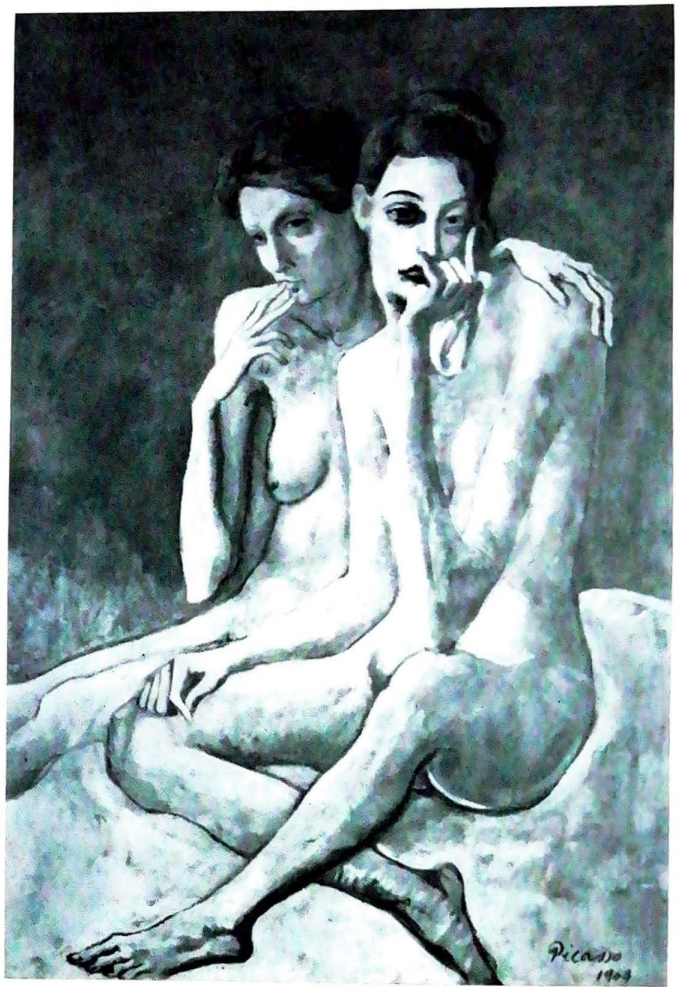


Paul Klee: *Virgin in a Tree*, 1903, etching

'The nude tormented by sexual indetermination'

'An ironic echo of the tormented nude'

Picasso: *Two Sisters*, 1904; Private Coll., Paris



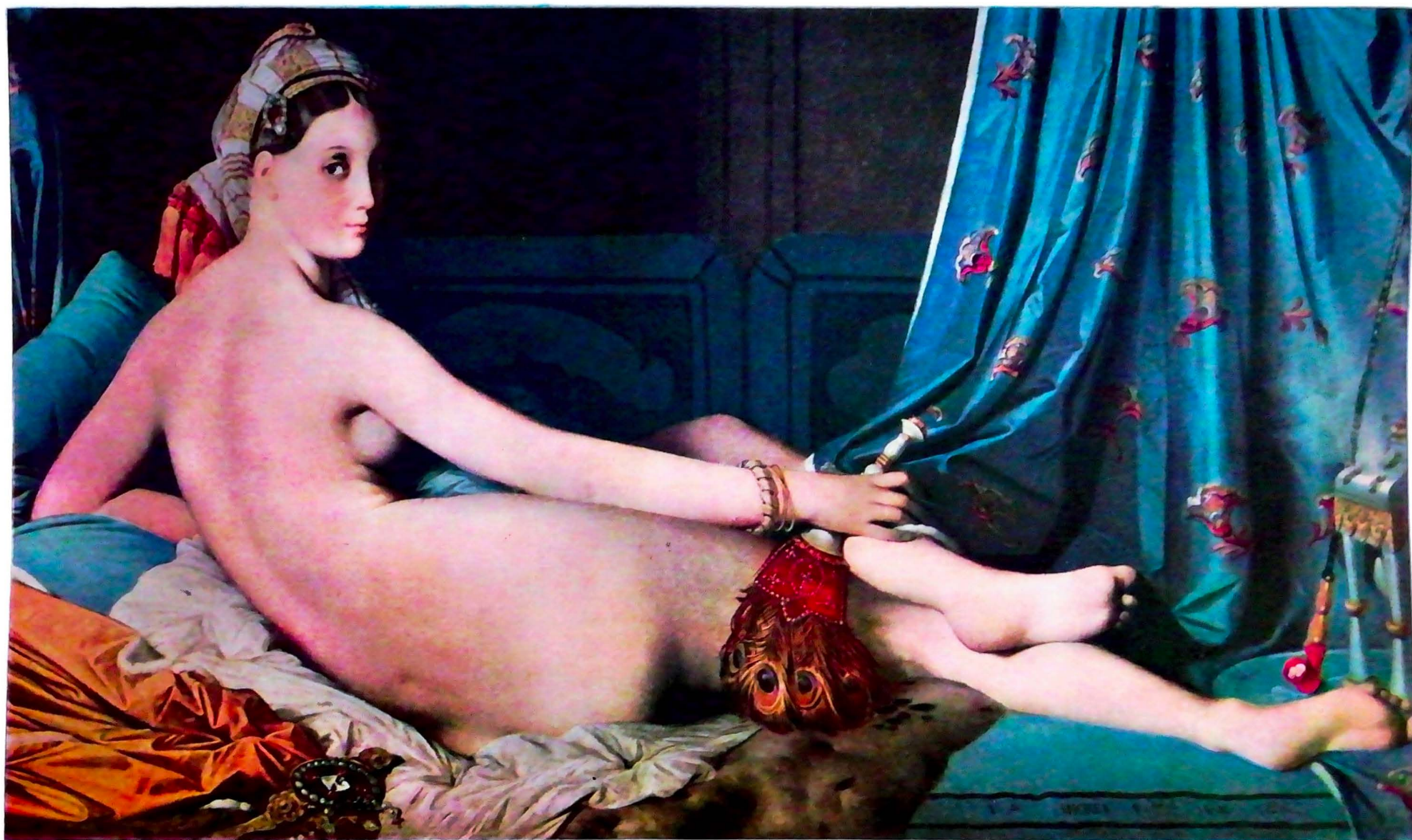
I should like to present a few reflections on the Nude from a non-artistic viewpoint. Art will speak for itself in the reproductions of several paintings among which these digressions will take their course. A few of these paintings have or display nude subjects. Other more recent paintings that we will include display less than they express, as though relieved of a burdensome obsession that weighed heavily on painting, or else speak as though recalling their burden.

Suppose that someone comes along and says: the Nude is always the Nude. In art schools, there are life classes, there are models. Yet who believes the Nude is studied in order to paint nudes? Who would even claim it was true? How was it ever possible in the first place?

This is the sort of question that was apparently not asked around 1800. But in 1899, in Munich, Paul Klee, then a student of the academic painter Knirr, already suspected he was wasting his time. After completing his apprenticeship with Franz von Stuck and studying with Haller in Rome, he wanted to work from nature again—in other words, to study the nude; once back in Berne, his scrupulousness impelled him even to take a course in anatomy—"that repellent science," as Ingres had called it sixty years before.

As a matter of fact, Klee's apprentice years in Knirr's studio have left us a sketch

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Ingres: *Reclining Odalisque*, 1814; Louvre, Paris

'A schoolboy spirit, a perfect and wholesome naïveté'

'Secret animality emerging from the intimacy of a room'

Delacroix: *Woman with a Parrot*, 1827; Musée de la Ville, Lyon





Giorgione and Titian: *Sleeping Venus*, ca. 1508; Gemäldegalerie, Dresden
'Habitually set in a legendary outdoors'

'Expresses the artist's emotion before the model'

Goya: *The Nude Maja*, ca. 1797; Prado, Madrid





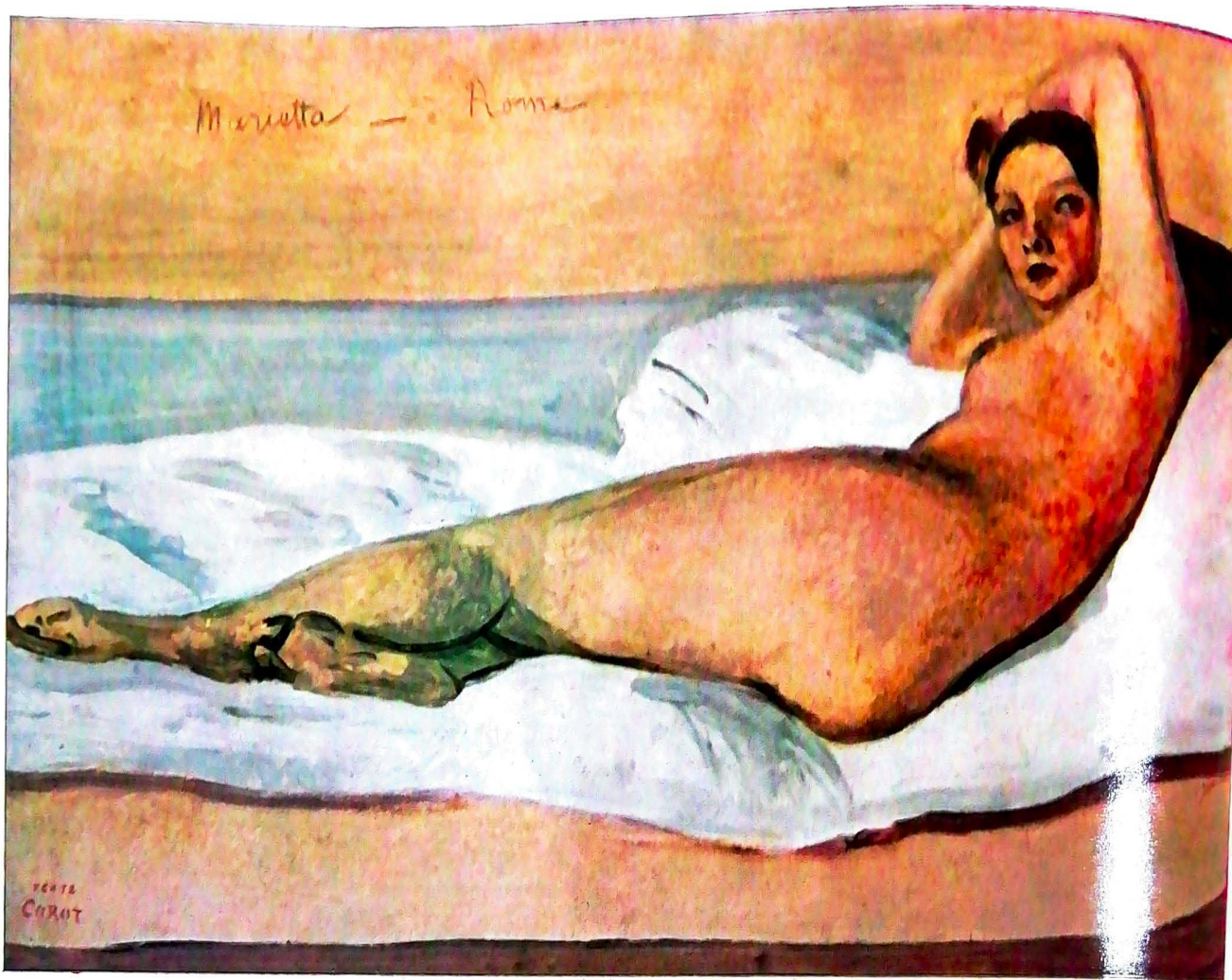
Fragonard: *The Bathers*, 1760-65(?); Louvre, Paris

'Developing an artificial language of gesture'

'A laceration of everyday banality'

Manet: *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*, 1863; Louvre, Paris



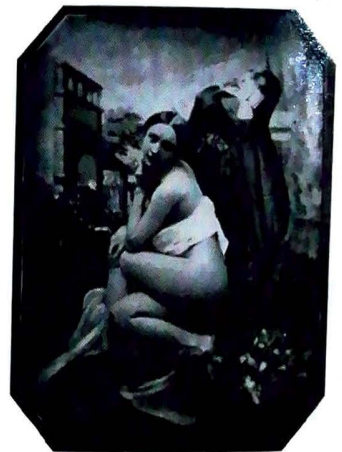


Corot: *Marietta*, 1843; Petit Palais, Paris

'The woman's sense of her own nudity'

of the Nude, *A Notorious Hermaphrodite* [page 106]. In the context of his interests of the period and of the erotic temptations noted in his diary, this vigorous drawing, with its interpretation of the model suggested by the title, reveals a whole substratum of emotion (from which Klee later wished to free himself). It discloses, in addition, the plastic methods in vogue in this disturbing milieu, which Klee also wished to jettison in order to become himself, to achieve "polyphonic painting." Klee, after all, had been a pupil of Stuck, that master "minus the sense of color" who has left us certain studies of women wantoning with serpents. And yet Stuck's bad taste—the "bad taste" of the period, which Surrealism has helped to make into an expressive category we find perfectly acceptable—still belongs to a plastic space, inherited from the Renaissance, where the illumination is not yet the diffused light of Impressionism, but aspires to the interpretation, all the more haunting in that it is conventional, of those oblong, spherical and curved forms which constitute the female body, as opposed to the angular ones of the male. *A Notorious Hermaphrodite* (we realize the significance which titles will assume in Klee's work)—this equivocal inscription points out a profound affinity between the artist and the female body he projects. Here a purely anecdotal androgynism nonetheless reveals an underlying and antedating psychic synthesis: the desire to create a Nude.

"Like man himself," Klee notes, "the painting too has a skeleton, muscles, a skin. We can speak of an anatomy particular to the painting. A painting whose



Marietta, Corot's model, ca. 1843, daguerreotype; Coll. Dieterle, Paris

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subject is 'a nude man' is not to be represented according to human anatomy but according to that of the painting. You begin by constructing a framework, a scaffolding for the painting to be built on. How far you can depart from it is left up to you; by starting from this scaffolding, you can produce a more profound plastic effect than by starting from the surface alone."

The special case of Paul Klee, a contemporary, in his youth, of the second wave of Impressionism, provides, historically speaking, a primary landmark for the conception of painting as painting, much as it has been developed in all theory since.

In 1905, Klee notes again: "The subject as such is decidedly dead. It is the *sensibility* which, in relation to the subject, occupies the chief role. The preponderance of erotic subjects is not an exclusively French phenomenon, but rather indicates a predilection for everything which appeals particularly to the sensibility. The external forms taken by this increase in sensibility become particularly variable and cover the entire scale of temperaments. They vary in proportion to the flexibility of the contents, one might say in this case, and according to the techniques of representation. The academy of the 'old masters' genre is certainly liquidated."

For our purposes, Klee's notes can be summed up as follows: the liquidation of the "old masters" genre implies the liquidation of the *Nude as subject*.

Let us remark that Klee attributes the variety of technical means to the development of sensibility and this development to the "preponderance of erotic subjects" insofar as they appeal to the plastic sensibility. Thus the means employed to achieve the plastic goal end by subordinating that goal, and we reach the intellectualist notion of the painting *as painting*. The human anatomy of "*la belle nudité*" is absorbed into the "anatomy of the painting." *La belle nudité* (the nude as sub-

'Glimpse into a forbidden realm'

Manet: *Olympia*, 1865; Louvre, Paris



Jean Gérôme, 1824-1904: *Roman Slave Market*; Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore



Adolphe Bouguereau: *Nymphs and Satyr*, 1873; Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Mass.

*'Sentimental Victorian erotics
of the titillators of the official Salon'*

ject) gives way to the nude as *motif*, the fortuitous nude, and the latter, first neutralized, is gradually disarticulated or dissolved according to the laws henceforth proper to the painting as painting.

That the nude is to be represented not according to human anatomy but according to the anatomy of the painting might mean, simply, that the painting's syntax—colors spread over a plane surface—must be respected independent of our natural vision in order to translate the sum of our experiences by equivalents. All the Masters have worked in this way.

But this is not all Klee means: the "anatomy of the painting" supposes that the painting is a *self* which becomes alive, which breathes according to its own laws, unconcerned with what it is given to feed on.

Do not Ingres' *Reclining Odalisque* [page 108], Courbet's *Sleep* [page 116] and Renoir's *The Bathers* [page 117] presuppose this anatomy of the painting, independent of the anatomy of the Nudes shown? Certainly. Suppose one of our modern masters were to set himself the task of copying any of these three works according to the "anatomy of the painting" alone: we should like to know if he rediscovers the different substrata of these compositions or if, on the contrary, he merely renders his

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Jean J. Henner, 1829-1905: *Reverse*; Private Coll.



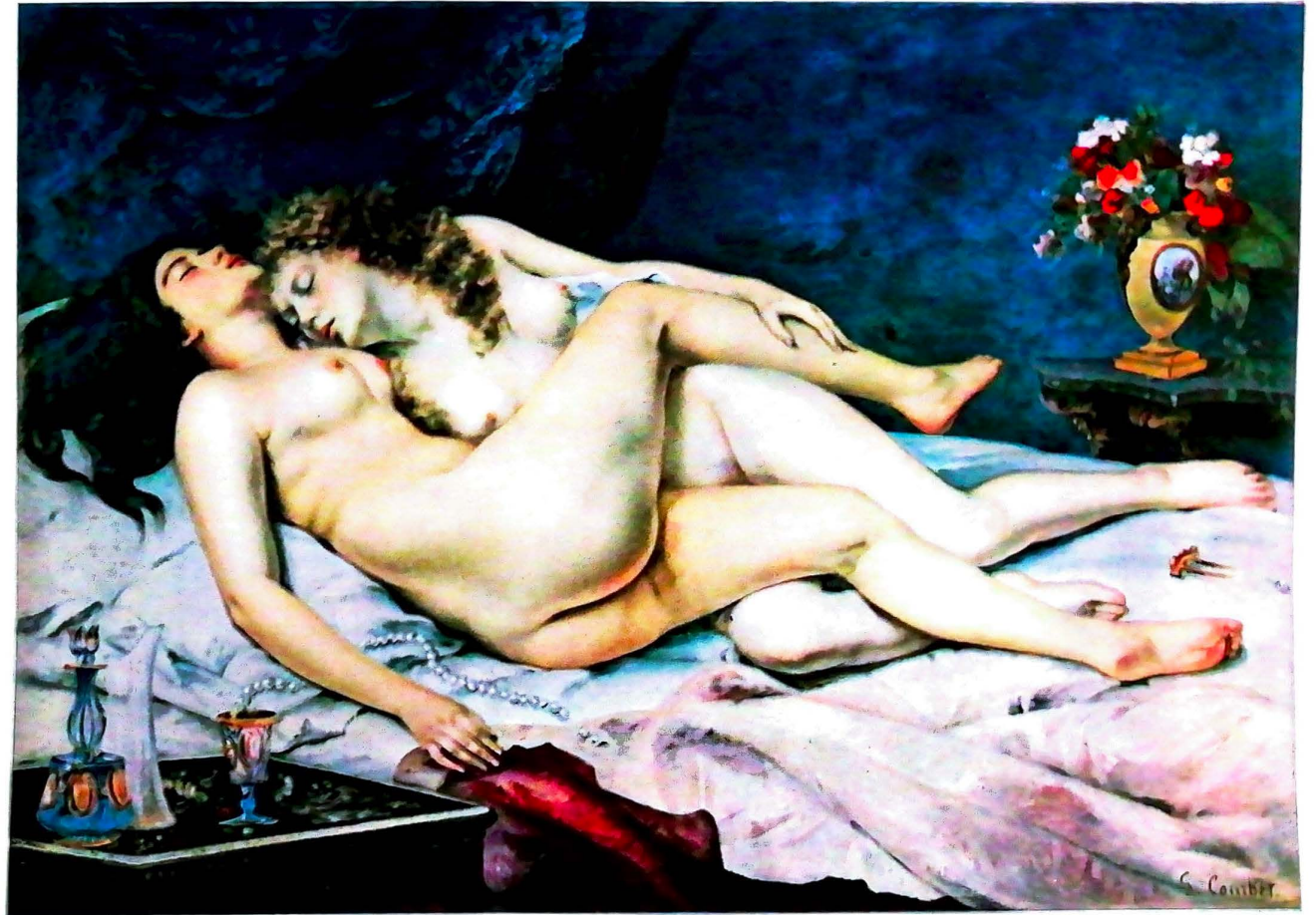
Anders Zorn: *The Bather*, 1892; Private Coll.

'Something secret in the openness of the landscape'

Theodore Chassériau: *Sleeping Nymph*, 1850;
Musée Calvet, Avignon



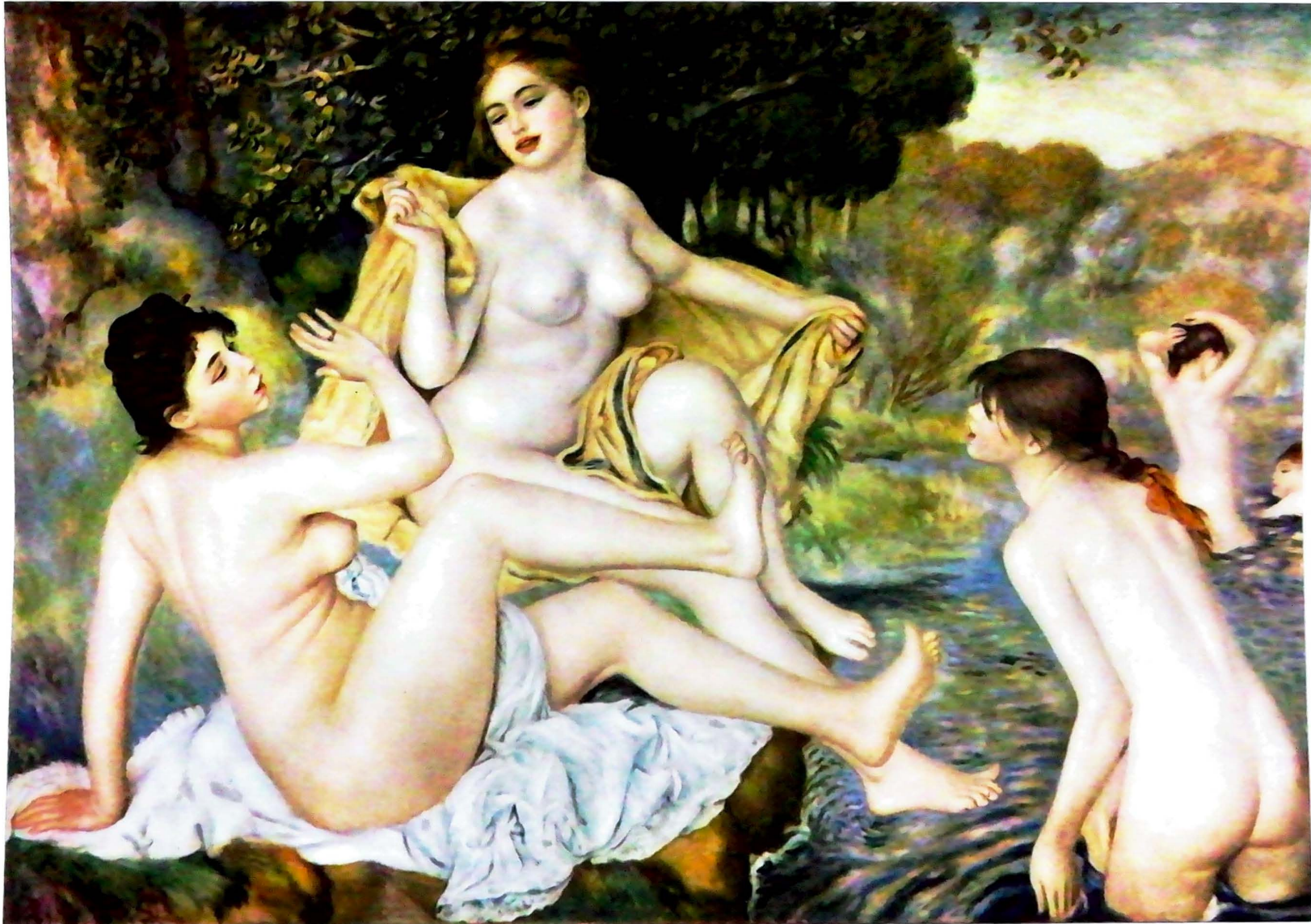
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Courbet: *Sleep*, 1866; Petit Palais, Paris
'A monument of audacity'

'Enslaved by an anecdotic sentiment'

Renoir *The Bathers*, 1884-1887; Coll. Mrs. Carroll S. Tyson, Philadelphia



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visual sensations of colors and tonalities, and this with a sense of irresistible superiority over these old masters, with the conviction of having said precisely what they had been able to say only when "enslaved" by their anecdotic sentiment . . .

Can we develop our point and say that the painting, this "self," gives us a Nude which is another "self" in the case of an Ingres *Odalisque* or Delacroix *Woman with a Parrot* [page 109]? Obviously not; such works show just what their titles indicate. Is the painting's anatomy here distinct from that of the women represented?

As a matter of fact, what is *la belle nudité*? And what, then, is the Nude in relation to it? A purely academic term, suitable on the one hand to reassure the art-lover and on the other to guarantee the intentions of the artist who pleads his right to study "nature." Everyone knows, as everyone also knew over a hundred years ago, that this was the opportunity, shielded by the prestige of a master, to look at a "beautiful naked woman." A schoolboy point of view, an adolescent day-dream, doubtless exploited by a suspect genre of painting and sculpture, denounced according to the criteria of "good" and "bad" taste (according to which even a

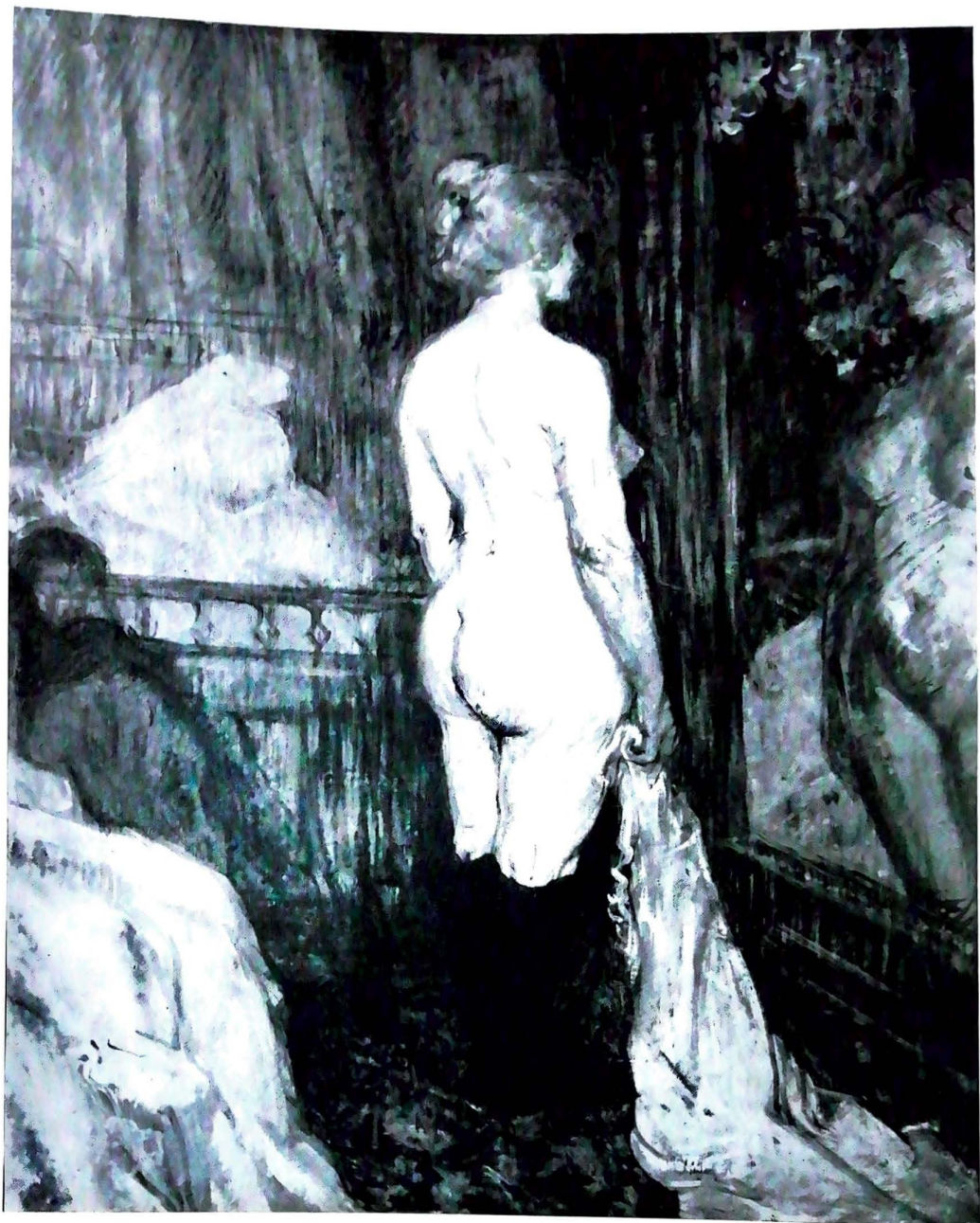


'Purely occupational divestment'

Degas: *The Serious Client*, ca. 1879, monotype

'A powerful and terrible evocation'

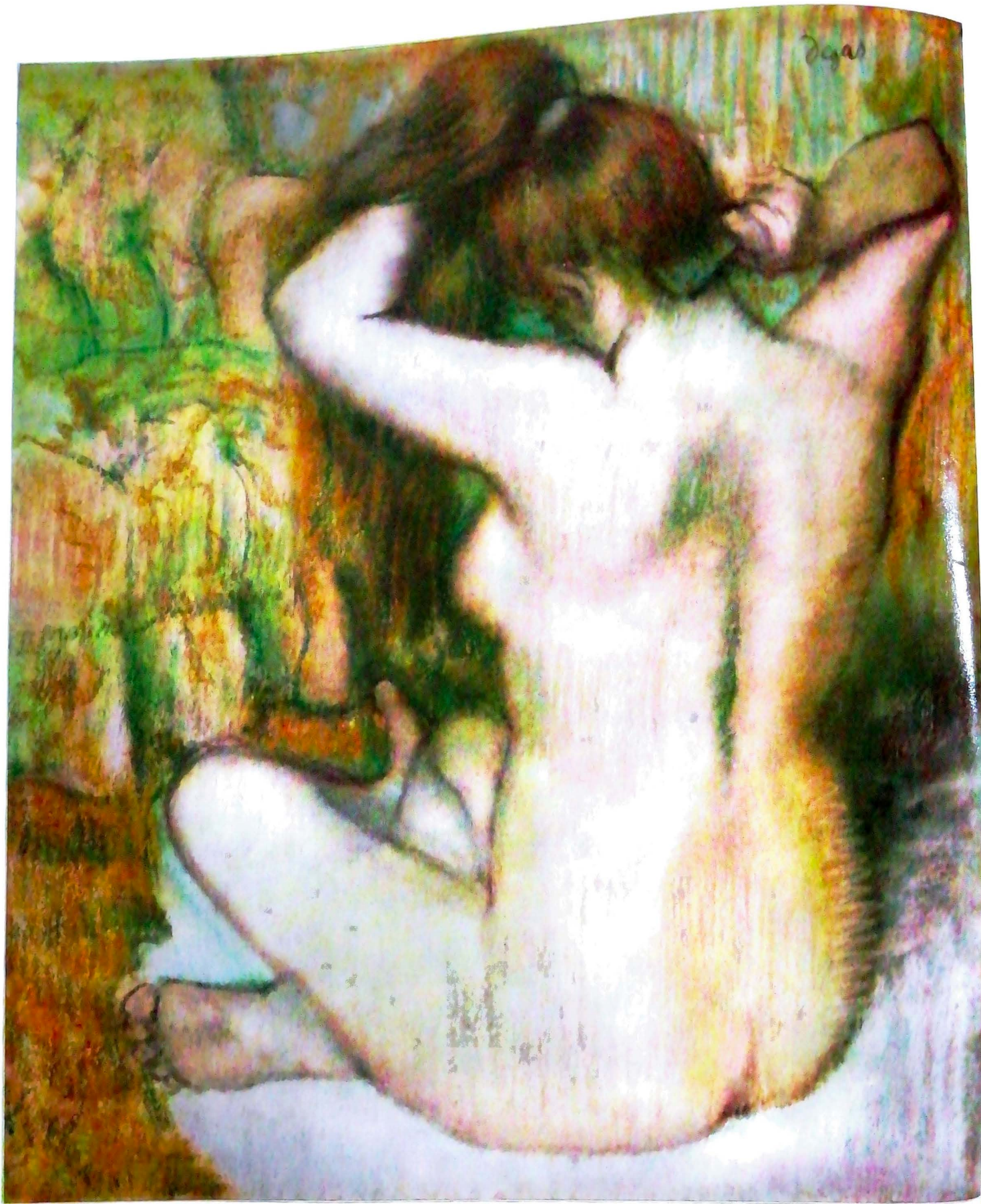
Toulouse-Lautrec; *Nude before a Mirror*, 1897;
Coll. Mr. and Mrs. Ira Haupt, New York



Delacroix censured certain of Courbet's nudes). But today, when the transformation of techniques in the plastic arts has assured the universalization of "good taste," our young people know that to see beautiful naked women you must go not to the museum but to the movies. What progress! After photography, the cinema, with all the more reason, will have "liberated painting from the need to imitate nature." The preponderance of our epidermoscopic theaters accounts to a degree for the persistence of abstract art, the triumph of puritan industrialism.

Between 1800 and 1899, however, the artist, even if his name was Ingres, as well as the art-lover, kept this schoolboy spirit with all its pubescent fantasies. The disabused conclusion of the heroes of Flaubert's *L'Education Sentimentale*—"Perhaps it's the best thing we ever had"—establishes the tone of sensibility at the end of the last century as much as at the beginning of our own, and as much among the great masters as among the daubers and their respective publics. In other words,

Text continued on page 122



Degas: *Nude Fixing her Hair*, ca. 1883, Coll. Durand-Ruel, Paris
'Never before the over-muscled laundresses'

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'A new iconography as a symbol of class warfare'
Toulouse-Lautrec: *La Toilette*, 1896; Louvre, Paris



a perfect and wholesome naïveté. But as social crises and catastrophes threaten, as the convulsions of the modern world become increasingly overwhelming, a bad conscience attacks this naïveté and its governing energies in painting as in everything else. Discernible even in the plastic interpretation of the Nude, the symptoms of this pernicious atmosphere of the modern world's agony and anxiety have nothing in common with what earlier periods have manifested in this regard. For instance, in the case of a Goya, it is the very aggressiveness of a powerful temperament which, in the expression of his art, becomes an accomplice of the social evils he portrays. Such a genius actually exploits anguish for the purposes of his work. He makes sure not to express this external anguish in his nudes except by his own emotion felt before his model.

'Disappearance of the divestment complex'

Gauguin: *Aïta Parari*, 1891-1893; Coll. H. R. Hahnloser, Berne





Van Gogh: *Reclining Nude*, 1887; Coll. Van Deventer, Wassenaar
'A desperate individual vision'

In the last forty years, precisely the opposite has been the case. Humanitarian preoccupations, rebellions against collective misery occasionally combined with desperate individual visions, with morbid esthetic nostalgias—either asocial or schizophrenic—produce a whole climate of opinion no longer tolerating an unmediated vision of the images of this world, a climate that is essentially iconoclastic. This ambiance is what, following hard upon the invention of *art nouveau*, in the twilight of Impressionism, prepares conditions favorable to the Expressionist mutilation wherever painting lacks a continuous tradition, particularly among Germanic temperaments which claim to see, in the images of a past serenity still persisting among a few last French masters, the signs of a "Latin decadence." These same Germanic temperaments, with an innate disposition for the morbid, interpret Van Gogh according to this master's pathological condition and exploit his touch and his line in order to extend their love of catastrophe into the "new reality."

Fin de siècle nostalgias, particularly the hermaphroditic obsessions so pronounced in the ornamentalism of *art nouveau*—these heralded in Beardsley, and also in Klee's *Virgin in a Tree* [page 107], the "Nude tormented by sexual indetermination," an expression of the pederasto-feminist claims contemporary with Havelock Ellis' researches. It remained an ephemeral and inconsistent ideal opposed to their contemporary Lautrec's powerful and terrible evocations of prostitutes. Picasso, who had not yet revealed the infinite resources of his versatile craftsmanship, seems to have echoed the ideal of this "tormented nude" ironically in his *Two Sisters* [page 107], though on the other hand he had expressed certain Pompeiian reminiscences in the nude of *La Toilette* [page 105].

In the context of this legendary twilight of the female body, Gauguin's case is significant: the exotic Tahitian nude appears as a rehabilitation of *nature as style*.

Where was the emancipation which this master produced to lead? For Gauguin, "barbarism was rejuvenation"; he liked to say he had gone back further than the horses of the Parthenon, all the way to the dada of his own childhood. The answer,

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Edvard Munch: *Nude by the Arm Chair*, 1929;
Municipal Collections, Oslo

'The modern world's agony'

therefore, has nothing to do with the renewal of plastic techniques, but instead with the "dada of childhood": the animal serenity of Gauguin's exotic Tahitian belles marks a new break with an important element of the traditional vision of *la belle nudité*: that is, the self-exhibitionism of women inherent in the traditional Nude. How dare we characterize the nude in this way? How do we note the absence of this element in Gauguin's Tahitian paintings? Here we touch on a specifically Western complex which modern painting has wished to cure itself of: the Divestment Complex.

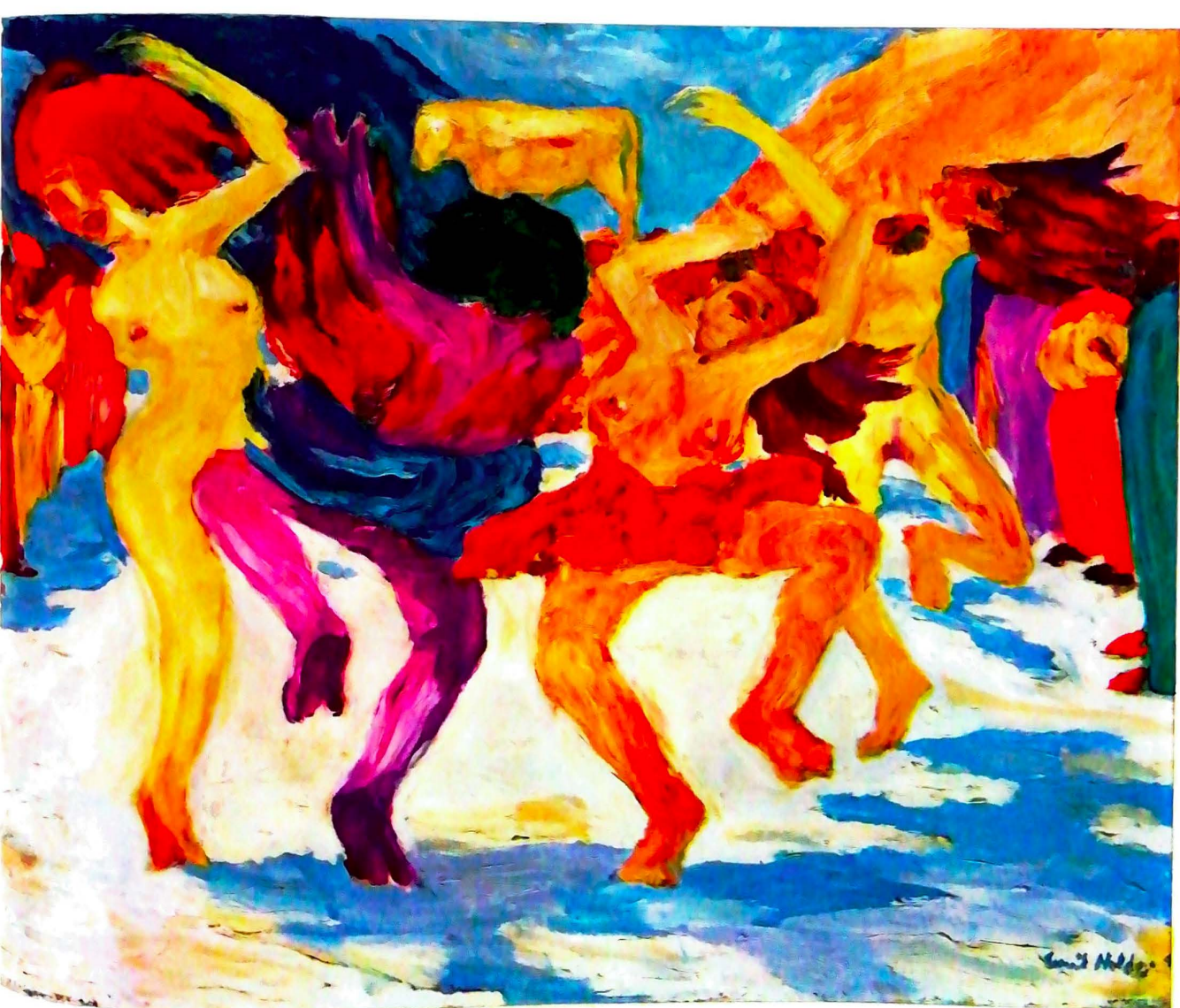
The masters of the traditional Nude—of the Nude as subject, as distinguished from the fortuitous Nude—have in fact observed the *identity between nature and style* in their plastic expression and released the style in nature, elaborating their vision of female nudity according to an ensemble of emotional landmarks, emphasizing them in one place or another according to their temperament and their mood, arranging them to favor this or that account of the body in space. And there would be no style at all if the natural structures did not coincide with emotional landmarks, that is, the different zones of the female body: neck, shoulders, breasts, buttocks, hollow of the back, thighs, knees and calves, which the *attitudes*, whether in movement or repose, whether prone or standing, are intended to make the most

of. But above all, the means apparently the most conventional, but in reality the subtlest as to the intention of the whole, resided in the model's face and occasionally in her hands, expressing the woman's consciousness of being seen or of seeing herself in secret, or even of yielding to an eventual indiscretion.

In the classical periods, the conventional genre of legendary scenes permitted infinite variations of the dramaturgy of the Nude-as-subject (surprise, shame, violence, etc.), sometimes suggesting every phase of undress from being fully clothed to total nudity according to the pretexts furnished by the themes treated. With the increasing abandonment of the legendary themes in favor of the aspects of daily life, to the point of the establishment of the nude as a "snapshot," the dramaturgy of the nude became interiorized, starting with Fragonard, who had developed an artificial language of gesture, while avoiding the dangers of mannerism which this language implied. After that, how could the Nude persist, deprived of plausible excuses other than the "academic study," unless treated as a subject? What we are today justified in describing as "anecdotic" I should here prefer to attribute to the Nude's dramatic content in Ingres, Chassériau, Delacroix, Courbet, Manet and Renoir. Their nudes bear witness to the notion that the fact of nudity conceals an ineffable secret.

'Expressionist mutilation, the love of catastrophe'

Emil Nolde: *The Golden Calf*, 1910;
Coll. Mrs. E. Nolde, Seebüll



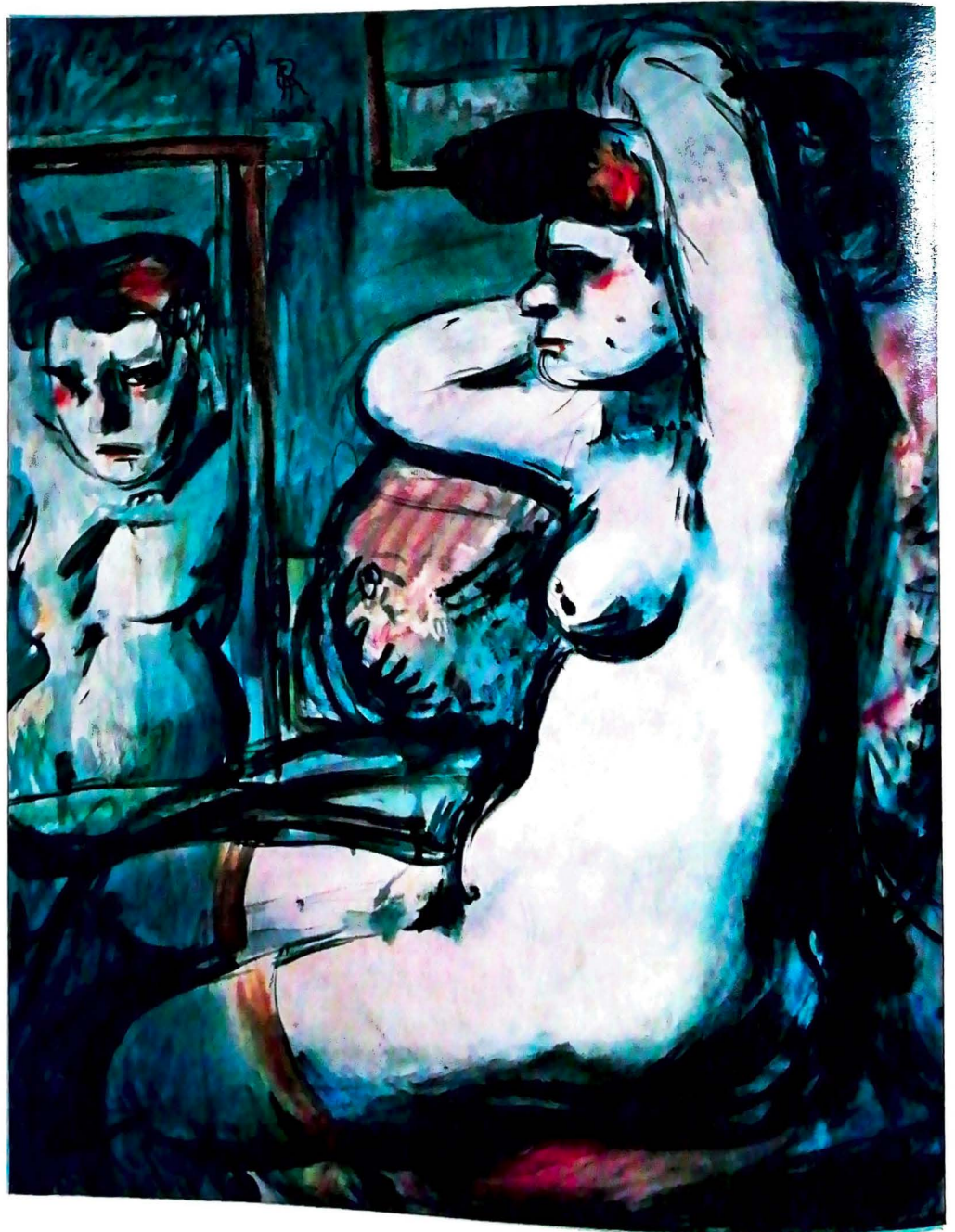
In traditional painting, the Nude, inspired by classical sculpture, is habitually conceived as being outdoors, but a *legendary outdoors*, as though emanating from the mythological perception of the nude. In Romantic painting, nudity transmutes the legendary quality of this outdoors as soon as it reveals itself in an enclosed space.

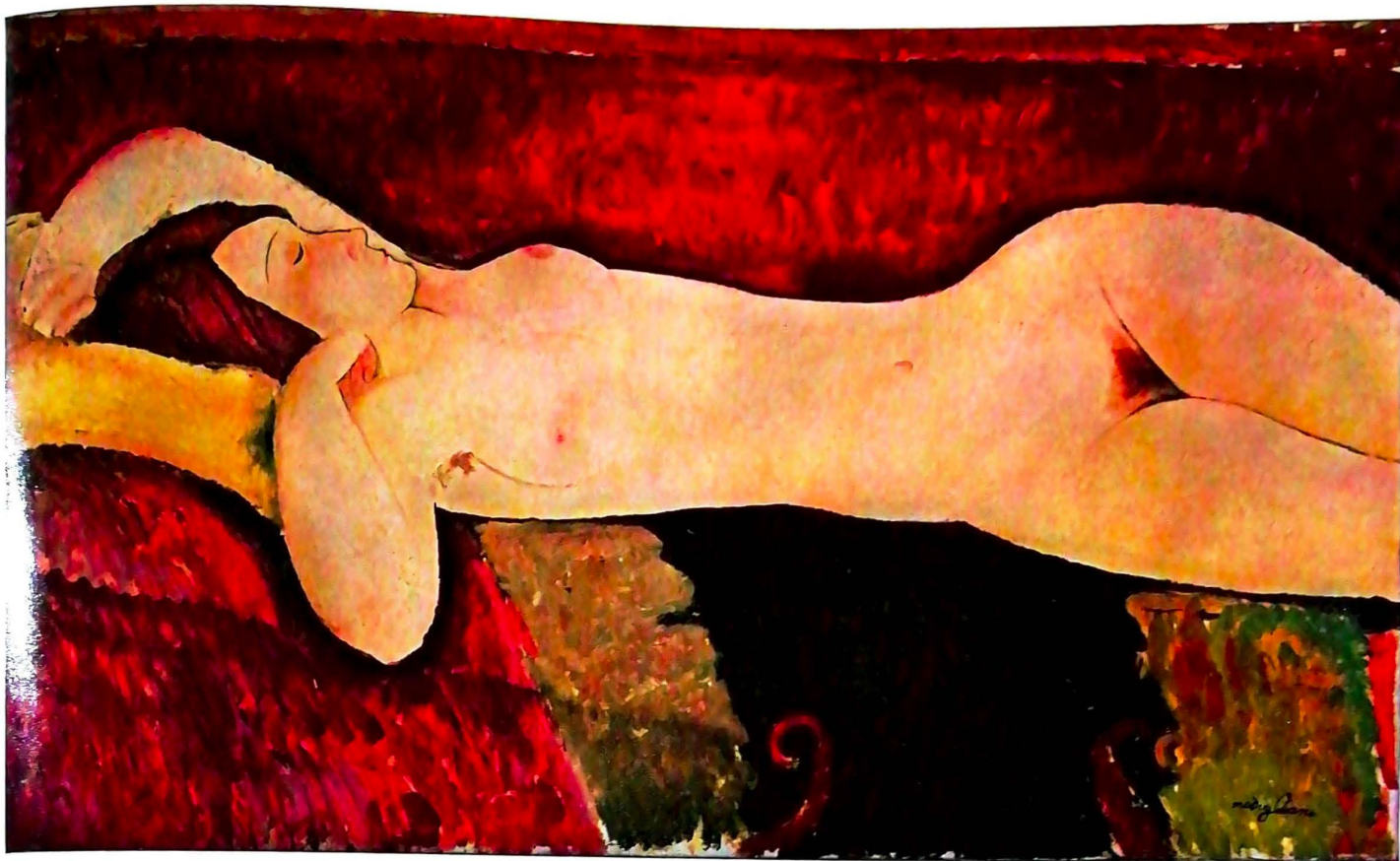
Nudes in a landscape before the advent of Impressionism—I am thinking particularly of Courbet—are not assimilated into the diffused light of natural surroundings, as they are in *plein-air* painting. Rather this painting has the effect of revealing—by nakedness itself—something abnormal and secret in the very *openness* of the landscape—a nude lying on a riverbank, at the seashore or shadowed by thick branches above a pool.

Female nudity in an enclosed space—Delacroix's *Woman with a Parrot*—to the degree that her secret sensuality emerges from the shadowy intimacy of her room,

'Rebellion against misery'

Rouault: *Woman at the Mirror*, 1906; Private Coll.





Modigliani: *Reclining Nude*, ca. 1919; Museum of Modern Art, New York

'Psycho-neurotic attenuation'

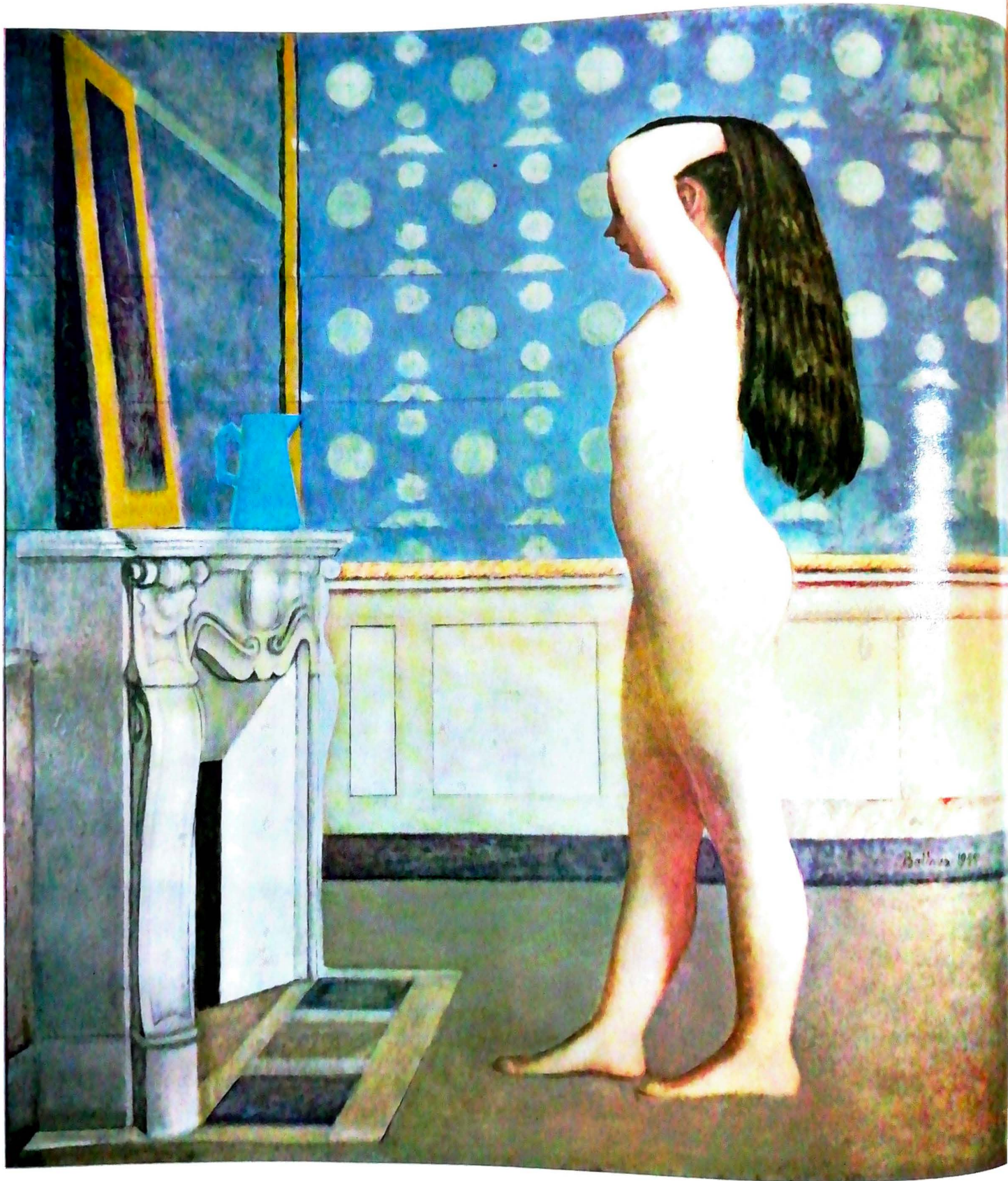
through the magic of her body, appears on canvas as an *exterior* obtained from *inside* the woman herself.

Among the modern masters who have retained the traditional image of the Nude, whether as a sleeper, a bather, or a reclining figure, the woman's sense of her own nudity always reaches its climax in the attitude of the head or in the expression of the face. And this consciousness of her own carnality, which the masters express by a play of features, establishes the moment of a woman's animal awareness of her body as a plastic motif. A narcissistic sentiment, a delight in her own fleshliness: this consciousness in the face of the woman being painted reflects the painter's contemplation of her.

Consider Ingres' *Reclining Odalisque* from this point of view for a moment: her eye is on the lookout for an eventual beholder, and her expression in itself would be quite banal if it were isolated from this display of corporeal splendor which is offered *simultaneously*. The same is true of Delacroix's *Woman with a Parrot*: the face bent over the bird expresses nothing but delight in the light that voluptuously caresses her breasts and her belly. In the relaxation of Courbet's *Sleep*—that monument of audacity—the faces of the two girls, though their expressions are quite different even in the same drowsiness, maintain the mask of a consciousness, a wakefulness the artist has assumed for his own purposes.

It is true that group compositions like Ingres' *Turkish Bath* or Renoir's *The*

THE FALLING NYMPHS



Baldus: *Figure in Front of a Maniel*, 1956; Coll. Mr. and Mrs. Robert Lehman, New York
'Lolita-ish aspects of the pubescent'

THE FALLING NYMPHS

Bathers, because they set before us figures variously placed on the canvas, do not provide exactly the same example. Yet in the *The Bathers* the countenance and gesture of the young woman who is virtually prone immediately leaps to the eye, the protecting gesture of her arm, her hand, her ringed finger, facing her companion who is playfully splashing her: an anecdotic detail, indeed, but thanks to the atmosphere of casual silliness, one that grants this figure a certain "individuation."

I am now dealing with the painting not as an artist for whom it is necessary to bear in mind "the anatomy of the painting." I am speaking as an unbiased witness of what the painting represents: in this case a naked woman. I do not want to know that photography exists. However, since I happen to have a photograph of the *Reclining Odalisque*, I must say that it delights me almost as much as the original, which I can examine in the Louvre whenever I like. But this is purely a coincidence . . .

It was doubtless useful to remind the public that art is not a documentary copy of immediate reality, like photography, but an interpretation. "I wanted to copy nature . . . I did not succeed. I was satisfied with myself when I discovered that the sun, for instance, could not be reproduced, but that it had to be represented

by something that I saw—by color." How many disasters has this admission of Père Cézanne's brought down on our heads! This sun and light . . . Henceforth nudity, that torch which illuminated all great painting of the nineteenth century, was nothing more than a moment of light to be represented by color.

Yesterday it was a matter of refuting the superstition of "scientific" objectivity. But what does the objectivity of representation matter to us today? Reproduced yesterday, the nude today is represented in photography.

Ingres, Chassériau, Delacroix, Courbet, Manet and Renoir—what distances and often what chasms lie between these unequal peaks! And yet these masters have at least this much in common: each in his way reproduces the image of the female body according to its myth as a source of emotion, but therefore represents only the more powerfully the emotion which the sight of such nakedness affords them. Nudity, then, is an interpretation of the mind.

It is one thing to reproduce the object which moves us, another to reproduce this emotion itself, whether by a luminous vibration or even by reconstructing the combination of colors which signify it: when we deal with emotion, we are in another world where we communicate only by ideograms with the incommunicable experi-

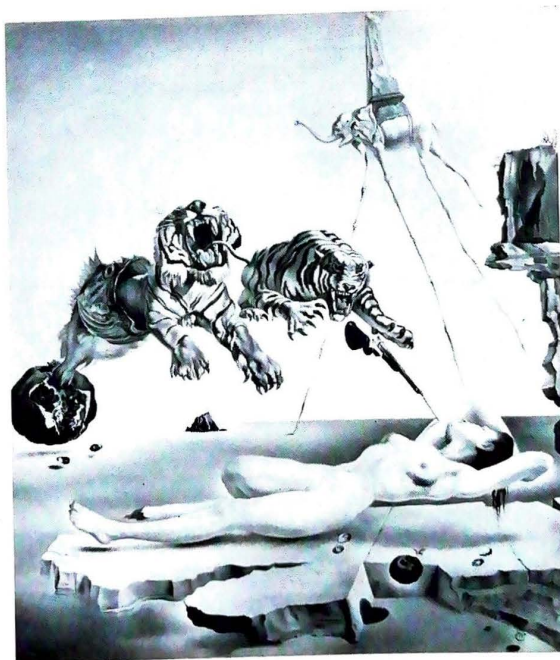
René Magritte: *The Eternal Evidence*, No. 2, 1952, five oils mounted on glass; Iolas Gallery, New York

'Irrational super-photography'



Marcel Duchamp: *Nude Descending a Staircase*, No. 2, 1912, Philadelphia Museum of Art (Arensberg Coll.)

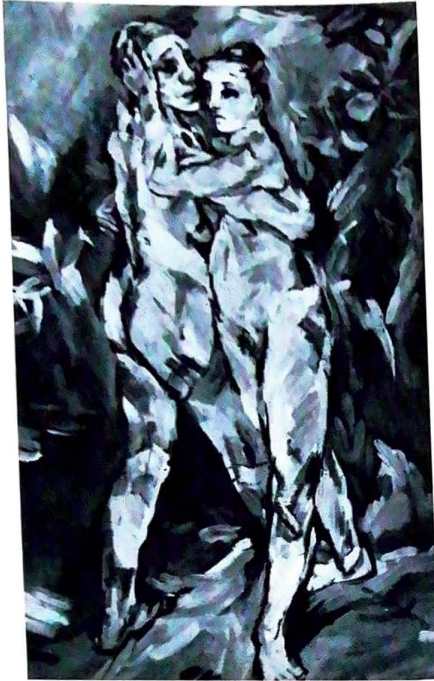
'Unclothed robot'



Dalí: *One second before the awakening from a dream provoked by the flight of a bee around a pomegranate*, 1947; Private Coll., New York

'Riotous personal demons'





Kokoschka: *Dancing Couple*, ca. 1912;
Coll. Mrs. J. Blodgett, Jr., Portland, Ore.

'Pseudo-Gothic shame'

ence each of us may have had, of nudity or of the entire universe.

And yet in each of these masters there has been something incommunicable, an idiosyncrasy they have doubtless had to abandon trying to express: perhaps it is this renunciation which makes so much more intense the tone of their expression, even at its most deliberately conventional.

In contemplating a painting by one of these masters, I shall avoid recapitulating all the stages of its progress: I grasp it at first glance in the effect it produces upon me. By which I mean that I accomplish the inverse process and immediately reach the painter's point of departure: that is, the initial emotion. Such is the actual result of the painting, but for this emotion to reach me, or rather for me to find it, the painter has actually had to pass through all the stages of its elaboration in the painting. Of course there is no question of a painting's being "finished" or "incomplete." The slightest sketch, the most tenuous drawing can contain it all.

The very concept of the Nude is only the neutralization, the esthetic and social compromise, of a *violent primary fact*: it is against this neutralization that the most subversive temperaments among modern painters have rebelled. With a curious result: their insurrection has destroyed what they wished to liberate; the destruction of this neutralization has been effected only at the cost of this primary fact.

It is in the contemplation of the naked female body that the primary violence consists, of which the painting is only the likeness; in itself, this likeness is the fruit of labor. Nevertheless, the sense of violence remains with regard to the spectator. The likeness (here the painting) is less than violence and at the same time transcends violence, since it exists entirely in and for contemplation. Yet it is by the act of contemplation that the mind's image of the divestment animates the body of the imaginary woman and that the original model, separated from her body, imaginatively reconstitutes herself as naked before the spectator's eyes.

A so-called "erotic" painting showing a rape has, however, nothing in common with this image of the traditional nude. For such a

representation is only the making explicit, the fortuitous exploitation of the primary violence inherent in the contemplation of nakedness. This is not the place to demonstrate that the "erotic" painting thereby purges and purifies the traditional Nude still remains explosive potential with which the scandal certain great paintings by Courbet or by Manet (*Olympia* [page 113], *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* [page 111]) produced in their time, works which today's public regards with the simple reflexes of the art-lover.

For the contemporary public of these paintings, such images were still the equivalent of a laceration of everyday banality, a glimpse into a forbidden realm. We, however, live entirely in a boundless space. Today painting seems to unroll within that space on the endless canvas Delaunay imagined which is the denial of the duration implicit in the interpretation of the nude as motif. In our universe, the very principle of contemplation is in question.

I return to the primary fact: the painted interpretation of the female body stripped naked is accomplished in that space interior to the contemplating eye, where the motif has been grasped, felt and conceived, where the artist's eye and the spectator's are identified for a moment: the moment of the initial emotion. Here the spectator, as in a moment of unconscious recollection, finds the reference for his own reaction in the experience of that Other, the artist—who is the Other *par excellence*—and who by his testimony provides the spectator with the commentary on a mutual emotion. It is this commentary which creates the *resonance* of a painting and holds us by the duration of this resonance: it is here that the recollection is fulfilled. And indeed, the recollection of female nakedness in the traditional "production" of nudes accomplishes a function analogous to that of resemblance in portrait painting.

TRANSLATED BY RICHARD HOWARD



Jules Pascin: *Model in the Studio*, 1900;
Coll. J. Marshall, Eugene, Ore.

'Shopgirls in animal guise'