

A CELEBRATION

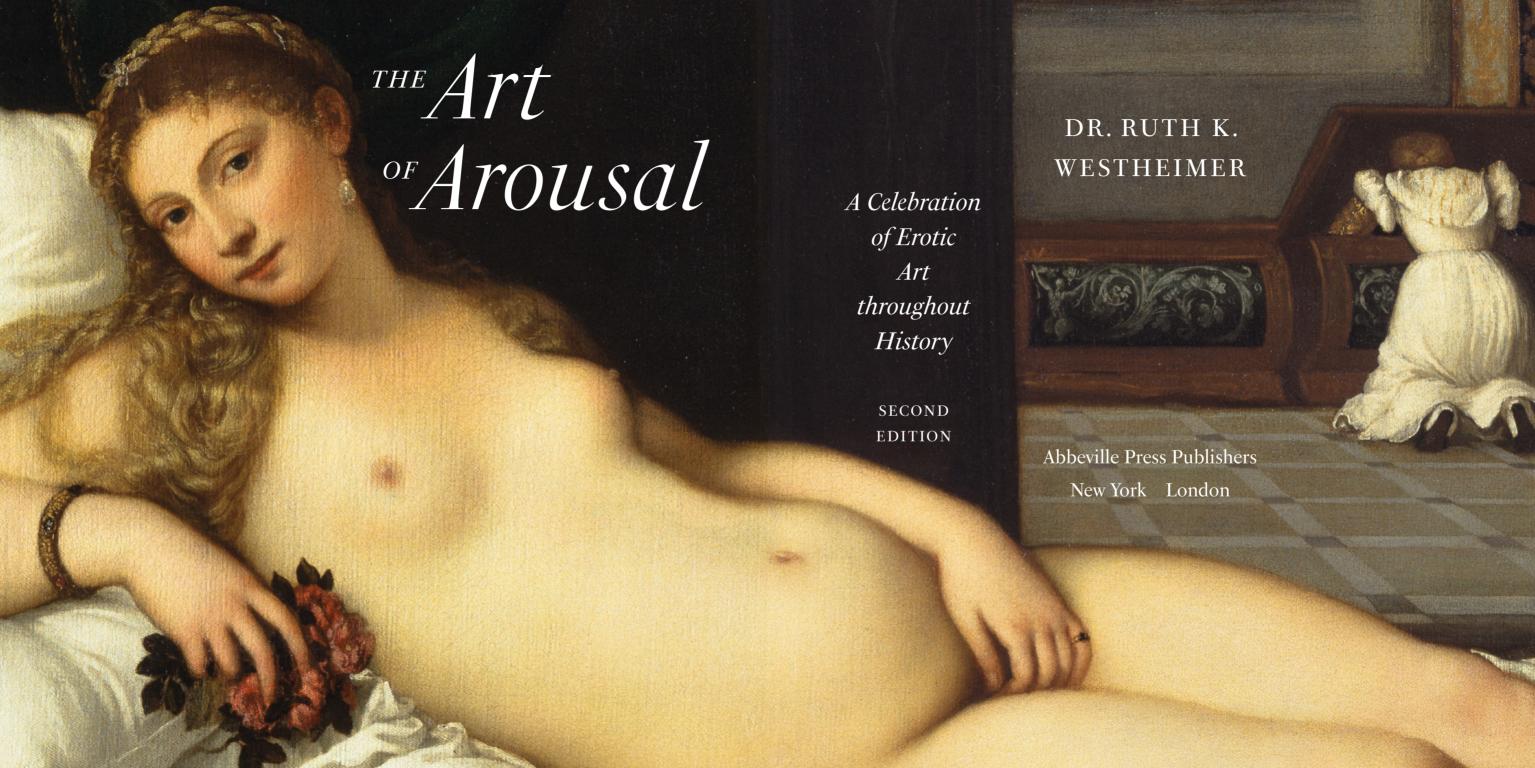
OF EROTIC

ART

THROUGHOUT

HISTORY

Dr. Ruth K.
Westheimer



PREFACE

f all the books I've written. The Art of Arousal has always been one of my favorites. It proved to me that it's never too late to start off in a brand new direction. Before I began work on the first edition, I would never have believed that I could walk into a museum and pick out pictures that are not only sexually arousing but retell the great stories of humankind. Now I almost live in museums and art galleries, and I had great fun picking out the works of contemporary art that we've added to this new edition.

I originally wrote this book in partnership with a serious art historian who's a very good friend of mine. He had photocopies made of stacks and stacks of images, and then we spent days giggling and choosing the illustrations for the book. Right at the beginning we decided that we'd only use pictures in which everyone was having a good time—that left out all the rape scenes that art history is filled with. And then we decided that rather than organizing the book by date or by culture or by some other traditional structure, we'd use the images to illustrate the progression of an erotic relationship, from the first glance to postcoital bliss. To the best of our ability we've tried to make it multicultural and multisexual, with something for everyone, though we've tended to favor the figurative over the abstract and the refined over the raw.

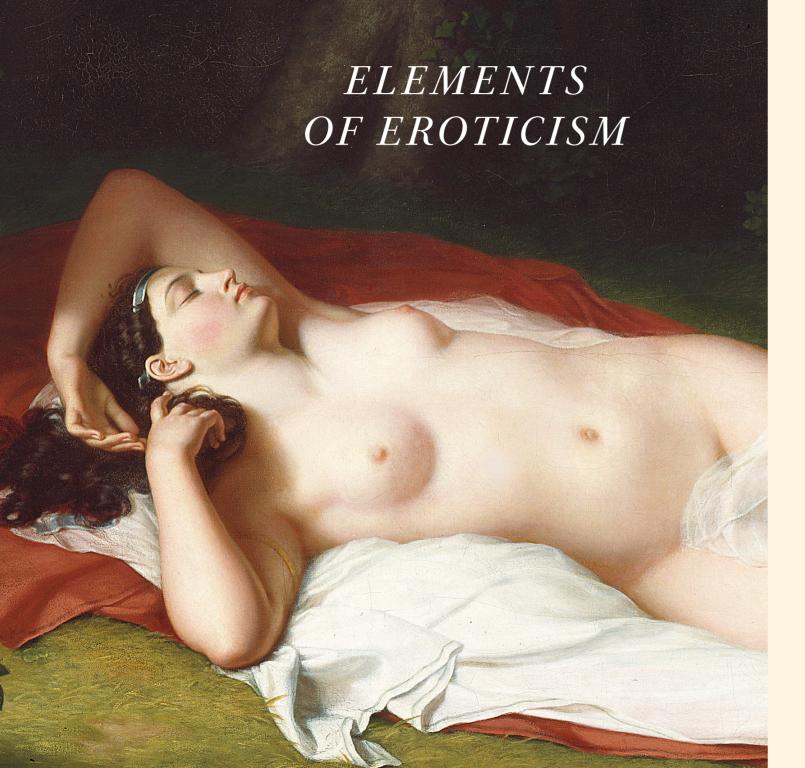
Art historians have written plenty about the sexuality of the art they study, but they can make it seem awfully dry and academic. What we've tried to do here is make it clear that these images have real erotic power. Some of the works in this book were, in fact, originally made explicitly to whet the sexual appetites of the patrons who commissioned them.

In the texts that follow, the art history is all by my friend and the comments about the works' sexual content come from me—the surprise for both of us was how arousing the art turned out to be. I urge you to tuck some of these images away in your erotic imagination. Not only will you have sexy dreams, but your waking moments will be sexier too.

Working with an art historian showed me how little I knew about art, how much there was to learn, and how exciting it all was. After you look at the pictures and read the texts in this book—and maybe make love with your partner, having been stimulated by the material between these two covers—you will recognize the delights of sexual and artistic variety that await your discovery. Maybe you'll even go out and buy your lover not another box of chocolates but books on art. And who knows—maybe some of you will even be inspired to start painting your beloved—naked. If that happens, be sure to let me know.

I invite you to come with me on this great adventure!





ost of the images in this book show two or more people engaged in a sexual encounter. This chapter is an exception in that it shows the elements of eroticism—the two kinds of bodies, male and female, that come together in sex, and also the parts of the body that are particularly arousing.

One of the earliest known art objects, the so-called Venus of Willendorf, is a prehistoric figurine of a woman who is not a beauty by contemporary standards. Squat and short, with a huge belly and breasts, she probably represented fertility or abundance. Soon, however, art took on a different purpose. The ancient Greeks, for example, were intensely interested in the concept of beauty, which was first symbolized by perfected naked men and later by perfected naked women. The Greek notion of beauty—which stood as a paragon until the early twentieth century—recognizes that the appreciation of beauty is mixed with sexual desire. An admission of this sexuality can be found in the pose of the Aphrodite of Knidos; if she were not potentially so arousing, she would not have to cover herself so modestly. (The Greeks must have thought either that female genitalia were too exciting for viewers or not aesthetically pleasing—we don't know which.)

Taboos aside, this chapter includes lots of genitalia—female and male. The great Renaissance artist Leonardo thought that genitalia were hideous and the sexual act repugnant, but fortunately few artists agreed with him. Sex has been one of the principal concerns of art in all cultures, and the finest artists of all times have made the human body the instrument of beauty and feeling—as you will discover when you turn the page.



he Venus of Willendorf was discovered in 1908 at an archaeological site near the village of Willendorf in Austria. She is estimated to be about 25,000 years old, and is one of a number of similar Stone Age figurines, most carved in stone or ivory, that have been found throughout Europe. With their exaggerated breasts and genitals, these figurines are often believed to represent fertility goddesses, so scholars have dubbed them "Venuses." Whether or not this hypothesis is correct, the Venus of Willendorf clearly represents an archetype of abundant female sexuality. Although she is not a conventional beauty, she proves that from the very beginning, sex has been an important theme of art.

Venus of Willendorf, c. 25,000 B.P. Limestone, height: 41/4 in. (11 cm) Naturhistorisches Museum, Vienna This small statue's enormous erection identifies him as Priapus, a Greek fertility god responsible for, among other things, the flourishing of orchards and gardens—hence the basket of produce perched atop his penis. Priapus was worshipped seriously in Asia Minor, where this rather rustic statue is from, but for artists elsewhere in the classical world he was mainly a pretext for naughty sight gags—as some amusing frescoes from Pompeii attest.

Priapus's massive member is an unmistakable erotic symbol, in the same manner as the enlarged breasts and vulva of the Venus of Willendorf. However, male readers who may be feeling envious should remember that if such an outsize organ could exist in real life (it couldn't), any woman who encountered it would be more horrified than aroused.

Nor is it healthy to sport a constant erection, as Priapus does. In fact, he gave his name to the medical condition of *priapism*, or an abnormally prolonged erection. If you have an erection that lasts more than four hours, don't try to balance fruits and vegetables on it—go to the hospital!



Statue of Priapus, c. 100 A.D. Ephesus Archaeological Museum, Selçuk, Turkey



Titian (c. 1490–1576)
The Venus of Urbino, 1538
Oil on canvas, 47 × 65 in.
(119.5 × 165 cm)
Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence

"You enter [the Uffizi] and proceed to that most-visited little gallery that exists in the world—the Tribune—and there, against the wall, without obstructing rag or leaf, you may look your fill upon the foulest, the vilest, the obscenest picture the world possesses—Titian's Venus. It isn't that she is naked and stretched out on a bed—no, it's the attitude of one of her arms and hand. If I ventured to describe that attitude there would be a fine howl.... There are pictures of nude women which suggest no impure thought—I am well aware of that. What I am trying to emphasize is the fact that Titian's Venus is far from being one of that sort."

When Mark Twain published these words in 1880, he was one of the first to admit publicly what thousands before had no doubt thought privately: that beneath the time-honored varnish of this canvas and the

august reputation of the supreme painter Titian there lies an extremely erotic image. *The Venus of Urbino* is perhaps the first overtly provocative female nude of the Italian Renaissance—and the prototype for many of the great nudes of the centuries that follow.

Titian based his figure's pose on a painting by Giorgione (the *Sleeping Venus* now in Dresden), which Titian had actually worked on while serving as Giorgione's apprentice. Giorgione's nude modestly covers her *mons veneris* while she sleeps, but Titian's looks immodestly at the viewer while keeping her left hand in the same place. (It may be the suggestion that she strokes herself as we watch that got Mark Twain so flustered.) With that simple shift from a sleeping to a staring beauty, Titian altered our role from voyeur to participant in an act of sexual solicitation and thereby heightened the erotic content of the picture immeasurably.

However carnal the appeal of Titian's picture may be, it was probably intended as an allegory of marital bliss. Venus holds a bouquet of roses, her emblem of beauty and love, while the topiary of myrtle in the window symbolizes everlasting congeniality. The dog represents fidelity, and the two maidservants in the background arrange clothing in a *cassone*, a type of chest that traditionally contained a bride's trousseau.

Some art historians believe that this work was commissioned in honor of the marriage of its first owner, Guidobaldo II, son of the duke and duchess of Urbino, but this cannot be proved. The painting remained in Urbino until it was taken to Florence in 1631, by which time it was already well known to artists all over Europe through engravings and painted copies.



Diego Velázquez (1599–1660)
The Toilet of Venus
(or The Rokeby Venus), 1649–51
Oil on canvas, 48¼ × 69¾ in.
(122.4 × 177.2 cm)
National Gallery, London;
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Even though female nudes are extremely rare in Spanish painting, two of the most famous nudes in the history of art were painted by Spaniards. Velázquez painted his Toilet of Venus to hang alongside a Venetian painting (now lost) that was closely related to Titian's Venus of Urbino (opposite). A century and a half later Goya painted his Nude Maja (page 16) to hang next to Velázquez's Venus.

Velázquez cleverly chose to take the pose of the earlier Venetian nude and reverse it. Not only did this allow him to create one of the most beautiful backs ever painted, but it also enabled him to show a highly sensual nude while avoiding the problem of genitalia. Since nothing in the pose is inherently offensive, Velázquez did not need to idealize the figure to make it conform to standards of propriety, and he was therefore free to portray the goddess as a living, breathing mortal. He placed the model's left arm so as to emphasize the curve of her hip and her slim, delicate waist; her pearly skin is set off by the swath of black satin on her couch. The artist arranged for Cupid to hold a mirror so that Venus could assess her beauty, but she seems to look at us instead.

This picture became so identified with an aggressively male eroticism that early in the twentieth century a crusader for women's rights stormed into the museum and slashed the painting in protest. The suffragette's fate is, sadly, long forgotten, but the painting has been expertly repaired.

Francisco Goya (1746–1828) The Nude Maja, c. 1800 Oil on canvas, 38% × 75% in. (98 × 191 cm) Museo del Prado, Madrid

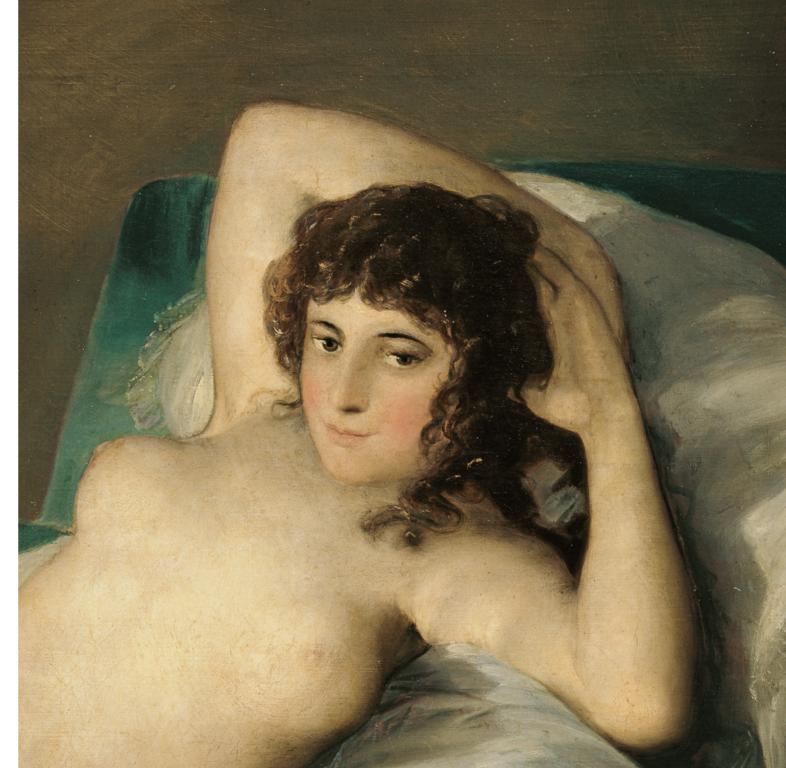
On Manuel de Godoy, the most powerful man in Spain, received the Velázquez *Venus* (page 15) as a gift from the duchess of Alba in 1800. That same year a visitor to Godoy's palace recorded seeing Goya's nude along with the Velázquez in the same room.

Being a thoroughly modern artist, Goya had, of course, updated Velázquez's picture. With Godoy (who was effectively the head of government for King Charles IV) to protect him from the Spanish Inquisition, Goya could dispense with the accessories that projected Velázquez's nude into the safely distant realm of mythology. Goya's woman is thus not an idealized Venus but a frankly contemporary woman endowed with elements of mortal flesh and blood—like pubic hair—that continue to shock. (The representation of pubic hair in Western art had been implicitly banned since ancient times, and Goya's picture was one of the first to break the taboo.) Traditionally the pose of arms up behind the head represented sleep, as in Giorgione's

Venus, but here the pose serves the provocative purpose of thrusting the breasts up and out and completely exposing the torso. No wonder that, after Godoy had been banished from Spain, the Inquisition investigated Goya for being the author of "various obscene pictures."

Soon after completing this work Goya painted a version with a clothed model, and some evidence suggests that they were fitted together in a mechanical frame so that the nude could be conveniently hidden behind the clothed version. The latter, also in the Prado, is hardly less provocative, for the pose implies that the woman is ready to undress. Her gypsylike costume is that of a maja—a slang term for a woman of loose morals. The appealing old story that the duchess of Alba, who was in fact Goya's lover, had served as the artist's model has been disproved, but what remains is the conviction that a living woman had posed for him, and that he was able to bring the erotic charge he experienced to the image he created.







Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571–1610) Young Bacchus, c. 1598 Oil on canvas, 37³/_k × 33³/₂ in. (94.9 × 85.1 cm) Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence

address the viewer, he solicits us. He offers a glass of wine with one hand (Bacchus is the god of drink) while with the other, he fiddles with his robe in a manner that suggests that he is ready to take it off—recalling that it is Bacchus who presides over orgies. Caravaggio no doubt knew that the lifelike treatment of the boy's beautiful skin would appeal to the refined sensibility of his patron, Cardinal del Monte, just as much as the extraordinary trompe-l'oeil still life in the foreground.

Following in the tradition of half-length figures with exposed breasts established by Raphael and Giorgione, Titian and Veronese, Caravaggio substituted a boy for the women usually depicted bare-chested and then cloaked him with mythological references in order to make the homosexual imagery acceptable in mixed company. The artist's patrons, however, might well have recognized the boy's resemblance to Antinoüs, the Bythnian boy who was loved by the Roman emperor Hadrian.

Careful observers will note that Bacchus's nipples are almost erect. The nipples of both sexes become erect as the person becomes aroused, but this very natural phenomenon causes anxiety in some men, who consider it an unnervingly "feminine" response.

Bathrooms are an obvious place for sex. One is often undressed, one is often freshly washed, and the narrowness of most bathrooms means that body contact is virtually inescapable. And although baths and sex were frequently linked during the Renaissance (when baths were a rare luxury), modern painting deals with the subject infrequently—perhaps because contemporary bathrooms are not always picturesque.

It seems interesting that this painting does not show genitalia, only the model's shapely buttocks. He bends over to show them to us, and even turns to look, in a manner that invites us to consider the desirability of anal intercourse. Reaching out toward him are three penislike shapes yearning to stroke those buttocks. Is that the artist's subconscious desire made manifest? The artist says no, he simply wanted to avoid having to paint the model's feet and so he inserted a plant. What would Freud say about that answer?

Throughout his long career, Hockney has made no attempt to hide his homosexuality—which was a courageous attitude in the early 1960s. Curiously, however, his paintings are rarely erotic. Although they often show handsome men, they never show the act of sex taking place. Hockney's art is always cool and somewhat distant, and it could well be that the passions of sex would unduly heat up the atmosphere he works so hard to maintain.



David Hockney (b. 1937) Man in Shower in Beverly Hills, 1964 Acrylic on canvas, $65\% \times 65\%$ in. (167 \times 167 cm) Tate, London

Dr. Ruth kennt keine Tabus: «Provokativ, vielschichtig und reich an Inspirationen... eine erfreuliche Bettlektüre!» — Publishers Weekly

Ruth K. Westheimer

THE ART OF AROUSAL

A Celebration of Erotic Art throughout History

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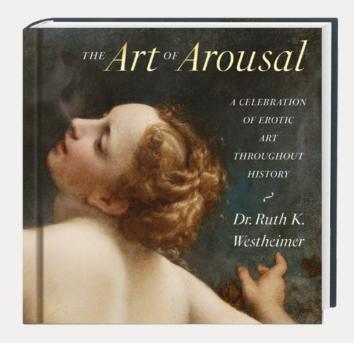
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Die Kunst ist universal und Gleiches trifft auf Sex zu! Dr. Ruth kennt keine Tabus, sie und ein befreundeter Kunsthistoriker untersuchen und erkunden für uns, auf wie vielen Wegen bekannte und unbekannte Künstler die Welt der Erotik dargestellt haben. Mit Erfahrung und Expertise werden die diversen Situationen in Kapiteln aufgeteilt: vom ersten Blick bis zum Höhepunkt, von der wilden Ekstase bis zum Stadium der wonnevollen Erschöpfung. Diese aktualisierte Neuausgabe präsentiert weitere künstlerische Werke, die unser Herz erfreuen, von der Altsteinzeit bis heute reicht die inspirierende Auswahl...

A delightful tour through the sensual side of fine art, from America's favorite sex therapist

Art is universal – and so is sex! In this irresistible volume, Dr Ruth and an art historian friend reveal the surprising variety of ways in which artists from around the world have depicted every stage of an erotic encounter, from the first glance to the climactic moment and the blissful exhaustion that follows. Now available in a revised edition that includes delightful new works by contemporary artists, The Art of Arousal is a stimulating gift for art lovers.

Dr. Ruth K. Westheimer is a beloved and trusted therapist who revolutionized the national dialogue on sex, sexuality, and relationships with her radio program Sexually Speaking, and went on to host numerous television shows and author some forty books. She is the subject of a one-woman show about her life, Becoming Dr. Ruth, and the Hulu documentary Ask Dr. Ruth. She teaches at Columbia University's



ber die Autorin:

Dr. Ruth K. Westheimer, geb. 1928, genießt Kultstatus und, ist die lustigste und klügste Sex-Beraterin und uns allen aus vielen Fernsehsendungen bekannt. Sie hat mit Ihrem Radioprogramm «Sexually Speaking» und ihren Dialogen über Sex und Partnerschaft in ca. 450(!) TV-Sendun-



gen in den U.S.A. und international viel Pionierarbeit geleistet. Sie vertritt feministische Ansichten, obwohl sie sich nie als Feministin bezeichnet, und ist Autorin von mehr als 40 Büchern. Sie ist Hauptfigur ihrer Show über ihr Leben, «Dr. Ruth, All the Way» und natürlich der Serie «Ask Dr. Ruth». Ihre Worte kommen an, weil sie authentisch und ehrlich sind – und dies im heutigen, oft so reaktionären Amerika.

