

EXPOSED

The Victorian Nude

News Release
Public Information
Department

Exposed: The Victorian Nude to Make Only North American Stop at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, September 6, 2002 – January 5, 2003
Press Preview Thursday, September 5, 10 a.m. – 1 p.m.

July 2002

Exposed: The Victorian Nude, the first exhibition to chart the moral and aesthetic controversies about the nude body in English visual culture during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837–1901), will make its only stop in North America at the Brooklyn Museum of Art from September 6, 2002 through January 5, 2003. The exhibition, organized by the Tate Britain and touring internationally, includes some 150 works ranging from painting and sculpture to popular illustration, photography, and moving pictures by such artists as Edwin Landseer, Frederic Leighton, William Orpen, Julia Margaret Cameron, Lewis Carroll (Charles Dodgson), Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Lawrence Alma-Tadema, and Edward Burne-Jones.

English artists began to pay attention to the nude as a primary subject in the 1830s and, as the century wore on, the nude became one of the most hotly debated topics in the arts in England. Alternately interpreted as a sign of aesthetic advancement in the nation's arts and as a sign of society's general moral decay, the nude figure also incited and reflected debates concerning sexuality, public health, social welfare, racial attitudes, suffragist issues, religion, and censorship.

To trace the history of the Victorian nude and its reception, the exhibition is arranged roughly chronologically and is divided into six major themes. The first is **The English Nude** tracing how the heightened attention to the nude in the 1830s was validated by portraying it in distinctly English literary or historical contexts. Works in this section include William Etty's *Musidora*, based on Thompson's poem, *The Seasons*, and Edwin Landseer's *Godiva*, inspired by the Lady Godiva's nude ride through the streets of Coventry in the eleventh century.

Brooklyn Museum of Art

200 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, NY 11238-6052
Telephone (718) 638-5000 Fax (718) 638-5931 www.brooklynmuseum.org

The Victorian Nude

page 2

The Classical Nude focuses on the next generation of artists, who reacted against the provincialism of English art and began to look increasingly to antique sources, justifying their portrayals of the nude body by basing their subjects on ancient Greek and Roman myths and even sometimes recapitulating poses of well-known classical sculptures in their art. Major works in this section include Frederic Leighton's painting *The Bath of Psyche*, and Alfred Gilbert's bronze *Perseus Arming*. This part of the installation also includes examples of illustrated periodicals, Parian ware, and a souvenir photograph of famed bodybuilder Eugen Sandow, gathered to demonstrate the extent to which classical sources influenced the depiction of the body at all levels of visual cultural production.

The Artist's Studio explores the theme of artist and model, encompassing the practical issues of making art, art training and the role of the live model, and the studio as a mysterious site where the idea of beauty was converted to material form. Central to this section is Edward Burne-Jones's *Pygmalion* series, in which the artist falls in love with his own creation of female perfection. Such metaphorical subjects, dressed in the trappings of ancient myth, intersected with then popular and often mistaken notions about the moral profligacy of female models, which in part rested in social resistance to working women and continued attempts by some officials to ban the live model from art schools.

The Private Nude explores imagery largely produced for private consumption. In works ranging from Dante Gabriel Rossetti's femme fatale *Venus Verticordia*, to Aubrey Beardsley's pornographic illustrations for privately printed books to Lewis Carroll's rare photographs of nude children, this section investigates the subjective nature of codes of decency against the backdrop of an era during which legislation was first enacted to regulate imagery for the moral welfare of the public.

The Nude in High Art concentrates on the proliferation of nude imagery on a more spectacular scale and in more daring ways at such respected venues as the London Royal Academy and the New Gallery at the end of the nineteenth century. Arthur Hacker's sensuously poetic *The Cloud* and John William Waterhouse's dramatic portrayal of the teenage martyr *Saint Eulalia* exemplify the greater stylistic and thematic complexities of the late Victorian arts. Such works called

The Victorian Nude

page 3

into play English resistance to the influence of “vulgar” French art and increasing social anxieties about vice and sexual exploitation that led to the passage of the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Bill raising the age of consent to sixteen.

The final section, **The Modern Nude** traces the rise of more naturalistic treatments of the body in studio and outdoor settings. The exhibition concludes on a note of dramatic contrasts carried out in works such as William Orpen’s unidealized depiction of a favorite model in a darkly realistic domestic interior and Henry Scott Tuke’s *August Blue*, in which a light-filled plein-air manner evokes nostalgic thoughts of youth’s untainted innocence.

Exposed: The Victorian Nude was conceived by Alison Smith, Senior Program Curator, Tate Britain, and is co-curated by her and Tate Britain curators, Martin Myrone, and Robert Upstone. The exhibition is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue of the same title, edited by Alison Smith and containing contributions by the curators and others. Barbara Dayer Gallati, Curator of American Art at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, is the exhibition coordinator for the Brooklyn showing. The exhibition installation at Brooklyn is designed by Matthew Yokobosky. An audio tour from Acoustiguide will be available (\$5, \$4 members).

Exhibition Tour Schedule

Tate Britain, London, England	November 1, 2000–January 27, 2002
Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany	March 1, 2002–June 2, 2002
Brooklyn Museum of Art	September 6, 2002–January 5, 2003
Kobe City Museum, Kobe, Japan	February–May 2003
Gedai Museum, Tokyo, Japan	June–August 2003

End

Media Contact: (718) 638-5000

Sally Williams, Public Information Officer, ext. 331

James Gordon, Media Relations Manager, ext. 334

Reggie Cameron, Sr. Public Information Coordinator, ext. 354

Adam Husted, Public Information Associate, ext. 330

www.brooklynmuseum.org

The Victorian Nude

page 4

GENERAL INFORMATION

Admission:

Contribution \$6; students with valid I.D. and older adults \$3. Free to Members and children under 12 accompanied by an adult. Group tours or visits must be arranged in advance by calling extension 234.

Directions:

Subway: Seventh Avenue express (1 or 2) to Eastern Parkway/Brooklyn Museum stop; Lexington Avenue express (4 or 5) to Nevins Street, cross platform and transfer to the 1 or 2. **Bus:** B71, B41, B69, B48. On-site parking available.

Museum Hours:

Wednesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.; First Saturday of each month, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m.; all other Saturdays, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.; Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Closed Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day.