

Venus of Urbino vs. Olympia



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Sam Bugay Intro to Visual Arts Bryce Speed November 30, 2012 Faces of Sexuality Sexuality has been a face of a rt for many centuries. Olympia by Edouard Manet and Venus of Urbino by Titian represent the face for female domination and the ability to lure men. As we look at these two different faces of sexuality, we will briefly touch on the artist's lives, and explore the content of the two works. Edouard Manet was born in Paris in 1832. He was considered to be the founder of modern art as well as a master interpreter of visual arts. His works were " spontaneous, monumental, and realistic.

Although Manet was born into a more privileged class, he chose to portray lower classes or the less desirable people of Paris. He commonly reflected everyday scenarios such as construction workers, street singers, and beggars in his art work. Manet's artwork never dwindled in value or passion. The Bar at Folies-Bergere, one of his best known works, was painted a year before his death in 1883. Tiziano Vecelli, Titian in English, was born in 1448. Titian was regarded as one of the greatest painters of the Renaissance in Venice. He is best known for his religious arts, portraiture, and mastery of color.

He had released over 600 works of art which included some of the best Renaissance paintings and drawings. As an artist, Titian explored new themes to portray and new uses of color which added to his reputation as leading painter in Venice at that time. Titian died in 1576. Venus of Urbino, painted in 1538 by Titian, is considered to be one of the most famous nude female paintings in art history (6). Venus of Urbino is an oil-on-canvas painting located in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence (3). The painting is of a nude

female lying on a bed in a Renaissance palace. The woman is painted wearing a bracelet, earrings, and a ring.

In her left hand she holds a small bouquet of red roses. Two maids and a small dog are in the room with the woman. Secret seduction and marriage are two themes that could be related to this painting. According to (6), Venus of Urbino is the “ iconic version of the reclining nude female. ” The woman in the painting is believed by many historians to be the goddess of love, Venus. Venus of Urbino was commissioned by the Duke of Urbino for his young wife, and is believed to support the idea of marriage and marital obligations. The painting is said to celebrate marital love and the physical intimacy between the husband and wife.

A clue to support this is the small dog at the foot of the bed. The dog symbolizes marital fidelity. Another clue is the housemaid standing in the background. She symbolizes motherhood. The standing maid is watching over a younger maid while she rummages through a large chest. The chest is referred to as a “ cassone. ” A cassone was often given as a wedding gift in Italy, and was usually where the wife stored her clothes. Final clues to support the idea of marital love are the small bouquet the woman holds, and a small myrtle tree in the window seal.

The bouquet of roses symbolizes love. The myrtle tree symbolizes undying love and commitment, and was a Hebrew symbol of marriage (7). Venus of Urbino is “ often cited as the origin of many of western art’s most controversial images” (6). Many historians believe that the woman in the painting does not depict Venus, rather a model from that time. They justify this by saying that the woman shows no characteristics of the goddess she is

said to be. There are several clues to support the belief of secret seduction to be a theme for the painting Venus of Urbino.

To begin, the woman painted does not seem to be unattainable, often a characteristic of Venus. (6) suggested that the woman “ is both available and deliberately tempting. ” Her piercing stare emanates the idea of sexuality. Her body is tilting forward, exposing her neck, and initiating the idea of suggestion or demand. The way she covers her pelvic region is a final clue to support the idea of secret seduction. Some historians believe she covers herself in modesty. Others believe that Titian intended to suggest that the woman was masturbating or playing with a strand of pubic hair (6).

Ultimately, that is for the viewer to decide. “ Although the nude body has been visual art’s most enduring and universal subject, it has often spurred conflict. ” This quote proves especially true when referencing the painting Olympia. Olympia is an oil-on-canvas painting, painted by Edouard Manet in 1863. The painting is of a nude woman reclining on a bed. She is seen wearing a bracelet, earrings, shoes, a black ribbon around her necks, and an orchid in her hair. The woman is accompanied by a maid holding flowers, and a black cat at the foot of the bed.

The objections to Olympia began when the painting was submitted to the French Salon in 1865. The controversy evolved from the realism of the subject matter: the woman Manet depicted was a courtesan. According to reference. com, a courtesan refers to a mistress who is associated with wealthy or powerful men. What shocked the critics wasn’t that the woman was nude, but that she gazed so boldly at the viewer. This scene wasn’t typically displayed. The woman Manet was a real woman from Paris believed

to be Victorine Meurent. Two themes Olympia could represent are prostitution and domination.

Many details contribute to the idea of prostitution as a possible theme. To begin, the maid is presenting the courtesan with a large bouquet of flowers. The flowers are presumed to be from a client. The bored expression on the woman's face gives way to think that this isn't the first time she has received a high priced gift. The black cat at the foot of the bed symbolizes prostitution too. Around the 15th century, brothels were frequently referred to as a "cathouse." Brothels were early century houses for men to visit to pay for sexual encounters with strange women. Manet also paints the woman wearing shoes.

This symbolizes "streetwalking", which refers to the act of soliciting dates on the street. Another possible theme for Olympia is domination. The model depicted shows the characteristics of a strong and independent woman. She stares in the direction one may assume the door would be, almost as if a client, in this case, you, has barged in unannounced. She stares directly at the viewer demanding attention and respect. This shocked viewers because it was scandalous for a woman to stare directly at someone at that time. She also shows domination over men by the way she "firmly protects" her pelvic region.