

THE SECOND GLANCE

Introduction

Exhibition 1: All Forms of Love



1
Zacharias Hegewald [1596–1639]
Adam and Eve as Lovers, ca. 1530
Marble, 29,5 x 15,3 cm

Inv. Nr. 3120, on loan from the Würth Collection.

© Archiv Würth

The project »The Second Glance« aims to present the Bode Museum's collection from new and different perspectives, which are usually not included in the conventional art history discourse. The first of these viewpoints, *All Forms of Love*, is rooted in the history of the city of Berlin and its open-minded and tolerant attitude; as reflected in King Frederick the Great's (1712–1786) famous quote from 1740: »in this

country every man must get to heaven in his own way«. Already in 1794, the Prussian state recognised the right of intersexual citizens to freely choose the gender they wanted to belong to and, consequently, to be legally judged under the chosen sex. Only a short time after, planning began for the first exhibition hall in the town, this being the germ of the present Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

But an exceptional tolerance in these earlier times should not be idealised. Although the representation of love and affection has been a recurrent topic within the history of art, the expression of sexual love has usually been considered a taboo in human history. Indeed, museums were, and often still are, places where this aspect was not particularly emphasised.



2
 Leonhard Kern [1588–1662]
Vision of Ezechiel, ca. 1640/50
 Alabaster, 72 x 84 x 13 cm

Inv. Nr. 8482
 © Skulpturensammlung und Museum
 für Byzantinische Kunst
 der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin / Antje Voigt

It is often overlooked that none of the works of art in the Bode Museum was created with the intention of being exhibited here one day. Every work of art kept in this museum was originally created as a reaction of its creator to a particular context. The presentation in a museum, however, gave these objects a unique aura that encouraged misguided interpretations. After all, from the moment they were created, they were exposed to a wide variety of interpretations: by the artist himself, by the client, and by each and every one of the millions of viewers who have seen them to this day – including yourself.

The Bode Museum houses many examples where the expression of an erotic and sexual desire can only be recognised at second glance. For instance, around 1530 Zacharias Hegewald (1596–1639) sculpted in ivory the figures of *Adam and Eve* (fig. 1). They are naked, embracing and smiling at each other, so that their mutual attraction can be assumed without any doubt. More-

over, they even seem to lie together. But their sexual attributes, the genitals, are covered with a piece of cloth held by two pegs as they are not supposed to be seen at first glance, at least not by us.

On the other hand, heterosexual relations have also been integrated in the Bode Museum's collection as secondary topics within more complex scenes, only perceptible to those viewers willing to give them a second glance. In Leonhard Kern's (1588–1662) *Vision of Ezechiel*, an illustration of the resurrection of the dead, the biblical scene is even difficult to recognise as the prophet fades into the background of the composition due to the prominent position taken by the naked couples rising from the dead (fig. 2).

Both Hegewald and Kern have represented heterosexual relations. But what happened to the representation of same-sex affection? Furthermore, does every image of affection automatically mean sexual attraction? Close intimate relationships

between two women or two men can be homosocial (social relationships between persons of the same sex) and/or homosexual. The dividing line between the expression of friendship or romantic love and sexuality was and still is very vague. In some countries two male friends commonly hug and kiss as a sign of friendliness, or two female friends can walk hand in hand without this implying any sexual attraction. The impression would be much the opposite when ignoring the cultural context. In other countries the language does not even distinguish between sexual love and any other type of love. In English, the expression »I love you« can be equally directed to a sexual partner, to a friend, or to a member of the family – something unthinkable for instance in German, where the expression »Ich liebe dich« until recently automatically implied romantic love. Thinking in fixed categories does not, therefore, reflect the many forms that love and affection can take.

In the case of women, heterosexual or homosexual desires have sometimes been assumed to be non-existent. As we can see in a textile fragment, women in Antiquity were active members of the Roman *Bacchanalia*, festivals celebrated in honour of Bacchus, god of wine and freedom (fig. 3). But after the fall of the Western Roman Empire in the year 476, the expression of the simplest affection among women was artistically ignored until the 9th century.

At a time when there is much less certainty regarding sexual norms than ever before, the Bode Museum offers the visitor five paths, conceived as autonomous themes, through which one may unearth new meanings related to all forms of love within the collection. The first path analyses the representation of the heroic soldier and the boundaries between masculine prowess and bisexuality. The second deals with works made by homosexual artists or those close to this group. Homosexual patrons are the focus of the third path, while the fourth concentrates on the representation of women's intimacy and female-to-female sexual affection. Finally, the fifth path questions the boundaries of gender assignment. Many of the following artworks were not specifically made under a LGBTIQ* (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, intersexual, and queer) perspective but they simply acquired this connotation from the viewer's perspective. Other works were revolutionary at their time, just because of showing same-sex affection, even when devoid of sexual implications.

With the aim of making the following texts accessible, footnotes have been omitted. However, it must be acknowledged the significant relevance on the present work of studies by Robert Mills, Samantha J.E. Riches, Sarah Sali, James M. Saslow,



3

Egypt

Fragment of a Curtain with Dionysian Figures (Detail), ca. 5th c.

Linen and wool, 152 x 60 cm

Inv. Nr. 5/69 © Skulpturensammlung und Museum für Byzantinische Kunst der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin / Antje Voigt

James Small, and Andreas Sternweiler, among others. Their publications are recommended for a deeper understanding of the subject. A basic general bibliography and vocabulary have been added as an appendix.

Generally the term homosexual, as opposed to heterosexual, has been used. Although this word was coined in the 19th century in the medical

context of human sexuality, it still is the most commonly used designation in most European languages.