INTRODUCTION

The Subject, Structure and Methodology of the Book

The subject of this book is the depiction of Greek Aphrodite, whom the Romans venerated as Venus. Everyone knows statues of this goddess, and for that very reason, they became the brunt of mockery in the beginning of the 20th century by avant-garde artists who, as Hans Arp conveyed profanely, *gave the clyster to Venus of Milo.*[1] Nonetheless, in the past decades, the public has had the opportunity to see ancient statues of Venus[2] or works inspired by them at a series of exhibitions around the world,[3] which is proof that they can still attract contemporary viewers. They can also provoke adverse reactions, because it involves a sensitive subject, the portrayal of naked women by men and for a male audience. The book contains opinions and perspectives that I have merely reproduced without identifying with them in any way. I am fully aware that the male approach to depicting a naked Venus can be offensive to women today.

The score of monographs dealing with ancient depictions of Venus began with the first one in 1873,[4] but lately they have distinctly risen in number.[5] K. Bender has already published six books containing lists of post-ancient depictions of the goddess in individual European cultures accompanied by extensive bibliographies.[6] The sheer number of depictions of Aphrodite and Venus is staggering, and therefore in this book I will focus only on statues. I will deal with depictions of the goddess in painting, graphics, artistic crafts and literature only to the extent necessary for understanding the sculptures themselves. This boundary presented itself naturally, as it corresponds to the way that Venus lives on in our imagination. Each of us first thinks of her statue,

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[1] El Lissitzky and Hans Arp, *Die Kunstismen. Les Ismes de l'art. The Isms of Art* (Zürich: Eugen Rentsch, 1925), x.

[2] See Christine Kondoleon et al. (eds.), *Aphrodite and the Gods of Love* (Boston: MFA Publications, 2011).

[3] See, for example, Ekkehard Mai (ed.), *Faszination Venus: Bilder einer Göttin von Cranach bis Cabanel* (Cologne: Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, 2000); Maria Sframeli, *The Myth of Venus* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale 2003); Michael Squire et al. (eds.): *The Classical Now* (London: Elephant Publishing, 2018); Thomas Kren et al. (eds.), *The Renaissance Nude* (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2018).

[4] Johann Jacob Bernoulli, *Aphrodite: Ein Baustein zur griechischen Kunstmythologie* (Leipzig: Wilhlem Engelmann, 1873).

[5] See, for example, Göta Johansson (ed.), *Aphrodite: The Making of a Goddess* (Lund: Palmkron, 2005); Karen Schoch, *Die doppelte Aphrodite – alt und neu bei griechischen Kultbildern* (Göttingen: Universitätverlag, 2009); Mustafa Koçak, *Aphrodite am Pfeiler: Studien zu aufgestützten/angelehnten weiblichen Figuren der griechischen Marmorplastik* (Istanbul: Ege Yayınları, 2013); Kathrin Barbara Zimmer, *Im Zeichen der Schönheit: Form, Funktion und Stellenwert klassischer Skulpturen im Hellenismus am Beispiel der Göttin Aphrodite* (Rahden: Verlag Marie Leidorf, 2014); Robert Sturm, *Kauernde Aphrodite: Die Bedeutung des Bildmotivs in der antiken und postantiken Kunst* (Hamburg: Dr. Josef Kovac, 2015); Mandy Richter, *Die Renaissance der Kauernden Venus. Ihr Nachleben zwischen Aktualisierung und Neumodellierung von 1500 bis 1570* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 2016).

[6] K. Bender, *The Iconography of Venus, 1.2: The Italian Venus Revisited* (s.l.: Lulu Com 2018); K. Bender, *The Iconography of Venus, 2,1: The French Venus* (s.l.: Lulu Com 2020); K. Bender, *The Iconography of Venus, 3.1: The Venus of the Low Countries* (s.l.: Lulu Com 2010); K. Bender, *The Iconography of Venus, 4.1: The German, Swiss and Central-European Venus* (s.l.: Lulu Com 2012); K. Bender: *The Iconography of Venus, 5.1: The British and Irish Venus* (s.l.: Lulu Com 2013). K. Bender: *The Iconography of Venus, 6.1. The Venus of the Eastern-, Southern- and Northern- European Regions*. N.p.: Lulu Com 2014.

because she has been preserved since ancient times primarily in this form. The most popular sculptures tend to be those of the naked Venus, which evoke her birth from the sea foam and her subsequent bath. They summarize not only her myth, but at the same time give visibility to her essence, which is erotic attraction, thus allowing one element to meld with the other.

The content of this book is the story of ancient and post ancient sculptural representations of Venus understood as a whole. Kenneth Clark's book,[7] to which I will return below, is still an unequalled model in the diachronic approach to depicting Venus, as scholars who have subsequently dealt with this ancient goddess have always approached her synchronically. They have either focused on the ancient Venus or on her reception in post-ancient Europe. In comprehensive works, there is either a short introductory chapter on the goddess in Greco-Roman antiquity, or contrarily there is an equally brief final chapter on her "next life" after the demise of ancient civilization. To date, only one single monograph has been written that studies the sculptures of Venus from the beginning in classical Greece all the way up to post-ancient Europe. Nonetheless, Berthold Hinz focuses on one sculptural type only, which he furthermore studies only up to the beginning of the 16th century.[8] On the contrary, the book that the reader now reads analyses all sculptural types and furthermore explores their reception in the post-ancient world (unless otherwise stated, all dates are AD). The goddess was known in the post-ancient world under her Latin name, and therefore her Greek name will be used in the following text only in connection with ancient Greece.

The structure of this book is straightforward. Its individual chapters are ordered chronologically; where necessary, however, their internal ordering combines the chronological perspective with the thematic. The first chapter explores the origin and development of the sculptural types of Aphrodite in the context of the evolution in the religious practice of Greek communities. This process determined the further development of Venus imagery. We will trace not only its primary stages but also its entire thematic breadth. Our main focus will be on the Cnidia, Praxiteles' statue from around 360 BC, the prototype of most later goddess statues. The second chapter is devoted to the adaptation of Greek sculptural types of Aphrodite for the needs of the Roman cult of Venus, which was closely linked to the Roman state and also played an important role in Roman concepts of the afterlife. The Romans were primarily responsible for continuing the tradition that the Greek statues of Aphrodite established. These statues are largely lost, but their memory has been preserved through countless Roman versions. The third chapter deals with the break in the representation of Venus brought about by the fall of the ancient Roman Empire and the rise of Christianity. This short chapter is the most important of the whole book because it will deal with the period when the modern view of ancient Venus statues was taking shape. Early modern Europe saw them primarily through medieval eyes, which profoundly influenced their reception in subsequent centuries.

The fourth chapter deals with the Italian reception of the ancient statue of the naked Venus, which began in the 15th century and culminated in the 16th century. This chapter is the longest one in the book and forms its core. It describes a paradox

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[7] Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A study of Ideal Art* (London: John Murray, 1956).
[8] Berthold Hinz, *Aphrodite: Geschichte einer abendländischen Passion* (Vienna: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1998).

that has not yet received the attention of art historians. Renaissance Italy has become very thoroughly familiar with all the ancient sculptural types of the naked Venus, but this had only a limited impact on the original sculptural production. For clarity, the chapter is divided into thematic blocks that analyse in detail the various aspects of this paradox. We will first deal with the Roman collections of ancient statues and the various ways in which the knowledge of ancient statues of Venus was spread. We will study their reception in the artistic creation of the time in the independent sections devoted to the production of statuettes and monumental statues. One section is devoted to Giambologna, with whom the reception of ancient models of the depiction of Venus in Italian renaissance sculpture both culminated and simultaneously ended, as the ancient goddess was transformed into a bathing woman. In the last section, this development is connected with the inconsistent relationship to Venus and her ancient statues. Early modern Europe admired these statues and condemned the goddess.

In the two chapters that follow, we will explore the development of the reception of ancient statues of Venus after the 16th century, when focus on her shifted to ultramontane Europe. In the fifth chapter, the first section traces how the Renaissance concept of Venus statues flourished and faded in England over the 17th-18th centuries. The second section briefly discusses why readers learned little about ancient Venus statues in the work of the founder of art history, Johann Joachim Winckelmann. The final section, which is devoted to neoclassicism, emphasises that in the first half of the 19th century, sculptors imitated the forms of ancient Venus statues but changed their meaning. In the last chapter, we will elaborate upon the final phase of the reception of ancient statues of Venus. From the third quarter of the 19th century, female nakedness, the confirmation of the patriarchal concept of the world or its resolute rejection, and other isolated aspects of ancient statues of Venus began to come to the forefront. Venus de Milo will be discussed at lengths because it is a fitting example of the use of ancient statues of Venus in modern political propaganda. In the 1930s, surrealist artists began to explore responses to ancient statues of Venus in the subconscious of modern man. After the second half of the 20th century, some artists have turned their attention also to Venus as a goddess.

At the end of the introduction, a brief comment on the methodology of the book. In the 20th century, the past lost the firm contours that it had possessed in the 19th century, and began to change more quickly and radically with each successive generation. The impossibility of reaching some "definitive" image of the past that was not immediately refuted had an indisputably positive effect at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st. Scholars shifted their attention from the search for the "one correct" image of the past to the way in which those who actually lived in the past perceived themselves and their culture. Only in previous decades have scholars begun to notice more attentively how this perception changed in time and space. They are interested in how the work of art was perceived by the audience for whom it was intended and how its perception has evolved in later centuries, including today. Works of art are understood not as manifestations of evolutionary tendencies guided by their internal logic or as the visibility of subconscious or timeless ideas but in their temporal and local conditioning. In the previous decades, this approach has

also found support in classical archaeology.[9] Also, in this book, sculptures of Venus were not the final goal of the research, but always its starting point.

The methodology of this book is the same as in my previous works. In the 1980s, when I was researching the depiction of life on Athenian vases from the 6th-4th centuries BC, I was interested in how these depictions changed over time and what these changes might say about Athenian society.[10] For me, what these images depicted was secondary; what was primary were the shifts in the way life was represented. The Athenian vase painter can distort beyond recognition the relationship between an individual "scene from reality" and real life as he knew it. He could depict what he saw, e.g. a naked women bathing, but he could also show what he dreamed of or what his customers wanted to see. I was not interested in solo scenes, but only in a series of scenes whose development I can objectively describe. I took a similar approach to the depiction of Venus. I was similarly uninterested in individual statues and their relationship to the goddess, focusing rather on recurring pictorial types whose changes showed tendencies that could be clearly defined. I was interested in what types of statues were used to represent Venus and how their composition changed over time.

The advantage of the combined synchronic and diachronic approach lies in the fact that it has led to a distinct increase in the historical value of the individual sculptures, which are always understood as part of a larger whole, which is the source of their purpose. I will not be interested in individual scenes and their relation to the goddess, but above all, in recurring image types whose changes show tendencies that can be clearly defined. I will be interested above all in the variations of iconographic themes and motifs. It is possible to analyse what they have in common and how they differ, thus allowing us to approach the content of the message. Sculptures of Venus are thus merely the subject of the book. Its contents are formed by the transformations in her representation. These transformations may tell us something about the relationship these statues had to the goddess and the women who served as models for their creation.

People tend to link Venus to "eternal beauty," and depictions of her are considered a visualization of the "female essence." However, the reader will find nothing on this topic in the book. On the contrary, I will be interested in the dramatic changes related to the development of artistic culture and the re-evaluation of deities, rituals, sexuality and the position of women in society.

"Renaissance" and "Renascences"

In the second half of this book, which is devoted to the reception of ancient Venus statues in modern Western culture, two art-historical concepts, the Renaissance and the nude, take centre stage. In the following two thematic blocks, we will briefly summarize their historical development.

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[9] See, for example, Rosemary Barrow, *Creating Continuity with the Traditions of High Art: The Use of Classical Art and Literature by Victorian Painters 1860-1912* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007); Rachel Meredith Kousser, *Hellenistic and Roman Ideal Sculpture: The Allure of the Classical* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Tonio Hölscher, *Visual Power in Ancient Greece and Rome: Between Art and Social Reality* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018).

[10] Above all: Bažant 1985 (cf. Osborne 2018).

Italian intellectuals and artists understood what we call the Renaissance in a different manner than we do today. We have a tendency to emphasize the continuity with ancient Greece and Rome. Those who experienced and created this epoch understood it as a discontinuity, which gave them a new and better start. In his work "Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors and Architects" published in 1550 (and in an amended addition in 1568), Giorgio Vasari compared the development of art to the development of a person, who is born, gets old, and finally dies. This allows him to understand the *process of a second birth (rinascità)* that took place in the art of his time.[11] After a blossoming of art comes a decline and definitive end, which is the basic prerequisite for a new beginning, i.e. the rebirth that took place in the 15th and 16th centuries.

However, today we use the term *renaissance*, which is taken from French. The reason for this is the fact that historian Jules Michelet planted the Italian concept of the cultural revolution in the 15th and 16th centuries to European consciousness in his work from 1855 entitled "La Renaissance". Michelet radically reevaluated the Italian concept of the cultural revolution. It didn't happen until the 16th century, not in Italy but France. The goal of Michelet's "renaissance" was the discovery of man and the material world. The essence of this intellectual revolution was the development of the empirical study of nature and the renewal of the Greco-Latin program for the self-development of humankind via reason. A political dimension was added to Michelet's concept by Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt in his groundbreaking work from 1860, "The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy" (Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien), thanks to which the French term entered all world languages. According to Burckhardt, a person in the Middle Ages was primarily embedded in a class or community; it was only in the Italian Renaissance that he became a self-aware individual who was fully allowed to develop his genius. From Michelet and Burckhardt on, the Italian Renaissance in the general consciousness has been venerated as the rediscovery of something that forms an essential part of Western civilization and is a permanent and fundamental part of it.[12]

Perhaps the most influential art historian of the 20th century, Erwin Panofsky, refuted this construction, in which antiquity, the Middle Ages and the modern period are isolated from one another according to the "thesis – antithesis – synthesis" scheme. His analyses are based on the concept that the development of Italian Renaissance art and the reception of ancient works of art in this epoch was much more linked to the previous epoch of European history and much less to ancient Greco-Roman culture. Nonetheless, even Panofsky assumed that the reception of antiquity was the goal here and understood the development of art as being designated by this goal. It was a reaction to the "revolt of the medievalists."[13] As early as the 1920s, specialists in the European Middle Ages began to point to the fact that ancient culture did not end with

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[11] Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de'più eccellenti pittori, scultori ed architettori, 1568*, ed. Gaetani Milanesi, vol. 1-9 (Florence: Sansoni, 1878-1885), vol. 1, 1878, 243. Cf. Matteo Burioni, "Vasari's Rinascità: History, Anthropology or Art Criticism?" in: *Renaissance? Perceptions of Continuity and Discontinuity in Europe, c. 1300– c. 1550,* ed. Alexander Lee et al. (Leiden: Brill, Leiden 2010), 115– 28.

[12] For Michelet and Burckhardt, see Jo Tollebeek, "'Renaissance' and 'fossilization:' Michelet, Burckhardt, and Huizinga," *Renaissance Studies* 15, no. 3 (September 2001): 354-366.

[13] Leidulf Melve, "The Revolt of the Medievalists: Directions in Recent Research on the Twelfth-century Renaissance," *Journal of Medieval History* 32, no. 3 (2006): 231-252.

the fall of the ancient Roman Empire. The Italian Renaissance was truly not the first and exclusive return to ancient models; the so-called "Macedonian renaissance" had already taken place in the Byzantine Empire in the 10th century. There had been a whole series of renaissances in the west, which spanned over nearly all of the Middle Ages, from the Northumbrian to Carolingian renaissance to the Ottonian renaissance and renaissance of the 12th century, which ended *de facto* after 1250.

Erwin Panofsky attempted to save the uniqueness of the Italian Renaissance and suggested that we not call these retrospective movements renaissances, as they were something fundamentally different.[14] He therefore dubbed them "renascences," which differed from the Italian Renaissance in the "principle of disjunction." Whenever a form was adopted from ancient times, it was almost always complemented by Christian content. On the contrary, whenever an ancient topic was adopted, it was almost always presented in a non-ancient and usually medieval form. According to Panofsky, only from the Italian Renaissance onward did ancient topics begin to be depicted in a thoroughly ancient form. However, the "principle of disjunction" is not a natural law, as there are so many exceptions to it that even using the term "exceptions" is a misnomer. The Italian Renaissance did not differ fundamentally in its intensity, extent of transformation or reinterpretation of ancient forms and topics from the previous epochs.[15]

Ancient Greco-Roman culture is without a doubt a part of the history of Western civilization, but its reception in post-ancient Europe was not something that was fated to happen or had to occur as a rule. We can create a fairly good image of other alternative models that stemmed from specific historical circumstances and what fields such as economic and political history, climatology, demographics, and religious studies tell us about the given epoch. In 1995, the respected "Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies" reacted to this new situation by renaming itself to the "Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies."[16] The term "renaissance," which is burdened by tradition and evokes a certain cultural turning point, is generally replaced by the ideologically neutral and purely chronological term "early modern period." The "rinascità" of Vasari and the "renaissance" of Michelet, Burckhardt and Panofsky provide us with a better understanding of the reception of ancient statues of Venus in the European culture of the 14th to 16th centuries, but they in no way explain it. As we will demonstrate in this book, in the case of Venus, the "principle of disjunction" never lost its cogency. From Renaissance Italy to the present day, people have looked at Venus from the position of a medieval man, although artists have recreated the ancient Greek art form in depicting her.

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[14] Erwin Panofsky, *Renaissance and Renascences in Western Art* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1960), 84.
[15] Cf. Michael Squire, "Reception: The Legacy of Greek Sculpture," in *Handbook of Greek Sculpture*, ed. Olga Palagia (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 725–767.
[16] Cf. Salvatore Settis, "Rinascimento e dacedenza, una simmetria necessaria," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 56, no. 2 (2014): 139-151.

"Nude" and "Naked"

> *So much of the nude body as in daily life of the nation may be shown with modesty, and seen with reverence and delight – so much, and no more, ought to be shown by the national arts, either of painting or sculpture. What more than this, either art exhibits, will assuredly, pervert taste and in all probability morals.*
> John Ruskin, *The Eagle's Nest* (Chicago IL: Belford & Clarke, 1872), 102.

Modern Western culture continually returns to ancient Greece and Rome and their visual arts, but each time from a different position, with a different goal, and with different results.[17] The depiction of the "goddess of love" in various contexts and different cultures had a common denominator, i.e. Venus, but the form and content of these depictions was constantly transforming, often completely. This approach, which prevails among scholars today, is the opposite way in which Venus was seen by the famous art historian Lord Kenneth Clark, who was more interested in the way these depictions did not change or, more exactly, the way in which they were not supposed to change according to the dominant opinion of the time. Clark's "The Nude" was the very first book aimed at the general public that dealt with the reception of ancient visual culture in post-ancient Europe.[18] In it, the author focused on the depiction of the human body, primarily the female body, and thus systematically discussed Venus, whose ancient sculptures he understood as a generally acknowledged model.

Clark's book was a manifesto protesting against the relativization of everything that Western culture had traditionally endorsed. This negative wave rose as early as the end of the 19th century and a reaction to it was the creation of a new scientific discipline, the goal of which was to study ancient traditions in Western visual art. The success of scholarly books by Aby Warburg, Erwin Panofsky, Ernst Gombrich and others culminated in Clark's monograph, which is one of the most widely read books on the fine arts to this day. The success of the new discipline and thus Clark's book was due to the stance which these works held, i.e. one that was based on nostalgia for a static, patriarchal world of unchanging values, the emblem of which was the ennobling sculpture of the naked Venus and the female nude in general. Classical archeologist Nikolaus Himmelmann also dealt with nakedness in art in the 1980s from similar positions, but almost exclusively in the tradition of German idealism.[19] As of late, the depiction of the naked body has become a frequent topic among classical archeologists and art historians, which has led to a fundamental revision of Clark and Himmelmann's normative concept.[20]

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[17] Cf. Ursula Rombach and Peter Seiler (eds.), *Imitatio als Transformation: Theorie und Praxis Der Antikennachahmung in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Petersberg: Imhof, 2012).

[18] Clark, *The Nude*. Cf. Kathryn Moore Heleniak, "Naked/Nude," in *Encyclopedia of Comparative Themes Depicted in Works of Art*, ed. Helene. E. Roberts, vol. 2 (Chicago IL: Fitzboy Dearborne, 1998), 641–649.

[19] Nikolaus Himmelmann, *Ideale Nacktheit* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 1985); idem, *Antike Götter im Mittelalter* (Mainz: P. von Zabern, 1986); idem, *Ideale Nacktheit in der griechischen Kunst* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990). Cf. Tonio Hölscher, "Nikolaus Himmelmann: Ideale Nacktheit in der griechischen Kunst," *Gnomon* 65, no. 6 (1993): 519-528.

[20] E.g. Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992), 12-33; Helen McDonald, *Erotic Ambiguities: The Female Nude in Art* (London: Routledge, 2000), 7-30; John-Paul Stonard, "Kenneth Clark's 'The Nude. A Study of Ideal Art, 1956,'" *The Burlington Magazine* 152, no. 1286 (May 2010): 317-321; Mireille M. Lee, *Body, Dress, and Identity in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge:

Clark saw the nude as a recasting of nature into an aesthetically perceived work of art, which was expressed in the secondary title of his book *A Study of Ideal Art*. The final paragraph of the book ends with a glorification of ancient nudes: *The Greeks perfected the nude in order that man feel like a god, and in a sense this is still its function, for although we no longer suppose that God is like a beautiful man, we still feel close to divinity in those flashes of self-identification when, through our own bodies, we seem to be aware of the universal order*.[21] We have no proof of the fact that the Greeks perfected the nude in order for man to feel like a god; on the contrary, we do know for sure that they created these sculptures to honor the gods. All ancient Greek depictions of Aphrodite were the subject or evocation of a religious cult. Originals of all sculptural types of this goddess which have been preserved from ancient Greece were created in order to be displayed in the temples of the goddess that they depicted. Sculptures of gods in ancient times were designated primarily to the gods, and their interpretation must stem from this fact.

Clark was also wrong in the way he approached post-ancient depictions of the naked body. He assumed that the goal of the visual arts was to create a depiction that had no tinge of uneasiness and was not disconcerting. Only ten years after the publication of Clark's book, Lucian Freud, grandson of the founder of psychoanalysis, began to depict the nakedness of women and men in a way that intentionally aimed at evoking a feeling of embarrassment in the viewer.[22] However, this in no way suggests that they are not artistic nudes. Furthermore, this method of depicting nakedness is clearly dominant from the end of the 20th century. Postmodern nudes do not allow for the soothing experience of a universal order of which the British historian wrote, as their creators plunge into the depths of a reality of wholly concrete people, which is always bizarre and often intolerable to the majority of viewers. We may disagree with it, we may dream of a world in which people are similar to gods, but we must take our present visual culture into consideration, as through it we understand the art of the past.

The nudes of Lucian Freud did not appear strictly out of thin air. As early as in ancient times and the Italian Renaissance, naked women were depicted by even the greatest of artists in a way that was not only perfectly perplexing, but also sometimes evoked a feeling of disgust. This is the case of Botticelli's series from 1482-1483 illustrating the bizarre story from Boccaccio's Decameron.[23] The dominant element of these paintings is a beautiful naked girl who is, however, hunted as if she were an animal, torn apart by dogs and finally disemboweled.[24] According to Clark, the sight of the human body always evokes unpleasant feelings, and therefore must always be *clothed by a consistent style*.[25] Rembrandt, however, intentionally depicted the female body in order to give the viewer the impression that he or she was looking at a real

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Cambridge University Press, 2015), 172-197; Jill Burke, *The Italian Renaissance Nude* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 14-15.

[21] Clark, *The Nude*, 357.

[22] Cf. Frances Borzello, *The Naked Nude* (Farnborough: Thames & Hudson, 2012), 6-12.

[23] Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, 5.8.

[24] Cf. Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ouvrir Vénus: Nudité, rêve, cruauté* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 86-98.

[25] Clark, *The Nude*, 320.

live woman who was standing before the artist.[26] Clark was naturally aware of this fact, and therefore writes about Rembrandt's naked women in the chapter "*The Alternative Convention*." The name of the chapter implies a hierarchy of conventions which, however, never existed. The depictions of Venus, which we will study in this book from beginning to present, have always oscillated between two opposite poles – the nude which was attractive in Clark's era and the nakedness that evoked unpleasant feelings. The goal of depicting Venus, however, was always both an expression of divinity, which is by principle not depictable, and a portrait of femininity. The more this portrait corresponds to sensual experience, the more attractive and also problematic it becomes. What has changed in time and space has been the intensity and understanding of these two basic components of every depiction of Venus.

[26] Cf. Eric Jan Sluijter, "The Nude, the Artist and the Model. The Case of Rembrandt," in *The Nude and the Norm in the Early Modern Low Countries,* ed. Karolien De Clippel et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 11-34.