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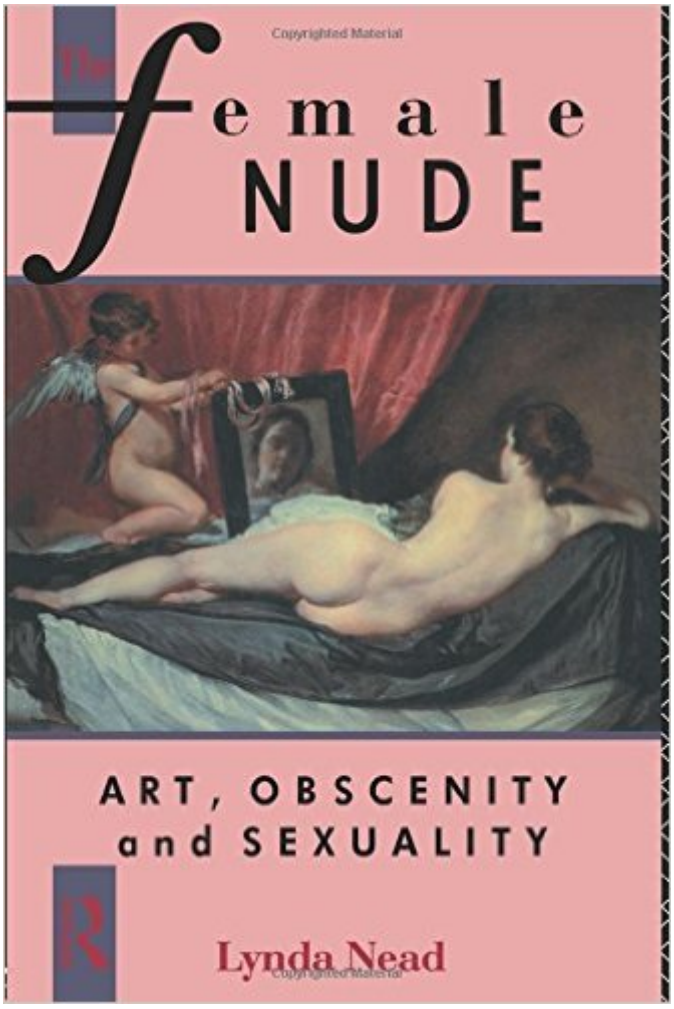
The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity And Sexuality



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Synopsis

Anyone who examines the history of Western art must be struck by the prevalence of images of the female body. More than any other subject, the female nude connotes `art'. The framed image of a female body, hung on the walls of an art gallery, is an icon of Western culture, a symbol of civilization and accomplishment. But how and why did the female nude acquire this status?The Female Nude brings together, in an entirely new way, analysis of the historical tradition of the female nude and discussion of recent feminist art, and by exploring the ways in which acceptable and unacceptable images of the female body are produced and maintained, renews recent debates on high culture and pornography.The Female Nude represents the first feminist survey of the most significant subject in Western art. It reveals how the female nude is now both at the centre and at the margins of high culture. At the centre, and within art historical discourse, the female nude is seen as the visual culmination of enlightenment aesthetics; at the edge, it risks losing its repectability and spilling over into the obscene.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book reviews previous scholar's understanding of the nude, including an extremely insightful look at Kenneth Clark's The Nude and Berger's work on the nude, illuminating many areas where their theories revealed disturbing social views.... it also incorporates philosophy from a wide range of areas, providing the reader with a comprehensive look at why and how we respond to the female nude while exploring a wide range of explanations. it becomes an extremely valuable lesson on

what makes us comfortable and the social implications of all the things we naturally find disgusting. By trying to strike at the core of some of the attitudes towards the female body, she also critiques many current feminist trends that she feels perpetuates the problem and directs us to a clearer understanding of what is needed to view the female body with somewhere near equal respect to the way we view the male body. Before reading this book I honestly thought feminism was silly and that in modern society men and women were close to equal. This book opened my eyes.....wide.... not only about women's studies but also about many of the tendencies of the human mind and i have continued to reference at least one of the ideas it introduced me to in most papers i have written since reading it.

I've said it before, feminists are too often their own worst enemies. Not only do they apparently presume to speak for all women, as perhaps subconsciously does Ms. Nead, but they frequently take a platform that is both dour and too stringent. Her contentions here in The Female Nude are extreme. She is all-but critical of sexuality itself, all but denies that there is any non-sexual beauty in the human body, chides lust as an institution (no, I could not type that with a straight face) and contrary to her goals of championing women she in fact attacks women much more ardently than most any man ever would. Really this is not an overview of western female nudity in art and photography at all. There's little to be learned here, and the overall tone to this message leaves you feeling like you've just sat thru a sermon, or at best one of those college lectures where the professor was a bit too dogmatic in her approach to conveying the subject matter. Heck, even the photographs in here were bad choices. Nead won't be able to market this to either voyeurs or the intellectually curious. This book seems intent upon punishing its reader and is yet another "get the message in first" example of attacking rather than studying; of overtly delivering a message instead of neutrally expounding upon what could have been an engaging topic.

Nead's book examines the male gaze throughout history in the canon of visual art. She thoughtfully takes a feminist approach to deconstruct the representation of the female body in the nude.

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