

Deborah Tomkies
Student number: 508112

History of Western Art
Part One – An Introduction to Art History

Assignment One – Exercise 1

Notes on up to four portraits, self-portraits, nudes or religious works

I. In the Tepidarium – Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema

In the Tepidarium

Sir Lawrence Alma-Tadema

Opus CCXXIX, 1881, Oil on Panel (24.1 x 33cm)

The Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight, Liverpool



Political, economic or social factors

Classical setting allowed use of more sensual poses at a time when nudity and provocative art were considered inappropriate by the repressive Victorian aesthetic. Viewer is not directly seeing an erotic nude woman but admiring a classical painting.

'In its [obituary](#) in 1912, The New York Times wrote: "His maidens were garbed in flowing chitons; they lounged on marble benches or played by the blue waters of the Mediterranean, but in spirit and in actual form they were taken from the girls that he saw around him, and so his work was singularly free from stilted affectation." '(Forbes, 2016)

Originally purchased by A & F Pears for a soap advertisement (Liverpool Museums, 2017), then in 1916 by Lord Leverhulme. However, it was apparently never used due to fears of shocking customers. (Naby, Pinterest, 2017).

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Changes to status or training of artists

A classically trained Dutch artist, Alma-Tadema was one of the wealthiest artists of his age and a shrewd businessman. Works were numbered to reduce risk of fakes. (Alma-Tadema: Biography)

Trained at the Royal Academy, took a role as studio assistant to one of his professors, Jan de Taeye. Later (1858) worked in the Belgian studio of Jan August Hendrik Leys where he produced *The Education of the Children of Clovis* (1860). Of the painting, 'Alma-Tadema related that although Leys thought the completed painting better than he had expected, he was critical of the treatment of marble, which he compared to cheese'. (Swanson, Alma-Tadema p12)

Development of materials or processes

Use of marble as setting to facilitate more accurate representation of naked skin.

'By 1871 he had met and befriended most of the major Pre-Raphaelite painters and it was in part due to their influence that the artist brightened his palette, varied his hues, and lightened his brushwork'. (Alma-Tadema: Biography)

Styles and movements

Not part of the pre-Raphaelite movement but influenced by, and an associate/friend of, many of the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood (Madox Brown, Holman Hunt, Millais, Rossetti).

Alma-Tadema was himself cited as influencer of Gustav Klimt and Fernand Khnopff (Barrow, 2001).

Inside and outside influences

Classical ancient Greek and Roman influences – beginning with a honeymoon in Greece/Italy and continued with many return visits to study, in particular, architecture. Considered to be a tour de force in realistic depiction of marble/granite. Depiction of women in Greek/Romano-classical settings and poses. Inclusion of classical motifs (model reclines on marble bench, Mediterranean oleander tree in pot).

Critics, thinkers and historians

Critically a huge variation in the value and attractiveness of his work to collectors, evidencing the vagaries of fashion in the art world. Hugely successful in his lifetime, prices dropped from the £1000's to mere hundreds between the 1920's -1960's. (Reitlinger, 243–244, also Vol III, 31–32 for 1960s, via Wikipedia)

From 1960 when the Newman Gallery 'called in' the painting of *The Finding of Moses* (1904) at a derisory £252, (Reitlinger, 243-244 via Wikipedia) to 2010, prices hugely increased. In 2010, *The Meeting of Antony & Cleopatra* 41BC sold at Sotheby's for \$29,200,500. (Sotheby's, online catalogue)

Of a current exhibition of his work, co-curator Peter Trippi states "His work has been dismissed as 'Victorians in togas' but younger scholars – and younger viewers – don't bring that baggage to it and instead see his outstanding quality," the co-curator, Peter Trippi, said. "It's not all white marble in

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sunlight. The wealthy English and American buyers loved his work because they saw themselves as the new Romans – but they missed the fact that he also portrayed the darkness and corruption of that world.” (theGuardian, 2016)

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II. Benefits Supervisor Sleeping – Lucian Freud

Benefits supervisor sleeping

Lucian Freud

Oil, canvas (1995) (151.3 x 219cm)

Private collection, (?Roman Abramovich)



Political, economic or social factors

"The distinctive, recumbent manner in which Freud poses so many of his sitters suggests the conscious or unconscious influence both of his grandfather's psychoanalytical couch and of the Egyptian mummyThe particular application of this supine pose to freaks, friends, wives, mistresses, dogs, daughters and mother alike (the latter regularly depicted after her suicide attempt and eventually, literally mummy-like in death), tends to support this hypothesis." (Chaney, 2006)

Changes to status or training of artists

Despite a tempestuous art school background (he was expelled from at least one establishment), Freud went on to guest-lecture at Slade School. (The Art Story, 2017, online)

Development of materials or processes

Freud required significant commitment from models, with paintings often taking many months of intense work to complete. Frequently worked with friends, family and neighbours as well as models. Painted a large body of work with his mother as model.

In his early work Freud works on a relatively small scale with fine brush strokes and detail. Later works, including Benefits Supervisor, are far larger (c1.5x 2m) and use the heavier, bolder technique of impasto, where thick layers of oils are used to create light, shade, texture and form.

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In this work, the model states that he worked with them both facing the canvas. He would turn to look at her, turn away to the canvas and paint. (the Guardian, 2011)

Of this work Freud says of the model's body "It's flesh without muscle and it has developed a different kind of texture through bearing such a weight-bearing thing". (National Portrait Gallery, 2012)

Styles and movements

One of the 'School of London' artists (a term coined at a later date by its originator, American artist R B Kitaj), Freud worked in a figurative style. Notable as a 'School' owing to its pursuit of figurative painting in part as a reactionary response to the abstract and avant garde styles in vogue in the 1960s-1970s. Fellow proponents of this style included Auerbach, Bacon, Hockney and Leon Kossoff. (Tate gallery online)

Freud's nudes are in stark contrast to the erotic, sensual or divine as frequently depicted in art (Botticelli, Rubens, Titian for example). There is little deification, idealisation or glorification in evidence; models are presented as almost brutally real ('warts and all' one might say). The representation of the flesh is uncompromising; no painter's equivalent of the airbrush or photoshop. His portrait of the queen drew particularly strong reactions, from the Sun's 'travesty' to the Guardian's description 'this is a painting of experience'. (BBC online)

His model for Benefits Supervisor, Sue Tilley ("Big Sue") states of his approach: "He wasn't cruel – he painted what he saw. What strikes me most is, I look at my fat ankles and my fat feet every morning and I think they look just like that painting. Even the skinny girls don't look good, do they? He painted out of love." (theGuardian, 2011)

Inside and outside influences

Critics, thinkers and historians

'Curator at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Starr Figura summed up Freud's divisive quality. "The ones who don't appreciate him find his work hard to look at and a bit out of step with what is going on in the rest of the world. They have a hard time categorising it." (theGuardian, 2011)

'Art critic and presenter Tim Marlow said Freud was a "very special man". "He looked at the world was as if he was painting it but when you saw his paintings you saw how he really saw it," he said. "He was the sort of person who had a twinkle in his eye but he would also look at you in a daunting and scrutinising way".' (the Guardian, 2011)

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