Objectified:  
A Sculptural Study

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Introduction

From my youth, I was always fascinated by the ubiquity of nudity in art. It was the one realm where it was acceptable for a child of my age to view images of naked women. As a pubescent boy during the rise of the Internet, I couldn’t fully understand the social factors that made pornography unacceptable and the photographs in my mother’s art books and journals praise-worthy. I think it was this seemingly hypocritical nature of fine arts that turned me off from art originally. In high school, I became disgusted with modern art that seemed like it was created by untalented painters copying a Mondrian a century too late. Yet somehow, when it came time to register for classes for my freshman at Wheaton, I realized that the only ones that really interested me were the art courses. At my mother’s encouragement I enrolled in Great Works art history survey and selected an art based first-year seminar as my first choice.

As I began formally studying art at Wheaton, I realized that many of the questions that had bothered me about art were the same ones that modern artists were grappling with. In Professor Howard’s first-year seminar “It’s Art Because I Say it is!” I learned the complexities behind the definition of art. In his course and Great Works, I remained most interested by the blatant sexuality in that much art involves. Professor Howard introduced me to Robert Mapplethorpe, a photographer that surely explored the boundaries of pornography and art, but at the same time created some of the most beautiful figure studies I’ve ever seen. Less sexual but equally stunning, were Edward Weston’s female nudes, carefully composed with aesthetic appeal stronger than sexual. In “It’s Art
Because I Say it is!” I also saw the violent sexuality in surrealist art that attempted to delve into the subconscious mind.

In Great Works, I was intrigued by ancient fertility goddesses such as the Venus of Willendorf. Classical and Hellenistic Greek sculptures astounded me for the sheer skill they demonstrated as well as the beauty of the figures. I found Renaissance art to be permeated with sexuality, and the Rococo evoked a utopia of hedonism that I very much enjoyed. It was the Baroque period’s Gian Lorenzo Bernini who incited my desire to sculpt. Not only were his realism and quantity of work unfathomable, but his command over depicting human expression gave him the ability to create some incredible religious images of spiritual ecstasy. In Ecstasy of St. Teresa, Bernini gives St. Teresa an expression that is overtly sexual and even orgasmic.¹

In the same class, I was consumed by numerous readings on the ‘male gaze,’ through with I encountered the problematic nature of sexual art generated by and for male viewers. As Gill Saunders states in her book The Nude: A New Perspective, “Most images of naked women by men are designed to display their bodies to the male gaze without challenge or confrontation. The female nude is an object of desire, a focus of male sexuality.”² She further comments on the power of the gaze, “Staring is a male prerogative, a strategy for dominating women, controlling and circumscribing their actions.”³ Despite the controversy, throughout the history of art, the nude, specifically the female nude, has remained the principle subject of great art. In her book, Titian’s Venus of Urbino, Rona Goffen writes, “educated viewers would also have understood

³ Ibid. 25.
something else about the painting… the traditional association of the beautiful (nude) woman with beautiful art. Representing the beautiful female nude, the artist represented his own genius.” As such, sexuality has persistently been at the foundation of great art.

After a sophomore year exploring various media and my own skill level, I entered my junior year ambitious, ready to make art I could be proud of. From the start of Professor Howard’s Photo II course I knew I wanted to photograph nudes. In pursuit of Edward Weston, I photographed my girlfriend and myself in an effort to capture the natural beauty of the human form. Though pleased with the results, my work led me to question the implications of photographing a young, beautiful girl that I was in a relationship with, as well as finding narcissistic pleasure in the idealized depiction of my own body.

I spent the spring of my junior year studying at Studio Art Centers International in Florence, Italy. It was there that I explored sculpture and was influenced by the Renaissance art throughout the city. My sculpture professor, Dario Arcamone, encouraged me to copy from great works of the past in order to practice technique, and this appealed to me very much. I’m sure this was in no small part because of my interest in the nude subjects so often found in great works. In fact, two of the three sculptures I completed were nude female figures that referenced images from ancient art (Fig. 1-2).

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I began my independent study in sculpture last fall as a continued exploration of the human form. I wanted to improve my skills at sculpting the human figure. I also knew that I somehow wanted to comment on religion or society for my senior project, but I was in no rush to narrow my focus. I figured a theme would manifest itself along the way, and that is what happened. I began by sculpting a variety of figures for practice, emulating classical stylization and idealization the best that I could. Because much of my work was influenced by the creation process, it is important to explain the techniques before I discuss my work.
Process

The process for creating my figures goes in hand with the classical look of my pieces. Though my work consists of pieces modeled in clay, cast in plaster, and carved in marble, all of these processes are part of the traditional method of marble carving as I was taught at Studio Art Centers International. In Renaissance Italy, figures were first modeled in clay and then cast in plaster before they were carved in stone. Some of these plaster models survive today, one of the most impressive being the model for Giambologna’s *Rape of the Sabine Women* (Fig. 3). For me, the casting is the most complicated and unnerving part. The figure has to be coated in plaster in such a way that the clay can be removed from the plaster mold. This means that, for a full figure, the mold must be poured, or rather applied, in many pieces. It makes sense to think of it as the front half of the body and the back half, but it is usually more complicated than that. The seams must be coated with a release agent such as vegetable oil so that the pieces don’t stick together, but the pieces must be keyed so that they will fit back together in the same way. Once all the pieces are poured and dry, they must be taken apart, which usually destroys the clay model. The plaster parts are coated with a release, rejoined, and sealed along the seams. The mold is filled with fresh plaster and is rotated so that the plaster coats the inside of the mold evenly. Once the cast is dry, the mold must be chipped away with chisels, revealing the cast underneath. Unless the sculptor is very skilled, it is easy to damage the cast by chiseling too hard. When the mold is removed, damage can be repaired, and the artist can make more changes to the piece. The model is then copied into marble by setting several common points on which can rest a wooden cross and a pointing tool (Fig. 4). With three points set in the same places on the plaster
and the stone, any fourth point relative to those can be transferred from the surface of the plaster to a corresponding point in the stone.

Though I only completed this process one time all the way through, all my work involves at least one part of the process, whether it be clay modeling, plaster casting or stone carving. Over the course of the past two semesters, I have completed approximately 25 figural pieces, many of them models for other pieces, some of them simply body casts (Fig. 35-47). I took eight pieces to a level that I consider finished. Of those eight, I chose seven for the senior studio art exhibition. It was primarily through these seven pieces that my ideas have most fully developed. These are the pieces I will principally examine.
Figure 4. My homemade “machinetta di punto”

Figure 5. Transferred points
The earliest of the I completed is also the largest piece I produced. I originally planned to body-cast as much of a standing female body as possible to use as a model for a stone piece. Instead, I decided it would be easiest to accomplish the casting if the model was lying down. I pulled molds of my model’s torso and the outsides of her arms and legs, five pieces altogether. I pressed clay into the plaster molds and removed the casts when they were stiff enough. With clay slabs, I built a base for the torso, and constructed the other halves of the limbs. Once I joined all the pieces together, it became clear that my clay mock-up was worth turning into a finished piece. Accordingly, I modeled a head for her as realistically as I could.

Although I was very pleased with my clay woman, I knew I was far from a finished product. Since I could not fire her, I would have to cast her in plaster, and I knew that involved destroying the figure I had worked on for so many hours. Casting the figure involved coating her in plaster, removing the clay from the hardened mold, coating the inside of the mold with a release, and nearly filling the mold with a tougher form of gypsum cement called hydrocal. I created a wooden base in the cast with 2x4s and waited for it to dry.

Chiseling the mold away was the most frustrating part. The petroleum jelly I used as a release did not work well, and I damaged the piece many times by chiseling into it. Once all the excess plaster was gone, I repaired the holes with plaster and spackling paste. To unify the whole creation, I built a more concealing wooden frame for the base and painted the entire piece white (Fig. 10-11).
As a finished piece, I was very happy with the natural beauty of the figure in such a simple pose. She is lying on her back with legs bent and arms by her sides, one hand resting on her thigh. Her eyes are closed as if she is at rest. One of the things that I first noticed about the piece was that it looks like the cover of a sarcophagus, which was not my intent. I did not dwell on this reaction at first.

The one particular comment I received that significantly affected the way I viewed the piece was that it seemed to be simply another objectification of the female body for male viewers. Indeed my image fit the norm: “The male artist constructs for his own or for his male patron’s enjoyment the perfect partner – passive, receptive, available.” At first, I dismissed the comment, confident that my piece was simply a copy of a real female body composed in a way that made the process easier. However, the comment stuck with me, and eventually I embraced that reaction, but not until I had done a lot more thinking.

It is worth noting that my girlfriend served as a model for the piece, and of course, part of the appeal for me was sexual. Subtle choices in the composition of the figure, such as the closed eyes, were perhaps due to sexual appeal though I was not wholly conscious of it. Indeed, the placement of the hand on the thigh nearly mimics the sensual gesture of modesty replicated so many times in female nudes (Fig. 32). The relaxed bend of the legs angles inward, allowing just enough view of the genital region to entice the viewer to look. I find it interesting, however, that I did not make any effort to sculpt a vagina. This was due to my own discomfort in the representation of the sex organ. I find that this parallels archetypal depictions of the female nude, in which the vagina is hinted at but

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generally hidden and never entirely illustrated. In fact, nudity that involved a full view of the vagina would most likely have been considered pornographic, as was the case with Gustave Courbet’s 1866 painting *The Origin of the World* (Fig. 6). Thus, for a piece that I initially thought of as minimally sexual, I now see how its nakedness borders on an earlier era’s definition of pornography. Maybe my unease with depicting the vagina was influenced by Western culture’s avoidance of it or maybe I shared the same inherent unease as past male artists, which is sometimes accounted for as ‘castration anxiety.’

Eventually, I named this piece *Odalisque* after the numerous paintings of reclining nudes of the same title, including a few well-known ones by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres (Fig. 8-9). Signifying a female virginal slave, this title is indicative of the use of submission in the sexual imagery of females. It is apparent to me that the many paintings of odalisques were created solely for the purpose of male enjoyment. In Richard Leppert’s book *The Nude*, he discusses this aim. Referring to Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres’ *Odalisque with a Slave*, he says, “in effect, Ingres disciplined her soft flesh for his and our viewing… And yet despite Ingres’ attempt to subject her to his and our gaze by placing her in a pose that responds to a command, ‘I want to look at you,’ she comports herself as a figment of the male imagination and not as the representation of a real woman.” The creation of my *Odalisque* shows similar intent, in that the female body, one that I clearly find quite attractive, is essentially placed on a platter. Despite *Odalisque* being a nearly a replica of my girlfriend’s body, I do not consider it in any way a portrait. It is primarily an object intended to provide visual pleasure. Though I do not believe that

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7 Ibid. 12.
seeking visual pleasure in sexual beauty is wrong, the derogatory meaning of the title
*Odalisque* indicates awareness of the arguably misogynistic act of objectifying the female.
Figure 10. Evan Morse, *Odalisque*

Figure 11. Evan Morse, *Odalisque*
Venus

*Venus* is another female figure, this time carved in marble, that I also produced during the fall semester. Similar to *Odalisque*, the piece was influenced by the limits of the process. The rectangular shape of the stone suited it nicely for a torso, so I chose to carve a female torso without limbs or a head in imitation of classical pieces that have been broken (Fig. 15). At my skill level, sculpting arms would be too difficult for a stone this size (about 20” high), and I thought that it would not be a good use of the stone to try to include a head or more of the legs. I had already done a piece like this the spring before, but I wanted to do it better and carve it in marble this time (Fig. 1).

Practicing the traditional process, I first modeled my idea in clay and cast it in plaster. Using the three-point system, I slowly carved down until the marble was nearly the same as the plaster model. I then made small changes that I thought looked better and roughly chiseled away at the neck and arms to make it look more like it had been broken.

The comment from one of my peers that affected my thoughts most about this piece was that carving a torso without limbs or a head seemed bizarre and violent. As with *Odalisque* I felt defensive at this comment, seeing as many other artists have also recreated these fragmented, classical subjects, including Aristide Maillol, Auguste Rodin, and Rene Magritte (Fig. 12-14). Also, I insisted that I would have much preferred to carve a full-figure female if I had the stone and the skill set to do so. However, I couldn’t deny that I had twice put the female in a position of vulnerability and had twice given the male a very neutral appearance in other pieces (Fig. 35-36). It is no coincidence either
that I was inspired by sculptures that were depictions of Aphrodite or Venus, the Greek and Roman goddess of love and beauty; I enjoyed the sexuality and beauty of the form.

Speaking specifically about the *Venus de Milo*, Caroline Arscott and Katie Scott remark upon the ubiquity of the Venus in art in their book *Manifestations of Venus: Art and Sexuality*. “The grand scale of the reproduction and dissemination of the *Venus* raises questions about the evergreen allure and enduring power of images of Love which any study of the relations of art and sexuality must address.” ⁹ It seems interesting, though, that many of these reproductions are of the statues without heads or limbs. To me, this practice seems to be another example of the victimization of the female in art, a concept that is not inconspicuous: “Only the female is fetishized, mutilated, fragmented, rendered anonymous.” ¹⁰ I didn’t intend to continue the tradition of victimizing females through my own work. Nevertheless, I figured that didn’t mean that I should go out of my way to make my work politically correct. Conversely, I believe that inflammatory art is often the most important art. Art that outrages people can also make people question the norm. However, continuing in the same scheme isn’t provocative either. As I went into spring semester I knew I had to figure out an appropriate but effective way to approach these ideas.

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Figure 16. Evan Morse, Venus
Satyr

After being urged by classmates, I decided to create a few more male figures, perhaps objectifying the male rather than the female. My first piece of spring semester was based on Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* (Fig. 18). The pose of the main subject in *Venus of Urbino* is one that is repeated time and again and is a classic example of a female nude presented provocatively for male enjoyment, making it a continual subject of discussion. “Titian’s *Venus of Urbino*, one of the most familiar images in western art, has come to stand for both the sensuality and the classicism we ascribe to the culture of the High Renaissance…More recently, it has become the locus of critical debate over ways of perceiving and understanding the imagery of the past, our modes of response and interpretation.” 11 In my creation of *Satyr* I wanted to see the effect of a piece that places the male figure in this conventionally female position.

Though the pose of my four-foot long reclining plaster figure is nearly identical to that of Titian’s figure, much of the feedback that I received from peers was that *Satyr* did not seem as objectified as the *Venus of Urbino*, and in fact seemed aggressive rather than vulnerable (Fig. 17). This can only be attributed to the associations that viewers bring with them, regarding gender. To my mind, the only differences that could make the male seem less vulnerable are the physical differences between men and women. *Satyr*’s erect penis could understandably be conceived as aggressive; a penis can be used as a weapon. However, an erect penis is the closest male equivalent to the stimulated genitalia that is implied in the *Venus of Urbino*. If a vagina is less threatening than a penis, then that is

because of the innate differences between the male and female genitalia that give the penis a more violent connotation. Leppert discusses this distinction saying, “As Luce Irigaray puts it, ‘The male sex becomes the sex because it is very visible, the erection is spectacular,’ and all the more in a culture that privileges sight over other senses.”  
Though I interpret the Venus of Urbino as being sexually aroused, it could be debated that the Venus’ hand is merely resting on her genitals in the same act of “modesty” shown in the Venus de Medici (Fig. 32). With Satyr, there is no question that the figure is sexually aroused, making Satyr considerably more pornographic. This distinction demonstrates the convenient qualities of the female anatomy that allow male artists to be sexually suggestive without being overly offensive.

I originally hoped that Satyr might look contradictory because of the somewhat feminine pose for a male nude. However, I found the pose to be surprisingly natural. I realized that the male form is often portrayed as boy-like or androgynous in art. As Leppert writes, “throughout the history of art the sort of male body that has been designated as ideal is consistently and paradoxically infused with female characteristics.”  
Nearly every image of Cupid, the son of Venus, depicts him as a young boy, feminine and often homoerotic as in Agnolo Bronzino’s Allegory of Venus and Cupid, in which much emphasis is placed on Cupid’s prominent backside. (Fig. 19). Another renaissance piece that shares similar sexual aspects as Satyr is Donatello’s David (Fig. 21) Though David is indeed shown as active and heroic in the male convention, Donatello emphasizes the figure’s youth. David’s thin body, androgynous

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13 Ibid. 165.
14 Ibid. 88.
breasts, feminine facial features and long hair are effective in emasculating him. His
genitals are miniscule and seemingly pre-pubescent in their lack of hair. However, David
holds a very phallic sword handle as if to signify his masculinity. Unlike these
precedents, Satyr’s conspicuous erection addresses the figure’s sexuality directly,
achieving an image closer to pornography and reminiscent of Robert Mapplethorpe’s
erotic male nudes (Fig. 20).

The Hellenistic sculpture Barberini Faun, also know as Sleeping Satyr, is another
similar piece to my Satyr in that the figure is somewhat reclining, composed sexually in a
way that draws attention to the penis (Fig. 22). I titled Satyr after these sex-crazed
creatures from Greek mythology often found in ancient Greek art. Though satyrs are
often portrayed with goat legs and tails, they were sometimes indistinguishable from
humans. Moreover, my Satyr is named after the Dionysian desires by which satyrs were
characterized rather than the physical features. In the naming of Satyr I also play into the
practice of justifying the sexuality in artwork through titles; “Salon sculpture had
centuries of tried and true devices for treating the erotic with discretion so as to raise
eyebrows but not protests. The academically approved means for expressing purely
sensual instincts was through the use of inferior beings such as satyrs, fauns, sirens, and
centaurs.”

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15 Richard Leppert, The Nude: The Cultural Rhetoric of the Body in the Art of Western Modernity
16 Albert E. Elsen, Origins of Modern Sculpture: Pioneers and Premises (New York: George Braziller,
Figure 17. Evan Morse, *Satyr*
Victim

Not satisfied that I had objectified the male figure sufficiently, I decided in my next piece to victimize the male as much as possible. A marble piece, *Victim*’s form was dictated by the size and shape of the stone. At 27x7x4 inches I thought a torso would fit best and that it would be fitting to do a male figure corresponding to my *Venus*. Like *Venus* I carved *Victim* to suggest that his limbs, head, and penis had been broken off (Fig. 23). The figure is thin rather than overly muscular and his ribcage juts out. I had in mind images of the crucifixion of Christ when I modeled the clay maquette for *Victim* (Fig. 25) “The central image of Christian religion is a tortured male nude, a feminized man who has passively, even masochistically accepted humiliation, punishment and death.” 17 Many sculptures from Hellenistic Greece also graphically display violence toward male figures as in *Hanging Marsyas* (Fig. 24). I chose to subtly allude to the crucifixion of Christ, but I did not want it to be a direct reference. I positioned an arm and a leg at angles so that crucifixion would not be a possibility.

One piece of feedback I found very encouraging was that it reminded the viewer of a Pietà, an image of Jesus in Mary’s lap after he is taken down from the cross (Fig. 26). I took it as a mark of success; images of Jesus’ suffering are seemingly the most ubiquitous depictions of male victimization in the history of art. There is also much evidence of sexuality in images of Jesus, including phallic references, figures shown handling the genitals of the baby Jesus, and the resting of Christ’s hand on his groin in

many depictions of the Pietà. In fact, there are nearly a thousand Renaissance images of Christ that demonstrate emphasis on his genitalia.  

I believe I achieved a commentary between this bizarre mix of violence and sexuality by presenting Victim naked and effectively castrating him. For me, the broken penis is the most violent part; nothing is more emasculating than the loss of one’s “manhood.” Unlike most other portrayals of victimized male nudes, Victim does not have an identity and is therefore dehumanized. Furthermore, Victim is without context besides his obvious delivery from the stone. As such, Victim as a human figure is not directly depicted as a victim of violence; rather, as an object, he is a victim of my chisel.

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Figure 23. Evan Morse, Victim
In an attempt to take the sexual objectification of the female figure to a more provocative and direct level, I created *Olympia*. She is a female figure in the most sexually suggestive position I could think of; she is crouched down on all fours on a mattress with her back arched and genitalia presented to the viewer. She looks back over her shoulder attentively (Fig. 28). In the conception of this piece I was considering works such as Manet’s *Olympia*, Picasso’s *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*, Titian’s *Venus of Urbino*, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres’ *Le Grande Odaslique*, and others in which the female subjects present themselves sexually (Fig. 27).

I originally expected to offend viewers when I presented my piece in critique. Maybe some people were offended, but the reviews I received were mostly positive, with livelier reviews from women than men. From men’s comments I get the sense that maybe male viewers find *Olympia* somewhat accosting in the same way that many regard *Les Demoiselles d’Avignon*. As Richard Leppert writes,

> It is also the case that women look back…sometimes in ways that challenge the male gaze and, as a result, gave offense, as though looking back ran risk of upsetting the cultural apple cart of gender hierarchy. Manet’s Olympia is perhaps the most renowned—and in its own time infamous—painting of this sort. The picture dramatically confronts the viewer both on account of its imposing size and its subject.”

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One of the aspects of Manet’s Olympia that caused so much controversy was the positioning of her hand over her genitalia. Though *Olympia* directly imitates Titian’s *Venus of Urbino* in most features, viewers found her slight difference in hand placement problematic. “Several things about the painting caused most of the scandal, especially her left hand not so much covering the pubis as slightly clutching it, and her direct and confident staring back at us.”  

In the placement of her hand, *Olympia* draws attention to her sex rather than hiding it. This practice is a long tradition in art, going back to ancient Greece and is seen in the *Venus de Medici* (Fig. 32) Leppert explains, “The gesture accomplished two contradictory tasks; it marked female modesty and it simultaneously sexualized the woman by drawing attention to what must be kept from sight.”  

My *Olympia* similarly draws attention to the female genitalia but negates any form of modesty. Manet’s *Olympia* was interpreted the same way, and was met with outrage. Both my sculpture and Manet’s painting seem to demonstrate the male preference toward submissive female figures and even distaste for powerful females. Gill Saunders writes, “only that bold look, and an alert rather than languorous pose, distinguishes her from thousands of admired nudes; she deflects the spectator’s guilt from herself.”  

It makes sense that men would prefer to look at female nude justifiably, rather than being confronted with explicitly sexual images that make them feel guilty in the context of a

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21 Ibid. 145.

museum. In simply presenting the female’s desire for sex rather than just hinting at it, 
*Olympia* becomes far more pornographic than the ordinary female nude.

I chose to model Olympia in clay because the form would too difficult to cast. At approximately 8x24x13 inches, she was small enough to fit in the kiln. To enliven the pale, rough surface of the earthenware I applied a patina of wax and oil paint. I chose an earthy red color to give the piece an effect closer to terra cotta.

![Figure 28. Evan Morse, *Olympia*](image-url)
Having inadvertently played into stereotypes of the female nude, I decided in my next piece to tackle the most stereotypically masculine representation of the male nude. Similar to *Olympia* in its patina, *Hercules* is a ceramic piece that stands 34 inches high. As the name suggests, I tried to replicate the classical Herculean male, muscular and aggressive, weapon in hand. I specifically looked at Baccio Bandinelli’s *Hercules and Cacus* (Fig. 29). In such a piece, the musculature is so developed and unrealistically flexed in every muscle that the figure itself becomes phallic. My *Hercules* primarily plays on the preference of phallic weapons over male genitalia to emphasize masculinity in sculpture. Artistic representations of the penis are consistently minimal in western art of past eras. It is logical that this is because male viewers are made to feel uncomfortable by the sight a flaccid penis. Richard Leppert suggests that, “whenever the penis is directly drawn, it is realized for what it actually is, a rather small, fleshy piece of skin, which validates Lacan’s notion that the phallus only works as the ‘privilege signifier’ when it is veiled.” Similarly Gill Saunders writes,

The vulnerability of nudity is screened out of representations of the male (to the extent that the erect penis—unable to match up visually to its role as symbol of phallic power—is forbidden even in so-called ‘soft’ pornographic publications) Images of the male nude are constructed to work against the stereotype of vulnerability, passivity and availability, over-emphasizing strength and physique

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24 Ibid. 184.
in extremes of body-type or by means of accessories bearing phallic connotations.\textsuperscript{25}

I find this practice of replacing penises for bigger, more dangerous weapon-phalluses to be comical. In \textit{Hercules}, I try to emphasize the disproportions in an effort to make viewers acknowledge them. As I hoped, I have had many people tell me that they initially mistook \textit{Hercules’} club for a penis. They find it humorous, but I may not have taken the exaggeration far enough because many people have also asked me if the effect was intentional.

Though \textit{Hercules} is meant to be amusing by comparing a weapon to a penis, in doing so, statues like this also reinforce the idea of penis-as-weapon. I find this very troubling, especially in the way artists of the past made an extra effort to hide the vulnerable reality of the penis in favor of a more violent alternative. In \textit{Hercules} I want to confront the idealization of aggression and violence in men in the same way I have confronted the idealization of women as submissive.

Figure 30. Evan Morse, *Hercules*
Eve

Like my two other works in marble, my final sculpture was influenced by the shape of the stone. The first thought that came to mind in the conception of this piece was a kneeling, curled woman, and I couldn’t think of a better way to use the cube-like, foot-wide stone. I thought that a woman curled in the fetal position would appear to feel ashamed and vulnerable. This reminded me of depictions of Eve from religious imagery in which she is concealing her nudity as she is expelled from the Garden of Eden. Accordingly, I modeled a clay figure and set to work carving my Eve. I was very pleased to discover the beauty and abstraction of the female form in this position (Fig. 34).

I find that Eve is the perfect contradiction to Olympia in that Olympia is completely comfortable and Eve is humiliated. It is odd to me, then, that Eve is the figure that most viewers would regard as nude whereas Olympia is the naked one. Historically, male viewers prefer Eve, depicted as ashamed and sinful; “For the Greeks, the nude, apart from its celebration of physical beauty, expressed the nobility and potential of the human spirit, but in Christian theology nakedness became a symbol of shame and guilt; the gestures which imply nothing more than modesty in the Venus Pudica become signs of sinfulness, grief and humiliation in Masaccio’s Eve Driven from Paradise.” 26 (Fig.31) In fact, most female nudity in art exploits Eve’s sin for male enjoyment; “In the clothed culture of the West, the removal of drapery references Eve’s sin, even when female nudity is represented in purely secular subjects. Indeed, the arousal upon which the functional success of the painted nude depends is connected to Eve’s shame.” 27

linking sin to nudity, male viewers effectively take the guilt off of themselves when looking upon nude women, and females are punished by remaining on display for all to view.

In my opinion, Eve is my least sexual, and most beautiful piece of these seven. However, the significance of her name and pose could also make her the most misogynistic; Eve is the basis for so much objectification of women in art. I would like to think that as a contemporary piece addressing this fact, *Eve* comments on the burden that women have to bear in a society that still objectifies women more than ever in advertising and entertainment. I’ve been excited to receive enthusiastic feedback on *Eve* from men and women alike. In my opinion, the piece is successful because everyone knows what it’s like to feel utterly naked and vulnerable.

![Figure 34. Evan Morse, *Eve*](image)

*Figure 34. Evan Morse, *Eve*
Conclusion

In the history of art, male artists have relentlessly objectified the female, going as far as heroically depicting rape, while demonstrating outrage at overtly sexual portrayals of women. At the same time, male artists have depicted males as androgynous boys, sex hungry mythological creatures, and muscle-bound, weapon-wielding phalluses. These contradictions comment primarily on male sexuality, given the male artists and patrons who created the work. As a male artist and a sexual being myself, I’ve found exploration of these sexual roles immensely interesting. Though my work references classical imagery in content and form, it is very rooted in my experiences in the contemporary society I live in. The roles of both genders in historical, western art are still very present today, most noticeably in the implied promise of sex or sexual appeal inescapable in advertising. Many modern artists in relatively recent years have made efforts to break these gender typecasts.

Rather than destroy the conventions, I ended up exploring them in an effort to better understand the sexual drives and desires behind the art. Because my ideas developed throughout the course of my exploration, my pieces may not be effective in communicating any one message about sexual objectification in art. What I have learned is a lot about my own sexuality, and of course, my artistic motivations. I suppose I cannot claim to stand apart from other male artists in terms of my enjoyment with the female nude. However, I like to think of myself as a lover of women, not a hater. At the same time, I can say truthfully that I am not against male artists articulating their sexual appetites, however misogynistic. I value art that is, above all, truthful to the artist. In that
respect, I would love to see more female artists expressing their sexuality in a way that
doesn’t simply break the archetypal model.

To return to the subject of pornography from my introduction, I am further
affirmed after researching and writing this thesis, that the line between pornography and
art is very faint. No matter how one defines pornography, there will always be an
example of art that fits the description; given simple definitions of pornography, much of
my work would surely fit. On this subject, Richard Leppert wittingly writes, “The middle
ground between the extremes of the certainly obscene and the unquestionably beautiful is
enormous; it is generally all right to represent a baby’s behind; it is generally not
acceptable to represent, say, fellatio. But then there are all those ancient Greek vases,
beautifully made, that show precisely that.” 28 That violence and sexual exploitation
exists in artistic, erotic images is certain. I would also argue that some images, clearly
pornographic, possess artistic qualities in the frankness with which they present human
sexuality.

This whole thought process, including discussions with peers and professors as
well as scholarly research has given my work considerably more meaning and value. I am
thankful for the experience and everyone that made it a richer study. In the end, I am very
pleased with my finished pieces. Above all, I strive for beauty in my artwork, and if I am
successful in this pursuit, then I am happy no matter whether the effect is aesthetic or
sexual or even pornographic.

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28 Richard Leppert, *The Nude: The Cultural Rhetoric of the Body in the Art of Western Modernity*
(Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2007), 244.