The forbidden gaze: women artists and the male nude in late nineteenth-century France

TAMAR GARB

In 1883 Charles Aubert, author of mildly titillating, sometimes smutty pulp fiction, published a short story with a woman artist as its central character. This was one of thirteen tales of sex and seduction by the same author, entitled Les nouvelles amoureuses, which were to be collated into one volume in 1891 and illustrated by Jul. Hantiot, the engraver who had provided a frontispiece and engraving to accompany the 1883 publication (Plate 6).

The story begins as a conversation between the narrator and a prim, self-righteous, older woman who expresses outrage at the request of the wealthy young Isabelle, the heroine of the tale, to see the body of a naked man. She, and the reader, are assured of the innocence of the heroine’s motive by the revelation that she is an artist, incarcerated in her luxurious Parisian hôtel and closely guarded by her mother-in-law, while her husband, a captain, is away at sea. To pass away her time in her husband’s absence she has turned to painting religious scenes and has been thrown into a state of utter confusion and distress by being offered a commission to paint a St. Sebastian.

From the beginning, therefore, the story invokes a range of anxieties and potential threats. What is primarily articulated at this stage in the narrative, albeit in a disingenuous tone of concern, is the threat to the modesty of the woman artist, representative here of upper-middle-class femininity, who is caught in an impossible situation in which she is bound to be compromised. A classic staging of resistance (her piety, innocence and loneliness are stressed) and the inevitable path to seduction (beneath the veil is a rampant and unfulfilled desire) is set up. What subtends the linear narrative thrust, which in itself has only the richness of banality as its defence, are subtle and deeply rooted anxieties which invoke the power structures at stake in the scopic field as encoded in narrative and image in fin-dé-siècle Paris.

One cannot underestimate the banal or the repetitive as historical material. For in the dichotomies of resolutions and cheap gratifications offered by much caricature and popular fiction, of which this story is a typical example, lies a form of cultural repression which renders anxieties manageable even as it veils and occludes them.
undressed or semi-undressed male figure offered ample opportunity for smutty humour and caricature throughout the century. In an early nineteenth-century image a young woman with eyes modestly downcast is told to remember that she is painting history by her stern and rather lecherous-looking teacher as she is confronted by the full frontal nudity of the less-than-ideal male model (Plate 7). In a much later caricature from Gil Blas the predictable scene of seduction and deception is staged in the temporary absence of the older male chaperone/authority figure. Here the power of the woman artist to possess the world with her sight is contained by the reinscription of her as object of seduction, admired and exchanged, often unconsciously, between men. In keeping with contemporary narrative structures, the expectation which is set up in our story is that Isabelle, after some resistance, will be seduced.

The prohibition which gave Aubert’s story its frisson was tenaciously defended by the art establishment during this period. But the disquiet that the prospect of a woman viewing the body of a naked man provoked is surely based on more than the protection of women’s chastity required for their exchange and circulation in the interests of the bourgeois family. At any rate, even if this lies at the heart of the social order, it is not primarily the protection of women and their modesty which is at stake here but the preservation of masculinity as it is lived out in different social spheres. Discursively this may, of course, masquerade as beneficence towards women.

Aubert’s story was published during a period of heated debate over women’s involvement in art and their exclusion from state-funded Fine Art education. The Union des femmes peintres et sculpteurs, founded in 1881, campaigned vigorously for women’s admission to the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and women journalists and artists poured scorn on what they saw as a reactionary and exclusive art establishment.9 There were those who saw no sense in the case which apparently sought to protect women by their exclusion from the life-class whilst they were free to visit the art galleries of the world and behold, unscathed, the painted image of the male nude.4 The debates raged in the Ecole, in the press and in the Chamber of Deputies itself. Many reasons were given for women’s exclusion from the Ecole, including their ostensible innate inability to work in the higher genres because of their limited powers of abstraction. Other reasons cited were the overcrowding of the artistic profession, the expense that the provision of Fine Art education for women would entail, the need for women to contribute to the threatened industries of luxury goods, decorative arts and traditional light crafts, and even the threat of depopulation which the advent of the professional woman would, it was believed, only exacerbate, if not by her refusal to have children then by the deterioration of her reproductive capacities which would inevitably result from excessive mental stimulation.5

But the problem to which many commentators returned, and on which the teachers and administrators of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and even the deputies in
the Chamber were to dwell repeatedly, was the issue of the life-class. Why was the prospect of mixed life-classes such a threat during this period and how could the anxieties they provoked be resolved? The ready-made solution of fiction, that of seduction in the interests of salacious humour, mild sexual excitation or the appeasement of anxiety, available to the predictable Aubert were, of course, not on offer as strategies of containment in the realm of public debate, however much their concerns occupied the same dialogical field.

The devices mobilised by Aubert to assure the minimum disruption to the phallic order in the face of threat are not quite as simple as one might expect. The focus of anxiety in the story centres on the problematics of looking and sight, for it is through these that power is encoded or subverted. It is through the usurping of a culturally forbidden look that the gaze, which polices looking, is momentarily threatened and rendered vulnerable. But it is not only the woman's look that is potentially dangerous. In the man's beholding of the woman who looks lies a much deeper threat, for it is through the unveiling of the threat of castration, linked here, as in the case of the Medusa's head, 'to the sight of something', to quote Freud, that

---

7 'Songez que vous peigniez l'histoire', from the series Pièces sur les arts
masculinity is potentially at risk. The effect of Medusa’s power, her ‘evil look’, is that it not only kills or devours but blinds as well (Freud 1955b).6

Isabelle’s problem when first mooted by Aubert, is framed as a problem of sight: ‘elle désirait voir un jeune homme’ (Aubert 1883, p. 20). The obstacles facing her seemed insurmountable. The house in which she was confined was guarded by her mother-in-law and no young man would have been allowed to enter her private quarters although she had had no problem in having women models to sit for her. More difficult even than such practical problems were the fears and resistances which she built up in the processes of thinking about the prospect of beholding a naked man. Would she have the courage to look at the model, would she dare to confront his body with her eye? Would he not triumph at her discomfort and delight in her difficulties and how would she cope with her own inadmissible desires which must be repressed at all costs? These are the thoughts, according to our narrator, which go through the young woman’s mind but instead of dissuading her from her course make her obsessed by it. At this point Aubert introduces an intermediary male figure, a corrupt old picture seller from Montmartre who supplies Isabelle with equipment and models. He is brought in to resolve the conflict and promises, at a considerable cost, to smuggle a male model into her quarters for her. He is described as ‘a superb young man, the ideal of beauty and elegance, gentle and well brought up’ (Aubert 1883, p. 21). At first Isabelle resists resolutely but she is persuaded to accept him by the vital piece of information that, though possessed of magnificent eyes, the young man has been blind from birth. This fills her with comfort and relief: ‘Elle pourrait voir sans être vue’ (Aubert 1883, p. 22). This is perhaps the moment to reveal that the title of the story is, appropriately, L’aveugle.

Momentarily we are offered a complete inversion of traditional power relations in the visual field: a woman in possession of the gaze, a beautiful male body providing the unthreatening spectacle. But this fantasy, at least on behalf of the reader, is short lived for no sooner are we offered this vision of a world turned upside down than we are assured that patriarchy is still intact and an elaborate trick is about to be played on the vulnerable and unknowing Isabelle. The model turns out, of course, to be a starving artist called Charles Morose, in the debt of our dealer/intermediary, who is promised to be released from his debts if he agrees to pretend to be blind and be smuggled in a crate, for a period of thirty days, into the studio of the beautiful woman who is too modest to dare view a model who can see her.

It is this symbolic inversion of the natural order which the story must both play out and undermine. The tempering of Isabelle’s power comes early on in this potentially dangerous scenario and is achieved by the usual means. Overcome by the young man’s beauty as he strips down in order to put on his drapery, Isabelle faints and is caught in his arms, coming to with her head on his naked breast.

From very early on, therefore, the woman’s power as an artist, as encoded in the
engraving at the beginning of the 1883 edition, is contained by her weakness as a woman. The model's vulnerability, his nakedness, the 'effeminate' pose which he is forced to adopt and his incapacitating blindness, is assuaged by the power beneath his masquerade which even the innocent Isabelle suspects but never admits. At the same time, however, the relationship of looks in an engraving like that in Plate 6 points to a source of anxiety which is never quite articulated in this context but surfaces, as we shall see, elsewhere. Whilst the play-acting of the model requires the adoption of the ethereal, abstracted expression of the St Sebastian, traditionally constructed in representation as a feminised male, the attention of the woman artist is firmly fixated on his covered genitals.

Which are the forbidden gazes at stake here? On the one hand the story must contain and police female sexuality, reinscribe it as lack, and subordinate it to male desire if order is to be maintained. The inevitable seduction, Isabelle's transformation from artist into amorous woman, will assure this and invest in masculinity the power which is its due. The seduction scene itself is ultimately dependent upon the reinscription of Isabelle as the object of the look. At the beginning of the story, the artist is described as being dressed formally, in black silk and firmly corseted in keeping with the laws of etiquette. Gradually, however, the heat of the studio and the knowledge that her model is blind allow her to discard the corset and to dress less formally.

This makes for her easy narrative objectification as we are treated to long descriptions of the gradual slipping of her gown off her shoulder and the slow but climactic revelation of her nipple, while she, unawares, is absorbed in her work. All that she notices is a movement in the model's drapery, the origins of which she does not quite understand, but which unsettles her. Her power is further undermined by the reinscription of the model as artist. In her absence he corrects her drawing and improves the painting so that it turns out by the end to be the best work she has ever done. The model/artist transcends his objectification by becoming master of his own image. The man transcends his humiliation by having an erection.

But the frightening spectacle of a woman who usurps power, whilst able to be diffused effectively in fiction through the fantasy of seduction, is not quite so easily contained within the discourses of art education and administration. One of the ways in which fear in men is managed, according to Freud, is via the erection: 'it offers consolation to the spectator: he is still in possession of a penis, and the stiffening reassures him of the fact'. Or put another way: 'To display the penis (or any of its surrogates) is to say: "I am not afraid of you. I defy you. I have a penis"' (Freud 1955b, pp. 273–4). The erection therefore can function as a defence in a situation where power is usurped or horror is invoked. The objectification of the male model and the empowerment of the woman artist is discursively constructed as one such situation.

The entry of women into the life-class at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts would, it was felt, lead to a major disruption. As Gérôme stated in 1890 (p. 318), it was impossible
to admit women and men into the same classes as work would suffer. Proof of this was the fact that when the art students had, approximately once a month, to work from a female model, they worked much less well. The very presence of women, even in this subordinate role, was disruptive to the high seriousness of an all-male community and its commitment to the transcendent qualities of art. But the appearance of a female art student, an equal, was potentially much more threatening than the presence of working-class women used as models in relation to whom the young male art students could unite in predictable pranks and sexual innuendos. The form of male bonding perceived to be under threat by women’s entry to the École is encoded in contemporary photographs of the ateliers of the École. In Plate 8, for example, the young art students pose in serried ranks, anonymous in their masculine costume, together with their teacher who kneels in the front row. Behind them on the walls are their nude studies, draped or naked. In this representation, the life studies can be read as the referent to the art which ostensibly draws these men together. It was this apparent harmony which the entry of women threatened. Pedagogical principles and lofty aspirations required, therefore, that in the École itself and the associated School at Rome, women be almost entirely excluded.

8 Atelier des Beaux-Arts, c.1880, photograph, from the series Pièces sur les arts
Amongst the traditionalists, what needed to be preserved was the capacity of art, conceived in this context in terms of the threatened academic doctrine of idealism to transcend the physical. What was needed to perform this transformation was serious training, developed powers of intellectual abstraction and an ability to see beyond immediate visceral experience. There was serious doubt as to whether women were capable of this. In their presence art risked being reduced while the model's physicality would be emphasised. In a contemporary caricature, the absurd underpants, portly figure and Venus-like pose of the model are juxtaposed with the artists, represented as shrewish wife and skinny daughter, who are rendered as incapable of transforming nature into art as the model is of evoking the great hero Achilles (Plate 9).

Supporters of women's entry to the Ecole like Jules Antoine of L'Art et Critique argued that the situation of the life-class 'gives a sort of impersonality to the model which becomes no more than an object to be drawn' (Antoine 1890, p. 344). In their view, the sex of the artist should not affect this. Art transformed the naked into the nude and thereby occluded its sexual connotations. It came rather to signify the pure, the ideal.

9 'Allons Darancourt, gros indécent, songez que vous n'êtes plus ici aux bains, vous représentez Achille, et vous posez devant votre épouse et Clara votre fille', from the series Pièces sur les arts
But others were not so easily reassured. They felt that for this basic but fragile tenet of academic doctrine to be sustained, the person who would need protecting was not the woman artist and her modesty, but the male model. The writer for the Moniteur des Arts explained the resistance to women’s entry as stemming from ‘a concern for the male models, who in front of the pretty little faces, blonde hair and laughing eyes of the young women artists, would not be able to conserve their “sang froid”’ (Sainville 1890, p. 325). It was the gaze of the model which had to be forbidden. For if the model was to become aroused, who would testify to the transcendence of the nude over the naked? One deputy speaking in the Chamber in 1893 even alluded to an allegedly American practice of making the male model wear a mask as a way out of a tricky situation.⁹

In this context the memoirs of Virginie Demont-Breton, one of the chief campaigners for the entry of women into the Ecole, are instructive. Reporting on a meeting of the sub-commission set up at the Ecole itself in 1890 to debate the issue, the conflicting claims of the transcendent powers of Art on the one hand, and the assertion of male virility on the other, come into open conflict. Mme Demont-Breton recounts that while she was addressing the meeting the architect Charles Garnier suddenly cried out that it was absolutely impossible to put men and women under the same roof at all: ‘this would put the fire near to the powder... and would produce an explosion in which art would be completely annihilated’. He was quickly attacked by the sculptor Guillaume who allegedly exclaimed: ‘You don’t know what you are saying. When an artist works, does he think about anything else but the study in which he is passionately engaged...? In the school we envisage, there will be no men and women, but artists animated by a noble and pure spirit.’ Garnier was not satisfied with this vision and retorted: ‘It is possible that you, O Great Sculptor, you are made of marble and wood like your statues, but if I had seen a pretty little feminine face next to my easel at twenty years, to hell with my drawing. O! Guillaume. You are not a man!’ To which Guillaume is said to have exclaimed: ‘O! Garnier. You are not an artist!’ (Demont-Breton 1926, pp. 198–9).

It is the presence of women who apparently bring this otherwise harmonious conjunction of art and masculinity into conflict. To assure castration anxiety, male virility must assert itself. But in so doing the edifice of the already waning academic establishment and the repression on which its pedagogy is founded is at risk. Masculinity needs the erection as reassurance. Art needs an occlusion/diminution of the penis if the phallic order/ideal is to remain intact. When women were finally admitted into the Ecole in 1897, after having been hounded out of the school by some of their future colleagues with cries of ‘Down with women’, the ateliers still remained closed to them, and life drawing and anatomy lessons were segregated, with male models neatly tucked into their much-maligned underpants.¹⁰

It is only in the fantasy world of fiction that resolution is potentially absolute. Scolded by Isabelle for the strange movement in his drapery, Charles is armed with one of her absent husband’s arrows and told to keep still. The humiliation is too
much for him. In a dramatic gesture he wounds himself in the chest with the arrow. Finally castrated, the model appears about to become the martyr he has been imitating. But his masculinity is restored by a contrite Isabelle who prostrates herself before him and declares her love. The charade is over. The danger is gone. All that is needed now is the annihilation of the absent sea-captain. In a gruesome narrative twist which invokes the implicit violences involved in the maintenance of social order, he is conveniently devoured by a band of savage nègres. The story is ultimately haunted and framed therefore by the excessive fantasy of an untamed voracious femininity, out there on the margins of civilisation, but one which threatens to invade its closely policed boundaries. At the moment of the tale’s resolution, this grotesque disposal of the final obstacle, the legitimate husband, reveals the fear of feminine power that the story has done everything to contain but which seeps out, in a displaced form, at its edges.
Illustrations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Artist</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Frida Kahlo</td>
<td><em>What the Water Gave Me</em></td>
<td>1938</td>
<td>Oil on canvas</td>
<td>91 × 70.5 cm</td>
<td>Collection Daniel Filipacchi, Paris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Frida Kahlo</td>
<td><em>Henry Ford Hospital</em></td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Oil on metal</td>
<td>30.5 × 38 cm</td>
<td>Collection Dolores Olmedo, Mexico City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Frida Kahlo</td>
<td><em>My Birth</em></td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Oil on metal</td>
<td>30.5 × 35 cm</td>
<td>Private collection, United States of America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Frida Kahlo</td>
<td><em>The Broken Column</em></td>
<td>1944</td>
<td>Oil on canvas, mounted on hardboard</td>
<td>40 × 30.7 cm</td>
<td>Collection Dolores Olmedo, Mexico City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Man Ray</td>
<td><em>Rose Sélävy</em></td>
<td>1921</td>
<td>Photograph</td>
<td></td>
<td>Collection of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, California (Accession No. 84.XM.1000.80), © 1991 Man Ray Trust/ADAGP–Paris/ARS–USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>‘Songez que vous peignez l’histoire’, from the series <em>Pièces sur les arts</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cabinet des estampes, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>Atelier des Beaux-Arts, c.1885, photograph, from the series <em>Pièces sur les arts</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cabinet des estampes, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>‘Allons Darancourt...’, from the series <em>Pièces sur les arts</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>Cabinet des estampes, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Jackson Pollock</td>
<td>Springs, New York</td>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Photograph</td>
<td>© Hans Namuth, 1950</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Mark Rothko</td>
<td>East Hampton, New York</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>Photograph</td>
<td>© Hans Namuth, 1964</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mark Rothko</td>
<td>Number 10</td>
<td>1950</td>
<td>Oil on canvas</td>
<td>198.10 × 145 cm</td>
<td>Collection Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Philip Johnson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Thomas Eakins</td>
<td><em>Salutat</em></td>
<td>1898</td>
<td>Oil on canvas</td>
<td>126 × 100 cm</td>
<td>1930.18, gift of anonymous donor, © Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, MA. All rights reserved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Winslow Homer</td>
<td><em>Undertow</em></td>
<td>1886</td>
<td>Oil on canvas</td>
<td>76 × 112 cm</td>
<td>Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, MA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
relationship between the shifting poles of transference and the non-fixed nature of gender identity.

5 I have not been able to verify whether Duchamp wrote this text or not. It has been attributed to Duchamp in Sanouillet and Peterson (1989, p. 185); and, given his committed involvement in the marketing of his objects and readymade schemes, it seems likely that he did 'author' the advertisement.

6 The title itself also plays with the gendered nature of the object commodified through the female image. 'Belle Hélène' or 'beautiful breath', references one of history's most famous women - 'belle Hélène' or 'beautiful Helen'. (It was Helen of Troy's abduction by Paris that began the Trojan war; Helen herself was the daughter of Zeus and Leda. Furthermore, Hélène was the Greek goddess of light.) This is a reference to the Offenbach operetta La Belle Hélène as well (Sanouillet and Peterson 1989, p. 109). And the reference relates to another quip of Duchamp's relating to the perfume-bottle text: 'Avoir de l'haleine en dessous' (Duchamp frequently reused and recycled his own works and texts).

7 The bottle itself existed both as a found object – a Rigaud perfume bottle – appended with the fake label, and as a photo collage, reduced to diagrammatic form. According to one source, the collage existed before the actual object, which was 'rectified' by reference to the earlier two-dimensional image (Duchamp 1984, p. 243). Robert Lebel, however, states that the bottle, which still exists, was produced first and the collage was made from a photograph of the bottle (Lebel 1985, p. 170). Arturo Schwarz notes that the original label of the Rigaud perfume bottle had the phrase 'Un air qui emballe' ('an embalming [or perfumed] air') written on it (Schwarz 1969, p. 484). 'Embaume' also suggests 'to embalm' (a corpse) and 'air' signifies 'appearance' or 'look'; 'a look that embalms'.

3. The forbidden gaze: women artists and the male nude in late nineteenth-century France

1 I would like to express my gratitude to Paul Smith whose generous gift to me of an original edition of the Charles Aubert story set me thinking in this direction. I am grateful, too, to Katie Scott for alerting me to some of the caricatures in the Estampes collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale and for the comments made on an earlier draft of this essay by Kathleen Adler, Tag Gronberg, Alex Potts, Abigail Solomon-Godeau, Neil MacWilliam, Marcia Pointon and Rasaad Jamie.

2 The title of the short story will be revealed in the course of this article.


4 See, for example, Audouard 1882, p. 461, and Camille 1882, p. 1.

5 For representative views, see 'Les femmes à l'Ecole des Beaux-Arts', Journal des Artistes, 37, 28 September 1890, 293; Gérôme 1890; anonymous article from L'Union Franco-Russe reprinted in Moniteur des Arts, 1925, 28 November 1890, 109.

6 For a discussion of the Medusa myth in relation to broader questions about narrative, see de Lauretis 1984, pp. 109–11.

7 For a discussion of academic principles and the centrality of the life-class to academic training, see Vaise 1880, pp. 217–22.

8 Among women's supporters there was the feeling that even though the bulk of women were not suited to such elevated aspirations, there were exceptional women like Rosa Bonheur and Henriette Browne who were capable of this and who should not be discriminated against. See speech by M. Georges Berger in the debate on the budget for 1897, Journal Officiel, 29 November 1896, 1824.

9 See speech made by M. Gerville-Reache in which he described the position in the USA: 'Women are admitted to the Fine Art schools under the same conditions as men; they work together with men in the same studios, except in drawing classes in front of the nude. For these special studies, the studios are reserved for women only who are admitted there with their professors alone. The male models have their faces covered with a mask' (Journal Officiel, 31 January 1893, 304).
4. Out of the body: Mark Rothko’s paintings

1 Quoted in Rosenberg 1975, p. 71.
2 Personal interview with Shirley Climo, sister of Rothko’s second wife, Mary Alice (‘Moll’) Beistle, 15 October 1986.
3 Dvinsk is now Daugavpils, located in southwestern Latvia. Just before migrating to America, Rothko’s family had lived at 17 Shosseymaya Street (now Sarkarnamijas – or Red Army – Street). Rothko’s eldest brother, Moise Roth, remembered the name of the street, and Rothko’s sister Sonia, a dentist, is listed at that address in Dvinebanim, A Reference Calendar of 1914, ed. E. V. Tseitl, a copy of which is held by the Daugavpils Museum. Only 12,000 of the town’s 35,000 Jews survived the First World War; during the Second World War, about 120,000 people – some of them prisoners of war, some of them politically suspect, most of them Jewish – were murdered in the Wood of Meshiems, just north of the town.
4 Personal interview with Murray Israel, a student of Rothko’s when he taught at Brooklyn College in 1951–4, 20 May 1988.
6 In Mark Rothko, A Retrospective, the date of Rothko’s mother’s death is incorrectly given as early 1930 (p. 273). The correct date is 10 October 1948 according to an obituary in the Oregonian, 13 October 1948.
7 Personal interviews with Ben Diener, a painter who knew Rothko in the 1950s and 1960s, 19 January 1987; and with Hedda Sterne, 22 January 1986.
8 In his diary, the painter Ulfert Wilke records a lunch with Rothko: ‘Being brought up as the youngest child when his father was an orthodox Jew, Mark during the first nine years of his life was a Hebrew infant prodigy. All the rules and rigor of religion were never sufficiently observed by his mother, not sufficiently to Mark’s rigid father. And then a complete blank came into his life – oblivion of the Hebrew language and a complete break with temple rigor – after having gone 100 times to the temple during holidays one day at the age of nine he came home and announced to his mother he would never set foot in a temple again’ (Diary of Ulfert Wilke, 28 September 1965, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC).
9 In his ‘From Eastern Europe to Paris and Beyond’, Arthur A. Cohen points out that ‘nowhere is the prohibition of the representative imaging of God explicitly expressed in either the Hebrew Bible or its rabbinic exegesis’. What is forbidden is the worship of such images – idolatry. But Mr Cohen also observes that by the second century AD, this careful distinction was lost, producing ‘the unexpressed but well-diffused taboo against all iconic representation’ (Silver and Golan 1985, p. 61).
11 Rothko’s portrait of his mother, probably done in the late 1920s, is reproduced in Mark Rothko 1987, Fig. 1.
12 Quoted in Robert Morrow, personal interview with Barbara Morrow (Price) and Robert Morrow, 12 January 1990. Barbara Morrow was an old and close friend of Mell Rothko.
13 Personal interview with Herbert Ferber, 27 January 1987. Ferber was also interviewed by Phyllis Tuchman, 2 June 1981, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC. Other interviews utilised in this essay are with Regina Bogat, who worked in a studio across the hall from Rothko’s at 222 Bowery, New York City, in the late 1950s and early 1960s (5 February 1986); with Robert Motherwell, 20 January 1987; and with Moise Roth, 27 June 1985.

5. Muscles, morals, mind: the male body in Thomas Eakins’ Salutat

1 My thanks to Marcia Pointon, and especially Lynda Nead for their invaluable help and support.