

THE
NUDE

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KENNETH
CLARK

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JOHN
MURRAY

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Other Works by Sir Kenneth Clark

LANDSCAPE INTO ART (John Murray)

THE GOTHIC REVIVAL (Constable)

CATALOGUE OF DRAWINGS OF LEONARDO DA VINCI IN THE COLLECTION
OF HIS MAJESTY THE KING AT WINDSOR (Cambridge)

ONE HUNDRED DETAILS IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY (National Gallery : Longmans)

LEONARDO DA VINCI (Cambridge)

FLORENTINE PAINTING : 15TH CENTURY (Faber)

PIERO DELLA FRANCESCA (Phaidon)

RUSKIN AT OXFORD (Inaugural Lecture as Slade Professor of Fine Arts, Oxford) (Oxford)

MOMENTS OF VISION (Romanes Lecture, 1956) (Oxford)

KENNETH CLARK



THE NUDE

A Study of Ideal Art

JOHN MURRAY

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95. TITIAN. Venus

keeping with her body. In spite of this she remains one of the most complete and concentrated embodiments of Venus in post-antique art. If the pipe-player in the *Concert Champêtre* anticipates the shape of the female nude in the 19th century, the Ellesmere Venus anticipates the whole conception of the subject which ended, for our generation, in the nudes of Renoir: that is to say, the female body, with all its sensuous weight, is offered in isolation, as an end in itself. This presentation of the nude, with no pretext of fable or setting, was in fact extremely rare before the 19th century, and it would be interesting to know under what circumstances Titian conceived it. Perhaps he was asked to preserve in the medium of oil paint a specimen of the single nude figures with which he and Giorgione had frescoed the Fondaco de' Tedeschi. His point of departure is of course an antique, presumably the same one which inspired an engraving by Marcantonio of Venus wringing the water from her hair; but Titian has changed the flowing rhythm of the Hellenistic original into the firm rectangular design of the two arms, to which even the thigh, in some measure, conforms.

That an austere tradition of design is an essential of the nude has been one of the chief themes of this book, but I will re-state it here, for the nudes of Titian provide its most impressive illustrations. An epic poet of sensuality, an absolute master of flesh painting, one might have supposed that an infinite variety of poses and situations was available to him. And yet the number of attitudes which seemed to him to achieve finality was extremely small. It is, to begin with, astonishing that in 1538, thirty years after he had put the finishing touches on Giorgione's Venus, he should have used identically the same pose for almost the whole body of the Venus of Urbino, varying only, as we have seen, the position of the right arm and breast; and the same form, much coarsened, serves in that laboured attempt to recapture his early style, the Venus del Pardo.

In the 1540's he discovered two fresh patterns for a recumbent Venus which were to satisfy him for a decade. One of them is the figure reclining on her left arm, her body turned round towards the spectator, who appears first alone with Cupid, in the Uffizi picture, and thereafter, in numerous replicas, with an admirer seated at her feet making music on an organ or a lute [96]. In this series only the position of her head is varied: her body remains the same, and there can be no doubt that Titian found it unusually satisfying. This is the nude which is most nearly Titian's own creation. In his other figures Giorgione, Michelangelo and the Antique provide at least the outlines; but the Venus of the Organ Player series has a quality which is entirely Titianesque. It is, as has often been observed, the quality of the full-blown rose, rich, heavy