

Louis Bonnard, *The Painter and Sculptor Jean-Léon Gérôme in His Studio with His Model and the Statue 'Omphale', 1887*



Jean-Léon Gérôme, *The End of The Sitting, 1886*

18 representation. This might be deduced in retrospect, but for little Miss Flickers at that time, it was an un-theorised experiential encounter.

The reality of things is unwrapped in complexities and it was through her experience with the skirt that little Miss Flickers first realised this. The suspension of disbelief that made so much material from the everyday appear to be art, was conveyed to her by the raw layer of everyday fabric that hung over the top of the sculpted bronze. To her childish eyes the girl was fake, but the skirt flowed towards her imagination as an effusive rush of richly existing phenomena; simply more present and believable than anything she had ever seen in the world. She was caught up in the wonder of the texture of the real skirt that was wrapped around the real bronze that was pretending to be a living body, which was in turn hoping to be art. The girl's nonchalant but anxious poise encapsulated the attempt to balance the conflicting substances and social pretensions from which she was composed. With a view to understanding precisely what was hidden, Reality felt compelled to explore the layers of deception further. She thrust her inquisitive little hand under the thin gauze of reality. She stroked the cod vagina. Her own chubby skin was visible as a bodily presence under the fabric and combined with the other complexities seen through its worn fibres. In that moment she felt materiality as both cold absence and vital presence. In the same instant everything changed. The teacher pulled her back and slapped her

hand. Told she was 'disgusting', she stood terrified at the centre of accusatory voices, alarms and uniformed guards. The entire class was sent home by way of collective punishment. At this formative young age, she associated the investigations of sculpture with disgust, indiscretion and public offence. Several sessions with a child psychiatrist followed and she was forbidden to look at art for a long time.

The psychiatrist, Dr Sinclair, had been sympathetic enough to assess little Miss Flickers' deviance as rooted in intelligence, but he could have been cannier. Had he delved deeper into Reality's recent past he would have discovered that events at the gallery were immediately preceded by a less cultured experience in which she was the victim of a sexual assault. But she was a very small child when that had happened and without a conceptual grasp of the encounter she would not be able to identify the terms with which to talk about it for many years. Despite his shortcomings, Reality would never forget Dr Sinclair. They spent their meetings playing Scrabble and Hangman and by their final session had devised a game that combined both so that the progressively drawn stick figure was spared from death by the opponent who found the highest-scoring words. In directing her consciousness towards what might be at stake in the use of language, Dr Sinclair had provided a valuable distraction, but as she grew up, the bronze incident continued to play on her imagination.

Although Reality eventually attended art school, she was an unproductive student who understood education as nothing more than an opportunity to talk to someone. Talking and not making, she never

396 He pressed his lips to hers once again; and then he started to stroke her breasts. The ivory gradually lost its hardness, softening, sinking, yielding beneath his sensitive fingers. Imagine beeswax from Mount Hymettus, softening under the rays of the sun; imagine it moulded by human thumbs into hundreds of different shapes, each touch contributing value. Astonished, in doubtful joy, afraid that he might be deluded, Pygmalion fondled that longed-for body again and again. Yes, she was living flesh! He could feel the throbbing of her veins as he gently stroked and explored. At last the hero of Paphos opened his heart in a paean of thanks to Venus, and pressed his lips to the lips of a woman. She felt his kisses, and blushed; then timidly raised her eyes to the light and saw her lover against the sky. The goddess graced the union she'd granted; and soon, when the horns of the moon had grown nine times to their fullness, a daughter was born called Paphos, who gives her name to the island.

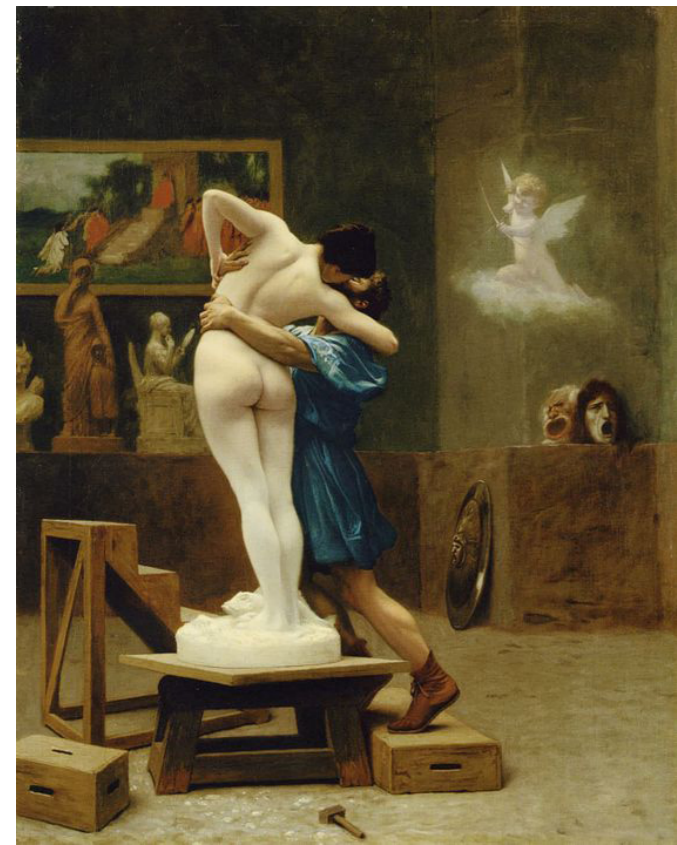


Front and Back Cover: Hasselberg's studio, by Anders Zorn

395 to girls, such as shells from the shore, smooth pebbles or tiny birds, flowers of a thousand colours, lilies and painted balls, or tears of amber dropped from the trees. He even dressed in clothes, put rings on the fingers and necklaces round the neck, and hung jewels from the ears and girdled the breasts with elegant bands. All these looked well – though the naked body was equally lovely. He laid this down on a couch, well strewn with covers of purple, and called it his darling mistress; then lifted the head on the soft white pillows, as though it could relish their comfort. 'Venus' festival now had arrived, and the whole of Cyprus was making holiday. Hefers with gold on their spreading horns had fallen, struck by the axe on their snow-white necks, and was smoking. His offering laid, Pygmalion stood by the altar and nervously asked: "You gods, all gifts are within your power. Grant me to wed . . ." – not daring to say "my ivory maiden"; he used the words "a woman resembling my ivory maiden". Golden Venus was present herself for her own celebration. She understood what Pygmalion meant and she signalled her favour: the fire on her altar, with shooting tongues, flared up three times. As soon as the sculptor returned, he made for his loved one's statue, and bending over the couch, he gave her a kiss. Was she warm?



Looking at the Women in the Museum Daniel Jewesbury, 2018



Jean-Léon Gérôme, Pygmalion & Galatea, 1890

no longer ran to their cheeks but congealed as hard as their natures, it didn't take much of a change to transform them to solid granite.

ORPHEUS' SONG: PYGMALION

"These women's scandalous way of life was observed by a sculptor,

Pygmalion. Sick of the vices with which the female sex has been so richly endowed, he chose for a number of years

to remain unmarried, without a partner to share his bed.

In the course of time he successfully carved an amazingly skillful

statue in ivory, white as snow, an image of perfect feminine beauty – and fell in love with his own

creation. This heavenly woman appeared to be real; you'd surely suppose her

alive and ready to move, if modesty didn't preclude it; art was concealed by art to a rare degree. Pygmalion's

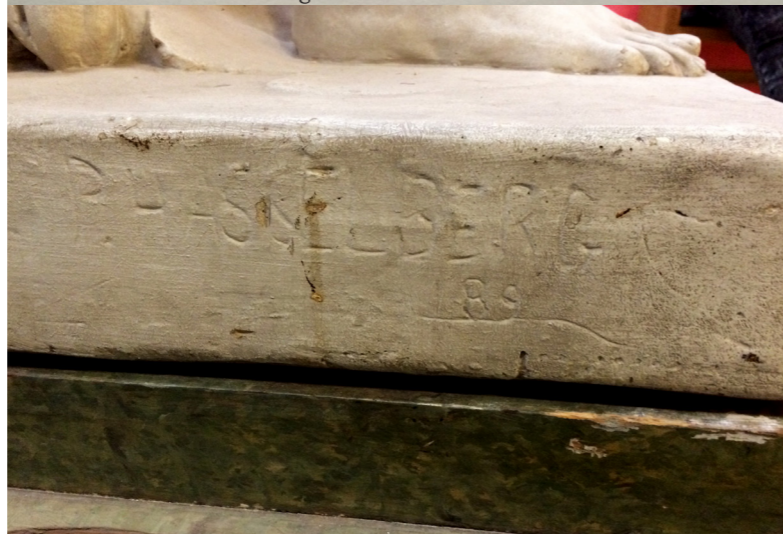
marveling soul was inflamed with desire for a semblance of body.

Again and again his hands moved over his work to explore it.

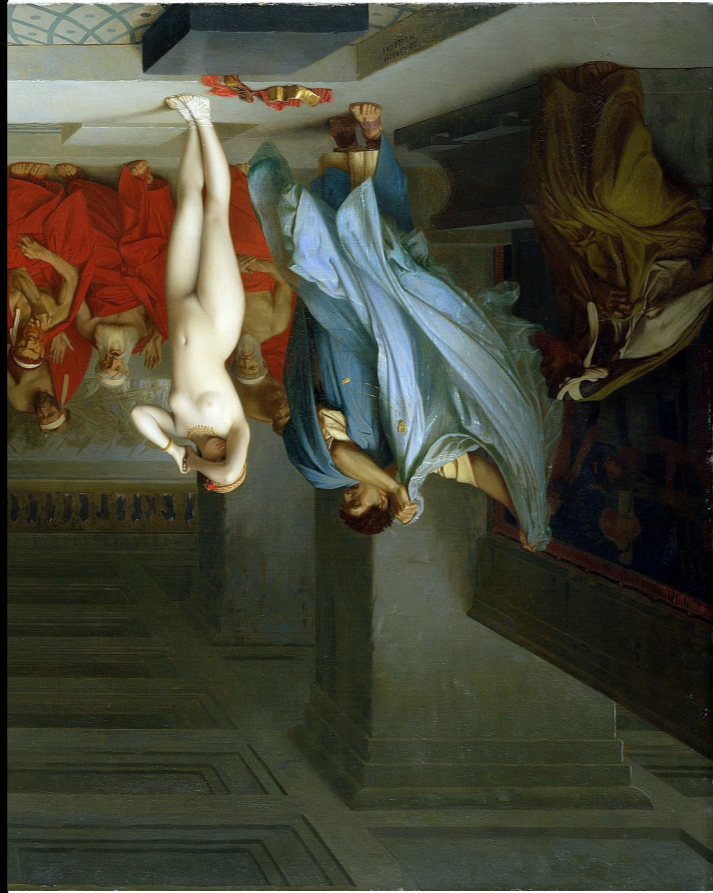
Flesh or ivory? No, it couldn't be ivory now! He kissed it and thought it was kissing him too. He talked to it, held it,

imagined his fingers sinking into the limbs he was touching, frightened of bruising those pure white arms as he gripped them tight.

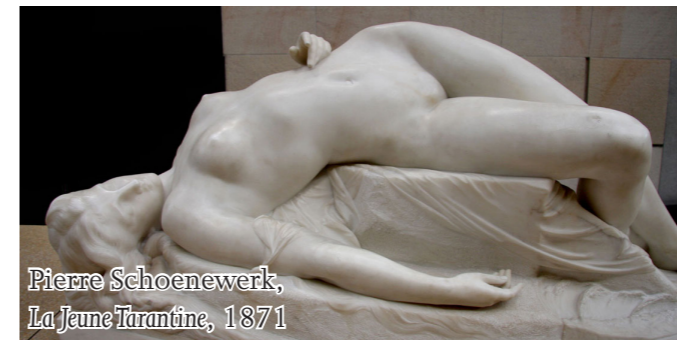
He'd whisper sweet nothings or bring his idol the gifts which give pleasure



Signe Larsson in 1892



Jean-Léon Gérôme, Phryne Revealed Before The Areopagus, 1861



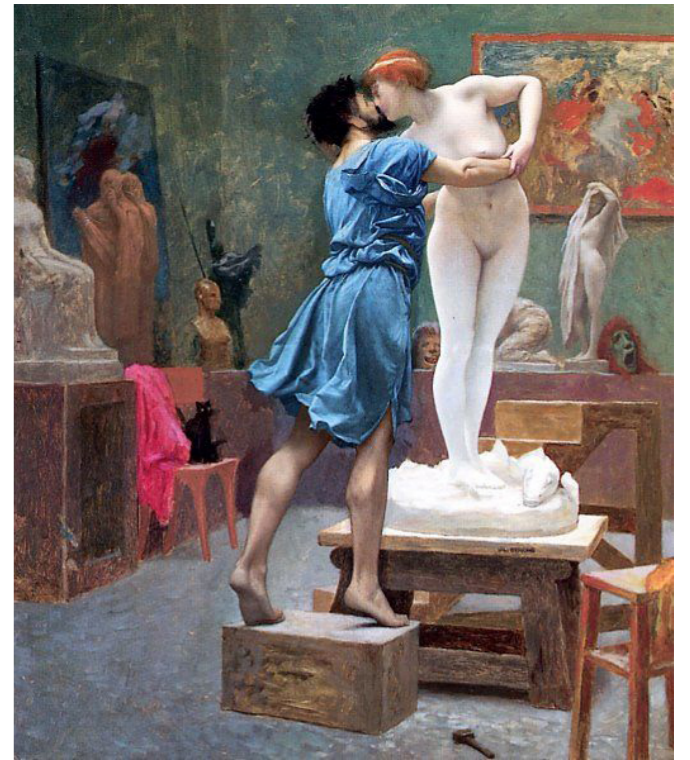
Pierre Schoenewerk, La Jeune Tarantine, 1871



Eugène Cyrille Brunet, Messaline, Impératrice Putain, 1884



Auguste Clésinger, Femme Piquée par un Serpent, 1847



Jean-Léon Gérôme, Pygmalion & Galatea, 1890



Louis Bonnard, The Painter and Sculptor Jean-Léon Gérôme in His Studio with His Model and the Statue 'Omphale', 1887

