

Residenzgalerie Salzburg
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9. July 2009

10. July - 1. November 2009

BATHING SCENES

Ritual, Indignation and Seduction

The exhibition presents only a cross-section of the richness of this subject from antiquity to the present.

Observations of nature, erotic allusions, religious rituals and a history of body hygiene are intricately related in this pictorial theme because bathing scenes open up huge possibilities for the artistic imagination.

A bath in cold water or in the warmed tub serves not only cleansing purposes but above all it is pure sensuality and eroticism, arising not least by taking off clothes.

The relationship between intimacy and nudity in public while bathing in alleged solitude or in illustrious company reflects the customs and morals of the time.

By bathing in curative waters people hoped for spiritual purification, “new” life, the renewed desire to have children, a loving relationship, fertility and youth.

Passing time alongside a source of water and “bathing fun” are nowadays some of the most widespread leisure activities.

We experience bathing as something pleasant, indeed as something highly desirable.

On the one hand there is a profound archaic link between human beings and the element water, and on the other hand – and this is what the exhibition focuses on – pure “desire” while taking an exclusive or communal bath.

Artists: Jean Barbault, H. S. Beham, Herbert Boeckl, Peter Brauneis, Jan Brueghel the Elder, Wilhelm Busch, Paul Cézanne, Lovis Corinth, Honoré Daumier, Maurice Denis, Rudolf Dimai, Albrecht Dürer, Reinhold Max Eichler, Viktor Eichler, Georg Einmart the Elder, Hans Escher, Hermann Grom-Rottmayr, Felix Albrecht Harta, Erich Heckel, Wolfgang Heimbach, Wolfgang Herzig, Dieter Huber, Ludwig Heinrich Jungnickel, Johanna Kandl, Anton Kolig, Johann König, Hermann von Königsbrunn, Alfred Kubin, Julius Kuhr, Joos de Momper the Younger, Otto Müller, Oswald Oberhuber, Crispin de Passe, Georg Pecham, Narcisse Virgilio Diaz de la Peña, Georg Petzold, Robert Philippi, Erich Pieler, Cornelis van Poelenburgh, Leo Putz, Johann Christian Reinhart, August Heinrich Riedl, Johann Michael Rottmayr, Andrea del Sarto, Heinz Schlimarski, Peter Schweighofer, Gustav Seyffferth, Francesco Solimena, Franz Xaver J. Späth, Heinz Stangl, Felix Vallotton, Claude-Joseph Vernet, Cornelis de Vos, Ferdinand Georg Waldmüller, Jean-Antoine Watteau, Max Weiler, Caspar A. van Wittel, Erich Wulz, Franz von Zülow, et al.

Curator: Dr. Gabriele Groschner, Residenzgalerie Salzburg

Opening times: daily 10.00 – 17.00, closed on Mondays after 30. August 2009

THE EXHIBITION

Roman Baths

The Romans had a tradition of bathing that goes back to Greece and the Orient.

Many towns had private baths with a high standard of comfort, and public thermal springs which the population used in particular on market days.

The large imperial spas can be compared with modern leisure centres: they comprised rooms for bathing, perspiring, relaxation and massage chambers, libraries, sports areas and gardens. The curative baths had a special status. They were set up near to natural springs and their regenerative and prophylactic effects were already known about in antiquity. Baths had above all a prestigious character and represented Rome's identity as an imperial city. The architecture was mostly extravagant with elaborate façades and entrances.

Artists: *J. Barbault, G. Petzold*

The Culture of Bathing in the Late Middle Ages

In this period public and communal bathing was a very popular form of social entertainment. In the 15th century it took on inordinate proportions: people loved to bathe several times a day. There was the open-air bath and the bathing house which were meeting places for festivities. Men and women bathed together and the related enjoyment of love acts was not regarded as offensive. The church, however, frowned upon declining morals, but it was not until syphilis became widespread in the 15th and 16th centuries that the bathing house was condemned and ultimately banned altogether.

In higher levels of society it was replaced by private baths.

Nudity in art

The (female) nude, traditionally so far without sexual undertones, was regarded from now onwards as the most strongly reviled and at the same time most desirable motif in art. So as not to expose "him" to any kind of provocation, "her" body had to be concealed. The ban on seeing certain things brought about a new pattern of behaviour: the secret desire to satisfy visual curiosity.

This was regarded as the birth hour of voyeurism. The pictorial motif of people bathing – taken from models from antiquity and from the Old Testament and transformed into something erotic – is a welcome theme to make nudity socially acceptable.

Artists: *H.S. Beham, A. Dürer, W. Heimbach, J. König, C. v. Poelenburgh, C. d. Vos*

The Bath in the Baroque and Rococo Periods

For cleansing purposes at least the bath was more or less non-existent in this time. People were afraid that physical contact with water would make them ill, and during the Counter-Reformation a moral prevailed that was contemptuous towards the body and so as far as possible baths were avoided.

Even during the 18th century people carried out body hygiene with greatest reserve.

They washed their hands; the rest of the body was powdered and perfumed. Nevertheless, the nobility frequently had magnificent bathrooms built into their manor houses where they could remain among their own kind. Public therapeutic bathing was practised for medicinal purposes. Trust in the healing power of water gradually returned, and people bathed together, but no longer nude – nudity was regarded as uncouth – in public spas. The "bathing scenes" developed under these social ideas of morals – taken from harmless models from antiquity and the Old Testament and given an erotic touch – and became a popular theme in art.

Artists: *H. v. Balen, J. Brueghel the Elder, J. de Momper, J. B. Pater, F. Solimena, C. J. Vernet, G. A. van Wittel*

The intimate boudoir

In their pictures Baroque artists extolled the fancifulness of life, world charm and the aesthetic preciousness of the female body. Love was seen merely as a vain, erotic and above all fashionable playfulness. Profane permissiveness presented itself now to the enraptured and particularly eager gaze of a broader public that wanted to satisfy its desires without censure. The ideal of the demi-vierge was typical of the Rococo period. People were fond of genre scenes, entering the intimate boudoir of the apparently surprised lady.

Artists: *G. C. Einmart the Elder, G. Pecham, J. A. Watteau*

Holy water

banishes disaster and evil, and multiplies healing and blessing.

The purpose of a ritual ablution consists in purification which goes beyond removing physical dirt and consists in becoming free of emotional impurity and sin. The healing of physical and psychological illnesses as well as the attainment of a “new” life are made possible. The Christian baptism corresponds to the submerging in the element water as *regressus ad uterum* (return to the uterus).

Artists: *C. d. Passe, F. X. J. Späth*

Biedermeier and Gründerzeit

The silky smooth skin of the Rococo goddess was permeated and “bathing women” thus became middle-class contemporaries. Bathing nymphs as a classical model become simple middle-class girls – academically tamed and de-sexualised, and eroticism is simple and contemplative.

The culture of bathing reached the middle-class: wash basins could be set up in every room. The first bidets, wash stands with marble platters and pottery basins showed the somewhat more luxurious variation of the middle-class household in the Biedermeier period; the lady’s room was equipped with mirrors and toiletry tables draped with material covers. The first bathtubs, made of wood or zinc, were also mobile.

Artists: *R. v. Doblhoff, H. F. v. Königsbrunn, J. C. Reinhart, A. H. Riedel, H. Schlimarski, G. Seyfferth, F. G. Waldmüller*

The Modern Bathers

The “bathers” – with new modern, sportive and bodily awareness, and tourists enjoying summer holidays – do not look towards the observer but ignore his presence.

No gaze of evaluation (sexual) or monopolisation seems to disturb them.

The act thus liberated from fetters develops explosively in all possible stylistic directions. On the one hand the precision of a real view and fullness, and on the other abstraction and contortion disappoint and provoke the public to an equal degree. The bathers – naked or in modern bathing suits – point beyond mere eroticism to further social contexts.

For many centuries the “simply” practised voyeuristic view of nakedness frequently remained ineffective and crept in again via devious ways. The new analytical X-ray view of the modern age permeates the surface of the body and seizes the sub-conscious, which like the reflective, cool area of a forest pond, suggests a deep, dark projection surface of abnormal fantasies.

Artists: *Boeckl, P. Cézanne, M. Denis, R. M. Eichler, E. Heckel, A. Kolig, A. Kubin, O. Mueller, N.V. Diaz de la Peña, E. Pieler, L. Putz*

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