

In Praise of the
Backside

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“Our arses should be signs of peace!”

— Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

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Biederer Studio, c. 1925
Gelatin silver print, 24 x 18 cm
Private collection

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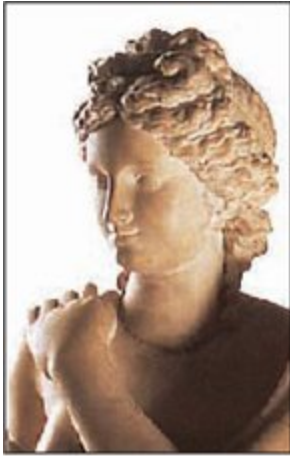
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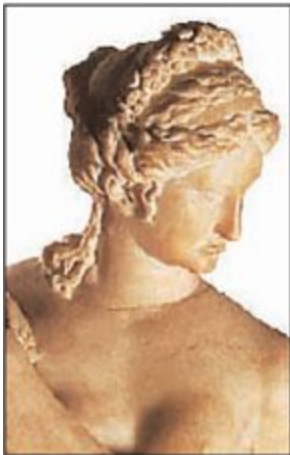
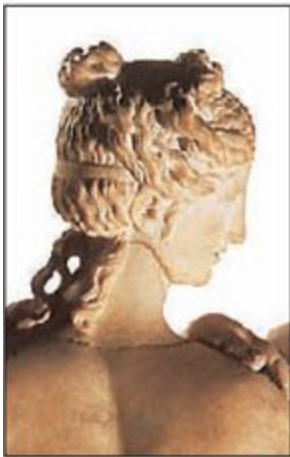
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Love's Body

As we fragment the body, we make its parts the subject of a fetish. Each individual part can become a focus of erotic passion, an object of fetishist adoration. On the other hand, the body as a whole is still the sum of its parts.



The Three Graces

Anonymous, Roman copy of a
Greek original created
during the 2nd century B.C.E.
(restored in 1609)

Marble, 119 x 85 cm
Musée du Louvre, Paris





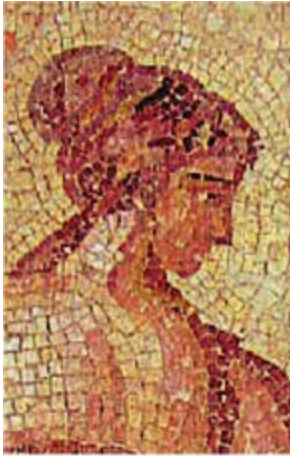
The division of the body that we carry out here brings to mind the worship of relics. Relic worship began in the Middle Ages with the adoration of the bones of martyrs and was based on the belief that the body parts of saints possessed a special power. In this respect, each fetishist, however enlightened he pretends to be, pays homage to relic worship.



Sleeping Hermaphrodite

Anonymous, Roman copy of a
Greek original from the 2nd
century B.C.E. (?)
(mattress carved in 1619 by Gian
Lorenzo Bernini)
Marble, 169 x 89 cm
Musée du Louvre, Paris





At first, this dismemberment only happened to saints, in accordance with the belief that in paradise the body will become whole again. Only later were other powerful people such as bishops and kings also unearthed after their deaths. In our cultural survey of body parts, we are particularly concerned with the history of those with “erotic significance”.

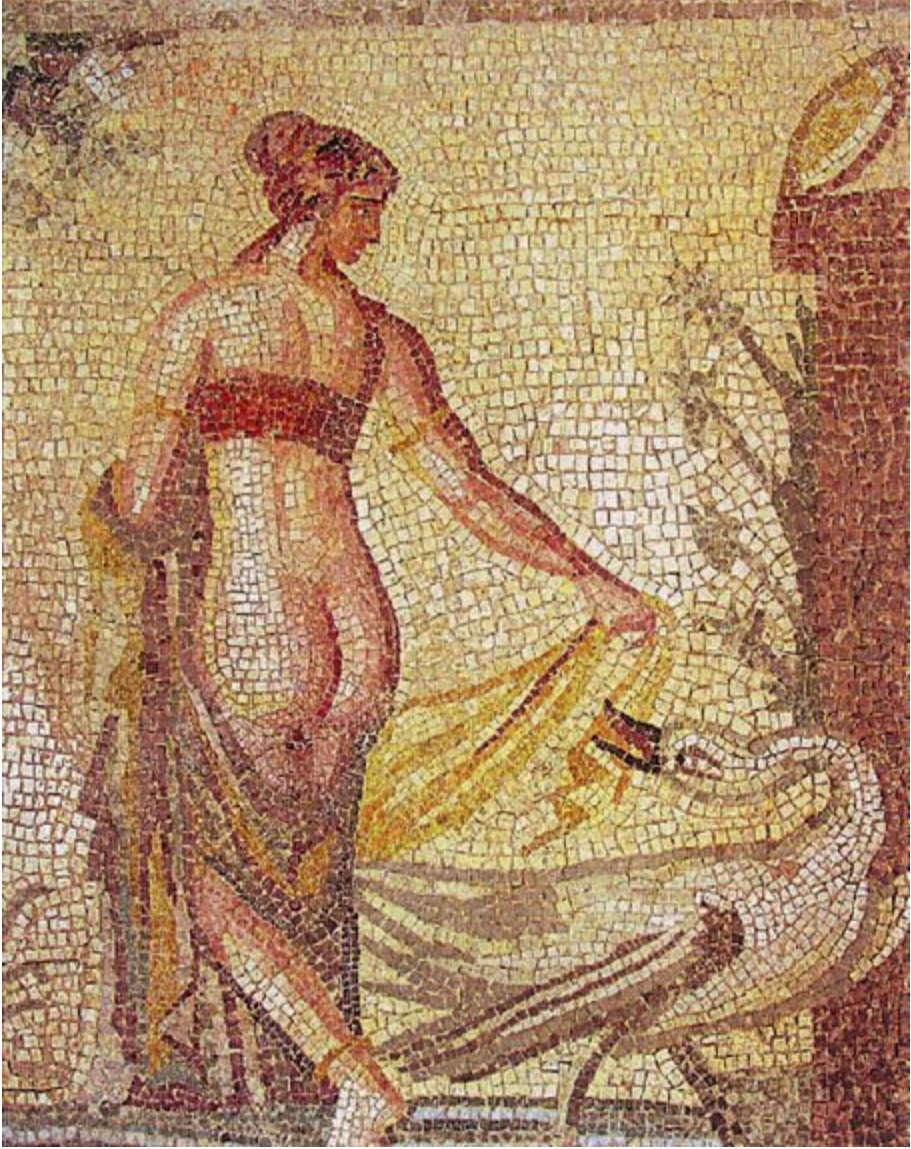


Leda and the Swan

Anonymous, 3rd century B.C.E.

Mosaic

Museum of Nicosia, Nicosia





Regardless of whether their significance is religious or erotic, they all attain the greatest importance for both the believer and the lover because of the attraction and power inherent within them. This way, fetishist heritage of older cultures survives in both the believer and the lover.

O Body, how graciously you let my soul

Feel the happiness, that I myself keep secret,



The Three Graces

Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio), 1504-1505

Oil on wood, 17 x 17 cm
Musée Condé, Chantilly





And while the brave tongue
shies away,

From all that there is to praise,
that brings me joy,

Could you, O Body, be any more
powerful,

Yes, without you nothing is
complete,

Even the Spirit is not tangible, it
melts away

Like hazy shadows or fleeting
wind.



The Pastoral Concert

Titian (Tiziano Vecellio), c. 1508

Oil on canvas, 109 x 137 cm

Musée du Louvre, Paris





Anatomical Blazons of the Female Body appeared in 1536, a newly printed, multi-volume collection of odes to each individual body part. These poems, praising parts of the female body, constituted an early form of sexual fetishism. "Never," wrote Hartmut Böhme, "does it sing the 'whole body,' let alone the persona of the adored,



Hebe and Proserpina

Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio), 1517
Sanguine and silver point, 25.7 x
16.4 cm

Teylers Museum, Haarlem





but rather it is a rhetorical exposition of parts or elements of the body". In these poems, head and womb represented the "central organs". It was to be expected that representatives of the church suspected a new form of idolatry in this poetic approach and identified a sinful indecency in this depiction of female nakedness:



Jupiter and Io

Correggio (Antonio Allegri), c.
1530

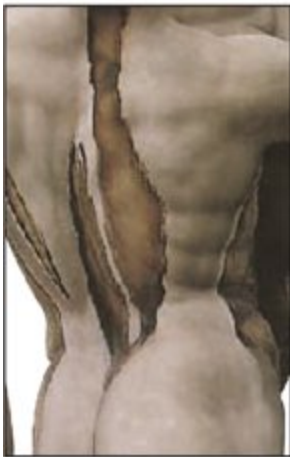
Oil on canvas, 162 x 73.5 cm
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna





To sing of female organs,
To bring them to God's ears,
Is madness and idolatry,
For which the earth will cry on
Judgment day.

This is how such condemnation
is expressed in a document
entitled *Against the Blazoners of
Body Parts*, written in 1539.



The Rape of the Sabines

Giambologna (Giovanni Bologna),
1581-1583

Marble, height: 410 cm
Loggia dei Lanzi, Piazza della
Signora, Florence