

## The Nude and the Naked: from Fine Art to Comics

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The fine-art nude, designed for aesthetic contemplation, gave way in the twentieth century to portrayals of the naked female body in its fleshy and sometimes messy materiality, notably in the work of female artists, who delighted in portraying unruly bodies, often their own. The boundary between depictions of nakedness that were institutionally consecrated and those stigmatised as pornographic was redrawn to demarcate gallery-hung images (and performances of body art within galleries) from those that circulated in various forms of mass culture, including erotic comics, a distinction contested by some critics who pointed to the graphic virtuosity of an artist like Milo Manara. We propose to differentiate further, within comics itself, between those that represent naked woman as male fantasy and those that embody female experience. This divergence does not automatically map onto the gender of the artist. The idealised nude (that had largely migrated to advertising) has turned up in French-language comics in the form of chicklit, accompanied by expressions of anxiety over ageing and imperfection that recall a traditional metaphorical use of the female body: the decay that lies under the surface allure. Other comics artists, however, have deployed the resources of the medium to far more disruptive effect. Sylvie Rancourt's graphic memoir of her work as a nude dancer includes the male spectator within the frame, a *mise en abyme* likely to discomfort the male reader, while Julie Doucet uses the multiplicity of the comics self and the sequentiality of the panels to show femininity as performance. A number of comics artists have integrated canonical works of art, including Manet's *Olympia* and Coubet's *L'Origine du monde*, through quotation or transformation, into their narratives, remediating them to create a new set of cultural meanings and to explore a politics of the body.

### Kurzbiographie

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