

Male Nude Depictions by Artists Frieda Riess and Renée Sintenis (1925)

Abstract

Photographer Frieda Riess and sculptor Renée Sintenis both created pieces of art in 1925 that featured the boxer Erich Brandl in the nude. In doing so, these artists overturned the historical power dynamic in which the male artist rendered the female model as an object of beauty. Here, Riess and Sintenis did the rendering. They transformed the male boxer into an object of beauty, a move that reflected the changing gender roles in many parts of German society, from the art world to the office to sports and the cinema. Brandl's willingness to pose compliantly for these two female artists suggested a simultaneous, if more subtle, shift in male gender roles at the time, too, as some men expressed a hitherto rarely seen passivity as well as a pleasure in being looked at.

Both artists' careers and self-presentations also underscored the independent lives that they had chosen for themselves in the Weimar Republic. Frieda Riess opened her own studio on Berlin's upscale Kurfürstendamm in 1917, distinguishing her as one of the first independent businesswomen of her generation and launching her reputation as a photographer of modern life. Her photographs appeared in some of the most renowned magazines published in Germany at the time, and the gallerist Alfred Flechtheim honored her with her own solo exhibition in 1925. Renée Sintenis, trained at a school of arts and crafts (Kunstgewerbeschule), but she dropped out before completing her course and decided to strike out on her own. Flechtheim included a number of Sintenis's works in exhibitions that he organized between 1920 and 1933, which helped to establish her reputation. Sintenis seemed drawn to male boxers, and she did several sculptures of the prizefighters Max Schmeling and Helmut Hartkopp. Schmeling, who held the world heavyweight title in the early 1930s, referred in his autobiography to the "great Renée Sintenis," whom he described as an "imperious woman with an unforgettable Indian face."

Source



Source: Renée Sintenis, Boxer (Erich Brandl), 1925. Museum Ludwig, Cologne. Photo: Rolf Zimmermann. Rheinisches Bildarchiv Köln.

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