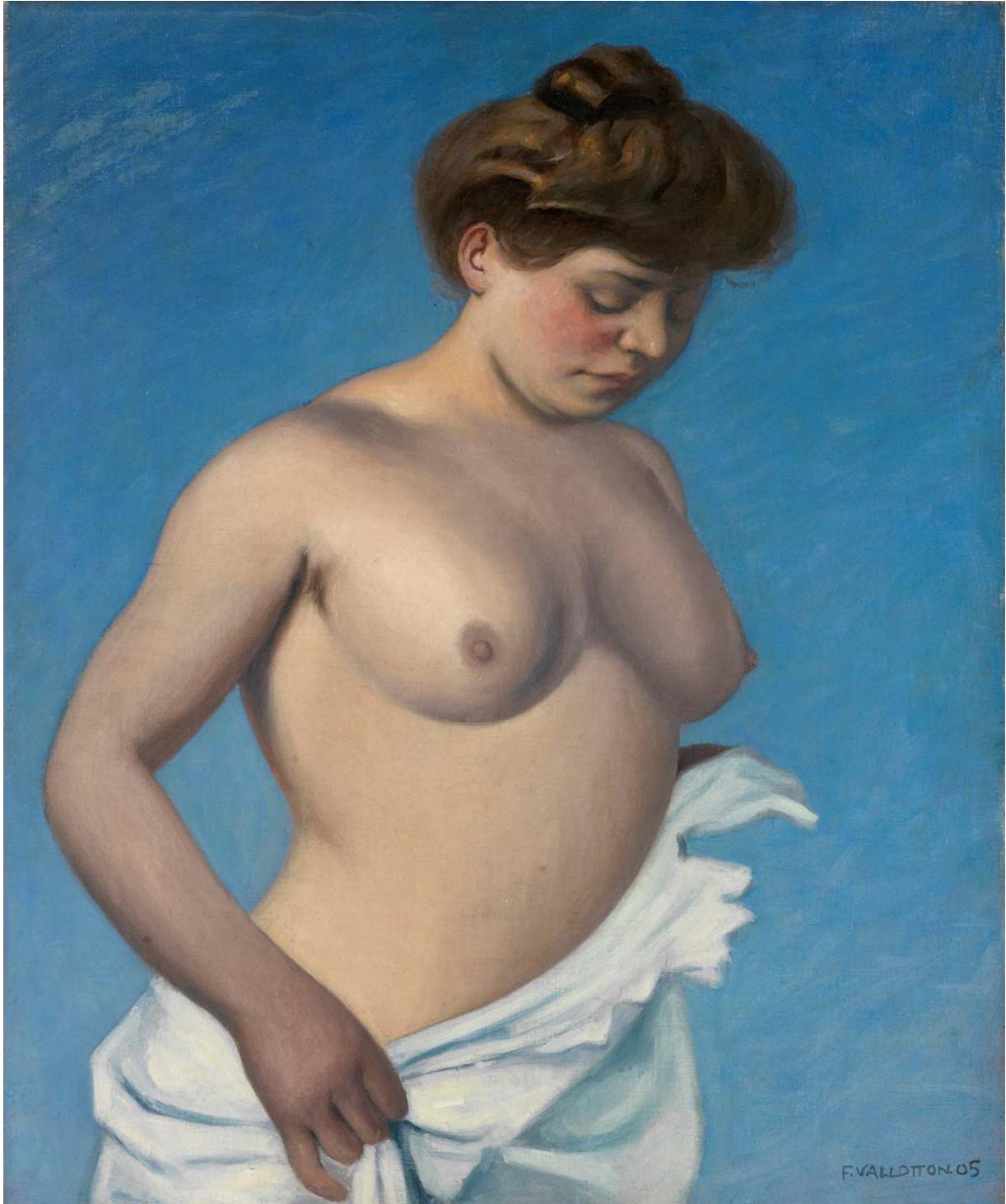


LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

KUNST



FÉLIX VALLOTTON

1865 Lausanne - Paris 1925

Femme en torse tenant sa chemise

Oil on canvas; 1905.

Signed and dated lower right: *F. Vallotton 05.*

60.0 x 50.0 cm

PROVENANCE: Succession Vallotton [no. 362] – Galerie Paul Vallotton, Lausanne [no. 1032] – Pierre-René Vallotton, Richmond – Claude Vallotton, Pully – Auction sale, Phillips, *Feine Möbel, Objekte und Gemälde*, Zurich, 29 November 2000, lot 631 – Private collection, Switzerland

EXHIBITION: *Félix Vallotton*, Galerie Zäune 8, Zurich, 5 March–24 April 1999, no. 10 [no catalogue] – *Musen-Modelle-Malerlegenden, von Renoir bis Warhol*, Gemeinde Rechberghausen, Haug-Erkinger-Festsaal, Rechberghausen, 14 July–14 October 2007, no. 6

LITERATURE: Félix Vallotton, *Livre de raison*, no. 564 – Gilbert Guisan and Doris Jakubec, *Félix Vallotton, Documents pour une biographie et pour l'histoire d'une œuvre*, Lausanne/Paris, 1973-5, II, pp. 194 – Marina Ducrey with Katia Poletti, *Félix Vallotton 1865–1925 – l'œuvre peint*, II, Zurich/Lausanne 2005, no. 568, repr. p. 349 – *Musen-Modelle-Malerlegenden, von Renoir bis Warhol*, exhib. cat., Gemeinde Rechberghausen, Haug-Erkinger-Festsaal, Rechberghausen, 14 July–14 October 2007, no. 6

All Vallotton's paintings of nudes seem to be marked by elements of the bizarre, whether the figures are set in bourgeois interiors, on wide sandy beaches, in inky-blue water or in undefined spaces. In most of his depictions the figures seem oddly unrelated to their settings, their bodies do not follow the classical canon of proportion, their poses are sometimes odd and the tone of their skin peculiar. Vallotton's nudes are perplexing, even to a modern viewer. This style broke with traditional ideals of beauty as prescribed by the Académie in Paris.

The present, somewhat Renoiresque nude was executed at the turn of the twentieth century. It reflects a stylistic shift in Vallotton's approach to the nude. He has abandoned the compressed, frieze-like structure of earlier compositions with their flat, paper-cut-out figures and instead adopts a more sculptural approach. This is evident in his treatment of limbs, the use of modelling and the emphasis on outlines. Formal elements like these recall the work of Ingres who was an important source of inspiration for Vallotton¹ and a very clear influence. Julius Meier-Graefe, author of the first monograph on Vallotton – published in 1898 – rightly recognized how Vallotton saw Ingres as his mentor and teacher. He noted: 'It is inconceivable that [Vallotton's] line could have developed without a conscious effort to pick up where Ingres had left off.' Many of Vallotton's contemporaries – Thadée Natanson, Charles-Ferdinand Ramuz, Louis Vauxcelles, Guillaume Apollinaire and Jacques Rivière – all loudly testified to Vallotton's *ingrisme*.²

¹ The sight of *Le Bain turc* (1863) by Ingres [Musée du Louvre, Paris] is said to have made Vallotton weep with excitement.

² Dominique Radrizzani, *Watteau, Ingres, Steinlen* in exhib. cat., Solothurn and Winterthur 2012, op. cit., p. 89.

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In the present painting the chromatic combination of azure blue (for the background) and flesh tones (for the woman's body) seems to lend the skin surface a smooth, almost metallic sheen. Although the style of execution has little in common with academic ideals, the composition itself is more closely related and may owe a debt to Renoir's depictions of nudes, which Vallotton would have known from photographs. He did, in fact, occasionally work from photographs. He would remove the figures from their context and reconfigure their setting in order to heighten the verism of his paintings.

The opening chapter of Kenneth Clark's classic study, *The Nude* (1956), is titled 'The naked and the nude'. In his book, Clark chronicles changes in standards of beauty and analyses the historical development of the nude as an art form. Discussing the distinction between 'naked' and 'nude' he balances the real and the ideal. He posits that to be naked is to be without clothes and that the word 'naked' may imply a sense of embarrassment and shame generally felt in a condition of nakedness. He considers the word 'nude' to be lacking such overtones. In Clark's view, the image the word 'nude' evokes is of a 'body re-formed', an idealization moulded into an art form by a 'fusion of beliefs, conventions and impulses'. In this, the meaning of certain poses varied from culture to culture and the body was configured to embody real human needs and experiences until the arrival of 'lifeless' academic nudes in the first half of the nineteenth century. He argues that the nude is '... still a means of affirming the belief in ultimate perfection ... [that remains] ... the most complete example of the transmutation of matter into form'.³

Vallotton's nudes do not conform to the ideal of perfection formulated by Clark. They do not embody ideal beauty or reflect the classical canon but are quotidian figures in seemingly natural poses portrayed with all their imperfections and weaknesses. The element of the bizarre in his images is a reflection of the viewer's expectations which are determined by the discrepancy between acquired cultural values and Vallotton's somewhat stereotypical subjects.⁴ The present *Femme en torse*, with her somewhat exaggerated Rubenesque figure and frozen posture, is an impressive example of this approach. The model is not a fashion plate, rather just an unassuming quotidian woman.

Vallotton's handling of the human body was both unique and era-specific, and this was recognized by contemporaries, as in the appreciative comments of Hedy Hahnloser, his patron, and the influential French artist and writer Louise Hervieu. In 1919, Hervieu noted enthusiastically: 'Women large and small, you will love [Vallotton] as he must have loved you all – thin or stout – in your touching humanity. The care he exercises in studying the curves of your bodies, not forgetting those enchanting defects – arms too scrawny, distended bellies, buttocks too bulbous, all this makes him your most diligent friend.'⁵

³ Kenneth Clark, *The Nude. A Study of Ideal Art*, London 1956, 1960 and later, repr. 1980, esp. pp. 2-25.

⁴ Linda Schädler, 'Schonungslose Perspektive – Das Befremdliche in den Aktdarstellungen', in exhib. cat., *Félix Vallotton – Idylle am Abgrund*, Hamburger Kunsthalle and Kunsthhaus Zürich, Zurich 2007, pp. 99-103.

⁵ Louise Hervieu, 'Félix Vallotton', in *La Gerbe*, April 1919; see Guisan and Jakubec, *Félix Vallotton. Documents pour une biographie et pour l'histoire d'une oeuvre*, III, Lausanne/Paris 1975, pp. 344-5.