

Assessment 1(10%)

Due: Assessment conducted during tutorial times on Monday 28 March 2011 and completed and uploaded to moodle within 7 days.

Assessment Criteria. See Course Outline

THE GAZE

This assessment is based on the reading in your course book on page 11, an extract from Griselda Pollock's "About Canons and Culture Wars" in *Differencing the Canon: Feminist Desire and the Writing of Art's History* (London & New York: Routledge, 1999), 3-6.

ALL RESPONSES MUST BE COMPLETED IN YOUR OWN WORDS.

1. What do you understand the term 'canon' to mean?

Certain rules and standards of what is considered to be acceptable and the best representative in art, literature or music, and what should be taught to those studying a practice in academic institutions. For example, "a painting must be well painted and resemble the person it depicts, using traditional skills acquired by the great masters of the past, and only men can create great artworks of beauty".

2. What do you understand the term 'the other' to be referring to?

Artists who were outside the traditional "canon", such as the Impressionists like Renoir, Manet, Monet and Degas.

3. What are feminists critics of the canon attempting to do?

Create total gender equality in the canon and accepting all feminist ways, opinions, theories and questions of art history.

4. Discuss how Cabanel's, *The Birth of Venus*, 1875, embodies notions of a 'canon' and how Manet's, *Olympia*, 1863 breaks with established principles of the canon of the French Academy.

The Birth of Venus by Cabanel, painted first in 1863 and later in 1875, depicts a nude woman lying on a rolling wave with 5 small cupids hovering above her. Cabanel was an artist, who painted within the boundaries of the traditional academic canon. He was opponent to Impressionism, so he depicts Venus, as a beautiful realistic nude white woman with her long hair under her, her arm dramatically over her head and her eyes closed. She lies on top of rolling waves accompanied by cupids representing "love". The figures are modelled to look real, brush strokes tight, and paint carefully mixed, that create the sexual fantasies that was appreciated by male audiences of the canon who traditionally ruled the art world, wrote art history and believed that paintings should reflect beauty and be attractive to look at. On the other hand, Manet painted *Olympia* in 1863, the same time as the original Cabanel painting of *The Birth of Venus*. Manet was an Impressionist, a group of artists who were establishing their own ways to paint that challenged the traditional ways in the canon of the French Academy. He depicts *Olympia* not as an attractive mythological figure as Cabanel had painted *Venus*, but as a typical prostitute of the time, lying on a white bed, gazing at the viewer, her hand covering her genitals as if gesturing to the viewer to "pay up to

see more". She is nude but is still wearing slippers on her feet backing the indication that she is a prostitute. *Olympia* is accompanied by an African woman, which was not accepted in the canon at the time the picture was painted. This painting by Manet doesn't reflect any of the methods that were traditionally taught by the French Academy. Also it doesn't give the attractive sexual fantasy experienced with earlier paintings. The brush strokes are painted in a looser style to that of *The Birth of Venus*. The figures are outlined vividly with a darker line. The dull background makes the painting seem flat. This is why the painting was alienated, and not accepted into the canon of the French Academy.