PLEASURE AND THE BODY: THE BATH IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FRENCH ART AND ARCHITECTURE

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ABSTRACT

KATHERINE J. ARPEN: Pleasure and the Body: The Bath in Eighteenth-Century French Art and Architecture
(Under the direction of Mary D. Sheriff)

This dissertation examines the eighteenth-century French interest in the bath from the perspective of the arts, evaluating a wide range of material, including paintings, sculptures, printed images, and architectural interiors. The primary period under review (circa 1715–1785) saw a revival of bathing practices in France after nearly two centuries of decline; concurrently, artists and patrons increasingly turned to the contemporary—rather than classical or biblical—bather as a subject of art, and specialized suites for bathing were incorporated into private residences with greater frequency than ever before. I investigate the relationship between these related developments in the social practice of bathing and the arts, tending to the ways in which representations of and architectural spaces for bathing both reflected and helped to shape period attitudes towards the bath.

The significance of the visual material, however, extends beyond illustrating an increasingly promoted activity. Bathing was, I contend, an ideal subject through which eighteenth-century artists and architects might engage with new understandings of the body. Of particular interest is the association of the bath with various sensory (and at times, sensual) pleasures, a connection present in a variety of eighteenth-century texts, including personal writings and architectural treatises. Throughout the study, I examine the ways in which pleasure is central to both the works of art and architecture themselves and the
viewer’s reception of them, focusing on the role of gender within this process. Further
supporting my analysis with medical guides, philosophical texts, and literary works, I explore
the complex interconnections between bathing and emerging discourses on aesthetics,
pleasure, sensation, and physical health in eighteenth-century France, producing new
interpretations for a corpus of visual material that has been only superficially understood.
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INTRODUCTION

The arts of eighteenth-century France are marked by a great interest in the bath, as both a represented subject and an architectural space. For the first time, contemporary women challenged the longstanding dominance of mythological and religious figures as favored subjects for depictions of bathing. These contemporary bathers are rendered in a variety of media, including paintings, prints, and sculpture, and set within a range of contexts: they appear in groups gathered around an outdoor water source, as single figures deeply engrossed in the physical experience of the bath, and within the private quarters of the domestic interior, often accompanied by a female attendant. At the same time as this turn towards the contemporary bather as a subject of art, specialized suites dedicated to bathing were included in elite residences with greater frequency that ever before. They were first found in a number of the new hôtels erected in Paris following the court’s return from Versailles at the death of Louis XIV (1638–1715) and became more common during the wave of building that accompanied the end of the Seven Years’ War (1754–1763). Extending far beyond the basic necessities, documented examples were luxurious and richly decorated spaces meant to provide a sensory environment that could be enjoyed by the bather and shown to guests.

The eighteenth-century artistic and architectural interest in the bath also coincided with a return to more regular bathing practices in France following nearly two centuries of
decline. Prior to the eighteenth century, French bathing culture had been at its strongest during the medieval period, when baths were most often undertaken in public facilities due to the practical and financial difficulties of maintaining an abundant water supply in one’s own home.1 By the sixteenth century, however, the public baths within Paris were subject to regular closures as centuries of plague outbreaks fueled concerns over the bath’s potential to open the body to disease. As noted in one text on the plague, “Steam-baths and bath-houses should be forbidden, because when one emerges, the flesh and the whole disposition of the body are softened and the pores open, and as a result, pestiferous vapours can rapidly enter the body and cause sudden death.”2 Moreover, water was thought to penetrate the skin’s fragile surface, dangerously altering the interior and weakening the body, increasing the likelihood of infection in the process. Those who did risk a bath, as a treatment for a medical ailment, for example, often followed it with a long period of bed rest—up to several days in some cases—to avoid debilitating the body further.3 While medieval Europeans had embraced the bath as a means by which to produce a clean and therefore socially acceptable body (visual presentation, rather than hygiene, being the concern at this point), sixteenth- and seventeenth-century anxieties over water’s effects on the body meant that other methods of maintaining one’s appearance were practiced, including dry rubbing visible skin with clean linen, regularly changing underclothes, and using perfumes.4

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1 At the close of the thirteenth century, there were 26 public establishments within Paris, offering immersion baths as well as steam baths. See Georges Vigarello, Concepts of Cleanliness: Changing Attitudes in France since the Middle Ages, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 21. On medieval bathing culture, believed to have been initiated by Crusader’s reports of the Turkish baths, see Katherine Ashenburg, The Dirt on Clean: An Unsanitized History (New York: North Point Press, 2007), Chapter 3.


3 See, for example, the account of one of Henri IV’s ministers in Vigarello, Concepts of Cleanliness, 12.

4 On these practices, see Vigarello, Concepts of Cleanliness, 17-19; Ashenburg, The Dirt on Clean, Chapter 4.
As fears regarding the plague lessened, bathing gradually became a more accepted practice within French society. Bathing in the Seine, considered to be the purest water source available, was popular in the final decades of the seventeenth century and into the next, and public bathing establishments returned to Paris over the course of the eighteenth century, albeit in small numbers. Among them were a number of floating bath-houses, which first appeared in the 1760s and pumped water directly from the river into the bathing chambers. Domestic bathing rooms were a rare luxury restricted to the homes of the French elite, but within residences that did not include a specialized space reserved solely for the purpose of bathing, one of the garde-rogues or a cabinet de toilette may have still contained a bidet. Most often shaped like a narrow chair with a ceramic basin set inside, the bidet was a new item in the eighteenth century, used by men and women alike.

The Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers (1751–1777) contains several entries related to bathing, covering the baignoire (bathtub), the architectural space of the bathing room, and the act of bathing itself. The entry classified under ‘Medicine’ outlines the variety of baths that were undertaken during the period—bains généraux (immersion baths up to the shoulder), demi-bains (half-baths up to the waist),

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5 Françoise de Bonneville notes that there were “no more than nine in 1773.” The Book of the Bath, trans. Jane Brenton (New York: Rizzoli, 1998), 42. The growth of public facilities in Paris beginning in the 1780s is addressed in the epilogue of this dissertation.

6 The two Bains Poitevin, the first of such vessels, are addressed in Vigarello, Concepts of Cleanliness, 103.

7 The history of the bidet is covered in Fanny Beaupré and Roger-Henri Guerrand, Le Confident des dames: le bidet du XVIIIe au XXe siècle: histoire d'une intimité (Paris: La Découverte, 1997).

pédiluves (foot and leg baths)—which are further distinguished by their location, being either
bains domestiques (taken within the domestic interior) or bains naturels (cold baths in the
river or sea, and warm baths in mineral waters). While issues over air quality had largely
subsided, the body was still regarded during the eighteenth century as highly permeable and
therefore subject to the penetrating effects of water; but this was now thought to have
potential benefits, allowing for desirable changes in the body’s overall habitude and internal
functions. As the Encyclopédie explains, the physical effects of the bath were dependent on
its temperature: warm water softens the fibers and relaxes the entire body, whereas cold
water has the opposite effect, strengthening the fibers and invigorating the body.

Such alterations to the body were valued from a medical perspective—the
Encyclopédie recommends different baths for breaking up blockages in the arteries and
producing a calm in patients with rabies, among other things—and by mid-century
dissertations on bathing entered the medical literature in France. But the bath was also
undertaken for other reasons during the eighteenth century. As one of the definitions for bain
in the 1706 edition of Pierre Richelet’s Dictionnaire français notes, “young people bathe for
pleasure, and others take baths for the sake of their health.” A similar sentiment is echoed at
the other end of the century by the architect Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières (1721–1789),
who writes: “A bath is never a matter of indifference; its benefits derive from how it is

Vapor baths, taken in either moist or dry air, are described in a separate entry: “Fumigation,” 7: 366-367.

“Bain de santé ou de propreté,” in Encyclopédie, 2: 20.

For example: François Raymond, Dissertation sur le Bain aqueux simple (Avignon: la Société, 1756); Jean-
Philippe de Limbourg, Dissertation sur les bains d'eau simple (Liege: F.J. Desoer, 1757).

“Les jeunes gens se baignent par plaisir, et les autres prennent le bain pour se conserver en santé.” Pierre
Richelet, Dictionnaire François (Amsterdam: J. Elzevir, 1706), 99. Compare this to the edition of 1690, which
states only that “Le bain est bon pour la santé.”
undertaken: let us strive to make it both pleasurable and healthful.\textsuperscript{13} Alongside this new consideration of pleasure, ideas concerning the healthful benefits of the bath were expanding over the course of the century to include not just matters of the internal body, but also issues related to its exterior, such as general cleanliness, the management of odor, and removal of bodily fluids. In the second half of the century, health manuals began to include for the first time sections on the bath, and more generally, the necessity of regular washing.\textsuperscript{14}

As Le Camus suggests, pleasure and health were not mutually exclusive motives. A dip in the cool waters of the Seine, for example, might provide an invigorating charge to the body, as well as the opportunity to eye fellow bathers in the water. And a warm soak in a bathtub would clean and relax the body after a long day, while simultaneously providing a peaceful and luxurious retreat in which to reflect or perhaps admire a garden view. The eighteenth century, however, never quite shook off earlier concerns about the bath’s potential to dangerously weaken the body. As had been the case in the preceding centuries, bathing came with a host of warnings. According to the \textit{Encyclopédie}, it should be preceded by a period of fasting and followed by rest, and one should not indulge in any excesses during the bath.\textsuperscript{15} One health manual for women prohibits consuming sugary foods, coffee, chocolate, or anything that might overly excite the blood, while simultaneously cautioning against becoming too comfortable. In particular, the author advises women not to read or sleep while

\textsuperscript{13} “Le bain n’est jamais indifférent, la manière de la prendre en fait les avantages: cherchons à le rendre en même-temps, agréable et salutaire.” Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, \textit{Le génie de l’architecture, ou L’analogie de cet art avec nos sensations} (Paris: Author and Benoit Morin, 1780), 142. The full manuscript has been translated into English in \textit{The Genius of Architecture: Or, the Analogy of That Art with Our Sensations}, trans. David Britt (Santa Monica, CA: Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, distributed by the University of Chicago Press, 1992). Translations here remain my own.

\textsuperscript{14} For example: Achille Guillaume Le Bègue de Presle, \textit{Le conservateur de la santé} (Paris: Didot le Jeune, 1763); Jean Goulin, \textit{Le médecin des dames, ou l’art de les conserver en santé} (Paris: Vincent, 1771).

bathing, as people have been known to drown in their bathtubs, presumably victims of their overly relaxed bodies.\textsuperscript{16} Immersion bathing, then, had to be taken in moderation, being more of an occasional indulgence than a daily occurrence, and matters of hygiene could be more routinely managed via localized washing with a sponge and basin or a bidet.

In light of persistent concerns over the bath’s potentially harmful effects, it is perhaps not surprising that images of and architectural spaces related to bathing garnered so much attention during this period; many may have found the idea of the bath preferable to the real thing. Admiring a painting of bathers hanging in one’s home, standing before a statue at the Salon, holding a print in your hand, walking through or reading a description of a bathing suite: all of these actions could provide an opportunity to imaginatively experience the bath without the restrictions and inconveniences that often accompanied the practice in the eighteenth century. Throughout this dissertation, I consider how images and architectural interiors can represent the bath, in the sense of standing in for it, evoking various pleasures associated with it in satisfying ways.\textsuperscript{17}

This process often involves placing one’s self in the role of the bather, which is overwhelmingly figured as a woman in eighteenth-century French art.\textsuperscript{18} In my first three chapters, which focus on artistic representations of female bathers, I return repeatedly to this idea of imagining oneself as the depicted bather, an interpretative strategy that pushes beyond

\textsuperscript{16} Goulin, \textit{Le médecin des dames}, 310.

\textsuperscript{17} As Thomas Kavanagh has addressed, representations were considered ideal vehicles for pleasures, as they allowed for its enjoyment at a safe distance: “What one read in a novel or saw in a painting offered vividly vicarious experiences of pleasure, with none of its dangers.” Thomas M. Kavanagh, \textit{Enlightened Pleasures: Eighteenth-Century France and the New Epicureanism} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 4.

\textsuperscript{18} The male body appears in only a small number of images from the period, including: book illustrations such as those discussed in Philip Stewart, \textit{Engraven Desire: Eros, Image & Text in the French Eighteenth Century} (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992), Chapter 5; works by Hubert Robert and Charles-Louis Clérisseau, discussed below; and representations of Jean-Paul Marat’s death.
the too frequent conclusion that the nude female body is intended for and directed at an exclusively heterosexual male audience. Such assessments, while not without merit, ultimately limit interpretation by failing to extend the analysis beyond an acknowledgment and/or a critique of patriarchal systems of viewership. Although bathing was not yet a regular occurrence in eighteenth-century France, it was a social practice shared by both sexes. With this in mind, I open a space to interpret the male viewer’s response in terms of an identification with, rather than or in addition to a desiring of, the represented female bather; and in investigating the unique pleasures offered to female viewers, I reclaim the images for an audience that has historically been denied a voice in the interpretative process.

The notion of identifying with a represented subject would not have been unfamiliar to eighteenth-century audiences, as it was central to theories of viewership active in the period. In his widely-read Réflexions critique sur la poésie et sur la peinture (1719), Abbé Jean-Baptiste Du Bos declares art’s chief pleasure to be its ability move the audience through an identification with the depicted subject, with the viewer feeling represented actions and emotions as if they were one’s own. There is equally a precedent in eighteenth-century France for identifying across gender lines: as Mary Sheriff has evidenced, passages of Denis Diderot’s Salon criticism describe the practice of male viewers (in one case himself, in another a fictional abbé) moving between their own positions and that of represented female

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19 On the need for feminist scholarship to move beyond the ‘impasse of critique’ and reclaim images that have long been designated objects of the male gaze, see Mary D. Sheriff, “Une approche subversive: Interpréter la dimension érotique dans la peinture française du XVIIIe siècle,” Histoire de l’art 66 (2010): 27-38; and “Seeing Beyond the Norm: Interpreting Gender in the Visual Arts,” in The Question of Gender: Joan W. Scott’s Critical Feminism, ed. Judith Butler and Elisabeth Weed (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 161-186.

20 Du Bos most fully outlines this idea in Section 3 of the first volume of Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture, 2 vols. (Paris: Jean Mariette, 1719).
subjects, imaginatively experiencing her emotions and physical comportment.\textsuperscript{21} Also useful here is a poem written in response to François-Hubert Drouais’s pendant portraits depicting Madame du Barry as a both a woman and a man. In his verses, the author expresses a desire to change his own sex in response to du Barry’s shifting appearance, so that he might view the male portrait as a woman and the female portrait as a man. Although the author seeks to move between the sexes as a way to always occupy the position of the subject of desire, his poem nevertheless “indicates a certain fluidity and positionality of gender identity as it is constituted through the act of viewing—a fluidity that inflects the work of other rococo artists as well,” as Melissa Hyde has argued.\textsuperscript{22}

To identify with the female bodies represented in the paintings, prints, and sculptures I analyze is to best position oneself to experience the range of pleasures depicted within the works. The absence of substantial scholarship on many of the art objects in this dissertation is, I believe, the result not only their focus on the female nude but also their embrace of pleasure as both a subject and a potential viewer response, a feature they share with the architectural interiors reviewed in Chapter Four. Modern attitudes towards pleasure perhaps too often blind us to the importance of these images and spaces, but pleasure—and specifically, a pleasure experienced via the senses—carried great weight in eighteenth-century France. Texts as diverse as the aesthetic theory of the abbé Du Bos, libertine

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\item Melissa Hyde, “Troubling Identities and the Agreeable Game of Art: From Madame de Pompadour’s Theatrical ‘Breeches’ of Decorum to Drouais’ \textit{Portrait of Madame Du Barry En Homme},” in \textit{Women and Portraits in Early Modern Europe}, ed. Andrea Pearson (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 172. As Hyde has explored elsewhere, François Boucher’s representations of the Ovidian tale of Jupiter and Callisto, in which Jupiter assumes the form of the beautiful Diana to seduce the nymph Callisto, are also marked by a fluidity of gender identification on the part of the spectator: “The viewer who identifies with the seducing Jupiter does not assume only the position of the viewing subject: he also simultaneously identifies with the objectified spectacle of desirable femininity, that is, with Jupiter/Diana.” \textit{Making Up the Rococo: François Boucher and His Critics} (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2006), 211.
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literature, and the sensationist philosophies of Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, Julien Offray de La Mettrie and others all posit the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain as a fundamental drive of the individual. For those who adopted this Epicurean principle, the eighteenth-century embrace of pleasure was fueled not by empty hedonism but by man’s natural desire to improve his condition.

The significance of pleasure in eighteenth-century France is perhaps best demonstrated by the sheer number of texts devoted to the subject: as Robert Mauzi has stated with an admitted degree of hyperbole, there is no one in the period who fails to emphasize or exalt its importance. Among the authors addressing the subject is Louis-Jean Levesque de Pouilly, who brings pleasure into the service of natural theology, regarding it as proof of a benevolent creator that endowed man with the physical capacity for sensation—the root of all pleasure according to the dominant theory of sensationism—so that he might find happiness in the world around him. As Levesque de Pouilly writes in his *Théorie des sentiments agréables* (1736):

> There was a sect of philosophers who seemed desirous to eradicate all things pleasurable. Their school resounded only the austere lesson: *abstain from all pleasures*. But why? Do they not present themselves to us everywhere, when we open our eyes or ears, when we partake in a hearty meal, when we engage in our occupations as well as that which amuses us, when we enjoy our solitude or the company of others? Should all these blessings so inseparable from our existence be subject to our scorn rather than our gratitude?

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24 On Voltaire’s similar defense of pleasure as proof of a benevolent God, see Ibid., 387 n5.

25 “Il y a eu une secte de philosophes qui semblaient vouloir anéantir tous les biens agréables. Leurs écoles ne retentissaient que de l’austère leçon *abstenez-vous des plaisirs*. Mais quoi? Ne s’offrent-ils pas à nous toute part, soit que nous ouvrions les yeux ou les oreilles, que nous fussions usage d’aliments sains, que nous sachions nous occuper, ou nous amuser à propos, que nous jouissions de la solitude, ou de la société? Tous ces biens inséparables de la vie, seront-ils l’objet de nos dédaign, plutôt que de notre reconnaissance?” I cite here the final edition published with Louis-Jean Levesque de Pouilly’s lifetime: *Théorie des sentiments agréables, où, après avoir indiqué les règles que la nature suit dans la distribution du plaisir, on établit les principes de la théologie naturelle et ceux de la philosophie morale* (Geneva: Barrillot et fils, 1747), 178.
In *Du Plaisir, ou de Moyen de se rendre heureux* (1764), Abbé Jean-Baptiste-François Hennebert extols pleasure’s beneficial effects on both the individual and society. A love of pleasure, he argues, provides personal satisfaction and a relief from life’s pains, but it also brings man out into the world, where he develops an awareness of and acceptance for those different than himself. Moreover, it aids in the development of talent and inspires genius, improving society as a result. Like the abbé Du Bos and Claude Adrien Helvétius, among others, Hennebert characterizes pleasure as man’s primary defense against boredom and idleness. Without it, Hennebert claims, society would become nothing more than a collection of automatons. Regarded as necessary to both the happiness of the individual and the well-being of society, pleasure—in moderation—was something to be sought after and appreciated, rather than dismissed or condemned.

In giving considerable attention to objects and spaces in which pleasure plays a central role, I build on existing scholarship in the fields of art history and literary studies that challenges the historical dismissal of certain cultural products of eighteenth-century France on account of their embrace of pleasure. In particular, I position my work within the steadily growing body of scholarship that seeks to complicate the art and architectural interiors of eighteenth-century France—especially those associated with women and elite society—by uncovering the ways in which deceptively simple or straightforward visual

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27 Of pleasure, the abbé writes, “S'il était possible de concevoir un monde où son empire fût inconnu, l'ennui en aurait bientôt flétri les habitants; les ressorts qui mettent l'âme en activité se rouilleraient; l'engourdissement et la langueur s'emparereraient des esprits: la société nécessairement dissoute n'offrirait que la masse énorme d'un corps sans mouvement. Ce serait moins un peuple organisé qu’un groupe d'automates.” Jean-Baptiste-François Hennebert, *Du Plaisir, ou de Moyen de se rendre heureux*... , 2 vols. (Lille: Henry, 1764), 1: 2-3.

material can provide significant insights into the period. As I investigate in the chapters that follow, the works analyzed in this dissertation contribute to our understanding of the practice of bathing as it developed over the course of the century; but they also serve more broadly as an entry point to explore emerging ideas about the body, including the role of sensory pleasure in the experience of art and architecture, philosophical and physiological theories, matters of physical cleanliness, and issues of female sexuality and intimacy.

Given my particular focus on the ways in which art and architecture can serve as a lens through which to examine both bathing practices and understandings of the body active during the period, I have limited my primary selection of images to examples depicting the contemporary French bather. In addition to being the works most closely linked to period practices and ideas, such images would have provided the greatest potential for eighteenth-century audiences to identify with the depicted subject’s experience of the bath. My first three chapters do not, therefore, provide a comprehensive survey of the full range of bathing imagery produced in eighteenth-century France, but rather present a focused investigation of the interests in and various significances of the contemporary French bather in particular. While other eighteenth-century French works depicting the bath engage with issues outside of the scope of this dissertation, a brief summary of the excluded material is warranted.

Although the contemporary bather rose with new force as a subject of eighteenth-century art, the long-established tradition of mythological and biblical bathers remained active as well. The Diana and Actaeon narrative, in which the mortal hunter looks upon the chaste Diana bathing with her nympha, was a particularly common subject (fig. 21–23), as I discuss briefly in Chapter One; and artists such as Antoine Coypel, Jean-François de Troy, and Noël-Nicolas Coypel depicted Diana and her nympha bathing alone. While Venus is most often rendered during the eighteenth century in contexts other than the bath, her most notable appearances as a bather include François Boucher’s canvas for the appartement des bains at the Château de Bellevue (fig. 137) and the work of Louis-Jean-François Lagrenée. In terms of biblical subjects, representations of Bathsheba at the bath are less common, but Susanna appears in paintings by Jean-Baptiste Santerre, de Troy, and Lagrenée, among others.

I will also not address works that clearly establish a non-French location, a category that includes a considerable body of images by Claude-Joseph Vernet depicting bathers set within Mediterranean landscapes (fig. 1). Vernet’s bathing scenes are most closely related in their general character to representations of the outdoor bath by Northern Baroque artists such as Laurent de La Hyre, Bartholomeus Breenberg, and, above all, Cornelius van

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30 A. Coypel, 1695 (Musée Départemental d'Art Ancien et Contemporain d'Epinal); de Troy, 1722 (Getty Museum); N. Coypel, 1732 (State Hermitage Museum). Several representations of Diana at the bath are included in the exhibition catalogue Loves of the Gods: Mythological Painting from Watteau to David, ed. Colin Bailey (New York: Rizzoli, 1992). See also Steven Levine’s contribution to the Loves of the Gods catalogue: “To See or Not to See: The Myth of Diana and Actaeon in the Eighteenth Century,” 73-95.

31 Lagrenée, 1776 (private collection).

32 Santerre, Salon of 1704 (Louvre); de Troy, 1727 (Musée des Beaux-Arts de Rouen); Lagrenée, Salon of 1763 (lost) and 1771 (Stourhead). Lagrenée also produced a representation of Bathsheba, 1770 (private collection).

33 Two bathing scenes by Vernet (1761, Residenzgalerie Salzburg; 1783, Galerie Bernheim) are included in Gabriele Groschner, Badeszenen: Ritual, Entrüstung und Verführung (Salzburg: Residenzgalerie, 2009), 230-233. His best-known bathing scene is perhaps Matin, 1772 (Louvre).
Poelenburg, whose works were highly valued by eighteenth-century French collectors.

Several of Hubert Robert’s paintings set in Italy also depict bathers—in this case, male—gathered both outdoors and at the ruins of the ancient Roman baths (fig. 2), the latter location also serving as the setting for a gouache by Charles-Louis Clérisseau.\(^{34}\) Locations further east are depicted in a painting of a Greek bath by Joseph-Marie Vien (fig. 3) and Turkish scenes by Vernet and Nicolas Lavreince (fig. 4, 5).

The most famous representation of a ‘Turkish’ bather in eighteenth-century French art is, in fact, a portrait of French noblewoman: *Mademoiselle de Clermont en sultane* by Jean-Marc Nattier (fig. 6). This fascinating image of Marie-Anne de Bourbon, maternal granddaughter to Louis XIV and cousin of Louis XV, justly deserves the scholarly attention it has thus far and will surely continue to receive, raising a number of intriguing issues, including: its relationship to earlier French bathing portraits produced by the School of Fontainebleau as well as to textual and visual representations of the Eastern bath; its anticipation of the interest in *turquerie* that arose within the visual arts as the century progressed; Mademoiselle de Clermont’s adoption of a non-European identity; the sensual yet assertive display of her body; and questions of power as structured through both Clermont’s position at court and the image’s representation of racial difference.\(^{35}\)

Representations of Jean-Paul Marat’s death, such as the posthumous portrait by Jacques-Louis David (fig. 7), have likewise been excluded on account of their depiction of a known individual (rather than a more generalized presentation of the act of bathing). While

\(^{34}\) Robert, *Le Torrent* (Musée de Valence); Clérisseau, *Un bain dans des ruines*, 1762 (Louvre).

this sizeable body of images has traditionally been interpreted in relation to the main
action—the assassination of a revolutionary leader—it warrants future study from the
perspective of the bath.\textsuperscript{36} Prior to his demise at the hands of Charlotte Corday, Marat sought
the refuge of the water not as a peaceful, sensory retreat but as relief for his unspecified
dermatosis.\textsuperscript{37} The bath recorded for posterity in David’s posthumous portrait and represented
at Marat’s funeral in the form of his bathtub, which was placed on display in the Église des
Cordeliers, was undertaken to allow the weakened Marat to continue his political activities
on behalf of \textit{le peuple}; rather than individual pleasure, it stands for the good of the collective.

While the history of bathing images outside of eighteenth-century France is too
extensive to review here, it is worth noting that representations of contemporary bathers
produced in other times and cultures have been the subject of focused studies. Scholars have
investigated, for example, the representation of contemporary subjects in Greek vases,
medieval manuscripts, fifteenth- and sixteenth-century German woodcuts, and, above all, the
paintings and drawings of the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists.\textsuperscript{38} In light of such

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\textsuperscript{36} Paintings of Marat by David and Jacques Roques (Musée des Augustins) are briefly discussed in Burkhard

\textsuperscript{37} While diagnoses are speculative, Marat remains a point of interest in modern medical literature in part due to
his training as a physician. See Warren Dotz, “Jean Paul Marat. His Life, Cutaneous Disease, Death, and
Depiction by Jacques Louis David,” \textit{American Journal of Dermatopathology} 1 (Fall 1979): 247-50; J.E. Jelinek,
“Jean-Paul Marat: The Differential Diagnosis of his Skin Disease,” \textit{American Journal of Dermatopathology} 1
(Fall 1979): 251-252; Lisa Carolyn Murphy, “The Itches of Jean-Paul Marat,” \textit{Journal of the American
Academy of Dermatology} 23.1 (Sept 1989): 565-567; Covadonga Coto-Segura, Pablo Coto-Segura, and Jorge
Santos-Juanes, “The Skin of a Revolutionary,” \textit{Archives of Dermatology} 147.5 (May 2011): 539.

\textsuperscript{38} Material from antiquity to the Renaissance is included in Isabelle Bardiès-Fronty, Michèle Bimbenet-Privat,
and Philippe Walter, \textit{Le bain et le miroir: soins du corps et cosmétiques de l’antiquité à la Renaissance} (Paris:
Gallimard, 2009). On ancient vases, see Robert F. Sutton, Jr., “Female Bathers and the Emergence of the
Female Nude in Greek Art,” in \textit{The Nature and Function of Water, Baths, Bathing, and Hygiene from Antiquity
through the Renaissance}, ed. Cynthia Kosso and Anne Scott (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 61-85. On German prints,
see Alison Stewart, “Sebald Beham’s Fountain of Youth and Bathhouse Woodcut: Popular Entertainment in
Large Prints by the Little Masters,” \textit{Register of the Spencer Museum of Art} 6.6 (1989): 64-88. I cite here only a
Degas} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), Chapter 5; Tamar Garb, \textit{Bodies of Modernity: Figure and
studies, the limited attention paid to the subject of the contemporary bather in eighteenth-century French art is striking, even more so given the scholarship on other period images that focus on the body, such as representations of ladies at their toilette or receiving enemas. My study will help fill this gap in the art historical scholarship on bathing imagery, and I hope that it might also encourage others to look more attentively at a sizeable body of images that has perhaps too often been regarded as merely representative of a fashionable taste for eroticism within the elite culture of the ancien régime. While the architectural space of the eighteenth-century domestic bath likewise remains understudied, Dominique Massounie and Mimi Hellman have begun an important investigation of the significance of its design and decoration, to which this study contributes.

In the chapters that follow, I move from the outdoor bath (Chapters One and Two) to the domestic interior (Chapters Three and Four), following general patterns in the social

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39 Sources addressing individual works are cited below as the objects are analyzed. Many, however, have not been the subject of any substantial scholarship. General texts on the theme of bathing typically overlook representations the contemporary bather in eighteenth-century French art. Bonneville’s well-illustrated Book of the Bath covers the social history of bathing, but includes only three eighteenth-century images, none of which are discussed in any detail. Likewise, several eighteenth-century images are reproduced but not discussed in Anne de Marnhac, Femmes au bain: Les métamorphoses de la beauté (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1986). The above-cited exhibition catalogue Intimacy!: Baden in der Kunst includes 156 works, but only one contemporary French scene from the eighteenth century (not including portraits of Marat). Most curious is Jacques Bonnet, Femmes au Bain: du voyeurisme dans la peniture occidentale (Paris: Hazan, 2006); of the thirteen images from the eighteenth century, only three depict some from of bathing or washing. Several eighteenth-century representations of immersion bathing and localized washing are briefly discussed in Nadeije Laneyrie-Dagen and Georges Vigarele, La toilette: naissance de l’intime (Paris: Hazan, Musée Marmottan Monet, 2015), although the material is largely focused on the toilette. On the toilette, see also Kimberly Chrisman-Campbell, “Dressing to Impress: The Morning Toilette and the Fabrication of Femininity” in Paris: Life and Luxury, 53-73. Enema images are discussed in Donald Posner, “Watteau’s Reclining Nude and the ‘Remedy’ Theme,” Art Bulletin 54 (1972): 385-89; Laurinda S. Dixon, “Some Penetrating Insights: The Imagery of Enemas in Art,” Art Journal 53 (Fall 1993): 28-35; and Mary L. Bellhouse, “Erotic ‘Remedy’ Prints and the Fall of the Aristocracy in Eighteenth-Century France,” Political Theory 25 (Oct. 1997): 680-715.

practice. While the material is united by way of its basic subject and shared investment in various forms of pleasure, each chapter sheds light on a distinct aspect of the eighteenth century’s increased interest in the bath. In this regard, what is presented is a selective examination comprised of four case studies, each centering on a particular point of significance within period discourses on the bath and, more generally, the body.

Chapter One examines representations of outdoor bathers in the work of Nicolas Lancret (1690–1743) and Jean-Baptiste Pater (1695–1736), two understudied artists who achieved great success in the 1720s and 1730s producing scenes of contemporary life, including numerous representations of all-female bathing parties set within natural landscapes (fig. 8–17). In particular, I interpret their bathing images in light of the role of visual pleasure within three areas: period accounts of public bathing in Paris, which routinely remarked on the potential for (and appeal of) seeing and being seen at popular outdoor sites; the images themselves, which emphasize their subjects’ own acts of looking, creating complex networks of gazes cutting across the image; and early eighteenth-century aesthetic theory that promoted the visual appeal of the painted surface as the chief means of capturing the viewer’s attention.

While depicting contemporary figures engaged in an activity that was popular in the period, Lancret and Pater also adopt the visual language of the goddess Diana and her nymphs at her bath, creating insular spaces in which women interact with and attend to one another in small groups, wading in the waters or resting along its edge. While the bathers are always female, all the images in this chapter depict men within the scene as well, either hiding behind dense brushes of foliage or positioned on the periphery of the group, calling to mind the Ovidian character of Actaeon, who caught sight of Diana and her companions
bathing in the woods. Yet, unlike traditional representations of the narrative, in which Diana mortally punishes Actaeon for his transgressive gaze, the bathers in Lancret’s and Pater’s scenes often acknowledge and interact with their admirers, allowing and in some cases even encouraging them to look. Although such an arrangement may at first glance cast these works as playing primarily to a heterosexual male gaze, I challenge this assumption, addressing the ways in which the actual viewing dynamics established by the images are far more complex. Rather than simply serving as the object of the male gaze, the women depicted within the images assume a more active role, looking at men and to one another. Viewers standing before the works are invited not only to look upon the bathers but also, in turn, to imagine experiencing the scene from the perspective of female figures. As I also explore, in emphasizing the act of looking—and, specifically, finding pleasure through looking—the works correspond with the aesthetic theory of the amateur Roger de Piles (1635–1709), who championed visual pleasure as the chief objective of painting. For de Piles, the act of viewing a painting is akin to a seduction of the eyes in which the spectator is called forward to delight in the rich application of paint. As I conclude, attentively examining the painterly surfaces of Lancret’s and Pater’s works can also engage the viewer’s sense of touch, directing attention to the tactile pleasures of the bath presented in the images, an issue further explored in the following chapter.

Chapter Two shifts to sculpted representations of bathers produced in the second half of the century, focusing on works by Étienne-Maurice Falconet (1716–1791), Jean-Antoine Houdon (1741–1828), and Christophe-Gabriel Allegrain (1710–1795). Situating the statues within the context of eighteenth-century philosophical and physiological conceptions of the body that privilege the sense of touch as the principal mediator in an individual’s experience
of the outside world, I consider the ways in which the sculptures emphasize various tactual sensations of the bath to create the illusion of a living form.\textsuperscript{41} As Falconet addresses repeatedly throughout his \textit{Réflexions sur la sculpture}, first delivered to the Academy in 1760, overcoming the material limits of cold, hard stone is the greatest challenge to figural sculpture, but a necessary task should the artist wish to move the spectator. By focusing on the bather’s physical experience of the bath, Falconet, Houdon, and Allegrain not only endow their figures with a sense of animation, in doing so, they also encourage viewers to place themselves in the position of the bather and imagine her touch-based sensations.

While linked by a compositional focus on the bather’s sense of touch, the sculptures analyzed in this chapter depict different stages of the bath—before, during, and after—thus opening unique avenues of discussion in my respective analyses of the works. Tentatively edging a foot over the edge of the statue’s pedestal, Falconet’s figure (fig.40) experiences the initial sensation of the bath, her body rendered as if responding to the mild shock of contact with cool water. Houdon’s work (fig. 42), by contrast, depicts a bather whose relaxed surfaces suggest the effects of warm water washing over her, which would have been enhanced by the statue’s original placement in a fountain that included a servant figure pouring water over the bather’s body. And, finally, Allegrain’s statue (fig. 43) shows a woman in the process of drying herself after the bath, deeply absorbed by the contact of fabric against flesh. Adopting Johann Gottfried Herder’s (1744–1803) writings on sculpture as a theoretical model, I explore the ways in which freestanding figural sculpture activates an internal sense of touch in viewers, allowing them to more effectively identify with the

\textsuperscript{41} Here, I employ ‘tactual’ in the manner proposed by F. David Martin, who utilizes the term to describe “both tactile sensations—i.e., feelings of things external to the skin—and haptic sensations, i.e. muscular, visceral feelings within the skin.” F. David Martin, “The Autonomy of Sculpture,” \textit{The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism} 34.3 (1976): 273.
represented subject and, in the case of the bathing statues, imagine their own bodies responding to the physical effects of the bath.

Chapter Three moves to the domestic interior, the site of numerous depictions of women undertaking sponge and immersion baths, often with the assistance of their maids. Drawing on a diverse range of visual material—including paintings, prints, and book illustrations—produced from the Regency to the close of the century, I explore the ways in which the images illustrate, often with surprising frankness, various personal intimacies associated with the female body elsewhere in eighteenth-century French culture. Using Antoine Watteau’s (1684–1721) La toilette intime (fig. 60) as an introductory image, I establish the chapter’s main areas of investigation: issues of personal hygiene, the link between bathing and sexuality, and the interpersonal relationships that develop between women within the domestic interior.

Many of the images focus on genital washing, using either a sponge and basin or a bidet, a practice that was increasingly recommended as a method of managing bodily odor, being more convenient and, in the view of eighteenth-century physicians, less physically debilitating than immersion bathing. While medical guides such as Achille Guillaume Le Bègue de Presle’s Le conservateur de la santé (1763) encouraged both men and women to regularly wash their parties naturelles, visual representations exclusively depict women, and many establish a clear association between genital washing and female sexuality in particular. This link could serve as a point of critique, as in two drawings from Charles-Germain de Saint-Aubin’s (1721–1786) Livre de caricatures that are most likely meant to depict Madame de Pompadour, Louis XV’s mistress, but in other cases, genital washing takes on a number of positive significances. As evidenced by a illustrated plates from the
pornographic novel Thérèse Philosophe (1748) and a series on the Times of the Day after designs by Pierre-Antoine Baudouin (1723–1769), genital bathing could also be figured as an essential element of woman’s routine that aided her pursuit of sexual pleasures, both solitary and with a lover. The final group of images reviewed in this chapter features women bathing with the assistance of their maids, which express a sense of closeness and comfort experienced by the women. Rather than focusing on their erotic potential for a male viewer, I turn to the ways in which the works cast the bathing space as a distinctly feminine realm where women can form intimate bonds in the absence of men.

In Chapter Four, I examine the architectural design and decoration of domestic bathing rooms, focusing on the ways in which the eighteenth-century bath functioned as both a site of private pleasures and public display. Given the required space, complicated plumbing, and costly equipment, a permanent room—or in some cases, rooms—dedicated to bathing was a rarity in eighteenth-century France, found only in the homes of the elite. Such rooms would have therefore been savored personally by their owners while also functioning as an outward demonstration of wealth and privilege. This chapter explores this duality through a consideration of documented bathing rooms from the period, with a particular focus on the ways in which various aspects of the décor served to established the bath as a space of refined luxury and sensory pleasure, appreciated by owners and guests alike.

Before turning attention to aspects of the decoration, I begin by reviewing the ideal makeup and location of the bathing suite, as established in Jacques-François Blondel’s De la distribution des maisons de plaisir (1737–1738). I then turn to floor plans of eighteenth-century homes in and around Paris that included one or more rooms dedicated to bathing, charting changes in the standard placement of the bath within a residence. Of particular
significance is the shift that occurs in the second half of the century, at which point architects break from the existing practice of placing the bath in an isolated area and instead locate it in closer proximity to the main areas of the residence. This shift, I argue, allowed homeowners to better show off what was still a novel addition to a home. The remainder of the chapter focuses on the decoration of the bath, using architectural renderings, personal inventories, and guidebook descriptions related to period examples. I first outline the key features commonly found in documented rooms, with particular emphasis on the ways in which the decoration and furnishings would have projected a sense of refined luxury associated with both the site and its owner. In the final sections of the chapter, my analysis shifts to aspects of the interior meant to elicit sensory pleasures, placing actual bathing spaces alongside Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières’s *Le génie de l’architecture* (1780), in which the bathing room is presented as perhaps the richest sensory environment within Le Camus’s model home. In particular, I focus on period interiors that align with Le Camus’s dual interest in nature and mythology as sources of inspiration, including a number of examples designed by Alexandre-Théodore Brongniart (1739–1813) and François-Joseph Bélanger (1744–1818). While Le Camus’s model bathing room is associated with women—both in its figuration as the realm of the goddess Diana and its placement adjacent to the personal quarters of the lady of the house—I conclude the chapter by looking at two bathing spaces designed for men, which are rich in sensory potential but take on a more ‘masculine’ character, being more austere and imposing in design.

The epilogue glimpses into the next century, charting the effects of changing attitudes towards the bath. By the close of the eighteenth century, bathing was gradually becoming distanced from the pleasures of an elite few due to an increased focus on the physical benefits
of bathing and the growth of public baths. As bathing at the public facilities became more routine and more widely practiced in the opening decades of the nineteenth century, guidebooks no longer chronicled the interiors of the grand salles des bains found in the capital’s hôtels; rather, authors and artists alike increasingly turned attention to the new public baths and their patrons.
CHAPTER ONE

Looking for Pleasure in the Bathing Scenes of Nicolas Lancret and Jean-Baptiste Pater

On August 25, 1725, the doors of the Louvre’s Salon Carré were opened to the public for what has since been called the “pseudo-Salon,” an abbreviated version of the public exhibitions that had begun in 1673 and were to become regular events in Paris beginning in 1737.42 Organized by Louis de Boullogne II and the duc d’Antin on behalf of the French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture, the Salon of 1725 was distinguished from its predecessors on account of its shortened run, lasting only ten days, during which time the Louvre was reportedly filled with “a never-ending crowd of spectators from all walks of life, of every sex and age.”43 Visitors would have surely been struck by the significant showing of genre painting, an area of production that had comprised only a modest fraction of works at previous Salons, which had instead been dominated by history paintings on classical and religious subjects (and to a lesser extent, by portraiture).44 In addition to a number of animal paintings, still lifes, and landscapes, at least a dozen paintings of contemporary life were

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42 For a history of the Salon of 1725, see Georges Wildenstein, Le salon de 1725: compte rendu par le Mercure de France de l'exposition faite au Salon Carré du Louvre (Paris: Les Beaux-Arts, 1924). While there was not an official livret, a list of exhibited works was published in “Exposition de tableaux,” Mercure de France (Sept. 1725): 2253-2271; reprinted in Wildenstein’s text.

43 “On a vu en effet pendant cette magnifique exposition, un concours infini de spectateurs de toutes conditions, de tout sexe et de tout âge, admire et critique, louer et blâmer.” “Exposition de tableaux,” 2255.

44 As Mary Tavener Holmes has noted, 32 of the approximately 74 works included in the Salon of 1725 can be classified as genre paintings. By comparison, genre paintings made up approximately 14% and 12.5% of the works exhibited in 1699 and 1704, respectively. Nicolas Lancret, 1690-1743 (New York: H.N. Abrams in association with the Frick Collection, 1991), 25.
exhibited in 1725, among them, an outdoor bathing scene by Nicolas Lancret, now identified as *Les Plaisirs du bain* in the Louvre collection (fig. 8).\(^{45}\)

Two figural groups populate the foreground of this charming river scene, each occupying a separate section of the diagonally bisected composition. To the viewer’s right, a fashionable quartet enjoys an afternoon on the bank; to the left, a group of women takes up a shaded stretch of river, gathering alongside a boat that has presumably ferried them to their location. Following the course of the river back into the image, it becomes apparent that these women are not the only ones out enjoying the waters, as a second boat crosses the middle ground along a connecting waterway. Onboard, a pair of musicians serenades a group of women, one of whom is already dressed in her bathing gown, submerging her bare calf in the passing waters. Further in the distance, two more boats have pulled up along the riverbank, their canvas vaults visible just to the left of the oarsman guiding the boat in the middle ground.

While bathing rooms were a luxury in eighteenth-century France, found only in a small number of elite residences, outdoor bathing was a common activity across all levels of society. The average Parisian looking for a refreshing bath would wade out into the Seine from the favored quays, but those who could afford to would employ boatmen to take them further out to spots above and below Paris, where they enjoyed private use of less populated and less polluted waters. Small staked tents (*gores*) similar to those depicted behind the boat in the left foreground of Lancret’s work were installed in the river, providing ladies with the

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\(^{45}\) Lancret also exhibited a horse painting, a portrait of a man playing a guitar, a scene of an outdoor ball, a dance in a landscape (possibly *Dance Between Two Fountains*, Galerie Neue Meister, Dresden), and a work now identified as *Le repas de chasse*, also in the Louvre collection. On the identification of the two Louvre canvases as the pair exhibited at the Salon of 1725, see Marie-Catherine Sahut, Élisabeth Martin, and Claudia Sindaco-Domas, “*Le repas de chasse* et *Les Plaisirs du bain* de Nicolas Lancret,” *Technè* 30-31 (2009-2010): 162-169. Other artists to exhibit scenes from contemporary life at the Salon of 1725 include François Lemoyne, Charles Cypel, and Jean-François de Troy.
opportunity to bathe “sûrement, commodément, et secrètement.” But Lancret’s ladies are, of course, not bathing quite so secretly, subject as they are to the peeping sets of eyes on the bank. The external viewer of the painting, too, is privy to the scene and afforded a superior vantage point that allows for unobstructed views of the bathers. In placing the bathing ladies under the voyeurs’ curious eyes, Lancret presents a scene that would have been familiar to Salon visitors who had walked the Seine during the warm summer months: historical accounts of bathing in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century confirm that men and women flocked to popular bathing spots not only to bathe, but also to gaze.

The selection of such an everyday subject is indicative of a growing private market that favored contemporary scenes of pleasure and conviviality. With the nobility returning to the capital from Versailles following Louis XIV’s death in 1715 and a rising class of financiers equally eager to establish themselves in the capital, the Parisian market boomed as collectors filled the walls of their newly-built residences. Motivated by a different set of interests than those that led the market in the preceding decades, these private collectors increasingly distanced themselves from the Crown’s typical commissioning of aggrandizing portraits and instructive narratives drawn from ancient texts. Instead, they were looking for lighter fare—something to decorate and delight—and savvy artists quickly recognized this new market potential. Following the death of Antoine Watteau, the master of outdoor scenes of pleasure, Lancret and Jean-Baptiste Pater quickly met the market demand, turning out charming images of contemporary life. While their general output varies—with paintings of hunting parties and fairgrounds, dancing women and lovers coupled in conversation—both Lancret and Pater returned repeatedly to the theme of women bathing outdoors.

The bathing scenes of Lancret and Pater do more, however, than simply capture the pleasure of contemporary life. Their frequent pairing of male voyeurs and bathing ladies also calls to mind the Ovidian narrative of Diana and Actaeon, in which the mortal hunter Actaeon witnesses the goddess Diana bathing in the forest with her entourage of nymphs. As members of the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture who had come up through its school, Lancret and Pater knew their classical narratives well, both as a result of their own academic training and through the work of their colleagues. Yet, while the Academy promoted mythology on account of its grand moralizing lessons, early eighteenth-century artists increasingly selected classical narratives—either as direct or alluded sources—for their pleasurable potential.47 If Ovid was alive and well, it was on account of his ability to divert, entertain, and please, motivating nothing short of an “eclipse of the heroic by the sensual.”48

Even prior to the court’s return from Versailles, this shift was already underway, as Nicole Garnier-Pelle has discussed in relation to Antoine Coypel’s turn towards gallant mythological scenes in the final decade of the seventeenth century.49 With the royal Bâtiments no longer a viable source of patronage following the outbreak of the costly Nine Years’ War (1688–1697), even the great bastions of the Academy were forced to abandon le grand goût and adjust their production to meet the tastes of the private market. The selection of history paintings that hung alongside Lancret’s Les Plaisirs du bain at the Salon of 1725 reveals the degree to which artists had, by choice or necessity, embraced the turn toward

47 "The weakening of power of the court and of a versaillais aesthetic led to a distortion of mythology, which, during the rococo, functioned as little more than one possible mode for the expression of pleasure." Philippe Le Leyzour, “Myth and Enlightenment: On Mythology in the Eighteenth Century,” in Loves of the Gods, 23. While academic theory charged the arts with the task of entertaining and pleasing, this was always secondary to the primary goal of instruction.


sensual mythologies. In addition to two representations of Rinaldo and Armida, the lovers of Torquato Tasso’s sixteenth-century La Gerusalemme liberata, six paintings depicted amorous scenes taken from Ovid, among them, Diane et Actéon by Louis Galloche (1670–1761).\textsuperscript{50} Unlike so many of their contemporaries, Lancret and Pater never pursued gallant history painting—the notable exception being Lancret’s Diane et Callisto\textsuperscript{51}—yet, in infusing their bathing scenes with references to the visual iconography of the goddess Diana at her bath, they were able to capitalize on this market demand and elevate their works in the process.

With their clever allusions to Ovidian mythology, references to the practices of contemporary life, and underlying insistence on pleasure, the bathing scenes of Lancret and Pater were primed to satisfy the directives of the new market. Yet, despite the frequency with which the two artists represented the outdoor bath (a clear indicator of the subject’s appeal among their contemporaries), these works have received remarkably little scholarly attention, with discussions mostly limited to brief entries in museum and exhibition catalogues. If scholarship has too often skipped over these works altogether, it is perhaps because the paintings’ frequent pairing of gazing men and semi-nude women makes for a quick conclusion that the paintings were primarily directed at heterosexual male desire, with the depicted voyeurs functioning as stand-ins for the (presumed male) viewer. And indeed, it is easy—perhaps too easy—to see the works as both illustrating and reinforcing the dominant

\textsuperscript{50} In addition to Galloche’s work, Ovidian narratives are depicted in the following works from the Salon of 1725: Leda and the Swan, François de Troy; Callisto and Jupiter, Jean Restout II; Hercules and Omphale, The Rape of Europa, Apollo and Daphne, all by François Lemoyne.

\textsuperscript{51} On this work, which was once part of Frederick II’s Picture Gallery at Potsdam and has been lost since 1945, see cat. no. 52 in Christoph Martin Vogtherr, ed., Französische Gemälde I: Watteau, Pater, Lancret, Lajoüe (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2011), 475-479.
positioning of “woman as image, man as bearer of the look.” Yet, women purchased Rococo paintings that put the female nude body on display. Among such collectors we find the comtesse de Verrue (1670–1736), Madame de Pompadour (1721–1764), Queen Lovisa Ulrika of Sweden (1720–1782), and Catherine the Great (1729–1796), the latter two of whom owned bathing scenes by Pater and Lancret. While these examples are notable women of power, a more diversified population of women would have also had the opportunity to view such images through printed reproductions or when they appeared in public exhibitions.

Surely, many historical women saw more in these images than a straightforward objectification of the female body by the male gaze, and the same is certainly true of modern viewers of both sexes. As a woman who finds these images immensely satisfying, I am interested in the ways in which these images open themselves to additional avenues of interpretation and processes of viewership. What other pleasures can be found here, in both the subject matter and the execution of the works? How might viewers—historical and contemporary, female and male—respond to these works in ways that extend beyond or even


53 Lovisa Ulrika owned the bathing scene by Pater that is today in Sweden’s Nationalmuseum (fig. 12), which her brother acquired on her behalf from Count Gustav Tessin in 1749. See the entry on the painting in Catherine the Great & Gustav III (Helsingborg, Sweden: Boktryck AB, 1999), 432. Catherine the Great owned two bathing scenes by Lancret: Les Gentilles baigneuses (fig. 17), purchased from the heirs of Heinrich von Brühl in 1769; and L’Été (fig. 11), part his Four Seasons series commissioned by Jean-François Léger de La Faye, purchased from the Dutch dealer Johann Klosterman in 1782. On the sale of Les Gentilles Baigneuses, see Natalya Semyonova and Nicolas V. Iljine, eds., Selling Russia’s Treasures: The Soviet Trade in Nationalized Art, 1917-1938 (Paris: The M. T. Abraham Center for the Visual Arts Foundation, 2013), 150. On the Klosterman sale, see Mary Tavener Holmes, Nicolas Lancret: Dance Before a Fountain (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2006), 86.

54 Engravings after Lancret include reproductions of his Les Gentilles baigneuses, L’Été from the Léger de La Faye series, and Le Soir from the series on the Four Times of the Day (National Gallery, London). Several outdoor bathing scenes by Pater (all lost) were also engraved, including numbers 303bis, 311, 313, and 315 in Florence Ingersoll-Smouse, Pater (Paris: Les Beaux-Arts, 1928).
challenge the traditional patriarchal viewing dynamic? Following an overview of Lancret and Pater’s respective bodies of work on the theme, this chapter will investigate the role of visual pleasure within several pertinent areas: the historical bathing practices of early eighteenth-century Paris, the images’ various restagings of the Diana and Actaeon myth, and the aesthetic theories that guided the market for Rococo art. The bathing scenes of Lancret and Pater are, I argue, images that delight in the pleasures of looking, inviting the viewer to revel in the scene, the sensual experience of the bath, and the appeal of the painterly surfaces.

**Surveying Lancret and Pater**

Although Lancret did not depict the subject of the outdoor bath with the same frequency as Pater, he returned to the theme throughout his career. Nineteen outdoor bathing scenes are recorded in Georges Wildenstein’s *catalogue raisonné* of Lancret’s work, seven of which can currently be identified as secure attributions. The earliest example, an oval painting now in the Musée des Beaux-Arts of Rouen (fig. 9), is dated to *circa* 1718, while the final work, a lunette currently owned by the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco Museum (fig. 10), was produced *circa* 1740 as part of a series of overdoors for Louis XV’s chateau at Marly. Despite their shared subject matter, Lancret’s bathing scenes vary greatly in overall format, scale, and compositional approach, demonstrating an ability to adapt the theme to different contexts. In addition to the examples above, he produced small-scale pictures on the subject (*Jeunes femmes au bain*, Wallace Collection) and incorporated bathing scenes into

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series on the Seasons (L’Été, fig. 11) and the Times of the Day (Le Soir, National Gallery, London). While certain poses and actions are repeated in multiple canvases, each work maintains a unique character.  

Pater’s outdoor bathing scenes are, by comparison, both more numerous and more consistent in their approach. Florence Ingersoll-Smouse’s catalogue raisonné of Pater’s work includes nearly 60 painted scenes of female bathers, many of which are unsigned copies adapting existing compositions. The examples with the securest attribution are horizontally oriented canvases of a similar size (approximately 60-65 cm x 80-85 cm), which Pater began shortly following his admissions to the Academy in 1728. The earliest of such works to be dated with certainty is a painting purchased by Carl Gustaf Tessin in 1729, now in Sweden’s Nationalmuseum (fig. 12). Pater produced similar works on the theme until his death in 1736, consistently repeating the standard format seen in the Stockholm canvas: a large bathing party—sometimes of mixed company, though the bathers are always women—gathers around a circular pool that fills the central foreground and middle ground; man-made features, such as architectural structures, figural sculptures, and fountains, are placed along the perimeter of the bathing site; and the background is dominated by lush, billowing trees,

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56 For example: The woman clutching her breast in Les Plaisirs du bain also appears in L’Été, Le Soir, and Jeunes femmes au bain; Les Plaisirs, Jeunes femmes, and the Rouen Baigneuses depict a woman with a dropped left shoulder and tilted neck, shown from behind and submerged in water to her waist; L’Été and the Rouen Baigneuses depict a standing woman tilting her neck and extending a stretch of fabric, although the positioning of the Rouen figure’s head more closely matches that of the central woman in Lancret’s L’Automne (The Homeland Foundation); Les Plaisirs and L’Été depict a woman extending her hand down to splash water; and Les Gentilles baigneuses and L’Été depict a seated woman extending an arm overhead to remove her bathing gown.

57 Unlike Lancret, who only represented the outdoor bath, Pater set the scene indoors in Le Plaisir de l’été (discussed in the following chapter), now lost but known through an engraving and several painted copies. See Ingersoll-Smouse’s catalogue raisonné: no. 307 (Wallace Collection); no. 308 (Detroit Institute of Arts); and no. 309 (Potsdam).
the bowing branches of which frame a small opening to a distant landscape and atmospheric skies.\(^5\)

In addition to reemploying this overall formula, Pater produced groups of works that are closely related in their particular details as well. The Stockholm canvas, for example, is nearly identical in its specific figures and setting to paintings at the Musée des Beaux-Arts d’Angers and the National Galleries of Scotland, the latter differing only in the positioning of the woman seated in the left foreground. A second group of closely related works includes paintings in the Wallace Collection (fig. 13) and the Musée de Grenoble, as well as slightly smaller versions with greater variations in the Indianapolis Museum of Art and a private collection.\(^6\) Other works, such as paintings in the collections of the Neues Palais in Potsdam (fig. 14), the Toledo Art Museum (fig. 15), and the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art (fig. 16) are unique in particular aspects while nevertheless maintaining the general format of the examples listed above.

Pater was nothing if not consistent; his entire oeuvre is marked by a repetition of subjects and compositional preferences, which has lead to rather harsh evaluations of his talents and significance. Lancret has historically fared better when placed alongside Pater, in large part due to his fine draftsmanship and more innovative body of work.\(^7\) Both men,

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\(^5\) Pater deviates from this format only in several smaller scale cabinet pictures (approximately 17-20 cm x 20-28 cm), although he maintains a general approach within this group as well, filling nearly half of the canvas with three or four figures placed closer to the picture plane. Examples from Ingersoll-Smouse’s *catalogue raisonné* include: no. 303 (Residenzgalerie, Salzburg), 303bis (Plasa sale, 15 November 2013), no. 304 (Palais de Justice, Saint-Quentin), no. 304bis (Marc-Arthur Kohn sale, 25 March 2005), no. 305 (Louvre), no. 310bis (Musée Cognacq-Jay).


however, have long lived in the shadow of Watteau, an undeniable influence on the two younger artists. As early as 1723, Lancret was labeled an “emulator of the late M. Watteau,”\(^6\) and only in recent decades have scholars turned attention to the development of Lancret’s individual style and his critical role in the elevation of genre painting within early eighteenth-century France.\(^6\) Lancret worked for a time in the studio of Claude Gillot (1673–1722), as did Watteau, and it is likely that the two men were first acquainted through this connection. Although Lancret never studied formally with Watteau, the older artist reportedly advised Lancret on occasion, and his subject matter and formal technique greatly influenced Lancret’s early works.\(^6\)

Pater holds the distinction of being Watteau’s only known student, having trained under him as a young man after first meeting in their shared hometown of Valenciennes. The apprenticeship occurred sometime during Pater’s first stay in Paris (ca. 1710–1718) and was short-lived, reportedly on account of Watteau’s difficult temperament. The two men reconciled at the end of Watteau’s life and worked together at Nogent-sur-Marne in 1721, after which Pater reportedly told Edme-François Gersaint that “he owed all he knew to that short period of time.”\(^6\) Although Pater’s close adherence to the traditions of Watteau resulted in great market success in his day, his historical reputation has largely suffered from the connection. Pierre-Jean Mariette, writing after the death of Pater, claimed that the artist

\(^6\) “Nouvelles littéraires, des beaux arts, etc.,” *Mercure de France* (June 1723): 1175.

\(^6\) The critical reevaluation is due in large part to the considerable work of Mary Tavener Holmes. In addition to the previously cited publications, see also “Nicolas Lancret and Genre Themes of the Eighteenth Century” (Ph.D. dissertation, New York University, 1986).


had quickly fallen into obscurity as one would expect of a servile imitator, and he remains today a largely unstudied and underappreciated artist.\(^{65}\)

The tendency to consider Lancret and Pater in terms of their shared debt to Watteau, while potentially reductive, is in many ways unavoidable given the clear evidence of his influence over them. The lessons of Watteau are found in formal aspects of the younger artists’ works, such as the lightly daubed foliage, the broadly swept skies, and the painterly interest in the texture of fabrics. Moreover, Lancret and Pater frequently depicted figures strongly reminiscent of Watteau’s own. Lancret’s *Les Plaisirs du bain* and numerous bathing scenes by Pater, for example, include figures similar to the central of the three women in Watteau’s *La Proposition embarrassante* (Hermitage), shown from behind with their silk skirts trailing off to one side. The bathers raising their gowns overhead in Lancret’s *Les Gentilles baigneuses* (fig. 17) and *L’Été* seem to be derived from Watteau’s *Woman at her Toilet* (Wallace Collection), while the couple strolling arm-in-arm in the right foreground of Pater’s Stockholm bathing party could have easily wandered in from Watteau’s *L’Assemblée dans un parc* (Louvre).

Lancret and Pater were also, unquestionably, the primary inheritors of the tradition of the *fête galante* following Watteau’s death. In addition to their market success in this area, both were admitted to the Academy as specialists in the genre, the first since Watteau. The particular works I focus on in this chapter maintain much of the visual language established by Watteau’s *fête galante*, depicting large groups in peaceful outdoor settings with a general

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\(^{65}\) Pierre-Jean Mariette, “Jean-Baptiste Pater,” in *Abecedario de P. J. Mariette: et autres notes inédites de cet amateur sur les arts et les artistes*, 6 vols. (Paris: J-B Dumoulin, 1857-58), 4: 90. Nearly a century after its publication, Ingersoll-Smouse’s French-language *catalogue raisonné* is the only major work on Pater, with other discussions of the artist limited primarily to studies on Watteau and Lancret, as well as entries on single works in museum and exhibition catalogues.
spirit of pleasure and conviviality.\textsuperscript{66} Yet, as has long been noted in the literature on Lancret and Pater, the particular subject of their bathing scenes has no direct precedent in Watteau’s work.\textsuperscript{67} Although the female bather is not entirely absent from Watteau’s oeuvre—in addition to his well-known \textit{Diane au bain}, he also painted an indoor scene in which a woman prepares for a genital sponge bath, discussed in the following chapter—there are no known works by his hand that depict contemporary figures bathing out of doors.

In the catalogue for the recent exhibition \textit{De Watteau à Fragonard: les fêtes galantes}, Christoph Vogtherr and Mary Tavener Holmes justly called attention to the ways in which the bathing scenes of Lancret and Pater are novel contributions that significantly expand the field of the \textit{fête galante}.\textsuperscript{68} In addition to introducing the female nude to the genre, the subject of the outdoor bath imparts a narrative specificity to Lancret and Pater’s scenes that breaks from the ambiguity often found in Watteau’s work.\textsuperscript{69} In contrast to so many of Watteau’s \textit{fêtes galantes}, in which individuals gather together for no discernible reason, Lancret and Pater depict figures engaged in a particular activity that was popular, widely practiced, and publicly visible during the period.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[66] On the visual traditions and development of the \textit{fête galante}, see Christoph Martin Vogtherr and Mary Tavener Holmes, \textit{De Watteau à Fragonard: Les fêtes galantes} (Antwerp: Mercatorfonds, 2014), especially 19-36.
\item[67] This was first observed by Ingersoll-Smouse in \textit{Pater}, 13-14. Subsequent scholarship has generally reiterated the theme’s inventiveness when addressing the work of Pater and Lancret, with the notable exception of Donald Posner, who proposed (with little evident support) that unknown works by Watteau may have served as models for Pater’s bathing scenes. See Donald Posner, \textit{Watteau: A Lady at her Toilet} (New York: Viking Press, 1973), 36.
\item[68] Vogtherr and Holmes, \textit{De Watteau à Fragonard}, 36, 70-71, 77.
\end{footnotes}
Bathing and Gazing in Eighteenth-Century Paris

Although the images under review in this chapter should not be taken as straightforward records of bathing practices, they would have nevertheless called to the minds of their eighteenth-century viewers certain associations active in the period. The *Mercure de France*’s reviewer for the Salon of 1725, for example, found the scene depicted in Lancret’s *Les Plaisirs du bain* to be a familiar one, identifying the work as “Bain de Femmes. Vue de la Porte S. Bernard.” The Porte Saint-Bernard once towered along the quai de la Tournelle, the Left Bank section of the Seine that had long been a favored bathing spot for Parisians, along with the adjacent quai Saint-Bernard. The area’s association with bathing can be traced back to the early decades of the seventeenth century—Henri IV (1553–1610) and his son, Louis XIII (1601–1643) reportedly ventured down to the quai Saint-Bernard to bathe in the Seine’s waters—and the site’s popularity continued well into the eighteenth century. Given the rather vague physical location depicted in Lancret’s painting, the reviewer’s identification of the site as a particular stretch along the Parisian section of the Seine is somewhat curious. While the overgrown bank resembles outcroppings seen in a nineteenth-century representation of the area (fig. 18), Lancret’s scene is entirely devoid of any references to the city, its structures (including the triumphal gateway), or the great triumphal arch by Jean-François Blondel, the Porte Saint-Bernard was located on the present-day quai de la Tournelle, which begins at Pont Sully and ends just downriver from Pont l’Archevêché. The adjacent section between Pont Sully and Pont Austerlitz is today designated as the quai Saint-Bernard. The quai de la Tournelle was not, however, named as such until 1750, and it appears that prior to that point the entire area was referred to as either the quai Saint-Bernard or the Porte Saint-Bernard. For a history of the area, see Marc Gaillard, *Quais et Ponts de Paris* (Paris: CEP/Moniteur, 1982), 33-38.

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70 Similarly, Thomas Crow has cautioned against taking Watteau’s fêtes galantes to be “a literal rendering of the life around him, however much accuracy of description they might contain.” *Painters and Public Life in Eighteenth-Century France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 57.

71 “Exposition de Tableaux,” 2266.

72 Built in 1606 and replaced in 1670 with triumphal arch by Jean-François Blondel, the Porte Saint-Bernard was located on the present-day quai de la Tournelle, which begins at Pont Sully and ends just downriver from Pont l’Archevêché. The adjacent section between Pont Sully and Pont Austerlitz is today designated as the quai Saint-Bernard. The quai de la Tournelle was not, however, named as such until 1750, and it appears that prior to that point the entire area was referred to as either the quai Saint-Bernard or the Porte Saint-Bernard. For a history of the area, see Marc Gaillard, *Quais et Ponts de Paris* (Paris: CEP/Moniteur, 1982), 33-38.

73 Ibid., 38.
activity associated with this section of the Seine. Rather, the river extends indefinitely into
the background with an unbroken shoreline of heavy vegetation; the landscape, in sum,
seems more befitting the countryside. One may therefore assume that it is not the appearance
of the physical site but rather its association with public bathing (and gazing) that the
attributed title was meant to invoke.

The practice of outdoor bathing along the Seine was popular enough for the Parisian
government to issue an annual ordinance at the start of each summer from 1722 to 1752,
outlining proper bathing practices in an effort to maintain decency.\footnote{Ordonnance du Bureau de la ville concernant les bains de rivières (Paris, P.-A. Le Mercier, 1722).} The ordinance, in all of
its variations, stresses above all the necessity of regulating interactions among the sexes,
requiring the operators of bath boats to keep female bathers at an acceptable distance from
areas in which men bathed. Shameless and disrespectful men, it is claimed, enter the waters
naked and force women to abandon their bathing spots, while others, “under the pretext of
bathing, promenade naked along the banks of the river…where they play and spend most of
the day in this state,” subjecting women and girls to their immoral ways.\footnote{“…des hommes sans pudeur ni respect pour le sexe & par un esprit de dérèglement, entrent nus dans les Bains des femmes, d’où par leurs insolences ils les contraignent de sortir…un grand nombre de fainéants, vagabonds, gens sans aveu, & autres, sous prétexte de se baigner, se promenant nus le long des bords de la Rivière…où ils jouent & passent la plus grande partie du jour en cet état, & affectent de se présenter ainsi aux femmes & filles qui vont pour se baigner, & aux Blanchisseuses qui travaillent dans les bateaux, auxquelles ils tiennent des discours dissolus & contre l’honnêteté.” Ibid.} To ensure the
protection of these innocent women, the ordinances enacted harsh penalties on violators. In
the original version, boat operators who failed to maintain an appropriate distance between
male and female bathing parties were subject to a 300-\textit{livre} fine and confiscation of their
boats; men who bathed or gallivanted nude along the shores faced a 50-\textit{livre} fine and an
imprisonment of one to three months.
But if gazing was something of a problem for the authorities during the period in which Lancret and Pater’s paintings were produced, many Parisians seem to have felt differently. As evidenced by historical accounts, individuals cruised the banks of the Seine on foot and in carriages, hoping to catch glimpses of the bodies in the water, and there was perhaps no spot more frequented than the area surrounding the Porte Saint-Bernard. In contrast to the city ordinances, which cast women as innocent bystanders exposed to the sight of male bathers through no fault of their own, these popular accounts paint a very different picture. Jean de La Bruyère (1645–1696), for example, offered the following description of the Porte Saint-Bernard and the allure it held for women:

Everyone knows this long embankment that marks off and reinforces the banks of the Seine near the point where it enters Paris following its confluence with the Marne. Men bathe at its foot during the peak of the midsummer heat. One sees them at very close range, throwing themselves into the water; one sees them getting out of it; it is an amusement. Before this season arrives, the women of the town do not yet walk there, and when it has passed, they walk there no more.76

Several decades later, the spot had not lost its appeal according to Georges-Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon (1707–1788), who remarked in a letter from August 1732, “It’s excessively hot…The princesses are going to see the young men bathing at the Porte Saint-Bernard.”77

The area’s identity as a place to take in bathing bodies on display also turns up in *Les Bains de la Porte Saint Bernard*, a 1696 play attributed to the architect Germain Boffrand

76 “Tout le monde connaît cette longue levée qui borne et qui resserre le lit de la Seine, du côté où elle entre à Paris avec la Marne, qu’elle vient de recevoir. Les hommes s’y baignent au pied pendant les chaleurs de la canicule; on les voit de fort près se jeter dans l’eau; on les en voit sortir: c’est un amusement. Quand cette saison n’est pas venue, les femmes de la ville ne s’y promènent pas encore; et quand elle est passée, elles ne s’y promènent plus.” Jean de La Bruyère, *Les caractères de Théophraste: traduits du grec, avec Les Caractères ou Les mœurs de ce siècle*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Estienne Michallet, 1692), 258-259.

(1667–1754), in which the female protagonist Angelique feigns an illness and secures a medical recommendation to spend the evening bathing in the river, a clever cover for an illicit rendezvous with her lover Octave. The doctor issuing the order is Octave’s servant in disguise, but the ruse works, and Angelique’s father grants permission despite his valet’s concerns that the young lady will be subjected to the gazes of men and presented with the opportunity to do some looking of her own. As it turns out, Angelique is never ‘compromised’ in this way, as the third act spirals out from farce to fantasy, ending with Angelique’s betrothal to a triton of the Seine. As the play closes in song, the triton declares of the Porte Saint-Bernard:

| Tout Paris est à la nage       | All of Paris is swimming           |
| Le long de ci rivage;         | Along this shore;                  |
| Tout Paris est à la nage,     | All of Paris is swimming,          |
| Ah! que de corps nus!         | Ah! So many nude bodies!           |
| Ici les coeurs sont émus       | Here, hearts are stirred           |
| Quand les yeux vont au fourrage, | When eyes go foraging,              |
| Quand les belles y vont au pillage, | When beauties go there pillaging,  |
| Que les traits d’amour sont drus! | The spears of love are so plentiful! |

With “so many nude bodies” along the shores of the Seine, the custom of public bathing was creating something of a scandal in Paris, leading to the institution of the city’s first enclosed bath boats in 1680. The Encyclopédie entry on Bains confirms the vessels’ continued use into the eighteenth century, describing the covered wooden boats (toue) that ferried bathers out to a series of stakes posted in the river. After undressing in the privacy

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79 Gaillard, Quais de Paris, 33.

80 “Parmi nous, les bains publics sur la rivière, ne sont autre chose que de grands bateaux, appelés toue, faits de sapin, & couverts d'une grosse toile, autour desquels il y a de petites échelles attachées par des cordes, pour descendre dans un endroit de la rivière où l'on trouve des pieux enfoncés d'espace en espace, qui soutiennent
of the covered interior, bathers entered the water using ladders hung from the side of the boat, as illustrated in a 1706 engraving (fig. 19) by Bernard Picart (1673–1733). But, as Picart’s image suggests, the popular association of outdoor bathing with the public display of bodies remained firm even after such reformative measures were enacted.

In his print, Picart establishes a contrast between the privacy offered by the boat’s vaulted interior, draped on all sides with heavy fabric, and the visibility of the women’s bodies once in the water. Free from the layers of clothing that covered their bodies prior to disrobing, the women are now dressed only in bathing robes that open at the front to reveal their breasts. As the central woman eases into the water, the back of her robe is caught up on the ladder, exposing her backside (unknowingly, it seems) to a man peering out from behind the canvas flap hanging from the boat. The women do not notice this man’s presence; not only is he well concealed but their attention is directed elsewhere, to the viewer. In contrast to the clandestine, lecherous peeper at the edge of the boat, the viewer is both acknowledged and seemingly welcomed by the women. Despite their semi-nude states, the women appear at ease, responding with coyly tilted heads, slight smiles, and attentive gazes. The woman on the ladder, for example, makes no real attempt to cover herself, casually gathering a bit of her gown between her fingers but leaving visible her chest and a flash of her open thighs.

The print’s accompanying verse, inscribed below the image and addressed to a bather named Iris, suggests that although Iris’s bath is intended to calm the fire that consumes her, it will only further arouse her amorous senses, along with those of her lover.81 When image and text are taken together, the woman on the ladder most readily assumes the role of Iris due to

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81 En vain par la fraîcheur d’un bain délicieux / Vous cherchez à calmer le feu qui vous dévore / Iris c’est le moyen encore / D’irriter vos sens amoureux / Et de rendre bientôt heureux / Le tendre amant qui vous adore.
her compositional priority, with the viewer cast as her lover, whom the verse implies is present and delighted by the sight before him. Given the image’s low vantage point, the viewer-lover is placed in the position of another bather already wading in the waters that extend to the edge of the scene’s oval frame. Might, then, the described arousal of Iris’s amorous senses be the result of her own desiring gaze as she looks upon her lover’s body exposed by the bath? As indicated by the reports of La Bruyère and the comte de Buffon, as well as the above-cited verses from the *Les Bains de la Porte Saint Bernard*, men were not the only ones scoping the shores and waters of the Seine.

According to official and popular accounts—which, it should be said, do not allow for the possibility of homosexual desire—the scandal, and the thrill, of the outdoor bath was the potential opportunity to gaze at the opposite sex. Yet, rather than presenting outdoor bathing as an activity through which both sexes can enjoy the pleasures of the bath and the display of bodies offered there, Lancret and Pater exclusively take the female bather as their primary focus. With the exception of two paintings by Lancret, to which I will return below, the male bather makes no appearance in their works. While indicative of the general absence of male bathers in eighteenth-century French art, this preference for female bathers also ties the works more closely to the classical and biblical narratives of the bath, in which men look and women bathe.

**Revisions of the Goddess Diana**

Among the most familiar classical bathing scenes, representations of the goddess Diana held a favored place in eighteenth-century French art, appearing regularly in the public Salon exhibitions. In addition to more general scenes in which Diana bathes with her coterie of nymphs, representations of her encounter Actaeon were displayed in thirteen of the thirty-
nine public Salons held in the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{82} Best known from Ovid’s \textit{Metamorphoses}, the scene is set outdoors in a shaded grotto, where “the goddess of the wild woods, when weary of the chase, was wont to bathe her maiden limbs in crystal waters.”\textsuperscript{83} As Diana and her nymphs take to the water to cool themselves, the mortal Actaeon, also completing a day of hunting, stumbles across the site and catches a glimpse of the chaste goddess’s nude body. This intrusion into the all-female space cannot go unpunished, and it takes only a quick splash of water from Diana for Actaeon to be transformed into a stag and set upon by his own hounds. No longer recognizing their master, the hounds rip him to pieces, serving up the ultimate punishment for his offensive gaze.

Writing of Lancret’s practice in general, and the same can be said here of Pater’s, Mary Tavener Holmes has noted the way in which many of his works present themselves as genre scenes while employing classical iconography drawn from history painting, regarded as the highest form of artistic production by the French Academy.\textsuperscript{84} For the savvy viewer, recognizing classical references in such seemingly contemporary scenes would have been more than a source of amusement; it was also a key component of social identity and a crucial marker of cultural credibility.\textsuperscript{85} In infusing their works with the visual language of Diana at the bath, Lancret and Pater were therefore able to elevate their bathing scenes above

\textsuperscript{82} On general Diana imagery at the Salons, see Levine, “To See or Not to See,” 74, 89n11.


\textsuperscript{84} “If superficially the works retain the appearance of genre, they are supported by an underpinning of iconography. Of course, this touch of intellectual rigor moved Lancret one step closer to history painting. He showed that such discipline need not accompany only themes of great moral or philosophical import; it could be put as well to the service of charm and wit.” Holmes, \textit{Nicolas Lancret: Dance Before a Fountain}, 27.

the rather lowly academic status accorded to traditional genre painting while simultaneously providing private patrons the opportunity to present their classical knowledge in a witty and playful fashion.

Although Lancret and Pater clearly establish their bathers as contemporary women—chiefly through the period clothing discarded along the water’s edge and worn by women watching from the bank—numerous aspects of their bathing scenes cleverly reference key elements of Diana imagery. Like Diana and her entourage, women gather together in small units at the center of the canvas, while men frequently assume the role of Actaeon, looking in on the scene from behind walls or brushes of foliage. Both artists often favor compositional arrangements that privilege a single female figure over the others, offering up a modern Diana set amongst her nymphs. In such cases, one or more of the accompanying figures assume the duties typically assigned to Diana’s attendants, either attempting to shield the body of the central bather, as seen in several of Lancret’s works (fig. 8, 9, 11), or drying her feet, a common feature in Pater’s paintings (fig. 13–15). In Pater’s Potsdam and Toledo canvases (fig. 14, 15), the primary figure is positioned beneath a canopy, a traditional demarcation of the goddess’s sacred space that appears in numerous Renaissance and Baroque depictions of the story. In both paintings, the fabric draped between two trees is strongly reminiscent of the identically colored curtain in Titian’s famous Diana and Actaeon (1556–9, National Gallery of Scotland), a work that was part of the Orléans collection open to artists and amateurs during the eighteenth century.86 Although Lancret and Pater omit the bow and quiver frequently represented at Diana’s side, hunting dogs—specifically, spaniels and whippets—feature in Lancret’s L’Été and nearly all of Pater’s bathing scenes.

86 Alan Winternute, Important Old Master Paintings, Part I (New York: Christie's, 2005), 107.
Produced during a period in which mythological paintings were increasingly losing their didactic edge and rigid genre designations were breaking down, these images astutely move between the realms of mythology and contemporary life. The sort of demythologization seen in the bathing scenes of Lancret and Pater has its most immediate precedent in a representation of the goddess Diana by Watteau. In his Diane au bain (fig. 20), produced circa 1715–16, the quiver and arrows resting in the left foreground suggest the bather’s identity as the goddess of the hunt, yet little else marks this as a classical scene. With none of the stately airs of the chaste Diana, Watteau’s figure bears a greater resemblance, as commentators have long observed, to the subject of his pastel study Half-Nude Woman Seated on a Chaise Lounge (British Museum). Giving the figure the goddess’s symbolic attributes while imbuing her with the contemporaneity of a “sweet little parisienne,” Watteau ironically merges the sacred and the profane into a single figure. The setting of Watteau’s work also breaks from conventional representations of Diana at the bath, as she is removed from the shaded grotto of Ovid, separated from her nymphs, and set against an open landscape that includes smoke rising from a cottage chimney. As Colin Bailey has noted, although the buildings depicted in the background are frequently described

87 Watteau’s departure from traditional Diana imagery is discussed at length in Colin Bailey’s catalogue entry for Diana at Her Bath [no. 13] in The Loves of the Gods, 180-185.


89 Quoted in Grasselli and Rosenberg, Watteau, 1684-1721, 309.
as Venetian in character, they also bear resemblance to studies Watteau produced on-site in the Parisian suburb of Porcherons.\footnote{Bailey, \textit{The Loves of the Gods}, 182.}

Even more traditionally academic representations of Diana at her bath produced during the opening decades of the eighteenth century occasionally broke from Ovid’s narrative in significant ways, particularly in regards to the character of Diana. As Steven Levine has argued in his evaluation of Diana imagery in eighteenth-century France, the goddess undergoes significant shifts during the course of the century, eventually coming to abandon her duties as the vengeful protectress of chastity.\footnote{As Levine notes, this transformation extends to all the principle players in the Ovidian stories of Diana: “During the course of the eighteenth century Actaeon is forgiven his intrusion, Callisto is pardoned her transgression, and Diana withholds her punitive gaze.” Levine, “To See or Not to See,” 86.} This change is particularly pronounced in the work of Lancret and Pater’s contemporary, Jean-François de Troy, who represented Diana at the bath on several occasions, including two canvases specifically depicting the Actaeon narrative: his large-format \textit{Diane surprise par Actéon} in Basel (fig. 21) and a smaller work in a private collection (fig. 22). Compared to Watteau’s depiction of Diana, de Troy’s canvases are rather orthodox in several aspects. In addition to more overtly signaling Diana’s identity through the inclusion of her crescent diadem, de Troy also places the goddess in the company of her nymphs and maintains the setting described by Ovid. In both paintings, however, de Troy has replaced the banishing curse of the virgin goddess with something closer to a response one might expect of a lover. In the smaller work, Diana looks to Actaeon with her lips parted in a sweet smile, leaning towards the hunter and extending a hand as if beckoning him to join her in her sacred space. As the fully transformed Actaeon flees the scene in the Basel canvas, Diana appears disappointed to see him go, responding to
his departure with a sense of wistful longing in her gaze and gesture.\textsuperscript{92} The novelty of de Troy’s approach is evident when his works are placed alongside Louis Galloche’s treatment of the subject (fig. 23), in which Actaeon’s unwelcome presence is clearly conveyed by Diana’s boldly extended arm and stern expression, as well as the more frantic responses of the nymphs. Diana’s gesture is repeated by the crouching figure in the right foreground of Galloche’s canvas, who raises a hand out towards the viewer. With wide eyes and her mouth agape, she seems to be issuing a warning, imploring the viewer—always figured as a second Actaeon in such images—to turn away from the sight of Diana’s nude body or meet the same fate as the cursed hunter.

The transgressive nature associated with the gaze in Ovid’s narrative, so central to traditional Diana imagery such as Galloche’s canvas, is greatly lessened in the contemporary bathing scenes of Lancret and Pater. No longer punished for looking upon the female form, the modern Actaeons participating in the scenes—be they the voyeurs depicted within or the viewers standing before them—are not only permitted but also encouraged to look in many instances. Of the images in which members of the bathing party have caught notice of the voyeurs peering in from the periphery of the main scene, Lancret’s Rouen canvas (fig. 9) is the only example in which the depicted onlookers are fully prevented from viewing the bather’s nude body. In this work, however, the voyeurs are figured as curious young boys, suggesting that the veiling of the bather’s body is perhaps as much an attempt to protect children’s innocence as the woman’s virtue. Although a bather wading in the water in Lancret’s \textit{L’Été} has spotted the group of men hidden in the trees at left and now hurries to cover the exposed body of the woman seated atop the rock, she is alone in her endeavors at

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid., 83; Bailey, \textit{The Loves of the Gods}, 236.
modesty (fig. 24). As she ineffectively extends an arm in a pose reminiscent of the protective nymphs who furiously concealed the nude Diana, her concern is undercut by the responses of those around her. Rather than joining in on the effort, another woman in the water splashes at this chaste companion: the splash of water that once punished Actaeon for gazing on the nude Diana now chastises the sole figure attempting to inhibit the same action. The bather atop the rock, for her part, has also spotted the group of voyeurs, yet nothing about her manner suggests their presence is unwelcome. With a slight smile on her lips, she positions herself to optimally reveal her body to the men.

Several works by Pater likewise depict voyeurs who are allowed to gaze freely at the women gathered in and around the water. In his Potsdam canvas (fig. 14), for example, several women at the left edge of the bathing pool turn their attention towards the peeping trio hidden amongst the trees behind them, but they make no effort to prevent the men from looking a little longer. Similarly, the woman wading in the water at the lower right corner of the Wallace canvas (fig. 13) has spotted, but shows no concern for, the group of voyeurs eagerly leaning in over the foliage at left. And finally, while the man straining to see past the tree set at the right edge of the Toldeo bathing party (fig. 15) goes unnoticed by the group, the two young men peering over the wall at left have caught the attention of the woman standing at the edge of the bathing pool. Rather than warning her companions of the intruders, the woman seems to be teasing the young men, gently fingering the scooped neck of her bodice and raising her heavy skirts to show off a bit of stockinged leg.

In addition to acknowledging the voyeurs depicted within the scenes, certain figures in Pater’s Toledo canvas and Lancret’s L’Été directly address the external viewer as well. Two women in Lancret’s L’Été—one in the water and the other standing atop the rock—
look out of the image with suggestive glances and coyly tilted heads, turning their upper bodies towards the picture plane as if presenting themselves to the viewer (fig. 24). Although the woman in the water places a hand over her left breast, the gesture seems intended to draw attention to her body rather than conceal it. The sensuality imparted by her delicate fingers gently touching her exposed flesh is particularly pronounced when compared to the mirrored action of her chaste companion standing in front of the rock, who forcefully clutches her gown to her chest in an effort to protect her body from the voyeurs’ gazes. The bather emerging from the water in Pater’s Toledo canvas likewise responds to the presence of the external viewer, turning her head towards the picture plane as she crawls onto the bank (fig. 25). Despite her revealing position, the woman appears pleased with the attention, meeting the viewer’s gaze directly and flashing a clever smile broad enough to reveal a glint of her teeth.

Looking Beyond the Male Gaze

Due to the seductive manner with which they openly display their bodies to either the image’s internal voyeurs or its external viewers, many of Lancret and Pater’s female bathers might be said to assume what Laura Mulvey has called the “traditional exhibitionist role,” in which women are “simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness.”93 Yet, while such figures may have served (and can still serve) as objects of desire for heterosexual male viewers, the viewing dynamics at play in the bathing scenes of Lancret and Pater are significantly more complex than such a cursory characterization would suggest. Although the particulars vary with each work, Lancret and Pater consistently present a

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multiplicity of viewing positions that prevent the fixing of a clear subject-object relationship, both within and outside of the image. Yes, men look at—and potentially desire—women; but women look as well, both at men and at other women.

Of the works in which a bather acknowledges the presence of a depicted voyeur, I am particularly interested Lancret’s *L’Été*, in which the bather seated atop the rock seems to embody Mulvey’s notion of a woman who “holds the look, plays to and signifies male desire.” I am, however, much more intrigued by the fact that the woman is also presented as a *subject* of desire. Not only does she return the gaze of the man eagerly leaning forward from behind the tree, their sightlines cutting across the center of the image along a shared horizontal axis, but her expression also clearly suggests that she is pleased by what she sees. On the one hand, it can be argued that such a reciprocation of desire serves only as a means by which to further enhance the woman’s appeal for her male audience, slipping into the realm of heterosexual male fantasy in which a woman eagerly awaits sexual fulfillment by an able lover. While it is important to acknowledge this possibility, stopping there leaves female viewers in an unsatisfactory position should they wish to identify with this woman, whose own desires amount to little more than another avenue to objectification in such a scenario.

The issue of female viewers (and their potential desires) is particularly pertinent in regards to Lancret’s *L’Été* as it was at one time owned by Catherine the Great. Without attempting to presume the painting’s appeal to this female collector, my own interpretivist desires incline me to hope that Catherine, noted lover that she was, may have taken pleasure in Lancret’s depiction of a woman who looks directly to the men who look at her, freely acknowledging her own sexuality in her forthright expression. Prior to being acquired by

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94 Ibid.
Catherine the Great, the painting had hung, along with its pendants depicting the other three seasons, in the salon of the Parisian hôtel belonging to the diplomat Jean-François Leriget de La Faye (1674–1731), a key member of the circle of collectors associated with Jeanne-Baptiste d'Albert de Luynes, comtesse de Verrue. Given the close relationship between Leriget de La Faye and the comtesse de Verrue and their shared taste in art—he bequeathed to her a dozen works from his collection—Lancret’s painting would have been known and admired by the independent comtesse, who might, too, have delighted in the work for as much for its erotic potential as its brilliant execution. Based on the comtesse’s own collection of paintings, which included sensual mythological scenes, as well as the presence in her vast library of a number of libertine titles deemed too licentious to include in her posthumous sale, this may have indeed been likely.

Were the comtesse de Verrue or Catherine the Great to imagine themselves in the role of the woman seated atop the rock in Lancret’s L’Été, they would be not simply be eyeing men, but nude men. As is also the case in his Gentilles baigneuses, another work owned by Catherine the Great, the voyeurs in L’Été are figured as male bathers who have perhaps wandered over from a nearby stream, their lower bodies shrouded by foliage but their bare torsos clearly visible (fig. 26). In Les Gentilles baigneuses, the women have not yet spotted the peeping men, but the voyeurs’ discovery seems imminent given the close proximity of the two groups; the seated bather needs only to raise her gaze just a little. Although the female form remains the primary subject of L’Été and Les Gentilles baigneuses, the inclusion of male bathers, even if only shown in partial view, is significant. In keeping with the

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95 On the tastes and personal collections of the comtesse de Verrue, Leriget de La Faye, and their associates, who avidly collected works by Lancret, Pater, and other artists depicting the pleasures of contemporary life, see Rochelle Ziskin, Sheltering Art: Collecting and Social Identity in Early Eighteenth-Century Paris (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012). An inventory of Leriget de La Faye’s hôtel listing the Lancret series on the Four Seasons is provided as an appendix.
historical accounts of the Seine, Lancret’s works establish the outdoor bath as an activity through which both men and women may indulge in the pleasures of looking at the opposite sex. In attempting to catch a glimpse of the bathing women, the male voyeurs expose their own bodies, which may, in turn, serve as sources of visual pleasure for the women in the scene. And if, as is routinely suggested in such a scenario, the voyeurs function as stand-ins for the external male viewer, Lancret’s works place the latter in a rather unique position: to identify with the represented voyeurs is to become both the subject and the potential object of the gaze.

An equally interesting relationship between the external viewer and the represented voyeurs is established in Lancret’s *Plaisirs du bain* (fig. 8), a work that, like his overdoor now in the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, depicts both male and female voyeurs. Of the four figures seated on the bank in *Plaisirs du bain*, the man and woman nearest to the bathers are most actively engaged by the action in the water, and it is to this pair that the viewer’s eye is first drawn. Positioned along the painting’s central vertical axis and set in front of a tree that boldly sweeps down from the upper half of the image, the couple is further emphasized by the circular patch of light that so effectively illuminates both the man’s face and the exquisite pink fabric of the lady’s skirt. This captivating duo serves as the viewer’s entry point into the scene, as the figures’ gazes and casually leaning bodies lead the eye from the riverbank to the group of women congregated in the water. If we follow the sightline of the man, however, it is clear that he is not looking at the female bathers but is instead caught in an exchange with the finely attired women seated in the boat at the canvas’s left edge. It is his female companion on the riverbank who is the true voyeur to the bathing scene. In rendering this figure from a rear view with her face obscured, Lancret encourages viewers to
place themselves in the position of this female voyeur and, in turn, to look not just at women, but as a woman.

Elisabeth Young-Bruehl has addressed the similar ways in which the viewing dynamics depicted within Pierre-Auguste Renoir’s *Large Bathers* (fig. 27) can challenge the dominance of an external masculine gaze. In a letter reproduced in Linda Nochlin’s study of bathing in nineteenth-century French art, Young-Bruehl writes, “It seems to me that viewers, male and female, are being invited to identify with the female viewers in the painting...[M]en are being welcomed not just as men, but as women as well, that is, in both the masculine and the feminine ‘positions.’”96 While this assessment applies to the depiction of female voyeurs in Lancret’s *Plaisirs du bain* and San Francisco overdoor, the female viewers in the painting that Young-Bruehl writes of are not voyeurs, but fellow bathers actively engaged in looking at their companions, a common feature in the bathing scenes of Lancret and Pater as well.

In several notable cases, Lancret and Pater establish visual correspondences between the women who gaze from within the bounds of the bathing party and the voyeurs who look in on the scenes from the outside. In Lancret’s *Plaisirs du bain*, for example, the bather leaning against the riverbank in the lower left foreground mirrors the posture of the female voyeur watching from above, both shown in rear view with one arm bent and the other extended as they turn their heads towards the bathers splashing one another. Similarly, the woman positioned at the extreme left of the Wallace bathing party and the male voyeur in the red beret look in unison to the bather standing at the center of the composition, their faces shown in profile and their necks extending forward for a better view (fig. 28). These gazing bathers are doubly active as both spectators to and participants in the bath; they are able to

96 Quoted in Nochlin, *Bathers, Bodies, Beauty*, 11-12.
enjoy the pleasure of looking upon the female form—and unlike the voyeurs, they do so without restrictions—while also experiencing the pleasure of the bath itself.

In works such as Pater’s Toldeo and Potsdam canvases or Lancret’s *Plaisirs* and *L’Été*, the bathers’ gazes, gestures, and overlapping bodies create compositional circuits that bind them together as a single unit. As a female viewer, I find something satisfying about this homosocial space where women come together, aware of but unthreatened by the male presence. In much the same way that Eunice Lipton has described the appeal of François Boucher’s later representations of all-female groupings, I see these as images in which women “seem beyond the bounds of male control…with time on their hands and pleasure on their horizon.”97 In contrast to the interconnectedness of the women gathered in and around the water, the depicted voyeurs are kept on the periphery, sequestered by high rock walls and foliated branches. In Lancret’s *L’Été* and nearly all the scenes by Pater, the external viewer is positioned similarly, offered a bare spot in the center foreground of the composition yet still not granted direct access into the scene. A plank of wood or series of rocks typically runs along the ground at this point, creating a clear demarcation between the space of the viewer and that of the bathers.

When men are depicted within the boundaries of the bathers’ space, as is the case in many of Pater’s works, they remain at the edges of the group, and their focus is nearly always on the fully dressed ladies on the bank. Unlike the voyeurs, for whom the female body is a source of visual fascination, these socializing men are primarily occupied by other pursuits, namely proper courtship. In the Stockholm *Bathers* (fig. 12) and its related canvases, for example, Pater omits the voyeurs but shows three men in the central scene,

97 Eunice Lipton, “Women, Pleasure and Painting (e.g., Boucher),” *Genders* 7 (March 1990): 82.
each partnered by a woman at one of the three points of the pyramidal arrangement of figures. Despite the presence of some of the most scantily clad bathing figures in the whole of Pater’s oeuvre, the men remain fully attentive to their clothed female companions.98

While several of Pater’s works include examples of what Mary Vidal has called “the refusal theme,”99 in which a woman resists the overeager advances of a male suitor, the aggressor’s actions are offset by the more civilized behavior of other men in the party. In *La Barque de plaisir* (fig. 29), two of the men politely escort their female companions aboard the boat, while another work in a private collection (fig. 30) includes a male musician serenading his lady, as well as a relaxed couple enjoying a carafe of wine together. A notable exception that does not present a more gentlemanly alternative to the inappropriate actions of the male aggressors is an unfinished work in the Musée de Grenoble (fig. 31), in which two men disrupt the otherwise pleasant gathering of women.100 To the left of center, a man hunches forward to eye one of the bathers, grasping onto the skirt of the woman in front of him, who leans away, seemingly unsettled by his presence; at right, a second man presses towards a seated woman, wrapping his arms around her waist as she rejects his advances.

As Christoph Vogtherr has suggested, although the unfinished state of the Grenoble canvas may be due to Pater’s death, it is equally possible that the work served as a painted *esquisse*.101 It is, notably, nearly identical in its dimensions and general composition to his

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98 Notably, the woman standing at the apex of the group has turned her attention away from her male suitor and instead engages in a visual exchange with the nude bather seated on the rock.


100 In finding the men’s presence disruptive to the overall tone of the work, I differ from Christoph Vogtherr, who has suggested that, although the men “accost [the women] in aggressive manner, the general ambiance is peaceful.” *De Watteau à Fragonard*, 70.

101 Ibid, 71.
finished work in the Wallace Collection (fig. 13), the most significant difference between the two being the shift in tone of the male-female pairings. In the Wallace version, the men no longer grasp and grope; the women no longer recoil in disgust. The woman at left now leans in towards the man, as the two look in unison at one of the bathers in the water. The second couple, meanwhile, engages in polite conversation rather than a tense struggle. If the Grenoble canvas was indeed an *esquisse* for the Wallace painting, as I believe it was, these alterations are significant. Beyond simply restoring a sense of calm and harmony to the scene, the actions of the Wallace couples highlight the pleasures of looking and conversing, two activities early eighteenth-century aesthetic theory frequently associated with the process of viewing colorist painting.

**The Language of the Eyes**

The Academy’s weakened status during the early decades of the eighteenth century opened the door for new voices to direct aesthetic preferences, most significant among them Roger de Piles, an *amateur* whose writings broke from academic doctrine on the objective of painting.\(^{102}\) While the Academy regarded painting, in its highest form, as a source of intellectual stimulation, de Piles declared pleasure—specifically, a pleasure that originates in the act of looking—to be the medium’s ultimate objective. In his “On the Excellence of Painting,” published over a decade after the death of de Piles, the artist Antoine Coypel

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102 Although de Piles was elected Amateur Counselor of the Academy in 1699, his most important critical and theoretical work was primarily supported by private, aristocratic collectors, chief among them Pierre Crozat. On Crozat’s support of de Piles, see Crow, *Painters and Public Life*, 39.
continued to promote vision’s key role in this process, noting the transfixing ways painting “so agreeably occupies the eyes, the spirit and the imagination.”

For de Piles and his followers, painting operates first and most powerfully through vision, making the act of viewing a work a sensuous experience rather than an intellectual exercise. While I use the term ‘sensuous’ here in its original meaning—that is, relating to a satisfaction achieved by way of the senses—there is also in de Piles’s writing a “pervasively erotic aura that his vocabulary lends to the experience of painting,” as Svetlana Alpers has noted. De Piles figures the painting and the viewer as if participating in an exchange, in which the painting is charged with an array of tasks: it seduces and strikes the eyes; it surprises, seizes, and beckons the viewer. For de Piles, painting’s chief allure is its coloring, a quality that had long been associated with the feminine due to its link to artifice and, by extension, makeup. Yet, rather than condemning color on account of these associations, de Piles champions its ability to capture the viewer’s attention and, in turn, provide pleasure. The seductive charm promoted by de Piles and his followers is found in what Richard Rand has called “the lure of the surface—in which the succulent passages of painting, the creamy folds of drapery, the glowing tones of flesh continually appeal to the eye of the beholder.”

The visual appeal of the painted surface was too great for even La Font de Saint-Yenne, the first public critic of the Rococo, to dismiss entirely. As he lamented and railed against the

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dethroning of subject matter as the prime element of painting, La Font nevertheless concedes
the appeal of a de Pilesian aesthetic (without naming it outright), of “seductive imitation, a
freshness and a melting of colors, a suavity of the brush and so on. All these objects are
presented to our eyes with the artifice and the picturesque magic necessary to amuse our look
and to have them placed in our cabinets.”106

Cast as an active agent in de Piles’s viewing process, the painting-as-seductress must
compel the viewer to come forward as if being called to conversation.107 The bathing scenes
of Lancret and Pater—with figures coyly looking to the depicted voyeurs or the external
viewer, and others already engaged in tête-à-têtes—provide a compelling thematization of de
Piles’s aesthetic theory, in which seduction is followed by rich dialogue carried out through
what Coypel calls the langage des yeux. And while both de Piles and Coypel write always of
masculine viewers, this language of the eyes, of course, is a language open to all, regardless
of sex. I cannot help but think here of the couple attentively studying the bathing scene
displayed on an easel in Watteau’s L’Enseigne de Gersaint (fig. 32), the man inspecting the
bather’s bodies while the woman turns attention to the rendering of the foliage and skies in
the upper section, each with their looking devices poised at the surface of the canvas.

Lancret and Pater excel in presenting a range of surface attractions in their bathing
scenes. These are images that reward attentive looking, with every section of the canvas
offering up points of visual interest. Their skies are swept with streaks of color (fig. 33, 34,
details); flowers and bits of foliage are rendered in daubs and dashes (fig. 28, 34); billowing
fabric is formed by swirls and stripes of paint (fig. 35, 36); cheeks are highlighted by soft

106 La Font de Saint-Yenne, Sentiments sur quelques ouvrages de peinture… (1754), quoted in Marian Hobson,
The Object of Art: The Theory of Illusion in Eighteenth-Century France (Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press, 1982), 69.

107 Roger de Piles, Cours de peinture par principes (Paris: Jacques Estienne, 1708), 4.
patches of pink. Their painterly skills are equally on display in their depictions of water. In his Toledo Bathing Party, for example, Pater presents water in a variety of forms, each executed in its own way: still water, running water, splashed water, light and shimmering water falling from the edge of the fountain, dark and deep water resting in the gray interior of the pool. As reflective surfaces, the areas of standing water hold a particular visual interest, picking up surrounding colors and capturing the effects of light and shadow. Pater’s bathing pools are often punctuated by strokes of bright paint, reflecting the pink of the sky or the yellow of the dress, while Lancret’s larger expanses of water become broad passages of blended color.

In addition to being the primary means by which the viewer explores the painting, vision might also be considered a secondary subject of the works themselves. The bathing scenes of Lancret and Pater put forth a privileging of vision befitting the aesthetic interests of the period; these are scenes where the very act of looking is on display. In Pater’s Toledo canvas, for example, all of the figures—the bathers, the ladies on the bank, the voyeurs, even the sculptures—actively create circuits of vision, leading viewers across the canvas as they follow the diagonal sightlines back and forth (fig. 37). In his Nelson-Atkins canvas, the majority of the figures are arranged along a rising diagonal from left to right, creating a crescendo of gazes with each head turned in a different direction, each figure momentarily lost in his or her own moment visual reverie.

**Visualizing a Sense of Touch**

While the bathing scenes of Lancret and Pater embrace visual pleasure as both pictorial subject and external response, certain haptic pleasures are also called up by the tactile application of the paint described above as well as the emphasis on touch within the
scenes. Careful looking activates the viewer’s sense of touch, sparking a desire to follow the artist’s brush across the sweeps and daubs forming the skies, the landscapes, and the splendid displays of fabric and flesh. And touch is activated everywhere within the images themselves as fingertips are dotted in pink, like rosy sensory clusters responding to the range of stimuli around them (fig. 38). Chains of physical contact among the figures and with their environment become as crucial as the chains of glances. In Lancret’s L’Été, for example, the figures’ gestures and poses draw attention to a range of tactile experiences. The pair of bathers positioned just left of center press their bodies together, each extending an arm around the back of the other and resting a hand on her companion’s shoulder. The woman on the left skims her free hand across the water, while the second gently touches her breast.

Moving to the right foreground, the woman seated at the edge of the water cradles her exposed calf in her right hand as she presses her left against a rock. Elsewhere, hands hold fabric and brush against fur, a set of toes disappears underneath a thin veil of water, and bathing gowns cling to wet bodies.

In his engaging reading of Diego Velázquez’s Rokeby Venus (fig. 39), Edward Snow focuses on the privileged position of touch within the image as a means by which to resist the frequent conclusion that the female nude is on display solely for the sake of its objectification by the male gaze. Rather, Snow is interested in aspects of the painting that “appeal less to visual delectation than to the those gender-indifferent kinesthetic instincts that cause bodies to identify with other bodies, and to imagine what they feel.” For Snow, this identification

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108 Similarly, Mary Sheriff has noted the ways in which Jean-Honoré Fragonard employed brushwork in his Bathers (ca. 1765, Louvre) to not only facilitate a movement of the eye around the painting and draw attention to certain aspects of the composition (the clothing covering one of the bather’s genitals, for example), but also to bring to mind an imaginary tactile pleasure in caressing the forms of the female body. Fragonard, 149-152.

is found in the contact of skin and fabric, the weight of the head on the hand, the warmth of legs pressed together; that is, in aspects of the image that trigger “an undeniably sensual effect not so much voyeuristically observed as felt from within the body’s own private, un-self-conscious experience of itself.”110 The bathing scenes of Lancret and Pater, I argue, likewise invite the viewer to imagine the physical experience of the bath and the various sensory pleasures called up by the images.

Linda Nochlin’s analysis of Renoir’s Large Bathers (fig. 27) provides another useful model that positions the female body as more than simply an object of visual pleasure for a male audience. In contrast to Snow’s gender-indifferent response, Linda Nochlin has turned attention to the issue of female viewership, speculating on how historical women of Renoir’s day would have responded to the nude women in the image. She proposes the possibility that female viewers, accustomed to covering and constricting the body, would have been receptive to Renoir’s “fantasy of bodily liberation…this vision of freely expanding flesh, the pictorial possibility of unconstricted movement.”111 And unlike Renoir’s work, in which all the figures are nude, Lancret and Pater visualize the distinction between liberated and constrained bodies within their images, presenting female and male figures whose bodies are heavily concealed under layers of clothing. To return full circle to Lancret’s Les Plaisirs du bain, the relationship between the voyeurs and bathers provides a striking contrast in this regard. The women in the water enjoy a remarkable bodily freedom when compared to the female voyeur in the central foreground, her torso bound by a tightly stringed bodice and legs subsumed by full skirts, or to her male companion, whose velvet suit and lace trimming leave

110 Ibid.

111 Nochlin, Bathers, Bodies, Beauty, 9.
only his hands and head exposed. The bathers, however, are free to experience the pleasurable sensations of water, air, and sun on their skin, with their lower bodies submerged in river and their loose bathing gowns falling effortlessly from their shoulders and chests. And if, as external viewers, we are invited to imagine ourselves in the voyeurs’ position as spectators of the bathing scene, we may also join them in this process of imagining the unique bodily pleasures experienced by the bathers they look upon.

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In their various appeals to the senses and their stagings of pleasure, the bathing scenes of Lancret and Pater hit at the core of both period conceptions of the bath and the aesthetic theories that drove Rococo painting. The decades following the artists’ deaths saw the rise of new voices calling for a return to art that improved rather than pleased, an art that stimulated the mind, not the eyes. But even as critics came to denounce its sensual enticements and diverting scenes of daily life, the Rococo would not be easily cast aside. To view the century selectively, as if often the case, only looking back on such works with the knowledge of their eventual censure is to miss the compelling ways in which they open up onto the unique climate of their time. The works of Lancret and Pater speak to a period in which pleasure—be it the sight of another’s body, the experience of viewing art, or the indulgence of a bath on a warm summer day—was never something to be condemned.
CHAPTER TWO

Touch, Sensation, Imagination: The Sculpted Bathers of Étienne-Maurice Falconet, Jean-Antoine Houdon, and Christophe-Gabriel Allegrain

When first exhibited at the Salon of 1757, Étienne-Maurice Falconet’s Bather was met with great success and an immediate demand for reproductions. Surely among the sculptor’s most popular creations—perhaps rivaled only by his Menacing Cupid, also exhibited in 1757, and his Pygmalion and Galatea of 1761—the work is best known today from the marble version commissioned by Jeanne Bécu, comtesse du Barry (1743–1793), presently in the Louvre collection (fig. 40). Other examples in marble soon appeared, and within the year, the Sèvres porcelain factory, with Falconet as its newly appointed director, began manufacturing biscuit porcelain versions, which remained in production through the 1770s. As Falconet’s biographer later remarked, the reproducibility of the porcelain format ensured that this pleasing work was soon found in every appartement in Paris. In the two and a half centuries since its Salon debut, the figure has become so ubiquitous one can now

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112 On the ownership record of the Salon original, lost since the 1830s, see Jean-Pierre Babelon, “Les Falconet de la collection Thiroux d’Épersenne,” Bulletin de la Société de l’histoire de l’art français (1964): 102-103. As Babelon concludes, the Louvre version cannot be the same as the Salon version, as the latter was in the collection of Thiroux d’Ésperenne when exhibited in 1757 and its ownership is documented through 1833. The Louvre version is first recorded in the inventory of property seized from Madame du Barry, dated 22 Pluviôse, year II (10 Feb 1794), at which time the Salon version was in the possession of Marie-Angélique-Catherine Darlus (to whom Thiroux d’Ésperenne had bequeathed it) or possibly her sister, Madame Thiroux d’Arconville.

113 Falconet also designed a second bather type for Sèvres, this time shown amidst reeds. Examples of the various versions produced in porcelain are discussed in Falconet à Sèvres, 1757-1766, ou, L’art de plaire (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 2001), cat no. 95a, 95b, 97a, 97b.

order copies online, with options fit for the tabletop all the way up to the outdoor garden. While the abundance of copies in various media has disseminated Falconet’s basic design to a broader audience, most reproductions significantly alter details of the original figure, transforming the character of the work in the process. Typical of many modern reproductions is the bonded marble version produced by the Vittoria Collection (fig. 41), which appeared on the online auction site eBay under the search terms “Sexy” and “Erotic,” presumably due to her considerably more pronounced breasts and hourglass silhouette. The subject of the bath serves here as little more than a pretext for displaying the female nude, but this is not the case with Falconet’s original statue. By retuning to the bather’s original form and to the historical context in which the work was first presented to the public, it becomes apparent that Falconet’s Bather speaks to a new model of the body emerging over the course of the eighteenth century, a body that is in communion with the outside world, constantly acted upon by external forces that indelibly shape and affect the individual. Where the reproductions prove most useful is in helping to see the unique aspects of the Louvre statue, in particular the specific articulations of the bather’s body that are not found in the smoothed over surfaces of the later versions. As I will discuss in detail, Falconet’s depiction of the initial sensation of the bath emphasizes both the moment of external contact and its internal effects—that is, the touch of the toe to the water, and the subsequent nervous and muscular responses that lie beneath the exquisitely rendered flesh.

Falconet’s Bather steps out at a particular moment in which the fields of philosophy and physiology are converging around a mutual investigation of the effects of sensation on physical and mental activity. Influenced by John Locke’s notion of the mind as tabula rasa inscribed by sensory experiences, the Enlightenment’s sensationalist philosophers promoted
the senses as the means by which the individual comes to know the world, develop a sense of self, and achieve higher thought processes. And of the five external senses, it is touch that reigns supreme in the second half of the eighteenth century, with philosophers like Étienne Condillac (1714–1780) and Denis Diderot (1713–1784) “dethroning sight from the summit of the sensual hierarchy.”115 One of the principle factors behind this shift was the debate surrounding the Molyneux Problem, which centered on vision’s capacity to evaluate objects independently of touch.116 Writing to Locke in 1688 and again in 1693, William Molyneux inquired as to whether a congenitally blind man now in possession of sight would be able to initially distinguish the difference between a cube and a sphere by use of vision alone. Locke posed the question in the 1694 edition of An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, answering in the negative, as did the majority of the most prominent eighteenth-century philosophers who weighed in, including George Berkeley, Voltaire, Diderot, and Condillac.117 Although the question was initially presented as a thought-experiment on the principle of innate ideas, rather than a judgment on the particular senses, the debate effectively challenged vision’s position as the fundamental contributor to one’s knowledge and understanding of the world.118 In particular, numerous participants in the Molyneux


117 Berkeley, Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision (1709); Voltaire, Elements of Newton’s Philosophy (1738); Diderot, Letter on the Blind for the Use of Those who can see (1749); Condillac, Traité des sensations (1754) in a reversal of his affirmative position in Éssai sur l’origine des connaissances humaines (1746).

118 For a summary of vision’s privileged status from the ancient Greece to the seventeenth century, as well as a consideration of the historical ambivalences towards vision, see Chapter 1 of Jay, Downcast Eyes.
debate questioned vision’s capacity to evaluate basic properties of an object such as its three-dimensional form, spatial constructions, solidity, and weight. It is not through sight, they argued, but rather through touch, that the individual comes to understand such aspects of the material world.

One of the strongest eighteenth-century declarations of touch’s significance is found in Condillac’s *Traité des sensations*, published in 1754, in which Condillac proposes his famous thought-experiment of the statue-man. Made of marble and initially senseless, the statue begins as a blank slate, having no ideas, no sense of self, and no understanding of the external world. Gradually, the statue begins to acquire the external senses, which are activated one at a time: first smell, then hearing, taste, and vision. In this state—with all its senses except for touch—the statue “will continue to see only itself, and nothing can draw it out and transport it beyond itself.”120 Once in possession of the sense of touch, the statue begins to explore with its hands, touching its own body and then the objects that surround it, developing a sense of interiority through the first action and a sense of exteriority through the second.121 With touch in hand, the statue is able to recognize itself as a discrete body and in turn formulate a concept of something that exists outside of and in relation to itself. Touch is therefore deemed crucial to the development of human understanding, functioning as the bridge between the individual and the outside world. It is positioned as the sense that ‘makes sense’ of one’s physical environment and, equally, of one’s self as a unique body within this

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120 “…elle continue à ne voir qu’elle, et rien ne la peut encore arracher à elle-même, pour la porter au-dehors.” Condillac, *Traité des sensations*, 1: 200.

121 Ibid., 1: 219-231.
environment.

From a physiological perspective, touch had long been a source of interest and debate due to its unique position as the only sense not associated with a particular organ. As the *Encyclopédie* entry on *Toucher* notes, “The other senses are bound by narrow limits; touch alone is as expansive as the body, being necessary to the well-being of all its parts.”\(^{122}\) Given touch’s extended nature, opinions were historically divided as to where the sense was located. Some thought it resided in the flesh, some in the skin, while others linked it more broadly to all parts of the body with nervous fibers (the flesh and skin, as well as muscles, membranes, and parenchyma).\(^ {123}\) With the invention of the microscope, early modern physiologists were better able to study what had previously been unseen: the subcutaneous network of sensory receptors responsible for transmitting to the brain information gained through the individual’s tactual experiences, including sensations relating to temperature, texture, solidity, etc.\(^^{124}\) By mid-century, the prevailing theory supported by the *Encyclopédie* regarded the *papilles pyramidales* as the principal organ of touch.\(^ {125}\) Discovered by the seventeenth-century Italian physiologist Marcello Malpighi with the aide of the microscope,

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\(^{122}\) “Les autres sens sont bornés par des limites étroites; le toucher seul est aussi étendu que le corps, comme étant nécessaire au bien-être de toutes ses parties.” “Toucher, (en Physiolog.),” in *Encyclopédie*, 16: 446. The *Encyclopédie* entry on *Sens*, similarly notes, “…tous les sens semblent avoir des organes distingués, excepté celui du toucher, qui est répandu plus ou moins par tout le corps.” *Encyclopédie*, 15: 24; and the entry on *Tact* opens by stating that the sense of touch “est le plus sûr de tous les sens; c'est lui qui rectifie tous les autres, dont les effets ne seraient souvent que des illusions, s'il ne venait à leur secours.” *Encyclopédie*, 15: 891.

\(^{123}\) “Toucher,” in *Encyclopédie*, 16: 446.

\(^{124}\) As Mechthild Fend has noted, the term ‘subcutaneous’ originates during the eighteenth century, concurrent with “this new conception of the human being as an organism dominated by the nerves, communicating with the external world by means of a complex sensitive tissue.” See Mechthild Fend, “Bodily and Pictorial Surfaces: Skin in French Art and Medicine, 1790-1860,” *Art History* 28.3 (2005): 314. A fuller understanding of the somatosensory system was not achieved until the late nineteenth century, when physiologists first classified the unique touch receptors of the epidermis and dermis, including the thermoreceptors responsible for identifying temperatures and the mechanoreceptors responsible for evaluating pressure, textures and vibrations; and it was not until the early twentieth century that neurons were identified as the essential units that relay the sensory information to the brain.

\(^{125}\) “Toucher,” in *Encyclopédie*, 16: 446.
these *papilles* are described as small, smooth and responsive protuberances residing beneath the uppermost layer of skin, formed by extremely sensitive subcutaneous nerves stripped of their endings. The *Encyclopédie* entry goes on to explain that while the *papilles* are distributed across the body, they are larger and more abundant in the parts of the body principally engaged in tactile sensing, such as the fingertips and feet.

As Aline Magnien has suggested in her study of eighteenth-century French sculpture, given the popularization of philosophical and physiological conceptions of the body, particularly during the second half of the century, it seems inevitable that artistic representations of the human form would be influenced by such developments. Focusing on three works—Falconet’s *Bather*; the primary figure of Jean-Antoine Houdon’s fountain group of 1782 (fig. 42); and Christophe-Allegrain’s life-size *Bather* of 1776 (fig. 43)—this chapter investigates the role of tactual sensation as both a subject of the sculptures and a potential viewer response to them. The selection of bathing as a subject matter, I argue, allows these artists to effectively tackle the main challenge facing sculptors of the human form: to create a figure that appears not as an inert mass of hard, cold marble, but as a responsive body coursing with life. The bath is an ideal subject for such a challenge in that, no matter the circumstances, the act of bathing produces an immediate physical response that alters the body. Eighteenth-century commentators on the bath were acutely concerned with the body’s reactivity to the water, routinely itemizing the bath’s positive and negative effects on the body. Relying on their subject matter to meet the sculptural challenge of animating marble, Falconet, Houdon, and Allegrain place great emphasis on the physical experience of

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the bath and, more broadly, on the way the human body—via the sense of touch—is animated through contact with the world outside itself. In doing so, they enliven their figures, providing greater opportunities for viewers to identify with the bathers as similarly ‘embodied’ figures and in turn to imaginatively experience the bath via their own sense of touch.

The Sculptor’s Touch: Ancient Contours and Modern Flesh

The Salon success of Falconet’s *Bather* is not surprising given the popularity of the bathing female as a sculptural subject, a tradition that dates all the way back to Praxiteles’s *Aphrodite of Knidos*, the first work to depict the female nude in a life-size, freestanding form. Likely dating to circa 360-330 BCE, Praxiteles’s Parian marble statue was originally displayed as a cult image in a temple to Aphrodite on the island of Knidos and later made its way to the palace of Lausos in Constantinople, where it was destroyed in a fire in 476 CE. Based on ancient descriptions of the statues, numerous works were later identified as Roman copies of Praxiteles’s original, including the *Belvedere Venus* (fig. 44), which was widely known in Falconet’s day. Falconet never traveled to Italy and thus never saw the *Belvedere Venus* on display in the Vatican’s sculpture court, but he knew the work through a seventeenth-century engraving by François Perrier-Rennes (fig. 45) and likely through sculpted replicas as well. Using Perrier’s title of *La Vénus au bain*, Falconet references the work in one of his texts on ancient statuary, stating that, in contrast to his contemporaries, he

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129 The *Colonna Venus* is today cited as the best of the various Roman copies, but was not known until 1781. The *Belvedere Venus*, by contrast, had been on display in sculpture court of the Belvedere since 1536 and was known outside of Rome through engravings and sculpted replicas. See Francis Haskell and Nicholas Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture: 1500-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press: 1981), 330-331.
does not believe it to be a copy of the illustrious *Aphrodite of Knidos* so praised by Pliny.\textsuperscript{130} Nevertheless, it is possible that Falconet may have had the *Belvedere Venus* in mind when conceiving of his own bathing statue, as Guilhem Scherf has suggested.\textsuperscript{131} The figures differ in their body types—in place of a mature goddess, Falconet depicts a graceful young woman—yet, both are posed according to a similar compositional format, with the right arm crossing the body, the left hand making contact with the drapery, the right leg engaged, and the left leg bent slightly at the knee.\textsuperscript{132} Given the period interest in classical sculpture and the general familiarity with the *Belvedere Venus* in particular, it is likely that many eighteenth-century viewers would have recognized these similarities, as well as the most striking difference: rather than focusing attention towards an unseen external presence, Falconet’s figure looks downward to her left foot, which, no longer rooted to the pedestal, extends forward as if the bather is dipping her toes in the water.

The gesture of the advancing foot would have been equally familiar to many of Falconet’s contemporaries, having appeared previously in François Lemoyne’s (1688–1737) painted *Bather*, now at the Dallas Museum of Art (fig. 46).\textsuperscript{133} Lemoyne’s work enjoyed great popularity following its exhibition at the Salon of 1725, as evidenced by the existence of

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  \item \textsuperscript{130} Falconet, “Discussion un peu pédantesque sur la Vénus de Médicis,” in *Œuvres d’Étienne Falconet*, 6 vols. (Lausanne, Société typographique, 1781), 2: 330.
  \item \textsuperscript{131} Cat. no. 78 in *Le goût à la Grecque: la naissance du néoclassicisme dans l'art français, chef-d'œuvres du Musée du Louvre* (Athens: Pinacothèque nationale - Musée Alexandros Soutzos, 2009), 302.
  \item \textsuperscript{132} Allegrain and Houdon likewise follow this general format with slight variations: the left foot of Allegrain’s *Bather* rests atop a rock rather than the ground, creating a more pronounced bend at the knee; and the right leg of Houdon’s seated figure is no longer straight, although it does continue its supporting function, as evidenced by the way her foot presses down into the earth.
  \item \textsuperscript{133} The similarity in the posing of Lemoyne and Falconet’s respective bathers is widely acknowledged in scholarship addressing Falconet’s work. See, for example, George Levitine, *The Sculpture of Falconet* (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1972), 32; Michael Levey, *Painting and Sculpture in France, 1700-1789* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 133; Victor I. Stoichită, *The Pygmalion Effect: From Ovid to Hitchcock*, trans. Alison Anderson (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 136-137.
\end{itemize}
painted copies, such as the signed version in the Hermitage Museum, as well as engravings and decorative objects replicating the design in reverse. While Falconet more directly follows the reversed composition from Laurent Cars’s engraving of 1731 (fig. 47), he may have had access to Lemoyne’s Salon canvas, which was then in the Parisian collection of Etienne-Michel Bouret, a fermier-général associated with the circle of Madame de Pompadour, one of Falconet’s greatest supporters. Though less mature than Lemoyne’s bather and without an attendant, Falconet’s sculpted figure includes elements of the painted example from head to toe: the center-parted coiffure, loosely pulled back at the sides; the light draping that begins at the hip and wraps around the thigh; the balancing hand against a tree limb; and, of course, the gracefully extended leg tentatively submerging a foot in the water.

Although there is no historical evidence that suggests Falconet was intentionally quoting either Lemoyne’s Bather or the Belvedere Venus, the question of their influence on his statuette is an intriguing one, especially given Falconet’s own interest in the relationships between painting and sculpture, on the one hand, and ancient sculpture and modern sculpture, on the other. While a consideration of the particular comparisons Falconet or his contemporaries may have drawn between his Bather and these two potential models remains speculative, a useful entry into this investigation is found in Falconet’s Réflexions sur la

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134 In addition to the 1731 engraving by L. Cars, Lemoyne’s Bather appears in reverse in the following: J. Johnson, mezzotint; J. Lidel, mezzotint; Gauthier Dagoty, colored mezzotint, 1782; Plumoer or J.L. Courret, Louis XV boiserie (Beaux-Arts à l’Hôtel de Ville, Liège); Étienne Lenoir, enamel watch, ca. 1740 (Louvre); Sèvres porcelain vase, ca. 1770 (Wallace Collection).

135 For the painting’s provenance, see Jean-Luc Bordeaux, François Le Moyné and his generation, 1688-1737 (Neuilly-sur-Seine: Arthena, 1984), 95.

136 This hairstyle became a signature element of Falconet; in 1772, Madame du Barry requested a portrait statue by Augustin Pajou with “coiffé dans le genre de la Baigneuse de Falconet.” Louis Réau, Étienne-Maurice Falconet (Paris: Demotte, 1922), 194.
sculpture, which he first delivered to the Academy in June 1760 and subsequently published as an independent text, adapted for the 1765 printing of the Encyclopédie, and included in his comprehensive Œuvres. Of particular interest here is Falconet’s attentiveness to the ways in which modern sculptors improve upon representations of the body found in both ancient sculpture and modern painting, a theoretical position effectively illustrated by his Bather statuette.

As a practicing sculptor, Falconet’s admiration for ancient statues is, understandably, measured carefully; should the ancients be upheld as the untouchable pinnacle of achievement, modern sculptors would have nowhere to go. Although he regarded the study of ancient statues as a fundamental aspect of the sculptor’s training, finding in the best examples a mastery of design (dessein) and an expression of energy worthy of emulation, Falconet stresses that the antique must be studied selectively, as even untrained observers can recognize that “the Greek artists also had their moments of slumber and coldness.”

Falconet does not cite any examples of such imperfect Greek works, yet the terms sommeil (slumber) and froideur (coldness)—both associated with a lack of movement and vitality—could be appropriately applied to the Belvedere Venus. When compared to the ancient works Falconet repeatedly praises in his Réflexions and other texts (for example, the

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138 “Une connaissance médiocre de nos arts suffit pour voir que les artiste grecs avaient aussi leurs instants de sommeil et de froideur.” Falconet, Œuvres diverses, 3: 21.

139 The 4th edition of the Dictionnaire de l'Académie française (1762) provides the following example for the figurative use of sommeil: “Sommeil est la frère / est l’image de la mort.” Its related term, somme, is described as deriving from “l'assoupissement naturel de tous les sens.” Froid, when applied to the artistic design, is defined as “Celui dont les formes trop unies ne rendent point la force nécessaire au mouvement.”
Apollo Belvedere or the Venus de Medici), the Belvedere Venus seems rather lifeless due to her more static pose and generally smoothed over surfaces.

Throughout his Réflexions, Falconet repeats the necessity of endowing the sculpted figure with a sense of life and mobility. The ancients will always provide the best model for beautiful forms, but the sculptor’s ultimate objective of moving the spectator cannot be achieved through a proper delineation of physical forms alone. In depicting the surfaces of the human body, he writes, sculpture must not offer merely “a cold resemblance, such as man might have been before the life-giving breath animated him…It is living, animated, impassioned nature that the sculptor must express in marble, in bronze, in stone, and so on.”140 This requires conveying a convincing illusion of a body made of real flesh and blood, a quality that Falconet finds lacking in many ancient works. Noting the attentiveness with which modern sculptors have approached this aspect of the human body, Falconet turns to the example of Pierre Puget (1620–1694), praising the Baroque sculptor in a passage that warrants being cited in full:

In what Greek sculpture do we find a sense of the skin’s folds, of the softness of flesh, and of the fluidity of blood as superiorly rendered as in the works of this celebrated modern artist? Who does not see the circulation of blood in the veins of the Milos at Versailles? And what sensitive man would not be inclined to be fooled upon seeing the flesh of Andromeda, whereas one can cite numerous beautiful antique figures lacking such truthfulness? It would therefore be a great ingratitude if, acknowledging in other regards the sublimity of Greek sculpture, we withheld our praise of a quality that is continually found to be superior in the works of a French artist.141

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140 “En se proposant l’imitation des surfaces du corps humain, la sculpture ne doit pas s’en tenir à une ressemblance froide et telle qu’aurait pu être l’homme avant le souffle vivifiant qui l’anima…C’est la nature vivante, animée, passionnée, que le Sculpteur doit exprimer sur le marbre, le bronze, la pierre, etc.” Falconet, Œuvres diverses, 3: 3-4.

141 “Dans quelle sculpture grecque trouve-t-on le sentiment de plis de la peau, de la mollesse des chairs et de la fluidité du sang, aussi supérieurement rendu que dans les productions de ce célèbre moderne? Que est-ce qui ne voit pas circuler le sang dans les veines du Milos de Versailles? Et quel homme sensible ne serait pas tenté de se méprendre en voyant les chairs de l’Andromede, tandis qu’on peut citer beaucoup de belles figures antique
Falconet was neither the first nor the last author to recognize the degree to which modern sculptors had surpassed the ancients in their articulation of bodily surfaces. Charles-Antoine Jombert, for example, addresses the issue in his Méthode pour apprendre le dessein (1755), distinguishing modern sculptures from their ancient predecessors on account of the former’s embonpoint, a word associated with fleshiness but also, more generally, a body in good health.\(^{142}\) Jombert continues, “This taste [for embonpoint], or to call it by its rightful name, this seductive manner of rendering sculpture today, is to this art what color is to painting.”\(^{143}\) As Jacqueline Lichtenstein has suggested, the aspect of Puget’s work that Falconet and Jombert find so appealing, so worthy of emulation, is a quality that had traditionally been associated with colorist painting.\(^{144}\)

While it is true that Falconet has a great interest in what we might call a painterly illusion of living flesh, he also finds clear faults in colorist painting. Whereas many ancient sculptors excelled in design while insufficiently conveying a sense of life in their figures, modern painters, in Falconet’s opinion, have frequently failed in reverse terms, relying on color (their chief means of rendering the illusion of living bodies) at the expense of design. According to Falconet, since color’s visual allure is capable of capturing attention in spite of

\(^{142}\) Charles-Antoine Jombert, Méthode pour apprendre le dessein (Paris: Jombert, 1755), 90. The Dictionnaire de l’Académie française (1762) captures these two associations in its definition of embonpoint: “Bon état, ou bonne habitude du corps. Il ne se dit que des personnes un peu grasses.”

\(^{143}\) “Ce goût, ou pour lui donner son véritable nom, cette manière séduisante de traiter la sculpture aujourd’hui, est en quelque sorte à cet Art, ce qu’est le coloris à peinture.” Jombert, Méthode pour apprendre le dessein, 90.

any deficiencies in form, the painter can therefore be less exacting in his design, an advantage not afforded to the sculptor.\textsuperscript{145} Falconet is careful to make clear that this does not mean design is not also essential to painting as it is to sculpture, noting that certain painters are exceptional draftsmen (his examples are Raphael and Domenichino). Rather, in painting, precision of design is not necessary to maintain the interest of the viewer, as is the case with sculpture. Were a sculptor to copy faithfully the figures of Rubens, for example, the resulting work would be a failure in Falconet’s opinion:

Since sculpture requires the most rigid precision, a negligent design can be tolerated less than in painting…a painting in which design does not dominate can still be appealing on account of other beautiful elements. Proof of this is found in the women painted by Rubens, who will always attract though the charm of their color, despite their Flemish and incorrect character. Should they be executed in sculpture according to the same design, the charm would be considerably lessened if not destroyed entirely.\textsuperscript{146}

Although Falconet cites no eighteenth-century examples by name, this assessment would certainly hold true for Lemoyne’s bathing figure. Formed of broad applications of color, the bather’s body is strikingly indistinct in its boundaries, particularly along her exposed right side. The fabric gathered at her waist seemingly dissolves away, blending into the flesh of her hip and upper thigh. Continuing down, the shadow cast from her lower thigh to her foot entirely obscures any proper contour to her form. It would be impossible to recreate completely such a figure in marble, as she is a form without tangible limits.

\textsuperscript{145} Moreover, as Falconet points out, the sculptor only has one chance at achieving perfection in design since once the marble is chipped away, it cannot be reworked; there is no sculptural equivalent of \textit{pentimento}, a notable remark given the visible reworking of the bather’s right foot in Lemoyne’s Salon painting.

\textsuperscript{146} “Comme sculpture comporte la plus rigide exactitude, un dessein négligé y serait moins supportable que dans la peinture…un tableau où [dessein] ne dominerait pas pourrait intéresser encore par d’autres beautés. La preuve en est dans quelques femmes peintes par Rubens, qui, malgré le caractère flamand et peu correct, séduiront toujours par le charme du coloris. Exécutez-les en sculpture sur le même caractère de dessin; le charme sera considérablement diminué, s’il n’est entièrement détruit.” Falconet, \textit{Œuvres diverses}, 3: 15-16.
Additionally, Lemoyne presents the bather’s body on a nearly continuous vertical plane, receding slightly but largely parallel with the surface of the picture. While this pose is successful in the painting, effectively tantalizing the eye by presenting a continuous expanse of softly modeled flesh, it would have little interest as sculptural form as it fails to engage the full space surrounding it.

A straightforward copy of Lemoyne’s figure would therefore not suit Falconet’s specific objectives as a sculptor, and Falconet’s *Bather* indeed breaks from Lemoyne’s model in significant ways, more fully inhabiting the surrounding space with greater bends in the form and a greater variation to the contours. By lowering the stump upon which the bather steadies herself (now positioned midway between the hip and knee), Falconet creates a more pronounced bend at the waist, with the figure leaning more emphatically to her left. As a result, her right hip rises, its softly curved contour fully visible due to the repositioning of the drapery from the free to the engaged side of the figure’s lower half. In addition to this increased lateral bend, Falconet’s bather also pushes forward to a greater degree, with her mid-torso acting as a centering point from which her upper body leans out, while her hips and buttocks push back into space. With these alterations, Falconet achieves the beauty of line and form he associates with ancient sculpture; to this he must add a sense of animated flesh worthy of the moderns, something that Falconet—like Houdon and Allegrain after him—achieves by focusing on the young woman’s responsiveness to the physical sensations and touch-based experience of the bath.

**Falconet: First Sensations**

While the modern sculptural emphasis on the illusion of a living, responsive body derives, in part, from an admiration for Baroque sculptors such as Puget, as stated by
Falconet in his Réflexions, it also corresponds with the period’s particular fascination with the trope of living statue. In addition to being a recurring element in philosophical texts, the figure of the gradually animating statue is central to the mythological story of Pygmalion and Galatea, which enjoyed great popularity during the eighteenth century. Falconet was among the artists to take up the theme, executing a depiction of Pygmalion watching his beloved statue coming to life (fig. 48). Shown at the Salon of 1763, the sculptural group drew praise from Diderot, who claimed that Falconet’s own figure of Galatea ceased, to his eyes, to exist as marble. While distinguished by her more mature appearance and less active pose, Falconet’s Galatea appears to be derived from his earlier Bather, as has long been noted. Yet, whereas Falconet’s figure of Galatea remains locked in a contrapposto pose and firmly rooted to the pedestal, the bather demonstrates her mobility by advancing one foot beyond the limits of her sculptural framework, a move that “signals the passage from inanimate to animate,” as Victor Stoichită has suggested in relation to Galatea imagery.

With three toes hanging over the edge of the statue’s plinth, the bather breaks the space that

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148 For a list of eighteenth-century philosophical texts that utilize the figure of the ‘statue-man’ to articulate their Sensationalist / Materialist positions, see Walsh, “The ‘Hard Form’ of Sculpture,” 458. Within the broad body of scholarship addressing the eighteenth-century interest in the story of Pygmalion and Galatea, sources specifically addressing visual representations include: Oskar Bätschmann, “Pygmalion als Betrachter: Die Rezeption von Plastik und Malerei in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts,” in Der Betrachter ist im Bild: Kunstwissenschaft und Rezeptionästhetik, ed. Wolfgang Kemp (Köln: DuMont, 1985), 183-224; Andreas Blühm, Pygmalion: Die Ikonographie eines Künstlermythos zwischen 1500 und 1900 (Frankfurt: Peter Lange, 1988); Aurélie Gaillard, Le corps des statues: le vivant et son simulacre a l’age classique (de Descartes a Diderot) (Paris: Champion, 2003), 87-136; Sheriff, Moved by Love, 159-200; Stoichită, The Pygmalion Effect, 111-160.


150 See, for example, Levitine, The Sculpture of Falconet, 32; Sheriff, Moved by Love, 170; Stoichită, The Pygmalion Effect, 136.

151 Stoichită, The Pygmalion Effect, 113.
constitutes her status as an art object, visually simulating her passage from base marble to living form. In addition to establishing the figure’s capacity to move, the bather’s step also suggests a second action that further animates her form: the stimulation of the nerves on first contact with water.

Falconet concludes the first section of his Réflexions with an impassioned declaration of the importance of feeling (sentiment) in sculpture, describing it as both the soul of sculpture and the source of its life. While sentiment was variously defined in the eighteenth century in physical, emotional, and intellectual terms, it is the first context that seems to be most directly at play in Falconet’s Bather. Within its physical dimension, feeling is defined in period sources as the capacity to receive sense impressions, as well as a function of the animal spirits, the supposed vital fluid believed to circulate the body via the nervous system, orchestrating sensation and movement. Someone who is dead, for example, is said to be without this type of physical sentiment—that is, he is lacking the vital energy of an animated being. As a figure endowed with sentiment, Falconet’s Bather is, therefore, both a ‘sensing’ subject experiencing the world through touch and a ‘nervous’ subject coursing with vital life.

Scholarship addressing Falconet’s Bather routinely acknowledges the sculptor’s success in depicting a nervous shiver coursing through the bather’s body, and most recently, Aline Magnien and Victor Stoichită have provided brief but illuminating discussions of the work within their respective studies on the relationship between sculpture and physiology in

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152 Falconet, Œuvres diverses, 25.

153 See, for example, the first two entries under sentiment in Dictionnaire de l’Académie française (1762), as well as the entry on “Sensibilité, Sentiment (Médecine),” in Encyclopédie 15: 38.
the second half of the eighteenth century. But precisely how this sensation is formally conveyed is left largely unexplained. Unlike Lemoyne, who presents a soft and unaffected body, more surface than depth, Falconet extends his focus to what lies beneath the surface as well, endowing his bather with a charge that reveals the full tactual effects of the bath, something that can only be seen when viewing the work from all sides.

From the frontal view, Falconet emphasizes the contact of skin and water—the touch of the toes—by establishing a series of lines that move the eye down the elongated form of his subject. While Michael Levey has faulted Falconet for positioning the head on the same axis as the extended foot, preferring instead the later biscuit porcelain version in which the head is tilted, this critique fails to acknowledge the alignment’s significant role in the original statue’s composition. Leaning forward, the marble bather directs her gaze downward, creating a vertical sightline that pulls attention to the set of toes hanging just over the edge of the sculpture’s base. The contour extending from her straightened left hip down through her leg reinforces this downward movement to her foot, running vertically along the same axis as her sightline. On her right side, the gentle c-curve created by the rounded shoulder, the bent arm, and the pronounced tucking back of the engaged leg again guides our attention to the advancing left foot and the set of toes entering the water.

While the frontal view encourages a downward tracing of the body to the ultimate focal point of the toes making contact with water, a clockwise movement around the sculpture leads us back upwards to reveal the effects of this action. As Louis Réau has observed in his catalogue raisonné of Falconet’s works, the bather appears to be overtaken

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155 Levey, *Painting and Sculpture in France*, 133.
by the initial sensation of the bath, as if “a tremor is spreading like an electric wave,”
coursing through every part of her body.\textsuperscript{156} This response can be found, for example, in both
the highly exaggerated ‘dimples of Venus’ just below the bather’s sacrospinalis muscle and
in the tightening of her gluteus muscles. Instructed by nervous impulses, the muscles contract
most intensely where they join with bone, that is, at the tendon. As outlined in the
\textit{Encyclopédie}, muscle fibers narrow at the tendon, assuming a tight and compact quality in
comparison to the meatier center of the muscles.\textsuperscript{157} The particular section of the bather’s
body so skillfully carved away to show her muscular response is situated precisely at such a
point, where the gluteus medius muscle, along with several others, joins up with the femur’s
greater trochanter. This muscle grouping is serviced by the secondary networks of the sciatic
nerve, the longest and thickest nerve in the body, which extends all the way to the feet,
branching out to the individual toes (fig. 49). An entire nervous response is presented in
Falconet’s work, with impulses running from the plantar nerves up through the leg to
stimulate muscular contractions. On the upper part of the bather’s body, the light tension in
the muscles surrounding the scapula correspond with the subtle projection of the ribcage and
the contraction of the diaphragm at front (fig. 50), as if the bather is experiencing a sudden,
light inhalation. The sculpture’s individual parts, then, come together to present a chain
reaction: water makes contact with the toe; a nervous shiver runs up leg and hits the various
muscles, which contract; the sensation prompts a small gasp.

\textsuperscript{156}“…il semble qu’un frémissement se propage comme une onde électrique dans tous les membre de la jeune
nymphe.” Réau, \textit{Etienne-Maurice Falconet}, 192. More recently, Aline Magnien has noted how “la sensation de
fraîcheur de l’eau gagne la jambe, dans laquelle on sent, dit-on, la propagation du froid le long des nerfs.” See
\textit{La Nature et l’Antique}, 214. Neither author, however, explores these observations through a detailed analysis of
the sculpture’s form.

\textsuperscript{157}“Nous avons déjà observé que le tendon d’un muscle est composé d’un même nombre de fibres que le muscle
même, avec cette différence, que les cavités des fibres musculaires diminuant vers les tendons, & y perdant de
leur diamètre, elles forment dans cet endroit un corps compacte, dur, ferme, sec & étroit, qui n’est que très - peu
The bodily response depicted here is in keeping with period medical accounts of the cold bath’s effects, including Jean-Philippe de Limbourg’s description of the initial contact with water: “The sudden action of cold on the skin’s sensitive fibers induces a shock, which is communicated to all of the body’s sensitive parts by way of the nerves.” Additional effects described in Limbourg’s text, as well as François Raymond’s dissertation on bathing and the Encyclopédie’s medical entry on the subject, include the tightening of the skin, constriction of the pores, a snap of the fibers, and tension in the muscles. These effects are, of course, relative to the extremity of the water’s temperature; as Raymond notes in his dissertation, “Since coldness is determined in a wide latitude, it is appropriate to distinguish medium or slight coldness, which is refreshing, from coldness properly speaking.” Given the smile of Falconet’s Bather, it appears that she is experiencing a sensation not so much violently forceful as agreeably cool and refreshing.

Houdon: Flowing Water

An equal attention to the body’s responsiveness to water is present in Houdon’s Bather, both in the articulation of the body and in its original setting as the centerpiece of a fountain group. Yet, whereas Falconet’s figure experiences cool water as a catalyst for a deep-felt internal response, Houdon’s fountain sculpture creates the illusion of warm water enveloping the skin of the bather as it glides across the relaxed surface of her body and fills the basin below. Initially proposed as a potential royal commission for Louis XVI, the

158 “Si le bain est notablement froid, l’action subite du froid sur les fibres sensible de la peau excite un ébranlement, qui se communique à toutes les parties sensible du corps, par le moyens des nerfs...” Limbourg, Dissertation, 32.


160 “Comme la froideur s’étend dans une grande latitude, il est à propos de distinguer la froideur moyenne ou légère, qui est la fraicheur, d’avec la froideur proprement dite.” Raymond, Dissertation, 31.
bathing figure and an accompanying servant—a black female figure cast in lead—were ultimately acquired by the king’s cousin Louis Philippe Joseph d’Orléans, duc de Chartres (1747–1793), for the newly designed garden on the outskirts of Paris (today the Parc Monceau). The group was included in the Salon of 1783 as an off-site work, having already been installed at that time, and remained on public display in the duke’s garden. A period guidebook for “amateurs and foreign visitors to Paris” offers the following description:

Advancing a few steps, you will enter a small area occupied by a white marble basin, at the center of which is a charming group by M. Houdon, sculptor to the king, which depicts a superb figure in white marble taking a bath; behind her, another woman, executed in lead and painted black, represents a negress holding in one hand a white marble drapery and in the other a gilded ewer from which she pours water onto the body of her mistress; from there it continues to stream, forming a pool in the basin.

Both figures suffered damage during the Revolution and were subsequently removed from the garden circa 1795, but their original configuration is preserved in a maquette now in

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161 Jean-Baptiste Marie Pierre, comte d’Angiviller and director of the Bâtiments du Roi, first passed on the pair of figures in 1779, citing the high estimated cost. On the history of the duc de Chartres’s garden, which was designed by Louis Carrogis Carmontelle and completed in 1779, see Béatrice de Andia, ed., De Bagatelle à Monceau: 1778-1978, les folies au XVIIIe siècle à Paris (Paris: Musée Carnavalet, 1978), 25-35; and David Hays, “‘This is not a jardin anglais’: Carmontelle, the Jardin de Monceau, and Irregular Garden Design in Late Eighteenth-Century France,” in Villas and Gardens in Early Modern Italy and France, ed. Mirka Beneš and Dianne Harris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 294-326.


163 Following the duke’s execution in November 1793, the National Convention decreed that the park be maintained as a public space, and Houdon’s statues remained there until at least 1795, when they are recorded in the Procès-verbaux de la Commission temporaire des arts. The servant figure was shortly thereafter listed in a 1796 inventory of revolutionary seizures held at the Hôtel de Nesles. The location of the bather was unknown until ca. 1835, when Richard Seymour, 4th Marquess of Hertford, installed the statue in grotto in the Château de Bagatelle gardens. For a full history of the group, see Louis Réau, Houdon: sa vie et son œuvre, 2 vols. (Paris: F. de Nobele, 1964), 1: 236-238; and Florence Ingersoll-Smouse, “Houdon en Amérique,” La Revue de l’art ancien et moderne 35 (April 1914): 293-296.
the Metropolitan Museum’s collection (fig. 51), believed to be a twentieth-century cast of the original terracotta model (fig. 52). Although Houdon’s *Bather* has been described as experiencing the initial dip of a toe in the water (the most likely narrative when viewing the work in its current format), the maquettes reveal that her left foot would have originally rested on the lip of the fountain’s basin. Although there are, to my knowledge, no extant illustrations of the installed fountain at Monceau, the high positioning of the bather’s left foot—best seen in a photograph of the work prior to the addition of the extended base (fig. 53)—suggests that this was indeed the case. Therefore, in contrast to Falconet’s depiction of the nervous sensation brought about by the first contact with water, the original configuration of Houdon’s *Bather* presented her as already immersed in the bath, her full body overtaken by its effects.

Additionally, whereas Falconet’s viewer can only imagine the water underfoot, live water played an important role in Houdon’s fountain. Poured from the servant’s ewer, water would have washed over Houdon’s *Bather*, gliding down her surfaces and pooling in the basin below. Even though the work is now removed from the fountain and separated from the statue of the servant, a suggestion of water still exists in the cascade of fabric running down the rock on which the bather sits. The visual resemblance of the folds of fabric to running water would have been even more pronounced in the work’s original form, which did not include the extended base that today projects out to the front edge of the work. Consequently, the drapery would have streamed down directly into the fountain’s basin, merging with the

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164 According to the Metropolitan Museum’s files, the Duveen Brothers’ New York gallery produced the cast from the original maquette (current location unknown) at the request of Benjamin Altman shortly after Altman’s acquisition of the marble bather.

165 See, for example, Magnien, *La Nature et l’Antique*, 214.
water pooled within it. Although the statue of the servant is presumed to have been destroyed in the early nineteenth century, the maquettes suggest that drapery wrapped around the servant’s waist and across the top of the ewer, falling vertically alongside the water that poured over the ewer’s edge. While the flowing drapery would have reinforced the visual effect of the streaming water, the water would have visually lessened the hardness of the sculptural materials as it ran across the fabric and the bather’s body.

On the whole, Houdon’s *Bather* is carved in a manner that endows the body with a great softness and general relaxation, in contrast to the tension found in the upright posture and muscle articulation of Falconet’s earlier work. While adhering to the same general compositional configuration as Falconet’s *Bather* (left leg extended, left arm engaged, right arm reaching across to the body, right leg pulled back), Houdon seats his figure, pushing her upper half forward in an extreme lean. The bent pose emphasizes the supple nature of the bather’s body, creating two folds of flesh between her breasts and navel, and a pronounced swell to the lower abdomen. Other areas of the body are equally rendered to accentuate the softness of the flesh, such as the rounded, ample right oblique, or the inner right thigh, which, under the weight of the body, spreads out where it makes contact with the rock. There is no tension in the body here, no nervous shiver charging through the limbs. Rather, the body is at ease, its surfaces as smooth and fluid as the water that would have run over it in its original fountain setting.

In his early monograph on Houdon, Georges Giacometti criticized the work for failing to express a sense of movement in the figure, noting the absence of even the slightest

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shuddering of the body as water passes over it.167 This perceived fault is, for Giacometti, particularly egregious given Houdon’s success in depicting a physical response to external conditions in his contemporaneous Winter (fig. 54), also known as the La Frileuse. In particular, Giacometti praises the way the marble of Winter has been made to shiver (frissonner), as demanded by the subject matter. Although Houdon’s Bather does not capture the sensitive chill so wonderfully expressed in his Winter or Falconet’s Bather, this does not mean the bather’s body is unaffected by the water or that Houdon fails to sufficiently animate the work. Rather, the body of Houdon’s Bather can be read as equally responsive to an external stimulus, just of a different sort. What Houdon presents is a body experiencing the effects of the warm bath. As described by Raymond in his dissertation, “Hot water causes a pleasant sensation on the skin which it bathes: the sensitive faculty delightfully relaxes the fleshy system.”168 The Encyclopédie entry on the bath reiterates this point, recommending a warm bath when one wishes to soften the fibers and provide a general relaxation to the body.169

Allegrain: After the Bath

In contrast to Falconet and Houdon’s shared focus on the tactual sensations brought about through contact with water, Allegrain’s Bather emphasizes a different aspect of the bath that equally engages the sense of touch, depicting a woman drying her body. Originally commissioned by the Bâtiments du Roi for the Château de Choisy-le-Roi, the statue was


exhibited in Allegrain’s studio during the Salon of 1767 and was ultimately gifted, upon request, to Madame du Barry. According to the marquis de Marigny, the comtesse had “heard praising talk” of the statue following its exhibition in Allegrain’s studio and desired the work for her property at Louveciennes, where it was installed in the garden surrounding her newly completed neoclassical pavilion. The statue would have corresponded well with natural landscape of the English garden at Louveciennes, as the bit of grass and rock rendered beneath the bather’s left foot indicate that she has just taken her bath out of doors.

From a frontal view, the figure’s pose leads the eye down the bather’s form along a serpentine line that extends from head to foot, crossing back and forth from one side of the body to the other. Along this path, particular emphasis is placed on the lower half of the statue, where Allegrain presents a series of sensory focus points that highlight the bather’s contact with both her own body and things external to it. Following the diagonal of the bather’s tilted head, the eye moves across to her pulled back left shoulder and continues along the curve of her bent arm to her left hand, which rests atop the fabric slung over her upper thigh. While the palm of her hand presses down firmly against her thigh through the drapery, her fingers are relaxed and raised at the knuckles, with each individual fingertip making light contact with the fabric (fig. 55). The inward angle of the bather’s left arm leads the viewer down the cascading fabric to her other hand, with the bather’s downward gaze and extended right arm drawing further attention to this area. The point at which these various

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170. In 1755, the Bâtiments commissioned a marble statue on a subject of Allegrain’s choosing, the model for which was presented at the Salon of 1757 under the description “Une jeune femme au bain” (no. 165). Allegrain exhibited the final version in his studio during the Salon of 1767 (no. 187) and received full payment for the work in 1771. The statue was in storage at Versailles when du Barry requested it in 1772. For a history of the commission and the statue’s relocation to Louveciennes, see Marc Furcy-Raynaud, *Inventaire des sculptures exécutées au XVIIIe siècle pour la Direction des bâtiments du roi* (Paris: A. Colin, 1927), 31-37.

elements of the statue come together is, significantly, the greatest point of sensory contact (fig. 56): the falling drapery runs along the bather’s inner thighs, grazes her right forearm, and trails down her left calf; as she reaches down, her right forearm brushes softly against her upper leg; she gathers the fabric in her right hand with her fingers settled between its folds. This emphasis on the bather’s tactile contact continues as we proceed down to her left foot, the curling toes of which grip the surface of the rock, and, finally, circle around to the back of the statue, where the drapery sweeps across the left buttock and the back of the right thigh as it wraps around her lower body.

The degree to which Allegrain prioritizes the tactile experience of the bather is all the more pronounced when the work is compared to its pendant, a representation of Diana surprised at her bath (fig. 57), which was exhibited at the Salon of 1777 before being installed at Louveciennes. Whereas Allegrain’s Bather emphasizes the woman’s physical engagement with her own body, his Diana shifts focus to a different sort of self-awareness that derives from the body’s exposure to another’s gaze, de-emphasizing tactile sensation in the process. As Diana turns her attention to an unseen onlooker to her left, her body is exposed to a frontally positioned viewer, who is granted a full view of her form in the absence of any concealing drapery. Rather than wrapping the body and caressing its surfaces, the main drapery has instead been placed over the supporting tree stump, touching only a small section of Diana’s right thigh before continuing down, fully detached from her form. Diana raises to her left breast a bit of cloth, which again makes only minimal contact with her body, and her right hand rests atop the drapery, yet neither hand is rendered with the sort of

172 Michael Levey has noted this contrast in the two works, remarking on the shift from “a sort of contemplative self-love” to an “excited consciousness of being nakedly exposed to a stranger’s gaze.” He remained, however, unimpressed by both works. Painting and Sculpture in France, 121.
heightened attention found in the *Bather*. There is little animation in the fingers—the fingers on her left hand, for example, are smooth and unarticulated—and the fabric no longer streams between and around the fingers. She touches things, but there is not a preoccupation, on the part of Diana or the artist, with her tactile experiences.

With its allusion to the Actaeon narrative and the inclusion of a crescent diadem, Allegrain’s later work is clearly identifiable as a representation of the goddess Diana, yet nothing about the earlier bather of 1767 suggests she is anything more than a mortal woman. The crown’s records routinely refer to the figure as Venus, but Allegrain’s contemporaries most frequently described her as simply a bather. Even after the pendant was completed, a 1787 guidebook description of Louveciennes refers to the pair as representations of Diana and “une baigneuse sortant de l’eau.” In addition to lacking any attributes that might identify her as the goddess of love, the *Bather*’s inward focus breaks from traditional representations of Venus at the bath, which, like Diana statues, tend to pose the figure in response to an outside presence. In contrast to the various copies after Praxiteles’ *Aphrodite of Knidos* or, closer to Allegrain’s time, the Venus statues of Giambologna, Allegrain’s bathing woman exhibits a total absorption in her own body, seemingly unaware of anyone outside of herself. While Michael Levey has criticized the figure on this point, finding the woman to be “narcissistic,” I argue this is the work’s most compelling feature, as it directs...

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175 Levey, *Painting and Sculpture in France*, 120.
focus to the bather’s personal engagement with her body and its tactile experiences. Rather than existing simply as the object of another’s gaze, the bather is presented, equally, as a subject deeply engaged by her own sense of touch. This preoccupation with the touch-based experience of the bath, in turn, prompts a similar attentiveness to feeling on the part of the spectator, a critical part of the viewing process to which I will now turn attention.

**Feeling Like a Statue**

The internal focus exhibited by Allegrain’s *Bather* is a feature shared by Falconet and Houdon’s figures as well. With these works, the bath is not simply a pretext for presenting the nude female body to the viewer; as a subject, it is also the entry point into a sustained investigation of the physical experience of the bath and the ways in which the bather’s sense of touch triggers various pleasurable sensations described in the sections above: the shiver of first contact, the relaxing rush of water over the skin, and the feel of fabric against the body. Deeply engrossed in the actions of their respective stages of the bath, the statues serve as a sculptural counterpart to the turn towards absorptive subjects identified by Michael Fried in mid-century French painting. Like the concentrating figures of Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin’s genre scenes or the emotionally preoccupied characters in Jean-Baptiste Grueze’s family dramas, these sculpted bathers deny the presence of any external viewer, a move that, following Fried, serves to transfix the beholder standing before the work.

It is no wonder that Diderot, so compelled by the work of Chardin and Greuze, was equally moved before Allegrain’s *Bather* when it was exhibited at the Salon of 1767. Writing of the work for Grimm’s *Correspondance littéraire*, Diderot informs his reader that his

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viewing companion, Sophie Volland, “fell mute” before the statue, while Allegrain’s brother-in-law and former teacher, the sculptor Jean-Baptiste Pigalle (1714–1785), admitted to Diderot that he was “stupefied” upon seeing the work.\textsuperscript{177} For his part, Diderot attempts but cannot fully convey the power the work has over him: “How many details that one can feel but not express!”\textsuperscript{178} Considerable sections of Diderot’s account amount to a cataloguing of each body part as he and Sophie circle the statue, shifting their focus to one area and then another. In some cases, he remarks on a compelling element of a particular part of the body, such as the fleshy (grasement) modeling of the left arm. At other times he can only manage to relate to the reader an enthusiastic list of body parts in succession: “And the lower back! The buttocks! The thighs! The knees! The legs!...”\textsuperscript{179} This inventory of the bather’s features is amassed through sustained looking on Diderot’s part and yet, as he notes, words cannot express adequately what he sees. Diderot looks—he looks closely, for he is captivated like Sophie and Pigalle—and through this act of vision he takes in details that, while indescribable, are nevertheless felt.

We are not told what, precisely, Diderot feels when he views Allegrain’s statue, but my own experience before this work, as well as the bathing statues of Falconet and Houdon, aligns with Condillac’s notion of sensory imagination. With physiology linking the nerves to the brain and sensationalist philosophy positing the senses as the catalyst for human knowledge, to be a subject of feeling in mid-eighteenth-century France was also to be a ‘thinking’ subject. I would like to briefly return to Condillac’s \textit{Traité des sensations}, in which he articulates the link between physical sensation and intellectual capacity through his

\textsuperscript{177} Diderot, \textit{Œuvres complètes} (1975), 17: 484.

\textsuperscript{178} Emphasis mine. “…que de choses que l’on sent et qu’on ne peut rendre!” Ibid., 17: 483.

\textsuperscript{179} Ibid.
thought-experiment of the statue-man. Through a gradual acquisition of the five external senses, chief among them the sense of touch, the statue evolves from his initial state to eventually possess full use of his intellectual faculties. Of the mental powers the statue acquires along the way, I am interested in memory and imagination in particular. With each successive sensory experience, Condillac explains, the statue comes to remember past sensations in relation to present ones. The statue is therefore granted two capacities for feeling: one related to the present state, in which the body is passively affected via the sense organs; and the other, a recollected past state actively reproduced in the statue’s brain. And to this Condillac eventually adds a third form of feeling: imagination.

According to Condillac, whereas memory always maintains sensations as past states, sensory imagination allows one feel a past sensation as vividly as if it were occurring in the present; it is not just reproduced in the brain as an idea, it’s also experienced by the body. Standing before the bathing figures of Falconet, Houdon, and Allegrain, the sight of their concentrated physical engagement with their bodies calls to mind past sensory experiences of my own. I cannot help but feel as the represented bather feels, to identifying with the figure in the same way that Condillac insists his reader “put himself exactly in the place of the statue we are going to observe…in a word, one must become just what the statue is.”

While Condillac’s instruction to imagine oneself as the statue is offered only in relation to this thought-experiment, in which actual sculptures and real viewer responses do not figure, a parallel within the field of aesthetics can be found in the work of the German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder, specifically in his Fourth Critical Forest (1770) and Sculpture:

180 “J’avertis donc qu’il est très important de se mettre exactement à la place de la statue que nous allons observer…en un mot, il faut n’être que ce qu’elle est.” Condillac, Traité des sensations, 1: iii-iv.
Some Observations on Shape and Form from Pygmalion’s Creative Dream (1778). Unlike Condillac, whose total body of work reveals an uneasiness with imagination and specifically its illusory potential, Herder places imagination at the center of his model of sculptural viewership, providing a useful theoretical model for the type of identificatory response I introduced above and will return to momentarily. According to Herder, it is through the imagination—and specifically, an activation of the viewer’s own sense of touch via the imagination—that the viewer processes (and thus understands and finds pleasure in) the complete, three-dimensional nature of the sculpted object and is, in turn, moved to identify with the sculpture as if it were a similarly embodied form.

Activating the Viewer’s Sense of Touch

Shifting away from our trio of sculpted bathers momentarily, I would like to turn to La Comparison, a work by Jean-Frédéric Schall (1752–1825) that effectively, if unintentionally, illustrates the significance of touch within Herder’s notion of sculptural viewership. As seen in an engraved version of Schall’s now-lost painting (fig. 58), two ladies have momentarily stepped out of the river, taking a break from their bathing to participate in a playful competition. The women present their bare backsides to a trio of female companions seated on the shore and await the verdict of this impromptu beauty competition. The bathers are up against stiff competition, however, as they are posing alongside a statue of the illustrious Venus Callipyge, also known in eighteenth-century

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182 To my knowledge, the last known location of the original painting (signed and dated to 1789) is the Galerie Pardo, where it was recorded in 1969. There are two documented copies—one is in the Louvre and the other was last recorded at auction in March 1993 (current location unknown)—both of which omit the scene of women on the riverbank in favor of a portrait-format focused exclusively on the bathing party.
France as *Vénus aux belles fesses*. During the eighteenth century, the statue type was frequently associated with the ancient story of the *Kallipygoi* (the ‘fair-buttocked’), two Syracusan sisters who called on a passerby to judge which of them had the superior derrière, later erecting a temple to Aphrodite to commemorate the event. In Schall’s work, three women seated on the riverbank assume the role of the judges, leaning forward for better views as they survey the contestants.

By the time of the painting’s production, Schall was one of the few remaining specialists in scenes of outdoor pleasure, a late heir to Watteau’s tradition, which had been waning since the deaths of Lancret and Pater approximately a half-century earlier. In many regards, *La Comparison* is in keeping with the works discussed in Chapter One, presenting an all-female bathing party enjoying the pleasures of an afternoon along the river, among them, the pleasure of looking. Additionally, and again like the scenes of Pater and Lancret, Schall equally emphasizes the various tactile experiences of the bathers: a woman presses her back into the wet earth of the riverbank, her lower body sinking down into the still water; a pair of ladies enters the scene from the background, their legs pushing through the water as they wade forward; the bather positioned to the left of the statue’s pedestal stands amidst a group of reeds, the leaves of which seem to be caressing her bare body.

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183 While the oldest extant statue of this type is a Roman copy based on an unknown Hellenistic original, modern reproductions abounded across Europe in Schall’s day and were often displayed in outdoor settings. Seventeenth-century examples are discussed in Haskell and Penny, *Taste and the Antique*, 317-318; and Gustave Macon, *Les arts dans la maison de Condé* (Paris: 1903), 55, 104.

184 Athenaeus of Naucratis recounts the story in his *The Deipnosophists, or, Banquet of the learned of Athenaeus*, volume III, Book XII, 887-888. According to Athenaeus, the man who judged the competition married the elder sister and arranged a union of the younger sister to his brother. Having risen up the ranks of society with these marriages, the now prosperous sisters honored Aphrodite by funding the construction of a temple in her name.
My interest here, however, is in another figuration of touch within Schall’s image: the relationship between live and sculpted bodies as mediated by the sense of touch. Returning to the trio of women on the riverbank, their gazes are active and alert, but so too are their hands. Vision, it seems, has sparked a desire to touch. Notice, for example, the way the standing figure extends her arm slightly behind her, allowing for a clear view of her precisely articulated hand. With the index finger erect and the other fingers curled under, her hand gives the impression that she is imagining the act of touching something, of making contact with her fingertip. Below, the woman seated to the left leans forward to view the contestants, reaching out and placing a hand on the arm of her companion. Meanwhile, the woman seated nearest to the water’s edge seems poised to announce the final verdict, extending her arm to declare the victor. She raises her index finger to signal her visual assessment, yet the gesture reads equally as a yearning to touch, a desire to bridge the gap from shore to pedestal and make contact with the contestants’ bodies.

The gesture calls to mind a sign posted alongside a replica of nude statue by Antonio Canova at the J. Paul Getty Museum, which informs the visitor, “You may touch this statue of Aphrodite. Most people wish to touch the statues. They want to feel the sculptor’s work, the volumes and surfaces, the nuances that escape the eye.” The Getty’s invitation to touch the artwork acknowledges a unique element of sculptural viewing: there are aspects of the sculpted object that vision alone cannot sufficiently comprehend. Reiterating a key claim raised in the Molyneux debate, Herder states unequivocally that individuals effectively perceive things as three-dimensional bodies through the sense of touch, flatly declaring, “The living, embodied truth of the three-dimensional space of angles, of form and volume, is not

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something we can learn through sight.” Like Condillac before him, Herder argues that vision alone is incapable of perceiving the truth of an object—that is, its tangible, three-dimensional nature—as the eye can only perceive forms as surfaces and colors.

Herder does not, however, entirely deny vision a role in sculptural appreciation, despite his occasional bold declarations to that effect. As the initial means by which a sighted person takes in a sculpture, vision is clearly necessary to the process, yet the viewer’s understanding of the object will always remain incomplete without the intervention of touch. According to Herder, we may see a sculpture with our eyes, but we know a sculpture—that is, we recognize it as a body possessing particular attributes—through our sense of touch. Like the female judge in Schall’s painting, sitting on the riverbank extending her finger as if to touch the bodies on the pedestal, Herder’s viewer does not need to employ touch literally to understand and appreciate the qualities of the sculpted object that constitute it as a tangible whole (e.g., the continuity of its contour or the completeness of its three-dimensional form).

Rather, the eye becomes as an instrument of touch aided by the imagination. Circling a statue, we see individual parts of the sculpted form, our imagination pieces them into a coherent whole, and we understand the total form via our sense of touch.

A recognition of and an identification with the three-dimensional nature of the

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186 Herder, Sculpture, 40. This echoes his claim made just prior to the summary of the Molyneux debate in “Critical Forests: Fourth Grove,” 207.

187 See, for example, Herder, “Critical Forests: Fourth Grove,” 217-218: “…there is definitely no sculpture for the eye! Not physically, and not aesthetically. Not physically, because the eye cannot see a body as a body; not aesthetically, because when the bodily whole vanishes from sculpture, the very essence of its art and its characteristic effect disappears with it.” On Herder’s overly strict correlation of sense and medium in which vision (and visual pleasure) risks being eliminated from the process of viewing sculpture, see Alex Potts, The Sculptural Imagination (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 29; and Rachel Zuckert, “Sculpture and Touch: Herder’s Aesthetics of Sculpture,” The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 67.3 (2009): 287.

188 “The eye that gathered [the impressions of an object] was no longer an eye that perceived pictures on a surface; it became a hand, the ray of light became a finger and the imagination became a kind of immediate touching.” Herder, “Critical Forests: Fourth Grove,” 219.
sculpted body is crucial for Herder, for whom the pleasure of sculptural viewship involves taking the sculpted body as a sort of ‘living’ double for that of the viewer. The two women standing atop the pedestal with the Venus statue in Schall’s painting provide an ideal illustration of Herder’s text in this regard. As we move across to the right side of the image, the gentle arc of the judge’s raised arm is repeated in the posing of the woman leaning across the statue’s pedestal. Extending her reach with a reed stalk, the bather tickles the brunette contestant’s buttock as if verify whether this body is made of cold, inert stone or sensitive, responsive flesh. The women posing for the judges, having stepped onto the pedestal alongside the Venus statue, occupy the sculptural space, a space where bodies of marble and flesh are interchangeable. The two women are so intertwined with the statue, they seem to become part of the work, with arms crossing one another and contours fitted together, forming a new sculptural group where there was once just a single figure. Moreover, the two women strike attitudes that directly play off that of the Venus statue: the figure on the left displays a more active version of the statue’s contrapposto positioning, with her left foot raised up off the pedestal, while the woman on the right matches Venus in her anásyrma pose and the profile view of her face.

The intimate connection between figures of flesh and marble is particularly interesting given the popular stories of men who were so enraptured by statues of goddesses that they attempted to copulate with them. The oldest report of this sort comes from Pliny, who tells of the stains on the backside of the Aphrodite of Knidos left by young men who molested the statue in the dark of night. Writing in 1767, Denis Diderot laments the similar fate of the Venus Callipyge at Versailles, condemning the wayward imaginations that led to

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such acts. These tales reveal the extremes of an imagination run unchecked, leading to a confusion of imitation and reality, a concern addressed by writers as far back as Plato. If Diderot’s deviant men assaulting the Venus Callipyge represent the negative outcome of temporarily taking imitation as reality, might Schall’s women provide a different model of viewership in which the spectator identifies with, rather than possesses, the sculpted body? Such an approach allows imagination be reconceived, not as a danger, but as a useful means through which to enhance one’s experience before a sculpture.

While the first form of imaginative touch proposed by Herder establishes the viewer’s comprehension of the object’s total form, the second involves an identification with the sculpted subject as a similarly embodied figure, achieved by way of proprioception. As Rachel Zuckert has suggested, “Though we do not tend to class proprioception as a form of ‘touch,’ it is, too, a sense of a solid body with volume, located in three-dimensional space, in contact with other bodies—a sense of touch, one might say, of and from the inside.”

Herder’s interest in this proprioceptive form of touch is expressed most directly in the following passage from Sculpture, in which he links an internal identification with the sculpted object to the essential nature of the medium itself:

For what is so uncommonly certain and definite in a sculpture is that, because it presents a human being, a fully animated body, it speaks to us as an act; it seizes hold of us and penetrates our very being, awakening the

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190 For a brief discussion of Diderot’s account, see Sheriff, Moved by Love, 145.

191 Such an abandonment of reason when faced with the pleasures of imitation was not a concern unique to sculpture, but one that extended to other art forms such as painting and literature. In his commentary on Pierre-Antoine Baudouin’s works at the Salon of 1765, for example, Diderot addresses the potential dangers of falling under the spell of paintings depicting ‘lascivious’ subjects. In this case, his concern is directed specifically at female spectators; as a well-reasoned man, he claims, he can maintain the appropriate sense of distance and keep his imagination under control. On Diderot’s remarks, see Sheriff, Moved by Love, 89-90. His account of the Venus Callipyge at Versailles, however, makes clear that he did not regard this controlled response as universal among male viewers.

full range of responsive human feelings…it possesses the power virtually to *transpose* our soul in the same sympathetic *situation*. The rise and fall of the breast and the knee, the ways the body rests quietly revealing the soul—all this passes, silently and incomprehensively over into us: we find ourselves, so to speak, embodied in the nature before us, or the nature before us is enlivened by our own soul.\(^\text{193}\)

Herder’s viewer is moved—naturally, perhaps unconsciously—to imagine his or her own body bending, turning, extending in space in the same manner of the sculpted figure, in a sort of internal variation of the women mimicking the pose of the *Venus Callipyge* in Schall’s painting. In imaginatively assuming the posture and general form of the statue, the viewer consequently understands and can identify with the feeling—be it emotional, physical, or sensational—that seemingly gives the life to the sculpted figure’s body.

Within Herder’s model then, a proprioceptive identification of Falconet’s *Bather* would involve the viewer imaginatively taking on the physical bearing of the figure and relating this to the sensation of his or her own body experiencing first contact with cool water. Viewing this work, my imagination triggers a physical response similar to that of the bather: my left toes curl and my thigh tightens nearly every time I see this work in person; I have even found myself seizing a quick breath, my shoulders tightened like those of the bather. The small scale of the statuette is ideal for eliciting such a response, as the viewer can in one glance take in the full vertical stretch of the bather and thus more effectively process the chain of sensory reactions triggered by the contact with water. While the marble version belonging to Madame du Barry is recorded in the posthumous inventory of her possessions at Louveciennes, the particular placement of the work within the pavilion is, to my knowledge, unknown. If, however, the work was placed on a mantelpiece before a mirror, as was often the case with statuettes, du Barry and her visitors would have had the opportunity to see the

\(^{193}\) Herder, *Sculpture*, 80-81.
bather’s physical reaction from both the frontal and back view simultaneously, creating an opportunity for a more immediate sympathetic response based on past sensory experience.

Turning now to Houdon’s work, the viewer might internally experience an overall relaxation similar to the sensation caused by warm water washing the body, such as a drop in the shoulders or the release of the abdomen muscles. The potential for such an identification with the body of Houdon’s *Bather* would have been heightened in the work’s original setting, where the added element of live water offered a concrete visualization of the sensation’s source. The water washing over the sculpted figure would have also encouraged a greater sense of movement on the part of the viewer as he or she walked around the basin, tracing the water as it streamed across all sides of the figure. In circling the work at close range, individual features not seen at full view come into focus, such as the soft folds of her stomach, the pressure of her flexed right foot against the mound of earth, or the weightiness of her backside as it presses down into the rock on which she sits (fig. 59).

As with Houdon’s figure, the details of Allegrain’s *Bather* cannot be effectively seen at full view due to its scale, requiring instead the sort of visual roaming suggested by Diderot’s Salon account, with a close focus on individual elements of the body rather than the work as a whole. Given the figure’s elevated position atop a pedestal—both in her original placement outside du Barry’s pavilion at Louveciennes and in the Louvre today—the viewer is ideally positioned to take in the various sensory touch points on the statue’s lower half, imagining the feel of fabric running between fingers, the brush of the back of the hand against a knee, or the weight of a palm pressed against a leg. The cascade of fabric that leads the viewer around the work, falling between the bather’s thighs in front before wrapping the
backs, calls to mind the sensation of drying the skin while also creating a visual resemblance to water rushing across and around the body.

Figural sculpture is not alone in potentially eliciting a viewer’s identification with a depicted subject; as argued in the preceding chapter, this can occur with the painted bathing scenes of Lancret and Pater as well. Yet, the relationship between the viewer and the represented body is often enhanced in the case of a freestanding statue on account of its tangible presence as a three-dimensional object occupying the same space as the spectator. This fundamental aspect of statuary was often acknowledged by eighteenth-century authors, including Antoine-Marin Le Mierre, who writes of sculpture’s unique nature in relation to painting, “Sculpture is a more material, more palpable copy of nature; it is available to all points of view; it reveals its dimensions; it speaks directly to the senses.” Even though Le Mierre ultimately favors painting, he cannot deny the powerful presence of the sculpted object, represented in its full dimensions and from every angle. More recently, Alex Potts has argued that, as compared to a painting, “a free-standing sculpture tends to activate a more directly physical and bodily engaged response from the viewer.” Sharing space with another figure and moving around to take it in from all sides, the viewer becomes acutely aware of his or her own body and, in turn, more disposed to feel as the statue ‘feels.’

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In his Réflexions, Falconet notes that while a painting attracts through a range of elements—the dazzling application of paint; a variety of figures, expressions, and actions; a

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195 Potts, The Sculptural Imagination, iv.
developed background and setting—the viewer of statuary is most often presented with only a single figure. As Falconet declares, with such a focused concentration on the human body, “the sculptor has only one word to say; this word must be energetic. This is how he moves the springs of the soul.” For the viewer to be moved—or touched, one might say—by statuary, the sculptor must succeed in endowing the form with a sense of energy, an illusion of ‘living’ body standing before the spectator. For Falconet, Houdon, and Allegrain, the subject of the bath provided the necessary channel for this energy, allowing the viewer to imagine both the touch and the sensation of the bath.

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196 Falconet, Œuvres diverses, 3: 9.

197 “…le sculpteur n’a le plus souvent qu’un mot à dire; il faut que ce mot soit énergique. C’est par là qu’il sera mouvoir les ressorts de l’âme.” Ibid.
CHAPTER THREE

Behind Closed Doors: The Intimacies of the Bath and their Representation

In Antoine Watteau’s small-scale genre painting, *La Toilette intime* (fig. 60), a woman readies for her morning wash as a servant kneels before her, sponge and basin in hand. The title makes clear what precisely is about to take place, *la toilette intime* being a euphemistic phrase used in reference to genital washing, and the women’s poses are equally revealing in this regard. Clothed only in a dressing gown opened at the front, the central woman has slid to the bed’s edge and raised her left foot to the mattress to facilitate the impending bath. While the details of the painting’s production are unknown—it is first recorded in the collection of comte Charles-Henry de Hoym in December 1724, three-and-a-half years after Watteau’s death—it is generally accepted as dating to *circa* 1715.198 It is therefore roughly contemporaneous with Watteau’s *La Toilette* in the Wallace Collection (ca. 1717–19, fig. 61) and *Le Remède*, his *trois crayons* study at the Getty Museum (ca. 1716–17, fig. 62), which are among his only known works depicting a female nude outside of a mythological or an allegorical context.199 As with *La Toilette intime*, these works center on a woman engaged in a domestic ritual of bodily care (dressing and receiving an enema,

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198 This date was first proposed in Posner, *Watteau: A Lady at her Toilet*. On the painting’s provenance, including Hoym’s acquisition of it from a “sieur Noël,” see Pierre Rosenberg’s entry on the work (cat. no. 37) in Grasselli and Rosenberg, *Watteau, 1684-1721*, 333-336.

199 The reclining woman in the Getty drawing appears alone in a small oil on panel in the Norton-Simon Museum. While the right side of the Norton-Simon panel was cut at some point in its history, it is unclear as to whether it originally included the attending maid holding an enema syringe. See Posner, *Antoine Watteau*, 103. For a brief overview of Watteau’s secular nudes, see Christoph Martin Vogtherr, *Watteau at the Wallace Collection* (London: Wallace Collection, 2011), 105-113.
respectively) with the assistance of a female servant. Significantly, all three works were excluded from the *Recueil Jullienne* (1726–1738), the collection of engraved reproductions of Watteau’s paintings and drawings.\(^{200}\) Given the collection’s objective of recording Watteau’s complete oeuvre, the omission of these three works seems a deliberate move on Jean de Jullienne’s part, likely motivated by a desire to present Watteau as a decorous artist whose engagement with the female nude was limited to classicizing subjects appropriate to the academic tradition.\(^{201}\)

Independent of the *Recueil*, Philippe Mercier (1689–1760) produced an engraving of *La Toilette intime* sometime in the 1720s, although he notably altered the mistress’s dressing gown so that it closes at the front and covers the her body from breasts to upper thighs (fig. 63). In fully concealing the bather’s pubis in the engraving, Mercier presents a more modest image that would have potentially appealed to a broader print audience, yet the modification also has the effect of presenting a somewhat awkward scenario in which the mistress and her maid are transfixed by a rather heavy skirt of fabric. If Mercier was uncomfortable presenting precisely what he saw in Watteau’s original painting, he was not alone. Modern commentators, too, have often avoided directly identifying the work’s specific subject matter. Pierre Rosenberg, for example, is politely measured in his description of the painting, explaining that, “A very intimate subject is depicted: a servant *en chemise* presents a sponge,

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\(^{200}\) The collection takes it name from its organizer, Jean de Jullienne (1686-1766), who was a patron and friend of Watteau. On the project, see Émile Dacier, Albert Vuflart and Jacques Hérold, *Jean de Jullienne et les graveurs de Watteau au XVIII\(^\text{e}\) siècle*, 4 vols. (Paris: Société pour l’étude de la gravure française, 1921-1929).

\(^{201}\) Posner, *Watteau: A Lady at her Toilet*, 31-32. Rosenberg similarly concluded that, “probably for reasons of propriety [Jullienne] declined to include it.” Grasselli and Rosenberg, *Watteau*, 334. According to the comte de Caylus, Watteau was himself concerned with his historical reputation in his final days, ordering the destruction of a number of works he deemed obscene, generally believed to be the products of private life drawing sessions with female models.
dish and towel to a naked woman who is getting out of bed.” And Donald Posner, while scoffing at an earlier scholar who, “preferring to ignore what he saw, imagined that the servant is about to help her mistress on with her shoes and stockings,” nevertheless avoids explicitly stating what is about to take place. First characterizing La Toilette intime as a work “of an overtly licentious character,” Posner attempts to redeem it from this critique by claiming that, ultimately, “Watteau has lifted it into the realm of high art.” Yet, he admits, “The intimacy of the scene is, it is true, a little disconcerting.”

La Toilette intime is a work, I believe, that has historically unsettled some viewers on several grounds, all of which center on various intimacies related to the female body. Most obviously, while artists had long represented the female bather, Watteau’s painting focuses on the genital bath in particular, a more private act even in a period in which Parisians waded in the Seine and, on occasion, soaked in their bathtubs in the company of invited guests. Although the bather’s intimate anatomy is concealed by a bit of nearly translucent fabric, it is nevertheless alluded to by the shell carved into the bed’s headboard. One half of a bivalve mollusk, the shell is a traditional emblem of Venus and a form long associated with the female pudendum due to its shape and, within the French language, the orthographic resemblance of valve and vulve. Beneath this reference to Venus, the carved bow and

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202 Grasselli and Rosenberg, Watteau, 334.

203 Posner, Watteau: A Lady at her Toilet, 35. Posner also raised this point in Antoine Watteau, 105.

204 Posner, Antoine Watteau, 105-106.

205 Ibid., 105.

206 The fabric falling over the pubis is rendered with an incredibly light touch that differs from Watteau’s paint handling elsewhere in the work, raising the possibility that this section was a later addition. This, however, remains speculative, as I have not seen the work firsthand due to its presence in a private collection.

207 Other period terminology related to female genitalia—bouton de rose (clitoris) and caroncles myrthiformes (hymenal caruncles)—draws from Venus’s other key attributes, the rose and the myrtle. Moreover, Venus is
arrow—emblems of her son Cupid, whose head emerges from the shell—imply a possible reason for this morning bath: the young god’s instruments of desire, coupled with the disheveled state of the bed sheets, suggests that the mistress’s wash follows a night of passion. Whether the mistress or her servant will now administer the bath is unclear, as both women’s hands remain firmly in place, the former’s upon her exposed breast and upper torso and the latter’s around the basin. Stopping short of depicting the actual act of genital washing, Watteau captures the women in a moment of dual contemplation, their gazes fixed on the mistress’s pubic area. Regardless of how the situation will ultimately play out, the close proximity and attentive gaze of the servant illustrate the ways in which female attendants, through their daily interactions with the lady of the house, possessed a profound visual and physical knowledge of another woman’s body.

While one may not expect to find a frank display of such a personal moment in a work by Watteau—indeed, I wonder if what is truly disconcerting to modern scholars is that the scene comes from Watteau’s brush in particular—La Toilette intime serves as an early example of a broad category of images in which artists throw back the doors to the private realm of the domestic interior and explore various intimacies associated with the bath. This chapter explores a range of two-dimensional representations of sponge and immersion bathing produced between the Regency period and the Revolution, all of which cast the act of bathing as a distinctly feminine activity despite historical evidence to the contrary. In

more generally associated with the mons pubis, which was in eighteenth-century France, as it is today, commonly referred to as the mont de Vénus.

exclusively representing the domestic bather as female, the works serve as entry points into issues that are, within the period, associated with the female body in particular. The images vary in tone, yet in all cases the works address one or more of the personal intimacies captured in Watteau’s painting: matters of personal hygiene, the link between bathing and sexuality, and the interpersonal relationships that develop between women within the domestic interior.

**Managing the Body**

Dressed in a chemise and bonnet with one red-heeled slipper already removed, a bather places her hand on a servant’s shoulder as she steps onto a cushioned footstool and prepares to enter her large copper bathtub (fig. 64, 65). Overhead, a pair of putti raises a green swag of fabric similar to those depicted in representations of Diana at her bath, but the bather here is neither a goddess nor even a mortal human, but rather a monkey. Part of the *Petite Singerie* at the Château de Chantilly, the work is one of six painted panels executed in 1735 by Christophe Huet (1700–1759) for a small boudoir in the private apartment originally occupied by Caroline de Hesse-Rhienfels (1714–1741), the second wife of Louis-Henri, the duc de Bourbon (1692–1740). The series is clearly meant to elicit a smile from its audience, with female monkeys engaged in an array of daily rituals and leisure activities that would have been familiar to the château’s eighteenth-century occupants and guests. In addition to preparing for the bath, fashionable monkeys perform the toilette, play cards, pick cherries, ride horses on the hunt, and glide across Chantilly’s frozen waterways.

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While the duchess and her guests would have found humor in seeing their daily routines acted out by monkeys, several aspects of the bathing panel call to mind more serious issues that emerge within the literature on the female body in the decades that follow. Two burning *cassolettes* (perfume vessels) rest atop ledges extending from the scene’s architectural framework, emitting their fragrances into the room as if to combat the unpleasant bodily odors that may have prompted this summer bath. As Mimi Hellman has noted in relation to such potpourri vessels, throughout the eighteenth century, “bodily odor was increasingly considered socially unacceptable and the state of undress required for immersion bathing courted olfactory offense as much as its prevention.”

As the century progressed, popularized medical texts increasingly turned attention to the necessity of washing as a means to manage natural odors, particularly those originating from areas prone to increased perspiration. In his *Le conservateur de la santé* (1763), for example, Achille Guillaume Le Bègue de Presle recommends regular washing of “the armpits, the groin, the pubic area, the genitals, the perineum, and between the buttocks or the ‘fold’” to eliminate odor and ensure a proper balance of the interior systems:

> If perspiration and sweat remain on these parts, the warmth inflames them, and, beyond the unpleasant odor that results and spreads everywhere, part of these exhalations and the waste that causes them is taken back up by the absorbent vessels and carried into the circulation where it can do only harm by inducing the putrification of the humors. Washing with warm water daily and following significant sweating in winter and likewise in the summer is the easiest method of safeguarding against such inconveniences.

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211 “Il y a plusieurs parties du corps où la transpiration est beaucoup plus abondante que dans d’autres, ce qui vient de leur conformation ou de la présence d’une plus grande quantité d’organes sécrétaires et excrétoires, ou enfin de la chaleur et du frottement qui y font continus et plus grands que ailleurs: telles sont les aisselles, les aines, la région du pubis, les parties génitales, le périnée et l’entre-fesson ou la raye; si la transpiration, la sueur séjournt dans ces parties, la chaleur les exalte, et outre la mauvaise odeur qu’on porte et qu’on répand partout, une partie de ces exhalaisons et de ce qui en fait la matière est reprise par les vaisseaux absorbants et portée dans la circulation où elle ne peut que nuire, en disposant les humeurs à la putréfaction. Se laver tous les jours et
Although immersion bathing would remedy such issues, Le Bègue de Presle, like many of his contemporaries, regarded it as fraught with potential dangers when practiced in excess. As the Le conservateur de la santé goes on to explain, while many wish to take a bath for either cleanliness (propreté) or pleasure, this should be done with caution, as the body’s prolonged exposure to warm water may result in weakness and fainting, among other effects.\textsuperscript{212}

Although Le Bègue de Presle does not make specific recommendations regarding the ideal manner of washing one’s parties naturelles and other areas of concern, his apprehensiveness over immersion bathing suggests that the preferred method would be localized washing, with either a sponge and hand basin or a bidet. As other sources suggest, the bidet—an object prominently on display in the central foreground of Huet’s bathing panel—was increasingly employed for genital washing during the eighteenth century, as it was both more convenient and without the supposed dangers presented by a full bath.

The first recorded use of the term bidet in print is a 1739 business card for La Belle Teste, the Parisian shop owned by the cabinetmaker Remy Pèverie, which lists several types of bidets among the various items sold there, suggesting that the bidet was already a desirable object for the shop’s target clientele at that time.\textsuperscript{213} Period inventories and merchant records, such as those of the marchand-mercier Lazare Duvaux, offer an idea as to the range of options available to mid-century Parisians. In 1749, the Prince d'Enrichemont purchased a modest version from Duvaux, described as being enriched with Morocco leather (marquin) après les grandes sueurs avec de l’eau tiède en hiver, et telle qu’elle est dans l’été, est le moyen facile de se garantir de ces incommodeités.” Le Bègue de Presle, Le conservateur de la santé, 344-345.

\textsuperscript{212} Ibid., 345-346.

\textsuperscript{213} For the full text of the carte d’adresse, see Édouard Fournier, Histoire des enseignes de Paris (Paris: E. Dentu, 1884), 308-309.
and recorded at 21 *livres*, nearly equal in price to one of the two night tables acquired from Duvaux around the same time (24 *livres*).\(^{214}\) The following year, the Princesse de Rohan purchased for 32 *livres* a slightly more ornate bidet with blue Morocco leather additions and a blue varnish applied to the wood.\(^{215}\) Among the several bidets owned by Madame de Pompadour is an exceptional example purchased from Duvaux in 1751 for 360 *livres*, the exterior of which is covered in a rosewood veneer with inlaid floral designs and gilt ornaments (fig. 66).\(^{216}\) According to Duvaux’s records, this was designed as a *bidet à seringue*, an advanced model with a hand pump that released a water spray from a tube within the basin. Additionally, the hinged lid at the top of the chair back opens to three interior compartments, which stored a sponge and two crystal vials for perfumes or oils. The bidet was not, however, intended for the marquise’s use but rather for the king’s, as it was installed in the *garde-robe* of Louis XV at Madame de Pompadour’s Château de Bellevue.\(^{217}\)

The 1762 inventory of the Château de Saint-Hubert, Louis XV’s hunting lodge near Rambouillet, also includes a *bidet à seringue*, this one in walnut.\(^{218}\) With red Morocco leather panels held in place by gilded studs and an interior storage compartment set within the backrest, the bidet was likely similar in style to example owned by the duc de Choiseul-Stainville (fig. 67). As interest in the bidet rose during the 1760s, manufacturers and


\(^{215}\) Ibid., 2: 51 (no. 522).


merchants seized the opportunity to further expand their market, offering travel versions, for example, and even renting them, in one case for 20 **sols** per month.\textsuperscript{219}

By mid-century, the bidet was familiar enough to play a leading role in Antoine Bret’s *Le ******, *histoire bavarde* (1749), a libertine transformation narrative in the manner of Crébillon’s *Le Sopha* (1742). The story tells of the travails of Cyparide, a man turned into a bidet by a vengeful fairy, yet Bret avoids directly using the word *bidet*, censoring it in the novel’s title and omitting it entirely within the text itself. Cyparide’s lover, for example, describes Cyparide’s new form to the reader as simply “a piece of furniture [*un meuble*] that you will have to guess; it is rarely named.”\textsuperscript{220} The term *bidet* begins appearing in French dictionaries in the 1760s, and while the dictionary authors may have been comfortable naming it at this point, they nevertheless remained reluctant to fully explain its intended use. It is described rather vaguely in 1762, for example, as “a piece of furniture for the *garde-robe* that is used for cleanliness.”\textsuperscript{221} In his published travel journal, Arthur Young, a British visitor to Paris in 1790, makes particular note of the frequency of bidets within the capital, remarking in a lengthy discussion of the differences between his home nation and France that “The French are cleaner in their persons…I speak of the mass of the people, and not of individuals of considerable fortune. A bidet in France is as universally in every apartment as a basin to wash your hands.”\textsuperscript{222}


\textsuperscript{220} “Cyparide parut à mes pieds transformé en un meuble qu’il faut que vous deviniez, il ne se nomme guère; je ne sais même comment vous le désigner.” Antoine Bret, *Le ******, *histoire bavarde* (London: 1749), 39.

\textsuperscript{221} “On appelle aussi bidet un meuble de garde-robe qui sert à la propreté.” *Dictionnaire de l’Académie* (1762), 173.

\textsuperscript{222} Arthur Young, *Travel During the Years 1787, 1788, and 1789*… (London, J. Rackham, 1792), 278.
In keeping with Young’s observation about the wide distribution of bidet use among all classes within France, genre paintings from the final decades of the eighteenth century depict the item in a variety of settings, ranging from well-appointed homes (fig. 68) to more modest interiors (fig. 69). For much of the century, however, bidet use, like immersion bathing, was most frequently associated with the French elite. Moreover, while the historical record shows that neither activity was exclusively practiced by women, the bath and the toilette ritual are most often—indeed, almost universally—represented as feminine activities that take place in areas of the domestic interior (bathing rooms, boudoirs, cabinets de toilette) that are likewise gendered as feminine within the period.  

Certain textual sources, for example, associate bathing and, more specifically, genital washing with women in particular. Jean Goulin’s *Le médecin des dames* (1771) states that proper care of one’s *parties naturelles* is an “indispensable necessity,” especially during the summer, when a woman’s private areas are “prone to taking on a sticky humor and a very strong odor.” Although Goulin also published a companion text for men—*Le médecin des hommes*—it does not include sections on general bathing or genital washing. Louis-Antoine de Caraccioli’s *Dictionnaire critique* (1768) likewise positions the bidet as a woman’s accessory, defining it as a “type of basin used in the homes of all women who are fond of cleanliness, and with which some provincial women are not yet familiar.”

Caraccioli’s use of the adjective *provinciales* here is significant: in addition to describing

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223 To my knowledge, there are no eighteenth-century images that depict or imply male use of the bidet.


those residing outside the capital, the term was also used, more generally, in a distinctly pejorative fashion to signal something “in opposition to the air and manners of the grand monde and the court.”

Within the visual tradition, the association of the bidet with elite women appears in *La Toilette* (fig. 70), part of a series of designs by Charles-Germain de Saint-Aubin entitled *Essai de Papillonneries Humaines*. Executed circa 1748–1756 and intended as a pattern guide for decorative artists, the series is comprised of five vertical and five horizontal designs depicting anthropomorphized butterflies engaging in various personal and social pursuits popular among the French elite. In *La Toilette*, a butterfly sits before her dressing table, admiring herself in a hand mirror as two other butterflies—one standing at her side and the other flying down from above with a curling rod—tend to her ‘hair’ and a fourth, an invited guest to the toilette ceremony, takes a seat on the right side of the image. The presence of this guest, identified by his clerical collar as an abbé, suggests that the central butterfly is engaged in the second of her two toilettes, the first being private in nature and the second serving as a lengthier, staged event before company. As Louis-Sébastien Mercier would later complain, any embellishment that took place at the second toilette was merely a calculated act to attract the attention and praise of guests, the real work having been done at

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227 *Dictionnaire de l’Académie française* (1762), 2: 491-492.

228 Both the vertical and horizontal suites also include an illustrated title page. The series as a whole has received limited scholarly attention, as have the individual images. The series is reproduced and biographical information for Saint-Aubin is provided in Patrick Mauriés, *Sur les papillonneries humaines* (Paris: Le Promeneur, 1996). To my knowledge, the only in-depth consideration of the series, which also offers detailed analyses for several individual prints (including *La Toilette*), is Dana Loughlin, “*Essai de Papillonneries Humaines* and the Metamorphoses of Eighteenth-Century Decorative Art” (MA thesis, The University of British Columbia, 2012).

229 On the toilette ritual and its visual representation in eighteenth-century France, see Chrisman-Campbell, “Dressing to Impress.”
the first toilette. By including a bidet, exiled to a large void at the left of the scene and distanced from the activities surrounding the dressing table, Saint-Aubin’s image reminds viewers that a woman’s daily routines involved more than just the staged displays of beauty that made up the public toilette. There were also unseen acts of bodily maintenance undertaken in privacy, extremely personal and potentially embarrassing—yet necessary—practices that often, as in the case of the bidet, involved the elimination of odors and the removal of bodily fluids.

*Jeune femme à sa toilette* (fig. 71), a genre scene by the Belgian painter François Eisen (ca. 1695–1778), similarly alludes to the private acts of bodily maintenance that surround more public acts of personal embellishment. Dated to 1742, the painting depicts a young woman turning from her toilette table as a servant prepares a bidet for her use. Wearing a *peignoir* with her hair done up with flowers, the woman appears to have already completed her public toilette, her left hand and leg posed as if she is about to stand and move on to the next, more intimate aspect of her morning routine: the bidet. (Eisen has reversed the order of the two toilettes in this case.) As the servant pours warm water from a kettle into the bidet’s basin, she gently pushes away a younger girl, suggesting that her attention rests solely with the personal needs of the scene’s central figure, who now needs to occupy the space in privacy.

With her coyly tilted head and direct address, the young woman seems to be bidding a sweet farewell to a visitor to her toilette ceremony or is perhaps, more boldly, giving an unspoken invitation to stay. If we are to believe the memoirs of the marquis d'Argenson

230 Louis-Sébastien Mercier explains, rather critically, “Une jolie femme fait régulièrement chaque matin deux toilettes. La première est fort secrète, et jamais les amans n’y sont admis ; ils n’entrent qu’à l’heure indiquée…La seconde toilette n’est qu’un jeu inventé par la coquetterie…Cette toilette n’est qu’un rôle qui favorise le développement de mille attraits cachés ou non encore aperçus.” *Le Tableau de Paris, nouvelle édition*, 8 vols. (Amsterdam: 1783), 6: 148-149.
(1694–1757), while using the bidet was normally a private practice, it could on occasion provide an opportunity for seduction as well. Writing of his visit to the Courbœpine property of Madame de Prie (1698–1727), whom he likens to Potiphar’s wife in her attempts to attract him, the marquis informs his reader: “Her door was never closed to me, and one day when I entered her place, she received me at her toilette. She was seated on her b…..: I wished to retire; she made me stay. ‘Allow me, madame,’ I said to her, ‘to at least have the first go at this cleanliness.’ And indeed, I kissed her…and heartily.”

Whatever the suggestion intended by the coy gaze of Eisen’s young woman, she does not appear embarrassed by the presence of objects of a most personal nature. In addition to the bidet, an oblong bourdalou (chamber pot) rests on a stool in the right foreground, illuminated by the band of sunlight that also streams across the young woman, highlighting her flush cheeks and porcelain décolletage. Elements such as the partially exposed right breast, the stocking ed ankle, the bidet, and the bourdalou call attention to the woman’s physical body, yet Eisen maintains an overall modesty and sense of respectability to the scene, showing just enough without revealing all. Like Saint-Aubin’s La Toilette, Eisen’s painting illustrates the often-unseen personal routines associated with elite women without pushing the image beyond the bounds of decorum. This is not, however, always the case; artists were equally apt to employ the bidet, and more generally, genital washing, as a direct sign of a woman’s sexual availability.

231 “Jamais sa porte ne m’était refusée, et un jour que j’entrais chez elle elle me reçut à sa toilette. Elle était assise sur son b….. : je voulus me retirer; elle me fit rester. ‘Permettez, Madame, lui dis-je, que j’aie au moins l’étrenne de cette propreté.’ Effectivement, je lui embrassai…de bien bon cœur.” René-Louis de Voyer de Paulmy, marquis d’Argenson, Mémoires et journal inédit du marquis d’Argenson, ministre des affaires étrangères sous Louis XV, 5 vols. (Paris: P. Jannet, 1857-1858), 1: 205. This incident must have occurred (if it did indeed occur) in either 1726 or 1727, as it postdates Madame de Prie’s move to Courbœpine—where she was exiled in 1726 following the fall of her lover, the duc de Bourbon—and it immediately precedes d’Argenson’s account of de Prie’s death in October 1727.
Washing as a Sign of Female Sexuality

For Saint-Aubin, the bidet could pack a critical punch when figured in the right context, as seen in two drawings included in the Livre de caricatures tant bonnes que mauvaises, an assemblage of nearly 400 images produced during the middle third of the eighteenth century by Charles-Germain and other members of the Saint-Aubin family’s inner circle. In the first image, Ne blâmons personne; ils ont sans doute leurs raisons (Let us blame no one; they have no doubt their reasons), a naked woman is shown from behind, straddling a bidet as Jesuit priests kneel adoringly at her feet (fig. 72); the second, Pommade pour les lèvres (Ointment for the lips), depicts a female monkey positioned between her dressing table and a bidet, standing backwards on a chair as she applies a touch of unguent to her labia (fig. 73). Very different in tone from Saint-Aubin’s La Toilette or Huet’s Le Bain, in which the bidet functions as part of a light satirization of the daily rituals of elite women, the Livre drawings utilize the bidet in a much more pointed manner, employing it as a critical signifier of their female subjects’ sexuality.

The two Livre drawings are generally taken to be personal attacks on Madame de Pompadour, appearing in a section of the Livre that includes several other images of the marquise most likely produced in the 1750s, yet neither image directly identified the subject by name in its original form. (The secondary inscription at the bottom of Ne blâmons

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232 The Livre was an on-going project spanning from the 1740s to ca. 1775, with contributions from the Saint-Aubin brothers—chiefly Charles-Germain, but also his younger brothers Gabriel-Jacques (1724-1780) and Augustin (1736-1807)—along with other family members and friends. On the history of and potential contributors to the Livre, see Colin Jones and Emily Richardson, “Archaeology and Materiality,” in The Saint-Aubin Livre de caricatures: Drawing Satire in Eighteenth-Century Paris, ed. Colin Jones, Juliet Carey, and Emily Richardson (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation: 2012), 31-53.

233 Ne blâmons personne and Pommade pour les lèvres are pages 282 and 288 in the Livre, respectively. Among the Livre drawings depicting Madame de Pompadour, several are clustered in the same section as the two bidet images, including: Les biens viennent tous ensemble (page 276), La plaisanterie n’est pas sans fondement (281), Pour la plus grande Gloire de dieu (285), L’Alliance de ... faitte en may 1756 par l’abbé de Bernis (286), and La
personne, which reads, “Les Jésuites aux pieds de Mme de Pompadour,” is a nineteenth-century addition by Pierre-Antoine Tardieu, the husband of Charles-Germain’s granddaughter. If Madame de Pompadour was indeed the intended target, as I believe she most likely was, avoiding any direct identification of the central figure would have been a wise move given the sensitive nature of the drawings’ subject matter. While the Livre was intended for a very private audience, limited to the Saint-Aubin family and their most intimate acquaintances, those discovered to have authored an attack on the marquise, even an unpublished one, had a history of ending up in the Bastille.

The drawings are roughly contemporaneous with Madame de Pompadour’s renewed religious commitment under the guidance of her Jesuit spiritual advisor, père de Sacy, providing a possible interpretative context for the Ne blâmons personne. In light of this biographical detail, the work may be read as a response to both the perceived fraudulence of Madame de Pompadour’s pious reform and the hypocrisy of the Church embracing France’s most notorious mistress. The brazen display of her naked body atop the bidet and the ambiguity of her pose—as Humphrey Wine has pointed out, it is difficult to tell whether she is washing or pleasing herself—suggest that, despite a retinue of clerics, she remains a sexualized woman; as the caption explains, the men have their reasons for fawning over her. Unlike the female butterfly in Saint-Aubin’s papillonneries, who maintains the proper distinctions between the public and private aspects of her toilette, the central figure in

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234 Wine, “Madame de Pompadour,” 182.

235 On Madame de Pompadour’s embrace of religion in the 1750s, see Colin Jones, Madame de Pompadour: Images of a Mistress (London: National Gallery, 2002), 111-119.

236 Wine, “Madame de Pompadour,” 182.
blâmons personne allows her male guests to witness her most intimate act of cleansing, displaying herself as an object of sexual adoration in the process. While Tardieu’s secondary inscription makes clear that at least one member of the extended Saint-Aubin family took the central figure to be Madame de Pompadour, the reverse view of the woman does leave her identity open, allowing for alternate readings as well. Wine, for example, has proposed the “possibility that the target was the relationship, actual or assumed, between women in general and their confessors,” in which case the image would function as a more vulgar version of popular representations of abbés doting on ladies at their toilettes.237

Pommade pour les lèvres likewise draws on an existing visual tradition—in this case, images of anthropomorphized creatures mimicking the manners of the French elite, such as Huet’s singers and Saint-Aubin’s papillonneries—yet, again, the image pushes well beyond the gentler tones of such works. Whereas Huet’s monkeys and Saint-Aubin’s butterflies maintain a charm and decorum, the monkey in Pommade pour les lèvres is almost grotesque, in both form (the contorted pose, the unsettling long toes flopped upon the table, the snarling face) and action, despite the outward signs of beauty found in the pink ruffled peignoir and the headpiece with a decorative floral spray.238 The drawing is typically regarded as a commentary on the love of cosmetics and the elaborate beauty rituals associated with French women, in general, and Madame de Pompadour, in particular.239

237 Ibid.

238 As Aileen Ribeiro has pointed out, such decorative sprays were referred to as pompoms, named after Madame de Pompadour. “Fashioning the Feminine,” in The Saint-Aubin Livre de caricatures, 244.

239 Wine proposes it is either a critique of Madame de Pompadour or “the use of make-up in general” in “Madame de Pompadour,” 182; Jones references it as a satire of Madame de Pompadour’s fondness for the toilette in Madame de Pompadour: Images of a Mistress, 78; and Riberio reads it as comment on the “improbable, even disgusting ingredients” used in cosmetics, noting that “The monkey is clearly intended to mimic a fashionable woman, possibly Madame de Pompadour,” in “Fashioning the Feminine,” 244.
monkey’s pomade may be read as simply a rouge cream, with the image offering a mildly
crass play on the idea of tinting one’s ‘lips,’ yet other options remain. While some pomades,
such as rouge creams, were purely cosmetic, others were used for less appealing reasons:
hair pomades, for example, were heavily scented, intended not only as styling products but
also as masking agents, and the term was used to refer to medicinal skin ointments as well.241
Given the prominent display of the bidet within the image, the pomade may then serve,
perhaps more readily, as signifier of a need to conceal an odor or topically treat the skin. The
hand towel hanging over the edge of the bidet suggests the monkey has washed herself prior
to applying the pomade to her red ‘lips,’ her teeth now bared in a grimace as if she is
responding to the pain of contact with this sensitive area.

As an official mistress to the king, Madame de Pompadour was subject to public and
private scrutiny regarding her sexuality, and with this came the frequent assumption that, as a
sexual woman, she had cause to be extra vigilant in her personal hygiene. Among the topics
regularly raised in attacks on Madame de Pompadour’s sexuality was her affliction of les
fleurs blanches, a euphemistic term for leucorrhoea presumably deriving from the
orthographic similarities in fleurs and flueurs (menstrual discharge). Public talk of the
marquise’s fleurs blanches began in 1749, following a private dinner at which Madame de
Pompadour distributed white hyacinths to members of her party, which included Louis XV,
Madame d’Estrades (Pompadour’s cousin), and the comte de Maurepas. A nasty poem, for

240 Recipes for a “pommade pour les lèvres” often called for (among other things) alkanet, the roots of which
were used to make red dye, implying its cosmetic use. See, for example, Antoine Joseph d’Emery, Recueil des
nouveaux secrets, concernant les arts & les maladies des animaux alkanet, 2 vols. (Paris: Pierre Vender, 1693),
1: 110; Pierre-Joseph Buchoz, Toilette et laboratoire de Flore: réunis en faveur du beau sexe (Paris: 1784),

241 On period hair pomades, see Chrisman-Campbell, “Dressing to Impress,” 62.
which Maurepas was believed to be responsible, quickly began circulating the next day, one of a number of the so-called ‘Poissonnades’ aimed at Madame de Pompadour:

Par vos façons nobles et franches, Iris, vous enchantez nos cœurs; Sur nos pas vous semez des fleurs, Mais ce sont des fleurs blanches.  
By your noble and free manner, Iris, you enchant our hearts. On our path you strew flowers, But they are white flowers.

It is now thought that Madame de Pompadour did indeed suffer from leucorrhea, although, as Colin Jones has noted, this would have only been known by only a small number of individuals.  

It is more likely, therefore, that popular references to Pompadour’s *fleurs blanches* were intended to signal her presumed sexual promiscuity.

While period medical texts associated *fleurs blanches* to a number of causes, it was connected in the public imagination to venereal disease (especially gonorrhea) and, more generally, sexual activity. Precipitating factors listed in the *Encyclopédie* entry on the subject, for example, include “strong passions, resulting from love; overly frequent coitus, or other irritations to the genitals.” In addition to the various therapeutic remedies for treating the disease internally, Arnulphe d’Aumont, the author of *Enyclopédie* entry, recommends that afflicted women take care to properly clean “the parts from which the discharge arises,”


244 While the term “leucorrhea” is today used more generally in reference to any vaginal discharge, eighteenth-century medical discussions of *fleurs blanches* often include a section distinguishing it from vaginal discharge caused by sexually transmitted disease, with which it was commonly confounded. See, for example, “Fleurs blanches (Médecine),” in *Encyclopédie*, 6: 862; and Joseph Raulin, *Traité des fleurs blanches*, 2 vols. (Paris: Herissant, 1766), 1: 125-127.

245 “les fortes passions, effets de l'amour; le coït trop fréquent, ou toute autre irritation des parties génitales.” “Fleurs blanches,” in *Encyclopédie*, 6: 862.
directly linking les fleurs blanches to genital cleansing, as suggested by the bidets in Ne blâmons personne and Pommade pour les lèvres. While such allusions to Madame de Pompadour’s sexual health may not have been intentionally inscribed in these images—it is one thing to show the marquise defecating on her former ally, the abbé Bernis, in the wake of his exile (as depicted on page 276 of the Livre) and quite another to suggest she had a venereal disease—the images certainly have the potential to call up such rumors and, more generally, Madame de Pompadour’s sexuality writ large. The presumed dating of Ne blâmons personne and Pommade pour les lèvres places their production to the period following the end of Madame de Pompadour’s sexual relationship with the king, yet the works’ focus on their subject’s genitalia—in both the figures’ poses and the included bidets—suggests that the marquise’s sexuality was not simply swept under the rug with this change in position.

Unlike the Livre drawings, which potentially target a particular individual, libertine genre scenes establish a more generic and less critical link between bidet use and female sexuality. Among such works is François Boucher’s La Toilette intime (fig. 74), part of a series of four oval canvases depicting intimate moments in the daily lives of women. In addition to the bidet scene, the series includes images of a woman using a bourdalou (Une Femme qui pisse, fig. 75), exposing her backside as she lifts the skirt of her dress (La Jupe

246 “Il n’est pas besoin, dans les fleurs blanches, de beaucoup de remèdes extérieurs: il est seulement important de tenir propres les parties par où se fait l’écoulement; d’empêcher que les humeurs épanchées n’y séjournent, n’y croupissent.” Ibid., 6: 863.

247 The painting depicting a woman using a bourdalou is recorded under the title La Toilette intime in Alexandre Ananoff, François Boucher, 2 vols. (Lausanne: La Bibliothèque des arts, 1976), 1: no. 212. I have opted for the more commonly used title Une femme qui pisse to avoid confusion with the bidet image, which is also referred to (more fittingly) as La Toilette intime. The bidet image was apparently unknown to Ananoff despite its publication two years prior in Bradley Smith, Erotic Art of the Masters: the 18th, 19th & 20th centuries (New York: Erotic Art Book Society, 1974). At the time of Smith’s publication, the bidet image was in the Munich collection of Albert Lange. Ananoff’s catalogue raisonné includes a canvas fragment related to the bidet painting (no. 213), cropped to show only the head and torso of a figure nearly identical in appearance to the woman at the bidet, but this fragment cannot be from the Lange painting, as it was recorded in its altered state in a 1917 sale. Following Smith’s publication, the bidet image was reproduced in Bonnet, Femmes au Bain, in
relevée, fig. 76), and taking a footbath (Une Jeune Femme prenant un bain de pieds, fig. 77). Although only Une Jeune Femme prenant un bain de pieds is dated (to 1766), the paintings’ similar themes, dimensions, and overall format suggest that they were conceived of as a series. All four works are first recorded in the collection of Paul Randon de Boisset (1708–1776), Louis XV’s receveur général des Finances and a regular patron and close friend of Boucher. An inventory of Randon de Boisset’s diverse collection, drawn up for his 1777 estate sale, includes works of the Italian Renaissance, Baroque works from the Low Countries (which he visited with Boucher in 1766), and over a hundred entries for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century French paintings. While many of the works in the collection, specifically those of Italian and Northern origin, depict traditional religious, mythological, and allegorical themes appropriate for public display, the small scale and overtly erotic tone of the Boucher series suggest it was likely intended for private viewing.

The series was broken into two lots at Randon de Boisset’s estate sale, divided according to compositional similarities: La Jupe relevée and Une Femme qui pisse, which formed the first pair, both show standing figures before glazed doors, while the La Toilette intime and Jeune Femme prenant un bain de pieds depict seated figures placed before a canopy bed with apricot-colored curtains. In addition to their similar settings and shared

which it is listed as being in a private collection in Munich. A work recently sold by the Auktionshaus Stahl (Gemälde Alte und Neuere Meister, May 2013) appears to be identical to the bidet image in Smith’s and Bonnet’s texts. The Stahl canvas, however, was sold as a nineteenth-century work. Unfortunately, I was unable to confirm the provenance of the Stahl canvas or the rationale behind the dating.

248 Ananoff dates La Jupe relevée (no. 210), Une Femme qui pisse, and the canvas fragment related to La Toilette intime to 1742, but does not account for this assignment.

249 Pierre Remy and Claude-François Julliot, Catalogue de tableaux & desseins précieux des maîtres célèbres des trois écoles, figures de marbres, de bronze... (Paris, 1777), no. 196 and 197.

250 According to the annotations in a copy of the sale catalogue, the first lot was acquired by Dubois and the second by Quesney. The latter group next appears in the catalogue for the estate sale of the Baron de Saint-Julien (21 June 1784, lot 67).
focus on women engaged in acts of bodily cleansing, *La Toilette intime* and *Jeune Femme prenant un bain de pieds*, the two works on which I will focus here, both include the same silver ewer and a black-and-white cat resting at the feet of the main figure.

*Une Jeune Femme prenant un bain de pieds* breaks from the ribald tone of the series’ other three canvases, in which the women hitch up their fashionable gowns and part their legs. Swathed in a white chemise as she dips her feet in water, the woman at the footbath seems more closely related to eighteenth-century representations of bathing goddesses than her indelicate series counterparts. The top of the woman’s gown slips down uncovering a bit of décolletage and a bare shoulder, and a glimpse of her legs is revealed by the raised skirt, but on the whole the work projects only a mild sensuality, with the table’s carved heart and the sleeping cat nestled between a pair of pink slippers adding a sweet charm to the scene. Raising a finger to address an unseen figure to her right, the woman is also, notably, the only figure in the series to acknowledge any presence outside the limits of the image.

*In La Toilette intime*, by contrast, the mistress and servant look only to one another, unaware of any potential onlookers before them. Accordingly, there is no mannered posing or projected modesty here. Rather, the central woman is positioned quite naturalistically in accordance with the task at hand, firmly seated on the bidet with her legs spread wide and her back slightly hunched as she reaches down with her cloth. Such an unselfconscious comportment and display of the woman’s body places the viewer in the role of a true voyeur to the scene, one who looks on without being seen. This effect is enhanced by the oval format of the series, which, as commentators have noted, mimics the eye gazing through an opening such as a peephole or keyhole. Only the cat positioned between the double set of ‘legs’—

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251 Bonnet, *Femmes au Bain*, 107; Smith, *Erotic Art*, 5. Voyeurism is directly depicted in *Une Femme qui pisse*, in which a man peers in on the scene from glazed doors behind the urinating woman.
those of the woman and of the bidet—seems to acknowledge any outside presence, looking out toward the picture plane. Boucher had previously employed the double entendre of a minon (pussy) between a woman’s legs in his La Toilette of 1742 (Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza), but in the case of La Toilette intime, the cat’s flattened ears and erect tail suggest it is somewhat unsettled. In sharp opposition to the contented, sleeping cat in Une Jeune Femme prenant un bain de pieds, the cat in La Toilette intime appears actively stimulated, as if this minon is itself responding to the physical shock of the water. The two pink roses on the floor just to the left of the woman’s foot in La Toilette intime also seem ripe for a symbolic reading, the rose being a long-established symbol for the female genitalia—and one commonly employed in eighteenth-century genre scenes—due to its form and link to reproduction. Significantly, the roses in La Toilette intime are plucked, suggesting the woman’s already ‘deflowered’ state.

A plucked flower likewise rests on the floor of La Toilette intime by Louis-Léopold Boilly (1761–1845), an undated work likely from the 1790s when Boilly was producing mildly erotic genre scenes (fig. 78).252 Set within a modest interior, the scene depicts a woman straddling a bidet similar in design to the examples owned by Louis XV and the duc de Choiseul-Stainville (fig. 66, 67), with a removable lid, ceramic basin, and hinged storage compartment for scented oils and other accessories. With her right hand partially submerged in the bidet basin, her wrist bends towards her body as she prepares to splash some water up her skirt. Like Boucher’s woman on the bidet, she is unaware of any onlookers to this private moment, staring off with an unfocused gaze and a slight smile as if caught in a daydream.

252 Among his works from this period is The Lovers and the Escaped Bird (ca. 1794, Louvre), which prompted the artist Jean-Baptiste-Joseph Wicar to denounce Boilly before the Société Républicaine des Arts on the charge of producing “ouvrages d’une obscénité révoltante pour les moeurs républicaines.” Athanase Detournelle, Journal de la Société populaire et républicaine des arts (Paris: 1794): 381-3.
Might she be thinking about a lover? Given the manual contact required of the bidet, it would be an easy transition for the woman to slip from washing her genitals to pleasuring herself. Such a shift occurs, for example, in Thérèse Philosophe (1748), the pornographic novel attributed to Jean-Baptiste de Boyer, marquis d'Argens (1704–1771). As the narrator Thérèse recounts, while washing herself alone in her room one evening, she “became engaged in attentively examining this part that makes us women,” discovering the great pleasures of clitoral masturbation in the process (fig. 79, note the basin to left of the candle).

« Si utile & si nécessaire »

Elsewhere in Thérèse Philosophe, the marquis d'Argens further associates genital washing, and the bidet in particular, with female sexuality, as does the pornographic novel Margot, la ravaudeuse (1750), written by Louis Charles Fougeret de Monbron (1706–1760). Rather than simply relying on the bidet as a narrative device through which to present titillating scenes, d'Argens and Fougeret de Monbron positively present the bidet as a necessary—indeed, the most necessary—aspect of a sexually active woman’s personal hygiene ritual. In both texts, the young female protagonist is unacquainted with the bidet until falling under the guidance and influence of an older, more sexually experienced woman and, in turn, extols its benefits to her readers.


254 “…j’écartai les cuisses de mon mieux et m’attachai à examiner attentivement cette partie qui nous fait femmes.” Romanciers libertins, 1: 903.

Having left her home following an extended liaison with a stable boy, the titular character in *Margot, la ravaudeuse* ends up in the brothel of Madame Florence, who informs her new recruit that women in their line of work must never “skimp on the sponge” and offers Margot her “first lesson in cleanliness” by introducing her to the bidet. Later in the text, having been well convinced of the benefits of the bidet, Margot breaks from her narration to offer a lengthy aside in which she outlines the many valuable things *les honnêtes femmes* owe to the prostitute, first among them the bidet, which Margot describes as “so useful and so necessary.” Like Margot, the narrator of *Thérèse Philosophe* is also introduced to the bidet by a former prostitute, a neighbor named Madame Bois-Laurier, who has taken to checking in on Thérèse following the death of Thérèse’s mother. In a short chapter entitled “Utilité des bidets,” Thérèse recounts her education in this essential item, which occurs during one of Madame Bois-Laurier’s usual morning visits. As Thérèse dresses for the day, Bois-Laurier stops her, remarking, “I believe that you are putting on your chemise without having washed your pussy. So where is your bidet?” When Thérèse admits that she is unfamiliar with the bidet, Bois-Laurier is shocked, advising her young friend, “Be very careful not to boast of having lacked a piece of furniture that is as necessary

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256 “Cependant il ne suffit pas d'être belle; on doit être encore attentive sur soi: un des devoirs indispensables de notre profession, c'est de ne point épargner l'éponge. Il y a apparence que vous n'en connaissez pas trop l'usage: venez, que je vous le montre, tandis que nous en avons le tems. Aussitôt elle m'introduisit dans une petite garde-robe; & m'ayant fait mettre à califourchon sur un bidet, elle m'y donna la première leçon de propreté.” Ibid., 1: 812.

257 “Je ne puis m'empêcher de dire ici, par manière d'apostille, que les honnêtes femmes nous ont bien de l'obligation. Non seulement elles nous sont redevables d'un meuble si utile & si nécessaire, mais encore d'un nombre prodigieux d'autres découvertes charmantes pour les commodités de la vie, & d'un goût exquis dans l'art de rehausser les charmes de la Nature, & d'en réparer ou dérober aux yeux les imperfections. C'est nous qui leur avons appris le secret de multiplier les grâces, de les combiner à l'infini par les différentes façons de nous parer; & surtout par l'air aisé de nos démarches, de notre port, de notre maintien. Nous sommes en tout les objets de leur attention & de leur étude.” Ibid., 1: 815.

258 “Mais, coquine! me dit-elle par réflexion; je crois que tu prends ta chemise sans avoir fait la toilette à ton minon! Où est donc ton bidet?” *Romanciers libertins*, 1: 927.
for a respectable girl as her own chemise.”\(^{259}\) After bringing her own bidet over for Thérèse’s use, Bois-Laurier offers a hands-on tutorial, as recounted by Thérèse:

She planted me on it, and despite everything I could say and do, this obliging woman, while laughing like a madwoman, washed thoroughly what she called my pussy. Lavender water was not spared on it. How little I suspected the party it was being prepared for and the motive behind this meticulous ablution!\(^{260}\)

With hindsight, Thérèse now recognizes that this was more than a simple lesson in feminine cleanliness; it was also preparation for Thérèse’s ensuing rendezvous (arranged by Bois-Laurier) with an older man.

An illustration of the bidet scene in a 1783 edition of *Thérèse Philosophe* (fig. 80) emphasizes the bidet’s role in transforming Thérèse into a suitable object of desire for her impending date.\(^{261}\) With Thérèse already astride the bidet, Bois-Laurier readies a sponge with a heavy dose of perfumed oil—presumably the lavender Thérèse mentions in the text—from one of the many bottles kept in the wooden box in the right foreground. This emphasis on not simply cleaning but also enhancing the female body (in this case by way of perfume) is found in other elements of the image as well, including the toilette table set to the right, upon which sit several pots likely filled with various creams and powders, and the display of Thérèse’s dress and corset on wall hooks immediately behind her. Additionally, despite Thérèse’s explanation that, being in a state of mourning for her mother, she was obliged to decline

\(^{259}\) “Je ne sais, en vérité, ce que vous voulez me dire avec votre bidet. Comment! dit-elle, point de bidet? Garde-toi bien de te vanter d’avoir manqué d’un meuble qui est aussi nécessaire à une fille du bon air que sa propre chemise. Pour aujourd’hui, je veux bien te prêter le mien, mais demain, sans plus tarder, songe à l’emplette d’un bidet.” Ibid., 1: 927-928.

\(^{260}\) “Elle me campa dessus, et malgré tout ce que je pus dire et faire, cette femme officieuse, tout en riant comme une folle, lava elle-même abondamment ce qu’elle nommait mon minon. L’eau de lavande ne lui fut pas épargnée. Que je soupçonnais peu la fête qui lui était préparée et le motif de cet exact lavabo!” Ibid., 1: 928.

\(^{261}\) All of the *Thérèse Philosophe* illustrations reviewed in this chapter come from Jean-Baptiste de Boyer, marquis d’Argens, *Thérèse Philosophe avec figures*, 2 vols. (London: 1783).
Bois-Laurier’s offers to fix her hair and instead kept her nightcap on as she took the bidet, the engraving depicts a towering coiffure crowning Thérèse’s head.

Whereas Bois-Laurier encourages Thérèse to bathe herself in preparation for a night of potential sexual activity, Madame C***, a close friend and advisor of Thérèse, had previously promoted the genital bath for purely therapeutic reasons. Aware that Thérèse has been experiencing great discomfort after stimulating herself against a bedpost, Madame C*** recommends Thérèse bathe in warm wine the area bruised by the friction. Although the text does not suggest a bidet was used in this remedy, clearly establishing the later experience with Bois-Laurier as Thérèse’s first exposure to a bidet, the 1783 illustration for this episode depicts Thérèse astride a bidet, treating her tender vulva (fig. 81). Wearing a chemise and simple nightcap, Thérèse is set in a stark room, stripped of all the references to the various rituals of self-adornment and embellishment found in the Bois-Laurier illustration. There are no clothes on display, toilette tables stacked with goods, or boxes of scented oils here. Rather than casting the bidet as simply one of a number of steps in a woman’s preparation of her body for a male suitor, the image illustrates the personal benefits of the bidet. Not only does Madame C***’s recommended genital bath greatly soothe the pain Thérèse is experiencing as a result of her over vigorous attempts at self-stimulation, it later leads to Thérèse’s discovery of her clitoris in the episode noted above, which keeps Thérèse thoroughly satisfied for quite some time.

Within Thérèse Philosophe, therefore, genital washing takes on a number of positive significances: it is the gateway to pleasurable self-stimulation, a successful therapeutic remedy, and a prelude to lovemaking. The bath similarly takes on multivalent nature in Le

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262 Romanciers libertins, 1: 927.
Soir (fig. 82), part of a series on the Times of the Day engraved in the 1770s by Emmanuel Jean Nepomucène de Ghendt (1738–1815) after designs by Pierre-Antoine Baudouin.²⁶³ The timing of the scene is ambiguous, as it is unclear whether the bather, nude except for her slippers and the sheet wrapped around her torso, is about to begin or has just finished her bath. The particulars of the bath itself—that is, whether it is a simple sponge bath, as indicated by the shell-shaped basin and sponge at foreground left, or a full immersion bath in the oblong basin positioned in front of the left wall—is also left open. What is entirely evident is that the bather and her two female servants are not expecting the arrival of the male visitor peeking his head through the door at right. Raising a hand towards the man, the bather leans away from him and into the arms of her maid, which are wrapped around the mistress’s waist in a protective embrace. The second servant responds as well, pushing the door closed with one hand and pulling a curtain with the other as she attempts to prevent the man from having any longer of a look at her mistress. The women’s reactions closely mirror those found in traditional depictions of Diana surprised at the bath, in which the goddess’s nymphs protectively shield her nude body from Actaeon’s gaze. Moreover, the man’s facial response—with wide eyes, raised eyebrows, and an open mouth—seems to express the same sense of surprise Ovid attributes to the hunter Actaeon, whose disruption of Diana’s bath, though intrusive, was nevertheless unintentional. Yet, while the bather mirrors the man’s surprised expression, nothing in her face (nor in that of the servant by her side) suggests that she is particularly disturbed by his presence. Rather, she simply appears caught off guard and

²⁶³ On the works comprising the print series, see the entries in Emmanuel Bocher, Les Graveurs du XVIIIe siècle, Pierre-Antoine Baudouin (Paris: 1875): cat. no. 32 (Le Matin, p. 35), cat. no. 33 (Le Midi, p. 35), cat. no. 35 (La Nuit, p. 37), and cat. no. 46 (Le Soir, p. 46). On Baudouin’s original gouaches for Le Matin and La Nuit, see Jacob Bean and Lawrence Turchić, 15th-18th Century French Drawings in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986), 21-22.
unprepared to receive him at this moment. The *amour* depicted in the circular overdoor positioned above the man’s head suggests that he is, in fact, the bather’s lover.

When *Le Soir* is placed within the context of the series to which it belongs, it becomes clear that this is indeed the case. In *La Nuit* (fig. 83), the next and final print in the series, a man and woman with features and hairstyles similar to the pair depicted in *Le Soir* have met in a wooded grove. The woman is seated with her legs spread open slightly as the man leans in, tightly clutching a bit of fabric at her waist. Again, an *amour* presides over the scene, this time a version of Falconet’s *Menacing Cupid*, who eyes the couple as he reaches for an arrow. To make what is about to happen even more apparent, a large log surrounded by a flowering bush extends into the scene from the right foreground, mirroring the direction of the man’s forward lean. When paired with this scene, the bath central to *Le Soir* becomes a preparatory act to lovemaking, as is the case in novels such as *Thérèse Philosophe*, and the bather’s raised right hand, ambiguous when viewed in isolation, now reads as a gesture for her lover to wait but a little longer.

The act of bathing takes on a second significance when considered in relation to *Le Midi* (fig. 84), the print that precedes *Le Soir* in the series. Alone in a garden, a woman—again, presumably the same woman, as she is bears similar features and wears a dress identical to that in *La Nuit*—has broken from her midday reading to masturbate. Having dropped her book from her right hand, she has given herself over fully to her act of self-stimulation, raising a leg in the air as she leans back, staring off into the distance with heavy-lidded eyes and parted lips. In her moment of pleasure, the woman experiences a physical languidness in keeping with medical accounts detailing the enervating effects of masturbation, triggered by the softening of the nerves. *L'onanisme* (1760), the widely read
treatise on masturbation by Samuel-Auguste Tissot (1728–1797), recommends bathing as a remedy for such effects, explaining that the water—specifically cold water—will restore “a spring even to inanimate fibers.” Moreover, Tissot also promoted the bath as a means by which to “diminish the feverish and nervous heat” brought on by masturbation, an effect that Baudouin seems to allude to in Le Midi by setting the woman outdoors under the warmth of the midday sun. Might the bath undertaken in Le Soir, then, be a restorative act intended to remedy the effects of her afternoon pleasures while also preparing her for those to come?

In placing the bathing scene between representations of self-stimulation and a lovers’ tryst, Baudouin’s series clearly establishes a connection between a woman’s washing of her body and female sexuality, yet, as with Thérèse Philosophe, this link can be instructive as well as pleasurable. While such visual and literary sources offer up mildly titillating scenes of libertine pleasures, they nevertheless impart to their audiences important lessons in female health and hygiene. Pleasure and instruction are, of course, not incompatible; since the classical age, they had together been upheld as the dual objective of the arts, an objective met in these cases by unexpected sources. And significantly, as mass-produced objects, prints and novels were more likely than other forms of representation to impart their lessons to a wide audience, one that surely included women.


265 Ibid.

266 Sheriff, Moved by Love, 100.

267 While the primary audience for libertine novels and prints is often taken to be male, there is no reason to assume women were not familiar with them as well. Certain topics addressed in Thérèse Philosophe—including female hygiene practices, masturbation, and contraception—offer lessons to a distinctly female audience, as Mary Sheriff has noted in Moved by Love, 122. The wide availability of prints also allows for a potential female audience; Baudouin’s series of the Times of the Day, for example, was publicly advertised in Journal de Paris, 14 July 1778. The announcement is reproduced in Bocher, Les Graveurs du XVIIIe siècle, 46.
Intimate Interiors

Beyond establishing the act of washing as a crucial part of a woman’s domestic routine, representations of bathing women also participate in the construction of the bathing space as a distinctly feminine realm, a space in which, barring the occasional intrusion, women can interact freely with one another in privacy. The intimacy formed among women in such a setting is best expressed in the relationships established between the bather and the attending figures, be they friends (as in the episode with Thérèse and Bois-Laurier) or servants (as is most commonly seen in prints and paintings). In the aforementioned illustration of Thérèse’s introduction to the bidet by Bois-Laurier (fig. 80), the two women lock eyes and smile at one another as Bois-Laurier readies her sponge, sharing a connection that is rarely expressed in the other illustrations of the text; the only other instances in which characters are mutually fixated on one another in such a way are scenes of potential or actual lovers.268 Lifting her chemise with her right hand, Thérèse raises her left in a gesture that reads equally as a reaction to the physical sensation of cool water against her skin and a sign of her relinquishing control of the situation as she leans back and thrusts her pelvis forward towards Bois-Laurier’s waiting hand. The necessary physical intimacy required of the situation is played up for maximum impact here, sexualizing the women’s private interaction to near comic effect.

Intentionally or not, the heightened relationship between Thérèse and Bois-Laurier (in both image and text) plays to period fears, frequently cited in moralizing medical texts, regarding the improper role certain female acquaintances may have in a woman’s developing sexuality. J.D.T. de Bienville (1726–1813), for example, casts suspicion on such intimate

268 See, for example, d'Argens, Thérèse Philosophe avec figures, vol. 1: plates following pp. 94, 96; vol. 2: plates following pp. 10, 62, 64, 74.
relationships between women in *La Nymphomanie, ou Traité de la fureur uterine*, first published in 1771. According to Bienville, to treat a woman afflicted with a dangerously insatiable sexual drive, one must root out the negative influence that serves to encourage her deviant sexuality, starting with intimate acquaintances. The most likely suspect, however, is the female domestic servant:

> Should this [intimate] relationship exist with a serving maid, regardless of how prudent she may appear, she must be watched and followed as attentively as if she was a prostitute who raised the most intense suspicions regarding her conduct. It will be necessary to carefully observe the actions and looks of the afflicted as she receives the services of this attendant.\(^{269}\)

Yet, if Bienville and others regard female servants as a potentially corrupting presence in a household, historical accounts of relationships between mistresses and servants provide an important counter-voice to such condemnations. Contemplating what went on behind closed doors may have provoked certain anxieties for many eighteenth-century men, but from the perspective of women, the bonds forged in the absence of men could be meaningful and fulfilling. Letters from the period, for example, attest to the close relationships that often arose between a woman and her *femme de chambre*, who is sometimes described as a cherished and trusted friend.\(^{270}\) As Claude Petitfrère has suggested, such sentiments were in large part a product of the intimate physical interaction required of the relationship, with the

\(^{269}\) “Si cette liaison existe vis-à-vis d’un domestique, de quelque sagesse qu’on la suppose, il faut l’examiner et suivre avec la même rigueur qu’on aurait vis-à-vis de la fille du monde qui aurait donné le plus violents soupçons sur sa conduite. On observera avec le plus grand scrupule les gestes et les regards de la malade en recevant les services de ce domestique.” J.D.T. de Bienville, *La Nymphomanie, ou Traité de la fureur uterine*... (Amsterdam: Marc-Michel Ray, 1771), 82. A similar warning regarding the potential influence of female servants is raised in Tissot, *L’onanisme*, 48-49.

\(^{270}\) For examples, see Claude Petitfrère, *L’Œil du Maître: Maîtres et serviteurs, de l’époque classique au romantisme* (Brussels: Éditions Complexe, 2006), Chapter 4.
personal servant being privy to the mistress’s most private domestic routines. Within representations of the domestic bath, such a bond might serve merely as an easy source of great erotic potential, yet female relationships are often more sensitively rendered. In many cases, artists cast the spaces of the bath as distinctly feminine realms in which the most intimate exchanges are found between women, stressing the ease and comfort with which the female subjects interact in privacy.

Huet’s bathing panel at Chantilly provides an early example of the structuring of the bathing space as an isolated site of female interaction (albeit of the monkey variety), a feature that is particularly pronounced when the image is considered within its larger series. The placement of the bathing scene on the same wall of the duchesse de Bourbon’s boudoir as the panel depicting a card game (fig. 85) enhances, through contrast, the association of the domestic bath with the private space of women. Whereas the card scene takes place within a salon, a setting that is more ‘open’ both spatially (with fully exposed windows spanning the rear and lateral walls) and in terms of gender (the party is mixed, with one male and two female monkeys), the represented bathing room is occupied exclusively by women and closed off on three sides by shuttered and curtained windows, providing an increased sense of solitude. As the bather and her servant turn away from the external viewer, seemingly unaware of any potential witnesses to the scene, they suggest a familiar rapport in their poses. They are, notably, the only two figures in the entire series to make eye contact with one another; the bather looks to her servant from a slightly elevated position as she steps onto her stool, but the pair is, nevertheless, pictured in a reciprocal exchange. Moreover, apart

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from the trio depicted in the toilette scene (fig. 86), the bathing panel is the only instance of any direct physical interaction between figures in Huet’s panels.

The physical intimacy required of a mistress and her servants during the act of bathing is well expressed in an aquatint engraved by Nicolas-François Regnault (1746–1810) after a design by Baudouin (fig. 87). 272 Set within a circular bathing room, three women—one bather and two servants—are pictured in such close proximity that their bodies seem to merge: the upper half of the standing servant’s profile is rendered as if it is actually touching the top of the bather’s head, connecting the two figures along a shared contour line; and the side of the kneeling servant’s turned head follows the curve of the bather’s torso, positioned against her body like two fitted pieces. As the bather carefully exits the bath, the three women’s bodies are staged in a remarkable bit of choreography, with curved limbs cutting gracefully across the image’s center. The bather’s right ankle catches on the front edge of the square bathtub, and she reaches forward to steady herself, placing one hand on the shoulder and the other on the forearm of the servant standing at the head of the bathtub. The servant, in turn, opens her left arm around the side of the bather’s body, which she prepares to wrap in a large sheet. Extending a second drying cloth around her mistress’s lower half, the kneeling servant is poised as if she is about to rise and, with the other attendant, encircle the bather with their arms. Despite her fully nude state, the bather appears at ease at the center of this interconnected trio, her body open to the servants’ touches and her mouth curved in a slight smile.

272 Bocher, Les Graveurs du XVIIIe siècle, 12 (cat. no 10). The aquatint was produced using an undated (and now lost) gouache on ivory miniature by Baudouin, recorded and illustrated in Gustave Mühlbacher, Catalogue des tableaux, dessins gouaches, aquarelles, gouaches, miniatures et marbres du XVIIIe siècle… (Paris, 1899), 197 (cat. no. 332).
The lack of self-consciousness with which a lady of the house appeared nude before her female servants is likewise illustrated in a pair of oil paintings by Nicolas-Réne Jollain (1732–1804), probably produced in the late 1770s (fig. 88, 89).²⁷³ Depicting the bath and the toilette, the works appear to feature the same mistress, and, although the face of the maid is mostly obscured in *La Toilette*, the coloring and style of her hair suggest that the same maid is depicted as well. The visual focus of both works is certainly the mistress’s nude body, the lightness of which is enhanced by the white fabrics surrounding it and set off against the darker tones of reds, greens, and grays used extensively throughout the images. As with Baudouin’s *Le Bain*, the mistress’s nudity is contrasted with the layers of clothing that cover all but a few sections of the servant’s body (with the fullness of the skirt suggesting more layers underneath), yet both appear completely accustomed to this disparity.

In Jollain’s *Le Bain*, the bather sits atop a pillowed cushion placed at the end of a bathtub shaped to imitate seat furniture, as was popular during the period, while the maid leans in to wrap a thin *toile* around her nude body. The relaxed comportment of the bather’s body suggests her comfortability with and openness to the servant’s intimate proximity: her extended left hand rests casually on the cushion; the soft skin of her torso folds into pillows of flesh; and, in pulling her right foot back and pushing her knee out towards the servant, she parts her legs slightly. The servant, for her part, attends her mistress with great sensitivity, pinching the fabric lightly with one hand and gathering it softly with the other, her arms forming a C-shape around the right side of the bather’s upper body as if she is posed in a moment of pre-embrace. There is, perhaps, even a sense of affection suggested by the

²⁷³ While neither painting is dated, Louis-Marin Bonnet (1736-1793) produced engravings based on their designs in 1781. According to the sale inventory of Bonnet’s estate, the paintings were in Bonnet’s collection at the time of his death in 1793. They were acquired in 1914 by Ernest Cognacq and are now part of the Musée Cognacq-Jay, Paris. See cat. no. 66 and 67 in Thérèse Burollet, *Les peintures: Musée Cognacq-Jay* (Paris: Paris Musées, 2004), 182-185.
exaggerated extension of the servant’s neck towards the bather, as well as the wistful expression she imparts as she gazes down upon her mistress’s face. Similarly, in La Toilette, the servant looks directly at her mistress, now from an even more intimate position, her head placed just below the woman’s left breast. As she bends down to slide a chemise up the woman’s extended leg, the servant extends her right arm between the mistress’s upper thighs, her gauze shawl grazing against mistress’s pubis. As with Le Bain, the mistress shows no signs of being unsettled by the servant’s intimate engagement with her body. In both works, the physical closeness required of such domestic activities come off as rather routine, to the extent that the mistress remains largely detached from the servant’s presence, instead fixing her attention elsewhere.

Such a casual response to being unclothed in the presence of a servant is in keeping with early modern codes of behavior in which revealing one’s naked body to a person of a lower social position was not only acceptable, but also seen as expressing a favorable regard towards the recipient of such a display. Given the physical contact required of domestic routines such as bathing and dressing, such an unselfconscious attitude on the part of the employer was an essential element of a successful mistress-servant relationship. The personal familiarity between servants and their employers extended to other aspects of daily life as well. As Sarah Maza has discussed in her study of domestic service in early modern France, higher-ranking female servants often slept in close proximity to their employers, either in the same room or, more commonly, in an adjacent garde-robe attached to the mistress’s bedchambers. Due to the near constant presence and regular physical contact required of

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domestic service, it is likely that female servants possessed a greater knowledge of the intimate details of a mistress’s life, routines, and body than even the master of the house.

Within Jollain’s pendants, this sense of a female servant being an ‘insider’ to her mistress’s private life and personal quarters is suggested by the way in which the spaces dedicated to the bath and the toilette are depicted as restricted areas of female interaction. The bathing room is closed off from the outside by the canopy and folding screen behind the bather, while the curtains and mirror in the dressing room cover all but a small section of the window. Significantly, an oval portrait of a man (presumably the master of the house) hangs to the left of the fireplace in *La Toilette*, the figure’s eyes looking down at the scene below. Although this added element to the room offers a figurative point of identification for a male viewer of Jollain’s painting, it also calls attention to the absence of an actual male presence in the represented space. Moreover, the stress placed on the servant’s attentive gaze in *Le Bain* and *La Toilette* underscores how, as Chris Roulston has remarked in relation to Boucher’s *La Toilette* of 1742, “the maid sees what society and, to some degree, the husband or lover never sees.”

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**The Servant’s Gaze**

The issue of who can and cannot behold the bather’s body is central to Jean-Baptiste Pater’s *Le Plaisir de l’été* (fig. 90), the design of which is known through an engraving produced in 1744 by Louis Surugue (1686–1762).277 As a retinue of maids busy themselves in the service of their bathing mistress—drying her breast, readying to dress her, preparing

276 Chris Roulston, “Framing Sensibility: The Female Couple in Art and Narrative,” *Studies in English Literature* 46.3 (Summer 2006): 650.

277 According to the print’s inscription, Pater’s original painting (now lost) was in the collection of the Claude Le Besgue de Majainville, abbé de Morigny at the time of the engraving’s production. Painted copies in portrait format are presently in the Wallace Collection and the Detroit Institute of Arts.
her toilette—one servant has stepped away to the window at the left of the composition, where a man is shown peering into this private world of women. While he is clearly attempting to gain a glimpse of the bather, the composition is arranged so that, significantly, he appears to be prevented from doing so. His sightline to the bather is blocked by the curtain being pulled by the servant at the window, as well as by the two women standing at the foot of the bathtub. The voyeur’s inability to look upon the bather’s body is underscored by the two busts mounted on the upper wall of the bathing chamber. The male portrait subjects, being rendered in mirrored profile views, are also denied the opportunity to gaze upon the bathing body below and are instead caught in a back-and-forth with one another. In contrast to these male gazes that go nowhere, the women in the room look freely, with the bather serving as the primary visual focus for the group. Not only is she the potential object of her own gaze as she looks across the room towards the small mirror placed atop the dressing table, four of the maids (the three standing at the bathtub and the one at the dressing table) look to her as well.

The bather is made a focal point for the external viewer as well, with her radiant and voluminous body distinguished from the surrounding pictorial elements, contrasting with the darker tones of the interior as well as her servants’ heavily-clothed and tightly-corseted figures. Yet, if she serves a primary focus for the viewer, she is just one such point. As is so often the case with Pater’s designs, the work is structured so that our eye is encouraged to look elsewhere as well, moving from figure to figure across the image. If there is a clear point of rest, it is found perhaps in the two women at the center of the composition, placed at the apex of the figural group and visually reinforced by the two vertical wall panels behind them. My eye most often returns to (and stays with) these two attendants, who
simultaneously look upon their mistress and, through their body placement, deny the voyeur at the window the chance to do the same. In the end, the image’s most compelling element is not the bather but rather the women who are able to see what men cannot.

The servant’s gaze is central to Watteau’s *La Toilette intime* as well, narrowed here considerably and directed between the bather’s parted thighs. Linda Nochlin, far less evasive on this point than the commentators noted earlier, characterizes the subject as “not a mere morning toilette but a mock religious scene: the worship of the female sex organ.”

Nochlin continues:

>The snowy bed is a kind of altar. The servant who stares in a trance of ravished contemplation at the revealed sex of her mistress proffers the sponge and water like an acolyte presenting the sacred objects at Mass. This is surely intended as a travesty of Christian worship, meant to intensify the pleasure of the (male) viewer who was the intended recipient of the erotic revelation. For revelation is doubtless what this painting is about: a kind of erotic epiphany.

But is the viewer indeed the true recipient of the revelation? In contrast to, for example, an anonymous eighteenth-century engraving (fig. 91) in which, as Nochlin describes it, “a half-clad young woman, a razor in one hand, a bidet on the floor at her feet, looks down with satisfaction at her newly shaven pubic area, revealed for the delectation of her lover and the potent consumer of the print,” Watteau’s bather is posed so that she presents herself not to the external viewer, but rather to the servant kneeling before her. It is the female attendant, therefore, who assumes the most immediate point of visual (and, potentially, physical)

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279 Ibid., 117-118.

280 Ibid., 118. Posner introduced the print into discussions of *La Toilette intime*, arguing that, while the two images are clearly related, “Watteau has lifted [*La Toilette intime* into the realm of high art.” Posner, *Anotine Watteau*, 106. Unlike Posner, Nochlin sees no distinction between the two images, either in terms of pornographic potential or intent.
contact with the bather, with the viewer “structured as a third party to the intimate exchange,” as Nancy Miller has observed. Should Nochlin’s presumed male viewer wish to partake in this revelation of the female sex organ, he must do so by inhabiting the role of the female servant and occupying her fixed, attentive gaze.

To be certain, elements of Watteau’s work undoubtedly carry an erotic appeal for certain viewers who seek it there. One might linger on the mistress’s exposed breasts, imagine the previous night’s activities in the bedroom, or delight in the possibility that the women will soon abandon their daily routine and engage in the sort of sexual intimacies often ascribed to private female relationships. Yet, the image offers other potential pleasures as well, which are overlooked when we assume it is meant to only speak to heterosexual male viewers. It may have been produced with a male patron in mind—and indeed its first recorded owners were men—but it has also passed through at least three female owners since the close of the nineteenth century: it was in the collection of the Vicomtesse de Courval by 1899, purchased by the Princess de Poix in 1912, and was last recorded in the possession of the Duchesse de Mouchy. What these women found of interest in the painting we do not know, but as a female viewer who has looked at and thought about the image for some time, I


282 Hubert Damisch has also noted this viewing dynamic in The Judgment of Paris, trans. John Goodman (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 301: “According to René Démoris, the doubled or relayed looks at the sexual object built into the structure of this painting…makes it quite audacious, for here the beholder is invited to project himself onto the figure of the voyeur within the painting [i.e., the servant], thereby vicariously gaining access to a full view of said object.” The fact that the external viewer’s double is, in this case, a woman does not factor into his discussion. For Démoris’s note of le double regard, see “Watteau, le paysage et ses figures,” in Antoine Watteau (1684-1721): The Painter, His Age and His Legend, ed. François Moureau and Margaret Morgan Grasselli (Paris: Champion-Slatkine, 1987), 161.

283 Grasselli and Rosenberg, Watteau, 335.
find it to be a truly compelling work, particularly in the way it prioritizes the female gaze and sensitively renders, to my eyes, the intimate connections that can develop between women.

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Exploring a diverse range of visual material, this chapter has suggested various ways to move beyond standard characterizations of domestic bathing imagery as a source of simple erotic pleasure. Without denying that as a potential (and for some viewers, a primary) response, it is possible—and important—to explore other issues raised by the works’ representation of the female body. Produced in a period in which medical texts were for the first time turning attention to the hygienic benefits of bathing, many of the works offer instructive lessons in this regard, disseminating and to some degree normalizing practices that were still newly recommended. In other cases, such as the images alluding to female sexuality and the intimate bonds formed between women, the works often serve as a counterbalance to voices—both literary and, as evidenced by the Saint-Aubin drawings, visual—concurrently circulating within French culture, positively figuring aspects of female daily life that were frequently condemned during the period. The works reviewed in this chapter do not present a single, unified response to what goes on behind closed doors, but in providing an entry point through which to explore a variety of issues of intimacy associated with the female body, they are more significant and far more complex than they may first appear.
CHAPTER FOUR

Private Pleasures & Public Display: The Eighteenth-Century Domestic Bathing Space

Within architectural manuscripts addressing private residences, an early discussion of the domestic bathing space appears in Louis Savot’s *L’architecture française*, first published in 1624 and reprinted throughout the seventeenth century.284 While Savot devotes a chapter to rooms related to the bath, he begins the section by declaring such spaces to be unnecessary given the period practice of wiping the skin with clean linens, which Savot regards as not only sufficient, but also more convenient and lacking the unknown risks he ascribes to bathing.285 As a physician, Savot approaches the architectural space of the bath from a medical standpoint; finding no direct health benefits to the practice of bathing, he remains skeptical as to the usefulness of the space itself. Despite his reservations, Savot proceeds with his recommendations, outlining a suite of rooms that, while noteworthy for its appearance in such an early architectural guide, pales in comparison to the baths that would be built within French residences during the following century.

After covering basic practical concerns related to the architecture of the bathing suite—for example, that the rooms should be located on a lower floor where water can be


285 “Les étuves et bains ne sont pas nécessaires en France, comme aux Provinces où l’on y est accoutumé, et encore moins aujourd’hui en quelque pays que ce soit, qu’anciennement; d’autant que les chose non accoutumées doivent toujours être suspectes à notre santé, et que nous nous en pouvons plus commodément passer que les anciens, à cause de l’usage du linge que nous avons, qui nous sert aujourd’hui à tenir le corps net, plus commodément...” Savot, *L’architecture française*, 95-96. On the early-modern practice of dry cleaning with linens, see Vigarello, *Concepts of Cleanliness*, 17-20.
transported more easily—Savot outlines the mechanics and functions of its various rooms. The first room, the *chambre du fourneau*, contains a wood-burning furnace servicing the hot-water heater (*chaudière*) and room-warmer (*poîle*). Savot next proposes a *chambre de l’étuve*, a term that is sometimes applied to the furnace room (particularly in eighteenth-century texts), but is here used to describe the steam room, which connects directly to the main bathing room, or *cabinet du bain*. Savot proposes a very modest *cabinet*, small in size with low vaulted ceilings to maintain a warm environment and windows to allow fresh air in after the bath is complete. Apart from the two bathtubs, outfitted with hot and cold taps, the only additional elements mentioned in the *cabinet* are a wall ledge for “boxes and vases filled with powders, liquids, and fragrant mixes” and a warming device for the linens.\(^{286}\) The final room is the *chambre du bain*, a space in which to retire and take the requisite rest following the bath. It is only in the description of the *chambre* that Savot addresses any specific decorative embellishment, describing it as a larger room “which will be clear, gay, and the most ornamented,” with tapestries lining the walls and beds dressed according to the season.\(^{287}\)

Given its required space, complicated plumbing, and costly equipment, even a modest multi-room bathing suite such as that described by Savot would have been available only to a certain class of homeowners, something Savot implies in the opening section of his chapter when he associates the bath with the nobleman in particular. After establishing his reservations regarding the necessity of the bath, he makes clear that he is going ahead with recommendations in case, “for some other reason, a *seigneur* desires to have one in his

\(^{286}\) Savot, *L’architecture française*, 100.

\(^{287}\) Ibid., 101.
Savot does not state explicitly what such a consideration might be, but the inclusion of a permanent space dedicated to bathing within a domestic interior would have served equally as a great personal luxury and an external signifier of status. And indeed, multi-room bathing suites were rare in seventeenth-century France, most often found in royal and noble residences, such as the Palais-Royal, the Louvre, and the châteaux de Versailles, Vaux-le-Vicomte, Clagny, and Saint-Cloud. Postdating the original publication of Savot’s text by several decades, these examples are more richly decorated and far more spacious than Savot’s basic model, often comprised of an *enfilade* of rooms for the bather’s use before, during, and after the bath, with service spaces located adjacent to or above the principal rooms. When Augustin-Charles d'Aviler defines the domestic bath in 1691, he describes it in accordance with these examples, expanding Savot’s practical four-room model into a grand *appartement des bains* with bathing rooms, service rooms, and social spaces, “all decorated and enriched by marble, stucco, and paintings, with sumptuous inlaid flooring.”

By the close of the seventeenth century, the domestic bath was firmly established as a site that allowed for both personal pleasures and a demonstration of one’s wealth and privilege, a duality that continues into the eighteenth century and is well captured in a painted fan now in the Victoria & Albert collection (fig. 92). Likely produced in the 1670s to

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288 Ibid., 96.

289 Palais-Royal and Louvre, Jacques Le Mercier for Anne of Austria, begun 1645 and 1652, respectively; Vaux-le-Vicomte, Louis Le Vau for Nicolas Fouquet, begun 1656; Versailles, Le Vau for Louis XIV, begun 1671; Clagny, Jules Hardouin-Mansart for Madame de Montespan, begun 1674; Saint-Cloud, Antoine Le Pautre for Philippe I, duc d'Orléans, begun 1677. The late seventeenth-century association of the bath with the French elite is evidenced by the definition for the term “bain” in the first edition of the *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*, 2 vols. (Paris: J. B. Coignard, 1694), 1:77: “the *appartement* intended for bathing. The baths of the king, the baths of the queen, the baths of Fontainebleau.”

celebrate the construction of Louis XIV’s *appartement des bains* at Versailles, the fan depicts a resplendent room in which Cupid soaks in his bathtub, just right of center. Comfortably resting against a large pillow, the young god seems to be enjoying this presumably well-deserved break from his work, which is alluded to by the quiver of arrows near the foot of the tub and the portrait of Cupid in action mounted over the fireplace. In addition to providing a bit of respite, the room is presented as a rich, sensory environment meant to stimulate all five senses. Starting from the bottom left and moving across the fan, we find the boxed orange tree for taste; the musical quintet for hearing; the landscape extending behind the open room for sight; the *cassolette* burning perfume and the rose garland placed above the bathtub for smell; and, finally, the bather’s submersion in the water for touch.

While the bathing room is figured as a private retreat in which the Cupid can seek refuge from his regular affairs and indulge his senses, the great activity surrounding him makes evident the considerable work that goes into providing such pleasures. Fifteen *amours* tend to his every need, bringing him linens, shuttling basins of water, readying the bed for the post-bath rest, and offering musical entertainment. Although the musicians and garland-hanger are superfluous additions, the remaining attendants carry out tasks that were commonly undertaken in the period, a time when simply preparing a bath was no easy matter. Having a bathing room in one’s home would have therefore always implied the presence of an active service staff on hand to take care of a host of duties, and thus signaling the owner’s elevated social position as a result. The sumptuous décor surrounding Cupid likewise establishes the bathing room as a site of privileged luxury. Consider the range of

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291 This connection is proposed in Pamela Cowen, *A Fanfare for the Sun King* (London: Third Millennium Publishing, 2003), 92-97.
costly materials presented here: the marble used for the large bathtub, marquetry floor, chimney piece, portrait frame, cassolette, and winged sculptures lining the perimeter; the gilt decoration on the pedestals, canopy vaults, and bed frame; the various fabrics detailed with lace and gold embroidery; and the blue-and-white porcelain vases, imported from China.

Documented eighteenth-century bathing rooms were not decorated with the same degree of opulence depicted in the fan—this is, after all, an imaginary space meant to evoke a royal example—but fine décor continued to play a critical role in creating an interior that would have been appreciated by the bather as well as those invited to view the space.

Compared to previous centuries, bathing rooms were more common in France during the eighteenth century, yet they remained rare additions to even the homes of the elite, found only in a small percentage of the floor plans recorded in the architectural guides of Jean Mariette, Jacques-François Blondel, and Jean-Charles Krafft.292 Accordingly, they were both great luxuries to be savored personally and novelties to be put on display, valued not just for the solitary pleasures they offered, but also for what they suggested about the owner. As Mimi Hellman has noted, while access to bathing rooms was generally limited, “the interactions that unfolded there would have been highly status-enhancing for all concerned. In this type of interior, privacy did not entail complete spatial or personal concealment—indeed, in order to attain significance it had to be shared.”293


Who, then, would have seen these spaces? In contrast to modern attitudes towards bathing, the bath was sometimes taken before company during the eighteenth century, as suggested by the range of seat furniture often cited in period inventories; several documented bathing rooms even included two tubs, so that, following the advice of Blondel, “two people can keep each other company and amuse one another in their solitude.” 294 Most likely, however, bathing rooms would have been shown off to invited guests when not in use, particularly in the second half of the century when they were given greater visibility due to shifts in the distribution, or planning, of private residences. As outlined in the first section of this chapter, while early baths were often located in isolated areas of residences, by mid-century, they were most often connected to either public rooms or personal quarters where owners would frequently entertain guests. Moreover, several eighteenth-century residences containing a bath would have been accessible to the general public—the Château de Bagatelle and the residence of the Opéra singer Anne-Victoire Dervieux, for example, were opened for ticketed viewing—and even those who did not gain access to a residence might still know of its bath through popular guidebooks and architectural texts that often noted their inclusion in a residence and, in some cases, described in detail their design and decoration.

Following a summary of the general placement of bathing rooms within eighteenth-century private residences, this chapter will explore the décor of documented examples, tending equally to the ways in which the interior served as a space of private pleasure and public display. Far removed from the sober cabinet du bain proposed by Savot in 1624, the

eighteenth-century bath was a site in which the bather and invited guests could enjoy more than just a good soak in the tub. All aspects of the decorative program—from the wall designs to the furniture to the works of art on display—were designed to provide a rich and often highly sensory environment to be enjoyed by the bather while also shaping visitors’ perceptions of both the space and its owner.

**Situating the Bath in Eighteenth-Century Private Residences**

The rise of the domestic bathing space in eighteenth-century France coincides with the development of theories of architectural *distribution*, often translated as “space planning.” As outlined in Jacques-François Blondel’s *De la distribution des maisons de plaisance, et de la décoration des édifices en général* (1737–1738), *distribution* was a matter of arranging the individual rooms or suites of rooms in the main residence, as well as the property’s secondary structures and grounds, so that each part best served its specific function while also contributing to a harmony of the whole. In addition to the site’s overall layout, *distribution* was equally concerned with issues of design and décor: the placement of doors and windows, the selection and arrangement of furniture, and a room’s decorative scheme were all determined by the particulars of the space. Rather than applying a single approach to all residences, architects were to consider the unique nature of each building, such as its location, the status of its owner, and its overall function, and arrange the property to best suit the needs of its occupants. Accordingly, Blondel does not include an *appartement des bains* in each of the five model plans he presents in his first volume—a telling indicator that the bath was not yet considered an essential addition to a home—and the two plans that

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295 This is the English translation used, for example, in Reed Benhamou, “Parallel Walls, Parallel Worlds: The Places of Masters and Servants in the ‘Maisons de plaisance’ of Jacques-François Blondel,” *Journal of Design History* 7.1 (1994): 2.
include a bathing suite (fig. 93, 94) differ in the placement of the appartement in relation to the main living quarters. In both, however, the bath is located in an isolated area (in detached wing and on the lowest floor of the corps de logis, respectively) with access to the garden.

The model plans follow the same general selection of rooms assigned to a complete appartement des bains in the second volume of Blondel’s text, which includes a chapter on the decoration and mechanics of the bathing suite.\(^{296}\) The rooms intended for the bather’s use are: a salle des bains (the main bathing room, an enlarged version of Savot’s cabinet) with two tubs; a chambre des bains for rest after the bath; a garde-robe (dressing room);\(^ {297}\) and a lieux à soupape (water closet with flush toilets). Additionally, Blondel recommends a number of service spaces, including an étuve (now a furnace room), a chauffoir for the drying of linens, and an antichambre where the servants can wait while the bath is in use.\(^ {298}\)

Following the publication of De la distribution, the key aspects of Blondel’s model appartement des bains are reiterated in new texts on domestic architecture, including a new section in the 1738 edition of d’Aviler’s Cours d’architecture and Charles-Étienne Briseaux’s L’art de bâtir des maisons de campagne (1743).\(^ {299}\) It is important note that these texts present the architectural space of the bath in its ideal form; as the authors themselves

\(^ {296}\) Blondel, De la distribution, 2: 129-133.

\(^ {297}\) While the first plan does not include a proper garde-robe, the second chambre, directly linked to the main chambre des bains, would have served the same purpose.

\(^ {298}\) The vestibule adjacent to the salle des bains in the second plan would have functioned as an antichambre.

\(^ {299}\) Augustin-Charles d’Aviler, Cours d’architecture (Paris: Jean Mariette, 1738), 218; Charles-Étienne Briseaux, L’art de bâtir des maisons de campagne..., 2 vols. (Paris: Praelt Pere, 1743), 1: 7-8. Le Blond recommends the inclusion of a garde-robe, an antichambre, a salle des bains with one or more copper bathtubs, a chambre des bains, and an étuve. Briseaux proposes a selection of rooms identical to those outlined in Blondel’s De la distribution and follows Blondel’s recommendation for two bathtubs to allow for company. Briseaux does, however, propose an alternative to owners who do not wish to take on the cost of a full appartement des bains: a single room in close proximity to the kitchen, the latter of which can serve as a space to heat the water and dry the linens.
routinely note, the final composition and decoration of a bathing suite, like all elements of
the residence, should be determined by the particulars of the commission, with architects
taking into account the residence’s size and location as well as the client’s needs and
wishes. As we shall see, documented eighteenth-century residences rarely included
appartement des bains on the scale recommended by Blondel, and as the century progressed,
architects increasingly moved away from his model of isolated distribution.

The earliest eighteenth-century baths, which predate and likely informed the model
later set out by Blondel, are found in the châteaux and maisons de plaisance on the outskirts
of Paris, ideal locations given the residences’ primary occupation during the summer months
when bathing was most desirable. Part of vast estates with ample ground on which to
build, country residences sometimes included baths set within freestanding pavilions or
wings, liberating the architect from the spatial constraints of the corps de logis and thus
allowing for a more extensive appartement des bains. The pavilion at the Château de
Bercy (1712, fig. 95), for example, included rooms for bathing as well as ones in which to
engage in social activities or personal pursuits. In addition to the standard salle des bains,
chambre with bed, and garde-robe, there was also a general salle and cabinet, and kitchen
facilities were located in an adjacent building. As the pavilion was placed at a considerable

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300 For example: “Les moyens Appartements [des bains] sont composez d’une moindre nombre de pièces, et les petits à proportion; le tout suivant les usages et l’état des personnes pour lesquelles ils sont destinez.” d’Aviler, Cours d’architecture (1738), 218.

301 In Mariette, L’Architecture française: Maison de Pierre Crozat (1708), pl. 348; Château de Bercy (1712), pl. 162; Maison de Rohan-Soubise (1714), pl. 342; Château de Stain (1714), pl. 358; Château de Petit-Bourg (1716), pl. 322.

302 In addition to the Château de Bercy, the Maison de Rohan-Soubise follows this model, with a salle des bains, two adjoining chambres, and the necessary service spaces set in a wing to the right of the corps de logis. On the appartement des bains at the Maison de Rohan-Soubise, see Massounie, “L’usage, l’espace, et le décor du bain,” 201.

303 Designed by Jacques de la Guêpière (d. 1734) as part of a larger renovation project to Bercy estate of Charles-Henri II de Malon (1678–1742).
distance from the main residence—it was located off the *basse cour* and accessible only by garden path—the range of rooms would have ensured that those who made the trek would be set for an extended, perhaps daylong, visit.

Domestic baths were being constructed in Paris as well, particularly within the aristocratic residences in the faubourg Saint-Germain, which experienced a building boom initiated by the 1715 return of the court from Versailles and further stimulated by well-timed investments in John Law’s trading company prior to 1720. Unlike seventeenth-century *hôtels*, which had most often favored single-room baths,\(^{304}\) many early eighteenth-century residences in the developing faubourgs featured more expansive suites, taking advantage of the larger properties available outside of the city’s crowded center. Two Regency-period residences in the faubourg Saint-Germain included baths set at a remove from the most active centers of the residences, providing a sense of private isolation in which to partake in the pleasures of the bath. The *appartement des bains* at the Hôtel de Belle-Isle\(^{305}\) (1721, fig. 96), comprised of a *salle des bains* with twin bathtubs, an adjoining *chambre*, and an *étuve*, was located on the residence’s *souterrain* level overlooking the quai d’Orsay, offering a river view and a cool environment in which to retreat from the main activity on the upper floors.\(^{306}\) At the nearby Hôtel de La Vrillière\(^{307}\) (ca. 1726, fig. 97), the *appartement des bains* formed

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\(^{304}\) For example: Hôtel de Beauvais, Lepautre for Catherine Beauvais, first lady to Anne of Austria, 1657 (Blondel, *Architecture Française*, 2: no. VI, pl. 1); Hôtel Lambert, Le Vau for Jean-Baptiste Lambert, begun 1660; Hôtel de Noailles, renovations by Pierre Cailleteau, known as Lassurance for Adrien Maurice, duc de Noailles in 1715 (Blondel, *Architecture Française*, 3: no. XXVI, pl. 1).

\(^{305}\) On the rue de Bourbon (now the rue de Lille), demolished. Designed by François Bruant (1679-1732) in 1721 for Charles Louis Auguste Fouquet, duc de Belle-Isle (1684-1761).


\(^{307}\) 14 rue Saint-Dominique (formerly no. 90), today the Hôtel de Brienne housing the Ministère de la Défense. Designed by François Debias-Aubry (d. 1773) and completed by sometime after 1726 for Françoise de Mailly-Nesle (1688-1742), the widowed marquise de La Vrillière. François Duret purchased the property in 1725 for the marquise de Prie, mistress to the duc de Bourbon. The marquise de Prie sold the *hôtel* in an unfinished state
an isolated wing that extended off the marquise de La Vrillièr’s personal quarters and opened onto an interior courtyard, serving as a quiet retreat that remained easily accessible for regular use.308

Not all homeowners, however, wished to keep their bathing rooms so private. At the Palais Bourbon,309 designed by Lorenzo Giardrdini in 1722 for Louise Françoise de Bourbon (1673–1743), the appartement des bains served as a transitional space between the residence’s public and private spheres.310 Located in the left wing of the palace, the appartement included a salle des bains and an adjoining chambre, with niches for their respective bathtub and bed placed opposite the rooms’ windows (fig. 98). A passage off the chambre opened to a private corridor, from which the servants could access the étuve and Madame la Duchesse could, by way of a second corridor, cross to her personal quarters positioned along the central courtyard. Although the appartement’s design offered certain private pleasures for the bather, such as convenience of access and a view of the west gardens, its placement off the palace’s grand galerie suggests that it was intended for public display as well, at least on occasion. By opening the doors to the grand galerie, visitors would be given a glimpse of the appartement des bains through to the curved niche placed in

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308 When Louise-Elisabeth de Bourbon, princesse de Conti (1693-1775), acquired the hôtel in 1733, she upgraded the suite with the addition of three more spacious rooms overlooking the newly designed west gardens. With the addition, designed by Nicolas Simmonet (d. 1743), the original series of rooms were greatly altered and converted to service spaces, as indicated in the revised plan illustrated in Blondel, Architecture Française, 1: no. XIII, pl. 1; the central of the three new rooms most likely served as the salle des bain, flanked by a chambre, and lieux (as indicated by the notation for a chaise percée in a niche in the first room).

309 126 rue de l'Université, today the seat of the Assemblée Nationale. Construction began under Lorenzo Giardini (d. 1724), who was replaced upon his death by Lassurance (1655-1724), followed by Jacques Gabriel (1667-1742) and Jean Aubert (1680-1741).

a sidewall of the *chambres des bains*, an ideal place for the installation of a statue.\(^{311}\) Although full details of the décor are not known, Blondel later describes the *appartement des bains* as being decorated with the greatest elegance, on par with the *grands appartements*.\(^{312}\)

As the century progressed, architects increasingly moved away from the established practice of placing the bath in an isolated location in favor of providing a more direct connection between the bath and a residence’s public areas, a shift that allowed patrons to better showcase what was still a rare luxury addition to a private home. With the court returning to Versailles after Louis XV’s coronation in 1722 and France involved in a series of wars from 1733–1763, the construction of new residences in Paris generally came to a halt during this period, but this did not stop Parisians from renovating existing properties and, in several cases, adding new baths to their homes.\(^{313}\) Upon acquiring the Hôtel d'Évreux\(^{314}\) in 1753, Madame de Pompadour ordered a number of changes to the property, including work on the original bathing facilities, which were significantly expanded and brought into better

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311 Records suggest this may not have come to pass during the duchess’s lifetime: while her estate inventory includes items related to the bath, including a painted copper tub, the *lambris* remained unfinished in the *grand galerie* and *appartement des bains* at the time of her death in 1743. On the state of these rooms in 1743, see Françoise Magny, “Palais de la duchesse de Bourbon,” in *Le Faubourg Saint-Germain: Palais Bourbon, Sa Place* (Paris: Institut Néerlandais, 1987), 21. The bathtub is noted in Joan DeJean, *The Age of Comfort: When Paris Discovered Casual—and the Modern Home Began* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2009), 73.

312 Blondel, *Architecture française*, 1: 267. At the time of Blondel’s text, the palace was occupied by the duchess’s second son, Charles de Bourbon-Condé (1700-1760).

313 Thought it will not be discussed here, the 1749 renovations to the Hôtel de Maisons (originally designed by Lassurance in 1706 for François Duret; Blondel, *Architecture Française*, 1: no. XX, pl. 4) included the addition of a *salle des bains* set on view for guests. Designed by Pierre Michel Mouret (b. 1705) following the *hôtel’s* acquisition by Louis-Armand de Seiglières de Belleforière (1722-1790), the *salle* was placed at the end of an *enfilade* running the entire length of the residence, ensuring that the marquis’s guests would catch a view of the large central tub positioned opposite the room’s doorway. Also from this period, the *salle des bains* built at the Hôtel de Montmorency-Luxembourg in 1749 (addressed later in this chapter) likewise served as a potential public showpiece, as it was attached to the residence’s only *salle à manger*.

communication with the main areas of the residence. The appartement des bains built in 1718 for the previous owner, Henri de La Tour d'Auvergne, comte d'Évreux (1679–1753), included a salle des bains, an adjacent chambre, and a mezzanine-level étuve, set in a pavilion separated from the corps de logis by a passage linking the stables and east garden terrace (fig. 99). As part of the renovations under Pompadour, this passage was enclosed, a significant modification that directly connected the previously detached appartement des bains to the corps de logis. As indicated on the revised plan (fig. 100) by Ange-Jacques Gabriel (1698–1782), who oversaw the renovations following the death of Lassurance le jeune (1690–1755), this change allowed for easy movement between the bath and the marquise’s private living quarters, located on the corps de logis’ upper floor and accessible by way of the staircase located at the left end of the appartement des bains. But perhaps more importantly, it also brought the bathing wing into direct communication with the public rooms on the corps de logis’ ground floor, allowing Pompadour to lead her guests directly from the salle d’assemblée to the appartement des bains, should she wish to show off her impressive—and significantly enlarged—suite.

With the enclosure of the passage and the reduction of the staircase located at the lower right corner of the corps de logis, additional space was opened up, allowing for the construction of several new rooms. Although Gabriel does not indicate the functions of these rooms in his plan, the posthumous inventory of the marquise’s property contains entries for two antichambres, a boudoir, and a garde-robe within the vicinity of the salle and chambre des bains, all of which would be appropriate additions to the appartement.315 In Gabriel’s plan, the first two rooms accessed from the corps de logis were surely the antichambres,

315 Jean Cordey, Inventaire des biens de Madame de Pompadour, rédigé après son décès (Paris: Francisque Lefrançois, 1939), 22-23.
followed by *salle des bains*, and finally the *chambre des bains*, which was enlarged and modified to an octagonal plan. On the stable side of the *appartement*, a private hallway linked the *chambre* to two adjoining rooms positioned behind the second *antichambre*, most likely the *boudoir* and *garde-robe* mentioned in the inventory. Pompadour’s renovations, then, resulted in an *appartement des bains* that was more accessible (publicly and privately) and more fully developed than its predecessor, with a range of new rooms that increased both the bather’s comfort and the suite’s general splendor. As will be discussed below, the lavish decorations of the marquise’s *appartement des bains* suggest that, in addition to serving as a private retreat, the *appartement* played an important role in Pompadour’s self-presentation and required a certain public visibility.

With the conclusion of the Seven Years’ War in 1763, construction in Paris began again, with considerable development in the Chaussée d’Antin quarter in particular. Among new residences in the area was the *petite maison* of the famed Opéra dancer Marie-Madeleine Guimard (1743–1816), designed in 1770 by Claude-Nicolas Ledoux (1736–1806). As a non-noblewoman who strategically courted public attention as a means of gaining social standing, La Guimard intended to make an impression with the residence, popularly known as ‘The Temple of Terpsichore’ due to the sculptural representations of the muse of dance—a role La Guimard had famously performed on stage—above the Ionic peristyle and on the central frieze of the semicircular porch (fig. 101).\(^{316}\) Noblemen, artists, writers, and *gens du monde* frequented the house, and Ledoux’s design guaranteed that all who passed through its doors would take note of the *appartement des bains*. From the entrance at the right of the porch,

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\(^{316}\) Kathryn Norberg addresses the residence’s role in shaping La Guimard’s public image in “Salon as Stage: Actress/Courtesans and their Homes in Late Eighteenth-Century Paris,” in *Architectural Space in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, 105-128; and “Goddesses of Taste: Courtesans and Their Furniture in Late-Eighteenth-Century Paris,” in *Furnishing the Eighteenth Century*, 97-114.
guests stepped into a circular antichambre that served as the starting point for two enfilades (fig. 102): the first extended back to the second antichambre and salle de compagnie; and the second ran parallel to the façade, crossing the salle des bains and chambre des bains, before terminating at the cabinet de toilette. In addition to providing ideal visibility, the placement of the bathing rooms immediately behind the porch was historically appropriate, as the porch’s form—a niched apse set behind a colonnade—was derived from the thermal baths of Rome, a fitting reference given the Neoclassical character of the residence. 317

At the Château de Bagatelle, 318 designed by François-Joseph Bélanger for Louis XVI’s brother Charles Philippe, comte d’Artois (1757–1836), the bath was likewise positioned to be seen, being located off the ground-floor salon (fig. 103). Essentially a small pleasure pavilion, the Bagatelle was the result of the comte d’Artois’s wager, accepted by Marie-Antoinette, that he could have a residence constructed in six weeks, a task at which his premier architecte succeeded. The site as a whole was therefore something of a spectacle reflecting the young count’s privilege, and the bathing room played its role. Given the small scale of the residence, the bath was reduced to a single room with a tub facing the formal French garden, but its placement off the main reception room ensured that its richly decorated interior would have been seen by both invited guests and those who toured the residence by special ticket.

The final phase of development in that bath’s distribution begins in the late 1760s, when the bathing room is most often found in close proximity to one of the primary chambres à coucher (eliminating the need for a separate chambre des bains) as part of a


series of interconnected rooms that most often served the personal needs of a female occupant in particular. In addition to rooms for bathing, these suites frequently included boudoirs, cabinets de toilette, garde-robes, and lieux; in sum, spaces designed to add pleasure or comfort to daily life. An early example of such a suite was found at the Hôtel de Gourgues (later known as the Hôtel Kinsky), built along the rue Saint-Dominique for Élisabeth-Olive de Lamoignon (1738–1773). Designed by Ledoux in 1769, the hôtel included two bedrooms on the rez-de-chaussée, one overlooking the garden (E on fig. 104) and the other centrally positioned on the cour d’honneur (M). From the larger bedroom on the garden side, Madame de Gourges could pass directly to her boudoir (F), the first room in her personal suite, followed by the cabinet de toilette (G), and then the salle du bain (H), which included a bathtub facing the garden window and an alcove bed opposite the fireplace. The cabinet de toilette and salle du bain shared a garde-robe (I), from which one could access the lieux à l’anglais (K), followed by a second cabinet de toilette (L) placed off the smaller bedroom on the cour d’honneur. In addition to keeping all the rooms for personal use grouped conveniently together, Ledoux’s distribution positioned the two bedrooms as transition points between the more private rooms on the right of the rez-de-chaussée and the public spaces on the left (salon de companie, salle à manger, grand cabinet, and related

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319 Of the examples discussed here, the only instance in which the house was not occupied by a woman (either the sole owner or a wife) is the hôtel belonging to the unmarried Maximilien Radix de Sainte-Foix.

320 53 rue Saint-Dominique, today greatly altered. Élisabeth-Olive de Lamoignon, the estranged wife of Armand-Guillaume-François de Gourgues, purchased land for the hôtel in 1770 using money awarded in her 1764 separation. While Ledoux designed the residence, Porquet and Gingault de Buffêix ultimately executed the project according to Ledoux’s plans. Leased to the Marie-Léopoldine, princesse de Kinsky, in 1773; sold to the princess in 1777. On the hôtel, see Christian Baulez and Felia Bastet, “L’Hôtel Kinsky,” in Le Faubourg Saint-Germain: La rue Saint-Dominique, 113-133.

321 Ledoux had previously designed a similar suite at the Hôtel d’Uzès (1767), built for François-Emmanuel de Crussol, duc d’Uzès (1728-1802), and his wife, Julie de Pardaillan de Gondrin (d. 1799). The bathing rooms and other personal spaces (cabinet de toilette, boudoir) were grouped together off of the duchesse d’Uzès’s chambre à coucher. This suite, however, included a chambres des bains adjoining the salles des bains. Plan illustrated in Krafft, Plans, pl. 76.
antichambres). When the Marie-Léopoldine, princesse de Kinsky (1729–1794), acquired the property in 1777, she was clearly satisfied with the arrangement, making no alterations to the plan other than linking the two bedrooms by private corridor.

Over the next decade, other architects of Ledoux’s generation continued this approach: Mathurin Cherpitel (1736–1801), for example, included a similar arrangement at the Hôtel du Châtelet (1770), as did Alexandre-Théodore Brongniart at the Hôtels de Monaco and Sainte-Foix (both 1774), and François Soufflot le Romain (d. 1802) and Jean-Jacques Lequeu (1757–1826) at the Hôtel de Montholon (1785). In each of these cases, while the suite containing the bath was separated from the reception areas by a chambre à coucher, its rooms would have likely been seen on occasion by visitors as well, particularly as the suite contained the floor’s only toilet as well as the cabinet de toilette, a space that had long been a site for receiving guests. Such suites were something of a mix, private in theory but semi-public in practice. The significant shift that takes hold during the 1770s is, therefore, the development of a distribution that allowed owners to conveniently

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322 Such a distribution with a clear division of reception areas and personal quarters becomes increasingly standard in the 1770s, as evidenced by the plans for the Hôtels du Châtelet, de Monaco, Sainte-Foix, and Montholon, cited below.


324 57 rue Saint-Dominique, today the Polish Embassy. Built for Marie-Catherine de Brignoles (1737-1813), the estranged wife of Honoré-Camille-Lénoir Grimaldi, prince de Monaco. Plan illustrated in Krafft, Plans, pl. 69. The distribution of the hôtel in relation to the bath is outlined in Massounie, “L’usage, l’espace, et le décor du bain,” 204.


326 23 boulevard Poissonnière, still a private residence today. Built for the magistrate Nicolas de Montholon (1736-1801) and his wife, Marie Marguerite Catherine Charlotte Fournier de La Chapelle (d. 1788). Final plan illustrated in Krafft, Plans, pl. 5; earlier plan by Lequeu, which places the private quarters on the opposite side of the main floor, at the Bibliothèque nationale de France along with interior drawings by Lequeu.
access these personal spaces for regular use while still being able to show them off when
desired. And as evidenced by records related to the interior designs of eighteenth-century
baths—including architectural renderings, personal inventories, and guidebook
descriptions—these were spaces that indeed warranted attention, not only for their novelty,
but also for the great care with which they were decorated and furnished.

Luxury Interiors: Decorating the Bath

Two of the most talked about baths of the seventeenth century, Louis XIV’s
appartement des bains at Versailles (1671) and Anne of Austria’s appartement at the Louvre
(1652), established a precedent for a luxurious decorative program.327 Both suites regularly
drew the attention of period guidebook authors, who provided detailed accounts of their
sumptuous interiors. Adorned with an impressive array of marbles, fine furnishings, and
works by the preeminent painters and sculptors of the day, these were stately, somewhat
imposing, spaces designed to convey a sense of opulent splendor befitting their royal
occupants. Although less is known about the interiors of non-royal baths from the
seventeenth century, one well-known example—the cabinet des bains at the Hôtel
Lambert328—was certainly designed to impress, if not on the same scale as its counterparts at
the Louvre and Versailles. This small room located in the hôtel’s attic was much admired for
its frescoed ceiling depicting a trompe-l’œil trellised skylight and a retinue of water divinities,
executed in 1652 by Eustache Le Sueur (1617–1655). Documents related to eighteenth-

327 On Louis XIV’s appartement, see Sophie Mouquin, “Versailles en ses marbres. Un décor marmoréen du
grand siècle: l’appartement des Bains,” Revue de l’art 151 (2006): 51-64. On the appartement at the Louvre, see

328 Quai Anjou on the Île Saint-Louis, currently a private residence. Designed by Le Vau in 1640 for Jean-
Baptiste Lambert, who died in 1644 before the hôtel was finished; his brother, Nicolas Lambert de Thorigny,
was owner when construction was completed and work on the decorative projects began. Unfortunately, while
Le Sueur’s paintings were restored in 2010, the cabinet des bains was destroyed in a fire three years later.
century bathing rooms—including those of the comte d’Évreux, Madame de Pompadour, the
princesse de Kinsky, the comte d’Artois, and others—reveal that the bath continued to be a
space in which every décor element would have projected a sense of refined luxury
associated with both the site and its owner.

To begin with the flooring, architectural guides from Blondel on recommend the use
of stone, preferably marble, to best provide the sense of cool freshness desired of the space.
Marble seems to have indeed been the standard in the most illustrious homes, such as the
Hôtel d’Évreux and the Bagatelle, where, in both cases, white marble floors with Languedoc
cabochons were installed in the bath. Upon acquiring the Hôtel de Gourgues, the princesse
de Kinsky had every surface of the existing bath recovered to suit her tastes, including the
flooring, for which she ordered a fine white marble with an inlaid green border dotted with
lilac roses. Finding the right flooring seems to have been an issue taken quite seriously in
the case of Madame de Pompadour. For her appartement des bains at the Château de
Bellevue—which, similar to earlier country houses in Blondel’s model, was detached from
the main residence—Pompadour originally ordered faience flooring for the salle des bains,
only to have it later replaced with marble.

Faience covered both the floor and walls of the bathing room at the Château de
Rambouillet, installed circa 1730 for Louis XIV and Madame de Montespan’s son, Louis

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329 Details on the décor of the comte d'Évreux's appartement des bains, gathered from an inventory held at the Archives nationales (LXVIII 446), are provided in Coural, Le Palais de l’Élysée, 22. The décor of the Bagatelle bathing room, known through the Livre des comptes de Bagatelle, is summarized in Joseph Baillio, “Hubert Robert's Decorations for the Château de Bagatelle,” Metropolitan Museum Journal 27 (1992): 154.

330 A description of the décor, drawn from the Papiers Kinsky at the Archives nationales (T 220-7), is provided in Baulez and Bastet, “L'Hôtel Kinsky,” 121-122.

Alexandre de Bourbon, comte de Toulouse (1678–1737). While the room has since been repurposed, the original wall decoration remains in place: multiple tiles form large scenes depicting naval battles and ornate floral arrangements swarming with birds and butterflies, while hundreds of single-tile representations of Dutch seascapes cover the remaining wall area (fig. 105). Not only was the room’s emphasis on water imagery appropriate given its function as a bath, it would have surely delighted the comte de Toulouse on a personal level given his position as a high-ranking officer in the royal navy. Such an extraordinary display of faience was, however, quite exceptional within recorded baths of the period. Although the Cours d’architecture recommends a partial wall lining in faience tiles, walls were more frequently covered in wood panels (boiserie) that often included either painted or sculpted relief designs at their center. Blondel states a preference for arabesque ornamentation or natural imagery for such wall decorations, but other approaches were adopted as well. For the salle des bains at the Hôtel d’Évreux, for example, the comte d’Évreux opted for painted stucco walls imitating marbles in an array of colors including grey, red, violet and green. While the dominant use of marble surfaces (real and faux) in the comte’s salle des bains would have granted the room a sense of freshness and nobility appropriate to its use, the parquet wood floors and fabric-lined walls in the adjacent chambre offered a much warmer atmosphere, both visually and physically.

333 D’Aviler, Cours d’architecture (1738), 218.
334 Blondel, De la distribution, 2: 129.
335 According to Coural, “La salle des bains…était lambrisée de hauteur dans tout son pourtour et peinte en faux marbre: brèche grise pour la plinthe, sarancolin pour les lambris à hauteur d’appui, brèche violette pour les grands panneaux, vert campan pour les bâtis, porphyre vert pour les pilastres.” Le Palais de l’Élysée, 22.
A marble fireplace with an overmantle mirror was another standard feature found in both single-room baths and salle-chambre arrangements. In addition to serving a practical function in heating the room following the bath, the fireplace offered yet another opportunity to embellish the space. The fireplace in the bath at the Château de Bagatelle, placed opposite the room’s entrance, was a particularly impressive sight, its mantle made of green Egyptian marble with gilt-bronze ornaments resting atop fluted columns. Overmantle mirrors were equally elaborate—and costly—additions, often placed in gilded wood frames with detailed decorative carvings. The mirror frame in the chambre des bains at Bellevue, for example, was topped with volutes and rocailles, while the one at the Hôtel de Kinsky included a running motif of twirling ribbons. Mirrors, which would have aided in visually expanding the rather small dimensions of these rooms, were not limited to placement over the fireplace. Upon entering Madame de Pompadour’s chambres des bains at the Hôtel d’Évreux and Bellevue, one would be struck by the array of reflective surfaces. In addition to the overmantle mirrors placed in both chambres, mirrored panels covered the four doors and lined the two alcoves at the Hôtel d’Évreux, and mirrored trumeaux were positioned between the windows at Bellevue.

The elements of architectural décor described above were, of course, not unique to the bath; elaborately designed floors, wall panels, fireplaces, and mirrors were regular features throughout elite homes. Although the bath would have been occupied far less regularly than other rooms in the residence, it was a true luxury in itself and therefore

336 The boudoir placed on the other side of the salon included an equally striking fireplace of Turquin blue marble opposite the room’s entrance. While the precise location of the fireplaces in both the bath and boudoir were determined by the overall design of the room, their visibility from the salon would have surely impressed visitors as they entered this zone of the residence.

337 Similar to the doors of the Hôtel d’Évreux’s chambre, mirrors were set within the two doors flanking the bathtub at the Château de Bagatelle.
warranted the same decorative attention paid to more frequented interior spaces. It did, however, contain one feature no other room could boast: the bathtub itself. The novelty and wonder surrounding the bathtub is evidenced by the great detail in which many eighteenth-century architectural guides outline its mechanics.\(^{338}\) As seen in the plans in Mariette’s *Architecture Française* and Blondel’s *De la distribution* (fig. 106, 107) that detail the necessary plumbing, the complex pipe system serving the bathtubs was concealed from view in the *salle des bains*, set within the walls and running to and from the various service spaces, which would have only been accessed by servants. This network of pipes distributed unheated water (either collected rainwater or pumped) from a large reservoir to several locations, including a small mounted basin for washing one’s hands, which Mariette places in the *étuve* and Blondel places in the *antichambre*; one of the bathtub’s two taps; and an open tank in the *étuve*, where it is heated by the overhead fire before being distributed to the bathtub’s second tap. In addition to their primary function as the water-distribution mechanism for the bathtub, taps were often cleverly sculpted to add a decorative element as well, as seen in two extant examples dating to the middle third of the century (fig. 108, 109). Water was a common theme for such taps: in the comte d’Evreux’s *salle des bains*, the bathtub was mounted by gilt lead taps in the form of dolphins emerging from reeds, while taps shaped like swans were used for the small washbasin placed opposite the room’s fireplace; Madame de Pompadour also had swan-head taps installed in the *salle des bains* within her small private suite above the Salon de Mercure at Versailles, occupied between 1748–1750.\(^{339}\)

\(^{338}\) The fullest explanation is found in Blondel, *De la distribution*, 2: 130.

Increasingly throughout the eighteenth century, copper came to replace marble as the preferred material for the bathtub itself, the latter being too difficult to heat.\(^{340}\) Given copper’s tendency to develop a patina with prolonged exposure to water, Blondel’s *De la distribution* recommends tinplating the interior and draping the bathtub with a linen cloth to ensure greater cleanliness (*propreté*).\(^{341}\) In his *Encyclopédie* entry on the bathtub, Blondel expands the benefits of the linen drape to also include a greater sense of comfort (*commodité*), recommending the placement of pillows within the bath as well.\(^{342}\) The necessity of such additions to the bathtub’s interior suggests the rather uncomfortable reality of these large copper basins. The princesse de Kinsky seems to have preferred the option of avoiding the hard surface of her bathtub altogether, ordering a small seat to be placed within it. The princess also purchased two stepstools (*marchepieds*) from the same manufacture, which would have allowed her to enter and exit the bath with a greater ease and decorum.

Many of the bathtub’s drawbacks—its propensity to tarnish, the coldness and hardness of its interior, the difficulties of getting in and out of it—were often masked by their decorative exteriors and the elaborate environments in which they were set. In the *salle des bains* in La Guimard’s *petite maison*, for example, a fabric-lined niche contained a silver-gilt bathtub adorned with allegorical figures and a swarm of *amours*.\(^{343}\) Blondel’s ideal configuration, however, goes even further, setting the bathtub under an embroidered and

\(^{340}\) Havard, *Dictionnaire de l’ameublement et de la decoration*, 1: 223-224. While records suggest that copper was the preferred material, particularly in the second half of the eighteenth century, some homes did include a marble tubs, as evidenced by the sale records for Françoise Marie de Bourbon, duchesse d’Orléans (1749) and the abbé de Borbon (1783), cited by Havard.

\(^{341}\) Blondel, *De la distribution*, 1:74.

\(^{342}\) “Baignoire,” in *Encyclopédie*, 2: 15.

fringed canopy with fabric falling on three sides (fig. 110). Although such a display may seem extraordinarily ornate to modern eyes, it was not mere fantasy, as evidenced by the salle des bains at the Hôtel d’Évreux. There, the comte d’Évreux’s bathtub was placed beneath a striped baize canopy (pavillon) set within a niche, and later, Madame de Pompadour bathed under a curtained baldaquin with a fabric panel hanging on the wall behind the tub. According to the inventory of the marquise’s property at the Hôtel d’Évreux, she owned two canopy sets with corresponding wall hangings—one done entirely in matching embroidered cotton, and the other with a vault and curtains in yellow batiste and a wall panel of embroidered muslin—allowing her to change the look of the setup as she pleased or, perhaps, according to the seasons.

As Mimi Hellman has remarked of Sigmund Freudenberger’s (1745–1801) engraving of a domestic bath (fig. 111), in which the bather is artfully posed underneath a canopy similar to those illustrated by Blondel and found in the baths of the comte d’Évreux and Madame de Pompadour, such an elaborate theatrical arrangement presents the bather as “an aesthetic object, engaged in a performance of comfort and enjoyment that implied the presence of an audience.”344 And, indeed, bathing before an audience was not unheard of in the eighteenth century, as evidenced by memoir accounts of individuals taking a bath within the presence of invited guests. The duc de Richelieu tells his readers of an afternoon in which the Marie Anne de Mailly-Nesle, duchesse de Châteauroux (1717–1744), and one of Madame de Pompadour’s predecessors as maîtresse-en-titre, enjoyed her bath in the company of the king as courtiers sat in the adjacent room with the door open so they might

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share in the conversation. In such social occasions, bathers would have to manage their bodily positions carefully to both feature themselves to their best advantage and avoid any awkward or unseemly displays, a difficult task given the trough-like design of the standard copper tub. Comporting oneself with ease—or at least the illusion of ease—would have been less difficult in a bain de siège (also called a demi-bain) such as the one illustrated in Freudenberger’s print, which, like other designs from the period (fig. 112, 113), is shaped to resemble seat furniture with a lower lip and supportive raised back. Though fraught with potential challenges when it came to bathing before company, the bathtub would have also provided opportunities to impress guests as well. As Hellman has suggested, “Indoor plumbing was a luxurious novelty in itself, and the possibility of controlling the bathwater without visible assistance from servants would have been considered not only an enhancement of intimacy, but also a magical, amusing form of play.” The concealed tubs at the Hôtel de Kinsky and the Bagatelle, hidden beneath an ottoman when not in use, would have surely impressed visitors as well; one can imagine the ottoman being shuttled away to reveal the bathtub, much to the delight of invited company.

The presence of multiple pieces of seat furniture in the baths of the princesse de Kinsky and the comte d’Artois suggest that, indeed, these rooms were conceived of as spaces in which guests could be received. The bath at the Hôtel de Kinsky included a pair of curved-back armchairs (fauteuils en cabriolet), their frames carved with a running design of ribbons and pearls to match those of the ottoman that covered the tub and the lit à trois dossiers set within the alcove opposite the fireplace. The bath at the Bagatelle was incredibly well


appointed for its size, with six cane-backed *chaises*, four additional *chaises*, and a window seat facing the bathtub. A similar consideration of guests was also provided in La Guimard’s residence, where the main bathing room and the adjacent *chambre* were each outfitted with a *canapé* and four *cabriolets*, and in Madame de Pompadour’s *salles des bains* at the Hôtel d’Évreux, which included two *chaises* and two seating stools (tabourets), the upholstery of which that could be changed out to match either of her two bathtub canopies.

The most elaborate piece of furniture was often the bed used for a post-bath rest and perhaps to enjoy the garden view or partake in conversation in the company of friends. Like the staging of the bathtub, the bed was another opportunity to present oneself amidst an elaborate display of fine fabric. The comte d’Évreux’s *chambre des bains*, for example, included a canopy bed in carved walnut, its crown (*imperaile*), curtains, headboard, and cover (*courtepoint*) all done in a painted taffeta to match the room’s fabric wall panels and decorative screen. Among the renovations made to the room following Madame de Pompadour’s acquisition of the Hôtel d’Évreux was the addition of an alcove on the wall facing the garden windows, in which a double-bolstered bed was placed sideways. All of the fabric surfaces in the marquise’s *chambre*—the bed’s two quilted covers (a full *courtepoint* and a smaller *couvre-pied*), head curtains (*bonne grâces*), and the panel circling the top of the alcove (*pente*); the upholstery of the seat furniture, which included an ottoman placed in the niche opposite the fireplace, a *fauteuil*, two *chaises*, and a *tabouret*; and the decorative screen’s panels—were a red *perse*, a term applied to high-quality hand-painted cotton textiles.

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that were, despite the name, most often Indian rather than Persian in origin. Although a French ban on the fabric was enacted from 1686–1759 in an attempt to remedy the negative impact of the import on local textile markets, *perse* remained popular within royal and aristocratic circles throughout the eighteenth century. Given the lack of a sanctioned market in eighteenth-century France, *perse* items, already incredibly costly prior to the ban, would have directly signaled the wealth and the social privilege of their owners.

Madame de Pompadour in particular displayed a fondness for the fashionable material, as evidenced by the records for additional *perse* furnishings in the inventories of her other residences and the inclusion of *perse* items in two of her portraits: *perse* pillows are seen in her 1756 portrait by François Boucher (Alte Pinakothek), and she wears a *perse* dress in her last known portrait, begun by François-Hubert Drouais in 1763 (National Gallery, London). While the inventory records related to her *appartement des bains* at the Hôtel d’Évreux do not specify the particular patterns of the red *perse* used there, the descriptions of the fabric used in the *chambre des bains* at Bellevue are more specific in this regard. Most notably, the *chambre* included several examples of *découpures*, in which *perse* designs are cut out and sewn onto a base fabric: a cotton tapestry with *perse* appliqués depicting Chinese scenes hung on the wall, bordered by chenille and *cordonnet*; an appliqué depicting a woman

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349 The inventory records for the *chambre des bains* at the Hôtel d’Évreux describes the *perse* items as “de perse fond rouge, liseré en or” with no description of the pattern, with the exception of the screen, which is described as checked (à carreaux).
seated at her toilette beneath a baldaquin decorated the cotton bed cover; and white *perse* decorated with flowers, red butterflies, and unspecified appliqués covered the room’s two *fauteuils en bergère* and four *chaises*, the carved and varnished frames of which were painted sea-green with dark green edging (*rechampis*). Additionally, the room’s firescreen included *perse* panels depicting a large central image—a lion on one side and a peacock on the other—surrounded by flowers and red birds, with a decorative border framing the full scene.

The appeal of *perse* was surely enhanced by the sense of exoticism lent by its non-European origin, an effect that would have been heightened by further references to Eastern locales within the decoration of Madame de Pompadour’s *appartements des bains*. In addition to the Bellevue chambre’s *chinoiserie* tapestry, “personages et animaux chinois” adorned the seats of the four *chaises* in the *salle des bains*, and panels of *papiers de Chine* were set within the *boiserie* of the *garde-robe* serving the *appartement des bains*. At the Hôtel d’Évreux, the mantelpiece in Madame de Pompadour’s *chambre des bains* displayed a Sèvres porcelain set (*garniture de cheminée*) comprised of two lidded vases (fig. 114), two vases with candleholders (lost; similar in design to fig. 115), and a boat-shaped vase (fig. 116), all bearing cartouches with *chinoiserie* scenes. As with *perses*, there was a strong market for porcelain *chinoiserie* pieces during the period, evidenced by the numerous Vincennes and Sèvres designs to incorporate such painted scenes. The mélange of Eastern references—Indian, Persian, Chinese—found within the décor of Pompadour’s *appartements des bains* at Bellevue and the Hôtel d’Évreux, then, presented the marquise as a collector attuned to the latest fashions, while also playing into European notions of the Eastern bath as site of luxury and exoticism.

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The Bath as Art Gallery

The installation of works of art provided another opportunity to both display one’s good taste and add a thematic element to the bathing room. The salle des bains and adjacent cabinet de toilette at the Hôtel de Kinsky, for example, displayed a collection of prints described in a 1787 guidebook as “superb” and “richly framed.”351 According to Christian Baulez, among the engravings were a series of marine scenes after Claude-Joseph Vernet, Carlo Antonio Porporati’s Susanna at the Bath after Jean-Baptiste Santerre (fig. 117), Jean-Joseph Balechou’s Saint Genevieve after Carle Van Loo (fig. 118), and Jacques Firmin Beauvarlet’s The Spanish Conversation and The Spanish Reading, again after Van Loo (fig. 119, 120).352 Also shown alongside the prints was a tableau mouvant depicting the garden side of the Château de Saint-Ouen that, when animated, shuttled boats across a stretch of the Seine in the foreground (fig. 121). Although the iconography of these images is diverse, several major themes emerge amongst the group. While all of the images depict aspects of the natural world, water in particular is central to the Vernet series, the representation of Susanna, and the tableau mouvant. Additionally, all three of the prints after Van Loo represent women immersed in literature, either reading (Saint Genevieve), listening to (Spanish Reading), or discussing (Spanish Conversation) a text. As Felia Bastet has shown, the princess’s vast library—housed in her boudoir off the cabinet de toilette—contained an impressive range of titles, including works by and about the ancients, reference books, scientific treatises, and philosophical and literary texts.353 The images displayed within her private suite, therefore, would have reflected both the activities that went on in this part of

353 Ibid., 117.
the hôtel (bathing, reading, conversation) and the artfully arranged natural landscapes of the garden just beyond the rooms’ windows.  

Perhaps the most extensive painted program designed for a documented eighteenth-century bath was the series of canvases executed by Hubert Robert (1733–1808) for the Bagatelle, which are today in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The six paintings, all of equal height, were set within the room’s paneling and likely displayed in pairs with matching widths. Based on the recorded dimensions of the works and the available wall space suggested in Bélanger’s plan, the following arrangement is most plausible: the narrowest works, *The Fountain* (fig. 122) and *The Mouth of a Cave* (fig. 123), on either side of the fireplace; the widest pair, comprised of *Wandering Minstrels* (fig. 124) and *The Bathing Pool* (fig. 125), facing the bathtub, one on either side of the garden window; and *The Swing* (fig. 126) and *The Dance* (fig. 127) on either side of the doorway to the salon. In typical Robert fashion, the paintings depict Italianate environments in which natural and man-made elements—many of which resemble landscapes and monuments Robert would have seen

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354 Originally of the formal French variety, the garden was redesigned in the *anglo-chinois* style from 1790-1792; a river, a grotto, and a mountain were among the additions. Ibid., 125.

355 This arrangement was proposed in Paula Rea Radisch, *Hubert Robert: Painted Spaces of the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 83. Unfortunately, the location of each work prior to their removal from the Bagatelle was not recorded. It is known that the pair originally placed on the fireplace wall was sent to Robert for restoration work in May 1784, having been damaged by humidity. *The Mouth of a Cave*, one of the two narrowest works, is signed and dated to 1784, suggesting it may have been a replacement for an original that was beyond repair. *The Fountain*, of equal dimensions, is not dated. Although a 1784 work request recommends Robert be paid 25 *livres* per canvas for the restorations, the *Livres de comptes de Bagatelle* records a January 1785 payment to Robert for 1200 *livres*. It seems very likely that, rather than restoring the existing pair, Robert produced two new canvases in the fall of 1784, each priced at 600 *livres*. This amount matches with the initial payment for the series, which was 3600 *livres* (600 *livres* per canvas). Robert’s submissions to the Salon of 1779 included three paintings belonging to the comte d’Artois, all of the same height and the first two of matching widths: *Une pêche sur un canal*; *Un grand jet d’eau*; and *Une partie de la cour du capitol*, now identified as the Bagatelle’s *Wandering Minstrels*. It is likely that the first two, for which no records exist following the Salon of 1779, hung on either side of the fireplace in the Bagatelle bath until 1784, when they were replaced by *The Mouth of a Cave* and *The Fountain*. Joseph Baillio has suggested that the lost Salon works may have been the damaged works sent out in 1784, but nevertheless assigns the undated *The Fountain* to the original commission of 1777-1779. See “Hubert Robert’s Decorations for the Château de Bagatelle,” 171.
during his years working in and around Rome—tower over the scenes’ human figures.\textsuperscript{356} The paintings’ mix of classical elements and untamed natural landscapes is a fitting selection for the Bagatelle, a Palladian-style residence with an interior décor rich in Neoclassical stucco medallions and painted arabesques, set within a sprawling Anglo-Chinese garden. Significantly, several elements within Robert’s series directly call to mind specific features found on the Bagatelle’s grounds: the garden’s various grottos resemble the setting of \textit{The Mouth of the Cave}; several water features (fig. 128) visually evoke the waterfall and irregular rocks in \textit{The Dance}; and the Egyptian obelisk with hieroglyphics (fig. 129, destroyed) was similar to the example depicted in \textit{Wandering Minstrels}. While the series invites viewers to make visual links between such corresponding elements in the paintings and the Bagatelle’s Anglo-Chinese garden, Robert’s picturesque landscapes would have contrasted sharply with the formal French garden seen through the room’s large window placed opposite the bathtub.

As Paula Rea Radisich has observed, Robert also presents numerous internal connections within the images themselves, encouraging the viewer to explore the “[a]musing analogies, contrasts, juxtapositions, and parallels” found within single works and across the series as a whole.\textsuperscript{357} Nearly all of the paintings, for example, depict running water feeding into a placid pool—either natural (\textit{The Dance, The Mouth of the Cave}) or man-made (\textit{Wandering Minstrels, The Bathing Pool, The Fountain})—a repeated element that clearly alludes to the room’s function as a bath.\textsuperscript{358} Bathing is, of course, explicitly referenced in \textit{The Swing} is the only scene to not include live water, yet even there it is alluded to, as the base of the \textit{Marble Faun} bears the same lion-head water spout depicted in \textit{Wandering Minstrels, The Bathing Pool, and The Fountain}.

\textsuperscript{356} On the many references to ancient works found in the paintings, see Baillio, “Hubert Robert’s Decorations for the Château de Bagatelle,” 161-171.

\textsuperscript{357} Radisich, \textit{Hubert Robert}, 89.

\textsuperscript{358} \textit{The Swing} is the only scene to not include live water, yet even there it is alluded to, as the base of the \textit{Marble Faun} bears the same lion-head water spout depicted in \textit{Wandering Minstrels, The Bathing Pool, and The Fountain}. 
Bathing Pool, a work rich in the sort of visual play suggested by Radisich. A comparison of the ancients and the moderns is established by the juxtaposition of a classical statue of the bathing Venus with contemporary works based on Jean-Baptiste Pigalle’s Mercury and Venus, which flank the steps of the pool in which several modern ‘Venuses’ bathe.\(^{359}\) The depicted bathing figures, in turn, serve as potential sources of identification for the room’s real bather (on the rare occasions when the bathtub was in use) and, more generally, invite visitors to imagine the activity with which the space was associated.

Perhaps the most intriguing form of comparative play found in the series is the way in which Robert refers to earlier works of art through both the paintings’ general subject selection and specific figures depicted within the scenes. The images are full of many of the stock motifs of early eighteenth-century decorative painting—outdoor gatherings, musicians, a swinging woman, a conversing couple, bathers, dancers—with several directly copying figures from earlier works. The woman seated on the steps in The Bathing Pool, for example, is taken from François Boucher’s Le Fleuve Scamandre (engraving by Nicolas de Larmessin), while the central couple in The Dance comes from a drawing by Boucher.\(^{360}\) Additionally, aspects of Robert’s formal style, such as the light brushwork he employs to capture the ephemeral qualities of light and shadow, are in keeping with the Rococo visual aesthetic.\(^{361}\) Yet, while the Bagatelle paintings seem at first glance to present classicizing versions of scenes frequently depicted by Watteau, Lancret, Boucher, or Fragonard, upon closer inspection, it becomes clear that many of the familiar images of Rococo decorative

\(^{359}\) Radisich, Hubert Robert, 89.

\(^{360}\) Baillio, “Hubert Robert’s Decorations for the Château de Bagatelle,” 166-167.

\(^{361}\) Radisich, Hubert Robert, 88.
painting, particularly those associated with romantic courtship, are set within rather mundane scenes that sap them of any erotic potential. The Swing, for example, lacks the grace and sensuality found in earlier works on the theme, such as those by Watteau and Fragonard (fig. 130, 131), presenting instead a woman who struggles to maintain composure atop the swing, her legs awkwardly askew as a hunched man holds the limp rope orchestrating the swing’s movement (fig. 132). In other examples, musicians woo ladies watching from the windowsills overhead, but do so surrounded by wandering children, bored men, and washerwomen going about their business (fig. 133); a couple dances in isolation before a gathering of thoroughly uninterested company (fig. 134); and a woman attempts to converse with a man who stares off blankly into the distance (fig. 135). On the level of the figural scenes, Robert’s paintings do not, I find, illustrate the sensuality so often ascribed to a petite maison like the Bagatelle, as Radisich has suggested of the series as a whole, but rather serve as clever jests about the sort of imagery one would expect to find in such a residence. After identifying certain iconographic references in the paintings, viewers could then take great amusement in recognizing the ways in which Robert then plays with and alters his sources.

Setting the Imagination Free

The bath would be an ideal site for a witty iconographic game such as Robert’s, as period texts often associate the space with a spirit of freedom and imagination. While its decoration and furnishings created an appealing—and impressive—environment of luxury and refined taste, the bathing room could equally captivate and delight bathers and guests in more inventive ways. As noted in the Encyclopédie, it was a space unencumbered by the sense of formality that reigned in other parts of the house:
It is here that an architect possessing genius can give free rein to his imagination; these rooms are not governed by the rigor of artistic convention. On the contrary, I propose that it is only in these sorts of rooms that one can appropriately splash out elegance and playfulness.\textsuperscript{362}

The strongest and most enthusiastic eighteenth-century advocate for the imaginative potential of the bath was unquestionably the architect Nicolas Le Camus de Mézières, whose \textit{Le génie de l'architecture, ou L'analogie de cet art avec nos sensations} (1780) includes a lengthy description of his ideal bathing suite.\textsuperscript{363} Comprised of an \textit{antichambre}, a \textit{cabinet des bains}, an \textit{étuve} (in this case, a steam room), a \textit{chambre des bains}, several \textit{garde-robes}, and a \textit{lieux}, Le Camus’s \textit{appartement des bains} is in its basic elements very similar to the model first proposed by Blondel a half-century earlier.\textsuperscript{364} What makes \textit{Le génie de l'architecture} unique, however, is the stress placed on the individual’s sensory responses to different interior spaces, which are orchestrated by the architect through a careful consideration of each room’s unique function, design, and decoration. While theorists within the fields of painting (Roger de Piles) and landscape design (Claude-Henri Watelet, Thomas Whateley, and Jean-Marie Morel) had previously explored how aspects of an object can engender distinct sensory effects, shaping an individual’s experience of it, Le Camus was the first to fully consider the role of the senses in relation to the architectural interior.\textsuperscript{365}

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\textsuperscript{362} “C'est dans cette occasion qu'un Architecte qui a du génie, peut donner carrière à son imagination, ces sortes de pièces n'étant pas susceptibles de la sévérité des règles de l'art. Au contraire, j'estime que c'est dans ces sortes de pièces seulement qu'il convient de répandre de l élégance & de l' enjouement.” “Bains,” in \textit{Encyclopédie}, 2: 20.
\textsuperscript{363} Le Camus de Mézières, \textit{Le génie de l'architecture}, 136-149.
\textsuperscript{364} It does, however, differ in regards to its placement within the residence. Rather than being positioned within an isolated area, as recommended by Blondel, the \textit{appartement} connects directly to the \textit{chambre à coucher}, boudoir, and \textit{cabinet de toilette} belonging to the lady of the house; in this regard, Le Camus’s proposed \textit{distribution} follows the taste of the times, corresponding to the suites of interconnected personal rooms found within many \textit{hôtels} beginning in the late 1760s.
\textsuperscript{365} On the influence of de Piles’s \textit{Cours de peinture par principes} and various eighteenth-century texts on the art of landscape design, see Robin Middleton, introduction to \textit{The Genius of Architecture}, 28-31 and 46-51.
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Within his text, Le Camus places particular emphasis on the main bathing room, the section on which runs longer than any other area of the domestic interior, apart from the salle à manger. After first providing some basic recommendations—e.g., the Corinthian order will best impart a sense of elegance; white veined marble should be used for the fireplace and flooring; the tub should be placed at a low level, ideally sunken, to avoid difficulties entering and exiting the bath—Le Camus launches into a detailed description of the space that builds in momentum as more and more decorative elements are added to the room, each intended to provide a stimulation of the senses that keeps the bather pleasantly diverted. Diversion is critical for Le Camus, for whom the act of bathing, it seems, does not in itself provide any form of sensory pleasure and is instead marked by an inherent sense of idleness and ennui that risks producing melancholy thoughts. While the room’s design and decorative elements help the bather avoid such undesirable effects, it is clear that Le Camus regards them as serving the architect as well. In keeping with the Encyclopédie entry cited above, Le Camus considers the bath as an ideal opportunity for the architect to “unveil all his talents and make known the extent of his Art,” unrestrained by convention and formality. It is a site in which the bather and the designer alike are encouraged to indulge and set free their imaginations, and, although Le Camus does not address any potential visitor responses, the decorative schemes he proposes would have enchanted all who entered such a room.

366 Totaling eight pages, the section on the cabinet des bains is equal in length to the section on the boudoir (pp. 116-123). The section on the salle à manger, at just over thirteen pages (173-186), is longer than both, but is far less concerned with the room’s sensory potential and lacks the unbridled enthusiasm Le Camus applies to certain passages on the bath.

367 “Le désœuvrement qu’on éprouve dans le bain, exige des objets de dissipation. Les idées sont tristes, il faut les égayer.” Le Camus de Mézières, Le génie de l'architecture, 142.

368 “C’est dans ce cas où l’Artiste doit développer ses talents, et faire connaître l’étendue de son Art.” Ibid., 142.
Many of Le Camus’s design recommendations seek to engage the bather visually: he suggests placing the bathtub in the center of the room to allow for a 360-degree view; the room’s window should face the garden, ideally looking out onto a path that ends in a grove; large mirrors should extend low on the other three walls so that the bather can admire herself from all angles. The room’s total decorative scheme, however, is meant to stimulate multiple senses (either literally or imaginatively), drawing from the natural world to create a sensory retreat sure to delight the bather. After proposing a painted trelliswork teaming with jasmine and honeysuckle, Le Camus goes on to call for live trees (or artificial ones in the winter) and aromatic flowering plants to be placed within the space to better enhance the effect of nature. Similarly, he follows up his suggestion to paint a trompe-l’œil sky with swooping birds by recommending the addition of birdcages, as “the movement of the birds and their song would help dispel the ennui of the bath.” To further engage the sense of hearing, he encourages the architect to “install in the walls a few small waterfalls, which would be reflected in the mirrors, and which, by their murmur, would render the space more pleasing.”

Although aspects of Le Camus’s proposed design may seem rather extraordinary, documented examples confirm that, even prior to the publication of *Le génie de l’architecture*, many architects and patrons were indeed moved to capture the sense of wonder and freedom Le Camus ascribes to the bath. The baths of the comte d’Évreux, Madame de Pompadour, the princesse de Kinsky, and the comte d’Artois, for example, all included amusing decorative additions evoking the natural world. The comte d’Évreux’s copper bathtub was decorated with painted ducks and flowers, and the room’s taps, as

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369 “le mouvement des oiseaux et leur ramage contribueraient à dissiper l’ennui du bain.” Ibid., 139.

370 “il serait aisé de pratiquer dans les pans quelques petite cascades qui se répétteraient par les glaces, et qui, par leur murmure, rendraient ce lieu plus agréable.” Ibid.

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previously noted, took the form of dolphins and swans. Andirons set within hearths were frequently shaped to depict various creatures as well: Pompadour’s *chambres des bains* at the Hôtel d’Évreux and Bellevue both included andirons in the form of birds—swans emerging from rushes in the former (fig. 136), hens and pigeons in the latter—and the princesse de Kinsky’s set depicted doves and a nesting partridge settled in marshy reeds. At the Bagatelle, a gilded relief of honeysuckle and flowers adorned the cornice, which was trimmed in the same ribbon and flower banding that ran along the edges of the window box and doorways. And finally, as would later be recommended by Le Camus, *trompe-l’œil* skies crowned the bathing rooms at both the Bagatelle and the Hôtel de Kinsky.

Natural specimens were in some instances exhibited within bathing rooms as well. After admiring the aforementioned selection of prints hanging in the princesse de Kinsky’s *salle des bains* and *cabinet de toilette*, for example, one might peruse the selection of marine plants on display there. The *salle des bains* at the Hôtel de Montmorency-Luxembourg featured a more extensive collection with various stuffed birds presented in glass cases, a feature that would have surely pleased Le Camus. Part of a freestanding pavilion designed in 1749 by Antoine Matthieu Le Carpentier (1709–1773),\(^{371}\) the bath was directly connected to the residence’s only *salle à manger*, ensuring that guests of the duc and duchesse de Montmorency-Luxembourg would see and enjoy these novel additions to the bathing space. While a guidebook description of the *hôtel* has little to say about the room’s overall design and furnishings, apart from the presence of two bathtubs, the author records in detail each natural specimen presented there, among them a male peacock fanning his tail, a female

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\(^{371}\) 10 rue Saint-Marc, demolished. Main residence designed by Lassurance *circa* 1706 for Thomas Rivié (1653-1732); sold to Nicolas Desmarets (1648-1721) in 1711; sold in 1723 to Charles François Frédéric de Montmorency-Luxembourg (1662-1726); inherited by his son, Charles François Frédéric II (1702-1764); inherited by his daughter, Charlotte Anne Françoise (1752-1829), who later resides there with her husband Anne-Léon de Montmorency (1731-1799) following their marriage in 1767.
peacock, two guinea fowl, a swan, a heron, and a goose, along with more exotic species from South America and Louisiana. In such examples, the bathing space extends beyond Le Camus’s model of pleasurable diversions by also offering the bather and invited guests an opportunity to study and discuss plant and animal forms that may otherwise be unfamiliar to them.

For Le Camus, the emphasis on the natural world as a source of decorative inspiration goes hand-in-hand with his characterization of the bathing space as the realm of the gods, with the architect’s designs drawing on the habitats of the classical divinities who reign over land and sea. As he declares near the end of his section on the cabinet des bains, “This is the palace of the Gods; these apartments that we have to decorate are theirs, and it is for us to impose our customs upon them.” Le Camus establishes the connection to classical mythology at the start of his section on the main bathing room, the opening lines of which state, “Diana descends to her bath. It is here that you must seek to delight her in the form of the room, in its arrangements, and in its ensemble.” Elsewhere in the text, Le Camus again refers to the bather as Diana, inviting his reader to imagine the bathing space being inhabited not by a mere mortal, but by a divine presence worthy of all the pleasures the architect can muster. Like Le Camus’s reader, visitors to several notable eighteenth-century baths would have been prompted by the decorative scheme to imagine the owner in the role of a bathing

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372 Thiéry, Guide des amateurs, 1: 449-450. The display continued in a second room adjacent to the bath, which was added after the original construction of the pavilion, with additional animals and birds grouped in a picturesque manner to illustrate popular fables.

373 Hellman, “Domesticity Undone,” 18. Moreover, as Hellman has noted, the fable displays in the adjacent room would have served as amusing, yet instructive, moral lessons.

374 “C’est le palais des Dieux; ce sont leurs habitations à décorer, il s’agit de les soumettre à nos usages.” Le Camus de Mézières, Le génie de l’architecture, 143.

375 “Diane descends à ses bains. C’est ici qu’on doit chercher à l’égayer par la forme du lieu, par son arrangement, par son ensemble.” Ibid., 137.
goddess; yet, rather than the chaste Diana, the mythological model most often assumed was the sensual goddess of love.

For the decoration of the appartement des bains at Bellevue, Madame de Pompadour called upon François Boucher, who produced a pair of oil paintings depicting Venus at her bath (fig. 137) and at her toilette (fig. 138), both dated to 1751. According to Paul Biver, the works were displayed in the chambre des bains (the entrance point for the appartement) and hung above the doorways leading to the salle des bains and the cabinet de commodité where the suite’s chaise percée (close stool) was located. While the rationale behind the selected subjects of the bath and toilette is evident enough given the setting, the figure of Venus would have most likely been recognized as a personal reference to Madame de Pompadour, who had played the goddess in Pierre Laujon’s La Toilette de Vénus, part of a ballet héroïque performed at Versailles in 1750. The conceit of Pompadour assuming the role of Venus within her appartement des bains is underscored, if unintentionally, by the placement of the appartement within a detached wing of the château that directly faces her small theater across the courtyard. And just as the marquise reigned over the bath at Bellevue, the figure of Venus is made the visual focus of Boucher’s paintings, her fair skin set against a field dominated by lush blues and green (a palette that would have harmonized

376 Technical analysis of the two canvases has revealed later additions to the corners of both works, suggesting their rectangular format is not original. The National Gallery of Art has proposed the pair would have initially had a more curvilinear shape similar to that of Boucher’s preparatory drawing for Washington canvas, held in the Hermitage collection. See Richard Rand, “The Bath of Venus,” in French Paintings of the Fifteenth Through the Eighteenth Century, ed. Philip Conisbee (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2009), 19-25.

377 The only period source, to my knowledge, to mention the pair’s inclusion in the décor of Bellevue does not address their specific location with the appartement des bains. Antoine Nicolas Désallier d’Argenville, Voyage pittoresque des environs de Paris... (Paris: de Bure, 1755), 29. Although Biver does not cite a source for his proposed arrangement, the placement of The Bath of Venus above the entrance to the salle des bains would have certainly been appropriate, and from a conservation standpoint, the chambre des bains would have been a preferable location to the main bathing room, given the latter’s more humid conditions.

nicely with the painted frames of the *chambre’s* seat furniture) and her limbs artfully posed to best display her soft, flowing contours.

Visitors would have been further encouraged to see Pompadour’s image in Boucher’s pendants due to the relationships between the paintings’ settings and the spaces of the marquise’s *appartement des bains*. Like the bathing Venus, who presents her body to the spectator amidst a verdant landscape with billowing trees and sprays of flowers, Pompadour ‘performed’ the bath surrounded by representations of the natural world. In her *salle des bains*, she bathed beneath a canopy of a light yellow cotton embroidered with flowers, birds, and butterflies, its curtains framing her as if on stage. The same embroidered designs were found on the room’s window curtains, four chair backs, and the sheet that lined the bathtub and hung over its sides, hiding its hard copper surface under soft folds of textured fabric. Overhead, the cornice was sculpted with trees as well as hens, one of several types of birds kept in the menagerie situated just behind the *salle des bains*, which served as something of an unseen backdrop to the natural scene staged within the *salle*. Although it was modern mechanics that made the domestic bath possible, the Bellevue *salle des bains* sought to disguise this reality under a blanket of the natural world, presenting the marquise-as-Venus as the beneficiary of the refreshing pleasures—fictional though they may be—of fragrant air, singing birds, and cool water lapping against the banks of a stream.

If Boucher’s *Venus at her Bath* evoked the space of the *salle des bains*, its pendant was more closely related to the *chambre* in which it hung. As Katie Scott has suggested, *The Toilette of Venus* represents a space in which a variety of rich fabrics surround the goddess’s body, closing in around it to provide a sense of comfort mirrored by the nesting doves within
the image. In this regard, Boucher’s painting corresponds with the décor of the chambre itself. As Scott has observed, the multiple materials (cotton, chenille, cordonnet, perse appliqués) used in the room’s tapestry “created a highly textured, supple surface in contradiction to the rigidity of the wall. To describe the effect differently, instead of drawing out space in the straight lines of a geometric shape, such a surface, by its address to touch, advanced to meet the bather, crowded in to comfort the body.” Boucher’s paintings and the appartement’s décor, therefore, came together to characterize the salle des bains and chambre des bains in distinct and meaningful ways: while the salle was figured as Venus’s natural retreat, the chambre served as a space of luxurious comfort where she could settled in after the bath.

The two architects of Le Camus’s generation who best exemplify this turn are undoubtedly Alexandre-Théodore Brongniart and François-Joseph Bélanger, both of whom created several novel bathing spaces that drew equally from mythology and the natural world. For the salles des bains at the Hôtels de Bondy (1771) and Monaco (1774), Brongniart designed complex water features that would have captivated the bather (and visitor) both visually and aurally. While it is unclear as to whether the works were executed, Brongniart’s proposed designs are known through preparatory drawings. At the Hôtel de


380 Ibid., 267. As Scott goes on to note, while comfort may have been lacking in the distribution of the freestanding appartement in relation to the main living quarters, the décor of the chambre des bains compensated for this reality, as it “performed the comforts and conveniences that planning apparently denied.”

381 A 1790 description of the Hôtel de Monaco’s salle des bains does not mention the fountains, noting only the room’s stucco paneling with gilded congelation and a lit de repos set within a perse-lined niche. Françoise Magny, “Hôtel de Monaco puis de Sagan,” in Le Faubourg Saint-Germain: La rue Saint-Dominique, 145. There are, to my knowledge, no period descriptions of the Hôtel de Bondy’s salle des bains. The floor plan included in Krafft’s Plans does not match the layout suggested by Brongniart’s interior drawings, as the bathtub (rather than a lit de repos) is placed before the room’s only window, with a bed placed in a niche on the opposite wall. Nevertheless, the water features may have been intended for (and possibly installed on) the flat
Bondy,\textsuperscript{382} built for Jean-Baptiste Taillepied de Bondy and his wife Marie-Catherine de Foissy, Brongniart designed a pair of wall fountains with spouts mounted on vertical mirrored panels, from which water streams down, pooling in the basins below (fig. 139). Positioned between the fountains, a relief sculpture depicts a naiad pouring water from a hydria resting on her shoulder, with pairs of similar figures placed on another wall in the room. Adding to the natural motif, garland swags are placed above the nymphs, and floral scrollwork fills the relief panels surmounting the fountains, at the center of which pairs of amours reach across Venus’s emblematic coquille shell in an embrace. For the Hôtel de Monaco,\textsuperscript{383} home of Marie-Catherine de Brignoles (1737–1813), the estranged wife of Honoré-Camille-Lénoir Grimaldi, prince de Monaco, Brongniart designed two vertically bisected fountains reflected in mirrored panels to visually complete their forms (fig. 140). At the base of these multi-tiered works, mermen hold up a small basin that supports a trio of Graces above; the Graces, in turn, raise a second basin, from which a spout streams water back down across the lower levels. While the casts of nymphs, amours, mermen, and Graces decorating the baths at the Hôtels de Bondy and Monaco are in keeping with the Neoclassical character of the residences, they also invite the visitor to imagine the bather as Venus, partaking in the pleasures of the bath surrounded by her retinue of divine attendants.


\footnote{383}{On the history of the hôtel, see note 324. The hôtel is addressed in Magny, “Hôtel de Monaco puis de Sagan,” 134-145; Sacy, \textit{Alexandre-Théodore Brongniart}, 24-32; and Béatrice de Rochebouët, “Hôtel de Monaco puis de Sagan,” in \textit{Alexandre-Théodore Brongniart: Architecture et décor}, 54-64.}
The bathing room of Anne-Victoire Dervieux (1752–1826), part of Bélanger’s 1789 renovations to her residence in the fashionable Chaussée-d'Antin quarter, was likewise a sensory retreat evoking the goddess of love, and one that was publically opened for viewing. Having risen up the ranks of Parisian society as a singer at the Opéra and a companion to a number of well-positioned men, Dervieux—like La Guimard—utilized her private residence as a means of drawing and maintaining public interest, placing a great significance on the interior design and décor. As Nikolai Karamzin later notes in his *Letters of a Russian Traveller* (1797):

> [This] famous enchantress, after laboring for twenty years at her lucrative art and accumulating millions, decided to erect a house that would attract the admiration of Paris. Such was her wish, and so it was done: this edifice is regarded as a miracle. You need a ticket to view it; Mr. P*, my countryman, procured me this pleasure. What rooms! What décor!  

Among the residence’s impressive sights was the bathing room (fig. 141), which, along with the adjoining boudoir, formed a wing extending along the garden from the *cabinet de toilette*. While much of the room’s painted decoration is comprised of classically inspired cartouches connected to strands of garland, the most complex paintings are centered in the niches set within four of the room’s eight walls. The specific subjects of the red-figure bas-reliefs occupying the lower third of these vertical panels are difficult to identify from extant

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384 On the rue de la Victoire (formerly the rue Chantereine), demolished in 1867. Designed by Brongniart in 1777. After acquiring additional property, Dervieux commissioned Bélanger—whom she would later marry in 1795—to remodel the garden and expand the existing plan, adding a bath, boudoir, and *salle à manger*. Brongniart and Bélanger’s respective contributions to the property are outlined in Béatrice de Rochebouët, “Maison de Mademoiselle Dervieux,” in *Alexandre-Théodore Brongniart: Architecture et décor*, 47-52. Final plan illustrated in Krafft, *Plans*, pl. 7.

385 See Norberg, “Salon as Stage” and “Goddesses of Taste.”


387 A line engraving with a key describing one of the room’s panels is included in Krafft, *Plans*, pl. 101, no. 2.
illustrations of the room, but the theme of the upper sections is clear: at the center of each panel, a circular river scene is set within a decorative frame, above which a graceful woman balances on an orb flanked by swans. For visitors versed in the iconography of Venus, whose chariot is pulled by a pair of swans, this image—reproduced four times throughout the room—would have established the bath as the realm of the goddess of love, a fitting reference for a well-known courtesan like Dervieux.

In addition to its mythological decoration, multiple elements of Dervieux’s bath correspond closely to the model set out by Le Camus in *Le génie de l'architecture,* including the octagonal plan, marble flooring, centrally-positioned sunken tub, and fireplace mounted by a mirror, which was placed opposite the French doors leading to the property’s garden. Moreover, the space is designed with various sensory pleasures in mind, as recommended by Le Camus. The bathtub, for example, was filled by multiple spouted mascarons running along its interior perimeter, which would have added an appealing aural component to the room as they cycled water. While Dervieux must have certainly enjoyed such features, many visitors would have also recognized and appreciated the room’s ability to evoke the senses, as evidenced by Karamzin’s brief description of the space:

> Behind the bedroom, in a small room, a marble pool has been made for bathing, and above there is a gallery for musicians so that the beauty can splash to the rhythm as she listens to their harmonious playing. From this room there is a door to the garden of the Hesperides, where all paths are covered in flowers’ where all the tress give off fragrances as they cast shade.\(^{388}\)

Here, Karamzin’s reader is invited to imagine—presumably as Karamzin did while visiting the space—Dervieux admiring the garden view while she soaked in her tub, enjoying a bit of music as she took in a fresh and fragrant breeze carried through the open doors.

\(^{388}\) Karamzin, *Letters of a Russian Traveller,* 297.
Dervieux’s *salle des bains* is, in many ways, an exemplum of the female bathing space. In addition to its pictorial references to the goddess Venus, it was connected to a boudoir and *cabinet de toilette*, two interior spaces traditionally associated with women, and was part of a residence owned by an unmarried courtesan. Le Camus likewise establishes the bath as a feminine space in *Le génie de l'architecture*, placing it off the personal quarters of the lady of the house, as was often the case in many residences designed from the 1770s on, and continually figuring the bather as a goddess. Yet, while Le Camus initially presents the bath as the domain of Diana, full of the sights and smells of her woodlands, he goes on to propose other decorative schemes, including one that evokes a male presence:

> Why not represent a grotto of Amphitrite, sparkling with the riches of the sea? Why not create a room from Neptune’s palace? How many interesting objects could be assembled there!...The chariot of the Sovereign of the Seas might serve as the bathtub; it could be harnessed to sea horses whose nostrils would project jets of water that flow through the rocks, the silvery streams of which would delight the eye; you would think you were the midst of the seas.\(^{389}\)

While the bath is otherwise characterized as a space for women with Le Camus’s text, his model of Neptune’s palace raises the idea of a male alternative. Two baths designed by Brongniart and Bélanger in the early 1780s—the subterranean bath at the Hôtel de Besenval and the *salle des bains* set within the *Grand Rocher* at the Folie de Saint-James—provide the opportunity to reflect on the character and appearance of what might be considered a ‘masculine’ bathing space, rich in sensory potential but more austere and imposing in design.

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\(^{389}\) “Pourquoi ne représenterait-on pas une grotte d’Amphitrite, en y faisant briller les riches de la mer? Pourquoi ne pas former l’intérieur d’une des salles du palais de Neptune? Que de choses intéressantes pourraient s’y réunir!... Le char du Souverain des mers pourrait servir de baignoire; il serait attelé de chevaux marins qui lancereraient par les narines de jets dormant des ruisseaux que l’on verrait couler à travers les roches, et dont l’onde argentine flatterait agréablement la vue; on se croirait au milieu des mers.” Le Camus de Mézières, *Le génie de l'architecture*, 140-141.
Classical Grandeur

In 1782, Brongniart began one of his most splendid projects, a subterranean bath for the last commander of the Gardes Suisses, Pierre-Victor de Besenval (1721–1791). The details of the project are well documented through the architect’s plans and interior drawings, as well as a guidebook description of the space.\footnote{Thiéry, *Guide des amateurs*, 2: 579-580. Rue de Grenelle, today the Swiss Embassy. Hôtel designed by Pierre-Alexis Delamair (1675-1745) in 1704 for the l’abbé Pierre de Chanac de Pompadour. On the residence, see Bruno Pons, “Hôtel de Pompadour,” in *Le Faubourg Saint-Germain: La rue de Grenelle*, 2nd ed. (Paris: La Galerie, 1985), 24-27. On the bathing room, see Sacy, *Alexandre-Théodore Brongniart*, 60-62; Béatrice de Rochebouët, “Nymphée de l’hôtel Chanac de Pompadour,” in *Alexandre-Théodore Brongniart: Architecture et décor*, 85-88.} Preceded by a vestibule at the foot of the staircase from the rez-de-chaussée, the bathing chamber was accessed via a double-leaf door adorned with bronze mascarons, which opened onto a large rectangular hall divided into three zones (fig. 142). A row of columns marks off a small gallery at either end of the main bathing area, a floor plan that was likely inspired by ancient frigidaria, or cold-water bathing pools, such as the one at the Baths of Caracalla.\footnote{Although Brongniart never traveled to Rome, it is likely that he would have been familiar with the architecture of the most famous ancient baths through studies such as Marie-Joseph Peyre’s *Oeuvres d’architecture* (1765). Peyre’s text, for example, includes floor plans for the Baths of Caracalla (pl. 19) and Diocletian (pl. 18).} Notably, all of the columns in the room are Tuscan, an order that, according to Le Camus, “declares through its proportions a sense of strength and solidity, representative of a vigorous [nerveux] and robust man.”\footnote{“L’ordre Toscan par ses proportions annonce la force, la solidité, et représente un homme nerveux et robuste.” Le Camus de Mézières, *Le génie de l'architecture*, 22.} Notably, the term nerveux implies a body that is healthy and strong on account of having good nerves,\footnote{See, for example, the definitions for “nerveux” in *Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française* (1762), 2: 206: “Qui a de bons nerfs, qui a beaucoup de force dans les muscles / On dit figurément, qu’un discours est nerveux, pour dire, qu’il est plein de force & de solidité.”} an appropriate characteristic in a bathing room evoking the cold baths of Rome. As we have seen, cold water was promoted for its ability to produce a nervous reaction that
strengthens fibers and invigorates the body. As one medical guide remarked, “Does it not make men stronger and more robust?” Upon entering Besenval’s bath, covered entirely in chilly pierre de Tonnerre, one would not imagine a bather who luxuriated in warm water, delighting in its softening effects, but rather a solid, contracted body charging with vitality.

Yet, while the room worked to project this spartan image, Besenval did not yield entirely to the cold bath: as Thiéry’s guidebook notes, the elliptical bathtub—approximately ten feet in diameter and set into the floor of the vaulted central space—was serviced with both hot and cold water delivered from a mascaron on the statue pedestal placed just behind the columns marking off the rear gallery (fig. 143). Further adding to the visual and aural stimulation provided by the water streaming into the tub, the gallery also included handled urns supported by half-columns, which cycled their own jets of water. Atop the central pedestal, an over-life-size naiad representing La Source reclined against a tipped urn, her body entirely at ease with soft flesh and flowing contours, seeming somewhat out of place in such a cold environment.

The statue was one of many works by Clodion (Claude Michel, 1738–1814), whose sculpted decoration continued along the walls of the main bathing space, filling the openings between the room’s engaged columns (four on each side). As illustrated in Brongniart’s interior drawing (fig. 144) and confirmed by Thiéry’s description, the decoration of each lateral wall included a centrally-placed relief panel, flanked by a pair of carved vases set within niches. While bands of jubilant male and female satyrs encircled the vases, the large panels take up specific narratives related to the loves of the gods, set within and along the

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395 On the statue, last recorded at the château d’Armainvilliers in the early twentieth century but presently lost, see cat. no. 51 in Anne Poulet and Guilhem Scherf, Clodion: 1738-1814 (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1992), 248-251.
banks of a river. Beginning with the panel placed on the right sidewall upon entering (if Brongniart’s drawings are accurate in this regard), Clodion first presents Venus disarming Cupid, with the young god offering up flowers in an attempt to persuade his mother to release her firm hold on his quiver (fig. 145). Cupid, or perhaps one of his followers, is again depicted on the other side of Venus, her left hand pinching his wings as he reaches out for the bow teasingly dangled by one of the nymphs in the water. The right side of the panel depicts Leda’s seduction by Jupiter in the guise of a swan, which Cupid watches from his hiding spot behind a tree, soliciting the viewer’s silence with a finger pressed against his lips. Cupid is witness to the scene presented in the second panel as well, watching from the shore with a fellow amours as the lustful Pan goes after Syrinx, one of Diana’s chaste nymphs, who flees in the direction of her frightened naiad sisters (fig. 146).

While the settings of the Leda and Syrinx stories make them fitting pendants and appropriate subjects for a bathing room (both myths traditionally take place in a woodland stream), the panels are further unified by their thematic presentation of the Triumph of Love. As Guilhem Scherf has observed, “Disarmed by Venus and her nymphs, Cupid takes his revenge, demonstrating his power twice over: he is an indispensable ally to Jupiter and the ruthless victor over Pan, whom he torments with the very desire he inflicted upon him.”

The site of Besenval’s bath, therefore, becomes a space in which the cunning god of love reigns, inciting passions according to his whims. Yet, in contrast to Jupiter and Pan, who eagerly take to the waters in pursuit of their desires, the female characters in Clodion’s series


397 “Le véritable sujet des reliefs en effet est le Triomphe de l’Amour. Cupidon, désarmé par Vénus et les nymphes, se venge deux fois, démontrant son pouvoir: il est l’allié indispensable de Jupiter, et le vainqueur impitoyable de Pan dont il brime le désir, après l’avoir suscité.” Ibid., 234.
are far less willing participants in Cupid’s games: Syrinx adamantly rejects Pan’s attentions, calling upon the gods to transform her into marsh reeds so that she might escape him; and although Leda eventually succumbs to Jupiter (with Cupid’s aid), Clodion has depicted her prior to this turn, with a gesture that suggests her hesitancy. One can hardly imagine such a decorative cycle appearing in a bathing room commissioned by a woman. It is perhaps this strange tension in the selected narrative moments that led Brongniart’s wife, Anne-Louise d’Egremont, to report home upon visiting the hôtel with a companion, “My friend, in viewing the baths, I experienced the sensation that beautiful things arise in me. But the sculpture is quite morose and creates an incomprehensible disparity with the architecture.” For her husband, Madame Brongniart has only the highest praise, assuring him that “this is one of your creations that will bring you the greatest honor.”

No doubt owing to Brongniart’s imposing architectural design and the high technical quality of Clodion’s sculpted works, the bathing room was a point of pride for Besenval, who made note of it in his correspondence and opened the room to visitors. In all likelihood, Besenval would have appreciated the room primarily for its public appeal and aesthetic value, as it was notoriously difficult to heat and therefore largely unusable as a bath. If one often repeated account is to be believed, a Swiss guard under Besenval’s command died of pneumonia shortly after bathing in the frigid basement, his body reportedly weakened by the

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398 Madame Brongniart’s full account of the bath, recorded in a letter dated 3 September 1793, reads: “[U]n chose qui m’a fait un grand plaisir, ce sont les bains. Mon ami, c’est une des choses que vous ayez fait qui vous fera le plus d’honneur. Ils ont le caractère de l’antique. Les pierres ont un caractère de vétusté que l’humidité leur donne et qui sied au local. Mon ami, j’ai éprouvé la sensation que les belles choses me donnent en voyant ces bains. Mais la sculpture est bien morose et elle fait un [sic] disparate inconcevable avec l’architecture. Chaudet en a été frappé et les a trouvés dignes d’être au rang des plus belles choses.” Quoted in Sacy, Alexandre-Théodore Brongniart, 62.

399 Poulet and Scherf, Clodion, 229.
room’s inhospitable climate. Based on Thiéry’s description and other recorded responses to the space, the general public was, however, duly impressed: Thiery characterizes it as a “delicious salle de bains” and a “superb room,” while the memoirs of Joseph Weber, Marie-Antoinette’s foster brother, note that it was “a curiosity of the capital.”

Around the time Brongniart was setting to work on his project at the Hôtel de Besenval, Bélanger has just completed the Grand Rocher at the Folie de Saint-James, which was likewise renowned for its imaginative design. With a Doric portico set into the front rock face and a salle des bains at the back (fig. 147), this monumental structure is one of the numerous fabriques Bélanger designed for the Anglo-Chinese gardens of Claude Baudard de Saint-James (1738–1787), trésorier général de la Marine. At this point in his career, Bélanger had already designed one freestanding bathing structure for a garden: his first architectural commission was a Neoclassical bath-house ordered by Louis-Léon de Brancas at the request of his mistress, the actress Sophie Arnould (fig. 148). The Brancas project, however, appears to have never been completed, with work on the bath-house recorded as being underway but still unfinished when the comte prepared the hôtel for sale in July 1768.

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400 Sacy, Alexandre-Théodore Brongniart, 62.


402 The main residence, along with the garden and its many fabriques, are covered in Gabrielle Joudiou, La folie de M. de Sainte-James: une demeure, un jardin pittoresque (Neuilly-sur-Seine: Editions Spiralinthe, 2001). Based on preliminary designs for the temple front (illustrated in Joudiou’s monograph), work on the Grand Rocher likely began circa 1780.


404 Ibid. 382. As Perry notes, the bath-house may have been completed in the two-month period between property survey and the final sale, but it is more likely that work stopped after negotiations began in July.
acquiring the property, and it is today known only through Bélanger’s descriptions and elevation drawings of the façade and ground-floor salon; there are no records related to the subterranean bathing room. The Grand Rocher, on the other hand, garnered great attention in its day. Even prior to its construction, it had become something of a spectacle—Louis XVI allegedly dubbed Saint-James ‘l’homme au rocher’ after witnessing a team of forty horses transporting the necessary rocks from the Forest of Fontainebleau to Saint-James’s estate, located just north of the Bois de Boulogne—405—and in the years to follow it continued to impress those who ventured to the outskirts of Paris to see the unique attraction.406

While the structure exists today in an overgrown state, a painting by Claude-Louis Châtelet (1753–1795) documents its original appearance from the garden side, with a massive arch of rocks framing a Doric temple façade (fig. 149). Like the Tuscan order, the Doric was traditionally characterized in masculine terms; Le Camus, for example, associates it with “a man of a noble and lofty build.”407 Visitors in the foreground of Châtelet’s painting take in the sight of the imposing façade from the waters and shoreline of a small lake, which is fed by water cascading from a central semi-circular opening and two flanking canonnières positioned on the brick wall that runs behind the four columns. Further establishing flowing water—so central to the bathing chamber set deep within the rock—as key element in the structure’s overall design, fountains are set on small terraces on either side of the lake. At the base of the left terrace, Châtelet depicts a family standing at the doorway to the Galerie en Rocher, a dark cave-like hall of unfinished rocks that connects to the salle des bains via an

405 Joudiou, La folie de M. de Sainte-James, 54.

406 Many visitors may have made the trip on the recommendation of Thiéry, who includes a lengthy section on the gardens in his guidebook of 1787. Thiéry, Guide des amateurs, 1: 35-39.

intermediary chambre at the other end. While the salle des bains can also be accessed directly from a recessed porch set into the Rocher’s rear façade (fig. 150; B on Krafft’s foundation plan), entering from the gallery provides the most impressive unveiling of the space, transitioning from the dark rugged grotto to the refined classical interior of the bath.

Comprised of a rectangular central section with semi-circular apses on either end, the bathing chamber adheres to a floor plan commonly used for various rooms within ancient bathing facilities, including the caldarium of the Baths of Diocletian and the East Bath at the Roman complex in Bath, England. Overhead, Bélanger set white rosette plaques within the coffers covering both the central barrel vault and the apsidal half-domes, again, likely in imitation of the great Roman baths (fig. 151). To complete the room, Bélanger designed a canapé and fifteen chaises, providing Saint-James and his visitors with ample furniture should they wish to socialize while a bath was underway or gather in a more formal manner to enjoy the architecture.

As with the salle des bains at the Hôtel de Besenval, one wonders how frequently Saint-James or his wife would have actually bathed within the space. The Grand Rocher is located within manageable walking distance from the main residence, but to access the salle des bains, one would have to either pass through the rock gallery or take the narrow allée that originally ran along the rear façade; neither route is particularly convenient, especially when returning to the residence after a long bath. Moreover, unlike many of the freestanding baths

408 Like Brongnarti, Bélanger never traveled to Rome, but he may have been familiar with the plan of the Baths of Diocletian through sources such as Peyre’s Oeuvres d’architecture. Bélanger did, however, visit Bath in 1778, at which point the excavations of the East Bath (discovered in 1755) were complete.

409 Similarly coffered vaults are depicted, for example, in a painting of the Baths of Diocletian by Hubert Robert (Musée des beaux-arts de Besançon).

410 Inventory listed in Joudiou, La folie de M. de Sainte-James, 70.
designed for early eighteenth-century *maisons de plaisance*, it lacks the variety of auxiliary spaces intended to serve the bather’s needs prior to and following the bath. Perhaps the rooms on either side of the *salle des bains* fulfilled this purpose, although with no fireplaces indicated on the plan, they would have been very difficult to heat to comfort, limiting their year-round use. It is more likely that Saint-James—like his contemporary Besenval—was drawn to the less functional benefits of the bathing space, namely its value as an architectural showpiece that conveyed the grandeur of the ancients and the wealth of its owner.

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As the *salles des bains* of Besenval and Saint-James demonstrate, a bathing room need not be practical to be desirable. While many homeowners surely appreciated their bathing rooms as spaces in which to partake in personal pleasures—relaxing the body, admiring a garden view, or simply reflecting in private—the room’s potential to shape an individual’s public reception was equally important. In this regard, the eighteenth-century bathing room occupies a unique moment. By the close of the century, neither indulging in pleasures nor displaying one’s privilege was looked upon favorably. Moreover, as bathing became more common, in part due to the great increase in public baths in the 1780s, its association with elite luxury began to fade. Yet, as evidenced by the spaces reviewed within this chapter, for eighteenth-century homeowners, the bathing room was a site awash in significance, both personal and social.
EPILOGUE

By the close of the eighteenth century, bathing was gradually being distanced from the pleasures of an elite few due to an increased focus on the physical benefits of bathing and the growth of public baths beginning in the 1780s. The effects of these developments fully took hold in the decades to follow, as evidenced by the definitions for the terms bain (the act of bathing) and bains (the bathing space) in the first nineteenth-century edition of the Dictionnaire de l'Académie française. Whereas the eighteenth-century editions had consistently presented bathing as an act undertaken either for pleasure (plaisir) or health (santé), the 1835 edition offers three motivations: pleasure—reframed as amusement—and health remain, but to this pair cleanliness (propreté) is added.411 As discussed above in Chapter Three, localized washing had been promoted for reasons of cleanliness starting in the second half of the eighteenth century, but cleanliness is linked in the 1835 dictionary to prolonged immersion baths, suggesting an easing up of anxieties over the potential debilitating effects of extended exposure to water. In addition to this expansion of the entry for bain, the word bains, previously defined only in terms of private bathing spaces (la chambre du bain, l'appartement des bains), is amended in 1835 to also include “All public establishments where one can go to take a bath.”412


412 Ibid. There were 78 establishments in Paris by 1832, as noted in Dominique Laty, Histoire des bains (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996), 101.
The increased development of public facilities beginning in the 1780s was in large part a response to the gradual adoption of bathing practices within elite society over the course of the eighteenth century. As a bathing became more common among the minority of Parisians able to afford the cost of maintaining a residential water supply or attending one of few existing public facilities, there was an increased desire to extend the practice to the rest of Paris as well, for both the benefit of individuals and the community as a whole. Motivated by a new “demographic consciousness,” physicians and local administrators alike placed new emphasis on the bath’s therapeutic and hygienic benefits—that is, both its curative and preventative potential—as a means by which to extend life expectancies and therefore ensure the success of the state.  

Expanding access to clean water was crucial to this project: as Antoine Lavoisier remarked in 1786, “There can be no doubt that such a shortage of water contributes to the dirtiness of the people and does much to render the atmosphere of the capital unhealthy.” Since private baths remained out of reach for the vast majority of Parisians, requiring either a personal well on the property or the transport of water from public fountains by water-carriers or servants, attention was focused on developing more affordable public facilities.

In 1785, the Bureau de la Ville of Paris acknowledged that the average prices of the existing bathing establishments (three livres at the floating bath-houses and six livres at the regular bath-houses) restricted their use to a limited segment of the population. To rectify

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413 Vigarello, Concepts of Cleanliness, 142-143.


the situation, the city administrators proposed the establishment of reduced-price facilities “so that the most numerous class of the bourgeoisie might enjoy them,” citing the benefits of cleanliness that would surely be appreciated by the public.\textsuperscript{416} The Bureau authorized the proprietor Guignard, who ran the floating Bains Poitevin,\textsuperscript{417} to build four new bath-boats to be set at various points along the Seine, providing a total of eighty-eight new bathing cabins at a price of twenty-four \textit{sols} and a dozen spaces free of charge to the poor. Although Guignard ultimately failed to come through on the order, other free and reduced options were available in Paris. As documented in guidebooks from the period, the Bureau de la Ville’s twenty-four-\textit{sol} baths did come to fruition along with free facilities for the poor, and several establishments were offering such services even prior to the 1785 order.\textsuperscript{418}

While bathing directly in the river at sanctioned locations, as had been custom for over a century, remained the cheapest option, the public baths established in the 1780s were regarded as a more beneficial alternative to this traditional practice. In 1782, Barthélémy Turquin opened his floating Bains Chinois at the Pont de la Tournelle, which included twenty-two private cabins at a starting price of twenty-four \textit{sols} per person, with a reduction if two or three people opted to bathe together.\textsuperscript{419} Open on the sides so that river water could pass directly into the pierced tubs, Turquin’s baths were incredibly popular according to one guidebook, which states: “They have earned, in the space of one or two years, the approval of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[417] Guignard took over the Bains Poitevin following the death of the original owner. Established in 1761, the two floating bath-houses were the first of their kind in Paris, with private chambers for rent at a price of three \textit{livres}. See Vigarello, \textit{Concepts of Cleanliness}, 103.
\item[418] Public baths established under the Bureau de Ville are noted in Jean-Luc Thiéry, \textit{Almanach du voyageur à Paris}… (Paris: Hardouin, 1786), 75; Dulaure, \textit{Nouvelle description}, 61. Free baths for the poor are noted in Thiéry, \textit{Almanach du voyageur}, 76; and \textit{Guide des amateurs}, 2: 593.
\item[419] On the boat and cabins, see “Avis Divers,” \textit{Gazette de santé}… (2 June 1782): 87.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
all the *Citoyens* due to their cleanliness and convenience, as well as their modest price.”

As period descriptions of the Bains Chinois attest, water purity was an important consideration, with each cabin receiving its own water supply, which was then filtered out by a pipe, so that one never bathed in water used by another. The fully enclosed floating bath-houses, such as the Bains Poitevin and the Bains Albert, offered regulated environments safe for year-round use and bathtubs serviced with hot and cold water to meet the particular needs of the bather. The Bains Albert, built in 1783, specifically focused on hydrotherapy, offering different types of baths approved by the Faculté de Médecine, including regular immersion baths, medicinal baths, vapour baths, and showers. According to one guidebook, “Here, the infirmed find all the comfort and relief they may require.”

Although the proprietor certainly profited heartily from his standard fees—ranging from three to twelve *livres*—he also offered free baths. As the author Thiéry notes: “Despite the considerable expense required of such an establishment, Sir Albert, to whom we are indebted, demonstrated patriotism and philanthropy by dedicating two private rooms for the poor.”

While a step in the right direction, the bathing facilities established in Paris in the 1780s were still woefully inadequate given the city’s population, estimated at 620,000 in 1789. Yet, despite being limited enough in number to not effect an immediate and

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420 “Ils ont mérité, dans l’espace d’un ou deux ans, le suffrage de tous les Citoyens, tant à causes de leur propreté, de leur commodité, que par rapport à la modicité de leur prix.” Dulaure, *Nouvelle description*, 61-62.

421 Ibid., 62; “Avis Divers,” 87.


complete shift in practice, the creation of new facilities helped to reframe the bath, at least in concept, as necessary to the well-being of the general public—something that should be, even if it was not yet, readily available to all classes. As George Vigarello has suggested, with the “limited but real” presence of public baths at the close of the eighteenth century, the act of bathing “had become more utilitarian, and the role of water more functional, neutral even. A certain familiarity seemed to have been established.” As bathing at the public facilities became more routine and more widely practiced in the opening decades of the nineteenth century, guidebooks no longer chronicled the interiors of the grand salles des bains found in the capital’s hôtels, many of which had been confiscated during the Revolution; rather, authors and artists alike increasingly turned attention to the new public baths and their patrons.

For all the emphasis on the physical benefits of bathing, pleasure was, however, central to many of the new establishments built at the close of the eighteenth century and into the next. The sense of luxury and refinement associated with the private bathing rooms discussed in Chapter Four was transferred to the upper-tier public facilities, the architecture and décor of which went well beyond practical necessities, providing an impressive and often highly sensory environment. Among the establishments that attracted the greatest notice were the floating Bains Vigier moored on either side of the Seine at the Pont Royal, one facing the Tuileries and the other along the Quai d’Orsay (fig. 152). According to author Cuisin, simply approaching the small garden at the entrance to the Right Bank vessel brought about an agreeable change in one’s attitude:

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425 Vigarello, Concepts of Cleanliness, 159.

Your soul calms upon entering this pleasing retreat; you smile at a new order of things, and the tiring noise of Paris, its insufferable hubbub, is already a distant memory. Your feet, tired from the cobblestone streets, press with pleasure against a green lawn, a unified surface that seems like the Promised Land. The smell of shrubs and flowers, the murmur of the water together encourage the most delightful relaxation.427

Writing for the *Nouveau tableau de Paris* (1834), the poet Émile Deschamps details the additional pleasures to be found inside the Bains Vigier, especially for those who opted for take advantage of the establishment’s extended evening hours.428 Providing a first-person narration of a visit with a male companion, Deschamps describes the range of appealing views available from the comfort of the private bathing chambre: out one window, the moon shone high in the sky and was reflected in the Seine, the other side of which was lined with magnificent hôtels illuminated by thousands of candles; turning towards the entrance garden, willows, poplars, and a field of grass materialized faintly under the glow of gas lamps.429 After being mesmerized by the “triple spectacle” of Paris, the heavens, and the earth, Deschamps’s narrator found himself captivated by the aural delights provided by a group of musicians gathered in the garden. In their accounts of the Bains Vigier, Cuisin and Deschamps convey the sensory experience of the bathing space in a manner similar to Le Camus de Mézières’s text a half-century prior, evocatively describing the various diversions one might find there. Significantly, however, the rise of public establishments extended the pleasures of the bathing space, previously the prerogative of a small section of the Parisian

427 “Votre âme se rassérène en entrant dans ce riant séjour; vous souriez à un nouvel ordre de chose ; et le bruit fatigant de Paris, son brouhaha insupportable, est déjà loin de vos souvenirs. Vos pieds, fatigués du pavé des rues pressent avec plaisir une pelouse verte, un plancher uni, qui vous semblent la terre du repos. L’odeur des arbustes, des fleurs, le murmure des eaux, tout vous invite aux plus délicieux délassements.” Ibid., 1: 50.

428 Deschamps does not specify in which of the Pont Royal vessels his story is set, but his description of the hôtels across the river suggest the Right Bank looking towards the faubourg Saint-Germain, as the other location looked across to the Louvre and Tuileries.

elite, to a considerably enlarged population. The Bains Vigier at the Tuileries, for example, included over 170 private chambres,\textsuperscript{430} with hundreds more in the other upscale bath-houses placed along the river and within town.

Simultaneously serving as pleasurable retreats and centers of cleanliness and health, the best bathing establishments had much to offer, but the enthusiasm with they were embraced, particularly by upwardly rising Parisians, opened their clientele to instances of light satirization as well. A print entitled Les bains à la mode (fig. 153), produced at the turn of the nineteenth century, depicts the crowded entrance of a bathing vessel (often taken to be one of the Bains Vigier), with merveilleuses in gauzy, low-cut dresses and eye-catching accessories passing by several incroyables sporting their signature tight breeches, high cravats, and bicorn hats.\textsuperscript{431} The appeal of the public bath for this group of peacocking patrons, the image seems to suggest, has very little to do with bathing; rather, its value lies primarily in its designation as something new and modish, a venue in which one might see and be seen by other members of fashionable society.

Several decades later, Eugène Victor Briffault’s Paris dans l’eau (1844) likewise pokes gentle fun at those who flocked to the Bains Vigier, focusing on the private experience of the bath rather than the establishment’s public dimension. Addressing the ritualistic zeal with which many of his contemporaries approached the act of bathing, Briffault remarks of the Bains Vigier:

\begin{quote}
It is here that the pacified bourgeois sinks comfortably into the depths of his bathtub...he has surrounded himself with all the sensualities he holds dear: his watch, thermometer, handkerchief, snuffbox, with spectacles well fixed on his nose, and a beloved book before his eyes; such are his...
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{430} Cuisin, Les bains de Paris, 47.

\textsuperscript{431} The print is based on a drawing at the Musée Carnavelet, reproduced in Ewa Lajer-Burcharth, Necklines: The Art of Jacques-Louis David after the Terror (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 182.
delights. He makes and remakes his bath, artfully calibrates it, and proudly observes his inflated belly floating on the water.⁴³²

Ensconced in his bath, the figure depicted in the corresponding illustration (fig. 154) appears as if he has settled in for a long soak, fully won over by the pleasures of the bath. Briffault, however, can only laugh at this embrace of pleasure, noting, “While in the bath, the Parisian bourgeois dreams of the Orient, of its delights, its sensual pleasures, its perfumes and odalisques, the opium and its ecstasies, and then has a croûte au pot.”⁴³³ Just as Briffault’s reference to a croûte au pot, a thoroughly ordinary and distinctly French dish, brings the bather back down to reality, so too does the illustration. It creates a cutting contrast between the dream of exotic beauty and sensuality—as described in Briffault’s text and pictured by contemporaneous artists such as Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres and Théodore Chassériau (fig. 155, 156)—and the image of this unidealized French bourgeois with his protruding jaw, wild hair, and corpulent body. While neither Les bains à la mode nor Paris dans l’eau are particularly scathing in their critiques, they nevertheless caricature the bourgeoisie’s attachment to the various pleasures now made routinely available to them thanks to public facilities such as the Bains Vigier.

Not everyone, however, wished to laze in the warm waters of the bathtub, as evidenced by the popularity of public facilities suitable for swimming, which were

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⁴³² “C’est là que le paisible bourgeois s’enfonce douillement dans les profondeurs de sa baignoire...il a su s'entourer de toutes les sensualités qui lui sont chères; sa montre, son thermomètre, le mouchoir, la tabatière, les besicles bien affermies sur le nez, et sous ses yeux son livre bien-aimé, voilà ses délices. Il fait et refait son bain, le gradue avec art, voit avec orgueil flotter sur l'eau le ballon de son abdomen.” Eugène Victor Briffault, Paris dans l'eau (Paris: J. Hetzel, 1844), 38.

frequented by all classes in the first half of the nineteenth century. Comprised of a central basin marked off on four sides by a deck, such establishments began appearing along the Seine at the close of the eighteenth century. The first was opened in 1785 by Turquin, who like many of his contemporaries adhered to the belief that moving about in river water, as compared to idling in a bathtub, had unique advantages: not only was the body cleansed, the colder temperature and physical activity also invigorated it, energizing internal systems and strengthening one’s overall form. While facilities such as Turquin’s écoles de natation off the île Saint-Louis and the quai d'Orsay catered to the middle and upper classes, Parisians further down the social spectrum gradually abandoned the open-water bathing areas set along the banks of the Seine in favor of the modestly-priced communal basins popularly known as the bains à quatre sous.

While the basins at such facilities provided ample space and a suitable depth in which to swim, a firm distinction between swimming and bathing had yet to take hold in the first half of the nineteenth century, with many period accounts routinely classifying the clientele

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435 On the perceived benefits of cold water and activity, see Vigarello, *Concepts of Cleanliness*, Chapter 8. For many, such a practice was favorably linked to the early days of Rome, before it succumbed to the luxurious pleasures of the warm bath. The Genevan physician Turquin, for example, declared: “Tant que les Romains, au sortir du Champ de Mars, allaient se jeter dans le Tibre, ils furent les maîtres du monde, mais les bains d’Agrippa et de Néron en firent peu a peu des esclaves.” Théodore Trochin, “Lettre du 3 septembre 1759,” in Henry Tronchin, *Un médecin du XVIIIe siècle, Théodore Tronchin* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit, 1906), 59. This line of thought continues into the nineteenth century, appearing in medical dissertations on bathing such as P. Lambert, *Dissertation sur les Bains d'Eau-douce, et leur emploi dans la pratique* (Paris: L'école de médecine de Paris, 2 January 1806), 6-7.

436 According to Philippe Artru, by 1820, only two open-water baths existed within Paris, presumably due to the appeal of the new swimming basins. “Bains Sur La Seine et Écoles de Natation,” 25.
of both upper- and lower-tier establishments as *baigneurs* and *baigneuses*. Such is the case with several print series by Honoré Daumier (1808–1879), first published in the satirical journal *Le Charivari*. Entitled *Les Baigneurs* (1839, 1842) and *Les Baigneuses* (1847), the series depict the range of Parisians who frequented the new swimming facilities, often humorously juxtaposing the bathers’ different but always unidealized physiques (fig. 157) or focusing on their maladroitness in the water (fig. 158, 159). In a plate from his later series *Croquis D'Été* (fig. 160), Daumier captures the chaos associated in period texts with the *bains à quatre sous* in particular. Alphonse Karr’s contribution to the *Nouveau tableau de Paris* warns the reader that upon entering such an establishment, “You hear horrible cries, confused and discordant, howling screams, the thrashing of water; it seems as if the structure is sinking with all hands lost in the ocean,” that is, without any survivors. But the lower-class Parisians who frequented the *bains à quatre sous* are not the exclusive subjects of Daumier’s series. *Les Baigneuses*, for example, includes a scene in which a lady attempts to flatter a baroness by complimenting her dive (fig. 161). With Daumier establishing an amusing contrast between the well-dressed lady and the grimacing, soaking wet baroness, the work effectively “underscores how people in high places put aside their dignity along with their elegant clothing when they dare to indulge in public swimming.”

437 In *Paris dans l’eau*, for example, Briffault shifts constantly between the terms *baigneur* and *nageur* when writing about both the *écoles de natation* and the *bains à quatre sous*.


Whereas the eighteenth-century artists and architects reviewed in the chapters above chiefly turned to the bath as a means through which to engage with notions of pleasure centered on the elite body, Daumier’s prints reveal—in an admittedly exaggerated fashion—the awkwardness and at times gusto with which men and women of all classes plunged into the public waters. As Linda Nochlin has suggested, in casting his baigneurs and baigneuses as ridiculously inept figures saddled down by swimming costumes, it seems that Daumier “was pillorying not merely his victims but the high-art bather theme itself.”\footnote{Nochlin, Bathers, Bodies, Beauty, 23.} And indeed, once bathing became familiar enough to be satirized in a daily journal, with everyone from the baroness to the worker taking advantage of the public facilities, the figure of the contemporary French bather seemingly loses its appeal as a subject of high art, at least for the time being.\footnote{For several examples of contemporary French bathers in the domestic interior, see Marnhac, Femmes au bain, 172-173.} In turn, the sense of pleasure, luxury, and novelty that fueled much of the eighteenth-century interest in the bath is transferred elsewhere, to the private interiors of the hammam (Turkish steam bath) so frequently depicted in Orientalist paintings and texts.\footnote{While the nineteenth-century interest in the hammam is far too considerable to cover here, general introductions to the subject are found in Bonnet, Femmes au bain, 116-131; Bonneville, Book of the Bath, 50-54.} While Daumier does not depict bathing in the sense in which one applies the term today, his contemporary characters and the spaces they inhabit are nevertheless the descendants of the eighteenth-century material reviewed in this dissertation, born of a new age in which the greatest pleasure to be found in French bathing culture was perhaps the ability to find humor in the gap between the ideal dream and the practical realities of bathing.
Fig. 1: Claude-Joseph Vernet, *Summer Evening*, 1773 (National Museum of Western Art)

Fig. 2: Hubert Robert, *Ancient Ruins Used as Public Baths*, 1798 (State Hermitage Museum)
Fig. 3: Joseph-Marie Vien, *Grecque au bain*, 1767 (Museo de Arte de Ponce)
Fig. 4: Claude-Joseph Vernet, *Turkish Toilette* (previously *Greek Bath*), Salon of 1757 (Staatliche Kunsthalle Karlsruhe)

Fig. 5: Nicolas Lavreince, *Le bain de la sultane* (Musée du Louvre)
Fig. 6: Jean-Marc Nattier, *Mademoiselle de Clermont en sultane*, 1733 (Wallace Collection)

Fig. 7: Jacques-Louis David, *Death of Marat*, 1793 (Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels)
Fig. 8: Nicolas Lancret, *Les Plaisirs du bain*, Salon of 1725
Oil on canvas, 97 x 145 cm (Musée du Louvre)
Fig. 9: Nicolas Lancret, *Les baigneuses*, ca. 1718
Oil on canvas, 66 x 55 cm (Musée des Beaux-Arts of Rouen)

Fig. 10: Nicolas Lancret, *Les baigneuses*, ca. 1740
Oil on canvas, 61 x 129.5 cm (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco)
Fig. 11: Nicolas Lancret, *L’Été*, ca. 1730
Oil on canvas, 115 x 95 cm (The State Hermitage Museum)
Fig. 12: Jean-Baptiste Pater, *Company Bathing in a Park*, ca. 1729
Oil on canvas, 49 x 59 cm (Nationalmuseum, Stockholm)
Fig. 13: Jean-Baptiste Pater, *Baigneuses dans un parc*, ca. 1730s
Oil on canvas, 64.2 x 85 cm (Wallace Collection)
Fig. 14: Jean-Baptiste Pater, *Baigneuses*, ca. 1730s
Oil on canvas, 102 x 143 cm (Neues Palais)
Fig. 15: Jean-Baptiste Pater, *The Bathing Party*, ca. 1730s
Oil on canvas, 66.8 x 81.9 cm (Toledo Museum of Art)
Fig. 16: Jean-Baptiste Pater, *Les Baigneuses*, 1725-1730
Oil on canvas, 57.79 x 66.04 cm (The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art)
Fig. 17: Nicolas Lancret, *Les Gentilles baigneuses*
Oil on canvas (Private Collection)
Fig. 18: Noël Jules Achille, *Vue de l'Île Saint-Louis et du pont de La Tournelle*, 19th c. (Musée Carnavalet)

Fig. 19: Bernard Picart, *Two Women Bathing*, 1706, etching (Rijksmuseum)
Fig. 20: Antoine Watteau, *Diane au bain*, ca. 1717-1716
Oil on canvas, 80 x 101 cm (Musée du Louvre)

Fig. 21: Jean-François de Troy, *Diane surprise par Actéon*, 1734
Oil on canvas, 131.5 × 196 cm (Kunstmuseum Basel)
Fig. 22: Jean-François de Troy, *Diane et Actéon*
Oil on canvas, 66 x 81.5 cm (Private Collection)

Fig. 23: Louis Galloche, *Diane et Actéon*, Salon of 1725
Oil on canvas, 81 x 46.5 cm (The State Hermitage Museum)
Fig. 24: Detail of Lancret, L’Été (fig. 11)
Fig. 25: Detail of Pater, *The Bathing Party* (fig. 15)

Fig. 26: Detail of Lancret, *L’Été* (fig. 11)
Fig. 27: Pierre-Auguste Renoir, *The Large Bathers*, 1884-87 (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

Fig. 28: Detail of Pater, *Baigneuses dans un parc* (fig. 13)
Fig. 29: Jean-Baptiste Pater, *La Barque de plaisir*, ca. 1730s
Oil on canvas, 75 x 93 cm (Private Collection)

Fig. 30: Jean-Baptiste Pater, *Fête champêtre*, ca. 1730s
Oil on canvas, 50.5 x 61 cm (Private Collection)
Fig. 31: Jean-Baptiste Pater, *Baigneuses dans un parc*, ca. 1730s
Oil on canvas, 66 x 82.5 cm (Musée de Grenoble)
Fig. 32: Detail of Antoine Watteau, *L’Enseigne de Gersaint*, 1720
Oil on canvas, 163 x 306 cm (Schloss Charlottenburg)
Fig. 33: Detail of Lancret, *Les Plaisirs du bain* (fig. 8)

Fig. 34: Detail of Pater, *The Bathing Party* (fig. 15)
Fig. 35: Detail of Pater, *Les Baigneuses* (fig. 16)

Fig. 36: Detail of Lancret, *L’Été* (fig. 11)
Fig. 37: Sightlines in Pater, *The Bathing Party*
Fig. 38: Detail of Pater, *The Bathing Party* (fig. 15)
Fig. 39: Diego Velázquez, *The Rokeby Venus*, 1647-51 (National Gallery, London)
Fig. 40: Étienne-Maurice Falconet, *Baigneuse*, Salon of 1757
Marble, 80 cm (Musée du Louvre)
Fig. 41: Vittoria Collection, 24 cm
Fig. 42: Jean-Antoine Houdon, *Bather* (from a fountain group), 1782
Marble, 119.4 x 109.2 x 71.1 cm (Metropolitan Museum of Art)
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