

COLNAGHI ELLIOTT

MASTER DRAWINGS

George Grosz
(Berlin 1893 – 1959 West Berlin)

Female nude, seen from behind

Signed lower left with stamp: *Grosz*
George Grosz Estate stamp and number '1-63-2' on the reverse
Watercolour on paper
60 x 40 cm. (23 ½ x 15 ¾ in.)

Provenance:
Studio of the artist, Douglaston, Long Island, 1938;
George Grosz Estate, 1959;
Private European Collection, until 2023.

To be included in the forthcoming catalogue raisonné of George Grosz works on paper, by
Ralph Jentsch.



Escaping growing nationalism and militarism in Germany, and bitterly anti-Nazi, George Grosz moved with his family to the United States in January 1933, just a few weeks before Hitler gained power. By March the exiled artist was stripped of his German citizenship, in May his books and portfolios were publicly burned and July saw the seizure of some of his assets and the closure of his dealer Alfred Flechtheim.

Against such an ominous political backdrop, Grosz embraced America, teaching at the Arts Student League of New York and becoming a naturalised US citizen in 1938. In his autobiography, Grosz wrote 'A great deal that had become frozen within me in Germany melted here in America and I rediscovered my old yearning for painting'.¹ Abandoning his previous themes and caricatural style, visits to the Frick Collection and the Metropolitan Museum led to his reassessing the art of the past, with Grosz stating that 'Today, I consider all caricatures very overrated...I admire real skill, perfection, and Greek mastery and temperance'.

Inspired by Courbet, Ingres, Boucher, Renoir and, of course, Rubens (figs. 1 and 2), one of his main subjects now became the female nude. In a revealing letter to his wife's aunt, Grosz admits 'I am also painting the other side. Numerous nudes – woman signifies for me life, future, she is the harbinger of things to come. I depict her in a 'positive' manner...my world is mainly a gloomy one, a haunted one, but there are areas without fear, without pain and war, areas where nymphs live and that has a sensuality in its own right'.



Fig. 1, Peter Paul Rubens, *Study of a nude woman*, chalk, 53.5 x 25.7 cm, Musée du Louvre

Fig. 2, Peter Paul Rubens, *Judgement of Paris*, oil on panel, 144.8 x 193.7 cm, National Gallery, London

¹ G. Grosz, *A Little Yes and A Big No*, New York 1946, p. 270.

Grosz had a penchant for fleshy women whom he describes as 'playing a prominent part in my fantasies' (fig. 3). From his early drawings of trapeze artists to the prostitutes of his Berlin street scenes, the 'Rubensian' physique is prominent in all his work and, as with Rubens, there is often an erotic frisson to his women, here accentuated by the high-heels and necklace. The vegetation on the other hand emphasises a nymph-like aspect and perhaps refers in some ways to the renewal, artistically and spiritually, that Grosz experienced in America.

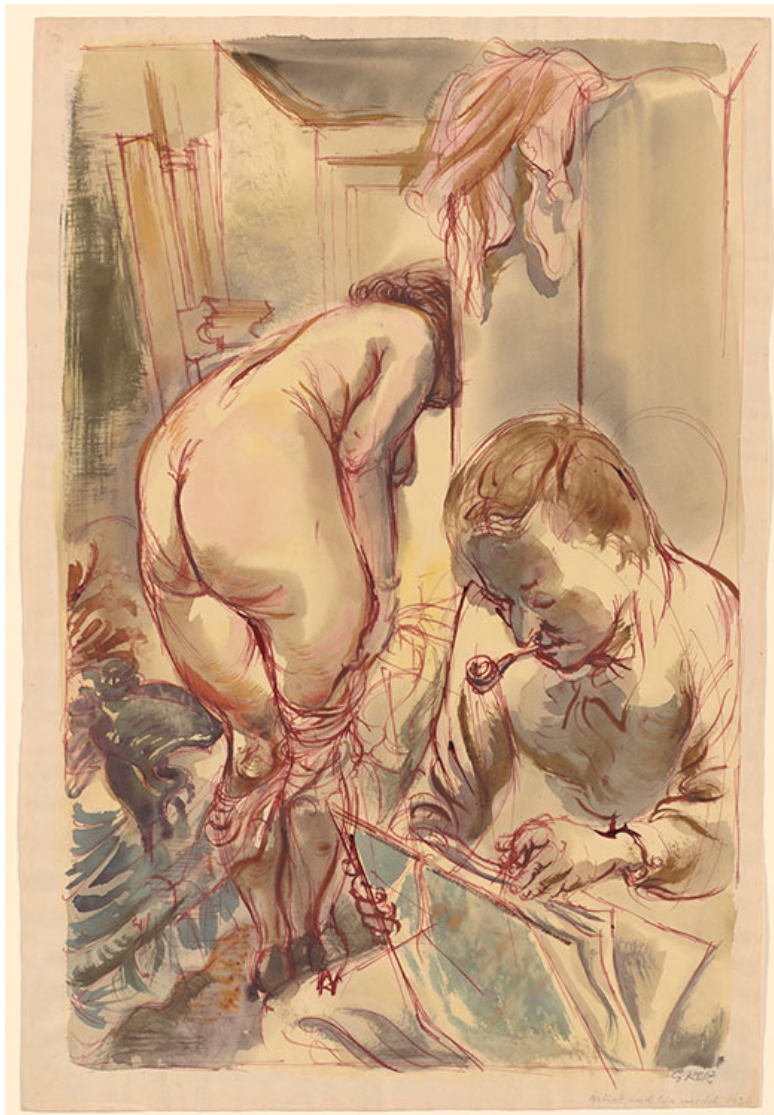


Fig. 3, George Grosz, *Artist and Model*, watercolour, 58.8 x 39.2 cm, Morgan Library