

Beundrad barbar

Amasonen i västeuropeisk bildkultur 1789–1918

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Abstract

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The aim of this thesis is to study the Amazon as a motif in relation to a sex/gender hierarchy during the period 1789–1918. The myth of the Amazons was an inheritance from Greek antiquity and told of a female warrior-people who were ruled by a queen. The Amazons are said to have lived in Northern Turkey or in the Caucasus, it is also claimed that they cut or burnt off their right breast in order to facilitate their fighting. In the thesis the myth is examined in its visual form in six separate chapters. In the first chapter the definition of the concept Amazon is presented through the analysis of encyclopedias and other texts. The definition is broad and includes women who resemble the Amazons of antiquity, i.e. women with influence, and is broadened further in chapter two through a study of the visual world of the French revolution. Here, Amazons appear both as a symbol of a woman who arms herself and as a collection of visual elements, attributes of the allegoric figure Liberté – the Phrygian Cap, the naked breast and the weapon.

In chapter three and four the Amazon is analysed in relation to the public, first as a motif exhibited in World's fairs and then as public sculpture, primarily in Berlin. In this context the popularity of the sculpture *Kämpfende Amazone mit Panther* by August Kiss is elucidated and how this Amazon came to represent the struggles of humanity. The sculpture was reproduced in several different materials and forms and was spread widely.

The two final chapters are devoted to visual analyses of two groups of motifs: the large Amazon battles painted between the end of the 19th century and the World War I and the lone Amazon as a motif. The latter is divided into the motifs the wounded, the threatening and the peaceful Amazon. Through the visual analysis it becomes apparent how the male bellicose side of the Amazons was admired and how she was portrayed as attractive when she fell. The glorification of the masculine and the sexualization of the feminine is the theme that becomes most apparent. Seen in relation to a sex/gender hierarchy this shows that the Amazons worked both as a projection of desires – she was all one could desire – and as a valve, a "leak" in queer theoretical terms, of what was hidden, i.e. the transgressive. That Amazons, defined as barbarians by the Greeks, were admired caused the unfamiliar to become visible.

Keywords: amazons, women, feminism, public sculpture, French revolution, World's fairs, Berlin, visual culture, August Kiss, female warriors, 19th century art, bronzes, the nude, phrygian cap, Liberté, horsewomen

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