



The Artist's Model

Frances Borzello

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'To admit to writing about artists' models is to set off an avalanche of interest. "Didn't Rossetti marry his model?" "didn't Augustus John sleep with all of his?" At first I brushed such questions aside as frivolous. Instead of revealing the facts about modelling in England from the foundation of the Royal Academy to the present day, the gossip column approach to art history seemed to veil them. But as research revealed the mundane business of a model's life, I had second thoughts about my high-minded approach. I became fascinate by the way that contrary to the facts that were emerging, the majority of model anecdotes shared a common obsession - sex - and a common assumption - that models are female. I started to wonder to wonder how posing for artists, a tiring, tedious and lowly-paid profession practised by both sexes and all ages, could have become so fascinating to the public mind and also so distorted.'

This is how Frances Borzello's unusual and revisionist book begins. Myth and reality are far apart. It is quite wrong to suppose models were always women, always naked and always promiscuous. Male models were just as much in demand for painters of History, Mythology and Genre, in which both sexes might require to be clothed in some particular manner. There are ten chapters: Fact and Fantasy, The Rise and Fall of the Professional Model, The Heyday of the Professional Model, The Model's Status, Bohemia, The Stereotype, High and Low Writing, The Propagation of Myth, The Model in Fiction, The Model in Art: and in them the author, with great originality, covers all aspects of this much misunderstood activity.

'The first chapter of Frances Borzello's book, The Artist's Model, is entitled Fact and Fantasy. The facts are dull. Modelling is a boring, tiring, badly paid profession. Yet out of them we have created an image of a woman dressed only for seduction who probably sleeps with the artist, cooks for him, and inspires his best work. Rossetti has his beloved Lizzie Siddall, Whistler had his Maud, Augustus John . . . well Augustus had whoever he could, whenever he could.' Waldemar Januszczak, *Guardian*

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