

Re: Query: Women's Undergarments (female allegories of the state)

H-ArtHist-Redaktion

The following six answers reached H-ArtHist (some of them due to an x-post at the Association for Women in Slavic Studies <AWSS-L@H-NET.MSU.EDU>)

(1)

From: Joanna Kirkpatrick <jkirk@spro.net>
Date: 23 Feb 2004

I suggest that one possibly useful source would be ancient Greek, Roman etc coins. Female figures appear on these. If a human figure appears on a coin it's almost a sure bet that it is emblematic of the state that mints the coins. You could do a careful study of how the human form is handled.[...].

Joanna Kirkpatrick
Boise, Idaho, USA

(2)

From: Lisa Rull <aaxlmr@nottingham.ac.uk>
Date: 24 Feb 2004

Check out the following two texts:

Ann Hollander's "Seeing Through Clothes" (on the significance of clothing as symbolic) Marina Warner: Monuments & Maidens The allegory of the female form, (London, 1985) Vintage (paperback) UK; University of California Press (paperback) reprinted, US, 2001 --- covers the female body, clothed and unclothed as symbol of the state.

hope these help
Lisa Rull
University of Nottingham, UK

(3)

From: Galina Schneider <archivolt@erols.com>
Date: 24 Feb 2004

It occurs to me that there are two examples from the 20th century that

might be appropriate to mention. First, for all those majority slavic speaking countries, the fact that the name of countries often is in the feminine lends itself to Mother [fill in name of country with feminine ending here] but is not so simple. With associated statuary and imagery, the Mother image substituted for the local veneration of the Virgin Mary, the ultimate link between God and man, and fully human in Orthodoxy, almost raised to a goddess in Roman Catholicism. Here are a few images:.

1. Majka Bulgaria - This is often a statue in a central square, in even small villages, representing Bulgaria as a woman. She is usually sturdy.

2. Majka celebration - similar - Czech Republic - The concept was reintroduced as a method of raising ecological awareness. I quote here from a report:

"Permalot: the Czech Republic

An area of about 10.5 Ha is being worked on. 8.5 Ha of this has been converted into organic management. [...] By doing this biodiversity is being protected. They are trying to enhance public interest especially that of the locals who are suspicious. This has been partially overcome through the reintroduction of the Majka Celebration, and the restoring of the pond found in the village. [...]"

(Minutes from YEE Annual Meeting, September 2002, Caparica, Portugal:
http://www.ecn.cz/yee/2002%20AM_Minutes.doc)

3. Modern version of mother figure, Song of the Mother God, for which see <http://www.titanicahoy.com/asfp/palikr.htm> , by Fanya Paikruscheva, self nicknamed Fanya da Stella, of Bulgaria. The artwork is both a sculpture and a song [...].

4. Mother as a concept - Majkati Macedonian teenagers and young women who gathered up children caught in the Greek civil war and brought them to safety in other countries. [...]

5. Similar to the Majka Bulgaria concept, one historian has suggested that Macedonia the word essentially means Mother Earth's Gift (Michael A. Dimitri: Macedonia: The Mother's Gift, Macedonian Canadian News" - June 1993) [...]

6. The concept Mother Russia is long standing and still used, even for the name of a rock band. This concept has been developed in a book: Mother Russia: The Feminine Myth in Russian Culture by Joanna Hubbs

Galina Schneider, Washington, DC

(4)

From: "Elena Gapova" <e.gapova@worldnet.att.net

Date: 25 Feb 2004

To: Association for Women in Slavic Studies AWSS-L@H-NET.MSU.EDU

Dear Cristina,

Women may bear "the burden of representation", though not of the state (government apparatus), maybe, but rather of the nation, which is more about "we the people". See "Gender and Nation" by Yuval-Davis (1997). Powerful images of "mother of the nation" (Mother India, Mother Russia, matka Polska - Polish mother etc.) have been strongly established in these respective cultures. There is a book (which you probably know) by Marina Warner "Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form". A very powerful female image is the Motherland statue that towers over the city of Volgograd, former Stalingrad, to commemorate a great battle of WWII. You can see it at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2718529.stm> (roll down the page) .

She is also sometimes called Victory (compare to the Warsaw Nike, another victorius symbol of WWII). You might find the work of Cynthia Paces, a US scholar of Czech women's history, particular useful: she published a paper on the monument to Jan Huss in Prague and the figure of the mother in it, and now is working on "breastfeeding sculptures" (paces@tcnj.edu) But I would be very careful with any metaphors: under everyday circumstances, female bodies "spring" from popular culture, and how this is related to the state ideology is a question. And technological advances, like the "discovery" of tights to substitute stockings and all the harness that goes with them, certainly helped with making female bodies more liberated.

Elena Gapova

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(5)

From: "Libora Oates-Indruchova" <libora@policy.hu>

Date: 26 Feb 2004

Dear Cristina,

[...]An interesting gender twist as the "majka" (the Maypole) - although the word itself is of feminine gender - is, of course, a symbol of male virility. In old village rituals, a young man would erect the Maypole in front of the window of his beloved. He, then, had to guard it, because other young men from the village sought to fell it. At least this is the story I was told as a young girl and found it also in (I think) Bozena Nemcova's novel Podhorska vesnice. [...]

I have been using in class a text by the German scholar Silke Wenk on

women's bodies used as symbols of the State. Unfortunately, I don't have it at hand now and have the title only of the Slovak translation, but I did find two articles by the same person which could be either it or at least something on the same topic:

Naturalizing the Female Representations of the Nation and the State: the Debate of "Allegory or Symbol" circa 1800. In: Nationalismus und Subjektivität. Mitteilungen des Zentrum zur Erforschung der Frühen Neuzeit, Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt a.M., Beiheft 2, Frankfurt a.M. 1995, S. 277-237.

Gendered Representations of the Nation's Past and Future. In: Ida Blom, Karen Hagemann, Catherine Hall (Ed.): Gendered Nations. Nationalisms and Gender Order in the long 19th Century. Berg Publishers, Oxford/New York 2000, S. 63-77

Hope this helps.

Libora

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Reference:

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