

# art INQUIRIES



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# Wicked, Hard and Supple

## An Examination of Suzanne Valadon's Nude Drawings of Young Maurice

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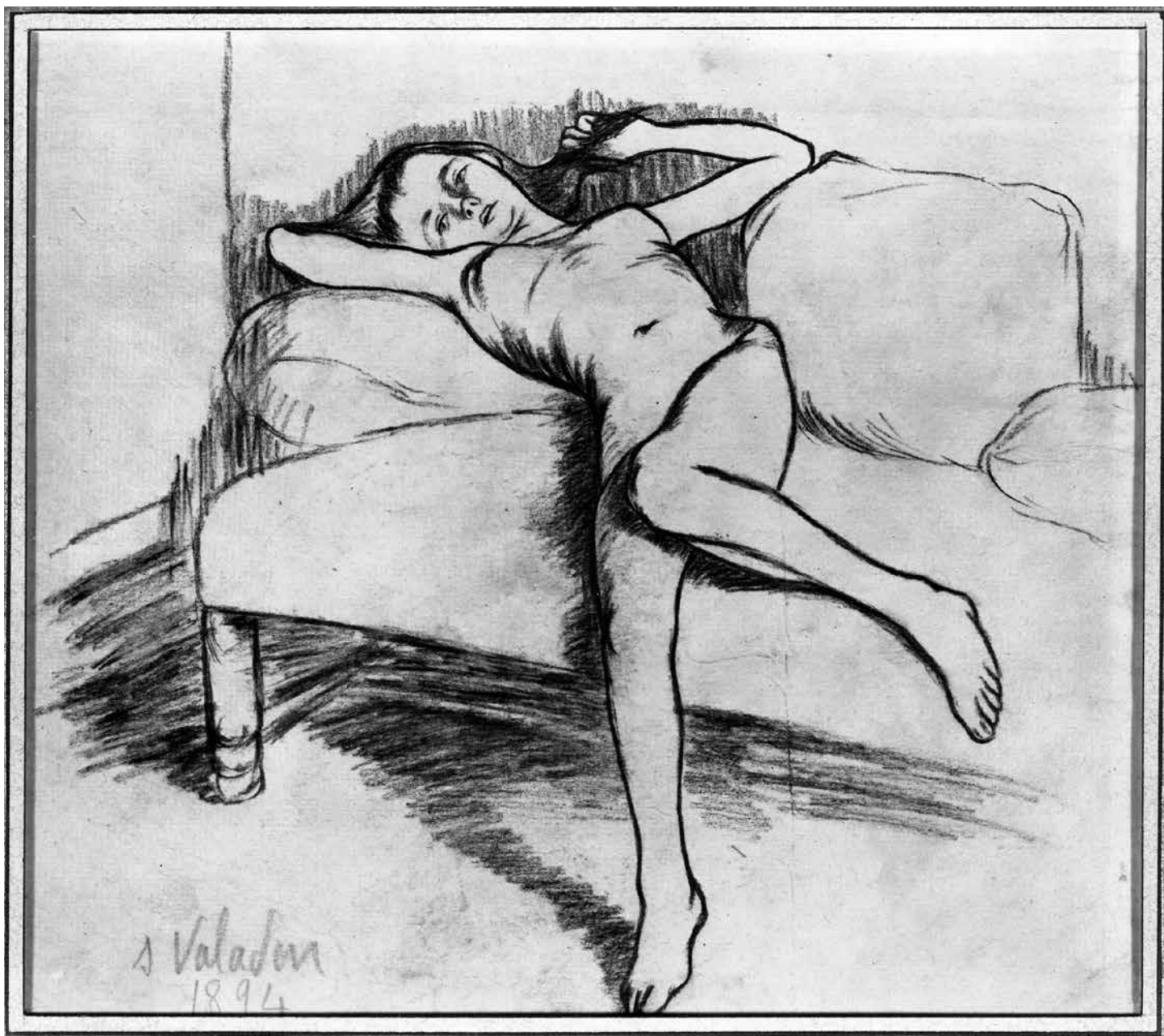


**T**he artist Suzanne Valadon's singular position was the result of many intersecting circumstances in her life that allowed her the freedom and ability, rare among women artists, to depict not just the female nude, but also the male. Born in the French countryside in 1865, Valadon moved to Paris with her mother Madeleine when she was just a child. In Montmartre, Valadon became an acrobat and then a model for such artists as Henri Toulouse-

Lautrec and Auguste Renoir. As an artist's model, Valadon was able to observe the bohemian art scene on the Butte and then to use this unique perspective for her own artwork, supplementing it with the encouragement and assistance of those who painted her.<sup>1</sup> Valadon began as an artist by making drawings, a practice that is evident in the signature bold line present even in her later paintings. Her drawings in the 1890s include pictures of children, often in the nude. Most

of her subjects came from her neighborhood of Montmartre, but one model occupied a closeness to the artist that the others did not—her own son.

In this article, I will address the nude drawings of Maurice Utrillo, depicted by his mother from late childhood until adolescence. Portraits of Maurice, who was the sole male model in Valadon's body of work representing children, are intrinsically complicated, and are markedly different from works made



**Figure 1.** Suzanne Valadon, *My Utrillo at the Age of Nine*, 1892, black crayon on paper, 9 x 11 13/16 in. (22.9 x 30 cm). Private Collection. Work in the public domain; retrieved from Wikiart.org.

**Figure 2.** Suzanne Valadon, *A Nude Girl Reclining on a Couch*, 1894, black crayon on yellow tracing paper, 7 5/8 x 8 7/8 in. (19.4 x 22.5 cm). Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Bequest of Meta and Paul J. Sachs. © President and Fellows of Harvard College.

by well-known contemporaries (such as Mary Cassatt and Berthe Morisot) who were creating a new intimate view of motherhood. This difference hinges in part on Valadon's unique relationship to Maurice.<sup>2</sup> The artist's interest in the body as a site of representation reflects a strong acknowledgement of the western canon as well as the importance of the nude to the contemporary Parisian avant-garde. Valadon's choice to use her own son's body as source material in her work brings

into the public eye her own private life as a single mother, muddying the boundaries of the personal and professional. Using Maurice as a model, Valadon found an avenue in which to experiment with the young male nude, a subject otherwise off-limits for a woman artist, using established artistic conventions to examine the form of her son's body and his budding sexuality.

The nude is a well-documented subject for artistic representation. Valadon's paintings of nude male

adults are arguably easily consumed and analyzed, even if they were not initially adored, because they fit into that canonical tradition.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, her drawings of her son Maurice, which depict him not simply as a child but also as an individual with erotic potential, have received less attention.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps this is because, as Lauren Jimerson notes in her recent article on Valadon's later male nudes, "Valadon would not portray him past early adolescence, but rather, adopted [Andre] Utter as her muse."<sup>5</sup> But even scholars who have addressed the images of Maurice have tended to downplay any sexual implication. For instance, Thérèse Diamand Rosinsky asserts, "The nude children, even Maurice, are just seen as children, and Valadon does not allude to their sexuality."<sup>6</sup> To suggest that Valadon was interested in the sexual qualities of her own son might thus seem scandalous—especially in the shadow of our modern culture, which has crucified photographers such as Sally Mann and Edward Weston for daring to photograph their children in what some have deemed pornographic compositions.<sup>7</sup> Despite this, I argue that Valadon's pictures of Maurice indeed explore his youthful sexuality, pushing the accepted norms for both a woman artist depicting a male nude and a mother depicting her son.

### Mother and Son

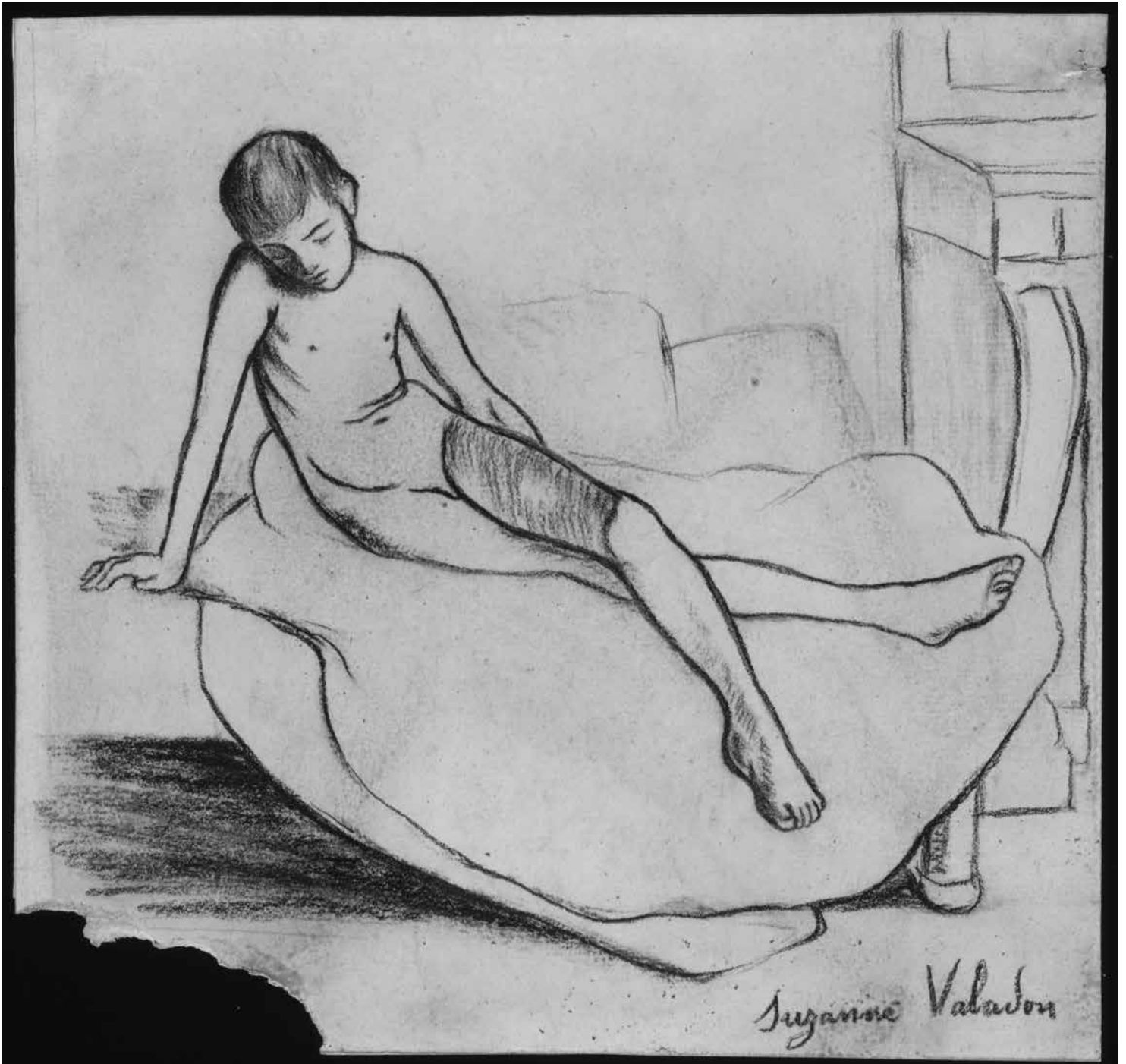
Born on December 26, 1883, Maurice Utrillo grew up primarily under the care of his grandmother in Montmartre while Valadon continued her carefree lifestyle, which included a revolving door of lovers and general participation in the Montmartre party scene. Like many of her female models, often "young adolescents from

her neighborhood," Maurice was familiar to her, as well as readily available, appearing in many of her early works.<sup>8</sup> Maurice's position as Valadon's son, however, distracts from the relationship between artist and artist's model. He was not simply another youth chosen out of convenience, but had a particular relationship to the artist, who was his mother. This seemingly simple fact makes it all the more unusual that out of the drawings made by Valadon of Maurice, at least fourteen depict her son in the nude between the ages of nine and thirteen.<sup>9</sup>

But how to read these works? To begin with, Valadon's frequent inscriptions on these works (*D'après mon fils, mon fils*, and others) suggest a maternal attachment that expresses a sentimental awareness toward her son. But scholars have also pointed to certain basic tensions produced by the drawings: tensions that hint at a sexual content. In considering *My Utrillo at the Age of Nine* (fig. 1), for example, Thérèse Diamand Rosinsky notes "an uneasiness as the viewer becomes a voyeur."<sup>10</sup> Her use of the term "voyeur" indicates a potentially erotic aspect. And Jean-Pierre Valeix writes that Valadon appropriates the gaze when she paints the male nude, subjugating the norm of the male spectator, and perhaps even creating a female counterpart.<sup>11</sup> Germaine Greer, meanwhile, makes note of the unconventional way in which Valadon and her son were involved, invoking a Freudian context: "From his earliest childhood, when he lived on the fringe of her hectic life, Maurice adored his mother, the more because he was the unsuccessful rival of her lovers."<sup>12</sup> Such analyses thus gesture towards an erotic content, while resisting any explicit mention of it.

Significantly, Valadon's other drawings of young nude female models often explore themes of young sexuality. Both *Nude Girl Sitting* (1894) and *Young Girl Hiding her Forehead*, (1913–14) offer stereotypical representations of childish behavior while hinting at sexuality. The figure in *Nude Girl Sitting* sits alone on the floor, in a bare room, with her hands beside her and her legs stretched out in front. Her hair pulled back into a half-ponytail, she pouts as she stares at an unknown point in front of her. Alone in her thoughts, her nudity feels not at all natural. Rather than an innocent depiction of a child in her most natural state, this young girl appears tense yet resigned to her lack of apparel. Reading this work invites a series of contradictions, where the viewer can understand her sexual potential through her unease. And in *A Nude Girl Reclining on a Couch* (fig. 2), also from 1894, Valadon again imbues her young model with sexuality in an awkward and uncomfortable way. The little girl leans back into a sofa, displaying her newly budding chest with her right arm bent so that her head rests on it atop the pillow. Her left arm, dangling above her head, allows her to twirl her hair between her fingers. The model's gaze is melancholic and detached, her mouth shaped into a distinct frown. The model's age is apparent in her childish frame, yet the sinewy lines that make up her body lead us to understand her as sexually available. As she leans back into the sofa, the entire front of her figure is on display, her gaze unengaged with the viewer/voyeur.<sup>13</sup>

The sexual tension present in the drawings of Maurice, however, is more precarious, due to the implicit inappropriateness of a



**Figure 3.** Suzanne Valadon, *Utrillo nu assis sur un divan (Utrillo Seated Naked on a Sofa)*, 1895, black crayon on paper, 7 5/8 x 7 5/8 in. (19.4 x 19.4 cm). Photo: Philippe Migeat, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France. © CNAC/MNAM/Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY.

mother depicting her child within the parameters of well-defined sexual visual language. The artist's choices in how Maurice is depicted further this uncertainty, as there is little difference in how she poses him and her female models, child or adult. Valadon often placed her son in an odalisque pose, as is the case with *My Utrillo at the Age of Nine* (1892), in which the viewer encounters Maurice asleep in the nude. The odalisque, of course, is typically associated with the display of female nudity and sexual availability, as in Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, or Ingres' *La grande odalisque*. By 1863, however, Édouard Manet's *Olympia* had challenged ideas of the voyeur and of social class, even if it continued to place the female body on display for consumption by the male gaze. Later nineteenth-century artists pushed the genre even further. As the critic Stuart Preston remarked at the first showing of Valadon's work in the United States, at Peter Deitsch Gallery in 1956,

The Ingres nude, that staple of late nineteenth century academic art, would hardly have recognized, in the biting topical work of Degas and Lautrec, her own unruly offspring. Even less in the drawings and prints of their admired Suzanne Valadon [...] Yet the lineal descent from the suave and passionless Ingres nudes to those by Valadon, 'wicked, hard and supple,' as Degas characterized them, is straight and direct.<sup>14</sup>

Though Preston was discussing Valadon's larger works—her finished paintings of nude women in particular, rather than her smaller studies of her pre-adolescent son—

the tie between Valadon and artistic convention is clear. It is possible and probable that Valadon possessed a degree of art historical awareness and knowledge. However, her decision to place Maurice in poses typical for female models may also have been informed by her own modeling career. Valadon used her son as a male artist might have used her, naturalistically depicting the body by manipulating already established motifs, such as the odalisque, that carried an established (sexual) visual code.

Still, Valadon's appropriation of the genre for a portrait of her son automatically raises questions of intention and yields an uncomfortable sexual innuendo. Astutely and, I think, accurately, Paula Birnbaum observes that in a drawing such as *Utrillo nu assis sur un divan* (fig. 3), "Valadon may appear to be revealing her own anxiety in respect to the sexuality of her son's youthful male body at the age of twelve."<sup>15</sup> Birnbaum goes on to compare the work to Donatello's bronze *David*, "whose signs of sexual identity are equally mixed and confusing."<sup>16</sup> Birnbaum's assessment captures the nuanced aspect of Valadon's drawings of her son, which do not shy away from elements of the sexual but are at times touched by sentimentality. As Birnbaum puts it, "Valadon's line seems to me tender and delicate, representing her maternal love by means of eroticized looking."<sup>17</sup>

Of course, other artists at the end of the nineteenth century also depicted children alone with their thoughts. For instance, Mary Cassatt's *Little Girl in a Blue Armchair* (fig. 4) captures a similar sense of boredom and isolation in its subject. However, in *Utrillo*



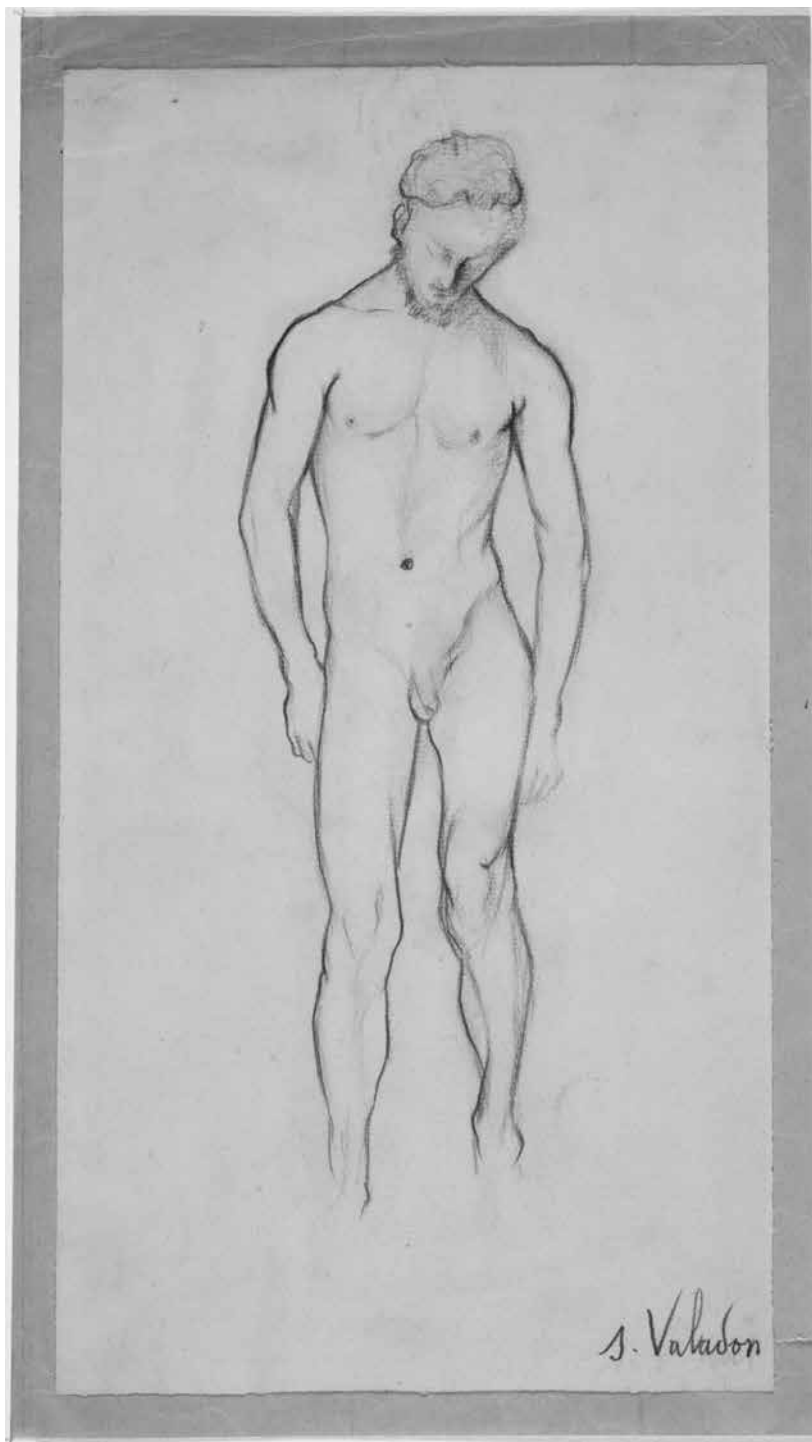
**Figure 4.** Mary Cassatt, *Little Girl in a Blue Armchair*, 1878, oil on canvas, 34 1/4 x 51 1/8 in. (87 x 129.9 cm). Collection of Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon, Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington.



*Sitting on a Couch*, Maurice appears more aware of his present role as model; he seems to understand what he is doing, even if it bores him. By contrast, Cassatt captures the

little girl in a moment of sulking, unaware of the artist's watchful eye. Importantly, too, Valadon's drawing is small in scale and offers little or no environmental or narrative

context. Led in by Valadon's resolute line, the viewer must examine and decode the expression of the model. Contrastingly, Cassatt's figure, in the brilliant blues of the floral print



**Figure 5, left.** Suzanne Valadon, *Utter Nu (Utter Nude)*, 1909, charcoal and graphite on paper, 12 x 6 in. (30.5 x 15.2 cm). Photo: Philippe Migeat, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France. © CNAC/MNAM/Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY.

**Figure 6, right.** Suzanne Valadon, *Utrillo Enfant Nu (Child Utrillo Nude)*, 1895, charcoal on paper, 10 1/4 x 5 3/5 in. (26 x 14.2 cm). Photo: Phillippe Migeat, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France. © CNAC/MNAM/Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY.

armchair, is completely dressed and perhaps made uncomfortable by her layers of frock, the focus on her state of childhood. This is not to say that Cassatt has not too embarked on a type of psychological study. Indeed, Cassatt's work targets the psyche of the young girl, caught in

a moment of contemplation and age-appropriate emotion. There is little question that her pose represents a moment of naturally expressed discontent, and there exist no overt sexual overtones. Instead (and although the artist never had children), Cassatt's picture

demonstrates a keen awareness of child behavior.

In *Utrillo Sitting on a Couch*, by contrast, Maurice's pose is decidedly less childlike, his bearing less immature. The starkness of his surroundings, which include a simple mantle and solid-colored bedclothes, emphasizes his bare body. Valadon's drawing hones in on the sinuous frame of her subject, which in turn highlights his pre-adolescence. Even his expression seems deferential. In both the Cassatt painting and the Valadon drawing, the child subjects express a detachment inherent in their solitude. The sexual pose and nudity in Valadon's work, however, are all the more shocking as the subject depicted is in her own son, while Cassatt's model is someone else's child, properly dressed. Though a mother is clearly intimate with her child's nude body, here Valadon has essentially made a record for public view, exposing her child for visual consumption.

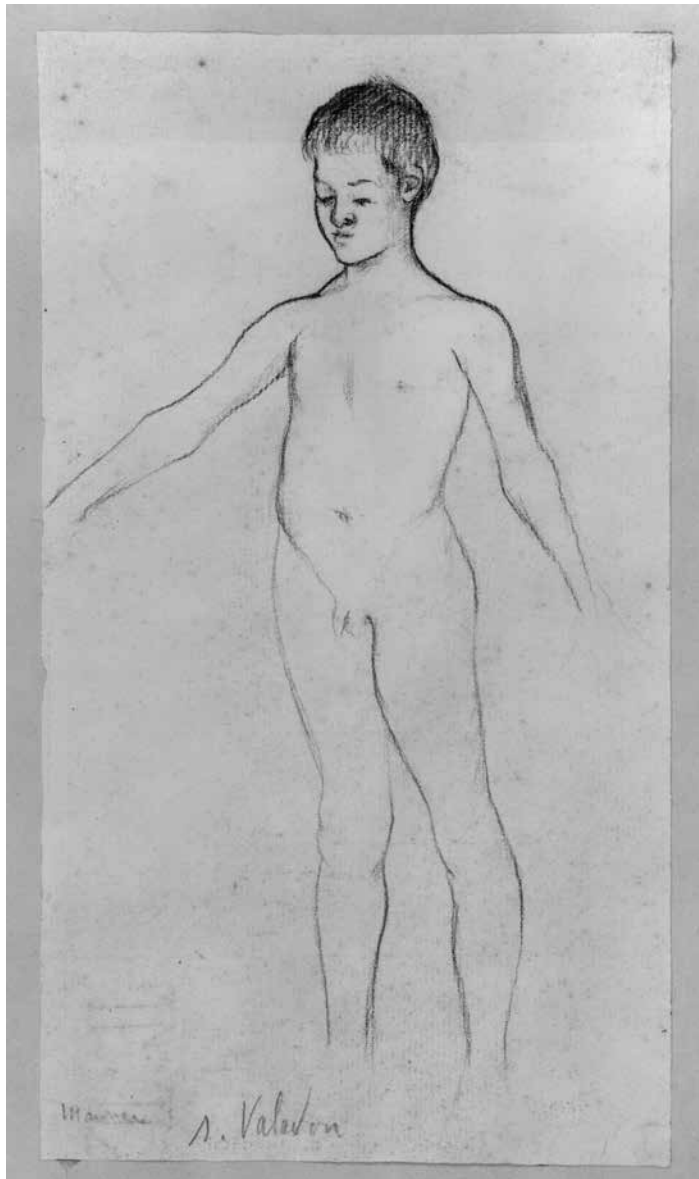
### **Utter, Utrillo, and Indistinctness**

A curious element in the drawings of Maurice is the ambiguity of his age. It seems that Maurice never



ages; he looks much the same at thirteen as at nine. The titles of the works, which sometimes refer to his age, are often the only clue to his stage of maturity. Though Valadon's evolving representations of Maurice show a lengthened figure, as well as minimal shadowing to indicate pubic hair and genitalia, his bearing and body do not change noticeably. Moreover, studies by Valadon of her lover André Utter from 1908–1911 recall the drawings of Maurice in their minimal compositions and sketch-like quality. With their dark outlines, the figures in these later studies appear soft and sensual, with Utter's sexuality obviously expressed. Valadon's use of line and form persistently blurs the division between the physical and emotional. The fact that Maurice and Utter were separated by only three years, and were personal friends, further muddles Valadon's depictions of each. One can almost imagine that the later nude studies of Utter, so striking in their non-specificity, are actually Maurice grown into adulthood. This revelation only increases the tension present in Valadon's representation of young Maurice nude. Valadon's eventual choice of Utter as a lover, whom she met through Maurice, surely made her relationship with her son all the more obscure. The trio, who were all artists, would eventually share a studio together, on the Rue Cortot, and Valadon was quite judgmental of Maurice's romantic liaisons as well.<sup>18</sup>

*Utter Nu* (fig. 5) and *Utrillo Enfant Nu* (fig. 6) are strikingly similar, with both figures shown nude and in contrapposto with eyes cast downward. In both drawings, the legs are shoulder width apart and cut off at the ankles. The drawing of Maurice shows him in a three-



quarter turn while Utter appears frontally, but the two drawings, shown side by side, could almost appear as a study in aging. Utter's facial hair and muscle definition help to reinforce his adulthood, while the round belly and narrow chest of Maurice's figure emphasize his youth. Nevertheless, *Utrillo Enfant Nu* is one of the few from its period in which Valadon left Maurice's genitals completely exposed, rather than alluding to them with shadow or line.<sup>19</sup> Presented upon a blank background, devoid of context, the picture forces the viewer to see

Maurice's young body as an object of art, contemplated for its shape rather than for its age.

### Influences and Allusions

*Utrillo Enfant Nu* recalls the final version of Paul Cézanne's *Bather with Outstretched Arms*, produced in 1878.<sup>20</sup> This work was at one time in the collection of Degas, increasing the likelihood that Valadon may have seen it in person.<sup>21</sup> One can clearly see the influence of Cézanne in Valadon's later paintings; the flattened planes of color, bold contoured lines, and even, to some



degree, the palette of blue, gold, and green all recur. However, Valadon's earlier drawings of Maurice also imply that she may already have been interested in Cézanne, whose bather stirs up enigmatic feelings. As Theodore Reff put it, in his essay on the work: "The bent legs imply a forward motion that the rigidly frontal upper body denies; the outstretched arms seem to reach and reject simultaneously; and the bowed head is dark and withdrawn, its eyes not focused on the barren landscape."<sup>22</sup> The figure is not nude, but almost, wearing only a simple pair of white underpants; the muscles are quite defined and somewhat bulbous, especially in the

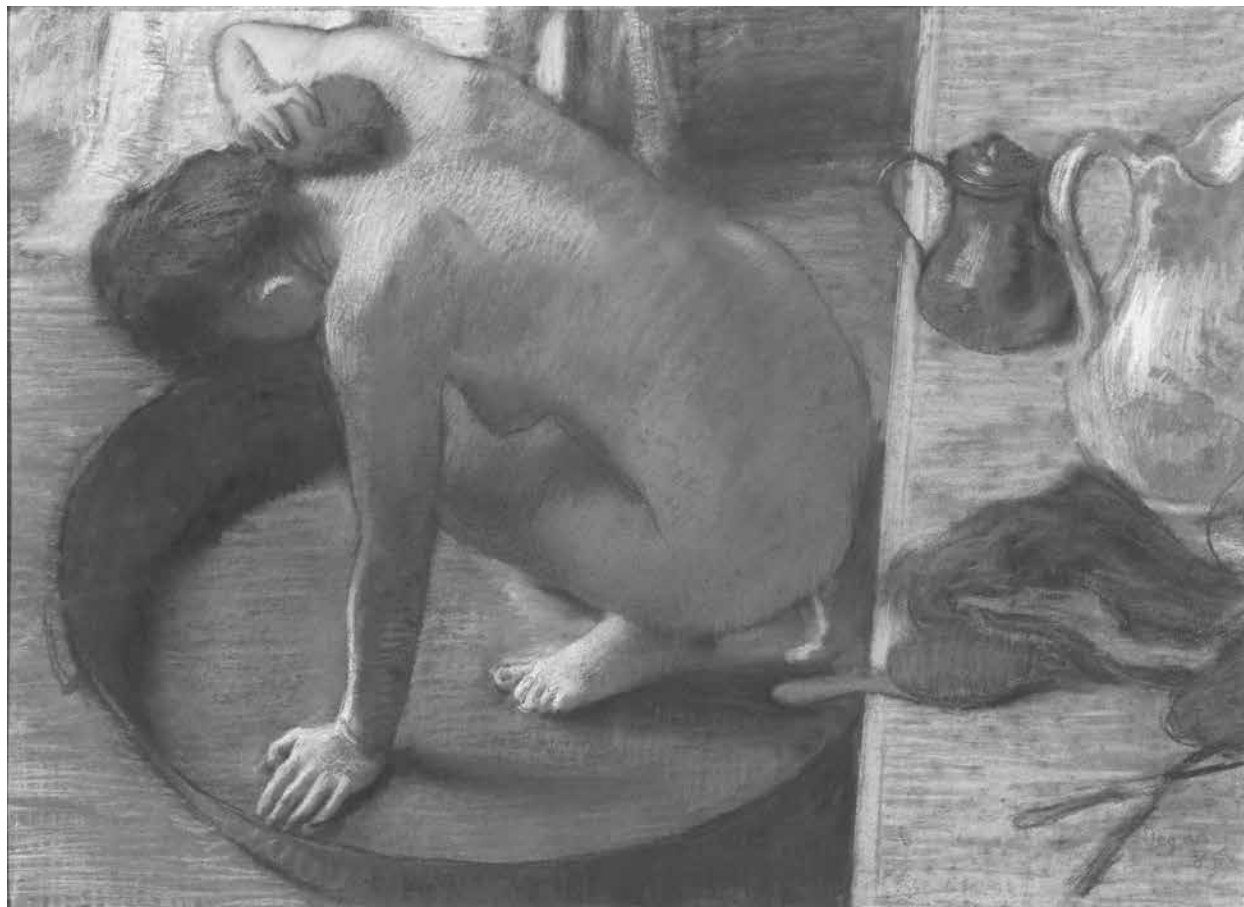
arms. He windmills his arms into a diagonal line, stretching from the left top corner of the canvas to the mid-right quadrant. Reff mentions the art historical lineage of this pose, noting that Cézanne at one time copied the "Hellenistic *Dancing Satyr*" while drawing at the Louvre (though he quickly adds that this resemblance "although striking in all respects, is only superficial and explains nothing in his bather").<sup>23</sup> But the bather's solitary form focuses in on itself, introspective and somewhat stunted. Despite the indication of movement in the slight bend of his figure's knee, as well as the arm in the air, Cézanne's work retains a static quality due to stylized chiaroscuro

and the truncated pictorial space that forces the figure into the extreme foreground of the composition.

Similarly, in *Utrillo Enfant Nu*, Valadon positions Maurice in a standing position, eyes downcast, with his arms coming up from his sides in an indication of motion. Rather than creating a diagonal, however, they make an upside down V shape. Though the difference in medium produces a drastically different finished effect, both *Bather with Outstretched Arms* and *Utrillo Enfant Nu* offer the viewer a glimpse of the young male body in its immaturity and focus on the contours of the body rather than a desire to contextualize the figures in

**Figure 7, left.** Suzanne Valadon, *Maurice Utrillo jouant avec un lance-pierres* (*Maurice Utrillo Playing with a Slingshot*), 1895, black crayon on paper, 7 1/2 x 13 in. (19.1 x 33 cm). Private Collection. Work in the public domain; retrieved from Wikiart.org.

**Figure 8, below.** Edgar Degas, *The Tub*, 1886, pastel on card, 23 1/2 x 32 3/4 in. (56.7 x 83.2 cm). Photo: Hervé Lewandowski, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France. © RMN-Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY.



a specific narrative. In some ways still sensual, Valadon's drawing of Maurice is a study of the adolescent male form, confined to the blank background of a sheet of paper.

*Maurice Utrillo Playing with a Slingshot* (fig. 7) may be the most genuinely candid of Valadon's drawings of Maurice. His nude rear end sits tentatively on the implied ground, and his body is completely folded over, as he readies to launch his toy weapon. Intent on his task, with his arms stretched out in front of him and his hair tousled, Maurice looks the part of a mischievous little boy. Valadon took extra care in shading her subject's hair, including a cowlick at the crown of his head:

a detail that lends the subject personal weight, projecting a sense of closeness and emotional intimacy that many of her other depictions of Maurice lack. The way in which Maurice turns from the viewer's gaze provides an invitation into the scene, while Valadon uses a heavy and uninterrupted contour to model the outer lines of his body.

The drawing also gently recalls the story of David and Goliath. Well-known variations on the tale, such as Donatello's homoerotic sculpture or Michelangelo's gargantuan masterpiece, emphasize the heroic in a way that recalls classical tradition and excuses the subject's nudity. In *Maurice Utrillo Playing*

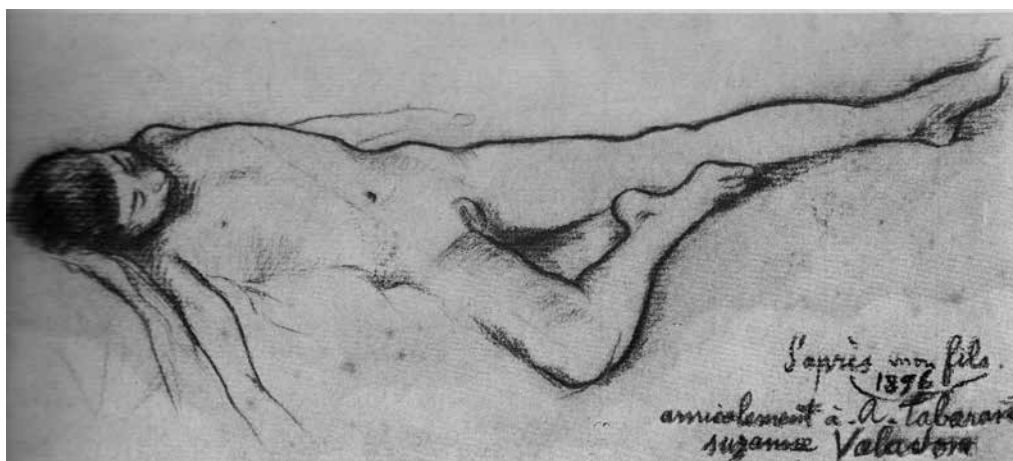
*with a Slingshot*, in turn, such an association and the innocent explicit narrative undermine any possibility of impropriety in showing the artist's nude son. Unlike its art historical sources, moreover, Valadon's drawing conceals the genitalia. This is all typical of Valadon's work, which clearly references established genre types, but diverges from tradition.

In this particular work, though, the artist further complicates its reading by marrying male archetypes of heroism with a composition seemingly quoting Edgar Degas' *The Tub* (fig. 8), a representation of the female form. Specifically, Valadon echoes Degas' angles of the body in her portrayal of the small boy,

deforming his skinny arm in a twitch of a line. Readily apparent are the jutting shoulder blades and line of Maurice's back; yet, as the eye moves to the buttocks, the line becomes irregular and misshapen. Maurice's feet keep him on the ground but without a horizon line, the viewer must depend largely on shadow to sense where the ground begins. The result is one of tentative balance, heightened

a young boy, Degas' pastel depicts a woman bathing indoors, and the vantage point is markedly different, positioned above the figure. Given the documented friendship between Degas and Valadon, as well as her noted interest in contemporary art, Valadon undoubtedly knew of Degas' *Bathers* series, including *The Tub*. The solitary figures in both Valadon's and Degas' works crouch

by the side of the model's breast, cloaked a bit in the shadow of her own body, but nonetheless on display. Carol Armstrong summarizes and dissects early Degas critic Joris-Karl Huysmans' arguments about Degas' series of *Bathers*, noting that Huysmans states that the artist performed a kind of iconoclastic action by placing his models in such unforgetting and "vulnerable"



**Figure 9.** Suzanne Valadon, *Maurice Utrillo Nu Allongé*, 1896, black crayon on paper, 4 1/8 x 9 7/16 in. (10.5 x 24 cm). Private Collection. Work in the public domain; retrieved from Wikiart.org.

by Maurice reading his slingshot, left foot cocked to one side. General feelings of gracelessness do not necessarily mitigate feelings of eroticism or sexual innuendo, as evidenced by pictures such as Manet's *Olympia* or Matisse's *Blue Nude*. But *Maurice Utrillo Playing with a Slingshot* deflects a sexual reading because of its thoroughly childlike essence. In large part, this is because Valadon has kept the point of view low, where we as the viewer are occupying the same vantage point as the subject—we are party to the action.

Degas' work also shows the curved body of a figure with ambiguous ungainliness. However, instead of

close to the floor. The eye follows the elegant and graceful line down the model's back in Degas' work, beginning with her raised elbow, which lifts as she washes herself. The line continues, essentially unbroken, outlining the buttocks and eventually connecting to the stabilizing arm, rooting her to the ground.

For Wendy Lesser, *The Tub* "invites our lingering, caressing look: we roam among the light and shadows of the upper back, then slip gently down her left side to the shadowy breast, then down the thigh to circle the hip and come back up the rounded spine."<sup>24</sup> The scene retains a calm beauty, along with an element of titillation, emphasized in particular

positions, deconstructing the symbolic function of the female nude. To Huysmans, and indeed to Armstrong, this iconoclasm serves as proof of Degas' misogyny. Going still further, Armstrong asserts that "The nudes are, according to Huysmans, enactments of a process of disintegration interior to representation itself."<sup>25</sup> Involved in reflexive activities such as bathing or toweling dry, the 1886 nudes by Degas refer only to themselves, rather than a larger allegorical setting.

And that is a point repeated by Lesser, who sees Armstrong's analysis of the 1886 series as too concerned with Degas' misogyny. Lesser writes:

Armstrong accurately perceives that there is no room for an actual viewer where the painting posits one: Degas, in looking down on the woman who crouches in her bath and squeezes a sponge over her shoulders, gives us (in Armstrong's words) 'an impossible, awkward, too-close view which speaks so much to exclusion that it allows no place for the viewer to stand.' She sees, yet she doesn't believe. She insists that the posited viewer must be merely concealed—dangerously invisible—rather than entirely absent from the scene.<sup>26</sup>

But even Lesser sees the pastels as part of a larger focus on gestures and bodies, as in Degas' ballet pictures. Thus, whether they are taken as misogynistic, iconoclastic representations of the female body or as a simple proof of the artist's appreciation for beauty, the fact that Degas' 1886 nudes refer foremost to themselves remains perhaps the most integral element in attempting to read them formally.

In *Maurice Utrillo Playing with a Slingshot*, in turn, Valadon takes formal considerations such as pose, line, and shading from *The Tub*, but gives her subject a prop, and in so doing refers to the realm of the exterior. In Valadon's picture, Maurice's focus is not on himself but on an outside force, one that we as viewers are unable to see, towards which his kinetic energy is poised. This simple fact, along with the reference to the story of David and Goliath, gives the viewer a reason to look as well as the ability to understand, on at least a basic level, the action within the picture. The tie to the biblical story, along

with the act of playing and the shift in the point of view, effectively eliminates the presence of a voyeur. Instead, the viewer can understand the picture in terms of its potential narrative quality.

A final drawing, *Maurice Utrillo Nu Allongé* (fig. 9), is signed as a gift to "A. Tabarant" and shows a beautifully elongated and seemingly candid portrait of a sleeping Maurice that seems to anticipate Pierre Bonnard's *Woman Dozing on a Bed* of 1899.<sup>27</sup> Maurice's figure, seen from above, echoes the point of view in *The Tub* more than that in *Maurice Utrillo Playing with a Slingshot*. Stretched out across the picture plane, Maurice's leg makes a figure four as it bends at the knee. His right arm hangs limply from his body, while his left falls gently at his side, partially obscured from the viewer's line of sight by the top of the boy's chest—with the figure's penis implied by a quick curved line at the intersection of his legs. Valadon thus provides the viewer unfettered access to the body of her son, who sleeps on a largely undefined surface. Sprawled out, Maurice remains unaware of his audience, who peek in from above, recalling the vantage point of *The Tub*. But the inscription at the bottom right, "D'après mons fils," disrupts the voyeuristic quality of the work, bringing attention to the viewer that this is the artist's son. It also tells us that the drawing was a personal gift to a specific person in Valadon's Montmartre circle and thus not intended for a public viewership. In fact, the work was not shown publicly until 1962, at the Paul Pétridès Gallery in Paris.<sup>28</sup> Adolphe Tabarant, likely the recipient of this work, was a Parisian art critic who wrote at least one article on Valadon in 1921 and a monograph on Maurice, entitled

*Utrillo*, in 1926. Clearly, he admired both Valadon's and Maurice's work and was likely a close family friend.<sup>29</sup> Still, it is significant that Valadon would be willing to give such a sexualized picture of her son to one outside of the actual family, in an act that again reinforces the idea that she viewed young Maurice largely as subject for her art, despite the work's sentimental title.

Each drawing of Maurice in the nude blurs the line between the public persona of the artist Valadon, whose interest in representing the body shows great attention to the modern and classical canon of art, and the private life of a single mother. Valadon revisited the male nude as a subject after 1908, when she began to work on large-scale paintings that include either in idyllic group compositions and alone. Valadon continued in her career to make studies, drawings, and etchings, and these works offer a more intimate view of her subjects than do the larger, "finished" paintings. Even in their simplicity, however, the early drawings of Maurice show an attachment to artistic tradition, both of the female body and of the classical male hero, as well as an alternative to conventional maternal attachment, venturing to include an examination of youthful sexuality. Thus, to deny a reading of sexuality in the pictures of young Maurice is to ignore the works themselves, which focus on the feminized form of a young boy's undeveloped form, and uncomfortably position him directly within the male (and female) gaze.

## Endnotes

1. Valadon enjoyed success in her own time as an artist, first at the 1894 Salon de la Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, and later (and regularly) at the Salon d'Automne and Salon des Indépendants, as well as at galleries such as Galerie Berthe Weill and Galerie Bernheim-Jeune; see Paula J. Birnbaum, "Femmes artistes modernes: Women, art, and modern identity in interwar France" (Ph.D. dissertation, Bryn Mawr College, 1996), 114. Edgar Degas was among the artists who bought works by her, and the two become close friends. See Thérèse Diamand Rosinsky, *Suzanne Valadon* (New York: Universe Publishing, 1994), 11.
2. Lauren Jimerson notes how Valadon's career as a model influenced her painted compositions, noting "After having learned how to adeptly position her own body as a model, Valadon would apply these same skills as an artist, displaying Utter from the most complimentary angles." Lauren Jimerson, "Defying Gender: Suzanne Valadon and the Male Nude," *Woman's Art Journal* 40, no. 1 (2019), 5. I believe that Valadon's entire oeuvre, including her drawings of Maurice, reflects her career as an artist's model.
3. Jimerson notes that *Le lancement du filet* (*Casting of the Net*) "received very little attention by critics." But in one case the poet Arthur Cravan wrote, "Suzanne Valadon knows well the little recipes, but reduced it's not made to be simple, old slut!" Jimerson takes this to mean that the heterosexual female desire was well on display and able to be understood by the viewing public in Valadon's paintings of male nudes. But the atrocious remark and the silence from most critics imply that viewers actually had a difficult time digesting what they saw. See Jimerson, "Defying Gender," 6.
4. Significant publications on Valadon's work include: Rosemary Betterton, "How Do Women Look? The Female Nude in the Work of Suzanne Valadon," *Feminist Review* 19, no. 1 (1985), 3–24; Patricia Mathews, "Returning the Gaze: Diverse Representations of the Nude in the Art of Suzanne Valadon," *The Art Bulletin* 73, no. 3 (1991), 415–430; Gill Perry, *Women Artists and the Parisian Avant-Garde: Modernism and Feminine Art, 1900 to the Late 1920s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); and Rosinsky, *Suzanne Valadon*.
5. Jimerson, "Defying Gender," 4.
6. Ibid.
7. Anne Higonnet explains how Weston's photographs of his son Neil were at first accepted and revered for their departure from portraiture, depersonalizing the figure by cutting off the head and limbs and turning the image into a modernist form of photographic abstraction. Higonnet notes that beginning with Sherrie Levine's appropriation of the photographs, and Douglas Crimp's analysis of the topic, Weston's photographs began to be looked at in a more sinister and conflicted light. For more on the shift from accepting representations of children in modernist photographs to criticizing them for exploitation, see Anne Higonnet, "Private Pictures, Public Dangers" in *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* (London: Thames & Hudson, Ltd., 1998), 133–58.
8. Rosinsky. *Suzanne Valadon*, 35.
9. Ibid., 32.
10. Ibid.
11. Jean-Pierre Valeix, "Suzanne Valadon ou le corps rebouté," in *Valadon/Utrillo: Au tournant du siècle à Montmartre—de l'Impressionisme à l'École de Paris* (Paris: Pinacothèque de Paris, 2009), 31.
12. Germaine Greer. *The Obstacle Race* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1979), 66. Greer goes on to note, "The result was deep sexual disturbance, such that the sight of a pregnant woman would bring on terrible seizures, alcoholic crises and subsequent dependence upon his mother for everything." While the scholarship on Valadon does clearly document the close-knit relationship Utrillo would have with his mother in adulthood, there is no citation or scientific basis for the statement that Utrillo's seizures were actually caused by the sight of pregnant women.
13. A strong argument for Valadon's appropriation and subjugation of the gaze can be found in Rosemary Betterton, "How Do Women Look? The Female Nude in the Work of Suzanne Valadon," *Feminist Review* 19 (1985), 3–24. Betterton argues that Valadon's tendency later in her career, when she is producing large-scale painted female nudes regularly, to have her models engaged in activity or otherwise utilizing artistic convention but altering it in some way (*The Blue Room*, 1923, is a good example of this), reclaims the gaze from the solely male point of view.
14. Stuart Preston, "Gallery Variety: Valadon's Graphic Work—Three Americans, Virtuoso Figures, Triple Showing," *The New York Times*, April 29, 1956.
15. Birnbaum, "Femmes artistes modernes," 444.
16. Ibid., 444–45.
17. Ibid., 445.
18. *Valadon, Utrillo, & Utter in the Rue Cortot Studio: 1912–1926* (Paris: Somogy editions d'art, 2015).
19. Valadon shied away from depicting male genitalia in detail in her pictures of the male nude. However, she did include it in a few instances. Three of her drawings from 1894, including one of Maurice alone using his foot to play with a bowl and two of Maurice being tended to by his grandmother, include depictions of the child's penis. Interestingly, it is when she begins drawing him by himself in the nude that she excludes that detail or simply alludes to it with a quick line. Paul Pétridès, *L'Œuvre complet de Suzanne Valadon* (Paris: Compagnie française des arts graphiques, 1971).
20. This work is in a private collection. Aruna D'Souza, *Cézanne's Bathers: Biography and the Erotics of Paint* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), 130, n. 5.
21. Ibid.
22. Theodore Reff, "Cézanne's Bather with Outstretched Arms," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* (1962), 173.
23. Ibid., 174.
24. Wendy Lesser, *His Other Half: Men Looking at Women Through Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 73.
25. Carol Armstrong, *Odd Man Out: Readings of the Work and Reputation of Edgar Degas* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 192.
26. Lesser, *His Other Half*, 57.
27. On the friendship between Tabarant and Valadon, Rosinsky writes, "In 1924, Valadon signed a contract with the Bernheim-Jeune Gallery. To celebrate the event, the art critic Tabarant gave a banquet in her honor at the lavish Maison Rose. It was attended by several art critics and artists." See *Suzanne Valadon*, 21.
28. Paul Pétridès, *L'Œuvre complet de Suzanne Valadon* (Paris: Compagnie française des arts graphiques, 1971), 113.
29. Jeanine Warnod, *Suzanne Valadon* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1981), 93–94.