

Translated excerpt

Ulli Lust

Die Frau als Mensch. Am Anfang der Geschichte

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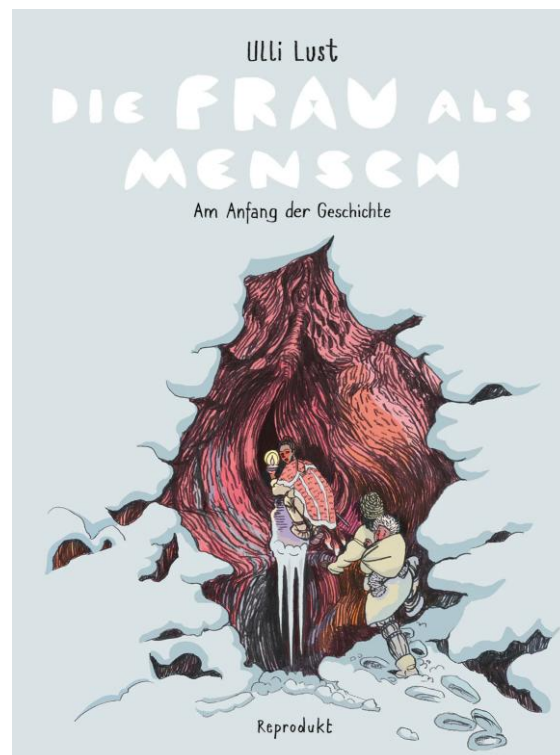
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Ulli Lust

The Woman as Human Being. At the Dawn of History

Translated by John Reddick





I grew up with two sisters. I was already six when I saw a penis for the first time.

* Hey! Look at this!

A six-year-old cousin showed us his.

* Look what I can do!

We'd already heard about this dangly thing that makes boys different from girls.

* Ha ha ha! You can't do this!

It was an amazing trick, but I did wonder...

... doesn't it bother you having a thing like that bouncing around between your legs all the time?

It looked so vulnerable... and so uncomfortable.

* Ha ha ha. No.

* It would certainly bother me!

I felt 'penis sympathy'.

* My fanny's far better.

* Blah blah blah

my fanny

blah blah blah blah...

* We don't use the word 'fanny'!

* So what else should I call it?

* Nothing at all. We don't talk about it!

* Why not?



* It's just not nice!
* ???

* We never talk about it and we never let anyone see it. If you ever do need to mention it, then say 'pudenda' or 'vagina'.

I could tell from the sound of her voice that Mum didn't like those words either.

I rarely needed any such words, thank heavens.

* Hey! Show me your cunny!

'Vagina' sounded like something made of metal.

* Moron!

* What did he mean?

* Don't you know?

* 'Cunny' means 'vagina'.

* Yuk!

I must have learnt much earlier than that not to touch myself down there. I don't recall ever playing with myself. I shared a double bed with my well-behaved older sister until I was 14.

* Turn the light out! I'm going to sleep.

The boarding school run by the Oblate Sisters of St Francis de Sales didn't provide the requisite intimate environment either. Catholic farming families used to put their daughters there while they were attending a vocational school in Vienna.

* Ha ha ha, just listen to this!

The most outrageous thing we ever did was to smuggle in a copy of *Bravo* and read it out to each other.

* A girl asks the Agony Aunt: 'When I masturbate in the shower, can I get pregnant if my brother had a shower immediately before me?'

* Ha ha ha!

* Ho ho ho!



In the 1970s girls often had funky short hair. In my home village in Austria I kept hearing the same question.

- * Hello!
- * Hello!
- * Hello!
- * ...
- * So what are you then - a lass or a lad?
- * I'm a bird, a bint, a GIRL!!!
- * How am I supposed to work that out?
- * Your hair's so short!
- * (dreaming of long hair)
- * You look like a boy!
- * No way that's normal!



In the original the narrator calls herself 'ein Mensch', which in this context means 'a girl'. German tends to avoid the feminine form in the case of portmanteau words. It's possible to speak of 'der Mensch', but not 'die Mensch'.

- * How disgusting, she thinks I'm a boy!!!
- * Boys are stupid!!!

'Der Mensch' can refer to a female or a non-binary individual. But most people would assume it means a man. In normal usage the referent is 'a man'. Extra words and syllables are needed to indicate departures from this rule-of-thumb.

- * So what do you reckon?

This makes it difficult to discuss general human concerns from a female point of view and to do so in a concise form. I apologise here and now to readers of both sexes for any generic masculine words that occur in this comic.

- * No way that's normal.
- * Quite right!

So what is 'normal'? According to Duden, the standard arbiter with respect to German language questions, 'normal' means '(a) that which corresponds to the norm or conforms to established rules; (b) that which is of such a nature as to correspond to what general opinion regards as right and customary.'¹⁾

'Normality' is what is familiar; circumstances that seem to us steady and stable. Familiarity gives us a sense of safety. But norms themselves are anything but stable, as history demonstrates beyond all doubt.

The history of the human race presents us with an astonishingly broad range of norms that people in the relevant period considered correct and customary.

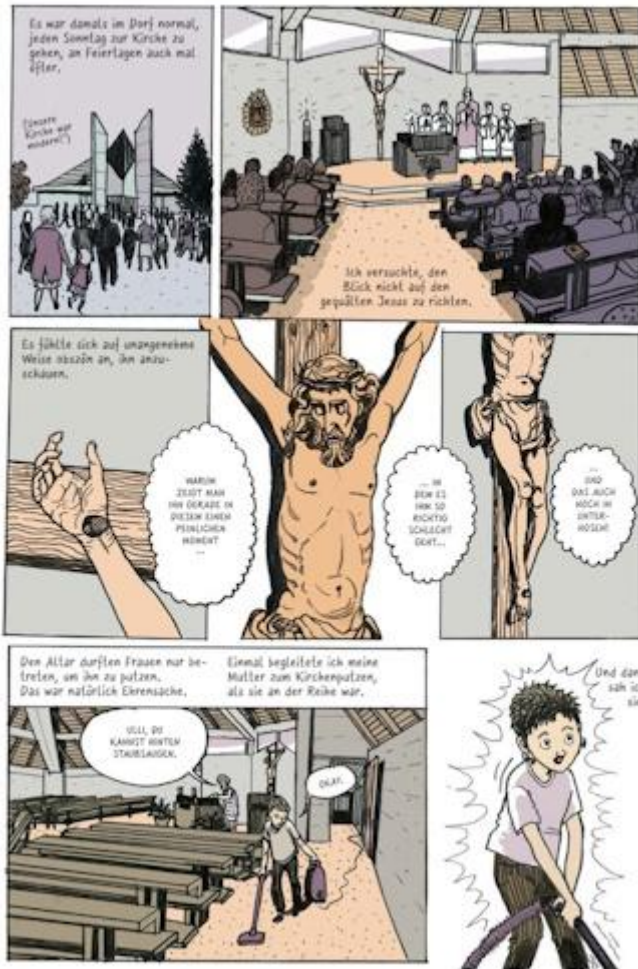
The images of Jesus that are everywhere to be seen in my home village depict him as fair-skinned with brown hair – thus as looking completely 'normal'. He looks exactly as we might expect him to look.

- * one of the most ancient of all images of Jesus, in a fresco in the catacombs of Rome, 300AD.

The man is said to have lived 2000 years ago in what is now Israel, and to have been so similar in looks to other Galileans that a traitor was necessary to enable the Roman authorities to distinguish him from his disciples. – But so what!

- * Image of a typical Galilean of 2000 years ago²⁾

In East Asia Jesus was envisaged as Asiatic, with long ear lobes (1000AD, Kocho era).



In our village it was normal to go to church every Sunday, and sometimes more often on feast days.

* (Our church was a modern building!)

I tried to avoid looking at Jesus in his suffering.

The sight of him seemed to me unpleasant and obscene.

* Why would anyone choose to show him at this moment of extreme agony...

* ... just when things are going so very badly for him...

* ... and with him wearing nothing but underpants!

Only women were allowed to approach the altar - for the purposes of dusting it. Being allowed to do that was of course regarded as an honour.

I once accompanied my mother when it was her turn to dust the altar.

* Ulli, you can do vacuuming at the back.

* Okay.

And then I saw her!



- * Who's that?
- * She's so beautiful!
- * That's Mary, holy mother of God.
- * What's the snake doing there?

The snake frightened me, and I tried to avoid looking at it.

- * It's the devil. Mary overcame the devil, and that's why she's standing on top of him.
- * Hmm.
She's not making a very good job of standing on him.
- * Only two of her toes are sort-of on top of him.



I was more scared of the devil than anything else at all, especially at night.

- * Fortunately I could pray to our dear Lord. He was much more powerful than the devil, and he couldn't stand the devil any more than I could.

Forty five years later I'm re-visiting the statue of Mary.

- .
- * Hm.
- * I remember her as being more beautiful.
- * Why did I find her so impressive back then?

I've seen quite a few images in the intervening years.

- * Tiny penis!
- * Florence.
- * God creating the first human being.
- * degenerate
- * Rome
- * What do a society's images tell us about their psyche?



* The Hague

* Vienna

When seeing the classic images of European cultural history I always have a sense of déjà vu.

* Hamburg

The carved Madonna in our village church may have lost a bit of her aura...

* Jetzelsdorf

... but that didn't detract from her key distinguishing feature, which was what caused her to make such a powerful impression on me as a child:

She was a woman amidst crowds of men.

* London



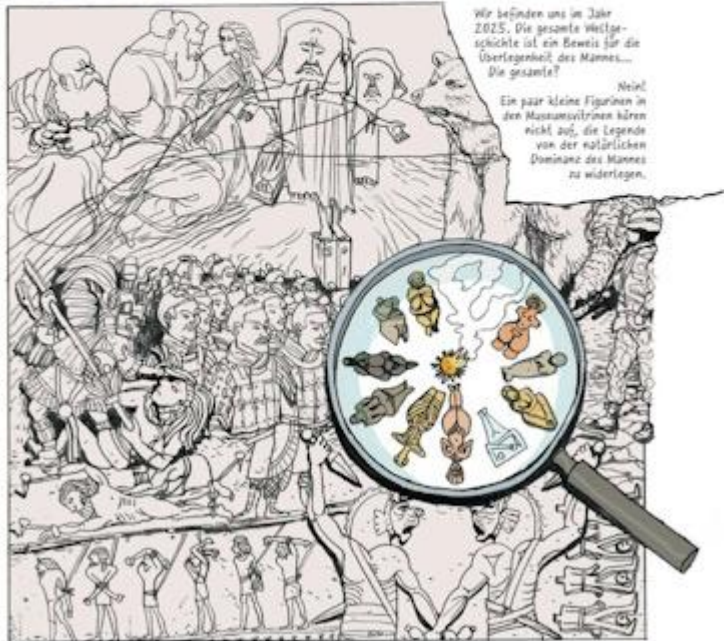
Even the Crouching Aphrodite in London's British Museum is surrounded by male statues. She looks extremely vulnerable there in the middle of the room as she tries to hide her nakedness. The 'Lely Venus' (c. 150AD) is a Roman copy in white marble of the 'Crouching Venus of Doidalses' (c. 250BC). The original was made of bronze.

The male figures make no attempt to cover themselves up. Right from ancient times they have represented nakedness in its ideal form.

In ancient Greece women were always depicted clothed unless they represented a goddess or a mythical being.

That explains the popularity of statues of the goddess Aphrodite and, later, Venus. These were replicated many times.

- * How strange.
She's a god of love! Why should she feel any shame?
The statue illustrated a myth – the goddess is caught by surprise while bathing – but it also demonstrated the physical posture that was deemed exemplary, and appropriate to the norm expected of Greek women.

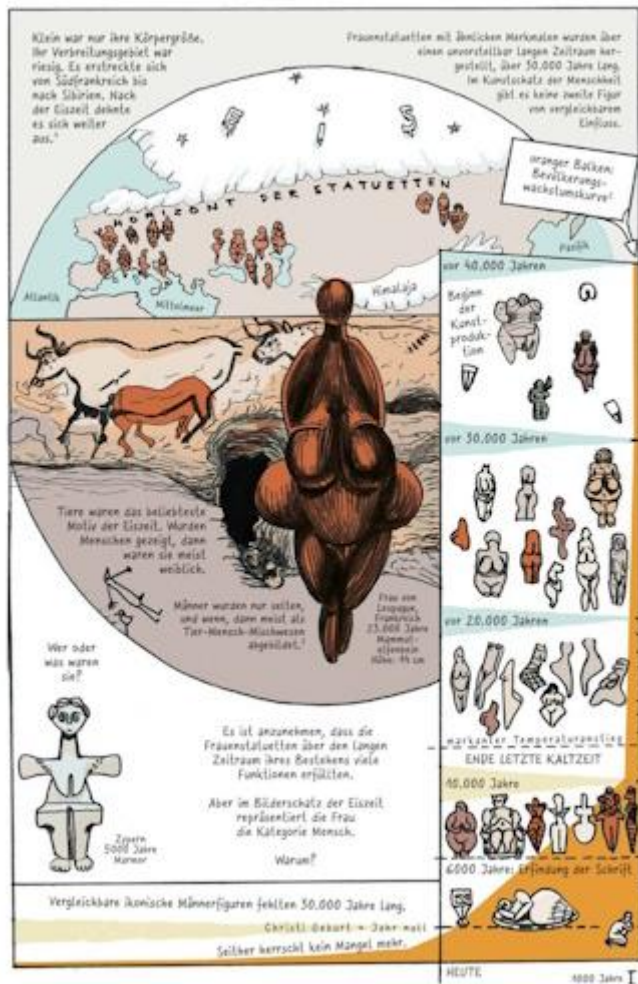


- * Just look around you, midget!
- * We're the ones who make the rules.

History was written by men.

Here we are in the year 2025. The whole history of the world testifies to men's superiority... The *whole* history?

No! A number of little figurines in the display cabinets of museums constantly serve to refute the legend of the 'natural dominance' of men.



They were small in size, but they were distributed across a vast area that stretched from southern France to Siberia, and which expanded even further following the Ice Age.¹⁾ Statuettes of women displaying similar characteristics were produced over an unimaginably long period of time. The entire gamut of human art knows no other comparably influential figure.

Who or what were they? Cyprus, 5000 years ago, marble
It can be assumed that the statuettes had a multiplicity of functions across the vast period of their currency.

But throughout the pictorial history of the Ice Age women served to represent humankind in general.
Why?

Limit of the statuettes
Atlantic Mediterranean Himalayas Pacific

Animals were the most favoured motif during the Ice Age. Whenever human beings were depicted, they were mostly women. Men were depicted only rarely and, when they were, then mostly as half-animal, half-human hybrids.³⁾
The Venus of Lespugue, France, 23,000 years ago; mammoth-ivory; height: 14cm.

Orange bar: population growth²⁾
40,000 years ago
The earliest artefacts
30,000 years ago
20,000 years ago
Marked increase in temperature
END OF THE LAST ICE AGE
10,000 years ago
6,000 years ago:
The invention of writing
TODAY. 1000 years ago

Throughout a period lasting 30,000 years there were no comparable male figures.
Birth of Christ = year zero
Since then there has been a plethora of male figures.



Es kam öfter vor, dass paläolithische Skelette zuerst männlich eingestuft wurden und sich nach genauer Prüfung als weiblich entpuppten.¹

Die Toten waren groß, sie zeigten Spuren gut entwickelter Schultermuskulatur – jener Muskeln, die beim Werfen trainiert wurden.

Wahrscheinlich waren die Menschen der Eiszeit Universalisten, wie es auch die Angehörigen späterer nomadischer Jäger- und Sammler-Kulturen waren. Das bedeutet, jede und jeder musste alle Fertigkeiten beherrschen, die zum Überleben nötig waren. Dazu gehörte auch das Jagen.



The displaying of women's breasts constitutes a link between the world's oldest depictions of human beings, and much more recent ones. Ancient cuneiform texts describe the breast-exhibiting characteristic of the Babylonian goddess Ishtar (otherwise known as Inanna) as a symbol of her life-giving fertility.¹⁾

The goddess Ishtar
Iran

4000 years ago

Votive figurine

The Hohe Fels Venus

Germany

35,000-40,000 years ago

The symbolism remains similar, but the world changed between the creation of the Hohe Fels Venus and the creation of Ishtar.

Notwithstanding the iconographic similarities, the two cultures probably comprehended the world in vastly different ways.

For instance, the women of the Ice Age were physically bigger.

Look, it's perfectly clear why women could only play a subordinate role in primitive societies!
Dr Constantin Rauer, cultural philosopher²⁾

[dramatic pause]

Because they couldn't hunt!

The people of that era were hunters, and hunting was dangerous!

If women had hunted it would have meant the extinction of the human species.

Palaeolithic skeletons were frequently categorised as male at first, but turned out on closer inspection to be female.³⁾

The skeletons were big in size and showed signs of well developed shoulder muscles – precisely the muscles that would be strengthened by the practice of spear-throwing.

- * Chechnya (Dolní Věstonice) 30,000 years ago ceramic ware

The people of the Ice Age were probably universalists, as were those belonging to later nomadic hunter-gatherer cultures. This meant that men and women alike had to possess all the skills necessary for survival. This will necessarily have included hunting.

- * Austria (Willendorf) 29,400 years ago Öölite



From a lecture on Ice Age art in 2014:¹⁾

- * This is the world's oldest depiction of a woman
- * ... the lion-man...
- * ... the bird-man...
- * ... the horned huntsman, presumably a sorcerer.
- * ... the shaman of Trois-Frères...
- * Men were always depicted with animal heads. It was different in the case of women: they were either shown wearing masks, or else had no head at all.

Many beautiful animal images were then shown.

45 minutes later:

- * Any questions?
- * Yes? Go ahead!
- * Can you tell me what the ratio of male to female depictions is amongst the surviving artefacts?
- * Approximately 1 to 100.

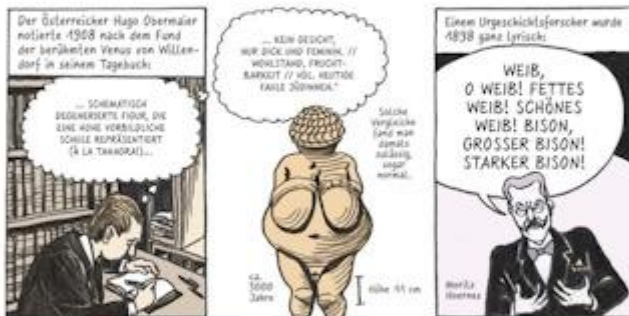
Wow!

The audience started muttering. The point was made to perfection.

- * So for every one hundred depictions of women there was just one depiction of a male? How do you explain this stark disproportion?
- * Well, it's explained by the simple fact that men were more important than women. That's quite literally what he said.

"In European palaeolithic art (40,000 – 11,000BC), 702 whole-body depictions of human beings have been identified. They were found on the walls of caves, on rock overhangs, or as transportable artefacts. 74 of them (10.5%) can be defined as males, as a scrotum and/or penis are explicitly represented."²⁾
(Javier C. Angulo)

Die vielen nackten Frauenfiguren, die seit dem 13. Jahrhundert in den Ausgrabungsfunden auftauchten, verwirrten die männlichen Forscher.



Male researchers found themselves confused by the large number of naked female figures that were discovered at excavation sites from the 19th century onwards.

The Frenchman (Marquis Paul de Vibraye), who in 1864, in the Laugerie-Basse Cave, was the first person to discover a naked female ivory figure, named her 'Vénus impudique' - 'immodest Venus'.

France
(Laugerie-Basse)
18,000 years old
Mammoth-ivory

In 1864 women who revealed their ankles were regarded as indecent.
A woman who comported herself provocatively could only be a love goddess.

Lewd!

In 1908, following the discovery of the famous Willendorf Venus, the Austrian Hugo Obermaier noted in his diary:

* ... schematically degenerate figure representing a high-level exemplary school (reminiscent of the Tanagra tradition)...

* ... no face, just fat and feminine. // indicative of prosperous circumstances and fertility // cf. the lazy Jewess of today.¹⁾

- * Back in those days comparisons of this sort were permitted, not to say commonplace.
- * Approximately 3000 years old.
- * Height: 11cm

In 1898 one specialist in prehistory waxed lyrical:

- * WOMAN, OH WOMAN!
FAT WOMAN!
BEAUTIFUL WOMAN!
BISON, BIG BISON!
MIGHTY BISON!
- * Moritz Hoernes

"Modern humanity's control of primitive drives was contrasted to the savage culture of the palaeolithic era in which primitive drives ran wild."²⁾ (Erich Neumann)

Beginning at the latest with Freud's writings on psychoanalysis, mothers had a truly miserable image. Professional palaeologists explained away the female figures as an expression of a mother fixation on the part of early males. The statuettes came to be seen as symbolic of surrender to primitive urges and intellectual immaturity.

An embarrassing characteristic of prehistory.

	<p>Many writings on Ice Age art briefly summarise female imagery before entering into a detailed discussion of animal images and of the relatively few masculine depictions of hybrid human/animal figures.</p>
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Until quite recently the Stone Age was depicted in illustrations as a male world. We encounter images of men fighting, hunting, hammering, painting, carving, thinking, inventing, making music. The virile hunters of the Stone Age, so we were led to believe, enjoyed exhibiting their choicest prey: animals, and naked women.

- * Showcase labelled 'Ice Age human being' in the New Museum, Berlin (loan exhibit from the Natural History Museum, Vienna)
- * Illustration in *Menschen der Urzeit* ('Prehistoric humans'), by Zdeněk Burian, 1977.

Books about the Stone Age routinely depict faces as bearded.

- * In his book *Geschichte der Menschheit* ('The history of the human race'), Hermann Parzinger wrote that 'the role of women in the Stone Age was to serve as workhorses.'¹⁾