

Moved by Love



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出版者:Univ of Chicago Pr

出版时间:2003-12

装帧:HRD

isbn:9780226752877

In eighteenth-century France, the ability to "lose oneself" in a character or scene marked both great artists and ideal spectators. Yet it was also thought this same passionate enthusiasm, if taken to unreasonable extremes, could lead to sexual deviance, mental illness, and even death. Women and artists were seen as especially susceptible to these negative consequences of creative enthusiasm - and women artists doubly so. Mary D. Sheriff uses these very different visions of artistic enthusiasm to explore the complex interrelationships among creativity, sexuality, the body, and the mind in eighteenth-century France. Drawing on evidence from the visual arts, literature, philosophy, and medicine, she scrutinizes the different forms of deviance ascribed to male and female artists. Sheriff also demonstrates that the perceived connections among sexuality, creativity, and disease also opened artistic opportunities for women - and creative women took full advantage of them.

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