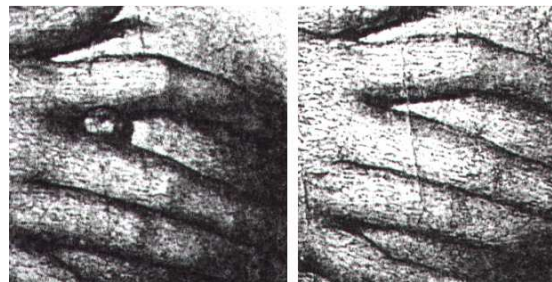


8 A "most improper picture"

Agnolo Bronzino (Agnolo di Cosimo), 1503-72
Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time (c.1546)

Bronzino's erotic allegory has been said to depict the cheekiest bottom in all art, but Mrs Grundy was not titillated.

Before finding its present home in the National Gallery, London, the painting was in the Spencer collection at Althorp, now famous as the last resting-place of Diana, Princess of Wales. It was acquired by the National Gallery in 1860, but was described by the gallery's first Director, Sir Charles Eastlake, as a "most improper picture". On his orders, Venus was partly (and clumsily) veiled, and the boy's pert bottom was masked with a myrtle



sprig (left). At a later date, Venus's nipple was painted over (above), and her tongue painted out of the kiss (above right). The painting was restored to its original state in 1958.



Venus was the mother of

Cupid, therefore it could be said that an act of incest is being depicted. It is not clear whether this was one reason for considering the picture objectionable.¹

On the right is what might be considered the "full-frontal" version of the painting - Bronzino's *Venus, Cupid and Jealousy* (1550s), now in the Szepmuveszi, Budapest.





Salvador Dalí (1904-89)

Psychoanalysis and morphology
(1939)

Left is Salvador Dalí's take on the Venus/Cupid theme - for which the 1546 Bronzino painting might well be the main reference.

¹See [Chapter 6](#) for speculation on the original model for Bronzino's Cupid.