

Marianne Koos

**The skin of pictures.**

**Surface and Gender in 18<sup>th</sup> century art**

Using the example of the Genevan born, cosmopolite painter Jean-Étienne Liotard (1702-1789), the article explores the relation of surface and gender in 18<sup>th</sup> century art. In his treatise on the principles and rules of painting (1781) Liotard explains his ideal of closed, stainless and delicate surfaces by comparing the *touches* in painting with the ugly traces of smallpox distorting female beauty. With this bodily metaphore concerning the (female) skin Liotard draws the attention to the material, skinlike surface of (female) painting. This is an aspect which – in concentration on the (humanistic) content – had consequently been neglected for a long time in the discipline of art history. Recent studies point to the fundamental change of analysis which occurs by exploring the material quality of art. Even these studies though, often do not reflect the gendered, cultural, ethnic and ethic metaphores that charge (pictorial) surfaces with meaning. As the article argues it is especially the methodology of gender studies which is able to contribute to a more critical perspective on the semantisations of pictorial surfaces.