

The Dawn of Love, also known as ***Venus Now Wakes, and Wakens Love***, is an oil painting on canvas by English artist William Etty, first exhibited in 1828 and currently in the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum in Bournemouth. Loosely based on a passage from John Milton's 1634 masque *Comus*, it shows a nude Venus leaning across to wake the sleeping Love by stroking his wings. While Etty often included nude figures in his work he rarely depicted physical intimacy, and owing to this *The Dawn of Love* is one of his more unusual paintings. The open sensuality of the work was intended to present a challenge to the viewer mirroring the plot of *Comus*, in which the heroine is tempted by desire but remains rational and detached.

While a few critics praised elements of its composition and execution, *The Dawn of Love* was very poorly received when first exhibited. Etty had developed a reputation for painting realistic figures, and his stylised Venus was thought unduly influenced by foreign artists such as Rubens as well as being overly voluptuous and unrealistically coloured, while the painting as a whole was considered tasteless and obscene. *The Dawn of Love* was not among the 133 paintings exhibited in the major 1849 retrospective exhibition of Etty's works, and its exhibition in Glasgow in 1899 drew complaints for its supposed obscenity. In 1889 it was bought by Sir Merton Russell-Cotes, and has remained in the collection of the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery & Museum ever since.