

The Art of the Nude: Illustrated Seminar and Discussion

Part 1 - Seminar

Background Notes

Dr Emma Bulley 22 November 2017

Why did the female nude become linked to ideals of beauty and the male nude to qualities such as strength? How do we judge if a nude is erotic, pornographic, or aesthetic? What sort of status has the model had in art history and whose bodies are missing from art history?

From the Venus figurines of the Upper Palaeolithic era to the *kourus*, naked youths of ancient Greece, the hideous “sheela na gig” to contemporary performance art, this seminar will examine the degree and manner in which the use of the body and the nude in art has changed.

If we attend a figure drawing class, we are participating in a tradition that is hundreds, possibly thousands of years old. The body in art has been shunned, desexualised at points in history and admired, even glorified, at others. I will examine the reasons for this, investigating the prevalent belief systems of the specific time and place.

Taking a historical overview we can consider the different ways in which the depiction of the nude model was related to both social context, as well as personal ideals. From nude to naked, from confrontational to vulnerable, the artist's engagement with the model continues to evolve and to shape our understanding of what it means to be a human being.



Questions to ask of the Nude in Art

1. How was the nude in art regarded at the time it was made?
2. What do you know about the place where the artwork was made?
3. What does the nude signify? How do we know this?
4. Is the body realistic, stylised or glamorised?
5. Is she/he naked or nude?
6. Would you describe the nude as erotic? Pornographic? aesthetic?
7. Can we tell anything about the individuals' character?
8. What other objects are in the artwork and what does this tell us?
9. Are we voyeurs; where does power lie?
10. Are class/gender/racial or other issues depicted?



John Coplans (1994) Frieze No. 2, Four Panels, Tate Modern

Further Research:

Tim Marlow The Nude in Art [DVD]

Frances Borzello The Naked Nude

Flaminio Gualdoni The History of the Nude

Sally O'Reilly The Body in Contemporary Art

Websites

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2008/nov/21/nude-naked-art-diana-actaeon>

<http://arthistoryteachingresources.org/lessons/sexuality-in-art/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2014/apr/15/top-10-female-nudes-art>

<http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/genres/female-nudes-art-history.htm>

http://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/events/exhibitions/in-the-musee-dorsay/exhibitions-in-the-musee-dorsay-more/article/masculin-masculin-37292.html?S=&print=1&no_cache=1&