

MICHELANGELO

AND BEYOND

Exhibition Facts

Duration	15 September – 14 January 2024
Venue	Propter Homines Hall The ALBERTINA Museum
Curators	Klaus Albrecht Schröder, Achim Gnann, Eva Michel, Martina Pippal, Constanze Malissa
Works	139
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Opening Hours	Daily 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. Wednesday and Friday 10 a.m. – 9 p.m.
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Michelangelo and Beyond

15.9. – 14.1.2024

The master of the Renaissance: Michelangelo is one of a handful of artists whose fame has been unwavering for centuries. Although his art and his ideals are deeply rooted in the attitudes of the time – the heyday of the Renaissance and the progressive 16th century – the impact of his work extends into the present day.

Every century experiences its own Michelangelo Renaissance, and in doing so revives the historic ideal of the perfect male nude developed by the prominent Florence native on an unrivalled scale through his drawings for the incomplete fresco the *Battle of Cascina*, the *Ignudi* in the Sistine Chapel and the *Dying Slave* for the tomb of Pope Julius II.

Michelangelo and Beyond deals with the emergence and the power, the decrease in significance and the decline of a canon – a canon on which Michelangelo and his works made a lasting impression 500 years ago – and how the generations that followed have approached this template since.

The depiction of the human body

The richly populated portfolio of graphic pieces at the ALBERTINA allows for examination of the Michelangelo ideal, which is strikingly conveyed in both his drawings and his sculptures as the athletic and powerful male nude, whose inner tension appears to want to burst out of the body.

The new status of the drawing as its own work of art in the 15th century solidified the artistic concept and the temperament of the artist, and was reflected by the high demand of collectors for these valuable items. The provenance of the drawings by the Renaissance

master at the ALBERTINA shows Peter Paul Rubens to be the owner in the 17th century, which highlights the importance of the Italian genius for subsequent generations of artists.

On the one hand, the classical nude as we encounter it in the drawings in the ALBERTINA Museums' Collections, from Michelangelo to Raffael and Beccafumi to Bandinelli, da Volterra and Salviati, always strives for the harmonious balance between generic formulas like standardised poses, the study of the anatomy according to ancient sculptures or the full-scale outline of body parts according to the formalised proportions of the Vitruvian man, and emulating nature on the other hand.

With their opposing positions, artists Rembrandt and Rubens shape the Baroque period. Rubens deals with the real, living model and brings back ancient nakedness in a new guise.

Rembrandt, on the other hand, doesn't shy away from portraying the ugliness of the authentic body, of people in their impermanence and weakness. In doing so, he strikes a harsh contrast with the athletic body of Buonarroti.

In Classicism, the image of the beautiful and muscular naked male body continues. Almost 200 years after the death of Florence's master, the Michelangelesque canon finds its sequel in the prevalent depiction of the ideal nude. The painters of the time, such as Anton Raphael Mengs or Pompeo Girolamo Batoni, create works that return to Michelangelo with their precision in shaping the musculature, the portrayal of complicated poses and perspective foreshortening contingent on complex postures. They are particularly reminiscent of his superlative drawings, associated with works like the *Battle of Cascina* or the ceiling fresco in the Sistine Chapel.

Just as slavishly and anachronistically, artists in the time of Klimt and Schiele imitate the heroic, athletic design, but more outwardly, superficially, without the intellectual depth of Buonarroti. This canon, shaped by Michelangelo, finally reaches its peak, as the depiction of the male nude as a symbol of a heroic individual finds increasingly diminishing resonance in modern society.

The exhibition bears the historic sign that for centuries, only men drew men, and women were also only drawn by men. A man defined the canon of the male nude to the extent of that

of the female nude. Michelangelo himself drew very few naked women, instead lending the male body a feminine grace.

A woman in art is like the dark side of the moon: you know it exists, but it's *terra incognita*. In a few typical examples from the 17th and 18th centuries, the exhibition displays the unrealistic ideal of the woman. For a long time, the depiction of a naked woman was discriminated against and discredited for identifying with vices, immorality and sexual instincts. The immorality of women leads to death and sin in the form of Eve; the sexual instinct of *Luxuria* appears vain and naked. The virtuous are largely cloaked in flowing robes. The antithesis of virtuously veiled women describes the naked woman as a female force, as a witch, as a seductive Venus.

The outlook at the end of the exhibition has been chosen as an example. It represents a century in which Michelangelo's canon has lost its authority and devotes itself to the opposition between Secessionist beauty by means of Gustav Klimt's curvy ideal of the woman and the ugliness and pathologizing of the first nude not robbed of its sexuality by Egon Schiele.

Exhibition Texts

Introduction

The exhibition *Michelangelo and Beyond* explores the origins and impacts of a canon that was to reign for 300 years as the standard against which all depictions of the male nude were measured.

In Michelangelo's drawings, as in his sculptures, the ideal of the male nude charged by inner tension is presented largely free of any narrative accessories. Michelangelo developed this ideal around 1500 based on the interplay between his study of nature and the model embodied by the ancient monumental sculptures that were being rediscovered during the Renaissance.

The 16th century's Mannerist style exaggerated Michelangelo's ideal, giving rise to elegant, elongated figures. The 17th century's relationship with Michelangelo, on the other hand, was dominated by two antipodes: Peter Paul Rubens, who admired and collected Michelangelo's drawings, came to view his Florentine forebear as an unsurpassed model. Opposing this master's stance was Rembrandt, who—unlike Michelangelo—insisted on portraying non-idealized, realistic images of human beings and knew no fear of ugliness in doing so.

The 18th century saw the central Neoclassicist masters Pompeo Batoni and Anton Raphael Mengs rediscover Michelangelo's exemplary balance between the ideal put forth by ancient sculptures and the study of nature.

It was amidst the Industrial Revolution and the major wars of the 20th century that this idealized image of the human being ultimately lost its significance once and for all—for it represented neither the actual facts of life nor society-wide dreams.

The final chapter of this exhibition offers a glimpse of this modern and modernist world. The fictitious bodies of Gustav Klimt's *femmes fragiles*—a deeply male dream featuring a disembodied ideal of the fragile woman, the woman in limbo—represent one pole of the move to overcome Michelangelo's legacy.

The other pole is represented by Egon Schiele and his ostentatious sexualization of the human body. This and Schiele's pathologized portrayal of bodies convulsed under the pressure of psychological overload testify to how the Michelangelesque canon of the male nude had declined in relevance with the modern-era death of the hero.

In cases where Michelangelo had painted female figures, such as those of the Old Testament prophetesses in the Sistine Chapel, it had been nude males who served him as models. Women, thus hidden by Michelangelo's shadow, would for centuries remain the unknown

dark side of the Moon: draped in flowing garb, a woman was fit to serve as a symbol of virtue. Stripped naked, she became a witch or Venus.

Michelangelo and Beyond hence tells of a canon's emergence and power as well as of that blind spot that Michelangelo's art left behind before his ideal was forced to give way to radical new depictions of human beings.

Michelangelo 1475 – 1564

In 1475, Michelangelo is born in Caprese near Florence.

1496 witnesses his creation of the Pietà for St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. For Florence, he creates his monumental sculpture of David in 1501. These two works mark his artistic breakthrough.

In 1504, he works at the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence on a monumental mural depicting *The Battle of Cascina*. Leonardo da Vinci has simultaneously been commissioned to paint the *Battle of Anghiari* on the opposite wall. All that survives of Michelangelo's never-completed fresco are preliminary drawings—but these go on to found the canon of the ideal male nude.

In 1505, Pope Julius II summons Michelangelo to Rome to create his tomb. This project, with its important Slaves and Moses, occupies Michelangelo for years but is to remain unfinished.

From 1508 and 1512, Michelangelo paints the ceiling frescoes at the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican.

In Florence, Michelangelo creates tombs for members of the Medici family.

Between 1536 and 1541, Michelangelo works on his fresco *The Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel.

In Michelangelo's late oeuvre, numerous drawings and sculptures revolve around the Crucifixion and the Pietà—the Lamentation of Christ.

1546 sees him assume leadership of the project to rebuild St. Peter's.

In 1564, Michelangelo dies in Rome at the age of 88.

Michelangelo's Beginnings, or the Rebirth of the Body

Michelangelo's early drawings from the 1490s reflect the young artist's interest in the past and engagement with works by artistic role models such as Giotto, Masolino and Masaccio.

He admired the simplicity, dignified grandeur, and monumental unity seen in the works of both, these being closer to his ideal than the artistic styles of his contemporaries.

Even so, the understanding of the human body seen in Michelangelo's own drawings represents a development entirely his own. He lends his bodies gravity and weight, shaping them organically and powerfully via his detailed portrayal of the muscular details. Whereas the nudes of Giotto, Masolino and Masaccio remain confined within their outer contours, Michelangelo bestows upon his bodies freedom and the capacity for autonomous action.

Before Michelangelo, or Nudity by Template

Prior to the formation of Michelangelo's canonical ideal of the body, the representation of the human nude is flat, template-like, and inorganic. Pollaiuolo was the first artist to skin many human bodies in order to study their anatomical makeup. Even so, Pollaiuolo's knowledge of this area appears rudimentary: while some muscles are rendered correctly, others are missing, overemphasized, or vaguely indicated. His nude portrayals are hence hardly organic, with the bodies seeming like templates cut out and placed within landscapes like so many set pieces. Pollaiuolo can thus be said to have been too attached to the art of his time to fully realize a new ideal of the human body—which was later to be achieved above all by Michelangelo.

Laocoön: found in 1506

The ancient Laocoön group was discovered in 1506 during excavations just outside the gates of Rome. This caused a sensation. Michelangelo was among those who hurried to view the masterpiece. Laocoön, whom the gods punished with death for warning his fellow citizens about the Trojan Horse, is shown with his two sons struggling against deadly serpents set on them by the gods. Immediately after its discovery, the work was purchased by Pope Julius II and put on display among other sculptures in the Belvedere courtyard at the Vatican. Artists made pilgrimages to the Laocoön in order to draw from an antique original and study its human anatomy. The sculptural group was regarded as the quintessential portrayal of agony, as expressed in the figures' strained poses. It represents an ancient ideal that has a lasting impact on Michelangelo's canon.

Bacchus

Bacchus is one of Michelangelo's early sculptures. From the time of its creation, this statue of the Roman god of wine was recognized as being on a par with masterpieces of classical antiquity. Francesco I de' Medici acquired the figure in 1572 for display in the grandducal gallery in Florence alongside ancient sculptures already in his collection. In this early work, Michelangelo grapples with the ideal of the male nude. At the end of the seventeenth century, Massimiliano Soldani-Benzi made this same-size bronze copy for Hans-Adam I, Prince of Liechtenstein.

The Battle of Cascina, or: A Tumult of Bodies

Around 1504, Michelangelo received a commission to realize a monumental mural depicting the Battle of Cascina in the Palazzo Vecchio in Florence. Across the room at the opposite wall, Leonardo da Vinci was working on his Battle of Anghiari. It was thus that the two artists entered into a competition over the ideal portrayal of the human body. Michelangelo's unfinished work shows a scene from the battle that took place between Florentine and Pisan forces in 1364: the Florentine Army is surprised by an enemy attack while bathing in the Arno. The soldiers scramble to grab their weapons. In numerous drawings, Michelangelo grappled with the complex motifs of motion that he needed for his naked male figures. Such motifs reflect an ideal that founded a canon whose validity was to remain intact for centuries: that of the male nude charged to the breaking point by inner tension.

Nudes in the Sistine Chapel

The ceiling frescoes in the Sistine Chapel are one of the most influential artistic creations of all time. It was in 1508, at the behest of Pope Julius II, that Michelangelo—largely alone—commenced his efforts. In numerous drawings, the artist prepared the dynamic inner turmoil and contorted postures of his athletic nudes, the famous *Ignudi*. The finished frescoes feature these 20 naked young men as bearers of heavy bronze medallions, with the required effort clearly manifest in their physical tension. The qualities of the artist's nascent canon are also apparent

in the powerful, heroic bodies of the Sibyls (Prophetesses): like all of Michelangelo's female figures, they are likewise based on the ideal of the male model.

The Suffering of God

His entire life long, Michelangelo was frequently preoccupied with thoughts of death and resurrection—and though he had already brought the motif of the Pietà to its highest perfection at a young age in his famous Roman sculpture, he kept returning throughout his further artistic career to the subject of the dying or dead Christ. His drawings and sculptures featuring these motifs can be understood as personal confessions. In such moving portrayals, Michelangelo exhibits intense empathy with Christ's suffering—and even so, his drawings depict the martyred, maltreated body of the Son of God in immaculate, divine purity and integrity like those of no other. In these images, the deeply devout artist articulated his hope for salvation through divine grace.

The Death of Christ, or the Beauty of the Immortal

Michelangelo's early masterpiece is the marvelous Pietà in Saint Peter's Basilica, which brings sudden fame to the artist. Created from a single block of white Carrara marble, Christ's mortal body is lying heavily and abandoned by all strength in the lap of his strikingly young mother. Based on anatomical studies, the muscles, veins and skin folds are depicted with extreme precision. The body's limp and relaxed posture suggests that this is the savior's corpse, its idealized, unscathed depiction without any wounds seems to radiate supernatural power and beauty. This serves to suggest divine immortality while offering a salvatory, promising glimpse of how beautiful eternal life after death might be.

The Influence of the Pietà

Michelangelo's graceful Pietà has been deeply admired and copied by countless artists. One such artist was Rosso Fiorentino, who resided in Rome from 1524 to 1527. His model study of a reclining male nude quotes the pose of Michelangelo's dead Christ. In contrast to the original's detached quietude, however, Rosso's nude's angular outlines and cramped hand allude to preceding agony. Moreover, this artist's penchant for the strange and bizarre is reflected in his figure's highly arched ribcage with the ribs straining against the skin as well as in its bent, claw-like fingers. Even so, this work on paper betrays Rosso's familiarity with the pen and ink drawings of Michelangelo—to whom it was even attributed in the collection of Peter Paul Rubens. Giovanni Battista Franco's drawing of the dead Christ likewise indicates its artist's engagement with Michelangelo's Pietà as a model. Compared with Rosso's work,

however, Franco's depiction of the savior's body radiates less tension and in fact suggests a certain inner peace.

Raphael: Under the Spell of Michelangelo

Raphael's early works exhibit a clear equilibrium, a balance between ideality and the imitation of nature in their serene figures. These stand in stark contrast to Michelangelo's athletic bodies, which radiate strength and an intense dynamism. Raphael devoted study to Michelangelo's anatomically detailed soldiers in *The Battle of Cascina*. In engaging with Michelangelo's works, Raphael became attuned to the importance of studying musculature in order to correctly depict figures' motion sequences and inner exertions. And with Michelangelo as a model, the figures that Raphael went on to create grew more monumental and came to stand on an equal footing with the Florentine artist's heroic nudes.

Mad about Michelangelo

The unsurpassed influence of Michelangelo's work, in particular his canon of the idealized male nude, is particularly evident in the Florentine master's immediate environment and direct succession. His contemporaries expanded the scope of possibilities for the classical nude in its tension between ancient ideal and imitation of nature by appropriating Michelangesque figures. The overpowering shadow that Michelangelo cast over his fellow Florentine Baccio Bandinelli as well as the School of Fontainebleau in France had a lasting impact on the creative processes of an entire generation of artists, especially on how they dealt with the human body's representation and the ideal of the athletic male nude.

Un sacco di noce, or: Nature Distorted

Unnaturally elongated and distorted proportions, contorted bodies, and occasionally grotesque representations of human anatomy characterize the art of Mannerism. The point here was not to imitate a real model in strictly naturalistic fashion, but rather to achieve extreme expressivity by way of form, lighting, and color. While the average human physique conforms to a ratio of 1:7 (head length to body length), the Mannerists increased this ratio to between 1:9 and 1:11. In so doing, they made a mockery of all the proportions that defined the prevailing bodily ideal. Alongside its other precursors, Michelangelo embodied an important

point of reference. His ideal of a powerful and dynamic body ended up being taken to occasionally unrecognizable extremes. Jacopo Tintoretto was among those who realized this distorted Mannerist ideal in the context of nude drawings: with their exaggerated depiction of pronounced muscle groups, Tintoretto's nudes did true justice to the descriptive epithet *un sacco di noce*—a sack full of nuts.

Under the Skin

The term *écorché* denotes the depiction of a human body without skin, its muscles and sinews laid bare. While this French term dates back to the 18th century, the earliest depictions of a “muscle man” with his skin peeled off appear as early as the Renaissance. With that period's resurgence of interest in the ancient world and its classical ideal of the body, interest in human anatomy also grew. Early on, artists such as Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci dissected corpses in order to obtain a wellfounded understanding of the human body's anatomical structure and the functioning of joints, muscles, and bones. In their drawings, these artists strove to reconcile the findings of such study with their observations from living models. Artistic *écorchés* went on to see increasing use in medical training, as well, from the 17th century onward.

Adriaen de Vries: Suffering More Beautifully

Dutch sculptor Adriaen de Vries, a pupil of Giambologna, was a representative of late Mannerism and simultaneously a pioneer of Baroque sculpture. The bronze sculpture of Christ at the Column is an outstanding example of de Vries' conception of the body. The muscular figure of the flagellant stands in a casual pose before the torture stake, which has been transformed into an antique-style column. Here, de Vries takes the classical engaged leg-free leg *contrapposto* motif to the extreme, creating the impression of lively motion despite a static standing posture.

Its body of a hero—unblemished by any depiction of wounds—puts it at odds with the subject matter of the martyred Messiah. In this respect, De Vries' rendering of Christ at the Column recalls the Michelangesque nude with its idealized portrayal of the beautiful but suffering body in depictions of the dead Christ.

Rembrandt, the Anti-Michelangelo, or: The Naked Truth

Like Michelangelo, Rembrandt worked according to nature. But unlike the Renaissance master, who idealized the male nude as muscular and athletic, Rembrandt was an adherent of merciless realism. Rembrandt's departure from the ancient ideal that Michelangelo had upheld amounted to an act of resistance against the canon established by the great Florentine. His depictions of the naked body diverge quite decidedly from all classical notions of what is beautiful. Rembrandt's naturalistic image of the body represents an extreme counterposition—more or less that of an “anti-Michelangelo.” His male nudes are not muscular athletes but lanky young men, while his female figures are women with proportions that did not conform to the ideal. Rembrandt's true-to-nature depictions of the human body met with a lack of understanding even in his own day. The art criticism of that time, dominated as it was by classicist norms, even declared his figures to be of base ugliness. By staging human beings in all their weakness and with all coincidences of appearance, Rembrandt fought against the flawless human ideal of the ancients and ultimately against the Michelangelesque canon.

The Strongest Man, a Demigod

The Farnese Hercules is one of the most famous examples of ancient sculpture. This fascinatingly naturalistic portrayal shows not an active warrior but instead a muscular hero tired from his labors, resting in deep thought. Hercules leans with his muscular left arm on his club, which is draped with the pelt of the Nemean lion he slew. In his right hand, rested behind his back, he holds three golden apples stolen from the garden of the Hesperides. In 1546, this sculpture—after a copy of a Hellenistic original—with its height of 3.17 meters was found in the ruins of the Baths of Caracalla in Rome and placed in the Palazzo Farnese.

The Farnese Hercules, as the epitome of the strong male body, gave rise to its own type where the representation of this demigod is concerned. The ancient Hercules sculpture being recommended as an object of study in artists' treatises and guidebooks. The most famous later renditions are those by the Dutch artists Hendrick Goltzius and Peter Paul Rubens. Here, however, it was no longer Michelangelesque study of human anatomy based on a living model that was important, but rather orientation toward a famous model from antiquity.

La serpentinata: Equally Beautiful from All Sides

In principle, visibility from all sides is an artistic concept that is reserved for the three-dimensional, for sculpture. Ever since the Renaissance, this virtue has been a point of argument in the debate over which artistic genre could be viewed as preeminent. Michelangelo was among those who spoke out in favor of sculpture—and the highest claim in this regard was raised by the *figura serpentinata* style developed in his artistic wake. A single figure or group of figures developed according to this concept should invite to walk around it, offering a thrilling and dynamic impression from every perspective.

Giambologna's *Rape of a Sabine Woman*—named for an episode from Roman mythology—is considered a prime example of this style. It was with the utmost technical perfection that the sculptor carved these three tightly entwined figures, who twist weightlessly upward around their own axis, from a single block of marble. 1583 saw the work installed in the Loggia dei Lanzi in Florence, where it was enthusiastically received by the general public. Imitations of the sculpture soon appeared in the form of numerous copies and casts.

“Michelangesque,” or: The Canon in Full Bloom

Even a full two hundred years after Michelangelo's death, the canon of the idealized nude marched onward through the Age of Enlightenment. The writings of Johann Joachim Winckelmann catalyzed that era's interest in antiquity—and with the increased enthusiasm for the ideal of beauty realized in ancient sculptures, the Michelangesque canon once more came into view. In artists' training and particularly in the discipline of life drawing, the 18th century saw the ideal of the classically beautiful figure upheld. The most outstanding painters of their day, among them Anton Raphael Mengs and Pompeo Girolamo Batoni, attempted to strike a balance between ancient perfection and the study of nature. Michelangelo's influence can be clearly recognized in the bodily tension, inner exertion, and dynamism of their figures, which remind one of his masterful drawings for the Battle of Cascina and the frescoes for the Sistine Chapel ceiling. The canonical body ideal by which they are inhabited identifies them as part of Michelangelo's legacy.

Rubens, or Michelangelo's Return

Like many other artists, Peter Paul Rubens traveled to Italy for study purposes following his apprenticeship. He visited Mantua, Florence, Venice, Genoa and Rome between 1600 and 1608, during which time he was particularly influenced by the art of Michelangelo. A nude

study of a man in a bentover posture, for instance, attests to Rubens' engagement with Michelangelo's ideal of the body. His interest in Michelangelo is also borne witness by copies of the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel. Moreover, Rubens acquired drawings by the master that are held by the Albertina Museum today. Most of these are nude studies, which represented the aspect of Michelangelo's work that Rubens particularly admired.

Although the late 16th century saw the Counter-Reformation initially reject the achievements of the Renaissance and Humanism, among them particularly Michelangelo's work, the rise of the Jesuits reversed this situation. Painting was to now also appeal to the heart and to all of the senses, affording artists undreamt-of possibilities. It is thus that the prevailing doctrinal style was superseded by an art both emotional and overwhelming, which Rubens viewed as having been realized to perfection in Michelangelo's oeuvre.

Albrecht Dürer: The Body, Measured and Planned

Albrecht Dürer's quest in search of the ideal human physique capable of being measured is a story of failure. To Dürer, the foundation of all art consisted in virtuosity, the study of nature, and mastery of theoretical rules. It followed from this precept that every artistic process would require not only skill but also knowledge—namely that canon formed by his own and others' writings. In this, Dürer had an enduring influence on the humanistic idea of the *Pictor doctus*, the learned painter.

In Dürer's oeuvre, the period after 1500 sees study of the human body via direct observation joined by the idea of human beings' construction according to measure and plan. Based on his analysis of human proportions, he attempted to develop a set of rules for perfect portrayal. Dürer's efforts to arrive at what he referred to as the human being drawn "according to measurement" climaxed around 1513, but it was in fact several decades that he spent assembling the materials for his *Four Books on Human Proportions*—whose publication in 1528 he did not live to see.

Though Dürer placed himself firmly in the tradition of authors from the ancient world and from Italy in his writings, he soon recognized this tradition's unsuitability for artistic practice. His 1504 engraving *Adam and Eve* was to remain the only work in which he actually followed his own rules—for ultimately, nature would remain the guiding principle in which all art had its origin: "Whosoever can extract it, has it".

The Female Body and Male Terror of Witches

The traditional image of the witch as a hideous old woman who lives alone in the forest dates back to 19th century portrayals such as those in the fairytales of the Brothers Grimm. However, the witch as such is a far older figure. In 1486, the so-called *Hammer of Witches* (*Malleus maleficarum*), a treatise by the Alsatian inquisitor Heinrich Kramer that equated witches with Satanic demons, was published in Speyer. It is but one example of the panic around witches and the resulting witch hunts that spread across Germany during the second half of the 15th century, thus reaching the cultural milieu of Albrecht Dürer and Hans Baldung Grien. Amidst the persecution of supposed witches, places created specifically for and led by women were suspiciously watched. This phenomenon was fueled by general skepticism regarding women's independence and selfdetermination that stemmed not least from that era's incomprehension of female desire and sexuality.

Woman, the Unknown Being

It was during the fifteenth century that artists began establishing depictions of the nude female body in their works. Though live models were used for this purpose, portrayals of the female physique were simultaneously oriented toward the ideals that these artists perceived as having been realized in works from antiquity. This turn toward drawing women in a state of undress and studying the naked female figure did not entail the increased perception of women as individuals. Michelangelo, still entirely in keeping with medieval tradition, depicted the female nude only when he had to. The female type that he employed was developed with reference to male models, for example seen in the Sibyls on the Sistine Chapel ceiling. Despite or perhaps precisely because of this, it did indeed go on to affect subsequent generations of artists.

The woman thus remained "terra incognita," the dark side of the Moon, with her naked body continuing to function as a locus of various imputations: in depictions of beings such as goddesses or nymphs, the female physique was idealized and placed in proximity to the ancient world rather than to its model's personality. And by the same token, the naked woman's defamation as a witch, whore, or temptress also served to ensure a sense of distance.

The Birth of Venus

During the Middle Ages, female nudity was essentially proscribed in visual media. The only unclothed female figures that medieval painters and sculptors could hardly avoid depicting were Eve in Paradise and the female dead arisen on Judgment Day. But with the Renaissance, portrayals of the naked Venus—already regarded as a symbol of earthly love and beauty in ancient times—returned to Western art. This development went hand in hand with excavation projects in which ancient sculptures, most of them Roman copies of Greek originals, were extracted from their eras' cultural detritus. These efforts also brought to light a second ancient type of nude Venus, shown crouching during her bath. It is thought to be a creation of the Hellenistic sculptor Doidalses and was to serve as a model for numerous artists.

To the Fairest One, or the Judgment of Paris

According to ancient myth, an argument broke out between the three goddesses Juno, Minerva, and Venus over which of the three was the fairest. Zeus, who did not care to judge, delegated the decision to Paris, Prince of Troy. Paris ultimately decided in favor of Venus, since she promised him marriage to Helen, the fairest mortal woman. But since Helen was already married to Menelaus, the King of Sparta, Paris's decision had dire consequences. While the conflict between the three goddesses had been resolved, what followed was the outbreak of the Trojan War. Scenes from Greek mythology were frequently used by artists as opportunities to place the female nude at the center of their works. Subjects such as the Judgment of Paris legitimized the nakedness of the female protagonists—and in this case, the aspect of males judging the female body is more than merely an indirect theme.

Male Fear of Female Sexuality

From the late Middle Ages onward, the theme of the hermit Anthony's temptation was used to associate people's fear of their own sexual urges with fear of the opposite sex and especially the female sex. Similar ideas underlie The Old Testament story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife: she attempts to seduce God-fearing young Joseph, who flees—whereupon the rejected woman accuses him of attempted rape. Rembrandt portrays this scene with Joseph turning away with the woman, who grasps at his robe. Charles André van Loo's work, as well, shows the escaping Joseph held fast while desperately pleading with God for

fortitude. In 1846, August Pettenkofen addresses in a similar vein its protagonist's fear of feminine sexuality: Brunner, shown in a bedroom with his wife, fails to deliver the sexual performance that is demanded of him.

Rembrandt's Joseph will not; Van Loo's Joseph must not; Pettenkofen's Monsignore Brunner simply cannot—and viewed from a presentday perspective, the third work provides clear indication of just how hard it was for nineteenth century men to deal with women's incipient emancipation.

All Beginnings Are Naked: The Academy and the Nude

The naked male body in keeping with Michelangelo's example dominated the general notion of the ideal nude until far into the 18th century. It also found its way into academic teaching. Students first, however, had to prove themselves in easier disciplines such as drawing after graphic images as well as casts of classical models. Only those who did so were then permitted to draw nudes in specially furnished halls.

The main idea was to present varied positions with the help of sticks, ropes, or cushions in order to constantly challenge students with new tasks, in the process also giving them an opportunity to compile studies for later pictorial compositions. As is the case with many of Michelangelo's works on paper, the media used to draw were soft, warmtoned red chalk, black chalk, and charcoal. Until far into the 19th century, male nude models were considered unobjectionable since the mature male body was said to be incapable of evoking erotic desire. The naked female body, on the other hand, continued to be studied at academies using plaster casts based on works from ancient times.

Egon Schiele: The Ugly Nude

In 1910, Schiele departed from prevailing conventions of portraiture and devoted himself to the uninhibited exploration his own identity through drawing. He set out in search of self-knowledge in countless self-portraits, trying out numerous roles and emotional states on his face and body. In this, his naked body became an expressive locus of enactment. He sought out instances of ugliness, portraying himself as an emaciated figure with long, twisted limbs and amputated hands and feet— a cripple making strange and hideous faces. He thus put his fear and loneliness, his rage, drivenness, arrogance, and sexuality on full display in all of its facets, doing so in poses pathologized by society.

Schiele also depicted female sexuality in a radically modern light. Following centuries of disparaging or idealized attributions, he gives rise here to an unprejudiced vision of the naked woman, who—in contrast to women portrayed by Klimt—does not seem to withdraw into herself with closed eyes. Instead, she gazes unwaveringly at the artist. It is an encounter between two people on an equal footing.

Gustav Klimt, or: The Secessionist Cult of Beauty

Gustav Klimt's masterful art of the line revealed itself as early as his 1880s works of near-photorealistic precision. The mid-1890s then witnessed a transition to Symbolism, and it was during the years around 1900 that his drawings' reached a maximum of curvilinearity. Klimt's motifs were almost exclusively female, and the Fin de Siècle's prevailing image of women finds its ultimate expression in his *femme fragile*: weak, lost in reverie, with a weary gaze or closed eyes, at a distance to life and powerless to take part in real life. Especially in preparation for *Medicine*, one of his "Faculty Paintings", Klimt produced countless nude studies that explored the great themes of human existence and how they might be drawn. He ultimately spent years preoccupied with how to devise this painting's "floating" figures—and with these disconnected, free-floating bodies, Klimt elevated the female nude to a different, ethereal dimension, transforming it into the image of a spiritualized being rather than of a woman of autonomous sexuality.

Press images

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Michelangelo Buonarroti
Male Nude Seen from Rear
c. 1504
20 x 27 cm
Black chalk, heightened with white
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna



Michelangelo Buonarroti
Seated Nude Youth and Two Arm Studies
1510/11
28 x 19 cm
Red chalk, heightened with white
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna



Michelangelo Buonarroti
Studies for the Libyan Sibyl
c. 1510/11
Red chalk
29 x 21 cm
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York,
Purchase, Joseph Pulitzer Bequest, 1924, inv. no.
24.197.2
Photo: © bpk / The Metropolitan Museum of Art



Raffaello Santi
A Young man Carrying an Old Man
(Aeneas and Anchises)
1514
Red chalk
30 x 17 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna



Albrecht Dürer
Four nude women, 1497
Copper engraving
19 x 14 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna



Hans Baldung gen. Grien
New Year's Greeting with Three Witches
1514
Pen and black ink, gray wash, heightened with white, on brown prepared paper
31 x 21 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna



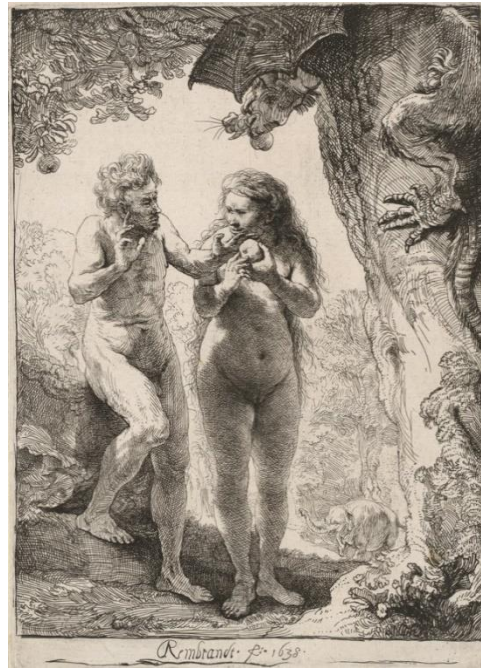
Ugo da Carpi
Diogenes
c. 1527
Chiaroscuro woodcut from four blocks
48 x 35 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna



Hendrick Goltzius
The Great Hercules
1589
57 x 41 cm
Engraving
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna



Albrecht Dürer
Adam and Eve
1504
Engraving
27 x 21 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna



Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn
Adam and Eve (The Fall of Man)
1638
Etching
16 x 12 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna



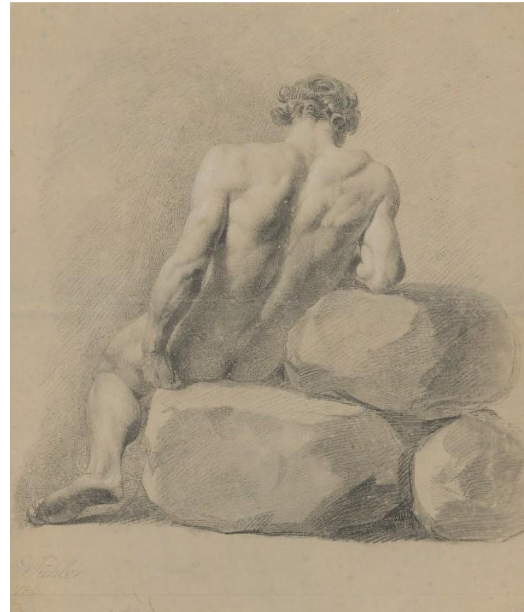
Peter Paul Rubens
Study of a Male Nude Leaning Forward
c. 1613
Black and red chalk heightened with white
30 x 17 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna



Rembrandt Harmensz. van Rijn
Naked Woman Seated on a Mound
c. 1631
Etching and engraving
18 x 16 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna



Charles-Joseph Natoire
Bacchante with a Tambourine
c. 1740
Black and red chalk, heightened with
white gouache, brown wash
28 x 21 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna



Johann Peter Pichler
Male Nude Seen from Rear
1789
Black chalk, wash, heightened with white,
on gray paper
50 x 42 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna



Gustav Klimt
Study for the Left Figure of "Three
Gorgons" in the Beethoven Frieze
1901
Black chalk, on paper
45 x 32 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna



Egon Schiele
Nude Self-Portrait, Grimacing
1910
pencil, charcoal, gouache, on paper
56 x 37 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna



Egon Schiele
Nude Girl with Folded Arms
1910
Black chalk, watercolor, on paper
45 x 28 cm
The ALBERTINA Museum, Vienna