
The Nude: Art from the Tate Collection

It was the invention of clothes and certainly not nature's imperative, that made "private parts" private. The things we do not usually see. The Nude: Art from the Tate Collection follows the nude through two hundred years of art and as the title suggests, draws on a single source – the collection of the Tate. It is a spectacular thematic tour de force through a mélange of major art movements, including romanticism, cubism, expressionism, realism, surrealism and feminism.

More than one hundred artworks are divided into eight chronologically arranged sections: The Historical Nude, The Private Nude, The Modern Nude, The Real and Surreal Bodies, Paint as Flesh, The Erotic Nude, Body Politics and The Vulnerable Body, intended to reveal the perception of bodies through time and to raise questions about beauty, desire, truth, mortality, equality and power. The highlight of the exhibition is Rodin's iconic marble sculptural blend of eroticism and idealism, The Kiss in the Erotic Nude section, with its fluid, smooth modeling, the dynamic composition and the charming theme. Picasso's portraits never disappoint and the depiction of his mistress Marie-Therese Walter and his redefinition of the human figure is not an exception: In line with the school of the British Vorticists, he channels the signs of their times into something dynamic, angular and at times completely abstract.

The theme of Harem girl or odalisque pervade the works by Matisse, while Pierre Bonnard's rich chromatic range with his cropping of figures lend an interesting and different perspective, accentuated by his focus shifting the main incidents to occur at the edges of the canvas. Francis Bacon's expressively brushed and suggestively distorted nudes following the suicide of his lover, Georg Dyer, and Lucian Freud's naked portraits dominate the Paint as Flesh section. Bacon's Triptych feels like a memento mori with Dyer struggling in vain to survive and with what death has not already consumed seeping incontinently out of the figures as their shadowblood.

Body Politics presents artworks from the 1970s, when the unclothed body in art became a political statement as feminist writers and artists began to question the imbalance of power in traditional nudes and thereby challenging stereotypes. The Vulnerable Body features more recent artworks with a focus on vulnerability, imperfection and a sense of mortality. Photographs of women holding their babies shortly after giving birth serves as the reminder that the way all of us enter the realms of this world would have made us prime candidates for the exhibition.

Ron Mueck's astonishingly lifelike verisimilitude, the nearly three-meter high Wild man looks so uncomfortable in his own (fore-)skin as he would like nothing more than join you as we exit through the exhibition's gift shop – a display of anxiety, intimidation and vulnerability as a result

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of objectification. A turning of the tables. The journey through human emotion and representation of its physical incarnation in its purest state is curated by Justin Paton, head curator of international art at the Art Gallery of NSW, in tandem with Emma Chambers, curator of modern British art at the Tate. They have set out to show that the nude has changed dramatically over the last two hundred years with the constant being that the depiction of the model has always been closely tied to social, political and personal relationships between the artist and his object.

A constant that is reinforced through the segmentation of the exhibition, which underlines the continuity of the evolution of the artists' engagement with the respective models.

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