

TEACHERS: RESOURCES AND DEMONSTRATIONS

Self Guided Tour For High School Students Grades 9-12

Odd Bodies: Finding them in the National Gallery of Canada

Introduction

Welcome to this exploration of the human figure. By looking closely at four artworks in the Gallery's collection, you will discover how artists through time have represented the body and expressed the values of their society.

Why does the human figure have such an important status in art?

- It is the most difficult form to draw accurately.
- The body is very important to our sense of self-identity.
- The representation of the human figure reveals a culture's general attitudes towards beauty, sexuality, and man's relationship with nature, as well as its belief's about decency and morality, and its assumptions about social class.
- What else do you think?

In the galleries

Find four artworks that represent different aspects of the body. Then answer the questions.

1. Choose an artwork in the **Medieval gallery (C201)**. **What can the way in which the human figure is shown tell us about artists and society during the medieval period? Can you find an artwork that has most or all of the criteria listed below?** (see next page)

Artwork #1

Artist:

Title:

Date:

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- There is a reference to religion.
- The artist focuses on the formal elements of the face (line, shape, colour).
- There is no interest in the realistic depiction of the human figure.
- This artist uses rich colours and decoration to present the figure.
- This artist does not integrate the human figure into the background.
- Anything else?

Draw a thumbnail sketch

2. Find another artwork that you like in the **Renaissance galleries (C202, C203)**. **What can the depiction of the human figure tell us about the values of society during the Renaissance? Can you find an artwork that has most or all of the criteria listed below?**

Artwork # 2

Artist:

Title:

Date:

- This artist shows the body in a natural-looking way.
- The body is in perfect proportion.
- This artist is very interested in natural beauty.
- This artist is inspired by Greek and Roman sculpture.
- This artist fully understands the body.
- The nude is an important subject for this artist.

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- The human figure is well integrated into the landscape.
- Anything else?

Draw a thumbnail sketch

3. Choose your favourite artwork in the **Baroque galleries (C204, C205)**. What can this artwork tell us about the interests of artists during the Baroque period? Can you find an artwork that has most or all of the criteria listed below?

Artwork #3

Artist:

Title:

Date:

- Anatomical illustration is very important.
- Figures show muscles.
- Light and shadow create dramatic effects.
- The diagonal and curving lines create energy.
- Emotion is expressed on the faces.
- The bodies are exaggerated.
- The artist shows the texture of the skin and clothes

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Draw a thumbnail sketch

Optional Question

4. Find another representation of the human figure in the **20th century galleries (C214, C215, C216)**.

Artwork #4

Artist:

Title:

Date:

Draw a thumbnail sketch

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How many idealized representations of the human figure can you find in these galleries? Why do you think the representation of the idealized human figure is less important for artists at this time?

Select and prioritize answers from the list below and add your own thoughts.

- This artist has a complete knowledge of anatomy and is no longer challenged to represent the body.
- This artist is more interested in stylization and abstraction in art.
- This artist has turned to primitive cultures for inspiration.
- This artist has lived during times of strife and war and therefore questions the role of the figure in art.
- This artist prefers to focus on the disembodied parts of the body (fragments).
- This artist prefers to focus on the psychological aspects of the sitter.
- The Second World War heightened the anxieties experienced by this artist.
- This artist represents his/her own emotional states in the artwork.
- Anything else?

After your gallery visit

Select one artwork from your visit to the Gallery and research it on the [CyberMuse](#) website. Then answer the following questions:

Imagine you are part of the events unfolding in this work. What would you say about the lives of the character/s?

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How are emotions conveyed by body language?

What personality traits and habits does the painter reveal about the people portrayed?

In the studio

Create two self-portrait drawings: one very realistic, the other very idealistic.