

CORPUS  
THE BODY UNBOUND

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16 / 06 / 2017 - 16 / 07 / 2017

This exhibition is dedicated to the memory of our tutor, Giles Waterfield. His intelligence, warmth, and generosity continue to inspire us all.

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Organised by the Students of the MA Curating the Art Museum programme 2016-2017:

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## INTRODUCTION

*CORPUS: The Body Unbound* has been created by a group of eleven student curators. The exhibition takes the body as its subject, looking at how artists have engaged with the human form, in states of liberation and limitation, across the centuries. In curating the show, we have all brought our own experience and ideas to assemble a body of works: a corpus.

Our brief was to respond to *Bloomsbury Art & Design*, a display showcasing the artistic output of the Bloomsbury Group, which operated in the early decades of the twentieth-century. Much of the work of the Bloomsbury artists presented a challenge to social and artistic constraints. Many of their designs depicted the human figure as a fluid and free form. For the Bloomsbury Group, the body was a source of limitless potential, a vehicle for expressing utopian desires. Other artists at the time, such as Wyndham Lewis, took a more pessimistic view of the human form, seeing it as flawed, mechanised, and ultimately restrictive.

The body has provided a metaphor for artists for such divergent views of humanity across time and into the present day. The human form in art transcends a simple binary of either hope or despair, often coming to represent both. In responding to a particular moment in art history, we have taken a trans-historical approach, drawing objects from The Courtauld Gallery collection, as well as works dating from the mid twentieth-century to the present day from the Arts Council Collection.

How do we consider our own forms in space? Through curating *CORPUS*, we have become increasingly aware of our own bodies, both within the gallery walls and beyond. This exhibition is a record of our own emergence as a student corpus.

*Students of the MA Curating the Art Museum*

What follows is a dialogue between two viewers as they move around the gallery space.

**A:** As I walk from the Bloomsbury Art & Design display into the first room of CORPUS, the connections are immediately visible. *Design with Red Male Figure* by Duncan Grant - a member of the Bloomsbury Group - stretches the human form to its limits, liberating it within a free-flowing design. But the opposite is true of *Figure in Profile*, a drawing by Grant's contemporary, Wyndham Lewis. In this work, the figure appears trapped, merging with the landscape.

**B:** It's disturbing to see this angulated form, more mechanised than human. It seems in keeping with Lewis's view of mankind: that despite the apparent progress of modernity, humanity was yet to overcome its more base, 'primitive' nature.

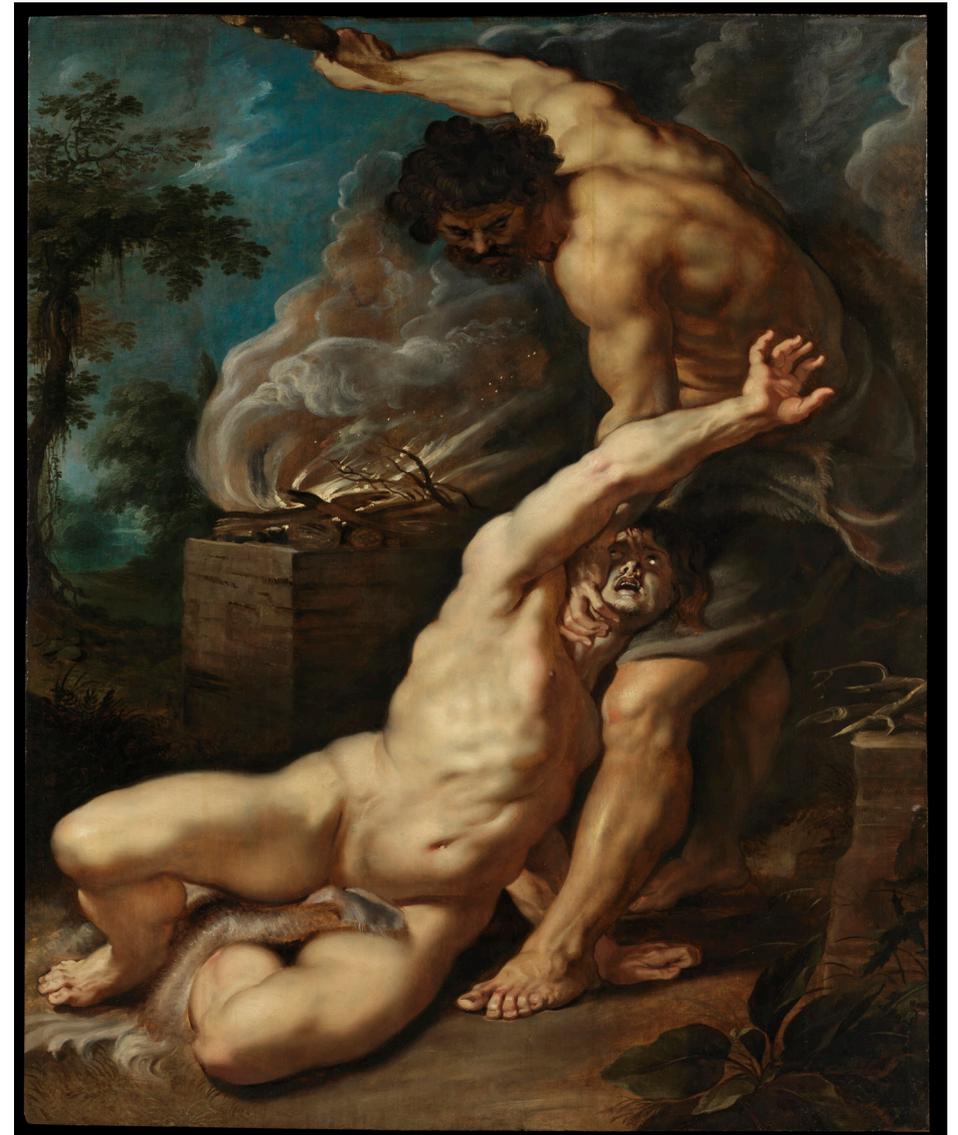
**A:** The distorted body depicted by Lewis contrasts with the fluid figure of Saleem Arif Quadri's *Pressed against Good and Evil*, which appears trapped – or is it flying?

**B:** I see the figure as floating. It swims between a fish and a fly, both of which have symbolic significance in Sufi and Christian religion.

**A:** 'Good and Evil' could be an alternative title for Rubens's *Cain Slaying Abel*, which depicts the moment when Cain is about to strike the final blow in the Old Testament story of fratricide. It invokes our fear of ever being in that position -

**B:** Of complete vulnerability -

**A:** Of being at the mercy of someone else, particularly someone you love. Rubens's incredible ability to depict the human form with such mastery and realism brings this scene of betrayal vividly to life.



Peter Paul Rubens, *Cain Slaying Abel*, 1608-09  
© The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London

**B:** The theme of falling from grace continues in Rubens's *Atlas Supporting the Heavens*. Here is the titan of Greek mythology, who tried unsuccessfully to overthrow the king of the gods, and was condemned to carry the weight of the world on his shoulders. The mythological narrative expresses a more human experience of physical punishment and resilience.

**A:** Atlas's physique is muscular; powerful and virile.

His body has been shaped by the heavy burden of supporting the world.

**B:** Meanwhile, it's the body's vulnerability that underscores Henry Moore's *Shelter Drawing*, which depicts a group taking refuge from bombing during the Second World War.

**A:** Huddled together underground, the figures seem to gain their strength from one another.



Henry Moore, *Shelter Drawing*, 1942  
© The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London/Estate of the artist, reproduced by permission of The Henry Moore Foundation



Wolfgang Tillmans, *Dan*, 2008

Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London  
© Wolfgang Tillmans, courtesy Maureen Paley, London

**B:** And Wolfgang Tillmans's *Dan* brings ideas of strength and fragility together. In Tillmans's photograph, we see an idealised male body, muscular and defined. Yet the perspective is ambiguous. The figure's fingers could be brushing the ground, or pressed to the wall.

It's a piece that changes with your reading of its composition.

**A:** Though this image harks back to classical sculpture of Greek gods, it shows a specific person: 'Dan.' He seems both powerful and vulnerable, subject to gravity.



Tsugumi Ota, *The Death of Hyacinthus*, 1990  
Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London © the artist.

**B:** But the gods can be vulnerable too. Tsugumi Ota's *The Death of Hyacinthus* is a tragic depiction of love lost through mortality.

Hyacinthus, a mortal, has been struck a fatal blow by a discus, thrown by his lover the grief-stricken god Apollo.

**A:** But surely this is also a hopeful work? As Hyacinthus lies dying, Apollo transforms him into a hyacinth, a flower that returns every spring. Through the loss of his mortal body, Hyacinthus gains eternal life.

**B:** With this gesture, we can sense Apollo's love for Hyacinthus. It's a very tender piece.

**A:** The act of transforming or reproducing the human form is shown in Bruce Bernard's photograph of *Leigh Bowery and Nicola Bateman Posing for 'And the Bridegroom' (1)*, which shows two models in Lucian Freud's studio.

The apparently restful scene depicted within Freud's painting is at odds with the stiffly-held poses of the sitters in the photograph. Here the bodies seem segmented, almost like mannequins.

**B:** And the human form is broken down even further in Dubois's *Sheet of Figure Studies*. This is a highly unusual image; limbs float across the page, untethered to a body. In its finished detail, this could be an anatomical or scientific drawing - except for the complete figure in the corner, which recalls Masaccio's Adam banished from paradise.



Eduard Dubois,  
*Sheet of Figure Studies with Legs and Arms*,  
© The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London

**A:** The consequences of Adam's original sin can be seen close by, in the Passion Diptych, an ivory sculpture from fourteenth-century Paris.

**B:** This was originally a devotional object, to be 'read' like a book from bottom to top. Viewers were intended to imagine themselves as part of the Biblical narrative. In the left-hand middle register we see Judas committing suicide. He has hanged and stabbed himself, a tangled mass of intestines spilling from his body. This image of Judas carved within the ivory, itself an organic material, is a tangible depiction of despair.

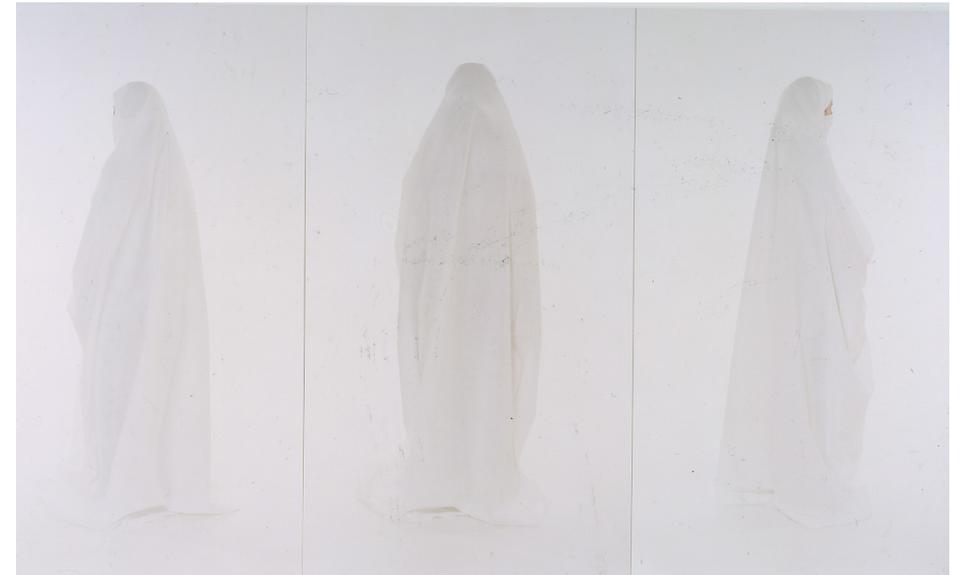


Paris Workshop,  
*Passion Diptych*, circa 1350-75  
© The Samuel Courtauld Trust,  
The Courtauld Gallery, London

**A:** From the diptych - the oldest object in *CORPUS* - you can look across to one of the most recent works, Sarah Lucas's *NUD CYCLADIC 7*.

**B:** To me, the two work together as a strange pair: one of flesh, one of bone. Lucas's sculpture suggests both a figural silhouette, and something more visceral. It's a tubular mass, barely contained by its skin.

**A:** It hints at ancient sculpture too - I think of monolithic marble forms despite the spongy softness. And it seems uncannily human.



Zineb Sedira, *Self Portraits or the Virgin Mary* (From the 'Self Portrait' Series), 2000  
Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London © the artist.

**B:** In this, the exhibition's second room, the lighter wall colour and larger scale of the pieces open up the space. I feel more 'immersed' in here, among this group of contemporary works with figures closer to my own scale.

**A:** We're drawn into the space, like a moth to a light, by Zineb Sedira's *Self Portraits or the Virgin Mary*. The work's sheer luminosity pulls us in.

**B:** When I saw the covered female body in this triptych, I automatically assumed that this was a Muslim woman. But when I saw the work's title I had to think again.

**A:** Sedira reminds us that women are veiled in Christianity as well as in Islam. Through the conscious creation of a beautiful image, the artist's work both encourages us to look and challenges us.

**B:** The female form dominates in this space. Rebecca Warren's *Regine* re-imagines the bronze nude in art. This reminds me of other works in the same medium I've seen at The Courtauld, by Degas and Rodin.

**A:** Warren recasts and reworks remnants of previous bronzes, with the final outcome formed according to chance. It seems to me that a distorted body emerges in this sculpture, frozen in motion.



Rebecca Warren,  
*Regine*, 2007

Arts Council  
Collection,  
Southbank  
Centre,  
London  
© Rebecca Warren,  
courtesy  
Maureen Paley,  
London



Claudette Johnson, *Trilogy (Part Two) Woman in Black*, 1982-86  
Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London © the artist.

Quotation from *Claudette Johnson: Pushing Back the Boundaries* by Maude Saulter, 1990

**B:** Claudette Johnson's trilogy presents a direct challenge to institutions of Western art history showing predominantly white bodies.

**A:** The artist says something really powerful about this:

"The Blackwomen in my drawings are monoliths. Larger than life versions of women, invisible to white eyes..." The subject's presence is celebratory, assertive. She is not performing any consciously rebellious act, but is simply being, across all three pieces of the trilogy.

**B:** There's a trio of triptychs in this room. The last is John Coplans's *Self Portrait (Upside Down No. 1)*.

**A:** When we came upon this work at the Arts Council Collection stores, none of us was expecting anything like it. For me, the huge scale and upside-down-ness of this work meant that it took a few moments to understand what I saw. But once seen as a body, every detail became completely clear to me; the skin's softness, and the hairs covering it.

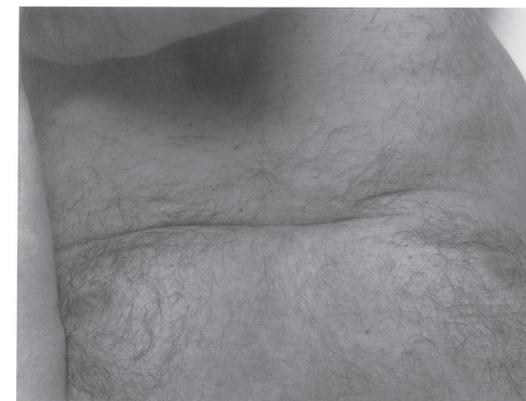
**B:** Despite the magnified scale, as a self portrait it's a very intimate work.

**A:** Or maybe it's because of the scale?

**B:** Donald Rodney's *In the House of My Father* also goes far beyond human proportions, which lends a sense of immense power to the work. What is he holding?

**A:** The tiny 'house' in his hand is made from fragments of the artist's own skin, removed during one of the many operations he had to treat sickle cell anaemia, the disease that he eventually died from. Here, the house stands in for the whole body.

**B:** The sculpture is so small compared to the hand, and it's being held gently. To me, this image alters the dynamic of power between Rodney and his illness, returning it to the artist.



John Coplans, *Self Portrait (Upside Down No. 1)*, 1992  
© The John Coplans Trust  
Courtesy Galerie Nordenhake Berlin/Stockholm  
Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London

**A:** Suffering is an inescapable element of being human - this truth underscores the exhibition. The suffering body has always been a subject of art, in mythological and religious works.

**B:** But limitation doesn't always constrain. Sometimes, I see artists as inventing their own rules of making, which results in new kinds of figuration.

**A:** And many of the works focus on artists' identities and their own bodies, celebrating and affirming a strong sense of self.

**B:** I keep returning to how my own lived experience of being in a body is transformed through these works of art. For me, they become an expression of - what's it called -

**A:** 'Hope?'

**B:** Yes exactly - hope!

## LIST OF WORKS

### From The Courtauld Gallery:

*Design with Red Male Figure*, 1913-15  
Duncan Grant (1885-1978)  
Gouache on paper  
59 x 44 cm

*Figure in Profile*, 1912  
Wyndham Lewis (1882-1957)  
Graphite, pen and ink and gouache on paper  
21 x 24 cm

*Untitled (Female Figures Imprisoned)*, 1913  
Helen Saunders (1885-1963)  
Pen and ink on paper  
16 x 19 cm

*Shelter Drawing*, 1942  
Henry Moore (1898-1986)  
Charcoal, watercolour on paper  
55 x 24 cm

*Atlas Supporting the Heavens*, 1635-40  
Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640)  
Oil on panel  
20 x 28 cm

*Cain Slaying Abel*, 1608-09  
Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640)  
Oil on panel  
118 x 154 cm

*Sheet of Figure Studies with Legs and Arms*  
Eduard Dubois (1619-1697)  
Pen and ink on paper  
42 x 30 cm

*Passion Diptych*, circa 1350-75  
Paris Workshop  
Ivory  
19 x 21 cm

*Athlete*  
Théodore Géricault (1791-1824)  
Pen and ink on paper  
14 x 9 cm

Written by Elizabeth Brown and Elizabeth Shoshany Anderson, from a series of discussions with students of the MA Curating the Art Museum

## From The Arts Council Collection:

*Dan*, 2008  
Wolfgang Tillmans (b. 1968)  
C-type print  
40 x 30 cm

*The Death of Hyacinthus*, 1990  
Tsumugi Ota (b. 1951)  
Woodcut print  
93 x 62 cm

*Leigh Bowery and Nicola Bateman  
Posing for 'And the  
Bridegroom' (1)*, 1993  
Bruce Bernard (1928-2000)  
C-type print  
30 x 45 cm

*Trilogy (Part One) Woman  
in Blue*, 1982-6  
Claudette Johnson (b. 1959)  
Watercolour, pastel and  
gouache on paper  
153 x 90 cm

*Trilogy (Part Two) Woman  
in Black*, 1982-6  
Claudette Johnson (b. 1959)  
Watercolour, pastel and  
gouache on paper  
153 x 122 cm

*Trilogy (Part Three) Woman  
in Red*, 1982-6  
Claudette Johnson (b. 1959)  
Watercolour, pastel and  
gouache on paper  
153 x 99 cm

*NUD CYCLADIC 7*, 2010  
Sarah Lucas (b. 1962)  
Tights, fluff, wire  
47 x 44 x 39 cm base  
22 x 22 x 43 cm each breeze block  
100 x 43 x 43 cm

*Self Portraits or the Virgin Mary  
(From the 'Self Portrait'  
Series)*, 2000  
Zineb Sedira (b. 1963)  
C-type photograph  
3 parts, 182 x 101 cm each

*Pressed against Good and  
Evil*, 1987  
Saleem Arif Quadri (b. 1949)  
Sand and acrylic on  
muslin-backed paper  
82 x 134 cm

*Self Portrait (Upside Down  
No. 1)*, 1992  
John Coplans (1920-2003)  
Silver gelatin print  
220 x 114 cm

*In the House of My Father*, 1997  
Donald Rodney (1961-1998)  
Photographic print on Aluminium  
153 x 122 cm

*Regine*, 2007  
Rebecca Warren (b. 1965)  
Bronze  
126 x 37 x 39 cm

This exhibition has been supported with loans from the Arts Council Collection. Founded in 1946, the Arts Council Collection is the UK's most widely circulated loan collection of modern and contemporary British art and includes important examples by all of the UK's prominent artists. For more information please see [www.artscouncilcollection.org.uk](http://www.artscouncilcollection.org.uk)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We would like to thank Argile for their generous support. The galleries have been painted with the colours Ardoise Bleue and Rose de Naples

Installation: Crown Fine Arts  
Lighting: Lightwaves Limited

Design by Elizabeth Shoshany Anderson  
Poster design by Nathan Stazicker



**Arts Council  
Collection**

**ARGILE**  
couleurs de terre



# events

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## ARTIST TALK

19 June 2017 18:00-19:30

Kenneth Clark Lecture Theatre,  
The Courtauld Institute of Art

In collaboration with the  
Sackler Research Forum

For more information visit:

[courtauld.ac.uk/corpus](http://courtauld.ac.uk/corpus)

FREE & OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

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## LUNCHTIME TALKS

13:15-13:30

Rooms 13 & 14, The Courtauld Gallery

For dates, please visit:

[courtauld.ac.uk/corpus](http://courtauld.ac.uk/corpus)

All talks in the Courtauld Gallery are  
included with your admission ticket

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The Courtauld Gallery

SOMERSET HOUSE

Strand, London WC2R 0RN

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Open daily 10:00-18:00