

# Learning Resource

CORPUS: The Body Unbound

16 June to 16 July 2017, The Courtauld Gallery



Wolfgang Tillmans, *Dan*, 2008. C-Type print, 40 x 30 cm  
Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London © Wolfgang Tillmans, courtesy  
Maureen Paley, London

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## Introduction to the Exhibition

The Courtauld Institute of Art's MA Curating the Art Museum programme presents *CORPUS: The Body Unbound*. This exhibition responds to the Gallery's special display, *Bloomsbury Art & Design*, on view in the adjacent gallery. *CORPUS* is an exhibition that explores how artists past and present have engaged with the body - the corpus - to interrogate, analyse and reimagine fundamental aspects of the human condition.

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## The Bloomsbury Group and Wyndham Lewis Connection

*Bloomsbury Art & Design* highlights works produced by The Bloomsbury Group in the Omega Workshops. Roger Fry (1866 - 1934), the artist and critic, organised exhibitions in 1910 and 1912 that introduced the British public to the works of Cézanne, Matisse, Picasso and others for the first time. Fry was the central figure that brought together a group of British intellectuals and artists - including Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell - who also admired the new styles expressed in modern European painting. This collective became known as The Bloomsbury Group after the name of the central London district where they lived and worked. In 1913 Fry opened the Omega Workshops, which functioned as a studio and store for the Bloomsbury artists to bring the avant-garde style of modern painting into the home.

The rugs, ceramics, painted furniture and design drawings on display illustrate the Group's range of artistic creativity in breaking down the boundaries between fine art and design. The Gallery's rich collection of Bloomsbury works came from Fry himself, who bequeathed his collection to the newly formed Courtauld Institute of Art upon his death in 1934.



Duncan Grant (1885-1978), *Design with red male figure*, 1913-15. Gouache on paper, 56.9 x 44.4 cm  
© The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London/1978 Estate of Duncan Grant, courtesy of Henrietta Garnett

The display highlights the Omega Workshops's innovative methods of figural representation, in which the human figure was used to express the Group's desire to break free from Edwardian societal conventions and to liberate both body and spirit. In contrast, Wyndham Lewis – a former member of the Omega Workshops – conceived of the figure as oppressed by nature and subject to physical suffering and the uncertainty caused by the increasing mechanization in society.

*CORPUS: The Body Unbound* explores how the body - the corpus - has served as a site of anxiety and optimism in art, expanding the conversation outside of Wyndham Lewis and The Bloomsbury Group. To different artists, the figure has been a site of optimism, a source of anxiety, or a symbol of limitations imposed by the self and society. The works shown are drawn from The Courtauld Gallery

collection and the Arts Council Collection, bringing historic and contemporary pieces into dialogue. Across the centuries, artists exploring the body have worked with different narratives: mythological, religious, and social. Additionally, some artists employ experimental processes to shape and form figures that are at once constrained and free.

## Works in Focus

The following section discusses four key themes in the exhibition; the duality of the human condition; the relationships between representation, identity, and the body; human mortality in religious and mythic stories; and the artistic process of creating bodily forms.

### The duality of the human condition



Saleem Arif Quadri (1949-), *Pressed Against Good and Evil*, 1987.  
Sand and acrylic on muslin-backed paper, 81.8 x 134 cm  
Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London © the artist

Born in Hyderabad, India in 1949, Saleem Arif Quadri moved to England in 1966. He studied at the Birmingham College of Art and then the Royal College of Art. Quadri works in a variety of media to question depictions of perspectives and shadows. Some of his early work explores the *Inferno* of Dante's 'The Divine Comedy.' This painting, a more recent work on muslin-backed

paper, experiments with scale and optical illusion to create a three-dimensional quality. He currently lives and works in London, England.

Like many of the artworks found in *Bloomsbury Art & Design*, this painting is extremely bold and colourful, and is particularly reminiscent of some of the bright ceramics and design drawings from the Omega Workshops.

The featureless human figure, emerging on both sides of the bowl, looks caught between a fish and a fly, either trapped or freely floating. In making this work, the artist took inspiration from Christian and Sufi traditions: the fish is a symbol for Jesus in Christianity, while it also represents the ship of life in Sufism. This work illustrates how artists have innovatively depicted the duality of the human condition (liberation and limitation) in different styles and time periods.



Duncan Grant (1885-1978), *Shutter design for 38 Brunswick Square*, 1912.  
Gouache and pencil on paper, 37.6 cm x 17.2 cm  
© The Samuel Courtauld Trust, The Courtauld Gallery, London/1978  
Estate of Duncan Grant, courtesy of Henrietta Garnett

## The relationships between representation, identity, and the body



Zineb Sedira (1963- ), *Self Portraits or the Virgin Mary* (From the 'Self Portrait' Series), 2000.  
C-type photograph, 3 parts, 182 x 101 cm each  
Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London © the artist.

Zineb Sedira was born in 1963 in Paris to Algerian parents. She studied at Central St Martin's School of Art and the Slade School of Art, later completing research studies at the Royal College of Art. Since 1997, Sedira has been making installations, photographs, videos and film. Her practice uses her own perspective and experiences to explore questions about language, transmission, memory and mobility. She currently lives and works between London, Paris and Algiers. *Self Portraits or the Virgin Mary* is a key piece in the exhibition, exploring the relationship between representation, identity, and the body. This piece allows visitors to draw connections to other works in the exhibition (for example the ivory diptych in the previous room depicting the Passion of Christ, and the trilogy of paintings by Claudette Johnson) and exposes preconceived notions of identity based on the covering of the female form. Sedira's work encourages visitors to question definitions of liberation, freedom, and repression with regard to the veil.

## Human mortality



Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), *Cain Slaying Abel*, 1608-09. Oil on panel, 117 x 154 cm

Peter Paul Rubens was born in 1577 and is celebrated as one of the greatest Flemish artists of the seventeenth century. He was an incredibly prolific and successful artist in the Baroque tradition, whose patrons included the Roman Catholic church and royalty across Europe. Rubens made this painting shortly after returning from Italy, where he was inspired by the figural sculptures of Michelangelo and the ancient Romans. Depicting the story of Cain and Abel allowed the artist to show the male figure at its most physically powerful: a killing machine. Yet, through the figures' positions and expressions, Rubens conveys the fragility that underpins this strength: human mortality, and the inevitability of pain and death.

## Artistic Process



Eduard DuBois (1619-1697), *Sheet of Figure Studies with Legs and Arms*, 17<sup>th</sup> Century. Pen and ink on paper, 41.7 x 29.5 cm

A Flemish artist born in 1619, Dubois spent much of his life in Italy where he likely made this study. This highly-finished drawing celebrates the beauty, power, and possibility of movement of the disembodied limbs shown. In the upper-left of the composition, a single figure depicted in full resembles Masaccio's depiction of Adam at the Brancacci Chapel in Florence. Banished from Eden, he mourns the end of his innocence and immortality.

## Discussion Points

- The exhibition showcases artworks across different media that deal with bodies, a topic that has preoccupied artists for centuries. How do the artists choose to depict these bodies, and how do you feel when you see these works?
- Many of the works in Room 14 feature stories about mythological heroes and religious events. Can you share a myth or legend? How would you choose to depict that story in a drawing or painting?
- One of the most difficult issues for people to grapple with is the idea of their own death. How do artists in this exhibition deal with the issues of death, getting older, and the fragility of human bodies?
- Various contemporary artists today incorporate everyday and unusual materials into their artworks. For instance, tights, fluff and wire are used to form a human figure in Sarah Lucas's *NUD CYCLADIC 7*. There is another work in the exhibition that is a similar colour and also contains an image of a coiled gut. What is that work, and what other similarities do you see between this work and *NUD CYCLADIC 7*?
- The figure shown in Wolfgang Tillman's photograph *Dan* is captured in a strange balancing position. Although the figure's face is hidden, we recognise that this is a human body before us. How is Dan standing? Where are his other limbs and how are you imagining his complete body? From what angle are we (and the artist) looking at the figure?
- Wyndham Lewis left the Omega Workshops because he had a very different artistic vision from the rest of The Bloomsbury Group. What were the two artistic visions, and why were they different? Do any other works in the exhibition seem compatible with either the Bloomsbury works or Lewis and his followers' works?

## Suggested Activities



Encourage visitors to look at other bronze artworks in the Courtauld Gallery - such as Degas's *Dancer ready to dance, right foot forward (Préparation à la danse, pied droit en avant)* (circa 1885-1890) in room 5 and Rodin's *Pas de deux B* in room 9 - to compare other artistic styles to that of *Regine* by Rebecca Warren.

Rebecca Warren (1965- ) *Regine*, 2007. Bronze, 126 x 37 x 39cm  
Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London © the artist. Acquired with funds from the McLaren Art Foundation, in association with Outset

Claudette Johnson instructed the woman in her work *Trilogy* to take up as much as room possible when posing for these drawings. Ask visitors to try and imagine themselves in the artist's studio. How would you pose if asked to take up as much room as possible? How would you proclaim your presence in a space? Take a picture to record the activity. (Share this on social media and tag #corpus.)



Claudette Johnson (1959- ), *Trilogy (Part Two) Woman in Black*, 1982-6. Watercolour, pastel and gouache on paper, 153 x 90 cm / 153 x 122 cm / 153 x 99 cm  
Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London © the artist



This piece is the product of a common artistic exercise – *cinq points* - used by the artist during his time at the *École de Beaux Arts* in Paris. The teacher put five points of ink on a piece of paper and the students were asked to connect the dots to create a figure. Prepare pieces of paper with five points randomly placed on the page and give one to each student to make their own figure.

Theodore Gericault (1791-1894), *Athlete*, c.1810-1824. Pen and ink on paper, 14.4 x 8.9 cm

Word Association: In this piece, Donald Rodney - who suffered from sickle-cell anaemia - has created a small house out of his own skin and needles to represent his body. The body is commonly referred to as a home, temple, shrine, or shelter. Complete this sentence:  
MY BODY IS A...



Donald Rodney (1961-1998), *In the House of my Father*, 1997. Photographic print on aluminium, 153 x 122 cm  
Arts Council Collection, Southbank Centre, London © the Estate of Donald G Rodney

## Glossary

*Contemporary art*: The term contemporary art is loosely used to refer to art of the present day and of the relatively recent past, of an innovatory or avant-garde nature. (TATE Website)

*Corpus*: The main body or mass of a structure. (Oxford)

*Casting*: An object made by pouring molten metal or other material into a mould. (Oxford)

*'cinq points'*: A graphic exercise used at the École de Beaux Arts in the 18th century. Teachers placed five points randomly on a page and students were asked to connect the points in the shape of a figure.

*Edwardian era*: Relating to or characteristic of the reign of King Edward VII (1901-1910). (Oxford)

*Haik*: A large wrap, typically white, worn by people from North Africa. (Oxford)

*Woodcut*: A method of relief printing from a block of wood cut along the grain. The block is carved so that an image stands out in relief. The relief image is then inked and paper placed against its surface before being run through a press. (TATE Website)

*Self-portrait*: A self-portrait is a portrait of the artist by the artist. (TATE Website)

*Atlas*: The Titan of Greek mythology who supported the heavens and whose picture appeared at the front of early atlases. (Oxford)

*Cain and Abel*: According to the Book of Genesis, Cain and Abel were the two sons of Adam and Eve. Cain was the first human born outside of Eden and Abel was the first human to die. Cain committed the first murder by killing Abel out of jealousy.

*Hyacinthus*: A beautiful boy whom the god Apollo loved but killed accidentally with a discus. From his blood Apollo caused the hyacinth flower to spring up. (Oxford)

*The Passion*: The suffering and death of Jesus. (Oxford)

