

NAKED BODIES

Teachers' Notes

Art and Design Workshops for Key Stage 5
at the Wallace Collection



Naked Bodies

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Art History Workshops for Key Stage 5 at the Wallace Collection

Naked Bodies I

During Naked Bodies I students will spend the day studying the human form and how it has been portrayed by artists, such as Titian and Boucher, in the Renaissance and the Rococo periods. In the afternoon students will put their observations into practice by drawing from a female nude life model.

Naked Bodies II

During Naked Bodies II students, who have already completed 'Naked Bodies I' and it will extend skills already learnt by discovering how artists have depicted the human form in movement and action, focusing on sculpture. The morning will be spent in the galleries, the afternoon drawing from a male nude life model.

All materials are provided for both workshops.

Naked Bodies I: The Renaissance and Rococo Nude

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Naked Bodies I – Art History Workshops for
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The Renaissance

This term covers what people saw as the rebirth, which is what the word renaissance means, of Classical Civilisation. This period runs in Italy roughly from 1400 to the mid 1500s. For a variety of reasons, at this time, anything to do with Ancient Rome was considered good, worth copying, even worth competing with. This resulted in many changes in education, politics, architecture, city planning, sculpture, furniture design, painting, engineering, literature, and clothing.

The problem for artists was that between the fall of the Roman Empire, in the 5th century, and the beginning of the 15th century, all of the painting and much of the sculpture had disappeared, making it difficult to produce work that looked ancient Roman. Still, there was some sculpture, and there were written descriptions of paintings. From these, several things were clear:

- the main subjects for sculptors and painters was the human body, nude or in loose flowing robes
- the treatment was realistic, from observation, though there was a stress on idealised beauty
- that the characters depicted were often shown acting out a story, a bit of history or a myth

So, the emphasis for Renaissance artists was on bodies which combined direct observation, hands, feet, muscles, torsos, knees, noses, hair, bellybuttons, etc, with Classical perfection. This produced faces with straight noses, round chins and small but full lipped mouths, muscle that was defined but not overemphasised, and figures, who, when standing, stood in contrapposto. The last is the most important. It is the way Michelangelo's *David* stands, relaxed, with weight on one foot, so that his pelvis and his shoulders tilt in opposite directions. The asymmetry gives the pose a feeling of movement, and throws

the body into a pleasing S curve, while the relaxation helps to convince us that he is flesh and blood.

For painters there was a final aspect of this "perfect" Ancient art to deal with, and they only knew about it from descriptions; not only did the bodies they painted have to look like real, three dimensional bodies, but they were to inhabit a space that you would mistake for the real thing, three dimensional space. It was not an entirely new idea, but there was increased pressure to make the illusion of depth completely convincing. To solve the problem they learned how to imitate the distortions you see, when you look at the world. A large man in the distance looked small, so they painted him small. A hand reaching towards the viewer looked bigger than one reaching away, so they painted it that way. Looking down a corridor, it seemed as if the walls were converging, so they imitated that. They added mathematical calculations to observation, and developed the science of perspective, so that the illusion would be consistent. The recently perfected figures would seem to move about in a continuation of the viewer's space.

Some characteristics of the Renaissance nude:

- Direct observation from life
- Use of the contrapposto
- Ideal forms, based on Classical works of Art
- Concern with anatomy



Francesco da Sant' Agata, Statuette of Hercules, Padua, Italy, 1520

Rococo

Rococo refers to the delicately light style which first appeared in the decorative arts in France at the end of the 17th century, it later spread to painting, sculpture and architecture. By the 1730's this style was fashionable in the rest of Europe. The Rococo style was a particular favourite of the French King, Louis XV, who reigned from 1715-74, and his mistress Mme de Pompadour.

The point of Rococo painting is pleasure. The name itself looks rounded, and it is a style of swirls and curves, of twists and turns. It is based on natural forms, plants, animals, birds, shells, the shapes made by splashing water. Colours are bright and clear with a lot of gold, pink and pale green-blue, with a delicate play of brushstrokes on the surface of the painting.

The compositions are complicated and asymmetrical.

The spirit of Rococo art is lighthearted and often gently erotic, a celebration of sensual and sexual pleasure and a product of a free and poetic imagination. There is a lot of naked flesh, and most of it is female. The characters portrayed in Rococo paintings are often mythological figures, but there is very little story telling. What is important, instead, is well drawn voluptuous bodies in a variety of poses and a sensuous 'painterly' use of paint.

Mme de Pompadour's particular painter, and one of the creators of this style, was Francois Boucher who is particularly known for the depiction of the female form. Boucher is quoted as saying that he objected to nature as it was 'too green and badly lit'.



François Boucher, *The Rising of the Sun*, France, 1753, Oil on canvas

Some characteristics of the Rococo Nude:

- Asymmetrical poses, often reclining
- Attention to how the flesh is painted, with use of light tones, pink and visible brushstrokes
- Reliance on a repertory of motifs and poses, instead of direct observation from nature
- Sensual and erotic

Naked Bodies II: French Bronze Sculpture

Teachers' Notes

Naked Bodies II – Art History Workshops for
Key Stage 5 at the Wallace Collection

The French bronze sculptures or statuettes that you have seen today at the Wallace Collection became especially popular in the years following 1682 when the French King, Louis XIV, moved his court to the palace at Versailles, just outside Paris.

At Versailles many marble sculptures were commissioned to go in the gardens. Some of these sculptures were copies from ancient Greek and Roman times (antiquity) and others were copies of sculptures by artists working in Italy from the Renaissance and onwards, such as Giambologna, who had themselves been inspired by Classical sculptures; so people were commissioning copies of copies which were themselves copies. It became fashionable, especially for courtiers, to have smaller copies of the most famous of these sculptures cast from bronze, for example the pair of vases illustrated are contemporary models from the huge marble vases made for the gardens at Versailles.



As in Renaissance times, King Louis XIV and other prominent people collected sculptures. Their collections were still dominated by casts after the antique and Giambologna workshop models. But these must have stimulated a taste for small bronzes among courtiers, encouraging production, as well as influencing the style, of independent French bronzes.

Contemporary Italian sculpture, by artists such as Bernini and Algardi, was highly influential on French sculptors, such as Philippe Bertrand and Robert Le Lorrain. The subject matter was often taken from classical mythology and they were frequently conceived in pairs to make a balanced decorative display and designed to be seen from the front.

The style of French bronzes later became light and airy with graceful poses reflecting the 18th-century Rococo taste. Sculptures often had a theatrical feel and would have been displayed alongside furniture

decorated with ornate brass and turtleshell marquetry and mounted on bases made from similar materials. Sometimes this furniture would have gilt-bronze mounts cast from models supplied by the sculptors to create one of the earliest 'designer' looks to a room.



These statuettes were made in the same way that all bronze statues were. The sculpture was originally modelled from either clay or wax by the artist, which was then cast in bronze, which is a much more durable material than clay and especially wax. Having these statuettes made from bronze would have been much cheaper than having a marble reproduction as an artist could make more than one bronze statue from each cast made, although bronze was still expensive and you could buy cheaper versions in plaster. To find out more about how to make a cast please visit this website: www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/pharos/sections/making_art/index_bronze.html



Bronze is an alloy, a mixture of metals, of copper (usually about 90%) and tin, often also containing small amount of other metals such as lead or zinc. Since antiquity it has been the metal most commonly used in cast sculpture because of its durability, strength, and the fact that it is easily workable, both hot and cold, by a variety of processes. It is easier to cast than copper because it has a lower melting- point. Its greater tensile strength makes possible the protrusion of unsupported parts, e.g. an arm stretching out. This strength gives bronze an advantage over marble. Think of classical Greek sculptures, such as the *Venus de Milo*, which often have their arms missing.