

History of the Nude

by

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The nude human form, both male and female, has been forever inspiring to the artist. Throughout time, the shapes and forms provide a creative stimulus for those who wish to capture the body's sensuality and beauty. Even in cave drawings, the human form was designed and etched in artistic impressions adding aesthetic features to their creations. Ever since, art of the nude has remained present in art history.

In Greco-Roman times, Paganism was predominant with Pompeii probably being the most noted leader to saturate Rome with exquisite nude sculptures and paintings. During this time, mythological gods and goddesses were portrayed with celebrations of human form. Being mythological perfection, their nude images were exquisite. The culture and societal values of Greco-Roman culture viewed the nude as classic and romantic.



With the downfall of Roman rule, Gothic art and architecture superseded this period with the nude have a more slender and frail appearance. As the early Christian church developed with a focus on chastity and celibacy, nudes became very rare. Few Medieval pieces of nude art surfaced during this time. Giovanni de Paolo's *Expulsion from Paradise* in the 15th



century was one of the few depicting the nude as weak and defenseless tying nude form to the original sin and fall from grace.

However, by the mid 15th century, Renaissance artists began to restore the nude to its creative form. Donatello portrayed the first statue of David bridging the gap between Christianity and this nude revival by painting a biblical hero in classical nude form. This was followed by other Renaissance artists including Pollaiuolo and Michelangelo. Michelangelo of course also did his own version of David and painted many male nude forms in his works with classic mythological antiquity.

Venetian painters also adopted a return to mythological nude figures focusing on the female nude in much of their work. Some examples of this include Titian's *Venus and Adonis* as well as Lucas Cranach's *Judgment of Paris*. Most of the work of the Renaissance recreated the ancient portrayal of the nude by reestablishing creations of gods and goddesses of Roman and Greek mythology.

In the 17th century, the fascination with the nude of antiquity continued, but as the Baroque Art period evolved, allegorical depictions of personified values such as Grace and Truth were created as undressed nude human forms. As Romanticism flourished and Neo-Classical Art replaced the Baroque period, ancient sculpture techniques of the nude continued. However, a freer attitude was developing about the human body and painting of live models began to be common practices.



By the late 19th century, the nude was being removed from mythological contexts. Instead of mythological creations or settings of fantasy, female nudes

were depicted in contemporary situations. Artists such as Edouard Manet were one such artist taking bolder risks and challenging social morals. This extended into the 20th century with artists such as Renoir and Degas. This has continued to evolve with rapidly changing opinions of the nude most notable in the latter half of the 20th century.

Today, nude art takes us where it has never before with a wide array of nude genres from contemporary to classical. Its robust increase within current cultural norms is evident by the number of nude art events flourishing around the country. Events such as Nude Nite Orlando, Seattle Erotic and Dirty Detroit are just a few of the more popular art exposes.

While the history of the nude has also been art inspiring, it also has been the birth child of the social climate and cultures of the times. Religious and political views have molded the presentation of nude art throughout history. Today is no different. The human body continues to allow us to express the social climate of the day through wonderful art. The nude in essence captures humanity across the ages.