

Talking about **Nudity in Art**



Why is
that person
NAKED?



*This is a great
resource for
families!*

Why is that person NAKED?

Most adults who bring children into an art museum dread this question. Some people do not feel equipped to answer the question correctly and others feel uncomfortable addressing nudity in general.

To be honest, this is a question most museum visitors have. This guide is designed to help you have a productive discussion about nudity in an art museum.

QUICK TIPS

- 1. Relax:** Take a “no big deal” attitude about the subject. Your group will follow your lead!
- 2. Respect:** Be sensitive to the cultural and religious backgrounds that produced these works and be polite to the interest and questions of your companions.
- 3. Remember:** Nudity does not mean the same thing to every culture or every person and people will have different reactions to nudes. All of these feelings are valid.
- 4. Revisit:** The more times you have the conversation, the less intimidating it gets!

*The human body
is something we all
have in common*



Regardless of time, race, age, sex, ability, or body modifications, every human has a body. Artists can use nudity as a way to proudly display this aspect of the human condition.

We all have one!

*The body is
timeless*

While clothing fashions can change quickly and drastically, the unclothed human body does not. Since the time of Ancient Greece, depicting the nude human body has been considered a marker of artistic skill that lasts the test of time.

100s



1500s



1900s



The body can tell us about a person



Figures can be nude to show a defining mark or characteristic—or lack thereof! For example, images illustrating stories from the Christian Bible often show the infant Jesus undressed to show that he is a fully human boy although Christians also believe he is the divine son of God.

Sometimes nudity helps to accurately tell a story. For instance, Roman legend says that Romulus and Remus were raised in the wild by a mother wolf. In the context of this story, showing the boys clothed would not make sense so the artist chose to show them nude.

The body can tell us a story



Babies in their Birthday Suits



Nude male babies called **putti** (from the Latin “putus” meaning “boy”) can be found in art dating back to Ancient Greece. Putti have many different purposes: they can show human emotion, represent the presence of God, or symbolize romantic love. The next time you see putti, try to guess why the artist decided to include them!

The body can tell us about an activity



Some figures in art are taking a bath or nursing a baby, activities that usually do not require clothing. Rules about dress have also changed over time. In Ancient Greece men exercised nude, so artists represented athletes without clothes.



“To be naked is to be deprived of our clothes, and the word implies some of the embarrassment most of us feel in that condition. The word ‘nude,’ on the other hand, carries, in educated usage, no uncomfortable overtone. The vague image it projects into the mind is not of a huddled, defenseless body, but of a balanced, prosperous, and confident body.”

– Kenneth Clark, *The Nude*, 1956

Credits listed in order shown:

Chiurazzi Foundry, *Laocoön* (detail), Italian, early 20th century. Bronze cast from Roman bronze original from c. 40-30 BCE.

Unknown, *Hindu Goddess Durga*, East Indian, Hindu, late 18th century. Sandstone.

Chiurazzi Foundry, *Apollo*, Italian, 20th century. Bronze cast from Roman original (1 CE) in the National Museum, Naples.

Chiurazzi Foundry, *David*, Italian, mid 19th – early 20th century. Bronze cast from the marble original (1501-1504) by Michelangelo.

Gaston Lachaise, *Elevation* (a.k.a. *Standing Woman*), French, 20th century. Bronze, (ninth of twelve, cast in 1963)

Domenico Tintoretto (Italian 1560-1635), *The Holy Family with Saints Anne and John the Baptist: Holy Family with Roses* (detail), 1590s. Oil on canvas. Bequest of John Ringling, 1936.

Chiurazzi Foundry, *Discobolos* (Discus Thrower), Italian, 20th century. Bronze cast from Greek original ca. 450 BCE.

Domenico Gargiulo, *Bathsheba at her Bath*, Italian, 17th century. Oil on canvas. Gift of Asbjorn R. Lunde, 1976.

Luca Giordano (Italian, 1634-1705), *Allegory of Faith and Charity* (detail), 17th century. Oil on canvas. Bequest of John Ringling, 1936.

Chiurazzi Foundry, *Wolf with Romulus and Remus*, Italian, early 20th century. Wolf cast from Etruscan bronze original from late 6th century BCE. Figures added c. 1475.

Peter Paul Rubens (Flemish, 1577-1640), *The Triumph of Divine Love* (detail), c. 1625. Oil on canvas. Museum purchase, 1980.

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941.359.5700