

Power Point #3: The Body in 20th Century Art

The human body has been a central part of western art throughout history. At some points in time, gods were made in the image of men; at other times, man was made in the image of the gods; while at still others, no apparent connections between gods and humans seem to exist in art. Discuss the changing treatment of the human figure in 20th century art. The key question concerns the relationship of the meaning of the human figure to the manner in which it is depicted. How do representations of the body change? How does the meaning of the human body change? Is it valid to see a relationship between these changes? Are there other uses of the body in art which are not concerned with representation but with using the body to convey some other message? If this is the case, why is the human body used?

Your discussion should include an overview of the changes as well as 4 key examples chosen from your overview for indepth discussion of critical points or developments in these changes. For this project, focus on paintings and 2-d media. You can include other media in the overview section but not in the indepth analyses. (We'll do this again for sculpture and other forms of 3-d art.) It will be effective if you set other parameters as well. These might consist of a decision to focus only on the female body or the male body. Another approach might be the decision to focus on a particular meaning communicated through the body and how that changes. One example which comes to mind is representations of mothers, particularly in the work of Paula Modersohn-Becker in the early 20th century, Frida Kahlo, and Dorothea Lange.