

The Human Body
Curated by Karel Schampers

As the title already indicates, this exhibition of works from the Hill Collection centers round the human body. At the same time it can also be seen as a tribute to this collection, which covers a wide variety and time span: from Renaissance bronzes to Warhol, from Rubens to Bacon, from Giovanni da Milano to Christopher Wool.

Usually works of art are exhibited in an art–historical context, ordered according to style, discipline, place and period. In this exhibition we have avoided this traditional museum system and have, in line with the nature of the Hill collection, interrelated works of great diversity. It concerns a transgression of borders, a fusion of works, which while retaining their autonomy assume a new meaning because of their changed context. This confrontation results in surprising, unexpected dialogues in which the works enrich and comment upon each other.

The human body is ideally suited for such an approach. It is a phenomenon that has been a continuous source of curiosity throughout the cultural history of humanity, in which all facets of the human body were explored: from intimacy, grace, mortality and helplessness to brute force, passion, grandeur and hubris. The body is a universal given, which extends all cultural, linguistic, political, religious, social and moral barriers. It is as comprehensible and recognizable in the bronzes from Benin as in Giotto's frescos, in the Greek marble 'kouroi' as in Picasso's paintings, in the woodcuts from China as in Rembrandt's etchings.

The exhibition shows the adventure of the human body through different ages and cultures. It is a plea for a beneficial appreciation of the body and at the same time a testament to the unprecedented scope of art.

Starting point for the installation of the exhibition was to cater to viewing pleasure, thereby doing justice to the visual quality of the work as much as possible. Sometimes you have to come very close and almost look at it on the hand, at other times you have to take distance; one time you have to look at it frontally, the other time you have to walk around it.

At the same time an arrangement with regard to content was added, a story line that connects the works. At its basis are two opposites, which are nevertheless in line with each other: it starts with the depiction of the human on the 3rd floor, where figures take

an individual pose, and rises up to the imagination of the divine on the 4th floor, where the figures take a more symbolic pose.

Third floor

The human part opens with the flagellation and crucifixion of Christ (1–5). God in the shape of a vulnerable human being, mortal and sensitive to physical pain.

In addition to this, there are works that want to make certain states of man palpable, such as suffering, decay, loneliness and anger (6–9). They function as a reminder of general human traits, weaknesses and qualities of character. One recognizes ‘man’. In contrast to these works, which are large and expressive and with an emphasis on the physical and emotional impact, the works that follow are small, modest, timid and intimate (10–17). Here it concerns ‘real’ persons, individuals who are carefully rendered in a realistic way.

Fourth floor

It was seldom possible to imagine gods and mythical heroes other than in the sublimated guise of a human being. The male deities present themselves as noisy primal forces with swollen musculature (18–20), while the females display their seductive grace with timid elegance (21–23). Goyer’s nipple-shaped plunger (24), which is set against wallpaper with red cherries (the heavenly fruit that symbolizes love), gives a surrealistic twist to this.

On the other hand there are also human who have been given divine status and become the subject of worship, precisely because they rose from the crowd (25–26). Some have gained a nearly divine reputation as wrestler, warlord or political leader (27–31) and are depicted with an aureole of invincibility. The idealized representation of the untouchable ‘Übermensch’. In this context Robert Mapplethorpe’s arm (32) symbolizes the long arm of power, but also shows the fascinating relationship between his photography and classical art.

Karel Schampers (1950) was curator of the print room of the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam (1981–1986); chief curator modern and contemporary art of Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen Rotterdam (1986–2000); director of the Frans Hals Museum Haarlem (2000–2014). He has organized exhibitions of amongst others Matthew Barney, Günther Förg, Isa Genzken, Bob Goyer, David Hockney, Jörg Immendorff, On Kawara, Martin Kippenberger, Ron Mueck, Cady Noland, Jorge Pardo, Stephen Prina, Gerhard Richter, Ed Ruscha, Cindy Sherman, Christopher Williams and Christopher Wool.