

September 2018 Public Tour: **Body Language**

Website tour description:

Decipher messages we send as expressed in images of the human body.

When showing the human body, artists communicate a message with their choices. Many Mia favorites will work well on this tour. Also consider “hidden gems” that might be new to regular visitors or provide a unique perspective on body language.

These are ideas, suggestions and approaches from which to build your own tour! Choose objects from any of these areas.

How Body Language Tells a Story

- **George Tooker’s Supermarket** (Kunin collection, G359) was painted in 1972 but seems relevant today. Look at the body language and imagine what these people are thinking and feeling. How do the shelves and aisle evoke a shoppers’ world? What do the people in the upper right add to the painting? Tooker said, *“I am after reality—painting impressed on the mind so hard that it recurs as a dream...but I am not after dreams as such, or fantasy.”*
- **After the Reception, Douglas Volk (23.42)**. Not all marriages in 1887 were based on romantic love. What other reasons might a woman have for getting married? How do you think this bride feels about the marriage? Or about her groom?
- Most Mia images of Judith and Holofernes show the beheading at the end of the story. In **Judith Presenting Herself to Holofernes (62.45, G340)**, **Antonio Gionima** painted an earlier scene when the two first meet. Share Judith’s story. What does her body language suggest about her vulnerability as well as her plan? Discuss the artist’s use of light and dark and how it affects how we see the two main characters. What is the most compelling part of the story for you?

The Language of Movement

From docent Morry Rothstein’s research: *“Leonardo da Vinci was dedicated to connecting the movements of the body with movements of the soul.”* How well did these artists do?

- **Egon Schiele’s Portrait of Paris von Gütersloh (54.30)**. How does Schiele use line and color to capture the subject’s body and soul at the moment of creative inspiration?
- Many visitors may associate **Degas** with pretty ballerinas. On loan in G351 is the **Little Dancer Aged Fourteen**. Use the following link to briefly share the life of a dancer in the 1880s:
<https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.110292.html>
Look carefully at the position of her body, from head to toe. If you like, mimic her stance. What does her body language tell us about her? What can we surmise about her personality?
- **Loie Fuller, Joseph Kratina (2016.33.14, G322)**. Watch the “Serpentine Dance” designed by Fuller and filmed by the Lumière brothers, as performed here by another dancer:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCJ7gJLRyE>
How does Fuller’s use of fabric enhance the message of her dance? What feelings do her movements evoke?

Unspoken Messages / What Appearance Says

- **Der Postagent Hausler (The Telegraph Operator) by Albert Birkle (2015.55.1)**. We seem to have interrupted the telegraph operator at work. What does his body language say to us? Have you ever met someone like him? What about his body language seems familiar? What does the position of the messenger in the background suggest?
- **Self-Portrait by Francesco de Mura (62.48)**. Artists often display works in their studio to impress possible buyers with their skills. Based on how he positions his body, what does de Mura think about you? About himself? What advantage would there be in portraying himself this way? How might that affect your negotiations in hiring him as a painter?
- **Susan Folwell's Why Does He Call Me Caitlyn? (2016.5.13, G259)** is part of her "Crybaby Series," which incorporates figural images from pop art (think Roy Lichtenstein) with native ceramic traditions. Here are some resources for her work:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j4S9buXggKo>
http://www.southwestart.com/articles-interviews/featured-artists/susan_folwell
She wants her pottery to convey messages other than stereotyped images of Native people: *"This romanticized version of stereotyped Native imagery makes me angry and frustrated, since to me it represents how our people have always been exploited by providing images of what non-Native people think we should look like or be like."*
How do you react to her use of contemporary pop art figures?
- In the "First Blush Exhibition" (G353) **Jan Theodoor Toorop** has created highly detailed faces in the portraits of **Fritz and Nina Meyer-Fierz (2018.35.1, 2018.35.2)**. Without giving any background, ask visitors to imagine their personalities. Based on their appearances, what might they be thinking?
- **Temptation of Christ by Titian/Tiziano Vecelli (25.30)**. Share the story of the temptation of Christ from the Christian Bible. What do you think Christ's face and gesture reveal? How does his appearance reveal both his divinity and humanity? Why do you think Titian chose to paint the devil as a young boy?

Body Language Reflects Place and Time

- Two sculptural works reflect how life changed from the fear and uncertainty of the medieval ages to the relative optimism of the Renaissance. Compare and contrast **Madonna Enthroned in Majesty with the Christ Child (66.24)** and **Virgin of the Milk by Circle of Gil de Siloe (2012.12)**. Based on the body language of the figures, how does the mother/child relationship differ? How do you think each sculpture reflects people's relationship with their church? Or their world view?
- In G357 pick a painting of a 19th century woman. Chances are she is either modest and saintly or a beautiful temptress. Describe how her body language helps define who she is. What role does direct eye contact play? What do these ways of portraying women say about the society they lived in?
- Compare a 19th century woman's portrait with **Wilhelm List's Young Woman in Undergarments (2015.40.1)** from the early 20th century. She is wearing bloomers, which are associated with the suffrage movement and bicycling. Both demand greater freedom—

physically and metaphorically. (See Wikipedia on “bloomers (clothing)” for background.) What does her pose tell you about her? What about her face? In what ways does she seem modern?

- **Marcia Marcus’ painting Renoir (2018.22, G375)** was painted in 1968 as people brought greater attention to the struggle for racial and gender equality. What’s the message in her posture? She is not looking in the mirror; why do you think it’s in the painting? What do you imagine she would like to say? Although the painting is 50 years old how does it seem relevant to us today?

Most of the suggestions given above are “Western” objects; be sure to broaden your tour with objects from many different cultures. Explore how body language expresses messages important to these cultures:

Ernie Whiteman wall sculpture – what message is conveyed by combining the body with symbolism?

Allen Hauser, Rendezvous

Japan, Vajra Warriors

Chinese Tomb Reliefs

Chinese Kowtowing official (L2004.348.3, G207)

Buddhist figures in G200

African gallery 250:

Mummy, False door – what is the significance of the way the body is positioned?

Mohan Modisakeng, Lefa 5, 2017.23 – how does the artist use his own body to express trauma and loss?

Figure, stone, 19th c. 2017.28 – discuss the body language of a chief as “thinker of sad things”

Maori, Post figure, 2001.65a,b – look at the proportions of parts of the body. What do you think they tell us about this figure?