

May 21, 2020

Third Thursday Virtual Tour: Body in Art

Stop 1: Bodies in Art



Henrich Yselin (German, active 1477-1513), *Saint Margaret with the Dragon*, polychrome wood and glass. Samuel H. Kress Collection, 1961. (1961.58)

This sculpture by Henrich Yselin depicts a young Saint Margaret of Antioch. Although some of the paint has worn away from the passage of time, we can still see her soft visage and make out the great attention Yselin put into every delicate detail of this wooden sculpture. Beneath her left hand lies the creature that is a key character in her canonization. Can you tell what it is?



Although at first glance, it may look like a moustached dog, it is actually a dragon! According to apocryphal sources, Margaret was born into a pagan family— her father was even a pagan priest. However, as a young woman, Margaret converted to Christianity and consecrated her virginity to God. After refusing to renounce her faith and marry a high official of Antioch,

Margaret was subjected to several trials and tortures before she was eventually martyred in the year 304. These harrowing experiences included several miraculous episodes, including being swallowed by Satan in the guise of a dragon. Margret saved herself by using the symbol of the cross to cut her way out from within, thus earning her veneration as the patron saint of expectant mothers, particularly in difficult childbirth.

We couldn't talk about Bodies in Art, without also examining the small glass covered indentation in Margaret's chest. This is called a reliquary, which is meant to hold religious relics, such as remains from holy figures including bones, hair, pieces of clothing, or other relevant physical objects like pieces of the cross or the crown of thorns worn by Jesus. While this reliquary is now empty, and we do not have record of what was once housed here, know this work once served as an important object of devotion, and a reminder of St. Margaret's sacrifice.

Stop 2 and 3: Art on Bodies





Furisode (Young woman's kimono), ca. 1800–1850, silk crepe, yūzen-dyed with embroidery in silk and metal-wrapped thread, collected 1896–1900 by Charles Sumner Graham (American). Gift of Louise McKelvy Walker, 1990. (90.21.89)

In the mid 1850s, after two centuries of isolation, Japan opened its borders to global trading. Because there was strict control on goods entering and leaving the country during those two hundred years, there was a surge in popularity and thus demand for Japanese products at the turn of the century. A french art critic first coined the term "Japonisme" in 1872 to describe the popularity and influence Japanese art and culture had on the West at this time. The influx of Japanese imagery served as a major source of inspiration for artists such as Claude Monet, Vincent van Gogh, and Frank Lloyd Wright.

Traditional Japanese kimonos like this one also had a huge influence on fashion (coming next!). This kimono, called a Furisode, is a young woman's kimono. Designed shortly before Japan opened its borders, this garment is

also a guessing game, or a goshi-toki. A young noblewoman would wear it and challenge her friends to identify the story hidden in its painted and embroidered designs. By knowing the literary work that the kimono referenced, they could show off their education. Unfortunately, we don't have the "answer" to this kimono: because the guessing game was supposed to be tricky, many of the interpretations for goshō-toki kimonos are now unknown.



This avant-garde coat draws inspiration from the T-shaped silhouette of a kimono, like the one we just saw. Made from supple velvet, this garment is intended to drape loosely on the body.

Cutting-edge couturiers like Maria Monaci Gallenga, a cutting-edge, created this bold evening wear that anticipated the mainstream embrace of Art Deco design in the 1920s. Gallenga also drew inspiration from Italy, especially textiles of 14th-century Lucca. The graphic, flat-looking motifs of this era adapted well for unique Deco prints, like the one we see here.

Maria Monaci Gallenga (Italian, 1880–1944), Evening Coat, 1915–20, silk velvet, block-printed with metallic pigments. Gift of Kate Fowler Merle-Smith, 1980. (1980.3.2)

Stop 4: Body Language



Kay WalkingStick (American, born 1935), *Blame the Mountains, III*, 1998, oil and brass leaf on canvas (left panel); oil on canvas stretched over wood (right panel). Gift of David Echols, 2011. (2011.11 a,b)

Kay WalkingStick is renowned for her diptychs (separate panels that are joined together to create a unified piece). At first glance, these two panels may appear unrelated; however, by presenting these next to each other, WalkingStick puts seemingly disparate images into conversation. How do they relate? Are there notable similarities? Differences?

Kay Walkingstick has painted landscapes in her work since the mid 1980s. WalkingStick kept figures out of her work almost entirely, using the landscapes as a visual metaphor for her own experience. It wasn't until she came to the conclusion that all paintings are to some extent a portrait of the artist, that she began incorporating self-portraits into her work.

Part of a larger series, *Blame the Mountains III* is inspired by a romantic trip to the Dolomite Mountains, which unfortunately ended in heartbreak. In the left panel, beneath a sky of gold is a rugged mountain from the



Dolomite range, while in the right panel, the artist depicts herself bent over. The sensual curves of the female figure both contrast and compliment the rugged mountains of northern Italy, and remind us of both heartbreak and resilience.