



Between the ideal and the reality: The human body through the eyes of European artists

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ABSTRACT

The human body has always been one of the most important subjects for European artists. But the way it is displayed in art has varied in different epochs. In ancient Greece, a canon was constituted that proclaimed an ideal vision of the body, derived from the rules governing the universe. This idealization of the human body, neglected in the Middle Ages, was re-established in Renaissance and Classicist art. However, Renaissance artists also created another image of the human body by borrowing from patterns mainly found in nature, and started to depict their models not in an ideal but rather in a more natural shape. The new non-ideal forms of art that appeared in Mannerist art made the artists develop a much wider artistic language, which brought into being a variety of individually interpreted artistic representations of the human body. It preceded similar phenomena which became widespread in the twentieth century. Thus, the human body was not always displayed in art as strong, healthy and beautiful. On the contrary, the martyred bodies of Christ and the saints, as well as the depictions of aged, tired or ill people, also carried enormous artistic expression. A distinct problem has occurred with the ways in which corpses have been presented in art. The review concludes with a reference to the contemporary trend called Body-Art that involves various artistic activities, such as happenings and performances, where the human body is itself used as a significant work of art.

KEYWORDS

European painting; image of human body; body in art; idealization of human body

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Let us open our review with the classical Francis Bacon's (1561–1626) observation:

That is the best part of beauty which a picture cannot express; no nor the first sight of the life. There is not excellent beauty that has not some strangeness in the proportion. A man cannot tell whether Apelles or Albert Dürer were the more trifter; where of the one would make a personage by geometrical proportions; the other; by taking the best parts out of divers faces; to make one excellent. Such personages; I think; would please nobody but the painter that made them. Not but I think a painter may make a better face than ever was; but he must do it by a kind felicity (as a musician that makes an excellent air in music) and not by rule. A man shall see faces; that if you examine them part by part you shall find never a good; and yet altogether do well (Bacon, 1887: 362).

The human body as well as the human face always were the most important subjects that strongly attracted the artists. The innumerable works of art of all the epochs first of all show the humans exposing their bodies and faces in various positions and different psychological emotions. Really the art turns around the human body. Only in the very remote periods of human artistic activity, such as in the cave paintings of the Palaeolithic era, did artists focus mainly on animals and omit the human figure, or when they tried to show a man often depicted him in a very simplified way. In the caves of Lascaux, a small figure (probably of a dead witch), is shown placed in front of the image of a huge bull — painted in a very realistic manner — who has been drawn with some simple lines only and seems to be rather a symbol of a man than a real presentation. From the same Palaeolithic Period, also called the Old Stone Age, we know of numerous female figurines that probably represented a fertility goddess, perhaps the most popular of which is the so-called Venus of Willendorf (ca. 25,000 BCE), exhibited in Vienna in the Naturhistorisches Museum. This naked woman, faceless and feetless, emphasises the female organs connected with childbearing. For us, it would be almost impossible to view this mysterious figurine as the norm of female beauty, but in those times when people mainly concentrated on how to survive, they could not be especially interested in aesthetic problems.

Later, substantial questions about the rules of beauty for the human body were asked for the first time, and then came to be more and more prominent, even in ancient Egypt and particularly in ancient Greece. These questions concerned the proportions between the different parts of a human body and the relations between a man and the universe, and a set of principles was composed that constituted the Canon that gave the artists the possibility to create something that could be said to be truly beautiful and aesthetically pleasing. The concept of beauty proposed by the Canon was of course ideal, and the artists who strictly followed the rules of the Canon rendered their subjects in mostly idealised forms, often not faithful to the real proportions and forms found in the concrete world.

Maybe the most idealised artistic images of the human body were created by the great Greek sculptors Phidias and Polykleitus (fifth century BCE). They believed that the ideal human proportions were defined by the harmonious proportions that govern the universe. Because of this, they tried to make an image that could be taken as a completely perfect human figure, using in this aim various mathematician rules (among others, the golden section that was treated as fundamental in the construction of the cosmos).

Over many centuries, these ideal canons of beauty were maintained in Europe, probably as the result of the constant longing of man for the ideal that always seems to be better than his reality. Of course, these Canons of Beauty changed throughout the ages, following the evolution of man together with changes in his customs and fashions, and what was thought to be beautiful in one epoch was not necessarily regarded as beautiful in another.

It will suffice to compare the rather slender type of sculptured or painted female figures in the Middle Ages with the type of plentiful and exuberant female shapes that were taken as the most proper, according to the taste of the people in Baroque times. The ideal images of nude men and women created by the Greek artists, and later copied and followed by the Roman ones, after its long time of oblivion in the Middle Ages, came back into prominence during the Renaissance, for whom antiquity was a fundamental pattern. In fact, we may say that the best ideal images of the human body are those typical for these three great eras of European culture.

The statue of *Doryphoros*,¹ a naked young male carrying a spear, by Polykleitus (fifth century BCE) is known only from later copies. It represents all the essential features of the Greek Canon of Beauty for the human figure, with a pose of immobility, symmetry, a straight-forward-looking gaze and the weight of the body placed on one leg making the so-called *contrapposto*. Kenneth Clark aptly notes that 'Polykleitos invented a pose in which the figure is neither walking nor standing, but simply establishing a point of balance' (Clark, 1984: 38). In the same way, the most idealised female figures of Antiquity, the numerous statues of Venus, were appreciated as the best and most ideal presentations of a woman. Particularly, the type of sculpture called *Venus Pudica* (Modest Venus)² had a special posture. The young naked female shields her breasts and genitalia with her hands, and was often recalled by numerous artists of all epochs as the best model for displaying a woman in art. A good example might be the *Aphrodite of Melos*, the statue of a half-naked woman (who in an unknown accident lost her hands). Since its discovery in 1820, the

¹ One of the best Roman copies of this statue is kept at the National Archeological Museum in Naples.

² The best examples of this type are the figures that evolved from the *Aphrodite of Cnidus* by Praxiteles, the Greek sculptor active in the fourth century BC, including the so-called *Venus Medici*, Galleria Uffizi, Florence and *The Capitoline Venus*, Capitoline Museums, Rome.

figure has become very famous and has achieved special recognition 'in popular imagery as a symbol, or trade-mark of beauty', as Clark (1984: 88) puts it.

There must be hundreds of products, from lead pencils to face tissues, from beauty parlours to motorcars, that use an image of the Aphrodite of Melos in their advertisements, implying thereby a standard of ideal perfection (Clark, 1984: 88).

All of these 'marks of beauty' have been preserved in European art for a very long time, as the best possible forms and the ideal presentations of a man and a woman in art. After several centuries, at the beginning of the sixteenth century we find exactly the same features in Michelangelo's *David* (exhibited at the Academy, Florence) and in the *Birth of Venus* by Botticelli (Uffizi Gallery, Florence). Likewise, in the eighteenth century, we observe very similar characteristics in the statues made by such Classicist sculptors as Canova and Thorvaldsen, and in the painting of Ingres, e.g. *The source* (Musée d'Orsay, Paris), as well as in the numerous works produced by members of the academies of art, where depicting the human figure according to the classical canon was viewed as an obligation.

In the Middle Ages, naked human bodies in official art were rather rare and were mainly limited to representations of Adam and Eve tempted by the devil, or being expelled from Paradise by an angel, or of the half-naked Christ hanging on the Cross. In these times, when the possibility of viewing a nude figure was not frequent and dissections were forbidden by the Church, the artists had practically no real knowledge of the human body. The medieval aesthetics did not define any specific pattern for the body in art; therefore, it was mostly sculptured or painted without any special trouble taken about its anatomical correctness, which sometimes brought about unexpected or bizarre results. Some nudes, both male and female, that appear in the paintings produced in the fifteenth century and even at the beginning of the sixteenth century, seem to be made by artists who had never seen a naked man at all.

The Renaissance created a new sort of art, particularly in the style of painting called *The Nude*, that has continued as one of the most popular types of art until today. The new technical possibilities, as well as the geometrical perspective invented in Florence by Brunelleschi and Masaccio at the beginning of the fifteenth century, now allowed the artists to depict fully three-dimensional human figures on the flat panels and walls, which seemed to be almost alive. The Renaissance artists, mainly Italians, also started to look for patterns less in the ideal and more often in reality. It goes without saying that many of them continued to base their works on the classical prototypes, borrowing from them the same proportions, poses and gestures; but their search for beauty in Nature also caused them to use natural models. Many human figures, very often naked, sculptured and painted by the Renaissance artists

in Italy (Masaccio³, Giorgione, Titian, Raphael), as well as in the northern countries (Dürer, Holbein), seem to have been drawn from life. Gradually, the traditional aesthetical norms preferring the ideal view of man were overcome and new, more real descriptions of man were introduced into art. We must acknowledge this as one of the most important achievements of the Renaissance.

In Venice, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, a special type of a painting was created showing a female nude reclining in a landscape or a domestic interior. Probably, as Malcolm Bull notices:

the pleasure such paintings offered was primarily erotic, and for this reason they were more likely to be found in the patron's bedroom (where they might also aid the conception of children) than anywhere else (Bull, 2005: 62).

The theme of Venus, the goddess of love, was also appreciated. Surely some of the most intriguing female nudes of all times are those created in the paintings *The sleeping Venus* (Gemäldegalerie, Dresden) by Giorgione and *Venus from Urbino* (Uffizi Gallery, Florence) by Titian (ca. 1488/1490–1576). Seen in her charming landscape is the reclining Venus of Giorgione, a little voluptuous in her maybe erotic dream. The painting announces a long list of similar presentations of a woman lying naked and sensitive, by the greatest painters of all the epochs, including among others: Velazquez, Rubens, Rembrandt, Goya, Ingres, Delacroix, Renoir and Modigliani. It is worth noting that before Giorgione and Titian, nobody had shown the female body with such a sense of the true natural beauty emanating from it. Also, in the erotic sense, nobody has used brushes and paints to create imagined naked female bodies that seem to be completely alive, and nobody managed to model, with warm golden light, such delicately soft young female flesh.

In order to know the body better, some the artists began to study human anatomy. The first regular dissections were undertaken by the artists in the first part of the sixteenth century. Earlier than this, maybe only Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519) had examined the body in this way, but as a scientist rather than a painter. His fundamental aim was to know the interior structure of a body, and its interior mechanisms that regulated the movements of a man and decided all his physical activities.

I have dissected more than ten human bodies — writes Leonardo — destroying all the various members, and removing even the very smallest particles of the flesh which surrounded these veins without causing any effusion of blood other than the

³ *The expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden*, the fresco painted by Masaccio ca. 1427 in the Brancacci Chapel of St. Maria del Carmine in Florence, was one of the first realistic presentations of naked human bodies in Renaissance art.

imperceptible bleeding of the capillary veins. And, as one single body did not suffice for so long a time, it was necessary to proceed by stages with so many bodies as would render my knowledge complete (Plumb, 1989: 225).

However, Leonardo was not so sure that such a full knowledge of the human body could be absolutely useful for every artist, and said to the painters: 'beware, lest in the attempt to make your nudes display all their emotions by a too strong indication of bones, sinews, and muscles, you become a wooden painter' (Clark, 1961: 121).

At the beginning of the sixteenth century in Rome, two antique sculptures *The Apollo Belvedere* and *The Laokoon* were unearthed, each very different from the other in style. On the one hand, they confirmed the traditional classical conception of human beauty, but on the other hand they caused new ways of thinking about these displays, in some ways foretelling the new streams of art: Mannerism and Baroque, and even the future modern trends of twentieth century art. The Apollo Belvedere was 'the epitome of grace and refinement'; whereas the other (The Laokoon) was 'highly dramatic, emotional, complicated in its poses and in its use of three figures linked physically and psychologically to form a narrative group. [...] The antique itself changed through new and exciting discoveries, and new ways of looking at and interpreting the past, so that the classical influences which helped to form the Early Renaissance and those which worked so powerfully upon the High Renaissance are the same in name, but often very different indeed in nature' (Murray, 1997: 205).

Keeping still an admiration for antiquity and following the traditional classical patterns, artists now looked intensively for new solutions. Walter Friedlaender rightly points out that late Renaissance and Mannerism art:

is idealistic, but it does not rest on an idea of a canon, rather upon a *fantastica idea non appoggiata all'imitazione*, an imaginative idea unsupported by imitation of nature. Thus, the canon apparently given by nature and hence generally recognised as law is definitively given up. It is no longer a question of creating a seen object in an artistically new way, 'just as one sees it' or, if idealistically heightened and ethically stressed, 'just as one ought to see it'. Neither is it a matter of recreating the object 'as I see it', as the individual person observes it as a form of appearance. Rather, if one may use a negative expression, it is to be recreated 'as one does not see it', but as, from purely autonomous artistic motives, one would have it seen (Friedlaender, 1990: 6).

So the artist's own invention was born from studying the earlier artistic creations and nature, but also from his individual thinking about the sculpture or painting he actually worked on now, and this became more and more significant. In this way, the original figures created by the artists could even appear, to the eyes of the viewers, as more vivid not only than an ideal but also more vivid than life itself. In one of Shakespeare's plays we can read a very

interesting discussion between a poet and a painter about a painting just completed by him:

Poet: Let's see your piece.

Painter: 'Tis a good piece.

[...]

Poet: Admirable. How this grace / Speaks his own standing! What a mental power / This eye shoots forth! How big imagination / Moves in this lip! to th'dumbness of the gesture / One might interpret.

Painter: It is a pretty mocking of the life. / Here is a touch, is't good?

Poet: I will say of it, / It tutors nature: artificial strife/Lives in these touches, livelier than life (Shakespeare, 1980: 811).⁴

The artists of the Mannerist period introduced quite a new manner of presenting man into art, giving the artist more liberty in his own creations. This influenced many later artists that have represented the different styles up to our times. As Arnold Hauser observes:

The mixture of stylistic trends characteristic of Mannerism manifests itself, not only in the presence side by side of naturalistic and completely un-naturalistic tendencies, schools and works, but also in the different levels of reality that appear in one and the same, for even different parts and layers of the same work may deviate from reality in different degrees. The dissimilar quality of stylistic elements in Mannerist works is, however, inadequately described by stating only that some parts are completely true to reality while others are stylized and actually distort or deform reality (Hauser, 1986: 30).

The Renaissance and Baroque themes for sculptures and paintings were taken mainly from two sources: the Bible and ancient mythology. These sources supplied the artist with very attractive motifs, and gave them the opportunity to present human bodies half naked or completely naked. From the Old Testament, the scenes most often chosen were connected with two biblical heroines: Bathsheba and Susanna. The first was painted naked in the bath, before her meeting with King David; whereas the second one was watched furtively by two elders while bathing.

Also, very popular Greek and Roman motifs for the artists drawn mainly from Ovid's *The Metamorphoses*, provoked them to paint numerous works showing nudes. Ancient mythology offered an abundance of themes rich in the actions of the Gods and numerous heroes, and supplied the artists with a lot of ideas for sculptures and painting with innumerable visions of the naked or half-naked Hercules and Theses, Apollo and Dionysus, or Venus and Diana.

⁴ This quotation has been taken from *The life of Timon of Athens* (in: Shakespeare, 1980: Act 1, Scene 1).

With the new aesthetic ideas proposed by the artists of Mannerism and the Baroque, we find quite other forms of the presentation of human bodies. The static and rather immobile forms of the Renaissance figures are neglected to show sometimes very intensive movements. Rubens and his numerous followers (for example, Van Dyck, Jordaens and many others) showed male bodies as massive and muscular, and often presented them in vivid action, with all of their muscles in a great tension. Also, female bodies were often caught in strong movement, exposing their sometimes extraordinary fullness and strength.

But the human body was not always depicted by the artists as ideally harmonious, beautiful and fresh. The motif of the Ages of Man was popular in the Middle Ages, as well in Renaissance art, and was often connected with the allegory of *Vanity*. This made possible the conjunction of persons of different ages in one sculpture group, or in one painting. Usually young people and their elders were gathered together, often in the presence of the allegorical figures of Time or Death.

There was marked and distinct difference between the young and the old bodies. The young people, and particularly young women (for example in the paintings by the German artist of the sixteenth century, Hans Baldung Grien)⁵ had white and smooth flesh, while the grey-haired old women had much darker flesh, and usually had breasts unpleasantly hanging down. In the presentations of the elders, the artists did not avoid the appearance of sometimes extraordinarily drastic signs of decrepitude.

We know of many works of art from different epochs that display the human body not in its best physical condition. The state of the human body changes with age, and changes are also determined by different accidents such as illnesses and other misfortunes that always leave their traces on the human face and body. The artists discovered that the poor physical condition of a human body could give the possibility of increasing the expressiveness of a work of art. Albrecht Dürer portrayed his 63 year old mother (Kupferstichkabinett, Berlin) two months before her death, showing in his naturalistic drawing her face and a part of her body that was mostly destroyed by age and illness. Caravaggio, in some of his works presenting St. Jerome,⁶ also gave a very expressive view of an old extenuated body. Numerous diseased and dead human bodies gathered in the famous Theodore Gericault painting *The raft of the Medusa*, exhibited in the Louvre, Paris (1819), were derived from studies the artist made in hospitals and in the morgue.

⁵ See *The three ages of Man and Death* (ca. 1510), by Hans Baldung Grien, Museo del Prado, Madrid.

⁶ See, for example, *Saint Jerome in meditation* (ca. 1605), Pinacothèque du Monaster de Saint Marie de Montserrat, Montserrat; *Saint Jerome* (ca. 1606), Galleria Borghese, Rome; and *Saint Jerome* (ca. 1608), The Cathedral of Saint John, La Valetta, Malta.

In Christian art, there are also suggestive images of the human body sometimes in a very bad state, mostly connected with presentations of the Passion and the persecutions of the Saints and their martyrdoms. The paintings showing the flagellation of Christ often expose his face and disrobed torso dripping with blood, being stung, beaten, bound and slashed, and often almost decomposed by the cruel doings of the hangmen. Viewing these very dramatic paintings, we would likely say that their creators were completely finished with the ideal images of the human body and had turned absolutely to realism. Christ on the Cross, shown in the last moments of his life and slowly agonising under the gaze of many people, is one of the most popular themes of religious art. His almost completely naked body is the object of the dramatic studies of the German painter Matthias Grünewald in his *The Isenbeim Altair* (Musée Unterlinden, Colmar), painted ca. 1510–1515, and also in some of his other paintings. Christ is dying, or is already dead with his head hanging down, and the fingers of his hands and his feet have stiffened, and are crooked in a very unnatural way. The skin of his breast, arms, thighs and tibias is lacerated with the innumerable traces of the flagellation and the other acts against Christ during the Way of the Cross. Perhaps we can find human bodies similarly marked with such extreme suffering as late as the twentieth century, in the photographs taken in Auschwitz, Cambodia and other terrifying places where humans were persecuted in various incredibly cruel ways.

Long is the list of works of art showing the martyrdoms of the Christian Saints. Many of them present the human body being deconstructed by, among other methods, decapitation (St. Paul), burning (St. Lawrence), removal of the eyes (St. Cecilia), cutting of the breasts (St. Agatha) and by numerous other horrible acts against them. All these presentations have, of course, a special religious aspect concerning the vanity of the temporary human life, and the happiness of a future eternal life in Heaven as the reward for all this earthy suffering.

A separate theme marks the pictorial view of the human body as a corpse. Traditionally, some dead people were presented in a special kind of portrait called *Dead on the bed of State*, but as they were completely dressed these paintings are not of interest for us here. In seventeenth century Holland, it was popular to portray eminent surgeons giving doctors and students lessons of anatomy, usually in special anatomical theatres where people from the street also came to watch the autopsy for money. The well-known paintings by Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (1606–1669) show two famous Amsterdam surgeons: Dr Tulp⁷ and Dr Deyman.⁸ Both of them stand over the corpse

⁷ See *The anatomy lesson of Dr. Tulp* (1632), Mauritshuis, The Hague.

⁸ See *The anatomy lesson of Dr. Jan Deyman* (1656), Amsterdams Historish Museum, Amsterdam.

reproduced by the painter in a mostly realistic manner. The young corpse, that is being commented on by Dr Deyman, is very painful to view with its big hole in the middle of the belly, unveiling the complete emptiness of the corpse's interior. Gazing at this young man, once with a certainly strong and beautiful body, we can maybe understand what the word 'nothingness' means.

Naturally, in slightly another way, we may look at the numerous presentations of the body of the dead Christ — hanging on the Cross, descending from it, or lying on the ground or in the grave. A quite extraordinary painting from the hand of Hans Holbein the Younger (1497–1543) shows the profile of the body of the dead Christ⁹ placed in a very narrow coffin, and almost pressed down by its lid. It has been suggested that the body of a drowned man, fished out of a river, was used by the artist as a model. Fyodor Dostoyevsky (1821–1881), who described this painting in his novel *The idiot*, said that it would be possible to lose one's faith after looking at it.

In modern art from the beginning of the twentieth century, the human body became the object of many various manipulations performed on it by artists creating their own vision of a man, rather than searching for him in life or in the ideal forms. Of course, descriptions of the world with the use of the individual language of the artist started much earlier, and artists in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century such as El Greco (1541–1614) often deformed the human figure,¹⁰ becoming in this way the precursor of modern artists. Therefore, looking at the presentations of the human body in different modern art movements as Fauvism, Cubism, Dadaism and Expressionism, we find sometimes human bodies with very unusual proportions, with their bodies lengthened, shortened, and deformed in many different manners. One of the most representative pieces might be the famous painting by Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M.)* (1906–1907), exhibited in the Museum of Modern Art, New York, that shows five naked women from a brothel on the Avignon street in Barcelona. Three of them, as Horst Waldemar Janson aptly emphasises, 'are angular distortions of classical figures, but the violently dislocated features and bodies of the other two have all the barbaric qualities of primitive art' (Janson, 1986: 681).

The painting by Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968), *Nude descending a staircase* (1912), exhibited at the Philadelphia Museum of Art and inspired in some ways by Cubism, displays a mostly simplified and deformed human figure, 'seen in many successive moments simultaneously', which makes an impression of very intensive movement (Hartt, 1989: 903). Among the twentieth century artists who focused on the naked human body and its activities, at least two great painters are worth mentioning. Egon Schiele (1890–1918) drew

⁹ See *The body of the dead Christ in the tomb* (1521–1522), Kunstmuseum, Basel.

¹⁰ See, for example, *Christ on the Cross* (ca. 1590), The Louvre, Paris; *Resurrection* (ca. 1600), Museo del Prado, Madrid; and *Laokoon* (ca. 1610), National Gallery of Art, Washington.

and painted many female and male nudes, many with not particularly beautiful faces, and sometimes mostly deformed in their shapes. The nudes, often lying in bed, were caught in poses that could be taken as highly erotic. Their widespread legs unveil their genitals and their gestures suggest the possibility of touching themselves, probably in the act of masturbation. At the beginning of the twentieth century in conservative Austria, these very expressive presentations of human solitude and perplexity, also revealing the sexual problems of a man, could not be understood, and the works of Schiele were wrongly taken for pornography, even causing his temporary imprisonment.

At this time, also in Austria, Sigmund Freud who worked on the complicated problems of human sexuality became the grandfather of another contemporary artist worthy of discussion here. Lucian Freud (1922–2011) was one of the most interesting figurative painters operating with a brush. Almost with the same cleverness as the great masters of the past, he portrayed many people, mainly his friends, showing them naked and in strange poses, and mostly as recumbent on a couch. Some critics suggest that this may be reminiscent of the famous couch used by his grandfather during psychoanalytical sessions. The bodies of the people painted by Freud, and particularly the women, are often huge and heavy; their fullness falls down in fat folds making an image that is very far from the classical presentation of the human figure.

But can anyone depict the true ideal of the human body after all? And do contemporary artists still long for and search for the ideal, or rather do they focus on the manifold realities that have recently become more and more virtual? In the modern world with its growth of globalisation and offensive pop culture, a general art recipient wants viewing art to be extremely easy and is likely to accept every image of human body as potentially beautiful, without needing to refer to ideal measures or canons, like the people of ancient times did. The ugliness of the human body resulting from illnesses, aging or other mechanical reasons, formerly hidden or ignored by artists, is now openly exposed and is perceived as natural, and is not a cause for any shame or embarrassment.

The bodies of contemporary people are often painted and tattooed in a similar way as they used to be decorated ages ago, in primitive cultures. The human body with its smooth skin may be a suitable background for an artist to draw, paint or write a message. The self portrait of Albrecht Dürer¹¹ is well-known, probably sent by him to a doctor, where the artist has painted on his naked body a little yellow spot signalling in this way his painful place. Since the 1960s, so-called Body Art has gained popularity in the Western world. The artists representing this current trend use the human body — and their own body above all — as the main instrument for their activities and expression. Usually, Body Art is realised in the form of various happenings and performances, organised

¹¹ See: <http://www.albrecht-durer.org/Self-Portrait-2.html> (30.04.2014).

in art galleries in the presence of an audience. The artists demonstrate their experiences with the body that is written on, drawn on and painted, but is also sometimes hurt and bloodied. The aim of the actions of Body Art is, as the artists themselves claim, to examine the relationship of the body and the mind, and to challenge the limits of the body's endurance in cases of physical suffering, as well as to test the mind's ability to endure pain and other unpleasant stimuli. These connections between the body and the mind were the main subject of the numerous activities of Jerzy Bereś (1930–2012), the leader of Body Art in Poland.¹² This long-haired skinny man used his own lean naked body to demonstrate many ideas, as well as to reveal political meanings that made him not fully accepted by the official authorities of the People's Republic of Poland. In one of his performances Bereś passed through a town, having on his naked body only a small tablet with the inscription: 'The body of the artist'; and holding in his raised hand a small banner reading: 'The soul of the artist'. Perhaps we may take this as a quintessence of all discussions in the body-and-mind community, representing cases artists from all times who pursue such a union.

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¹² For more details about this artist see: Bereś, 2007; Gryglewicz, 2006.