People and Places

Human form in art

The artist's interest in the human form has endured for thousands of years. Representations of human figures have been discovered from prehistoric cave paintings right through history until the present day. These figures can inform us about the cultural, religious or everyday life of different societies. Pictures of human figures can be figurative, abstract or photographed.

The Convalescent by Gwen John, c1923

Figurative forms portray their subjects, which are generally posed, as accurately as possible.

The Model by Lyubov Popova, 1913

Abstract forms distort their subjects by using simplified shapes and patterns.

Naples, Italy – Children by Herbert List, 1961

Photographs capture their subjects, often unposed, in a single moment.

Urban landscapes

The Ideal City by Fra Carnevale, c1480–1484

Urban landscapes are drawings of towns and cities shaped by the people and buildings found there. Different atmospheres are created using bright, dark or muted colours and sharp or blurry lines.

LS Lowry

LS Lowry was an artist who lived from 1887 to 1976. He was famous for his simplistic, elongated figure drawings and paintings of the industrial urban landscapes of Manchester in the north of England.

Going to Work by LS Lowry, 1959

Drawing with detail

Many artists are fascinated with the finer details of the human figure. This was especially popular during the Renaissance, when links between art and science inspired artists to draw anatomically correct representations of the human form. Some artists focused on just one part of the body, such as Albrecht Dürer, who created many hand drawings.

Glossary

abstract	A distorted representation consisting of shapes and patterns.
anatomy	The study of the structure of animals' bodies, including humans.
elongated	Unusually long and thin.
muted	Soft in colour instead of bright.
posed	Arranged in a particular position.
Renaissance	A period in the 14th to 17th centuries when there was interest in art, science and literature.
subject	A person or thing that is being described.

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