



NYU | SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

Center for Publishing

ADVANCED DIGITAL
PUBLISHING INSTITUTE
Program begins March 2015

Apply today >



sign in



search

jobs US edition ▾

theguardian
Winner of the Pulitzer prize

home > arts > art & design

stage classical movies tv & radio music games ≡ all

Art Adrian Searle encounters

The Naked: artists get turned on by the body laid bare

Nudes by everyone from Warhol to Emin are enticing, disturbing, distorting, masturbatory but ultimately most revealing of us as viewers

● At London's Drawing Room until 29 November



📷 Maria Lassnig, Woman in the Bed. Photograph: Adam Reich/Private collection, New York

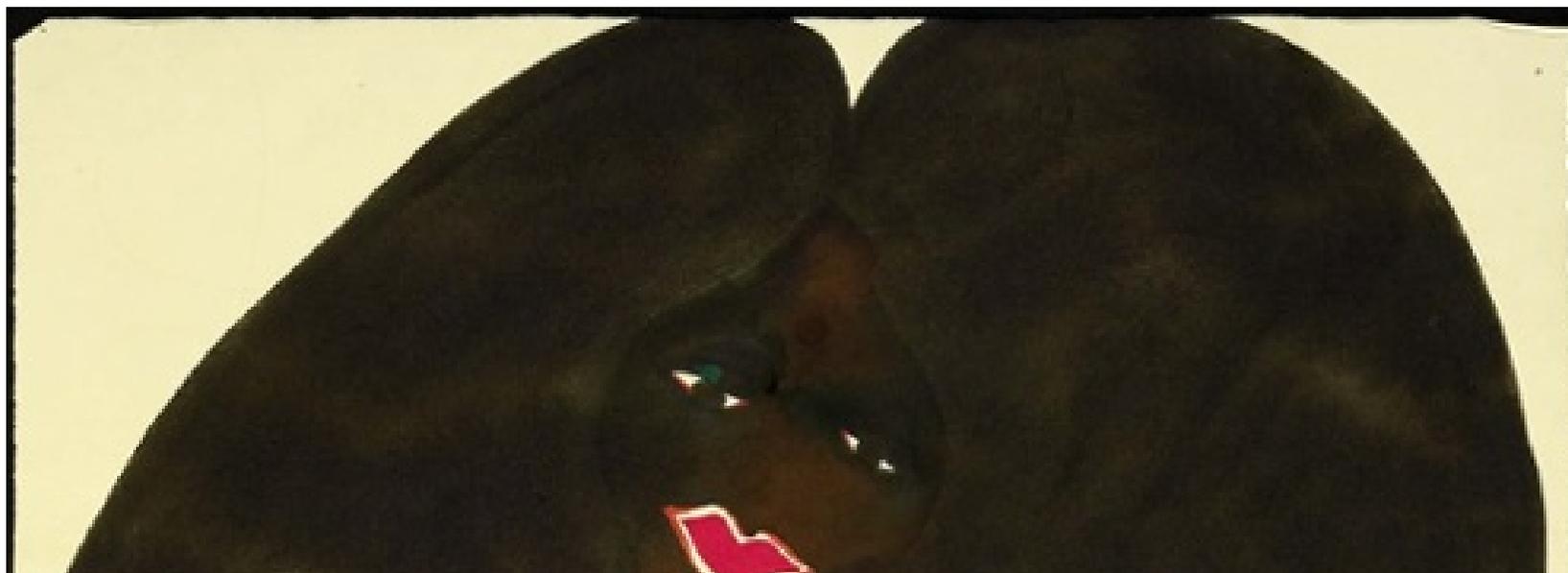
Adrian Searle

@SearleAdrian

Wednesday 29 October 2014 11.43 EDT

The Nakeds is a drawing exhibition about sex and abjection and bodies exposed. I get quite enough of that at home, I hear you say. Here's Pierre Bonnard's wife, re-imagined by Marlene Dumas, coalescing in a faint yellowy pink as if she's condensed from steam in the bathroom. More bodies by Dumas turn on the paper to show us their sex, front and rear, displaying themselves not for us so much as at us, as provocation and a tease. We project their awareness of us, imagining that these drawn beings have an inner life.

Their lives are a fiction; drawing is not some magical invention of real people who happen to live in two dimensions. It is what we do with these images – and what they do to us – that makes them come alive. Drawings are drawings first, whatever they describe. Someone emerges out of a gram of pencil lead, a drop of ink, a saucer of dirty water, a bit of paper.







📷 Chris Ofili Untitled (Afronude) 2006. Photograph: Private collection, London

It is always a surprise to realise how little is actually on the paper in Dumas' work. Nearby, [Chantal Joffe](#)'s self-portrait figure turns impossibly, smiling as she bares her rump. The naked men Joffe paints are more lumpen, as if they don't quite own their flesh but are lumbered with it like a badly-fitted suit. A single figure by [Enrico David](#), cut from brown paper, hangs unframed on a wall. Its arms raised in a posture that reminds me of the calcified figures at Pompeii, it seems at once real and timeless. It probably took the artist no time at all – to rub the paper with graphite, cut out the shape, make a fold along its length (as though it were a paper boat), and hang it on the wall. The important thing was to do it. It is a terrific thing.



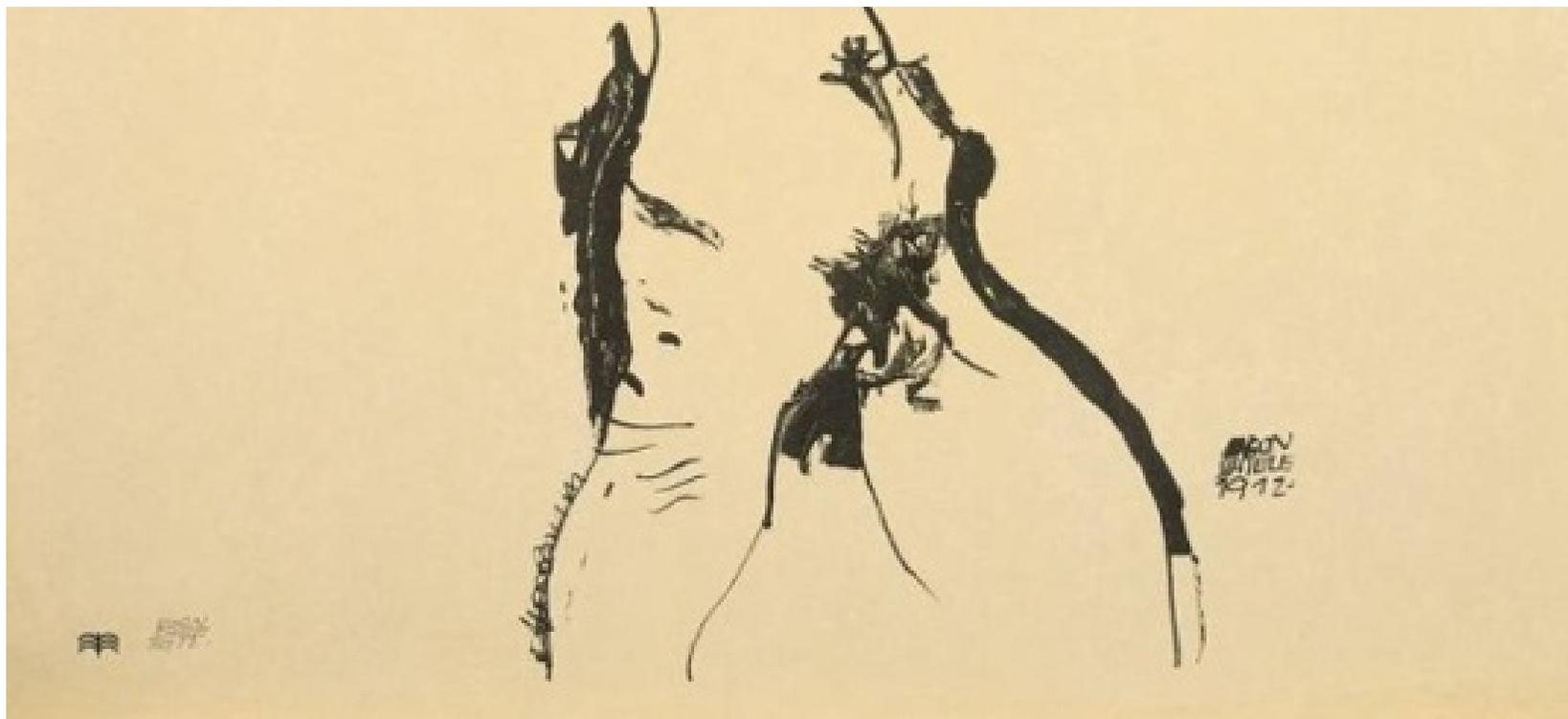


📷 Paul McCarthy, from the series *Étant donnés White Snow Walt Paul Drawings*, 2013

In [Andy Warhol's spare line-drawings](#) of male figures from the early 1950s, the line feels like an eye getting up close and involved as it makes its way around every bulge with a tender objectification. Apart from Warhol, and [Stewart Helm's](#) Buenos Aires transvestites, who display themselves as miracles of self-invention, most of the men in *Naked*s look somehow depleted, awkward, uncomfortable and absurd. A series of recent drawings by [Paul McCarthy](#), a parody of the reclining figure in [Marcel Duchamp's last work *Étant Donnés*](#), make you feel that the human body is a horrible thing to inhabit, and that desire itself is a wretched affair. Unlike Duchamp's work, there isn't much

[Egon Schiele](#) in an exhibition in Vienna, and Schiele is also a presiding spirit in *The NAKEDS*. It's [Schiele time at the Courtauld Institute](#) too. In the show's catalogue, artist [Nicola Tyson](#) writes Schiele an open letter, detailing her extreme ambivalence towards the artist. "You," Tyson writes, "the Predatory Pornmaster – would persuade under-age working-class girls – 'urchins' – to expose their pudenda for a small fee, whereas I guess Gerti – your long-suffering younger sister – did it for free."





📷 Egon Schiele Self-Portrait 1917. Photograph: Richard Nagy, London

Tyson's own drawings of women are strangely stretched and compressed. There are moments of extreme focus, and places where bodies drift apart, as if she is mapping her own desire, then creating phantoms with it. [Alina Szapocznikow](#)'s naked figures also seem to be both themselves and somehow morphing and becoming other. A small self-portrait by Austrian artist [Maria Lassnig](#), who died earlier this year, is entirely concerned with the mental distortions of one's own body-image. This is perhaps the key theme of this show. How at odds the images here are with those pictures of perfect bodies that advertising sells us.







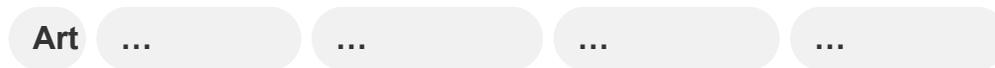
📷 Alina Szapochnikow, Bust-Length Figure of a Woman, Headless 2, (1971). Photograph: Private collection, Paris

These men and women have been drawn with all kinds of intentions, both public and private. Artists draw for themselves and they draw for us too. Often artists make you feel like you are looking over their shoulder, while they are showing something intimate, rather than making a public statement. Sometimes they just like to draw dirty pictures. Tyson is quoted in the catalogue observing that with Schiele, “you are invited to have a threesome with him just through lines and washes of colour”. Even a twosome with Schiele would be too much for me.

There are drawings here to masturbate to, drawings of masturbation itself, and drawings that are masturbatory in their creation. Drawing can be a way of pleasuring yourself, and who is to say what uses viewers – as much as artists – make of any artwork? Whatever turns you on.

So unlike photography, so unlike what biology and anatomy tell us, how real these images feel. It is all in their quickness and paraphrase, their caricature, their malleability, their obsessiveness and scrappiness, in the plight these images find themselves in. To be only a body is to be an object. And sometimes some of us like to be objectified.

Looking at all these images, something drives us on. It is more than polite art appreciation or a connoisseurship of drawing. We want to be turned-on, in some way or other. “Being turned-on is not a failure of intelligence”, said [Jennifer Doyle](#) in a discussion about sexuality at the [recent Frieze art fair](#). It is intelligence directed. We want to see and we want to look. Here come the Nakeds ...



[View all comments >](#)

related content

popular→

More stories from around the web

Promoted content by Outbrain

Why virtual graffiti walls are such a hit all over the world?

New Digital & Interactive Entertainment Products - Foto Master

See What You'll Look Like In 20 Years

Co. Design

37 Seconds Explains our broken Standards Of Beauty

FullyM.com by Snapsort

11 Painful Tattoos That Will Make You Cringe

BrainJet

Retiring: Finding Communities That Connect and Nurture the Like-Minded

The New York Times

Beauty Beyond the Grave: The Story Behind Europe's Bejeweled Skeletons

People

Recommended by  Outbrain



back to top

theguardian



US world opinion sports soccer tech lifestyle fashion business money travel

≡ all

arts > art & design > art

jobs

subscribe

all topics

all contributors

about

us

contact

us

feedback

**complaints &
corrections**

terms & conditions

privacy policy

cookie policy

securedrop

© 2015 Guardian News and Media Limited or its affiliated companies. All rights reserved.