

Question 5:

From the Lens-Based Image Making research strand lectures, choose a theme, movement, or selection of artists or designers that relate to your practice or interests, and construct a 2,500-word essay. Critically assess primary themes, key writers, and relevant practitioners.

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Illustration list

- Figure 1. Andreas H. Bitesnich. Yvonne & Tom, Vienna 1994, No. 66
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The human body has been celebrated from the Ancient Greece, particularly the male, in religious festivals where they were bringing an honour for their god, Zeus, by fighting completely naked, and by doing so their bodies became symbols of glory and triumph and examples of moral excellence. In the Renaissance period, nude art took a new form when Leonardo da Vinci studied the anatomy of the body and those close calculations and accuracy were reflected clearly in his work.

The bare body gives the artist the chance to express more feelings and therefore,

the nude paintings or sculptures help the artists deliver more due to the freedom of expression.

If talking about the nude art, it is not going to stop here, as it is far from just a form of artistic skill; nude art has been used to creating portraits of gods and goddesses in their nudity to symbolise different virtues such as beauty, bravery and fertility; and it can also be seen later in Christians paintings where it symbolise divinity and innocence.

When the photograph was first introduced, it had no big value, moreover it was feared not to be the death of art and was handled only as a tool which would help artists by offering a starting point for creating a painting. The pictures themselves were not worthy back then to be called an art piece, but they were much better and handy to be replicate than a life model.

However, the photography has lived throughout those times and now is one of the best ways to express yourself. In regarding the nude art, there are many more feelings that someone can send only by stripping the model of its clothes because the viewer will then be forced to have to read the image only from body language and subtle gestures, such as whether the body is tensed or relaxed and allow the viewer to get an idea or a glimpse of the mental state of the figure.

Showing the beauty of the human body has been one of the supreme achievements and greatest challenges of artists for centuries. Of course the nude has always been as well a controverted subject and has triggered many discussions over the years about sexuality and sin, therefore many artists became controversial because of their work.

In the next paragraphs there will be a few examples of artists that I admire, whose niche include nude fine art as well and we will only be looking at that part of their work.

The first artist discussed about will be **Andreas H Bitesnich**, born in 1964 in Vienna. He has discovered his talent quite late, at age 25, after spending a decade working as a home-electronics salesman. Andreas claims that he realised that he is into photography when he had a look at someone else's work from his friend who worked at the time as a photographer assistant.

His initial thought was that he wanted to become a fashion photographer, but soon realised that his country, Austria, has little to offer. Three years later he has photographed his first nude session and found that he had "both flair and a feel for the human body" as it is reported as well in the book "NUDES. The World's Top Photographers and the stories behind their greatest images".

Andreas' first work published was called "Nudes", published by Stemmler (Zurich/New York) back in 1998 and he discussed that was an exception and he had seen in a dream the idea of a "male-female, yin-yang circle that resembles a human pinwheel", as well stated in "NUDES. The World's Top Photographers and the stories behind their greatest images". His first project had also win the 1998 Kodak Photography Book Award.

Andreas is one of the most famous nude photographers, both for male and female. He has got a generous portfolio and his work can easily be recognised due to its perfect synthesis and of beauty and form and by its simple aesthetic. Although the artist sustains that he works intuitively without having a preconceived notion of what a photograph should mean or be, his most famous

work that made well known internationally were images with couples which were so good realised and elaborated that they seem to be living glyphs or Gordian knots of flesh to be studied and solved.

Andreas claims that there is no formula when it comes to his photographs and that he does not think in advance about what is he going to do, he only thinks about shapes and forms and everything falls in place in front of the camera lens.

By the year of 1996, Andreas had enough material to write a book, but he took another three years to work on his book called "Nudes". The books "Nudes" and "Woman" contain images in black and white and his most recent book "On Form" has got colour photography which has kept him busy for a few years. The colour photography softness and warms up the human body that brings a different feeling to the viewer eye than the black and white images which seem more cooler.

He has done all the printing for his first book "Nudes", and he scanned half of his work for "Woman" and then scanned everything for "On Form". As any other good artist, he is not interested in the realisation techniques and he is more focused on the results.

In 2004, he made a big exhibition in Vienna and 40,000 people were able to see first hand his work.

"I'm always inspired. I don't even put my own pictures on the wall. I only want to move forward.", Andreas claims in "NUDES. The World's Top Photographers and the stories behind their greatest images"



fig. 1

The second artist argued today is **Sylvie Blum**, a female nude photographer. She was born in 1967 in Taxenbach, Austria, and moving in 1974 to Germany; throughout her life she travelled the world. Sylvie knows both sides of the camera as she has started at 16 her career as a model in the worlds of fashion and art and became a photographer later on. Sylvie worked in Europe for over ten years as a model at the beginning and worked with names such as Helmut Newton, Jean-Loup Sieff, Lucien Clergue, Andreas Bitesnich and Jan Saudek. In 1986 she met Guenter Blum, erotic photographer, and became his model and later his muse. They got married in 1995 and by his side she gained knowledge

as well about techniques of photography, light and composition. She always felt drawn to art and developed interests in fashion, music, architecture and photography which became her passion for life. In 1997, after her husband death, she has moved to an old factory which she turned into a photography studio. After becoming famous with some artistic publications Sylvie moved to California. .

Her first publication as a photographer was “Venus Selbst(Venus Herself)” (Publisher, 2000), created of a collection of self-portraits, followed by her two second publications in 2002, “Nudes” and “Hotel Orient” and two years later, in 2004 published “M, Like Male Nudes”, which include only male models and express the male nudity through a woman’s point of view.

In 2005, she relocated to the USA and worked on different art projects. In 2008, she produced her iconic series called “Big Cat”, showing naked women walking and being surrounded by wild animals. She claimed that it was her dream since childhood that become a reality when the “Big Cat” project actually took place; she said that the project has started long before 2008, in 2004 in South Africa and Namibia where she studied wild life. The images she created have been sold at Christie’s New York and some of them are kept in the permanent collection in the Museum of Contemporary Art- MOCA BANGKOK.

After meeting David Fahey in Los Angeles he encouraged her to work on a new project book and so becoming her mentor and artistic inspiration. In 2011, Sylvie has released “Naked Beauty” published by teNeues and distributed worldwide.

Today, the artist owns a studio called “The White Box” where she lives as well in Los Angeles.



fig. 2

The third chosen photographer, **Barbara Bordnick** was born in 1943 in Bronx, New York and got her education at the Pratt Institute, with courses focused on fashion and fine art. She began her career in Copenhagen and Paris before returning to open a home studio in New York in 1969. That moment is the beginning of her story, as she started shooting for Harper's Bazaar.

Barbara is a well renowned portrait and fashion photographer. Over the past 35 years she has been published internationally and also received numerous awards for her film and print work: Clios for film and print, Art Director's Club

Award, Missouri School of Journalism Award, Nikon Award, ASMP Award for Distinguished Service, International Photographic Council's Leadership Award at the United Nations, The Polaroid Corporation commission to document portraits of America's Great Women of Jazz.

Her work was published by New York Times Magazine, Harpers Bazaar, Life, Lears, Newsweek, Fortune, Vogue Francais, Geo, Vanity Fair.

Here, we will bring our attention on Barbara's art of nude. The subjects of her erotica are mostly naked. Even though the most intimate part of the body is not visible, there is definitely a powerful feeling of strength, sensuality and sexual energy. The simple act of hiding on purpose is provocative and exciting, unleashing the viewer's imagination. Her style of photographing people is sensual, poetic and erotic. She describes her work as being mysterious and sensuous.

As she declared in an interview with John Paul Caponigro, published in the 2000 issue of View Camera Magazine, the form of the naked body is what makes her nude photography so sensual. Her subjects might beg to be touched, which makes the composition even more erotic. The sexual energy transmitted is not only coming from the subject, but also from the relation with the camera or even the photographer. Even so, she is not interested in gender. The eroticism and the sexual tension are depicted between subjects of the same or different gender.

"The nude is a very evocative study, both sensual and erotic. It's a landscape and movement that captivate and inspire me. Perhaps it's the way the light moves over the body and carries the gaze with it. As I follow the light with my eyes it seems as though I can "feel the form" and only when it's the way I want to be touched does it please me. That's the photograph I want to make."

Barbara Bordnick's approach towards the nude photography is to embrace the human body with her camera. Her work distinguishes as very tactile. Her images are brought to life most often by the subject's hands, in a very gentle, feminine touch.



fig. 3

The fourth mentioned, **Ernestine Ruben** was born in 1931 in Detroit, Michigan, USA. She received a BA in art history at the University of Michigan in 1953 and an MA in art education at Wayne State University in 1956. She was a reporter during her school days for various newspapers and never professionally used a camera. Ernestine was “discovered” in the 1980s by the director of photography at the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris, Jean-Claude Lemagny. At the time, she was 49 and practically became an overnight success.

Ruben is an internationally known artist, her work is included in many collections such as the University museums of Princeton, Michigan, Stanford and the University of the Arts, the Art Museums of Philadelphia, Houston and Detroit, as well as the Museum of Modern Art, the Maison Europeene de la Photographie and the Bibliotheque National in Paris.

She covered subjects such as landscapes during her career but it is the human body that has fascinated her for decades. Her concepts and ideas are focused on celebrating the human spirit and energy. The work she produced reflects an attraction towards dance, the subjects closely cropped in a moment of activity: extended torsos, tighten muscles, strained necks. According to Ernestine, "The motive force behind my photography remains the same. I persist in the endeavour to bring an image to life, by rendering it human, dynamic, and sentient. Human energy is represented by movement, gesture, composition and

is described by colour, texture and the other necessary elements in a visual image. These elements are in constant change much as our ideas and lives change".

Ernestine's work is less dogmatic, the subject's bodies translate into feelings as the viewers could reflect themselves in her images. During a workshop, where Jim Casper (the editor-in-chief and publisher of LensCulture) was invited to participate, she made a bold statement: "Photography is abstract because it starts with a given — what the camera records. The challenge is to transcend that. If you think about it, photography is really deductive, because what makes it interesting — and abstract — is what you take away. It's very much the way a sculptor works... While photographing bodies, for instance, I want to create new bodies in the shadows."



fig. 4

Having argued all these about nude photography and the above mentioned four examples of artists who practice this type of art, we see that it has not always been like this. The nude photography has not always been seen nor accepted as real art, but as a visual aid and a tool for painters and sculptors.

After the invention of photographic techniques in 1839, photography itself has started to become gradually recognised as art equal to established art forms, such as painting, sculpting and drawing. However, the nude art has still been seen as an inferior imitation of the traditional artistic creations for a while and over 150 years later, sometimes still be the case of a taboo.

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