

Speaking Figuratively: Narrative, Emotion, & The Body

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Schneider Hall Galleries, University of Louisville

Speaking Figuratively: Narrative, Emotion, & The Body offers diverse representations of the figure in art globally, thematically, and in various media. With work by 26 artists spanning the 17th – 21st centuries, *Speaking Figuratively* explores the ways artists utilize the human form—narratively to tell stories or comment on current political and social issues and emotionally to conjure feelings of bliss, desire, pain, or pleasure.

Artists working narratively include Adriaen Van Ostade (Dutch 1610-1684) who used printmaking to devote his practice to capturing the ordinary men and women of the working class – a turning point for art in the 17th century that previously focused on re-creating biblical stories or portraits of the upper classes. Similarly, 20th century artist William Wolfson used printmaking to create works of Social Realism, documenting the struggles of working class and poor individuals during the great depression.

Alberto Giacometti and Flavio Do Carvahlo abstract the figure to eschew narrative and focus on creating emotive responses in the viewer. Giacometti’s “Head (The Artist’s Mother)” elongates the features of his figure to create a tormented portrait evoking fear and loneliness while Carvahlo’s figural studies emphasize the gesture of the artists hand, creating movement and a lighthearted bliss that emanates from the page.

Other artists work between narrative and emotion. Robert Carter’s drawing “Mother and Child” powerfully illustrates the parent-child connection and captures a mother’s need to protect her child. Mary Cassatt’s etching “Looking in the Hand Mirror” showcases an intimate and private moment between mother and child, while instilling a sense of spirit and playfulness in the viewer.

In presenting these diverse artists together, *Speaking Figuratively* seeks to expand our understanding of what the figure in art represents—more than a portrait, nude, or form to study, the figure can illuminate the social and cultural atmosphere of its time, can be emotively powerful or lightheartedly playful.

Speaking Figuratively features 32 artworks from the UofL Hite Institute of Art and Design Permanent Collection. Represented artists include: Pansy Phillips, William Henry, Alberto Giacometti, Mauricio Lasansky, Willy Habl, Henry Gotleib, Flavio Do Carvahlo, Alexander Brook, Robert Carter, William T. Wiley, Mark Priest, Jane Miller, Harold Gregor Jr. Edward Melcarth, Gerhard Marcks, Adriaen Van Ostade, Anders Zorn, Albert Edward Sterner, Rufino Tamayo, David Bumbeck, Mary Cassatt, Edwin Finch, Thomas Hart Benton, Utagawa Toyokuni, Morikawa Chikashige, and Utagawa Kuniyoshi.