



SILENT PARTNERS

Artist and Mannequin from Function to Fetish

Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Tuesday 14 October 2014 – Sunday 25 January 2015

And at Musée Bourdelle, Paris

Spring 2015

Every picture tells a story ... but it does not always give away its secrets. For much of its existence, the artist's mannequin, or lay figure, was one of art's best-kept.

Now, for the first time, *Silent Partners* will unveil the mannequin's secret life to show how, from being an inconspicuous studio tool, a piece of equipment as necessary as easel, pigments and brushes, the lay figure became the fetishised subject of the artist's painting, and eventually, in the twentieth century, a work of art in its own right.

A common figure in the studios of painters and sculptors from the Renaissance onwards, this 'artful implement' was used to study perspective, arrange compositions, 'rehearse' the fall of light and shade and, especially, to paint drapery and clothing. But, while even the very greatest artists condoned its use, the mannequin best served its purpose by remaining 'silent': too present or visible in the finished picture, the mannequin could make figures appear stiff and unnatural, and so betray the tricks of the artist's trade.

The nineteenth century was a turning point. Mannequin-making became a profession in its own right and Paris, especially, became a leading centre of production. Competition was fierce to create and perfect the 'naturalistic' mannequin, one that was life-size with an articulated skeleton that could move in realistic ways and an exterior finish that was painted and padded to look - sometimes eerily - human.

And as the mannequins became an increasingly sophisticated human replica, so they emerged from the anonymity of the studio to take their place, centre stage, on the canvas. At first the mannequin featured humorously, in witty visual games of 'hide and seek' and double entendre. However, throughout the course of the nineteenth century, painters such as Degas began to represent it in more troubling ways, playing on the



Edgar Degas (1834-1917)
Portrait of Henri Michel-Lévy, c. 1878
Museu Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon
© Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon
M.C.G., photo: Catarina Gomes Ferreira



Alan Beeton (1880-1942)
Reposing, c. 1929
© The Fitzwilliam Museum,
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unnerving psychological presence of a figure that was realistic, yet unreal, lifelike, yet lifeless. Others - photographers especially - explored in more voyeuristic terms how the relationship between male painter and female mannequin played out behind closed doors, revealing the studio as a place of potent erotic encounter.

By the end of the century, innovations in the manufacture of mannequins shifted to the shop window dummy, the lay figure's closest kin. Again, Paris led the way, and the fashion mannequin was transformed by firms such as Pierre Imans and Siégel from a schematic approximation of the human form into an uncannily realistic surrogate that inspired both consumerist longing and sexual fantasy.

This distinctively modern mannequin - one that reflected the life and elegance of its era - set a new challenge for twentieth century painters and photographers. Featureless and expressionless, they haunted the paintings of the Italian metaphysical painters Giorgio de Chirico and Carlo Carrà, while the Surrealists celebrated the 'modern' mannequin as a manifestation of the 'marvellous', an object that could reveal the artist's - and our - secret unconscious desires.

One of the most wide-ranging and ambitious shows ever hosted at the Fitzwilliam, the exhibition will feature over 180 paintings, drawings, books and photographs as well as fashion dolls, trade catalogues, a series of extraordinary patent documents and videos that will surprise and at times disturb. There will be paintings and drawings by Fra Bartolommeo, Cézanne, Poussin, Gainsborough, Millais, Ford Madox Brown, Courbet, Wilhelm Trübner, Kokoschka and Degas as well as photographs by and of Surrealist artists such as Bellmer, Raoul Ubac, Dali and Man Ray; two works by Jake and Dinos Chapman will form a twenty-first century coda.

But among the most striking and fascinating exhibits will be the mannequins themselves: from beautifully carved sixteenth century figures to haunting wooden effigies once belonging to Sickert (and maybe Hogarth) and painted dolls of full human height, top-of-the-range models that were highly sought after by artists throughout Europe.

For more information and a selection of images contact the Fitzwilliam Museum Press Office:
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Visitor information:

Fitzwilliam Museum, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RB
FREE ADMISSION

OPEN: Tuesday - Saturday: 10.00 - 17.00
Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays: 12.00 - 17.00
CLOSED: 24-26 & 31 December and 1 January

www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk | 01223 332900



Oskar Kokoschka (1886-1980)
Self-portrait at the easel, 1922
Oil on canvas
Leopold Collection II, Vienna
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