

Heroic, Wounded, Dissected: “Real” Male Bodies in Netherlandish Art

Organizers

Kendra Grimmett (Assistant Teaching Professor of Art History, Ball State University, kendra.grimmett@bsu.edu)

Sunmin Cha (Ph.D. Candidate, Columbia University, sc4596@columbia.edu)

Abstract

Although “Truth” was often personified by a female figure, Netherlandish artists regularly used depictions of the male body to construct, test, and contest claims about reality and truthfulness. This panel interrogates when and why the male figure became a paradigm for visualizing “real” presence, authority, evidence, vulnerability, and doubt.

Across religious, mythological, scientific, civic, and artistic contexts, the male body could appear heroic, wounded, dissected, divine, disciplined, eroticized, laboring, and suffering. Christ’s wounded and resurrected flesh offers one crucial example: in representations of Doubting Thomas, the Mass of St. Gregory, the Man of Sorrows, and the Resurrection, sacred truth is mediated through the exposed, tactile, and evidentiary body of Jesus.

We invite papers that explore how “reality” was gendered, materialized, and made persuasive by the male body in Netherlandish art. For example, papers may consider the male body as an artistic model, used in workshop training, drawing practice, and plaster casts. Others may examine the male figure as a site of emulation, exploring concepts of virtuosity associated with the body and the mind, the individual and society. In the early modern period, male bodies were also studied scientifically as medical evidence, opened and examined in anatomy lessons and theaters, then used as medical illustrations and sources of empirical inquiry. Symbolically, the male form came to represent sacred, civic, and political bodies, through which Netherlandish artists visualized presence, authority, belief, and collective identity.

Applicants are invited to expand, challenge, or redefine these categories. Taken together these examples will consider how images of male flesh negotiated the dichotomous relationships between artifice and nature, idealization and observation, surface and presence.

Please submit your proposal to Kendra Grimmett (kendra.grimmett@bsu.edu) and Sunmin Cha (sc4596@columbia.edu), no later than **September 15, 2026**. Submissions must include a presentation title, an abstract (maximum 300 words), and a shortened 2-page curriculum vitae with your current institutional affiliation and contact information.