



**TITLE:** *Reclining Figure*  
**ARTIST:** Ben Johnson (1902-1967)  
**DATE:** 1965  
**SIZE:** 27 ¼ X 22 ¼ inches  
**MEDIUM:** Lithograph  
**ACQUISITION #:** 94.5.1  
**ADDITIONAL WORK IN COLLECTION BY ARTIST:** Yes  
 Completed By: Natalia C. Martinez Summer 2018

MoFA

### VOCABULARY

**Lithograph:** the process of printing from a flat surface treated so as to repel the ink except where it is required for printing. In Ancient Greek *lithos* means ‘stone’ and *graphein* means ‘to write.’

**GRD Studio:** Gallery opened by Jean S. Roosevelt from 1921-1970, named after her sister, Gladys Roosevelt Dick

**The nude, “is not a subject of art but a form of art.”**  
 –Kenneth Clark in *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*

### ARTIST’S BIOGRAPHY

Ben Johnson was a painter born in Brooklyn, New York in 1902 and he specialized in the female nude figure. He studied at the Pratt Institute and was accepted to show at the First International Watercolor Exhibition at the Brooklyn Museum in 1925.

He became a Tiffany Scholar in 1930-1933 and exhibited at Jean S. Roosevelt’s gallery, the GRD Studio in New York, and had his first solo show at the Jumble Shop Restaurant in 1930. After focusing on religious activities for twelve years, he began painting the female nude once again from his cabin in the country.

Johnson’s studies of the nude figure were some of his most known works. He would add blocks of color to his prints, as pictured above in the blocks of red in *Reclining Figure*.

### SOURCES

[https://library.svr.edu/digital/guides/i/johnson\\_b.htm](https://library.svr.edu/digital/guides/i/johnson_b.htm)  
[http://www.askart.com/artist\\_bio/Ben\\_Franklin\\_Johnson/100959/Ben\\_Franklin\\_Johnson.aspx](http://www.askart.com/artist_bio/Ben_Franklin_Johnson/100959/Ben_Franklin_Johnson.aspx)  
<https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdfplus/10.1086/677303>  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nude\\_\(art\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nude_(art))  
<http://www.victorianweb.org/sculpture/nudes/naked.html>  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aphrodite\\_of\\_Knidos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aphrodite_of_Knidos)



Left: Polykletus, *Diadumenos*, National Archaeological Museum, Athens  
 Right: *The Ludovisi Cnidian Aphrodite*, Roman marble with restored



Left:  
*Reclining Figure*,  
 Ben  
 Johnson,  
 1965,  
 13 ½ x 17  
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### KENNETH CLARK IN *THE NUDE: A STUDY IN THE IDEAL FORM*

“The English language, with its elaborate generosity, distinguishes between the naked and the nude. To be naked is to be deprived of our clothes, and the word implies some of the embarrassment most of us feel in that condition. The word ‘nude,’ on the other hand, carries, in educated usage, no uncomfortable overtone. The vague image it projects into the mind is not of a huddled and defenseless body, but of a balanced, prosperous, and confident body: the body re-formed. In fact, the word was forced into our vocabulary by critics of the early eighteenth century to persuade the artless islanders [of the UK] that, in countries where painting and sculpture were practiced and valued as they should be, the naked human body was the central subject of art.”

### THE GREEK NUDE

Ancient Greeks sculpted the male nude form to be symbolic of triumph, glory, and moral excellence. The male nude subjects were considered heroes. However, the female nude symbolized highly sensualized sexuality. In the fourth century, Greek sculptors began to depict Aphrodite in the nude.

## FIGURE DRAWING GRADES 9-12

**Session Activity:** In this session, students will be exposed to drawing the human form by doing figure drawings on fully clothed student models.

**Objectives:**

- Students will be introduced to the history of the nude form.
- Students will draw structures of the human form, for example the hands, face, and arms.
- Students will practice figure drawing in increments of 15 minutes.

**Materials:** Charcoal, pencil, paper, timer

**Procedure:**

Explain the classic history of the nude. Ancient Greeks first began using the male nude as a form symbolic of power and triumph. The female nude began to appear later in Ancient Greek work. Aphrodite was the first female to be shown nude. The male nude was more symbolic of power, but the female nude was meant to pleasure the male onlooker and sexualize Aphrodite. Use a powerpoint to show several examples of the nude over time. Include Ben Johnson pieces as examples of contemporary work.

Begin the activity by having the students split into even groups. Within those groups, one student at a time will stand and model fully clothed while the others sit and draw the model for 15 minutes. The teacher may assign a specific part on which to focus during each 15 minute interval (i.e. the face, hands, feet, arms). During each interval, a different student will stand still while the others focus on the part assigned for that round.

After the figure drawing session is over, discuss the experience. Was it difficult to stand still for 15 minutes at a time? Would you assign any symbolism to your forms as the ancient Greeks did? How could you make a hand, a foot, or an arm represent an idea? Have the students talk about what they learned from the experience and what they would do to enhance their drawings and evolve them into images that carry symbolic meaning?



Heroic Statue of a Roman General with the head of Augustus, 1<sup>st</sup> Century BC, Louvre, Paris

### Visual Arts Next Generation Sunshine State Standards: 9-12

Strand A: Critical Thinking and Reflection

Standard 1: Cognition and reflection are required to appreciate, interpret, and create with artistic intent

Benchmark: VA.912.C.1.1 Integrate curiosity, range of interests, attentiveness, complexity, and artistic intention in the art-making process to demonstrate self-expression.

### Visual Arts Next Generation Sunshine State Standards: 9-12

Strand C: Cultural and Historical Connections

Standard 1: The arts reflect and document cultural trends and historical events, and help explain how new directions in the arts have emerged.

Benchmark: VA.912.H.2.5 Analyze artwork from a variety of cultures and times to compare the function, significance, and connection to other cultures and times

## THE HISTORY OF THE NUDE FIGURE GRADES 9-12

**Session Activity:** In this assignment, students will explore the history of the nude and write an essay that compares/contrasts a Johnson nude with a classic Greek nude.

**Objectives:**

- Students will be introduced to the classic history of the nude form.
- Students will write a 3 page paper as stated in the Session Activity section in Chicago and/or MLA format.
- Students will present their research as a powerpoint presentation.

**Materials.** Computer, paper, pen, internet connectivity, access to library resources

**Procedure:**

Explain the history of the Greek nude. Ancient Greeks first began using the male nude as a form symbolic of power and triumph. The female nude began to appear later in Ancient Greek work and was first shown in the form of a highly sensualized Aphrodite. In addition, research shows the original colors of the Greek statues. Use a powerpoint to show a selection of nudes in sculpture in ancient Greek art as well as selections of contemporary pieces to include the work of Ben Johnson. Introduce Kenneth Clark's work on the nude.

Compare and contrast one of the nude works by Ben Johnson with a Greek figure. Describe the time period each nude was created and describe the symbolism of each. What materials were used? What colors were used? Describe the positions of the models. Each student will present the research to the class with a powerpoint presentation. Compare and contrast the message of each work. What did the artist convey through the use of the nude form?

**Resources:**

<https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdfplus/10.1086/677303>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nude\\_\(art\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nude_(art))

<http://www.victorianweb.org/sculpture/nudes/naked.html>

[https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/nuan/hd\\_nuan.htm](https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/nuan/hd_nuan.htm)