

The bachelor loses the loincloth

BY NATALIE MACLELLAN

"To draw a dressed man, first you have to draw him naked and then you cover him with clothes," stated artist Leon Battista Alberti in 1435.

His words embody the beliefs of many early Renaissance artists and art instructors. The male nude was the prime subject of life-art classes in art academies throughout Europe. Drawing the male nude was an important test of an artist's skill.

The Dalhousie Art Gallery's exhibit, *The Bachelor Stripped Bare*, is composed mainly of these academic-type sketches, drawn for live models in life-drawing

classes. There are also a variety of books on hand documenting the historical relationship between art and anatomy.

A popular subject in Ancient sculpture and paintings, the male nude lost popularity in the Middle Ages because it was reminiscent of artwork from a pagan past. It gained popularity again in the Renaissance period, when artists began to turn to nature to inspire realism in their work.

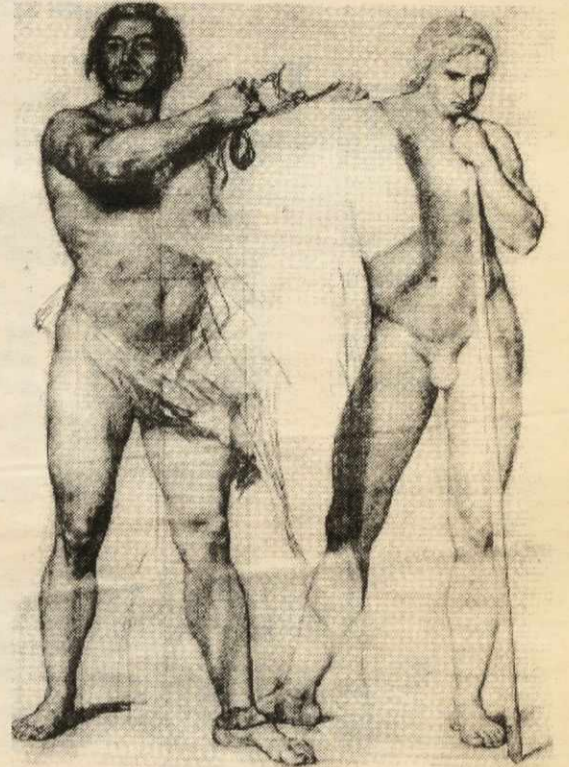
Despite the intense training in drawing the male nude form, there was never much demand for male nudity in popular art. The female nude seemed to be the favoured erotic image. Images of female nudes are provocative and

beautiful. Her nudity is meant to be admired. When a male nude is presented, his nudity always serves some purpose. It defines his strengths or weaknesses, it defines him as a martyr or a god.

The bulk of the pieces shown at the gallery are religious images: Adam and Eve; Christ as a child, on the cross and in the tomb; and the sacrifice of Abraham. There are also images of Hercules and other mythical personalities.

It wasn't until the 19th and 20th centuries that there was any demand for representations of male beauty, coming primarily from the emergence of an open gay community.

With the female as the usual subject of erotica, and the male as the usual admirer, *The Bachelor Stripped Bare* allows for a much needed role reversal. It is a chance for both men and women to admire the male body as a work of art, just as the female body has been seen for ages.



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