



THE FIGURE

Throughout history, the human figure has been one of the central motifs of art. The Renaissance saw a growing awareness of the expressive possibilities of the figure, and drawing from the live model soon became one of the foundations of painting and sculpture. Artists received a grounding in anatomy as part of their training, and a few, such as Leonardo da Vinci (no. 5), even conducted and drew human dissections themselves.

To learn about the forms of the body through intense observation, artists posed nude models in the studio – Annibale Carracci’s black-chalk studies (no. 23) were unprecedented in their grandeur, and inspired artists for the next century.

Armed with this knowledge, the artist could then use the body for whatever dramatic effect he desired, from the soft grace of Raphael’s allegorical figure of *Poetry* (no. 9) to the vigorous muscularity of Michelangelo’s *Risen Christ* (no. 8).

Individual figures were then used as the building blocks of larger compositions, and Domenichino’s *St Matthew* (no. 24) and Giovanni Lanfranco’s *Angel* (no. 25) were drawn over with a squared grid to allow their transfer to another drawing or enlargement to the surface of the painting.