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**Article of the week #****1**

**“Medieval Censorship, Nudity And The Revealing History Of The Fig Leaf”**

Sarah Bond For Forbes Oct 27, 2017 @ 08:54 AM

https://www.forbes.com/sites/drsarahbond/2017/10/27/medieval-censorship-nudity-and-the-revealing-history-of-the-fig-leaf/#2de77afcb455/

**Read and annotate the following article. Answer the questions that follow.**

1. How did we come to use fig leaves to cover naked figures in art? The tale of the fig leaf is part of the long history of censorship in art.
2. Those who love Instagram know that there are strict guidelines about the parts of the body that can be shown on the site. While some have risked removal of their photographs by posting nudes, others like artist  Claudia Sahuquillo have begun to explore how the material used to cover sensitive areas of the body can themselves be seen as art. Instagram's censorship of nudity is nothing new. It can be traced back to the Renaissance use of fig leaves to cover nude statues and frescoes.
3. The first mentions of a fig leaf to cover nudity is in conjunction with the book of Genesis (3:7) with the Hebrew words [עֲלֵ֣ה](http://biblehub.com/hebrew/aleh_5929.htm%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)[תְאֵנָ֔ה](http://biblehub.com/hebrew/teenah_8384.htm%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank). Adam and Eve cover their nakedness with a loincloth or apron of fig leaves that were--as later early Christian commentators noted--quite scratchy. In his commentary on Genesis, the late Roman bishop and theologian Augustine would hypothesize that these leaves symbolized lying, whereas the Venerable Bede noted that they were a symbol of the tendency to sin.
4. The earliest depictions of Adam and Eve in the catacombs in Rome (from the third and fourth centuries CE) often show the two shamefully clutching fig leaves to cover their naked bodies. Well into the later fourth century, fig leaves were attached to the story of the Garden of Eden but were notably not applied to all works of art. Classical statuary depicting heroic nudes and other types of naked bodies continued to be appreciated during the late empire. However, the heroically nude statues of classical antiquity began to become a symbol of a "pagan" past within medieval Europe and the Byzantine Empire.
5. As classical archaeologist Troels Myrup Kristensen has noted, "In medieval manuscripts, naked statues on columns frequently served as signifiers of idolatry." Within western medieval art, nudity still played a role, albeit to a lesser extent than it had in antiquity. Certain biblical scenes such as the crucifixion had nudity and numerous manuscripts transmit depictions of naked martyrs, but the shift to the use of clothing was a sign of modesty and Christianity that took root. The naked idols had been rejected.
6. The Renaissance brought about the revival of classical statuary and with it, nudity. Donatello's small bronze statue of David from around 1440 is considered the first nude statue since antiquity (well, that we know of). Yet it was another David, by Michelangelo, that would cause a stir due to its nudity. When the 5.17 meter tall David (called Il Gigante) of Michelangelo was installed in the Piazza della Signoria in Florence in 1504, authorities immediately placed a garland called a ghirlanda made of twenty-eight copper leaves around his waist in order to cover his nakedness. This modesty wreath was in place until at least around the mid-16th century.
7. On her academic blog, Alberti's Window, art historian Monica Bowen has recounted the history of using fig leaves to censor genitals in the early modern period. As she notes, it was around 1541 that the "Fig Leaf Campaign" was begun by a fundamentalist named Cardinal Carafa and Monsignor Sernini, the Ambassador of Mantua. These men wished to cover naked figures in Michelangelo's Last Judgement. In part, this was a Catholic reaction to the modesty preached within the Reformation.
8. Popes like Paul IV began to speak out against nudity, but it was not until the Council of Trent (1545-1563) that the Catholic Church took a firmer stand. As art historian Arthur Frederick Ide notes on his academic blog, "the Council of Trent condemned nudity in religious art while most of the bishops and cardinals maintained pornography in their personal collections...Pope Paul IV mandated the use of concealing fig leaves, promulgating the church’s attack on nudity in art in a papal bull dated 1557."
9. Ide and other historians argue that it was Pope Innocent X (r.1644-1655) and then Pope Clement XIII (r. 1693 –1769) who began to fully cover Vatican statuary with fig leaves, à la mode of Adam and Eve in the Old Testament's book of Genesis. It was Pope Pius IX (r. 1846-1878) who actually desecrated statues and had their genitalia removed completely. Papal stands against nudity were a way of underscoring modesty and conservative approaches.
10. Perhaps the most infamous fig leaf story involves Queen Victoria. It helps to explain many of the plaster fig leaves made in England and then used in the U.S. for popular classical statuary made into plaster casts. Around 1857, there was a fig leaf created for a plaster cast of Michelangelo’s “David” given to the Queen by the Grand Duke of Tuscany. The Queen was quite scandalized by the plaster David (just as Florentines had been in the 16th century), and thus the fig leaf was kept at the ready at the Victoria & Albert Museum in case she visited.
11. Plaster casts of classical statues sold to wealthy men like the Carnegies and to many American museum collections in the 19th and 20th centuries still had plaster fig leaves attached to them in order to protect the eyes of the conservative patrons who bought them. This despite the fact that the original statues were often completely nude. Censorship continues in museum up to the modern day. As recently as 2016, before a visit from Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, the Capitoline Museum in Rome took measures to put naked statues in modesty boxes.
12. While most original classical statuary has broken free from the "Fig Leaf Campaign," we can perhaps still see some of the medieval and early modern attitudes towards nudity embedded within the image policies on social media platforms like Instagram. A belief that the display of the body within images or art should be censored in order to decrease lust and promote modesty is nothing new. However, just as it was in the late Roman empire and then the Renaissance, the debate over the true meaning of nudity continues.

**Answer the following questions in complete, thorough sentences. Be sure to TAG and ICE! Use the ACTIVE READING STRATEGY.**

Create an MLA citation for this article.

How do we see the influence of past censorship in our world today?

Do you think art should ever be censored? Explain using evidence from the text.{Be sure to use your ICE and TAG format}

In the eighth paragraph of the article, what does the use of the word ‘condemned’ mean?

Find the word **Reformation** in the 7th paragraph and, using context clues, determine a definition. AFTER you have written your own definition, look up the actual definition of the word and write it down. Is your definition similar to the original? How do they differ?