

STONE FACE

The psychology of the face, the phenomenology of the bust

October 1-2 2018

Faculty of Humanities, University of Copenhagen, South Campus,

Building 27, room 27.0.09

ABSTRACTS

All papers 25 minutes (followed by 20 minutes discussion)

Helen Ackers (University of Warwick)

Networks of Interaction: The Roman Portrait Bust in its Familial Context

When one views a Roman portrait bust in a museum or collection, it has often been set in a display context far removed from its original setting. Even within Antiquity, busts were regularly moved, re-carved and reused in new contexts. These ancient contexts are consequently difficult to reconstruct. This fluidity of display can confuse the way we view and interpret Roman busts. Frequently stacked together in museum or stately home collections, they could be interpreted as high-status ornaments. The power of the ancient portrait and the significance of the bust format can be lost. In this talk I will argue that the Roman bust format not only endowed their subjects with status, through placing focus on the face and likeness of the subject, it also actively encouraged and extended relationships between the portrait and viewer (Kohl and Müller 2007; Kohl and Olariu 2012). Portrait busts thus functioned as particularly effective 'stand-ins' for deceased relatives or absent parties (Bettini 2005; Stewart 2007: 170; Ewald 2012, 43 & 2015: 391; Ackers 2018). The Roman portrait busts could consequently develop agency, encouraging interaction and response (Gell 1998; van Eck 2015). However, this interaction was not limited to that between viewer and portrait. Through display context, networks of interaction between portraits became possible. I will consequently explore in this talk how the Roman portrait bust was displayed and utilised to forge and preserve familial networks. Through focusing on surviving examples of paired or family bust groups and representations of Roman portrait busts, especially on sarcophagi, I will consider the social function of the Roman bust format.

Josefine Baark (University of Warwick)

'The Originals': Commemorative Clay Likenesses and Portrait Sculpture in Qing China

This presentation will explore how Qing dynasty clay sculptures straddle the line between likeness in death and life-likeness. By concentrating on their indicators of rank and their material preciousness rather than their physiognomy, it is possible to tell a new story about the production

of portraiture in southern China during early modern trade. Ultimately, the presentation will challenge and expand the existing cross-culturally informative, but ultimately euro-centric framework for understanding early modern Chinese clay sculptures. The presentation focuses on the possible domestic origins of early Qing clay portrait figures of Chinese and European merchants fashioned in Canton. These miniature models were produced by 'face-makers' and they contain intricate, small-scale systems of weights attached to strings that allow them to nod along in endless agreement with their beholders. Their materials (clay, cloth, leather and hair) connect the sculptures to commemorative ancestral portraiture, while their interior mechanics draw on a tradition of automata from classical literature.

Malcolm Baker (University of California Riverside)

Busts and Faces: Aesthetic Theory and Perceptual Difference

As Byron put it, a bust "smacks something of *public* fame rather than private remembrance"; at the same time, sculpture more generally has been understood as a public mode of representation. But the apprehension of sculpture can sometimes be a more intimate affair and the viewing of busts in particular can involve a closeness of engagement, with the spectator coming, as it were, face-to-face with the sitter. This paper will consider the circumstances in which the portrait bust becomes a subject for more intimate viewing. What factors are involved here and how might we understand different ways of viewing busts and faces in the eighteenth century? How does the spectator view a portrait bust simultaneously both as a face and as a sculptural representation? The oscillation involved here was something very much played on by sculptors during a period when sculptural portraits were becoming more ambitiously illusionistic - even veristic - and was increasingly a concern for critics and writers of texts on aesthetic theory.

Joris van Gastel (University of Zurich)

The Coat of Arms and the Portrait Bust Sculpted Presence in Late Renaissance Florence

In the last decades of the sixteenth century, a large number of sculpted Medici portraits appeared on façades throughout the city of Florence, almost all of them sculpted by the little-known sculptor Giovanni Bandini. Departing from a chapter in Hans Belting's 2001 book *Bild-Anthropologie*, this paper will explore the agency of these busts within the public realm, arguing that this agency is informed for a significant part by their connectedness with coats of arms and the façades they adorn. By drawing attention to this understudied episodes in the histories of portraiture, sculpture, and Medici propaganda, the paper provides an exceptional case for exploring the powers of what Belting calls "media of the body" in public space.

Andreas Grüner (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg)

Strike! Diderot and the reproduction of immediacy in ancient portraits

For decades, the analysis of ancient portraits followed the strict and well-established rules of German typological categorization and socio-political semantics. Modes of emotional perception, subtle psychological strategies and the mystery of liveliness – as in the mummy portraits – were discarded as annoying phenomena out of any serious discussion. Going back to the empiricist

tradition of the eighteenth century, the paper tries to outline the capability of phenomenological approaches in revealing the hidden qualities of ancient portraiture.

Jeanette Kohl (University of California Riverside)

The Silence of Busts. Phenomenology, Ontology, Presence?

Bust portraits 'live' on the threshold. They are *images* of mediated immediacy perpetuating an individual face and personality to posterity – a function they have maintained from Antiquity to the present. Yet they are also things, objects, *bodies* – capturing the presence of an individual in the form of an intentionally fragmented art object. At the same time, they are *embodiments* of societal ideals and aesthetic theories. Like no other artistic genre, the bust epitomizes key dichotomies of artistic thinking – as a deeply ambivalent and at times paradoxical image medium with the power to oscillate between lifelikeness and artificiality, corporeality and fictionality, presence and preservation, fragmentation and imagination.

My paper is divided in two parts, a conceptual introduction and a short case study. Based on the (phenomenological) question "What *are* these objects?" (Lavin), I will discuss ideas related to the gesture (Agamben, Randolph), fragmentation and the fragmentary (Walker Bynum, Sawday, Boehme), 'image anthropology' and the triad of image-body-medium (Belting), the criticism of hermeneutics and the production of presence (Gumbrecht) and the correlating principle of 'Bild-Evidenz' (Krueger/Geimer), as well as image theories of recognition and similarity (Ubl/Pichler). How can they expand our understanding of the paradoxical phenomenology of bust portraits, beyond the beaten paths of patronage, identity, and the categories of realism vs. idealism? These conceptual approximations will be complemented by a look at the fifteenth-century bust reliquary of San Rossore, which raises an array of questions that help us relate the more abstract idea of a bust's agency to particular referential and temporal structures, to its cult and context, and to its material and making, all of which lend it a very distinct 'voice.'

Tomas Macsotay

Women and Sculptural Resignification: The cases of Catherine the Great and the Countess of Albany

The history of emotions has forced us to ask fundamental questions again on the sociocultural project of the Enlightenment. William Reddy, Ute Frevert and Javier Moscoso, and on a different level Lynn Hunt, have returned to the question of how historical actors construed their cultural interventions on the basis of ideas of intimacy and interpersonal exchange, and indeed how that intimacy was itself a result of cultural practices concerned with the image. Enlightenment sculpture and women constitute a fascinating point of departure, finding themselves united via a similar confluence of doing and feeling. In the aftermath of Madame de Pompadour, who gave her personal image and her ideas to bear on the employment of sculptors like Lemoyne, Pigalle, Slodtz and Falconet, I want to consider two very celebrated women of the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary era: Catherina II of Russia in her homages to Voltaire from the 1770s, and Countess Albany in her controversial commissioning, destined for the Florentine Mausoleum-Church of Santa Croce, of a funerary monument for the famed Italian dramatist and lover Vittorio Alfieri.

Pompadour's use of sculpture as a type of personal confession of her 'friendship in love' for Louis XV is matched in these examples by a determination to ritualize and monumentalize tender loyalty and intimacy for a literary friend. To create a conceptual framework for these incursions of sculpture into sentimental culture, I will borrow from William Reddy's spatialized metaphor of practices of sentimental association as unfolding in improvised 'emotional refuges'. The analysis will also engage Moscoso's recent work on obsession as emotional therapy. The aim is to take the reading of the Empress's and the Countess's cultural interventions to address problems of performativity. Rather than the stable significations of the bust (homage, ancestor worship, memento or 'wax' effigy), doing and feeling created its own visual and theatrical schemas.

Lejla Mrgan (University of Copenhagen)

Perception and Imagination: Busts as Objects of Attachment

The letters of Wilhelm and Caroline von Humboldt contain an interesting and rich account of responses to each other's busts. During times of absence, the busts seemed to function as agents in the letter correspondence, and are often mentioned or directly addressed. Thorvaldsen made two busts of Caroline (1805 and 1818) and one of Wilhelm, the genesis of which Caroline could follow in Thorvaldsen's studio in Rome in 1810 during her stay there. She wrote her opinions of the bust in letters to Wilhelm during 1810, and this leaves us with some very interesting documents regarding her reception of it and the ways it entangled itself in her longing for Wilhelm, serving as a proxy for him in absentia. Furthermore, the letters give us insight into how likeness was perceived and evaluated, and how a viewer who was familiar with the portrayed projected different, sometimes even conflicting, emotions and perceptions into their portrait. These letters are therefore a rich source for understanding the negotiations between bust and viewer, and what the beholder's share entailed in the viewing of busts, particularly one of a person with whom you are personally familiar, such as a close family member or friend. The first part of my paper lays out this letter correspondence, while the second part attempts to embed it in theoretical reflections on the reception and attachment to bust portraits in different display contexts.

Melissa Percival (University of Exeter)

The Painted and Sculptural Imagination: Short Cuts

The fantasy figure, a widespread but elusive phenomenon in European painting, is here presented as a comparative model (or counter-model?) for the neo-classical portrait bust. A human of uncertain identity, with a truncated body, appears outside of time or place, a striking combination of realism, whimsy and self-conscious artistry. The viewer engages in a charged encounter with a stranger, outside of social norms. Joshua Reynolds, himself a compulsive producer of 'fancy pictures', held that sculpture possessed 'sobriety and gravity' and not 'fancy and caprice'. Yet the gulf was perhaps not as wide as he alleged. It is suggested that an aesthetics of incompleteness heightens the viewer's imaginative experience when confronted with sculpted as well as painted human heads, busts and half-lengths.

Rubina Raja (Aarhus University)

The Palmyrene More-than-bust Funerary Portraits

In Palmyra, an oasis city on the Silk Road, situated in the Syrian Desert between the Euphrates and the Mediterranean, more than 3,700 funerary busts were produced over a period of 300 years.

These more-than-bust portraits, often showing the deceased individual until the lower abdomen, were all produced in the local limestone and carved in deep relief on rectangular slabs, which covered burial niches in large family graves. The sheer number of the representations of deceased upper class Palmyrenes, as these were, handed down to us through time, makes it possible to begin to tackle issues of the relationship between the more than bust format in its original context and the relationship between the portrait representation and the viewer. This paper will focus on some examples, which come from in-situ contexts in Palmyrene graves (tower tombs and underground tombs) and will ask questions about the agency of this kind of portraiture, which emerged in Palmyra at the same time monumental grave types were introduced into the rapidly expanding urban landscape and its surroundings. The paper will address issues of mass production versus individualization of portraits, monumentalisation processes as vehicles for the development of individual portrait-traditions as well as the local situations in Roman period Palmyra. Pivotal to the introduction and development of the particular more-than-bust type, stands the local Palmyrene elite's urge to represent itself as part of the large family-groups (tribes) within Palmyrene society. This social structure played a crucial role in the development of this particular way of commemorating the deceased in a style that persisted for more than 300 years and only was broken as a result of the Roman invasion of Palmyra in 273 CE after the uprising spearheaded by Zenobia.

Alexander Todorov (Princeton University)

The Inherent Ambiguity of Facial Expressions

The prevailing view of emotional expressions in psychology is that there is a limited set of universally and unambiguously recognized emotions. Such views have been expressed early on in the visual arts, notably by Charles Le Brun, and first tested by Duchenne de Bologne. Charles Darwin was influenced by the studies of Duchenne and developed an argument about the evolutionary origins of facial expressions. This particular evolutionary view of a limited set of emotional expressions was further developed by Paul Ekman in psychology and has been hugely influential in and outside psychology. However, much of the work of Ekman and his followers is based on using posed emotional expressions. Recent studies using authentic and spontaneous emotional expressions show that these expressions are inherently ambiguous. In real life, we don't experience the expressions as ambiguous because we rapidly disambiguate their meaning using the immediate context.

Anna Schram Vejlbj

The Inner Gaze

Eye-to-eye contact is rarely possible when looking at Thorvaldsen's portraits. Whether the pupils are carved or not, the viewer will have trouble catching the eyes of the portrait because most of them look us over the head or refrain from focusing on anything. While upturned eyes are used in many contemporary portraits as a sign of contemplation or contact with the higher realms of art, poetry and the divine, and thus often reserved for poets and thinkers, Thorvaldsen seems to have given almost all his portraits this type of gaze without consideration of the sitter's place and

doings in the world. My paper will explore how artists like Jacques-Louis David, C.W. Eckersberg, and Joseph-Siffred Duplessis used the upturned or inward gaze in their art and what implications this type of portrait had traditionally and in the first half of the 19th century. As one critic noted when seeing Eckersberg's famed portrait of Thorvaldsen: "His mild blue eyes are turned to the sky, but you see clearly that no image is imprinted on the soul through them. Only the inner gaze is active, and perhaps in spirit he sees another Jason." I will discuss why Thorvaldsen preferred this inner gaze in his portraits and where this leaves us as viewers.

Michael Yonan (University of Missouri)

Messerschmidt, Thorvaldsen, and the Specious Surfaces of the Self

This paper argues for a new way of thinking about sculpted portrait busts, one not reliant upon notions of likeness, classical idealization, or the broader category of representation, but rather based in conceptions of surfaces. Sculptures like Bertel Thorvaldsen's portraits invite interactions rooted in the combined social encounters of people and art, with the bust standing in for the living person it represents, while also rendering the represented figure distant. This paper shall propose that in addition to that representational-realist encounter, portrait busts present surfaces that offset our comprehension of them as images. My example this will come from the curious *Charakter-Köpfe* of Franz Xaver Messerschmidt. In Messerschmidt's busts, we find delight in the abstracted sculptural surface blended with the representational characteristics of the figure portrayed, a push-and-pull of representation that calls into question the ability of its viewer to accept the figure's personhood. I suggest that the investigation of the surface one finds in Messerschmidt may help us understand why Thorvaldsen's later sculptures seem so foreign. Thorvaldsen's portrait busts strive for a depth that in the 1770s had been revealed as impossible to picture.