Portraits: More than Paint

1. Catching a Likeness

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1. Catching a Likeness

WHAT MAKES A PORTRAIT DIFFERENT from any other work of art involving people? One possible answer is that it has to capture the likeness of the person represented—but then a photograph can do that. Let's talk about photographs, then: what makes a portrait different from a casual snap? Three things, I would suggest: it needs some kind of formal quality, it needs to transcend the moment, and it needs to make a statement. The same criteria apply to paintings, sculpture, or any other kind of portrait.

Making a statement implies that a portrait in any medium must have a purpose. In the first four parts of today's class, we shall look at many kinds of portraits and their function. Some of the categories, in alphabetical order, are: portrait-as-allegory, portrait-as-art, portrait-as-bio, portrait-as-character, portrait-as-diagnosis, portrait-as-document, portrait-as-memorial, portrait-as-proxy, portrait-as-publicity, portrait-as-query, portrait-as-sentiment, portrait-as-social-validation, and self-portrait-as-signature.

In the last third of the class, we shall sample two media that might otherwise be under-represented later: the biographical video clip, and some rare cases of portraits in music. *rb.*

A. Portrait as Bio... or What?

Two early 16th-century portraits compared: portrait-as-bio, portrait-as-query, and in a later example, even portrait-as-prediction.

Holbein: *Georg Gisze* (1532, Berlin)
Lotto: *Young Man with a Lamp* (c.1506, Venice Accademia)
Zoffany: *Emperor Francis II at the Age of Seven* (1775)
Zoffany: *Emperor Francis I in his Study* (1777, posthumous)

B. Mummies, Madonnas, Memorials

Some early examples: portrait-as-memorial, portrait-as-donor, portrait-as-document, and a glimpse of everyday life.

Mummy Case, 30th Dynasty, 4th century BCE
Mummy portraits, Faiyum, 1st century CE
Fresco: *Terentius Neo and his Wife* (Pompeii, 1st century CE)
Mosaic: *Justinian and Theodora* (San Vitale, Ravenna, 547 CE)
Naumburg Master: *Ekkehard and Uta* (mid-1100s CE)
Van der Weyden: *The Last Judgement* (c.1445, Beaune)
Van Eyck: *Madonna with Chancellor Rolin* (c.1433, Louvre)
Van Eyck: *The Arnolfini Wedding* (1434, London NG)
Campin: *Portrait of a Fat Man* (c.1425, Berlin)

C. Going to Extremes

Portraits from the renaissance on with more extreme attitudes to realism: portrait-as-sentiment, portrait-as-flattery, portrait-as-allegory, portrait-as-psychological-analysis.

Ghirlandaio: *Old Man and his Grandson* (c.1490, Louvre)
Titian: *Isabella d'Este in Black* (1536, Vienna)
♫ **Arcimboldo**: *Rudolf II as Vertumnus* (c.1591, Stockholm)
Arcimboldo: *Fire* (1566, Vienna)
Johann Caspar Lavater, and some of his silhouettes
Messerschmidt: Self-portrait heads (c.1780)
Géricault: Studies of the Insane (c.1820)
Géricault: *The Raft of the Medusa* (1819)

D. Further Functions

Moving forward: portrait-as-proxy, portrait-as-politics, portrait-as-art, and (in photography) portrait-as-statement.

Rubens: *Henri IV Sees Portrait of Marie de' Medici* (1621, Louvre)
Ducreux & **Kranzinger**: Two portraits of Marie Antoinette
Brodsky: Portraits of Lenin

Whistler: *Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 1* (1871, Paris Orsay)
Klimt: *Adele Bloch-Bauer* (1907, Neue Galerie NY)

E. Video Capsules

Three brief bios compared, plus a prizewinning short from Australia.

♫ **Video**: Wilma Rudolph (Biography.com)
♫ **Video**: Wilma Rudolph (Olympic Committee)
♫ **Video**: Wilma Rudolph (TV, Rome Olympics, 1960)
♫ **David May**: *A Place Like This* (2012)

F. Musical Portraits

Music in general is a difficult medium for portraiture. Two examples that may or may not have a portrait function.

♫ **Schumann:** *Carnaval*, movements 11 and 14 (Boris Giltburg)
♫ **Tower**: *Fanfare for the Uncommon Woman #1* (Marin Alsop)

Giuseppe **Arcimboldo** (1526–93, *Italian painter*), Isaak **Brodsky** (1884–1939, *Russian painter*), Robert **Campin** (1375–1444, *Netherlandish painter*), Francesco **Francia** (1447–1517, *Italian painter*), Théodore **Géricault** (1791–1824, *French painter*), Domenico **Ghirlandaio** (1449–94, *Italian painter*), Hans **Holbein** the Younger (1497–1543, *German painter*), Gustav **Klimt** (1862–1918, *Austrian painter*), Johann Caspar **Lavater** (1741–1801, *Swiss physiognomist*), **Leonardo** da Vinci (1452–1519, *Italian painter*), Lorenzo **Lotto** (1480–1557, *Italian painter*), Franz Xaver **Messerschmidt** (1736–83, *German sculptor*), Michael **Praetorius** (1571–1621, *German composer*), Peter Paul **Rubens** (1577–1640, *Flemish painter*), Robert **Schumann** (1810–56, *German composer*), **Titian** (Tiziano Veccellio, 1485–1576, *Italian painter*), Joan **Tower** (1938– , *American composer*), Jan **van Eyck** (–1441, *Netherlandish painter*), Rogier **van der Weyden** (1399–1464, *Netherlandish painter*), James Abbott McNeill **Whistler** (1834–1903, *American-British painter*), Johann **Zoffany** (1733–1810, *German-British painter*)

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