History of portraiture

Portraiture is a visual representation of an individual people, distinguished by references to the subject's character, social position, wealth, or profession.

Portraitists often strive for exact visual likenesses. However, although the viewer's correct identification of the sitter is of primary importance, exact replication is not always the goal. Artists may intentionally alter the appearance of their subjects by embellishing or refining their images to emphasize or minimize particular qualities (physical, psychological, or social) of the subject. Viewers sometimes praise most highly those images that seem to look very little like the sitter because these images are judged to capture some non-visual quality of the subject. In non-Western societies portraiture is less likely to emphasize visual likeness than in Western cultures.

Portraits can be executed in any medium, including sculpted stone and wood, oil, painted ivory, pastel, encaustic (wax) on wood panel, tempera on parchment, carved cameo, and hammered or poured metal (plus, many more).

Portraits can include only the head of the subject, or they can depict the shoulders and head, the upper torso, or an entire figure shown either seated or standing. Portraits can show individuals either self-consciously posing in ways that convey a sense of timelessness or captured in the midst of work or daily activity. During some historical periods, portraits were severe and emphasized authority, and during other periods artists worked to communicate spontaneity and the sensation of life.

The history of portraiture spans most of the history of Western art, from the art of ancient Egyptian and Greek civilizations to the modern art of Europe and North America.

The Romans were expert in rendering individuals. Some scholars have argued that it was the practice of making and keeping death masks of ancestors (worn by survivors in the funeral processions) that accounts for the enormous skill with which Roman portraitists captured the individuality of their subjects. Many portrait busts survive, including images of Roman rulers as well as poignant representations of aged citizens. Especially noteworthy are the mummy portraits from the region of Al Fayyūm in Egypt. Painted during the 2nd century AD, these portraits depict individuals who stare wide-eyed at the viewer. These slightly simplified representations of staring subjects anticipate the severity and frontal orientation of early medieval portraits.

The Renaissance marked a turning point in the history of portraiture. Partly out of interest in the natural world and partly out of interest in the classical cultures of ancient Greece and Rome, portraits—both painted and sculpted—were given an important role in Renaissance society.

In the Netherlands, Jan van Eyck was a leading portraitist; *The Arnolfini Marriage* (1434, National Gallery, London) is a detailed full-length portrait of a couple. Leading German portrait artists include Hans Holbein the Younger and Albrecht Dürer.

During the baroque and rococo periods (17th century and 18th century, respectively), portraits became even more important. In a society dominated increasingly by secular leaders in powerful courts, images of opulently attired

figures were both symbols of temporal power and wealth, and a means to affirm the authority of certain individuals. Flemish painters Sir Anthony van Dyck and Peter Paul Rubens excelled at this type of portraiture. Also during these periods, artists increasingly studied the facial expressions that accompanied different emotions and they emphasized the portrayal of these human feelings in their work. In particular, Italian sculptor Gianlorenzo Bernini and Dutch painter Rembrandt explored the many expressions of the human face. This interest fostered the creation of the first caricatures, credited to the Carracci Academy, run by painters of the Carracci family in the late 16th century in Bologna, Italy

Group portraits were produced in greater numbers during the baroque period, particularly in the Netherlands. Dutch painter Frans Hals used dashed lines of vivid colour to enliven his group portraits, and Rembrandt experimented with introducing time and historical references into the group portrait, most notably in his famous *Night Watch* (1642).

Other portraiture in brief:

Death masks- used to preserve images by pressing matter such as thin gold onto the face, then lifting appropriately, so preserving the image. Romans had very realistic death masks, kept on mantelpieces or cupboards; they were made in order to honour ancestors and to place the living in context with the deceased; this meant that there could be a link between spirit, and the owner themselves.

The Etruscan vase- was used for keeping ashes after death, wit the portrait of the person with holes in it, and these holes were then in turn used to attach an actual realistic 'skin' to. They were often made of wood and they also carried the ashes and skull of the dead person.