

PORTRAYED?

Traditional and current trends in portrait art

Group exhibition in August / September 2019

New Archive, Wertheim Castle · Germany

Opening speech: Axel Schöber, ART-isotope.de
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you to the second exhibition of the 'Art Summer Castle Wertheim 2019' with the title PORTRAYED?

The artistic portrait of a person has been a great challenge for centuries and seems to be subject to constant change. The recognizability, nature and social status of a person have repeatedly created outstanding or irritating works in the hands of the artists. The art works shown here are limited exclusively to 'busts' - colloquially: to a human head with a neck or breast.

Classical Portrait Art

Techniques of the classical portrait art are on the one hand sculptural works in wood as by the artist Sieglinde Gros. Works such as 'With plait' show the nature of a young girl rather than a certain person. Besides portraits in wood, bronze castings (based on plaster or clay models) have established themselves. This can be seen in the works of Mechthild Ehmann, who, for example, had the honour to portray several Nobel Prize winners on behalf of the Max-Planck-Institute.

On the other hand, paintings are another standard of classical portrait art: the works of the British artist Tai Shan Schierenberg, who was commissioned by the English Royal

Family to portray the Queen with Prince Philip, are impressive. Here, too, the focus is on recognition and the 'dignity of the human being'.

The small portraits of the Berlin artist Marc Taschowsky also seem classical. But he forces the icons of the media world into the closest order and thus creates an almost stage-like emphasis. Daisy, Christian Lindner, Götz George, Holly (Lucky Luke's horse), Jesus, Krümel-Monster, Joachim Gauck – portraits that are subject to the fast rhythm of the TV's remote control and suggest visual forcing into line.

Anonymous Portraits

The classical focus of portrait art has meanwhile shifted to a more generally valid interpretation of persons due to a lack of clients. Paintings and graphic interpretations increasingly take international stars into account. For example, in the works of Eberhard Bitter, which depict the actor Moritz Bleibtreu and the singer Campino of the music band 'Die Toten Hosen'. They are based on publicly accessible photographs and thus 'free' themselves from personal contact with the person portrayed.

In contrast, the Polish artist Justine Otto explores the border between recognizability and anonymity or abstraction in her work group 'Black Paintings': dynamic painting technique, head shape, posture and clothing merge in a grandiose way.

Ronni Zettner contributes another aspect with her 20-part series 'Gluttony'. In her black-and-white drawings, orally dominated people stuff everything they can into their mouths. The respective portrait of a person is closely interwoven with his unrestrained greed.

Biometrics

A further focus of portrait art is the artistic examination of the biometric definition of the face. Biometric data are now used everywhere - e.g. in the production of a passport photo, in the unlocking of a smartphone and in the recognition of persons by means of video surveillance. It is still relatively easy to evade this recognition:

Blurrednesses such as those used by the artist Conrad Schierenberg and applications and masks such as those placed on the faces by the Austrian artist Elena Steiner in her paintings allow similarities to be made with a person - but they change the cornerstones of biometrics and thus the clearness of identification.

The Dutch artist Rosa Verloop deals with the systematics of biometrics in an outstanding way. On the basis of her training as a medical assistant, she also places needles in exactly those areas that define a person's facial expression. The result are bewitching objects between anatomy, horror and beauty.

Cosmetic surgery and the cosmetics industry also try to set standards in human appearance. Business and government security agencies are also working to identify and evaluate the moods, length of stay, shopping habits and whereabouts of people. This has never been easier, since for many people the mobile phone is an integral part of life. Very nice to see in the work 'Illumination' by Jolanta Szalanska. Only a small percentage of mobile phone users know the real connections between IP address, radio cell, positioning service, standby etc.. Is a selfie still just a photo that is quickly taken, sent and deleted? Or does it already form the basis for patents for avatars that will guide our lives in the future?

Unrecognizability

We humans grow older. And so – despite all the ointments, poison injections and liftings – the human face changes over the decades. Professor Ulrika Eller-Rüter takes up this aspect in her series of works 'Anna's charwoman'. The faces painted with acid on metal plates are constantly changing due to an increasing formation of rust. At the very end, the metal plate will fall to pieces into a small pile, mix with the soil and will have eluded any personal recognition.

Acknowledgements

My thanks go to Mrs Brita Kreuzfeldt, who not only provided her painting 'Malaye', which is reminiscent of the painting style of Lyonel Feininger, but also translated the German text into English. I would also like to thank the city of Wertheim for allowing me to show these unique works of art in these wonderful rooms of the New Archive of Wertheim Castle.

Finally, I would like to thank the artist Joanna Jesse, whose beautiful painting 'In the Sun' reminds me that life can simply be full of beauty.

Thank you for your attention.

Artists (alphabetically)

Eberhard Bitter, Wuppertal • Mechthild Ehmman, Dachsberg
• Ulrika Eller-Rüter • Sieglinde Gros, Michelstadt • Joanna Jesse, Siegen • Brita Kreuzfeldt, Dortmund • Justine Otto, Berlin • Conrad Schierenberg, Dachsberg • Tai Shan Schierenberg, London (GB) • Elena Steiner, Wien (A) • Jolanta Szalanska, Lindau • Marc Taschowsky, Berlin • Rosa Verloop, Wijk en Aalberg (NL) • Ronny Zettner, Schweinfurt

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