

A103, Art Appreciation: Visual Culture
Lecture Notes: 12,13,14: Portraiture, Animals and Landscape
Online Version

Images are noted in *blue*, refer to the accompanying image file while reading notes.

Portraiture

Images of people dominate the world of art as we have seen. Today we are going to look at portraiture both of people other than the artist and those of the self, called a “self portrait”.

A successful portrait is thought to be when an artist captures something of someone’s character going beyond the physical identity or “mug shot” so-to-speak and entering the world of psychological representation.

1. Shimomura Kanzan
2. Hockney “American Collectors”
3. Giacometti” “Self Portrait”

We are invited to look which is unusual in Western culture, especially American, it is considered impolite and often makes one uncomfortable making eye contact with someone you barely know. Portraiture allows us the luxury of just looking in a relaxed fashion.

4. Chuck Close “Manny”

The Body

5. Maori Tattoos The Maori the warrior saw tattoos as a symbolic protective layer enhancing a fierce look or simply as a distraction serving to confuse the opponent in much the same way markings on herd animals (zebra) make it difficult for the hunter to fixate on one animal.

The body in Contemporary Art is seen as a canvas as well but in a much more revealing way rather than concealing vulnerability.

- 6 & 7. Hannah Wilke

in Wilke’s work the invitation is given by the artist it is open, educational and conceptual. We are invited to share and mourn the loss of beauty as she succumbs to cancer. *Intra Venus* is a play on words that both reference Venus the goddess of love and beauty, the medical term meaning travel via vein the way most cancer treatments are given and the concept that beauty is internal and personal, something we need to look beneath the skin to find.

- 8,9 & 10. Orlan

Orlan is a French artist whose work is framed by the statement “beauty is only skin deep”. She uses her body as a canvas and the plastic surgeon as her tool to transform her natural features into forms that resemble (11 & 12.) Botticelli’s “Venus”. The surgeries themselves are performances with actors, music and readings.

Death

The body is vulnerable and mortal. Many artists have tried to portray our dialogue with suffering, death and loss. It is difficult to create and view these works because of the many cultural taboos that shroud the reality that each and every one of us will face one day. How we process our own mortality and the deaths of others... be it expected and accepted or untimely and tragic is the subject of many contemporary artists work.

13. Andres Serrano

“The Morgue Hacked to Death” is an intimate, rather, “in your face” portrait of violence. We see the face of violence on the anonymous closely cropped faces of individuals who met their fate in tragic deaths. The book tells us it doesn’t matter that we do not know the location and by not revealing identity or location it is impossible to see the death as distant, instead, through its sheer impersonality it becomes personal.

Animals and Nature

Animals like people appear in the art of all cultures throughout time. Our relationship with animals is as complex as our relationships with other human beings. Artists, however, basically taken two approaches to the representation of animals in art:

1. Animals Observed. Animals representational narrative or portraiture.
2. Symbolic Animals. Utilizing real and fantastic animals to illustrate a concept or idea.

Examples of the animal observed.

14. Lascaux

(although the image may have been used in symbolic way i.e.: sympathetic magic the bull is a bull, important as a source of food and actually present in the landscape)

15. Stag hunt

16. an equestrian portrait

In this image a horse can be seen as just a horse, a beast of burden and a form of transportation.

17. Hoefnagle

insect specimens for scientific study

18. Chinese scroll 100 geese

A celebration of the beauty of flight

19. Minoan mural with swallows

20. Minoan mural with dolphins

21. Minoan octopus vase

The following are works of art utilizing real and fantastic animals to illustrate a concept or idea. These are the symbolic animals.

Sometimes the image of the animal does double duty but that is usually the mark of a true symbol... in these examples some are more obvious than others...

22. Frans Snyders

Fantastic beasts have allowed us to make symbolic connections between the world humans (civilization) and the wild untamed nature. Images of half animal/half human entities are imaginative ways that humans have made the connection. Notably in Greco Roman culture these beasts were a good way to express the internal conflict humans face when reconciling their inner animal desires/instincts that often conflict directly with their intellectual reasoning.

23, 24. mermaids

1/2 fish and 1/2 human

25-28: centaurs

1/2 horse and 1/2 human

29-31. satyrs/fauns

1/2 goat and 1/2 human

32 & 33. minotaur

1/2 bull and 1/2 human

34 & 35. Hanuman

Hindu hero monkey man and follower of Rama in the epic poem The Ramayana. Credited with intelligence, strength, fame, valor, fearlessness, lack of sickness, absence of sloth and skill in language.

-both the mask and puppet are used in the oral theatrical telling of the Ramayana. the telling of the story can last from several hours to several days depending on the production.

Bestiaries

Beasts have been represented in mythology, folklore and collections of images that were called "bestiaries". Bestiaries were common in the middle ages and included real and fantastic creatures such as the

[36 & 37. unicorn](#)

Originally a more goat like animal ([#36](#)) than a horse with a horn. As old as Greek and Roman lore the Unicorn's horn was thought to have had magical properties and always eluded hunters. The only person who could capture one was a true virgin. This connection to virginity or the Virgin fueled a Christian interpretation of the captured unicorn as a symbol for the Passion of Christ.

[\(#37\)](#) Today (especially in popular culture) the unicorn has more horse-like features highlighting how we privilege our relationship with horses over goats.

[38-40. Griffin](#)

1/2 lion - 1/2 eagle attacks people on horseback and was said to attack Alexander the great in India.

Similar and variations on the Griffin image were used as guardians ([#39](#)) such as the [40. lamassu](#) 1/2 eagle – 1/2 bull with a human head.

[41 & 42. Gargoyles](#)

Were found on churches warning humans of the torment of hell and to make haste to mass "inside" the church. Many gargoyles function architecturally as water spouts, hence the name which is originally from the French 'gargouille,' meaning "gargle" or "throat."

[43 & 44. Roosters](#)

The rooster is a symbol for France. They can be found on churches instead of crosses in France as a symbol of the separation of church and state but, more importantly... the power of the state over the church. They are also prominent on the French football team's jerseys ([#44](#)).

Landscape & Animals

As man's relationship to animals is seen as intimate, so is an animal's relationship to the environment. Many cultures have reflected on that connection.

[45 & 46. Nasca lines](#)

Pre-Incan Peruvians made mysterious and lyrical marks on the nasca plain in Peru over 1500 years ago. Most images cannot be discerned from the ground thus all of these photographs were done from airplanes. It is still a mystery as to what they mean or how they were created or even who they were for.

[47. Serpent mound](#)

The exact purpose is unknown but it was common in ancient cultures to commemorate the gods or the dead in hill like mounds or pyramids.

Landscape & Earthworks

Earthworks can be seen as socio-political anti-gallery statements. Or simply, a meditation on the beauty of the natural world and that we can be in-sync with it at times.

[48. Smithson](#)

[49. de Maria](#)

[50. Goldsworthy](#)

Landscape as metaphor

The underlying symbolism of these two artist's work reveals man's relation to the environment

man vs nature

[51. Casper Friedrick](#)

[52 & 53 Michael Schnable](#)

The absence of animals is a powerful reminder of their former presence even if it is in a zoo. These works force us to question the "proper" place for animals.