On Portraiture. Theory, Practice and Fiction (Lisbon, 26–28 Apr 21)

Artistic Studies Research Centre, Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Lisbon, Apr 26–28, 2021
Deadline: Nov 30, 2020

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On Portraiture. Theory, Practice and Fiction. From Francisco de Holanda to Susan Sontag

CIEBA – Artistic Studies Research Centre, Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Lisbon

26 - 28 April 2021 - Faculty of Fine-Arts, University of Lisbon

This colloquium intends to discuss the theory and practice of artistic, historical, anthropological, social and political experience on the topic of portraiture, as well as the fictional dimension contained within it. Located at the intersection of several disciplinary fields, the discussion(s) and papers will address the portrait as a concept, theme, process, object (monument and document) and device, in its multiple developments and in its successive conceptual, technological and contextual updates.
More than defining a temporal framework, the subtitle – From Francisco de Holanda to Susan Sontag – underscores the dynamic porosity on the researched topic in the fields of art and literature, as well as, in its mutual reversibility.
Francisco de Holanda, humanist and 16th-century Portuguese artist, is the author of Do Tirar pelo Natural [On Portraiture], the first treatise dedicated to portraiture in early modern Europe, which he concluded in 1549, in the decade following his return from a trip to Italy undertaken in 1538 to 1540, as member of the embassy of Ambassador D. Pedro de Mascarenhas. One objective for Holanda was to meet Michelangelo Buonarroti, in addition to observing and drawing fortresses and the most outstanding works of art across Italy. Upon his return, Holanda undertook writing Da Pintura Antiga [On Ancient Painting], concluded on October 13 (St. Lucas Day) 1548, as it is written at the end of Book II, followed by his second treatise, Do Tirar polo Natural [On Portraiture]. These two works were prepared for publication and were even translated into Spanish in 1563, by his friend, the Portuguese painter Manuel Denis. These treatises, written almost simultaneously, would only see publication, in Portuguese and Spanish, only in the 19th century. At the end of the Do Tirar polo Natural [On Portraiture], Holanda states that the text was completed on January 3rd, 1549, only a few months after the completion of the two Books of Da Pintura Antiga [On Ancient Painting]. In fulfilment of John B. Bury's ground-breaking research, a bilingual edition of this portrait treatise, published by Paul Holberton Publishing in London, will be presented during this Congress.
Indeed, the two great pillars of Francisco de Holanda's theory of art – the imitation of himself, nature and antiquity on one hand, and idea, on the other – have, precisely, as a point of departure,

the artist's creative process which Holanda discusses in his first two treatises. The importance of Do Tirar polo Natural [On Portraiture] for the theory of art, which Holanda explains and abundantly illustrates in his two books in On Ancient Painting, as well as in his drawings and illuminated albums, especially in As Antigualhas [On the Antique], makes Holanda's need to write a portrait treatise fully justified. As an autonomous work, Do Tirar polo Natural [On Portraiture], complements Da Pintura Antiga [On Ancient Painting]. This treatise's structure, in the form of dialogues, follows the model used in Book II of Diálogos em Roma [Dialogues in Rome], but here, instead of many interlocutors, is reduced to conversations between two protagonists, Brás Pereira and Feramando, the disciple and master, as well as the alter ego of Holanda. The themes and issues defined in Do Tirar polo Natural [On Portraiture], extend, deepen and, above all, specify in detail questions regarding portraiture; themes related to the representation of the human figure which Holanda took up in Chapters 38 to 41 in Book I of Da Pintura Antiga. These chapters lack the decisive contributions, which throughout the eleven, small dialogues of Do Tirar polo Natural [On Portraiture], Holanda describes as precepts for a painter to "portray" or "paint from life" the "persona" of a sitter. In Do Tirar, Holanda distinguishes the portrait as distinctive from other representations of the human figure.

In The Volcano Lover, Susan Sontag begins with documentation related to three historical figures from the 18th century, expanding them into a fictional extension where they appear as characters or doubles; emerging as figures stabilized in the credibility of portraits, thus questioning their presence throughout the history of art and the history of images. These figures are the diplomat, collector and volcanologist William Hamilton, his wife Emma Hamilton, lover of Admiral Nelson and the muse of the painter George Romney and Admiral Nelson. The portraits directly refer to those of William Hamilton, made by Joshua Reynolds, and those of Emma Hamilton, made by George Romney and Élisabeth Vigée-Lebrun. The questions asked regard the genesis of the sensitive body, in the example of the statue of Condillac, and the metamorphosis of the statue in the myth of Pygmalion; the metamorphosis of beings in the morphological accidents of the earth and in natural objects that retain their name and history; the ideal portrait; the impossibility of describing the beauty of a face or a body, delegated to the rhetorical artifice of metaphor; the portrait as a theme and as a model; the genre of statues: action and stillness, narcissism and modesty; effigies: symbolic death; cameos: miniaturization of the portrait, living picture: representation staged inside a box or in a place surrounded by the frames of the paintings; the body in pose: support and object of the representation of a representation; the body as the embodiment of the work; the ephemerality of the body and the perpetuity of the portrait; the figure, the portrait and the recognition that erases or illuminates the name. And the ruin of it all, because ruin is the inevitable destiny of human bodies and their representations, some and others relegated to the future of our time.

THEMATIC LINES

In conjunction with these topics the main thematic lines of the colloquium are defined as:

- The portrait as a place and the place of the portrait in the visual culture of all periods
- Time and trans-temporality in and of the portrait
- The portrait as theory and the theories of the portrait
- The portrait as fiction

In the transversality of these lines, the following sub-themes are proposed:

The body and the portrait; Portrait: presence and representation; Portrait, self-portrait and self-representation; The expanded portrait: media, intermediary and mediation; Portrait: iconism, sym-

bolism and similarity; Metonymic portrait; Portrait galleries; The portrait as a connotative place; The double and the portrait; The portrait and the mask; Portrait and genre: the collector and the collection; Portrait and gender: the artist and the model; Portrait: celebration and power; Portrait: celebration of anonymity; Portrait: show and monstrosity; The statistical portrait; Avatar: copy without original; The Impossible Portrait; The composite portrait; Portrait: the desecration of the body.
Keynote speakers will be selected according to the sessions formed from the submitted proposals and the thematic lines of this congress.
The official languages are Portuguese, English, French, Italian and Spanish.

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS
All those interested in participating must send an abstract of up to 400 words, including title, name, affiliation, and text, along with a brief curriculum summary of 50 words maximum by November 30, 2020.
Proposals should be submitted in doc. file from Office Word, according to the template available HERE and sent to onportraiture.congress@belasartes.ulisboa.pt
The email's subject and the attached file should be designated as follows: NAME_SURNAME_TITLE OF PAPER
Results will be released by December 31, 2020.

PITCH SESSION
Authors from selected papers are invited to participate in an optional pitch session (5 min/5 slides) which will take place on January 15, 2021 between 14h00 and 19h00 (in Lisbon).

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Reference:
CFP: On Portraiture. Theory, Practice and Fiction (Lisbon, 26-28 Apr 21). In: ArtHist.net, Oct 24, 2020 (accessed Nov 21, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/23782>.