

# NEW YORK STUDIO SCHOOL

## OF DRAWING, PAINTING & SCULPTURE

### Fall 2019: Friday Evening Sculpture

Instructor:	Brandt Junceau
Class Hours:	Fridays, 6:30pm – 9:30pm
First Class:	Friday, September 20, 2019
Last Class:	Friday, December 6, 2019
No Classes:	Friday, November 29, 2019 – Thanksgiving
Contact Info:	kmcdonough@nyss.org
Office Hours:	by appointment

### Course Description

Previous figure classes have asked “Want to know how Rodin did it?” This time around, with a Marino Marini exhibition running concurrently, one might ask, “How did Marini do it?” He (Italian, Pistoia, 1901-1983) had a gift for the body that maybe no one else after Rodin could claim, and of all 20C artists, he was the one sculptor one could say was both a modern (quite a stylish guy, actually) and an ancient. How did he do that?

This class is a lesson in the body, from the model, in clay. We’ll make clay behave in character, which it seems to enjoy. We’ll work without an armature (roughly 18-24” high), and fire what we make: you’ll take it all home. The pieces needn’t include hands and head, and maybe only so much of the arms, or the feet. Our attention is on the “core,” the central volume of the body, that speaks eloquently even without the rest.

Apropos figure and fragment, ancient and contemporary, it will be highly suggest to visit the Marini exhibition, *Marino Marini Arcadian Nudes*, at CIMA, Center for Modern Italian Art.

### Course Outline

The course is basically observation, working from a model, in clay. We meet 11 times: 3 times in “preface,” without the model; making the skull, life-size, in clay. Our reference will be a life-size skull, but our critical dimensions will be taken from life: each artist’s own, with calipers, self-measured, so the skull in clay will be your own, as nearly observed as possible. In the next 8 classes we make a life-size likeness in clay, from the model. Same model each class. An efficient portrait commission might take 12 sittings and more, so we must set a brisk pace.

The preface includes a brief slide talk on the head and likeness, from the ancients to the modern era. Our received 19/20th Century naturalism; the head of Houdon, Carpeaux, Rodin, Epstein and Kolbe, was thousands of years in the making. Mankind went many thousands of years without individual likenesses, at all. The portrait had to be invented, and invented again, and again and

again. Modern portrait naturalism employs a host of conventions, with a long history. One sees that they are always in play, always have been, and must be refreshed over and over.

Having looked under the conventions, at the skull itself, midway in the semester we will have established the "arithmetic" of the head from the model; width, breadth, relative heights and placement of features from centerline. That done, we construct features. Everyone has the same set, so what is like-ness? The head from life is not just a head. It's some *one* head. For us, our model. When does it look like her? Likeness is not close copying. Having moved into likeness, we'll have a second talk, a brief talk on caricature. Noted portrait artists (Picasso for one) have said that caricature is the critical element of likeness.

In dealing with features, and likeness, we bump into the difference between life as we observe in the model, and the classical constructions that have made eyes, lips, brows and hairline legible. Those are "the conventions." We'll discuss them. In monochrome sculpture, slight exaggerations of convex and concave (Rodin's "art of the bump and hollow") stand in for differences of color, and fictive solid forms fill in for not-so-solid hair, by seemingly "acting" like it.

The general trend in western art has been toward a further and further naturalism, each of different, each of them a fresh reinvention. The conventions have changed, as does language, with time and place, and persons, but there has been no portrait without conventions, until the modern era, when at last the gap between self and other was openly recognised, and a basic unease with it. That will not be the stuff of our work, but we can see it from where we will get, and we may talk about it.

### Learning Outcomes

This course intends to familiarize the student with the 19/20 Century western classical naturalistic bust (not the head), as practiced by Rodin (among others), and given to the modernist generation. That bust still the benchmark departure point for contemporary human likeness. By the end of the course the student would have been introduced to the first great European portrait sculptor, Houdon, to Rodin's more interesting busts, and those of his contemporaries. Some introduction will be made to the generation following: Gilbert, Epstein, Kolbe and Marini.

The class is leaning by doing. Students will make a credible life-size likeness from the model. They will be introduced to the basic construction of pertinent features in specific; the "drilled" pupil and Rodin's hollow iris, for instance. Before trying the likeness from life, they will have constructed a life-size skull in clay, for familiarity with the underlying construction. The skull and the bust may be hollowed and fired.

By way of seeing and doing, the student will be *introduced* to a conceptual framework of life-likeness (and perhaps to modelling itself). Life-likeness, and the presentation of the human likeness as practiced by Rodin and his peers is still the implicit baseline "human condition" of contemporary art. *This class is a foundation point for the student's contemporary practice.*

At each practical occasion the course will re-center on the making of an *image*, and the basic human and emotional appeal of the image. At every appropriate occasion we will look to the

sculptural image as a shapely form of language, like a sonnet or a sonata, saying something the artist means to say, and more.

### **Evaluation and Grading**

Grading is on a High Pass/Pass/Low Performance/Fail basis. To achieve a Passing grade, MFA students must demonstrate the full application of their interest, diligence and commitment to address two basic skills and one basic idea. The skills are careful observation of the model, and the construction of a corresponding structure in clay. The basic concept is the matter of difference and exchange between the thing seen and the thing made. My means of evaluation are primarily the things made. Of course, individual talents vary, and everyone's understanding takes a unique path at a unique pace; that's a given. Work, as is practice for a musician, is the essential element. "Beauty" will not be a criterion, diligence, understanding and progress are.

### **Readings and Resources**

The instructor will distribute photocopied images and text apropos the day's work or discussions during the previous class and will sometimes read aloud during periods of work from the model. Students are encouraged to keep the distributed materials together, with their own notes, for future reference.

### **Materials and supplies**

Students should have:

- basic wood modelling tools
- at least one "elephant ear" sponge and a 14-inch (open) calipers

all of which can be had from Compleat Sculptor, and elsewhere.

### **School, Department & Class Policies**

Please refer to the Student Handbook for information regarding the School's policies on academic integrity and plagiarism. All students must abide by the general health and safety regulations laid out in the Student Handbook, as well as any specific instructions given by the Instructor.