

# NEW YORK STUDIO SCHOOL

## OF DRAWING, PAINTING & SCULPTURE

### Spring 2020: Friday Evening Sculpture

Instructor:	Brandt Junceau
Class Hours:	Fridays, 6:30pm – 9:30pm
First Class:	Friday, February 7, 2020
Last Class:	Friday, April 17, 2020

#### Course Description

Some of us consider the head the basic unit of sculpture. It's the one piece of the body that can stand in for the rest, and, in the Western tradition, the head alone may be taken for a likeness of the whole person.

How did Rodin do it? And what did he get from Carpeaux, Houdon and the Romans?

In this class, we will make a life-size head in clay, from a model. It will be fired. You will have a terra cotta, and we'll discuss how raw terra cottas can be finished and mounted. The technique is nuts and bolts, as basic as possible. Taking the measure of the model by eye, calipers, and comparison. The head is a big place. Without basic arithmetic, you can get lost in there. Rodin, famously, stuck to the arithmetic, and he was fast. Not so artsy, very effective.

While we're working, I'll tell a few stories, and week by week bring in pictures. We are dealing the head "as seen," but as seen in the western tradition of naturalism. We'll talk about what our naturalism is, and isn't. We learn to "make an eye," but there are as many naturalisms and as many eyes as times, places and artists. We'll demonstrate the Houdon eye and the Rodin eye. We'll look at many eyes, more than one mouth and more than one idea of character, attitude, and "life."

The takeaway is your first run-through, mapping the head face-front and profile, making features that look right, and working up to the point of life-likeness. We do *not* copy the model. But when the geometry is right and things are in their place, there comes a glimpse of likeness, like recognizing someone in the street; *ah, that's him*. That "glimpse" makes a portrait. The glimpse is the target. Always has been. It might be nearly intangible, but having got it once, you have the touchstone for any head you try hereafter.

#### Course Outline

The course is basically observation, working from a model, in clay. We meet 11 times; one session will be without the model and the others will be with the model. An efficient portrait commission might take 12 sittings and more, so we must set a brisk pace.

The first class includes a quick slide talk on the head and likeness, from the ancients to the modern era. Our received 19/20th Century naturalism, which is the head of Houdon, Carpeaux, Rodin, Epstein and Kolbe, was thousands of years in the making. Mankind went many thousands of years without any individual likenesses. The portrait had to be invented, and thereafter it was re-invented again, and again and again.

In the first weeks, we will have established the "arithmetic" of the head from the model; width, breadth, relative heights and placement of features from centerline. By mid-semester we will have constructed features. 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 most correct head is still not “life” but a portrait is. So, what is likeness? Likeness is *not* a copy. Having reached the point of likeness, we’ll have a talk (with slides) on caricature. Some artists (Picasso for one) have said that caricature is the critical element of likeness.

Lastly, we’ll get the clay off the armature, and prep it for firing. The clay has to be bone-dry before firing, so firing takes place well after class. Beforehand we’ll talk about mounting, and I will be available later to advise on physically mounting the piece.

### **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. Their naturalist bust is still the benchmark 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 learning 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.

Each student is considered an artist in the making. Therefore, 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 any given opportunity, we will look at the sculptural image as a shapely form of language, like a sonnet or a sonata, saying something the artist means to say, and more.

Life-likeness as practiced by Rodin and his peers is still the baseline “human condition” of contemporary art. *This class is a foundation point for the student’s contemporary practice. There is at the moment no practice of the portrait bust corresponding to the painted portraits of Elizabeth Peyton, Claire Tabouret and Marlene Dumas. Wide open field.*

### **Evaluation and Grading**

Grading is on a High Pass/Pass/Low Performance/Fail basis for MFA students. 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
- a 14-inch (open) calipers

all of which can be had from Compleat Sculptor, and elsewhere. They offer our students a worthwhile discount.

NYSS supplies clay, an armature, and firing; you get your finished piece in terra cotta.

### **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.