

NEW YORK STUDIO SCHOOL

OF DRAWING, PAINTING & SCULPTURE

Fall 2023

Monday Evening Sculpture – IN-PERSON

The Head from Life

Instructor: Brandt Junceau
Class Hours: Mondays, 6:30pm - 9:30pm, ET
First Class: September 18, 2023
Last Class: December 4, 2023
No Class: October 9, 2023
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Course Description

The Head from Life. It's 2023 and our idea of good portrait bust is still the Naturalism of Carpeaux and Rodin, fellow travelers of Balzac, Flaubert and Proust. Making a good portrait head today, the question is still *how did Rodin do it?*

We begin with two exercises without a model, followed by 9 working sessions from the model. It's hands-on. If you're willing, you really will do it the way Rodin did it. Which is more workmanlike and less artistic than people expect. He asked a lot of his eye and didn't waste any time.

The goal is a fair likeness, but not a still life. A bust is a very special kind of object-- it can't succeed unless it is unique, vivacious, and looks back. You do that with your hands. While staring at someone else, you learn a lot about your hands, and what makes a three dimensional "picture." You may be surprised at how far a good sculptural eye is from anatomy, and how little clay moves to get from a determined stare to a melting look.

The technique is basic throughout. If you haven't modelled in clay before, you could start here. And take three terra cottas away with you. It isn't staring at a model the whole evening-- some evenings start out with a particular problem, for example, a fist-size skull from the model, or the Giacometti exercise-- a fist-size sketch from life (another student) at 6 feet distance. That radicalizes the confrontation with the model, and presses very close to caricature.

Along the way, frequent short slide talks. We see a lot.

Observation is a skill that can't be taken for granted. It has to be inspired, and nurtured. This class has to be as much about seeing as making. And taking a trip to the third dimension, which hardly anyone can take for granted anymore. The screen has got in the way. This class is a conceptual eye-opener. It makes the museum a different place and you won't ever see people in the street, or at home, the same way again.

Course Outline

This class will include two starter exercises followed by nine working sessions from the model. Michelangelo, Canova, Carpeaux, Rodin, Moore are high points. We'll start right away making smallish (12-18") figures, assembled from the clay round bars, on the clock, poses of a half hour, to start. Will start with poses engaged "on the ground" before making standing figures. No armatures. Bernini didn't use them, even for standing angels with wings. A pylon of clay, like a leaning post, and clay wire or dowels will stick the thing together. The pose time period expands or shortens depending on progress, and what we begin to turn up, in developing a family of poses that "speak." Every group has its own chemistry, pace, and conversation, depending on what people bring to (and want from) the room. If, for example, a reclining pose is making things happen, we would stick with that for some time, making variations, probing what essentially is the hook, and how to make the most of it. The next slides, either that same evening or next, would investigate that pose as available via art history— there are always precedents and premonitions. A conversation begins

in the room at the first meeting and carries through to the last. The given subjects Sketch, Maquette, their employment by Inspiration, Theme and Variations, Rhetoric, Composition, and Invention itself are steppingstones, but the room writes the sequence and makes the story in its own words.

Learning Outcomes

Funny thing is, your attention won't be on anatomy, but you'll acquire it, by use, as a way to make things happen. Likewise, composition, a word which seems terribly old-fashioned, isn't so much instructed, as exercised, again, *to make things happen*. Composition comes close to what was called Rhetoric— talk about a dubious term—which is simply examining a message for its inherent nature and making it plain. We look at what a pose “says,” how it says it, what is strictly necessary to it, and cut ruthlessly everything that isn't. A sketch model is idea and nothing but. For the Romantics, it was the soul of an artwork, all but superior to any enlarged development. That notion has largely stuck, though for much of non-figural sculpture, architecture and engineering today, “mockup” is the operative word. Could be useful, as a thought-experiment, to consider a clay sketch a “mockup.” That acquires a life of its own. Lastly, we will get the clay off the armature, and prep it for firing. The clay must be bone-dry before firing, so the last firing takes place after class. We will produce early enough to review terra cottas in class. Every change of state and perspective is a means to objectivity. Objectivity is the soul of ruthlessness, is the means of economy, is the necessary condition of poetry. Poetry, in the sense of highly condensed essential speech, carrying unforeseen and unpredictable messages, saying more than and other than intended, is ever the goal. The freehand clay sketch is the first and necessary eruption of poetic speech. This class is about clearing its path, recognizing, and protecting it at first sight, and learning how to *make it happen*.

Evaluation and Grading

Grading is on a High Pass/Pass/Low Performance/Fail basis for NYSS MFA candidates. 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; however, diligence, understanding, and progress are to obtain a passing grade.

Readings and Resources

I occasionally distribute photocopy images and text apropos the day's work or discussions during the previous class. I sometimes read aloud during periods of work from the model. If we meet via Zoom, we save the slides and the talk, for further reading. Students are encouraged to keep the distributed materials together, with their own notes, for future reference.

Materials and supplies

Students should have basic wooden modelling tools; at least one “elephant ear” sponge, all of which can be had from Compleat Sculptor, and elsewhere online. NYSS supplies clay and firing options to keep your work 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. All students will follow the School's current COVID-19 guidelines and procedures to maintain a healthy and safe working environment for the NYSS community.