



Portrayal and the Search for Identity

Marcia Pointon

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We are surrounded with portraits: from the cipher-like portrait of a president on a bank note to security pass photos; from images of politicians in the media to Facebook; from galleries exhibiting Titian or Leonardo to contemporary art deploying the self-image, as with Jeff Koons or Cindy Sherman. In antiquity portraiture was of major importance in the exercise of power. Today it remains not only a part of everyday life, but also a crucial way for artists to define themselves in relation to their environment and their contemporaries.

In Portrayal and the Search for Identity, Marcia Pointon investigates how we view and understand portraiture as a genre and how portraits function as artworks within social and political networks. Likeness is never a straightforward matter, as we rarely have the subject of a portrait as a point of comparison. Featuring familiar canonical works and little-known portraits, Portrayal seeks to unsettle notions of portraiture as an art of convention, a reassuring reflection of social realities. Pointon invites readers to consider how identity is produced pictorially and where likeness is registered apart from in a face. In exploring these issues, she addresses wide-ranging problems such as the construction of masculinity in dress, representations of slaves, and self-portraiture in relation to mortality.



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