

THE ANCESTORS



Sir Joseph Edgar Boehm Bt, RA
1834–1890
Bust of Edward Armitage RA, 1876

Terracotta
Given by the Executors of Mrs Armitage in 1897



Sir Francis Chantrey RA
1781–1841
Bust of Henry Bone RA 1820

Marble
Given by Robert Trewick Bone in 1836



Baron Carlo Marochetti RA
1805–1867
Bust of Sir Edwin Landseer RA, 1867

Marble
Diploma Work given by Baron Carlo Marochetti in 1868



Sir Joseph Edgar Boehm Bt, RA
1834–1890
Bust of Sir John Everett Millais, Bt, PRA, 1881–82

Bronze
Diploma Work given by Sir Joseph Edgar Boehm, Bt, RA in 1882



Sir Thomas Brock RA
1847–1922
Bust of Lord Leighton PRA, 1892

Bronze
Diploma Work given by Sir Thomas Brock RA in 1893



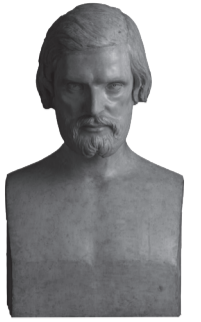
Sir Francis Chantrey RA
1781–1841
Bust of Benjamin West PRA, 1818

Marble
Diploma Work given by Sir Francis Chantrey RA in 1818



Francis Derwent Wood RA
1871–1926
Bust of Ambrose McEvoy ARA, 1916

Bronze
Given by Mrs Derwent Wood in 1953



Isabel Cholmeley
fl.1864–69
Bust of John Gibson RA 1864

Painted plaster
Given by Isabel Cholmeley in 1868



Sir George Frampton RA
1860–1928
Bust of William Strang RA 1903

Bronze
Given by David Strang in 1954



Charles Hartwell RA
1873–1951
The Oracle, 1917

Marble
Diploma Work given by Charles Hartwell RA in 1924



Sir William Goscombe John RA
1860–1952
Bust of John Macallan Swan RA, 1910

Bronze
Given by Mrs J.M. Swan in 1926



Sir William Goscombe John RA
1860–1952
Bust of Sir William Goscombe John RA, 1942

Bronze
Given by Sir William Goscombe John RA in 1943



Ivor Roberts-Jones RA
1913–1996
Bust of Kyffin Williams RA 1974

Bronze
Diploma Work given by Ivor Roberts-Jones RA 1974



George Rennie
1802–1860
Bust of Sir David Wilkie RA, 1833

Marble
Given by David Wilkie RA in 1935



Sir Eduardo Paolozzi RA
1924–2005
Naked Head, c.1979

Bronze
Diploma Work given by Sir Eduardo Paolozzi RA in 1979



Uli Nimpf RA
1897–1977
Bust of James Fitton RA 1970

Bronze
Given by Executors of Uli Nimpf RA in 1978



Eric Schilsky RA
1898–1974
Heliose, c.1936

Bronze
Diploma Work given by Eric Schilsky RA in 1968



Louis Francois Roubiliac
Bust of Joseph Wilton RA c.1760

Plaster
Given by Lady Frances Chambers, daughter of Joseph Wilton, in 1824



Charles Rossi RA
1763–1839
Bust of James Wyatt PRA After 1797

Painted Plaster
Given by N.J.S. Wyatt in 1995



Leopold Solomon
1919–1976
Bust of L.S. Lowry RA c.1967

Bronze
Given by Monty Bloom in 1967



Willi Soukop RA
1907–1995
Meditation, c.1969

Terracotta
Diploma Work given by Willi Soukop RA in 1969



Mary Grant
1831–1908
Bust of Sir Francis Grant PRA, c.1865

Marble
Given by Mary Grant in 1876



Arthur George Walker RA
1861–1939
Bust of a woman 1912

Marble
Bequeathed by Arthur George Walker RA in 1939



Sir Hamo Thornycroft RA
1850–1925
Bust of John Belcher RA 1881

Bronze
Given by Mrs John Belcher in 1914



Dame Ethel Walker ARA
1861–1951
Bust of a man ?1920s

Bronze
Bequeathed by Caryl Weight RA, received in 1999



Sir Alfred Gilbert RA
1854–1934
Bust of Lionel Percy Smythe RA, 1898

Plaster
Possibly given by William Lionel Wyllie RA in c.1924



Death Mask of John Constable RA
1837

Plaster
Given by John Constable in 1888



Charles Summers
1825–1878
Bust of Henry Weekes RA 1872

Marble
Given by Miss Margaret Thomas in 1880



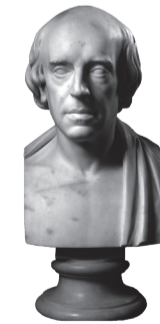
Sir Alfred Gilbert RA
1854–1934
Bust of George Frederic Watts RA, 1889

Plaster
Given by National Art Collections Fund in 1936



John Gibson RA
1790–1866
Bust of Elizabeth, Duchess of Wellington 1857

Plaster
Bequeathed by John Gibson RA in 1866



Edward Hodges Baily RA
1788–1867
Bust of John Flaxman RA c.1823

Marble
Diploma Work given by Edward Hodges Baily RA



Dame Elisabeth Frink RA
Goggle Head 1969

Bronze
On Loan from The Ingram Collection of Modern British Art © DACS

T H E A N C E S T O R S

A portrait bust is a very strange sculptural convention when you look at it in a new context. You might see examples inside grand old buildings, or high up on their exteriors; more likely you will walk past them without even noticing. A bust is a representation of a head, or head and shoulders, with some more or less formally elaborate base where the rest of the body is chopped off. Usually they represent particular persons who have been considered important enough to commemorate. Collectively they tell us about who, what kinds of people, a society has valued, and, by exclusion, who is left out, overlooked.

The Ancestors is a display of portrait busts from the Royal Academy's Collection curated by Cathie Pilkington RA and Alison Wilding RA. The installation celebrates the skill and artistry of these works while also emphasising the strangeness of portrait sculpture conventions, prompting the viewer to ask questions about the sitters, the artists, and the historical practices of the Academy as an institution. Some of the works represent former Academy presidents. Historically, Academicians were fond of making commemorative busts of each other, then gifting them to the Collection for posterity.

The oldest and largest work here is the rococo *Bust of Joseph Wilton RA* c.1760 by Louis Francois Roubiliac, which pre-dates the founding of the Royal Academy by several years. This is portrait sculpture in all its magnificent, bombastic self-confidence. The folds of Wilton's loose coat and the twist of his head lend his bulky torso a restless energy, and the sculptor's mallet in his right hand is a reminder that he is proudly a maker as well as a sitter.

In the 18th and 19th centuries morphing a human head and shoulders down into an architectural column could demonstrate a confident ownership of classical inheritance. Later 20th century portrait busts often seem unsure of how to navigate inherited conventions. Leopold Solomon's rapidly made *Portrait of L.S. Lowry* 1967, struggles to reconcile expressive modelling with monumentality and ends up being a lumpy monster sprouting incongruously from a slate cuboid.

Few of the busts represent, and even fewer are by, women. Significant exceptions are provided by the works of Mary Grant and Isabel Cholmeley. Both were accomplished sculptors of the mid-19th century but relatively uncelebrated compared with John Gibson RA who they worked alongside in his Rome studio. Cholmeley's austere *Bust of Gibson* 1864 focuses all attention onto the sitter's stern expression and swirling hair.

Most, but not all, of the busts are portraits. But among the bearded worthies there are a few exceptions. Eduardo Paolozzi's *Naked Head* c.1979 and Willi Soukop's *Meditation* c.1969 stand out like extra-terrestrial delegates from other galaxies. *Naked Head* is a robotic assemblage of machine parts without a face, while *Meditation* seems like a graceful, self-absorbed humanoid alien.

One object on display is not a sculpture at all. *The death mask of John Constable* 1837 was cast quickly from his newly dead face before the cheeks became hollow and sunken. Despite the apparent similarity to the surrounding sculptures, this is a very different kind of object. Something more documentary, it is a forensic record of the final state of a great landscape painter.

In the centre, serving as a key symbol for the whole display, is *Goggle Head* 1969 by Elizabeth Frink. Although Frink was a Royal Academician, in fact the first female sculptor to become one some two centuries after the Academy was founded, this work is the only one on display that isn't from the RA Collection.

The *Goggle Head* image fascinated Frink and she remade it many times. She claimed it was a symbol of universal evil and brutal inhumanity, but perhaps he is just a macho dude projecting a cool, tough persona to hide his sensitivities. It is a fascinatingly ambivalent image, reflecting Frink's reluctance to make art about her own interior life. When she made this work, Frink's preference for representing the figure was being strongly challenged by large abstract sculpture, usually made by men.

Frink sometimes displayed her *Goggle Head* sculptures on breeze block plinths like the ones used here. By contrasting low-grade construction materials with precious bronze and marble, The Ancestors borrows this practice to draw attention to the strangeness of the viewing conventions that surround these artworks.

Using varied materials to support and surround the sculptures, The Ancestors is a form of carefully composed art historical fly-tipping in a central space crossing aesthetics and anthropology.

Neil Walton and Cathie Pilkington RA

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