



Bust of a Man, Francis Harwood

Bust of a Man

Francis Harwood

British, 1758

Black stone (*pietra da paragone*) on a
yellow Siena marble socle

27 1/2 x 19 3/4 x 10 1/2 in.

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Questions for Teaching

Take the time to look closely at the work of art. What do you see?

How do you think the man feels? What do you see that makes you say so? Look closely at the tilt of the man's head, shoulders, and chest. Mimic the pose. When someone is posed in this way, how do you think the person feels?

The bust is displayed on a yellow base or pedestal called a socle. What does it mean to “put someone on a pedestal”?

The artist chose a black stone for this bust, rather than the traditional white marble. How would the impact of this portrait be different if it were sculpted in white marble? (*It would be less striking, it would not replicate the man's dark skin tone, the light would not reflect off the surface as well, and it might look more like a timeless figure from history than a contemporary sitter.*)

What elements in the man's face and body lead us to believe that this is a portrait of a particular individual rather than a generalized portrayal of a historical or mythological figure? (*The natural, non-idealistic features: bags under the eyes, small scar on the forehead, and small ears.*)

By terminating the figure below the chest and shoulders in a wide arc, Harwood evokes associations with ancient busts of notable men. Why would a sculptor in 1758 want to associate his subject with ancient busts of notable men? (*He may have wanted viewers to think of the subject as a notable figure. In addition, artists at this time wanted to revive the ideal of classical Greece and Rome in the popular style of the day, neoclassicism.*)

This portrait is different from other depictions of Africans made at the time. In other European works of sculpture and painting, a stereotypical depiction of a minority would have been more common. How does this portrait reflect changing views of Africans in the eighteenth century? (*It shows that some Africans were gaining more respect as individuals in Western society. European society was beginning to view them as people rather than as exotic possessions.*)

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Background Information

With noble bearing, this man proudly holds his chin high above his powerful chest. Sculptor Francis Harwood chose a black stone to reproduce the sitter's skin tone. Harwood also chose an unusual antique format for the bust, terminating it in a wide arc below the man's pectoral muscles. Harwood was familiar with antique sculptures from time spent in Florence reproducing and copying them. He may have deliberately used this elegant, rounded termination, which includes the entire, unclothed chest and shoulders, to evoke associations with ancient busts of notable men.

This bust is unique among Harwood's works in that it appears to be a portrait of a contemporary sitter. It is also of great historical importance because it is one of the earliest known sculpted representations of an African individual by a western European artist since antiquity. Although the identity of the sitter is unknown, his muscular torso and detailed features—seen in the bags under the eyes, the small ears, dignified expression, and scar on the face—suggest that this is a portrait of a specific individual. These characteristics distinguish Harwood's sculpture from the decorative and generalized busts of Africans in exotic costumes, which were more commonly produced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

About the Artist

Francis Harwood (British, active in Florence 1748–1783)

Nothing is known of Francis Harwood's birth or training. His first recorded work, a bust of the Roman Empress Faustina at Castle Ashby, England, is dated 1748. Later, establishing himself in Florence, Harwood became one of the major providers of sculpture for English aristocrats visiting Florence on the Grand Tour, a period of European travel during the 18th century during which young men learned about the politics, culture, and art of neighboring lands. Most of his known work consists of copies after the antique; his own compositions were also created in a classicizing style. He also produced decorative sculptures such as vases in colored marbles. As a sign that his work was appreciated in Italy, in 1758 he was commissioned to execute sculptures for a monumental arch in Florence, which included an allegorical figure of Equity and two trophies.