

Mortal Things: Portraits Look Back and Forth

Exhibition Celebrates 25th Anniversary of the Tufts University Art Gallery
September 14 to December 4, 2016



Rachel Perry, *Lost in my Life (fruit stickers)*, 2010.
Pigmented ink print. Image courtesy of the artist.

intriguingly, contemporary portraiture has revealed the active gaze of not only the artist, but also of the subject and the viewer.

Mortal Things includes a range of portraits in diverse media that span from the mid-nineteenth century to the present; nearly all the works included feature a legible human figure. Despite their inclusion of the traditional form of figure and face, however, these portraits suggest how subjective and elusive identity can be and demonstrate the array of inventive strategies artists have employed to interrogate the traditional genre for more than a century. This conceptual, and sometimes literal, exchange of gazes offers a way to consider the long arc of modern and contemporary portraiture and structures the exhibition in three sections: The Invisible Gaze, The Acknowledged Gaze, and The Self-Conscious Gaze.

Right Image: Rania Matar, *Dania 9, Beirut Lebanon*, 2011, 2015. Color photograph. Image courtesy of the artist.



MEDFORD, MA - The Tufts University Art Gallery at the Shirley and Alex Aidekman Arts Center proudly presents **Mortal Things: Portraits Look Back and Forth**, from September 14 through December 4, 2016. In honor of the 25th anniversary of The Tufts University Art Gallery, TUAG will feature *Mortal Things: Portraits Looks Back and Forth*, an exhibition about the changing role of artists and subjects in portraiture. Drawing on the strengths of both the Tufts' permanent art collection and the Gallery's dynamic record of thematic contemporary art exhibitions, the exhibition features more than 90 works by 49 artists from the Tufts permanent collection, as well as loans from Tufts alumni and Boston area collectors. The exhibition is curated by Amy Ingrid Schlegel, Ph.D., with advisor and independent curator Rachael Arauz, Ph.D.

Portraiture remains one of the most recognizable and deceptively simple forms of representation in art, yet throughout the twentieth century, the traditional exchange between portrait subject and artist has shifted and the genre has explored new ideas about the portrayal of human identity. Portraits once embodied a hierarchical relationship between an important sitter and an aspiring or established artist. With the expansion of artistic identity and the democratizing effect of photography in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, portraiture in all media embraced a greater subjectivity on the part of both agents. No longer bound by expectations to immortalize a heroic subject, modern portraits have acknowledged the fleeting, fragmentary, and vulnerable aspects of our human experience. Most

In the first section of the exhibition, “The Invisible Gaze,” a selection of historic and contemporary works are presented that reflect the traditional aims of portraiture, while also suggesting the ways artists have actively complicated those traditions. The second section, “The Acknowledged Gaze,” features works that reflect the democratization of portraiture and the increasingly acknowledged complexity of the relationship between sitter and subject. In the final section, “The Self-Conscious Gaze,” visitors encounter portraits that deeply engage with the subjective nature of identity construction.

The Tufts University Art Gallery is a recognized player in the active contemporary art scene in the Boston metropolitan area and an unparalleled campus resource for fostering visual literacy and critical thinking skills. The Gallery’s mission is to animate the intellectual life of the greater university community through exhibitions and programs that explore new, global perspectives on art and art discourse.

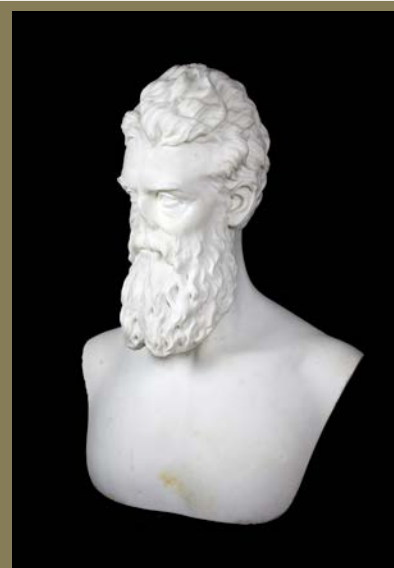
John Brown's Body on view in the Slater Concourse Gallery September 14 to December 4, 2016

Tufts University has in its permanent collection a marble bust of the late abolitionist John Brown (1800-1859). While the bust stands as a symbol of Brown’s ardent fight against slavery and his pivotal role in the events leading up to the beginnings of the Civil War, it likewise recognizes the University’s connection to the Stearns Estate, from which the bust was originally commissioned and on which the Cousens Gym, Steve Tisch Sports and Fitness Center, and Alumni Fields now rest. Preparing the bust for exhibition necessitated its repair and cleaning. Its restoration and exhibition emphasizes the dramatic story of its original creation and lays claim to a history of abolitionism in the Greater Boston area, which will be elucidated through a supporting exhibition in the Slater Concourse Gallery this fall.

The commission for Brown’s bust arrived shortly after the abolitionist’s arrest at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia in October 1859. With the support of Medford residents George and Mary Stearns, Brown organized a resistance movement in which he attempted to seize the federal armory and arsenal. His efforts at insurrection failed, however, and he was tried and scheduled for hanging on December 2, 1859. Upon hearing of Brown’s impending execution, Mary Stearns commissioned Winchester-based sculptor Edward A. Brackett to form a bust for Brown’s memorialization. In order to complete this task and maintain secrecy, Brackett traveled to the prison in Charlestown, West Virginia where Brown was being held, befriended a prison guard, and attained access to Brown’s jail cell where measurements and sketches were made. The Stearns officially revealed the marble bust of Brown, with his long beard and assertive gaze, during a New Year’s celebration in 1863. Those in attendance included philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson, poet and civil rights activist Julia Ward Howe (who wrote *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*), and Concord Transcendentalists and authors Bronson and Louis May Alcott. In part a celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation, the gathering further acted as a memorialization of John Brown, whose actions and ideals had helped establish the abolitionist cause.

In anticipation of its inclusion in the fall 2016 exhibition, Edward Brackett’s marble bust of John Brown is in a process of restoration. The entirety of the nose and a portion of the right eyebrow, lost through unknown circumstances, have been recreated through a 3D digital scanning process. The recessed surfaces of the nose and eyebrow have been compared with an intact plaster copy loaned from the Boston Athenaeum to create a three-dimensional printed mold. From this positive mold, a new marble nose will be cast and adhered.

John Brown's Body will be on view in the Slater Concourse Gallery concurrent with *Mortal Things: Portraits Look Back and Forth* from September 14 to December 4, 2016.



Edward Brackett, *John Brown*, 1860. Marble