

Laura Schawelka

Again

September 3 – October 15

Opening September 2 / 1 – 9 pm

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JOHN
Was she a ...?

PETER
Probably.

JOHN
That's amazing!

PETER
Supposedly you really can't tell...
except by looking at the hands. They
haven't perfected the hands yet.

"Westworld", Michael Crichton, 1973

Approximation

The bust of Nefertiti (ca. 1340 BC) was discovered in 1912 during excavations in the workshop of ancient Egyptian sculptor Thutmose in Amarna. It is believed that Nefertiti sat as a model for the bust, which then was used as a study portrait for other artworks.

It was not until 1923 that photographs of the bust were published. A year later it was exhibited publicly for the first time in the Neues Museum in Berlin, where it remains today. Until then, it was in the private quarters of its owner, James Simon, where only a few people were able to see it. However, in 1913 he commissioned the expressionist sculptor Tina Haim-Wentscher (1887-1974) to create two copies of the bust. Simon kept one of these two resulting busts for himself - which is now lost - and gave the second one to emperor Wilhelm II. This oldest copy of Nefertiti's bust is still exhibited today in the emperor's Dutch exile residence in Doorn.

The peculiarity of these first two versions is that Tina Haim-Wentscher complemented the missing parts of the original. Since the surface of the original bust is far too delicate to allow a cast, she created a no-contact copy - based solely on visual clues. It is unclear why and by whom it was decided to reconstruct the lost parts and complete Nefertiti's fragmented face, erasing the flaws of the ancient bust. But this version of the queen has both eyes and ears and also the cobra on her crown was added.

Tina Haim-Wentscher created another hand-measured version of the bust around 1920. Until a few years ago, this bust served as the master model for the plaster molding workshop of the National Museums in Berlin (Gipsformerei der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin), which sells replicas of Nefertiti worldwide.

In 1802, Marie Tussaud (1761-1850) opened her first exhibition of celebrity wax portraits in London. She had learned her trade from a well-known doctor and producer of medical wax works in France and now set up her own business in Great Britain. She traveled with her exhibition through the theaters, dioramas, and arcades in the early 19th century, which also housed the first photographic and cinematic experiments. However, Tussaud herself was never photographed; only her death mask has been preserved in the Madame Tussauds archive in London.

Tussaud's technique for making wax figures has remained virtually unchanged until now, and some of her models still exist today. Whereas during her lifetime she probably had to resort to sculptures, drawings, and engravings, now mainly photographs and manual measurements of the model are used. However, casts are practically never taken. Like the copies of Nefertiti, the wax portraits are created without contact. They are more approximation than copy, interpretation instead of index.

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