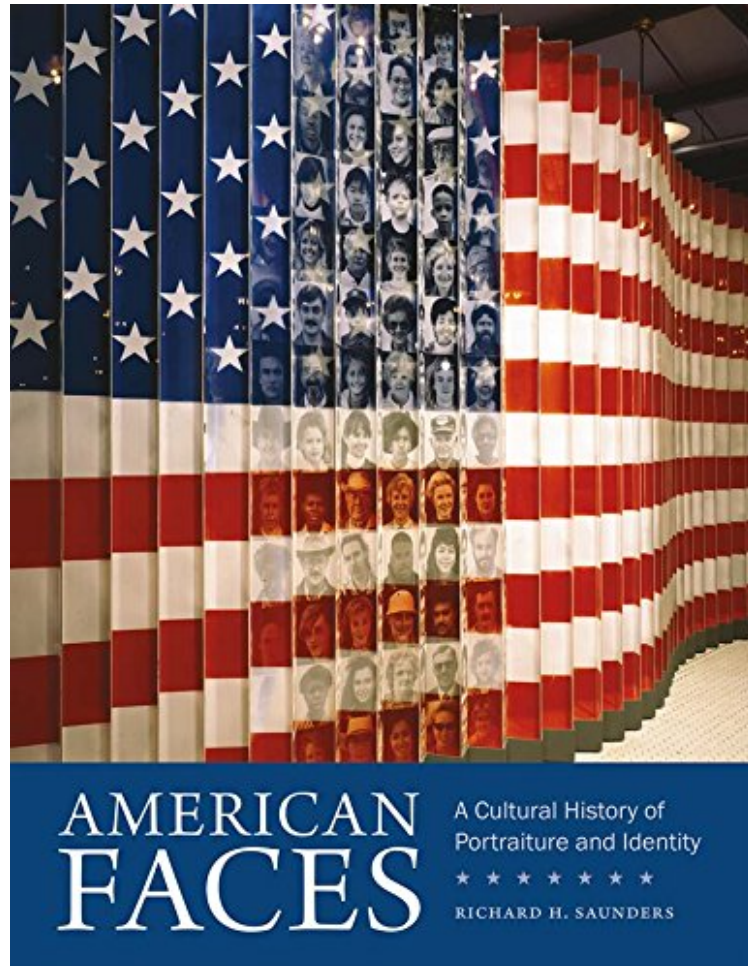


American Faces: A Cultural History of Portraiture and Identity

Richard H. Saunders

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Richard H. Saunders : American Faces: A Cultural History of Portraiture and Identity before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised American Faces: A Cultural History of Portraiture and Identity:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A social history of genres of portraiture for memory, propaganda, egotism, social status and more. A very fine book. By lyndonbrechtBooks on some subset of art can be unreadable and full of jargon. Unlike those, this is a highly readable, excellently written and superbly illustrated study of portraiture. Note that portraits in this book is not just paintings, but portrait sculpture, prints, silhouettes, photos and mass illustration (such as portraits in Life magazine). It really is a social history. There is a bit of technical detail, but not much. I had not known that there were devices for creating accurate silhouettes, I'd always thought it was just mastery with a pair of scissors. It's too short to offer huge detail, but it is a wonderful introduction to the subject, and thought-provoking. Chapter one considers the rich and portraits. The rich could afford to commission portraits and had residences large enough for hanging them. Their portraits were a form of ostentation. In the 1800s the society portrait

was a major genre, and the tradition of fine oil paintings remains even in an age of digital media. For example, the succession portraits of CEOs of large corporations, much like the portraits of American presidents or college presidents. A recent development is the portrait commissioned from a famous artist as an investment rather than personal egotism. Chapter 2 is titled "Portraits for Everyone," and covers a fascinating range, from silhouettes to miniatures to Civil War photography. Peale's museum in Philadelphia made 8,800 silhouettes in 1803, for a penny each. In 1853 with a population of 17 million the US had between 13,000 and 17,000 people working in daguerrotypes, some 3 million of them a year, easily affordable and mostly portraits. In the Civil War 300 photographers followed the Army of the Potomac alone. Lots of Americans were photographed with tools of their trade, a form the book calls the occupational portrait. Developments keep coming, of course, including the first Kodak camera (1888), the photo booth (1920s) and the polaroid (1948). Chapter 3 covers fame, portraits in various media of the famous, with a fascinating description of portraits of Washington and Lincoln, the two main American icons. Chapter 4 considers propaganda, examining the famous "Mission Accomplished" photo. Sojourner Truth sold portraits of herself to raise money for the cause, in a form immensely popular in the later 1800s, the carte-de-visite. The famed 1869 portrait of the meeting of the railways in Utah left out the 12,000 Chinese who'd largely built the Central Pacific portion. Portraits can be manipulated to make points, and the chapter is excellent. Chapter 5 is titled "Self, Audience" and examines artist's self portraits--the relation to today's ubiquitous "selfie" is obvious. Chapter 6 looks at "Ritual, Power and Memory." This includes Mt Rushmore, public sculpture (think of pigeons pooping on some bronze general on horseback). Memory includes some odd genres such as photographing the recently deceased or the sad later 1800s genre of the memory painting. One photograph that is wrenching is a father holding a dead child, something that seems horrifying today but once was common. Chapter 7 is a gallery and the book is worth it for this alone. Wonderful illustrations with exceptionally good captions (granted that captions are usually so mundane that anything reasonably good stands out).

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The Varied Identities And Visual Images of Americans By Customer Richard Saunders is Director of the Middlebury College Museum of Art and the Walter Cerf Distinguished Professor of Art History. An acknowledged scholar of early American portraiture, Saunders has mounted a remarkable exhibition to which American Faces is the equally remarkable catalogue, the latter sumptuously reproducing portraits in every conceivable and sometimes inconceivable visual medium from the 18th century to the present. The result is a wonderfully creative, insightful and all encompassing iconographic investigation which questions how Americans from every class, gender, and socio/economic station have expressed their identity, whether in high-art portraiture or the current obsession with digital "selfies." Clearly Saunders is aligned both methodologically and philosophically with E.H. Gombrich's approach to the study of cultural history and humanistic studies by drawing upon the commonplace, the everyday and often overlooked expressions of "portraiture" in addition to the better known examples of high art. American Faces will appeal to anyone interested in the shifting and complex images which define how Americans have seen themselves over the last two centuries. William Lipke, Emeritus Professor of Art History, University of Vermont

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Here's looking at you..... By RonGA fascinating exploration of all aspects of American portraiture - in many media - from colonial days to the present: artifact history, art history, and human history, expertly mixed in a readily accessible text. The result of more than ten years of concentrated effort by a dedicated scholar, the book is beautifully designed, well illustrated, and filled with occasionally surprising stories. Numerous footnotes and a complete bibliography provide links for further research. Highly recommended for the general public - and public libraries! - as well as specialists in art, antiques, history, and material culture. A triumph for all involved.

Portraits. We know what they are, but why do we make them? Americans have been celebrating themselves in portraits since the arrival of the first itinerant portrait painters to the colonies. They created images to commemorate loved ones, glorify the famous, establish our national myths, and honor our shared heroes. Whether painting in oil, carving in stone, casting in bronze, capturing on film, or calculating in binary code, we spend considerable time creating, contemplating, and collecting our likenesses. In this sumptuously illustrated book, Richard H. Saunders explores our collective understanding of portraiture, its history in America, how it shapes our individual and national identity, and why we make portraits--whether for propaganda and public influence or for personal and private appreciation. American Faces is a rich and fascinating view of ourselves.

“An engaging, light history of the way the United States has embraced images of its people and how these have helped define a national identity.” —ARLIS, Art Libraries Society of North America