

[\(Un\)Like: Life Writing and Portraiture, c.1700-the present](#)

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Portraiture and life-writing have long been understood as genres that, for all their differences, share key concepts. As both genres are concerned with the individual figure, they rely on particularities and specificities, on telling events and characteristic anecdotes and, most importantly, on a representative depiction of the subject in question which was similar or like. Resemblance, similarity, likeness - these were the terms by which works were judged. A letter to the *Daily Gazetteer* remarked in 1742: 'I think it is agreed on all Hands that in Biography, as it is in Portrait Painting, a Likeness is to be preserved, if we would give satisfaction in either Science.' Importantly (and to complicate the study of likeness), the media concerned with likeness were likewise considered to be alike. The art theorist Jonathan Richardson famously wrote in 1715: 'to sit for one's Portrait is like to have an Abstract of one's Life written and published, and to have one consigned over to Honour or Infamy'. Richardson referred to the long tradition of inter- or multi-media portraying and life-writing practices, the linking of literary with visual portraits for mutual benefit and the reciprocal bolstering of genres by providing additional information or another perspective. Next to resemblance and medial proximity, Richardson introduces a third aspect: appreciation or emotional response to portraits and biographies. Samuel Johnson would later write in the *Idler* no. 45 (1759) that 'Every man is always present to himself, and has, therefore, little need of his own resemblance; nor can he desire it, but for the sake of those whom he loves, and by whom he hopes to be remembered'. Likeness, it appears, therefore intersects with the representation's potential to make a person not only like, but also likeable, to have third parties appreciate both the individuals and their representations. This notion of recognition - understood as identification - being closely linked with respect and social approval still shows in such phenomena as Facebook and Instagram, where 'to like' equals acceptance, affirmation, or recommendation, signalling approval of the online persona.

This one day conference explores the different layers of likeness in portraiture and life writing in Europe, from the beginning of the eighteenth century to the present day. Subjects include authors, inventors, painters, self-painters and selfie-takers, robots, realists, surrealists, expressionists and others, from literature, painting, photography and film. How does the concept of likeness appear, converge and change across these instances of portraying and portraiture?

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