

Know Thyself: A Conference on Early Modern Images

Department of History of Art, UCL. Saturday 2nd May 2015

“Admiring one’s own face is most easy. To know one’s internal self always has been reputed to be difficult.”

Ulisse Aldrovandi (Italian naturalist, 1522-1605)

The tragedy of Narcissus was his failure to recognise the image he admired on the surface of the pool as his own. His fate might have improved, had he possessed the deeper self-knowledge implied by the Delphic maxim, “know thyself.” The question prompted by Narcissus, of how images pertain to self-knowledge, is especially relevant to the Early Modern period, during which the ancient aphorism *nosce te ipsum* was engaged provocatively in a range of visual material: it is quoted in illustrations of anatomy, natural history and cartography, and evoked in religious and secular works of art. This renewed cultural imperative to self-knowledge is bound up with the scientific and technological advancements of the period. It is epitomised by the technical refinement of the looking glass, which enabled a person to admire – or better, scrutinise – her own face with unprecedented clarity.

The premise of this conference is that consideration of the Delphic maxim can be productively channeled into interrogating the role of the image in relation to the self: How might images mobilise the philosophical challenge to “know thyself”? What are the mechanisms within images that invite participation in the practices of self-discovery and self-representation?

Conference programme:

10-10.30 am

Registration and coffee

10.30

Introduction & discussion

11.15

Session 1: The Art of Self-Reflection

Anita Sganzerla

The Courtauld Institute

Self-knowledge as a Quest in the Art of G. B. Castiglione, il Grechetto

Nathanael Price

University College London

In their own image. Medallion portraits of Jews in sixteenth-century Italy

James Hall

Independent scholar

Sculptors as violators: Michelangelo, Bandinelli and creative destruction

12.45

Lunch (provided for speakers)

2.00 pm

Session 2: Reproducing the Self

Rebecca Whiteley

University College London

Revealing the secrets of the body: early modern images of the fetus in utero

Rosemary Moore

University College London

Title TBA (Charles Estienne's *The Dissection of the Human Body*)

3.00

Session 3: A World of Self-Knowledge

Thalia Allington-Wood

University College London

The twentieth-century 'discovery' of the Sacro Bosco at Bomarzo: an exercise in knowing thyself

Radu Leca

SOAS, University of London

The Refraction of Self-Knowledge in Early Modern Maps

Alexandra Marraccini

University of Chicago

The Mind, The Garden, And The Flask: Ways of Knowing In Elias Ashmole's Alchemical Manuscripts

4.30

Concluding thoughts and discussion

5.00

Drinks Reception

For more information and registration, please email Sophie Morris sophie.morris@ucl.ac.uk and Nathanael Price n.price.12@ucl.ac.uk