



## **BESONDERS/EXEMPLARISCH** **Morphomatische Fallstudien zu Biographie und Portrait**

### **Abstract**

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### **Facing Objects. Index and Exemplariness in Renaissance Portrait Culture**

This paper will discuss an underexplored side of Renaissance portraits, in its relation to what I call the 'image policy of faces' in 15th century Florence. My discussion will focus on a group of astounding portrait busts based on either life casts or death masks. They were meant not only for individual representations but also for reproduction and distribution. Based on interests both in the objects' materiality and 'facture' and their representational functions, my paper reflects upon the concept of 'indexicality' and its relation to concepts of 'virtue' and 'agency' in Renaissance culture. As images generated by immediate touch, by the application of artistic raw material to the human body, the objects claim unquestionable truthfulness while circumventing artistic mimesis. The key questions I pose are: Why did portraits based to such a high degree on largely mechanical principles, which prima vista counteract common notions of the Renaissance artist's creative powers, become such valued and commonly produced items in fifteenth century Florence? What role does the production and display of utmost similitude – as an antique point of reference – play in a culture deeply permeated by ideals of ethical and aesthetical 'mirroring'? And last but not least: How do religious practices and the emerging portrait culture of Saints relate to secular portraiture and the ways in which they were perceived by the beholder? I will be able to show why and how antique frames of reference became a powerful foil for new forms of largely 'non-artistic' agency in art, and how concepts of 'individuality' and exemplariness are central for a new understanding of sculpted portraits' political, moral, and genealogical functions – in a culture where the particular becomes the exemplary by means of indexical reproduction.



