

Allegorical and Emblematic Women's Faces

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"Had Cleopatra's nose been shorter, the whole face of the world would have changed."—B. Pascal

Women's figures have often been used as symbols representing a religion, an ideal, a country, which should appeal to everybody. In the classical Greco-Roman culture, these figures were associated with a symbolic accessory: a balance for justice, a mirror for truth, a Phrygian cap for liberty. The ideal head shape configuration and facial features have varied over the centuries and have been a subject of debate among ancient artists, philosophers, physicians, and more recently among physical anthropologists.¹ Although these allegorical faces do not necessarily reflect beauty in a common sense, they are sculpted, painted, carved, or built to appeal to the majority of the people who are going to see, worship and revere them. To create an allegorical figure, most artists have used existing female models, that best suited their purpose. In a few instances, the visage of a known person has become by itself an allegorical figure, like the *Monalisa* of da Vinci.

ATHENA PARTHENONS, GODDESS OF WISDOM AND VICTORY

For the ancient Greeks, one of the most emblematic goddesses was certainly Athena, the daughter of Zeus, king of the gods. According to the legend, Metis, the goddess of ruse and intelligence, was pregnant from Zeus. As it was prophesized that the son of Zeus would overthrow his father, Metis was turned into a drop of water and swallowed by Zeus who later developed an unbearable headache. Decision was made that Hephaistos, god of the blacksmiths, should open the skull of Zeus, which he did with an axe. Out of the skull sprang Athena, fully grown and in a full set of armor. Due to the way and the origin of her birth, she became the goddess of wisdom and victory, and the emblematic figure of the Athenians, who built the Parthenon temple on top of the Acropolis in her honor. Phidias, the most acclaimed sculptor of his time was asked to design, sculpt and erect a gigantic statue (11.50 m) inside the temple (447 BC). The Parthenon statue has been destroyed, but we have several descriptions and replicas to figure out how it looked (Fig. 1A). The statue was made of ivory and gold; It depicts Athena after winning in combat. With her left hand, she supports a shield with carvings of an Athenian battle against the Amazons. Phidias did not use a model for sculpting her face. Knowing that things that are high will appear exceedingly small, his Athena was made with increased lengths of the facial features, and the body was proportionate to the height of the columns. Athena's visage has also been sculpted in several smaller statues and coins (Fig. 1B). With her

straight and long nose, projecting slightly from the forehead, she was probably a model of the Greek beauty, and it became often a model of an allegorical face.

MARIANNE, FRENCH REPUBLIC AND FREEDOM

In 1792, at the end of monarchy, the French Convention chose to adopt a new seal for the young Republic. The figure of a young woman, with the popular name of Marianne, became the symbol of the Republic. Since then, Marianne's busts, seals and stamps symbolize officially the France Nation and represent the founding principles of its democracy: liberty, equality, fraternity. But, as opposed to the representations of monarchy, the artists had since the beginning, the entire freedom to choose their model and give their statue the features they want, providing, she is wearing a red Phrygian cap (the Phrygian cap had been used by freedmen in the Roman Empire). For 250 years, hundreds of different "Marianne" have been represented. Initially, the models were chosen among country girls (Fig. 1C); they depicted dignity, a chaste look, and a certain type of physique capable of combining beauty and austerity. The display of a bare breast, symbolizing maternity, was not exceptional. During the 19th century, the dignified look was replaced by a more charming one.

Until 1970, tradition was that the artists give to Marianne an anonymous, impersonal face, which figured nothing else than the ideal expression of the Nation. Nobody would care to know who the model



FIGURE 1. A, Athena Varvaikon. B, Tetradrachme with the face of Athena. C, One of the first representation of Marianne. D, Bust of Brigitte Bardot.

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was chosen by the artist. In 1969, the sculptor Aslan broke the tradition and chose Brigitte Bardot (Fig. 1D), the most renowned actress of the time, as a model. After a first bust of Bardot was displayed in a small city hall by its mayor, Aslan was assailed by requests of similar molds. Today, it is the most sold bust of Marianne in the Louvre Museum. In 1978, Aslan built another Marianne with the head of the singer Mireille Mathieu. In 1985, a few journalists made a poll in France to determine whose figure would best represent Marianne among a series of actresses. Catherine Deneuve won with 39%, described as a classical beauty with a touch of “quiet feminism,” best suited for a modern Republic. President François Mitterrand was in favor of Deneuve. She, however did not want to appear as an “unchained revolutionary, with a bare breast and a triumphant cap.” She finally accepted if she could control her image and was sculpted by the winner of a contest among 35 sculptors, Marielle Polska (Fig. 2A). Similar polls to determine to whom the French would prefer as Marianne were organized by journalists subsequently, and in 2000, the 36,400 mayors of France were asked at their turn to choose the best face to ornate their city hall. Among a series of beautiful women, 36% choose the top-model and actress Laetitia Casta (Fig. 2B), who was sculpted by Marie-Paule Deville-Chabrolle. Many politicians and historians were opposed to this type of beauty contest. The Republic cannot be represented or identified to a living individual, necessarily not perfect. Only anonymity may transmit the perfect abstraction of the message, they argue. Marianne’s look on the French Post stamps varied over the last century, and in July 2018, President Emmanuel Macron himself revealed the face of Marianne, who will ornate the new stamps. An unknown model succeeds to the famous French actresses (Fig. 3).

In 2019, took place an exhibition called “The Mariannes of the Republic, an allegory with 1000 visages,” displaying plaster or bronze busts, statuettes, press clippings, watercolors, everyday objects representing Marianne throughout its history, as a beautiful woman, but also as a witch, a senile old woman, a monster, or ferociously portrayed in cartoons by the political opposition, which denounces the regime’s shortcomings. Like a chameleon, the allegory adapts to all sensibilities. The wise Marianne, hieratic and maternal, dressed long and wearing a laurel or oak wreath, is more to the taste of conservative republicans. The other, the revolutionary Marianne, is in motion and wearing a red Phrygian cap, she has a bare chest or breast, she is fiery and more to the taste of revolutionary republicans. In times of peace, the wise Marianne prevailed, while in times of war, the revolutionary Marianne exalted republican patriotism.

THE STATUE OF LIBERTY, LIBERTY ENLIGHTENING THE WORLD

Edouard René de Laboulaye (1811–1883), a prominent political thinker and a staunch abolitionist, president of the French Anti-Slavery Society



FIGURE 2. A, Bust of Catherine Deneuve. B, Bust of Leticia Casta.



FIGURE 3. Evolution of Marianne’s stamps in the French Post.

was a careful observer of the politics of the United States, an admirer of its constitution and an ardent supporter of the Union. In 1865 he originated the idea of a monument presented by the French people to the United States, to commemorate the 1776 Declaration of Independence of the United States. But it was only 20 years later that the French sculptor Frédéric Bartholdi put the project to execution. Laboulaye and Bartholdi considered that the best way to express the idea of American liberty was to build some suitable memorial showing the fraternal feeling existing between the republics of the United States and France. In early American history, one female figure was frequently used as a cultural symbol of the nation: Libertas, the goddess of freedom widely worshiped in ancient Rome, especially among emancipated slaves. A Liberty figure already adorned most American coins at the time, it was represented in popular and civic art, as well as in Thomas Crawford’s Statue of Freedom (1863) atop of the dome of the US Capitol Building. Bartholdi broached the idea of a massive statue in neoclassical style, with gown and cloak common in depictions of Roman goddesses and holding a torch. Instead of a Phrygian cap or a helmet, to avoid reference to a French Marianne, the head was topped with a diadem or a crown. The 7 rays form an aureole. They evoke the sun, the 7 seas, and the 7 continents, and represent another means, besides the torch, whereby Liberty enlightens the world (Fig. 4).

Who was Bartholdi’s model? Since 1886 and its inauguration on New York’s Liberty Island, the wildest rumors have been circulating, an enigma maintained by Frederick-Augustus Bartholdi himself. Among his muses, his mother, Charlotte Bartholdi is often quoted. This authoritarian, marmorean woman with a stern smile, was favored by many experts. In fact, it has been recently affirmed that Bartholdi did not copy an antic image or his mother, but used as a model a beautiful American of German origin, Sarah Coblenzer, who was the fiancée of Adolphe Salmon, the proxyholder and good friend of Bartholdi. According to their descendant, Nathalie Salmon, it was in 1875 that Adolphe introduced his friend Auguste to Sarah. She was 30 years old and Bartholdi was in shock. It was the face he was looking for. “Serious, tall, modern, luminous... and American! The sculptor is going to capture her neoclassical features for his Statue of Liberty, her magnificent Roman nose, her perfect eyebrow arch, her enigmatic bluish grey eyes and the cut-out of her face would embody Liberty from now on and for eternity” (Fig. 5).

At the end of the 20th century, various rumors concerning the origin, the model and the meaning of the Monument, particularly in reference to the US black population, arose and made the object of a report by several anthropologists of the National Park Service. In their conclusions, they made clear that several assumptions were fake: Although Laboulaye was a strong abolitionist, and while references to the Civil War and abolition of slavery occur repeatedly since its erection, Bartholdi never thought of using a black woman as a model for his statue (except may be an Egyptian goddess).

LIVING PERSONAGES: IS THERE A ROLE FOR PLASTIC SURGERY?

If beauty is not a guarantee to become a successful politician, numerous studies have shown that physical attractiveness plays a role in political elections, as it does in the chance of a child to



FIGURE 4. Crowned head of the Statue of Liberty exposed in Paris.

receive a better education. To enhance their popularity a few leaders have added to their facial appearance something that made them immediately recognizable and emblematic, like Hitler’s and Stalin’s mustaches, or Donald Trump’s and Boris Johnson’s haircuts. These hairy signs may please a good part of the population, but may also be an object of hatred for others. Recently, the American ambassador to South Korea, Harris Harris, had to shave his mustache, because he resembled the reviled Japanese leaders who ruled the Korean Peninsula with an iron fist during the Japanese occupation from 1910 to 1945. Some of Japan’s most prominent wartime leaders—including Emperor Hirohito and Hideki Tojo, the Prime Minister who was later executed by a postwar tribunal—had mustaches.

Today, it is almost necessary for all women in politics to use some type of cosmetic method to improve their facial appearance, particularly when they appear on TV, and it is exceptional to observe an aging politician who did not undergo a face lift, a blepharoplasty or another operation of rejuvenation. Structural modifications of the face to increase attractiveness, necessitating a plastic surgery operation, are more exceptional. According to a few journalists, it was the case of Benazir Bhutto, who became the



FIGURE 5. Head of the Statue of Liberty with aging alleged model, Sarah Coblenzer.



FIGURE 6. Benazir Bhutto, before and after septorhinoplasty.

first woman to head a Muslim country, and to have been twice elected Prime Minister of Pakistan, before being assassinated in 2007. “Angel or demon,” titled a newspaper, “her beauty made François Mitterrand wriggle, blush PPDA (Star presenter of the French TV) and melt George Bush: Benazir’s beauty was her magic wand.” Always wearing a light veil, she never hid her face, and knew what she represented for the majority of her people: “I know I’m a symbol of what the so-called jihadists, Taliban and al-Qaeda fear the most, I’m a woman, a political leader, who struggles to bring modernity and communication, education and technology in Pakistan,” she wrote in her autobiography.

Was this symbolic appearance enhanced by plastic surgery? It is difficult to ascertain. Nevertheless, it is a fact that in 1985, she came to Switzerland to undergo a septorhinoplasty, to correct a deviated nose and septum, as well as a dorsal hump, a long nose and a plunging tip (Fig. 6). At age 32, Benazir had already an eventful political history. She was the daughter of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who served as president and then prime minister of Pakistan from 1971 to 1977 and was executed in a 1979 following a coup by General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq. It was a shock for the young girl, who swore to have her revanche on the militaries. After her studies in Oxford, she returned to Pakistan, where she was incarcerated several times because of her political activism. Free to leave her country for medical reasons in 1984, she reached London to undergo a delicate middle ear operation, and then Geneva, to have her nose operated. After 4 months, in April 1986, returning to Pakistan, she was greeted by such large crowds that it took her motorcade 9 1/2 hours to travel the 8 miles from the airport to a rally in Lahore. Thanks to her charisma (and her appearance?) Benazir’s figure had become emblematic for many Pakistanis, the symbol of a new era where a woman could lead a Muslim country. Despite severe criticisms concerning her fortune, she remained an emblem until her assassination in 2007.

The choice of a female model to express an allegory is never insignificant. At a time like ours, when dozens of statues are taken down and thrown to the ground because the figures who were honored at one time, are no longer admired, even hated, it is understandable that the decision to represent an allegory, or the symbol of a nation by this or that female face is a very delicate one. Whether the appearance of a personage could have changed the history of the world or a nation, as proposed by the French philosopher Blaise Pascal, this is another question.

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