

## Research Point: Portrait Sculpture

For this exercise I have chosen to look at a couple of portrait sculptures in more detail and to look at the techniques a sculptor can use to comment on the subject's status and achievements. I have selected two sculptures to look at in more detail, one from 1905 and the other from almost a hundred years later.



The bronze statue of Sir Thomas Browne on Hay Hill Norwich was produced by Henry Pegram in 1905. Browne was born in 1605 and, according to the Norwich City Council website he was a “physician, philosopher, botanist and writer”.

I think that the sculptor has used a number of techniques to show Sir Thomas Browne's status and achievements:

- Clothes – very well dressed for the period, the sculptor portrays the subject as a man of some means
- Seated – unusually for a public sculpture like this, Browne is depicted seated, indicating perhaps that he is at work studying
- Props – Browne is holding a broken urn and is looking at it. One of Browne's books was on the subject of Burial Urns so the sculptor has used this to signify one of Browne's achievements
- Pose – Browne is shown deep in thought and with his left arm supporting his head conveying the impression of the philosopher that he was.



This statue of Sir John Betjeman by Martin Jennings was erected at St Pancras Station in 2007.

Betjeman was the Poet Laureate and had a keen interest in Victorian architecture. He has been credited with saving St Pancras station from demolition and it is very fitting that the statue is sited in the newly refurbished station.

The larger than life statue has skilfully captured Betjeman's appearance, according to Justin Gowers in The Guardian "His shoelace and scruffy collar are undone. He has knotted string for one shoelace. His right trouser leg is lower at the back". However just skilfully rendering Betjeman's appearance is not sufficient to also capture his achievements. This Jennings has achieved by:

- Posture – Betjeman is shown looking up at the great glass roof and this encourages the viewer to do the same. This then makes you appreciate Betjeman's role in saving the historic building.
- Betjeman's clothes are shown blowing in the wind giving a sense of movement and of action.
- Inscriptions around the base have been used to signify Betjeman as a poet with lines from one of his poems, but also to recognise his role in saving the station with the inscription of Betjeman's name and the words "who saved this glorious station".

I think that I fully agree with the final sentence of Gower's article in The Guardian where he states "Jennings' amazing work is a fitting tribute for a national icon".

## Web References

<http://www.norwich.gov.uk/ThomasBrowne-TheHayHillArtProject/pages/ThomasBrowne.aspx>

<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/artblog/2007/oct/22/afittingtributetobetjeman>