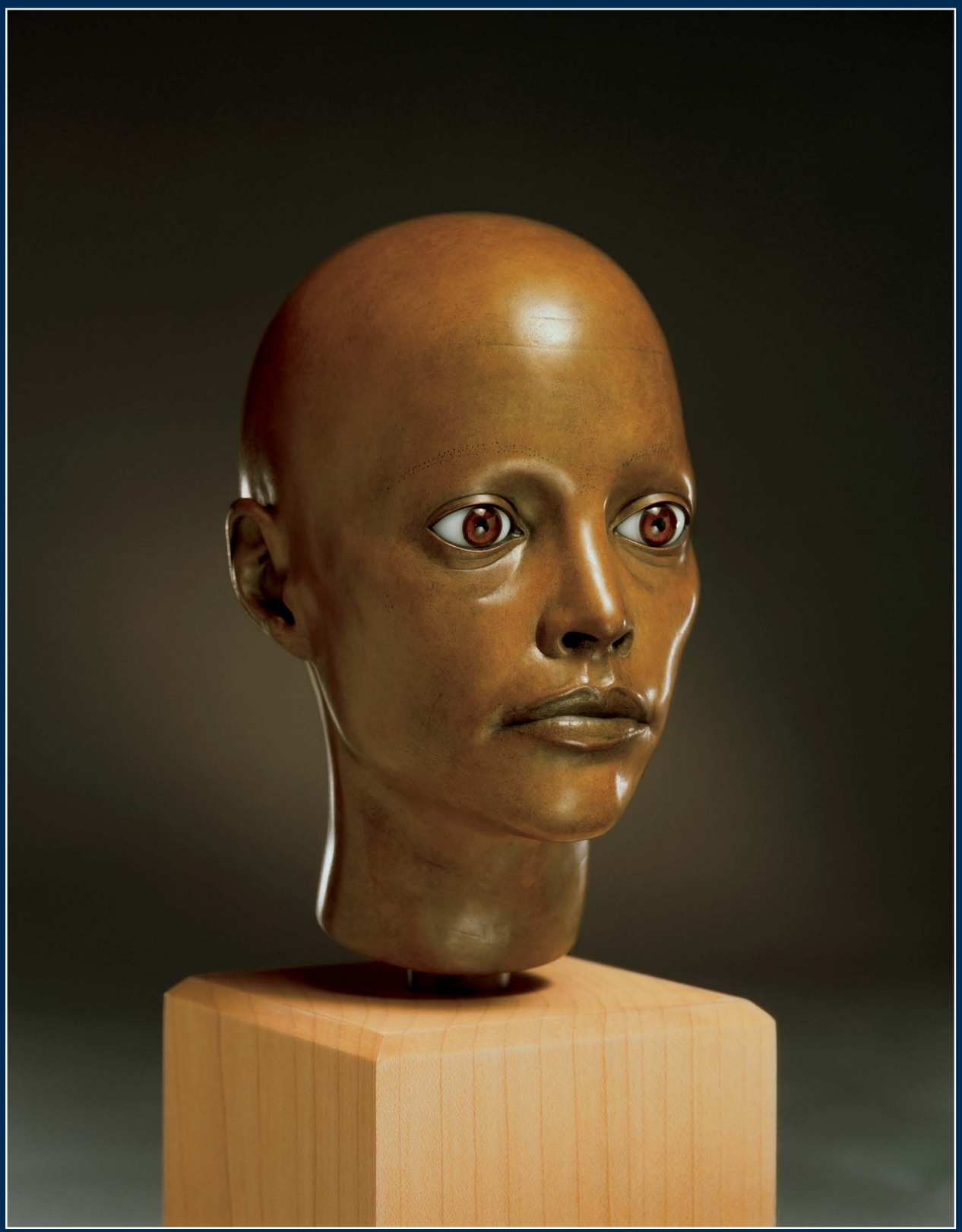
THE ART BULLETIN



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Cover: Elizabeth King, *Untitled*, 1991–94, bronze, glass eyes, first of a variable edition of four, 6 × 3 × 4 in. Collection of Martin Puryear, Accord, N.Y. (artwork © Elizabeth King; photograph © Katherine Wetzel). The eyes are movable: to reposition the gaze, the back of the head may be removed to access the eye mechanism inside.

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Recent Books in the Arts *listings are now available online within* caa.reviews *at www.caareviews.org.*

EDITOR'S NOTE

The Art Bulletin will celebrate its centennial in 2013. In the journal's first hundred years, findings and arguments shaped the history of art, as queries arising from the correlation of objects and their histories—queries about subject and style, material and meaning, inclusion and exclusion, gender, race, sexuality, and so on—ushered the discipline in new directions. Gliding into a new century, *The Art Bulletin* should reflect the widening scope and manifold practices of the history of art. Specialty journals exist for many fields, but *The Art Bulletin* is uniquely positioned as a venue for critical, cross-field dialogue. To reflect the vibrancy of art history today and to stimulate dialogue across fields and with neighboring disciplines, the March 2012 issue of *The Art Bulletin* includes three new features, "Regarding Art and Art History," "Notes from the Field," and "Interview." These features will run through the December 2013 issue, the last in the journal's centennial year and in my tenure as editor-in-chief.

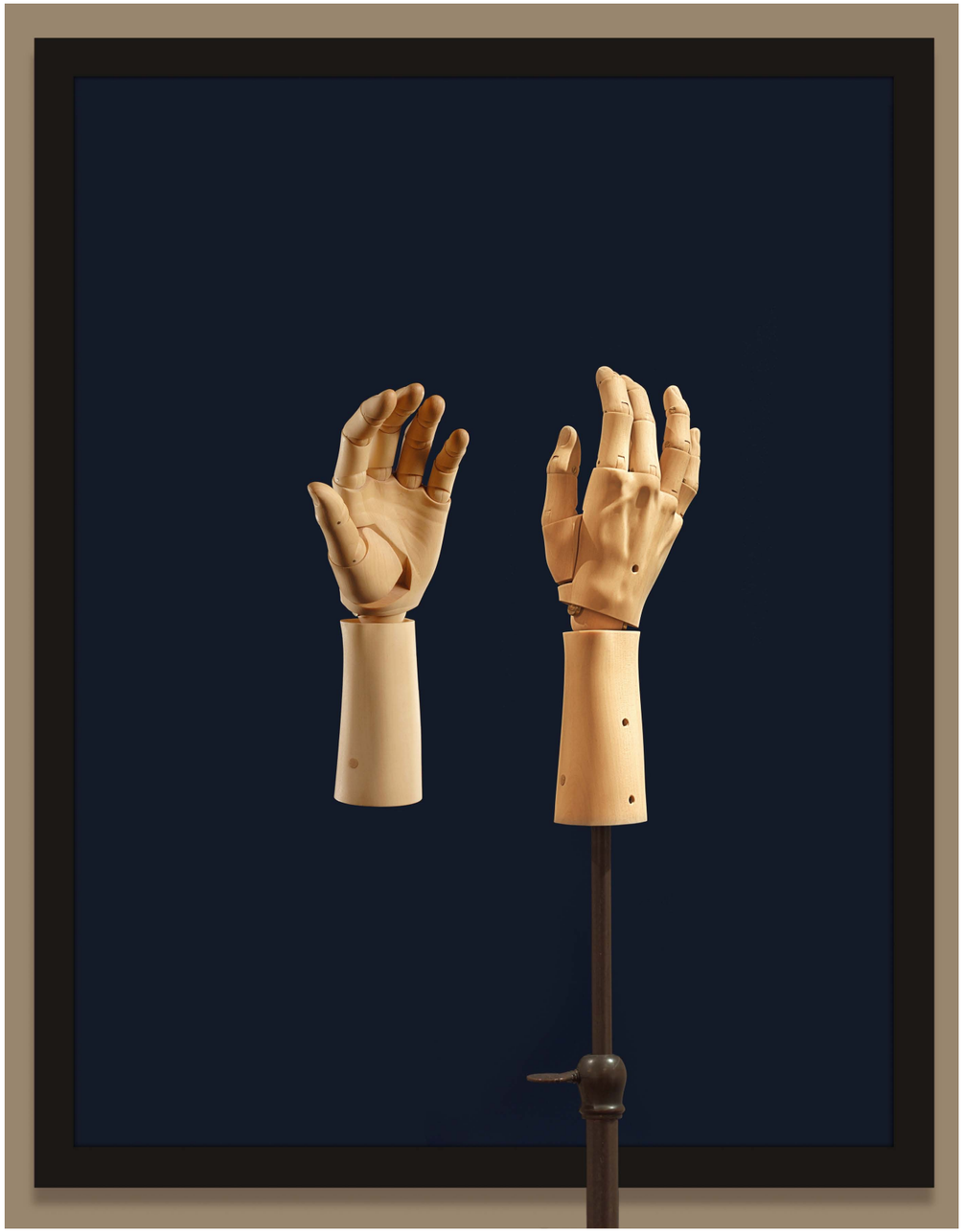
Drawing on both senses of the word "regard," "Regarding Art and Art History" will explore relations between looking and considering. If the feature asks art historians to muse in their own ways about how seeing objects and thinking about them come together, Anne Wagner's essay shows that these musings cannot help but touch on the discipline of art history itself. Regardless of whether the object before us is original, in reproduction, in the mind's eye, in the canon or outside of it, ours is a field predicated on looking and considering. It is also a field dedicated to historical consideration. In that sense, Wagner's invocation of Michael Baxandall's curiosity, and of his characterization of historical work as being "inferential about cause," deliver us to the "how" and "why" of objects, to those questions and conjectures that lie at the heart of our enterprise as art historians.

"Notes from the Field" will gather thoughts on a common topic. Beginning with "anthropomorphism" and concluding with "tradition," this feature offers an abecedary of resonant topics. "Notes from the Field" will not present keywords or critical terms so much as it will explore the ways historians of art, literature, culture, and science, archaeologists, anthropologists, philosophers, curators, and artists think and work with materials and ideas. The field notes in this issue manifest modes of attention and analysis in motion. They pinpoint how objects and meanings come together and apart, how they travel across time, place, and disciplinary domain, how, sometimes existing in spaces eccentric to current concerns, they emerge to become a focus of attention. As "Notes from the Field" draws together voices often separated in and outside of the academy, it delves into deeper registers and lures interesting things to the surface. In all these ways, "Notes from the Field" extends an invitation to inquiry.

"Interview" brings scholars into dialogue. By turns an oral history and a glimpse into the thinker behind the writing, "Interview" opens the door to a field of specialty to reveal contexts, ideas, and motivations in a personal voice. Following *The Art Bulletin*'s standard for critical investigation, the feature commences with an essay by Julia Gelshorn that alerts us to the complicated nature of the interview format—of its status as reproduction, construction, and historical artifact. The three new features in this issue open and close on the note of curiosity. Like Wagner's invocation of Baxandall's forensics and of the role curiosity plays in her own scholarly labors, Hans Ulrich Obrist, in dialogue with Philip Ursprung, declares curiosity to be the motor of his entire interview project.

Curiosity, conjecture, being "inferential about cause": these continue to be the tools of any careful trade with aesthetic objects, whatever our materials or methods. "Regarding Art and Art History," "Notes from the Field," and "Interview" demonstrate this through looking, considering, writing, and spoken dialogue.

KAREN LANG
Editor-in-Chief



Elizabeth King, *Bartlett's Hands,* 2005, installation: sculpture and stop-frame animation, LCD screen, hidden computer, dedicated lighting, overall 72 × 24 × 60 in. Collection of Karen and Robert Duncan, Lincoln, Neb. (artwork © Elizabeth King; photograph © Lynton Gardiner). The sculpture is a small articulated right hand, half life-size (6 × 2 × 2 in.), carved of English boxwood. A stop-action animation made with the hand shows it in motion: a sequence of fleeting involuntary gestures (a five-minute loop). The animation, built of 6,350 high-resolution photographs played directly from a computer hard drive, has been rotated to make the onscreen hand a left hand. The sculpture itself is mounted on a stand and placed before the screen, relit for a close match. The two hands—one in motion, the other live—make a pair.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Anthropomorphism

Elizabeth King

I have been working on a new bronze head. Yesterday I finished smoothing out the inside walls of the casting, with my small flex-shaft grinder. People forget bronze sculptures are hollow, even small ones like this. The head is exactly half life-size, and open at the back so I can get inside. It is a self-portrait. I cast the back of the head as a separate piece to fit on later, like a surgeon replacing a section of skull; the occipital hatch. Why so smooth, these inside walls? They will not be visible once the head is closed. Nonetheless, the interior must be coherent, habitable. The bronze perimeter is thin and strong; I caliper the wall: a little over one-eighth-inch thick. Today I'm working on the openings: nostrils, eyes, ears, mouth—the elegant apertures of the head. Our points of congress with the world. In spite of our knowledge, we persist in feeling that when we close our eyes, we adjourn to a private interior, our sovereign estate, something we experience as a *space.* We move around in here, arranging this and that, checking the windows.

But gazing out, across the contested territory between our separate bodies, we shudder at the terrible darkness in another's ear, another's nostril. How far in do we dare look? Can I sculpt in a bit farther, maybe all the way in, to be sure I represent that darkness? I hold the head and bring the spinning grinder bur through the open back and into the ear canal from the inside—steady!—while eyeing the operation from the outside. Looking in the tunnel from one end at my bur entering from the other, with tiny strokes I refine the negative shape of the curved passage. Is there an exact boundary between outside and inside?

Sculpting the open mouth is a particularly difficult challenge. One would like an exhibition of works on just this theme (Bernini's *Costanza,* Houdon's *Diderot* . . .). Two extraordinary examples were on view last year in exhibitions in the United States. *The Sacred Made Real: Spanish Painting and Sculpture 1600–1700,* at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., brought us Pedro de Mena's 1663 *Saint Francis Standing in Ecstasy* (Fig. 1).[1] A small polychrome figure carved of wood, the saint stands in arrest on an ebony plinth, pale face suspended in the dark recess of the drawn cowl, glass eyes raised under real eyelashes, mouth open to reveal two uneven rows of ivory teeth (some missing), the teeth parted over a black interior. Years ago I had searched for this figure in Toledo. The day I visited, it was all but a shadow in the cathedral, installed in the sacristy many paces behind a closed balustrade. In Washington, you could step up to within inches of the vitrine. The sculpture was lit with subdued but focused precision (what saint lit this show?). One tooth caught a tiny highlight and glinted from within the mouth. You see this and catch your breath—then realize the figure, too, is inhaling. No mistaking it: the contracted lift of the head, beard just sprung free of the cowl, indrawn gulp at the mouth and jaw, taut chest: an inspired pressure at the back of the throat is inferred from every part visible around it. All who looked at this sculpture held their breath.

A more hyperbolic performance was Franz Xaver Messerschmidt's *The Yawner,* in a formidable lineup of Messerschmidt's character heads at the Neue Galerie in New York (Fig. 2).[2] Has any sculptor, save the great eighteenth-century Italian anatomists of La Specola, undertaken so close a study of the floor of the mouth? The underside of the lifted tongue, the frenulum, sublingual caruncle, and salivary ducts, delicate connective epithelium—Messerschmidt has executed every clinical detail. A sculptor's paradise of ridges, bumps, grooves, hollows, and undercuts. So thin is the membrane beneath the tongue that the body absorbs a drug faster here than by swallowing, and the thermometer best reports our fever. But yawning this fevered head is not! Air is rushing out of the mouth, not in. The eyes squeeze shut so tightly that the forehead and cheeks buckle into a rack of bulges and fissures. Veins stand out on the temples. The upper lip is pulled back from the teeth. The jaw contracts back into the neck, not out from it, to marshal strength to the larynx. Could we hear the sound that goes with this face, we would never lean in for so close a look.

A third head, to calm down: this one with mouth closed, holding its tongue, but in possession of palpable interior volume. It is the *Head Called "Lájùwà"* in the exhibition *Dynasty and Divinity: Ife Art in Ancient Nigeria,* on tour in Europe and the United States from 2009 to 2012 (Fig. 3).[3] A life-size terra-cotta portrait, dated between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, this head is as poised and self-contained as the Messerschmidt is torqued and agape. Those muscles that hold the body at full attention are in supple play across the face. The fall of light allows us to identify the slight sinus swells at forehead and flanking the nose, the lift of the muscle orbiting the mouth, the modulated rise of the cheekbone intercepted by the faint crease beneath the eye. Our eye is caught almost more by these zones of transitional contour than by the nameable features, although each of these—mouth, nose, eye, and ear—delivers a smaller topology of quickening curves. The mouth in particular, most powerful symbol in Yoruba oral culture, is articulated as a coherent set of muscles in near perfect equipoise. Nose and ear openings penetrate through to the hollow interior ("the nose, *imú,* the source of ventilation for the soul"[4]). I am struck by a paradoxical evenness of pressure in the rise and fall of the flesh. Perhaps the air of composure arises from this buoyant evenness. Flesh and air: there is breath in this clay head. Ife sculpture is famous for its depiction of nobility of character. Who was Lájùwà? Oral tradition identifies him as steward to a ruling Ooni, who usurped the throne after concealing his master's death. He was beheaded when the ruse was discovered.[5] The portrait head, like its subject, is a noble deception.

1 Pedro de Mena, *Saint Francis Standing in Ecstasy,* detail, 1663, polychromed wood, glass, cord, and human hair, with plinth, 38¼ × 13 × 12¼ in. (97 × 33 × 31 cm). Toledo Cathedral (artwork in the public domain; photograph provided by the Instituto del Patrimonio Cultural de España, Ministerio de Cultura)

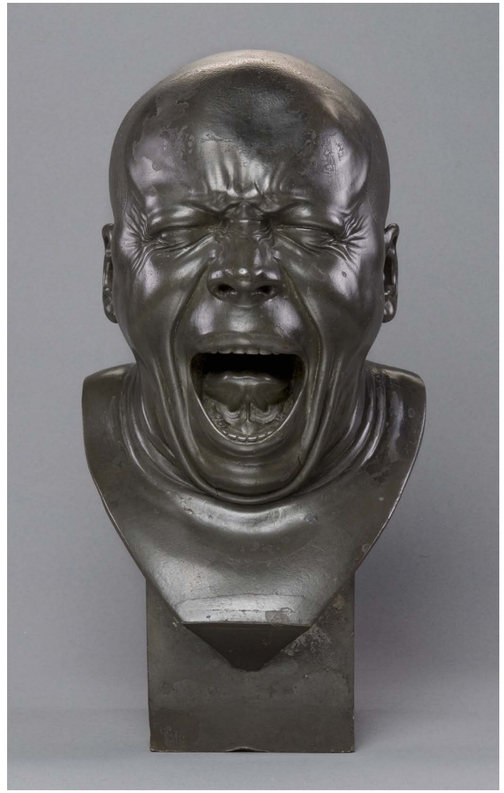
As are the tricks by which the sculptor gains access to the interior of a form. One might almost expect Mena to have carved not just the inside of the saint's mouth, but the throat and very trachea to the lung. Close to it: the face was carved as a separate piece, the mouth hollowed out from the back, eyes and teeth set in place, and the whole then fastened like a mask into the deep concavity of the cowl.[6] The medium, and sometimes the method, provides the way in. The lost-wax casting process makes a hollow shell that is filled with molten metal. Messerschmidt gives us two hollows, the cavern of the mouth and behind it the hollow of the head, cast in tin. Terra-cotta, "baked earth," must be hollow to be fired, and one can imagine the Ife sculptor coiling the wet clay with hands both inside and out. Indeed, the interior walls of the *Lájùwà* are so smooth the coils are barely visible. The sculptor finds the way in, then holds the door open for us.

Wood, tin, clay. *Sculpture can do this.* It can take us from outside to inside. A carving made long ago addresses us via our common nerve. We are sensitive to the minute angle of the head to the neck. Imitators all, we practice the angle unconsciously as we look. And the pose itself reaches backward into our somatic repertoire and selects the originating emotion, reverse engineers it. We look at a little statue and say, "Oh, this is Saint Francis receiving the stigmata." And our own mouth drops open. And we are wounded.

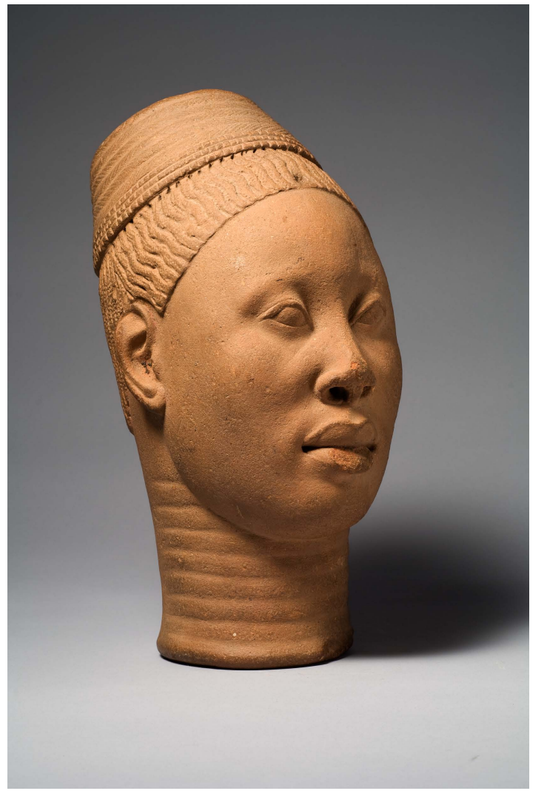
Elizabeth King is an artist who combines figurative sculpture with stop-frame animation. Her work reflects her interest in early clockwork automata, the history of the puppet, and literature's host of legends in which the artificial figure comes to life. She is represented in New York by Danese Gallery [Department of Sculpture and Extended Media, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Va. 23284-3005, elizabethkingstudio.com].

Notes

1. *The Sacred Made Real: Spanish Painting and Sculpture 1600–1700,* the National Gallery, London, 2009–10; the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., 2010. Exh. cat., ed. Xavier Bray (London: National Gallery, 2009).
2. *Franz Xaver Messerschmidt 1736–1783: From Neoclassicism to Expressionism,* the Neue Galerie, New York, 2010–11; the Musée du Louvre, Paris, 2011. Exh. cat., ed. Maria Pötzl-Malikova and Guilhem Scherf (Milan: Officina Libraria; New York: Neue Galerie New York; Paris: Louvre Éditions, 2010). The titles of Messerschmidt's heads do not originate with the artist; they were the caprice of an unnamed author on the occasion of the first exhibition of the heads ten years after the artist's death. That show, forty-nine heads in all, took place in Vienna at the Bürgerspital (communal hospital) in 1793 (Pötzl-Malikova, "The Life and Work of Franz Xaver Messerschmidt," in ibid., 23).
3. *Dynasty and Divinity: Ife Art in Ancient Nigeria,* organized by the Museum for African Art, New York, and the Fundación Botín, Santander, Spain, in collaboration with the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria. Exh. cat. by Henry John Drewal and Enid Schildkrout (New York: Museum for African Art, 2009). Grateful thanks to Richard Woodward, curator of African Art at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, where the exhibition was on view in the spring of 2011, for spending time with me in this show and for cross-referencing the details of ear, nose, and interior of the head in Frank Willett with Barbara Blackmun and Emma Lister, *The Art of Ife: A Descriptive Catalogue and Database,* CD-ROM (Glasgow: Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery, University of Glasgow, 2003), chap. 2.26.
4. Babatunde Lawal, "Orí: The Significance of the Head in Yoruba Sculpture," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 41, no. 1 (1985): 91. As I wrote this essay, Dr. Lawal generously responded to my questions about *èmí,* divine breath, in the Yoruba cosmos.
5. Willett et al., *The Art of Ife,* chap.2.26. See also Babatunde Lawal, "*Àwòrán:* Representing the Self and Its Metaphysical Other in Yoruba Art," *Art Bulletin* 83, no. 3 (2001): 509–10.
6. Bray, *The Sacred Made Real,* 182.



2 Franz Xaver Messerschmidt, *The Yawner,* 1771–81, tin cast, 16⅞ × 8⅝ × 9½ in. (43 × 22 × 24 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, RSZ 53.655 (artwork in the public domain; photograph by Csanád Szesztay, © 2012 Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest)



3 *Head Called "Lájùwà,"* 12th–15th century, terra-cotta, height 12⅝ in. (32 cm). Ife Palace, Ife, Collection of the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, 79.R.10 (artwork in the public domain; photograph © National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria, provided by the Museum for African Art and Fundación Botín/Karin L. Willis)