

Eva Henschen: Self-portraits by Thorvaldsen

Three self-portraits from 1794, 1810, and 1838 can be considered as statements of the artist's view of himself as well as reflections of the world's expectations of him. One of the people who coloured his contemporaries' expectations (with the ideas of Romanticism) was the philosopher Henrik Steffens, who was a member of Thorvaldsen's circle from his youth in Copenhagen to his old age on Nysø.

The drawn portrait from Thorvaldsen's youth in Copenhagen was done for the artist's parents and is animated with a private ingenuousness that is not found in the bust from 1810, which is official and is clearly intended to be self-assertive. The bust lives up to Romanticism's deification of the artist genius, but can also be seen as an open protest against some of the contemporary views of Thorvaldsen as dreamy and capricious. Thorvaldsen's self-portrait statue from 1839 was done under pressure shortly after his return to Denmark. It is just as contradictory and equivocal in form and content as Thorvaldsen must have felt himself to be in his last years, in the role as man as well as living legend.