



Astonishment and Authority

The shock must have been great. When the Russian count Andrey Matveevich Apraksin viewed the Berlin Palace in late January or early February 1699, he reported seeing a life-size seated effigy of Elector Friedrich III, whose realism was “hard to believe”: “He is sitting in an armchair and the closer you get, the more alive he appears.”¹ When viewing this figure, another Russian envoy, Andrey Artamonovich Matveev, said that the interpreter thought it was the elector himself and greeted him “with due deference.”² The journalist David Fassmann also emphasized “that you are struck by a slight shock as it were, and with respect toward the image.” A general who had not realized it was a work of art was thrown into such a deep depression due to the king’s disregard for him that he died only a few days later.³ Georg Gottfried Küster’s Berlin guidebook of 1756 also stated that the deception was so perfect that “some who were not aware were terribly upset by this image”.⁴ Additional reports, as well, confirm the striking effect of the figure with its impression of apparent life and power.⁵

The effigy, which triggers extreme reactions, can now only be perceived through photographs (fig. 1). However, even in these black-and-white images, its appearance is very eye-catching – almost hideously real and by no means enhanced, and thus all more the compelling. Each detail, the shoes, the prominent legs, the hands resting on the thighs, the frock and the ruffled scarf, the ermine-lined red coat, the wig, and the hat (initially not placed on the head), the sceptre and sword – each detail gives the figure a real presence that corresponds to the face, which appears earnest and demanding.

The impression of vitality was largely due to the material. Head and hands were moulded from beeswax; the figure thus took up the tradition of ceroplastics, which extends from antiquity to the present day.⁶ Because the queen bee was ascribed the capacity for virgin birth, this material, a product of bees, was considered a symbol of the Virgin Mary; and in their self-consuming, light-bringing purpose, wax candles were also associated with the Body of Christ. As a votive offering and liturgical structure, wax figures draw on the aura of sacredness and protection. No less significant was the unparalleled impression of a real body evoked by the ceroplastic.⁷ Since viewing wax figures is always also accompanied by some doubt, a sense of deception, ceroplastics lead into the depths of trembling before death and the hope for eternal life. In contrast to marble tomb effigies, which keep memories alive, wax effigies make it possible to experience the direct interplay of death and survival in an uncanny and thus compelling fashion.⁸

Since ancient times, a powerful strand of the art of memory has used lifelike wax figures to represent the deceased in this strongly emotional realm between life and death and their eerie, apparent juncture.⁹ This was the case in the early modern age, especially regarding the practice in England of displaying lifelike wax effigies in place of deceased kings, so that the royal dignity

◀ 1 | Johann Wilhelm Kolm, seated effigy of Elector Friedrich III of Brandenburg, 1698, photo ca. 1910.

- 1 Quoted in Otten 1988, p. 80.
- 2 *Ibid.*, pp. 80–1.
- 3 Fassmann 1735/1741, vol. 1, p. 850. See Waldmann 1990, p. 94; Otten 1988, p. 81 n. 16.
- 4 Küster 1756, p. 18.
- 5 For comparable anecdotes, see Waldmann 1990, p. 93.
- 6 Kornmeier 2003.
- 7 Schlosser 1993; Kretzschmar 2014.
- 8 Didi-Huberman 2006.
- 9 Lessmann/König-Lein 2002, pp. 11–20.



2 | Effigy of Charles II, Westminster Abbey, London.

continued to live on, as it were, until a successor was installed. The fate of a country depended on these effigies to the extent that their presence prevented the interregnum.¹⁰ The outstanding evidence of this political liturgy is presented in the gallery of funeral effigies in London's Westminster Abbey.¹¹ In 1625, during the funeral of James I, the illusion of life was even intensified by an automatic mechanism that enabled the figure to move.¹²

It was presumably this sensational event that was taken up nine years later in Berlin. Elector Georg Wilhelm summoned the wax sculptor David Psolmaier to the royal court in Berlin in 1634 to embellish ceremonies and create "contrafacta", that is, replicas. Outstanding among these was a seated effigy of the Swedish king Gustav II Adolf, who had died two years earlier.¹³ Psolmaier furnished it with an internal clock mechanism that enabled it to rise from its sitting position and move its eyes in various directions.¹⁴

This example evidently caught on. Georg Wilhelm's son, Friedrich Wilhelm, had his head and hands modelled in wax as the Great Elector by the artist Johann Christoph Döbel,¹⁵ and this in turn inspired his son, Friedrich III, to likewise present himself during his lifetime using ceroplastics. Presumably in 1698, he commissioned a hitherto unknown wax sculptor to prepare a life-size wax effigy of himself in a sitting pose, which Apraksin and Matveev were the first to mention with such incredible amazement.¹⁶

Whereas Apraksin referred generally to the palace as the location, Matveev also specifically mentioned the room that was decorated "with Chinese lacquerwork inside on the plafond and the walls."¹⁷ He was obviously referring to the Chinese Cabinet designed by the court lacquerer Gérard Dagly, which preserved the Great Elector's sinological interests.¹⁸ It must have been a spectacular experience to enter this room and be confronted with the seemingly alive rendering of the Great Elector's son.

After 1703, this wax effigy, together with the scattered holdings of the *Kunstkammer*, was transferred to the new rooms on the mezzanine level of Andreas Schlüter's new palace building. According to the report of a visitor from Venice in 1708 [● 1696 vs. 1708], the tour commenced in the northeast via the already existing circular stairway, so that one could directly encounter the elector in the first room (room 992): "You enter a large room and upon first glance you see the king, clothed in fine fabric with embroidered trim, sitting in an armchair."¹⁹ Friedrich III thus greeted the visitors as an exhibit of himself, and he maintained this position until Napoleon occupied Berlin [■ Cupid].

Wax Effigies as a Real Presence of the Future

In view of its compelling appearance, from the 1740s on the seated effigy was generally viewed no longer as Friedrich III, but as Friedrich I – not the elector, but the king.²⁰ As suggested by various details in the figure, this anticipation was designed intentionally. The buckle around his left leg and its inscription, *Hony soit qui mal y pence* [sic], refer to the Most Noble Order of the Garter. For the Hohenzollerns, the order was highly significant once the British king Charles II installed the Great Elector into the knightly brotherhood in 1654.²¹ Friedrich Wilhelm often had himself depicted with this distinction, which led him into the inner circle of European high nobility.²²

- 10 Marek 2009.
 11 Harvey/Mortimer 2003.
 12 Williams 1625, pp. 75–6. This practice was first attempted in 1507 on the effigy of Henry VII, whose joints were movable (Galvin and Lindley 1988, pp. 892–902).
 13 Nicolai 1786b, p. 39.
 14 Waldmann 1990, p. 92. See Kornmeier 2002, pp. 352–3; Kretzschmar 2014, pp. 181–2.
 15 Lessmann/König-Lein 2002, pp. 204–5.
 16 Traditionally attributed to Johann Wilhelm Kolm, this is presumably incorrect, as he was not summoned to Berlin until after the figure was installed (Otten 1988, p. 81).
 17 *Ibid.*, p. 80.
 18 Dagly 2015, pp. 31–2.
 19 Anonimo Veneziano 1999, p. 120.
 20 Anonymus B, fol. 2v; see Segelken 2010b, p. 158, n. 97; Nicolai 1786a, p. 796.
 21 Shaw 1906, vol. 1, p. 35, no. 457. Inscription translation: Shame on him who thinks this evil.
 22 Steguweit/Kluge 2008, p. 92, no. 50; see Theuerkauff 1980, pp. 108, 115.
 23 Shaw 1906, vol. 1, p. 39, no. 499.

On 1 January 1690, his son Friedrich III was also installed,²³ and from then on he too made the Order of the Garter part of his personal iconography.²⁴ When Friedrich III had himself presented not as a standing statue, as Charles II had done (fig. 2),²⁵ but instead in a seated pose, like Gustav II Adolf, the opportunity to display the garter in this position likely played a role.²⁶

The fact that he originally carried “the hat under his arm” is an indication of the anticipatory character of the wax effigy of the elector.²⁷ It was easy to imagine that the figure was waiting to have the royal crown placed on its head.²⁸ When the coronation took place in January 1701, the ceroplastic transmuted from a medium of anticipation to the means of remembering a status that had become historical. From this moment on, the hat could be placed on the figure’s head, and this did in fact take place at an unknown point in time. In Monbijou Palace, where the effigy ended up in 1876, the game with the head-covering was explicitly emphasized (fig. 3). Friedrich III/I wore the hat on his head from his time as elector, whereas the royal crown was placed next to his left knee, in direct proximity to the garter.²⁹



3 | The King Friedrich I Room in the Hohenzollern Museum, Monbijou Palace.

A 1697 law that defined the legal status of images in the sense of *executio in effigie* was significant for this trust in the actual force of the *imago*. The practice of carrying out punishments on images of fugitives who had committed high treason was repeatedly exercised over the next almost hundred years (fig. 4).³⁰ If the punishment of images as proxies for the delinquents represented a fully valid legal act, then conversely it could be assumed that the claims fixed in the image also possessed such an allegorical legal character. Salutes paying respect to the figure are indications of such transference.

This idea was manifested at first with the help of a wax high-relief figure of the elector that has been attributed to Johann (Wilhelm) von Kolm (fig. 5). Although Friedrich III had not yet been crowned king at that time, the crown is embroidered into the sleeve and the satin robe.³¹ As the ceroplastic embodied not the actual circumstance, but what was meant to be, the future became the present. Endowing the elector with the royal dignity, as was effectuated in the picture, was the talisman of the self-coronation at Königsberg Palace on 18 January 1701.



4 | Anonymous, *Ich spare niemand* (I spare no one), illustration from Hans Friedrich Fleming, *Der vollkommene teutsche Soldat*, 1726.



A third ceroplastastic work located in the second room of the *Kunstkammer* carried out allegorically what the seated effigy suggested and the high relief promised.³² This is the many-figured high relief of *King Friedrich I: Restorer of the Golden Age* (fig. 6), which was made of red wax in 1707 by the Augsburg wax sculptor Abraham II Drentwett. The main elements in the exuberant allegorical scene of the felicitous reign are the personification of Borussia (Prussia) kneeling at the left with outstretched arms, draped in an ermine robe and wearing an electoral hat (with arches), looking upward to the eagle holding the sceptre and sword in its claws and wearing the royal crown, while above it to the right, Providentia (providence) presents the crown in an even larger form.³³ The promise of the status as given by the seated figure of Friedrich III and his relief image as elector was in turn shown in wax as having been realized. The ceroplastastic sitting effigy was like a shadow preceding reality.



The Resilience of the Wax

This anticipation extended all the way to St. Petersburg. The court artist Bartolomeo C. Rastrelli was commissioned by Catherine I on 12 February 1725, almost twenty days after Peter the Great had died, to create a seated wax effigy of the emperor using authentic pieces of his clothing (fig. 7). She had no doubt been impressed by the Berlin example that she herself had seen [■Priapus]. The great significance of the ceroplastic work was reflected in the fact that the empress had an honour guard set up in front of Rastrelli's workshop.³⁴ In 1726, the figure was placed in the St. Petersburg *Kunstkammer*, which the emperor had had built according to ideas of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz that had inspired him.³⁵

The inspiration from Berlin was likely reinforced by the fact that Friedrich III/I became the focus of a veritable wax figure cabinet within the Berlin *Kunstkammer*, which included not only members of the European dynasties,³⁶ but the queen consort Sophie Charlotte as well. The representation of the electress was made by the wax sculptor Charles Claude Dubut, who created the memorial presence of the ceroplastics through the wax figures of the deceased brother Karl Emil and the deceased son Friedrich August, as well as the grandsons Friedrich Ludwig and Friedrich Wilhelm, who also died early.³⁷ When Friedrich III/I was laid out in the palace chapel in 1713, two winged wax figures representing Fama (the goddess of renown) and Heroic Virtue carried the crown, and armour-clad male ceroplastic figures holding wax candles, as well as a painting depicting Prussia and Brandenburg as weeping figures, were located at the entrance pillars.³⁸

The successors to Friedrich III/I likewise used the iconology of wax. When Friedrich Wilhelm I died in 1740, instead of the corpse, a deceptively real-looking wax effigy lay in state in the ceremonial coffin. And in the mourning room, beneath the royal coat of arms one saw an "armchair with the image of the late king moulded in wax seated upon it".³⁹ The body of the deceased and the dignity of the office of the kingdom came together in this constellation.⁴⁰ In the case of his death, Friedrich II (Frederick the Great) ordered that his face be copied using ceroplastics. Sculptor Johannes Eckstein made a plaster mask of the deceased on 17 August 1786, from which he made two wax casts. The veneration of Friedrich II, soon ascending to hymnal spheres, generated such a strong desire for near-natural sculptures that numerous figures modelled with these casts could be viewed in various wax figure cabinets in Europe around 1800.⁴¹

The Utility of Curiosity

In Berlin, where wax effigies of Friedrich II were also shown in private exhibitions, Jean Henry, director of the *Kunstkammer*, responded by gradually adapting the collection to satisfy the sort of curiosity that this fuelled. Significantly, however, it was initially not the wax cast of Friedrich II's head that received an entire body, but the head and hands of the Great Elector. This evidently aimed to counter the public fixation on Friedrich II with a visual upgrade of a no less significant Hohenzollern. Daniel Nikolaus Chodowiecki was commissioned in 1796 to give the Great Elector a life-size form, which was placed next to Friedrich III as a second seated figure. The earliest extant photograph was taken after it found its place in Monbijou Palace (fig. 8).⁴²

◀ 5 | Johann Wilhelm Kolm, relief portrait of Friedrich III, ca. 1700, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Sculpture Collection and Museum for Byzantine Art.

◀ 6 | Abraham II Drentwett, *King Friedrich I, Restorer of the Golden Age*, 1707, Herzog Anton Ulrich Museum, Braunschweig.



7 | Bartolomeo C. Rastrelli, wax effigy of Peter the Great, 1721, State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.

- 24 For example, in the Porcelain Cabinet in the Oranienburg Palace, where the Order of the Garter was presented in the corner cartouches of the ceiling painting (see Sommer 2001, pp. 37–40), or the Alabaster Hall in the Berlin Palace, where the acceptance into the order was commemorated (see Beger 1696/1701, vol. 1, pp. 226–7).
- 25 Harvey/Mortimer 2003, pp. 79–94.
- 26 Kretzschmar 2014, pp. 190–1 refers to the French royal effigies in St. Denis as an additional incentive.
- 27 Otten 1988, pp. 80–1.
- 28 Samuel Theodor Gericke's paintings of Friedrich III in Schwerin (Theuerkauf 1980, p. 115) and in Potsdam (Kretzschmar 2014, p. 196) are dedicated to this configuration.



8 | Seated effigy of the Great Elector Friedrich Wilhelm in the Hohenzollern Museum, Monbijou Palace, figure created in 1796 using a mask made during his lifetime.

The side effect of this addition of another Hohenzollern figure was that the group character served to place it in a relationship with the seemingly alive representatives of foreign cultures. In reference to the room with the wax effigy of Friedrich III, in 1708 a visitor from Venice mentioned the replica of a Laplander whose sled was pulled by a stag [■Antlers].⁴³ In the *Kunstkammer's* ivory room around 1800, a collection of in part life-size representatives of Japan, China, and the Americas awaited visitors.⁴⁴ It must have given an egalitarian impression to be able to view the displayed representatives of foreign cultures portrayed in a similar way to the wax figures of the Hohenzollerns. This effect was reinforced when the ethnographic collection was rebuilt after the Napoleonic occupation with two additional rooms adjacent to the entryway in the direction of the Swiss hall (rooms 1001 and 1005) [●Around 1800, fig. 6].⁴⁵

In contrast to the holdings of the *Kunstkammer* that were requisitioned under Napoleon [●Around 1800], the two Hohenzollern wax figures remained untouched, possibly for reasons of piety, showing respect for their historical testimony, so that a third figure, that of Friedrich II, could be added.

29 Lindenbergh 1892, p. 30, plate XII. On the entire context, see Kretzschmar 2014, pp. 190–1.

30 Brückner 1966, p. 274; Preisendorfer 2000, p. 286. The copper engraving was taken from Hans Friedrich von Fleming's *Der vollkommene teutsche Soldat* (Fleming 1726).

31 Theuerkauff 1980, p. 108.

The sculptor Johann Gottfried Schadow had received one of the wax death masks, which, after making a copy for himself, he sold to Johann Georg Dubsy, the owner of a wax figure cabinet in Vienna. Dubsy added a life-size figure to the head, which he donated to the Berlin *Kunstammer* in 1825. On the initiative of Jean Henry's successor, Leopold von Ledebur, it was reassembled the following year by Schadow and placed together with the already existing wax effigies of the Great Elector and Friedrich III. Dressed in the uniform, sash, and gloves of the king, it became an extraordinary attraction. Adolph Menzel captured it in its direct presence in a pencil drawing sometime after 1842 (fig. 9), whereas in Monbijou Palace it was given a protective glass showcase (fig. 10).⁴⁶

Musealization

Parallel to the development of the Museum Fridericianum in Kassel, these measures marked the beginning of the transformation of the Berlin *Kunstammer* into a historical museum, and this impetus gradually led to its final dissolution.⁴⁷ When the Neues Museum opened in 1855, the *Kunstammer* holdings were brought to the southern wing of the third upper floor, where they then became the Historical Collection. The wax figures of the three Hohenzollerns received a new, especially prominent location in the alcove of the large historical hall [●Around 1855, fig. 2].⁴⁸

This lasted only about twenty years. During the transformation of Monbijou Palace into a museum, which began in 1820 with the transfer of the Germanic-Slavic antiquities from the *Kunstammer*, the wax figures of the royal house were also moved to this building. In 1876, the year prior to the founding of the Hohenzollern Museum in Monbijou Palace, they were transferred from the *Kunstammer* to the Knobelsdorff wing along with a total of 414 objects.⁴⁹ There, however, they were no longer an ensemble, but each resided alone in the corresponding rooms of the Brandenburg-Prussian rulers (figs. 3, 8, 10).⁵⁰

When the Hohenzollern Museum was reopened in 1930 after having been closed after the fall of the German Empire, the three sitting figures were again seated together in one room as they had been in the *Kunstammer*.⁵¹ Their final journey led them back to the Berlin Palace on 2 April 1943, when the objects in the Hohenzollern Museum were moved due to the risk of bombing. However, even there they were not protected: after the palace suffered partial destruction on 3 February 1945, only remnants could be recovered.⁵² If they had survived the Second World War, their appreciation would undoubtedly have again increased through the return of wax as a material in contemporary art.⁵³

The ceroplastic figure of Friedrich III, in particular, had endured a substantial journey. After it was first displayed in the Chinese Cabinet of the old palace, it was then moved to the first room



9 | Adolph Menzel, *Effigy of Friedrich II in the Kunstammer*, after 1842.

32 Anonimo Veneziano 1999, pp. 122–3.

33 The relief inscription reads: REX FRIDERICUS I AUREI SEculi IN REGNO BORUSSIAE REPARATOR (see Lessmann/König-Lein 2002, pp. 55–9, no. 28).

34 See Vasser 2015, pp. 367–70. My earlier interpretation of it being created during the emperor's lifetime (Bredenkamp 2001, pp. 355–6) must therefore be corrected.

35 Bredenkamp 2020b, pp. 183–93.

36 Sigismund III Vasa and Anna of Austria, king and queen of Poland; King Christian IV of Denmark and Norway; and Friedrich IV, Elector Palatine (Hildebrand/Theuerkauff 1981, pp. 152–6, nos. 72–6).

10 | Former library of Queen Sophie Dorothea as the Throne Room of Frederick the Great in the Hohenzollern Museum, Monbijou Palace, photo ca. 1890.



- 37 Theuerkauff 1980, pp. 115–16. On the wax figures later created of the deceased children of Friedrich Wilhelm I and Sophie Dorothea, see Dilba 2015a, pp. 199–202; Dilba 2015b, pp. 1–24.
- 38 Wachter 1713, pp. 4–5; Brückner 1966, pp. 131–2.
- 39 Fassmann 1735/1741, vol. 2, pp. 826–7.
- 40 Brückner 1966, p. 135; Kretzschmar 2014, p. 191.
- 41 Völkel 2008, pp. 304–6. See Kretzschmar 2014, pp. 215–20.
- 42 Völkel 2008, p. 307. See Dolezel 2019, pp. 154–6; Meckel 2020, p. 105.
- 43 Anonimo Veneziano 1999, pp. 122–3.
- 44 Dolezel 2019, pp. 94–5.
- 45 On the situation before Napoleon, see *ibid.*, pp. 122–42. The new layout is clearly shown in a floor plan by Schinkel (Bredenkamp 2011, p. 26).
- 46 Ledebur 1844, pp. 63–4; see Völkel 2008, pp. 306–8; Dolezel 2019, pp. 101, 155. On the drawing, see Eckardt 1990, pp. 228–9.
- 47 On Kassel, see Kornmeier 2007, pp. 35–42; on Berlin in this context, see Dolezel 2019, pp. 154–6.
- 48 Schasler 1861, pp. 207–8.
- 49 Kemper 2005, pp. 94–7.
- 50 *Ibid.*, pp. 47, 151–2.
- 51 Augustin 1930, p. 18 (room 48). See Kemper 2005, p. 151.
- 52 Dilba 2015b, pp. 23–4.
- 53 Wagner/Rübel/Hackenschmidt 2002, pp. 231–8.

of the *Kunstkammer* in the new Schlüter construction, where in the late eighteenth century it was put in the company of the Great Elector and, in 1826, of Friedrich II. After being transferred to the Neues Museum in 1855, the three figures then migrated to the Hohenzollern Museum in Monbijou in 1876, where they were placed in separate rooms so that the image of Friedrich III could once again appear as an autonomous figure. They were reunited anew when the museum was restructured in the Weimar Republic in 1930.

Friedrich III/I was a custodian of the *Kunstkammer* through his ceroplactic. In his stately radiance, this collection was a microcosm attributed to him. In turn, however, his presence was relativized by the representatives of foreign cultures and the treasures and mirabilia of other subject areas. He was a ruler, but for his part he fell under the pressure of the exhibits, of which he was one. This contributed to the fact that the individual areas of the Berlin *Kunstkammer* became liberated from him. He ultimately no longer appeared as an actor within the framework of the Hohenzollern Museum, but as a historical witness to his former prestige, still with the same impressive vitality noted by those first visitors, Apraksin and Matveev (fig. 11).

Translated by Allison Brown



11 | Replica of a room of Queen Sophie Charlotte in the Hohenzollern Museum, Monbijou Palace, view of the Royal Cabinet with the wax effigy of Friedrich III/I, photo 1910.