

# ART, DEATH AND MEMORY

LATE EIGHTEENTH TO EARLY NINETEENTH  
CENTURY POSTHUMOUS PORTRAITURE  
IN BRITAIN

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George Romney, *Ann Wilson with Her Daughter, Sybil*, 1776-7



Allan Ramsay, *Infant Son of the Artist*, c.1740



Charlotte Jones, *the eye of Princess Charlotte*, c.1817



Death mask of Sir Thomas Lawrence, 1830



Thomas Woolnoth after George Dawe, *Her Royal Highness Princess Charlotte of Saxe Coburg*, 1818

## PROJECT OUTLINE

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the phenomenon of posthumous portraiture in the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries in Britain. During this period there was a marked shift in the ways in which people grieved the loss of a loved one, the manner in which this grief was expressed and how the memory of the deceased was manifested in the visual arts. From reserved stoicism to more openly expressed mourning, this period witnessed a change in attitude that corresponded to the wider sentimentality of the age. By focusing on posthumous portraiture in its various forms, I intend to unpack this change in attitude and establish precisely what these works meant and how they were used and experienced during this period.

**SOURCES** My research will necessarily require an interdisciplinary approach and a variety of sources.

- Personal letters and diaries
- Religious writings
- Conduct books
- Newspaper articles and obituaries
- Poems, odes, songs

## WHY RESEARCH THIS TOPIC?

The lack of research carried out into posthumous portraiture during this period is due to the fact that greater interest has been placed on the self-fashioning of portraiture during the late eighteenth to early nineteenth centuries and the pervasiveness of the material culture of mourning in the Victorian Age. Where attention has been paid, it often takes the form of a general survey or falls outside this timeframe.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- Why did posthumous portraits take the forms that they did?
- What accounts for the more openly expressed grief in posthumous portraiture at this time and how did this differ from earlier representations of death?
- What were the implications of these works for the artist, patron and wider socio-cultural and religious context in which they were produced?