



Death Mask of Napoleon

Date

modeled 1821, cast 1833

Primary Maker

Dr. Francesco Antommarchi

Medium

Bronze

Description

In the nineteenth century it was customary to preserve the likeness of famous and powerful individuals by creating death masks. These objects were generally made by wrapping plaster around the head of a person who was recently deceased. The original death mask, or “parent mold,” of Napoleon Bonaparte was taken a day and a half after his death on May 5, 1821. The emperor passed away on the island of St. Helena where he had been exiled for life following the Battle of Waterloo. He was surrounded by medical professionals when he died, including the English doctor Francis Burton and anatomist Francesco Antommarchi. Dr. Burton is credited with the creation of the primary death mask and was also responsible for performing Napoleon’s autopsy. After Napoleon’s death, a series of “first generation” copies were made of Burton’s original mask. However, following Burton’s death in 1832, Dr. Antommarchi obtained a plaster mold from the original cast and began to produce his own copies in both bronze and plaster. This bronze copy by Antommarchi only shows the front of the head, which is encircled in a golden laurel wreath, and ends at the suggestion of ears.

Dimensions

Overall: 13 1/2 × 6 1/2 × 7 1/4 in. (34.3 × 16.5 × 18.4 cm)