

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

LECTURE SERIES FB07

07.01.

Serina Berg M.A. (Art History)

**“The Body of a Woman,
the Heart of a King” –
Elizabeth I, Victoria and
the visual representation of
female power in portraiture**

„Famous have been the reigns of our queens. Some of the greatest periods in our history have unfolded under their sceptre.“¹ Winston Churchill

This quote by Winston Churchill, which can be found in his speech from the 7th of October 1952 given on the occasion of the enthronement of Elizabeth II, highlights the consistency of female rule and female power in Britain’s history and can be used as a European example in general.

Although there are only a few women who actually and officially came to rule a country in their own name, examples like Elizabeth I and Queen Victoria show how exceptional these reigns could be viewed in their own time and beyond. They also show how many obstacles these women had to overcome to end up commanding men instead of being ruled by them. Their lives can be read as catalysts concerning concepts of gender as well as the rules and stereotypes around it; but can also serve as blueprints for our own contemporary ideas of gender and which forms of visual representation we give them.

Therefore, my contribution to the lecture series Under Construction – Young Humanities at Work starts with some basic ideas surrounding the term “female power”. The main part emphasizes how female power was presented in portraiture and how it has changed throughout their reign based on different portraits of Elizabeth I and Queen Victoria. The conclusion emphasizes the importance of the results by comparing them not only to each other and showing how gender and power has changed from Elizabeth I to Victoria, but by comparing them with a current example and therefore with the public discussion of gender today.

¹ <http://www.winstonchurchill.org/publications/finest-hour/finest-hour-114/for-valour-king-george-vi-in-remembrance-of-his-late-majesty> [24.4.2017].