

Artist Statement – “A Walking Shadow”

When I was first introduced to the life of Gabriel Furman, I was intrigued almost immediately. A remarkable man saturated with passion, despair, and turmoil without a single image or painting of his likeness known to exist, a walking shadow in history. This deeply disturbed me. How could I research anything about a man without a clue as to his appearance?

First, I looked into the fashion of his time, the Romantic Era (1815-1860). I found that the styles were predominantly French, but with all the options to choose from, I had to select the haircut and attire to best represent Furman. The hairstyle I chose and his clean-shaven face portray his neatness and intelligence. The complexity of the tie style also hints at his classy and upscale way of life. But the question still remained, what did Furman’s face look like?

Through his journals, one can discern his beliefs, emotions, psyche, and way of life, traits that can provide much insight as to a person’s physical characteristics. He loved his book collection, at times even neglecting everything and everyone around him just to immerse himself in his only true love. This, to me, pointed to a thin, sleep-deprived man whose wrinkles would be pronounced around the eyes. The high eyebrows were inspired by the fact that he was a well-read man with fine taste and elegance in the way he carried himself. There was also one brief description of Furman given by The Faust Club that mentioned his Roman-like nose and prominent forehead, which I also incorporated into my drawing.

Charcoal was the only obvious medium for me. There is a mysterious and dramatic, yet illuminating, power to the way charcoal flows, which perfectly illustrates Furman’s life. The drawing itself is dark to give a sense of his gritty and isolated life. The lighter half represents what was inspiring about Furman – his writing, which is drawn faintly in the background. In contrast, the darker side embodies his chaotic yet peaceful self. When approaching a drawing like this it is sometimes difficult to determine the style – whether to stick to a classic portrait or to try something with modern elements. I chose a combination of the two, using a classic body stance along with modern elements in the background.

The goal of this project was to show everyone the face of a man that, until today, had never been seen. I hope this rendering incites people to further explore the life and contributions of Gabriel Furman.