



DR. ANDREA BALDECK

2020

Portrait by Maureen Drdak

Collection of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia

ESSAY by the ARTIST



DR. ANDREA BALDECK, detail

Portrait by Maureen Drdak

"Medicine is about preventing suffering wherever possible; as Schweitzer said, "Aides la vie ou se trouve", help life wherever you find it. Compassion is paramount." Dr. Andrea Baldeck

This brief essay serves as a guide for the viewer in appreciating my approach to the conceptualization and creation of the portrait of Dr. Andrea Baldeck. Dr. Baldeck is an internist, anesthesiologist, photographer, and author of eight books of her photography featuring landscapes, still life, and portraiture. She is a Fellow and immediate past Board Chair of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, and only the second woman to serve in that position. A woman of talent, vision, and accomplishment, I am deeply privileged to call Dr. Baldeck my close friend.

When Andrea entrusted me with this commission, I realized both the import and opportunity of the extraordinary moment. To portray a physician during the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a departure from traditional conventions of institutional portraiture and representation, both of the sitter and this remarkable moment in time. To this end, I decided to imbue the portrait with symbolic elements that bore witness not only to the personal interests and qualities of the subject but also to signify their relevance to the historic moment.

The first consideration was the choice of palette, and for this I chose what is today commonly known as the Zorn palette, a selection of colors attributed to the great Swedish artist, Anders Zorn (1860–1920). A limited palette consisting of only four colors being yellow ochre, ivory black, vermilion, and titanium white, to which I added a very limited amount of viridian. Though today most artists use cadmium red, I was fortunate to obtain genuine vermilion, a quite costly but especially beautiful red favored by artists since antiquity. The result is a portrait reliant on the dominance of three colors, white, black and red, a trinity of colors of ancient usage and one invested with heavy symbolism, and of itself worthy of an essay.

Dr. Baldeck's visage surmounts the vermilion column of her figure; in gaze and aspect she confidently yet compassionately faces the viewer. In color the vermilion of her dress represents *shakti*, the principle of power or agency associated in the east with the Feminine. Red is a universal signifier of power in all societies, associated with blood, vitality, and life. It is a primal signifier of extremes—fire, energy, blood, and action; qualities and conditions informing the field of engagement for both physician and artist.

Dr. Baldeck's left hand, associated with the feminine principle, cradles a small skull—this child's skull was selected from the CCP collection—an intimate physical marker of the subject's relationship with the College. The feminine principle—known as *prakriti* in eastern tradition—is associated with matter and the creative impulse, the power which gives existential material or physical form to the spirit.

In her right-hand Dr. Baldeck holds a book symbolizing knowledge and a pair of glasses, symbolizing perception, insight, and reason. In eastern philosophy, the right is associated with the male principle of spirit, or *purusha*. *Purusha* is latent potentiality and is fully dependent upon the feminine principle of *prakriti* for its realization. Thus, this simple equipoise of left and right hands, masculine and feminine, and their contents represent the fully interdependent whole of the corporal and spiritual universe.

This affinity for the philosophy, arts and sensibility of the East is reflected in the monumental necklace worn by Dr. Baldeck. Ten Tibetan visages of gilded bronze cluster in poetic mass upon the breast of the subject; it is a work of mystery. This work of art references her great love for the arts of South East Asia, as exemplified by her service as a Trustee of the Philadelphia Museum of Art and its East Asian Art and

Indian and Himalayan Art committees. Noble in materials, virtuous in execution, these enigmatic faces speak as one to the human condition. They reference the human, geographic and aesthetic fields that absorb the complementary interests of Dr. Baldeck, to which she continues to devote her considerable intellectual and creative powers.

Upon Dr. Baldeck's shoulders lies a soft grey shawl. Symbolic of tradition, maturity and sophistication, the grey of her shawl alludes to the hard-won control of faculties, emotions and knowledge that now rest gently upon the shoulders and life of the physician.

Dr. Baldeck stands in front of a pattern of large white ginkgo leaves which reference her long devotion to the practice and art of photography. The choice of ginkgo leaves was both aesthetic and symbolic. Their graceful fan-shaped abstraction of form lends rhythm to the composition, alluding to Dr. Baldeck's accomplishments as a musician, and the duality of its associations amplify the symbolism contained throughout the portrait. A living fossil, the ginkgo is the oldest known surviving tree species. Capable of living over one thousand years, it is a metaphor for longevity. A holy and healing tree, its leaf extracts are thought to improve blood flow, especially to the brain, increasing mental and spiritual well-being. In the face of the pandemic, its association with endurance in the face of adversity—it was a ginkgo tree that survived the blast of Hiroshima—is the symbolic grace note of the portrait, speaking powerfully to the current pandemic and the physician's critical place within this moment.

The life of Dr. Andrea Baldeck is itself the celebratory repository of the challenge, achievements, and promise of our moment in time, the potentiality of which she embodies with authority, grace, and compassion. It is my hope that this portrait testifies to the fulfillment of a well-lived life, the life of a woman who has proven an inspiration to so many and who has yet to inspire so many more.

Maureen Drdak

October, 2020



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Drawing Study for the portrait
Collection of Dr. Andrea Baldeck