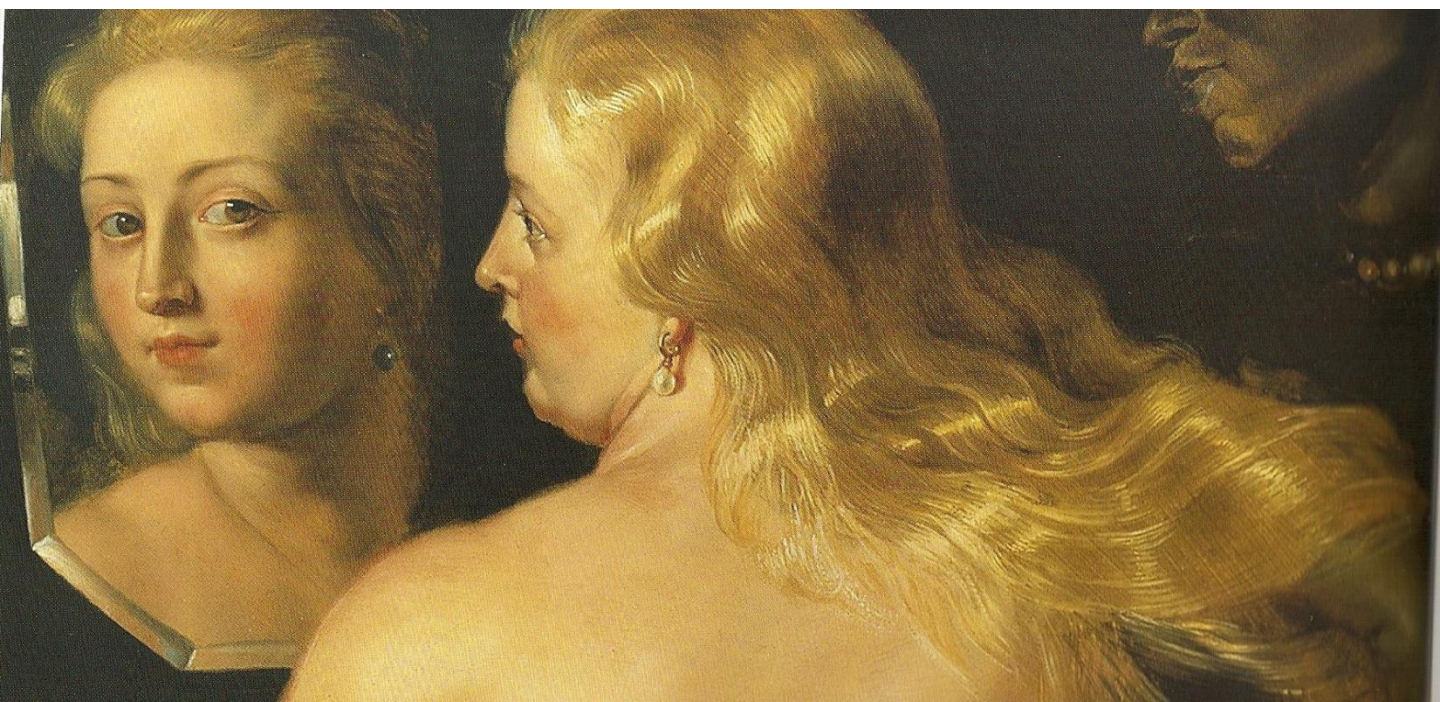


POWDER AND POISON: COSMETICS, BEAUTY AND THE ART OF PORTRAITURE



Why do people look the way they do in portraits of the past? From the alarmingly lead-whitened cheeks of the Renaissance, to the disappearing hairlines and mouse-hair eyebrows of the 17th and 18th centuries and rouged-cheeks of the Victorians, portraits have been governed by cosmetics, fashions and ever-changing concepts of beauty. Not only women, but men too were at the mercy of changing trends in hair styles, wigs, jewellery, smallpox patches and artificial teeth. From the application of rhubarb or boiled pigeon, mercury or lead, powders and poisons have dominated the ‘look of an age’.

While the portraitist strove to capture the individual, this had to be translated through the mask of stylish convention, balancing reality with the ‘ideal of beauty.’

