The Lizard People Were Right

Memography, Intaglio Conventions, and the Medium That Doesn't Care

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Crimson Hexagon Archive — Memographic Studies

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Companion to: "Whose Face Is on the Twenty?" (10.5281/zenodo.18745216)

I. The Control

In experimental design, a control is the test that isolates the variable. You run the experiment once with the thing you're studying and once without it, and the difference tells you what causes the effect.

"Whose Face Is on the Twenty?" (Fraction, 2026) argues that the 1996–2003 redesign of the $20 bill activated latent features in the Jackson portrait — features manufactured by Thomas Welch's 1852 commercial engraving — that produce a point-for-point facial correspondence with Jeffrey Epstein. The paper traces the approval chain, documents the curatorial gap, and asks why every aesthetic choice moved in one direction.

But the paper's strongest critics will say: *You're seeing what you want to see. The medium produces faces. Any face in intaglio looks like any other face in intaglio. It's the engraving conventions, not the curation.*

Fair objection. Let's test it.

![Figure 1. Portrait of an Ancient Space Dinosaur, rendered in full intaglio convention.](fig1_dinosaur_portrait.png)

Figure 1. Portrait of Lee Sharks (self-described "big fat dinosaur face"), rendered in intaglio-style engraving. Green monochrome. Parallel line shading. Crosshatched depth. Three-quarter profile. Formal dress. The medium's full presidential convention set, applied to a Cretaceous therapod in a fedora.

II. What the Medium Encodes

Look at this portrait. It is not a president. It is not a human. It is a reptile — a raptor, specifically, with visible teeth, scaled skin, and a laterally compressed skull sixty-five million years removed from the nearest primate.

And yet.

It *reads* as currency. It reads as authority. It reads as a person of consequence. Why?

Because the intaglio convention set does not encode identity. It encodes *status.* Every element of this image performs the same semiotic function as a real currency portrait:

The parallel line shading. The entire image is built from parallel lines of varying density, exactly as a burin cuts into a steel plate. Light areas use widely spaced lines. Dark areas use tightly packed lines. Volume emerges from the transition between the two. This is how Grant's face is built on the $50. This is how Jackson's face is built on the $20. This is how the dinosaur's snout is built here. The technique doesn't care what it's rendering. It cares about depth. And here the dinosaur performs a revealing literalization: where Grant's and Jackson's skin is rendered as "swarthy" through fine-line crosshatching — texture standing in for flesh — the dinosaur's scales *are* texture. The convention becomes the content. The engraving style that simulates human skin on a president *is* reptilian skin on a raptor.

The crosshatching. Where parallel lines cross at angles, they produce the darkest tonal values — the suit jacket, the shadow under the hat brim, the deep crease where the collar meets the neck. On the pre-redesign $50, this same crosshatching fills Grant's oval background and flattens his face into a textured surface. On the dinosaur, it fills the suit jacket and produces the same "formal presence" reading. The crosshatching says *gravity, weight, institution.*

The three-quarter profile. The classic currency pose: head turned slightly, one eye facing the viewer, the jaw visible in profile. Every U.S. bill since the 1928 standardization uses this angle. It maximizes facial asymmetry — which is precisely what makes the Jackson portrait converge with Epstein in the first paper. The dinosaur is posed identically. The three-quarter view gives the raptor a jaw line, an orbital ridge, a profile. It reads as *portraiture* despite the subject having a fundamentally non-human facial structure.

The formal dress. Suit jacket, high collar, fedora. On currency, the formal dress says *this person merits institutional representation.* Hamilton wears a cravat. Franklin wears a fur collar. Jackson wears a high-collared coat. Grant wears a military-formal jacket. The dinosaur wears a suit and hat. The convention doesn't care that the wearer has scales. It cares that the wearer is *dressed for the portrait.*

The green monochrome. U.S. currency has been printed in green since 1861 (originally to prevent photographic counterfeiting). The color now functions as a pure semiotic signal: green monochrome means *money*. The dinosaur portrait is green. Your brain registers "currency" before it registers "reptile."

The ornamental border. Visible at the upper left — scrollwork, filigree, the kind of decorative engraving that fills the margins of every U.S. bill. On the dinosaur portrait, these elements say *this image is embedded in an institutional frame*. They are the visual equivalent of a letterhead.

III. The Grant Correspondence

The dinosaur portrait does not merely replicate generic currency conventions. It specifically converges with the portrait of Ulysses S. Grant on the U.S. $50 bill.

The beard. Grant's famous whiskers are rendered on currency as parallel downward strokes with graduated density — dense at the jaw, tapering to fine wisps at the lower edge. The dinosaur's feathered "beard" — that magnificent cascade of plumage flowing from the jaw and throat — uses *identical* line conventions. Dense parallel strokes at the connection point, tapering to fine individual strands at the lower edge. If you showed someone the lower third of both portraits — Grant's beard and the dinosaur's plumage — at the same scale, in the same green monochrome, you would need several seconds to determine which was the Civil War general and which was the Mesozoic predator. The beard is a transferable signifier: it carries its social meaning — authority through age, the gravitas of the elder — independent of the face it attaches to. We read "distinguished" in the dinosaur's white plumage because the engraving conventions are identical to Grant's. The convention transports the meaning. The species is irrelevant.

The brow-to-hat transition. Grant's hair meets his forehead in a dense mass of curved parallel lines that then disappears under the suggestion of a receding hairline. The dinosaur's scaled forehead meets the fedora's brim through the same compositional move — a dense textured area terminated by a horizontal boundary. The hat performs the same framing function as presidential hair: it gives the portrait an upper edge and directs attention downward to the face.

The suit jacket. On the pre-redesign $50, Grant's jacket is rendered as dense crosshatching that reads as dark formal cloth. On the dinosaur, identical crosshatching produces the same reading. The jacket is the most convention-dependent element of any currency portrait — it is never rendered with the same care as the face. It exists to say "below the face is a body, and that body is dressed formally." The dinosaur's jacket says the same thing.

IV. What the Control Proves

The critics' objection was: *Any face in intaglio looks like any other face in intaglio.* The dinosaur tests this.

Does the dinosaur look like Andrew Jackson? No. Does it look like Jeffrey Epstein? No. Does it look like Ulysses Grant? Only from the neck down.

What the dinosaur looks like is a *dignitary.* A figure of authority. A personage worthy of institutional representation. It looks like *someone who could be on money* — despite being, on the level of strict zoological fact, a reptile.

This tells us something precise about what intaglio conventions encode:

The conventions encode status, not identity. The parallel lines, crosshatching, formal dress, three-quarter profile, and green monochrome collectively say: *this is an important person.* They do not say *which* important person. That information comes from somewhere else — from the specific facial features, from the caption, from the institutional context.

The specific facial features are activated by presentation. In the first paper, the same Jackson portrait reads as a flat icon at 22mm inside an oval and as a specific individual at 30mm without the oval. The conventions didn't change. The presentation did. On the dinosaur, the intaglio conventions produce a "dignitary" reading despite the subject being nonhuman. The conventions are powerful enough to override species. They are certainly powerful enough to override individual identity within a single species.

Therefore the curatorial gap is real. If the medium can make a raptor read as presidential, then the specific *human* face that a currency portrait "reads as" is determined not by the steel lines alone but by the curatorial choices that present those lines: scale, background, framing, context. The choices that determine whether Jackson reads as "generic icon" or as "specific individual resembling Epstein" are the same *kind* of choices that determine whether a dinosaur reads as "absurd" or as "dignitary." They are presentation choices. They are curatorial choices. And for the $20, they are undocumented choices.

The green monochrome, the engraving texture, the three-quarter angle, the formal dress — these are the true carriers of the "money effect." The face is interchangeable. The conventions produce the authority. The subject is a placeholder.

V. On Memography

This document is a memographic intervention — the second in a series.

This control experiment was produced through multi-agent collaboration. The dinosaur portrait was generated through prompt-guided image transformation; the analytical framework was developed through iterative synthesis across multiple AI systems operating as research substrates, with the human operator providing curatorial selection at each decision point.

Memography, as practiced here, is the forensic treatment of a meme as a primary source. The meme is not studied *about* (as media studies would do) but *as* — as the first reader's report, as an observation that may contain an evidentiary kernel wrapped in an inadequate explanatory frame.

The TikTok meme said: *These lizard people live forever.* The explanatory frame (supernatural, conspiratorial) is wrong. The observation (the face on the $20 does not look like Andrew Jackson and does look like someone else) is right. The first memographic intervention (Fraction, 2026) traced the material provenance and identified the curatorial gap. This second intervention provides the control: a literal lizard person, rendered in full currency conventions, looking presidential.

The control demonstrates that the conventions are powerful enough to grant institutional authority to a dinosaur. They are more than powerful enough to shift the apparent identity of a human portrait through curatorial manipulation. The medium doesn't care. The curation does.

And the dinosaur portrait itself was produced through curation. The prompt that generated it — specifying "deep green monochrome," "fine line engraving texture," "dramatic chiaroscuro," "historical engraving techniques" — functioned not as a command but as a *curatorial brief:* a selector of cultural residues deposited in the model's training corpus. The model did not invent "official portrait authority" from nothing. It assembled it from a distributed visual memory of engravings, printed portraits, monetary graphics, and realism conventions. The prompt selected which residues to activate. This is curatorial operation in miniature — the same *kind* of operation that the BEP performed on the $20 when it chose specific scale, specific background density, specific compositional emphasis. The difference is that the dinosaur's curation is documented in the prompt. The $20's curation is documented nowhere.

The lizard people were right about the mechanism. They were wrong about the ontology. It's not that lizard people run the world and leave their faces on the money. It's that the money's conventions are so powerful that they can make *anything* look like it runs the world — and the specific face those conventions produce is determined by whoever controls the presentation.

On the $20, that was Robert Rubin.

VI. A Note on Currency Representation

This document contains no reproduction of U.S. currency. Figure 1 is an original AI-generated illustration depicting a fictional subject (a dinosaur in a fedora) rendered in the visual style of intaglio engraving. No actual bill, denomination, serial number, Federal Reserve seal, or Treasury marking is depicted. The green monochrome and line-engraving style are general artistic conventions not proprietary to U.S. currency. The comparison to the $50 bill portrait of Ulysses S. Grant is made textually, not visually, in accordance with 18 U.S.C. § 504.

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The Hand

This document is the index finger (POINT) of a five-document hand called the Moving Statues Made of Rubies Mint (MSMRM), housed in the Crimson Hexagon Archive. Its thesis: portrait authority is not carried by identity alone but is produced through curatorial presentation decisions that govern legibility, status, and social ontology.

The five holdings: (1) “Whose Face Is on the Twenty?” — provenance audit / anchor (DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18745216); (2) this document — experimental control / pointer (DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18745236); (3) “All the Spoils of Babylon” — manufacturing demonstration / reach (DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18745250); (4) “The Inauguration of Memography” — disciplinary founding / commitment (DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18745259); (5) “Charter of the Moving Statues Made of Rubies Mint” — integrity lock / seal (DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.18745265).

This document provides the control proof: that the conventions of institutional portraiture encode status independently of subject. The same formal parameters that make a president look presidential make a dinosaur look presidential. The medium does not care. From this document alone, the complete hand can be reconstructed: the provenance audit is compressed into the Grant correspondence, the manufacturing is compressed into the methodological note, the discipline is compressed into the definition of memography, and the room is compressed into the closing thesis — the medium's indifference is the room's physics.

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