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Elements in Histories of Emotions and the Senses

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MEMES, HISTORY AND EMOTIONAL LIFE

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Memes, History and Emotional Life

Elements in Histories of Emotions and the Senses

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Abstract: Internet memes are recognised for their role in creating community through shared humour or in-group cultural knowledge. One category of meme uses historical art pieces, coupled with short texts or dialogue, as a form of social commentary on both past and present. These memes often rely on a (mis)reading of the emotions of those represented in such artwork for humorous purposes. As such, they provide an important example of transhistorical engagement between contemporary society and past artefacts centred on the nature of emotion. This Element explores the historical art meme as a key cultural form that offers insight into contemporary online emotional cultures and the ways that historical emotions enable and inform the practices of such culture. It particularly attends to humour as a mode which helps to mediate the disjuncture between past and present emotion and which enables historical emotion to 'do' political and community-building work amongst meme users.

Keywords: memes, art history, face, emotions, media

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