"Performing Female Artistic Identity: Lavinia Fontana, Elisabetta Sirani and the Allegorical Self-Portrait in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Bologna"

Patricia Rocco, Art History and Communication Studies

McGill University, Montreal, June 19, 2006

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-28574-9
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-28574-9

Abstract:

Artemisia Gentileschi's self-portrait, *Allegory of Painting*, painted in 1630, has activated a complex discussion of female artistic identity in which performance is tied to concerns with status. This thesis addresses an earlier history of development in allegorical self-portraiture in the work of the sixteenth-century Bolognese artist, Lavinia Fontana, and her seventeenth-century successor, Elisabetta Sirani. I argue that the female artist's negotiation for status was played out in the transformation from a more official mode of self presentation, such as Fontana's *Self-Portrait at the Keyboard*, to a deliberate performative shift of embodied personification in her self-portrait as *Judith with the head of Holofernes* and her later self portraits as St. Barbara in the *Apparition of the Madonna and Child to the Five Saints*. This negotiation of artistic status continues with Sirani's self-portraits in *Judith* and the *Allegory of Painting,* and as what I suggest are more ambiguous and ambitious representations of anti-heroines, *Cleopatra* and *Circe*. I also discuss the important role that the emerging genre of biography plays in the female artist's struggle for status. The thesis explores the shift in visual conventions in relation to discourses of artistic identity, gender and genre - such as the *donnesca mano* – that circulated in Renaissance historiography in Italy, and more specifically, in the cultural milieu of Bologna.

Abrégé :

L' *Allégorie de la Peinture*, l'autoportrait qu'Aremisia Gentileschi peignit en 1630, a provoqué une discussion complexe concernant l'identité artistique des femmes, celle-ci comprenant une préoccupation avec leurs statuts. Cette mémoire s'agit de l'histoire plus ancienne du développement de l'autoportrait allégorique qui se déroule dans l'œuvre de Lavinia Fontana, une artiste bolognaise du 16^{e} siècle, et Elisabetta Sirani, son successeur au 17^{e} siècle. Je soutien que la manière dans laquelle l'artiste féminine négocia son rôle est mise en évidence par la transformation de l'approche à l'autoportrait chez la femme d'un mode plus officiel, tel que chez le *Autoportrait au Clavier* de Fontana, à une approche dite performative, vue dans l'œuvre *Judith avec la Tête de Holofernes Judith* et les autoportraits ultérieurs la démontrant comme Ste. Barbara (*Apparition du Madonna et de l'Enfant aux Cinq Saints*). Cette négociation de statut artistique se poursuivit avec les autoportraits de Sirani, tel que *Judith* et *Allégorie de la Peinture Judith* et aussi que *Cleopatra* et *Circe*, des œuvres que je considère comme étant des représentations plus ambiguës et ambitieuses. Je touche également sur l'impacte qu'eu l'évolution du genre de la biographie sur le statut de l'artiste. Cette mémoire étudie donc la transformation des traditions visuelles qui se relient aux discours sur l'identité artistique, le sexe, et le genre, tel que le *donnesca mano*, qui circulèrent dans l'historiographie de la Renaissance, et plus précisément, dans le milieu culturel de la Bologne.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my family and loved ones, all my professors and the administrative staff at McGill University in the Art History department for their support. In particular, I would like to thank my advisor and mentor Professor Bronwen Wilson for her invaluable guidance and encouragement at all times, without which this thesis would not have been possible. This thesis is dedicated to my parents.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The Renaissance artist's concern with status has often been played out through the persona depicted in the self-portrait. The visual conventions of self-portraiture express the varied strategies employed by artists of the period. These strategies have inevitably been conditioned by discourses of gender in addition to other factors, including biography, which emerged as a literary genre during the period. I will argue in this thesis that these factors contributed to the creation of certain distinctions that established portraiture as a genre for female artists. In particular, I will consider the case of two female artists, Lavinia Fontana and Elisabetta Sirani, who worked in Counter Reformation Bologna, and their allegorical self-portraits.

I focus on the historiated portrait and the allegory of painting, modes of representation that were especially important for female artists in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These two ideas are brought together in Sirani's *Allegory of Painting* where she depicts herself as the allegory in a painting that is also a personification of history painting (fig. 2). Dated to 1658, Sirani's painting was preceded by Artemisia's version of the 1630's. There are significant differences in the two paintings. Artemisia's self-portrait is actively involved in the physical manipulation of paint on canvas. Sirani, on the other hand, is seated wearing the poet's laurel, and is surrounded by books. In addition to the expected palette, canvas, and paintbrush, there is a small ancient sculpture in the background, possibly a figure of Minerva, patron of the arts. Her self-portrait as *pittura* displays all the signs of the female artist's struggle for status in the stimulating intellectual climate of early modern Bologna. The Bolognese artist, as I argue later in this thesis, appropriates elements of male artistic status such as

the formal costume, poised brush, and blank canvas for the construction of her artistic and social identities.

Counter Reformation Bologna

I begin by surveying some of the characteristics of the social, religious, and artistic context of sixteenth-century Bologna in order to highlight the unusual status of women in the city and their artistic achievements. I introduce two key figures from the period whose lives intersected in intriguing ways in the city: a Bolognese female saint, who was also an artist, and Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti, author of the influential treatise on painting, *Discorso sul' Imagine Sacre e Profane (Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images).*

The political and cultural climate of Bologna encouraged a thriving class of noble intelligentsia, both male and female, that was especially interested in promoting and displaying their status. In a city without a ruling duke, competition among the noble class was especially strong in Bologna, and was expressed in terms of status and display, not only of financial wealth, but also of intellectual and cultural patrimony. The portrait was an ideal format for the display of status as it allowed for a visible embellishment of one's persona.

Rivalry between Papal States contributed to this context, fostering competition about artistic status and cultural patrimony. In the Renaissance, being able to claim direct ties to antiquity and thus to classical knowledge was a guarantee of elite genealogy for any city. Bologna claimed an Etruscan heritage for itself to combat Rome's primacy in antiquity. This rivalry is clearly delineated in the *Felsina, Lives of the Artists,* written by

the Bolognese historiographer Conte Carlo Cesare Malvasia. Felsina was the ancient Etruscan name for Bologna; thus Malvasia calls attention to Bologna's illustrious role in antiquity and thereby challenges Giorgio Vasari's similar claims for Florence in the process.[1]

Bologna also attempted to assert its religious independence from the reigning papal state of Rome, and one locus of this battle was the canonization of one of Caterina dei Vigri, who would become one of the city's iconic female saints. Both artist and Poor Clare nun, Caterina dei Vigri was first put forward for canonization by Cardinal Paleotti in 1586, but the completed ceremony did not take place until 1712, during the papacy of Benedetto XIV.[2] Vigri's canonization had become, together with San Petronio, the patron saint of Bologna, the expression, as Andre Vauchez explains, of "autonomia rivendicati nei confronti di Roma" (autonomy re-vindicated from Rome).[3] Urban VIII changed the rules to include "virtú e miracoli" (virtue and miracles) as the main requirement for canonization. A new vita of the saint was written in 1623 by Giovanni Grassetti and translated into several languages and Vigri became associated with a public display of female virtues. Even the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and the Pope came to see Vigri's uncorrupted body on display; her effigy became a signifier of civic pride and female virtú. In this way, civic self-fashioning was made to relate to the virtuous or allegorical female body.

Vigri was celebrated by her official biographer, Illuminata Bembo, for having created images of her mystical visions said to contain self-portraits within their

---

[1] Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* vol. 1(New York: Alfred Knopf, 1927), intro. Vasari had always claimed Tuscan antiquity for Florence, including the origins of the Etruscan civilization.
[2] Vauchez, "Santa Caterina Vigri", 6.
[3] Ibid., 6.

narratives.[4] The nun was made patron saint of the illustrious Accademia Clementina, Bologna's first art academy.[5] An active reformer, Vigri wrote a description of her own spiritual struggles entitled: "The Seven Spiritual Weapons."[6] She created a *libro devoto* as a proactive illustration of her approach to theology. Vigri advocated that the truth of the Bible may be reached by a combination of scriptures and good works, as opposed to merely faith in God, thereby uniting practice and theory. This approach arguably paved the way for more active participation in religious and social life for women by contributing to the birth of religious salons, or tertiaries, pious female groups. [7] Led by a member of the community, the main focus of these groups was performing charitable work, which gave women an outlet for the public performance of their religious duties. In this context, Vigri could become a role model for her successors and a public symbol for virtuous women, especially artists.

Significantly, visual imagery was influenced by the intersection of religious writing and artistic criticism in Bologna. The most significant example is Cardinal Paleotti's influential instructional manual for artists, the *Discorso sul' Imagine Sacre e Profane.* The Cardinal's text called for a strong tradition of visual imagery, including portraiture, which had implications for female artists that are important for this thesis. It was Paleotti who encouraged a formal program of visual imagery that included detailed instructions to artists concerning the representation of saints and worthy individuals, and

---

[4] Ibid., 6. See also Babette Bohn,"Female Self-Portraiture in Early Modern Bologna ".
[5] Irene Graziani, "L'Icona della Monaca Artista" , in *Pregare con L'Imagine : il Brevario di Caterina Vigri,* ed. Vera Fortunati (Firenze: Sismel, 2001), 29.
[6] Ibid., 29.
[7] Gabriella Zarri, "Religious and Devotional Writing 1400-1600", in A History of Women's Writing in *Italy,* ed. Letiiza Panizza (Cambride: Cambridge University Press: 2000), 82.

these instructions were specifically aimed at portraiture.[8] This was especially relevant to female artists, including Fontana, for whom portraiture comprised the majority of their work. The Cardinal states that when representing a saint, the artist must select as models only those individuals who are of virtuous character. Paleotti's program raises interesting implications regarding the use of the artist herself and the noblewomen of the city as models for representation of the saints.

Other important factors that contributed to the formation of female artistic and social identities included the university and local literary traditions. The University of Bologna was among Europe's first great institutions of higher education, and the first one to grant *laurea* (degrees) to women. The university contributed to civic identity by legitimizing and enhancing the status of Bolognese noblewomen in particular, through its acceptance of women students.[9] *Laude*, or verses of praise written in honor of women's virtues, were another tradition that furthered the image of noblewomen in the city. In contrast to Venice, where *laude* were written in praise of courtesans,[10] in Bologna it is female virtù that is used to promote the city, inextricably tying the city of Bologna to the image of its virtuous noblewomen.

Theater was another opportunity for the display of allegory and female persona. Records exist of allegorical theater, in which women took on the roles of personified allegories in a pastoral play written and performed for a noblewoman's marriage;

---

[8] Paola Bocchi, *Trattatti del Cinquecento, fra Manierism e Controriforma,* 3 vols. (Bari: Laterza: 1960) 348-49.
[9] Caroline Murphy, "In Praise of the Ladies of Bologna", *Renaissance Studies* vol. 13, no.4 (Dec. 1999): 443.
[10] Ibid.

Cardinal Paleotti himself is noted as having performed in such a production.[11] Public performances by women, as I will posit, are mirrored in the art of portraiture.

Self-portraiture and the historiated portrait

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the self-portrait arguably reveals the ways in which artist's constructed their personas based on a composite identity. According to Harry Berger, portraiture, including the self-portrait, is about the art of self-portrayal and posing.[12] In this thesis, I employ Berger's definition of a portrait: "a sign that denotes by resemblance whose content purports to refer to some possible state of the world that corresponds to it but is absent from it."[13] A portrait then, records the sitter's posing which is part of a performance. For Judith Butler, a person's performance is determined by forces that are external to the subject and her or his agency. Instead, Berger argues for a type of performance in portraits where the sitter's agency is important to the process of interpretation: "the portrait presents a representation of the act of self-representation or posing."[14] Although never completely transparent, the portrait records the performance of status, and contains evidence of the sitter's agency. In a self-portrait of the artist, this becomes more complex because it is the artist who is posing/performing for himself or herself, and also others.

The historiated portrait and self-portrait are also central to this thesis. The former is a concept defined by Berger that refers to donor portraits in which the patron is aware

---

[11] Ibid.
[12] Harry Berger Jr., *Fictions of the Pose*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 10.
[13] Berger, Fictions, 27.
[14] Ibid., 29

of performing.[15] For example, Gentile Bellini's *Miracle at the Bridge of San Lorenzo* contains a group of kneeling men as the collective donors. This is a religious painting, but one conflated with history painting since it serves a social value by claiming to document an event.[16] In this fashion, Berger explains, donor portraits in religious paintings "intrude on the issue of posing, with a primary emphasis on the sacred."[17] The combination of religious painting (considered a variation of history or ambitious painting) and portraiture resulted in donor portraits for male artists, where the donor's role as a minor character was clear, often by conventions such as the smaller size of the figure in a religious painting. According to Ludovico Dolce, whose *Aretino* was published in 1557, it is not always considered appropriate to insert the patron directly into a historical narrative.[18] The Bolognese artist, Ludovico Carracci, shared this opinion and stated that it was inappropriate to use a recognizable layperson's features for a religious narrative.[19]

For female artists, the self-portrait represented unique challenges and possibilities. In Bologna, women artists availed themselves of these visual possibilities by creating historiated self-portraits in concert with other modes of allegorical visual display for the female body. I argue that placing elements of history painting in self-portraiture gave women artists the "symbolic capital" that Berger mentions in his analysis of history painting and donor portraits regarding male artists.[20] If the privilege of posing was all about status, as Berger states, the stakes were even higher for the female artist.

---

[15] Ibid., 29
[16] Ibid., 10.
[17] Ibid., 27.
[18] Ibid., 28.
[19] Conte Carlo Cesare Malvasia. *Felsina Pittrice: Vite de'Pittori Bolognesi, 1678*, ed. Giampietro Zanotti (Bologna: Tip. Guidi dell'Ancora, 1841), vol.1, 29.
[20] Berger, *Fictions,* 29.

Biography and the construction of identity

The self-portrait and its relation to the construction of identity can be considered during the sixteenth and seventeenth century in relation to the literary genres of biography and manuals of bodily comportment. Biographies would have prompted artists to consider questions about their identities, and how they were perceived. Vasari's *Lives of the Artists*, published first in 1550 and revised in 1568, became the paragon of artistic status promotion for artists. This literary mode allowed the author to create an ideal image of his subject to be seen externally, or at least, an image based in part on the author's motives. Vasari's *Lives* are a construction of the myth of the artist as created by the author. Where biography fueled concerns among artists regarding their status, manuals of bodily comportment had an important impact on the construction of identity for noblewomen. For example, the "Third Book" of Castiglione's *Courtier*, from 1508, is devoted to questions about the status, appearance, and expectations for women. Together, biography and treatises on conduct influenced both male and female artists and their patrons in their struggle for status.

Fontana's *Self-Portrait in the Studiolo* and Elisabetta Sirani's *Allegory of Painting*, which we will examine in depth further on, exemplify the impact of Vasari's ideal male artist (fig. 1-2). That these female artists were thinking about identity in relation to biography is evident in their concern with the visual conventions used to display status in their self-portraits. The self-portrait is often an expression of multiple selves scholar, artist, poet, etc.

What better performance of Renaissance status was there for an artist than to embody the *Allegory of Painting*? In Sirani's version, the artist represents herself calling

on that ancient conceit of artistic status from Horace, *ut picture poesis*. Cesare Ripa's description of the allegory uses the ancient poet Horace as his source for painting as silent poetry. Sirani based many of her allegories on Ripa's descriptions from his *Iconologia,* published in 1611. The genius poet was the ultimate status symbol of the day for female or male artists. It is no coincidence then, that the earliest visual depiction of the artist as the allegory of painting (1542), and the artist's biography were instituted by the same person, Vasari (fig. 3).[21] Each of the *Lives,* moreover, was introduced by a woodcut portrait of the artist.

Gender and genre discourse

A discussion of self-portraiture and identity naturally intersects with discourses of gender, and thus one concern in this thesis is the gendering of style. Art criticism from Vasari onwards has separated style into masculine and feminine, an idea that had serious repercussions for artistic identity and status.[22] Masculine style was considered superior due to the fact that it was *virile*. Feminine style, on the other hand, was deemed inferior and labored, appropriate only for certain types of painting. Prominent among these was portraiture, and thus the genre became explicitly linked to the female artist.

Furthermore, the female artist was subject to a variety of ideologies and male dominated theories of medicine prevalent in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[23] For example, theories of creation were based on these gender biased views of procreation, and artistic creation was no exception to the rule. Women artists such as Fontana and

---

[21] Mary Garrard, "Artemisia Genteleschi's Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting", *The Art Bulletin* 62:1 (1980): 97.
[22] Philip Sohm, "Gendered Style in Italian Art Criticism from Michelangelo to Malvasia", *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 48, iss. 4, (Winter 1995): 759-94.
[23] For a complete discussion if this, see Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman.*

Sirani thus faced "biological" limitations on their perceived ability to create meaningful works of art, as is evident in the recorded reception of their work. These barriers specified that women artists were physiologically well suited to creating portraits; however they did not possess the necessary qualifications for the more highly respected art of history painting.

Fontana and Sirani's struggle against these limitations resulted in what I posit is an innovative breed of portraiture involving the use of allegory and personification. Mary Garrard, in her well known study of Artemisia Gentileschi states that for these Bolognese artists, "it appears to have been enough to be accepted professionally; to attempt any innovative artistic contribution was unnecessary, perhaps hazardous".[24]Against this position, this thesis will argue that innovation is exactly what these Bolognese artists were seeking based on the visual evidence they have left behind. In the oeuvres of these female artists we find self-portraits in the guise of biblical heroines, pagan goddesses, personifications and allegories of virtue.

The Chapters

Chapter one addresses the historiography of the "donnesca mano", or feminine hand. The term was used to describe a style of painting that was considered appropriate for female artists. I discuss the discourses of gender which assumed female artists to be better suited to portrait painting, since they lacked the physiological attributes for the more prestigious art of history painting. Although contemporary art criticism often

[24] Mary D. Garrard, Artemisia Gentileschi Around 1622: The Shaping and Reshaping of Artistic Identity (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 6.

praises female artists for their talents as portrait painters, we shall see that the majority of the historiographers relegate them to this genre alone.

Chapter two looks at the female artist's transformation in self-portraiture from a so-called traditional role, such as Renaissance bride, to the more ambiguous biblical persona of Judith. Both Fontana and Sirani perform this role in *Judith with the Head of Holofernes,* using innovative visual conventions which recall history painting.

Chapter three discusses the public performance of an identity that is shared with the other noblewomen of Bologna in the historiated portrait. The portrait begins as a resemblance to its subject which the artist then extends into the guise of Christian saints and pagan goddesses, despite strict the guidelines for portraiture established by Cardinal Paleotti. This includes recognizable portraits of noblewomen as the pagan goddess of love, and the artist herself as Saint Barbara. Fontana used these portraits to her advantage as a female artist.

In the seventeenth century, Sirani creates self-portraits in which she takes on more ambiguous personas such as Delilah, the biblical anti-heroine who crops Samson's locks. These female anti-heroines suggest an innovative approach to portraiture in that they request the viewer's knowledge to fill in the narrative. Thus the single figure image must activate the viewer's memory in order to recall the story and functions as a type of interactive history painting, due to the artist's visual details, such as Delilah's shears.

In the final chapter, I examine Elisabetta Sirani's self-portrait as the *Allegory of Painting* in relation to the performance of status. Sirani wears the laurel crown to call upon the prestige of history painting in the form of the ancient poet Horace. In other

words, the female artist's response to genre restrictions is the performance of allegory within self-portraiture.

Fontana and Sirani used portraiture as a vehicle to push beyond the boundaries established by Renaissance art criticism. I will argue that one of the strategies that artists such as Fontana and Sirani employed was the transformation of portraiture into a historiated portrait--a cross between history painting and portraiture--in order to elevate their public status as female artists.

Chapter One:

Historiography of *La Donnesca Mano*

The allegorical self-portraits of Lavinia Fontana and Elisabetta Sirani and their reception serve as visual evidence of the conflicting discourses that formed part of female artistic identities in Renaissance and Counter Reformation Bologna. A recurring theme throughout this period was that of the *donnesca mano*, a gender biased discourse of art criticism. This topos was based on theories of Renaissance medicine hailing from Aristotle. By 1568, Vasari still subscribed to these standards, as did other early biographers from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries such as Giovanni Baglione, Giovanni Bellori and Filippo Baldinucci. There was one particular exception, namely Carlo Cesare Malvasia whose different approach to the female artist is evident in Sirani's biography. I assess these contemporary understandings of women painters and also late twentieth-century scholarship concerning female self-portraiture, particularly studies by Carolyn Murphy, Maria Teresa Cantaro, and Fredrika Jacobs. As the historiography illustrates, there is a contradiction between, on the one hand, the apparent praise that these female artists received during their lifetimes, and on the other, the gender based limitations on genre in the art criticism.

Presentation of the artists

Fontana and Sirani received great accolades during their own lifetimes. However, these laudatory verses were often contradictory as they existed side by side with lower expectations of female artists. Born in 1551, Fontana's artistic career spanned an active and dynamic period in Bologna from the 1570's to 1614, a period that included the

emergence of the Carracci. Portrait painting became Fontana's forte, upon which the artist established a thriving business, in addition to her many religious commissions. Her original training was accomplished through her father Prospero, as was the custom of the period.[25] Sirani, born almost a century later in 1638, was also trained by her father Andrea. Praise for both Fontana and Sirani can be traced from the sixteenth to the twenty-first centuries through the artists' biographers and other intelligentsia of the period. Upon closer examination, the nature of this praise illustrates the complexity of female artistic identity at that time.

In 1584, the art critic Borghini was the first to describe Fontana as one of the extra-ordinary women of her day.[26] The well known Bolognese poet of the piazza, Giulio Cesare Croce wrote in the late sixteenth century that Fontana was "alta pittrice unica al mondo come la fenice...che agguaglia Apollodoro, Zeusi et Apelle, Michel Angela...Correggio, Titian, e Raffaelle (highest of painters, unique in the world like the phoenix, she who is equal to Apollodoro, Zeuxis and Apelles, Michelangelo, Correggio, Titian, and Raphael).[27] No artist, male or female could receive more praise than the combination of these masters. In 1603 Lucio Faberio stated that Fontana was "ammirata universalemente e massime da molti principi" (universally admired, and especially so by many princes) and compared her to the famous female painters of antiquity: Timarete, Martia, Irene di Cratino.[28]

Many other critics mention Fontana's work throughout the seventeenth century, both with and without attaching subjective judgments. Baldinucci however, is very

---

[25] Maria Teresa Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana Bolognese "pittora singolare" 1552-1614* (Milano: Jandi Sapi Editori, 1989), 6.
[26] Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana*, 319.
[27] Ibid., 329.
[28] Ibid., 321.

critical regarding Fontana, to the point of stating that after a "failed" public commission for San Paolo Fuori le Mura, she restricted herself to portrait painting. The commission he is referring to is for the large painting of *The Stoning of St. Paul*, which would have required skills in portraying male figures in a large crowd and in perspective. Baldinucci writing from 1681 to 1728 describes her as a "gran genio della pittura" (great genius of painting) but later adds an important caveat to his praise which we will discuss further on.[29] Malvasia, also Sirani's official biographer, writes laudatory verses about Fontana telling his readers that her paintings were greatly appreciated to which their financial value attests: "maggior prezzo a giorni nostri non siasi usato con un Vandych, con un Monsu Giusto" (a higher price was not asked for a Van Dyke or Monsu Giusto).[30] He also mentions the verses written by Ridolfi Campeggi and the poet Gianbattista Marini in Fontana's honor. Campeggi calls her "o della nostra eta vero ornamento" (the true ornament of our age) and Marini ekphrastically addresses a now lost painting of *Salome with the Head of John the Baptist* by Fontana as if it were alive.[31] Taken together these writers describe Fontana as a great genius, equal to all the great masters, yet at the same time a failure at history painting, exposing a contradictory and complex message of female artistic identity. This message became manifest in the visual conventions of self-portraiture as the struggle for status.

Sirani was another acclaimed heroine of her native city. Malvasia, who was an art critic, scholar, lawyer, cleric and collector, credits himself with starting Sirani on her artistic career in his *Felsina: Vite dei piu Eccellenti pittori di Bologna.* The elaborate catafalque that was constructed in her honor after her death at age 27 demonstrates how

[29] Ibid., 323.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., 324.

highly regarded the artist was by her contemporaries. Indeed, Malvasia includes an illustration of the catafalque in his *Felsina*.[32] To appreciate fully the significance of this funerary ceremony to the artist's career, we must consider that only one other artist in Bologna is mentioned by Malvasia as having had a catafalque made in honor of his death: Agostino Caracci, the well known artist and head of the Academia Clementina.[33] After Sirani's death, one of her supporters, Piccinardi, wrote *Il Pennelo Lacrimante* (the crying brush) to mourn what in his words was the tragically premature passing of such a talented and beautiful artist. Malvasia cites Piccinardi who calls Sirani "the sun of Italy and the gem of Europe," heady praise in the seventeenth century for a female artist.[34]

This laudatory tradition continued in the eighteenth century when famous women were the focus of numerous scholarly publications. In 1719 Orlandi wrote that Fontana was "celebrate dai poeti e oratori," while Marcello Oretti repeats Croce's account of the artist in his *Glorie delle Donne*.[35] Other early biographers would continue writing about the fame of these artists throughout the following centuries. Marco Minghetti compiled a work on *Donne Famose Italiane dei Secoli XV e XVI* in 1877 in which he praises the female artists of Italy and especially of Bologna.[36] Fontana and Sirani are two of the artists that also include the nun Caterina de Vigri, Suora Plautella Nelli of Florence, Prosperzia de Rossi, Sofonisba Anguissola, Irene Spilembergo, and Marietta Robusti.

According to Peter Burke, the proliferation of books written in the sixteenth century regarding the notable women of a city can be attributed in part, to the influence of Castiglione's *Courtier* and its proto feminist statements regarding women and their

---

[32] Malvasia, *Felsina*, II, 390.
[33] Ibid.., I , 300-01.
[34] Ibid.., II, 391.
[35] Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana,* 329.
[36] Marco Minghetti, *Le Donne Italiane nelle Belle Arti al Secolo XV e XVI.*

education.[37] In the conversations that take place in the *Courtier*, Castiglione speaks through his characters and advocates education for noblewomen similar to that of noblemen in terms of letters, except for arts of war. The need for a genre of literature that recognizes and promotes well educated noblewomen arose while at the same time constructing that very identity. This identity began to define women's status as partially based on her learning and literacy.

Modern historiography

The first modern work that significantly addresses these artists is Laura Ragg's *The Women Artists of Bologna,* published in 1907 by the British Historical Society. Ragg brought forward the interesting phenomenon of this flourishing community of women artists in Bologna including Caterina de'Vigri, the sculptor de Rossi, Fontana, and Sirani. Her research, evidently overlooked by subsequent scholars, uncovered a collection of drawings in the Uffizi by Sirani.[38] Ragg's opinions are influenced by early twentieth-century perceptions of Baroque art which she describes, along with the religious and social environment, as "distasteful." Nonetheless, Ragg did report some redeeming qualities among Sirani and her Bolognese compatriots who show us "the best and noblest aspect of an age of decadence, devoid of true dignity, and destitute of great ideals."[39] Regarding Fontana's talent, Ragg states that the artist remains admirable and was

[37] Peter Burke, "The Invention of Leisure", *Past and Pres*ent 146 (1995): 136-150.
[38] Laura Ragg, *The Women Artists of Bologna* (London: Methuene & Co., 1907), 306-07. Fredrika Jacobs states that about "two dozen drawings have been attributed to Fontana, few to Anguissola, and none have been securely established as the work of any other female hand." Fredrika Jacobs, *Defining the Renaisance Virtuosa*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 91.
[39] Ragg, *Women Artsists,* 292.

successful in spite of her limitations since she had the good sense to recognize them.[40] Following Renaissance critics, she observes that portrait painting does not demand the very highest gifts of imagination. In the author's opinion, Fontana's religious paintings are therefore neither inspired by nor capable of inspiring deep emotion. Ragg voices stronger praise for Sirani, saying that her studies are certainly in the manner of the great masters, and that they possess qualities lacking in Fontana: "dexterous, spirited, unhesitant and self confident, the work of one truly mistress of herself, and the technical side of her art."[41]

Recent scholarship has brought forward the significant role that these female artists played. Carolyn Murphy and Fredrika Jacobs have both written extensively on Fontana and other female artists. Murphy focuses on the market of patrons in Bologna for Fontana's portraits of Bolognese noblewomen, pursuing a social history of her art and its economic relation to the city and its patrons. She describes Fontana as an artist whose fame was largely founded on providing a product for which there was a growing market: Bologna was a city with a large class of well-off noblewomen and mercantile bourgeois, a rich source of clientele for portraiture.[42] Jacobs takes up the reception of style from the Cinquecento and presents the topos of the *donnesca mano.*[43] In addition, Jacobs discusses the semantics of "pro-creation" as understood in the early modern period; she explains the active part of the male in conception, while the female is the passive vessel. These

[40] Ibid.., 206.
[41] Ibid., 292-295.
[42] Caroline P. Murphy *Lavinia Fontana, a Painter and her Patrons in Sixteenth Century Bologna*, 79.
[43] Jacobs, *Defining,* 154. Regarding Sofonisba Anguissola's *Self-Portrait Painting Bernardino Campi*, Jacobs states that, contrary to what Vasari believes, it is Campi who is represented as needing the mahlstick to steady his hand, not Sofonisba,

studies have allowed for a better understanding of the female artist's relationship to self-portraiture in the early modern period.

Creation and procreation in the Renaissance

According to Renaissance theories of medicine, women artists were considered to be unfit for history painting, since female physiological differences made women instead more suited to portrait painting. The inferior notion of women in the Renaissance can be attributed to the theory of the humors which sees them as cold and damp, as opposed to the male who is hot and dry, and thus fit for artistic and scholarly *ingegno*.[44] Due to the prevalence of cold and moist humors in women, they are seen as passive, subject to lunar influences, and less in control of their emotions and thus irrational. By contrast, masculine dryness is associated with an active mind which makes men better able to reason.

Renaissance medicine was based on ancient theories, including those of Galen and Aristotle, which held the male seed to be the more active component of creation that formed female matter or semen. In 1561 Gabriele Falloppio claimed that although female organs were comparable to the male, he could find no equivalent to the male seed.[45] In the conundrum that was the Renaissance view, women were no longer considered imperfectly formed males, yet the female sex was still subordinate to a male's, and thus denied the active role in creation. In view of prevailing ideas about the formative capacity of women in procreation, and their abilities for creation (views which were formative for art criticism), how did female artists of the day negotiate their own artistic identities?

---

[44] Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 30.
[45] Maclean, *Reniassance*, 33-36.

This conflict is particularly clear in the historiography surrounding the work of Fontana's contemporary, Sofonisba Anguissola, and her famous self-portrait in which she appears on a canvas being painted by her mentor, Bernardino Campi (1559; fig. 4). The painting provided the catalyst for Vasari's praises of the artist which conflate her procreative and artistic talents. In his life of Anguissola, Vasari asks "but if women know so well how to produce living men, what marvel is it that those who wish are also so well able to create them in painting?"[46] However, it is to her teacher that he moves, "but to return to Bernardino, of whom these young women are disciples."[47] By stressing that it is Anguissola's relations with men who were responsible for her training and talent, Vasari implies that the women are the master's creations, instead of creators. In attempting to explain the unusual case of female artistic talent in the Anguissola household, he writes "it is necessary to have by nature an inclination for art, and then to add to that study and practice...the house of Anguissola appeared to me the home of painting".[48] Thus he neatly ascribes the success of her study to Campi's teaching, while the origin of her natural proclivity for art is derived from her father: the role of his active male seed. Not much of Vasari's esteem remains for Anguissola herself, save his comment that her portraits are "things to marvel at," or oddities. Her work is produced "with great diligence," moreover; in other words her painting is the opposite of *sprezzatura.* This was not a compliment, of course; according to the standards of art criticism in the sixteenth century, as excessive diligence was said by Vasari himself to produce a dry style.[49]

---

[46] Vasari, *Liv,* vol. 2, 468.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid., 463.
[49] Ibid., vol.1, 251.

Contemporary writing from Vasari into the seventeenth century makes clear that women were often relegated to genres of painting considered more appropriate to the feminine hand. For example, according to Baldinucci, Fontana's painting *The Vision of St. Hyacinth* is "a miracle for having come from the hand of a woman", or "*mano donnesca*" (fig. 5).[50] Even more specific was Giuseppe Maria Mazzolari who stated that Fontana's works "do not have the excellence, and valor to be found in such things by great men, because they are after all, by a woman who has left the usual path and all that which is suitable to their hands and fingers."[51] Thus portrait painting emerged as the ideal mode for women and both Anguissola and Fontana were categorized by contemporary sources as primarily portrait painters. As Giovanni Baglione, one of Fontana's biographers put it: she was "excellent at painting portraits, and *for being a woman*, did quite well at that type of painting."[52] Once again, following Vasari, there is a combination of criticism and admiration, creating a contradictory form of praise.

Gendered genre

What exactly was it about portrait painting that caused it to be considered less challenging, and thus more feminine, than history painting by contemporary critics? The answer, in part, is that portraits were considered to require only simple mimesis, as opposed to history painting which was understood to start in the mind. As Fredrika Jacobs and other have demonstrated, portraiture was deemed to consist of merely copying nature (*ritrarre*), as opposed to inventing (*inventare*), whose intermediary step is

[50] Jacobs, *Defining Renaissance*, 95.
[51] Ibid., 91.
[52] Giovanni Baglione, Le Vite de'Pittori, Scultori, et Architetti dal Pontificato de Gregorio XIII del 1572 in sino ai Tempi di Papa Urbano ottavo nel 1642 (Citta del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1995), 143.

imitation. This is a crucial difference in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a period of transition where history painting becomes a signifier of value, going from textual to figural: an ideological framing synonymous with ambitious painting.[53] As early as the 1450's, *istoria* or history painting was defined by Alberti as a sort of varied composition, with the inclusion of many figures to tell a better story or show off the virtuosity of an artist's skills.[54] Painting was required to challenge and educate its audience, not just to please. In order to raise the status of painting in the Renaissance, an ideological framework was required to rescue it from the hands of mechanical craft.[55] Needless to say, it was this leap of *ingegno* that was considered improbable for a woman artist. It is this shift from mimesis to figural from resemblance to representation, that, as I will argue, female artists have appropriated for portraiture through their use of allegory.

Sexuality of the brush

As narrative painting was the preferred genre, it was understood that it be accompanied by a preferred style, or brush: the masculine one. This was clearly evident in contemporary art theory and biography. For example, the Bolognese artist Guido Reni was never referred to as merely a portrait painter; nevertheless he was at times criticized for his "feminine" style which was also associated with the Flemish style.[56] This is reported by Malvasia, but the origin of the comparison between the Flemish and the feminine goes back to Michelangelo who commented that oil painting was too slick and thus belonged to Northern painters and women (as opposed to fresco, a truly manly and

[53] Paul Duro, *The Academy and the Limits of Painting in 17th Century France* (Cambridge: Cambrdige University Press, 1953), 93.
[54] Alberti, *De Pittura*, 74-77.
[55] Duro, *Academy*, 93.
[56] Sohm, "Gendered Style", 759-808.

virile medium in Michelangelo's opinion). For Reni however, I suggest that this resulted in a type of hybrid or transvestite hand: a male body with a feminine hand, yet not restricted to a feminine genre. Although Reni was said to have a feminine style, he was not admonished to remain within the bounds of portraiture, since he was biologically male.

The preference for the style of *virile* as opposed to the *feminile* is bound up with the long history of gender prejudices of antiquity, a discourse elucidated by Philip Sohm's influential essay on the gender of style. For male artists, a gendered style came down to the brush, *il penello virile*, (the virile brush); for women, by contrast, it was a *donnesca* "hand." Thus a sexual identity was given to the artist's brush itself. In Renaissance painting, the brush became a synecdoche for the artist in the writing of the period. According to Sohm, the primary source for the topos of the manly brush centers around Marco Boschini's defense of the Venetian school against Michelangelo's charges that oil painting was somehow effeminate. In order to accomplish this, Boschini invents the metaphor of the brush as phallic symbol, and thus virile and manly, which, laden with pigment, is thrust at the canvas in contrast to the feminine cosmetic finish *(leccato).*[57] It is important that the manly action of the brush and its strokes are visible on the canvas. Sohm also draws from the richly comic example of Pietro Aretino's sexual metaphor from *Ragionamento della Nanna e della Antonia* regarding the main character's "paintbrush moistened with spit which he dipped into her tiny color cup and made her

[57] Sohm, "Gendered Style", 799.

twist and turn."[58] Is it possible then, for women painters to procreate with "bold thrusts of the manly brush"?[59]

Sohm notes that Baroque writers rarely attributed any style to women painters at all. Yet Sirani is a unique case in that her Bolognese biographer Malvasia seems to rise above the typical male prejudice of the seventeenth century. In his *Felsina,* Malvasia both acknowledges her as a woman artist, and also praises her *ingegno.* A product of her Bolognese background and influenced by artists such as Reni, she has her own approach to the portrait and self presentation, with a preference for allegorical and mythological representations. To paraphrase Malvasia, Sirani has nothing of the timid, but possesses the speed and *facilità* associated with men and *sprezzatura*, whereas Reni's style has been associated historically with the feminine.[60]

If contemporary sources accused some other female artists of having only their father's style, Sirani is given a higher honor in that she is said to have surpassed her father's style with an *ingegno* all her own, far from one of "self-effacing brushwork."[61] Malvasia even compares Sirani's brush to that most powerfully masculine and phallic of all symbols, the sword. He then compares her brush to the sword of Julius Caesar, certainly an exemplar of masculine valor.[62] Malvasia also gives her that other most masculine attribute; he describes her as "born under a melancholy Saturn."[63] Malvasia clearly intended it to be a compliment to her artistic genius since melancholy had been the domain of male artistic genius since the time of Ficino's *furore divino*. Typically for

---

[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Malvasia, *Felsina*, II, 389.
[61] Sohm, "Gendered Style", 800.
[62] Malvasia, *Felsina*, II, 389.
[63] Ibid.

women, it would have meant more madness than genius. According to Babette Bohn, Sirani's classical "heroines" connect her to a tradition of male virtue.[64]

If as Sohm has argued, each gender can only paint in a style that is physiologically proscribed, this would fulfill "the art critic's tautological expectations," becoming a self-fulfilling prophesy of gender biased expectations. A partial response may be found in Sohm's explanation of the writer Gian Bologna Manzini's comments regarding the appropriate style for the figure of Hercules. According to Manzini, the figure of Hercules should obviously not be delicate, but a robust style so that it is appropriate to its subject matter, a mythical hero of manly strength.[65] However, in the end Manzini states: "the best things are not so tender, but more robust"; thus "effeminate talents can paint nothing but polished things." It seems that the subject matter within a history painting like *Hercules and the Nemean Lion* must be painted in an appropriately virile style, but no recommendations were made to male artists regarding genre. By extension, if women artists could only paint in a polished, feminine style, according to most art critics of the day, then they could only paint portraits. But we shall see that "only portraits" could be more than contemporary critics may have bargained for. Fontana's self-portrait, *Judith with the Head of Holofernes,* raises the query: could there be such a thing as a "*virile*" portrait done by a *donnesca mano*?

---

[64] Babette Bohn, "The Antique heroes of Elisabetta Sirani", *Renaissance Studies* vol. 16, number 1 (2002): 79.
[65] Sohm, "Gendered Style ", 802.

Chapter *2*

Transformations of the self: from virtuoso bride to "woman on top"

The artists Lavinia Fontana and Elisabetta Sirani employ self-portraiture as an act of self promotion, displaying identities that go from private wife to public heroine, from contract to narrative. Fontana's early marriage self-portrait operates as an advertisement for the virtuoso wife, a familial contract between herself and her husband (fig. 6). By the time of her experimentation with Judith, the famed biblical heroine, the artist had become a public figure of virtue. Fontana's painting of *Judith with the Head of Holofernes* displays Judith in a dynamic three-quarter view, with a sharp diagonal leading the viewer's eye from the sword in her uplifted right hand, to the head of Holofernes that she holds with her left hand in the lower corner of the painting (fig. 7). The emphasis is on her righteous deed as an epic moment in the heroine's life. Thus, as I will argue, Fontana is responding to the restrictions on genre for female artists by encoding such a narrative structure within the genre available to her, that of portraiture. Sirani takes this narrative structure further in some of her other portraits such as *Cleopatra* and *Delilah* (figs. 8-9). The artist includes only the barest details necessary and yet creates a successful narrative from a single figure portrait. In Sirani's case, we are often dealing not only with heroines, but also with anti-heroines in which the iconography suggests an ambiguous identity.

Private contract to public narrative

In Fontana's early self-portrait of 1577, she is shown in three-quarter length, hands on the keyboard and directly facing her viewer; she wears a rich costume of red fabric with white lace collars and cuffs, and several golden and coral chains (fig. 6). The

painting displays early evidence for what would become Fontana's hallmark hand: a virtuoso handling of surfaces such as jewels and rich fabrics. We are told by the Bolognese biographer, Cesare Malvasia, that this self-portrait was probably created as a form of personal publicity, to be sent to her future in-laws the Zappi of Imola in order to create a favorable impression upon them.[66] We know that Fontana's father-in- law was duly impressed by this portrait, and also her written correspondence. In a letter to his wife, Zappi states that he is certain she will approve his choice of bride for their son, since Fontana demonstrates modesty and intelligence. By picturing herself performing, she demonstrates her musical skills. Musical talent, like painting, was seen as a favorable trait for women in the Renaissance. The artist has included her maidservant in the background, actively engaged in carrying her sheet music, a performance of her duties that reminds the viewer of the artist's status.

The portrait thereby conveys Fontana's composite identity as a prudent image of a bride who displays her best qualities. The painting's signed inscription, seen in the upper left, contributes to this: "Lavinia, virgin daughter of Prospero Fontana, painted from a mirror her likeness, in the year 1577."[67] Her use of the word *virgo* in the inscription serves to underline her still nubile status. In the background, by the windowsill is a representation of her easel which faces the marriage chest, or *cassone*; this has been interpreted as a sign that the picture was intended to advertise her earning potential.[68] However, Fontana's marriage contract specifically states that the artist would only agree to the marriage if she were allowed to continue her profession as an artist; this was not a

[66] Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana*, 302.
[67] Ibid., 86.
[68] Murphy *Lavinia Fontana,* 43.

given in the marriage climate of the sixteenth century for women.[69] Thus, the juxtaposition of the marriage chest to the easel needs to be understood not only as promotion of her talents, but as a direct reminder of Fontana's personal caveat to her marriage contract: the continuation of her professional life.

In 1579, Fontana created *Self-Portrait in the Studiolo,* a small work in a roundel form on copper. The portrait had been requested by Alfonso Chacon who was assembling a collection of portraits of great men and women for Philip II of Spain (fig. 10).[70] The artist represents herself as a scholar, wearing rich formal clothing, and with pen poised and hand in front of a blank sheet of paper. Her hair is elegantly swept back with a hairpiece and she is surrounded by a collection of classical models, perhaps those from which she would have studied human anatomy. The blank sheet of paper is significant in that it implies the *ingegno* of creation.[71] *Ingegno* was a necessary prerequisite for *invenzione,* which happens in an artist's head before painting. It is this aspect of creation which was usually not attributed to women artists. In this self-portrait, Fontana transforms her identity from intimate marriage image to public figure. Without easel and paintbrush, she clearly fashions herself as a scholar. This indicates both her sensitivity to the painting's illustrious destination and an awareness of art criticism with its primacy of *ingegno* and *disegno.*

A link may be established between this signature portrait and later versions of the allegory of painting by female artists. Fontana's *Self-Portrait in the Studiolo* includes all the examples of male artistic status such as formal costume, poised pen and paper, and remnants of classical art. These elements are later incorporated by other female artists

[69] Malvasia, *Felsina*, I, 171.
[70] Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana,* 86.
[71] Ibid.

such as Sirani. The Bolognese tradition of the artist as intellectual came naturally in a city which founded numerous art academies that were more intellectual salons than artistic art studios. Since portraiture, despite also being practiced by males, had become gendered in the language of Renaissance art criticism as the genre for female artists, I'm suggesting that Fontana responded to these restrictions by encoding a narrative structure within her portraits, using allegory as part of a performance of identity to transgress boundaries of genres. *Self-Portrait in the Studiolo* sows the seeds for the artist herself as an allegory of painting, and ultimately, of history painting, or that art which required poetry and *ingegno*.

Virgo to virago

Fontana's two other self-portraits, dated to c. 1600, are *Judith with the Head of Holfernes* , and St. Barbara in the *Apparition of the Madonna and Child to the Five Saints* (fig. 7, fig. 23). In contrast to the good wife, or scholar, here the artist uses allegory to emphasize heroic courage and saintly virtue. As we will see, the figure of Judith also represents an ambiguous identity suggesting that the Bolognese artist was constructing a composite identity.[72]

In *Judith*, Fontana depicts the heroine close up, her body cropped in a three quarter view, with the dark background of the village of Bethulia barely visible behind the figures. Her attendant is reminiscent of the maidservant in Fontana's early self-portrait. In order to seduce the Assyrian general Holofernes, Judith is dressed in fine red

[72] Artemisia Gentileschi also used her own likeness for the figure of Judith. Most approaches to her painting have focused on psychoanalytic interpretation of her personal identification with the subjects of her paintings (*femmes fortes*), as related to the trauma of her rape by Agostino Tassi. See Mary D. Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi, the Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 21.

veils and rich jewels, as described in the Apocryphal *Book of Judith.*[73] There is a strong diagonal from the top of the sword in her right hand, whose blade is also dramatically cropped, to the head of Holofernes she is holding with her left. The pose may allude to the allegorical figure of Justice who holds a sword in one hand, and the scales of Justice in the other; the severed head stands in as a metonym for the scales of Justice which is thereby well executed. The composition of the three heads forms a dramatic triangle on the right side of the painting, with Judith's face glowing by moonlight, highlighting her expression of self righteousness.

The iconography of Judith may seem straightforward at first. The personification of Judith is commonly interpreted in the Renaissance as an allegory of the virtuous and courageous woman which would have been an appropriate model for a virtuous widow.[74] And yet, Judith has often been co-opted by contemporary sources as a lady-killer, the aggressive woman on top, who uses her sexuality to seduce the Assyrian general; she is thus the personification of the dangerous female within Renaissance society.[75] This is especially so in Northern art, where she is often conflated with the evil Salome, a misogynist re-appropriation of her virtuous identity. An illustration of this is Lucas Cranach's paintings of *Judith* and *Salome* (figs. 11-12).[76] The two images of violent women are almost identical and the same visual clues are repeated in both Judith and Salome. These examples reinforce the duality and ambiguous nature of Judith.

---

[73] Elena Ciletti, "Patriarchal Ideology in the Renaissance Iconography of Judith ", in *Refiguring Woman: Perspectives on Gender and the Italian Renaissance,* ed. Juliana Schiesari and Marilyn Miguel (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 37. (The Book of Judith was rejected by Protestants but reaffirmed by Counter Reformation Catholics as the official Bible in the Latin Vulgate in 1546).
[74] The painting was indeed commissioned by a wealthy noblewoman and widow; yet we have no evidence of specifications made by the patron for a self-portrait of the artist within the work.
[75] Ciletti, "Patriarchal Idealogy", 46.
[76] Ibid.

Without attempting to analyze Fontana's personal identification *as* Judith, the artist's embodiment of Judith can be understood as a reference to history painting: the artist has transformed herself into a historical figure, and thus the work becomes an example of *istoria*.[77] Fontana's painting of Judith is not simply a self-portrait but a narrative of biblical history, a composite genre. The inclusion of her self-portrait calls attention to the fusing of these genres, a strategy that capitalizes on her socially accepted role as an artist as it also transgresses it. This ambiguous identity is paralleled by the split *virgo/virago* persona of Judith as a virtuous heroine, on one side, and a femme fatale on the other. Thus the allegorical self-portrait is transformed into a vehicle for artistic ambition. This strategy is significant, then, as a direct reference to the artist's *ingegno*; *as* Judith, Fontana is herself a personification of history painting.

Sirani also confronts the figure of Judith in a work painted in 1658 for the Bolognese banker, Andrea Cattalani.[78] Like Fontana and Gentileschi before her, Sirani presents herself in the powerful guise of the Jewish heroine. However, she chooses a version that may look to earlier examples such as Botticelli's *Judith returning home to Bethulia with the head of Holofernes and her maidservant*. Bottticelli's version is one of the few that depicts the heroine's return to her hometown. Instead of emphasizing the act of physical violence, Sirani exhibits her knowledge of the biblical sources by presenting Judith's town which is rarely shown in other versions of Judith. Most examples include only the heroine, her maidservant and the decapitated head.

---

[77] Garrard suggests a personal identification for Artemisia in her painting of Judith; I am interested in the subject as more of an artistic strategy for status.

[78] Cattalani may also have been the one to commission her painting of another heroine from antiquity as a pendant to this one, Sirani's striking version of Timoclea.

In Sirani's *Self-Portrait as Judith* (fig. 13), the figures are arranged in the mode of a theatrical stage set. The castle in the background sets the stage, with a dramatic spotlight on Judith's face. A diagonal line of light moves the viewer from her face and sleeve to Holofernes' head which Judith has grabbed with both hands and is pulling out of a bag for display. There is a dark night sky with a sliver of moon showing in the distance. One young boy carrying a torch is left in shadow, but the interest lies in the left side of the canvas. The artist seems to set up a contrast between the head of the old women, and the other child carrying a torch whose face is extremely similar to another one of her angels in her *Baptism of Christ*. This brings to mind conventions seen in representations of the three ages of man. For example, in Titian's version, there are three portrait heads: the central one is an adult male frontal portrait, with an adolescent male profile on the right and elderly profile to the left, all joined as one. In Sirani's painting, the artist comments on the three ages of woman: the child is innocence, Judith represents maturity, and the old woman is the final stage. Sirani uses her characteristically rich draping fabrics for Judith's red robe and highlights the luxurious Renaissance sleeve. Sirani strives for historical accuracy regarding the details of the costume such as the underskirt's pattern and the footwear. She has also included a variety of physiognomic detail in the sea of heads of the people of Bethulia behind Judith.

Her choice of moment is probably not casual for she has chosen the instant of public acclaim for Judith; instead of a typical representation of the moment following the decapitation, Sirani depicts the heroine return with her righteous deed done. Indeed Judith is displaying the head it for deserved *public* praise, not merely private reflection. The

child on the right seems to put his hand up in the gesture of *castigo*, or the horror of innocence seeing the decapitated head.

It is interesting to compare the visual conventions used by these female artists to two other examples of Judith by male artists, Agostino Carracci and Alessandro Allori (figs.14-15). The latter uses his own features for the decapitated head, following Caravaggio's self-portrait as Goliath. Not only does Allori identify with the severed head; he also placed his mistress in the vestments of Judith. Agostino similarly uses the narrative for biographical effect: he has portrayed his patron as the lifeless head of Holofernes and his deceased wife as Judith. In this posthumous portrait, the severed head serves as an expression of grief related to the husband's loss.

Another of Sirani's antique "heroines" (as we will see, this can be a misleading term, as many of them are actually of dubious character) is *Cleopatra* (fig. 16). In contrast to traditional single figure images of the suicide and their naked eroticism, Cleopatra is decorously dressed. Babette Bohn has pointed to the painting as further proof of the artist's feminist sympathies.[79] However, this can be pressed further, given the great resemblance between this figure's facial features--round eyes, arched eyebrows, small pouty lips, round face--that characterize her other historical and allegorical self-portraits. More importantly, as a single female figure, it fits into a series of other self-portraits of this type in which the artist represents herself as the protagonist, as the allegory of painting, for example, and as Judith.

The choice of subject matter is unusual, but not completely without precedence. The Flemish artist Jacob Jordaens painted a similar version in 1653, except that he

[79] Bohn, "Self-Portraiture", 56.

included the entire cast of the narrative (fig. 17).[80] In Jordaens' painting, Cleopatra is attired in seventeenth-century costume, although Marc Anthony wears Roman armor. Her servants are also present, including a Moor as page and a court jester. The significance of the leering fool is related to the foolish and wasteful act that Cleopatra is about to commit. The figures are grouped around the seated figure of Cleopatra, with Marc Anthony leaning over in wonderment.

Sirani has instead chosen to include only a three-quarter length portrait of Cleopatra herself, instead of adding the other characters. According to the legend, she made a bet with Marc Anthony that she could spend ten million sesterces in one evening, and to prove it, she dropped one of her precious pearl earrings in a cup of vinegar where it dissolved, and then she drank it, thus winning the bet. Although this story from Cleopatra's life may seem a strange choice in Counter Reformation Bologna, the subject may be an allegory against foolishness and vanity. The menacing presence of the leering court jester (a traditional reference to the fool) reinforces this interpretation.

The details in the figure require closer inspection, such as a tiny reflection in the pearl and the Renaissance sleeve with its voluminous folds and reddish color. The fabric of the turban with its elaborate lace fringe recalls the artist's treatment of costume in her *Judith.* Cleopatra is shown at the moment when she is about to drop the pearl in the cup and commit the wasteful act. She looks back at someone, perhaps Marc Anthony with whom the viewer can identify as witness to the act, as if to be sure of his attention. Since there is no stage set in the background, the observer concentrates on the figure herself, whose serious expression suggests defiance. The fold of the red cloak contrasts the white

[80] Christina Corsiglia, ed. *Rubens and His Age, Treasures from the Hermitage Museum Russia.* (Toronto:AGO, 2001), 54.

of her sleeve, and the viewer is drawn from the ivory skin of her face and neck, to the arm and then her hand, poised to drop the pearl, while the other hand holds the silver cup to receive it.[81]

Many male artists such as Guido Reni have chosen to display the moment that Cleopatra was weakest (fig. 18). Her naked body at the moment of the suicide is a vehicle for an eroticized image of passive female flesh on display for a male patron's eyes. Sirani however, has chosen a different moment. The moment is an instant of reflection for the subject and the viewer, before the powerful queen of Egypt dissolves the precious pearl forever. Cleopatra was a woman whose gestures and public actions carried the weight of a kingdom.

Earlier, Fontana also created an image of *Cleopatra* during her stay in Rome from 1604 to 1615 (fig. 19). Once again she is not depicted at the moment of death, nor is she an erotic vision of female nudity for the male gaze. In contrast to Sirani's version, however, Fontana's representation is a bust-length, profile portrait in which the Egyptian Queen is fully clothed. Her costume speaks more of exotic eastern origins than the European gowns donned by most Baroque Cleopatras. The headdress rises up into a serpentine curve, strikingly similar to a snake. This may be a symbolic reference to both her future suicide by the bite of an asp, and to her crown and role as regent.[82] Fontana's choice of costume may have been influenced by an encounter with the Persian ambassador while at the Pope's court. Mancini records that while in Rome, Fontana

[81] Strangely at the Flint Galleries this painting was entitled La Pulce (the flea), before being correctly recognized as Cleopatra by the Berry Hill Galleries where it was finally sold.
[82] Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana*, 212.

received a request for a portrait of the Borghese Pope Paul V from the King of Persia and that she completed a portrait of the King's ambassador as well[83].

Fontana has included details such as the bust of Diana on the mantelpiece and an antique vase.[84] Diana is the goddess of the hunt and is often associated with the moon. As the moon can be a sign of melancholy, perhaps this is another erudite allusion to her suicide. The vase is a reference to antiquity and the power of the classical world. The profile pose also alludes to antiquity and Roman coins; the latter were used as models for portraits of rulers on medals and prints that circulated in the Renaissance (for example, the medals made of Mehmed II by Gentile Bellini and Costanzo da Ferrara). Fontana's use of these visual conventions suggests Cleopatra's position as an icon.

Anti-heroines of the Counter Reformation

In discussing the extent of Sirani's pictorial innovations for portraiture we must examine some of her other enigmatic subjects such as *Circe* (fig. 20). The sorceress is depicted in three-quarter view in an interior setting with an open window in the background displaying a mysterious night sky. Circe is dressed in luxurious fabrics in rich reds, blues and violets. As with any saint and her or his characteristic attribute, the pagan sorceress holds her famous book of spells in her hand so that she may be easily identified.

As Circe is listed in Alciati's emblems as the prostitute, she is certainly an ambiguous choice for a self-portrait of the artist in seventeenth-century Bologna?[85] Circe

---

[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Alciati, emblem 76: "Circe, by her famous name, discloses the prostitute, and whoever loves her, loses the reason of his mind."

was always seen as an evil influence, a sorceress who enchanted and enslaved Ulysses' men and turned them into swine.[86] Here we seem to have a choice of the anti-heroine, a moral pendant to heroines such as Judith. Although Circe may also be used as an example of the evil female, the artist has created a unique presentation of this character. The painting emphasizes the idea of Circe as a keeper of knowledge; the female as keeper of secrets and dark arts, talents which were often already associated with women.

Sirani has represented the aspect of wisdom in the sorceress. She is depicted with her book of spells, partially open and showing intricate calculations and geometric signs, which she holds as if it were an artist's palette. The implicit analogy is obvious: Sirani, like Circe is capable of performing magic, of creating images that live. We need only glance at the verses written in her honor to realize that the artist herself was most probably aware of the conceit and encouraged such an association as it enhances her image as an artist. Seen in this light, her treatment of the subject and persona of Circe becomes self-explanatory.[87] Sirani's visual innovations display her knowledge of classical myths and legends in order to present an image of the female artist as femme savant. By choosing only a single figure to focus on, she has embedded a complex network of associations in an image of a single woman, thus defying the very limits of portraiture for women artists as established by the rhetoric of the day.

Sirani continues this experimentation with a portrait of *Delilah* (fig. 21). Delilah is represented in a bust length format, wearing a slightly sheer and diaphanous dress which partially exposes her breast. Her physiognomy is reminiscent of Sirani's in her *Judith, described above*. The viewer is drawn to the powerful detail in her right hand:

---

[86] *Bullfinch's Greek and Roman Mythology* New York, Dover, 2000), 194.
[87] Other than the fact that Circe is shown blond, the physiognomy is still Sirani's.

Delilah holds up the shears with which she cropped Samson's locks after seducing him with wine and feminine wiles. Her other hand holds the sheared locks. The figure is an interior setting, perhaps the bedroom where the deed took place. Delilah is the evil biblical anti-heroine who cut the heroic Samson's hair in order to sap his legendary strength. Although her deed is considered a noble gesture to save her people, Delilah is traditionally listed in the category of evil females. As in the portrait of Circe, Sirani is creates a narrative using only one figure, a single gesture, and an emblematic object.

This potent visual shorthand may also derive from a culture deeply interested in emblems. Andrea Alciati's emblem book published in 1531 was immensely popular and translated into many languages. Alciati greatly influenced the Bolognese Achille Bocchi's version of an emblem book, the *Symbolicae Questiones.* The *Questiones was* published in Bologna in 1555 with illustrations from Giulio Bonasone's designs.[88] Agostino Carracci collaborated on the illustrations for the 1574 version, with which Fontana and Sirani would have been familiar. The emblem was a picture or image combined with a motto and/or epigrammatic text. By remembering the image, one could call forth the text or moral of the emblem. It is the image, however, that carried the potency to activate the memory to narrative recall.

Memory and recall are central to *emblemmata* following the revival of Roman mnemonic techniques in the Renaissance. These were based on the work of the Greek Simonides' from the 2nd century BC as practiced by Cicero. Cicero used memory techniques to perfect rhetorical form. As an orator, he used the idea of the domus, or

[88] Andrea Alciati, *A Book of Emblems*, transl. John Moffit (London: Mc Farland & Co., 2004).

house, as the container for images.[89] By visualizing oneself moving through the house, different paintings or images would recall different points of the argument and thus aid the memory in disciplined recall. In the example of the *House of the Tragic Poet* in Pompeii, wall paintings of scenes from Troy, such as the *Leave Taking of Briseis,* may have served a didactic purpose. In this way, as Bettina Bergman explains, images "reactivated the knowledge of ancient stories" and perhaps caused the viewer to ponder "contemporary moral questions" at the same time.[90] To those familiar with their classical stories as most visitors to the Roman patron's home would be in antiquity, images such as that of *Briseis* on the walls may have been moral exempla meant to rehearse the narrative. These *domus* memory techniques were revived in the Renaissance, notably by Giulio Camillo, who created a three-dimensional model of a theatre in 1550. This was based on the use of words and images which were located within an amphitheatre that enabled a single word or image to recall a complex idea.[91] This idea is suggested by Sirani's *Delilah* in which the single figure, presented with shears alone, would have been prompted contemporaries to recall the entire story and thus to contemplate the moral implications of the biblical story.

It is in this sense that Sirani manages to thwart visual conventions, whereby portraiture was the expected genre for female artists. Instead, she transforms the format into an allegorical mode that solicits the observer's interpretation of the work. We will see how this performance of identity--being both the model and the painter--constructs a

[89] Bettina Bergmann, "The Roman House as Memory Theater", *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 76, no. 2 (June, 1994), 225.
[90] Bergmann, "Roman House", 254.
[91] Giulio Camillo, L'Idea del Teatro e altri Scritti di Retorica (Torino: RES, 1990).

composite self that includes Christian saints and pagan goddesses. These artists use this composite identity to represent the noblewomen of Bologna as well.

Chapter 3

Christian saints and pagan goddesses: re-presenting the noblewomen of Bologna

Both Fontana and Sirani extended this practice of using portraits in allegorical images to other models. Fontana portrayed the Duchess of Mantua in the guise of a biblical heroine in an allegory of wisdom and Sirani transformed Anna Maria Ranuzzi, a Bolognese noblewoman, into Charity, a figure that the countess performs with her own children as virtues. In addition, following the precedent of Caterina de'Vigri, both Fontana and Sirani represented themselves (and others) as either saints or nuns where they embody the allegory of pious virtue. The representation of virtuous saints was so important to the culture of Counter Reformation Bologna that religious texts were written that specifically encouraged the creation of this kind of visual imagery. The visual evidence illustrates the complexity and plurality of female artistic identities, both lay and religious, and how they intersected with discourses of gender.

Courtly allegory: the ladies of Bologna

Fontana's painting *Queen Sheba visiting Solomon* has been said by Maria Teresa Cantaro to be a portrait of Eleanor of Gonzaga Duchess of Mantua, kneeling at the foot of Solomon's throne. Her husband Vincenzo is in the guise of Solomon, seated on Solomon's throne on the left hand side of the painting.[92] The Duke and Duchess were frequent visitors to Bologna during the artist's career. The different physiognomies of the women indicate they are portraits, probably of Bolognese noblewomen, who have become Queen Sheba's ladies in waiting.[93]

---

[92] Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana,* 191.
[93] Ibid.

Fontana's *Visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon* depicts the important visit to King Solomon of the Israelites by the pagan Queen of Sheba. Legend has it that she heard of his great knowledge and had come to test him with her questions (fig. 22). Queen Sheba was apparently satisfied and praised his wisdom by bringing rich gifts, such as the jewels carried by her maidens and servant that are depicted in the right foreground of the painting. These objects have been identified as contemporary Bolognese *zebellini*; the golden animal heads, encrusted with jewels, are attached to the pelts of martens. These decorated pelts, found in the inventories of wealthy families and often worn by Bolognese women in portraits, were used to attract fleas away from the wearer's body and may have served as fertility talismans.[94] Thus the curious use of *zebellini* for Sheba's gifts furthers the likelihood that these are portraits of contemporary women.

Although men are included in the portrait, the focus is on the female figures. The careful attention to details and skill in rendering rich surfaces such as the jewels and fabrics are the signature of Fontana's hand. The poet Tasso apparently dedicated one of his *dialoghi* to Duke Vincenzo Gonzaga's mother in which he compares virtuous women to the Queen of Sheba.[95] A component of naturalism is added in the figures of the servant, dwarf and the large dog, as well as the landscape. The dwarf and dog represent courtly accoutrements, recalling the lavish Mantovan court.[96] The landscape as seen through the window, hints at the hilly towns of Bologna and Mantova, instead of the land of the Israelites.

---

[94] Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana*, 129; see also Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 136.
[95] Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana,* 191. (Further evidence for the association may be the existence in the Gonzaga collection of an onyx vase, believed to be a reliquary from the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem).
[96] Ibid.

In this painting, the protagonist is also referring to an allegorical idea, a virtue. Thus the artist uses allegory in a multi-layered fashion, by bringing together history painting and personification. On one level, the artist represents a historical personage, and on the other, there is a reference to an allegory about good government. Solomon represents wisdom and thus the painting can be seen as an allegory of the wise ruler and his court, a witty quotation of portraiture and history painting. The Duke and Duchess of Mantua are displayed in roles that are similar to their real life situations as rulers, yet at the same time an embodiment of ideals. As such, these historiated portraits also served a didactic purpose.

Virtuous saints: Vigri and Paleotti

Perhaps influenced by de Vigri, Fontana created a painting of herself as an image of saintly virtue, yet, at the same time, courtly elegance. One of her final paintings before moving to Rome in 1604, the *Apparition of the Madonna and Child to the Five Saints,* was painted for the Church of San Michele in Bosco in 1601 and commissioned for the confessional of the Monaci Olevatani (fig. 23). According to Malvasia, it includes a self-portrait of the artist as Saint Barbara on the extreme left of the painting; indeed, she places her signature at the foot of the saint who is depicted with a likeness of her younger self.[97] Scholars have also suggested that the remaining four Saints--from left to right: Ursula, Catherine of Alexandria, Agnes and Margaret--with their individualized physiognomies, may be, once again, portraits of other Bolognese noblewomen.[98] Evidence for this comes from the status of the saints, each represented with her attributes,

[97] Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana*, 200.
[98] Ibid., 201.

who all come from a regal, wealthy, or noble bloodline, mostly from the third century A.D. The bodies of the saints themselves are represented as elegant elongated forms, recalling both an ethereal sacredness and courtly refinement.

The Madonna and Child and two angels, seen through the clouds holding the crowns and palms of martyrdom, are depicted in daring foreshortening. Indeed, the composition, especially in the arrangement of the Saints' gazes, is reminiscent of Raphael's *Ecstasy of St. Cecilia,* which was in Bologna by 1515 (fig. 24).[99] In the latter, Raphael arranged the four saints around St. Cecilia in a semi-circle. St. Peter and St. John are on her left, and on her right are St. Augustine and the Magdalen, who is turning towards the viewer to invite her or him into the painting. Fontana, by contrast, presents an entirely female cast of saints in this *sacra conversazione* and includes her own self-portrait, as well as that of other Bolognese noblewomen. Interestingly, Fontana takes the active position of the interlocutor, mirroring the Magdalen, by looking out at the viewer and inviting communication. Thus Fontana appropriates this famous model of religious painting--it would be difficult to exaggerate the impact of Raphael's painting when it arrived in Bologna--yet she transforms the representation into something else. Fontana quotes the work by combining Raphael's composition with portraits of contemporary women and she challenges the boundaries of genres. The faithful women are given an active role in the narrative, a performance of identity that goes beyond conventional donor portraits. In light of Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti's directions for only using virtuous models to represent saints, the conclusion is obvious: these noblewomen were thus made into a construction of virtue.

---

[99] Ibid.

The tradition of learned religious women and active works of faith may have encouraged increased intellectual expression for the women of Bologna. Caterina dei Vigri, for example, became the patron saint of artists in the city. As such, she would have been a probable role model for other young and talented women in Bologna, including Fontana and Sirani. Certainly both artists portrayed themselves as saints--Fontana as the aforementioned Saint Barbara, and Sirani as a Poor Clare nun--thus visually associating themselves with this local tradition and recalling the common male topos of the artist as scholar.

Pagan identities

One final example of Fontana's experimentation with the allegorical portrait is a *Venus and Cupid* in which Isabella Ruini, another Bolognese noblewoman, is used as a model for the pagan beauty (fig. 25).[100] The goddess of love is shown in a bust length portrait, with a smiling and mischievous cupid by the side of her face. Venus is dressed in a diaphanous white cloth that barely covers her milky white skin and exposes her breasts to the viewer's gaze. She is holding cupid's bows, perhaps symbolically disarming him. Her hair is upswept and decorated with jewels; the hairstyle and clothing are similar to that of a full-length painting of *Venus and Cupid* by Fontana in which Venus takes cupid by the hand (fig. 26). The full-length version may have inspired the portrait.

The physiognomy of Venus recalls Fontana's well known *Portrait of Isabella Ruini*, a bust-length image of the Ruini dressed in rich clothing and seated (fig. 27). Her hair is once again upswept and decorated with jewels, yet her clothing is dark and somber in color, appropriate attire for a wife and noblewoman as Castiglione writes in *The*

[100] Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana,* 163.

Courtier. We also have portrait medals of Ruini, which may have been a response to the demand for images of this woman, described at times as one of the "emblems" of the city.[101]

Was this a request of her patron, or was there other motivation for the choice of an allegorical portrait of a recognizable noblewoman in the guise of a rather erotic subject such as Venus and Cupid? The exact identity of the patron is unknown, but according to Caroline Murphy, it is assumed to be either Isabella herself or her husband, Giovanni Angelleli, as any other patron would have implied a scandalous undertaking for Fontana. To request a portrait of a nobleman's wife in the guise of a semi-naked pagan goddess of love would have caused quite a stir. However, it would be conceivable that her husband might wish her to be portrayed as the goddess of beauty. More importantly, it would be consistent with primary sources which describe Isabella as a remarkably beautiful woman, even compared to the sun itself in the poetry of her day.[102] It would be quite unusual to depict a noblewoman in such an openly erotic pose, were it not specified by her husband, although Fontana may even have used Venetian paintings of courtesans as a model for the body of Venus.[103] There must have been a demand for this type of portrait despite the religious climate at the time.

It is significant that this painting is obviously not in keeping with the strict moral code of Counter Reformation Bologna established by Paleotti. The Cardinal urged that images of pagan gods be kept only for scholarly purposes; they could be justified only if

---

[101] Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana,* 104.
[102] Ibid., 98-104.
[103] Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana,* 163. In addition, Cantaro has also remarked upon a similarity between this painting and the Fontainebleau school.

they demonstrated some virtuous qualities.[104] Murphy points out that in Fontana's full-length version of *Venus and Cupid*, one could conceivably interpret a cautionary message since Venus has taken away cupid's bow, and cupid in turn is covering up Venus' pudenda. In addition, the sling with gemstones that she wears could be seen as the sling of the goddess Diana the huntress, adding a further dimension to her persona as a chaste heroine. Diana has been traditionally endowed with chaste and virginal qualities. She could also be associated with a maternal figure, in this case, the mother of cupid,[105] which would soften the openly erotic suggestion of Venus and her exposed body.

Of note here is the recognizable identity of the sitter. We know that Ludovico Carracci disapproved of the use of recognizable physiognomies in history painting, and he therefore would have been unlikely to approve of the use of one of Bologna's prominent noblewomen as a model for a pagan goddess. That an artist such as Fontana, normally in perfect consonance with Paleotti's guidelines, would produce such an allegorical identity for Isabella indicates the duality of such images and suggests they were meant to be read beneath the surface.

Sirani also creates portraits that are both personifications of virtues and representations of Bolognese noblewomen. These portraits demonstrate the artist's iconographical knowledge from both ancient and Renaissance texts, and thus imply her status as a learned scholar. For example, her painting of *Anna Maria Ranuzzi as Charity*, commissioned by Conte Ranuzzi, illustrates the conceit of a contemporary woman embodying an allegorical figure (fig. 28).[106] The painting closely follows Ripa's iconography of charity as a woman with three children, one each in her arms and at her

[104] Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, 102.
[105] Ibid., 98-104.
[106] Malvasia, *Felsina,* II, 400.

breast, and two others at her feet with one of the two behind her.[107] The colors are dark with warm flesh tones and the artist displays the intricate details of the luxurious fabric in Charity's sleeve. Its lighter color contrast and elaborate design draw attention to the child in her clasped arms. The light is focused on the portrait of Ranuzzi's face, with fields of dramatic shadow between the other figures.

Sirani omits the divine flame that Ripa describes behind the head of Charity, since this element would have been difficult to integrate with a portrait. The children represent the multiplying of Charity's virtues, as explained in the *Iconologia.* Ranuzzi had several children of her own, and the figures are indeed dressed in contemporary costume, furthering the evidence that they are portraits of her children. Sirani thus employs this version of charity so that she could have the additional figures, adapting the allegory to suit her patron's needs.[108] In this way the children are represented as the embodiment of the Graces of God, a statement that would have had, as Sirani well knew, particular meaning for their mother, Ranuzzi. The gesture of offering fruit to the smallest child in her arms may be a reference to the religious imagery of Christ symbolically accepting his sacrifice for humanity. These religious echoes would fit perfectly with the spirit of charity for a Counter Reformation audience.

Was the allegorical representation the choice of the artist or patron? In her list of paintings, Sirani writes: "Una Carita, *per la quale ho voluto ritarre la stessa sig.* Anna Maria Ranuzzi Marsigli, come bellissima Dama, e similmente I suoi bambini, Silvio e Francesco Maria, il terzo facendolo di capriccio, e questo per l' Illustriss. Sig. Co. Annibale Ranuzzi, fratello della detta signora" (a Charity for which I wanted to portray

[107] Cesare Ripa, *Iconologi,* (Padova, 1611), 72.
[108] For example, in Giotto's version of Charity in the Arena Chapel in Padova, the graces are in her basket of food and the heart that she gives and receives from the Lord.

the Countess Anna Maria Ranuzzi herself, as a beautiful Lady and similarly her children).[109] Therefore it seems that it was Sirani's own choice to depict Ranuzzi as Charity, her own *ingegno* to have the sitter embody this virtue.

In the final chapter, I explore how Sirani's other allegorical portraits push the boundaries of the textual (allegory as word) and figural (artist/subject's visual embodiment of the allegory in a self-portrait) leading to the artist becoming the allegory of painting itself.

[109] Malvasia, *Felsina*, II, 400.

Chapter 4

The boundaries of the body: the allegory of (history) painting and the personification of narrative

Throughout this thesis I have been tracing the development of the historiated portrait as its own hybrid genre. This chapter focuses on Sirani to explore how the artist negotiated the complex relationship of subject and object between the layers of allegory. Allegorical portraiture becomes a visual language, a way of blurring the distinction between model, maker and image. Examples of this include Justice from the Medici virtues, and the allegories of music and painting. Allegory's Greek roots imply its public aspect, as it derives from the word for public speech. The public aspect would have been crucial for Sirani, as most of her works are meant to perform a public narrative in the form of a portrait.[110] Sirani uses allegory as the element of historical narrative within portraiture.

Narratives of virtue

Sirani's *Allegory of Charity, Justice and Prudence* constructs an image of the allegories as three elegant women whose rich costumes recall the status of Bolognese noblewomen and associate them with the idea of civic justice (fig. 29).[111] The figure of Justice is in the center, Charity on the left and Prudence on the right. The composition is dramatic, with the figure of Justice at center stage and the viewer is drawn quickly to the upraised sword of Justice. The folds of rich fabric move across the canvas and the heads of the figures on either side engage in some form of communication with each other, as

[110] Fletcher, *Allegory,* 16-17

[111] Despite the city's sumptuary laws, most noblewomen dressed in fine silks and displayed many of the family jewels.

Justice looks defiantly out beyond the frame. Indeed, Justice, a self-portrait of Sirani, is the focus of the painting. The painting is signed by the artist on the buttons of Justice's bodice.[112]

The *Allegory of Charity, Justice and Prudence* was done on commission for Leopold Medici. The purpose of the virtues was to convey good government for the house of Medici: in other words, the use of allegory as human reconstruction of a "divinely inspired message."[113] John Huizinga explains this idea: "Having attributed a real existence to an idea, the mind wants to see this idea alive and it can only affect this by personification, the giving of a visible form to the conception of such a connection".[114] Although Ripa presents several versions of Justice, Sirani chose to represent the version, called Divine Justice.[115]

The first version in Ripa, which Sirani does not employ, displays no sword or scales, but a necklace with the pendant of an all-seeing eye on it.[116] The eye pendant may have seemed a reference to pagan justice and superstition, and thus less appropriate for her patron's purposes. Divine Justice, however, according to Ripa, has an "unsheathed sword" in one hand and scales in the other, whereas *Giustizia Retta* (Correct Justice) has a sword *"alta"* (high). Both Divina and Retta have the scales of justice in the other hand, and are crowned. The former also has a dove above her head as the Holy Spirit, and the latter has a dog and snake to symbolize friendship and hate. Although Sirani chooses Divine justice, she eliminates the dove because it would be inappropriate in a portrait.

---

[112] Bohn, "Drawing Practices", 222.
[113] Fletcher, *Allegory,* 21
[114] Ibid.
[115] Vasari had painted a version of Justice in the usual manner of male artists: with exposed breasts (a manner followed also by Luca Giordano), however Giotto's versions seem to share some characteristics with Sirani's. Giotto's figure is also not wearing the all-seeing eye pendant, and is covered by a regal robe.
[116] Ripa, *Iconologia*, 201.

The color of Justice's costume is specified as gold. Instead, Sirani uses red, which recalls the bridal color in Bologna, and relates the allegory to Bolognese noblewomen as in portraiture. Both versions would have had specific meaning for a good ruler: the sword of Retta must not be swayed by either friends or enemies. Divine Justice, as Ripa states, also has "loose locks of hair with eyes looking down towards the world as she is above all else."[117] She is to be of *"singolare bellezza," to* represent the beauty of the divine, with loosened locks of her hair symbolizing the graces from the goodness of the heavens. The scales represent God's severe judgment of man, based on merit and the sword represents the fact that the life of man can be given or taken by God, lived with honor or without.

The figure of Prudence also contains elements from Ripa that are reworked by Sirani.[118] Prudence is traditionally shown with a mirror wearing a helmet with a garland of blackberry leaves, and having two faces as in Ripa's illustration. The motif of the two faces represents a true understanding of oneself through knowledge of the past and future. The helmet represents the *ingegno* to be able to defend oneself, and the blackberry leaves are a reminder to avoid haste since they are not to be picked before their time. Other usual accompaniments for Prudence include an arrow around which is wound a snake, and a stag. The snake represents the combat against misfortune, since it is an animal that uses its whole body to defend itself when attacked, and the stag represents caution. Perhaps again, in the interest of personification, Sirani's version retains only the mirror to which Prudence emphatically gestures with her hand, leaning on a book. The mirror represents the knowledge of one's defects, without which one cannot avoid misfortune.

---

[117] Ibid.
[118] Ripa, *Iconologia,* 442.

There is also a religious significance to the image in Ripa, in that Christ displays prudence and so must we in order to reach happiness.

Charity remains closest to Ripa's version. As already discussed, in reference to Ranuzzi's portrait as Charity, Sirani substitutes the three children for physical embodiments of the graces. The older child in front is seen reaching up to the mother. Charity's virtues are not represented as something ethereal, floating away on a cloud, as seen, for instance, in Luca Giordano's version of the theme. In the tradition of Bolognese naturalism, Sirani's virtues in the Medici painting are solid female figures, the fleshy incarnation of her lofty ideas.

Another important detail is that the virtues communicate with one another. Prudence does not look into the mirror, an act that could also be interpreted as a sign of female vanity, but only points to it as she leans on the book and looks out at Justice and Charity as if to emphasize the pedagogical and active aspect of her title. Her glance is returned by Charity, and only Justice looks beyond the canvas, in this case confirming her role as the predominant virtue.

The arrangement is significant in that Sirani depicted one each of the three cardinal virtues, one of the three theological virtues, and then Justice as the supreme virtue in between. In this fashion her painting incorporates a complete repertoire of the three most important virtues for her patron, assuring him of all that was needed for a good ruler. Her erudition in matters of iconography would not have been lost in the political and religious climate of the period, especially to her powerful patron, Leopold de Medici. Allegory was always at the service of a ruler (as well as the artist) and his or her needs for the construction and display of status.

The body of painting

Together with the allegory of music, the *allegory of painting* is another example of the female re-appropriation of the male image of idealized artist or poetic genius. The allegory of painting harkens back to images of St. Luke painting the Madonna as a type of iconic artistic identity with which the artist as creator could identify himself/herself. As St. Luke painting the Madonna may be considered the first artist, his painting is the first self-portrait.

Sirani's self presentation as the *Allegory of Music* transforms the artist into the guise of another art form. There are two versions of this painting, both dated to around 1659. In the first in order to emphasize performance, the artist includes not only the instruments but also an open mouth in the gesture of singing to create a visual transcription of music, practice and theory (fig. 30). We see both aspects of music: the sheet music standing in for the textual, and the open mouth to emphasize the practice of singing. This is parallel to the debate in the Renaissance regarding which was more important to an artist's formation, practice or theory.

In the second version the figure is also a three-quarter length portrait, but here, moonlight floods the room from an open window with a mysterious night sky (fig. 31). The muted browns and dark blues of her costume contrast with her ivory white skin, underlining the nocturnal mood of the scene. She holds a sheet of music, which is on the verge of slipping casually from her hands as she gazes provocatively towards the viewer. The association with the allegory is not causal, as Malvasia reports that Sirani was quite a talented performer.

As in Sirani's other allegories, the visual details largely concur with Ripa's descriptions, which suggest a figure holding the lyre of Apollo and sheets of music.[119] Other descriptions in the same treatise suggest elements such as a cicada, a symbol of song, or a bird above her head, and a viola da gamba. Ripa writes that music is repose for a tortured soul, a theme which resonates with this painting, as the color scheme and expressive details imply a melancholic tone in need of soothing harmonies. The moon has long been a symbol of melancholy and Sirani may be suggesting an identification between melancholy and creative talent for the female artist, since the night sky and moonlight are her own additions to the allegory.

Allegory of Painting

There have been many versions of the allegory of painting by Renaissance and early modern artists, but Sirani includes specific visual details which serve as evidence for a particular conception of artistic identity. Sirani's *Allegory of Painting* can be seen as a complete embodiment of painting as she is shown wearing the laurel crown of the poet with a classical statue in the background (fig. 32). This female statue may be Minerva, alluding to her meaning as patron of the arts. *Pittura* is also surrounded by the other attributes of her vocation including symbols of theory and practice as well as *disegno* and poetry.

Mary Garrard writes that, as opposed to a male artist who could never visually embody a female allegory, Artemisia Gentileschi made the leap to the embodiment of allegory as only a woman artist can in her 1630 version of the *Allegory of Painting* by

[119] Ripa, *Iconologia,* 366.

turning it into a self-portrait (fig. 33).[120] Garrard further states that Gentileschi's version includes a union of theory and practice, the combination of manual work and intellectual activity. However, the visual evidence communicates a work that is imbued with the sense of painting as craft. Although Gentileschi's version wears the pendant of *imitatio* around her neck, Sirani's allegory invokes Horace's sacred lines for the artist, *ut pictura poesis,* or painting as silent poetry, by wearing the poet's laurel. Here the painter is not merely a clever craftswoman, but a genius poet, a classical scholar, and an intellectual as indicated by the books on the table at her side. This painting is a direct expression of the seventeenth-century artist's ingegno through her use of visual imagery to manifest an idea of the artist as creator and poet.

Plato's concept of the feminine chora, or the female element as receptacle, comes into play in relation to the allegory of painting. The Renaissance idea of form is as the male element, whereas matter is considered female. A personification such as the allegory of painting however, contains both matter and form. According to these theories, a receptacle (female) may contain the allegory, but the idea would be male. I posit that in Sirani's version of the Allegory of Painting, the artist becomes the paint and canvas, as well as the idea of painting in the form of the artist poet. This embodiment of an idea was predominant in Sirani's work, coming out of a century with a characteristic penchant for emblems,[121] Looking back to Fontana's *Self-Portrait in the Studiolo*, Sirani has managed to combine self-portraiture together with the image of artist as creative scholar and Vasari's *Allegory of Painting*. In his version of the allegory, Vasari depicts a female

[120] Garrard, "Allegory of Painting ", 97.
[121] Praz, *Seventeenth Century Imagery (*Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1975), 15.

allegorical figure seated at an easel with a paintbrush in hand. However, this image can never be a self-portrait for the male artist forced to use a female model for the allegory.

A precedent for Sirani's image may have been Fontana's portrait as the allegory of painting that appeared on a medal in 1611. Antonio Casoni produced a medal in Fontana's honor that associates her with the allegory of painting. Felice engraved the medal which bears Fontana's likeness on the obverse, and the allegory of *pittura* on the reverse (fig. 34). *Pittura* is shown seated at the easel with highly arched eyebrows, hair flying wildly and mouth gagged in silence with a sash as described by Ripa. Representing silent poetry, Pittura's inscription in Ripa states: "For you, in joyous state I am maintained."[122] This medal symbolizes the culmination of Fontana's complex artistic identity in visual form, both private and public, and far from silent. Through the circulation of the medal, the female artist's status becomes disseminated. It is this public status which became a part of the female artist's legacy regarding identity.

[122] Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana,* 19, see also Garrard, *The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 356.

Conclusion

The historiated portrait thus becomes a mode of agency and an artistic strategy in the female artist's struggle for status. I posit that male artists encase themselves in the passive form, or object, with the female artists taking on the active role of subject. Although the female form was traditionally used for allegorical representations because it was understood as a type of empty vessel that could be filled with meaning, Fontana and Sirani use allegory to create a hybrid genre.

Deconstructing the problem of the gender of allegory, Barbara Johnson refers to a painting by Joshua Reynolds, the *Allegory of Theory,* embodied by an unknown female figure.[123] Johnson shows how the personification of the idea as a woman goes beyond the linguistic gendering of theory (*la teoria*). As Garrard notes in her article on Artemisia's *Allegory of Painting*, male experiments in combining allegory with self-portraiture resulted in images such as the Bolognese artist Cerrini's version. The artist depicts a female allegorical figure holding up a small canvas containing a self-portrait of the artist. This example introduces the dichotomy between male form and female matter, or the male imprint of the divine idea on female matter.

Judith Butler discusses the division between form and matter evident in Plato. The feminine is seen as an "inscriptional space, a repository, or hypodoche".[124] Irigarary writes that the feminine is historically outside of a form and matter binary, a "non-thing receiving the marks of a masculine signifying act, to give back a reflection of herself". In the cosmogony of *Timaeus* Plato argues that there are three natures, the process of generating, that in which the generation takes place, and the product of that generation

[123] Barbara Johnson, *The Wake of Deconstruction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1994), 59.
[124] Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter, Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 38.

(likened to father, mother and child). One of the three is a receiving principle (the second) which "receives all things... but never... assumes a form of any of the things which enter into *her*".[125]

Plato's concept of the feminine chora, or the female element as receptacle, comes into play in relation to the allegory of painting. The Renaissance idea of form (which continues into the seventeenth century) is as the male element, whereas matter is considered female. A personification such as the allegory of painting however, contains both matter and form. According to these theories, a receptacle (female) may contain the allegory, but the idea would be male. I posit that in Sirani's version of the *Allegory of Painting*, the artist becomes the paint and canvas, as well as the idea of painting in the form of the artist poet. This embodiment of an idea was predominant in Sirani's work, coming out of a century with a characteristic penchant for emblems.[126] Looking back to Fontana's *Self-Portrait in the Studiolo*, Sirani has managed to combine self-portraiture together with the image of artist as creative scholar and Vasari's *Allegory of Painting*. In his version of the allegory, Vasari depicts a female allegorical figure seated at an easel with a paintbrush in hand. However, this image can never be a self-portrait for the male artist forced to use a female model for the allegory.

The dis-embodied male

The male self-portrait often resembles what Berger calls the male anxiety-homo clausus or a dismembering of the male corporal self. Male artists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries represent themselves as partial or even disembodied figures outside

[125] Butler, *Bodies*, 40.
[126] Praz, *Seventeenth Century Imagery* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1975), 15.

of corporal experience. For example, in one of the most dramatic statements in the history of male artistic identity, Michelangelo depicted his deformed facial features in the flayed skin of Bartholomew in the Sistine Chapel's *Last Judgment* (fig. 36). Later examples include Caravaggio's *David and Goliath* and Annibale Carracci's *Self-Portrait with an Easel.* These paintings present the artists' likenesses in a synecdochal relationship with the self: as a severed head and a bust on an inanimate canvas (figs. 37-38).

Michelangelo's self-portrait as the flayed skin of St. Bartholemew, is a masochistic vision of violence and punishment. The saint is shown holding his own dead skin, as if it were merely a piece of clothing. This self-portrait is part of the *Last Judgement* where the artist chose to represent himself as a flayed skin, reminiscent of the myth of Marsyas. The faun Marsyas decides to challenge the god Apollo to a contest of the pan pipes and Apollo has him flayed alive due to his arrogance in daring to challenge the gods. The artist has placed himself in a symbol of mortality, an empty shell of skin as Michelangelo at times referred to mankind in his poetry. The artist has objectified himself in a historiated self portrait, instead of becoming the subject of his representation.

Caravagggio's enigmatic self-portrait in his painting of *David and Goliath* has been much commented upon. The young David is shown triumphantly holding the severed head of the brutish Goliath. The artist chose to represent himself as the severed head of Goliath, as opposed to David. This choice mirrors the relationship between Judith and Salome, the artist this time choosing the symbol of the defeated evil, and what is more important, a severed part. Does this speak to the isolation of the artist? Again, be it a severed head or a canvas, we have a dis-embodied relationship of part standing in for

the whole. Far from an empowering stance, it is the symbol of the vanquished, and an allegory of defeat.

Carracci's *Self-Portrait with an Easel* from the Hermitage displays a sense of detachment from the world and isolation. Annibale represents himself as a canvas within a canvas, perhaps a copy of one of his earlier self-portraits, as he seems much younger than the dating of the canvas would suggest (it was painted shortly after his brother Agostino's death in 1602). The colors are dark and gloomy, with a window showing the only bit of light in the painting except for a patch of light falling on Annibale's face. His eyes look directly out at the viewer with a melancholy gaze. A palette of colors is hanging lifelessly from the corner of the easel. This self-portrait may be an unconventional comment on the allegory of painting. Annibale represents himself as composed solely of paint and canvas, the material of his trade, without presenting a corporal self.

The mysterious half figure by the window may be a sculpture, leading to a possible comment on the paragone between sculpture and painting. Donald Posner has called it a herm, whereas some scholars have suggested it may be Terminus, the Roman deity representing boundaries, such as those between the beginning and end of life, thus also associating the painting with death.[127] In this case, the portrait also functions as a memento mori.

The easel acts as a metonym for the body of the artist, and the painted canvas is in a synechdochal relationship to it, representing the head or seat of his *ingegno,* while the palette of paint stands in for his heart. This may have come naturally for Annibale since

[127] Joanna Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture; the Visual Construction of Identity and the Social Status of the Artist.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 250.

Malvasia writes of the artist's love of visual riddles, and how with just a few lines Annibale could represent so much more.[128] A strong diagonal from the upper left draws the viewer through the canvas to the palette on the lower right. The artist has encapsulated the allegory of painting into the form of a canvas.[129]

Instead of passive body parts, the female artists have presented an active image of self. Fontana and Sirani have chosen to be the subjects, engaged in performing instead of being the object of another's performance. Strangely, the male artists have depicted themselves as the objects of violence, not as the subjects narrating (see also figs. 14-15). Annibale's represents himself as a canvas, isolated from his own bodily experience, as opposed to the image of Fontana grasping the severed head of Holofernes and Sirani raising the sword of Justice.

Drawing on these theories, I would posit that Fontana and Sirani assume both a form and embody an idea simultaneously, the feminine reproducing herself, not the other. The two artists enter historical characters, in the words of Butler, "redeploying the paternal language of allegory", inhabiting idea and transcending the feminine receptacle theory. The image of dismemberment remains for the male as object. Women artists on the other hand, explore the boundaries of their bodies and the logic of identity through personification and allegory, resulting in the artist as embodiment of history painting.

---

[128] Malvasia, *Felsina,* I, 335.

[129] There also exists an interesting preparatory drawing for this self-portrait, with some elements later modified for the final painting. For example in the space of the window there is a circular object with another figure in it that seems to be another portrait. This object may have been intended as a mirror, where the mirror refers to the art of self-representation itself.

Lavinia Fontana
Self-Portrait in the Studiolo
1579
(Uffizi, Florence)

fig. 1

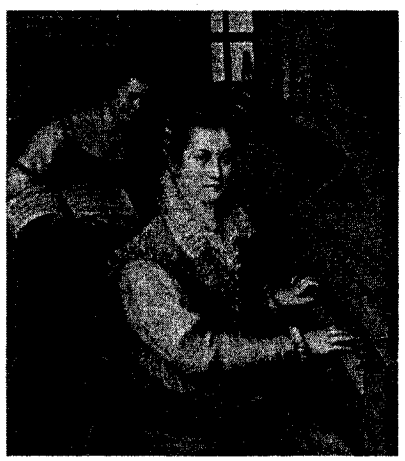
Elisabetta Sirani
Allegory of Painting
1658
(Rushkin Museum, Moscow)
fig. 2

Giorgio Vasari
Allegory of Painting
1542
(Stanza della Fama,Casa Vasari, Arezzo)
fig. 3

Sofonisba Anguissola
Bernardo Campi Painting Sofonisba Anguissola
1559
(Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena)
fig. 4

Lavinia Fontana
Vision of Saint Hyacinth
1599
(Church of Santa Sabina, Rome)
fig. 5

Lavinia Fontana
Self-Portrait at the Keyboard with Maidservant
1577
(Academy of San Luca, Rome)
fig. 6



Lavinia Fontana
Judith with the Head of Holofernes
1600
(Museo Davia Bargellini, Bologna)
fig. 7

Elisabetta Sirani
Cleopatra
1663
(Private collection)
fig. 8

Elisabetta Sirani
Delilah
1657
(Private Collection)
fig. 9

Lavinia Fontana
Judith with the Head of Holofernes
1600
(Museo Davia Bargellini, Bologna)

Artemisia Gentileschi
Judith and Her Maidservant
1613-14
(Palazzo Pitti, Florence)
Fig. 10

Lucas Cranach
Salome
1530
(Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest)
fig. 11

Lucas Cranach
Judith with the Head of Holofernes
1530
(Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna)
fig. 12

Elisabetta Sirani
Judith with the Head of Holofernes
1658
(Burghley House, UK)
fig. 13

Agostino Carracci
Judith with the Head of Holofernes
(Portrait of Olimpia Luna)
1590's
(Mathieson Fine Art, London)
fig. 14

Alessandro Allori
Judith with the Head of Holofernes
fig. 15

Elisabetta Sirani
Cleopatra
1663
Private Collection
fig. 16

Jacob Jordaens
Cleopatra
1653
(Hermitage Museum, St.Petersburg)
fig. 17

Guido Reni
Cleopatra
1635-40
(Palazzo Pitti, Florence)
fig. 18

Lavinia Fontana
Cleopatra
1662-3
(Galleria Spada, Rome)
fig. 19

Elisabetta Sirani
Circe
1657
(Bologna)
fig. 20

Elisabetta Sirani
Delilah
1657
(Private Collection)
fig. 21

Lavinia Fontana
Visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon
1600
(National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin)
fig. 22

Lavinia Fontana
Apparition of the Madonna and Child to the Five Saints
1601
(Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna)
fig.23

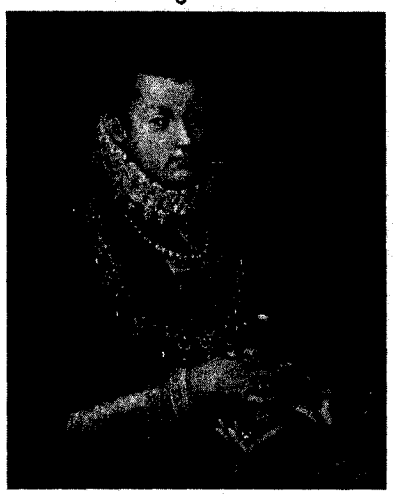
Raphael
Ecstasy of Saint Cecilia
1513
(Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna)
fig.24

Lavinia Fontana
Venus and Cupid
1592
Musee des Beaux Arts, Rouen
fig. 25

Lavinia Fontana
Venus and Cupid
1585
Venice, Private Collection

fig. 26

Lavinia Fontana
Portrait of Isabella Ruini
1593
Palazzo Pitti, Florence
fig. 27



Lavinia Fontana
Minerva
1613
(Galleria Borghese, Rome)
fig. 28

Elisabetta Sirani
Anna Ranuzzi as Charity
1665
(Private Collection)
fig. 29

Elisabetta Sirani
Justice, Prudence, and Charity
1664
(Comune di Vignola, Modena)
fig. 30

Elisabetta Sirani
Allegory of Music
1659
(Private Collection)
fig. 31

Elisabetta Sirani
Allegory of Music
1659
Private Collection
fig. 32

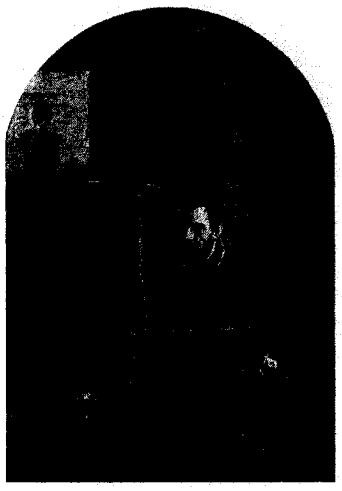
Elisabetta Sirani
Allegory of Painting
1658
(Rushkin Museum, Moscow)
fig. 33

Artemisia Gentileschi
Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting
1630
(Kensington Palace, London)
fig. 34

Felice Casoni
Medal of Lavinia Fontana
1611
(Pinacoteca Civica, Imola)
fig. 35

Michelangelo's Self Portrait as the flayed skin of St. Bartholomew
Last Judgement, Sistine Chapel, Rome
1535-41
fig. 36

Annibale Carracci
Self-Portrait
1604
(The Hermitage, St. Petersburg)
fig. 38



Caravaggio
David with the Head of Goliath
1605-10
(Galleria Borghese, Rome)
fig. 37

Artemisia Gentileschi
Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting
1630
(Kensington Palace, London)
fig. 39

Elisabetta Sirani
Allegory of Painting
1658
(Rushkin Museum, Moscow)
fig. 40

Bibliography

Alberti, Leon Battista .*De Pittura.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966.

Andrea Alciati, *A Book of Emblems.* Transl. John Moffit. London: Mc Farland & Co., 2004.

Baglione, Giovanni. *Le Vite de'Pittori, Sculturi, et Architetti dal Pontificato de Gregorio XIII del 1572 in sino ai Tempi di Papa Urbano ottavo nel 1642.* Citta del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1995.

Bentini, Jadranka, ed. *Elisabetta Sirani: "Pittrice Eroina", 1638-1665.* Bologna: Editrice Compositori, 2004.

Berger, Harry Jr. *Fictions of the Pose.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.

Bergmann, Bettina. "The Roman House as Memory Theater: the House of the Tragic Poet", *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 76, No. 2 (June, 1994) 225-50.

Bocchi, Paola. *Trattati del Cinquecento, fra Manierismo e Controriforma.* Bari: Laterza, 1960 Vol. III.

Bohn, Babette. "Female Self Portraiture in Early Modern Bologna". *Renaissance Studies* vol.18, issue 2 (June 2004): 239- 266.

"The Antique heroes of Elisabetta Sirani". *Renaissance Studies* vol. 16, number 1 (2002): 52-79.

"Elisabetta Sirani and Drawing Practices in Early Modern Bologna". *Master Drawings* vol. 42, number 3 (2004): 207-236.

Broude, Norma and Mary Garrard. *The Expanding Discourse.* New York: Harper Collins, 1992.

Bullfinch, Thomas. *Bullfinch's Greek and Roman Mythology.* New York: Dover Editions: 2000.

Burke, Peter. *The Historical Anthropology of Early Modern Italy.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

"The Invention of Leisure inEarly Modern Europe". *Past and Present* 146 (1995): 136-150.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex.* New York: Routledge, 1993.

"Performative Acts and Gender Constitution. An essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory". *Performing Feminisms.* Ed. Ellen Case. Baltimore:John Hopkins Press, 1990.

Cantaro, Maria Teresa. *Lavinia Fontana Bolognese, "Pittora Singolare", 1552-1614.* Milano: Jandi Sapi Editori, 1989.

Camillo, Giulio. *L'Idea del teatro e altri scritti di Retorica.* Torino: RES, 1990.

Chadwick, Whitney. *Women, Art, and Society.* London: Thames and Hudson, 1990.

Ciletti, Elena. "Patriarchal Ideology in the Renaissance Iconography of Judith" *Refiguring Woman: Perspectives on Gender and the Italian Renaissance.* Ed. Juliana Schiesari and Marilyn Miguel. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991. 35-70.

Cohen, Elisabeth. "The Trials of Artemisia Gentileschi: a Rape as History". *Sixteenth Century Journal* Vol. 31 (Spring: 2000).

Corsiglia, Christina. *Rubens and His Age: Treasures from the Hermitage Museum Russia.* Toronto:AGO, 2001.

Duro, Paul. *The Academy and the Limits of Painting in Seventeenth Century France.* Cambridge: Cambrdige University Press, 1953.

Fletcher, Angus. *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode.* Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1964.

Eisenbichler, Konrad. "Charles V in Bologna: the Self- Fashioning of a Man and City". *Renaissance Studies* Vol. 13, No. 4 (Dec. 1999) 389-96.

Fortunati, Vera. *Lavinia Fontana of Bologna: 1552-1614.* Milan: Electa, 1977.

Frisoni, Fiorella. "La Vera Sirani". *Paragone* Firenze, Vol. 335 (Jan. 1978):1-18.

Frugoni, Chiara. "Female Mystics, Visions and Iconography". *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy. Ed. Daniel Bornstein.* Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996.

Garrard, Mary. Artemisia Gentileschi's Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting". *The Art Bulletin* 62:1 (1980): 97-112.

Artemisia Gentileschi, the Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.

Atremisia Gentileschi Around 1622, the Shaping and Reshaping of Artisitic Identity. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

Graziani, Irene. "L'Icona della Monaca Artista e le Fonti Storiografiche sul suo Breviario". *Pregare con l'Imagine: il Brevario di Caterina Vigri.* Ed. Vera Fortunati. Firenze: Sismel.

Jacobs, Fredrika. *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Johnson, Barbara. *The Wake of Deconstruction.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1994.

Maclean, Ian. *The Renaissance Notion of Woman.* Cambridge: Cambridge Univesity Press, 1980.

Malvasia, Conte Carlo Cesare. *Felsina Pittrice: Vite de'Pittori Bolognesi, 1678.* Ed. Giampietro Zanotti. Bologna: Tip. Guidi dell'Ancora, 1841.

Minghetti, Marco. *Le Donne Italiane nelle Belle Arte al Secolo XV e XVI.* Firenze: Nuova Antologia, Giugno, 1877.

Modesti, Adelina. "The Making of a Cultural Heroine: Elisabetta Sirani 'Pittrice Cellebrisima' di Bologna (1638-1665)". *Per l'Arte da Venezia all'Europa; Studi in onore di Giuseppe Maria Pilo* Monfalcone, Gorizia: Edizioni della Laguna (2001) 399-404.

Murphy, Caroline P. *Lavina Fontana: A Painter and her Patrons in Sixteenth-century Bologna.* New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2003

"In Praise of the Ladies of Bologna: the Image and Identity of the Sixteenth Century Patriciate in Bologna". *Renaissance Studies* Vol. 13, No. 4 (Dec. 1999) 440-454.

Mussacchio, Jacqueline Marie. *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.

Pevsner, Nikolaus. *Art Academies.* New York: Di Capo Press, 1973.

Pozzi, Giovanni. "Occhi bassi", *Thematologie des Kleinen, Petits Themes Litteraires,* Freiburg, Editiones Universitaries Fribourg Suisse, 1986.

Praz, Mario. *Studies in 17th Century Imagery.* Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1975.

Ragg, Laura. *The Women Artists of Bologna.* London: Methuene & Co., 1907.

Ripa, Cesare. *Iconologia (edizione Padua 1611).* New York: Garland Publishing, 1976.

Sohm, Philip. "Gendered Style in Italian Art Criticism from Michelangelo to Malvasia." *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 48, Iss. 4, (Winter 1995): 759-794.

Style in the Art Theory of Early Modern Italy. Cambrdige: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Spear, Richard E. *The "Divine" Guido: Religion, Sex, Money and Art in the World of Guido Reni.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

From Caravaggio to Atremisia: *Essays on Painting in Seventeenth Century France and Italy.* London:Pindar Press, 2002.

Steinberg, Leo. *The Last Paintings.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1975.

Summer, David. "Form and Gender". *New Literary History* Vol. 24, No. 2 (Spring 1993) 243-271.

Vasari, Giorgio. *Lives of the Painters, Sculptors, and Architects, Vols. 1-2.* New York: Alfred Knopf, 1927.

Vauchez, Andre. "Santa caterina Vigri 1413-1463 e il suo Processo di Canonizzazione". *Pregare con l'Imagine: il Brevario di Caterina Vigri.* Ed. Vera Fortunati. Firenze: Sismel.

Woods-Marsden, Joanna. *Renaissance Self Portraiture; the Visual Construction of Identity and the Social Status of the Artist.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

Zapperi, Roberto. *Annibale Carracci, Ritratto d'Artista da Giovane.* Torino: Giulio Einaudi Editore S.p.A., 1989.

Zarri, Gabriela. "Religious and Devotional Writing, 1400-1600". *A History of Women's Writing in Italy.* Ed. Letizia Panizza. Cambridge: Cambrdige University Press, 2000.