Identity Politics in Renaissance France: Cellini's *Nymph of Fontainebleau*

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In 1540, Benvenuto Cellini set out for Paris in order to secure the royal patronage of Francis I. Unlike his previous trip of 1537, Cellini was successful in gaining the favor of the French king, and immediately received various commissions as a metal worker.[1] Cellini, however, saw his sojourn in Paris as an opportunity to make the jump from metal smith to sculptor. He maneuvered himself into the renovation project underway at the Château of Fontainebleau, the favorite hunting lodge of Francis I, for which Cellini planned a monumental portal decoration illustrating the legend of the château's origins. The bronze relief, *The Nymph of Fontainebleau* (Figure 1), a lunette produced for the Porte Dorée, is Cellini's crowning achievement in monumental sculpture from the five years he spent in Paris. Yet in 1545, when Cellini left Paris in disgrace, this commission was incomplete. The lunette was never installed at the château for which it was made, but, instead, was placed over the main portal at the Château of Anet, where it became known as an image of Diana. Some scholars have characterized this appropriation as an unscrupulous re-use of Cellini's masterpiece.[2] Yet when the lunette was taken to Paris in the in the late eighteenth century, it was identified as a figure of Diana.[3] Indeed, even André Chastel, in his posthumous publication of 1995, calls it *Diana with a Stag*.[4] Oddly enough, although Cellini himself does not refer to the figure in his relief as a nymph in either his *Vita* or his *Treatises*, most scholars refer to her as a nymph, believing that to be the proper, historical designation and a correction of the later misnomer "Diana."[5] It is my contention that these various transformations of the female figure's identity reflect not misinformation, but are the result of a deliberate ambiguity originating in the French court.

The bronze lunette, 409 centimeters in width and 205 centimeters high, is the only sculpture executed by Cellini on this scale during his stay in Paris. It was cast in pieces, assembled, and chased during the first four months of 1543.[6] The commission for the project had come just a year earlier when the king, together with his mistress, Anne d'Etampes, paid a fortuitous visit to Cellini in his studio at the Hôtel Petit Nesle.[7] Cellini, in his autobiography, recounts with great pride both the mark of privilege this rare visit signaled and the delight his patron took in his talents. According to Cellini, the king awarded him the commission for the portal at Fontainebleau, but he notes that it was Mme d'Etampes who first urged Francis I to let Cellini do something for the royal

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1 The primary source for the life and work of Benvenuto Cellini is his own autobiography, in which he describes his stay in France and his commissions for Francis I. An accessible English translation of Cellini's *Vita* is by G. Bull (New York: Penguin Putnam, 1956, revised edition 1998), see esp. 251-310. For Cellini's discussion of work from his stay in France in his *Treatises*, see "Della scultura," in *Opere di Benvenuto Cellini*, ed. G. G. Ferrero (Torino: Tipografia, 1980), esp. 751-53. For general information about Cellini in Paris, *The Nymph of Fontainebleau*, and Francis I, see: C. Grodecki, "Le Séjour de Benvenuto Cellini à l'Hôtel de Nesle et la Fonte de la Nymphe de Fontainebleau d'après les Actes des Notaires Parisiens," *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de Paris et l'Isle de France* 98 (1971): 45-80; J. Pope-Hennessy, *Cellini* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1985), esp. 133-146; and J. Cox-Rearick, *The Collection of Francis I: Royal Treasures* (Antwerp: Fonds Mercator, 1995), esp. 46, 288-94. A recent monograph of Francis I that includes a section on Cellini and other Italian artists of his patronage is by R. J. Knect, *Renaissance Warrior and Patron: The Reign of Francis I* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), esp. 425-61.

2 "Dix ans plus tard, Philibert de l'Orme adapte sans scrupule cette représentation de Fontainebleau au château de Diane." This interpretation of the royal architect Philibert de l'Orme's installation of the lunette at Anet, which reflects the general consensus among Cellini scholars, is stated by S. Pressouyre in her "Note Additionelle sur la Nymph de Fontainebleau," *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de Paris et l'Isle de France* 98 (1971): 81-92.

3 The lunette, believed to be a work by Jean Goujon, was taken to Paris during the French Revolution and identified as a Diana. Pressouyre, 86-90, states that E. Q. Visconti attempted to correct the mistake in a catalogue entry for the Louvre in the early nineteenth century; nevertheless, when Fontaine installed the lunette in the Salles des Cariatides in 1811, he renamed the room "Salle de Diane." Pope-Hennessy, 305 n 16, states that it was L. Cicognara who first reattributed it to Cellini in 1816.

4 A. Chastel, *French Art: The Renaissance 1430-1620*, trans. D. Dusinterre (Paris, New York: Flammarion, 1995) 173.

5 Except for Chastel (1995, 173), every scholar cited in this article uses the title the *Nymph of Fontainebleau*. For the sake of clarity, Cellini's bronze relief will be identified as the *Nymph of Fontainebleau* throughout this paper.

6 The chasing was completed by Thomas Dambry, Pierre Bontemps, and Laurent Mailleu. For a more detailed analysis of the casting and chasing including contemporary notarized documents, see Grodecki 59-61, 71-72.

7 A year after his arrival in Paris, Francis I gave Petit Nesle to Cellini. The residence had a foundry on site, which aided the production of the various *objets d'art* in precious metal that Cellini had been commissioned to do; as recorded by Cellini, *Vita* 268. The artist was working on the twelve Olympian gods and the saltcellar, as well as a silver vase and various bronze heads, when Francis I visited his studio.

hunting lodge:

> Madame d'Etampes told his majesty that he ought to commission me to make some beautiful decoration for his Fontainebleau. The King at once answered: "That's an admirable suggestion, and I shall decide what he is to do this very instant"...and he commanded and implored me to exert myself to the utmost in effort to produce a work of beauty. I promised to do so.[8]

Mme d'Etampes' intercession is of particular interest because later she is to become Cellini's nemesis, and, according to Cellini, her enmity had been aroused by his work for the château.

After making plans to adjust the proportions of the existing Porte Dorée, which he found vulgar and unsuitable for his lunette, Cellini made his model. He describes the model for the doorway as a half circle with supporting elements flanking the opening. Over the lunette, Cellini intended to place an image of the king's emblem, the salamander. On either side of the doorway, "instead of two columns," Cellini's plan substituted two satyrs; they were never executed and are known today only from a drawing and a model in bronze possibly done by Cellini himself.[9] In the spandrels of the lunette were intended to be two bronze reliefs of torch-bearing victories which were later installed, along with the nymph, at the Château of Anet.[10] At the center of the portal program was the lunette itself, which Cellini describes in his own words:

> In the half-circle I made a woman reclining in a beautiful attitude; she had her left hand resting on the neck of a stag, which was one of the King's emblems. On one side I had showed some little fauns in half-relief, and there were some wild boars and other wild beasts in lower relief. On the other side there were hunting dogs and hounds of various kinds since these are found in that beautiful forest where the fountain springs.[11]

Cellini's phrase "that beautiful forest where the fountain springs," refers to the mythical discovery of Fontainebleau that the lunette was intended to recall. According to the local legend, a hunting dog named Bleau or Bliaud found a nymph presiding over the source of a fresh-water spring. The spring and, consequently, the château both took the name Fontainebleau. The legend had been depicted in an image by Rosso that once formed part of the decoration of the *Gallerie François Ier* in the château, but is now known only through an engraving by Pierre Milan (Figure 2). It is this image that most scholars agree is the basis for Cellini's version of the same subject and, indeed, his *Nymph* shares many of the same attributes as Rosso's image.[12] In the engraving, the reclining nymph lies among the rushes, with her left arm encircling an urn. She is nude, her torso twisted to exploit the view of her bare chest, but her legs are bent slightly at the knees for modesty's sake. The hunting dog—Bleau—appears on the left, emerging from among the rushes at the very moment of discovery.

Cellini expands this imagery to describe, not simply the narrative of the nymph's discovery, but the very idea of the nymph as the personification of the royal hunting lodge, Fontainebleau. The half-relief figure is stretched across the entire field so that her nude body is revealed in full. As the lunette was meant to be seen from below, Cellini tilts the figure, further aiding a view from ground level. She has three urns under her left arm from which flowing and curling representations of water pour. These, as well as the billowing drapery that frames her, identify the female figure as the presiding deity. Replacing the hunting dog which comes face-to-face with the surprised nymph in Rosso's image, Cellini represents a pack of hunting dogs on the right that does not noticeably interact with the nymph. She looks off to her left, her head tilted down as she gazes out of the relief. On the left, two wild boars intrude upon the scene. Behind the boars, in low-relief, are deer grazing against a backdrop of trees. Projecting outward from the top of the lunette is a stag-head trophy, a fully three dimensional form positioned above the

8 Cellini, *Vita* 268-69.

9 For more on the satyrs, see J. Pope-Hennessy "A Bronze Satyr by Cellini," *Burlington Magazine* 124 (July, 1982): 406-12, where he argues that the importance and prominence of the satyrs would have overshadowed the lunette and would have been the dramatic focus of the portal program. However, as the focus of the commission, the lunette seems to be the most prominent and iconographically significant feature.

10 The victories were installed with the lunette at the Château of Anet until the time of the French Revolution when they were taken to Paris. After the Revolution, they returned to Anet and were set up in the funerary chapel of Diane de Poitiers. In 1851, they were lost, but fortunately, casts had been made; Pope-Hennessy, (1985), 140; no records indicate whether or not the salamander was cast.

11 Cellini, *Vita* 270.

12 For a discussion of Milan's etching after Rosso's *Nymph of Fontainebleau*, see E. Carroll, *Rosso Fiorentino: Drawings, Prints, and Decorative Arts*, exhibition catalogue (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1987), cat. no. 79, pp. 252-53. The inscription on the print reads: "O Phidias, O Apelles, could anything have been devised in your era more beautiful than this sculpture [whose representation you see here]: a sculpture that Francis I, most puissant king of France, foster father of *beaux arts* and *belles lettres*, left unfinished in his palace, under a statue of Diana reposing after the hunt and pouring from a jar the waters of Fontainebleau." Carroll argues that the inscription's identification of the figure as Diana is a mistake made by the etcher René Boyvin, who completed the work. However, as the image is also called a "statue" that was "left unfinished," Carroll suggests that Rosso intended a stucco relief to occupy the center of the south wall that was never completed. Both Pressouyre, 88-89, and Cox-Rearick, 46, make similar statements. H. Zerner's argument, in his *L'Art de la Renaissance en France*: *L'invention du classicisme* (Paris: Flammarion, 1996) 123, proposes that Milan recorded a design for a relief by Rosso intended to decorate the base of a statue of Diana. However, a comparison of the frame in the engraving, including the roundels of Apollo and Diana above the nymph, with the extant decoration of the section of the south wall, now filled with a fresco of Danaë, suggests that the image was designed for a place in the gallery, either in relief or fresco.

nymph. She is physically linked to it by her right arm which is draped over the stag's neck.

Given the subject and placement of the commission, Cellini operated under certain dictates for its production. Besides the restrictions of size and shape, Cellini had to combine a recognizable depiction of the legendary Nymph of Fontainebleau with the appropriate emblems of royal authority. Cellini turned, no doubt, to a host of Renaissance sources and antique examples of nymphs with which he would have been well-versed.[13] As required in such representations, Cellini employed the image of the recumbent nude female with her urn to personify a fresh water spring. Her static, exposed pose explicitly designates the feminine role as the receptacle of the male procreative force, the result of which, in the case of the nymph, was life-giving water. In many Renaissance garden sculptures, water quite literally flowed from a female figure's breasts or from a womb-like urn. An example of this latter type can be seen in Ammanati's *Spring of Parnassus* of *c*. 1555, now in the Bargello, where, in an overt comparison between womb and urn, the urn is placed directly between the legs of the passively-posed female. Moreover, Cellini's intention to include the satyrs as columnar elements originated in a similar tradition of representing the sexual role of the nymph, where, passively reclining, she is encroached upon by a male presence. An example is a rather suggestive pair from the mid-sixteenth-century Grotto of Venus in Villa Lante: *Sleeping Nymph and Climbing Male*.[14]

That nature or, more precisely, the manipulated wilderness of Francis I's hunting lodge, is announced in terms of an explicit sexual fecundity should come as no surprise. The nymph invites the viewer to gaze at her life-giving form as she embraces the virile stag. The garland of ripe fruit and grapes she wears on her head, as well as the grapes she holds in her languorous hand, connote both sensuality and fertility.[15] The woodlands populated by an abundance of wild beasts allude to sexual activity.[16] The king, personified by the stag, which was one of his emblems, is an active participant: poised directly over the genitals of the nymph, he partakes of the pleasures of nature just as he is the procreative source of her abundance.[17] Francis I consciously played on the sexual subtext of the hunt and filled Fontainebleau with images of amorous pursuits. Inside the royal hunting lodge, representations of nymphs and satyrs, Mars and Venus, and Jupiter at his conquests abounded.[18] Indeed, the inherent elitism of the hunt as an aristocratic pastime, in place since the Middle Ages, was associated with these other pleasurable pursuits of the ruling class.[19] Cellini's placement of a stag's head in a relief intended for the entrance of the king's hunting lodge created a powerful expression of royal authority and privilege.

Cellini's account of his project for the decoration of the Porte Dorée at Fontainebleau ended when he left Paris forever in 1545. In the intervening two years, relations with his patron had deteriorated rapidly. By his own account, Cellini had made enemies that were threatening his life.[20] When Cellini left the lunette behind, cast and chased, but not installed at Fontainebleau, he quite literally closed his chapter of the history of *The Nymph of Fontainebleau* and his career in Paris.[21] Scholars often follow his precedent as they, too, finish their discussions of the nymph in 1545, characterizing it as an unrealized and discarded commission. However, the story of Cellini's nymph did not end in 1545. In the years immediately after Cellini's departure, the meaning, indeed the very subject of the lunette, was transformed as Cellini's bronze depiction of the nymph of the Fountain of Bleau came to be regarded as the goddess, Diana.

Despite the termination of the portal project at Fontainebleau, Cellini's lunette was not discarded, but was given to Diane de Poitiers, mistress of Francis's son, the future Henri II. After Francis I's death in 1547, the royal architect Philibert de l'Orme, who had been at work at Fontainebleau, began renovating of the Château of Anet. The château belonged to Diane de Poitiers and it is here that

13 For the tradition of nymph imagery in the Renaissance, see C. Lazarro, "Gendered Nature and Its Representation in Sixteenth-Century Garden Sculpture," in *Looking at Italian Renaissance Sculpture*, ed. S. Blake McHam, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 246-73, and E. B. MacDougall, "The Sleeping Nymph: Origins of a Humanist Fountain Type," *Art Bulletin* 57 (1975): 357-65; for the antique tradition of nymphaea from which the Renaissance versions originate, see M. Fagiolo, "Theaters of Water," *FMR*, no. 66 (1994): 22-46.

14 Images of both of these garden sculptures can be found in C. Lazarro's article, figure 110, p. 263 and figure 107, p. 260, respectively.

15 Although I have found no written account of the fruit that decorates the garland around the stag's neck, Dr. Asen Kirin aided me by suggesting that they are representations of the small, round medlar fruit. In the sixteenth century, medlars were herbal remedies for women that were believed to increase fertility and ward off miscarriage; see Nicholas Culpeper, *The English Physician and Complete Herbal* (London: printed privately, 1802 reprint of 1652 original) 244. This idea can be linked to the belief that the stag also had curative powers, especially for pregnant women; see A. Strubel and C. de Saulnier, *La Poètique de la Chasse au Moyen Age: Les Livres de Chasses du XIVe Siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1994), 242.

16 Lazzaro 252-54.

17 Cellini was correct in saying that the stag was an emblem of Francis I, *Vita*, 270. So strong was the association between the king, the stag, and hunting, that during the French Revolution the antlers of Cellini's bronze relief were torn off by rioters. Consequently, the stag in the lunette is not in its original state but was extensively restored in the mid-nineteenth century; Pressouyre 86-89.

18 See Cox-Rearick 96-130, and Zerner 55-89, for images of the paintings found at Fontainebleau.

19 For more on the history of hunting in the Middle Ages, as well as the analogy between romantic love and the hunt, see Strubel, esp. 127-72.

20 Cellini, *Vita* 306; the king, Mme d'Etampes, and San Polo, who is given charge of Cellini, talk of hanging Cellini. Even though it may have been in jest, Cellini expresses his relief at having escaped Paris with his life.

21 Cellini, *Vita* 308.

Cellini's *Nymph of Fontainebleau* was installed over the entrance portal, most likely in the early 1550s (Figure 3).[22] Diane de Poitiers, who identified herself with and likened herself to the goddess Diana, displayed the lunette as a representation of the goddess. She even had a sculpture for her garden modeled after Cellini's lunette with her own portrait serving as the model for the goddess' face.[23] Surrounded by the stag and her hunting dogs and with her bow prominently displayed, the sculpture unmistakably represents Diana, not a nymph.

Although it is quite clear that Diane de Poitiers deliberately chose to read Cellini's *Nymph of Fontainebleau* as Diana, and that consequently it became Diana through her assimilation of it, the question remains: when did the shift in identity occur? This association was established even before the lunette arrived at Anet. By 1549, Jean Cousin was already using Cellini's figure for his painting *Eva Prima Pandora*, a misogynistic image of original sin that would have been seen as a pointed attack on Henri's mistress.[24] This obvious appropriation of Cellini's figure in a context meant to disparage Diane de Poitiers, suggests that the female in the lunette was no longer commonly identified with the legendary Nymph of Fontainebleau. Thus, within four years of his departure, Cellini's nymph evolved into a Diana or, more correctly, into Diane de Poitiers.

To sixteenth-century spectators, the image of a nude or semi-nude female figure with a stag would typically signify the goddess Diana. Condensed from images of the most famous narrative of the goddess, the metamorphosis of Actaeon, the stag became Diana's attribute.[25] Dürer's engraving *Apollo and Diana* from *c*. 1504 juxtaposes the active figure of Apollo with the static figure of Diana, using only the most basic attributes to identify the two deities—Apollo draws back his bow while Diana sits next to her stag, gently stroking its muzzle.[26] In Lucas Cranach's painting of the same subject, the nude figure of Diana sits with her stag, more specifically, on her stag, with her arm draped around his neck.[27] With none of her usual identifying objects, such as the bow and quiver or the crescent moon diadem, it must be assumed that the stag is all that is required by the viewer to recognize her, just as only Apollo's bow is needed to define his person. Like the Diana in Cranach's image, a portrait of Diane de Poitiers in the guise of the goddess shows the mistress with her arm around the stag.[28] Both Diane de Poitier and the goddess Diana, needed only a single attribute to identify them.

The standard iconography of the stag as the identifying attribute of the goddess of the hunt might suggest, therefore, that Cellini actively conflated the imagery associated with Diana and the nymph. Moreover, Cellini's choice to present the stag as a hunting trophy makes the connection between the female and the hunt all the more apparent, further suggesting that the figure is, indeed, Diana. Diana, the goddess of the hunt and the moon who inspires amorous pursuits and procreation, would have been a fitting subject for the iconography of the hunting lodge, Fontainebleau. Cellini does not comment on this possible dual reading of his figure in his autobiography. However, female personifications of nature as nymphs and goddesses in the Renaissance often had overlapping poses and attributes, as can be seen in the Diana fountain of the Quattro Fontane in Rome.[29] There, a recumbent female figure personifying a source of fresh water also wears the half-moon diadem of Diana. A painting at Fontainebleau by Primaticcio entitled *Diana Reclining among Dogs and Sav-*

22 Grodecki 55, places the installment of the lunette between the years 1551 and 1555, the years that the portal was under construction, and states that the lunette was left discarded at Nesle until Philibert de l'Orme requested to use it as decoration at Anet. The date inscribed on the portal is 1552.

23 The sculpture, *Diane*, done for the courtyard at the Château of Anet, is now in the Louvre. Once considered a work by Jean Goujon, the sculpture now lacks attribution; Zerner 360-61.

24 J. Guillaume made this argument in his article about Cousin's painting, suggesting that the combined pagan and Christian mythologies of original sin cast Diane de Poitiers into the role of *femme fatale*, "Cleopatra Nova Pandora," *Gazette de Beaux Arts* 80 (1972): 185-94. See also S. ffolliot, "Casting a Rival into the Shade: Catherine de Medici and Diane de Poitiers," *Art Journal* 48 (Summer, 1989): 138-43.

25 The idea that the female with the stag was identified as Diana serves as the premise for an article by N. J. Vickers, who argues that the Ovidian text had been re-interpreted by Cellini for the glorification of the king. Diana, who renders the hunter impotent, becomes herself the conquered as she, instead, embraces him. This refers to the privilege of the king, who alone accomplishes this brazen act of looking upon the nymph/Diana and lives, and to the sexual dominance and royal authority such a statement exerts; "The Mistress in the Masterpiece," in *Poetics of Gender*, ed. Nancy K. Miller (New York: Columbia UP, 1986) 19-39.

26 For an illustration, see B. Aikema and B. L. Brown, eds., *Renaissance Venice and the North: Crosscurrents in the time of Bellini, Dürer, and Titian*, exhibition catalogue (New York: Rizzoli, 1999), cat. no. 62, pp. 318-19. Also included is Jacopo de' Barbari's print, *Apollo and Diana*, of 1502, cat. no. 63, pp. 320-21.

27 Illustrated in M. J. Friedlander and J. Rosenberg, *The Paintings of Lucas Cranach* (Secaucus, NJ: Wellfleet, 1978), figure 271.

28 The original fragments of the portrait are in the collection of the Earl of Spencer, but a copy exists in the hunting museum, Museé de Senlis. For an image, see I. Cloulas, *Diane de Poitiers* (Paris: Fayard, 1997), figure 8.

29 B. L. Brown (1999, 497) states that the ambiguity of poses and attributes for depictions of Cleopatra, Venus, Diana, and nymphs was deliberate both in northern and southern Europe during the Renaissance. The Diana fountain of the Quattro Fontane is illustrated in F. Venturi and M. Sanfilippo, *The Fountains of Rome*, trans. Andrew Ellis (New York: Vendome Press, 1996) 101. In the Renaissance, Diana was often used to personify Nature; see M. Tanner, "Chance and Coincidence in Titian's *Diana and Actaeon*," *Art Bulletin* 56 (Dec. 1974): 535-50. Using sixteenth-century literary and pictorial traditions, Tanner argues that the goddess Diana in the Actaeon myth was presented by Titian as a personification of Nature.

30 Bartsch no. 39. Primatticio arrived in France shortly after Rosso in 1530. Although it may be impossible to date Primatticio's painting of *Diana*, Leon Devant was working as the main engraver of Primattico's works between the years 1543 and 1546 and left Fontainebleau in 1547, suggesting that this painting existed at least simultaneously with Cellini's commission; for more on Primatticio's work at Fontainebleau, and Leon Davent's engravings, see Zerner, esp. 65, 118.

age Beasts, known today only though an engraving made before 1546 by Leon Devant, shows the goddess of the hunt reclining in a natural setting.[30] Here the figure is clearly Diana, her accompanying dogs, beasts, and stag anticipating Cellini's design for his lunette.

Cellini's allegorical figure of Fontainebleau, as well as her attributes, then, were understood to be a depiction of both the legendary nymph of Fontainebleau and the huntress Diana. However, the political climate in which Cellini produced his nymph/Diana made his choice of imagery extremely volatile. During the last five years of his reign, Francis I was very ill.[31] Diane de Poitiers, the mistress of his son, the future Henri II, was twenty years the dauphin's senior. With the imminent demise of the king, she stood to gain not only power in the court, but power over the very throne of France. She thus posed a serious threat to the position of the incumbent mistress, Mme d'Etampes. Persistent rumors of Diane de Poitiers' own relations with Francis I suggest that the hostility between the two women would have been both personal and political as they jockeyed for power at court.[32] As Diane de Poitiers gained influence, their mutual animosity increased. Otherwise benign references to the goddess Diana became potential vehicles for political diatribe. Indeed, in the games of the French courtiers, various members were assigned the personae of pagan gods. Diane de Poitiers used her namesake, claiming the identity of Diana. Her rival, Mme d'Etampes was called the supreme beauty, the goddess of love, Venus.[33] Yet, clearly, Venus's ascendancy was not to be long lasting. The very year Cellini departs for Italy, 1545, a court poet, François Habert published a bold declaration of the passing of one mistress and the rise of another:

> Certes Venus n'est pas encores morte,
> Déesse elle est, grand honneur on luy porte:
> Que pleust à Dieu la voir en mer plongeé,
> La République en serait bien vengeé.
> Mais peu à peu Venus s'abolira,
> Et en son nom Diane on publira.[34]

Cellini's blatant depiction of a figure, implicitly both the legendary nymph and Diana, with her arm around the stag, the king's device, proved to be a political blunder. Cellini had vastly underestimated the power of Anne d'Etampes.[35]

Time and again Cellini writes in his *Vita* of the enemy he had in Mme d'Etampes. Although, as has been noted, it was she who commended him to the king for the project at Fontainebleau, immediately after his presentation of the model to the king, Cellini detects the animosity of the king's mistress. He hears that her ire was aroused when she learned of the plans for Fontainebleau from the king, writing, "...such poisonous anger accumulated in her breast that she burst out: 'If Benvenuto had shown me his fine works of art he would have given me cause to remember him when the time comes.'"[36] Although Cellini explains her anger as a result of the fact she had not been present when the king approved the lunette design, her statement can also be read as a revealing glimpse at her immediate reaction to the imagery Cellini had proposed. And, it is at precisely this moment, when Mme d'Etampes hears of the plans for the portal decoration, that her approval of Cellini turns to venomous hatred.

The next few years were miserable for Cellini, who never was forgiven by Mme d'Etampes. Although what is written in his autobiography must be taken with at least one grain of salt, since Cellini blames the king's mistress for practically every one of his ensuing misfortunes such as spies in his home, lawsuits, and ultimately the withdrawal of the king's favor, it is generally accepted by scholars that she diverted the commission for Cellini's colossal fountain of Mars to Primaticcio.[37] According to Cellini, she prompted the king's famous censure of Cellini when, otherwise pleased with his work, Francis I formally reprimanded the artist for his overly-ambitious plans that had come at the expense of his initial commissions as a metal worker.[38] Mme d'Etampes' hatred of Cellini sabotaged his chances of obtaining other commissions and she quite possibly demanded the termination of his portal commission as well.

Mme d'Etampe's manipulation of court iconography, especially as it related to Francis's hunting lodge, might shed light on the fate of Rosso's lost image of the *Nymph of Fontainebleau*. If, as indicated by the inscription on the engraving, which describes the figure as Diana, resting after the hunt, and "pouring from a jar the water of Fontainebleau," Rosso's image was an homage to the château's nymph *and* to the goddess of the hunt, Diana, it seems highly significant

31 Knect 495.

32 The debate on whether or not Diane de Poitiers had an affair with Francis I continues. However, the mysterious pardon of Diane's father, who had been condemned to death for treason, shortly after her initial arrival at court to plead for his life, as well as continued favoritism, indicate that she most likely had sexual relations with Francis I; see Cloulas 49-64. After the death of Francis I, Diane de Poitiers took her position, but now as the mistress of the king, Henri II, and Anne d'Etampes was banished; Knect 551.

33 Cloulas 223-24.

34 Certainly Venus is not yet dead,
A goddess she is, great honor to her:
If only God could see her pitched into the sea,
The Republic would be well-avenged.
However, little by little, Venus will disappear,
And in her name, Diana will be published.

(Translation thanks to Catherine Parayre.) From *Exposition morale de la Fable des trois Déeses, Venus, Juno et Palla*s, Lyon, 1545, as cited in F. Bardon, *Diane de Poitiers et le Mythe de Diane* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963) 41.

35 The Imperial ambassador at the French court described Anne d'Etampes as "the real president of the King's most private and intimate council;" as cited in Pope-Hennessy 105.

36 Cellini, *Vita* 272.

37 Pope-Hennessy 142.

38 Cellini, *Vita* 303-04.

that sometime in the years between 1543 and 1545, Rosso's conflation of these two mythical females was deliberately destroyed and replaced with the presumably more innocuous Danaë.[39] Cellini claims that Mme d'Etampes first became angry with him immediately after the creation of his model for the lunette, and it is, therefore, not unreasonable to assume that Cellini's nymph may have been too replete with Diana imagery for the tastes of Mme d'Etampes. Cellini's nymph, and perhaps Rosso's as well, were seen by Madame d'Etampes as unpleasant reminders of her rival, Diane de Poitiers. The enmity of Mme d'Etampes, which can be directly connected to the portal commission, brought about Cellini's ultimate failure in Paris.

It would seem that the conflation of the nymph and Diana may have occurred almost at the moment of the relief's creation. Cellini's own account of Mme d'Etampe's anger following the presentation of the model for the lunette to the king coincides too closely to the rivalry between Anne d'Etampes and Diane de Poitiers, as described by the poem, to be ignored. What scholars have disregarded in the history of *The Nymph of Fontainebleau* is its interpretation by the intended spectators—the king, his mistress, and her rival. Their responses have played an integral part in the history of the lunette, which was conceived of as an allegory of the fountain, but with multiple and ambiguous meanings. This paper has attempted to show that these spectators participated in the history of the work, investing it with their own meaning. Whatever Cellini intended when he made it, his nymph clearly allowed for an interpretation as Diana. More importantly, considering court politics during the years of Cellini's stay in Paris, Cellini's figure could have been construed as Diane de Poitiers in great detriment to his career in Paris. It is precisely this reading of the lunette's imagery that may directly relate to Cellini's failure as an artist under the patronage of Francis I.

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[39] See note 10 for the full inscription and citation. Bardon, 20-24, believes that the image was meant to be both the nymph and Diana, and that it was deliberately destroyed between 1543-45. Given the overwhelming evidence that the goddess of the hunt and the nymph of Fontainebleau were purposefully treated as if interchangeable reigning deities of the royal hunting lodge, it seems very likely that this was, indeed, the case.

Figure 1. Cellini, *The Nymph of Fontainebleau*, 1543, bronze, 409 cm x 205 cm, Louvre, Paris. Courtesy Alinari/Art Resource, New York.

Figure 2. Pierre Milan after Rosso, *The Nymph of Fontainebleau*, 1534, engraving *c*. 1540-1557, completed by René Boyvin, from François Courboin, *Histoire Illustrée de la Gravure en France* vol. 1 (Paris: Maurice Le Garrec, 1923) fig. 303 (called *La Diane de Fontainebleau*).

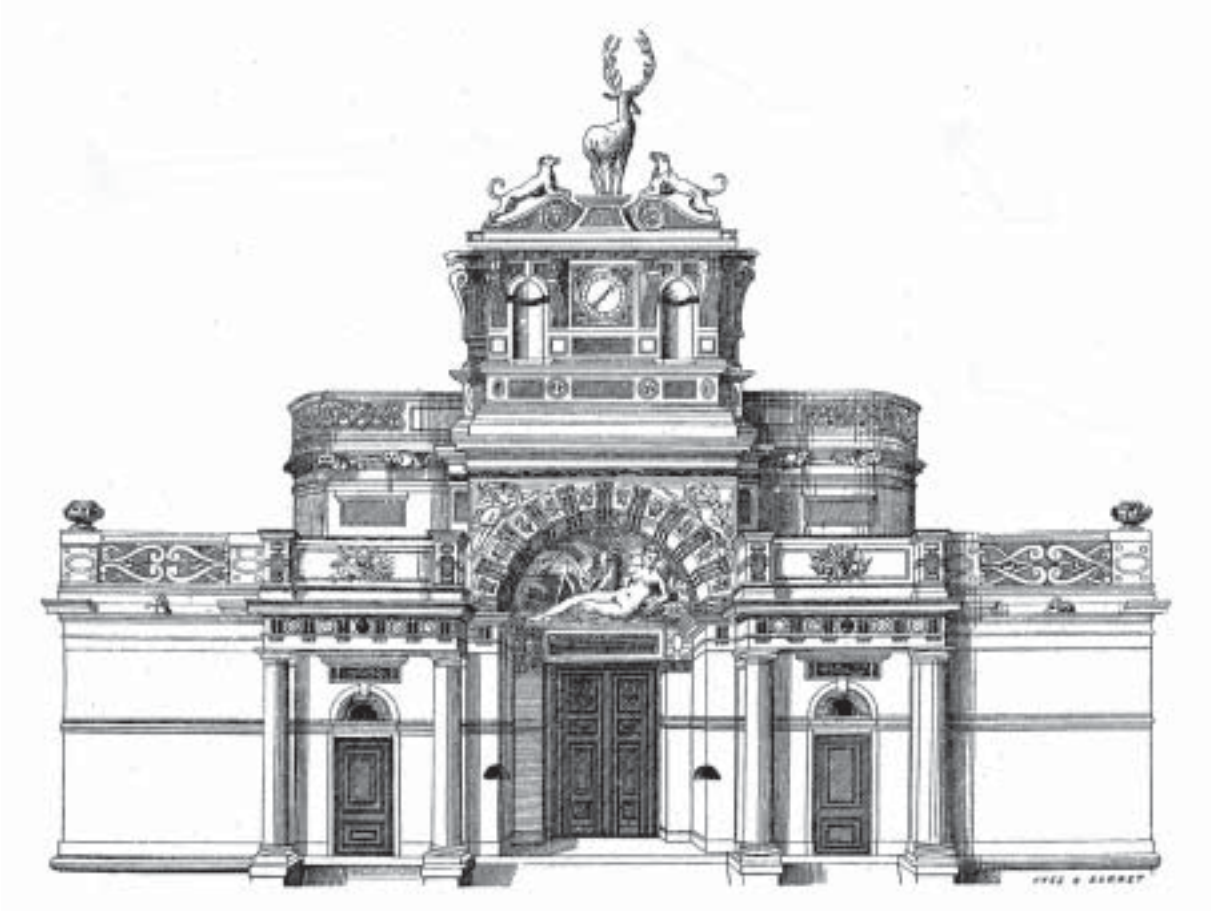

Figure 3. Copy of an engraving by Philibert de l'Orme, Portail de l'Entrée of the Château of Anet, Pierre Desire Roussel, *Histoire et Description du Château d'Anet* (Paris: D. Jouaust, 1875).