ATHANOR XXIII

FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF ART HISTORY

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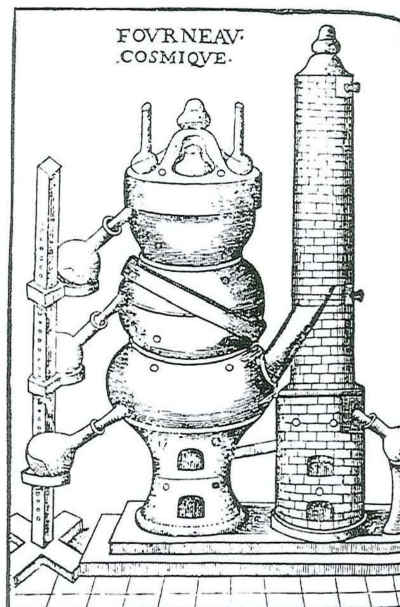

Cosmic oven or *Athanor* from Annibal Barlet,
Le Vray Cours de Physique,
Paris, 1653.

Cover: Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, *Lenin Hails a Cab,* 1993, oil on canvas, 48 x 36 inches.
Courtesy of the Sloane Gallery of Art, Denver, and Wayne F.Yakes.

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The Annual Art History Graduate Symposium for the 2004-2005 academic year will be held during the month of February; symposium paper sessions cover a wide variety of topics. Students from universities nation-wide make presentations which frequently become published essays in ATHANOR. The format of the symposium includes a keynote address by major scholars. Since 1994 keynote speakers have been: Fred Licht, Boston University and the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice (1993-94); Gerald Ackerman, Pomona College (1994-95); Marcel Roethlisberger, University of Geneva (1995-96); Robert Farris Thompson, Yale University (1996); Oleg Grabar, Institute for Advanced Study (1996); Phyllis Bober, Bryn Mawr College (1997-98); Carol Duncan, Ramapo College (1998-99); Bogomila Welsh-Ovcharov, University of Toronto at Mississauga (1999-2000); Neil Stratford, ret. Keeper of Mediaeval Antiquities, British Museum (2000); Debra Pincus, Professor Emerita, University of British Columbia (2002); Jonathan Brown, Institute of Fine Arts, NYU; David Summers, University of Virginia. For details of date and for precis submission, please contact Professor Paula Gerson, Chairman, Department of Art History, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306-1150.

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Athanor and the Museum Press

In 1980 Professor François Bucher (University of Bern, *Medieval Art*) asked Allys Palladino-Craig (formerly of the variorum editions of *The Collected Works of Stephen Crane*, 10 vols., Fredson Bowers, Editor, University of Virginia Press) to take on the responsibility of general editor and publisher of the first volume of *Athanor* (1981). Professor Bucher served as faculty advisor until his retirement. During that time, Palladino-Craig won several grants for the publication, and in 1994 established the Museum Press of the Florida State University Museum of Fine Arts with Julienne T. Mason as principal editorial assistant and graphic designer. From 1998-2002, Patricia Rose served as faculty advisor to this annual journal, which is a project of the Museum Press.

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The Art of Divination in Indigenous America—A Comparison of Ancient Mexican and Modern Kuna Pictography

Alessia Frassani

This essay will focus on a few pages of two pre-Hispanic religious codices from the so-called Borgia Group.[1] Of the estimated hundreds of manuscripts only five have survived the destruction by the Spaniards during the conquest and the following colonization. Nevertheless, a remarkable consistency of style, iconography, and contents among these manuscripts has been recognized.[2]

Early colonial and seventeenth century documents are the main interpretative sources of indigenous pictography. These documents portray religious customs and ritual practices as they existed before the political and religious colonization. Since the Borgia Group manuscripts date to a period just prior to the European contact, a direct historical approach can be used to interpret the iconography.

The original ritual context of the pre-Hispanic codices can be inferred from written sources however cannot be studied by direct means, because the pictography, particularly of religious subject matter, ceased to be employed rapidly after the conquest. This disjunction has not only posed methodological problems, but has also resulted in a theoretical obstacle, by which both the oral tradition of present-day indigenous people and the pictography of pre-Hispanic times are described only in negative terms: oral cultures are understood to be a culture lacking written documents. Pictography, on the other hand, is seen as a deficient recording system that lacks the accuracy of the alphabetic script. This paper endeavors to overcome this obstacle by applying works on indigenous oral tradition to the study of the pictography.

In his seminal work *Pre-Columbian Literatures of Mexico* published in 1969, León-Portilla identified the couplet as one basic poetic feature of Nahuatl literature.[3] The couplet can be described as a set of two lines (verses) linked together by a semantic or syntactic parallelism. Lyrical and epic poems of the ancient Mexican tradition were primarily created through the juxtaposition of these sets of parallel verses and were typically very long and redundant both in content and structure, only very slight variations occurring between the lines. More recently, ethnographic research, such as the work by Dennis Tedlock on the Maya Quiché Popol Vuh, has proven to be essential in the reconstruction of early colonial indigenous texts.[4] In addition, philological investigation on oral poetics and narrative features can also be directly applied to the interpretation of codex pages.

In the Mixtec historical codices, paired sets of elements, which parallel verbal couplets, are common. In the codex Vienna, page 27, third line (Figure 1), the wind god Ehecatl is represented twice. Jansen reads: "Sopla el viento de oriente / sopla el viento que quema" [The wind from the east blows / the wind that burns blows].[5]

More recently, Jansen and Pérez Jiménez, a native Mixtec speaker, also proposed a tentative Mixtec reading of the same lines: "Kee tachi ichi nuu kana iha Ndikandii / kee tachi ñuhu, tachi jahmu itu" [The wind from the Orient blows / the earth wind blows that breaks the fields].[6]

A good example of the couplet structure can be found in the religious manuscripts in Vaticanus B, page 71 (Figure 2). The open jaws of the earth are represented sequentially nine times. The couplet-like pattern is highlighted by the alternate jade and yellow color of the earth monster and the dots linked to it. Nonetheless, as will be seen, cases in which pictographic elements can be reduced to discrete verbal components, such as parallel verse structure, are rare in the religious manuscripts. The pictographic page is typically more elaborate, and looks more like what is called, from the Western perspective, a painting. Looking for another key to understand the relationship between spoken word and painted image in the divinatory codices, this discussion turns first to a few specific pages.

The codices Vaticanus B and Borgia share a long parallel

1 The Borgia Group includes: Codex Borgia (Vatican Library, Rome), Codex Vaticanus B (Vatican Library, Rome), Codex Cospi (University Library, Bologna), Codex Féjérvary-Mayer (Free Library, Liverpool), Codex Laud (British Museum, London), Fonds Mexicain 20 (National Library, Paris) and Codex Tututepetongo (Library of the National Institute of History and Anthropology, Mexico City).

2 Eduard Seler, *Codex Borgia. Eine altmexikanische Bilderschrift der Bibliothek der Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* (Berlin: Druck von Gebr. Unger, 1904); Karl Anton Nowotny, *Tlacuilolli. Die mexikanischen Bilderhandschriften; Stil und Inhalt* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1961); Donald Robertson, "Mixtec Religious Manuscripts," *Ancient Oaxaca*, ed. John Paddock (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1964) 298-312.

3 Miguel León-Portilla, *Pre-Columbian Literatures of Mexico*, trans. Grace Lobanov and the author (Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1969).

4 *Popol Vuh*, trans. Dennis Tedlock, 2nd ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

5 Maarten Jansen E. R. G. N., *Huisi Tacu. Estudio interpretativo de un libro mixteco antiguo* (Amsterdam: CEDLA, 1982) 182. Author's translation.

6 Maarten Jansen E. R. G. N., and Gabina Aurora Pérez Jiménez, *Origen e historia y de los reyes mixtecos. Texto explicativo del llamado Códice Vindobonensis* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1992) 69.

sequence of sections that encompasses pages 13 through 27 and 49 through 53, respectively. In the codex Vaticanus B, the first section (pages 13-16; Figure 3) twice represents a set of temples, seen first in frontal display, and laterally in the following pages. The disposition of the days of the calendar further emphasizes this movement in space, by placing the day-names first around the temples and eventually in a row from the center to the temples. The first temple is presided over by an owl, obviously a nocturnal symbol that also bears negative connotations in ancient and modern indigenous belief in Mexico. Death symbols such as bones, skulls and hearts are prevalent. Around the temple is a centipede. The second temple is, on the other hand, characterized by a colorful bird. Precious jewels and a powerful serpent further decorate the scene.

Four temples are found on the codex Borgia, pages 49 through 52, at the center of each page. They are not as clearly paired as in the previous example, but rather are associated with the cardinal directions and a specific iconography. The first temple (Figure 4), for example, corresponds to the east and bears solar connotations, such as the sun seen inside the temple, and Tonatiuh, the sun god, as officiating priest. The last temple (Figure 5) clearly resembles the one on pages 13 and 15 in the Vaticanus B. The structure is made of bones, and the owl inside the temple receives a deadly offering from Miclantechutli, the death god.

Pages 17-18 in the Vaticanus B (Figure 6) are divided into two vertical registers, tightly connected to one another. In both cases, the periodical division of the calendar is regular, four periods of thirteen days each, repeated five times. According to the tonalpohualli (the full-fledged calendar found in the first pages of the codex) each section can be associated with a cardinal direction, east-north-west-south, respectively. Each direction is characterized by a tree, associated with a bird (a jaguar in the last tree) and a man in the lower part. In the upper part, a deity "rules" by pointing a finger, seated on a royal cushion covered by a jaguar skin (except for the third deity, who is seated on the ground).

In the same pages 49-52 (Figures 4 and 5) in the Borgia, four trees are depicted just below the temples discussed above. Similarly to those of the Vaticanus B, they are topped by a bird. Cihuacoatl, the mother earth is lying under the trees.

Pages 19-23 in the Vaticanus B (Figure 7) are divided into two vertical registers, like the previous section, although the connection between the two parts is less clear. The upper part has a counterpart in the section of the Borgia considered. The chapter portrays the sky bearers: four couples of deities associated with the four directions, plus one with the center. The first deity of the couple is associated with the day of the year, seen below the feet, while the sky band above contains the day immediately preceding the year bearer. The second deity of the couple walks and holds a rattle staff, and is more probably leading a procession for the celebration of the days to come (represented with three day signs). This chapter is represented in a very similar fashion in the Borgia, where it runs across four major sections in a long strip from page 49 through 53.

Finally, the Vaticanus B concludes in pages 24-27 (Figure 8) with the depiction of animals, men and deities engaged in various fights. They, as well, are associated with the cardinal direction (east-north-west and south) in similar manner to pages 17-18. The respective section in the Borgia is found again in the main pages 49 through 52 on the right top corner.

Comparing the composition of the sections in the codices (Figure 9), it is clear that pages 13-27 in the Vaticanus B encompass six different chapters laid out in a linear and consequential fashion. On the other hand, the same information is present in the Borgia according to a quadripartite sequence that breaks down the chapters and reorganizes them according to a tighter cardinal order. Although references to the four directions are found in the Vaticanus B, such as the trees and patrons in pages 17-18, and the sky bearers in pages 19-23, the temples in pages 13-16 do not bear any cardinal information differently from examples in 49-52 in the Borgia, which are the center of the cult's activities.

The anthropologist Carlo Severi studied extensively the oral tradition of the Kuna people who today are settled in the archipelago of San Blas off the Atlantic Coast of Panama.[7] His research offers an interesting comparison to Mesoamerica because pictography is similarly employed as a mnemonic device for the correct recitation of ritual songs. However, far from merely transcribing the song as a written counterpart of the oral performance, the pictography has a much more complex relationship with the meaning, the preservation, and the transmission of the chant with which it is connected.

Only the very restricted number of songs characterized by a ritualized and fixed structure is recorded in pictorials. The pictography is mainly a didactic tool through which the teacher introduces the apprentice to the most esoteric knowledge of the shamanic practice. Pictographic documents are therefore generally not used or displayed in public.

Priestly education requires the apprentice to learn by rote the texts of the oral tradition. The education does not allow improvisation and great concern exists about the exact preservation of the text of the songs. During the long process of memorization, the trainee does not know the meaning of the text he is performing. Only when he can recite the text without mistakes is he initiated to the art of pictography; and only then, will the shaman show to him that the long enumeration of slightly different sentences is not merely a listing of elements, but corresponds instead to an ordered setting within a spatial composition. Thus, the initiation to the pictography corresponds to the entrance into a cosmological knowledge and cannot be understood by merely reciting the chant.

The picture *Canoe of the Moon* (Figure 10) is a pictographic page of the Kuna tradition and is today in the Ethnographic Museum in Goteborg, Sweden. At the bottom of the

7 Carlo Severi, *La memoria rituale. Follia e immagine del Bianco in una tradizione sciamanica amerindiana* (Florence: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1993).

pictographic page, a canoe carries various spirits that accompany the moon in its nightly tour. Above, a starry sky hosts more spirits. The realms of the earth and the sky are clearly divided by the horizon line in the middle of the composition. In the diagrams below Severi illustrates the two possible interpretations of this page. On the left, the arrows show the reading order that corresponds to the listing of the spirits from bottom right to top left, in a form that corresponds to the plain enunciation of the text, the litany. The second diagram illustrates the territorial distribution of the spirits in the realms of the sea, the horizon, and the sky. When read in this manner, the pictography reveals information about the placement in the cosmos of the supernatural beings that is never explicitly verbalized in the chant, but that can only be accessed through the vision of the pictographic page. The cosmological order that substantiates the litany will never be revealed to those who are simply listening to the chant. However, for the priest the pictography works also as an efficient support for the recitation of the song. The shaman knows, or literally envisions, why the list of the spirits has to be repeated in that specific order and he will be able to reconstruct it by recalling their pictorial classification.

This double interpretation can also be applied to the codices Vaticanus B and Borgia just considered. Although both contained the same information (the coupled temples, the trees, their patrons, the sky bearers, and the mythical fights) the linear disposition of the sequences adopted by the painter of the Vaticanus B prevented that deeper understanding of cosmogonic nature, i.e. the reference to the cardinal directions, that becomes apparent when looking at the same sections in the codex Borgia.

This brief case study, just one of numerous parallel readings found in the divinatory manuscripts, illustrates how faulty is the current opinion of pictography as a deficient recording device, and typical of simple and underdeveloped societies.[8] The comparison of these two distinct, yet culturally close pictographic traditions demonstrates the complexity of the pictography that, without the substantial employment of phonetic devices, combines and enhances the potentials of both literature and the visual arts.

City University of New York, Graduate Center

[8] See for example Irving J. Gelb, *A Study of Writing* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1952) and, more recently, John De Francis, *Visible Speech. The Diverse Oneness of Writing Systems* (Honolulu: U of Hawaii P, 1989).

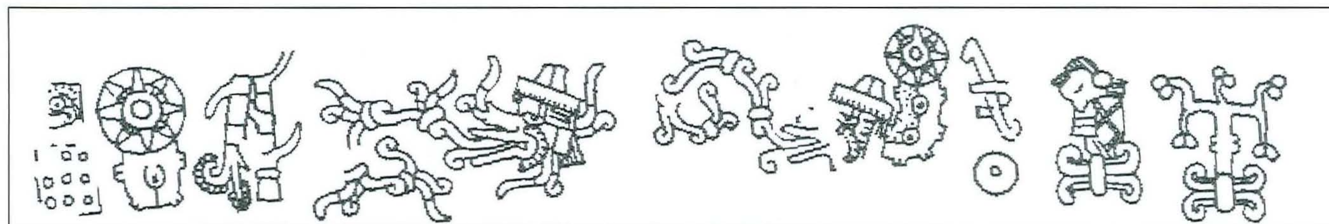

Figure 1. *Codex Vienna*, page 27.

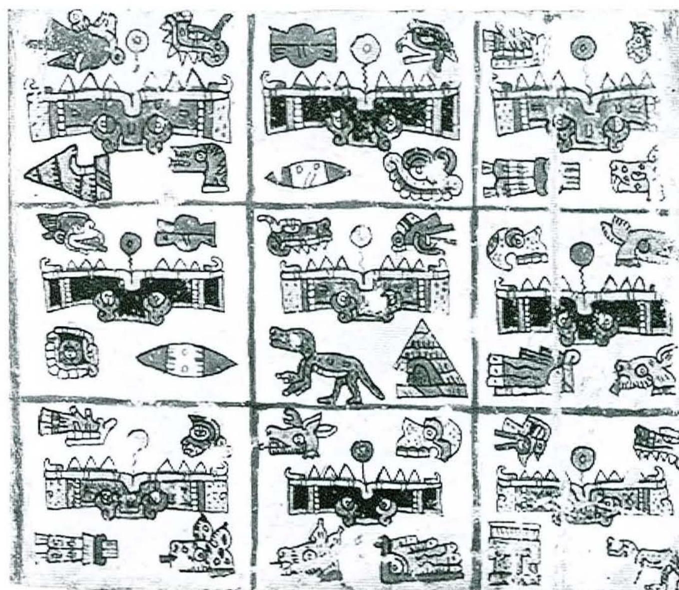

Figure 2. *Codex Vaticanus B*, page 71.

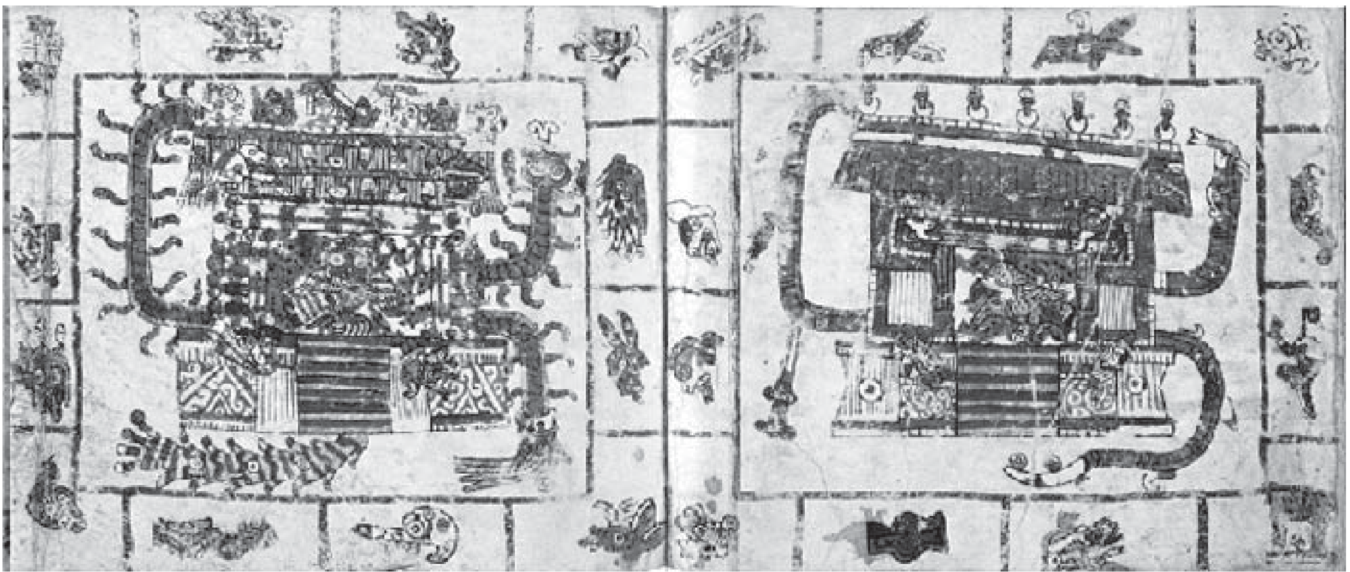

Figure 3. *Codex Vaticanus B*, pages 13-14.

Figure 4. *Codex Borgia*, page 49.

Figure 5. *Codex Borgia*, page 52.

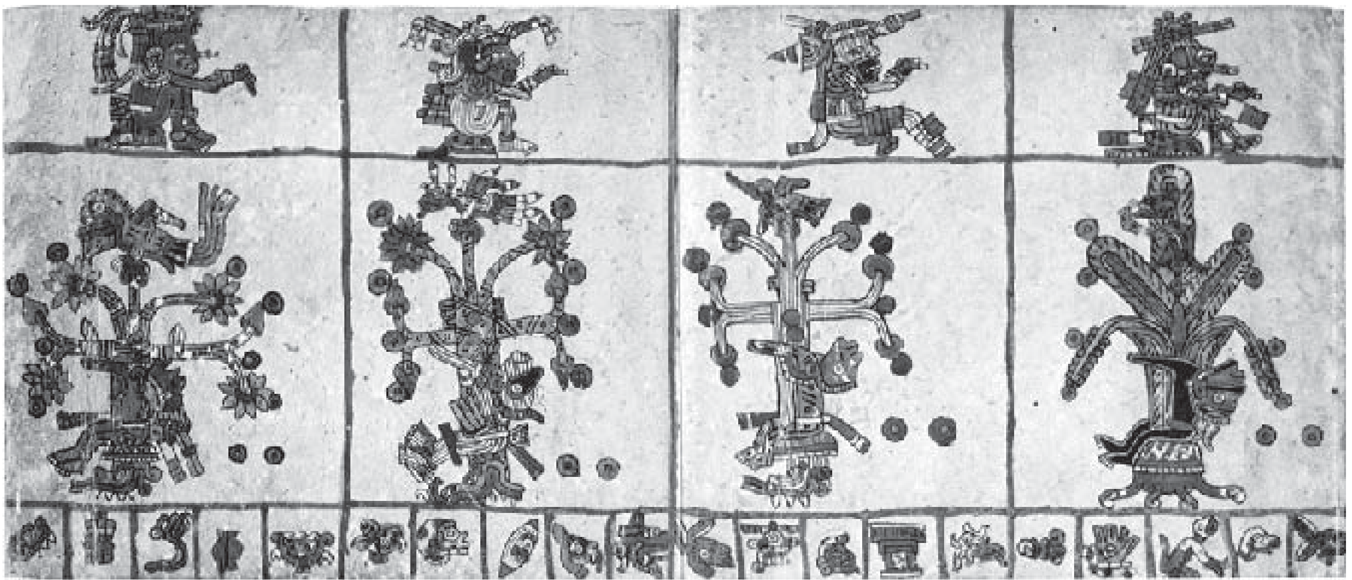

Figure 6. *Codex Vaticanus B*, pages 17-18.

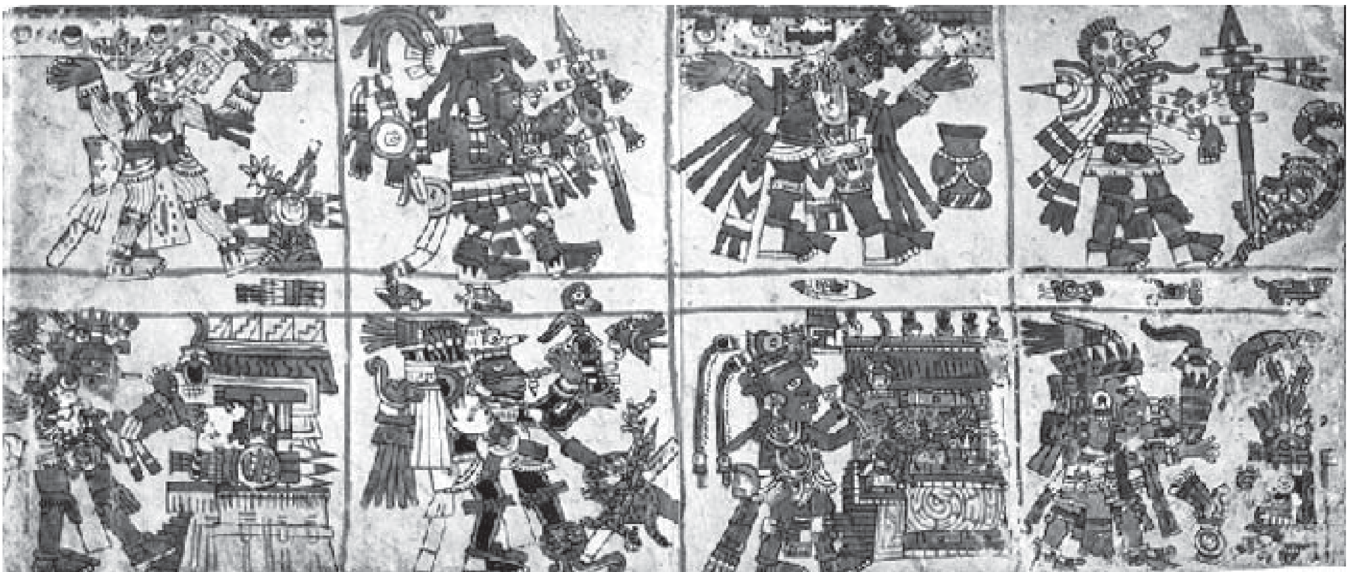

Figure 7. *Codex Vaticanus B*, pages 19-20.

Figure 8. *Codex Vaticanus B*, page 27.

Figure 9. Diagram of the composition of the two codices.

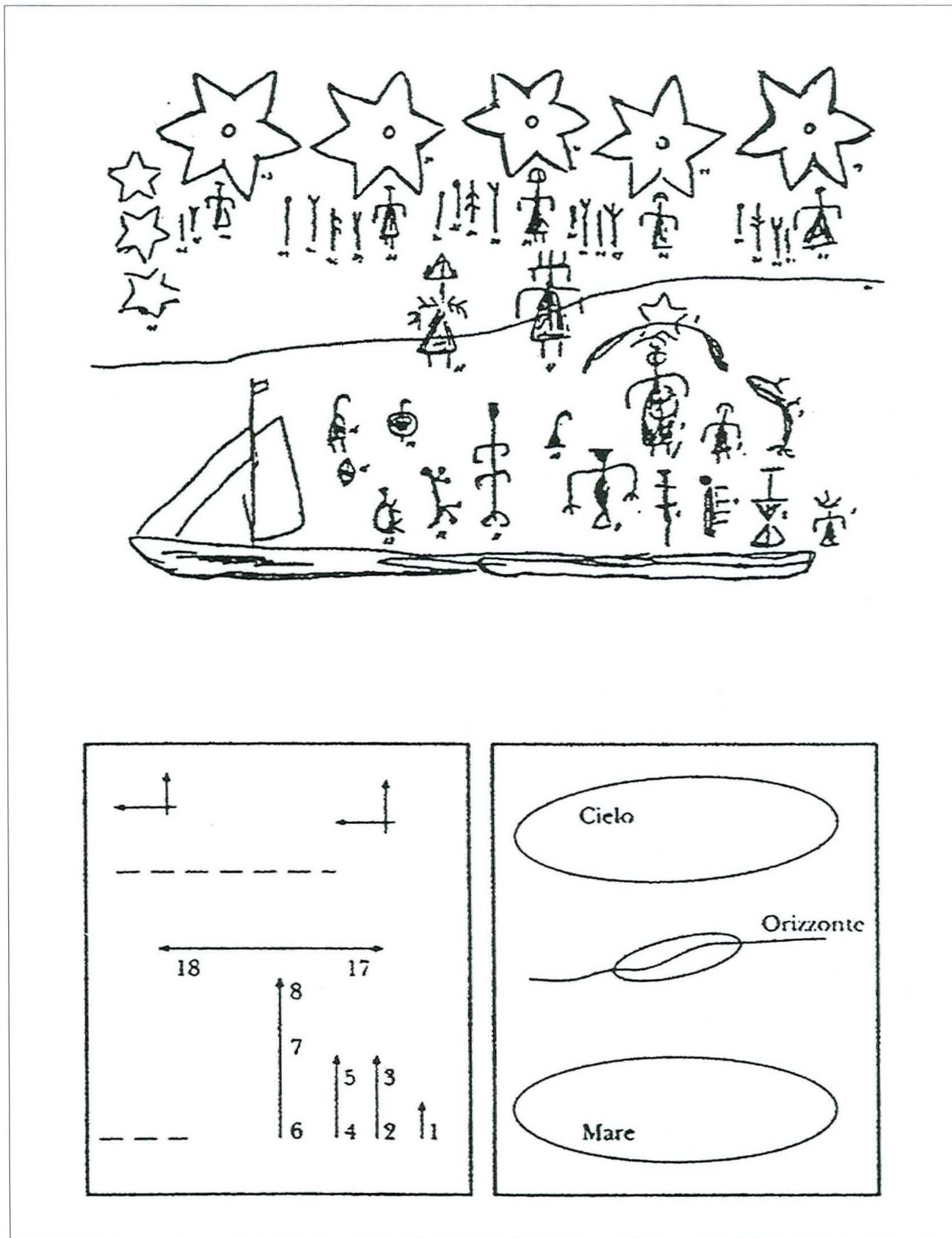

Figure 10. Above, *The Canoe of the Moon*. Below, diagrams of two possible readings; in Carlo Severi, *La memoria rituale. Follia e immagine del Bianco in una tradizione sciamanica amerindiana* (Florence: La Nuova Italia Editrice, 1993) 178.

Classical Chastity and Chivalric Tradition: Pisanello's Portrait Medal of Cecilia Gonzaga

Tanja L. Jones

In 1447, Pisanello (Antonio di Puccio, *before* 1394-*c.* 1455) created a group of cast bronze portrait medals for Ludovico Gonzaga (b. 1412, 1444-1478), second Marchese of Mantua. Inscriptions on the obverse of three of the works identify the subjects as Gonzaga family members. They are Ludovico (Figure 1); his deceased father, Gianfrancesco (b. 1395, 1433-1444) (Figure 2); and Cecilia, Ludovico's youngest sister (Figure 3).[1] The medallic portrait of Cecilia Gonzaga (1426-1451), the focus of this paper, bears two distinctions long acknowledged by art historians. First, it is the only portrait medal that Pisanello created of a woman. Second, it is the only one of the Mantuan works inscribed with both the artist's signature and a date—1447. Since the commission for the works is undocumented, the group is dated upon the basis of the Cecilia medal inscription.[2] Though this work has been extensively examined in art historical literature, the fact that Pisanello's portrait medal of Cecilia Gonzaga was the first medallic portrait of a contemporary female produced since antiquity has been largely overlooked in studies of Gonzaga court patronage.[3] In acknowledgement of this unique position, the medal, and the circumstances surrounding the commission, merit critical reevaluation.

Previous scholarly examination of the Cecilia medal has focused on formal and iconographic analysis of the individual work contextualized through the subject's biography.[4] An alternative reading for the image, beyond a strictly biographical/commemorative function, becomes possible when one examines the object both in relation to the others that Pisanello produced for Ludovico Gonzaga and within the larger scope of Gonzaga court concerns during the 1440s. It is suggested here that the work was conceived as an integral part of a broader visual campaign mounted by Ludovico Gonzaga to glorify his mission as a military leader, or *condottiere*. To that end, the second marchese cast himself in the role of Christian knight in an effort to associate his military prowess with imperial, Christian service. A statement made in 1443 by Filippo Maria Visconti, the powerful Duke of Milan and the former employer of the Gonzaga *condottiere*, acknowledged Ludovico's desired persona.[5] Visconti noted, "[T]he lord Lodovico does not practice the profession of arms for the greed of gain but to obtain honor and fame."[6] When the medals that Pisanello created of the Gonzaga are viewed as a thematically interrelated group, as they have not been before, the Cecilia image can be understood, not as an isolated innovation, but as a functional, and critical, element in this larger visual program.

A drawing by Pisanello of Faustina the Elder, wife of Antoninus Pius, now at the Louvre, has a pictorial basis in numerous extant examples of ancient medals and coins depicting the Roman empress.[7] Such visual evidence confirms that Pisanello accessed and studied classical examples of fe-

This paper developed from a course under the direction of Dr. Jack Freiberg. I would like to thank Dr. Freiberg for his invaluable suggestions and encouragement during the development of this topic.

1 See George Francis Hill, *A Corpus of Italian Medals of the Renaissance before Cellini,* 2 vols. (London: British Museum, 1930). Ludovico Gonzaga (second Marchese), cat. 36; Gianfrancesco Gonzaga (first Marchese), cat. 20; Cecilia Gonzaga, cat. 37.

2 For a discussion of Pisanello's movements in Italy during the 1440s and his employment by the Gonzaga, see Joanna Woods-Marsden, *The Gonzaga of Mantua and Pisanello's Arthurian Frescoes* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1988) 35-36, 55. For notes on dating the medal of Gianfrancesco to 1447, see Luke Syson and Dillian Gordon*, Pisanello: Painter to the Renaissance Court* (London: National Gallery Company, 2001) 45, n. 3.

3 This position of primacy was first acknowledged and discussed by Eleonora Luciano, *Medals of Women from the Italian Renaissance Courts: From Cecilia Gonzaga to Isabella of Aragon,* diss., Indiana University, 1997 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, 1998) 3-24.

4 Most recently and notably, the substantial bibliography surrounding the work includes: David Alan Brown, ed., *Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo's Ginerva de' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001) 119-120; Syson and Gordon 114-117; Luciano 3-24; Luke Syson, "Consorts, Mistresses and Exemplary Women: The Female Medallic Portrait in Fifteenth-Century Italy," *The Sculpted Object: 1400-1700*, ed. Stuart Currie and Peta Motture (Brookfield: Ashgate Publishing Co., 1997) 50-51; Stephen K. Scher, ed., *The Currency of Fame: Portrait Medals of the Renaissance* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. in association with The Frick Collection, 1994) 52-53.

5 For Ludovico Gonzaga's early career and various *condotte*, see Elisabeth Ward Mahnke (Swain), "The Political Career of a *Condottiere*-Prince: Ludovico Gonzaga, 1444-1466," diss., Harvard University, 1975, esp. 24-105; Woods-Marsden 48-50.

6 Letter from Filippo Maria Visconti to Gerolamo di Siena, Milan, 21 February 1443, Archivio di Stato, Mantua, Archivio Gonzaga, busta 1607, quoted in Woods-Marsden 67.

7 Louvre inv. RF 519 recto, referenced in conjunction with the Cecilia medal by Syson and Gordon 117; published by Syson, fig. 3.2; Dominique Cordellier, ed. *Pisanello: le peintre aux sept vertus* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1996) cat. 70. For examples of medals depicting the Empress Faustina, see Alberto Banti, *I grandi bronzi imperiali: selezione di sesterzi e medaglioni classificati secondo il sistema Cohen*, trans. Anna Banti, vols. 2 & 4 (Firenze: A. Banti, *c.* 1983) cat. 30 (5) and cat. 31 (3).

male medallic portraiture; in fact, documentary evidence suggests that the artist owned a group of antique coins.[8] Certainly, the cast bronze form, profile portrait obverse, and allegorical reverse of the Cecilia medal indicate a formal debt to such classical prototypes. Yet, the seamless integration of classical form and Christian allusion that distinguish Pisanello's medallic works mark the Cecilia medal as a re-creation. As a Renaissance "re-invention," in both style and visual syntax, the Cecilia medal is a complex of contemporary signifiers, relaying information to the viewer regarding the political and religious concerns of the Gonzaga court.[9] I suggest that the image represents a visual allegory of Christian salvation, a message that links the work with the others in the group, particularly the medallic portrait of Ludovico Gonzaga, and allows the identification of a visual and ideological model for the medals.

The Chaste Ideal and Christian Allegory

The Florentine bookseller and biographer, Vespasiano da Bisticci, described Cecilia Gonzaga as, "[O]ne of the most beautiful maidens of her time . . . who in learning and in conduct surpassed all other women."[10] Though we have only her medallic portrait to attest to Cecilia's physical attributes, her academic precocity was the subject of much contemporary acclaim. She reportedly demonstrated a mastery of Greek by age eight.[11] Vespasiano and other contemporary sources attest that, in 1443, Cecilia expressed the desire to enter a convent. In doing so, she defied her father, Gianfrancesco, by refusing the politically advantageous marriage he had arranged for her to Oddantonio da Montefeltro, the future Duke of Urbino.[12] Though the marchese did not force the marriage, neither would he allow her monastic investiture during his lifetime. It was only after his death, in 1444, that Cecilia was confirmed in the second Franciscan order of Poor Clares at the Mantuan convent of Corpus Domini.[13] The order was *en clausura*, that is, removed from contact with the secular world.[14] Thus, Cecilia's circumstances in the year 1447, the date inscribed on the medal, raise questions regarding the verisimilitude of the image and the function of the work.

The resemblance that the image bears to Pisanello's earlier, painted portrait of Margherita Gonzaga (1418-39) (Figure 4), Cecilia's sister and the first wife of Leonello d'Este, the Marchese of Ferrara, has long inspired scholarly suggestion that the pre-existing panel served as model for the medallic image.[15] Certainly, the sculptural depiction of Cecilia Gonzaga in contemporary court attire, rather than the Clarissan veil and scapular, belies the reality of the subject's circumstances at the inscribed date.[16] Given these issues, it may be suggested that the serene countenance of the obverse image, bearing the inscription "VIRGO" and aligned with mid-fifteenth-century conceptions of idealized beauty (note the high, plucked forehead of the figure) provides insight into contemporary expectations regarding the function of this medallic portrait. As both Luke Syson and Patricia Simons have noted, the depiction of an idealized beauty, rather than the realistic portrayal of an individual, is an abstraction typical of fifteenth-century

8 See Syson 45, n. 17; and Joanna Woods-Marsden, "Art and Political Identity in Fifteenth-Century Naples: Pisanello, Cristoforo di Geremia, and King Alfonso's Imperial Fantasies," *Art and Politics in Late Medieval and Early Renaissance Italy: 1250-1500*, ed. Charles M. Rosenberg, Notre Dame Conferences in Medieval Studies, no. 2 (Notre Dame, London: U of Notre Dame P, 1990) 12.

9 For the designation of Pisanello's medallic work as a "re-invention" of the classical form in the fifteenth-century context, see Syson 46.

10 Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Renaissance Princes, Popes, and Prelates: The Vespasiano Memoirs, Lives of Illustrious Men of the XVth Century*, trans. William George and Emily Waters (New York: Harper & Row, 1963) 411-412.

11 Scher 52; Margaret Leah King, "Thwarted Ambitions: Six Learned Women of the Italian Renaissance," *Soundings* 59 (1976): 29.

12 For the circumstances surrounding the cancellation of the marriage, see I. Lazzarini, "Cecilia Gonzaga," *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 57 (Roma: Instituto della enciclopedia italiana, 2001) 696-698; Luciano 14-17; Giancarlo Malacarne and Rodolfo Signorini, *Monete e medaglie di Mantova e dei Gonzaga dal XII al XIX secolo: Stemmi imprese gonzagheschi* (Milano: Electa, 1996) 67-71.

13 Gianfrancesco relented in 1443, but, according to a letter of the same year from another of Vittorino's former pupils, Gregorio Correr, the marchese did not immediately consent to Cecilia entering the convent. See Margaret L. King and Albert Rabil, Jr., eds., "Gregorio Correr: Letter to the Virgin Cecilia Gonzaga, on Fleeing this Worldly Life," *Her Immaculate Hand: Selected Works by and about Women Humanists of Quattrocento Italy* (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1983). For Gianfrancesco's provision for Cecilia's entry into the convent only in his will, see Lazzarini 698. The circumstances surrounding Cecilia's investiture in the order remain unclear and cannot be directly associated with the date of 1447. A contemporary Mantuan merchant, Gianfrancesco Maloselli, recorded the ceremonial procession of family members who accompanied Cecilia to the convent on February 2, 1445; see Malacarne and Signorini 70-71. Following entrance, the Clarissan rule required a one-year wait for full investiture; for this and the Gonzaga connection with the convent (renamed Santa Paola in honor of Cecilia's mother), see Jeryldene M. Wood, *Women, Art, and Spirituality: The Poor Clares of Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996) 88-96, n. 10-12. The date on the medal may relate to Ludovico's appointment as captain general of Florence in the anti-Visconti Florentine-Venetian alliance, an important political but not particularly financially lucrative contract for the *condottiere*, but this seems tenuous as the date of the *condotta* does not appear on the medal depicting Ludovico himself. For the *condatta*, see Ward Mahnke (Swain) 68-77 and Woods-Marsden, *Gonzaga* 48-50.

14 Wood 37, 85.

15 For a thorough discussion and identification of the sitter as Margherita Gonzaga, rather than Ginevra d'Este (as is often suggested), see Syson and Gordon 102-106. For a third identification of the sitter as Lucia d'Este, see Dominique Cordellier, ed., *Pisanello: le peintre aux sept vertus* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1996) cat. 105.

16 For Clarissan dress, see Cordelia Warr, "Religious Dress in Italy in the Late Middle Ages," *Defining Dress: Dress as Object, Meaning and Identity*, ed. Amy de la Haye and Elizabeth Wilson (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1997) 80-82.

Italian 'portraits' of females.[17] Thus, the portrait is removed from Cecilia as an individual, Clarissan nun to 'Cecilia' as an expression of universals, of contemporary ideals of behavior and appearance. The image presents 'Cecilia' as a physical manifestation, a personification, of that which was considered the virtuous female's primary attribute. This was purity of spirit as expressed through exemplary behavior—namely, chastity. [18]

A combination of Christian signifiers identify the subject of the medallic portrait, not only *with*, but *as*, the chaste feminine ideal, a message that unites the medal obverse and reverse. The inscription of the subject's name, Cecilia, on the obverse, evokes the third-century Roman martyr for whom the Gonzaga daughter was named. Not coincidentally, that saint's hagiography bore a strong association with Cecilia Gonzaga's biography. According to the *Golden Legend*, St. Cecilia was born to a wealthy family, and, when married to a pagan, immediately convinced her husband to convert to Christianity and join her in a vow of chastity. Styled as a *sponsa Christi*, a bride of Christ, the saint declared to her husband, "I have a lover, an angel of God, who watches over my body with exceeding zeal."[19] Thus, the saint provided a chaste moral exemplar for Pisanello's depiction of Cecilia Gonzaga as a fifteenth-century *sponsa Christi,* an identification made explicit through the unicorn image on the medal reverse.[20]

The unicorn resting at the feet of the female figure is the prime example of Pisanello's careful blend of contemporary signifiers of chastity within the image. The medieval texts of the *Physiologius*, upon which numerous bestiaries were based, associated the mythic animal with that quality, since only a virgin was believed to be able to capture the fierce beast**.** A drawing, attributed to Pisanello and featuring a goat in the same position as the unicorn on the medal reverse, also with cloven hooves and a long beard, confirms that the medallic depiction of the mythic creature was based on observation of the natural world.[21] While Cecilia's birth date of January 18, under astrological sign of Capricorn, may have inspired Pisanello's visual alignment of the two animals, there was a textual basis for the elision as the *Physiologius* described the "monoceros" or unicorn as, "like the kid, as is our Savior."[22] By the fifteenth century, multiple narrative sequences had developed around the unicorn. A Swiss tapestry altar antependium (*c*. 1480), depicting a Marian *hortus conclusus*, identifies the creature as symbolic of Christ: hunted, captured, and killed (Figure 5). Thus, the unicorn was constructed as a christological symbol, its death analogous with the Passion of the Savior, as the *Physiologus* suggested.[23] The medallic image of the virgin with the unicorn identifies 'Cecilia' both as a personification of the chaste ideal and as a Gonzaga bride of Christ. Isolating the singular image of the mystical union between the virgin and unicorn from the larger narrative constitutes an allegory of the redemptive power of Christianity. In the broader culture that permeated the Gonzaga court, the image signified a *particular* Christian triumph and salvation, specifically, that which might be attained through a successful Gonzaga military campaign in the Holy Land, a concept made clear through an examination of both political context and court commissions.

A Christian Quest

Celebrated as a center of learning, the Mantuan court was part of a larger community interested in the communicative and commemorative possibilities of medallic portraiture. In 1438, while at the court of Leonello d'Este, Ludovico's brother-in-law, Pisanello created his first medal, an image of the Byzantine Emperor John VIII Palaeologus (Figure 6).[24] Produced during his attendance at the Council of Ferrara and Florence (1438-39), the medal depicts the Emperor as a Christian pilgrim, praying to a roadside cross.[25] Political and religious concerns motivated the imperial visit to the west and participation in the Council. The Emperor sought western aid against the Muslim Turks, who threatened to overrun Constantinople.

17 Patricia Simons, "Women in Frames: The Eye, the Gaze, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture," *History Workshop* 25 (1988): 4-30; Patricia Simons, "Portraiture, Portrayal, and Idealization: Ambiguous Individualism in Representations of Renaissance Women," *Language and Images of Renaissance Italy*, ed. Alison Brown (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1995) 263-311. For an application of many of the concepts expressed by Simons in relation to painted portraits to female medallic portraits, see Syson 41-57.

18 For questions of verisimilitude in relation to the Cecilia medal and the expression of contemporary behavioral ideals in medallic images, especially the emphasis on chastity, see Syson 47-51.

19 Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993) 322.

20 For a discussion of the significance of early Christian virgins, especially St. Cecilia, to the Poor Clares, see Wood 24-25. That contemporary Mantuans regarded Cecilia Gonzaga as a bride of Christ is attested to by the merchant, Maloselli, who described Cecilia upon her entry into the convent as "spoxa de Yesu Christo;" see Malacarne and Signorini 70.

21 The drawing is Louvre inv. 2412 (Codex Vallardi), reproduced and discussed in relation to the Cecilia medal by Maria Fossi Todorow, *I disegni del Pisanello e della sua cerchia* (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1966) cat. 14; Cordellier cat. 222.

22 For the association of Cecilia's natal sign with the unicorn image, see Luciano 23. *Physiologus*, trans. Michael J. Curley (Austin: U of Texas P, 1979) 51.

23 On visual narratives surrounding the unicorn, including the passion allegory, see Adolfo Salvatore Cavallo, *The Unicorn Tapestries at the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Abrams, Inc., 1998); Guy de Tervarent, "Licorne," *Attributs et Symboles dans l'Art Profane: 1450-1600* (Geneve: E. Droz, 1958) 236-241. For the evolution of the unicorn as a signifier of purity, see Yona Dureau, "The Metamorphosis of a Signifier vs. an Iconic Signified: The Unicorn—A Case Study," *Semiotica* 128 ½ (2000): 35-68.

24 Hill cat. 19; Scher 44-46.

25 For the Council and Pisanello's medal of John VIII Palaeologus, see Irving Lavin, "Pisanello and the Invention of the Renaissance Medal," *Italienische Frëuhrenaissance und nordeuropèaisches Spëatmittelalter: Kunst der frëuhen Neuzeit im europäeischen Zusammenhang* (1993): esp. 70-74; Syson and Gordon 29-33, 113-114.

The Council produced a short-lived agreement, temporarily uniting the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches, which stipulated that Pope Eugenius IV would, among other things, encourage the western European courts to revive the crusade.[26] This did not come to pass, and both the Muslim control of holy places and the threat to Constantinople continued. Indeed, the Turkish capture of that city in 1453, and attendant Western fears of further advances, insured that the issue remained of major concern to the papacy and the courts throughout the fifteenth century. As Irving Lavin has suggested, this equestrian image of a prayerful emperor underlines the fact that Pisanello's re-creation of the classical, medallic form was firmly rooted in the Christian, imperial context.[27] This context was, it is here argued, consciously evoked in the Gonzaga medals, as a manifestation of Ludovico's political aspirations.

While the Cecilia and Ludovico medals are not pendants, per se, the images are certainly thematically interrelated. First, the inscriptions on the medals make the familial relationship between the subjects clear. Cecilia is explicitly identified as the "Daughter of Gianfrancesco, First Marchese of Mantua." As the medals of both Gianfrancesco and Ludovico bear their titles, the inscriptions link the images in a dynastic program. Second, as we have seen, the Cecilia medal distills the subject's attributes in an image immortalizing the Gonzaga sister as a passive, female exemplar of the Christian ideal. As such, she serves to inspire chivalric action, stimulating the active, equestrian image of Ludovico as a Christian knight.[28] The *Golden Legend* recounts the day of St. Cecilia's martyrdom, when "Dawn ended the night, and Cecilia exclaimed: 'Hail, soldiers of Christ, cast aside the works of darkness and put on the arms of light!'"[29] The answer to this metaphorical exhortation is found on the reverse of the Ludovico medal. Cecilia's brother appears not only as a Gonzaga knight, identified by the familial daisy attribute, but as a "soldier of Christ," wearing the "arms of light" beneath a shining sun, one of his favored personal emblems.[30] The corresponding crescent on the Cecilia image has been utilized to associate the semi-nude, female figure with the goddess Diana, a reference limited solely to Cecilia's chastity.[31] While the moon and sun may have served to visually align the Gonzaga pair with the mythological siblings Diana and Apollo, I suggest that the crescent bears an additional meaning in this reading. The new moon was an important celestial body in Muslim cosmology, and the Islamic *hilal* was associated by Westerners, from the time of the medieval crusades, with the Muslim world. The crescent was also a traditional, pre-Islamic emblem of the ancient city of Byzantium (later Constantinople), which held a devotion to Diana.[32] Thus, the inclusion of the lunar symbol on the Cecilia image, in the Christian and political context here identified for the medals, may be read as reference to the specific and pressing goal that emerged following the Council of Ferrara and Florence—a crusade to protect the endangered city of Constantinople from the Muslim Turks, symbolized by the placement of the maiden and unicorn, signifying the Christian ideal, beneath the crescent moon.[33]

Political Legitimation and an Ideological Source

From the beginning of imperial Christianity under Constantine, the protection of Christian relics and locales in the Holy Land was a duty associated with imperial mission, a conception still very much alive during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Lavin has suggested that, in order to associate himself with the imperial legacy of Christian championship, Jean, Duke of Berry (1340-1416), acquired an image, created by the Limbourg brothers, (*c.* 1402), of the Emperor Constantine as a victorious Christian soldier, a cross upon his chest (Figure 7).[34] In fact, the duke's brother, Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, mounted the unsuccessful Crusade of Nicopolis in 1396.[35] While the Constantine image is known today only through copies of the lost original, an inventory of the ducal collection indicates that the original work was gold,

26 See Aziz S. Atiya, *The Crusade in the Later Middle Ages* (1938; Reprint, London: Butler and Tanner, 1965) 267 and Deno Geonakoplos, "Byzantium and the Crusades, 1354-1453," *The Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, ed. Harry W. Hazard, vol. 3, *A History of the Crusades*, ed. Kenneth M. Setton (Madison: The U of Wisconsin P, Ltd.) 94.

27 Lavin 70-74.

28 For an association of the activity of the chivalric knight with that of the "Christian soldier" as adapted by fifteenth-century Italians, see Kristen Lippincott, "The Genesis and Significance of the Fifteenth-Century Italian Impresa," *Chivalry in the Renaissance*, ed. Sydney Anglo (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1990) 61-62.

29 de Voragine 322.

30 For the daisy or marigold in Gonzaga imagery, the exact significance of which is unclear, and Ludovico's employment of the sun emblem as related to his natal horoscope, see Woods-Marsden, *Gonzaga* 45-46, 55-56; Malacarne and Signorini 71-76.

31 Scher, *Currency* 53; Luciano 21; Syson and Gordon 117.

32 For a reference to the use of crescent in the early fifteenth-century French medallion of Heraclius as symbolic of ancient Byzantium, see Scher, *Currency* 37; Mark Jones, "The First Cast Medals and the Limbourgs: The Iconography and Attribution of the Constantine and Heraclius Medals," *Art History* 2 (1979): 41, n. 1. See notes 37 and 38 for Pisanello's familiarity with the Heraclius medallion. For the association of the crescent with Byzantium and the independent usage of the image as an Islamic emblem, see R. Ettinghausen, "*hilal*," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. H.A.R. Gibb, et. al., vol. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1971) 379-385, esp. 385. Ettinghausen refutes the suggestion in earlier literature that the Turks adopted the crescent only after the conquest of Constantinople in 1453.

33 Jones 41, n. 1.

34 For the attribution of the image to the Limbourg brothers, see Jones 38-40; for the same and an assertion of the programmatic efforts of Jean, Duke of Berry, see Lavin esp. 71-73.

35 George Holmes, *Europe: Hierarchy and Revolt 1320-1450*, 2nd ed. (Malden: Blackwell, 2000) 174-175.

embellished with jewels, and worn on a chain.[36] Since the object did not depict a contemporary, but rather an historical figure and was not cast, as Pisanello's medals were, the Constantine image might be termed a 'proto-medal,' as a precursor to Pisanello's works.[37] Indeed, scholars have contended that the Duke of Berry's Constantine proto-medal or medallion, copies of which circulated widely in the Italian courts during the fifteenth century, served as a formal model for the scale of and equestrian imagery found on Pisanello's portrait medals and, because both depict Christian emperors, an ideological model for the medallic portrait of John VIII Palaeologus.[38]

The Gonzaga were eager to align themselves with the concept of royal prerogatives as embodied in the person of Constantine and expressed on the Franco-Burgundian medallion.[39] In the political realm, this motivated Gianfrancesco Gonzaga's repeated and finally successful efforts, in 1433, to purchase the title of Marchese from the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund. In that same year, Gianfrancesco paid a 50,000-florin brideprice to arrange the arrival of Barbara of Brandenburg (1422-81), a daughter of the Hohenzollern family and relative of the Emperor, in Mantua as Ludovico's fiancée.[40] It would seem that, beyond a formal debt, there also exists an ideological relationship between the Gonzaga medals and the Constantine image that makes both the political aspirations of Ludovico Gonzaga and the relationship between Pisanello's Mantuan medals clear. The obverse inscription of the Constantine medallion reads, "Constantine, faithful in Christ our God, emperor and ruler of the Romans and forever exalted," identifying the emperor who, on the basis of a battlefield vision and victory under the sign of the cross, converted to and later legalized Christianity.[41] Understood as an extension of this image, the equestrian portrait of Ludovico Gonzaga identifies him as a Christian knight in the same imperial lineage, on a mission to the Holy Land. In the absence of documentary evidence, the question of whether or not such a Gonzaga mission was specifically planned remains unanswered; nevertheless, given the contemporary political context, this visual alignment with Christian and imperial models glorified the work of the *condottiere* as that of a righteous warrior in the chivalric tradition, in pursuit of "honor and fame," not simply the "greed of gain."[42]

It is the reverse of the Constantine image, featuring a little-understood and iconographically obscure scene, which bears comparison with the Cecilia medal. Two women, old age and youth, are shown seated on either side of the Fountain of Life (*fons vitae*), which issues the True Cross. Though the specific identity of the figures and their attributes has been the subject of much scholarly debate, the image is certainly an allegory of the redemptive power of Christianity.[43] It is here suggested that the work served as an ideological source for the Cecilia medal, which carried the same message. The combination of Christian soldier and eternal goal on the Constantine medallion was clearly adapted by Pisanello for the portrait medals of the Gonzaga siblings. Ludovico appears as the Christian soldier and Cecilia as an idealized exemplar, the reverse of her image manifesting the ultimate triumph of salvation through unity with Christ.

Finally, the redemptive message on the Cecilia medal, while indebted to the Constantine image, held unique significance in Mantua, where the relic of the Most Holy Blood was a source of reverence and local pride. According to legend, St. Longinus brought the blood of Christ to the city, where it was traditionally kept buried for safety. In 1401, the Gonzaga began a tradition of exhibiting the relic on an annual basis, drawing more than 10,000 pilgrims the first year. Both Gianfrancesco and Ludovico, in 1436 and 1460 respectively, had coins struck bearing images of the relic.[44] Just as the water in the Fountain of Life on the Constantine image was associated with Baptism and redemption, the blood of Christ was

36 For the inventory listing of 1413, see R. Weiss, "The Medieval Medallions of Constantine and Heraclius," *The Numismatic Chronicle* 7.3 (1963): 133.

37 For these criteria as distinctions, see Lavin 68. For the history of the Constantine medallion (and the image of Heraclius, the original likely produced contemporaneously with that of the Constantine image), see Syson and Gordon 114; Scher, *Currency* 32-37; Jones, 35-44; Weiss 129-44.

38 An Este inventory of 1432 included two silver copies of the work closely identified with the Constantine image, the medallion depicting the Emperor Heraclius (see notes 32 and 37); indeed, scholars traditionally view the works as a pair; see Syson and Gordon, 114. An inventory of the goods of Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga, Ludovico's son, made in 1483 indicates that he owned a medallic image of Constantine, likely a copy of the Burgundian proto-medal; see D. S. Chambers, *A Renaissance Cardinal and His Worldly Goods: The Will and Inventory of Francesco Gonzaga (1444-1483)* (London: The Warburg Institute, U of London, 1992) 186. While these dates do not specifically place the Constantine image at the Gonzaga court in 1447, Pisanello moved between Mantua and the Este court at Ferrara. For the Constantine image as ideological model for the Palaeologus medal, see Lavin 70-74. The author suggests similar circumstances, involving the visit of an eastern emperor to the West, seeking aid against Turkish invasion, occasioned the creation of both of those works.

39 There is some discrepancy in the literature regarding fifteenth-century conceptions of the Constantine image. For the suggestion that the Constantine and Heraclius medallions were believed to be ancient originals, see Weiss 129-130. Scholars have also suggested that Pisanello would have recognized the images as creations of the French courts; see Lavin 72-73 and Syson and Gordon 114.

40 See Woods-Marsden, *Gonzaga* 47; Ward Mahnke (Swain) 36.

41 For the translation of the inscriptions see Scher, *Currency* 33.

42 See note 6.

43 For various interpretations of the identity of the figures and their significance, see Scher, *Currency* 34-35; Jones 35-39.

44 For a brief discussion of the Most Holy Blood in Mantua, see Eugene J. Johnson, *S. Andrea in Mantua: The Building History* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State UP, 1975) 5-6, 16. For the coins, see David Chambers and Jane Martineau, *Splendours of the Gonzaga* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1981) cat. 41. For a coin bearing the relic on the obverse with Ludovico's sun emblem on the reverse, see Malacarne and Signorini 73. For the sake of brevity, I have not included the fourth medal that Pisanello created in Mantua, that of the humanist who educated

the sacramental vehicle for the goal of eternal salvation. Though the capture of the unicorn on the Cecilia medal is quite bloodless, the next sequence in the Christological narrative was the bloody spearing of the beast. Signifying Crucifixion and Christian salvation, the image was familiar to fifteenth-century viewers, as indicated by the appearance of the scene on both the antependium and a late fourteenth-century French ivory casket (Figure 8). Both works visually compress the unicorn narrative, conflating the capture of the beast with the sacrificial moment, testimony to conventional recognition of the sequential connection between the incidents. On the antependium, Eve catches the unicorn's blood in a chalice; her banderole says, "And by his blood we are saved."[45] The composition marries the unicorn with the Fountain of Life, as the sealed garden fountain in a Marian *hortus conclusus*, in the Eucharistic context, affirming the sacramental associations of each image.[46]

This is where Pisanello's Gonzaga medals, traditionally viewed solely as distinct images, each with a singular biographical context, intersect. The reverse of the Constantine medal manifests the True Cross and the eternal goal, an imperial Christian message. So, too, the Gonzaga medal group consists of a series of images tied by the themes of the Christian, chivalric tradition attesting to familial virtue and political aspiration. As a re-creation of the classical form with a Mantuan-specific, fifteenth-century Christian message, the medallic portrait of Cecilia Gonzaga played a crucial role in this thematic program.

Florida State University

Ludovico and Cecilia, Vittorino da Feltre (1378-1446), Hill cat. 38. The Vittorino medal reverse features an image of a pelican in piety, a Eucharistic symbol traditionally interpreted as a reference to the Christian charity and generosity of the educator towards his students, see Scher, *Currency* 53-54. Given the Mantuan reverence for the Most Holy Blood, I suggest that the Vittorino medal might be viewed in the same local context as the Cecilia medal reverse, thus placing the work within the visual program here proposed for Pisanello's Mantuan medals.

45 For the banderoles on the altar frontal, see Cavallo 49.

46 Brian E. Daley, "The 'Closed Garden' and the 'Sealed Fountain': Song of Songs 4:12 in the Late Medieval Iconography of Mary," *Dumbarton Oaks Colloquium on the History of Landscape Architecture*, ed. Elisabeth B. MacDougall, vol. 10 (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, 1986) 255-278.

Figure 1. Pisanello, *Ludovico III Gonzaga, 1412-1478, 2nd Marquess of Mantua, 1444*, *c.* 1447, bronze, diameter: .102 m (4"). Samuel H. Kress Collection. Image © 2004 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Figure 2. Pisanello, *Gianfrancesco I Gonzaga, 1395-1444, 1st Marquess of Mantua, 1433*, c. 1447, lead, diameter: .100 m (3 15/16"). Samuel H. Kress Collection, Image © 2004 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Figure 3. Pisanello, *Cecilia Gonzaga, 1426-1451, Daughter of Gianfrancesco I*, bronze, diameter: .087 m, 1447, Victoria & Albert Museum, London / Art Resource, NY.

[*left*] Figure 4. Pisanello, *Portrait of Margherita Gonzaga*, oil on wood, *c*. 1438-40, 43 x 30 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris, Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

[*below*] Figure 5. (Det.) *Hortus Conclusus*, Antependium, 1480, Swiss National Museum, Zurich, COL-14873-4.

[*top*] Figure 6. Pisanello, *John VIII Palaeologus, 1390-1448, Emperor of Constantinople, 1425*, 1438, lead, diameter: .103 m (4 1/16"). Samuel H. Kress Collection. Image © 2004 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

[*center*] Figure 7. *Constantine the Great, Roman Emperor (307-337)*, 15th century, Parisian, bronze, diameter: .095 m (3 ¾"). Samuel H. Kress Collection. Image © 2004 Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

[*bottom*] Figure 8. *King Mark in the Tree and the Capture of the Unicorn* (from the *Ivory Casket with Scenes of Romance and Chivalry*, right end), 1330-50, French, ivory, 11 cm x 25.2 cm. The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, 71.264.

Knot(s) Made by Human Hands: Copying, Invention, and Intellect in the Work of Leonardo da Vinci and Albrecht Dürer

Eileen Elizabeth Costello

Between 1506 and 1507, during his second stay in Venice, Albrecht Dürer copied a series of engravings based on designs by Leonardo da Vinci to produce a set of six woodcuts (Figures 1-4). Scholars continue to puzzle over these ornamental patterns, yet their inquiries commonly focus on the prints' intended purpose.[1] Their speculations are often intriguing, although they neglect to consider more important questions such as why Leonardo's designs appealed to Dürer, what compelled the northern Renaissance artist to copy them, and how one might understand these intricate patterns within the context of Renaissance invention. Additionally, since Dürer's impact on Renaissance print production tends to overshadow other artists' influences on his own work, these woodcuts provide a unique opportunity to consider how Leonardo's designs stimulated innovation in Dürer's later achievements.

Although there is no evidence that Leonardo ever made engravings or even made reference to them in his writings on art, these engravings undoubtedly represent his designs.[2] The designs almost certainly date between 1490-1500, and instances of similar interlaced patterns occur in his *Lady with an Ermine* (1489-90), in the Salle delle Asse's ceiling decoration from the Castello Sforzesco (1497-98), and in the *Mona Lisa* (begun in 1503).[3] The patterns are also prevalent throughout his notebooks dating from 1493-1508.[4] Furthermore, Vasari writes that Leonardo "spent much time in making a regular design of a series of knots so that the cord may be traced from one end to the other, the whole filling a round space. There is a fine engraving of this most difficult design, and in the middle are the words: '*Leonardi Vinci Academia.*'"[5]

From the inscription, art historians once supposed that Leonardo directed a drawing school in Milan and that these engravings represented tickets to disputations held at the academy, prizes, or perhaps *ex libris* to be pasted in books from the Academy's library. However, such a school would not have existed in Leonardo's time and "Academia" could not have applied to an art academy, a type of school that was only introduced later in the sixteenth century by Vasari.[6] Because Leonardo incorporated the interlaced patterns within his portrait costumes, some scholars assume that the designs served as lace or embroidery models. Others have guessed that the engravings served as Leonardo's coat of arms since "Vinci," the town of his birth, also means "to bind" or "entwine." Many propose that these prints were conceived as textile designs, ornaments for pottery, labyrinths, or puzzle patterns for artists working in various crafts. But without further evidence it is impossible to know either Leonardo's intention for these engravings or Dürer's for his woodcuts. Although the possibilities are almost endless and the hypotheses engaging, what is of greater importance is why these interlaced patterns so intrigued Dürer. The designs exhibit extraordinary complexity, and they doubtless involved a great deal of time and concentration in their execution. Time was a particular concern

This paper was developed under the direction of Dr. Jeffrey Chipps Smith, Kay Fortson Chair in European Art, The University of Texas at Austin, whom I would like to thank for his advice, encouragement, and inspiration.

1 Wherever one finds Leonardo's designs or Dürer's woodcuts discussed or even briefly mentioned, one also finds a different opinion as to their purported function. For the most informative summaries, see Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, "The Iconography of Dürer's 'Knots' and Leonardo's 'Concatenation,'" *Art Quarterly* 7 (Spring 1944): 109-128; Arthur M. Hind, "Two Unpublished Plates of the Series of Six 'Knots' Engraved after Designs by Leonardo da Vinci," *Burlington Magazine* 12 (October 1907/March 1908): 41-42; and Carlo Pedretti, *Leonardo, Architect*, trans. Sue Brill (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1985) 296-298.

2 Arthur M. Hind believes that it is somewhat strange that Leonardo, an artist who practiced and experimented in so many arts, "did not investigate the copper plate." Although we do not know who actually engraved the designs, Hind asserts that "the plates were certainly engraved after drawings of Leonardo." Arthur M. Hind, *Early Italian Engraving*, vol. 5 (Nendeln/Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1970) 93.

3 Hind also cites the Cortile of the Casa Ponti as well as the sleeve of *Young Woman's Profile* (also known as *Lady with a Pearl Hairnet*) in the Ambrosiana (now attributed to Ambrogio de Predis). In addition, Paul Errara refers to the decoration of Cascina Pozzobonella (now in part demolished) in which he sees the same interlace pattern by Leonardo. Hind, *Early Italian Engravings* 93. Paul Errara, "L'Accademia di Leonardo da Vinci," *Rassegna d'Arte* (1901): 81.

4 *Windsor 12351*, *c.* 1493-94; *Codice Atlanticus 385*, *c.* 1490; *Codice Atlanticus 83*, *c.* 1508; *Codice Atlanticus 173*, *c.* 1490; *Codice Atlanticus 279*, 1497-1500; *Codice Atlanticus 23*, 1485-87. Kim H. Veltman, *Studies on Leonardo da Vinci, Linear Perspective and the Visual Dimensions of Science and Art* (Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 1986) n.p.

5 Giorgio Vasari in *Leonardo, Paintings and Drawings, with the Leonardo Biography by Vasari, 1568*, ed. Ludwig Goldscheider (1959; London: Phaidon Press, 1975) 12.

6 A more likely situation is that of the first Platonic academy, where artists and intellectuals gathered informally to share ideas and discuss cultural activities. Nikolaus Pevsner credits Vasari as founder of the first "Accademia del Disegno" in 1563 in Rome. Nikolaus Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1973) 25-40.

of Dürer during his stay in Venice, and he often complained in letters to his close friend Willibald Pirckheimer about how much attention he had to devote to the commissioned altarpiece *Feast of the Rose Garlands*.[7] Therefore, it seems certain that Dürer must have had compelling reasons to devote a significant measure of his precious time in Venice to copying Leonardo's intricate designs.

The six patterns are approximately uniform in size and all are based on similar schemes. Each design appears to consist of a single white thread that comprises several smaller units of repeating motifs on a black background. According to William Ivins, probably no one ever invented a wholly new and original ornamental design, and it appears as if Leonardo based his interlaced patterns on Islamic ornamented bowls that remained very much in vogue in Italy throughout the first half of the sixteenth century.[8] Islamic metalworkers who had settled in Venice in the mid-fifteenth century produced similar complicated designs in gold and silver on brass or bronze bowls and trays. While the endlessly repeating motifs reminded the Muslim audience of God's indivisibility, the art of Islamic ornament also concerned itself with the science of geometry as well as advances in mathematics. Geometry seems to generate not only the basic motifs of circles that fit within squares, but the overall format of Leonardo's designs as well. Essentially, his patterns involve plane division, proportional systems, and methods of constructing various regular polygons. Thus, the original Islamic designs provided Leonardo with a means to observe how a compass, ruler, and strings could produce certain results, geometrical operations in which both he and Dürer shared a great interest. Both artists based their work on scientific systems in which geometry was a fundamental component, and both subscribed to the idea that artistic mastery resulted from a thorough command of geometry as well as skill or talent.[9] As Dürer later claimed in his theoretical writings of 1512, "These two must be together, for the one without the other is of no avail."[10]

Geometry allowed artists to measure things and these measurements assured the rendering of objects in their correct proportions. Since the whole of Renaissance art concerned itself with faithful representation, one needed a thorough understanding of geometry in order to correctly represent three-dimensional objects on a two-dimensional surface. Additionally, within the theory and practice of perspective, plane geometry enabled the artist to work out the proper placement of objects in space. Plato's writings helped stimulate the rise of theoretical geometry during the Renaissance, and in the *Timaeus* he describes the genesis of geometric solids. Plato's account explains how God created a coherent universe out of chaos by assigning each of the four elements to the solids. Thus, He composed the cube for earth; the tetrahedron, or pyramid, for fire; the octahedron for air; and the icosahedron for water. However, since the fifth solid, the dodecahedron, cannot be constructed out of basic triangles, Plato writes that, God used the dodecahedron for arranging the constellations, or, translated literally, for "embroidering [the universe]."[11]

In his *Painter's Manual*, begun in 1512 or earlier and published in 1525, Dürer demonstrates his comprehensive understanding of the Platonic solids by the fact that he represents them in a wholly original way. Instead of illustrating them more typically in perspective or stereographic images, he devised a method in which one could cut them out of paper and fold them along their facets to form an actual, three-dimensional model of the solid. He also developed tracery patterns based on the construction of regular polygons which he combined into "pavements;" these compositions anticipate Kepler's ideas of uniform polyhedra in his *Harmony of the World*. Italian geometricians of the later sixteenth century such as Galileo also absorbed Dürer's ideas, and Pietro Antonio Cataldi wrote a monograph in 1570 entitled *How to form pentagons . . . as described by Albrecht Dürer*.[12]

The Platonic solids also fascinated Leonardo, who learned much about geometry from the highly respected mathematician Luca Pacioli. Pacioli, similar to many Renaissance artists, believed that mathematics was key to understanding nature and that geometry was particularly useful because it shared a common ground with art and science as well as the construction of the world. Leonardo purchased a copy of Pacioli's *Summa*, his monumental book on mathematics, algebra, and

7 Dürer first mentions "a panel to paint for the Germans" (*Feast of the Rose Garlands*) to Pirckheimer on January 6, 1506. In his letter of February 7, 1506, Dürer mentions that he has only just begun to sketch in the picture since his hands were "so scabby" that he "could do no work with them." In his letter dated April 2, 1506, the artist writes: "I might have gained a great deal of money if I had not undertaken to paint the German picture. There is much work in it and I cannot get it quite finished before Whitsuntide." And on September 8, 1506: "I have earned much praise but little profit by [*Feast of the Rose Garlands*]. In the time it took to paint I could easily have earned 220 ducats, and now I have declined much work, in order that I may come home." Albrecht Dürer in William Martin Conway, *Literary Remains of Albrecht Dürer* (Cambridge, 1889) 47, 48, 51, 55.

8 William M. Ivins, Jr. in Janet S. Byrne, *Renaissance Ornament Prints and Drawings* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1981) 11.

9 According to Kim Veltman, "Geometrical patterns underlie the natural forms which Leonardo has mastered." And further, "geometrical coils and knots play a significant role in his [Leonardo's] natural representation." *Studies on Leonardo da Vinci,* 340-341.

10 "Consummate mastery results, according to Dürer—and to all other thinkers of the Renaissance—from a perfect coordination of two accomplishments: theoretical insight, particularly a thorough command of geometry ('Kunst' in the original sense of 'knowledge'), and practical skill ('Brauch'). 'These two must be together,' Dürer says, 'for the one without the other is of no avail.'" Erwin Panofsky cites this quote from Dürer's preliminary draft of the introduction to his "Painter's Manual," later published in 1525. Erwin Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, 4th ed. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1955) 164.

11 Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. H.D.P Lee (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965) 77-78. E.H. Gombrich does not cite the edition of the *Timaeus* to which he refers, but it is interesting to note that he translates God's use of the dodecahedron, "for the universe in His decoration thereof." *The Sense of Order, A Study in the Psychology of Decorative Art* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1979) 67.

12 Panofsky 257.

geometry published in Venice in 1494, and the two eventually met in 1496 at the court of Ludovico Sforza. The mathematician was also a member of the so-called "Leonardi Vinci Academia" and, in fact, he provides the only known contemporary record of the group's gathering at the Castello Sforzesco in February 1498.[13] That same year Pacioli, who based his studies on Euclid's understanding of the five regular bodies, completed his *De Divina Proportione*, for which Leonardo supplied sixty illustrations, including designs of the five solids. In 1507 Dürer wrote to Pirckheimer from Venice that he hoped to travel to Bologna to learn the secrets of perspective, and many historians have suspected that Dürer is referring to studying with Pacioli, who was teaching at the University there.[14] Pacioli's clear methods and procedures for solving mathematical problems would have attracted Dürer, who later wrote his own teaching manual in straightforward prose to explain abstract mathematical concepts. The fact that Leonardo had studied with Pacioli would also have appealed to Dürer. Although we do not know whether or not Dürer and Pacioli met, the artist did purchase a copy of Euclid's *Elements* before he left Venice.[15]

Dürer's interest in Leonardo had occupied him prior to his copying the ornamental engravings. In the early 1500s Dürer based a number of horse drawings directly on Leonardo's silverpoint and pen drawing *Two Horsemen*.[16] In *Two Young Horsemen*, Dürer mimicked the foreshortening, and in a series of subsequent drawings such as *Animals Fighting* he continued to copy the horses' heads.[17] Dürer's 1505 etching *The Small Horse* is his first work drawn in accordance with Leonardo's structural framework of a horse's proportions, and Dürer continued to rely on Leonardo's proportion studies in *Knight, Death, and the Devil* of 1513. While Leonardo's ideas may have reached Dürer through Pirckheimer, who was at Sforza's court in Milan concurrent with Leonardo, it is also possible that Dürer saw original drawings by Leonardo through Leonardo's patron and Pirckheimer's close friend, Galeazzo de San Severino, who visited Dürer's hometown of Nuremberg in 1502. However, Leonardo's ability to render in perfect proportions was not the only aspect of his work that attracted Dürer.

Leonardo's influence also appears in *Christ Among the Doctors* (1506), (Figure 5), a painting Dürer described to Pirckheimer as "the like of which I have never done before."[18] The work has few analogies in sixteenth century painting, and like his ornamental woodcuts, it is unique to Dürer as well, albeit amongst his painted works. Erwin Panofsky notes that Christ's head obviously goes back to a drawing by Leonardo, and although he does not associate it with a specific work, the doctors' heads clearly refer to Leonardo's *Five Grotesque Heads* from 1490.[19] The use of half-length figures is typical of contemporaneous northern Italian painting, but here Dürer has arranged the figures so densely that one scholar describes them as forming a "wreath of heads."[20] The painting's most striking feature is the central placement of the circular group of hands; from preparatory drawings it appears that Dürer conceived of the hands as an isolated motif from the very beginning.[21] When one considers that this painting is contemporary with the ornamental woodcuts, this strange configuration of twenty fingers becomes even more curious. Indeed, Heinrich Wölfflin likens the hands to late Gothic ornament, and Isolde Lübbeke contends that considering the arrangement of hands, books, and heads further entwined in a network of glances, one can perceive the fundamental influence of Leonardo's engravings in the painting's overall structure (Figure 4).[22] Because Dürer so proudly announced "Opus Quinque Dierum," or "the work of five days," on the bookmark in the painting's lower left corner, it has been suggested that Dürer emphasized his unusual speed as an allusion to Leonardo, who worked slowly and often left his paintings unfinished.[23] However, unlike Dürer's ornamental woodcuts or his horse drawings, this painting reflects neither his direct copying of Leonardo, nor is it a competition in skill. Instead, *Christ Among the Doctors* represents the artist's ability to learn by copying a master and in the process to arrive at unique

[13] In his *Divina Proportione* (1509, Venice) Pacioli writes of an assembly of scholars, theologians, doctors, astrologers, and lawyers who participated in a "praiseworthy scientific duel" at the Castello Sforzesco on Februrary 19, 1498, where Leonardo's participation in the event "made his surname come true. That is, he wins out (*vince*) over every artist." Luca Pacioli in Pedretti 296.

[14] Dürer mentions a contact in Bologna whom he was keen to meet, "to learn the secrets of the art of perspective" in Conway 58.

[15] "This book [Euclid's *Elements*] I have bought at Venice for a ducat in the year 1507." Dürer in Conway 60.

[16] Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, England.

[17] *Two Young Horsemen*, pen on paper, and *Animals Fighting*, Collection Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, Munich.

[18] Dürer in Conway 56.

[19] Panofsky 153.

[20] Jane Campbell Hutchison, *Albrecht Dürer, A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990) 88.

[21] If one compares Dürer's *Study of the Hands of the Twelve-Year Old Christ* (1506), brush drawing on blue Venetian paper, to *Christ Among the Doctors*, it is obvious that the artist expanded the space between Christ's left hand fingers, adjusted the right hand in order to create more of a circular form in conjunction with the left, and eliminated the elliptical contour of Christ's sleeve to further emphasize the radial arrangement of fingers in the painting.

[22] Heinrich Wölfflin, *The Art of Albrecht Dürer*, trans. Alastair and Heide Grieve (London and New York: Phaidon, 1971) 153; Isolde Lübbeke, *The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection, Early German Painting 1350-1550*, trans. Margaret Thomas Will (London: Sotheby's Publications, 1991) 237.

[23] Scholars commonly agree that the "five days" may apply only to Dürer's actual execution of the painting and not to his planning of the composition in addition to preparatory studies. Lübbeke 237.

inventions of his own. In fact, Dürer took the ideas that he discovered in copying Leonardo's ornamental designs and found new ways in which to incorporate them into his own work.

As Peter Parshall has so rightly noted, it is out of continuous practice in imitation that the artist cultivates endless new additions to the world.[24] This involves not only adding original elements to a given composition, but also the ability to recombine images or parts of images into wholly new forms or ideas. This becomes apparent in close observation of Dürer's ornamental woodcuts. Mere copies repeat their source line by line; however, although Dürer paid meticulous attention to Leonardo's designs, he also made important additions to the latter's interlaced patterns. In each of the four corners Dürer turned Leonardo's simple outline into foliate motifs and appended closely symmetrical calligraphic flourishes. At first glance, one might think these additions are simple embellishments to Leonardo's original models. However, Dürer's later engravings suggest that these adornments are precursors to a type of bilateral symmetry in which the artist used line not only for ornamentation, but also as a way in which to create new images. An early instance of bilateral ornamentation occurs, aptly enough, in Dürer's 1512 *Conjoined Twins of Ertingen* (Figure 6), where he framed the twins' images with mirrorlike scrolls that mimic the abnormal configuration of the twins' conjoined bodies. Dürer expanded upon this idea even further throughout the 1515 *Prayerbook of Maximilian* where such calligraphic inventions are legion. On the page in which King David introduces the first Psalm of the Book of Hours, Dürer created a lion's face out of an apparently single continuous line (Figure 7) as an attribute of David's kingly power. On the page illustrating St. Apollonia, Dürer once again turned his calligraphic ornamentation into an image, this time of a man's face (Figure 8). These marginal decorations are loose, yet complex inventions that resulted from Dürer's mental as well as manual dexterity. They confirm that from copying Leonardo's designs, Dürer's work with a ruler and compass led to an art of pattern-making in which curving lines and the flourish of the pen could turn abstract designs into representational imagery.

In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, concepts such as symmetry, perspective, and proportion were not only descriptions of structure in the world, but also constructs of man's intellect. For instance, when Alberti tried to describe symmetry, he had to do so at length because he lacked the developed critical vocabulary.[25] The same is true of Dürer, who resorted to expressions such as *Fischblase* (fish bladder) for ellipses or *Schneckenline* (snail line) for spirals since there were no exact words for such constructions in his lexicon. Thus, it took an artist of exceptional intellect to not only investigate these constructions based on mathematical premises, but to understand them so thoroughly that he could translate these ideas into new and inventive forms.

The poet Helius Eobanus Hessus' eulogy attributed Dürer's remarkable skill to the divine. Likewise, the artist's early biographer, Camerarius, also implies a direct link between Dürer's hand and the hand of God by his declaration that, "You might swear [Dürer] employed a rule, square, or compasses to draw lines, which, in fact, he drew with the brush, pencil or pen, unaided by artificial means."[26] Joseph Koerner suggests that Dürer's 1500 *Self-Portrait* exemplifies an *acheiropoeton*, or an image not made by human hands, by virtue of its stillness, symmetry, and flawlessly smooth surface.[27] This analogy between God's hand and the hand of the artist was without precedent, and to equate or even compare an artist with God would have been blasphemous from Dürer's point of view. Instead, within the context of Renaissance ideologies and their new emphasis upon man, Dürer's achievements could only be acclaimed as expressions of human intellect and never of a divine hand.

To return to the earlier question of what attracted Dürer to Leonardo's ornamental designs, we can conclude with several possibilities. The Islamic motifs may have initially appealed to Dürer's taste for the exotic, and their intricate patterns posed a challenge to his draughtsmanship. The imprint, "Leonardi Vinci Academia," would have further prompted Dürer to copy the hand of a master. In his Netherlands diary, Dürer referred to the woodcuts as knots, which has led some historians to suppose that the designs were used in embroidery patterns.[28] However, the word "knot" also implied, as it does today, theoretical problems, and therefore his use of the word might have indicated that the designs presented geometrical complexities that Dürer wished to unravel or figure out. Dürer's ornamental woodcuts demonstrate his extraordinary aptitude as a graphic artist, but they also exhibit his ability to comprehend complicated geometric constructions and mathematical methodologies. While geometrical bodies could best illustrate the projection of forms in space, the more complex polygons such as the icosahedron and the dodecahedron actually played little part in the practice of painting, thus their

24 Peter Parshall, "Albrecht Dürer and the Axis of Meaning," *Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Bulletin*, 50.2 (1997): 8.

25 "We must take great care to ensure that even the minutest elements are so arranged in their level, alignment, number, and appearance, that the right matches the left, the top matches bottom, adjacent matches adjacent, and equal matches equal . . . as though twinned." Leon Battista Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, ed. Joseph Rykwert and Haig Beck (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988) 310.

26 Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993) 145.

27 Koerner 80-126.

28 "I gave Master Dietrich the glass-painter an *Apocalypse* and the 6 *Knots*." From Dürer's diary entry dated between December 14, 1520 and April 6, 1521 in Conway113. In the Middle High German, that is, the language of Dürer, "knoten" conveyed both literal and metaphorical meanings: "Verdickung, beim Menschen sind das die Hand- und Fußknöchel Verdickungen beim Holz und an Pflanzenstengeln." Alternately, "ist 'knode' schon im Mittelhochdeutschen auch ein Rätsel, eine Rätselfrage, ein hindernder Grund, eine Hauptschwierigkeit (a riddle, a puzzle, or a difficulty to overcome)." Karl Bartsch, *Meisterlieder der Kolmarer Handschrift* (Stuttgart,1862) 268.

elaborate construction presented an intellectual challenge as well as an opportunity to display virtuoso mastery and skill. By examining Dürer's later prints, one can establish that the designs spurred his growing ability to understand mathematical premises, furthered his knowledge of geometric solids, and enhanced his instruction in proportion, but they also led to the invention of his highly innovative symmetrical compositions. Perhaps divine intervention inspired Dürer's motives, but his woodcuts portray, inarguably, knots made by human hands.

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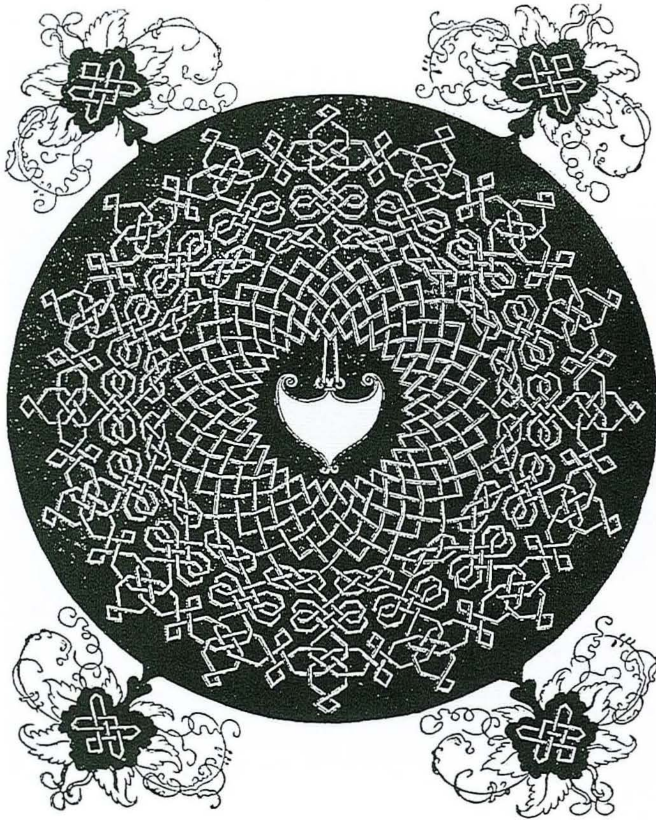


Figure 1. Albrecht Dürer, *Knot with a Heart-Shaped Shield*, *c.* 1506-7, woodcut, 272 x 211 mm. Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art, The University of Texas at Austin, The Leo Steinberg Collection, 2002.

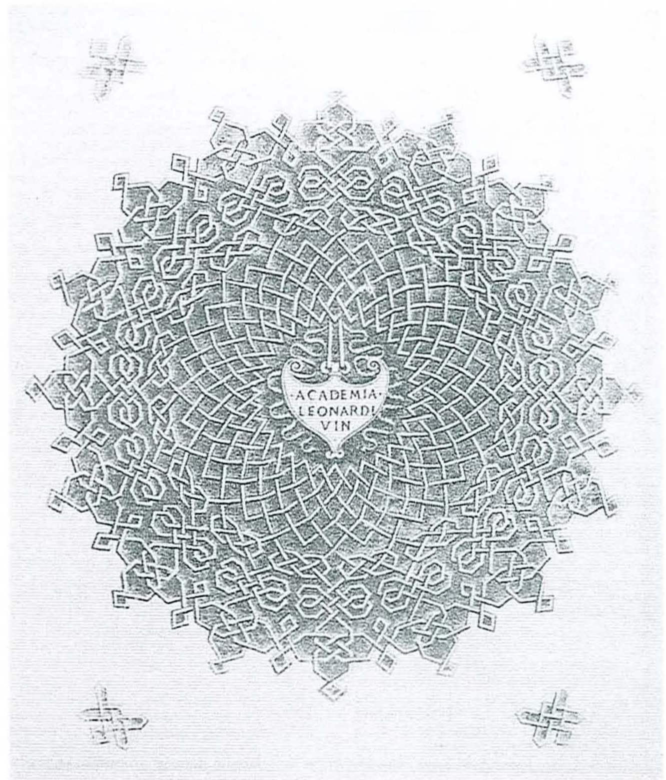


Figure 2. Leonardo da Vinci, *Knot with a Heart-Shaped Shield*, *c.* 1490-1500, engraving, 293 x 204 mm. Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan.

Figure 3. Albrecht Dürer, *Knot with a Scalloped Shield*, *c.* 1506-7, woodcut, 272 x 211 mm. British Museum, London.

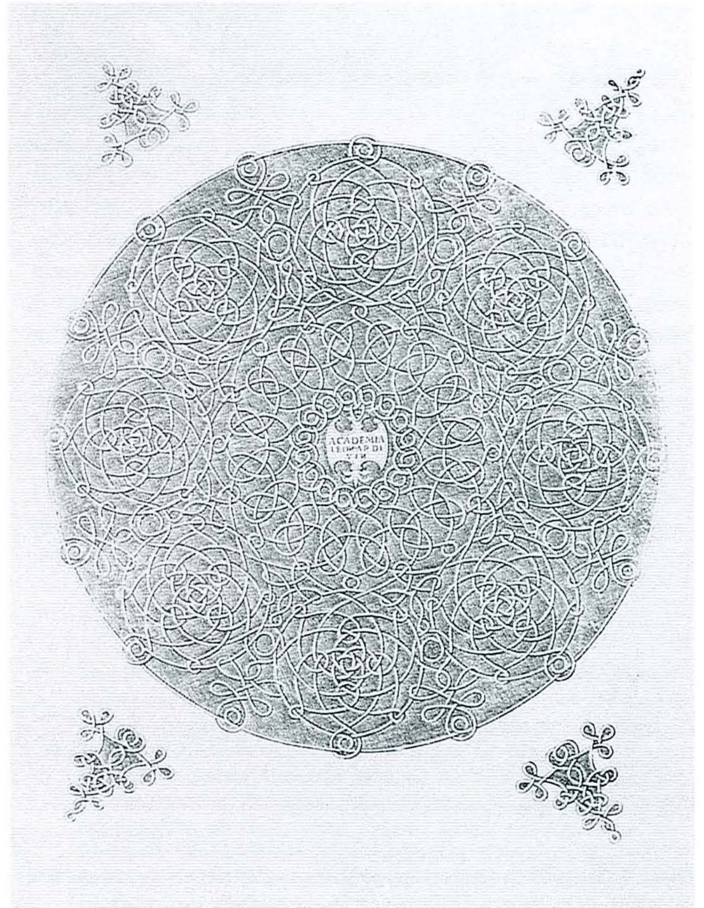


Figure 4. Leonardo da Vinci, *Knot with a Scalloped Shield*, *c.* 1490-1500, engraving, 292 x 212 mm. Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris.

Figure 5. Albrecht Dürer, *Christ Among the Doctors*, 1506, oil on panel, 65 x 80 cm. Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.

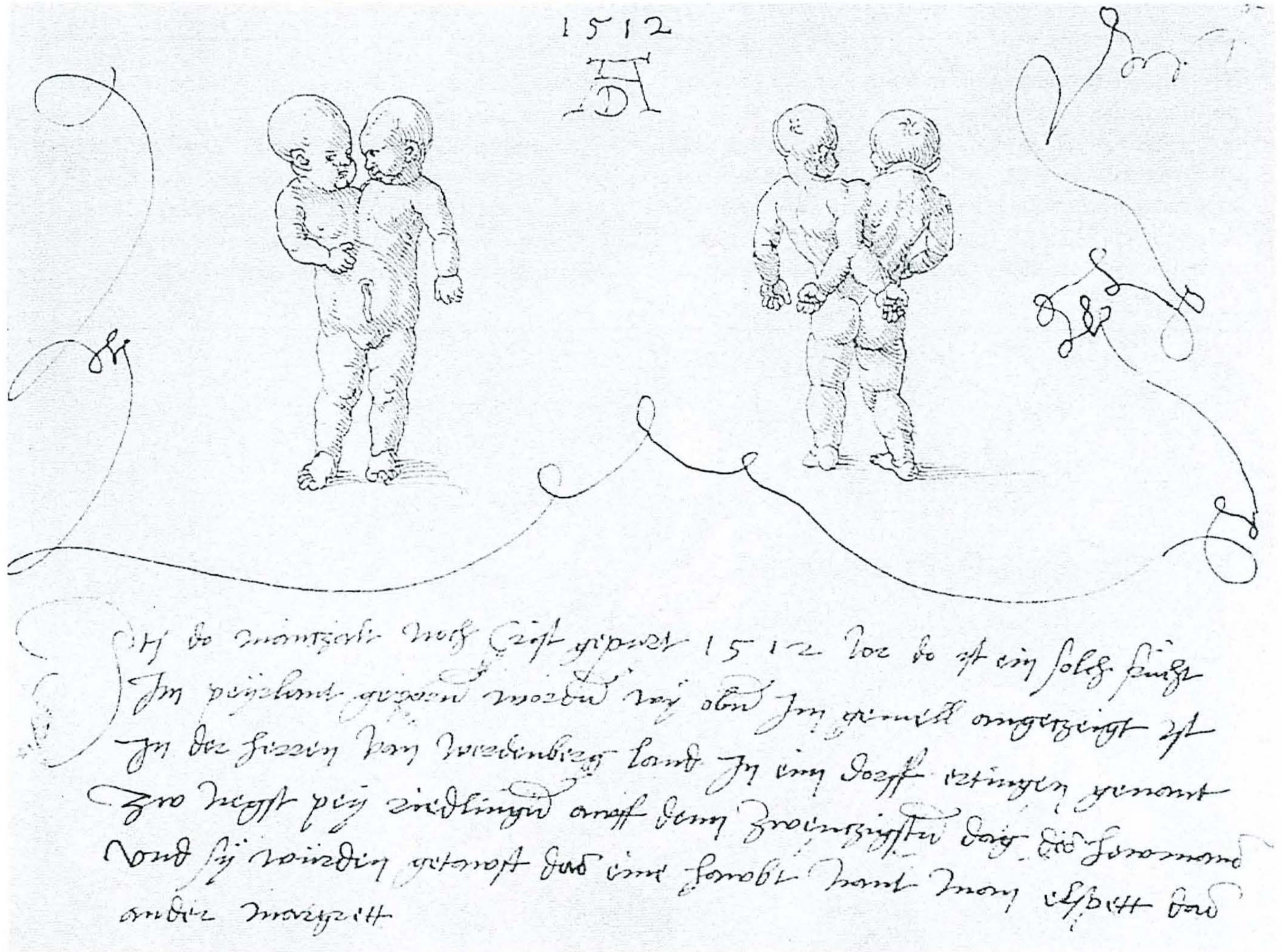
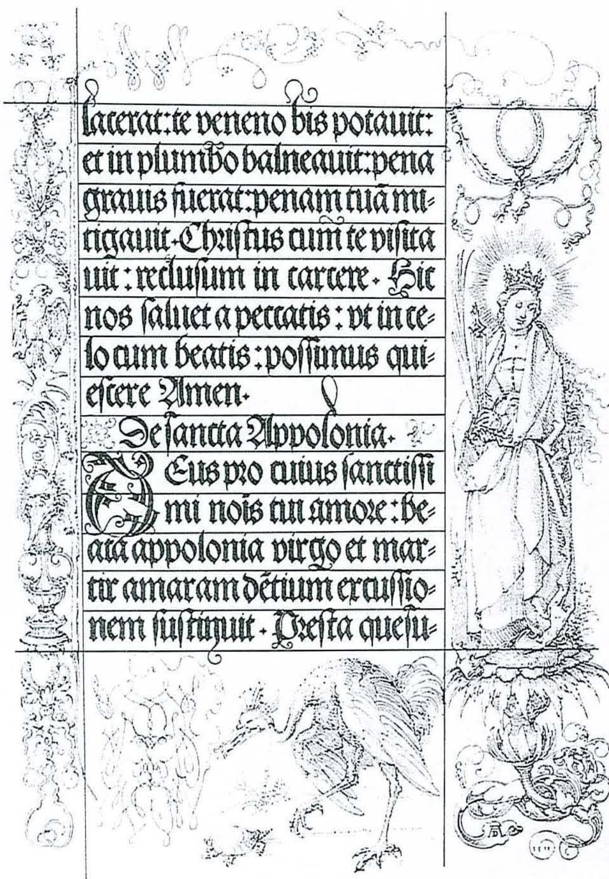
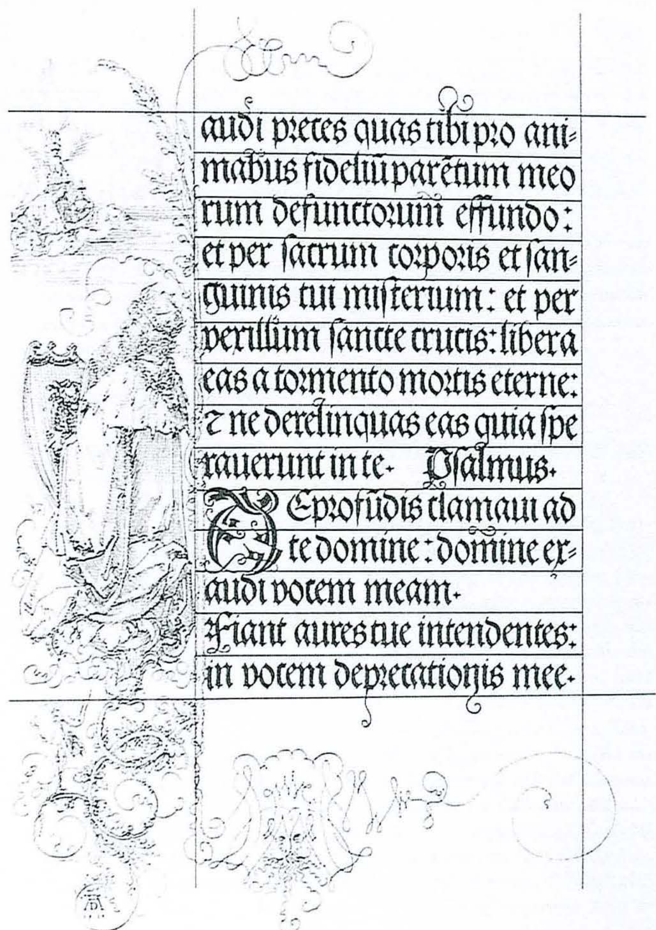


Figure 6. Albrecht Dürer, *Conjoined Twins of Ertingen*, 1512, pen and black ink, 158 x 208 mm. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.



laterat: te veneno bis potauit:
et in plumbo balneauit: pena
grauis fuerat: penam tuā mi-
tigauit. Christus cum te visita
uit: reclusum in carcere. Hic
nos saluet a peccatis: ut in ce-
lo cum beatis: possimus qui-
escere Amen.
De sancta Appolonia.
DEus pro cuius sanctissi
mi nois tui amore: be-
ata appolonia virgo et mar-
tir amaram dētium excussio-
nem sustinuit. Presta quesu-

Figure 7. Albrecht Dürer, *The Book of Hours of the Emperor Maximilian I* (Prayer to St. Apollonia, folio 24r), *c.* 1515, pen and ink on vellum, 195 x 280 mm. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.



audi preces quas tibi pro ani-
mabus fideliū parētum meo
rum defunctorum effundo:
et per sacrum corporis et san-
guinis tui misterium: et per
vexillum sancte crucis: libera
eas a tormento mortis eterne:
⁊ ne derelinquas eas quia spe
rauerunt in te. Psalmus.
DE profundis clamaui ad
te domine: domine ex-
audi vocem meam.
Fiant aures tue intendentes:
in vocem deprecationis mee.

Figure 8. Albrecht Dürer, *The Book of Hours of the Emperor Maximilian I* (Psalm 130: 1-2, folio 16v), *c.* 1515, pen and ink on vellum, 195 x 280 mm. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.

Caravaggio's Capitoline *Saint John*: An Emblematic Image of Divine Love

Shannon Pritchard

With an oeuvre filled with striking, even shocking works, Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio's *Saint John the Baptist in the Wilderness*, still remains one of his most visually compelling works (Figure 1).[1] The painting, now in the Capitoline Museum in Rome, was completed around 1601-02 during the height of the artist's Roman career.[2] At first glance, the nude figure, splayed from corner to corner across the entire canvas, produces an uneasy response in the viewer. The boy's soft, curly hair, prepubescent body and coquettish turn of the head endow the image with an unexpected sensuality. It is precisely this quality that has spawned nearly four hundred years of debate about the identity of Caravaggio's nude youth, the supposed John the Baptist. Indeed, viewers from the seventeenth century to the present have often found it difficult to reconcile the image's apparent secularity with its ostensibly sacred subject.

Little is known about the circumstances surrounding the commission and execution of the painting except that, according to payment records, it was in Ciriaco Mattei's possession by 1602.[3] Caravaggio had entered the Mattei household by mid-1601 on the invitation of the Roman Marchese Ciriaco Mattei and his two brothers, Cardinal Girolamo Mattei and Asdrubale Mattei, and remained there for approximately two years.[4] Thirteen years later, his painting was recorded in the 1616 inventory of Ciriaco's only son and heir, Giovanni Battista Mattei, at which time it was listed as "Saint John the Baptist with his lamb by the hand of Caravaggio."[5] From this point forward, the painting is documented in numerous inventories, and these records reveal that uncertainty over the subject matter was present virtually from the beginning. In 1623, Giovanni Battista Mattei bequeathed the painting to Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte, in whose 1627 inventory it was described as a Saint John the Baptist. When the painting was sold the following year to Cardinal Emmanuel Pio, the sale documents described the subject as *il coridone*, a term commonly used in classical and Renaissance poetry to identify shepherds.[6] The painting was then mentioned in various inventories as a sacred Saint John, a secular shepherd or nude youth.[7] In 1749, the painting entered the Capitoline collection after its purchase from the Pio family by Pope Benedict

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1 For general bibliographic information on Caravaggio, see: Walter Friedlander, *Caravaggio Studies* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1955, reprint 1974); Howard Hibbard, *Caravaggio* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1983); John T. Spike and Michèle K. Spike, *Caravaggio* (New York: Abbeville Press, 2001); Catherine Puglisi, *Caravaggio* (London: Phaidon Press, 1998, 2002); and Helen Langdon, *Caravaggio: A Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999).

2 Hibbard 151; Puglisi 205; Langdon 213.

3 Francesca Cappalletti and Laura Testa, *Il Trattenimento di Virtuosi: Le collezioni secentesche di quadri nei Palazzi Mattei di Roma* (Roma: Àrgos Edizioni, 1994) 105-6. The authors have suggested that the Capitoline painting is the one recorded in the Mattei account book of 1602, where two payments to Caravaggio are noted, one on June 26, 1602 for 60 *scudi* and one on December 25, 1602 for 25 *scudi*, for a total of eighty-five *scudi*. No title or description is given in the ledger regarding the nature of the two payments, although it is generally accepted that they refer to the Capitoline *Saint John*. The two other works by Caravaggio owned by the Mattei are also documented in the ledger, which lists the payment for the *Supper at Emmaus* at 150 *scudi* on January 7, 1602, and the *Taking of Christ* for which 125 *scudi* were paid on January 2, 1603.

4 Spike 126, 150. Between 1603 and 1606, Caravaggio was frequently imprisoned on various charges; while out of jail during this period, it is unclear where he resided. By 1605, he was residing in a house in the Vicolo dei Santi Cecilia e Biagio, but by 1605 was again without a permanent residence. In May of 1606, Caravaggio fled Rome after a fight between himself and Ranuccio Tomassoni left Tomassoni dead and Caravaggio accused of murder. Langdon 293, 303, 311-316.

5 Cappelletti and Testa 139-140.

6 Creighton E. Gilbert, *Caravaggio and His Two Cardinals* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1995) 43.

7 Conrad Rudolph and Steven F. Ostrow. "Isaac Laughing: Caravaggio, Non-Traditional Imagery and Traditional Identification," *Art History* 24. 5 (November 2001): 646-682; esp. 648-651. The authors provide a concise summary of the various identifications of the painting's subject matter beginning with Gaspare Celio's identification of it as a *pastor friso* by 1620, and perhaps as early as 1607 when Celio was employed as a painter by the Mattei. Celio's identification of the painting as a *pastor friso* was later published in his 1638 guidebook of works of art in Rome. (For more on Celio's role in identifying the subject matter of the Capitoline *Saint John*, see: Gilbert, ch. 3 "Gaspare Celio's Credentials"). However, the 1616 inventory of Giovanni Battista Mattei listed the painting as *Saint John the Baptist*. The same is true in 1623 when it was recorded in Giovanni Battista's will and in 1627 when it was documented in the inventory of Cardinal Francesco Maria del Monte, to whom it was bequeathed by Giovanni Battista Mattei. In the 1628 sale of the painting, it was given the title "il Coridone," and in the 1641 inventory of Cardinal Emmanuel Pio, the secular identification of the painting remained, since it was called "nude youth with a ram." In 1724, the title remained more or less the same, but by the 1740 Pio inventory, it was again a Saint John the Baptist. However, in 1749 the

XIV, and from the late eighteenth century up through the early twentieth century, the work was variously listed in Capitoline guidebooks as a "nude youth embracing a ram," "a nude youth embracing a lamb," or just "a nude youth."[8]

Modern viewers have had similar problems in attempting to determine whether the painting's subject is sacred or secular in nature. In 1953, Denis Mahon "re-discovered" the painting in the office of Rome's mayor, and subsequently identified it as *Saint John the Baptist* by Caravaggio.[9] However, two years later, Mahon reconsidered his identification, referring to it as *Nude Youth with a Ram*.[10] In subsequent scholarship, other interpretations have been proposed, including suggestions that the painting is a representation of the sanguine temperament or the ancient Roman shepherd Paris.[11] With regard to the latter, Creighton E. Gilbert argued that Caravaggio might have executed such an image of Paris in competition with Annibale Carracci's newly completed Farnese Gallery ceiling.[12] While the idea of artistic competition between Caravaggio and Annibale has great merit, Gilbert's reading of the nude youth as Paris has not been universally accepted. More recent attempts to identify the young boy in Caravaggio's painting have associated him with Isaac from the Old Testament story of Abraham's sacrifice.[13] Instead of the traditional narrative commonly depicted, as seen in Caravaggio's own *Sacrifice of Isaac* from 1603 (Uffizi Gallery, Florence), in which Abraham is poised to sacrifice his son but his hand is stayed at the last moment by an angel sent from heaven, the authors suggest the artist has represented the moment after Isaac's release from sacrifice. This interpretation would explain the conspicuous absence of the standard narrative elements such as Abraham, the angel, the knife, and the sacrificial altar.[14] The authors also rely on the exegetical writings of Saints Jerome and Gregory the Great to further bolster their argument as these texts interpret the name "Isaac" as meaning "laughter or joy," thus providing a justification for the young boy's smile.[15]

Despite these erudite readings, there can be no doubt that the figure in the Capitoline painting is the young Saint John the Baptist as recorded in the 1616 Mattei inventory. In fact, the Capitoline *Saint John* was the first in a series of at least three other paintings of the Baptist executed by Caravaggio within a ten-year period.[16] In each of the later paintings, the mood is markedly somber and meditative, with the saint presented frontally seated, clothed in a hairshirt and red mantle, and holding the most recognizable attribute of the Baptist, the reed cross.[17] Although the unconventional nature of the Capitoline painting is in stark contrast to Caravaggio's later depictions of the saint, it is nevertheless possible to securely identify the figure as the young Baptist.

As the issue of attributes, or lack thereof, has been the nail upon which scholars have hung their interpretations of this painting, it is important to review both the iconographic elements of the Baptist that are present and those that are not. In the Capitoline *Saint John*, the most obvious attributes of the Baptist such as the reed cross, banderole, and the baptismal bowl or font, are absent.[18] Also gone is the young Lamb of God, traditionally depicted as a small, hornless animal, which Caravaggio has replaced with a ram.[19] That these key elements

painting was given no title whatsoever upon its sale to Pope Benedict XIV. Benedict's collection founded the Capitoline gallery, and the painting is noted in several guidebooks, with the 1765 edition being the last which recorded the painting as *Saint John the Baptist*. In the other guidebooks listed by the authors, including the years 1766, 1771 and 1794, the painting was given the secular title of 'nude youth' with a 'lamb,' 'ram,' or 'goat.' The painting was taken down from exhibition by 1925, as it was no longer listed in the Capitoline guidebook. For the painting's "re-discovery" and authentication, cf. note 9.

8 Rudolph and Ostrow 650.

9 Denis Mahon, "Contrasts in Art-Historical Method: Two Recent Approaches to Caravaggio," *Burlington Magazine* 95 (1953): 213, n.7. See also, Gilbert 11; Puglisi 205; and Rudolph and Ostrow 650-651. The variant of this painting in the Doria Pamphili had been considered the original work by Caravaggio prior to Mahon's discovery. It is now universally accepted that the Capitoline painting is the autograph work and the Doria Pamphili copy was executed shortly after the original was completed.

10 Denis Mahon and Denys Sutton, *Artists in Seventeenth Century Rome*, exh. cat. (London: Wildenstein & Co, 1955) 20-4.

11 Leonard Slatkes, "Caravaggio's 'Pastor Friso'," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 23 (1972): 67-72. For the Paris identification, see Gilbert 55-78.

12 Gilbert 85.

13 Liliana Barroero, " 'L'Isaaco' di Caravaggio nella Pinacoteca Capitolina," *Bollettino dei Musei comunali di Roma* 9 (1997) 37-41; Rodolfo Papa, "Il Sorriso di Dio," *Art e Dossier* 14.131 (1998) 28-32; Rudolph and Ostrow 646.

14 Rudolph and Ostrow 658. For this last detail, the authors argue that the ledge on which the boy reclines, admittedly hard to see, is the makeshift altar.

15 Rudolph and Ostrow 667-668.

16 Hibbard 340; Puglisi 397. The *Saint John the Baptist* in the Cathedral Museum in Toledo, Spain has been attributed to Caravaggio, and dated to 1597-98, and if accepted, would therefore place it earlier in Caravaggio's career than the Capitoline *Saint John*.

17 There are three securely attributed paintings of St. John the Baptist by Caravaggio located in: the Galleria Antica, Rome (1603-04); the Nelson Atkins Museum, Kansas (1603-05); and in the Galleria Borghese, Naples (1610).

18 Hibbard 340; Puglisi 409. A painting of *Saint John the Baptist at the Source* has been attributed to Caravaggio and dated to 1608-09, although the attribution is still under debate.

19 Rudolph and Ostrow 660-661. The authors explain the difference between a young lamb with horns (a spring lamb) and a ram, and suggest that a ram is the appropriate animal for the Sacrifice of Abraham while the spring lamb would be used for identifying Saint John the Baptist. The suggestion is made that Caravaggio intentionally differentiated between the two animals in his paintings, and the authors propose that the animal in the Borghese *Saint John* is a spring lamb, while the animal in the Capitoline *Saint John* is a ram, which thus supports their reading of the Capitoline painting as Isaac on the altar. However, the animal depicted in the Borghese *Saint John* is not noticeably different from the ram in Caravaggio's *Sacrifice of Isaac*,

were excluded does not automatically imply that the painting is entirely devoid of iconographic references to the Baptist. To begin with, the young boy reclines on an animal pelt, which certainly suggests the Baptist's hairshirt. Underneath the pelt are two mantles, one red and the other white, evocative of the worldly clothes the Baptist casts off in accepting his calling in the wilderness. In addition, the horizontal tree stump on which the boy rests his left foot may possibly be seen as forming a natural cross, as two small branches are joined to the trunk perpendicularly. As for other attributes contained within the painting, the plant in the lower right foreground has been identified as a mullein plant and has been associated with the Tree of Jesse as its flowering stem shoots upward when it blooms.[20] And the leaves in the upper right corner have been read as grape vines, a familiar emblem of Christ's blood and sacrifice. Despite the above-mentioned iconographic symbols that can be associated with John the Baptist, the unabashed nudity of the youth has made it difficult for many viewers to accept the image as a depiction of the saint.[21] Although there have been other images of Saint John which show him almost completely nude, such as Raphael's *Saint John the Baptist* of 1518 (Uffizi Gallery, Florence) and Bronzino's painting of the same subject from 1550-55 (Borghese Gallery, Rome), Caravaggio's fully nude Baptist assaults the viewer with his seductive smile and tantalizing sexuality in a manner that is unquestionably absent from almost all other depictions of the Baptist.[22]

Despite these apparent precedents for a semi-nude Baptist in the wilderness, both the pose and the emphasis on the ram in Caravaggio's *Saint John* differs markedly from standard depictions of the saint. A careful analysis of the complex layering of imagery and ideas encompassed within the image is required in order to fully understand this painting. One of the most important of these aspects is Caravaggio's adaptation of figural precedents that speak not only to ideas related to the Baptist, but also to more esoteric concepts. Two precedents that Caravaggio appears to have used for their implicit baptismal references can easily be identified.[23] The first is Giulio Mazzoni's 1585 fresco of the *Allegory of Water* in the Palazzo Spada in Rome.[24] Although Mazzoni's allegorical figure is much more muscular than Caravaggio's Baptist, the similarity in pose between the two is undeniable. The other apparent source for Caravaggio can be found in the water sprites on Taddeo Landini's *Tortoise Fountain* of 1588.[25] Conveniently located in the piazza in front of the Palazzo Mattei where Caravaggio had been living, the nude, lithe figures with remarkably activated poses, and sweet, smiling faces anticipate many of the most disconcerting aspects of Caravaggio's *Saint John*. Since both Mazzoni's and Landini's images relate to water—one allegorically and the other both physically and symbolically—their allusion to the rites of baptism, would not have been lost on the erudite seventeenth-century viewer familiar with either of these works. However, the precedent most often noted in comparison with Caravaggio's painting, and one that is not directly related to water, is Michelangelo Buonarotti's Sistine ceiling *ignudi*. Both the *ignudi* and Saint John are represented as ideal images of male beauty and youth and it is the dynamic pose of the *ignudo* at the top left corner of the *Sacrifice of Noah* that is most clearly reflected in Caravaggio's young Baptist. The implication of such a direct reference to Michelangelo's ceiling, and particularly the *ignudi*, is significant to Caravaggio's Capitoline *Saint John* painting and will be fully discussed below.

It is important to acknowledge that during this same time Caravaggio completed another painting that also made reference to Michelangelo, and that is the *Victorious Cupid* of 1601-02 (also known as the *Amor Vincit Omnia* [Figure 2]).[26] The painting was executed while Caravaggio was living in the Palazzo Mattei and was in the collection of the Vincenzo

which seems to undermine the argument that Caravaggio drew such distinctions and suggests therefore that the same type of animal could be used in different iconographic situations.

20 Richard John Raymond, *Caravaggio's Saint John and the Ram: Its Sacred Symbolism and Iconographic Sources* (MA Thesis: Arizona State University, 1988) 42.

21 See note 7 above for a discussion of the sacred and secular interpretations of the painting throughout its history. See also, Puglisi 205.

22 The exception is Leonardo's *St. John the Baptist* (Louvre, Paris). See Paul Barolsky, "The Mysterious Meaning of Leonardo's *Saint John the Baptist*," *Source* 8.3 (Spring 1989): 11-15. The comparison between Caravaggio's Baptist and Bronzino's was famously made by S.J. Freedberg, *Circa 1600. A Revolution of Style in Italian Painting* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Cambridge UP, 1983) 52-53. For Raphael's depiction of the Baptist in the wilderness, see: *Raffaello a Firenze: Dipinti e disegni delle collezioni fiorentini*, exh. cat. Palazzo Pitti, Florence, January 11- April 29, 1984 (Milan: Electa, 1984), cat. entry 19, 222-228 where the painting is attributed to the "Bottega di Raffaello (Giulio Romano)."

23 Giovanni Pietro Bellori, *Le Vite de'pittori, scultori et architetti moderni*, (1672) 211-33. English translation of Bellori provided in Puglisi 415. Bellori recounts Caravaggio's assertions that he need only look to the streets of Rome, not to the past, for inspiration. It is now recognized that Caravaggio routinely drew from a variety of visual resources that he accumulated throughout his lifetime. For further information, see: Keith Christiansen, "Thoughts on the Lombard Training of Caravaggio," in *Come dipingeva il Caravaggio atti della giornata di studio*, ed. Mina Gregori (Milan: Electa, 1996) 7.

24 For information on the Palazzo Spada and Giulio Mazzoni's work therein, see: Roberto Cannatà, "L'opera di Giulio Mazzoni da Piacenza, pittore e scultore nel palazzo Capodiferro," in ed. Roberto Cannatà, *Palazzo Spada: Arte e Storia* (Rome: Bonsignori Editore, 1992).

25 For information on Landini's fountain, see: Carlo Benocci, "Taddeo Landini e la Fontana delle Tartarughe in Piazza Mattei a Roma," *Storia dell'Arte* 52 (1984): 187-215; and Thomas Eser, "Der Schildkrötenbrunnen des Taddeo Landini," *Römisches Jahrbuch der Bibliotheca Hertziana* 27-28 (1991-1992): 201-82.

26 Hibbard 157; Puglisi 207; Christiansen 8. Hibbard and Puglisi suggest Michelangelo's *Victory* as the source of Cupid's pose while Christiansen compares it to the figure of St. Bartholomew in the Sistine Chapel *Last Judgement*.

Giustiniani by 1602.[27] The Marchese Vincenzo Giustiniani, along with his brother Cardinal Benedetto Giustiniani, were important patrons of Caravaggio and were friends of the Mattei family. Although the circumstances of the commission are unknown, it is possible that the *Victorious Cupid* may have come about through a verbal agreement between the artist and Giustiniani. Caravaggio thus appears to have executed almost simultaneously the Giustiniani *Cupid* and the Mattei *Saint John*. Significantly, these are the only two single figure, full-length nudes painted by the artist. The *Victorious Cupid*, regarded by Giustiniani as one of his most prized paintings, gained instant notoriety, driving other artists to challenge Caravaggio's place as the preeminent artist among Roman painters.[28] Caravaggio's chief rival, Giovanni Baglione, responded to this emblematic image of profane love with his own interpretation, *Divine Love Overcoming the World, the Flesh, and the Devil* (Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin). Baglione exhibited his painting in unofficial competition with Caravaggio's *Victorious Cupid* and Orazio Gentileschi's *St. Michael Archangel* (now lost) on August 29, 1602, at the annual exhibition at San Giovanni Decollato.[29] Berated by Gentileschi for not depicting a nude cupid, but rather one clothed in armor, Baglione painted a second version (Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome) which was unveiled on Easter Sunday, 1603, in which he eliminated most of cupid's armor and inserted what many believe to be a portrait of Caravaggio as the devil. Baglione dedicated both versions of his painting to Cardinal Benedetto Giustiniani, from whom he received a gold chain. This type of perceived competition among painters delighted patrons, and, in this case, the Giustiniani brothers were the recipients of two contrasting images of love, one Profane and the other Sacred.

In a like manner, Caravaggio's *Victorious Cupid* and Capitoline *Saint John* may be understood as a conceptual pairing. Where the *Saint John* is expressive of the power of Divine Love, the *Victorious Cupid* represents the earthly pleasures of Profane Love. A similar correspondence can also be found between Annibale Carracci's Farnese Gallery ceiling and Michelangelo's Sistine ceiling. Unveiled in 1601, Annibale's fleshy celebration of the allegorical love of the pagan gods may be viewed as the metaphorically profane counterpart to Michelangelo's sacred Sistine.[30] It therefore may be possible to suggest that Caravaggio's pairing of sacred and profane themes in the *Saint John* and the *Victorious Cupid* were, perhaps at the behest of Giustiniani and Mattei, a competition of sorts between himself, Annibale and the ever-lasting presence of Michelangelo.[31] As such, both paintings by Caravaggio speak to the artist's ability to express intellectually complex ideas similar to those of Michelangelo and Annibale, without compromising his own artistic identity.

As mentioned previously, Caravaggio had access to a wide variety of pictorial precedents from which to draw. While Mazzoni's and Landini's figures provided the requisite baptismal implications necessary for an image of *Saint John*, Michelangelo's *ignudi*, on the other hand, evoked entirely different symbolic associations for the artist. Understood as wingless angels, Michelangelo's nude youths were appropriately situated between the enthroned prophets and sibyls, and the heavenly realm of the story of creation.[32] These angelic, yet corporeal beings define an intermediate zone, itself emblem-

27 Puglisi 201.

28 Both Giovanni Baglione and Joachim von Sandrart remark on Giustiniani's regard for Caravaggio and the *Victorious Cupid* in particular. For Baglione, see Puglisi 414; and Hibbard 353. For Sandrart, see Hibbard 378-79.

29 Langdon 258, 262. For a slightly different account of the event, see Maryvelma Smith O'Neil, *Giovanni Baglione. Artistic Reputation in Baroque Rome* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2002) 27. O'Neil cites Gentileschi's "carelessness with the facts" as he claimed the exhibition had been held in San Giovanni Fiorentini. It is interesting that in the second version the devil turns and looks out to the viewer while in the first version his face is turned away from the viewer.

30 For a recent review of the theme of "love conquers all" in the Farnese Gallery, see Gail Feigenbaum, "Annibale in the Farnese Palace: A Classical Education," in *The Drawings of Annibale Carracci*, exh. cat. The National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., September 26, 1999 - January 9, 2000 (1999) 109-21, esp. 115.

31 Langdon 211-13. Langdon cites three instances where Caravaggio and Annibale were commissioned simultaneously by the same patron for similar works. The first instance of this type of artistic commission came from Tiberio Cerasi and his chapel in Santa Maria del Popolo in 1600-01. Following this came Onorio Longhi's commission to both artists in 1601, when he ordered portraits of himself and his new bride, neither of which have been located. Another competition between the two artists was instigated in 1608 when Giulio Mancini arranged for two paintings of Saint John to be exhibited and judged in Siena. However, no report of the outcome exists. For more on the idea of artistic competition in Rome during the early seventeenth century, see: Beverly Louise Brown, "The Black Wings of Envy, Competition, Rivalry and Paragone," in *The Genius of Rome: 1592-1623*, ed. Beverly Louise Brown (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2001) 250-273. One may also consider Annibale's 1609 *Saint John the Baptist* which is remarkably similar in conception to Caravaggio's Capitoline painting. For more on Annibale's *Saint John*, see: Dennis Mahon, "Il San Giovanni Battista di Annibale Carracci dipinto per Corradino Orsini," in *Il San Giovanni Battista ritrovato. La tradizione classica in Annibale Carracci e in Caravaggio* (Rome: Comune di Roma, 2001) 17-27. It should also be remembered that in Giustiniani's treatise on painting, he placed both Caravaggio and the Carracci in the twelfth category of painting, the one he considered to be "the most perfect since it is the rarest and most difficult." This most difficult of methods, according to Giustiniani, was the ability to "paint *di maniera* and also directly from life." For Giustiniani's treatise, see: *Italian and Spanish Art, 1600-1750. Sources and Documents*, eds. Robert Enggass and Jonathan Brown (Illinois: Northwestern UP, 1970) 16-20.

32 Charles de Tolnay, *Michelangelo. Volume II The Sistine Ceiling* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1945) 63-64. De Tolnay cites two preparatory drawings by Michelangelo, one in London (No. 36) and the other in Detroit (No. 37) which indicate that in the early stages of planning he originally had included small, winged angel-like figures. See also: Edgar Wind, "Michelangelo's Prophets and Sibyls," in *Art and Politics in Renaissance Italy, British Academy Lectures* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993; orig. pub. in *Proceedings of the British Academy* 51 [1966]) 263-300; esp. 294-297. Wind also proposes that the *ignudi* were intended by Michelangelo to represent angels, or as he suggests, perhaps seraphs, citing the same preparatory drawings as de Tolnay as evidence. In the late sixteenth century, it seems that the focus of interpretation of meaning had switched from

atic of God's divine plan for universal salvation.[33] Their sheer physical beauty embodies the notion of divine love since they were surely made, as was man, in God's image.[34] Thus, Caravaggio's appropriation of a figural type expressive of *amor divinus*, endowed his nude Baptist with metaphorical inferences beyond the sacrament of baptism. Because Saint John was the last prophet of the Old Testament and the forerunner of Christ in the New, he, too, can be seen as an intermediary figure: one who traverses the threshold between Mosaic Law and Christian Grace.[35] Furthermore, the *ignudo* most like Caravaggio's young saint is one who flanks the *Sacrifice of Noah*, where the animal being sacrificed is a ram. It is, thus, no mere coincidence that the Baptist has his arm around a similar ram; in fact, its presence suggests Caravaggio's understanding of the ram as both an Old and New Testament symbol of sacrifice.

Interestingly, Caravaggio depicted a ram in two of his four paintings of Saint John (the Capitoline work and the 1610 Naples version), which suggests that the inclusion of the ram had specific connotations for him and for his audience. Traditionally, the Lamb of God, usually depicted as a small, hornless animal, is used as an identifying attribute of the Baptist. If the animal was absent, then a banderole inscribed with *Ecce Agnus Dei* ("Behold the Lamb of God"), was either wrapped around the reed cross or otherwise present, indicating the spiritual presence of Christ. In an effort to explain Caravaggio's inclusion of a ram instead of the *Agnus Dei*, one tendency has been to see this supposed anomaly as a byproduct of his trademark "naturalism" and lack of concern for the traditional pictorial conventions of Christian subjects.[36] An alternate explanation considers the possibility that Caravaggio was alluding to the ram's association with the Cross of Redemption as a symbol of Christ's sacrifice.[37] Since the ram was an Old Testament sacrificial animal, known not only through the sacrifice of Noah, but also through the story of Abraham and Isaac, the allusion to Christ's sacrifice would have been understood to a seventeenth-century viewer. Moreover, the use of sacrificial rams as guilt offerings to God is detailed in Leviticus 6:6.[38] As Thomas Aquinas explicated in his gloss on Leviticus in the *Summa Theologica*: "Christ is offered in the calf to denote the strength of the cross; in the lamb to signify His innocence; in the ram, to foreshadow His headship; and in the goat, to signify the likeness of 'sinful flesh.'"[39]

In this painting, the young Baptist embraces the ram, in a gesture of love that is reciprocated by the animal through a gentle nuzzle. Illuminated by a radiant light that descends upon them from above, their physical and emotional union suggests another type of Divine Love. The concept of Divine Love was one that resonated throughout the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.[40] In Benedetto Varchi's *Due Lezioni*, a copy of which was in the Mattei household by 1603,[41] the theoretician explained Divine Love in neoplatonic terms: "…by means of love, not only can we, but must we elevate ourselves from this mortal veil, and slip from one form into another, to that otherworldly splendor, mounting to Heaven, and there contemplating visibly the prime mover face to face, becoming one with him."[42] The face-to-face exchange between lover and the beloved that leads to spiritual connectedness in Varchi can be seen in Caravaggio's *Ecstasy of Saint Francis* (Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, Connecticut) painted prior to the Capitoline *Saint John*. Scholars have often seen the sensual nature of the contact between Saint Francis and the angel who gently cradles him as a depiction of spiritual love charged with an erotic undertone.[43] Moreover, the physical beauty of the angel draped in diaphanous fabric, combined with the delicate grace of Francis, seem intended to invite the viewer to share in this visual spiritual ecstasy. The Capitoline *Saint John* is not far removed from this desire; but unlike the closed circle of Francis and the angel, the Baptist gazes not at the ram but at the viewer. Thus the viewer is transformed from observer of spiritual ecstasy, to active participant.[44] The stimulation of the senses through a vision of Saint John's divinely radiant beauty transcends the carnal appetite to awaken in the heart and soul of the beholder an intimate awareness of the

Michelangelo's work on the Sistine ceiling to his altar wall *Last Judgment*. For further information, see: Romeo de Maio, *Michelangelo e la Controriforma*, 1st ed. 1978, (Firenze: Sansoni Editore, 3rd ed., 1990) and Bernadine Barnes, *Michelangelo's 'Last Judgment': the Renaissance Response* (Berkley, CA: U of California P, 1998).

33 Staale Sinding-Larsen, "A Re-Reading of the Sistine Ceiling," *Institutum Romanum Norwegiae Acta ad archaelogiam et artium historiam pertinentia* 4 (1969): 143-57, esp. 145 n. 5; Christiane L. Joost-Gaugier, "Michelangelo's *Ignudi*, and the Sistine Chapel as a Symbol of Law and Justice," *Artibus et Historiae* 17.34 (1996): 28-29.

34 De Tolnay 64.

35 John's intermediary role is also depicted in Michelangelo's *Doni Tondo* (Uffizi Gallery, Florence), where the Baptist literally and figuratively occupies a transitional space between the Old and the New Testaments.

36 Rudolph and Ostrow 660; Puglisi 205.

37 Puglisi 206; Raymond 35.

38 Leviticus 6:6: "And he shall bring his trespass offering unto the Lord, a ram without blemish out of the flock, with thy estimation, for a trespass offering, unto the priest."

39 Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* available online at http://www.newadvent.org/summa/210203.htm.

40 Maurizio Calvesi, *La realtà del Caravaggio* (Torino: Giulio Einaudi editore, 1990) 242.

41 Cappelletta and Testa 156.

42 Leatrice Mendelsohn, *Paragoni: Benedetto Varchi's Due Lezioni and Cinquecento Art Theory* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1982) 99.

43 Spike 56.

44 Avigdor Poseq, "The Puzzling *St. John*," in *Caravaggio and the Antique* (London: Avon Books, 1998) 47-48. Poseq proposes that the sexually suggestive nature of the interaction between the boy and the ram was a visual pun on the allegedly shared homosexual proclivities of Cardinal del Monte and Giovanni Battista Mattei.

Divine Love of God. And who better to represent the love of God as made manifest through the beauty of man, than the one who bridged the gap between the Old and the New, the past and the present—the one to first acknowledge and to love Christ as the Savior?

The content and context of the Capitoline *Saint John* has puzzled art historians for many years. Undeniably, Caravaggio's *Saint John the Baptist* clearly diverges from other images of the saint as its meaning extends beyond the boundaries of visual hagiography. The precedents provided by Mazzoni, Landini and Michelangelo were more than compositional motifs for Caravaggio. The deliberate combination of these diverse sources, themselves replete with symbolic significance, endows the Capitoline painting with a complex iconography that establishes the identity of the young boy and creates the fundamental meaning of the work, imbuing this multivalent Saint John the Baptist with all of the requisite spiritual weight. As Saint John reaches up to embrace the ram, and by association Christ, with his right arm, his right leg remains connected with the ground below, his body thus becoming the definitive link between the earthly realm of the profane and the sacred realm of the divine, where one may contemplate the love of God through the beauty of man.

University of Georgia

Figure 1: (Michelangelo Merisi da) Caravaggio, *St. John the Baptist*, *c.*1602, oil on canvas, 132 x 97 cm, Pinacoteca Capitolina, Rome, Italy. Photo Credit: Scala / Art Resource, NY.

Figure 2: (Michelangelo Merisi da) Caravaggio, *Victorious Cupid*, *c.*1601-02, oil on canvas, 156 x 113 cm, Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin, Germany. Photo Credit: Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY.

"Virtue must be hir chiefest garnish" Rules for Painting an Early Stuart Lady as Evidenced by Larkin's *Mary Curzon*

Jennifer L. Hallam

Early Stuart portraits are, for the most part, pictures of beautiful women, women who in dress and face conform to social ideals that dictated rich attire for the elite and prized white brows and red lips, soft limbs and bright eyes in women of any class. For the early Stuart audience, however, the notion of beauty was accompanied by a deep-seated ambivalence. Vexingly, womanly beauty was associated with both sides of an antithetical argument. It was *either* an illusion, an artificial carapace for a corrupt interior *or* it was a shining reflection of inner purity and worth, most often referred to by seventeenth century writers as a woman's "virtue."

In the *Asylum Veneris*, *or a Sanctuary for Ladies,* Daniel Tuvil insisted:

> It is not purple, needle-worke, or precious stones that must adorne and beautifie a woman. / These be arguments of hir wealth, not of hir worth, and get hir nothing but a popular applause…Virtue must be hir chiefest garnish.[1]

What comprised a woman's Virtue? For Gervase Markham, the meritorious early Stuart lady was not only pious and zealous, amiable and delightful, but also

> Of chast thought, stout courage, patient, vntryed, diligent, witty, pleasant, constant in friendship, full of good Neighbour-hood, wise in Discourse, but not frequent therein, sharpe and quicke of speech, but not bitter or talkatiue, secret in her affaires, comfortable in her counsels, and generally skilful in the worthy knowledges which doe belong to her Vocation…[2]

Markham, Tuvil, and other authors of prescriptive tracts and defense treatises seemed to have a never-ending supply of adjectives with which to describe the ideal woman.[3] For the portraitist, however, Tuvil's widely held belief that "Virtue" should be a woman's greatest ornament posed an enormous challenge not shared by the writer. Namely, he had to translate Virtue—a vague, general, multifaceted concept, which was intrinsically non-material—into tangible, visual terms. What is more, the observable signs an artist had at his disposal for communicating virtue were precisely those superficialities contemporaries regarded with suspicion—beautiful faces, for instance, and extravagant clothing. Given these circumstances: how did an artist, such as William Larkin, paint an early Stuart lady like Mary Curzon?

Wearing the right dress

William Larkin's portrait of *Mary Curzon* (Figure 1) is generally dated to *c.* 1612, the year in which Mary married Edward Sackville, later fourth Earl of Dorset. Both the choice of artist, a favorite painter of the Sackville family, and the work's provenance, since its production part of the Dorset collection at Knole House, seat of the third Earl, make it likely that *Mary Curzon* was commissioned by or for the family of her husband.[4] The Sackvilles were a great dynastic family in England and Richard, the third Earl, was not only a member of the royal circle, but had in 1609 increased the family's wealth and reputation through his own marriage. Hanging in the home of Mary's titled brother-in-law, the Larkin portrait would not only act as a testament to the pledge made between Mary and Edward, and by extension, between Mary and her new family, but also attest to Mary's suitability for the role of Sackville bride and wife.

Contemporary seventeenth-century prescriptive literature urged unions between men and women of comparable wealth and position, and in his list of recommendations regarding match-making, Richard Brathwaite exhorted the man of dignified birth to "Chuse one whose parentall blood / makes claim

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1 Tuvil, Daniel. *Asylum Veneris. or A Sanctvary for Ladies Iustly Protecting them, their virtues, and sufficiencies from the foule aspersions and forged imputations of traducing spirits.* (London: Edward Griffin for Laurence L'isle, 1616) 22-23.

2 Gervase Markham, *The English Hovse-Wife, Containing the inward and outward Vertues which ought to be in a compleate Woman* (London: Nicholas Oakes for John Harison, 1631) 3.

3 For examples and a discussion of literature attending to women during the period, see Linda Woodbridge, *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womankind, 1540-1620,* (Urbana: U of Illinois, 1986).

4 On the provenance of the work, see Roy Strong, *William Larkin: Icons of Splendor* (Milan: F.M. Ricci, 1995) 64.

5 Patrick Hannay, *A Happy Husband or, Directions to a Maide to choose her Mate. A Wives behavior towards her Husband after Marriage. To Which is adoiyned the Good Wife; together with an Exquisite discourse*

to vertue."[5] Wealth, as Tuvil insisted, was distinct from Virtue. Nobility, however, was a stipulation of non-material worth. Paralleling such sentiments, Mary's portrait, by showing her attired in costly and fashionable garments on the eve or event of her marriage, reminds the viewer that she is both an heiress and the daughter of a genteel family. Her status, emphatically conveyed through her costume, as is common in portraits of upper-class ladies, gives her an intrinsic "claim to vertue," thereby enhancing her status as an apt match for the brother of Richard Sackville.

Like many other female sitters for Jacobean easel paintings and miniatures, Mary wears an excessively embroidered dress. The gold and silver needlework that appear on Mary's armband and petticoat were most likely the work of a professional embroiderer who would have invested a good deal of time in creating exact and intricate patterns with hard-worked metal thread.[6] The abundantly embroidered bodice, sleeves, and skirt of her gown might also have been the creations of a hired laborer. It is possible, however, that the threaded flora and fauna adorning Mary's dress were the handiwork of female amateur elites, perhaps of Mary herself.

Proficiency in needlework was a requisite skill for the aristocratic lady and was often seen as a mark of nobility, since it was considered not toil, but rather pastime, for the wealthy woman for whom manual, income-producing work was anathema, not to mention unnecessary. The embroidery decorating Mary Curzon's dress twice proclaims her nobility—once through its evident priciness and once through its identification with a gentlewoman's accomplishments. Mary's rank, in turn, is inextricably linked through her embroidered gown with an aptitude for sewing, one of those worthy knowledges that belonged to the vocation of her sex.

In *The Needle's Excellency,* John Taylor remarks,

> …And more the Needles honour to advance,
> It is a Taylors Javelin, or his Launce.
> And for my Countries quiet, I should like,
> That Women-kinde should use no other Pike[7]

Taylor's playful conceit holds that sewing is more appropriate to women than sport or war. Not for women were outdoor pursuits demanding physical exertion and dexterous mobility. Rather, women were suited for sedentary work, which required small, careful movements carried out within the safety of the domestic realm. Moreover, Taylor's stanza proposes that when needlework keeps women industriously occupied, the country is kept "quiet." Literally, this turn of phrase suggests that women engaged dutifully in needlework will be silent. Figuratively, it suggests that needlework will prevent women from participating in unwanted or dishonorable practices that could disturb the social order of the country. Taylor's words, therefore, equate sewing with female honor in the form of female obedience arrived at through proscribed movement in a circumscribed space. Two decades before Taylor's book appeared on the market, Mary Curzon's portrait relied on the same associations between embroidery and domesticated passivity as markers of feminine virtue.

Standing still

Like countless women in early Stuart portraits, Mary Curzon exists in a state of stasis concocted through a series of formal elements suppressing and denying the sitter's potential for action. First and foremost, the very unwieldiness of Mary's gown implies that awkwardness would accompany attempted movement.[8] The cumbersome fullness of her cylindrical skirt is played up by a series of circular forms—the arc of her ruff, the dip of her bustline, the wheel of her farthingale, and the curve of her hemline. These centralized elements create a weighty vertical axis that suctions the sitter into place. The nearly symmetrical curtains that hang at either side of Mary repeat the curving forms found elsewhere, and reaching to the top of the farthingale wheel, serve to enclose the sitter, further denying her motion.

Mary's choice of fashion and the artist's circular ploys, however, account for only a degree of the stillness the image imparts. Perhaps more important is the configuration of Mary's limbs in this portrait. Mary's arms rest upon her farthingale; her hands, hanging limply over its edges, are useless. Upon close inspection, it is clear that Mary does not even hold the fan at her side. Touching, but not gripping the fan's handle, the inactivity of the hand, outlined with deep shadows and called out with reflected light, is made a central focus of the image. In this particular portrait, the inefficacy of Mary's upper appendages is intensified by the inarticulation of her wrists, and the hyperbolic, almost monstrous size of her hands that results. The juxtaposition of Mary's large right hand and the white expanse of feathers below leads to an equation of body part with accessory.

Like her hands, Mary's feet serve to set her in place. Perfectly positioned, her right heel abuts her left toe. The arrangement of Mary's feet is not conducive to the taking of a step, and the sense of her fixity is amplified by the patterns of the carpet, whose lines echo her turnout. We imagine Mary to be tied indefinitely to the space in which she stands. There are no references to the outside world and the sense of confine-

of EPITAPHS, including the choysest thereof, Ancient or Moderne by R.B., Gent. (London: John Beale for Richard Redmer, 1619).

6 On professional vs. amateur embroidery, see George Frederick Wingfield Digby, *Elizabethan Embroidery,* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1964) 26-31.

7 John Taylor, *The Needle's Excellency. A New Booke wherin are diuers Admirable Workes wrought with the Needle. Newly inuented and cut in Copper for the pleasure and profit of the industrious*, 10th ed. (London: For James Boler, 1634) A.

8 Of course, the farthingale construction would in life as much as in art have been maneuvered with difficulty, and it has been pointed out by Filipczak and others that women's fashion in general seemed designed to restrict movement. Zirka Filipczak, *Hot, Dry Men, Cold, Wet Women Women: The Theory of the Humors in Western European Art 1575-1700,* (New York: The American Federation of the Arts, *c.* 1997) 126 especially.

ment created by the picture's black backdrop and framing curtains would only have been stronger when the portrait was in its initial state. The original canvas was smaller, only later extended on the top and sides to make it a pendant to Larkin's portrait of her brother-in-law.[9]

Compared to the artist's portrayal of Richard Sackville, the third Earl (Figure 2), Mary's containment is even more apparent. Richard also stands centrally, framed by curtains. However, the Earl's body, unlike Mary's, is ready for action. An implied diagonal running from the gloved fist at Richard's waist through his uncovered hand on the table is mimicked in reverse by the diagonal of his sword belt. This crossing of diagonals sets up a push and pull tension at the very core of the work that allows for the possibility of movement. Richard's spread feet seem much better prepared to take a step than Mary's tight footwork, and although the carpet design apes the turnout of his right foot, his left foot imperiously breaks the horizontal lines making up the carpet's border. A bent elbow not only gives him spatial dominance and suggests his potential to turn in space, but also aligns Richard with a visual tradition in which the arm akimbo represents masculine assertiveness and boldness associated with both warriors and kings.[10]

If we think back to Taylor's injunction that the woman's needle is her lance and pike, we become aware that while the defining instrument of manly activity—the sword—is present in the picture of Edward Sackville, there is no needle in evidence in Mary's portrait. In fact, needles are never present in early Stuart portraits of women. In *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory,* Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass discuss woman's needleworking as a site of contention. Needlework could be a sign of nobility and virtue, but sewing, paradoxically was a creative outlet for women that allowed them to achieve public fame, which as a general rule was a male prerogative.[11]

Mary's embroidered gown in the Larkin picture draws up associations with womanly skill and virtue, but her unmoving body and useless limbs negate her potential for creative production considered inappropriate for the aristocratic woman. We are free to assume that this dress could be the work of a professional as easily as that of a dexterous noblewoman and the ladies of her circle. In fact, the details of the embroidery in the Larkin portrait are rendered so carefully in paint that, ultimately, we must attribute them to the hand of the male artist, whose expressive imagination, unlike woman's, was encouraged and praised. In the end, Mary's relationship to her embroidered gown reminds us that woman's duty was not creative but procreative.

Mary is not pictured in the act of producing needlework, but she wears the results of sartorial efforts. Those efforts have led here to an embroidered gown covered with living creatures and leafy vegetation. Mary's passive body, *woman's* passive body, becomes a fecund garden teeming with life. Her creative potential is thus redirected into her "natural" role as progenitor. As the future or new wife of Edward Sackville, a large part of Mary Curzon's appeal, especially to the portrait's owners—her in-laws—would be her ability to conceive heirs.

Mary's clothing marks her as fertile; her posture, meanwhile, assures that she is chaste. In a social system that based inheritance on primogeniture, a woman's fidelity to her husband, in other words, her chastity, was imperative. The issue was a particular concern for members of the upper strata to which Mary Curzon belonged because so much could be lost if paternity came into question.[12] Thus, chastity was associated not only with female obedience, but also with the successful maintenance of the social structure. Like stitching, it could keep the country "quiet." Chastity was best protected from woman's own lascivious inclinations and against unwanted advances from the opposite sex when women were relegated to the home. The passive, indoor existence of the needleworking noblewoman was, therefore, especially conducive to developing and safeguarding this greatest of feminine virtues. As explained earlier, the delicate, precise, and constrained movements of the embroiderer represented a more profound control over woman's conduct. Specifically, the sewing woman could be seen as a metaphor for the woman who adhered to her place within the social and natural order. Passive women complied; active women disobeyed.

Unchastity meant both a literal and figurative lack of control over the female body. Thus, the immotile woman became associated not just with the virtue of conformity, but also with that of chastity. Meanwhile, the unruly female body became a sign of promiscuity. In *Faultes, Faultes and Nothing Else but Faultes,* Barnabe Rich writes that a besotted man will buy his mistress all the trappings of a Venetian courtesan, including "a Buske to streighten a lasciuious bodie." He goes on to call the man's mistress "loose legged."[13] The mistress is inherently crooked. It is up to man to straighten her out, to bridle her body, and in doing so, to take possession and command of her sexuality.

Mary's body is carefully controlled through the fastidious stitches and repetitive patterning of the needle/brush, the shap-

9 Strong 64.

10 Joneath Spicer, "The Elbow Akimbo," *A Cultural History of Gesture*, eds. J. Bremmer and H. Roodenburg, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1992) 92-93.

11 Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 131-174.

12 For middle class women, chastity was a point of honor, which Henderson and McManus suggest may have served to distinguish women of that rank from lower classes generally believed to engage freely in licentious behavior. On the English woman's chastity, see Henderson and McManus, *Half-HumanKind*, 59.

13 Barnabe Rich, *Favltes, Favltes, And nothing else but Favlts*, 1606 Facsimile reprint, ed. M. H. Wolf, (Gainesville, [FL]: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1965) 21.

ing silhouette of her gown, and the disciplined carriage of her body proper. The ideological potency of attire and posture by which Mary is deemed chaste in the portrait is supplemented by symbolic language: like the blue rosette, the strawberries embroidered on Mary Curzon's sleeves are an emblem of purity.[14]

Properly accessorized

Having announced the sitter's fertility and chastity, the portrait must promise both to Edward Sackville and his kin. At the middle of Mary's neckline is a dark blue rosette, visually compelling both because it is centrally placed and because it sharply contrasts with the dominant palette of whites and reds employed in the piece. The rosette becomes a secondary focus to the face itself in this portrait. Its importance should not be underplayed. In the world of Elizabethan and early Stuart fashion, colors were often assigned symbolic meaning. While the significance of certain hues changed from handbook to handbook, blue was a color consistently associated with amity and faithfulness.[15] Thus, positioned at the center of Mary's breast, the knotted blue ribbon rosette immediately suggests that this picture is about both the affection of Mary's heart and her virtuous fidelity.

Once the eye is drawn to the rosette, it moves easily to a second blue element in the portrait. A larger blue rosette, embroidered with gold, is tied around Mary's left arm. The band is, as Roy Strong points out, the favor of a suitor.[16] The favor's status as an object of faithful devotion is intensified by the symbolic meaning of its pigmentation. Rendered in the same color and placed close to one another, the two rosettes form a pair. At the core of the work a marriage takes place between objects—one associated with Mary, the other with Edward Sackville.

For contemporary viewers, other accessories in the portrait might have alluded to the union of woman and man as well. Falling almost in line with the portrait's central vertical axis and placed adjacent to the attention-grabbing triangle of red petticoat filling the opening in the front of Mary's gown, the extravagant and expensive fan in the portrait cannot be missed. This object is a conventional testament to wealth, but might also be a token of love given by Edward. Objects such as fans, handkerchiefs, gloves, and jewels were often gifts from suitors, fiancés, or husbands. Several authors have lately noted the symbolic currency of these goods, which could simultaneously mark emotional investment between a man and woman and act as a materialization of a more official bond between the two.[17]

The bracelet Mary wears wound around her left wrist, like the fan, might be interpreted not only as a palpable sign of fortune, but also as an emblem of connubial commitment. Bracelets were extremely common items of courtship in early modern England, sometimes referred to as "Cupid's manacles."[18] The multiple strands of Mary's bracelet, further, suggest that the bond to which she is committed is a fast one, not to be undone. Mary's bracelet wraps around her exceptionally long wrist until its final strand falls loosely about the flesh of her hand. As it does so, it calls out a less prominent piece of jewelry—a ring. One of the few pieces of jewelry Mary wears, her ring, in dialogue with her pearl bracelet, becomes a symbol of her wooing or of her newly wedded status.[19] The representation of Mary's ring functions as a semi-public display of her attachment, ensuring, in turn, that the picture itself becomes a declaration of her troth to Edward. On a deeper level, the presence of the ring, and other possible love tokens, confirm her place within the established social order.

Playing her part

In Markham's terms, wifedom and motherhood were a woman's primary "vocations" in early Stuart England. The 1632 *Law's Resolution of Women's Rights* was among a multitude of authoritative documents, including the Bible, to affirm the belief that "All [women] are understood either married or to be married…"[20] Marriage and motherhood were not only presupposed for early Stuart women, but were in fact key obligations for any woman pretending to probity. In attending to their duties as wives, and by extension mothers, the female sitters of early Stuart portraits prove their virtuousness vis-à-vis their consensual participation in the patriarchal social order. Mary poses as a woman "married or to be married" and by way of that virtue—natural and enacted—she is deemed, tautologically, a worthy bride.

Mary Curzon's picture presented the likeness of an individual and functioned within the specific circumstances of her life. As a portrait of an early Stuart lady, however, it is not

14 On the meaning of strawberries, see Thomasina Beck, *The Embroiderer's Flowers* (Devon: David & Charles, 1992) 112.

15 On color symbolism in early modern England, see Beck, *The Embroiderer's Flowers*; Digby, *Elizabethan Embroidery*; and M. Channing Linthicum, *Costume in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1936).

16 Strong 64.

17 On the exchange of tokens in the rituals of courtship and marriage, see Diana O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint: Rethinking the Making of Marriage in Tudor England* (Manchester; New York: Manchester UP, 2000) 57-99. On the circulation and meaning of love tokens in cultural production, also see Juana Green, "*The Sempster's Wares; Merchandizing and Marrying in* The Fair Maid of the Exchange (1607)," *Renaissance Quarterly* 53 (Winter 2000): 1084-1118.

18 Pearl necklaces and bracelets are recurrent accessories in portraits of early Stuart women. See Diana Scarisbrick, *Tudor and Jacobean Jewellery* (London: Tate, 1995) 88.

19 On rings as tokens, see O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint,* 62 especially; and Scarisbrick, *Tudor and Jacobean Jewellery,* 93-95.

20 I.L., *The Lawes Resolutions of Womens Rights: or, the Lawes Provision for Woemen. A Methodicall Collection of such Statutes and Customes, with the cases, opinions, arguments and points of learning in the law, as doe properly concerne Women* (London: John More, Esq. for John Grove, 1632) 6.

unique. The Jacobean lady, and the Caroline woman after her, were bound to a shared repertoire of representational conventions associated with female virtue. Their images repeat and recycle the same symbols, signs, and role-playing attitudes, and through that multiplicity produce a "picture" of virtuous womanhood, both recognizable and desirable. Thus, William Larkin's portrait of Mary Curzon—wearing the right dress, standing still, properly accessorized, and playing her part—like so many other female portraits of the period, actively defined not only the shape of Woman, but also her substance, constructing ideological expectations regarding both Woman's appearance and her behavior and conspiring with other culture discourses to perpetually recreate the justifications for and terms of Stuart patriarchy.

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Figure 1: William Larkin, *Mary Curzon*, *c.* 1612-13, oil on canvas, 211.5 x 130 cm. Courtesy of Lord Sackville, Knole House, Kent.

Figure 2: William Larkin, *Richard Sackville, 3rd Earl of Dorset,* 1613, oil on canvas, 213.4 x 127 cm. Courtesy of Lord Sackville, Knole House, Kent.

Invention and the Court Copyist: David Teniers the Younger and Gallery Paintings

Andrea Keppers

As a court painter to the Hapsburg Archduke Leopold Wilhelm, David Teniers the Younger became something of a specialist in the creation of gallery paintings, such as *The Archduke's Picture Gallery in Brussels*, painted after 1654 (Figure 1). Teniers depicted himself standing proudly next to the archduke and holding onto *The Madonna of the Cherries* by Titian as if interpreting the painting for its owner. Teniers also included portraits of his other benefactors in the collection. Philip IV of Spain, who owned several of Teniers' paintings, is represented in an oval portrait over the door, and a bust of Queen Christina of Sweden, from whom Teniers received a golden chain of honor, hovers above the red-draped corner of Raphael's *St. Margaret* in the foreground. Teniers is dressed like a nobleman, wearing a sword and a golden chain given to him by Leopold Wilhelm, from which hang the cameral keys, signifying his position as chamberlain or valet. It was highly desirable to be a court painter and to receive the attendant honors, as Teniers demonstrates in this gallery painting. Yet for all of Teniers' self-aggrandizement, as an artist he is overshadowed in this gallery hung with works not of his own invention, but by other masters' hands. The works for which he was known, paintings of tavern-goers, smokers, and peasant kermises, are not present in his painted galleries, rather it is his physical presence and royal obligations that speak to his identity. This study proposes that Teniers' gallery paintings suggest an inherent struggle between imitation and invention. As such, the paintings are a site of anxiety about the position of the court painter and the status of imitation.

The eight years Teniers spent in the archduke's service demanded of him a number of duties. He was required to paint anything Leopold Wilhelm requested, from gallery paintings to genre scenes to hunting portraits of the archduke. As keeper of the collection, Teniers advised the archduke on the care and display of his possessions and was involved with the purchasing of new works. His responsibilities as valet to the archduke were of a more personal nature and kept him tied closely to court life. Leopold Wilhelm was even the godfather to Teniers' sixth child.[1] For an artist, so much could be gained from royal favor; it was one of the best ways to attain honor and fame, not to mention financial security. Having a connection to and the support of a princely patron elevated the artist and in a sense legitimized his practice. While the position of court painter was coveted, it came with a degree of servitude that troubled some artists. Rubens, for instance, occupied the same position that Teniers did for the governor of the southern Netherlands, but demanded and enjoyed much greater freedom. He was exempted from taxes, guild restrictions, and court duties in Brussels so he could remain at home in Antwerp. In becoming Leopold Wilhelm's court painter, Teniers had to move himself and his family from Antwerp to Brussels to remain in residence at court.[2] Perhaps to combat this sense of indenture, Teniers began a life-long quest for nobility. These aspirations were not uncommon among artists of the time, but they underscore Teniers' desire to become something more than a court painter.[3]

Throughout his career Teniers sought after hereditary honors and used his connections at court to reinstate his family coat of arms and title. From 1657 his social aspirations are well documented: he petitioned the King of Spain to grant him a patent of nobility on the basis of his official position at court and his descent from Flemish military heroes.[4] The King replied that he would be glad to grant the letters of nobility on the condition that Teniers refrain from exercising his art publicly or for profit, that he, in effect, stop painting. It is not known if Teniers refused this condition, or if the process was tied up in the Spanish bureaucracy, but he did not receive his coat of arms until 1680.[5] This episode demonstrates that the practice of painting was not always compatible with the status of gentleman. Teniers had Rubens and Velazquez as his models, but was never able to achieve the same level of nobility that they enjoyed.

The collection Teniers maintained was one of the biggest in Europe, but Leopold Wilhelm had to build it almost from scratch. Just before he began his governorship of the Spanish Netherlands, the archduke dispatched one of his early court painters to Antwerp on a mission to initiate the royal

1 *David Teniers, Jan Brueghel y Los Gabinetes de Pintura* (Madrid: Museo del Prado, 1992) 238.

2 Margret Klinge, *David Teniers the Younger* (Antwerp: Snoek-Ducaju & Zoon, 1991) 21.

3 For a discussion of Teniers' contemporaries as court painters, see Madlyn Millner Kahr, "Velázquez and Las Meninas," *Art Bulletin* LVII (1975): 225-42, and Martin Warmke, *The Court Artist* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993).

4 Zaremba Filipczak, *Picturing Art in Antwerp* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987) 141.

5 Faith Paulette Dreher, "David Teniers II Again," *Art Bulletin* 59 (1977): 108-10.

kunstkamer. Writing to an art dealer there, the painter warned that "his Highness has said to me that when he comes to Antwerp, he wishes to see all the most beautiful things that can be seen…in the art of painting, and that he wishes to buy all the most beautiful things that suit him best."[6] It is clear from this passage that the duties of the court painter extended beyond painting and beyond the court. The letter also indicates that Leopold Wilhelm was in a hurry to establish a painting collection and hoped to make a large purchase of "all the most beautiful things" as soon as he arrived. It is not known what part of his collection resulted from this effort, but he did start his gallery with works by Flemish painters. Luckily for the archduke, but not so lucky for the beheaded Charles I, the English Civil War put the enormous Hamilton collection of Italian paintings up for sale in 1651. Having been made Leopold Wilhelm's court painter that year, Teniers was sent to London to supervise the purchase and shipment of paintings for the archduke's collection. He was also responsible for verifying the attribution of the paintings to be purchased. The paintings obtained in London made Leopold Wilhelm famous as a collector and formed the largest part of the collection with which Teniers was to become intimately familiar. All in all, the archduke acquired nearly 400 paintings from the sale, and it seems that the establishment of this instant *kunstkamer* led to the commissions of painted gallery interiors by Teniers.[7]

The genre of the gallery painting was developed at the beginning of the seventeenth century in Antwerp, the city where David Teniers grew up and trained. Teniers took what began as an allegorical genre in a documentary direction. Previously, gallery paintings were imaginary spaces filled with non-existent works or ideal collections assembled to assert a moral or to make visible some intangible quality. Teniers' invention was the real gallery. In a 1617 work by Rubens and Jan Brueghel the Elder called *The Sense of Sight*, the fanciful gallery is loaded with every object that might conceivably stimulate the vision of the viewer. The telescopes and magnifying glasses warn the seer about spiritual blindness, of looking but not seeing, and the figure of Sight herself studies a small painting depicting Christ curing the blind. The inclusion of these elements in the allegory adds a Christian ethic that helps convey the notion that viewing paintings was a moral and worthwhile endeavor.[8] This painting also serves as an allegory of collecting as well, in that it illustrates the notion of diversity that collectors of the time strove towards.[9]

In the case of Leopold Wilhelm, 35 years later, where his collection lacked diversity, it excelled in sheer volume (Figure 2). It was Teniers job to depict that large collection using an artistic convention that had never been applied in such a factual manner. Teniers' gallery pictures are visual inventories, and he was so skilled at reproducing famous paintings by great masters that almost every replica he painted in reduced scale can be identified. Certain paintings appear repeatedly, such as Raphael's *St. Margaret* and a *Danaë* then attributed to Titian. He made the attributions doubly certain in some cases by inscribing the artists' names on the frames of their compositions. All of the paintings reproduced were actually in the archduke's collection, and the people depicted are all portraits of visitors to the galleries; the one aspect that Teniers manipulated for compositional or other reasons is the size and layout of the room. It is not known what Leopold Wilhelm's picture galleries in Brussels looked like, but by the sheer variety of rooms Teniers' depicted containing the same paintings, it seems clear that he invented these rooms, yet furnished them with accurate copies of the most famous paintings.

None of the dozen gallery paintings Teniers made for his patron appear in the 1659 inventory of the archduke's collection. It appears that the works were not to be kept, but sent as gifts to friends and relatives to spread the fame of the collection. They also spread the fame of the archduke.[10] By having Teniers create these grand views of the *kunstkamer*, Leopold Wilhelm proclaimed that he had joined the elite group of princely collectors that all members of his class should aspire to join. In most gallery paintings Teniers portrayed Leopold Wilhelm surveying or discussing, always interacting with his collection of famous paintings. This learned interaction, or provocative conversation is the true purpose of a painting collection, and the means through which a collector is intellectually and spiritually uplifted. While there is no way of knowing how the recipients regarded the gallery paintings, it is possible that they were viewed as the crass self-promotion of a novice collector who stumbled into a significant collection instead of building it with time and careful appreciation.

The gallery pictures also spread Teniers' fame. Teniers depicts himself in every view of the archduke's *kunstkamer*, often presenting a work for his patron's inspection (Figures 1 and 2) and sometimes alone, as in the variation, *Teniers in the Archducal Gallery* (Figure 3). Here the artist stands in the doorway with his hand on the knob, not coming or going, only watching. He appears as the keeper of collections who has unrestricted access to the royal galleries, but must also guard and inspect them, tasks not typically associated with virtue or artistic talent. At the same time, by depicting himself in his gallery paintings, Teniers repeatedly proclaims himself indispensable to the archduke, a necessary member of the court.

Teniers' reputation and artistic identity was also shaped

6 Quoted in Jonathan Brown, *Kings and Connoisseurs* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995) 160.

7 W. Alexander Vergara, "The Count of Fuensaldaña and David Teniers: Their Purchases in London After the Civil War," *Burlington Magazine* 131 (1989): 130-31.

8 J. Müller Hofstede, "'Non Saturatur Oculus Visu' – Zur Allegorie des Gesichts von Peter Paul Rubens und Jan Brueghel d. Ä," *Wort und Bild in der niederländischen Kunst und Literatur des 16. Und 17. Jahrhunderts*, eds. H. Vekeman and J. Müller Hofstede (Erfstadt, 1984) 250.

9 Victor Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997) 129.

10 Warmke 208.

by these paintings in conflicting ways. On the one hand, Teniers' presence in the gallery embodies what was a broader anxiety about whether the artist gains honor through artistic skill or through royal favor. On the other hand, his particular project of copying, in miniature, the masterpieces in the courtly collection suggests the possibility of a more specific tension between his role as imitator and inventor. It may seem that there is little in these paintings by which to judge Teniers' imagination. None of Teniers' original works are represented in the gallery, only copies of the revered masters. However, Teniers makes a claim for the status of the imitative artist. When the gallery pictures arrived at their destination, viewers would be rightly amazed at the intricate and skilled replication of such illustrious paintings. They show off Teniers' expertise at imitating the styles of others, his versatility, and his universality. In these pictures Teniers is the supreme imitator, and was famous for it. The gallery paintings spread Teniers' fame—with a caveat. For Teniers' contemporaries, imitation was a double-edged sword, one that could sever an artist from greatness.

Franciscus Junius, a Flemish philologist and art theorist, published an influential definition and defense of the arts in 1637 called *The Painting of the Ancients*. His treatise uses ancient sources to trace the origins, progress and decline of the arts, to define the nature of painting and sculpture, and to identify perfection. Junius' reconstruction of ancient art theory was for the benefit and enlightenment of modern artists and connoisseurs and contains numerous admonitions to them. For Junius, everything that is good in art is based upon the imitation of nature, not, however, the mere act of copying nature, but animating it through the power of imagination. Imitation of works of art is also a concern to Junius, who sets up the ancient artists as paragons of artistic perfection. Frequently paraphrasing Quintilian, Junius observes that emulating the works of an antecedent is an acceptable practice for the student, but it does not advance art; in fact, it can be detrimental. The artist's judgment should be applied in selecting the best models and recognizing what makes a particular work great, and then only what is best should be imitated, leaving aside the poor elements. Junius reminds the student that "such things as do deserve to be most highly esteemed in an artificer, are almost inimitable; his wit, namely his Invention, his unstrained facility of working, and whatsoever cannot be taught us by the rules of art."[11] A copy is only a copy and can never approach the power of the original possessing the spark of invention.

These ideas were first formulated in antiquity and reiterated again and again by Renaissance and Baroque theorists like Vasari, Rubens, Philips Angel, and Samuel van Hoogstraten.[12] Placed in this context, which is antipathetic to imitation, it is hard not to see Teniers' gallery paintings as sources of possible anxiety for the artist. There are, however, elements of the paintings that are of his invention. As mentioned above, the rooms in which the collection is displayed, the people who inhabit them, and which paintings are chosen for inclusion change in each permutation. The variety of compositions of rooms and people are an attempt on Teniers' part to invent while using his talent for imitation. The gallery pictures are therefore a product of imitation and invention, and an acknowledgment of the tension between the two approaches.

Teniers' consciousness of this tension is made evident in a work called *The Archducal Gallery with a Painter at His Easel* (Figure 4). The scene takes place in a familiar room of Leopold Wilhelm's gallery, filled with many of the famous Italian paintings, but also a number of Flemish works. In the lower, left corner sits an artist in front of a blank canvas with palette, brushes, and mahlstick in hand, ready to paint the man seated just left of center. Behind the painter a group of three men dressed in elegant, earth-toned costumes observe his work. While the painter at his easel is unidentified, and certainly not a true likeness of Teniers, his actions and context make him a stand-in for Teniers. The inclusion of paintings by notable Flemish artists, mostly hung near the easel, reminds the viewer of Teniers' artistic lineage. The landscape in the top left corner is by Jan Brueghel, the two works below it are by Rubens, and directly to the right of the easel is a portrait by Van Dyck. Above the portrait is a small painting of a smoker, to which the artist points with his mahlstick. The smoker is by David Teniers and the frame is inscribed with his initials. It is the only time a work of Teniers' invention appears among his copies of the archduke's collection.

The most important manifestation of Teniers' invention in this gallery picture is the imminent act of creation the painter is about to perform (Figure 5). The figure in white cap and blouse who serves as a model is a rustic-looking man holding an unidentified farming implement and was a type found in many of Teniers' paintings of tavern-goers, smokers, and peasant festivals. It appears that the painter seated at his easel is about to create a genre scene on that blank canvas, one suggestive of Teniers' oeuvre. If the viewer accepts that this unknown painter is a substitute for Teniers, he seems to be using this painting as a statement about his role as court copyist, drawing attention to his appreciation of the blurred line between invention and imitation in his position as court painter. He is fully aware that he has been commissioned to reproduce faithfully and "in the style of X" the variety of pictures in the Archduke's collection, but here he asserts his ability to create, in the style of Teniers. Even though he is surrounded by great works of art from which to copy, this artist, and Teniers, can

11 Franciscus Junius, *The Literature of Classical Art*, eds. Keith Aldrich, Philipp Fehl, and Raina Fehl (Berkeley: U of California P, 1991) 35.

12 See Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Artists*, trans. George Bull (London: Penguin Books, 1987); Jeffrey M. Muller, "Rubens's Theory and Practice of the Imitation of Art," *Art Bulletin* 64 (1982): 229-47; Philips Angel, "In Praise of Painting," trans. Michael Hoyle, *Simiolus* 24 (1996): 227-49; Samuel van Hoogstraten, *Introduction to The Academy of Painting; or, The Visible World*, trans. Hester Ysseling, in *Art and Theory 1648-1815: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, eds. Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, and Jason Gaiger (Blackwell Publishers, 2000).

still use his imagination and invent a picture based on a model from nature, not just imitate without comprehending. At the same time, Teniers also tells the viewer that the court painter is just another status symbol collected by his patron. The scene that unfolds in this gallery is on some level a ridiculous fiction enacted for the benefit of the well-dressed visitors. It is unlikely that an artist would set up a model in a royal *kunstkamer* as a regular part of his artistic practice. Instead it appears to have been arranged as a display of one of Leopold Wilhelm's more animated objects of curiosity.

Teniers satirizes that elite audience for whom he worked, a class to which he did not belong, and also satirizes his own actions in an undated picture, *The Monkey Painter,* in which he depicts a simian artist painting at an easel situated in a small picture gallery (Figure 6). Behind the monkey painter, another well-dressed monkey wearing a plumed hat holds spectacles in front of his face to better observe the painter. Scattered about are paintings of peasant villages, landscapes, and portraits (genres that would be classified as imitative), and the painter seems to be copying the large picture of a battle on horseback propped on a chair at right. The painting is comic, but it has serious implications for the practice of art. These monkeys are imitating human activities: painting, collecting, dress, and mannerisms, although they cannot understand them. Monkeys bring to mind buffoonery and the idea of "aping" the actions of others, and they signified the same things in the seventeenth century, even more so in the context of a painting where they became symbols for rote imitation without judgment.[13]

This painting bears noticeable similarities to *The Archducal Gallery with a Painter at His Easel*. Monkey and human painters are seated in identical poses, while their spectators look over their shoulders. However, the monkey artist is in the act of copying another painting, not creating an original work from life, and the well-dressed observer seems overly impressed with the copyist's abilities. Teniers has set into place a satire of collectors and patrons who pretend to be connoisseurs, imitating the conduct of learned aficionados, but void of appreciation. The figure of the monkey painter lampoons artists who copy the works of others, like Teniers himself, though it seems doubtful that Teniers would so blatantly mock his own artistic shortcomings. Instead the painting exposes the inconsistencies integral to Teniers position in the archduke's court. Leopold Wilhelm required Teniers to copy the famous works in his collection, yet the rhetoric of his time dictated that he abandon imitation for invention if he was to achieve artistic honor. *The Monkey Painter* demonstrates Teniers' awareness of his inability to actually live up to the lofty status of the masters whose works he copied and calls attention to the contradictions of the period's definition of exalted artist. If it was impossible to copy and not be an ape, was it possible to be an ape and an honorable artist?

As a court painter, curator, servant, and (he hoped) nobleman, Teniers was also a self-conscious artist who required his viewers to consider what it meant to copy the works of others and still retain a distinct artistic persona. His gallery paintings reveal those tensions, complicate the genre, and problematize the artist's stake in its creation. Not just virtuosic displays of Teniers' stylistic range and abilities as an imitator, they depict a struggle between invention and imitation, in which Teniers' own artistic identity might be lost.

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[13] Horst Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London: Warburg Institute, 1952) 310.

Figure 1: David Teniers the Younger, *The Archduke's Picture Gallery in Brussels*, after 1654, oil on canvas. Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich.

Figure 2: David Teniers the Younger, *Archduke Leopold Wilhelm in His Picture Gallery*, c. 1651, oil on canvas. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

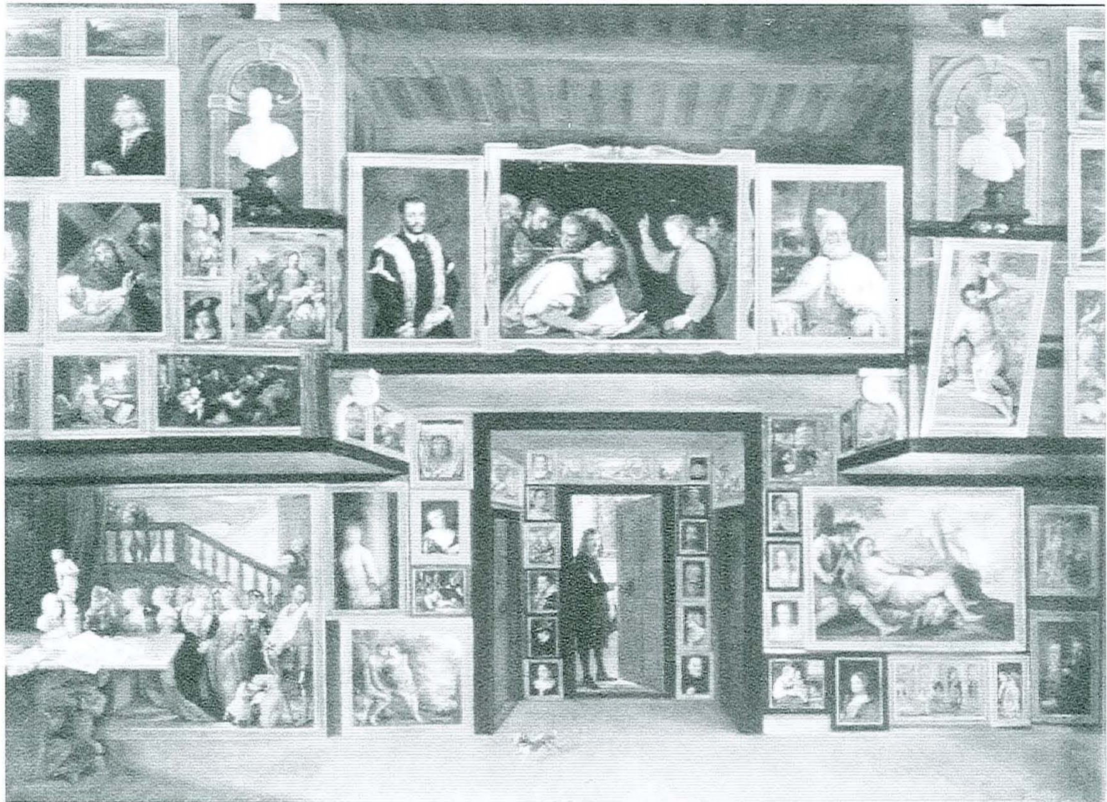

Figure 3: David Teniers the Younger, *Teniers in the Archducal Gallery*, *c.* 1651, oil on canvas. Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich.

Figure 4: David Teniers the Younger, *The Archducal Gallery with a Painter at His Easel*, *c.* 1651-59, oil on canvas. Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich.

Figure 5: Detail of Figure 4.

Figure 6: David Teniers the Younger, *The Monkey Painter*, undated, oil on canvas. Museo del Prado, Madrid.

Luisa Roldán's Terracottas: Result of Failure or Strategy for Success?

Casey Gardonio-Foat

In the third volume of his treatise on art, the eighteenth-century Spanish artist and critic Antonio Palomino prefaced his biography of Luisa Roldán (1652-1704) with the description "Eminent Sculptor." Of the two hundred twenty-six artists discussed by Palomino, she is the only Spanish woman.[1] In fact, Roldán is one of only two female sculptors to have gained widespread public acceptance in early modern Europe. The first, Properzia de Rossi, left only one large-scale work, and Giorgio Vasari suggested that her male contemporaries' hostility prevented her from achieving a higher degree of success in this medium.[2] Conversely, Roldán was praised by contemporaries such as Palomino and was even made *escultora de cámara*, or court sculptor, to Kings Charles II and Philip V. This unique situation thus raises the question of how a woman sculptor was able to achieve such professional success and recognition in this period, especially in a country that produced almost no other well-known women artists.

Although during her lifetime Roldán was best known for her life-size figural sculptures, modern authors almost always refer to her small-scale terracotta groups as her most characteristic works. Even so, these pieces and the circumstances surrounding their production have not attracted in-depth critical analysis. Instead, most authors have been content to dismiss these pieces as distinctly "feminine" in style or to interpret them as evidence that Roldán was unsuccessful in her post as *escultora de cámara,* forced to create and sell small works in order to earn a living in the absence of court commissions.[3]

However, given the difficulty that all court artists faced in collecting payment from the Spanish crown in the late seventeenth century, Roldán's dire financial situation is not sufficient evidence to label her career unsuccessful.[4] Additionally, writing off Roldán's terracotta production as a response to a failed career in life-size sculpture follows the insidious historiographical pattern of assuming that women artists could succeed in the so-called "lower" genres, such as portraiture, still life, or in Roldán's case, small terracottas, but not in "higher" ones.[5] In fact, it seems illogical that, while at court, Roldán could so significantly fail at large-scale sculpture while simultaneously becoming so successful with her small-scale works. Indeed, Palomino's biography suggests that she was better known for her large-scale works during her career, and so modern-day statements to the contrary should be viewed critically. This paper suggests an alternative way of viewing Roldán's terracottas, one that takes into account the economic and social circumstances surrounding seventeenth-century Spanish sculptors. By examining the possible functions and consumers of Roldán's terracottas and the practical obstacles

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1 Antonio Palomino, *Lives of the Eminent Spanish Painters and Sculptors*, 1724, trans. Nina Ayala Mallory (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987). Of the two other women included by Palomino, one, Sophonisba Gentilischi, is a fictional composite and the other, the Italian Sophonisba Anguisola, is described primarily in terms of her official position as a lady-in-waiting to the Queen.

2 Germaine Greer, *The Obstacle Race* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979) 209-210. Another female sculptor, Dorothée Massé, was admitted into French Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture on November 23, 1680; however, beyond the official notice of her acceptance I have found no other references to her life or work (Gail Stavitsky, "Women Artists in the Guilds and Academies of Europe ca. 1300-1800," MA qualifying paper, New York University, 1978, 57 and app. I, item 5). Additionally, Pedro de Mena taught two of his daughters, Andrea and Claudia, to sculpt, and they are said to have created figures of St. Benedict and St. Bernard upon entering the Convent of St. Anne in Málaga in 1672. The only known extant works by Andrea are busts of the *Ecce Homo* and *Dolorosa*, now at the Hispanic Society of America, and she is not mentioned by Palomino (Hispanic Society of America, *Tesoros*, ed. Patrick Lenaghan [New York: Hispanic Society, 2000] 324).

3 Patrick Lenaghan, personal interview, 4 April 2003.

4 She sent repeated requests for payment to the King and Queen. For transcripts of these letters, see Beatrice Gilman Proske, "Luisa Roldán at Madrid," pt. 1 of 3, *Connoisseur* 155.642 (February, 1964): 131-132.

5 Greer 109. Greer gives the example of Properzia de Rossi's carved fruit stones, which are admired while her biblical marble relief for the Basilica of San Petronio is neglected. With a few exceptions, early modern women painters were generally considered incapable of painting historical or religious subjects; lower genres such as portraiture and still life were considered more appropriate to their "feminine" sensibilities. I do not wish to suggest that we should evaluate women artists' works according to different standards from those applied to their male contemporaries; it is certainly true that some women were not as skilled in the higher genres as they were in the lower ones, as were some male artists. However, while we should not over-value certain works simply because they were made by women, we should also beware of undervaluing the same works for the same reason.

that she would have faced as a professional woman artist, one can better understand how her terracottas may have been part of a calculated strategy for achieving success.

Luisa Roldán was the daughter of the well-known Sevillian sculptor, Pedro Roldán, and learned to sculpt in her father's workshop together with her two older sisters, Francisca and María Josefa.[6] She began working independently following her 1671 marriage to the sculptor and polychromer Luis Antonio de los Arcos.[7] In 1686 Roldán moved with her husband and two children to Cadíz, where she received commissions from the Ayuntamiento and the New Cathedral.[8] The family moved to Madrid around 1688 under the protection of Don Cristóbal de Ontañón, *ayuda de cámara* to Carlos II.[9] Roldán was made *escultora de cámara* by Carlos II in 1692, and again by Philip V in 1701.[10] It is thought that she died in Madrid between 1704 and 1706.[11]

Seven extant terracottas signed by Roldán are known, all dating from this period in Madrid; often these works include her title, *escultora de cámara*. At least sixteen other terracottas have been attributed to her, while seventeenth- and eighteenth-century documents refer to still more pieces. All of these works represent religious subjects, and they likely served as objects of private devotion. Their modest size and quiet, often domestic, subjects are identical to those of contemporary devotional paintings by Roldán's contemporary and fellow Sevillian, Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617-1682).[12] Like devotional paintings, the terracottas present a limited number of figures removed from a narrative context and often incorporate quotidian or symbolic details, for example the salamander, snake, rabbit, and irises incorporated into the base of her *Death of the Magdalene* (Figure 1). These details encouraged contemplation and aided devotion, making the terracottas appropriate foci for meditation.[13]

Devotional paintings were often produced in multiples for sale on the art market, as were small, inexpensive religious sculptures.[14] Evidence suggests that Roldán's terracottas were also conceived of in this way. Because terracotta was relatively inexpensive, easy to use, and could be molded to produce multiples, it was an ideal medium for creating such works.[15] Roldán created multiple versions of some works, among them the *Education of the Virgin* and the *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (Figure 2). Art historian Marjorie Trusted's analysis of these and other works, such as the Hispanic Society of America's *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine* (Figure 3), strongly suggests that Roldán used molds to cast individual figures which could then be combined just before firing in order to create various compositions.[16] Roldán's use of molds to quickly produce terracotta groups may explain her state-

[6] Given the collaborative nature of seventeenth-century sculpture production in Spain and the tendency for workshops to be organized according to family lines, it is not surprising that Luisa and her siblings participated in Pedro Roldán's studio. María Josefa and Francisca both married sculptors and continued to produce sculpture in collaboration with their husbands and father (María Dolores Salazar, "Pedro Roldán, Escultor," *Archivo español de arte* 22 [1949]: 324). The contemporary sculptor Pedro de Mena also taught his daughters to sculpt, although it does not seem that they pursued the profession independently (see note 3, above). It is tempting to hypothesize that other Spanish women followed this model, although Luisa Roldán remains unique in the level of success and recognition she achieved.

[7] María Victoria García Olloqui, '*La Roldana:' Escultora de Cámara*, Arte Hispalense (Seville: Disputación Provincial de Sevilla, 1977) 24-25. (Henceforth abbrieviated as '*La Roldana*.')

[8] Luisa and her husband collaborated on a life-size *Ecce Homo* for the New Cathedral of Cádiz, signed and dated 1684; in 1687 she was given the commission for seventeen alabaster figures of patriarchs and angels for the city's Holy Week monument. Her life-size figures of *Sts. Servando* and *Germán* for the New Cathedral also date from 1687 (Garcia Olloqui, *Luisa Roldán: La Roldana: Nueva Biografía* [Seville: Guadalquivir Ediciones, 2000] 75. [Henceforth abbrieviated as *Neuva Biografía.*])

[9] Garcia Olloqui, '*La Roldana*' 27, and Beatrice Gilman-Proske, "Luisa Roldán at Madrid," pt. 1, 128 and 131n5.

[10] García Olloqui, *'La Roldana'* 29.

[11] García Olloqui, *'La Roldana'* 36.

[12] For a discussion and illustrations of Murillo's devotional works, see Jonathan Brown, "The Devotional Paitnings of Murillo," *Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1617-1682): Paintings from American Collections*, ed. Suzanne L. Stratton-Pruitt (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers in association with the Kimball Art Museum, 2002) 31-45.

[13] Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative: the rise of the dramatic close-up in fifteenth-century devotional painting* (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1984) 53-54, and Catherine Hall-van den Elsen, "Una Valoración de Dos Obras en Terracotta de Luisa Roldán," *Goya* 209 (March-April, 1989): 291-295. Hall-van den Elsen suggests that such details as the animals and plants included in the *Death of the Magdalene* carried specific symbolic meanings that drew upon the devotee's understanding of Scripture.

[14] See, for example, Bruce Boucher, ed., *Earth and Fire: Italian Terracotta Sculpture from Donatello to Canova* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2002); *17th and 18th century Terracottas: the Van Herck Collection* ([Antwerp]: King Baudouin Foundation, [2000]); Michael Baxandall, *German Wood Statuettes 1500-1800* (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1967); and Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1980). In Spain, such images were quickly and cheaply cast from lead and papier-maché (Juan José Martín González, "Spain IV, 2-4: Sculpture," *Dictionary of Art*, vol. 29 [London: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1996] 291; and Marjorie Trusted, *Spanish Sculpture: Catalogue of the Post-Medieval Spanish Sculpture in Wood, Terracotta, Alabaster, Marble, Stone, Lead and Jet in the Victoria and Albert Museum*, [London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996] 11-13 and 90.)

[15] In fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italy, advances in terracotta production led to its being the favored medium for producing such images, for instance by the della Robbia workshop (Emily Black, "Terracotta II, 2 (i): History and Uses in the Western World: Sculpture," *Dictionary of Art*, vol. 30 [London: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1996] 496). These works bear remarkable similarity in both size and subject matter to Roldán's terracottas. Although no evidence suggests that she was familiar with pieces by the della Robbia, their popularity demonstrates the existence of a market for devotional sculpture on this scale. See also Bruce Boucher, "Italian Renaissance Terracotta: Artistic Revival or Technological Innovation?" *Earth and Fire*, 1-31.

[16] Trusted, *Spanish Sculpture*, 71-74, and "Art for the Masses," *Sculpture and its Reproductions*, ed. Anthony Hughs and Eric Ranfft (London: Reaktion Books, 1997) 54. Her theory is based on compared measurements of similar figures in the *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine* at the

ment to Carlos II that she had created over eighty terracotta works while living at the court in Madrid.[17]

The existence of a Spanish market for devotional terracotta sculptures is also suggested by such works as a sixteenth-century relief of the *Pietá*[18] by Juan de Juni and the small, early eighteenth-century representations of the Christ Child with the Virgin or Saint Joseph, produced in Granada by José Risueño.[19] However, the question remains of why Roldán only seems to have begun producing works of this nature after her arrival in Madrid, especially when the medium of terracotta was more popular in Andalucía, where she spent the first part of her career. It is possible that the Italian-born sculptor Juan Bautista Moreli played a role in popularizing the medium at the Madrid court during his service as court sculptor from 1664 until 1669,[20] thus laying the foundations for a market that Roldán would later exploit upon her arrival in the city. An inventory of the royal collections made between 1701 and 1703 reveals several terracotta works attributed to Moreli.[21] However, these works differ markedly in style and conception from Roldán's: they often depict profane rather than religious subjects and consist of single figures rather than groups. Thus, while Moreli may well have introduced terracotta as a viable medium for small-scale sculpture, Roldán's works remain original in format.

Roldán's patrons probably included members of the royal family, aristocrats at the royal court, and religious institutions and individuals. Although Roldán's terracottas are not specifically mentioned in royal inventories, it is likely that the royal collections contained at least three of her works: a *Nativity* and a *Burial of Christ* that she gave to Philip V in 1701, and an *Education of the Virgin* documented in the *guardajoyas* of the Royal Palace in 1792.[22] Furthermore, inventories reveal that private oratories in the royal palaces often contained small religious sculptures, suggesting how Roldán's terracottas might have been displayed and used in the royal collections. Additional terracottas may have been destined for the collections of ecclesiastical institutions, as were many of José Risueño's terracotta groups.[23] Finally, Roldán most likely sold some of her terracottas to members of Madrid's aristocratic elite, the capital's primary art patrons.[24] Roldán's own references to these works as "jewels"[25] and Palomino's description of their display in vitrines[26] suggest a parallel between their collection and that of the miniature wax reliefs by Fray Eugenio Gutiérrez de Torices, which were modeled in small boxes with decorated glass lids and were kept as "rare jewel[s]" at the Escorial and in various private collections.[27] Although Fray Eugenio's reliefs probably functioned differently from Roldán's devotional works, their presence in court collections provides a clue as to which individuals might purchase such works and how they might view them.

Although it has been suggested that Roldán began producing terracottas in Madrid because she was unsuccessful as *escultora de cámara*, comparing her work for the crown to that of other seventeenth-century court sculptors suggests that this was far from the case. The list of large-scale works attributed to Luisa Roldán during her service to the court suggests that she was held in high regard and received commissions on a regular basis.[28] Furthermore, although Roldán was initially

Hispanic Society of America and the *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* in the collection of the Condesa de Ruiseñada in San Sebastián; an examination of the underside of the *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine*, which reveals pieces of straw possibly used as a binding agent; and an examination of the Victoria and Albert Museum's *Virgin and Child appearing to San Diego of Alcalá*, which has a terracotta fill in the back, perhaps resulting from a flaw where two figures were joined.

17 Hall-van den Elsen located this letter, which is now lost (cited in Trusted, "Art for the Masses" 178).

18 Three nearly-identical versions of this work exist, along with one more version of slightly reduced dimensions. (Trusted, "Art for the Masses" 51; *Spanish Sculpture* 14; and "Three Terracottas in the Victoria and Albert Museum," *Boletín del seminario de estudios de arte* 59 [1993]: 324-327. See also Martín González, *Juan de Juni, vida y obra* [Madrid: Dirección General de Bellas Artes, 1976] 115.)

19 Risueño spent his entire career in Granada and seems to have produced terracotta groups beginning around 1712. However, unlike Roldán, Risueño never signed these works. (Domingo Sánchez-Mesa Martín, *José Risueño: Escultor y pintor granadino (1665-1732)* [Granada: Granada Universidad Caja de Ahorros, 1972] 90; and Sánchez-Mesa Martín and Trusted, "Risueño, José," *Dictionary of Art*, vol. 26, [London: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1996] 421.)

20 Mercédes Agulló y Cobo and Alfonso E. Pérez Sánchez, "Juan Bautista Moreli," *Archivo Español de Arte* 49.194 (April-June, 1976): 109-110.

21 Martín González, *El escultor en palacio: viaje a través de la escultura de los Austrias* (Madrid: Editorial Gredos, S.A., 1991) 257.

22 All three of these works appear to have been lost or destroyed. Roldán referred to the *Nativity* and *Burial of Christ* in her May 1, 1701, letter to Philip V requesting to be reinstated as *escultora de cámara*. The *Education of the Virgin* is described in Antonio Ponz's *Viaje en España*, published in Madrid in 1793. Both sources are cited in Gilman-Proske, "Luisa Roldán at Madrid," pt. 1, 132n20 and pt. 2, 272n49.

23 Sánchez-Mesa Martín 161. Of the fifteen terracottas listed in the catalog raisonée, ten remain in church and monastery collections, and the two for which extended provenance information is given were obtained from church collections.

24 J. H. Elliot, *Spain and its World, 1500-1700: Selected Essays* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989) 279. Elliot goes on to note that the market for devotional works remained high in Madrid throughout the seventeenth century (283). Trusted cites Hall-van den Elsen's statement that Roldán "spent the last two years of her life working for a private patron, producing a large number of small terracotta groups" (*Spanish Sculpture*, 70); however, she does not give the name of this patron and I have been unsuccessful in obtaining a copy of Hall-van den Elsen's dissertation, the source for this information.

25 Gilman-Proske, "Luisa Roldán at Madrid," pt. 1, 132, n20; and pt. 2, 199.

26 Palomino 341.

27 Palomino 327-328.

28 She received two documented commissions from Carlos II: a monumental figure of the *Archangel St. Michael* for the Escorial in 1692 and an *Ecce Homo* around 1700 (Gilman Proske, "Luisa Roldán at Madrid," pt. 1, 130, and Mindy Nancarrow Taggard, "Luisa Roldán's *Jesus of Nazareth,*"

named to her post "*sin gajes,*" or without pay, in 1695 she was awarded an annual salary of one hundred ducats,[29] an amount equal to that paid her apparent contemporary, Enrique Cardón,[30] and twice that of her immediate predecessor, José de Mora.[31]

Unfortunately, while Roldán's salary suggests that she was successful as a court sculptor, the court's impending bankruptcy prevented her from easily collecting her pay. It is therefore probable that she viewed terracotta production as a way of supplementing her income, as various authors have suggested.[32] Producing terracottas might also have freed Roldán from the need to operate a large workshop. Medieval and early modern guilds throughout Europe often allowed women to inherit and run their husbands' workshops, however they generally prohibited women from taking on male apprentices or assistants.[33] Even if Roldán's position at court exempted her from guild regulations,[34] her hiring of male assistants would most likely still have been seen as inappropriate. This may have hindered her ability to establish a workshop capable of fulfilling large-scale commissions comprising multiple figures, which usually entailed the collaboration of numerous assistants.[35] Furthermore, sculpture studios required a considerable amount of space.[36] A letter from Roldán to Carlos II of 1693 states that she and her family had no place to live, suggesting that obtaining the working space necessary for creating large-scale sculpture may have presented yet another obstacle to her career.[37] Roldán's small terracottas, on the other hand, could have been created in a smaller studio and would not have demanded the help of numerous assistants. Thus, perhaps Roldán's terracotta production was a strategy for circumventing guild restrictions, societal constraints, and material deficiencies that would have stood in the way of her establishing a career at the court.

Additionally, Roldán's terracottas probably also served to establish her reputation in the eyes of potential patrons, including the incoming Bourbon king Philip V, to whom she submitted two terracottas when requesting that he renew her position as *escultora de cámara*.[38] Towards this end, Roldán would have benefited from the innovative format of her terracotta groups. As argued by Mindy Nancarrow Taggard, seventeenth-century Spanish sculptors sought to create "brand names," which promoted the loyalty of patrons and heightened the perceived value of their products.[39] This strategy can be seen as a form of monopolistic competition—creating a

Women's Art Journal 19.1 [Spring-Summer, 1998]: 9 and 13). Mari-Tere Alvarez has suggested that the life-size figure of *San Jinés de la Jara*, now in the Getty Museum, was also a royal commission, perhaps intended as a gift to a convent or monastery ("The Reattribution of a Seventeenth-Century Spanish Polychrome Sculpture," *J. Paul Getty Museum Journal* 24 [1996]: 67-68). Eleanor Goodman notes that the four life-size figures of *Sts. Michael*, *Margaret*, *Dorothy*, and *Gabriel* that flank the image of *Our Lady of the Miracle* in the retable of the Capilla de los Milagros are attributed to Roldán ("Royal Piety: Faith, Religious Politics, and the Experience of Art at the Convent of the Descalzas Reales in Madrid," Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2001, 67-68). Martín González attributes to Roldán six *Angels with Instruments of the Passion* in Madrid's Church of San Isidro and dates them to the last years of her career, (Martín González, *Escultura barroca en España, 1600-1770* [Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 1983] 181), which suggests that she may have received commissions from Philip V as well as Carlos II.

29 Martín González, *El escultor en palacio* 225.

30 Martín González, *El escultor en palacio* 225. Enrique Cardón was made court sculptor in November, 1688, and was awarded a salary of one hundred ducats per year. However, because almost nothing is known of his life or works, it is impossible to compare his work for the court to Roldán's.

31 José de Mora served as *escultor de cámara* from 1672 to 1680 and received 18,750 *mearavedís* per year, equal to about fifty ducats. I have found no other information on his work for the Spanish court. (Agulló and Pérez Sánchez 110; Palomino 217-218; and Martín González, *El escultor en palacio*, 223; conversion from *meravedís* to ducats given in Jonathan Brown and J.H. Elliot, *A Palace for a King: The Buen Retiro and the Court of Philip IV* [New Haven: Yale UP, 1980] 247).

32 See, for example, Trusted, "Art for the Masses" 54; and Garcia Olloqui, *'La Roldana'* 29. Other artists of this period, such as El Greco, also seem to have created small-scale devotional works as a way of earning a steady income between larger and more lucrative commissions.

33 See Stavitsky, especially chapters 1 and 2, and Mary Elizabeth Perry, *Gender and Disorder in Early Modern Seville* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1987) 17.

34 Valerie Mainz, "Court Artists," *Dictionary of Women Artists* (London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1987) 37.

35 Martín González discusses the position of assistants in sculpture workshops and notes that assistants would usually be given single figures to complete (*El artista en la sociedad español* 31). Within this context, it is notable that the large-scale autograph works that Roldán produced in Madrid are all single figures, which she could have completed herself.

36 Martín González, *El artista en la sociedad español* 36.

37 See Gilman-Proske, "Luisa Roldán at Madrid," pt. 1, 132, for a transcript of this letter. In her first letter requesting the post of *escultora de cámara* from Philip V, Roldán stipulated that the King should also provide her with an income and a house. A document of 1702 lists her husband, Luis Antonio de los Arcos, as residing across the street from the Casa del Tesoro, a house traditionally occupied by court painters, and it would be interesting to investigate whether her request for lodgings was met ("Partición de los bienes de la Condesa de Villaumbrosa," reproduced in Agulló y Cobo, *Documentos sobre escultors, entalladores y ensambladores de los siglos XVI al XVIII* [Valladolid: Publicaciones del Departamento de Historia del Arte, 1978] 16. For further information on the Casa del Tesoro, see Martín González, *El artista en la sociedad española* 26.)

38 For further discussion of the use of terracotta *modelli* to attract potential patrons, see Charles Avery, *Fingerprints of the Artist: European Terra-Cotta Sculpture from the Arthur M. Sackler Collections* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980) 18; and Boucher, "Italian Renaissance Terracotta."

39 Nancarrow Taggard, "Piety and Profit in Spanish Religious Art," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 134. 1570 (Nov. 1999): 205-206. Her arguments center mainly on the market for large-scale religious images; however, the same strategies could apply equally well to other genres.

40 Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* 121-122. Again, although Baxandall describes this situation in the context of sixteenth-century German woodcarving, it can be applied equally well to seventeenth-century religious sculpture.

market in which the product is not differentiated solely on the basis of quality and price, but also according to the consumer's perceptions of its uniqueness and the artist's personal skill.[40] By producing a type of devotional group that was unique in Madrid, Roldán may have sought to create a market in which she was, at least initially, the only competitor.

In conclusion, while the markets for both devotional and terracotta sculptures seem to have existed throughout Europe by the seventeenth century, the small terracotta groups that Luisa Roldán produced in Madrid were unique for their time and place. Contrary to some scholars' opinions, Roldán seems to have built a strong reputation as a sculptor at the Spanish court; her terracottas should be viewed as contributing to this success rather than symptomatic of her failure. Her innovative works catered to the market for intimate, devotional imagery, and perhaps even created a new market in which she was the only competitor. They also allowed her to earn a living during financially precarious times without requiring a large and expensive studio or the help of male assistants, which presumably would have aroused controversy and criticism. It is perhaps with respect to this last condition that Roldán's terracotta production is most likely to have been influenced by her social status as a woman. However, we should not dismiss these works as the inherently "feminine" results of a failed career in large-scale sculpture. Rather, we should recognize them as part of a calculated response to the restrictions placed on women artists or, in short, as a strategy for achieving success.

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Figure 1: Luisa Roldán, *Death of the Magdalene*, *c.* 1690, polychromed terracotta. Courtesy of the Hispanic Society of America, New York.

Figure 2: Luisa Roldán, *Rest on the Flight into Egypt*, c. 1688-1700, polychromed terracotta. Courtesy of the Hispanic Society of America, New York.

Figure 3: Luisa Roldán, *Mystical Marriage of St. Catherine*, 1690-1692, polychromed terracotta. Courtesy of the Hispanic Society of America, New York.

Picturing American Femininity: Addressing the Body of Alfred Steiglitz's *Portrait of Georgia O'Keeffe*

Sandra Zalman

When it comes to theories of the female nude in Western art, clothes necessarily fail to figure largely in the discourse.[1] This is because, quite simply, clothes and nudity are definitively discordant—the former serving to displace the characteristics of the latter. As static objects then, the representations of the clothed and nude body cannot be reconciled, but if we reconsider the status of nude as a quality of the represented body, then clothing becomes its contiguous counterpart. The connection between dress and undress via the body makes it all the more strange that while Alfred Stieglitz's *Portrait of Georgia O'Keeffe* (1917-1937) has been extensively written upon as a body of work, the appearance of the body in that work—namely O'Keeffe's—has, for the most part, eluded textual description. A quick quantitative survey illustrates the perpetuity of O'Keeffe's dual presence in the project—of the near 100 photographs that Stieglitz took of her in 1918, approximately one-third portray O'Keeffe dressed and an almost equal number present her in various states of undress.[2] The body operates obviously in both categorical realms and when this body is Georgia O'Keeffe's, the dialogue between its clothed and nude states becomes particularly interwoven with issues of identity. As represented in Alfred Stieglitz's photographs of Georgia O'Keeffe, dress and undress function in tandem to conjoin these diametrical states, constructing a multiple but unified identity through the seriality of the medium of photography.

What this discussion aims to do is pin down the similarities between dress and undress to get at the ways in which these states operate in terms of O'Keeffe's physical body (and its artful presentation) and her artistic persona (and its physical manifestation). Initially, these terms—the nude and the clothed—can be seen as operating in two different realms—the represented and the real. They can be said to be referring to contrasting appearances—the undressed and the dressed. They can be conjured to reveal conflicting statements about identity—as object and subject. However, this paper proposes that nudity and clothing function in surprisingly similar ways (surprising for all the time spent defining terms which in the vernacular surely signal opposition). That is, in the case of these photographs, each successive representation of O'Keeffe contributes to the contiguity, and eventual collapsibility, of the visually constructed difference between nude and clothed.[3]

Essentially, there is a bit of a theoretical cover-up going on here. Clothing both distinguishes the body, while transforming the appearance of the body in order to render it legible. Thus, dress not only physically contains the body, but also functions tangibly to control its meaning(s)—even, it has been argued, to give it meaning. According to Hegel, clothing effectively shifts the body from the realm of sentience to the realm of significance.[4] And because clothing regulates the visualization of the body, what is key is the inter-subjective aspect of dress. The clothed body is constructed for social consumption (as the term "sumptuary" implies)[5] and thus is designed not to exist in the proverbial vacuum, but rather in social space.

Since the clothed body exists to be recognized, another subject is indicated in the process of dress: the viewer. As Anne Hollander writes, "the most important aspect of clothing is the way it looks."[6] When the female body becomes aestheticized as the female nude, the specific corporeality of

1 Anne Hollander is among the few art historians to address this correspondence in *Seeing through Clothes* (New York: Viking Press, 1974). However, Hollander suggests in her thoughtful chapter on the nude that the nude's conception occurs via reflection of the clothed. She writes, "Above all, Western representational art had to invent a nudity that allowed for the sense of *clothes*—their symbolic importance…their influence" (Hollander 84).

2 The remaining third of the 1918 photographs are of O'Keeffe's head and/or hands, which could not be counted into either category.

3 To push these terms toward their intersection is not to say that they are the same; merely these separate representations should be treated in terms of their shared implications.

4 Amelia Jones presents the transition by invoking Hegel's supposition that: "'as pure sentience, the body cannot signify; clothing guarantees the passage from sentience to meaning…Fashion resolves the message from the abstract body to the real body of its reader.' The assumption of 'real' bodies aside, Hegel notes that it is *clothing* that allows communication to occur between subjects…." (Jones, "'Clothes Make the Man:' The Male Artist as a Performative Function, in *The Oxford Art Journal* 18.2 (1995): 18). As Jones points out, for Hegel, the body unclothed is essentially unreadable.

5 Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge Press, 1992) 21.

6 Hollander 311. Through the eyes of another subject, the viewer, the discourse on the female nude begins to intersect with that of clothing, making its appearance in the visual realm, and, as a visual representation of the body in the space of art, mediated by the hand and eye of the (usually male) artist. Indeed, Berger writes, "In the average European oil painting of the nude the principal protagonist is never painted. He is the spectator in front of the picture and he is presumed to be a man." John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Penguin Books, 1972) 54. It should also be remembered

the real subject is, through the process of representation, subjected to the refinements and conventions of artistic tradition.[7] This might seem apropos in cases such as O'Keeffe's wherein the body transformed by art is in fact an artist's body. According to Lynda Nead, the female nude exhibits the desire by male artists to contain and regulate the female body, "to seal orifices and to prevent marginal matter from transgressing the boundary dividing the inside of the body and the outside…."[8]

The female nude body is beginning to resemble the clothed body. Both require an altered state of the so-called natural body and a transition from illegible to legible. In making this transition, the body is contained via superficial means—by artifice or by apparel—and ascribed a controlled (or controllable) meaning. The critical distinction mentioned above—that between interior and exterior—is the liminal space that both clothing and nudity seek to cover, putting the body on display to the viewer. As John Berger puts it, "to be on display is to have the surface of one's own body turned into a disguise …Nudity is a form of dress."[9] Nudity, as Berger points out, is the metaphorical veiling of the real body in the sheath of art, forever confined in the moment of its making.

Seeing nudity as a form of dress in works of art entails that the trappings of clothing (while not clothing itself) might be ascribed to the nude state. Not least among these is the clothed body's association with identity. As noted above, the clothed body is constructed with the intent to display, thus linking it, perhaps inescapably, to the performance of identity. In the process of self-fashioning, clothing as an entity figures substantially in the discourse on identity. For Amelia Jones, "identity is not fixed by clothing but takes its meanings through an exchange between subjects, communicated through sartorial codes…."[10] What such description demonstrates is that dress cannot be separated from its function as a signifier—the dressed body is a body presented for social (performative) interaction. Even gender sociologists speak of identity in language that recalls that of fashion choices: "Individuals have many social identities that may be donned or shed. . .depending on the situation."[11] Effectively accessorized, the dressed body wears identity on its sleeve.

But we should recall that, as Berger and others suggest, nudity is a form of dress. The characteristic most closely associated with dress—its role in visually articulating identity—should therefore also be a quality of the nude. This supposition goes against both conventional and revisionist readings of the female nude, for the female nude is generally thought to be the male artist's mediation of flesh to form. Indeed, in rendering the female body as an art form, the nude becomes the object of the male artist's sight, the site upon which he acts. For instance, Kenneth Clark writes that in order to produce the nude, "the means employed have been symmetry, measurement, and the principle of subordination..."[12] The female nude easily becomes a passive object, and so it is at first strange when Nead, who describes the nude as having "undergone a process of containment, of holding in and keeping out"[13] also tells us that the discourses on ideal beauty (one chapter of which is certainly the nude) are chiefly concerned with "the production of a rational, coherent, subject."[14] The nude for Nead and for Clark remains the subject, but it is the subject of art—the practitioner of which is the artist. As such, the nude becomes the means through which the artist literally makes his mark. This paper contends, though, that the object can also speak. Not only is the nude/clothed binary much complicated by a confluence of theoretical characteristics, but identity—what clothing reveals through its appearance—must then also be a characteristic of the nude, and here, the nude Georgia O'Keeffe.

Anita Pollitzer once wrote of Alfred Stieglitz, "With his knowledge, amazing memory and joy in debate, he could cap any argument."[15] The goal of this discussion is to employ Stieglitz's rhetorical panache, for it is in Stieglitz's collaboration with O'Keeffe that the nude as identity-laden subject can be exposed. When Pollitzer first introduced O'Keeffe's work to him at 291, Stieglitz was already an incredibly accomplished figure in the art world, not only for his visual enterprises, but also for his publications. Indeed, it was through his magazine

that the principal spectator of any painting is the painter himself.

7 In being an aestheticised body, the female nude corresponds quite readily to the idea that "the cultural significance of the female body is not only… that of a flesh-and-blood entity, but that of a *symbolic construct.*" Susan Rubin Suleiman, *The Female Body in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996) 2, original emphasis. Nead echoes this statement in more specific terms, "…the claim that the body can ever be outside of representation is itself inscribed with symbolic value. There can be no naked 'other' to the female nude, for the body is always already in representation." Nead, "Theorizing the Nude" in *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 20. Because I find these two authors' views extremely compelling, I will refrain from reciting the commonly held distinction between nude and naked first introduced by Kenneth Clark in *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1956).

8 Nead 6. Additionally, the necessity of framing the female body through clearly defined borders shows that "the fundamental relationship is not that of mind and body, or form and matter, but the critical distinction of interior and exterior and the consequent mapping of the body's boundaries." (Nead 22).

9 Berger 54.

10 Jones 18.

11 Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, "Doing Gender" in *Gender and Society* 1.2 (1987): 139.

12 Clark 71.

13 Nead 19.

14 Nead 19.

15 Pollitzer, *A Woman on Paper: Georgia O'Keeffe* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1998) 117.

Camera Work (1903-1917) which galvanized photography in America that O'Keeffe became familiar with his ideas, and deeply impressed, she scanned the pages of the periodical that Stieglitz published.[16] Not only was he able to guide photographic thought through his art as well as with his writing, but as a gallery owner, Stieglitz managed to play a rare tripartite role in the art world—creatively, theoretically, and financially.[17] It was in this third guise that Stieglitz became aware of O'Keeffe's work and mounted its first public exhibition, which consisted of her works such as the *Special* series. These early drawings—and more significantly, Stieglitz's response to them—guided the reception of Georgia O'Keeffe as both woman and work, and subsequently encouraged the indivisibility of those terms. Though Anne Wagner is one of the few writers on O'Keeffe to note that in achieving legendary status, such stories are clearly fraught with fictions, they function no less importantly in the formation of the public perception of O'Keeffe.[18] Stieglitz's influential articulation is something akin to what Pollitzer reported to O'Keeffe in a letter on January 1, 1916:

> 'Finally, a woman on paper'—he said. Then he smiled at me & yelled 'Walkowitz come here'—Then he said to me—'Why they're genuinely fine things—you say a woman did these—She's an unusual woman—She's broad minded, She's bigger than most women, but she's got the sensitive emotion—I'd know she was a woman—Look at that line.[19]

Trimmed to the more concise fragment "A woman on paper," Stieglitz's words convey the extent to which representation and reality converge upon the female body. Moreover, Stieglitz was convinced that O'Keeffe's work was unmediated and unconscious—in a word, natural—and that it was this spiritual evocation of the female that was unique in O'Keeffe's work. Stieglitz's opinion proved not only exceedingly influential but also exceptionally enduring, as evidenced by various critics' continued conflation of self and art. In his review of the 1916 exhibition featuring O'Keeffe's work, Henry Tyrell wrote that O'Keeffe "looks within herself and draws with unconscious naïveté what purports to be the innermost unfoldings of a girl's being, like the germinating of a flower."[20] Even several years later, the intermingling of artist and art was often represented as an equation, as when Paul Rosenfeld wrote, "We glimpse on the plane of practical existence a woman singularly whole…We see a woman who herself sees deeply into…living." Critics never strayed too far from the precedent set by Stieglitz—he was a man whose opinions were listened to, but this, of course, was why it was so important that O'Keeffe and her work were shown by him in the first place.[21]

And what woman was it that Rosenfeld and others saw on the surface of these canvases? If O'Keeffe was being mapped onto her paintings in such a potentially reductive way (and here it is important to note that O'Keeffe herself did not appreciate the sexual equation so readily slapped onto her work), then how does Stieglitz's *Portrait of Georgia O'Keeffe* function?[22] Perhaps we "see a woman," though not, as Rosenfeld stated "singularly whole," in any one picture, but rather different and partial in each one. For example, in the closely cropped *Georgia O'Keeffe: A Portrait*, 1918 (Figure 1), we see features that are hardly specific to one Georgia O'Keeffe. Included in the 45 photographs that Stieglitz exhibited of O'Keeffe in the Anderson Gallery in 1921, this photograph fits both Clark's and Nead's definitions of the nude. The careful balance, artificial pose and unselfconsciousness speak to Clark's conceptions and, for Nead, the particular framing of the body marks it as contained form. Bordering the body in curtain-like manner is a loose drapery that completes the sym-

[16] O'Keeffe had been a reader of *Camera Work* since at least 1915, but this was not her first interaction with Stieglitz, since she had visited *291* as early as 1908 to see an exhibition of Rodin's nudes that Stieglitz had presented. Anne Wagner, *Three Artists (Three Women): Modernism and the Art of Hesse, Krasner, and O'Keeffe* (Los Angeles: U of California P, 1996) 34.

[17] Though he did run *291* as a for-profit art space, Stieglitz, in accord with his ideas that to be bound to commerce was to lose artistic freedom actually operated *Camera Work* at a financial loss to himself. Pam Roberts, "Alfred Stieglitz, 291 Gallery and Camera Work," in *Camera Work: The Complete Illustrations* (New York: Taschen, 1997) 12. Additionally, Stieglitz was also known to refuse sale of some works based on his assessment of the buyer's appreciation for the work.

[18] Indeed, one need only witness the plethora of chapter headings, book titles, and essay subdivisions which use variations of "Woman on Paper." Anna Chave uses it in her essay and it is the title of Politzer's book.

[19] Pollitzer to O'Keeffe, January 1, 1916 in *Lovingly Georgia: The Complete Correspondence of Georgia O'Keeffe and Anita Pollitzer* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990) 115-116, qtd. in Wagner 35.

[20] Tyrell, "New York Art Exhibitions and Gallery News…" qtd. in Barbara Buhler Lynes, *O'Keeffe, Stieglitz and the Critics 1916-1929* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989) 19.

[21] Lynes 24.

[22] Perhaps I should explain here why I see such evaluations of O'Keeffe's work as "potentially reductive," for O'Keeffe has an ambivalent relationship with such reviews. On the one hand, they diminish the role of her mind in her art-making, tending instead to present her work as an unmediated transfer of womb to artwork. On the other hand, O'Keeffe's work was presented as unique for exactly this reason, and was celebrated especially for such qualities. The reductiveness comes then because O'Keeffe is literally bodily equated with her work; however paradoxically, such a supposition was actually productive to her reception in the art world, and in fact, was the quality for which her work was highly regarded. In particular, Stieglitz's Freudian reading of O'Keeffe's work was both damaging and sensationalistic. Lynes writes that "although he could not have realized how it might be used to exploit O'Keeffe's art, Stieglitz did not hesitate to use Freudian theory as a promotional device." (Lynes 24) I disagree with Lynes. I think that Stieglitz, experienced dealer that he was, banked precisely on the popularity and acceptance of a reductive Freudian reading of O'Keeffe's paintings. Though Stieglitz was an ardent supporter of female modernists, he must have known that in order to successfully support them, he had to fit them into existing rubrics of public perception. Hence, we see the contradictory compromise between essence and expression.

metry of the image that in so framing the body calls attention to what is center stage—a pair of breasts intersected by a left hand.

Indeed, it is unusual, if not jarring, that these breasts and this hand are so foregrounded and thus almost fragmented. In fact, the site upon which we are accustomed to gazing in a portrait is conspicuously absent. O'Keeffe's face—and thereby, her specificity as a person—is not submitted here for photographic scrutiny. The headings under which Stieglitz organized the 1921 show also underscored this universality of Woman, which coincided with the way that O'Keeffe was being presented in the media with regards to her own art. This confluence was partly the result of critics' awareness of O'Keeffe's work coming within the context of Stieglitz's photographs of her (some of which presented her in the same visual field as her art). Both allusive and elusive, Stieglitz carefully positioned the photograph's sexuality:

> Suggesting that he had created other…more audacious works, Stieglitz provocatively claimed in the exhibition brochure that he had omitted some works because 'the general public is not quite ready to receive them.' Thus, although he had coyly not named O'Keeffe in his titles, as a result of this exhibition she became, as McBride noted, 'a newspaper personality' long before her work as an artist was widely known.[23]

Calling this body of work *A Woman* with a subtitle here: *Hands and Breasts*, Stieglitz's marketing both diminishes and amplifies O'Keeffe's position in such presentation; she is any woman, but simultaneously, all women. This is how the female nude is often read: cropped along axes that result in her beheading, O'Keeffe (or more precisely, O'Keeffe's body) is restrained and limited, a display not of nature, but of art. And yet, though the female body is here on display, we still cannot gain full visual access. The nude reveals, but it also conceals.

And paradoxically, it is through clothing (which conceals) that the viewer might better see the body in the photograph. In a slightly earlier 1918 photograph from the same series (Figure 2), O'Keeffe appears not only dressed, but—it could be considered—cross-dressed. Wearing a white collared button-down shirt beneath a black jacket, O'Keeffe completes the look by tucking up her long tresses into a black bowler hat. Such an appearance, which bears a definitive resemblance to portraits and self-portraits by Romaine Brooks, a left-bank lesbian painter of the same period, locates the costume in a gender-ambiguous realm (Figure 3). This was utilized as "a way of ad-dressing and re-dressing the inequities of culturally-defined categories"[24] as "female modernists escaped the strictures of societally-defined femininity by appropriating the costumes they identified with freedom."[25] Male clothing upon a female body was not entirely aberrant in the circles within which O'Keeffe traveled and thus had an understood social significance via the discordance such dress provoked.[26] O'Keeffe here becomes androgynous and in so doing declares her mobility and affiliation with something other than cookie-cutter femininity, meanwhile demonstrating that dress, while physically constricting, can also be liberating.[27]

Like both clothing and nudity, androgyny offers a bridge across the liminal space between exterior and interior. In this photograph, O'Keeffe references the duality of androgyny not only by being a woman pictured in male garb, but by making explicit reference to the (female) body beneath these (male) clothes. With her right hand curling into the folds of the fabric and her left hand cupping both cloth and cloth-covered breast, O'Keeffe's pose at once directly references her dress as well as her corporeal presence beneath her dress, a gesture that seems to remind us of that which remains unseen. Moreover, such a movement embeds the clothing between her exposed hand and her unexposed chest, twice emphasizing her flesh as it both occludes and is occluded by her shirt and jacket. While the clothes obscure her femininity, O'Keeffe puts her physical presence in the photographs on display—a display that delineates the ambiguity of dress.

This is particularly interesting in light of Lynes categorization that "without question, Stieglitz felt O'Keeffe's art was, most fundamentally, a revelation of her sexuality" for here, O'Keeffe's dress actually renders her ambiguously.[28] In addition, O'Keeffe is pictured in front of her 1917 watercolor *Blue I*, a juxtaposition that would emphasize not her sex but her profession. Consider for a moment that *Blue I* is, like many of O'Keeffe's works (the early works in particular), a figurative abstraction that invariably invokes uterine associations. It could easily be marshaled as an illustrative archetype for Stieglitz's never published 1919 essay "Woman in Art," in which he asserts that "Woman *feels* the World *differently* than Man feels it. …The Woman receives the World through her Womb. That

[23] Greenough, "Georgia O'Keeffe: A Flight to the Spirit,"450. Stieglitz's textual framing of the photographs is even more deliberate in light of Greenough's assertion that O'Keeffe's extreme scrupulousness in assembling the corpus of the *Portrait* following Stieglitz's death would indicate that she never censored them in any way, regardless of if "they were too racy or she didn't like the way she looked." *Alfred Stieglitz: Photographs from the J. Paul Getty Museum* (Malibu, California: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 1995) 129.

[24] Gubar, "Blessings in Disguise: Cross-Dressing and Re-Dressing for Female Modernists" in *The Massachusetts Review* 22 (1981): 479.

[25] Gubar 478.

[26] Susan Fillin-Yeh writes, "If the politics and mores of life in avant-garde circles influenced her dandyism, [O'Keeffe] also brought with her to New York in 1907 the disposition for cross-dressing not uncommon among middle-class young women born in the last decades of the nineteenth century." Fillin-Yeh, "Dandies, Marginality and Modernism: Georgia O'Keeffe, Marcel Duchamp and Other Cross Dressers" in *The Oxford Art Journal* 18.2 (1995): 33.

[27] Garber 161.

[28] Lynes 24.

is the seat of her deepest feeling."[29] But here, Stieglitz positions O'Keeffe before her work, picturing not a conflation but a secession—if she is seen in front of her work, then she necessarily figures in opposition to, rather than mapped upon, the painting's surface. In the background, the painting demonstrates femininity in its most intrinsic form while in the foreground, O'Keeffe's androgyny signals that no matter the sexuality, O'Keeffe is above all, an artist. She is pictured as both an author in and object of the photograph, but she is, in the end, a separate entity distinguished from her artwork by her position in front of it. As she eclipses her painted womb-like forms by grasping her breasts, O'Keeffe's presentation parallels Stieglitz's promotion of her work—physical and professional identities are clearly co-existent.

Returning to Figure 1, the photograph with which this investigation began, one notes O'Keeffe's left hand displaced only inches from its position in Figure 2. Previously encountering this photograph, a viewer would have noted that O'Keeffe's bared breasts—symmetrical, stylized, bounded—seemed exactly congruous with traditional conceptions of the female nude, a site where the female body is fixed ('fixed' in the sense of repaired and stabilized) in the guise of art. But this seems incomplete: this discussion asserts that she has not been rendered a passive object of the (male) artist's gaze. Whereas when clothed O'Keeffe uses her hands to draw attention to her non-exposed breasts in a way that would emphasize the concealed female body, when nude she places her hand in a way that both shields and displays her chest. With many of the elements of usual portraiture now erased from the pictorial field, O'Keeffe's hand takes on a literal centrality and becomes the focus of attention, perhaps superseding the display of her breasts. In its diagonal dynamism, the hand indicates a multitude of directions, displaced from its natural position on the body, thus transforming an image of breasts into an image of a gesture, in which that gesture is the only element that fails to be doubled in the photograph. As the visual center, the hand is the sole singular occurrence, but its significance remains double. The gentle tactility and dual stimulation marked by the hand (as both sender and receiver of the touch) implicates a transmutable sensorial transfer between what is outside (but pictured within the photograph) and what is inside (but ostensibly remains out of the bounds of photography).

Pressed against her chest, the hand speaks to a certain self-possession and actively resonates in dialogue with the vitality of the body. Meanwhile the arm just grazes the erect nipple of the left breast, which is shielded by the arm from complete display. O'Keeffe's gesture can readily be read as self-referencing. Such a gesture—such an action—is hardly mute. As a performative act, it effectively displaces the metonymy usually associated with women to a site that is oftentimes associated with men's creative power—the hands. However, as a female painter, O'Keeffe maintains two loci of productive capability. In casting O'Keeffe thus, Stieglitz might be activating both—first, her hands are significant as an expressive site as those of a female painter and secondly, O'Keeffe's hands were constantly fetishized by Stieglitz as well as a source of pride for O'Keeffe herself.[30] They evoke both a professional and sexual sense of self.

Identity—the object of this search—becomes visible even on the female nude body because it involves a display of surface conflated with substance in much the same way as clothing does. In Caroline Evans' analysis of Joan Riviere's influential 1929 essay, "Womanliness as a Masquerade," she writes:

> In its cultural construction, female identity is all front: it is modeled, or fabricated, on the surface... In Judith Butler's words, 'gender is the repeated stylization of the body …[it] is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies'.[31]

The body is the site of performance whenever it is subjected to social discourse—thus nudity (the sheath of the body in art) is entirely appropriate to such an idea, especially when the surface of bodies and the surface of photographs are conflated entities. As Butler writes, "Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally…are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means."[32] Perhaps this is why the intersection of O'Keeffe's many guises visually articulates a dialogue between dialectics—a multiplicity of identities that occurs in moments of dress and undress. Identity is both something that must be put on but also uncovered.

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29 Stieglitz, qtd. by Lynes 33.

30 O'Keeffe reminisces in the Metropolitan catalogue, "My hands had always been admired since I was a little girl…" O'Keeffe, "Introduction," in *Georgia O'Keeffe: A Portrait by Alfred Stiegltiz* (New York: Viking Press, 1978) unpaginated.

31 Evans, "Masks, Mirrors, Mannequins: Elsa Schiaparelli and the Decentered Subject" in *Fashion Theory* 3.1 (1999): 7, and Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 33.

32 Butler 173.

Figure 1: Alfred Stieglitz, *Georgia O'Keeffe: A Portrait*, 1918, palladium photograph, 19.4 x 23.6 cm. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, copyright Estate of Georgia O'Keeffe.

Figure 2: Alfred Stieglitz, *Georgia O'Keeffe: A Portrait*, 1918, gelatin silver photograph, 24.1 x 19.7 cm. The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, copyright Estate of Georgia O'Keeffe.

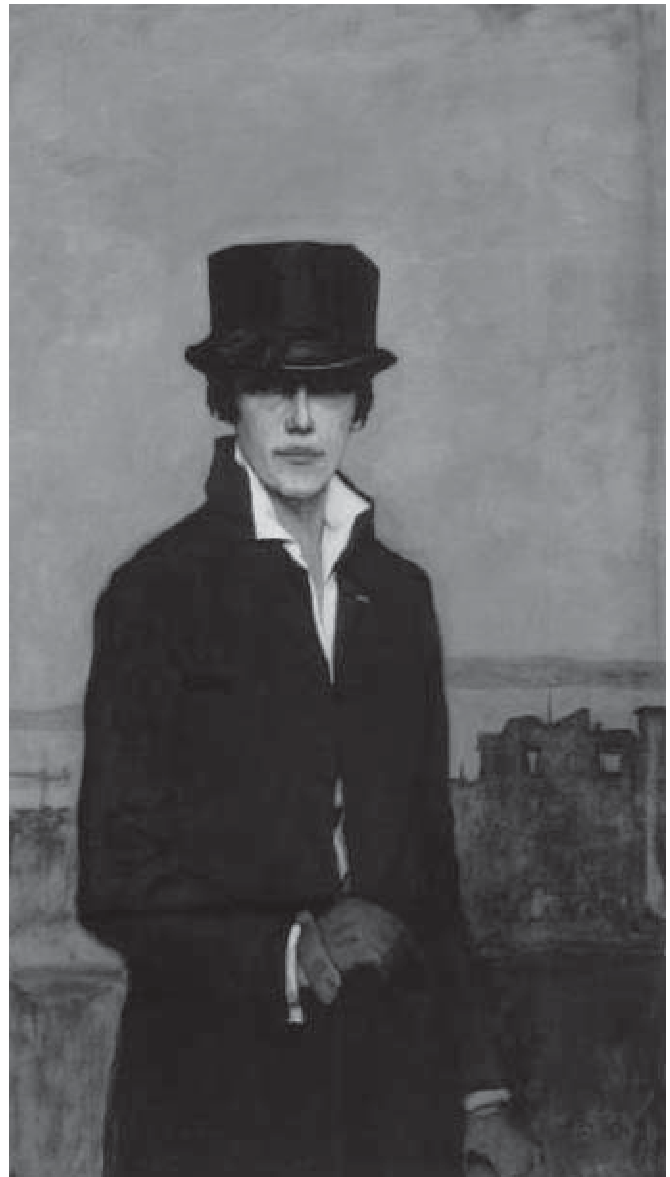

Figure 3: Romaine Brooks, *Self-Portrait*, 1923, oil on canvas, 117.5 x 68.3 cm. Smithsonian American Art Museum, gift of the artist.

Identity and the Artist: Soviet and Post-Soviet Sots

Kristen Williams Backer

It would seem that with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 an art movement that took its most potent iconography from official Party propaganda—and that critically examined the Soviet system—would meet its end as well. Even though the peak of its popularity was nearly twenty years ago, the Nonconformist movement known as Sots art remained in full swing throughout the 1990s, and contemporary artists are still making art that fits well within the Sots tradition. Though superficially an art of agitprop, consumerism, and pop culture, Sots art is inextricably tied to identity. During the Soviet era, Sots artists defined themselves by the official images that so pervaded every facet of their lives and, conversely, by the Western consumer culture to which they were denied access. In the decade or so since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Sots artists have had to come to terms with an era of oftentimes unsure iconoclasm, as well as with living in a world where formerly unobtainable commodities abound. One of the most crucial issues for post-Soviet Sots artists is working through what it means to be a New Russian Person, especially when one has already lived a lifetime with a Soviet identity.

While Sots is most often compared to Pop art (and rightly so), more accurately at its origin were the Socialist Realist images that were the only permissible form of art since the time of Stalin.[1] In theoretical terms, Socialist Realism was intended to be a "truthful portrayal of the life of the land of the Soviets," and was extolled above all as an art for the people, accessible to all Soviet citizens, regardless of level of education or region of origin.[2] Socialist Realist artists were members of the Artists' Union, and the government provided them with commissions, studio and exhibition space, and materials. Art that touched on proscribed subject matter or that was executed in a style other than Socialist Realism was labeled Nonconformist and its creators faced what ranged from close scrutiny from the police and KGB to outright persecution. Many of the Nonconformist artists had state-funded careers as illustrators or artists and simply made and exhibited their unofficial work underground.

Such was the case with Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, Sots art's founding fathers. The Sots art they have been making since the 1970s is an outgrowth of their careers as Socialist Realist painters and of the memories of their childhood years spent surrounded by paintings and statues of Soviet leaders and everyday heroes. It is difficult for the Western observer, particularly in the current post-Soviet age of technological globalization, to understand the extent to which the imagery penetrated people's lives. Every public space, every piece of print media, every school and place of work was a museum that forced interaction with instructive Socialist Realist images.

Victor Tupitsyn discusses the effect of constant inundation by such images on the psyche in terms of identification. A Soviet person, every facet of whose life would be shaped by the propagandistic images, must surely have been in constant conflict between the authoritarian "je" and the communal "moi," to borrow terms from Jacques Lacan. The communal experience was like a constant encounter with Lacan's Imaginary Order; for the masses there existed an ongoing tension between identification with the images and alienation stemming from the unattainable nature of the images. Since the experience of the images was a communal one, the acuteness of alienation was dampened by what Tupitsyn calls the "cathartic optic," a mechanism by which multiple viewers (functioning as a singular unit) can distance themselves both from identifying with the image and from experiencing the sting of realization that the image is a representation of the unreachable.[3]

Within the fantasy of official Soviet ideology, nothing was unreachable. It was only in the West that the human appetite for fulfillment went lacking. Capitalism created a culture of want, the icons of which were slick and colorful advertisements for consumer products. These were the materials of Pop art. The connection between Pop and Sots is intentional; when Komar and Melamid invented the term, they took the first syllable of the Russian word for Socialist Realism, and com-

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1 C. Vaughan James, *Soviet Socialist Realism, Origins and Theory* (New York: St. Martin's P, 1973) 86-7. For general information on Soviet Socialist Realism, see also Matthew Cullerne Bown, *Socialist Realist Painting* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998).

2 James 86-7.

3 Victor Tupitsyn, "Icons of Iconoclasm," *Parachute* 91 (1998): 14-15.

bined it with the English word "art" (taken from "Pop art" and deliberately not translated into Russian).[4] The two movements are most related, however, in terms of the way in which their sources function in the societies from which they derive. For the Soviet Union, despite its theoretical denial of such a system, instructive images were the equivalent of product advertisements. They were a currency unto themselves, a commodity to be exchanged, and a product to be desired. The Socialist Realist painted type can be thought of as equivalent to the celebrity product endorser in America. The paintings, like commercials, inspired desire in the viewer.

Sots was the first current of Nonconformist art that addressed this commodification. Sots paintings, such as the 1972 diptych, *Portrait of Komar's Wife and Child* and *Portrait of Melamid's Wife* 1973 (Figure 1), sought the decommunalization and "decatharsization" of perception. Both represent what would have been immediately recognizable as traditional types in Socialist Realist painting. Komar presented his wife in the guise of the New Soviet Woman: strong and triumphant, but nevertheless tied to traditional domesticity (symbolized by the wash hanging on a clothesline behind her).[5] The presence of the child as well as the bright sun referenced the constant push to the future that characterized Socialist Realism, as did the general upward thrust of the visual elements in the painting. The same vertical push is visible in the background and reaching posture of the figure in Melamid's painting. The athlete was another permutation of the New Soviet Woman, and a gymnast would have resonated as particularly Soviet. Even though the figures are stylized, opaque forms that bear no visual markers as to their exact identities, the titles make it clear that they are portraits of specific people. Viewers saw not only the perfect New Soviet Woman, but also Melamid's wife. Komar's painting was not just an ideal vision of family, it was somebody else's own family. By giving individual identities to the types that had long been held as exemplar, Komar and Melamid forced individual, rather than communal, interaction with the image. When the buffer of the "cathartic optic" (only possible through mass identification) is removed, alienation is the natural response to such images. This, according to Tupitsyn, was the desired effect of Sots art, as its practitioners "thrive on alienation."[6]

Not surprisingly, Komar and Melamid's attempts at public exhibition of their works were quashed (sometimes even by violent military action).[7] The pair left the Soviet Union in 1978 and set up studios in New York, effectively ushering in the second phase of Sots art, often called New York Sots.[8] One of the best known pieces of New York Sots is fellow émigré Alexander Kosolapov's *Coca-Cola* (Figure 2).

The painting juxtaposes the iconic profile of Lenin's head with the corporate logo for Coca-Cola and its then current advertising slogan, "It's the Real Thing." For Kosolapov, who immigrated to the United States in 1975, the painting's iconography is laden with meaning both on a national and personal level.[9] In a 1995 interview he mentioned a life-changing event at the 1957 International Youth Festival. The festival, which a number of Sots artists identify as both their first exposure to American culture and as a defining moment in their childhoods, was an exposition of American technology, visual experiences, and consumer culture. A highlight for nearly every artist who writes about the event was the free Coke; each visitor was treated to a complimentary glass of that most American of beverages, Coca-Cola. Kosolapov said, "The taste of Coke was like the milk of paradise."[10]

He goes on to recount how when he moved to America, he drank Coke all the time, and ultimately discovered that one can only drink so much soda. The paradise represented by the taste of Coke was tainted by his longing for a different paradise, that of the Soviet Union. By combining the two in the 1980 painting, Kosolapov expressed his feelings about his place in the world, caught between two paradises ("one, a paradise lost, and the other, not quite found").[11] The painting's bright red color was the natural connection between the two cultures, representing both the leading product of American consumerism and the color of the Soviet world. The text also represents Kosolapov's place in limbo between two cultures. "The Real Thing" was and is immediately recognizable as Coke's slogan, but it also represents the feelings of ambivalence toward their Soviet heritage felt by Kosolapov and other Soviet defectors. Lenin, and the world his face and name represent, may indeed have truly been the real thing, and their new American world, a land of false promise.

In 1998 the Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum at the University of Minnesota mounted the exhibition, "It's the Real Thing: Soviet and Post-Soviet Sots Art and American Pop Art." Not surprisingly, its catalogue featured a work by Komar and Melamid on its cover. In *Lenin Hails a Cab*, 1993 (Figure

4 Renee and Matthew Baigell, *Soviet Dissident Artists: Interviews after Perestroika* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1995) 268.

5 This was the ideal for women that the Party had promoted since the mid 1920s, when women were forbidden from holding certain political offices and urged to be "housewife activists." The New Soviet Woman was to be healthy and robust enough to physically defend the nation's vast borders if necessary, but more importantly strong enough to breed the Soviet Union into its bright future.

6 Tupitsyn 14-15.

7 The 1974 "Bulldozer Exhibition," where the government sent in tanks, bulldozers, and fire hoses to level an outdoor exhibit of only 14 (mostly Sots) artists, is a prime example of this excessive use of force.

8 Valerie L. Hillings, "Komar and Melamid's Dialogue with (Art) History," *Art Journal* 58.4 (1999): 48.

9 Baigell 257.

10 Baigell 262.

11 Baigell 262. Carol Lufty ("Émigré Artists: Rocky Landings," *Art News* 93 [1993]: 49-50) describes Kosolapov's relationship to the subject matter as one of derision: "lingering contempt for totalitarianism and newfound contempt for capitalism" (49). Lufty's reading and Kosolapov's own are not mutually exclusive; much of the art produced by Sots artists reflects this same confliction between love and hatred for one's homeland.

3), the leader stands with his right arm extended and his left hand clutching the lapel of his coat, a pose used repeatedly in Socialist Realist paintings and in monumental statuary. The painting and its title reference the longtime joke that Lenin actually raises his arm in order to signal a taxi (and has been waiting for decades but none has materialized). In Komar and Melamid's painting, the cab has arrived, and the letters "N.Y.C." stenciled on its side are one of many clues that the setting is New York, not Soviet Russia. The Chrysler building looms in the background, and at its top is the Soviet red star. Behind Lenin hangs a banner reminiscent of the Soviet flag. The golden arches of McDonald's, however, have replaced the gold hammer and sickle.

According to the exhibition's curator, Regina Khidekel, "the greatest Russian leader of the twentieth century has been reduced to hailing a cab in the center of the world that vanquished his ideals."[12] There is some truth to the observation; the painting speaks to the idea that Lenin must surely be turning in his grave since the state and system he and other Communist ideologues believed would last ten thousand years fell in less than a century. The implication that Lenin has been dropped into the middle of New York, however, is off the mark.

More accurately, the painting's iconography references the experience of Soviet émigrés living in New York. During the Soviet era, a number of Nonconformist artists fled to the United States to escape imprisonment. Many, Komar and Melamid included, encountered an almost complete ignorance of the Soviet Union on the part of their American neighbors and audience. As Kosolapov put it, "After I came, I understood for the first time that Russian culture was utterly unknown here."[13] The American understanding of Soviet culture may well have been (and probably still is) limited to a rudimentary ability to identify its symbols. For ethnocentric Americans, the red star simply signifies Communism, and has no meaning beyond the superficial recognition. Though it gleams bright at the top of the composition, the star is upstaged by the skyscraper below. The Chrysler building is a New York landmark; the entire city can be reduced to that single icon.[14] The red star (the artists' Soviet identity) is all but lost in the New York world which does not understand it.

The other side of the coin is the artists' feelings about American culture encroaching on the Soviet Union/Russia. The first Russian McDonald's restaurant opened in Moscow in January 1990.[15] It was the beginning of the infiltration of Western capitalism that furthered the process of dissolving the Soviet Union and establishing free states. Unfortunately, the survival of such an institution as McDonald's meant the death of one or more indigenous cultural traditions. The single golden "M" behind Lenin's head is now (like the red color of a Coke label) recognizable worldwide, and is in many ways synonymous with Americanness. Komar and Melamid replaced the crossed hammer and sickle, the symbol of the Soviet Union since the 1917 revolution, with the golden arches, implying that America has so wholly taken over Russia that even its flag is a product advertisement. Lenin has been usurped on his home turf, so to speak.

Another post-Soviet Sots artist whose works were featured in the 1998 exhibition is Sergei Bugaev, who paints under the pseudonym Afrika. His 1990 *Anufriev Goes Reconnoitering, Anti-Lissitzky Green* (Figure 4), is an inversion both of Soviet propaganda and of what many Westerners see as the "golden age" of Russian art, the short period when the Russian avant garde was allowed to create modern, abstract art without persecution. He appropriated El Lissitzky's famous graphic work, *Beat the Whites with the Red Wedge*, a print made in three colors, red, white, and black, subsituting green for red and adding a column of text to the composition's right. The earlier work was Bolshevik propaganda, a poster the artist believed would sway even the illiterate to support the Reds on the strength of its bold colors and vocabulary of reduced forms. In replacing Red propaganda with green, the opposite of red, Afrika introduced yet another means of critiquing the visual language of Communism.

Certainly, Afrika's Sots work in the early 1990s primarily addressed his feelings about Soviet life and Soviet oppression (green figured into many of his paintings from the period; he chose it specifically because it was the most "unred" of colors). Paintings like *Anti-Lissitzky Green* were tools not only for Afrika to explore his cultural identity, but his identity as an artist and as a homosexual as well. The El Lissitzky composition referenced in the painting was revolutionary propaganda, but it was also a bold example of the Suprematist abstraction that can only be described as pure modernism. Afrika not only appropriated the image and inverted its colors, but he also added the word "grandpa" descending along the right edge of the composition. The text suggests that the image it accompanies is outmoded or old-fashioned, possibly that modernism as a whole is obsolete.[16] Nevertheless, Afrika and fellow later Nonconformist artists saw themselves as heirs to the Rayonists, Suprematists, and Constructivists, as the new generation of the avant garde.[17] A word as specific as "grandpa" might even hint at the artist's feelings of kinship to the legacy of ancestors like El Lissitzky.

The appropriation and inversion of El Lissitzy's work also

12 Regina Khidekel, *It's the Real Thing: Soviet and Post-Soviet Sots Art and American Pop Art* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1998) 82.

13 Khidekel 82.

14 The single symbol becomes particularly potent when viewed in light of changes in American society following the events of September 11, 2001: the entire nation identified with the city of New York in ways it had not previously. Likewise, in this painting, the symbol of New York is also a symbol for the whole of the United States.

15 "McDonald's—Russia," *McDonald's Around the World*, 3 December 2003 <*http://www.mcdonalds.com/countries/russia/index.html*>.

16 Khidekel 90.

17 Victor and Margarita Tupitsyn, "Timur and Afrika: Leningrad, Nomes, Necrorealism and the Disadvantages of Going West," *Flash Art* 151 (1990): 124.

addresses Afrika's experience as a gay artist. As with Abstract Expressionism, the Russian avant garde is often regarded as a heroic, heterosexual male enterprise.[18] Like Jackson Pollock's drip paintings, works by artists like Mikhail Larianov, Alexander Rodchenko, and El Lissitzky have a cachet of dominant masculine power attached to them. By making a painting that is in effect "the opposite" of such works, Afrika subverted that power structure and claimed some of its esteem as his own.

Some contemporary Sots art has added an additional element to to the previously discussed issues of personal, national, and sexual identity, i.e. that of religious identity. During the Soviet era, artists could be imprisoned for creating religiously-themed art, and atheism was the mark of an enlightened person uninhibited by bourgeois or peasant superstition. By the end of the twentieth century, however, the Russian Orthodox Church had supplanted the Soviet state as the (unofficial) governing body over artistic production. The recent example of Avdei Ter-Oganyan, like Afrika, a second generation Sots artist, demonstrates that in some ways the situation of the Sots artist in Russia has changed little since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In a November 1998 performance called "Young Atheist," Ter-Oganyan created an exhibit of chintzy, mass-produced copies of Russia icons, which he offered to chop to bits with an axe for a small fee. The violent destruction of pieces of religious "art" was intended to comment both on Stalinism and capitalism.[19] That he used an axe, a large, unwieldy weapon to destroy the images specifically refers to the often ostentatiously violent means that the KGB, military, and cultural authorities used to destroy paintings and exhibitions of religious or Nonconformist art during the Soviet era. On the other hand, that the artist only destroyed the images when paid for the service was most certainly a comment on the ills of capitalism, a system under which a person can even be paid to blaspheme. In true Sots fashion, the work described the unique condition of the post-Soviet Russian caught between two worlds.[20]

Even now, nearly 15 years since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russian artists still struggle with expressing and exploring their personal and national identities. In some cases the government itself presents a major stumbling block to free expression. While the case is generally best exemplified by religious conflicts like that which Ter-Oganyan faced, holdover from the Soviet system is still evident in the way the government addresses itself to the arts. As recently as 2001, an official representing the Russian State Museum said of Grisha Bruskin, a Sots artist who remained in Russia rather than emigrating, "[His] art is more about life in general than about the Soviet era in particular…He chose Soviet material simply because he happened to grow up during that time." Bruskin himself, however, describes it differently: "I am sending a message to future generations, hoping that by comparing my art to genuine Soviet propaganda art, they will be able to get a true picture of the era."[21] Even in the current age, when the Soviet system has been dead for over a decade, as far as the arts are concerned there is reticence to admit past wrongdoing.

For the artists themselves, ambivalence toward their Soviet past and New Russian present is a problem they will no doubt continue to explore in their work. When, in a 1995 interview, Nonconformist installationist Ilya Kabakov (whose work often intersects Sots), was asked if he worked in a Russian tradition, he replied, "No, I consider myself a Soviet artist. Soviet is not the same as Russian. I am a Soviet person, and the Soviet civilization uses the Russian language."[22] This seems to be the experience of many of the artists highlighted herein. They lived as Soviets for a large portion of their lives, and were forced to reconcile being Russian overnight. The transition back to a culture that was suppressed for seventy years has been and will be difficult. Sots continues to offer formerly Soviet artists in the United States and Russia a language for exploring their cultural, national, and personal identities.

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[18] Note: this was not the *Soviet* perception. Abstraction and homosexuality were equally as "dangerous" to Soviet ideals and were equally rejected.

[19] Konstantin Akinsha, "The Icon and the Axe," *Art News* 101.9 (2002): 72.

[20] Andrey Kovalev, "Advey Ter-Organian at Marat Guelman," *Flash Art* 36 (2003): 158. The head of the Russian Orthodox Church accused Ter-Oganyan of attacking both the church and the government, and in 1999 he was charged with "promoting international and religious hatred" (By the time of the trial he had already fled the country and was living in a Czech refugee camp; the Czech Republic granted him asylum in late 2002). The charge refers to a never-implemented law that seems to be only erratically applied, as Neo-Nazis and other anti-Semitic groups have been uncurbed (Akinsha 72).

[21] Galina Stolyarova, "New Insights into Old Images," *The St. Petersburg Times*, 14 December 2001 <*http://www.sptimesrussia.com/archive/times/730/features/a_5370.htm*>.

[22] Baigell 147.

Figure 1. Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, *Portrait of the Wife of Vitaly Komar with Son* and *Portrait of the Wife of Alex Melamid*, 1972, from Sots Art series, tempera on plywood, 25 1/2 x 17 3/4 inches. Collection of Neil K. Rector.

Figure 2. Alexander Kosolapov, *Coca-Cola,* 1980, acrylic on canvas, 78 3/4 x 118 1/8 inches. Courtesy of Drs. Irene and Alex Valger.

Figure 3. Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid, *Lenin Hails a Cab,* 1993, oil on canvas, 48 x 36 inches. Courtesy of the Sloane Gallery of Art, Denver, and Wayne F. Yakes.

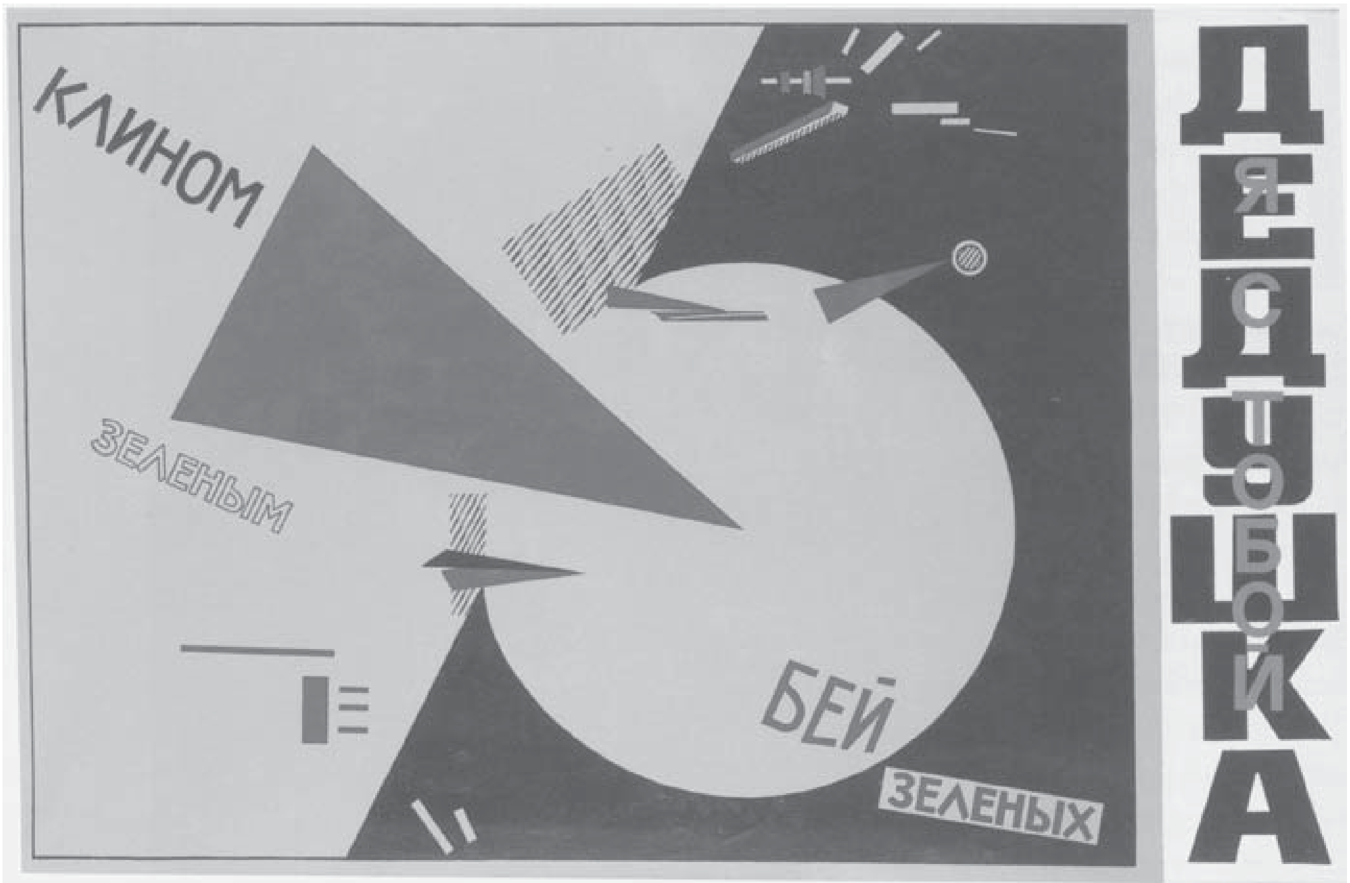


Figure 4. Afrika (Sergei Bugaev), *Anufriev Goes Reconnoitering, Anti-Lissitzky Green*, 1990, oil on canvas, 40 x 59 inches.Courtesy I-20 Gallery, New York.

You Make Me Feel Like a Natural Transgendered Person: Contemporary Photography and the Construction of Queer(ed) Identities

Stefanie Snider

> Some queer identities have appeared recently in lesbian zines and elsewhere: guys with pussies, dykes with dicks, queer butches, aggressive femmes, F2Ms, lesbians who like men, daddy boys, gender queens, drag kings, pomo afro homos, bulldaggers, women who fuck boys, women who fuck like boys, dyke mommies, transsexual lesbians, male lesbians. As the list suggests, gay/lesbian/straight simply cannot account for the range of sexual experience available.[1]

Sex, gender, and sexual identities have exploded in the last ten to twenty years on both theoretical and practical levels. The roles described by Judith Halberstam certainly put pressure on the seemingly uniform categories of straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender. Some might call the proliferation of such descriptors evidence of particularly queer expressions of gender and sexuality, such that queer might be a better term or concept to encompass that which does not fit into hetero- and homosexuality, or even lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender sexes, genders, and sexualities. It is the intention of this paper to consider how a photographer who identifies as transgendered/transsexual uses his work to interrogate queerness and identity.

This paper explores these issues within the context of photography by and about female-to-male (FTM) transsexual photographer, Loren Cameron. In his photographs, Loren Cameron deals with issues of sex and gender; in his work, the body becomes the canvas or map in and on which various identities are performed, sustained and documented. This discussion analyzes his images with regard to questions suggested by queerness and its possibility as an identity category. Do the photographs construct or embody issues around queer theory and/or identity politics? How are identities reified, constructed, deconstructed, and/or made over in specifically *photographic* images? How is photography used within the context of identity issues and what makes photography good for these purposes?

In her book *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex,"* Judith Butler discusses how identity formation might be seen as a process of repetition that both reifies and makes unstable the identities in question.[2] I would suggest that not only might methods of queering be seen in this way, but also the process of photography itself. Butler writes that the construction of sex is a repeated process that takes place in time and space and both produces and destabilizes itself through its very acts of repetition. The categories of sex and gender appear natural because they come about through a

> reiterative or ritual practice […] yet, it is also by virtue of this reiteration that gaps and fissures are opened up as the constitutive instabilities in such constructions, as that which escapes or exceeds the norm, as that which cannot be wholly defined or fixed by the repetitive labor of that norm.[3]

Butler argues that these gaps open up powerful possibilities for deconstructing seemingly stable norms in order to "put the consolidation of the norms of 'sex' into a potentially productive crisis."[4]

Butler explains that the performativity of identity as a method of operation is one that necessarily and simultaneously produces itself as continuous and fractured. In other words, built into the very system of making identity coherent is the process that has the potential to bring about its downfall. It is by recognizing this disjunction and acting on and with it that we may see, or even exploit, the creation of identities as both a queered or unstable process and a fruitfully consistent one as well. This discussion extends these ideas to include queerness as an identity category in itself, with mutability, conglomeration, and recitation as some of its main and constant attributes. In numerous ways, photography as a particular kind of medium also plays a major role in the formation of coherent but splintered senses of identity, and the four self-portraits by Loren Cameron discussed here play on the body and the photographic medium in these ways.

Photographs, much like identities, are both consistent and fractured. Art historian Deborah Bright describes photography in a way that can be characterized as queer because it plays along the line of the real and constructed, while never truly belonging to either genre: "Photographs […] masquer-

1 Judith Halberstam,"F2M: The Making of Female Masculinity," *The Lesbian Postmodern*, ed. Laura Doan (New York: Columbia UP, 1994) 212.

2 Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993).

3 Butler 10.

4 Butler 10.

ade as compelling evidence of the real, while obscuring their status as (always already) mediated representations. As a result, they are assigned a credibility and persuasiveness that inspires belief."[5] Of course, this credibility is contingent upon multiple factors based in social definitions of what is "real" and what is "imagined," with the former seeming to hold sway over the latter. Consequently, photography gives an *illusion* of "reality." Also inherent to the medium of photography is its basis in repetition—multiple shots, frames, and reproductions. Strictly speaking, photographs don't have an original, due to the circumstances of the negative/positive process of photography. In photographs of the body, the subject is at once constituted as both the same and different, singular and numerous, with each photograph. The repeated process of becoming, of creating, of always already layering forms and meanings, works effectively with the identity category of queerness, confounding more traditional identity categories while demonstrating the dependence of queerness on identity characteristics.

An analysis of Cameron's work may begin by looking closely at an early image of his transition from female to male. This image provides a referent to which may be compared Cameron's more masculine body in the later images, while also compelling us to ask why and how the nude body becomes a privileged zone of identity construction. Both the body and the photograph are multiple and irregular, but also just coherent enough to be marked as a whole.

The first image, simply entitled *Loren Cameron: Before Sex Reassignment*, and not dated (Figure 1), is quite different from most of his other self-portraits. Here Cameron photographs himself lying on his back, atop a patterned rug or blanket, before the double mastectomy that would remove his breasts. His exposed upper body is highlighted in a wash of light while his face is partially shadowed, as is the lower right corner. The smooth skin on his face, arms, and upper torso, and thin arms and body mark this image as one taken before extensive hormonal use and physical bodybuilding. The tattoos on his upper chest and forearms are obvious in the raking light and further highlight the soft skin of his face and body. The tattoos are evidence of an already marked body; Cameron, even before his FTM transition, is apparently interested in fleshly modification. The tattoos do not mark a single place on the body, but create a unified set of markings that encircle the torso and emphasize his chest and arm muscles (or in this photograph, lack thereof) in each of his nude self-portraits. The tattoos draw attention to the contours of the body and designate it as self-defined and personalized to a larger extent than non-modified bodies.

Cameron wears pants, but the majority of his lower body is cropped out. He looks obliquely to the left of the photo, managing not to make eye contact with the viewer and obscuring any recognition of his own body as well. His hands lie just below his breasts on his stomach. They seem if not awkward exactly, perhaps slightly protective of the body he is offering the viewer. The positioning and lighting might imply a certain sense of friction between what the viewer sees and what Cameron might want us to see; the averted gaze is neither coy nor shy nor ashamed, but rather appears to feign disinterest in the viewer and in his own body. Cameron as a subject is here and not here in this image. He is both subject and object, and as he looks beyond the frame, we have no real idea of what he might be seeing, making his complicity in the image difficult to read. Because we don't know if we are intended as the initial viewer of this image, or if perhaps the original viewer was only to be the photographer himself, there is a pervasive sense of voyeurism. Cameron presents himself as vulnerable to our gaze and distanced from it. By taking the position offered to us by the image, we become a consumer of this splayed body. In comparison to his later standing self-portraits, as we shall next see, this image is both ambiguous and particularly intimate. Perhaps adding to this sense of vulnerability is the fact that this photograph portrays Cameron before his mastectomies; we are aware that it is his wish to have his breasts removed, yet we are now intimately privy to this tenuous, incipiently transitive body.

The next three images form a triptych entitled *God's Will* from 1995 (Figures 2, 3, and 4). Each of these is a three-quarter length nude image of Cameron's body; it is in large part Cameron's nudity in these images that make them a compelling examination of non-normative identities. Others of Cameron's self-portraits, showing him in various forms of dress, do not work in quite this same way. In one hand he holds the shutter release bulb that is ubiquitous in his self-portraits, and in the other he holds a prop, signifying, as this discussion asserts, an aspect of his physical embodiment of a particular mode of masculinity. In one photograph he holds a scalpel, doubtless a reference to his now evident double mastectomy and his lack of a surgically constructed penis (Figure 2). In the next image he holds a free weight, and both arms are flexed, one up, holding the weight, one down holding the bulb, as he faces and stares at the viewer (Figure 3). In the third image his body is in an ultra-twisted contrapposto curve as he injects his right thigh with testosterone from a hypodermic needle (Figure 4). In each of these images, Cameron asserts himself as a truly "self-made" transsexual man. In these images Cameron is exposing his own body and its personal reconstruction under his own line of body conditioning, and revealing how it is that one can (re)construct the signs of man and masculinity, despite the traditional notion that both are "natural" characteristics of the male-bodied individual and the group "Man." Cameron enacts masculinities as they relate to his female-born but male-identified body.

Cameron's use of photography emphasizes this in several ways. First, Cameron invariably photographs himself by using a remote shutter release bulb that allows him to be both the author and subject of his image simultaneously. As such, the construction of the photograph is never a hidden process;

[5] Deborah Bright, "Introduction: Pictures, Perverts, and Politics," *The Passionate Camera: Photography and Bodies of Desire*, ed. Deborah Bright (London and New York: Routledge, 1998) 5.

nowhere do we find Cameron trying to secure a smooth, discrete and impermeable image that might "fool" the viewer into thinking this is anything other that a posed shot. In his book *Body Alchemy: Transsexual Portraits*, from which these images are selected, Cameron writes,

> People have asked me [...] why I don't try to conceal the [shutter release] bulb in the photographs. At times, given the composition of a photograph, concealing the bulb may not be possible. I also feel a certain pride in making a decent image without seeing through the lens, so I don't really mind that the bulb is visible. Its presence serves as a metaphor: I am creating my own image alone, an act that reflects the transsexual experience as well.[6]

As art historian Richard Meyer makes the case for Robert Mapplethorpe's 1978 *Self-Portrait* with a bullwhip, Cameron here serves as "both the productive agent and the receptive object of photography."[7] One might even go so far as to say, while not implying sadomasochism in any way similar to Mapplethorpe, that Cameron does indeed refer to the penetration of his own body through testosterone injection and scalpel incision. It is in part through these penetrative acts that Cameron becomes a transman; in both the photographs and in actuality, he must act on his own body to produce an appearance of masculinity. In framing the images of himself with the "tools of the trade," of how to become masculine in a transsexual realm, Cameron exposes traditional concepts of masculinity as unfixed and shifting, while also presenting an unstable representation of how to be masculine as an FTM transsexual. Cameron displays for the camera the constructedness of both male- and female-born masculinities.

This is not to argue that Cameron is constantly performing variations of masculine identities in and on his disruptive body *solely* for the purposes of exposing sex, gender, and sexuality identities as many-layered and constructed fictional categories. Cameron's images are assertions of his lived subjectivity beyond the gender binary. Gender theorist Jacob Hale writes about how thoroughly individuals in our cultural systems are dependent upon gender to establish subjectivity:

> To attempt to image ourselves as [genderless] would be to attempt to imagine ourselves out of social existence. The remaining possibilities, then, would be imagining oneself as having some gender other than *man* and *woman* or imagining oneself on a borderline between the category in which one began life and some other category of the realm of the genderless.[8]

Cameron's photographs put pressure on the system of identification by imaging himself as "hyper-gendered," by constructing masculinities not adherent to the male body, as well as constructing the body as quite literally transsexual—in-between male and female—in order to expose both as fantasies.

Gender theorist Sandy Stone articulates a nuanced concept of "posttranssexuality" in her essay, "The *Empire* Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto."[9] Here posttranssexuality implies that *all* bodies, not just those designated by owner or others as transgendered or transsexual, should be read in a way that revels in the body and its associated identities as constructed phenomena, and that acknowledges that the body is a primary site for gender manipulation. Stone urges transsexuals to give voice to their identities, rather than having their identities mapped for them by the medical and legal systems that depend on the dual and seemingly mutually exclusive gender system to "correctly diagnose" and provide "treatment" for transsexuals.

Stone writes that in reclaiming hidden histories and lives, transsexuals might disrupt the normative binary that restricts and excludes transsexuality. Instead of swapping one's "born gender" for the "opposite gender," and thus perpetuating the dichotomy, Stone suggests that transpersons own their lived histories *as transsexuals*. In this way transsexuals might provide a "counter discourse"[10] that interrupts traditional notions of gender. Cameron's photographic triptych operates in just this way. In exposing his body as neither male nor female, in highlighting his physical transitivity, these images disrupt traditional binary gender norms. Stone's argument that transsexuality "occupies a position which is nowhere"[11] in the dual sex/gender regime, repositions transsexuals as productively marginal, and as able, in interrogating and rejecting binary gendered discourse, to profitably create and represent alternative realities.

Critic David Pagel, writing about transgender imagery, states:

> each detail [of the subject's body and posture] proves to be an unreliable hint….The real strength of [this] art lies….in its rigorous scrutiny of perception, and the social values embedded in the physical and psychological facts of vision. [These] powerful photos are not interesting because they 'give voice' to some unrecognized subgroup, but

6 Loren Cameron, *Body Alchemy: Transsexual Portraits* (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1996) 11.

7 Richard Meyer, *Outlaw Representation: Censorship and Homosexuality in Twentieth-Century American Art* (New York: Oxford UP, 2002) 196-197.

8 Jacob Hale, "Are Lesbians Women?," *Hypatia* 11:2 (Spring 1996): 106; emphasis original.

9 Sandy Stone, "The *Empire* Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto," *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity*, eds. Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub (New York and London: Routledge, 1991).

10 Stone 295.

11 Stone 295.

> because they effectively interrogate what takes place when we all look at each other.[12]

Loren Cameron's photographs destabilize the ways in which we categorize ourselves and others. We are asked to reevaluate how as queer and/or LGBT or straight subjects and viewers, Cameron's and our own identities are constructed, enacted, and embodied through the photographic image. By staging his nude body as a space "in between," Cameron queers sex and gender and is symptomatic of posttranssexuality.

University of Southern California

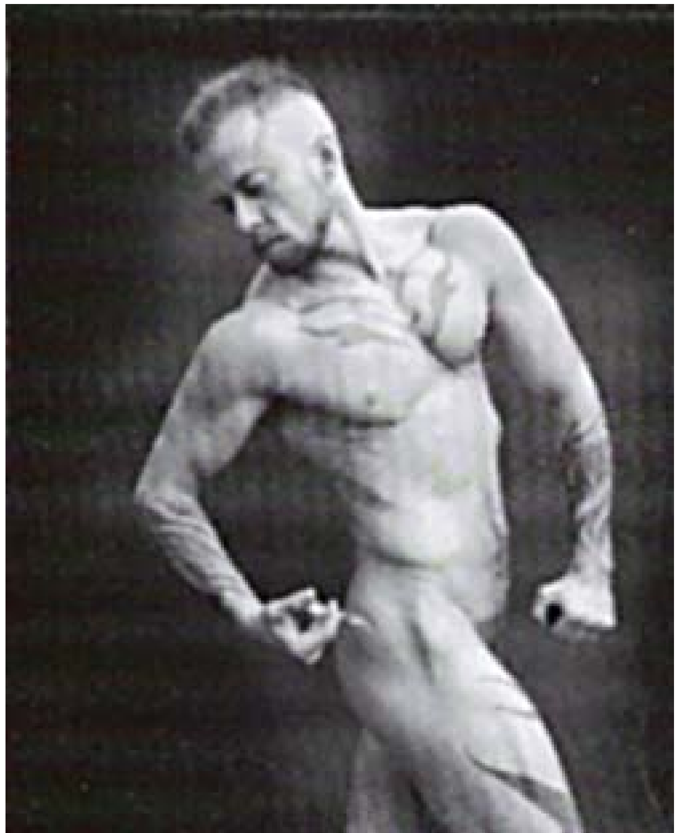
12 David Pagel, "Catherine Opie at Regen Projects," *Art Issues* (September-October 1994): 45.

Figure 2. [*left*] Loren Cameron, *God's Will*, 1995, gelatin silver print. Reproduction permission and copyright Loren Cameron.

[*middle*] Figure 3. Loren Cameron, *God's Will*, 1995, gelatin silver print. Reproduction permission and copyright Loren Cameron.

[*right*] Figure 4. Loren Cameron, *God's Will*, 1995, gelatin silver print. Reproduction permission and copyright Loren Cameron.

Figure 1. Loren Cameron, *Loren Cameron: Before Sex Reassignment*, n.d., gelatin silver print. Reproduction permission and copyright Loren Cameron.



Misremembering Racial Histories: The Role of the Viewer in Kara Walker's *The Emancipation Approximation*

Nathan J. Timpano

The silhouette art by African-American artist Kara Walker (b. 1969) persistently (re)emerges in the problematic discourse surrounding intentionality and its attempt to establish meaning within a given text or image. Given the tendency for art historians and critics to focus on Walker's biography, race and presumed intentionality, a paucity of scholarship examining alternative analyses has greatly diminished any re-reading of her silhouettes. This inability, perhaps failure, for current discourse to acknowledge Walker as only one component (and not the *solitary* component) in artistic interpretation has thus hindered contemporary scholarship on her works while propagating the need to reconcile the ambiguity of her satirical silhouettes. As such, a critical analysis of the artist's work beyond her personal perspective is necessary to the conceptualization and understanding of her engaging artwork.

This study[1] will principally acknowledge viewer responses to signs, or "Walker signs," as they will be identified within this paper. Building upon literary and feminist responses to viewer intentionality, this examination will illustrate how concepts of *history* and *memory* have become misappropriated within the iconography of Walker's silhouette art. To facilitate this argument, we will examine portions of her life-sized, multi-paneled piece *The Emancipation Approximation* (Figure 8), which will serve as a synecdoche for the artist's collective works. Due to its heightened sense of deliberate ambiguity, this piece will effectively illustrate how Walker's oeuvre, in its entirety, requires this vital re-reading of her signs.

The task of the reader, a notion introduced by Roland Barthes, is perhaps the most significant aspect of Walker's oeuvre requiring further analysis in order to conceptualize history and memory within her silhouettes.[2] When establishing primacy, Barthes theorized that the role of the viewer is more important in establishing meaning within a given text/image when compared to the role of the artist as creator of the specific work.[3] In other words, this analysis removes the artist as the principal focus in the creative process and places greater emphasis on the viewer as a significant creator of meaning. This is not to say, however, that Walker's intentionality is arbitrary when considering meaning in her signs, or that viewer intentionality should be the overwhelming catalyst in her work. On the contrary, Walker's intentionality seems to validate the notion that her experiential art is deliberately ambiguous in order to elicit viewer responses to her work.

Walker has admitted, "there's a way in which I'm more interested in what viewers bring to this iconography that I'm constantly dredging out of my own subconscious."[4] Moreover, "working with such loaded material as race, gender, sex, it's easy for it to become ugly…I really wanted to find a way to make work that could lure viewers out of themselves and into th[e] fantasy."[5] Thus, in striving for, and incorporating ambiguity into her silhouettes, she is constructing very specific socio-semiotic relationships between art and viewer, while simultaneously accounting for racial and cultural differences. This notwithstanding, the result of this argument presents a larger undertaking—the task of establishing how the alternative agent (the viewer) creates meaning from perceptions of history and memory and how these societal conjectures contribute to the contemporary scholarship surrounding Kara Walker's art. Thus, a semiotic analysis is crucial when conducting a viable exegesis of her silhouettes in order to establish intentionality beyond Walker's personal (artistic) perspective.

Visible in an early untitled piece from 1996 (Figure 1), Walker was principally working with black paper on a white

1 I would like to express my thanks to the following individuals and organizations who aided in the various stages of this paper. My gratitude is owed to the art history faculty at Florida State University for their many insights and ideas, with particular thanks due to Dr. Karen A. Bearor and Dr. Tatiana Flores for their support and direction. I owe an equal debt of gratitude to the University of Chicago Minority Graduate Student Association, as well as the Cleveland Museum of Art/ Department of Art History at Case Western Reserve University for allowing me to present my ideas at their invaluable graduate symposia.

2 Roland Barthes, "Death of the Author," *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 142-48. See also Robert Hobbs, "Kara Walker: White Shadows in Blackface," *Kara Walker*, ed. Stephan Berg (Freiburg: modo Kunstverein Hannover, 2002) 83. Applying Barthes' theory to Kara Walker's work, art historian Robert Hobbs equally asserts, "looking at the artist's act of creation from her perspective is only one component of a far more complex interpretive process. A crucial second state involves an analysis of the ways that works of art and distinct styles galvanize historic discourses of which the artist [Walker] may or may not have been consciously aware when creating them."

3 Barthes 142-48.

4 Kara Walker, "Kara Walker," *Art 21: Art in the Twenty-First Century 2*, ed. Susan Sollins (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2003) 71.

5 Hilarie M. Sheets, "Cut It Out!" *ARTnews* 101.4 (April 2002): 129.

background and interested in how this dichotomy created an appropriate vehicle for depicting racial stereotypes.[6] In this image, we can discern an African-American woman, perhaps a slave or Negress, holding a black child from the tip of a pigtail. As inferred from the animalistic feet and elongated tail, the child has morphed into a reptilian-like creature, while a black dandy (bowing submissively in the background) remains isolated from the other figures. In a more recent work entitled *Darkytown Rebellion* (Figure 2), Walker explored the integration of projected light and paper-cut silhouettes on a blank wall. *Darkytown Rebellion* signals a shift away from her early black-on-white iconography by utilizing overhead projectors to cast colored light onto her silhouetted figures, thus implementing (as well as implicating) viewer shadows within the work's ephemeral narrative.[7] This conception of "viewer participation" is yet a further step in legitimizing viewer intentionality in the artist's work.

In a clever and paradoxical approach, Walker utilizes the antiquated practice of silhouetting to execute her contemporary, stereotyped signs. Popular in the United States in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, American silhouetting was predominantly associated with female artisans (both Caucasian as well as African-American), but largely patronized by white male plantation owners in the antebellum South.[8] By utilizing this particular medium, which evolved from shadow portraiture and physiognomy studies, Walker physically cuts her racial figures from large pieces of black and white paper.[9] This pronounced distinction between white and black can further be interpreted as *positive* and *negative* renderings of stereotypical racial attributes—again commenting on the complex and varied connotations inherent in "Walker signs." In so doing, Walker altogether manipulates the original conceptualization of silhouetting (i.e. portraying the "black/negative" of the human profile) by resurrecting this antiquated medium into her work.

Within Figure 7 from *The Emancipation Approximation*,[10] the black silhouettes of an ax and a young cotillion-clad Caucasian woman (whose race is "discernable" solely through her cultural attributes—i.e. hairstyle and clothing) rest indifferently against a large tree stump. Bodiless heads depicting stereotypical African-American physiognomies are scattered haphazardly along the foreground beneath the woman and the stump. This juxtaposition of forms may suggest that the young woman and the ax are responsible for the presumed act of decapitation and subsequent severed heads. Moving back along the visual plane in Figure 6, the viewer confronts the dark outline of a crouching black woman struggling with a white swan. In Figure 5, the swan displays an expression of ambiguity—perhaps a squeal of titillation or a cry of horror. Within Figures 3 and 4 additional swans, whose heads have been replaced with the heads of African-Americans, glide upon a body of water scattered with black and white lily pads—elements, perhaps, which allude to the physical mixing of races and the uneasy *gray* area surrounding American racial discourses. Accordingly, the piece seems to read as a life-size shadow drama, a stage set with ambiguous actors, a backdrop laden with black and white figures dispelling their disturbing (and provocative) narrative.

Evident in Figure 6, a white swan is coupled with an African-American woman. Speaking in connotative terms, the white swan symbolizes (whether appropriately or inaccurately) *white* beauty and power, while the young woman very directly represents a *black* slave (a connotation deduced from the tableaux's antebellum subject matter). Since the figures are visually engaged in a sexual confrontation, it is inferred that these forms embody white-on-black miscegenation and cease to represent their perfunctory identities as *swan* and *slave*. This maneuver physically conceptualizes white-black, master-slave miscegenation in the antebellum South and could easily reference the classical misogyny/bestiality of Leda's swan-god, particularly when one notes the progeny of egg-like heads produced from their sexual union in Figures 6 and 7.

By manipulating this misogynist-construct, one will notice that the slave *woman*—and the *black* figure of the pair—is in fact committing the offense. She, the presumed victim, becomes the perpetrator as she molests the swan. This concurrence of forms seems to confirm racial stereotypes prevalent in the antebellum era, namely the notion that African slaves were base, bestial and sexually deviant commodities to their white owners. If this conception holds true, then the white swan is paradoxically objectified and miscegenized by black female desire and exploitation—a notion that radically challenges our contemporary understanding of historical master-slave relations. As such, Walker's art forces the viewer to create a succession of signified meanings for her signs and thus supports the notion that *created* meaning is decisive in explaining our understanding of the world.[11] The functioning of these signs allows us to comprehend why a viable component of Walker's art is not concerned with the artist's transmit-

6 Walker 60-64.

7 Walker 71. See also Mark Reinhardt, "The Art of Racial Profiling" *Kara Walker: Narratives of a Negress*, ed. Ian Berry (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003) 119.

8 R. L. Mégroz, *Profile Art Through the Ages: a study of the use and significance of profile and silhouette from the stone age to puppet films*, first ed. (London: The Art Trade Press Ltd, 1948) 59, 87. See also Anne M. Wagner, "The Black-White Relation" *Kara Walker: Narratives of a Negress*, ed. Ian Berry (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003) 91-101.

9 Edna Moshenson, "The Emancipation Approximation" *Kara Walker* (Frankfurt am Main: Deutsche Bank AG, 2002) 55.

10 It is important to note that *The Emancipation Approximation* is a multi-paneled piece of *circa* 150 scenes, of which only five are considered for this study.

11 Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics* (London: Routledge, 2001) 14.

tance of *contained* information, but interested instead in her audience's constructed perspectives.

Semiotician Daniel Chandler further examines how meaning becomes applicable to our understanding of signs by asserting that signs are both *disguised* and serve *ideological functions*.[12] Accordingly, "Walker signs" do in fact disguise the viewer's initial understanding of their meaning by offering a cursory (albeit problematic) reading that situates the silhouettes between clear-cut forms and ambiguous implications (i.e. silhouettes that belie their deeper social implications). From this assertion, one may question how these cuts in paper actually derive meaning from societal conjectures. To explicate possible solutions to this query, we will turn our attention to Chandler's second element of signs: ideological function.

Art historian Robert Hobbs recognizes this relationship in Walker's work and presumes that the artist's primary subject is not the iconic silhouette form, but *ideological stereotypes* of black and white individuals.[13] Hobbs believes that Walker creates these ideological stereotypes as a means of invoking audience conjecture about her work and argues that these stereotypes strive to reconcile conflicting viewer-responses promulgated by a 1960s generation of civil-rights era artists and a younger generation of postmodernists.[14] He suggests that Walker is attempting to debunk racial stereotypes by physically representing them, that is, she hopes to illustrate just how appealing the romanticizing of slavery has become—among Caucasians as well as African-Americans.[15] This speculation suggests that by examining Figures 3-7 under the guise of romantic and ideological stereotypes, the viewer can begin to recognize how these ideologies are quite pervasive in "coloring" the modern viewer's perception of racial histories.

As a synecdoche, the slave woman can be viewed as a stereotype of innumerable slaves within the larger institution of slavery. This stereotype, which nonetheless holds a learned and recognized meaning, heralds back to antebellum and post-antebellum minstrel-shows, as well as slave narratives and novels like *Gone with the Wind*, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. As such, it attempts to situate itself within a collective American memory—a concept that we will momentarily explore under the guise of literary criticism. Furthermore, the antiquated practice of silhouetting relied entirely upon caricature, just as Walker's work utilizes racially coded physiognomies to discriminate between various figures.[16] This decisive use of stereotype illustrates the fact that her viewers are at once capable of distinguishing between races based merely (or precisely) on exaggerated profiles. As such, it would appear that Walker is exposing the fact that these ideological stereotypes are neither originated, nor manipulated by the artist, but inhabit the cultural fabric of society and reside in her viewers' pre-conditioned perceptions of race.

With regard to history, literary critic Robert F. Reid-Pharr suggests that critics have spent copious amounts of time trying to decode how Walker's art reconstructs American history. In his opinion, her work has nothing to do with the historical past.[17] On the contrary, Reid-Pharr deduces that Walker is primarily concerned with the current state of American racism and suggests that she uses these ideological stereotypes to illuminate the "humanity" of blacks, rather than classify them under the discrediting and overly-sentimental stigma of the slave narrative.[18] And while Walker and her critics readily admit the importance of history *to* her work, this study contends that scholars misappropriate the idea that her silhouettes attempt to reconstruct a "factual" history—a concept that is problematic in and of itself. Reid-Pharr believes that

> what we currently lack within the cottage industry that has grown-up around Walker is a full understanding that her primary focus is neither the history of American race relations nor the physical and psychological damage that has been visited upon (Black) American people, but…the retraining of her audiences.[19]

While it may be difficult to divorce the history of physical and psychological damage of African-Americans from Walker's work, it seems likely that Walker attempts to retrain her audiences in order to expose the myth of our past and how it incorrectly informs our current perceptions of slavery and racial histories. In other words, it would appear that Walker's work

12 Chandler 14-15. Chandler believes that "through the study of semiotics, we become aware that these signs and codes are normally transparent and disguise our task in "reading" them. Living in a world of increasingly visual signs, we need to learn that even the most realistic signs are not what they appear to be…In defining realities, signs serve ideological functions. Deconstructing and contesting the realities of signs can reveal *whose* realities are privileged and whose are suppressed…. To decline the study of signs is to leave to others the control of the world of meanings which we inhabit."

13 "Kara Walker at the São Paulo Biennial: A Conversation with Robert Hobbs," *Art Papers Magazine* 26.2 (March/April 2002): 12-13.

14 "Kara Walker at the São Paulo Biennial: A Conversation with Robert Hobbs" 12-13. For a similar argument, see Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, *Seeing the Unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker* (Durham: Duke UP, 2004).

15 "Kara Walker at the São Paulo Biennial: A Conversation with Robert Hobbs" 13.

16 Annette Dixon, ed., *Kara Walker: Pictures from Another Time* (Ann Harbor: University of Michigan Art Museum, 2002) 11-24.

17 Robert F. Reid-Pharr, "Black Girl Lost," *Kara Walker: Pictures from Another Time*, ed. Annette Dixon (Ann Harbor: University of Michigan Art Museum, 2002) 27-41. See also Darby English, "This is not about the Past," *Kara Walker: Narratives of a Negress*, ed. Ian Berry (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003) 141-167. Like Reid-Pharr, art historian Darby English contends that Walker's silhouettes are more concerned with contemporary racial discourses rather than actual events in our historical past.

18 Reid-Pharr 28.

19 Reid-Pharr 28.

is concerned with the present and not the past.

Akin to Kara Walker, 1960s-era African-American artists Robert Colescott, Faith Ringgold and Betye Saar have challenged their notions of black history by addressing their contemporary contexts through racial iconographies. With this in mind, it is all the more surprising that Saar has openly attacked Walker's attempt to represent the notion of history in her silhouettes, claiming that Walker is too young and foolish to understand (from a first-hand account) the plight of African-Americans during the struggle for emancipation and civil rights.[20] From this assertion, Saar assumes rather falsely that Walker is concerned with transmitting a "factual" history of slavery and therefore mishandles the discourse. Moreover, when critics acknowledge that works by Saar and other 1960s-era artists were concerned with *their* social contexts, they inconsistently strive to reconstruct the past in Walker's art—thus denying its ability to be grounded in, and likewise critique, contemporary racial scholarship. It appears that scholars have become intellectually stuck in what they "see" on a cursory level and perceive these forms as reconstructions of an actual American past. In fact, a much larger notion is at hand here. If neither Walker, nor Saar, nor any viewer is capable of *directly* knowing any full, deep, or real history of slavery, then what the viewer presumes to be history, is conceivably only the memory of slavery and the reconciliation of an African-American past.[21]

Like history, the concept of memory presents problems to the current discourse and raises questions of its own. If we were to solely address Walker's notion of memory, we would neglect her audience's collective memory, or at least the possibility of its theoretical existence. Author Toni Morrison offers further erudition concerning the notions of history and memory and how these concepts might manifest themselves in Kara Walker's silhouettes. In her novel *Beloved*, Morrison principally explores the notion of an omniscient slave *rememory*—or the collective cultural memory of slavery in the African-American past. This assertion does not imply that Morrison's work should be stripped of its historical connotations, but rather, that she (like Walker) is interested in exploring the past institution in order to explore the present implications of slavery. If this idea of a fuzzy and malleable memory is at work within Walker's silhouettes, then Morrison's literary-construct helps to elucidate the multifaceted nature of memory in American racial discourses.

Analogous to the notion that Walker's work confronts responses raised from two separate generations, the novel's principal characters, Sethe and her daughter Denver, parallel these generational differences. While Sethe is consumed by the rememory of slavery, Denver (who was neither born into, nor ever "participated" in slavery) is not interested in re-hashing the past, but in the consuming questions about the present, the now.[22] Like 1960s-era artists, Sethe is inescapably affected by the struggle for emancipation, while Denver, representative of the postmodern generation, struggles to make sense of the collective history of an unknown, unfelt, second-hand memory. However, unlike Sethe, Saar and other African-American artists of her generation were affected by the aftermath of American slavery and not the first-hand physicality of its atrocities. In this regard, each grouping of artists (i.e. the 1960s-era and the postmodern generation) were, and are, solely influenced by the memory of slavery and not the *rememory* of its presence. As such, Walker's audience, which accounts for both generations, offers conjectures that have been filtered through second and third-hand memories (i.e. perceptions) of slavery in the American past.

Historian and memory theoretician Paul A. Shackel further explores how "memory and racism on the American landscape has changed over the past century" by exploring the idea of a national collective memory and the struggle for African-Americans to find their place in this socio-political construct.[23] Moreover, Shackel theorizes that memory is invented, created and manipulated by society for its own ideological gains.[24] In this respect, memory (like a "Walker sign") is merely a representation of some aspect of reality, though this reality may not be tangible or unbiased. Central to this concept is the idea that collective memory is a construct of current discourse. Thus, by establishing that Walker's art draws on a collective African-American memory, we can acknowledge the aforementioned assertion that her silhouettes seek to engage current discourse surrounding history, memory and the past.

According to Morrison and Shackel, we, Walker's contemporary viewers, unavoidably run the risk of assigning our own perceptions of the past in dealing with the topic of slavery. With this in mind, contemporary misconceptions are, in effect, by-products of a current dialogue regarding American racism and contested histories. As a result, this is where Walker's work faces its greatest obstacle and at the same time, its precise goal. By directly engaging the modern viewer, her racialized silhouettes become endemic to the *mismemories* of a widely-varied, multicultural and multifaceted audience, thus generating a plethora of conjectures from their ambiguous narratives. As such, Walker's work specifically elicits a multi-

20 Reid-Pharr 38. See also Reinhardt 119-120. Mark Reinhardt equally discusses Saar's open criticism of Walker's work and the ongoing debate over the use of racial stereotypes in socially-provocative artwork.

21 Reid-Pharr 37.

22 Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (1987; New York: Plume, 1998) 119. In her novel *Corregidora* (1975; Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), Gayl Jones equally explores (re)memories of slavery within the numerous generations of the Corregidora women. Fashioned from first-hand accounts of master-slave miscegenation, these memories become consistent reminders that the histories of slavery should never be forgotten by the present generation.

23 Paul A. Shackel, *Memory in Black and White: Race, Commemoration, and the Post-Bellum Landscape* (Walnut Creek: Altamira, 2003) 1.

24 Shackel 11. For further reading on the construction of memory, as well as its cultural/collective formation, see Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2003).

plicity of responses in order to perpetuate this ongoing dialogue. Consequently, a vital and inescapable intentionality lies not so much with Walker's ability to transmit her own perceptions of history and memory, but with her audience's active responses to these prevalent conceptions. By harnessing this intentionality, Walker effectively captures her viewer's attention, forcing him or her to engage in a dialogue with her work's unconventional narratives. Through this exploration, the viewer can begin to understand the complexity of signs within her silhouettes—signs that represent concepts much deeper than cuts in paper and allude to the fervent re-evaluation of racial, social and gender-specific implications in our contemporary society.

Florida State University

Figure 1. Kara Walker, *Untitled*, 1996, cut paper, watercolor and graphite on paper, 177 x 168 cm. Courtesy Brent Sikkema, New York.

Figure 2. Kara Walker, *Darkytown Rebellion*, 2001, installation view at Brent Sikkema, New York. Projection, cut paper and adhesive on wall, dimensions variable. Courtesy Brent Sikkema, New York.

Figure 3. Kara Walker, *The Emancipation Approximation* (detail), 1999-2000, cut paper and adhesive on painted wall, dimensions variable. Courtesy Brent Sikkema, New York.

Figure 4. Kara Walker, *The Emancipation Approximation* (detail), 1999-2000, cut paper and adhesive on painted wall, dimensions variable. Courtesy Brent Sikkema, New York.

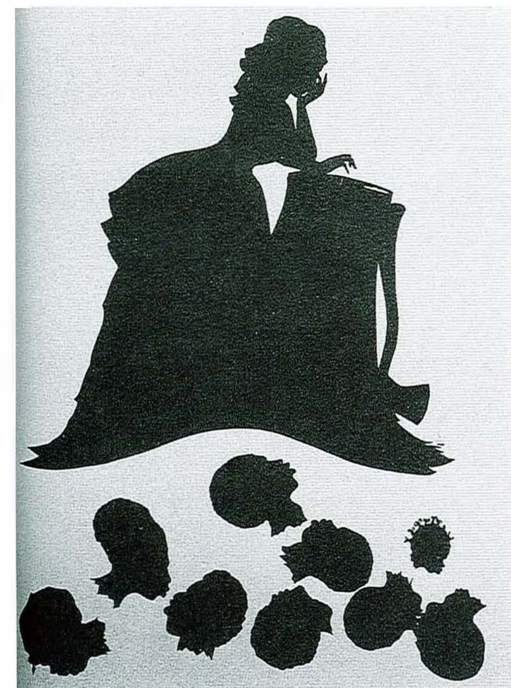
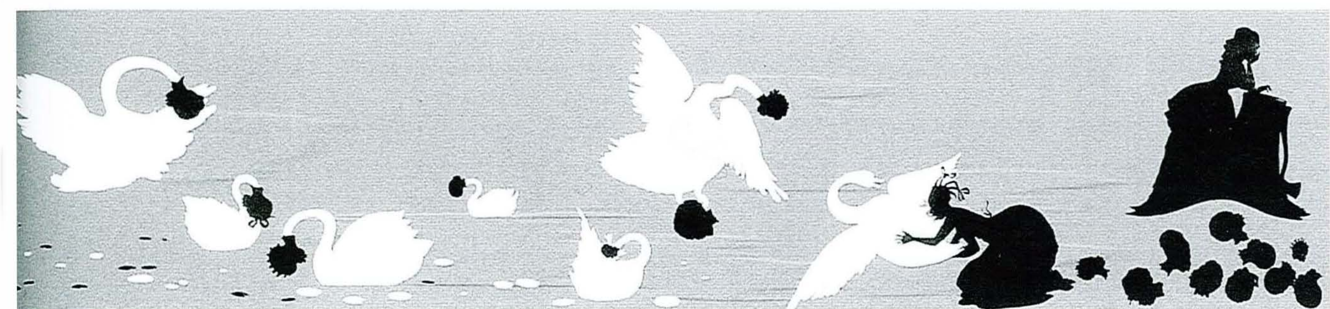


Figure 5. [*upper left*] Kara Walker, *The Emancipation Approximation* (detail), 1999-2000, cut paper and adhesive on painted wall, dimensions variable. Courtesy Brent Sikkema, New York.

Figure 6. [*upper right*] Kara Walker, *The Emancipation Approximation* (detail), 1999-2000, cut paper and adhesive on painted wall, dimensions variable. Courtesy Brent Sikkema, New York.

Figure 7. [*left*] Kara Walker, *The Emancipation Approximation* (detail), 1999-2000, cut paper and adhesive on painted wall, dimensions variable. Courtesy Brent Sikkema, New York.

Figure 8. [*below*] Composite of details from Kara Walker's *The Emancipation Approximation,* 1999-2000, cut paper and adhesive on painted wall, dimensions variable. Courtesy Brent Sikkema, New York.



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