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**ABSTRACT: The Nude in Central Italian Painting and Sculpture (1500-1600):
Definition, Perception and Representation**

This interdisciplinary study of the male and female nude explores the cultural, social and political context in sixteenth-century Italy in order to discover new connections between images of the nude and everyday life. Many of the sources concerning behaviour, undressing and sexual activities in diverse settings, which are believed to reflect actual behaviour (Rudolf Bell, 1999), were written in Italian at a time when the printing industry began to flourish. This new literature, which has received scant attention from art historians, reached a wider audience and directly competed with prescriptive writings, thus challenging social and religious conventions.

My investigation has brought to light important connections between the focus on beauty in daily life and images of the male and female nude in works of art, such as the muscular and virile male nude in Florence and the beautiful, seductive female nude in Venice. As symbols of beauty, courtesans participated in Venetian civic spectacles, while Florentine youths engaging in competitive sports in the public arena were widely admired for their physique. Sources pertaining to artistic practices regarding the observation of the live model reveal that artists sought the same physical qualities as those appreciated by society at large.

The investigation of Giorgio Vasari's *Lives* (Florence, 1550 and 1568) not only underscores the central importance of the nude in both editions but also revises the conclusions drawn by Svetlana Alpers (1969), demonstrating that the different notions of perfection can be pre-dated to the first edition. Writings produced after the *Lives* point to a continued interest in the nude as the most difficult and beautiful form in art while constraining its representation in both erotic and non-erotic works available to a wider audience. The new guidelines are consistent with prescriptive behaviour books that underscore social and gender distinctions. The nude remains acceptable for the elite and for propaganda purposes. By contrast, Vincenzo Danti and Benvenuto Cellini continue to promote the nude as an autonomously-created form suited to a range of settings.

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Introduction

To say that the nude was important in Renaissance art is a truism of art-historical study; nonetheless, it is an issue which remains unexplored in all its various aspects, particularly with regard to the social context in which images of the nude were produced. This interdisciplinary study of the nude attempts to broaden discussion of the subject, and to show that, by looking at the nude and scantily-clad body in art from the wider cultural and social context we can come closer to a true understanding of its significance for the public at large.

A complete range of verbal and visual sources selected for analysis accumulatively reveal a great deal about the representation of the nude in sixteenth-century Italian society. Verbal sources comprise writings on art produced by artists, *letterati*, and ecclesiastics; contracts, descriptions and discussions of individual works of art; letters intended for both private and public perusal; inventories of and references to art collections; guidebooks; behaviour and courtesy books; poems; plays; books dealing with female beauty and beauty treatment; advice manuals and books of secrets; medical treatises; archival documents; confessional books and writings pertaining to the Tridentine Reforms. Visual sources include images of the nude in paintings, sculpture, major decorative schemes, engravings, prints, ornamental objects, drawings, and cityscapes. These images show the body fulfilling a range of functions and in a variety of settings.

Each chapter explores the nude from a different perspective, building up various interweaving layers of perception. Chapter One analyses verbal and visual sources which shed light on the display of the nude and scantily-clad body in daily life with particular reference to the focus on the perceptions of physical beauty and physical love. The emergence of popular books in the new print culture is highly significant. These texts openly breach religious and social conventions promoted in prescriptive literature and seem to have been shaped by real behaviour. Measures to curb and control unruly and unconventional behaviour, which were not always effective, are also discussed.

Chapter Two examines sources which can illuminate the perception of the nude in art by artists and non-artists, in order to clarify the reasons for the increasing prominence of the nude in a variety of strikingly new images. The artistic procedures intimately bound up with the nude are analysed with particular reference to the importance attached to artistic preoccupations and innovations. The perceptions and functions of the male and female nude in Florence and

Venice are investigated in the light of the respective civic myths with which they were associated during the period under investigation.

Chapter Three focuses on the role of the nude in a major source for Renaissance art, Giorgio Vasari's *The Lives* (1550 and 1568). Taking as the starting point the assumptions posited by Svetlana Alpers in her instructive 1969 article regarding the different notions of perfection associated with the art of Michelangelo and Raphael, I present new research findings which throw into relief the central importance of the nude, particularly the communicative and ornamental power of the nude body in pose and in motion. The chapter explores the theoretical assumptions formulated for the representation of the nude in art and the close connections between these assumptions and the art-critical vocabulary applied in the biographical sections.

An examination of the key critical and conceptual terminology enables us to pinpoint significant passages on the nude and its representation in sixteenth-century painting and sculpture, as well as locate these passages within a wider discourse concerning the artistic and aesthetic merits of the nude. This analysis reveals a new perception of art and its potential for producing figures which can be appreciated for their own sake as well as a new perception of the artist as an image-maker. In addition, this examination helps establish sections of the text most probably written by the same person, that is, somebody with a keen interest in the nude and understanding of the artistic process involved. The survey of key terminology thus also contributes to the current debate on the authorship of the *Lives*, conducted primarily by Charles Hope and Thomas Frangenberg.

Chapter Four examines the alternative notion of perfection bound up with the nude as promoted by the Venetian *letterato*, Lodovico Dolce, who seeks to make claims for Titian's supremacy over Michelangelo's. The main objective is to demonstrate the reasons for Dolce's contrasting aesthetic of the nude and the inventive power of the artist by redefining key terminology employed in the 1550 edition of the *Lives*. The final section investigates Vasari's response in key additions and passages in the 1568 edition of the *Lives*, highlighting connections between various passages and the 1550 edition of the text.

Chapter Five investigates attitudes towards the nude in later writings produced by artists and non-artists in the wake of the mood created by the Counter-Reformation. The Tridentine reforms for religious art are briefly analysed alongside the writings of ecclesiastics who sought to expand on the reforms. The writings of the artists Vincenzo Danti and Benvenuto Cellini are analysed in contrast to the new requirements for art and help clarify their assumptions concerning artistic

processes in relation to creating images of the nude. Key conceptual terms and notions which help to establish the dichotomy between the requirements of art and the notion of the decorum of nudity which impinge most on the new prescriptions for religious art and an untrained audience. In addition, the notions of artistic perfection help to explain the continued interest in the nude and the classification of subjects and settings where the nude is seen to be acceptable. The final section considers the dissemination of both erotic and non-erotic images of the nude through the printed medium with particular reference to the implications for elite and non-elite audiences.

The separate chapters aim to provide a context in which to read a range of primary sources in relation to each other and the society in which they were produced. By emphasising the importance of the social context in which artists operated, it is hoped that a new definition of the role of nude in sixteenth-century art can be established in connection with this context, shifting the debate away from Neo-Platonic interpretations which have little relevance to the daily lives of most sixteenth-century Italians and for which no theory of art was formulated.

CHAPTER ONE

Perceptions of Physical Beauty and Behaviour in Sixteenth-Century Italian Society

Introduction

During the period under investigation, nude/naked (*nudo* or *ignudo*) and its cognates were fluid terms which could indicate both a completely naked male or female and a scantily-clad figure, that is, one wearing garments which revealed parts of the body or the shape of the body underneath. This understanding of nudity broadens the investigation into undressing and behaviour in daily life. Apart from the private sphere, contexts in which the naked, scantily-clad or sensuous body was on display include public bathhouses, dancing and competitive sports played in the public arena. Sources pertaining to these contexts illustrate that a cross-section of society was attracted to the display of the body in a period in which attitudes towards sex were beginning to change.¹ In addition, population growth meant that there was a higher number of young adults, creating tensions between older and younger generations.²

¹ Recent studies on social and political contexts have provided useful insights into changing social patterns and attitudes towards the body and sex with particular reference to the Venetian context. For an analysis of changing attitudes towards marriage and love during the Renaissance, see G. Cozzi, 'La donna, l'amore e Tiziano', *Tiziano e Venezia, Convegno internazionale di studi*, Venice, 1976, Vicenza, 1980, pp. 47-63. On the defiance of sumptuary laws and the expenditure on dress as a way to create power and flaunt physical assets, see S. Chojnacki, 'La posizione della donna a Venezia nel Cinquecento', *ibid.*, pp. 65-70. On attitudes towards infidelity and sex crimes, see G. Scarabello, 'Devianza sessuale ed interventi di giustizia a Venezia nella prima metà del XVI secolo', *ibid.*, pp. 75-84. For a summary and comment on the research presented at the round table, see F. Haskell, 'Titian – a new approach?', *ibid.*, pp. 41-46. As a whole, the round table demonstrated the useful insight that can be yielded from an multi-disciplinary approach.

² D. Herlihy has provided an illuminating analysis of the social and economic impact of increasing numbers of young adults during the Renaissance. See D. Herlihy, 'Popolazione e strutture sociali dal XV al XVI secolo', *Tiziano e Venezia* (as in n. 1), pp. 71-74. The population in most Italian cities fell sharply as a result of the plagues during the Middle Ages and tended to stabilise at low levels in the period 1400-1470. In this period there was a high number of young children and a considerable elderly population supported by young adults, who found it relatively easy to find work and marry. This situation changed drastically towards the end of the fifteenth century. The population of Venice doubled between 1425 and 1563, when it reached 170,000. Population growth had important economic, social and cultural repercussions, in that more young adults were looking for work and were available for marriage. In Venice, competition for jobs was high. While some men entered religious life, most of them remained in the home of married relatives. Poorer women looked for work as servants, courtesans and prostitutes. This situation led to social, cultural and ultimately erotic tensions, which were dealt with in different ways. On the one hand, patrician families often impeded the marriage of male members and isolated women and girls from contact with men. Herlihy observes that the conflict between generations and rebellion against the rules imposed by the older generation was most serious in patrician families. On the other hand, the erotic tension could be exploited through the availability of prostitutes, with the courtesan becoming a sexualised version of the patrician woman. The restrictions placed on the lives of upper-class Venetian women have been attributed to oriental influences in Venice. However, Herlihy postulates that these restrictions were dictated by dangers related to the sexual tension. The conclusions reached in this thesis lend support to Herlihy's assumption. Herlihy also assumes that the new climate and bachelor culture influenced the art produced in Venice at that time, in that there are no tranquil domestic scenes, as was common in Florentine art of the preceding period, but rather an erotic element. For Venetian divisions of workers, see B. Pullan, *Rich and Poor in Renaissance Venice. The Social Institutions of a catholic State to 1620*, Cambridge, Mass., 1971, p. 72. A similar pattern can be found in Florence. The population began to rise in the later fifteenth century and rose steadily after the 1520s. In 1550 there was a population of around 59,000. The numbers of the so-called *nonstatuali*, that is, men with no right to political office though not necessarily poor, seems to have risen in the fifteenth century

The widespread interest in the physical beauty of both men and women, the importance attached to beauty treatment, the popularity of public baths, reports of men dressing up as women, women dressing up as men, nuns dressing as women of the world, gentlewomen dressing as prostitutes and prostitutes dressing as gentlewomen are all symptoms of the desire to look and act differently and exploit the power of the body both inside and outside marriage.³ Although such behaviour is not unique to the Renaissance, it is significant that after about 1540 the vice most frequently treated in manuals drawn up for confessors is lust rather than avarice, which had been the most commonly cited vice before that date. These behavioural patterns challenged the traditional boundaries of ideal behaviour and social and religious conventions.

In this chapter I will analyse Renaissance perceptions of nudity with particular reference to popular dances, bathing conventions, and changing attitudes towards sex, as well as measures aimed at controlling unacceptable and licentious behaviour. The second section deals with perceptions of female and male beauty and behaviour and aims to develop a more complete picture of the appreciation and display of the sensuous female and the physically fit male body as part of the construction of civic myths in Venice and Florence respectively.

Descriptive and Prescriptive Primary Sources

A range of primary sources which express the different attitudes towards beauty and the naked body in sixteenth-century Italian society have been selected for analysis. Verbal evidence of changing attitudes towards the body is connected with the new print culture, which was seen to embody a new openness, as well as greater social and literary independence.⁴ With the birth of the print culture not only the number of texts written in Italian increased considerably, thus reaching a larger audience, but also a wider range of reading material was produced. The main target audience for books written in the vernacular was the commercial and

as heredity increasingly became a matter of political status. The population was predominantly young. Population density in the city centre does not seem to have been problematic and Trexler believes it explains the gatherings of youths from different social backgrounds. See R. C. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*, New York 1980, pp. 10-12 and 400. Much of this thesis focuses on young male and female adults and makes connections between the economic, cultural, and social issues discussed above and the importance of the body beautiful in daily life and in art.

³ For examples of breaches of marital fidelity and examples in Venice, see G. Scarabello, *Tiziano e Venezia* (as in n. 1), pp. 75-84.

⁴ On the new generation of writers, their objectives and the influence of Pietro Aretino, see P. F. Grendler, *Critics of the Italian World (1530-1560): Anton Francesco Doni, Nicolò Franco & Ortensio Lando*, Madison, Milwaukee, London, 1969.

professional classes, landowners and wealthier peasants, that is, people who had received basic schooling and could therefore read Italian.⁵

A consistent body of the new literature claiming to mirror behavioural patterns, is eloquent testimony of the preoccupation with the body beautiful and sexual performance. This new literature directly competed with Catholic texts and the writings of many humanists by challenging social and religious conventions. In his dialogues, letters and plays, which were snapped up by the Venetian printers Marcolini and Giolito, Pietro Aretino consciously disregarded the bounds of convention in a rebellion against respectability, revelling in besmirching papers just as others 'take pleasure in defacing the white walls of hostelries'.⁶ Aretino's writings focused on the concrete world of the senses and encouraged a generation of younger writers to produce more accounts of scandals. Anton Francesco Doni praised the Venetian press because it made possible the diffusion of new and varied ideas. Along with Nicolò Franco and Ortensio Lando, Doni found a role for himself as one of the key social commentators of his day. Reprints of their writings are indicative of the popularity of their views. Just as Aretino had derided sixteenth-century Petrarchan poets for attempting to write poetry by establishing norms, Doni stated that his writings reached out to a diverse audience and showed them things other than the praises of women in learned language.⁷

Other popular texts which catered for the new interest in physical beauty and physical love include the growing literature on the beauty of women, manners and deportment, as well as advice manuals, books of secrets, and vernacular medical tracts. While the more expensive herbals seem to have been purchased by herb dealers who passed on information to their clients, the publication of popular advice manuals, which are closely related to books of secrets, shows how elite texts could be transformed into less expensive editions for a wider audience. Many of the texts published during the period under investigation contain a wide range of information and household tips, from cooking recipes to instructions on how to make herbal remedies and hair dyes. The knowledge they disseminate was largely drawn from oral and practical traditions, and crafts such as metallurgy and

⁵ In late sixteenth-century Venice about one in three adults were literate; people literate in Italian outnumbered readers of Latin by about three to one. Potential readership included merchants, master artisans, established shopkeepers, and most of their wives, all of whom could read Italian. There may also have been some literate people among petty shopkeepers. Clerics, nuns, lawyers, professors, civil servants and educated noblemen could master Latin and Italian, whereas servants, most soldiers, sailors, retainers to nobles and merchants, and poorer peasants could not read. For these and other statistics on literacy and education, see P. I. F. Grendler, *Books and Schools in the Italian Renaissance*, Aldershot, UK, 1995 and R. M. Bell, *How to do it – Guides to Good Living for Renaissance Italians*, Chicago, 1999, pp. 5-15.

⁶ As cited by P. F. Grendler (as in n. 4), p. 8.

⁷ Ibid. Doni's self-defence as a popular writer appears in *I marmi*, while in *La Zucca* he promises to provide the reader with alternative views. A. F. Doni *I Marmi*, E. Chiòrboli (ed), 2 vols., Bari, 1928, vol. 1, pp. 173-192; A. F. Doni *La Zucca*, Venice, 1565 ed., 112-12v., 107v-108.

practical alchemy. The popularity of these texts suggests a receptive audience with respect to the dissemination of new ideas, which were also probably passed on by word of mouth. Books of secrets were all-purpose household manuals which adopted a down-to-earth and experimental approach telling those who could read how to solve specific problems and bring about a physical transformation.⁸ Books of secrets had a broad range of settings, including pharmacies, squares, printing houses, courts and academies of science. These texts were sold by peddlers in the country, and by *ciarlatani* and popular healers in the squares of major cities. The selling techniques adopted made the texts highly visible in the public arena.⁹

At the opposite end of the spectrum we find legal provisions, devotional and Catholic confessional texts, books on morals and the writings of humanists which indicate the different ways in which writers and governments across Italy aimed to influence behaviour and curb unruly and unlawful sexual behaviour with different degrees of success. Many dance texts of the period prescribed acceptable movements for men and women. Traditionally, behaviour books prescribed acceptable codes of conduct in terms of gender, social class and age, promoting the view that culturally constructed distinctions were natural.¹⁰ In art, images of movement and gesture were frequently designed to fulfil an exemplary and didactic function which helped consolidate notions of polite behaviour and went

⁸ On the literary tradition, format, publication, authorship and impact of books of secrets produced during the Renaissance, see W. Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Modern Culture*, Princeton, NJ, 1994, esp. pp. 4, 94-96 and 168-193. On sexual matters discussed in books of secrets, see E. Renzetti, 'La sessualità nei libri segreti del XVI e XVII secolo', *Il corpo delle donne*, G. Bock and G. Nobili (eds), Ancona, 1988, pp. 47-68. On the content and importance of books of secret and advice manuals in daily life with particular reference to marriage and conception, see R. M. Bell, *How to do it – Guides to Good Living for Renaissance Italians*, Chicago, 1999. Bell believes the popular advice manuals and books of secret all arose from the behaviour and interests of the readers. For a contemporary discussion on the tradition of these texts, see T. Garzoni, *Piazza universale di tutte le professioni del mondo*, Venice, 1585, P. Cerchi and B. Collina (eds), 2. vols, Turin, 1996, vol. 1, pp. 324-327: 'de' professori dei secreti'.

⁹ See W. Eamon (as in n. 8), pp. 234-250. On printing and competition in Venice and Florence, see B. Richardson, *Print Culture in Renaissance Italy: The Editor and the Vernacular Text, 1470-1600*, Cambridge, 1994, p. 91.

¹⁰ For a discussion of the connections between the promotion of exemplary conduct and narrative religious painting, see *Decorum in Renaissance Art*, F. Ames-Lewis and A. Bednarek (eds), London, 1992. For a discussion of the notion of decorum with regard to gender and rank, see L. Jacobus, 'Gesture and decorum in early 14th-century Italian art', *ibid.*, pp. 24-34. According to Jacobus, the large amount of medieval writings on the subject indicates that social behaviour was a major concern. These texts provided instructions for men, women and children from every social group, as well as for ecclesiastics. The concerns of conduct books and devotional literature frequently coincided, in that behaviour was linked to religious devotion. Jacobus connects these texts to religious narrative paintings, particularly those that were seen to have a bearing on everyday life and addressed to a middle or upper-class audience. Jacobus convincingly argues that these images and texts helped to construct and promote social norms by describing and showing exemplary behaviour. This ideology was based on the conviction that behaviour revealed the inner person and can be traced to Aristotle and Galen. More importantly, behaviour helped define social groups by rank, gender and religion. Men and women were believed to have different natures which were reflected in their behaviour. With respect to rank, 'noble', 'gentle' and 'common' served to define a person not only in terms of blood-stock but also behaviour. The significance of these distinctions is reflected in the fact that the lively gestures of ordinary people were rarely depicted in Trecento religious narrative paintings, since this would have constituted a breach of decorum. This ideology continued to impinge on behavioural texts and prescriptive literature in the Quattrocento and Cinquecento and has particular relevance for the nude.

beyond the narrative function of a painting. Prescriptions regarding social and gender distinctions thus served as a yardstick for the painter and viewer. I shall return to this important notion of decorum in later chapters.

Although there is evidence of the importance of prescriptive behaviour literature and the didactic role of visual images, it is important to bear in mind that they promote ideal conduct rather than reflect actual behavioural patterns. This kind of text thus frequently reveals a discrepancy between ideal and real behaviour. With respect to the provisions introduced or prompted by the decisions of the Council of Trent, some writers ignored or obviated the more rigid prescriptive measures, while others sometimes went beyond the list of prohibitions and sins provided by the Church.

PART ONE: PERCEPTIONS OF NUDITY AND THE BODY ON DISPLAY

General attitudes towards nakedness and common perceptions of undressing clarify the social and moral pressures at work and also pinpoint some of the contexts for the display of the body. There is ample evidence that from the late fifteenth century through much of the sixteenth century revealing parts or the whole body became more common than in earlier periods in connection with the increasing preoccupation with personal hygiene, health and body treatment, as well as the new focus on sexual performance and experiments.

Positive and negative views on nakedness are expressed in relation to both public and private settings. With respect to the domestic sphere and married life, priests and authors of confessional books were assigned the task of guiding their parishioners towards moral rectitude and the observance of church teachings on acceptable sexual behaviour. Ecclesiastics such as Cherubino da Siena (c. 1490) advocated covering up the body in the domestic setting, including during sexual intercourse, warning wives not to be seen naked by their husbands: 'Never allow yourself, woman, to be seen naked by your husband'.¹¹ In addition, he claimed that it was a sin for a wife to look at her husband's genitals for sexual excitement and prescribed that the wife should do so only if he was ill.¹²

A number of sixteenth-century humanist writers continued to promote less tolerant attitudes towards female behaviour. In his *Istituzione delle donne* (Venice, 1553) Dolce applied the metaphor of nudity to emphasise the need for fidelity on the part of women, claiming that a woman's identity, existence and well-being were solely dependent on her husband:

A woman, away from her husband, remains simply naked, and subject to every insult, but when she is accompanied by her husband, wherever she may be, he is her homeland, her home, her relatives, her servants, and all her riches.¹³

¹¹ Cherubino da Siena, *Regole della vita matrimoniale* (1482), Bologna, 1969, rpt of 1888 edn, F. Zambrini and C. Neuron (eds.), p. 94: 'non acconsentire mai donna, tu donna, a lassarti vedere al tuo marito nuda; che pecca egli e ancora tu'. Cherubino's text, which further promoted the teachings of Bernardino da Siena, was produced in the latter half of the fifteenth century and had twenty-one printings before 1500. The text continued to enjoy popularity in the sixteenth century. Some publications of the text were bound with Cherubino's *Regole della vita spirituale*.

¹² Ibid.: 'Certo quando bisognasse la moglie vedere il suo marito nelle parti vergognose, per alcuna infermitade o per altra necessità, non è peccato; anzi è carità. Ma quando lo fanno per brutale dilettazone, è peccato; perché, come di sopra è detto, tal cosa è lecita a fare, che non è lecita vedere'.

¹³ L. Dolce, *Dialogo delle Istituzioni delle donne*, Venice, 1553, p. 42: 'La donna lontana dal suo marito, riman sola ignuda, et soggetto a tutte le offese, ma essendo dal marito accompagnata, dove ella si trova, ivi è la sua patria, la sua casa, i suoi parenti, i suoi domestici, et tutte le sue ricchezze'. Dolce's metaphor most probably alludes to the financial and social consequences of infidelity on the part of women in sixteenth-century Italy as outlined by G. Scarabello, *Tiziano e Venezia* (as in n. 1).

Dolce's metaphor brings to mind the representation of Boccaccio's *Story of Giselda* which is known to have been depicted on *spalliere* panels produced in fifteenth-century Florence. Representations of the story point to the importance of chastity, promoting the view that women are subordinates and advocating severe forms of punishment for infidelity.¹⁴

Physicians promoted the strict observance of propriety. Evidence available suggests that physicians did not see or examine female genitalia, whether the patient was pregnant or not, and they did not assist women during labour, tasks usually performed by midwives with the exception of life-threatening cases. Giovanni Marinello and Girolamo Mercurio both claimed that the physician's sense of *onestà* [honesty/decency] prohibited them from directly examining the female's genitalia.¹⁵ Mercurio advised the physician to intervene in deliveries only in emergency cases and to disguise himself as a woman. A barber-surgeon was usually called in to remove a dead foetus or to perform a caesarean. According to Tommaso Garzone, the *ruffiana* performed abortions.¹⁶

The terminology applied to the genitals and sexual behaviour indicates the issues at stake when determining the acceptability of both behaviour and nakedness. Indecent behaviour was frequently referred to as *disonesto* (*dishonest/indecent*) as opposed to *onesto* (acceptable behaviour). Whenever nudity was condemned in life and art, the male and female genitals are usually referred to as *parti vergognose* (shameful parts) or *parti disoneste* (indecent parts). Typical expressions for the sexual organs are *membro virile* (virile limb) for the penis, *parte indecente* (indecent part) for the vagina, and *l'atto di Venere* (the act of Venus) for coitus. The application of more vulgar terms in sixteenth-century low-register literary sources, which frequently reflects the provocative tone of the author, is symptomatic of more open attitudes towards sex. Vulgar terms for sex and its practitioners comprise *fotter* (fuck), *figa* (cunt), *chiavar* (screw), *gran chiavar* (great fuck), *poltronzona* (slut), and *puttana* (whore).

Punishment for transgressing gender boundaries could also be associated with nudity. Johannes Burchard, Pope Alexander VI's master of ceremonies, provides an

¹⁴ Giselda faces a series of unjustified and cruel tests by her husband and is finally stripped of her beautiful clothes and sent back to her father's home wearing just a shift to symbolise her public rejection, though her virtue wins her back her role and place in society. The represented ritual of dressing and undressing marked the place and role of women in society and acted as a moral indicator. On the connection between this literary source and domestic decoration in Renaissance Florence, see P. Tinagli, *Women in the Renaissance: Gender, Representation and Identity*, Manchester, 1997, pp. 33-34.

¹⁵ G. Marinello, *Delle Medicine pertinenti all'infermità delle donne*, Venice, 1563 and G. Mercurio, *La commare*, Venice, 1601 edn. Selections of both texts are reprinted in *Medicine per le donne nel Cinquecento*, M. L. Biagi (ed), Turin, 1992.

¹⁶ T. Garzoni (as in n. 8), p. 974. On reports of abortion in sixteenth-century Venice, see G. Scarabello, *Tiziano e Venezia* (as in n. 1), p. 80. According to Scarabello, very few cases of abortion were reported.

account of the outrage and punishment of the male servant of a Roman courtesan, Corsetta, who called himself Spanish Barbara and paraded around the city in lavish women's clothes. As a punishment, inflicted partly because of his foreignness, Barbara was made to walk the streets exposing his genitals and was later viciously executed.¹⁷

With respect to the semi-private and public domain, undressing was connected with a range of common vices and unacceptable behaviour, which were commonly lumped together, and in the course of the sixteenth century became increasingly associated with contravening social conventions. In the fifteenth century the humanist Enea Silvio Piccolomini (d. 1464) related nakedness to poverty and vulgarity, claiming that 'dressing and undressing beyond necessity stem either from poverty, as certified by Diogenes, or from vulgarity'.¹⁸

Baring parts or the entire body often went hand in hand with gambling, frequenting bathhouses and taverns, as well as carnivals, dancing, and excessive drinking. Sixteenth-century sources also illustrate that certain movements and gestures could be equated with offering one's body for consumption. Orazio Lombardelli's *De gli ufizi e costume de' giovani* (Florence, 1579), which is a literary spoof of the advice manual and dedicated to Francesco de' Medici, sets out to exonerate the immoral behaviour of youths by pushing the blame onto a number of every-day social contexts seen to encourage their waywardness.¹⁹ According to Lombardelli, debauchery and drunkenness were closely associated with the sale of dirty books and lascivious pictures by shopkeepers, frequent dances and fairs, the existence of bathhouses, which encouraged people to undress, as well as public and private displays of indecent women who lured males into gambling and a wicked life involving participants who were naked or who made obscene gestures. That members from a wide social spectrum engaged in such activities is evident from a letter written by Aretino, which recalls a party in the home of the courtesan Camilla Pisana. Aretino reports that riotous and unconventional behaviour involving nakedness delighted the participants:

Do you remember the old woman fleeing when Firenzuola shouted rude things at her out of the window? And how I was naked, and he too, except for his shirt.²⁰

¹⁷ J. Burchard, *Johannis Burchardi Diarium*, L. Thuasne (ed), 2 vols., Paris, 1883-1885, vol. 2, pp. 442-444, diary entry April 1498; also cited by G. Masson, *Courtesans of the Renaissance World*, London, 1975, p. 9, and B. Talvacchia, *Taking Positions – On the Erotic in Renaissance Culture*, Princeton, N.J., 1999, pp. 107-8, and 263 n.17.

¹⁸ E. S. Piccolomini, *De liberorum educatione*, *L'Umanesimo e i suoi problemi educativi*, M. de Donno (ed and trans.), Milan, 1960, p. 119. For the English translation, see E. S. Piccolomini, *De liberorum educatione*, J. S. Nelson (ed and trans.), Washington, 1940.

¹⁹ See O. Lombardelli, *De gli ufizi e costumi de' giovani*, Florence, 1579, pp. 26-34.

²⁰ P. Aretino, *Opere*, F. Flora (ed), Milan, 1960, pp. 809-811, Letter dated 26 October 1541.

Of deep significance for the present purpose is the practice of undressing in connection with the differentiation between the common whore and the socially elevated courtesan. In Venice the common prostitute was required by law to stand naked to the waist on the Ponte delle Tette (Bridge of Tits). While public prostitutes in Venice and in Florence revealed and sometimes painted their bosoms in order to sell their merchandise, undressing completely for sex does not appear to have been a common practice. In his *Sei Giornate – Ragionamento della Nanna e della Antonia* (Venice, 1534), a word picture of the world of prostitution written to reflect the language of lower-class people and using farce and bawdy humour, Aretino contrasts the sexual preferences and practices of lowly males (dockworkers, cooks, and so on) with those of high-ranking male clients in the convent-brothel where Nanna, one of the female protagonists, used to work as a prostitute. While the lowly male treats the prostitute with respect and devotion, the inspection of her body by high-ranking clients to establish whether she was infected by syphilis is presented as a pretext for looking closely at the female body in different positions. Nanna recounts that it was common practice to look closely at the female body, particularly the face, breasts, vagina and backside, making the prostitute stand in the 'most obscene positions imaginable' and obtaining a double view in a mirror.²¹

Aretino's account fits with another diary entry of Johannes Burchard, where it is suggested that certain contexts seemed to warrant complete nudity. Burchard describes an erotic game leading to a full-blown orgy reported to have taken place in the public hall of the Apostolic Palace at the papal court in Rome. The participants included clerics, members of the upper-classes and high-class prostitutes. The scene is said to have been watched by the pope, Cesare Borgia and his sister, Donna Lucrezia. The courtesans danced and took part in games naked while prizes were given for those who managed to copulate with the most courtesans.²²

These samples indicate that complete nudity was particularly related to the world of courtesans and the sexual preferences of the elite clients they entertained. The examples which follow serve to pinpoint other important forms of behaviour

²¹ P. Aretino, *Sei Giornate – Ragionamento della Nanna e della Antonia fatto in Roma sotto una ficaia composto dal divino Aretino per suo capriccio a correzione dei tre stati delle donne*, Venice, 1534, G. D. Bonino (ed), 1975, p. 274; hereafter *Ragionamenti*.

²² J. Burchard (as in n. 17), vol. 2, p. 443, vol. 3, p. 167, diary entry October 1501: 'In sero fecerunt cenam cum duce Valentinense in camera sua, in palatio apostolico, quinquaginta meretrices honeste cortegiane nuncupate, que post cenam coreaverunt cum servitoribus et aliis ibidem existensibus, primo in vestibus suis, denique nude. Post cenam posita fuerunt candelabra communia mense in candelis ardentibus per terram, et projecte ante candelabra per terram castanee quas meretrices ipse super manibus et pedibus; unde, candelabra pertranseuntes, colligebat, Papa, duce et D. Lucretia sorore sua presentibus et aspicientibus. Tandem exposita dona ultima, diploides de serico, paria caligarum, bireta, et alia pro illis qui pluries dictas meretrices carnaliter agnoscerent; que fuerunt ibidem in aula publice carnaliter tractate arbitrio praesentium, dona distribuita victoribus'.

connected with undressing in daily life, as well as the mixing of gender and social classes.

Dancing

The debate prompted by popular dances not only yields insight into attitudes towards the display of the body, but also shares a number of similarities with the sixteenth-century discussion on the decorum of nudity and bodily motion in art and daily life. The new popular dances introduced in the sixteenth-century were physically demanding and involved spectacular displays of agility. As such they posed a challenge to the social ideals and sense of control and restraint with which dance steps had been previously associated. Fifteenth-century writers of dance treatises place particular emphasis on moderation and restraint, in that dance was commonly perceived as an extension of what were purported to be natural movements.²³ The concept of *misura* (measure) established the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable movements. Composure was given both a moral and aesthetic dimension.²⁴ Measure required that dancers avoid particularly excessive and fast movements, since these were seen as signs of a lack of self-control. In addition, extravagant and flamboyant motion was associated with the lowly and thus deemed unsuitable for people of good breeding.

Andrea Calmo (1510/11-1571) associated the new lively dances with 'lowly and boisterous youths', such as butchers, knaves and delinquents whose presence and behaviour were deemed unacceptable to people of good breeding. The dance movements are said to comprise *saltari* (leaping), *vertigolari* (spinning), *zurlando a torno a mo una rioda* (whirling round like wheels), *tirando cavriole a mo di simoto* (performing capriole like monkeys), *ganzari de calcagni* (kicking up one's heels) and *picegri de pie* (twisting one's feet). In addition, these performers were blamed for behaving inappropriately with their female partners, holding them under the arms, squeezing their hands and 'certain other things' ('e qualche altra cosa').²⁵

²³ Dance was largely ignored and sometimes condemned in treatises on education produced during the fifteenth century. The humanist curriculum, which was designed to educate young nobles, upper and upper-middle class males and a smaller number of females, was based on religious and moral studies and physical development. On this issue, see B. Sparti, Introduction to G. Ebreo of Pesaro, *De Pratica seu arte tripudii*, Oxford, 1993, p. 57, nn. 39 and 40. On dance as an important social skill, see S. Chojnacki, *Tiziano e Venezia* (as in n. 1), p. 67.

²⁴ On the nature of fifteenth-century and sixteenth-century dances and the debate prompted by new popular dances, see S. Fermor, 'Studies in the Depiction of the Moving Figure in Italian Renaissance Art, Art Criticism and Dance Theory', unpublished PhD Thesis, University of London, Warburg Institute, 1990; S. Fermor 'Decorum in Figural Movement: The Dance as Measure and Metaphor', F. Ames-Lewis and A. Bednarek (as in n. 10), pp. 78-88; On dance and gender issues related to sixteenth-century dances, see S. Fermor, 'Movement and Gender in Sixteenth-Century Italian Painting', *The Body Imagined, The Human Form and Visual Culture since the Renaissance*, K. Adler and M. Pointon (eds), Cambridge, 1993, pp. 129-208.

²⁵ A. Calmo, *Lettere*, V. Rossi (ed), Turin, 1888, pp. 232-233.

Two of the most popular dances, the galliard and the *moresca*, both involved vigorous bodily movements.²⁶ Initially performed by itinerant troupes, as well as dance-masters and squires, there is ample evidence that many people in the sixteenth century delighted in watching and performing these new dances.²⁷ Reports include an account of the wedding between Ercole d'Este and Angela Sforza (1491),²⁸ a description of New Year festivities in Rome in 1502, which records Cesare Borgia, the Pope's son, joining in a *moresca* in disguise, although the writer notes that he was clearly recognisable,²⁹ and a description of the wedding of Lucrezia Borgia and Alfonso d'Este in 1502.³⁰ A letter of 1499 written by Isabella d'Este's envoy, Giovanni Pencharo, succinctly expresses the appeal of the *moresca*: 'and they performed a vigorous and most beautiful *moresca*'.³¹ Like other descriptions, this letter indicates that the spectators enjoyed watching the 'rapid movements' ('celere movitione') and 'the greatest dexterity and agility' ('grandissima dexterità e agilità di persona').³²

The changing nature of dance required terminology which could give a good indication of the kind of bodily movements involved. One of the recurrent terms in descriptions of dance and movement was *gagliardezza*.³³ Because of its complex and difficult steps, the galliard provided a visual model of what *gagliardezza* signified. The term denoted agility, dexterity, physical energy, and boldness of spirit; it was applied to fast, flamboyant and spectacular dances.

²⁶ Primary sources on the *moresca* comprise contemporary descriptions only, in that references to the dance never appear in dance treatises. On the history of the *moresca* and the various types of choreography with which it was associated, including the often bizarre and grotesque movements, see *Moresca* in *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*, 11 vols., Florence, 1910, vol. 10, p. 538; I. Brainard, *Moresca*, *International Encyclopedia of Dance*, 6 vols., Oxford, 1998, vol. 4, pp. 460-462. See also S. Femor, 1990 (as in n. 24) and B. Sparti (as in n. 23), pp. 47-61, 223. For an iconographic documentation of this dance during the sixteenth century, see B. Premoli, 'Note iconografiche a proposito di alcune moresche nel rinascimento italiano', *L'uomo selvatico in Italia*, Rome, 1986, pp. 43-53. On dance in the Tuscan theatrical context during the same period, see A. D'Ancona, *Origini del teatro italiano. Libri tre con due appendici sulla rappresentazione drammatica del teatro toscano e del teatro mantovano nel XVI secolo*, Turin, 1891, pp. 436-437.

²⁷ B. Sparti, (as in n. 23), p. 54.

²⁸ G. Trotti, *Feste di nozze per Ludovico il Moro nelle testimonianze di Tristano Calco, Giacomo Trotti ed altri*, trans. by G. Lopez, Milan, 1976, p. 123, which reprints the Latin with an Italian translation of Trotto's official record of 'The nuptials of the Milanese Princes and the Este Princes'. The account shows that the guests admired the agility and beauty of a Tuscan girl who, accompanied by her master, performed a variety of twists and turns of the body.

²⁹ F. Gregorovius, *Lucrezia Borgia secondo documenti e carteggi del tempo*, trans. R. Mariano, Florence, 1874, pp. 208 and 416-417.

³⁰ B. Zambotti, 'Diario ferrarese dell'anno 1409 sino al 1504', G. Pardi (ed), *RIS*, vol. 24, part 7 (Appendices), 1928-1937, p. 35. There are also extant accounts of servants masquerading and performing a *moresca*. In a letter dated 25 February 1542 and addressed to Don Ferrante, Lord of Guastalla, Ercole Gonzaga's secretary, Ippolito Capiluppo, describes a magnificent *moresca* based on a pastoral theme with costumes designed by the painter Giulio Romano. The *moresca* in question was performed during carnival festivities held by the Gonzaga in Mantua, which impressed the spectators on account of the costumes, the music, and the agility and dexterity of the servant-dancers. Letter cited by A. D'Ancona (as in n. 26), pp. 438-441.

³¹ A. Luzio and R. Renier, 'Commedie Classiche in Ferrara nel 1499', *GSLI*, XI, 1888, p. 183.

³² See B. Zambotti (as in n. 30).

³³ The term does not appear in fifteenth-century dance treatises, though it is occasionally applied in descriptions of the *moresca*, which suggests that it was associated with real movements performed by dancers and that it conjured up specific motions.

Extant images of the *moresca* present visual clues regarding some of the movements involved and demonstrate widespread interest in the dance. A fresco of dancing men, *Dancing Nudes* (after 1464; Arcetri, Villa La Gallina) (**figure 1**), painted on the walls of the Villa La Gallina at Arcetri near Florence, probably produced in the 1460s has been attributed to Antonio Pollaiuolo.³⁴ Such figures would have been acceptable as part of a decorative scheme in a private villa. It is significant that the clients requested the representation of a dance which was just beginning to gain popularity. Another image produced around the same period shows a group of dancers performing a popular contemporary dance (Anonymous Florentine, *Round Dance*; c. 1470) (**figure 2**), which shows the performers nude.

It is also instructive to consider the perception of visibility and gender in relation to the new dances. Baldassare Castiglione's *Il cortegiano* (1528; *The Courtier*) establishes a set of guidelines for men and women, drawing distinctions in terms of audience (dancing in front of common folk or *popolo*, in disguise at balls, and in private) as well as gender. When performing before a crowd, the courtier and the man of class should maintain a 'certain dignity, tempered by lightness and delicate grace'.³⁵ Even if he is sure of his skill, the courtier should avoid the flamboyant movements of the professional entertainer in front of a mixed audience. However, such dances can take place at balls attended by the elite and other gatherings of the nobility, as well as in the privacy of one's chamber. In such circumstances the gentleman could imitate the skilful movements of the lowly professional entertainer for his own amusement and that of a restricted audience.³⁶ From Castiglione's remarks it can be inferred that maintaining social distinctions was seen to be crucial and that by performing the new dances in front of mixed audiences the man of class risked being identified with the lowly professional entertainer. Criticism could thus be avoided by performing them in a more private setting, illustrating that what was at issue was the visibility and not the performance itself.

Female dance steps were traditionally designed to manifest a woman's chastity through simple movements, which was usually expressed as *leggiadria*, a restrained and charming grace. Women were required to lower their eyes, make small steps,

³⁴ For a recent discussion of the fresco, see A. Wright, 'Dancing nudes in the Lanfredi Villa at Arcetri', *With and Without the Medici: Studies in Tuscan Art and Patronage 1434-1530*, E. Marchand and A. Wright (eds), Aldershot (UK) and VT (US), 1998, pp. 47-77. F. Shapley suggested that Pollaiuolo was influenced by dancers on Greek vases; see *ibid.*, 'A Student of Ancient Ceramics, Antonio Pollaiuolo', *Art Bulletin*, 2, 1919, pp. 78-86. The antique vase as a source for the fresco has been rejected by L. D. Ettlinger, *Antonio and Piero Pollaiuolo*, Oxford, 1978, pp. 35-36 and 145-146, and by R. Weiss, *The Renaissance Discovery of Classical Antiquity*, 2nd edition, Oxford, 1988, p. 189 n. 7. Given the contemporary interest in dances like the *moresca*, it is plausible to assume that the painter of the fresco referred directly to performances of the dance.

³⁵ B. Castiglione, *Il libro del cortegiano*, 1528, W. Barberis (ed), Turin, 1998, pp. 134-135, hereafter *Cortegiano*. All translations are taken from or based on G. Bull's English translation; B. Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, G. Bull (ed and trans.), London, 1967.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 134-135.

and avoid jumping movements which men were permitted to make. The twisting, turning, and bending of the body required by the new dances were perceived as sexually provocative, as a letter by Andrea Calmo indicates:

I have ended up in a turmoil, because you move your legs so fast, and shake your body so excellently, that I have died with longing to know you.³⁷

Women's involvement in the new dances provoked harsh criticism from several contemporary commentators. In Tommaso Garzoni's mind, the display of skill in women is undesirable because it is akin to offering one's body for consumption.³⁸ In *La pazzia del ballo* (1549; *The Insanity of Dancing*), Simeon Zuccollo is critical not only of women performing the new dances but of dancing in general. Zuccollo describes the dances as flirtatious, sexually charged, and licentious.³⁹ Verbs relating to the twisting and turning of the body appear frequently and are used to indicate the evils of modern dance. One example of unacceptable bodily motion is 'twisting their legs lasciviously' ('ragirir con la gambetta lascivamente'). Zuccollo associates dancing with both the baring of the body and debauchery caused by excessive drinking. In his mind, dancing at carnivals leads to all sorts of indecent and lascivious behaviour, making it difficult to say that a girl is a virgin, a wife chaste, and a widow honest. The behaviour of ordinary women, who first offer their gloved hand, then their bare hands, arms, bosom and other voluptuous parts, is likened to that of public prostitutes enticing their clients. He accuses husbands and fathers of allowing female relatives to display their skills and of encouraging their immoral behaviour. Accordingly, he advises men to keep their women away from dances.⁴⁰

Similar views are expressed by Castiglione, who prescribes that women were to avoid the new frenetic dances in any setting. Castiglione juxtaposes *gagliardezza*, which he considers to be a male quality, with *delicatezza* and *dolcezza*, which should always be the distinguishing characteristics of the female. Moderation is the standard to which women are to aspire not only when dancing but also when singing and playing a musical instrument. Moderation in women, which is given an aesthetic dimension, is directly opposed to ingenuity and virtuosity.⁴¹ In his *Della ostentazione* (1497-1500; *On Ostentation*), Vincenzo Calmeta quotes women

³⁷ A. Calmo (as in n. 25), p. 293: 'Et cusi chi a un muodo e chi per diverse vie: mi quando ve visti a balor, restii un coguaro da minestra, perche vu menavi tanto presto le gambe e sin scorlavi tanto ben la vita, che moriva de voia cognoscerve'.

³⁸ T. Garzoni (as in n. 8), p. 464, where the author provides descriptions of contemporary dances, their origins and famous dancers.

³⁹ S. Zuccollo, *La Pazzia del Ballo*, I. Fabriano (ed), Padua, 1549, pp. 19v., 20r. and 21v. The original was a cheap, probably popular edition. On this source, see R. M. Bell, (as in n. 8), pp. 188-189. Bell believes Zuccollo's anti-dance polemic realistically portrays sixteenth-century dances and a variety of attitudes towards dance.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 19v. Dolce also disapproved of women taking part in certain leisure activities, particularly dancing; see Dolce (as in n. 13), p. 30.

⁴¹ B. Castiglione (as in n. 35), p. 226.

dancing the galliard as one example of ostentation. He strongly disapproves of women engaging in fencing and dancing the galliard. In his mind, beauty and restraint are the adornment of women and any deviation from these qualities is considered to be a breach of womanhood.⁴²

By contrast, there were authors who openly encouraged women to perform the new dances. One case in point is Fabritio Caroso, whose *Il Ballarino* (1581; The Dancer), believed to have been addressed to an elite audience, was reprinted with some alterations and additions in 1601 and 1605 under the title *Nobiltà di Dame* (Nobility of Women). Caroso's text opens with a justification of dancing and instructs women on how to dance the galliard. In the *Nobiltà di dame* Caroso provides advice on walking and dancing in high-heeled shoes.⁴³ Caroso's text, which is a good source for dancing practices of the last decades of the sixteenth century, strongly suggests that women continued to enjoy the new dances and that some writers responded to their predilections despite criticism of female participation in certain forms of dance.

The new dances brought to the fore bodily motion which had hitherto been criticised and rejected largely on social grounds. The focus on physical exertion resulted in the blurring of the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. While prescriptions for movement and dance aimed at women had always been stricter than those for men, gender distinctions seem to have become more urgent with the introduction of more energetic dances in the sixteenth century. However, given the evidence on the participation of women in these dances, it is important not to confound prescriptive literature with actual behavioural patterns.

Bathing Conventions, Public Bathhouses and Spas

The role played by public baths and spas is highly significant as regards not only the display of the body but also social conventions. A range of primary sources are highly instructive with regard to the perception of bathing, the display of the body, health and beauty treatment and illicit sexual behaviour. These sources clearly indicate that public baths and spas were emblematic of changing behavioural patterns and more relaxed customs. The visibility of scantily-clad bodies seems to have contributed to the popularity of spas and urban bathhouses, which attracted

⁴² V. Calmeta, 'Della ostentazione', *Prose e lettere inedite*, C. Grayson (ed), Bologna 1959, pp. 40-41.

⁴³ F. Caroso, *Il Ballarino*, Venice, 1581, p. 141. Other editions of this text include F. Caroso, *Nobiltà di dame*, Fabritio Caroso, Venice, 1605 and *Nobiltà di Dame*, Fabritio Caroso (1600), J. Sutton (ed and trans.), Oxford, 1986.

attention from contemporary commentators, chroniclers and foreign visitors, most notably Michel de Montaigne.

Advice manuals and books of secrets make numerous references to the facilities and medical treatment available at public bathhouses. Giovanni Marinello's *Gli ornamenti delle donne* provides a wealth of information on diets, baths, douches, and flushes. These texts can be supplemented by illuminating references to bathing in other sources, such as Grazzini's bawdy poem, *In lode del bagnarsi in Arno*, and Francesco Bocchi's comment on swimming found in his *Bellezze della città di Fiorenza* (Florence, 1591), the first guidebook to the city. Sources on people working in public bathhouses, the barber-surgeon and the *stufaiolo* (stover) comprise Garzoni's accounts in his *Piazza universale di tutte le professioni*, as well as Grazzini's poem *Lo stufaiolo*. A letter written by a professor of canon law at Bologna, Floriano Dolfo, to Marquis Francesco Gonzaga hints at the reputation of spas and their association with sexual licence.⁴⁴

The typical structure of the urban bathhouse reflected the range of activities practised there.⁴⁵ Bathing facilities were usually on the ground floor, whereas upper floors were used as massage and beauty parlours or for medical treatment. There is evidence that other rooms were specifically set aside for sexual encounters. In cities, bathhouses were typically situated in districts frequented by prostitutes and near taverns and inns.

⁴⁴ The largest cluster of spas were in the Tuscan countryside and along the main routes from Rome to the north and in the vicinity of Padua and Verona. Well-known bathing establishments in Tuscany included the baths of San Giuliano (Pisa), several baths around Lucca (the baths of Corsena and Villa became particularly fashionable in the sixteenth century), San Casciano, south of Florence, and several bathing establishments near Siena. Poretta, another famous spa, was situated on one of the main routes from Bologna to Tuscany. The Sienese spa of Petriolo, which was celebrated in the fifteenth century, was virtually abandoned in the following century. In a letter dated 16 May 1461 Alessandro Gonzaga likened it to the Inferno because of the sulphurous smell of the steam. For a useful map and discussion of these spas, see D. S. Chambers, 'Spas in the Italian Renaissance', *Reconstructing the Renaissance*, M. A. Di Cesare (ed), New York, 1992, pp. 3-27. Chambers also includes in his analysis a number of contemporary letters which provide useful insight into social practices connected with bathing and health treatment.

⁴⁵ For discussions of bathhouses in Rome, see D. Gnoli, 'Descriptio Urbis o Censimento della popolazione di Roma avanti il sacco borbonico' *Archivio della società romana di Storia Patria*, 17, 1894, pp. 375-520; U. Gnoli, 'Stufe romane della Rinascenza', *Pan: Rassegna di lettere arte e musica*, 2, 1934, pp. 402-408; A. Del Vita, '"Le Stufe" di Roma', *Il Giornale d'Italia*, 24/07/1962, 176, p. 3; A. Esposito, 'Stufe e bagni pubblici a Roma nel rinascimento', *Taverne, locande e stufe a Roma nel Rinascimento*, Rome, 1999, pp. 77-93; A. Esposito, 'La città e i suoi abitanti', *Roma nel Rinascimento*, A. Pinelli (ed), Bari, 2001, pp. 3-47. *Ibid.*, p. 28 on the location of inns and taverns in Rome; *ibid.*, p. 30 for statistics emerging from the censuses of 1513 and 1517. Information on public bathhouses in Florence is available in archival documents and documents relating to the Office of the Night (ASF, *L'Ufficio della Notte*, 1432-1502), a government body set up with the primary task of curbing the practice of sodomy. See also B. Dei, *La cronica, dall'anno 1400 all'anno 1500*, Florence, 1500, p. 92. R. Barducci (ed), Florence, 1985. For several general references to bathing practices in Italy, see S. Bertelli, 'Percezione del corpo e spazi privati', *Ricerche storiche*, 16, 1986, vol. 3, pp. 496-522. See also R. Palmer, '"In this our lightye and learned tyme": Italian baths in the era of the Renaissance', *The Medical History of Waters and Spas*, R. Porter (ed), Supplement 10, London, 1990, pp. 14-22 and F. de Bonville, *The Book of the Bath*, New York, 1998. On the history of bathing in northern Europe between the Middle Ages and the sixteenth century, see P. Braunstein, 'Dal bagno pubblico alla cura corporale privata: tracce per una storia sociale dell'intimo', *Ricerche storiche*, 16, 1986, vol. 3, pp. 523-534. On the history of bathing in the UK, France and the USA, see L. Wright, *Clean and Decent. The Fascinating History of the Bathroom and the Water-Closet*, London 1960, 2nd edn, 2000. On bathing in classical antiquity, see R. Jackson, 'Water and Spas in the Classical World', *Medical History*, Supplement 10, 1990, pp. 1-13.

Sources chiefly concerned with medical treatment available at public baths are useful as regards bathing conventions in general but provide less insight into the perception of the body. The Latin medical tract, *Pratica Canonica* (Venice, 1458), written by Michele Savonarola (c. 1384-c. 1462) deals with the treatment of a range of conditions and diseases and provides a topography of the waters, relating them to a variety of disorders and diseases.⁴⁶ One of the most authoritative texts in the sixteenth century was *De thermis* by Andrea Bacci (Venice, 1571). Gilio Durante's *Trattato di dieci bagni* (Perugia, 1595) provides an account of ten of the best-known baths in the Roman countryside near Viterbo, the services they offered, and their allocation to different social classes. A later, illustrated text, Giovanni Bottarelli's *De bagni di San Casciano* (Florence, 1688) shows how bathing conventions began to change in the seventeenth century. The decline in public bathhouses in Europe has been chiefly attributed to injunctions against bathing issued by Catholic and Protestant church authorities in the wake of the arrival of the great plagues and the spread of syphilis, which was erroneously attributed to water and frightened customers away.

From the earliest treatises onwards waters were recommended for a range of disorders, such as indigestion, muscular pains, irregular menstruation, arthritis, nervous and rheumatic complaints. Hydrotherapy was prescribed for sterility. Several images of medical treatment available at baths have come down to us. In one such image, a man, presumably a barber-surgeon, is bleeding a female patient with cups (*Cornettatura*; in Bottarelli's treatise) (**figure 3**). Other images show medical treatment available at baths and the typical tools of the barber-surgeon's trade, both illustrated in Bottarelli's treatise (**figures 4 and 5**). Savonarola promoted bathing in cold water particularly for the young in the belief that it made them healthier.⁴⁷ In his *Bellezze*, Bocchi dedicates a passage to the River Arno, praising the delights and health benefits of bathing in the river in summertime. According to Bocchi and the Florentine municipal provisions⁴⁸, bathing not only cools the body but also cleanses it and helps cure a number of ailments in keeping with medical

⁴⁶ G. M. Savonarola, *Practica canonica, de febris i Michaelis Savonarolae item de pulsibus, de urinis, de egestionibus, de vermibus, de balneis omnibus Italiae*, Venice, 1561. Savonarola's comprehensive text superseded earlier tracts. On the influence of Pliny's *Natural History* on the vogue for medical baths among the literate elite and in relation to earlier sources, see D. S. Chambers (as in n. 44), pp. 4-6. In 1553 most of the literature on bathing was incorporated into one volume, *De balneis*, which was printed with woodcut illustrations by the Giunta press in Venice. Its publication led to the production of more texts documenting the popularity of specific baths and spas. On this point, see D. S. Chambers, *ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴⁷ G. M. Savonarola (as in n. 46), p. 118.

⁴⁸ ASF, *Statuti Comune di Firenze*, 31, 1451 Libro III, c. 337 r. It is not certain whether bathing in the River Arno was permitted by local legislation, though both Bocchi and Grazzini suggest people, particularly males, did bathe there. Florentine municipal provisions issued in 1415 permitted a number of activities in rivers in both the city of Florence and the surrounding countryside. Permitted activities include collecting stones along the river for building work provided duties were paid, washing clothes and textiles. Animals could also be taken there to drink water or be cooled down provided they did not have or were not harbouring a contagious disease.

prescriptions.⁴⁹ Swimming is also advocated as a sport which makes practitioners physically fit.

Military and non-military aristocracy and many other wealthy people made bath-going fashionable. There are surviving letters of the Gonzagas and their doctors referring to visits to spas. During their political ascendancy the Medici were regular frequenters of bathing establishments, not only those in the Florentine territory. Baths also attracted the clergy, from the highest dignitaries to the vagrant friar. Popes brought fame to the waters as did cardinals and numerous other dignitaries in their entourage, many of them suffering from diverse diseases. However, baths and spas in the countryside were not open exclusively to the elite but had a much wider appeal, as is suggested in a letter which Francesco Datini, a merchant from Prato, received from Petriolo in 1405: 'There are many Florentines here and so many people that one cannot move'.⁵⁰

Attendance at spas by the lower classes became the target of literary anecdote. Sercambi of Lucca tells the story of Ser Ganfo, a furrier, who was afraid of losing his identity when he found himself in the bath with so many naked people.⁵¹ Ugolino complained about arthritic peasants and artisans taking the waters at Montecatini. Other authors who did not tolerate the mixture of social classes include Andrea Bacci. In Bacci's eyes, bathing was a leisure pursuit for high-ranking citizens, whose desire for a quiet and orderly life required pleasant surroundings, good food and company, and he saw bathing as a moment of relaxation to be enjoyed in the company of musicians. Bacci's perception of bathing thus excluded the presence of people from lower social classes.⁵²

In cities public bathhouses were frequented not only by common folk but also artists, members of the clergy and foreign visitors, including Montaigne, whose travel diary of 1580-1581 provides accounts of his experiences in numerous spas.⁵³ Montaigne's accounts of visits to some of the most famous spas in Italy as well as

⁴⁹ F. Bocchi, *Le Bellezze della città di Fiorenza, dove à pieno di pittura, di scultura, di sacri templi, di palazzi i più notabili artifizi, et più preziosi si contengono*, Florence, 1591, reprint edition with introduction by J. Shearman, Farnborough, 1971, p. 135; hereafter *Bellezze*.

⁵⁰ 'Qui ci sono assai fiorentini e c'è tanta gente che non ci si vive', as cited by D. S. Chambers (as in n. 44), p. 14, n. 48.

⁵¹ G. Sercambi, *Novelle*, G. Sinicropi (ed.), Bari, 1972, nov. 3, l. 20-22. Also cited by D. S. Chambers (as in n. 44).

⁵² On the separation of the sexes in the late sixteenth century, see G. Durante, *Trattato di dieci bagni*, Perugia, 1595. Durante remarks that facilities varied depending on the social class of the customers; males and females from the upper classes used separate facilities, whereas baths for people of the lower classes were open and mixed. Medical treatment was said to be available in communal baths.

⁵³ M. de Montaigne, *Journal de Voyage en Italie par la Suisse et l'Allemagne en 1580 et 1581*, *Viaggio in Italia*, E. Camesasa (ed. and trans.), Milan, 2003.

urban baths in Rome refer to the practice of men bathing at establishments for women, illustrating that the separation of the sexes was not rigidly observed.⁵⁴

Set in contemporary Venice, Anton Francesco Doni's comedy, *Lo Stufarolo* (1559), recounts the adventures of Vincenzo, a stover. Vincenzo's crush on an attractive widow induces him to steal the moneybag and clothes of a wealthy gentleman attending the baths where he works. The swapping of identities occurs exclusively through the garments, since nakedness, the narrator concludes, makes everybody equal.⁵⁵ The popularity of baths thus gave rise to the mixing of social classes and gender, a phenomenon which tended to blur the boundaries between them.

With regard to bathing establishments and rivers there is ample evidence that sexual licence was one of the major attractions. Montaigne reports the widespread belief that married women were often impregnated at baths rather than at home by their husbands.⁵⁶ Floriano Dolfo's letter likens the baths of Porretta to a Golden Age of natural liberty where social distinctions are blurred and where 'true licentiousness is adored and practised':

Here women, however noble and gentle, are not recognisable from the plebes, both in their habits and how they live, in that everyone is equal. The pauper like the rich man takes his bread, wine, meat, a bed. [...] Any form of respect and decency is alien to the bathers, who are not ashamed to fart, shit, burp and piss in public, very often showing their backsides, dicks, and farts, without blushing, and since they say that coitus is bad for women drinking water, for the sake of the vagina, those maidens are glad to concede their behinds. Men and women go to the baths together and they get in the water naked. With their feet and hands and sweet nothings they take great pleasure. Husbands are not jealous of their wives, fathers of their daughters, brothers of their sisters, knowing that here death will take care of corruption. Everybody kills time playing games, dancing, singing, having parties, without a care for trades and crafts, not even if shops were open and sold their merchandise on Sundays.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 382.

⁵⁵ A. F. Doni, *Lo stufaiolo commedia e La Mula e la chiave dicerie di Anton Francesco Doni, nuova e compiuta edizione riveduta e corretta*, C. Teoli (ed), Milan, 1863; first published in Lucca in 1861. An autograph copy with Doni's own decorative art work is kept in the Biblioteca Riccardiana, Florence, Ms. 1184. On conclusions regarding nakedness, see p. 173.

⁵⁶ M. de Montaigne (as in n. 53), p. 344.

⁵⁷ ASMn, G b. 1143. The letter is mentioned in A. Luzio and R. Renier, 'La Cultura e le relazioni letterarie di Isabella d'Este', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 37, 1901, 243 n. 1: 'L'acqua del bagno de la Porretta [.....] mi pare esser simile a quella piscina probatica narrata da Santo Ioanne nel suo evangelio, ma questa suole curare tutte le infirmitate [.....] veramente, Illustrissimo principe, in questo solo loco fra tuti i loci de' cristiani se adora et mantene la vera libertade che mi resemela quella prima etade aurea, che senza alcuna discrezione et cognizione de pronomi ogni soa cosa era in comune. Qui le donne quantunque nobile et gentile non si cognoscono de la plebe, si nele loro habitatione como nel vivere, che ad ogni homo è eguale. A la doza dove del saxo la beata acqua deriva, cossi si serve il povereto como lo richo uno pane, uno vino, una carne, uno lecto ad ogni persona parimente, [.....]. Ogni reverentia et pudore è alieno da li bagnaroli, che non si vergognano pedere, cacare, rutare et pissare in publico, mostrando spessissime volte senza rubore li culli, cazi et pete [.....] et perché il coito dicono esser nocivo a le done che beno l'acqua per amore de la matrice, si contentano et consentono queste damigelle esser potute nel buso del cullo [.....] insieme maschi e femine vanno al bagno et entrano nel'acqua ignudi, et qui cum piedi et mano et parolete amorose se piglianno grandissimo piacere; il marito non ha gelosia de la moglie, il patre di la figlia, el fratello de la sorella, sapendo che la morte qui custodisse la corruptione [.....] tute consumano il loro tempo in giochi, balli, canti et feste senza pensiero de alcuna mercantia o arte, e le botteghe non meno se apreno et vendesse le robe la domenica'.

Grazzini's poem *In lode del bagnarsi in Arno* describes an all-male setting where scantily dressed male bodies could be displayed and observed. The poem suggests a context for the practice of sodomy and male prostitution. Bathing constitutes the prelude to sexual intercourse between males from different social backgrounds, with the poorest working as male prostitutes.⁵⁸ Wealthier youths are recognised by their garments, the presence of servants and by the fact that they are accompanied home by boys who are said to provide 'good company'. The mating ritual is concluded in a closed, private setting with a good meal and heavy drinking ('poi mangiando e bevando da Tedesco'). Adolescents ('fanciulli o garzoni') are said to attract the attention of older males. The poem contains a number of sexual allusions, such as 'hammer and fantasy' ('martello e fantasia'), as well as references to bodily contact, which comprises the ploy of being taught to swim.⁵⁹ A painting by Passignano (Domenico Cresti; 1559-1638), *Bathers at San Niccolò* (1600; private collection), (figure 6) shares striking similarities with Grazzini's poem, in that it depicts nude males performing many of the actions described in the poem. For example, Grazzini refers to diving ('those diving'), which matches the male figures diving into the water in the bottom right-hand corner of the picture. The circle of youths on the left-hand side of the picture visualises the youths who are jumping ('che saltano') and performing acrobatics ('giostrando'). Finally, a figure in the foreground is pointing to a house in the distance, suggesting this was the typical setting for the amorous encounters that followed.⁶⁰

A number of other sources pertaining to the urban bathhouse depict it as a typical setting for illicit sex, noting that bawds, stovers, and barber-surgeons were all involved in promoting such activities.⁶¹ Garzoni associates the stover with 'the filth of flesh' ('sporczia della carne') because he also worked as a pimp ('ruffiano') and rented out rooms. The bathhouse is presented as a place of 'shameful and indecent carnal desires' ('vergognose e disoneste libidini carnali'). In the *Ragionamenti*, Aretino writes that barber-surgeons often acted as go-betweens for prostitutes and clients.⁶² Grazzini's poem *Degli stufaroli* reads like an advertisement

⁵⁸ On the practice of sodomy and male prostitution in sixteenth-century Florence, see M. Rocke, *Forbidden Friendships*, Oxford, 1996.

⁵⁹ A. F. Grazzini, *In lode del bagnarsi in Arno*, *Opere di Anton Francesco Grazzini*, G. Davico Bonino (ed.), Turin, 1974, pp. 412-416.

⁶⁰ For a Neoplatonic reading of this painting, see C. del Bravo 'Il Passignano e la Libertà', *Artista*, 1999, pp. 150-163.

⁶¹ T. Garzoni (as in n. 8), p. 1375. Garzoni casts the barber-surgeon as a jack-of-all-trades. Barber-surgeons performed a number of tasks seen as inferior to the science of medicine, such as shaving, cutting hair, massages, bloodletting, dressing wounds and extracting bad teeth. The barber-surgeon also played musical instruments like the lute, zither, and violin, made nets, carved meat and served at tables. Garzoni provides a rather negative account of the barber-surgeon, casting him as a gossip and criticising him for pampering old men. A. F. Grazzini lists the stover's duties as doing laundry, shaving customers and performing massages. See A. F. Grazzini, *Degli Stufaioli, Le rime burlesche edite e inedite di Anton Francesco Grazzini detto il Lasca*, C. Verzone (ed.), Florence, 1882, pp. 205-206.

⁶² P. Aretino (as in n. 21), p. 115.

of the public bathhouse. Addressed to women, it sums up many of the tasks performed by the *stufarolo* and the services available at the bathhouse, highlighting the benefits of personal hygiene, washing, taking a hot bath, and particularly of massage, which is described as a great pleasure ('sommio diletto').⁶³ The account of Montaigne's visit to the baths of San Marco in Rome also refers to the custom of being massaged with a female companion.⁶⁴ Allusions to sexual activities add spice to Grazzini's poem. Grazzini refers to secret rooms ('stanze segrete') and invites women to bring along their spouse or lover and join in a three-way encounter ('lasciate stropicciarvi a noi'). Grazzini's poem ends with a description of the physical endowments of the *stufarolo*, whose merchandise on offer is revealed through his light shirt.

Finally, a number of images of bathers give an indication of both bathing rituals and the observation of the live model in everyday settings, which can be contrasted with earlier images. Memmo de Filipuccio's *The Married Couple's Bath* (c. 1317; San Gimignano, Palazzo del Popolo) (**figure 7**) shows a young couple bathing together. An improvised canopy has been placed over a bath tub and a woman, bringing hot water, stands waiting nearby with towels. In the background there is a bedroom where the spouses can go afterwards. The image of the happy couple is in stark contrast to later verbal and visual sources, which tend to emphasise promiscuity.

Several artists are known to have produced bathing and related scenes. Raphael's drawing, *Two Male Nudes Undressed for Bathing*, (pen with brown ink; Vienna, Albertina, Sr 308, r 67, inv. 250) (**figure 8**), is an interesting image of two bathers seen from the back as they are getting into the water. Perino Del Vaga's *Bath of Woman* (pen and ink with wash; Horne Museum, Sheet H, 55550) (**figure 9**) shows several women washing and drying themselves, while another female figure sleeps in a bed in an adjacent room. One of the most famous bathing scenes is found in Michelangelo's *Cartoon for the Battle of Cascina* (1542; copy by Aristotle da San Gallo; Norfolk, Holkham Estate) (**figure 10**), which makes a strong connection between bathing in the River Arno and an important historical event. The fresco was to adorn Palazzo Vecchio and the choice of this scene from daily life strongly suggests that it would have had particular significance in the Florentine context and with local viewers.

⁶³ A. F. Grazzini (as in n. 61), pp. 205-206.

⁶⁴ M. de Montaigne (as in n. 53), p. 264.

Nude Images in Public Bathhouses and the Private Bathroom

Erasmus in a passage cited by Johannus Molanus speaks of taverns and market places where nude images may be expected to occur. Both Savonarola and Aretino mention the presence of mirrors and images in bathhouses and brothels for the viewing of depicted and real bodies.⁶⁵ Unfortunately, there is no trace of the kind of images which are reported to have adorned the walls of bathhouses and brothels. There is, however, other verbal evidence of the use of mirrors in bathing establishments, underpinning the claims of Savonarola and Aretino. In his *De viris illustribus* (1456), Bartolommeo Fazio refers to a painting now lost of a woman leaving the bath. The painting, which is by Jan van Eyck, showed 'only the face and breast but then represented the hind parts of her body in a mirror painted on the wall opposite, so that you may see her back as well as her breast'.⁶⁶ These sources all suggest that the presence of mirrors augmented the pleasure of viewing living bodies that were naked or sparsely clad.

In the first half of the Cinquecento the private bathroom was the preserve of the wealthiest and most innovative clients. Evidence available indicates that there were only around ten such bathrooms in Rome, most of which are known to us only through descriptions and drawings.⁶⁷ These bathrooms were usually small and intimate spaces inspired by ancient Roman baths as described by Vitruvius and were equipped with a bath tub and connected to the supply of hot and cold water.⁶⁸ They were richly adorned with frescoes, mosaics and small statues.

Decorative schemes for the private bathroom for which extant documentation is available include designs by Raphael, Antonio San Gallo the Younger, and Giulio Romano. In the 1568 edition of the *Lives*, Giorgio Vasari provides descriptions of a number of private bathrooms, including that of François I at Fontainebleau. Designs were frequently based on ancient grotesques discovered during the excavation of

⁶⁵ For Molanus's citation of Erasmus, see D. Freedberg, 'Johannes Molanus on provocative paintings: *De historia sanctorum imaginum et picturarum*, Book II, Chapter 42', *JWCI*, 1971, vol. 34, pp. 229-45. On the presence of mirrors in public bathhouses, see G.M. Savonarola (as in n. 46), p. 121: '... nam ornatum esse debet ut inde delectabilior reddatur: quoniam multae stationis locus esse debet, quamobrem potentes luminaria vitris omata, ac picturis amenis eam fabricant, et ut locus temper iocundior reddatur, ia eo sint, quae animum dulciter molliant'. For Aretino's reference to the adornment of bathhouses and brothels, see P. Aretino 1534 (as in n. 21), p. 19. The passage from Aretino is cited in full below.

⁶⁶ See M. Baxandall, 'Bartolommeo Facius on Painting', *JWCI*, vol. 28, 1964, p. 102.

⁶⁷ For a discussion of private bathrooms in Rome, see *Der römische Palastbau der Hochrenaissance*, C. L. Frommel (ed), Tübingen, 1973.

⁶⁸ On the use of mosaics and stones for flooring suited to bathrooms, see Vasari, G., *Le Vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori nelle redazioni del 1550-1568*, P. Barocchi and R. Bettarini (eds), 6 vols., Florence, 1966-1967, vol. 1, p. 75; hereafter VBB. All subsequent translations of passages from the *Lives* are taken or adapted from G. Bull, unless otherwise specified. For the English translation of selected passages, see Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, trans. G. Bull, 2 vols., London, 1987. For a detailed description of the construction and interior design of private bathrooms based on the designs for the bathroom of Federico da Montefeltro in Urbino, the first private bathroom constructed in Renaissance Italy and a model for subsequent designs, see F. di Giorgio Martini, *Trattati di architettura, ingegneria e arte militare*, ed. C. Maltese, trans. L. M. Degrossi, 2 vols., Milan, 1967, vol. 1, p. 25.

Roman villas. The grotesque was perceived as an ornamental motif comprising 'extravagant and fantastical forms' ('forme stravaganti e fantastiche') used to 'adorn and generate a delightful effect' ('per ornare e dare vaghezza') and was considered particularly suited to a range of private and semi-private spaces, such as loggias, studies, gardens, chambers, courtyards, staircases, bathrooms, and every type of small room'.⁶⁹ Armenini observes that the painter can draw on and adapt earlier grotesque designs in accordance with his own style and the room to be adorned. With regard to the decoration of the private bathroom, Armenini expresses a predilection for aquatic themes.⁷⁰

The decoration of the bathroom (*stufetta*) of Cardinal Bernardo Dovizi da Bibbiena in his apartment in the Vatican Palace and located in the vicinity of his bedroom was executed by Raphael and his workshop in the spring and summer of 1516. The decorative scheme was provided by the cardinal, who was a learned humanist familiar with Neoplatonic philosophy, and clearly had a predilection for erotic nudes. The ecclesiastic was also the author of *La Calandria*, a play full of sexual puns which was performed at the papal court of Leo X in 1514. The decorative scheme was composed of grotesques, marble reliefs, niches and mythological paintings. Now badly damaged, the mythological scenes are also known to us through a series of engravings by Marco Dente and Marcantonio Raimondi.

The scenes in question centre on the figure of Venus. On the eastern wall Venus is shown stepping into her shell with her back turned to the viewer. On the northern wall she is represented lying with Adonis who is caressing her breast (Venus and Adonis, 1516; Rome, Vatican, Bathroom of Cardinal Dovizi da Bibbiena) (**figure 11**) while on another wall she is shown wounded by Cupid; another image shows her riding on a sea monster.⁷¹ A marble statue of Venus originally designed for the *stufa* was subsequently requested by Pietro Bembo.⁷² On the western wall there is an image of Pan with an erect penis as he ogles a nymph who sits combing her hair with her legs apart.

Decorative projects for the private bathrooms of Clement VII in Castel Sant'Angelo, the datary Gian Matteo Giberti in the Vatican palace, and Baldassare Turini da Pescia in villa Lante were commissioned from Giulio Romano and Giovanni da

⁶⁹ G. B. Armenini, *De veri precetti della pittura*, M. Gorreri (ed), Turin, 1988, p. 201: 'forme stravaganti e fantastiche [.....] per ornare e dare vaghezza [.....] logge, studi, giardini, camere, cortili, scale, bagni, stufe, anditi e ogni sorte di vani minori. All English translations are taken from or based on the English text translated and analysed by E. J. Olszewski. See G. B. Armenini, *On the True Precepts of the Art of Painting*, E. J. Olszewski, New York, 1977.

⁷⁰ G. B. Armenini (as in n. 69), p. 202.

⁷¹ On the decorative scheme, see H. Malme, 'La "stufetta" del Cardinal Bibbiena e l'iconografia dei suoi affreschi principali', *Quando gli dei si spogliano: Il bagno di Clemente VII a Castel Sant'Angelo e le altre stufe romane del primo Cinquecento*, Rome 1984, esp. pp. 36-39.

⁷² As cited by P. Tinagli (as in n. 14), p. 131.

Udine. Although the images painted in Turini's bathroom are now destroyed, the subject of the scenes can be inferred from Vasari's brief description of them:

In the bathrooms of the palace, with the help of his young men, Giulio painted some scenes of Venus and Cupid, and of Apollo and Hyacinth, which have all appeared as engravings.⁷³

One image, which seems to have survived from the Turini bathroom, is a drawing of *Apollo and Cyparissus* or *Hyacinth* by Giulio Romano, now in the Nationalmuseum, Stockholm (**figure 12**). The narrative content has been minimised. The drawing explicitly represents sexual foreplay and includes a voyeur commenting on the scene with a lustful gesture. The slung-leg posture signifies sexual intercourse and also appears in the *Apollo and Hyacinth* engraving after Perino del Vaga (Istituto nazionale per la Grafica, Rome FC 4947), in which Cupid plays the role of voyeur and comments on the scene by pulling away the drapery covering the genitals.

The decoration of the bathroom of Clement VII, now attributed to Giulio Romano and Giovanni da Udine, was based on erotic scenes, seven images of thrones of the gods, grotesques, as well as marine and aquatic motifs. In the biography of Giovanni da Udine, Vasari describes the bathroom as 'most beautiful'.⁷⁴ The main scenes depict mythological stories in connection with Venus. One scene shows Venus sitting at her toilette awaiting her lover, while Vulcan is on the point of claiming revenge for his wife's love affair with Mars (c. 1527-1530; Rome, Castel Sant'Angelo, Bathroom of Clement VII) (**figure 13**). Another scene depicts Venus bathing and playing in the water with Cupid, nymphs and a small cast of other figures against the backdrop of an idyllic landscape.

Beautiful female figures and physical love are thus the focal point of the decorative scheme, which contains further allusions to bathing in the seven images of thrones, of which now only four are easily discernible.⁷⁵ The painting showing the garments and attributes of Mars draped over the throne alludes to undressing. The abandoned garments are suggestive of the cardinal's own undressing before bathing surrounded by images of Venus. This reading fits with a contemporary account provided by Johann Carl von Fichard, who describes the bathroom as pleasantly adorned. Fichard imagines to himself the bathing ritual performed by the ecclesiastic:

⁷³ VBB, 1550 & expanded in the 1568 edn., vol. 5, p. 64: 'Nella stufa di questo palazzo dipinse Giulio alcune storie di Venere e d'Apollo e di Giacinto, con l'aiuto de' suoi giovani che sono in stampa'.

⁷⁴ VBB, vol. 5, p. 558: '.... fece Giovanni in Castel Sant'Angelo una stufa bellissima; e nel palazzo del papa, oltre alle già dette molte altre minuzie, che per brevità si lasciano'. For documents pertaining to the payment of Giovanni for the decorations, see B. Contardi, 'Il bagno di Clemente VII in Castel Sant'Angelo' (as in n. 71), pp. 70-71. For a detailed description of the architectural and decorative organisation, see L. Saari, 'Lettura della decorazione pittorica del bagno di Clemente VII', *ibid.*, p. 73.

⁷⁵ For a detailed description of these seven paintings, see B. Contardi (as in n. 74), p. 82.

Here, sitting in an arched tub, his Holiness bathes in hot water poured by a young nude woman of bronze. Here are depicted also young nude women, which, I am sure, touch him with the greatest devotion.⁷⁶

In the Palazzo Magno, the residence of the Archbishop of Trent, the most erotic nudes were depicted near the bathrooms, along more secluded corridors.⁷⁷ Extant documentation pertaining to the decoration of the palace suggests that mythological scenes and nude images were seen as appropriate in certain parts of the building. The sensuous nudes near the bathroom suggest that such images were most appropriate near a room where undressing took place, while also giving pleasure to the viewer.

The Pursuit of Sexual Pleasure

Although it is impossible to reconstruct the sex life of the average Italian during the Renaissance, a range of visual and verbal sources available to us convey a great deal about attitudes towards sex and the naked body in daily life. These sources cast a new light on the perception of and responses to the representation of the nude in art. Whereas the kinds of prescriptions promoted by men of the church yield less tolerant views and the fear that their directives were not always followed rather than hard facts, other sources bear testimony to generally tolerant attitudes towards sexual pleasure and a widespread interest in a range of sexual matters, such as sterility, conception, orgasm, and a keen interest in sexual performance.

The system of religious values constructed by the Catholic Church made sexuality an arena for committing major sins and established a hierarchy of transgressions. While unmarried sexual partners could be reproached for illicit coupling, everyone was to avoid forbidden positions. A range of sexual postures were considered to be "contrary to nature" or "unnatural", such as entering the "wrong" organ and assuming the "wrong" coital position. These practices were banned as sinful because they were seen to frustrate the possibility of procreation. Homosexual and heterosexual sodomy were considered the most abhorrent of all sinful sexual acts. The sexual prescriptions promoted by the church drew on medical theories. While one current of the church allowed some degree of sexual pleasure for purposes of procreation, another current strongly disapproved of physical pleasure and

⁷⁶ J. Fichard, 'Observationes antiquitatum et aliarum rerum memorabilium quae Romae videntur. Collectae per me Joannem Fichardum J. C. in eadem urbe mense VIIbri et VIIIbri. Anno MDXXXVI', *Frankfurtisches Archiv für ältere Deutsche Literatur und Geschichte*, Frankfurt, 1815, vol. 3, pp. 15-74; 'Istic sedens sanctissimus in labro quodam ovato lavat calida, quae per nudam quandam aeream puellam subministratur. Sunt et plures inibi puellae depictae. Ex quibus non dubito quin magna devotione tangatur'. As cited in *Quando gli dei si spogliano* (as in n. 71), pp. 68-69.

⁷⁷ For a detailed description of these paintings see E. Chini, F. De Gramatica, (eds), *Il Magno Palazzo di Bernardo Cles Principe Vescovo di Trento*, Trento, 1985.

considered sexual desire under any circumstances to be a manifestation of lust, one of the seven deadly sins.⁷⁸

Prescriptions regarding sexual behaviour were verbally communicated in confessors' books. Written in the vernacular, these texts provided acceptable terms for referring to various parts of the body during confession, though any reference to sex was generally seen as a potential danger to the layperson. The popular fifteenth-century text by Cherubino da Siena, *Regole della vita matrimoniale* (Rules of Married Life), prescribes acceptable sexual behaviour of married couples in accordance with church rulings without too much clinical terminology. Comments hinting at the lack of servants strongly suggest that the book was not intended for an aristocratic or patrician audience.

Cherubino constructed narrow parameters within which married couples could engage in sexual intercourse without sinning. The four rules determining the legitimacy of a request for intercourse comprise intention, timing, place, and mode.⁷⁹ Of particular interest is the prohibition of sex in public places, such as churches, open fields and public squares, as well as the prescription that sexual activity should not involve any part of the body not needed for procreation, such as the ears, nose, eyes, mouth, and tongue, including French kissing. Cherubino strongly disapproved of couples touching and kissing decent let alone 'indecent parts' ('parti disonesti'), forbidding both oral and anal intercourse. He also stresses that soaps and perfumes are for good personal hygiene rather than for sexual arousal.

Despite the popularity of texts like Cherubino's both before and after the Counter-Reformation, there is ample evidence to suggest that attitudes towards sex were beginning to change. The earliest verbal evidence for such changes can be traced to aristocratic circles. Michele Savonarola, the author of a handwritten

⁷⁸ The more tolerant view was based on the writings of Galen, who observed that women produced their own generative seed, necessary for conception, and that its release during intercourse gave the female intense pleasure. The theologians who accepted this view were prepared to accept some degree of pleasure though where it began and ended was much debated. The belief that women play an essential role in procreation, vaguely equal to that of men, had become common in popular literature certainly by the mid-sixteenth century. On this last point, see R. M. Bell (as in n. 8), p. 26. On Renaissance theories and practices concerning conception, *ibid.*, pp. 17-72.

⁷⁹ Legitimate intention was generally understood as procreation but was also seen as a way of preventing infidelity on both parts. Couples were to abstain from sex on holy days, during pregnancy, after childbirth, during breastfeeding, and before the official blessing. The proper place for intercourse was the marriage bed, though Cherubino recommends that couples sleep in separate beds. The missionary position with the woman looking towards heaven and the man towards earth is considered the only acceptable position. Inverted and lateral positions are only acceptable if dictated by some physical handicap. Any other position is prohibited. In addition, men should always ejaculate in the vagina, while women are forbidden from impeding conception and inducing abortion. Cherubino does not make precise prescriptions as regards frequency, though he cites a number of rather serious disorders caused by excessive frequency. On these points, see R. M. Bell (as in n. 8), pp. 36-39.

pregnancy guide for noble women of Ferrara, wrote positively of the importance of foreplay, convinced that it aided conception.⁸⁰

The accounts provided by Aretino and Burchard discussed above give an indication of sexual interests and practices in aristocratic and ecclesiastical settings. A late fifteenth-century account of a pardon granted to a certain Bartolomeo de ser Jacomo by Caterina Sforza, the ruler of Forlì is another example of the more general permissiveness towards sexual intercourse for pure pleasure. The magnanimity of Caterina and the Duchess of Ferrara saved Bartolomeo from the death sentence by absolving a most indecent act ('disonestissimo') involving heterosexual sodomy, an account of which provided entertainment for the two noblewomen who wanted to hear and learn about the practice.⁸¹

Several other instances of moral laxity involving the clergy and other "respectable" citizens were reported during the period. In his *Vita*, Cellini, who boasts of his own sexual escapades with both males and females, denounces the ostentation and moral laxity of clerics in Rome, claiming that priests were among the most frequent victims of syphilis.⁸² Apart from his attack on convents in the *Ragionamenti*, Aretino makes explicit references to the sexual escapades of clerics at the papal court in Rome in the *Sonetti lussuriosi* accompanying Giulio Romano's *Modi*. In his discussion of the convent-brothel Aretino refers to the presence of sex toys (murano glass vibrators), orgies, the range of sexual positions requested, vaginal and anal sex, voyeurism, pornographic booklets owned by the nuns, as well as erotic images painted in brothels.⁸³ His reference to such images in the convent-brothel suggests that they served to incite lust and add spice to intercourse:

In the last picture there were painted all the positions and ways of fucking and of being fucked. And the nuns are obliged, before performing them with their friends, to try out the lively postures that are painted.⁸⁴

Burchard's description of the orgy in the Vatican illustrates that certain sections of the clergy delighted in more unusual sexual escapades and that voyeurism was not uncommon. Although cloistered life was supposed to be exemplary and to represent the moral salvation of the community, several contemporary commentators doubted the nuns' immaculacy. Their criticism was tantamount to

⁸⁰ M. Savonarola, *Il trattato ginecologico-pediatrico in volgare: ad mulieres ferrarienses de regimine pregnantium et noviter natorum usque ad septemniun* di Michele Savonarola, L. Belloni (ed), Milan, 1952, pp. 41-43.

⁸¹ For a full account of the episode, see M. Milani, *Piccole storie di stregoneria nella Venezia del '500*, Verona, 1989, pp. 179-185.

⁸² B. Cellini, *La Vita*, G. Davico Bonino (ed), Turin, 1982, p. 57.

⁸³ P. Aretino (as in n. 21), pp. 16-19, 22-23, 27, 36, and 46.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19: 'Nell'ultimo quadro ci erano dipinte tutti i modi e tutte le vie che si può chiavare e farsi chiavare; e sono obbligate le moniche, prima che le mettino in campo con gli amici loro, di provare di stare negli atti vivi che stanno dipinte: e questo si fa per non rimanere goffe nel letto, come rimangono alcune che si piantano là in quattro senza odore e e senza sapore, che chi ne gusta ne ha quel piacere che si ha di una minestra di fave senza olio e senza sale'.

accusing the daughters of members of the upper classes of immoral behaviour. Aretino's claim that public authorities tolerated permissive behaviour in convents is not isolated in the sixteenth century. Grazzini's satirical poem *Alle Puttane quando fu proibito loro per legge di poter andare in cocchio, né portar drappi, né perle né oro*, ends with the suggestion that lowly prostitutes go to the Convertite, a religious institution which opened its doors to repentant prostitutes.⁸⁵ According to Grazzini, they will become 'more beautiful and richer' ('più belle e più ricche') at the Convertite. There is documentary evidence to show that convents were the site of scandals, fighting and rape and that some of them were dubbed as brothels. In trials nuns re-asserted the freedom of convent life. Magistrates threatened heavy punishments to little avail. According to the chronicler Girolamo Priuli, new laws prescribing a prison sentence and a fine for anyone known to have had sex with a nun were short-lived in Venice.⁸⁶

The new focus on sexual experimentation and permissiveness is attested across the social spectrum, as can be seen in the discussion above on everyday contexts where the body was on display. A range of texts produced in the sixteenth century, ranging from cheap pamphlets to elegant herbals, contain numerous remedies for a variety of sexual problems and give increasing prominence to sexual performance and pleasure for its own sake.⁸⁷ It is highly significant that Aretino's *Ragionamenti* presents bawds, prostitutes and mid-wives as experts on a range of sexual matters and beauty treatment, since the knowledge possessed by these marginal yet key figures is disseminated in advice manuals and books of secrets.

The wealth of information available to the general public regards conception, contraception, aphrodisiacs, impotence, sterility, sperm production, as well as remedies for performance doubts and failures.⁸⁸ Furthermore, advice is given not only on curing infertility, but also on terminating unwanted pregnancies.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ A. F. Grazzini (as in n. 61), *Alle Puttane quando fu proibito loro per legge di poter andare in cocchio, né portar drappi, né perle né oro*, pp. 442-445.

⁸⁶ As cited by G. Scarabello, *Tiziano e Venezia* (as in n. 1), pp. 75-84.

⁸⁷ One of the most important herbals produced during the sixteenth century was P. A. Mattioli's *Discorsi*, (Venice, 1585). The text translated and updated the influential work of Pedanius Dioscorides of Anazarba (first or second century AD) which contained descriptions of remedies used to treat illnesses at that time. Mattioli added an extensive list of his own remedies as well as an index and illustrations. Significantly, the text was produced in Italian, thus reaching out to a wider audience. The text provided herbalists, the main purchasers, with an authoritative guide in the booming business of selling all kinds of drugs. The text found imitators in the form of less expensive books on home remedies. C. Durante's *Herbaio nuovo di Castore Durante, medico e cittadino romano* (Rome, 1585), was another popular herbal and drew widely on earlier medical texts.

⁸⁸ For a discussion of the eight factors which Marinello believes determine the sex of a child, see R. M. Bell (as in n. 8), pp. 25-26.

⁸⁹ Sections on menstruation provided advice on how to avoid pregnancy. Herbs and remedies made from plants such as ferule, pomegranate, juniper, and pennyroyal were commonly recommended for terminating pregnancy. On the use of linseed oil as a possible anti-contraceptive during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as well as the use of oils rubbed on the penis to stimulate both partners, see E. Renzetti (as in n. 8), pp. 58-59. L. Fioravanti recommends a mixture of herbs and plants to induce menstruation; see L. Fioravanti, *La chirurgia*, Venice, 1582, book three, chapter 67. Although Marinello discusses a range of concoctions, he writes that provoking menstruation during pregnancy is a serious

Sometimes remedies are given to speed up as well as slow down ejaculation, indicating that the remedies catered for the different needs of sexual partners.⁹⁰

In the *Herbaio nuovo*, Castore Durante claims that betel, a herb which had been recently imported from India, aroused the passions of Venus. Timoteo Rosselli discusses aphrodisiacs, which are listed under foods. Recipes to improve coitus promise 'a great performance' ('un'operazione mirabile').⁹¹ Gabriele Faloppio mentions recipes to make men more virile.⁹² In his *Secreti medicinali* (1561; Venice), Pietro Bairo provides erection remedies and recommends foods which 'improve coitus' ('fortificano coito'), a substance to 'arouse Venus', and one to increase sperm production, as well as ointments that guarantee prolonged pleasure.⁹³ Marinello refers to ointments that are supposed to enhance sexual performance. Used during coitus, these ointments will 'delight the lady and get her to love you more', and 'give her a great experience'.

Recurrent terminology for coitus in books of secrets and advice manuals is indicative of a general preoccupation with sexual pleasure. Such expressions include 'excite Venus' ('eccitare Venere'), 'using coitus more forcefully' ('a usare con forza il coito'), and 'making a woman love only you' ('a far sì che una donna ami solo te'). In several later texts, the term 'lust' ('lussuriare') tends to replace the expression 'using coitus more forcefully', suggesting that sexual pleasure increasingly became the main concern.⁹⁴

Preoccupation with sexual pleasure for its own sake brought with it the search for the perfect partner. A number of sources, sometimes polemically, ironically, or humorously, portray the lowly male as the most virile and skilful lover. In the *Ragionamenti*, Aretino states that in brothels and in the convent-brothel mentioned above, men of the lower classes, such as *facchini* or dockworkers, are valued as skilful lovers despite their shoddy appearance and coarse manners.⁹⁵

sin. He also lists a series of ailments affecting men who have sexual intercourse with menstruating women; see G. Marinello 1563 (as in n. 15) pp. 99, 107-108, and 122. C. Durante provides one hundred and sixty formulas to provoke menstruation. G. Ruscelli discusses the properties of the root of pimpinella and maintains that it helps prevent pregnancy; see G. Ruscelli, *I secreti di Don Alessio Piemontese*, Venice, 1555, p. 351. In *Secreti medicinali*, Venice, 1561, p. 192, P. Bairo, holds that alum and saltpetre are the best anti-contraceptives. On the issue of contraception in Renaissance Italy, see J. M. Riddle, *Contraception and Abortion from the Ancient World to the Renaissance*, Cambridge, Mass., 1992, pp. 144-158. A rich source for Florentine contraceptive methods is ASF, *Ufficiali dell'Onestà*, 2, *Condannazioni*, 1421-1523.

⁹⁰ C. Durante provides a list of foods believed to increase sperm production and quicken ejaculation, as well as recipes to inhibit sperm production and retard ejaculation; C. Durante (as in n. 87), pp. 32, 51, 100, 154, 155, 68, 86, 245, 289. Mattioli's herbal provides remedies designed to suppress desire both for the chaste and for those who wish to maintain their high sexual drive by avoiding debilitating foods.

⁹¹ T. Rosselli, *Della summa de' secreti universali in ogni materia*, Venice, 1561, pp. 57-68.

⁹² G. Faloppio, *Secreti diversi et miracolosi*, Venice, 1563, p. 121.

⁹³ P. Bairo (as in n. 89), pp. 215-216.

⁹⁴ This terminology is discussed by E. Renzetti (as in n. 8).

⁹⁵ P. Aretino (as in n. 21), pp. 272-273.

A number of writers prescribed ideal physical features for men and women wishing to procreate, and most believed that physically strong males were the most apt for producing healthy male offspring. Marinello associates a lack of 'virile virtue' ('virtù virile') with thin and weak people.⁹⁶ Mercurio believes that a strong simpleton can give his female partner great pleasure in the delectations of Venus and that this is conducive to the conception of a bright child.⁹⁷

Given the widespread preoccupation with enhanced sexual performance and the availability of advice books and herbal medicinals designed to enhance performance, it is hardly surprising that erotic prints and images became popular. Although not originally intended for a large audience, Giulio Romano's *Modi* and Aretino's accompanying sonnets, *Sonetti lussuriosi*, are important for our understanding of eroticism and the interest in sexual acrobatics, particularly because variations of them spread across other parts of Italy and to other European countries.⁹⁸ Romano's images of sexual intercourse may not have been as isolated as one might suppose. One such image is Titian's drawing, *The Couple of Lovers* (1564-1568; Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum) (**figure 14**).⁹⁹

Aretino added his *Sonetti* to the prints in a second edition in 1525 and sent a copy to Cesare Fregoso, to whom he wrote 'the book of sonnets and lustful figures you so desired', suggesting that the gift was sent with pride.¹⁰⁰ The *Modi* immediately attracted much attention in Rome, particularly among high prelates, many of whom kept mistresses. The images are non-narrative and focus almost entirely on the sexual act, showing readers how to vary and enhance their love-making. Both the engravings of the positions of love-making and the sonnets contravene sexual conventions acceptable to the church and thus became synonymous with illicit sexual acts. The sonnets make more references to anal sex than the actual drawings suggest; similar references to the vogue for anal sex can be found in Aretino's *Ragionamenti*. The women in the images and sonnets take an active part in the dialogue, a practice which also contravened the church's rules regarding the passive role of women. In the sonnet to position 12 the woman feigns the voice of Venus, inciting her lover with the kind of expressions that appear in advice manuals and books of secrets.

⁹⁶ G. Marinello (as in n. 15), p. 23.

⁹⁷ G. Mercurio (as in n. 15), pp. 92-95.

⁹⁸ In 1524 Marcantonio Raimondi made engravings of Romano's drawings when the artist was already at the court of Federico Gonzaga in Mantua. Our knowledge of the *Modi* is based on woodcuts printed in a sixteenth-century book with the sonnets, packaged for a wider audience. Surviving copies of the *Modi* comprise two examples of engravings of Position 1 kept in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, and the British Museum, London, while a woodcut of Position 2 is in the Albertina, Vienna. The British Museum also houses nine fragments (heads, torsos, etc.).

⁹⁹ See Titian's drawing *The Couple of Lovers* (Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum; 1564-8), repr. in J. Pope-Hennessy, *Tiziano, Schede e cronologia* di S. Zuffi, Milan, 2004, p. 30.

¹⁰⁰ P. Aretino, *Lettere*, F. Erspamer (ed), Parma, 1995, pp. 40-41, letter dated 9 November 1527.

Various suppositions have been made as to the possible source of inspiration of the *Modi*. Bette Talvacchia has suggested that Romano took his inspiration from antique precedents and particularly from a collection of antique medallions containing erotic images.¹⁰¹ However, an understanding of the context in which the *Modi* and the *Sonnetti lussuriosi* were produced provides clues as to other possible sources. Brothels and the world of prostitution both provided an everyday context for the images and text of the *Modi*. A drawing by Romano indicates that he was familiar with bathing establishments. The drawing reproduces, with some differences, the detail on the left of the fresco on one of the eleven allegorical subjects of human life executed in 1531 in the Loggia della Grotta, Palazzo del Te. Likewise, an engraving after Romano's drawing *Illness* (c. 1540; Cambridge, Mass., Fitzwilliam Museum) (**figure 15**) seems set in a public bathhouse.¹⁰² A barber-surgeon is performing bloodletting to a naked female patient and is assisted by several young women, probably prostitutes. An old woman wearing a veil, probably a relative of the patient, is kneeling at the foot of the bed.

The old woman standing in the doorway in Romano's painting, *Two Lovers* (c. 1523-1524; St Petersburg, The Hermitage) (**figure 16**) creates a specific link to the world of prostitution, while the bunch of keys alludes to access to the secret rooms in baths and brothels, which was usually through a back entry.

Other clues are found in Aretino's sonnets and his *Ragionamenti*. In the *Ragionament*, Aretino writes that once prostitutes get old they find work as bawds and washer-women and that older prostitutes were often scarred by syphilis. In sonnet 11 (Anonymous; 1500s, I *Modi*, Position 11). Woodcut after Marcantonio Raimondi after Giulio Romano; Vienna, Albertina, Graphische Sammlung) (**figure 17**) the female shouts abuse at the old bawd-voyeur – 'crap on you old poxed woman', implying that the old woman may have once worked as a prostitute, now acting as a go-between for the sexual encounter she is spying on.¹⁰³

Aretino's reference to the depiction of overtly erotic images in the convent brothel and similar locations of ill repute implies another link between the use of overtly erotic images and sexual practices. Aretino's *Ragionamenti* thus seems to provide us with vital clues as to the source of inspiration of Romano's drawings, suggesting that they could have been modelled on similar images, improved by Romano's

¹⁰¹ B. Talvacchia (as in n. 17), pp. 49-69. For earlier studies on the images and sonnets, see bibliography therein.

¹⁰² On the various attributions of the work under discussion, see S. Massari, 'Giulio Romano pinxit et delineavit: Opere grafiche autografe di collaborazione bottega', Istituto nazionale per la grafica, Rome, 1993, pp. 167-168.

¹⁰³ P. Aretino, *Sonetti lussuriosi*, 11, repr. in and trans. by B. Talvacchia (as in n. 17), p. 215. See also P. Aretino, *I sonetti lussuriosi di Pietro Aretino, Sonetti sopra i "XVI"*, G. Aquilecchia (ed), Rome, 1992.

draughtsmanship and virtuosity. In view of the evidence analysed in this section, it certainly seems more plausible to argue in favour of contemporary interests and elements as opposed to the view that antique sources provided the main impetus for Romano's images.

Measures Aimed at Curbing Moral Laxity in the Period of the Counter-Reformation

Moral reforms were not unknown before the Tridentine reforms. One case in point is the harsh moral reform introduced in Florence by the Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola (1452-1498; governor of Florence 1494-1495) at the end of the fifteenth century, which met with strong resistance, particularly from youthful groups.¹⁰⁴ The first meetings of the Council of Trent took place in Trent between 1545 and 1547, in Bologna in 1547, and again in Trent between 1550 and 1552. The final sessions were held in Trent in the period 1561-1563. The main source for the Tridentine prescriptions is the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, which was not available for general consumption but seems to have influenced other writings that determined what could be seen and heard.¹⁰⁵ It is, however, difficult to pinpoint accurately the direct and indirect effect of the Counter-Reformation on social and cultural life.¹⁰⁶ The various prescriptions that came into being in the wake of the Counter-Reformation were generally directed at introducing more effective means of social control and enforce more acceptable codes of conduct. However, their effects appear to vary from region to region and sometimes depend on the specific behavioural patterns concerned.¹⁰⁷ Advice from writers differs, in that some authors obviated the new prescriptions, while others who were keen to correct the behaviour and sexual practices of their readers introduced a set of rules that went beyond the lists of sins and prohibitions provided by the church.

The prelates gathering at Trent were concerned that the language used with regard to sexual matters, particularly the different ways in which men and women could breach the prescribed codes of sexual conduct, might encourage them to

¹⁰⁴ Savonarola's moral preachings were opposed by various sections of the Florentine community, most notably the *Compagnacci*, an aristocratic group comprising ten older members and ten youths from eminent families supported by several hundred youths determined to humiliate the friar. On the defamatory and rebellious actions of the *Compagnacci*, see R.C. Trexler, *Ritual in Florence: Adolescence and Salvation in the Renaissance*, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana (undated typewritten manuscript), p. 65; also published under the same title in C. Trinkhaus, *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion*, H. Obermann (ed), Leiden, 1974, pp. 200-264. The friar's death on 23 May 1489 was followed by a series of defamatory acts across the city of Florence. For an account of the events, see R. C. Trexler (as in n. 2), p. 125.

¹⁰⁵ All subsequent references are to the English translation, *The Catechism of the Council of Trent*, T. Buckley (trans.), London, 1852. Many of the measures discussed here are also examined by R. M. Bell (as in n. 8), pp. 32, 155, 161-162, 194-197, 208, 236-238.

¹⁰⁶ For an overview of the Tridentine decrees, see A. Prosperi, *Il Concilio di Trento, un'introduzione storica*, Turin, 2001.

¹⁰⁷ On the sporadic enforcement of the Inquisition in Venice, see P.F. Grendler, *The Roman Inquisition and the Venetian Press*, Princeton, NJ, 1977.

do so.¹⁰⁸ Accordingly, confessors were advised to approach the subject of sex with appropriate discretion. Priests were to emphasise the importance of marriage, which was to be considered a natural tendency, a guarantee of stability and a remedy against concupiscence.¹⁰⁹ Priests were also to remind parishioners of Christ's teachings on adultery but omit details of immodest and licentious behaviour, which was to be discussed privately, depending on the particular circumstances.¹¹⁰

In the first half of the sixteenth century increasing emphasis seems to have been placed on confession. The Roman datary Gian Matteo Giberti initiated practices concerning the control of sexual behaviour and was responsible for introducing the physical separation of male and female penitents during confession so that any form of intimate contact could be avoided.¹¹¹ The practice of penitence was thus seen as an important vehicle for underscoring the church's teachings on sexual matters.

Prescriptions on acceptable moral behaviour provided in the *Catechism* also concerned issues such as conjugal debt, marital relations and lust. The text specifically instructed priests to stress the virtue of continence in married life in preference to the payment of conjugal debt. Married couples were also to be advised to abstain from intercourse three days before receiving the Holy Eucharist and during the fasting session of Lent.¹¹² Biblical episodes which were seen as providing effective moral warnings against unacceptable sexual practices comprised the punishment of the Israelites who fornicated with the daughters of Naob (Numbers 25), the slaughter of the Benjamites (Judgement 20), and the destruction of Sodom (Genesis, 19). More general provisions were designed to repress desire and thus prevent any form of immoral behaviour. Priests were to provide the congregation with clear guidelines on how to avoid temptation, such as eating and drinking moderately and idleness. Since the eye was considered to be the most dangerous inlet for lust, parishioners were to make every effort to keep it in check by avoiding any form of temptation.¹¹³ Female parishioners who adorned themselves too lavishly or seductively were to be admonished. Adolescents and youths were to be warned about engaging in obscene conversation, which was seen to arouse the senses. Other incitements to sexual

¹⁰⁸ T. Buckley (as in n. 105), part. 3, Chapter 7, question 1.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, part. 2, Chapter 8, questions 13-14.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, part. 3, Chapter 7, question 5.

¹¹¹ On this point, see A. Prosperi, *Tribunali della Coscienza*, Turin, 1996, p. 513; on the confession box as a context for the discussion of sexual matters, *ibid.*, p. 524. On Aretino's polemic with Giberti and Giberti's accusations against Marcantonio Raimondi, see B. Talvacchia (as in n. 17), pp. 13-18.

¹¹² T. Buckley (as in n. 105), part 2, Chapter 8, question 34.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, part 2, Chapter 8, question 33.

licence were seen to include effeminate and lascivious songs and dances, obscene books and indecent printed images, all of which were to be avoided. Confession, communion, devout prayers, fasting, vigils, and pilgrimages were all seen as remedies against temptations to commit sexual sins.

According to Rudolf Bell, Cherubino da Siena's *Regole* was given to newly married couples in the wake of the Counter-Reformation, thus contributing to its continued popularity.¹¹⁴ Francesco Tommasi's *Reggimento del padre di famiglia* (Florence, 1581) is a good example of attempts to control and influence daily life by expanding on the Tridentine prescriptions. Tommasi was convinced that a friendly relationship between spouses was preferable to a physical one and frequency of intercourse.¹¹⁵ In 1563 the Dominican friar Cherubino da Firenze published the *Confessionario*, a self-help confessional aimed at the layperson. The text contains lists of actions and situations considered to make marriage sinful. Like Tommasi's text, several of the prescriptions went beyond the measures introduced by the reforms. The *Confessionario* reveals a general fear of female sexuality and an almost obsessive concern with sexual positions, implying that married couples were commonly thought to have intercourse in forbidden positions. Accordingly, Cherubino da Firenze encourages confessors to discuss the issue with penitents.¹¹⁶ He strongly disapproves of ejaculation outside the vagina if done intentionally and of intercourse with women on top or in a lateral position unless required by some physical handicap. In his mind, the woman is always guilty of sin even if the requests are made by her husband, thus revealing double standards and indicating a general trend to target women as the main culprits.¹¹⁷

Servigi di Venere: Social Distinctions and Prescriptive Measures

The term *Venere* not only indicated sexual intercourse and images of beautiful women but also the sexual services provided by prostitutes. Although there were some regional differences in the ways prostitution was controlled, most laws directed at this marginal group seem to have affected the common perception of

¹¹⁴ See R. M. Bell (as in n. 8), pp. 35-37. On the increasing use of the confessional in the post-Tridentine period and the participation of women in confession, see S. Haliczzer, *Sexuality in the Confessional: A Sacrament Profaned*, New York, 1996, pp. 7-41. On earlier vernacular confessionals for laypeople, see A. Jacobson Schutte, 'Consiglio spirituale e controllo sociale: Manuali per la confessione stampati in volgare prima della Controriforma', *Convegno Internazionale di Studi Lucca, 1983, Città italiane del '500 tra Riforma e controriforma: Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi di Lucca, 13-15 ottobre 1983*, Lucca 1988, pp. 45-59. With reference to the economic pressures of publication, Schutte underscores attempts to control behaviour in daily life in pre-Tridentine confessional manuals, which became more pronounced after 1550.

¹¹⁵ F. Tommasi, *Reggimento del padre*, Florence, 1580, p. 95.

¹¹⁶ On this point, see T. N. Tentler, *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation*, Princeton, NJ, 1977, esp. pp. 174 and 208.

¹¹⁷ Cherubino da Firenze, *Confessionario*, Florence, 1563, pp. 48-54.

its members, though important distinctions were made as regards the financial and social status of prostitutes.¹¹⁸

The *meretrice* was considered to be a merchant of sex without honour and had been the target of reformers long before the Counter-Reformation. Fairs, bathhouses, markets, and the movement of seasonal labourers, soldiers and sailors were all associated with prostitutes at the bottom of the scale. A Venetian ruling of 1542 defined a common whore as a woman who was not married but had 'commerce and intercourse with one or more men' ('commercio et pratica con uno over più homeni') or married women who did not live with their husbands but had commerce and intercourse with several men. From this definition we can deduce that the common prostitute was usually a woman too poor to marry, though marriage itself did not always save poor women from using their bodies as a financial asset.

Prostitutes at the bottom of the social scale were often seen as dangerous and unruly.¹¹⁹ Legal provisions attempted to mark them out physically, making them visually distinguishable from other women. In Florence registration at the Ufficio d'Onestà (The Office of Decency; 1403-1685) excluded the *meretrice* from the reputation and lifestyle enjoyed by courtesans. Fines had to be paid for not wearing the identifying yellow, green or red veil. Restrictions were placed not only on where they should live but also on their movements around the city, particularly at night. In addition, they were forbidden from dressing up as men or wearing disguises to facilitate entry into taverns.¹²⁰

Grazzini's little-known poem *Alle puttane* is addressed to the lowly prostitute and draws interesting distinctions between the common whore and richer courtesan.¹²¹ This highly topical poem makes indirect references to the above-mentioned

¹¹⁸ This discussion draws chiefly on the most recent and instructive studies for the present purpose. On Renaissance Florence and related legal provisions and institutions, see J. K. Brackett, 'The Florentine Onestà and the Control of Prostitution, 1403-1680', *Sixteenth-Century Journal*, vol. 24/2, 1993, pp. 275-300 and bibliography therein. On prostitution in Rome, see E. S. Cohen, 'Seen and Known: Prostitutes in the Cityscape of Late Sixteenth-Century Rome', *Renaissance Studies*, 1998, vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 392-409 and bibliography therein. See also, E. S. Cohen, 'Courtesans and Whores: Words and Behaviour in Roman Streets', *Women's Studies*, vol. 19, 1991, pp. 201-208. For a discussion of prostitution in Italy and particularly Venice, see R. Canossa and I. Colonnello, *Storia della prostituzione in Italia dal Quattrocento alla fine del Settecento*, Rome, 2000. See also E. Pavan, 'Police des mœurs, société et politique à Venice à la fin du Moyen Age', *Revue Historique*, n° 536, 1980, pp. 241-248.

¹¹⁹ According to R. M. Bell, popular advice manuals contain numerous references to the common whore rather than to the courtesan. Bells cites Giovanni Antonio Massinori's *Il flagello delle meretrici et la nobiltà donnesca ne' figliuoli*, reprinted in Venice in 1599, as an example of the popular condemnation of prostitution. Casting common prostitutes as vile creatures, the author provides several reasons why prostitutes should be avoided. Firstly, they are unruly; secondly, their insatiable lust will drain the energy of the male lover; and thirdly, they harbour lethal diseases. As cited by R. M. Bell (as in n. 8), pp. 181-182.

¹²⁰ On the legal measures instituted by the Ufficio d'Onestà, see J. K. Brackett (as in n. 118), esp. pp. 280-285. For legal measures in Venice aimed at restricting prostitution to the area around the Rialto and at eliminating pimps and bawds from sexual commerce, see G. Scarabello, *Tiziano e Venezia* (as in n. 1). On the freedom granted to prostitutes, *ibid.*, p. 84 n. 33. On attempts to relegate prostitutes to designated areas in Rome, see E. S. Cohen 1998 (as in n. 118), pp. 400-402.

¹²¹ A. F. Grazzini (as in n. 61).

measures aimed at restricting the movement and thus visibility of lowly prostitutes in the urban space. Grazzini suggests that they use Sedan chairs to whisk them around town, revealing and concealing themselves as necessary. Although prostitutes cannot afford to wear pearls, precious jewels or expensive clothes of silk or silver-thread, Grazzini advises them to hoard their gold and coins for old age, to charge for the services they provide, and to accept only cash. They are also advised to work as much as they can while they are young because old age brings shame and ruin as they lose their 'grace and beauty' ('grazia e bellezza'). Aretino also considers youth to be the best age for the services of Venus.¹²²

In addition, Grazzini advises prostitutes on their physical appearance, implying that their gaudy outfits made them conspicuous in the cityscape. In his opinion, tight-fitting clothes are more attractive than gaudy gold and silver gowns, which respectable people associate with loose women, while also indicating that garments designed to show off the figure were sexually alluring. Moreover, the square veil and coloured sleeves make them look like professional entertainers ('giocolatrici o strionesse'). More subtle garments are recommended, such as the attire of haughty and attractive up-market courtesans, who are likened to Jupiter's spouse or daughter. Fine black overcoats worn by courtesans are associated with wealth and a striking impact on the beholder, while also suggesting that the more elegant appearance of courtesans gave them an edge over their poorer counterparts. Grazzini's poem suggests that measures to control prostitution affected the common prostitute much more than her socially-elevated colleagues and that important distinctions persisted particularly in the social domain.

The *cortegiana* (courtesan) was associated with women who had been trained and educated to give pleasure to high-ranking men, both ecclesiastics and nobles. The term *honesta* used to qualify a prostitute first appears in the diary of Johannes Burchard, who refers to a courtesan called Corsetta as a *meretrix honesta*.¹²³ Burchard's remarks indicate that the term *honesta* served to distinguish the bearer's economic standing, that is, a prostitute who could afford a household with

¹²² P. Aretino (as in n. 21), p. 110.

¹²³ J. Burchard (as in n. 17), pp. 442-444. On the first appearance of this term in verbal sources, see M. Kurzel-Runtscheiner, *Tochter der Venus: Die Kurtisanen Roms im 16. Jahrhundert*, Munich, 1995, p. 19. On the term *cortegiana onesta*, see also G. Masson (as in n. 17), pp. 9-12 and 152; R. Casagrande di Villaviera, *Le cortegiane veneziane nel Cinquecento*, Milan, 1968, pp. 19-43 and E. Musatti, *La donna in Venezia*, Padua, 1891 p. 120. According to M. F. Rosenthal, legal distinctions in Venice were not always well drawn in that both *meretrice* and *cortegiana* or *cortesana* often appear in the same sentence. The first official acknowledgement of hierarchical distinctions within the profession appears in ASV, Provveditori Sopra la Sanità, Capitolare, l. C., 33; as cited by M. F. Rosenthal, *The Honest Courtesan: Veronica Franco, Citizen and Writer in Sixteenth-Century Venice*, Chicago and London, 1992, p. 67. Rosenthal provides an instructive investigation of the courtesan with particular reference to the literary works and activities of Veronica Franco, as well as her condition as courtesan in a wider social context, her response to criticism, and her Inquisition trial. For an earlier discussion of Venetian courtesans, see also R. Casagrande, as cited above. On the terminology applied in Roman documents, see E. S. Cohen 1991 (as in n. 118), pp. 201-208.

servants. The term was first applied to women attached to the ruling elite of the papal curia and its considerable number of professionally celibate men.

The term *onestade* appears alongside *lascivia* in Aretino's description of the Venetian courtesan Angela Zaffetta and gives a further indication of how the privileged working conditions of the courtesan made her activities less blameworthy. Aretino praises Angela because she 'more than any other has known how to put the mask of virtue ('la mascara de l'onestade') over the 'lascivious' ('lascivia'), and for 'caressing the virtues and honouring the virtuous'.¹²⁴ The courtesan's social refinements were seen to make morally reproachable behaviour socially acceptable mainly because she served men of status with style. Her accomplishments thus gave her an elevated social standing and set her apart from her colleagues operating in less reputable locations, such as brothels and bathhouses.

The occupation of *cortegiana* required that courtesans be spirited and accomplished. Physical beauty was seen as an important asset. Veronica Franco (1546-1591), one of the most celebrated courtesans in Venice, summed up the prerequisites of the profession as 'beauty, allure, judgement, and knowledge of many subjects'.¹²⁵ In the *Ragionamenti* Aretino implies that beauty could be exaggerated to attract clients.¹²⁶ In Venice the courtesan was not given a precise legal definition of her own in sixteenth-century senate rulings, though some courtesans kept husbands as a way of observing legal provisions. By imitating the gestures and donning clothes worn by noblewoman, the courtesan succeeded in differentiating herself from the lower-class *cortegiana di lume* and the *meretrice* and acquired a highly sophisticated public image which she used to enter the public arena, using her accomplishments and, sometimes literary skills, as a tool of the trade.

Literary and intellectual pursuits proved essential in saving some courtesans from moral reform, as was the case with both Veronica Franco and Tullia d'Aragona (c.

¹²⁴ P. Aretino (as in n. 100), vol. 1, pp. 609-611, Letter to Angela Zaffetta dated 25 December, 1537: 'voi più ch'altra avete saputo porre al volto de la lascivia la mascara de l'onestade'.

¹²⁵ V. Franco, *Lettere familiari a diversi della Signorina Veronica Franco*, Venice, c. 1580, S. Bianchi (ed), Rome, 1998, Lettera 22: 'nella quale ha gran fatica di riuscire chi sia bella e abbia maniera e giudizio e conoscenza di molte virtù'. See also, *Lettere familiari a diversi della S. Veronica Franco*, B. Croce (ed), Bari, 1949. An English translation of an excerpt of this letter is provided by L. A. Stortoni and M. Prentice Lillie, *Women Poets of the Italian Renaissance: Courtly Ladies and Courtesans*, L. A. Stortoni (ed), New York, 1997, pp. 174-178. The letter is addressed to a woman who seeks Veronica's help in introducing her daughter to the profession of courtesan. Veronica comments on the physical transformation of the daughter in question, which entailed dyeing her hair blond, wearing make-up and donning low-cut dresses. It is interesting to note that Veronica does not believe that the aspiring courtesan is actually beautiful enough to work as one. The content of the letter has been interpreted as a criticism of the circumstances that push young women to prostitution. On this point, see M. R. Rosenthal (as in n. 123), pp. 127-135 and R. M. Bell (as in n. 8), p. 182.

¹²⁶ P. Aretino (as in n. 21), pp. 215-222.

1510-1556).¹²⁷ Their intellectual talents have been interpreted as a way of cutting out a social space for themselves in a climate characterised by increasingly oppressive regulations.¹²⁸ Tullia took advantage of her literary and musical education for her advancement in the world. She never publicly acknowledged her condition as a courtesan and all her writings are in keeping with the Neoplatonic doctrines promoted in literary circles. In Florence in 1546 Tullia established a salon or literary academy which attracted many notable Florentine figures, such as Antonio Francesco Grazzini, Niccolò Martelli, and Benedetto Varchi. It is believed that Varchi helped Tullia write her plea to Eleonora di Toledo pleading for exemption from having to wear the veil or handkerchief with the yellow border over her head, which would have identified her as a common prostitute.¹²⁹ The plea was accompanied by Tullia's *Rime* in further support of her defence. Cosimo I granted her freedom with a comment written on the back of the plea which effectively raised her courtesan status to that of the poetess: 'let her off as a poet' ('fasseli gratia per poetessa'). The official version of the pardon, written by one of Cosimo's ministers and dated 1 May 1547, stated that an exception had been made 'in recognition of the rare gifts of poetry and philosophy, which are recognised with pleasure among the esteemed skills of the learned Tullia d'Aragona'. Tullia's literary production is a good example of how poetry and the ability to raise love to a higher, spiritual level enhanced the status of the writer and the characters portrayed, however reproachable the behaviour behind it. The different approaches to love during the Renaissance made it possible to talk about physical love in more approachable terms, turning vice into virtue.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ On Tullia's literary productions and their reception from the Renaissance to the present day, see R. Russell, *Tullia d'Aragona – Dialogue on the Infinity of Love*, R. Russell and B. Merry (eds. and trans.), Chicago and London, 1997. See also A. Strotoni and M. Prentice Lillie (as in n. 125), pp. 81-91.

¹²⁸ On this point, see G. Masson (as in n. 17), pp. 91-131 and M. F. Rosenthal (as in n. 123), pp. 58-110. Both Tullia and Veronica had their detractors. For a brief discussion of Tullia's detractors in Florence, see G. Masson, *ibid.*, pp. 112-113 and 116-117. On Maffio Venier's scathing attacks of Veronica Franco, see M. F. Rosenthal (as in n. 123), pp. 42-58. Rosenthal believes that the negative portrayals of the courtesan in general, and of Veronica Franco in particular, on the part of men like Garzoni, Speroni and Lorenzo and Maffio Venier stems from their own uneasiness with patronage in Venice, which forced them to compete with Veronica for literary acclaim. Rosenthal also includes Aretino as a literary adversary of the courtesan, a point I would hesitate to make, since Aretino's primary objective seems to have been poking fun at and exposing a range of hypocrisies in Roman and Venetian society. Criticism directed at specific courtesans is more subtle and sporadic in Aretino in contrast with Maffio Venier's explicit attacks.

¹²⁹ The plea and other documents pertaining to her exemption are still preserved in the Florentine State Archive. For the petition and deliberation, see S. Bongi, 'Il velo giallo di Tullia d'Aragona', *Rivista critica della letteratura italiana*, 3, 1886, pp. 86-95.

¹³⁰ S. Speroni made Tullia one of the main characters in his *Dialogo dell'amore*, casting a Neoplatonic veil over her amatory exploits. See S. Speroni, *Dialogo dell'Amore*, Venice, 1542, *I dialoghi di Messer Speron Speroni*, Opere, M. Pozzi (ed), vols. 5, Rome, 1989, vol. 4, pp. 1-45. A. R. Jones has suggested that Tullia faced the challenge of expressing herself in a male-dominated field and that she did so on equal terms. See A. R. Jones, 'The Poetics of Group Identity. Self-commemoration through Dialogue in Pernetta du Guillet and Tullia d'Aragona', *The Currency of Eros: Women's Love Lyric in Europe, 1540-1620*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1990. See also, A. R. Jones, 'New Songs for the Swallow: Ovid's Philomela in Tullia d'Aragona and Gaspara Stampa', *Refiguring Women: Perspectives and Identity and the Italian Renaissance*, M. Migiel and J. Schiesari (eds), Ithaca, 1991, pp. 263-277 and G. Masson (as in n. 17), pp. 91-131.

Veronica Franco was one of the most celebrated Venetian courtesans, renowned for her beauty, amatory skills, wit and literary activities. Unlike Tullia, Veronica never denied her profession. Veronica continued to take an active part in intellectual, civic and social projects in spite of Venetian laws introduced in the first half of the sixteenth century directed at restricting the pursuits of the courtesan. Her profession helped her enter the male domain of cultural and social activity which she exploited to support her own literary works. Veronica perceived her social advancement to be connected mainly with her literary skills, the characteristic of her male counterpart, the courtier. According to Margaret Rosenthal, Veronica's ability to create an image of herself as a writer proved advantageous in the more hostile climate towards the end of the century. In 1580 Veronica Franco was summoned by the Inquisition on charges of practising magic. During the trial, Veronica admitted she had given birth six times, though she managed to defend herself and was absolved.¹³¹

The courtesan was both victor and victim of this phenomenon. For much of the sixteenth century, the Venetian courtesan became the icon of female beauty and independence even though she was accused of blurring social and class boundaries, and of appropriating positions that did not belong to her. Attempts to reconstruct the social boundaries, monitor the courtesan's dress and impose restrictions on her circulation were, however, largely unsuccessful. The reasons for this are discussed below.

¹³¹ For a full account of Veronica's Inquisition trial, see M. F. Rosenthal (as in n. 123), pp. 153-196. Rosenthal observes that her connection with Marco Venier is indicative of the kind of privileges a courtesan could attain through the protection of a Venetian patrician family yet also the jealousy arising from her influence and role in Venetian society.

PART TWO: FEMALE PHYSICAL BEAUTY AND THE MYTH OF VENUS

The Perception of Female Behaviour and Physical Beauty

Codes of conduct prescribed for women in a variety of texts were generally more rigid than those for men both before and after the Counter-Reformation.¹³² The perception of female behaviour was influenced by deportment, dress, accessories, and particularly body language. As the analysis on dance above suggests, excessive bodily motion was seen to be dangerous to the degree to which it exerted power over members of the male sex. While an upright carriage was emblematic of physical and mental purity, bending the body was considered to be highly seductive. Sixteenth-century ideal codes of conduct reflect the long-held belief that women had less control over their bodies than men. In medical and physiological theory from antiquity onwards, women were generally perceived to be physically and mentally unstable, and more subject than men to irrational passions, such as lust.¹³³ Many of the precepts concerning correct wifely behaviour listed in a late medieval manuscript appear in Renaissance guides to female conduct and married life, indicating how values like submissiveness and chastity continued to be promoted as essential female traits.¹³⁴ Morally-oriented writers of both the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries promoted the view that wives should be respectable, modest and chaste, presenting these qualities as the adornment of the perfect wife. In the fifteenth century St Bernardino da Siena preached in Santa Croce, Florence, that the 'the honest woman is the crown of her husband'.¹³⁵ Sources on ideal behaviour analysed here include Francesco Barbaro's text on wifely duties, *De re Uxoriam*, originally written in Latin and dedicated to Lorenzo de' Medici on the occasion of his marriage. The text was published in Venice in 1548 under the title *Prudentissimi e gravi documenti circa la elettion della moglie*.

¹³² Fifteenth-century treatises dedicated to female qualities comprise Antonio Cornazzano's *De Mulieribus admirandis* (1467) and Vespasiano Bisticci's *Il libro della lode e commendazione delle donne* (1480). The writers of these texts both praise what are considered to be female virtues rather than the role of women in public life. Giovanni Sabadino degli Arienti's *Gynevra de le clare donne* (1483) marks an important development in the genre, since it redefines female virtues by extolling female participation in spheres traditionally reserved for men. Bartolomeo Goggio's *De laudibus mulierum* (1483) and Agostino Strozzi's *Defensio mulierum* (1601) draw on Sabadino's ideas. On these points and for more detailed references, see L. A. Stortoni (as in n. 125), p. x. For a recent study of female virtues during the Renaissance, see F. H. Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa: Women Artists and the Language of Art History and Criticism*, Cambridge, 1997. R. M. Bell observes that there are fewer books in defence of the equality or even superiority of women than anti-feminist popular texts and none to his knowledge that use the advice-manual format. Possible exceptions to anti-women literature include S. Vasolo's *La gloriosa eccellenza delle donne, e d'amore*, Florence, 1573. As Bell points out, pro-women literature merits closer study. For recent studies on relevant primary sources and aspects of daily life beyond the scope of this present work, see R. M. Bell (as in n. 8), pp. 334-346.

¹³³ See I. Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*, Cambridge, 1980.

¹³⁴ See R. M. Bell (as in n. 8), pp. 223 and 347 n. 8. Bell reproduces a list of rules traditionally established for female behaviour reported and translated in D. Bornstein's *The Lady in the Tower: Medieval Courtesy Literature for Women*, Hamden, 1983, p. 63.

¹³⁵ Bernardino da Siena, *Le prediche volgari*, C. Cannarozzi (ed), 3 vols., Florence, 1940, vol. 1, p. 414.

Lodovico Dolce's *Istituzione delle donne* is also analysed with respect to the prescriptions on correct female behaviour and the terminology applied to different forms of behaviour.

The most complete analyses of female beauty appear in two texts which convey contemporary views on standards of female physical beauty and its significance in the contemporary world. Agnolo Firenzuola's *Delle bellezze delle donne* (Florence, 1548; On the Beauty of Women) is a two-part dialogue dedicated to the 'noble and beautiful women of Prato', a town in north-east Tuscany.¹³⁶ The dialogues take place at two social gatherings, the first in the grounds of the Badia di Grignano, the other in the house of Mona Lampiada, one of the four female participants. The dialogue is led by Celso, who acts as the author's mouthpiece and discourses on female beauty in theoretical and empirical terms, relating parts of the female body to various attractive parts of each of the four female interlocutors. Federigo Luigini's *Il Libro della bella creanza delle donne* (Venice, 1554) is a three-part dialogue set in a villa where five men aim to 'paint' the image of the perfect woman. The discussion of female beauty in the writings of Firenzuola and Luigini bears interesting similarities with Alessandro Piccolomini's book on the art of seduction, *Dialogo della bella creanza delle donne* (Siena, 1538).

Advice manuals and books of secrets are also instructive as regards the perception of female beauty. These texts adopt a practical approach to female beauty and clearly cater for the widespread preoccupation with physical beauty. Firenzuola's and Luigini's writings thus acquire greater significance when analysed in conjunction with popular manuals and pamphlets dealing with physical beauty, with which they share the same set of aesthetic ideals. Good examples are Celebrinos's *Opera Nuova* (Venice, 1551), Giovanni Marinello's *Gli ornamenti delle donne* (Venice, 1562), and the 1584 edition of the enormously popular, anti-elite text, *I secreti della Signora Isabella Cortese*. The appeal of these texts to women of financial means is evident in the dedications and claims made. Marinello's popular tract is addressed to genteel women and promises to show them how to become more beautiful and charming, while Celebrino's *Opera Nuova* maintains that the

¹³⁶ For a discussion of Firenzuola's contribution to the debate on female beauty, see L. Tonelli, *L'amore nella poesia*, Florence, 1933, pp. 295-298. Firenzuola's treatise has been analysed by E. Cropper in her important article, 'On beautiful women: Parmigianino, Petrarchism and the vernacular style', *Art Bulletin*, vol. 58, 1976, pp. 374-394. Cropper analyses the text in relation to contemporary poetry on female beauty and paintings of beautiful women. M. Rogers was the first art historian to analyse the perception of female beauty not only in Firenzuola but also Luigini and Trissino, linking the concept of beauty and decorum to a range of contemporary paintings, including nude images. See M. Rogers, 'The decorum of women's beauty: Trissino, Firenzuola, Luigini and the representation of women in sixteenth-century painting', *Renaissance Studies*, vol. 2, n° 1, Oxford, 1988, pp. 17-88. For other connections between female qualities and contemporary images, see M. Rogers, 'Reading the female body in Venetian Renaissance Art', *New interpretations of Venetian Renaissance painting*, F. Ames-Lewis (ed), London, 1994, pp. 77-90. For an overview of Firenzuola's life and treatise, see the introduction to the English

numerous recipes and remedies in his book can 'make every woman beautiful' ('far bella ciascuna donna'). The availability of new kinds of texts dealing with beauty treatment played a key role in helping women flaunt their physical assets in a society which offered them no political outlet but which proposed other contexts for wielding female charm and power.¹³⁷

Before analysing these texts in greater depth, it is instructive to consider the conventions and prescriptions which attempted to govern the lives of sixteenth-century women. Such an analysis helps us develop a better picture of the shift of emphasis from correct moral behaviour as the adornment of the ideal woman and wife to physical beauty perceived to be the greatest adornment (*ornamento*) of a woman.

The Adornment of Ideal Female Behaviour - *L'ornamento dei costumi*

The central importance of chastity is reflected in Leon Battista Alberti's claim that the wife should be 'good, chaste, and fruitful', adding that next to celibacy, the worst fate for a family is a dishonoured woman.¹³⁸ Dolce's text, which sets down a series of rather harsh rules for single, married and widowed women, alerts readers to the dangers of various forms of social contact seen to pose a threat to chastity.¹³⁹

Barbaro provides a number of guidelines for choosing a spouse, advising men to opt for a young virgin rather than a widow, since the latter is more likely to have adopted a number of vices making it more difficult to control her behaviour.¹⁴⁰ By contrast, younger wives are thought to be more humble and obedient, and able to adapt more quickly to their husband's habits. In addition, small women are seen to make 'a better concubine' than a wife. Barbaro's understanding of the term 'adornment' strongly suggests that it denotes a sense of restraint and modesty which should govern every aspect of a woman's life. Modesty is perceived as an adornment appreciated by husbands and the community at large and it should be manifested in facial expressions, gestures, movement, clothes, eating habits, and in

translation, A. Firenzuola, *On the Beauty of Women*, K. Eisenbichler and J. Murray (eds. and trans.), Philadelphia, PA, 1992, esp. pp. xiii-xli. Subsequent citations in English are from or based on this text.

¹³⁷ The connection between different kinds of texts dealing with female beauty and behaviour has been overlooked by art historians, though several social historians, such as R. M. Bell (as in n. 8), have made general references to beauty and health treatment in the advice manual.

¹³⁸ L. B. Alberti, *Della famiglia* (1430s-1440s), *Opere Volgari*, C. Grayson (ed), 3 vols, Bari, 1960, vol. 1, pp. 110 and passim. The longest discussion of wifely duties is not included in Book 2, which is dedicated to marriage, but in Book 3, which deals with the economic organisation of the household. Female virtues are associated with the stability and good organisation of the city. Although not available in print in his own lifetime, Alberti's treatise is instructive as regards the promotion of more rigid social norms for women promoted by a number of Renaissance humanist writers, such as Ludovico Dolce.

¹³⁹ L. Dolce (as in n.13), p. 67.

¹⁴⁰ F. Barbaro, *Prudentissimi e gravi documenti circa la elettion della moglie*, Venice, 1548, p. 120.

conversation.¹⁴¹ Every form of wifely behaviour should be suited to the time, place and people present. Any form of behaviour associated with the lowly should be avoided at all times. Such behaviour includes walking quickly, gesticulating inappropriately, laughing loudly, and any brusque gesture or rapid movement associated with pantomime performers.¹⁴² It is highly significant that Firenzuola also promotes modesty in noble and gentle ladies unless the circumstances suggest otherwise:

it is appropriate for noble and gentle ladies,[...] as an indication of their happiness, to laugh with modesty, with restraint, with honesty, with little bodily motion and a low tone.¹⁴³

Both Barbaro and Dolce provide clear instructions on acceptable physical appearance and dress. Barbaro prescribes that the arms and other parts of the body should always be covered and that women should wear a veil.¹⁴⁴ Dolce also promotes the use of the veil for the respectable woman (*matrona*), the icon of correct female behaviour. Barbaro advises against the use of expensive, lascivious clothes, excessive amounts of jewellery and make-up, which are all perceived as the mark of a loose and vain woman, permitting only the use of pearls as a reflection of the husband's social and financial status.¹⁴⁵ Dolce expressly disapproves of the current predilection for cosmetics for the body and the face, deemed inappropriate for 'decent women' ('*donne oneste*').¹⁴⁶ Dolce backs up his argument against cosmetics by drawing attention to their negative effects. Cosmetics ruin the skin and bring on early ageing, powders used to whiten teeth cause tooth decay and hair dyes ruin the hair. Perfume is best used in moderation because too much incites lust and usually conceals poor personal hygiene. Finally, expensive clothes provoke jealousy in other women, though Dolce implies that women can find other ways of obtaining them if a husband refuses to buy them.¹⁴⁷

Barbaro is convinced behavioural virtues far outweigh any aesthetic qualities.¹⁴⁸ In his mind, taciturnity is 'the finest and most precious adornment of women' ('*il più bello et prezioso ornamento che posson aver le donne*').¹⁴⁹ The adornment of good manners ('*l'ornamento dei costumi*') and inward virtues are praised above all others. While Barbaro perceives ideal female conduct as an adornment, Dolce juxtaposes acceptable and morally praiseworthy behaviour, which is defined as

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁴³ A. Firenzuola, *Dialogo delle bellezze delle Donne* (1548), *Opere di Messer Agnolo Firenzuola Fiorentino*, Florence, 1548, 2 vols., 1763, vol. 1, pp. 249-328, p. 285; Firenzuola/Eisenbichler and Murray, p. 29.

¹⁴⁴ F. Barbaro (as in n.140), pp. 23 and 46.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁴⁶ L. Dolce (as in n. 13), p. 29.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 26.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁴⁹ F. Barbaro (as in n.140), p. 47.

honest/decent (*onesto*), with morally lax actions, which are labelled dishonest/indecent (*disonesto*). Women who observe the codes promoted by Dolce are thus honest or decent, whereas those who fail to do so are to be considered dishonest and indecent. Dolce's focus on these terms suggests that *ornamento* as an indicator of moral virtue was becoming less common.

A number of key terms associated with ideal female movement and behaviour appear in Firenzuola's *Dialogo*. Firenzuola provides definitions of five words *grace* (*grazia*), *elegance* (*leggiadria*), *majesty* (*maestria*), *pleasing charm* (*venustà*), and *loveliness* (*vaghezza*), associating them with different kinds of women. As in Castiglione's *Il cortegiano*, *leggiadria* is seen to denote a female quality. In Firenzuola's mind, *leggiadria* concerns movement and bearing as a manifestation of grace, modesty, gentility, measure and style. *Leggiadria* is comparable to an understated elegance created by composed and regulated movements and gestures.¹⁵⁰ *Leggiadria* stems from a certain natural judgement and while it is not the preserve of every beautiful woman, it is always pleasing in a woman who is not beautiful. *Grazia* is defined as a 'splendour awakened in some mysterious way' and is dependent upon a 'mysterious proportion and measure which escapes precise definition'. *Grazia* may be possessed by women who are not beautiful, and it is a quality which pleases and makes the possessor grateful, that is, appreciated. *Venustà* in a woman bestows a noble, chaste, reverent and virtuous aura in every movement. The woman who possesses *venustà* is full of 'modest loftiness'.¹⁵¹ *Maestà* refers to the movement and carriage of a lady who moves with a certain aristocratic aura, more typical of women who are tall and robust.¹⁵² *Vaghezza* is given three different meanings, according to its application in Petrarch and Boccaccio, referring to movement from place to place, desire and the beautiful, though in Firenzuola its erotic connotations are heightened compared to earlier uses. *Venustà* denotes something which is charming because it is beautiful and beautiful because it is charming: 'charm indicates that special beauty that has within it all those elements whereby anybody who looks at it, becomes charmed and desirous'. *Vaghezza* is thus a more sensuous quality, 'a beauty which attracts and sparks the desire to contemplate and enjoy it; a certain sensual air and desirability mingles with virtue (*onestà*)'.¹⁵³

Trissino's *I ritratti* (Rome; 1524) marks a half-way stage between *ornamento* as behavioural virtue and *ornamento* as the highest mark of physical beauty. Physical

¹⁵⁰ A. Firenzuola (as in n. 143), p. 290.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 297.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 293-294.

beauty must be accompanied by 'i debiti ornamenti', understood as virtues and good customs.¹⁵⁴ Unlike treatises on proper behaviour aimed at women lower down the social hierarchy, such as Sperone Speroni's *Della cura familiare* (Venice, 1542) and Dolce's *Istituzione*, Trissino approves of lavish clothes as an indicator of aristocratic rank.¹⁵⁵

The Adornments of Female Physical Beauty

As Castiglione's *Il cortegiano* shows, comments and discussions of female beauty were common among the educated elite during the Renaissance. The poems of Poliziano, Bembo and Ariosto, which epitomise the Petrarchan canon, present images of ideal female beauty, praising specific features but treating the body cautiously. Part of Firenzuola's treatment of female beauty exemplifies the evocations of beautiful women in Renaissance sonnets and madrigals. The table below illustrates the points of contact between Firenzuola's description and Neo-Petrarchan poetry.

Ariosto – <i>Orlando Furioso</i> ¹⁵⁶	Firenzuola – <i>Delle bellezze delle donne</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ blond hair, gleaming like gold; ➤ cheeks tinted with rose shades; ➤ proportioned forehead, smooth and white like polished ivory; ➤ symmetrical black eyes, under dark arching eyebrows; ➤ white round neck; ➤ well-proportioned arms; ➤ milk-white breasts, which should be full, high, smooth and firm. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 'the ornament of golden hair'; 'hair like fine gold'¹⁵⁷; fine and blonde; sometimes gold, sometimes like honey; wavy and thick;¹⁵⁸ ➤ broad, wide, high forehead; ➤ dark tan eyes (tané) that are large and full; ➤ nose 'made more for the beauty and ornament of the face'; ➤ lips of the finest coral; ➤ candid breasts.

While Firenzuola draws on the features epitomised in the descriptions of Ariosto, Bembo and Poliziano, his treatment of the female body goes beyond the Petrarchan canon, and like Luigini, he treats the female body in more openly erotic terms. According to Firenzuola's scheme of female beauty, the terms most closely

¹⁵⁴ G. Trissino, *I ritratti*, Rome, 1524, p. 17. On the perception of female beauty in this treatise, see M. Rogers (as in n.136), esp. pp. 49-50, 57-59, 60, 73.

¹⁵⁵ See S. Speroni, *Della cura della famiglia, I dialoghi di Meser Speron Speroni*, Venice, 1542, *Opere*, M. Pozzi (ed), 5 vols., Rome, 1989, vol. 1, pp. 75-96.

¹⁵⁶ L. Ariosto, *Orlando furioso*, R. Ceserani (ed), 2 vols., Turin, 1981, Canto VII, dealing with the beauty of Alcina. On these features, see K. Eisenbichler and J. Murray (as in n. 136), p. xxxiv.

¹⁵⁷ A. Firenzuola (as in n.143) p. 302, Firenzuola/Eisenbichler and Murray, pp. 45-6; the description is from Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, 160, v. 14; 90, v. 1, as cited by Eisenbichler and Murray (as in n. 136), p. xxxiv.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 303; The description is from Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, II, 8-10.

associated with physical beauty are *leggiardria* and *vaghezza*. The application of these terms to physical qualities and gestures perfectly illustrates how women could blatantly contravene social conventions they were supposed to uphold. Erotic and beautiful hair is described as *leggiadra*.¹⁵⁹ In Firenzuola's mind, the erotic quality of a female is enhanced by a sensuous mouth. In the First Dialogue, Firenzuola justifies his description of the lips as the seat of those 'loving kisses capable of letting souls pass from the body of one to that of the other lover' on the basis of the ancient consecration of the lips to 'beautiful Venus'.¹⁶⁰ In the Second Dialogue, Firenzuola's description of the mouth serves to heighten its erotic charge. The biting of the lower lip with 'a slight modest sensuousness' while gazing ahead and then lowering the eyes is one manifestation of *vaghezza* denoting a slightly wanton loveliness. It is a gesture which throws wide open 'a paradise of delights' and floods 'the heart of the man who gazes at them with yearning'.¹⁶¹ Another manifestation of *vaghezza* is placing the tip of the tongue under the top teeth, though such a gesture should be made only when circumstances allow:

And if by chance it should happen that the tip of the tongue should be seen, and this should be rarely, this will add charm, yearning and consolation.¹⁶²

In Firenzuola's mind, a sensuous mouth augments the erotic power of the female. In addition, the parts of the body that are usually covered up are seen to be an essential part of the beauty of the whole body. The most erotic parts of the female body comprise the breasts, the hips, and the back. In the second dialogue four vases are used to illustrate in a novel and original way the corresponding shapes of the female body, in order to clarify his ideal of physical beauty. From left to right, the second vase embodies the perfect female form.¹⁶³ The first vase on the left corresponds to a woman with a long and slender throat, with wide and graceful shoulders.¹⁶⁴ The second vase illustrates a woman with wide hips, which are the foremost attraction of a shapely, naked woman, whose bosom is gentle and whose figure is well-proportioned. The third vase possesses neither grace nor beauty, while the fourth appears as if the corresponding female has been roughed out.

The standards of physical beauty established by Firenzuola allow for only one perfect form which fits with Luigini's model of female perfection, that is, the Cnidian Venus. Luigini and Firenzuola both claim that a beautiful body is the greatest

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 289-290.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 317.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 284; Firenzuola/Eisenbichler and Murray, p. 59.

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 317: 'che la punta della lingua si avesse a vedere, che sarà di rado, porgherà vaghezza, struggimento, e consolazione'; Firenzuola/Eisenbichler and Murray, p. 59.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 319. For a different interpretation of the vases and their correspondence to female shapes, see E. Cropper (as in n. 136), pp. 377-381.

¹⁶⁴ A. Firenzuola (as in n. 143), p. 232.

female asset and equate true beauty with nudity. In some respects, Luigini's word picture of the ideal woman is even more overtly erotic and he provides a graphic description of the perfect nude female body. In order to justify his treatment of the female nude, Luigini appeals to the views of classical and modern poets, such as Apuleius, Plutarch and Ariosto, though literary sources do not always provide a precedent for the promotion of his ideal woman. Luigini argues against the view that the private parts are shameful and should be covered. The genitals are defined as playful, loving and the seat of pleasure.¹⁶⁵ Accordingly, his discussion focuses on the buttocks and genitals. His perfect female is nude or clad in a very thin and transparent veil of gold or silk thread.

Similarly, Marinello advocates that female physical features rather than her garments are her greatest asset or *ornamenti*, just as the ideal features described by Firenzuola are defined as 'adornments'.¹⁶⁶ According to Marinello, 'a well-proportioned body delights the eyes'.¹⁶⁷ The perfect physical qualities championed by Firenzuola, Luigini, Piccolomini and Marinello illustrate the features which are perceived as adornments of the body and are analysed below.

Hair

Firenzuola	Luigini	Piccolomini	Marinello
An important physical adornment, particularly when worn loose: 'even Venus, beautiful Venus, would not please some people without the adornment of golden hair'. ¹⁶⁸	Most beautiful when worn loose or plaited. ¹⁶⁹	A key physical feature, though no specific colour is promoted. ¹⁷⁰	Beautiful hair is said to be long, fine, wavy and golden; A number of recipes for dyeing hair are provided; Instructions on how to make it grow long and fine or wavy with hot irons are given. ¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁵ F. Luigini, *Il Libro della bella donna*, Venice, 1554, *Trattati del Cinquecento sulla donna*, G. Zonta (ed), Bari, 1913, pp. 251-255.

¹⁶⁶ A. Firenzuola (as in n. 143), p. 328.

¹⁶⁷ G. Marinello, *Gli ornamenti delle donne*, Venice, 1574, unpaginated dedication: 'somma vaghezza porta agli occhi nostri il corpo debitamente proporzionato'.

¹⁶⁸ A. Firenzuola (as in n. 143), p. 304; Firenzuola/Eisenbichler and Murray, p. 46.

¹⁶⁹ F. Luigini (as in n. 165), p. 249.

¹⁷⁰ A. Piccolomini, *Dialogo della bella creanza delle donne da lo Stordito Intronato*, Siena, 1538, *Trattati del Cinquecento sulle donne*, G. Zonta (ed), Bari, 1913, pp. 27-28.

¹⁷¹ G. Marinello (as in n.167), pp. 42, 57, and 66.

Arms and shoulders

Firenzuola	Luigini	Piccolomini	Marinello
Well-proportioned, white, fleshy, and muscular but sweet, that is, more like the arms of Pallas than those of Hercules. ¹⁷² Shoulders should be very sweet and large. ¹⁷³	Delicate, quite large and sweet. ¹⁷⁴ Broad and large shoulders, but softer than the male's. ¹⁷⁵	Large and well-proportioned; thin arms are unsightly, while muscular arms are likened to the lowly male, that is, the <i>facchino</i> ¹⁷⁶ (dockworker/porter).	White, delicate and large and in proportion to the rest of the body. ¹⁷⁷ Wide and graceful shoulders. The shape of the shoulders can be adjusted by garments. ¹⁷⁸

Hips

Firenzuola	Luigini	Marinello
Wide hips are the foremost attraction of a shapely woman and make the bosom appear slender. ¹⁷⁹	Wide hips are preferred in a woman. ¹⁸⁰	Wide hips are preferable. ¹⁸¹

Legs and feet

Firenzuola	Luigini	Piccolomini	Marinello
Long and thin; straight in the lower part and with calves as big as they need to be. ¹⁸²	Legs should not be too thin; ¹⁸³ The thighs should be soft, voluptuous, and quivering, qualities suggestive of erotic enjoyment. ¹⁸⁴ Feet should be white and round.	Large feet are associated with peasants and thought to be ugly. ¹⁸⁵	Long and round; he provides a number of remedies for treating and improving them. ¹⁸⁶ Thighs should be soft, quivering, as white as alabaster and full of charming beauty. ¹⁸⁷

¹⁷² A. Firenzuola (as in n. 143), pp. 325-6; Firenzuola/Eisenbichler and Murray, p. 67.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 319.

¹⁷⁴ F. Luigini (as in n. 165), p. 250.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ A. Piccolomini (as in n. 170), p. 251.

¹⁷⁷ G. Marinello (as in n. 167), p. 295.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 300.

¹⁷⁹ A. Firenzuola (as in n. 143), p. 322.

¹⁸⁰ F. Luigini (as in n. 165), p. 251.

¹⁸¹ G. Marinello (as in n. 167), p. 320.

¹⁸² A. Firenzuola (as in n. 143), pp. 323-324.

¹⁸³ F. Luigini (as in n. 165), p. 256.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ A. Piccolomini (as in n. 170), p. 21.

¹⁸⁶ G. Marinello (as in n. 167), pp. 325-326.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 320.

Breasts

Firenzuola	Luigini	Marinello
Plump and firm, showing no bones; A proportioned breast lends grace, charm and elegance. Breadth is the chief adornment of the breasts. Beautiful breasts appeal to the sense of sight: 'here is Venus with all her court' ¹⁸⁸	Perfect breasts are small, round, firm, and youthful. ¹⁸⁹	Small, round, firm, and fleshy. ¹⁹⁰ He claims bathing them in water and vinegar and wrapping them in bandages will prevent them from growing too big. ¹⁹¹

Buttocks

Luigini	Marinello
Not too small or large ¹⁹²	Disapproves of large buttocks ¹⁹³

Back

Marinello
The perfect female has a back which is soft to see and touch. ¹⁹⁴

Similar physical standards with a few slight variations are repeated in minor works, such as the anonymous *Giardino di virtù* (Florence, c. 1600) and Ciro Spontone's *Hercole difensore d'Homero* (Verona, 1595), which also mention the whole body, including the more intimate parts.¹⁹⁵ The perfect female physical features promoted in the anonymous *Giardino di virtù* are presented in terms of colour, size, shape, and tactile qualities:

- three white features: flesh, teeth, and face
- three black features: eyes, lashes, and pubic hair
- three red features: lips, cheeks and nails
- three long features: body, hair and hands
- three broad features: buttocks, thighs and 'nature'

¹⁸⁸ A. Firenzuola (as in n. 143), p. 321.

¹⁸⁹ F. Luigini (as in n. 165), p. 250.

¹⁹⁰ G. Marinello (as in n. 167), p. 290.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² F. Luigini (as in n. 165), p. 255.

¹⁹³ G. Marinello (as in n. 167), p. 322.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

- three soft features: hair, lips and fingers
- three small features: mouth, nose and breasts.¹⁹⁶

The author's preference for large buttocks differs from the predilection of both Luigini and Marinello and suggests that large buttocks may have appealed more to members of the lower classes, while Spuntone expresses a preference for large breasts. In other respects, Spuntone's ideal female shares many of the features described above, such as clean teeth, a small body, high hips, straight legs, and small feet. In Spuntone's mind, only natural beauty can be enhanced by beauty treatment, cosmetics and garments. If a woman is less than a Venus, she should be content with what she sees in the mirror, since any attempt to improve her looks would be akin to adorning a pig with precious jewels.¹⁹⁷ The discussions of physical beauty in Aretino's *Sei Giornate* suggest that natural beauty can be enhanced by the right cosmetics. Sensual beauty is defined as a shapely figure and a firm and soft body; these are the physical assets which the prostitute should possess.¹⁹⁸

Marinello, Celebrino, and the authors of books of secrets provide recipes and remedies specifically designed to achieve many of the standards of physical beauty described above. While Marinello promotes natural qualities like blond hair and dark eyes, he lists a number of techniques (*arte*) which he claims have the power to bring about a physical transformation. Remedies for achieving a more proportioned figure include special diets, bathing and rubbing the body with oils.¹⁹⁹ Specific body parts, such as the face, breasts, and arms, can be enlarged by massaging the part concerned and wrapping it in paper or rubbing it with a special paste.²⁰⁰ According to Marinello, teeth can be whitened with a special paste and sage can be used to keep the breath fresh. The author of *I secreti di Isabella Cortese* promotes a toothpaste which is supposed to polish teeth and restore gums. Celebrino's *Opera Nuova* shows readers how to keep the breath fresh, cure gums and whiten teeth. Frequent references to bathing illustrate the importance of bathing establishments in daily life. In Marinello's mind, bathing helps preserve the 'adornments of beauty' ('gli ornamenti della bellezza'), since it cleanses the body

¹⁹⁵ C. Spuntone, *Hercole difensore d'Homero. Dialogo del Sig. Cavalliere Ciro Spuntone; nel quale oltre ad alcune nobilissime materia, si tratta de' tiranni, delle congiure contro di loro, della magia naturale; & dell'ufficio donnesco*, Verona, 1595, p. 192. As cited by R. M. Bell (as in n. 8), pp. 200-201.

¹⁹⁶ Anonymous, *Giardino di virtù. Nel quale si contiene alcuni particolari, e meravigliosi secreti. Non più da persona alcuna data in luce. E con diligenza, e spese di Zan Frittella ritrovati*, Florence, c. 1600. As cited by R. M. Bell (as in n. 8), pp. 200-201.

¹⁹⁷ C. Spuntone (as in n. 195), p. 201.

¹⁹⁸ P. Aretino (as in n. 21), p. 192. In response to Pippa's question as to why a certain lady had not been successful in Venice, Nanna replies: 'Ti dirò: I Viniziani hano il gusto fatto a lor modo; e vogliono culo e tette e robbe sode, morbide, e di quindici o sedici anni e fino in venti, e non de le petrarchesche'. This remark is probably aimed at Tullia d'Aragona's Petrarchan pretensions.

¹⁹⁹ G. Marinello (as in n. 167), p. 25.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., pp. 30 and 32.

and keeps it healthy. Marinello suggests using scents and herbs when bathing.²⁰¹ Celebrino's *Opera Nuova* also places emphasis on personal hygiene and the use of soap. Several of the 'secrets' revealed show how to make skin rosy and snow-white, making women 'artificially natural' ('finto naturale'), as well as how to remove unwanted hair and get rid of blemishes.²⁰² In addition, Celebrino suggests a number of lotions which help make and keep the skin white, shiny and beautiful. Finally, the *secreti di Isabella Cortese* promotes a face cream which promises to make the skin look younger.

The Art of Seduction

Both Firenzuola and Luigini take on board the need to avoid accusations of indecency by including in their books traditional views of chaste females alongside descriptions of perfect beauty, showing both a concern for and disregard of conventional notions of decency and modesty. In the Second Dialogue of Firenzuola's treatise there is every indication that revealing as much flesh as possible is highly desirable, while in parts dedicated to physical beauty in Luigini's text there is little that is chaste or platonic. At one point in the text, it is suggested that the 'painted' lady will be a woman of light reputation, capable of satisfying her lover's erotic fantasies. The two-fold image of the female which emerges from both texts indicates a dual perception of contemporary women, suggesting that women could adapt their behaviour to specific settings and circumstances, adopting a number of ploys to flaunt their physical virtues.

The associations made by Firenzuola and Luigini are not isolated in sixteenth-century sources. Piccolomini's *Dialogo della bella creanza della donna* features a procuress, Raphaella, and Margherita, a gentlewoman. Raphaella instructs Margherita in the art of seduction, which involves improving and flaunting her physical assets by adopting a number of cunning strategies designed to reveal parts of or the whole body. In keeping with social norms prescribed for women, the seductress was to possess a range of social skills, such as knowing how to converse in public, and attaining style (*garbo*), colour (*colore*), as well as achieving correct deportment (*portatura*).²⁰³ Clothes should be chosen both to enhance and reveal the shape of the body underneath (*sotto le vesti*).²⁰⁴ Although Piccolomini implies that it is unusual for a woman to reveal parts of her body which are normally covered, he discusses a number of contexts in which women could show off their

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 2.

²⁰² E. Celebrino, *Opera Nuova*, Venice, 1551.

²⁰³ A. Piccolomini (as in n. 170), pp. 19-20.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 21.

physical assets. Cunning and discretion are seen as vital so as to avoid accusations of indecency. Beautiful hands should be revealed whenever possible, for example, when eating, playing cards or chess.²⁰⁵ A beautiful bosom should be revealed whenever possible and preferably without the support of a corset. Possible contexts include feigning that one has just risen, playing in the snow, or bathing in summer.²⁰⁶ Legs can be revealed when women are engaged in a number of leisure activities, particularly outdoor pursuits such as fishing, hunting, riding, dismounting a horse or stepping over a ditch. While some of these situations fit with ploys approved by Castiglione regarding the discreet display of the female body,²⁰⁷ others are far more daring and promote varying degrees of social transgression. The most serious transgression is Raphaela's suggestion that women may bare all at bathing establishments. Women with a perfectly beautiful body, including those of the upper-classes, are told to display their bodies at the baths at appropriate times, where they can be seen through slits in the wall. Piccolomini recounts that two beautiful and completely naked women were observed by two young men at the baths of Vignone, near Siena. Piccolomini's remarks suggest that discretion justifies an act which would otherwise have been deemed improper for women.²⁰⁸

The assistance of Raphaela is not without significance. In sixteenth-century Italy, the *ruffiana* was the female counterpart of the *mezzano*, a man specialised in writing love-letters, the first step towards an amorous encounter, and who negotiated meetings between gallants and courtesans. The *ruffiana* acted as procuress and talent scout and was sometimes a fortune-teller and sorceress. She knew how to make love potions and charms and was often a hairdresser and a beauty specialist, an expert in hiding defects and concealing the ravages of age. It is known that she frequented the homes of ladies because she knew all the latest fashions. Thus the contact between Piccolomini's fictional Raphaela and Margherita is plausible. The *ruffiana* thus appears to be the ideal person for passing on beauty secrets and helping women of the middle and upper classes to appear more attractive and seduce members of the opposite sex. The emphasis on discretion and correct behaviour seems deliberate and shows how such women might avoid accusations of indecency.²⁰⁹ The discussion of inner beauty and virtue found in the writings of Luigini and Firenzuola also suggests that women were to be

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 32.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ B. Castiglione (as in n. 35), pp. 87-88.

²⁰⁸ A. Piccolomini (as in n. 170), p. 33.

²⁰⁹ Stories of unfaithful wives were very popular during the Renaissance. One popular story is Tommaso Costo's *Il fuggilozio. Diviso in otto giornate ove da otto gentilhuomini e due donne si ragiona delle malizie di femine e trascuragini di mariti*, Venice, 1601, which is written in imitation of Boccaccio but with fewer literary pretensions and more sexual escapades related. As cited by R. M. Bell (as in n. 8), p. 340 n. 51.

careful to choose the right place and moment for flirting and seducing men and revealing parts of their bodies they were supposed to keep covered.

These writings indicate that under certain circumstances the behaviour of the "respectable" woman could come dangerously close to that of the courtesan or high-class prostitute and that their bodies could be a useful tool for asserting their personalities and power. What is perhaps most significant is the availability of written texts which told women how to achieve this goal and warn or inform men of their antics.

Other documentary evidence provides confirmation of this cross-over. A number of visitors to Venice remarked on the physical appearance and attire of the local women in a period which spans from the late fifteenth to the late sixteenth century. A testimony from the early 1600s clearly shows that Venetian women had not modified their style of dress. Fynes Moryson (1566-1630) noted that the local women 'shew their naked necks and breasts and likewise their dugges'.²¹⁰ In his costume book of the period Cesare Vecellio refers to the overlapping of the courtesan's and the married woman's style of dress.²¹¹ Such testimonies indicate that women liked to dress attractively. Legal provisions which aimed to foster more appropriate female dress and the sartorial privileges of the courtesan were largely unsuccessful.

The rigid prescriptions for women and claims that the widespread use of cosmetics was for the pleasures of others rather than for the husband expresses a fear of adultery which has been well documented. As Rosenthal refers Judicial documents of the period contain reports of infidelity and stories of women running off with their lovers. Adultery was often initiated by women and usually by the wives of wealthy merchants, better-off artisans, shopkeepers, and older men. Their lovers were the opposite: youthful, unstable, and usually members of the lower social classes, admired for their physique and sexual prowess. Women chose as lovers their spouse's workers, monks, or even pimps. Adultery was a serious issue and could end in the adulteress losing her dowry, injury and even murder. It is therefore not surprising that texts dealing with physical beauty and seduction portray dual images of women and are keen to underscore the importance of cunning and discretion.²¹²

The focus on looking good has been linked to social-economic changes and the increase in dowries which is believed to have led women from wealthy families who

²¹⁰ F. Moryson, *Itinerary containing his Ten Years Travell*, London, 1617, p. 220.

²¹¹ C. Vecellio, *Degli habiti antichi et moderni di diverse parti del mondo*, D. Zenaro (ed), Venice, 1590, p. 137. On the transformation of the ordinary woman to courtesan, see n. 125 above.

²¹² On Venetian sumptuary laws concerning dress and physical appearance, see S. Chojnacki, *Tiziano e Venezia* (as in n.1) on infidelity and adultery see M. F. Rosenthal (as in n. 123), pp.15 and 263 n.18.

had no political outlet to make choices at least as far as their physical appearance was concerned.²¹³ This social and political situation provides a context which helps explain the preoccupation with female beauty in everyday life, bringing with it changes in attitudes towards physical beauty and prompting attractive and presumably young women to seek to improve and exploit their physical assets, while adopting different behavioural patterns depending on the context. Of particular significance is the suggestion that money spent on clothes, perfumes and jewellery and time spent on improving their looks was seen as part of a campaign to display their bodies and acquire greater visibility through which they could wield power or at least find sexual satisfaction.²¹⁴ The transgression with which some contemporary commentators associated women shares striking similarities with the world of courtesans and the Venetian civic myth of female physical beauty and power to which my attention will now turn.

Venetian Courtesans and the Civic Myth of Female Beauty

In Venice various strands of cultural myth were created around embodiments of commercialisation, luxury, spectacle and voluptuous sensuality.²¹⁵ The city was keen to underscore its tolerance of sexual permissiveness, foreign immigrants and marginal groups, while simultaneously promoting its image as the playground of Europe. The courtesan was visible proof of progressive social policies, equality and justice, ideals that spread to the wider social context. An important civic myth was constructed around the figure of the courtesan as the goddess of love, Venus, the deity most in vogue at that time. The courtesan thus came to be identified with the myth of Venice as a maritime republic and city of freedom. This myth emerges most powerfully for the first time in the sixteenth century and it echoes the general permissiveness in daily life, which is inextricably linked with the focus on the body beautiful.

The courtesan's marketable skills and relative independence gave her an aura of glamour which often made it difficult to distinguish her from women of the upper echelons of Venetian society.²¹⁶ The system in Venice was such that courtesans

²¹³ On dowries and the fear of financial ruin brought about by over-expenditure on clothes, see S. Chojnacki, *Tiziano e Venezia* (as in n.1), p. 67.

²¹⁴ See G. Scarabello, *Tiziano e Venezia* (as in n.1), p. 97.

²¹⁵ For a general discussion of the Venetian civic myth of the republic, see F. Gaeta, 'Alcune considerazioni sul mito di Venezia', *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance*, 23, 1961, pp. 58-75; G. Fasoli, 'Nascita di un mito', *Studi storici in onore di Gioacchino Volpe per il suo 80° compleanno*, Florence, 1958, vol. 1, pp. 445-479; W. J. Bouwama, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty: Renaissance Values in the Age of the Counter-Reformation*, Berkeley, 1968; M. P. Gilmore, 'Myth and Reality in Venetian Political Theory', *Renaissance Venice*, J. R. Hale (ed), London, 1974, pp. 431-433; M. L. King, *Venetian Humanism in an Age of Patrician Dominance*, Princeton, NJ, 1986, pp. 174-178.

²¹⁶ On documents and sumptuary laws comparing the courtesan's dress to that of women from the upper-classes, see M. F. Rosenthal (as in n. 123), pp. 59-60 and 66. See also D. Owen Hughes, 'Sumptuary

could be protected by members of government administration, men who paid to be entertained by them. The special status afforded to the courtesan allowed them to appropriate their male protectors' rank and use their name as if it were their own. Their particular position also meant that they were not tied to the same kind of familial and class ideologies and restrictions governing the lives of patrician women.²¹⁷ While patrician women played no part in public displays or local political life, the attributes of the courtesan made her acceptable in civic displays, thus providing access to the public domain denied to most upper-class women.²¹⁸ Local and foreign commentators place emphasis on the beauty and talents of the *cortegiane honeste*, expressing praise, and sometimes criticism, of their sophistication and cunning use of language, as well as their ability to navigate their way through a the network of social structures and class hierarchies.

The civic myth which gave prominence to Venetian social policies, commercial and maritime power meant that the courtesan could be marketed in public displays, such as annual festivities, when receiving merchants and during the triumphal entries of powerful leaders.²¹⁹ On such occasions the courtesan served the republic as a luxury item, affirming the city's beauty and grandeur. By performing this key public function, the courtesan was selling much more than her body. Angela Zaffetta was chosen to entertain Ippolito de' Medici who visited Venice in 1530. Veronica Franco, whose name, address and fee were listed in the Official List of Prostitutes of Venice, was hired by the Republic of Venice in 1574 to entertain Henry of Valois who was travelling to Paris where he was to be crowned king.²²⁰ The triumphal entry of Henry III occasioned the grandest and most

Laws and Social Relations in Renaissance Italy', *Disputes and Settlements: Laws and Human Relations in the West*, J. Bossy (ed), Cambridge, 1983, pp. 69-99. On the procuress's role in dressing prostitutes as highborn ladies, see C. Vecellio (as in n. 211), p. 137.

²¹⁷ On the position of Venetian women during the period under investigation, see S. Chojnacki, 'Patrician Women in Early Renaissance Venice', *Studies in the Renaissance*, vol. 21, 1974, pp. 18-84.

²¹⁸ On the participation of the courtesan in the Venetian religious festival known as the *Sensa* and at large scale fairs, see L. Padoan Urban, 'La festa della *senza* nelle arti e nell'iconografia', *Studi veneziani*, 10, 1968, pp. 291-353.

²¹⁹ On the triumphal entries of sovereigns as an important phenomenon of the Renaissance, see R. Strong, *Art and Power: Renaissance Festivals, 1450-1650*, Berkeley, 1984; for a discussion of Henry III's entry into Venice, *ibid.*, pp. 115-116. On the function of triumphal entries, see B. Mitchell, *The Majesty of the State: Triumphal Progresses of Foreign Sovereigns in Renaissance Italy, 1494-1600*, Florence, 1986, pp. 112-116. According to Mitchell, triumphal entries provided an "emotional catharsis" for citizens and he argues that the emotion was primarily political, serving to display the possession of civic devotion and loyalty.

²²⁰ Famous for his sexual proclivities, Henry is said to have selected Veronica Franco from a book of miniatures of the most famous Venetian courtesans which was shown to him by the Signoria for the purpose. It has been suggested that the *Catalogo di tutte le principali et più honorate cortegiane di Venezia*, Venice, 1565, in which Veronica's name and fee are listed, provided Henry with her name and address. See P. De Nolhac and A. Solerti, *Il viaggio in Italia di Enrico III Re di Francia e le feste a Venezia, Ferrara, Mantova e Torino*, Turin, 1890, p. 119 n. 2. De Nolhac and Solerti provide a complete record of contemporary literary texts and manuscripts composed to commemorate the visit, *ibid.*, pp. 3-17. G. Tassini, *Veronica Franco, celebre poetessa e cortegiana del secolo XVI*, Venice, 1888, p. 89, rejected the catalogue theory and suggested that Marco Venier probably played a part in arranging the encounter. G. Masson (as in n. 17), p. 156, believes that the nobleman, Andrea Tron, with whom Veronica claimed to have had a child, was involved in the encounter. M. F. Rosenthal does not believe the Catalogo theory is plausible, believing that it could not provide accurate details regarding Veronica and her address in 1574. See M. F. Rosenthal (as in n. 123), pp. 103-4. The catalogue is reproduced in R.

extravagant preparations for a state reception, comprising balls, theatrical productions and musical performances.²²¹ Veronica celebrated the encounter in a letter in which she downplays the erotic element and in which she figures as Danae, impregnated by Henry's valour.²²²

Veronica identified herself with this myth and saw it as a way of ennobling herself. With Marco Venier as her male patron and literary counsellor, Veronica Franco composed verses in praise of the republic and its heroes, whereby she fashioned her own image as a loyal citizen. Veronica's patriotic writings emphasise the female attributes of the noble city of Venice as the Queen of the Adriatic Sea. In Chapter 22 of the *Terze Rime*, she celebrates female beauty, opulence and social cohesion.²²³ By associating herself with the civic icon she thus combined a patriotic gesture and a self-ennobling one. She is emblematic of the self-promoter, self-justifier, erotic lover, and public debater. The significance of the courtesan's role in the civic myth is reflected in the criticism of Garzoni, Speroni and Lorenzo and Maffio Venier, who employed the honorific image of Venice as sublime female ruler to disparage the courtesan as a vulgar whore.

The courtesan maintained her display function though later in the century there were economic pressures to reduce excessive spending. Distinctions between the courtesan and other citizens were underscored in moments of crisis, such as a series

Casagrande di Villiaviera (as in n.123). On the publishing history of the catalogue, see G. Tassini, p. 9 n.1 and p. 56 n. 2. Tassini argues that the catalogue was not originally commissioned by the Venetian government but by Hieronimo Calepino, a publisher who was tried by the Inquisition courts in 1566. Another Venetian catalogue is *La tariffa delle puttane di Venegia*, which was probably first published in clandestine form in Venice in 1535. Neither the name of the author nor that of the publisher were given. The 1566 version is reprinted in A. Barzaghi, *Donne o cortegiane? La prostituzione a Venezia: documenti di costume dal XVI al XVIII secolo*, Verona, 1980, pp. 168-191. The catalogue names 110 courtesans and 25 procuresses. M. F. Rosenthal believes that both the *Catalogo* and the *Tariffa* could have been conceived as satires, though the *Catalogo* appears to be more explicitly satirical. In addition, she does not believe that either text served a practical purpose like northern picture albums, such as the Flemish Crispijn van de Passe text, which was used by foreigners for selecting a prostitute to their liking. On these points, see M. F. Rosenthal (as in n. 123), 39-40 and pp. 274-275 nn. 87, 89 and 92. Another catalogue listing prostitutes is the anonymous, *I germini sopra quaranta meretrice della città di Fiorenza*, Florence, 1553, which was promoted as a guide to selecting the forty best prostitutes in Florence. For other sources, see F. Dittico, *Il catalogo delle principali e più onorate cortigiane di Venezia nel Cinquecento*, Venice, 1956, pp. 7-8. R. M. Bell (as in n. 8), pp. 181-183, believes that these catalogues were purely satirical in purpose.

²²¹ For a discussion of the celebrations, see D. Nutter, 'A Tragedy for Henry III of France, Venice, 1574', *Essays in Honor of Craig Hugh Smith*, A. Morrogh et al. (ed), 2 vols., Florence, 1985, vol. 2, pp. 591-611. See also L. Padoan Urban, 'Gli spettacoli urbani e l'utopia', *Architettura e utopia nella Venezia del Cinquecento*, L. Puppi (ed), Milan, 1980, pp. 144-166.

²²² The encounter and related sources are analysed by M. F. Rosenthal (as in n. 123), pp. 101-7 and G. Masson (as in n. 17), pp. 155. For an account of Veronica's rendezvous with Henry III in the first of the *Lettere Familiari*, see V. Franco (as in n. 196) *All'invittissimo e Cristianissimo Re Enrico III di Francia e I Re di Polonia*, pp.30-31 and accompanying notes pp. 118-120.

²²³ V. Franco, "*Terze Rime*" e sonetti, Venice, 1575, G. Beccari (ed), Lanciano, 1912; as cited by M. F. Rosenthal (as in n. 123), pp. 16-17. On Franco's literary activities and writings, see B. Croce, 'Veronica Franco', *Scritti di storia letteraria e politica*, 3 vols., Bari, 1952, vol. 3, *Poeti e scrittori del pieno e del tardo Rinascimento*, pp. 218-234. See also, B. Croce, 'La lirica cinquecentesca', *Poesia popolare e poesia d'arte*, Bari, 1967, pp. 341-441.

of natural disasters in the 1570s, when courtesans, prostitutes and other disenfranchised groups were available as symbols of disorder and vileness.²²⁴

²²⁴ On legal provisions affecting courtesans in Rome, see M. Kurzel-Runtscheiner (as in n. 123). On the law established by Leo X and later reinforced by Clement VII, see E. Rodocanachi, *Cortegiane e buffoni di Roma*, Milan, 1927, p. 71.

PART THREE: MALE BEAUTY AND BEHAVIOUR - *Il giovane, il facchino e il gentiluomo*

Like women and public prostitutes, *fanciulli* (boys) and *giovani* (youths, though usually this age group comprised males up to the age of thirty), and *plebi* or *lavoratori* (lowly salaried manual works and farm labourers) were traditionally viewed as "problem" and marginal groups. These groups were traditionally seen to lack the virtues and qualities needed for good governance, such as reason, gravity and sexual restraint. The visibility of youths in bawdy behaviour was always high, particularly in times of social and political unrest and when political informers were most active. In 1511 the Florentine chronicler, Giovanni Cambi, reported that the pursuit of prostitutes on the part of adolescents led to fights and even murder, while in 1527 he condemned both working-class and patrician youths who spent their time feasting, gambling and practising sodomy.²²⁵

Humanists expressed concerns about unruly behaviour and common vices, though the ideals they advocate seem unattainable in the given context. Francesco Barbaro's *De re uxoria* and Leo Battista Alberti's *Della famiglia* both promote marriage as a cure for unruly and immoral behaviour. Alberti dedicated a lengthy discussion to the problems of the unrestrained sexual passions of youths, perceiving them as civil vices that threatened social order. In his *Della vita civile* (c. 1436) Matteo Palmieri claims that the most culpable males were those belonging to the mercantile elite, who, apart from other vices, seduced women and squandered their fathers' patrimony.²²⁶

However, in the course of the sixteenth century the perception of the youthful and lowly male as the bearer of physical beauty and a body which is physically fit for action comes to the fore. Like female physical beauty, the muscular and virile physique came to be admired as the highest adornment of the person. This phenomenon emerges most powerfully in Florence, where the participation of males in public spectacles gave prominence to the display of their physical fitness and beauty and ennobled them in the eyes of every Florentine. In addition, the display of the virile male seems to have contributed to the re-definition of male physical virtues as adornments of the city and particularly the perception and application of the term *nobile*, which had generally been a synonym for the dominant or ruling classes.²²⁷ It thus challenged the notions of ideal physique and behaviour advocated in behaviour texts like Castiglione's *Cortegiano*. The social

²²⁵ For Cambi's accounts, see M. Rocke (as in n. 58), p. 228.

²²⁶ M. Palmieri, *Della vita civile*, Florence, 1529, pp. 22-24.

²²⁷ On Renaissance primary sources concerning the notion of nobility and related historical developments, see C. Donati, *L'idea di Nobiltà: secoli XIV-XVIII*, Rome and Bari, 1988.

and political implications of the Florentine myth of the physically fit virile male will become clearer when analysed alongside Castiglione's text and the current debate on the nature of nobility.

The Man of Class and the Virtues of the Courtier: *Grazia, armi e libri come ornamenti*

Much of Castiglione's *Cortegiano* centres on the qualities associated with gentlemen living and operating in courtly settings. Castiglione frequently uses the terms *gentiluomo* and *cortegiano* interchangeably. The dialogue attempts to establish the connections between nobility and the courtier. Although different views are expressed as regards ancient lineage, the discussion as a whole indicates that, while noble blood may be an asset, it is not seen as an essential trait for the courtier.²²⁸ It is, however, clear that fashioning the perfect courtier entailed considerable grooming and was intimately bound up with wealth and leisure. Castiglione's ideal courtier is the paragon of refinement and courtesy, thoroughly groomed and trained for life at court. The courtier should master a range of skills, in that he should be eloquent and well-versed, an accomplished musician, an expert in courtship, a skilled dancer of the *moresca*, horseman and fencer. These skills are best cultivated in youth.²²⁹ His education should be based on the study of Greek and Latin, as well as on the poets, orators, and historians of classical antiquity, and he should be able to engage in contemporary debates on aesthetics and the arts. Because his reputation hinges on all-important social distinctions, he should pay particular attention to dress, speech, gestures and movements which are all social indicators and should befit the setting and audience. In every-day situations he is bound by a sense of restraint and gracious and sober dignity.²³⁰ The standards established are also significant with regard to the distinctions they draw between the man of class and males further down the social scale. One of these distinctions concerns the ideal physique of the man of class:

and in warfare, when for the most part the work to be done demands exertion and strength, the strongest are not the most esteemed.²³¹

²²⁸ Arguments in favour of nobility by birthright are drawn from Quattrocento treatises on the subject and are primarily advocated by the leading interlocutor of Book 1, Count Lodovico da Canossa, a member of an old Veronese aristocratic family. In Book 2 nobility is discussed in terms of appropriate behaviour, appearance and honour.

²²⁹ B. Castiglione (as in n. 35), pp. 28-29. Castiglione's account of the accomplishments of the courtier fit with the new definition of the term, which was prompted by the new and more versatile functions he fulfilled at court. The courtier was no longer associated with the medieval knight; military and athletic displays primarily fulfilled a political function. For a negative portrayal of the courtier also in connection with moral degeneracy and comparisons with the immoral behaviour of courtesans, see Garzoni (as in n. 8), pp. 846-854.

²³⁰ B. Castiglione (as in n. 35), p. 22.

²³¹ Ibid., p. 271: 'e nelle guerre, dove sono la maggior parte delle opere laboriose e di forza, i più gagliardi non sono però i più pregiati.'

Castiglione associates physical strength and accentuated musculature with the lowly male, championing the view that boldness and strength are not the most admired qualities in a male. Athletics and military displays are recommended for the fittest and the youthful. Contexts for the display of physical skills include public spectacles in front of a mixed audience made up of common folk (*populi*), noblewomen and noblemen (*gran signori*). Physical activities performed in public spectacles include jousts (*giostrare*), tournaments (*torneare*), volleying (*nel giocare a canne*), tilting (*il corer lance*), casting spears and darts (*lanciar aste e dardi*) and running bulls (*corer tori*). *Lottare* comprises both wrestling and fencing. While ball games (*gioca di palla*) demonstrate speed and agility, performing on horseback, which is seen as a spectacular sport, is said to be tiring and difficult (*faticoso e difficile*) but is believed to make men agile and dextrous. Since these activities are chiefly performed at public spectacles, Castiglione stresses that the noble participants should always maintain the decorum of location and social distinctions. Accordingly, he urges the performer to accompany his movements with judgement and grace, which are the qualities through which 'universal favour' is attained.²³²

The man of class was to pay particular attention to his behaviour and appearance. The participants' social status was to be evident through the lavish display of the performers' garments and the finery of their horses. The focus on fine garments strongly suggests that the body alone cannot function as an adornment of the person:

If he engages in public spectacles, such as jousting, volleying, or some other kind of physical recreation, remembering where he is and in whose presence, he will make sure that he is elegant and attractive in the exercise of arms as he is competent, and that he feeds the eyes of the onlookers with everything that will enhance his grace. He will make sure that his horse has beautiful finery, that he is suitably attired, with appropriate mottoes and devices to attract the eyes of the onlookers in his direction as surely as the loadstone attracts the iron.²³³

The demonstration of social superiority is seen as essential when jousting, wrestling, and playing sport with members of the lower orders. Competitions with members of the lower classes are to be carried out casually; out of 'noblesse oblige' and only if the socially superior participant is sure of victory. The courtier should be wary about engaging in mock battle with the lower classes particularly in front of large crowds since defeat at the hands of the common folk is tantamount to a loss of dignity: 'He

²³² Ibid., pp. 52-53.

²³³ Ibid., p. 131: 'e poi se ritroverà armeggiare nei spettacoli pubblici, giostrando, torneando o giocando a canna, o faccendo qualsivoglia altro esercizio della persona, ricordandosi il loco ove si trova in presenza di cui, procurerà esser nell'arme non meo attilato che sicuro, e pascere gli occhi del pubblico di tutte le cose che gli parrà che possono aggiungere grazia; e porrà cura d'aver cavallo con vaghi guarnimenti, abiti ben intesi, motti appropriate, invenzioni ingegnose, che a sé tirino, gli occhi de' circostanti, come calamita il ferro'.

should be almost certain of winning or else not take part at all, for it is a terrible thing and quite undignified to see a gentleman beaten by a peasant, especially in a wrestling match'.²³⁴

Ease and poise are the defining characteristics of the courtier's gestures and actions. *Grazia* (grace) is understood as a quality 'which immediately pleases', and like Firenzuola's definition, it denotes a quality which makes its bearer appreciated. Grace is perceived as an 'adornment informing and accompanying all his actions, so that he appears clearly worthy of the companionship and favour of the great'.²³⁵ *Sprezzatura* (nonchalance) is defined as law governing gestures and movements, making them appear effortless. *Sprezzatura* is related to *grazia*, in that both serve to establish the boundaries within which seemly and acceptable behaviour lies.²³⁶ Both terms refer to social skills which are acquired partly naturally and partly by imitating the behaviour of men taken as models. Natural defects can be corrected and the qualities associated with grace can be demonstrated by actions and manners.

The Florentine Civic Myth of the Male Physically Fit for Action

Richard Trexler's research into the changing roles of marginal groups, most notably youths and lowly manual workers, in Renaissance Florence has brought to light the deployment of these groups in opulent governmental displays in what constituted a 'visual revolution'.²³⁷ References to these marginal groups as *giovani* and *plebi* were fluid terms. Groups comprising youths were mixed and therefore did not only include members from the upper classes, nor did the plebeian groups include only poverty-stricken men. An analysis of primary sources not examined by Trexler, including a number of bawdy poems by Grazzini and passages from Bocchi's *Bellezze della città di Fiorenza*, both concerned with the participation of males from the upper ranks as well as youths further down the social scale in competitive sports played in the public arena, indicates that this visual revolution elevated the most dangerous elements of society chiefly on account of their beautiful physique. Physically fit for strenuous activity and admired for his sexual prowess, the lowly male and the youth became the embodiment of the new Florentine notion of

²³⁴ Ibid., pp. 133-134; 'dee l'omo esser quasi sicuro di vincere altamente è troppo brutta cosa e fuor della dignità vedere un gentiluomo vinto da un villano, e massimamente alla lotta'.

²³⁵ Ibid., p. 41: 'e sia questo un ornamento che componga e compagni tutte le operazioni sue e prometta nella fronte quel tale esser degno del commercio e grazia d'ogni gran signore.'

²³⁶ On the application of the terms *grazia*, *sprezzatura* and *affettazione* in Castiglione's *Cortegiano*, see E. Saccone, 'Grazia, Sprezzatura, Affettazione in the Courtier', Castiglione. *The Ideal and the Real in Renaissance Culture*, R. W. Hanning and D. Rosand (eds), New Haven, 1983, pp. 45-69.

²³⁷ R. C. Trexler (as in n. 2), esp. pp. 364-418.

nobility with male physical beauty celebrated in the public arena as the ultimate male virtue.

In order to understand the application of this term, it is necessary to examine briefly the debate on social class specific to the Florentine context. The definition of the nature of nobility had been an important social concern since the late medieval and early modern Italy, but was more complex in Florence.²³⁸ Most Florentine and non-Florentine humanists advocated the view that the only legitimate source of nobility was individual virtue rather than titles, distinguished lineage and wealth. However, in fifteenth-century Florence this view increasingly gained momentum and shaped political rhetoric and civic consciousness. As a community which had acquired wealth largely through commerce and thanks to the activities of merchants, in Florence nobility came to denote not honour based on blood and origins but on one's own merits, ingenuity and virtues. Accordingly, the primacy of personal merits is a recurrent theme in Florentine writings on nobility produced during the Renaissance. The concept of nobility as a virtue was primarily developed by humanists who shifted the emphasis away from Dante's notion of Christian virtue and notions of hereditary privileges, whereby an ethics of display was developed and which was transformed by successive generations.

Around the middle of the Cinquecento the issue resurfaced with a new urgency on account of the legal dispute between Duke Cosimo and the d'Este dukes of Ferrara with regard to precedence at the Imperial Court. Medici support placed emphasis on the ancient lineage of the city and written texts focused on virtues

²³⁸ Lapo da Castiglionchio's *Epistola o Sia Ragionamento* (1377-1378), (Bologna, 1753), included in the definition of nobility merchants of wool and cloth, describing the trade as 'noble and honest', pp. 31-60: 'di mercatanzie nobili e oneste, non villi trafficando panni e lane, come fanno li maggiori e migliori uomini della città'. Coluccio Salutati did not reject hereditary privileges provided they stemmed from a good reputation, glory and wealth. Salutati held that true nobility resides in virtue and an innate and natural disposition rather than visual signs. See C. Salutati, *Epistolario*, F. Novati (ed), Rome, 1896, vol. 3, pp. 644-653. Poggio Bracciolini's *De nobilitate* (written after 1439; published Venice, 1471.) points to a more obvious shift towards the central importance of personal merit. The two interlocutors, Lorenzo de Medici (Giovanni di Bicci), brother of Cosimo de Medici, and Niccolò Piccoli, both agree that nobility is determined by virtue but disagree as to the specifics involved. In the Florence of Lorenzo il Magnifico the debate on nobility increasingly shifted towards the humanistic emphasis on personal qualities. Set in 1469-1470, Cristoforo Landino's *De vera nobilitate* (written 1481-1487) advocates the view that true nobility is determined by man's actions as opposed to birthright and ancient lineage. See C. Landino, *De vera nobilitate*, M. Lentzen (ed), Geneva, 1970. The theory of magnificence was developed in the fifteenth century in connection with the ideals of civic life, and Matteo Palmieri was one of its notable exponents. Book Four of his *Libro della vita civile* (c. 1436; *On Civil Life*) is concerned with the notion of the useful from various viewpoints, including its connection with wealth, which is defined as a means for worthy men to act virtuously. Palmieri's discussion on magnificence draws on Aristotle's definition in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Theories like those expounded by Palmieri and his contemporaries were convenient to the citizens of a mercantile republic because they related earnings to private merit and public benefit. In Palmieri's mind, public splendour was a means of embellishing the city and contributing to civic beauty. Palmieri's merits were celebrated by the contemporary bookseller and biographer Vespasiano da Bisticci, perfectly illustrating the recognition of the values he advocated. Vespasiano pays tribute to Palmieri as a man of relatively modest birth who was the 'founder of his house and ennobled it by his worthy life [and] won a high position in the city and ultimately enjoyed all the honours it could give. In Vespasiano's mind, Palmieri became an ornament to his city, not for his beautiful features, but for having an honourable reputation ('onoratamente notabili'). On the debate on the nature of nobility, see also D. A. Barbagli, 'La difesa dei valori etici nella trattatistica sulla nobiltà del secondo Cinquecento', *Rinascimento*, vol. 29, 1989, pp. 377-427.

connected with global achievements and listed the names of illustrious men. In the later sixteenth century the definition of nobility required further revision as the Medici rulers created a new nobility of civil servants from various segments of society. It is in the writings of this period that we find the most instructive discussion of nobility for the present purpose.

Paolo Mini's *Discorso della nobiltà di Firenze e De' Fiorentini* (Florence, 1593 & 1614) represents the culmination point in the Florentine debate on nobility and is of particular import with regard to the perception of the Florentine male. In addition, the treatise sheds light not only on the wide application of the term *nobile* but also on the new ethics of display. In Mini's mind, purity of blood and consistently virtuous actions are the only two distinguishing features of nobility. In order to demonstrate both qualities, he discusses Florentine history since the city's foundation, military and political achievements, and examples of religious piety.²³⁹ Florentine nobility embraces the entire city and its inhabitants, encompassing both the practical and speculative intellect, that is, all the arts and sciences in which ingenuity and a noble spirit can be demonstrated.

A wide range of professions and crafts are included under the definition of *nobile*. While Mini refers to different kinds of nobility, he promotes the importance of personal merit and includes in his list of nobles individuals and groups which Vincenzo Borghini would not have accepted.²⁴⁰ According to Mini, a gentleman is a person who operates virtuously. He provides ample historical evidence of the virtuous deeds carried out by the Florentines, including their political

²³⁹ P. Mini, *Discorso della nobiltà di Firenze e de' Fiorentini*, Florence, 1593 and expanded edition 1614, pp. 25-6. All references here are to the 1614 edition. Mini's text has received relatively scant attention. On Mini's text, see C. Donati (as in n. 227), p. 219 and for general references, *ibid.*, pp. 216, 241. Other Florentine writings keen to promote the special qualities of the city featuring inventories of accomplished men, demonstrations of the virtue of magnanimity, examples of faith, and charitable organisations, include P. Mini, *Difesa della città di Fiorenza*, Lyon, 1577, expanded and republished in 1593; L. Ferrini, 'Discorso della nobiltà di Firenze ancor che sia mercantile', Florence, 1589, and M. Poccianti, *Vite de' sette beati fiorentini fondatori dello Sacro Ordine de' Servi*, Florence, 1589. R. Williams has linked Mini's text to the commission of the herm busts that decorated the façade of the palace at Borgo degli Albizzi, 18, Florence rather than the wider social context. The first names mentioned are those of the men celebrated in the herms. Williams believes the text was modelled on Ugolino Verino's *De Illustratione urbis Florentiae*, which contains three sections that respectively deal with a history of the city, illustrious men, and noble families. See R. Williams, 'The Façade of the Palazzo dei 'Visacci'', *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance*, vol. 5, 1993, Florence, pp. 209-244; *ibid.*, p. 236 n. 77 for references to Verino's treatise. Williams's article is chiefly concerned with documents pertaining to the herms with particular reference to the small book on the decoration produced by Baccio Valori's son, Filippo Valori, *Termini di mezzo rilievo e d'intera dottrina tra gli archi di casa Valori*, Florence, 1604, which may have been produced in defence of the project.

²⁴⁰ The manuscript copy of Vincenzo Borghini's discourse on Florentine nobility is reprinted with introduction by J. R. Woodhouse, *Storia della nobiltà fiorentina: discorsi inediti o rari*, Pisa, 1974. For an overview of Borghini's intellectual activities on the topic, see *ibid.*, pp. XIII-XLIV. See also C. Donati (as in n. 227), pp. 217-218 and 240. On Borghini's studies on local heraldic symbols in his *Dell'arme delle famiglie fiorentine*, *ibid.*, pp. 216-217. While Borghini acknowledges that nobility was based on meritocracy and that members of the lower classes, such as shopkeepers, could be and were included in the list of noble citizens, his primary goals seem to have been to trace the origins of the term and provide a precise definition of nobility and related terms, as well as to present documentary evidence for the oldest noble houses of the city.

independence.²⁴¹ True nobility resides in ingenuity and Florentines have shown their worth in warfare, not as private captains but as public generals, succeeding in conquering principalities, in defending cities, and liberating princes. Such deeds indicate that they are of noble blood and not gentlemen by proxy.²⁴² By extending the notion of nobility to every field of human action, Mini sets out to demonstrate the universal applicability of this term. Nobility and valour are manifest in the city's civic government, the magnificence of its architecture, the virtue of magnanimity evident in restoring the noble arts, eloquence, the unique quality of its poetry, its scientific investigations, its skills in warfare, and its piety. Ingenuity and industry are the trademarks of the Florentines and as such they deserve the title 'nobili'. The present generation of Florentines is the offspring of men who distinguished themselves by virtue or civic good sense and has been born to demonstrate the same qualities.²⁴³

Bocchi's *Bellezze* is written in praise of the entire city of Florence. Bocchi makes beauty and nobility the focus of his discussion and in uses them as categories specifically expressive of Florentine achievements in keeping with Mini's perception of Florentine qualities.²⁴⁴ By looking at the terms nobility is paired with, we can learn a great deal about his understanding of nobility and its relation to the myth of the physically fit male. The ability to discern these special qualities means grasping the full merit of Florence and the Florentines. Bocchi's description of the Florentine *calcio* tournament that took place in Piazza S. Croce each spring illustrates that beauty is a key feature of the movements of males as they reveal parts of their bodies in a display of energy and dexterity which creates a 'beautiful spectacle':

Those who are robust, dextrous, youthful, and of noble blood gather in this square [S. Croce] every day and, taking off those garments that prevent movement, which is needed to play football, they train with the liveliest pride one can imagine. Fifty-three elect youths are chosen and divided into two teams; they make a beautiful spectacle because of their speed and dexterity, and at the prime of life they all exert themselves as much as possible and like two armies with great pride. Gentlemen and small boys come from every part of the city to see them: so there is a lovely spectacle and much enjoyment because of all the various actions that take place during the match and because of the qualities of these most noble men.²⁴⁵

²⁴¹ P. Mini (as in n. 239), pp. 66-67. Valori's discussion of nobility fits with the current debate on nobility. At the end of the introduction, Valori defines Florentine nobility as joint participation in 'civic and moral life, accompanied on each side by prudence and wisdom, the foundation of all virtues, and united with eloquence' (unpaginated). At the end of the essay, Valori concludes that nobility is not necessarily connected with courtly life (*vita cavalleresca*), but is bound up with political affairs, the liberal arts and learning, as well as financial commerce, the wool and silk trade, and the management of guilds. His perception of nobility is closely connected with the promotion of the active Florentine who acquires prosperity for himself and the community. On these points, see R. Williams (as in n. 239), esp. p. 228.

²⁴² P. Mini (as in n. 239), pp. 87-88.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 133-134.

²⁴⁴ On the notion of beauty in Bocchi's *Bellezze*, see T. Frangenberg, 'Beauty in *Bellezze della città, I'*, *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art*, F. Ames-Lewis and M. Rogers (eds), Hants (UK) and Vermont (USA), 1998, pp. 191-198, and R. Williams, 'The notion of beauty in Francesco Bocchi's *Bellezze della città di Fiorenza, II'*, *ibid.*, pp. 199-205. My analysis expands on their conclusions concerning the notions of beauty and nobility in Bocchi's text.

²⁴⁵ F. Bocchi (as in n. 49), pp. 146-147, 'Quelli che di forze sono robusti, et destri di persone, di giovanile età, di sangue nobile, ogni giorno fanno adunanza in questa piazza et spogliandosi le vesti, che

The male body which is physically fit for action ennobles the bearer of beauty as a visible sign and quality, bringing honour to the city and its inhabitants. Bocchi's perception of beauty is not only intimately bound up with the notion of nobility as it was to be formulated by Mini but also inextricably linked with the Florentine civic myth constructed around the youthful and virile physique as the highest adornment of the city.

Grazzini's poems on male participation in competitive sports leave little doubt that the primary interest was the display of the physically fit body. The poems underscore male virility, strength, agility, and youth as the male physical qualities most admired in his day. Youth is an essential trait in all the different kinds of sports. In the poem *In lode del maglio* (In Praise of Maglio), the appeal of youth is directly linked to the city of Florence: 'what they are looking for is youth, which pleases in this place as in others'.²⁴⁶ In the poem entitled *Di giocatori di palla a maglio* (On the Players of Maglio) the author states that the players wore light garments to allow them to move about freely, a shirt in summer and in winter a *colletto* or *giubbone*. Grazzini's emphasis on the effects of physical exertion on the body strongly suggests that the arms and legs must have been visible to the spectators, while the shape of the back was revealed through thin garments.

Praised physical features include a firm and strong back ('sode bisogna e forti aver le schiene'), in particular when it is flexible: 'he who wants and longs for honour should bend his back', as well as strong arms ('gagliarde braccia')²⁴⁷. Grazzini expresses appreciation of views of the body from all sides: 'and turning well forwards and backwards, showing sometimes the face and sometimes the back'.²⁴⁸ According to Grazzini, strength and dexterity are the required physical features for active participation in the sports he describes.²⁴⁹

Dexterity and skill are evident in the various actions: 'and then with dexterity and skill this (the ball) is grabbed with both hands'.²⁵⁰ Dexterity resides in the arms and

impediscono l'atteggiar la persona. Come chiede il giuoco del Pallone, con fierezza più desta, che pensar si possa, si esercitano. Perché scelto un numero di LIII giovani eletti, et divisi in due parti, è incredibile a dire quanto facciano bella vista nella velocità e destrezza del corpo; e nel fiore dell'età usando maggiore sforzo che si puote come sembra l'una parte, e l'altra come usanza tra due eserciti con gran fierezza. Da tutti le parti della città concorrono gentiluomini a vedere et fanciulli di piccolo età: onde si fa una vaghezza vaga, et di molta letizia per gli incidenti vari, che ad hora, ad hora nel guoioco intervengono, et per le qualità per gli uomini nobilissimi'.

²⁴⁶ A. F. Grazzini (as in n. 61), *In lode del maglio*, p. 540: 'E tra le cose migliori e più belle che si trovano in lui, vuol giovinezza, che tanto piace in queste parti e 'n quelle'.

²⁴⁷ A. F. Grazzini (as in n. 59), *Di giocatori di palla a maglio*: p. 339 'chi d'acquistare onor brama e disia, e con galanteria fassi arco delle schiene'.

²⁴⁸ A. F. Grazzini (as in n. 61), pp. 208-209.

²⁴⁹ See also A. F. Grazzini (as in n. 59), *In lode della Palla a Calcio*, pp. 416-422, where similar physical requirements are mentioned.

²⁵⁰ A. F. Grazzini (as in n. 59), p. 339: 'e poi con gran destrezza e maestria questo a due man s'afferra'.

the back and is dependent upon well-arranged limbs.²⁵¹ Physical exertion has hero-like qualities and the movements of the muscular virile youth is perceived to be superior to the activities of intellectuals, further confirming the predilection for a beautiful physique over other merits. This view is most eloquently expressed in the poem *In lode del maglio*, where it is stated that dextrous young men can bring more honour to the city than any intellectual:

And anyone who is a superb player deserves great praise like Achilles in Greece or Charlemagne in France. He receives more glory and praise than Cincinnatus, Caesar, Fabrizio, Horatius and Scipio in their own day. It would be better to be born into this world and be like him rather than be praiseworthy and good and more educated and cultured than Varchi.²⁵²

Addressed to both males and females, Grazzini's poems also highlight the sexual appeal of the players. *Dei giocatori di pome* (On the Players of Pome) is addressed to 'beautiful and lovely women ('donne belle e leggiadre') and it makes allusions to different sexual positions. This and other poems contain homosexual and heterosexual innuendo, which involves plays on words connected with the equipment used in the game, such as *palla* (ball and testicles), and the pounding of bats and sticks. Finally, the author implies that the fewer the garments worn, the greater the appeal: 'women, if this game is to be played well, it is better to be naked since garments do not please and do not help'.²⁵³

The active participation in energetic and spectacular sports also involved members of the Medici family. With the end of the republic and the establishment of the ducal regime, the ideology of nobility and the civic virtues associated with the male physique were appropriated by Cosimo I, despite the fact that they undermine social and political structures. A Venetian ambassador left the following portrait of Cosimo aged forty-two when he was at the height of his powers, illustrating that fit men continued to play sports and that behavioural codes were fluid when playing sport, and more significantly that his participation demonstrated that he was fit to govern the city.

He is unusually large, very sturdy and strong. His expression is gracious but he can make himself terrible when he wishes. In toil or in taking exercise he is indefatigable and delights in recreations that call for agility, strength and dexterity, having no rival in lifting weights, handling weapons, tournaments or ball games, and in other similar pastimes, from which he derives great pleasure. And in these, as in fishing and swimming, he doffs all his authority

²⁵¹ A. F. Grazzini (as in n. 61), p. 540: 'ma più di ogni altra giova la destrezza; la quale e nelle braccia e nelle schiene consiste, ed è un certo movimento che dale membra ben disposte viene'.

²⁵² Ibid, pp. 540-541: 'E chi a questo giucator sovrano, a mio giudizio, merta maggior lode, ch'Achille in Grecia, o in Francia Carlo Magno. Più Gloria e pregio ha lui delle persone, che non ebbe al suo tempo, Cincinnato, Cesar, Fabrizio, Orazio e Scipione. Sarebbe meglio essere il mondo nato eguale a lui, ch'esser da bene e buono e più del Varchi dotto e letterato'.

²⁵³ A. F. Grazzini (as in n. 59), *Di giocatori di pome*, p. 209: 'donne, volendo far ben questo giuoco, ignudi esser convien di mano in mano poco piace e giova'.

and dignity, and jokes with easy familiarity with all around him, wanting to be treated with equal informality without any special marks of respect.²⁵⁴

Alessandro de' Medici continued to promote and encourage competitive sports played outside the Medici palace and the benefits of physical exercise to consolidate Medici rule over the city. According to the local chronicler, Ceccherelli, the duke also took part in sports as a way of demonstrating his own fitness to govern.²⁵⁵ It was Alessandro who commissioned from Pontormo images of male nudes playing Florentine calcio as part of a decorative scheme for the Medici Villa Poggio a Caino, most probably intended as a celebration of youth displaying physical exertion.²⁵⁶ Pontormo made a number of drawings for the scheme. Two such drawings, *Drawing for the History of Nudes Playing Football*; Florence, Gabinetto dei Disegni e Stampe, n. 6505 F.) (**figure 18**) and *Drawing for the History of Nudes Playing Football* (Florence, GDSU, n. 13861 F.) (**figure 19**), show the exploration of the human body in motion in both single and pairs of figures.

The Beautiful Physique of the Lowly Male

There is ample evidence to suggest that the lowly male was seen to share the same physical features as the youth, and that he was widely admired for his physique. Workers or *plebi* were a social class rather than a generation. The term *plebi* denoted both a political and economic distinction. Plebs were disenfranchised *non-statali*, which meant that they had no access to political office, though it was thought that their strength lay in the sheer mass of manual workers at the base of society. The occupational institutions made up of workers such as scissor makers, wool beaters, wool purgers and carders that had been allowed to form in the course of the fifteenth century began to play a prominent role on the communal stage as *potenze di plebi* (powers of the plebes) towards the end of the century.²⁵⁷ There is evidence that groups of youths played a role in the first workers' groups that were formed in the context of a citywide recognition of Florentine *potenze*.

The establishment of the association of Florentine wool beaters (*battilani*) in 1488 has been interpreted as particularly significant. Within a year they had purchased

²⁵⁴ As cited by J.R. Hale, *Florence and the Medici: the pattern of control*, London, 1977, p. 137.

²⁵⁵ A. Ceccherelli, *Delle azioni e sentenze di Alessandro de' Medici primo duca di Fiorenza*, Florence, 1564, p. 82, as cited by C. Falciani, *Pontormo, Disegni degli Uffizi*, Florence, 1996, pp. 103-105.

²⁵⁶ On this commission and related studies of nudes produced by Pontormo, *ibid.*, p. 104; see also J. Cox-Rearik, *The Drawings of Pontormo: A Catalogue Raisonné with Notes on the Paintings*, Cambridge, 1964, pp. 285-287.

²⁵⁷ R. C. Trexler (as in n. 2), pp. 368 and 400. The first recorded reference to these groups as *potenze* appears in 1517, whereas references to them before this date use several different names. On this point, *ibid.*, p. 400 n. 159. Around the 1470s organised groups of the lower classes were permitted by the Florentine government to mark off their neighbourhoods using inscribed stone boundary markers, referring to their neighbourhoods as 'kingdoms'. On the reasons for the backing of higher-ranking guild members, *ibid.*, p. 412. On the economic advantages of such associations, *ibid.*, p. 413.

buildings, built a hospital, and for the next century and a half they maintained their distinctive corporate identity as a hospital, religious brotherhood and festive *potenza*.²⁵⁸ Trexler believes that the consolidation of some of the most feared subjects of Florentine industrial guilds is partly attributable to institutional developments and particularly Medicean policy which saw members of the cloth proletariat as instrumental to the consolidation of their political power, with associations being approved particularly in moments of crisis.²⁵⁹ Yet Trexler also points out that the *potenze* transcended politics, retaining their functions in the absence of the Medici because they were useful to the whole socio-economic and guild systems that prevailed in Florence irrespective of any one political faction.

The social and political importance of the lowly worker on public display emerges most powerfully in carnival festivities from the later fifteenth century onwards as a result of Lorenzo de' Medici's tactics. It was at this time that the nature of the carnival began to change, becoming equal in importance to the feast of St John, indicating that civic displays were seen to be as significant as religious processions. The elaborate carnival celebrations involved the whole city rather than single neighbourhoods. In the new festivities the *potenze* represented their own occupations in a setting which combined the world of honour and the world of work, ennobling the two male forces, the youthful and the lowly male, representing chivalry and manual work respectively.²⁶⁰

Small merchants, peddlers, wool workers, tailors and mule drivers appeared on the festive stage as natives and non-natives pretending to sell their merchandise by occupational demonstrations which had a double meaning in that the performers also sold their sexuality. The activities of the manual worker are thus presented to the Florentines as worthy of their admiration and support. The presentation of manual work as a positive social phenomenon performed by groups recognised as

²⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 411-412. The first occupational corporations of *sottoposti* were formed by wool purgers and carders, as well as by scissor makers in the mid-fifteenth century. This latter was approved by the silk weavers' guild. According to Trexler, the association of the wool beaters had particular political significance since this group descended from the leaders of the Ciompi revolt of 1378 and was approved by the conservative wool guild. On late sixteenth-century documentary evidence of the wool beaters as a neighbourhood and occupational force, see *ibid.*, p. 412 n. 207. The wool trimmers (*cimatori*) formed their own confraternity in 1494. The activities of this latter group are indicative of the kind of subversive activity feared by the authorities; on this point, see *ibid.*, p. 414.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 412. The conclusion is suggested by the vicinity of the new foundations to the Medici palace and the parish of San Lorenzo. On early sixteenth-century criticism of Medicean political manoeuvring in relation to manual workers, see *ibid.*, p. 413 n. 213.

²⁶⁰ On carnival songs associated with the new focus on the male celebrants, see *Canti carnascialeschi del Rinascimento*, C. Singleton (ed), Bari, 1936.

part of the community was unprecedented in the history of Florence, a perception which emerges most powerfully in the 'Canto of the 100 Occupations' of 1547.²⁶¹

Members of the *potenze* also appeared as foot soldiers and in ambassadorial cavalcades honouring Florence, leaving the occasional hint of their identity in their songs or by carrying banners. The *potenze* of occupational and neighbourhood confraternities had moved from the margins of Florentine society into the centre of its festive stage, a role which was temporarily interrupted during the rule of the Dominican ruler Girolamo Savonarola but which was re-gained and maintained for much of the sixteenth century.

Support and admiration of the lowly male was not, however, confined to the ennobled status of their occupations but, like that of the youthful male, was inextricably linked to the worship of the body beautiful. Evidence of the physical beauty of the manual worker within the Tuscan context is found in Gilio Durante's tract on bathing practices. Commenting on the beautiful physique of a group of scantily-clad carders, humble textile workers, soaking linen in the waters of an abandoned hot spring in the Tuscan countryside, Durante emphasises the beauty of the male bodies engaged in physical exertion: 'in that place a hundred men, all naked because of their work, make a spectacular sight'.²⁶²

The content of several of Grazzini's poems are suggestive of the sexual appeal of youthful lowly labourers to women who needed to satisfy their lustful cravings. The *Di battitor di grano* (On Threshers) focuses on the physical qualities and sexual prowess of threshers, itinerant farm labourers. The poem is a celebration of brawn over brain ('più forza che cervello').²⁶³ The threshers are all young ('giovani') and strong ('gagliardi'), possessing the same physical features as the youthful Florentine football players. Grazzini casts them as virile, cunning and discreet males, qualities which give them an edge over older males:

Women do not get mixed up with old men if you want to do it properly; it seems that their arms, legs, and back ache and they often need to stop for a rest.²⁶⁴

Two other poems, *De pescatori* (On Fishermen) and *De pescatori veneziani* (On Venetian Fishermen), are addressed to women and make a number of sexual allusions, suggesting the poems were deliberately designed to incite lust.²⁶⁵

²⁶¹ On the occupational song presenting Florence as a city of workers, see G. Biagi, 'Per la cronica di Firenze nel secolo XVI', *Rivista delle Biblioteche e degli Archivi* XVII, 1906, p. 80.

²⁶² G. Durante (as in n. 52), chapter 12, p. 210: 'in quel luogo cento huomini tutti nudi per quell'esercizio, che fa un vedere meraviglioso'.

²⁶³ A. F. Grazzini (as in n. 61), *Di battitor di grano*, pp. 201-202.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 201: 'Donne, non vi impacciate con vecchi mai, se volete far bene; par ch'alle due aiate duol le braccia, le gambe e le schiene e spesso lo conviene fermarsi e riposare'.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., *De pescatori*, pp. 200-201 and *De pescatori veneziani* (as in n. 61), pp. 186-187.

Grazzini's poems dedicated to the youthful male in action and the youthful labourer along with the other writings discussed here provide useful insight into the focus on the beautiful male physique within the wider social context, casting new light on the principles on which the civic myth of Florence and the Florentines as physically fit for action was constructed. The layers of myth revolve around a range of actions perceived to be ennobling or as having a wide social and political appeal, of which the body beautiful was the most eloquent testimony.

One other male figure requires further analysis in relation to the notion of the admired male physique in daily life and art. The *facchino* was a key figure type of the period, admired for his physique and servility but despised for his clumsy manners and low origins. In his account of the *facchino* in his *Piazza universale*, Garzoni describes the dockworker/porter as a good-natured, simple, ignorant man with rough and coarse manners, though capable of sharpening his wits when the circumstances made it necessary.

The *facchino* was a jack-of-all-trades, performing a range of tasks in the market place, at dockyards, toll booths, and arsenals, carrying wine caskets, fruit and vegetables, heavy goods, and coal and sacks around the city.²⁶⁶ Garzoni also reports that the *facchino* made baskets and wicker cages, which was considered to be the lowest kind of job, and deemed by everybody to be 'without nobility'.²⁶⁷ In addition, the *facchino* served *gentiluomini* and *cittadini*. The *facchino* was one of the lowest paid workers of the period, 'earning little to the advantage of those he served'.²⁶⁸

Frequently the butt of jokes because of his speech and manners, the *facchino* was also imitated in plays 'for the enjoyment and delight of the audience'.²⁶⁹ Garzoni's description suggests that the *facchino* was muscular and strong, highly visible in the cityscape, and that his physique was at the service of people further up the social ladder. As noted above, Aretino's reference to this figure type illustrates that his admirable physique was closely associated with sexual prowess, making him the preferred lover of prostitutes and courtesans.

As we shall see in the following chapters, the *facchino* is a figure of deep significance for the present purpose, not only as a type whose physique served the artist in his observation of the configuration of contours produced by a physically strained body but also as a figure picked out for blame in Michelangelo's works on

²⁶⁶ T. Garzoni (as in n. 8), pp. 1276-1282. Garzoni notes that carrying coal made the *facchino* dirty and gave him a distinctive smell.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1280.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*: 'con pochchissima spesa e debolissimo guadagno loro'.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1281: 'per dar trastullo e diletto'.

the part of *letterato* Lodovico Dolce, who disapproved of figures resembling the lowly *facchino* in high art despite their aesthetic qualities.

Conclusions

A range of new texts produced during the period under investigation provide accounts regarding both physical beauty and behaviour which challenged conventional views. These sources open up important paths of inquiry and understanding for anyone concerned with the perception of both physical beauty and behaviour in daily life in sixteenth-century Italy. It is through these texts that we can begin to develop a fuller picture of the prominence given to physical beauty and its connection with daily life during the sixteenth century.

While nakedness was condemned by moralists even in the domestic sphere, a number of contemporary sources point to the increasing practice of undressing, not only in the private setting but also in public spaces. The emphasis on physical beauty, beauty treatment and sexual pleasure were all closely associated with undressing and flaunting one's physical assets. The sources explored indicate that a broad spectrum of society participated actively in these contexts, including male and female members of the church.

Measures introduced in the wake of the Counter-Reformation place more emphasis on moral behaviour but seem to attempt to affect the lives of ordinary men and women rather than members of the upper echelons of society. This is particularly evident in the outcry and censorship which followed the dissemination of erotic prints, which became a social threat once copies of images commissioned by eminent citizens left the private sphere. Despite the emphasis on upholding moral values in instructions to parish priests there is no overwhelming evidence of different behavioural patterns.

Passages which deal with female beauty and behaviour indicate the different ways in which social conventions and rigid prescriptions could be breached as a result of changing attitudes towards sex and physical beauty. Firstly, specific standards of physical beauty set for women underscore their sensuality and erotic quality, defining them as the highest adornment of the person. Popular advice manuals provided beauty tips. Secondly, contemporaneous advice regarding the decorum of female behaviour strongly suggests that women wishing to flirt or have affairs with members of the opposite sex were to choose the right context carefully. Thirdly, the suggestion that women with beautiful bodies could be viewed by men at bathing establishments confirms one of the main attractions of bathing in

keeping with contemporary sources which describe them as havens of sexual licence. Finally, the discussion on popular dances indicates that they provided another context in which to flaunt one's physical assets and like public baths and spas were associated with sexual activity.

The emphasis on physical beauty and its power to allure and seduce emerges most powerfully in Renaissance Venice, where courtesans played a significant part in the civic myth constructed to enhance the image of the city. Trained to entertain powerful men and eminent citizens, the Venetian courtesan was seen as the embodiment of physical beauty and physical love, yet her raised status frequently allowed her to bypass social conventions and prescriptions deemed necessary for other women, allowing women like Veronica Franco to enter male-dominated circles where she learned to celebrate her own image and that of "Venice as beautiful Venus".

Sources pertaining to male physical beauty also illustrate features which were perceived to be the most beautiful and admired in society, such as strong and muscular arms and legs, as well as broad shoulders, that is, a body fit for strenuous activity, including sex. Youths, the lowly male labourer and the *facchino* were all associated with the beautiful male physique, making them sought-after lovers and admired sportsmen. Their physique and sexual prowess were not only seen as superior to those of older and higher-ranking men but also posed a threat to the behavioural codes established for the man of class. The deployment of youths and lowly males in the context of Florentine public spectacle raised their status within the city and made them suitable figures for the construction of a civic myth. The involvement of youths in competitive sports was given a universally acceptable dimension from both a social and political viewpoint and was based on the principle that the male physically fit for action was a source of pride for the city and thus deserved the title of *nobile*.

In the next chapter I will explore the striking similarities between the civic myths of Venice and Florence and artistic practices and commissions relating to the nude. The perceptions of physical beauty as the chief ornament of the person in daily life are reflected in many images of the nude in painting and sculpture. Sexual allusions, puns and other references to daily life also appear in a number of works, making it possible to locate the images within the context in which they were produced.

CHAPTER TWO

The Decorum of Art and the Poetics of the Nude

Introduction

Reasons for the increasing prominence of the nude in the fifteenth and particularly the sixteenth century can be inferred from a range of primary sources written by artists and non-artists, such as texts dealing directly and indirectly with the representation of the nude in painting and sculpture, contracts, descriptions and inventories regarding individual works of art, letters intended for both private and public perusal, literary texts, and guide books. Accumatively these sources help us develop a picture of the perception of the nude as a requirement of art, its striking impact on the viewer, its appeal to artists and their clients, the specific set of artistic procedures with which it was associated, its commission and display, as well as the various meanings and functions of the male and female nude.

My aim in the first section of this chapter is to demonstrate the widespread appeal of the nude for artists and their clients. I then go on to examine sources pertaining to the artistic processes involved in forming a perfect nude body, underscoring artistic innovations between the late fifteenth and mid sixteenth centuries.

The second and third parts spotlight some of the most important and innovative approaches to the representation of the nude in art with particular reference to the social and political context in which the images were produced. Part Two investigates the perception of the perfectly beautiful virile male nude as an adornment of the client and the city of Florence, which is inextricably linked to the urban myth of the physically fit male. Part Three explores the different representations of the female nude in Florence and Venice. While images of the female nude produced in Venice have been the object of intense debate, little attention has been paid to Michelangelo's and Michelangelesque muscular female nudes, which are strikingly different from their Venetian counterparts and reveal a particular perception of the female body and a wider range of functions. Surprisingly little was written about the female nude at the time it was produced. Extant documentary evidence, such as inventory entries, correspondence between artists, *letterati* and clients, and descriptions of individual images, are best analysed in harness with texts dealing with female beauty, poetic conventions and sources revealing alternative views and assumptions regarding the female form.

PART ONE: VERBAL AND VISUAL SOURCES ON THE NUDE AND RELATED ARTISTIC PRACTICES

Contemporary Views on the Nude

'The worthy art of the good painter is recognised by his ability to form a nude body well'.
Pietro Andrea Mattioli

Fifteenth-Century Sources

The earliest indication that the nude was a requirement of art is found in Florentine sources pertaining to the relief competition announced by the Florentine Arte di Calimala (Cloth-merchant's guild) in the winter of 1400-1401. The competition concerned the design of a relief of the Sacrifice of Isaac for the bronze doors of the baptistery, which was eventually awarded to Lorenzo Ghiberti for his *Sacrifice of Isaac*, (1401; Florence, Bargello). (figure 20). Since the guilds were called upon to plan and arrange works which expressed common or communal ideals, the specific requirements for the relief can be seen as reflecting a shared perception of the difficulties of art and an appropriate subject through which to demonstrate mastery.

Documents concerning the second contract indicate that the nude and the hair were considered to be the most difficult parts of sculpture and were to be executed by Ghiberti himself.²⁷⁰ Writing one hundred and fifty years later, Vasari states that the scene was chosen to test the participants' mastery of 'all the difficulties of their art, since the story would include landscapes, nudes, clothed figures, and animals'.²⁷¹

This artistic event is indicative of gradual changes in Florentine contracts in the course of the fifteenth century, illustrating the new demands placed on artists. As less prominence was given to precious pigments, more emphasis was placed instead on skill.²⁷² The new emphasis on technical mastery also emerges from Antonio Manetti's account of Filippo Brunelleschi's relief for the competition, the *Sacrifice of Isaac* (bronze, part gilt; 1401; Florence, Bargello). Manetti's account underscores the various difficulties the artist had set himself and overcome, such as Abraham's pose, his prompt movement and drapery, Isaac's delicate body, and the angel's gesture and drapery. Manetti sums up the reaction of the judges: 'they

²⁷⁰ R. Krautheimer, *Lorenzo Ghiberti*, Princeton, 1952, 3rd edn. 1982, pp. 868-869.

²⁷¹ VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 3, p. 79: 'Et elessero che dentro si facessi la storia quando Abraham sacrifica Isac suo figliuolo: nella quale pensarono dovere avere eglino che mostrare quanto a le difficultà dell'arte, per essere storia che ci va dentro paesi, ignudi, vestiti, animali.'

²⁷² M. Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, Oxford, 1972, 2nd ed, 1988, pp. 14-16.

were astonished at how many difficulties there are in these figures, and how well they carry out their functions'.²⁷³

The first discussion of the representation of the nude in art appears in Alberti's treatise on painting, *Trattato della pittura* (1435-1436; Florence). Alberti (1404-1472) considers the nude from the viewpoint of the artist and promotes its representation provided it is justified by the narrative context. Alberti also advises artists to observe decency by way of a loin cloth, fig leaf or similar device.²⁷⁴ Inspired by artistic developments in Florence, Alberti's separate treatises on painting, sculpture, *De Statua* (1440s; Florence), and architecture, *De re aedificatoria* (published 1485; Florence) are important sources because they lay the foundation stones for Renaissance art theory and also suggest areas for future development with the emphasis on artistic skill rather than the use of expensive materials.

Several of Alberti's concepts were introduced to a wider audience by Cristoforo Landino (1424-1498) in his commentary on Dante's *Divine Comedy*, *Commento di Christophoro Landino fiorentino sopra la Commedia di Dante Alighieri* (1481; Florence), which includes a preface on Florentine painters and sculptors.²⁷⁵ Although Landino does not discuss the nude specifically, his art-critical vocabulary, which is drawn from both the workshop and more general terms that relate pictorial style to social and literary styles, is particularly interesting in the light of later applications and preoccupations.²⁷⁶

Written in the 1450s, Angelo Decembrio's *De politia litteraria pars LXVIII* is an unusual document for the Quattrocento.²⁷⁷ *De politia litteraria* offers a record of Ferrerese views on the arts, and contains a monologue dealing with the nude performed by Leonello D'Este, concluding with the applause of his courtiers. No similar Quattrocento document provides justification for the nude in art on this scale. Although Alberti's influence is felt in the text, the preoccupation with the nude is much more explicit, shedding light on its appeal in an aristocratic and courtly setting. The representation of the nude is discussed from both the point of view of the artist and the viewer without any hint of Platonism.

²⁷³ Ibid., pp. 142-143, citing A. Manetti's *Vita di Filippo Brunelleschi preceduta da la Novella del Grasso*, D. de Robertis and G. Tanturli (eds), Milan, 1976.

²⁷⁴ L. B. Alberti, *Il Trattato della pittura*, 1435-1436, G. Papini (ed), Lanciano, 1934, p. 66. Subsequent citations in English are taken from or based on J. R. Spencer's translation; see L. B. Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. J. R. Spencer, London, 1956.

²⁷⁵ Landino's introductory discussion on ancient art draws on Pliny, while the section on fourteenth-century artists uses Filippo Villani as his main source. The third section, which is dedicated to fifteenth-century artists, is believed to be his own contribution. For an overview of the structure of the text, see M. Baxandall (as in n. 272), pp 116-117.

²⁷⁶ On the art-critical terminology applied by Landino, see M. Baxandall (as in n. 272), pp. 117-151.

²⁷⁷ A. Decembrio's discussion analysed by M. Baxandall, 'A dialogue from the court of Leonello d'Este. Angelo Decembrio's *De politia litteraria pars LXVIII*', *JWCI*, 26, 1963, pp. 304-326. For earlier influences on the text, see esp. p. 306.

Like Alberti, Decembrio holds that images of the nude should be in keeping with the requirements of propriety and that the painter should show 'modesty' by covering up 'shameful parts'.²⁷⁸ The merits of the nude are promoted in a number of ways. Nudity is considered to be a sign of sensual restraint. The imitation of nature and ancient works of art are seen to be the painter's primary goals and as ends in themselves they justify the nude in art. Examples in antiquity include the figures of Praxiteles and Phidias, promoting the view that artists of antiquity sought to attain excellence in the belief that they would be judged on their ability to make nude figures.²⁷⁹ The nude is justified by examples in nature; it is fitting for the painter to imitate natural objects and to aim for natural truth, which is obscured by garments referred to here as 'ornaments' (i.e. accessories).

The processes involved in forming a nude figure are then discussed. The painter should focus on the face and body, including the sinews, muscles, veins, skin and hair. Colours, contours and proportions are the primary parameters for gauging the merits of individual artists and are more praiseworthy than the rendering of drapery. Drawing on Alberti's advice to artists seeking to imitate the antique, the painter is advised to start by working out all the measurements of the body and determine which parts should be tense and which relaxed. This procedure is advocated even if the figure is to be clothed. The nude thus allows the artist to convey his knowledge while the viewer is rewarded by more learning than he could acquire from a draped figure. Summing up the importance of the nude, Decembrio has Leonello say: 'in any picture it is best for things to be nude'.²⁸⁰ Finally, convinced that it was the painter's primary task to provide technical skill, Leonello rejects the painter's claim to *ingenium*, understood as an individual creative force dependent on the intellect, which becomes central to the debate on the nude in the sixteenth century.²⁸¹

Sixteenth-Century Sources

'the most beautiful and perhaps the most difficult imitation we make'. Alessandro Allori²⁸²

Pietro Andrea Mattioli's poem *Il Magno Palazzo del Cardinale di Trento* (Venice, 1539), which provides a lengthy description of the decoration of Cardinal Cles's residence in Trent carried out by Gerolamo Romanino, Dosso and Battista Dossi,

²⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 320-321.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 312-314.

²⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 320-321.

²⁸¹ Ibid., p. 324-325.

²⁸² A. Allori, *Il primo libro de' ragionamenti delle regole del disegno*, P. Barocchi (ed), *Scritti d'arte del Cinquecento*, Milan and Naples, 1971-1977, 3 vols., 1973, vol. 2, p. 1947: 'che mi par la più bella e forse la più difficile imitazione che si faccia da noi'.

and Marcello Fogolino between 1531 and 1532, is a useful and rare early sixteenth-century account on the representation of the nude and the notion of artistic decorum.²⁸³ Mattioli's arguments in favour of the representation of the nude bear many resemblances to Decembrio's, suggesting that similar ideas may have had a much wider circulation than can be documented today owing to the scarcity of verbal sources for the early Cinquecento.

Evidence that the nude had a special appeal for Cles and his courtiers can be found both in the poem and in the extensive extant correspondence concerning the decoration of the palace. A letter of 1531 written by the *soprastante* Andrea Crivello and addressed to Cles refers to the attached drawings by Dosso Dossi for the fountain which was to be set up in the Cortile dei Leoni. Because the statue was to adorn a dignified place and would be expensive, the artist was to ensure that it was 'good, well made, and praiseworthy'. Drawing Cles's attention to a drawing of a nude statue, Crivello remarks that it would be more praiseworthy than a draped one.²⁸⁴

Mattioli's poem opens with a dedication to Cles, praising the commission concerning the decoration of his residence from the best artists, a comment which strongly suggests that the representation of the nude was intimately linked with artistic skill not only in Florentine artistic circles. He then provides a room by room account which clarifies the subject-matter of the depicted scenes. On four occasions he refers to and discards criticism of the decorations, which question their appropriateness in terms of subject and place. The focus of the discussion is on the nude as the figure best displaying artistic excellence:

All around this noble space, the good painter has demonstrated the art of painting nude bodies with lively gestures, though some say they are not decent. The worthy art of the good painter is recognised by his ability to form a nude body well. Excellence is not truly demonstrated when some figures are clothed with skirts, and others bear shields. Should I now offend anyone, he may be silent, so that I can expound to him the truth of this art. It is an easy thing to place some pretty head above a beautiful garment.²⁸⁵

While Mattioli concedes that some find nudity and its representation inappropriate and indecent, he associates the ability to create a lively nude figure with artistic excellence. True artistic excellence does not reside in the representation of

²⁸³ The poem is analysed by T. Frangenberg, 'Decorum in the Magno Palazzo in Trent', *Bulletin of the Society for Renaissance Studies*, vol. 7, n° 4, 1993, pp. 352-378.

²⁸⁴ Ausserer-Gerola, 54, 31 December 1531, as cited by T. Frangenberg (as in n. 283), p. 375.

²⁸⁵ T. Frangenberg (as in n. 283), p. 370: 'attorno attorno ai nobili pavimenti mostrat' ha i' buon pittor qual arte sia di finger nudi corpi in vivi gesti, se ben dice qualcun non sono honesti'. L'arte del buon pittore degna si vede nel saper ben formare un corpo ignudo, non fa dell'eccellenza vera fede il vestir chi di gonna, e chi di scudo. Hor s'io calco a qualcuno adosso 'l piede taccia, ch'il ver dell'arte gli concludo. facil cosa è sopra una bella vesta accomodar qualche leggiadra testa. s'honesta ben non parve la pittura per mostrar che natura ben sapeva imitar con suo disegno, ma perche d'honestà poi hebbe cura il tutto ritrattò con grand'ingegno, e dimostrò che col divin pennello fare, e disfar sapea qualcosa anch'ello'. English translation slightly adapted from T. Frangenberg.

drapery, accessories or fanciful objects but in the depiction of the nude. The nudes are decorous because they demonstrate such excellence. Mattioli's comments also suggest that the nudes in the spandrels primarily serve to demonstrate the artist's skill and to adorn the loggia, one of the most innovative roles of the nude in the sixteenth century. The representation of the nude is closely related to the quality of artistic *ingenium* (*ingegno*), illustrating a highly significant transformation of the artist's role as creator of an image, particularly with regard to the nude.

Mattioli forcefully argues in favour of the decorum of art as opposed to the decorum of nudity, though his discussion points to differing degrees of tolerance.²⁸⁶ His poem should be seen as an early example of the dichotomy between the requirements of art and the need for decency, which became more pressing with the widespread dissemination of erotic and non-erotic images of the nude in the second half of the sixteenth century.

A number of documents compiled in Florence between the early and mid sixteenth century record the representation of male and female nudes by Florentine artists, often commenting on their beauty. *Il Libro di Antonio Billi* (undated) consists of a series of notes on Florentine artists from Cimabue to Michelangelo, a list of art works, references to artistic styles, and anecdotes.²⁸⁷ This influential text reflects the interest in art among the leading social groups in Florence in the early sixteenth century. The anonymous *Codice Magliabechiano* cl XVII, entitled *Contenente notizie sopra l'arte degli antichi e quella de' Fiorentini da Cimabue a Michelangelo Buonarroti scritte da Anonimo Fiorentino* (1530s-1540s), expands the commentary of Billi while reworking comments both in the Billi text and in Landino with regard to the art of the preceding centuries. There is also a section on sculptors from Andrea and Nicola Pisano to Verrocchio.

While drawing on Landino and his art-critical terminology, the author of the *Libro di Antonio Billi* adds his own comments on the nude, picking out for praise a nude *Charity* by Andrea del Castagno, describing the figure as an 'excellent thing'.²⁸⁸ In the section on Sandro Botticelli, the author notes his mastery of the female nude: 'he made more female nudes which are more beautiful than any other'.²⁸⁹ The *Anonimo Magliabechiano* also notes Botticelli's representation of 'the most

²⁸⁶ On the overpainting of the nudes, see T. Frangenberg (as in n. 283), p. 366 n. 34.

²⁸⁷ *Il Libro di Antonio Billi*, C. Frey (ed), Berlin, 1892. The text bears the name of the Florentine merchant Antonio Billi, who has been suggested as the owner and possible author of the text. It survives in two separate manuscripts in the Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence: the so-called Codice Stroziano (Codice Magliabechiano cl XXV 636) and the Codice Petri Stroziano (Codice Magliabechiano cl XIII 89). Although the former is fragmentary, it is more accurate. The document draws on earlier sources, such as Villani, Landino, and Manetti's *Life of Brunelleschi*.

²⁸⁸ *Il Libro di Billi*, Codice Magliabechiano XIII, 89 (as in n. 287), p. 328: 'una Carità ignuda: cosa per eccellenza'.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 329: 'fece più femmine ignude belle più che alcun altro'.

beautiful female nudes'. Antonio Pollaiuolo is praised for his *ingenium* and for making 'miraculous things'.²⁹⁰ In the *Libro di Antonio Billi* Michelangelo is presented as the artist who has attained perfection in all three arts, surpassing all other artists, both ancient and modern with particular reference to the nude as a difficulty of art and citing the Sistine Ceiling fresco, the *Pietà* and *David* as examples of his supremacy. Similar comments are found in the *Anonimo Magliabechiano* though more works are listed.²⁹¹ The brief references to the nude in these fragmentary documents are eloquent testimony of the general interest in the nude, its association with artistic excellence and the appreciation of its aesthetic qualities.

The appreciation of the nude also emerges in a number of letters. One case in point is Giorgio Vasari's letter dated 1536 and addressed to Pietro Aretino. In the letter Vasari describes a cartoon he was sending him for the frescoes of scenes from Caesar's *Commentaries*, which he was painting in the Palazzo Medici. The cartoon is presented as a token of his ambition, particularly his virtuoso command of the human form. The focus of the cartoon is 'a skirmish of nudes in battle, first to show the study of art and second to follow the story, in that, armed with their galley slaves, the ships fight furiously to win the battle and beat their enemies'.²⁹² A letter from Aretino to Vasari, dated 1540 and referring to one of Vasari's now lost drawings underlines the visual qualities of the nude and its appeal to the viewer. Aretino lavishly praises a nude figure drawn so that it can be seen showing the front and back of the body, indicating that such figures were stylistically significant and highly ornate:

the nude that, bent to the ground, displays front and back, to be, in virtue of its easy force and with the grace of its unforced ease, a magnet to the eye, in that having encountered it the eye holds it to itself until dazzled it turns elsewhere.²⁹³

It is in Giorgio Vasari's *Lives* (1550; revised, expanded and republished in 1568) that the nude is given pride of place in an art-historical and aesthetic context for the first

²⁹⁰ *Anonimo Magliabechiano contenente notizie sopra l'arte degli antichi a quella de' Fiorentini da Cimabue a Michelangelo Buonarroti scritte da Anonimo Fiorentino*, C. Frey (ed), Berlin, 1892, pp. 323-324: 'fu di grandissimo ingegno' and 'fece cose miracolose'.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 113-114, 127, 129 and 130.

²⁹² G. Vasari, *Il carteggio di Giorgio Vasari*, K. Frey (ed), Munich, 1923, p. 47: 'che come vedrete, ho fatta la una zuffa di ignudi, che combattono, per mostrare prima lo studio dell'arte e per osservar poi la storia, che armate di ciurma, le galee combattono animosamente per vincere la pugna contro il nimico'. On the nude as both a demonstration of artistic skill and meriting a larger financial reward, see Vincenzo Borghini's letter to Giovanni Caccini dated 18 June 1565, *L'Apparato per le Nozze di Francesco de' Medici e di Giovanna d'Austria, nelle narrazioni del tempo e da lettere inedite di Vincenzo Borghini e di Giorgio Vasari*, P. Ginori Conti (ed), Florence, 1936, p. 87. In the letter Borghini provides indications for the wedding decorations, including the expenses involved. Caccini was responsible for purchasing the necessary materials and supervise and pay artists. The higher value and technical skill associated with the nude is thus expressed: 'et una figura nuda vuol più arte che una vestita; et quella Helena con Teseo di Vincentio de' Rossi ha molto più fatica et tempo et disagio che la Madonna d'Or San Michele del San Gallo che son tre figure insieme, ma piene di panni er straforate poco.'

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 107. See also P. Aretino, *Lettere sull'arte*, E. Camesasca (ed), 3 vols., Milan, 1957-1960, vol. 1, 1957, p. 175.

time. Art has reached the peak of its development with the nudes of Michelangelo according to a scheme which includes mainly Florentine artists, such as Antonio Pollaiuolo, Rosso Fiorentino and also Perino del Vaga and Luca Signorelli. Unlike his predecessors, Vasari does not stress the need for decency and he does not distinguish between a completely nude figure and one whose genitals are covered by a loincloth or other visual device. His aesthetic of the nude hinges on the notion that it constitutes the highest mark of technical mastery and the mark of creative power in relation to the interplay of a specific set of artistic practices. In addition, Vasari redefined and added to Landino's artistic and critical terminology as a result in the shift of emphasis on artistic skills particularly in relation to the nude.

The writings of Vincenzo Danti and Benvenuto Cellini are essential to our understanding of artistic practices and theoretical formulations in the wake of Michelangelo and Vasari's perception of the artist, and also in view of the representation of the nude in the Florentine context. The unfinished treatise of Vincenzo Danti (1530-1576), *Il primo libro del trattato delle perfette proporzioni di tutte le cose che imitare e ritrarre si possono con l'arte del disegno* (1567; Florence) not only provides the theoretical basis for the artistic interests of his own day but also helps us develop a more complete picture of the notion of perfection in relation to the body which is fit for action.

Topics which were to make up Danti's treatise include anatomy, the postures and movements of the human body, the representation of emotions, historical compositions, drapery and other accessories, animals, landscapes, architectural proportions based on the human body, as well as important practices relating to the arts of design. On closer examination, his treatise helps construct useful links between the ideas of Paolo Mini and Francesco Bocchi with regard to the Florentine appreciation of the muscular and virile male.

Cellini's *Vita* (The Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini), written between 1558 and 1562 but not published until 1762, provides useful information on the selection of the male and female live model, as well as indications of general artistic concerns and the predilections of clients with regard to the nude. Further insight into the key role played by the nude in the art of his day can be gained from his *Trattato dell'oreficeria* and *Trattato della scultura*, which he presented as a combined manuscript copy to Francesco de' Medici on the occasion of his marriage in 1565. The two treatises were published in Florence in 1568 after they had been revised and partially censored, probably by Gherardo Spini, a member of the Florentine Academy. The texts were purged of polemical and autobiographical aspects, resulting in a book of guidelines and recipes.

In addition to these, Cellini's *Discorso sopra l'arte del disegno* ('On the principles and the way to teach the Art of Design'), a short piece written in the mid 1560s in the context of debates over the curriculum to be instituted for the newly founded Accademia del Disegno, provides further insight into practices relating to the nude, Michelangelo's role as benchmark, and the theoretical precepts connected with the creative process.

Forming the perfect nude: artistic practices related to the nude

'And so, little by little, you will create this beautiful instrument, in which consists all the importance of this art of ours.' Benvenuto Cellini

The main aim of this section is to examine sources pertaining to the artistic practices associated with the nude. Examples from both the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries will help clarify the connections between artistic practice and theory in relation to the nude. In addition, I consider some of the more general issues which affect the perception of artistic processes and goals and the display and description of works of art. The discussion thus locates artistic practices within a wider discourse, raising issues which should be borne in mind in other parts of this thesis.

Fifteenth and sixteenth-century writings on the working processes in connection with the nude serve as a sensitive barometer of the changes in focus occurring in specific artistic circles. During this period the nude body became central to the debate on art whether the viewpoint was positive or negative. The most useful insight into working practices can be gained from writings by artists rather than outsiders.

The sources investigated reveal the key role played by the interplay of three specific practices: the observation of the live model, the antique, and anatomical studies. The earliest drawings made from the posed, naked or scantily-dressed studio model date from the same period as studies of the structure of classical sculpture. Anatomical studies comprised a range of procedures, including observation of the live model, and not merely dissection.²⁹⁴ Current discussions on anatomy clearly point to an interest in both internal and external anatomy with

²⁹⁴ See J. Elkins, 'Michelangelo and the Human Form: His Knowledge and Use of Anatomy', *Art History*, vol. 7, n° 2, June, 1984, pp. 176-186. See also J. Elkins, 'Michel-Ange et la forme humaine. Sa connaissance et son utilisation de l'anatomie, *L'anatomie chez Michel-Ange: de la réalité à l'idéalité*, C. Rabbi-Bernard (ed), Paris, 2003, pp. 89-112 and R. P. Ciardi, 'Le corps transparent. Modalités d'iconographie anatomique chez Michel-Ange', *ibid.*, pp. 51-75. Elkins and Ciardi reach similar conclusions, pointing out that Michelangelo's knowledge of anatomy was subordinate to the living figure, the mechanisms of the body, the complex interplay of muscles and an understanding of the skeleton. Knowledge of these forms provided the artist with a repertoire of shapes that stimulate the imagination and support the representation of the body in motion. However, Elkins relates anatomical knowledge only with dissection, whereas several primary sources indicate that it also involved the observation of the living body. My own investigation into the role played by the various artistic practices related to the nude otherwise echoes the conclusions of both Elkins and Ciardi.

particular regard to the study of surface contours produced by active muscles. The configuration of strained and active models, forms not visible in dissection, became one of the most important artistic procedures and was linked to a specific live model. An understanding of anatomy in these terms helps us expand the scope of investigations into its role and explain the increasing interest in anatomy from the late fifteenth century onwards.

In the *Trattato della pittura*, Alberti pays little attention to the practice of drawing and never deals with drawing in basic technical terms. Yet, as from the second half of the fifteenth century, drawings and engravings of single and groups of nude figures, which were seen to be particularly innovative, were circulated in the various workshops and played a fundamental role in arousing interest in the nude.²⁹⁵ Artistic interests in central and northern Italy converge to some extent, but those relating to the nude are more prominent in central Italy, particularly as regards the period from the late fifteenth century to the mid sixteenth.²⁹⁶ Many drawings were made with the explicit intent of exploring movement of the human figure and musculature, initially through observation of the live model. As artists began to draw from nature and observe motion and its effects on the body, the use of the pattern book began to change and gradually decline.²⁹⁷

One instance of the changing focus disseminated through innovative media is the engraving of *Battle of Nudes* (1469-1470; Cleveland Museum of Art) (**figure 21**) by the Florentine artist Antonio Pollaiuolo (1431-1498). The engraving exploited the potential of a newly discovered graphic technique and it is unique as a sheet demonstrating the human figure in motion. The engraving focuses entirely on the male nude in a variety of poses. The image was widely copied and transformed, making Pollaiuolo an innovator in the representation of the human body.²⁹⁸ The choice and treatment of the subject has led to suggestions that it is based on ancient sarcophagi he could have seen in Tuscany or Rome, though a literary source explaining the exact subject has not been pinpointed.²⁹⁹ A comment in the

²⁹⁵ See F. Ames-Lewis, *Drawing in Early Renaissance Italy*, New Haven and London, 1981, rev. edn., 2000, pp. 3 and 134.

²⁹⁶ D. Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, Princeton, NJ, 1981, p. 482. On the different value attached to preparatory drawings in artistic circles in northern and central Italy, see F. Ames-Lewis (as in n. 295), pp. 2-7 and 10-11.

²⁹⁷ See L. D. Ettlinger (as in n. 34), pp. 33-34.

²⁹⁸ Luca Signorelli's drawing of *Hercules and Anteus* (Windsor, Royal Library; black chalk) is one example of its impact. The influence of Florentine artistic circles on Signorelli is sparsely documented and thus difficult to assess precisely. The earliest reference to his contact with such circles appears in Vasari's *Lives*, where it is said that he went to Florence to see the style of modern artists. See VBB 1550 & 1568, vol. 3, p. 636. For bibliographical information on Pollaiuolo's influence on Signorelli, see L. S. Fusco, 'The Nude as Protagonist: Pollaiuolo's Figural Style Explicated by Leonardo's Study of Functional Anatomy', PhD diss., New York University, 1978, pp. 175-176, n. 20. There is no documentary evidence that he served in Pollaiuolo's workshop as Crutwell claimed; see M. Crutwell, *Luca Signorelli*, London, 1899, p. 4.

²⁹⁹ The subject of the work has eluded a convincing explanation. L. S. Fusco has suggested that the engraving was produced in Rome around 1488 and that its figural source was an antique bronze group; see L. S. Fusco (as in n. 298), pp. 106-107. Both Fusco, *ibid.*, pp. 16-25, and B. Schultz have focused on

Magliabechiano manuscript clearly indicates that the variety of poses aroused much admiration: 'he also engraved a copper sheet of nudes in different and admirable postures'.³⁰⁰ It is thus reasonable to assume that the primary objective was to transmit his skills as a draughtsman by representing the reversal of figures and successive stages of movement, suggesting the observation of one or several live models.

Pollaiuolo's designs became potentially usable in more than one context, which, as evidence suggests, was one of the most appealing qualities of the nude. Pollaiuolo's skill at depicting human limbs is further confirmed by an inscription on his drawing *A nude man, seen from the front, side and back* (1486; Paris, Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques) (**figure 22**), which was widely copied and became an important model for the representation of surface anatomy.³⁰¹ The inscription on the drawing bears testimony to the appreciation of his representation of the male body:

This is the work of the excellent and famous Florentine painter and outstanding sculptor, Antonio, son of Jacopo. When he represents man, look how marvellously he shows the limbs.³⁰²

Antonio was much admired by his contemporaries, including Lorenzo il Magnifico. One of his clients, Giovanni Rucellai, gave him the epithet 'master of Design' ('maestro del disegno'). In both editions of the *Lives* Vasari underscores his assiduous practice and mastery of drawing.³⁰³

The earliest illustrated manual on wrestling, Hieronymous Mercurialis's *De Arte Gymnastica* (1569; Venice) contains illustrations of wrestlers in strained motion, demonstrating the connection between artistic interests and real-life contexts.³⁰⁴ Two images from the treatise give a good indication of the kind of actions performed by wrestlers, *Wrestlers* (1560s, in Mercurialis's treatise) (**figure 23**) and tight-rope walkers, *Tightrope-Walkers* (1560s, in Mercurialis's treatise) (**figure 24**), as

identifying the mistakes in the anatomical structure. On this point, see B. Schultz, *Art and Anatomy, Studies in the Fine Arts: Art Theory*, no. 12, Ann Arbor, 1985, pp. 53-54. Such an approach is misleading because it draws attention away from the interests of artists at that time, a point made by L. D. Ettlinger (as in n. 34), pp. 31-33 and 146-147. See also P. L. Rubin, A. Wright, *Renaissance Florence: The Art of the 1470s*, London and New Haven, 1999, p. 257.

³⁰⁰ Anonimo Magliabechiano (as in n. 290), p. 81: 'intagliò anchora una forma di rame di ignudi di diverse attitudini et mirabile'.

³⁰¹ See L. D. Ettlinger (as in n. 34), pp. 161-162 and F. Ames-Lewis (as in n. 295), pp. 82, 104, 178.

³⁰² As cited by L. D. Ettlinger (as in n. 34), p. 161-162. The Latin inscription reads 'Antonii Jacobi excellentissimi as eximii Florentini pictoris scultorisque prestantissimi hoc opus est. Umquam hominum imaginem fecit viole quam mirum in membra redegit'. Ettlinger believes the inscription may have been added by the owner or collector. The second sentence also appears on a copy of this drawing in the British Museum, suggesting that it is a cut-down copy. See also A. E. Popham and P. Pouncey, *Italian Drawings of the XV and XVI Centuries in the Collection of His Majesty the King at Windsor Castle*, London, 1949, n° 226, p. 139.

³⁰³ VBB 1550 & 1568, vol. 3, p. 550: 'E molti anni seguitò l'arte disegnando continuamente e facendo di rilievo cere et altre fantasie, che in breve tempo lo fecero tenere, come egli era, il principale di quello esercizio.'

well as how the observation of these sportsmen and professional entertainers interested artists.

Evidence of the interest in everyday contexts in Florence can also be understood from a map of the city, known as the *Pianta della Catena* (Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett) (**figure 25**), which is believed to have been made by Francesco Rosselli around 1472. The map presents a view of the River Arno and the city beyond. Prominence is given to a group of male nude figures engaged in activities connected with the river, such as fishing and stone collecting, while on the right a group of scantily-clad workers can be discerned. The male nudes are arranged in different poses and the figure on the left is represented in an antique pose. The map nicely sums up the interplay of different kinds of studies related to the nude, that is, the live model in repose and motion, and the imitation of antique poses. It is interesting to note that the city of Florence is represented through these lowly figures in stark contrast to maps of Venice and Rome, which generally show images of the Adriatic Sea with the city in the background for the former and ruins for the latter.³⁰⁵

The interplay of different artistic procedures became increasingly important in the sixteenth century. Michelangelo's figures are prominent examples of an innovative interplay of the live model, anatomical studies and the study of antique figures. As James Elkins has pointed out, Michelangelo was extremely accurate in his anatomical depictions, frequently simplifying forms observed in his studies of dissection.³⁰⁶ His new approach to anatomy served to articulate difficult surface contours and set the stage for future generations. Observations and studies allowed artists to draw anatomical forms from memory, creating figures and a range of postures from the imagination. This ability played a key role in the high valuation of the nude in art. As we shall see in the next chapter, both editions of Vasari's of the *Lives* indicate that the investigation of the human form came to be associated with the search for the most perfect and beautiful form, which also demonstrated anatomical knowledge. Accordingly, anatomical structures using both live and flayed models acquire an aesthetic dimension, and Vasari frequently picks out for praise figures which demonstrate the anatomical knowledge of individual artists.

³⁰⁴ H. Mercurialis, *De Arte Gymnastica*, Venice, 1569, *Sport e giuochi. Trattati e scritti dal XVI al XVII secolo*, C. Bascetta (ed), Milan, 1978, pp. 1-5.

³⁰⁵ The map is reproduced with commentary in A. Mori and G. Boffito, *Firenze nelle vedute e piante*, Florence, 1926, pp. 144-145. For a map of Venice produced in 1500, see, Jacopo de' Barbari, *Bird's-Eye View of Venice*, which shows a muscular Neptune in the centre. The map is reprinted in *Tiziano e Venezia* (as in n. 1), ill. 1-3 and *The Genius of Venice: 1500-1600*, exhib. cat., J. Martineau and C. Hope (eds), Royal Academy of Arts, London, 1983, p. 12.

³⁰⁶ See J. Elkins 1984 (as in n. 294), pp. 176-186.

The Role of the Antique

Pieces of antique sculpture inspired artists and collectors in different ways. A brief consideration of the antique in private and semi-private collections reveals some basic points about the changing perception of the antique and its display.

In fifteenth-century Venice nearly all pictures in the private setting were religious subjects on panel, most notably the Madonna and Child type compositions made popular by Bellini and his workshop, though by mid century some Venetians began to show an interest in the antique. By the 1520s, the perception of art in the domestic sphere had changed, indicating a predilection for the antique and the beautiful. Giorgione was one of the first artists to work almost exclusively for collectors interested in widening the range of paintings to include new picture types, such as landscapes, reclining nudes, as well as semi-portraits of beautiful boys and girls. Michiel's descriptions show that competitive collecting encouraged keener interest in the antique and an appreciation of drawings, especially those related to specific paintings.³⁰⁷

The Medici had been enthusiastic collectors of the antique since the middle of the Quattrocento, though it is impossible to reconstruct the individual items making up their earlier collections. In the fifteenth century the collecting of antiquities had been far more common in Florence than in Rome. Lorenzo de' Medici took to Florence a considerable part of the collection of gems, coins and small bronzes which had belonged to Pope Paul II (1464-71).³⁰⁸ In Florence Duke Cosimo assembled a prestigious group of classical sculptures, including pieces he had acquired from two of the most famous Roman collections, though some of the most remarkable pieces remained in their Roman villa. Figures taken to Florence include the *Dying Alexander* (Florence, Uffizi) and the *Hercules and Antaeus* (Florence, Palazzo Pitti) (**figure 26**), a figure of particular significance in Florence. At that time Florence was the only city outside Rome which could boast major antiquities, a fact which Bocchi is keen to promote in his *Bellezze*.

It is significant that the values of antiquity and its art works were used as a parameter of artistic merits, promoting the view that the artist's goal was to equal or surpass ancient sculpture. In the *Lives*, both equalling and surpassing ancient statuary are among the parameters for gauging the merits of modern sculpture.

³⁰⁷ J. M. Fletcher, 'Patronage in Venice', *The Genius of Venice: 1500-1600* (as in n. 305), pp. 16-20.

³⁰⁸ The collection and appreciation of antique items in Rome gained momentum during the reign of Sixtus IV (1471-1484), who moved ancient bronzes to the palace of the Conservators on the Capitol where they could be viewed by artists and ordinary citizens, thus achieving widespread fame. On public and private collections of the antique, see F. Haskell, N. Penny, *Taste and the Antique: The Lure of Classical Sculpture, 1500-1900*, New Haven and London, 1981, esp. pp. 7-15.

The sculptor's goal particularly for the Quattrocento is to equal ancient statuary, while in the Cinquecento sculptors who surpass its qualities are extolled. Several modern works were displayed alongside genuine antique pieces with the intention of imitating the juxtaposition of ancient and modern art that was frequently made in the viewer's imagination.³⁰⁹ On the recommendation of Michelangelo, Guglielmo della Porta had made legs for the *Farnese Hercules*, which, it is reported, were retained even after the discovery of the originals in order to show that works of modern sculpture could stand comparison with those of the ancients.³¹⁰ In the *Bellezze*, Francesco Bocchi promotes the view that modern sculpture has surpassed ancient statuary primarily through anatomical knowledge and he cites Michelangelo's figures on the Medici tomb in San Lorenzo (Florence) as examples of his superiority.³¹¹

Bocchi's discussion of the modern and ancient statues set up in the Uffizi plays on the juxtaposition of an ancient figure of Bacchus displayed next to Michelangelo's version. According to Bocchi, the figures were thus displayed in order to set off the superiority of the latter. In Bocchi's mind, Michelangelo's figure is not only widely acclaimed as more beautiful but also demonstrates Michelangelo's intimate knowledge of the 'mechanics of the human body'.³¹²

With respect to artistic practices, visual evidence suggests the antique provided the artist with a repertoire of gestures and poses which could be borrowed and used for different types of figures. The antique figure in profile, with one knee bent and taking a step forward was considered suitable for fighting warriors, the angel of the Annunciation and even for Christ's descent into hell. At first, motifs were borrowed by way of the notebook but later living models began to be posed in antique patterns, as can be seen in Rosselli's map.³¹³

Around the middle of the Quattrocento Florentine copies of classical sculpture reveal new artistic concerns as artists began to move beyond mere imitation. Benozzo Gozzoli's *Study of one of the Dioscuri* (Drawing; silverpoint with white heightening on blue prepared paper. c. 1460; London, British Museum) suggests that the artist was most interested in reproducing the volumetric shape of the statue. One of his workshop sketchbooks comprises the careful drawing of a female torso from classical sculpture, *Study of a classical female torso* (Drawing; silverpoint with white heightening on grey prepared paper. c. 1460; New York, Cooper-Hewitt

³⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 5.

³¹⁰ G. Baglioni, *Le vite de' pittori, scultori et architetti*, Rome, 1642 (facsimile edition), Rome 1935, p. 151; as cited by F. Haskell, N. Penny (as in n. 308), p. 230.

³¹¹ F. Bocchi (as in n. 49), p. 273.

³¹² Ibid., pp. 47-48.

³¹³ J. Meder, W. Ames, *The Mastery of Drawings*, 2 vols., New York, 1978, vol. 2, pp. 310-311.

National Design Museum).³¹⁴ According to Ames-Lewis, the drawing provides further confirmation that Gozzoli (1420-1497) was less interested in recording the antique than in investigating sculptural form, in keeping with Alberti's advice to imitate a mediocre statue rather than good painting, since the study of sculpture trains the eye to represent both likeness and the source and effects of light.³¹⁵ The books of drawings made by the Venetian Jacopo Bellini (1396?-1470?) contain random studies including a *Study after the Antique Nude Figure* (Drawing; silverpoint on prepared parchment. 1544; Paris, Louvre), indicating that though experimental figure drawing may have been given more prominence in Florence, it was certainly not exclusive to that region.

Artists who could not study in Rome had access to images of ancient sculpture through printed copies which became increasingly popular after 1500.³¹⁶ Plaster casts, which were less expensive than bronze copies, were essential in spreading appreciation of the most esteemed antique statues. The production of casts was still an expensive business in the middle of the sixteenth century, and the preserve of elite circles.³¹⁷

The fusion of the anatomical with classical iconography which occurred in the sixteenth century was inspired by excavations of ancient Roman sites. Fragments or whole figures of antique statuary provided a wide range of poses, gestures, proportions, facial expressions and backdrops. The most admired ancient statues in the Cinquecento include those excavated in the first half of the century: *Commodus as Hercules* (Musei Vaticani, Galleria Chiaramonti), *Cleopatra* (Rome, Musei Vaticani, Galleria delle statue), which is first recorded in 1512, the *Laocoon* (discovered 1506; Rome, Musei Vaticani, Belvedere Courtyard), which was admired for its anatomy and physiognomy and was copied by several artists, most notably by Baccio Bandinelli in 1523, the *Apollo Belvedere* (Rome, Musei Vaticani, Belvedere Courtyard), and the *Tiber* (Paris, Louvre), excavated 1512. These and other sculptures all belonged to Pope Julius II (1503-13) and were displayed together in a sculpture court behind the Vatican palace which had been specially designed for the pope and attracted much attention from visitors to Rome. Not surprisingly, most of the statues which drew the attention of artists were nude figures.

³¹⁴ F. Ames-Lewis (as in n. 295), p. 94.

³¹⁵ L. B. Alberti (as in n. 274), p. 92.

³¹⁶ On Titian's knowledge of the antique based on the circulation of prints and engravings and his direct observation of the antique in Rome and in Roman private collections, see R. W. Kennedy, 'Tiziano in Roma', *Il Mondo Antico nel rinascimento: Atti del convegno internazionale di studi sul rinascimento*, Florence, Palazzo Strozzi, 2-6 September 1956, Florence, 1958, pp. 237-245.

³¹⁷ See F. Haskell, N. Penny (as in n. 308), p. 3.

An indication of the role played by the study of the antique as part of an artist's training can be gained from the writings of Vasari, Cellini and Armenini. The prefaces to the *Lives* make several references to ancient statuary, while the biographical sections sometimes refer to specific statues but more often praise individual artists for the study of the antique in Rome without specifying particular works.³¹⁸ References to the antique in the biographies frequently serve as part of Vasari's rhetoric of praise and blame, a point further pursued in the next chapter.

Ancient sculpture mentioned in the *Lives* include the *Apollo*, the *Farnese Bull* (excavated 1545; Naples, Museo Nazionale), the *Cleopatra*, the *Laocoon*, the *Marforio* (Rome, Musei Capitolini), the *Nile* (Rome, Musei Vaticani, Braccio Nuovo), which was first recorded in 1523 and installed as a fountain in the Belvedere courtyard, and the *Tiber*. The Belvedere Torso (Rome, Musei Vaticani, Atrio del Torso) (**figure 27**), which was recorded as early as 1432-5 and is known to have been much admired by Michelangelo, is not mentioned in relation to the Florentine artist by Vasari.

According to Cellini, the most beautiful ancient statues in Rome comprised the *Laocoon*, the *Cleopatra*, the *Apollo*, *Commodus as Hercules*, an unidentified *Venus* and *Camillus* (Rome, Musei Capitolini, Palazzo dei Conservatori).³¹⁹ Antonfrancesco Doni listed seven antique statues worth seeing in Rome: *Laocoon*, *Apollo*, *Torso*, *Marcus Aurelius* (Rome, Piazza del Campidoglio), *Spinario* (Rome, Musei Capitolini, Palazzo dei Conservatori), *Antinous* (Rome, Musei Vaticani, Belvedere Courtyard), and *Meleager* (Rome, Musei Vaticani, Sala degli Animali). Giovanni Battista Armenini recommends that all students draw from casts of the finest statues in Rome: *Laocoon*, *Hercules*, *Apollo*, *Torso*, *Cleopatra*, *Venus* (Rome, Musei Vaticani) and the *Nile* of the Belvedere, as well as reliefs on triumphal arches and on the Trajan's column and the Antonine column.³²⁰

The influence of specific pieces of ancient fragments and statues has been widely debated. John Shearman has examined the influence on the so-called Mannerist style of a passage in Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*, in which the movement in Myron's *Discobolus* (Rome, Museo Nazionale, Museo delle Terme) is equated with

³¹⁸ For a discussion of the role of the antique in the *Lives*, see P. Barocchi, 'Il valore dell'antico nella storiografia vasariana', *Il mondo antico nel rinascimento, V convegno internazionale di studi sul rinascimento*, V convegno internazionale di studi sul rinascimento, Florence, 2-6 September 1956, Florence, 1958, pp. 17-36. According to Barocchi, Vasari's treatment of the antique from the fourteenth to the sixteenth century tends to focus on the surpassing of the qualities with which it was associated, observing that the antique does not play a significant role in the text. Barocchi provides examples of a number of references to the antique in the various parts of the text.

³¹⁹ B. Cellini, *La Vita*, G. Davico Bonino (ed), Turin, 1982, p. 357.

³²⁰ G. B. Armenini (as in n. 69), p. 77.

ornate and unusual diction in rhetoric.³²¹ According to David Summers, changes in Italian Renaissance art did not stem from the discovery of antique sculpture but rather than the elaboration chiefly of Quintilian's writings on rhetoric.³²² In addition, Summers has argued that Myron's *Discobolus* (**figure 28**) provided an unprecedented antique example of movement and *varietas* in sculpture and that examples of similar images in the Cinquecento yield insight into the critical significance of Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*. Summers cites Baccio Bandinelli's study for the *Massacre of the Innocents* (1520s; Florence, Uffizi, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe) as an image similar to the *Discobolus*, with the twisted torso giving the impression of motion and physical exertion, indicating how the ancient fragment was seen by sixteenth-century artists. Other examples include the central figure of Michelangelo's *Brazen Serpent* pendentive (Rome; Sistine Ceiling), the central charging nude in Rosso's *Moses and the Daughters of Jethro* (1523; Florence, Uffizi), and a fallen soldier in Giulio Romano's *Battle of Maxentius and Constantine* (1520-1521; Rome, Vatican, Sala di Constantino). Summers believes all these images are difficult and bold displays of *varietà* and *facilità* and thus exemplify an antithesis that played a key role in rhetorical, poetical and pictorial ornament during the Renaissance. In the sixteenth century, the use of the *contrapposto* by adding opposition of direction to a *figura serpentinata*, another form of *contrapposto*, was equated with a highly ornate style and was created with the *cognoscenti* in mind, in keeping with Quintilian's interpretation of Myron's *Discobolus*.³²³

Summers believes that images of twisted torsos became 'self-generating'. According to James Elkins, there is evidence of the influence of the *Belvedere Torso* on Michelangelo's sketch for a *Victory*, though it is impossible to ascertain whether Michelangelo remembered these forms directly from the Torso or whether he compared them to a live model. The Torso provided the artist with a knowledge of the variety of contortions and forms which he studied and augmented through the practice of drawing.³²⁴

By the mid sixteenth century the influence of classical sculpture was tempered increasingly by the attention of artists to the mechanics of the human body through the observation of the live model and the study of anatomy, both of which allowed

³²¹ See J. Shearman, *Mannerism*, London, 1967, pp. 83-86. Shearman provides several examples of what he believes are citations of the *Discobolus* in Cinquecento art. For the relevant passage in Quintilian, see *Institutio Oratoria*, English trans. H. E. Butler, New York and London, 1921, vol. 2, xiii, 9-11.

³²² See D. Summers, 'Contrapposto: Style and Meaning in Renaissance Art', *Art Bulletin*, 1977, vol. 59, pp. 335-361, esp. pp. 336-337.

³²³ On the *figura serpentinata* as a *contrapposto*, see D. Summers, 'Maniera and Movement: The Figura Serpentinata', *Art Quarterly*, vol. 35, 1972, p. 273.

³²⁴ J. Elkins 1984 (as in n. 294), p. 180. Both Summers and Elkins interpret the importance of ancient statuary as providing artists with a starting point for generating new and striking forms. On the influence of the *Belvedere Torso* on Francesco Salviati's *Beheading of St. John*, see L. Steinberg, 'Salviati's *Beheading of St. John the Baptist*', *Art News*, vol. 70, 1972, pp. 56-69.

the representations of the human figure that could claim to surpass ancient art. Vincenzo Danti sets out to demonstrate that anatomy serves two main goals, surpassing both nature and the ancients.

Two further points have particular relevance to the representation of the nude and the debate it engendered. Firstly, ancient mythology continued to provide a wealth of characters and accompanying cast for representation in a range of art works and settings. It is important to note that images were frequently related to current ideas and predilections. Modern translations of ancient sources, which were usually popularised and not always accurate, were more frequently used than original texts.³²⁵ Secondly, the antique precedent was used to justify or criticise the representation of the nude by a number of writers during the period. The reasons for this and the effectiveness of such claims need examining carefully if we are to develop a fuller understanding of the perception of the nude.

The Role of Anatomical Studies

During the period under investigation, the term *notomia/notoria* was used in different ways.³²⁶ It referred to the physical structure of a man or animal, a book on anatomy, the act of dissection, a drawing or print of an anatomical figure, and *écorché* figures.³²⁷ Anatomy played an important role in artistic training and the many copies of drawings illustrate how anatomical models were circulated and copied. The mechanics of the human body were investigated empirically through dissection, prints, and three-dimensional *écorché* models. Illustrated books were also consulted.³²⁸ *Écorché* models in the form of three-dimensional sculptures of the

³²⁵ C. Ginzburg, 'Tiziano, Ovidio e i codici della raffigurazione erotica nel '500', *Tiziano e Venezia* (as in n. 1), pp. 125-135.

³²⁶ M. Kornell, 'Rosso Fiorentino and the anatomical text', *Burlington Magazine*, 131, December, 1989, pp. 842-847.

³²⁷ For a documented compilation of early sources pertaining to the canon and civic laws on dissection, see L. S. Fusco (as in n. 298), pp. 232-247. On the history of dissection, related ethical and religious issues, the role of the authorities, and official and unofficial anatomic practices which emerge from the sixteenth-century Roman source *Studium Urbis*, see A. Carlino, *La fabbrica del corpo: Libri e dissezione nel Rinascimento*, Turin, 1994, pp. 79-132. On the Florentine statutes of 1387, which decreed that one male and one female body be made available to university anatomists and that the cadavers were to be alien criminals, hanged and delivered the same day, *ibid.*, p. 236. On the underground and illegal investigation of anatomy permitted by priors of hospitals, and the availability of the cadavers of paupers and orphans who died at the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova, Santa Croce and Santo Spirito (Florence) specifically requested for the 'study of figures', see R. A. Bernabeo, 'Michel-Ange. Forme et Fonction', C. Rabbi-Bernard (ed) (as in n. 294), pp. 77-88, esp. p. 78. The statutes of the Florentine Accademia del Disegno of 1563 stipulated that dissections should take place in the cold winter months. On this point, see D. Heikamp, 'Appunti sull'Accademia del Disegno', *Arte illustrata*, vol. 50., 1972, pp. 298-301, esp. p. 298. For a written account of a dissection in the Accademia di San Luca in January 1593, see F. Zuccaro and R. Alberti, *Origine e progresso dell'Accademia del disegno di Roma*, Pavia, 1604, *Scritti d'arte*, D. Heikamp (ed), Florence, 1961, p. 40.

³²⁸ G. Vasari (as in n. 292), Letter 26 dated 1537, pp. 79-81. Vasari requests from his friend and physician, Baccio Rontini, a book of bones and anatomy needed for his *Deposition* (Arezzo, SS Annunziata), indicating that artists could turn to medical texts as an alternative to empirical anatomical studies. The inventory of Clovio's possessions dated 4 January 1578 shows that he owned two texts on anatomy though no titles are given. The reference to the 'libro intitolato perfette proporzioni' might refer to Danti's treatise. Before the publication of books aimed specifically at artists in the seventeenth century,

body with the skin removed in order to reveal the surface muscles were first introduced for study in the sixteenth century. Plans and attempts made by artists to produce their own texts, most notably Danti, Allori, Rosso Fiorentino and Michelangelo, provide further evidence of the centrality of anatomy.

The male cadaver was the preferred subject for dissection when the artist was concerned with the underlying body structure and the connection between surface anatomy and motion. Evidence available indicates that at public dissections, youthful corpses, in good health at the time of death and with visible and tense musculature were preferred because their physical features best demonstrated the theoretical precepts of interest at a time when public dissections had been transformed into a theatrical performance with the physician-dissector and the corpse playing the leading roles.³²⁹ The same preference is expressed by Vesalius, who for public dissections prescribes the use of robust, youthful cadavers possessing features as similar to those of Polyclitus as possible.³³⁰

The first verbal observations regarding the importance of anatomy in the arts appear in Alberti and Ghiberti, when artistic anatomy was at its early stages. With regard to the draped or nude body, Alberti advises the artist to build up the body from the bones, paying attention to the position and size produced by a particular pose or the bending of the body. The next stage involves adding the sinews and the muscles before 'clothing' the figure with flesh and skin, so that the muscles are visible.³³¹ At the end of his treatise on sculpture Alberti advises the sculptor to gain a knowledge of surface anatomy by studying the bone structure of the human body, as well as the muscles and nerves, in order to form a nude or draped figure 'without error'.³³² The artist should therefore build up the body from the bones, adding muscles and skin.

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³²⁹ See A. Carlino (as in n. 327), p. 98 n. 76 which cites the comments of a contemporary anatomist, Alessandro Benedetti, in his Latin text *Historia corporis Humani, Sive Anatomice*, Venice, 1502, G. Ferrari (trans.), Florence, 1998.

³³⁰ A. Vesalius, *De umani corporis fabbrica libri septum*, Basilea, 1543, p. 548. This anatomy atlas was produced with the co-operation of Titian's workshop in a period in which the increasing importance attached to visual representations of anatomical structures required the assistance of artists. Whether the woodcut is by Titian or can be attributed to Giovanni da Calcar, a member of his workshop, is a matter of dispute. See M. Kemp, 'A Drawing for the Fabrica; and some thoughts upon the Vesalius Muscle-man', *Medical History*, vol. 14, 1970, pp. 277-288; C. Bornstein, 'Titian and the Anatomy of Vesalius', *Bollettino dei Musei Civici di Venezia*, vol. 22, 1977, pp. 39-50; M. Muraro, 'Tiziano e le anatomie del Vesalio', *Tiziano e Venezia* (as in n. 1), pp. 307-316.

³³¹ L. B. Alberti (as in n. 274), p. 60.

³³² L. B. Alberti, *De statua*, M. Collareta (ed), Livorno, 1998, pp. 23-25.

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³³¹ L. B. Alberti (as in n. 274), p. 60.

³³² L. B. Alberti, *De statua*, M. Collareta (ed), Livorno, 1998, pp. 23-25.

The next theoretical step is found in Ghiberti's *Commentarii* (1447-1455), where *notomia* is counted as one of the ten liberal arts pertaining to the artist.³³³ Anatomy is seen as a method of investigation and exploration, and Ghiberti advises artists to observe dissections ('aver veduto notomia') when forming a male figure in sculpture in order to gain an understanding of the bones, muscles and nerves.

The first stages of anatomy in art concerned images relating to death and decomposing figures. Early Renaissance *memento mori* images provided an emblematic visual language which allowed artists to demonstrate their skill at representing dead figures, écorchés, skeletons and skulls. The observation of skeletal fragments on the part of Masaccio (1401-c. 1428) may have assisted him in the *memento mori* image in the Trinity fresco (c. 1426) at Santa Maria Novella.³³⁴ Vasari's references to Donatello's understanding of anatomy relates to his statue of the penitent Magdalene of wood in the Baptistery, Florence. Vasari connects an emaciated, dry body-type type with actual anatomies or *notomia secca*, praising the figure for its aesthetic merits.³³⁵

In the biography of Antonio Pollaiuolo, Vasari pointed to a new phase in anatomical studies in relation to the nude:

He had a more modern grasp of the nude than the masters before his day, and he dissected many bodies in order to study their anatomy. He was the first to demonstrate the method of searching out the muscles, in order that they might have their due form and place in his figures.³³⁶

Antonio Pollaiuolo's study for the *Hercules and Hydra* (Drawing. c. 1460; London, British Museum) indicates that the tibial crest was used as the defining support for the extended right leg. In the case of the bending archer in his *Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* (c. 1475; London, National Gallery) (**figure 29**), muscular opposition is illustrated by the active triceps and relaxed biceps in the archer's right arm.

The Orvieto frescoes by Luca Signorelli (c. 1445-1523) illustrate the investigation of structural forms designed to heighten the visual impact of the depicted scenes. His *Resurrection of the Dead* (1499-1504) is inhabited by skeletal forms and male nude

³³³ L. Ghiberti, *I commentarii*, L. Bartoli (ed), Florence, 1998, p. 48: 'ancora bisogna avere conosciuta la disciplina della medicina, et avere veduto notomia, acciò che lo scultore sappi quante ossa sono nel corpo humano, volendo comporre la statua virile, e sapere e muscoli sono nel corpo dello huomo e così tutti nervi e legature sono in esso.' Other recommended subjects include grammar, geometry, philosophy, medicine, astrology, perspective, history, arithmetic, and the theory of *disegno* (teorica del disegno), which Ghiberti called the 'foundation-stone of art'.

³³⁴ See B. Schultz (as in n. 299), p. 2.

³³⁵ For a definition of *notomia secca*, see M. Kornell (as in n. 326), p. 846. For a discussion of evidence of Donatello's observation of anatomies and at least a basic knowledge of anatomical structure, see Schultz (as in n. 299), p. 212 n. 16. On early Renaissance illustrations of dissections by artists, *ibid.*, pp. 48 and 212 n. 25. On medical illustrations of dissection at that time, *ibid.*, pp. 48-49.

³³⁶ VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 3, pp. 505-506: Egli s'intese degli ignudi più modernamente che fatto non avevano gli altri maestri inanzi a lui, e scorticò molti uomini per vedere la notomia lor sotto; e fu primo a mostrare il modo di cercare muscoli, che avessero forma et ordine nelle figure.'

figures, while his *Damned Consigned to Hell* contains anatomical structures with several of the demons revealing muscles and sinews under the flesh.³³⁷ There is no conclusive evidence that Signorelli studied anatomical models or cadavers though in the 1568 edition of the *Lives*, Vasari relates that he drew the corpse of his dead son.³³⁸

More systematic anatomical studies were undertaken in the sixteenth century with Michelangelo and Leonardo setting new standards for figural representation and bringing artistic anatomy to a new stage in its development. While their initial anatomical investigations are similar, their preoccupations came to differ significantly with implications for figural representation.³³⁹

The *Anonimo Magliabechiano* reports that Michelangelo was actively involved in the pursuit of anatomical knowledge through the dissection of corpses in a crypt: 'where he made anatomies of many bodies and cut and gutted them'.³⁴⁰ According to Ascanio Condivi, Michelangelo dedicated many years to the study of anatomy.³⁴¹ Drawing on Condivi, Vasari recorded Michelangelo's study of anatomy in a passage added to his biography in 1568 and elsewhere in his *Life* he expands on the objectives of anatomical study in terms strongly reminiscent of Danti's discourse. Vasari writes that dissection serves to determine the position of the bones, muscles, nerves, the origin of motion, and every pose of the human body. Vasari's comment underscores Michelangelo's anatomical knowledge regarding man and animal, linking it directly with the mastery of the nude, *ingenium* and perfection in the design of the widest range of motion and postures of the human figure.³⁴²

James Elkins has demonstrated that Michelangelo invented very few muscles and when he did so it was probably deliberate and usually for expressive purposes. One example of an invented muscle can be found in the hand of his statue of David (Florence, Academy; 1501), where the effect of the alteration is to make the hand look more massive.³⁴³ In this instance anatomy provides an alternative creative

³³⁷ On the development of accuracy in the depiction of skeletons, including Signorelli's skeletons in the *Resurrection of the Dead*, see M. Kornell, 'The Study of Anatomy by Artists in Sixteenth-Century Italy', unpublished PhD thesis, London University, Warburg Institute, 1993, chapter 3. See also K. Clark, *The Nude: Study of Ideal Art*, London, 1957, p. 265 and B. Schultz (as in n. 299), p. 66.

³³⁸ VBB, 1568, vol. 3, p. 637.

³³⁹ On the different anatomical pursuits of Leonardo and Michelangelo see B. Schultz (as in n. 299), pp. 67-109, esp. p. 95.

³⁴⁰ *Anonimo Magliabechiano* (as in n. 290), p. 115: 'fece notomia di assai corpo et tagliò et sparò'. It is interesting to note that Michelangelo's activities, which provoked the outcry of family members, was supported by the Florentine gonfaliere, Piero Soderini, who justified these activities in the name of art.

³⁴¹ A. Condivi, *Vita di Michelangelo*, Rome, 1553, E. Spini Barelli (ed), Milan, 1964, p. 30. See also A. Condivi, *The Life of Michelangelo*, A.S. Wohl (trans.), H. Wohl (ed), Pennsylvania, 1999.

³⁴² VBB, 1568, vol. 6, p. 108.

³⁴³ J. Elkins (as in n. 294), p. 177.

device to achieve a particular effect, that is, a combination of strength and ingenuity.

From the mid sixteenth century, representations of flayed bodies became more common. These representations were usually anatomical illustrations of dissected and skinless *écorchés*, the satyr Marsyas flayed by Apollo, and St Bartholomew. Bohde discusses the symbolic function of flayed figures like Michelangelo's St Bartholomew (1534-1541) in his *Last Judgement* and Titian's *Flaying of Marsyas* (c. 1570; Krom_í Archiepiscopal Palace, Arcibiskupsy Zámek).³⁴⁴

In Vasari's scheme, mastery of the 'dry anatomy', corpse and flayed figure is given an aesthetic dimension suggesting that this kind of figure was much admired for its own sake irrespective of the narrative context in which it appears. Praised figures in both editions of the *Lives* include Donatello's *Magdalene* (1460-1466; Florence, Baptistery), Michelangelo's flayed St Bartholomew in the *Last Judgement*, as well as corpses and flayed figures by Rosso, Baccio Bandinelli, and Bronzino. Vasari underscores Rosso's study of anatomy and his disinterment of dead bodies, describing the outcome of his anatomical investigations as a 'beautiful anatomy' ('bellissima notomia').³⁴⁵ Vasari singles out for praise the anatomical studies undertaken by the Florentine sculptor, Baccio Bandinelli.³⁴⁶ According to Vasari, Bandinelli's anatomical knowledge is demonstrated in the engravings he had made from his drawings, such as a much admired nude Cleopatra and a large cartoon showing a range of anatomical studies ('anatomie diverse').³⁴⁷ Bandinelli's figure of St Jerome is also cited as an excellent example of his anatomical knowledge.

Prominence was to be given to anatomy in Vincenzo Danti's unfinished treatise. Eight of the fourteen lost books were to deal with anatomy and five of these were

³⁴⁴ The Marsyas myth was known through Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, which was usually read in vernacular versions. The social dimension of this myth was first emphasised by A. Gentili, *Da Tiziano a Tiziano, Mito e allegoria nella cultura veneziana del Cinquecento*, Rome, 1988, pp. 114-137 and 225-243. A comprehensive analysis of the political context is provided by E. Wyss, *The Myth of Apollo and Marsyas in the Art of the Italian Renaissance. An Inquiry into the Meaning of Images*, Newark and London, 1996, pp. 45-46 and 125-127. Art historians have tended to read Titian's painting as Marsyas concealing, within his interior, truth and beauty revealed through flaying. Bohde has argued against this Neo-platonic reading, which identifies Plato's *Symposium* as the philosophical source. Bohde points out that at that time Marsyas was chiefly perceived as a shallow and presumptuous character and she emphasises how the Neo-platonic reading has tended to disregard the representation of skin for its own sake, as well as the wider and more general connotations of skin. See D. Bohde, 'Skin and the Search for the Interior: The Representation of Flaying in the Art and Anatomy of the Cinquecento', *Bodily Extremities: Preoccupations with the Human Body in Early Modern European Culture*, Aldershot, Hants and Burlington, VT, 2003, pp. 10-47, esp. 11-19. The essays in this text attempt to draw attention away from studies of literary sources with regard to the issue of physical manifestations and representations in the early modern period and focus attention on other textual and contextual sources, in order to create connections between an art work and the society in which it was produced. The approach of the text is thus similar to that adopted in this thesis, and likewise draws parallels between everyday practices and high art.

³⁴⁵ VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 4, p. 485.

³⁴⁶ VBB 1568, vol. 5, p. 243.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

to be illustrated. According to Margaret Daly Davis, these books were modelled on Valverde's book of anatomy.³⁴⁸ Anatomy was central to Danti's own artistic training. Danti claimed that he performed eighty-three dissections in preparation for his book, and that he obtained several cadavers between 1567 and 1570. Indications of what Danti's ideas on anatomy would have been can be inferred from comments in Book One, where his theoretical formulations are expounded in relation to anatomy, taking Michelangelo as his benchmark.

The objective of the treatise as a whole was to formulate a rule for the arts of design and in particular a rule for the proportions of the human figure. Danti rejected mathematical schemes like the one proposed by Dürer and sought in anatomy *una vera regola* for human proportions since he believed that the perfection of Michelangelo lay in his understanding of the secrets of anatomy.³⁴⁹

In Danti's book, internal anatomy chiefly concerns physiology, an understanding of blood, muscle mass, nerves governing movement, which constitute the artist's initial training in anatomy. Internal anatomy explores the variety of movement and the effects of movement on musculature. Book Nine was to be dedicated to surface anatomy, that is, the outward forms and surfaces produced by the movement of the bones and muscles.³⁵⁰ Great emphasis is placed on the need to acquire a full understanding of surface anatomy, which comprises the function of the muscles, their source (*origine*), location (*sito*), size (*qualità*), number (*quantità*) and form (*figura*), as well as the variety created as the figure twists and turns and as it is engaged in diverse actions.³⁵¹

Danti's aim is to demonstrate that the study of anatomy enables the artist to correct the flaws and dissonance when composing a human figure, enabling the artist to make a perfectly formed figure. Anatomical study trains the artist's mind towards perfect judgement, so that with the compass of the eye he can spontaneously recognise what is beautiful.

In his *Sopra i principii e 'l modo d'imperare l'arte del disegno* Cellini was keen to promote Florence as the city which had established the tradition of artistic

³⁴⁸ M. Daly Davis, 'Beyond the Primo Libro of Vincenzo Danti's Trattato delle perfette proporzioni', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Instituts in Florenz*, vol. 26, 1982, pp. 63-70. In her excellent article, Daly points out that there is no concrete evidence that Condivi transmitted Michelangelo's ideas on anatomy and provided Danti with relevant information, as both Schlosser and Blunt claimed. On this point, *ibid.*, p. 81 n. 51. It is important to note that these artists had similar artistic goals and interests and were working within a common frame of reference, which explains, in my view, many of the analogies between them.

³⁴⁹ V. Danti, *Il primo libro del trattato delle belle proporzioni di tutte le cose che imitare e ritrarre si possono con l'arte del disegno*, Florence, 1567, *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento*, P. Barocchi (ed), 3 vols., Bari, 1960-1962, vol. 1, 1960, p. 212.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 232-233 and 255.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 232-233.

anatomy. Stressing the importance of a correctly structured body, Cellini elucidates the role of anatomy in art from the construction of the skeleton to the moving figure. As with Vasari and Danti, the anatomical structure is perceived as an aesthetic form. Cellini is convinced that the beauty of the body is discernible in the beauty of the bones:

I want you first of all to know the measures of the human bone structure so that you can better and more exactly arrange the flesh on it, that is, the nerves, through which, with great art, divine nature, links this beautiful instrument, and its fleshy muscles, linked together with the said bones by the nerves.³⁵²

The artist should gain a thorough understanding of bone structure before learning to cover bones with flesh, and should learn how to measure them. Cellini advises the artist to place the bones as if the figure were alive, for example, the bones of the leg should be placed as if it were leaning on the ground in order to observe the effects on the hips and changing shape of the hip as the body is turned. This procedure should be repeated for all the limbs in a range of postures, while turning and twisting the body.³⁵³

The practice of modelling and observing the figure helps the artist acquire a marvellous 'foundation in art' ('fondamento alla propria arte') and to overcome the difficulties in this 'divine art of ours', resolving difficulty with facility. The understanding of bone structure is associated with the perfection of Michelangelo, who introduced a new and revolutionary style ('high style' or 'gran maniera') never seen before. His greatest merit in both painting and sculpture is not simply placing well the most beautiful muscles but also and above all showing the position of the bones.³⁵⁴

According to Cellini, wax and clay models also serve to study posture and the effects of changing positions. These models are also essential in determining the effect of a figure viewed at different angles. While there are four main views, an infinite number can be created by modelling the figure with each view adjusted to fit with the others. Accommodating these different views is perceived as one of the difficulties of sculpture. Cellini advises the artist to furnish the first view with beautiful grace, since the visual and aesthetic qualities of all the others depend on this.

³⁵² B. Cellini, *Sopra i principii e 'l modo d'imparare l'arte del disegno*, Scritti d'arte del Cinquecento, P. Barocchi (ed), 3 vols., Milan, 1971-1977, vol. 2, p. 1939: 'Innanzi tutto io voglio [...], che tu sappi prima tutte le misure di questa umana ossatura, perchè meglio tu possa di poi con più sicurtà comporci sopra la carne, cioè i nervi, co' quali con tanta divina natura lega questo bello strumento, e i suoi muscoli di carne, insieme colle dette ossa da i nervi legati'.

³⁵³ Ibid.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 1940.

A piece of sculpture must have infinite views in order to arrive at infinite variety, a quality which can be achieved in a single figure or muscle. One twisting figure or a figure with inflated muscles or only slightly revealed muscles are all cited as examples of the potential of an infinite variety created with the human body. The human body is thus perceived as the source of an infinite range of beautiful postures and forms.

Michelangelo's knowledge of anatomy, particularly the rendering and display of bones and muscles, is also evoked by Allori in his unfinished treatise on anatomy.³⁵⁵ The text, which was written with direct knowledge of the works of Vesalius and Valverde, indicates that the generation of artists after Michelangelo shared similar interests. Allori's preoccupation with anatomy is also attested by his drawings. His *Three Leg Studies* (Drawing black pencil on white paper. c. 1575; Florence, Uffizi, GDS) (**figure 28**) shows the construction of the leg from the skeletal position to the accurate formation of surface musculature through to the finished leg on the right, which reveals the position of the muscles.³⁵⁶

The Live Model

During the Renaissance, the notions of the imitation of nature and the study of the antique, as well as the ultimate goal of surpassing both, were not seen as opposing factors. During the early Renaissance, the imitation of nature was associated with the break away from pattern books and stock solutions.³⁵⁷ Landino defined Masaccio as an 'imitator of nature' ('imitatore di natura'), which implied not only the observation of natural objects but also understanding the causes of nature, the mastery of perspective (*prospettiva*) and light and shadow (*rilievo*). In Florence from the 1460s onwards, innumerable studies were made from the nude studio model with workshop assistants and *garzoni* posing as both male and female models in postures which could later be used in works of art.³⁵⁸ Mannequins were used to study the arrangement of folds on a clothed figure.

³⁵⁵ A. Allori (as in n. 282), pp. 1941-1981.

³⁵⁶ For an analysis of Allori's treatise and his preoccupation with anatomy, see R. P. Ciardi, 'Le regole del disegno di Alessandro Allori e la nascita del dilettantismo pittorico', *Storia dell'arte*, vol. 12, 1971, pp. 267-284.

³⁵⁷ For a discussion of the Renaissance understanding of imitation, see M. Baxandall (as in n. 272), 'imitatore della natura – imitator of nature', pp. 119-121. For a useful discussion of Renaissance concepts of liveliness and connections and distinctions between art and nature, see M. E. Hazard, 'The Anatomy of "Liveliness" as a concept in Renaissance Aesthetics', *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 33, 1975, pp. 407-418.

³⁵⁸ On the *garzone* serving as a live model in the workshop, see G. Dalli Regoli and C. Raghianti, *Firenze 1470-1480: Disegni dal modello*, Pisa, 1975 and G. Dalli Regoli, 'Il disegno nella bottega', *Maestri e botteghe: pittura a Firenze alla fine del Quattrocento*, exhib. cat. M. Gregori, A. Paolucci, C. A. Luchinati (eds), Florence, 1992. For an overview of the artist's model in general, see M. Postle, 'Model, artist's', *Dictionary of Art*, J. Turner (ed), 34 vols., New York, 1996, vol. 21, pp. 757-762. With reference to the Renaissance, *ibid.*, pp. 758-759.

According to Michael Baxandall, this process amounted to 'an edited reality and selective nature'. The question of what nature and which ancient works were seen as worthy or suitable for imitation is essential to our understanding of the nude and the debate it engendered. The kind of live model and type of motion deemed appropriate in terms of the figure represented and the setting is also of deep significance. As the representation of the nude gained momentum, the new artistic concerns and ideas came into conflict with the prescriptions regarding images seen as a reflection of ideal social behaviour.

Alberti's treatise points to the artistic preoccupation with bodily motion and its relation to the notions of *ornato* and *varietà* while underscoring the importance of observing the laws governing the decorum of behaviour and the representation of appropriate figure types, couching his advice in humanistic terms.

Alberti underscores the importance of observing and understanding the body in repose and motion. In order to convey successfully and with decorum, that is, appropriately, the emotional states of figures, the painter should observe and understand the variety of human movements:

The painter must know all the movements of the body, which I believe he must take from nature with great skill'.³⁵⁹

Alberti's understanding of variety (*varietà*) distinguished it from copiousness (*copia*) as the sheer quantity of objects and figures in a painting. Variety regards both a range and contrast of hues and diverse postures of figures. Variety, which is seen as an absolute value, is linked with the representation of the nude:

Some will stand upright and show their whole face, with their arms high and hands spread joyfully, standing on one foot. Others will have their face turned away and arms down, their feet together; and so each figure will have its own posture and curve of limbs: some will sit, others rest on one knee, others lie down. And if it is allowable, let one figure be nude, and others partly nude and partly draped.³⁶⁰

Varietà is associated with another important quality, ornateness (*ornato*), in that Alberti advised the artist to aim for a copiousness that was *ornato* with a certain *varietà*.³⁶¹ The Quattrocento application of the term *ornato* in the context of painting most frequently related to the posture or motion of a figure. In Alberti's mind, the movements of male figures should be *ornato* with more firmness and

³⁵⁹ L. B. Alberti (as in n. 274), p. 67: 'Così adunque conviene, sieno ai pictori notissimi tutti i movimenti del corpo quali bene impareranno dalla natura.'

³⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 65-66: 'Ivi adunque stieno alcuni ritti et mostrino tutta la faccia, con le mani in alto et con le dita liete, fermi in su un piè. Ali altri sia il viso contrario, et le braccia remisse, coi piedi aggiunti: Et così ad ciascuno sia suo atto et flessione di membra: altri segga, altri si posi su un ginocchio; altri giaceano. Et se così ivi sia licito, sievi alcuno ignudo et alcuni parte nudi et parte vestiti...'

³⁶¹ For an analysis of Landino's application of the terms *ornato* and *varietà*, see M. Baxandall 1972 (as in n. 272), pp. 131-135.

skilful poses as opposed to those of a boy or woman. This understanding of *ornato* resembles its application in classical antiquity, as defined by Quintilian, and is synonymous with a mobile and varied pose displaying *gratia/grazia*.

However, Alberti was not prepared to grant the artist total freedom as regards the movement of figures and he provided the artist with a number of clear guidelines. The representation of bodily motion, understood as natural truth (*verecundia*), was to be controlled by modesty (*modestia*) and a sense of restraint. Although the greatest emotions or passions of the soul ('*moti dell'animo*') should be expressed by the most powerful indications, they should always fit the age and status of the figure. Each limb should be suited to the social class of the depicted figure and motion in keeping with the task represented. Distinctions should be evident with regard to princes and paupers, philosophers and fencers. Alberti warned strongly against the representation of extreme gestures, particularly those which could be associated with fencers and lowly professional entertainers in keeping with morally-oriented social commentators:

Some think they will be praised because they hear that figures appear most lively when they throw about their limbs. For this reason their figures look like fencers and ham actors without any dignity in the painting. Because of this they are not only without grace and sweetness but moreover they show the too fiery and turbulent imagination of the artist.³⁶²

Alberti's constraints concerning motion are connected with his promotion of a higher status for the artist.³⁶³ Alberti advocated the association between successful pictorial communication and social behaviour, suggesting a link between depicted behaviour and the character of the painter who produced it. Since the human figure is seen as the vehicle through which the concept of the *istoria* is manifested, bodily motion and every part of the depicted figure must be appropriate. Painters who depicted fitting and appropriate gestures and actions deserved greater esteem than those who did not.

One of the earliest sources providing useful information on the live model is Leonardo's *Libro della pittura*. Although not available to a wide audience, Leonardo's writings on art sum up some of the central concerns of artists active at that time, illustrating that perspective was no longer a central concern and that painting was characterised by a wider scope.³⁶⁴ In Leonardo's mind, the 'universal

³⁶² L. B. Alberti, (as in 274), pp. 71-72: 'truovasi, chi exprimendo movimenti troppo arditi, et in una medesima figura facendo che ad un tratto si vede il petto et le reni, cosa impossibile et non conducente, credono essere assai lodati, perche odono quelle immagini molto parer vive, quali molto gettino ogni suo membro et per questo in loro figure fanno parerle schermidori et istrioni, senza alcuna dignità di pictura'.

³⁶³ See M. Kemp, 'Virtuous artists and virtuous art: Alberti and Leonardo on Decorum in Life and Art', F. Ames-Lewis and A. Bednarek (eds) (as in n. 10), pp. 15-23.

³⁶⁴ The edition of Leonardo's *Treatise of Painting* (pub. Paris, 1651) displays the effects of multiple authorial agencies: Leonardo, sixteenth-century compilers of the abridged treatise from the Codex

painter' ('pittore universale') should be skilled in every part of painting, including the nude.³⁶⁵ Leonardo's discussion of the practice of figural drawing and his instructions for representing the human body and the flesh reflect an increased preoccupation with the nude and bodily motion.³⁶⁶ According to Leonardo, the best time of the year for studying the live nude is the summer, spending the winter months learning and improving on what has been observed during the warm season. The best way to draw live figures is to aim for spontaneity, making quick sketches in silver point. The model chosen for observation should be proportioned, and, after observing the figure, the artist is advised to improve on any imperfections.

The ideal figure type for observation is short and stocky, since it is this form which best displays musculature.³⁶⁷ The objective is to 'imitate the power of nature, the contours of the body and the variety of movement which can be observed in life. Life-drawing is thus the means to arrive at a thorough knowledge of both musculature and movement:

The painter who knows the sinews, muscles, and tendons, knows very well when a limb moves, how many and which sinews are the reason for it, and which swollen muscle is the reason for the contraction of the sinew, and which sinews, changed into very thin cartilage, surround and contain the muscle.³⁶⁸

Muscles which possess the greatest variety comprise the back of the thighs, the back, the throat, the shoulders, the backside, and the stomach.³⁶⁹ The painter should draw muscles of every age group. When drawing the muscles of the body in motion, the painter should choose muscular bodies, which are defined as 'good nudes' ('buoni nudi') or memorise the variety of forms seen in real life.³⁷⁰

In addition to artistic procedures relating to the human body, Leonardo provides the artist with a set of instructions for its representation in art. Firstly, poses and bodily motion must reveal a state of the mind ('intenzioni dell'animo').

Urbino, and editors active in the seventeenth century. Research on the treatise is currently being undertaken by T. Frangenberg and C. Farago, see T. Frangenberg, 'Bartoli, Giambullari and the Prefaces to Vasari's *Lives* (1550)', *JWCI*, vol. 65, 2002, pp. 244-258, and 244-245 n. 5. Leonardo's manuscripts were passed on to Leonardo's pupil, Francesco Melzi and were seen by Vasari. On Vasari's reference to his own perusal of the text, see VBB, 1568, vol. 4, p. 28.

³⁶⁵ L. da Vinci, *Libro della pittura*, C. Pedretti (ed), 2 vols., Florence, 1995, vol. 1, p. 183. Subsequent English translations are from or based on K. Clark's English text. See L. da Vinci, *On Painting*, C. Pedretti (ed), K. Clark (intr.), Los Angeles, 1964.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 187 and 189.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 274.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 192: 'Quel dipintore che arà cognizione della natura de' nervi, muscoli e lacerti, saprà bene, nel muovere uno membro, quanti e quali nervi ne sono cagione, e qual muscolo, sgonfiando, è cagione di racortare esso nervo, e quali corde convertite in sottilissime cartilagini circondano e raccolgano ditto muscolo; e così sarà diverso e universale dimostratore di vari muscoli, mediante i vari effetti delle figure, e non farà come molti che in diversi atti sempre fanno quelle medesime cose dimostrare in braccia, schiene, petto e gambe; le quali cose non si debbono mettere infra i piccoli errori'.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 278.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 265.

Secondly, male nude figures should only show muscles in the parts that are strained and the shape and size of the limbs should always fit the function they fulfil.³⁷¹ Strained figures should be muscular while figures at rest should be without muscles and sweet.³⁷² Leonardo is convinced that figures showing all their musculature are 'difficult and without grace' ('difficili e sgraziati'). Furthermore, motion should never be for its own sake but always justified by the context. He referred disparagingly to artists whose figures displayed movements of performers of the *moresca*, equating excessive movement with the artist's state of mind and personality.³⁷³ Motion should be in keeping with age and social status and the movement of the aged should not be 'prompt' like that of youth. The motion of a king should be graver than that of a *facchino*.³⁷⁴

Observe decorum and note that it is not suitable, either with respect to place and action, for the lord to behave like the servant, nor should the baby behave like the adolescent. [...] the actions of man should be expressed in keeping with their age and station, and vary according to the types of men and those of women.³⁷⁵

The observance of decorum was also essential in the representation of women, who should never be shown with their legs apart, since this is indecorous.³⁷⁶ Artists are urged to observe decorum particularly in history painting, showing special regard for social status and making clear distinctions between the prince and the pauper.³⁷⁷ The artist's ultimate goal was thus the imitation of natural truth while observing all-important social and gender distinctions. While Leonardo's writings point to innovation in art, decorum is the notion through which a connection is made between the virtues (*virtù*) of the artistic process and the characteristics of the artistic product.³⁷⁸

We can develop a picture of the changing modes of artistic practices both inside and outside the workshop from Vasari's *Lives* and Cellini's *Life*. Vasari's humorous anecdote relating how Sansovino's *garzone* suffered mental problems after having to pose as Bacchus on the roof of the workshop during winter, serves to highlight the difficulties of using workshop live models.³⁷⁹ The *Lives* shows that artistic interest in the live model shifted from the workshop assistant to the lowly male in action and that physical exertion was a key artistic goal which was admired for its own sake. In the *Lives*, the samples of the artist's live model range from lowly urban workers,

³⁷¹ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 259.

³⁷² Ibid., vol. 2, p. 263.

³⁷³ Ibid., pp. 285 and 289.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 264.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 220.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 294 and vol. 1, p. 205.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 220.

³⁷⁸ M. Kemp 1992 (as in n. 10), p. 20.

³⁷⁹ VBB, 1568, vol. 6, p. 181.

porters/dockworkers and archers, to bathers and farm labourers. Vasari's accounts of the observation of the lowly male provide an eloquent testimony of the interest in the muscular and active body beautiful in keeping with its centrality in contemporary society.

One of the earliest references to the observation of the live model displaying physical exertion appears in Vasari's discussion of the *Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* (**figure 29**) attributed to Antonio Pollaiuolo. The muscular archers loading their bows, which are not part of the traditional iconography, are given emphasis both visually and in Vasari's description and value judgement. Vasari underscores the artistic innovation introduced by the artist, particularly in the bending figure on the right. Physical exertion is manifested in the arms and legs of the archers, which are described as 'the most beautiful nudes' ('bellissimi ignudi').³⁸⁰ The many derivations of the archers show that they must have held particular interest to other artists. By contrast, Vasari makes a brief reference to the effete features of St Sebastian, which are said to have been modelled on Lodovico Caponi, considered to be one of the most beautiful youths of his age, representing the youthful and glamorous patrician type. While this type of beauty may have been appreciated, Vasari's emphasis on the archers points to the admiration of a more muscular body in action.

While Vasari's praise of Pollaiuolo's representation of muscular lowly males in action reflects the contemporary preoccupation with the muscular male physique, it is in the biography of Michelangelo that he highlights the search for male live models outside the workshop, linking it to the creation of a new style based on the perfectly beautiful male body. In an anecdote in Michelangelo's *Life*, Vasari reports that the practice of drawing lowly male workers, specifying that the models in question were youthful builders working in the city, and, by implication, engaged in strenuous activities; they helped the artist acquire a new *maniera* [style] and *imitazione* [imitation]:

Michelangelo began to draw the scaffolding with some stools and other tools of the trade as well as some of the young men who were working there. When Domenico returned and saw Michelangelo's drawing, he declared: "This boy knows more about it than I do". And he was amazed by the new style and the new kind of imitation that came from the judgement given by heaven to a youth of such tender age, for in truth, it was as much as one might expect in the practice of an artist who had worked many years.³⁸¹

³⁸⁰ VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 3, p. 503.

³⁸¹ VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 6, pp. 7-8: 'si mise Michelangelo a ritrarre di naturale il ponte con alcuni deschi, con altre masserizie dell'arte et alcuni di quei giovani che lavoravano, per il che Domenico e visto il disegno di Michelangelo rimase sbigottito della nuova maniera e della nuova imitazione che da giudizio datoli dal cielo, aveva un simil giovane in età così tenera'.

In the biography of Baccio Bandinelli, Vasari recounts that the sculptor made live studies of naked peasants (*lavoratori*) on his father's estate in the Florentine countryside in order to improve his mastery of the human figure.³⁸² Elsewhere in the *Lives*, Vasari reports episodes of the study of the lowly male for artistic purposes. In the biography of Fra Giocondo e Liberale, Vasari relates an anecdote regarding the use of the *facchino* as a live model in order to create the effects of a muscular body under physical and emotional tension. The *facchino* is chosen on account of his beautiful body ('*bel corpo*'). Feigning the scene to be depicted, the *facchino* pulls at ropes with which he is tied in order to produce the effect of fear in his facial expression and in the twisting and turning of his body.³⁸³

Artists not only studied the lowly live male in action but looked for other suitable settings, such as bathhouses, where they could observe the scantily-clad body at rest and in motion. In the Life of Francesco Salviati (1510-1563) Vasari recounts that he and Salviati went to a bathhouse specifically to study the live nude and that they also carried out anatomical studies as part of their attempt to attain mastery of the nude:

As he had been ordered by Cardinal Salviati to paint a fresco of some stories from the life of St John the Baptist in the chapel in his palace, where he heard mass every morning, Francesco began studying live nudes along with Giorgio in a bathhouse nearby and after they did some dissections in Campo Santo.³⁸⁴

Bathrooms in private apartments were also used for studying the live nude in winter. Filippo Baldinucci relates that having moved to the home of Girolamo detto del Crocifisso, Gregorio Pagani had at his disposal well-lit rooms for painting and a bathroom (*stufa*) for drawing the live nude in winter along with fellow Florentine artists.³⁸⁵

In his biography, Benvenuto Cellini writes that he invariably chose male models on account of their physical beauty and he claimed that this benefited his art. In one passage, Benvenuto relates that he used an adolescent, the son of a prostitute, as a model for his Perseus, which suggests that the live model served as a starting

³⁸² VBB, 1568, vol. 5, p. 240: 'Et in vero Baccio avendo più amore alla scultura che alle cose dell'orefice, ne mostrò molti segni; et andando a Pinzirimonte, villa comprata da suo padre, si faceva stare spesso innanzi i lavoratori ignudi e gli ritraeva con grande affetto il medesimo facendo degli altri bestiami del podere'.

³⁸³ VBB, 1568, vol. 4, pp. 580-581.

³⁸⁴ VBB, 1568, vol. 5, pp. 515-516: 'Essendo poi dal cardinale Salviati ordinate che dipignesse affresco nella cappella del suo palazzo, dove ogni mattina udiva messa, alcune storie della vita di san Giovanni Battista, si diede Francesco a studiare ignudi di naturale, e Giorgio con esso lui, in una stufa quivi vicina, e dopo feciono in Campo Santo alcune notornie'.

³⁸⁵ F. Baldinucci, *Notizie dei professori del disegno da Cimabue in qua, per le quali si dimostra come, e per chi le Belle arti di pittura, scultura e architettura, lasciata la rozzezza delle maniere greca e gotica si siano ridotte alla loro antica perfezione*, 1681, P. Barocchi and A. Boschetto (eds), 7 vols., Florence, 1974-1975, vol. 3, p. 194.

point as well as a constant point of reference while working on the statue.³⁸⁶ Cellini also provides practical instructions on how to achieve foreshortening, advising the artist to use a beautiful youth as model ('un uomo giovane di bella fatta'). Michelangelo is presented as the paradigm of foreshortening because as a sculptor he was an expert in giving relief to figures since the purpose of foreshortening is to make figures stand out.³⁸⁷

Danti's treatise is of particular relevance regarding the observation of the lowly male and the perception of the beautiful male form. Danti's focus on the human figure is based on the assumption that it is the most difficult object to represent in art, composed as it is of more parts than any other living form. Mastery of the human form assists the artist in his understanding of all other proportions pertaining to the arts of *disegno*.³⁸⁸ The artist's primary goal is to create the 'perfect compound' ('composto perfetto'), a human form with a potential for motion and action. In connection with this, Danti's application of the term *uso*, which is drawn from Galen's *usus*, refers to the suitability or fitness of each part of the body to perform its proper functions.³⁸⁹

Specific physical standards are established for the human body, which relate to motion, the primary purpose of each limb. The most beautiful form in nature performs each function perfectly. Excessively fat and thin men are deplorable because they are unable to function properly, whereas a sufficiently full figure ('la giusta pienezza') possesses limbs which assist both internal and external functions. Fleishy limbs ('membra carnose') function perfectly and are thus a characteristic of properly proportioned figures.³⁹⁰

Beauty is most apparent in youth when the limbs are fully developed and function perfectly, though beauty possessed in youth is discernible in subsequent ages. In Danti's mind, each body part possesses its own beauty and he divides the body into five parts: the head, chest, abdomen, legs, and arms. The beauty and proportion of one part is dependent on the beauty and proportion of others.

An understanding of motion can be gained by observing accidental movements ('quelli fatti accidentalmente nel muoversi') and bodily motion produced by diverse poses ('quelli in varie attitudini').³⁹¹ Bodily motion serves two purposes, the

³⁸⁶ B. Cellini (as in n. 319), p. 45.

³⁸⁷ B. Cellini, *Discorso sopra l'arte del disegno, Scritti d'arte del Cinquecento*, P. Barocchi (ed), 3 vols., Milan, 1971-1977, 1973, vol. 2, pp. 1929-1933.

³⁸⁸ V. Danti (as in n. 349), p. 212.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

representation of perfect movement for its own sake ('attitudini o ver movimenti') and as 'signs of a state of the mind'.

According to Danti, the breasts are perceived as an accessory feature which the artist should add to a female figure with similar features that have been perfectly formed.³⁹² This understanding of the female body suggests that in Danti's schema, the perfect female possesses similar physical features to the male, that is, she possesses a form fit for action.

The Female Live model

We can gain insight into the use of the female model from both Venetian and Tuscan sources. Lorenzo Lotto's account book provides important evidence of the use of the female live model in the Venetian workshop, as well as information concerning materials, renting premises and exhibiting and selling techniques. Lotto's nude models were usually poor people and on one occasion he first provided a bath.³⁹³ Included in Lotto's lists of day-to-day expenses are references to money paid to live models.³⁹⁴ With regard to female models, Lotto notes the amount of money paid for 'undressing a woman only to look' and 'to a woman for undressing'.³⁹⁵ Lotto simply records the observation of the female nude model without indicating the reasons for choosing a particular model. Lotto's *Study for the Tarsia of Judith and Holofernes* (Drawing; pen and brown ink and brown wash with traces of white highlights. c. 1527; London, British Museum) contains a number of scantily-clad figures, which were probably based on the live model.

Surviving drawings by Jacopo Palma il Giovane indicate artistic interest in the female nude. On the recto of his *Sheet of Studies of Nude Women* (Drawing; recto, pen and brown ink, verso, red chalk; London, British Museum) there are three studies for a naked female figure with two draped figures above. On the verso the painter made a similar study of a naked woman in red chalk. Domenico Tintoretto's *Venus sleeping in a landscape* (Drawing. Brown, black and cream oil with pink tints for flesh tones, over black chalk on paper; London, British Museum) is one of four oil sketches of a sleeping Venus which relate directly in composition to prototypes by Titian. Tintoretto emphasises the voluptuousness of his nude reclining beneath a canopy and recalling in her pose Titian's painting of Danae and the Venuses. Jacopo Tintoretto's *Nude woman lying down* (Black chalk and some use of stump,

³⁹² Ibid., pp. 212 and 269.

³⁹³ P. Zampetti, *Lorenzo Lotto: Il 'Libro di spese diverse'*, Venice and Rome, 1969, pp. 236, 240-1.

³⁹⁴ See 'Working Practice, Technique and style of Life', *Documentary History: 1450-1630*, D. Chambers and B. Pullan (eds) with J. Fletcher, Oxford, 1992, pp. 438-439.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., entries 2 September 1541 and October 1541, pp. 235-237.

heightened with white on blue paper faded to grey. Florence, Uffizi, GDS) (**figure 30**) shows the view of the back. The drawing illustrates that the painter was interested in the shape of the body and is suggestive of the influence of Michelangelo.

Titian seems to have used the same model for more than one painting, both dressed and undressed. The woman posing as *La Bella* (c. 1536; Florence, Pitti) appears naked in the *Venus of Urbino* painting as well as in the versions now in Vienna and Leningrad, indicating that a successful figure type could be adapted for different clients, though we cannot be sure whether the naked body in the *Venus* paintings belongs to the face as well or whether Titian used a different model for the body. The female nude in the various versions of Titian's paintings featuring *Venus* and a musician discussed below are also based on the same live model.³⁹⁶

In the late sixteenth century some private academies introduced the study of the female nude and although the study of the female model was absent from public academies such as those in Rome and Paris, private academies, for example, in Venice and Stockholm, being free from the dictates of professional bodies, introduced this practice, suggesting a line of continuity in the use of the female live model in Venice.

The various accounts provided by Benvenuto Cellini give prominence to the beautiful physical form of his female models, though like Lotto's models, they were drawn from the lower classes, and included prostitutes and servant girls.³⁹⁷ Cellini's comments shed light both on his aesthetic sensibilities, and also provide information on his working method. Caterina (dates unknown) was Cellini's mistress and modelled for payment after her marriage to Cellini's accountant, Miceri. Caterina was the first sitter for the preparatory model for the bronze relief of the *Nymph of Fontainebleau* (1543-1544; Paris, Louvre) (**figure 31**), commissioned by François I.³⁹⁸ Of Caterina, Cellini writes: 'I also set to work upon another head ... which I copied from a very beautiful girl, whom I was keeping for my sexual satisfaction. Upon this bust I conferred the name of Fontana Baliò'.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁶ On these points, see C. Hope, 'Problems of interpretation in Titian's erotic paintings', *Tiziano e Venezia* (as in n. 1), pp. 111-124, esp. p. 119.

³⁹⁷ On Cellini's use of the female live model, see S. Haskins 'Caterina and "Scorzone"', *Dictionary of Artists' Models*, J. Berk Jimenez (ed), London and Chicago, 2001, p. 111. In seventeenth-century Venice, private academies, which were not subject to the same kind of restrictions as professional bodies, introduced the use of the female live model banned from public academies; see M. Postle (as in n. 358), p. 759.

³⁹⁸ B. Cellini (as in n. 319), p. 355. The *Nymph* was originally designed for the monumental doorway to Fontainebleau but after the death of the French king was given by Henry II to his mistress Diane de Poitiers and placed over the door of her own Château d'Anet.

³⁹⁹ B. Cellini (as in n. 319), p. 355: 'Ancora messi mano in un'altra testa della medesima grandezza, quale io ritraevo da una bellissima fanciulla, che per mio diletto carnale a presso a me tenevo. A questa posi nome Fontana Baliò.'

In another account Cellini remarks 'that poor young girl, Caterina, I keep her for the sake of my art, since I cannot manage without a model, but being also a man, I have used her for my pleasures, and it is possible that she may bear me a child'.⁴⁰⁰ While boasting that he made Caterina pose in uncomfortable positions for hours, Cellini praises her 'for she was of the most beautiful form', which helped the artist produce a figure which gave him 'very great credit'.⁴⁰¹

In order to complete the "Baliò Fountain" and the *Two Victories* (1543-1545; plaster casts for the main door of Fontainebleau, now Paris, Louvre) (**figure 32**) Cellini used as a model a 'poor little girl of about 15', whose body was 'very beautifully formed'.⁴⁰² Cellini describes Gianna as a "savage", whose quick and lively gestures led him to nickname her "Scorzzone", suggestive of her lower-class origins. The hands, shoulders, throat, breasts and stomach of the Nymph indicate that these were the parts of the live model which most interested Cellini. Another young girl, Dorotea (dates unknown), served as a model for about four years.⁴⁰³ Dorotea was the model Cellini used for the figure of Medusa and, 'those other females', that is, the bronze figures of Danae and Minerva on the base of the Perseus.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 342: '....ancora ti vedi quella povera fanciuletta della Caterina, la quale io tengo principalmente per servizio de l'arte mia, che senza non potrei fare: ancora, perchè io sono uomo, me ne son servito di mia piaceri carnali, e la potria essere che la mi farebbe un figliuolo'.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., p. 355: 'Perché lei era di bellissima forma e mi faceva grandissimo onore'.

⁴⁰² Ibid., p. p. 358: 'Questa era molto bella di forma di corpo ed era alquanto brunette, e per essere selvaticchetta e di pochissime parole e veloce nel suo andare, (...) le posi nome Scorzzone, il nome suo proprio si era Gianna. Con questa ditta figliuola io finì benissimo di bronzo la detta fontana Baliò, e quelle due Vittorie ditte per la ditta porta.'

⁴⁰³ Ibid., pp. 392-393.

PART TWO: THE BEAUTIFUL MALE NUDE AS THE ADORNMENT OF FLORENCE AND THE FLORENTINES

'Virtuous action makes the fountains of glory and praise spring forth', G. C. Capaccio

The Nude as an Ornament

The writings of Vasari, Danti and Cellini are instrumental in establishing the frame of reference and values through which the aesthetic and artistic qualities of the virile nude were perceived and understood. Vasari's *Lives*, proof of artistic virtuosity at its highest level, amply demonstrate that the nude was perceived as an aesthetic form with a wide range of uses and functions in religious, non-religious, public and private works.

One of the most interesting artistic innovations charted by Vasari is the use of the perfectly formed nude as a vehicle for ingenious expression, adorning a painter and giving lustre to the client or to the city.⁴⁰⁴ Ornament was an important concept during the Renaissance. While it denoted decorative objects and motifs, either imitated or invented by the artist, another application and understanding of the nude indicated much more than a frivolous decoration.⁴⁰⁵ The ornament was synonymous with notable rhetorical devices in literature and especially poetry. Devices employed in poetry required adequate expression in terms of audience, occasion, intention, style, and sophisticated language.

The main objective was to illuminate or create striking effects and the language which best served this purpose was not necessarily the shortest distance between the poet and his audience. *Ornamento* fulfilled a dual role. In the domain of literature and the visual arts, the Greek term *enargia/enargeia*, which was considered to bestow glorious lustre and light, became associated with virtuous

⁴⁰⁴ On the application of the term adorning ornament ('schmückender Schmuck'), see R. Kuhn, *Michelangelo: Die sixtinische Decke. Beiträge über ihre Quellen und zu ihrer Auslegung*, Berlin and New York, 1975, esp. pp. 52-58; the term 'schmückender Schmuck' appears on p. 57. Kuhn first applied the term to the *Ignudi* and *putti* on the Sistine Ceiling fresco in the belief that these figures were primarily ornamental rather than narrative. In this thesis, the term ornamental is applied to nude figures which are autonomous aesthetic forms, the meaning and function of which, derives from the context in which they appear. In painting these figures do not form part of the main narrative scene, usually appearing in friezes or outside the main scene. They frequently hold a device or object related to the client. The figures are paradigms of the decorum of art and the autonomy of art, the hallmark of the virtuoso artist and a way of celebrating the client. The term also refers to nude figures, in both painting and sculpture, that celebrate and enhance the status of the city of Florence, illustrating that such figures could be perceived to play an ornamental role in a wider context. The ornamental role of the nude is further explored in Chapter Three of this thesis.

⁴⁰⁵ On the application of the term *ornato* in Landino, see M. Baxandall (as in n. 272), pp. 131-133. As M. Baxandall points out, the term *ornato* was a key term in art-criticism and denoted specific qualities that were highly valued.

deeds. In portraiture, gorgeous costume served this function.⁴⁰⁶ The lustre afforded by sumptuous costume competed with the perfectly beautiful nude in a range of postures as the latter gained increasing momentum in keeping with the conviction that the body beautiful was the person's chief ornament. As an aesthetic form and an adorning ornament the nude created striking and spectacular effects which grabbed and held the viewer's attention.⁴⁰⁷

An analysis of Bocchi's *Bellezze* enables us to enlarge and sharpen our awareness of the ways in which these qualities were viewed by an audience of non-artists, thereby rendering our own perception of the beautiful male nude both richer and more precise. The first modern guide book in literary format written in praise of the city, its buildings, art works, and inhabitants, promotes the view that Florence has a long tradition of artistic excellence and Medicean patronage, which is equal to or even superior to precedents in classical antiquity. Bocchi's assessment of Florentine art and citizens centres on the application of four edifying terms: beauty (*bellezza*), noble (*nobile*), virtue (*virtù*), and adornment (*ornamento*).⁴⁰⁸

The use of the term *ornamento*, which expands on Vasari's perception of the term, acquires particular significance in relation to the representation of the muscular male nude as the most excellent and beautiful works in the city, in keeping with the civic myth of the active and beautiful male, which continued to be promoted despite the mood of the Counter-Reformation. While *bellezza* is applied to single exceptionally beautiful objects scattered around the city, the term *nobile* refers to the city as a whole. In his consideration of the male nude Bocchi draws on Danti's notion of functionalism, which gives bodies an aesthetic dimension.

Prominence is given to the abundance of virtue in the city and the industry of its citizens, virtues for which the art works provide ample visual evidence. Florentine art and architecture are thus directly related to the great worth of the locals and their government and they all contribute to the beauties of the noble city. Bocchi presents the city of Florence as a showcase of beautiful youths both in action,

⁴⁰⁶ On the significance of *ornament* in Renaissance poetry and connections between garments, accessories and the notion of ornament, see M.E. Hazard, 'An essay to amplify Ornament': Some Renaissance Theory and Practice', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 16, 1976, pp. 15-32. For a brief discussion of the terms *energia* and *enargeia*, see M. W. Roskill, *Dolce's Aretino and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento*, New York, 1968, 2nd edn., Toronto, 2000, p. viii and bibliography therein. The Greek term *energia*, which roughly translates as 'dynamism', is a term in rhetorical theory used to indicate the force of effective detail. In literature and the visual arts it is distinguished from *enargeia*, which denotes pictorial vividness, understood as setting the subject clearly before the viewer's eyes.

⁴⁰⁷ See M. E. Hazard (as in n. 406), pp. 15-32.

⁴⁰⁸ On the perception of the beautiful in the *Bellezze* and other writings by Bocchi, see T. Frangenberg, (as in n. 244), pp. 191-198 and R. Williams, *ibid*, pp. 199-206. I disagree with Williams' understanding of Bocchi's aesthetic merits as sometimes referring to invisible forms and mere ornaments. Bocchi's text demonstrates the dual application of the term, presenting the ornament of the body as the highest form of beauty. Bocchi's discussion of beauty suggests that it was highly visible either in the perfectly formed body or in the virtues, actions, buildings and art works around the city as a special quality.

according to the perception of sculpture as living forms and living forms as sculptured bodies.

All of the writings discussed here are thus in keeping with Mini's notion of *nobiltà* and they all, albeit in different ways, perfectly illustrate that the lowly male and the wild and boisterous male youth, the most dangerous and feared elements in society, came to be perceived as the chief ornament of the city in both the public and private spheres.

Cultural Rebirth and Social Status: The Male Nude in the Private Sphere

A number of strikingly new images containing male nudes which were designed specifically for the private setting have prompted a debate on possible meanings which cannot be considered as yet resolved, but which acquire new significance in relation to the nude as an adorning ornament. Among these are Signorelli's paintings, the *Court of Pan* and the *Medici Tondo*. The nude figures have been read as personifications, as examples of the Renaissance predilection for the antique, as reflections of Neoplatonic thought, and as portraits, while the *Court of Pan* has been seen as a reference to Lorenzo's political ideology.⁴⁰⁹

Vasari, who describes the *Court of Pan* (1489-1490; destr.) (**figure 33**) as the 'canvas where there are some nude gods', reports that it was made for Lorenzo de' Medici.⁴¹⁰ The painting was listed in the Medici inventory of 1598. The male and female nudes in various poses demonstrate Luca's skill at conquering the difficulties of art. The painting has been interpreted in connection with a number of poems written by Lorenzo il Magnifico.⁴¹¹ The Master of Pan, depicted as a youthful nude, is surrounded by his entourage of Arcadian shepherds, two young musicians, three female figures in the guise of nymphs, and two older men engaged in debate and contemplation, one of whom seems to be advising Pan. Several of the figures are engaged in leisure activities which were practised and deemed fitting in a courtly setting. The painting represents an example of *otium rustico* and cheerful activities, suggestive of the golden age of Arcadia.

⁴⁰⁹ On the various interpretations of Signorelli's paintings, see Luca Signorelli, L. B. Kanter, G. Testa, T. Henry (eds), Milan, 2002, entries 18 and 19, pp. 172-173, where the paintings are read chiefly as reflections of Neoplatonic thought and the Renaissance predilection for the antique.

⁴¹⁰ VBB, 1550, vol. 3, p. 636: 'la tela dove sono alcuni Dei ignudi'.

⁴¹¹ On these poems and their connection with the Medici, see A. Chastel, 'Pan Saturnis', *Arte e Umanesimo a Firenze al tempo di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, Turin, 1964, pp. 232-239. Pan is mentioned in several of Lorenzo's poems, including *Altercazione a Apollo e Pan*. According to A. Chastel, Pan can be seen as a 'Medicean' god on account of the association between Pan, Cosmo (Cosmos) and Saturn as the symbol of pastoral contemplation. Similar associations are made in the pastoral poems of Naldo Naldi. In an eclogue composed on the death of Pan, the lord of Florence and the emblem of *ars medica* in both a physical and moral sense, the symbolic role of Pan is passed on to his descendents.

In several poems Lorenzo expressed a preference for these aspects of courtly life in contrast to the burden of political responsibility.⁴¹² As the first Medici ruler to attempt to form a governmental system modelled on other Italian and European courts, the scene may reflect Lorenzo's vision of ideal life at court where he takes centre stage just as he was the charismatic centre of the male youth culture he promoted.⁴¹³ His own youthful beauty and that of other figures eloquently expresses the new focus on youth which was beginning to take shape in Florentine society partly thanks to his own policies.

The beautiful youthful figures serve a dual function. As figures inhabiting Arcadia, they symbolise the golden age originating with Pan. They can also be read as figures functioning as adorning ornaments, giving lustre to the persona of Lorenzo and his court, where the arts and poetry flourish. In keeping with the role Lorenzo gave Florentine youths, the figures underpin his qualities and objectives and enhance his image as leader.

As regards Luca's *Medici Tondo* (c. 1489-90; Florence, Uffizi) (**figure 34**), Vasari briefly mentions the figure of the Virgin and the two prophets in the frame but does not refer to the groups of male nudes in the background. According to Vasari, the painting was in Cosimo I's villa at Castello, where it was still recorded in the inventory of 1634. The figures of the Virgin and Child are set against a backdrop of luscious pastureland suggestive of regeneration and rebirth. The youthful nude shepherds on the right, who are debating and playing music, have been interpreted as personifications of *ante legem*, replaced by the age of grace introduced by Christianity. The combination of the profane alongside Christian figures suggests rather that the cultural and religious values are mutually reinforced. The nudes not only create particular effects but also serve as visual metaphors of virtuous deeds, elevating the status of the client and bestowing glorious lustre.

There is ample evidence that towards the end of the fifteenth century images for the Florentine private setting were becoming more varied. Although religious subjects continued to adorn bedrooms and private chambers, from around the 1470s decorative programmes began to focus increasingly on secular images and images depicting love. Males, as both spouses and citizens, became more concerned with their personal status, character and social standing. This trend can also be charted in the decoration of the marriage chamber, a room on which most

⁴¹² See Lorenzo de' Medici (il Magnifico), *Poesie*, Milan, 2002, p. 17, where Lorenzo's poem concerning the death of his father and his nomination as ruler of Florence, in which he considers himself to be too young for the responsibilities of political leadership.

⁴¹³ On Lorenzo's promotion of the youthful and noble Florentine, see Lorenzo's *Ricordi* dated 2 December 1469. On the charismatic figure of Lorenzo il Magnifico and his cultural and political policies,

money was spent and where decorative elements gave prominence to the husband's personal qualities rather than merely displaying his gratitude for his wife's dowry. The combination of the secular and the profane in the private realm can thus be seen as a new type of adornment in which the nude figure plays a prominent role.

Michelangelo's *Tondo Doni* (completed 1506; Florence, Palazzo Pitti) (**figure 35**), which seems to have been inspired by the new representation of the holy family in the *Medici Tondo*, is a good case in point. The painting was commissioned by Agnolo Doni (1474-1539) at the time of his marriage to the noblewoman Maddalena Strozzi in 1504. In the marriage portraits, which were commissioned to Raphael, expensive clothes and jewellery are clear indicators of their social status. The images reflect society's expectations of male and female behaviour. While Agnolo, who married at the "perfect age" of thirty, looks straight at the viewer, Maddalena's gaze eludes us. The gems worn by Maddalena are symbolic of chastity, virginity, prosperity, and purity.⁴¹⁴ On the reverse of both pictures are scenes from the legend of Deucalion and Pyrra, which are now thought to have existed before they left the workshop. These scenes suggest that the pictures served an apotropaic function by associating the mythical rebirth of mankind with the images of the new couple. The allegory thus expresses hopes for the newly-weds and a fruitful union.

While the individual portraits celebrate each sitter in terms of behavioural ideals and accessories, the *Tondo Doni* represents the client's social status in a novel way, illustrating a new and highly significant development in the representation of the nude in the wake of Signorelli's *Tondo*. Vasari's description of the painting is tellingly divided into two parts. In the first part Vasari highlights the immediacy with which the artist has conveyed a range of emotions, love, affection, tenderness, and reverence. Mary's gesture of holding the baby towards Joseph underscores the birth of a male heir as a bond between the spouses. The second part of the description focuses on the representation of the male nude in diverse postures as proof of the artist's technical mastery and virtuosity. Vasari's descriptive technique strongly suggests that it is in the *Ignudi* rather than emotions that true mastery and visual interest reside:

But this was not enough for Michelangelo, and to show that his art was supreme he included in the background of this work many nudes, some leaning, others standing, or seated, and he completed this painting with such diligence and finish that of all his paintings on panel, even though there are

see R. C. Trexler (as in n. 2), pp. 367-399. For a useful overview of the the political context under Lorenzo, see J. R. Hale, *Florence and the Medici: The Pattern of Control*, London, 1977, pp. 49-75.

⁴¹⁴ See P. Tinagli (as in n. 14), pp. 97-98.

not many of them, this one is certainly considered the most perfect and the most beautiful painting in existence.⁴¹⁵

The *Ignudi* do not serve narrative ends nor do they convey any kind of emotion. Rather they are synonymous with the lustre bestowed on the patron by figures functioning as adorning ornaments. Doni, who had held important public offices and had made a considerable fortune from the cloth trade, typified the Florentine man of action and virtue. It is highly significant that the *Ignudi* are holding and pulling pieces of cloth, the source and sign of Doni's wealth. The *Ignudi* can thus be seen as visual metaphors of his public and professional qualities as well as of the higher social position he acquired through marriage.

The Adorning Nude in the Religious Setting

The Medici tomb monument - Michelangelo's *Night and Day, Dawn and Dusk* (San Lorenzo, Florence; 1524-34)

The tomb monuments in the New Sacristy are dedicated to Lorenzo, grandson of the Magnificent, sitting on the sarcophagus above Day and Night, and Giuliano, son of the Magnificent, above Dawn and Dusk. Lorenzo bears the condottiere's baton recording the ceremony of 1515, in which the republic gave him civil command, while Giulio holds only the cloth of the Roman consul to represent the command of the papal army. These two captains look toward the head of the chapel where Mary and Child are flanked by Damian and Cosmas.

Contemporary sources demonstrate that the four figures below the dukes had a striking impact on both artists and viewers. A letter written by Cardinal Giulio de' Medici to Michelangelo on 28 November 1520 refers to the four figures as 'ornamenti' and leaves the artist to design the tomb as he believes most fitting.⁴¹⁶ Another letter, this time from Cardinal Domenico Buoninsegni to Michelangelo, reports that the designs for the tomb pleased the duke very much.

Vasari reports that the monument was praised in both poetry and prose. General praise of the figures given by Vasari focuses on the perfectly beautiful forms and

⁴¹⁵ VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 6, p. 22: 'dentrovi una donna, la quale inginocchiata con ambedue le gambe, alza in su le braccia un putto e porgerlo a Giuseppe, che lo riceve; dove Michelangelo fa conoscere nello svoltare della testa della madre di Cristo e nel tenere gli occhi fissi nella somma bellezza del figliuolo, la meravigliosa sua contentezza e lo affetto del farne parte a quel santissimo vecchio, il quale con pari amore, tenerezza e reverenza lo piglia, come benissimo si scorge nel volto suo senza molto considerarlo. Né bastando a Michelangelo, per mostrar maggiormente l'arte sua esser grandissima, fece nel campo di questa opera molti ignudi appoggiati, ritti e a sedere; e con tanta diligenza e pulitezza lavorò questa opera, che certamente delle sue pitture in tavola ancora che poche siano, è tenuta la più bella che si truovi'.

⁴¹⁶ For an account of the commission and the various designs, see J. Pope-Hennessy, *Italian High Renaissance and Baroque Sculpture*, 1963, 4th edn 1996, pp. 47-80 and 437. On contemporary sources pertaining to the figures, *ibid.*, pp. 437-446.

the postures, their role as adorning figures serving to honour the deceased dukes, and the striking effect on the viewer:

Even more did he cause everyone to marvel by the circumstances that in making the tombs of Duke Giuliano and Duke Lorenzo de' Medici he considered that earth alone was not enough to give them an honourable burial in their greatness, and desired that all the parts of the world should be there, and that their sepulchres should be surrounded and covered by four statues; wherefore he gave to one Night and Day, and to the other Dawn and Dusk. These statues, most beautifully wrought in form, in posture, and masterly treatment of the muscles, would suffice, if art were lost, to restore her to pristine lustre.⁴¹⁷

Although Condivi's account is shorter than Vasari's, he praises the work in similar terms. In Condivi's mind, the work displays artistic excellence ('l'eccellenza dell'artefice'), as well as beauty and perfection ('la perfezione e la bellezza dell'opera').⁴¹⁸ Raffaele Borghini perceives the figures as examples of living sculpture, referring to them as 'reclining figures in beautiful postures; though of marble, they seem to be of real flesh and they lack only breath, nothing else'.⁴¹⁹ Benedetto Varchi emphasises the impact on the viewer, underscoring the 'amazement at the genius and judgement of this man'.⁴²⁰ Varchi equates the creation of the four figures with artistic expression: 'expressed his high conception in four marbles, in the same way as Dante does in his verses'.⁴²¹

In the *Bellezze*, the four figures are the paradigm of perfection. Bocchi praises Michelangelo's mastery in overcoming the difficulties of art, his knowledge of anatomy, the beauty of the figures, and their liveliness, merits equated with the surpassing of both ancient and modern sculpture. His value judgement of the figure of Day (1524-1534; Florence, San Lorenzo, New Sacristy) (**figure 36**) contrasts the

⁴¹⁷ VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 6, pp. 54-58: 'Ma molto più fece stupire ciascuno che, considerando, nel far le sepolture del duca Giuliano e del duca Lorenzo de' Medici, egli pensassi che non solo la terra fussi per la grandezza loro bastante a dar loro onorata sepoltura, ma volse che tutte le parti del mondo vi fossero, e che gli mettessero in mez[z]o e coprissero il lor sepolcro quattro statue: a uno pose la Notte et il Giorno, a l'altro l'Aurora et il Crepuscolo. Le quali statue sono con bellissime forme di attitudini et artificio di muscoli lavorate, convenienti, se l'arte perduta fosse, a ritornarla nella pristina luce. Ma che dirò io de la Aurora, femmina ignuda e da fare uscire il malinconico dell'animo e smarrire lo stile alla scultura? Nella quale attitudine si conosce il suo sollecito levarsi sonnaccchiosa, svilupparsi da le piume, perché par che nel destarsi ella abbia trovato serrati gli occhi a quel gran Duca; onde si storce con amaritudine, dolendosi nella sua continovata bellezza in segno del gran dolore. Che potrò io dire della Notte statua unica o rara? Chi è quello che abbia per alcun secolo in tale arte veduto mai statue antiche o moderne così fatte? Conoscendosi non solo la quiete di chi dorme, ma il dolore e la maninconia di chi perde cosa onorata e grande. Credasi pure che questa sia quella Notte la quale oscuri tutti coloro che per alcun tempo nella scultura e nel disegno pensano, non dico di passarlo, ma di paragonarlo già mai. Nella qual figura quella dico di passarlo, ma di paragonarlo già mai. Nella qual figura quella sonnolenza si scorge che nelle immagini addormentate si vede. Per che da persone dottissime furono in lode sua fatti molti versi latini e rime volgari'.

⁴¹⁸ A. Condivi (as in n. 341), pp. 59-99.

⁴¹⁹ R. Borghini, *Il Riposo*, Florence, 1584, p. 514: 'figure giacenti con bellissime attitudini, le quali comeche sieno di marmi, di vera carne appariscono, e lo spirito sol manca loro, e niente più'. See also the commentary and accompanying notes to the text, R. Borghini, *Il Riposo: saggio biobibliografico e Indice analitico*, M. Rosci (ed), Milan, 1967.

⁴²⁰ B. Varchi, *Due Lezioni*, 1549, *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento*, P. Barocchi (ed), 3 vols., Bari, 1960-1962, vol. 1, 1960, p. 117: 'meravigliarsi tanto, che baste dell'ingegno, et del giudizio di questo huomo'.

⁴²¹ Ibid.: 'esprese in Quattro marmi, à guisa, che fa Dante ne' versi, il suo altissimo concetto'.

difficulty ('cosa vera malegevole') of the pose ('piega le membra') which has been modelled with ease ('con agevolezza'): '[Day] bends the limbs into this posture which is truly difficult but which this marvellous artist has sculpted with ease'.⁴²² Bocchi draws attention to the fleshy muscles, the proportioned body, remarking that the viewer who carefully examines the figure is amazed by the *disegno* of the legs, feet and arms and the beauty of the whole body, noting that the left leg was much admired by artists.⁴²³

Anatomy is evident in the bones under the flesh revealing the nerves where the limbs are joined, displaying *grazia*. The figure's posture is described as lively ('viva') and vigorous ('vigore') and, even though it is reclining, it looks as if it is ready for action ('pare, che voglia operare') in that it displays dextrous motion ('destra movenza') and activity ('attiva'). Michelangelo is esteemed for giving the figure strength in both the head and the limbs.⁴²⁴ The figure is likened to men of action who need 'virile features' ('fattezze virili') in order to operate effectively. The figure is thus seen to possess the physical features which in Florence are considered best suited to action.

The figure of *Dusk* (1524-1534; Florence, San Lorenzo, New Sacristy) (**figure 37**) is said to have been made with 'stupendous artifice' ('artificio stupendo'), 'miraculous and the rarest artifice' ('artificio miracoloso & rarissimo').⁴²⁵ Bocchi describes it as a 'marvellous figure' ('figura maravigliosa').⁴²⁶ The attentive viewer is rewarded with a vision of supreme beauty which produces an effect of amazement.⁴²⁷ Bocchi perceives the figure as representing a man who lies down to rest after the toils of the day ('fatiche del giorno'). The bones in the chest reveal the artist's profound knowledge of anatomy which helps create external parts which conform with the internal structure. The arms are fleshy and natural and sweetly joined to the shoulders.

In Bocchi's mind, Michelangelo is superior in sculpture because 'this unique mind is wonderful when it wishes to imitate a living thing', perfecting it by means of artistic knowledge to create beautiful forms.⁴²⁸ From Bocchi's comment on the figure of *Dusk* one can infer that artifice consists in imitating natural objects so that they appear beautiful.⁴²⁹ According to Bocchi, Michelangelo acquired his

⁴²² F. Bocchi (as in n. 49), p. 267.

⁴²³ Ibid., p. 268.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., p. 267.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., pp. 271 and 272.

⁴²⁶ Ibid., p. 271.

⁴²⁷ Ibid., p. 272.

⁴²⁸ Ibid., p. 272: 'E maraviglioso l'avviso di questo singolare intelletto, quando alcuna cosa, che nel vivo si vede, vuole imitare'.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.: 'e in ciò con tanta bellezza è chiaro l'artificio, che pare, che il tutto sia fatto dalla natura'.

understanding of 'the fabric of the human body' ('fabbrica del corpo humano') by long study and practice, learning how the bones and the nerves work when the body, 'the wonderful fabric' ('fabbrica mirabile'), is in motion.⁴³⁰ The understanding and mastery of the mechanisms of the human body is perceived as a 'noble' merit ('nobile acquisto'). It is this very quality of Michelangelo which puts him above every other artist, both modern and ancient.

The individual pieces of sculpture in the chapel, which was open to the public in 1545, became key artistic examples for the generation of academicians from the 1560s onwards.⁴³¹ Casts of the figures are known to have been available in Venice by 1557 at the latest, providing further evidence of their key role as models to artists of the period.

The Male Nude as a Civic Symbol Adorning the City

'La Piazza ducale ornatissima', Francesco Bocchi

Piazza della Signoria was not only the main public square where Florentines went about their daily business but also the arena where citizens subsumed private identities in civic and corporate affairs, acting as members of the government, guilds and confraternities. With the exception of Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes*, all the sculptural works displayed there are of nude figures: Michelangelo's *David*, Baccio Bandinelli's *Hercules and Cacus*, Ammanati's *Neptune Fountain* (1576; Florence, Piazza della Signoria) and Benvenuto Cellini's *Perseus*. Bocchi's *Bellezze* present the square as paradigmatic of the conjunction of Florentine artistic excellence and the ingenuity of Florentine citizens. In Bocchi's mind, the statues set up in the square are all 'unique and admirable ornaments' ('ornamenti singolari e mirabili') which bestow 'beauty' and 'artifice' because they display 'such perfection' and make up an 'incomparable treasure' ('tesoro incomparabile').⁴³² Anton Francesco Doni describes the square as 'the main and universally beautiful site' ('il principale e universale bellissimo sito').⁴³³ These sources show that contemporaries made close connections between beauty, ornament with the nude figure.

Commissioned and produced at different times, and, in some instances, for different settings, the images of Hercules, David and Judith were all familiar to

⁴³⁰ Ibid., p. 273.

⁴³¹ On the significant part played by the statues in San Lorenzo as a model for the generation of academicians and their drawings and studies, see Z. Wazbinski, *L'Accademia Medicea del disegno a Firenze nel Cinquecento idea e istituzione*, 2 vols., Florence, 1987, vol. 1, pp. 82-83.

⁴³² F. Bocchi (as in n. 49), p. 32.

⁴³³ A. F. Doni (as in n. 7), ii, p. 49.

Florentines as heroic figures, seen as incitements to civic virtues and the defence of the city from the rule of tyrants. The familiarity of the images to the Florentines of Bocchi's day stemmed from their deployment by both the Medici and Republicans, suggesting that their symbolic function had a universal appeal, irrespective of political sympathies. It is therefore worthwhile examining the perception and promotion of these civic values with regard to the figures set up in the square.

The statue of *Judith and Holofernes* (1455-1460; Florence, Piazza della Signoria) (**figure 38**) was originally located in the large garden beyond the courtyard in the Medici Palace in Via Larga, that is, in a more private setting compared with Donatello's bronze *David* (c. 1459; Florence, Museo del Bargello) (**figure 39**), displayed in the courtyard of the same building. The identification of Judith with civic virtues is evident in the inscription on the base added in the 1460s as ordered by Piero de' Medici (1416-69), the Medici ruler (Lord of Florence, reigned 1464-9).⁴³⁴ The inscription is as follows:

Kingdoms fall through luxury, cities rise through virtue; behold the neck of pride severed by the hand of humility.

On the reverse: Public SALUS – Piero, son of Cosimo Medici, has dedicated the statue of this woman to that liberty and fortitude bestowed on the republic by the invincible and constant spirit of the citizens.⁴³⁵

The private and public significance of the statue emerges from a poem dedicated to the story of Judith written by Lucrezia Tornabuoni (d. 1482), wife of Piero and mother of Lorenzo the Magnificent.⁴³⁶ The poem, which was written after Piero's death, expands on the message conveyed by the inscription. In the *Istoria di Iudith*, Lucrezia identifies herself with the biblical figure, who was also a widow, and takes inspiration from Judith's strength of character. More importantly she expresses her intention, as both a widow and Florentine citizen, to continue to uphold the ideals and virtues Judith was seen to represent in defence of the city and its inhabitants.

The poem is based on a series of juxtapositions between the virtues linked to good governance and the negative characteristics connected with the defeat and disgrace of oppressive rulers. Hence 'humility' ('humilità'), 'devotion' ('devozione'), which bring about 'victory' ('victoria') and 'great revenge' ('magna vendetta') are opposed to 'pride' ('superbia'), 'arrogance' ('arroganza'), 'tyranny' ('tiranno'),

⁴³⁴ For an exhaustive investigation of the statue, its commission, display, function, critical reception and connection with Medici propaganda, see F. Caglioti, *Donatello e i Medici: Storia del David e della Giuditta*, Florence, 2000.

⁴³⁵ The Latin inscription reads: 'Regna cadunt luxu, surgunt virtutibus urbes: Cesa vides humili corda superba manu'. The Latin inscription on the other side was: 'Salus publica Petrus Medices Cos. fi. libertati simul et fortitudini hanc mulieris statuam quo cives invicto constantique animo ad rem publicam tuendam redderunt, dedicavit'.

⁴³⁶ *L'Istoria di Iudith, I poemetti sacri di Lucrezia Tornabuoni*, F. Pezzarosa (ed), Florence, 1978, pp. 201-248.

which in defeat are equated with 'shame' ('vergogna'), 'harm and destruction' ('danno'). In addition, kingdoms based on these negative characteristics lack nobility ('nobiltà').

A poem, *Trionfo delle virtù* (Triumph of Virtue) by Bastiano Foresi (1424-88), lawyer, Medici supporter and friend of Marsilio Ficino, likewise emphasises the virtues celebrated in Lucrezia's poem and is based on the same set of juxtapositions.⁴³⁷ The image of Judith was further promoted in Florentine religious plays, which began to roll off the presses from 1485. The anonymous *Rappresentazione di Iudith ebrea* was published in 1519 and repeats the same notions expressed in the inscription and in the poems of Lucrezia and Bastiano.

Images of Judith were also depicted on marriage furniture, including the marriage chest or *cassone*, serving as an example of humility and female courage. Unlike other women taken as symbols of virtue, as the liberator of her people from an enemy tyrant, Judith is a woman of action, an attribute which puts her on a par with Hercules and David. Whereas Judith is in full control of her actions, suicide was the only option open to Lucretia, who also appears on marriage furniture as a symbol of chastity. Judith's virtues meant that she could be represented defeating her foe without the need for supplementary figures. However, not every Florentine approved of the presence of the statue in the square.⁴³⁸

Although the stories appearing in the decoration of wedding furnishings promote ideal rather than real behavioural patterns, they illustrate the close connection which was seen to exist between the spheres of the private and public behaviour of both men and women. The actions and choices of individual men, women, and families, especially from the mercantile middle and upper classes, had a direct effect on public life and in connection with complex links between politics, *parentela* and patronage.⁴³⁹ While the lives of women like Lucrezia Tornabuoni or Alessandra Macinighi Strozzi may have been exceptional, fifteenth-century women, denied access to official public life, exercised their direct and indirect influence on society through the life of the family and through the activities which took them

⁴³⁷ B. Foresi, *Trionfo delle virtù*, document preserved in the National Library of Florence (BNF), mss. Magl., VII, 816 (c. 24r).

⁴³⁸ In 1504 Francesco Filarete expressed his disapproval of the statue of Judith, which he thought presented an image of indecorous gender imbalance. See C. Gaye, *Carteggio inedito d'artisti dei secoli XIV, XV, XVI*, 3 vols., Florence, 1840, vol. 2, p. 456.

⁴³⁹ On the fluidity of the public and private realms and the complex network of politics and family connections with particular reference to women, see S. Strocchia, 'La famiglia patrizia fiorentina nel secolo XV: la problematica della donna', D. Lamierini (ed), *Palazzo Strozzi*, pp. 126-137. On the role of women's lives and alternative courses of action open to them based on contemporary documentary evidence concerning three Florentine families, see E. G. Rosenthal, 'The Position of Women in Renaissance: neither Autonomy nor Subjection', *Florence and Italy: Renaissance Studies in Honour of Nicolai Rubenstein*, P. Denley and C. Elam (eds), London, 1988, pp. 370-381.

outside the limits of the home.⁴⁴⁰ As one contemporary Florentine remarked: Florentine women dedicate their virtues to contemplative life through prayer and actively as virago.⁴⁴¹ The connection between public and private is particularly evident in the new setting of Donatello's figure following its confiscation in 1494 along with Donatello's *David*, a connection which the new republican government wished to promote.

Commenting on the statue in 1550 Vasari contrasts Judith's self-control, modesty and ingenuity with the life-like rendering of Holofernes' limbs which convey the physical and mental state which led to his defeat. Vasari's description highlights the qualities which continued to make Judith an emblem of civic pride.⁴⁴² Vasari's comments allude to an inner and outer guidance manifest in Judith's face. She does not simply lift the sword but performs an action that stems from a good cause. Donatello enhanced the image of victory with cause and made it an attribute of virtue.⁴⁴³

The male nude figures displayed in the square were also significant in the Florentine context, though sixteenth-century sources underscore the artistic and aesthetic merits of the figures created by Michelangelo, Bandinelli and Cellini, sometimes referring or alluding to the political context.

The association between David and Hercules can be traced back to Dante.⁴⁴⁴ Both figures were seen as men of action, ingenuity and courage, essential ingredients of professional and political success. As the biblical character who rose from shepherd boy to ruler, David had particular significance in a city of merchants whose wealth had come from trade rather than blood and whose social status was seen to be down to their individual merits. Moreover, as the man responsible for uniting the kingdom of Israel and conquering Jerusalem, David was seen as the epitome of good leadership and governance.

Donatello's bronze *David*, commissioned by Cosimo de' Medici (1389-1464; Lord of Florence 1434-1464) for the courtyard of the Medici palace in Via Larga, stood on a pedestal with an ornamental base serving to give prominence to the form of the figure. The inscription on the base read: 'victory will come to those who defend the

⁴⁴⁰ See L. Tornabuoni, *Lettere*, P. Salvadori (ed), Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, Studi e Testi, XXXII, Florence, 1993, esp. pp. 38-39.

⁴⁴¹ D. Bruni, *Difese delle donne, nella quale si contengono le difese loro*, Florence, 1552, p. 79.

⁴⁴² VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 3, pp. 209-210: 'La semplicità del di fuori nello abito et nello aspetto di Giudith; manifestamente scuopre nel di dentro, l'animo grande di quella donna, et lo aiuto di Dio, sì come nella aria di esso Oloferne, il vino et il sonno, et la morte nelle sue membra, che par avere perduto gli spiriti si dimostrano fredde et cascanti'.

⁴⁴³ On this point, see M. W. Cole, *Cellini and the Principles of Sculpture*, Cambridge, 2002, p. 138.

⁴⁴⁴ See L. D. Ettlinger, 'Hercules Florentinus', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Instituts in Florenz*, 16, 1972, pp. 119-142.

fatherland. God's wrath destroys the foe. A youth will defeat the tyrant. Let us win, citizens!' That images of the victorious David were an accepted figure for the virtuous defence of good government which could be displayed in key areas of the city is evident from the sale of Verrocchio's bronze statue of David to the Signoria on 10 May 1476 by Lorenzo and Giulio de' Medici. The board responsible for the sale, an unmistakable sign of the association between the Medici and state buildings, stipulated a site for the statue outside the Sala dei Cigli and considered it to be an appropriate and beautiful ornament for the decoration of the palace.⁴⁴⁵

Michelangelo's colossus *David* (1501-1504; Florence, Accademia) (**figure 40**), which was commissioned by the Republican gonfaloniere, Piero Soderini, is a monumental example of ingenuity as he lifts his sling, sizes up his foe and takes aim. Perception and ingenuity are transformed into a heroic act, employing the entire nude body and showing that virtue stems from presence of mind.⁴⁴⁶ Vasari's account of the statue presents it as a symbol of righteous defence and good governance: 'a youthful David holding a sling to show that he had legitimately defended and ruled over his people just as those in power should courageously defend and rule it fairly'.⁴⁴⁷ However, Vasari is also keen to underscore the level of perfection attained in terms of proportion (*misura*), beauty (*bellezza*), and excellence (*bontà*), qualities which set it apart from Donatello's version and which demonstrate the new focus on the perfectly beautiful body:

The work eclipsed all the other statues, both modern and ancient, whether Greek or Roman; and it can be said that neither the Marforio in Rome, nor the Tiber and the Nile of the Belvedere, nor the colossal statues of Monte Cavallo can be compared to this David, which Michelangelo completed with so much measure, beauty, and skill. For the contours of the legs are extremely beautiful, along with the splendid articulations and grace of the hips; a sweeter and a pose of such grace has never been seen that could equal it, nor have feet, hands, and a head ever been produced which so well match all the other parts of the body in skill of workmanship or design. To be sure, anyone who sees this statue need not be concerned with seeing any other piece of sculpture done in our times or in any other period by any other artist.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁵ P. L. Rubin, A. Wright (as in n. 299), p. 38.

⁴⁴⁶ According to D. Summers, David's scowl may indicate Michelangelo's familiarity with Aristotelian physiognomic theory. See D. Summers, 'David's Scowl', *Collaboration in the Italian Renaissance*, W. Steadman Sheard and J. Paleotti (eds), New Haven and London, 1978, pp. 113-124. M. W. Cole has pointed out that David's facial expression should be considered in relation to the action he is performing in that his whole body is focused on the task at hand. The scowl indicates that he is aware that he is about to confront a giant and that the dimensions of the statue suggest that it is a giant of immense proportions. On this point, see M. W. Cole (as in n. 443), p. 213.

⁴⁴⁷ VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 6, p. 19.

⁴⁴⁸ VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 6, p. 21: 'E veramente che questa opera ha tolto il grido a tutte le statue moderne et antiche, o greche o latine che elle si fossero; e si può dire che né i Giganti di Monte Cavallo, le sian simil' in conto alcuno, con tanta misura e bellezza e con tanta bontà la finì Michelagnolo; perché in essa sono contorni di gambe bellissime et appicature e sveltezza di fianchi divine, né mai più s'è veduto un posamento sì dolce né grazia che tal cosa pareggi, né piedi né mani né testa che a ogni suo membro di bontà, d'artificio e di parità né di disegno s'accordi tanto. E certo chi vede questa non dee curarsi di vedere altra opera di scultura fatta nei tempi o negli altri da qualsivoglia artefice'.

Reworking Vasari's description of the statue, Bocchi emphasises the perfection of the figure characterised by a charming and heroic poise ('posamento di piedi così leggiadro e sì virile') and heroic bearing ('portamento di vita così eroico').⁴⁴⁹

The figure of Hercules, which plays a key role in Florentine visual culture, has its roots in the Middle Ages, clearly indicating that it has little to do with Neoplatonic ideas of beauty.⁴⁵⁰ Numerous studies were made of the figure and Antonio Pollaiuolo produced a number of canvases and statuettes of the exploits of Hercules for the Medici. The choice of Hercules in the square, at one stage intended as a commission from Michelangelo, is symbolic of the Florentine celebration of ingenuity in a lowly figure, serving his social superiors through a range of tasks in his role as "facchino degli dei".⁴⁵¹

Baccio Bandinelli's *Hercules and Cacus* (1530-1534; Florence, Piazza della Signoria) (**figure 41**) is in keeping with the encomiastic nature of Bocchi's text and in stark contrast with the critical reception of the statue. The statue was set up in 1534 and was received with a blizzard of criticism with sonnets condemning the artistic performance, while others perceived as a sign of arrogance and Medici control.⁴⁵² Bocchi's assessment of the figures should not be read simply as empty praise and a sign of his *campanilismo*, since he is keen to promote the artistic merits and achievements of the sculptor. Bandinelli, who Bocchi claims is the best draughtsman ever and one of the most outstanding sculptors, is defined as a 'most noble artist' ('nobilissimo artefice') on account of his mastery of the human body and understanding of the mechanisms of the body, made manifest in the bones, flesh, nerves and limbs. The figure of Hercules displays the qualities Florentines were encouraged to identify with, in that the head, chest, arms and entire body possess heroic vigour. Finally, the statue is presented as an artistic example for fellow artists because it manifests 'profound design' and 'the power of art'.⁴⁵³

⁴⁴⁹ F. Bocchi (as in n. 49), p. 32.

⁴⁵⁰ See L. D. Ettlinger (as in n. 443), pp. 119-128.

⁴⁵¹ On the patronal network and particularly cross-group patronage which involved protection in exchange for service with the higher-ranking male patron accepting under his supervision a garzone or a mature male of lower-class provenance as a way of fostering vertical integration and the representation of non-political segments of the population, see R. C. Trexler (as in n. 2), pp. 19-33, esp. 29.

⁴⁵² For a discussion of the criticism of the statue, see D. Heikamp, 'Rapporti tra accademici e artisti nella Firenze del '500', *Il Vasari*, XV, vol. 1, 1957, esp. p. 12. See also *ibid.*, 'In margine alla vita di Baccio Bandinelli del Vasari', *Paragone* XVII, 1966, pp. 51-62. One of the criticisms of contemporary viewers was that the figure of Hercules does not seem to pay sufficient attention to what it is doing. On this point, see *Opere di Benvenuto Cellini*, G. G. Ferrero (ed), Turin, 1980, p. 508. Criticism of the statue suggests that contemporaries considered the actions of the figures to be important. In *I marmi*, Doni implies that Bandinelli's *Hercules* does not deserve to be displayed in the square, while Donatello's *St George* is worthy of such an eminent position. See A. F. Doni (as in n. 7), ii, pp. 8-11.

⁴⁵³ F. Bocchi (as in n. 49), p. 24.

Cellini's *Perseus and Medusa* (1545-1550; Florence, Loggia dei Lanzi) (**figure 42**) is another image of a heroic figure adorning the square.⁴⁵⁴ The meaning and function of the statue has been widely debated. The statue has been interpreted as signifying public executions known to have taken place in the square during the rule of Cosimo I who commissioned it.⁴⁵⁵ John Shearman believes Cellini planned the statue with the critical reception of the other statues in the square in mind, as well as the response of a sophisticated audience, which was based on a shared aesthetic experience.⁴⁵⁶ The choice of subject of the statue bears a striking resemblance to the others displayed in the square, signifying ingenuity in defeating one's enemies, a reading which points to a wider and more general appeal.

Cellini's own account of the making and casting of the statue, a mixture of fact and fiction, perceives it as a heroic deed, and an artistic feat which was to surpass all the other statues in the square. Cellini's objectives was thus to show what his art could do, not only technically and in terms of *disegno* but also beauty. Cellini's own comments fit with the shower of praise which the statue and its maker received. In the poems Varchi dedicated to the Perseus, Cellini is celebrated as godlike, ornamenting Cosimo's realm with an art capable of turning the viewer into stone.⁴⁵⁷ The myth of being turned into stone was a common theme in Florence and had been applied by Anton Francesco Doni with regard to Michelangelo's

⁴⁵⁴ Varchi's contribution to the iconography of the base is discussed by D. Heikamp, 'Rapporti fra accademici ed artisti nel Firenze del '500, *Il Vasari* XV, vol. 1, 1957, pp. 144-145.

⁴⁵⁵ W. Braunfels interpreted the statue as a symbol of the 'power and cleverness' of Cosimo; see W. Braunfels, *Benvenuto Cellini: Perseus and Medea*, 1948, Stuttgart, 1961, esp. p. 7. M. McCarthy believed that Cosimo commissioned the statue as a triumph of restored despotism; see M. McCarthy, *The Stones of Florence*, Harcourt, Brace, 1959, p. 22. J. Pope-Hennessy also read the statue as a reflection of the duke's wisdom and heroism; see J. Pope-Hennessy, *Cellini*, New York, 1985, p. 168. More recently, M. W. Cole has indicated other layers of meanings inspired by the statue at the time it was produced, noting that not all its admirers were friends and supporters of Cosimo; see M. W. Cole, 'Cellini's Blood', *Art Bulletin*, June 1999, vol. 131, n° 2, pp. 215-235. On antique and modern literary sources which Cole believes inspired Cellini, see M. W. Cole (as in n. 443), pp. 54-60.

⁴⁵⁶ See J. Shearman, *Only Connect... Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance*, The A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 1988, Bollington series 35, 37, Princeton, NJ, esp. pp. 27-33, 52, 57-58 and 192. Shearman accepts the political function of the statues but believes they functioned chiefly as art works; hence their political role should be seen as secondary. According to Shearman, one of Cosimo I's political strategies was to transform the main civic space in Florence by shifting the emphasis away from Piazza della Signoria with its republican connotations to Piazza Ducale. Thus the political message was neutralised and Piazza della Signoria became a kind of open-air art gallery. This process of re-contextualisation also affected Michelangelo's *David*, which was presented chiefly as a masterpiece and demonstration of Florentine supremacy, above and beyond its promotion as a symbol of civic liberty. Shearman draws a distinction between different responses to a work of art on the part of the viewer. The basic assumption is that a transitive work of art, unlike an intransitive work, directly engages the viewer. With regard to the Renaissance style, the invention of an art work can be forecast on the basis of the viewer's ability to identify with it and his or her willingness to read it realistically in narrative or behavioural terms. Shearman believes the *Perseus* perfectly illustrates the transitive work of art and the close relationship between art work and the sophisticated, knowing viewer, in that it implies the engaged viewer who acts as an accomplice in the statue's aesthetic functioning. In addition to this, the viewer brings with him experiences, attitudes and knowledge of the critical frame of reference which form part of the artist's own assumptions. Shearman concludes that the informed viewer is a prerequisite of the notion of *ostentio ingenii*, the expectation of admiration for the artist's genius, a characteristic of Mannerism and some of the most striking works of the later Renaissance.

⁴⁵⁷ B. Varchi, *I sonetti*, Florence, 1557; *Poesie toscane, et latine sopra il Perseo statua di bronzo*, Appendix to B. Cellini, *I trattati dell'oreficeria e della scultura di Benvenuto Cellini*, C. Milanese (ed), Florence, 1857, rev. 2, 1893. See also D. Heikamp (as in n. 440), p. 153.

statue of *Dawn*. Paolo Mini's poem, *Nuovo Miron*, contrasts the human beauty of the figure of Perseus with the poisonous mask of Medusa.⁴⁵⁸ Niccolò Martelli saw the planned statue as an adornment of the square and realm while also demonstrating ingenuity and knowledge.⁴⁵⁹ Francesco Bocchi, describing Medusa's body as 'dead and cascading, it makes wholly manifest how flesh and bones deprived of spirit are disposed', underscores the artist's goal of rendering the bones of a cadaver in terms similar to those used by Cellini himself.⁴⁶⁰ A slightly different perception of the statues emerges from Bernadetto Minerbetti's comment. Minerbetti observed that he 'could not get enough of the blood' pouring from Medusa's head and that the figures were so lifelike that people were driven away out of fear of being soaked with blood.⁴⁶¹

⁴⁵⁸ P. Mini, *Nuovo Miron, che con la dotta mano*, as cited by J. Shearman (as in n. 456), p. 57.

⁴⁵⁹ N. Martelli, Letter to Luigi Alemanni, 20 August, 1546, D. Heikamp (as in n. 452), p. 151.

⁴⁶⁰ F. Bocchi (as in n. 49), p. 35.

⁴⁶¹ B. Minerbetti, 'A Giorgio Vasari in Roma', *Scritti d'arte del Cinquecento*, P. Barocchi (ed), 3 vols., Milan, 1971-1977, vol. 2, 1973, pp. 1198 - 1200, letter to Giorgio Vasari, 20 August 1552.

PART THREE: THE REPRESENTATION OF THE FLORENTINE AND VENETIAN FEMALE NUDE AS BEAUTIFUL VENUS

The Florentine Female Nude

'Made in the form of a woman of wondrous beauty', Ascanio Condivi on Michelangelo's figure of *Night*

In Michelangelo's *Vita*, Condivi praises the vast range of figures created by the artist: 'although he has painted all the thousands of figures that are to be seen, he has never made two alike or in the same pose'.⁴⁶² The female figures on the Sistine ceiling are one instance of the range of figures he represented.⁴⁶³ The different forms of his female figures must have had particular significance to the artist, particularly when Michelangelo chose the subject, as was the case with *Leda*, *Night* and *Dawn*. With the articulated musculature in the thighs, arms, torso and shoulder, these figures represent a new kind of female beauty, the result of the artistic practices he pursued and distinct from the female nude promoted by writers like Firenzuola and Luigini, as well as from earlier Florentine images and contemporary images produced in Venetian artistic circles. Michelangelo's images of *Leda* and his *Venuses*, all produced in the 1520s and 1530s, thus established a new and specifically Florentine type of reclining nude, which was enthusiastically praised and promoted by Vasari and Aretino, prompting the demand for copies from other artists.

From Vasari's biography in the 1568 edition of the *Lives*, letters and *Ricordi* we know that at least four copies were made and that at least two were linked to the figure of *Leda*. A number of copies were taken to Venice, where Vasari was keen to promote these images through the assistance of his agent, the Florentine Francesco Lioni. Vasari's *Ricordi* provide brief accounts of Michelangelesque female nudes which were commissioned and copies and references to which were shipped to Venice.⁴⁶⁴ Several extant copies and copies mentioned in contemporary documents were executed by Vasari and his circle.

⁴⁶² A. Condivi (as in n. 341), p. 84; Condivi/Wohl, p. 107: 'avendo egli dipinte tante migliaia di figure quante si vedono, non ha fatta mai una che somigli l'altra, o faccia quella medesima attitudine.'

⁴⁶³ Recent studies on Michelangelo's female nudes which also indicate useful primary sources include F. H. Jacobs, 'Aretino and Michelangelo, Dolce and Titian: Femmina Masculo, Grazia', *Art Bulletin*, March 2000, vol. 132, n° 1, pp. 51-67, and J. K. Nelson, 'The Florentine "Venus and Cupid": A Heroic Female Nude and The Power of Love', *Venus and Love*, exhib. cat., Florence, 2002, pp. 27-63.

⁴⁶⁴ For a number of contemporary references to the commission, production and promotion of Michelangelo's female nudes, see J. K. Nelson, *Venus and Love* (as in n. 463), pp. 230-231.

Although strikingly different from ancient and modern images of the female, there were ancient and modern textual precedents of the virile female form.⁴⁶⁵ Cicero's account of Zeuxis's selection of the seven virgins of Croton for his picture of Helen demonstrates that the beauty of the females has its source in the beautiful physical forms of their brothers wrestling in the palestra.⁴⁶⁶ Alberti was the first Renaissance writer on the arts to discuss, albeit briefly, the representation of large and strong women, remarking that Zeuxis had made figures with a powerful appearance.⁴⁶⁷

The conjunction of the male and female was discussed and admired in the Cinquecento. Michelangelo described Vittoria Colonna as a person in whom the masculine and feminine were conjoined, creating a 'divine' form.⁴⁶⁸ Aretino reports on the appeal of gender ambiguity. His account of the Pistoian courtesan La Zufolina focuses on how she masqueraded as both male and female: 'the first time as a woman dressed like a man and the next time as a man dressed as a woman'. This way of showing herself as both sexes so intrigued Alessandro de' Medici that 'he did not wish to sleep with her for any other reason than to find out if, in reality, she was a hermaphrodite or merely jesting'.⁴⁶⁹

Descriptions and depictions of virile females illustrate that the widespread belief that women were biologically inferior to men was being challenged by several contemporaries, arguing in favour of the view that women are not an imperfect variant of the male but perfect when conjoined with the male. In the early Cinquecento, Agostino Strozzi stated that the sexes were physically equal and cited Avicenna's belief that if women exercised more, they would become more robust.⁴⁷⁰ On the basis of the evidence available, I suggest these robust and virile female figures should not be read as representing hermaphrodites or as androgynous forms but rather as females which go beyond the 'cultural' limits of their gender. This assumption is consistent with Danti's notion of the perfect virile male and female form which is physically fit for action.

⁴⁶⁵ The trope of the robust female warrior, surpassing men in wrestling appears in Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris*, V. Branca (ed), Milan, 1967, and also in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (as in n. 156), XXXII.102, the identity of the lady knight Bradamante is presented as ambiguous: 'ma chi dirà, se tutta non mi spoglio, s'io sono o s'io non son quell ch'è costei?' On the image of the warrior woman, see D. Shemak, *Ladies Errant. Wayward Women and Social Order in Early Modern Italy*, Durham and London, 1998, p. 96.

⁴⁶⁶ M. T. Cicero, *De invenzione* 2.1.1, J.J. Pollitt, *The Art of Ancient Greece: Sources and Documents*, Cambridge, 1990, pp. 150-151. B. Varchi reiterated the perception of female figures in Homer and Zeuxis as robust; see B. Varchi, 'In che siano simili et in che differenti i poeti e i pittori. Disputa Terza e Ultima', (1549), *Pittura e Scultura nel Cinquecento*, P. Barocchi (ed), Livorno, 1998, pp. 56-57.

⁴⁶⁷ L. B. Alberti (as in n. 274), p. 72: 'siano alle vergini movimenti et posarsi ariosi, pieni di semplicità, in quali più tosto sia dolcezza di quiete che gagliardia, bene ch'è ad Homero, quale seguì Zeuxis, piacque la forma fatticcia persino in le femine'.

⁴⁶⁸ G. Cambon, *La poesia di Michelangelo*, Turin, 1991, madrigale G. 235, p. 75: 'un uomo in una donna, anzi un Dio'.

⁴⁶⁹ P. Aretino (as in n. 100), pp. 199-201.

⁴⁷⁰ On Strozzi's *Defensio mulierum*, c. 1501, see P. J. Benson, *The Invention of the Renaissance Woman. The Challenges of Female Independence in the Literature and Thought of Italy and England*, Pennsylvania, 1993, p. 49. Alternative perceptions of the female form and function merit further study.

Michelangelo's figure of the inebriated *Bacchus* (1496; Florence, Bargello) combines physical features of both the male and female. Vasari praised the statue because it shows 'the youthful slenderness of the male and the fullness and roundness of the female'.⁴⁷¹ The statue illustrates how the antique could provide inspiration for a new human form, while the conjunction of the male and female achieves a new realm of expression for the living body. Preoccupation with and the exploration of the female form also emerges from Michelangelo's drawing of male and female archers (London, Windsor Castle, The Royal Collection) (**figure 43**).⁴⁷²

In the *Archers* both men and women are actively engaged in physical exercise, displaying perfect physical features suitable for action. Michelangelo's drawing of *Samson and Delilah* (Oxford, Ashmolean Museum, inv. Parker, II, 39) presents the female as a writhing figure totally oblivious to the sufferings of her male companion. The bodily motion she displays is used as a device to convey her deceptiveness.

The *Archers*, *Delilah*, and the *Bacchus* indicate that the conjunction of the male with the female could convey both positive and negative ideas, displaying the potential for action which could produce both positive and negative effects. Hence virile virtues can ennoble the female or be synonymous with base and vile things. The symbolic function of the female nude is dependent upon the context in which the figure appears, illustrating that like her male counterpart, the female nude was an aesthetic form with multiple meanings and functions. The following examples serve to illustrate female nudes as adorning ornaments and as emblematic of the negative effects of physical love.

The Virile Female Nude as an Ornament

The figures of *Night* and *Dawn*, San Lorenzo

Vasari and Bocchi lavishly praised the figures of *Night* and *Dawn*, which are said to surpass both ancient and modern sculpture. Vasari's description focuses on the two robust female nudes:

In her posture can be seen her effort, as she rises, heavy with sleep, and raising herself from her downy bed, it seems that on awakening she has found the

⁴⁷¹ VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 6, p. 15: 'la sveltezza della gioventù del maschio, e la carnosità e mondezza della femina'.

⁴⁷² There is evidence that Michelangelo was familiar with Plato's conviction that women should engage in physical exercise. See Plato, *Le leggi*. Opere complete, A. Zadro (ed and trans.), Bari, 2000, vol. 7, pp. 793-4 and vol. 7, pp. 216-7 and 794-5. Plato argues in the favour of participation of males and females in sport, particularly archery, since this sport helps develop both sides of the body. The physical imbalance between males and females is attributed to the stupidity of wet nurses who encourage males to perform tasks using the right arm and females to engage in activities using the left. On contrasting views of women practising sport in the *Cortegiano*, see B. Castiglione, (as in n. 35), p. 266, where Unico Aretino (Bernardo Accolti, 1458-1535) considers wrestling to be an excellent ancient sport, while Duke Giuliano de' Medici objects to women participating in any form of strenuous exercise.

eyes of that great duke closed in death, so that is she agonised with bitter grief, weeping in her beauty in token of her great sorrow.

And what can I say of Night, a statue not only rare, but unique? Who has ever seen in that art in any age, ancient or modern, statues like this? For in her can be seen not only the stillness of one sleeping but also the grief and melancholy of someone who has lost a great and honoured possession, and we must believe that this is the night that will eclipse all those who thought for some time, I will not say surpass, but to equal Michelangelo in sculpture and design. In that statue is infused all the somnolence seen in sleeping forms, wherefore many poems in Latin and rhymes in the vernacular have been written in her praise by people of great learning, such as these, the author of which is not known.⁴⁷³

In Vasari's mind, the perfectly formed female figures function both as adorning ornaments of the deceased dukes and as poignant expressions of sorrow and melancholy, conveyed through stillness and sleep in the figure of Night (1524-1534; Florence, San Lorenzo, New Sacristy) (**figure 44**) and through bodily contortions in the figure of Dawn (1524-1534; Florence, San Lorenzo, New Sacristy) (**figure 45**). A continual source of beauty ('continovata bellezza') is generated by the twisting and turning figure of Dawn, hallmarks of artistic and aesthetic perfection.

Condivi commented on the attributes of Night, considering the owl, diadem with moon and stars, an unfinished garland, and the mask to be appropriate to the figure while clarifying its meaning. The attributes thus serve to enhance her identity, while 'wondrous beauty' remains her chief characteristic. Raffaello Borghini expresses admiration of 'the beautiful figure representing Night'.⁴⁷⁴ He contrasts the ancient representation of night as a winged figure and a wreath of poppies with the new attributes given by Michelangelo. Bocchi reserves the highest praise to the figure of Night, though, unlike those before him, he considers the figure from different viewpoints, inviting the viewer to walk around the figure and focus his or her attention on the different views.⁴⁷⁵ The figure is beautiful when viewed from both the left and the right, indicating a proportioned, balanced body, and stupendous when seen from the front, displaying a beauty which can compete with and rival nature.

Bocchi picks out for praise the lifelike flesh, and the natural arrangement of the body.⁴⁷⁶ Artifice has been transformed into nature, marble into flesh, industry into

⁴⁷³ VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 6, pp. 54-58; cited in full in n. 417.

⁴⁷⁴ R. Borghini (as in n. 419), p. 65: 'Invention ben osservata si può chiamar quella di Michelagnolo nella bellissima figura da lui per la notte finta; perciocche oltre al farla in atto di dormire, le fece la Luna in fronte, e l'uccello notturno a' piedi; cose che dimostrano la notte, se bene la dipinsero gli antichi; conciosiache la fingessero una donna con due grandi ale nere con ghirlanda di papaveri in capo, e con manto pieno di stelle intorno: la quale imagine il Buonarruoto ben conobbe esser piu propria al pittore che allo statuario'.

⁴⁷⁵ F. Bocchi 1591 (as in n. 49), pp. 268-9.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 268.

liveliness. Bocchi extols the 'charming pose of the feet', the 'noble accord of the limbs', and 'such gentle physical features'.⁴⁷⁷ The pose of the right hand holding the head is described as 'charmingly beautiful' ('leggiadramente bellissima'). The term *ingenium* ('ingegno') appears several times, and the statue is considered to be a work of virtue ('virtù'), high value ('alto valore') and 'divine' ('divino').⁴⁷⁸ The figure is compared with Praxiteles' Venus, which it surpasses on account of its rare beauty:

but Buonarroti's Night is now so famous and considered incomparable for its supreme beauty, equalling the beauty of Venus, or rather it is even rarer, and admired by everyone and is so highly regarded and praised that no esteem can match such wonderful and superlative perfection.⁴⁷⁹

The Power of Love and the Duplicious Nature of Venus

In Aretino's mind, much of the beauty of Michelangelo's *Leda* (Cartoon. Attributed to Rosso Fiorentino after Michelangelo. 1533-1538; London, Royal Academy of Arts) (**figure 46**) and *Venus Reclining with Cupid* (Cartoon. c. 1553; Florence, Galleria dell'Accademia (**figure 47**)) resides in the masculinity of their female physiques, which he calls 'sentimenti virili e donneschi'.⁴⁸⁰ Aretino's promotional letter, dated April 1542 and addressed to Guidobaldo della Rovere underscores the merits of Michelangelo's cartoons of *Leda* and *Venus reclining with Cupid*, pinpointing what is most appealing and artistically praiseworthy, shedding further light on the perception of his virile female nudes. The letter opens with general praise of Michelangelo: 'the cartoons of these figures are by the hand of the great, marvellous and unique Michelangelo'.⁴⁸¹

The *Leda*, which was repeatedly copied, never reached Alfonso and was returned to Florence. In his description of the *Leda*, Aretino celebrates the merging of the two sexes, remarking that the most desired woman has a masculine body. The source of her beauty resides in the softness of her flesh, the 'lovely limbs' as she passively succumbs to the swan with her 'sweet, easy and gentle posture'. Nudity contributes much to the beauty of the figure:

One of the two images is *Leda*, who is soft of flesh, lovely of limb and slender of body and so sweet, easy and gentle in her posture. In her nudity she

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.: 'posamento di piedi sì leggiadro', 'unione di membra così nobile' and 'fattezze di corpo sì gentili'.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 269.

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid.: 'ma homai tanto è famosa la Notte del Buonarroti, & per sua sovrana bellezza riputata incomparabile, che eguale alla bellezza di Venere, anzi più rara, & da tutto 'l mondo ammirata, è salita in tanta stima, che dalla lode in fuori, non si trova pregio, che tanta perfezione, così mirabile, così eccessiva possa agguagliare'.

⁴⁸⁰ P. Aretino (as in n. 293), pp. 264-265.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.: 'I cartoni di cotale figure sono di mano del grande, del mirabile e del singolare Michelagnolo. L'una de le immagini è *Leda*, ma in modo morbido di carne, vaga di membra e svelta di persona, e talmente dolce, piana e soave d'attitudine, e con tanta grazia ignuda da tutte le parti de lo ignudo, che non si può mirar senza invidiar il cigno, che ne gode con affetto tanto simile al vero, che pare, mentre stende il collo per basciarla, che le voglia essalare in bocca lo spirito de la sua divinità'.

manifests such grace in every part that is nude. As such, one cannot look at her without envying the swan who takes such real pleasure in her. As he stretches his neck to kiss her it seems that he wants to exhale into her mouth the very spirit of his own divinity.

Two full-scale drawings or cartoons, now lost, made by Michelangelo in the 1530s served as a basis for paintings of the *Venus and Cupid* (c. 1533; Florence, Galleria dell'Accademia) and the *Noli me tangere* by Pontormo. The cartoon for a 'nude Venus and Cupid who kisses her', which was commissioned from Michelangelo by the Florentine banker and merchant, Bartolomeo Bettini, was copied more than any other panel painting by Michelangelo and Pontormo.⁴⁸²

Vasari describes Michelangelo's cartoon for Bettini as 'divine' ('cosa divina').⁴⁸³ The cartoon was available for study in Bettini's home, and after its confiscation by Duke Alessandro de' Medici, could be seen in the private Medici apartments, where it would have been accessible to artists working on the decorations in Palazzo Vecchio.⁴⁸⁴ The 1568 edition of the *Lives* provides an account of both the collaboration between Michelangelo and Pontormo and the painting's confiscation.⁴⁸⁵

Aretino's description of the Venus underscores the beauty generated by conjoining the male and the female:

who is delineated with a wondrous roundness of line. Because the goddess infuses her qualities into the desires of the two sexes, the wise man made her with the body of the female and the muscles of the male so that with an elegant vivacity of artistry she is moved by masculine and feminine sentiments.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸² Letters to Bettini written by Niccolò Martelli, Busini, Grassini (il Lasca), and Varchi indicate that the merchant played a key role in the circle of Florentine artists and *letterati*. On his contact with these learned men and other paintings commissioned for his chamber, see J. K. Nelson, 'Dante Portraits in sixteenth-century Florence', *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, vol. 69, 1992, pp. 59-77. Bettini is a good example of the kind of client for interior decorations with the emphasis on ornamentation, character qualities and civic pride. On the project for the decoration of his house, see 'Bartolomeo Bettini and his Florentine Chamber Decoration', *Venus and Love* (as in n. 463), pp. 3-25.

⁴⁸³ VBB, 1568, vol. 6, p. 116: 'A Bartolomeo Bettini fece e donò un cartone d'una Venere con Cupido che la bacia, che è cosa divina, oggi appresso agli eredi in Fiorenza'. Cf., *ibid.*, 1550 where Vasari lists a number of cartoons, including the one for Bettini, which are said to be 'incomparable'.

⁴⁸⁴ Vasari briefly relates the confiscation of the cartoon by Alessandro in the *Life of Pontormo*, describing his version as 'miraculous' ('cosa miracolosa'); see VBB, 1568, vol. 5, pp. 326 and 327. R. Borghini also refers to the cartoon, noting how Alessandro greatly admired it; see R. Borghini (as in n. 419), p. 484: 'Havendo Michelagnolo Buonarruotì fatto il famoso cartone della Venere ignuda che bacia Cupido, il Pontormo da quel cartone ritraendola ne dipinse una che per il disegno di Michelagnolo, e per lo colorito di Iacopo riuscì cosa rarissima, e l'ebbe e tenne molto caro il Duca Alessandro'.

⁴⁸⁵ VBB, 1568, vol. 5, p. 326: 'Veggendosi adunque quanta stima facesse Michelagnolo del Pontormo, e con quanta diligenza esso Pontormo conducesse a perfezione e ponesse ottimamente in pittura i disegni e' cartoni di Michelagnolo, fece tanto Bartolomeo Bettini, che il Buonarruotì suo amicissimo gli fece un cartone d'una Venere ignuda con un Cupido che la bacia, per farla fare di pittura al Pontormo e metterla in mezzo a una sua camera, nelle lunette della quale aveva cominciato a fare dipignere dal Bronzino Dante, Petrarca e Boccaccia, con animo di farvi gl'altri poeti toscani che hanno con versi e prose toscane cantato d'amore. Avendo dunque Iacopo avuto questo cartone, lo condusse, come si dirà, a suo agio a perfezione in quella maniera che sa tutto il mondo senza che io lo lodi altrimenti'. Vasari's account of the confiscation of the painting is carefully couched so as to avoid pinning the blame directly on the Medicean Duke, shifting the blame from unnamed sycophants, to Jacopo and then to Bettini for 'having wanted too much', *ibid.*, p. 327.

⁴⁸⁶ P. Aretino, *Lettere* (as in n. 293), p. 137: 'L'altro mo' è Venere, contornata con maravigliosa rotondità di linee. E perché tal dea diffonde le proprietà sue nel desiderio dei due sessi, il prudente uomo le ha

The array of mysterious objects contributes to the cryptic iconography of the Venus and Cupid. Cupid winds his left arm below the goddess's chin, pulling it closer to give her an emotionless kiss on the lips. Nose to nose with Venus, his gaze eludes hers and is turned towards his arrows which fall as he leans forward, stepping over her hip. Although the arrows fall in the direction of Venus, seeming to strike her legs, they must actually fall behind her. Venus's left index finger indicates her unblemished chest, while the other hand grasps Cupid's arrow, pointing it towards the symbolic objects on the left. The direction of the arrow thus draws our attention to the masks and the supine figure in an open chest.

The figure is a statuette of a young man with upraised arms, the colour of pietra serena, with wild hair and a swollen face, symbolising pain and death. With its death-like qualities, the supine figure contributes much to the disturbing mood of the painting, and most probably alludes to the consequences of illicit love. Benedetto Varchi referred to the use of enigmatic figures to obscure the mysteries of love, while Michelangelo's own poems alluded to two different kinds of love, pure love which tends towards heaven and earthly love which is directed towards base and vile things.⁴⁸⁷

The representation of negative connotations of female beauty and sensual love was not uncommon in Renaissance Florence. While Botticelli painted female nudes as a celebration of beauty and love in a number of paintings destined for the homes of many Florentines,⁴⁸⁸ Piero di Cosimo depicted the *Portrait of a Lady* (c. 1485-90; Chantilly, Condé Museum), which can be read as a moral warning against seductive attractiveness. The head is represented in profile and set against a stormy sky. The torso is slightly twisted towards the picture plane, so that her naked breasts are offered to the viewer's gaze. Her chest is framed by a striped shawl wrapped around her shoulders, while her hair is twisted, plaited and decorated with pearls. Around her neck a snake is intertwined with a gold necklace. Sensuality is explored in the naked flesh, the fabric of the shawl, and the hair and jewels. The presence of the snake alerts the viewer to the dangers of lust. Images with less positive messages as regards sensual beauty were thus produced alongside more positive portrayals.

An indication of the influence of Michelangelo's representation of the duplicitous nature of love with the focus on the beautiful female nude can be gained from Bronzino's *Allegory with Venus and Cupid* (c. 1545; London, The National Gallery)

fatto nel corpo di femina i muscoli di maschio; talché ella è mossa sentimenti virili e donneschi, con elegante vivacità d'artifizii'.

⁴⁸⁷ M. Buonarroti, *Rime*, E. N. Giradi (ed), Bari, 1960, n° 260.

⁴⁸⁸ VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 3, p. 513.

(figure 48), in which several of the motifs in Michelangelo's design reappear.⁴⁸⁹ Recurrent motifs include the roses, masks, the pointed arrow and the blue drapery.⁴⁹⁰

A contemporary account of the painting is given by Giorgio Vasari in the second edition of the *Lives* (1568), which identifies the figures as Venus kissing Cupid, Pleasure (Piacere), Playfulness (Giuoco), other Loves, Fraud (Frode) and Jealousy (Gelosia):

he made a painting of unique beauty, which was sent to the king of France. In it there was a nude Venus with Cupid kissing her with Pleasure, Playfulness and other Loves on one side and Fraud, Jealousy and other passions of love on the other.⁴⁹¹

Vasari's identification of the figures has been contested and a number of alternative readings have been suggested.⁴⁹² The painting is divided into three spatial layers. In the foreground Venus is kneeling and clutching the apple she was awarded in the Judgement of Paris in one hand while she points her arrow to the hair-tearing figure of a mature male, which has been identified as a syphilis victim.⁴⁹³ The tip of Venus's tongue touches the back of her top teeth. As we saw in chapter one, Firenzuola associates this gesture with sensuous beauty (*vaghezza*) and erotic delight.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁸⁹ For a different interpretation of the connection between Michelangelo's painting and Bronzino's allegory, see L. Mendelsohn, 'How to depict "Eros": Greek origins of the malevolent Eros in Cinquecento Painting' (as in n. 463), pp. 91-108 and R. Bellucci, C. Frosinini, 'A Michelangelesque Myth and Production in Series: The 'Venus and Cupid' Cartoon', (as in n. 463), pp. 109-130.

⁴⁹⁰ On Cosimo I's gift of the painting to François I and related documents, see J. Cox-Rearik, 'Sacred to profane: diplomatic gifts of the Medici to Francis I', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, vol. 24, n° 2, 1994, pp. 239-258.

⁴⁹¹ VBB, 1568, vol. 6, p. 243: 'fece un quadro di singolare bellezza, che fu mandato al re Francesco; dentro al quale era una Venere ignuda con Cupido che la baciava, et il piacere da un lato e il Giuoco con altri Amori, e dall'altro la Fraude, la Gelosia et altre passioni d'amore'.

⁴⁹² For earlier interpretations focusing on negative aspects of love, see E. Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology*, New York, 1939, pp. 86-91 and P. Hendy, *The National Gallery*, London, 1960, rev. 1971, p. 171. For an interpretation of the painting as the conquest of beauty, see M. Levey, 'Sacred and Profane Significance in two Paintings by Bronzino', *Studies in Renaissance and Baroque Art presented to Anthony Blunt*, London, 1967. For a discussion of the identity of the figures in the painting in relation to Vasari's comment and Bronzino's *Venus, Cupid and Jealousy* (after 1546; Budapest, Museum of Fine Arts), see C. Hope 'Bronzino's Allegory in the National Gallery', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, vol. 45, 1982, pp. 239-243. For an interpretation of the painting on the basis of Vasari's comment and in relation to Bronzino's love poetry, see T. Frangenberg, 'Der Kampf um den Schleier: zur Allegorie Agnolo Bronzinos in der National Gallery London', *Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch*, vol. 46, 1985, pp. 377-386. See also R. W. Gatsion, 'Love's Sweet Poison: a new reading of Bronzino's London allegory', *I Tatti Studies*, vol. 4, 1991. On Michelangelo's painting and Bronzino's allegory, see L. Mendelsohn, 'How to depict "Eros": Greek origins of the malevolent Eros in Cinquecento Painting', *Venus and Love* (as in n. 463), pp. 91-108 and R. Bellucci, C. Frosinini, 'A Michelangelesque Myth and Production in Series: The 'Venus and Cupid' Cartoon', *ibid.*, pp. 109-130.

⁴⁹³ See J.F. Conway, 'Syphilis and Bronzino's London Allegory', *JWCI*, vol. 49, 1986, pp. 250-255 and M. Healy, 'Bronzino's London Allegory and the Art of Syphilis', *The Oxford Art Journal*, 1997, pp. 3-11. This figure displays some of the symptoms of the disease, such as finger nodules and decayed teeth. It also contrasts with the figure of Jealousy painted in Bronzino's Budapest painting of Venus, in which the arrow is pointing in the opposite direction. An x-ray of the painting has indicated that the position of the arrow in the London allegory was changed. Any specific identification with a syphilis sufferer must thus have been made at a later stage. On this point, see P. Tinagli (as in n. 14), p. 147. The inclusion of a syphilitic victim in a painting was highly topical. To combat the disease, Duke Cosimo had herbs imported from South America.

⁴⁹⁴ A. Firenzuola (as in n. 143), p. 317.

The viewer's gaze is directed towards the figure of Cupid kissing Venus and caressing one of her nipples, following the line of the arrow to the tormented male, kneeling in the second spatial layer. The chubby little boy to the right of Venus represents the figure of Playfulness or *Giuoco*. He is holding a bunch of roses and has an anklet of bells. He is stepping on a thorn, apparently unaware of the pain he is about to feel. The roses and the thorn symbolise the two sides of love. The figure behind him is Pleasure (*Piacere*), holding a honeycomb. While her body is covered in reptilian scales, her legs and feet resemble those of a lion.

The serpent's sting-in-the-tail is half hidden behind her right hand. The particular form of this figure suggests that the sweet joy she promises is followed by pain. Thus the only figure looking towards the viewer, directly involving him or her in the act of seduction, repeats the suggestion of the duplicity of love.

In the third spatial layer the blue cloth contrasts with the fair skin of the figures in the foreground. The cloth draws our attention to the struggle between Father Time and Deceit. Father Time is winged and bears an hour glass on his shoulder. He reveals the negative effects associated with the lustful sort of love Venus represents. He looks angrily at Deceit who is trying to obscure the scene with the cloth and thus prevent the viewer from acknowledging the risks of sexual love.

The dangers of love have been represented in the form of a complex allegory specifically designed for the amusement and edification of an aristocratic audience. The painting shows that love engenders ambivalent passions, such as Playfulness, Pleasure and Deceit, and Jealousy, or if we read this figure as representing a syphilis sufferer, it can be associated with the horrific effects resulting from copulation with a contaminated female. The inclusion of laurel, which is traditionally associated with poetry and love, suggests that the poet or painter can reveal or obscure the passions and effects relating to love, and particularly physical love.

The Venetian Female Nude

The Venetian nude has been the object of intense debate. Attention has focused on the meanings of the paintings and various objects in them, the influence of sophisticated literary ideas and Neoplatonic thought, as well as the identity of 'Venus' and the mythological names frequently given to female nudes. This debate has sometimes drawn attention away from current ideas and predilections associated with the representation of the nude. There is no evidence that the images were seen as conveying sophisticated ideas and Neoplatonic thought

seems to have been a minor tributary of more powerful cultural concerns, as was the case with the male nude. Conversely, a range of contemporary sources strongly suggest that the images of the sensuous and beautiful female nude produced particularly but not only in Venetian artistic circles are inextricably intertwined with the focus on female physical beauty, physical love, with important implications for the Venetian civic myth constructed around the figure of the courtesan.

While some elements in individual paintings may have had special meaning for the client, the sensuously beautiful females, which share striking similarities with the physical features promoted by Firenzuola and Luigini, have particular import as regards the contemporary context.⁴⁹⁵ Recurrent physical features can also be linked to texts providing beauty tips, suggesting that the authors were working within a common set of assumptions and terms of reference. It is highly significant that the Venetian context provided the impetus for the inclusion of contemporary elements, particularly the world of courtesanship, illustrating that allusions to it were obviously compelling not only in Venice but also in other parts of Italy and further afield.

The debate on the identification of the female nude as a mythological figure has centred on Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1538; Florence, Uffizi). In letters of 9 March and 1 May 1538 to his envoy in Venice, Gian Giacomo Leonardi, Guidobaldo della Rovere referred to the painting as 'the nude woman' ('la donna nuda').⁴⁹⁶ Another brief account of the painting is provided by Giorgio Vasari, who saw the painting in the ducal apartments (guardaroba) of Guidobaldi's palace at Pesaro in 1538. Vasari refers to the nude female figure as 'a young Venus' ('una Venere giovanetta'):

A young Venus, reclining, with flowers and certain draperies around her, which are very beautiful and well finished.⁴⁹⁷

Several academics have questioned the application of a mythological name to images like the Urbino nude, stating that contemporary references seem at variance with any strong notion of a classical precedent. Charles Hope does not believe that such terminology is an accurate reflection of what is represented.⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁵ My analysis of the Venetian female nudes concurs with, draws and builds on the study of M. Rogers (as in n. 136), pp.17-88, rather than the connections between the ideal female figure and Parmigianino's paintings proposed by E. Cropper (as in n. 136), pp. 374-394.

⁴⁹⁶ G. Gronau, 'Die Kunstbestrebungen der Herzöge von Urbino,' *Jahrbuch der Königlich Preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 25, 1904: p. 19, doc. 31 and 33; republished in idem *Documenti artistici*, pp. 93-94, doc. 31 and 35.

⁴⁹⁷ VBB, 1568, vol. 6, p. 162: 'et una Venere giovanetta a giacere con fiori e certi panni sottili intorno, molto belli e ben finiti'.

⁴⁹⁸ C. Hope (as in n. 396), pp. 111-124. For a response to Hope's interpretations of the Venus as 'pornography for the élite', see R. Goffen, 'The Problematic Patronage of Titian's *Venus of Urbino*', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 24, 1994, pp. 307-308 n. 19. Goffen observes that the

The paintings which Titian produced in his later years mainly but not only for Venetian clients do not have the same kind of narrative content as the *Poesie* and should be seen simply as mildly or overtly erotic images representing women as 'sex objects'. Hope concludes that Vasari was mistaken in identifying the depicted woman as a Venus and cites other examples of the misidentification of female figures in a similar context. Vasari thus applied the term to indicate a nude female, a mistake justified by the fact that images of anonymous females were common in Venice, while this was not the case in Florence.⁴⁹⁹ Paola Tinagli also considers the mythological name to be out of place with the contemporary setting and lack of mythological attributes.⁵⁰⁰

Rona Goffen believes both the brief reference made by the duke and Vasari's description provide reliable evidence as to the figure's identity, stating that she is both a 'nude woman' and 'a young Venus', 'the one being tantamount to a pithy, yet accurate account of the other'.⁵⁰¹ Goffen holds that Vasari's identification of the figure as a Venus stems from the figure's pose, which Titian adapted from Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus* (1510; Dresden, Gemäldegalerie), introducing other changes, such as depicting the female awake and indoors.⁵⁰²

Bette Talvacchia explains the references as examples of 'a double system of description' in relation to the nude.⁵⁰³ Talvacchia believes that the figure is an erotic representation of a female nude while her typology as a Venus figure served as a sanctioning cover whenever the decorum of nudity was called into question.

The debate on the identification of the female nude as Venus has tended to play down the connection between the application of the term in daily life and contemporary love poetry. As we saw in chapter one, the term Venus denoted physical beauty, widely perceived as the chief ornament of a woman and thus highly valued. The term was also used to refer to the sexual act ('l'atto di Venere') and prostitutes and courtesans provided the 'services of Venus' ('i servigi di Venere').

Applied to painting the term not only indicates the physical beauty of the depicted figure but also the function of these females as emblems of sexual passion, no small compliment in a society in which physical beauty was worshipped. The terms 'nude

emphasis on the representation of courtesans ineffectively posing as a goddess in many interpretations was prompted by E. Panofsky's over-interpretation of nudes as Neoplatonic images of the senses expounded in *Problems in Titian, Mostly Iconographic*, New York, 1969. pp. 109-171.

⁴⁹⁹ C. Hope (as in n. 396), p. 119.

⁵⁰⁰ P. Tinagli, (as in n. 14), p. 124.

⁵⁰¹ R. Goffen (as in n. 496), pp. 301-321. For other interpretations of the Venus as 'pornography for the élite', *ibid.*, pp. 307-308 n19.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 311-312.

woman' and 'young Venus' are not the sum of two separate lexical items, the viewpoint of the client and that of the professional artist, which need reconciling, or mythological references providing a sanctioning cover, rather they are part of the same semantic unit, the merits and functions of which were obvious to the Renaissance artist and viewer. Understood in this way, the evidence available becomes easier to assess, however scant or perplexing it may seem at first glance. In referring to the nude figure in Titian's painting for Guidobaldo as a Venus, Vasari was not guilty of mistaken identity or employing a double system of description. On the contrary, Vasari's remarks demonstrate that he was perfectly aware of the interests to which the painting responded and that he was working in a common frame of reference.

An analysis of sixteenth-century love poetry sheds further light on the appeal of mythological names in connection with physical love. It was common practice to conceal the identity of the lovers by employing literary and mythological names, which, in some instances, may have had a special significance to those concerned.

Tullia d'Aragona's affair with Girolamo Muzio, poet and courtier in the service of the Duke of Ferrara, was immortalised in his book of eclogues, *Le Amorse*, in which pastoral fiction is used to sing of Tullia's earthly beauty, and in the erotic poems in his *Rime Diverse*, published under the title *Belladonna*.⁵⁰⁴ The erotic nature of the affair between the courtesan Tullia d'Aragona and Girolamo Muzio is represented in poetic form in the first "Tirrenia" eclogue, which concludes:

Come, beautiful Nymph, and gather into your soft arms he who with open arms awaits you with desire, and welcome in your womb, with joy, your ardent lover: Hold close your yearning lover and press your lips to his. Suck the living spirit from the soul of the beloved one: And with your spirit inspire the living flower of his desires.⁵⁰⁵

Veronica Franco's poetry illustrates that love, and especially passionate love, were more important than poetic talent, thus revealing a deeper truth about the society in which she lived. One of the most interesting poems for the present purpose is addressed to her friend and lover, Marco Venier, in response to a poem he had

⁵⁰³ B. Talvacchia (as in n. 17), pp. 241 and 46, where it is stated that inventory entries on the nude are unreliable as sources for determining the real subject matter of a painting.

⁵⁰⁴ See G. Muzio, *Delle lettere*, Florence, 1590. L. Borsetto (ed), Forni, 1985, pp. 196-199, Muzio's letter to Mezabarba. In the *Ecloghe*, Tullia's noble patronage is noted and a list of her lovers is provided. In the poems Muzio concealed Tullia's identity with the pseudonym Tirrenia, and she appears under this name in the first three eclogues, where Muzio appears as Mopsa. Muzio's enchantment of Tullia's desirability met with her approval, though she requested a few minor yet significant changes, for example, she asked Muzio to change her name from Tirrenia to Thalia to make her more readily identifiable with the heroine and the muse of idyllic verse.

⁵⁰⁵ G. Muzio, *Ecloghe*, Venice, 1550, p. 25: 'Vien, Ninfa bella, a fra le molle braccia raccogli quel che, con braccia aperte, disioso l'aspetta, e nel tuo grembo ricevi, lieta l'infocato amante: stringi'l bramoso amante: e stretta aggiungi la labbra a le sue labbra: e'l vivo spirto suggi de l'alma amato: e del tuo spirto il vivo fiore inspira le sue brame'.

written for her. Presenting herself as an expert between the sheets, Veronica writes that she and her lover were transformed into gods during their sexual escapades:

all delight Phoebus (Apollo) who served the goddess of love, received from her recompense so sweet that it meant more to him than to be a god, his bliss, to make my meaning clear, were those pleasures that Venus afforded him in her soft embrace.⁵⁰⁶

Although Veronica is capable of singing the praises of love, it is the joy afforded by her body which is most memorable and which makes her worthier than Apollo's mastery of the arts. The services she provides as a Venus are seen to outlive her other talents of singing and writing, in spite of the fact that she later plays down the erotic side of her life.

We can infer that poetry could serve as a vehicle for hiding the lascivious, just as the courtesan's refinements gave her a veil of decency. While poetic devices and rhetoric, precedents in classical antiquity, and philosophical notions of beauty, provided layers of possible meaning appropriate to the courtly setting, they were also part of the ploy towards self-elevation. What is most striking, however, is that the celebration of physical beauty and love for their own sake emerge as the reasons behind the poems. In one of his lascivious sonnets written for the *Modi*, Aretino unmasked the practice of concealing the lovers' identity with the names of mythological characters, using obscene language as a political weapon. In four of the sonnets he gives the names of known contemporaries.⁵⁰⁷

Position 12 narrates an encounter between Ercole Rangone, a member of a prominent Modenese family, and Angela Greca, a fashionable Roman courtesan. Aretino plays on the use of mythological names by also referring to the couple as Venus and Mars. The mythological references are, however, soon discarded by Aretino's unabashed and libellous technique of naming names: 'I am not Mars. I am Ercole Rangone, and I am screwing you, Angela Greca. And if I had my lute here I would play for you, while fucking, a song'.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁶ V. Franco, "Terze Rime" e sonetti, Venice, 1575. G. Beccari (ed.), Lanciano, 1912. 'Risposta della Sig. Veronica Franca', pp. 21-27: 'Febo che serve a l'amorosa dea, e in dolce guideron de lei ottiene quel che via piu, che l'esser dio, il bea, a rivelar nel mio pensier ne viene quei modi, che con lui Venere adopra, mentre in soavi abbracciamenti il tiene; ond'io instrutta a questi so dar opra si ben nel letto, che d'Apollo a arte questa va d'assai spazio sopra, e'l mio cantar e'l mio scivar in carte s'oblia da che mi prova in quella guisa ch' a' suoi seguaci Venere comparta'. Veronica's account of her alleged encounter with Henri III also contains allusions to mythological figures of Danae and Jupiter.

⁵⁰⁷ On these references to contemporary personages, see B. Talvacchia (as in n. 17), pp. 91 and 259 n. 18.

⁵⁰⁸ P. Aretino / Aquilecchia (as in n. 103) sonnet 12: 'Io non son Marte, io son Hercol Rangone, E fotto voi, che sete Angela Greca, E s'io avessi qui la mia ribeca, Vi suonerei potendo una canzone'. Translation B. Talvacchia (as n. 17), p. 217. Elsewhere in the sonnet Aretino plays on Rangone's profession as a man of arms in the service of the Este family. Aretino insults Rangone by implying that he has followed Mars in love rather than on the battlefield. Other references to real people are found in sonnet 4, sonnet 7, and sonnet 14; see B. Talvacchia, *ibid.*, pp. 91-93.

An understanding of the social context and of the ennobling quality of poetic conventions puts us in a better position to analyse images of scantily-clad and nude females which abound with contemporary elements and references, most notably in Venetian artistic circles.

The Scantily-clad Female

A number of paintings which show women at various stages of undress became important in Venice during the early sixteenth century and later in Rome and Milan.⁵⁰⁹ A range of images belong to this type of painting, including Titian's *Flora* (1515; Florence, Uffizi) (**figure 49**), Palma Vecchio's *Violante* (1516-1518; Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum), *La Bella* (1525; Madrid, Thyssen Museum) and *Flora* (1515-1520; London, National Gallery) and Paris Bordone's *La Zaffetta* (1550; London, National Gallery). Successful prototypes were often adapted for different clients with variations on the same theme. Entries in inventories and descriptions of early sixteenth-century private collections in Venice refer to these images as a 'painting of a woman' or 'canvas of a woman', strongly suggesting that they were chiefly admired for the beauty of the sitters. The names typically given to the images frequently allude both to love-making and the world of prostitution, for example *Flora* was directly related to the sexual intercourse, while *Laura* was a name common amongst prostitutes and courtesans.⁵¹⁰

Most of the women wear their hair loose, which writers like Firenzuola and Luigini considered to be erotic and an adornment of the beautiful woman. Several of the figures reveal one or both breasts either blatantly or through loosened, see-through garments like night-shirts and chemises, elements which place them firmly within contemporary society. As Firenzuola suggests in his dialogue, revealing one's breast was an act of seduction, deemed possible in a private setting, while Piccolomini advocated the baring of the bosom through loose garments. These unidentified and unidentifiable women should be seen as images of subtle eroticism intimately bound up with the contemporary appreciation of female beauty rather than as nymphs caught up in the safe distance of a mythological past.

⁵⁰⁹ P. Tinagli (as in n. 17), pp. 98-104.

⁵¹⁰ On the origins of the goddess *Flora* and connections with the world of prostitution, see L. Tongiorgi Tomasi, in G.B.,Ferrari, *Flora ovvero la cultura dei fiori*,(1638), ed. L. Tongiorgi Tomasi, Florence, 2001, introduction, pp. II-X.

The Reclining Nude and Sexual Passion

Early images of the reclining female nude in the private sphere appear on the inside lids of the fifteenth-century marriage chest (*cassiere/forziere*), usually with a male nude as a companion piece on a second chest (Anonymous. *A Nude Inside Cassone Lid*, c. 1400; London, Private Collection) (**figure 50**).⁵¹¹ Ernst Gombrich defined the marriage chest not just a repository for clothes but as a 'carrier of happy auguries, if not lucky charms'.⁵¹² One of these auguries was the conception of children, preferably a male heir, and there seems to have been a common belief in the magical power of such images as being instrumental in ensuring the beauty of the off-spring.

Although initially linked to marriage, images of the female reclining nude became more frequent, appearing in easel paintings, frescoes, and prints and in private bedrooms and chambers, loggias and large halls in the homes of eminent citizens, ecclesiastics and merchants, making the earlier connection with marriage less crucial as the female nude became associated with sexual enjoyment for its own sake.

Aretino's remark cited above was made in a letter to the Duke of Mantua and it makes an explicit link to the figure of Venus and erotic enjoyment without any reference to procreation. In a letter written by Pietro Bembo requesting the statuette of Venus which Cardinal Bibbiena had planned to put in his private bathroom (*stufetta*), Pietro writes that he intended to place the figure in his *camerino*, where he would 'desire her every day with more delight, than you ever could, because you are constantly occupied'.⁵¹³

References to the nude in a number of inventories indicate that the nude was the subject of the work and that it was the main interest of the compiler and collector. The inventory of the Farnesina, compiled at the death of Agostino Chigi in 1520, contains a reference to the painting of the *Death of Adonis*, which simply describes it as 'the painting with many beautiful nude women'.⁵¹⁴ No reference is made to the narrative scene, which strongly suggests that the compiler recorded what was most striking and admired, that is, the representation of a beautiful nude female. There is evidence that images of the female nude were perceived in similar terms well into the seventeenth century.

⁵¹¹ For a complete bibliography of the commissions, decorations, subject matter and functions of marriage furniture, including the *cassone* and *spalliere*, see P. Tinagli (as in n. 14), pp. 43 nn. 4 and 5; p. 44 n. 17.

⁵¹² E. H. Gombrich, Apollonio di Giovanni. A Florentine Cassone Workshop Seen Through The Eye of a Humanist Poet', *Norm and Form. Studies in the Art of the Renaissance*, London, 2nd ed., 1971, pp. 11-28.

⁵¹³ P. Bembo, as cited by P. Tinagli (as in n. 14), p. 131.

⁵¹⁴ As cited by R. Bartolini, *Le occasioni del Sodoma*, Rome, 1996, p. 62.

Carlo Ridolfi's *Meraviglie dell'arte* (Wonders of Art; 1648) described Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus* as 'a delightful sleeping nude Venus which is in Marcello's house. At her feet there is Cupid holding a bird which was finished by Titian'.⁵¹⁵ There is also evidence that the same qualities appealed to an international clientele. In 1519 Francesco Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua, gave Lorenzo Costa's *Venus with a Cornucopia* (now lost) to King François I. A letter to Gonzaga from his envoy in Paris shows that the painting depicted a subject that the king had specifically requested: 'His majesty tells me the he would be delighted to receive one of your paintings of a nude, or one of a Venus'.⁵¹⁶ It was in the same year that the French king attempted to acquire a painting by Michelangelo, presumably of a nude.⁵¹⁷ In 1531 Federico Gonzaga requested a work by Michelangelo without stating any of the requirements he had made when commissioning a work by Sansovino.⁵¹⁸

Caro's letter written to Giorgio Vasari in 1548 illustrates the approach of a letterato/client to the nude.⁵¹⁹ Caro asks Vasari to make a painting with any invention he likes providing there is a male and female nude figure, which, in his mind, are the greatest subjects of art. Caro suggests a Venus and Adonis, 'a composition of two of the most beautiful bodies' ('un componimento di due più bei corpi che possiate fare'). Caro proposes an invention based on a passage in Theocritus, though he does not want Vasari to follow the episode exactly. If Vasari chose to depict this narrative scene, it should display 'charm' ('vaghezza') and 'emotion' ('affetto') which give figures spirit ('spirito'). The main figures should form the focus of the painting, though a few dogs may be added if there is enough space.

Caro's preoccupation with the nude is even more evident at the end of the letter, where he suggests other figures which please him: a Leda after Michelangelo or a Venus coming out of the sea: 'if you do not want to do more than one figure, a Leda, especially Michelangelo's, gives me so much pleasure'.⁵²⁰ Caro's letter implies that narrative sources based on an ancient text and the rendering of

⁵¹⁵ C. Ridolfi, *Meraviglie dell'arte*, 2 vols., Venice, 1648, vol. 1, p. 102: 'una deliziosa Venere ignuda dormiente è in casa Marcella, ed a' piedi è Cupido con Augellino in mano, che fu terminato da Tiziano'.

⁵¹⁶ L. Gonzaga, letter of 20 March 1518, C. M. Brown and A. M. Lorenzoni, 'Lorenzo Costa in Mantua, Five Autograph Letters', *L'arte* 3, 1970, fasc. 11-12, pp. 110-113: 'Sua Maestade mi disse che volentieri havrebbe una sua qualche figura nuda hover una qualche Venere.' See also J. Cox-Rearick (as in n. 488), pp. 239-240.

⁵¹⁷ M. Buonarroti, *Il carteggio di Michelangelo*, P. Barocchi (ed), 5 vols., Florence, 1965-1983, vol. 2, p. 151.

⁵¹⁸ P. Aretino, (as in n. 293) vol. 1, p. 17; cf. Federico's request to Sebastiano in 1527, in which he told the artist not to include anything hypocritical or make the scene violent.

⁵¹⁹ G. Vasari (as in n. 292), Letter from Annibal Caro to Giorgio Vasari, 10 May 1548, pp. 220-221.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 221: 'Se non voleste far più di una figura, la Leda, et specialmente quella di Michel'Angelo, mi diletta oltre modo'. Vasari chose the Venus and Adonis scene but the painting was smaller than Caro had requested and was left incomplete.

emotion could simply be a pretext for the representation of the nude, selecting elements in the verbal source felt to be most relevant or appealing.

References like the Chigi inventory have been seen as unreliable sources in reconstructing the true subject of a painting because they 'confound the two separate aspects of what is being represented'.⁵²¹ The recurrence to mythological scenes, like the one in Titian's *Danae* for Alessandro Farnese, has been interpreted as an effective way of avoiding censure, leading to the conviction that the image portrayed is one thing and the visual experience another. Yet this type of reference is crucial to anybody investigating the perception of the nude and strongly suggests that the viewer derived sensuous pleasure from the image and appreciated the painter's skill in bringing to life the seductive power of the beautiful female.

While the pose of the female nude in Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (1538; Florence, Uffizi) recalls fifteenth-century nudes inside marriage chests, the figure's sensuality is heightened in several ways. As she looks seductively at the viewer, her left hand covers her genitals, drawing attention to them, a gesture which is suggestive of voluptuous enjoyment. A similar scene was painted by Sustris, illustrating the appeal of Titian's painting.⁵²²

A contemporary account of Titian's *Danae* for Cardinal Farnese (1545-1546; Naples, Museo di Capodimonte) (**figure 51**) compares the sensuous appeal of this nude with the Urbino Venus, indicating that the former was perceived as even more erotic. A letter written in September 1544 by Giovanni della Casa, the papal legate in Venice, refers to his visit to Titian's workshop and claims that the image of the female nude will 'bring the Devil down on the back of Cardinal San Silvestro', a stern Dominican theologian and censor.⁵²³ The nude figure is so arousing that Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, which Alessandro had seen in Pesaro, is 'like a Theatine nun compared to this'. With her legs slightly apart the female's pose is a sign of complete sexual fulfilment as she looks towards the god appearing in the form of a shower of gold.

X-ray photographs show that the Farnese *Danae* was originally commissioned as a nude female in the same manner as the *Venus of Urbino* but was later transformed into a mythological scene with the portrait head of a courtesan with whom Alessandro was infatuated, who Giovanni mentions in his letter. Roberto Zapperi has

⁵²¹ B. Talvacchia (as in n. 17), p. 46.

⁵²² The image is reprinted in *The Genius of Venice: 1500-1600* (as in n. 305), p. 120.

⁵²³ Della Casa's letter was first analysed by C. Hope, 'A Neglected Document about Titian's "Danae" in Naples', *Arte Veneta*, vol. 31, 1977, pp. 188-189. For a detailed reconstruction of the events and

suggested that irrespective of any changes to the painting, whether to make it more acceptable to the cardinal, the motif of gold coins could be read as 'a euphemistic representation of the coupling of its owner with the courtesan', thus heightening the erotic content.⁵²⁴ Alessandro was obviously proud of his *Danae*, which he kept in his *camera propria*, and it was still there in 1581. The painting, which was obviously known to a select audience, was discussed by both Lodovico Dolce and Giorgio Vasari in relation to Titian's mastery of the female nude.

A series of paintings, such as *Venus, Cupid and Organ Player* (c. 1550; Madrid, Prado) (**figure 52**), *Venus and the Organ Player and Little Dog* (c. 1550; Madrid, Prado), *Venus, Cupid and the Lute Player* (c. 1560; Cambridge, Mass., Fitzwilliam Museum) and another *Venus, Cupid and the Lute Player* (c. 1560; New York, Metropolitan Museum), *Venus with Cupid and Organ Player* (c. 1560; Berlin, Staatliche Museum, Gemäldegalerie), based on a studio prototype undergoing successive modifications, have been interpreted as the visual representation of the Neoplatonic concept that hearing and sight allow the mind to know beauty.

The Neoplatonism of the time was associated with Ficino and Pico della Mandorla and later diluted by Bembo and Castiglione. Through a hierarchy of the senses it attempted to explain reason's elevation towards heaven or downward path towards the brutish.⁵²⁵ The images have thus been read as the celebration of the spiritual senses over the baser senses of touch, smell, and taste to which true beauty is inaccessible.⁵²⁶ This moralising interpretation is based on antique and

interpretative evidence regarding the commission of this painting, see R. Zapperi, 'Alessandro Farnese, Giovanni della Casa and Titian's Danaë in Naples', *JWCI*, vol. 54, 1991, pp. 159-171.

⁵²⁴ R. Zapperi (as in n. 523), p. 179.

⁵²⁵ The contemporary debate on the nature of love and the term *love* referred to a range of feelings and experiences, from the desire for sexual satisfaction, wealth and honour, and the intellectual pursuit of the divine. Many texts on love written or published in the early sixteenth century take their basic principles from Marsilio's theory of Platonic love. Ficino's philosophy became more accessible to a larger public through his Latin commentary on Plato's *Symposium* and his Italian translation published as *Sopra lo amore o ver' Convito di Platone* in 1544. See Ficino, M., *Sopra lo amore o ver' Convito di Platone. Comento di Marsilio Ficini fiorentino sopra il Convito di Platone*, (1544), G. Ottaviano (ed), Milan, 1973. His understanding of Platonism was in keeping with Christian principles and the humanistic focus on man as the centre of the universe. Love is perceived as a universal force binding together the divine and the world. Man's love leads back to God and his act of creation as an act of love. The human soul moves from the love of earthly beauty to the ecstatic contemplation of the divine. Ficino's ideas were widely popularised and promoted not only in treatises on love but also texts dealing with ideal behaviour and advice manuals. Pietro Bembo's *Gli Asolani*, 1505, was the first dialogue on love. The different types of love and human feelings, each with its own social form, appealed to members of the upper echelons of society and to men of letters. According to Bembo's scheme, man's love for a woman is the first stage in his ascent to transcendence. Bembo appears in Castiglione's *Cortegiano* as the exponent of Platonic love as best suited to men at court.

⁵²⁶ O. Brendel, 'The Interpretation of the Holkham Venus', *Art Bulletin*, vol. 28, 1946, pp.65-75. For a brief discussion of the objections to Brendel's reading of the painting, see W. G. Studdert-Kennedy, 'Titian: The Fitzwilliam Venus', *Burlington Magazine*, 1958, vol. 100, pp. 349-351. Studdert-Kennedy concludes that the Fitzwilliam painting is a 'resolution of the paradox of body and soul, the pressure of which is acknowledged in the Neoplatonic hierarchy of the senses'. C. Hope has pointed out that the clear sexual imagery in these paintings make Brendel's interpretation incongruous; see C. Hope (as in n. 396), p. 122-123.

contemporary texts familiar to the learned Renaissance reader.⁵²⁷ For Ficino and his followers, the senses of touch, smell and taste perform bodily functions and are thus considered inferior senses, while hearing, sight and reason are deemed to be higher senses, capable of perceiving spiritual things. The soul rather than sensory experience is believed to be the true source of knowledge. In addition, human love hinders the contemplation of God, which is the purest form. This approach to the paintings has tended to divest them of their eroticism. There is, however, no evidence that any of these paintings convey such complex ideas nor that Titian would have seen them as relevant to his works. It should, however, be noted that the hierarchy of senses promoted by Ficino and his followers was being challenged by several writers in favour of sense perception and experience, promoting the conjunction of the various senses and their satisfaction.⁵²⁸

The paintings are all variations on the reclining female nude in the company of a man playing a musical instrument and in a contemporary setting, suggesting that this type of image had a wide appeal. Charles Hope has identified the *Venus and the Organ Player* in the Prado as the prototype for the series of paintings, again believing that the depicted females are not "Venuses".⁵²⁹ These later paintings are more overtly erotic than Titian's earlier ones, suggesting an increasing predilection for clear sexual imagery against a contemporary backdrop. In all of them the nude, bejewelled body of Venus is tilted towards the picture plane and she is lying on a bed with scarlet drapery. The musician is dressed in contemporary clothes and turns to look at her. In the *Venus, Cupid and Organ Player* (c. 1550; Madrid, Prado), and *Venus and the Organ Player* (c. 1550; Madrid, Prado) his gaze is unmistakably on the genitals. The musical symbolism in the paintings is very strong, and it is not only intimately bound up with the sexual imagery but also has particular relevance

⁵²⁷ According to D. Rosand, the meaning of particular images can only be determined on the basis of the relevant text to which it refers. See D. Rosand, 'Ermeneutica Amorosa: Observations on the interpretations of Titian's Venuses', *Tiziano e Venezia* (as in n. 1), pp. 375-381.

⁵²⁸ The counter-debate on the physical senses and the promotion of physical love seems to be more in keeping with the intended function of the paintings in question. Aristotelians denied that the mind has a direct knowledge of ideas and argued that cognition proceeds from sense perception and experience. Several writers promoted the conjunction of the different senses and their satisfaction. Mario Equicola's *D'Alveto di Natura d'amore* (Book on the Nature of Love; Venice, 1563, p. 381) maintained that sensual love was essential if all the lovers' senses were to be satisfied. Agostino Nifo's *De pulchro et amore* (On Beauty and Love; Rome, 1531) connects love with sexual appetite, stating that beauty leads human beings to respond to the needs of the senses primarily through the sense of touch and coitus. Nifo is convinced that sexual pleasure is enjoyed by sight and hearing and enhanced by intellectual accomplishments and gracious manners, virtues closely connected with the courtesan. Sperone Speroni's *Dialogo dell'Amore* (Dialogue on Love; Venice, 1542) draws on Leone Ebreo's *Dialoghi d'amore* (Dialogues on Love; Venice, 1535), which seeks to justify the pleasures of sexuality. Speroni argues that Platonic senses alone cannot satisfy the lover who seeks the pleasures afforded by the other senses. The perfect union between man and woman, the 'amorous hermaphrodite' occurs when the pleasure of the mind is added to the pleasures of the other senses. The task of satirising the Bembian view of love as contemplation is given to the courtesan Tullia d'Aragona, who is presented as a bright, articulate woman. Her eulogy of eroticism contains lewd overtones and makes references to the authority of Francesco Maria Molza, a poet of erotic *novelle*. For a discussion of these treatises, see R. Russell (as in n. 127), pp. 27-32.

⁵²⁹ C. Hope (as in n. 396), p. 120

to the contemporary world. The musician, the lute, the flute, and the bass viol all add significance apparent to contemporaries familiar with the practice of the madrigal.⁵³⁰ It is the introduction of the musician that makes the sexual content more explicit. In the Cambridge painting the woman is holding a flute and there are open pages of music by the bed, suggesting that they have been playing a madrigal together.⁵³¹ The flute in the woman's left hand is obviously phallic, and similar imagery appears in Titian's earlier *Three Ages of Man* (1515; Edinburgh; National Gallery of Scotland). The Venus-figure is also holding a flute in the New York *Venus, Cupid and Lute Player*, in which the female is also being crowned by Cupid.

Many examples of similar imagery are found in Aretino's *Ragionamenti*.⁵³² Many of the madrigals of the period were explicit and based on the theme of a man's desire to win the favours of a mortal woman, such as an expensive courtesan in Rome or Venice. The Roman courtesan Imperia is known to have composed sonnets and madrigals. In addition, the score in front her suggests that she had been playing not the flute but the bass viol, which she would have held between her legs. The imagery is also very close to the metaphor used by Pietro Aretino in one of his letters, where he wrote that 'the sounds, songs, and letters that women know are the keys that open the door to their prudery'.⁵³³ In Castiglione's *Cortegiano*, Messer Federico comments that singing to the viol is the most beautiful music of all.⁵³⁴

The association with the courtesan is implicit in the furnishings, in that the homes of some of the most well-known courtesans were richly decorated. In 1505, a Dominican friar, Matteo Bandello, left a record of the home of Imperia, in which he wrote that the salon, boudoir, and bedroom were all sumptuously furnished with velvets and brocades, and in the boudoir there was always a lute or viol, books of music and other instruments.⁵³⁵

The meaning of the paintings lies in the contemporary preoccupation with the sensuous body and the art of seduction. However, the image of the nude courtesan is much more than the 'pin-up' of the day.⁵³⁶ As the ultimate

⁵³⁰ W. G. Studdert-Kennedy (as in n. 524), pp. 349-351.

⁵³¹ Ibid., p. 349 n.1, where it is noted that an x-ray of the Fitzwilliam version shows that Venus was originally in profile, looking at the musician.

⁵³² Ibid., p. 351.

⁵³³ P. Aretino (as in n. 100), vol. 1, p. 105: 'I suoni, i canti, e le lettere che sanno le femmine sono le chiavi che aprono le porte della pulizia loro'

⁵³⁴ B. Castiglione (as in n. 35), p. 137. Elsewhere in the text, the flute is not deemed suitable for the courtier and women are instructed not to play ungraceful and inappropriate instruments.

⁵³⁵ For the description of a courtesan's boudoir, see G. Masson, *Courtesans of the Renaissance World*, London, 1975, p. 37.

⁵³⁶ C. Hope (as in n. 396), p. 119.

embodiment of sexual power and independence, the courtesan's life illustrated how the worship of physical female beauty afforded its possessor opportunities hitherto unheard of. Firenzuola shows his women of Prato how to exploit such power in the same way as Piccolomini's *Raphaela* shows her client. In having his female characters in the *Ragionamenti* conclude that prostitution was the best option for the Renaissance woman, perhaps Aretino was making more than a flippant remark.

Titian's *Poesie* for Philip II

Titian's *Poesie* belong to an established genre and were the kind of non-religious painting sanctioned by classical precedent considered suitable for an aristocratic client. This genre is more predominantly central Italian and nothing comparable was produced in Venice until after 1550. The fresco decoration of the Roman Villa Suburbana on the Tiber belonging to the Sienese banker Agostino Chigi, carried out by Raphael and his workshop in 1512 is an early example of the genre.

The two series of mythological compositions were created for Alfonso d'Este and Philip II. The paintings Philip commissioned from Titian imposed special requirements only for the early portraits, a *Martyrdom of St Lawrence* (1567; Madrid, Escorial) and an *Allegory of Lepanto* (1572-1575; Venice). In all other instances it was Titian who made the choices, including the themes for the *Poesie*, and on several occasions he changed the subject without consulting the monarch. Titian's correspondence with Philip does not suggest any hidden meaning and Titian never explained the content, suggesting that the meaning was obvious. Carlo Ginzburg has demonstrated that Titian's *Diana and Actaeon* (1556-1559; Edinburgh, National Gallery, Collection of Duke of Sutherland) was not based on Neoplatonic, Stoic or any other philosophical notion but on a rather inaccurate current translation of Ovid, and that the same source was used for the *Perseus and Andromeda* (1536; London, Wallace Collection).⁵³⁷

References to the images as *poesie* occur in later correspondence, from 1554, where Titian refers to the mythological paintings as *poesie* in contrast to religious ones, which are defined as 'devout works' ('opere devote'). Titian's wording implies that the licence afforded by fictional literature gave him free rein to explore his artistic preoccupations. The paintings for Philip comprise a range of poetic images from the highly erotic to the dramatic, in which Titian explores different bodily forms, poses, and expressions through the female nude. Titian's letter to Philip written in

⁵³⁷ C. Ginzburg, *Tiziano e Venezia* (as in n. 325), pp. 125-135.

1554 leaves no doubt that his primary goal was to demonstrate his virtuosity by painting the female in a variety of postures, designed to enhance the visual experience. The letter also indicates that Titian was aware of the erotic charge of the paintings for the *camerino*:

And because Danae, which I have already sent to your Majesty, was shown from the front, in this *poesie* I wanted to vary and show the other side, so that the room where they are to be displayed makes a more gracious sight. Soon I will send the scene with Perseus and Andromede, which will have a different view, as will the Medea and Jason.⁵³⁸

Lodovico Dolce's lengthy description of the figure of Venus in Titian's *Venus and Adonis* (1551-1554; Madrid, Prado) (**figure 53**) focuses on the painter's mastery of the female nude as well as its appeal to the viewer. The beauty of the figure is described as 'not just extraordinary, but divine' and appropriate to Venus. Venus's pose is said to have been executed 'not for lack of art, but to demonstrate double art'. The female nude is the mark of the 'wonderful skill' of a 'divine spirit', manifested in the compressed flesh of Venus's behind. Dolce goes on to compare Titian with Apelles, referring to ancient art as a touchstone against which Titian's merits could be measured. Finally, he underscores the erotic qualities of the figure and its impact on the viewer:

There is no man so cold by age, or so hard of constitution, who will not feel warmed, softened and will not feel his blood running in his veins. No one should be surprised: if a statue made of marble could, with the stimulus of its beauty, penetrate a young man to the very marrow so much so that he left his stain on it, what could this one do, since she is made of flesh, and she is beauty itself, and she seems to breathe?⁵³⁹

The *Danae* (1554; Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum) (**figure 54**) was in Madrid in the summer of 1554 and Titian mentions the painting in a letter he sent to Philip in

⁵³⁸ T. Vecellio, *Tiziano le Lettere*, U. Fasolo (ed), p. 171: 'Et perché la Danae, ch'io mandai già a Vostra Maestà, si vedeva tutta dalla parte dinanzi, ho voluto in quest'altra poesie variare, e farlo mostrare la contraria parte, acioché riesca il camerino, dove hanno da stare, più gratiosa alla vista. Tosto manderò la Poesie di Perseo e Andromeda, che havrà un'altra vista diversa da queste; et così Medea et Iasone'.

⁵³⁹ L. Dolce, The Letter of Dolce to Alessandro Contarini, 1554 or 1555, as cited and translated by M. W. Roskill (as in n. 406), pp. 213-217: 'Ma vegniamo alla Venere, vedesi in questa un giudizio soprahumano. Che havendo egli a dipingere una così fatta Dea, si rappresentò nell'animo una bellezza non pure straordinaria, ma divina; e per dirlo in una parola, una bellezza conveniente a Venere, in guisa, ch'ella assembla quella, che meritò in Ida il pomo d'oro. Qui molte cose sono da dire, che hanno tutte del miracoloso e del celeste; ma io non m'assuro pur d'immaginarnele, che non che di scriverle. La Venere è volta di schena, non per mancamento d'arte, come fece quel dipintore, ma per dimostrar doppia arte. Perché nel girar del viso verso Adone, sforzandosi con ambe le braccia di ritenerlo, e meza sedendo sopra un drappo sodo di paonazzo, mostra da per tutto alcuni sentimenti dolci e vivi, e tali, che non si veggono, fuor che in lei: dove è ancora mirabile accortezza di questo spirito divino, che nell'ultime parti ci si conosce la macatura della carne causata dal sedere. Me che? Puossi con verità dire, che ogni colpo di penello sia de que' colpi, che suol far di sua mano la natura. Lo aspetto è parimente, quali si dee creder, che fosse quello di Venere, s'ella fu mai: nel quale appariscono manifesti segni della paura, che sentiva il suo cuore dell'infelice fine, che al giovane avvenne. E se alla Venere, che usciva dal mare, dipinta da Apelle, di cui fanno tanto rumore i Poeti, e gli Scrittori antichi, aveva la metà della bellezza, che si vede in questa, ella non fu indegna di quelle laudi. Vi giuro, Signor mio, che non si trova huomo tanto acuto di vista e di giudicio; che veggendola non la creda viva: niuno così affreddato da gli anni, o sì duro di complessione, che non si senta riscaldare, intenerire, e commoversi nelle vene tutto il sangue. Ne è maraviglia, che se una statua di marmo poté in modo con gli stimoli della sua bellezza penetrar nelle modolle d'un giovane, ch'ei vi lasciò la macchia: hor, che dee far questa, che è di carne; ch'è la beltà istessa; che par, che spiri?'.

October of that year, after Philip's marriage to Mary Tudor. Sensuality is conveyed through Danae's pose, her languid gaze and slightly open mouth as she receives the god appearing in the form of gold coins. The introduction of an old woman is particularly interesting, since it brings to the scene elements from the contemporary world, explored in many of the writings of Pietro Aretino.

Crouched behind the bed trying to catch the golden coins, the old woman is clearly a procuress from the world of prostitution. A bunch of keys (*chiavi*) is dangling around her waist, alluding to the sexual act which is about to take place, in that the Italian verb *chiavare* is a colloquial term for sexual intercourse.⁵⁴⁰ The old woman also assists the scene playing the role of voyeur. Here presence relates the nude to daily life and down-to-earth physical union and does not have the same kind of literary or antique precedent as the other paintings for Philip. It indicates that the preoccupation with the beautiful body and sexual performance in sixteenth-century daily life found its way into a painting for a foreign client believed to be highly conscious of propriety. The painting perfectly illustrates that the most sensuous female nudes are accompanied by elements from daily life.

Giulio Romano's earlier erotic painting, *The Lovers* (c. 1523-4; The Hermitage, St Petersburg) for Federico Gonzaga combines the antique and contemporary elements. The painting also contains a visual pun on the word *chiavi-chiavare*, as well as other references to the world of prostitution.⁵⁴¹ Vasari, who reports that he had seen Giulio's painting in the collection of Vespasiano Gonzaga, the Duke of Sabbioneta, presents the erotic function and the presence of the old bawd as the painting's essential characteristics:

... in which there is a young man and a young woman embracing on a bed, and they are caressing each other, while an old woman is spying on them from behind the door. The figures are just a little smaller than life-size and very gracious.⁵⁴²

The *all'antica* bed and the drapery create the impression of luxury. Illusions to love-making are depicted on the terminals of the legs of the bed which are composed of rectangles containing scenes of coupling satyrs, goats and nymphs. Another sexual allusion is evident in the female's plait which points straight at her partner's genitals she is about to reveal by pulling away the drapery. The old woman

⁵⁴⁰ Examples of puns on the terms *chiave* and *chiavare*, which occur frequently in sixteenth-century texts, include Cardinal Dovizi da Bibbiena's *La Calandria*, Aretino's *Sei Giornate - Ragionamenti*, and Anton Francesco Doni's treatise, *La Chiave*.

⁵⁴¹ S. Ferino Pagden has suggested the possible influence of Pietro Aretino concerning the subject matter of the painting. See S. Ferino Pagden, 'I Due Amanti di Leningrado', *Giulio Romano. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi su 'Giulio Romano e l'espansione europea del Rinascimento'*, Mantua, 1991, pp. 227-236.

⁵⁴² VBB, 1568, vol. 5, p. 74: 'nel quale è un giovane et una giovane abbracciati insieme sopra un letto, in atto di farsi carezze, mentre una vecchia dietro a un uscio nascostamente gli guarda: le quali sono figure poco meno che il naturale e molte graziose'.

standing behind the door creates a specific link with the world of prostitution, acting as both procuress and voyeur as her gaze invites the viewer to spy on the lovers. The dog accompanying her is sniffing at the bunch of keys around her waist, the visual pun for the sexual act about to take place. The keys give access to the room, implying the old woman's role as a procuress who in real life would have arranged the encounter in a brothel, bathhouse or other setting. Vasari's reference to the 'back entry' ('uscio'), could have a double meaning, suggesting not only the practice of sodomy, in that *uscio* refers to a smaller doorway, but also to the smaller back or side entry in brothels and bathhouses which led to the secret rooms used for sexual encounters.⁵⁴³

Conclusions

There is ample evidence to suggest that soon after the nude became a requirement of art, it was perceived as the most difficult and beautiful form in art which best demonstrated artistic skill. The many passages dedicated to the nude, most notably by artists, illustrate that it was a major concern, prompting the formulation of art-theoretical statements and the re-definition of art-critical terminology.

Verbal and visual sources clearly indicate that an interplay of different artistic procedures was pursued in the search for perfect physical beauty and the representation of bodily motion. Vasari's *Lives* and Cellini's biography clearly show that the search for perfect beauty in the live model brought the artist outside the confines of the workshop, while Danti developed theoretical assumptions to fit with the idea of the virile male body in action as the most functional and therefore the most beautiful adornment of the city of Florence.

Francesco Bocchi draws on these ideas, as well as Mini's notion of the new Florentine nobility, in order to celebrate the inhabitants of his native city and its most beautiful works of art. He amply demonstrates that the perfectly formed nude was an aesthetic form functioning most eloquently as an adornment of the city and supporting the civic myth of the physically fit male.

Sources pertaining to the virile female nude as the embodiment of a new kind of beauty suggest that it could fulfil similar functions as the male nude, as well as serve as a symbol of the negative effects produced by physical love.

⁵⁴³ On the use of *uscio* as an allusion to sodomy, see B. Talvacchia (as in n. 17), p. 43.

The examination on the female nude in Venetian circles aimed to demonstrate the close analogies between visual images and daily life, particularly the predilection for physical female beauty, the new emphasis on beauty treatment, physical love, and the world of courtesanship in connection with the Venetian civic myth constructed around the figure of Venus, in an attempt to shift attention away from Neoplatonic and sophisticated readings.

In conclusion, images of both the male and female nude have a strong basis in the social context in which they were created.

CHAPTER THREE

Ignudi bellissimi and 'la perfezione delle arti nostre' in Giorgio Vasari's *Lives* (1550 and 1568)

Introduction

Addressed to both artists and non-artists,⁵⁴⁴ the first edition of Giorgio Vasari's *Lives* was published amidst widespread interest by Lorenzo Torrentino in 1550.⁵⁴⁵ By 1548-49 there seems to have been real interest in the propagandistic scope of the *Lives* as a fitting text for Cosimo I's project to promote the Florentine state with regard to its literary and cultural achievements. Letters from early 1550 show that four Florentine men of letters, Pier Francesco Giambullari (1495-1555), Carlo Lenzoni (1501-1551), Cosimo Bartoli (1503-1572), and Vincenzo Borghini (1515-1580) were variously involved in editing and publishing the text.

The 1550 text comprises over one thousand pages in two volumes, including a dedication to Cosimo de' Medici, a general introduction ('Proemio'),⁵⁴⁶ and separate chapters dealing with architecture (*Dell'architettura*),⁵⁴⁷ sculpture (*Della scultura*)⁵⁴⁸ and painting (*Della pittura*).⁵⁴⁹ The biographies of artists from Cimabue to Michelangelo make up the bulk of the text and were modelled on the kind of eulogy perfected by the historian Paolo Giovio.⁵⁵⁰ The biographies are divided into three sections each preceded by a preface, suggesting that art works of a particular period or age (the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, respectively) share certain characteristics, that is, a period style or *maniera*.⁵⁵¹ The

⁵⁴⁴ VBB, 1550 ('Proemio'), & 1568 ('Proemio di tutta l'opera'), pp. 9-30.

⁵⁴⁵ Based on Vasari's own notes, information provided by contemporaries, memory and a small number of earlier texts, the biographies were written in a surprisingly short time, between autumn 1546 and 1547. Vasari was in Florence while much of the *Lives* were being written, hence the scant evidence pertaining to the various writing stages. After Vasari's departure in autumn 1549 there is more documentary evidence pertaining to the stages of publication and collaboration of others. For an analysis of the circumstances surrounding the composition of the text, see P. L. Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari: Art and History*, New Haven and London, 1995, pp. 148-230.

⁵⁴⁶ VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 1, pp. 9-30; *ibid.*, 1568 'Proemio di tutta l'opera'.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 31-81.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 82-110.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 111-172.

⁵⁵⁰ Although incomplete, W. Kallab's *Vasaristudien*, J. Schlosser (ed), Vienna and Leipzig, 1908, was the first text to attempt a systematic analysis of Vasari's sources, particularly for the Quattro and Cinquecento. Kallab suggested the existence of a lost source book, *Schrift-K*, used by Vasari but no longer traceable. He also pointed out that other writers had contributed to the biographies and accompanying texts, *ibid.*, pp. 147-8 and 444-449. Ghiberti's *Commentari* was identified as one of the main sources for the biographies up to the sixteenth century. On Vasari's use of Ghiberti, *ibid.*, pp. 151-7 and P. L. Rubin (as in n. 545), pp. 171-174. Other possible sources for the text as a whole include F. Albertini's guide to Florence, 'Memoriale di Molte Statue et Picture nella inclyta Cipta di Florentia', Rome, 1510, repr. in *Five Early Guides to Rome and Florence*, P. Murray (ed), Farnborough, Hants, 1972; A. Manetti's *Vita di Filippo Brunelleschi preceduta la Novella del Grasso*, D. de Robertis and G. Tanturli (eds), Milan, 1976, and *Il Libro di Billi* (as in n. 287). Unspecified writings by Raphael and Ghirlandaio are also mentioned.

⁵⁵¹ The first preface is entitled 'Proemio delle vite', VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 2, pp. 3-32; the preface to the second period is called 'Proemio della seconda parte delle vite', VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 3, pp. 3-19, while

first age begins with Cimabue and ends with Lorenzo de' Bicci, the second opens with Jacopo della Quercia and ends with the life of Pietro Perugino, while the third starts with Leonardo da Vinci and concludes with Michelangelo, with whom the development of art reaches its peak. The biographies make up a richly layered text containing descriptions of art works, a variety of observations and value judgements, as well as discussions of artistic techniques and a complex baggage of fluid critical terms, which play a fundamental role in Vasari's value system.⁵⁵²

The revised and much expanded second edition of the *Lives* was published by Giunti in 1568.⁵⁵³ Serious work on the new edition does not seem to have been

the preface to the third age is referred to as 'Proemio della terza parte delle vite, VBB, vol. 4, 1550 & 1568, pp. 3-13.

⁵⁵² Scholars have been divided over the relative importance of the various parts of the text. W. Kallab believed the special value of Vasari's perception of art lay in the variety of observations and judgements made throughout the text. Conversely, J. Schlosser believed that a systematic analysis should take as its starting point the prefaces and the terminology. According to Schlosser, the main theoretical views are expounded in the prefaces and art is judged according to the five terms discussed there; see J. Schlosser, *Die Kunstliteratur*, Vienna, 1924, Italian trans., *La Letteratura artistica*, Florence, 1977, pp. 289-346, esp. pp. 315-322 and 323-346. In her excellent study, 'Ekphrasis and Aesthetic Attitudes in Vasari's *Lives*, *JWCI*, vol. 23, 1960, pp. 190-215, S. L. Alpers emphasised the importance of analysing the biographies, particularly the value judgements, which are seen as the key to understanding Vasari's perception of art. Alpers believed Vasari's value judgements were examples of verbal evocations of actual paintings intended to bring the subject before the mind's eye of the reader, that is, examples of ekphrasis as used by Greek rhetoricians from the second century AD principally as an attempt to convey the visual impression and emotional responses evoked by a work of art and as a form of praise. While the earlier tradition of ekphrasis used works of art as a starting point for displays of virtuosity, the value judgements in the *Lives* are concerned also with the mastery of specific techniques and reveal a critical terminology of enormous import. For a detailed analysis of ekphrasis, see L. James and R. Webb, 'To understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places: Ekphrasis and Art in Byzantium', *Art History*, vol. 14, 1991, pp. 1-17, and R. Webb, 'Ekphrasis', *Dictionary of Art*, J. Turner (ed), Macmillan, London/Grove, New York, 1996, 2nd edn, 1998, vol. 10, pp. 128-131. T. S. R. Boase addressed various aspects of the *Lives*, including the two editions, the biographies of Raphael and Michelangelo, and so-called *maniera greca* and *maniera tedesca*. Of particular interest is the discussion of Vasari's criticism, seen to comprise descriptions of individual paintings with the focus on narrative art and emotional responses, and the critical terms and values applied, including imitation, design, anatomy, perspective and grace; see T. S. T. S. R. Boase, *Giorgio Vasari: The Man and the Book*, Princeton, NJ, 1979. In his brief but informative article, 'Doing Justice to Vasari', *Times Literary Supplement*, 1 February 1980, p. 111, M. Baxandall emphasised the need to include the technical chapters in an analysis of the text in order to gain a better understanding of the key conceptual terms which are expounded there for the first time. Baxandall also underscored the significance of the fluid terminology forming part of Vasari's critical baggage in the biographical sections. The fluidity of the terms applied in Vasari's value judgements has also been noted by P. Barocchi, 'Michelangelo tra le due redazioni delle Vite vasariani (1550-68)', *Studi vasariani*, Turin, 1984, pp. 35-52.

⁵⁵³ References to sources are more plentiful in the second edition. Extensive use was made of the histories of Paulus Diaconus, chronicles, including the texts of Giovanni and Matteo Villani, and Filarete's treatise on architecture. The letter on ancient art was commissioned from Giovanni Battisti Adriani. Unacknowledged excerpts were taken from Condivi's biography of Michelangelo, though a reference to it is made at the beginning of Michelangelo's Life, VBB, 1568, vol. 6, pp. 6-7. The insertion rejects Condivi's claim that Michelangelo had never worked under Ghirlandaio by transcribing the deed of his apprenticeship. On the use of Condivi's *Vita*, see J. Wilde, *Michelangelo. Six Lectures*, Oxford, 1978, pp. 1-16 and P. Barocchi (as in n. 552), pp. 35-52. Information was also provided by friends, collaborators and correspondents, including Fra' Marco de' Medici in Verona, G. B. Grassi, and Danese Cattaneo. After Bartoli moved to Venice, where he became one of Vasari's informants, Vincenzo Borghini became Vasari's chief literary adviser. Borghini wanted Vasari to write a general history of painting and sculpture and to include more works in other parts of Italy, such as Milan, Naples, Venice, and Genoa. On this point, see K. Frey, letter dated 14 August 1564, Vincenzo Borghini to Giorgio Vasari, *Die literarisches Nachlass Giorgio Vasari*, 2 vols., Munich, vol. 2, pp. 100-102. Borghini's assistance is acknowledged in a digression of the Life of Cimabue, VBB, 1568, vol. 2, p. 43. For a detailed analysis of the role and influence of Vincenzo Borghini in the 1568 edition, see R. Williams, 'Vincenzo Borghini and Vasari's *Lives*', PhD thesis, Princeton University, 1988. According to P. L. Rubin, Borghini's chief contribution lay in a standard of assessment based on documentary evidence, the direct presentation of facts, an increased interest in fourteenth-century artists, and a historical context in which political events feature more prominently and the role of the Medici emerges more clearly; see P. L. Rubin (as in n. 545), pp. 199-201.

started until the early 1560s.⁵⁵⁴ The first parts of the second edition were already being published in the summer of 1564 when the other sections were being revised.⁵⁵⁵

The revised text is three times longer than its predecessor and the section on artists of Vasari's own time was extended and published in a separate volume. The text was given a more complete chronological order and wider geographical scope. A brief section was added on northern artists (Flemish and German) and in the last volume a section was dedicated to the then young members of the Accademia del Disegno. Among the additions were references to private collections, especially to drawings in Vasari's own *Libro de' Disegni*, which he had begun collecting during his apprenticeship (1528-1529) with Vittorio Ghiberti, who gave him drawings by several fourteenth-century artists and Lorenzo Ghiberti.

While new biographies were added, insertions and changes were made to existing biographies.⁵⁵⁶ With the additions and new biographies the section on the third period was much longer than the other two. Many scholars believe the new edition transformed the text, sacrificing the unified structure and the original plan of the 1550 *Lives*.⁵⁵⁷ Convinced that the two editions illustrate two different kinds of

⁵⁵⁴ For a discussion of the changes in Vasari's life which are believed to have helped shape the second edition, see P. L. Rubin (as in n. 545), pp. 187-226. Rubin's overemphasis on Vasari's omnipresence in the second edition tends to obscure significant new passages.

⁵⁵⁵ See P. L. Rubin (as in n. 545), pp. 187-200.

⁵⁵⁶ W. Kallab was the first to note the considerable differences between the two editions, pointing out that the second edition was more factual with less emphasis on anecdotes and moral lessons, and that many of the errors of the first edition had been corrected. See W. Kallab (as in n. 550), pp. 293-402. See also R. Bettarini, 'Vasari scrittore: come la Torrentiniana diventò Giuntina', *Il Vasari Storiografo e Artista: atti del congresso internazionale nel IV centenario della morte (Arezzo-Firenze, 2-8 settembre 1974)*, Florence, 1976, pp. 485-500; Z. Wazbinski, 'L'idée de l'histoire dans la première et la seconde édition des vies de Vasari', *ibid.*, pp. 1-25; P. Barocchi (as in n. 552), pp. 35-52 and *ibid.*, 'L'antibiografia del secondo Vasari', *Giorgio Vasari tra decorazione ambientale e storiografia artistica. Atti del convegno di studi (Arezzo, 8-10 October 1981)*, ed. G. C. Garfagnini, Firenze, 1985, pp. 157-170; P. L. Rubin (as in n. 545), pp. 187-230.

⁵⁵⁷ J. Schlosser (as in n. 552) held that the additions in the biographies of Michelangelo and Raphael, relating to the particular perfection of each artist, gave the text a less unified order. See also U. Scoti-Bertinelli, *Giorgio Vasari Scrittore*, Pisa, 1905, pp. 79-82. L. Venturi pointed out that the second edition associated Raphael with a particular kind of perfection, while Michelangelo represented 'perfection'; see L. Venturi, 'La critica di Giorgio Vasari', *Studi Vasariani. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi per il IV centenario della prima edizione delle Vite del Vasari* (Firenze, 16-19 Settembre 1950), Firenze, 1952, pp. 29-46, esp. p. 42. P. Barocchi claimed that the second edition expresses greater admiration for Raphael, see P. Barocchi (as in n. 552), pp. 35-52 and *ibid.* (as in n. 556), pp. 157-170. According to A. M. Brizio, the second edition acknowledges the existence of other types of perfection achieved through different types of procedures and styles. See A. M. Brizio, 'La prima e la seconda edizione delle "Vite"', *Studi Vasariani: atti del convegno internazionale di studi per il IV centenario della prima edizione delle Vite del Vasari* (Firenze, 16-19 Settembre 1950), Firenze, 1952, pp. 83-90. A similar view was held by Z. Wazbinski (as in n. 556), who noted that the scheme of development becomes more complex in the second edition on account of the discussion of different artistic interests though the original plan of the *Lives* remains essentially intact. P. L. Rubin (as in n. 545), p. 33, has stated that the two editions are fused, the main difference being that the approach to historical writing transformed a closed historical system into an open-ended compendium of artistic achievements. See R. Williams (as in n. 553), who also noted a shift in the second edition, attributing the more historically accurate text to the influence of Vincenzo Borghini. See also R. Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy: From Techne to Metatechne*, Cambridge, 1997, p. 29. According to Williams, the climax is no longer with Michelangelo but a detailed account of the decorations for the wedding of Prince Francesco de' Medici in 1565 with the collaboration of the academicians as promising newcomers, illustrating the triumph of the *bella maniera* in a commission celebrating the Medici. On the continuing importance and appreciation of

perfection, Svetlana Alpers emphasised the central importance of the terms imitation (*imitazione*), invention (*invenzione*) and drawing/design (*disegno*) in the biographical sections and in relation to certain parts of the technical chapters. She concluded that the plan of the *Lives* relates imitation as the means or skill of art perfected over time and invention (narration or story-telling) as the constant end of art.⁵⁵⁸ According to Alpers, the 1550 plan leads to the complete perfection of Michelangelo, while specific additions in the 1568 edition point to two different kinds of perfection in terms of imitation and invention.⁵⁵⁹ The notion of complete perfection in the 1550 edition is transformed into the notion of absolute perfection in the 1568 edition.⁵⁶⁰ Michelangelo excels in the representation of the nude, while Raphael is associated with perfect inventions, a story-teller in pictures with appropriate costumes, postures and emotional expression, the kind of perfection understood as the wide range of painting ('il campo largo'), including a mastery of portraits, landscapes, natural phenomena, drapery, and so on. Raphael is thus the embodiment of the universal painter despite his inability to conquer the supreme difficulty of the nude, which represents the only possible area of absolute perfection. In terms of the progress of art, absolute perfection refers to the particular perfection of representational means, while the ends of art are susceptible to an infinite variety of perfect inventions: 'with Michelangelo the technical equipment of the painter has been completed, *disegno* is perfected, and the artist must now cultivate the end of art, making inventions'.⁵⁶¹

While the *Lives* have claimed the attention of many art historians who have focused on the whole text, parts of it, and the art-critical terminology used, the text has never been analysed in relation to the representation of the nude and its role in the various parts of the text in the two editions. This chapter presents the findings of such an analysis, which took as its starting point a computerised search of the terms *ignudo* and *nudo* and their cognates, tracing their use in different parts of text in both editions. References to the artistic, aesthetic, and stylistic terms with which the nude is associated are examined in detail. The findings of this research point to the key role played by the nude in both editions of the *Lives*, and draw on and revise Svetlana Alper's interpretation of the plan of the *Lives* in terms of the notions of perfection. In addition, this investigation illuminates the analogies and differences between painting and sculpture, while shedding light on the possible authorship of different parts of the text.

the nude in relation to the decorations for the wedding ceremony of Francesco de' Medici, see P. Ginori Conti (as in n. 292), p. 187.

⁵⁵⁸ S. L. Alpers (as in n. 552), pp. 214-215.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

PART ONE: THE TECHNICAL SECTIONS – Key Terminology in *Della pittura* and *Della scultura*

In order to understand the parameters used in the biographies to assess the merits of the human figure in general and of the nude in particular, we need to turn to the technical sections, where many of the key conceptual terms are elucidated for the first time. The technical chapters deal with the materials and techniques of painting and sculpture and provide definitions of the required qualities and related artistic practices. The technical chapters help us to locate the points of contact between the biographical and technical sections, clarify the different values attached to individual artistic merits and stylistic qualities, and the artistic innovations achieved over time, casting a new light on Vasari's critical lexical baggage.

Evidence that Vasari must have been the author of at least part of the chapter on sculpture is provided by a letter written to Vincenzo Borghini.⁵⁶² This chapter sets out the qualities related to the nude in general terms. *Ignudo* refers both to a sculpted nude body and the shape of the body revealed under garments ('ignudo di sotto').⁵⁶³ The basic standards established for sculpture require that the figure be similar to the depicted object ('somiglianza a quella cosa'), possess a proportioned body with limbs which are both anatomically accurate and fit the age of the figure, and display a certain posture (*attitudine*). In addition, individual pieces of sculpture should present good design (*disegno*), accord among the parts (*unione*), grace (*grazia*) and diligence (*diligenza*).⁵⁶⁴ The nude, hair, and clothing all require particular care.⁵⁶⁵ Finally, the sculpture should be perfect when viewed from different points.

In passages dedicated to the proportions of the human figure, fixed measurements are discarded in favour of the judgement of the eye (*giudizio dell'occhio*), that is, the sculptor should adjust the proportions of figures according to the pose or the final setting of the work rather than rely on fixed mathematical measurements. By gauging measurements by means of the eye, the artist is more likely to succeed in

⁵⁶² K. Frey (as in n. 292), pp. 256-257 and commentary, pp. 258-262, Letter 11-12 February 1550, before 22 February 1550. The letter requests that a certain passage be changed because it distorts the meaning. On this letter, see P. L. Rubin (as in n. 545), p. 111.

⁵⁶³ Anton Francesco Doni formulated a similar notion, stating that beautiful drapery is dependent on the beauty of the body beneath. See A. F. Doni, *Disegno*, Venice, 1549, p. 15.

⁵⁶⁴ On Vasari's approach to sculpture in the two editions of *Lives*, see P. F. Collins, 'Vasari on Sculpture', PhD thesis, London University, Warburg Institute, 1982; on Vasari's knowledge and first-hand experience of sculpture, see especially pp. 1-17. For a discussion of Vasari's understanding and treatment of sculpture in the *Lives*, see T. Frangenberg, 'The Art of Talking about Sculpture: Vasari, Borghini, Bocchi', *JWCI*, 58, 1995, pp. 115-131.

⁵⁶⁵ VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 1, pp. 82-86.

creating figures which display proportion (*proporzione*), grace (*grazia*), design (*disegno*) and perfection (*perfezione*).

Here and elsewhere in the chapter on sculpture, the level of perfection the sculptor should seek to attain is evoked in general terms. Some of the most frequent parameters for gauging the merits of sculpture in the biographies include the extent to which individual sculptural works equal or surpass nature or the antique, though specific works are rarely mentioned. Donatello's statues and reliefs are exemplary of these two parameters, in that he is praised for the liveliness of his figures and his equalling of the ancients. Comparing these standards with value judgements in individual biographies, one can infer that the standards for sculpture take into account the artistic achievements of both the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, with particular reference to the historical development of sculpture in Florence. In Quattrocento Florence relief sculpture was seen as indicative of the general development of art in terms of the imitation of natural objects, the grouping of figures together, as well as rivalling the merits of ancient art. Accordingly, Vasari underscores the achievements of Donatello and Ghiberti in this medium. Progress in sculpture reaches its peak in the unsurpassed heights of Michelangelo's sculpted nudes. Descriptions and value judgements of Michelangelo's sculpture focus on the various parts of the body and the whole body indicating the central importance of *disegno* and *grazia*, as well as of artistic anatomy, qualities which lead to the surpassing of both nature and the antique.

A lengthy discussion of the artistic processes associated with the mastery of the nude is provided in the chapter on painting, where selected passages illuminate terms like *disegno*, *grazia*, *proporzione* and *perfezione* appearing in *Della scultura*. The chapter on sculpture thus implies or requires a knowledge of these passages, suggesting that they may have been written first or that Vasari was keen to focus attention on them in relation to painting rather than sculpture.⁵⁶⁶

Selected passages in *Della pittura* contain an exposition of the theoretical assumptions embedded in the biographies. These assumptions, which are based on a specific set of artistic practices intimately bound up with the nude and the artistic achievements of the mid sixteenth century, point to the development of earlier formulations made by Leo Battista Alberti, Filarete, Francesco Di Giorgio and

⁵⁶⁶ Extracts from Vasari's *paragone* debate, which are found in his letter of 12/2/1547 addressed to Benedetto Varchi, appear in the preface to the entire work; VBB 1550 & 1568, vol. 1, pp. 11-27, esp. p. 15. The letter demonstrates that Vasari possessed an acute understanding of pictorial phenomena, stressing, as he does, the wide range of phenomena which can be depicted in painting but which is beyond the sculptor. Vasari's discussion is confusingly structured, requiring re-elaboration, a point pursued elsewhere in this chapter. Other points which Vasari presents in favour of painting include the variety of postures of human figures and foreshortening. It is interesting to note that Vasari does not put

Leonardo. It is deeply significant that Vasari's exposition demonstrates the historical development of the terms applied in the earlier writings. Key conceptual terms relating to the nude comprise different types of imitation, the study of anatomy, *disegno*, *grazia*, artistic imagination (*fantasia*), invention and the arrangement of figures, colouring, and foreshortening. These passages are thus also highly instructive as regards the potential of painting and sculpture.

Vero disegno fondato, grazia and the bella maniera

The discussion of *disegno fondato* is central to the representation of the nude and the two notions of perfection. Since it establishes a hierarchy of technical skills and aesthetic merits and related artistic processes, it is worth quoting in its entirety:

All of this is the result of drawing and having copied figures from life, or from models of figures made to represent anything one wishes to make. Design cannot have good origin if it has not come from the continual practice of copying natural objects, and from the study of paintings by excellent masters and of ancient statues in relief, as has been said many times. But above all, the best thing is to draw men and women from the nude and thus fix in the memory by constant exercise the muscles of the torso, back legs, arms, and knees, with the bones underneath. Then one can be sure that through much study postures in any position can be formed from imagination without needing to see the living forms in view. Again, having seen human bodies dissected one knows how bones lie, and the muscles and sinews, and all the order and conditions of anatomy, so the limbs can be placed correctly and the muscles of the body arranged with greater surety. And those who have this knowledge will certainly draw the outlines of figures perfectly, and these, when drawn as they should be, show good grace and a beautiful style.⁵⁶⁷

Disegno fondato stems from different kinds of imitation and a specific kind of artistic training involving the interplay of imitation of nature, anatomical studies, and the observation of excellent ancient and modern art. The focus on the study of the male and female live model as the best type of imitation is of fundamental importance. Defined as the contours of objects, *disegno* demonstrates the artist's skill and knowledge most clearly in the nude figure. The ability to create the contours of the nude is not merely a skill enhanced by continuous practice and learning; the nude itself is endowed with aesthetic and stylistic qualities, such as

forward any arguments in favour of sculpture. The letter is reprinted in P. Barocchi, *Scritti d'arte del Cinquecento*, 1971-1977, 3 vols., Milan and Naples, 1971, vol. 1, pp. 493-499.

⁵⁶⁷ VBB, 1550 & 1568, *Della pittura*, vol. 1, p. 114: 'la qual cosa nasca dal disegno e da lo avere ritratto o figure di naturale vive o da' modelli di figure fatte per quel che si voglia fare; il qual disegno non può avere buon'origine, se non s'ha dato continuamente opera a ritrarre cose naturali e studiato pitture d'eccellenti maestri ed istatue anche di rilievo. Ma soprattutto, il meglio è gli ignudi degli uomini vivi e femmine, e da quelli aver preso in memoria per lo continovo uso i muscoli del torso, delle schiene, delle gambe, delle braccia, delle ginocchia e l'ossa di sotto, e poi aver sicurtà per lo molto studio che senza avere i naturali innanzi si possa formare di fantasia da sé attitudini per ogni verso, così aver veduto degli uomini scorticati per sapere come stanno l'ossa di sotto et i muscoli et i nervi con tutti gli ordine della notoria, per poter con maggior sicurtà e più rettamente situare le membra e porre muscoli nelle figure. E coloro che ciò sanno, forza è che facciano perfettamenteemente i contorni delle figure, le quali distornate come elle debbono mostrano buona grazia e bella maniera'. The English translation here and all subsequent translations concerning passages from the technical sections are adapted from L. S. Machlehole, *Vasari On Technique*, New York, 1907, pp. 209-210.

good grace ('buona grazia') and 'beautiful style' ('bellissima maniera').⁵⁶⁸ The ability to produce perfectly formed nudes is thus associated with the manifestation of three special qualities, *disegno*, *grazia* and *bellissima maniera*, which are the main attributes of absolute perfection in both painting and sculpture.

Vasari was not the first to associate *disegno* with the contours of objects. Cristoforo Landino defined Andrea del Castagno (1423?-1457) as a *disegnatore* or exponent of design, indicating that he was skilled in drawing lines defining forms and their position in space by accurately delineating the edges and parts of an object.⁵⁶⁹ Ghiberti underlined the importance of the practice of drawing and with reference to the drawings of Parrhasios, he wrote that embellished contours ('dintorni vaghi e leggiadri') are the greatest perfection of art, which the skilled ('periti') do well. The ability to make such contours is innate, as is the ability to create gracious expression ('graziosa aria').⁵⁷⁰ Summarising Ghiberti's assumptions, it emerges that embellished contours are associated with *ingenium* and nature rather than technique, and are comparable to invention in poetry.

Vasari is, however, the first writer to link *disegno* with specific artistic practices, which centre on perfecting the lowly, muscular male nude, and to relate them explicitly to the notion of absolute perfection. Vasari thus summed up artistic practices associated with the muscular nude and formulated a theoretical precept related to supreme perfection in art.

Disegno is also perceived to have an image-forming capacity. Interestingly, this notion appears in a passage in the chapter on sculpture in the 1550 edition, where *disegno* is defined as technical skill brings to life the image formed in the mind of the sculptor:

sculpture is an art form which takes away the superfluous from the given material and reduces it to that shape of the body which is designed in the idea of the artist.⁵⁷¹

By piecing together this definition with the assumptions formulated above we can arrive at a new formula for the artistic process. Transforming an object into a work of art involves both technical mastery and an intellective faculty. Any given image, first formed in the artist's mind, is controlled and created by the artist and brought to perfection by means of his skills of execution.

⁵⁶⁸ T. S. R. Boase (as in n. 552), p. 124. Boase defines Vasari's understanding of *disegno* as the interrelation of curves and spirals, which, through grace, transmute nature into something more appealing in its beauty than what natural objects provide.

⁵⁶⁹ See M. Baxandall (as in n. 272), pp. 139-41.

⁵⁷⁰ L. Ghiberti (as in n. 333), p. 70.

⁵⁷¹ VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 1, p. 82: 'che levando il superfluo dalla materia soggetta, la riduce a quella forma di corpo che nella idea dello artefice è disegnata.'

This concept is developed in a passage added at the beginning of the chapter on painting in the 1568 edition. The passage underscores the qualities of *disegno* and inventive power as the essential attribute of the arts of architecture, sculpture and painting.

Seeing that design, the parent of our three arts, architecture, sculpture, and painting, having its origin in the intellect, draws out from many single things a general judgement, it is like a form or idea of all the objects in nature, most marvellous in what it composes, for not only the bodies of men and of animals but also in plants, in buildings, in sculpture and in painting, design is cognizant of the proportion of the whole to the parts, and of the parts to each other, and to the whole. Seeing too that from this knowledge there arises a certain conception and judgement, so that there is formed in the mind that something which afterwards, when expressed by the hands, is called design, we may conclude that design is no other than a visible expression and declaration of our conception and of that which others have imagined and given form to in their idea.⁵⁷²

The new passage reiterates the definition of *disegno* as the contour or profile of things and its role in the artistic process as the combination of mental and manual qualities, giving further prominence to the mastery of *disegno* as one of the greatest artistic achievements. The hand must be capable of expressing the idea conceived by the artist and requires the assiduous practice of drawing natural objects, in order to produce perfectly proportioned forms. The mastery of *disegno* demonstrates the artist's perfection (*perfezzione*), excellence (*eccellenza*) and knowledge (*sapere*). *Disegno* is the vehicle through which the image-making capacity of the sculptor, architect, and painter is manifested using a variety of media. As an intellectual quality, which has its source in the artist's mind, *disegno* is the animating principle of all creative processes and pertains to the three arts of design as the mark of *ingenium*. As a form created by the artist, it is intimately

⁵⁷² Ibid., 1568, vol. 1, p. 111: 'Perché il disegno, padre delle tre arti nostre architettura, scultura e pittura, procedendo dall'intelletto cava di molte cose un giudizio universale simile a una forma ovvero idea di tutte le cose della natura, la quale è singolarissima nelle sue misure, di qui è che non solo nei corpi umani e degli animali, ma nelle piante ancora e nelle fabbriche e sculture e pitture, conosce la proporzione che ha il tutto con le parti e che hanno le parti fra loro e col tutto insieme; e perché da questa cognizione nasce un certo concetto e giudizio, che si forma nella mente quella tal cosa che poi espressa con le mani si chiama disegno, si può concludere che esso disegno altro non sia che una apparente espressione e dichiarazione del concetto che si ha nell'animo, e di quello che altri si è nella mente imaginato e fabbricato nell'idea'. English translation by L. S. Machleose (as in n. 567), pp. 205-206. The passage was composed in the summer of 1564, not long before the third volume went to press. There is documentary evidence that the new section was still unwritten in April of that year; see K. Frey (as in n. 553), vol. 2, p. 78. The draft of the beginning of the section, one of the few extant drafts for the 1568 edition, is conserved in a single sheet and is reproduced by U. Scoti-Bertinelli (as in n. 557), pp. 82-84. The draft expresses the ideas rather awkwardly and was probably given its final, polished form by V. Borghini; see R. Williams (as in n. 557), pp. 29-32. Various readings of the passage have been proposed. Earlier scholarship recognised Platonic elements expressed in terms like 'form' and 'idea'; see W. Kallab (as in n. 550), p. 453. E. Panofsky observed that Vasari used the term 'idea' to refer to the faculty of the soul similar to *fantasia* or *imaginatio*, with which it could be loosely synonymous. Panofsky believed the passage misconstrued the Platonic theory of ideas, implying that its substance lay elsewhere; see E. Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, J. S. Peake (trans.), New York, 1968, pp. 62-63. A. Blunt remarked on the generally Aristotelian flavour of Vasari's definition; see A. Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy, 1450-1600*. See also R. Williams (as in n. 557), pp. 34-43. Williams explores the connections between Aristotle and the Cinquecento debate on art as expounded by B. Varchi and V. Borghini. According to R. Williams, the passage is an extension of Borghini's universal history of art with *disegno* as the main theme. Vasari aims to synthesise Plato and Aristotle in the belief that the two different ways of defining *disegno* are not incompatible. Williams concludes that Vasari is suggesting that the practitioners of *disegno* share an understanding of universals like poets, orators and philosophers and defines Vasari's *disegno* as a 'figurative mode of thought'. On Vasari's use of *disegno*, see also D. Summers (as in n. 296), pp. 229, 519 and 526.

bound up with perfect proportion and synonymous with a particular kind of invention.⁵⁷³ Artistic judgement and the right kind of training are also seen as essential if the artist is to make the image in the mind's eye visible.⁵⁷⁴

With respect to sculpture, *disegno* primarily concerns creating the contours of figures and should be visible from every view of the figure, a quality of sculpture which was arousing increasing interest at that time.⁵⁷⁵ The 1568 reference to painting in the same section reaffirms the 1550 definition of the role of *disegno* as serving to create contours of figures, which are well designed and proportioned, displaying excellence and perfection.

'Formare di fantasia da sé attitudini per ogni verso': The Notion of Inventive Power in Painting:
Collocazione, invenzione and fantasia

In the opening passage of *Della pittura*, Vasari discusses the requirements for the preparatory stages of painting, first worked out on paper, in a cartoon or other drawing. These requirements comprise good arrangement of figures (*collocazione*), skill in drawing (*disegno fondato*), judgement of the eye (*giudizio*) and invention (*invenzione*).⁵⁷⁶ The figural basis of composition stems from the artistic practices discussed above. These artistic practices, particularly the observation and understanding of the live model, help the artist develop a good working method, which is the source of invention, that is, the grouping together of figures to create an *istoria*, the theme or subject to be represented. Invention is thus perceived in figural terms rather than in terms of literary content, which is subordinate to it:

Hence springs the invention which groups figures in fours, sixes, tens, twenties, in such a manner as to represent battles and other great subjects of art.⁵⁷⁷

Invention, understood as the grouping together of several figures to create a scene or the range of figures in various poses created by means of *fantasia* is beyond the scope of the sculptor. Sculpture is primarily seen as a single free-standing sculpted

⁵⁷³ On this last point, see T. S. R. Boase (as in n. 552), p. 124, where the 1568 definition of *disegno* is seen in relation to the concept of invention.

⁵⁷⁴ VBB, 1568, vol. 1, p. 111: 'questo disegno ha bisogno, quando cava l'invenzione d'una qualche cosa dal giudizio, che la mano sia mediante lo studio et esercizio di molti anni spedita et atta a disegnare et esprimere bene qualunque cosa ha la natura creato'. For English translation, see L. S. Machlehole, (as in n. 567), p. 207.

⁵⁷⁵ VBB, 1568, vol. 1, p. 112.

⁵⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 114: 'il quale è necessario che [cartone ovvero altro disegno] sia condotto con buona collocazione e disegno fondato e con giudizio et invenzione, attesoche la collocazione non è altro nella pittura che avere spartito in quell loco dove si fa una figura, che gli spazii siano concordi al giudizio de l'occhio e non siano disformi, ch'il campo sia in un luogo pieno e ne l'altro vòto'.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 115: 'per chi studia le pitture e le sculture buone fatte con simil modo, vedendo et intendendo il vivo, è necessario che abbia fatto buona maniera nell'arte. E da ciò nasce l'invenzione, la quale fa mettere insieme in istoria le figure a quattro, a sei, a dieci, a venti, talmente ch'è si viene a formare le battaglie e l'altre cose grandi dell'arte'.

figure in keeping with developments in both art theory and practice.⁵⁷⁸ In *Della scultura*, the term invention is applied to relief sculpture but not to free-standing sculpture.⁵⁷⁹

Of particular significance in relation to the nude and inventive power is Vasari's application of the term *fantasia*, which is seen as a special attribute of the painter. In the opening passage on *disegno* it is implied that the ultimate goal of the painter's study and memory of postures of live nude bodies and anatomy is to 'form from one's imagination a variety of postures' ('si possa formare di fantasia da sé attitudini per ogni verso'), with the potential to create an infinite variety with regard to the chosen theme. During the Renaissance the term *fantasia* came to be associated with a particular kind of invention as artistic goals shifted from the mere imitation of natural objects (*mimesis*) and began to focus on the creation of new forms on the part of the artist (*fantasia*).⁵⁸⁰

In order to gain a better understanding of Vasari's contribution to this concept, it is useful to trace its historical development from the fifteenth to the early sixteenth century and to consider the different understandings of invention. In Renaissance art theory, the different application of the term in antiquity became increasingly differentiated.⁵⁸¹ Literary-poetic invention concerned the topics for painting, such as iconographical schemes, variations on mythological scenes and histories, new allegories, or new ornaments for the main scene. This kind of invention relates primarily to ways of telling a story. Many humanists believed that it was the task of the humanist or client to provide the invention, while the artist provided the technical skill needed to carry it out.⁵⁸² Another meaning of *invenzione* was

⁵⁷⁸ On this point, see M. C. Ciardi Duprè Dal Poggetto, 'Nuove ipotesi sul Cellini', *Essays presented to Myron P. Gilmore, II, History of Art, History of Music*, S. Bertelli and G. Ramakus (eds), Florence 1978, pp. 95-106; L. O. Larsson, *Von allen Seiten gleich schön. Studien zum Begriff der Vielansichtigkeit in der europäischen Plastik von der Renaissance bis zum Klassizismus*, Stockholm 1974.

⁵⁷⁹ VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 1, pp. 92-6. On the application of *invenzione* to sculptural works, see T. Frangenberg (as in n. 564), pp. 116-8.

⁵⁸⁰ M. Kemp, 'From 'mimesis' to 'fantasia': the Quattrocento vocabulary of creation, inspiration and genius in the visual arts', *Viator*, vol. 8, 1977, pp. 347-398. According to S. J. Campbell, one of Vasari's objectives was to demonstrate Michelangelo's independence from *mimesis*. Campbell relates this objective to Florentine artistic circles concerned with the similarities between human creation and divine creation, that is, works come into being by miraculous rather than human means. Hence making figures seem alive was the outcome of an authentic visionary power and Campbell cites Vasari's comments on Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* as evidence. Campbell states that contemporaries believed the ability to create figures with dynamic energy was conceived in the Promethean *fantasia* of the artist rather than after human beings, and that the rendering of motion was a divine gift, a manifestation of divinely inspired furor. See S. J. Campbell, "'Fare una Cosa Morta Parer Viva": Michelangelo, Rosso and the (Un) Divinità of Art', *Art Bulletin*, vol. 84, n° 4, December, 2002, pp. 596-620, esp. pp. 596-598. I believe Campbell overemphasises the importance of the perception of the artist chiefly in these terms. Vasari makes close connections between the beauty of the chosen live model, the artistic procedures needed to make the perfect nude and the ability to create new postures by twisting and turning perfectly proportioned figures and striking effects. On these last points, see below.

⁵⁸¹ Cicero based his definition of *invenzione* on his scheme for rhetoric. *Inventio* is the subject-matter; *collocatio* the formal organisation, and *elocutio* the detailed ornament. Cicero's scheme was reinstated and applied to Renaissance art as rhetorical and poetic traditions became inextricably linked. On these concepts, see R. Lee, 'Ut pictura poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting', *Art Bulletin*, 1940, pp. 228-235 and M. Kemp (as in n. 580), p. 348.

⁵⁸² See M. Kemp (as in n. 580), p. 348.

associated with the discovery of truth and with the term *excogitare* (discover or devise).⁵⁸³ In relation to architecture, Alberti, Manetti, and Francesco Di Giorgio acknowledged the ability to invent new and beautiful things, such as new ground-plans, elevations and ornaments, and were the first to promote this concept, primarily in the field of architecture, where it was related to *ingenium* (*ingegno*), a term that, though not frequently applied to the visual arts, makes its first appearance in relation to Quattrocento architecture.⁵⁸⁴ It is important to note that this type of invention was more free-ranging than poetic-literary invention.

The theoretical assumptions of Francesco Di Giorgio, who promoted *ingenium* as an individual attribute, bear interesting similarities with Vasari's concept of *fantasia* as the notion of infinite variety and its close association with *disegno*. According to Francesco Di Giorgio, the architect should possess both *ingegno* and *invenzione*. The three essential requirements for perfection are acquired learning (*doctrina*) rather than discipline (*disciplina*), which suggests obediently following a set of rules, innate brilliance of mind (*ingegno*); and skill of execution (*disegno*). Drawings are essential in communicating to others one's inventions and the means through which skill and inventive power are best illustrated. *Scientia* plays an important role in the requirements of good design and the architect should base his designs on the designs underlying the universe.

Francesco Di Giorgio established a hierarchical system for invention, drawing distinctions between the inventions of man and those of inferior beings. While the inventions of inferior beings like animals are invariable, those of man's intellect are 'almost infinite, of an infinite variety' ('quasi infinite, infinito varia').⁵⁸⁵ Francesco Di Giorgio's concept of *immaginazione*, which entailed both diligence (*diligenza*) and industriousness (*effetto d'industria*), gave the artistic process a rational element tending towards infinite potentiality.

Although more problematic, Leonardo's writings on art are also historically significant in the present context. In Leonardo's mind, the objectives of painting comprised the invention of things put together (*invenzione dei componimenti*) and motion. His writings on painting indicate how imitation and invention can work in

⁵⁸³ In Cicero *invenzione* thus perceived indicated the discovery of the true and the probable. Examples of the application of the term in this sense include Landino's praise of Brunelleschi as the re-discoverer (*ritrovatore*) or inventor (*inventore*) of perspective. Alberti considered the discovery of column proportions as another example of excogitative invention; Filarete used the terms *trovare* and *inventare* interchangeably. For Alberti, this kind of invention was to be diligently refined according to mathematical truth and the examples provided by the ancients. The basis for this kind of invention was a combination of innate judgement and an understanding of the underlying design of nature. All quoted by M. Kemp (as in n. 580), pp. 348-349.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 349-50. Similar connections to the development of these ideas are not found in the technical chapter on architecture.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 352-355.

harness. Invention is perceived as a guiding principle, a component of the imagination, a form or concept from which a specific image arises.

Imagination and an intellectual understanding of the laws of nature operate together and the painter's ultimate goal is to produce an imagined *historia* obeying natural truth. As a product of artistic imagination, inventions (*invenzioni*) guide the artist in his creation of *componimenti* of battles, landscapes, human figures, demons and dragons. Leonardo's concept of *invenzioni* allows for a range of fantasy images. *Imaginazione* and *fantasia*, which are used interchangeably in the earlier manuscripts, are key conceptual terms in these texts and prominence is given to the aesthetic qualities of *fantasia* and the variety it helps create. However, despite the emphasis on *fantasia* and variety, the painter was not free to follow his *fantasia* haphazardly but was to operate according to scientific truth and plausibility.

In the treatise on painting, Leonardo argued for the superiority of painting over sculpture on the grounds that the former is 'adorned with infinite speculations', suggesting that infinite variety was a special attribute of painting.⁵⁸⁶ Variety is perceived as one of the greatest artistic merits and is two-fold. One type of variety comprised the range of different elements in a painting, such as drapery and natural phenomena.⁵⁸⁷ Historical paintings should display a variety of figures, postures, garments, and movement. The other type of variety could be attained through the variety of depicted limbs and motion. An infinite variety of limbs produces a continuous flow of infinite vision.⁵⁸⁸

Closer to the writing of the 1550 *Lives*, Anton Francesco Doni's *Disegno* (Venice, 1549) also picks up on the notion of the infinite possibilities of painting as the main difference between painting and sculpture. In Doni's mind, every natural object, including male and female figures and animals, could be represented in a wide variety of shapes and poses depending on the context in which they appear, and he provides contexts suited to each range.⁵⁸⁹ However, Doni's understanding of variety is general rather than specifically related to the nude. This concept is thus more fully developed in the *Lives*.

⁵⁸⁶ L. da Vinci (as in n. 365), vol. 1, p. 161: 'è ornata di infinite speculazioni che la scultura non ha'. Alberti claimed that painting was superior to sculpture because it deals with more difficult things; See L. B. Alberti (as in n. 274), p. 66.

⁵⁸⁷ L. da Vinci (as in n. 365), vol. 1, p. 193.

⁵⁸⁸ Leonardo's later writings give greater prominence to a scientific approach to art. In the Late A, as reconstructed by Carlo Pedretti, judgement plays a key role in guiding the images made or created by the artist and judgement is best developed by means of a thorough scientific investigation of natural law. The emphasis on science left little room for the 'infinite speculations' promoted in the earlier manuscripts. In addition, individual style, though explained, is not advocated because it is seen to distort natural truth. A more complete picture of these concepts in Leonardo, not only with regard to Pedretti's reconstructions but also to similar concepts in other writings would richly repay further study.

⁵⁸⁹ A. F. Doni (as in n. 563), pp. 27-28.

The sources of Vasari's emphasis on the idea that the artist can create forms and postures of figures from the imagination should now be clearer. Of the different kinds of invention traceable in the *Lives*, the highest form of art is not the type of artistic operation requiring a third party or written source but the artist himself. The knowledge of the artist does not consist in his familiarity with literary or biblical texts but is directly related to the mastery of the nude figure, which requires that the artist acquire a thorough understanding of the mechanisms of the human body, memorising the variety of muscles and limbs. Artistic imagination (*fantasia*) enables the artist to leave aside the live model and create from his own imagination an infinite variety of postures, perfectly proportioned figures which can be turned and twisted to create infinite patterns of figures.

Perceived first and foremost as the greatest difficulty of art and the most beautiful, the perfect nude is praised in its own right. These artistic qualities could be demonstrated in painting in different ways, demonstrating that the perfectly formed nude is an aesthetic form with a potential for multiple meanings and functions. Battle scenes and martyrdoms, which traditionally represented struggling and suffering, armour and cruelty, could be given new force thanks to the nude figures displaying a variety of bodily motion as narrative devices of emphasis, augmenting the dramatic effects of the scene, while making stock solutions and accessories unnecessary. A battle and martyrdom scene could thus be transformed into a composition of nudes, as is the case in Michelangelo's cartoon for the *Battle of Cascina*.

Alternatively, these specific artistic qualities can function in their own right, using the nude as an adorning ornament. Artistic *ingenium* is demonstrated by the ability to find or devise contexts for the demonstration of mastery. *Fantasia* is an active virtue, illustrating the painter's boundless powers of invention, transforming the nude into emblems of poetic fantasy and representing an impulse to the formulation of new meanings and functions. The art-theoretical assumptions formulated in *Della pittura* imply higher goals for the painter as he moves away from mimesis and narrative truth towards *fantasia* and *ingenium*.

There remain two other important attributes of painting which have direct bearing on the role of the nude in both editions of the *Lives*.

Scorci: Figures at Eye Level and Seen from Below

Foreshortening is considered a major difficulty of art and an attribute of absolute perfection. In the section in *Della pittura* dedicated to foreshortening Vasari compares and contrasts foreshortened figures on level ('scorcio in piano') with "up

from below" foreshortening ('scorcio in su'), a distinction indicating a historical development. 'On the level' foreshortening refers to perspective and the ability to create convincing figures within the pictorial space. Landino associates Paolo Uccello's skill at foreshortening with his understanding of perspective. Foreshortening was of interest to Quattrocento painters and was seen as a test of the artist's skill as well as a way of taxing the viewer.⁵⁹⁰

In *Della pittura* 'on level' foreshortening is presented as an achievement of older generations of artists ('nostri vecchi'), which has been surpassed by those artists who have acquired the ability to create striking postures, viewed from below. Andrea del Castagno's figures are good examples of the mastery of foreshortening in the Quattrocento.⁵⁹¹ However, Michelangelo is supreme in foreshortening and he is taken as the benchmark for gauging the merits of other artists:

never was there a painter or draughtsman who did better work of this sort than Michelangelo Buonarroti, and even yet no one has been able to surpass him, he has made figures stand out so marvellously.⁵⁹²

The ability to create foreshortened figures requires the study of live models and specially made models viewed at suitable heights, which was the method used by Michelangelo.⁵⁹³ Foreshortening is not only one of the main difficulties of painting ('difficili') but is also given an aesthetic dimension ('belli'). The ability to create striking effects is one of the main parameters for gauging the merits of individual artists in the biographies:

And certainly the difficulty in this kind of work generates the highest grace and great beauty and also shows something stupendous in art. In the *Lives* of our artists, you will find that they have given prominence to these works, and laboured to complete them perfectly, thus receiving great praise.⁵⁹⁴

Colorire

In Vasari's hierarchical scheme, *colorire* is subordinate to *disegno fondato* in both editions of the *Lives*. In the general definition of painting colouring is defined as the

⁵⁹⁰ See M. Baxandall (as in n. 272), p. 143.

⁵⁹¹ VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 3, p. 355. In the preface to the third age, the foreshortened figures of a number of artists, including del Castagno and Luca Signorelli are criticised as 'as painful to see as they were to execute', a remark which is not backed up by comments in the biographies of several of the artists listed. In his reference to Vasari's comment on Castagno's foreshortened figures M. Baxandall quotes the preface and not the artist's biography; see M. Baxandall (as in n. 272), pp. 143-144.

⁵⁹² VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 1, p. 122: 'di questa specie non fu mai pittore o disegnatore che facesse meglio che s'abbia fatto il nostro Michelangelo Buonarroti, et ancora nessuno meglio gli poteva fare, avendo egli divinamente fatto le figure di rilievo'. It is interesting to note that Vasari reports the criticism of foreshortening on the part of artists, attributing it to the inability to make this kind of figure. Ibid., p. 123.

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 123: 'e certo in questo genere si recano in quella difficoltà una somma grazia e molto bellezza, e mostrassi una terribilissima arte. Di questa specie troverete che gli artefici nostri, nelle Vite loro, hanno dato grandissimo rilievo a tali opere e condottele a una perfetta fine, onde hanno conseguito lode grandissima'. It is interesting to note that Vasari refers to the criticism of foreshortening on the part of artists, attributing this to their inability to create foreshortened figures. See VBB (1550 & 1568), P. 123: 'E quegli che li biasimano (dico gli artefici nostri) sono quelli che non li sanno fare e che per alzare se stessi, vanno abbassando altrui.'

"filling in" part of the artistic process:

A painting is a plane covered with patches of colour on the surface of wood, wall, or canvas filling up the outlines, which by virtue of the good design of encompassing lines, surround the figure.⁵⁹⁵

Particular attention must be paid when applying colour so as not to spoil the *disegno*.⁵⁹⁶ Colouring can enhance the aesthetic merits of a painting and is most perfect when it consists in a 'variety of different colours harmonised together'.⁵⁹⁷ Grace and beauty are achieved by varying the colours of the flesh according to the age of the figures, and this helps enhance *disegno*.⁵⁹⁸

Raphael and the followers of his style of colouring are exemplary of excellent colouring. In perceiving colouring as less praiseworthy than *disegno*, Vasari was following a well-established artistic and critical tradition in Florentine circles. In Landino colouring does not feature prominently in his commentary, where it is defined as the application of pigment and used primarily in opposition to *disegno*.⁵⁹⁹ Leonardo also advises the artist to focus on the practice of drawing before learning about colouring.⁶⁰⁰

Constraints for Painting

The prominence given to artistic imagination does not mean that painting should be totally free from constraints. The final section of the first chapter in *Della pittura* provides a set of general requirements for compositional organisation. Emphasis is given to the visual qualities of painted images rather than moral or behavioural codes of conduct. Good invention is governed by the principle of appropriateness which demands a clear arrangement of figures in the pictorial space, an obedience of the elements ('convenevolezza formata di concordanza e di obediencia') to an overall propriety of effect.⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 113: 'la pittura è un piano coperto di campi di colori, in superficie o di tavola o di muro o di tela, intorno a diversi lineamenti, i quali per virtù di un buon disegno di linee girate circondano le figure'.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 124.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., The colouring of nude figures should be light and delicate especially when drapery falls over the body, *ibid.*, p. 125.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 127: 'Né si può credere quanto nel variare le carni con i colori, faccendole a' giovani più fresche che a' vecchi et a' mezzani tra il cotto e il verdiccio e gialliccio, si dia grazia e bellezza alla opera, e quasi in quello stesso modo che si faccia nel disegno la aria delle vecchie accanto alle giovani et alle fanciulle et a' putti, dove, veggendosene una tenera e carnosa, l'altra pulita e fresca, fa bellissima discordanza accordatissima'.

⁵⁹⁹ In his *De prospectiva pingendi*, Piero della Francesca defines colouring as the application of colours as they are seen in objects, lights and darks and how the effect of light changes them. *Colorire* thus partly overlaps with *rilievo* and corresponds to what Alberti calls the 'Reception of Light'. See P. Della Francesca, *De prospectiva pingendi*, G. N. Fasolo (ed), Florence, 1912, as quoted in M. Baxandal (as in n. 272), p.122.

⁶⁰⁰ L. da Vinci (as in n. 365), vol. 1, p. 169.

⁶⁰¹ VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 1, p. 115: 'Questa invenzione vuole in sé una convenevolezza formata di concordanza e di obediencia, che, s'una figura si muove per salutare un'altra, non si faccia la salutata voltarsi indietro avendo a rispondere: e con questa similitudine tutto il resto'.

Appropriateness means that postures and gestures should be according to age and gender or character type, for example, spirited figures should show movement and vigour. The pictorial representation should be immediately clear to the viewer, who experiences pleasure from the apt representation of motion and an appropriate rendering of the scene.⁶⁰²

The property of decorum resides within the work of art and requires the maintenance of an internal consistency amongst the component parts through which the story is told rather than being dictated by external and social factors. Vasari's negative assessment of Pontormo's representation of the *Last Judgement* in San Lorenzo (1546-57; Florence, San Lorenzo. Destr. 1742) (Drawing.) (**figure 55**) makes plain the requirements of an internally consistent representation of the scene. The painting fails to achieve the required standards for pictorial composition, producing a lack of understanding and pleasure on the viewer's part despite the inclusion of the nude:

.... nowhere did he pay heed to any order of the *storia*, or measure, or time, or variety in the faces, or changes in the flesh colours, or, in brief, to any rule, proportion or law of perspective; instead, the work is full of nude figures with an order, design, invention, arrangement, colouring, and painting done in his own personal way, with so much melancholy and so little pleasure for the beholder, that I am resolved, since even I do not understand it though I am a painter myself, to let those who see it judge for themselves.⁶⁰³

It is notable that the general need for appropriate gestures and motion in painting are not given the same kind of prominence they receive in the writings of Alberti and Leonardo, who invited the painter to show a sense of restraint and to observe social as well as gender distinctions. Vasari's perception of the nude in painting does not take into account moral or social codes which had been traditionally promoted by painted and sculpted images.⁶⁰⁴ In his descriptions and value judgements Vasari consciously drew on Quattrocento terms for motion, for example, *grazioso* (graceful) and *leggiadro* (a charming, restrained grace), but nowhere are these terms defined as the most praiseworthy in art, rather they indicate the merits of measured bodily motion as opposed to static figures.⁶⁰⁵

⁶⁰² Ibid., 1550 & 1568, vol. 1, p. 116: 'advertendo però sempremai che ogni cosa corrisponda ad un tutto della opera, di maniera che quando la pittura si guarda vi si conosca una concordanza unita che dia terrore nelle furie e dolcezza negli effetti piacevoli'.

⁶⁰³ Ibid., 1568, vol. 6, p. 332: 'in niun luogo, osservato, né ordine di storia, né misura, né tempo, né varietà di teste, non cangiamento di colori di carni, et insomma non alcuna regola né proporzione, né alcun ordine di prospettiva; ma pieno ogni cosa d'ignudi, con un ordine, disegno, invenzione, componimento, colorito e pittura fatta a suo modo, con tanta malinconia e con tanto poco piacere di chi guarda quell'opera l, ch'io mi risolvo, per non l'intendere ancor io, se ben son pittore, di lasciarne giudizio a coloro che la vedranno'.

⁶⁰⁴ For a discussion of various aspects of decorum in fifteenth and sixteenth-century texts concerning behaviour, movement and art, F. Ames-Lewis and A. Bednark (as in n. 10). For a discussion of decorum in general and of thematic decorum in Alberti, see also S. Summers (as in n. 322), pp. 341-342.

⁶⁰⁵ See S. Fermor, 'Poetry in motion: beauty in movement and the Renaissance conception of *leggiadria*', *Concepts of Beauty in Renaissance Art*, F. Ames-Lewis and M. Rogers (eds), Aldershot (UK)

Vasari shows a predilection for bodily motion and striking postures whether justified by the context or not. The lowly muscular male possesses the most beautiful physique and is thus most apt for imitation, while twisting and turning figures in a variety of postures create a continually renewable source of beauty. The specific features and merits with which the nude is associated should not be attributed to Neoplatonic ideas, which denoted a different and more generic type of beauty and which did not advocate physical exertion.

Vasari's predilection should thus be linked to the Florentine perception of male beauty and the body in motion, in keeping with the most innovative artistic concerns of the sixteenth century. By promoting it in the *Lives*, Vasari allowed an important place for artistic virtuosity and inventive power in keeping with the preoccupations of society at large.

and Vermont (USA), 1998, pp. 124-133. Fermor claims that Vasari's perception of beauty in relation to motion is not of a particular kind.

PART TWO: FIGURE TYPE AND THE NOTIONS OF ABSOLUTE AND GENERAL PERFECTION

As a requirement of art and the most perfect form, the nude plays a central role in the biographical section of the *Lives*. There are no significant references to the nude in the biographical section dedicated to artists of the fourteenth century.⁶⁰⁶ The Florentine relief competition of 1401 is presented as an artistic event in which the representation of the nude became a requirement of art on a par with landscape, animals, and garments.

It is from this period that Vasari begins to chart the development of art in relation to the nude according to a line of development leading to the absolute perfection of Michelangelo. Detailed accounts of the nude appear in the 1550 biographies of artists of the fifteenth century, particularly in Antonio Pollaiuolo (1432-98) and Luca Signorelli (c. 1450-1523); and Michelangelo (1475-1564), Perino del Vaga (1501-1547) and Rosso Fiorentino (1495-1540) for the sixteenth century.

The scheme of artistic development in relation to the nude is not linear and there is no steady overall improvement in its representation, as is suggested by the preface to the third age. The nude is the hallmark of specific artists in the so-called second age and by the time Vasari arrives at the third it is by no means a foregone conclusion in that not every artist has succeeded in forming the perfectly beautiful and perfectly proportioned muscular nude. Michelangelo is taken as the benchmark and the mastery of the nude is gauged on a sliding scale according to its distance from the supreme creator of nudes. Re-tracing the line of development leading to absolute perfection means charting the imitation of a specific live model (*mimesis*) to the creation of poses from the artist's own imagination (*fantasia*).

Terms relating to the absolute perfection and beauty of the nude range from 'most beautiful nudes' ('bellissimi ignudi'), 'the art of the nude' ('l'arte degli ignudi'), the difficulty of the nude ('la difficoltà degli ignudi' – Luca Signorelli), to 'the perfection of our art' ('la perfezione dell'arte nostra'), 'the summit of art' ('gli estremi dell'arte' – Battle of Cascina) 'the divinity of art' ('divinità dell'arte' - Battle of Cascina), 'all the power and value of art' ('tutto il valore e potere dell'arte' – Michelangelo's Pietà), and 'the heights of art' ('tutti gli estremi dell'arte' - Perino del Vaga).

The conceptual terms analysed above, such as *disegno* and *grazia*, relate specifically to the notion of absolute perfection with which the perfectly formed

⁶⁰⁶ See VBB, 1568, vol. 2, p. 101. The insignificance of the nude in the so-called first age is confirmed by the second edition in that no references of interest are added. In the biography of Giotto a nude figure in the Assisi fresco is simply mentioned without comment. For the nude in Trecento sculpture, see VBB, 1568, vol. 2 p. 59, the biography of Andrea and Nicola Pisano, where references are made to the merits of ancient reliefs imitated by Nicola praise the artistic practices and *disegno* of the ancients.

nude is associated in both painting and sculpture. The study of artistic examples of the nude, the study of the live model, artistic anatomy, foreshortening aimed at creating striking effects, variety created by bodily motion and a range of poses, and *fantasia*, become the key parameters for gauging individual merits, though they also form part of Vasari's critical tools, indicating key areas in which a particular artist deserves praise or blame. Leaving aside negligence and regional bias on Vasari's part, the failure to mention or praise the nude is often indicative of its lack of artistic merits and striking visual impact, and we need to pay particular attention to this resonating silence.

The main attributes and qualities of the itinerary leading to general perfection as opposed to absolute perfection can be traced through the use of recurrent terms underscoring lifelikeness, natural truth, the representation of the entire range of natural phenomena and a wide variety of emotions. Recurrent terms comprise 'lively figures' ('figure vive'), 'liveliness' ('vivacità'), 'more alive than painted' ('più vive che dipinte'), 'it seems as if it [the figure] is talking' ('par che favilli'), while descriptions of the flesh often contain words like 'shivering' ('triema'), 'quivering' ('tremante'), 'fleshlike' ('simile alla carne'), and 'looks like flesh' ('paiono di carne').

This scheme begins with Giotto and culminates in the paintings of Raphael arriving at the supreme perfection of natural objects. Key figures in this line of development in the 1550 edition include Masaccio (1401-1428), Lorenzo Ghiberti, Donatello, Andrea del Sarto and Raphael, who represents its culmination point. The nude may or may not be present, though where it does appear, the figure in question is usually delicate and in a gentle pose.

The association between the figure type chosen for imitation and the two schemes of artistic development is of central importance. As the most apt for imitation, the lowly, muscular male body is closely associated with the scheme leading to the absolute perfection of Michelangelo, whereas the more delicate body is linked to the scheme of general perfection. In some instances Vasari draws our attention to both muscular and more delicate figures in the same work of art or by the same artist, suggesting that their maker could be seen as belonging to both developmental schemes.

Instances of this dual positioning are found in the biographies of several Florentine artists, most notably Donatello and Lorenzo Ghiberti. In the account of Ghiberti's relief depicting the *Sacrifice of Isaac* (**figure 20**), Vasari contrasts the perfection

manifested in the servants' rustic limbs with the delicate limbs of Isaac.⁶⁰⁷ Vasari's value judgement of Ghiberti's nude Samson, which forms part of the decorations on the middle door of the baptistery in Florence, compares the figure to the perfection achieved by the ancients in figures of Hercules, confirming that this was an important though not always specific parameter.⁶⁰⁸

An anecdote related in the biography of Donatello also implies the different kind of figures he represented, placing him in both lines of development. According to Vasari, Donatello sought to overcome the difficulties of art by giving the figure of Christ in his *Christ on the Cross* (wood; c. 1420; Florence, Santa Croce) with the physical features of a peasant, by implication muscular, in sharp contrast with Brunelleschi's more delicate figure in wooden statue of Christ (1435; Florence, Santa Croce):

When Donatello saw this, he begged Filippo for the sake of their friendship to give him his honest opinion of it, and so, Filippo, who was very candid, replied that it seemed to him as if Donatello had placed a peasant upon a cross and not a body like that of Jesus Christ, whose limbs were most delicate and in all parts the most perfect man that was ever born⁶⁰⁹

By 'gently ornate' Vasari means a slightly animated figure rather than a body displaying physical exertion. These comments are reiterated in the biography of Brunelleschi, where Vasari implies that Donatello's more muscular Christ falls short of the standards attained in Brunelleschi's 'delicately ornate' figure.⁶¹⁰ Vasari may be alluding here to the inability to master the muscular nude. Some of the most recurrent terms in the descriptions of Donatello's works, whether reliefs, equestrian statues or figure groups, relate to lifelikeness, particularly the facial features, gestures and postures.

Finally, Donatello's biography illustrates in general terms that the artist's dual objective comprises the equalling of both nature and the antique, which are surpassed by most artists of the Cinquecento. The description of Donatello's Calvacanti *Annunciation* provides a good example of an assessment based on these two parameters. The relief is a demonstration of the exploration of the 'ignudo di sotto', an artistic achievement given an aesthetic dimension, and is at once associated with the merits of both ancient art and the quality of lifelikeness.⁶¹¹

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid., 1550 & 1568, vol. 3, pp. 79 and 97: 'tanta perfezione nelle membra rustiche a comparazione delle delicate d'Isac'. Ghiberti's figures of Adam and Eve are also highly praised and Vasari includes among his merits, *ornamento, perfezione* and *ingegno*.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., 1550 & 1568, vol. 3, 272.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., 1550 & 1568, vol. 3, p. 204: 'Il che vedendo Donato, lo pregò per quanta amicizia era fra loro che gliene dicesse parer suo, per che Filippo, che liberalissimo era, rispose che gli pareva che egli avesse messo in croce un contadino e non un corpo simile a Gesù Cristo, il quale fu delicatissimo e in tutte le parti il più perfetto uomo che nacesse giammai.'

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., 1550 & 1568, vol. 3, pp. 144-145.

⁶¹¹ Ibid., 1550 & 1568, vol. 3, pp. 336-337.

Vasari clarifies the narrative and singles out for praise the measured and graceful movement of the Virgin Mary, expressed as 'the most beautiful grace and honesty' ('con bellissima grazia e onestà'), a pose which communicates both her fear upon seeing the angel and her humble disposition. In this particular context *grazia* indicates a measured and graceful movement and is akin to *leggiadria* understood as a kind of charming and restrained gesture. Vasari praises Donatello's search for the perfection and style of the ancients, for example aiming to show the nude form through the folds of drapery (*cercare l'ignudo di sotto*), which is described as a 'vestige of the antique' (*vestigia dell'antico*).⁶¹²

Vasari's overall assessment of Donatello strongly suggests that the artist represents an important stage in artistic development.⁶¹³ In the second edition the examples of his objective of demonstrating anatomical knowledge, the practice of drawing, and mastery of design are presented as playing a central role even though he does not arrive at the standards of absolute perfection.

The samples which follow aim to demonstrate the contrasting qualities which distinguish the two different types of perfection taking as the starting point the 1550 edition and then going on to discuss the continued emphasis on the absolute perfection of the nude in the 1568 edition.

Antonio Pollaiuolo

As the first modern artist who mastered the nude according to the standards established in *Della pittura*, Antonio represents the starting point of the journey leading to absolute perfection, characterised by the study of the muscular youth in action and by an understanding of the workings of the human body gained from the study of anatomy and the observation of the live model, to which Antonio's mastery of the nude is directly linked. These artistic achievements are emphasised most notably in Vasari's praise of the bowman in Pollaiuolo's *St Sebastian* (**figure 29**):

And in the Pucci Chapel, in San Sebastiano de' Servi, he did an altar panel, which is a rare and excellent work, displaying wonderful horses, male nudes, and very beautiful figures in foreshortening, with St Sebastian himself portrayed from a living figure, namely Gino da Lodovico Capponi; and this work was the most praised of any that Antonio ever did. This was because, imitating nature as closely as possible, he showed in one of the archers, who is resting his crossbow against his chest and kneeling down in order to load it, all the force that a man with strong arms can exert in loading that weapon, for we can perceive in him the swelling in his veins and muscles, and how he holds his breath to exert more force. And not only did he finish this figure with great attention, but all the others in their various postures display very clearly all the

⁶¹² Ibid., pp. 203-204 and 202.

⁶¹³ Ibid., 1568, vol. 3, p. 208.

considerations and skill he applied to that work, which were certainly recognised by Antonio Pucci, who gave him 300 crowns, which he commented would hardly cover the cost of the paint.⁶¹⁴

The representation of the muscular archers loading their bows, which are not part of the traditional iconography, indicates that the artist has added a natural action to the episode in which his mastery of the nude could be demonstrated. Vasari draws attention to the swelling of the limbs, resulting from the imitation of the actions of strong men whose bodies are naturally strained. The lowly figures are described as 'nudes and the most beautiful foreshortened figures' ('*Ignudi e figure bellissime in iscorto*'), while the range of postures ('*diverse attitudini*') is associated with artistic *ingenium* (*ingegno*). Vasari's value judgement on the painting gives expression to the admiration for Pollaiuolo's achievements with regard to the nude.

Luca Signorelli

The representation of the nude reaches a new stage of development with Luca Signorelli, a key figure in both editions of the *Lives*, not only for his mastery of the nude but also because he arrived at ingenious inventions involving the nude, both as regards individual figures in a painting and images almost entirely based on the nude.

It is in Luca's biography that Vasari first associates the representation of the nude with difficulty, the mastery of which enhances the artist's status:

Luca Signorelli was an excellent painter. In his own day he was more famous throughout Italy and his works were held in more esteem than any other at any time, because in the works he made in the art of painting he showed the true way of making nudes, and with great difficulty and very good procedures he made them seem alive.⁶¹⁵

⁶¹⁴ VBB, vol. 3, pp. 503-504 "...e nella cappella de' Pucci a San Sebastiano da' Servi fece la tavola dello altare, che è cosa eccellente e rara, dove sono cavalli mirabili, ignudi e figure bellissime in iscorto, et il San Sebastiano stesso ritratto dal vivo, cioè Gino di Lodovico Capponi; e fu questa opera la più lodata che Antonio facesse già mai. Con ciò sia che, per andare egli imitando la natura il più che e' poteva, pose in uno di que' saettatori, che appoggiatosi la balestra al petto si china a terra per caricarla, tutta quella forza che può porre un forte di braccia in caricare quell'instrumento, imperò che e' si conosce in lui il gonfiare delle vene e de' muscoli et il ritenere del fiato per fare più forza. E non è questo solo ad essere condotto con avvertenza, ma tutti gl'altri ancora con diverse attitudini assai chiaramente dimostrano l'ingegno e la considerazione che egli aveva posto in quest'opera ". Payments to Piero Pollaiuolo for part of his work on the altarpiece prove that the painting dates from the 1470s, though its high cost according to Vasari has not been confirmed.

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., vol. 3, p. 633: 'Fu Luca Signorelli pittore eccellente, e nel suo tempo era tenuto in Italia tanto famoso e l'opre sue furono in tanto pregio quanto nessuno in alcun tempo sia stato, perché nell'opre ch'egli fece nell'arte di pittura mostrò il modo dell'usare le fatiche negli ignudi, e quegli con gran difficoltà e bonissimo modo potersi far parer vivi'. The passage is slightly changed in the second edition, in which 'bonissimo modo' is replaced by 'arte', that is, using the right techniques: 'e che si possono con arte e difficoltà far parer vivi'. The modification conveys the original statement more clearly. Luca Signorelli was commissioned to paint the Orvieto paintings in 1497. Luca's ecclesiastic clients considered him to be the 'most famous painter in all of Italy' ('*famosissimus pictor in tota Italia*'). The first contract was drafted on 5 April 1499 and stipulated that Luca was to be personally responsible for 'the beautiful and honoured figures', all the figures on the ceiling, as well as the limbs of all the figures in the middle and bottom sections. This requirement strongly suggests that these figures, particularly the nudes, were held to be the most important and difficult to execute. The relevant document reads: 'sic promisit

The key conceptual terms, *disegno* and *grazia*, appear for first time in relation to the representation of the nude in the description of Luca's painting of *St Michael Weighing Dead Souls* (1499-1504; Orvieto Cathedral, Chapel of San Brizio. Destr.):

The work contains a remarkable St. Michael who is weighing souls, and the splendour of the armour, the reflections of the light, and indeed the whole work, particularly demonstrates Luca's understanding with grace and design. In St. Michael's hands Luca placed a pair of scales with beautifully foreshortened nude figures, one of which goes up while the other goes down. Among the other ingenious things in this painting is a nude figure most skilfully transformed into a devil while a green lizard licks the blood flowing from his wound.⁶¹⁶

The description clearly shows that the challenges posed by the nude entail mastery of 'difficult' and 'beautiful' foreshortening and the representation of figures displaying *grazia* and *disegno*. The ability to attain these goals is associated with the artist's *ingenium* ('among the other ingenious things').

Another painting which is highly praised is Signorelli's *Last Judgement*, particularly the fresco depicting *The End of the World* (1500-1503; Orvieto, Chapel of the Assumption) (figure 56):

The most beautiful, bizarre and capricious invention for the variety of so many angels, demons, earthquakes, fires, ruins, and most of the miracles of the Anti-Christ, where he showed the invention and considerable practice he had in the nude with many foreshortened figures with beautiful forms, imagining in an unusual way the terror there will be on those days.⁶¹⁷

The description of this invention of nudes gives prominence to the combination of creative power ('*imaginandosi*') and the ability to form and group together beautiful and foreshortened nudes to form an *istoria*. From his imagination the painter has created a scene of extraordinary power on account of the variety of human figures and striking effects, such as natural disasters and fires. Variety is achieved in two different ways: through the range of depicted figures and striking visual effects, such as disasters, ruins and fire. Both serve as devices of narrative emphasis. This is the first example in the scheme leading to absolute perfection of an invention of nudes in which compositional and technical skill work in harness

pingere manu propria omnes figuras fiendas in dictis voltis, et maxime facies et omnia membra figurarum omnium a medio figure supra'. As cited by L. Andreani *I documenti*, App. 1, doc. nn. 271-218-219-220, *La Cappella Nova*, G. Testa (ed), Milan, 1996.

⁶¹⁶ VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 3, p. 634: 'In questa opera è un San Michele che pesa l'anime, che mirabile è a pensare di vedere l'arte di Luca negli splendori dell'arme, e vedere i barlumi, le riverberazioni e i riflessi fatti dalle mani e di tutto quello che ha indosso, dove con molta grazia e disegno mostrò quanto sapeva. Miseli in mano un paio di bilance, nelle quali uno ignudo va in alto, et una femmina da la bilancia che va giù all'incontro: cosa in iscorto bellissima. E fra l'altre cose ingegnose, sotto i piedi di questo San Michele è uno iscorto d'una figura ignuda, bonissimo trasformato in diavolo, nel quale un ramarro il sangue d'una ferita gli lecca.' English translation slightly adapted from J. Conaway Bondanella and P. Bondanella, *Giorgio Vasari, The Lives of the Artists*, Oxford, 1991, rev. edn. 1998, pp. 268-269.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid., 1550, vol. 3, pp. 637-8: 'invenzione bellissima, bizzarra e capricciosa per la varietà di vedere tanti angeli, demoni, terremoti, fuochi, ruine, e gran parte de' miracoli di Anticristo, dove mostrò la invenzione e la pratica grande ch'egli aveva negli ignudi con molti scorti e belle forme di figure, imaginandosi stranamente il terror di que' giorni'. The description is more concise in the second edition but without changing the main focus of the 1550 version: VBB, 1568, vol. 3, p. 637.

with creative power to conquer the difficulties of art and move away from stock solutions.⁶¹⁸

The central importance of Signorelli's nudes is further emphasised in the second edition in two different ways. His biography is placed at the end of the second age, which in the first edition had ended with the Life of Pietro Perugino, under whose apprentice Raphael had been.⁶¹⁹ This position is clarified in a comment added at the end of his biography which presents him as the precursor of the perfection attained by Michelangelo and most, but not all of the other artists as regards a specific set of attributes comprising the fundamentals of *disegno*, mastery of the nude, the *grazia* manifested in his grouping and arrangement of figures in historical paintings.

And so, with the end of this man's life, which came in 1521 [1523], we bring to an end the second part of the lives, concluding with Luca as the man who, through the fundamentals of design, particularly his nudes, and the grace of his invention and the disposition of his scenes, opened the way to the ultimate perfection of art for the majority of artists discussed from here on, and who, in following, were able to add the crown.⁶²⁰

The artistic achievements of Pollaiuolo and Signorelli will become clearer through a comparison of Vasari's assessment of the nude figures produced by Masaccio. Masaccio is defined as the initiator of the modern age, and the first painter who 'more than other masters tried to make nudes and to foreshorten his figures, which had been little done before him'.⁶²¹ The individual comments on Masaccio's figures, both draped and nude, clearly show that his chief contribution lay in his ability to form lively and lifelike figures and convincingly represent reality by means of perspective and the type of foreshortening with which it is associated.

Like Donatello, Masaccio is commended for providing others with 'the rules for making figures well' ('regole per fare bene le figure'), that is, for making the imitation of nature one of his primary goals. Linked to this is Masaccio's ability to convey emotional and physical states. Liveliness (*vivezza*), lively (*vive*), and real (*vere*) are the most recurrent terms in his biography and Vasari characterises his

⁶¹⁸ For a discussion of the *Last Judgment* as depicted by Fra' Bartolomeo and Luca Signorelli, see B. Barnes, *Michelangelo's Last Judgement: the Renaissance Response*, Berkeley, 1998, pp. 22-25, 33, 36, 37, 108-110.

⁶¹⁹ On the different structure of the second age, see P. L. Rubin (as in n. 545), p. 228. According to Rubin, the new position of the biography is attributable to the wider geographical spread of the 1568 edition, as well as Luca's abilities in drawings and invention leading directly to the next age, and thus reinforcing historical progression. In addition, as the artist who influenced Michelangelo and encouraged Vasari, Luca's biography helps weave the autobiographical thread into the beginning of a golden age.

⁶²⁰ VBB, 1568, vol. 3, p. 640: 'così col fine della Vita di costui, che fu nel 1521, porremo fine alla Seconda Parte di queste Vite, terminando in Luca come in quella persona che col fondamento del disegno e delli ignudi particolarmente, e con grazia della invenzione e disposizione delle istorie, aperse alla maggior parte delli artefici la via all'ultima perfezione dell'arte, alla quale poi poterono dar cima quelli che seguirono, de' quali noi ragioneremo per innanzi'.

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*, 1550 & 1568, vol. 3, pp. 125-6: 'cercò più degli altri maestri di fare gli ignudi e gli scorci nelle figure, poco usati avanti a lui'.

style as 'sweet' ('dolce'). The 'nude figure shivering with cold' in his painting of *The Baptism of the Neophytes* (1423-1425; Florence, Brancacci Chapel) (**figure 57**), serves to imitate convincingly natural effects in that bodily motion is functional:

In the scene showing Saint Peter performing baptisms, a very fine nude figure, shown shivering with cold among those baptised, is executed with the most beautiful relief and the sweetest style. This is a figure which both older and modern artisans have always held in the greatest reverence and admiration, and as a result, this chapel has been visited by countless masters and those who were practising their drawing from those times to our own.⁶²²

While the shivering nude figure is highly praised as an artistic example, its lifelike qualities are seen on a par with his other figures, which do not share the aesthetic qualities of Pollaiuolo's nudes, and is therefore distant from the qualities associated with Vasari's aesthetic of the nude. Masaccio represents an important stage in Vasari's developmental scheme chiefly as one of the first painters to master and use perspective and for representing figures in relief.

The artistic example of the Brancacci figures is specifically linked to the origins of Raphael's style.⁶²³ Landino characterised Masaccio's style as 'senza ornato', that is, without the ornament of motion and bending figures. Landino's definition indicates a clear, simple and functional style rather than a grand and ornate style characterised by bodily motion.⁶²⁴ Vasari seems to expand on this perception of his figures, including the nude.

Michelangelo

Michelangelo is the demonstration of the theoretical formulations expounded in the technical sections. Not surprisingly, it is with this man that Vasari's aesthetic and historical scheme arrives at the summit of perfection. Michelangelo's hero-like status in the *Lives* has been noted by many. An analysis of the nude in his biography and in other parts of the text helps us gain a better understanding of why so much importance was attached to his artistic achievements and why he was promoted as the artist's artist.

Descriptions and value judgements of his works also illustrate the extent to which the qualities of the nude in sculpture were perceived to match those in painting.

⁶²² VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 3, p. 131: 'Nell'istoria dove San Pietro battezza, si stima grandemente un ignudo che triema, fra gli altri battezzati, assiderato di freddo ; condotto con bellissimo rilievo e dolce maniera: il quale dagli artefici e vecchi e moderni è stato sempre tenuto in riverenza ed ammirazione. Per il che, da infiniti disegnatori e maestri continuamente sino al di d'oggi è stata frequentata questa cappella'.

⁶²³ Ibid., 1550 & 1568, p. 132.

⁶²⁴ On Landino's definition of Masaccio's achievements and style, see M. Baxandall (as in n. 272), pp. 119-23.

No similar descriptions of sculpture can be found elsewhere in the text as regards the terminology applied and the focus on the nude body. The *Pietà* (c. 1501; Rome, Vatican, St. Peter's) (**figure 58**) and *David* (**figure 40**) are good examples of the highest levels of perfection attainable in sculpture.

Michelangelo's Sculpture

Vasari provides the following description and value judgement of Michelangelo's marble *Pietà* in Rome:

To this work let no sculptor, however rare an artist, ever think he will be able to approach in *disegno* or *grazia*, or ever, with all the labour in the world, be able to attain such delicacy and smoothness or perforate the marble with such art as Michelangelo did here, for in it can be seen all the power and value of art. Among the lovely things to be seen in the work, to say nothing of the divinely beautiful draperies, is the body of Christ; nor let anyone think they will see greater beauty of the limbs or more mastery of art in any body, or a nude with more detail in the muscles, veins and nerves over the framework of the bones, nor a corpse more similar than this to a real corpse. Here is perfect sweetness in the expression of the face, harmony in the joints and articulations of the arms, legs and trunk, and the pulses and veins so wrought, that in truth Wonder herself must marvel that the hand of an artist was able to execute so divinely and so perfectly, in so short a time, a work so admirable; and it is certainly a miracle that a stone, in the beginning without shape, could ever be reduced to such perfection as Nature rarely creates in the flesh.⁶²⁵

Many of the terms relating to perfection, such as *disegno* and *grazia*, which are mentioned in *Della scultura* and discussed at length in *Della pittura*, appear in the description of one of Michelangelo's earliest sculptural works. Further emphasis on these hallmarks of perfection is given through the use of expressions like 'all the power and value of art', 'so divinely and perfectly', and 'reduced to such perfection'. The description focuses on the dead body of Christ, which is seen as a demonstration of the artist's ability to create a perfectly formed nude by means of the mastery of design and anatomy. Michelangelo's knowledge of anatomy is underscored by references to the muscles, veins, nerves, and bones, the concord in the joints, arms, legs, and trunk.

Anatomy is intimately linked with the aesthetic qualities of the work, such as the beauty of the limbs. Such knowledge and mastery ('arte') are the means through

⁶²⁵ VBB, 1550, vol. 6, pp. 16-17: 'Alla quale opera non pensi mai scultore né artefice raro poter aggiugnere di disegno né di grazia, né con fatica poter mai di finitezza, pulitezza e di straforare il marmo tanto con arte quanto Michele Agnolo vi fece, perché si scorge in quella tutto il valore et il potere dell'arte. Fra le belle cose che vi sono, oltra i panni divini suoi, si scorge il morto Cristo: e non pensi mai alcuno di bellezza di membra e d'artificio di corpo vedere uno ignudo tanto divino, né ancora un morto più simile al morto, di quello paia. Quivi è dolcissima aria di testa, et una concordanza ne' muscoli delle braccia e in quelli del corpo e delle gambe, i polsi e le vene lavorate, che in vero si maraviglia lo stupore che mano d'artefice abbia potuto sì divinamente e propriamente fare in pocchissimo tempo cosa sì mirabile: che certo è un miracolo che un sasso, da principio senza forma nessuna, si sia ridotto a quella perfezione che la natura a fatica suol formar alla carne un posamento sì dolce né grazia che tal cosa pareggi, né piedi né mani né testa che a ogni suo membro di bontà, d'artificio e di parità né di disegno l'accordi.' The passage was slightly changed in the 1568 edition.

which the sculptor can convincingly render the sense of death, surpassing the beauty of figures in nature in keeping with the artistic practices promoted by Vasari in relation to the nude.

A similar descriptive technique and application of terminology can be found in Vasari's comment of Michelangelo's *David*, as discussed in Chapter One. The statue is paradigmatic in terms of the superlative qualities it displays, such as excellence ('tanta bontà') with regard to the perfectly proportioned nude ('misura'), and perfect beauty ('bellezza'). *Disegno* and *grazia*, which are visible in the contours of every part of the body, the pose, and the limbs, contribute to the aesthetic qualities of the statue as a whole and each individual body part.⁶²⁶

Vasari's description of Donatello's bronze statue of the nude *David* (**figure 39**) is the first reference to a free-standing nude figure in the biographical section. In a reflection of the work's art historical position, Vasari gives emphasis to the imitation of a youthful live model with a soft ('morbidezza') and lively body ('vivacità'):

In the palace courtyard of these lords there was a nude David, life-size, who has cut off Goliath's head, and raising a foot rests over him, and in his right hand he is holding a sword. And the figure is so natural in its liveliness and softness that it seems impossible to artists that it was not formed from life.⁶²⁷

The description of Michelangelo's *David* provides evidence of the distance between the two artists in terms of the choice of the live model, the search for perfect beauty and proportion by choosing a muscular model, and mastering anatomy to an unprecedented extent. Michelangelo's knowledge of the mechanisms of the human body and his skilful working of it (*artificio*) ultimately enable him to surpass ancient and modern art.

Michelangelo's Cartoons and Paintings

Michelangelo's cartoon for the *Battle of Cascina* (**figure 10**), which is the most cited work of art in the *Lives*, is presented as the manifestation of supreme technical perfection and *ingenium*:

.... a huge cartoon, which he never wanted anyone to see. And this he filled with nude males bathing in the River Arno because of the heat, when suddenly the alarm sounded in the camp, announcing that the enemy was attacking, and, as the soldiers were jumping out of the water to dress, there could be seen depicted by the divine hands of Michelangelo, some hastening to arm themselves in order to give assistance to their comrades,

⁶²⁶ Ibid., 1550 & 1568, vol. 6, p. 21.

⁶²⁷ Ibid., 1550 & 1568, vol. 3, p. 210: 'trovasi di bronzo nel cortile del palazzo di detti Signori un David ignudo quanto il vivo ch'a Golia ha troncato la testa, et alzando un piede sopra esso lo posa, et ha nella destra una spada; et è la figura in se tanto naturale, nella vivacità e nella morbidezza, che impossibile pare agli artefici che non sia formato sopra il vivo'.

others buckling on their cuirasses, many fastening other armour on their bodies, and a vast number beginning the fray and fighting on horseback. There was, among other figures, an old man who had a garland of ivy on his head to shade it, and he, having sat down to put on his stockings, into which his legs would not go because they were wet with water, and hearing cries and tumult of the soldiers and the uproar of the drummers, was struggling to pull on a stocking by force; and besides that all the muscles and nerves of his figure could be perceived, his mouth was so distorted as to show clearly how he was straining and struggling down to the very tips of his toes. There were also drummers and other figures with their clothes in their arms running to the combat; and there were to be seen the most extravagant postures, some standing, some kneeling or bent double, others stretched horizontally and struggling in mid-air, and all with masterly foreshortenings. There were also many figures in groups, all sketched in various ways, some outlined with charcoal, some drawn with strokes, others stumped in and heightened with lead-white, Michelangelo desiring to show how much he knew in his profession. Hence artists were seized with admiration and astonishment, seeing the perfection of art revealed to them by Michelangelo in that drawing; and some who saw it, after beholding figures so divine, declare that there has never been seen any work, either by his hand or by others, no matter how great their genius, that can equal it in the divine beauty of art. And, in truth, it is likely enough, for the reason that since the time when it was finished and carried to the Sala del Papa with great exclamation from the world of art and extraordinary glory of Michelangelo, all those who studied the cartoon and drew those figures – as was afterwards the custom in Florence for many years both for natives and non-natives – became eminent in art, as we have since seen.⁶²⁸

The cartoon, entirely 'filled with nudes', represents a new stage in artistic development in terms of the spatial organisation and variety of bodily motion, transforming a composition of bathers into an innovative representation of a battle scene. The *ingenium* ('alto ingegno') of Michelangelo has thought up a context in which he can demonstrate his mastery of artistic procedures leading to the highest levels of perfection, expressed as 'gli estremi dell'arte', and 'divinità d'arte'. The

⁶²⁸ Ibid., 1550 & 1568, vol. 6, pp. 23-4: '... un grandissimo cartone: né però volse mai ch'altri lo vedesse. E lo empì d'ignudi, che bagnandosi per lo caldo nel fiume d'Arno, in quello istante si dava l'allarme nel campo, fingendo che gli inimici li assalissero, che mentre che fuor dall'acque uscivano per vestirsi i soldati, si vedeva dalle divine mani di Michelangelo disegnato chi tirava su uno, e chi calzandosi affrettava lo armarsi per dare aiuto a' compagni, altri affibbiarsi la corazza e molti mettersi altre armi indosso, et infiniti combattendo a cavallo cominciare la zuffa, eravi tra l'altre figure un vecchio che aveva in testa per farsi ombra una ghirlanda d'ellera, il quale postosi per mettersi le calze, che non potevano entrargli per avere le gambe umide dell'acqua, e sentendo il tumulto de' soldati e le grida et i romori de' tamburini, affrettandosi tirava per forza una calza, et oltra che tutti i muscoli e nervi della figura si vedevano, facevano uno stordimento di bocca, per il quale dimostrava assai quanto e' pativa e che egli si adoperava fin alle punte de' piedi. Eravi tamburini ancora e figure che coi panni avvolti ignudi, correvano verso la baruffa; e di stravaganti attitudini si scorgeva chi ritto e chi ginocchioni, o piegato o sospeso a giacere et in aria attaccati con iscorti difficili. V'erano ancora molte figure aggruppate et in varie maniere bozzate, chi contornato di carbone, chi disegnato per tratti, e chi sfumato con biacca lumeggiato, volendo egli mostrare quanto sapeva in quella professione. Per il che gli artefici stupiti e morti restarono, vedendo l'estremità dell'arte che in tal carta per Michelangelo mostra loro. Onde veduto sì divine figure, dicono alcuni, che le videro, di man sua e d'altri non essere mai più veduto cosa che della divinità dell'arte nessuno alto ingegno possa arrivarle mai. E certamente è da credere, perciocchè, dappoi che fu finito e portatolo alla Sala del papa con gran romore dell'arte e grandissima stima di Michelangelo, tutti coloro che su quel cartone studiarono e tal cosa disegnarono, come poi di seguito molti anni in Fiorenza per forestieri e per terrazzani, diventarono persone in tale arti eccellenti, come vedemmo, poichè in tal cartone studiò'. In the 1568 edition, Raphael's name is added to list of those who studied the cartoon. The diligent and admiring company of young artists, such as Andrea Del Sarto, Franciabigio, Aristotile da Sangallo, and Ridolfo Ghirlandaio were the "new artists" as Vasari called them in the biography of Pietro Perugino. This younger generation abandoned their first masters – Perugino, Lorenzo di Credi, and Piero di Cosimo – to learn the mastery of art directly from Michelangelo. In the Life of Andrea del Sarto, Vasari writes that in his youth, his teacher spent every spare moment with other young artists doing drawings in the Sala del Papa at Santa Maria Novella where the Council Hall cartoons by Michelangelo and Leonardo were displayed at that time; see VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 4, p. 344. On this point, see also P. L. Rubin (as in n. 545), p. 77.

paratactic structure of Vasari's description presents the scene like a snapshot, vividly rendering the immediacy with which the depicted events are captured. The sounding of the bugle triggers an infinite variety of striking and challenging postures and difficult foreshortenings from the artist's imagination as the naked men struggle to dress and take defence from enemy attack.

The figure of the old man, whose fear is expressed through his tense muscles and distorted mouth, looks as if he is pulling on his own skin, demonstrating Michelangelo's anatomical knowledge and how it could be used for dramatic purposes. The range of foreshortened nude bodies in motion serves to display mastery and augment the sense of drama, giving the impression of continuous bodily motion and transformation, providing fellow and future artists with an unprecedented example to follow. Michelangelo's cartoon perfectly illustrates the representation of a dramatic scene entirely based on the nude, which dispenses with other elements and which perfectly demonstrates the inventive power of the artist.

Raphael

Vasari's accounts of Raphael's *Fire in the Borgo* (c. 1514; Rome, Vatican, Stanza dell'Incendio) (**figure 59**) and the *Deposition* are significant expressions of the scope of Raphael's merits, in that both descriptions highlight the range of natural objects and emotions which are seen to characterise his paintings. It is highly significant that Vasari rarely mentions and certainly does not lavishly praise on Raphael's nudes. The dramatic episode of the *Fire in the Borgo* depicts the range of dangers and effects caused by fire and natural phenomena, as well as the emotional and physical effects.

In this scene, various dangers are depicted. On one side, are women whose hair and garments are blown about by the windstorm with a tremendous fury while they are carrying water to put out the fire. Others trying their best to throw water are blinded by the smoke and confused. On the other side, depicted in the same way Virgil described Anchises being carried by Aeneas, is the figure of a sick old man, beside himself from the effects of his infirmity and the flames of the fire. In the figure of the younger man, we see courage and strength, as well as the suffering in all his limbs from the weight of the abandoned old man on his back. He is followed by an old woman with bare feet and disordered garments, who is fleeing from the fire; and a small naked boy runs before them. On top of some ruins, likewise, may be seen a naked woman, with hair all dishevelled, who has her child in her hands and is throwing him to a man of her house, who, having escaped from the flames, is standing in the street on tiptoe, with arms outstretched to receive the child wrapped in swathing-bands.⁶²⁹

⁶²⁹ VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 4, pp. 193-194: 'Da una parte v'è femmine che dalla tempesta del vento, mentre elle portano acqua per spegnere il fuoco con certi vasi in mano et in capo, sono aggirati loro i capegli e i panni con una furia bellissima, oltre che molti si studiano a buttare acqua, i quali accecati da fumo non conoscono se stessi. Da l'altra parte v'è figurato nel medesimo modo che Virgilio describe

Vasari picks out for praise the 'imagination that this ingenious and marvellous artist showed' in his representation of a mother, whose garments are in disarray and who has gathered her children in a desperate attempt to save them from the flames. Vasari's description reflects the force of effective detail of a naturalistic scene depicted with supreme perfection. The variety of dangers is synonymous with the variety of figures and naturalistic effects: the windstorm blowing the hair and drapery of a group of female figures, the fire blinding men trying to put it out.

Physical states are related to emotional ones and to the character's qualities, for example, the strain on the young man's body as he carries the old man towards salvation reflects his courage and strength, though the limbs under tension are not technically or aesthetically praised. The '*furia bellissima*' refers to the depiction of the scene rather than the creative impetus behind the figures. Raphael excels at telling a story in pictures, and his chief merits lie in his ability to portray moving physical and psychological states.

In Raphael's case, imagination and inventive *ingenium* relate to literary-poetic invention, drawing on a literary source and adding other elements. Not surprisingly, in Raphael's biography Vasari associates this kind of invention with the notion of *ut pictura poesis*, which Vasari defines as a type of general poetic licence, allowing the inclusion of figures not necessarily justified by the narrative context, which, in Vasari's mind, is perfectly acceptable.

paintings like poetry, go straying from their subject for the sake of ornamentation although not digressing in a way that would be out of harmony with their first intention.⁶³⁰

Andrea del Sarto

Vasari's treatment of Andrea del Sarto clearly indicates that the Florentine painter belongs to the scheme of general perfection, in that it underscores the ability to create flawless and lifelike figures, natural phenomena, as well as physical and emotional states, elements which chiefly serve the narrative ends of art. Vasari's description of Andrea del Sarto's *Sacrifice of Isaac* (1529; Madrid, Prado) (**figure 60**) illustrates how the variety of depicted elements, such as clothed and nude figures, the animals, the atmospheric effects, and the landscape serve to create naturalist effects and underpin the narrative. The effects Vasari picks out for praise include

che Anchise fu portato da Enea, un vecchio ammalato, fuor di sé per l'infermità e per le fiamme del fuoco, e vedesi nella figura del giovane l'animo e la forza et il patire di tutte le membra dal peso del vecchio; abbandonato addosso innanzi. Così dal sommo di una rovina si vede una donna ignuda tutta rabbuffata, la quale avendo il figliuolo in mano, lo getta ad un suo che è campato dalle fiamme e sta nella strada in punta di piedi e braccia tese per ricevere il fanciullo, in fasce.'

⁶³⁰ VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 4, p. 183: 'come interviene molte volte che con le pitture come con le poesie si va vagando per ornamento dell'opera, non si discostando però per modo non conveniente dal primo intendimento.'

the ram, Isaac's garments on the ground, the effect of the sunlight on Isaac's neck, and the various effects of light and shade on the tints of the flesh. The emotions conveyed are also admired, particularly the faith portrayed in Abraham.

The delicate ('tenero') body of Isaac, trembling ('tremare') with fear is described as 'most beautiful', a comment which seems to allude to the ability to convey emotion rather than a figure admired for its aesthetic qualities.⁶³¹ Tellingly, the nude servants, which are not part of the traditional iconography, are not picked out for praise. The painting's primary merits thus comprise an ability to represent mainly delicate figures, lifelikeness, liveliness and a range of natural effects perfectly and without error. Lifelike flesh is also emphasised in Andrea's representation of Saint Sebastian showing his back which does not appear painted but made of 'the most lively flesh'.⁶³² In the 1568 edition Vasari sums up these merits at the beginning of his *Life*, adding that these also included Andrea's understanding of the nude, a comment which serves to relate the mastery of the nude to central Italy in response to Lodovico Dolce's claim for the supremacy of Venetian art.⁶³³ In the second edition the painter thus represents the universal painter who has also mastered the nude, though the features of his dressed and nude figures chiefly belong to the more delicate kind of figure.

Perino del Vaga

Perino's biography is the fourth longest in the 1550 *Lives* and in it Vasari enthusiastically praises Perino's ornamental style and mastery of the nude, stylistically placing him between Raphael in terms of general representational means and Michelangelo in terms of figural representation. Although Perino's biography, like Rosso Fiorentino's, was placed before that of Michelangelo thus leading up to absolute perfection, his achievements regarding the nude are judged according to the standards attained by Michelangelo.

As one of the artists who studied from Michelangelo's cartoon, Perino became one of the finest draughtsmen in Rome, subsequently producing 'beautiful works, executed with art and excellence'.⁶³⁴ Vasari directly links his skill at figure drawing to his knowledge of musculature and the mastery of the nude, merits which aroused admiration in Roman artistic circles and among prospective high-ranking clients.⁶³⁵

⁶³¹ *Ibid.*, 1550 & 1568, vol. 4, p. 389.

⁶³² *Ibid.*, p. 365.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, 1568, pp. 341-342.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, 1550 & 1568, vol. 5, p. 109.

⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1550 & 1568, vol. 5, p. 112.

Value judgements on Perino's mastery of the nude all appear in descriptions of religious narrative paintings, indicating how the perfectly formed nude can serve as a device of narrative emphasis, while also demonstrating mastery, an interest in bodily motion, and an understanding of anatomy. Vasari also commends the artist for finding contexts in which to explore the potential of the nude.

Vasari lavishes praise on Perino's *Christ on the Cross with the Two Thieves* (c. 1520; London, Hampton Court) (**figure 61**), particularly the figures of the two thieves:

And he chose that the subject be Christ descended from the cross, which Perino executed with much study and labour. In the picture he represented Him already taken off the cross with the Maries around him, weeping for him, and showing sorrow and pity in their poses and gestures. Besides these, there are the Nicodemuses and other most admired figures, woeful and afflicted at seeing the innocent dead Christ. But what he made so divinely were the two thieves still on the cross, and which, apart from seeming dead and real, reveal much understanding of the muscles and nerves, since here he had the opportunity to show them, and to the eyes of those who behold them, representing the limbs pulled by the nerves through that violent death, and the muscles pulled by the nails and ropes.⁶³⁶

The passage is tellingly divided into two parts, with the initial comments focusing on the representation of emotion through posture, while in the second part prominence is given to the rendering of violent death, suggesting that it was more technically challenging and artistically innovative. Like the figure of Christ in Michelangelo's marble *Pietà*, the corpses seem 'dead' and 'real' ('morti' e 'veri'). In addition, the artist is praised for making full use of the narrative context to explore the effects of violent death on the muscles and limbs, demonstrating his anatomical knowledge ('much understanding'). The level of perfection attained is expressed by the adverb 'most divinely' (*divinissimamente*).

A consideration of Vasari's perception of Raphael's approach to religious paintings reveals some basic points about the influence of Raphael and Michelangelo on Perino's figurative style. Raphael's *Deposition* (1507; Rome, Galleria Borghese) is primarily praised as a depiction of mourning. The psychological focus of the painting gives it a wide appeal and poignantly expresses the sense of loss through gestures and facial expressions, particularly the fainting Virgin Mary, actions serving to arouse emotion in the viewer. Supreme excellence resides in the expressions of the figures and the beautiful drapery. Rather than a mark of perfection attained in

⁶³⁶ Ibid., 1550 & 1568, vol. 5, pp. 120-121: 'et in quella volse a sua elezione un Cristo sceso di croce, il quale Perino con ogni studio e fatica si messe a condurre: dove egli lo figurò esser già in terra deposto, et insieme le Marie intorno che lo piangono, fingendo un dolore e compassionevole affetto nelle attitudini loro; oltra che vi sono que' Niccodemi e le altre figure ammiratissime, meste et aflitte nel vedere l'innocenza di Cristo morto. Ma quel che egli fece divinissimamente, furono i duo ladroni rimasti conflitti in sulla croce, che sono, oltra al parer morti e veri, molto ben ricerchi di muscoli e di nervi, avendo egli occasione di farlo, rappresentandosi agli occhi di chi vede le membra loro in quella morte violenta tirate dai nervi, et i muscoli da' chiovi e dalle cordi'.

the human figure, grace (*grazia*) denotes graceful poses and expressions, that is, measured motion.

In this most divine picture there is a Dead Christ being brought to the Sepulchre, executed with such freshness and loving care it seems to the eye to have been only just painted. In the composition of this work, Raphael imagined to himself the sorrow that the nearest and most affectionate relatives of the dead feel in laying to rest the body of the most beloved, and on whom, the happiness, honour and welfare of a whole family have depended. Our Lady is seen in a swoon; and the heads of all the figures are very gracious in their weeping, particularly that of St John, who, with his hands clasped, bows his head in such a way as to move the hardest heart to pity. And in truth, whoever considers the diligence, love, art and grace shown by this picture, has great reason to marvel, for it amazes all those behold it, what with the air of the figures, the beauty of the draperies, and, in short, the supreme excellence it reveals in every part.⁶³⁷

The above passages clearly show that Vasari was keen to underscore Michelangelo's mastery of the nude in repose and motion, while indicating Michelangelo's influence on Perino's figures. Raphael's importance is seen to reside in the ability to represent natural objects perfectly, portray human emotions, and tell a story in pictures. Raphael's influence is seen most clearly in Perino's portrayal of sorrow in his painting of the crucifixion. In addition, Vasari's treatment of Andrea del Sarto makes implicit connections between the characteristics of the Florentine's works and Raphael's. Vasari's descriptive style is thus adapted to fit with the two lines of perfection which form the basis of his historical and aesthetic schemes.

Vasari's admiration of Perino's figurative style inspired by Michelangelo emerges from a number of descriptions of religious works. Vasari lavishes praise on Vaga's cartoon of *the Ten Thousand Martyrs* (c. 1522-1523) for the confraternity of artisans, Compagnia de' Martiri in Camaldoli. A drawing, *Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand* (Vienna, Graphische Sammlung Albertina) survives of the lost original cartoon (**figure 62**).⁶³⁸

The narrative context provides the painter with much scope in terms of invention understood as the grouping together of figures, and the demonstration of *ingenium* (ingegno).⁶³⁹ Vasari's description focuses on analogies with Michelangelo's cartoon for the *Battle of Cascina* particularly in terms of design and beauty, which are directly linked to his study and drawing of Michelangelo's cartoon:

⁶³⁷ VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 4, p. 164: 'Immaginossi Raffaello nel componimento di questa storia il dolore che hanno i più stretti ed amorevoli parenti nel riporre il corpo d'una alcuna cara persona, nella quale consista il bene, l'onore e l'utile di tutta una famiglia. Vi si vede la nostra donna venuta meno, e le teste di tutte le figure molto graziose nel pianto, e quella particolare di San Giovanni il quale, incrocchiate le mani, china la testa con una maniera da far commuovere qual è più duro animo e pietà. E di vero chi considera la diligenza, l'amore, l'arte e la grazia di quest'opera, ha gran ragione di meravigliarsi, perché ella fa stupire chiunque la mira, per l'aria delle figure, per la bellezza dei panni, ed insomma per una estrema bontà ch'ell'ha in tutte le parti'.

⁶³⁸ The original cartoon was kept in the home of the Florentine goldsmith Piloto as a showpiece. See B. Davidson, 'Early drawings by Perino del Vaga', *Master Drawings*, vol. 1, 1963, p. 25, n. 6, where it is suggested that the copy in the Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Mass., may have been the one made by Vasari.

Perino drew this cartoon on white paper, all shaded and hatched, leaving the paper itself for the lights, and executing the whole thing with admirable diligence. In it were the two emperors on the seat of judgement, condemning to the cross all the prisoners, who were turned towards the tribunal, some kneeling, some standing, and others bowed, but all nude and bound in different ways, and writhing with piteous gestures in various poses, revealing the trembling of the limbs at the prospect of the severing of the soul from the body in the agony and torment of crucifixion. There is depicted in those faces the constancy of faith in the old, the fear of death in the young, and in others the torture that they suffer from the strain of the cords on their bodies and arms. And there can also be seen the swelling of the muscles and even the cold sweat of death, all depicted in that design. Then in the soldiers who are leading them there is revealed a terrible fury, most impious and cruel, as they present them at the tribunal for condemnation and lead them to the cross. The emperors and soldiers are wearing cuirasses after the antique and very ornate and bizarre garments, with buskins, shoes, helmets, shields, and other pieces of armour wrought with all the wealth of the most beautiful ornaments which an artist can attain by copying and reproducing the antique, and designed with great lovingness, subtlety, and delicacy that the perfection of art can display. When this cartoon was seen by other artists and by other judges of discernment, they declared that they had never seen such beauty and excellence in design since the cartoon drawn by Michelangelo Buonarroti for the Council Chamber.⁶⁴⁰

In the description Vasari draws our attention to how Perino has successfully turned a martyrdom scene into a display of beautiful nudes in a range of postures, enhanced by a variety of expressions and 'ornaments' after the antique, such as the armour and garments. Physical and emotional strain is conveyed in different ways, through facial expression and through the twists and turns of the bodies as the martyrs writhe to free themselves. The variety of ways in which the martyrs are tied generates different effects on the body, such as trembling limbs and the swelling of the muscles.

Similar artistic qualities are emphasised in the description of Perino's *Moses Crossing the Red Sea* (c. 1522-1523; Milan, Brera Academy). Vasari briefly describes the scene and then focuses attention on the beauty generated by bodily motion: 'with the most beautiful postures, some swimming in armour and some nude, others

⁶³⁹ VBB, 1550 & 1568, p. 129.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid., 1550 & 1568, pp. 129-130: 'Aveva Perino disegnato questo cartone in sul foglio bianco sfumato e tratteggiato, lasciando i lumi della propria carta, condotto tutto con una diligenza mirabile, nel quale erano i due imperatori nel tribunale che sentenziavano a la croce tutti i prigionieri, i quali erano volti verso il tribunale, chi ginocchioni, chi ritto, et altro chinato, tutti ignudi legati per diverse vie, in attitudini varie storgendosi con atti di pietà, e conoscendo il tremar delle membra per averli a disgiungere l'anima nella passione e tormento del crocifiggersi; oltra che vi era accennato in quelle teste la costanza della fede ne' vecchi, il timore della morte ne' giovani, in altri il dolore delle torture nello stringerli le legature il torso e le braccia. Vedevansi appresso il gonfiar de' muscoli, e fino al sudar freddo della morte accennato in quel disegno. Oltra che si vedeva ne' soldati che gli guidavano una fiera e terribile, impietosissima e crudele nel presentargli al tribunale per la sentenza e nel giudicargli a la croce. Oltra che vi erano per il dosso degli imperadori e de' soldati corazze all'antica et abbigliamenti molto ornati et bizzarri, senza i calzari, le scarpe, le celate, le targhe, e le altre armature fatte con tutta quella coppia di bellissimi ornamenti che più si possa fare et imitare et aggiungere all'antico, disegnate con quell'amore e quell'artificio, e fine che può fare tutti gli estremi dell'arte. Il quale cartone vistosi per gli artefici e per altri intendenti ingegni, giudicarono non aver visto pari bellezza e bontà in disegno dopo quello di Michelagnolo Buonarroti fatto in Fiorenza per la Sala dei Consigli'.

swimming while clasping the horses round the neck'.⁶⁴¹ The drama is played out by realistic effects, such as the wet beards and hair, and the impression of screaming though the sense of drama is augmented by the figures in motion: 'with their beards and hair soaked, crying out in fear of death and struggling with all their might to escape'. As in the description above, Vasari praises the variety of ornaments in the form of vases and female hairstyles.⁶⁴²

Rosso Fiorentino

Vasari's characterisation of Rosso underscores the combination of virtuosity, expression, force and grandeur, evident in the poetic composition of his figures and his mastery of *disegno*, qualities directly related to his representation of the nude:

he was consistently very poetic in putting his figures together, bold and well-grounded in his design, with a charming style and breathtaking fantasy, as well as very skilful in arranging figures.⁶⁴³

According to Vasari, his fresco of a dead Christ for Piero Bartoli showed that his ultimate goal was to develop a bold style, displaying grandeur and grace and striking nudes, while his *Deposition* for Volterra (1521; Volterra, Volterra Gallery) conveys a strong sense of design, bold figures and the abstract quality of the poses, suggestive of motion not dependent on mimesis or prompted by a particular context. Vasari also emphasises the international appeal of his nudes in striking poses as a mark of his 'bold style' ('maniera gagliarda'), particularly his ability to turn a religious narrative into a virtuoso performance, irrespective of whether or not the nudes are justified by the narrative context.

Vasari's brief reference to Rosso's *Moses Defending the Daughters of Jethro* (1523; Florence, Uffizi) (**figure 63**) focuses entirely on the aesthetic qualities of the nudes: 'some very beautiful nudes'.⁶⁴⁴ Vasari's value judgement of the panel painting *Rebecca and Eliezer at the Well* (1523; copy in Pisa, Museo Nazionale di San

⁶⁴¹ Ibid., 1550 & 1568, vol. 5, pp. 131-132: 'Nella quale tela, che serviva per ispaillera, fece l'istoria di Mosè quando e' passa il mar Rosso, e che Faraone si sommerge in quello co' suoi cavalli e co' suoi carri; dove Perino fece attitudini bellissime di figure, chi nuota armato e chi ignudo, altri abbracciando il collo a' cavalli, bagnati le barbe e' capelli, nuotano e gridano per la paura della morte cercando il più che possono, con quel che veggono, scampo da allungar la vita.'

⁶⁴² Ibid., p. 132: 'da l'altra parte del mare vi è Mosè, Aron e gli altri Ebrei, maschi e femmine che ringraziano Iddio, et un numero di vasi, ch'egli finge che abbiano spogliato l'Egitto, con bellissimi garbi e varie forme, e femine con acconciature di testa molto varie.'

⁶⁴³ Ibid., 1550 & 1568, vol. 4, p. 474: 'fu che egli del continuo nelle composizioni delle figure sue era molto poetico e nel disegno fiero e fondato, con leggiadra maniera e terribilità di cose stravaganti, e un bellissimo compositore di figure.'

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 477: 'fece ancora a Giovanni Bandini un quadro d'alcuni ignudi bellissimi in una storia di Mosè, quando ammazza l'Egizio, nel quale erano cose lodatissime; e credo fosse in Francia mandato'. Available evidence shows that the painting was purchased by the exporter of Florentine art, Battista della Palla, and sent to François I around 1530. Giovanni Bandini, a loyal Medicean in early life and later the supporter of the Medici sympathiser Filippo Strozzi, helped to run a brothel outside Porta San Gallo, Florence. On these points, see D. Franklin, *Rosso in Italy: The Italian Career of Rosso Fiorentino*, New Haven and London, 1994, p. 109.

Matteo) similarly draws attention to the appeal of nude figures: 'which was held to be divine, since it contained male nudes and women executed with consummate grace'.⁶⁴⁵

The *Lives*, 1568

In the new biographies of the 1568 edition Vasari continues to chart the representation of the nude as the mark of absolute perfection and beauty, most notably in the biographies of Daniele da Volterra, Domenico Beccafumi (1484-1551) and Giulio Clovio, and in the section dedicated to the academicians, particularly Bronzino (1503-1572) and Alessandro Allori (1535-1607). While comments on individual paintings in this section are often succinct, it is clear that the mastery of Michelangelo's nudes constitutes the primary parameters for gauging artistic excellence and the benchmark in terms of absolute perfection. The value judgements and descriptions continue to focus on perfectly formed and beautiful nude figures which capture and hold the viewer's attention. Now that the mastery of the nude has been demonstrated by Michelangelo, the artist's chief goal is to think up new ways of using the nude to create a scene which illustrates his *ingenium* through a range of postures formed from his own imagination and original and striking effects. Thus the art of the nude does not end with Michelangelo but continues with the new generation of artists belonging to the fourth age of art in which the representation of the nude continues to play a central role.

Domenico Beccafumi's chief qualities as an artist comprise *art* (*arte*), *judgement* (*giudizio*) and *fine ingenium* (*ingegno bellissimo*), qualities which have their source in the artist. Artistic training and practices are linked to the notion of absolute perfection. First, he is praised for studying the paintings of Michelangelo and Raphael, as well as ancient statues, which helped him become a bold draughtsman, prolific in inventions and a good colourist. Secondly, Vasari notes that drawing anatomical figures and nudes also enhanced his reputation.

Vasari provides accounts of both versions of Domenico's *Fall of the Rebel Angels*. The rejected and incomplete version (c. 1524; Siena, Pinoteca) (**figure 64**) illustrates the transformation of a biblical scene through the artist's new invention of figures to convey Lucifer's expulsion:

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 477-478: 'Similmente un altro ne fece a Giovanni Cavalcanti, che andò in Inghilterra, quando Iacob piglia 'l bere da quelle donne alla fonte, che fu tenuto divino, atteso ch'è vi erano ignudi e femmine lavorate con somma grazia, alle quali egli di continuo si diletto far pannicini sottili, acconciature di capo con trecce et abbigliamenti per il dosso'. For the commission, see D. Franklin (as in n. 644), pp. 113-114. Since Giovanni Cavalcanti, a distinguished Florentine merchant, had business contacts in England, it has been suggested that the painting was probably commissioned for export, though copies are known to have been made before its dispatch. The fact that Vasari was mistaken about the subject suggests that his own and the general interest was in the nude figures rather than the narrative context in which they appear.

in which he was to paint St Michael killing Lucifer, and since he was capricious, he thought up a new invention to demonstrate the virtue and the fine concepts of his mind. And so, in order to represent Lucifer with his followers driven out of heaven to the deepest depths because of their arrogance, he began a shower of nudes which was most beautiful, but because he strove too hard it appears somewhat confused. Since this panel was not finished, it was taken after Domenico's death to the Spedale and placed near the high altar, where it can still be seen to the amazement of the viewer because of some of the most beautiful and foreshortened nudes.⁶⁴⁶

The figurative invention is perceived as an active creative force which demonstrates the artist's virtue and intellectual capacity, made visible through the representation of beautiful foreshortened nudes. The closing comment is a significant expression of the importance of aesthetic merits and inventive power in the assessment of a painting, which prevail over any other shortcomings. Vasari's comment on the completed version brings to mind Perino's fleeing and drowning figures in his *Moses Crossing the Red Sea*. Vasari singles out for praise the variety of bodily motion generated by the events and associated with 'beautiful grace and style':

the figure of God the Father, surrounded by angels, is shown above the clouds with the most beautiful grace. In the middle of the panel Angel Michael in armour is flying and indicating that he has placed Lucifer in the centre of the earth, where there are burning walls, a lake of angels in various poses and nude souls, who, in different gestures are swimming and suffering the torments of that fire. The whole picture has been made with such beautiful grace and style that the work appears illuminated by the fire and is marvellous to see. It is thus held to be rare.⁶⁴⁷

Aesthetic concerns prevail in Vasari's brief reference to other paintings by Beccafumi, such as *Moses Breaking the Tablets of the Law* (1537-38; Pisa, Cathedral), which is remarkable for 'some nudes that are extremely beautiful figures', and the striking effects created by lightning: 'and here, too, are some nude figures killed by lightning bolts which are admirable'.⁶⁴⁸ His *Christ in Limbo* (1530-1535; Siena, Pinoteca) likewise focuses on the merits of different nude or scantily-clad figures, such as the 'extremely beautiful' figure of Eve and the figure of the thief.⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁶ VBB, 1568, vol. 5, p. 167: 'nella quale aveva a fare un San Michele che uccide Lucifero, egli andò, come capriccioso, pensando a una nuova invenzione per mostrare le virtù e i bei concetti dell'animo suo. E così per figurar Lucifero co' suoi seguaci cacciati per la superbia dal cielo nel più profondo a basso cominciò una pioggia d'ignudi molta bella, ancora che per esservi molto affaticato dentro ella paresse confusa che no. Questa tavola essendo rimasta imperfetta, fu portata dopo la morte di Domenico nello spedale grande, salendo una scala, che è vicina all'altar maggiore, dove ancora si vede con meraviglia per certi scorti di ignudi bellissimi'.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid., 1568, p. 168: 'nella quale è finto nel più alto un Dio Padre con molti angeli intorno, sopra le nuvole, con bellissima grazia, e nel mezzo della tavola è l'Angelo Michele armato, che volando mostra aver posto nel centro della terra Lucifero, dove sono muraglie che ardono, antri rovinati et un lago di fuoco, con angeli in varie attitudini et anime nude, che in diversi atti nuotano e si cruciano in qual fuoco: il che tutto è fatto con tanta bella grazia e maniera, che pare quell'opera meravigliosa, in quelle tenebre scure, sia lumeggiata da quel fuoco; onde è tenuta opera rara'.

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid., 1568, p. 175: 'in uno è Moisè, che trovato il popolo avere sacrificato al vitel d'oro, rompe le tavole; et in questo fece Domenico alcuni nudi, che sono figure bellissime; e nell'altro è lo stesso Moisè, e la terra che si apre et inghiottisce una parte del popolo, et in questo anco sono alcuni ignudi morti da certi lampi di fuoco, che sono mirabili'.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid., vol. 5, p. 174

Vasari's comments on Daniele da Volterra's *Deposition* (c. 1545; Rome, Orsini Chapel in Trinità dei Monti) centre on the technical and aesthetic merits rather than the portrayal of emotions. Foreshortening is praised with regard to the beautiful figure of Christ and the men taking him off the cross.

With the fainting Virgin Mary who is supported by Magdalene and the other Marys, he showed the greatest judgement and that he was a rare man, so that, apart from the composition of the other figures, which is very rich, Christ is an excellent figure and a most beautiful foreshortened figure, coming forward with his feet and the rest behind. The figures that have defeated him support him up with strips of cloth while standing on ladders. They show the nude in some parts and have been executed with such grace.⁶⁵⁰

The Academicians

In the section on Bronzino, Vasari extols the artist's representation of corpses as the mark of technical mastery and well-understood anatomy, as well as his ability to make full use of narrative contexts in which to demonstrate his artistic qualities. The supreme perfection ('somma perfezione') and excellence ('bontà') of his *Christ on the Cross* manifested in Christ's dead body also provides evidence of his training and skill:

in which a dead Christ with the cross is executed with much study and labour and one can see that he drew it from a real dead body crucified on the cross, since it displays supreme perfection and excellence in every part.⁶⁵¹

With respect to an untraced painting by Bronzino depicting Christ on the cross, Vasari picks out for praise the figure of St Bartholomew, which is described as a 'truly flayed body' ('un uomo scorticato per davvero'). Vasari's concluding comment suggests that the representation of flayed bodies enhances the aesthetic value of a painting, demonstrating the ability to turn anatomical knowledge to artistic ends: 'a work of art which is beautiful in every part'.⁶⁵² Bronzino's *Christ in Limbo* (1552; Florence, Santa Croce) (**figure 65**) contains *ignudi bellissimi*, both male and female.⁶⁵³

Alessandro Allori's partial copy of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* (1560; Florence, SS. Annunziata, Montauto Chapel) is said to have been executed with study

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid., vol. 5, p. 541: 'lo svenimento di Maria Vergine sostenuta sopra le braccia da Madelena et altre Marie, mostrò grandissimo giudizio e di esser raro uomo, perciò che, oltre al componimento delle figure, che è molto ricco, il Cristo è ottimo figura e un bellissimo scorto, venendo coi piedi innanzi e col resto in dietro. Sono similmente belli e difficili scorti e figure quelli di coloro che, avendolo sconfitto, lo reggono con le fasce, stando sopra certe scale e mostrando in alcune parti l'ignudo, fatto con molta grazia.'

⁶⁵¹ Ibid., 1568, vol. 6, p. 231: 'in un quadro un Cristo crocifisso, che è condotto con molto studio e fatica; onde ben si conosce che lo ritrasse da un vero corpo morto confitto in croce, cotanto è in tutte le sue parti di somma perfezione e bontà'.

⁶⁵² Ibid., 1568, vol. 6, p. 235: 'nella quale fece Cristo ignudo con la croce, et intorno a lui molti Santi, fra i quali un San Bartolomeo scorticato, che pare una vera notoria et un uomo scorticato per davvero, così è naturale et imitato da una notoria con diligenza. Opera bella in tutte le sue parti'.

⁶⁵³ Ibid., p. 234.

('studio') and diligence ('diligenza'), 'having tried to imitate the nudes of Michelangelo'.⁶⁵⁴

The cluster of samples discussed above helps us develop a more complete picture of the qualities associated with Vasari's schemes of absolute and general perfection.

The application of terms denoting technical, stylistic and aesthetic merits in relation to the nude illustrate the key role played by individual artists in presenting to the viewer new images of the human figure. The attributes of the perfectly formed nude and the different contexts in which it appears, bring with them a new visual experience, which is indicated by the descriptive technique used.

Descriptions tend to use a simple, paratactic structure, vividly presenting the key features of the scene with particular reference to the nude and the striking effects it creates in both painting and sculpture. In sculpture the perfectly formed nude is admired for its own sake, that is, it is an aesthetic form which may acquire multiple meanings and functions. In painting variety is a key concept. Variety can comprise a range of natural or invented objects, a range of striking elements, ornaments and fanciful objects, which can make the scene look more convincing or simply add visual interest. However, variety created by bodily motion and a range of striking postures of nudes whether for dramatic emphasis or its own sake is the most highly valued artistic achievement, an infinite variety of figures.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 238.

PART THREE: VASARI ON ABSOLUTE PERFECTION AND THE NUDE AS AN ORNAMENT IN PAINTING AND SCULPTURE

One of the most interesting developments with regard to the nude charted in both editions of Vasari's *Lives* concerns the representation of the nude devoid of any literary content, that is, the ornamental nude and ornamental fantasies based exclusively or chiefly on the nude.⁶⁵⁵ The range of positive connotations with which ornament was associated is traceable in the *Lives* as Vasari maps out the changing perception and role of ornament as the emphasis shifts away from precious to dazzling performances achieved by exploiting the potential of bodily motion as a source of beauty appreciated for its own sake. The appeal of ornament ultimately rested on the difficulty of creating figures, particularly *ignudi bellissimi*. Just as the body beautiful came to be perceived as the person's chief ornament, the perfectly beautiful and proportioned nude is seen as the most beautiful form in art.

The role of the nude as an adorning ornament has its roots in Quattrocento usage of the two separate though interrelated terms *ornato* and *ornamento*. Landino characterises the paintings of Filippo Lippi and Fra Angelico as *ornato* as opposed to those of Masaccio which were 'without ornato' according to the belief that Masaccio's primary goal was the imitation of nature and truth.⁶⁵⁶ In fifteenth-century literary criticism the application of the term *ornato* drew on Book VIII of Quintilian's *Education of an orator*, as discussed in Chapter Two.

Landino's praise of Lippi's figures as *ornato* suggests that they were seen as counterpoised and flexed.⁶⁵⁷ Landino also notes that Lippi was skilled at all kinds of *ornamenti*, whether imitated from real life or invented. Properly used on buildings and in moderation *ornamenti* were seen as belonging to *ornato*.⁶⁵⁸ Vasari's

⁶⁵⁵ On the use of the term 'adorning ornament' ('schmückender Schmuck') in relation to figures that do not fulfil a narrative function, see R. Kuhn (as in n. 404), pp. 52-58.

⁶⁵⁶ On the application of the terms *ornato* and *ornamento* in Landino, see M. Baxandall (as in n. 272), pp. 131-133.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁸ In the *Lives*, the term *ornamento* is used to denote both *ornato* and *ornamento*. The terms *ornamento* (480 hits) and *ornamenti* (498 hits) appear more frequently than *adornato* (16 hits), *adorno* (68 hits), and *aricchiere* (4 hits) in both editions. Landino applies the separate but interrelated terms *ornato* and *ornamento*, whereas Vasari's usage with respect to the human figures indicates a fusion of the two terms. In the *Lives*, the term is applied to a range of qualities and objects. On the one hand, it can indicate personal qualities and virtue, both of the artist and eminent citizens. On the other hand, it refers to a range of decorative objects, after the antique or invented by the artist. Particularly in the biographies of sixteenth-century artists, Vasari frequently picks out for praise beautiful and bizarre ornaments, such as hairstyles, headdresses, armour, footwear, garments, vases, and grotesques. *Ornamento* is one of the defining characteristics of Perino del Vaga's style and he is highly praised for having surpassed the ancients in this aspect of painting. The idea that figures could serve primarily as adornments emerges from a number of references pertaining to the fifteenth and sixteenth century, indicated with expressions like 'adornare di figure'. In terms of artistic innovation and excellence, *Ignudi* as adorning ornaments can be seen to supersede a similar function traditionally performed by angels or the adorning function of putti. Vasari's main contribution in this respect lies in tracing the development of the adorning figure which reaches its peak with the ornamental *ignudi* on the Sistine Ceiling.

perception of the perfectly beautiful nude in a range of twisted and turned postures as the chief ornament of art illustrates the development of the term *ornato/ornamento* between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

In Vasari's aesthetic, the ability to vary the poses and shapes of the nude figure in endless profusion is perceived as the mark of boundless powers of invention. The focus on new, autonomously invented poses unrelated to the portrayal of emotions and devoid of literary content, included primarily for the sake of ornamentation and appearing frequently in friezes, could lead to the formulation of new meanings given by the artist in relation to the context in which the *Ignudi* appear. In terms of artistic development the freedom of imagination culminates in the creation of variety and novelty as a virtuoso performance resolving difficulty with facility.

In the *Lives* it is Michelangelo who sets the standards for this innovative role of the nude, though as we saw in Chapter Two, Luca Signorelli had adorned the *Court of Pan* (**figure 33**) and the *Medici Tondo* (**figure 34**) with nude figures. Michelangelo's *Tondo Doni* (**figure 35**) is presented as an important example of the ornamental role played by the nude. Vasari praises the painting particularly on account of the group of male nudes in a variety of postures demonstrating the artist's technical skill and inventive power, using the nude as a vehicle for ingenious symbolic expression of the client's status. With its range of figures adorning the tomb of Julius II, Michelangelo's design is an instance of draped and nude figures functioning as adorning ornaments in sculpture. It is interesting to note that in the discussion of the tomb in the second edition the term 'invenzione' is replaced by the terms 'ornamento e ricchezza' in the 1568 edition.⁶⁵⁹

Michelangelo's *Ignudi* on the Sistine Ceiling (1508-1512; Rome, Sistine Ceiling) (**figure 66**) are presented as the culmination point of the ornamental role of the nude and a major artistic example:

In these compartments he used no rule of perspective in foreshortening, nor is there any fixed point of view, but he accommodated the compartments to the figures rather than the figures to the compartments, being satisfied to execute figures, both nude and draped, with the perfection of design, so that another such work has never been and never can be done, and it is scarcely

⁶⁵⁹ VBB 1550, vol. 6, p 26; cf. *ibid.*, 1568. In the revised account Vasari recounts that the tomb was to demonstrate not only Michelangelo's artistic skills but also surpass every ancient and imperial tomb in terms of beauty, splendour, magnificent ornament and richness. In both editions, Vasari's description of the design focuses on the range of figures that were to adorn the tomb monument. The prisoners bound to terminal figures are said to be 'truly sublime' and Vasari praises their strange and unusual poses. Vasari further underscores the merits of the prisoners and the figure of Victory by naming the eminent citizens who owned them at the time of writing the text. Vasari states that the prisoners fulfil a symbolic role, representing the provinces subjugated by Julius during his papacy. Vasari also picks out for praise the bronze frieze above the cornice which is adorned with difficult figurative ornaments. Vasari's comment on the figure of Moses brings to mind the standards set for sculpture in *Della scultura*, in that the figure is commended for its facial expression, lifelike hair, beard and garments, all of which display beauty and perfection. Vasari's focus on the adorning nudes provides further evidence that he was chiefly interested in this aesthetic form.

possible even to imitate his achievement. This work, in truth, has been and still is the beacon of our art, and has bestowed such benefits and shed so much light on the art of painting, that it has served to illuminate a world that had lain in darkness for so many hundreds of years. And it is certain that no man who is a painter need think any more to see new inventions, attitudes, and draperies for the clothing of figures, novel manners of expression, and things painted with greater variety and force, because he gave to this work all the perfection that can be given to any work executed in such a field of art. And at the present day everyone is amazed who is able to perceive in it the excellence of the figures, the perfection of foreshortenings, and the extraordinary roundness of the contours, which have in them slenderness and grace, being drawn with the beauty of proportion that is seen in beautiful nudes; and these, in order to display the supreme perfection of art, he made of all ages, different in expression and in form, in countenance and in outline, some more slender and some fuller in the limbs; as may be seen in the beautiful attitudes, which are all different, some seated, some moving, and others upholding certain festoons of oak leaves and acorns, placed there as the arms and device of Pope Julius, and signifying that at that time and under his government was the age of gold; for Italy was not then in the travail and misery that she has since suffered.⁶⁶⁰

Paradigms of the ornamental nude, the *Ignudi* display every attribute of absolute perfection, that is, 'design' ('disegno'), 'grace' ('grazia'), 'contours' ('contorni'), 'perfection of foreshortened figures' ('perfezione degli scorti'), 'the most beautiful postures' ('bellissime attitudini') and 'inventions of postures' ('invenzioni di attitudini'), all intimately bound up with the technical mastery and *ingenium* of Michelangelo. *Terribilità* is applied here to denote artifice and skill, indicating the high valuation of these qualities. The perfection and beauty of the figures is manifested in the 'roundness of the contours', which are 'turned with that beautiful proportion seen in beautiful nudes'. The range of poses created from the artist's imagination by twisting and turning the figures, which generates a constantly renewable source of beauty, provides an infinite variety in rendering the same motif.

Having defined the *Ignudi* as the summit of perfection, Vasari goes on to discuss the actions they perform. The *Ignudi* are bearing and presenting to the viewer garlands of the patron's heraldic plant, the oak and bronze medallions. The figures are visual metaphors of the Golden Age during Julius's reign as pope. The beauty and perfection of these ornaments thus mirror the pope's glory and adorn his persona. The medallions they bear contain stories from the Old Testament and thus create a

⁶⁶⁰ VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 6, pp. 39-40: 'La quale opera è veramente stata la lucerna che ha fatto giovamento e lume all'arte della pittura, che ha bastato a illuminare il mondo, per tante centinaia d'anni in tenebre stato. E nel vero non curi più chi è pittore di vedere novità et invenzioni di attitudini, abbigliamenti addosso a figure, modi nuovi d'aria e terribilità di cose variamente dipinte, perché tutta quella perfezione che si può dare a cosa che in tal magistero si faccia a questo ha dato. E stupisca ogni uomo che sa scorgere nella bontà la perfezione degli scorti, la stupendissima rotondità dei contorni, che hanno in se grazia e sveltezza, girati con quella bella proporzione che nei belli ignudi si vede. Ve ne fece di tutte le età, differenti d'aria e di forma, così nel viso come ne' lineamenti, di aver più sveltezza e grossezza nelle membra, come ancora si può conoscere nelle bellissime attitudini che differenti e fanno, sedendo e girando. ... sostenendo alcuni festoni di quercia e di ghiande messe per l'arme e per l'impresa di Papa Giulio denotando che a quel tempo et al governo suo era l'età dell'oro, per non essere allora la Italia ne' travagli e nelle miserie che ella è stata poi.'

visual link with the main narrative scenes. By courting the viewer's attention they direct his or her attention to their perfectly beautiful form and towards the narrative scenes with the glorious lustre of Pope Julius as the linking element.⁶⁶¹

In the second edition of the *Lives*, Vasari brings to our attention a number of examples of the ornamental nude in several works in which adorning *ignudi* augment the artistic merits and enhance the visual experience while creating explicit or implicit links to the main scene. Michelangelo's adorning *Ignudi* on the Sistine ceiling are the benchmark for gauging the merits of any artist's ability to find ways of using this kind of nude figure.

A good example of the continuing interest in the ornamental role of the nude on the part of artists and their clients is evident in the account of the decorative scheme in the Sala Regia (Rome; The Vatican). The project, begun by Perino del Vaga, was completed by Daniele da Volterra. Vasari praises the ornamental arch 'richly adorned with grotesques and many beautiful small nude figures' by Perino. Dividing the ceiling into squares and ovals, Perino carried out the stucco work much admired by Vasari on account of the abundance of beautiful and difficult ornaments: 'and he made those ornaments richer and more beautiful than one can in the difficulty of that art'. Daniello's commission to complete the decoration following Perino's design, allegedly awarded due to the intervention of Michelangelo, illustrates that the most beautiful nudes ('bellissimi ignudi') were intended to serve as the main ornamental figures.⁶⁶²

Another reference to the nude as an adorning ornament can be found in the description of Francesco Salviati's decoration of Palazzo Vecchio in Florence (1543-1545), particularly the friezes adorned with a range of nude figures holding festoons with cameos depicting the deeds of Camillus, through which they relate indirectly to the main scenes, thus serving as additional symbols of his exploits:

Above the windows there is a frieze completely full of the most beautiful *Ignudi*, which are life size and in different postures and with some stories of the exploits of Camillus.⁶⁶³

A particularly sophisticated example of the use of *Ignudi* as adorning ornaments is represented by the miniatures painted by Giulio Clovio (1499-1592) in the *Libro delle*

⁶⁶¹ Condivi's discussion of the *Ignudi* as adorning figures devoid of literary content is in keeping with Vasari's understanding of them. See A. Condivi (as in n. 341), p. 47-50: 'ma non meno di questa è meravigliosa quella parte, che alla storia non si appartiene. Questi son certi ignudi, che sopra la già detta cornice, in alcuni zoccoli sedendo, un di qua, et un di là, sostengono i medaglioni, che si son detti, finti di metallo, nei quali, a uso di rovesci son fatte varie storie tutto a proposito però della principale.'

⁶⁶² Ibid., 1568, vol. 5, p. 543: 'per mezzo di molti amici e particolarmente Michelagnolo Buonarroti, fu da papa Paolo Terzo messo in suo luogo Daniello, con la medesima provvisione che aveva Perino, et ordinatogli che desse principio agli ornamenti delle facciate che s'avevano a fare di stucchi, con molti ignudi tutti tondi sopra certi frontoni.'

⁶⁶³ Ibid., 1568, vol. 5, p. 522: 'Sopra le finestre è un fregio tutto pieno di bellissimi ignudi, grandi quanto il vivo et in diverse attitudini, con alcune storie similmente de' fatti di Camillo.'

Ore (The Farnese Hours, 1546; New York, The Pierpont Morgan Library), a private commission for Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, though evidence suggests the work was accessible to artists and experts of art.⁶⁶⁴ The Farnese Hours, which illustrates the stories of the sacred office of the Virgin Mary with the written text by Francesco Monterchi, contains 26 main scenes arranged in pairs.

The miniature paintings are presented as the artist's masterpiece and said to be executed with *studio* and *fatica*, terms with positive connotations relating to artistic practices, assisting perfection in art and associated particularly with the fourth age of art. The level of perfection attained by Clovio is evident in Vasari's definition of him as a 'new Michelangelo in miniature', describing his work as 'divine', displaying 'beautiful grace and style', whereby the artist surpassed both modern and ancient artists. Clovio is thus credited with taking the art of illumination to new heights just as Michelangelo had done with painting and sculpture.⁶⁶⁵

Vasari describes the paintings at length and gives prominence to the range of nude figures depicted in the scenes and in the borders. The miniatures represent figures from classical mythology and the Old and New Testament. Michelangelesque nudes appear in several of the main scenes, for example, in folios 34v-35, which represent the *Circumcision of Christ* (**figure 67**) and *St John Baptising Christ* (**figure 68**) respectively. Hence the two scenes placed one on the left, the other on the right, depicting the rites of circumcision and baptism. The baptism scene, which contains a direct quotation from Michelangelo's cartoon for the *Battle of Cascina*, is referred to as a 'story full of nudes' ('*storia piena di ignudi*').

Folios 30v-31 (**figures 69 and 70**) represent the Angels appearing before the shepherds and the Tributine sibyl indicating the Virgin and Christ-child, thus announcing the coming of Christ to the East and West. The shepherds are nude and are represented in difficult postures. According to Webster Smith, the main scenes are placed in relation to each other. Usually the picture on the left represents a biblical episode or subject linked to the text which follows, while the picture on the facing page is a prefiguration of or analogy to the picture facing it. Smith refers to this pictorial device as the type and anti-type, which Vasari calls *la figura and il figurato*.⁶⁶⁶

⁶⁶⁴ On access to the book and Alessandro Farnese's view of it, see the excellent study by W. Smith, *The Farnese Hours*, New York, 1987, p. 12. Alessandro Farnese's will, dated 1587, strongly suggests that the manuscript was his favourite possession and that it was seen more as a semi-public than a private work. At the end of the artist's biography Vasari writes that Clovio was always willing to show others his works and designs, VBB, 1568, vol. 6, p. 219.

⁶⁶⁵ VBB, 1568, vol. 6, pp. 215-217.

⁶⁶⁶ W. Smith (as in n. 664), pp. 13-14.

While the nudes in the main scenes are part of the narrative and may or may not be justified by the context, nude figures in the borders (*Ignudi* or *putti*) are depicted in a range of postures and in some instances perform various actions and functions. Vasari lavishes praise on these figures, the range of other ornaments and bizarre elements which frame the main scenes, enriching them while also relating to them:

and it is not possible to see in all the stories a stranger or more beautiful variety of bizarre ornaments, and different actions and postures of nudes, male and female, studied and well understood in every part, and placed intentionally around [the stories] in the friezes to enrich the work.⁶⁶⁷

The postures of the *Ignudi* and *putti* on the right-hand page are turned the opposite way to those on the left-hand page. They could therefore be seen as mirror figures, holding the key to the associations between the pairs of paintings, constituting a visual link between the type (*figura*) and anti-type (*figurato*).

In passages which deal with the representation of the nude as an adorning ornament Vasari underscores the celebration of its aesthetic and artistic qualities for their own sake as the main appeal of the images in both painting and sculpture. The adorning ornament lends itself to a range of works and settings for both art forms. In addition, it provides a context in which the artist can design from his imagination a range of postures, giving the figures a function or a symbolic role depending on the specific context in which it appears. The nude as an adorning ornament, particularly those on the Sistine Ceiling, represents the culmination point of the nude admired principally for its artistic and aesthetic merits.

⁶⁶⁷ VBB, 1568, vol. 6, p. 215: 'E non è possibile vedere per tutte le storie la più strana e bella varietà di bizzarri ornamenti, e diversi atti e posture d'ignudi, maschi e femine, studiati e ben ricerchi in tutte le parti, e poste con proposito attorno in detti fregi per arricchirne l'opera'.

PART FOUR: THE PREFACES AND THE NUDE

The central importance of the nude in both editions of the *Lives* is not reflected in the prefaces preceding each of the three ages of art, where very few references are made to the nude figure. In the preface to the second period, Masaccio's nude in the Carmine Chapel, which is said to contain an admirable nude shivering with cold, is the only specific reference to a nude figure in painting.⁶⁶⁸ Masaccio's general improvements are seen to comprise the representation of buildings, nudes, colouring and foreshortening, whereas the nude figures of Antonio Pollaiuolo and Luca Signorelli, key figures in the biographies, are not mentioned. In the preface to the third age, where the progress of the earlier period is considered to be inferior in every respect. The figures of artists like Luca Signorelli are described as flayed and rudimentary, and no mention is made of his ability to foreshorten figures well.⁶⁶⁹ While Michelangelo is presented as the supreme artist in architecture, painting and sculpture, no mention is made of his unsurpassed heights in relation to the nude.

The three prefaces preceding the biographies trace the progress of art from crude beginnings in the thirteenth century to a state of perfection in the sixteenth century according to the notion that the imitation of natural objects is perfectible over time and that artists ultimately arrive at a flawless representation. Artistic development is presented as an ever increasing degree of lifelikeness; the perfection of ancient works of art constitutes another benchmark for gauging artistic development, particularly in the second and third prefaces.⁶⁷⁰ Artistic achievements are specific to a particular period and are surpassed in the age that follows.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid., 1550 & 1568, vol. 3, p. 17.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid., 1550 & 1568, vol. 4, p. 7.

⁶⁷⁰ During the early Renaissance various views on perfection were recorded in writing, often with references to ancient art. The first section of Landino's commentary on art is concerned with the perfection in ancient art. In modern times rebirth occurred with Cimabue, who brought to painting natural lines, true proportion and lively and varied gestures. Further progress was made by Giotto, whose lively gestures in the *Navicella* are praised and deemed appropriate. According to Landino, Masaccio, Brunelleschi, and Donatello all played a key role in the progress of art in the fifteenth century. The authors of the *Anonimo Magliabecchiano* and the *Libro di Antonio Billi* believe that true rebirth began with Giotto. The most elaborate notion of progress is found in Gelli's *Vite d'artisti*. Progress in ancient art is followed by decline in the Middle Ages but rebirth occurs in Florence thanks to the ingenuity of its citizens. Art is reborn in Florence with Cimabue and Giotto and reaches its peak with Michelangelo. Perfection is associated with the ability to convey emotion according to the notion of appropriateness (*convenevolezza*) and the introduction of a new style (*maniera*). Art progressed from Giotto to Michelangelo, as is most evident in Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*. Primacy in the three arts is awarded to Giotto, Orcagna and Michelangelo. Progress is seen as linear and is assessed on the basis of stylistic characteristics and the ability to depict emotions rather than technical and artistic qualities. Despite the lack of emphasis on technical skill, the notion of perfection expounded by Gelli hints at the central role played by Michelangelo, and by implication of the nude. Decline in art is attributed to genetic and cultural degeneracy resulting from the Barbarian invasions or from the past bigotry of popes who condemned ancient sculpture because it was seen to arouse carnal desire. The result was art works of inferior quality, suggesting that for Gelli the representation of the nude contributed to the progress of art and artistic quality. In Gelli's mind, there should be beautiful images of men and women in art just as there are beautiful men and women in real life, implying that beauty was an important objective in art. See G. B. Gelli 'Vite di Artisti di Giovan Battista Gelli', *ASL*, G. Mancini (ed), Ser. 5, Tl. 17., 1896, pp. 32-62.

The notion of rebirth or resuscitation ('rinascita') appears at the end of the preface preceding the first age, in which an account is given of the origins of the arts, their rise in antiquity and their subsequent decline. Gombrich demonstrated that the notion of progress towards technical mastery is derived from a passage in Cicero's *Brutus*, a text which was not available in translation at that time.⁶⁷¹ The author expands on Cicero's division of artistic development into three ages, comparable to the biological development of men, that is, infancy, youth, and maturity. The division of Renaissance art into three periods is based on the notion that art history is governed by periodization. While it appears that the biographies were to be ordered chronologically according to the year the artist died, there is no overwhelming evidence that a division into three ages was an original intention.⁶⁷²

Recent research into the authorship of the *Lives* has questioned the extent of Vasari's contribution to the text and particularly to the prefaces. This research has focused on the role of Vasari's editors, whose involvement, particularly that of Bartoli and Giambullari, changed the scope of the text. Charles Hope has observed that the whole text is less unified than is often assumed and that certain parts of it, particularly the prefaces preceding the biographies, cannot plausibly be attributed to Vasari.⁶⁷³ While Hope (1995) suggests that Vasari was largely responsible for the biographies, he maintains that the division into periods must have been a later addition, pointing out that the notion of the three periods of art is only mentioned twice in the biographies.⁶⁷⁴ Further evidence for this assumption is provided by the fact that the introductory preface contains no references to the subdivision, though such references appear in the second and third prefaces.⁶⁷⁵ Hope believes that the first preface bears the stamp of a historian and has proposed Giambullari as the probable author on account of his historical expertise, suggesting, on these grounds, that he also authored the second and third.

More recently, Thomas Frangenberg has provided further evidence supporting the involvement of these Florentine literary men, pinpointing sections of the *Lives* most probably written by Bartoli and Giambullari and identifying Bartoli as Vasari's main

⁶⁷¹ VBB, 1550 and 1568, vol. 3, pp. 7-8; see E. H. Gombrich, 'Vasari's *Lives* and Cicero's *Brutus*', *JWCI*, vol. 23, 1960, pp. 309-311. Vasari's training and education, which provided him with a basic knowledge of Latin, were primarily suited to the activities of artist and courtier. It is highly unlikely that he possessed expert knowledge of the kind of classical literary texts needed to write the sections of the *Lives* under discussion here. In addition, literary experts like Cosimo Bartoli and Vincenzo Borghini assisted Vasari for much of his career as an artist.

⁶⁷² These points were first made by C. Hope in his illuminating article 'Can You Trust Vasari?', *The New York Review of Books* 42, 15, 1995, pp. 10-13.

⁶⁷³ *Ibid.*, Hope's investigation into the authorship of biographies is on-going and is likely to increase the number of passages unlikely to have been written by Vasari.

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, The relevant passages in the *Lives* are: VBB, 1550 and 1568, vol. 3, pp. 301-305; vol. 4, p. 47. The intention to present the biographies chronologically is expressed in the 'Proemio', vol. 1, p. 10, while the remark made in the 'Proemio delle vite', vol. 2, p. 32 indicates a different perception of the text.

⁶⁷⁵ VBB, 1550 and 1568, vol. 3, pp. 5-19; vol. 4, pp. 3-13.

co-author.⁶⁷⁶ According to Frangenberg, the general preface was co-authored by Bartoli and Giambullari, each according to his own expertise.⁶⁷⁷ Frangenberg also believes that the 'Proemio delle vite' was probably the first to be included; he bases his assumptions on the title, the lack of references to subsequent divisions, and the numerous references to classical texts.⁶⁷⁸ The 'Proemio', which refers to the content of the 'Proemio delle vite', was probably included afterwards. This preface contains a discussion of the *paragone*. Frangenberg believes Bartoli adapted Vasari's own response to Varchi and provided a more complete presentation of the key conceptual points.⁶⁷⁹

Frangenberg ascribes the second and third preface to Bartoli on the basis of the application of the five terms that make up 'rule of art' ('*regola d'arte*'), that is, *ordine* (order), *misura* (measure), *regola* (rule), *disegno* (design) and *maniera* (style). Of these five terms, *ordine* and *regola* mainly pertained to architecture. Bartoli's expertise of architecture has led Frangenberg to identify him as the main author of the chapter on architecture.⁶⁸⁰ Frangenberg concludes that it is highly likely that both Vasari and Bartoli compiled information for the chapters on sculpture and painting, while it is reasonable to assume that Bartoli gave the sections a more polished form.⁶⁸¹

My own analysis of the nude lends support to these assumptions. The discrepancies between the prefaces and the biographical and technical sections chiefly concern the role of ancient art, and specific understandings of the terms *disegno*, *invenzione*, and *colorire*. In the prefaces these are generally evoked without distinction, while they are given specific connotations in the biographies and *Della pittura*.⁶⁸² In addition, a comparison between the role of ancient art in the prefaces

⁶⁷⁶ T. Frangenberg (as in n. 364), pp. 244-258.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid, pp. 257-8.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid, pp. 248-352.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 253. One example of the differences between Vasari's letter and the passage in question is the application of *disegno*. While the letter refers to *disegno* as the 'mother' of the three arts, in the *Lives*, it is presented as the 'father'. For Vasari's response as published by Varchi, see B. Varchi (as in n. 564), pp. 493-499.

⁶⁸⁰ Vasari embarked upon all his most important architectural projects after the 1550 edition of the *Lives* had been completed. Before that time Vasari had not acquired any significant practical knowledge on architecture. Frangenberg also notes that he also had little experience of technical writing. It is therefore plausible to assume that Bartoli, who was an amateur architect and translator of Alberti's *De re aedificatoria*, provided much of the architectural background. Vitruvius, Alberti and Serlio were all key earlier sources for the chapter on architecture. On this point, see T. Frangenberg (as in n. 364), pp. 247-248. Further evidence that Vasari was not the main author of the chapter on architecture is provided by the fact that it does not develop the ideas of architects like Francesco di Giorgio, which were central to the notion of artistic imagination expounded in *Della pittura*.

⁶⁸¹ T. Frangenberg (as in n. 364), p. 255. An additional argument in favour of Bartoli as co-author is the application of the term, 'secrets' ('*segreti*'), a term not used by Vasari.

⁶⁸² The attempt to analyse the *Lives* as a unified text and to make the content of the prefaces match that of the biographies has led to the failure to pinpoint and relate key passages in the *Lives*, as well as the inability to distinguish major from minor concerns. This has ultimately resulted in misleading accounts of the text's main objectives. According to P. L. Rubin, the overall framework of the prefaces fits with each biography as a record of the important works; together they re-construct the sequence of excellence. The biographies of individual artists are closely connected with the life cycle of the arts with each artist displaying his own individuality and talent. Art history is 'not divided from theory or art

and the biographies reveals a different perception of its importance. Firstly, the many references to ancient art in the prefaces point to the interests of connoisseurs and men of letters rather than the concerns of practising artists. Secondly, the prefaces contain specific references to ancient works of art and artists in sharp contrast with the biographies, where such references are few and far between.⁶⁸³ Vasari's account of Michelangelo's *David* is one of the few passages that makes specific references to ancient statues. In the biographies, equalling and surpassing ancient works is one of the parameters for assessing the merits of a piece of sculpture. Michelangelo's *David* demonstrates that the Florentine artist created figures which surpassed the qualities inherent in ancient works and that this was an important goal for artists of that period. Once the standards are set by Michelangelo, particularly with regard to the nude, the goal of surpassing ancient art is replaced by the objective of creating the perfectly beautiful nude in new and striking postures. Thirdly, the discussion of artistic practices pertaining to the nude places greater emphasis on the observation of the live model and an understanding of anatomy rather than the study of ancient works, though this remains an important part of the artist's training. As with the nude, individual artists are picked out for praise on account of their study of ancient works. Thus the term *antico* is used as part of Vasari's critical baggage to praise and blame an artist. However, the choice of the live model, the rendering of bodies in motion, and striking effects achieved with nude figures are the ultimate parameters for gauging an artist's merits. This emphasis on the nude fits perfectly with Vasari's promotion of the autonomous artist; this important objective seems unattainable simply from the study and surpassing of ancient works, as expounded in the prefaces.

Finally and perhaps most significantly, a linear view of artistic development as expounded in the prefaces is inconsistent with the notions of different kinds of perfection in the biographies of the two editions.⁶⁸⁴ Taking into consideration both

criticism'. One of Vasari's tasks as a historian was to see the relation between individual styles and the characteristics of the time. See P. L. Rubin (as in n. 545), pp. 2, 7, 233 and 246. Rather than see Vasari as a historian this chapter suggests that he should be considered as a theorist on the one hand, since he provided theoretical formulations for the artistic practices of his own day and related them to a specific set of terms, and as a critic on the other hand, in that key conceptual terms are used as critical tools in the biographies to distinguish between different artistic merits and achievements which in turn are linked to different notions of perfection.

⁶⁸³ VBB (1550 & 1568), vol. 4, p. 7. The *Proemio della Terza Parte* mentions ancient sculptural works, such as the *Laocoon*, the *Torso Belvedere*, *Venus*, *Cleopatra*, and *Apollo*. For references to ancient artists, such as *Apelles* and *Zeuxis*, *ibid.*, p. 9. On the role played by ancient statuary, see this thesis, Chapter Two. References to ancient art works and comparisons between ancient and modern artists are more frequently found in the writings of *letterati*. Vasari's discussion of artistic procedures and preoccupations focuses on the live model and the study of anatomy, particularly for sixteenth-century art, and with regard to both sculpture and painting. While Vasari's general references to ancient works tend to downplay the role of ancient works, he provides the most useful insight into artistic preoccupations particularly concerning the Florentine context, thus making it possible to make connections with his value judgements and the myth of the virile and youthful figure in Florence.

⁶⁸⁴ An example of the synchronous view of the development of the visual arts is found in the writings of V. Borghini, according to whom art improved little by little. Giotto was not completely perfect, while Masaccio added to the merits of Giotto and Fra Filippo to Masaccio and Filippino to his father Fra

the linear notion of artistic development and the emphasis on ancient art, the prefaces reveal not only a different perception of the progress and perfection of art but also of art and the preoccupations and goals of its practitioners. Linear artistic development and the emphasis on ancient art were characteristics of earlier writings concerned with the progress of art, such as Landino's *Comento*. By contrast, the approach to art adopted in *Della pittura* and the biographies is thus innovative, promoting artistic imagination and the freedom to create while raising the status of the artist.

Conclusions

In both editions of the *Lives* references to the nude constitute analyses and judgements made by someone with an acute understanding of the technical and stylistic aspects of the nude. Relating artistic practices and theory, the author of passages on the nude promoted the belief that the most innovative artistic contributions centred on its representation in painting and sculpture. The conceptual terms applied, particularly in *Della pittura*, fit perfectly with the value judgements on the nude in the biographies and the notion of absolute perfection which emerges from them. The evidence available strongly suggests that references to the nude and terms relating to the notions of perfection were most probably written by the same person, with several passages elaborated for representation by one of Vasari's editors. Since evidence to the contrary has not been produced, it is assumed that Vasari was the author of these sections. A study of the nude therefore helps us gain a better understanding of Vasari's personal contribution to the text, while also pinpointing links between different sections of the text.

An examination of the nude demonstrates the importance of Alpers' assumptions regarding the 1568 edition yet also the need to revise them. The different notions of perfection were charted in the 1550 edition along with the relevant theoretical concepts. Key additions in the second edition serve primarily to re-affirm these distinctions, while new passages demonstrate the continual development of these notions in the second edition. Both editions demonstrate that the nude was

Filippo. Michelangelo and Raphael then added to these achievements, bringing art to perfection. In V. Borghini's mind, artistic progress did not preclude an appreciation of the past and he praised Vasari for writing about the virtues of past artists who had been surpassed but who could still 'please' and 'teach'. See V. Borghini, MS. II. X. 116, ff. 10v-11, Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence, as cited by R. Williams (as in n. 557), p. 71, n. 96. Like the prefaces, V. Borghini's view of historical development as linear fails to see not only the stylistic differences discussed in the biographies but more importantly the different kinds of perfection expounded in the *Lives*.

perceived as an aesthetic form with multiple meanings, opening up new realms for its representation and display.

Finally, the theoretical concepts which make up Vasari's aesthetic of the nude and notion of absolute perfection open new possibilities for thinking about the artist's work. The nude, more than any other form, constitutes proof of technical mastery and *ingenium*, illustrating that the artist can create from imagination an infinite variety of figures by modifying postures. In Vasari's mind, it is the artist who demonstrates his supreme skill in depicting the nude figure who passes beyond the traditional professional boundaries established by society, the workshop and the guild system.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Debate over the Characteristic of the Nude

Michelangelo's muscular *facchino* versus Raphael's delicate *gentiluomo*

'To reprove those who cannot deny your genius [Titian] and mine and so put you in the first rank as a mere painter of portraits and me there as a slanderer', Pietro Aretino.⁶⁸⁵

Introduction

Aretino's intention to promote Titian's pictorial skills beyond his mastery of the portrait is nowhere better reflected than in Lodovico Dolce's *Dialogo della pittura – Intitolato L'Aretino*, which was published in Venice in 1557.⁶⁸⁶ The dialogue comprises three interrelated parts. The first section discusses the nobility of painting and all the elements needed for perfection, the principles of which serve to resolve the *paragone* between Michelangelo and Raphael in favour of the latter in the second section. Connected with this is the appraisal of eight leading sixteenth-century artists, building up to the concluding encomium of Titian as the greatest representative of Venetian painting and a brief account of his career. Dedicated to the patrician Loredan family,⁶⁸⁷ the treatise contains a number of flattering allusions to noble Venetians and exemplary patronage with specific reference to works produced for Venetian churches and the Doge's palace. The setting of the dialogue in the Basilica of SS. Giovanni and Paolo provides the perfect backdrop for celebrating Venetian artistic excellence, military power and religious piety.⁶⁸⁸

As Mark Roskill has demonstrated, Dolce's ideas and formulations are culled from a wide range of sources, most notably the 1550 edition of the *Lives*, from which Dolce made extensive and open borrowings. He also drew on Alberti's *Trattato della pittura*, Gauricus's *De scultura*, the literary theories of Daniele Barbaro and Bernardino Daniello, as well as Castiglione and Bembo, selecting those elements which best fit his arguments and tally with his perception of art and the wider

⁶⁸⁵ P. Aretino (as in n. 293), vol. 1, p. 79, Letter to Titian dated 9 November 1537: 'accorar quegli che, non potendo negar l'ingegno nostro, danno il primo luogo a voi nei ritratti, e a me nel dir male: come non si vedessero per il mondo le vostre e le mie opre'. English translation from *Selected Letters*, G. Bull (trans.), Harmondsworth, 1976, p. 124.

⁶⁸⁶ L. Dolce, *Dialogo della pittura – Intitolato L'Aretino*, P. Barocchi (ed), *Trattati d'arte: fra manierismo e controriforma*, vol. 1, Bari, 1960, pp. 141-202, pp. 433-493, and M. W. Roskill (as in n. 406). All subsequent English translations are from or adapted from Roskill's translation of Dolce's treatise. Dolce's text combines three functions of the dialogue form, that is, it serves to adorn a treatise, provide a framework for autobiography, and evoke contemporary humanistic discussion, concluding in favour of one particular argument. 'Aretino' takes the lead early on while Fabbrini's remarks are either passed over or used to supplement points already made by Aretino, and at the end of the dialogue Fabbrini is convinced of the superiority of Raphael and Titian.

⁶⁸⁷ L. Dolce / Barocchi (as in n. 686), pp. 143-4.

⁶⁸⁸ See M. Rogers, 'Decorum in Lodovico Dolce and Titian's *poesie*', F. Ames-Lewis and A. Bednarek (eds) (as in n. 10), pp. 111-120, esp. pp. 112-113.

implications it had for the role of the artist and the function of art.⁶⁸⁹ Dolce also frequently cites ancient sources to shore up his assumptions and critical comments.⁶⁹⁰

The *Dialogo* reveals a major preoccupation with the nude and is centred not only on the opposition between the clothed and nude figure but also between the muscular and delicate nude. There is little doubt that in writing the treatise Dolce's key interests lay in discrediting the absolute perfection of Michelangelo promoted in the 1550 edition of the *Lives* and in establishing that Titian deserved such an honour within the framework of a text celebrating the artistic and cultural policy of Venice.⁶⁹¹ Dolce's treatment of Michelangelo in the dialogue is partially based on Vasari though most of the positive comments are turned into their opposite. Dolce's letter to Ballini contains the main thrust of his re-assessment of Michelangelo in the dialogue, taking his mastery of the muscular nude in a variety of poses as the starting point for a sustained argument against their appropriateness in certain contexts. Most of Dolce's comments on Raphael primarily concern the *paragone*, promoting his character and paintings as ideals of decorum and decency.

The task of promoting Titian as an ideal artist whose chief artistic merits comprise excellence in invention, *disegno* and colouring, as well as the observance of the rules governing decorum, is given to the fictional Aretino, while Fabrini, a Florentine and fervent supporter of Michelangelo, serves chiefly as his foil. As we shall see from samples of Aretino's writings, Dolce's promotion of Titian and the censorship of Michelangelo's nudes do not fit perfectly with Pietro Aretino's views of the two

⁶⁸⁹ According to M. W. Roskill, Dolce drew principally on Aretino's letters produced in the period 1530-1546, whereas he seems to have been less familiar with the aesthetic interests of Aretino and his circle in the later 1540s and early 1550s. See M. W. Roskill (as in n. 406), p. 32 and p. 56 n. 194. On the contact and relationship between Aretino and Dolce, see *ibid.*, pp. 32-35.

⁶⁹⁰ For a detailed analysis of Dolce's ancient and modern sources, see *ibid.*, esp. pp. 14-17.

⁶⁹¹ M. Poirier believes Dolce deliberately set out to 'destroy the notion of Michelangelo's supremacy first of all in *disegno*' and that his ultimate goal was to establish Titian as the greatest painter. On this point, see M. Poirier, *Studies on the Concepts of Disegno, Invenzione, and Colore in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Italian Art and Theory*, Diss., New York University, 1976, pp. 111-112. See also M. Poirier, 'The Disegno-Colore Controversy Reconsidered', *Explorations in Renaissance Culture*, vol. 13, 1987, ed. A. W. Fields, esp. pp. 64-66. Roskill (2002) believes the dialogue was conceived as a Venetian counterpart to the *Lives*, noting that there is no explicit documentary evidence as regards its commission, which would lend support to the view that it was conceived as an official response. On this point, see M. W. Roskill (as in n. 406), p. 38. Several academics have noted connections between Vasari's *Lives* and the *Dialogo*, though no earlier study has analysed the two texts with regard to the representation of the nude or art-critical vocabulary. P. Barocchi 1984 (as in n. 552), p. 42, observes that the additions in the biographies of Raphael and Michelangelo should be seen as a response to Dolce's treatise, though she argues in favour of a reappraisal of Raphael's merits as a painter. P. L. Rubin analyses Vasari's additions in the 1568 *Life of Raphael*, stating that the additions to the 1568 edition were partly prompted by Dolce's treatise; see P. L. Rubin (as in n. 545), pp. 397-400. M. W. Roskill (as in n. 406) pinpoints a number of additions and changes but does not analyse the connections between the texts in art-critical terms. Cf. C. Hattendorff, 'Francesco Bocchi on Disegno', *JWCI*, vol. 55, 1992, pp. 272-277, esp. p. 276 n. 33, where Roskill's earlier claims (Roskill 1968) that there are connections between the *Lives* and the *Dialogo* are rejected. Roskill (1968) believed that Raphael had been included in the treatise because Vasari associated both Raphael and Michelangelo with consummate perfection. As M. Poirier (1976) points out, Raphael had not received the same kind of praise as Michelangelo and the myth that needed destroying in the 1550s was Michelangelo's; Raphael primarily serves that end. On this point, see M. Poirier (1976), pp. 111-112.

artists. An analysis of these views not only reveals his perception of the nude but can also help ascertain the extent to which Dolce drew on his ideas.

Dolce's pronouncement of the superiority of Raphael and Titian, particularly as regards the nude, did not escape Vasari's notice and in the 1568 edition of the *Lives* he set the record straight in numerous passages, particularly the biographies of Raphael, Titian and Michelangelo. These passages have been analysed separately but never in relation to each other, nor to Vasari's schemes of absolute and general perfection and the art-critical vocabulary with which they were associated.

My main objective in this chapter is to analyse Dolce's alternative scheme of artistic development, his art-critical vocabulary and its application to painting in general and to the nude in particular. In addition, I consider the implications of the requirements he sets with particular reference to the nude and the artist as image-maker. The final section examines Vasari's response to Dolce in the 1568 edition of the *Lives*.

PART ONE: ARETINO'S AESTHETIC VIEWS ON TITIAN AND MICHELANGELO

Aretino's letters and sonnets are the chief source for his views on the art of his own day as well as his appreciation of both Titian and Michelangelo. While Aretino praised Titian's unprecedented use of colour, his letters and sonnets focus on his merits as a portrait painter.⁶⁹² Letters dealing with Titian's portraits identify the subject, explain the requirements of the portrait painter, such as lifelikeness and the essence of the person portrayed, and also shed light on the perception and reception of his portraits on the part of contemporary connoisseurs. Aretino describes Titian's portraits as 'miracles of his hand' and he praises his ability to portray his subjects 'so very naturally alive'.⁶⁹³ Aretino makes frequent references to the notion of *ut pictura poesis*, likening his own compositions to Titian's pictorial creations. In addition, his writings elucidate theoretical aspects of portraiture and the concept of the subject (*concetto*) conveyed in the portrait.⁶⁹⁴

In the *Life of Titian*, Vasari alludes to the instrumental role Aretino played in shaping and promoting Titian's artistic career through his literary activity in Venice, that is, between 1537 and 1550.⁶⁹⁵ The relationship was, however, advantageous to both men, in that Titian's portraits provided Aretino with the opportunity to establish and enhance his own connections with various powerful and influential noblemen.⁶⁹⁶

From the 1540s onwards Aretino's letters regarding Titian contain the kind of exalted praise Aretino had reserved for Michelangelo a few years earlier. Aretino's letter dated June 1548 and addressed to Giovan Bernardino Ferrario is a good case in point. In the letter Aretino exclaimed that in Titian's style there lay the idea of a new

⁶⁹² P. Aretino praised Titian's colouring in his dialogues, such as *La cortegiana*, Da "Le Carte Parlanti", as well as in several descriptions of Titian's works, including his account of the now lost altarpiece *Martyrdom of St Peter Martyr*, in which he focused his attention on the landscape. On the fate of the painting and our knowledge of it through the engraving of Bertelli, see F. Valcanover, *Opera di Tiziano*, Milan, 1969, p. 134, entry card 484. According to M. Rogers, (as in n. 688), p. 114, Aretino possessed a much better understanding of Titian's colouring than Dolce. His letters indicate that he understood how the application of paint can demonstrate the artist's skill and express the subject's qualities, for example, the colouring in the portrait of the Duke of Urbino the quality of the flesh and the virility of the person; see Aretino (as in n. 20), pp. 324-6.

⁶⁹³ P. Aretino (as in n. 293), vol. 2, pp. 48 and 445.

⁶⁹⁴ For useful insight into Aretino's writings concerning Titian's portraits, see L. Freedman, 'Titian's Portraits in the Letters and Sonnets of Pietro Aretino', *The Eye of the Poet – Studies in the Reciprocity of the Visual and Literary Arts from the Renaissance to the Present*, A. Golahny (ed), London, 1996, pp. 102-127. See also L. Freedman, *Titian's Portraits Through Aretino's Lens*, Pennsylvania, 1995, esp. Chapter 1.

⁶⁹⁵ VBB, 1568, vol. 6, p. 160.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 105-9. Aretino's sonnets on portraits chiefly concern eminent citizens, such as Charles V and Philip II of Spain, prelates, ambassadors and admirals. L. Freedman notes that the innovative character of Aretino's sonnets lay in the hyperbolic description of the subject's essential traits, the frequent mention of the painter, and the fact that the poems were not intended to be read as love poems. Aretino picks out for praise those features that indicate virtuous character or that enhance the value of his service to the addressee. Freedman believes that Aretino's use of superlatives was intended to promote a keener response to the portraits and simultaneously emphasise the merits of virtuous people. Titian's mastery of the portrait thus came to be associated with the Renaissance convention of the rhetoric of praise.

nature.⁶⁹⁷ It was, however, as a portraitist that Aretino construed and exalted Titian. The enormous popularity of his letters, which also encouraged a new attitude towards portraits as works of art, helped establish this admiring though circumscribed view of the painter.

Aretino's enthusiasm for, and later his censorship of, Michelangelo was equally specific. As we saw in Chapter Two, Aretino was a keen promoter of Michelangelo's female nudes in Venice and other parts of Italy, and he ordered and made frequent requests for prints, drawings, and copies of his works, including drawings of the *Last Judgement*.⁶⁹⁸ In letters to Michelangelo, Aretino tended to use exalted language, in the belief that the artist's divine status called for language which was 'more than human', adopting rhetorical devices similar to those employed in his sonnets.⁶⁹⁹

His praise of Michelangelo focuses on his mastery of *disegno* with regard to the human body and the dazzling performances generated by bodies in motion. In a letter dated 22 December 1536 and addressed to Bernardino Daniello, Aretino extols Michelangelo's style because it constitutes an innovative approach to art based on monumental figures and brilliant displays of artifice, generating amazement in the viewer while at the same time inviting him to make a closer examination of the figures.⁷⁰⁰ Aretino's letter of 15 September 1537 addressed to Michelangelo, reiterates that his special merits lie in his mastery of *disegno* from which a 'new nature' arises.⁷⁰¹ *Disegno* is associated with difficult outlines, which are perceived as the most challenging aspect of art ('la fatica dell'arte') and which Michelangelo has mastered with such facility. Aretino also held that art consisted in much more than imitating drapery and accessories for garments and that charming colours were not praiseworthy without *disegno*.⁷⁰²

Aretino associated Michelangelo's art, rather than Titian's, with *ingenium*, creative freedom and a high style best suited to an elite audience. While he considered Raphael to be a great painter, he considered his pupils to be just as great and Michelangelo to be even greater.⁷⁰³ An analysis of Aretino's appraisal of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*, which is discussed in the next chapter, strongly

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 252 and 288. The letters merely associate Titian's art with a 'new nature' without linking this assertion to any particular aspect or quality; cf. Aretino's letter of 15 September 1537 addressed to Michelangelo, *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 64., which is discussed below.

⁶⁹⁸ See M. Pozzi, 'Note sulla cultura artistica e sulla poetica di Pietro Aretino', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 145, 1968, pp. 293-322; repr. in M. Pozzi, *Lingua e cultura del Cinquecento*, Padua, 1975, pp. 23-47. All references to Pozzi in this chapter refer to the 1975 text.

⁶⁹⁹ P. Aretino (as in n. 293), vol. 1, p. 113.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 62-65.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 64. Aretino's remarks bear similarities to a passage in Sebastiano Serlio's *Regole generali di architettura sopra le cinque maniere de gli edifici*, Venice, 1537, iii.

⁷⁰² Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 57 and 108. On this point, see M. Pozzi (as in n. 698), pp. 28-29.

⁷⁰³ Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 267 and 294.

suggests that it was Aretino's criticism of the fresco rather than his views of Michelangelo and Titian that most influenced Dolce's assessment of Michelangelo in the *Dialogo*.⁷⁰⁴

Dolce's preoccupation with the notion of decorum, which has important extra-aesthetic implications, constitutes a major discrepancy between the treatise and the aesthetic ideals of Pietro Aretino, which it claims to reflect. The emphasis on decorum, expressed as *convenevolezza* and its cognates *convenevole*, *conviene*, appears in letters to Alessandro Contarini and Gasparo Ballini.⁷⁰⁵ The letters therefore best illuminate Dolce's reinstatement of decorum as a key critical parameter in the dialogue while indicating the development of the assumptions and requirements which hold sway in it.⁷⁰⁶

⁷⁰⁴ The assumptions concerning the contributions of Dolce and Aretino have influenced the interpretation of the text. According to J. Schlosser, the text does not reflect the views of Aretino; see J. Schlosser (as in n. 552), p. 392. Conversely, L. Venturi believed the dialogue mirrored the views of Aretino, though his discussion is based primarily on the dialogue and gives less weight to Aretino's letters; see L. Venturi, *Storia della critica d'arte*, Turin, 1964, pp. 111-115. E. Camesasca does not seem to distinguish the real Aretino from his fictional counterpart, see E. Camesasca (as in n. 293), vol. 3, pp. 421-429 and 472-477. Conversely, P. Barocchi's commentary on Dolce's dialogue points out the various aspects of Dolce's anti-Michelangelo stance; P. Barocchi (as in n. 686). S. Ortolani distinguished the two figures of Aretino on the basis of Dolce's understanding of colour, which he believed drew on Aretino's views; see 'Le origini della critica d'arte a Venezia', *Arte*, 25, 1923, p. 16. M. Pozzi was the first to investigate the role of Aretino in the dialogue and to compare his views on Michelangelo, Raphael and Titian with those expressed in the dialogue. Pozzi's discussion did not, however, give particular weight to the role of the nude. See M. Pozzi, "'L'Ut Pictura Poesis" in un dialogo di Lodovico Dolce', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana* 144, 1967, pp. 234-60; repr. in M. Pozzi, *Lingua e cultura del Cinquecento*, Padua, 1975, pp. 1-22. See also M. Pozzi (as in n. 698).

⁷⁰⁵ L. Dolce, Letter to Gasparo Ballini, reprinted and translated by M. W. Roskill (as in n. 406), pp. 200-211. The letter was first published in *Lettere di diversi eccellentissimi*, L. Dolce (ed), Venice, 1559. The letter is undated but must have been written after the publication of the *Lives* since it implies a knowledge of the text; see M. Pozzi (as in n. 704), p. 6, n. 11, and M. W. Roskill (as in n. 406), pp. 36 and 38.

⁷⁰⁶ See M. Rogers, (as in n. 688).

PART TWO: Lodovico Dolce's *Dialogo della pittura – Intitolato L'Aretino*

'It is not enough to say that this nude is as beautiful and perfect as that one. You need to prove it.'⁷⁰⁷

Conceptual and Critical Terms: Invention, Disegno, Colorito, Imitation and Decorum

Like Paolo Pino, Dolce divides painting into *invenzione*, *colore* and *disegno*.⁷⁰⁸ Other key notions in Dolce's art-critical baggage comprise the notions of *ut pictura poesis*, decorum, and high and low styles. The notion of decorum and high and low styles are connected with the kind of figure selected for imitation. Another important parameter for gauging the merits of a work of art is that it should stir the viewer and/or produce a pleasing effect. Together, these terms provide the tools he needs to set up his argument against the artistic achievements associated with Vasari's notion of absolute perfection, such as the muscular nude, particularly Michelangelo's virile male and female nudes, foreshortening, anatomy, and *fantasia* manifested in nude figures in a variety of spectacular postures and actions, and to campaign for an alternative line of artistic development moving from Rome to the 'divine' Titian's Venice.

Dolce's notion of various styles, referred to as *genere* or *maniera*, plays a key role in his re-assessment of Michelangelo's merits and introduces an interesting concept of the decorum of style. Each style has its own qualities and is characterised by elements and rhetorical devices best suited to the subject treated. Dolce's application of the notion of high, middle and low styles caters to the objectives at

⁷⁰⁷ L. Dolce / Barocchi, p. 194 & Roskill, p. 173: 'Non basta a dire, questo nudo è bello e perfetto, quanto quell'altro. Ma bisogna provarlo'.

⁷⁰⁸ P. Pino, *Dialogo di pittura*, Venice, 1548, P. Barocchi (ed), *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento*, 3 vols., Bari, 1960-1962, vol. 1, 1960, p. 114. Dolce/Barocchi, p. 164. R. W. Lee noted the derivation of the definitions of painting as invention, *disegno*, and colouring from rhetoricians like Cicero and Quintilian, as well as the close connection between poetry and painting in the Renaissance critical tradition. On these points, see R. W. Lee (as in n. 581), pp. 197-269; for the derivation of *disegno*, *colore* and *invenzione*, see *ibid.*, p. 264. The emphasis on this derivation has been challenged by M. Poirier, "'Disegno" in Titian: Dolce's Critical Challenge to Michelangelo', *Tiziano e Venezia* (as in n. 1), pp. 249-253. Lee's study, which was concerned with the period between the mid sixteenth century and the mid eighteenth century, was instructive in demonstrating the role played by Horace's simile *ut pictura poesis* in Renaissance artistic theory and practice. K. Borinski first emphasised the importance of ancient rhetoric for the literature of Renaissance art. See K. Borinski, *Die Antike in Poetik und Kunsttheorie, von Ausgang des klassischen Altertums bis auf Goethe und Wilhelm von Humboldt*, 2 vols., Dieterich, 1914-1924, vol. 1, 1914, p. 176 and *passim*. J. R. Spencer, 'Ut Rhetorica pictura. A Study in Quattrocento Theory of Painting', *JWCI*, vol. 20, 1957, pp. 23-44, offers an alternative to Lee's study and points out Alberti's debt to Cicero and Quintilian. M. Baxandall, *Giotto and the Orators – Humanist observers of painting in Italy and the discovery of pictorial composition 1350-1450*, Oxford, 1971, provided illuminating insight into the adaptation of classical rhetorical ideas to Renaissance needs especially in the earlier period. Baxandall demonstrated the importance of prose composition since it dealt with almost every aspect of discourse. Both Cicero and Quintilian contained numerous references and parallels to painting. Horace's writings were closely connected with the rhetorical tradition. For Horace, poetry was essentially determined by the intended audience, an important issue in Dolce and several other writings on art produced after the mid sixteenth century.

hand.⁷⁰⁹ He demands that all styles should be clear, use variety to avoid satiation, show a preference for moderation, and use ornament sparingly. Of deep significance are Dolce's views on the appropriateness of the nude to the different styles. The representation of the nude, particularly the muscular nude in motion, is ultimately dependent on the intended audience. The implications of the distinctions he draws in terms of artistic style are best reflected in his discussion of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* and Giulio Romano's *Modi* and Aretino's accompanying sonnets.

Also of significance is the key role attributed to men of good discernment, who are considered to be better judges of art than the painters themselves. The downplay of technical skills and artistic practices and the promotion of non-artists as better judges of art impinges upon the assessment of art works and particularly the artistic achievements related to Michelangelo's perfection. 'Aretino' is presented as the ideal judge in all matters, not only painting. He is thus seen as exemplary with regard to the kind of parameters the general public should be encouraged to apply when assessing the merits of individual art works.

Invention

Invention is defined as 'the fable or history which the painter chooses on his own or which others present him with'.⁷¹⁰ Invention is primarily understood in poetic-literary terms and intimately bound up with the notion of *ut pictura poesis*, which Dolce extends to include the composition of every learned man. *Istoria* exists before and independently of *invenzione*, though painters, such as Raphael, are praised for following the written source. The artist's goal is to create a pictorial composition which can compete with a poetic composition. To this end the painter should acquire a competent knowledge of the poets and historians without which fine invention is deemed to be impossible.⁷¹¹ The painter is also advised to cultivate the acquaintance of learned men and poets, who can act as literary guides and competent judges in the search for inspiration from poetic and mythological texts.

⁷⁰⁹ On the influence of contemporary literary theory on Dolce's treatise, see R.W. Lee (as in n. 581), pp. 211-212, n. 73 and P. Barocchi's commentary to the text; Dolce/Barocchi, pp. 431-493. In *Della poetica*, Venice, 1536, Bernardino Daniello divided poetry into three parts: *invenzione*, *disposizione* and *forma*. Daniello followed the Ciceronian model of dividing speech into a high, middle and low style. The high style was intended for subjects requiring 'ornate composition', such as grave, magnificent and sonorous words, which can have a straightforward or metaphorical meaning. A range of 'ornaments' should be used to give sentences the same gravity as the words. For an example of the appropriation of rhetorical categories to poetics, see B. Weinberg, *Trattati*, vol. 1, p. 243, as cited by D. Summers (as in n. 322), p. 345, n. 37. In his letter thanking Daniello for his book, Aretino compared the writer's discretion to Michelangelo's own. See P. Aretino (as in n. 20), n° 85.

⁷¹⁰ L. Dolce / Barocchi, p. 164: 'la invenzione è la favola, o istoria, ch'l pittore si elegge da lui stesso, o gli è posta inanzi da altri'.

⁷¹¹ Ibid., p. 170. B. Daniello advocated the idea of the 'pittore letterato', stating that the poet should become learned if he wants to create fine inventions, see B. Daniello (as in n. 710), p. 27.

Learning and the assistance of the *letterato* serve chiefly as a guarantee of decorum, the observation of which is not designed to foster artistic originality.⁷¹² Dolce gives little credit to painters operating with the imagination in the sense of creating their own vision of a particular episode or thinking up an original composition of figures and postures. Raphael is exalted as a painter who 'complied admirably, in every respect, with what is appropriate', whereas Michelangelo 'has done this not at all or minimally'. In the Ballini letter, Raphael's art is seen to have 'fine and appropriate considerations' ('belle convenevolezza').⁷¹³

Invention has two sources, the subject matter (*l'istoria*) and the painter's *ingenium* (*ingegno del pittore*) or divine *ingenium* (*divino ingegno*).⁷¹⁴ The main requirements of invention are an orderly arrangement of the figures (*ordine*), which has its source in *ingenium*, and decorum or appropriateness (*convenevolezza*), from which spring 'the poses, variety, and motion' (*energia*) of the figures.⁷¹⁵ *Convenevolezza* is the primary parameter for gauging the merits of the *invenzione* of a specific painting. It is through this notion that Dolce is able to criticise Michelangelo's nude figures to the advantage of both Raphael and Titian.

Convenevolezza is extolled as a guide to the painter as he works out appropriate ways to make his invention by means of *disegno* and *colorito*. The notion encompasses a range of requirements, such as fitting physical characterisation, movement, pose, facial expression, emotional behaviour, dress and accessories.⁷¹⁶ All figures should be appropriate to the narrative context and there should be clear distinctions with regard to social status, age and gender.⁷¹⁷ Breaches of decorum comprise an inaccurate rendering of the text, for example, setting the scene of Moses striking the rock in luscious pastureland rather than biblical wilderness.⁷¹⁸

Implausibility, such as making velvets drape like fine linens, or, more importantly for the present purpose, making women muscled like men, are considered to constitute breaches of decorum.⁷¹⁹ The representation of the nude is justified in terms of thematic decorum and requires particular consideration with respect to holy figures. Dolce carefully orchestrates his discussion of the nude in art so as to emphasise the need for decency, giving prominence to the audience for which the images are intended.

⁷¹² See R. W. Lee (as in n. 579), p. 268.

⁷¹³ M. W. Roskill (as in n. 406), p. 204.

⁷¹⁴ L. Dolce / Barocchi, p. 171.

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁷¹⁶ For a general discussion of the role of decorum in Dolce, see R. W. Lee (as in n. 579), pp. 228-35 and M. Pozzi, (as in n. 704).

⁷¹⁷ See R. W. Lee (as in n. 581), pp. 230-231.

⁷¹⁸ L. Dolce / Barocchi, p. 167.

⁷¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 167 and 182.

Dolce's understanding of invention and decorum not only affects his appraisal of Raphael and Michelangelo but also has important implications for the role of artistic imagination and, ultimately, the role and status of the artist. Fantasies and compositions based on *Ignudi* as a theme of infinite variety which in Vasari's mind manifests the artist's *ingenium* is discarded by Dolce in favour of the 'delicate fantasies' of Raphael. Raphael's *Galatea* (c. 1513; Rome, Villa Farnesina) (**figure 71**) is one instance of his delicate fantasies and is said to compete with the poems of Polizano; it is thus an example of *ut pictura poesis*.⁷²⁰

According to Dolce, other exemplary inventions, produced by a 'flourishing mind' ('fiorito ingegno'), include Raphael's *Fall of the Manna* (1517-1519; Rome, Vatican, Logge). Raphael's merits in terms of invention are summed up as follows:

Raphael imitated the writers to such a degree that the judgement of connoisseurs is often stirred into crediting this painter with having depicted the events better than the writers had described them, or at least into considering that the two compete on equal terms, I have this to say on the subject of propriety: Raphael never deviated from it, but made his children really children, that is, somewhat soft and tender, his men robust and his women delicate in the way which is fitting in them.⁷²¹

In addition, Raphael produced 'beautiful' ('belli') and 'divine' ('divino') religious works such as *St Cecilia* (1514; Bologna, Pinacoteca Nazionale) and the *Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor* (1517-1520; Rome, Pinacoteca Vaticana). In short, his works are 'miraculous' ('miracolosi'), 'equal and perhaps superior to Michelangelo'.

Convenevolezza and the Human Figure

Dolce's prescriptions regarding the representation of the human figure chiefly revolve around bodily motion, foreshortening, variety in painting, anatomy, the impact on the viewer, and the rendering and colouring of flesh. Behavioural decorum plays a key role in his appraisal of the merits of central Italian artistic achievements. As in the Ballini letter, *convenevolezza* is associated with both temperate grace and appropriate expression of the narrative.

⁷²⁰ Ibid., p. 192 & Roskill, p. 169: 'et è cosa iscambievole, che i pittori cavino spesso le loro invenzioni da i poeti, & i poeti da i pittori. Il simile vi potrei dire della sua Galathea, che contende con la bella poesia del Policiano, e di molte altre sue leggiadrissime fantasie.

⁷²¹ Ibid., p. 88: 'Raffaello imitò talmente gli Scrittori, che spesso il giudizio de gl'intendenti si move a credere, che questo pittore habbia le cose meglio dipinte, che essi discriitte; o almeno, che seco giostri di pari,) e parlando della convenevolezza, Raffaello non se ne dipartì giamai: ma fece i putti putti, cioè morbidetti e teneri: gli huomini robusti, e le donne con quella delicatezza, che convien loro'.

1 Bodily Motion

Bodily motion is considered to be a source of pleasure (*aggradevole*) which can generate amazement (*stupore*) in the viewer. However, Dolce is opposed to the representation of bodily motion for its own sake, calling for plausible movements, in that 'human beings are not always in motion, or so violent that they look deranged'.⁷²² Motion should never reach 'the point of inappropriateness'.⁷²³ Dolce expresses a preference for restrained motion and promotes the view that 'often too a graceful pose is more pleasing than a forced and untimely action'. In Dolce's art-critical vocabulary 'elegant motion' ('*leggiardo*') is used in direct opposition to 'strained' actions ('*sforzato*'). *Leggiadria* is a type of movement which is deemed suitable for both male and female figures.

From Dolce's prescriptions it can be inferred that strained bodily motion is not necessarily seen as a suitable vehicle for the representation of emotion. The artist is urged to use restraint as regards facial expressions and body language so that the moral character of holy personages can be read through their appearance.

2 Foreshortening

Dolce strongly objects to an excessive amount of complicated foreshortening. Dolce's perception of foreshortening contrasts sharply not only with Vasari but also with Pino who believed that excellence in *disegno* implied perfection in foreshortening.⁷²⁴ Dolce states his opposition particularly in terms of uncalled-for foreshortening and dismisses it as a characteristic of a highly ornate style. He may well have had in mind the *Ignudi* on the Sistine Ceiling (**figure 66**). Dolce is convinced that foreshortening requires judgement (*giudizio*) and discretion (*discretione*) rather than the technical skill needed to create beautiful figures in striking poses. One single foreshortened figure suffices as proof of skill.⁷²⁵ In addition, Dolce adopts an anti-artistic and ant-intellectual stance claiming that few people appreciate foreshortening. On these grounds it should be used sparingly. Dolce thus diminishes its status as a major artistic achievement, discarding its striking impact on the contemporary viewer.⁷²⁶

⁷²² Ibid.,

⁷²³ Ibid., p. 180 & Roskill, p. 147: 'ma non tanto che disconvenga'.

⁷²⁴ P. Pino / Barocchi, p. 114: [*disegno*] 'contrafà ben gli scurci'.

⁷²⁵ L. Dolce / Barocchi, pp. 180-1 & Roskill pp. 147-149: 'ma vi dico bene, che appresso altro ci vuole per essere buono o compiuto pittore. Et una sola figura, che convenevolmente scorti, basta a dimostrare, ch'ì pittor volendo, le saprebbe far iscartar tutte'.

⁷²⁶ Ibid., p. 181.

3 Variety

Variety, which is associated with poetry, is defined as 'the main marvel of nature' ('la principale meraviglia della natura'), generating beauty ('bellezza') and artifice ('artificio'). Dolce advocates a type of variety based on minor changes in pose, facial expression, and drapery. This kind of variety is said to appear 'fortuitous' ('fatta a caso'), indicating a predilection for variety arising from natural and culturally reinforced differences. By contrast, Dolce writes critically of infinite variety founded on a range of postures of nude figures invented by the artist and arranged in striking poses, such as that of the ornamental nudes on the Sistine Ceiling is considered to be 'deliberately pursued' ('studiosamente ricercata'); this type of variety should be avoided.⁷²⁷

4 Impact on the viewer

Stirring the viewer's soul by arousing emotions like compassion or disdain in keeping with the depicted scene is seen as an essential function of painting. Failure to achieve effective pictorial communication impinges on the assessment of the work as a whole.⁷²⁸ Again, Raphael is exemplary in his observation of this requirement, particularly in his religious paintings:

But the upright Raphael always maintained decency in all of his creations. As a result, even though he generally gave his figures a soft and gentle air which charms one and sets one on fire, he nonetheless invariably preserved, on the faces of his saints and above all on the face of the Virgin, Mother of Christ, an indefinable quality of holiness and godliness (and not only on the faces but also in each and all of the movements) – a quality which seems to remove every nefarious thought from the minds of mankind.⁷²⁹

5 Colouring

Colouring concerns the representation of natural phenomena and the human figure. It requires an understanding of perspective.⁷³⁰ The painter's chief task is to

⁷²⁷ Ibid., p. 179 & Roskill, p. 149: 'fatto un uomo volto in ischiena, ne faranno subito un altro che dimostri le parti dinanzi, e vanno sempre continuando un tale ordine. Questa varietà io non riprendo, ma dico che, essendo l'ufficio del pittor d'imitar la natura, non bisogna che la varietà appaia studiosamente ricercata, ma fatta a caso'.

⁷²⁸ Ibid., p. 186 & Roskill, p. 157: 'Questo è, che bisogna che le figure movano gli animi de' riguardanti, alcune turbanogli, altre rallegrandogli, altri sospingendogli a pietà, & altre a sdegno, secondo la qualità della istoria. Altrimenti reputi il pittore di non haver fatto nulla: perche questo è il condimento di tutte le sue virtù: come avviene al poeta, all'historico, & all'oratore'.

⁷²⁹ Ibid., pp. 189-90 & Roskill, p. 165: 'Ma questa onestà usò sempre il buon Raffaello in tutte le cose sue, in tanto che, quantunque egli desse generalmente alle sue figure un'aria dolce e gentile che invaghisce et infiamma, nondimeno nei volti delle sante e soprattutto della Vergine, madre del Signore, serbò sempre un non so che di santità e di divinità (e non pur ne' volti, ma in tutti i lor movimenti), che par che levi dalla mente degli uomini ogni reo pensiero'.

⁷³⁰ A number of earlier studies that have focused on the *colore-disegno* debate in the Cinquecento have concluded that *colore* played a more significant role in Venice, while *disegno* was more important in central Italy. The first study to introduce this polarity was M. Pittaluga, 'Eugène Fromentin e le origini della moderna critica', *L'Arte*, vol. 20, 1917, pp. 1-18 and 240-258. A number of subsequent studies have tended to treat the two schools in these contrasting terms. See, for example, S. J. Freedberg, 'Disegno versus Colore in Florentine and Venetian Painting of the Cinquecento', *Florence and Venice: Comparisons and Relations, Acts of Two Conferences at Villa I Tatti in 1976-1977*, 2 vols., Florence, 1980,

create forms that appear lifelike. Mastery of colouring involves forming contours that are devoid of linearity since these do not exist in nature. Colouring is defined as the imitation of those 'hues with which nature variously paints animate and inanimate things'.⁷³¹ The main part of colouring is the *chiaroscuro*, which gives figures relief.⁷³² Dolce makes the representation of flesh the main parameter for gauging artistic merits.⁷³³ This parameter seems to serve as an alternative to the rendering of a muscular body requiring an understanding of anatomy.

To shore up his promotion of colouring, Dolce cites its importance to the ancients as a vehicle for representing truth. Yet mimesis is not the only objective, since the painter is required to make appropriate distinctions in terms of flesh tones and softness, according to age, gender and social class. Hence colouring serves as a social marker, differentiating the male from the female, the old from the young, and the nobleman from the peasant. Finally, the painter should seek to attain the effect of 'appropriate nonchalance' ('convenevole sprezzatura'), a quality promoted by Castiglione for the courtier and the man of class, denoting an effect displaying an understated elegance.⁷³⁴

The Male and Female Nude: Imitation and Disegno

In the treatise, *disegno* primarily concerns the form and proportion of the human figure. Dolce sums up Michelangelo's merits principally in terms of mastery in *disegno*.⁷³⁵ As Maurice Poirier has pointed out, Dolce's primary task is to re-assess Michelangelo's supremacy in *disegno*. According to Poirier, he first contrasts Raphael and Michelangelo in terms of *disegno*, in order to facilitate the 'acceptance of this thesis regarding Titian's greatness in *disegno*'.⁷³⁶ Dolce thus

vol. 2, pp. 309-322. See also D. Rosand, *Painting in Cinquecento Venice: Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto*, New Haven, 1982, pp. 1-39 and idem, 'The Crisis of the Venetian Renaissance Tradition', *L'Arte*, vol. 11-12, 1970, pp. 5-35. M. Poirier produced the first study that explores the shortcomings of this polarity; see M. Poirier 1976 (as in n. 691), pp. 106-107 and Poirier 1987, (as in n. 691), esp. pp. 52 and 83-85.

⁷³¹ L. Dolce / Barocchi, pp. 181-182. On Dolce's understanding of colouring, see M. Poirier 1987 (as in n. 691), pp. 51-62.

⁷³² *Rilievo* also comes under colouring in Pino. Both Vasari and Aretino associate relief with *disegno*. On Aretino's definition, see P. Aretino (as in n. 293), vol. 2, p. 205.

⁷³³ L. Dolce / Barocchi, p. 184: 'così la principal difficoltà del colorito è posta nella imitation della carne'.

⁷³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁷³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 146 & Roskill, p. 87: 'e massimamente d'intorno alla parte del disegno, nella quale senza dubbio è profondissimo. Percioche egli è stato il primo, che in questo secolo ha dimostro a Pittori i bei dintorni, gli scorti, il rilievo, le movenze, e tutto quello, che si ricerca in fare un nudo a perfezione'.

⁷³⁶ See M. Poirier 1976 (as in n. 691), p. 112. Poirier observes that despite the importance both Pino and Dolce attach to colouring, their primary parameter is *disegno*. For Pino, *disegno* is 'lo spirito della pittura'. See Pino/Barocchi, p. 114. See *ibid.*, p. 109: 'certo è che la pittura impera e supera de virtù tutte le arti, come guida e calamita di esse, per l'ordine e per la perfezione del disegno'. Pino stated his preference for Michelangelo's *disegno*. On this point, see also M. Poirier 1987, pp. 57-58, where he remarks that several of Dolce's statements imply that colouring is inferior to *disegno*. Both Pino and Dolce are convinced that *disegno* governs the proportions of figures, perceived to be the essential component of beauty. In the Ballini letter, Dolce writes that *disegno* is comparable to the sinew of sentences, while beautiful colouring is equivalent to beautiful words, though colouring needs to be accompanied by good *disegno*. See M. Roskill, pp. 200-211. In the following century, C. Ridolfi claimed that Titian had

opposes Raphael's *disegno* to Michelangelo's and seeks to demonstrate that in most respects he is superior to the latter so that he can later make a claim for Titian's merits in this connection. As with *invenzione*, the notion of *convenevolezza* provides the instruments Dolce needs to re-assess Michelangelo's achievements.

Dolce perceives the artist's goal as both equalling and surpassing nature. Like many of his contemporaries, Dolce holds that the human figure best displays the imitative skills of the artist in his search for the most perfect form.⁷³⁷ *Disegno* is thus the quality through which perfection is attained. However, central to the treatise is the issue not simply of the imitation of natural objects and figures but rather what kind of figures are most appropriate for imitation, and what type of figure is most beautiful. It is the painter's task to edit reality through judgement: 'imitation should be done with fine judgement' ('questa imitazione vuole esser fatta con buon giudicio').⁷³⁸ Beauty is defined as 'appropriate proportion' ('proporzione convenevole'):

What produces beauty is nothing other than a harmony of proportion, such as resides in the human body in general, and in the relation of limb to limb in particular; and disproportion similarly gives rise to its opposite.⁷³⁹

Dolce bound proportion and *disegno* together by making his specific definition of proportion one of the main foundations of *disegno*. As a guide to the artist he includes a set of numerical ratios for composing the body. Irrespective of how useful or not these measurements were to the artist, it is clearly an attempt to promote the observation of fixed measurements as opposed to the judgement of the eye, whereby the size of individual body parts and the whole body are gauged by the 'compass of the eye', which Dolce rejects as the source for perfect measurements, thus diminishing the artistic merits implicit in Vasari.⁷⁴⁰

In both the treatise and the Ballini letter, *disegno* is intimately related to the nude. In the treatise, *disegno* is defined as 'the form imparted by the painter to the things he is imitating', by making lines to give shape to a figure.⁷⁴¹ *Disegno* is understood as the search for perfect beauty through appropriate proportions. It is therefore given an aesthetic dimension. *Disegno* and invention are interrelated, in that an ugly form invalidates invention of its merits and fine invention is not complete without the

regarded beautiful figures to have their source in *disegno* rather than *colore*. See C. Ridolfi (as in n. 515), vol. 1, p. 189.

⁷³⁷ L. Dolce / Barocchi, p. 172.

⁷³⁸ Ibid., p. 176.

⁷³⁹ Ibid., p. 155 and Roskill, p. 101: 'non procedendo la bellezza da altro, che da una convenevole proportione, che comunemente ha il corpo humano, e particolarmente tra se ogni membro: et il contrario derivando da sproporzione.'

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 174-175. Pino also provided a list of ratios of the basic proportions of the human body; see P. Pino / Barocchi, p. 104.

⁷⁴¹ L. Dolce / Barocchi, p. 171 and Roskill, p. 131: 'la forma, che da il pittore alle cose, che va imitando.'

mastery of design. Invention is communicated through form and form is identical to *disegno*, an assumption which later serves in Dolce's praise of Titian.

The Male Nude

Of crucial importance is the association of *disegno* with different figure types, clothed or nude. The artist who clothes his figures certainly deserves great praise, indicating an important shift in the parameters used to assess artistic merits. The nude figure can be represented as a muscular ('pieno di muscoli') or delicate ('delicato') body.⁷⁴²

The representation of a muscular or delicate nude is dependent upon appropriateness, that is, it should be in keeping with age and particularly gender and figure type, for example, Samson should have a robust figure, Ganymede a more delicate one. Social distinctions are paramount, in that the features and gestures of figures serve to highlight differences of social class: 'yet all patterns of action and all modes of representation should keep to what is proper for Hercules and Caesar respectively'.⁷⁴³

The delicate nude takes precedence over a muscular one according to the argument that flesh is more difficult to imitate than bones ('maggior fatica nell'arte a imitar le carni, che l'ossa'), and that flesh embodies softness ('tenerezza'), which is 'the most difficult part of painting' ('ch'è la più difficil parte della pittura').⁷⁴⁴ Anatomy plays a minor role in the artistic processes promoted by him. Dolce's assessment of the display of anatomical knowledge and virtuosity is central to Vasari's response in the 1568 edition of the *Lives*. Dolce argues that artists seeking to reveal bone structure create figures which appear 'flayed' ('scorticato'), 'dry' ('secco'), or 'ugly' ('brutto da vedere'), thus dismissing the knowledge of human anatomy and the aesthetic qualities which score highly in Vasari's value system. By contrast, Dolce promotes the view that the painter who seeks to imitate the delicate body ('chi va imitando il delicato') gives an indication of the bones where he needs to, but covers them smoothly with flesh and thus 'endows the nude figure with grace'.⁷⁴⁵

⁷⁴² Ibid., p. 177 & Roskill, p. 141: 'Ora abbiamo da considerar l'uomo in due modi, cioè nudo o vestito. Se lo formiamo nudo, lo possiamo far in due modi: cioè o pieno di muscoli, o delicato'.

⁷⁴³ Ibid., p. 177: 'però tutti gli atti, e tutte le guise serberanno la convenevolezza di Ercole e di Cesare'.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 177-8. & Roskill, p. 143: 'Io stimo che un corpo delicato debba anteporsi al muscoloso. E la ragione è questa; ch'è maggior fatica nell'arte a imitar le carni, che l'ossa: perche in quelle che non ci va oltre, che durezza, e in queste solo si contiene la tenerezza, ch'è la più difficil parte della pittura, in tanto, che pochissimi pittori l'hanno saputa esprimere, o la esprimono oggidì nelle cose loro bastevolmente'.

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 178: 'ma chi va imitando il delicato, accenna gli ossa ove bisogna, ma gli ricopre dolcemente di carne, e riempie il nudo di grazia'.

Building on this argument, Dolce goes on to state that those artists who give prominence to the fleshy areas display a better knowledge of anatomy than those preoccupied with bone structure. As regards the effect of the nude on the viewer, Dolce is convinced that 'a tender and delicate nude is naturally more pleasing to the eye than a robust and muscular one'.⁷⁴⁶ In addition, the delicate nude is more similar to the kind of nude figure common in antiquity. Summing up, Dolce fervently promotes the view that gentle physical features which closely resemble the physique of the man of class without being womanlike or similar to Ganymede are the most praiseworthy.⁷⁴⁷ Dolce's emphasis on the delicate body type and his claim that the contours of the delicate nude make the figure perfect and beautiful effectively invert Vasari's promotion of the muscular body as most apt for imitation and the concept of *disegno* expounded in *Della pittura*, though *disegno* retains its aesthetic qualities.

Michelangelo's *facchini* and Raphael's *gentiluomini*

Having redefined the artist's goals in terms of imitation, Dolce goes on to contrast the merits of Raphael and Michelangelo in an argument which has wide-ranging implications for Michelangelo's nudes.⁷⁴⁸ Dolce's discussion of their figures allows him to achieve a twofold goal, that is, limit the achievements of Michelangelo to the perfection of one figure type and promote the perfection of Raphael's more delicate figures, through which he makes his claim for Titian's superiority.⁷⁴⁹

Dolce's letter to Gasparo Ballini perfectly illustrates the dual perception of Michelangelo's artistic merits with regard to the nude, which also emerges in the dialogue.⁷⁵⁰ In the letter Dolce affirms that the nude is the most difficult form in art and that Michelangelo is its absolute master:

There is then the idea on Michelangelo's part that triumphs with immeasurable distinction over Raphael and all the other painters, when he shows that he is excellent at handling the most difficult artistic problems. And it is true that these problems loom larger in the creation of nudes and the foreshortening of figures.⁷⁵¹

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid.: 'oltre che all'occhio naturalmente aggredisce più un nudo gentile e delicato che un robusto e muscoloso, vi rimetto alle cose degli antichi, i quali per lo più hanno usato di far lor figure delicatissime'.

⁷⁴⁷ In the Ballini letter softness is seen as the distinguishing feature in terms of gender, age and social class. Softness is more appropriate in a woman's body than in a man's, in a younger body rather than an older one, and in the body of a nobleman as opposed to that of a peasant.

⁷⁴⁸ A. Pinelli, 'Raffaello convenevole, Michelangelo sconveniente', *Studi su Raffaello: atti del convegno internazionale di studi* (Urbino-Firenze, 6-14 Aprile), M. Sambuco Hamoud, M. L. Strocchi (eds), Urbino 1987, pp. 683-694.

⁷⁴⁹ See M. Poirier (as in n. 691), pp.249-53.

⁷⁵⁰ L. Dolce / Roskill, pp. 200-11.

⁷⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 200-1: 'perche alhora pare a Michele Agnolo trionfar con infinito honore di Raffaello, e di tutti gli altri dipintori, quando ei mostra di essere eccellente nelle maggiori difficoltà dell'arte: & è vero, che queste difficoltà si contengono maggiormente nel formar gl'ignudi, e nel far iscartar le figure'.

In addition, Michelangelo excels at a specific aspect of *disegno*, that is, the creation of striking figures:

As far as a certain force and grandeur of design is concerned, Michelangelo unquestionably holds first place, outperforming just as many painters as there have been over the span of many years.⁷⁵²

In the dialogue, achievements in favour of Michelangelo comprise his mastery of *disegno*, the muscular nude, and his sculpture, which equals but is not seen to surpass antique sculpture.⁷⁵³ Dolce's comment on Michelangelo's sculpture closely resembles the concluding remark made in the Ballini letter, in which Michelangelo is celebrated as the 'first man to give painting illumination and perfection in this age' and with respect to sculpture, for achieving the excellence of the ancients.⁷⁵⁴

However, Dolce censures Michelangelo's nudes from several viewpoints, limiting his achievements to sculpture and to the most complicated and awesome nude ('piu terribile e ricercata'). The hallmarks of Michelangelo's nudes comprise a muscular, elaborate, foreshortened nude displaying physical exertion, a form in which Michelangelo is truly 'miraculous' ('miracoloso'):

But as for design, which is the second part [of painting], we should consider the human being clothed and nude. I confirm to you that, as far as the nude is concerned, Michelangelo is stupendous, and truly miraculous and superhuman; nor was there anyone who surpassed him. He is supreme, however, in only one style – supreme, that is, at making a nude body muscular and elaborate, with foreshortening and bold movements, which demonstrate in detail every difficulty of art. His nudes are so excellent in each individual part of the body and in all of them together, that I venture to say that one cannot imagine, let alone execute, anything more excellent or more perfect. Yet, in the other styles he not only fails to measure up to himself but to others as well, because he does not know how or does not want to observe those differences between the ages and the sexes which were mentioned earlier and which Raphael handles so admirably. And to sum up, he who has seen a single figure by Michelangelo, has seen them all. One should note, however, that Michelangelo has adopted the most awesome and complicated type of nude, and Raphael the most pleasing and graceful.⁷⁵⁵

⁷⁵² Ibid., pp. 202-03: 'in quanto si appartiene a certa fierezza e terribilità di disegno, Michele Agnolo non tenga senza dubbio la prima palma di quanti Dipintori mai furone per molte età. La onde non senza cagione fu cantato dal lodatissimo Ariosto'.

⁷⁵³ L. Dolce / Roskill p. 181, Dolce/Barocchi p. 198: 'Nella scultura è poi Michelagnolo unico, divino e pare agli antichi, né in ciò ha bisogno delle mie lodi, né di quelle di altrui, né anco può esser vinto da altri che da se stesso'.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 211: Letter to Ballini (as in n. 406) 'Michelangelo, come di sopra io dissi Divino: perciocchè oltre, ch'egli è stato il primo che in questa età ha dato luce e perfettione alla pittura, tiensi anco, che egli abbia ridata la scultura alla eccellenza degli antichi'.

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid., Barocchi, p. 193 & Roskill, p. 171: 'Ma d'intorno al disegno, ch'è la seconda parte, dovendo noi considerar l'huomo vestito & ignudo, vi confermo, che quanto al nudo, Michel'Angelo è stupendo, e veramente miracoloso e sopra humano, ne fu alcuno, che l'avanzasse giamai; ma in una maniera sola, ch'è fare un corpo nudo miracoloso e ricercato, con iscorti e movimenti fieri, che dimostrano minutamente ogni difficoltà dell'arte & ogni parte di detto corpo, e tutte insieme, sono di tanta eccellenza, che ardisco dire, che non si possa immaginar, non che far, cosa più eccellente, ne più perfetta, ma nelle altre maniere è non solo minore di se stesso, ma di altri ancora; perchè egli o non sa, o non vuole osservar quella diversità delle età e de i sessi, che si son dette sopra: nelle quali è tanto mirabile Raffaello. E' per conchiuderla, chi vede una sola figura di Michel'Angelo, le vede tutte. Ma è da avvertire, che Michel'Angelo ha preso del nudo la forma più terribile e ricercata, e Raffaello la più piacevole e gratiosa'.

Michelangelo's muscular nude figure is perceived as the humble dockworker/porter, that is, the *facchino*, a physical type which ultimately makes his nudes unsuited to high art, given the assumption that high style calls for the representation of figures from the upper echelons of society. This figure type stands in direct opposition to Raphael's delicate male nude ('più piacevole e gratiosa'), which is associated with the man of class, and which, in Dolce's mind, is more universally pleasing:

I tell you that Raphael knew how to do every type of nude well, whereas Michelangelo achieves excellent results with only one type. And Raphael's nudes have this additional quality: they give greater pleasure. Nor shall I say, as a man of fine intelligence, that Michelangelo painted dockworkers and Raphael men of class. For as I said earlier, Raphael has produced figures of every type, both agreeable ones and also fearsome and elaborate ones, with at the same time more temperate and gentler movements. By nature, however, he was a lover of refinement and delicacy, just as he was also most refined and most courteous in his manners, so that he was no less universally loved for the fact that his figures pleased everybody.⁷⁵⁶

Raphael is praised for depicting a range of muscular nudes appropriate to the narrative context, such as the figures in the frescoes of Attila Meeting Leone Magno (c. 1513-1514; Rome, Vatican, Stanza di Eliodoro), *The Naval Victory of Leo IV at Ostia* (1514-1515) and *The Battle of Constantine against Maxentius* (1517-1524), and *The Fire in the Borgo* (**figure 59**), all forming part of the decoration in the Vatican Stanze.⁷⁵⁷ In his discussion of the latter painting, Dolce brings to our attention the figures reminiscent of Aeneas and Anchises, presenting them as examples of more robust nudes. However, it is on Raphael's predilection for more delicate nudes giving infinite pleasure and displaying a charming and gentle style that Dolce focuses his attention.⁷⁵⁸ Dolce contrasts the *difficulty* (*difficoltà*) of Michelangelo's nudes with the *facility* (*facilità*) of Raphael's, according to a value system which gives prominence to the delicate figure, thus reversing its significance in the *Lives*. According to Dolce's perception of the art of the nude, artistic ability is apparent without recourse to ostentatious displays of mastery and creative power, whereby he overturns the notion of difficulty: 'Michelangelo always sought difficulty in his works, while Raphael sought facility, a difficult thing to do'.

By redefining the parameters for gauging the beauty of the contours Dolce is able to establish the delicate nude as the most perfect form through the example of

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid., Barocchi, p. 194 & Roskill, p. 173: 'Io vi dico che Raffaello sapeva far bene ogni sorte di nudi, e Michelagnolo riesce eccellente in una sola; et i nudi di Raffaello han questo di più, che diletano maggiormente. Ne dirò, come già disse un bello ingegno, che Michel'Agnolo ha dipinto facchini, e Raffaello i gentiluomini. Che, come ho detto, Raffaele ne ha fatti di ogni sorte, e di piacevoli, e di terribili e ricercati, benche con atti temperati e piu dolci. ma naturalmente è stato vago di pulitezza e di delicatezza; sì come era etiando pulitissimo e gentilissimo ne' costumi, in guisa che non meno fu amato da tutti, di quello, che a tutti fossero grate le sue figure.'

⁷⁵⁷ For a discussion of the decoration of the Stanza di Costantino, see P. De Vecchi, *Raffaello. L'Opera completa*, Milan, 1979, entry 154 A-F, pp. 123-154.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 194-195.

Raphael. The fine contours which help create beautiful body parts are to take their source from the antique or from the live model, particularly the more delicate body, in observance of the procedures adopted by Raphael. In addition, the ability to dress 'the bones in pulpy flesh' constitutes the primary goal of the artist and the greatest achievement with regard to the nude.⁷⁵⁹ Raphael's superiority is summed up as follows:

There is equality between the two in design, and at the same time greater excellence on the part of Raphael, in that he was more varied and universal and better observed the proprieties of the sexes and of age, and again because more charm and greater pleasure is to be found in his paintings [.....] with his tremendous appeal he surpassed in his colouring all those who practised painting before him.⁷⁶⁰

The Female Nude

Whereas Vasari associated the imitation of the muscular live nude and anatomical knowledge with the supreme perfection of both male and female nudes, Dolce advocates the imitation of the less muscular male forms and promotes the female nude over the male, arguing that the best way a painter can demonstrate his ability to improve on nature is to show perfection in the body of a female nude. Dolce's perception of physical beauty is thus connected with his emphasis on gender distinctions: 'beauty is to be found in proportion, this proportion has its diversity'.⁷⁶¹ Dolce maintains that the female nude was proportioned differently from a muscular nude, and it is on this basis that Dolce implicitly censures Michelangelo's female nudes, when he states that the artist should 'keep to what is proper in the case of a woman, distinguishing one sex from another, making clear differences of age, and giving each figure its component parts in the proper way'.⁷⁶² In a subsequent passage criticism is directed more specifically at his female nudes, which are known to have been promoted by Vasari in Venice:

In the paintings of Michelangelo, that is, even though you see the ages and the sexes differentiated in a general way (something which everybody is

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid.: 'ch'è di assai maggiore importanza vestir l'ossa di carne poposa e tenera, che scortarle '.

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 197: 'nel disegno ci è parità, et anco dalla parte di Raffaello maggiore eccellenza, essendo stato egli più vario e più universale, & avendo serbato meglio la proprietà de i sessi e de gli anni; e trovandosi nelle sue Pitture più gratia e maggior diletto, in tanto, che non fu mai alcuno, che gli dispiacesse cosa di sua mano.'

⁷⁶¹ Ibid., p. 174: 'Quivi adunque entra una gran fatica, ché, quantunque la bellezza riposta nella proporzione, questa proporzione è diversa, perciocché la natura varia non meno nelle stature degli uomini che nelle effigie e ne' corpi.'

⁷⁶² Ibid., p. 177 & Roskill, p. 141: 'il simile è convenevole, che si osservi in una donna, distinguendo da sesso a sesso, & età da età, dando a ciascuno convenientemente le parti sue'. In a later passage, Dolce rejects the representation of female figures with elongated limbs, a remark which seems to allude to Parmigianino's female figures. He therefore limits the representation of female figures to a moderate figure type; *ibid.*, p. 176 & Roskill, pp. 139-40.

capable of doing), you will certainly not find such differentiation section by section within the musculature.⁷⁶³

The ultimate goal is to achieve 'within a single human body, by dint of art, that entire perfection of beauty which nature barely produces in a thousand'.⁷⁶⁴ The perfect female nude is attainable in two different ways, both based on antique precedents. The artist can select the most beautiful live model, following the example of Apelles who based his figure of Venus on Phryne, the most famous courtesan of his day. Praxiteles used the same model for his statue of the Cnidian Venus. Alternatively, he can imitate the ancient marble or bronze works, which contain 'all the perfection of art'. The study of ancient works helps the painter eliminate the flaws of nature and thus arrive at the representation of perfect beauty. Dolce also relates the anecdote of Zeuxis, indicating that the artist can arrive at a composite form which is more beautiful than forms existing in nature.

Antique and modern literary and artistic images of ideal female beauty are proposed for imitation. Ariosto is described as a 'painter' and held out as a model for the painter in his creation of female beauties.⁷⁶⁵ Ariosto's Alcina is cited as an example of feminine loveliness and of *ut pictura poesis*, illustrating how the painter and poet can compete on the same level with regard to the female figure. Ariosto is presented as exemplary in terms of *disegno* ('ben formata') and *colorito*, for example, the colour of Alcina's hair, while his manner of colouring figures is likened to Titian's.⁷⁶⁶ Two fundamental characteristics of the perfect female nude are the shape and colouring of the body.

Titian's *Danae* (**figure 51**) for Cardinal Alessandro Farnese is promoted as an example of appreciated female beauty. Dolce describes the figure as 'that most beautiful nude', stating that Michelangelo had seen it 'with amazement more than once'.⁷⁶⁷ Dolce briefly refers to the paintings commissioned by King Philip II. ⁷⁶⁸ Three of the *poesie* for Philip II, the *Danae*, *Venus and Adonis* (**figure 53**), and *Perseus and Andromeda*, which had been completed by the time the treatise went to press, but receive scant attention in Dolce's treatise and the *Andromeda* and *Adonis* are merely mentioned without comment.⁷⁶⁹ Surprisingly, Dolce's discussion of Titian's nudes does not expand on their aesthetic and visual merits, qualities which would surely have given his argument more thrust. There is nothing comparable to his

⁷⁶³ Ibid, Barocchi, p. 188 & Roskill, pp. 161-3: 'Che ben vedete nelle Pitture di Michel' Agnolo la distinctione in general dell'età e de' sessi (cosa che sanno far tutti) non la troverete già partitamente ne muscoli'.

⁷⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 172 and M. W. Roskill, p. 131: 'dimostrar col mezzo dell'arte in un corpo solo tutta quella perfezione di bellezza che la natura non suol dimostrare a pena in mille'.

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 171-4.

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 173.

⁷⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 161 and Roskill, p. 111: 'quella bellissima nuda visto da Michelangelo con maraviglia più d'una volta'.

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 159-60.

discussion of Titian's painting of Venus and Adonis in the letter to Alessandro Contarini. Passages alluding to the erotic enjoyment of Titian's female nudes are also suppressed.⁷⁷⁰ The omission of a sustained discussion of the mythologies is one indication of how selectively Dolce used Titian's art in the treatise to illustrate his notion of decorum.⁷⁷¹ The omission was probably deliberate, since it lent further support to his argument against Michelangelo, by avoiding the issue of a potential breach of decorum on Titian's part in terms of complete nudity and in keeping with the patriotic and celebratory tone of the discussion of Venetian art works.⁷⁷²

Dolce's carefully constructed promotion of Titian's nudes is directly related to the praise he lavishes on Raphael's female nudes. The comments on Raphael's cartoon of the *Coronation of Roxana*, owned by Dolce, enthusiastically praise the delicate nude body and sense of propriety and decency observed by the painter:

and she sits beside a bed in a timid and reverent pose. She is completely nude, except for a rather soft little piece of drapery, which for the sake of decency conceals those parts of her which should be kept hidden. And one cannot imagine a sweeter expression or a more delicate body, with a fitting fullness of flesh and a shape which, without being too long, is appropriately slim. [...] A little further off there is also a young man, naked as well, recognisable as Hymen, the god of marriage, who points out the same Roxana to Alexander with his finger, as if inviting him to take part in the sport of Venus or Juno; also a man carrying a torch. Further off one sees a group of infant children, some of whom support one of their number on top of Alexander's shield, showing a strain and a vivacity which are in accord with their age.⁷⁷³

The image is presented as exemplary with regard to the representation of the female nude and the decorum observed by the painter in covering up her pudenda. Dolce also alludes to the erotic function of the female nude, 'the sport of Venus', implying its connection with marriage, as well as its presence in private collections, while never explicitly referring to this function of the female nude.

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 205.

⁷⁷⁰ M. W. Roskill, pp. 212-217.

⁷⁷¹ See M. Rogers (as in n. 688), p. 112. Rogers sees the omission of the *Poesie* nudes as a limitation of Dolce's criticism, particularly in view of the innovations of the later paintings.

⁷⁷² Ibid., p. 118.

⁷⁷³ L. Dolce / Barocchi, pp. 191-192 & Roskill, p. 161: '& ella siede accanto un letto con attitudine timida e reverente: & è tutta ignuda, fuorché, per cagione di serbar la honestà, un morbidetto pannicino le nasconde le parti, che debbono tenersi nascoste. Ne si può immaginar ne la piu dolce aria, ne il piu delicato corpo, con una pienezza di carne convenevole; e con istatura, che non eccede in lunghezza, ma è svelta sconvenevolmente. [...] V'è anco alquanto piu lontano un giovanetto pur nudo, raffigurato per Himeneo, Dio delle nozze, che dimostra col dito ad Alessandro la medesima Rosana: come invitandolo al trastullo di Venere, o di Giunone, & un huomo, che porta la face. Evvi piu oltre un groppo di fanciulli: de' quali alcuni ne portano uno sopra lo scudo di Alessandro, dimostrando fatica e vivacità conveniente a gli anni, & un altro che porta la sua lancia. ce ne uno, che essendosi vestito la sua corazza, non potendo reggere il peso, è caduto in terra, e par che piagna. E sono tutti di aria, e di attitudini diverse e bellissimi. In questo componimento Raffaello ha servito alla istoria, alla convenevolezza, & all'honesto. Et oltre a cio s'è imaginato di suo, come Poeta mutolo, la invenzione d'Himeneo, & de' fanciulli'. Dolce's description does not match the Sodoma fresco in the Farnesina but resembles a drawing now at Windsor Castle. There are verbal affinities between Dolce's account and the passage in Lucian, with which he was familiar. According to Roskill, the sheet described by Dolce is more likely to be a design by one of Raphael's followers or a school copy after Raphael; see Roskill (as in n. 406), pp. 307-309.

Dolce also underscores the aesthetic merits and appropriate additions, such as the variety of extremely beautiful poses, the lively and fitting movement of the children, and the artist's inventive power, 'thinking up his own account, in the guise of a mute poet, the invention of Hymen and the infant children'. Dolce is clearly keen to promote images of what are perceived to be decent nudes and nowhere is this clearer than in his description of Michelangelo's nudes in the *Last Judgement* as 'most beautiful but most indecent'. By glossing over Titian's female nudes, relating artistic practices to antique precedents, and shifting the emphasis away from the use of the contemporary live model, Dolce is able to accuse Michelangelo of creating indecent figures and thus relegate them to a lower artistic register.

Dolce's Scheme of Artistic Development

The subsidiary evaluations concerning eight sixteenth-century artists - Giorgione, Giulio Romano, Antonio Correggio, Parmigianino, Polidoro da Caravaggio, Andrea del Sarto, Perino del Vaga, and Pordenone - are particularly interesting and serve to provide further support for the view that there is not only one form of artistic excellence. Several of these artists are mentioned in the opening pages where they are enumerated with a brief comment on their individual merits towards the end of the treatise. The painters mentioned are praised for having adorned Rome and all of Italy with their 'stupendous work' ('stupenda opera') and for having brought art to new heights.⁷⁷⁴ Mark Roskill does not posit the lines of artistic development according to different types of perfection established in the 1550 edition of the *Lives*; he points out that the artists listed by Dolce could be seen as part of a continuing line of development from Raphael in central Italy and artists active in Venice.⁷⁷⁵ If Roskill's assumption is correct, then Dolce not only grasped but also attempted to invert Vasari's lines of development, giving prominence to the notion of general perfection.

Dolce underscores the achievements of artists like Correggio, Giulio Romano, and Parmigianino, invoking the idea of a shared aesthetic along a central-northern Italian axis, touching cities like Florence, Genoa, Mantua, Parma and Venice. Thus through the spirit of Raphael, central and northern Italian art could progress in a perpetually renewed parallelism. In Venetian art Giorgione acts as an intermediary and a culmination point is reached with Titian.

⁷⁷⁴ L. Dolce / Barocchi, p. 199-200.

⁷⁷⁵ M. W. Roskill, pp. 42-45. Roskill believes that Dolce's comments of the artists may be modelled on the closing lines of the biographies in the *Lives*.

Giorgione (1477/78-1510; active in Venice), who surpassed Bellini, was a 'highly esteemed painter' ('pittor di grande stima'), commendable for his *sfumato* and extremely lively works ('vivacissime').⁷⁷⁶ Giulio Romano (c. 1499-1546; active in Rome and Mantua) was a worthy disciple of the divine Raphael in painting and architecture and was held in high esteem by Federico Gonzaga, whose palaces he adorned. He is defined as a fine inventor, good designer and excellent colourist ('bell'inventore, buon disegnatore, coloriva benissimo').⁷⁷⁷

Antonio Correggio (1489-1534; active in Correggio and Parma with some training in Mantua) surpassed Giulio in his colouring and is defined as a master of great delicacy. His paintings in Parma are praised for their great beauty.⁷⁷⁸

Parmigianino (1503-1540; active in Parma and in Rome in the circle of Giulio Romano and Perino del Vaga) was a 'refined colourist' ('coloriva politamente') and a lovely and accurate draughtsman ('leggiadro et accurate nel disegnare'). His admirable attention to detail is said to generate astonishment in the viewer. Citing Vasari, Dolce writes that Raphael's spirit had entered Parmigianino because they were both alike in intellect and habits.⁷⁷⁹

Polidoro da Caravaggio (c. 1490/1500-c. 1543; training in Raphael's workshop; active in Rome, Naples and Sicily) had learnt art under Raphael, becoming an outstanding and exceptional painter, a very fine inventor and an experienced and able draughtsman, as well as a remarkable imitator of the antique.⁷⁸⁰

Andrea del Sarto (1486-1530; active in Florence and France) attained perfection in art and was admired by François I.⁷⁸¹ Perino del Vaga (1501-1547; active in Florence, in Rome working in Raphael's workshop, and in Genoa) is described as a highly esteemed artist.⁷⁸²

Antonio da Pordenone (c. 1484-1539; active in Venice, Emilia Romagna, Lombardy) was an experienced and skilled artist, fond of foreshortening and fearsome figures. Dolce mentions his works in Venice, including the façade of Casa Talenti, a Mercury, which is well foreshortened, a highly praised battle scene, a figure of Prosperina clasped by Pluto, described as 'very lovely'. Despite his artistic qualities, Pordenone could not compete with Titian.⁷⁸³ Dolce's comparison between Titian

⁷⁷⁶ L. Dolce / Barocchi, pp. 198-199.

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 199.

⁷⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 199-200.

⁷⁸¹ Ibid., p. 200.

⁷⁸² Ibid.

⁷⁸³ Ibid. Vasari praises Pordenone for his *bell'ingegno*, natural talent for painting, his representation of natural objects and particularly his colouring. The painter is said to have learnt from Giorgione. Vasari notes also that Pordenone competed with Titian. Vasari does not remark on Michelangelo's influence,

and Pordenone is clearly aimed at underscoring the supremacy of the former not only over the latter but also implicitly over Michelangelo, given the latter's influence on Pordenone's figures.

Dolce's line of artistic development reaches its peak with Titian (c. 1490-1576; Venice), who trained under, but subsequently surpassed, a long line of Venetian masters, establishing a new style.⁷⁸⁴ Just as Giorgione had surpassed Bellini, Titian surpassed Giorgione because he imparted a heroic majesty to his figures and devised a system of soft colouring which is very similar to nature.⁷⁸⁵

Dolce emphasises Titian's Venetian roots as regards training, patronage, subject-matter, and political allegiance. The "myth" he constructs around the 'divine' figure of Titian is primarily that of an artist of Venetian themes and institutions, particularly evident in the discussion of the canvases in the seat of the Venetian government, the Sala del Maggior Consiglio. Despite prestigious foreign commissions he remained in Venice, where his art functions most eloquently.

Exemplary paintings by Titian include St Peter's venerable expression in the Pesaro altarpiece, as well as the postures in his *Madonna with Child and Saints* (SS. Catherine, Nicholas, Francis and Sebastian. 1530s; formerly Venice, San Niccolò Dei Frari, now Rome, Vatican Pinacoteca) (**figure 72**), in which St Catherine is said to be 'divine', while her companions show virtue, sanctity and majesty.⁷⁸⁶ The face of the ascending Virgin in the *Assumption* (1516; Venice, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari) is full of humility, a female quality which was promoted as a social and religious virtue, and one which Dolce promotes in this dialogue on female behaviour, *Istituzione della donna*, discussed in Chapter One.

In some instances Dolce is prepared to bend the rules in the name of Venetian patriotism. A good case in point is Titian's painting of the medieval scene, the *Humiliation of Emperor Frederick Barbarossa by Pope Alexander III*, in which the inclusion of eminent men of his own time (Bembo, Navagero and Sannazaro) is deemed 'not inappropriate' ('non disconevole') as the commemoration of outstanding contemporaries and their association with an example of pacific Venetian diplomacy.⁷⁸⁷

though his praise of the fine variety of figures may be an allusion to this. See VBB, 1550 and 1568, vol. 4, p. 429.

⁷⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 201-206.

⁷⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 145-146.

⁷⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 202.

⁷⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 169. The painting was made for the Sala del Maggior Consiglio, Palazzo Ducale but was destroyed by a fire in 1577. On Dolce's comment on this painting and its association with Venetian patriotism, see M. Rogers (as in n. 688), p. 115.

With respect to the development of art outlined towards the end of the treatise, Titian's art combined the perfection of the individual artists listed:

In Titian alone all these excellent parts are collected together in perfection, which are found dispersed in many others. As for invention and design, none ever was his equal. To Titian alone must be yielded the palm of perfect colouring, which none of the ancients could ever obtain.⁷⁸⁸

Dolce's reference to Titian's new style calls to mind Vasari's account of how Michelangelo introduced a new style of imitation in Florence. In Dolce's mind, this new style sets Titian apart from his predecessors and proves beyond the capabilities of fellow artists:

The people began to marvel at the new manner invented in Venice by Titian, and all painters from that time studied to imitate him, but they were incapable and lost their way.⁷⁸⁹

In the Ballini letter, Dolce is at pains to demonstrate that Titian's merits do not only concern the mastery of colouring but also embrace *disegno*:

Praise for painting, therefore, has its main basis in the layout of the forms, the objective here being the beauty and perfection of nature. In this, as in every other respect, Titian in his supreme excellence is not just divine, as the world takes him to be, but absolutely divine and without equal – like a man who backs up the liveliness of his colouring with the consummation of design in such a way that his creations look as if they were not painted, but real.⁷⁹⁰

Having placed prominence on *disegno*, Dolce is compelled to establish that Titian is at least equal to other artists in this respect. Without such a claim his argument would be weakened considerably. Paintings praised for their *disegno* include Titian's *Gloria* and *St John the Baptist*. Titian's nude *St Sebastian* from the *Madonna with Child and Saints* painting is taken as a significant expression of his artistic achievements. The figure is described as having a beautiful form, which implies the mastery of *disegno*, as well as lifelike colours, which make it look 'not painted but alive'.⁷⁹¹ In his writings Dolce expressed his unreserved admiration for Titian's *disegno*, however, it was his handling of colouring that made him superior to others. He expressed a similar view in the Contarini letter while in the earlier Ballini letter he denied that his greatest skill lay only in colouring, arguing in favour of his merits in terms of both *disegno* and colouring, in which he is said to be 'without equal'.⁷⁹² His paintings of *Andromeda*, *Tantalus* and *Sisyphus* are all praised for their *disegno*,

⁷⁸⁸ L. Dolce / Barocchi, p. 200: 'In costui solo veramente si veggono raccolte a perfezione tutte le parti eccellenti che si sono trovate divise in molte, essendo che d'invenzione né disegno niuno lo superò giammai. Poi di colorito non fu mai alcuno che a lui arrivasse'.

⁷⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 202: 'cominciarono le genti a stupir della nuova maniera trovata in Vinegia da Tiziano, e tutti i pittori d'indi in poi si affaticarono d'imitarla; ma per esser fuori della strada loro rimasero smarriti'. Roskill, p. 188. See also Aretino's letter on the followers of Michelangelo.

⁷⁹⁰ M. W. Roskill, pp. 206-207: 'ma se avviene, che sotto il colorito, & insieme col colorito, non si contenga la bellezza e perfettion del disegno, la fatica è vana'.

⁷⁹¹ L. Dolce / Barocchi, p. 203.

⁷⁹² M. W. Roskill (as in n. 406), pp. 200-211.

colorito and *invenzione*, while the Venus and Adonis is remarkable for its balance between *disegno* and *colore*.

The 'beauties of propriety' ('belle convenevolezze'), the 'attention to detail' ('minute considerationi'), the 'noble perfection of art' ('nobili perfettioni dell'arte') are all qualities which are seen to unite Titian's art with that of Raphael.⁷⁹³ What unites Titian and Michelangelo, however, is the 'heroic' grandeur of their figures, implying the mastery of *disegno*. His art is thus paradigmatic of merits in all forms of artistic practice, such as invention, decorum, *disegno*, and colouring.

By shifting the parameters for assessing painting, giving prominence to mimetic skills, underscoring the importance of decorum, and carefully selecting examples of Titian's perfection, Dolce is able to assert his superiority as a painter. By promoting the delicate nude, he is able to shift the focus away from the absolute perfection of Michelangelo. By glossing over the less conventional features of the female figures in the later *Poesie* and emphasising the decorum of Raphael's, he is in a position to censure Michelangelo's nudes on account of their indecency.

The reinstatement of decorum as an essential requirement meant that Dolce was compelled to exclude Titian's female nudes from the discussion, thus simultaneously excluding the celebration of female beauty that played such a key role in Venice. While the nude plays a fundamental part in the treatise, in contrast with Vasari, Dolce is unable to link its representation to an urban myth of physical beauty.

⁷⁹³ L. Dolce / Barocchi, pp. 204-205.

PART THREE: THE REAFFIRMATION OF MICHELANGELO'S SUPREMACY

The *Lives* (1568): Vasari's Assessment of the Nudes of Michelangelo, Raphael and Titian

As we saw in Chapter Three, the idea that the abundance of new material on Vasari's contemporaries and the additions to the lives of Michelangelo and Raphael amounted to a shift in Vasari's view of history and a change in his personal predilections can be rejected on the basis that the muscular and perfectly beautiful nude continues to denote absolute perfection, as is demonstrated by examples in religious narrative paintings, compositions of nudes and the nude as the most beautiful adorning ornament.⁷⁹⁴

With regard to artists of Vasari's own generation, Francesco Salviati represents the new type of universal painter, whose merits comprise the mastery of the nude and beautiful figures, including the ornamental nudes in the Palazzo Vecchio decorations.⁷⁹⁵ Vasari thus adds another dimension to his scheme, that is, the painter who attains complete perfection through the representation of a range of objects and forms including the nude. Salviati is thus considered to have achieved both general and absolute perfection.

Most of the insertions in existing biographies concern the representation of the nude. Signorelli's Life now placed at the end of the second age makes plain the significance of the nude in the age that follows. Even more emphasis is placed on artistic practices, particularly the study of anatomy, while numerous other passages highlight the achievements of Tuscan artists in terms of *disegno*.⁷⁹⁶

⁷⁹⁴ For the range of opinions on the historical development of the 1568 edition of the *Lives* and the relevant positions of Michelangelo and Raphael, see this thesis, Chapter Three, n. 555.

⁷⁹⁵ VBB, 1568, vol. 5, p. 517: 'La quale opera da essere annoverato nell'invenzione, nel componimento della storia e nell'osservazione et ordine del diminuire le figure con regola, nella prospettiva et architettura de' casamenti, negl'ignudi, ne' vestiti, nella grazia delle teste, et insomma in tutte le parti'. The comment appears in the value judgement of Salviati's painting, *The Visitation*, 1538; Rome, Oratory of S. Giovanni Decollato.

⁷⁹⁶ On the increasing emphasis on artistic practices, see P. L. Rubin (as in n. 545), pp. 2, 212-213, 236, 265 and 399. According to P. L. Rubin, Vasari seeks to advertise the Accademia del disegno (founded 1563) whenever possible. Given the importance of artistic practices in the 1550 edition and Dolce's diminution of their value, I would suggest that many of the assertions serve to highlight the merits and shortcomings of individual artists, particularly in relation to the nude. Several of the additions underscoring Florence and the Medici as supporters of the arts are more likely to have been made specifically in their honour rather than only as a promotion of the newly founded academy. For an examination of the Accademia del disegno, its foundation, activities and objectives, see Z. Wazbinski (as in n. 431), esp. pp. 287-288. For the statutes regarding anatomy, *ibid.*, pp. 179-196. On the study of the *écorché*, *ibid.*, p. 289. On the study of the nude, *ibid.*, pp. 493-494. On the role and functions of the academy, *ibid.*, pp. 179-213. Wazbinski concludes that the practices were not a primary concern compared with theory and that prominence was not given to the study of the nude. On the Accademia, see also N. Pevsner, *Accademies of Art Past and Present*, Cambridge, 1940, reprinted New York, 1973, esp. pp. 38-53 and C. Goldstein, *Teaching Art – Academies and Schools from Vasari to Albers*, Cambridge, 1996, esp. pp. 10-14, 16, and 23-24.

There is ample evidence to suggest that many of the added sections on the nude were specifically written and strategically placed in response to Dolce's centre-north line of development and his claim for the supremacy of Titian by means of his assessment of Raphael. Vasari's response to Dolce is most evident in his art-critical vocabulary relating to the different kinds of perfection first charted in the 1550 edition, as well as in specific references to the artistic practices pursued by Titian, Raphael and Michelangelo with regard to their nude figures. The following examples from the 1568 edition serve to illustrate how Vasari responded to Dolce by assessing Titian and Raphael according to the hallmarks pertaining to the scheme of absolute perfection.

Titian and Venetian Artistic Practices

While Vasari's 1550 treatment of Venetian art, though much briefer than accounts of art in central Italy, was complimentary, it is distinctly critical in the 1568 edition. Venetian painting cannot compete in the ultimate hierarchy of art and with the achievements of central Italian art in terms of *disegno* and the nude. It is highly significant that Titian's biography not only emphasises his lack of mastery of *disegno* but also the shortcomings of the Venetian approach to the art of painting according to a specific line of development. The passages pertaining to Venetian artistic practices have received scant attention from art historians and are worth analysing in some detail.

The perception of failure to observe specific artistic procedures leading to perfection is backed up by most of the value judgements of individual art works. Vasari's opening comment picks up on Dolce's scheme of artistic development in Venice, starting with Giovanni Bellini and moving on to Giorgione and Titian. Without the opportunity to study ancient art, Bellini and Giorgione copied everything from life but with a 'dry, harsh, and laboured style'. The shortcomings of their style are seen to have affected Titian's early training.

What Dolce dismisses as '*minuzie*' and '*far di pratica*', which concern only artists, play a key role in Vasari's aesthetic of the nude and are used here as critical tools to highlight the shortcomings of Venetian art. Giorgione arrived at a better style characterised by softness and relief but could not achieve higher levels of perfection because he was not able to improve on the natural objects he slavishly imitated and 'without making preliminary drawings', convinced that painting consists in colour alone. The practice of drawing is presented as the best way to

arrive at inventions of figures and to test the effects of figure groups and other elements.⁷⁹⁷

The passage which immediately follows reiterates the artistic practices related to the mastery of the nude in *Della pittura* as the only possible procedure for attaining perfection. The procedures leading to absolute perfection are contrasted with the mere imitation of natural objects and the reliance on colouring for natural effects, which, in Vasari's mind, produces good and bad effects depending on the object imitated. The passage stresses the need to develop the ability to draw natural objects from memory, since copying or studying a figure posing in front of the artist places constraints on artistic imagination. By contrast, the assiduous practice of drawing harnessed with an interest in a range of postures serves to augment the artist's inventive power, first tested out on paper. Vasari also reiterates the conviction that inventive power has its source in the artist, which is further underscored as a higher source of creativity than literary and poetic inventions:

The idea itself cannot perfectly envision or picture its inventions unless it opens up and displays its conceptions to the eyes, which assist it in producing sound judgement, not to mention the fact that the artist must undertake a serious study of nudes if he wishes to understand them thoroughly, something that cannot be done without sketching them out on paper, for by always having naked or clothed models before him as he paints, a painter becomes a slave, whereas when he has tested his hand by drawing on paper, he can, in turn set to work designing and painting with greater ease. And by gaining experience in his art in this way, a painter develops perfect judgement and style, avoiding labour and effort with which the artists we mentioned above executed their paintings, not to mention the fact that drawing on paper fills the mind with beautiful conceits and teaches the painter to imagine all the objects in nature without always having to keep his subject in front of him, or to conceal under the charm of colours his poor knowledge of how to draw, in the way Venetian painters such as Giorgione, Palma, Pordenone, and others do, who for many years did not visit Rome or see other completely perfect works.⁷⁹⁸

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid., 1568, vol. 6, p. 153.

⁷⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 154: 'ma venuto poi, l'anno circa 1507, Giorgione da Castel Franco, non gli piacendo in tutto il detto modo di fare, cominciò a dare alle sue opere più morbidezza e maggiore rilievo con bella maniera, usando nondimeno di cacciar sì avanti le cose vive e naturali, e di contraffarle quanto sapeva il meglio con i colori, e macchiarle con le tinte crude e dolci, secondo che il vivo mostrava, senza far disegno, tenendo per fermo che il dipignere solo con i colori stessi, senz'altro studio di disegnare in carta, fusse il vero e miglior modo di fare et il vero disegno; ma si accorgeva che egli è necessario a chi vuol ben disporre i componimenti et accomodare l'invenzioni, ch'è fa bisogno prima in più modi differenti porle in carta, per vedere come il tutto torna insieme. Con ciò sia che l'idea non può vedere né immaginare perfettamente in sé stessa l'invenzioni, se non apre e mostra il suo concetto agl'occhi corporali che l'aiutano a farne buon giudizio; senzaché pur bisogna fare grande studio sopra gl'ignudi a volergli intendere bene: il che non vien fatto, né si può, senza mettere in carta; et il tenere, sempre che altri colorisce, persone ignude innanzi overo vestite, è non piccola servitù. Lè dove quando altri ha fatto la mano disegnando in carta, si vien poi di mano in mano con più agevolezza a mettere in opera disegnando e dipingendo; e così facendo pratica nell'arte, si fa la maniera et il giudizio perfetto, levando via quella fatica e stento con che si conducono le pitture di cui si è ragionato di sopra; per non dir nulla che, disegnando in carta, si viene a empiere la mente di bei concetti e s'impara a fare a mente tutte le cose della natura, senza avere a tenerle sempre innanzi, o ad avere a nascere la vaghezza de' colori lo stento del non sapere disegnare, nella maniera che fecero molti anni i pittori viniziani, Giorgione, il Palma, il Pordenone et altri che non videro Roma né altre opere di tutta perfezione.' Vasari writes critically of Tintoretto's *Last Judgement*, particularly the extravagant invention and the lack of disegno. See VBB (1568), vol. 5, pp. 468-473, esp. p. 470.

The value judgements on Titian's nudes selected here illustrate how artistic merits are dependent on both the beauty of the live model and the mastery of *disegno* achieved through the assiduous practice of drawing. Vasari's account of Titian's *St Sebastian* (**figure 72**) is very subtle. The figure is said to be based exclusively on the live model, and, though it is admirable, there has been no attempt to improve on the beauty of the legs and torso:

For the little church of San Niccolò in the same convent, Titian painted a panel containing Saint Nicholas, Saint Francis, Saint Catherine, and a nude Saint Sebastian depicted from life without employing any obvious artifice in revealing the beauty of his legs and torso; nothing is shown except what Titian saw in nature, and as a result, everything seems imprinted from a living person, it is so fleshy and real, and it is, for all these reasons, considered very beautiful.⁷⁹⁹

Vasari's account of the *Farnese Danae* (**figure 51**), which draws explicitly on Dolce, emphasises the lack of design and hence the failure to produce figures displaying superlative beauty. The comments serve primarily to demonstrate that without the practice of drawing the artist cannot free himself from the live model and aim for that higher beauty which is the mark of true perfection and grace. Titian's stylistic hallmarks are expressive of the 'charming' and 'lovely' rather than the 'beautiful'.

One day as Michelangelo and Vasari were going to see Titian in the Belvedere, they saw in a painting he had just completed a nude female representing Danae with Jupiter transformed into a golden shower on her lap, and, as is done in the artist's presence, they highly praised it. After leaving Titian, and discussing his method, Buonarroti strongly commended him, declaring that he liked his colouring and style very much but that it was a pity artists in Venice did not learn to draw well from the beginning and that Venetian painters did not have a better method of study. 'If Titian', he said, 'had been assisted by art and design as greatly as he had been by nature, especially in imitating live subjects, no artist could achieve more or paint better, for he possesses a splendid spirit and a most charming and lively style.' And in fact this is true, for anyone who has not drawn a great deal and studied selected works, both ancient and modern, cannot succeed through his own experience or improve the things he copies from life by giving them the grace and perfection that derive from a skill that goes beyond nature, some of whose parts are not normally beautiful'.⁸⁰⁰

⁷⁹⁹ VBB, 1568, vol. 6, p. 159: 'Alla chiesetta di San Niccolò, nel medesimo convento, fece in una tavola S. Niccolò, San Francesco, Santa Caterina e San Sebastiano ignudo, ritratto dal vivo e senza artificio niuno che si veggia essere stato usato in ritrovare la bellezza delle gambe e del torso, non vi essendo altro che quanto vide nel naturale, di maniera che tutto pare stampato dal vivo, così è carnosso e proprio, ma con tutto ciò è tenuto bello'. English translation by J. Conaway Bondanella and P. Bondanella (as in n. 614), p. 495.

⁸⁰⁰ VBB 1568, vol. 6, p. 164: 'Andando un giorno Michelangelo et il Vasari a vedere Tiziano in Belvedere, videro in un quadro, che allora avea condotto, una femina ignuda, figurata per una Danae, che avea Giove trasformato in pioggia d'oro, e molto, come si fa in presenza, gliela lodarono. Dopo partiti che furono da lui, ragionandosi del fare di Tiziano, il Buonarroti lo comendò assai, dicendo che molto gli piaceva il colorito e la sua maniera, ma era un peccato che a Vinezia non s'imparasse da principio a disegnare bene e che non avessero quei pittori miglior modo nello studio: "Con ciò sia-diss'egli- che, se quest'uomo fusse punto aiutato dall'arte e dal disegno, com'è dalla natura, e massimamente nel confrontare il vivo, non si potrebbe far più né meglio, avendo egli bellissimo spirito et una molto vaga e vivace maniera." Et infatti così è vero, perciò che chi non ha disegnato assai e studiato cose scelte, antiche o moderne, non può far bene di pratica da sé né aiutare le cose che si ritranno dal vivo, dando loro quella grazia e perfezione che dà l'arte fuori dell'ordine della natura, la quale fa ordinariamente alcune parti che non sono belle'.

Raphael

The additions pertaining to the nude in Raphael's biography shrewdly respond to Dolce's invitation to compare his nudes with those of Michelangelo: 'stand in front of a nude by Michelangelo and one by Raphael and having considered them both properly, decide which is the most perfect'.⁸⁰¹

A lengthy passage, which reiterates the notions underlying the two types of perfection making up Vasari's historical and aesthetic schemes, is dedicated to Raphael's inability to reach the highest levels of perfection in the representation of the nude. In addition, incomplete training is seen to influence the development of the painter's style. Raphael's attachment to Perugino's style prevented him from overcoming the difficulties inherent in the nude. The absolute perfection attained by Michelangelo is intimately bound up with a specific set of artistic procedures which Raphael seeks to adopt, such as the study of the live model, anatomy, the observation and understanding of motion through which beauty is generated, and foreshortening. The implication is that Raphael's late study of the nude in imitation of Michelangelo excludes him from the scheme of absolute perfection.

Therefore, he devoted himself to study nudes and to comparing the muscles in anatomical studies and dead and dissected men with these of the living, since they are not as clearly defined under skin as when it is removed, and then, seeing how soft and fleshy parts are formed in the appropriate places and how by changing the points of view certain contortions can be gracefully executed, as well as the effects of inflating, lowering, or raising either a limb or the entire body, and the connections of the bones, nerves, and veins, Raphael became a master of all the details required of the greatest painters.⁸⁰²

In order to demonstrate this point more forcefully, Vasari adds value judgements of Raphael's nudes. The nudes in the *Fire in the Borgo* (**figure 59**), which did not warrant a judgement in the first edition but which were praised by Dolce. Vasari judges the nudes to be 'good' (buoni) but 'not entirely excellent' ('non in tutto eccellenti'). Furthermore, Vasari re-affirms the view that an artist can enhance his

⁸⁰¹ L. Dolce / Barocchi (as in n. 686), p. 194: 'Ma recatosi inanzi un nudo di Michelagnolo et un altro di Raffaello; et avendogli prima ambedue pienamente considerati, risolvetevi poi in dire qual dei due è più perfetto'.

⁸⁰² VBB, 1568, vol. 5, pp. 206-207: 'Ma tornando a Raffaello, gli fu col tempo di grandissimo disaiuto e fatica quella maniera che prese di Pietro quando era giovanotto, la quale prese agevolmente per essere minuta, secca e di poco disegno; perciò che non potendosela dimenticare, fu cagione che con molta difficoltà imparò la bellezza degli ignudi et il modo degli scorti difficili dal cartone che fece Michelagnolo Buonarroti per la Sala del Consiglio. Quando Raffaello si diede a voler mutar e migliorare la maniera, non aveva mai dato opera agl'ignudi con quello studio che si ricerca, ma solamente gli aveva ritratti di naturale nella maniera che aveva veduto fare a Pietro suo maestro, aiutandogli con quella grazia che aveva dalla natura. Datosi adunque allo studiare gl'ignudi et a riscontrare i muscoli delle notorie e degl'uomini morti e scorticati con quelli de' vivi – che per la coperta della pelle non appariscono terminati nel modo che fanno levata la pelle e veduto poi in che modo si facciano carnosì e dolci ne' luoghi loro e come nel girare delle vedute si facciano con grazia certi storcimenti e parimente gl'effetti del gonfiare et abbassare et alzare o un membro o tutta la persona, et oltre ciò l'incatenatura dell'ossa, de' nervi e delle vene, si fece eccellente in tutte le parti che in uno ottimo dipintore sono richieste.

style through the mastery of the nude, and that an artist's reputation ultimately resides in his ability to form a perfect nude body:

And if Raphael had stopped here with his style and had not sought to enrich it and vary it, in order to prove that he understood the painting of nudes as well as Michelangelo, he would not have lost some part of the reputation he had already acquired, for the nudes he painted in the chamber of the Borgia Tower, where he did the Fire in the Borgo Nuovo, while good, are not excellent in every aspect.⁸⁰³

Despite the shortcomings of his nudes, Vasari redresses the balance by re-affirming Raphael as a universal painter, skilled in composing scenes and in giving them variety, possibly surpassing Michelangelo in perspective, buildings, landscapes, drapery, faces, animals, portraits, all of which rank lower than the ability to freely invent and form perfect nude figures. Raphael thus remains the chief representative of general but not quite absolute perfection.

To this conclusion, as he considered to think about the problem, Raphael added the idea of enriching his works with the variety and inventiveness of his perspectives, buildings, and landscapes, a graceful way of dressing his figures, so that sometimes they disappear in the shadows and sometimes stand out in the light; a way of creating lively and beautiful heads for women, children, young men and old alike, and to give these, as necessary, a sense of movement and vigour.⁸⁰⁴

The added passages have been interpreted as a way of institutionalising artistic practices, just a few years after the foundation of the *Accademia del disegno*, indicating how the artist could make improvements to his figures.⁸⁰⁵ However, the passage forms part of a connected discourse on the nude based on a specific set of assumptions and objectives which are intimately linked with the notion of absolute perfection. Vasari underscores Raphael's inability to reach the highest level of perfection, 'la perfezione delle arti nostre', while reiterating and reinforcing his position as a painter attaining general perfection, that is, in the 'campo largo'.⁸⁰⁶

⁸⁰³ VBB, 1568, vol. 4, p. 207: 'e se Raffaello si fusse in questa sua detta maniera fermato, né avesse cercato di aggrandirla e variarla per mostrare che egli intendeva gl'ignudi così bene come Michelagnolo, non si sarebbe tolto parte di quel buon nome che acquistato aveva; perciò che gli ignudi che fece nella camera di torre Borgia, dove è l'incendio di Borgo Nuovo, ancora che siano buoni, non sono in tutto eccellenti.

⁸⁰⁴ VBB, 1568, vol. 4, p. 206. 'A questo, sì come bene andò pensando Raffaello, s'aggiugne lo arricchire con la varietà e stravaganza delle prospettive, de' casamenti e de' paesi, il leggiadro modo di vestire le figure, il fare che elle si perdino alcuna volta nello scuro et alcuna venghino innanzi col chiaro, il fare vive e belle le teste delle femmine, de' putti, de' giovani e de' vecchi, e dar loro secondo il bisogno movenza e bravura'.

⁸⁰⁵ See P. L. Rubin (as in n. 545), p. 399. On the probable connection with Dolce's *Dialogo*, see *ibid.*, p. 400.

⁸⁰⁶ For contrasting views on the re-assessment of Raphael in the 1568 edition of the *Lives*, see L. S. Alpers (as in n. 552), pp. 190-250 and P. Barocchi, *ibid.*, pp. 35-52.

Michelangelo

The addition on Michelangelo's anatomical studies and his profound understanding of the mechanisms of the human body, both flayed and in motion, rounds off Vasari's re-affirmation of his supremacy in relation to his pursuit of a specific set of artistic practices.⁸⁰⁷ Further evidence of his absolute perfection with regard to the nude appears in a passage added at the end of the description of the *Last Judgement*, which was intended as a response both to criticism of the fresco and particularly to Dolce:

It is enough to see that the intention of this unique man has been to avoid anything but the human body at its most perfect and well-proportioned, and in diverse postures; not only this, but also the effects of the emotions and the satisfactions of the spirit; it being enough for him to excel in that part in which he has been superior to all artists, and to show the way of the grand style, of the nude, and of all that he knows of the difficulties of design; and finally, he has opened the way to facility in this art in its primary object, which is the human body, and attending to this task only, has left aside all the charms of colour, the caprices and delicate and exquisite fantasies that many other painters, not without reason, have not neglected. So that some, not being well-grounded in design, have sought, with variety of colours and shadows, and with various bizarre and new inventions, and in short, by following that other way, to make a place for themselves among the leading masters. But Michelangelo, standing firm always in the profundity of art, has shown to those who already know a great amount how to arrive at perfection.⁸⁰⁸

Michelangelo's position at the summit of art cannot be challenged by the merits of colouring, *chiaroscuro*, or 'various bizarre and new inventions'. His mastery of the nude, both to convey emotion or as the most beautiful ornament, maintains its highest position amongst the standards of perfection. Michelangelo's focus on the nude is all the more remarkable because the style of the nude is the 'grand style' and because his mastery of it paved the way for the next generation of artists who were able to resolve difficulty with facility.

The second edition thus clarifies and adjusts, rather than reverses, the hypothesis of the first. The developmental scheme leading to the absolute perfection of art in terms of the nude and *disegno* on the part of Michelangelo continues with a younger generation of artists and members of the Florentine Academy, for whom Michelangelo continues to represent the ultimate benchmark. Just as Luca

⁸⁰⁷ VBB, 1568, vol. 6, p. 108.

⁸⁰⁸ VBB, 1568, vol. 6, p. 69: 'Basta che si vede che l'intenzione di questo huomo singolare non ha voluto entrare in dipignare altro che la perfetta e proporzionatissima composizione del corpo umano et in diversissime attitudini; non solo questo, ma insieme gli affetti delle passioni e contentezze dell'animo, bastandogli soddisfare in quella parte – nel che è stato superiore a tutti i suoi artefici – e mostrare la via della gran maniera degli ignudi e quanto e' sappi nelle difficoltà del disegno; e finalmente ha aperto la via alla facilità di questa arte nel principale suo intento, che è il corpo umano, et attendendo a questo fin solo, ha lassato da parte le vaghezza de' colori, i capricci e le nuove fantasie di certe minuzie e delicatezza, che da molti altri pittori non sono interamente, e forse non senza qualche ragione, state neglette. Onde qualcuno, non tanto fondato nel disegno, ha cerco con la varietà di tinte et ombri di colori, e con bizarre, varie e nuove invenzioni, et in somma con questa altra via, farsi luogo fra i primi

Signorelli leads the way to the perfection of Michelangelo, the Florentine artist paves the way for the fourth maniera.⁸⁰⁹

Conclusions

An examination of the nude and related artistic merits in Dolce's *Dialogo* throws into relief his dependence on the 1550 edition of the *Lives*. The redefinition of many of Vasari's key conceptual and critical terms points to the intention to diminish their significance in relation to Vasari's historical and aesthetic scheme for the nude. Dolce's understanding of invention in literary and poetical terms further diminishes the artist's role as the imaginative creator of perfectly beautiful nudes in favour of the *letterato* and his association with the painter as emblematic of the notion of *ut pictura poesis*. However, the reinstatement of decorum frequently restricts the artist's hand rather than increases the poetic licence which is granted to the artist elsewhere in the text.

An examination of Dolce's letters to Ballini and Contarini indicates that these were the primary sources for his ideas on decorum and the *paragone* between Michelangelo and Raphael rather than Aretino's views on art. References in the letters also influence his treatment of Titian, whose public works function most eloquently in the Venetian context. By omitting a full discussion of Titian's nudes Dolce is able to argue in favour of the decorum and decency of Raphael's to the detriment of Michelangelo. Dolce's discussion of the eight artists towards the end of the treatise may have been deliberately written to suggest an alternative line of artistic development along an axis from central Italy to Venice.

Many of the additions in connection with the nude in the 1568 edition of the *Lives* were specifically written in response to Dolce's claims for Raphael's and Titian's supremacy over Michelangelo. Vasari constructs his response according to the assumptions and parameters established in the first edition. Vasari takes as a starting point the artistic practices associated with the absolute perfection of the nude to diminish the achievements of both Titian and Raphael. The focus on the failure to follow these procedures is directly related to the artistic and aesthetic shortcomings of their nude figures and fits perfectly with both the theoretical assumptions in the technical sections and other passages on the nude in the biographical section. Michelangelo's supremacy of the nude is thus reaffirmed while Raphael is confirmed as the universal painter attaining general but not

maestri. Ma Michelagnolo, stando saldo sempre nella profondità dell'arte, ha mostro a quegli che sanno assai [come] dovevano arrivare al perfetto.'

complete perfection because he lacked mastery of the nude according to the standards set by Michelangelo.

⁸⁰⁹ L. S. Alpers was the first to refer to the period of art in which Vasari and the academicians were active as the 'quarta età'. See L. S. Alpers (as in n. 52), p. 209.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Dichotomy between the Requirements of Art and the Decorum of Nudity Writings on Art: 1560-1600

'If I had this beautiful figure in my house, said Michelozzo, I would esteem it greatly, and I would highly regard it as one of the most delicate and soft figures that one can find.'
Raffaele Borghini, *Il Riposo*⁸¹⁰

Introduction

The most notable treatises in relation to the nude produced after Vasari's *Lives* were written by both artists and non-artists. The debate engendered by the nude in this period is determined by several factors, all of which require careful consideration. It is important to establish clearly the effects and influence of the Counter-Reformation, as well as responses to the diffusion of images of the nude and erotic prints to a wider audience. Equally important, and to some extent connected with the new prescriptions for religious art and the reinstatement of the notion of decorum, is the redefinition of the boundaries within which the artist may operate.

The main objective of this chapter is to examine perceptions of the nude in terms of perfection, the status of the artist, the autonomy of art, as well as the issue of the appropriateness of nude images in terms of setting, audience, and behavioural decorum. All the texts analysed in this chapter reveal a preoccupation with the nude, albeit in different ways. I will analyse writings by artists, such as Vincenzo Danti, Benvenuto Cellini, and Giovanni Battista Armenini, by the ecclesiastic Gilio da Fabriano, and the *letterato* Raffaele Borghini. The notions of perfection that emerge from Francesco Bocchi's *Bellezze* are also discussed. Art-theoretical and art-critical terminology, as well as terms from daily life, all provide important clues to the various attitudes towards the nude in art in the second half of the Cinquecento. The discussion of the new requirements for religious art is followed by an investigation into a number of new suggestions for subjects and settings where the representation of the nude is perceived to be less problematic. The final section examines the circulation of prints and the changing perception of the nude. Both the reception of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* and the widespread dissemination of nude images through the print medium are investigated.

⁸¹⁰ R. Borghini (as in n. 419), p. 116. L'haver parlato della Resurrezione, soggiunse Michelozzo, mi hatto ricordare d'una tavola del Bronzino nella Nunziata dimostrante tal misterio. Digratia non ne parliamo, replicò il Vecchietto, perche vi è un Angelo tanto lascivo, che è cosa di sconvenevole. S'io havessi cotesta bella figura in casa, disse il Michelozzo, io la estimerei molto, e ne terrei gran conto per una delle piu dilicate, e morbide figure, che veder si possano.'

PART ONE: SOURCES REGARDING THE REPRESENTATION OF THE NUDE

The Counter-Reformation and the Tridentine Prescriptions for Religious Art

Before examining treatises on art produced in the second half of the sixteenth century, it is useful to examine in some detail the rulings of the Council of Trent and the influence exerted by the Tridentine decrees on ecclesiastics who sought to promote them, and in some instances, introduce sterner and more rigid reforms for the arts.

It is important to recognise that the closing session of the Council of Trent in 1563 did not bring about any sudden changes. The Counter-Reformation was a gradual process beginning in the 1530s, when Michelangelo's influence was at its peak, gaining momentum as the century proceeded, prompting different reactions and varying degrees of tolerance on the part of contemporary commentators and their readers with regard to the arts.

The decision of the members of the Council to maintain images in places of worship was based on the rejection of the iconoclasm of the Protestants and led to a series of general rather than specific requirements. The members of the Council codified rather than established reform and no strikingly new solutions were proposed. The general statements in the Decrees in Art of the Council of Trent indicate that the church regarded the main function of religious images as didactic, though no specific instructions are provided with regard to the treatment of narrative works.

The main concerns for the representation of the human figure regard the type of figure considered to be acceptable and its impact on the viewer, a point worth bearing in mind. The decrees drawn up in the last session state that 'due honour and veneration' should be given to images of Christ, the Virgin Mary and other saints, though they should never be worshipped as idols. Bishops were to oversee religious works of art and ensure they encouraged faith, piety, imitation of the lives of saints, and served as an admonishment of the benefits and gifts bestowed by Christ.⁸¹¹

The representation of images promoting biblical truth was clearly high on the agenda. Since the main purpose of depicted images in religious settings was

⁸¹¹ *Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, Session XXV, 4. XII, 1563: 'ita ut per imagines quas osculamur et coram quibus caput aperimus et procumbimus, Christum adoremus, et Sanctos, quorum illae similitudinem gerunt, veneremur'. The passage is partially transcribed and translated by A. Blunt (as in n. 572), p. 108. For the relevant Latin passage, see P. Barocchi, 'Un Discorso sopra l'onestà delle immagini' di Rinaldo Corso', *Scritti di storia dell'arte in onore di Mario Salmi*, 3 vols., Rome, 1963, vol. 1, pp. 173-191.

devotional and didactic, images that might mislead the viewer and provide Protestants with a weapon against the Catholic Church were not to be allowed. Hence the Council stipulated that 'no image must be displayed which is suggestive of false doctrine or which may provide an occasion of dangerous error to the uneducated'.⁸¹² In addition, any unusual image required the bishop's approval before it could be displayed.

The Tridentine decree on the issue of decency is very general: 'Finally all lasciviousness must be avoided; so that figures must not be painted or adorned with a beauty inciting to lust'.⁸¹³ We therefore need to consider what this meant to contemporary commentators, both ecclesiastics and laymen, and how it affected their assessment of individual images, if at all.

Related to the representation of nude, particularly its function as an ornament, is the attitude towards ornamental motifs in the arts. The new focus on religious significance brought with it the conviction that church music should not delight the ears but provide a setting where everyone could hear the words, and thus grasp the religious message. This requirement affected both the practice of singing popular songs and the use of the elaborate counterpoint during mass. Since the counterpoint created striking effects through its improvisations and diminutions which grasped and held the listener's attention, it was thought to obscure the words of the Mass and thus deemed inappropriate in the new climate.

As Marcia Hall has pointed out, the real influence exerted by the Tridentine reforms seems to lie more in the compliance with the spirit of Trent rather than an imposition from above.⁸¹⁴ Around the middle of the sixteenth century, religious images were increasingly seen to undermine rather than fulfil their devotional functions, prompting a reaction in the church and the production of texts seeking to encourage corrective measures. The general guidelines were, however, transformed into precise rules by several clerics, who took it upon themselves to expound and expand the decrees of Trent.

The first ecclesiastical writer to take the Tridentine decrees on religious images as a starting point for an analysis of the question of nudity was Johannes Molanus (1533-1585), Philip of Spain's censor in the Netherlands. Molanus's text, *De Picturis et*

⁸¹² Ibid.

⁸¹³ Ibid.: 'Omnis porro superstitio in Sanctorum invocatione, Reliquiarum veneratione et imaginum sacro usu tollatur, omnis turpis quaestus eliminetur, omnis denique lascivia vitetur, ita ut procaci venustate imagines non pingatur nec ornentur et Sanctorum celebratione ac Reliquiarum visitatione homines ad comessationes atque ebrietates non abutantur; quasi festi dies in honorem Sanctorum per luxum ac lasciviam agantur'.

⁸¹⁴ M. B. Hall, *Renovation and Counter-Reformation. Vasari and Duke Cosimo in Sta Maria and Sta Croce 1565-1577*, Oxford, 1979, p. 1. See also F. Zeri, *Pittura e Controriforma*, pp. 23 and passim. According to

Imaginibus Sacris (Louvrain, 1570), which was published again in 1594 in an enlarged and revised edition under the title *De Historia Sanctarum Imaginum et Picturarum*, enjoyed widespread popularity though it is not certain whether its perusal and influence were confined to the theological sphere.⁸¹⁵

Molanus addresses the issue of nudity in the chapter entitled 'In picturis cavendum esse quidquid ad libidinem provocat' ('In paintings whatever stimulates lust should be avoided'), which is the first indication of how Molanus extends the problem of *lascivia* in art beyond the relevant Tridentine decree.⁸¹⁶ While Molanus draws on earlier ecclesiastical sources, he introduces several of his own personal views to underscore the connection between morality and art. It is deeply significant that Molanus constructs his criticism of nude figures in relation to its effects on the viewer, particularly the untrained audience.

Molanus tolerates some degree of nakedness in art, for example, that of angels and Adam and Eve as a testimony of their innocence and sanctity.⁸¹⁷ However, as the title of the chapter suggests, he strongly disapproves of indecent and provocative elements in art. The thrust of his argument is that indecent pictures constitute a serious breach of the traditional justification of images as a means of encouraging the devotion of the faithful. Molanus associates the representation of the lower body in holy figures with impropriety, inveighing even against depictions of the infant Christ, contrasting the naked body depicted in his own day with early representations seen to display innocence.⁸¹⁸ Any biblical episode associated with indecency, such as Herod's daughter dancing and Bathsheba spied upon in the bath, should be avoided in churches.⁸¹⁹ He is convinced that there is no edification in nakedness, and while both books and images are perceived as dangerous,

Zeri, the general guidelines provided by Trent soon crystallised into precise norms in the atmosphere which emanated from the Council.

⁸¹⁵ The earliest writings produced by the Counter-Reformation pick up on the arguments of earlier theologians in the Iconoclastic conflict. The most important texts are: Ambrosius Catharinus, *De certa Gloria invocatione ac veneratione sanctorum*, Lyons, 1542; Conradus Brunus, *De imaginibus*, Augsburg, 1548; Nicholas Hartsfied, *Dialoghi Sex*, 1556; Nicholas Sanders, *De typica et honoraria sacrarum imaginum adoratione*, Louvain, 1569. Their arguments influenced later writings on religious art, such as those by Paleotti and Molanus. For a discussion of earlier writers who influenced Molanus in their arguments in favour of the retention of images, see A. Blunt (as in n. 572), p. 107, n. 1. For a full discussion of Molanus's text and the issue of nudity in art, see D. Freedberg (as in n. 65), pp. 229-245. On fifteenth-century pre-Tridentine polemicists such as Ambrosius Catharinus and Conradus Brunus, see *ibid.*, p. 230 n. 7; *ibid.*, n. 8, on the defence of images in religious art, see *ibid.*, n. 8.

⁸¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 237. In the 1570 edition Molanus's discussion appears in Chapter 33, but in later editions it appears as Chapter 42 of Book Two.

⁸¹⁷ According to K. Borinski, theologians of the Middle Ages tolerated nudity in art provided it served as a figurative demonstration of man's basic weakness and frailty. On this point, see K. Borinski (as in n. 708), vol. 1, p. 88.

⁸¹⁸ On the naked infant Christ in pre-Renaissance and Renaissance art, see L. Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion*, Chicago, 1983, 2nd edn. revised and expanded, Chicago, 1996, esp. pp. 15-45. Steinberg notes that a medieval metaphor localised Christ's divine nature symbolically in his upper body, his manhood beneath the girdle. Steinberg points out that the progressive denuding of the infant Christ has as much to do with the interest on the nude body as a new focus on the human aspect of Christ and a poignant display of human potential for suffering and as a way of participating in a mystic or tragic vision.

⁸¹⁹ D. Freedberg (as in n. 65), p. 241.

painting should be subject to greater censorship because the effects of images are felt to be more powerful and immediate.⁸²⁰

Molanus objects to both indecency in religious works and the private setting. His condemnation of the nude was not shared by every ecclesiastic. Molanus's prescriptions thus mark another significant extension to the decrees. Indecent images in the domestic setting are not tolerated because they are seen to encourage immoral behaviour in youths. In addition, since people are ashamed to show their bare limbs, there is no justification for their representation in art: 'why do you bare in paintings the limbs which you conceal for the sake of modesty [...] and never suffer them to be in sight of your children?'⁸²¹ Molanus directs harsh criticism at the representation of the loves of the mythological gods, associating them with 'naked limbs'.⁸²² Representations of Danae impregnated by Jupiter are abhorred because they are seen to encourage sexual intercourse, a fear which also emerges in the instructions to priests, as discussed in Chapter One.⁸²³ Lastly, Molanus disapproves of the representation of drinking and idle chat in religious works, presumably because they were associated with immoral behaviour in daily life.

Other key ecclesiastical writings are St Carlo Borromeo's *Instruktionen fabricae et supellectilis ecclesiasticae* (1577) and Bishop Gabriele Paleotti's *Discorso* (1582) and *De imagines sacris* (1594). St. Carlo Borromeo played a key role in the closing session of the Council and was head of a group that wished to formulate the new Tridentine catechism. His treatise provided clear guidelines for the adornment of churches, underscoring the need for images that are in keeping with the Holy Scriptures and the tradition of the church.⁸²⁴ He called for iconographic clarity with particular reference to external details, stating that angels should have wings, saints haloes and their usual attributes, adding that it may even be necessary to write their names underneath if their identity is unclear.⁸²⁵ Molanus's influence is felt in Paleotti's writings, where ecclesiastical supervision is promoted as regards the propriety of images in keeping with the Tridentine decrees. In addition, Paleotti prohibits any image seen to be superstitious, apocryphal, false, new and unusual.⁸²⁶

⁸²⁰ Ibid., p. 239.

⁸²¹ Ibid., pp. 240 and 241: 'Membra quae verecundiae gratia celas ne videantur, cur in tabula nudas, & nunquam ea pateris abesse a conspectus liberorum?'

⁸²² Ibid.

⁸²³ Ibid., p. 243.

⁸²⁴ C. Borromeo, *Instruktionen fabricae et supellectilis ecclesiasticae*, 1572, Book I, chapter 17. Borromeo's treatise is reprinted and commented in *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento*, P. Barocchi (ed), Bari, 1962, vol. 3, pp. 3-113.

⁸²⁵ For these prescriptions in Gilio, see *Dialogo nel quale si ragiona degli errori e degli abusi de' pittori circa l'istorie*, *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento*, P. Barocchi (ed), 3 vols., Bari, 1960-1962, Bari, 1961, vol. 2, pp. 111-114, hereafter *Degli Errori*, and in R. Borghini (as in n. 419), pp. 52 and 82.

⁸²⁶ G. Paleotti, *Archiepiscopale Bononiense*, Rome, 1594, p. 230.

Both Paleotti and Borromeo expressed concern for the issue of decency and elaborated upon the general statement of the relevant decree. Both writers add the view that indecency should be avoided not only in churches but also in the decoration of private houses.⁸²⁷ Like Molanus, they expanded on the relevant Tridentine decree.

Finally, the Counter-Reformation had an indirect bearing on projects for church renovation, though such projects do not relate to any specific directive. With regard to church renovation, the practices codified by Trent can be traced to an earlier period in connection with a long-recognised need to re-design churches and provide a setting which augmented the involvement of the entire congregation.

The Florentine altarpiece project and the renovation of Santa Maria Novella and Santa Croce are paradigmatic of the mood resulting from the Counter-Reformation and the spirit of renewal. It is significant to note that in the last quarter of the century most of the commissions in Florence were for religious paintings.⁸²⁸ The Florentine project began in the 1560s and was largely completed by 1577, with Vasari in charge of church designs and decorations as part of Cosimo's policy to consolidate his power.⁸²⁹ In devising plans for churches, Vasari aimed to achieve an interaction of liturgical and aesthetic considerations increasing both beauty and religious observance. Vasari made a few concessions to the new spirit, but his style was not completely transformed.⁸³⁰ According to Marcia Hall, after 1565, altarpieces tended to reduce the aesthetic appeal and to focus on the religious message, in keeping with the new spirit.⁸³¹

⁸²⁷ C. Borromeo, *Acta Ecclesiae Mediolanensis*, Brescia, 1603, ii, p. 496 and G. Paleotti (as in n. 821), Book Three.

⁸²⁸ For a thorough examination of the reforms in the decoration of Florentine churches under Cosimo I, Vasari's involvement, and relevant documents, see M. Hall (as in n. 814).

⁸²⁹ Nine artists were selected for the remaining paintings that were to complete the altar-piece project undertaken after 1565. The artists selected were Jacopo Coppi, the Fleming Stradano, the Veronese Sebastiano Vini, Santi di Tito, Alessandro Allori, Battista Naldini, Girolamo Macchietti, Alessandro del Barbieri, and Andrea del Minga, some of the key figures in the last decades of sixteenth-century Florentine art. Most of them were assistants in Vasari's *bottega*.

⁸³⁰ For Vasari's views on the effects of the Counter-Reformation on the arts, see M. Hall (as in n. 814), p. 50. Several letters written by Vasari in the 1560s indicate that he was not in sympathy with the Counter-Reformation, criticising its effects on artistic production and the art market in Rome. In addition, he expresses a predilection for the art of his own rather than the new generation, praising painters like Francesco Salviati. See, for example, C. Frey (as in n. 553), vol. 2, pp. 228-229, his letter to Vincenzo Borghini dated 14 April 1566.

⁸³¹ On the so-called High-Maniera and Counter-Maniera, see S. J. Freedberg, *Painting in Italy: 1500-1600*, Yale, 1971, 2nd edn. 1993, p. 477-499. On Mannerism and the Counter-Maniera, see J. Shearman (as in n. 321).

Writings on the Nude in Painting and Sculpture

Criticism of the nude was not unknown before the Counter-Reformation. One of the most vehement earlier attacks against images of the nude came from the Dominican moral reformer Girolamo Savonarola, who condemned in his sermons indecent images of men and women which decorated many Florentine homes and marriage furniture. Savonarola complained that stories from Greek and Roman mythology perverted the minds of young women and that day-beds (*lettucci*) and beds (*lettiere*) adorned with 'very indecent figures, nude men and women' encouraged young people to have intercourse or engage in unacceptable sexual behaviour.⁸³² One of the earliest examples of the dichotomy between the requirements of art and the decorum of nudity in the Cinquecento appears in a poem by Pietro Andrea Mattioli, who reports that criticism had been directed at the representation of the nude in the residence of the Archbishop of Trent.⁸³³

The paucity of extant documents for the early period makes it difficult to gauge the extent of similar criticism. What is clear, however, is that the attention paid to the strong emphasis on nudity in later writings, both as a direct and indirect consequence of the Counter-Reformation, demands further analysis. The emphasis placed on the nude raises a number of questions; firstly, did writers on art, whatever their background, pronounce an extensive, wide-ranging condemnation of the nude or were their views more circumscribed? Secondly, what were the real motivations behind their views and prescriptions? Thirdly, what kind of distinctions did they make in terms of the notion of decorum?

In the wake of the Counter-Reformation, the discussion of nudity continued to engage theorists and critics in a debate in which the dichotomy of the different requirements of art and decorum played a significant part. Various solutions were proposed but none that were binding for every writer on the arts. While the less tolerant views of the ecclesiastics discussed above were only partly accepted, the changing notion of audience, which was extended to include a much wider group of viewers, most notably the untrained masses, became of central importance in determining which images of the nude should be available for viewing. References to the actual or potential audience therefore have implications which go beyond the new religious climate. The new rules for public religious works impinged upon the perception of artistic production in general and of the nude in particular.

⁸³² As cited by P. Tinagli (as in n. 14), pp. 122.

⁸³³ See T. Frangenberg (as in n. 283), pp. 352-378.

Several of the texts investigated in this chapter reveal an interesting connection between attitudes towards the various aspects of decorum in art and daily life. The prescriptions and requirements particularly for religious art thus share striking similarities with writings concerned with moral and social behaviour and draw on the same parameters for gauging both behavioural forms and the decency of images, and thus the acceptability of the representation of the nude in painting and sculpture.

Before analysing these writings in more detail, it is useful to provide a rudimentary description of the structure and objectives of the texts analysed here.⁸³⁴

Gilio da Fabriano (d. 1584) *Degli Errori e Abusi dei Pittori*, Camerino, 1564

The dialogue, which involves six men from the Marches, is dedicated to Cardinal Alessandro Farnese.⁸³⁵ The interlocutors discuss a number of breaches of decorum committed by contemporary painters with many references to the nude and bodily motion. The text sets out to rectify these breaches by providing clear instructions and by dividing painters into historical, mixed and poetic, a division which serves primarily to distinguish between the degrees of freedom granted to each kind of painter, as well as pinpoint settings where the representation of the nude is still deemed acceptable. Not surprisingly, the focus of the debate is on history painting, particularly religious art. Gilio's prescriptions for religious art draw on Borromeo's guidelines, as well as earlier Catholic polemicists, such as Conrad Brun.⁸³⁶ His discussion of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*, which was based on a printed copy, was one of the most influential sources for the last decades of the Cinquecento. His text and particularly his division of painting influenced Raffaele Borghini's treatise, which is discussed below.

Despite the strong emphasis on the need to produce appropriate images, particularly in the public sphere, Gilio does not totally reject the artistic achievements of his own day. The retention of the nude, particularly in the private setting and in mixed and poetical paintings, is based on the assumption that it is a highly appreciated aesthetic form which manifests most powerfully the decorum of art.

⁸³⁴ For an overview of writings on art produced by non-artists and their respective audiences, see M. Barasch, *Theories of Art: From Plato to Winckelmann*, New York and London, 1985, pp. 174-179.

⁸³⁵ G. Gilio (as in n. 820), vol. 2, pp. 3-115 and commentary, *ibid.*, pp. 569-614.

⁸³⁶ For an overview of Gilio's treatise, see M. Collareta, 'Gilio da Fabriano, Giovanni Andrea', *Dictionary of Art* (as in n. 358), vol. 12, pp. 629-670. Gilio's treatise has been analysed with particular reference to his application of the notion of decorum, his division of painting and his assessment of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*. See J. Schlosser (as in n. 552), pp. 425, 431, 722; R. W. Lee (as in n. 581), esp. pp. 232-234; A. Blunt (as in n. 572), pp. 111-115, 118, 121-123, 126-127, 136; F. Zeri (as in n. 814), pp. 30-32, 47-48, 75, 77 and pp. 113-114; R. de Maio, *Michelangelo e la Controriforma*, Rome and Bari, 1981.

Raffaele Borghini (1537-1588), *Il Riposo*, Florence, 1584

Written explicitly for the non-artist, the treatise aims to provide the critical terminology needed to judge the merits and shortcomings of individual works of art in major Florentine churches and squares in the belief that every man can talk about art competently and that talking about art is an art form in its own right.⁸³⁷ The treatise is divided into four books, in which the representation of the nude in painting and sculpture is assessed from different viewpoints. The last two books make up a concise survey of predominantly Florentine art history comprising accounts which are to a large extent excerpts from the *Lives*, updated to include a substantial section on contemporary art, as well as important information on private collections and the paintings in Duke Francesco's *studiolo* in the Palazzo Vecchio. Borghini also draws the reader's attention to the availability of individual works in the form of prints, copies, models and drawings, as well as the ownership of important works. These two books illustrate that the nude played a key role in the progress of art and that it continued to be appreciated for its artistic and aesthetic merits.

Written in dialogue form, the first two books provide the non-artist with the five terms (*invenzione, disposizione, attitudine, membra* and *colore*) to be employed in the analysis of mainly sixteenth-century works of art displayed in the major churches and squares of Florence. In the first book, works of art are analysed in terms of literary invention and decorum. The second book follows a similar plan, discussing each of the works a second time to assess how well they fit with the aesthetic standards established. The same work of art is thus appraised from different viewpoints, sometimes leading to opposing and mutually exclusive value judgements, particularly with respect to nude and sensuous figures. As a whole, Borghini's text reflects the variety of opinions held at that time.

Borghini frequented the court of Francesco I de' Medici, under whose influence he assembled a collection which included art works and bizarre and curious natural objects. Vecchietti's collection in his villa, *Il Riposo*, is the starting point for the discussion on painting and sculpture. The intended audience is that of the refined and dilettante collector, the nobleman who spent his time in the *studioli* and in cultivated conversation.⁸³⁸ The key role afforded to the *letterato* in finding suitable

⁸³⁷ See T. Frangenberg (as in n. 562), pp. 115-131. See also T. Frangenberg, *Der Betrachter. Studien zur florentinischen Kunstdliteratur des 16. Jahrhundert*, Berlin, 1990, esp. pp. 44-58. For an overview of *Il Riposo* and the circle Borghini frequented, see D. Pegazzano, 'Raffaele Borghini', *Dictionary of Art* (as in n. 358), vol. 4, p. 408.

⁸³⁸ For an overview of the Studiolo during the Renaissance, including the Studiolo of Francesco I, see J. Oliveras, 'Studiolo', *Dictionary of Art* (as in n. 358), vol. 29, pp. 859-861.

inventions for works of art effectively reinforces his importance in the arts, and along with the collector and dilettante, he forms part of an elite audience.

Giovanni Battista Armenini (1525-1609) *De veri precetti della pittura*, Ravenna, 1586⁸³⁹ 840

Unlike Gilio and Borghini, Armenini discusses artistic practices at length. Book One deals with the nature of the art of painting and its constituent parts. The second book is dedicated to technical issues, such as foreshortening, proportions, the use of models, the antique, cartoons, colour and different kinds of painting. The last book is given over to a discussion of the type of decoration and ornamental motifs suited to churches and the private sphere, highlighting contexts that justify nude images, a section of the text that requires careful analysis. The structure of the last book is similar to the approach adopted by Gilio and Borghini, in that whenever constraints are placed on the religious painter, Armenini pinpoints settings where greater artistic freedom is permitted, particularly with respect to the nude.

Key conceptual terms in relation to the representation of the nude comprise *disegno*, imitation, invention, antiquity, the rules governing art, and decorum. Armenini's terminology is based on the perception of a dual and therefore fluid function of art, frequently eluding precise definition.⁸⁴¹ Key terms are analysed here with reference to specific examples of the nude in painting and the related notions of artistic creativity. Armenini's text contains one of the most articulate discussions of decorum of the period, based on a decorum of style and a hierarchy of clients, whereby the higher the rank, the grander the style, particularly one based on the nude. Many of the artistic examples mentioned were produced in the first half of

⁸³⁹ No manuscript copy survives. On printed versions and interest in the text over succeeding decades and centuries, see G. B. Armenini (as in n. 69), pp. 5-8. On the structure of the treatise and the type of text on which it was modelled, see *ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

⁸⁴⁰ For an overview of Armenini's treatise, see F. Quiviger, 'Giovanni Battista Armenini', *Dictionary of Art* (as in n. 358), vol. 4, pp. 445-446. The treatise has been analysed and interpreted in a number of different ways. J. Schlosser (as in n. 552), pp. 383-385, believed the treatise had a conservative flavour without any real sense of historical development. Schlosser also asserted that the real interest lay in prescribing a set of artistic practices. R. Lee (as in n. 581), pp. 228-235, analysed the text with regard to the notion of decorum and the ethical significance of painting and its relation to poetry. A. Blunt (as in n. 572), pp. 137-159, defined the text as typically mannerist revealing Counter-Reform influences. D. Mahon, 'Eclecticism and the Carracci: Further Reflections on the Validity of a Label', *JWCI*, vol. 16, 1953, pp. 303-341, believed the text was purely practical in its objectives.

⁸⁴¹ L. Grassi, 'Giambattista Armenini e alcuni motivi della storiografia artistica del Cinquecento', *L'Arte*, vol. 17, 1948, pp. 40-54. Grassi analyses some of the key concepts in the treatise, such as *imitazione*, *idea*, *invenzione*, *disegno* and *maniera*, noting that a number of terms are treated differently in different sections of the text. Grassi concluded that the value of the text lies in its reflection of the art of the preceding decades and Armenini's approach to key concepts. My own analysis echoes and expands on Grassi's analysis and obviously makes more explicit references to his assumptions and comments concerning the representation of the nude. Grassi believes the final section of the treatise is less instructive than the other parts. I disagree with this view. The final section merits closer study, in that it indicates the kind of settings, audiences and subjects deemed suitable for the representation of the nude as well as the artistic merits with which it was associated.

the sixteenth century, which, in Armenini's mind, was followed by an age of decline.⁸⁴²

⁸⁴² Ibid., pp. 41-42, where Grassi observes that for Armenini the current state of art required a new artistic vocabulary based on the art of the preceding generation in the belief that this might lead to improvements and the creation of works of higher quality.

PART TWO: THE DECORUM OF ART: MICHELANGELO'S LEGACY, THE STATUS OF THE ARTIST, NOTIONS OF PROGRESS AND PERFECTION

Vasari's art-aesthetical scheme promoted the view that the perfectly beautiful nude was as an image autonomously created by an ingenious and skilled artist. In Vasari's mind, the ability to create autonomously raised the status of the artist. This view threw open the debate on artistic creativity, to which Dolce contrasted his perception of *invenzione* in literary and poetic terms, underscoring the similarity between the painter, *letterato* and poet through the notion of *ut pictura poesis*. Dolce's reinstatement of the notion of decorum and his requirements for art attempted to lay down new rules which effectively diminished the major artistic achievements associated with the nude. These issues continued to engage writers of later texts on the arts. On the one hand, Vincenzo Danti and Benvenuto Cellini promoted the artistic procedures needed to create the perfect nude and the status and autonomy of the artist; on the other hand, the writings of Gilio, Borghini, and to a lesser extent, Armenini contain prescriptions which constrain the artist's hands. One of the most striking issues which emerge from the texts analysed here is the major shift away from the artist as an image maker to the central importance of audience, the written text, as well as the role of the ecclesiastic and man of letters in guiding the artist towards more acceptable images.

Although the writings of Danti and Cellini are determined by different objectives, they illustrate perfectly the central importance of artistic processes and inventive power as opposed to the requirements of decorum understood as what is most appropriate in terms of gender and class distinctions, bodily motion and setting. Picking up on, expanding, and, sometimes revising Vasari's terminology, they are unique as texts on art produced by artists after Vasari that continue to emphasise the key role of specific artistic practices and processes and that advocate artistic autonomy in an attempt to raise the status of the painter and sculptor.⁸⁴³

⁸⁴³ For an overview of the social position of the artist, see A. Blunt (as in n. 572), pp. 48-57 and M. Barasch (as in n. 832), pp. 174-190. See also F. Quiviger, 'Benedetto and the Visual Arts', *JWCI*, vol. 50, 1987, pp. 219-224 and bibliography cited therein. As M. Cole has pointed out, studies dedicated to Cinquecento sculpture have tended to centre on the *paragone* debate and the materials of sculpture rather than the artistic processes involved. See M. Cole (as in n. 443), pp. 12-13. For earlier studies on the *paragone* and more recent studies adopting a different approach, see *ibid.*, p. 171, nn. 44 and 45. Varchi's *Due Lezioni* and the *paragone* debate it introduced was primarily a literary phenomenon. Although it involved artists, the debate is insufficient as a source with regard to the artist's perception of art, its processes and the status of the artist. A study of the nude allows us to gain insight into artistic preoccupations and goals, not only with regard to the creation of perfectly beautiful figures but also within a wider social context.

Vincenzo Danti

Danti's views on art are expressed not only in his treatise, *Trattato delle perfette proporzioni* (1567), but also in two undated plates, which were published by his brother in Tavola 44, 'Della pittura e Della scultura cavata dalli XV libri delle arti del disegno di Vincenzo Danti Scultore', in Egnazio Danti's *Le scienze matematiche ridotte in tavole* (Bologna, 1577).⁸⁴⁴ The plate, which prints missing parts of the treatise, is divided into two columns. The left-hand column discusses the practical definitions of painting and sculpture, which draw on Alberti's *Della pittura* and Pomponius Gauricus' *De sculptura* (Florence, 1504).⁸⁴⁵ The right-hand column deals with the theoretical aspects relating to the arts of *disegno* with specific reference to *essercizio*, *ritrarre* and *imitazione*, and contrasts the artistic practices and merits of Titian and Michelangelo according to these terms. The terms *ritrarre* and *imitare* both appear in the unfinished treatise. A combined analysis of the plate and the treatise can shed light on these key conceptual terms both generally and in relation to specific artists, their representation of the nude, and the different notions of perfection. Danti's *paragone* between Michelangelo and Titian can thus be seen as a response to Dolce's claim of Titian's supremacy in art.

As in Vasari's scheme, the notion of *disegno* is closely related to the image-making process. In Danti's mind, mastery in *disegno* is an essential attribute of the painter, sculptor and architect. The central concern of *disegno* is the representation of the human body, since mastery in this form leads to mastery in all others. Drawing on Francesco Di Giorgio, Danti promotes the view that *disegno* is associated with new compounds and objects, which will sometimes appear invented (*ritrovare*).⁸⁴⁶ These new forms are called chimeras and comprise grotesques, foliage, and ornaments. Forms invented by the artist confer charm (*vaghezza*) and ornament (*ornamento*).⁸⁴⁷ The ability to create new forms is considered to be the greatest merit of the painter and sculptor. Danti's reference to forms functioning as adorning ornaments celebrating illustrious men suggests he had figures like the Sistine *Ignudi* in mind. These figures are associated with perfection and are perceived as the artist's ultimate goal. Although Danti does not expand on this point, his assumptions

⁸⁴⁴ The plates are reprinted and analysed by M. Daly Davis (as in n. 348), p.65

⁸⁴⁵ Ibid, pp. 64 and 66-67.

⁸⁴⁶ On Vasari's development of Francesco Di Giorgio's notion of variety, see this thesis, Chapter Three. See also M. Daly Davis (as in n. 348), pp. 75 and 83 nn101-3. Daly correctly pinpoints the analogies between Danti and Francesco Di Giorgio but believes the ideas intended for Danti's Book 14 would not have 'placed him among the avant-garde of architectural writers'. As we saw in this thesis, Chapter Three, Francesco Di Giorgio's notion of infinite variety developed in relation to architecture played an important role in Vasari's formulations for the nude figure as a source for the same quality.

⁸⁴⁷ V. Danti / Barocchi (as in n. 349), pp. 235-6. On Danti's understanding of *fantasia*, see D. Summers (as in n. 296), p. 229; on his notion of imitation, see *ibid.*, p. 195. For a thorough examination of Danti's works of art within the context of contemporary art practices and theory, see D. Summers, *The Sculpture of Vincenzo Danti: A Study in the Influence of Michelangelo and the Ideals of the Maniera*, New York and London, 1979.

suggest a strong analogy with the innovative and highly valued role of the ornamental nude in the *Lives* and the development of Francesco Di Giorgio's notion of infinite variety.

An analysis of the terms *ritrarre* and *imitare* in relation to artistic processes yields further insight into Danti's perception of artistic perfection. The notions of *ritrarre* and *imitare*, which indicate different kinds of representation of natural objects and a different potential for perfection, play a key role in Danti's art theory.

Essercizio, ritrarre and imitare

Essercizio refers to the continuous practice of drawing natural objects.⁸⁴⁸ From the mastery of *essercizio*, the artist arrives at the representation of the perfect intentional forms of nature. The distinction between *ritrarre* and *imitare* runs through the entire treatise and is most clearly formulated in Chapter 16.

Essercizio

In the treatise Danti attaches great importance to the practice of drawing, and refers to his assiduous practice of drawing natural objects, stating that his own works would have benefited from the more constant exercise of drawing and from a deeper study of Michelangelo's works.⁸⁴⁹ Through continuous exercise *disegno* becomes second nature to artists ('un habito perfetto').⁸⁵⁰

Ritrarre

The term *ritrarre* refers to the accurate representation of things, and requires both mental and technical skills. The degree of perfection attainable is proportionate to the degree of perfection possessed by the object in question. This notion is connected with Danti's hierarchy of forms from the most simple to the most complex.

Each form is associated with different types of representation and related artistic procedures. Stones and meteorological phenomena can be portrayed simply since their proportions appear to us to be perfect in nature. Further up the scale,

⁸⁴⁸ While Danti emphasises the importance of the practice of drawing in the treatise, the term *essercizio* appears only in the Plate.

⁸⁴⁹ V. Danti (as in n. 349), vol. 1, p. 211.

⁸⁵⁰ V. Danti / Daly (as in n. 348), Tavola, p. 65: 'Lo esercizio continuo dello studio del disegno, si come si vede che tutti li valenti uomini di questa mobilissima professione hanno fatto, avenga che in queste arti del disegno più che in tutte le altre per conseguire l'habito perfetto, fa mestieri la perpetua esercitazione di esse'.

compound forms (*composti*), like plants and trees, comprise several parts and are more likely to appear imperfect so they should be imitated.

Depending on their significance, animals can be portrayed or imitated.⁸⁵¹ The horse is the most difficult animal to represent because it comprises more parts than any other animal. Man is the most complex form in nature and each constituent part differs in size (*quantità*) and shape or form (*qualità*). *Qualità* is Danti's main concern because it relates to the range of forms of each individual body part and the whole body in repose and in motion.

The artist can 'portray things that are seen to be completely perfect'.⁸⁵² Because natural objects are rarely truly or totally perfect, the artist who adopts this approach, risks producing figures which display flaws. This type of representation can result in figures which may be perfect or imperfect depending on the object portrayed, that is, either 'good' ('buone') or 'bad' ('triste').

In Danti's mind, this procedure is not 'true design' ('vero disegno') since the artist relies on a procedure which involves simply reproducing what he has seen and stored in his memory without investigating the ultimate purpose of things, that is, the form's ability to function perfectly. As noted in Chapter Two, anatomical investigation is the means by which the gap between perfect and imperfect forms can be filled.

In Plate 44, Titian is seen as emblematic of this kind of artistic procedure.

One sees that Titian has sometimes depicted the most beautiful female figures, and sometimes not so beautiful female figures depending on whether he has many beautiful bodies to portray, like he who proceeds only by way of portraying.⁸⁵³

The aesthetic merits of Titian's female figures are thus entirely dependent upon the physical beauty of the chosen model, which is simply represented as the male or female appears in nature without attempting to improve on any physical flaws in order to arrive at the perfect form. Hence some of his painted female figures are 'most beautiful' ('bellissime'), while others lack beauty. Unlike Dolce and Vasari, Danti does not provide examples of specific figures.

Immitare

It is only through constant exercise in representing by way of imitation that artists can ultimately arrive at absolute perfection.⁸⁵⁴ The artistic procedure of *immitare* is

⁸⁵¹ V. Danti / Barocchi, p. 260.

⁸⁵² Ibid., p. 265: 'ritrarre le cose che si veggono essere di tutta perfezione'.

⁸⁵³ V. Danti / Daly (as in n. 348), p. 65: 'laonde si vede che Tiziano ha dipinto alle volte non così belle, secondo che ha tanti corpi belli da ritrarre, come quello, che procedeva solo per via del ritrarre'.

⁸⁵⁴ Ibid.

a technical and intellectual process aimed at creating an aesthetic form which fits with the perfection inherent in nature's intentional forms. *Immitare* is achieved through 'all the powers of the intellect' ('tutte le potenze dell'intelletto') and by gaining an understanding of the ultimate cause of every part of a moving object.

Unlike *ritrarre*, the artist seeks to correct the defects of an object through the idea of perfection formed in his mind. In order to create the perfect human figure, the artist must observe and study the mechanisms of the body and know the ultimate purpose of each limb and the body as a whole in repose and motion. The painter or sculptor needs technical skill ('mani atte') to transform the object into the work of art as perfectly as he had formed it in his mind.⁸⁵⁵

Beauty is manifested in a well-proportioned body. The belief that each limb possesses its own particular beauty shows a strong affinity with Vasari's notion of a constantly renewable source of beauty generated by motion and bending the figure:

in this proportion there lies a beauty that comprises different beauties or figures of beauty.⁸⁵⁶

In order to arrive at absolute perfection by way of *immitare*, the artist not only needs to practise drawing assiduously and master design, but also possess *ingenium* (*solerte ingegno*) and judgement (*acuto giudizio*). Not every artist possesses these qualities, which serve to recognise the different parts of the body by their beauty (*bellezza*), charm (*vaghezza*), and well-proportioned forms. In addition, anatomical knowledge helps the artist to recompose the perfectly proportioned human figure, forming a *composite* of perfect parts as the ultimate goal of *imitazione*.

In Plate 44, Michelangelo embodies the artist operating by means of *imitazione*:

And Buonarroti always depicted and sculpted them equally beautiful because he proceeded by way of imitating the intention of nature.⁸⁵⁷

Unlike Titian, Michelangelo painted and sculpted figures of a single and perfect beauty, representing figures the way they should be, that is, like the intentional forms of nature.

In Danti's mind, all the experts of art concord that Michelangelo has surpassed every other artist, both ancient and modern. As the artist who attained perfection in the arts of design, who grasped the difficulty of his 'composto' and created the

⁸⁵⁵ V. Danti / Barocchi (as in n. 349), p. 265.

⁸⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

⁸⁵⁷ V. Danti / Daly (as in n. 348), Tavola, p. 65: 'Et il Buonarroti l'ha dipinte sempre, & scolpite tutte belle à un modo perche procedeva per via della imitazione della intenzione della Natura'.

perfectly proportioned and perfectly beautiful human figure by means of 'fine artistry' (*bell'artificio*) and 'much study' (*lungo studio*), Michelangelo should be taken as an example for other artists to follow: 'come modello da imitare'.⁸⁵⁸

His supremacy over modern and ancient artists is intimately bound up with his mastery of the nude, the most difficult form in art, overcoming the greatest artistic challenges, whereas other artists shied away from the difficulties inherent in the human figure.⁸⁵⁹ Danti thus establishes a hierarchy, placing the mastery of the perfectly beautiful and perfectly proportioned nude in motion at the top of the list, praising Michelangelo for directing:

almost all his studies and diligence towards the human body, rather than to the other subjects of art.⁸⁶⁰

Danti associates Michelangelo's nudes with a higher kind of presentation of the human figure. It is a superior kind of art because the master of design creates with his own resources 'the perfect intentional forms of nature' rather than transcribing the appearance of natural objects. The image is made perfect by art and *ingenium*. The representation of the perfectly beautiful body is attained by means of *ingegno*, *studio*, *fatica*, *diligenza*, and it displays the greatest artistry (*artificio*) and difficulty (*difficoltà*).

To underscore artistic creativity, Danti draws a distinction between *imitazione* and *ritrarre* in terms derived from Aristotle's *Poetics* but with relevance to the debate on art in his own day. History records events as they happened and relates the life of an individual exactly as it was. By contrast, poetry not only expresses objects as they are seen and heard but also how they would have been in complete perfection. The poetic imitation of a person's life recounts it as it would have been with all the virtue and perfection pertaining to the person.⁸⁶¹

The notions of historic representation and poetic imitation are connected with the distinction between *fare* and *operare*. *Fare* concerns basic, everyday actions, whereas *operare*, which is dependent upon *fare*, produces a work of art, an object that remains after the action of the painter or sculptor. That *operare* possesses a higher virtue is demonstrated by the comparison between poetry and philosophy. The path of imitation exercises all the powers of the intellect, travelling through the most perfect and noble ways of philosophy, which are speculation and

⁸⁵⁸ V. Danti / Barocchi, pp. 211-212.

⁸⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

⁸⁶⁰ *Ibid.* cf. VBB, 1568, vol. 6, p. 69, as cited above.

⁸⁶¹ V. Danti / Barocchi, p. 252. P. Barocchi connects this passage to Aristotle's *Poetics*, 1460b, where it is asserted that imitation must follow things as they are, as they are thought to be, and as they ought to be.

consideration of the causes of things. Art is ennobled as a faculty dependent upon philosophy and other sciences.

Danti does not seem particularly concerned with high moral purpose, nor does he apply the term decorum. What he is interested in is justifying the representation of the human figure and its actions as the principal theme of art. The creative and imitative process helps establish a new domain for the nude as both an expressive form and as an adorning ornament, capable of conveying something that surpasses the average. Danti's poetics of the nude is thus associated with artistic and personal virtue as well as perfection. Poetic imitation frees the artist from the constraints of simply telling the story, allowing him to create new things. Through the concept of *disegno* and its related terms Danti locates the principle of art in the artist himself.

Supreme perfection is thus closely associated with Vasari's terminology relating to absolute perfection. The artist seeking to 'imitate' intentional forms imitates the activity of God, thus demonstrating his inventive power, creating freely and independently. Danti's promotion of Michelangelo is strikingly similar to Vasari's comment in the passage inserted in the 1568 edition of his *Life*, suggesting a shared aesthetic of the nude and belief in Michelangelo's undisputed supremacy, demonstrating that they were operating within a common frame of reference both from a practical and theoretical viewpoint.

Benvenuto Cellini

Cellini is also keen to promote the notion of the creative artist in several different ways, frequently passing traditional professional boundaries.⁸⁶² Cellini's discussion of *disegno* is fraught with social connotations. He goes as far as suggesting that the technical processes (*opera*) of casting and pouring are proof of artistic ingenuity. The two *Trattati* on sculpture and goldsmithery make references to the achievements of Florentine goldsmiths, such as Brunelleschi, Ghiberti and Donatello. These writings conclude with the celebration of the monumental achievement of his own late sculpture, which made more professional demands on experienced founders. The exploitation of the tensions between the perfect form conceived by the artist and its execution push the traditional professional boundaries further back. By associating his *operare* with the lowly craftsman, Cellini's ultimate goal seems to

⁸⁶² On Cellini's technical, scientific and literary knowledge in relation to his writings and works, see M. W. Cole (as in n. 455), esp. pp. 7-8. Rather than discuss Cellini's reliability as a witness of his time, Cole's study is centred on Cellini's perception of his activities as artist and writer in the context in which he operated in order to shed further light on the sculptural profession. Cole believes the value of his works and writings

have been to raise the status of the metalworker and sculptor. Significantly, the elevated status of the artist is most evident in the representation of the nude.

It is notable that Cellini includes metalwork, which is seen to comprise anything from small decorative objects to monumental bronze casts, as one of the arts of *disegno*. His writings promote the view that it was the expert goldsmith's task to produce works worthy of high praise and that he had to be able to invent figures. Cellini thus considers metalwork to be capable of attaining the same artistic goals and displaying the same qualities as other art forms and he demonstrates this belief most powerfully in his nude figures.⁸⁶³

In Cellini's mind, *disegno* is related to human undertaking in general as well as to virtue.

Disegno is the true lantern of all the actions that men of every profession do, such that *disegno* is of two kinds, the first, that which one makes in the imagination, the second, drawn from that which one makes with lines.⁸⁶⁴

Disegno is seen to play a role in every significant human action. Artists as much as other professionals are capable of achieving virtue. A similar claim is evident in sketches Cellini made in 1564. The sketches put forward a new seal for the Accademia del Disegno and aimed to express the academy's values. *Disegno* is the source of artistic excellence and those artists who proceed from it are *virtuossimi* (most virtuous) and *eccellenti* (excellent). The academy's charter stipulated that its members were to be *virtuosi* in both character and art. By linking artistic operation to virtuous action, Cellini emphasised the academy's admission criteria.

Cellini's conception of *disegno* is very much in connection with the ideas of his day, not only as regards the ideals of the academy but also the preoccupations of artists and art-theorists. Like Vasari and Danti, his notion of artistic creativity is intimately bound up with forming the perfectly beautiful nude, that is, with the artistic processes and the aesthetic merits of *disegno*. *Disegno* is defined as the linear

lies in the insight they yield into late Renaissance sculptural technique and poetics, artistic theory and practice.

⁸⁶³ According to M. W. Cole, Vasari's definition of *disegno* in relation to architecture, sculpture and painting effectively excluded other media that fell outside the boundaries established for *disegno*. Vasari's accounts of the careers of Lorenzo Ghiberti, Masolino, Brunelleschi and Pollaiuolo underscore their abandonment of goldsmithery in favour of art forms that tested their skills better. The transition from goldsmithery to more ambitious projects is presented as a kind of self-discovery. Cole believes that Cellini's writings offer a different perspective of what the goldsmith knew from working in that medium. Cellini thus sets out to demonstrate that the imaginative process was common to all four art forms and that his background was founded in goldsmithery. See M. W. Cole (as in n. 443), pp. 15-16. I believe that Cellini extends on Vasari's concept rather than writing in opposition to it and that the similarities between them are most evident in their perception of the nude and related artistic processes.

⁸⁶⁴ Cellini, *Dichiarazione*: 'perche si come questo è la vera Lucerna di tutte le Azioni, che fanno gli Huomini in ogni professione; perche il Disegno è di due sorte, il primo è quello che si fa nell'immagination, e il secondo tratto da quello si dimostra con Linee'. As cited and translated by M. Cole (as in n. 443), p. 123 and p. 200 n. 51.

representation of objects and it is made in the imagination.⁸⁶⁵ The practice of drawing intersecting lines with different media is associated with aesthetic merits, in that it produces a form which is most beautiful (*bellissimo*). *Disegno* relates to drawing live figures (*ritrarre dal vivo*) and *buon giudizio* when positioning limbs and parts of the body, which gives figures grace (*grazia*). The best way to attain mastery in *disegno* is to practise drawing, particularly the body in repose or motion, a practice which serves to gain an understanding of the mechanisms of the body.⁸⁶⁶

Cellini is particularly concerned with sculpture and the challenges posed by the representation of the nude body in that art form. In his mind, sculpting is a heroic act, a performance that displays both technical mastery and creative power. The difficulties of sculpture are overcome by the actions of a virtuoso or *valentuomo*.⁸⁶⁷ In addition, figural contortion is perceived as the hallmark of the best artists. A perfect piece of sculpture displays and records the actions performed by the artist's hands, and should therefore be assessed according to these parameters. Looking at the examples provided by Michelangelo, Cellini was in a position to discover the variety of functions the sculpted figure could serve. Cellini admired a particular quality in Michelangelo identifiable with the gestures and actions in the cartoon for the *Battle of Cascina*:

Although the divine Michelangelo made Pope Julius's great chapel after that, he never again made anything half as good as [the *Battle of Cascina*]: his virtù never again attained the *forza* of those first studies'.⁸⁶⁸

Cellini makes explicit connections between Michelangelo's monumental achievements and the representation of the nude:

A valiant painter such as Michelangelo would complete a painting of a life-size nude, with all the study and virtue that could be worked into it, and the longest this would take him is one week.⁸⁶⁹

⁸⁶⁵ M. Cole believes that Cellini's writings offer a competing view of the concept of *disegno* in the *Lives*. Cole cites earlier studies, such as those of Panofsky, Martin Kemp and, most recently, R. Williams (as in n. 557), which draw attention away from the connection between *disegno* and the set of artistic procedures with which the highest level of *disegno* is associated. As we have seen in Chapter Three of this thesis, Vasari connects *disegno* with a series of actions performed by the artist. Vasari locates artistic creativity and imagination for both sculpture and painting in *disegno*. *Fantasia* concerns the ability to create a range of poses from the imagination, though only the artist who proceeds from *disegno* can arrive at *fantasia*. I would therefore argue that Vasari is the source of this concept and that Cellini draws on and expands it.

⁸⁶⁶ B. Cellini (as in n. 387), pp. 1929-30.

⁸⁶⁷ For a discussion of Cellini's artistic preoccupations and the context in which he created his works, see M. Cole, 'The *Figura Sforzata*, Modelling, Power and the Mannerist Body', *Art History*, vol. 24, n° 4, September 2001, pp. 520-551. See also M. W. Cole (as in n. 455), 'The Design of Virtue', pp. 118-148. Cole investigates the concept of *disegno* in relation to broader ideals of good action. He argues that Cellini sought to create particular kinds of images in which artistic labour is manifested. *Disegno* was perceived as the first principle of virtue and in Cellini it is ultimately bound up with contemporary representations of heroism and forms displaying excellence.

⁸⁶⁸ B. Cellini, (as in n. 319), pp. 26-27: 'Se bene il divino Michelagnolo fece la gran cappella di papa Iulio da poi, non arrivò mai a questo segno alla metà; la sua virtù non aggiunse mai da poi alla forza di quei primi studi'.

Virtù and *forza* are key terms in Cellini's art-vocabulary and they are both associated with the bending of bodies and intimately bound up with the notion of artistic invention and creative power, synonymous with divine creation. In Cellini's mind, sculpture begins when the artist creates contortions with a piece of wax or clay:

A good man takes the clay or wax, and begins to impose on it one of his graced figures. I say graced because, beginning with the frontal views, and before they are resolved, [the sculptor] raises, lowers, pulls forward and backwards, bends and straightens the said figures' limbs many times.⁸⁷⁰

Cellini's account of his *Saltcellar* (1543; Vienna; Kunsthistorisches Museum) (**figure 73**) made for François I, and the summa of his work as a goldsmith, provides insight into his claims for the valuation of metalwork and the inventive power of the artist. The saltcellar is paradigmatic of the two principles of *opera* and *invenzione*, in that Cellini is keen to point out that not only does the artist decide what to create, conceiving his own poetic programmes, but that he gives his figures a perfectly beautiful form. Accordingly, Cellini refers to his model as a '*disegno* of the hands'. Technical mastery is demonstrated through the variety of materials and nude figures used, while Michelangelo's four figures of time function as adorning ornaments, pointing to the appeal of tiny nude figures like Clovio's miniature *ignudi* in the Farnese *Book of Hours*.

Different interpretations have been made of the *Saltcellar* and its inspiration. Julius Schlosser assumed that Cellini's work was eminently literary and that its invention relied on key concepts from contemporary art theory, such as beauty, grotesque, caprice, and conceit.⁸⁷¹ More recently, Michael Cole has provided evidence of the possible inspiration for this ornament in ancient and modern sources pertaining to salt.⁸⁷² Conversely, Charles Hope believes Cellini was primarily concerned with the composition of figures, choosing an appropriate subject to fit it afterwards.⁸⁷³

Hope's assumption fits with Raffaele Borghini's discussion of the *Rape of the Sabine Woman* (1574-1580; Florence, Piazza della Signoria) (**figure 74**) created by Giambologna, Cellini's most important follower. According to Borghini, the three intertwining figures of Giambologna's *Rape* sculpture, were made primarily as proof

⁸⁶⁹ As cited by M. W. Cole (as in n. 443), pp. 146 and 216 n. 110; Cellini, Ferrero, p. 811: 'un pittore valente uomo come Michelagnolo conduceva un ignudo grande quanto il vivo di pittura con tutti quelli studi e quelle virtù che in esso poteva operare.' For discussions of Michelangelo, Cellini and the notion of *furor*, see D. Summers (as in n. 296), pp. 60-70.

⁸⁷⁰ B. Cellini (as in n. 387), p. 1932: 'piglia un valentuomo terra o cera, e comincia a imporre una sua graziata figura; dico graziata perché cominciando alle vedute dinanzi, prima che ei si risolva, molte volte alza, abbassa, tira innanzi e indietro, svolge e dirizza tutt e' membri della sua detta figura'.

⁸⁷¹ For a discussion of J. Schlosser's assumptions on the *Saltcellar*, see M. W. Cole (as in n. 443), p. 20.

⁸⁷² Cole believes the central idea of the work is the union of earth and water that generates salt and that its composition connects the knowledge of the artist with that of the natural historian. For Cole's detailed discussion of sources he believes are connected with Cellini's *Saltcellar*, see M. W. Cole (as in n. 443), pp. 15-42.

of the sculptor's mastery of the nude, while the invention was provided by Raffaele himself after the statue had been executed:

..... goaded by the spur of virtue, [Giambologna] set out to show the world that he knew how to make not only ordinary statues, but also many together, and the most difficult that could be done, and that he knew where all the art of making nudes lay (showing deficient agedness, robust youth, and feminine refinement). Thus he depicted, only to show the excellency of art, and without attaching any historia, a proud youth abducting a most beautiful maiden from a weak old man; and this marvellous work, having been brought almost to completion, was seen by his Highness our Grandduke Francesco Medici, who, admiring its beauty, decided that it should be placed in the spot we now see it. And since figures aren't brought out in public without a name, [Francesco] asked Giambologna to come up with some speakable invention for his work; and someone (I don't know who) said to him, that his work was well made to follow (seguitar) the historia of Perseus by Benvenuto, which he would have created with the ravished Andromeda wife of Perseus, with the abductor Fineus her uncle, and her old father Cepheus.⁸⁷⁴

In Book One of *Il Riposo*, Giambologna is praised for facing the challenges posed by a figural composition in marble, the most difficult kind of sculpture. Giambologna not only conquered the difficulties of art in creating nude figures but in making an aged, a youthful and a female figure.⁸⁷⁵ The theme of the rape of the Sabines was deemed appropriate in Florence as the conquest of one's foes and the creation of heirs, thus creating a link between artistic achievements and regeneration as a cultural value.⁸⁷⁶

It is clear from Cellini's writings that his primary goal was the creation of the perfect nude, taking sculpture to new heights by forming an interplay of figures. As we saw above, Danti's theoretical assumptions give prominence to the creation of new forms linked to the mastery of *disegno*, the notion of infinite variety, and ornament. Cellini's Saltcellar demonstrates the realisation of these objectives, attributing to the

⁸⁷³ For Hope's assumptions concerning the Saltcellar, see M. W. Cole (as in n. 443), p. 20.

⁸⁷⁴ R. Borghini (as in n. 419), p. 72: punto dallo sprone della virtù, si dispose di mostrare al mondo, che egli non solo sapea fare le statue di marmo et ordinarie, ma etiando molte insieme, e le più difficili, che far si potessero, e doue tutta l'arte in far figure ignude (dimostrando la manchouole vecchiezza, la robusta gioventù, e la delicatezza femminile) si conoscesse; e così finse, solo per mostrar l'eccellenza dell'arte, e senza proporsi alcuna istoria, vn giovane fiero, che bellissima fanciulla à debil vecchio rapisse, & hauendo condotta quasi à fine questa opera marauigliosa, fu veduta dal Serenissimo Francesco Medici Gran Duca nostro, & ammirata la sua bellezza, deliberò che in questo luogo, doue hor si vede, si collocasse. Lande perche le figure non visser fuore senza alcun nome, procaccio Giambologna d'hauer qualche inuentione all'opera sua diceuole, e gli fu detto, non so da cui, che sarebbe tanto ben rapita Andromeda moglie do Perseo, per lo rapitore Fineo Zio di lei, e per lo vecchio Cefeo padre d'Andromeda. English translation by M. W. Cole (as in n. 443), pp. 139-140.

⁸⁷⁵ In Book Two, Borghini cites a number of poems written in praise of the 'most beautiful invention', R. Borghini (as in n. 419), pp. 175-178. The sonnet by Bernardo Davanzati, 'Sopra il Talassico di Giambologna Scultore', is cited and translated in full by M. W. Cole (as in n. 443), p. 140. Cole was the first to cite the poem in full, though the poem is connected to a poem by Michelangelo Sermartelli published in Giambologna's own day and which is reprinted by P. Barocchi, *Scritti d'arte*, 1973, vol. 2, p. 1221. On this point and for references to the poem, see M. W. Cole (as in n. 443), p. 214. Davanzati's poem juxtaposes the proud ardent youth with the tender virgin. The author likens the sculptor to Talassius, contrasting him with the figure of the old man, who signifies long and tiring study. The Rape sculpture is described as an example of ingenious, beautiful and divine art. Giambologna's patron and protector, Bernardo Vecchietti, one of the interlocutors in Borghini's *Riposo*, identifies the figures as 'oppressed debilitated old age', virile and youthful *furor*, and the spoil of the pure light virgin'. The contrast between old age and the virile, active youth fits with the appreciation of the youth in Florence during the period under investigation. For Vecchietti's comment, see P. Barocchi, *Scritti d'arte*, 1973, vol. 2, p. 1218.

goldsmith the ability to create new forms, transforming a table ornament into an art work that tests the artist's skill in creating a range of beautiful adorning figures, whereby one thing is transformed into another.

The Nude and Notions of Progress

While Vasari's notions of artistic perfection and developmental schemes influence Gilio and Armenini in different ways, their effects on Raffaele Borghini and particularly Francesco Bocchi likewise deserve fuller analysis. Furthermore, Dolce's *paragone* between Michelangelo and Raphael, his alternative scheme of perfection culminating in Titian, as well as his assumptions concerning colouring provide the background for Bocchi's appraisal of Andrea del Sarto, Raphael and Michelangelo in favour of the Florentine artists. The implications of Bocchi's comments become clearer when analysed alongside the application of specific terminology in his *Discorso sopra l'eccellenza dell'opere d'Andrea del Sarto, pittore fiorentino* (Florence, 1567).⁸⁷⁷

Raffaele Borghini

Borghini's art-historical scheme is mapped out according to the threefold division explained by the interlocutor Michelozzo.⁸⁷⁸ Baccio Valori deals with ancient art, Vecchiotti covers the period from Cimabue to Perino del Vaga on account of his mastery of *disegno*, whereas Sirigatti discusses the third period, where one of the longest passages is dedicated to the 'divine' Michelangelo. Borghini's division strongly suggests that *disegno* and the nude as an aesthetic form reaches a peak in the second age through the influence of Michelangelo. Michelangelo's position in the third age serves to link his achievements with the artists of the following generation, demonstrating further artistic progress. The merits of artists active in the second half of the sixteenth century will be discussed in a subsequent section of this chapter dedicated to new settings for the nude.

In the last two books of *Il Riposo*, terms underscoring the aesthetic merits of the nude are much more frequent than in other parts of the text. The following samples of value judgements on the works of artists forming part Vasari's scheme of absolute perfection help determine the extent to which Borghini draws on the *Lives*

⁸⁷⁶ On the representation and significance of the Rape of the Sabine in Florence, see P. Tinagli (as in n. 14), p. 30.

⁸⁷⁷ F. Bocchi, *Discorso sopra l'eccellenza dell'opere d'Andrea del Sarto, pittore fiorentino*, Florence, 1567, reprinted and analysed by R. Williams, 'A Treatise by Francesco Bocchi in Praise of Andrea del Sarto', *JWCI*, vol. 52, 1989, pp. 111-139.

⁸⁷⁸ R. Borghini (as in n. 419), p. 253.

while making clear his appreciation of the nude in painting and sculpture and in both the public and private sphere.

Antonio Pollaiuolo is highly praised for his understanding of the nude. His *Martyrdom of St Sebastian* is described as 'excellent' ('eccellente') and 'rare' ('rara') with its fine horses, and most beautiful foreshortened nudes. Borghini underscores Pollaiuolo's ability to render musculature and create a variety of postures.⁸⁷⁹ Like Vasari, Borghini promotes the view that Luca Signorelli was the first artist to demonstrate the true mastery of the nude ('il vero modo di far gli ignudi').⁸⁸⁰ Luca's painting of *St Michael Weighing Dead Souls* is presented as an example of the perfection of art manifested in the superb weapons, light effects, as well as the beautifully foreshortened nude figures.⁸⁸¹ The invention of the *Last Judgement* (**figure 56**) is described as 'beautiful' ('bella') and 'capricious' ('capriciosa'), giving artistic inventive power a positive value. Borghini extols the variety of postures, the nudes, the foreshortening, angels, demons, fires, and earthquakes, noting, like Vasari in the 1568 edition, that Michelangelo drew inspiration from the painting.⁸⁸²

Rosso Fiorentino, who is admired not only as a painter but also as an expert on music and philosophy, is directly linked to Michelangelo whose cartoon for the *Battle of Cascina* (**figure 10**) is presented as an artistic example of particular import for the development of Rosso's art.⁸⁸³ In addition, Rosso is esteemed for his bold and marvellous style ('maniera gagliarda e maravigliosa'). With regard to the SS. Annunziata Assumption, Borghini picks out for praise the circle of nude angels dancing around the figure of Mary which display beautiful contours and a graceful style, suggesting that the figures primarily fulfil an ornamental function.⁸⁸⁴ Remarking on Perino's artistic training in Rome and his study of ancient and excellent modern works, Borghini expresses admiration for a number works, such as the *Deposition* with the excellent figures of the thieves on the cross, and his 'most beautiful' cartoon of martyrs.⁸⁸⁵ Perino's ornamental figures are also highly praised, including the adorning figures, other ornamental motifs and friezes made for his aristocratic patron, Andrea Doria.

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 349: un saettatore, che appoggiatasi la balestra al petto si china a terra per caricarla, dimostrando il gonfiore delle vene, de' muscoli, & il ritenere del fiato per far forza, e tutte le altre figure, che vi sono con varie attitudini son condotte con gran diligenza e considerazione, e fu questa tenuta la miglior opera che facesse Antonio'.

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 365.

⁸⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 365-6.

⁸⁸² Ibid., p. 367; this reference indicates that Borghini must have culled information from the 1568 edition of the *Lives*.

⁸⁸³ Ibid., p. 434.

⁸⁸⁴ Ibid.: 'cielo d'Angeli tutti nudi, che ballano intorno alla Vergine con bellissimi dintorni e gratiosa maniera'. Borghini also refers to the international patronage of Rosso, underscoring the 'regal ornaments' made at Fontainebleau for François I and the beautiful images of Venus.

⁸⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 463-4.

Michelangelo is the artist who achieved absolute perfection in painting, sculpture and architecture, surpassing both ancient and modern artists.⁸⁸⁶ Borghini's value judgements serve to underscore the aesthetic and artistic qualities of his works. The *Pietà* in Rome is described as 'miraculous' ('miracolosa') (**figure 58**), while the *Tondo Doni* (**figure 35**), with its variety of male nudes, is without equal in terms of its aesthetic qualities.⁸⁸⁷ The cartoon for the *Battle of Cascina* (**figure 10**) provided Florentine artists with an important artistic example, and Borghini lavishes praise on the invention of the scene and variety of poses.⁸⁸⁸ With regard to two of the *Prisoners* (1513-1514; Paris, Louvre) for the tombs of Julius II, Borghini notes that they were given to Roberto Strozzi (1546) and subsequently sent to the French king's court at Écouen, underscoring international interest in Michelangelo's figures. The *Victory with Prisoner* in Palazzo Vecchio is eulogised as a statue of rare beauty surpassing both modern and ancient sculpture.⁸⁸⁹ The Sistine Ceiling fresco is presented both as a key artistic example and as a major attraction.⁸⁹⁰

In summing up Michelangelo's achievements, Borghini draws on the addition in the biography of the artist in the 1568 edition of the *Lives*, calling attention to the consummate perfection of his painting and sculpture achieved primarily through the mastery of the human figure and *disegno*: 'Michelangelo did not attend to fine colouring, nor certain charming landscapes, perspectives and adornments as other painters do', but he is 'unsurpassed in *disegno*'.⁸⁹¹

Borghini's account of Raphael's artistic career reworks Vasari's 1568 discussion of his stylistic development by listing works seen as good examples of each of his three styles with particular reference to his portraits and images of holy figures, omitting his nude figures and Vasari's criticism of them. Borghini presents Raphael's achievements as a universal painter in terms indicative of the superlative general perfection charted by Vasari. Good examples of his focus include the value judgement of Raphael's *Deposition* (1507), which is highly praised for the depicted expressions, the beautiful drapery, and charming colours, contributing to its rare and marvellous qualities. Borghini is keen to establish Michelangelo's role in the development of Raphael's third style by linking it to the figures on the Sistine Ceiling.

⁸⁸⁶ Ibid, pp. 509-10.

⁸⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 512-513.

⁸⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 513.

⁸⁸⁹ Ibid.: 'di tal bellezza che ne antica, ne moderna non le si agguaglia'

⁸⁹⁰ Ibid.: 'fu non solamente fece stupir Roma; ma tutto il mondo, concorrendovi gli artefici da ogni parte per vederla e per disegnarla'

⁸⁹¹ Ibid., p. 515: 'conciassiache Michelagnolo non attendesse al bel colorito, ne à certe vaghezze di paesi, e di prospettive, e di adornamenti come fanno gli altri pittori', p. 515 and p. 516: 'nel disegno non ha havuto pari'.

Raphael's Prophets and Sibyls (1514) in the Church of Santa Maria della Pace, Rome, are emblematic of his 'new and much greater style'.⁸⁹²

Titian's works are treated in a similar way with emphasis on his stylistic development, beginning with the imitation of Giorgione's style, and his portraits for eminent citizens.⁸⁹³ However, unlike his assessment of Raphael, he implicitly praises his female nudes in a brief reference to his 'many beautiful paintings' for Philip II.

Francesco Bocchi

In the *Bellezze* Bocchi adopts a two-fold approach to both painting and sculpture against the backdrop of Florentine art works celebrating both religious and civic values.⁸⁹⁴ The amount of space dedicated to individual artists plays a fundamental part in Bocchi's value system. About a quarter of the entire book is dedicated to Sarto and Michelangelo, providing an extended commentary on their works. The richness of the descriptions is a reflection of Bocchi's interests, whereby he draws the reader's and viewer's attention to their works, suggesting more time should be spent observing them.

It is of deep significance that the structure of the text derives from the four itineraries devised by Bocchi, culminating in the discussion of Andrea del Sarto's painting of the *Madonna del Sacco* (Florence, SS. Annunziata) and Michelangelo's San Lorenzo sculptures, particularly the figures adorning the tomb monuments of the Medici dukes. The two culmination points illustrate two different notions of perfection which relate to different types of imitation of natural objects and the antique.

The discussion of Andrea's paintings towards the end of the fourth and final itinerary includes images outside the area with which the itinerary is concerned. The discussion of his paintings clearly serves to bring to the fore his artistic achievements and his value as a painter of religious images.

⁸⁹² Ibid., p. 389: 'nuova maniera molto più grande'.

⁸⁹³ Ibid., p. 525 and pp. 528-529.

⁸⁹⁴ F. Bocchi (as in n. 877) and his *Eccellenza del San Giorgio di Donatello*, written in 1571 and published in 1584, both underscore the importance of the quality of *costume*, which refers to the range of character depiction and expression. *Costume* is a reflection of intellectual and spirited presence and an extension of lifelikeness though *costume* affects people more nobly ('più nobilmente'). In the representation of character Bocchi establishes a hierarchy giving greater praise to artists who represent higher character virtues. While R. Williams (as in n. 877) considers these virtues to be generic, I would suggest that they are also associated with the range of civic virtues the city of Florence was keen to promote. On these writings by Bocchi, see also R. Williams (as in n. 557), pp. 191-212.

Bocchi's discussion of Andrea's *Madonna del Sacco* is the longest contemporary description of a painting.⁸⁹⁵ Its characteristics comprise its aesthetic merits ('rara bellezza'), reiterated throughout the passage, as well as the sublime colouring ('colorito più sublime'), qualities which have contributed to the universal admiration of the painting.⁸⁹⁶ Bocchi considers the painting from several points of view, such as the source of light, the effects of chiaroscuro, the colouring, the architecture in the background, and effects created by viewing the painting close up and at a distance. The gesture of the infant Christ is seen to convincingly imitate that of young children.⁸⁹⁷ The flesh of the Virgin Mary is lifelike, charming (*leggiadra*) and graceful (*graziosa*).⁸⁹⁸ Draped around her body with 'wonderful intelligence', Mary's garments confer a sense of propriety while displaying aesthetic and artistic qualities. The pink shadows of her kerchief on the white fabric are seen in terms of painterly technique and natural phenomena, while the effects of chiaroscuro are one manifestation of wonderful artistry ('mirabile artificio').⁸⁹⁹

The description expands on the mimetic qualities underscored by Vasari.⁹⁰⁰ The terms drawn from Vasari's appraisal of the artist comprise the lifelike flesh, the lifelike and lively figure of the Christ child, and adjectives like soft and sweet. Bocchi places further emphasis on the perfect and flawless imitation of nature, particularly in Mary's garments, as well as merits such as the 'wonderfully incomparable artifice' and the miracle-like qualities of the cloth. Sarto's merits thus reside in the achievements associated with the line of development leading to general

⁸⁹⁵ On Bocchi's description of the *Madonna del Sacco* as a document of contemporary modes of perception, see T. Frangenberg, (as in n. 564), pp. 135-147.

⁸⁹⁶ F. Bocchi (as in n. 49), p. 229.

⁸⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 229: 'Siede la vergine sopra uno scaglione di semplice casamento con somma grazia, & stende la destra mano per prendere il figliuolo, il quale ha inforcata la gamba destra della madre; & con semplicità dicevole à teneri anni pare, che voglia farsi innanzi, non senza movenza, quale in simile età si vede ad hora ad hora'. See ibid., p. 230 for Bocchi's praise of the rendering of the motion ('ma di haver moto') in the infant Christ and for his lifelike flesh ('et pare, che sia fatto di carne').

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 229: 'E la Vergine di bellissimo volto, et il colorito delle membra è di vero ne più, ne meno, come è la carne; ella si mostra allegra con dignità, & colma di bellezza gode della vista divina del figliuolo; ne si puote imaginare, quanto in ogni parte sia leggiadria, & graziosa'.

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 229-230: 'Bellissimo è un panno bianco, che tiene à collo, che par vero del tutto, anzi, se vi fosse un vero appiccato, appresso questo parebbe finto, tale è l'arte, con cui è fatto, tale l'industria, ch'li mostra di rilievo: sono l'ombre oscuramente rossette, forse per lo copioso color rosso della vesta, che nella bianchezza è riflesso, ò perche è cangiante, come di fare alcuna volta ne' Pittori si costuma: ma con tanta proprietà del vero è stato effigiato, che da arte nessuna meglio esprimere si potrebbe. La veste di color rosso è di bellezza rara; & si vede, come è messa sopra la persona con meravigliosa intelligenza; ma nel porre il chiaro, & lo scuro à suoi luoghi, & nel mostrare il panno dolcemente ammaccato in alcuna parte, si conosce un artificio meravigliosamente incomparabile: et di vero egli par cosa simile à miracolo, che dal pennello siano uscite le fila della tesatura, & dal vaso de' colori l'arte del panneggiare. Così è dolce, così è morbido, così pannoso, che il vero con questo si scambia, quando alquanto di lungi dal muro si considera. Il mantello azzurro è bellissimo altresì: & fatto con molta industria scema l'artificio della veste rossa, & quanto più si puote nel vero le accresce pregio, & opera, che si creda, che non sia dipinto, ma di rilievo.

⁹⁰⁰ See, for example, VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 4, p. 389, as cited in Chapter Three, and ibid., p. 383 for his value judgment on the *Madonna del Sacco*. Vasari describes the painting as 'marvellous' ('stupenda') and 'most rare' ('rarissima'), praising the *disegno*, grace (*grazia*), excellent colouring (*bontà di colorito*), liveliness (*vivezza*), and relief (*rilievo*). See also the description of Sarto's *Madonna of the Harpies*, ibid., p. 357 and his general assessment of the Florentine painter, ibid., pp. 341-342. In both editions Vasari states that Sarto improved his style after having seen Michelangelo's figures in San Lorenzo; see ibid., p. 383.

perfection, of which Sarto represents, in Bocchi's mind, the culmination point in terms of the superlative imitation of nature.

The roots of these merits are seen to lie in paintings of Masaccio, whose *Baptism of the Neophytes* (**figure 57**) in the Brancacci chapel is praised for the convincing imitation of nature. Masaccio is said to have provided Raphael, Andrea del Sarto and Michelangelo with an important artistic example, thus representing a key stage in the historical development of painting in central Italy.⁹⁰¹ Bocchi's discussion of Florentine religious painting of both the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries frequently gives prominence to lifelike gestures, appropriate expressions and the narrative scene depicted, maintaining a balance between the contemporary focus on religious significance and the artistic merits associated with Vasari's scheme of general perfection.

Bocchi's discussion of Quattrocento sculpture receives greater emphasis than his treatment of painting for the same period. The parameters for gauging the merits of sculpture in terms of general mimetic skills comprise the rendering of drapery, expression, and liveliness. Bocchi reveals a special interest in relief sculpture and he describes many reliefs in detail, particularly of the fifteenth century. He is clearly keen to promote Florentine artistic progress in sculpture and painting, of which relief sculpture is seen to provide eloquent testimony. Donatello is almost as highly praised as sculptors of the sixteenth century with respect to the lifelike and lively quality of his figures, indicating his key role and the importance of relief sculpture in Bocchi's scheme leading to the perfect imitation of nature. The description of Donatello's *Annunciation* in Santa Croce focuses on the rendering of the drapery, which convincingly reveals the relationship between the garment and the body underneath.⁹⁰²

The last itinerary ends in San Lorenzo and its chapels, which is the burial site of the Medici whose tomb monuments were made by Michelangelo. The final part of the guided tour through the city leading to the San Lorenzo sculptures creates a link with the dedication to Christina of Lorraine, Grand Duchess of Tuscany, while also praising the new style of architecture introduced by Michelangelo in the New Sacristy and the Laurentian Library.⁹⁰³ The itineraries are specifically structured to emphasise Michelangelo's supreme position as the ultimate confirmation of Florentine excellence in the arts. The structure is also inextricably intertwined with the key role attributed to the Medici Chapel by the Accademia del Disegno and the artistic examples it sought to promote.

⁹⁰¹ F. Bocchi (as in n. 49), pp. 80-81.

⁹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 153.

Bocchi's assessment of sculpture and painting in terms of *disegno*, understood as the proportions and anatomical structure of a human figure, and the ability to surpass antique sculpture culminates in the figures of Michelangelo. Michelangelo's nudes are paradigmatic of Bocchi's re-working of Vasari's notion of absolute perfection within the context of Florentine art works, while underscoring their demonstration of key civic values.

The structure thus gives the text a special focus and crystallises the significance of Michelangelo in Bocchi's hierarchy of art. While artistic excellence is acknowledged in the discussion of the historical role of artists such as Cimabue, Giotto Masaccio, and Donatello, it is Michelangelo who attained absolute perfection in his sculpted figures which surpass ancient art on account of his understanding of the mechanisms of the human body. Since the church of San Lorenzo could have been included at the end of the first itinerary, its inclusion in the last itinerary, following SS. Annunziata, is thus highly significant and makes plain the culmination point in terms of absolute perfection which coincides with the nude.

Anatomy is a crucial achievement in the argument in favour of Michelangelo's supremacy. Although Bocchi hints at the possible superiority over nature, his descriptions are mainly guided by the notion of imitation as the artist's chief goal and the creation of living forms whose physique makes them fit for action: sculpture like living forms and living forms like sculpture.

With respect to sixteenth-century Florentine sculpture, the emphasis shifts to the rendering of the anatomical structure of the human figure. Apart from the San Lorenzo nudes, long discussions on anatomy are also found in the accounts of Michelangelo's *Bacchus* in the collection of the Grand Duke, and Baccio Bandinello's *Pietà* (1534) in SS. Annunziata and his figures of *Hercules and Cacus* (figure 41) in Piazza della Signoria.

With regard to Baccio's *Pietà*, Bocchi lavishes detailed attention on Christ's anatomy, and on the arrangement of the two figures.⁹⁰⁴ He clarifies the relation between the posture of Christ and its surroundings. The *disposizione* of the figure is described as 'most beautiful' ('bellissima') and graceful ('graziosa'). The head of the dead body expresses beauty ('bellezza') and majesty ('maestà'). The right arm is 'soft, and the veins and joints are so natural that it seems to consist of flesh, and appears to have been part of a living thing'.⁹⁰⁵ The left arm is described as 'artful'

⁹⁰³ Ibid., pp. 260-285.

⁹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 223-224. On the description of this statue and Bocchi's main concerns, see T. Frangenberg, (as in n. 564), pp. 130-131.

⁹⁰⁵ F. Bocchi (as in n. 49), p. 223: 'il braccio destro, che seguita questa cadenza, pare di carne, e del tutto da cosa, che sia stata viva, procedente, così è morbido, & nelle vene, nelle congenture naturale'.

('conforme di artificio'); proof of the sculptor's understanding of the human anatomical form. The chest is most beautiful and the bones under the flesh are rendered with 'wonderful art' ('arte mirabile'). The artist is praised for rendering 'nature' in the body of Christ, a body which appears dead but the beauty of which surpasses the natural form. Finally, Bocchi considers its effect on the viewer, stating that the figure of Christ inspires reverence, therefore fulfilling its religious function. Bocchi's description of Bandinelli's figures of *Hercules and Cacus* and the *Pietà* illustrate that artistic anatomy is suited to sculpted figures in both religious and civic works, as discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis.

Antonio Pollaiuolo's *Martyrdom of St Sebastian* (**figure 29**) serves as a link with the artistic achievements associated with absolute perfection in the sixteenth century while illustrating the dual interest in the beautiful nude and its religious significance. Summarising Vasari's comment, Bocchi focuses the attention on the anatomical forms of the archers, which are deemed to be appropriate to the martyrdom scene. The motions of these figures display *ingenium* (*ingegno*) and their postures are admired because they are 'lovely, bizarre and natural' ('vaghe, bizarre e naturali'). The bending figure in the forefront is much admired for his 'strangely lovely' pose, his 'fleshy muscles' and vigour, qualities which make him fit for action and therefore an example of the connection between Florentine merits in art and life. However, unlike Vasari, Bocchi also focuses on the expressions conveyed in relation to the scene. While the saint expresses faith in God, the archers communicate disdain.⁹⁰⁶

Michelangelo's Status

Bocchi's assessment of Michelangelo's figures in terms of *disegno* is related to his *paragone* between Raphael, Andrea del Sarto and Michelangelo:

For in painting Raphael is admirable, Michelangelo is sublime in *disegno*, and Andrea miraculous in portraying nature: Raphael surpasses every other painter in colouring; no one equals Michelangelo in *disegno*, but Andrea beats them all in creating three-dimensional forms and in representing everything just as God has created it: skill was capable of many things in Raphael, so was *ingenium* in Michelangelo; but undoubtedly Andrea is supreme: because his figures do not seem to be made by means of skill or *ingenium*, but miraculously produced by nature.⁹⁰⁷

⁹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 295.

⁹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 140: 'Però che è mirabile Raffaello nel dipignere, sublime il Buonarroto nel disegno, miracoloso Andrea nel contrafar la natura; avanza ogni pittore Raffaello nel colorire; non ha pari Michelagnolo nel disegno, ma vince tutti Andrea nel dar rilievo, & nel mostrar le cose, ne più, ne meno, come da Dio sono state fatte: assai puote l'arte in Raffaello, l'ingegno nel Buonarroto; ma senza dubbio è sovrano Andrea: però che non con arte, ne con ingegno humano pare, che siano fatte le sue figure, ma prodotte mirabilmente dalla natura'.

Bocchi's *paragone* has been linked to Dolce's *paragone* of Michelangelo and Raphael, and particularly as a response to Vasari's treatment of Sarto in both editions of the *Lives*.⁹⁰⁸ However, a closer examination of the passage dedicated to the *paragone* and the wider concerns of the guidebook in terms of the notions of perfection manifested in Florentine works suggests that Bocchi's discussion works in favour of the artists from his native city.

From the assessment of Michelangelo's sculpture it becomes clear that *disegno* serves as a distinguishing feature to mark his supreme mastery of human anatomy and beautifully proportioned nude figures. In the *Discorso*, Bocchi defines *disegno* as lines and he draws a distinction between pure *disegno*, which is concerned with anatomy and proportion, and *disegno* in painting. The latter definition involves blending the adjacent surfaces of objects by means of the skilful application of colour. Michelangelo is the chief exponent of pure *disegno* and his achievements in *disegno* are underscored in the *Bellezze*. This aspect of *disegno* is thus rehabilitated in the guidebook indicating that art-critical terms could be applied to fit the different objectives of a text.

In the *Discorso*, Bocchi understands *rilievo* in connection with *dolcezza* and *morbidezza*. These terms serve to underscore Sarto's mimetic skills, which are defined as *naturalezza*. Whereas *disegno* in painting refers to the blending of different and sometimes contrasting colours, *rilievo* regards the blending of hues of the same colour. Hence the emphasis on Mary's garments and the light reflections in his description of the *Madonna del Sacco* in the *Bellezze*.

Bocchi's value system establishes three key parameters for gauging artistic merits: mastery of *disegno*, the imitation of nature, and colouring. With respect to painting, each of these main merits is associated with a particular artist, with Michelangelo attaining unsurpassable heights in *disegno*, Raphael in colouring and Andrea in the imitation of natural objects.

The passage above can be read as Bocchi's participation in the debate on Tuscan-Venetian primacy, relating an anecdote about Titian's admiration of Sarto's painting and stating that Michelangelo had remarked that the painting would have challenged Raphael's supremacy. Bocchi's main target seems to be Raphael who is criticised for his colouring and elsewhere is challenged by Michelangelo on account of his mastery of the perfectly formed human figure. Bocchi's other target

⁹⁰⁸ C. Hattendorff (as in n. 589), esp. pp. 275-277. Hattendorff's argument is based on a number of links between the writings, such as the anecdotes of the visits to see works by rival artists, and primarily the conviction that Bocchi sets out to refute Vasari's assessment of Sarto. In addition, Hattendorff interprets Vasari's definition of *disegno* as a 'mental abstraction' determining the forms created by the artist, and thus inconsistent with Bocchi's definition and application of the term.

is Titian, employing the rhetorical device of one artist expressing admiration for another. Andrea is established as the 'almost new Prometheus' ('quasi nuovo Prometeo'), replacing Raphael at the peak of the perfect imitation of nature. I would therefore conclude that the passage does not challenge the supremacy of Michelangelo but rather serves to place Sarto at the peak of the line of artistic development leading to the superlative imitation of natural objects.

PART THREE: THE DECORUM OF NUDITY

The notion of artistic creativity and inventiveness is reassessed in writings produced by non-artists and has important implications for the nude and its image-maker. Artistic perfection is qualified by the requirement of appropriate images in terms of setting and audience, and decorum and decency become the parameters through which the artist's skill and imagination are constrained and social distinctions simultaneously drawn.

Gilio da Fabriano

With respect to religious works, Gilio claims that Michelangelo has erred not through ignorance but through the desire to serve art. Although Michelangelo is accused of being the artist who set an unprecedented and dangerous example by focusing his art on the representation of the nude by displaying the genitals,⁹⁰⁹ his works are emblematic of the 'power and decorum of art' ('forza dell'arte' and 'decoro dell'arte'), which resides in the perfect beauty of the muscular nude. Raphael is also commended for his contribution to art but nowhere in the text does he receive the same kind of praise. Gilio pays tribute to Michelangelo, praising him as the artist who has equalled the ancients and restored art to glorious heights.⁹¹⁰

Bodily motion is seen as an ornament perceived as a higher form of splendour. This view is expressed by one of the interlocutors, Silvio Gilio, whose role it is to defend the inventiveness of artists. His defence of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* echoes Vasari's in several ways, praising the variety of poses and the drapery in the resurrection of the dead, which is said to have scriptural references: 'to have therefore varied the artifice, one does not have to accuse him of little faith'. Foreshortening is seen as an adornment of the figure, manifested in the expressive power of the angels in the lunettes, augmenting the significance of the activities in which they are engaged:

That was done to show the decorum and power of art, and also out of reverence for those sacred Instruments of the Passions; for although only one angel could hold them without fatigue or discomfort, nevertheless this would

⁹⁰⁹ Gilio accuses Michelangelo of setting a dangerous precedent by showing holy figures completely nude. Gilio associates complete nudity with ancient art and the representation of mythological gods. As L. Steinberg as pointed out, the nudity of Michelangelo's *Risen Christ* (1514-1520) was neither a licentious conceit nor the imitation of the antique example, in that covering the genitals would have been tantamount to denying the figure of redemption which promised to free human beings from its Adamic contagion of shame. See L. Steinberg (as in n. 825), pp. 19-21 and p. 21 n. 20 where he cites a passage in Thomas Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* which provides the theological justification of the point he makes.

⁹¹⁰ G. Gilio (as in n. 825), p. 54.

not have had the appropriate majesty. Therefore I think that the multitude of angels was put there to make it more honoured, graver and more devout.⁹¹¹

In the *Crucifixion of St Peter* (1545-1550; Rome, Vatican, Pauline Chapel), Michelangelo dispensed with external accessories; the horse's bridle, the ropes and the nails, that would show the horror of martyrdom in order to focus entirely on the nude body in motion, whereby he established a new domain for the human body:

And this is what Michelangelo has done in that action, to ornament the mystery he has painted, and to introduce a new usage through this new form, and to demonstrate part of the manner of that mixture, as you say, that here shows the suffering of that saint. If you look at his pose, you consider the effort exerted by a man turned upside down, which you can see in his eyes and in the twisting of his chest, which seems tormented from the pain of death. It is assumed that this new way of working will bring delight to the eyes of the viewer and beauty to the work, more than the atrocity of the nails, ropes and chains.⁹¹²

Gilio credits Michelangelo with creating a new way of presenting figures by means of *ingenium* and the creation of a high style based entirely on the nude, implying that it is the most expressive and ornamental form in art. The expressive power of the nude lies in creating an elevated vocabulary through striking visual forms understood as rhetorical devices of metaphor and metonymy by transforming one thing into another and riveting the viewer:

Michelangelo, like someone with a lively *ingegno*, is always intent on returning art to the proper images of the famous painters and sculptors of antiquity; so he has discovered a new style, which being pleasing, has been accepted and put into use, both in pure *istorie* and in poetic and mixed painting. Now a painter can use metaphor and metonymy charmingly and many other figures as well, provided that he knows how to order them well.⁹¹³

Although admirable in religious art, at least in the mind of some commentators, the aesthetic form with multiple meanings is considered best suited to poetic painting, where the 'fabulous' is main attraction. Michelangelo's compositions of nudes are thus perceived as examples of mixed and poetical paintings rather than exemplary as religious works.

Gilio's understanding of invention in literary and poetic terms relates directly to his threefold division of painting and the requirement that everything in a painting

⁹¹¹ Ibid., p. 46: 'l'quello fu fatto solo per mostrar il decoro e la forza de l'arte, et oltre di questo per riverenza di quei sacratì istrumenti; che, sebben un angelo solo gli poteva senza fatica o scomodo sostenere, non arebbono non di meno auta la maestà che se gli conviene. Però penso che vi fesse quella moltitudine d'angeli, per renderli più onorati, più gravi e più devoti'.

⁹¹² Ibid., p. 95: 'E ciò che Michelagnolo ha fatto in quel'atto, per ornamento del mistero ha fatto e per introdurre con una nuova foggia nova usanza, e dimostrare parte la maniera di questa mistura che voi dite che ivi si provi la pena di quel santo. Se voi lo mirate in quella posatura, voi considerate in quello sforzo l'angustia d'un uomo rivolto col capo a l'ingiù, il che si può negli occhi conoscere, ne la piegatura del petto, che par che afflitto provi i dolori de la morte: presupponendo che questa novità dovesse recare diletto agli occhi d'i riguardanti e vaghezza a l'opera, più tosto che l'atrocità di chiodi, di funi o di catene.'

⁹¹³ Ibid., p. 101: 'Michelagnolo, come colui ch'aveva l'ingegno vivo sempre attese a ritornar l'arte alla propria immagine degli antichi e famosi pittori e statuari; però ha ritrovate nove maniere, le quali,

should be appropriate. In Gilio's schema, the religious painter is the most constrained of all. Most significantly, he is not allowed any imaginative treatment of the religious or historical subject but should closely follow the text. Historical truth thus prevails over artistic merits.

Drawing on the arguments of earlier theologians, such as the Gregorian concept of religious narrative painting as the Bible of the Illiterate, Gilio argues in favour of the retention of religious images on the grounds that they encourage devotion, reverence and piety. Accordingly, his prescriptions for religious art give prominence to the viewer's response and call for an accurate, simple and moving representation of biblical episodes.

Gilio's understanding of decorum is based on three main factors: firstly, that the depicted scene should be plausible; secondly, that gestures and motion should be in keeping with the age, gender and status of the depicted figure. The uneducated are to be presented with uplifting images which promote ideal behaviour and virtuous conduct. The painter is urged to:

discern between one gesture and another and make each one appropriate, not confuse them in an improper way by showing things which should not be there and what nature produces only by accident, always bearing in mind that art imitates nature and not nature art.⁹¹⁴

From comments elsewhere in the dialogue it is clear that Gilio's nature is selective, expressing a basic preference for restrained motion as opposed to physical exertion at least as far as religious works for a large audience are concerned. This requirement prompts Gilio to redefine diligence, giving it a social and didactic dimension. Gestures that are 'fitting, lovely and natural' ('accomodato, vago e naturale') are best suited to virtuous figures.⁹¹⁵ Restraint and moderation are crucial in the representation of Christ and the saints, which are ranked at the top of the social scale along with aristocratic figures. The representation of physical exertion, which is generally frowned upon, must be justified by the context.

The third notion of decorum is extended to include the requirement of decency (*onestà*) as opposed to indecency (*disonestà*), a distinction to which we shall return. Nudity must be justified by the narrative context, and even when it is, the religious painter is required to cover up the genitals. One of the few inventions the artist is allowed to make concerns the use of a loincloth or similar device for the

essendo piaciute, sono state accettate e messe in uso tanto ne le pure istorie, quanto ne le poetiche e ne le miste'.

⁹¹⁴ G. Gilio (as in n. 825), p. 49: 'saper discernere atto da atto et a ciascuno rendere il proprio suo, e non confonderli sgarbatamente, che uno mostro ove non deve, e la natura nol fa se non disgraziatamente; avendo sempre a mente che l'arte imita la natura e non la natura l'arte.'

⁹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 48.

sake of decency. In addition, any image that might be seen as sensually alluring must be avoided at all costs. This requirement includes images of Magdalene, which should show her repentant rather than 'clean, perfumed and covered in jewellery'.⁹¹⁶ Very few other concessions are granted to the historical painter, in that only elements that do not radically modify the subject or the event are permitted, such as increasing the number of figures in a scene.⁹¹⁷

Gilio directs harsh criticism against the demonstration of artistic skill for its own sake, since this constitutes a shift of focus away from the religious narrative, thus undermining the religious message. While the demonstration of anatomical knowledge by showing muscles and bodily motion is closely related to *ingenium*, it is only permitted if justified by the narrative context, and even then, it is deemed inappropriate in religious art. Religious and social decorum are thus inimical to aesthetic qualities:

They think they have paid their dues when they have made a saint, putting all their *ingenium* into twisting the legs, arms or the neck and making it strained; inappropriately strained and ugly.⁹¹⁸

The representation of Christ and saints as perfectly beautiful figures when it is out of keeping with the biblical episode also attracts criticism. Gilio writes scornfully of artists who show St Blaise without any sign of suffering, St Lawrence on the grate 'not burning but white', and St Sebastian without arrows. Episodes like the flagellation, Christ brought before the people, the crucifixion, deposition and entombment should vividly and poignantly convey suffering. The crucified Christ should be 'bleeding, ugly, deformed and afflicted', since it is these 'signs' which should be shown to Christian viewers so that they respond appropriately and fully comprehend the significance of each scene rather than riveting his or her attention by representing a beautiful nude body in motion or in pose.

Similarly, martyrdom scenes should be created to teach the uneducated the difference between the 'cruelty of tyrants' and 'the patience of martyrs through the power of divine grace', since this is believed to help alleviate physical suffering and make every form of severe torture more bearable.⁹¹⁹ Despite this criticism, Gilio proposes the ancient statue of the Laocoon as a suitable context for the representation of a struggling body justified by the narrative context.

⁹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 33.

⁹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 24.

⁹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 111: 'e par loro aver pagato il debito, quando hanno fatto un santo; e aver messo tutto l'ingegno e la diligenza in torcerli le gambe, ò le braccia, ò il collo torto; e farlo sforzato, di sforzo sconvenevole e brutto.'

⁹¹⁹ Ibid., 24.

Raffaele Borghini

Raffaele Borghini accepts Gilio's subdivision of painting and picks up on many of his points of criticism with particular reference to the invention of religious works and the notion of decorum. His five terms relevant to painting are invention, disposition, posture, limbs and colour. The first four are applied to the value judgements on sculptural works. Borghini defines invention as the 'history, fable, man or god represented in painting or sculpture', thus extending poetic-literary invention to sculptural works.⁹²⁰ Like Dolce and Gilio, Borghini understands invention as purely literary, devoid of any references to the visual organisation of a work of art.⁹²¹ Invention is the only part of painting that does not depend on the artist but rather on a literary text, provided there is one. Michelangelo's cartoon for the *Battle of Cascina* is cited as an example of the artist thinking up a context where nude figures are fitting.⁹²² However, nowhere in the dialogue does Borghini expand on the inventive power of the artist. Invention in a single statue is believed to be straightforward, especially as concerns the figures of saints.⁹²³

Borghini establishes three main parameters for the assessment of religious images. The primary goal in religious art is the faithful portrayal of the scriptures. In religious paintings biblical truth outweighs artistic merits. The chosen biblical scene should be depicted purely and simply and in accordance with the verbal source so that the illiterate can receive the sacred mysteries. Religious images should not contain any fantastical elements or complex forms. Any additions should be made after careful consideration and with good judgement so as to avoid any inappropriateness. Permissible inventive elements include the addition of figures that are not part of the narrative scene. The artist should aim for propriety, reverence and devotion so that the viewer is not moved to lasciviousness but to repentance. Like Gilio, the artist is praised for the observation of propriety by covering the genitals or even clothing the figures for the sake of decency. The nudity of saints is not tolerated even when justified by the religious narrative.⁹²⁴

The other terms, disposition, posture, limbs and with regard to painting colour, serve to establish the parameters for gauging the merits of art works from an aesthetic viewpoint. The arrangement of objects within a work of art is defined by the term *disposizione*, whereas Vasari applies *invenzione* for the arrangement of figures to form a historical scene and *collocazione* to refer to the arrangement of figures in

⁹²⁰ R. Borghini (as in n. 419) p. 52: 'Io chiamo inventione quella historia, o favola, ò quell'huomo, ò Dio, che rappresenta la pittura, ò la scultura'.

⁹²¹ On this point, see T. Frangenberg, (as in n. 564), p. 118.

⁹²² R. Borghini (as in n. 419), p. 61.

⁹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

⁹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 77-9.

the pictorial space. In arranging figures and objects (*disposizione*), the artist is not guided by nature but rather by his mental abilities:

The most difficult among the many important things the painter does, and among the difficult and the most important, is disposition, since in it one primarily recognises the knowledge and the good judgement of the artist.⁹²⁵

With respect to sculpture, *disposizione* applies only to reliefs of historical and biblical episodes, indicating that by *disposizione* Borghini meant figural composition, that is, the placing together of several elements and figures in a painting or relief rather than free-standing sculpture. When arranging figures, buildings, and landscapes, the artist should aim for visual clarity and avoid jumbling figures together.⁹²⁶ In the second book *disposizione* is not applied in relation to sculpture since none of the works discussed is a relief, sculptural works ranked lowest in Borghini's hierarchy of difficulty of execution, as opposed to sculpture in the round which is considered the most difficult. The two terms applied in assessments of sculpture are *posture* (*attitudine*) and *limbs* (*membri*). Posture (*attitudine*) relates to the actions and gestures of figures in different poses and should be appropriate to the invention, person and place. Limbs should be well-proportioned, avoiding the extremes of excessive and deficient motion.

It is instructive to examine several samples of Borghini's art criticism in relation to religious art. Only a few works receive complete approval, chiefly because they meet the three parameters for religious art and also achieve clarity of form. These include Allori's *Christ and the Adulteress* (1577; Florence, Santo Spirito), Santi di Tito's *Tobias and the Angel* (c. 1577; originally in San Marco, now Pisa, St Eustache), Machietti's *Adoration of the Magi* (1567-1568; Florence, San Lorenzo), and Barbieri's *Flagellation* (1575; Florence, Santa Croce, Corsi Chapel).⁹²⁷ Bronzino's *Raising of Jairus' Daughter* (1571-1572; Florence, Santa Maria Novella, Gaddi Chapel) is praised in terms of its invention in Book One but criticised for its artistic shortcomings in the second book.⁹²⁸

In Book One Borghini writes critically of Bronzino's *Martyrdom of St Lawrence* (1565-1569) (**figure 75**) in San Lorenzo, accusing the artist of representing nude figures simply to show his art. The depiction of the emperor surrounded by nude and

⁹²⁵ Ibid., p. 171: 'Fra le molte cose, che a il pittore importanti difficilissima, e fra le difficili importantissimi è la disposizione; conciosiacosa che in quella principalmente il sapere, e il buon giudizio dell'artefice si conosca'.

⁹²⁶ Ibid., p. 177. Borghini's understanding of *disposizione* is partly based on Vasari's discussion of invenzione in *Della Pittura*, VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 1, p. 115. T. Frangenberg also noted similarities between Raffaele's approach and Vincenzo Borghini's manuscript, *Selva di notizie*, extracts of which are published in *Scritti d'arte del Cinquecento*, P. Barocchi (ed), 3 vols., Milan and Naples, 1971-1977, pp. 611-673, esp. pp. 648-50; see T. Frangenberg (as in n. 564), pp. 19-32. In the manuscript Vincenzo Borghini applies the term *composizione* to history painting but not to images of single figures nor to sculpture.

⁹²⁷ R. Borghini (as in n. 419), pp. 203, 194, 111-112, and 190.

⁹²⁸ Ibid., p. 199.

sparsely-clad barons is condemned as 'most inappropriate' for people who serve princes and likened to mixed register in poetry, that is, giving people of high social standing the speech of the vulgar and uncultivated.⁹²⁹ Bronzino is also criticised for placing the Virtues, represented as beautiful women, in the foreground instead of outside the main pictorial space, which is more appropriate for allegorical figures.

In Book Four the same painting is highly praised for the 'infinite number of figures, various garments, and gestures, with a most beautiful perspective', as well as for 'the many nudes executed with much diligence and *disegno*'.⁹³⁰ The second appraisal of the painting shows that the nudes are highly esteemed for their artistic and aesthetic merits irrespective of any inappropriateness in terms of invention.

The discussion of the purpose of religious art as an incitement to reverence for the depicted holy figures frequently sparks off the strong criticism of nude and sensuous figures in religious works. Bronzino's *Resurrection* (c. 1549-1552; Florence, SS. Annunziata) (**figure 76**), condemned for its lascivious angel, illustrates the dichotomy between artistic and aesthetic objectives and the decorum of nudity.⁹³¹

The sensuous beauty of the semi-nude boy in the guise of an angel makes it inappropriate in a church yet its artistic merits makes it a collector's item to be treasured in one's home, a distinction which acquires central importance not only in Borghini but also in Gilio and Armenini. In Book Four, the angel is the only figure mentioned in a succinct reference to the painting which reiterates the figure's aesthetic merits, describing it as 'an angel of sheer beauty'.⁹³²

Bronzino's *Christ in Limbo* (1552; Florence, Santa Croce, Zanchini Chapel) leads to a discussion on the impropriety of lascivious figures in any public place because they 'set a bad example and induce vain thoughts'.⁹³³ Yet in Book Four the painting is praised chiefly for the depiction of 'the most beautiful male and female nudes in different postures'.⁹³⁴

In the first book Borghini takes the issue of nudity so seriously that he prescribes that in religious painting not only should men and women be chastely garbed but also

⁹²⁹ Ibid., p. 62.

⁹³⁰ Ibid., p. 538 : 'Ultimamente dipinse Bronzino à fresco in una facciata della chiesa di S. Lorenzo il martirio d'esso Santo con un numero infinite di figure variate d'habiti, e di gesti, con una bellissima prospettiva, e vi sono molti ignudi condotti con gran diligenza, e disegno'.

⁹³¹ Ibid., p. 116, as cited above.

⁹³² Ibid., p. 537: 'un angelo di tutta bellezza'.

⁹³³ Ibid., p. 110.

⁹³⁴ Ibid., p. 536: 'In Santa Croce alla Cappella degli Zanchini fece poi la tavola, che è entrando in chiesa per la porta del mezo à man manca, dipingendovi cristo disceso al Limbo per trarne i Santi Padri, dove sono ignudi bellissimi, e maschi e femine in diversi attitudini, e graziose, e vi è ritratto di naturale Iacopo Puntormo, e Giovambattista Gelli, e fra le donne Madonna Gostanza da Sommaia moglie di Giovambattista Doni per la sua bellezza, e onestà degna d'infinite lodi, ...'

children and *putti* in order to avoid any form of temptation.⁹³⁵ In addition, concern is expressed as regards any type of sensuous beauty, whether the figure is nude or draped. Allori's *Christ and the Samaritan Woman* (1575; Florence, Santa Maria Novella, Bracci Chapel) (**figure 77**) is one instance of this:

This is worth considering, and lovely, added Vecchietto, and it seems to me that the story has been followed well and that the other parts appropriately represented, even though some say that the Samaritan and the child are too soft and lascivious.⁹³⁶

In the second book the painting is praised in terms of the composition of figures, though the pose of Christ's head and the Samaritan's arm display defects. Nevertheless, the Samaritan is described as 'lovely' ('vaga'), the child's face is 'most beautiful' ('bellissima testa') and its limbs delicate ('delicate membra').⁹³⁷ In Book Four the panel painting is simply described as 'most praiseworthy' ('molto degna di lode').⁹³⁸

A number of images of Christ come in for harsh criticism because they show beautifully formed bodies of Christ when it is inconsistent with the biblical scene portrayed. The beautiful form is frequently associated with *grazia*. The disapproval of the beautiful figure of Christ is expressed frequently with reference to scenes of the deposition, such as Francesco Salviati's *Deposition* (c. 1545) in the Dini Chapel of Santa Croce. One instance of the over-emphasis on beautiful bodies is Naldini's *Pietà*, where Christ looks as though he has 'just had a bath', whereas the figure should display pain and suffering.⁹³⁹ This remark hints at the link between visual experience and daily-life contexts in which the beautiful body was on display, and therefore suggestive of the fine line between ideal and real images.

In Book Two the painting is commended as regards the skilful arrangement of the figures, the postures, the colouring and the most beautiful body of Christ, thus reversing the judgement in the first book.⁹⁴⁰

Allori's *Deposition* (1560) in Santa Maria Novella attracts criticism for not showing the lowering of the body of Christ from the cross, which is the main theme of the painting.⁹⁴¹ According to Marcia Hall, these comments are made in connection

⁹³⁵ Ibid., pp. 84-85.

⁹³⁶ Ibid., pp. 96-97.

⁹³⁷ Ibid., pp. 200-201.

⁹³⁸ Ibid., p. 625.

⁹³⁹ Ibid., p. 103: 'ma passando a l'altra tavola del Naldino in cui è il deposto di Croce, dico che mi piace; ma molto piu mi piacerebbe quando il corpo del Christo avesse piu del flagellato, e del morto che egli non ha, che così par piu tosto un corpo uscito dal bagno, che sconfitto in croce'.

⁹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 198: 'perciocche la disposizione è fatta con grande arte, l'attitudine bene accomodate, il corpo del Christo bellissimo, e il colorito eccellente'.

⁹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 104. Artists are frequently taken to task even for minor details which do not conform to the Bible. Bronzino's *Noli Me Tangere* (Santo Spirito) is criticised for including two women who should not be there; Vasari is accused of altering the scriptural account by adding saints who had not been born in his *Resurrection* (Santa Maria Novella, Pasquali Chapel). In addition, criticism is directed at artists for not giving enough prominence to narrative detail. One instance of this is Naldini's lack of emphasis on the ox and ass in his *Nativity* (Santa Maria Novella, Mazzinghi Chapel).

with the fear, fostered by Trent, that the figure of Christ does not show enough suffering and that his beautiful form might lead to the wrong response in the viewer.

Finally, artists are warned against making their figures overtly muscular or excessively soft and delicate, as well as making patterns of limbs, though, as we have seen, these requirements are often discarded in the aesthetic appraisal of several works.⁹⁴²

Giovanni Battista Armenini

Giovanni Battista Armenini's treatise is peppered with references to the poor state of the arts in his own day, though rather than expanding on the nature of the decline the author pinpoints examples of mainly early sixteenth-century art works which display the different kinds of perfection he sets out to promote. The first stages in the development of art are attributed to Giotto and art continued to progress along similar lines up to Perugino. The next phase led to the peak of art, which is seen to end around 1550 when decline set in. Analogies with Vasari's aesthetic scheme of the nude as well as Danti's theoretical precepts are found in Armenini's definition of good painting and his *paragone* between the art of portraiture and the representation of the nude.

Armenini's definition of good painting suggests that artistic skill plays a key role in shaping the painter's reputation. The mark of good painting resides in the ability to create figures in motion and good painting displays relief and a 'good style' ('buona maniera').⁹⁴³ The qualities of sculpture and reliefs to which painting should aspire include not only those manifested in marble and bronze works but also in living forms, such as beautiful men and women, horses and other animated beings. The painter's ultimate goal is the creation of figures with spirit and motion.

Armenini promotes the view that painters arrive at a good style through good training, by studying and imitating excellent works of art, and by applying judgement. Artistic practices thus play a fundamental role in attaining perfection.

In Armenini, the concept of the image-making capacity is interwoven with *invenzione* and *disegno*, which in turn are connected with *imitazione*. The process of creation has a strong conceptual basis in *disegno* which originates in the

⁹⁴² Ibid., p. 181.

⁹⁴³ G. B. Armenini (as in n. 69), p. 252.

capacity for artistic imagination.⁹⁴⁴ Armenini draws a similar distinction between *ritrarre* and *imitare* on which Danti bases his theory.

In Armenini's mind, *disegno* relates to sculpture, architecture and particularly painting. He argues in favour of the nobility of the practice of drawing citing examples in both ancient and modern times.⁹⁴⁵ Elsewhere in the treatise Armenini opens up a lengthier discussion of *disegno*, first summing up the definitions of others. *Disegno* has been defined as 'the beacon and the foundation of the arts', as a 'speculation borne in the mind and an artful intellectual zeal put into action in accordance with the beautiful idea', and as 'the science of fine and regular proportions of everything seen, with an orderly composition in which grace is created by appropriate measures, which may be attained through study and through the divine grace of good reasoning born of and nourished by study'. Armenini perceives *disegno* as an intellectual capacity.⁹⁴⁶

The practice of drawing and training the mind to identify the most beautiful and well-proportioned form (*disegno*) is associated with the perfection of art:

Therefore let no one think that he can ever appropriately possess the bright light of a complete knowledge of beauty, grace, and proportion, and truly grasp their eminent virtues, if he has not first through long practice become proficient in the art of design.⁹⁴⁷

Disegno is understood as the means by which the artist can improve on the imperfect living form by giving it proportion and grace.⁹⁴⁸ Mastery of *disegno* is linked to the beauty of created forms and it is most perfectly manifested in the human body:

since perfect beauty is clearer and more recognisable in man than in any other species because man was formed by the hands of the Great God with greater perfection, and because he is said to be the measure of all things we may conclude that the artist who gives man form through consummate design will prove to be equally successful in depicting every other object in that they are inferior to man.⁹⁴⁹

Like Danti, Armenini is convinced that mastery of the human figure implies a mastery of everything else. By extension, the nude body is the most perfect of all

⁹⁴⁴ On Armenini's definition of *imitazione*, see also L. Grassi (as in n. 841), p. 43. For Armenini's application of *disegno*, see *ibid.*, p. 44. See also D. Summers (as in n. 296), pp. 471-472.

⁹⁴⁵ G. B. Armenini (as in n. 69), pp. 52-56.

⁹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 53: 'il disegno sia come un vivo lume di bello ingegno e che egli sia di tanta forza e così necessario all'universale, che colui che n'è intieramente privo, sia quasi che un cieco, io dico per quanto alla mente nostra ne apporta l'occhio visivo al conoscere quello ch'è di garbato nel mondo e di decente'.

⁹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 55: 'perciò niuno si pensi giamai did over possedere convenevolmente e con vive ragioni di queste eminenti virtùdi il lume chiaro d'uno intiero conoscimento verso le bellezze, le grazie e le proporzioni, se egli non è prima sufficiente in esso per lunghissime prove'.

⁹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 113: 'Ma perciò che questa cognizione vien più scoperta e conosciuta nell'uomo, che in altra specie, per esser quello stato con maggior perfezione formata per le mani del grande Iddio, e perché si dice ancora esser modo e misura di tutte le cose, si conclude e si giudica che colui che con maggior disegno formar lo saprà, egli possa riuscire il medesimo in ogni altra cosa, come minore di questa.'

because it displays most clearly the beautiful form. Artists who seek the highest form of beauty in the nude are 'masterly, swift and resolute' and they express their conceits through what he calls the antique style. The practice of drawing helps the artist create a greater variety of forms.

Invention is independent of nature but intimately connected with *disegno* as the form envisaged emerges from the repeated sketches, evolving finally through discourse and judgement to become a *storia* or *bella idea*.⁹⁵⁰ Small sketches serve to define the rough image and the conception is tested against nature at the cartoon stage when the judgement of the artist assists him in creating the final picture.

In the chapter dealing with portraiture, it emerges that *disegno* is associated with a higher kind of perfection and *ingenium* than can be attained by simply arriving at the likeness of a person. While portraiture is highly valued as a subject of art, Armenini is convinced that it does not really test the painter's skills, 'since even the artist of mediocre talent can master this art sufficiently as long as he is experienced in colours.' In addition, the search for exact likeness is seen as a constraint for the artist, particularly when the aim is to arrive at the expression of the concept in the artist's mind in imitation of the antique style.⁹⁵¹ Conversely, the highest perfection of art resides in the perfectly formed nude:

seeking the perfection of art, they well know what few know and what is avoided as much as possible by vulgar artists of little skill. And this is that it takes greater study, greater diligence, greater *ingenium*, and greater effort to paint one or more life-size nude, with all the muscles in the proper places, with one's full senses, so that they appear ready to leave the place they were painted.⁹⁵²

Armenini limits the merits of Raphael to colouring, which represents a lower artistic value than *disegno*. Colouring is associated with the kind of pleasure appealing to the ignorant as opposed to *disegno* which makes demands on the intellect. Raphael is said to have excelled in portraits, though Titian is believed to be 'the true master', since he 'surpassed everyone in the imitation of everything from nature'.⁹⁵³

Like Vasari, Armenini makes stylistic distinctions in relation to the human figure. Michelangelo's art is defined as the 'grand style' ('grande maniera') based on the difficulty of the nude. Such a difficult style is appropriate only for 'supreme princes' ('per sommi principi'), that is, an elite audience and for sumptuous and highly significant locations, rather than for 'private people' ('persone private'), for whom it

⁹⁵⁰ On Armenini's notion of *invenzione*, see L. Grassi (as in n. 841), pp. 46-47. On artistic conception and invention in Armenini, see D. Summers (as in n. 296), pp. 496 and 518.

⁹⁵¹ G.B. Armenini, pp. 215-218.

⁹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 216.

⁹⁵³ *Ibid.*

is preferable to depict a 'fine variety of colours and pleasant things' rather than a composition of 'nudes with a lot of muscles everywhere'.⁹⁵⁴

Furthermore, Michelangelo's 'most difficult' style is considered to be almost impossible to imitate as if it were an absolute in terms of mastery, invention and stylistic merits. Accordingly, Armenini censures his imitators, who are liable to produce awkward forms ('solennissimi goffi'). Artists should thus be wary about imitating his figures.

As an alternative to the absolute perfection of Michelangelo, Armenini publicises Perino del Vaga's artistic procedures, which consist in making drawings after both modern and ancient works. Perino's sketchbook, which is said to have contained drawings of ancient and modern works, transformed by his 'sweet style' so that the images appear 'invented' rather than 'copied', is upheld as an example within the reach of every artist. However, his promotion of Perino retains the focus on the representation of the nude and nearly all Perino's works cited and praised contain nude figures though specific references to the nude are not made.

Despite his emphasis on the artistic process, Armenini's guidelines for religious images reveal didactic and moral concerns. In his mind, religious images should draw men's thoughts to purity and honesty, hence anything that turns people away from religion and towards the pleasures of the human senses should be avoided. Like Gilio and Borghini, he disapproves of images in religious settings which are designed to show skill with regard to the rendering of the human flesh through colouring and the naked limbs.⁹⁵⁵ In order to avoid the indecent, the painter should drape figures and make beautiful but not lascivious flesh tones. Armenini does not, however, disapprove of the display of the mastery of the nude provided the genitalia are covered.

In addition, his concerns are firmly founded in the belief in the power of images to affect the response of the viewer:

since the eye is the most perfect among the exterior senses, it moves the minds to hatred, love and fear, more than any other senses; and when the viewers see the grave tortures present and apparently real they are moved to true piety, and thereby drawn to devotion and reverence – all of which are remedies and excellent means for their salvation.⁹⁵⁶

⁹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 85: 'una bella varietà di colori, & di cose piacevoli, che tanta composition di nudi & tanti muscoli in ogni luogo'

⁹⁵⁵ G. B. Armenini (as in n. 69), pp. 232-233.

⁹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 120: 'Imperochè, fra li sensi esteriori, essendo l'occhio il più perfetto, per molte vere e belle ragioni, così ancora più commuove gli animi ad odio o all'amore o a timore, che tutti gli altri, secondo le cose vedute, e perciò essi supplicii gravissimi presenti vedendo e quasi veri et in quelli rimembrando, alle volte gli sono cagione perciò di essere commossi alla vera pietà e da queste tirati alla devozione et in ultimo al buon timore, i quali tutti sono rimedii e mezzi ottimi per la loro salute.'

New Settings and Audiences for the Nude

The perception of the nude as the most beautiful and difficult form in art spurs writers like Gilio, Borghini and Armenini to pinpoint a number of suitable subjects and settings for its display. While the nude and particularly the completely nude body is not felt to be appropriate in religious art and in public spaces and frequented by large numbers of people, there are other private and semi-private settings where the artist is invited to paint and sculpt nude figures. The decorum of location assumes particular significance when classifying the type of image suitable for viewing by common folk, who, it is felt, require ennobling images which not only promote the teachings of the church but also inform viewers of appropriate behavioural codes. Connected with this is the common view that the dissemination of erotic and non-erotic nude images to a wider public pushed the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour further apart. Redefining these boundaries thus became a major objective and resulted in an attempt to create an art for the elite in which the nude continues to play a dominant role. All of the images of the nude discussed are perceived as suited to the high social status of the client. The implication is that, as the most perfect and beautiful form, the nude is acceptable as an adornment of the high-ranking client in both narrative and non-narrative works.

Borghini's discussion of mixed painting pinpoints a number of scenes and subjects where the painter's hand is less constrained, provided the various depicted elements are plausible. Francesco Salviati's drawings of the *Four Seasons* and the *Ages of the World*, both owned by Sirigatti, are cited as good artistic examples of new representations. The artist is considered to be freer in terms of invention in a number of scenes, including dances, weddings, hunting, battle, bathing scenes with 'lascivious' women, as well as images of young lovers, and mischievous children. Several of these scenes suggest a suitable context for the depiction of nude and scantily-clad figures as well as bodily motion, and further examples below illustrate their acceptability in different locations.

The Nude as an Adorning Ornament in Public and Semi-Public Spaces

Gilio has no objection to poetical paintings, provided they are suited to the chosen context and setting. Like poets, the painter of poetical works is free to invent subjects provided he takes nature as his guide and avoids anything implausible, such as mixing the tame with the wild. Although Gilio acknowledges the liberty of

the imagination of poets and painters, it is difficult to establish exactly how much power is granted in the invention of nude figures from the imagination.⁹⁵⁷

According to Gilio, the mixed painter mixes 'fact with fiction in a delightful way and occasionally adds fanciful things to enrich his work'.⁹⁵⁸ The mixed painter has much in common with the great epic poets of antiquity, mixing fact and fiction in a delightful way, as Virgil did, when he added the purely fabulous account of Aeneas' sojourn with Dido to a story, which in the main, was historically correct. The painter is most indebted to the poet in the domain of allegory and symbolism where fact and fancy mingle. Both allegorical figures and personifications are sanctioned by antique precedent.

The parts seen to stem from the artist are referred to as 'capriccio', those from nature 'imitazione'. The artist is warned against the frequent representation of fictional and fantastic elements, and Gilio is keen to promote the view that the occasional fictional element creates a more pleasing effect. The examples of mixed painting cited strongly suggest that the nude is acceptable in the private setting chiefly as an adorning ornament.

The dedicatee of the dialogue, Cardinal Alessandro Farnese (elected Pope Paul III in 1534), an important client of the nude in painting, is upheld as an example to follow, though Gilio is careful to avoid citing examples of nude images that might provoke criticism or accusations of a breach of decorum.

Vasari's history painting of Pope Paul III in the Sala della Cancelleria (1546; Rome, Vatican) is praised as 'well arranged, well understood and finely executed'. An idea of Gilio's understanding of the fabulous and fictional can be inferred from the image itself. In the frieze there are ornamental nudes bearing the emblems of the patron, indicating that their primary function is the glorification of eminent clients.

Gilio also commends Salviati's history paintings of the Sala dei Fasti Farnesi, commissioned by Rannuccio Farnese. The decorative scheme celebrates the military success and key diplomatic role played by members of the Farnese family with particular reference to relations with the Catholic Church. In the paintings analogies are drawn between the ancient world and the triumph of Catholicism over Protestantism. The friezes around the historical scenes are inhabited by *Ignudi*, depicted in a range of postures and bearing the arms of the four Farnese brothers. The decorative scheme also contains a number of personifications, Peace, Fame,

⁹⁵⁷ G. Gilio (as in n. 825), pp. 15-23.

⁹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 89: 'colui che fa leggiadra mescolanza di cose vere e finte e a le volte per vaghezza de l'opera v'aggiunge le favolose'.

and the Virtues, which enhance the image and role of the family. These figures have been painted with very thin drapery, revealing the shape of the body underneath. The nude figure and the figure revealing the shape of the body underneath are thus rehabilitated in mixed paintings as ornaments adorning the paintings of distinguished men: As an aesthetic form with multiple meanings acquired from the particular context, the nude is promoted as the mark of *ingenium*:

I do not know what else to say other than that these things contain beauty and *ingenium*, to show great meanings with one figure.⁹⁵⁹

This cluster of samples from Gilio's text is instructive in clarifying an acceptable and admired function of the nude in the private setting. Placed in friezes and frames the nude enhances the main narrative scenes without distracting from them, serving as the highest and most valued visual metaphor.

Armenini's notion of the decorum of styles establishes both a hierarchy of setting and of clients.⁹⁶⁰ The notion of the decorum of style in relation to the client and the setting serves primarily to praise and justify rather than blame. Non-religious images are made for the delight of the human senses, and Armenini pinpoints a range of different locations where the nude is deemed appropriate. The discussion of works in the private setting focuses on artistic merits. The private realm affords greater artist freedom in keeping with the predilections of the client. Armenini likens artistic freedom to poetical licence, in that the poet is permitted to follow the fashions and predilections of his own time.

Armenini addresses the ornamental role of the human figure, pinpointing a number of examples, such as Perino del Vaga's *Oculus* (1521; Vatican, Rome, Sala dei Pontefici), which is described as an ornamental fantasy. The four personifications of Victory are said to create a marvellous effect.⁹⁶¹ Salviati's stories of Camillus in Palazzo Vecchio are also praised though he does not explicitly mention the ornamental *Ignudi*.

The ornamental role of the *Ignudi* on the Sistine Ceiling (**figure 66**) is considered to be appropriate and in keeping with biblical scenes. The fresco is highly praised and befits both the sumptuous location and elite client. The fresco, whose 'greatness and perfection is well known to all practitioners of this art', is also remarkable for the 'very beautiful painted nudes formed with great skill sitting on certain bases in various poses'. Like Vasari, Armenini attributes the origin of the nude as adorning

⁹⁵⁹ Ibid., pp. 103-104: 'io non saprei altro dire, se non che queste cose hanno del vago e de l'ingegnose, per mostrarme con poca figura gran significati'.

⁹⁶⁰ G. B. Armenini (as in n. 69), pp. 242-244.

⁹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 227.

ornament to Michelangelo, presenting his Sistine *Ignudi* as an artistic example of considerable import.

As we saw in Chapter Two, Bocchi presents the nude sculpted figures in Piazza della Signoria and Michelangelo's male and female nude figures adorning the Medici tomb monument in San Lorenzo in Florence as paradigmatic of the rich artistic heritage of the city. Perceived as figures which not only adorn the city but also reinforce civic virtues of central importance, the nude can be justified on account of its ennobling function and as the showcase of Florentine artistic achievements with a universal appeal. In Borghini's text, Giambologna's *Rape of the Sabine* (**figure 74**) is perceived as emblematic of the most difficult and beautiful figure in art while its invention provides the background for its cultural validation. As the showcase for the key art works celebrating Florence, Piazza della Signoria could retain its symbolic and heroic function expressed most eloquently in the nude figure.

The Princely Palace and the Private Apartments of Eminent Citizens

1) The Studiolo

The *studiolo* was unique as a private space in the residence of a ruler or distinguished citizen. The owner was the only person who had automatic access to it and it was he or she who chose the favoured guests with whom the precious collectable items could be viewed and discussed. It is notable that the *studiolo* became associated with the representation of the nude as it became less acceptable in spaces frequented by large numbers of people.

Borghini's account of Francesco I's Studiolo (decorated 1570-1) points to a suitable setting for the representation of the nude and the demonstration of artistic skill in a different style of painting compared with the religious works forming part of the project to renovate Florentine churches. The works for the *studiolo* in Palazzo Vecchio were commissioned in the winter of 1569-1570. The project, under the supervision of Vasari with the inventions provided by Vincenzo Borghini, involved nearly all the artists engaged in paintings for the renovation of Florentine churches. Francesco's interest in particular crafts and industries is reflected in the various depicted scenes, which symbolise, on each wall, one of the four elements.

The correspondence between Vincenzo Borghini and Vasari illuminates the main concerns of the *letterato*. Vincenzo suggests that the individual paintings should display 'order' ('ordine'), be appropriate and in keeping with the decorative

scheme as a whole.⁹⁶² The goal was to achieve a 'lovely room' where *naturalia* and *artificialia* were combined.

The cabinets of the *Studiolo* were for storing precious objects; thus the room was well suited to a fanciful decorative scheme. The meanings of the panels as symbols for the collected items rather than as narratives freed the artists, allowing them to exercise their fantasy, creating a realm far removed from reality and including images of the nude. The decorative scheme for Francesco's *studiolo* was elaborately ornamental with mosaics, marble, bronzes, frescoes, oil paintings on canvas and slate, gilded wood and painted stucco.

In the correspondence between Vincenzo Borghini and Vasari, the invention of the decorative scheme is described as simple though it is enriched with figures to augment the visual impact. Although neither Borghini nor Vasari specifically address the representation of nude figures, some of the scenes do relate to ones suitable for the display of nudes according to Raffaele Borghini.

On the wall representing water Macchietti's *Baths of Pozzuoli* (Florence, Palazzo Vecchio, Studiolo) (**figure 78**) depicts a bathing scene with male nude bathers wearing loincloths, while Santi di Tito's *Moses Separating the Red Sea* contains a nude figure seen from the back. Vasari's *Perseus and Andromeda*, which illustrates the origin of coral, contains a female nude. Other paintings with nude figures in a range of postures include Tito's *Phaethon's Sisters* (**figure 79**), Portelli's *Ocean Giving Pan the Shell*, Machietti's *Medea and Jason*, Naldini's *Allegory of Dream*, while a large, muscular male nude dominates the scene of Tito's *Discovery of Purple*. On the wall of fire Cavalori's *The Wool Dyer's* (**figure 80**) contains scantily-clad lowly males and *Vulcan's Forge* is inhabited by a variety of nude figures. Zucchi's *Mine* represents strong and sturdy scantily-clad males. Finally, there are male and female nudes in Sciorina's *Hercules and the Dragon in the Garden of the Hesperides*.

2) The Private Apartment

In Armenini's mind, mythological scenes are particularly suited to the private setting. Armenini also expresses admiration of Perino's *Shipwreck of Aeneas* (1531-1533; Genoa, Palazzo del Principe), which contains male nudes thrown to the ground, seen to heighten the dramatic mood of the painting. Giulio Romano's decoration of Palazzo del Te in Mantua is cited as a good example of poetical and mythological scenes suited to the representation of the nude. The Sala dei Giganti

⁹⁶² See K. Frey (as in n. 553), vol. 2, pp. 530-532, letter from Vincenzo Borghini to Vasari and dated 3 October 1570.

is praised for the depiction of gods struggling under collapsing stones, producing spectacular effects and a 'beautiful fantasy' of figures. The force of the contours makes the figures seem alive. The context is thus suited to the exploration and display of the nude body in motion and repose.⁹⁶³

The Sala di Psiche with its scenes from the loves of the gods and sumptuous wedding feast presents a context for the representation of beautiful and varied poses. In these settings the artist is free to use all earthly subjects and charming inventions, including the nude. The main sala was painted with episodes from the Story of Cupid and Psyche. In the series of frescoes painted by Giulio and his assistants, the nude triumphs and the erotic stories range from the suggestiveness of the *Pasiphae and the Bull* to the explicit representation of sexual intercourse in *Jupiter and Olympia*. The image which symbolically but explicitly represents Jupiter's phallus provides an instance of the kind of sanctioning cover which operated in terms of literary pretext, a select and elite audience, and costly production.

The decoration of Federigo Gonzaga's private apartment in Palazzo del Te, which was specifically designed to create a relaxing and pleasant atmosphere, is thus instructive as regards the representation of acceptable erotic images painted within the confines of the princely palace.

3) The Bedchamber and the Private Bathroom

In the fifteenth century the representation of male and female nude figures hidden away on the inside lid of *cassoni* could be seen as acceptable in terms of the decorum of location, since they could be viewed as necessary and by a small, restricted audience. Their apotropaic function and almost magical power could also be seen as a justification of the representation of the nude in fostering the conception of healthy and particularly male offspring.

In Book Four of Borghini's *Il Riposo*, beautiful and sensual bodies are seen to be perfectly acceptable in the private setting, though Borghini does not state whether the figure could be completely nude, nor does he mention specific locations. His many references to the presence of images of Venus in private collections, often with other mythological figures, suggest that representations of the loves of the gods were also acceptable in the private setting. His earlier reference to images of

⁹⁶³ Ibid., p. 222. For a discussion of Giulio Romano's decorative scheme, see F. Hartt, *Giulio Romano*, 2 vols., New Haven, 1958, vol. 1, pp. 140-145.

'lascivious' figures provides further evidence that he considers the erotic nude to be acceptable within the confines of the private realm.

Sources produced at the end of the sixteenth century indicate that such images continued to be popular and acceptable for the purpose of producing beautiful children. In *Considerazioni sulla pittura*, a widely-read treatise written at the beginning of the seventeenth century, the Sienese Giulio Mancini reiterates this function of pictures representing nude women or subjects like *Mars and Venus* and associates them with the conception of beautiful and healthy children:

And similar lascivious pictures are appropriate for the room where one has to do with one's spouse, because once seen they serve to arouse one and to make beautiful, healthy and charming children ...because each parent through seeing the picture imprints in their seed a similar constitution which has been seen in the object or figure.⁹⁶⁴

Mancini justifies nude images for the sake of procreation and sexual intercourse inside marriage, though, as we have seen, the representation of the erotic nude in the private setting was not confined to marriage but was also associated with sexual enjoyment for its own sake and was greatly appreciated by the owner, his restricted circle of associates and artists.

⁹⁶⁴ G. Mancini, *Considerazioni sulla pittura*, Milan, 1614, A. Marucchi (ed.), with commentary by L. Salerno, Rome, 1956, vol. 1, p. 143: 'perché simil veduta giova assai all'eccitamento et al far figli belli, sani, e gagliardi, non perché l'imaginativa imprima nel feto perché è materia aliena dal padre e dalla madre, ma perché l'uno e l'altro una simil costituzione come s'è impressa per la veduta di quell'oggetto e figura'.

PART FOUR: THE CIRCULATION OF PRINTS AND THE CHANGING PERCEPTION OF THE NUDE

The Reception of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*

The reception of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* (Rome, The Sistine Chapel; unveiled 1544) (figure 81) is symptomatic of the changing perception of the nude in the light of the wide circulation of images through the print medium. In the case of the *Last Judgement*, the highest form of art became unacceptable once the painting became viewable by a larger audience. Written responses to the work are instructive with regard to the issues at stake in terms of inventive power as well as the decorum of nudity and behaviour.⁹⁶⁵

The Sistine Chapel was both a public and private space. It was the setting for the most secret activities of the church and also the place for ceremonies, which in the course of the sixteenth century became increasingly complex, with services reinforcing the courtly aura and emphasising the distinction between the chapel and an ordinary church. The writings of masters of ceremonies of the period imply that the public was kept out of the chapel as much as possible and that special arrangements had to be made for visits by women. The audience was therefore generally composed of males, particularly members of the pope's personal staff.⁹⁶⁶

Bernadine Barnes believes Michelangelo's fresco reflects the gender of the regular audience and that the changes of traditional representations introduced by the artist were most probably designed to fit with the aura of the setting, as well as the rank of the clerical members making up a select audience which was for the most part well-read in theology and cultured.

Barnes cites the representation of female figures as one example of the artist's innovative approach to the biblical scene.⁹⁶⁷ While Michelangelo depicted females in larger numbers and in more prominent places than is the case in earlier representations of the scene, they are absent in several significant places, such as

⁹⁶⁵ The most complete collection of responses to the fresco is provided by P. Barocchi, 'Schizzi di una storia nella critica cinquecentesca sulla Sistina', *Atti e memorie dell'Accademia Toscana di scienze e lettere*, vol. 7, n° 21, 1956, pp. 177-212. See also R. De Maio (as in n. 836). De Maio adds several other sources to those indicated by Barocchi; however, his examination of them tends to overemphasise the negative reception of the painting as well as the Vatican's opposition of it.

⁹⁶⁶ The most useful study of the reception of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* is provided by B. Barnes, *Michelangelo's Last Judgement: The Renaissance Response*, Berkeley, 1998. Barnes analyses the fresco in relation to earlier representations and particularly the context and reception of the fresco both before and after its unveiling. For other recent studies of the theological ideas informing the painting made principally with regard to its select audience and the people guiding the artistic process, such as Vittoria Colonna, *ibid.*, p. 143 nn1-5. My own analysis of contemporary sources echoes Barnes's in most points.

⁹⁶⁷ B. Barnes (as in n. 618), esp. pp. 42-44.

in the lower parts of the fresco where the resurrection and hell are shown, parts which traditionally appealed most strongly to the viewers either by attempting to draw them into the scene or by making references to real people.⁹⁶⁸ According to Barnes, it is notable that women are given an ennobling role in the fresco and that they are associated with beatitude, or, as in the case of St Catherine, a figure which caused much consternation, with heroic courage.⁹⁶⁹

Some of the earliest responses to the painting were made before the painting was unveiled by people who did not have special access to the chapel, giving an indication of the interest it aroused. A letter dated 19 November 1541 and written by Nino Sernini, the agent of Cardinal Ercole Gonzaga of Mantua. The letter provides a good, early indication of the mixed reception of the painting, from the highest to consternation of several of the nude figures. Sernini remarks that 'the work is of such beauty that your excellency can imagine that there is no lack of those who condemn it'. This comment strongly suggests that the beauty of nudes could be associated with condemnation of nudity. In defence of Michelangelo, Sernini notes that '[Michelangelo] has shown great consideration, for hardly ten figures of so great a number are seen as immodest'. In addition, he reports other criticism, such as the fact that Christ is beardless and too young, and that he lacks the appropriate majesty. By contrast, Sernini's own response is one of high praise, calling the painting unique and remarking that people were willing to pay large sums of money for a copy of just one of the figures. He concludes by extolling Michelangelo as an artist who has 'put all his effort into making imaginative figures in a variety of poses'.⁹⁷⁰

The samples of responses which follow in the next section serve to highlight the artistic and aesthetic responses to the fresco. Negative comments are analysed with regard to the motivation behind them, the objectives of the critics, as well as the terms of discourse brought into play.

⁹⁶⁸ Giotto's fresco of the *Last Judgement* gives women special places in hell as was common at the time; see B. Barnes (as in n. 618), pp. 11, 17-18, 37, 44, and 107. On Michelangelo's inclusion of the master of ceremonies, Biagio da Cesena, in the hell scene in connection with his criticism of the fresco and the artist's ultimate control of the image, see VVB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 6, p. 69.

⁹⁶⁹ According to De Maio, the Vatican adopted a critical stance to the painting early on. See De Maio (as in n. 965), pp. 17-18. B. Barnes has argued against this interpretation, noting that opposition on the part of the clergy became stronger later in the century, while in the 1530s and 1540s it is questionable whether the clergy was against the painting. It is therefore more plausible to assume that ecclesiastics like Clement VII, Paul III, Cardinal Gonzaga and Cardinal Cornaro approved of Michelangelo's invention, including the nudity. For Barnes' argument in this respect, see p. 88, n. 29 and p. 157, n. 30. As we saw in Chapter Two of this thesis, there was a great deal of interest in the representation of the nude on the part of high-ranking ecclesiastic and non-ecclesiastic citizens, which supports the point made by Barnes.

⁹⁷⁰ Cited by B. Barnes (as in n. 618), p. 86. Barnes provides the English translation of the letter only. For references to the location of the letter in Italian, see *ibid.*, p. 157, n. 26.

Vasari

Vasari's assessment of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* is one of the longest and most notable of the period. According to Vasari's aesthetic scheme, the painting represents the peak of art with regard to the representation of absolutely perfect nude figures as both tokens of virtuosity and narrative devices of emphasis. Vasari lavishes praise on Michelangelo's invention of nudes geared at narrative ends and the portrayal of states of the mind made visible by 'turning' the figures, whereby the artist produced an effect of extraordinary force on the viewer. The painting exemplifies art at its highest level and is the summa of Michelangelo's career:⁹⁷¹

When the *Last Judgement* was unveiled, Michelangelo showed that he had not only triumphed over the first artists who had worked in the chapel but also over the ceiling he had made so famous, and since the *Last Judgement* was by far superior to that, Michelangelo surpassed even himself, having imagined to himself the terror of those days. And in it he depicted, for the greater punishment of those who had not lived good lives, the entire Passion of Christ, several nude figures in the air carrying the cross, the column, the lance, the sponge, the nails and the crown of thorns, in different and varied postures, executed to perfection in a triumph of facility over difficulty. There is Christ seated with a terrible and fierce expression, turning towards the damned and cursing them, while in great fear Our Lady, wrapping herself in her cloak, hears and sees great devastation. There is an infinite number of prophets and apostles circling around Him, particularly Adam and Saint Peter, which are believed to be there because one was the first parent of those brought to judgement, while the other was the founder of the Christian religion. At His feet there is the most beautiful figure of Saint Bartholomew who is showing his flayed skin. There is also a nude figure of St Lawrence; as well as countless male and female saints and other male and female figures around Christ, both nearby and further away, which are embracing and rejoicing because, through God's grace and their good deeds, they have earned eternal blessedness.⁹⁷²

Rather than focusing on every element in the painting, Vasari draws the reader's attention to specific pairs and groups of figures, and the most striking effects achieved through the nude figures. His discussion brings to the fore the hierarchical arrangement of the figures from top to bottom. The opening paragraph draws attention to the damned and the blessed, which are said to be identifiable and

⁹⁷¹ See B. Barnes (as in n. 618), p. 81.

⁹⁷² VBB, 1550 & 1568, vol. 6, pp. 71-75: 'Onde, scoperto questo Giudizio, mostrò non solo essere vincitore de' primi artefici che lavorato avevano, ma ancora nella volta, che egli tanto celebrata aveva fatta, volse vincere sé stesso; et in quella di gran lunga passatosi, superò sé medesimo, avendosi egli immaginato il terrore di que' giorni, dove egli fa rappresentare, per più pena di chi non è ben vissuto, tutta la passione, faccendo portare in aria da diverse figure ignude la croce, la colonna, la lancia, la spugna, i chiodi e la corona, con diverse e varie attitudini, molto difficilmente condotte a fine nella facilità loro. Èvvi Cristo, il qual sedendo, con faccia orribile e fiera ai dannati si volge maledicendoli, non senza gran timore della Nostra Donna che, ristrettasi nel manto, ode e vede tanta ruina. Sonvi in finitissime figure che gli fanno cerchio, di Profeti, di Apostoli, e particolarmente Adamo e Santo Pietro, i quali si stimano che vi sien mesi l'uno per l'origine prima delle genti al giudizio, l'altro per essere stato il primo fondamento della cristiana religione. A' piedi gli è un S. Bartolomeo bellissimo, il qual mostra la pelle scorticata. Èvvi similmente uno ignudo di San Lorenzo; oltra che senza numero sono in finitissimi Santi e Sante, et altre figure maschi e femmine intorno, appresso e discosto, i quali si abbracciano e fannosi festa, avendo per grazia di Dio e per giudicardone delle opere loro la beatudine loro'.

distinguishable through their postures and actions. The variety of bodily motion serves as a vehicle through which a range of states of the mind has been conveyed. The depicted figures are perceived as particularly challenging and Vasari expresses admiration for the difficulty resolved with facility. The *terribilità* of the painting, a form of praise repeated several times in the account, is associated with virtuosity, expression and force:⁹⁷³ Vasari picks out for praise the flayed figure of St Bartholomew and the figure St Lawrence as evidence of Michelangelo's grasp of anatomy.⁹⁷⁴ Vasari also notes that the artist has observed decorum in the representation of age and gender of the figures in keeping with the guidelines provided in the section entitled *Della pittura of the Lives*.⁹⁷⁵

And in truth, the magnificence and grandeur of the work, with the multitude of figures, is such that it cannot be described, for it is full of every possible human emotion expressed in the most marvellous way; the proud, the envious, the avaricious, the lustful, and all the other sinners can be easily distinguished from every blessed spirit, since Michelangelo observed every rule of decorum in portraying their expressions, poses and every other natural condition.⁹⁷⁶

Towards the end of his account, Vasari comments on the form given to the figures by modelling and bending them ('girati'). The forms and contours created are

⁹⁷³ In the Renaissance *terribilità* had a variety of connotations. One usage of the term denoted the character of the artist and the style in which he worked, illustrating the central importance of the artist, as well as a work of art as the mark of rare genius. The term is related to *difficoltà*, and the two terms augment their significance through mutual reinforcement. The *Lives* provide the most complete critical development of the term in a variety of meanings. Vasari used the term in all three of its original Greek meanings: loftiness or grandeur; force of expression; and artifice and skill. On the origins and Renaissance usage of the term, see D. Summers (as in n. 296), pp. 234-241.

⁹⁷⁴ On Molanus's citation of Michelangelo's misrepresentation of St Bartholomew, see D. Freedberg (as in n. 65), p. 231. With regard to Michelangelo's self-portrait on the saint, L. Steinberg has suggested that the saint is carrying Michelangelo's own skin, whereby the saint is transformed into intercessor, pleading for the artist's resurrection. Steinberg traces the biblical source for this function of the saint to Hiob 19, 25 and 26. Steinberg concludes that Michelangelo's message is that on the final day he will meet his maker clothed in flesh and skin. See L. Steinberg, 'The Line of Fate in Michelangelo's Painting', W. J. T. Mitchell (ed), *The Language of Images*, Chicago and London, 1995, pp. 85-128. Steinberg's assumption has recently been challenged by D. Bohde, who has argued that the status of skin in Hiob does not fit with the depiction of the flayed skin in the painting, noting that the skin hangs over the abyss of hell in the bottom left hand of the picture. Bohde also disagrees with Steinberg's interpretation that St Bartholomew is not holding his own skin, since this is his defining characteristic and it is also how it is interpreted by both Vasari and Condivi. Bohde believes that the self-portrait is one of the ways in which Michelangelo varied the iconography. Bohde remarks that associations between past sinful life and skin have been made in the Christian tradition and Michelangelo formulated his own thoughts on this association in his poems, including one to Vittoria Colonna and one to Tommaso Cavalieri. Bohde believes that the separation between sacrificed skin and the soul is depicted in the saint through his old skin and new glorified body. While the identity of the person is obscured by skin, it is identified through the self-portrait, though with a demeaning gesture. Bohde concludes that the connection between skin and flaying is thus contradictory. On the Renaissance significance of skin and flaying and the interpretation of Saint Bartholomew in Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*, see D. Bohde (as in n. 344), pp. 10-47, esp. p. 24. M. Hall has pointed out that the incongruity between the appearance of the saint and the skin has its source in the Pauline conception of the resurrection. According to Corinthians 1:15, with death earthly life is replaced with a spiritual body. On this interpretation, see M. Hall, 'Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*: Resurrection of the Body and Predestination', *Art Bulletin* 58, 1976, pp. 85-92.

⁹⁷⁵ VBB, 1550 & 1550, vol. 1, p. 115. In the passage in question Vasari discusses narrative contexts which are suited to the representation of bodily motion, such as battle scenes and martyrdoms. Bodily motion is thus justified as thematic decorum, as it had been for Alberti and Leonardo. For Leonardo's discussion of decorum, see Leonardo da Vinci (as in n. 365), vol. 2, pp. 291 and 292-295. For Alberti's prescriptions on this issue, see Alberti (as in n. 274), pp. 61-64.

⁹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 73: 'E nel vero la moltitudine delle figure, la terribilità e grandezza dell'opera è tale che non si può descrivere, essendo pieno di tutti i possibili umani affetti et avendogli tutti meravigliosamente espressi; avengaché i superbi, gli invidiosi, gli avari, i lussuriosi e gli altri così fatti si riconoschino agevolmente da ogni bello spirito, per avere osservato ogni decoro, sì d'aria, sì d'attitudini e sì d'ogni altra naturale circostanza nel figurarli'.

perceived as signs ('segni') through which the biblical episode is communicated. The combination of technical skill and the ability to create a 'true' vision of the scene by conveying the whole range of human passions contribute to the painting's exemplary status as 'grand painting':

The foreshortenings which appear as if in relief, an accord which gives softness and fineness in those parts painted with delicacy, truly showing how paintings executed by good and true painters should be; and in the contours of the forms turned by him in such a way as could not be done by any other, the true Judgement and true Damnation and Resurrection. This is for our art the exemplar and the grand manner of painting sent down to men on earth by God, to the end that they may see how Destiny works when intellects descend from the heights of Heaven to earth, and have infused in them divine grace and knowledge. This work leads after it bound in chain all those who believe that they have mastered art; and at the sight of the signs made by him in the contours of whatever figure he represents, every bold spirit trembles and is afraid, no matter how mighty in design. And while the eyes gaze at his labours in this work, the senses are benumbed just to think what other paintings, those made and still to be made would be if compared to this.⁹⁷⁷

In the 1568 edition, in response to Dolce's criticism, Vasari promotes the idea that the painting is viewable by different audiences. Distinguishing between an elite and non-elite audience, that is, experts of art and the general public, Vasari expresses the conviction that the former can appreciate the excellence and power of art and thus discern the concepts 'thoughts and concepts' ('pensieri e gli affetti'), while the common folk ('asaputi') are deeply moved by the vision:

for he moves the hearts of all those who know nothing about painting, just as he moves the hearts of those who understand this profession.⁹⁷⁸

Condivi

Michelangelo's biographer, Ascanio Condivi, also provides a positive account of the fresco.⁹⁷⁹ Condivi describes the main parts and figures in the fresco, presenting its composition as a grid from left to right and divided into upper, middle and lower sections. In Condivi's mind, the fresco is paradigmatic of the expressive force of the human figure, in that Michelangelo 'expressed all that the art of painting can do with the human figure, leaving out no attitude or gesture whatever'. This point is

⁹⁷⁷ Ibid., : 'Vi sono gli scorti che paiono di rilievo, e, con la unione, la morbidezza e la finezza nelle parti delle dolcezze da lui dipinte, mostrano veramente come hanno da essere le pitture fatte da' buoni e veri pittori; e vedesi nei contorni delle cose, girate da lui per una via che da altri che da lui non potrebbero esser fatte, il vero giudizio e la vera dannazione e resurrezione'. E questo nell'arte nostra è quello esempio e quella gran pittura mandata da Dio agli uomini in terra, acciò che veggano come il Fato fa quando gli intelletti dal supremo grado in terra descendono et hanno in essi infusa la grazia e la divinità del sapere. Questa opera mena prigionieri legati quegli che di sapere l'arte si persuadono; e nel vedere i segni da lui tirati ne' contorni di che cosa ella si sia, trema e teme ogni terribile spirito, sia quanto si voglia carico di disegno. E mentre si guardano le fatiche dell'opra sua, i sensi si stordiscono solo a pensare che cosa possono essere le altre pitture fatte e che si faranno, poste a tal paragone'.

⁹⁷⁸ Ibid., : 'perché fa scuotere i cuori di tutti quelli non son saputi, come di quegli che sanno in quel mestiero'.

⁹⁷⁹ A. Condivi (as in n. 341), p. 68.

reiterated at the end of the description: 'apart from the sublime composition of the narrative, we see represented here all that nature can do with the human body'.⁹⁸⁰

According to Condivi, the various gestures and actions signify the virtues and vices of the figures, for example, 'the sinners are dragged down by evil spirits, the proud by the hair, the lascivious by the pudenda, and each sinner correspondingly by the part of the body with which he sinned'.⁹⁸¹ Condivi's comment that the sinners are dragged down to hell by the part of the body with which they have sinned strongly suggests that Michelangelo set out to make moral judgements.⁹⁸²

Aretino

Aretino's contrasting perceptions of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* are expressed primarily in his letters. His comments cover a greater time span than others. His earliest comments were made even before the fresco was started and ended thirteen years later. His earliest remarks illustrate that he believed the work would be the culmination of Michelangelo's artistic career and that special skills would be required to understand it and appreciate its artistic merits. His first letter, which is dated 15 September 1537, indicates that the subject required a grand style and his own description of the episode strongly suggests that the subject lent itself to an elaborate invention suited to the select audience for which it was intended. In another letter, dated April 1544 and addressed to Michelangelo, Aretino writes that he had been deeply moved by the painting.⁹⁸³

It is highly significant that in the earlier letters Aretino presents himself as a member of an elite audience, capable of fully appreciating the merits of the fresco. His later criticism of the fresco takes inspiration from the circulation of printed copies, which generated a shift from a restricted elite to a wider, untutored public. As Bernardine Barnes has pointed out, Aretino's change of opinion points to an acute awareness of the changing audience and responses to the depicted figures. His stinging criticism of the fresco thus panders to the populist view, according to which the

⁹⁸⁰ Ibid.: 'In quest'opera Michelagnolo ha espresso tutto quell che d'un corpo umano può far l'arte della pittura, non lasciando indietro atto o moto alcuno'; *ibid.*, p. 70 & Condivi/Wohl, p. 87: 'basta che oltre alla divin composition della storia, si vede rappresentato tutto quel che d'un corpo umano possa far la natura.'

⁹⁸¹ A. Condivi / Wohl, p. 84; A. Condivi (as in n. 341), p. 69: 'I quali reprobì però, da' maligni spiriti sono in giù ritirati, I superbi per I capelli, i lussuriosi per le parti vergognose, e conseguentemente ogni vizioso per quella parte in che peccò'.

⁹⁸² With respect to Michelangelo's representation of the Master of Ceremonies, Biagio da Cesena, tormented by a snake biting his genitals, Bette Talvacchia has suggested that the artist's main objective was to devise an appropriate retribution for Biagio's criticism of the nudes. On this last point, see B. Talvacchia (as in n. 17), p. 113.

⁹⁸³ P. Aretino (as in n. 293), vol. 2, pp. 15-16.

artistic merits and allegorical elements were beyond the average viewer who only saw the indecency of the nude figures.⁹⁸⁴

Dolce

As mentioned earlier, Aretino's influence on Dolce is felt most in the discussion of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*, the focal point of the *Dialogo della pittura*. Dolce draws on Aretino's published negative criticism, adopting the populist view and clearly playing on the availability of the fresco in prints and copies which transformed it into a public work.⁹⁸⁵ Dolce's art-critical vocabulary articulates the dichotomy between the decorum of art and the requirement of decency.

With regard to the requirements of invention, Dolce draws attention to the blessed rejoicing instead of contemplating the divine, the beardless Christ, and a 'devil grabbing a large figure and pulling it down with a hand-grip on his testicles so that he bites his finger because of the pain',⁹⁸⁶ which Condivi had explained as a moral indicator. Dolce perceives these elements as absurdities and thus incompatible with the requirements of decorum outlined earlier in the treatise and examined in Chapter Four of this thesis.

Basing his appraisal of the fresco on the shift in audience, Dolce strongly disapproves of complete nudity as proof of artistic mastery in a public religious art work. The nude figures are assessed from a technical, aesthetic and moral viewpoint, setting the decorum of art against the requirement of decency:

Does it seem proper to you that an artist, to show off the complexities of his art, should constantly and disrespectfully expose those parts of his nude figures which shame and decency keep concealed, with regard either for the sanctity of the persons depicted, or for the place in which they stand on display?

In public, however, and most especially in those cases where the place is sacred and the subject matter is devoted to God, one should always pay attention to decency. And if these figures of Michelangelo's were more decent and less perfect in their design, this would be a good deal better than the extreme perfection and extreme indecency which one actually sees.⁹⁸⁷

⁹⁸⁴ See B. Barnes (as in n. 618), pp. 82-92. B. Barnes was the first to explain Aretino's criticism of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* principally in terms of his awareness and response to shifts in audience in the light of the increasing diffusion of prints of the fresco. Earlier scholarship tended to emphasise Aretino's personal vendetta against Michelangelo. See, for example, A. Blunt (as in n. 572), pp. 123-125.

⁹⁸⁵ See M. Pozzi (as in n. 696), pp. 293-322, esp. p. 298.

⁹⁸⁶ L. Dolce / Barocchi, p. 190: 'un diavolo che tira in giù, con la mano aggrappata ne' testicoli, una gran figura che per dolore si morde il ditto?'

⁹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 188: 'Pare a voi che si convenga per dimostrar la difficoltà dell'arte, di scoprir sempre senza rispetto quelle parti delle figure ignude, che la vergogna e la onestà celate tengono, non avendo riguardo ne' alla santità delle persone che si rappresentano né al luogo dove stanno dipinte?'. Ibid, p. 189: 'Ma in pubblico, e massimamente in luoghi sacri e in soggetti divini, si dee aver sempre riguardo alla onestà. E sarebbe assai meglio che quelle figure di Michelagnolo fossero più abondevoli in onestà e manco perfette in disegno, che, come si vede, perfettissime e disonestissime'.

The definition of the nude figures as 'most perfect but most indecent' introduces an extra-aesthetic dimension in an oxymoron which primarily serves to express the unsuitability of nude figures in the high art of religious narrative paintings. Hence the nude figures in the fresco not only constitute a serious breach of decorum in terms of setting and behaviour but also from a stylistic point of view.

Dolce condemns the fresco on account of the impact of indecency ('dishonestà') on an untrained audience, which is seen to comprise children ('fanciulli'), respectable women ('matrone') and young girls ('donzelle').⁹⁸⁸ The allegorical representation, which only men of learning ('dotti') can understand, is dismissed from an anti-intellectual stance:

He imitated those great philosophers who shrouded beneath the veil of poetry supreme mysteries of human and theological philosophy so that they would not be grasped by the masses.⁹⁸⁹

Dolce's anti-elitist stance and disapproval of artistic inventive power fit with the emphasis on poetic-literary invention promoted elsewhere in the treatise, whereby the boundaries within which the artist can operate are restricted by written sources and the guidance of the *letterato*.

Gilio

Gilio's assessment of the fresco, which is also based on a printed copy, was one of the most influential sources for the last decades of the Cinquecento.⁹⁹⁰ The list of errors places emphasis on the requirement of iconographical clarity and resembles the prescriptions provided by Borromeo in this respect.⁹⁹¹

Gilio assesses the fresco from a number of viewpoints, weighing the artistic merits against the requirement of decency in religious works assessable to a large audience, revealing a concern for the impact of complete nudity on the untrained viewer. The influence of Aretino's and Dolce's respective criticisms is felt particularly in the accusation of valuing art more than religion.

⁹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 191: 'Non mi par molta lode che gli occhi de' fanciulli e delle matrone e donzelle veggano apertamente in quelle figure le disonestà che dimostrano, e solo i dotti intendano la profondità delle allegorie che nascondono.'

⁹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 190; Roskill, p. 165: 'imitato quei gran Filosofi, che nascondevano sotto velo di Poesia misteri grandissimi della filosofia humana e divina, affine ch'e' non fossero intesi dal volgo'.

⁹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 190: 'egli avesse imitato quei gran filosofi che nascondevano sotto velo di poesia misteri grandissimi della filosofia umana e divina, affine ch'e' non fossero intesi dal volgo'.

⁹⁹¹ Gilio's list of errors picks out elements in the fresco which are not seen to fit the biblical account, such as the representation of angels without wings; Christ standing rather than seated on his throne; draperies blown about by the wind even though the Bible states there will be no wind or storm on the day of judgement; the trumpeting angels standing together instead of at the four corners of the world, as well as figures which are skill bare skeletons, while others are clothed with flesh. On these points, see A. Blunt, (as in n. 572), pp. 112-113. See also R. W. Lee's analysis of Gilio's treatise (as in n. 834).

The theologian participating in the dialogue, Ruggiero, censures Michelangelo for not observing the truth of the subject, rejecting the idea that the secrets of nature or art are hidden in the genitalia, convinced that the artist who covers them should be considered less worthy.⁹⁹² However, Gilio's comments leave no doubt that nudity is not the only issue at stake. Spectacular motion for art's sake is condemned in religious works. To drive home this point, Gilio likens the figures to people most clearly associated with physical exertion in daily life, that is, acrobats and actors, as well as erotic positions depicted in taverns and bathhouses, which were seen to contravene Catholic prescriptions for sexual behaviour.

Gilio's criticism of bodily motion bears a strong resemblance to that levelled by contemporary commentators, such as Calmo and Zuccollo, whose views were analysed in Chapter One, suggesting a further link between the new popular dances in daily life and the visual experience of the fresco:

Abandoning the customary practice of making them devout, they have made them strained, it seeming to them a great accomplishment to twist the head, turn the arms, the legs, so that they seem to represent moresca-dancers, and actors rather than those who stand in contemplation. And they have lowered that holy usage with this new invention of theirs, and could hardly have painted figures more immodest in bathhouses and taverns.⁹⁹³

Gilio's requirements for religious images serve to purge religious art of the *ingenium* associated with new inventions ('questa nova loro invenzione') created by the artist and mastery of the nude and foreshortening. Gilio is convinced that inventive power as a mark of artistic creativity and autonomy has no part to play in religious art. Accordingly, inventive power is not only perceived as an artistic whim ('capriccio') but is also considered to be fraught with extra-aesthetic implications. As in Alberti, the breach of decorum with regard to the representation of figures diminishes the status of the artist. Foreshortening should be executed with restraint so that respect for the holy figures is encouraged in the minds of the ignorant. Hence the artistic goals promoted by Vasari, Danti and Cellini are eradicated from religious art.

Raffaello Borghini does not participate in the debate on Michelangelo's *Last Judgement*. In Book Four of the *Riposo* he describes the fresco as 'miraculous' ('miracoloso Giudizio'), presenting it as the summa of Michelangelo's works and

⁹⁹² G. Gilio (as in n. 823), pp. 80-81.

⁹⁹³ G. Gilio (as in n. 823), p. 111: 'Per questo essi, antepoendo l'arte a l'onestà, lasciando l'uso di fare le figure vestite, l'hanno fatte e le fanne nude; lasciando l'uso di farle devote, l'hanno fatte sforzate, parendoli gran fatto di torcerli il capo, le braccia, le gambe, e parer che più tosto rappresentino chi fa le moresche e gli atti, che chi sta in contemplazione. Et hanno tanto quel santo uso sbassato con questa nova loro invenzione, che ne le stufe e ne l'osterie poco più disoneste dipingere si potrebbero le figure.'

simply referring to the availability of prints without any reference to the polemic provoked by the dissemination of the fresco.⁹⁹⁴

However, Borghini's assessments of versions of the biblical episode painted by Pontormo and Federico Zuccaro point to the key role played by the *letterato* in guiding the artists in the depiction of acceptable nude figures in religious art.

Borghini directs criticism at Pontormo's *Last Judgement* (c. 1530) and *The Flood*, now destroyed but originally in San Lorenzo, Florence, in terms of historical truth and decency. In representing the biblical episode of the flood Borghini criticises Pontormo for not following the biblical text, transforming the scene into a confused composition of indecent figures. The representation of nude figures in a range of postures is dismissed as a *whim* (*capriccio*), indicating that compositions formed from the artist's imagination are not tolerated in religious painting. As in Gilio's dialogue, artistic goals are set against the requirement of historical truth as if they were mutually exclusive. Similar criticism is levelled against Pontormo's *Last Judgement*, which is said to lack iconographic clarity, resulting in a scene composed of 'a great mass of ugly bodies, a filthy thing to see'.⁹⁹⁵ In addition to Vasari's criticism of the fresco on the grounds of spatial organisation and lack of iconographic clarity, Borghini underscores the indecency of the nude figures.

By contrast, Federico Zuccaro's *Last Judgement* (1567-1569; Cupola of S. Maria del Fiore) is exemplary with regard to invention and the decorum of nudity required in religious art. The saints are represented according to their different ages, which is felt to be in keeping with the biblical text and is therefore commendable. The covering of Christ's body is described as a 'fine invention'. The representation of nude figures contorted to signify guilt, degradation and shame and thus representing morally culpable states is an acceptable use of nudity in religious art. By contrast the draping of the saints and the elect is praised as a sign of decency and the reverence for holy figures, essential requirements that prevail over artistic preoccupations. The only criticism directed at the fresco concerns the representation of sin and lust, which is not considered appropriate even in a non-religious work.⁹⁹⁶ The assessment of the painting in terms of invention and decorum can be seen as a good example of the application of the Tridentine decrees.

⁹⁹⁴ R. Borghini (as in n. 419), p. 513. Elsewhere in the text Borghini refers briefly to Gilio's discussion of the errors in the invention, most probably with reference to the regulations of the Tridentine decrees concerning the presence of haloes and so forth, since nowhere in the *Riposo* does he suggest that the *ignudi* are blameworthy. In Book Two Borghini makes a brief reference to Alessandro Allori's painted excerpts from Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* originally in the Montauto Chapel in SS Annunziata. In Book Four Allori's paintings decorating three walls of the chapel, including the *Last Judgement*, are said to contain 'nudes made very well' ('*ignudi molto ben fatti*'), the only reference to the content of the paintings, suggesting that the nudes were the most striking feature.

⁹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 81: 'un gran monte di corpacci, sporca cosa da vedere'.

⁹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

The fresco is also presented as emblematic of the key role played by the *letterato*, Vincenzo Borghini, in suggesting a suitable visual version of a biblical episode. It is, however, highly significant that the fresco is not praised from an aesthetic point of view, which strongly suggests that the observation of specific prescriptions could be detrimental to artistic concerns.⁹⁹⁷

Despite his censorship of Michelangelo in some parts of the treatise, Armenini justifies his paintings in the Sistine Chapel in keeping with his hierarchy of clients, which requires that images for the highest ranks of aristocracy and members of the clergy should be remarkable. Thus the fresco on the ceiling, which begins with the Creation of the World, is seen to be compatible with the fresco of the *Last Judgement*.⁹⁹⁸ Armenini's notion of decorum of style allows for the artistic objectives manifested in the nudes and the wider aims of the painting.

In addition, Armenini highly esteems Michelangelo's ability to create from a few figures a wide range of different postures by bending and twisting ('torceva') them and he associates this ability with the nudes in the *Last Judgement*. Armenini's comments bear remarkable similarities to the notion of postures freely invented by the artist, a technical and mental ability which plays such a fundamental role in Vasari's scheme of absolute perfection:

Who is there that does not recognise that, having before oneself a figure or two in full relief, one can, simply by turning them so that they face in different directions, draw from them many figures for one's painting, and all differing from one another? It is in this way that the Judgement of Michelangelo should be considered, its artist having used the means I am relating. Some, in fact, say that he made certain figures of wax with his own hand, and that he twisted their members as he wished, first softening their joints in warm water, so that, re-softened, they could come out well.⁹⁹⁹

Erotic Prints: Censorship and the Common Viewer

Eroticised mythologies and images with generic mythological references were originally displayed in settings associated with bathing and undressing as well as pleasure and relaxation. There is ample evidence to suggest that sexual representation was part of the privilege and luxury afforded to a restricted

⁹⁹⁷ For Armenini's criticism of Federico Zuccaro's *Last Judgement* in Florence cathedral, see Armenini (as in n. 69), p. 178.

⁹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 189: 'ma come soggetti poi pigliar si possono dalle dignità o dagli ufficii, de' nomi creati, in che i signori o sono o sono stati, ne darò alcuni esempi, siccome di Michelagnolo il quale par ancora che egli cominciasse dalla creazione del mondo e venisse a finire col giudicio che deve essere il quale dipinse dopo ch'egli ebbe finita la volta'.

⁹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 118: Ma chi è che ancora non sapia che di una o due figure di tondo rilievo, nel modo che sono per diverse vie, non se ne cavino molte in pittura e tutte tra sé diverse? Poiché ciò pure si vede, da chi punto considera nel Giudizio dipinto da Michelangelo, lui essersi servito nel termine ch'io dico. Né ci sono mancati c'hanno detto quivi, ch'egli n'aveva alcune fatte di cera di man sue e che li torceva le membra a modo suo, immollandole prima le giunture nell'acqua calda, acciò quelle a rimorbidir si venisse...'

audience. In his *Dialogo della pittura*, Dolce made allowances for the representation of the nude along similar lines: 'and it is not inappropriate for the painter, from time to time, to make such things [as *I Modi*] for relaxation'.¹⁰⁰⁰ According to Bette Talvacchia, lascivious images could be justified provided *Otium* could be qualified as a recreation for the elite and as the relaxation of creative minds. The decorations in the Palazzo del Te, Mantua are a good example of the display of erotic images in an aristocratic residence which could be presented as justifiable in terms of *otium honestum*.¹⁰⁰¹ An analysis of the sources regarding erotica strongly suggest that not only was the sexual behaviour of certain sections of society less prone to scrutiny but also that their visual enjoyment of the erotic nude was considered to be less culpable.

The names of Giulio Romano, Rosso Fiorentino, Perino del Vaga and Jacopo Caraglio are all associated with images originally designed for the elite which were reproduced as engravings and prints. Several elements from Giulio Romano's designs appear in Caraglio's erotic images *Gli amori degli dei* (Loves of the Gods), the immediate successor of the *Modi*. At least a few of Romano's drawings are most probably connected, both thematically and compositionally, with images belonging to the Caraglio series. Available evidence suggests that Giulio continued to be involved in the production of erotic subjects in Mantua in collaboration with the engraver, Giovanni Batista Scultori.¹⁰⁰²

Whether based on mythological subject matter or combining modern and *all'antica* elements, erotic prints were clearly made with the contemporary viewer in mind and gave rise to a new audience. The *Modi* were primarily distributed in book form, though appropriated figures were also reproduced on dinner services. Erotic images were thus available as cheaper prints and more expensive collectors' items, suggesting diverse settings for the erotica in Cinquecento Italy. The new print media flourished through the distribution not only of the images and sonnets from the *Modi* but also through a wide range of heterosexual and homosexual erotic images.¹⁰⁰³ Despite the prompt confiscation of the *Modi*, various clandestine versions appeared in Italy and the rest of Europe.

¹⁰⁰⁰ L. Dolce, *Dialogo della pittura intitolato l'Aretino*, repr. in P. Barocchi, vol. 1, Bari, 1960, p. 189: 'Né si disconviene al pittore di fare alle volte per giuoco simili cose, come già alcuni poeti antichi scherzarono lascivamente, in grazie di Mecenate, sopra la immagine di Priapo per onorare i suoi orti'.

¹⁰⁰¹ On the notion of *otium honestum* during the Renaissance, see B. Talvacchia (as in n. 17), pp. 108-109. Although the Duke of Mantua never acquired a convincing reputation for the practice of *otium honestum*, he was evidently keen to justify the pursuit of leisure. On this point, see *ibid.*, p. 110.

¹⁰⁰² On Giulio Romano's collaboration with Scultori, see B. Talvacchi (as in n. 17), p. 132.

¹⁰⁰³ For the range of erotic images in engravings and prints available at that time, see *ibid.*, pp. 47, 129-59. On images and copies related to the *Modi*, see pp. 5, 22-44, 47, 198-224.

The wide circulation of images of erotic nudes and sexual positions prompted a debate as to what was considered acceptable and unacceptable in terms of setting and audience. While erotic images appear to have been tolerated as long as they remained within the confines of the private villa, their availability in public squares was less unacceptable and therefore prone to censorship. The dual perception of erotica created a tension between the widespread demand for erotic images on the one hand, and official disapproval and the concurrent circulation of confessors' books on the other. While erotic images illustrated the range of sexual options open to people, the sexual prescriptions contained in confessors' books attempted to rectify sexual behaviour in keeping with the church's guidelines. One print form thus competed with the other.¹⁰⁰⁴

The significance of the concerns regarding the availability of erotic prints in the public domain can be seen in examples of attempts to censor those destined for a wider audience. Once images appeared in the public sphere, the privileges associated with the elite's predilection for erotica no longer applied. Nor could a mythological pretext help save the image from censorship, illustrating that the display of certain body parts should not be accessible to a large and unselected audience, whose sexual behaviour was a matter of public and religious concern. Parts of the body which were deemed indecent and which thus required censorship include the penis, the vagina and the buttocks. Explicit sexual acts were also prone to censorship. Censorship was thus in keeping with the church's prescriptions for correct sexual behaviour promoted in confessors' books.

Examples of some of the adjustments to erotic images have been connected to the papacy of Clement VIII (1592-1605) who issued a number of severe decrees.¹⁰⁰⁵ It is probably during his papacy that prints like the *Sacrifice to Priapus* by the Master of the Die and Giorgio Ghisi's *Venus and Adonis* were made more acceptable by covering Priapus's penis in the former image and draping Venus's buttocks in the latter. Other examples are instructive with regard to the censorship of offending body parts. While Caraglio's engraving entitled *Gli amori degli dei* (Loves of the Gods) represented a mythological subject as a way of avoiding confiscation, most of the erotic elements in Giovanni Battista Scultori's engraving of *Jupiter and Olympias* (Vienna, Albertina, Grapische Sammlung) after Romano were censored. The printed version of this image was censored by transforming Jupiter's penis into a nebulous blur. Offending body parts in images like Scultori's *Hercules and Antaeus*

¹⁰⁰⁴ The *Breve instructione de' confessori* is one example of a text providing instructions to confessors which strongly suggests that 'indecent books' read by married couples were seen to encourage illicit sexual positions. See B. de Medina, *Breve instructione de' confessori*, 2 vols., Rome, vol. 1, p. 164.

¹⁰⁰⁵ On the censorship and reforms introduced by Clement VII, see D. Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, Chicago and London, 1989, p. 365.

and a number of other Herculean prints were covered with a decorous fig leaf. Although Marcantonio's *Pan and Syrinx* (also attributed to Marco Dente) initially escaped censorship, a bunch of leaves covering Pan's erection was added (**figures 82 and 83**): (Marcantonio Raimondi after Raphael, *Pan and Syrinx*; engraving, c. 1516 and the same image censored). Enea Vico's *Mars, Venus and Vulcan* (**figures 84, 85 and 86**): (Enea Vico after Parmigianino, *Mars, Venus, and Vulcan*; engraving, 1543, states 1, 2, and 3) underwent several adjustments.¹⁰⁰⁶

The record of a trial by the Inquisition in Venice in 1585 illustrates the spread and use of erotic books and prints as well as the terms of discourse with which they were associated.¹⁰⁰⁷ Throughout the document the term 'indecent' ('disonesto') is applied in different ways illustrating the perception of illicit sexual acts and their representation. The trial was against a certain Captain Annibale, who was accused of entertaining female prostitutes and boys ('putti') in his room and behaving indecently ('disonestamente'). According to the testimony of his landlady, Annibale had a painting of a nude female in an indecent pose hanging over his bed. In addition, the captain was charged with possessing images showing 'diverse indecent and monstrous things painted on them', including the sodomy of priests. One example of an indecent and unacceptable image was a trick flap card which showed a monk dispensing absolution over a nun but revealed the sodomitic coupling between the two under a hidden sheet. Erotic images were thus associated with illicit sexual behaviour, and both were referred to as indecent.

Much of the debate on acceptable and unacceptable erotic images centred on the terms *onesto* (decent) as opposed to *disonesto* (indecent), which were used to define the boundaries for the visual enjoyment of erotica. The new rules brought into play impinged on the perception of nude images. As we have seen throughout this thesis, the term *lascivia* and its cognates generally operated as a fluid term. Denoting sensuous figures and their erotic connotations, its acceptability depended to a large extent on where the relevant image was located and who had access to it. In an acceptable and positive context, Raffaele Borghini associates it with the beauty of soft flesh, which in contemporary society was a much admired physical feature.

The binary *onesto/disonesto* was generally a moral parameter denoting a range of activities across a broad social spectrum.¹⁰⁰⁸ Yet the emphasis placed on figures

¹⁰⁰⁶ On the dissemination of prints and related censorship, see D. Freedberg (as in n. 1005), pp. 361-368 and B. Talvacchia (as in n. 17), pp. 71-84.

¹⁰⁰⁷ See M. Milani (as in n. 81), pp. 179-192. Documents pertaining to the trial are preserved in the State Archives in Venice.

¹⁰⁰⁸ For a more complete discussion of the terms *onesto/disonesto* with useful notes, see B. Talvacchia (as in n. 17), pp. 101-124. According to Talvacchia, while *onesto* was applied as both a moral and social

and bodily motion perceived to be *disonesto* and deemed particularly dangerous when viewed by the untrained masses strongly suggests that certain images had to be marked out as suitable only for specific social groups, namely the elite. Dolce was one of the first to differentiate potential audiences for the nude, classifying the *Modi* and *Sonetti lussuriosi* as well as Michelangelo's nude *facchini* in the *Last Judgement* as suited to a low artistic style which was acceptable 'per il trastullo' of an elite. Dolce promotes the view that this social group was free to enjoy the images because they could easily distinguish between the different functions of painted and sculpted images.

By contrast, the display of sensuous beauty, the genitals, physical exertion and sexual activity were all defined as *disonesto* when viewable by a larger audience. Under these certain circumstances, the images lacked the decency considered to be essential in order to control the moral behaviour of certain sections of society. The term *disonesto* therefore served as marker underscoring important social differentiations rather than the merely indecent. Accordingly, any image perceived as *disonesto* should be banished from the eyes of a wider audience. *Disonesto* thus became increasingly associated not with what should be represented but who should freely enjoy the images. Gilio, Borghini and Armenini seem to support a similar view, accepting the representation of the nude as the preserve of the elite with the possible exception of Borghini's view on the nude in pieces of sculpture displayed in public spaces, which served important social and political functions. The distinctions they draw which determine the appropriateness of the nude in terms of audience share striking similarities with prescriptive literature, as well with Castiglione's prescriptions, which allowed for different kinds of behaviour depending on setting and audience.

Similar pressures were at work with regard to the nude in religious art. References to 'shameful parts' ('parti vergognose') are expressed most forcefully in connection with images readily available to a wider audience. Dolce states that this larger audience could include infants, respectable women and girls. Printed copies of Michelangelo's *Last Judgement* transform the figures into 'most indecent' nudes, revealing parts which 'shame and decency keeps concealed'. As with the pretext of ancient mythology, metaphorical representations do not provide a sanctioning cover as far as the common viewer or *volgo* is concerned.

There is an interesting analogy between the differentiation outlined above and the contrasting perception of, and prescriptions for, the common prostitute and her

marker, *disonesto* was not. I agree on most points made by Talvacchia though I suggest that *disonesto* also became a social marker in terms of potential audience for the nude in art.

more privileged counterpart, the courtesan, whose elevated status was frequently indicated by the application of the term *onesta*. The term *onesta* was thus also a social marker, cloaking the sexual activities of the courtesan under the veil of decency, making her behaviour socially acceptable by cancelling out morally reproachable behaviour.

The requirement of social behavioural decorum also played a key role in determining the kind of bodily motion which could be seen and enjoyed by different audiences. From a social perspective, physical exertion likened to the performances of professional entertainers of the *moresca* and popular dances and involving twists of the body is seen to resemble social practices associated with flirtatious behaviour and sexual licence. As we saw in Gilio's discussion of the *Last Judgement*, his terms of discourse resemble the language of the anti-dance polemicists discussed in Chapter One. These analogies are of deep significance. That visual experience should not match life experiences is most powerfully expressed in the assertion that Michelangelo's fresco would be more in keeping with images displayed in public bathhouses and taverns, where images of prostitutes and explicit sexual actions are known to have been portrayed. Religious art for the masses was to put before their eyes acceptable social behaviour and not merely uplifting moral images. These requirements meant the representation of restrained motion rather than physical exertion, which might further encourage viewers to take part in popular dances and frequent fairs. Paradoxically, Gilio's reference to bathhouses and taverns suggests, without overt criticism, another setting for undressing and the accessibility of erotic images to the *volgo*.

In conclusion, the evidence available strongly suggests that erotica, whether subtly or explicitly represented, was seen as an acceptable form of enjoyment for the elite rather than the general public. The fact that prints were more readily available and accessible to a wider public meant that it was more difficult to control potential viewers and their behaviour. The need to censor erotic images thus became more urgent in the new print culture. It should, however, be noted that attempts aimed at curbing the spread of undesirable ideas were only partially successful and that little could be done to prevent the wide circulation of erotic books and images. Although laws threatened to confiscate and burn cheap and pirated books, measures seem to have been taken in only a few particularly scandalous cases, such as the *Modi*, and even in this case clandestine images made their way around Italy and the rest of Europe. The debate prompted by the circulation of erotic images led to a changing perception of them, which impinged on their appropriateness in terms of audience and expressed primarily by the

distinction between what was deemed decent (*onesto*) and indecent (*disonesto*) by underscoring different social groups, their visual enjoyment and their behaviour.

Conclusions

Ecclesiastics inspired by the Tridentine reforms tended to adopt rather rigid attitudes towards nudity not only in religious settings but also in the domestic sphere. Their prescriptions thus constituted an extension of the decrees. Gilio, Borghini and Armenini pick up on the requirement of the decorum of nudity in religious art, prescribing the use of the loincloth and similar devices to cover the genitals. Whereas Gilio and Borghini express the opinion that nudity should be banished from every setting, they promote its retention in art. While Borghini directs criticism at the representation of nudity in religious art, he does not suggest the removal of the images or the intervention of over-painting and directs harsh criticism at only a few images of the nude, such as those in Pontormo's *Last Judgement*.

Gilio and Borghini both redefine the boundaries within which the painter may operate. Their prescriptions for religious art draw on the Tridentine reforms and re-instate the notion of decorum and redirect the artistic process towards the poetic and literary source, underscoring the importance of knowledge of verbal sources and the assistance of men of letters and ecclesiastics as judges of what figures and bodily motion are most apt in religious paintings. From this point of view, they have much in common with Dolce's approach to painting. However, in contrast to Dolce, they provide a number of subjects and settings suitable for the display of artistic skill and the representation of the beautiful nude body. Their perception of the nude as an aesthetic form with multiple functions most appropriate in private settings, and its association in Gilio with *ingenium* and metaphorical functions suited to high art, prompts both writers to draw attention to settings suited to its display. Armenini also suggests a range of settings where the nude is deemed appropriate.

An analysis of the settings where the nude can be justified and thus retained strongly suggests that it is perceived primarily as an art for the elite in keeping with attitudes concerning social behaviour in daily life. The visual enjoyment of the nude both in religious and non-religious art remains acceptable in the private space frequented by a select and trained audience believed to be more capable of distinguishing the different functions of painted and sculpted images. Conversely, similar images were to be banished from public spaces accessible to the untrained viewer, who, it was feared, was less capable of controlling his or her behaviour. As

we saw in Chapter One, this approach was both unrealistic and largely ineffective, revealing on the one hand the desire to elevate erotic and non-erotic images in the private space in keeping with the status and social rank of the client, and on the other the tendency to classify the nude as indecent when accessible to a wider audience, associating it with a low artistic style and places of ill repute.

In sharp contrast with the new prescriptions, Danti and Cellini continued to argue in favour of the high status of the artist expressing the conviction that the nude most powerfully conveys the artist's technical skill and mental capacity for image-making, and thus the ultimate hallmark of the virtuoso and virtuous artist. Neither writer pays heed to the notion of decorum understood as forms appropriate to the setting and audience as well as decency. Their writings can thus be seen as a further development of Vasari's notion of artistic autonomy, which is intimately bound up with the representation of the perfectly beautiful nude body.

Conclusions

My aim in this thesis has been to explore a wide range of primary sources in order to develop a picture of the perception of the nude body in both life and art, both before and after the Counter-Reformation. My approach throughout has been to closely examine and compare these sources for shared perceptions and a common frames of reference, considering the reasons behind the views which emerge from different kinds of texts.

The overwhelming evidence is that during the period investigated the body was both explored for its potential as a beautiful form and enjoyed sexually. Settings in which undressing took place not only included the domestic setting but also social and public spaces, such as public bathhouses and spas, taverns, fairs and carnivals, the courtesan's boudoir and the private apartments of eminent citizens, including high-ranking members of the church.

The public display of the body is symptomatic of the emphasis placed on the physical beauty of both males and females, prompting writers to produce texts which set specific standards for physical beauty and others to provide a range of beauty tips to help women transform their bodies into a physical asset. A number of writers make connections between the worship of female physical beauty with seduction, pushing the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable further apart.

The celebration of female physical beauty emerges most powerfully in the construction of the civic myth of Venice, which inextricably linked the courtesan to the power of beauty associated with Venus. This social context provided the impetus for the representation of the mildly and overtly erotic female nude in art. It is deeply significant that some of the most sensuous and erotic images of female nudes abound in references to daily life. The application of the term *Venus* to a physically beautiful woman and the services provided by courtesans and prostitutes is equally significant and provides us with a context in which to discuss the female erotic nude, reasons for its commission and responses to it.

With respect to male physical beauty, the Florentine social and political context provides the background against which we can begin to understand the prominent role played by the virile nude, frequently displaying physical exertion. The association of physical beauty with the youthful and lowly male, two of the most dangerous elements in society, has important implications for the

representation of the nude in art. Their physical beauty provides validation for its public display and celebration in a city where personal merits were promoted over aristocratic origins in keeping with its source of wealth in trade, most notably wealth linked to manufacture and trade of wool and cloth. Images set up in public spaces and in the domestic setting celebrate the ingenuousness of Florentine citizens, a virtue which is seen to be characteristic of the city.

The new notion of nobility which was formulated in the city fits with Vincenzo Danti's theoretical assumptions based on the view that the perfectly beautiful and proportioned body was most apt for physical activity. Nowhere was this more powerfully demonstrated than in competitive sports played in the public arena. Francesco Bocchi picks up on this perception of male beauty and fitness in his guidebook to Florence, applying the notion not only to living figures but also in the sculpted nude images adorning the city signifying and celebrating civic virtues in connection with heroic deeds, defence of the homeland and justice based on ingenuity and a body fit for action.

The civic myths of Venice and Florence are thus both constructed around the celebration of physical beauty and its display in the public arena in honour of the respective cities. As the chief ornament of the person in life, physical beauty is most powerfully manifested in the nude figure, transforming a work of art into an ornament of the highest level. The fact that the viewing experience was matched by real-life experience must have been a powerful motivating force behind the celebration of physical beauty.

As an adorning ornament the artist presented to the viewer the perfectly beautiful nude in a range of postures as well as a single or composition of figures modelled to produce beauty from every view, creating striking effects which riveted the viewer. In the Florentine context, the male and female nude were both represented as adorning ornaments celebrating both eminent citizens and the city. The use of the female nude as an adorning ornament ennobled the female and her elevated status is reflected in her physical form, conceived and perceived as the perfect conjunction of the male and the female.

The ennobling qualities associated with the Venetian civic myth helped raised the status of the courtesan under the pretext that she was selling much more than her body. For much of the sixteenth century her elevated social position allowed her to bypass both sumptuary laws and regulations which affected the common prostitute. The courtesan's attachment to the ruling elite, for whom she provided services with the style and accomplishments worthy of their rank, helped her

acquire the status of *onestà* as opposed to the sense of shame and degradation associated with the public prostitute.

This social differentiation is of deep significance since it provides a context in which we can locate a number of other prescriptions for moral behaviour which aim to affect ordinary men and women rather than eminent citizens. The censorship of printed erotic images is a good case in point, since it establishes that the untrained audience should not enjoy such images whereas the same image could be provided with a sanctioning cover within the confines of the private apartment of the eminent citizen. There is ample evidence to suggest that while sexual and social behaviour was not widely differentiated between the classes, attempts to control it were largely directed at the masses rather than the elite.

The search for the most perfect body had important implications for artistic practices, transforming the modes of working both inside and outside the workshop, as artists began to observe and explore live models which best displayed the effects of bodily motion and the configuration of surface contours. The live models they selected for observation were physically fit and engaged in strenuous activity. The study of the live model chiefly outside the workshop played a significant role in the artistic process and as part of an interplay of artistic practices which also involved dissection and a thorough knowledge of the mechanisms of the human body. The observation of the live model and empirical anatomical investigations helped the artist move beyond the imitation of the antique though the study of ancient works of art continued to engage the artist.

The specific set of artistic practices and the emphasis on bodily motion intimately bound up with the nude not only constituted a break away from Alberti's guidelines but also prompted a redefinition of the artist's objectives and the perception of his status as an image-maker. The 1550 edition of the *Lives* was the first major writing on the arts which formulated the theoretical assumptions and art-critical vocabulary needed to bring to the fore the artistic innovations and achievements inextricably linked to the nude. Vasari links the interplay of artistic practices to the ability to skilfully create a nude figure and to the mental capacity to form from one's imagination a range of figures and postures which powerfully manifest the supreme qualities of *grazia*, *disegno* and *arte/artificio* in both painting and sculpture.

The biographical sections throw into relief the aesthetic and artistic merits of the nude as an aesthetic form with multiple meanings and functions in both narrative and non-narrative works. The premium given to the nude is most powerfully expressed in the line of artistic development leading to the absolute perfection of

Michelangelo as opposed to the more general perfection achieved by artists forming part of the development scheme peaking with Raphael.

The 1568 edition continues to present the perfectly formed, proportioned and beautiful nude as the highest achievement in art in the examples of the art works produced by the next generation of artists. New passages written in connection with the nude figures of Raphael, Titian and Michelangelo, serve to re-affirm the schemes of the first edition and apply the art-critical vocabulary based on the formulations presented in the technical chapters, thus linking practice with theory. There can be little doubt that the insertions were specifically directed at re-asserting Michelangelo's status as the artist of absolute perfection in response to Lodovico Dolce's claims for the supremacy of Raphael and Titian and his proposal of an alternative line of artistic development moving along a central-northern axis.

The writings of Vincenzo Danti and Benvenuto Cellini are the most significant with regard to the nude and the artist's inventive powers after the *Lives*. Danti's unfinished treatise provides further evidence of artistic interests as well as the promotion of the artist as a creator of images, while his notions of imitation provide the principles for his assertion of Michelangelo's supremacy over Titian. Danti's emphasis on inventive power and its connection with *disegno* contrasts sharply with the resonating silence with regard to the notion of decorum. Cellini's writings, which provide useful insight into the role of modelling in the sculpture of his own day, place a sometimes dramatic emphasis on forming nude bodies as a heroic deed, the result of the actions of a virtuoso, making the creator of the Perseus adorning Piazza della Signoria as much a hero as his sculpted figure. Cellini's promotion of the sculptor and metalworker as creators of the most beautiful and perfect figures aims to redefine the professional boundary within which they traditionally operated.

These objectives were redefined in the writings of non-artists produced in the second half of the sixteenth century who found in the Tridentine reforms the pretext for a re-evaluation of the artist and the artistic process. Writers like Dolce, Gilio and Borghini all promoted the close observation of literary sources rather than the imaginative and metaphorical representation of narrative scenes particularly with regard to religious works. The poetic licence they granted was circumscribed by the major reinstatement of decorum with regard to setting and behaviour and effectively constrained the hands and intellect of the artist. The role they attributed to the *letterato* and ecclesiastic as judges and guides in terms of acceptable images competed with the idea of the artist as an image-maker demonstrating his technical skill and *ingenium*.

It is highly significant that writers such as Dolce, Gilio, Raffaello Borghini and Armenini classified images in terms of the intended audience, establishing that the nude should be chiefly a preserve of the elite, for whom high and low styles and the erotic and non-erotic nudes were equally acceptable. The same privileges did not apply to the untrained masses for whom uplifting and decent images were considered to be more appropriate as the *letterato* like the ecclesiastic came to perceive his role as the social controller of images. Their prescriptions were made in the wake of the widespread dissemination of prints which brought about changing notions of audience and they express their populist views on the argument not every social group can differentiate between the different functions of images and under the pretext that indecent images of the nude only exerted power on the untrained viewer. It is important to note that the reforms seem to have exacerbated rather than prompted changing attitudes to the nude given the prescriptive literature that existed before and on which later writers draw.

All writers on art do, however, acknowledge the nude as the most beautiful figure in art, prompting writers like Gilio, Borghini and Armenini to pinpoint subjects and settings for its continued display. They thus cleverly formulate their prescriptions to fit the reforms under specific circumstances and for specific audiences, namely religious images in public spaces frequented by the illiterate masses, rather than follow the writings of ecclesiastics who condemn any kind of nude image. The writings clearly show that the beautiful nude figure can continue to adorn the walls and rooms of the private home of the elite giving lustre to eminent citizens or providing an opportunity for *otia honesta*.



FIG. 1 ANTONIO POLLAIUOLO, *Dancing Nudes*, after 1464, Arcetri, Villa la Gallina.



FIG. 2 ANONYMOUS FLORENTINE, *Round Dance*, engraving, c. 1470, location unknown.



FIG. 3 'Cornettatura', a Barber-surgeon bleeding a female patient, engraving, ill. GIOVANNI BOTTARELLI, *De bagni di San Casciano*, Florence, 1688.

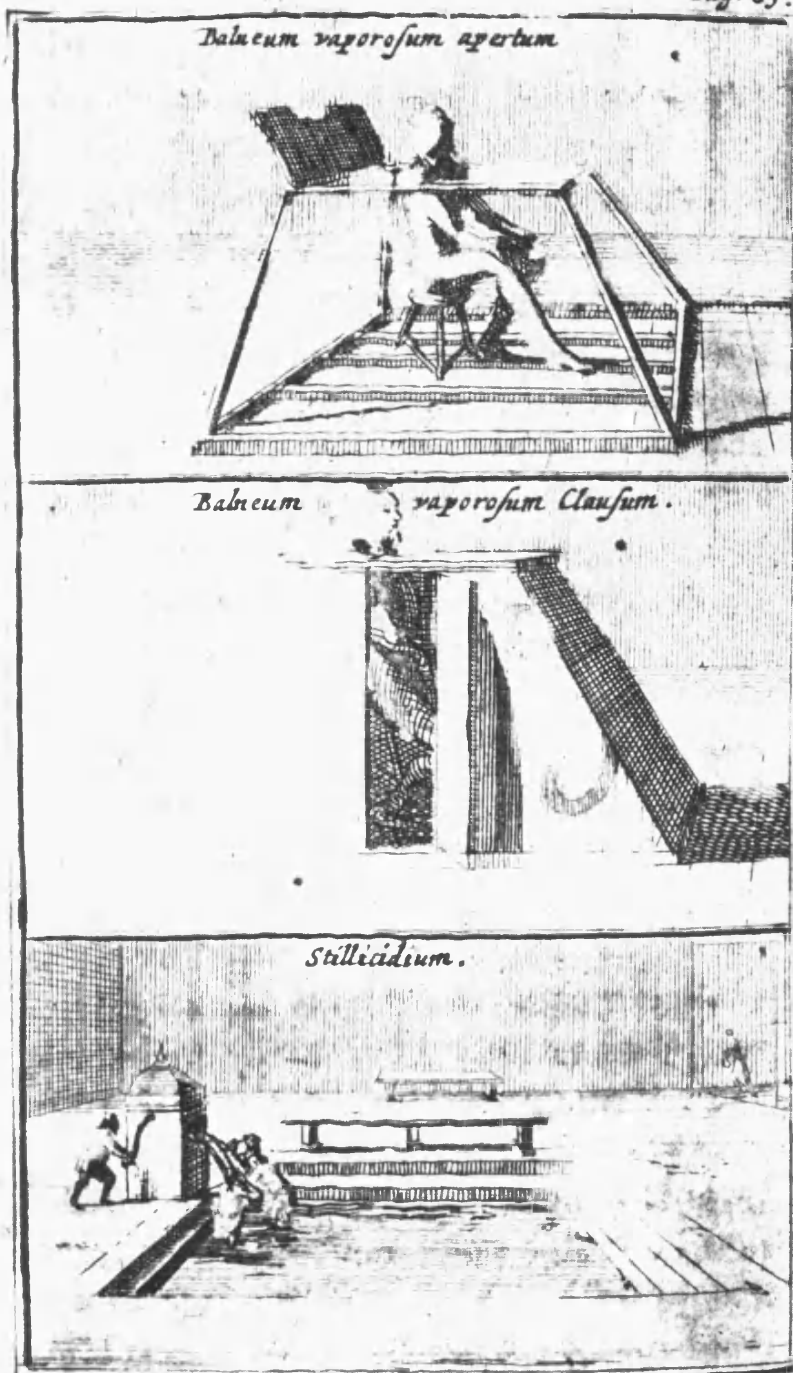


FIG. 4 Medical treatment available at the public baths of San Casciano, Tuscany, engraving, ill. GIOVANNI BOTTARELLI, *De bagni di San Casciano*, Florence, 1688.

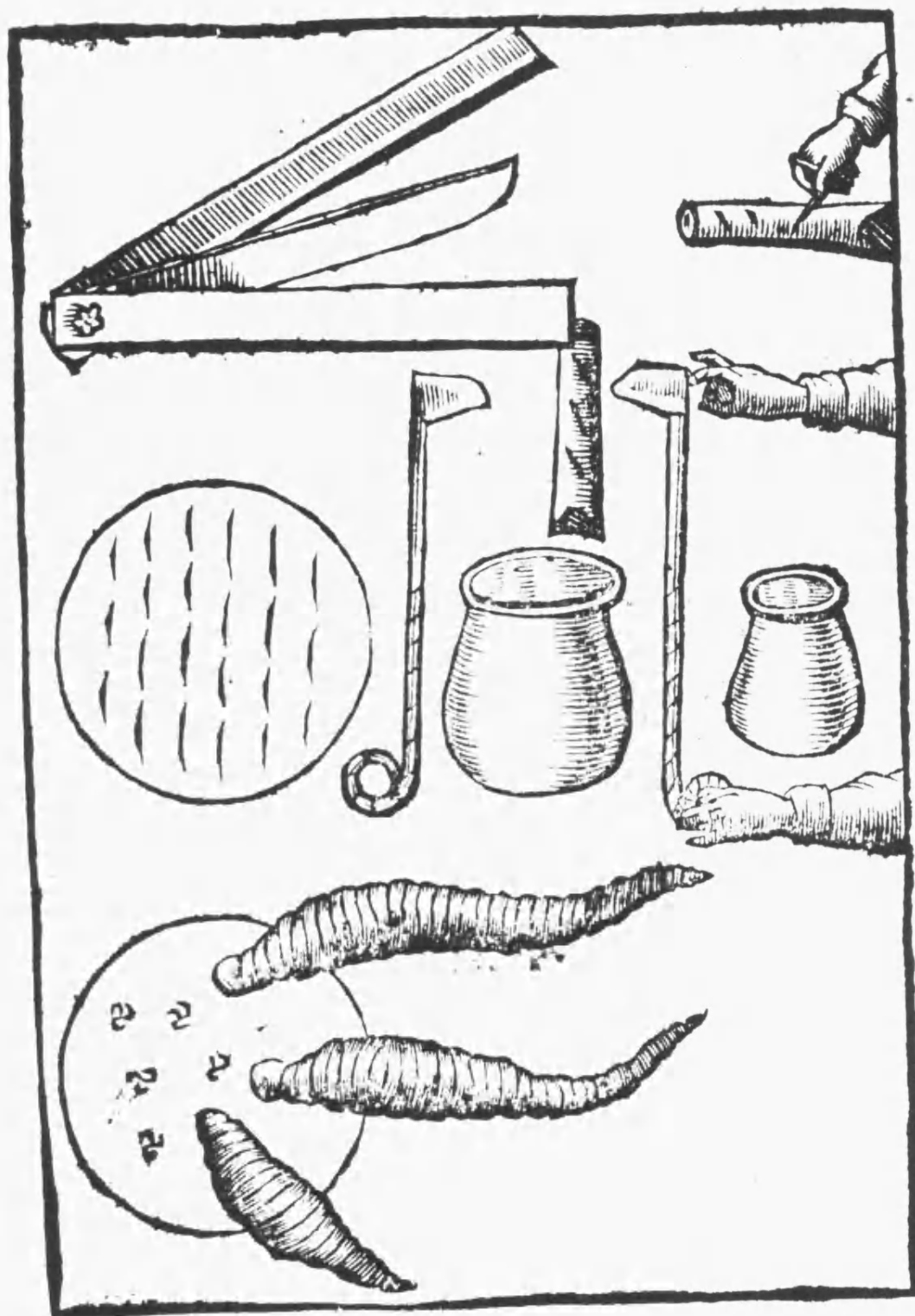


FIG. 5 *Barber surgeon's Tools*, engraving, ill. GIOVANNI BOTTARELLI, *De bagni di San Casciano*, Florence, 1688.



FIG. 6 PASSIGNANO (DOMENICO CRESTI), *Bathers of San Niccolò*, 1600, private collection.



FIG. 7 MEMMO DI FILIPPUCCIO, *The Married Couple's Bath*, c. 1317, San Gimignano, Palazzo del Popolo.



FIG. 8 RAPHAEL, *Two Male Nudes Undressed for Bathing*, c. 1505, Vienna, Albertina.

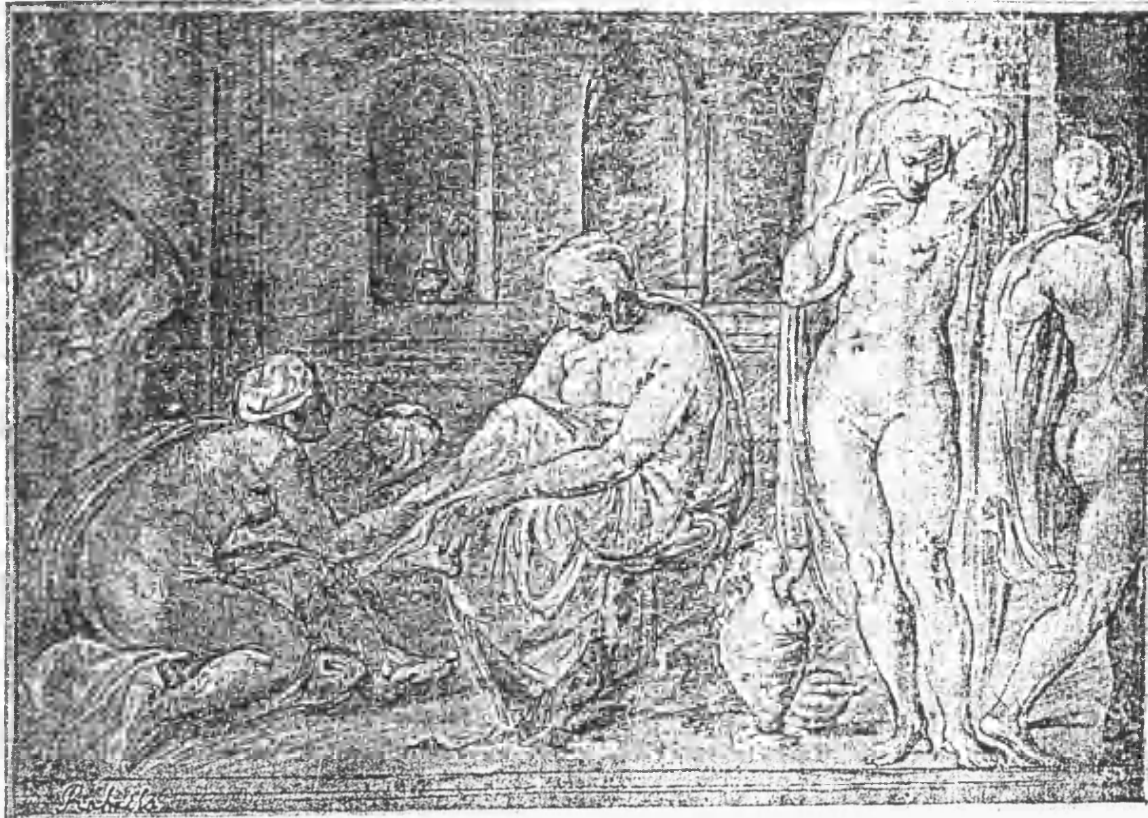


FIG. 9 PERIN DEL VAGA, *Bath of Women*, Horne Museum, c. 1540, Florence.



FIG. 10 MICHELANGELO, *Battle of Cascina*, copy by ARISTOTELE DA SAN GALLO, 1542, Norfolk, Holkham Estate.



FIG. 11 RAPHAEL (AND WORKSHOP), *Venus and Adonis*, 1516, Rome, Vatican Palace, Stufa del Cardinal Dovizi da Bibbiena.



FIG. 12 GIULIO ROMANO, *Apollo and Cypris or Hyacinth*, c. 1540, Stockholm, Nationalmuseum.



FIG. 13 GIOVANNI DA UDINE, (attr.), *The Four Main Scenes*, c. 1540
Rome, Castel Sant'Angelo, Stufa di Clemente VII.



FIG. 14 TITIAN, *The Couple of Lovers*, 1564-1568, Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum.



FIG. 15 GIULIO ROMANO, *Illness*, c. 1540, engraving, F.C. 50589.



FIG. 16 GIULIO ROMANO, *The Lovers*, St. Petersburg, c. 1525, The Hermitage Museum.



FIG. 17 ANONYMOUS 18th c. / mod. Position 11. Woodcut after MARCANTONIO RAMONDI, after G. R. ROMANO, 1500-1. Vienna, Alinari.

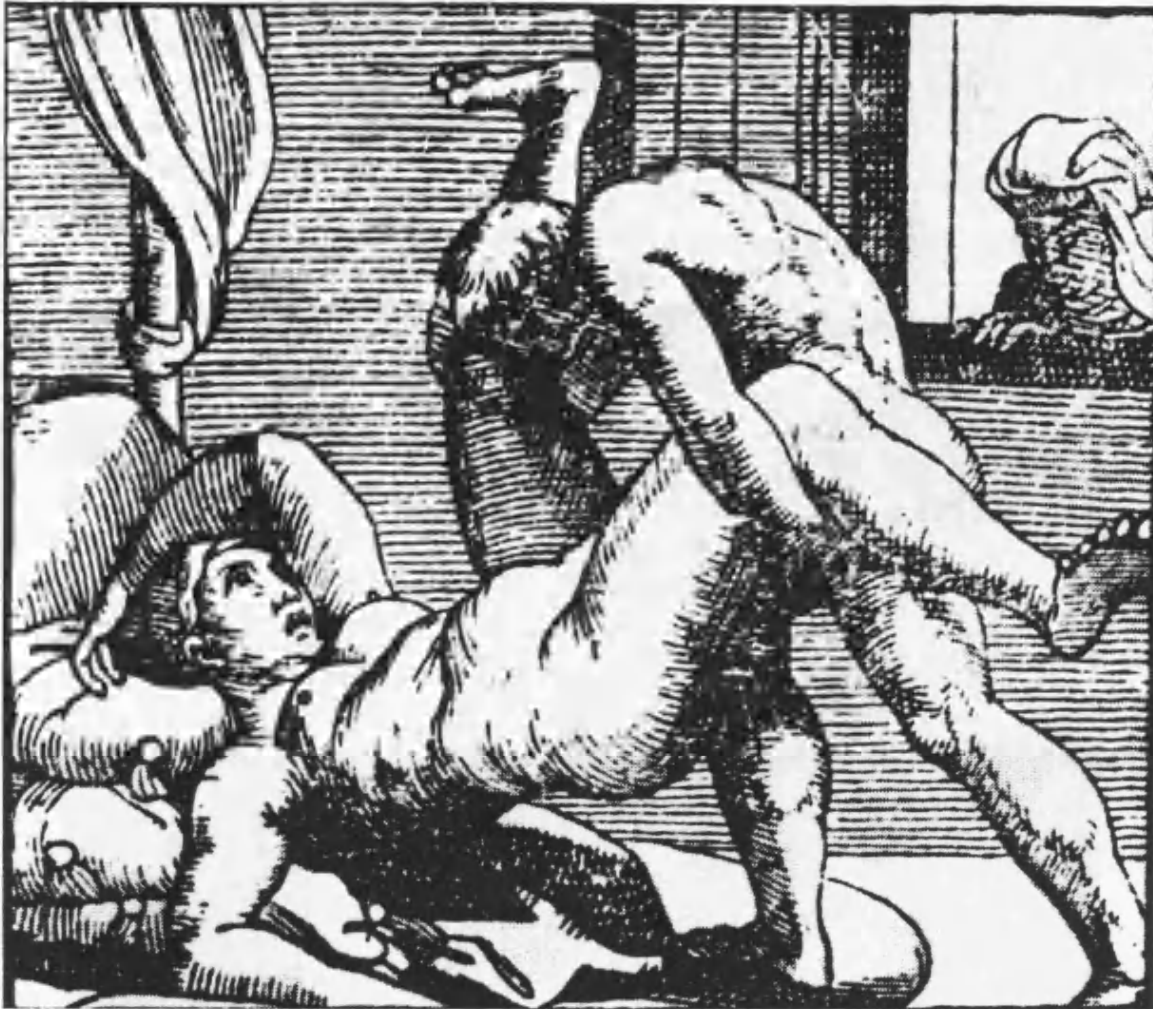


FIG. 17 ANONYMOUS 16TH, *I modi*, Position 11, Woodcut after MARCANTONIO RAIMONDI, after GIULIO ROMANO, 1500 s., Vienna, Albertina.

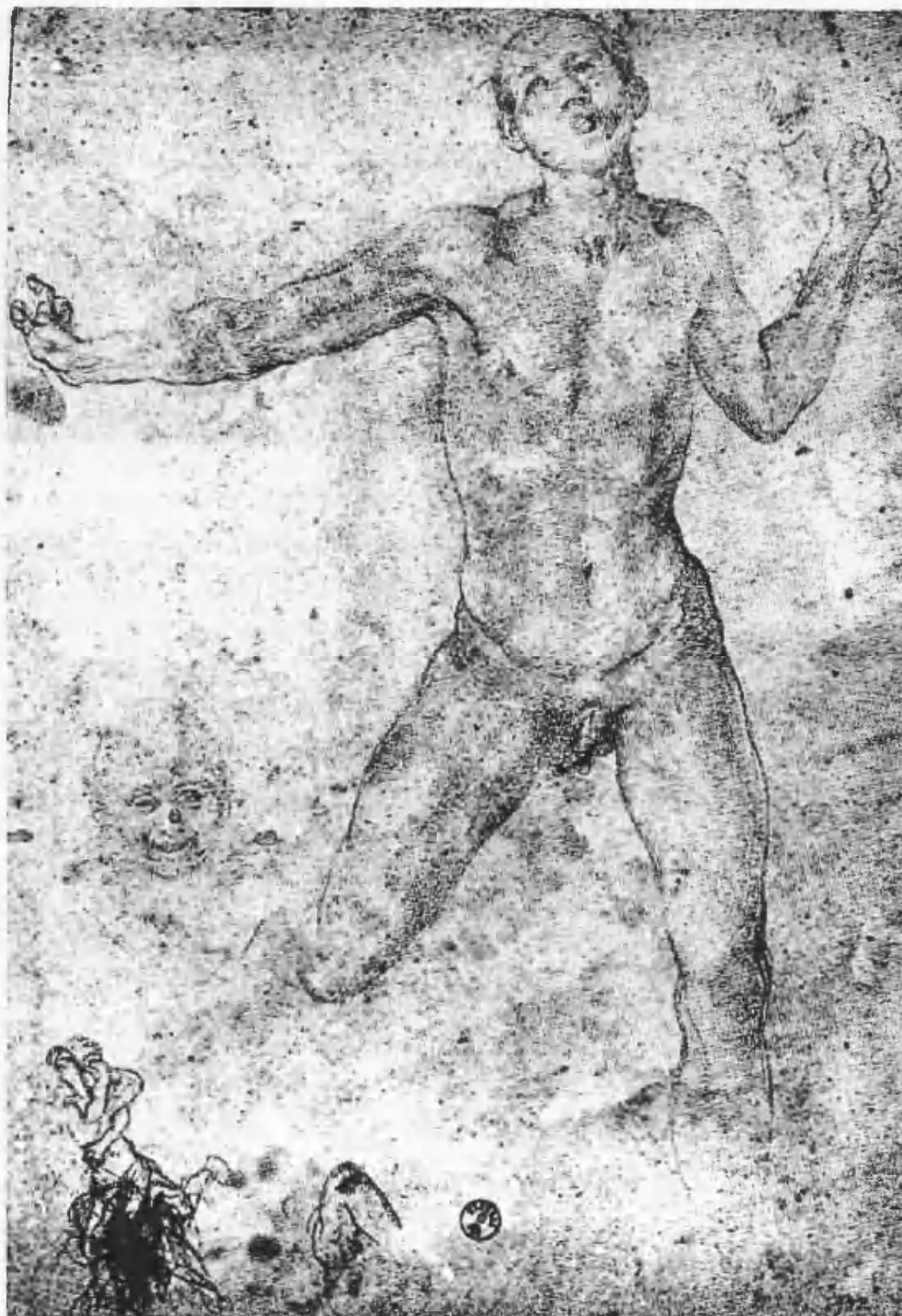


FIG. 18 PONTORMO, *Drawing for the History of Nudes Playing Football*, c. 1538-1543, Florence, Uffizi.



FIG. 19 PONTORMO, *Drawing for the History of Nudes Playing Football*, c. 1538-1543, Florence, Uffizi.



FIG. 20 LORENZO GIBERTI, *Drawing for the History of Nudes Playing Football*, c. 1490-1495, Florence, Uffizi.



FIG. 20 LORENZO Ghiberti, *Sacrifice of Isaac*, 1401, Florence, Bargello.

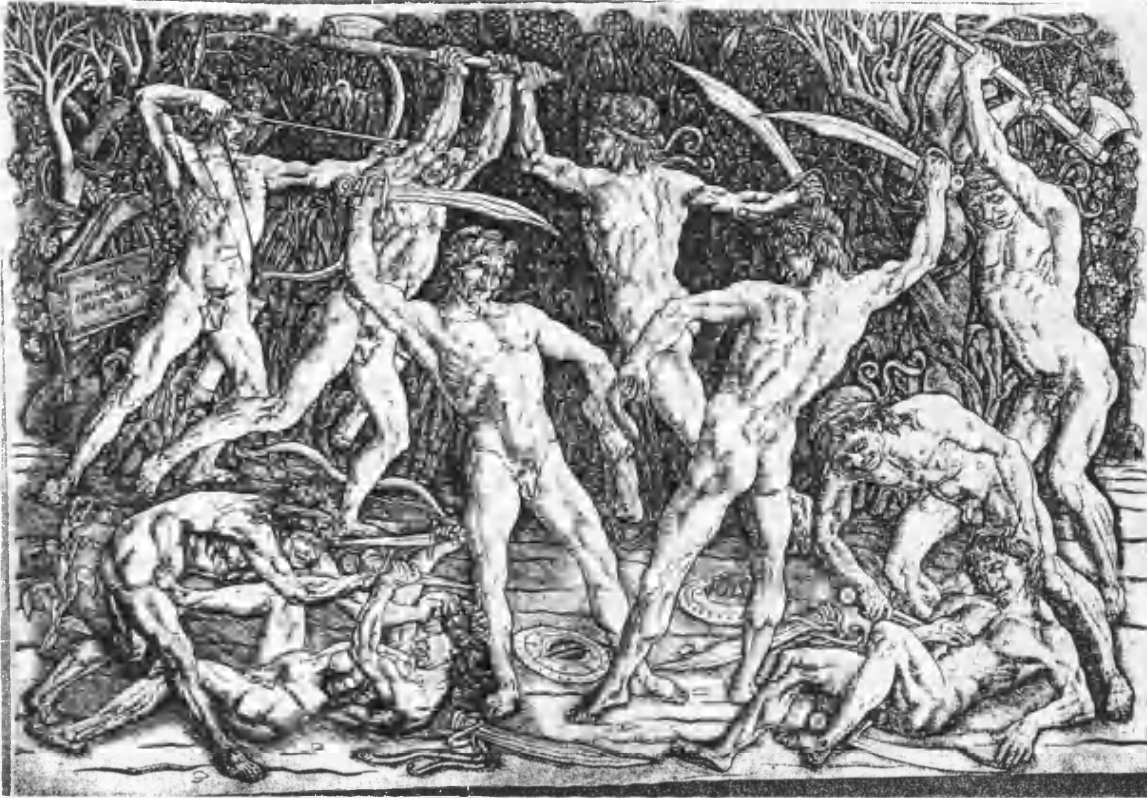


FIG. 21 POLLAIUOLO, *Battle of the Nudes*, 1469-1470, engraving, Cleveland, Museum of Art.

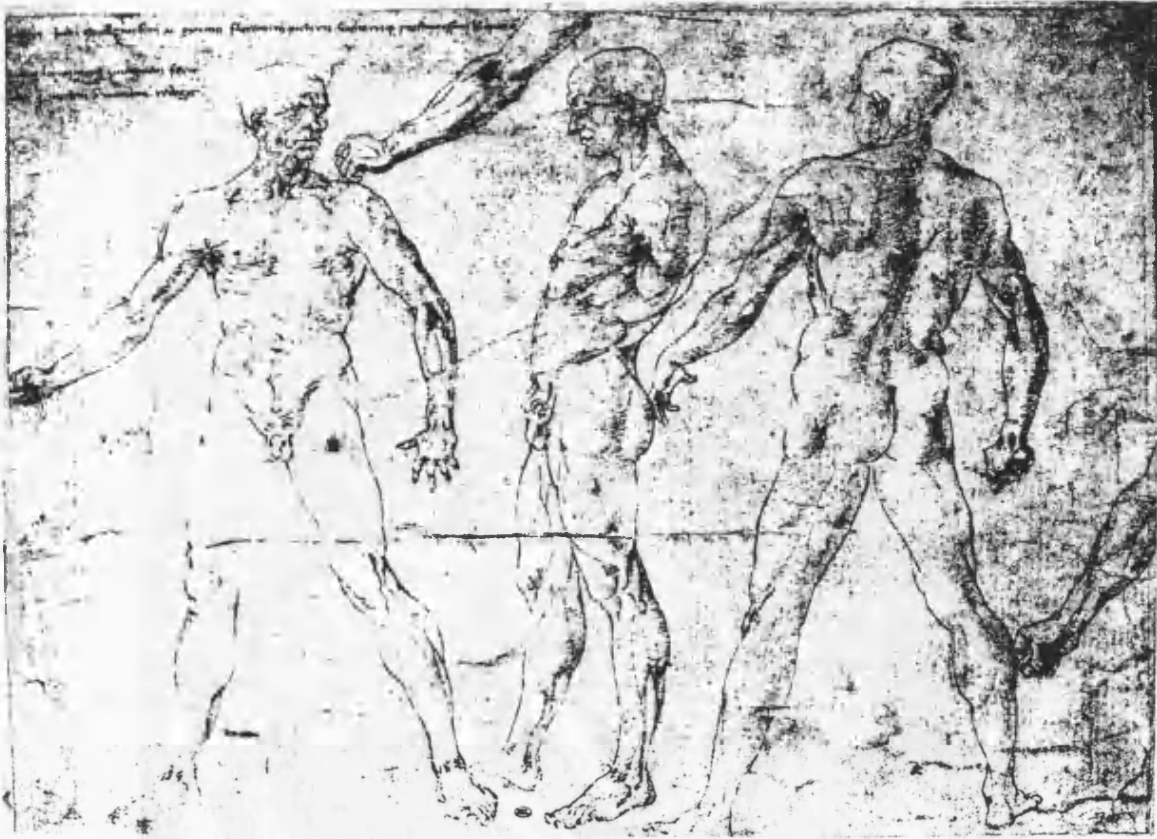


FIG. 22 POLLAIUOLO, *A nude man, seen from the front, side and back*, 1486, Paris, Louvre.

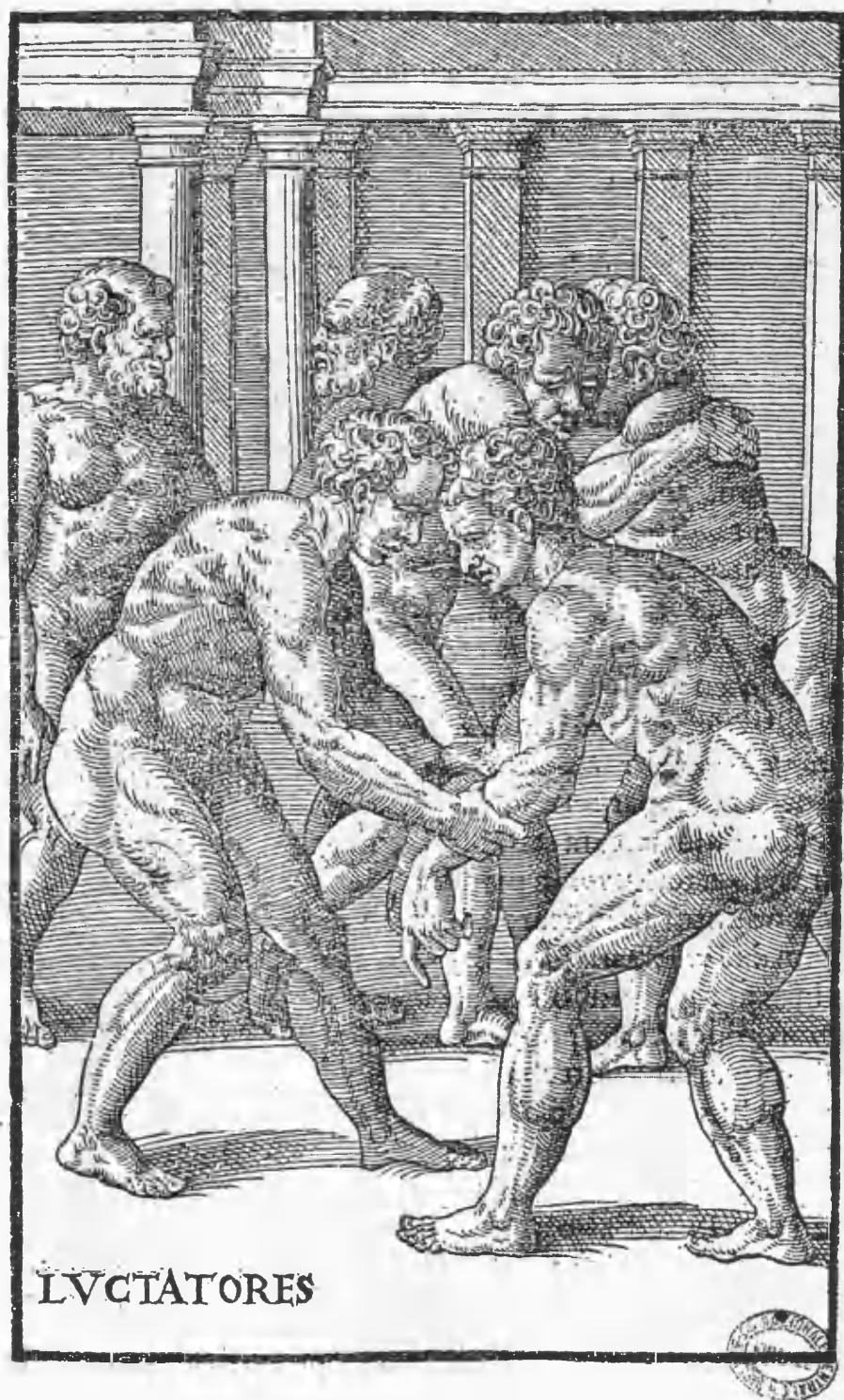


FIG. 23 *Wrestlers*, engraving, ill. GIROLAMO MERCURIALE, *De Arte Gymnastica*, 1569.

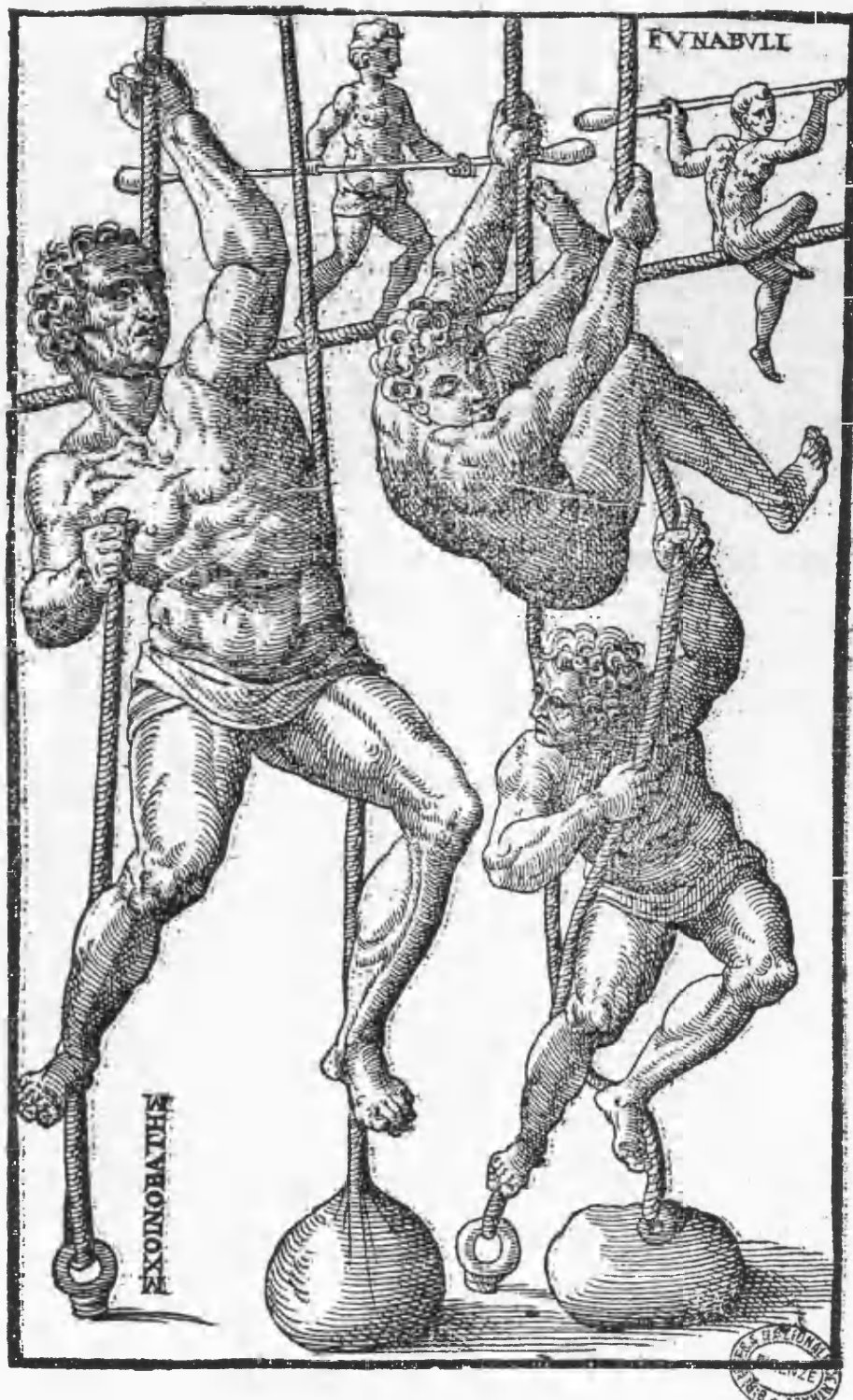


FIG. 24 Tightrope-Walkers, engraving, ill. **GIROLAMO MERCURIALE**, *De Arte Gymnastica*, 1569.



FIG. 25 FRANCESCO ROSSELLI, (attr.), *'La pianta della catena'*, c. 1472, Berlin, Kupferstichkabinett.

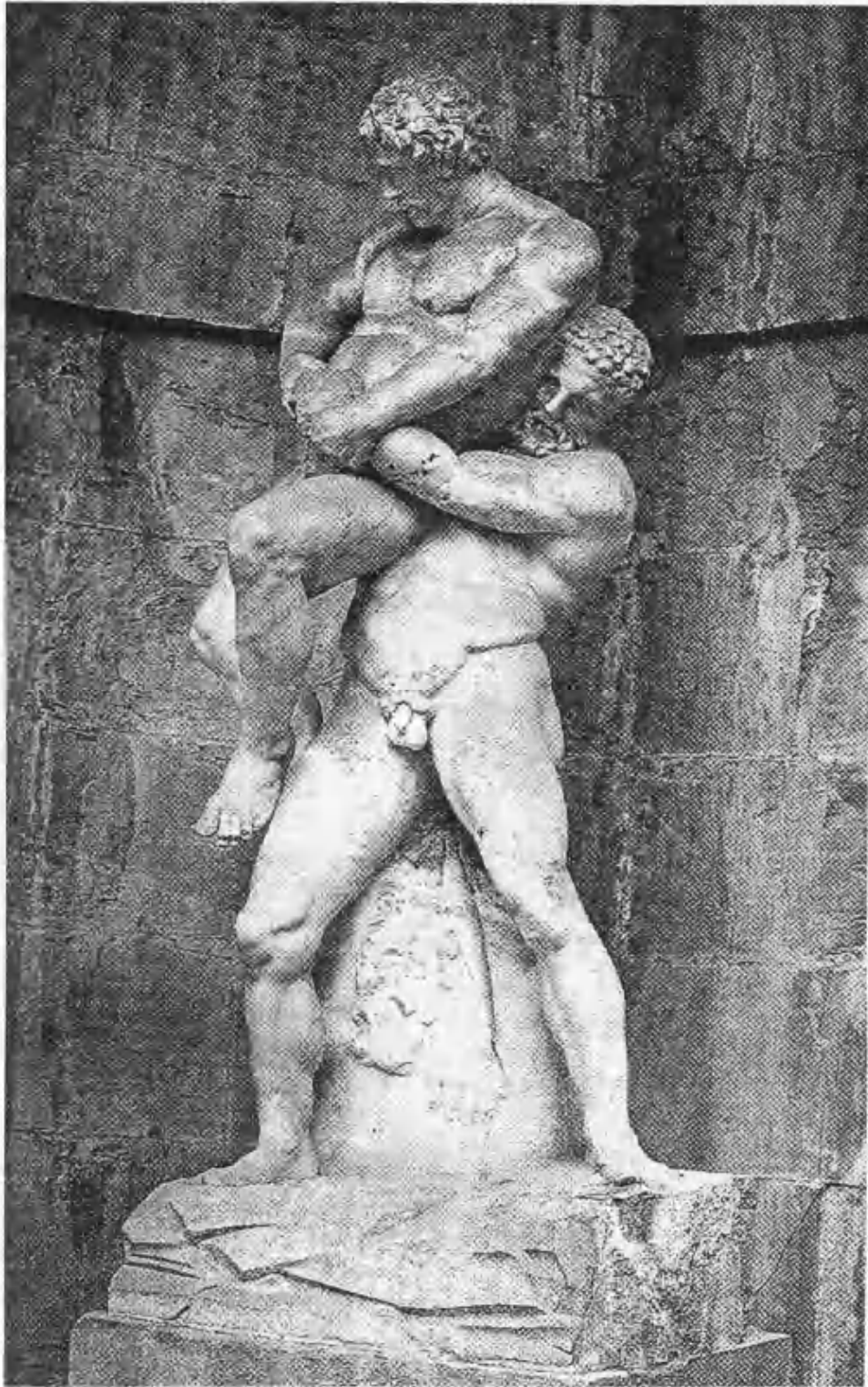


FIG. 26 *Hercules and Anteus*, Florence, Palazzo Pitti, (principal courtyard).

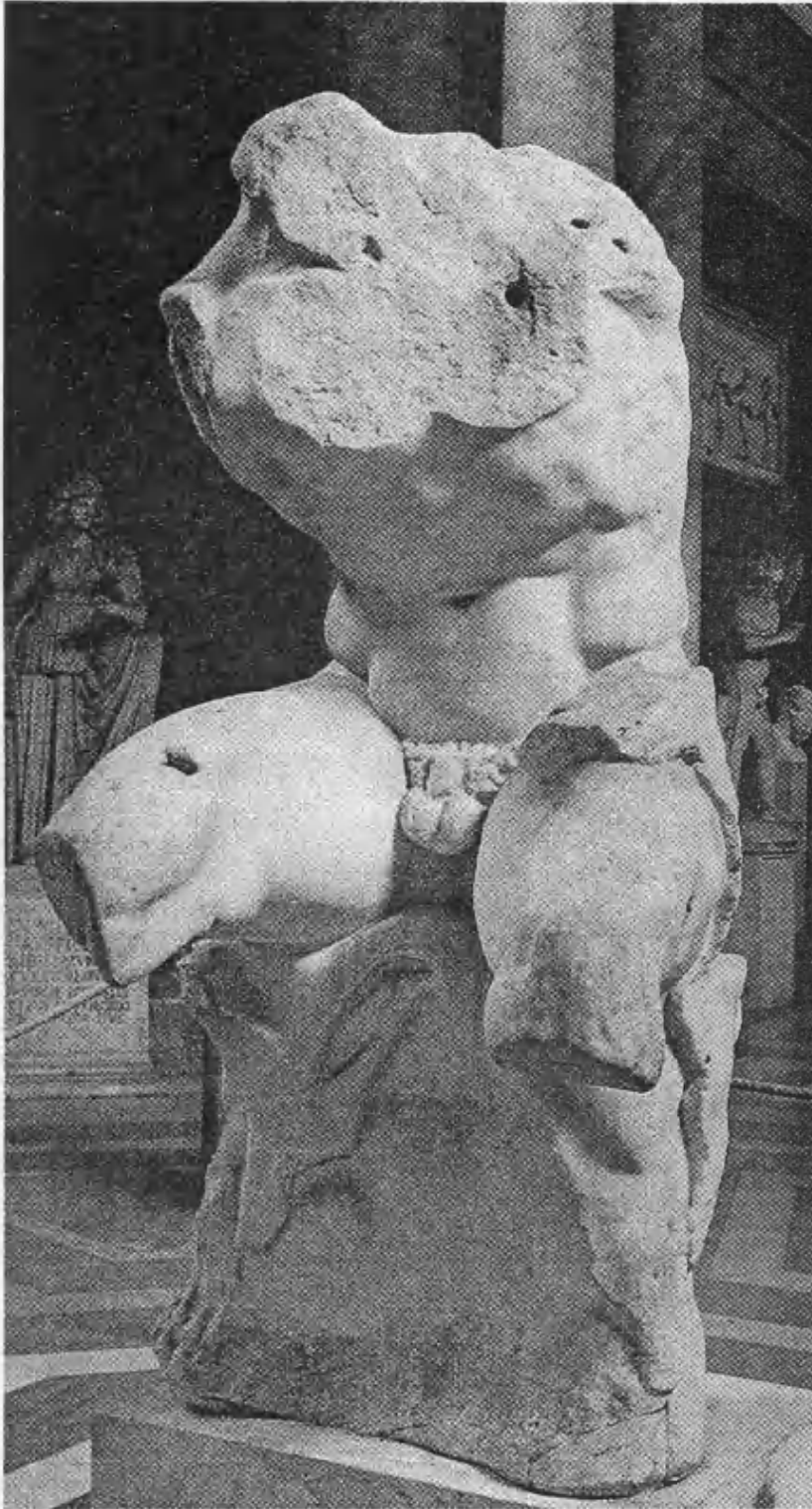


FIG. 27 *Torso Belvedere, Rome, Vatican Museum, (Atrio del Torso).*

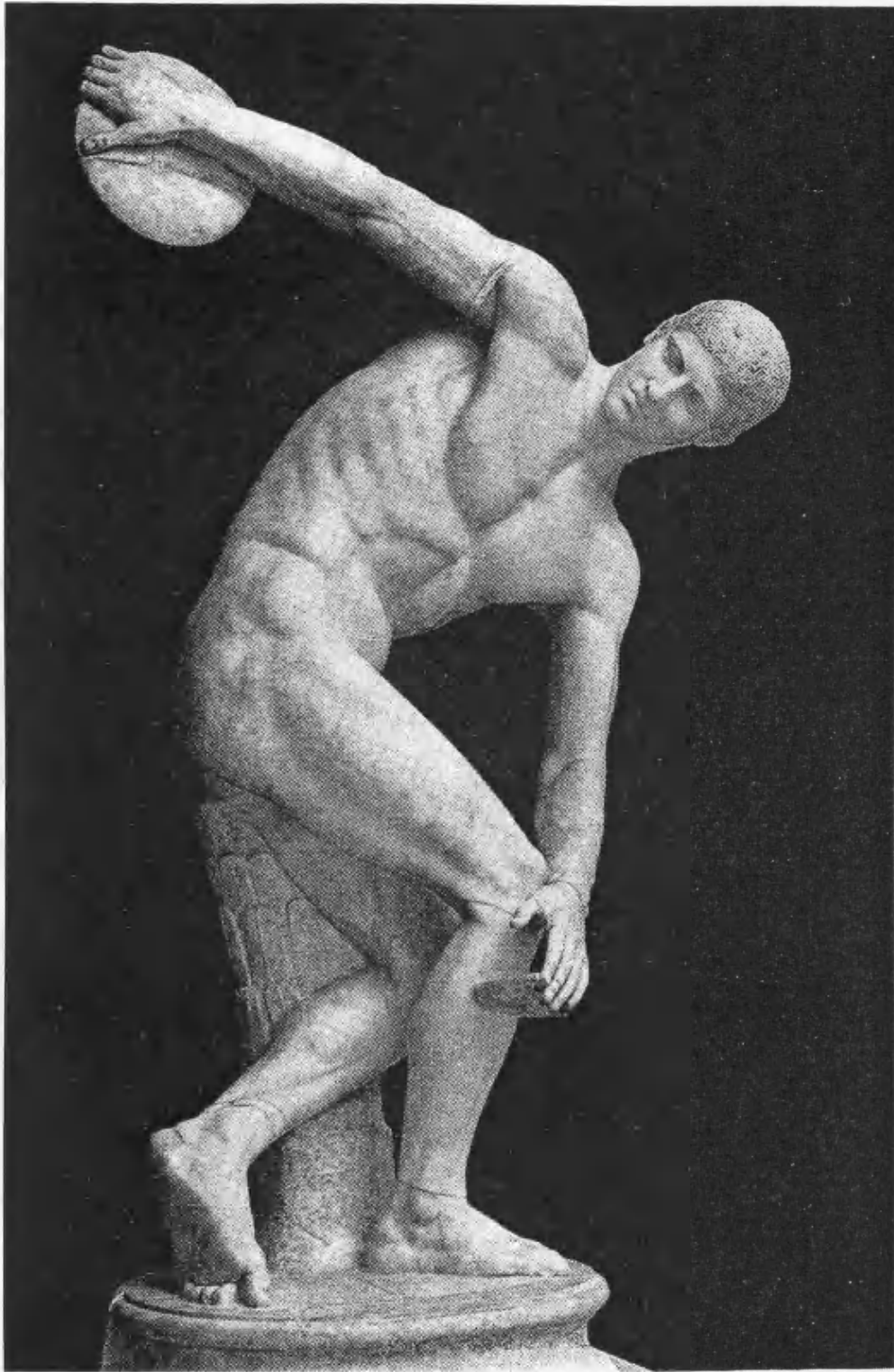


FIG. 28 *Discobolus*, Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, (Museo delle terme).

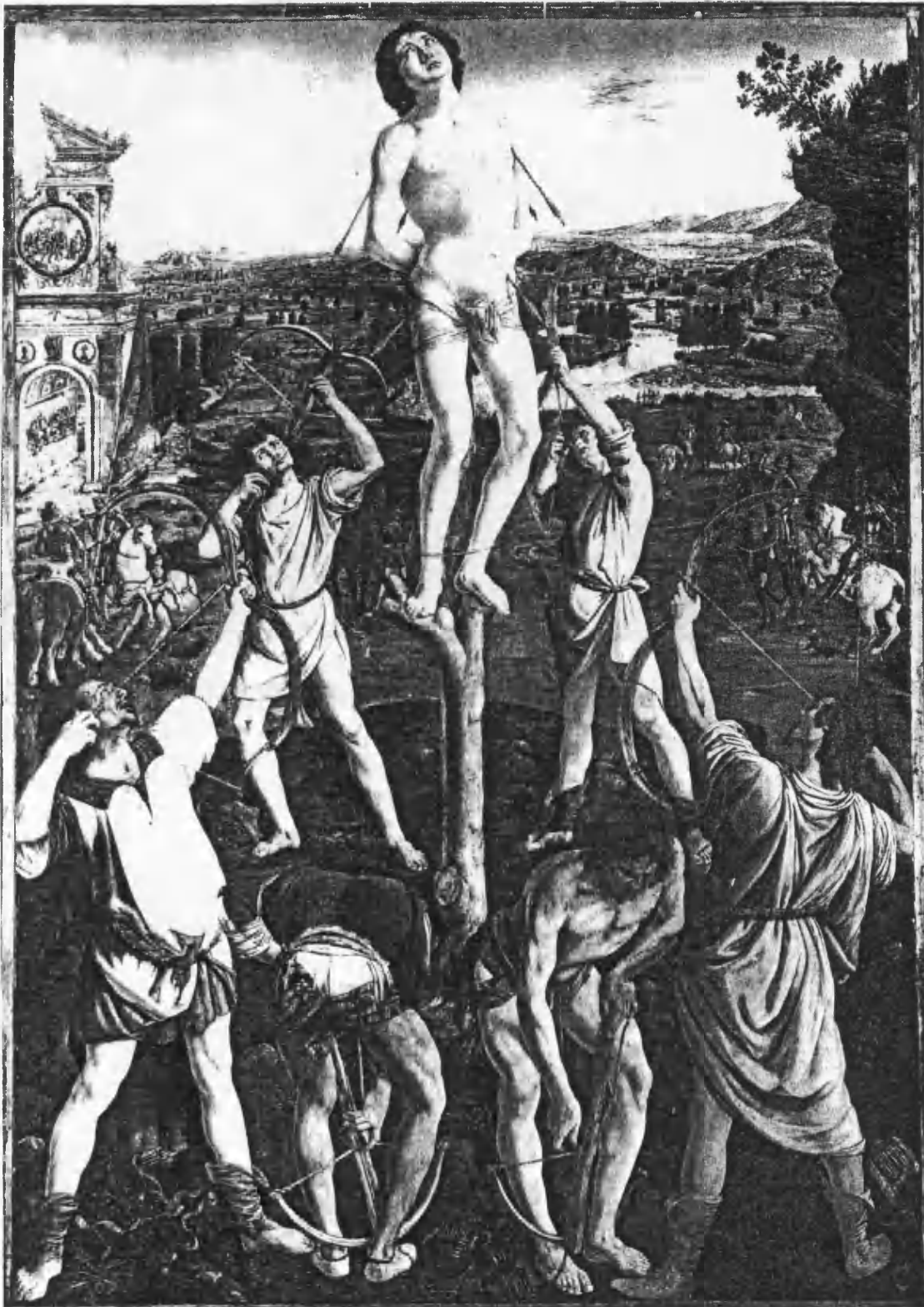


FIG. 29 POLLAIUOLO, *The Martyrdom of St. Sebastian*, c. 1475, London, National Gallery.

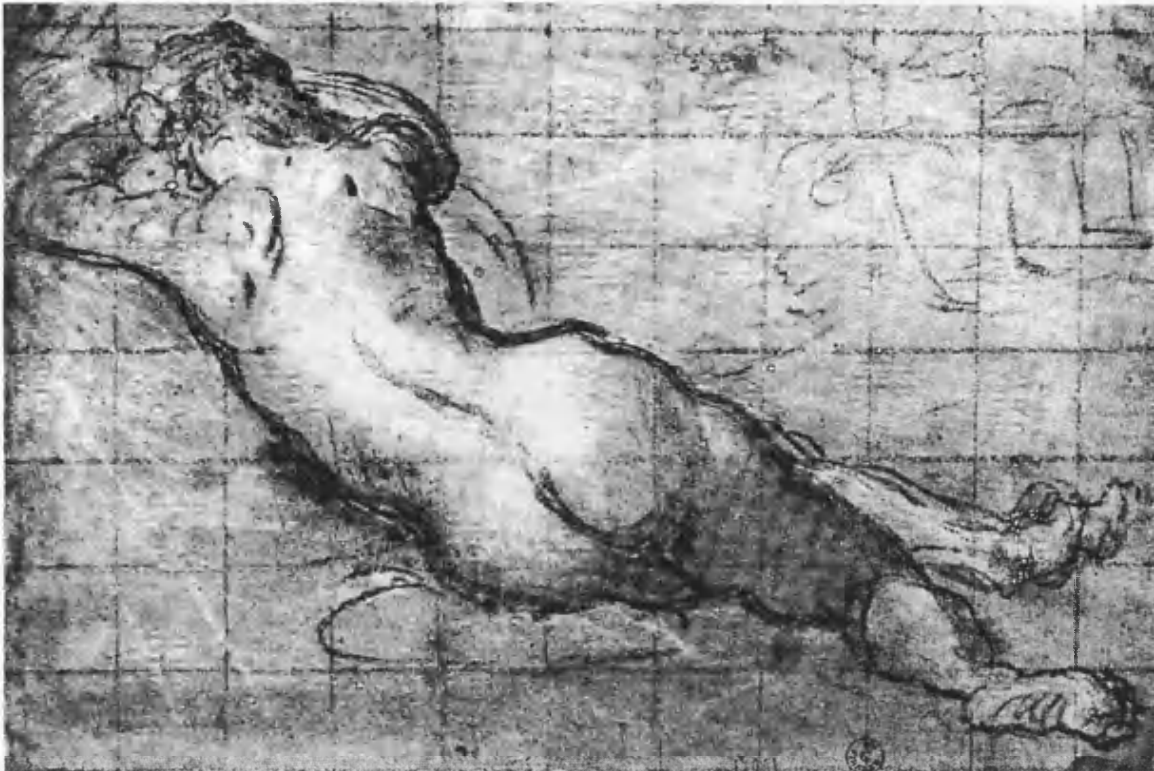


FIG. 30 TINTORETTO, *Nude woman lying down*, c. 1570, Florence, Uffizi.

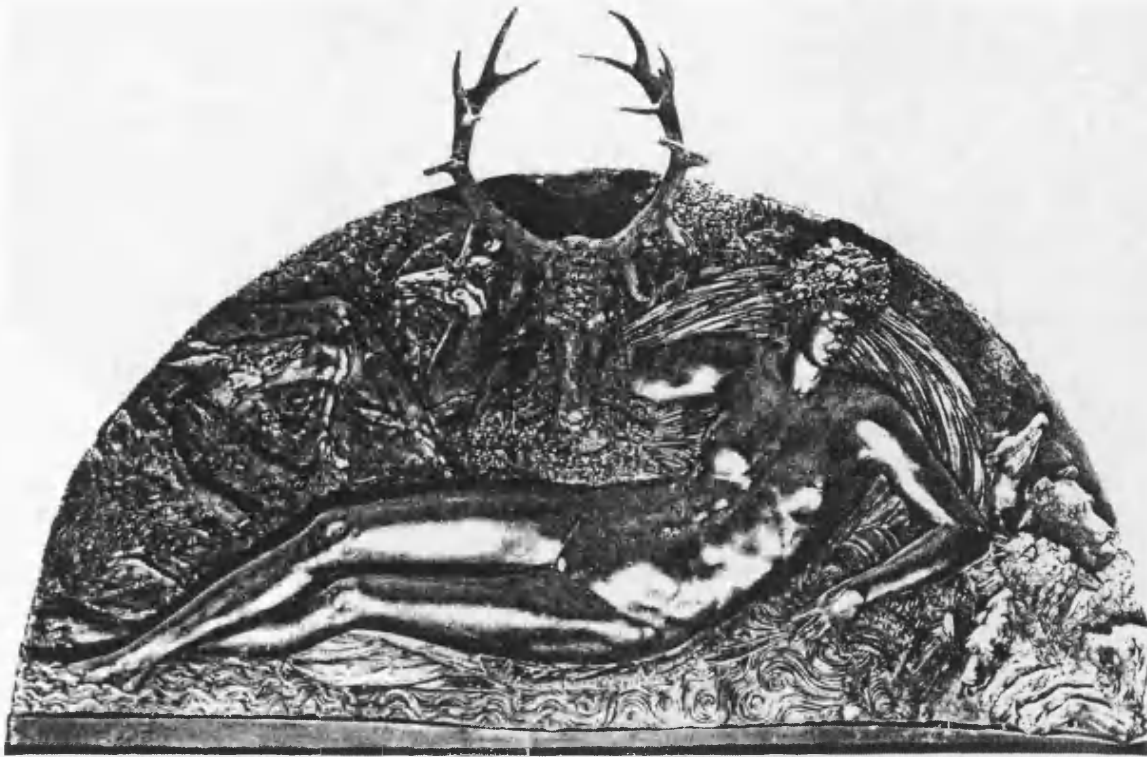


FIG. 31 **BENVENUTO CELLINI**, *The Nymph of Fontainebleau*, 1543-1544, Paris, Louvre.



FIG. 32 **BENVENUTO CELLINI**, *Two Victories*, 1543-1545, Paris, Louvre.

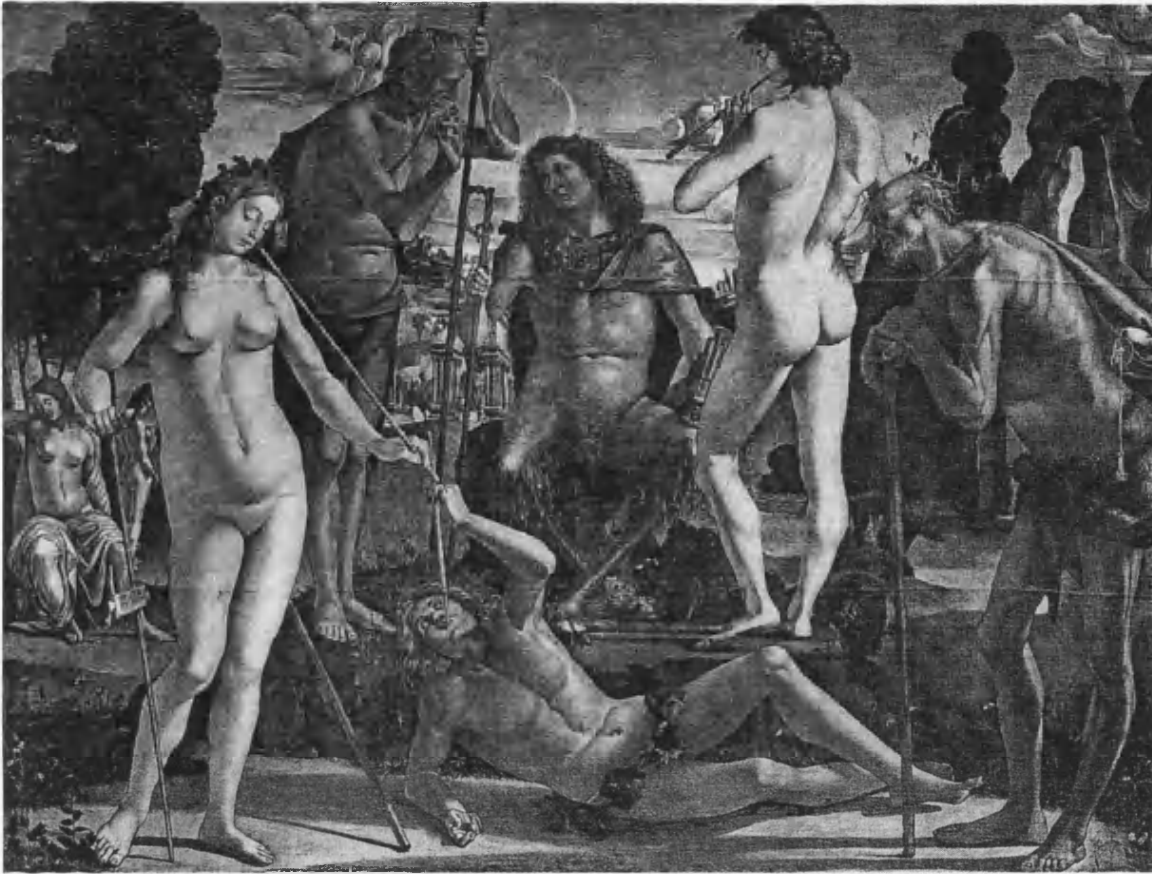


FIG. 33 LUCA SIGNORELLI, *Court of Pan*, destr., 1489-1490.



FIG. 34 LUCA SIGNORELLI, *Medici Tondo*, 1489-1490, Florence, Uffizi.



FIG. 35 MICHELANGELO, *Tondo Doni*, 1506, Florence, Palazzo Pitti, (detail).

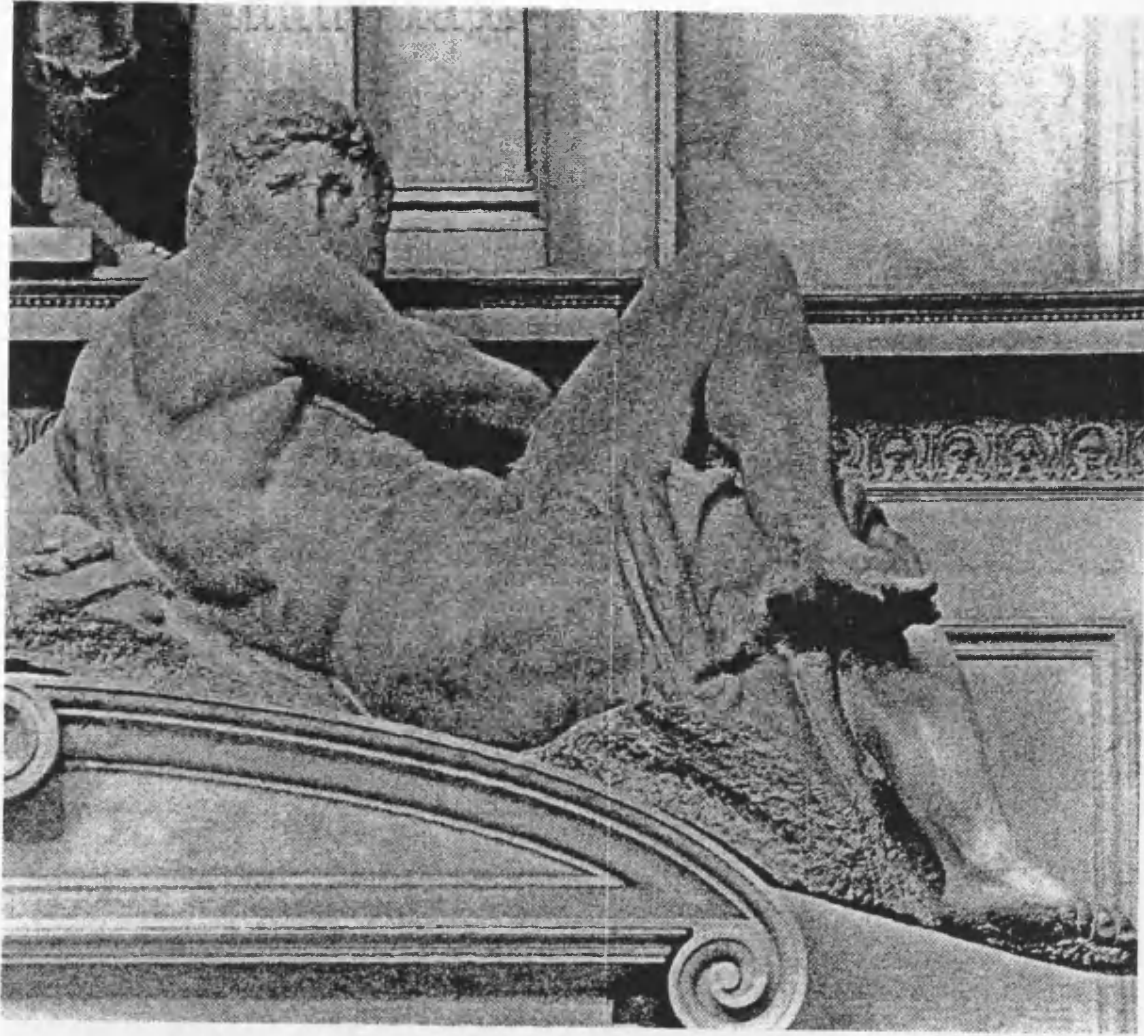


FIG. 36 MICHELANGELO, *Day*, 1524-1534, Florence, San Lorenzo, Sacrestia Nuova.

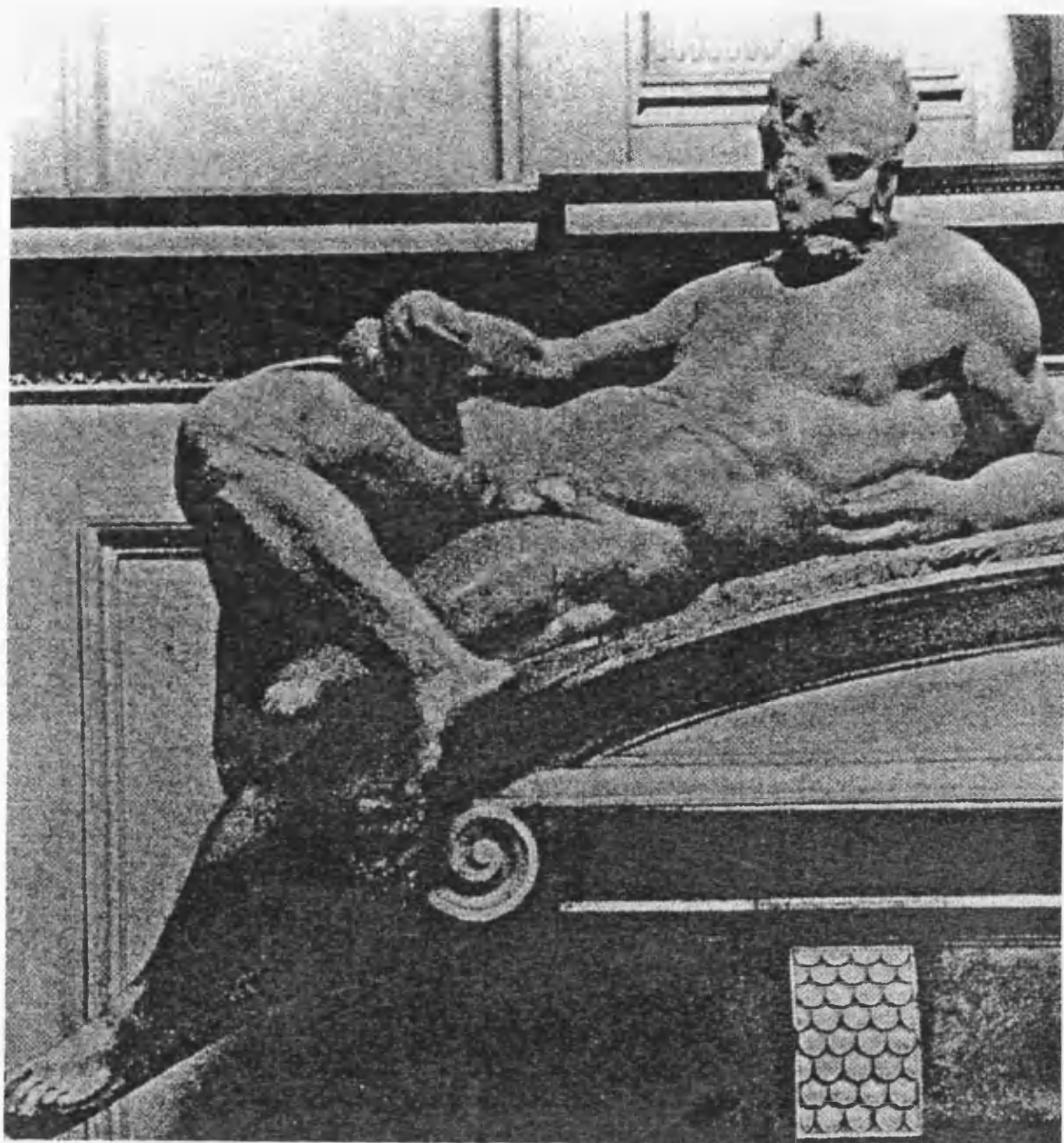


FIG. 37 MICHELANGELO, *Dusk*, 1524-1534, Florence, San Lorenzo, Sacrestia Nuova.



FIG. 38 DONATELLO, *Judith and Holofernes*, 1455-1460, Florence, Piazza della Signoria.



FIG. 39 DONATELLO, *David*, c. 1459, Florence, Bargello.

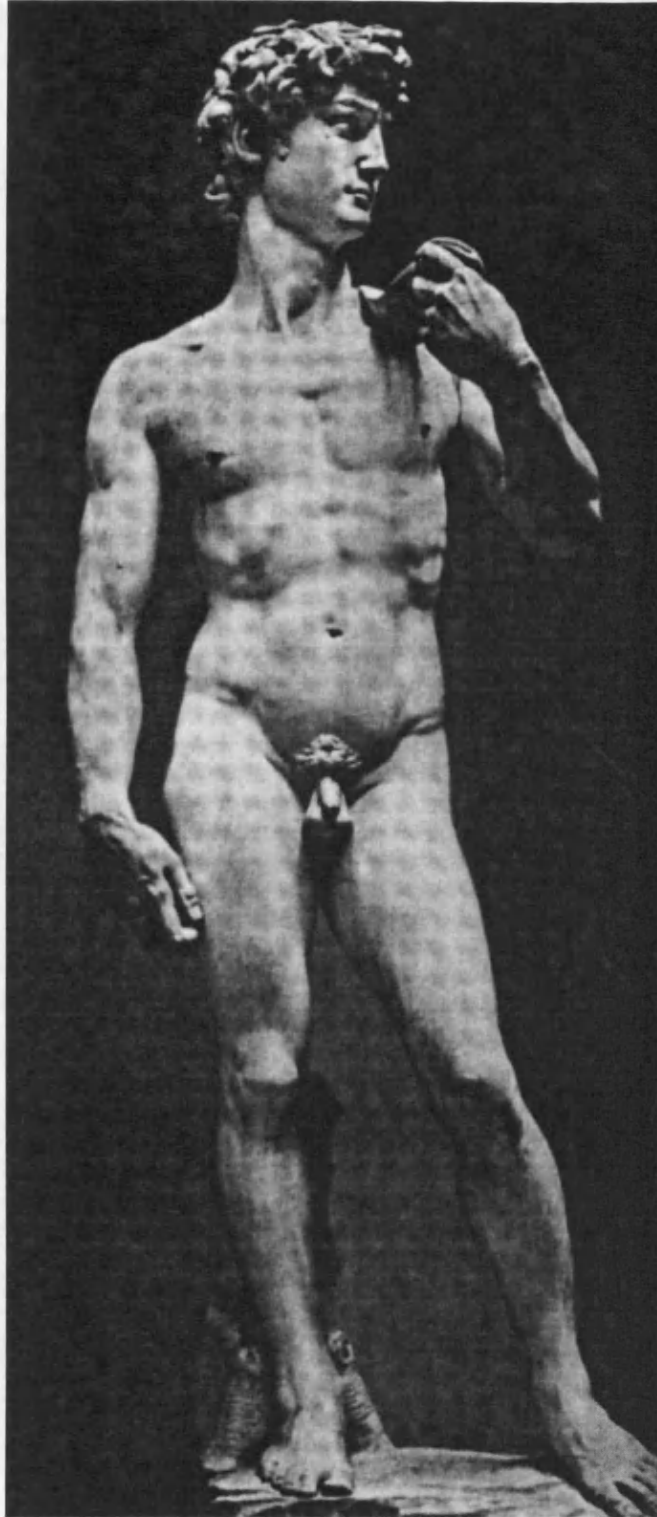


FIG. 40 MICHELANGELO, *David*, 1501-1504 Florence, Academy Gallery.

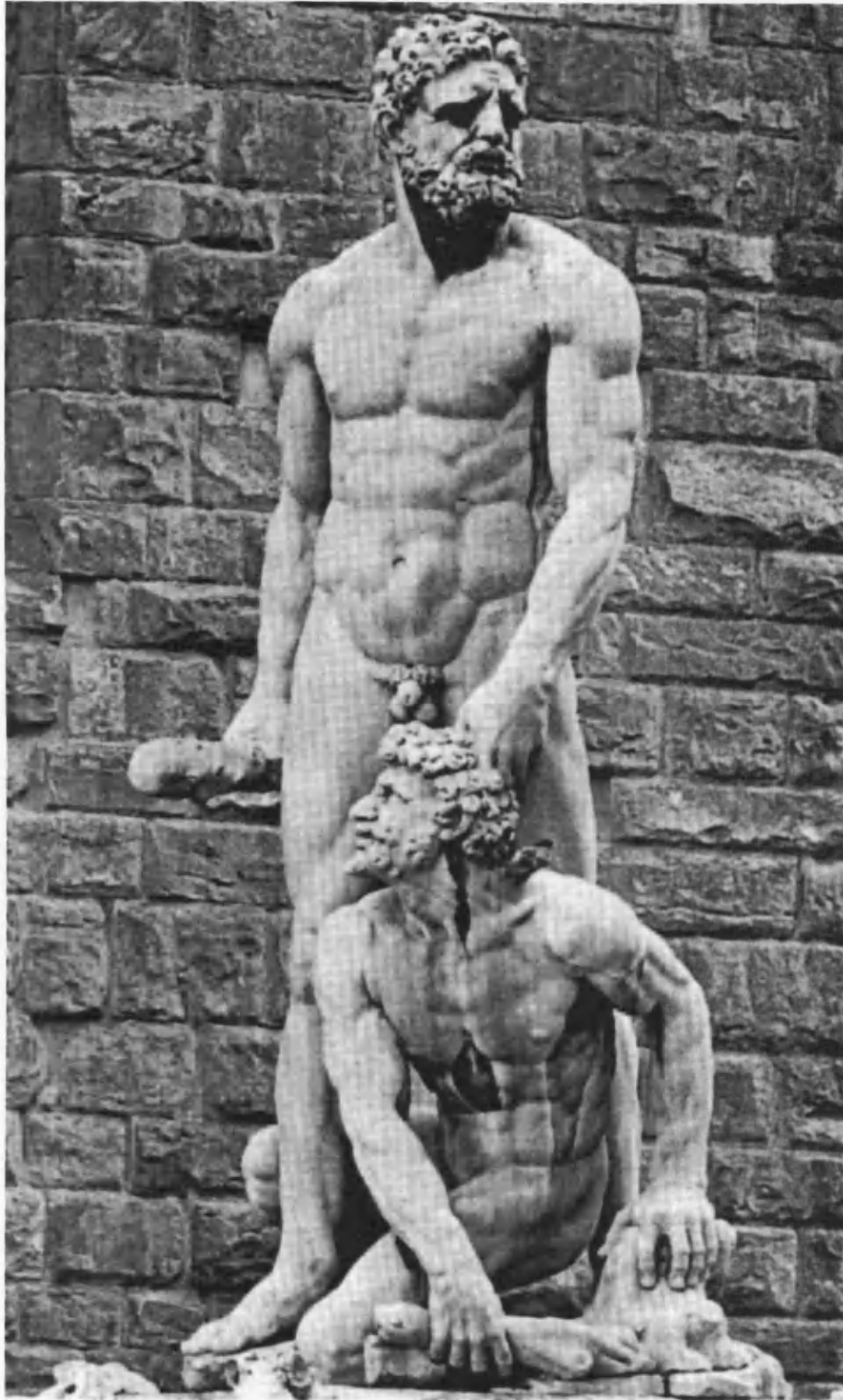


FIG. 41 **BACCIO BANDINELLI, *Hercules and Cacus*, 1530-1534,**
Florence, Piazza della Signoria.

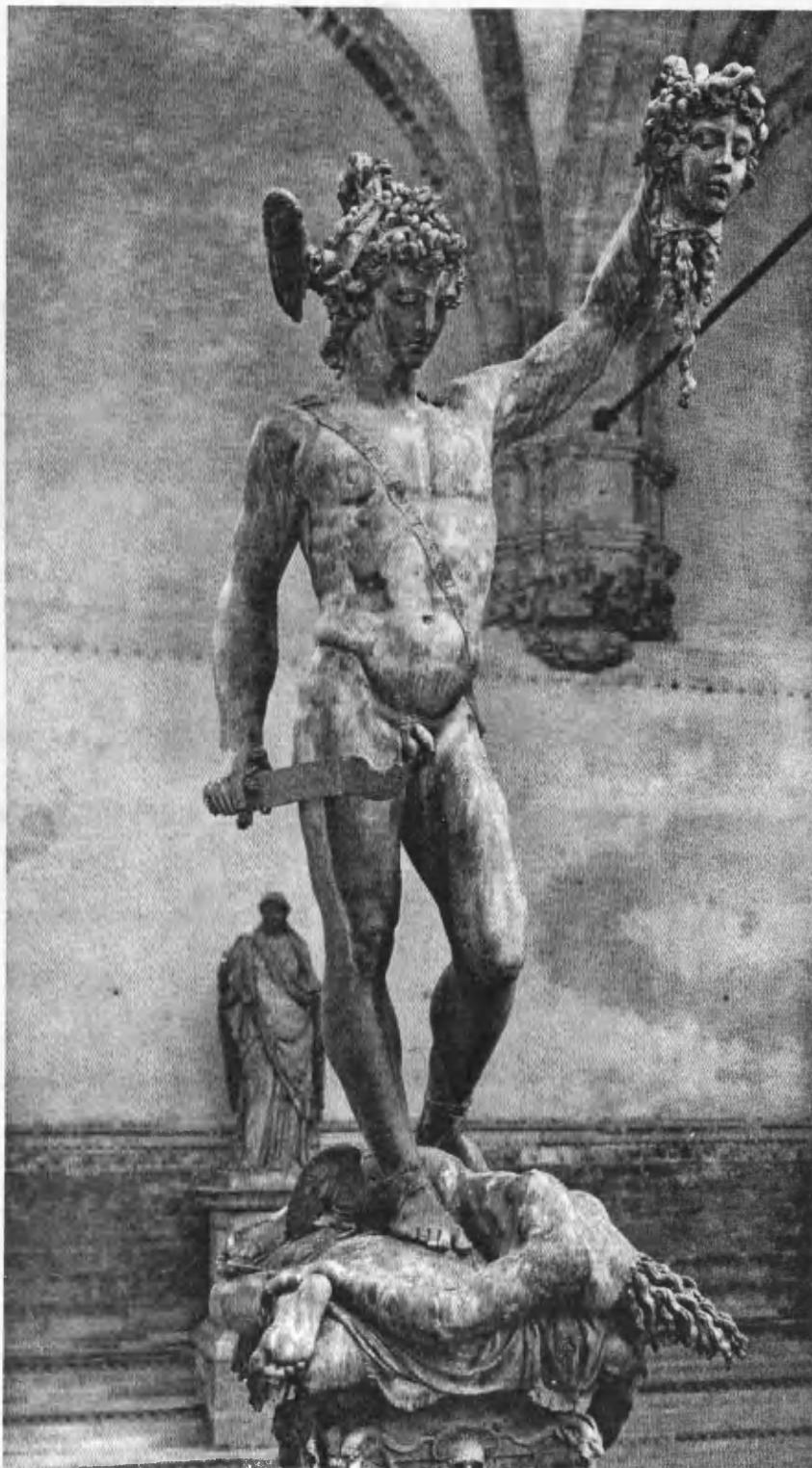


FIG. 42 **BENVENUTO CELLINI, *Perseus***, Florence, 1545-1550, Piazza della Signoria, Loggia dei Lanzi.



FIG. 43 MICHELANGELO, c. 1530, **Archers**, London, Windsor Castle.

FIG. 44 MICHELANGELO Night 1524-1530, 400 cm. 37 cm. London, Sacrestia Nuova.

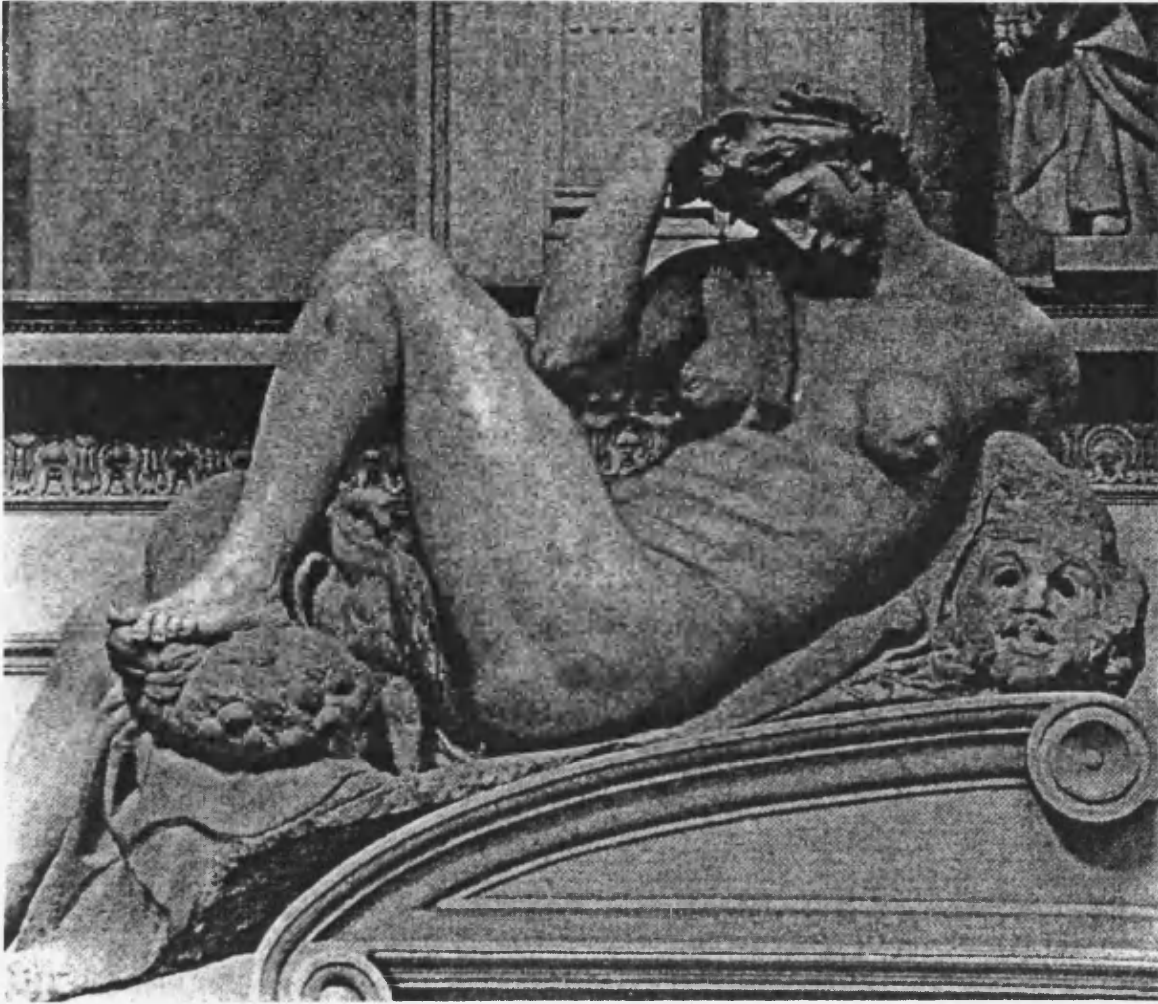


FIG. 44 MICHELANGELO, *Night*, 1524-1534, Florence, San Lorenzo, Sacrestia Nuova.

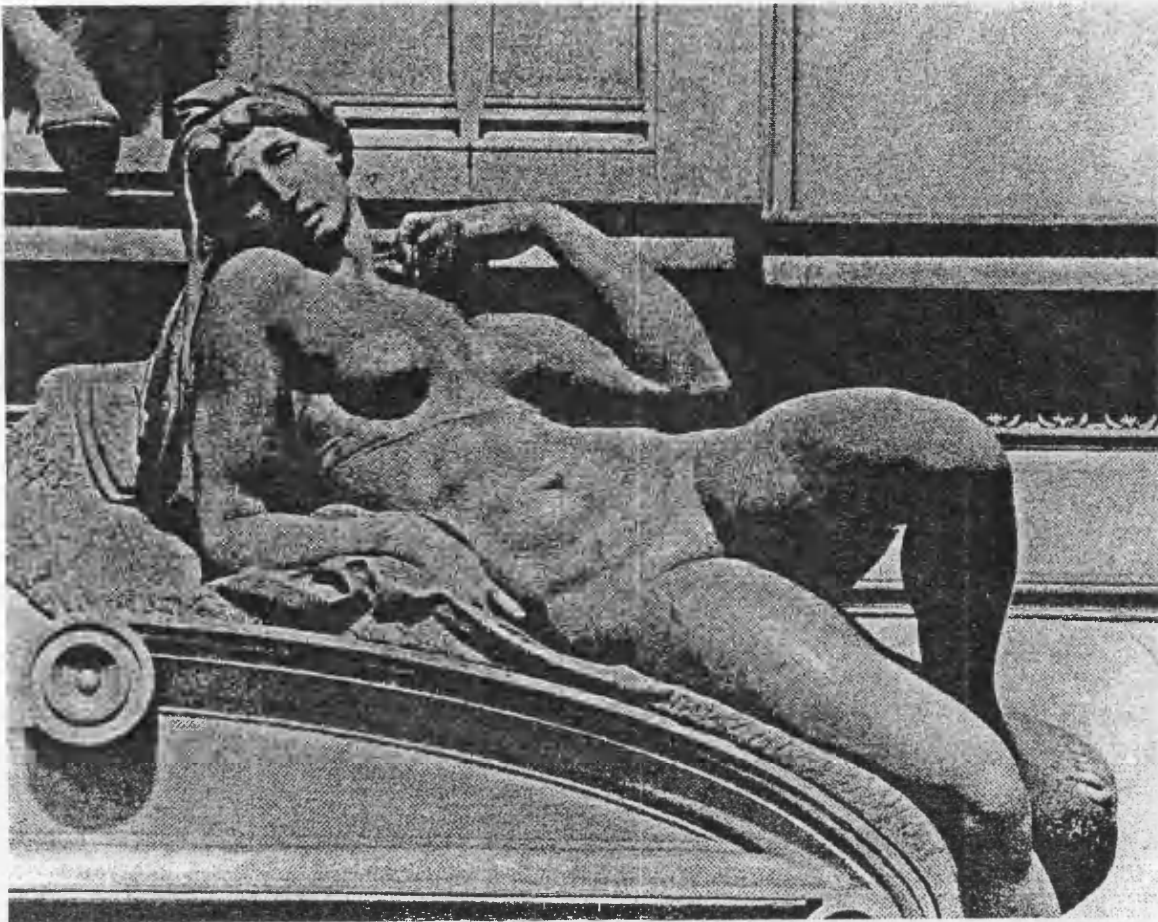


FIG. 45 MICHELANGELO, Dawn, 1524-1534, Florence, San Lorenzo, Sacrestia Nuova.



FIG. 46 ROSSO FIORENTINO, (attr.) copy by MICHELANGELO, *Leda*, c. 1533-1538, London, Royal Academy of Arts.



FIG. 47 MICHELANGELO-PONTORMO, *Venus Reclining with Cupid*, c. 1533, Florence, Academy Gallery.

FIG. 48 GIOVANNI, *Allegory with Venus and Cupid*, c. 1545, London, National Gallery.



FIG. 48 BRONZINO, *Allegory with Venus and Cupid*, c. 1545
London, National Gallery.



FIG. 49 TITIAN, *Flora*, Florence, Uffizi, 1515.

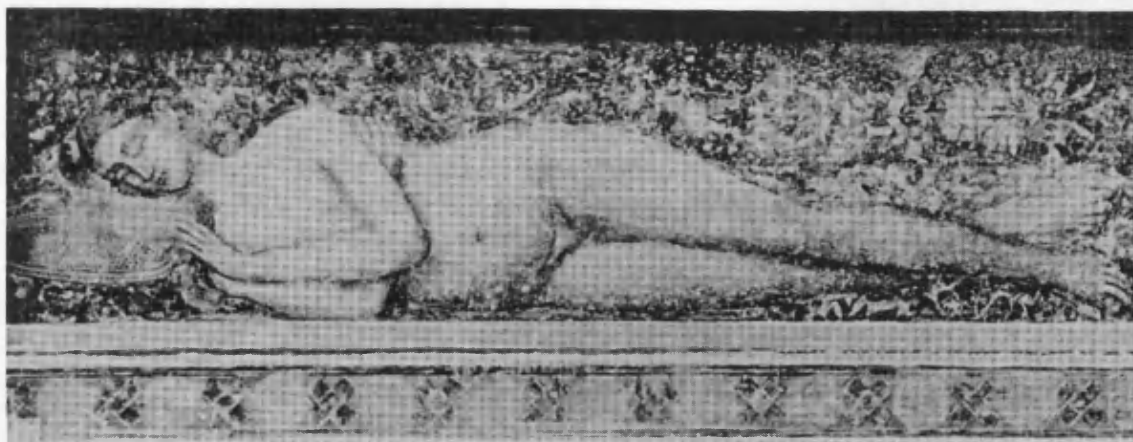


FIG. 50 Anonymus, *A Nude Inside a 'cassone' Lid*, c. 1400,
London, Private Collection.

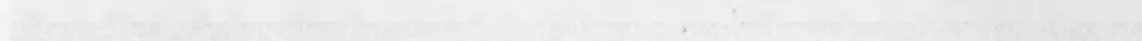


FIG. 51 MAN, *Dante Farnese*, 1545-1546. Naples, Museo di
Capodimonte.



FIG. 51 TITIAN, *Danae Farnese*, 1545-1546, Naples, Museo di Capodimonte.

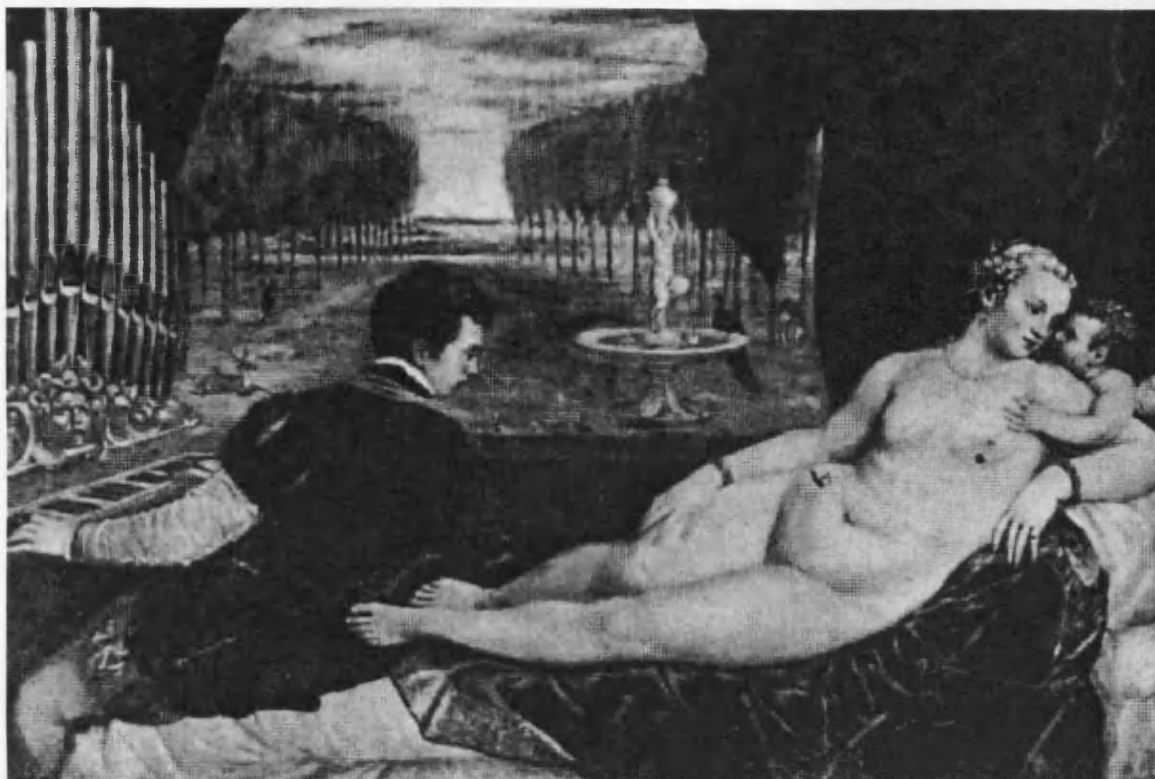


FIG. 52 TITIAN, *Venus, Cupid and the Organ Player*, c. 1550
Madrid, Prado.

FIG. 53 TITIAN, *Venus and Adonis*, 1551-1554, Madrid, Prado.

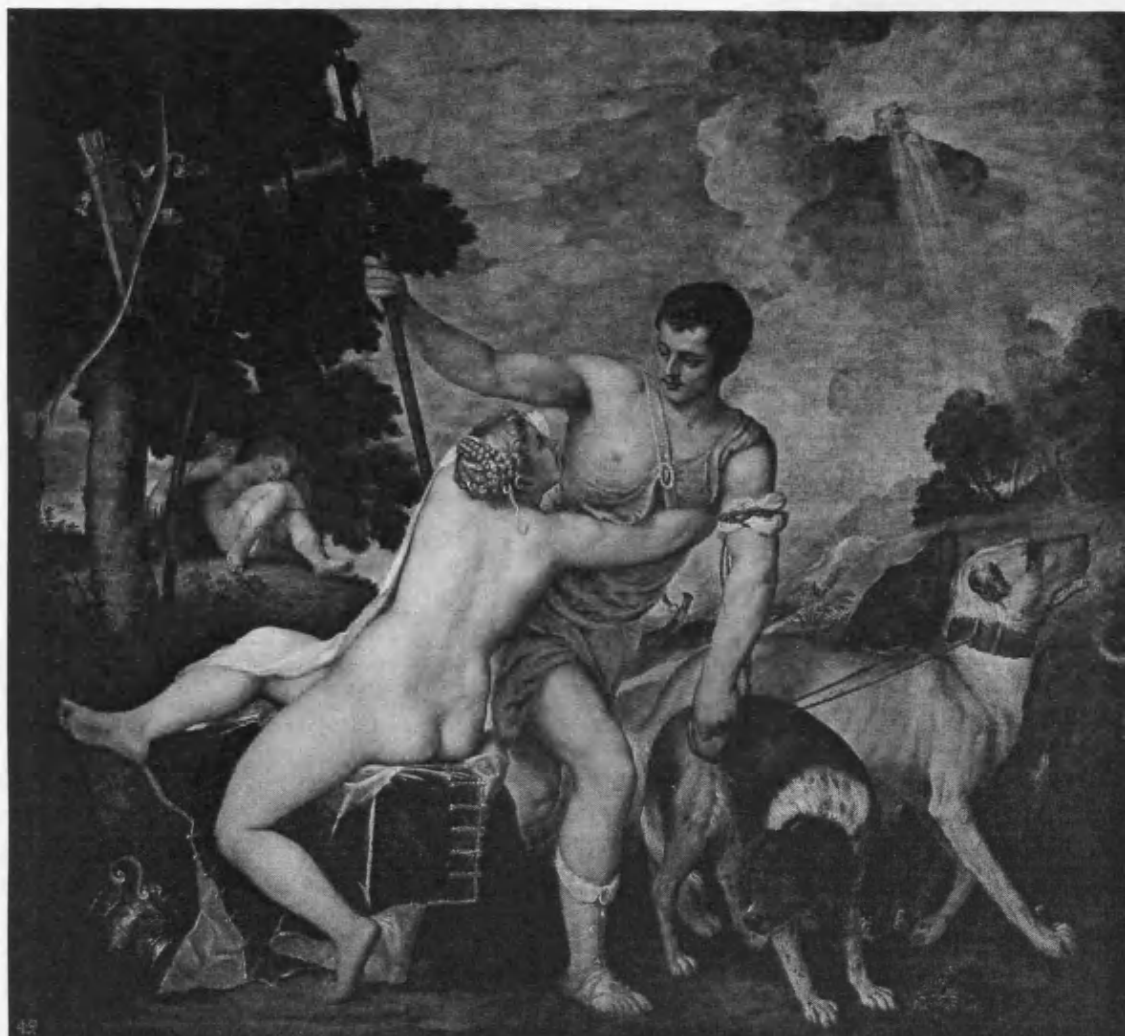


FIG. 53 TITIAN, *Venus and Adonis*, 1551-1554, Madrid, Prado.



FIG. 54 TITIAN, *Danae*, 1554, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.

FIG. 55 PONTORMO, *Study for Last Judgment*, c. 1550, Florence, Uffizi.



FIG. 55 PONTORMO, *Study for Last Judgement*, c. 1550, Florence, Uffizi.



FIG. 56 LUCA SIGNORELLI, *Last Judgement-The Resurrection of the Dead*, 1499-1504, Orvieto, Dome, Cappella San Brizio.



FIG. 57 MASACCIO, *Baptism of the Neophytes*, 1423-1425, Florence, Chiesa del Carmine, Brancacci Chapel.



FIG. 58 MICHELANGELO, *Pietà*, 1497-1500, Rome, Vatican, Basilica di San Pietro.



FIG. 59 RAPHAEL, *Fire in the Borgo*, c. 1514, Rome, Vatican Palace, Stanza dell'incendio di Borgo.

FIG. 40 ANTONIO DA S. LEO, *Sacrifice of Isaac Stopped by the Angel*, 1625, Palazzo Pitti, Florence.



FIG. 60 ANDREA DEL SARTO, *Sacrifice of Isaac Stopped by the Angel*, 1529, Madrid, Prado.



FIG. 61 PERIN DEL VAGA, *The Good Thief and the Bad Thief*, 1521-1522, (fragments of *The Deposition* for S. Maria sopra Minerva), London, Hampton Court.

FIG. 62 PERIN DEL VAGA, *Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand*, c. 1522, Vienna, Albertina.



FIG. 62 PERIN DEL VAGA, *Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand*, c. 1522, Vienna, Albertina.

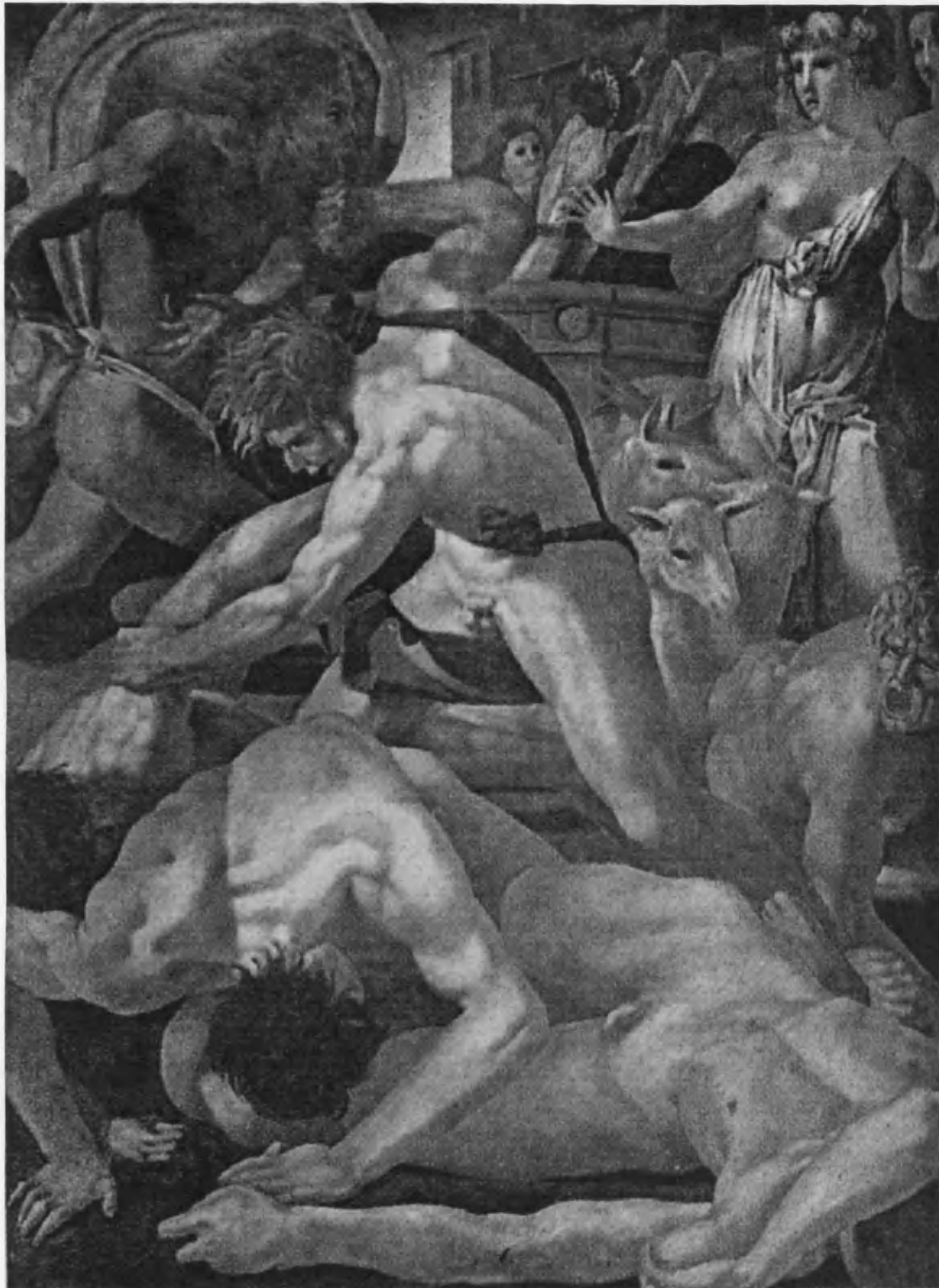


FIG. 63 ROSSO FIORENTINO, *Moses defending the Daughters of Jethro*, 1523, Florence, Uffizi.



FIG. 64 DOMENICO BECCAFUMI, *Fall of the Rebel Angels*, 1524,
Siena, Pinacoteca.

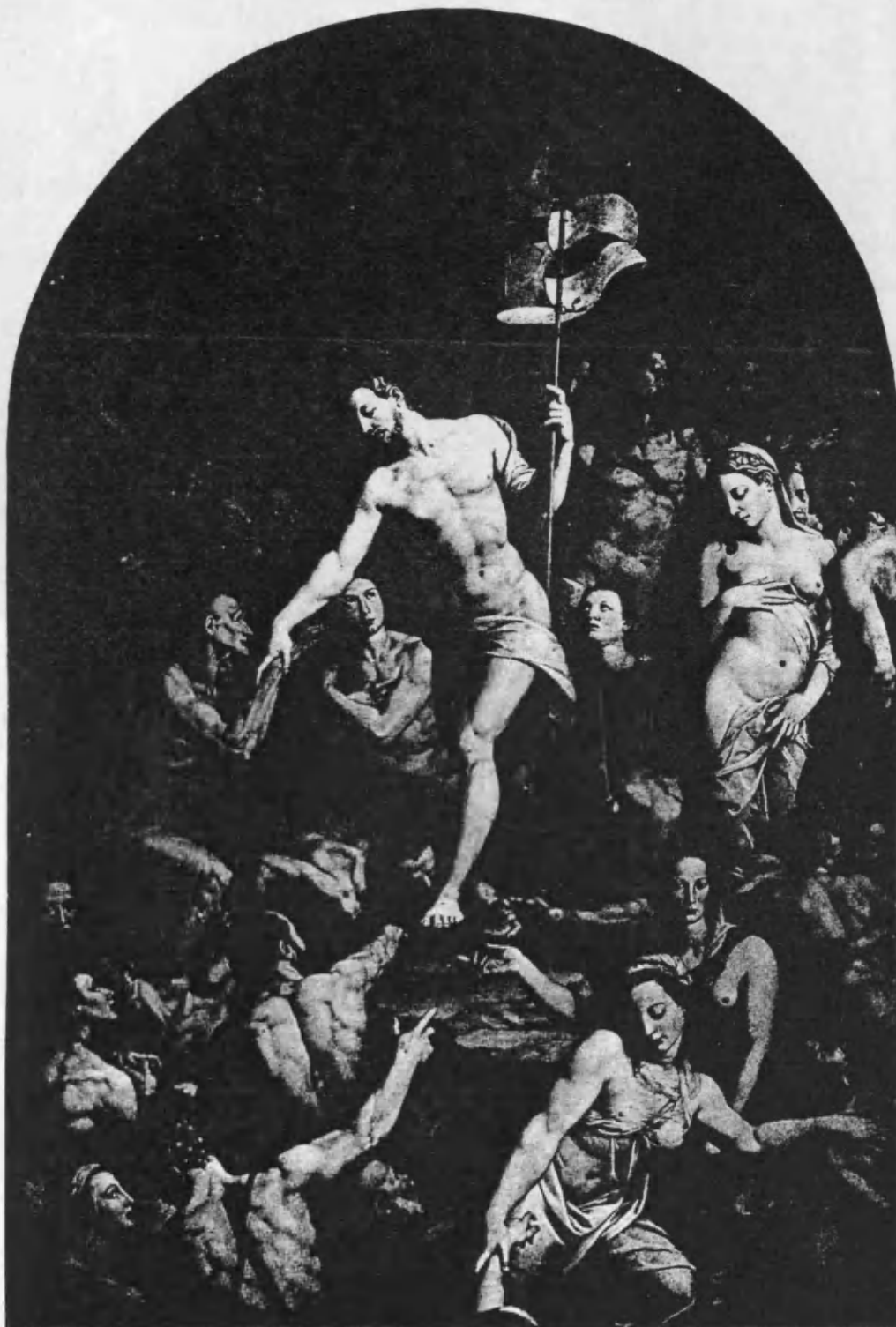


FIG. 65 BRONZINO, *Christ descending to the Limb*, 1552, Florence, Santa Croce.



FIG. 66 MICHELANGELO, *Ignudi*, 1508-1512 The Sistine Ceiling, Rome, Vatican Palace, (det.).

FIG. 67 GIULIO CLODO, *The Circumcision III, The Farnese Hours*, 1546-1548.



FIG. 67 GIULIO CLOVIO, *The Circumcision*, ill. *The Farnese Hours*, 1546.



FIG. 68 GIULIO CLOVIO, *The Baptism of Christ*, ill. *The Farnese Hours*, 1546.

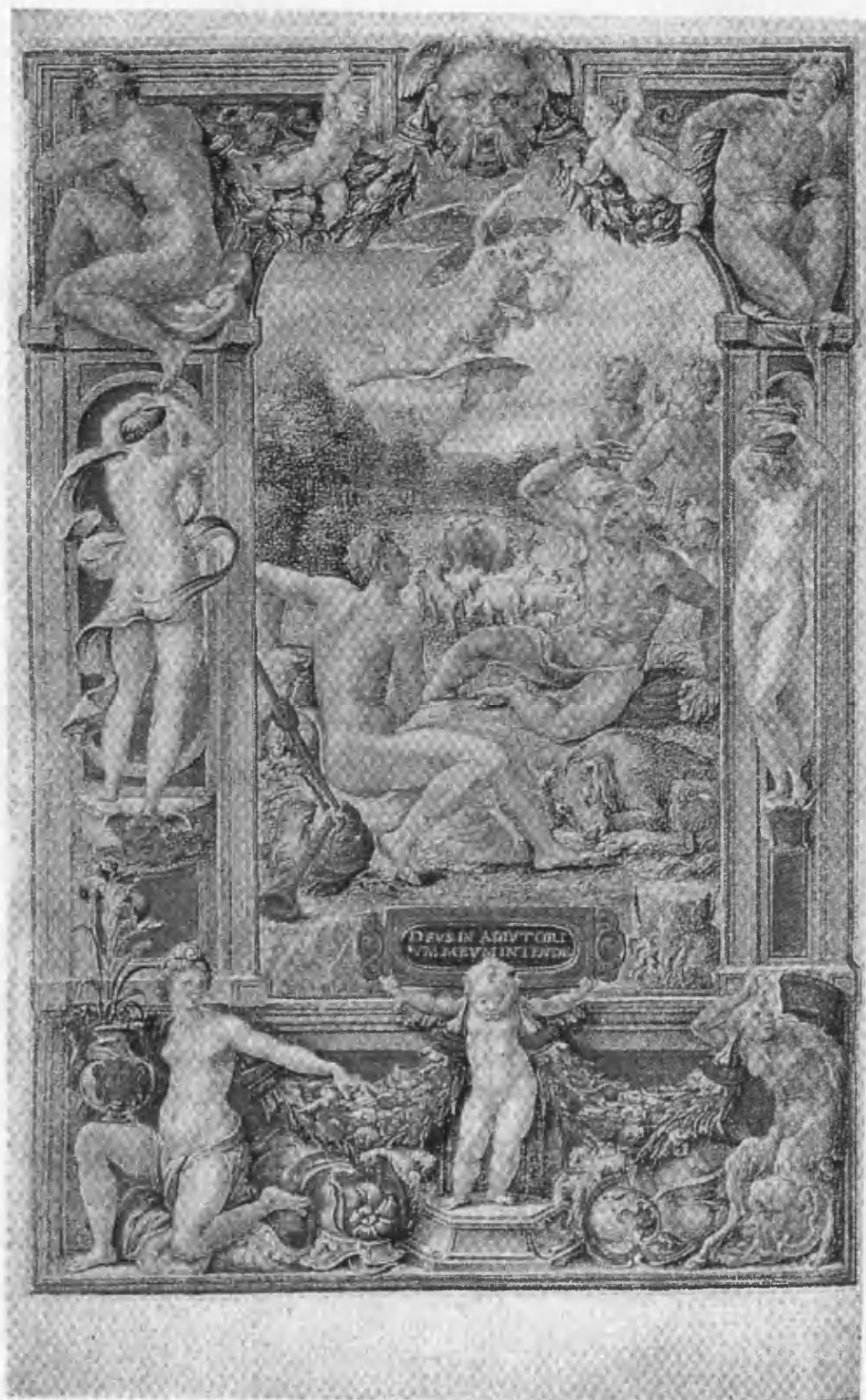


FIG. 69 GIULIO CLOVIO, *The Annunciation to the Shepherds*, ill. *The Farnese Hours*, 1546.



FIG. 70 GIULIO CLOVIO, *The Prophecy of the Birth of Christ to the Emperor Augustus*, ill. *The Farnese Hours*, 1546.



FIG. 71 RAPHAEL, *Galatea*, c. 1513, Rome, Villa Farnesina.



FIG. 72 TITIAN, *Madonna with Child and Saints*, c. 1560, Rome, Vatican Pinacoteca.



FIG. 73 **BENVENUTO CELLINI, *Saltcellar*, 1540-1543, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.**

FIG. 74 **GIAMBATISTA PONTICELLI, *Robust Woman*, 1574-1580, Florence, Piazza della Signoria, Loggia dei Lanzi.**



FIG. 74 GIAMBOLOGNA, *The Rape of the Sabine Woman*, 1574-1580, Florence, Piazza della Signoria, Loggia dei Lanzi.



FIG. 75 BRONZINO, *Martyrdom of St. Lawrence*, 1565-1569, Florence, San Lorenzo.

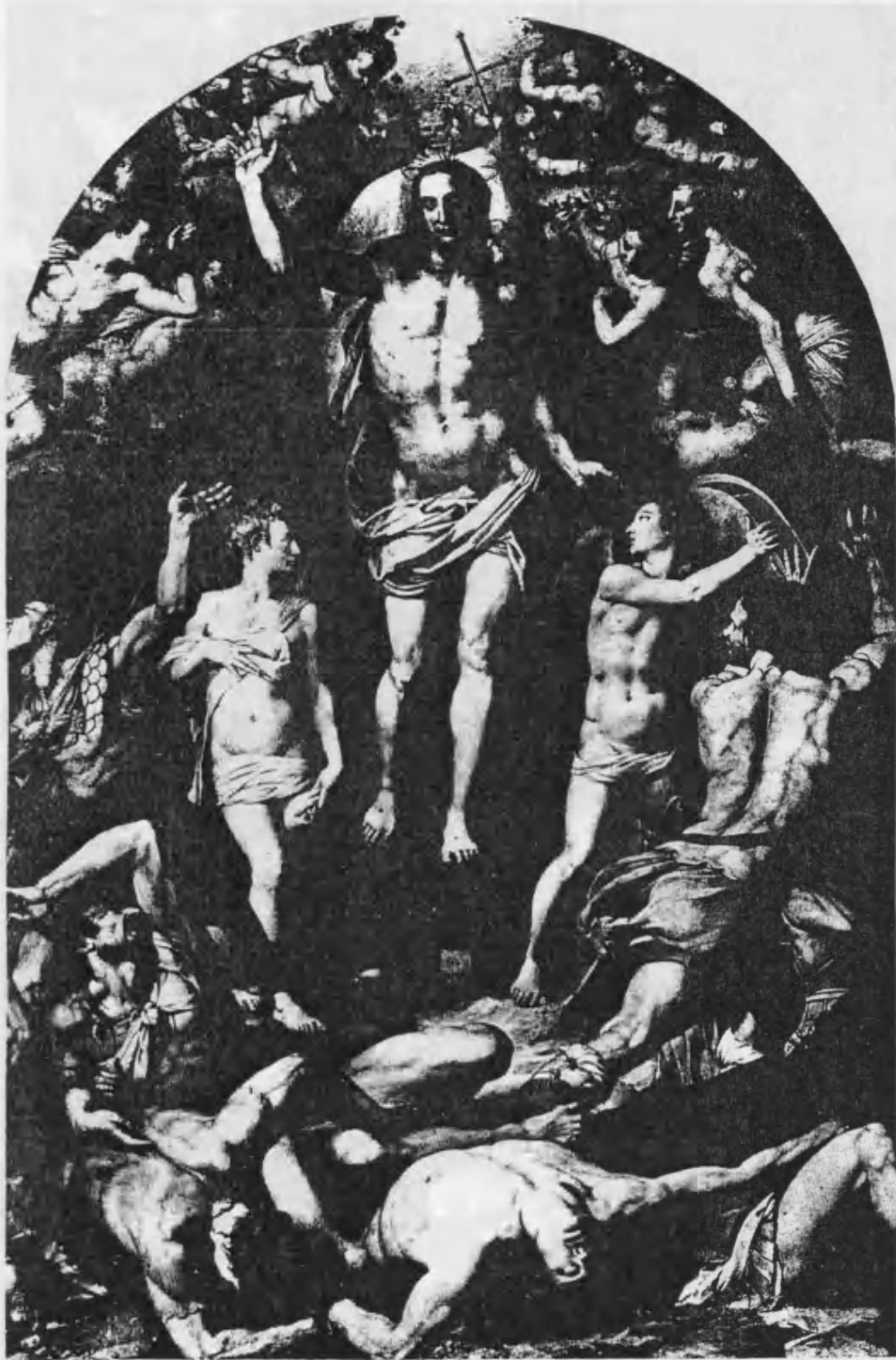


FIG. 76 BRONZINO, *Resurrection of Christ*, 1565-1569, Florence, Santissima Annunziata.



FIG. 77 ALESSANDRO ALLORI, *Christ and the Samaritan Woman*, Florence, 1575, Santa Maria Novella, Bracci Chapel.

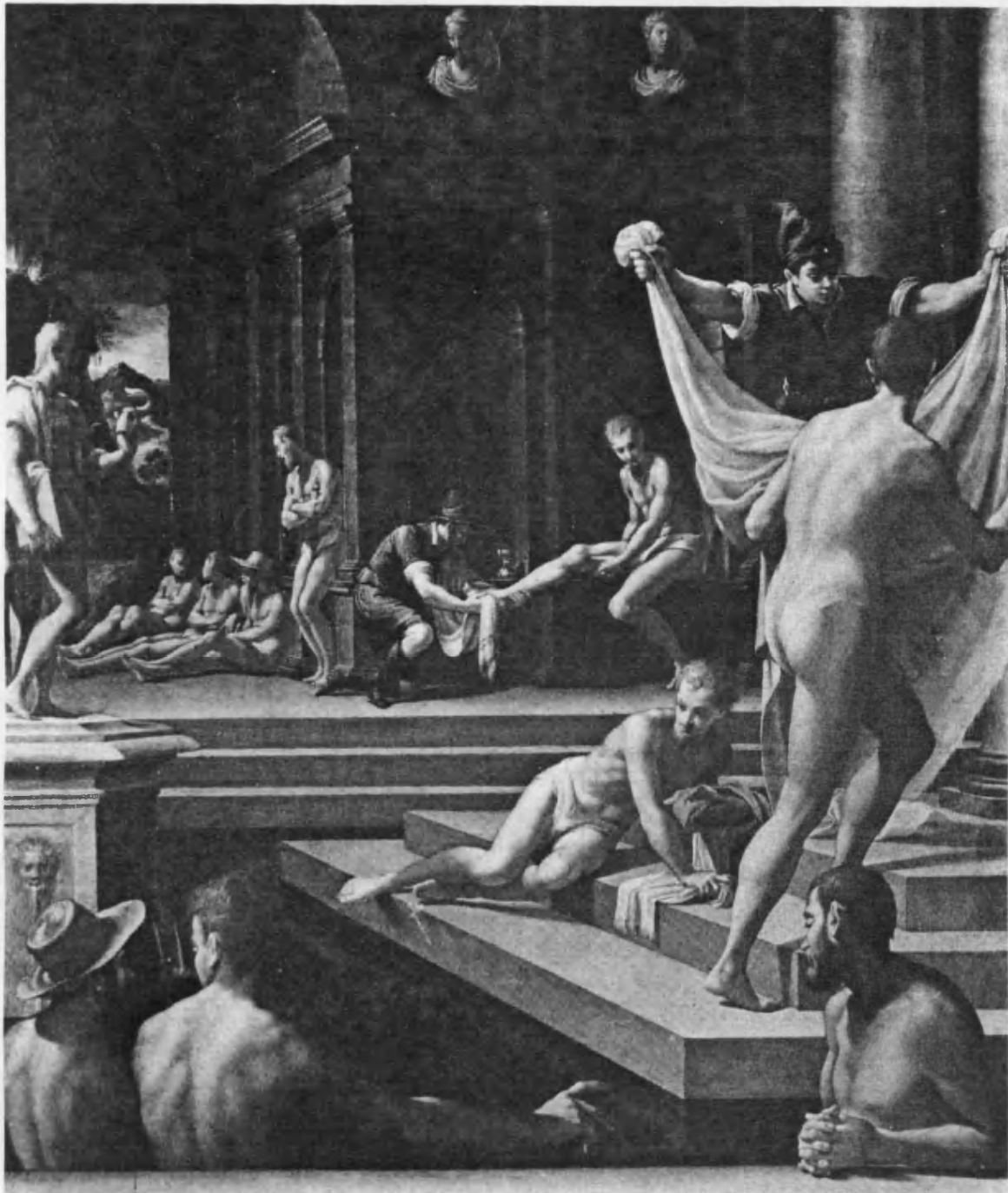


FIG. 78 **GIROLAMO MACCHIETTI, *Bath of Pozzuoli*, 1570-1572,** Florence, Palazzo Vecchio, Studiolo.

FIG. 78 GIROLAMO MACCHIETTI, *Bath of Pozzuoli*, 1570-1572, Florence, Palazzo Vecchio, Studiolo.



FIG. 79 SANTI DI TITO, *Phaethon's Sisters*, 1570-1572, Florence, Palazzo Vecchio, Studiolo.

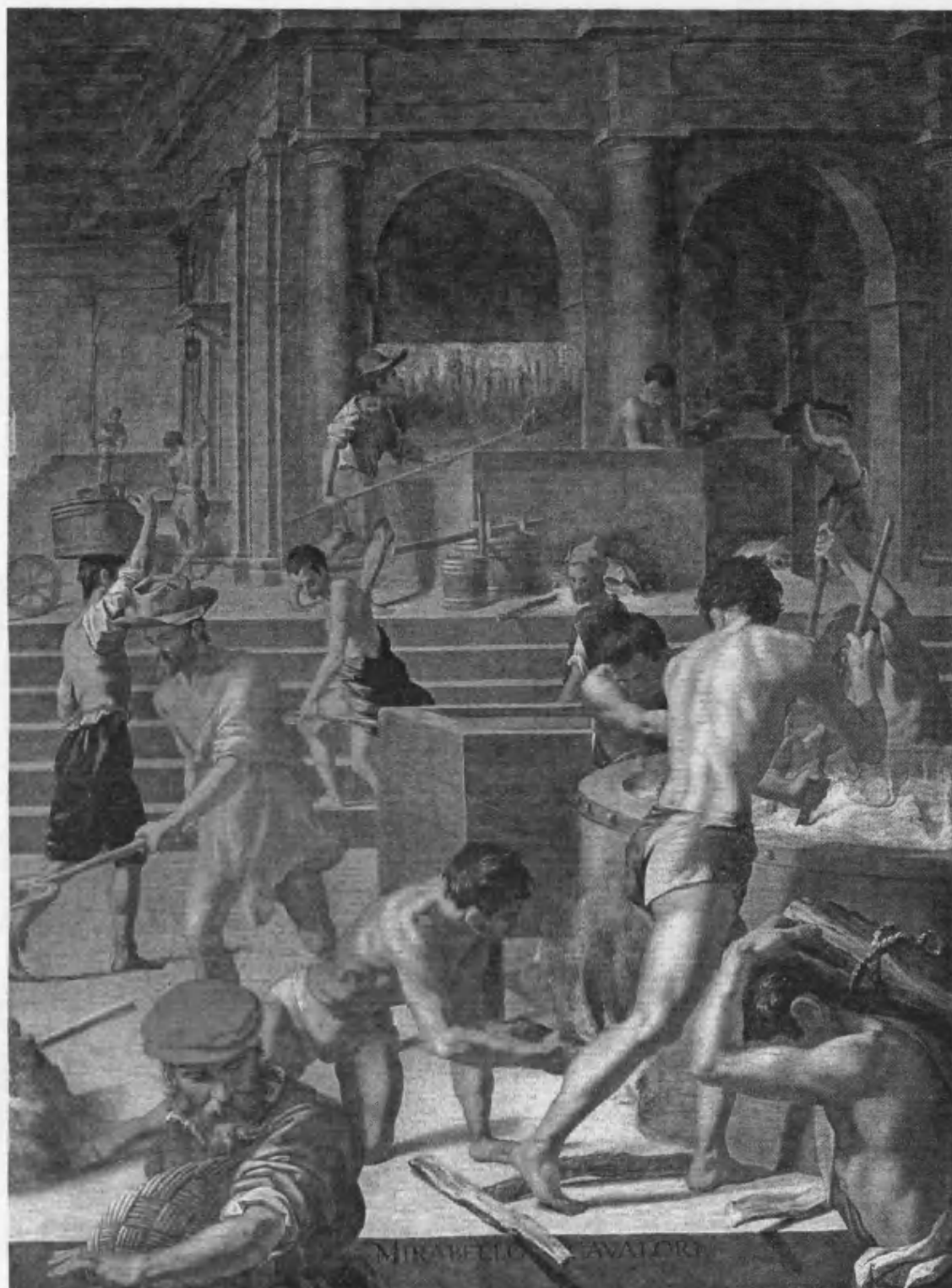


FIG. 80 CAVALORI, *The Wool Dyer's*, 1570-1572, Florence, Palazzo Vecchio, Studiolo.



FIG 81 MICHELANGELO, *Last Judgement*, 1536-1541, Sistine Chapel, Rome, Vatican Palace.



FIG. 82 MARCANTONIO RAIMONDI, *Pan and Syrinx*, engraving after RAFFAELLO SANZIO, c. 1516, B. 14-245-325.



FIG. 83 MARCANTONIO RAIMONDI, *Pan and Syrinx*, engraving after RAFFAELLO SANZIO, c. 1516, (censored), B. 14-245-325.



FIG. 84 ENEA VICO, *Mars, Venus and Vulcan*, engraving after PARMIGIANINO, 1543, B. 15-294-27.

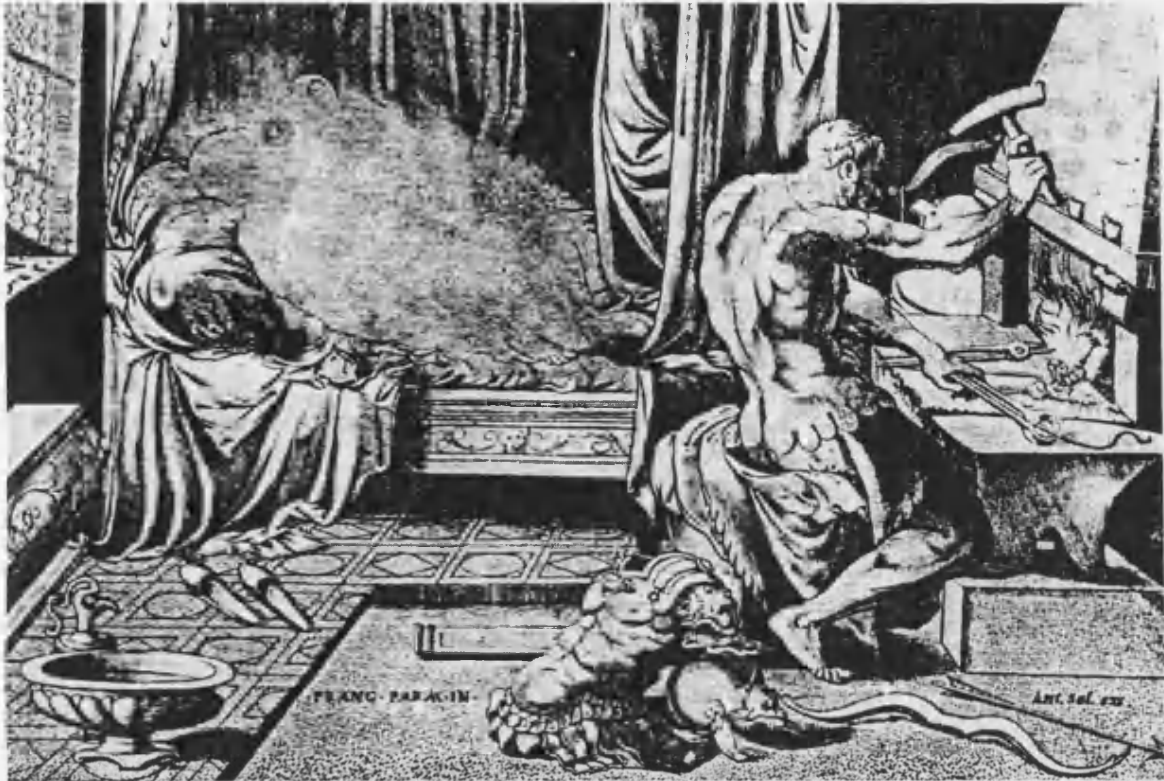


FIG. 85 ENEA VICO, *Mars, Venus and Vulcan*, engraving after PARMIGIANINO, 1543, (censored), B. 15-294-27.



FIG. 86 **ENEA VICO, *Mars, Venus and Vulcan*, engraving after PARMIGIANINO, 1543, B. 15-294-27.**

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