MARIETTA ROBUSTI, *LA TINTORETTA*:

A CRITICAL DISCUSSION OF A VENETIAN *PITTRICE*

By

ALICIA JEANE SAVAGE

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The University of Tulsa
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Thesis Approved:

Major Professor, Dr. Babette Bohn, Professor of Art History

Dr. Jessica Fripp, Assistant Professor of Art History

Dr. Nancy Edwards, Curator of European Art, Kimbell Art Museum

Dr. Joseph Butler, Associate Dean, College of Fine Arts

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CHAPTER I

MARIETTA ROBUSTI, THE FAMILY WORKSHOP, AND THE CONDITIONS FOR WOMEN ARTISTS

Marietta Robusti, known also as Marietta Tintoretta (c. 1554 – c. 1590), is remembered today primarily as a beloved pupil of her famous Venetian father, Jacopo Tintoretto (c. 1518 - 1594). Working in the family *bottega* until her premature death, Robusti was one of the earliest examples of a new but growing tradition of female painters being trained by their fathers in Cinquecento Italy. Like many women artists of the early modern era, Robusti has no secure extant works and is often remembered for qualities other than her artistic contributions. Part of this problem is due to the limited attention given to Robusti's artistic oeuvre by her early biographers, who leave many unanswered questions surrounding her life and contributions to the Tintoretto workshop. While in many ways Robusti is an anomaly, she is also described with the same gender-specific and recurring attributes of other women artists. The disconnect between Robusti's artistic fame and her lack of documented or surviving works today challenges scholars to assess what factors made Robusti remarkable. Further, the number of attributions that modern scholars have transferred from Tintoretto's oeuvre into his daughter's suggests that the increasing interest in Robusti studies may eventually lead to a more confident basis for her oeuvre. I aim to achieve a comprehensive and critical assessment of Robusti's life and artistic contribution, as well as her place in sixteenth-century Venice as a female artist within a thriving family workshop; this has yet to be done from an art historical perspective. I do not claim to confirm any secure attributions to Robusti in this thesis. Instead, I provide a critical analysis of

her role in a Venetian workshop, her early historiography with an emphasis on considerations of gender, her presence in collection history, and her modern attributions.

In order to give Marietta Robusti the same respect given to her male contemporaries, I will refer to her by her last name, "Robusti." Her father Jacopo Robusti will be referred to as "Tintoretto," and Robusti's other family members will be identified by their first names in order to avoid confusion. I will refer to Robusti and Tintoretto by their first names only when listing them among other family members or when citing a direct quote.

As Robusti's early biographies demonstrate, Marietta Robusti's life and circumstances cannot be considered without discussing her famous father and his impact on her life as an artist. Jacomo Comin,[1] alias Jacopo Robusti, called Tintoretto, was the only major sixteenth-century Venetian painter who was both born and died in Venice.[2] He left the city on only one known occasion, and very few Venetian artists remained so tied to local patronage for the duration of their careers. Tintoretto's father was a cloth-dyer named Giovanni Battista Comin, and the family was perhaps given the sobriquet Robusti after Tintoretto's father and brother bravely defended one of the gates of Padua in 1509.[3] Tintoretto was the eldest of twenty-two children, and not much is known of his family's middle-class social status. Giovanni's occupation however explains his son's professional nickname. "Tintoretto," or "the little dyer," derives from the word *tentor,* which referred to the equivalence between the processes of painting and dyeing by using colors on woven cloth.[4] Being raised around pigments, Tintoretto's knowledge as a colorist was sophisticated and became a distinguishing element of his canvases. Venetians were

[1] Archival documents usually record his first name as Jacomo.
[2] Miguel Falomir, "Jacopo Comin, alias Robusti, alias Tintoretto: An Exhibition and Catalogue," in *Tintoretto,* ed. Miguel Falomir (Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2007), 22.
[3] Falomir, "Jacopo Comin," 22.
[4] Thomas Nichols, *Tintoretto: Tradition and Identity*, 2nd ed. (London: Reaktion Books, 2015), 22.

recognized masters in their use of color, but Tintoretto's *colorito* particularly produced a sensuous pictorial effect that was created by rapid brushwork and is often described as *non-finito*.[5] Both Tintoretto's marriage to Faustina Episcopi, part of an elite *cittadini originarii* family, as well as his business contacts allowed Tintoretto to ascend to a higher social status than most other Venetian artists. His finances, however, were never as stable as those of his contemporaries Titian and Veronese, and he used aggressive strategies for obtaining commissions.[6] Tintoretto often painted canvases for the interiors of central Venetian buildings for only the cost of materials, eager to gain exposure and future work. His commissions for the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, on which he worked on and off for over twenty years, were won by a generosity in pricing that could not be matched by his contemporaries – one-third the price that other artists would have asked.[7]

Tintoretto married the young Faustina around 1559.[8] Not including Robusti, they had seven children who survived into adulthood. Robusti was illegitimate, born in the early 1550's to an unknown woman who was probably German.[9] Recently, Stefania Mason suggested that the Robusti family *Genealogia* recording Robusti's mother as German could have been an embellishment in order to promote Tintoretto's legacy; Sebastiano Casser, the last pupil to inherit the workshop and who wrote the genealogy document, was himself a German.[10] Mason further speculates that a "Maria da Feltre de parto Santa Maria Formosa," an unmarried woman

[5] Robert Echols, "Tintoretto the Painter," in *Tintoretto*, ed. Miguel Falomir (Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2007), 29-31.
[6] Stefania Mason, "Tintoretto the Venetian," in *Tintoretto: Artist of Renaissance Venice*, ed. Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 55.
[7] Nichols, *Tintoretto,* 219-21.
[8] Melania G. Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto & i suoi figli: storia di una famiglia veneziana* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2009), 140-41.
[9] *Genealogia della Casa Tintoretto,* in Fernando Checa Cremades (2004), 205; Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto,* 133.
[10] Mason, "Tintoretto the Venetian," 54.

who died in childbirth in 1554, could also have been the mother to a daughter given her name,[11] though no further evidence confirms this conclusion. While having illegitimate children was not uncommon, it may explain the unusual and more public facets of Robusti's upbringing. Her early training as an artist and Carlo Ridolfi's claim that she traveled with her father around Venice dressed as a boy were both unusual for women.[12] In fact, wearing male attire was subject to severe penalties based on sumptuary laws[13], begging the question of whether Tintoretto would have risked his young daughter's virtue, or if perhaps Ridolfi embellished Robusti's biography. Robusti lived and worked in Venice her entire life. She married the goldsmith Marco Augusta in 1578 and continued to work for her father thereafter. Marietta and Marco had at least one child together, a girl named Orsola born in 1580, nineteen months after their marriage.[14] They may have had more children, possibly a boy named Vespasiano who died of smallpox at the age of sixteen in 1602.[15] The belief that Robusti died in childbirth around 1590 is only an assumption. Her cause of death is unknown, and her death certificate has never been found.

Family was essential to Tintoretto's *bottega*, or workshop. Although workshops existed throughout Europe, many Venetian workshops had long relied on familial artistic tradition. The emphasis on group identity and cooperation ensured not only a facade of domestic tranquility, but also a distinctive approach to authorship under a common name. The Venetian family *bottega* usually included several generations of men, including male siblings and in-laws. Jacopo

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[11] Mason, "Tintoretto the Venetian," 54.
[12] Carlo Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto, and of his Children Domenico and Marietta,* trans. Catherine and Robert Enggass (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1984), 98.
[13] Julia Dabbs, *Life Stories of Women Artists, 1550-1800* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009), 88.
[14] The registry for the church of San Stin records the baptism of Orsola on April 9, 1580, daughter of "messer Marco Augusta and Madonna Marieta." ASMGF, Parrocchia di San Stin, Registro dei Battesimi n. 1 (1564-1588), c. 68; Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto,* 381.
[15] Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto,* 382.

Bellini, Titian, Tintoretto, and Veronese all sustained large workshops embedded with family members and kept business matters within the family for generations. Tintoretto was considered an independent master in his early twenties, and his workshop developed thereafter. By the 1570s, the overextended yet flourishing *bottega* had become a family enterprise. Tintoretto and Faustina's children who survived into adulthood were Domenico, Marco, Gierolima (later Sister Perina), Zuan Battista, Lucrezia (later Sister Ottavia), Ottavia, and Laura. Most demonstrated artistic talent. Domenico, as well as Marietta and Marco, became Tintoretto's chief assistants. Other known workshop members included the Italian Andrea Vicentino, the Greek Aliense, and several northern artists. Domenico survived Marietta and inherited the family workshop after Tintoretto's death in 1594 and supervised the *bottega* for over forty years. Upon Domenico's death in 1637, his eighty-year-old sister Ottavia was ordered to marry the last pupil of Tintoretto and Domenico, the German Sebastiano Casser, who was around twenty-five years younger than Ottavia. This arrangement enabled Casser to continue the family workshop into a third and final generation.[16] Ottavia wrote, "I find myself bound in matrimony to Messer Sebastian Casser. . . by the order and command of my brothers Domenico and Marco, who, before they died, made me promise that if the said Sebastian proved to be an able painter I should take him for my husband; in this way, by virtue of his talent, the Tintoretto name would be maintained."[17] Indeed, Tintoretto's sons ensured the survival of a familial workshop tradition after their father's death as well as their own, though the workshop was disbanded after Casser.

[16] Mario Brunetti, "La continuitá della tradizione artistica nella famiglia del Tintoretto a Venezia," in *Venezia: studi di arte e storia a cura della Direzione del Museo Civico Correr* (Venice, 1920), 269; David Rosand, *Painting in Sixteenth-Century Venice: Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 6.
[17] Translation from Rosand, *Painting in Sixteenth-Century Venice*, 8.

With so many hands contributing to Tintoretto's workshop, the notion of authorship was complex. Assistants often completed works under the supervision of their master. A patron did not necessarily expect a work by Tintoretto to be painted entirely by the master's hand, but created in his style and under his direction.[18] While this was standard workshop practice, it has created complex problems of connoisseurship for modern scholars when differentiating between *bottega* artists. The evidence of assistants is frequently apparent in Tintoretto's work and ranges in quality of execution. However, distinguishing between specific individuals is nearly impossible.

As far as we know, Robusti was the only female artist in the workshop. Tintoretto determined his daughter's career as an artist at a young age, training her to draw and paint and perhaps bringing her with him on jobs throughout the city.[19] The extent to which Robusti contributed to the public commissions completed by the workshop is unknown. Her earliest biographers specify only three works by her hand, and all are portraits.[20] Carlo Ridolfi's comment that "she also painted other works of her own invention and still others that she derived from her father" suggests that she contributed far more than portraiture.[21] History paintings that are cited in early collection inventories in Robusti's name indicate a similar conclusion.

Like many other *pittrici*, Robusti is remembered first and foremost as a portraitist. Discussing Italian women artists, Pomeroy states, "Economic necessity drove women to train as artists, but society dictated that they could not behave as aggressively in the public marketplace

[18] Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman, "Almost a Prophet: The Art of Jacopo Tintoretto," in *Tintoretto: Artist of Renaissance Venice*, ed. Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 30.
[19] Ridolfi states, "Being small of stature she dressed like a boy. Her father took her with him wherever he went and everyone thought she was a lad." Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 98.
[20] See Raffaello Borghini, *Il Riposo*, trans. Lloyd H. Ellis (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 265; Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 98.
[21] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 98.

as their male counterparts. Promotion and sales, therefore, occurred in the private sphere, through familial networking and word of mouth."[22] This explanation partially supports what little is known of Robusti's portraits and patrons—that they were often Venetians from the upper class, or colleagues of her husband Marco Augusta.[23] Ridolfi also wrote that much of her popularity as a portraitist came from Robusti's ability to entertain her sitters with music and song.[24] However, recent research has suggested that Robusti played a more dynamic role in the *bottega* than previously thought. Louise Arizzoli argues that Robusti was not only an assistant and portraitist, but also a model and source of inspiration for her father and brothers.[25] It may not have been an uncommon practice for Tintoretto to use his daughter as a model in sixteenth-century Venice.[26] Courtesans and working-class women were more commonly employed as models, but family members were also readily available. Arizzoli suggests that Tintoretto may have used Robusti in a similar manner to his contemporary Palma il Giovane, who used his wife and children as models for history paintings.[27] In an effort to find Robusti's likeness within the female representations of Tintoretto and Domenico, Arizzoli finds a reoccurring facial type that she argues is Robusti. She convincingly presents three paintings that use Robusti as a model—two by Tintoretto and one by Domenico. Male workshop assistants were often used as models, especially for preparatory drawings.[28] Women were much less commonly used, but Robusti's participation supports the conclusion that her active role in the workshop was perhaps equivalent

[22] Pomeroy, *Italian Women Artists*, 21.
[23] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 98.
[24] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 98.
[25] Louise Arizzoli, "Marietta Robusti in Jacopo Tintoretto's Workshop: Her Likeness and her Role as a Model for her Father," in *Studi di Storia dell'Arte,* ed. Leonilde Dominici (Perugia: Ediart, 2017), 109-112.
[26] Arizzoli, "Marietta Robusti," 110-111.
[27] Arizzoli, "Marietta Robusti," 110.
[28] Claire Van Cleave, *Master Drawings of the Italian Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 24.

to the other male assistants in terms of her overall contribution. However, identifying Robusti's hand in workshop commissions has been mostly unsuccessful. With no extant works to use for comparison, and no specific history paintings mentioned by her biographers, one can only acknowledge that she continued working with her father until her premature death around 1590 and likely contributed to many canvases. Speaking of the workshop as a whole, Echols and Ilchman state that "it may be futile to try to draw hard boundaries defining the many permutations of roles assumed by Jacopo, Domenico, and other studio assistants in the creation of individual works."[29] What remains instead are the details of Robusti's life and work by her male biographers.

While there are a few documented women artists in Venice during the sixteenth century, and perhaps more undocumented, painting was a man's profession. While most Italian women lived lives in the private sphere as wives and mothers, or housed in convents, Venetian women specifically were also their city's primary adornment. In public life they were a spectacle for foreign visitors during ceremonial occasions, decked in sumptuous jewelry and apparel, not only to display individual family wealth, but the wealth and power of the city of Venice.[30] Venetian women were famous for their beauty and grandeur, even if only seen from the windows of their *palazzi.* Further, like all of Italy, Venice was a patriarchal society, but Venetian women were granted liberties that many women in the Italian peninsula were not. While a woman's dowry was her most important means of economic influence, she could also own property above and beyond her dowry. She could inherit directly from her mother, or her mother could supplement her dowry from her father's inheritance. While dowries could not be spent or invested without the approval of the husband, there were no restrictions on how married women used the

[29] Echols and Ilchman, "Almost a Prophet," 31.
[30] Patricia F. Brown, *Art and Life in Renaissance Venice* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1997), 154.

supplemental property that they owned outright.[31] Last, it is believed that an astonishing ten percent of Venice's population was courtesans.[32] The high-end prostitutes were well dressed, often musically talented and educated, and lived in the public sphere with autonomy. The courtesans represented a middle ground in Venetian society between the common prostitute and the virtuous lady, contributing to the Venetian air of luxury.

While women began contributing more regularly to the arts during the sixteenth century, their image as contributors was convoluted. The language used to differentiate the capacity and artistic production of men from women exposes the innate prejudices in early modern society. Generally speaking, the feminine realm of life was one of enclosure, piety, and virtue. The fundamental insistence on female chastity restricted women's freedom, and motherhood or convent life offered avenues of virtuous existence for women of every status.[33] Artistic production, however, was considered an inherently male vocation. The concept of the genius artist emerged in the Cinquecento, transitioning from the *artisan* to the *artist,* and further to the *virtuoso,* a man with such talent that Vasari went so far as to call him a mortal god.[34] Ideology dictated that a woman's 'natural condition' or inferiority affected everything she did, creating obstacles for professional female artists.[35] Boccaccio's account of the ancient Greek artist Irene demonstrates such beliefs: "…the art of painting is mostly alien to the feminine mind and cannot be attained without that great intellectual concentration which women, as a rule, are very slow to

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[31] Stanley Chojnacki, *Women and Men In Renaissance Venice: Twelve Essays On Patrician Society* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 123.
[32] Brown, *Art and Life in Renaissance Venice*, 157.
[33] Dabbs, *Life Stories of Women Artists*, 9.
[34] Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects,* vol. 1*,* trans. Gaston du C. de Vere, ed. David Ekserdjian (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 316.
[35] For further discussion see Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa,* 27; Sheila Barker, "Introduction," in *Women Artists in Early Modern Italy: Careers, Fame, and Collectors*, ed. Sheila Barker (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2016), 16.

acquire."[36] In the hierarchy of artistic subject matter, portraiture was thought to require less *invenzione* than the more complex and original compositions of history painting. Portraiture could also be done in a private interior setting, and required less risk of impropriety for the artist. As a result, it was the most common female artistic pursuit. Women working or studying alongside men risked accusations of sexual impropriety that could ruin not only their own reputation, but also that of their family.[37] Plutarch, while acknowledging the possibility of creative capacity in women, designates in his *Mulierum virtutis* certain women worthy of praise. Beyond the role of a chaste wife and mother, a worthy woman was able to rise above her sex, essentially acting as a virtuous man.[38] In 1582, Torquato Tasso endeavored to explain the anomaly of women artists by defining two types of gendered virtue: feminine and womanly. *Feminine* virtue defined the typical private, motherly type, while *womanly* virtue defined those that were exceptional and "men by virtue of their birth."[39] Womanly virtue then was a grey area that challenged the assumption that women and men were innate binary opposites. In 1548 the Venetian Paolo Pino went so far to say that women artists who took up the occupations of men reminded him of tales told about hermaphrodites, defining them as not quite male or female.[40] Even Vasari, in his praise of female artists, defined the sculptor Properzia de' Rossi as a *miracolo*.[41] Thus, the place of a woman artist was complex not only in Cinquecento Venice, but also in the entire Italian peninsula.

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[36] Giovanni Boccaccio, *On Famous Women*, trans. Virginia Brown (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 251.
[37] Dabbs, *Life Stories of Women Artists,* 9.
[38] Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa,* 10.
[39] Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa,* 11; Torquato Tasso, *Discorso delle virtù femminile e donnesca,* vol. 3 (1724), 322-324.
[40] Paolo Pino, *Dialogo della pittura*, ed. and trans. Ettore Camesasca (Milan: Rizzoli, 1954), 36. Translated in Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa*, 18.
[41] Vasari, Lives, 858.

While criticism varied on how women artists were received in Cinquecento society, the notion that women, men, and their artistic work could be judged as equals was ultimately inconceivable. The qualities needed for a successful female artist were inherently different than the requisite qualities for men. Gendered language and stereotypes are most readily recorded in the array of artistic biographies written during the early modern era. Along with providing invaluable details of an artist's life, various "lives of artists" conceived as biographies were used to document and describe an artist's most successful works. The number of artists included in any biographical writing depended on the author's opinion and native city.[42] Ridolfi's *Life of Tintoretto,* written in 1642, is meticulous in its description of works by Tintoretto throughout Venice as well as his patrons. Comparing the master to both Titian and Michelangelo, Ridolfi praises Tintoretto's talent stating:

> His works have served as exemplars leading to an understanding of how to compose with originality, how to give grace and consciousness to design, how to provide order by isolating, with lights and shadows, groups of figures within composition, and how to give freedom and strength to the colors of the painting, and, in short, to do whatever is needed to make more effective the artist's creativity.[43]

In contrast, rather than talent or originality alone, physical beauty and musical inclination almost always qualify any artistic praise of women artists in early modern biographies. External beauty was thought to mirror internal virtue, and was thus a prerequisite when proclaiming a woman as exceptional—a justification not needed when describing the accomplishments of men.[44] The Venetian painter Irene di Spilimbergo, to whom an entire book of poetry was

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[42] Biographers generally promoted the most talented artists of their region, competing in a sense against the biographers and artists of other major cities for the most talented and successful collection.
[43] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 37.
[44] Sheila ffolliott, "Early Modern Women Artists," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, ed., Allyson M. Poska, Jane Couchman, and Katherine A. McIver (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2013), 429.

dedicated two years after her death in 1559, was remembered primarily for her beauty and virtuous life rather than her artistic achievements. Likewise, Vasari describes the only female artist for whom he writes a complete biography, Properzia de' Rossi, as a woman who was "very beautiful, and played and sang better in her day than any other woman of her city"[45] —as if these qualities justified her talent as a sculptor. Further, the details of works by most women artists are sparse. Unlike Ridolfi's account of Tintoretto, his biography of Robusti provides little detail on her artistic accomplishments; only a few works are briefly described. While Ridolfi alludes to many more of Robusti's paintings, he does not provide any specifics. More time is spent justifying her biographical inclusion, discussing her father's adoration, her beauty and virtue, and her thorough education in music.[46] As a whole, the recurring tropes in female biographies stress the underlying prejudices in the criteria deeming women artists as worthy while also reinforcing cultural stereotypes.

Further, in an attempt to overcome the obstacles associated with promoting the talents of *pittrici* to a male audience, biographers often rely on historical precedent as a prologue to the life story of women artists. Three significant precedents were relied on: the ancient Roman historian Pliny the Elder's *Natural History,* Boccaccio's elaboration of Pliny's Greek and Roman women in *De Claris mulieribus* in 1361, and Vasari's *Lives.*[47] By including one or two remarkable women, prefaced by a history of successful female artists, a woman's success could be better understood as the manifestation of a trend. Ridolfi begins the life story of Robusti with a vehement defense of the capabilities of women who "acquire learning in the various disciplines"

[45] Vasari, *Lives,* 857.
[46] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 98-99.
[47] Dabbs, *Life Stories of Women Artists,* 16.

by listing no less than eighteen ancient and contemporary accomplished and celebrated women.[48] Further stressing the value in including one or few token women among a collection of male artists, Dabbs states:

> The concept of the 'amazing' or 'marvelous' woman artist… was, I believe, a very significant factor in justifying her inclusion within a masculine artistic Valhalla. Early modern European culture was fascinated with the unusual or remarkable, and not just with those exotic wonders encountered and collected in an age of expanded exploration and foreign trade.[49]

Collecting women artists such as Robusti, whether biographically or by their physical works, as rare and curious objects is a trend further explored in the following chapters. Robusti's prominence in Venetian society was well established based on her public commissions, offers from foreign courts, and inclusion in both Florentine and Venetian early biographical collections – one of which was written and published during her lifetime. Chapter two will discuss Robusti's historiography, with an emphasis on her early biographies and the implications of gender. Chapter three goes on to provide a critical discussion of Robusti's contemporary attributions and presence in collection history.

[48] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 97-98.
[49] Dabbs, *Life Stories of Women Artists,* 17.

CHAPTER II

EARLY BIOGRAPHIES AND CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARSHIP

Table 1. Marietta Robusti's primary biographers.

Biographer	**Date**	**Location**
Raffaello Borghini	1584	Florence
Carlo Ridolfi	1648	Venice
Joachim von Sandrart	1683	Nuremberg
Roger de Piles	1699	Paris
Damiao de Froes Perym	1736	Lisbon
Dézallier d'Argenville	1745	Paris
Francesco Moücke	1752	Florence

While new information has been discovered in recent years concerning Marietta Robusti, a comprehensive picture of her life and work may never be complete. There are five things we know for certain: Robusti was Tintoretto's eldest child and was illegitimate;[50] she married the German jeweler and goldsmith Marco Augusta in 1578, and they had at least one child together;[51] she worked in her father's workshop and was renowned for her portraiture;[52] she was well trained in music and singing;[53] and she died prematurely, probably between 1590-91.[54] That we have any details at all is probably due to the prominence of her talented father and his robust workshop. Two biographers laid the foundation for what is known about Robusti's career as an artist: Raffaello Borghini and Carlo Ridolfi. Borghini's *Il Riposo* was published in Florence in

[50] *Genealogia della Casa Tintoretto,* Fernando Checa Cremades, 205; Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto,* 133.
[51] The registry for the church of San Stin, or Santo Stefano, records the baptism of Orsola on April 9, 1580. ASMGF, Parrocchia di San Stin, Registro dei Battesimi n. 1 (1564-1588), c. 68; Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto,* 381.
[52] Borghini, *Il Riposo*, 265; Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 98.
[53] Borghini, *Il Riposo,* 265; Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 98.
[54] While no death certificate survives, see Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 99; Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto,* 411-417.

1584, during Robusti's lifetime, and her artistic success must have been well known for her to be included. Ridolfi's *Maraviglie* was published in Venice in 1648, over fifty years after Robusti's death, but the living Robusti family members supplied Ridolfi with information for his biographies of Jacopo, Marietta, and Domenico. Numerous biographers wrote on Robusti for centuries after her death, but Borghini and Ridolfi offer the most complete and reliable accounts of Robusti's life and work.

Raffaello Borghini was a Florentine poet and playwright. Published sixteen years after Giorgio Vasari's second edition of his *Vite*, *Il Riposo* was the only art historical writing Borghini ever completed. He was the first to write a biography—though sparse—dedicated to "Marietta Tintoretta, dipintrice."[55] Robusti's *vita* is only one paragraph long and immediately follows Tintoretto's lengthier biography. Domenico—the male heir to the family workshop—is notably disregarded. Importantly, Borghini states that she is about twenty-eight years old, making her birth year around 1556.[56] Like all biographers of the early modern era, Borghini had a predisposition for male artists, and more specifically Florentines. Robusti was neither, and Borghini's lack of a detailed discussion on Robusti's work suggests that other factors prompted her inclusion. Borghini gives biographies of two other women: Properzia de' Rossi and Lavinia Fontana. Properzia de' Rossi was the only female artist to be included in Vasari's *Lives,* and receives a page and a half from Borghini. Lavinia Fontana is also given a biography, though it is even shorter than Robusti's at only one sentence. Borghini's entire biographical paragraph on Robusti is as follows:

> Tintoretto has a daughter named Marietta, called Tintoretta by all, who, besides her beauty and grace and knowledge of playing the harpsichord, lute, and other instruments,

[55] Robusti's inclusion in the table of contents reads "Marietta Tintoretta, dipintrice," clarifying her gender and profession. Raffaello Borghini, *Il Riposo,* (Florence, 1584) "Tavola."
[56] Borghini, *Il Riposo,* (Florence, 1584) 559; Borghini, *Il Riposo,* 265.

> paints very well and has done many beautiful works. And she did, among others, the portrait of Jacopo Strada, Antiquarian of Emperor Maximilian II, and the portrait of she herself that, as a rare thing, His Majesty keeps in his room. And [Maximilian], as also King Phillip and Archduke Ferdinand, did everything to have this excellent woman with him and sent to ask her of her father. But [Tintoretto], greatly loving her, did not want her taken from his sight. But having married, she enjoys its virtues and she does not fail continuously to paint, finding herself about twenty-eight years. But, because I have no detailed knowledge of her works, I will not move forward in discussing her.[57]

Importantly, Borghini's opening sentence defines Robusti not only as an artist, but also as a virtuous and musically inclined daughter of Tintoretto. Being the daughter of a celebrated Venetian painter is the foundation of her inclusion in his publication, but equally important is her gender. Indeed, her name "Marietta Tintoretta, dipintrice" in the table of contents differentiates her from the men. Beauty and musical talent reinforce her exceptionality and reiterate a common trope established by Vasari. As previously discussed, beauty and grace are common descriptions of women artists in the Cinquecento. Likewise, an emphasis on musical talent reinforced an expectation for *pittrici* to be proficient in a variety of virtuous and gendered vocations. Consequently, Borghini packs in Robusti's virtuosity before mentioning her artistic talent. Even his description of Robusti's talent follows a feminine sensibility; she paints *well* and has done many *beautiful* works.[58] Borghini treats De' Rossi in an almost identical manner: "[De' Rossi], being very rare of talent and very beautiful of form, beside singing and playing instruments that she did better than the other women of her city, gave herself also – being by nature inclined to design—to carving peach pits."[59] De' Rossi is defined first by her feminine virtues, and second as an artist. Borghini's brief mention of Fontana, like Robusti's, serves to further promote her father Prospero before Fontana's own accomplishments: "And, to proclaim his [Prospero's]

[57] Borghini, *Il Riposo,* 265.
[58] Emphasis added by author. Borghini, *Il Riposo,* 265.
[59] Borghini, *Il Riposo,* 211-12.

name he has a daughter named Lavinia, who paints very well and has done many paintings in public and private places."[60] De' Rossi is the only artist to receive a somewhat more detailed account of her oeuvre with seven works discussed in three different media.

Borghini admits to not having seen Robusti's paintings in person. This probably contributed to Borghini's lack-luster description of Robusti's talent and work details. So why include her at all? Borghini names only two paintings by her hand without much detail: a portrait of Jacopo Strada, antiquarian of Emperor Maximilian II at the time, and a self-portrait that the Emperor supposedly kept in his room.[61] Further, Borghini attests that Maximilian II, King Philip II of Spain, and Archduke Ferdinand all inquired after Robusti, presumably as a court painter. The names of specific foreign courts add an element of specific credibility to the assumption that Robusti was widely known or sought after, though their eagerness to bring her to their courts may be exaggerated by the author. A few other women worked as artists in foreign courts at this time. Sofonisba Anguissola, a Cremonese artist born in c. 1532, was invited to the Spanish court of Philip II to paint portraits in 1559. She was considered not only an artist, but also a noblewoman and lady-in-waiting to the queen, and was eventually provided a dowry and married.[62] Her court appointment solidified her career and fame. Therefore, Borghini's mention of Philip II as interested in the remarkable Tintoretta by 1584 or earlier is conceivable.

As far as we know, Robusti never left Venice. As Borghini describes, Tintoretto loved his daughter so much that he could not bear to part with her despite her potential foreign success. The portrayal of Tintoretto as an attached and doting father to his eldest daughter has been highly

[60] Borghini, *Il Riposo,* 271.
[61] Borghini, *Il Riposo,* 265.
[62] Cecilia Gamberini, "Sofonisba Anguissola at the Court of Philip II," in *Women Artists in Early Modern Italy: Careers, Fame, and Collectors*, ed. Sheila Barker (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2016), 32-34.

romanticized throughout the centuries, and reappears later in Carlo Ridolfi's biography of Robusti.[63] Her arranged marriage in 1578 to the German-born Marco Augusta, a local jeweler and goldsmith, would have ensured that she remained in Venice. Borghini states, "But having married, she enjoys [the] virtues [of marriage] and she does not fail continuously to paint..."[64] That is, while Robusti fulfilled the societal expectation of marriage, she was evidently happy to continue her work in the family *bottega.* Whether her complacency to stay in Venice and work under her father is authentic, Borghini's language again reveals a gendered treatment of Robusti as a woman first, and artist second. It is impossible to know whether Robusti saw Borghini's biography of her and what she thought of it, but it is likely considering it was published around six years prior to her death and also included a large biography of her father. Her recognition as an artist, however, regardless of the ulterior motives that supported her inclusion or fame, would have established her prominence in the art world of Venice during her life.

Robusti's second and most important biographer was the Venetian Carlo Ridolfi. Well known as a painter during his lifetime, Ridolfi is remembered today primarily for his biographies of Venetian artists. Published in 1648, Ridolfi's two-volume *Le maraviglie dell'arte* concerning the lives of Venetian painters includes the most informative extant early biography on Robusti. Six years prior, Ridolfi had published his *Life of Tintoretto,* a work that is still considered the most significant primary source of information in Tintoretto studies.[65] Generally, Ridolfi's account of Robusti reiterates Borghini's biography, but he expands on the details of her life exponentially. Published over fifty years after Robusti's death, though presumably assembled earlier, Ridolfi establishes the elements of her personal life that secured her romanticized myth

[63] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 98.
[64] Borghini, *Il Riposo,* 265.
[65] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 1.

through history; that is, as Tintoretto's dearest and most talented child taken prematurely at the peak of her career. Seven paragraphs are written in all—about two and half pages—yet only three specifically talk about Robusti's work as an artist. Only a few specific paintings by Robusti are described, and as in Borghini, all are portraits. Such little attention to Robusti's works along with her place as Ridolfi's only *pittrice* follows the assumption that her inclusion was complex and based more prominently on her gender and association to Tintoretto.

Unlike Borghini, in his introduction, Ridolfi uses a formula established by Vasari and followed by many biographers. He prefaces her *vita* by listing eighteen accomplished ancient and contemporary women who serve to establish a historical precedent for Robusti's accomplishments.[66] Ridolfi names the fellow Venetian Irene di Spilimbergo alongside the Bolognese Lavinia Fontana, Chiara Varotari, who also worked in Venice, and Giovanna Garzoni, from Ascoli Piceno. Spilimbergo and Fontana were Robusti's sixteenth-century contemporaries, and Varotari and Garzoni were present-day artists with connections to Venice when Ridolfi was writing.[67] Robusti, however, is the only woman to receive her own *vita* by Ridolfi.

Tintoretto's role as Robusti's affectionate father is stressed throughout her entire biography. Ridolfi praised Tintoretto as the great master of the Venetian Golden Age who painted images to "the greatest state of perfection."[68] Thus, Robusti's biography essentially acts as an extension of his own biography. Ridolfi writes: "Marietta Tintoretto, then, lived in Venice, the daughter of the famous Tintoretto and the dearest delight of his soul. He trained her in design and color, whence later she painted such works that men were amazed by her lively talent."[69] Not

[66] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 97-98.
[67] Julia K. Dabbs, *Life Stories of Women Artists, 1550-1800* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009), 93 n. 12.
[68] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 15.
[69] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 98.

only is Robusti distinguished as Tintoretto's dearest child, but his successful and talented protégé. So that Robusti could accompany Tintoretto to work around the city when she was young, Ridolfi writes, "Being small of stature she dressed like a boy, her father took her with him wherever he went and everyone thought she was a lad."[70] The description of a young Robusti dressed like a boy and following her father around Venice has been one of the most consistently repeated aspects of Robusti's life story. Because a profession in painting was considered a male faculty, this may also have served to associate Robusti with masculine characteristics that supported male artistic genius. Her eighteenth-century biographer Francesco Moücke, who wrote that she demonstrated a "masculine behavior," also supports this conclusion.[71] Ridolfi also notes Robusti's music instructor Giulio Zacchino, who "instruct(ed) her in singing and playing."[72] Ridolfi implies that Robusti was so talented that Tintoretto trained her not only as an artist in both drawing and painting, but also pursued her musical talents. While a formal education in music was a reflection of virtue, Zacchino's music lessons specifically were also costly and unusual for someone of Robusti's middle-class status. However, Tintoretto's own musical aspirations and interest may have been projected upon his favorite and eldest daughter.[73] Musical interest also extended beyond Robusti's immediate family. Her uncle Domenico was musically gifted and played professionally for the court of Mantua.[74] That Robusti was known for entertaining her portrait sitters "with music and song," as Ridolfi claims,

[70] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 98.
[71] Francesco Moücke, *Serie di ritratti degli eccellenti pittori dipinti di propria mano che esistono nell'Imperial galleria di Firenze*, vol. 2 (Florence, 1752-1762), 93; Dabbs, *Life Stories of Women Artists,* 88.
[72] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 98.
[73] Sergio Marinelli, "Marietta Robusti," in *Le Tele svelate: antologia di pittrici venete dal Cinquecento al Novecento,* ed. Caterina Limentani Virdis, (Mirano, Venezia: Editrice Eidos, 1996), 55.
[74] Marinelli, "Marietta Robusti," 55.

is likely an authentic detail.[75] Robusti's best-known attribution, an alleged *Self-portrait* at a harpsichord (fig. 1), discussed in chapter three, may have been chosen based on her documented musical abilities.

Importantly, Ridolfi gives credit to Robusti for a number of portraits as well as "works of her own invention and still others that she derived from her father."[76] Sadly, he does not give any further details on works other than portraiture, but his statement that she created works of her own *invenzione* is important. From this we can gather what may have only been implied; Robusti participated in workshop commissions outside of portraiture, which were most often history paintings. However, Ridolfi only gives a detailed account a few portraits by her hand. First is the portrait of Marco dei Vescovi (Robusti's maternal grandfather) with a long beard, with that of Pietro his son. Technically, because Robusti was illegitimate, Vescovi was not related to her by blood. Whereas Vescovi's son Pietro is mentioned in the same sentence, it is unclear whether the two men are painted as two separate portraits kept in the Tintoretto household, or whether they are painted together in a double portrait.[77] Second, and the only work also mentioned by Borghini, is the portrait of Jacopo Strada; Ridolfi expands further claiming that Strada gave his portrait to Emperor Maximilian II. The Emperor was allegedly so charmed by the portrait that he "made inquiries about her (Robusti) of her father."[78] Like Borghini, Ridolfi also mentions the inquiries by Phillip II and Archduke Ferdinand to have Robusti at their courts. But instead, Tintoretto arranges Robusti's marriage to Marco Augusta, "so that she may always be nearby,

[75] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 98.
[76] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 98.
[77] "Fù particolare dote però di Marietta il saper far bene I ritratti, and uno di Marco dei Vescovi, con barba lunga, si conserva ancora nelle casa de' Tintoretti, con quello di Pietro suo figliuolo." Ridolfi, Carlo. *Le Maraviglie dell'arte: Overo le vite degli illustri pittori Veneti e dello stato,* vol. 2, ed. Detlev von Hadeln (Berlin: 1924), 79.
[78] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 98.

rather than be deprived of her."[79] Yet, there is evidence that Tintoretto had more practical reasons for keeping Robusti in Venice; Tintoretto had a certain pride in the Venetian state and focused on artistic commissions from his native city more than any other Venetian painter of his time.[80] His work may have been in as many as forty-one Venetian churches[81], so it is reasonable to assume that he would expect his artistic heirs to work with a similar Venetian predisposition.

Ridolfi's biography of Robusti ends as follows:

> Marietta had a brilliant mind like her father. She played the harpsichord delicately and sang very well. She united in herself many virtuous qualities that singly are seldom found in other women. But in 1590, in the flower of her age when she was thirty years old, envious death cut short her life, depriving the world of such a noble ornament. Her father wept bitterly, taking it as a loss of his own inner being. He mourned her with unceasing tears for a long time… This excellent lady will serve in the future as a model of womanly virtue, making known to the world that gems, gold, and precious clothing are not the true female adornments, but rather those virtues that shine in the soul and remain eternal after life.[82]

There is an implication that Robusti's artistic biography is serving more than one purpose. Not once is her artistic talent mentioned in Ridolfi's closing statements. Instead, her feminine virtues are repeatedly affirmed, while her premature death at "the flower of her age" serves to secure a romanticized legacy. Tintoretto's loss is emphasized, but on a grander scale the world has gained an eternal "model of womanly virtue." Ridolfi implies that she is not a "noble ornament" for her public display of "gems, gold, and precious clothing," but for her internal "virtues that shine in the soul." This statement is especially relevant for Venetian women, who famously flaunted luxurious fashion and displays of wealth. The implications of gender are made plain: Without her outstanding qualifications of womanly virtue, as well as the

[79] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 98.
[80] Tom Nichols, *Tintoretto: Tradition and Identity* (London: Reaktion, 1999) 137.
[81] Nichols, *Tintoretto,* 137.
[82] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 99.

support and adoration of her father, Robusti would not have been included as a model female artist with the biographies of accomplished men.

Numerous details of Robusti's life and work rely on the credibility of the accounts by Borghini and Ridolfi. Borghini wrote his life of Tintoretto and Robusti during both of their lifetimes, visited Venice, and was in contact with the Robusti family. Similarly, Ridolfi should be considered quite accurate on the lives of Jacopo, Domenico, and Marietta due to his association with the living Robusti family members. His close contact with the Robusti family, including Tintoretto's still-living daughter Octavia, allowed him access to first-hand information for his publication on the three artists.[83] Ridolfi's credibility has also been investigated by the preliminary study done by Alison Carroll in 1980.[84] By assessing Ridolfi's accuracy on one lesser-known artist, Santo Peranda, included among more than 150 painters in Ridolfi's *Maraviglie,* Carroll argues that the accuracy of all artists included can be better judged. By concluding that the life and work details given for Santo Peranda were almost entirely accurate, Carroll argues that the biographies of renowned artists such as Tintoretto, where details would be more readily available, are likewise reliable. However, her assumption is not founded on anything more substantial, nor is her assumption supported by the same consistency of other biographical works such as Vasari's *Vite* or Borghini's *Il Riposo*. The credibility of Ridolfi specifically lies in his known connection to the Robusti family.

Importantly, Ridolfi includes etched portraits of the artists with his biographies (fig. 2). Ridolfi conducted his research for the lives of Domenico and Marietta between 1644-45 where he received a self-portrait of Domenico from Octavia Robusti. The portrait was then used to

[83] Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto,* 446.
[84] Alison Carroll, "On the Credibility of Carlo Ridolfi's *Lives of the Venetian Painters*," *Australian Journal of Art* 2 (1980): 51-62.

make an etching for Domenico's biography.[85] Perhaps he also received Marietta's portrait in this way—directly from the Robusti family. The original portrait may still exist today in the Museum of Fine Arts Budapest, though cut down from its original size (fig. 3).[86] Titled by the museum as *Portrait of a Lady (Marietta Robusti?),* it was originally attributed to Titian but has since been reattributed to Tintoretto and dated c. 1580. In 1934, Erika Tietze-Conrat published Arnold Wilde's discovery that the portrait was used by Carlo Ridolfi to make an etching for Robusti's biography.[87] While the etching is not an exact replica of the original, the similarities are such that the portrait is likely the closest known image of Robusti's likeness.[88]

A few other seventeenth-century biographies on Robusti exist, though they are less reliable and depend heavily on Ridolfi. The first is by the German writer Joachim von Sandrart, whose *Academia nobilissimae artis pictoriae* was published in Nuremberg in 1683, although he had not visited Venice since 1629. Many errors resulted from a too-literal translation of Ridolfi, including mistaking her husband's name.[89] However, some of Sandrart's information may have come directly from the living Robusti family members during his visit to Venice. Possibly Sandrart saw some of Robusti's portraits of Marco's colleagues—a detail supported by Ridolfi who said that Robusti "painted many portraits of goldsmiths who were friends with her husband."[90] Sandrart also includes an etched portrait of Robusti with her biography (fig. 4) that, while less naturalistically portrayed, closely resembles Ridolfi's etching. Roger de Piles offers the briefest biography of Robusti in his 1699 *Abrégé de la vie des peintres*, taking the highlights

[85] Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto,* 446.
[86] Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto,* 448.
[87] Erika Tietze-Conrat, "Marietta, fille du Tintoret," *Gazette des Beaux Arts* (December 1934): 258.
[88] Robusti's known likeness is discussed in chapter three.
[89] Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto,* 332.
[90] Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto,* 332; Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 98.

from Ridolfi almost verbatim. He writes that she was trained by her father, made portraits of men and women, delighted in music, played many instruments, was loved tenderly by her father who married her to a German, and that she died at the age of thirty.[91] Each fact was plucked directly from Ridolfi's earlier *vita* of Robusti, and does not mention any of her specific works.

Ridolfi's biography continues to influence writings about Robusti. Eighteenth-century writers such as Francesco Moücke kept Robusti's legacy alive,[92] but by this time her family had died out, and the information offered was entirely second-hand.[93] Like Sandrart's, Moücke's biography reiterates the Ridolfi highlights. For example, he mentions that she painted Jacopo Strada, and that the same three foreign monarchs sought after her: Emperor Maximilian II, Archduke Ferdinand, and Phillip II of Spain.[94] Further, Tintoretto's affection for Robusti remains a prominent aspect of her legacy. Interestingly, Moücke uses an etching of Robusti's then recently attributed *Self-portrait,* currently in the Uffizi collection*,* at the beginning of her biography (fig. 5).

A revived interest in Robusti studies began in the mid-twentieth century, primarily in regard to attributions—efforts to identify Robusti's "missing" works. In 1934 Erika Tietze-Conrat claimed that the Kunsthistorisches Museum's double portrait titled *Old Man and a Boy* (fig. 6), attributed to Tintoretto, bore the inscription "M R."[95] She argued that it was plausibly the portrait of Robusti's grandfather Marco dei Vescovi and his son Pietro, mentioned by Ridolfi. A few years later Erich von der Becken rebuffed the theory, though neither claim has been definitively proven. The portrait will be discussed in further detail in chapter three.

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[91] Roger de Piles, *The Art of Painting and the Lives of the Painters* (London, 1706), 198-199.
[92] Moücke, *Serie di ritratti,* 93-95.
[93] For additional eighteenth century biographies see Damiao de Froes Perym, vol 2. (Lisbon, 1736), 255; Dézallier d'Argenville, vol. 1 (Paris, 1745), 288-90.
[94] Moücke, *Serie di ritratti,* 94.
[95] Tietze-Conrat, "Marietta," 262.

The interest in Robusti's attributions has since multiplied. Most recently, historian, novelist, and Tintoretto specialist Melania Mazzucco published years of archival research with more new information regarding Robusti than had ever previously been published. Mazzucco compiled an extensive detailed account of the life of Tintoretto and his children, discussing both fact and speculation on Robusti's historiography and life details.[96] Still, confirmed attributions of existing works to Robusti cannot be made with certainty.

The date of Robusti's birth is widely disputed and has played a substantial role in validating or discrediting arguments for attributions of her works. For years the accepted birth year for Robusti was 1560, stemming from Ridolfi's declaration of her death at the age of thirty in 1590. However, this date of birth has rightfully been reconsidered and proven inaccurate.[97] Rather than 1560, it is almost certain that Robusti was born much earlier, probably in 1553 or 1554 as will be argued below. Due to uncertainty, Ridolfi may have given her age as an approximation rather than fact. There was also an unspecified amount of time that passed during both Borghini and Ridolfi's manuscript drafts and the date that the biographies were actually published. Borghini, writing in 1584 or earlier, claims Robusti was around twenty-eight. He may have actually written this passage a few years prior to publication. Borghini's uncertainty about her precise age is also clear with his use of the word *intorno,* or around.[98] Further, the story of a premature death at age thirty further romanticized Marietta's myth and may have been rounded down for effect in a cloud of uncertainty. Her death in 1590 is also not confirmed by any extant document, but the account by Ridolfi that she died in 1590 correlates to a four-month period at

[96] For example, Mazzucco publishes the baptism record for Robusti and Marco's daughter Orsola, providing an accurate date of birth, as well as evidence for Robusti's death between 1590 and 1591 in the absence of a death certificate.
[97] For the most recent argument regarding evidence of Marietta's age at her death, see Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto,* 411-413.
[98] Borghini, *Il Riposo,* 559.

the end of 1590 when Tintoretto ceased his work in the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, very possibly due to mourning his daughter's death.[99]

It is certain that Robusti was over that age of thirty at her death. First, although Robusti was Tintoretto's eldest child, she was illegitimate, probably born to a German woman before his marriage to Faustina around 1559.[100] Robusti's younger half-brother Domenico, Tintoretto's eldest son and heir to the workshop, is documented as having been born in 1560. A genealogy, created during the third generation of Tintoretto's workshop, traced the Robusti family lineage and confirmed Robusti's illegitimate birth prior to Tintoretto's marriage and other children. Faustina was only in her early to mid-teens when she married, making any children born before Domenico almost surely impossible. Second, Sergio Marinelli convincingly argued that Tintoretto probably invested in Robusti as an artistic heir because she was allegedly his only child for many years.[101] This may also be why she is his only daughter to be formally trained and work in his workshop. Marinelli places her birth on the later side between 1554 and 1556.[102] Most convincing for shifting her birthdate however, is the specific account by Carlo Ridolfi that Robusti painted the portrait of her grandfather Marco dei Vescovi. As Detlev von Hadeln first observed in his 1924 edition of Ridolfi's *Maraviglie,* Robusti must have been old enough to paint her grandfather before his death in 1571.[103] This would place Robusti at an age and skill level sufficient to complete a portrait of her grandfather seen and revered by others. A birth date of 1560 would have made this impossible, so a birth date no later than 1554 is more likely.

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[99] Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto,* 411-417.
[100] *Genealogia della Casa Tintoretto,* in Fernando Checa Cremades (2004), 205; Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto,* 133, 140-141.
[101] Marinelli, "Marietta Robusti," 55.
[102] Marinelli, "Marietta Robusti," 55.
[103] Ridolfi, *Le Maraviglie,* ed. von Hadeln, 78, n. 1.

When Robusti died around 1590, Ridolfi wrote, "Her father wept bitterly, taking it as the loss of a part of his own inner being. He mourned her with unceasing tears for a long time. . ."[104] Perhaps the loss was more than just that of a beloved daughter. Based on the evidence of Borghini and Ridolfi, including the proposals for foreign court appointments, Robusti was one of Tintoretto's most successful contributors to his workshop. His loss was that of both a daughter and a talented assistant, not to mention an additional source of income. Robusti had increasingly become a marvel, an idea expressed by Annibale Caro in a letter to the father of Sofonisba Anguissola in 1558. Caro stated that as a connoisseur of art he took pleasure in exhibiting works by women artists, such as Anguissola, so he could exhibit them as "two marvels" at once—the artist and the artwork.[105]

Talents aside, the motivation to either collect works of art by Robusti or have her as a court painter was complex. As a woman following in her father's profession—a male vocation by societal standards of creative capacity—she was a curiosity to be collected. This is not to say Robusti was not talented; she was a chief assistant in her father's workshop and was recognized as such, but the additional, if not primary, motivations behind her collectability by foreign courts presumptively rested in the novelty of Robusti herself.[106] The growing interest in collecting works by women artists in the mid sixteenth-century is expressed in Caro's letter of 1558. By the late seventeenth century, collectors sought out female painters specifically. Many feared their collections would be incomplete without female representation, and others wanted to distinguish

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[104] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 99.
[105] Mary D. Garrard, "Here's Looking at Me: Sofonisba Anguissola and the Problem of the Woman Artist," *Renaissance Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (Autumn, 1994): 566-568. To see the letter in its entirety, see Annibale Caro, *Lettere Familiare,* ed. Aulo Greco (Florence, 1959), 2.
[106] Marinelli, "Marietta Robusti," 58. Marinelli makes a similar claim to the motivation behind other European courts requesting Marietta, questioning the absolute skill of the artist against her rarity as a woman artist with a famous father.

their collection with rarities.[107] In 1579 Lavinia Fontana wrote to Alfonso Ciacón in response to his request for a self-portrait for his museum collection of "images of illustrious personages."[108] In the letter Fontana writes that she is too greatly honored by such an inclusion next to other artists of merit such as "Signora Sophonisba" —Sofonisba Anguissola.[109] By collecting a self-portrait of a female artist, such as Robusti's, the collector gained two rarities in one—the artist and her work. By 1687, the inventory of Don Gaspar de Haro y Guzmán, seventh Marqués del Carpio, contained works of art by at least six Italian women artists, including two by Robusti, discussed below. The growing interest in collecting works by *pittrici* has been compared to collecting for a cabinet of curiosities, the atypical status of women artists contributing to the heightened demand for works made by women to fill collections in the seventeenth century.[110]

While images of or by women artists were ultimately highly sought after, there are still no securely attributed extant paintings by Robusti. In fact, this is a common fate for works by women artists. Robusti was not the only female Venetian painter documented during the Cinquecento, nor is she the only one remembered for her myth rather than her surviving works. Irene di Spilimbergo (1538-1559) was the first woman artist to have a publication devoted entirely to her—a book of poetry published upon her death with contributions from approximately 143 different authors.[111] She moved to Venice at the age of fifteen to live with her maternal grandparents after her father's death, and she died a few years later at the age of twenty-one. She allegedly worked under Titian for a period of time before her death; both

[107] Sheila Barker, "Introduction," in *Women Artists in Early Modern Italy: Careers, Fame, and Collectors*, ed. Sheila Barker (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2016), 10.
[108] Caroline Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana: A Painter and Her Patrons in Sixteenth-Century Bologna* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 219-220.
[109] Rogers and Tinagli, *Women in Italy,* 316.
[110] Sheila Barker, "Introduction," 8.
[111] Dionigi Atanagi, *Rime di diversi nobilissimi et eccellentissima autori in morte della Signora Irene delle Signore di Spilimbergo* (Venice, 1561).

Atanagi and Vasari link Spilimbergo and her family to the Venetian master.[112] Her promising talent was apparently such that, Atanagi writes, "she attended to it [drawing] with such diligent study, and with so much patience, that in a few days she did that which a man, let alone a woman, could have perhaps not have done in many years."[113] However, similar to Robusti, her work as an artist is almost completely disregarded throughout the book of poetry. Further, no extant works are securely attributed to Spilimbergo, though some works have been tentatively attributed to her in recent years,[114] and her portrait is in the National Gallery of Art in Washington. What survives is Spilimbergo's legacy; a chaste, beautiful, and talented ideal woman for Renaissance and Christian culture, romanticized by her early death and remembered in poetry not for her artistic accomplishments, but her beauty and virtue. As with Robusti, what remains are the words of men who may not even have met her.

[112] Dabbs, *Life Stories of Women Artists,* 73; Vasari, *Lives*, 795-796.
[113] Dabbs, *Life Stories of Women Artists,* 72.
[114] For a discussion of Irene's attributions, see Schutte, "Irene Di Spilimbergo," 42-61.

CHAPTER III

ATTRIBUTIONS AND COLLECTION HISTORY

> Marietta's special gift, however, was knowing how to paint portraits well.[115]
>
> —Carlo Ridolfi, *Le Maraviglie dell'arte*

For most recent history, Marietta Robusti has lingered in art historical purgatory;[116] she is a legend without any secure, extant works. While Robusti's name is cited sporadically in inventories through the centuries, the whereabouts of her works are now unknown or misidentified. The absence of any certain attributions has propelled both her myth and contemporary art historians to create compelling arguments for what existing works may have or have not been her own artistic creation. Though Robusti did indeed paint portraits and was sought after for her portraiture, Ridolfi's assertion that they were her "special gift" is a typical assertion for women artists of the Cinquecento. Nevertheless, the few works specified by her biographers and what she is remembered for today are all portraits. Borghini describes two works: a self-portrait, and a portrait of Jacopo Strada.[117] Ridolfi describes the same portrait of Jacopo Strada, and a portrait of Robusti's grandfather Marco dei Vescovi and his son Pietro.[118] The portraits of Vescovi and Pietro may be two separate works, or they may be a double-portrait on one canvas; the description is unclear. Attempts to identify these works specifically are discussed below, as well as a few works outside of portraiture. The discussion is organized as

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[115] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 98.
[116] This phrase was used by Julia K. Dabbs, *Life Stories of Women Artists, 1550-1800* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009), 65.
[117] Borghini, *Il Riposo,* 265.
[118] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 98.

follows: Self-portrait attributions, followed by a discussion of Robusti's identifiable features, portraiture, drawings, and finally the few works cited in collection inventories.

Historian Melania Mazzucco states, "Marietta Tintoretta is a painter without works, one of the many [women] who punctuate the history of art as melancholy footnotes in a story that they have not written."[119] But this is not without trying. The attributions to Marietta Robusti are numerous. Further, the date of Robusti's birth is important in the scholarly debates surrounding her oeuvre. As discussed previously, Robusti may have been born as early as 1551, and the majority of attributions to her are based on the assumption that she was born in the early 1550s. Ridolfi's account suggests that Robusti began training under her father at an early age, and she could have been considered a proficient assistant by her mid-teenage years. This assumption is not unreasonable; Tintoretto was an independent master by the age of twenty-one.[120] Thus, placing a work as early as 1567 into Robusti's oeuvre is entirely conceivable. The works discussed here are not all-inclusive; numerous attributions have been made without substantial evidence, and an ambitious assortment of Robusti's so-called works appear in collection and sales catalogues over the past centuries. I examine the most discussed, investigated, and substantial attributions associated with Robusti's name. I will not claim to secure any attributions, but instead critically evaluate her presence in collection history – whether ambitious or factual – in relation to the reasons that have made her an object of collection.

By far the most famous attribution to Robusti is an alleged *Self-portrait* that hangs in Florence's Corridoio Vasariano as part of the Uffizi Gallery's expansive self-portrait collection

[119] Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto,* 253. All quotations of Mazzucco are translated by the author unless stated otherwise.
[120] Tietze-Conrat, "Marietta, fille du Tintoret," 259.

(fig. 1).[121] Most recently, the portrait served as the face of the 2018 exhibition *Con dolce forza: Donne nell'universo musicale del Cinque e Seicento* in the Santa Caterina Oratory outside of Florence. Though the portrait is not a secure attribution, the exhibition catalogue generally treats the work as autograph. However, the evidence against the *Self-portrait* is overwhelming. Tentatively dated c. 1580, the sitter would accord reasonably with Robusti's age in her mid-twenties, though the sitter may even be younger. The woman stands in front of either a harpsichord or spinet looking at the viewer with a slight smile, her right arm extended, about to play. Her left arm holds open a music score that reads *Madonna, per voi ardo,* "My Lady, for you I burn**."**[122] A tradition of women artists painting musical self-portraits with virginals or spinets was evolving with contemporary artists such as Lavinia Fontana (fig. 7) and Sofonisba Anguissola (fig. 8). The virginal, spinet, and harpsichord were instruments associated with chaste women in the Renaissance – primarily noblewomen.[123] It would not have been unusual for Robusti to paint a musical self-portrait based on her professional training in music and singing. It is important to distinguish, however, the presentation of the woman in the *Self-portrait* from the portraits of Fontana and Anguissola. While Fontana and Anguissola are active players, Robusti's attributed *Self-portrait* depicts a woman on display. The sitter stands in front of the keyboard with a subtle smile, gesturing to a romantic declaration of love. Louise Arizzoli suggests that the

[121] For a discussion of the Uffizi *Self-portrait* see Caterina Caneva, *Il Corridoio vasariano agli Uffizi* (Firenze: Banca Toscana, 2002).
[122] The composer Philippe Verdolet published the well-known madrigal in Venice in 1533, but the portrait shows only one line. Marinelli, "Marietta Robusti," 61; Joanna Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture: The Visual Construction of Identity and the Social Status of the Artist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 218; Naples, *Cinque Secoli di Stampa Musicale in Europa,* exh. cat. Museo di Palazzo Venezia (1985), 262, cat. 8.9.
[123] Mary D.Garrard, "Here's Looking at Me: Sofonisba Anguissola and the Problem of the Woman Artist," *Renaissance Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (Autumn, 1994): 589-590.

portrait seems more likely to have been painted by a man declaring his love for the sitter rather than an artist's self-portrait.[124]

Provenance records suggest additional issues with the *Self-portrait's* credibility. The correspondence between Marco Boschini and Cardinal Leopoldo de' Medici, in negotiating the price of the "self-portrait" by Marietta Tintoretta in September of 1675, is the foundation for the portrait's historical link to Robusti. Boschini informed the Cardinal of a rare find, "un ritratto di Marieta Tintoretta virtuosissima pittrice," that the Cardinal was immediately interested in.[125] Boschini purchased the *Self-portrait* from the Venetian collection of Francesco Fontana who had attributed the work to Titian.[126] Adding further speculation, it was sold to Boschini with other forgeries, but Boschini insisted on its authenticity.[127] In truth, it seems that Boschini attributed the *Self-portrait* to Marietta Robusti in order to meet the Cardinal's interest in owning a female artist's self-portrait.

Last, the style and quality of the work has led to the conclusion that the *Self-portrait* is not Robusti's. Joanna Woods-Marsden remarks that if Robusti was trained by her father to be skilled in portraiture, one might outright deny the mediocre portrait, which lacks elementary skills in foreshortening and anatomy.[128] Woods-Marsden's concerns about quality are shared. Duncan Bull goes so far as to suggest that the portrait is too feeble to even be considered a work

[124] Louise Arizzoli, "Marietta Robusti in Jacopo Tintoretto's Workshop: Her Likeness and her Role as a Model for her Father," *Studi di Storia dell'Arte,* ed. Leonilde Dominici (Perugia: Ediart, 2017): 108.
[125] *Archivio del Collezionismo Mediceo*. "II Cardinal Leopoldo," (1987), 316-18.
[126] In addition, Prior to Fontana's ownership, the work had been in the collection of the French painter Nicolas Régnier and was attributed to Jacopo Tintoretto. Marinelli, "Marietta Robusti," 61; Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto,* 458-59.
[127] Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto,* 458-59.
[128] Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture*, 218.

from Tintoretto's workshop, its style indicating Verona rather than Venice.[129] Indeed, the style of the portrait is significantly less naturalistic than the standard portraiture of Tintoretto's workshop. The treatment of the sitter's face and dress is stiff and disproportional. The lines used are harsh—not a quality of the Tintoretto workshop, nor of most Venetian painting—and the artist has only a rudimentary understanding of anatomy. The *Self-portrait* bears no stylistic resemblance to any known portraiture from the *bottega,* which can be seen in each portrait example discussed in this chapter, such as *Portrait of an Old Man and a Boy,* the Budapest *Portrait of a Lady,* and *Portrait of a Gentlewoman* (fig. 9) among many others.

Several other works have been identified as Robusti's potential self-portraits, two of which are mentioned here. Erika Tietze-Conrat was the first to attribute the Kunsthistorisches Museum's *Portrait of a Gentlewoman* (fig. 9) to Robusti in 1934.[130] Tietze-Conrat believed that the painting was the original self-portrait described by Borghini that was given to Emperor Maximillian II. The work was listed in the inventory of Archduke Leopold Guglielmo in 1659 as attributed to Titian.[131] The attribution went unchallenged until 1893 when Franz Wickhoff re-attributed the painting to Jacopo Tintoretto – an attribution accepted to this day by most scholars.[132] The portrait displays a wealthy noblewoman standing in a full-frontal pose. Her stance is rigid, and she glances slightly away from the viewer. While the facial features of the sitter resemble Ridolfi's etching of Robusti and the Budapest *Portrait* (fig. 3)*,* the work seems less like a self-portrait and more like a portrait of Robusti as a noblewoman painted by her father or another member of the workshop.

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[129] Duncan Bull, "A Double-Portrait Attributable to Marietta Tintoretto," *The Burlington Magazine* 151, no. 1279 (Oct., 2009): 678.
[130] Tietze-Conrat, "Marietta," 259-260.
[131] Paola Rossi, ed., *Jacopo Tintoretto: Ritratti* (Milano: Electa, 1994) 108.
[132] Franz Wickhoff, "Les Écoles italiennes au Musée Impérial de Vienne," *Gazette des Beaux Arts* (1893): 140.

Mazzucco is also generous with self-portrait discussions that are based loosely on historical inventory attributions that have changed with time. One such work is the Louvre's so-called *Self-Portrait* (fig. 10), attributed to at least four other Venetian painters before Robusti.[133] An "autograph" replica is also found in the Borghese Gallery, though the basis for the attribution is not clear. The painting probably came from the collection of the Spanish Marqués del Carpio, and the replica appeared in 1790 in the Borghese Gallery. The painting was originally catalogued in the Palazzo a Campo Marzio.[134] The work has never been cleaned, leaving the painting so dark that many details are hard to observe. However, Mazzucco notices the resemblance the sitter shares with many other portraits of Robusti.[135] If restored, more information may be revealed, as occurred with another attribution in Vienna discussed below.

The basis for identifying Robusti's facial features in each attribution follows a similar pattern. Both etchings of Robusti, published by Carlo Ridolfi in 1648 and Joachim von Sandrart in 1684, are based on a lost portrait, possibly the *Portrait of a Lady* (fig. 3) in Budapest's Szépművészeti Múzeum today.[136] The physiognomic similarities between these portraits include a round bulbous nose, large forehead, full lips, accentuated chin, and round eyes. Robusti's nose may be her most distinguishing feature; it clearly resembles a young Jacopo Tintoretto's *Self-portrait* (fig. 11) in the Philadelphia Museum of Art.[137] Robusti also wears a sleeved dress with a low neckline and pearls in both Ridolfi's etching and the Budapest portrait. Arizzoli similarly remarks on the recurring facial type found in Tintoretto and Domenico's work, "which is not the idealized Venetian beauty but who rather has some specific physiognomic features comparable

[133] Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto,* 453-54.
[134] Paola della Pergola, *Galleria Borghese: i dipinti,* vol. 1 (Rome: Istituto poligrafico dello Stato, Libreria dello Stato, 1955), 128.
[135] Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto,* 455.
[136] Tietze-Conrat, "Marietta," 258-59.
[137] This comparison is made by Arizzoli, "Marietta Robusti," 108-9.

to the famous portrait that Tintoretto did of himself when he was around thirty years old…."[138] Arizzoli's collection of paintings by Tintoretto and Domenico that employ the same female model with the facial characteristics of Robusti suggest that the model was likely Robusti herself.[139] Mazzucco too believes that Robusti, as the daughter of an artist, should certainly be found in figures painted by her father or brother,[140] and Arizzoli's findings are probably the first of many to be formally identified.

The interest in Robusti's portrait attributions outside of self-portraiture began with Tietze-Conrat's article "Marietta, fille du Tintoret" 1934. In the same article that suggested *Portrait of a Gentlewoman* as a self-portrait, Tietze-Conrat also attributed the Kunsthistorisches Museum's *Portrait of an Old Man and a Boy* (fig. 6) to Robusti. As previously mentioned, Tietze-Conrat argued that the double portrait contained a signature, the letters "M R" for "Marietta Robusti," near the bottom-left of the canvas.[141] Tietze-Conrat also assumed *Portrait of an Old Man and a Boy* was the same portrait that Ridolfi described of Marco dei Vescovi and his son. Ridolfi's description of Vescovi with "a long beard"—just like the old man in the double portrait—is used to corroborate her claim.[142] The portrait was cleaned in 1937 and also revealed the numbers "6 5'." The claim that the work was signed by Robusti was formally rebuffed in 1942 by Erich von der Becken, who suggested that the "M R" accompanied with a "'6 5" was likely an "M 3," indicating the third month of 1565.[143] There is no basis for Tintoretto's

[138] Arizzoli, "Marietta Robusti," 108.
[139] For the entire list of works that employ Robusti as a model, see Arizzoli, "Marietta Robusti," 109-12.
[140] Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto,* 276.
[141] The letters had previously been interpreted as "M Z."
[142] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 98.
[143] Bercken, Erich von der. *Die Gemälde des Jacopo Tintoretto: mit 360 bildtafeln* (München: R.Piper & co., 1942), 133.

workshop using dating identification such as "M 3," yet neither argument has been completely disproved.

Not all art historians accept von der Becken's "M 3" conclusion as fact. In 2009, Duncan Bull suggested that *Portrait of an Old Man and a Boy* should be reinstated to Robusti's oeuvre based on stylistic similarities to another attributed double-portrait in Dresden's Gemäldegalerie, discussed below.[144] The same year Julia K. Dabbs asserted that the double portrait is indeed the one of Vescovi and his son named by Ridolfi, and is Robusti's only secure attribution.[145] While Dabbs cites Whitney Chadwick's similar assertion, the latter's information on Robusti as a whole is incomplete.[146] Statements such as "her hand was indistinguishable from her father's" and "most modern scholars attribute only a single work to her, the *Portrait of an Old Man with a Boy* (c. 1585)" [147] not only lack supplemental citations but also exclude important information, such as the likelihood that the portrait was completed in 1565, not 1585, based on the "6 5" inscription. If the work is indeed by Robusti, it must be one of her earliest and would support a birth date around 1551. If the work is also the portrait of Marco dei Vescovi and his son Pietro, as described by Ridolfi, the striking age difference between the old man and young boy should be considered. While it is not impossible for a man in his seventies to have a young boy, the difference in age seems more akin to a grandfather and grandson rather than father and son, though this does not discredit the possibility that it is still Ridolfi's portrait.

The Rijksmuseum's *Portrait of Ottavio Strada* in Amsterdam, painted between 1567 and 1568, is another of Robusti's most discussed portrait attributions for a number of reasons (fig 12). Antiquarian Jacopo Strada and his son Ottavio were in Venice between 1567 and 1568

[144] Bull, "A Double-Portrait," 678, 681.
[145] Dabbs, *Life Stories of Women Artists*, 93, n. 17.
[146] Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2012), 18-19.
[147] Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society*, 18.

acquiring artwork and antiques for Duke Albrecht V of Bavaria.[148] During their visit, Titian painted a well-known portrait of Jacopo Strada, now located in Vienna's Kunsthistorisches Museum (fig. 13). The Rijksmuseum's portrait of Ottavio was presumably painted during their visit to Venice. Both portraits are similar in size and compositional arrangement, with allusions to antiquity through classical sculpture and ancient coins—a reference to Strada's position as antiquarian and his son's similar training. Whereas the Rijksmuseum catalogues *Portrait of Ottavio Strada* as by Jacopo Tintoretto, Robusti is often considered or credited with the painting by other scholars, discussed below. The assumption would set her date of birth very early, no later than 1554, though probably earlier.

The notion that the portrait is by Robusti is speculative. It is plausible that Borghini, and in turn Ridolfi, confused Ottavio with Jacopo Strada when they wrote about Robusti's portrait. Jacopo Strada was indeed a more illustrious patron, and citing Jacopo instead of Ottavio may have simply been a simple biographical error. Mazzucco likewise suggests the interpretation of the son being mistaken for his more famous father.[149] In 1944, Hans Tietze and Erika Tietze-Conrat suggested the possibility of mistaking Ottavio for Jacopo after identifying a drawing they believed was made by Robusti. The drawing shared a strong resemblance to the statue head in Ottavio's portrait, and in attributing the drawing to Robusti, they hypothesized that she had painted the younger Strada rather than the father. Tietze and Tietze-Conrat also recall Hadeln's observation that while *Portrait of Ottavio Strada* exhibits Tintoretto's "genius," the execution seems to have been done by an assistant rather than the master.[150] In 2000 Roland Krischel credited Robusti outright with the *Portrait of Ottavio Strada* in *Masters of Italian Art:*

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[148] Roland Krischel, *Masters of Italian Art: Tintoretto* (Koln: Konemann, 2000), 130.
[149] Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto,* 272.
[150] Hans Tietze and Erika Tietze-Conrat, *The Drawings of the Venetian Painters in the 15th and 16th Centuries* (New York: Hacker Art Books, 1944/1979), 293.

Tintoretto.[151] Krischel gives no substantial evidence for Robusti's authorship, but argues that connoisseurs of art such as Jacopo and Ottavio Strada must have found it "particularly intriguing to be painted by this young prodigy [Robusti]."[152] However, Krischel's lack of evidence undermines the remainder of his well-researched information on Robusti and her family.

Duncan Bull also discusses Robusti and *Portrait of Ottavio Strada,* but ultimately argues that the portrait is stylistically more in line with Tintoretto's portraits of the 1560's. In short, Bull believes the allegorical portrait's subject matter would have been too complex for a sixteen-year-old, or perhaps younger, to have painted entirely.[153] The initial under-drawing visible through X-radiography differs considerably from the final composition—a revisionism consistent with the work of an experienced Tintoretto who made changes as he worked.[154] Instead, Bull argues the case for another double portrait by Robusti's hand: The *Double-portrait* (fig. 14) in Dresden's Gemäldegalerie. The work is currently attributed to Domenico, and was ascribed to Tintoretto's workshop until 1749. Bull was the first to attribute the painting to Robusti in 2009. First, he argues that the sitters in Titian's *Portrait of Jacopo Strada* and the older man on the left in the *Double-portrait* share a distinct resemblance, and may in fact be the same person—Jacopo Strada. The tilt of the older man's head and pose in the *Double-portrait* mirrors that of Titian's portrait, and the dates of both paintings align with Strada and Ottavio's visit to Venice. Second, the original underdrawing on the Rijksmuseum's *Portrait of Ottavio Strada* canvas shares the pose of the young blonde sitter in the Dresden *Double-portrait,* though in reverse. Yet curiously, the young figure on the right in no way resembles the Ottavio Strada in the Rijksmuseum portrait. Thus, Bull speculates that the delicate young boy with blonde hair, a fashion donned by

[151] Krischel, *Masters of Italian Art,* 130-132.
[152] Krischel, *Masters of Italian Art,* 130.
[153] Bull, "A Double-Portrait," 680.
[154] Bull, "A Double-Portrait," 680.

Venetian women, pulled back might actually be the image of Robusti dressed as a boy, just as Ridolfi describes.[155]

Bull's unusual interpretation of the *Double-portrait* is based on a phrase used by Borghini to describe Robusti's portrait of Jacopo Strada and her self-portrait: "I quali, come cosa rara."[156] The phrase *come cosa rara,* or "as a rare thing," is significant. While Bull overlooks the reasons why a woman's self-portrait would have been rare, he believes that a double-portrait of Robusti and Strada would have "pricked imperial curiosity."[157] Thus, according to Bull, Borghini's description implies that the portraits were on one canvas.[158] Based on the age of the younger sitter, Robusti's birth date would again have probably been between 1551-1552, a date that would substantiate both Von Hadeln's claims and Ridolfi's statement that she painted her grandfather's portrait before his death in 1571.[159] Arizzoli also attributes the *Double-portrait* to Robusti based on Bull's argument, and further substantiates Bull's claims by considering the obvious likeness found between the younger sitter's facial features and Robusti's other discussed portraits.[160] While the shape of the young sitter's nose in the Dresden *Double-portrait* is Robusti's most distinguished characteristic, the lips, eyes, and chin also share an obvious resemblance.

Aside from portraiture, Robusti presumably participated in the training and perhaps the larger commissions of Tintoretto's workshop. The majority of *bottega* commissions were public works classified as history paintings. Ridolfi states, "She also painted other works of her own

[155] Bull, "A Double-Portrait," 680.
[156] Raffaello Borghini, *II riposo* (Florence: 1584), 558.
[157] Bull, "A Double-Portrait," 681.
[158] Bull, "A Double-Portrait," 680-681.
[159] Ridolfi, *Le Maraviglie dell'arte,* 79.
[160] Arizzoli, "Marietta Robusti," 108.

invention and still others that derived from her father."[161] He goes further to compare her "brilliant mind" to Tintoretto's.[162] Evidence of Robusti's training and contribution in the *bottega* exists in the drawings and paintings noted in inventories.

Two extant drawings may be the most convincing examples of Robusti's hand known today. Although sixteenth-century Italian drawings are rarely signed, at least two drawings have been tentatively attributed to Robusti based on her possible signature or a later inscription. Venetian artists drew considerably less than central Italian artists, and even more rare are drawings attributed to women artists. Therefore, the two drawings discussed hereafter receive considerable attention.

The first and better-known drawing is a study for the *Head of Vitellius* (fig. 15). The original marble bust of *Vitellius* was displayed in the Palazzo Ducale beginning in 1525, and Tintoretto was able to obtain a copy of the bust for his workshop.[163] At least twenty-five studies of the bust from the *bottega* survive today.[164] Curiously, a faint but large inscription across the *Head of Vitellius* sketch reads "questa testa sì è de ma[no] de Madonna Marieta," "This head is by the hand of Madonna Marietta."[165] The authorship of the writing is unknown. Mazzucco attests that the inscription is authentic to the period of the drawing's creation, and may in fact be by her hand.[166] Roland Krischel also credits the drawing to a young Robusti proudly inscribing the sketch with a "still childish hand."[167] Based on the scarcity of signed sixteenth-century

[161] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 98.
[162] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 98-99.
[163] Michiaki Koshikawa, "Draftsman," in *Tintoretto,* ed. Robert Echols and Frederick Ilchman (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2018), 174-175.
[164] Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto,* 259.
[165] Inscription translated by the author.
[166] Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto,* 259.
[167] Roland Krischel, "Tintoretto and the Sister Arts," in *Tintoretto,* ed. Miguel Falomir (Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2007), 119.

drawings, it seems unlikely that Robusti would have written this phrase. Based on a precedent of Tintoretto inscribing Marco's name on some of his son's drawings, however, it may actually have been Tintoretto who wrote the inscription to Marietta in order to distinguish the sketch among the countless similar workshop studies.[168] Antonio Morassi first published the drawing as Robusti's in 1937 as part of the Rasini Collection in Milan, and also ascribed the drawing *Head of Giuliano de' Medici* on the reverse to her.[169] In 1944, Hans Tietze and Erika Tietze-Conrat also attributed the *Head of Vitellius* to Robusti, along with a compositional drawing they titled *A Sainted Bishop Healing the Sick,* which has an inscription of "Ma. Tintoretta" in the bottom-right corner (Fig. 16).[170] Tietze and Tietze-Conrat generously added four more drawings to Robusti's oeuvre based on stylistic similarities, presumably on the basis of the inscribed drawings.

The drawing of *A Bishop Saint Healing the Sick*, located in the Museo Civico Ala Ponzone in Cremona, should more accurately be titled *St. Augustine Healing the Victims of the Plague.*[171] Rather than a quick sketch of a bust, the work is a compositional study and the style is "Tintorettesque." While Tintoretto did paint the subject of St. Augustine healing plague victims for an altarpiece in 1549-50, the composition was entirely different.[172] Ridolfi states that Robusti created works derived from her father,[173] and this may be an example of such a practice. The musculature and proportions of the twisted figures in the foreground receive the most attention,

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[168] This information was verified in personal correspondence with Dr. John Marciari. John Marciari, *Drawing in Tintoretto's Venice* (New York: The Morgan Library & Museum, Paul Holberton Publishing), 138.
[169] Antonio Morassi, *Disegni antichi dalla collezione Rasini in Milano* (Milano: Ulrico Hoepli, 1937), 33-34.
[170] Tietze and Tietze-Conrat, *The Drawings of the Venetian Painters,* 293.
[171] The author thanks Dr. John Marciari, the Charles W. Engelhard Curator and Head of the Department of Drawings and Prints at the Morgan Library and curator of the 2018 exhibition *Drawing in Tintoretto's Venice*, for clarifying the subject of this drawing.
[172] Confirmed by personal correspondence with Dr. John Marciari.
[173] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 98.

and the dynamic diagonal composition reflects Tintoretto's influence. The inscription "Ma Tintoretta," "Ma" abbreviated for either "Madonna," or more likely "Marietta," is written in black ink in the bottom-right corner next to a red collector's mark. The drawing last belonged to the collection of Marchese Giuseppe Sigismondo Ala Ponzone (1761-1842), and is now preserved in the Museo Civico with the rest of his collection.[174] The red collector's stamp has a crown and the initials "GSAP." Neither the Museo Civico nor the Frits Lugt database have formally attributed the stamp to the Marchese's collection, but Dr. John Marciari has suggested that it may have been briefly used by the Marchese based on the crown and identical initials.[175] *St. Augustine Healing the Victims of the Plague* was one of many drawings mounted on a paper frame for display purposes, making almost all of the reverse side of the drawing inaccessible. It is impossible to know for sure who inscribed the drawing to Robusti or why, but it is intriguing. Marciari confirmed that the drawing is not by Tintoretto and probably not by Domenico. The style suggests that someone in the Tintoretto workshop—maybe Vicentino or very possibly Robusti—made the drawing.[176] Marciari also notes a similarity in the handling of chalk to Palma il Giovanni, Venice's dominant artist after Tintoretto's death. Most importantly, there are no reasons to rule out Robusti's authorship.

Aside from the potential painting and drawing attributions discussed in relation to Robusti, her name also appears in many collection inventories from the seventeenth to nineteenth century. Because most of the works are not identifiable today, it is impossible at this time to know whether the inventory attributions are accurate. The two most probable works are cited in a

[174] For information on the collection, see Alessandra Squizzato, "Profilo di un collezionista cremonese tra Settecento e Ottocento: il marchese Giuseppe Sigismondo Ala Ponzone," in *La Pinacoteca Ala Ponzone Dal Duecento al Quattrocento,* ed. Mario Marubbi (Milan: Silvana, 2004) 17-27.
[175] This information was provided in personal correspondence with Dr. John Marciari.
[176] This information was provided in personal correspondence with Dr. John Marciari.

prominent seventeenth-century collection, and based on subject matter, where, and when they were probably obtained, are the only history paintings attributable to Robusti that are likely authentic.

Two paintings under the name of "Marietta Tintoretto" are recorded in the 1682 inventory of Don Gaspar de Haro y Guzmán, 7th Marqués del Carpio.[177] They are the earliest works ascribed to Robusti to be cited in an inventory, almost a century after her death. The Marqués worked as a Spanish ambassador in Rome and Naples from 1677 until his death in 1687. He was one of the most prominent Spanish art collectors in the seventeenth century, and his fascination with Italian art, especially Venetian, is evident prior to his appointment in Rome based on his collection of drawings in a 1677 inventory.[178] Documentation shows that in 1682 Carpio purchased the "remains" of the Tintoretto *bottega,* adding substantial weight to the possibility that the Robusti attributions are authentic.[179] Both of her works listed in his 1682 inventory are history paintings. The canvases are listed as companions, the first titled *La Prudenza con molte figure attorno,* "Prudence surrounded by many figures," and the second, *Una Donna che corona un Licorno,* "A Woman crowning a Unicorn."[180] Both a unicorn and the figure of Prudence are subjects with iconographical associations to feminine virginity and virtue. Thus, the subject matter seems appropriate and plausible for a woman artist. In Carpio's collection, the two paintings hung together in an entrance hall of the Palazzo della Vigna in Rome. He eventually owned 320 Venetian paintings in all, a significant 170 of them attributed to

[177] Marcus B. Burke and Peter Cherry, *Collections of Painting in Madrid, 1601-1755,* vol. 2 (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 1997), 762, f.99, n. 591.
[178] María López-Fanjul, "The Spanish Origins of the Marqués Del Carpio's Collection of Drawings," *Master Drawings* 48, no. 4 (2010): 464-466.
[179] Miguel Falomir, "Jacopo Comin, alias Robusti, alias Tintoretto: An Exhibition and Catalogue," in *Tintoretto,* ed. Miguel Falomir (Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado, 2007) 22.
[180] Burke and Cherry, *Collections of Painting in Madrid,* 762, f.99, n. 591.

Tintoretto or his workshop.[181] The Marqués also owned works by other Italian women artists. Listed in his inventory are works by Elisabetta Sirani, Irene di Spilimbergo, Sofonisba Anguissola, Domenica Macagana, and Teresa del Po.[182] His collection suggests not only a preference for Italian painting and drawing, but also a desire to collect rare works by women artists—certainly curiosities within Carpio's extensive collection. With his great interest in Tintoretto and his workshop, Carpio's collection would probably have seemed incomplete without works by the famous Tintoretta, and they may have been obtained when purchasing the *bottega* remains.

Other seventeenth and eighteenth-century collections cite potential works by or of Marietta Robusti. A *tondo* portrait titled *Head of Tintoretto's Daughter* is listed in the collection of Venetian Francesco Bergonzi, later inherited by his son Giorgio when inventoried in 1704.[183] The painting is described as *"Una testa di donna, dicono esser la figliola del Tintoretto, in un tondo, di mano del medemo."*[184] The phrase *"di mano del medemo"* suggests that the painting was a portrait by Jacopo Tintoretto rather than a self-portrait. Another autograph portrait of Robusti and her husband, probably a marriage portrait painted by Tintoretto, was listed for sale in the 1682 inventory of San Sebastiano.[185] The 1727 inventory of Louis, Duke of Orléans (1703-1752) in Paris cites a *Portrait of a Man* by Marietta Robusti at the Palais-Royal.[186] The inventory describes Robusti's portrait as a painting on canvas of a man dressed in black and sitting in an armchair. He wears a ring on his thumb, and his left hand lies on a book, which rests

[181] Burke and Cherry, *Collections of Painting in Madrid,* 164.
[182] Burke and Cherry, *Collections of Painting in Madrid,* 166.
[183] Linda Borean, Stefania Mason Rinaldi, and Michel Hochmann, *Il collezionismo d'arte a Venezia: Il Seicento* (Venezia: Fondazione di Venezia, 2007), 364.
[184] Borean, Rinaldi, and Hochmann, *Il collezionismo d'arte a Venezia,* 364.
[185] Archivio Segreto Vaticano, Monastero di San Sebastiano, b. 89; Mazzucco, *Jacomo Tintoretto,* 330.
[186] Getty Provenance Index® databases. J. Paul Getty Trust.

on a table with a crucifix, a small clock, papers, and an inkwell.[187] Portraits and history paintings continue to appear sporadically under the name "Marietta Tintoretto," "Marietta Tintoretta," and "Marietta Robusti" well into the twentieth century, but most have no credible basis for their attributions.[188] By the end of the nineteenth century, at least eight additional works by Robusti had been cited in collection inventories or sales catalogues, and a few of the paintings are recorded in multiple sales. From the information available, the collectors appear diverse, ranging from seventeenth-century European aristocracy to nineteenth-century English furniture makers.[189] Robusti's continued presence in collection history indicates the enduring trend to collect the few illustrious women of early modern art history, their existence as objects of curiosity, and the legacy of Robusti's life story established most successfully by Ridolfi. The wide range of potential attributions to her suggests that Ridolfi's account of Robusti was accurate; she painted portraits of many noblemen and women, as well as works of her own invention.[190]

[187] Getty Provenance Index® databases. J. Paul Getty Trust.
[188] At least a dozen collection and catalogue records in Robusti's name appear in the Getty Provenance Index® databases, with the most recent being in 1945.
[189] For an itemized list of works, see both the archival index and sales catalogue records in the Getty Provenance Index® databases. J. Paul Getty Trust.
[190] Ridolfi, *The Life of Tintoretto,* 98.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussions of the previous chapters, Marietta Robusti's presence in art history can be described as problematic. She was one of the earliest female artists to be trained by her father in a new and growing tradition of *pittrici.* While her talent secured her place in the Tintoretto workshop, her presence as an anomaly in Renaissance culture propelled her interest from local biographers to foreign courts. Robusti's male biographers define her by gendered attributes that reoccur in the descriptions of early modern women artists; Her beauty, musical ability, and father's adoration mark her distinctly as a virtuous woman first, and artist second. Yet, there is ample evidence that Robusti contributed to the family *bottega* in a similar capacity to her male counterparts. She probably participated as a live model for her father and brother, she created works of her own *invenzione,* she was sought after by the noble class for her portraiture, and she undoubtedly contributed to history painting commissions completed by workshop assistants. Caroline Murphy's description of Lavinia Fontana is also true for Robusti: "…the fact that Lavinia Fontana was a woman made her a noteworthy phenomenon. In fact, that obstacle to freedom of choice and personal development, her gender became instead an asset in furthering her business."[191] Indeed, Robusti was the only known female presence in her father's workshop, she received contemporary recognition by a male Florentine biographer, and at least three foreign courts inquired after her. Her father, a master of a thriving workshop, also found her so valuable that he did not allow her to leave the family *bottega*. This was not only because of his affection for her, as biographers have suggested, but also likely because she was a secure source of income. Last, her presence in collection history confirms a trend in the interest of female

[191] Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana,* 13.

artists as curiosities, and constitutes Robusti's status as an accomplished woman of history – even if the reasons are based on qualities outside of artistic ability. As we have seen, there is a disconnect between Robusti's enduring artistic fame and her lack of documented or extant works, due primarily to repercussions of her gender. Even so, *La Tintoretta* helped establish a new and rising era of women artists in Cinquecento Venice and the greater Italian peninsula.

FIGURES

Figure 1. Marietta Robusti?/Unknown, *Self-portrait?/Portrait of a Woman at a Harpsichord,* c. 1580, Uffizi Gallery.

Figure 2. Unknown, *Marietta Robusti,* 1648, published in Carlo Ridolfi's *Maraviglie.*

Figure 3. Jacopo Tintoretto, *Portrait of a Lady (Marietta Robusti?)* c. 1550-80, Museum of Fine Arts Budapest.

Figure 4. Unknown, *Marietta Robusti,* 1684, published in Joachim von Sandrart's *Academia nobilissimae artis pictoriae*.

Figure 5. Unknown, *Marietta Robusti,* 1752, published in Francesco Moücke's *Serie di ritratti degli eccellenti pittori.*


Figure 6. Jacopo Tintoretto/Marietta Robusti?, *Portrait of an Old Man and a Boy,* 1565, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

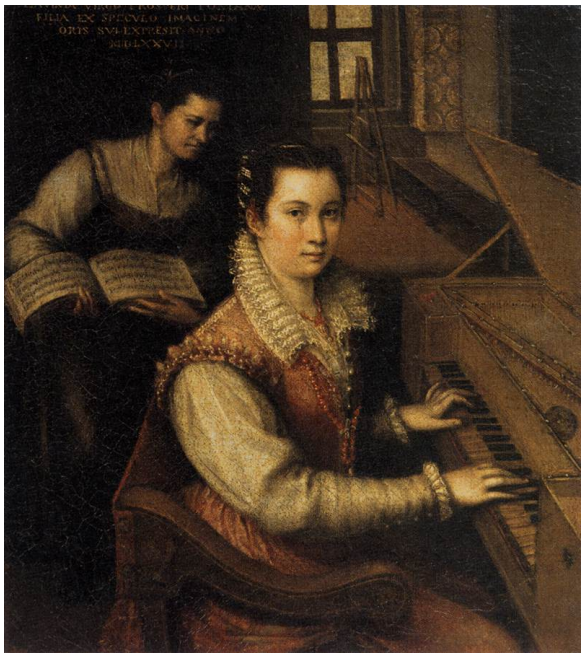

Figure 7. Lavinia Fontana, *Self-portrait at the Spinet,* 1577, Accademia di San Luca, Rome.

Figure 8. Sofonisba Anguissola, *Self-portrait at the Keyboard with a Maidservant,* c. 1550s, Althorp Earl Spencer Collection, Northamptonshire.

Figure 9. Jacopo Tintoretto/Marietta Robusti?, *Portrait of a Gentlewoman/Self-portrait?,* c. 1550s. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

Figure 10. Unknown/Marietta Robusti?, *Female Portrait/Self-Portrait?,* c. 1560s-80s, Louvre, Paris.

Figure 11. Jacopo Tintoretto, *Self-portrait*, c. 1546-1548, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Figure 12. Jacopo Tintoretto/Marietta Robusti?, *Portrait of Ottavio Strada,* 1567-68, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

Figure 13. Titian, *Portrait of Jacopo Strada,* 1567-68, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.


Figure 14. Domenico Tintoretto/Marietta Robusti?, *Double-portrait*, 1567-68, Gemäldegalerie, Dresden.

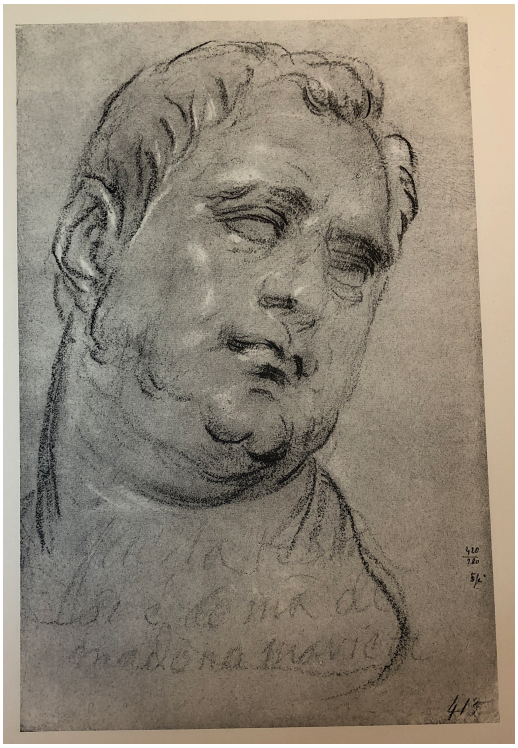

Figure 15. Marietta Robusti?, *Head of Vitellius,* 16th century, Private collection, Milan.

Figure 16. Marietta Robusti?, *A Bishop Saint Healing the Sick/St. Augustine Healing the Victims of the Plague,* 16th century, Museo Civico Ala Ponzone, Cremona.

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VITA

Alicia Jeane Savage (Ali) was born on January 9, 1990 in Fort Worth, Texas. She attended the University of Tulsa in Oklahoma, and graduated with her Bachelor of Arts in both Art History and Communications in May 2012. After working in the energy industry for four years in both Midland and Houston, Texas, Ali decided to return to her passion for art history. She pursued her Master of Arts in Art History at Texas Christian University from 2016 to 2018, where she concentrated in sixteenth-century Italian art. She received a graduate tuition fellowship and two Mary Jane and Robert Sunkel Travel Endowment awards allowing her to conduct thesis related research in Venice, Vienna, Amsterdam, and New York. Ali also worked as a curatorial intern to Dr. Nancy Edwards at the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, and as a teaching and research assistant for the art history faculty at TCU. Ali plans to pursue a career in museums. She is married to Tate Franklin Savage and has one child, Paxton.

ABSTRACT

Marietta Robusti, known also as Marietta Tintoretta, is recognized today primarily as a beloved pupil of her famous father, Jacopo Tintoretto. Before her premature death around 1590, Robusti earned international fame for her painted portraits and was praised by contemporary biographers. Though she was never granted the opportunity to practice autonomously outside of her father's workshop, her role within it was multifaceted, working as an assistant, a portraitist, and most likely a model. Robusti was one of the earliest examples of a new but growing tradition of female painters being trained by their fathers in Cinquecento Italy. Robusti's artistic legacy, however, is established by her biographers in terms of virtuous qualities pertaining to her gender and the adoration of her father rather than artistic achievement. As a result, no extant works by Robusti are securely known today.

Chapter one discusses Marietta Robusti and the Tintoretto *bottega,* along with the rise of women artists in Cinquecento Venice and Renaissance constructs of feminine *virtu* in early modern biographies. The second chapter critically considers Robusti's historiography, with specific attention to her earliest biographers and their gendered treatment of Robusti and her work. Chapter two also examines the trend of collecting works by women artists as curiosities. Chapter three includes a critical discussion of Robusti's highly disputed oeuvre and range of paintings documented in collection history.