

DOMENICO PIOLA AND HIS DRAWINGS:
A STUDY OF HIS FRESCO PREPARATIONS

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Bachelor of Arts, 2017
University of Denver
Denver, CO

Submitted to the Faculty
Graduate Division of the
College of Fine Arts
Texas Christian University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2019

DOMENICO PIOLA AND HIS DRAWINGS:
A STUDY OF HIS FRESCO PREPARATIONS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my primary thesis advisor, Dr. Babette Bohn, for her support and guidance through the thesis process. I also want to thank my other thesis committee members, Dr. Jessica Fripp and Dr. Nancy Edwards, whose expertise and advice greatly enhanced my thesis. I would like to thank the staff of the Palazzo Rosso, the British Museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, the Blanton Museum of Art, and the Morgan Library for aiding my primary research at their collections. A special thanks to Dr. Margherita Priarone at Palazzo Rosso for kindly directing me through their collection- Grazie!

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Lori Diel, Dr. Mark Thistlethwaite, and Dr. Frances Colpitt for their continued support throughout the program. Thank you to Edith Riley-Peinado, Taylor Day, and Hannah Plank in the Visual Resource Library for their constant encouragement and help with any issues, technological or otherwise. Thank you to Dr. Lindsay Dunn in the Writing Center for her assistance with my writing. In addition, I would like to thank all my fellow classmates during both years for their friendship- I have enjoyed learning and collaborating with you. To Alexis Meldrum and Dery Martínez-Bonilla thank you for your constant votes of confidence and laughter.

Lastly, I would like to thank my parents for their unfailing support, care, and words of wisdom. Thank you for always listening and always encouraging my passion for art. I would not be where I am today without you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| LIST OF FIGURES | vi |
| INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| CHAPTER I: DOMENICO PIOLA AND GENOA | 3 |
| CHAPTER II: DOMENICO PIOLA AS DRAFTSMAN | 15 |
| CHAPTER III: DOMENICO PIOLA AT PALAZZO ROSSO | 28 |
| CONCLUSION | 39 |
| FIGURES | 41 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 58 |
| VITA | 62 |
| ABSTRACT | 63 |

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione, *The Adoration of the Shepherds*, 1645, red-brown oil paint on paper, Royal Collection Trust / © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2019.

Figure 2. Domenico Piola, *Adoration of the Shepherds*, n.d., pen and brown ink, brown wash, over black chalk, British Museum, London, © Trustees of the British Museum.

Figure 3. Domenico Piola, *Herdsmen and women watering their flock of sheep at a well*, n.d., pen and brown ink, brown wash, over black chalk, British Museum, London, © Trustees of the British Museum.

Figure 4. Domenico Piola, *Nativity*, n.d., pen and brown ink, brown wash, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Palazzo Rosso, Genoa.

Figure 5. Domenico Piola, *Nativity 1*, n.d., pen and brown ink, brown wash, over black chalk, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Palazzo Rosso, Genoa.

Figure 6. Domenico Piola, *Nativity 2*, n.d., pen and brown ink, brown wash, over black chalk, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Palazzo Rosso, Genoa.

Figure 7. Domenico Piola, *Nativity 3*, n.d., pen and brown ink, brown wash, over black chalk, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Palazzo Rosso, Genoa.

Figure 8. Domenico Piola, *Nativity 4*, n.d., pen and brown ink, brown wash, over black chalk, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Palazzo Rosso, Genoa.

Figure 9. Domenico Piola, *A Sheet of Studies with Saint Jerome*, n.d., pen and brown ink with brown wash, 2009.249, The Joseph F. McCrindle Collection, Dept. of Drawings and Print, The Pierpoint Morgan Library, New York.

Figure 10. Domenico Piola, *Figural Group 1*, n.d., pen and brown ink, brown wash, over black chalk, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Palazzo Rosso, Genoa.

Figure 11. Domenico Piola, *Figural Group 2*, n.d., pen and brown ink, brown wash, over black chalk, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Palazzo Rosso, Genoa.

Figure 12. Domenico Piola, *Allegory of Autumn*, 1687-1688, fresco, Palazzo Rosso, Genoa, © Web Gallery of Art.

Figure 13. Domenico Piola, *Design for a painted and stucco ceiling*, 17th century, pen and ink and wash on paper, Prints, Drawings & Paintings Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Figure 14. Domenico Piola, *The Centaur Nessus*, n.d., pen and brush in brown, brown and green wash over black chalk on paper, Graphische Sammlung, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, *Italienische Zeichnungen: 1500-1800: Bestandskatalog d. Graph. Sammlung d. Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, mit Abb. Aller Blätter* (Stuttgart: Staatsgalerie, 1977).

Figure 15. Domenico Piola, *Study of a female figure*, n.d., black chalk, pen and ink, and wash, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Palazzo Rosso, Genoa.

Figure 16. Domenico Piola, *Allegory of Winter*, 1687-1688, fresco, Palazzo Rosso, Genoa, © Web Gallery of Art.

Figure 17. Domenico Piola, *Winter, study for a ceiling fresco*, 1642-1703, pen and brown ink, brown wash, over black chalk, The British Museum, London, © Trustees of the British Museum.

Figure 18. Domenico Piola, *Allegory of Winter*, n.d., black chalk, pen and ink, wash, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Palazzo Rosso, Genoa.

Figure 19. Domenico Piola, *Design for a ceiling with an allegory of winter*, n.d., pen and brown ink with brown and grey wash over black chalk, Frits Lugt Collection, Institut Neerlandais, Paris, James Byam Shaw, *The Italian drawings of the Frits Lugt Collection* (Paris: Institut Neerlandais, 1983).

Figure 20. Domenico Piola, *Winter*, 1670s, fresco, Palazzo di Andrea Spinola, Genoa, Ezia Gavazza, *Lo Spazio Dipinto: Il grande affresco Genovese nel '600* (Genova: Sagep Editrice, 1989).

Figure 21. Domenico Piola, *Lunette Design*, n.d., black and brown wash over black chalk, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Palazzo Rosso, Genoa.

Figure 22. Paolo Gerolamo Piola, *Lunette Design with an allegory of winter*, 1688, brush and brown ink and brown wash with black chalk, heightened with white opaque watercolor, The Muriel and Philip Berman Gift, acquired from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts with funds contributed by Muriel and Philip Berman and the Edgar Viguers Seeler Fund (by exchange), 1984, Philadelphia Museum of Art, www.philamuseum.org.

Introduction

Domenico Piola (1627-1703) emerged as a prominent artistic figure in Genoa in the latter half of the seventeenth century. Son of the talented Genoese painter Paolo Battista Piola, Domenico Piola was born in 1628.¹ The little information scholars have about his early childhood and education comes largely from Piola's biographer Raffaele Soprani. Soprani in 1764, along with Carlo Ratti who completed Soprani's work after his death in 1768, created a biography entitled *Vite de' pittori, scultori, ed architetti genovesi* dedicated to the lives of prominent Genoese painters, sculptors, and architects, an essential source on Genoese art history. Piola's early training consisted of copying artworks created by his artistic family members. Soprani emphasizes Piola's initial penchant for drawing that was constant throughout his artistic career.² A prolific draftsman, Piola created a multitude of drawings that were reworked during his design process and in his family-run artistic workshop, Casa Piola. Scholars most often mention Piola in relation to the success of Casa Piola. Under the direction of Piola, Casa Piola rose to prominence in the mid-seventeenth century, educating local artists and fulfilling the majority of aristocratic commissions. Casa Piola began as an organization with his younger brother, Giovanni Andrea Piola, his three sons Paolo Gerolamo Piola, Anton Maria Piola, and Giovanni Battista Piola, along with his two sons-in-law, Gregorio de' Ferrari and Domenico Parodi. Further, Piola, and by extension his workshop, is associated with the increase in large scale decorative commissions by the city's growing aristocratic class. Piola completed many grand fresco cycles in Genoese noble residences to meet this local demand.

¹ Raffaele Soprani, *Vite de' pittori, scultori, ed architetti genovesi* (Genoa: Nella Stamperia Casamara, 1768), 30.

² Piola's production as a draftsman is further discussed in Chapter 2.

By considering Piola within his Genoese environment, I assert that Piola and his prolific workshop occupy an important place in the history of art. His decorative frescoes for the Genoese aristocracy are prominent aspects of his art. Piola's preparatory drawings are considered here as a key component of his design process of these large-scale commissions. Because a study of Piola's drawing output illuminates his artistic priorities, Piola's approaches to drawing are crucial to understanding his fresco design process. This thesis argues that Piola's use of full compositional studies are key components of his graphic output. It will specifically focus on Piola's preparatory drawings for his fresco commission for the Brignole-Sale Family in Genoa. Piola creates fresco programs of the *Allegory of Winter* and the *Allegory of Autumn* in the family's noble residence, Palazzo Rosso, in 1687. This commission exemplifies Piola's characteristic reliance on a series of compositional studies.

Chapter I: Domenico Piola and Genoa

Situated on the Ligurian sea, the city of Genoa was a prominent port in the fifteenth century, providing access to Italy through the Ligurian region. The city preserved its medieval character until the early sixteenth century, with independent wealthy mercantile and banking families competing for economic and social power.³ These families resided as units in the dense maze-like streets of the city center, with residences surrounding a major piazza or church. Genoa's wealth was centered in these prominent families, rather than in a princely court, creating an unstable environment, characterized by internal family feuds and a lack of overall civic cohesion.⁴ A larger merchant middle class rose to prominence during the early sixteenth century, leading to further conflict.⁵ This instability between the old wealthy families and new middle class nobility characterizes the Republic of Genoa until the middle of the sixteenth century. In 1528, Andrea Doria, a successful sea admiral and member of an old noble Genoese family, instituted a constitutional reform that redefined Genoa's political structure.⁶ Doria's reform standardized and stabilized Genoa's ruling factions, allowing the entry of middle-class merchants into annual governmental elections. The ensuing constancy contributed to the state's unified economic interest. Instead of distinct separations in power between factions of the population, Doria created a more complex system, allowing for greater social mobility and interaction. This major change also led to increased international communication through the opening of new

³George L. Gorse, "A Classical Stage for the Old Nobility: The Strada Nuova and Sixteenth-Century Genoa," *The Art Bulletin* 79, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 311, <https://jstor.org/stable/304624>.

⁴ Timothy J. Standring and Martin Clayton, *Castiglione: Lost Genius* (London: Royal Collection Trust, 2015), 17.

⁵ George L. Gorse, "A Classical Stage for the Old Nobility: The Strada Nuova and Sixteenth-Century Genoa," 304.

⁶ Stephanie Hanke, "The splendor of bankers and merchants: Genoese garden grottoes of the sixteenth century," *Urban History* 37, no. 3 (December 2010): 400, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44614537>.

trade routes.⁷ As the city became more stable, its citizens were able to focus on external concerns, such as trade. The institution of Andrea Doria's reform also initiated the status of Genoa as an artistic center.

Andrea Doria's decoration of his Genoese residence, Villa Principe, set the stage for future artistic production in Genoa. Doria's villa publicly promoted his personal power and position and, by extension, that of the Genoese people. To ensure the success of the Villa's decorative program, Doria called on the Roman artist Perino del Vaga to complete this important task. Perino worked in Raphael's studio in Rome until the Sack of Rome in 1527 when he, like many of his contemporaries, fled the city for other parts of Italy.⁸ Perino's position as an already established and skilled artist in the leading art center of Rome legitimized Doria's authority through his decorative fresco cycles in Villa Principe, aligning his palace with the powerful and prestigious buildings of Rome.⁹ Perino introduced a highly decorative style, consisting of designs of garland and rosette patterns. His refined and controlled style utilizes rhythmic compositional devices to create a decorative surface.¹⁰ Doria's commission of Perino in the wake of his constitutional reform began a trend of new building and decorating of local palaces and churches.¹¹ As the city stabilized and became even more open to international contact, the Genoese nobility consciously promoted themselves through a new local artistic program, leading to Genoa's emergence as an artistic center in Italy in the late sixteenth century.

⁷ Hanke, "The splendor of bankers and merchants," 401.

⁸ Pamela Askew, "Perino del Vaga's Decorations for the Palazzo Doria, Genoa," *The Burlington Magazine* 98, no. 635 (Feb. 1956): 49, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/871798>.

⁹ Bernice Davidson, "Drawings by Perino del Vaga for the Palazzo Doria, Genoa," *The Art Bulletin* 41, no. 4 (Dec. 1959): 316, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3047856>.

¹⁰ Askew, "Perino del Vaga's Decorations for the Palazzo Doria, Genoa," 53.

¹¹ Mary Newcome Schleier, *Genoese Drawings* (Copenhagen: Statens Museum for Kunst, 2004), 10.

Perino's decoration at the Villa Principe was an important part of Genoese artistic education. Artists, including Domenico Piola, studied Perino's work and would often copy it. Piola's biographer, Soprani, stresses this step of Piola's education, claiming it as a common and crucial step in the education of Piola and his contemporaries in Genoa.¹² The attention given to these early frescoes underscores how essential Perino's work was to the development of local Genoese artistic practice.

Another contributing factor to Genoa's artistic ascendance is the system known as Palazzi Rolli. Literally translated to "building rolls or lists," Palazzi Rolli refer to the lists of buildings of prestige under the jurisdiction of the Genoese government. With the opening up of the city to international markets, the Genoese nobility saw a clear need for an official headquarters to host various foreign dignitaries. As Genoa's political system previously relied on distinct family factions, no centralized government building, or palace, existed. Once achieving political permanence, the Senate established a list of private houses that the government used as public housing to serve the interest of Genoese political affairs. The first list, or *rollo*, in 1576, contained fifty-two houses belonging to the most prominent and wealthy families of the Genoese nobility.¹³ The Palazzi Rolli also represented the power of each banking or trading family. The different noble families were now further unified under this innovative political system. Every family not only expressed their own wealth through the promotion of and renovations to their individual home, but also contributed to the power of the Republic. The *rollo* further divided the included houses into categories in order to place a foreign guest in the appropriate building. The

¹² Soprani, *Vite de' pittori, scultori, ed architetti genovesi*, 31.

¹³ Federico Giannini and Ilaria Baratta, "The true story of the buildings of the *rolli* of Genoa," *Finestre sull'Arte*, https://www.finestresullarte.info/593n_la-vera-storia-dei-palazzi-dei-rolli-di-genova.php.

palazzo's wealth and magnificence determined the rank an official had to have to stay there, another promotion of individual family wealth. For example, cardinals or great princes were housed in a building with a more extensive decorative program than a feudal lord or ambassador.

The majority of these houses are situated on the Strada Nuova (today via Garibaldi), visually promoting the nobility's privileged position in this shared location. The Strada Nuova is positioned on the northern end of the city, positioned above the dense medieval center of winding streets. Contrasting with the narrow medieval streets, the Strada Nuova is a wide and grand street affording a clear view of the magnificence of the Palazzi Rolli. Isolated on the prominent road of Strada Nuova, the Palazzi Rolli appear as a distinct unified entity and independent residential quarter, clearly set apart from the rest of Genoa. In this way, the constructed Strada Nuova and its noble inhabitants recall Genoa's medieval roots. As its own contained and localized geographical area of power, we are reminded of the old medieval ruling families of Genoa were contained in their independent neighborhoods.¹⁴ Just as the medieval noble families displayed their power in competition with others around them, the Strada Nuova promoting Genoa's power to its host of foreign visitors. Arranged consciously as new symbols of power, the Palazzi Rolli on Strada Nuova are a visual manifestation of a new political structure characterized by stability and wealth.¹⁵

Ultimately a success, the Palazzi Rolli received great recognition from its visitors. Bolognese Cardinal Giovanni Battista Agucchi wrote of the buildings' splendor in 1601, claiming not to have seen anything else like it, specifically mentioning the assortment of rich ornaments and decorations, such as gold, silver, and jewels. Such testimonies as this one from

¹⁴ Ennio Poleggi, *Genoa: a civilization of palaces* (Cinisello Balsamo, Milan: Silvana, 2002), 59.

¹⁵ United Nations, "Genoa, *Strade Nuove* and the Rolli Palace system," The World Heritage List, UNESCO, <http://whc.unesco.org/fr/list/1211>.

Cardinal Agucchi confirm that this system was an essential component of Genoese civic identity.¹⁶ Standing as a cohesive and illustrative symbol of the power of the city, the Palazzi Rolli system flourished in Genoa for over a century.¹⁷

The establishment of the Palazzi Rolli resulted in an increasing demand for decoration of the interiors by the local nobility in the beginning of the seventeenth century, consisting of fresco painting, stucco work, and sculptural ornamentation.¹⁸ Genoese ceilings had traditionally consisted of rich decorative frescoes, beginning with the transplanted Perino del Vaga at Villa Principe and the local Luca Cambiaso. The Genoese strove for magnificence that paralleled European absolute monarchs by commissioning extensive decorative painting cycles and beginning prominent art collections.¹⁹ The individual wealthy noble families of the Palazzi Rolli acted as the primary patrons of the arts. In order to compete with each other to best promote themselves and the Republic, the wealthy bankers and merchants commissioned and collected great artistic treasures. Paintings, frescoes, tapestries, and decorative arts, such as furniture, were the most sought after artforms to adorn the noble interiors. Genoa's plethora of artistic commissions and opportunities attracted artists from all over Italy and Europe, including artists such as Pietro Sorri, Giulio Cesare Procaccini, and Cornelis de Wael.²⁰ Foreign artists were able to fill the relative gap in local artistic production. Compared to major Italian artistic centers in the seventeenth century, such as Rome, Venice, and Florence, there was a lack of prominent

¹⁶ Peter Paul Rubens later compiled a book of engravings of each Palazzo, bringing greater awareness and promotion to the Genoese system. Today, the Palazzi Rolli are a protected UNESCO National Heritage site, continuing to promote Genoa's history through museum collections.

¹⁷ Federico Giannini and Ilaria Baratta, "The true story of the buildings of the *rolli* of Genoa."

¹⁸ William M. Griswold, "Painting and Drawing in Genoa: An Overview," in *Genoa: Drawings and Prints, 1530-1800* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1996), 9.

¹⁹ Federico Giannini and Ilaria Baratta, "The true story of the buildings of the *rolli* of Genoa."

²⁰ Griswold, "Painting and Drawing in Genoa," 9.

local artists. Perhaps due to Genoa's more splintered political structure, Genoa did not possess a distinct Genoese artistic tradition. The wealthy patrons of the Palazzi Rolli brought established foreign artists into the city, legitimizing the power of Genoa's ruling class through the artists' high reputation. This legitimization is paralleled in Perino's work at Villa Principe for Andrea Doria, a foreign artist working in Genoa to promote newfound Genoese supremacy. Most prominently, many Flemish artists relocated to Genoa, drawn to wealthy patrons and well-paying commissions.²¹ The presence of northern artists greatly affected local artistic style and subject matter. Anthony van Dyck painted many portraits of Genoese nobility; local artists subsequently copied his aristocratic portrait style. These portraits of the aristocracy line the walls of the Palazzi Rolli, promoting their respective owners through their artistic commissions. Genre painters from Antwerp, such as Lucas and Cornelis de Wael and Jan Roos, encouraged interest in landscape, still life, and genre painting. Genoese noble families also collected Northern European genre paintings, such as works by the de Wael brothers and Roos.²² Responding to the rise of noble patronage and the increasing presence of foreign artists, local artistic production emerged. With increased access to national and international art, Genoese artists began to look to more formal education and increase their own production.

The painter Giovanni Battista Paggi (1554-1627) was instrumental in the foundation of the local Genoese school of painting and the abolition of traditional artistic guild laws in Genoa, thereby opening up the art market. Advocating for the rights of artists regardless of their social standing, Paggi believed that artists should have their own status.²³ Paggi opened an artistic studio, admitting people from all ranks of society as students. His studio functioned as a *casa*

²¹ Newcome Schleier, *Genoese Drawings*, 14.

²² Griswold, "Painting and Drawing in Genoa," 9.

²³ Newcome Schleier, *Genoese Drawings*, 12.

aperta, an active and open academy space designed for greater interaction and education. Paggi taught mythology, history, and studio instruction using his collection of paintings, prints, and books. His collection exposed artists to a variety of styles and theories. Students also benefited from open communication with other working artists. Notably, local artists had the opportunity to meet foreign – especially Northern – artists, resulting in further interchange and influence, such as the impact of northern style as previously discussed.²⁴ Although scholars know little about specific interactions and meetings in Paggi’s studio, the space provided a conducive environment for exchange between artists. Paggi’s studio, then, parallels the cosmopolitan nature of Genoa at this time. As foreigners came into contact with the city through new artistic opportunities, they also interacted with local artists in places like Paggi’s studio. The newfound wealthy aristocratic patronage created the perfect environment for a variety of artists to interact with fellow artists and the assorted noble patrons. Paggi created a similar environment to facilitate interaction with imported and local artists. Paggi’s artistic education model is also important to the understanding of Genoese artistic training in the seventeenth century. His students emulated his model for artistic instruction in the subsequent years. The open environment that Paggi created for artists, in conjunction with the increase in artistic opportunity provided by the Palazzi Rolli, led to a growing localized artistic community in Genoa. Now having the chance for more formal education, to learn from other artists, and to be a part of a cosmopolitan artistic environment, local artists began commanding attention in the city. It is in this environment that Piola emerged as a prominent artistic figure.

Piola’s artistic fame arose in the 1670s when his prolific home studio-workshop, Casa Piola, opened. The organization and operation of Casa Piola was grounded in Paggi’s previously

²⁴ Standring and Clayton, *Castiglione: Lost Genius*, 18.

established educational model. Paggi's open concept workshop passed to Piola by way of Domenico Fiasella, one of Paggi's students and Piola's primary teacher. Following Paggi's precedent, Casa Piola provides a place of exchange for the city's varied population of artists.²⁵ This interchange was essential to Casa Piola operations, with Piola later bringing in handfuls of collaborators to produce works of art. In fact, members of Casa Piola were all connected directly or indirectly through kinship or friendship. In this way, the Casa Piola mirrors workshops in Antwerp, creating a collaborative brotherhood, as Federico Alizeri labeled it in his *Guida artistica per la città di Genova* of 1846.²⁶ Casa Piola artists were linked through these various relationships, constantly learning and influencing one another. Piola's relationship with Stefano Camogli, Piola's brother in law, is an important example of the facilitated interaction reminiscent of Paggi's workshop in the early seventeenth century. Camogli, a painter of still lifes and genre scenes, apprenticed with the Flemish master Jan Roos during Roos' stay in Genoa prompted by the increased aristocratic patronage. Works by Camogli included paintings with detailed leaves, flowers, fruit, animals, and arabesques, recalling Roos' natural still lifes. Although exceedingly talented in the depiction of such natural elements, Camogli did not know how to portray figures. Piola, well versed in figural depiction from his primary training of copying figures from other artists, painted figures for Camogli's artworks.²⁷ Casa Piola flourished in Genoa's multi-cultural artistic community produced by distinct Genoese patronage.

Casa Piola not only facilitated artistic interaction and collaboration, but also educated local artists. Students were instructed in drawing, theory, and artistic techniques through Piola's

²⁵ Newcome Schleier, *Genoese Drawings*, 13.

²⁶ Daniele Sanguineti, *Domenico Piola e i pittori della sua "casa,"* vol. 2 (Milano: Soncino, 2004), 101.

²⁷ Soprani, *Vite de' pittori, scultori, ed architetti genovesi*, 31.

extensive collection of paintings, prints, drawings, and books.²⁸ Soprani praises Piola for the emphasis he placed on artistic education, allowing students to freely watch him work. Students also consistently brought works in progress to Piola for review and advice. As Soprani notes, he gave excellent lessons and was very receptive to his students.²⁹ An inventory of Casa Piola published in 1768 following the death of Piola's great-grandson Giovanni Battista Piola, details specific instructional materials utilized at Casa Piola and is pertinent to the study of Piola's workshop. The inventory, compiled by Troilo Castiglione, documents the contents of the studio of two generations of the Piola family.³⁰ The French bombing of Genoa in 1684 resulted in an unknown number of lost artworks in Casa Piola. Therefore, many of the works listed in the inventory cannot be connected to extant works today. Castiglione lists 250 paintings with brief descriptive titles and their corresponding dimensions in Genoese *palmi*.³¹ The documented painting collection was dominated by religious scenes, primarily depicting individual saints.³² Recorded simply with cursory labels, the paintings do not have specific detailed descriptions, making it harder to fully know the contents of each painting. Castiglione organizes the Casa Piola inventory by room of the workshop. The works listed in the *stanza da studio* (or studio room, the heart of the workshop) consisted of twenty-seven paintings and twenty folders of drawings and engravings. In her article on the drawings of Casa Piola, Eloisa Malagoli expands on the findings in the main studio room, asserting that there were probably a large number of

²⁸ Sanguineti, *Domenico Piola e i pittori della sua "casa,"* 107.

²⁹ Soprani, *Vite de' pittori, scultori, ed architetti genovesi,* 47.

³⁰ Eloisa Malagoli, "The Drawings of Casa Piola," *The Burlington Magazine* 108, no. 763 (Oct. 1996): 503.

³¹ One *palm* is roughly equal to 25 centimeters. Sanguineti, *Domenico Piola e i pittori della sua "casa,"* 219.

³² Piola's penchant for religious subject matter aligns with Soprani's description of the painter as a virtuous man, who never studied, painted, or drew, until after Mass. Soprani, *Vite de' pittori, scultori, ed architetti genovesi,* 47.

drawings included in each folder through the high value in *lire* associated with each folder in the inventory.³³ Although the inventory lacks specific information on the individual drawings left, including exact number and title, in the Casa Piola studio space, Malagoli's analysis of the inventory proves the presence of drawings in Casa Piola. Piola's graphic output is considered to a greater extent in the following chapter. In the same room, the inventory lists eighty-nine books, including distinguished artistic texts on artistic theory and biographies.³⁴ The *Iconography* by Cesare Ripa, architectural treaties by Andrea Palladio, and Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* are among the listed texts listed at Casa Piola.³⁵ The existence of these important artistic texts verifies the workshop's educational goals.

The inventory of Casa Piola also verifies the act of copying in the Piola workshop. A traditional mode of Italian artistic education, artists in training copied finished works of art to hone their skills and learn new iconography. The inventory lists thirty-nine copies by artists in Casa Piola.³⁶ Domenico Piola himself examined many of his father's drawings as a young artist, copying them to develop his own skill. Cited sources copied by Piola and his peers include an album of animal drawings by Sinibaldo Scorza, as well as first hand drawn copies of works from artists such as Pietro da Cortona from visits to Rome.³⁷ Further, Piola created a plethora of copies

³³ Malagoli, "The Drawings of Casa Piola," 503.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 504.

³⁵ Sanguineti, *Domenico Piola e i pittori della sua "casa,"* 103.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 225.

³⁷ In the beginning of the twentieth century, the last descendent of the Piola family, Giovanni Maria De Simoni, inherited the contents of Casa Piola. Upon his death, De Simoni's wife, Carlotta Ageno, bequeathed the inherited Casa Piola holdings to the city of Genoa in 1913. In exchange, the city promised to catalog and conserve the works of Casa Piola, moving the majority of works to the museum at Palazzo Bianco, a noble building listed in the Palazzi Rolli.³⁷ At this point, Genoese Doge Marcello Durazzo and art instructor Santo Varni bought the contents of the Casa Piola drawing collection. The majority of Durazzo and Varni's purchases are now in the collection of the Gabinetto di Stampe e Disegni at Palazzo Rosso. *Ibid.*, 102.

and prints of various masterworks. The 1768 inventory lists work by Correggio, Annibale Carracci, Parmigianino, Titian, Bernardo Strozzi, and Peter Paul Rubens, among others. Additionally, students at Casa Piola had the opportunity to see original artwork around Genoa, a possible explanation for some of the copies in the inventory. Anthony van Dyck's aristocratic portraits, for example, hung prominently in major palaces such as Palazzo Spinola. Not only did Casa Piola members have access to work through Piola and his family, but they also benefited from Casa Piola's presence in Genoa. Piola also consistently retained his own drawings, consisting of many diverse compositional designs. Piola produced a number of sheets purely for the experimentation with different compositions.³⁸ A significant aspect of Casa Piola, Piola's drawings were retained in his shop to reinvent and reuse iconographies and spatial designs. Although many drawings in the Casa Piola inventory were lost during the French bombardment of Genoa in 1684, the numerous drawings that survive far outnumber Piola's paintings, attesting to the importance Piola placed on draftsmanship.³⁹

Piola's focus on drawings and the continuous use of his designs by others in Casa Piola resulted in a graphic dissemination of a *piolesque* style. Through the collaboration of the variety of artists at work at Casa Piola and Piola's talent as a draughtsman, Casa Piola provided graphic designs for works in varied media. Casa Piola supplied drawings of sculptures, stucco work, silverwork, prints, and tapestries. These designs all possessed the characteristic graceful line of Piola, showing an assimilation of style in the workshop. Soprani characterizes Piola's style as paternal, indicating a stylistic diffusion to his followers.⁴⁰ Rooted in Piola's intervention in

³⁸ Federica Mancini, *Catalogue Raisonné of Italian Drawings Volume XI: Genoese Drawings 16th-18th Centuries* (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 2017), 292.

³⁹ Sanguineti, *Domenico Piola e i pittori della sua "casa,"* 102.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 108.

Camogli's work, Piola's unification of artistic production promotes himself and his studio in Genoa. Piola's extensive impact on various aspects of the arts in Genoa resulted in Casa Piola's domination of art in the late seventeenth century. With his extensive network of artists and production of designs for works in different media, Piola even acted as an artistic director, unifying artistic creation.

Casa Piola's open structure, artist interaction, and inventory of rich works, contributed to Casa Piola's goal in fulfilling aristocratic commissions around Genoa. Genoa's political environment created the perfect location for Casa Piola to succeed and further, the city acted as the catalyst to the growth of this dominant local workshop led by Domenico Piola. Piola's work is distinctly Genoese in character with Casa Piola benefiting from its symbiotic relationship with the city of Genoa. Piola's workshop grew out of the emergence of local artists facilitated by the increase in aristocratic commissions.

Chapter II: Domenico Piola as Draftsman

By the late seventeenth century, during Domenico Piola's lifetime, drawing had been an important part of artistic education and preparatory procedures in Italy for more than two centuries. From the fifteenth century on, art instructors emphasized drawing from life to teach artists to portray proper proportions and naturalistic anatomical features. Drawings also played a principal role in preparing paintings. Artists used a variety of drawings, such as life drawings, cartoons, and compositional studies, to plan a painting in advance. These tools for painting preparation provide significant insights into an artist's design process, illuminating the artist's chief visual priorities, such as striving for anatomical naturalism through life drawing or compositional clarity through compositional studies.

In Genoa, a consistent emphasis on harmonious composition over individual details in drawings began with Luca Cambiaso, considered the founder of the local school of drawing in the sixteenth century.⁴¹ Domenico Piola followed artists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by employing similar methods. With influences from artists such as Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione and Valerio Castello, Piola's drawn work clearly fits into the Genoese tradition.⁴²

Raffaele Soprani, Piola's primary biographer, claims that Piola's graphic output surpasses 4000 drawings. It is important to note that this projection includes the drawings destroyed in the fire at the workshop following French bombardment in 1684 and drawings taken by fellow artists and foreigners visiting Genoa.⁴³ Thus, it is difficult to say with certainty the number of surviving

⁴¹ Mary Newcome Schleier, *Genoese Drawings* (Copenhagen: Statens Museum for Kunst, 2004), 9.

⁴² Federica Mancini, *Catalogue Raisonné of Italian Drawings Volume XI: Genoese Drawings 16th-18th Centuries* (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 2017), 13.

⁴³ Soprani, *Vite de' pittori, scultori, ed architetti genovesi*, 48.

drawings attributable to Piola. Today, the British Museum and Palazzo Rosso collections hold the majority of Piola drawings. Together, the total number of drawings by the artist at both institutions is only in the hundreds.⁴⁴ Although the drawings known today do not account for the entirety of his production as many are most likely lost or destroyed, the substantial number that survived and, more tellingly, the amount projected by Soprani confirm Piola's consistent creation of drawings throughout his career, marking him as a prominent draughtsman in his own right. The study of Piola's characteristic pen and ink and wash drawings provide crucial insights into the artist's tendency to favor the overall composition over details, consistent with prior Genoese drawing tradition.

Piola's relationship with drawing began early. According to Soprani, as a child Piola copied drawings and prints from his brother, Pellegrino's, collection. Soprani discusses the immense pleasure that drawing and copying brought to young Domenico. At the age of seven, Domenico switched his course of study from human letters to painting. He drew every day, now not solely copying images, but beginning to develop his own independent drawings. This noteworthy change signaled Piola's move from simple imitation to more advanced invention in drawing. To aid this invention, the artist's father suggested various stories or fables for his son to draw.⁴⁵ This proved influential on Piola's strategy of experimentation with compositional variants. Soprani's biography traces Piola's experimental use of drawings back to his artistic

⁴⁴ The British Museum has precisely 60 drawings attributed to Piola. The number of drawings at Palazzo Rosso is estimated around 150. Other institutions with prominent holdings of Piola drawings in Europe include the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart and the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Piola's drawings in the United States are concentrated in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Morgan Library, The National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., and the Blanton Museum of Art.

⁴⁵ Raffaele Soprani, *Vite de' pittori, scultori, ed architetti genovesi* (Genoa: Nella Stamperia Casamara, 1768), 30.

roots and confirms his future as a draughtsman. Later in the biography, when assessing his career holistically after the painter's death, Soprani asserts that he drew with greater ease than he painted.⁴⁶ Soprani deliberately assigns distinct importance to the artist's early experience with drawing, confirming his natural affinity for draftsmanship.

One of the first major influences on Piola's drawing method and style was Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione (1609-1664). His extended stays in Genoa, Rome, Naples, and Mantua, exposed Castiglione to a variety of styles and iconographies that informed his unique personal style.⁴⁷ His complex artistic range originated in his native Genoa, under the instruction of Giovanni Battista Paggi.⁴⁸ As discussed in Chapter 1, Paggi had a very open and active academy, teaching students about history and mythology, as well as technical studio instruction grounded in life drawing. Paggi additionally provided regular interaction with local and foreign artists in his collaborative space.⁴⁹ Sinibaldo Scorza (1539-1631), a painter, draughtsman, and etcher working in Genoa, also taught Castiglione. While Castiglione gained theoretical training on elements like iconography from Paggi, Scorza exposed Castiglione to pattern books, from which Castiglione copied motifs and compositions. These stock motifs found their way into the artist's work in all periods of his artistic production, and highlight his continual integration of elements learned in Genoa.⁵⁰ For example, in one of Castiglione's earliest sketches, *Studies of dromedaries and goats* (c. 1630), he clearly utilizes stock animal motifs from a pattern book as dromedaries were not found in the seventeenth-century city of Genoa.⁵¹ The use of animals in his

⁴⁶ Soprani, *Vite de' pittori, scultori, ed architetti genovesi*, 48.

⁴⁷ Timothy J. Standring and Martin Clayton, *Castiglione: Lost Genius* (London: Royal Collection Trust, 2015), 12.

⁴⁸ Standring and Clayton, *Castiglione: Lost Genius*, 19.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

work is also the result of interaction with Flemish animal and landscape painters in Genoa, such as Giovanni Roos.⁵² The inclusion of such pastoral elements, in addition to quick and abbreviated pen and brush marks, characterize Castiglione's early works created in Genoa.

Soprani first cites Castiglione's influence on Piola in the latter's biography. Soprani states that Piola readily imitated Castiglione and created such convincing copies, that some believed the copies were original works by Castiglione.⁵³ A comparison of both Piola and Castiglione's drawn depictions of the *Adoration of the Shepherds* reveals important influences from Castiglione and notable departures by Piola. Castiglione's version of the subject, completed in the mid-1640s, depicts the Holy Family positioned at the right half of space under a summarily sketched shelter (Figure 1). The cast of shepherds and angels fill the entire left side of the composition, overlapping and swirling into a mass of figures. Castiglione's active line work creates figures out of broken contours and parallel hatching. Piola's scene, on the other hand, possesses a characteristically greater degree of compositional clarity and finish (Figure 2). The Mother and Child appear centrally, and every other attending shepherd, animal, or angel, minimally overlaps with each other as they fan out around the Christ Child. Piola's graceful and controlled lines depict basic outlines of figures and allow for easy identification of each character. Piola adapts the holistic compositional format utilized by Castiglione to create a clearer narrative. Piola's clarity is aided by pairing down the scene to essential figures and positioning the scene closer to the picture plane.

Although these artists approach composition differently, both conceive their respective drawings as full compositional studies. Neither is solely focused on Christ and the shepherds, but

⁵² Anthony Blunt, "The Drawings of Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 8 (1945): 163.

⁵³ Soprani, *Vite de' pittori, scultori, ed architetti genovesi*, 30.

also include other characters and emphasis on the background, articulating great narrative detail and a sense of space. Some of these background elements include a brief outline of some sort of shelter, as well as the indication of foliage and animals. Like Castiglione, Piola's inclusion of the pastoral in his drawings stems from the Flemish influence in contemporary Genoese art. The cow, for example, is an animal both artists give specific attention. In Castiglione's *Adoration of the Shepherds*, he depicts only the cow's facial profile, the animal peeking into the far-right side of the composition. In other pastoral scenes drawn by Castiglione, for instance *A shepherd and flock in a landscape*, the cow is prominently drawn with similar indications of shadow and bone as Piola does in his version of *Adoration of the Shepherds*. Although Castiglione's brushstrokes are quicker than Piola's, Piola attains a comparable sense of movement with his figures through the use of wash. Both create various degrees of tone through sweeps of the brush, underscoring the variety of highlights and shadows. These highlights and shadows emphasize the energetic movement of both scenes. Piola's use of wash recalls Castiglione as Piola employs wash in similar strokes and to achieve an analogous animated effect. It is important to note, that whereas Castiglione uses the more experimental medium of thinned oil mixed with pigment and brush, Piola relies on the more traditional media of pen, ink, and wash.⁵⁴

Valerio Castello (1624-1659), a contemporary of Piola and only three years Piola's senior, also influenced his drawing practice. Son of the prominent portrait and historical painter Bernardo Castello, Valerio Castello grew up in an artistic family. Like Piola, Castello also copied drawings created by his father as his primary early education. Domenico Fiasella taught both Castello and Piola, another important similarity in training between the two artists. Piola first encountered Castello in Fiasella's studio, but later worked with him on multiple

⁵⁴ Standing and Clayton, *Castiglione: Lost Genius*, 30.

commissions for Genoese churches, including fresco cycles at San Giacomo della Marina, San Marta, and Santa Maria in Passione. At Santa Maria in Passione, Castello specifically advocated for Piola to assist him as the fresco project was too extensive for one artist. The artists' collaboration on the Passion and Resurrection frescoes at Santa Maria in Passione reveal their impact on each other. Castello's graceful rhythm influenced Piola's work, while Piola's full figure style added to Castello's colorful designs.⁵⁵ Piola continued to work with Castello and completed projects for the artist until the latter's early death at age thirty-five in 1659. Although their drawings are generally different in style, Piola borrows Castello's quick and frenzied pen marks in early drawing stages. For example, Piola's swift lines, reduced figures with gestural contours, simplified facial features, and animated rhythmic movements in *Seated Figure* from Düsseldorf recall Castello's brief sketch in *Death of a Saint* from Darmstadt. Piola, however, employs heavier shadows, almost completely obscuring the individual figures in the group.⁵⁶

Whereas Castello continues straight to the painting after an initial sketch, Piola continues to develop his ideas through a more finished drawing technique of multiple studies. Piola's preparatory drawings later in the design process evolve from his initial sketch and develop to show greater attention to rendering details and accurate figural proportions. Castello's compositional studies appear similar to the initial sketch in terms of the hurried line and incomplete contours, but Piola advances to a clearer line without sacrificing the grace and movement with which he imbues his figures. According to Soprani, while studying with Fiasella, Castello spent relatively little time drawing, because he was eager to use color.⁵⁷ Soprani further

⁵⁵ Mary Newcome, "The Drawings of Valerio Castello," *Master Drawings* 13, no. 1 (Spring, 1975): 31.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

describes Castello's drawings as "accurate as is sufficient for a painter," highlighting the drawings as simple aids to achieve the final painting, but not distinguishing them as impressive works of art in their own right.⁵⁸ This description accounts for the lack of existing drawings by Castello.⁵⁹ As he exhibits such a spontaneous painting style by quickly depicting a figure with a few brushes of paint, Castello's working method does not require extensive preparatory studies, unlike Piola.⁶⁰ His expressive and rapid marks in his drawings show a hurried experimentation with an idea that he fully realizes in his final painting. The lack of finish in Castello's drawings also shows his employment of drawings as intermediary tools, which may account for their scarcity. Additionally, Castello creates multiple compositions of the same subject as he investigates the most rhythmically organized scene. Although his compositional studies are quick and unfinished, Castello harkens back to the tradition of Castiglione by revising the same subject. Piola, also influenced by Castiglione, reworks his subjects through a multitude of compositional studies. Although Piola created more finished drawings, his interaction with Castello shows a continuation of Genoese drawing traditions and when comparing the two, distinguishing Piola's greater interest in drawing. The development of a carefully finished entire composition through multiple studies shows the greater attention Piola pays to drawing in contrast to Castello. In fact, Soprani describes Piola as surpassing Castello in the clarity and accuracy of design and composition.⁶¹

Piola's drawing oeuvre generally consists of a variety of fully finished compositional studies. Using almost exclusively black and red chalk, pen and ink, and wash, Piola draws with

⁵⁸ Newcome, "The Drawings of Valerio Castello," 27.

⁵⁹ Martin Royalton-Kisch, "New Works by Valerio Castello," *Master Drawings* 20, no. 2 (Summer, 1982): 132.

⁶⁰ Newcome, "The Drawings of Valerio Castello," 27.

⁶¹ Soprani, *Vite de' pittori, scultori, ed architetti genovesi*, 32-33.

simple but active contours.⁶² The British Museum's *Herdsmen and women watering their flock of sheep at a well*, for example, portrays his characteristic animated and graceful lines (Figure 3). Piola's compositional studies vary in their degree of detail. Despite the level of detail, however, Piola's drawings generally possess a high level of finish, with each figure complete and attention given to the background. Piola aims to create a sense of unification in his drawings, so he includes an indication of a background. Usually consisting of faded washes, calligraphic natural elements, and/or simply outlined architectural elements, the background completes the finished composition by providing narrative detail. Creating a space for the figures to inhabit, Piola creates fully functional descriptive scenes in their respective stories. In *Herdsmen and women watering their flock of sheep at a well*, the figures are positioned close to the picture plane, grounded by the surrounding nature. Piola draws summarily, providing brief outlines of trees and foliage that are accentuated by his application of wash.

Piola consistently relies on wash in his drawings. After sketching the basic linear figural form in ink, Piola uses wash to define the figures in terms of light and shadow.⁶³ His use of wash illustrates his primary concern for the overall spatial rhythm and movement created by light and shadow. The *Nativity* from Palazzo Rosso, a preliminary sketch, employs a heavy use of wash that almost completely obstructs specific details of the composition (Figure 4). Piola here studies the fall of light on the group of figures. His use of wash is broad and general, not used for detailing volumetric anatomy, but instead for the figures' spatial placement in the composition. He attends to how each figure interacts with another, as shadows fall from one figure to the other. In the *Nativity*, Piola also studies drapery, making fast and broad strokes down the bodies

⁶² Mancini, *Genoese Drawings 16th-18th Centuries*, 280.

⁶³ Newcome Schleier, *Genoese Drawings*, 93.

of Mary and Joseph. This distinct step in his design process, that of studying the light and shadow of a whole scene, proves his focus on the composition over individual details.

Piola produced fully finished compositional studies to experiment with different figural arrangements and spatial rhythms.⁶⁴ One subject he revisited multiple times is the Nativity. An integral and commonly depicted scene in Christianity, images of the Nativity depict the birth of Christ. Although there are only a few documented paintings of the Nativity, many drawings of this subject exist. Notably, these paintings do not perfectly correlate to available drawings. Anchoring our discussion on four drawings of the Nativity by Piola from Genoa's Palazzo Rosso, Piola invents to achieve compositional clarity. Unfortunately, the dating of each drawing is uncertain, but I will discuss these in order of increasing spatial complexity. The circumstances around the production of each drawing is also unclear. It could be argued that the drawings' different orientations and sizes account for different patronage (a larger vertical drawing for an altarpiece, while a horizontal study for a private picture in a palazzo). Regardless, this body of drawings stand as variants of the same subject, attesting to Piola's experimentation and invention.

The compositional focus of each drawing is the central motif of Mary with the Christ Child, a necessary component for this scene. Piola then experiments with different figural groups. The simplest of the group, *Nativity 1* focuses on Mother and Child and includes Joseph, donkeys, and putti, providing narrative detail to ground the holy scene (Figure 5). In *Nativity 2* and *Nativity 3*, Piola experiments with a landscape layout, incorporating other figures, such as the shepherds, into the scene (Figure 6 and 7). In these sheets he conflates the Nativity and the Adoration of the shepherds into a single scene, showing both happening simultaneously.

⁶⁴ Mancini, *Genoese Drawings 16th-18th Centuries*, 292.

Although not an innovation in artistic portrayals of the Nativity, these two drawings show Piola thinking through traditional iconography to arrive at his desired final configuration. *Nativity 4* shows the most complex spatial arrangement (Figure 8). Mary and child sit in the center as a host of figures and animals form a circular frame around them, enclosing the pair. *Nativity 4* also includes subtle grid-lines, placing this drawing later in Piola's design process. Looking at all four iterations, Piola employs the same shallow stage-like space and basic outlined figural type. There is a slight indication of background in each image, always a basic architectural structure and foliage, indicating the traditional humble setting of the nativity. Using his characteristic wash throughout these scenes, Piola creates a range of tones, enhancing the movement of the figures. Changing the scene with each iteration, Piola reuses elements from different stages. Even innovating as he creates a first rendition of the subject, Piola makes changes as he draws.

Even though Piola creates varied iterations of the same subject, not all possibilities are completely realized in their full form in the final painting. Despite their use as a step in the process, most compositional studies appear fully finished. Piola gives specific attention and care to each drawing to create clarity and form. I argue Piola finished these drawings to serve as both guides for his own work and teaching tools for his workshop. Keeping all of his studies in a finished state, Piola was able to return to past innovations and select elements for reuse in future experimentations. The need to record and understand past arrangements also explains Piola's tendency to create clear and simple drawings; he constantly reworked and rethought, while making his development of compositional ideas more efficient. The finished quality of his drawings also reinforces their use for educational purposes in Casa Piola. Similar to Scorza's teaching practice and Castiglione's copying of pattern books, Casa Piola readily utilized albums of drawings as the primary teaching tool, instructing students to copy and learn the various

compositions.⁶⁵ These albums of drawings are noted in the inventory detailed in Chapter 1. Given Piola's number of drawings cited in Soprani and his position as director, it is highly probable that his drawings were included in these albums, aiding instruction at Casa Piola.

Notably, Piola's drawing corpus lacks individual figures studies. Because Piola favors working in entire holistic units, his production of individual studies of figures, specifically life drawings, is limited. One consequence of working this way is the minimized attention given to individualization and naturalism in each figure. Although his figures are naturalistic, they all possess a degree of idealization. His cast of characters are all relatively young, with even bearded men having defined musculature. All have Piola's signature pointed features, generally described in their faces. Piola is less concerned with anatomical naturalism and more concerned with the spatial arrangement of figures. The lack of figure studies results in figures not appearing individualized. Revisiting the Nativity examples, the Mary figure in each drawing possesses the same basic outlined body, simple drapery, and plain face lacking individualization. By creating similar stock characters, Piola can easily place figures in various arrangements, developing a more efficient process for compositional permutation. This reuse of figures is in line with his artistic concerns, as he does not need to spend time on each figure and instead focuses on exploring compositional options. The simplicity and clarity of his characteristic figures aids this invention, allowing seamless figural intervention without obstructing spatial clarity. A drawing from the Morgan Library is one of the few sheets attributed to Piola that contain figures outside of a fully finished composition (Figure 9). These studies all possess the same idealized, yet naturalistic, figure of St. Jerome in different positions. The figures are fully finished and Piola attends to the fall of light and shadow, using his characteristic wash. Instead of redrawing a

⁶⁵ Newcome Schleier, *Genoese Drawings*, 17.

specific body part, as in a traditional life drawing concerned with the naturalistic rendering of anatomy, Piola redraws the entire body of St. Jerome in order to experiment with iconography. Further, the studies are relatively ordered with a degree of clarity and without significant overlap. The clear organization of the different figure studies shows Piola's concern in the drawing's continued existence. Instead of the constant redrawing of, for example, a hand in order to practice and perfect the hand, Piola redraws but does so while keeping all of the experiments in a high quality. Instead of throwing out inventions that maybe did not work, Piola keeps them all on the same sheet, perhaps for re-use in the workshop or in his own designs. Piola creates small-scale compositional studies on a single sheet, showing how he always thinks in completed compositional entities. Even in the style of traditional individual figure studies (multiple studies on a single page), Piola continues to think compositionally.

Finally, two drawings from the collection of Palazzo Rosso further attest to Piola thinking holistically when considering figures. *Figural Group 1* and *Figural Group 2* both show three figures in heavy drapery. As seen in these drawings, the difference between *Figural Group 1* and *Figural Group 2* show changes in pose and iconography. There is little attention to individualization in the body or face, displaying a lack of attention to anatomical detail and further proving that these drawings were not done from life. Piola is not concerned with specific anatomical characterization of each figure, but instead how they interact with each other and the space around them, as he changes a pose and changes the order of the figures in *Figural Group 2*.

Like his predecessors, Piola produced full compositional studies. Piola's simple but animated contours and consistent reliance on wash for interior modeling characterize his drawing style. His body of work lacking in individual figure studies, Piola successfully integrates his

personal stock figures into a variety of spatial arrangements. Piola highly finishes the majority of his compositional studies, aiding his own invention and allowing for a clear integration and reuse of previous motifs in new scenes. Piola's large body of compositional drawings attests to his privileging of the compositional whole.

Chapter III: Domenico Piola at Palazzo Rosso

“The production of Piola for the Genoese houses was so abundant that it tired every pen.” This quotation from the introduction of Soprani’s biography of Domenico Piola’s life proves Piola’s active involvement in aristocratic patronage. Piola, along with his workshop, met the decorative needs of the burgeoning nobility, completing interior fresco programs for noble families around Genoa. Between 1687 and 1689, Piola worked on a commission at Palazzo Rosso. This project not only serves as a case study in understanding Piola’s process of graphically preparing a fresco through his compositional drawings, but also reflects his prominent position in the local artistic culture and in his workshop. Piola’s invention through compositional experimentation is effectively utilized in his fresco preparation.

The Palazzo Brignole-Sale, known today as the Palazzo Rosso due to its red color, houses artwork connected to the building and the city’s aristocratic past. A part of the distinguished Palazzi Rolli, the Palazzo Rosso promoted the noble Brignole-Sale family as well the city of Genoa that they served. Members of the Brignole-Sale family were involved in Genoese foreign affairs and governmental institutions. The Palazzo Rosso was designed for the brothers Ridolfo and Giovanni Francesco Brignole-Sale in 1671, after their ambitious father Anton Giulio Brignole-Sale purchased the lot on the Strada Nuova.⁶⁶ Positioned in the heart of aristocratic commissions and wealth on the Strada Nuova, the Brignole-Sale family visually promoted themselves through the Palazzo Rosso. To accommodate both brothers, the palazzo was built with two *piani nobili* of equal prestige.⁶⁷ Choosing to live on the second *piano nobile*, Giovanni

⁶⁶ Ennio Poleggi, *Genoa: a civilization of palaces* (Cinisello Balsamo, Milan: Silvana, 2002), 159.

⁶⁷ Musei di Genova, “The Frescoes,” Strada Nuova Museums – Palazzo Rosso, Musei di Genova, <http://www.museidigenova.it/en/content/frescoes>.

Francesco Brignole-Sale and his wife Maria Durazzo commissioned a great decorative program for their living space, selecting prominent painter Domenico Piola and his colleague/son-in-law Gregorio de Ferrari to decorate the main hall, east rooms, and loggia, further promoting their wealth and aristocratic status in Genoa.⁶⁸

The iconographic program of this decoration visually exalts the family's prestige. The great hall prominently features the Brignole-Sale family symbol of a lion next to Apollo, celebrating their power. The lion also relates to the astrological sign for summer and thus, the sun. Allegories of the seasons, depicted in the following rooms to the east of the great hall, relate to the sun's triumphal passage through time, just as the Brignole-Sale family wields power over time.⁶⁹ In rooms to the east of the great hall, Gregorio was entrusted with the *Spring* and *Summer* rooms, while Piola was assigned the *Autumn* and *Winter* rooms.⁷⁰ Piola successfully utilized his skill as a draftsman to develop the final painted frescoes.

The analysis of these preparatory drawings for both *Autumn* and *Winter* frescoes provides insight into Piola's process for creating a fresco. When developing a painting, most of Piola's drawings are highly finished compositional studies. He reworks various solutions of a specific theme or story through drawing to arrive at his desired outcome. For frescoes, he is also creating full compositional studies. However, in his compositional studies for frescoes, Piola is particularly attentive to creating recession and illusion in the space within the architectural

⁶⁸ Ezia Gavazza, *Lo Spazio Dipinto: Il grande affresco Genovese nel '600* (Genova: Sagep Editrice, 1989), 156.

⁶⁹ Musei di Genova, "The Frescoes," Strada Nuova Museums – Palazzo Rosso, Musei di Genova, <http://www.museidigenova.it/en/content/frescoes>.

⁷⁰ Daniele Sanguineti, *Domenico Piola 1628-1703: Percorsi di pittura barocca* (Genoa: Sagep Editori, 2018), 175.

framework of the room.⁷¹ By exploring different options in these prepared drawings, Piola develops possibilities to revisit when painting the final fresco. I argue that no drawing perfectly corresponds with the finalized version, suggesting that Piola made final revisions directly on the fresco surface. He constantly experimented and invented until the end. These final changes are also dependent on the quadratura work.

While Piola completed all of the painted figural work in both the *Autumn* and *Winter* frescoes, the stucco artist Giacomo Maria Muttone (1667-1717) and the Bolognese quadratura painter Sebastiano Monchi (1630-1706) were hired to paint the simulated illusionistic architecture.⁷² Often in an illusionistic fresco, the figural scene is determined by the architectural program.⁷³ Casa Piola frequently designed the quadratura, along with the central fresco, indicating a high regard for this component of the commission.⁷⁴

Piola's addition of drawn suggestions for the other artists at work on the project at Palazzo Rosso confirms his leadership position on the project. The recorded payments from the books of Palazzo Rosso elucidate the payments to the various artists at work on the decorative project. Monchi and Muttone were paid on December 15, 1687 and Piola and Gregorio de Ferrari were paid on March 4 of the following year.⁷⁵ Notably, Piola was paid a significantly higher amount than Monchi, Muttone, and even De' Ferrari. Piola's payment was more than the payment Gregorio received for his commission of the great hall. Ezia Gavazza speculates that Piola not only acted as a supervisor of the site and was also given a privileged payment due to

⁷¹ Daniele Sanguineti, *Domenico Piola e i pittori della sua "casa,"* vol. 2 (Milano: Soncino, 2004), 481.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 481.

⁷³ Ingrid Sjöström, *Quadratura* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1978), 16.

⁷⁴ Fausta Franchini Guelfi, "Piola Family," *Oxford Art Online* (2003), <https://doi-org.ezproxy.tcu.edu/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.article.T067779>.

⁷⁵ Sanguineti, *Domenico Piola e i pittori della sua "casa,"* vol. 2, 481.

his high status in the artistic community.⁷⁶ Consistent with his role as director at Casa Piola and the workshop's creation of drawings for works in various media, Piola's drawn suggestions for the other artists and his inflated paycheck make sense.

As director of Casa Piola, Domenico Piola employed his son Paolo Gerolamo Piola to assist with aspects of the *Winter* fresco and the loggia. In fact, one known drawing by Paolo Gerolamo from the Philadelphia Museum of Art shows a design for a lunette with an *Allegory of Winter* for the *Winter* fresco decoration (Figure 23). Although similar in style to his father's drawings in his animated figure style and use of parallel hatching, the bold lines and intense white heightening indicate Paolo Gerolamo's hand.⁷⁷ As described in Chapter Two, commissions within the Piola family and their workshop were intertwined. Artists' education also consisted of looking at drawings within Casa Piola, producing the animated *piolesque* style seen in many drawings from the workshop. Because there are no recorded payments for Paolo Gerolamo, it is suggested that at this point he was probably totally dependent on his father and working simply as part of the Casa Piola.⁷⁸

The first of Piola's assigned rooms in the palace depicts the *Allegory of Autumn* (Figure 13). The ceiling opens up to the sky in layered quadrangle. Eight lunettes with figurative scenes are closest to the viewer, extending underneath the prominent architectural frame. Glimpses of an enclosing colonnade extend over the corners of the enclosing framework, adding a further dimension to the created illusion. This is also heightened by the gilded stucco frieze of vines and leaves in the cornices, creating a distinct separation in space.⁷⁹ Small groups of figures

⁷⁶ Gavazza, *Lo Spazio Dipinto*, 157-158.

⁷⁷ "Lunette Design with an Allegory of Winter," Philadelphia Museum of Art, last modified 2019, <https://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/168952.html?mulR=1173590765|1>.

⁷⁸ Gavazza, *Lo Spazio Dipinto*, 157.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 157.

congregate in the extended corners of the frame behind the stucco cornices and in front of the foreshortened columns. The architecture opens up to an animated cloudy pastel-colored sky sprinkled with figures. The central figural group, highlighted by a ray of sunshine peering through a nearby cloud, consists primarily of Bacchus and Ariadne on a cloud looking down upon the viewer. They are attended by putti carrying a garland, and a large cat, referencing Bacchus' chariot drawn by big cats. Nearby Cupid points an arrow toward the couple, further indicating the love they share. The rest of the putti disperse throughout the sky with wreaths, trumpets, and torches, announcing the union of the sitters. The light blue, purple, and yellow blend together and surround the pale figures, their movements echoing the swirling clouds.

Although a smaller number of drawings survive for Piola's *Autumn* room compared to the *Winter* room, the three that exist provide insight into the artist's reliance on his signature compositional drawings to develop the frescoed design. The three extant drawings for *Autumn*, at different stages of the design process, point to Piola's tendency to experiment with full compositions, instead of independent components. These drawings also underscore his reuse of figures and motifs, a consequence of his greater attention placed on the entire composition. Particularly poignant when designing a fresco, Piola's consideration of an entire spatial whole and its interacting components assists in his success in the final *Autumn* fresco.

A drawing in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London shows an early full compositional idea for the Autumn fresco (Figure 14).⁸⁰ Significantly differing from the final fresco, the drawing places the figures in a simplified circular space that was later replaced by the final rectangular area.⁸¹ Although there appears to be room for the present lunettes and the

⁸⁰ Peter Ward-Jackson, *Italian Drawings*, vol. 2 (London: H.M. Stationery Off., 1980), 74-75.

⁸¹ Sanguineti, *Domenico Piola e i pittori della sua "casa,"* vol. 2, 481.

figural groups by the cornices, the smaller circular opening to the sky in the drawing cuts off the outer edge of the frame, condensing the space. In the final fresco, the painted sky opening directly echoes the angular frame, resulting in more space for the central figures. The drawn proportions present a significant disconnect between this initial drawing and its final iteration in the frescoed form. The figures in the drawing tower over the simulated architecture. Perhaps due to the confined space created in this design, Piola's drawn characters differ from the fresco. Instead of the central coupling of Bacchus and Ariadne, it has been suggested that this drawing depicts Silenus complete with goats and putti.⁸² The different subjects suggests the drawing's early position in the design process. Just as Piola experiments with different compositions in many of his paintings, he experiments with varying figural narratives through drawing until landing on a finalized solution in the fresco. This preliminary drawing for *Autumn* explored a possible spatial solution for his design. Like the majority of Piola's drawings, this study appears almost fully finished, despite its function as a preliminary idea.

The two other drawings for the *Autumn* fresco program are lunettes. Both drawings attest to an awareness of a compositional whole, as Piola uses the drawings as guidelines but then makes changes in the final fresco. In both drawings Piola briefly sketches the outline of the lunette as a compositional guide. In this way, he conceives of these portions of the fresco as full compositions in their own right. The drawing in the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart is thought to be from an early stage in the design process (Figure 15).⁸³ The drawing depicts a centaur in motion, pulling back an arrow pointed diagonally down. With only small adjustments to pose and

⁸² Sanguineti, *Domenico Piola 1628-1703: Percorsi di pittura barocca*, 175.

⁸³ Graphische Sammlung, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, *Italienische Zeichnungen: 1500-1800: Bestandskatalog d. Graph. Sammlung d. Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, mit Abb. Aller Blätter* (Stuttgart: Staatsgalerie, 1977), 63.

placement, the drawing is similar to the final frescoed centaur. A similar preparatory study for one of the lunettes is in the Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe of Palazzo Rosso (Figure 16). The sole female figure leans to the left, gripping a lever, as her hair and drapery billow around her. In the final fresco iteration of this lunette, the woman retains her position from the drawing for compositional balance.⁸⁴ This lunette with the woman is next to the lunette containing the centaur and; in their final conception, Piola reverses the woman from the Palazzo Rosso drawing to mirror the figure of the centaur in the nearby lunette.

The next room depicts the *Allegory of Winter*. Although laid out in a rectilinear form similar to *Autumn*, *Winter*'s architectural framework provides a starker separation between the built environment and the sky (Figure 17). The small group of figures set in the cornices is set apart from the sky and its figures by a distinct dark framework. Above this framework, the same colorful pastel sky found in *Autumn* surrounds a central figural group. All three figures in the center are tangled around each other and their accompanying cloud, alluding to the great cloud and winds of winter.⁸⁵ Other figures are placed right above the defining architectural framework, peering up and into their surroundings. The four extant preparatory drawings for this ceiling similarly highlight the importance of drawing to Piola's fresco creation, with particular focus on his compositional planning.

Three of the four extant drawings for *Winter* are compositional studies for the central scene of the fresco which illustrate the development of his ideas, in the creation of illusion and figural clarity. The first drawing from the British Museum has only a slight indication of depth. Believed by Ezia Gavazza to be early in the design process, this drawing presents a detailed

⁸⁴Sanguineti, *Domenico Piola 1628-1703: Percorsi di pittura barocca*, 175.

⁸⁵ Gavazza, *Lo Spazio Dipinto*, 157.

study of a corner of the fresco (Figure 18).⁸⁶ The figure of Winter, depicted as an old man, sits atop a decorative cornice along with a woman tending to a fire and another above him holding a pitcher. A great cloud from above swoops down and around to the right of the figural group, neatly framing the narrative. Amidst the cloud are moving figures blowing air into the sky. Faint black chalk marks around the detailed section outline the rest of the fresco space, with brief circles as figural stand ins and quick lines indicating a proposed framework. Although this drawing was made at an early stage in the process, Piola includes indications of how this detailed corner fits into the greater compositional whole. The faint lines filing in the other corners of the scene allow Piola to judge the necessary space for this created group. Clearly over-crowded in this initial drawing, the groups of figures are spread further apart in subsequent drawings and in the final fresco. Even though Piola is studying a mere component of this fresco, he continues to develop ideas in terms of their larger contexts.

A drawing from the Gabinetto di Disegni e Stampe of Palazzo Rosso shows the next phase of the *Winter* ceiling (Figure 19). Now indicating the entire framework, Piola draws rapidly, sketching elements of the composition. While most of the individual figures are not recognizable due to Piola's rapid strokes, the old man holding his hands in front of a brazier positioned above the cornice in the lower half of the composition is clearly identifiable. Although slightly changing the man's pose and hand position, Piola retains this figure from his earlier British Museum drawing. Another element retained is the large cloud with its nude figures emitting powerful breaths into the wind.⁸⁷ These clearly important aspects of the composition are set within a more complete frame. Once this depth is resolved in the Palazzo

⁸⁶Gavazza, *Lo Spazio Dipinto*, 157-158.

⁸⁷ Sanguineti, *Domenico Piola 1628-1703: Percorsi di pittura barocca*, 175.

Rosso drawing, the figures are then correctly oriented and understood in the more advanced Paris drawing.⁸⁸

The closest drawing we have to the final fresco is in the Frits Lugt Collection in Paris (Figure 20). Proportionally smaller in size in relation to the architecture frame, the figures are closer to the finalized frescoed proportions in the fresco. Consequently, the sky is more prominent than in the two earlier drawings from the British Museum and Palazzo Rosso. This enlarged sky prefigures the dominant sky in the final composition. The more individualized and carefully outlined figures are more easily recognizable than those in the Palazzo Rosso drawing. The brazier that old man Winter attends to from both previous drawings lies in the top left cornice, its smoke extending into the sky and blending clouds and wind figures representing the winter storms. The old man again sits near the fire, twisting to warm himself with the heat of the flames. The other figures also indicate that this drawing is further along in the design process. Some of the characters with masks and props are taken from the *Commedia dell'Arte* cast and suggest the Carnival season that ends the winter season.⁸⁹ Similar characters are found in the final fresco, as Piola has successfully experimented and finalized his solution.

Analyzing these drawings for *Winter* highlights the content Piola believed most crucial, the iconographic content that ultimately defines the scene. Every drawing has an element of the figure of Winter, in the form of an old man, over a fire, as well as the symbolic winter storm identified by a large cloud and figures blowing into the wind. Beginning with the British Museum drawing, each design incorporates this figural grouping in some way, working through various solutions and interactions with the other compositional components. Once Piola decides

⁸⁸ Gavazza, *Lo Spazio Dipinto*, 158.

⁸⁹ James Byam Shaw, *The Italian drawings of the Frits Lugt Collection* (Paris: Institut Néerlandais, 1983), 418.

on this content in the initial drawing from the British Museum, the elements are consistently carried through drawings and then to the final creation. In fact, this content is also seen elsewhere in Piola's work, another example of Piola reworking his ideas. The old man leaning over a fire is found in Piola's frescoed vault decoration in the Palazzo of Andrea Spinola and labeled as *Inverno (Winter)* (Figure 21). Completed in the 1670s, almost twenty years before to the decoration in Palazzo Rosso, Piola reuses his earlier invention to create a similar figure in a new context.⁹⁰ With hands outstretched, billowing drapery, and twisted pose, this old man is clearly a model for Piola's depiction of the Winter figure in the Winter fresco at Palazzo Rosso.

A final example from the *Winter* ceiling also supports Piola's reworking figures through drawing. A design for one of the lunettes, a drawing from the Gabinetto di Disegni e Stampe of Palazzo Rosso depicts a muscular male nude leaning down against a large bowl-shaped vase (Figure 22). Using wash, Piola provides background detailing in shadows and small foliage. Like the lunette drawings for *Autumn*, he designs a composition in its entirety within the lunette outline. The same reclining nude is found in the British Museum drawing of the initial Winter fresco, but in the British Museum drawing, the viewer sees the back of the body and vase. The same vase returns in the Paris drawing of *Winter* but is attended to by a female in the far left of the composition. A similar nude figure sits to the right of the old man and fire in the lower half of the same drawing from Paris. All of these elements are articulated by Piola through drawing in order to find the best place for them in the overall composition, his primary artistic concern.

Reflecting his drawing practice and prominent place in the local artistic community, Piola's drawings for the *Autumn* and *Winter* frescoes in Palazzo Rosso shed light on his working practice in fresco. Constantly thinking about the image as a whole, each drawing is fairly

⁹⁰ Gavazza, *Lo Spazio Dipinto*, 224.

complete, grounding each figure in its own space. Even in the smaller drawings for the lunettes, Piola develops the composition fully, including background details. Only in the final fresco do these lunettes change, as Piola thinks about them in relationship to other portions of the fresco. Piola clearly followed this approach with his figural arrangements in the drawings for *Winter*, which changed as he accommodated the architectural framework. The figures start moving toward the edge of the frame as the design opens up to allow space for the sky. In the British Museum drawing, Piola incorporates suggestions for Monchi and Muttone in the leaf, flower, and mask motif of the decorative cornice underneath the figural group. Piola continues to create solutions for this architectural ornamentation in the full composition drawing from Palazzo Rosso. Each cornice has a slightly different variant of the British Museum design, providing Monchi and Muttone with ideas and further creating multiple drawn solutions as Piola does throughout his work.⁹¹ This is also an example of Piola providing designs for various media, another common thread in his draftsmanship.

In keeping with his penchant for full compositional studies, he worked through full solutions through drawing until making final decisions as he completed the fresco. The drawings are necessary for Piola to develop his final solutions, using the medium to his advantage as an integral tool to his design process. One of the many examples of his decorative undertakings for Genoese nobility, Piola's commission for Palazzo Rosso confirms his success as a local artist.

⁹¹ Gavazza, *Lo Spazio Dipinto*, 157.

Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated several key aspects of Domenico Piola's use of compositional studies for his paintings. Making up the majority of his graphic output, the numerous compositional explorations attest to Piola's privileging of the whole over individual details. By concerning himself with the conception of the image in its entirety, Piola successfully plans the outcome of his final paintings and frescoes. In fresco, Piola makes ultimate adjustments on the final surface, allowed through his vast drawn preparations, seen in his process for the *Winter* and *Autumn* frescoes at Palazzo Rosso. Through his studies, Piola experimented with the interactions of figures in space to ultimately achieve the clearest compositional solution. His drawings show an attention to the stucco and architectural elements in fresco as well, as he was always conscious of creating a harmonious image in totality. Piola created various compositional solutions for work in different media, focusing on spatial clarity and narrative comprehensive instead of individualistic figures. The lack of traditional individual figure studies also proves Piola's favoring of the composition. Instead of using various life studies to practice naturalistic anatomy, Piola's figure studies attend to the overall pose and spatial placement of the figures. Further, Piola reused figures in various experimentations of the same story, placing greater importance on narrative clarity. Although a vast number of Piola's drawings survive, perhaps more than for any of his Genoese compatriots during the seventeenth century, some are nevertheless lost, and conclusions are drawn from the surviving drawings in the Casa Piola inventory and major museum collections. The practice of copying other completed drawings, the reliance on compositional studies, and the consistent use of pen and ink medium are consistent with the practices of Piola's Genoese artistic predecessors. After tracing his origin and influence from the rise of Genoa as an artistic center, we can see how Piola's creation is a product of his

place. Piola and his successful workshop, Casa Piola, both evolve out of native Genoese patronage and artistic education. The relatively limited amount of scholarship on Piola may be the result of specific Genoese influences on his production as the majority of Piola's artistic output is contained in Liguria. Genoa, as a city on the periphery of the seventeenth century Italian art historical canon, is not given the same attention in general scholarship on the Italian seventeenth century. This study ultimately asserts that Piola's impressive drawing output is an essential part of his artistic creation, proving Piola worthy of distinct recognition as a prominent draftsman not only in Genoa, but in the larger Italian Baroque canon.



Figure 1. Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione, *The Adoration of the Shepherds*, 1645, red-brown oil paint on paper, Royal Collection Trust / © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II 2019.



Figure 2. Domenico Piola, *Adoration of the Shepherds*, n.d., pen and brown ink, brown wash, over black chalk, British Museum, London, © Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 3. Domenico Piola, *Herdsmen and women watering their flock of sheep at a well*, n.d., pen and brown ink, brown wash, over black chalk, British Museum, London, © Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 4. Domenico Piola, *Nativity*, n.d., pen and brown ink, brown wash, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Palazzo Rosso, Genoa.

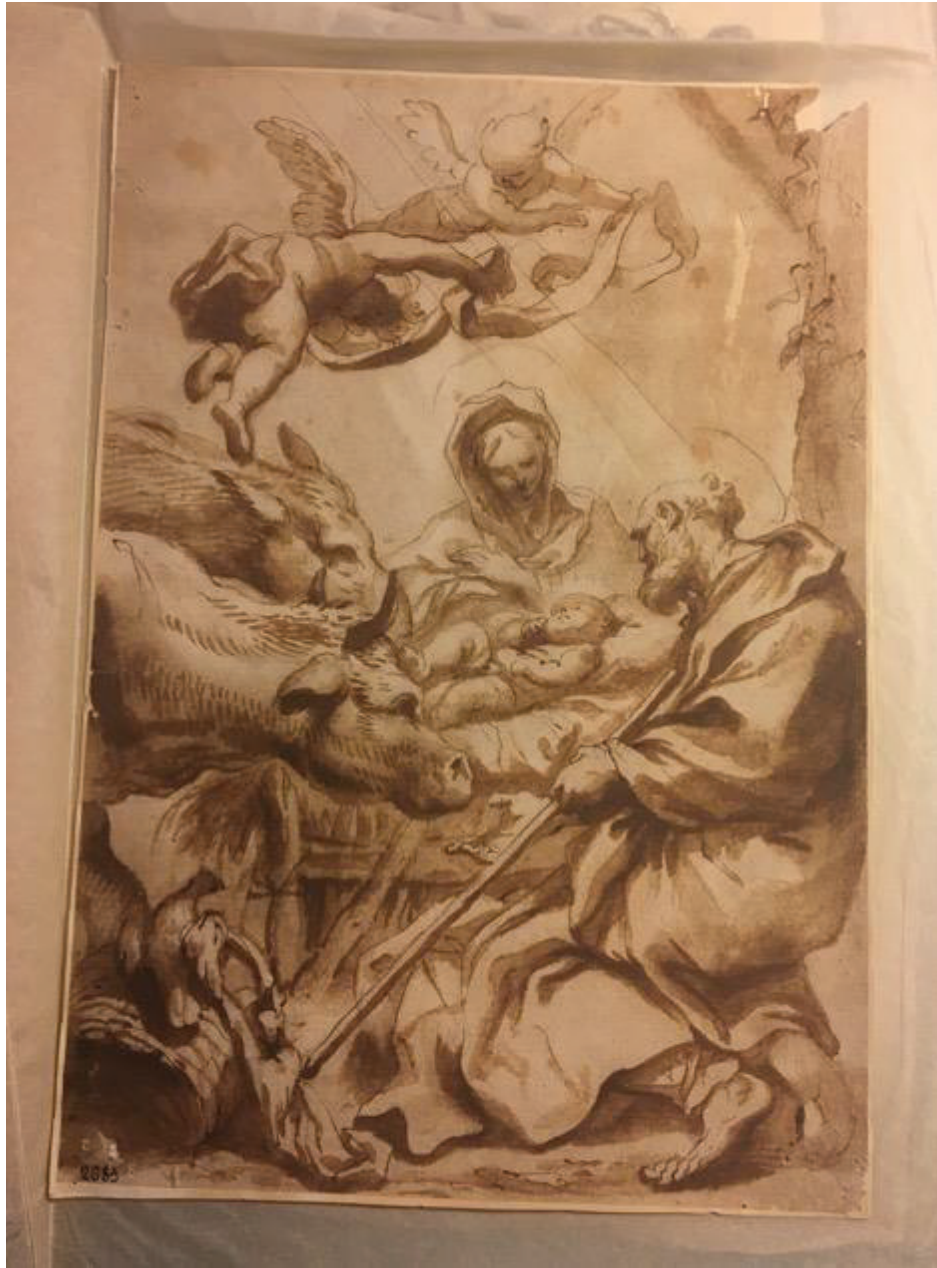


Figure 5. Domenico Piola, *Nativity 1*, n.d., pen and brown ink, brown wash, over black chalk, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Palazzo Rosso, Genoa.



Figure 6. Domenico Piola, *Nativity 2*, n.d., pen and brown ink, brown wash, over black chalk, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Palazzo Rosso, Genoa.



Figure 7. Domenico Piola, *Nativity 3*, n.d., pen and brown ink, brown wash, over black chalk, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Palazzo Rosso, Genoa.



Figure 8. Domenico Piola, *Nativity 4*, n.d., pen and brown ink, brown wash, over black chalk, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Palazzo Rosso, Genoa.



Figure 9. Domenico Piola, *A Sheet of Studies with Saint Jerome*, n.d., pen and brown ink with brown wash, 2009.249, The Joseph F. McCrindle Collection, Dept. of Drawings and Prints, The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.



Figure 10. Domenico Piola, *Figural Group 1*, n.d., pen and brown ink, brown wash, over black chalk, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Palazzo Rosso, Genoa.



Figure 11. Domenico Piola, *Figural Group 2*, n.d., pen and brown ink, brown wash, over black chalk, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Palazzo Rosso, Genoa.



Figure 12. Domenico Piola, *Allegory of Autumn*, 1687-1688, fresco, Palazzo Rosso, Genoa, © Web Gallery of Art.



Figure 13. Domenico Piola, *Design for a painted and stucco ceiling*, 17th century, pen and ink and wash on paper, Prints, Drawings & Paintings Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Figure 14. Domenico Piola, *The Centaur Nessus*, n.d., pen and brush in brown, brown and green wash over black chalk on paper, Graphische Sammlung, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, *Italienische Zeichnungen: 1500-1800: Bestandskatalog d. Graph. Sammlung d. Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, mit Abb. Aller Blätter* (Stuttgart: Staatsgalerie, 1977).



Figure 15. Domenico Piola, *Study of a female figure*, n.d., black chalk, pen and ink, and wash, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Palazzo Rosso, Genoa.



Figure 16. Domenico Piola, *Allegory of Winter*, 1687-1688, fresco, Palazzo Rosso, Genoa, © Web Gallery of Art.



Figure 17. Domenico Piola, *Winter*, study for a ceiling fresco, 1642-1703, pen and brown ink, brown wash, over black chalk, The British Museum, London, © Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 18. Domenico Piola, *Allegory of Winter*, n.d., black chalk, pen and ink, wash, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Palazzo Rosso, Genoa.

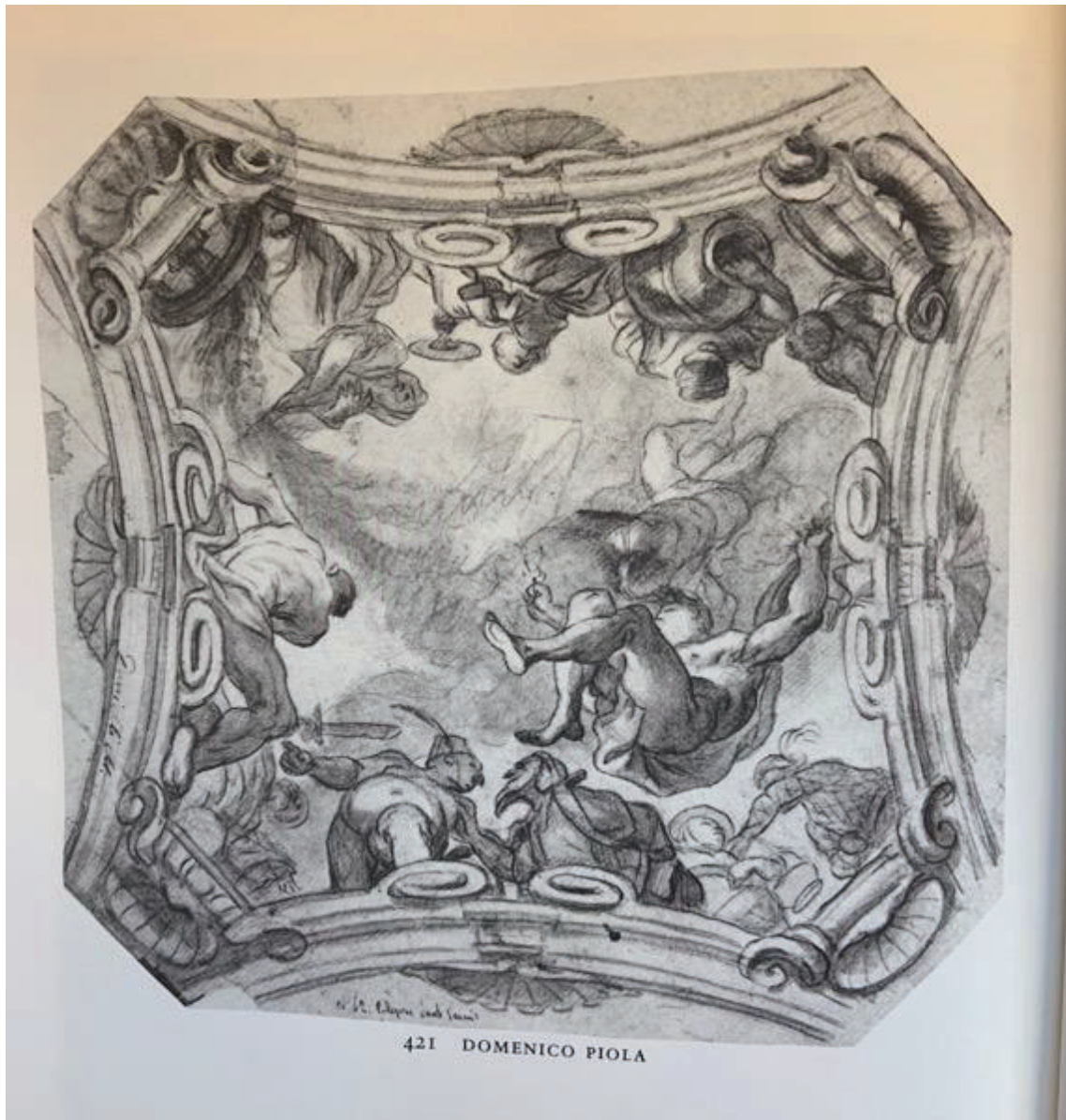


Figure 19. Domenico Piola, *Design for a ceiling with an allegory of winter*, n.d., pen and brown ink with brown and grey wash over black chalk, Frits Lugt Collection, Institut Néerlandais, Paris, James Byam Shaw, *The Italian drawings of the Frits Lugt Collection* (Paris: Institut Néerlandais, 1983).



Figure 20. Domenico Piola, *Winter*, 1670s, fresco, Palazzo di Andrea Spinola, Genoa, Ezia Gavazza, *Lo Spazio Dipinto: Il grande affresco Genovese nel '600* (Genova: Sagep Editrice, 1989).



Figure 21. Domenico Piola, *Lunette Design*, n.d., black and brown wash over black chalk, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe, Palazzo Rosso, Genoa.



Figure 22. Paolo Gerolamo Piola, *Lunette Design with an allegory of winter*, 1688, brush and brown ink and brown wash with black chalk, heightened with white opaque watercolor, The Muriel and Philip Berman Gift, acquired from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts with funds contributed by Muriel and Philip Berman and the Edgar Viguers Seeler Fund (by exchange), 1984, Philadelphia Museum of Art, www.philamuseum.org.

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VITA

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ABSTRACT

One of the leading artists in late seventeenth-century Genoa, Domenico Piola (1627-1703) created and maintained his own successful and highly organized workshop, “Casa Piola.” Piola and his Casa Piola completed grand illusionistic interiors for noble residences through the unification of painting, sculpture, and architectural adornment, catering to the Genoese patronage’s taste for the ornate. Piola’s artistic production also includes a large number of drawings (some 4000) that drastically outnumber his paintings and frescos. These drawings display a careful and methodical technique utilized in preparing works in a variety of media from fabrics to frescoes.

Using Piola’s five known preparatory drawings for his *Allegory of Winter* and *Allegory of Autumn* frescoes as a case study, this thesis will study Piola’s process of fresco design and argue that he used drawings to develop ideas that are reused and reworked in both final fresco compositions. My first chapter contextualizes Domenico Piola and his Casa Piola within seventeenth-century Genoese visual culture and highlights *piolesque* production’s inherent ties to the local aristocratic decoration. This introductory chapter traces the artist’s development from his early training through his rise to a prominent position in the city. The second chapter provides an overview of Piola’s draftsmanship, emphasizing his large output of highly finished compositional studies, often as iterations of similar subject matter. With comparisons to drawings by earlier influential Genoese artists such as Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione and Valerio Castello, I explore Piola’s corpus of drawings as indicative of the larger Genoese drawing tradition of full compositional designs. My third chapter examines Piola’s use of preparatory drawings for his frescoed *Allegory of Autumn* and *Allegory of Winter* decorations in the *piano nobile* of the Palazzo Rosso. Not completely corresponding to the final frescoes,

Piola's drawings show how he experiments with ideas through drawings, actively reworking elements to create innovative compositions that are not conceived until their final iteration in fresco. At various states of finish, these drawings show his specific approach to fresco design, while also continuing to design in complete compositional entities.