

A CULTURE OF ART AND SCIENCE: GIOVANNA GARZONI'S SERIES OF STILL LIFES
FOR THE MEDICI VILLA DEL POGGIO IMPERIALE

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Introduction

The subject of this thesis is Giovanna Garzoni (1600-1670), a gifted and multifaceted artist of the seventeenth century. Garzoni was born in Ascoli Piceno, a town in central Italy. The daughter of Giovanni Giacomo Garzoni and Elisabetta Gaia, Giovanna Garzoni also had a brother, Mattio, who accompanied her on many of her travels. Her early artistic training remains obscure, but she possibly trained with her uncle, Pietro Gaia, a minor painter active in the Marche region at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth century. Garzoni's artistic profession truly began once she left her hometown and started an itinerant career, unusual for a woman of her time, especially an unmarried woman. Nevertheless, she thrived in several cities such as Venice, Naples, Rome, Florence, Turin, and briefly in Paris. Although Garzoni enjoyed a successful career in some of the most important cities of Europe, her treatment by early biographers is limited. Aside from one unpublished example, there are no early biographies solely dedicated to Garzoni. It is not until the nineteenth century that two biographies are devoted to the artist. Garzoni explored a variety of subjects in her art, making her creative output wide-ranging including oil on canvas paintings and works on vellum, which comprise a majority of her production. These works, primarily miniatures, feature religious art, portraits, calligraphic art, botanical illustrations, and still life. Of the series of twenty still lifes, I will analyze five works comprised of depictions of fruits displayed on variety of dishes placed on a rocky surface, with exception of one whose contents are set directly on the ground.

Garzoni's work for the Medici represents a significant period of her career, when she completed countless commissions from the ducal family. These extant works include still lifes and botanical illustrations that she painted for Duke Ferdinando II and his wife, Duchess Vittoria della Rovere. Garzoni also created works for the duke's brothers, Cardinal Giovan Carlo and

Leopoldo de' Medici. During her long sojourn in Florence (1642-1651), Garzoni produced a unique series of twenty still lifes as part of a commission from Duke Ferdinando II de' Medici (1610-1670). This series reflects what was in vogue at the Medici court, where an interest in botanical subjects and still life was shared among several members of the family.

In this thesis, the first chapter will place Garzoni into context. First it will discuss important developments during the seventeenth century such the emergence of Italian still life, the scientific revolution, and how these events opened opportunities for women in artistic and scientific vocations. The section will conclude with a brief history of the Medici's endeavors in science up to the seventeenth century. The second chapter delves into Garzoni's early biographers, her artistic development in botanical illustration, followed by an analysis of Jacopo Ligozzi's influence on her work. Finally, the third chapter will concentrate on Garzoni's time at the Medici court, specifically, on five of the twenty still lifes commissioned for the Villa del Poggio Imperiale's Sala dell' Aurora (*Chinese Cup with Figs, Cherries and Goldfinch* (Fig. 12), *Grapes, Pears, and Snail* (Fig. 14), *Blue Cup with Strawberries, Pears, and a Grasshopper Eating Wheat Grains* (Fig. 17), *Plate with Plums, Jasmine and Walnut* (Fig. 16), and *Plate with Open Pomegranate, Grasshopper, Snail, and Two Chestnuts* (Fig. 18)). I argue that the culture of art and science championed by the Medici, along with Garzoni's practice of botanical illustration, encouraged her highly naturalistic approach in these still lifes. In these works, Garzoni successfully integrated characteristics from her illustrations of natural phenomena into her still lifes creating compositions that are uniquely her own.

Chapter I: Giovanna Garzoni and Seventeenth-Century Developments

During the seventeenth century, still life, referred to as *natura morta* in Italian, emerged in Lombardy, a region scholars consider the “cradle of Italian still life.”¹ The genre extended beyond this area and into other major artistic centers including Rome, Florence, Naples, and Genoa. Italian still life characteristically emphasized naturalism over symbolic significance. These lifelike representations were sources of knowledge and classification of natural phenomena, in contrast to Netherlandish still life’s frequently symbolic focus. While examples that convey deeper messages exist, the most common understanding of Italian works is that they generally lack symbolic allusions. Furthermore, Italian still lifes were not just sources of knowledge, they also exuded beauty and “decorative suggestion of enduring abundance.”²

Motifs characteristic of a city or region are another significant aspect of Italian still lifes. A common trait of the Roman school was depictions of vegetables, flowers, and fruit, whereas in the port cities of Naples and Genoa, still life painters often featured fish and crustaceans in their works.³ In Florence, the natural world and systems of classification were an interest of the Medici dukes, leading painters of the Florentine school to emphasize these qualities in their works.⁴ An interesting aspect of these regional distinctions is that they reflect the political climate of the Italian peninsula, which was then composed of separate states.

¹ John T. Spike, *Italian Still Life Paintings from Three Centuries*, Exh. cat. (Florence: Centro Di; New York: National Academy of Design, Old Master Exhibition Society of New York, 1983), 11.

² Sybille Ebert-Schifferer, *Still Life: A History*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1999), 173.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Mina Gregori, *Italian Still Life from Caravaggio to the Eighteenth Century*, Exh. cat. (Milano: Mondadori Electa, 2003), 18.

Despite living restricted lives, women thrived as painters of still lifes. The genre offered an opportunity for women artists to showcase their skills in faithful renderings of reality.⁵ Although comparable to portraiture, another genre “suitable” for women, still lifes provided an outlet for women artists to explore the natural world and objects in fine detail. Women’s suitability for still life derived from the idea that still life painting did not require invention because like portraiture, it replicated reality.⁶ Copying objects from life was a “lesser” art because it lacked imagination and creativity, traits believed exclusive to male artists and not available to women. Of course, some women artists painted historical and allegorical paintings, but despite their talent, were the exception, not the rule. Nevertheless, some women flourished as still life painters, as evidenced by the career of artists such as Giovanna Garzoni.

Garzoni created her first still lifes during her sojourn in northern Europe. Duchess Christina of France, wife of Vittorio Amedeo, Duke of Savoy, invited Garzoni with great insistence to the court of Turin. Garzoni left Rome for Turin and arrived in November of 1632.⁷ Her invitation to the court of Turin was as a portrait painter, but she also developed into a painter of still life during her stay. A 1667 inventory from the Palazzo del Valentino in Turin lists Garzoni’s painting of still lifes featuring fruit and snails, motifs also found in her later works. It is also here that she might have encountered the paintings of Fede Galizia and Panfilo Nuvolone.⁸ *Still Life with Plate of Fruit* (n.d., Fig.1), is an example of an early work attributed to

⁵ Jennifer Meagher, “Still Life Painting in Southern Europe, 1600-1800,” Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History Essays, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, last modified June 2008, https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/sstl/hd_sstl.htm

⁶ Mary D. Garrard, “The Not-So Still Lives of Giovanna Garzoni,” in *“The Immensity of the Universe” in the Art of Giovanna Garzoni*, edited by Sheila Barker, (Livorno: Sillabe, 2020), 66-7.

⁷ Gerardo Casale, *Gli incanti dell’iride: Giovanna Garzoni pittrice nel Seicento*, Exh. Cat. (Cinisello Balsamo: Silvana, 1996), 38.

⁸ Casale, *Gli incanti dell’iride*, 42.

Garzoni based on its style and the artist's signature on the branch of a grapevine. Despite the artist's signature, Garzoni did not date the still life, a recurring practice in her *oeuvre*. Gerardo Casale, in 1996, dated this work to the last year of her period in Turin, 1637, recognizing Garzoni's ability as beyond the point of study and reaching a level of mastery.⁹ This work also shows Garzoni beginning to conceive the unique compositions of her later still lifes.

Scientific Revolution and the “Feminine” Genres

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries witnessed the steady emergence of the Italian still life and new developments in science, medicine, and mathematics.¹⁰ Scholars generally refer to these advances as the scientific revolution, a term that refers to the scientific discoveries of this time that altered the way people understood the world. Before this period, ancient texts were the most important sources of information about the workings of the universe and remained an undisputed source of knowledge.¹¹ However, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, influential figures like Nicolaus Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, Isaac Newton, and René Descartes began to challenge old ideas and bring forth new scientific and philosophical insights.¹² With new knowledge came new methods for studying the world, which relied more on observation and experimentation as a means of supporting these findings. Furthermore, scientific study became more accessible outside universities with the emergence of scientific academies,

⁹ Casale, *Gli incanti dell'iride*, 46.

¹⁰ Monique Frieze, *The Bold and the Brave: A History of Women in Science and Engineering*, (University of Ottawa Press, 2009), 60-61.

¹¹ Arthur MacGregor, “Renaissance Collecting and Understanding of the Natural World,” in *Changing Perceptions of Nature*, edited by Ian Convery and Peter, 75-87. Davis, (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 2016), 92.

¹² Frieze, *The Bold and the Brave*, 60.

although these were almost always exclusively for men. However, in some Italian cities, such as Bologna, these academies allowed women to participate.¹³

While the scientific revolution brought much innovation, men made up a majority of those recognized in this movement, while women made up only a small number and rarely received recognition. Like many women artists, women who practiced science often worked with male relatives who introduced them into the discipline and allowed them to participate as assistants. Of course, their scientific pursuits did not come without scrutiny, so criticism often accompanied women who stepped outside their gendered roles and were accused of neglecting their domestic responsibilities.¹⁴ Likewise, women artists encountered several obstacles and were subject to similar critiques in a field also dominated by men. Nevertheless, opportunities allowed women to overcome these limitations and pursue a career in their chosen field as long as they maintained a level of decorum.

Scientific illustration was an area in which women were able to advance. This type of illustration was considered “appropriate” for women and was one of the “feminine” genres.¹⁵ Like portraiture, scientific illustration belonged to a “lower” art style, because it comprised replicating that which is before the artist instead of using the imagination. This lack of *invenzione*, an important ability usually only attributed to male artists, was thought uncharacteristic of women. Likewise, the scientific field considered women incapable of abstract thought and not suited for such erudite pursuits.¹⁶ Despite these setbacks, women found success

¹³ Frieze, *The Bold and the Brave*, 61-2.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 63-5.

¹⁵ Lucia Tongiorgi Tomasi, ““La Femminil pazienza”: Women Painters and Natural History in the Seventeenth and Early Eighteenth Centuries,” *Studies in the History of Art* 69, (2008): 160.

¹⁶ Tomasi, “La Femminil pazienza,” 160.

in scientific illustration, completing works for collectors who utilized these records for their own studies or added them to their cabinets of curiosities.

Garzoni worked in this cultural backdrop, which influenced her creative production. She benefited from the emergence of still life and the advances of the scientific revolution thus becoming involved in both artistic and scientific pursuits as will be discussed in the next chapter. Furthermore, her skills as a painter of still life and botanical illustrations encompass these important seventeenth-century developments and the inextricable link formed between science and art. These experiences eventually led to one of Garzoni's most prestigious posts, at the Medici court in Florence.

The Medici: Patrons of the Arts and Sciences

For centuries, the Medici family ruled Florence and were patrons of the most eminent artists whose works celebrated their great wealth. In addition to their artistic endeavors, they also had a decided interest in the natural world. Prior to the seventeenth century, Cosimo the Elder de' Medici (1389-1464) fostered this inquisitiveness in succeeding members of the family who continued to support the sciences, especially in botanical studies. Their interest in botanical subjects led to the building of "humanistic gardens" and renovation of their country villas. The architecture of these estates, along with the construction of elaborate gardens, represented a harmony between art and nature.¹⁷ The coexistence of these subjects was significant as it mirrored the Medici's own patronage of art and science.

The Medici further contributed to botanical studies by securing rare books such as Pliny the Elder's *Historia Naturalis* and the translation into Latin from Greek of Dioscorides' *De*

¹⁷ Lucia Tongiorgi Tomasi and Gretchen A. Hirschauer, *The Flowering of Florence: Botanical Art for the Medici*, Exh. cat. (Washington, D.C. : National Gallery of Art ; Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2002), 15-17.

Materia Medica, an ancient text dedicated to herbal medicine.¹⁸ Their gardens transformed into spaces of knowledge and pleasure that supported their study of nature.¹⁹ The Medici also sponsored the building of botanical gardens and offered top tier scientists incentives to come to the University of Pisa. The family made other generous donations for the benefit of science such as the Giardino delle Stalle. The Medici had this garden constructed as a resource for students from the University of Pisa who returned home to Florence during holidays. It functioned as a space for them to continue their studies while away from campus.²⁰

When Francesco I de' Medici became Grand Duke in 1574, he had little interest in matters of the state.²¹ He was more intrigued by the study of nature. His *studiolo* in the Palazzo Vecchio and his garden at the Villa di Patrolino attest to his fascination with natural phenomena. The *studiolo*'s decorative program references nature and the curiosities kept in this space created a setting where Francesco could retreat and become immersed in his studies. The garden at Villa di Patrolino, no longer extant, was described as other worldly and magical. Its extravagant design included rare plant specimens, fountains, and grottoes. Its magnificence attracted highly coveted visitors such as the Bolognese collector and naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi.²² Francesco's desire to immerse himself in the discipline also led to an invitation to the illustrator and painter from Verona, Jacopo Ligozzi in 1577. Ligozzi was an important authority in Florence who established, through his naturalistic illustrations, influential precedents for the depiction of the natural world.²³ Francesco highly regarded Ligozzi's botanical illustrations of plant and animal

¹⁸ Tomasi and Hirschauer, *The Flowering of Florence*, 15-16.

¹⁹ Tomasi and Hirschauer, *The Flowering of Florence*, 32.

²⁰ Ibid, 31-2.

²¹ Ibid, 36.

²² Ibid, 36-7.

²³ Spike, *Italian Still Life Paintings*, 65.

specimens from the Medici gardens, and is said to have admired them for long periods in his *studiolo*.²⁴

During the seventeenth century, the Medici began to collect still lifes to decorate their country villas.²⁵ These paintings suited the pastoral setting and represented the agricultural role of the land. The Medici's collection of these type of works was due to Ferdinando II, Prince Leopoldo, and Cardinal Giovan Carlo's shared interests in natural philosophy. The depiction of natural phenomena in these still lifes satisfied their shared scientific curiosity. Ferdinando would often invite members of Galileo Galilei's school to demonstrate experiments and discuss scientific matters. His brother, Cardinal Giovan Carlo, was also scientifically inclined and amassed a collection of art stemming from his fascination with botany and horticulture.²⁶ Duke Ferdinando's wife Vittoria della Rovere, both cultured and classically educated, also appreciated the genre, especially works with floral subjects.²⁷ She was a faithful supporter of Florentine artists such as Andrea Scacciati and Giovanni Stanchi, who specialized in still lifes depicting a wide variety of beautifully arranged flowers.²⁸

In Florence, the Medici shaped artistic tradition, as reflected in the Florentine still life with its highly naturalistic representation and classification of vegetation.²⁹ During Garzoni's time in Florence, Jacopo Ligozzi's depictions of botanical phenomena led her to employ similar

²⁴ Tomasi and Hirschauer, *The Flowering of Florence*, 38.

²⁵ Patrizia Pietrogrande, Stefano Casciu, Marco Chiarini, et al., *Natura Morta: Still-Life Painting and the Medici Collections*, Exh. cat. (Florence: Contemporanea Progetti; Washington D.C.: Trust for Museum Exhibitions, 2006), 13.

²⁶ Tomasi and Hirschauer, *The Flowering of Florence*, 75-76.

²⁷ Adelina Modesti, *Women's Patronage and Gendered Cultural Networks in Early Modern Europe; Vittoria della Rovere, Grand Duchess of Tuscany*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), 46-54.

²⁸ Pietrogrande, Casciu, Chiarini, *Natura Morta*, 14.

²⁹ Gregori, *Italian Still life*, 18.

techniques in her own paintings, which I will briefly touch upon here and return to in the next chapter. The works Garzoni created for the Medici combined aspects of botanical illustration and still life. Garzoni's use of gouache on vellum and a highly naturalistic approach recalls her practice of botanical illustrations as well as Ligozzi's own. Furthermore, both Ligozzi and Garzoni planned their compositions by creating an under-drawing prior to the application of color. Garzoni's still lifes, unlike Ligozzi's illustrations, do not always focus on one specimen but rather depict a botanical arrangement often composed of fruits, nuts, or flowers placed on plates or bowls. Another aspect of Garzoni's still lifes is her penchant for including insects like snails and grasshoppers and in some cases birds. These attributes earned Garzoni numerous commissions from the Medici, most notably a series of twenty still lifes for the Medici Villa del Poggio Imperiale.

The emergence of the Italian still life and the scientific revolution are integral developments for placing Garzoni's career in context. Garzoni practiced both botanical illustration and still life later in her profession. Her engagements with these art forms are undoubtedly connected to the artistic and scientific climate of the seventeenth century. What is extraordinary is that her engagements with still life and botanical illustrations happen consecutively and then evolve to a point where she unites both artistic methods.

Chapter II: Garzoni's Early Biographers and Artistic Development

The previous chapter placed Garzoni into context by discussing major developments during the seventeenth century such as the emergence of the Italian still life and the scientific revolution, both impactful to her artistic career. Naturalistic illustration and still life offered new possibilities for women to develop careers where they could engage with new artistic genres in the arts and sciences. These two areas, considered “appropriate” for women, allowed them to pursue these new opportunities. Garzoni benefited from these developments and produced both still life and botanical illustrations, as evidenced by her extant works. This brings attention to Garzoni's endeavors in botanical illustration which enhanced her skills in close observation and realistic depictions of nature. In this chapter I wish to elucidate how early biographers neglected Garzoni's artistic career, disregarding her celebrity and appointments at some of the most important courts in Europe, which affected her artistic profile. Garzoni was more than just a *miniatrice*, she was a talented and multifaceted artist as confirmed by her diverse artistic *oeuvre*. Next, this chapter will consider some of Garzoni's early works. Finally, the section will return to the painter Ligozzi and his influence on Garzoni's creative process, specifically, her herbal illustrations.

Early Biographers and Garzoni's Botanical Interests

Despite her fame and success, Giovanna Garzoni received only limited attention from early biographers. Her first biographers, including Carlo Ridolfi (1594-1658), Filippo Baldinucci (1625-1696), and Lione Pascoli (1674-1744), mention her career as a miniaturist only briefly. In all three of these biographies, discussion of Garzoni is integrated into the life stories of male artists or referenced in the biographies of other women artists, such as in the life of Marietta Robusti. The fragmentary information provided by these primary sources has made it difficult to

reconstruct part of Garzoni's career, especially her early artistic period. These early biographers' lack of detail on her profession leave out important facts that are formative to her development such as her practice of botanical illustration and still life.

Sheila Barker's essay "Marvelously Gifted," brings to attention a previously unknown and unpublished early seventeenth-century biography of Garzoni by Cristofano Bronzini (1580-1633) in *Della Dignità et delle Nobilità delle Donne* (1615-1622). This series was a record of exceptional women around the world from various vocations, including some in the Medici Court. Bronzini dedicated each volume to the powerful women of the court such as Archduchess Maria Magdalena of Austria, Margherita de' Medici, and Christine of Lorraine. His goal was to challenge the common notion of women's inferiority to men by providing examples of women's excellence and capabilities.³⁰ Among the women profiled is Garzoni, whom Bronzini met during a visit to the Medici court between 1618 and 1621.³¹ Garzoni's visit to Florence during her youth reveals more of her early artistic development. Bronzini does not specify who accompanied Garzoni or how she came to the court, and he characterizes Venice as her place of origin. Bronzini's account raises questions about what sort of connections Garzoni had that made it possible for her to be granted an audience with the Archduchess. It is remarkable that at such an early stage of her career Garzoni was travelling and showcasing her skills in miniature and calligraphy at important artistic centers such as Florence and the Medici court.

³⁰ Sheila Barker, "The First Biography of Artemisia Gentileschi: Self-Fashioning and Proto-Feminist Art History in Cristofano Bronzini's Notes on Women Artists," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 60, no. 3 (2018): 405-6.

³¹ Sheila Barker, "'Marvelously Gifted': Giovanna Garzoni's First Visit to the Medici Court." *Burlington Magazine* 160, no. 1385 (August 2018): 656.

Bronzini's commentary on Garzoni is full of praise and adds to our knowledge of Garzoni's artistic talents. He characterizes Garzoni as "a girl above all others."³² And he praises her skills in miniature, especially how she "colors so exceedingly well," and her skillful calligraphy that is enhanced by the "creative flourishes...with superb drawings of festoons, plants leaves, flowers, fruits and various animals of the land and sky."³³ Bronzini is the first among her early biographers to mention Garzoni's depiction of natural phenomena in her art. Bronzini's response to her work as excellent in nature, informs us of Garzoni's artistic capabilities during the early period of her itinerant career.

Garzoni's life became a subject of interest during the nineteenth century. Giacinto Cantalamessa Carboni's *Memorie intorno i letterati e gli artisti della città di Ascoli nel Piceno* (1830) and Amico Ricci's *Memorie storiche delle arti e degli artisti della Marca di Ancona* (1834) both offer individual biographies dedicated to her career. Carboni and Ricci's biographies are much longer than those of previous writers, not only praising Garzoni, but also mentioning extant works, important patrons, and the numerous cities she visited. However, these biographies are a broad overview of her life and not a specific record of her career. Despite their shortcomings, they both mention Garzoni's album of watercolors with depictions of animals and flowers bequeathed to the Accademia di San Luca in Rome after her death. Carboni specifically praises the contents of this album for its accurate and lifelike depictions of natural phenomena but does not further discuss her technique or how this practice reflected on her artistic output.³⁴ From Carboni's appraisal of her work, one can infer that he visited Rome and sought out

³² Barker, "Marvelously Gifted," 659.

³³ Barker, "Marvelously Gifted," 659.

³⁴ Giacinto Cantalamessa Carboni, *Memorie intorno i letterati e gli artisti della città di Ascoli nel Piceno*, (Ascoli, 1830), 203.

Garzoni's album of watercolors to provide an accurate and detailed commentary on her abilities in her biography. Ricci also mentions this album of watercolors in her biography but does not elaborate on the quality of the content, which could mean he was citing content from a previous biography in his version.³⁵

These early biographies demonstrate how the private nature of Garzoni's commissions contributed to early biographers' lack of awareness of her botanical interests. Unlike her still lifes and botanical illustrations, commissioned by private patrons, the album of watercolors at the Accademia di San Luca is a compilation of her exploration of botanical subjects and likely available for viewing at the time. Furthermore, this album was not mentioned until the nineteenth century, so Ricci and Carboni's awareness of her affiliation to the Accademia di San Luca and her donation of her estate possibly aided their knowledge of this work. Likewise, Bronzini's presence during Garzoni's visit allowed him to meet her personally and describe the artist and her works with an accuracy unlike other biographers such as Ridolfi and Pascoli. Bronzini's account provides valuable information about her development and what sort of artistic pursuits characterized Garzoni during the early period of her career such as her use of nature as decorative motifs in calligraphy. These accounts evidence how access to these works was imperative to their inclusion in Garzoni's biographies.

Baldinucci, who lived and worked for the Medici court in Florence and had access to their art collection, did not dedicate a biography to Garzoni.³⁶ Even if biographers had the

³⁵ Amico Ricci, *Memorie storiche delle arti e degli artisti della Marca di Ancona*. 3 vols. (Bologna: Forni editore, 1970), 294-5.

³⁶ Edward L. Goldberg, "Filippo Baldinucci," *Grove Art Online*, Accessed March 20, 2020, <https://www-oxfordartonline-com.ezproxy.tcu.edu/groveart/view/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.001.0001/oao-9781884446054-e-7000005884#oao-9781884446054-e-7000005884>.

information available about an artist, they could still choose not to record their careers.

Baldinucci shows a bias against women artists by instead mentioning Garzoni in passing in the biography of Ottaviano Janella, her compatriot from Ascoli.³⁷ Baldinucci had the access and capability to create a more comprehensive biography of her labor in Florence, especially of her still lifes and botanical illustrations for the Medici, but instead relegates her to a passing note.

The lack of a full early biography is an issue for many early modern women artists, as shown in Garzoni's case. Male artists dominated early biographies while women artists accounted for a very small number of these narratives. An example of this discrepancy occurs in the first edition of Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* (1550), where among the 142 artists featured in this compendium, only one woman is mentioned, the Bolognese sculptor Properzia de' Rossi.³⁸ Despite Garzoni's considerable fame and success during her lifetime, she lacks a full early biography. It was not until the nineteenth century that two full, but short, biographies are dedicated to her by Carboni and Ricci. Perhaps early writers' dismissal of Garzoni was also due to the nature of her work as a miniaturist and still-life painter, both lower-ranking genres then considered appropriate for women.

Piante Variæ

The limited information from early biographers leaves questions about the chronology of some of Garzoni's extant works unanswered. The *Piante Variæ* is one such work whose date of conception has been a source of debate among scholars. Early biographers' neglect of Garzoni's

³⁷ Filippo Baldinucci, *Notizie de' Professori del disegno da Cimabue in qua*, vol. 5, (Florence: Batelli and Compagni, 1847), 550-1.

³⁸ Frederika H. Jacobs, "Problems of Praise and the Pythagorean Contrariety," in *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa: Women Artists and the Language of Art History and Criticism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 17.

career adds to the difficulty of securely dating the *Piante Variæ*, a work that is imperative in understanding how Garzoni became involved in botanical illustration, a practice important to her development as a painter of still life.

Garzoni's *Piante Variæ* (1630-1632) is an album of fifty watercolors depicting various plant specimens currently housed at the Dumbarton Oaks Research Library in Washington, D.C. Early biographers did not reference this collection of Garzoni's botanical studies, perhaps for the same reasons many of her paintings are not discussed in these early sources: they were not public commissions. Her works were destined for private viewing by patrons and their immediate circle of acquaintances, so unless these early writers had access to these networks, they would not be aware of their existence. Garzoni's compilation of watercolors is an important indicator of her extensive practice and familiarity with the conventions used in botanical illustration to represent plant specimens.

Garzoni creates each study in watercolor on paper and focuses on a single species that is centralized and illustrated in close detail. She includes the specimens' scientific names, written near the stem of the plants depicted and on the top right corner of the sheet. Curiously, Garzoni only signs three sheets, the *Eryngium campestre* (1630-1632, Fig. 2), *Musa paradisiaca* (1630-1632, Fig. 3), and *Daphne gnidium* (1630-1632, Fig. 4). The placement of the specimens at the center of the sheet replicates the practice from printed botanical studies such as those found in Pier Andrea Mattioli's *Commentarii*.³⁹ In fact, Garzoni was familiar with the text as evidence by the composition of the *Musa paradisiaca*, clearly an amalgamation of two of Mattioli's prints, the *Musa sine fructu* (1565, Fig. 5) and *Musa cum fructu* (1565, Fig. 6)

³⁹ Sheila Barker and Anatole Tchikine, "Art in the Service of Botany: Giovanna Garzoni's *Piante Variæ* at Dumbarton Oaks," in "*The Immensity of the Universe*" in *The Art of Giovanna Garzoni*, edited by Sheila Barker, (Livorno: Sillabe, 2020), 42.

The dating of Garzoni's herbarium has been a source of debate, due to the portrait of the artist at an advanced age on the frontispiece (1650, Fig. 7).⁴⁰ The drawing features Garzoni as an older woman, looking out and smiling while she holds a small drawing of a figure in her right hand that she turns towards the viewer. An architectural frame with the inscription "Giovanna Garzoni Ascolana Miniatrice" surrounds her image. The frame is flanked by two putti while a third kneels at the bottom. This portrait of Garzoni was likely inspired by Giuseppe Ghezzi's *Portrait of Giovanna Garzoni* for the Accademia di San Luca.⁴¹ Paola Lanzara posits that the creation of the herbarium occurred between 1650 and 1660, thus locating the work during Garzoni's time in Florence and Rome.⁴² But Lucia Tongiorgi Tomasi rebuts this argument with Giovanni Targioni Tozzetti's account of Garzoni's herbarium that the pharmacist Enrico Corvino supposedly commissioned in 1616. This would mean that the frontispiece was inserted at later date either by Garzoni or by an anonymous artist, as Tongiorgi Tomasi has proposed.⁴³ While these different perspectives have persisted, Sheila Barker and Anatole Tchikine have brought to light new findings which challenge both Tomasi's and Lanzara's arguments.

As specified before, Enrico Corvino, a Roman apothecary was thought to have commissioned this from a young Garzoni in 1616. But new documentary information complicates this manuscript's origins. Sheila Barker and Anatole Tchikine argue that Tozzetti's misidentifies the manuscript in his *Selva di Notizie* (c. eighteenth century) as commissioned by

⁴⁰ Vera Fortunati, Jordana Pomeroy, and Claudio Strinati, *Italian Women Artist: from Renaissance to Baroque*, Exh. cat. (Milano: Skira; New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 2007), 24.

⁴¹ Fortunati, Pomeroy, and Strinati, *Italian Women Artist*, 224.

⁴² Paola Lanzara, "Un problemático erbario figurato a Dumbarton Oaks," in *Giovanna Garzoni: "Insigne Miniatrice", 1600-1670*, edited by Gerardo Casale, (Milano: Jandi Sapi, 1991), 36.

⁴³ Fortunati, Pomeroy, and Strinati, *Italian Women Artist*, 224.

Corvino. There is no evidence that such a transaction ever happened between Corvino and Garzoni, thus invalidating the formerly proposed date of 1616.⁴⁴ This makes sense because that same year Garzoni completed a commission for a painting of the *Holy Family* (1616) in her hometown of Ascoli. She was also sixteen years old at the time of this commission, which makes it unlikely that she would have undertaken a project of this capacity, especially since none of her early extant works suggest she continued her practice of botanical illustration after this supposed endeavor. Further supporting this hypothesis is Garzoni's completion of *St. Andrew* for the Church of the Ospedale degli Incurabili in Venice. She signed but did not date the work. Fortunately, the Ospedale's period of pictorial decoration for the institution is documented starting in 1616, so it is possible to date the work between this date and 1630, when Garzoni was last in Venice.⁴⁵ The nature of these two commissions, oil on canvas paintings, along with complete lack of evidence of Garzoni practicing botanical illustration this early in her career makes it unlikely that she was sought out by an apothecary in Rome to complete scientific illustrations of the caliber of those in the *Piante Variæ*.

Barker and Tchikine instead propose that Garzoni's conception of these plant studies likely happened during her visits to Rome between 1630 and 1632.⁴⁶ While in Rome, Garzoni met Cassiano Dal Pozzo, a collector and member of the scientific institution, the Accademia dei Lincei. Garzoni's possible affiliation to this academy is supported by the illustration of the *Lathraea clandestina* (1630-1632, Fig. 8), a rare plant that was hard to come by, but whose two depictions were owned by Federico Cesi, the founder of the Accademia dei Lincei.⁴⁷ Garzoni

⁴⁴ Barker and Tchikine, "Art in the Service of Botany," 36.

⁴⁵ Gerardo Casale, *Giovanna Garzoni: "insigne miniatrice", 1600-1670*, (Milano: Jandi Sapi, 1991), 50.

⁴⁶ Barker and Tchikine, "Art in the Service of Botany," 38.

⁴⁷ Barker and Tchikine, "Art in the Service of Botany," 38-40.

must have had access to these illustrations possibly through her connection to Cassiano Dal Pozzo.

Garzoni's endeavors in botanical illustration prior to her long sojourn in Florence prepared her for the studies of nature and still lifes she completed for the Medici. Botanical illustration enhanced her attention to detail and fostered her ability for close observation. In the *Piante Variæ* she undertakes a new artistic method that differed from the art she had produced. It introduced her into a different field whose interests in capturing the world went beyond aesthetics, social status, or piety, and which instead focused on increasing their knowledge of plant specimens. Furthermore, it expanded Garzoni's resume, as an artist whose experienced in botanical illustration could offer patrons such as the Medici with works that satisfied their taste for art and science.

Jacopo Ligozzi's Influence

Garzoni's later approach to botanical illustrations and still lifes can also be credited to the influence of the Veronese Jacopo Ligozzi (1547-1627), a painter and illustrator of natural phenomena. During her time at the Medici court between 1642 and 1651, Garzoni must have become acquainted with Ligozzi's paintings, and she was inspired to follow his example. Grand Duke Francesco I de' Medici invited Ligozzi to his court in 1577.⁴⁸ In Florence, Ligozzi executed several botanical and zoological illustrations for the duke, who was very interested in the marvels of nature. With an inclination for scientific observation, Ligozzi's illustrations captured through the delicate application of color and minute detail the individual characteristics of the specimens portrayed.

⁴⁸ Tomasi and Hirschauer, *The Flowering of Florence*, 38.

A comparison of Garzoni's and Ligozzi's work shows similarities in their approaches. Ligozzi's *Sea Daffodil* (n.d., Fig. 9) in gouache on paper exemplifies the simplicity of his composition as well as the detail, accuracy, and meticulous application of color. The plant is centralized on the sheet, and its length occupies a significant portion of the page. This presentation takes the plant out of its natural habitat and turns it into a specimen meant to be scrutinized and admired by the human eye. Moreover, the daffodils may represent different stages of botanical life: blooming, fully bloomed, and beginning to wilt that is demonstrated by the opacity of the blooms' colors, and finally, fully wilted. Ligozzi's portrayal is detailed, taking into consideration the subtle shifts in tones that are visible on the daffodil's stem and white petals. The petals are white with hints of grey that create shadows, which give the flower a sense of three-dimensionality. At the root, dark, earthy colors replace the cool tones that dominate the composition. Ligozzi provides not only a likeness, but also a sort of portrait that further identifies a daffodil by its natural colors.

Hyacinth with Four Cherries, a Lizard, and an Artichoke's (1648, Fig. 10) by Garzoni is a gouache on vellum illustration that bears a striking resemblance to Ligozzi's arrangement of his *Sea Daffodil*, with the exception of the three additional specimens Garzoni includes at the bottom of the sheet. This work showcases Garzoni's maturity in botanical illustration and attention to fine detail. The pencil marks on the sheet evidence her use of a preliminary sketch in order to map out the composition before going over it with tempera. She uses delicate lines to create texture on the leaves, the stem, and the petals of the artichoke that heightens their realism. In contrast, the skin of the cherries is rendered with a smooth surface achieved with very subtle lines that create gradient tones, which produce a glossy surface. The black lizard is lifelike with its coarse skin and anatomical precision, but its pose is awkward and unnatural. On the lower

right, a small fly sits on the cut stem of the artichoke. A closer look with a magnifying glass shows Garzoni paid great attention to the fly's detail down to the little bits of fuzz on its back.

Garzoni mimics Ligozzi's placement by centering the hyacinth that seems suspended and is without a shadow, unlike the specimens surrounding it whose shadow gives them a sense of weight. The plant is in full bloom with its white petals and grey highlights. Its shape is defined by a penciled outline that is opposite to Ligozzi's rendering of a daffodil, which has no outline but relies on color to define the shape of the plant. On the other hand, like Ligozzi's own composition with the wilted daffodil, Garzoni also includes a wilted strap-shaped leaf in her rendition. Despite their similar arrangements, Ligozzi's is more austere, while Garzoni includes multiple plants in the same composition. Furthermore, the hyacinth and other specimens are slightly separated from one another and displayed in a manner that, as in Ligozzi's work, removes these samples from their natural landscape and presents them as isolated objects for observation.

Garzoni's artistic endeavors in naturalistic illustrations would later lead to her production of still lifes with bowls of fruit, vegetables, flowers, and occasionally featuring insects or birds. Her skills of close observation would serve her well in these compositions that demonstrate her skills in replicating nature. Similar to her naturalistic illustrations, Garzoni continued to paint in a fine and detailed manner in gouache on vellum. Her still lifes are characterized by a centralized composition on a rocky surface and luminous background. This arrangement is reminiscent of her botanical illustrations with centralized composition and without the staging of a background discussed in this chapter. The twenty still lifes that Garzoni produced for Duke Ferdinando II de' Medici later in her career ultimately became some of her best-known works.

Chapter III: Giovanna Garzoni at the Medici Court

Early biographers who mention Garzoni, regard her Florentine period as the highlight of her artistic career, when she obtained great esteem and received a number of well-paid commissions. Prior to her stay in Florence, Garzoni had travelled to several cities and executed numerous works on subjects ranging from religious painting to botanical illustration to portraiture. Eventually her experiences led to an invitation from Duke Ferdinando II and her arrival in Florence, where she would spend several years working in the Medici court. In this chapter, I will discuss the circumstances that led to Garzoni's time in Florence and the commission of a series of still lifes from Duke Ferdinando II for the Villa del Poggio Imperiale, with specific attention to five of the twenty. In these still lifes she combined her scientifically trained eye and her practice of botanical illustration to achieve a greater degree of naturalism, and she successfully integrated elements from still life and botanical illustration in these twenty works. Finally, the unique compositions of these works demonstrate how the intellectual environment of the Medici court encouraged Garzoni's study of botanical subjects while simultaneously satisfying her patron's artistic taste.

Prior to her arrival in Florence, Garzoni briefly worked in Paris. How Garzoni came to work in France is unknown, but Ferdinando de' Bardi's letter confirms the artist's short stay in Paris. He wrote a letter, dated February 25, 1640, to the secretary of the Medici Duke Ferdinando II de' Medici on Garzoni's behalf to recommend her for a position at the Florentine court. According to de' Bardi, Garzoni was experiencing difficulty acclimating to Paris, so she sought a connection that would allow her to return to Italy. In this letter, De' Bardi cites a merchant, banker, and art collector, Lumaga, whom Garzoni had asked to inquire about a position from De' Bardi. Lumaga showed de' Bardi some works by Garzoni that Stefano della Bella, an artist

currently working in Paris and associated with the Medici, praised. Furthermore, De' Bardi was ambassador for the Medici in Paris and would have been keenly aware of the duke's taste, so his recommendation of Garzoni was based on his own approval of her miniatures. In the letter, De' Bardi writes that Garzoni would send samples of her works, including a portrait of the Duchess Vittoria della Rovere.⁴⁹ In the end, her request was approved and Giovanna Garzoni arrived in Florence in 1642.

After she had worked for several years at the Medici court, Duke Ferdinando II commissioned twenty still lifes for the Villa del Poggio Imperiale from Garzoni. This country estate, formerly the Villa Baroncelli, belonged to Archduchess Magdalena of Austria, who purchased it in 1617 to serve as a private retreat for herself and for future Medici women. The villa is located across the Arno River in the southern part of Florence near the Palazzo Pitti and Boboli Gardens. After the Archduchess's death in 1631, the villa was left to her son Ferdinando II. His wife, Vittoria della Rovere, used the property as a private sanctuary, following the late Archduchess's wishes. Vittoria della Rovere was already residing at Poggio Imperiale by 1639, having sent many of her personal belongings to the villa.⁵⁰ Her apartments occupied the first and second floors of the right wing of Poggio Imperiale and were comprised of various private rooms, salons for entertaining guests, and an art collection.⁵¹

Among the several rooms in her apartment was the Sala dell'Aurora, named after Vincenzo Dandini's painting of the same title that had been transferred to the villa from the

⁴⁹ Paola Tinagli and Mary Rogers, *Women and the Visual Arts in Italy c. 1400-1650: Luxury and Leisure, Duty and Devotion: a Sourcebook*, (Manchester; New York : Manchester University Press; distributed in the United States exclusively by Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 289-290.

⁵⁰ Modesti, *Women's Patronage*, 295.

⁵¹ Andrea Ragazzini and Riccardo Spinelli, *La Villa di Poggio Imperiale: Una Reggia Fiorentina nel Patrimonio Unesco*, (Firenze: Edizioni Polistampa, 2018), 78-79.

Palazzo Pitti.⁵² The Sala dell’Aurora was a cabinet of curiosities housing objects made from materials such as ivory, coconut, amber, porcelain, and rhinoceros feet.⁵³ Garzoni’s twenty still lifes displayed in the Aurora chamber were appropriate subjects for this room full of natural artifacts.

Ferdinando II’s commission of Garzoni’s paintings was a significant achievement for a woman artist. Garzoni began working on these still lifes in Florence, prior to her departure to Rome in 1651, as evidenced by the documented transfer of the works to the duke’s possession.⁵⁴ While a specific date for when she began these works is not certain, a letter from Garzoni to the duke dated October 28, 1662 marks the completion of the series of twenty.⁵⁵ Garzoni was singularly chosen to execute twenty miniature still life paintings on vellum to be displayed in a single space. Their measurements are not uniform but vary slightly, ranging from 15 x 9 to 16 x 10 inches. Given their similar dimensions, they would have likely been displayed all together, which is further suggested by a description of the Sala dell’Aurora by Englishman Philip Skippon, who visited Poggio Imperiale during his European Grand Tour. Skippon describes Vittoria della Rovere’s collection and notes “heads and fruit by a woman, viz. Giovanna Garzone, now at Rome.”⁵⁶ This account suggests that Garzoni’s still lifes were shown alongside other miniatures by her hand in this chamber. The significant number of works in this space by a single artist, especially a woman, is a testimony to her patron’s regard for Garzoni’s works. Also,

⁵² Modesti, *Women’s Patronage*, 294-295.

⁵³ Sheila Barker, *Women Artists in Early Modern Italy: Careers, Fame, and Collectors*, (London; Turnhout: Harvey Miller Publishers, and imprint of Brepols Publisher, 2016), 8.

⁵⁴ Riccardo Spinelli, “Ferdinando II 1628-1670,” In *Il Giardino del Granduca : Natura Morta nelle Collezioni Medicee*, edited by Marco Chiarini, (Torino: SEAT, 1997), 99.

⁵⁵ Maria Matilde Simari and Elisa Acanfora, *Flowers on Vellum: Floral Paintings from the Medici Collections*, Exh. cat. (Livorno: Sillabe, 2014), 74.

⁵⁶ Quotation from Modesti, *Women’s Patronage*, 277, note 54.

the fact that Ferdinando II patronized Garzoni even after her departure from Florence also speaks to his esteem for the painter and the importance of her still lifes to the Medici collection.

In these still lifes Garzoni prioritizes realistic rendition over symbolic meaning. Some scholars believe that still life in Italy and Spain was not concerned with the symbolism common in Netherlandish genre art.⁵⁷ In Netherlandish still lifes, moralizing and religious meanings were communicated through the arrangements of specific objects that embodied certain values. In contrast, Italian still life focused on naturalism and direct observation of nature, an idea promoted by the scientific advances of the seventeenth century. This unidealized approach to nature meant capturing every detail down to the imperfections of the subject portrayed, a characteristic found in Garzoni's still lifes. Another factor contributing to this notion was the Counter Reformation's idea of art being accessible and clear.⁵⁸ Attaching symbolic meanings to still lifes could lead to different and controversial ideas regarding the paintings' significance, hence the emphasis on true to life portrayals than moral themes. Furthermore, the idea of setting biblical themes alongside secular matters was seen as a "possible breach of decorum."⁵⁹

These still lifes held a different kind of significance more closely linked to their patrons that references the agriculture of the region. The fruits Garzoni features in these still lifes were common and especially accessible to the Medici who would have consumed these goods.⁶⁰ The Medici owned several country villas in which they housed various still lifes celebrating agricultural production, such as those by the painter Bartolomeo Bimbi at the Villa Poggio a Caiano. In Bimbi's *Figs* (1696, Fig. 11) he featured several varieties of a single fruit that are

⁵⁷ Garrard, "The Not-So Still Lifes of Giovanna Garzoni," 64.

⁵⁸ Schifferer, *Still Life: A History*, 173.

⁵⁹ Schifferer, *Still Life: A History*, 43.

⁶⁰ Garrard, "The Not-So Still Lifes of Giovanna Garzoni," 70.

classified in the inscription at the bottom right hand corner of the composition. Among the fruits Bimbi includes in his paintings are figs, pears, grapes, cherries, pomegranate, and plums, all of which can be found in Garzoni's still lifes. Furthermore, the Medici's display of the fruit produced on their properties demonstrates a sense of pride. Garzoni's commission indicates the Medici's desire to communicate their power, affluence, social distinction, and interest in erudition and art.

These works also communicate the Medici's wealth and status. The Medici were avid collectors of Chinese porcelains, and they certainly had the means to acquire such rare and valued objects.⁶¹ Acquiring Chinese porcelains was a highly popular activity during the seventeenth century, but the Medici had already been amassing their collection since the fifteenth century.⁶² Indicative of the Medici's taste for items from distant lands, the Sala dell' Aurora was also known as the "Stanze delle porcellane," meaning Porcelain Room.⁶³ In this setting the porcelain was exhibited not only literally but also as represented in some of Garzoni's still lifes. These porcelains are emphasized both through their tangible presence and depiction in Garzoni's still lifes as both decorative and utilitarian objects accessible to the Medici.

The depiction of Chinese porcelain in still lifes was not uncommon, but Italian still life did not feature these objects as often as their Netherlandish counterparts.⁶⁴ Due to the Netherlands' vast systems of trade, acquisitions from far reaches of the world such as Chinese

⁶¹ Simari and Acanfora, *Flowers on Vellum*, 70.

⁶² Francesco Morena, "An Exotic Liaison. China, the Medici and Giovanna Garzoni," in *The Immensity of the Universe" in the Art of Giovanna Garzoni*, edited by Sheila Barker, (Livorno: Sillabe, 2020), 88-91.

⁶³ Pasquale Focarile, "Vittoria della Rovere's Homage to Giovanna Garzoni: The Stanza dell'Aurora in the Villa del Poggio Imperiale," in *The Immensity of the Universe" in the Art of Giovanna Garzoni*, edited by Sheila Barker, (Livorno: Sillabe, 2020), 108.

⁶⁴ Schifferer, *Still Life: A History*, 132.

porcelains were widely available, thus they frequently appear in their still lifes. In Florence, the Medici enthusiastically collected hundreds of Chinese porcelains and so these rare items were available for artists to replicate or take inspiration from and feature in their art.⁶⁵ In *Chinese Cup with Figs, Cherries and Goldfinch* (1651-1662, Fig. 12) Garzoni depicts a carefully rendered Chinese porcelain the Medici may have owned. The Chinese porcelain's vibrant blue glaze and the figs it contains are placed at the center of the composition and further emphasized by their scale and color. Both the still life and the Chinese porcelain feature imagery, thus showing an image within an image, and a landscape within the landscape-like setting of the still life, thus demonstrating two distinctive approaches to the depiction of nature from two very different cultures. Garzoni also demonstrates her ability to adapt to different artistic demands through her replication of the painting on the surface of these Chinese porcelains.

In the space of the Sala dell'Aurora meant to exhibit curiosities, the still lifes faithfully depicted botanical subject and the accompanying Chinese porcelain would have fit in with the purpose of the room itself, since this chamber was a space where visitors could socialize and view the items displayed, as is demonstrated by the visit of the Englishman, Skippon. The fact that the Medici, specifically Vittoria della Rovere, allowed guests to enter the space meant that she wanted to flaunt the objects in her collection, thus indicating the advantages of her status, interests in natural phenomena, and cultures from distant lands.

In these paintings Garzoni unites aspects of still life and her practice of botanical illustration. I argue that her treatment of these works was due to the Medici's and Garzoni's common concern with botanical subjects. As part of the Medici court, Garzoni was aware of her patron's taste and thus felt confident in her portrayal of these still lifes. A comparison of one of

⁶⁵ Focarile, "Exotic Liaison," 91.

her botanical illustrations created for the Medici to the five still lifes analyzed in this thesis demonstrates how she uses elements from both artistic approaches that creates a composition that satisfies her patron's artistic and intellectual interests as well as her own.

Variegated Double-Flowered Ranunculus Plant with Two Almonds and an Insect from the Hymenoptera Family (1648, Fig. 13) was part of a series of four paintings on vellum commissioned by Ferdinando II. Elisa Acanfora suggests that it was executed prior to the commission of the twenty still lifes.⁶⁶ If this is correct, then the similarities between these illustrations and the later still lifes make sense. In these works, Garzoni, as in her early botanical illustrations in the *Piante Variæ*, centralizes the specimen as the focus of the composition. Unlike the early herbal illustrations, Garzoni adds additional specimens at the side of the plant on the center. Garzoni then transferred this new component into her still lifes.

In her still lifes, Garzoni similarly pairs the central dish with other items, whether that be an insect, bird, or fruit. For the botanical illustration, the plant is centered on the page, and the insect and almond featured suggests their placement on a hard surface by their shadows. In the still lifes, Garzoni sets the composition on a rocky surface instead of the predominantly blank space of the illustrations. This is where elements of still life come in that differentiate these works from those with a more scientific appearance. The surfaces on which they are arranged, in addition to the dishes that contain the fruits and vegetables, define these works on vellum as still lifes.

⁶⁶ Elisa Acanfora, "Variegated Double-Flowered Ranunculus Plant with two Almonds and an insect from the Hymenoptera Family (Xylocopa Violacea?)," in *Flowers on Vellum: Floral Paintings from the Medici Collections*, edited by Maria Matilde Simari, (Livorno: Sillabe, 2014), 62.

Although the group of still lifes primarily shows the produce set on dishes, there are two exceptions in the series, *Grapes, Pears, and Snail* (1651-1662, Fig. 14) and *Melon with Slice of Watermelon* (1651-1662, Fig. 15). In both these still lifes, Garzoni places the fruit directly on the rocky surface and only features a snail in one of them, while the other piece only shows the two varieties of melons. This shows Garzoni intended these two works to complement each other, especially because both feature different varieties of a fruit set on the rocky surface.

Furthermore, among the set of twenty they are the only two sharing a similar composition, with the exception of the snail on the foreground and the pears in between the clusters of grapes.

The use of gouache on vellum in these still lifes recalls botanical illustrations. It is clear that this was her preferred medium in which she demonstrated mastery and felt comfortable using in the execution of her paintings. Vellum was widely used by scientific illustrators to record the appearance of the specimens they studied. Garzoni's own experience with the medium and practice of botanical illustration familiarized her with the level of detail she could achieve if she applied the technique to still life. Thus, it served to enhance the naturalism in these still lifes further appealing to the Medici's fondness for genre and botanical subjects.

Assessing Garzoni's small still lifes replicates the act of close observation used in the study of nature. Their size demanded close scrutiny in order to admire the minute details just as scientific study required careful analysis of specimens. For example, in *Plate with Plums, Jasmine and Walnut* (1651-1662, Fig. 16) specific aspects of the contents, such as the texture of the plants, the venation of the leaves, and the detail of the inside of the walnut, can only be discerned in close proximity to the work. By distinguishing these qualities, the viewer simulates Garzoni's own study of the subjects as she worked painstakingly to faithfully imitate their natural appearance.

Garzoni follows a similar arrangement in all twenty works. Fruits or vegetables are at the center of the composition, sometimes placed on a plate or bowl, on a rocky surface, which showcase minute details and a careful application of color. Garzoni relied on color, scale, and the simplicity of the background to highlight the objects in the composition. Similarly, the luminous background that creates negative space around the central element serves to heighten the key object in the still life. In contrast, the composition in Bimbi's *Figs* (Fig. 11) is just as important as the abundance of figs and its varieties. The vibrant color of the red fabric, the ornate table, and the different vessels the figs are displayed on create a busy arrangement that draws the eyes to several points of the canvas instead of a fixed point as Garzoni intends in her still lifes.

The twenty still lifes each have distinct and individualized compositions. These miniature paintings are executed in gouache on vellum, a medium the Medici highly prized.⁶⁷ As with her botanical illustrations, Garzoni began with a underdrawing of the composition, evident by the pencil marks often visible on the surface, followed by the application of color. The rocky ground characteristic of this group of still lifes is generated by tiny dots, like stippling, that creates a textured surface and produces the illusion of an uneven terrain. Their luminous background creates an ambiguous setting. Garzoni does not place these still lifes within interiors, or in a landscape. Instead, the only contextualizing element is the rocky surface that gives the impression of an outdoor setting.

The inclusion of zoological specimens and the rocky surface reinforces the sense of an outdoor location. The fruits or vegetables are often accompanied by birds and insects like grasshoppers and snails. Furthermore, the inclusion of the flora and fauna demonstrates their interaction in nature where these insects and birds live side by side. An example of this is found

⁶⁷ Simari and Acanfora, *Flowers on Vellum*, 10.

in *Chinese Cup with Figs, Cherries and Goldfinch* (1651-1662, Fig. 12). The Chinese porcelain cup holds several figs, predominantly a yellowish and green variety and one that is dark in color. Among them are leaves, wilted, blemished, with one bearing a small hole suggesting the deed of an insect. On one side of the Chinese cup is a goldfinch feeding on the flesh of a fig, its beak pecking the opened fruit. The goldfinch in this still life, like insects and animals in other works, illustrates how they, like humans, consume the fruit of the land and live alongside them in nature.

The dishes of fruit communicate the idea of consumable goods. While their composition suggests an outdoor setting, their placement on a dish indicates they are meant for people to consume. Garzoni differentiates between how people ingest food, often by placing them on a plate, as compared to the goldfinch (Fig. 12) and the grasshopper in *Blue Cup with Strawberries, Pears, and a Grasshopper Eating Wheat Grains* (1651-1662, Fig. 17) that eat food directly found on the ground or from plants. These fruits are an indulgence for both people and animals, but Garzoni makes distinctions between how humans handle food versus how animals consume it.

Despite Garzoni's inclusion of the dish in these still lifes, she emphasizes nature more heavily. Her depiction of branches, blemished leaves, and animals in close proximity to these fruits accentuates the relationship between animals and nature. Instead of presenting an idealized depiction of these fruits, Garzoni presents them in a state that suggests they have recently been harvested. Nature is the emphasis of these works, rather than the presentation of consumable goods.

In these works, Garzoni's skills in botanical illustration heighten her ability to depict highly naturalistic detail. In *Blue Cup with Strawberries, Pears, and a Grasshopper Eating*

Wheat Grains (Fig. 17), the cup contains a cluster of branches bearing strawberries and is centered, while a large grasshopper consumes grains on the foreground next to two small pears. The mass of strawberries in different tones of red suggest their different stages of maturity. Some are white with hints of red, while others are somewhere between red and white. Scattered among them are those that have turned a deep red while others have shriveled to a brownish red. Likewise in *Plate with Plums, Jasmine and Walnut* (1651-1662, Fig. 16), Garzoni captures with marvelous accuracy the characteristic skin of the plum. The plums are represented by a mix of blue, green, yellow, red, orange, and brown thus replicating the smeared peel characteristic of this fruit. Garzoni also shows a highly naturalistic rendering of the leaves. Their venation is visible on the surface of each leaf, especially the dark green ones on the right on the branch. At the side of the plate the walnut's seed and shell and its color is captured with great precision, a testament to Garzoni's attention to detail and close observation of these specimens.

In these still lifes Garzoni's interest in nature extends beyond plant life, sometimes also depicting wildlife. In *Chinese Cup with Figs, Cherries and Goldfinch* (Fig. 12) the goldfinch is realistically rendered and can be identified as an adult based on the color of its feathers, demonstrating Garzoni's close observation, possibly from life, of these birds. Similarly, in *Blue Cup with Strawberries, Pears, and a Grasshopper Eating Wheat Grains* (Fig. 17) on the rocky surface, a grasshopper feeds on a couple of grains. Due to its size and place at the foreground, we are able to appreciate the texture and patterns of its wings and other characteristics of its anatomy. While the cup of strawberries is the focus of this composition, the grasshopper's detailed rendition also commands our attention.

Garzoni's depictions of fruit in these still lifes reference the seasons. *Plate with Open Pomegranate, Grasshopper, Snail, and Two Chestnuts* (1651-1662, Fig. 18) depicts a large

opened pomegranate on a plate with branches and pale green leaves characteristic of the plant. The shell of the pomegranate is split in three parts revealing the red jewel-like seeds inside. The careful coloring of the seeds creates the illusion that the surface of these kernels is gleaming. A snail slithers along the edge of the plate, its brown coiled shell carefully rendered to show the pattern of its smooth surface. In the foreground, two chestnuts rest closely alongside each other, showing different sides of the nut. Here, both the pomegranate and chestnut are available during the autumn. The same quality is found in the still life with *Grapes, Pears, and Snail* (Fig. 14), which features a cluster of pale red, purple, and white, and two pears. Like the pomegranate and chestnuts, the pear and grapes were available during the fall. Garzoni's conscious choice to depict seasonal fruits demonstrates that these arrangements are dictated by what was available during certain times of the year.⁶⁸

One of the primary concerns of this chapter is to demonstrate how Garzoni integrates her practice of botanical illustration into the genre of still life. It is evident that the intellectual and artistic climate at the Medici court influenced Garzoni's production of this series. Garzoni approached these paintings through an artistic and scientific lens where she includes aspects that defined these works as still lifes but simultaneously display the primacy placed on the depiction of natural phenomena. It also exhibits her experience as a traveling artist who encountered different artistic styles during her career, some of which she embraced and mastered as evidence by her extant works. In these still lifes, Garzoni successfully integrates the tastes of her patrons for nature and art while achieving a composition that is uniquely of her own creation and which sets her works apart from other still lifes.

⁶⁸ "Seasonal Fruits and Vegetables in Tuscany," Visit Tuscany, accessed January 13, 2020, <https://www.visittuscany.com/en/ideas/seasonal-fruits-and-vegetables-in-tuscany/>

Conclusion

Seventeenth-century developments in the arts and sciences influenced Giovanna Garzoni's artistic evolution. The advances in the sciences, especially women's practice of naturalistic illustration, opened up opportunities for women artists such as Garzoni whose patrons encouraged her endeavors in this empirical art. Likewise, the emergence of the Italian still life and its emphasis on realistic depictions of nature presented an opportunity for Garzoni to further exploit her talent in botanical subjects.

At the Medici court Garzoni's artistic and scientific pursuits came full circle. The Medici court's intellectual activities and their support of the arts, including of Garzoni herself, allowed the artist to exploit her talent in still life and botanical illustration. Most importantly, the commission of twenty still lifes for the Villa del Poggio Imperiale represents Garzoni's most ambitious extant project. These twenty works, of which five are the focus of this thesis, demonstrate Garzoni's unique compositions that combine elements from still life and botanical illustration. In these still lifes, Garzoni appeals to the senses. Their highly naturalistic renditions of botanical subject matter were a delight to the palate and the eyes. In addition to the senses, Garzoni also appeals to the Medici's taste and her own penchant for naturalistic representation. In these works, she applies her skills of close observation and her practice of botanical illustration to achieve a degree of naturalism that satisfied her patrons.

While Garzoni's twenty still lifes share similar compositions, this study is limited by its focus on five paintings. An expanded analysis of all twenty works might reveal new ideas about their content and Garzoni's compositional choices. Furthermore, if Garzoni had individually dated these paintings, a chronological study could expose more about how Garzoni planned the composition and whether there is a sense of progression in this series of still lifes.

Garzoni's career and artistic production brings up the issue of gender. As discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, Garzoni was not afforded a full early biography. She is instead mentioned briefly in the biographies of male artists and some women artists despite working for important patrons such as the Medici in Florence. Might the lack of an early biography on Garzoni be due to the artistic genre she practiced, which was considered "suitable" for women? Furthermore, since most of her commissions were private rather than public in nature, Garzoni's paintings would have only been seen by few and less available to the public.

An interesting part of Garzoni's career is her affiliation with the Accademia di San Luca in Rome. After a lengthy stay in Florence, Garzoni settled in the papal city in 1651. In Rome, she became an honorary member of the Accademia di San Luca, which served the needs of professional and aspiring artists from Rome and afar.⁶⁹ The institution admitted few women artists, specifically those with distinguished careers, as honorary members whose privileges were less than those of male academics.⁷⁰ It is not clear what sort of status Garzoni held in the Accademia because of the lack of documentation on her membership, but she was certainly well regarded. Based on Garzoni's request in 1659 to construct her home by the Church of Santa Martina, that after her death would be inherited by the Accademia and which the Accademia accepted, one can deduce that Garzoni was highly esteemed.⁷¹ Garzoni also gave several donations to the Accademia, more so than other women artists, and during her sickness the Accademia sent sugar bread to Garzoni, signaling their appreciation for the artist.⁷² The most

⁶⁹ "The History of the Accademia di San Luca, c. 1590-1635: Documents from the Archivio di Stato di Roma," National Gallery of Art, accessed January 10, 2020, <https://www.nga.gov/accademia/en/intro.html>.

⁷⁰ Peter Lukehart, "Giovanna Garzoni, "Accademica,"" in *"The Immensity of the Universe" in the Art of Giovanna Garzoni*, edited by Sheila Barker, (Livorno: Sillabe, 2020), 96.

⁷¹ Casale, *Giovanna Garzoni*, 11.

⁷² Peter Lukehart, "Giovanna Garzoni," 99.

unusual aspect of the relationship to the Accademia was Garzoni's bequest of her entire estate, various private documents, and property to the Accademia with the condition of being buried at their church, a condition that they accepted and honored in 1698.⁷³ While Garzoni's dedication to and monetary investments in the Accademia did not yield special privileges from the institution, she managed to tie her name to it in perpetuity. This significant accomplishment was one few women and male artists could dream of but which Garzoni made possible through the stipulations of her donation.⁷⁴ Garzoni's association with the Accademia gave her a means of cementing her legacy since she was not married and had no children as heirs. She was honored with a marble tomb by the architect Mattia d' Rossi in the Accademia's Church of Santa Martina with her portrait and a Latin inscription bearing her name and vocation as *miniatrix*, thus immortalizing her accomplishments.⁷⁵

This study brings attention to Garzoni's union of botanical illustration and still life paintings into a single composition through close observation of these paintings' components and their positioning, the naturalistic design of the specimens, and the medium used to execute these works. To further elucidate Garzoni's stylistic choices, I have discussed the context of the seventeenth century, considered her patrons' interests, which supported and inspired her work, and the setting of these paintings at the Villa del Poggio Imperiale. Unlike more celebrated women artists such as Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1654), Garzoni did not break barriers in terms of obtaining public commissions and producing history paintings. Instead, she enjoyed an itinerant career, commissions from some of the most important courts in Europe, and honorary membership at the prestigious Accademia di San Luca in Rome. Differences in their artistic

⁷³ Casale, *Giovanna Garzoni*, 12.

⁷⁴ Peter Lukehart, "Giovanna Garzoni," 102.

⁷⁵ Casale, *Giovanna Garzoni*, 12.

production may explain why Garzoni has not received as much consideration as Gentileschi, whose works were groundbreaking and whose career has been widely studied. In this thesis, I hope to bridge that gap and bring attention to Garzoni's career and her contributions to our knowledge of women's artistic careers and creative paths during the seventeenth century.



Figure 1. Giovanna Garzoni, *Still Life with Plate of Fruit*, n.d., tempera on parchment. Private collection.



Figure 2. *Eryngium campestre*, in Giovanna Garzoni, *Piante Variæ*, fol.6, 1630-1632, watercolor on parchment. Harvard University, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library, Washington, D.C, 009578774-METS.



Figure 3. *Musa paradisiaca*, in Giovanna Garzoni, *Piante Variæ*, fol.8, 1630-1632, watercolor on parchment. Harvard University, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library, Washington, D.C, 009578774-METS.



Figure 4. *Daphne gnidium*, in Giovanna Garzoni, *Piante Variæ*, fol.39, 1630-1632, watercolor on parchment. Harvard University, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library, Washington, D.C, 009578774-METS.

MVSA SINE FRVCTV.



Figure 5. *Musa sine fructu*, in Pietro Mattioli, *Commentarii*, pp. 223-224.

And. Matthioli Comm.

MUSA CVM FRVCTV.



Figure 6. *Musa cum fructu*, in Pietro Mattioli, *Commentarii*, pp. 223-224.



Figure 7. Possibly by Giovanna Garzoni, *Self-Portrait*, 1650, pastel and charcoal on paper, frontispiece, *Piante Variæ* (illustrated herbarium). Harvard University, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library, Washington, D.C.



Figure 8. *Lathraea clandestina*, in Giovanna Garzoni, *Piante Variæ*, fol.14, 1630-1632, watercolor on parchment. Harvard University, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library, Washington, D.C, 009578774-METS.



Figure 9. Jacopo Ligozzi, *Sea Daffodil (Pancratium maritimum)*, n.d., gouache on paper, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi, Florence.



Figure 10. Giovanna Garzoni, *Hyacinth with Four Cherries, a Lizard, and an Artichoke's*, 1648, gouache on vellum, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi, Florence.



Figure 11. Bartolomeo Bimbi, *Figs*, 1696, Oil on canvas. Villa Medicea Poggio a Caiano e Museo della Natura Morta, Poggio a Caiano, Italy.



Figure 12. Giovanna Garzoni, *Chinese Cup with Figs, Cherries and Goldfinch*, 1651-1662, gouache on vellum. Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence.



Figure 13. Giovanna Garzoni, *Variegated Double-Flowered Ranunculus Plant with two Almonds and an Insect from the Hymenoptera Family*, 1648, tempera and traces of black pencil on vellum. Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi, Florence.



Figure 14. Giovanna Garzoni, *Grapes, Pears, and Snail*, 1651-1662, gouache on vellum. Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence.



Figure 15. Giovanna Garzoni, *Melon and Slice of Watermelon*, 1651-1662, gouache on vellum. Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence.



Figure 16. Giovanna Garzoni, *Plate with Plums, Jasmine and Walnut*, 1651-1662, gouache on vellum. Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence.



Figure 17. Giovanna Garzoni, *Blue Cup with Strawberries, Pears, and a Grasshopper Eating Wheat Grains*, 1651-1662, gouache on vellum. Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence.



Figure 18. Giovanna Garzoni, *Plate with Open Pomegranate, Grasshopper, Snail, and Two Chestnuts*, 1651-1662, gouache on vellum. Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence.

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Abstract

Giovanna Garzoni (1600-1670) was a painter during the seventeenth century that enjoyed an itinerant career unusual for a woman of her time. Working in several cities, including Venice, Naples, Turin, Florence, Rome, and Paris, Garzoni benefited from the patronage of many influential patrons such as the grand dukes of Tuscany, the Medici. This led to a long sojourn in Florence between 1641 and 1652 as court artist to Duke Ferdinando II de' Medici and Vittoria della Rovere. There, and later while in Rome she produced a number of still life paintings on vellum. Most notably a series of twenty miniatures commissioned by Ferdinando II for the Villa del Poggio Imperiale. Garzoni's still lifes consist of a centralized composition with a luminous background featuring diverse arrangements of fruit, flowers, and leaves. Insects and birds also appear in some of these works. Despite their small scale, these paintings show rich detail with vibrant colors and a naturalistic representation the Medici highly valued.

This thesis will focus on five of the twenty still lifes. I will argue that the culture of art and science championed by the Medici along with her practice of botanical illustration encouraged Garzoni's highly naturalistic approach in the still lifes for the Villa del Poggio Imperiale. The first chapter will place Garzoni's career into context, through a discussion of the emergence of the Italian still life, scientific revolution, and women's status as still-life painters and illustrators of scientific subjects along with a discussion of the Medici's scientific activities. The second chapter focuses on Garzoni's reception by early biographers, her early artistic development in botanical illustration, and comparison to works by such contemporaries as Jacopo Ligozzi (1547-1627). Finally, the third chapter will explore Garzoni's stay in Florence and the series of still lifes commissioned by Duke Ferdinando II for the Villa del Poggio Imperiale. As renowned patrons of both the arts and the sciences, the Medici greatly

admired the ability of Garzoni's still lifes to convey their contemporary cultural and intellectual interests.