

**THE PORTRAIT DRAWINGS OF LAVINIA FONTANA:  
GENDER, FUNCTION, AND ARTISTIC IDENTITY IN EARLY MODERN BOLOGNA**

by

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## INTRODUCTION

Lavinia Fontana, if not positively plain, had none of Properzia's classical beauty nor Elisabetta Sirani's pretty grace...she alone of the four artists whose lives are here recorded experienced all the phases of a normal woman's life, and enjoyed an existence of commonplace happiness.<sup>1</sup>

In 1907, when Laura M. Ragg penned this statement regarding the life and career of the sixteenth-century Bolognese artist Lavinia Fontana (1552-1614), she inadvertently perpetuated the cultural biases that had plagued women artists since the Renaissance. Ragg assumed that Lavinia Fontana's outward appearance, her adherence to the traditional female roles of wife and mother, and the lack of drama surrounding her personal life all factored into a rather lackluster artistic career. This dismissive conclusion is not well reasoned, considering that Lavinia was highly praised by her contemporary biographers, enjoyed a remarkably successful career as a painter in her native city of Bologna as well as in Rome, and established lucrative relationships with the Bolognese patriciate. Yet Ragg's assertion does bring forward some relevant facts regarding Lavinia's artistic production. Compared to other Bolognese women artists like the sculptor Properzia de' Rossi and the painter Elisabetta Sirani, Lavinia's life and career was relatively free from personal drama, as she was not portrayed in contemporary accounts as a scorned lover, nor did she die prematurely. She was in fact a product of both her time and culture, and although she did conform to prescribed female behavior by becoming both a wife and a mother, she also transgressed the confines of her sex by becoming a successful, professional artist.

Although Fontana was renowned for her skill as a portraitist, she also completed commissions for history paintings, religious pictures and large-scale altarpieces. Her education

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<sup>1</sup> Laura M. Ragg, *The Women Artists of Bologna* (London: Methuen & Co., 1907), 194.

and early artistic training were shaped by her father, Prospero Fontana, a successful artist in Bologna. Not surprisingly, Lavinia's early painting style was a reflection of her father's own conservative, mannerist style, which featured affected, elongated figures that were crowded into insufficient compositional space. In her father's workshop, Lavinia learned the basic skills of design, media preparation, and painting execution required of all young artists. It is significant that Lavinia learned the importance of drawing as a preparatory skill from her father. She is the first woman artist for whom a sizeable number of drawings survive today, as there are between thirty and forty extant works on paper. The majority of her surviving drawings are portrait studies and were collected and preserved from the seventeenth century onwards. These drawings are all characterized by sensitivity to individual features, quickness of execution, and a somewhat formulaic use of red and black chalk. These portrait drawings provide unique insight into the creative workings of a woman artist who maintained a thriving career because of her technical skill, her social connections and her sensitivity to her sitters. These portrait drawings showcase Lavinia's direct, kinesthetic connection to her drawing media, and her keen observance of individual physiognomy. Apart from their practical function as preparatory studies, these drawings also reveal the motivations of a sixteenth-century woman artist.

Chapter one of this thesis will introduce Lavinia Fontana's education, marriage, and artistic career, in addition to a brief consideration of her father, Prospero Fontana. It is important to understand Lavinia's early training, her role as the primary supporter of the family, and her self-fashioning as Prospero's artistic legacy in Bologna. Chapter two will situate Lavinia Fontana in the cultural context of early modern Bologna and consider the gendered constraints placed on female abilities during the Renaissance. This chapter will begin by discussing the social, cultural, and artistic backdrop of Cinquecento Bologna, where the city's rich tradition of



female artistic productivity will be examined. Additionally, chapter two will introduce the issues of drawing production and the collection of drawings in early modern Bologna. Chapter three will examine Lavinia's portrait drawings, whose production, style, and function will form the crux of this paper. Most of her extant portrait drawings are divided into two caches, one at the Morgan Library in New York, and the other at the Uffizi Gallery in Florence. The history of both collections will be explored, in addition to a discussion of the practical function of Fontana's portrait drawings, as well as their desirability as collector's items. In chapter four, this thesis will introduce the issues of gender and patronage, arguing that Lavinia's production of portrait drawings was directly related to her intimate relationships with the Bolognese patriciate, especially the noblewomen who were her patrons. Finally, this thesis will explore a theoretical discussion of drawing production in relation to Lavinia Fontana's portrait drawings, and consider the creative act involved with physically translating red and black chalk into the likeness of an individual.

## CHAPTER ONE: PROSPERO'S DAUGHTER

So our Lavinia, born in this homeland and of that father, had natural talent and family training to enable her to progress as she evidently did, since she had already become famous for her works and especially for portraits, which were valued highly, as seen in her self-portrait done as a virgin in the year 1578.<sup>2</sup>

Giulio Mancini wrote this brief biography of Lavinia Fontana in 1620, only six years after her death, and had the benefit of knowing her personally. In his summation of her life, Mancini reveals several important facts. He describes her as her father's artistic legacy, suggests that she received artistic training in the family workshop, and notes that she was renowned as a portraitist. From other primary sources, it is known that Lavinia Fontana was baptized in the cathedral of San Pietro in Bologna, on August 24, 1552. Apart from her father, Prospero Fontana, in attendance at the baptism were two sponsors, Signor Agostino Hercolani and Signor Andrea Bonfiglioli, both members of the Bolognese patriciate.<sup>3</sup> Prospero Fontana's choice of two male members of the local nobility to recognize the birth of his daughter was auspicious, given that Lavinia Fontana's later artistic career was characterized by the frequent support and patronage of Bologna's aristocracy and by her intimate relationships with Bolognese noblewomen. Her given name of Lavinia appears to have been a conscious choice made by Prospero to align his daughter with the local patriciate. It was fashionable in the sixteenth century for the upper classes to give their children names of noble Roman origin.<sup>4</sup> Named for the Roman matron who died defending her chastity, Lavinia Fontana was intricately linked from birth with the Bolognese nobility. This chapter will examine not only Prospero Fontana's

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<sup>2</sup> Giulio Mancini, *Considerazioni della pittura*, [1620] Ed. A. Marucchi (Rome: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1956), 233-235. Translation provided by Mary Rogers and Paola Tinagli, *Women in Italy, 1350-1650: Ideals and Realities, A Sourcebook* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2005), 302-303.

<sup>3</sup> Caroline P. Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana: A Painter and her Patrons in Sixteenth-century Bologna* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 18.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

influence on his daughter's artistic training, but will also explore Lavinia Fontana's early successes, her mature career, and the general issues of connoisseurship associated with her corpus of paintings.

### **Familial Background and Early Influences**

The sole surviving child of the prominent Bolognese artist Prospero Fontana (c. 1512-1597), Lavinia Fontana was born into a modest home with powerful connections to the Bolognese aristocracy, local church leaders, and a variety of academicians. Her mother, Antonia de' Bonardis, descended from a family who ran a major publishing house in Bologna.<sup>5</sup> It was this intimate connection to a successful printing press that enabled Prospero Fontana to develop contacts with scholars and academicians who published works with his in-laws. In point of fact in 1543, the young Gabriele Paleotti, future archbishop of Bologna, along with the academician Armodio de Santi, signed a contract with Prospero Fontana to supply scenery and costumes for a comedy staged by their Accademia degli Affumati, a literary academy popular with the Bolognese nobility.<sup>6</sup> Prospero's friendship with men like Gabriele Paleotti was instrumental to the successful career of his daughter, who enjoyed patronage from the secular, religious, and scholarly circles of Bologna.

Even though there is little known about his early artistic training, the seventeenth-century biographer Carlo Cesare Malvasia states that Prospero studied under Innocenzo da Imola, a follower of Raphael.<sup>7</sup> Although Prospero had repeated contact with progressive artistic trends during his early career, his paintings do not reflect a radical interest in new approaches, but

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<sup>5</sup> Caroline P. Murphy, "Catalogue Entry on Lavinia Fontana," In *Italian Women Artists from Renaissance to the Baroque Ex. Cat.* (Milan: Skira, 2007), 135.

<sup>6</sup> Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, 16.

<sup>7</sup> Carlo Cesare Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice: vite dei pittori bolognesi* [1678] Ed. Marcella Brascaglia. (Bologna: Edizioni ALFA Bologna, 1971), 140.

rather maintain a conservative style, like his *Disputà di Santa Caterina* (Fig. 1), completed in 1551. Prospero's painting style is somewhat confused; his figures are seemingly formed with an attention to classicized musculature, yet are contorted and elongated in a mannerist style. He rarely achieves proper proportion or perspective in his large-scale paintings, and he lacks attention to detail, especially in differing textures of fabric and the variation of skin tones. Yet despite his flaws, the pinnacle of Prospero's success came in the 1550s, through his relationship with Cardinal Giovanni Maria del Monte, who served as vice-legate of Bologna in 1534 before being elected Pope Julius III in 1550.<sup>8</sup> During this period and the succeeding decades, Prospero served as head of the Bolognese painters' guild at least five times and attracted students and collaborators like Ludovico and Agostino Carracci.<sup>9</sup> While scholars acknowledge that Prospero's social aspirations were grand and ambitious, it is also known that his financial resources were often inadequate. Giorgio Vasari commented on Prospero's financial difficulties in his 1568 edition of *Lives of the Artists*, where he mentioned Prospero's inability to pay back the considerable sum of money advanced to him for travel to France by a patron.<sup>10</sup> It was perhaps for these reasons, increasing old age and infirmity along with financial considerations, that Prospero Fontana trained his daughter Lavinia as a professional artist.

### **The Emerging Artist**

Lavinia's earliest recorded works, like the *Holy Family with the Infant Saint John the Baptist and Saint Elizabeth* (Fig. 2), date from the early 1570s, when she was in her early twenties. This relatively late start date as a professional artist suggests that Prospero had not

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<sup>8</sup> Vera Fortunati Pietrantonio, *Pittura bolognese del' 500*, Vol. 1 (Bologna: Grafis Edizioni, 1986), 341-42.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de più eccellenti pittori, scultori et architettori*, [1568] (Florence: Sansoni, 1981), 414-15.

originally intended his youngest daughter for an artistic career.<sup>11</sup> This assertion is further reinforced by the fact that Vasari does not mention Lavinia as an artist in his 1568 edition of his *Lives*, although he does describe the artistic achievements of her contemporary, Barbara Longhi.<sup>12</sup> Given Vasari's friendship and professional history with Prospero, it seems likely that he would have mentioned Lavinia if she had been training in her father's workshop and practicing as a painter in the late 1560s.

It would be misleading to assume that Lavinia Fontana did not receive any artistic training until the 1570s. Considering Prospero's admiration of the nobility and his desire to emulate an aristocratic lifestyle, it is highly probable that his daughter received an education in arts and letters and possibly in mathematics and geometry during her youth. The majority of Lavinia's early paintings are small devotionals executed in oil and are painted in a style very similar to that of her father. In these works she adopted Prospero's adherence to mannerism, in which her figures lack proper proportion, are strangely elongated and are painted with a soft, sfumato effect. Lavinia's early works are also characterized by narrative clarity, which is not surprising given the profound effect of Tridentine reform on artistic production. Although early works such as *The Annunciation* (Fig. 3) showcase Lavinia's adoption of Prospero's style, such as the elongated figures and exaggerated perspective, her works also deviated from those of her father, especially in her attention to detail and her ability to replicate the intricacies of textiles.<sup>13</sup>

By the late 1570s, Lavinia had expanded her repertoire to include portraiture and history paintings, receiving commissions from Bolognese scholars like Carlo Sigonio, who were associated with her parents' social network and who helped spread her reputation as a promising

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<sup>11</sup> Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, 20-21.

<sup>12</sup> Vasari, 421. See also Caroline P. Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, p. 16 for a partial list of the other daughters of painters listed by Vasari in his 1568 edition of the *Lives of the Artists*.

<sup>13</sup> Vera Fortunati, "catalogue entry for *The Annunciation*," In *Lavinia Fontana of Bologna, 1552-1614 Ex. Cat.* (Milan: Electa, 1998), 50-51.

young artist.<sup>14</sup> Her marriage in 1577 to Gian Paolo Zappi of Imola, a fellow artist and pupil of Prospero, further encouraged her professional career. The Fontana-Zappi marriage contract, dated February 14, 1577, states, “Signor Gian Paolo is obliged to come and live in Bologna, and to stay and live with Signor Prospero... and the earnings that Gian Paolo and Madonna Lavinia make from art will be converted to the benefit of Signor Prospero.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, the contract clearly stated that Lavinia was to remain a part of her father’s household while he was still living and that she was required to contribute financially to the family expenses through the production of art. This unusual provision allowed Prospero to continue profiting from his daughter’s successes and for Lavinia to establish herself as her father’s artistic legacy. Renouncing his own mediocre career, her husband Zappi assisted her by helping to care for their large family of eleven children, while also acting as her agent for some commissions. Lavinia’s biographer Giulio Mancini also commented on Zappi’s role in the Fontana household, describing Gian Paolo as “also a painter, though more with words than with brushes, as he did not practice himself, but he had good judgment and knew it, so that this helped his wife greatly in the profession.”<sup>16</sup>

### **Career Maturity in Bologna and Rome**

Lavinia Fontana’s critical and commercial success came in the 1580s with her first documented public altarpiece, the *Assumption of the Virgin with Saints Cassiano and Saint Peter Chrysogonus* (Fig. 4), for the Palazzo Comunale in Imola in 1584. Although she produced more than a dozen altarpieces during her career, Lavinia established herself as one of the foremost portraitists in Bologna. Other prestigious commissions from this period include the *Holy Family*

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<sup>14</sup> Murphy, *Italian Women Artists*, 135.

<sup>15</sup> Full text reproduced and translated into English in Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, 217-218.

<sup>16</sup> Mancini, 233-235.

with *Sleeping Christ* (Fig. 5), completed in 1589, which was purchased by King Philip II of Spain.<sup>17</sup> The 1580s and 1590s hold special significance for this study, as they are the decades in which the majority of Lavinia's extant portrait drawings were executed. Although Lavinia's portrait drawings will be discussed in depth in the following chapter, it is important to consider them in the context of her career as a whole. The portrait drawings originally functioned as preparatory studies for finished paintings. These drawings were produced during Fontana's mature Bolognese career at a time when she was working almost exclusively for secular patrons, especially local noblewomen.

At the turn of the seventeenth century Lavinia had the freedom to work outside of Bologna for the first time in her career, because Prospero Fontana had died in 1597, and she was not longer obligated to support his household. In 1604, Lavinia moved her family to Rome, where she worked chiefly for the Borghese family. Pope Paul V, the former Cardinal Camillo Borghese, had been Bologna's papal legate and was the godfather to Lavinia's youngest son. Paul V introduced Lavinia to his nephew, Cardinal Scipione Borghese, for whom, among other works, she painted *Minerva Dressing* (Fig. 6), now in the Galleria Borghese. The realistically nude female figure of Minerva in this painting suggests that Lavinia Fontana may have been the first early modern female artist to paint nudes and to study the nude human body from life.<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, *Minerva Dressing* was also the last documented commission before Lavinia died in 1614, at the age of sixty-two.

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<sup>17</sup> Murphy, *Italian Women Artists*, 135.

<sup>18</sup> Caroline P. Murphy, "Lavinia Fontana and Female Life Cycle Experience in Late Sixteenth-Century Bologna," In *Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 111.

## Issues of Style and Connoisseurship

Lavinia Fontana's surviving oeuvre consists of over one hundred paintings and approximately thirty to forty drawings, which is larger than any of her female predecessors.<sup>19</sup> New works by Fontana are still being discovered and continue to illuminate the scholarship surrounding her artistic production. Additionally, there are a number of paintings attributed to her by some scholars that others do not readily agree upon. Two issues in particular obscure the attribution of works to Lavinia's hand. Firstly, is the number of copies of her works that are still in existence, which when unsigned prove difficult for some scholars to distinguish individual painting style and technique. Secondly, Lavinia's paintings are often stylistically similar to her father Prospero Fontana, especially in her early works, which makes it more difficult to separate the hand of the daughter from that of the father. Her early paintings often share the divergent qualities of classicism and mannerism found in Prospero's paintings, although Lavinia's technical skill and attention to detail is arguably more finely tuned than the works by her father. Fortunately, a number of Lavinia's larger commissions, especially religious altarpieces and history paintings, contain original signatures and are often dated. The inclusion of her married name, Zappi, on several paintings also aids in the dating of her works. Condition and survival rate are additional issues to consider when attributing paintings to Lavinia Fontana. There are a number of paintings listed in seventeenth-century inventories that are now lost. Additionally, the poor condition of many of her works makes it difficult to examine the subtleties of her technique and style. The issues of artistic style and connoisseurship as they relate to her drawings will be discussed at length in chapter three, but the following chapter will turn to the cultural context of early modern Bologna, the remarkable city that produced Lavinia Fontana.

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<sup>19</sup> Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, 5.



**CHAPTER TWO:**  
**THE RENAISSANCE *VIRTUOSA* IN CONTEXT**

Although there are many portraits by many worthy men that have been made of your Highness, none have ever been able to capture the truth...However, a new Apelles has arrived in the form of a genteel and in this art most skilled creature of a gracious young woman called Fontana with whom I spoke only yesterday...Showing me her work and seeing that it had more than one usually expects from art, I was particularly amazed by those portraits by her hand...<sup>20</sup>

There are several letters surviving from the late sixteenth century that document the rising status of Lavinia Fontana as a working artist in early modern Bologna and her skill as a portraitist, such as the above example, written in 1585 by the Friar Filippo Barbieri to the Medici duchess Bianca Cappello.<sup>21</sup> Contemporary male writers discussed Lavinia Fontana's art in terms of her status as a *virtuosa*, or an exceptional woman. In considering Lavinia Fontana as a *virtuosa*, it is crucial to characterize this term within the cultural and historical confines of the Italian Renaissance. Fredrika Jacobs, in her book *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa*, examines the multitude of issues regarding the status, situation and gendered biases that women artists faced in early modern Europe.<sup>22</sup> A woman artist was by definition a transgressor of gender barriers whose artistic capabilities were understood as inherently masculine skills. With a theoretical basis in the arguments of classical authors such as Plato, Aristotle, and Plutarch, Renaissance writers engaged in the *querelle des femmes*, or the woman question, with renewed

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<sup>20</sup> Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Medici di Principi, vol. 5938, fol. 40-41, cited by Caroline Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana: A Painter and her Patrons in Sixteenth-century Bologna* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 221. For a complete translation and a discussion of the specifics of this letter, see Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, 85, 221.

<sup>21</sup> Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, 85.

<sup>22</sup> Fredrika H. Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa: Women Artists and the Language of Art History and Criticism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

fervor.<sup>23</sup> The paired opposites of “Pythagorean contrariety” were at the heart of the Renaissance understanding of woman in which the female was aligned with concepts of darkness, passivity, and formlessness.<sup>24</sup> These negative and omnipresent associations were challenged by the presence of talented, intellectual women, whose abilities did not comply with prescribed female behavior. In these cases, as is true with Lavinia Fontana, gifted women were understood as exceptions to the rule; ideal women whose abilities were a reflection of their masculine qualities, not their female nature.

While the contemporary writings on Lavinia Fontana characterize her as a Renaissance *virtuosa*, it would be a disservice to dismiss their value as merely contrived, generalized statements of artistic worth. In many ways, Lavinia Fontana was an exceptional woman, whose talents and skills were sought after by both male and female patrons in Bologna and Rome. Her artistic training was more complete than many of her female predecessors; she maintained an active clientele as a mature artist and produced a variety of artworks, including drawings as well as portraits and history paintings. Her productivity and successes as an artist should be placed within the greater cultural context of early modern Bologna and the city’s noted female artistic community. In addition, the presence of some surviving drawings suggests that Lavinia Fontana’s works on paper were collected, preserved and accorded a certain value in the burgeoning art market of early modern Italy.

### **Cultural and Social Context of Early Modern Bologna**

During the second half of the sixteenth century, Bologna was known throughout the Italian peninsula as a center of artistic innovation as well as an intellectual city characterized by

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 8-26.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 12.

scientific discovery and religious reform. When Lavinia Fontana was born in 1552, Bologna was the second city of the papal states, having been restored to papal rule nearly fifty years earlier, in 1506, by Pope Julius II (ruled 1503-1513).<sup>25</sup> Bologna had a reputation as a politically neutral territory and following the Sack of Rome in 1527, became the site of peace talks between Pope Clement VII (1523-1534) and Charles V.<sup>26</sup> During the third quarter of the sixteenth century, Bologna's relationship with Rome was further solidified when Ugo Boncompagni, a native of Bologna, was elected Pope Gregory XIII (1572-1585).<sup>27</sup> Pope Gregory XIII was the first Bolognese pontiff in nearly four hundred years. He had also been educated at the University of Bologna like many of his papal predecessors. A prominent feature of the city, the University of Bologna was renowned as the oldest university in Europe, purportedly founded in 1088, and was a hub of intellectual and scientific activity.<sup>28</sup> It was also the largest university in Italy during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, lauded as a leading European university in the academic fields of law, medicine, and the arts.<sup>29</sup> Although Bologna came under direct papal rule during the early years of the sixteenth century, the city itself retained a great deal of autonomy and maintained direct control over the university, which in turn led to a greater sense of intellectual and theological freedom among the university faculty.<sup>30</sup>

One of the most influential public figures during Fontana's lifetime was Gabriele Paleotti (1522-1597), bishop and later the first archbishop of Bologna. A Bolognese native, Paleotti was born to a prominent local family and as a participant at the Council of Trent, was committed to

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<sup>25</sup> Babette Bohn, *Ludovico Carracci and the Art of Drawing* (Turnhout, Belgium: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2004), 11. See also Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, 2-3.

<sup>26</sup> Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, 3.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> For the historical discrepancies in establishing the founding date for the University of Bologna see Bohn, *Ludovico Carracci*, 24:61.

<sup>29</sup> Paul F. Grendler, "The University of Bologna, the city, the papacy," *Renaissance Studies* 13, no. 4 (1999): 476.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 477.

promoting Tridentine ideology. First as a cardinal and then later as bishop and archbishop, Paleotti was concerned with the social welfare of Bologna and actively supported religious reform in his native city.<sup>31</sup> In 1582, Paleotti published a post-Tridentine treatise on religious painting entitled *Discorso intorno alle immagini sacre e profane*, which emphasized the importance of scriptural accuracy in religious art and also encouraged patronage of the arts in Bologna.<sup>32</sup> In the first book of his *Discorso*, Paleotti associated artistic patronage with God, arguing that images were a gift from God and that He was the supreme ‘patron’ of the universe.<sup>33</sup> Paleotti also argued against the Protestant dismissal of religious images as idolatrous and suggested that image making and spirituality were acts both uniquely and innately human and they should not be separated.<sup>34</sup> In addition to his public sermons and his religious treatise, Paleotti’s interest in the intersection between art and religion became apparent with his enthusiastic interest in Caterina Vigri (1413-1463), the abbess of the Poor Clares convent of the Corpus Domini in Bologna. Paleotti’s efforts led to her beatification in 1592, which undoubtedly aided her subsequent election not only as one of the patron saints of Bologna but also as the patron saint of the Accademia Clementina, the Bolognese fine arts academy.<sup>35</sup> Although beatified during Paleotti’s lifetime, Caterina Vigri was not officially canonized until 1712.

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<sup>31</sup> Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, 4.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 8-12. For a more specific discussion of Paleotti’s treatise and its reception, see Giuseppe Olmi and Paolo Prodi, “Art, Science, and Nature in Bologna Circa 1600,” In *The Age of Correggio and the Carracci: Emilian Painting of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1986). See also Anton W.A. Boschloo, *Annibale Carracci in Bologna: Visible Reality in Art after the Council of Trent*, (New York: A. Schram, 1974), 122-141.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Bohn, *Ludovico Carracci*, 13-15.

### Tradition of a Bolognese Female Artistic Community

Early modern Bologna was particularly receptive to women artists during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and scholars have argued that it was the foremost Italian city to actively promote, encourage and foster artistic talent in women.<sup>36</sup> This tolerance towards training and supporting women artists can be attributed to a variety of factors. The presence of the university undoubtedly encouraged a more liberal view towards educating women and also provided artists with an additional resource of private patrons.<sup>37</sup> Extensive ecclesiastical patronage amongst the different religious orders also afforded women artists the opportunity to decorate the churches and other religious buildings of Bologna. Although the Dominicans had a venerable presence in Bologna's religious culture, the Augustinians, Benedictines, Carmelites, and Franciscans also flourished in the city and were important sources for artistic patronage.<sup>38</sup> These factors, in addition to the influential presence of Caterina Vigri, herself an artist and the first recorded female painter in Bologna, encouraged the education and artistic training of women within the numerous family workshops in the city.<sup>39</sup> In fact, Lavinia Fontana and Elisabetta Sirani (1638-65), the internationally acclaimed artist working several generations after Fontana, were both the daughters of Bolognese artists and received their formal artistic training in drawing and painting in their paternal workshops. Remarkably and despite her tragically short life, Sirani managed to establish a school of painting in Bologna that focused on training other women artists who were not so fortunate as to come from artisan families.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Babette Bohn, "The Antique Heroines of Elisabetta Sirani," *Renaissance Studies* 16, no. 1 (2002): 52. See also Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 87-88.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Bohn, *Ludovico Carracci*, 11-12.

<sup>39</sup> Bohn, "The Antique Heroines," 52-53.

<sup>40</sup> Bohn, *Ludovico Carracci*, 19.

Caterina Vigri was not the only Bolognese woman artist who would have been familiar to Fontana at the time of her education and training. Properzia de' Rossi (1490-1530) was the first recorded successor to Caterina Vigri's legacy and the only woman whose name was mentioned in the first edition of Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of the Artists* (1550).<sup>41</sup> According to Vasari, Properzia de' Rossi began her career as a sculptor by intricately carving the pits of various fruits with images of religious subjects.<sup>42</sup> More accessible than Rossi's exercises in miniature, Lavinia Fontana would have been familiar with the marble reliefs produced by Rossi for the left portal of San Petronio, Bologna's central church.<sup>43</sup> However influential the surviving artworks of Caterina Vigri and Properzia de' Rossi might have been to a young woman training in Bologna during the latter half of the sixteenth century, Lavinia Fontana explicitly mentions her admiration for a different woman artist in her personal correspondence.<sup>44</sup> In a letter to a client, Alfonso Ciacón, dated 1579, Fontana references Sofonisba Anguissola (c.1532-1625), a Cremonese noblewoman who had received international acclaim as a portraitist.<sup>45</sup> In the letter Fontana writes, "I attribute the excess of your lovingness [Ciacón's praise], the other, makes me think that you judiciously wish that the virtue and worth of Signora Sofonisba will be so much more resplendent, and the other illustrious personages whom I am unworthy to serve."<sup>46</sup> It is not surprising that Fontana would have looked to Sofonisba Anguissola as a role model. Anguissola enjoyed a successful career as a professional artist to the Spanish court of Phillip II. Fontana,

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, 220.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. See also Vera Fortunati, "Lavinia Fontana: A Woman Artist in the Age of the Counter-Reformation," in *Lavinia Fontana of Bologna, 1552-1614* (Milan: Electa, 1998), 13.

<sup>46</sup> This letter is reproduced in full and translated into English by Murphy in *Lavinia Fontana*, p. 220.

too, worked hard to maintain her status as a professional artist and established solid working relationships with the Bolognese patriciate during her career.<sup>47</sup>

### **Drawing Practices in early modern Bologna**

The practice of drawing and the use of preparatory drawings as creative vehicles in the artistic process was a cornerstone in the education and training of young artists in early modern Italy. In central Italy, there was an especially strong tradition for draftsmanship and design, or *disegno*, which was taught as the primary preparatory skill needed to establish the compositional structure of finished paintings and as a way to work through figural issues of form and movement. Drawings could also have a variety of functions, ranging from quick figure and drapery studies to detailed compositional cartoons and even finished drawings intended as gifts and artworks in their own right.<sup>48</sup> During the sixteenth century, Bologna became a center of artistic progress, and with the founding of the Carracci Academy in the 1580s, the act of drawing and observing life became a major facet of Bolognese artistic training. Although portrait drawing was not the main focus of the Carracci Academy, there are several examples by the Carracci that suggest that formal portrait drawings were a constructive part of the artistic process. Agostino Carracci's *Portrait of a Noblewoman* (Fig. 7) in Vienna, in red and black chalk, confirms that the Carracci, like Fontana, found red and black chalk an appropriate medium for documenting a sitter's likeness.<sup>49</sup> Apart from the Carracci in Bologna, Taddeo and Federico Zuccaro, two brothers working in central Italy, also executed small, finished red and black chalk portrait drawings. Federico Zuccaro's drawing *Head and Shoulders of a Woman* (Fig. 8), now in

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<sup>47</sup> For a more detailed account please see Caroline Murphy, "Lavinia Fontana and Le Dame della Città: Understanding female artistic patronage in late sixteenth-century Bologna," *Renaissance Studies* 10, no. 2 (1996): 190-208.

<sup>48</sup> Bohn, *Ludovico Carracci*, 59.

<sup>49</sup> Special thanks to Dr. Babette Bohn for introducing this image to my research.

Boston, is not only similar to the examples by the Carracci and Fontana, but also demonstrates that the genre of portrait drawings was popular in the latter half of the sixteenth century.<sup>50</sup>

The Italian Renaissance workshop was an inherently male dominated domain, and drawing from live nude models was an act deemed appropriate only for men. Therefore, it is unsurprising that very few drawings by women artists are known from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Italy.<sup>51</sup> It must not be assumed, however, that the lack of surviving drawings equates with the lack of female drawing activity in early modern Italy. It has been suggested that cities with a stronger drawing tradition like Bologna were more apt to produce female draftspersons in comparison to a city like Rome, where the *alla prima* painting of Caravaggio and his followers became popular.<sup>52</sup> Carlo Cesare Malvasia's *Felsina Pittrice* (1678), a key primary source for Bolognese artist biographies, lists a number of notable Bolognese women artists and asserts that women were active in a variety of artistic media.<sup>53</sup> The earliest recorded Bolognese women artists created works on paper, as is evidenced by the extant works of Caterina Vigri, which include small illustrations on illuminated manuscripts.<sup>54</sup> Properzia de' Rossi also worked in a variety of graphic media. Vasari claimed to own several pen drawings by her and observed that she made engravings.<sup>55</sup> Many of the works on paper by women artists are either lost or unidentified. Sofonisba Anguissola, although not Bolognese, made drawings, although only four, very poorly preserved examples are extant. Lavinia Fontana is the first Bolognese woman artist whose drawings survive to the present day, and fortunately

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<sup>50</sup> E. James Mundy, *Italian Master Drawings by the Zuccari, 1550-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 232-233.

<sup>51</sup> This issue is discussed in full in Babette Bohn, "Elisabetta Sirani and Drawing Practices in Early Modern Bologna," *Master Drawings* 42, no. 3 (2004): 207-236.

<sup>52</sup> The comparison mentioned here relates to Artemisia Gentileschi, who was a much less active draftsperson than her Bolognese female contemporaries and is discussed in Bohn, "Elisabetta Sirani and Drawing Practices," 208.

<sup>53</sup> Bohn, *Ludovico Carracci*, 19.

<sup>54</sup> Bohn, "Elisabetta Sirani and Drawing Practices," 208.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*



scholars have been able to convincingly attribute specific drawings to her hand. Regrettably, Malvasia does not mention Lavinia Fontana's drawings in the *Felsina Pittrice*, or the manner in which she employed drawings in her artistic production. Fortunately, there are approximately thirty known portrait drawings by Lavinia Fontana that are extant (Drawing Checklist nos. 1-29), and approximately five surviving compositional drawings.

### **Collecting Drawings in early modern Italy**

The presence of a small corpus of drawings attributed to Lavinia Fontana and their survival as cohesive groups in museum collections raises the issue of the survival rates for works on paper and the practice of collecting drawings in early modern Italy. For the most part, drawings in early Renaissance Italy were conceived as a means to an end, a necessary and beginning step towards a finished composition. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, drawings were rarely considered works of art in their own right, and did not have any intrinsic value desirable to collectors.<sup>56</sup> However, works on paper by artists such as Andrea Mantegna, Botticelli, Filippino Lippi and Leonardo were collected by their contemporaries, which suggests that there was a developing aesthetic consciousness regarding drawings during the Renaissance.<sup>57</sup> By the latter half of the sixteenth century, Bologna had long supported an active art market where drawings and engravings were praised and collected.<sup>58</sup> With the founding of the Carracci Academy in the 1580s, the drawings of the Carracci were avidly collected in their native Bologna and throughout the Italian peninsula during the seventeenth century.<sup>59</sup> The Carracci Academy placed heavy emphasis on drawing from life, and its students produced

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 61.

drawings with a wide range of functions, from highly finished portrait studies, to genre figures and quick compositional sketches. It has been convincingly argued that some of the Carracci drawings were created self-consciously, that is, with the express intention of being collected and preserved as finished aesthetic products.<sup>60</sup>

Collecting objects in the sixteenth century was a cultural practice that reflected the conventions of an elite society. It provided an arena for the patriciate to express themselves through material possessions and was accepted as an erudite and civilizing process.<sup>61</sup> The social and cultural constructs of early modern Italy created a world in which social worth was measured in terms of material objects and their display; thus the collector rose to a preeminent position within society.<sup>62</sup> Collecting in Bologna was also highly influenced by the scientific culture existing within the city's prominent university. One noteworthy example is Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522-1605), a great naturalist, who amassed a collection of 20,000 rare plants and animals and commissioned illustrations of about 8,000 of them from local Bolognese artists.<sup>63</sup> Thus, the act of collecting was an integral component of Bolognese culture, for intellectuals and aristocrats alike engaged in the preservation and commoditization of art objects, works on paper and scientific oddities. Although an indefinite number of Lavinia Fontana's drawings have been lost, the presence of a small corpus of surviving drawings speaks to the Bolognese culture of collecting, as well as her recognized worth as an artist and the desirability of her illustrative expression. These issues, in conjunction with a detailed exploration of the provenance of the two caches of Fontana's extant portrait drawings, will be examined in the following chapter.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>61</sup> Paula Findlen, *Possessing Nature: Museums, Collecting, and Scientific Culture in Early Modern Italy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 99-100.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Bohn, *Ludovico Carracci*, 20.

### **CHAPTER THREE: FONTANA'S PORTRAIT DRAWINGS IN FLORENCE AND NEW YORK**

The first two chapters of this thesis maintained similar goals: to present Lavinia Fontana in relation to her father's artistic legacy in Bologna and to situate her in the social, cultural, and historical context of early modern Bologna. Both chapters focused on an understanding of Lavinia's artistic production within the unique culture that fostered her talent. As previously discussed, the artistic community in late sixteenth-century Bologna was inherently shaped by post-Tridentine doctrine and by the city's rich tradition of female artistic activity. The creation of drawings in Bologna was also a critical element, both for its role in artistic training and for its application in preparatory design. Among Lavinia Fontana's extant works on paper, nearly thirty of the approximately forty total drawings are portraits. Although Lavinia received a variety of commissions for different genres of paintings, the majority of her works were portraits of Bolognese men, women, and children, which explains the predominance of portrait drawings. It is also crucial to note that Lavinia's drawing production was inherently more constrained than that of her male contemporaries, like the Carracci. As a woman artist, she was barred from drawing nude figures from life and exploring the intricacies of human anatomy in her art. Consequently, Lavinia's drawings focus on an appropriate and accessible part of the human body: the faces of her sitters.

Twenty-nine small, red and black chalk portrait drawings attributed to Lavinia survive in two repositories: the Uffizi's collection of ten loose drawings in Florence and the Pierpont Morgan Library's bound album of nineteen drawings in New York. The opportunity to view multiple drawings by the same hand in a single collection has definite advantages, because

stylistic similarities, as well as an artist's technical use of drawing media can be more readily observed. This chapter will examine both caches of Lavinia Fontana's portrait drawings, beginning first with their unique provenances. This chapter will also argue that at the moment of creation, these portrait drawings were intended as preparatory studies for forthcoming painted portraits, not as gift items, and that the drawings' innate artistic value resulted in their preservation by early modern collectors. An examination of the provenances of both collections reveals the motivations of the early collectors, the inherent collectibility of Fontana's drawings, and the works' undeniable aesthetic appeal. This detailed exploration of Fontana's works on paper will also examine the drawings' formal qualities, describe stylistic similarities present in all the drawings, and investigate their function as preparatory models for finished paintings. Lavinia Fontana's portrait drawings in Florence and New York are the products of a professional woman artist who employed a traditional preparatory method in her portraiture and utilized the drawing medium to reveal the humanity of her sitters; conversely, Fontana's portrait drawings were also prized by individual collectors as early as the seventeenth century, and transcended their original preparatory function to become highly valued aesthetic objects.

### **The Uffizi's Drawings**

The Gabinetto disegni e stampe of the Uffizi Gallery in Florence houses one of the two significant collections of Lavinia Fontana's portrait drawings. All ten of the portrait drawings at the Uffizi are executed in red and black chalk on cream-colored paper and depict men and women, children and mature figures. The drawings are small in scale, and the artist has paid particular attention to the individual features of each sitter. The first four portrait drawings at the Uffizi (Checklist nos. 1-4) are all of young children and adolescents. *Portrait of a Young Man*

(Checklist no. 1) and *Portrait of a Youth* (Checklist no. 3) both portray adolescent, aristocratic males. *Portrait of a Child* (Checklist no. 2) is recognizable as a girl through her the rolled, formal hairstyle, and *Portrait of a Child* (Checklist no. 4) is identified as a boy through the tight, flat collar and short hair. Of the remaining six drawings, five depict men, and only one represents a woman. *Portrait of an Older Man with a Hat* (Checklist no. 5) depicts a mature man, with sunken cheeks, a moustache and an unusual turban-like head covering. *Portrait of a Gentleman* (Checklist no. 6) and *Portrait of a Man* (Checklist no. 7) are very similar in their portrayals of bearded, adult men. *Portrait of a Lady* (Checklist no. 8) is the only portrait of a noblewoman in the Uffizi's collection of Fontana's drawings, although there are several depictions of women at the Morgan in New York. Finally, two drawings, both titled *Portrait of a Man* (Checklist nos. 9-10), illustrate older, fully bearded men, who turn to the viewer's left.

Fontana's drawings at the Uffizi have a long and secure provenance, dating back to the seventeenth century. The drawings were first recorded in an inventory written by Filippo Baldinucci in 1675 that chronicled the artworks collected by Cardinal Leopoldo de' Medici (1617-1675).<sup>64</sup> Unfortunately, Baldinucci's inventory did not describe specific drawings; rather, he notes only the number of drawings assigned to each artist in the collection.<sup>65</sup> Cardinal Leopoldo's nephew, Cosimo III de' Medici (1642-1723), Grand Duke of Tuscany, inherited the Fontana drawings along with a sizeable collection of other works on paper following his uncle's death in 1675. The drawings were then bequeathed to Cosimo III's daughter, one of the last figures of the Medici dynasty, Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici (1667-1743). In 1737, Anna Maria

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<sup>64</sup> Maria Teresa Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana Bolognese: "pittora singolare" 1552-1614* (Milan: Jandi Sapi Editori, 1989), 227. According to Cantaro, a copy of the original inventory is at the Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze.

<sup>65</sup> Anna Forlani Tempesti and Anna Maria Petrioli Tofani, "Filippo Baldinucci, Lista de' Nomi de' Pittori di mano de' quail si hanno Disegni, e il primo numero denota quello de' Disegni, e l'altro denota quello, nel quale, ò fiorirono, ò morirono I medesimi Pittori, e tutto final al presente giorno 8 Settembre 1673/1675," in *I grandi disegni italiani degli Uffizi di Firenze* (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 1972), 75, 79.

Luisa left all of Cardinal Leopoldo's drawings and a variety of other artworks to the Commune of Florence, where they would form the core collection of the Uffizi Gallery's holdings of works on paper.

Prince Leopoldo de' Medici, later ordained a cardinal, was a remarkable collector of art and antiquities, as well as an active patron of literature, the natural sciences and the fine arts.<sup>66</sup> He began collecting drawings in 1658, and his collection grew rapidly with the help of multiple agents who worked to acquire works for the Cardinal throughout Italy and Northern Europe. By 1663, he owned drawings attributed to 308 artists; by 1673 he owned 8,143 drawings that were attributed to 535 different artists; and at his death in 1675, he had assembled 11,247 drawings attributed to 654 artists.<sup>67</sup> Cardinal Leopoldo worked diligently to organize his drawing collection during his lifetime and required those who worked for him to familiarize themselves with the styles of the different Italian schools. Filippo Baldinucci, one of the men responsible for inventorying Cardinal Leopoldo's vast collection, was the official Medici art historian and worked closely with him.<sup>68</sup>

Although Cardinal Leopoldo amassed a monumental collection of drawings by the most revered Renaissance and Baroque artists during his lifetime, it is his interest in a wide variety of artists that is particularly noteworthy. Baldinucci organized Cardinal Leopoldo's drawings into 105 volumes in 1675 and categorized the represented artists into hieratical tiers. Lavinia Fontana was listed under the *pittori di seconda classe*, or second-class artists, a group that included artists

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<sup>66</sup> Edward L. Goldberg, "Cardinal Leopoldo de' Medici," *Oxford Art Online* (Accessed September, 2008).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Genevieve Warwick, *The Arts of Collecting: Padre Sebastiano Resta and the Market for Drawings in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 95.

like Guido Reni, Cristofano Allori, Domenichino and Perugino.<sup>69</sup> It would be misleading to assume that the artworks of Fontana were not valued highly, when considering that only sixty years after her death, her works were accorded the same level of respect as some of the most acclaimed Baroque artists of the seventeenth century. Records indicate that Cardinal Leopoldo collected her paintings as well as her drawings, as both are listed in Baldinucci's inventories.<sup>70</sup> Pelli's unpublished inventory of 1784, although not complete, does list several descriptions of Fontana's drawings that appear to correspond with sheets in the Uffizi's collection. For example, it seems likely that *Portrait of a Youth* (Checklist no. 3) the drawing described in Pelli's inventory as "una testa di giovane con lattuca al collo, di lapis nero di mano di Lavinia Fontana." *Portrait of a Youth* (Checklist no. 3) is one of only three male youths in the cache of drawings and is the only one wearing the full, ruffled collar.<sup>71</sup>

Baldinucci's list and Pelli's later inventory reveal several important issues regarding Fontana's portrait drawings. First, it is significant that her name was connected to drawings only fifty to sixty years after her death, which would seem to suggest that these drawings entered Cardinal Leopoldo's collection with a sense of continuity and that Fontana's artistic identity was consciously preserved. Secondly, Pelli's generic description of the sitter's age and gender demonstrates that the identity of the sitter was unknown during the eighteenth century. These incongruities become problematic when attempting to trace a drawing's provenance before Cardinal Leopoldo's acquisition. It also causes difficulty in connecting a preparatory drawing to

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<sup>69</sup> Giovanna Gaeta Bertelà, "Introduzione: Dal mercato veneto all'Inventario del 1784," in *Archivio del Collezionismo Mediceo: Il Cardinal Leopoldo*, Vol. 1, Ed. Paola Barocchi (Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1987), 461.

<sup>70</sup> Miriam Fileti Mazza, "Archivio elettronico del Carteggio: *Dürer Albrecht-Zuccari Taddeo*," in *Archivio del Collezionismo Mediceo: Il Cardinal Leopoldo*, Vol. 2, Ed. Paola Barocchi (Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi Editore, 1993), 537-548.

<sup>71</sup> A comparison of *Portrait of a Youth* (Checklist no. 3) with *Portrait of a Young Man* (Checklist no. 1) and *Portrait of a Child* (Checklist no. 4) reveals the difference in collar styles between the three drawings. *Portrait of a Young Man* (Checklist no. 1) sports a wide, pointed collar that lies flat, and *Portrait of a Child* (Checklist no. 4) wears a tight and narrow folded down collar.

a known portrait painting, for there are many more anonymous portraits than there are named individuals whose likenesses survive on canvas. However, the early date of Baldinucci's inventory and the convincing correlation between some of the surviving drawings and their eighteenth-century descriptions provides a relatively secure provenance for the Uffizi cache. The fact that Baldinucci recorded ten original drawings in his 1675 inventory, and that a century later Pelli described specific drawings that correlate to extant paintings further substantiate a secure attribution to Fontana. A reliable attribution to Fontana also allows scholarship to form a dependable reading of her drawing style and use of media, as well as exploring patterns of function. In addition to the ten drawings in the Uffizi's collection, the largest collection of Fontana's drawings are preserved in New York and feature many similarities to their Florentine counterparts.

### **The Pierpont Morgan Library's Album**

Dating from the late seventeenth century, the bound album of drawings in New York houses nineteen portrait drawings attributed to Lavinia Fontana.<sup>72</sup> These drawings (Drawing Checklist nos. 11-29) share many of the same attributes with the Uffizi's portrait studies, such as the small scale, exclusive use of red and black chalk, and a focus on the individual features of the sitter. The Morgan's album has nearly twice the number of drawings as the Uffizi's collection and has a greater cross-section of figures that balances images of men and women, religious and secular sitters. Of the nineteen total portraits, eleven are men, two of whom are friars (Checklist nos. 21, 29). *Portrait of a Man (Annibale Gozzadini?)* (Checklist no. 11) and *Portrait of a Man with a Moustache and Beard* (Checklist no. 15), share many of the same characteristics as their

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<sup>72</sup> Cantaro, 233.



Uffizi counterparts, such as a lively, aggressive use of black chalk that indicates facial hair. *Portrait of an Old Man with a Beard* (Checklist no. 13) is unusual because it is the only portrait drawing in either collection to show the figure in profile. Both *Portrait of a Bearded Man* (Checklist no. 17) and *Portrait of Federico Barocci* (Checklist no. 24), are highly finished drawings that demonstrate Fontana's skill in capturing individual likeness. In the album, there are also four nuns (Checklist no. 14, 16, 20, 23) and two noblewomen (Checklist no. 25, 27). The portraits of the noblewomen (Checklist no. 25, 27) share many traits with the Uffizi's example (Checklist no. 8), including fashionable hairstyles, high ruffled collars, and a roughed-out suggestion of clothing. Most of the portraits in New York are very similar to those in Florence, with the exception of two unique portrait drawings: the *Self-Portrait* of Lavinia Fontana (Checklist no. 12) and the *Portrait of Tognina Gonzalez* (Checklist no. 18), a girl with long, thick hair covering her face.

The album is constructed of dark blue goatskin, tooled in gold, and the frontispiece bears evidence of the two most recent owners: an inscription reading, "From the Library of CH: Fairfax Murray" and a wax seal inscribed with the name John Pierpont Morgan.<sup>73</sup> Considerably less is known about the provenance of the Morgan album than is known about the Uffizi's drawings from Cardinal Leopoldo's collection. However, there is a reasonable amount of surviving documentation that traces the history of the album back to the eighteenth century. The album entered the Pierpont Morgan library under J.P. Morgan, Jr., the son and heir of John Pierpont Morgan, who had acquired the album in 1909 through the Galerie Alexandre Imbert in Rome. Before Morgan's acquisition, auction records indicate that Charles Fairfax Murray purchased the album, listed as "A Volume of Portraits-in colors-by Lavinia Fontana," on April

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<sup>73</sup> These observations are first-hand descriptions from the author's personal notes upon examining the album of drawings in New York on March 12, 2008.

24, 1891 in London at a Christie's sale. The album was a part of the collection of Henry Temple, the Second Viscount Palmerston (1739-1802), who acquired a variety of Renaissance and Baroque drawings, paintings, and sculptures during his lifetime.

The history of the Fontana drawings before their inclusion in the Second Viscount Palmerston's collection is not known, nor is it recorded how they traveled from sixteenth-century Bologna to an eighteenth-century English collection. However, it is tempting to suppose that Palmerston acquired them during his Grand Tour of Europe in 1763. His diary entries indicate that he was in Bologna from October 20 to mid-November, 1763, and while he was there he, "occupied [himself] in visiting some fine churches and palaces and seeing many beautiful pictures."<sup>74</sup> Although his written correspondence from the period confirms that his first art acquisitions date from this period, the majority of the art works mentioned are classical sculptures, and there is no evidence that would confirm his purchase of the Fontana album.<sup>75</sup> However, there is no reason to doubt the attribution to Fontana at the Christie's sale from 1891 or that the album was not a part of Palmerston's greater collection of art and antiquities. The particulars of Palmerston's acquisition have been lost, but the inclusion of Fontana's *Self-Portrait* (Checklist no. 12), whose name is marked in original ink on the drawing, suggests that when Palmerston bought the album sometime in the 1760s, Fontana's authorship was already established. Thus, both Palmerston's album of drawings at the Morgan Library and the Uffizi's group of drawings were collected and preserved from an early date, and were recognized as autograph works on paper by Lavinia Fontana. Their survival was dependant upon the cultural recognition of her worth as an artist, her technical skill at manipulating red and black chalk, and the drawings' significant aesthetic qualities. The highly finished quality of her portrait drawings

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<sup>74</sup> Henry Temple, Second Viscount Palmerston, *Portrait of A Whig Peer: Compiled from the papers of the Second Viscount Palmerston 1739-1802*, Edited by Brian Connell (London: Andre Deutsch, 1957), 273-74.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-53.

indicates the possibility that Fontana gave these drawings to her patrons, but an examination of the close compositional similarities to her painted portraits implies that their dispersal as gifts was an afterthought. The drawings' finished quality, the delicate rendering of individual features, and petite scale are hallmarks of Fontana's drawing style, and were presumably used to capture the likeness of her sitters in preparation for a painted portrait.

### **Style and Drawing Technique**

An excellent example with which to initiate a discussion of Lavinia Fontana's drawing technique is *Portrait of a Lady* (Checklist no. 8), from the Uffizi's collection. This drawing raises several pertinent issues surrounding the purpose and function of these portrait studies. Executed on cream-colored paper, the small-scale portrait depicts a young noblewoman, seen from a three-quarter view. She looks out and past the viewer, with a serious, intense expression. Judging by the young woman's high, voluminous ruffled collar and the sketched out suggestion of elegant clothing, it is highly likely that she was a member of the aristocracy.<sup>76</sup> Fontana uses red and black chalk to define the sitter's fine features with a confident, economical hand. The black chalk defines the structural elements of the portrait, including the facial structure, torso, and the woman's clothing accessories and hairstyle. Conversely, Fontana uses the red chalk sparingly, predominantly at the sitter's temples, ears and mouth, in a manner that adds fleshy volume and a sense of vitality. The combination of both colors of chalk, the lightness of the artist's touch and the finished quality of the sitter's face are some of the hallmark features of Fontana's drawing style.

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<sup>76</sup> Cantaro, 233.

Another fine example of Fontana's technique as a *disegnatrice*, or drafts person, is her drawing, *Portrait of Tognina Gonzalez (Daughter of Pedro Gonzalez)* (Checklist no. 18) from the Morgan Library's album. At first glance, when turning through the Morgan album, this drawing appears much like the other portraits. The drawing is of a similar scale; Fontana uses red and black chalk in her prescribed method, which simultaneously gives structural form to the sitter's individual features and adds a pink, fleshy liveliness; and it also shows a greater attention to the facial area as compared to the sketched out suggestion of the sitter's torso. However, it soon becomes apparent that the young girl in Fontana's drawing is quite unusual, for she suffers from Hypertrichosis, a hereditary condition that causes long, curling hairs to cover the entire surface of her face in a thick mask.<sup>77</sup>

The *Portrait of Tognina Gonzalez* showcases Fontana's unique skill in capturing the humanity of her sitter whilst maintaining an accurate likeness. The girl's youthful face emerges from a sea of hair, and her calm, poised expression entreats the viewer to see her as a human, not as a freak of nature. The majority of this drawing is executed in black chalk, and Fontana uses red chalk sparingly and only to emphasize Tognina's mouth and the texture of the hair on her face. In fact, it is Fontana's dual use of red and black chalk in conjunction with a quick, fluid line that gives the sitter's facial hair a sense of energy in and of itself. Subtle shadowing in black chalk along the line of the forehead marks the transition from the facial hair to Tognina's casually upswept hairstyle. In this instance, the drawing media employed by Fontana compliments the aesthetic demands of the subject matter. The vital energy of the sitter's presence is conveyed through the quickly executed chalk lines that suggest the thick hairs on her face. The *Portrait of Tognina Gonzalez* reveals that while Fontana used a systematic approach to chalk

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<sup>77</sup> Vera Fortunati, "Portrait of a Hairy Faced Girl, Daughter of Pedro Gonzalez, Catalogue Entry," In *Lavinia Fontana of Bologna, 1552-1614* (Milan: Electa, 1998), 92-93.

application in her portrait drawings, she also was capable of meeting unique challenges and of conveying her sitter's humanity regardless of physical deformities. The following section will turn from stylistic concerns to the issue of function and the manner in which Fontana used these small, formal portrait studies.

### **Issues of Function**

The survival of *Portrait of a Lady* (Checklist no. 8), along with the other portrait studies plausibly attributed to Fontana, raises the question of the function of these drawings in Fontana's artistic production. Was the *Portrait of a Lady* a preparatory drawing for a painted portrait, and if so, where is that painting? Or were Fontana's portrait drawings intended as small gifts to patrons? Why do Fontana's drawings have a higher survival rate as compared to other women artists like Sofonisba Anguissola, who made drawings but by whom only a handful of works on paper survive? Utilizing the *Portrait of a Lady* as a model, this chapter will argue that Fontana originally conceived of her portrait drawings as preparatory studies for finished paintings. Following traditional artistic practice, Fontana did not envisage these portrait drawings as finished drawings, made as gifts, although her drawings were evidently preserved by others after their preparatory function had been fulfilled. Unlike the finished presentation drawings of her contemporary Ludovico Carracci, Fontana's drawings were not initially intended as gifts to her patrons or collectors. On the contrary, her drawings appear to have functioned on a more practical level in her artistic production. Although the drawings have a finished appearance, they are not fully realized, and only contain the most pertinent visual information needed for recording a sitter's likeness. In other words, these portrait drawings contained the information most relevant to the artist, not the patron. Patrons who commissioned portraits from Fontana,

were not only interested in their physical likeness, but also in the intricate details of their fine costumes and the symbols of wealth, power, and authority that were included in the finished portrait. It is plausible that Fontana understood her drawings as a necessary preparatory stage in her design process, in which she worked towards completing a finished, commissioned portrait painting by beginning with a quickly executed likeness of her sitter's features. Her uniform application of red and black chalk, the focus on the sitter's individuality, and the brief attention to clothing and torso, reinforce the concept that Fontana's drawings functioned in a predetermined manner, and that she employed a systematic approach in her production of portraiture.

There are two key issues that arise when researching Fontana's drawings and their collection in early modern Europe. Unusually, both issues surround the absence, not the presence of Fontana's drawings in literature and early modern collections. First, it is significant that Malvasia does not mention any drawings in his brief biography of Lavinia Fontana. Malvasia's exclusion could suggest one of two things; either he was not aware of her drawing production, or he did not think her drawings were worthy of mention. The latter assumption is not unlikely, as Fontana's small finished portrait drawings do not contain the highly inventive, energetic figural compositions that Malvasia so admired. Secondly, apart from their presence in Leopoldo's collection and the Palmerston album, none of Fontana's drawings were listed in surviving seventeenth-century Bolognese inventories.<sup>78</sup> Her paintings are listed in twenty-one seventeenth-century inventories, and her drawings are listed in none. Working with early modern inventories and trusting their information is not a precise science, as every inventory was

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<sup>78</sup> Two invaluable resources on seventeenth-century inventories were consulted: a partial selection published in Raffaella Morselli, *Documents for the History of Collecting, Italian Inventories 3: Collezioni e quadrerie nella Bologna del Seicento, Inventari 1640-1707*, Ed. Anna Cera Sones (Los Angeles: Fondazione dell' Istituto Bancario San Paolo di Torino and the J. Paul Getty Trust, 1998), and a complete list in *The Getty Provenance Index, Cumulative Edition*, Released on CD-ROM, 1999.

categorized differently. Sometimes paintings were listed separately from drawings, and other times the works were integrated and listed by the room that they were found in. Occasionally, drawings were not inventoried at all. Thus, for a variety of reasons, Lavinia Fontana's drawings were not listed in Bolognese inventories, nor did her biographers mention them. It seems likely then that Leopoldo and the creator of the Palmerston album had either gathered all surviving drawings by the time of these other inventories, or that Fontana's drawings traveled as a group after her death, and were not collected individually by Bolognese collectors. Regardless of their early dispersal, Fontana's drawings were collected by at least two individuals and were preserved and inventoried for subsequent generations.

In the study of early modern Italian drawings, it is important to distinguish between original artistic intent and the realities of collecting practices. Although Lavinia Fontana used her drawings in a practical, functional manner, it was a combination of external factors that led to the preservation of her works on paper. Such factors include the inherent aesthetic appeal of Fontana's drawings and the desirability of collecting works by well-known artists during the early modern period. As is evidenced by the survival of Cardinal Leopoldo's collection and Palmerston's album, Fontana's drawings were collected from an early date. The collecting of Fontana's drawings, however, does not presuppose artistic intent. It is a reasonable assertion that Fontana used her drawings in a strictly preparatory manner, and that the drawings were later accumulated by patrons and prominent collectors who were intrigued by the works' direct association to a famous woman artist and who appreciated their finished, elegant qualities. One pivotal issue associated with determining the function of Fontana's drawings involves locating corresponding portrait paintings. There is often much difficulty in matching her known portrait drawings to appropriate paintings. The low survival rate of both drawings and paintings by

women artists obscures scholarship and creates a challenging task in identifying preparatory works on paper with finished painted products. As will be demonstrated in the next section, employing the drawing, *Portrait of a Lady* (Checklist no. 8), new works by Lavinia Fontana are still being discovered and can fill some of the vacancies and discrepancies present in her oeuvre. This example also solidifies the argument that Fontana's portrait drawings can be firmly connected to finished paintings as preparatory studies, and that she closely followed her first impression of her sitter throughout the design process.

Current published research on the drawing, the *Portrait of a Lady*, has not succeeded in providing a reasonable connection between the drawing as a preparatory study for a known, finished painting. Eleanor Tufts suggested that the drawing relates to the *Portrait of Ginevra Aldrovandi Hercolani as a Widow* (Fig. 9), but there are too many differences between the sitter's age and individual facial characteristics to make this a convincing assessment.<sup>79</sup> Additionally, the figure in the drawing turns to the viewer's right, whereas Ginevra Aldrovandi is turned to the viewer's left. Although it is plausible that Fontana could have made this change after she completed the preparatory drawing, creating a reverse image of the sitter's features would have unnecessarily complicated her painting process. In her catalogue raisonné of 1989, Cantaro proposed that the drawing related to the crowd of female attendants in Fontana's *The Visit of the Queen of Sheba* (Fig. 10), all of whom sport high, ruffled collars.<sup>80</sup> Upon close inspection of the female figures in *The Visit of the Queen of Sheba*, it does not appear that any of the women share an exact likeness with the sitter in *Portrait of a Lady*, although there are some general similarities. In fact, none of the women in Fontana's *The Visit of the Queen of Sheba* are as detailed as the examples of her individual portrait paintings, and all appear fairly generalized.

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<sup>79</sup> Cantaro, 233.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 188, 233.



Caroline Murphy, in her monograph of 2003, also suggests a correlation between the drawing and this group of noblewomen, but she too does not account for their superficial similarity and generic appearance.<sup>81</sup> Therefore, it does not seem probable that the drawing in question relates to any of the figures in this multi-figured narrative painting. None of the published material to date provides a convincing correlation between the drawing in question and a known painting by Fontana, but new works attributable to her are still being discovered and may offer new possibilities.

On July 8, 2008, at Christie's evening sale of Old Master Paintings in London, an unpublished painting by Lavinia Fontana came to auction. The attribution of the painting, titled *Portrait of a Lady* (Fig. 11), was confirmed by Maria Teresa Cantaro, author of the Lavinia Fontana catalogue raisonné, in a certificate dated February 2006, and is both a convincing and appropriate attribution.<sup>82</sup> Looking at stylistic similarities, figural characteristics and individual details between the Christie's painting (Fig. 11) and the Uffizi drawing (Drawing Checklist no. 8) of the same name, this thesis will propose that these two works are undeniably related and that the drawing served as a preparatory model for the finished commission. At first glance, there are several similarities between the Uffizi drawing and the Christie's painting: both show a young woman in a three-quarter turn to the viewer's right who sports a full ruffled collar and a high, fashionable hairstyle. Examining the works in greater detail reveals several individualistic features that are present in both the drawn and painted forms of the young noblewoman. Her face is long, slightly heart shaped with a delicately pointed chin, and her nose is long with a small rounded tip. Her mouth is small and plump and bears a pleasant, if somewhat resigned expression. Perhaps more noticeable is the corresponding squared hairline that subtly curves

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<sup>81</sup> Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, 107-109.

<sup>82</sup> Christie's catalog, *Old Masters & British Pictures*, Evening Sale (London), 8 July 2008, 7 p.m., sale 7609, lot no. 7.

downwards to a point on her forehead that is present in both the drawing and painting. Even the tendrils that frame her face in the painting are suggestively sketched in Fontana's drawing. Without becoming too Morellian in the analysis of minute figural similarities, it is also noteworthy that the woman's right ear is remarkably similar in shape and in placement when comparing the preparatory study and the final work. Additionally, the sitter's eyes look out to the viewer with the same observant expression, and the tilt of her head in the two works is undeniably similar. The visual relationship between the drawing and the painting is evidence that in her production of portraiture, Fontana worked from a live model, created a chalk likeness with attention to individuality, and then used that study as the basis for her finished paintings.

The example of the Uffizi's drawing the *Portrait of a Lady* (Checklist no. 8) and the Christie's painting (Fig. 11) is not the lone instance where it is possible to connect Fontana's portrait drawing with a finished painting. An additional convincing pair includes the Uffizi's *Portrait of a Young Man* (Checklist no. 1) and the painted *Portrait of an Adolescent Boy at a Desk, with a Dog* (Fig. 12), which was first discussed by Murphy in her monograph on Lavinia Fontana.<sup>83</sup> Murphy contends that the drawing is a preparatory sketch for the final full-length portrait, and upon close inspection it is apparent that the two figures share the same full, heavy face, undulating hairline and pouting mouth. Again, like the example of the *Portrait of a Lady* discussed previously, the turn of the head of the sitter, the expression in the eyes and the individual facial features are a near match connecting the preparatory drawing and the finished painting.

Murphy also relates Fontana's drawing of *Portrait of Tognina Gonzalez* (Checklist no. 18), the girl with hypertrichosis, with the finished painting of *Tognina Gonzalez* (Fig. 13) in

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<sup>83</sup> Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, 180-81.

Blois, France.<sup>84</sup> The undeniable challenge that occurs in translating the drawn impression to painted image is evident in this comparison. The vital, energetic expression of the hair on the girl's face that is present in the drawing has been transformed into a softer, feathered appearance in the painting. Fontana has emphasized the pink rims of the young girl's eyes, the formal details of her clothes, and the piece of paper clutched in her hands that states her identity and affliction. The connection between the drawing and painting can also be seen in the similar tilt of Tognina's head, her reserved, unapologetic expression, and the squared top section of her bodice that is ornamented with three, small round buttons. This visual evidence confirms that Fontana did indeed create preparatory drawings for her portrait commissions and that she followed her original conception fairly closely throughout her design process.

Several other examples of corresponding preparatory drawings to existing paintings suggested by Cantaro, in her monograph, are credible ideas. The first pair relates the Uffizi's drawing *Portrait of a Man* (Checklist no. 7) to the figure of Annibale Gozzadini in Fontana's painting *The Gozzadini Family* of 1584 (Fig. 14) in Bologna's Pinacoteca Nazionale.<sup>85</sup> The man's long, oval face, his pointed chin and beard, and the small, bulbous point of his nose are convincingly similar. Additionally, the man's cropped hairstyle and the receding hairline that travels upwards at the temples both confirm his identity as Annibale Gozzadini. The Morgan Library album problematically identifies one of its drawings, *Portrait of a Man* (Checklist no. 11), as Annibale Gozzadini. Visual evidence negates this correlation, given the vast discrepancy between the sitter's full hair line, upturned mustache and long, curling chin hairs present in the Morgan's drawing and the man in the Pinacoteca's finished group painting. It is probable that the Morgan's drawing was a preparatory study for a different, individual portrait, and that the

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 163-64.

<sup>85</sup> Cantaro, 118-119.

classification as Annibale Gozzadini was an early attempt on the part of a collector to identify the unknown sitter.

The most finished portrait drawing in the Morgan's album is Lavinia Fontana's *Self-Portrait* (Checklist no. 12), which differs from her other drawings in several ways. The *Self-Portrait* is the largest portrait drawing in either collection and is also the most highly finished. Fontana draws a half-length portrait of herself in the costume of an aristocratic woman; she sports an intricate ruffled collar, fashionable rolled hairstyle, and a bodice trimmed with lace details at the shoulder and wrist. The hands of the artists are only slightly sketched in the drawing, which is an indication of Fontana's use of a mirror to capture her own likeness. Scholars have linked the Morgan drawing to two of Lavinia's self-portraits: the *Self-Portrait at the Keyboard with a Maidservant* (Fig. 15) in Rome and the *Self-Portrait in the Studiolo* (Fig. 16) in Florence, both produced early in her career. It is possible to see elements of the Morgan self-portrait in both the finished paintings, which suggests that the preparatory drawing could have been used in the production of both paintings.

Bohn proposes that The *Self-Portrait in the Studiolo* of 1579 (Fig. 15) is the closest to the Morgan's drawing, especially when considering the three-quarter pose to the viewer's left, the bent position of the left arm, and the small scale of both works.<sup>86</sup> Conversely, as Murphy points out in her monograph, the *Self-Portrait Portrait at the Keyboard with a Maidservant* of 1577 (Fig. 14) shares compositional and figural characteristics with the preparatory drawing, and was likely a preliminary sketch.<sup>87</sup> The pointed shape of the ruffled detail at the shoulders of Fontana's bodice is more pronounced in this painting, as well as in the drawing. The shaded side of Fontana's face is also more visible in this portrait, much like in the drawing. Despite the

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<sup>86</sup> Bohn, "Female self-portraiture in early modern Bologna," 255.

<sup>87</sup> Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, 40-42.

differences between both painted self-portraits, the intimate scale of all three works, and the striking figural similarities between them, indicate that the Morgan drawing was a preparatory study for either one or both of Fontana's finished painted self-portraits. Furthermore, the portrait drawing depicts the unidealized, realistic features of Fontana, which as Bohn surmises, reinforces the likelihood that the drawing was a preliminary sketch for the finished painting because a self-portrait made from looking into a mirror is more likely to show a faithful record of the artist's appearance.<sup>88</sup> A possible explanation for the highly finished character of her self-portrait drawing, as compared to her other examples, is that it was given as a gift to a patron or admirer. Women artists were appreciated as an unusual phenomenon in early modern Italy, and it is likely that images of Fontana, done by her own hand, were highly desirable.

An examination of the formal stylistic elements of Fontana's known portrait paintings in relation to her drawings reveals that it is possible to connect her small red and black chalk portrait drawings with finished paintings. Although there are several pertinent examples, it is imperative to keep in mind that it is not always possible to find such a direct connection between preparatory study and finished commission. As is evidenced by the example of the recent Fontana portrait sold at Christie's in July 2008, new and unpublished paintings by her are still being discovered. The question remains: how many still unknown works by her survive? Issues surrounding the survival rate of drawings and paintings, especially those by early modern women artists, remain a perpetually troublesome aspect of feminist scholarship. As was discussed in chapter two, works by women artists rarely survive in the same ratio as the works of their male counterparts, and as Frederika Jacobs notes, many early modern women artists survive in name

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<sup>88</sup> Bohn, "Female self-portraiture in early modern Bologna," 255.

alone, with no extant works.<sup>89</sup> Fortunately, in the case of Lavinia Fontana, her works on paper and her finished paintings survive in greater numbers than is true for her female contemporaries. Although Lavinia did not originally intend her drawings as gift items, they were noticeably collected as such during the seventeenth century. In considering Lavinia's drawings specifically, the reason for their uncommon survival is undoubtedly linked to their aesthetic appeal, finished quality, as well as her universal popularity within the Bolognese aristocracy. Set within a modern theoretical context, the issues of gender and the specifics of Fontana's patronage will be examined in the final chapter.

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<sup>89</sup> Jacobs, *Renaissance Virtuosa*, 1.

## CHAPTER FOUR: GENDER, PATRONAGE, AND DRAWING THEORY

The process of drawing is, before all else, the process of putting the visual intelligence into action, the very mechanics of visual thought. Unlike painting and sculpture it is the process by which the artist makes clear to himself, and not to the spectator what he is doing. It is a soliloquy before it becomes communication.

-Michael Ayrton (1921-1975), English artist and writer<sup>90</sup>

It is perhaps an unusual choice to begin a discussion of sixteenth-century Italian drawings with a quotation from a twentieth-century artist. However, the underlying concepts of Michael Ayrton's musings retain a universal appeal and can be applied to the act of drawing, regardless of time and culture. Exploring Ayrton's ideas more closely reveals issues pertinent to the portrait drawings of Lavinia Fontana. As Ayrton's quotation surmises, the act of drawing is both a visual and physical process that directly connects the artist to his or her hand and subsequently with the surface media. David Rosand characterizes this concept as the "kinesthetic circuit," in which the drawing is understood as an extension of the artist's mind and body.<sup>91</sup> Secondly, Ayrton stresses the idea that drawing, unlike the more finished products of painting and sculpture, is a highly personal artistic tool with which an artist can explore ideas and work through the "mechanics of visual thought." The concept of a drawing as a soliloquy is also noteworthy, considering that it implies an internal dialogue within the artist's mind and the intimate nature of the creative act. How does this conceptual understanding of the drawing act elucidate the portrait drawings of Lavinia Fontana? Prior to addressing these theoretical questions, this chapter will first investigate general issues of gender and patronage in early modern Italy. By considering Lavinia Fontana's popularity within the Bolognese patriciate and

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<sup>90</sup> Michael Ayrton, *Drawings and Sculpture* (London: Cory, Adams and McKay, 1966), 3.

<sup>91</sup> David Rosand, *Drawing Acts: Studies in Graphic Expression and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), xxiii.

analyzing her professional relationship with her patrons, the pictorial acts of her portrait drawings reveal an intensely personal connection between drawing medium, artist, and sitter.

### **Gender and Patronage in Early Modern Italy**

In recent years, the scholarly understanding of patronage in early modern Europe has gone through a series of redefinitions as issues of gender, economics and sociology have come to the forefront of academia. It has become critical to account for these groups of people who have long been rendered voiceless, which is due largely in part to a lack of surviving documentation, as well as the traditional biases of academic hegemony. Given the increasing emphasis on contextualization in Renaissance art, it has become imperative to understand women's active roles in shaping the period's innovative and dynamic visual culture.<sup>92</sup> Patronage can be broadly defined as the action of supporting, encouraging or engaging a person, institution or work of art, and was one of the most dominant social processes in early modern Europe.<sup>93</sup> Patricia Simons has argued that art patronage in the Renaissance should not be understood as a rigid system between patron and client but rather as a fluid, less deterministic process.<sup>94</sup> In terms of considering women as patrons of the arts, it is necessary to extend the definition of patronage even further, to encompass those persons who requested the work as well as those who were intended to use it.<sup>95</sup> This is an important distinction because it is often difficult to isolate women's activities as consumers of art during the early modern period. A married woman was

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<sup>92</sup> Stefanie Solum, "Attributing Influence: The Problem of Female Patronage in Fifteenth-Century Florence," *Art Bulletin* 90, no. 1 (2008): 76.

<sup>93</sup> F.W. Kent and Patricia Simons, "Renaissance Patronage: An Introductory Essay," in *Patronage, Art, and Society in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 1.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>95</sup> David G. Wilkins, "Introduction: Recognizing New Patrons, Posing New Questions," in *Beyond Isabella: Secular Women Patrons of Art in Renaissance Italy* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2001), 12.



rarely allowed to act independently.<sup>96</sup> An exception to this general rule is the greater social autonomy that widows enjoyed during the Renaissance. After the death of a husband, the realities of widowhood often required a woman to be more active outside the home and often signaled financial independence.<sup>97</sup> However, as we have seen in the examination of early modern Bolognese culture, Bolognese noblewomen both married and widowed, were afforded a greater sense of financial and personal freedom, and actively patronized Lavinia Fontana during the last two decades of the sixteenth century.

The Church served as an active patron throughout the sixteenth century, especially in Bologna, and was responsible for commissioning works from both male and female artists that reinforced the doctrines of religious reform and papal authority.<sup>98</sup> This concept became especially true in the decades following the Council of Trent (1545-63). As was discussed in chapter two, Gabriele Paleotti, Archbishop of Bologna, wrote a treatise on appropriate artistic subject matter. Noble families were also instrumental in the decorating of public, religious spaces, which demonstrated their wealth and cultural refinement through providing their family chapels with artworks commissioned from well-known artists.<sup>99</sup> Therefore, it is noteworthy that Bolognese art of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries reflected an elegance and sensibility that was attractive to learned, aristocratic patrons but that was also imbued with the sentiments and moral teachings of the Counter-Reformation.

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>98</sup> Chadwick, 91-92.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 93.

## A Woman's Artist

When using feminist theory to understand Renaissance women artists, there is often a danger of rewriting women's artistic production so that they are placed into predetermined categories. This practice carries with it the risk of trivializing women's achievements by viewing them solely through the lens of sexual difference.<sup>100</sup> However, in considering Lavinia Fontana's career and her relationships with patrons, it is essential to consider the gendered constructs of the female artist and the female patron in early modern Italy. In many ways, Fontana should be examined as a "woman's artist." Not only was she herself a woman, but she also painted images that commemorated the universal experiences of women, namely, marriage, childbearing, and widowhood.<sup>101</sup> Aristocratic women in Bologna sought out Fontana's works, as she brought a sensibility and intimacy to her images celebrating the intrinsically human female life cycle. Fontana was also successful with small devotional paintings commissioned by married couples. These paintings, intended for private viewing, were often given as wedding presents to women as a means of encouraging the healthy production of children.<sup>102</sup> Images of the Christ Child and the Virgin were placed over the marital bed and would allow women to contemplate the divine during conception. This viewing act would ensure the birth of healthy, beautiful infants, since it was a common superstition that a woman could give birth to a monstrous child if she viewed something ugly, or disturbing while pregnant.<sup>103</sup> It has also been suggested that Fontana may have painted these tender images of Mother and Child while she herself was pregnant, which is highly likely given that she bore eleven children during her lifetime.

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<sup>100</sup> Caroline P. Murphy, "Lavinia Fontana and Female Life Cycle Experience in Late Sixteenth-Century Bologna," In *Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 112.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 112-113.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-121.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

Bolognese noblewomen played a dynamic role in artistic patronage at the end of the sixteenth century, and the number of commissioned works from Fontana attests to this phenomenon.<sup>104</sup> Malvasia also comments on Fontana's close working relationship with the Bolognese female patriciate, for he writes in the *Felsina Pittrice*,

For some time, all the ladies of the City would compete in wishing to have her close to them, treating her and embracing her with extraordinary demonstrations of love and respect, considering themselves fortunate to have seen her on the street, or to have meetings in the company of the virtuous young woman; the greatest thing that they desired would be to have her paint their portraits, prizing them in such a way that in our day neither a Vandych or a Monsù Giusto could charge a higher price...<sup>105</sup>

It is apparent in Malvasia's selection that Lavinia was immensely popular with other noblewomen, and there was a sense of competition in their social circles to have one's portrait painted by her. Fontana's portraits of women typically fall into two categories: images of young brides on the advent of their weddings and those of widows. One particularly noteworthy example of marriage portraiture is Fontana's *Portrait of a Noblewoman* (Fig. 17), at the National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington D.C. Studies of account books and family diaries from the late sixteenth century reveal that clothing and jewelry, like those represented in the Washington portrait, correspond to the items that were typically included in a bride's trousseau.<sup>106</sup> Considering this historical perspective, the Christie's painting, *Portrait of a Noblewoman* (Fig. 11), which was described in chapter three, may have been intended as a wedding or betrothal gift. Although the corresponding preparatory drawing does not give any indication of individualized costume or jewelry, the finished painting showcases Fontana's

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<sup>104</sup> Caroline P. Murphy, "In Praise of the Ladies of Bologna: The Image and Identity of the Sixteenth-Century Bolognese Female Patriciate," *Renaissance Studies* 13, no. 4 (1999): 441.

<sup>105</sup> Malvasia, vol. 1, 146. See also Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, 86, for a partial translation in English.

<sup>106</sup> Jordana Pomeroy, "Catalogue Entry for *Portrait of a Noblewoman*," In *Italian Women Artists from Renaissance to Baroque* (Milan: Skira, 2007), 140.

intricate manipulation of the paintbrush, especially in the details of the brocaded cloth and the facets of individual jewels positioned in the young woman's hair. Fontana's observance of minute details and her naturalistic, less idealized approach to portraiture was undoubtedly appealing to Bolognese noblewomen, considering her popularity and the numerous demands for her portraiture.

### **Drawing Theory and Patronage**

As noted, Lavinia Fontana maintained a lucrative relationship with the Bolognese aristocracy, especially with noblewomen, and her portraits, along with other genres of paintings, were esteemed as highly desirable artistic objects. Fontana's portrait drawings, although originally conceived of as practical, functional preparatory studies for finished paintings, were quickly recognized and valued for their artistic merit and were intrinsically understood as a direct connection to the hand of the working artist. Imagining the moment when Fontana first set colored chalk to paper, when she looked upon the features of her sitter, it becomes possible to construct the re-enactment of her drawing process. Readdressing Ayrton's quote from the beginning of the chapter, it becomes possible to conceptualize drawing as both a visual and physical process. Fontana must have simultaneously conceptualized the identity and personality of her sitter, while transforming that image into a physical manifestation of chalk line on paper. As David Rosand asserts, "The peculiar tensions of the pose, the balance of the body... are instinctively felt, intuitively comprehended, rather than objectively analyzed."<sup>107</sup> In this sense, Ayrton's conception of drawing as soliloquy becomes pertinent, for the artist is engaged in an internal dialogue that seeks to find balance between visual reality and graphic interpretation.

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<sup>107</sup> Rosand, 15.

The theory of the physical act of drawing as connected to the artist's internal creative dialogue complements Lavinia Fontana's drawing production. The similar design style and her sensitive approach to her sitters are universal elements that connect all of her surviving drawings. With the exception of her *Self-Portrait* drawing (Checklist no. 12), the other portrait drawings are similar to one another in terms of style, level of finish, and scale. This suggests that Fontana approached the act of portrait drawing in a calculated, systematic fashion. The *Portrait of Tognina Gonzalez* (Checklist no. 18) is just one fine example of many, which can be examined according to the previously discussed theories by Rosand. The uniqueness and humanity of Fontana's sitter, the young girl afflicted with the rare genetic disease hypertrichosis, is constructed through Fontana's chalk line. In this drawing, the viewer directly encounters not only the sitter, but the artist as well. Through this unique configuration of separate marks, Fontana reveals her own personality: the reserved nature, an economic hand, and the sensitive, empathetic eye. In this manner, Fontana's drawings reveal as much about herself as they do her sitters.<sup>108</sup>

The survival and collectibility of Lavinia Fontana's portrait drawings relates to her intimate relationship with the drawing medium and the desirability of works by her hand in early modern Bologna. In describing the Renaissance construction of connoisseurship, Rosand reiterates the Renaissance mindset, which argued that, "By his line shall an artist be known."<sup>109</sup> It is important to remember that Fontana's drawings were collected in the same century that she died, and possibly during her own lifetime. As a result, early modern collectors and patrons recognized her individual artistic "line," and preserved her portrait drawings as evidence of her creative inspiration. Undoubtedly, they recognized the technical skill that was present in the

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 18.

hand of an exceptional woman, a *virtuosa*. A combination of these factors - her popularity among the noble classes, the demand for her skills as a portraitist, her intimate understanding of women's lives, her role as an exceptional woman in society, and her personal, kinesthetic relationship to her works on paper - all functioned together to ensure the preservation and collection of her portrait drawings for subsequent generations.

On the other hand, the importance of Lavinia Fontana's drawings do not necessarily lie in their historic function, but rather as vehicles with which to better understand the mind of early modern woman artist. Rosand asserts, "to declare that the meaning of a drawing lies essentially in its historical function not only ignores the complexity of that experience, thereby narrowing the possibilities of meaning, it effectively dislocates meaning itself."<sup>110</sup> The information revealed through the study of Fontana's drawings not only provides modern scholarship with a better understanding of her preparatory technique and her technical skill, but it also more importantly reveals her artistic personality. Over the centuries, these drawings have, in a sense, become her voice, a tangible connection to the mind and eye of a sixteenth-century woman artist. Although these personal elements can also surface in the numerous paintings by her hand, there is something inherently more intimate, more kinesthetically charged about drawings that speak to her personality. In viewing the random chalk marks, it is still possible to see her hand at work, moving across the paper, working on capturing the unique curves and angles of her sitter's face.

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 23.

## CONCLUSION

The survival and preservation of nearly thirty extant red and black chalk portrait drawings by a late sixteenth-century woman artist offers a tantalizing prospect to art historical analysis. Although women artists in early modern Bologna, like Caterina Vigri and Properzia de' Rossi, executed works on paper, Lavinia Fontana's surviving works are the first corpus of drawings that reveal the creative preparatory process of Bologna's first professional woman artist. Daughter of the prominent Bolognese artist Prospero Fontana, Lavinia Fontana worked diligently to present herself as her father's artistic legacy in Bologna during her career. This avid self-fashioning resulted in the lucrative patronage of the Bolognese aristocracy, especially its noblewomen. Fontana's relationship with the local patriciate, coupled with Bologna's rich tradition of a female artistic community, afforded her great success and recognition. She maintained consistent commissions over the duration of career, and executed a wide range of art works for her patrons. Fontana was, however, best known as a portraitist. The sensitive renderings of her sitter's individuality and a keen eye for minute detail are characteristic of her painted portraits. Fontana's two surviving caches of portrait drawings, the Uffizi Gallery's collection in Florence and the Pierpont Morgan Library's album in New York, reveal that she approached her portrait drawings with the same sympathy and gentle observance of personality that are evident in her finished paintings.

During the second half of the sixteenth century, drawings became a crucial component of artistic training and were often used in the preparatory design for commissioned works of art. In Bologna, the advent of the Carracci Academy at the end of the sixteenth century and the proximity to Florence and its tradition of *disegno*, created a positive environment that stimulated

the production of drawings and other graphic media. Drawings were usually preparatory studies for finished paintings, although some artists produced highly finished drawings that were intended as gifts to patrons. Gift and presentation drawings functioned much differently than preparatory works, and were viewed as autonomous art works. Although Lavinia Fontana's portrait drawings have a formal, finished quality, the artist did not conceive of them as gift items. They functioned in a strictly preparatory manner, and were the inception behind her finished portraiture commissions. Upon close inspection of her drawing technique and style, it becomes apparent that Fontana used her drawings as preliminary studies for paintings, as direct correlations between drawings and paintings can be observed. The collection and preservation of Fontana's works on paper stemmed not from her intention, but rather from the drawings' innate aesthetic appeal to early modern patrons and collectors. This becomes evident when examining the provenances of both caches of Fontana's drawings; her drawings were catalogued from the seventeenth century onwards, they were valued as highly as her male contemporaries, and they consciously preserved her artistic and personal identity by recognizing her authorship.

In sum, the portrait drawings of Lavinia Fontana reflect the creative workings and artistic production of an early modern woman artist, who painted professionally and supported her family with her talent. The examination of early modern drawings, as opposed to paintings, affords the modern scholar the opportunity to view the creative act on a more personal level. After four hundred years, the drawn line maintains its integrity and reveals the intimate connection between an artist's mind, hand, the sitter, and the chosen drawing media.



## Appendix: Checklist of Lavinia Fontana's Portrait Drawings

### Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi (Figures 1-10)

1. *Portrait of a Young Man*

Inv. no. 12189 F.

Red and black chalk on cream paper, laid down.

77.5 x 60 mm.

2. *Portrait of a Child*

Inv. no. 12190 F.

Red and black chalk on cream paper, laid down.

80 x 57.5 mm.

3. *Portrait of a Youth*

Inv. no. 12191 F.

Red and black chalk on cream paper, laid down.

86 x 50 mm.

4. *Portrait of a Child*

Inv. no. 12192 F.

Red and black chalk on cream paper, laid down.

80 x 65 mm.

5. *Portrait of an Older Man with a Hat*

Inv. no. 12193 F.

Red and black chalk on cream paper, laid down.

80 x 62.5 mm.

6. *Portrait of a Gentleman*

Inv. no. 12195 F.

Red and black chalk on cream paper, laid down.

77.5 x 60 mm.

7. *Portrait of a Man*

Inv. no. 12196 F.

Red and black chalk on cream paper, laid down.

77.5 x 60 mm.

8. *Portrait of a Lady*

Inv. no. 12197 F.

Red and black chalk on cream paper, laid down.

115 x 90 mm.

9. *Portrait of a Man*

Inv. no. 12198 F.

Red and black chalk on cream paper, laid down.

80 x 60 mm.

10. *Portrait of a Man*

Inv. no. 12199 F.

Black chalk on cream paper, laid down.

80 x 65 mm.

**New York, The Pierpont Morgan Library (Figures 11-29)**

Album description: dark blue goatskin, tooled in gold, 334 x 284 mm., end of the seventeenth century

11. *Portrait of a Man (Annibale Gozzadini?)*

Acc. no. IV, 158a

Red and black chalk on cream paper, ruled border in pen and brown ink, laid down, simulated frame in pen and brown ink.

78 x 60 mm.

12. *Self-Portrait*

Acc. no. IV, 158b

Red and black chalk on cream paper, ruled border in pen and brown ink, laid down, simulated frame in pen and brown ink.

164 x 145 mm.

13. *Portrait of an Old Man with a Beard*

Acc. no. IV, 158c

Red and black chalk on cream paper, ruled border in black chalk, partially cut off, laid down, simulated frame in pen and brown ink.

90 x 74 mm.

14. *Nun or Young Woman with a Veil*

Acc. no. IV, 158d

Red and black chalk on cream paper, ruled border in pen and brown ink, laid down, simulated frame in pen and brown ink.

79 x 68 mm.

15. *Portrait of a Man with Moustache and Beard*

Acc. no. IV, 158e

Red and black chalk on cream paper, ruled border in pen and brown ink, laid down, simulated frame in pen and brown ink.

78 x 60 mm.

16. *Nun or Widow with Veil*

Acc. no. IV, 158f

Red and black chalk on cream paper, ruled border in pen and brown ink, laid down, simulated frame in pen and brown ink.

78 x 68 mm.

17. *Portrait of a Bearded Man*

Acc. no. IV, 158g

Red and black chalk on cream paper, ruled border in pen and brown ink, laid down, simulated frame in pen and brown ink.

105 x 77 mm.

18. *Portrait of Tognina Gonzalez (Daughter of Pedro Gonzalez)*

Acc. no. IV, 158h

Red and black chalk on cream paper, ruled border in pen and brown ink, laid down, simulated frame in pen and brown ink.

94 x 76 mm.

19. *Portrait of a Young Man with Moustache and Beard*

Acc. no. IV, 158i

Red and black chalk on cream paper, ruled border in pen and brown ink, laid down, simulated frame in pen and brown ink.

78 x 60 mm.

20. *Nun or Young Woman with a Veil*

Acc. no. IV, 158j

Red and black chalk on cream paper, ruled border in pen and brown ink, laid down, simulated frame in pen and brown ink.

79 x 68 mm.

21. *Portrait of a Friar*

Acc. no. IV, 158k

Red and black chalk on cream paper, ruled border in pen and brown ink, laid down, simulated frame in pen and brown ink.

101 x 90 mm.

22. *Portrait of a Bearded Old Man*

Acc. no. IV, 158l

Red and black chalk on cream paper, ruled border in pen and brown ink, laid down, simulated frame in pen and brown ink.

78 x 62 mm.

23. *Nun or Young Woman with a Veil*

Acc. no. IV, 158m

Red and black chalk on cream paper, ruled border in pen and brown ink, laid down, simulated frame in pen and brown ink.

92 x 80 mm.

24. *Portrait of Federico Barocci*

Acc. no. IV, 158n

Red and black chalk on cream paper, ruled border in pen and brown ink, laid down, simulated frame in pen and brown ink.

80 x 63 mm.

25. *Portrait of a Lady*

Acc. no. IV, 158o

Red and black chalk on cream paper, ruled border in pen and brown ink, laid down, simulated frame in pen and brown ink.

131 x 100 mm.

26. *Portrait of a Man*

Acc. no. IV, 158p

Red and black chalk on cream paper, ruled border in pen and brown ink, laid down, simulated frame in pen and brown ink.

80 x 63 mm.

27. *Portrait of a Lady*

Acc. no. IV, 158q

Red and black chalk on cream paper, ruled border in pen and brown ink, laid down, simulated frame in pen and brown ink.

130 x 102 mm.

28. *Portrait of a Bearded Old Man*

Acc. no. IV, 158r

Red and black chalk on cream paper, ruled border in pen and brown ink, laid down, simulated frame in pen and brown ink.

78 x 62 mm.

29. *Portrait of a Friar*

Acc. no. IV, 158s

Red and black chalk on cream paper, ruled border in pen and brown ink, laid down, simulated frame in pen and brown ink.

112 x 98 mm.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4





Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8



Figure 9

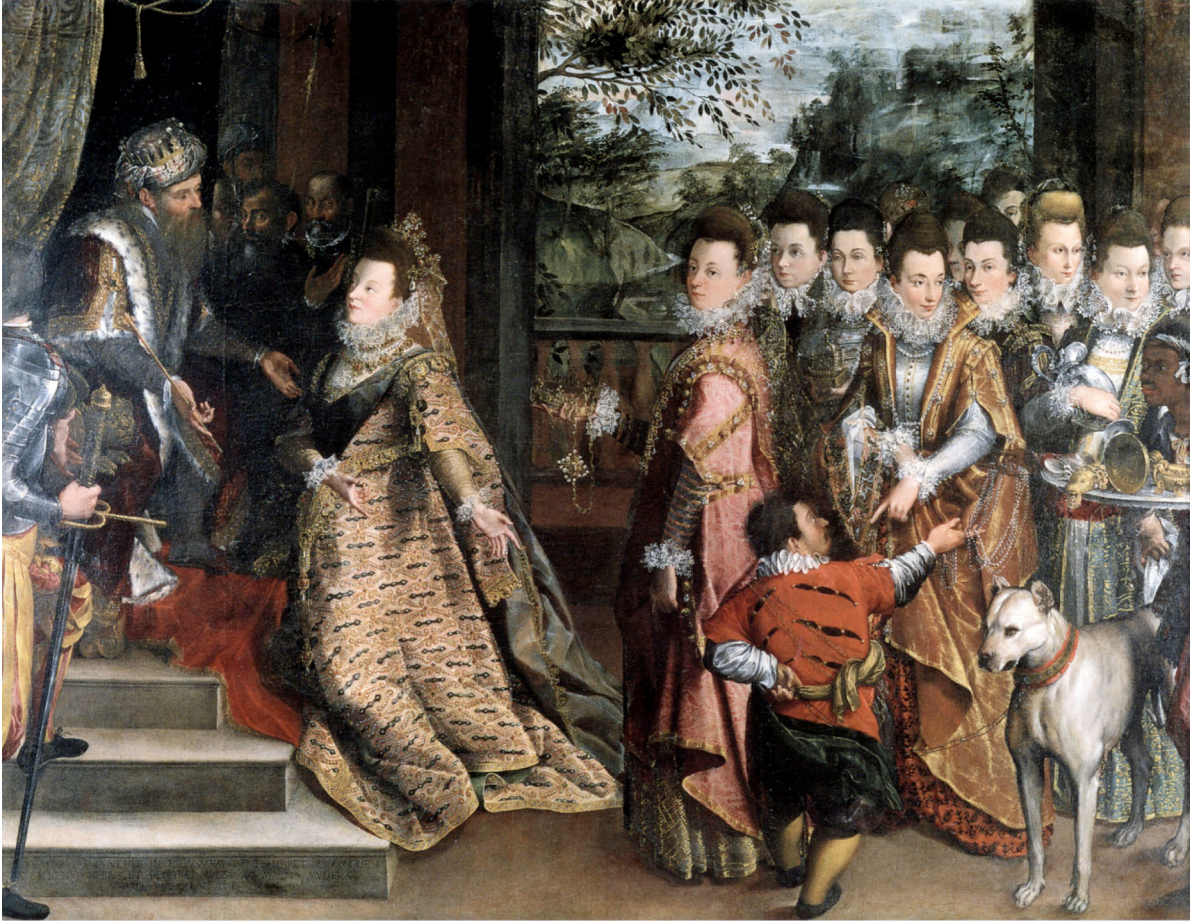


Figure 10



**Figure 11**



**Figure 12**





Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15



**Figure 16**



Figure 17



**Drawing Checklist no. 1**



**Drawing Checklist no. 2**



**Drawing Checklist no. 3**





**Drawing Checklist no. 4**



**Drawing Checklist no. 5**



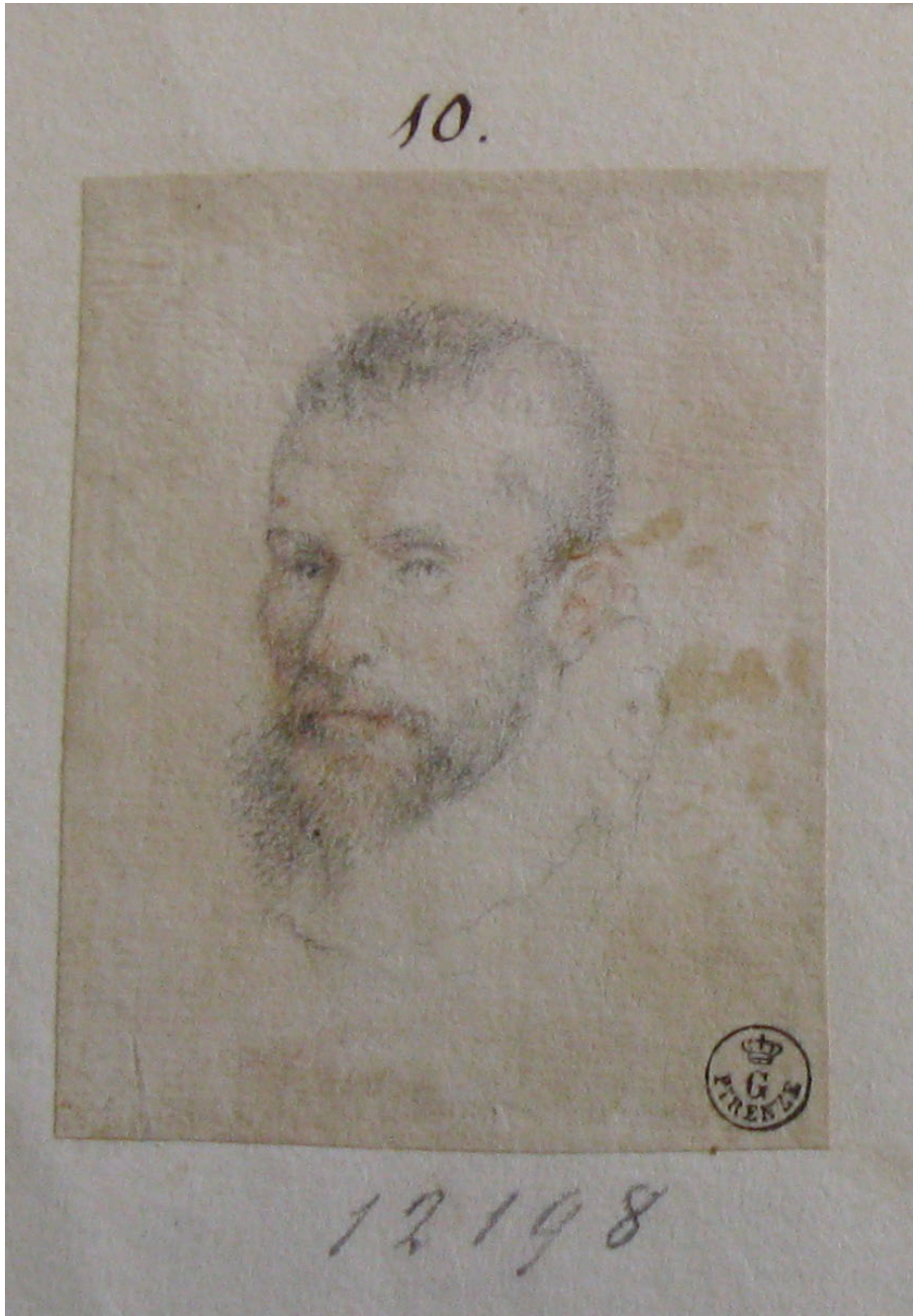
**Drawing Checklist no. 6**



**Drawing Checklist no. 7**



**Drawing Checklist no. 8**



**Drawing Checklist no. 9**



**Drawing Checklist no. 10**



**Drawing Checklist no. 11**





**Drawing Checklist no. 12**



**Drawing Checklist no. 17**



**Drawing Checklist no. 18**



**Drawing Checklist no. 24**



**Drawing Checklist no. 25**



**Drawing Checklist no. 27**

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Adrianna Hook Stephenson was born May 28, 1981 in Arcata, California to Robert Anthony Hook, Jr. and Mary Katherine Clary. She grew up in Cupertino, California. She graduated from Monta Vista High School in Cupertino, California in 1999. Adrianna attended Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia, where she graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Art History in 2003. At Washington and Lee, Adrianna received the Gerard Maurice Doyon Award for Excellence in Art History, an award granted by the faculty for the finest senior thesis. Upon graduation from Washington and Lee, Adrianna moved to Plano, Texas, where she taught Third Grade for Plano Independent School District.

Adrianna continues her studies at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas, where she anticipates a Master of Arts in Art History in December 2008. While working on her graduate degree, Adrianna received a Tuition Scholarship and a Kimbell Fellowship. She also received two Mary Jane and Robert Sunkel Travel Endowment awards, which allowed her to travel to the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York and also to Italy to see the drawings of Lavinia Fontana. Adrianna completed an internship with the curatorial department at the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, and served as a research assistant to the art history faculty of TCU. She is married to Charles Rollen Stephenson and they live in Hurst, Texas.