

## 2. Female Court Artists: Women's Career Strategies in the Courts of the Early Modern Period

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### Abstract

Based on a survey of the careers of forty-three female artists who worked at European courts c. 1500–1800, Christina Strunck argues that female court artists' roles, obligations, and career strategies differed significantly from those of their male colleagues. Women artists at court were often regarded as *mirabilia* (marvels) – a notion many actively encouraged by cultivating unusual artistic techniques. Nevertheless, the reduced range of artistic activities permitted women at court reflected the general hierarchy of the sexes there. Thus, the courts perpetuated a situation in which only men could achieve the status of 'genius' while, it is suggested, commissions from the middle class ultimately helped ambitious female painters gain greater autonomy.

**Keywords:** Sofonisba Anguissola, Angelika (Angelica) Kauffmann, Artemisia Gentileschi, Rachel Ruysch, Elisabeth Vigée Lebrun (Le Brun), Elisabetta Sirani

The gallery of the Casa Buonarroti in Florence clearly demonstrates the high social prestige prominent artists could achieve during the Early Modern period. Between 1615 and 1628, Michelangelo Buonarroti the Younger created a gallery in memory of his famous great-uncle, where Michelangelo appeared above all else as a court artist, raised to honour through the favour of powerful patrons.<sup>1</sup> One of the paintings proudly recalls how the Prince Francesco de' Medici offered his own seat to Michelangelo and hung on every word the master spoke, in a stark reversal of the accepted court hierarchy.<sup>2</sup> The special position of the court artist could hardly be

1 Wasmer, 'Die Casa Buonarroti', pp. 121–136.

2 Further similar examples can be found in Warnke, *Hofkünstler*, pp. 302–303.

made more apparent. Artists who managed to secure the favour of a sovereign were like the pop stars of their time. They formed the highest rank of their profession and were objects both of esteem and envy for their less successful colleagues.

The standard work on this topic has long been Martin Warnke's monograph *Hofkünstler*, a classic in the field of art history first published in 1985 and reissued in a new edition in 1996. Although the Trier University unit for the Social History of the Artist has ensured constant and increasingly focused research on the situation of the court artist in recent years, there have been very few publications on the topic of female court artists to date.<sup>3</sup> The register of names in Warnke's work includes around 800 artists, but among them are just two women. Each of these two female court artists receives no more than a brief, one-page treatment, and what Warnke reports is hardly worthy of mention. Concerning the Swiss-born Angelika Kauffmann, Warnke reveals nothing to the reader regarding beyond the fact that she painted a scene showing Leonardo da Vinci dying in the arms of the French king.<sup>4</sup> Sofonisba Anguissola of Cremona is, by contrast, presented more or less as a prize of the Spanish monarch when Warnke explains:

Generals could bring home artists from foreign lands, just like trophies [...]. Juan d'Austria took Nicolas Busi back to Spain with him and "after Phillip II, king of Spain, [...] learned of Sofonisba Anguissola's virtues and worth, he sent for her and had her brought with full honours to Spain".<sup>5</sup>

Any contribution concerning female court artists would, on the basis of Warnke's book, simply end there. But the question remains as to whether there were more than just one or two female artists engaged in the courts of Europe? If there were, then what might their strategies for success have been? To what extent could they assert themselves alongside their male colleagues?

Critical engagement with Warnke's work text demonstrates that his primary argument requires decisive modification when female court artists are brought into consideration. The method employed here proceeds in four stages. First, a list

3 On the Trier University unit for the Social History of the Artist, see especially Tacke, ed., *Hofkünstler*. Some introductory comments on female artists are offered in: Mainz, 'Court', pp. 37–42. Tanja Jones and I embarked independently on the study of female court artists and presented our findings at the same conference held at Irsee in 2016; see Jones, 'Makers'; and Strunck, 'Hofkünstlerinnen'. See also note 7.

4 Warnke, *Hofkünstler*, p. 325.

5 Warnke, *Hofkünstler*, p. 133:

Feldherren konnten aus fernen Ländern gleichsam wie Trophäen auch Künstler mit nach Hause bringen [...]. Juan d'Austria nahm Nicolas Busi mit nach Spanien, und nachdem Philipp II., der König von Spanien, [...] von den Tugenden und Verdiensten der Sofonisba Anguissola erfahren hatte, ließ er nach ihr schicken und sie höchst ehrenvoll nach Spanien bringen.

of women artists who were active at the courts of Europe is assembled. While many of these women have been studied individually in the past, they have not been considered as a group. On the basis of this new data, a statistical assessment of the group can be undertaken, which should in turn reveal success factors. Secondly, the career strategies of selected female artists will be analysed. These will then be contextualized through an examination of both the court environment and the relationship between male and female artists there. Finally, these points will be brought together in a revision of Warnke's assessment of the courts as the key 'catalysts' in the emancipation of the artist.

### Career factors: Selected statistical information concerning female court artists

What exactly defines a female court artist? Similar to Warnke's identification of the artist at court, a broad definition is adopted here. This includes female artists who held a permanent court appointment, or drew a regular court pension (these artists' names are italicized in the following list). The list is also comprised of artists who received commissions from the courts, even if they never attained a permanent place or position. Also contained are those artists whose qualifications impressed patrons sufficiently to secure an offer of a commission or appointment, but who nevertheless declined that offer.<sup>6</sup> The temporal range addressed is limited to the Early Modern period, meaning it includes only those women who received appointments and commissions prior to 1800. The forty-three female artists thus identified are listed here in chronological order:

*Susanna Horenbout* (c. 1503–c. 1553)

*Levina Teerlinc, born Bening* (c. 1510/20–1576)

*Catharina van Hemessen* (1528–after 1567)

*Sofonisba Anguissola* (c. 1525/35–1625)

Lavinia Fontana (1552–1614)

Marietta Robusti (c. 1552/60–1590)

Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–1652/53)

Arcangela Paladini (1599–1622)

*Giovanna Garzoni* (1600–1670)

Lucrina Fetti (act. c. 1614–1673)

Flaminia Triva (1629–after 1660)

Maria van Oosterwijck (1630–1693)

6 See below, notes 70 and 71.

- Elisabetta Sirani (1638–1665)  
*Isabella Del Pozzo* (?–1700)  
*Elisabeth-Sophie Chéron* (1648–1711)  
 Johanna Koerten (1650–1715)  
 Lucrezia Bianchi (second half of the seventeenth century)  
*Luisa Roldán* (1652–1706)  
 Maria Oriana Galli Bibiena (1656–1749)  
*Anne Killigrew* (1660–1685)  
*Rachel Ruysch* (1664–1706)  
 Giovanna Fratellini (1666–1731)  
 Rosalba Carriera (1675–1757)  
 Lucia Casalini Torrelli (1677–1762)  
 Anna Waser (1678–1714)  
 Henriette Wolters (1692–1741)  
*Madeleine Françoise Basseporte* (1701–1780)  
 Barbara Regina Dietzsch (1706–1783)  
 Violante Beatrice Siriès (1710–1783)  
*Anna Rosina de Gasc, born Lisiewska* (1713–1783)  
*Felicita Sartori Hoffmann* (c. 1715–1760)  
*Anna Dorothea Lisiewska-Therbusch* (1721–1782)  
 Angelika Kauffmann (1741–1807)  
*Katharina Treu* (1743–1811)  
 Mary Moser (1744–1819)  
*Anne Vallayer-Coster* (1744–1818)  
*Marie-Anne Collot* (1748–1821)  
*Adélaïde Labille-Guiard* (1749–1803)  
 Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun (1755–1842)  
 Dorothea Johanna Stock (1759–1832)  
 Marianne Lämmerhirt, born Kraus (1765–1838)  
*Félicité Henriette Robert, born Tassaert* (1766–1818)  
 Friederike Juliane von Lisiewska (1769–1856)

Some of these women are already the focus of a body of literature, but in most cases extensive foundational research is still necessary. Such research will certainly also uncover the names of further female artists employed at the courts.<sup>7</sup>

7 The research on which this text is based was first presented in my inaugural lecture at the Philipps-Universität Marburg on 30 April 2014. The present list of female court artists draws on the bibliography contained in Strunck, 'Hofkünstlerinnen', a revised and expanded version of that lecture. It is to be hoped that the research team (see Jones, 'Introduction', in this volume) led by Tanja Jones will discover many more female court artists.

Based upon information regarding this corpus of artists, it is possible to undertake certain statistical assessments. For example, we can establish that 65% of these female artists were born into artistic families. The early development of natural talent and access to the family's established network of connections therefore appears to be quite a decisive factor in achieving success.<sup>8</sup> Further, 58% of these female court artists travelled widely. Their travels seem to have contributed markedly to their success. Travel certainly served to further an artist's professional development, but it also allowed them to expand their network of patrons. Since the conventions of this period only allowed women to appear in public with an appropriate male chaperone, a female artist's capacity for such all-important travel was also dependent upon having a father, brother, or husband available to accompany her.<sup>9</sup>

As a woman's respectability was inevitably dependent upon her status as a wife, it is little wonder that at least 70% of the female artists in our list were married. The real percentage was probably even higher, since the marital status of some remains unknown. Many of the women examined in this study were married to artists or members of a court. The extent to which such marriages assisted their careers is a subject for closer examination. In the case of Angelika Kauffmann, it is reported that her husband cared for her interests like a manager.<sup>10</sup> By contrast, the husbands of Roman-born Artemisia Gentileschi and the French Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun squandered their wives' carefully managed gains, an abuse which led in both cases to separation.<sup>11</sup> Unmarried female artists appear to have been generally accepted, as is demonstrated by the notable example of the eighteenth-century Venetian artist Rosalba Carriera, who remained single throughout her life.<sup>12</sup> Remarkably, only half the married female court artists researched here appear to have had children. Whether this statistic is the result of gaps in the available documentation or a conscious decision to forego children must remain a subject of speculation.<sup>13</sup>

It is particularly astonishing to note that 42% of the female court artists listed were members of at least one academy. This comes as a surprise since women generally had no access to academies, which identified themselves as elite and wholly

8 This is postulated in Noehlin, 'Künstlerinnen', pp. 35–39, 49–50.

9 Harris, 'Gentileschi', pp. 4, 10; and Dabbs, *Life*, p. 346. Tintoretto reportedly took his daughter Marietta Robusti everywhere with him; on this see Wasmer, 'Künstlertöchter', p. 464.

10 *Angelika Kaufmann* (2007), p. 154.

11 Cropper, 'Documents', pp. 760–761; May, 'Woman', pp. 230–231.

12 Sani, *Carriera*, pp. 51–56; and Gaze, *Dictionary*, I, pp. 354–359. A further example of an unmarried female court artist who was nonetheless fully integrated in court society and enjoyed high social standing is Madeleine Françoise Basseporte (Mentelle, 'Mademoiselle', pp. 145–146).

13 For the connection between motherhood and the artistic profession, see ffolliott, 'Women', p. 427.

masculine institutions and traditionally denied women access to life-drawing.<sup>14</sup> In 1706 the French Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture blocked women categorically from its membership.<sup>15</sup> In 1770, however, a new and then progressive rule stated that no more than four women were permitted membership. The Royal Academy of Arts in London counted two women amongst its founding members in 1768, these were Angelika Kauffmann and Mary Moser, a London native. Both artists had also enjoyed the patronage of the queen of England prior to their acceptance into newly formed institution.<sup>16</sup> The unusually high percentage of female court artists who held academic memberships indicates that most of them probably gained entry to these institutions through the auspices of influential patrons at court.<sup>17</sup> Many even received simultaneous membership to multiple academies. Acceptance into an academy, then, seems to have been an honour acknowledging success already achieved at court.<sup>18</sup>

The first female court artist to hold a professorial title was Katharina Treu, a native of Bamberg primarily known for her still-life paintings today. Treu received an honorary professorship at the prince elector's academy in Düsseldorf in 1776.<sup>19</sup> But the considerable success that elite female artists could win during the Early Modern period was not limited to status, honour and titles; it also comprised remarkable financial gain. As Caroline Murphy has demonstrated through comparisons of artists' fees, successful female artists earned as much or more than their male colleagues.<sup>20</sup>

14 Nochlin, 'Künstlerinnen', pp. 40–45; Roworth, Sheriff, and Lindberg, 'Academies', pp. 43–53. Although life-drawing was given as the primary ground for exclusion of women, many women still found their way into the study of anatomy. See Maiwald, *Frauen*; Goodden, 'Kauffman', pp. 138–39; and Borzello, *World*, p. 119. In some academies in the German-speaking regions it had already become common practice to accept women as students in the second half of the eighteenth century. According to Mävers, 'Frauenzimmer', pp. 21–22, only the Art Academy of Kassel accepted female students. Other examples from Germanic culture can however be found in *Zwischen Ideal un Wirklichkeit*, pp. 266, 280, 301.

15 On this, and the following statements, see Barker, 'Women', pp. 109–111.

16 Perry, 'Women', pp. 90–91, 96–97; *Angelika Kauffmann* (1998), pp. 158–160; and *Angelika Kauffmann* (2007), p. 240.

17 See Vigée Le Brun, *Erinnerungen*, I, p. 53–54.

18 The following women from my list of female court artists held one or more academy memberships: Carriera, Chéron, Collot, de Gasc, Garzoni, Gentileschi, Kauffmann, Labille-Guiard, Friederike Juliane von Lisiewska, Lisiewska-Therbusch, Moser, Robert, Roldán, Sirani, Stock, Treu, Vallayer-Coster and Vigée Le Brun. Examination of the individual biographies reveals that these women were usually accepted by the relevant academy after their reputation had already been established.

19 Mainz, 'Court', p. 41; *Zwischen Ideal un Wirklichkeit*, p. 312. Anna Morandi Manzolini (a wax modeller rather than a court artist) had already held a professorial title in Bologna, although as an anatomist. See Ghirardi, 'Women', p. 45f. For further references, Messbarger, *Signora Anna*.

20 Murphy, 'Economics', pp. 23–29; also see ffolliott, 'Women', p. 426.

But how did these women manage to attain such influential positions in the world of art? And how exactly did one go about becoming a female court artist? Remarkable artistic abilities were of course necessary, but ability alone was not sufficient. Available appointments at court were not openly advertised. Rather, interested female artists needed to draw attention to themselves so that that a member of the court would be motivated to approach them. How, then, would this process play out?

## Career Strategies

The first female court artist whose career strategies are more or less known to us is Sofonisba Anguissola, born in 1530. She came from a noble Cremonese family of modest means. Her father Amilcare took it upon himself to capitalize upon his daughter's artistic gifts, an endeavour greatly aided by his knowledge of court protocol. Since it was impossible for an outsider to enter into direct contact with the highest levels of the court hierarchy, one needed to attain the goodwill of influential middlemen. To this end Amilcare sent one of Sofonisba's drawings to the most celebrated artist of the period, Michelangelo Buonarroti. The master found her work pleasing, but reportedly set the young artist a more difficult task: having drawn a laughing girl, she was challenged to depict a weeping boy. A little later Michelangelo received Sofonisba's drawing of her brother in tears, bitten by a crab, a work that earned even greater recognition of her talent. Amilcare Anguissola took care that Michelangelo's praise for his daughter was made public at the Florentine court. In this way the famous artist gave Sofonisba his mark of approval.<sup>21</sup>

The strategy of winning over influential artists and intellectuals to act as emissaries for one's work was constantly employed by young female artists. Such contacts were cultivated above all through the exercise of portrait painting. Portraits nurtured the sitter's vanity and moreover, the sittings provided an opportunity for sympathies to form that would in turn augment the subject's recommendation of the artist to his or her social circle. Thus Marie-Anne Collot created a bust of Daniel Diderot, who played a decisive part in Collot's promotion at the court of Catherine the Great.<sup>22</sup> Angelika Kauffmann sought to initiate contact with Johann Joachim Winckelmann and Joshua Reynolds in the same

21 Kusche, 'Anguissola', pp. 27, 29; *Gaze, Dictionary*, I, p. 189–190. For an illustration of the *Boy Bitten by a Crab* see *Sofonisba Anguissola*, p. 91.

22 The connection of the portrait sitting and the (probably successive) recommendation depends upon the date of the finished bust; however this is a subject of debate. See Borzello, *World*, p. 112; *Catherine la Grande*, pp. 36–37, 44; *Gaze, Dictionary*, I, p. 410. On Collot's success in St. Petersburg also see Schenker, *Horseman*, pp. 281–286.

way, painting portraits for both of these key figures of the London art world.<sup>23</sup> Sofonisba Anguissola, too, exercised the strategic use of portraiture. In this context, her portrayal of the miniaturist Giulio Clovio (1556) (fig. 2.5) is particularly interesting. Clovio holds in his hand a self portrait by the celebrated miniaturist Levina Teerlinc, who was herself court artist to the English crown.<sup>24</sup> Surviving documentation suggests that Clovio and Teerlinc had exchanged their portraits.<sup>25</sup> In depicting Clovio in this manner, Anguissola tacitly invited him to enter into an artistic exchange with her, as well.

Sofonisba Anguissola's miniature *Self Portrait* now at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts (c. 1556) may well have been painted in emulation of Levina Teerlinc's famed works. In this painting Anguissola holds a large, round medallion bearing a central monogram comprised of numerous letters, all enclosed within the Latin inscription: SOPHONISBA ANGVSSOLA VIR[GO] IPSIVS MANV EX [S]PECVLO DEPICTAM CREMONÆ.<sup>26</sup> While the monogram actually represents the addressee in a disguised manner, the Latin text serves not only as the artist's signature but also as a refined play on the *Naturalis historia*.<sup>27</sup> Pliny's text could be quoted as evidence that a few female painters worked and became widely known even in Antiquity. Amongst others there was Iaia, who created a self portrait with the aid of a mirror.<sup>28</sup> In his collection of biographies of famous women, Boccaccio elaborated upon Pliny's report, with Iaia appearing under the name Marcia. In illuminated manuscripts of Boccaccio's work she is often represented in the act of painting her self portrait.<sup>29</sup> Anguissola's depiction of the medallion takes the form of an oval mirror and the Latin inscription describes how the virgin Sofonisba Anguissola created the work with her own hand, using her mirror-image. This is a clear and intentional play upon Pliny's statements regarding the virgin painter Iaia.<sup>30</sup> So, on one hand, this self portrait consciously placed Anguissola in competition with

23 Angelika Kauffmann (1998), p. 158; Angelika Kauffmann (2007), p. 100–101.

24 Kusche, 'Anguissola', p. 28; *Sofonisba Anguissola*, pp. 81–82, cat. no. 15 (with illustration).

25 The Teerlinc portrait appears in the inventory of Clovio's possessions (*Gaze, Dictionary*, II, p. 1359). A letter written by Clovio indicates Teerlinc's portrait was sent to him around 1561 (*ibid.*), which makes this the *terminus post quem* for Anguissola's painting.

26 Illustration of the work in Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance*, p. 203.

27 Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance*, p. 203, reads in the complex lettering the name of Anguissola's father, Amilcare. Perlingieri connects the monogram to the Anguissola family, but also draws a comparison to a very similar work by Mary Stuart, though this was completed a little later; Perlingieri, *Anguissola*, pp. 62–64. The capitals *E* and *R*, very prominent at the beginning of the lettering in both works, could in both cases stand for *Elizabeth Regina* and thereby address the English queen. In this case, Anguissola's medallion image would be an attempt to gain favour at the English court, where Teerlinc had had such great success as a miniaturist.

28 Dabbs, *Life*, p. 27; Schweikhart, 'Selbstdarstellungen', p. 114, n. 8.

29 Dabbs, *Life*, pp. 33–35, 40–41; King, 'Portrait', p. 38; Schweikhart, 'Selbstdarstellungen', pp. 114–116.

30 Schweikhart, 'Selbstdarstellungen', pp. 117–119.



the great female painter of Antiquity. On the other, it showcased her humanist education and competency in Latin. Seen from the perspective of Anguissola's career strategy, the self portrait simultaneously illuminated three qualities she possessed, all of which were prerequisites for success at court: beauty, chastity, and education.

Anguissola painted many self portraits to be sent as gifts to various courts. These portraits were intended to arouse curiosity about her both as a virtuoso painter and as a beautiful woman. A self portrait showing her seated at the spinet visualized the aesthetic ideal of harmony, but also illustrated the artist's aristocratic education and multifaceted talents.<sup>31</sup> The juxtaposition of the youthful Sofonisba and an elderly maid both emphasized the artist's social status and provided an opportunity to display her command of accurate physiognomic depiction. By contrast, a self portrait showing Anguissola painting an image of the Virgin focused attention on the artist's chastity.<sup>32</sup> Taken together, these portraits display the full spectrum of qualities required to make the artist acceptable at court. Indeed, Sofonisba's years of effort spent promoting her possession of these qualities finally met with success in 1559: she was called to the Spanish court as lady-in-waiting and art teacher to Isabel de Valois, future Queen of Spain.<sup>33</sup> Anguissola advanced in this way to become an acknowledged role model for other female artists aspiring to a career at court.<sup>34</sup>

Lavinia Fontana, a native of Bologna, may be taken as an example of a female artist who followed in Sofonisba Anguissola's footsteps. Unlike Anguissola, Fontana did not come from a noble family but rather from an artistic one.<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, she sought to style herself upon the aristocratic model in order to demonstrate her suitability for a court appointment. Fontana who, according to a seventeenth-century source, acquired a doctorate from the University of Bologna, presented herself as a highly refined and well-educated lady (fig. 2.1).<sup>36</sup> She appears in elegant attire, seated at her desk and surrounded by a collection of antiques.<sup>37</sup> She is not engaged in the potentially messy act of painting, but is rather just beginning to sketch her ideas on paper. Thus, emphasis is placed on the intellectual conception required

31 Illustration and discussion of the painting in Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance*, pp. 210–211, 216–217.

32 The self portrait shows Sofonisba Anguissola in a simple, high-necked dress, painting an image of the Madonna, and thereby illustrates not only the artist's piety, but also presents a feminine version of the 'Lucas portrait', which so many of her male colleagues had already projected themselves into. See also Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance*, pp. 204–208; and *Italian Women Artists*, pp. 116–117.

33 Kusche, 'Anguissola', p. 30.

34 For example, Irene di Spilimbergo explicitly named Anguissola as her role model. Also see Kusche, 'Anguissola', p. 30; Greer, *Talent*, p. 70; Jacobson Schutte, 'Irene', p. 53; and Dabbs, *Life*, pp. 65–75.

35 Greer, *Talent*, pp. 208–214. More recently, see Gómez, ed., *Tale*.

36 Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance*, p. 221; Murphy, 'Fontana', p. 192.

37 Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance*, pp. 218–220.



Figure 2.1 Lavinia Fontana, *Self Portrait in her Study*, 1579, oil on copper, 15.7 cm diameter, Galleria degli Uffizi. Image Credit: bpk/Scala – courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Attività Culturali.

of the artist, rather than the craft of applying paint to canvas. The prominent signature announces the artist's refinement using a dignified formula of gold lettering and Latin.<sup>38</sup> In addition, the portrait's *tondo* format refers to the antique form of the portrait-medallion, which was reserved for patricians and scholars of the first rank during this period. Fontana's use of this format for her own image

<sup>38</sup> Lavinia Fontana painted this portrait for Alonso Ciacón (Chacon), who at that time was assembling a collection of portraits of famous personalities. According to his correspondence with Fontana, he also intended to publish reproductions of these paintings. The artist therefore realized that her work would, in this way, reach a very large public. The round format was intended to make the work more prominent in the book planned by Ciacón. See Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance*, p. 220; King, 'Portrait', p. 51; Schweikhart, 'Selbstdarstellungen', pp. 126–127.

may be seen as a conscious act of self-ennoblement.<sup>39</sup> The whole composition of the portrait suggested that she possessed the aristocratic education necessary to secure a court appointment.

Demonstrating one's cultural refinement also remained an important exercise for later female artists. Women who aspired to a court appointment needed to be fluent in the social codes of the nobility and possess the degree of education required for acceptance at court. From the seventeenth century onward it therefore became fashionable for female artists to host salons, assemblies that included artists, intellectuals, and aristocrats. Elisabeth-Sophie Chéron, Elisabetta Sirani, Angelika Kauffmann, and Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun all did so.<sup>40</sup> At these events the hostess might dazzle visitors with their talent and social accomplishment in order to acquire a loyal aristocratic clientele which, in turn, might gain attention and patronage at court.

Another career strategy was to capitalize upon the perceived novelty of the female artist. Precisely because no one credited women with artistic capabilities, the exceptions to this preconception were passionately celebrated as true wonders. For instance, Vasari referred to Properzia de' Rossi as 'un grandissimo miracolo della natura ne' nostri tempi' ('a great miracle of nature in our times').<sup>41</sup> Some female artists reinforced their exotic status by developing unusual artistic techniques. The Italian artist Giovanna Garzoni, who was famed for her still-life paintings, originated an innovative painting technique using a multitude of single-coloured dots, which resulted in an aesthetically pleasing pointillist effect.<sup>42</sup> Rosalba Carriera had great success in adopting the medium of pastels, innovative in the early eighteenth century.<sup>43</sup> The Dutch seventeenth-century artist Johanna Koerten made court portraits in the form of extremely fine, filigreed paper silhouettes. Her unique mastery of this unusual and difficult technique earned her high honour in the courts of Europe.<sup>44</sup> Luisa Roldán, appointed court sculptor by the Spanish King Carlos II in 1692, mastered the physically demanding art of wood-carving, rarely practised by women, and innovated in creating

39 Concerning the portrait-medallion made for Lavinia Fontana by Felice Antonio Casoni, see Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance*, pp. 206–208; Garrard, *Gentileschi*, p. 339; King, 'Portrait', pp. 54–57. A portrait-medallion made in honour of Sofonisba Anguissola between 1550–1560 is mentioned in: Schweikhart, 'Selbstdarstellungen', p. 125.

40 May, 'Woman', p. 230; Borzello, *World*, p. 74; Modesti, *Sirani*, pp. 79–84; Gaze, *Dictionary*, I, pp. 387, 764–770, 1402–1408.

41 Vasari, *Vite*, IV, p. 403. Also see ffolliott, 'Women', p. 425; and Schmidt-Linsenhoff, 'Dibutadis', pp. 12–13.

42 See Meloni Trkulja and Fumagalli, *Garzoni*; and *Italian Women Artists*, pp. 220–239.

43 Sani, *Carriera*.

44 Dabbs, *Life*, pp. 180–188.

terracotta sculpture at the court.<sup>45</sup> In this way Roldán became a particularly remarkable exception, just as did Marie-Anne Collot a century later with her marble sculptures.<sup>46</sup> Rachel Ruysch, court painter to Prince Johann Wilhelm von der Pfalz, delighted the court in Düsseldorf with her minutely detailed and deceptively realistic still-life compositions. She also remained active until a very advanced age, a marvel that Ruysch emphasized by both signing and dating her works.<sup>47</sup> In doing so Ruysch marked her paintings as double rarities: not only were they the work of a woman, but also of a person able to overcome the limitations imposed by old age.

All of the female artists mentioned above gained success at the courts of Europe. Their career strategies stressed their dual exceptionality as women who were artists, and as artists in command of particularly unusual technical skills. In considering these examples, however, suspicion may arise that the female artists were to a certain degree viewed simply as oddities at the court, gathered together much as rare and fascinating objects were assembled in the personal cabinets of curiosities or *Wunderkammern* favoured in the period. Did female artists and their works belong to the category of curiosities and wonders? This question leads immediately to another, broader one: what was the nature of a female court artist's working environment and tasks?

### The Environment and Duties of the Female Court Artist

Extremely self-confident female aristocrats flourished within the majority of Early Modern courts. Because dynastic crises regularly led to women taking power, it was important to promote their ability to rule.<sup>48</sup> Based upon this evidence of female competence, both men, as well as women, passionately criticized the common devaluation of intellectual capacities of women. Christine de Pizan's 1405 work, *Le livre de la Cité des Dames*, was among the earliest examples of such criticism, and credits women with the same mental capacities as men. Stimuli of this kind ensured the courts were host to passionate debates upon the role of women in society. This

45 Chicago and Lucie-Smith, *Blick*, p. 34; Taggard, 'Roldán', p. 9; Dabbs, *Life*, pp. 192–198; Borzello, *World*, p. 60. Also see Hall-Van den Elsen in this volume.

46 *Catherine la Grande*, pp. 22–23, 36–37, 44.

47 Dabbs, *Life*, p. 270.

48 Numerous court treatises and collections of biographies listed the deeds of famous women, who could certainly serve as role-models. For a summary overview, see Strunck, *Christiane von Lothringen*, pp. 60–66.

so-called *querelle des femmes* blossomed in the sixteenth century, coinciding with the emergence of the earliest documented female court artists.<sup>49</sup> Clearly the verbal and literary debates concerning prominent women had a positive effect upon the promotion of gifted female artists.

However, many female artists were not employed as court painters or sculptors *per se*, but rather as ladies-in-waiting who might educate their noble patrons in artistic pursuits. This was indeed the case for Sofonisba Anguissola in Spain; Susanna Horenbout, Levina Teerlinc, and Anne Killigrew in England; Catharina von Hemessen in the Netherlands; Giovanna Fratellini in Italy; Marianne Lämmerhirt and Dorothea Johanna Stock in Germany.<sup>50</sup> Ladies-in-waiting were considered 'ornaments' of the court, and in many places there existed so-called 'galleries of beauty' that celebrated the most attractive women at court in portraits.<sup>51</sup> In a similar way, female artists, with their special abilities, may have been regarded as collectors' items, desirable accessories for the decoration of the court. Male artists could equally attain court appointments which led them to the inner circle of the sovereign. Warnke lists numerous painters who were employed as *valets de chambre* or chamber servants.<sup>52</sup> Such appointments should not be seen as prosaic, but rather as underscoring the intimacy that might exist between the artist and the seat of power.<sup>53</sup> The hierarchically relevant difference between female and male court artists lay in the fact that, with rare exceptions, the female artists did not serve the ruler, but rather his spouse. What were the consequences of this difference?

49 Garrard, *Gentileschi*, pp. 141–171; Zimmermann, 'Querelle'; idem, 'Streit'; Valerius, *Herrschaft*, pp. 187–193; Opitz, 'Gleichheit'.

50 ffolliott, 'Women', p. 426. For vivid description of Sofonisba Anguissola's duties as a lady-in-waiting, see Kusche, 'Anguissola', pp. 32–36; and Gamberini in this volume.

51 The French queen mother Caterina de' Medici kept a retinue of 113 ladies-in-waiting. This 'belle troupe de compagnie de princesses, dames et demoiselles' ('beautiful group of companions made up of princesses, ladies and mademoiselles') was her pride and joy, a 'composante essentielle de sa dignité de reine' ('essential component of her dignity as a queen'). As such, the queen mother provided for the appropriate education and elegant dress of her retinue; see Zvereva, 'Commandement', pp. 225–226. On 'galleries of beauties', see Wenzel, 'Frauengalerien'; and idem, 'Beauties'; Petrucci, *Voet*, pp. 125–126, 210–235.

52 Warnke, *Hofkünstler*, pp. 18, 146–152.

53 Warnke, *Hofkünstler*, p. 149. Female artists appointed as ladies-in-waiting also enjoyed the special trust of their superior. For example, Sofonisba Anguissola and Susanna Horenbout each accompanied their mistress on diplomatic missions (Kusche, 'Anguissola', p. 40; Mainz, 'Court', p. 40). There is no documentation of the artists' duties on these missions, but they certainly could have contributed to the nurturing of diplomatic relations, for example, by completing portraits of the ladies at the court hosting them. Nonetheless, I know of no female artists who were given independent diplomatic missions of the kind Rubens undertook: this was simply incompatible with the demands of *decorum*.

The amateur practise of the arts amongst noble men and women had been made socially acceptable through reference to famous examples of Antiquity, so both girls and boys received at least rudimentary instruction in drawing.<sup>54</sup> There were, however, gender-specific differences. Women often achieved greater skill as painters, since they simply had more time to devote to the mastery of this difficult art.<sup>55</sup> Male amateurs of the noble classes also tended to concentrate more often on architectural drawing.<sup>56</sup> Young noblemen's training in draughtsmanship often took a military focus and was designed to deepen their understanding of defensive architecture.<sup>57</sup> Such training did not only have practical uses, it also held a symbolic value: since geometrical instruments served to measure and determine correct proportions, they symbolized the power of judgement held by the sovereign, and his ability to make appropriate and correct decisions.<sup>58</sup> Like God the father, the ruler could be regarded as architect of his own world.<sup>59</sup>

While geometry-laden and martially focused training in draughtsmanship aimed at young noble men was intended to prepare them for their future duties as leaders, the training offered to young women had a completely different focus. A quick glance at the work of Empress Maria Theresia's (1717–1780) three daughters illustrates this difference. Marie Christine, Maria Carolina, and Maria Anna were talented amateur artists, who nonetheless concentrated on family portraits and domestic scenes (the exchange of gifts on St Nicholas Day, for example).<sup>60</sup> Clearly the girls were restrained in their choice of subject matter, restricted to those domestic themes considered appropriate to their sex.

The creative activities of noble men and women at court were also plainly assigned different values. While Frederick the Great of Prussia promoted himself gladly as a musician, he belittled the inarguably significant works of his sister Wilhelmine of Brandenburg-Bayreuth (1709–1754) in a deeply condescending manner. The Marchioness painted depictions of strong women from Antiquity after the tradition of the *querelle des femmes*.<sup>61</sup> When, in 1747, she sent her

54 Warnke, *Hofkünstler*, pp. 297–302. Further to this thematic area, see Rosenbaum, *Amateur*.

55 The extremely accomplished double portrait of Isabella Clara Waldburg-Wolfegg with her husband serves as an example of this. See Birnfeld, 'Leben', p. 117, fig. 4.

56 There are several contributions to this theme in Cremer et al., *Fürst und Fürstin als Künstler*.

57 The princes Cosimo and Lorenzo de' Medici were therefore portrayed with a compass and plans for a fortress (obviously drawn by the princes themselves) in a painting from c. 1602 or 1617. In the following generation this became a common formula for portraits of the young men of the Medici family. See Langedijk, *Portraits*, I, pp. 169–173; also, *I Medici*, pp. 99–139.

58 Langedijk, *Portraits*, I, pp. 139–174.

59 Langedijk, *Portraits*, I, pp. 147, 149.

60 Mraz and Mraz, *Maria Theresia*, pp. 144, 203–205.

61 Krückmann, *Bayreuth*, p. 55; Krückmann et al., *Eremitage*, p. 103.

brother a sample of her work, Frederick thanked his sister for the painting and continued:

To my great sorrow a little of its beauty has been ruined on the journey, but enough remains for me to see that it was completed by a great artist. That is too much for you, dear sister; you should not unite so many talents in one person. I am afraid that painting damages your health: a bent posture is not good when one suffers with constipation. Believe me, good health is the most precious thing we have on earth.<sup>62</sup>

Following some general comments on the subject of good health and the transitory nature of life, Frederick came to quote Horace: 'O, posthumous, time passes! / why within this short span / do you press such long-term plans?'<sup>63</sup> In other words, given the short span of human life, female ambition is simply out of place; out of regard for her health, Wilhelmine should give up painting.

The artistic occupations of male and female nobles were clearly governed by different rules and were likewise assigned differing values. The future ruler might master drawing as a conceptual exercise that combined both practical and symbolic functions. Women at court were expected to concentrate on domestic subjects and, above all, should not nurture 'excessive' ambitions – artistic or otherwise. This ideology also restricted the creative range of female court artists, who were appointed as ladies-in-waiting and teachers to the sovereign's spouse, rather than to the sovereign himself.

Court artists were generally charged with creating a positive image for the court, partly through historical and allegorical paintings and partly through portraiture. While male artists might be employed in the creation of all of these genres, female court artists usually specialized in portraiture.<sup>64</sup> Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun, for example, conceived a new manner of portraying the French queen which showed her in seemingly private situations, and as a loving mother.<sup>65</sup> Precisely because Marie-Antoinette was criticized for her extravagance and rumoured love affairs,

62 Volz, *Friedrich*, II, p. 106, no. 133. The theme of the work is not named, but it was a copy after van Dyck.

63 Volz, *Friedrich*, II, pp. 108–109, cat. no. 137:

Zu meinem großen Leidwesen ist ein Stück seiner Schönheit durch die Reise verdorben, aber es bleibt doch genug davon, um zu sehen, daß es von einem großen Künstler stammt. Das ist zuviel für Dich, liebe Schwester; Du solltest nicht so viele Talente in einer Person vereinigen. Ich fürchte, die Malerei schadet Deiner Gesundheit; eine gebückte Haltung ist nicht gut, wenn man an Verstopfungen leidet. Glaube mir, die Gesundheit ist das Kostbarste, was wir auf der Erde haben. [...] O Posthumus, die Zeit verstreicht! / Warum in diese kurze Frist / So weitgesteckte Pläne drängen?

Christina Kuhlly kindly indicated this quotation to me.

64 ffollott, 'Women', p. 428.

65 Barker, 'Women', pp. 120–127; *Marie-Antoinette*, pp. 314–317; *Elisabeth Louise Vigée Le Brun*, pp. 158–159.

Vigée Le Brun sought to improve the queen's image through such depictions. At the same time, the artist thereby contributed to the highly consequential trend of restricting women more and more to the private sphere.<sup>66</sup>

History painters are thoroughly under-represented amongst the nineteen female artists identified in the list above as having held permanent court appointments.<sup>67</sup> This specialization amongst female painters appears to have been considered undesirable by the courts. The historical image, traditionally regarded as the foremost task of painters, was clearly the exclusive purview of men within the court's hierarchical society. In other words, the hierarchy that existed between male and female nobles was mirrored in the hierarchy of male and female court artists. The male court artist was associated with the sovereign, and thus it was his task to illustrate the governance of the realm through historical and allegorical paintings. As such, he was also permitted to employ a large staff of assistants. Artists like Giorgio Vasari or Charles Le Brun could control the entire artistic politics of a court setting. Female artists were effectively excluded from occupying a comparably dominant position.<sup>68</sup> They could only succeed within the lower genres of portraiture, landscapes, still-life, and flower painting. If a female artist did achieve a leadership role in artistic production associated with the court, then it would be within a far more restricted area. Giovanna Garzoni, who provided designs for the Florentine *pietra dura* workshops of the Grand Duchy, exemplifies this situation. The male workers had to transfer Garzoni's drawings into sumptuous inlays made of semi-precious stones.<sup>69</sup> Yet her designs were mainly ornamental as she had in fact specialized in the genre of still-life painting.

Given these constraints, it is little wonder that female artists might view court appointments as fundamentally problematic. Maria Carolina of Austria (1752–1814), the artistically gifted daughter of Maria Theresia mentioned above, became the queen of Sicily and Naples and tried to induce Angelika Kauffmann to serve as her court painter. Kauffmann spent several months teaching draughtsmanship at Naples, but finally declined the court appointment offered to her.<sup>70</sup> Because she was financially successful, she could afford to prioritize her own artistic freedom over courtly occupation. It may well be that she opposed being largely restricted to portraiture, the genre so highly valued at court. Interestingly, several other female

66 Strunck, 'Mutterschaft', pp. 203–207.

67 Anne Killigrew's poems indicate she painted histories (not preserved) as well as portraits (see Rippl, 'Killigrew', pp. 143–145). Catharina van Hemessen created a few religious paintings (see De Clippel, *Hemessen*, figs. 24–40; and the essay in this volume by Courts).

68 Mainz, 'Court', p. 41.

69 Meloni Trkulja and Fumagalli, *Garzoni*, p. 8.

70 *Angelika Kauffmann* (1998), pp. 25, 32–33; *Angelika Kauffmann* (2007), p. 158; Borzello, *World*, p. 117.



artists also reportedly refused court appointments. This was the case for Rosalba Carriera as well as Elisabeth-Sophie Chéron, Barbara Regina Dietzsch, Anna Rosina Lisiewska, Marietta Robusti, and Henriette Wolters.<sup>71</sup>

## Rivalry and Competition with Men

Although the popularity of the *querelle des femmes* in the Early Modern period emphasized the abilities of women, it hardly meant that there was a great emancipatory movement against the traditional notions of gender roles or relations. Quite the opposite. The unchallenged primacy of men was considered an immovable prerequisite for the stability of the accepted order at court. For this reason, the highest praise a woman could receive within the arguments of the *querelle des femmes* was the statement that she was as strong or as clever as a man – not more so. Thus, the sarcophagus inscription on the highly imposing monument erected by Maria Magdalena of Austria for her court painter Arcangela Paladini compared the deceased artist to Apelles, the most famous male painter of Antiquity.<sup>72</sup> Likewise, in 1775 an exhibition review from the *London Chronicle* praised Angelika Kauffmann for her 'masculine spirit':

Some philosophers have asserted that women have no souls. Others have maintained, and with greater probability, that they not only have souls, but that the only difference between their souls and those of men, depends on the great delicacy of the bodily organs. Miss Kauffmann's genius seems to favour strongly this latter opinion; for though a woman, she is possessed of that bold and masculine spirit which aims at the grand and sublime in painting[.]<sup>73</sup>

Since masculinity was the dominant ideal during the Early Modern period, and mankind rather than womankind was the unquestionable measure of evaluation, it was pragmatic for ambitious female artists to style themselves in a masculine manner. Artemisia Gentileschi said of herself that she had the spirit of a Caesar, and Rosalba Carriera manifested this visually in her masculine self portrait, complete

71 Greer, *Talent*, p. 77; Gaze, *Dictionary*, I, pp. 355, 385, 857; *Allgemeines Künstler-Lexikon*, vol. 27, pp. 330–331. A topic for further research is the role played by the artist's father or husband in the decision to decline a court appointment (see Mainz, 'Court', p. 39). In the case of Tintoretto's daughter Marietta Robusti, it is known that Tintoretto wanted to keep her in his workshop out of self-serving motives (see Wasmer, 'Künstlertochter', pp. 463, 469).

72 Greer, *Talent*, p. 72; Dabbs, *Life*, pp. 298–305.

73 Quoted after Perry, 'Women', p. 98.



Figure 2.2 Angelika Kauffmann, *Self Portrait at the Crossroads between Painting and Poetry*, 1792, oil on canvas, 151 x 212 cm. Pushkin Museum, Moscow. Image Credit: akg-images.

with a wreath of laurel leaves.<sup>74</sup> Elisabetta Sirani painted a Hercules and set her signature in gold lettering on the figure's club, associating herself in this way with a prime symbol of virile strength.<sup>75</sup> Her contemporaries attested explicitly to her 'masculine' style of painting, praise that she provoked precisely with works of this kind.<sup>76</sup>

Angelika Kauffmann also projected herself into the role of the ancient hero, in that she chose the iconographic model of Hercules at the crossroads for a self portrait depicting herself caught between Painting and Music. Just as Hercules had to choose between Virtue and Vice, so must the young Angelika choose between the arts of Music and Painting (fig. 2.2) as, owing to her dual talents, both career paths lay open to her. While Angelika looks undecided towards the personification of Music, Painting points towards a temple perched on a mountain's peak. In this way the artist visualized the steep and stony path to success, which

74 Lapiere, 'Woman', p. 75; Sani, *Carriera*, pp. 367–369, cat. no. 420.

75 *Elisabetta Sirani*, p. 216 (with illustration). On Sirani's signatures in general, see Bohn, *Fenomeno*, esp. p. 114.

76 Greer, *Talent*, p. 75; Dabbs, *Life*, pp. 127, 129; Gaze, *Dictionary*, II, p. 1275. Concerning Sirani's masculine style, see Modesti, *Sirani*, pp. 171–197.



Figure 2.3 Joshua Reynolds, *David Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy*, 1760–1761, oil on canvas, 147.6 x 183 cm. Waddesdon (Rothschild Family, on loan since 1995; acc. no. 102.1995). Image Credit: © National Trust, Waddesdon Manor.

she herself finally trod.<sup>77</sup> By depicting her choice in this way, Kauffmann played on the ‘Herculean’ strength that her career demanded. At the same time, she was also quoting a celebrated painting by her friend, the English artist Joshua Reynolds. Reynolds had used the model of Hercules at the crossroads in an ironic manner, portraying the preference of the actor Garrick for light comic plays over serious tragedies (fig. 2.3).<sup>78</sup> Through her reference to Reynolds’ painting,

77 Angelika Kauffmann (1998), pp. 234–237.

78 Wien, Reynolds, pp. 63, 109–115; Mannings and Postle, Reynolds, I, pp. 209–210. A possible source of inspiration for both paintings could be found in Federico Zuccari’s fresco in the Palazzo Zuccari (today the Bibliotheca Hertziana), which treats the theme of the artist’s ascension to the temple of virtue (Strunck, ‘Setting’, p. 115). Reynolds was briefly resident in the Palazzo Zuccari in 1752 (Zuccari Molinarini, ‘Bewohner’, p. 66). During his stay in Rome, Kauffmann was close friends with Johann Friedrich Reiffenstein, who lived on the ground floor of the palace, amongst Zuccari’s frescoes, from 1768 until his death in 1793 (Zuccari Molinarini, ‘Bewohner’, p. 66; Frank, ‘Weg’, pp. 184, 187, 188).

Kauffmann entered into friendly collegial competition with the president of the Royal Academy in London.

Male artists often showcased their abilities by means of a kind of rivalry with famous role models.<sup>79</sup> This career strategy was referred to as *paragone* during the Early Modern period.<sup>80</sup> In order to gain equality, female artists also engaged in the *paragone*. For example, Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun revealed in her biography that she had consciously imitated Peter Paul Rubens' *Chapeau de Paille* (c. 1622–1625) in her own *Self Portrait with a Straw Hat* (1782).<sup>81</sup> Her stated aim in this example was to tackle the artistic challenge presented by the light-and-shadow effect cast on the face by the hat's large brim. The self-confident gaze of the artist shows her conviction that the skills displayed there required no apology, even in comparison to Rubens.

Misogynist criticism was certainly not lacking. Many female artists were accused of succeeding only on the basis of their femininity. The English painter Nathaniel Hone, for example, insinuated this in his painting *The Conjuror* (fig. 2.4), which created a major scandal following its public display in 1775.<sup>82</sup> The magician after whom the work is titled alludes to the British Academy's president, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and is depicted with a young girl nestled up against his leg. The girl's pose recalled a painting by Angelika Kauffmann, who was rumoured to have a relationship with Reynolds. An engraving of the relevant painting by Kauffmann had been placed on the market in London only two months before the exhibition of Hone's work, so the informed public could easily make the connection between the images.<sup>83</sup> Hone had in fact gone even further in his painting: a highly compromising scene could be observed in the background. Before the silhouette of St. Paul's cathedral there appeared to be a bacchanalian dance in progress, with an attractive young woman at its centre, naked but for her boots. This scene referred to a 1773 commission to numerous Academy members who had been given the task of decorating the great London cathedral. Hone had not been amongst those chosen by Reynolds, though Kauffmann was. Therefore, in *The Conjuror*, Hone implied that Kauffmann had only been chosen because

79 See Hattendorff, *Künstlerhommage*, pp. 19–24.

80 *Paragone* literally means 'comparison'. A wealth of case studies regarding various forms of the *paragone* in art can be found in Baader, *Agon*.

81 Barker, 'Women', pp. 114–117; Borzello, *Frauen*, p. 77; Pfisterer and von Rosen, *Künstler*, pp. 112–113 (with illustration). On Rubens' *Chapeau de Paille*, now identified a probable portrait of Susanna Lunden, also see also: <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/peter-paul-rubens-portrait-of-susanna-lunden-le-chapeau-de-paille> (accessed 31 March 2020).

82 Angelika Kauffmann (2007), pp. 250–253 (with illustration).

83 See Angelika Kauffmann (2007), p. 96.



Figure 2.4 Nathaniel Hone, *Sketch for 'The Conjuror'*, 1775, oil on wood, 57.5 x 81.9 cm. Tate Gallery, London. Image Credit: © Tate, London 2019.

of her erotic power over Reynolds. Kauffmann was so appalled she insisted that the offensive section of the work be painted over. It remains visible, however, in a preparatory study.<sup>84</sup>

The resonant accusation contained in Hone's painting, that female artists were unjustly promoted, had already been encountered in the seventeenth century. Thus, the greatly successful artist Giovanni Lanfranco stated that he could sell his paintings for twice as much if he claimed they were the work of a woman.<sup>85</sup> Even today some researchers still seriously debate whether or not Artemisia Gentileschi really completed her famous *Susanna* (signed and dated by her own hand) alone or only with the aid of her father.<sup>86</sup> Similar accusations were also levelled at Elisabetta Sirani: since she was born into an artistic family, there arose suspicion that her father

84 Newmann, 'Reynolds', pp. 344–354.

85 Lapierre, 'Woman', p. 75.

86 ffollott, 'Women', p. 437; Bissel, *Gentileschi*, pp. 2–9, 187–189; Garrard, *Gentileschi*, pp. 182–209.

completed the works and had his daughter sign them to increase their sale value.<sup>87</sup> In order to combat such rumours, Sirani began to invite distinguished guests into her atelier, to observe her at work. This raised her public profile considerably and generated positive publicity.<sup>88</sup> Sirani even founded her own art school for women, which trained generations of female painters.<sup>89</sup>

When Elisabetta Sirani died at just twenty-seven years of age in 1665, she was honoured in her native city of Bologna almost like a modern-day celebrity.<sup>90</sup> A temporary temple was erected in the church of San Domenico, with a life-size statue of the painter seated within it.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, she was granted the honour of being buried next to Bologna's most famous artist, Guido Reni.<sup>92</sup> Her executors apparently understood the financial potential of Sirani as an artist and put much effort into her posthumous marketing which, in turn, led to the blossoming of her Bolognese art school for women, an enterprise supported by the middle class, rather than the court.<sup>93</sup>

For women who sought success as artists, it was inarguably wise to keep some distance from the court, since history painting at court was generally the exclusive occupation of male artists. Women like Artemisia Gentileschi, Elisabetta Sirani, and Angelika Kauffmann profited from their capacity to work for both court and civil patrons. In this way they maintained greater freedom to develop as historical painters and thereby advance in that sphere considered to be the most distinguished genre of painting.

A decisive measure for the success of female artists is the extent to which their work was referenced by other artists. As previously discussed, female artists constantly sought to measure themselves against their male colleagues in this way. But were there also male artists in the Early Modern period who took inspiration from their female counterparts? This question is usually excluded from consideration in art-historical research; however it can be answered in the affirmative. Caravaggio's famous *Boy Bitten by a Lizard* (1593/94) could easily have been inspired by Sofonisba Anguissola's much-praised, if less well-known, drawing of a boy with a crab.<sup>94</sup> Likewise, many artists produced variations on Anguissola's spirited double

87 Dabbs, *Life*, p. 129.

88 Greer, *Talent*, pp. 217–218.

89 Greer, *Talent*, p. 218; Modesti, *Sirani*, pp. 67–79.

90 Merkel, 'Sirani', pp. 137–148; Modesti, *Sirani*, pp. 199–209.

91 Ghirardi, 'Women', pp. 39, 41.

92 Greer, *Talent*, p. 222; Ghirardi, 'Women', p. 41.

93 See Merkel, 'Sirani', p. 146; Ghirardi, 'Women', p. 41.

94 See above note 21, and *Caravaggio*, p. 105. This comparison was already noted in *Sofonisba Anguissola*, p. 89, cat. no. 22.



Figure 2.5 Sofonisba Anguissola, *Double Portrait with her Tutor Bernardino Campi*, c. 1558/59, oil on canvas, 111 x 109.5 cm. Pinacoteca Nazionale, Siena. Image Credit: bpk/Scala – Courtesy of the Ministero Beni e Attività Culturali.

portrait with her tutor Bernardino Campi (fig. 2.5, 2.6), and copied her portraits of the Spanish royal couple.<sup>95</sup>

95 Concerning Anguissola's double portrait, see Christadler, *Kreativität*, pp. 93–96, 105–182; on her tutelage under Bernardino Campi, see: Kusche, 'Anguissola', pp. 25–26, 31. The double portrait of Anguissola and Campi was referred to by Luca Cambiaso (Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance*, p. 235), Elisabetta Sirani, and Luigi Martelli (Ghirardi, 'Women', pp. 38–40), as well as Ginevra Cantofoli, via Sirani (Greer, *Talent*, p. 220; Ghirardi, 'Women', p. 41; Pulini, 'Ritratto'). See also *Sofonisba Anguissola*, p. 105 (cat. no. 31), 113 (cat. no. 35 and 36), and Garrard, 'Here's Looking at Me'.

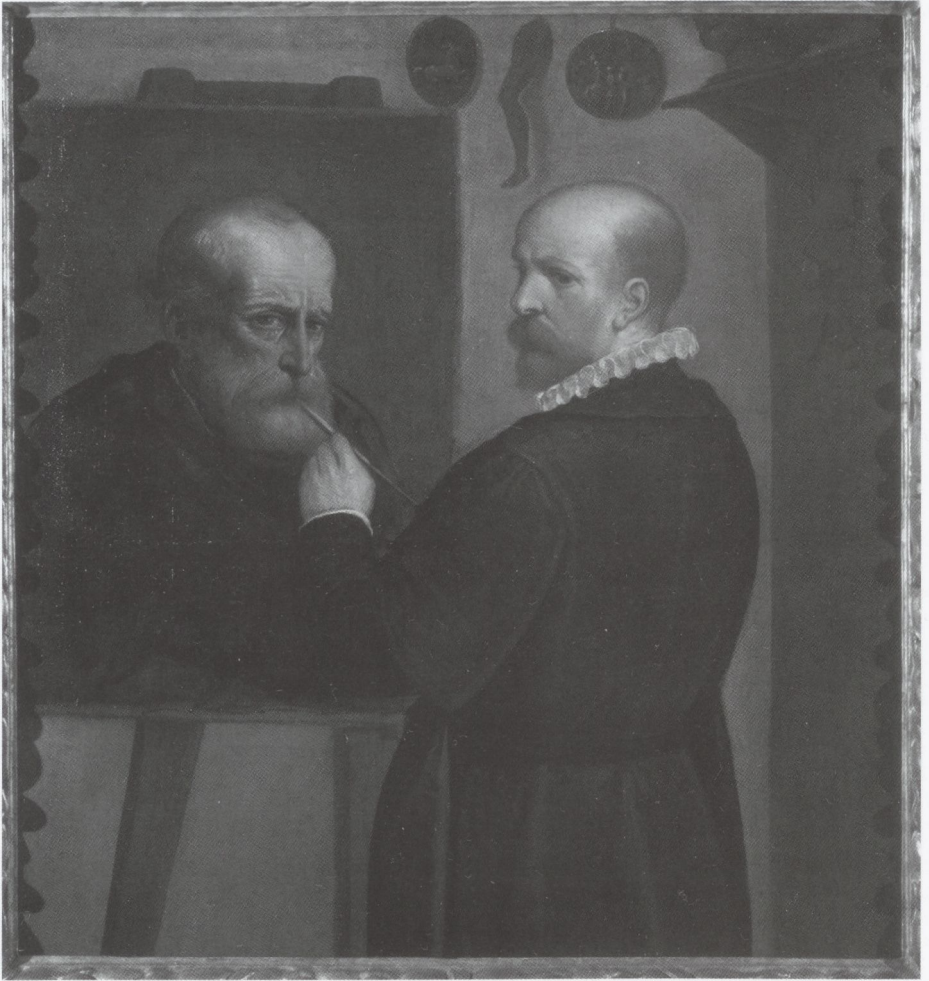


Figure 2.6 Luca Cambiaso, *Self Portrait with his Father (his First Master)*, c. 1570–1580, oil on canvas, 104 x 97 cm. Musei di Strada Nuova – Palazzo Bianco, Genoa. Image Credit: © Musei di Strada Nuova, Genova.

The pastel technique which Rosalba Carriera brought to a hitherto unattained level of refinement was imitated by several men.<sup>96</sup> Male artists created painted, engraved, and sculpted copies of pieces by Anguissola, Chéron, Collot, Lisiewska, and Sirani, a fact that testifies to the popularity of these women's works.<sup>97</sup> Angelika Kauffmann was actually copied and reproduced so often that a contemporary

96 ffolliott, 'Women', p. 435; Gaze, *Dictionary*, I, pp. 355, 357; Sani, *Carriera*, pp. 25, 27, 47.

97 Greer, *Talent*, p. 79; *Angelika Kauffmann* (1998), pp. 175–181; *Angelika Kauffmann* (2007), pp. 240–247; Gaze, *Dictionary*, I, pp. 387, 410, 859, 1275.



declared: 'the whole world is angelicamad'.<sup>98</sup> Motifs from her work appeared on fans, furniture, flower vases, chocolate cups, snuffboxes, wine coolers, and tea-sets.<sup>99</sup> Kauffmann's painting *Elfrida's Meeting with King Edgar* was the first work exhibited in the Royal Academy of London which took its theme from old English history and thereby began a trend of medieval subject matter being eagerly embraced by many male artists.<sup>100</sup>

The preceding case studies show that female artists associated with the courts of the Early Modern period might be highly successful and highly paid. Numerous of them were showered with honours and praise during their lifetimes, and often imitated by other artists. But there remains the question of how they could secure their posthumous fame and reputation. Alongside the education of both male and female pupils, endowments, biographies, and autobiographies could all help to perpetuate an artist's fame after her death. For this reason Giovanna Garzoni left her estate to the Roman Accademia di San Luca, on the condition that an honourable monument be erected in her memory in the academy's church of Saints Luca and Martina, complete with a laudatory Latin inscription.<sup>101</sup> There is much evidence to suggest that Angelika Kauffmann planned her own funeral, organizing a ceremony explicitly inspired by the funeral of Raphael.<sup>102</sup> In addition she encouraged her brother-in-law Giuseppe Carlo Zucchi to write down her life story, a text that would later form the basis of her first printed biography.<sup>103</sup> Elisabeth Vigée Le Brun went even further, completing an autobiography that appeared within her lifetime.<sup>104</sup>

The concern and effort female artists devoted to securing their posthumous reputation was not unfounded. They knew very well that women were often poorly represented in the literary genre of 'artists' lives', which were in any case exclusively produced by men.<sup>105</sup> An engraving from Houbraken's volume *De nieuwe schouburg de Nederlantsche kunstschilders en schilderessen* (1750) (fig. 2.7) reveals much on this subject: although Rachel Ruysch rose to be the court painter to the prince elector of the Palatinate, she is still depicted as inferior to her significantly less successful husband.<sup>106</sup>

98 Angelika Kauffmann (1998), p. 179.

99 Greer, *Talent*, pp. 79–80.

100 Angelika Kauffmann (1998), pp. 175–176.

101 ffollott, 'Women', p. 427; Meloni Trkulja and Fumagalli, *Garzoni*, p. 10.

102 Angelika Kauffmann (2007), pp. 284–285.

103 Angelika Kauffmann (2007), pp. 60–63, 262.

104 Vigée Le Brun, *Souvenirs*; Vigée Le Brun, *Erinnerungen*; May, 'Woman', pp. 226–229.

105 ffollott, 'Women', p. 424.

106 Dabbs, *Life*, pp. 263–272.



Figure 2.7 Jakob Houbraken, *Portrait of Juriaan Pool and Rachel Pool née Ruisch*, after Aert Schouman, 1750, engraving, 16.1 x 10.6 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Image Credit: Public Domain, Courtesy of Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

In his monumental collection of biographies, Giorgio Vasari refers to just a handful of female artists. The only one of these honoured with a portrait is the sculptress Properzia de' Rossi from Bologna.<sup>107</sup> According to Vasari, she held a doubly exceptional status. First, she had mastered the art of sculpture, which was physically demanding and heavily associated with men; second, she was paid just as well as her male colleagues.<sup>108</sup> Vasari discusses the reliefs completed by de' Rossi for the Bologna cathedral and 'discovers' autobiographical overtones in one of them: he interprets her depiction of the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife as an expression of her unrequited love for a Bolognese youth. Vasari ended de' Rossi's biography with the statement that she was lucky and happy in all things except love. By so emphasizing her failure to wed, he openly relativized her success as an artist.<sup>109</sup> Ultimately, the artistic success of women was always bound to their sex. Thus Vasari could conclude his biography of Sofonisba Anguissola with the rhetorical question: 'Since women know so well how to make real people, who should wonder at their ability to make painted people?'<sup>110</sup>

## Results

The developments discussed above are still surprisingly relevant for our present perception of artists. How is it possible that even today, for example in the exhibition for the 500th anniversary of Hieronymus Bosch's death, male artists are called 'geniuses'? And why is this epithet almost never given to female artists?<sup>111</sup>

As was noted previously, a central tenet of Martin Warnke's text was demonstrating that the courts facilitated the emergence of the idea of the artist as an autonomous 'genius'. Through a marked intimacy with the sovereign, and that ruler's respect for creative activities, artists could leave the status of craftsmen behind and begin to share the special, almost divine sphere of the ruler. Warnke argues against the nineteenth-century idea that 'an autonomous self-awareness of art and artists was one of the greatest achievements of the urban middle class

107 King, 'Portrait', p. 50.

108 Murphy, 'Economics', p. 23.

109 Vasari, *Vite*, IV, p. 403. See also Jacobs, *Renaissance*, pp. 65–84.

110 Vasari, *Vite*, V, p. 429.

111 *Hieronymus Bosch*. It has long been recognized that the term 'genius' carries an implicit, gendered bias in favour of male ability grounded in ancient misconceptions regarding the male capacity to create (and by definition, female inability to do so). The question of female 'genius' was opened up by Linda Nochlin; see Nochlin, 'Künstlerinnen'. This argument was developed by Battersby, *Gender and Genius*.

during the Renaissance'.<sup>112</sup> According to Warnke, we have the courts rather than the middle class to thank for the term 'genius'. But what was the situation of women at court? This question was completely neglected by Warnke.

Owing in part to the *querelle des femmes* there was a greater sense of the need to encourage the abilities of women at court than in civil life. As we have seen, female court artists could achieve high honour, but were nonetheless handled like decorative accessories, wonders, or objects for the court's 'cabinet of curiosities'. In order to succeed, women heightened their exceptional status by cultivating unusual artistic techniques. Nonetheless, the highest genre of art, history painting, remained the sole purview of male artists at court.

For the continued existence of the court, it was essential that the accepted hierarchy of the sexes remained unchanged. From their earliest phase of artistic education, young nobles received gender-specific training. Excessive artistic ambition in women was vehemently criticised, on the grounds that it called the superiority of men into question. The relationship between male and female nobles was mirrored in the hierarchy of male and female court artists. Only male artists were charged with portraying the politics and aims of the ruler. Noble women, as well as female artists, were forced by circumstance to concentrate above all on portraiture – that is, on what was deemed an inferior genre that held little potential for innovation. The final conclusion is therefore that the structure of the court created and perpetuated a situation in which only men could achieve the status of 'genius'.

Female artists who were only loosely associated with a court maintained comparably more freedom and potential for development, and could put forth the idea that they were equal to their male colleagues. The relatively high number of court appointments declined by women artists shows that it was more attractive for them to strive for a balance between court and civil commissions. Warnke's thesis must therefore be modified: while the courts were indeed the site of artistic emancipation for men, the patronage outside the court ambient played a decisive role in advancing the artistic autonomy of women.

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<sup>112</sup> 'daß ein autonomes Kunst- und Künstlerbewußtsein als eine der großen Leistungen stadtbürgerlicher Kultur der Renaissance anzusehen sei', Warnke, *Hofkünstler*, p. 9.

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