

"Iussu patris"? Prolegomena on Form and Function of Women Artists' Signatures in the Early Modern Period

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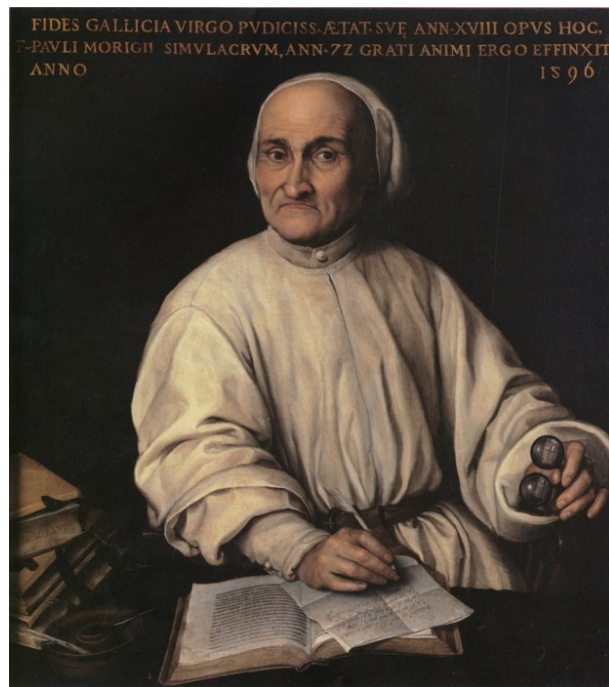
Abstract

This article aims to give for the first time an overview of the form and function of women artists' signatures in early modern Europe, with a particular focus on Italy. Through an analysis of the frequency with which women artists signed their works as well as the iconic and textual form of the inscriptions, it establishes a number of peculiarities that distinguish female from male signing practice. It attempts then to explain these differences by the specific sociocultural conditions under which artistic activity by women was possible

and accepted. The central thesis is that the frequency and particular textual form of women's signatures were prompted by the special interest of patrons and collectors in works created by female artists. Rather than an expression of their authors' self-assurance as artists in a field dominated by men, as earlier scholarship tended to assume, the characteristics of female signing practice were often an index of their limited autonomy.

Introduction

[1] Between 1592 and 1595, Fede Galizia (c. 1573/74–after 1630) painted a portrait of the Milanese Jesuati general Paolo Morigia (Fig. 1),¹ which features a prominent inscription in gilded capital letters at the upper edge. Even before the name of the sitter, the text mentions that of the artist, emphasising not only her youthful age of eighteen but also her status as a virgin and her modesty: FIDES GALLICIA VIRGO PVDICISS(IMA) ÆTAT(IS) SVĒ ANN(IS) XVIII OPVS HOC, F(RATRI) PAVLI MORIGII SIMVLACRVM, ANN(IS) 7Z [sic] GRATI ANIMI ERGO EFFINXIT ANNO 1596.



1 Fede Galizia, *Portrait of Paolo Morigia*, c. 1594–97, oil on canvas, 88 × 79 cm. Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Pinacoteca, Milan, inv. 110 (from: Alessandro Rovetta, Marco Rossi and Bert Meijer, eds., *Pinacoteca Ambrosiana: Tomo secondo – Dipinti dalla metà del Cinquecento alla metà del Seicento*, Milan 2006, 150)

Although not only the crude way the inscription is applied on the painting's surface but also a self-designation as "pudicissima" – a most unusual departure from the rhetorical conventions of the period – should have warranted scepticism, for a long time the inscription was considered the artist's signature, at least in terms of wording.² Only in 1989, Giacomo Berra debunked it as an addition from around 1670, when the painting entered the collection of the Ambrosiana.³ The actual signature is on the paper Morigia is writing on and is therefore difficult to decipher for the

¹ On the painting, see most recently Federico Maria Giani, in: *Fede Galizia. Mirabile pittoressa*, exh. cat., ed. Giovanni Agosti et al., Trent 2021, 204-214, no. 26.

² See, for example, Ann Sutherland Harris, in: *Women Artists. 1550–1950*, exh. cat., ed. Ann Sutherland Harris and Linda Nochlin, New York 1976, 116, no. 8; Gunter Schweikhart, "Boccaccios *De claris mulieribus* und die Selbstdarstellungen von Malerinnen im 16. Jahrhundert", in: *Der Künstler über sich in seinem Werk*, ed. Matthias Winner, Weinheim 1992, 113-136: 118.

viewer. Moreover, the painter has not employed a classical signature formula but a madrigal by the befriended poet Gherardo Borgogni, which credits Galizia as author of the picture and praises her art through a series of topoi from the panegyrics of portrait painting.⁴

[2] Yet despite this somewhat hidden but unmistakable auctorial presence, only a few decades after the portrait was painted its new owners clearly felt the need of a more visible and explicit mention not only of the sitter but also the painter. Both this act of labelling and the content of the inscription are symptomatic of the fascination that the work of a woman held for the – predominantly male – public in the early modern period, and at the same time of the value that was attached to it. The biographical characterisation of Galizia as a young, unmarried, and chaste woman reflects the ideas and expectations that were associated with the image of the female artist; and these preconceptions, as I will argue below, are also reflected in the authentic signatures by women.

[3] Although artists' signatures on the one hand and female artistic activity on the other have increasingly come into the focus of scholarship since the 1970s, there has been virtually no intersection between the two subject areas. While the signatures of women painters, sculptors, engravers, and architects are of course registered in the relevant studies and – more rarely – also commented on, publications that deal specifically with this aspect of their production can still be counted on the fingers of one hand.⁵ An investigation of the topic from a broader perspective is lacking, and it is this research gap that the present study addresses. Its aim is to examine, on a broader data basis, the extent to which women's signing practice was gendered: how it differed from that of their male colleagues, and why it did so.

[4] The investigation is hampered by the fact that research on signatures of the early modern period mostly concentrates on individual artists or case studies of particularly interesting inscriptions.⁶ Apart from the dissertation by Tobias Burg, whose chronological endpoint, however, is already

³ Giacomo Berra, "Alcune puntualizzazioni sulla pittrice Fede Galizia attraverso le testimonianze del letterato Gherardo Borgogni", in: *Paragone* 40, no. 469 (1989), 14-29.

⁴ "O viatore, che miri? Se di saper sei vago, / Chi diè col suo pannel voce à l'imgo / Che qui di me si vede, fu già Galitia Fede, / Che per tenermi dopo morte in vita, / Qui spirante, e qui vivo, a te m'addita" (cit. in Giani [2021], 204).

⁵ See Babette Bohn, "Il fenomeno della firma: Elisabetta Sirani e le firme dei pittori a Bologna", in: *Elisabetta Sirani: "pittrice eroina", 1638–1665*, ed. Jadranka Bentini and Vera Fortunati, exh. cat., Bologna 2004, 107-117; Judith W. Mann, "Identity Signs: Meanings and Methods in Artemisia Gentileschi's Signatures", in: *Renaissance Studies* 23, no. 1 (2009), 71-107. Bohn has recently published a revised English version of her article in her book *Women Artists, Their Patrons, and Their Public in Early Modern Bologna*, University Park, PA 2021, 146-151.

⁶ Among the vast literature on the subject published in the last two decades, see especially: Rona Goffen, "Signatures: Inscribing Identity in Italian Renaissance Art", in: *Viator* 32 (2001), 303-370; Patricia Rubin, "Signposts of Invention: Artists' Signatures in Italian Renaissance Art", in: *Art History* 29 (2006), 563-599; Tobias Burg, *Die Signatur. Formen und Funktionen vom Mittelalter bis zum 17. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 2007; Karin Gludovatz, *Fährten legen – Spuren lesen. Die Künstlersignatur als poetische Referenz*, Paderborn and Munich 2011; Nicole Hegener, ed., *Künstlersignaturen von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, Petersberg 2013; Stefano Riccioni, Giovanni Maria Fara and Nico Stringa, eds., *La "firma" nell'arte. Autorialità, autocoscienza, identità e memoria degli artisti*, Venice 2017 (= *Venezia Arti*, 26).

around 1600,⁷ there is a lack of studies that cover larger periods of time and geographical areas and at the same time also undertake a statistical evaluation of artists' signing practice. In addition, the basis for such a systematic and quantitative investigation is often inadequate – especially in the case of women artists: despite the boom in research on female art production in recent decades, for many women artists, even prominent ones, there are only outdated catalogue raisonnés or none at all. Partly because of this difficulty, the focus of my study is on Italian women painters of the Cinquecento and Seicento, although it does include some comparisons with the situation in other European countries. Moreover, it has to be borne in mind that for most of the artists here discussed only a fragment of their oeuvre survives or has been identified; therefore the percentages given in the first section of this article are only indicative values. Since signed works generally have a better chance of being preserved and correctly attributed, their real shares in a given artist's oeuvre are likely to be lower.

Frequency

[5] A first peculiarity of female signing practice is its high frequency. Babette Bohn already observed this "fenomeno della firma" in the work of the Bolognese painters Lavinia Fontana (1552–1614) and Elisabetta Sirani (1638–1665): Fontana affixed her name to a good half, Sirani to almost seventy percent of her surviving paintings, while the proportion of signed works among their male colleagues from Bologna in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries is between zero and 15 percent.⁸ According to Bohn, Florentine artists were similarly reluctant to sign during the same period;⁹ this corresponds to a trend that Tobias Burg has registered for all Italy – and which is in contrast to what happened in the Netherlands, for example –, namely that from 1500 onwards the frequency of artists' signatures declined.¹⁰

[6] Although Bohn points out the high number of signed paintings by Sofonisba Anguissola and Artemisia Gentileschi, after a survey on artists such as Giovanna Garzoni and Fede Galizia she concludes: "non si può affermare che le donne italiane apponevano la loro firma sempre più spesso dei loro contemporanei uomini".¹¹ If the emphasis is on the word *sempre*, this statement is undoubtedly correct. However, a more systematic study of women artists' signatures in the early modern period shows that the specifically female *fenomeno della firma* extends not only beyond Bologna but also beyond Italy. It is true that we know of several women artists from whom no signed work has survived at all, such as Properzia de' Rossi (c. 1490–1530), Levina Teerlinc (c. 1510/20–1576), or Marietta Robusti (c. 1554–1590); and conversely, there were also Italian male artists of the late Cinquecento who very often inscribed their names on their works.¹² Nevertheless,

⁷ Burg (2007).

⁸ Bohn (2004), esp. 107-108. According to the most recent catalogue raisonné of Sirani by Adelina Modesti, *Elisabetta Sirani "Virtuosa". Women's Cultural Production in Early Modern Bologna*, Turnhout 2014, the exact rate is 67,9 percent.

⁹ Bohn (2004), 108.

¹⁰ Burg (2007), 285, 293-298, 395-405.

¹¹ Bohn (2004), 108.

¹² A case in point is Alessandro Allori, who signed around 43 percent of his painted oeuvre (75 of the 173 paintings in the catalogue by Simona Lecchini Giovannoni, *Alessandro Allori*, Turin 1991). On his signatures,

a general tendency of women to sign more frequently can be observed at least into the seventeenth century.

[7] The earliest undisputed signature by a female artist in the early modern period – and the first ever in panel painting – is, as far as I can see, by Mechteld van Lichtenberg (c. 1520–1598) from Utrecht.¹³ She signed a *Pietà* in 1546 and about a quarter of a century later two other paintings, an *Adoration of the Shepherds* (1572) and a *Last Supper* (1574); another *Last Supper* can be attributed to the artist on the basis of style.¹⁴ Therefore, the quota of signed works would be no less than 75 percent – if it were acceptable to derive statistics from such a small amount of data. The case of Mechteld van Lichtenberg is nevertheless interesting, because in the first half of the sixteenth century, signatures were still not very common in the northern Netherlands in general and in Utrecht in particular; her presumed teacher Jan van Scorel, for example, only signed about 3 percent of his output.¹⁵

[8] The statistical basis is somewhat broader for the Antwerp painter Catharina van Hemessen (1527/28–after 1567). No fewer than thirteen signed paintings are preserved from the short period between 1548 and 1555; since there is little agreement about the limits of her oeuvre, it is difficult to estimate the proportion of signed works.¹⁶ But the considerable number of signatures from a period of seven years alone is an indication that it must have been relatively high, even considering that in Antwerp the frequency of signatures increased earlier than elsewhere in the Netherlands.¹⁷

[9] We are better informed about the life and work of Sofonisba Anguissola (c. 1535–1625) from Cremona, who was the first Italian woman painter to sign her pictures. Twenty paintings with presumably authentic signatures have been preserved or are documented photographically.¹⁸ In

see now Helen Barr, "Vielstimmigkeit. Alessandro Alloris Nachrichten aus dem Florentiner Cinquecento", in: *Vom Wort zur Kunst. Künstlerzeugnisse vom frühen Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Helen Barr et al., Emsdetten and Berlin 2020, 66-88, esp. 77-80.

¹³ On two earlier inscriptions considered as signatures in the older literature, which name the abbess Andriola de Barrachis (1489) and a SVOR BARBARA RAGNIONI, see Marco Tanzi, in: *Pittura a Pavia dal Romanico al Settecento*, ed. Mina Gregori, Milan 1988, 77, 210-211, 213, and Pietro Torriti, *La Pinacoteca Nazionale di Siena. I dipinti*, Genoa 1990, 355, no. 299.

¹⁴ For the *Pietà*, see Liesbeth M. Helmus, in: *Catalogue of paintings 1363–1600. Centraal Museum Utrecht*, ed. Liesbeth M. Helmus and Molly Faries, Utrecht 2011, 84-90, no. 4; on the artist's biography and her other works, Helmus (2011), 83.

¹⁵ Burg (2007), 403-405.

¹⁶ The catalogue by Karolien De Clippel, *Catharina van Hemessen (1528–na 1567). Een monografische studie over een "uytnemende wel geschickte vrouwe in de conste der schilderyen"*, Brussels 2004, lists five certain and eight questionable attributions in addition to the thirteen signed paintings; the latter would thus make up 50 percent of her production. On the other hand, Marguerite Droz-Emmert, *Catharina van Hemessen. Malerin der Renaissance*, Basel 2004, lists fourteen signatures and no less than forty-nine attributions and works from the artist's circle, but without critically examining them.

¹⁷ Burg (2007), 399-400.

¹⁸ These are nos. 1-5, 7, 9-16, 18, 30, 32, 33, 55, 57 in the catalogue raisonné in Michael W. Cole, *Sofonisba's Lesson. A Renaissance Artist and Her Work*, Princeton and Oxford 2019 (Cole [2019], 10, himself accepts only "around ten" of these as certainly authentic) as well as *The Mystical Marriage of Saint Catherine* published in Leticia Ruiz Gómez, ed., *A Tale of Two Women Painters. Sofonisba Anguissola and Lavinia Fontana*, exh. cat.,

her case, however, it is likewise not easy to gauge what proportion these represent of the total oeuvre, since its contours have become nebulous in recent years due to dozens of mostly less plausible attributions.¹⁹ According to a realistic estimate, her known oeuvre currently numbers no more than fifty paintings;²⁰ the signature quota would therefore be around 40 percent. A total of eight signatures by Sofonisba's younger sisters Lucia (c. 1540–1565), Europa (c. 1545–1578) and Anna Maria (b. c. 1555) have also survived or are documented;²¹ however, little is known about the rest of their oeuvres.

[10] Somewhat more definite statements can be made about Artemisia Gentileschi (1593–after 1654): twenty-three signed paintings are known from her,²² which account for over 40 percent of her oeuvre.²³ This is all the more remarkable because Artemisia grew up in a context much more averse to signatures than the Anguissola sisters. In early Seicento Rome, signing was even less common than in Florence or Bologna: Orazio Gentileschi signed only eight paintings – that is, about 10 percent of his surviving production –, most of these after 1620, when his daughter had long since been independent;²⁴ the catalogue of works by the Cavalier d'Arpino contains even less than 5 percent signed works.²⁵

Madrid 2019, 198, no. 49.

¹⁹ Cf. Cole (2019), 12. His catalogue lists only thirty-one paintings as authentic or "largely accepted by specialists"; in addition, there are no fewer than 129 paintings whose attribution is highly disputed, not very plausible or not verifiable (ibid., 155-246).

²⁰ Leticia Ruiz Gómez, "A Tale of Two Women Painters. Sofonisba Anguissola and Lavinia Fontana", in: Ruiz Gómez (2019), 15-37: 27.

²¹ Flavio Caroli, *Sofonisba Anguissola e le sue sorelle*, Milan 1987, nos. 32-34, 38, 41; Giuseppe Grasselli, *Abecedario biografico dei Pittori, Scultori ed Architetti Cremonesi*, Milan 1827, 20; *Sofonisba Anguissola e le sue sorelle*, exh. cat., Rome 1994, 286-287, no. 44; Loredana Olivato, "Pittrici sorelle: un dipinto di Europa Anguissola", in: *Uno sguardo verso Nord. Scritti in onore di Caterina Viridis Limentani*, ed. Mari Pietrogiovanna, Padua [2016], 305-310.

²² Mann (2009), 105-107, lists nineteen signatures; for four more discovered since then, see Adelina Modesti, "A Newly Discovered Late Work by Artemisia Gentileschi: *Susanna and the Elders* of 1652", in: *Women Artists in Early Modern Italy. Careers, Fame, and Collectors*, ed. Sheila Barker, London and Turnhout [2016], 135-149; Roberto Contini and Francesco Solinas, eds., *Artemisia Gentileschi. Storia di una passione*, exh. cat., Pero (Milan) 2011, 190-191, no. 25; Roberto Contini, "Napoli. Anni trenta", in: Contini/Solinas (2011), 96-107: 96 and 106, note 3; Gianni Papi, "A *David and Goliath* by Artemisia Gentileschi Rediscovered", in: *The Burlington Magazine* 162 (2020), 188-195.

²³ Mann (2009), 72-73, note 3, attributes forty-eight paintings to the artist, while the older catalogue raisonnés by Mary Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi. The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art*, Princeton 1989, and R. Ward Bissell, *Artemisia Gentileschi and the Authority of Art*, University Park, PA 1999, list thirty-eight and fifty works respectively.

²⁴ R. Ward Bissell, *Orazio Gentileschi and the Poetic Tradition in Caravaggesque Painting*, University Park, PA and London 1981, lists seventy "authentic works", of which nos. 20, 42, 56, 57, 61, 62 and 69 are signed, and twenty-six "questionable attributions". For the signature of Bissell's no. 16, see Keith Christiansen and Judith W. Mann, eds., *Orazio e Artemisia Gentileschi*, exh. cat., Milan 2001, 91-93, no. 15.

²⁵ Herwarth Röttgen, *Il Cavalier Giuseppe Cesari d'Arpino. Un grande pittore nello splendore della fama e nell'incostanza della fortuna*, Rome 2002, lists 281 paintings and frescoes, fourteen of which are signed.

[11] It is true that Fede Galizia and Giovanna Garzoni (1600–1670) signed much less frequently than their above-mentioned female colleagues, namely only about 15 to 20 percent of their works.²⁶ Their oeuvres, however, consist to a large extent of still lifes, which were rarely inscribed in Italy. Yet there were a few Italian specialists of this genre who signed their paintings more frequently. Besides male artists such as Giuseppe Recco and Evaristo Baschenis, one of these is another woman, Margherita Volò Caffi (1648–1710): of the 151 still lifes that Gianluca Bocchi attributes to her, thirty-one – more than 20 percent – are signed.²⁷

[12] The situation was somewhat different in the seventeenth-century Netherlands, where the art market fostered the signing of paintings as a systematic practice.²⁸ At the beginning of the century, the work of Clara Peeters (1587?–after 1636), one of the pioneers of Dutch still life, still presents a significantly higher frequency of signatures than that of contemporary male artists: her thirty-nine signed paintings account for almost her entire oeuvre.²⁹ Marija van Oosterwijck (1630–1693) and Rachel Ruysch (1664–1750) also produced an above-average number of signed paintings, even by Dutch standards. At present, twenty still lifes are attributed to Oosterwijck, fifteen of which are

²⁶ Flavio Caroli, *Fede Galizia*, Turin 1989, has catalogued thirty-five "opere autografe", six of which are signed (nos. 1-3, 5, 22, 24); in addition, there are twenty-eight "opere attribuite", most of which, however, Caroli does not accept. For four signatures published since then, see: Sam Segal, "An Early Still Life by Fede Galizia", in: *The Burlington Magazine* 140 (1998), 164-171; Maria Cristina Terzaghi, in: *Il ritratto in Lombardia. Da Moroni a Ceruti*, ed. Francesco Frangi and Alessandro Morandotti, exh. cat., Milan 2002, 104, no. 31, and 106, no. 32; Alessandro Morandotti, "Inventare in famiglia. Un pezzo di bravura nella Milano di Federico Borromeo", in: *Nuovi studi* 11 (2004/05), 213-224. For Garzoni see Gerardo Casale, *Giovanna Garzoni. "Insigne miniatrice", 1600–1670*, Milan 1991, which lists eighty-six works with eleven signatures (nos. A1-5, 7, 8, 32, 55, 56, and the herbarium A86-136). For six other signed works, see Gerardo Casale, ed., *Gli incanti dell'iride. Giovanna Garzoni pittrice nel Seicento*, exh. cat., Cinisello Balsamo 1996, 32, no. 3, and 64-65, no. 19, as well as Sheila Barker, ed., *"La grandezza dell'universo" nell'arte di Giovanna Garzoni*, exh. cat., Livorno 2020, 58-59, Fig. 5, 6, 124-125, no. 3, and 138-139, no. 10.

²⁷ For Caffi, see most recently Gianluca Bocchi, "Ricerche genealogiche e indagini storico-artistiche intorno a una famiglia di pittori milanesi del XVII secolo: i Vicenzini", in: *Arte lombarda* 175, no. 3 (2015), 47-69, Fig. 18-21. I am grateful to Gianluca Bocchi, who is preparing a catalogue raisonné of the artist's work, for sharing this information with me.

²⁸ Ann Jensen Adams, "Rembrandt f[ecit]. The Italic Signature and the Commodification of Artistic Identity", in: *Künstlerischer Austausch. Akten des XXVIII. Internationalen Kongresses für Kunstgeschichte Berlin, 15.–20. Juli 1992*, ed. Thomas W. Gaehtgens, Berlin 1993, vol. 2, 581-594, esp. 581-582; Burg (2007), 521-523, 527-533.

²⁹ Alejandro Vergara, "Beschouwingen over kunst en cultuur in de schilderijen van Clara Peeters", in: *De kunst van Clara Peeters*, exh. cat., Antwerp 2016, 13-47: 14, with reference to the database of the RKD (Nederlands Instituut voor Kunstgeschiedenis), which accepts only seven attributions in addition to the signed paintings (cf. www.rkd.nl [accessed January 13, 2019]). On Clara Peeters' identity, see Jean Bastiaensen, "Finding Clara: Establishing the Biographical Details of Clara Peeters (ca. 1587–after 1636)", in: *Boletín del Museo del Prado* 34 (2016), 17-31.

inscribed;³⁰ of the hundred or so known works by Rachel Ruysch, around 90 percent bear her name or monogram.³¹

[13] Among the figure painters of the southern Netherlands, Michaelina Wautier (1604–1689) stands out: she signed around half of her known works,³² while Flemish artists with a similar range of subjects, such as Jacob Jordaens, Jacob van Oost, Michael Sweerts, or Thomas Willeboirts Bosschaert, only have quotas of between 10 and 25 percent.³³ On the other hand, the Dutch painter Judith Leyster (1609–1660) inscribed around 30 percent of her extant works,³⁴ but this does not set her apart from comparable artists in Haarlem such as Frans Hals or her husband Jan Miense Molenaer.³⁵

[14] A survey on women artists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in other European countries shows a similar picture. The French still-life painter Louise Moillon (1609–1696), the Spanish-Portuguese history painter Josefa de Óbidos (1630–1684) or the Spanish court sculptor Luisa Roldán (1656–1704) signed their works with striking frequency;³⁶ but they too worked in a context where the practice of signing was more common than in Italy, which makes it difficult to gauge to what extent the frequency of their signatures is significant.³⁷

³⁰ The figures are based on the works listed by the RKD (www.rkd.nl [accessed January 13, 2019]), to which a painting in the Palazzo Pitti in Florence should be added (Marco Chiarini and Serena Padovani, eds., *La Galleria Palatina e gli appartamenti reali di Palazzo Pitti. Catalogo dei dipinti*, Florence 2003, vol. 2, 276, no. 446).

³¹ The RKD registers 102 works with 91 signatures (www.rkd.nl [accessed September 26, 2019]). On Ruysch, see most recently Tom van der Molen, s.v., in: *Allgemeines Künstlerlexikon*, vol. 100, ed. Günter Meißner and Andreas Beyer, Berlin 2018, 202.

³² Ben van Beneden, "Proloog. Het wonder van Michaelina", in: *Michaelina Wautier, 1604–1689. Triomf van een vergeten talent*, exh. cat., ed. Katlijne van der Stighelen, Antwerp 2018, 9-12: 12.

³³ For Sweerts, see Rolf Kultzen, *Michael Sweerts. Brussels 1618 – Goa 1664*, Doornspijk 1996, who lists 118 surviving paintings, twelve of which are signed. For the other painters, see www.rkd.nl (accessed September 28, 2019), where 304 paintings with 47 signatures are registered for Jordaens, 73 paintings with 18 signatures for Van Oost, 63 paintings with 10 signatures for Willeboirts Bosschaert.

³⁴ Cf. Frima F. Hofrichter, *Judith Leyster. A Woman Painter in Holland's Golden Age*, Doornspijk 1989, which lists forty-seven paintings (plus seven "problem works"), fifteen of which are signed, mostly with monograms only.

³⁵ For Hals, see Seymour Slive, *Frans Hals*, London 1970–1974 (222 works with 72 signatures); for Molenaer, see www.rkd.nl (accessed September 27, 2019; 246 paintings with 142 signatures).

³⁶ For Moillon, see Dominique Alsina, *Louyse Moillon (Paris, vers 1610–1696). La nature morte au Grand Siècle. Catalogue raisonné*, Dijon 2009, who lists seventy-one works (plus six "oeuvres attribués") with thirty-four signatures. For de Óbidos, see *Josefa de Óbidos e a invenção do Barroco Português*, exh. cat., Lisbon 2015; for Roldán, most recently Catherine Hall-van den Elsen, *Fuerza e intimismo. Luisa Roldán, escultora (1652–1706)*, Madrid 2018.

³⁷ In seventeenth-century France, signatures on still lifes were as common as in Holland; for a representative selection of examples, see Éric Coatalem and Florence Thiéblot, *La nature morte française au XVII^e siècle*, Dijon 2014. On the signing practice of Spanish artists, see Karin Hellwig, "Künstleridentität und Signatur in Spanien im 17. Jahrhundert. Velázquez, Zurbarán, Ribera und Palominos Kommentare im 'Parnaso Español Pintoresco Laureado'", in: Hegener (2013), 316-339.

[15] In Italy, however, the difference to male artists is manifest not only in the number but also in the genre of signed paintings. Bohn has already noticed that Lavinia Fontana, in contrast to her male colleagues, inscribed her name less on altarpieces on public view than on her paintings for private collections, that is, mainly portraits and small devotional and mythological works.³⁸ This is particularly striking in the case of portraits, which were rarely signed in the Cinquecento even by specialists in the genre: Giovanni Battista Moroni, for example, signed thirteen of his 126 portraits, Bartolomeo Passerotti only one.³⁹ In contrast, Lavinia Fontana signed around 40 percent of her portraits,⁴⁰ Elisabetta Sirani four of the five that have been thus far identified.⁴¹ This trend can even be observed in the case of Barbara Longhi (1552–1638), who rarely signed her paintings: of the nine signatures known so far, eight are found on small paintings mostly of religious content, while of the six altarpieces only one is signed.⁴² Barbara's father Luca and her brother Francesco, on the other hand, inscribed their name on almost all works for public display, but only exceptionally on paintings for private destination.⁴³

[16] A parallel phenomenon is the proliferation of self-portraits in the work of many women artists: Around a dozen by Sofonisba Anguissola survive, three each by Lavinia Fontana and Catharina van Hemessen, and even Elisabetta Sirani in her short career produced at least two painted and two drawn self-portraits.⁴⁴ The likeness of Anna Maria van Schurman (1607–1678), who became famous

³⁸ Bohn (2004), 108.

³⁹ See Mina Gregori, "Giovan Battista Moroni", in: *I pittori bergamaschi dal XIII al XIX secolo. Il Cinquecento*, vol. 3, Bergamo 1979, 95-377, nos. 11, 46, 60, 63, 66, 68, 81, 100, 103, 133, 153, 171, 217; Angela Ghirardi, *Bartolomeo Passerotti pittore (1529–1592). Catalogo generale*, Rimini 1990, no. 4.

⁴⁰ Bohn (2004), 108.

⁴¹ Modesti (2014), nos. 15, 46, 62, 90, 132. According to Sirani's own list of paintings published by Carlo Cesare Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice. Vite de pittori bolognesi*, Bologna 1678, vol. 2, 467-476, she produced eight more likenesses that have not yet surfaced; the share of signed portraits thus amounts to at least 30 percent.

⁴² For Barbara Longhi's signatures, see Giordano Viroli, *I Longhi. Luca, Francesco, Barbara: pittori ravennati (sec. XVI–XVII)*, Ravenna 2000, nos. 110, 132, 133, 140; Raffaella Zama, "Una Madonna autografa di Barbara Longhi già in collezione Borghese", in: *Romagna arte e storia* 33, no. 98 (2013), 107-113.

⁴³ Cf. the respective catalogues in Viroli (2000).

⁴⁴ On this topic see esp. Angela Ghirardi, "Lavinia Fontana allo specchio. Pittrici e autoritratto nel secondo Cinquecento", in: *Lavinia Fontana 1552–1614*, exh. cat., ed. Vera Fortunati, Milan 1994, 37-51; Catherine King, "Looking a Sight: Sixteenth-Century Portraits of Woman Artists", in: *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 58 (1995), 381-406; Joanna Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture. The Visual Construction of Identity and the Social Status of the Artist*, New Haven, CT 1998, 185-222; Babette Bohn, "Female Self-Portraiture in Early Modern Bologna", in: *Renaissance Studies* 18 (2004), 239-286; Bohn (2021), 152-170. See also (despite many imprecisions): Frances Borzello, *Seeing Ourselves. Women's Self-Portraits*, Farnborough 2016 (1998); Liana De Girolami Cheney, Alicia Craig Faxon and Kathleen Russo, *Self-Portraits by Women Painters*, Aldershot et al. 2000. For Anguissola see esp. Mary D. Garrard, "Here's Looking at Me: Sofonisba Anguissola and the Problem of the Woman Artist", in: *Renaissance Quarterly* 47 (1994), 556-622; Maïke Christadler, *Kreativität und Geschlecht. Giorgio Vasaris "Vite" und Sofonisba Anguissolas Selbst-Bilder*, Berlin 2000; for Fontana Maria Teresa Cantaro, "Lavinia Fontana: il primo 'Autoritratto alla spinetta' ritrovato e una breve disamina sugli autoritratti della pittrice", in: *Bollettino d'arte* 99, no. 24 (2014), 99-110; for Sirani Modesti (2014), 8-13. I am preparing a study on the phenomenon of female self-portraits, scheduled for publication in *Ricerche di Storia dell'Arte* in 2023.

also as a scholar and poet, is known from no fewer than fourteen self-portraits in various media that survive as either originals or copies.⁴⁵ The Franco-English calligrapher and miniature painter Esther Inglis (1571–1624) included a total of twenty-four self-portraits in her fifty-five manuscripts, all but four of which are signed.⁴⁶ In Artemisia Gentileschi's case, the identification of the self-portraits is disputed, but the reference to her own image seems to pervade the entire body of her work: as Judith Mann has noted, scholars have suspected overt or disguised self-portraits in about two-thirds of her oeuvre.⁴⁷

[17] The female *fenomeno della firma* as well as the large number of self-portraits are particularly remarkable because there are no comparably strong claims for authorship by women in the literature of the same period – quite the opposite. In the early modern period, the "stigma of print" – the idea, widespread in aristocratic circles, that publishing literary works in print was a vulgar act⁴⁸ – was particularly discouraging for women authors: since silence was considered one of the highest female virtues while public speaking (and thus also writing) by women was associated with prostitution, issuing their writings was seen as an immediate threat to female authors' moral and social integrity.⁴⁹ Especially north of the Alps, women therefore published their works – if at all – mostly anonymously, under pseudonyms, or at least accompanied by "screen paratexts", in which male editors testified that the printing was done against the author's will or at any rate not on her initiative.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Katlijne van der Stighelen, *Anna Maria van Schurman of "Hoe hooge dat een maeght kan in de konsten stijgen"*, Leuven 1987, 260-271, nos. I.11.3, I.1.1.5, I.1.1.6, I.1.1.7, I.2.6-11, I.2.15, I.3.1., I.3.2., II.2.1.

⁴⁶ A. H. Scott-Elliot and Elspeth Yeo, "Calligraphic Manuscripts of Esther Inglis (1571-1624). A Catalogue", in: *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 84 (1990), 10-86: 11-12; the unsigned manuscripts are nos. 5, 6, 20, and 34.

⁴⁷ Judith W. Mann, "The Myth of Artemisia as Chameleon: A New Look at the London *Allegory of Painting*", in: *Artemisia Gentileschi. Taking Stock*, ed. Judith W. Mann, Turnhout 2005, 51-77: 52 and 74, note 6. For Gentileschi's self-portraits, see most recently Jesse Locker, *Artemisia Gentileschi. The Language of Painting*, New Haven, CT 2015, 125-160, and Letizia Treves, "Artemisia Portraying Her Self", in: *Artemisia*, ed. Letizia Treves, exh. cat., London 2020, 64-77.

⁴⁸ On this issue, see the fundamental study by J. W. Saunders, "The Stigma of Print: A Note on the Social Bases of Tudor Poetry", in: *Essays in Criticism* 1 (1951), 139-164.

⁴⁹ Wendy Wall, *The Imprint of Gender. Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance*, Ithaca, NY 1993, esp. 180.

⁵⁰ Wall (1993), esp. 181-184 (for the situation in England); Elizabeth C. Goldsmith and Dena Goodman, "Introduction", in: *Going Public. Women and Publishing in Early Modern France*, ed. Elizabeth C. Goldsmith and Dena Goodman, Ithaca, NY 1995, 1-9, esp. 6-8 (for France around 1700). In Italy, the social climate for women writers was somewhat more liberal, but even here "screen paratexts" by men were common: cf. Virginia Cox, *Women's Writing in Italy, 1400–1650*, Baltimore 2008, esp. XXVI, 154-155. On the conditions of female writing, see also Rüdiger Schnell, "Sprechen – Schreiben – Drucken (Speaking – Writing – Printing). Zur Autorschaft von Frauen im Kontext kommunikativer und medialer Bedingungen in der Frühen Neuzeit", in: *Ein Platz für sich selbst. Schreibende Frauen und ihre Lebenswelten (1450–1700)*, ed. Anne Bollmann, Frankfurt a. M. et al. 2011, 3-41, esp. 40-41.

Iconic form and wording

[18] As far as the placement of the inscription in the picture is concerned, the signatures of women artists in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries differ little from those of their male colleagues. They make use – in a similar quantitative distribution – of the same devices that Burg has described for artists' signatures of this period in general.⁵¹ "Non-integrated" or "weakly illusionistic" signatures that float, as it were, on the surface of the picture are relatively rare – at least until the advent of the italic signature in seventeenth-century Netherlands⁵² – and occur mainly in portraits. The vast majority of women's signatures are illusionistically integrated into the reality of the picture; as in works of male artists, the typical places of application are architectural elements, floor slabs, or boulders in the foreground of the picture, pieces of furniture (especially arm rests and table edges), ribbons, belts and hems of clothing, as well as attributes of saints and similar objects, especially weapons. In contrast, the *cartellino*, that is, a piece of paper with the artist's name placed in the picture space, appears only sporadically;⁵³ this is consistent with the decline of its use among male artists, at least in Italy, from the Cinquecento onwards.⁵⁴ Also rare are hidden signatures, such as the one in Fede Galizia's *Portrait of Paolo Morigia* (Fig. 1). On the contrary, women artist's signatures are conspicuously often placed very prominently in the picture. Distinct examples of this tendency are Artemisia Gentileschi's painting *Jael and Sisera* in Budapest, discussed by Judith Mann,⁵⁵ or Sofonisba Anguissola's self-portrait miniature in Boston (Fig. 2), where a medallion containing a monogram (probably of her father Amilcare's name) and the elaborate signature forms the very focus of the composition.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Burg (2007), 321-388.

⁵² For this development, cf. Burg (2007), 521-541.

⁵³ Two examples can be found in works by Artemisia Gentileschi, where the *cartellino* may have been motivated by content; cf. Mann (2009), 97-99.

⁵⁴ Burg (2007), 342. In Spain, the *cartellino* was still popular in the seventeenth century: cf. Hellwig (2013), 323-324; Steven F. Ostrow, "Zurbarán's Cartellini. Presence and the Paragone", in: *The Art Bulletin* 99 (2017), 67-96, esp. 70-77.

⁵⁵ Mann (2009), 93-94.

⁵⁶ See Cole (2019), 33-39 and 156-157, no. 2. For an alternate but less convincing interpretation of the monogram, see Patrizia Costa, "Sofonisba Anguissola's Self-Portrait in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts", in: *Arte Lombarda* 126 (1999), 54-62.



2 Sofonisba Anguissola, *Self-Portrait*, ca. 1554, oil (?) on parchment, 8,3 × 6,4 cm. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, inv. 60.555 (photograph © Museum of Fine Arts, Boston)

[19] There are, however, a few instances where the integration of the name into the painting can be described as specifically 'female' – insofar as the signature of a male artist would not make sense in the same place or would not open up the same semantic field. A case in point is the first version of Fede Galizia's *Judith with the Head of Holofernes*, now in Sarasota (Fig. 3a): by inscribing her signature "Fede Galitia f(ecit) / 1596" on the blade of Judith's sword (Fig. 3b), the artist not only claimed authorship of the pictorial representation, but also, identifying with the biblical heroine, of the action itself. The literal meaning of her first name (*fede* = faith) reinforces the association with Judith, the epitome of female strength of faith and virtue.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Cf. Cheney, Faxon and Russo (2000), 81. For the painting, see most recently Giovanni Agosti and Jacopo Stoppa, in: Giovanni Agosti et al. (2021), 138-141, no. 17.



3a Fede Galizia, *Judith with the Head of Holofernes*, 1596, oil on canvas, 120,7 × 94 cm. The Ringling Museum of Art, Sarasota, inv. SN684 (© The Ringling Museum of Fine Arts, Sarasota)



3b Detail from Fig. 3a (photograph: Mary Vaccaro, Arlington)

Entirely unthinkable for a male colleague would have been a device like that of Clara Peeters, who signed six of her still lifes with her name on the handle of a bride's knife, possibly a depiction of her own one (Fig. 4a, b).⁵⁸

⁵⁸ See Anne Lenders, "Clara Peeters dekt de tafel. De objecten en etenswaren door de ogen van de zeventiende-eeuwse beschouwer", in: *De kunst van Clara Peeters* (2016), 49-65: 57. For the probable date of Peeters' wedding (1605), see Bastiaensen (2016), 25.



4a Clara Peeters, *Still Life with Cheeses, Almonds and Pretzels*, c. 1615, oil on panel, 34,5 × 49,5 cm. Mauritshuis, The Hague, inv. 1203 (© Mauritshuis, The Hague)



4b Detail from Fig. 4a (© Mauritshuis, The Hague)

[20] The wording of women artists' signatures also resembles that of their male colleagues in many respects. They are likewise predominantly written in Latin and – at least in Italy – often use the learned imperfect *faciebat* (or *pingebat*), which notoriously goes back to a passage in Pliny's *Historia naturalis*, instead of the simple *fecit*.⁵⁹ There are, however, recurring motifs that are typical of women's signatures, especially until the early seventeenth century: the most obvious is the indication of gender, marital status, and kinship, especially the reference to father or husband.

[21] Scholarship has mostly focussed on the self-qualification of women artists as *virgo*.⁶⁰ As far as I know, it is attested only in Italy, first in several signatures by Sofonisba, Lucia, and Anna Maria Anguissola,⁶¹ then in those by the young Lavinia Fontana,⁶² and finally in those by another

⁵⁹ On the origin of the *faciebat* formula, see Alessandro Della Latta, "Storie di un imperfetto. Michelangelo, Plinio, Poliziano e alcune firme di fine Quattrocento", in: Hegener (2013), 128-141; for its dissemination in the wake of Michelangelo's *Pietà*, Nicole Hegener, "Faciebat, non finito und andere Imperfekte. Künstlersignaturen neben Michelangelo", in: Hegener (2013), 188-231.

⁶⁰ See esp. the literature cited below, notes 109 and 119.

Bolognese painter, Antonia Pinelli (d. 1644), a pupil of Ludovico Carracci.⁶³ In addition, all four Anguissola sisters often mention their father's name, referring to themselves as "filia Hamilcaris".⁶⁴ The name of the father also appears in signatures of Catharina van Hemessen, Lavinia Fontana, Barbara Longhi, Fede Galizia, and Susanna Maria von Sandrart.⁶⁵ In a number of inscriptions Sofonisba Anguissola takes a step further: on the *Portrait of a Canon Regular of the Lateran* from 1556, she declares that she painted the work "coram Amilcare patre", that is, in the presence of her father,⁶⁶ and in two other cases even on his orders ("iussu patris"). One of these is the lost *Portrait of a Dominican Astrologer* (Fig. 5), where the sitter lifts his pen from the sheet with astronomical studies in front of him as if he had just written the signature "Sophonisba Angussola virgo / Iussu Patris Amilcaris / F. Cremonae MDL(...)" visible upside-down on the paper.⁶⁷ This picture possibly inspired Fede Galizia's *Portrait of Paolo Morigia* not only in terms of composition, as has already been suggested,⁶⁸ but also for the hidden signature.

⁶¹ Cole (2019), nos. 1-3, 9, 10, 12, 14, 16, 33 (Sofonisba); Caroli (1987), nos. 32, 34 (Lucia); Grasselli (1827), 20 (Anna Maria).

⁶² Maria Teresa Cantaro, *Lavinia Fontana bolognese. "Pittora singolare", 1552–1614*, Milan 1989, nos. 6, 7, 11, 12.

⁶³ Fiorella Frisoni, in: *Il museo come programma. Restauri del patrimonio artistico della città e della Diocesi di Imola*, ed. Grazia Agostini and Claudia Pedrini, exh. cat., Bologna 1985, 81-82; Jadranka Bentini, Gian Piero Cammarota and Daniela Scaglietti Kelescian, eds., *Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna. Catalogo generale*, vol. 3, Venice 2008, 164-166, no. 85; Bohn (2021), 52-55, 147.

⁶⁴ Cole (2019), nos. 3, 7, 10, 11, 13, 16 (Sofonisba); Caroli (1987), nos. 32-34, and *Sofonisba Anguissola e le sue sorelle* (1994), no. 44 (Lucia); Caroli (1987), no. 41, and Grasselli (1827), 20 (Anna Maria); Olivato (2016) (Europa). In the latter two signatures, Anna Maria and Europa also mention their elder sister Sofonisba.

⁶⁵ De Clippel (2004), 91-92, 122, nos. A8, A9, B4; Cantaro (1989), nos. 6-8, 10, 12; Zama (2013), 107, 111; Caroli (1989), no. 22; Terzaghi (2002), 106, no. 32; Morandotti (2004/05), 213; Sabina Lessmann, *Susanna Maria van Sandrart (1658–1716). Arbeitsbedingungen einer Nürnberger Graphikerin im 17. Jahrhundert*, Hildesheim, Zürich and New York 1991, 310, 318-322, 328, 330, 334-338, 344-362.

⁶⁶ Cole (2019), no. 3.

⁶⁷ For the painting, cf. Cole (2019), no. 13. The second instance of the "iussu patri" formula is the *Women at the Keyboard* in the Spencer Collection, Althorp (Cole [2019], no. 16) – in my opinion a self-portrait, as is also attested by the oldest transcription of the now illegible signature. Arcangela Paladini (1596–1622) also used the word *iussu* to indicate that her self-portrait in the Uffizi was commissioned by the Tuscan grand duchess Maria Magdalena of Austria (cf. Lisa Goldenberg Stoppato, "Arcangela Paladini and the Medici", in: Barker [2016], 81-97: 85).

⁶⁸ Harris and Nochlin (1976), 116; Cole (2019), 154.



5 Sofonisba Anguissola, *Portrait of a Dominican Astrologer*, 1555?, oil on canvas. Formerly Calligaris Collection, Terzo d'Aquileja (from: *Sofonisba Anguissola e le sue sorelle* [1994], 20)

[22] Changes in marital status often entailed also a change in the wording of the signatures. After her marriage to Paolo Zappi in 1577, Lavinia Fontana not only abandoned the designation as *virgo*, but also replaced the reference to her father with that to her husband, usually in the standardised formula "Lavinia Fontana de Zappis faciebat", to which she would add the year of the painting's creation.⁶⁹ Sofonisba Anguissola also stopped mentioning her father in the few known signatures from the time after she married the Genoese nobleman Orazio Lomellini (1579) and instead added her husband's family name to her own.⁷⁰ Her sister Europa, on the other hand, referred to both her father and her husband Carlo Schinchinelli in the inscription on *The Vocation of Saint Andrew* for the Schinchinelli family chapel: "Europa Amilcharis / Angussolae f(ilia) et / Caroli Schinchinelli / uxor p(inxit)".⁷¹

[23] It is obvious that the qualification as *virgo* and the husband's surname are unparalleled in male artist's inscriptions. Yet also the mention of the father or the teacher – which usually was the same

⁶⁹ From the period after 1577, Cantaro (1989) records only six signatures in which any reference to the husband is missing: nos. 28, 73, 76, 82, 91, 99. Susanna Maria von Sandrart was married twice and accordingly changed the wording of her signature several times: cf. Lessmann (1991), 302, 340 and 242-245, 364 respectively.

⁷⁰ Cole (2019), nos. 4, 5, 32. The reference to the husband is also found in signatures by Mechteld van Lichtenberg (see Helmus [2011]) and the engraver Diana Scultori (c. 1547–1612; see Paolo Bellini, ed., *L'opera incisa di Adamo e Diana Scultori*, exh. cat., Vicenza 1991, 213, 218, nos. 29 and 32). Among the exceptions to this rule are Catharina van Hemessen, whose two last signatures dating from after her wedding contain only her maiden name (Droz-Emmert [2004], 41), and Artemisia Gentileschi, who never signed with her husband's name.

⁷¹ *Sofonisba Anguissola e le sue sorelle* (1994), 310-311, no. 56.

person for women artists – seems to be a question of gender: while still occurring in men's signatures of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it becomes extremely rare after 1500.⁷²

[24] These characteristics of woman artists' signatures can easily be explained by the social and legal position of women in the early modern period, which generally necessitated a reference to a man, be it the father or the husband.⁷³ This does not apply, however, to two further peculiarities, both of which can be found in the signature of Catharina van Hemessen's self-portrait in Basel: EGO CATERINA DE / HEMESSEN ME / PINXI 1548 // ETATIS / SVÆ / 20 (Fig. 6).⁷⁴



6 Catharina van Hemessen, *Self-Portrait at the Easel*, 1548, oil on oak panel, 32,2 × 25,2 cm. Basel, Kunstmuseum Basel, gift of the Prof. J. J. Bachofen-Burckhardt-Stiftung 2015, inv. 1361 (© Kunstmuseum Basel)

The first is the specification of her age. True, in this case it is justified by the memorial function of the portrait; it also occurs in male self-portraits, especially north of the Alps.⁷⁵ However, Europa and

⁷² Burg (2004), 306-309. Apart from the artists mentioned by Burg, exceptions include Alessandro Allori, who not only refers to his teacher Bronzino in almost all his signatures but also four times to his father Cristoforo (cf. Lecchini Giovannoni [1991], nos. 133, 138, 141, 155), and Carlo Dolci (cf. Francesca Baldassari, *Carlo Dolci. Complete Catalogue of the Paintings*, Florence 2015, nos. 47, 84).

⁷³ For this aspect, see Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, Chicago et al. 1985, esp. 118, 285. Cf. also Christadler (2000), 192.

⁷⁴ De Clippel (2004), 77, no. A2; Kunstmuseum Basel, Sammlung Online, <http://sammlungonline.kunstmuseumbasel.ch/eMuseumPlus?service=ExternalInterface&module=collection&objectId=1077&viewType=detailView> (accessed February 22, 2022).

⁷⁵ For example in Dürer's self-portraits of 1498 and 1500 (Fedja Anzelewsky, *Albrecht Dürer. Das malerische Werk*, Berlin 1991, 154-156, 166-171, nos. 49, 66). De Clippel (2004), 79, suspects that, given the use of the third person, the age might have been added later by another person.

Anna Maria Anguissola as well as Giovanna Garzoni also recorded their (young) ages of thirteen, fifteen and sixteen years respectively in the signatures of religious paintings.⁷⁶ Sofonisba and Lucia Anguissola, on the other hand, sometimes underlined their youthfulness in inscriptions of portraits and religious works not by giving their exact age, but with the attribute *adolescens*.⁷⁷ North of the Alps, more mature female artists also noted their age in the signatures: in her last three manuscripts, written in the year of her death 1624, Esther Inglis stated that she had created the work "in the fiftie thre yeere of hir age".⁷⁸ She was possibly aware of her near end or at least saw these works as a special achievement in view of her physical condition, for in the dedication of one of these booklets, the *Cinquante Emblemes Chrestiens*, she mentions her "totering right [hand], now being in the age of fiftie three yeeres".⁷⁹ It is certainly for this reason that Rachel Ruysch gave her age in the signatures of eight still lifes painted in the last years of her life, between age seventy-six and eighty-four.⁸⁰ In the case of male artists, on the other hand, declarations of age are highly unusual, except in self-portraits: I know of only eleven examples in total from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁸¹

[25] The second peculiarity of van Hemessen's signature on her self-portrait concerns the grammatical form: the artist speaks of herself in the first person – EGO [...] ME PINXI. Such "ego signatures" are extremely rare in European art: for the period before 1300, Peter Cornelius Claussen was able to list only a dozen examples.⁸² Subsequently, in signatures by male artists the first person occurs in a *Pietà* by Giovanni da Milano⁸³ and a handful of works from the years around 1500,⁸⁴

⁷⁶ For Europa, see the *Annunciation* published by Olivato (2016); for Anna Maria see the lost *Virgin with Child and the Infant Saint John* described by Grasselli (1827), 20; for Garzoni see a *Holy Family* in private collection (Casale [1996], 32, no. 3).

⁷⁷ Cole (2019), no. 15 (transcribed as "Abolenscens") and no. 18; Caroli (1987), no. 33.

⁷⁸ Scott-Elliott and Yeo (1990), nos. 53-55 (the quote is from no. 53; the wording in no. 55 is similar, while the signature of no. 54 is written in French).

⁷⁹ Scott-Elliott and Yeo (1990), 81, no. 54.

⁸⁰ <https://rkd.nl/explore/images/38196>, <https://rkd.nl/explore/images/64635>, <https://rkd.nl/explore/images/69554>, <https://rkd.nl/explore/images/69556>, <https://rkd.nl/explore/images/193066>, <https://rkd.nl/explore/images/193081>, <https://rkd.nl/explore/images/193095>, <https://rkd.nl/explore/images/193523> (accessed September 25, 2019). Cf. Christina Strunck, "Hofkünstlerinnen. Weibliche Karrierestrategien an den Höfen der Frühen Neuzeit", in: *Künstlerinnen. Neue Perspektiven auf ein Forschungsfeld der Vormoderne*, ed. Birgit Ulrike Münch et al., Petersberg 2017, 16-33: 20.

⁸¹ Most of them are also by very young artists, such as Adamo Scultori, who signed an engraving at the age of eleven (Paolo Bellini, ed., *L'opera incisa di Adamo e Diana Scultori*, exh. cat., Vicenza 1991, no. 1), Camillo Procaccini, and Cristofano Allori (see below, paragraph no. 81). A special case is Carlo Dolci, who gave his age in signatures throughout his career, but except for two cases (Baldassari [2015], nos. 86, 163) always on the reverse or the stretcher, i.e. in a form not intended for the viewer.

⁸² Peter Cornelius Claussen, "Autorschaft als Egotrip im 12. Jahrhundert?", in: Hegener (2013), 76-89: 78.

⁸³ Burg [2004], 305, note 64.

⁸⁴ These are two self-portraits by Dürer (for which see above, note 72), Francesco Francia's *Pala Calcina* (Emiliano Negro and Nicosetta Roio, *Francesco Francia e la sua scuola*, Modena 1998, 149-150, no. 18) and Botticelli's *Nativity* in the National Gallery (Frank Zöllner, *Botticelli*, Munich et al. 2009, 266-267, no. 85).

only to virtually disappear after that date.⁸⁵ This is in stark contrast to the practice of women artists: besides Catharina van Hemessen, Artemisia Gentileschi uses the first person in *The Beheading of Holofernes* in the Uffizi, signed with the words "Ego Artemitia Lomi fec(i)",⁸⁶ Lucrina Fetti (c. 1590/99–1673) in her *Saint Barbara* (Rome, Strinati Collection; "[Lucrina] Fetti fecj l'Anno 1619 / in S.ta Orsola")⁸⁷ as well as Esther Inglis in no less than ten of her manuscripts.⁸⁸

[26] As already noted, the features described so far characterize especially the inscriptions up to the first quarter of the seventeenth century. In the following period, the signatures of both women and men become increasingly laconic and, at least in Italy and the Netherlands, are usually limited to the name or even a monogram, sometimes supplemented by the date and an "F" for "fecit" or "faciebat". One essential difference remains, however: while male artists usually abbreviate the first name or even omit it altogether, their female colleagues tend to write out their first names and often omit the surname instead. For the reasons outlined in the introduction, it is not possible to document this with statistical figures on a broad data basis; yet samples based on limited but representative selections of works clearly confirm this trend. The catalogue of the exhibition *A chacun sa grâce: femmes artistes en Belgique et aux Pays-Bas 1500–1950* registers fifty-six signatures of female artists born between 1500 and 1700; of these, forty-three – i.e., almost 77 percent – contain the first name fully written out (in three cases even without any surname), whereas in thirteen cases it is abbreviated or missing altogether.⁸⁹ Among their male colleagues of the same period, the ratio tends to be exactly the opposite: of the sixty signatures of men in the exhibition catalogue *Het Nederlandse Stilleven 1550–1720*, only fourteen (about 23 percent) mention the first name in full, while in the remaining forty-six it is present only as an initial or entirely left out.⁹⁰

The socio-cultural context: signature as a means of authentication

[27] Albeit inevitably superficial, this survey thus confirms the suspicion that women's signing practice differed in many respects from that of men. But how are the peculiarities of female artists' signatures to be explained?

[28] Insofar as this question is addressed at all in the literature, the prevailing tendency is to consider both the frequency and the wording of the signatures as an expression of the self-assurance of women artists, but also of their struggle for recognition in a professional environment

⁸⁵ The major exception is Carlo Dolci, who signed a number of paintings in the first person, but except for two cases (Baldassari [2015], 286-287, no. 163, and 322-323, no. 3) always on the reverse, in a form more reminiscent of private *ricordanze*.

⁸⁶ For this painting, see most recently: Francesca Baldassari, ed., *Artemisia Gentileschi e il suo tempo*, exh. cat., Milan 2016, 138, no. 28.

⁸⁷ Harris and Nochlin (1976), 127-129, no. 16. A photo of the signature is in the Fondazione Zeri, Bologna (<http://catalogo.fondazionezeri.unibo.it/entry/work/35978/Fetti%20Lucrina%2C%20Santa%20Barbara>; accessed November 4, 2019).

⁸⁸ Scott-Elliott and Yeo (1990), nos. 22, 23, 27, 30, 31, 33, 37, 38, 52, 54.

⁸⁹ Katlijne van der Stighelen and Mirjam Westen, *A chacun sa grâce. Femmes artistes en Belgique et aux Pays-Bas 1500–1950*, exh. cat., Ghent et al. 2000.

⁹⁰ Alan Chong, *Het Nederlandse stilleven: 1550–1720*, exh. cat., Amsterdam et al. 1999.

dominated by men and thus potentially or openly hostile.⁹¹ The numerous studies on the self-portraits of Sofonisba Anguissola, Catharina van Hemessen, and Lavinia Fontana also interpret these paintings – and the signatures they contain – as a confident self-fashioning of their exceptional role as female artists, or even as a subversive deconstruction of the image of women expected and demanded by the male gaze.⁹² The tacit assumption behind these readings is that women artists painted their self-portraits of their own free will and conceived them in complete autonomy.

[29] In contrast, I will argue here that the *fenomeno della firma* and the high number of female self-portraits are indeed determined by the particular position of women artists in early modern society; yet rather than a manifestation of an emancipated attitude, in my view they are a consequence of male prejudices against female creativity. In many cases, the initiative to sign her work and paint her own likeness probably came not from the artist herself but from her (male) environment: first and foremost her father, who typically was at the same time her teacher, but also from the audience, especially the patrons of these works.

[30] As scholarship has amply demonstrated in recent decades, the prevailing view during the Renaissance was that women were by nature physically and mentally inferior to men, indeed that they were a kind of "botched man".⁹³ Accordingly, women were considered incapable of genuine – that is, not merely reproductive – creativity.⁹⁴ Moreover, due to social barriers and norms of decency, women could not pursue an apprenticeship in a painter's workshop and certainly could not draw from the nude, so that as a rule they were denied the profession of artist; the few exceptions were mostly daughters of painters who were trained by their fathers.⁹⁵

Conversely, the few women who, against these odds, succeeded in working as artists often enjoyed enormous fame during their lifetime. A prominent example is Sofonisba Anguissola, whose works were sought after throughout Italy and beyond when she was only in her twenties, so that Philipp II summoned her to Spain as a lady-in-waiting and drawing teacher to his wife, but also as a portraitist. Yet, this phenomenon, which might seem paradoxical at first glance, is just the other side of the same coin, namely the disdain for female creativity. Since women were considered devoid of artistic talent, a skilled female painter was consequently regarded as a prodigy, even a miracle of nature.⁹⁶ It is therefore not surprising that in the age of the cabinets of curiosities, when

⁹¹ See a.o. Frances Borzello, *A World of Our Own. Women as Artists*, London 2000, 47-48; Bohn (2004), 114; Droz-Emmert (2004), 50; Mann (2009), 104; Bohn 2021, 145, 151.

⁹² See esp. Garrard (1994); Christadler (2000), 254-256 and *passim*; Droz-Emmert (2004), 49-97.

⁹³ See esp. Ian MacLean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman. A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life*, Cambridge 1980; Constance Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism. Literary Texts and Political Models*, Ithaca, NY 1990, 11-64; Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge 2008, esp. 17-51.

⁹⁴ See esp. the remarks by Giovanni Boccaccio, *De claris mulieribus*, LIX, 3, and Paolo Pino, *Dialogo di pittura*, Venice 1548, c. 12r. On this topic also Fredrika Jacobs, *Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa. Women Artists and the Language of Art History and Criticism*, Cambridge 1997; Woods-Marsden (1998), esp. 188; Christadler (2000), esp. 69-71.

⁹⁵ Borzello (2000), 20-32; Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society*, London 2007, 31-38.

⁹⁶ On the female artist as natural wonder, see esp. Ghirardi (1994), 37-39; Christadler (2000), 33-34; Julia Dabbs, *Life Stories of Women Artists, 1550–1800. An Anthology*, Aldershot 2009, 17.

meraviglia and *stupore* were central aesthetic concepts, the rare paintings by talented women were coveted collectors' items;⁹⁷ and this gave female artists a competitive advantage over their male colleagues, which in turn not infrequently provoked the latter's envy.⁹⁸ As Carlo Cesare Malvasia for instance reports in his life of Elisabetta Sirani, "invidi, e maligni" claimed that she was helped by her father Andrea, who attributed his own paintings to her "per renderle più rare, et ammirate, come operazione di femmina".⁹⁹

[31] Since it was thus not the artistic quality alone that defined the intrinsic and monetary value of an artwork by a woman, but at least as much the gender of its maker, it required authentication of authorship through a signature more urgently than one created by a man.¹⁰⁰ This necessity not only explains the frequency of women artists' signatures; it may also be the reason why they are often prominently placed and more elaborate than those of men, and why they hardly ever leave any doubt about the gender of the author – be it only by writing out the first name, be it by additional qualifications such as *virgo* or *filia*. From this perspective, the "ego signatures" also take on a deeper meaning. Especially the formulation *ego feci* in works by Catharina van Hemessen and Artemisia Gentileschi, with its combination of personal pronoun and full name, is reminiscent of signatures in notarial deeds, thus endowing the artists' inscriptions with a legal touch that reinforces their authenticating power. Since the extreme youth or – as in the case of Ruysch – the great age of the author was bound to increase the beholder's *meraviglia*, both very young and old women artists may have been induced to include their age in the signatures.

[32] Against this background, it is not surprising that Italian women painters signed their works for private collections at least as often as altarpieces. From the male artist's perspective, his name on a work on public display was useful because, despite the increasing emergence of a public that was well informed about art production through oral and written channels, it was always possible that foreigners, for example, might come across their works without expert accompaniment. In the case of cabinet paintings, on the other hand, the signature was much less needed, since the owner – who typically was also the patron or his heir – would usually know about the authorship of the works in his collection and would inform visitors accordingly. If the painting was by a woman, however, the host himself would be interested in the clearest possible authorial presence within the work, so that his guest would be convinced of and impressed by the marvel before his eyes. The stimulus to sign a work could therefore come just as much from the patron as from its female author.

[33] Direct evidence for this assumption is provided by a letter that the nobleman Girolamo Giordani sent to the painter Giovanni Francesco Guerrieri in Pesaro on 5 June 1653. Giordani expresses his anticipation about the imminent dispatch of a *Saint Jerome* by Guerrieri's daughter Camilla (1628–1694); in addition to instructions on suitable packaging, he also quite openly requests that the work be signed:

⁹⁷ Cf. Sheila Barker, "Introduction", in: Barker (2016), 5-14: 10.

⁹⁸ Cf. Strunck (2017), 25-26.

⁹⁹ Malvasia (1678), vol. 2, 478.

¹⁰⁰ With regard to eighteenth-century French women painters, this explanation has recently been proposed also by Charlotte Guichard, "Signatures, Authorship and Autography in Eighteenth-Century French Painting", in: *Art History* 41 (2018), 266-291: 279-282.

[...] et se alla detta sua figlia / piacerà di scriverci in qualche luogo il suo nome, con simili / parole / Camilla Guereria pingebat / Acciò che si sappia / esser quella opera di una Donna, non sarà se non ben fatto.¹⁰¹

[34] This same impulse presumably prompted the inscription on Fede Galizia's *Portrait of Paolo Morigia* around 1670 – and perhaps also the forging of Artemisia Gentileschi's signatures that has been suggested by Mary Garrard.¹⁰²

Signing and not signing as an index of heteronomy and emancipation

[35] One could conclude from the above that the female signing practice simply testifies to the skill with which self-confident women artists took advantage of market mechanisms to exploit their competitive advantages. In many cases – such as that of Gentileschi – this possibility cannot be ruled out or is even probable; yet there is circumstantial evidence to suggest that, at least in the case of adolescent women painters, it was primarily their family environment that encouraged them to sign and also influenced the text of the inscriptions.

[36] One of these clues is the apparent precociousness of early modern female artists, which Ann Sutherland Harris had already observed in 1976: from a strikingly large number of women painters we have reliable information about independent artistic work already in their teens, mostly thanks to their signatures.¹⁰³ The most spectacular example is the Swiss Anna Waser (1678–1714), who showed herself as a portrait painter at the age of twelve and proudly signed the picture: "Durch An(n)a Waser v(on) Zürich / im 12. Jar ihres Alters gemalt / in the year 1691" (Fig. 7).¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Cit. in Andrea Emiliani, *Giovanni Francesco Guerrieri da Fossombrone*, Bologna 1997, 215 ("And if it pleases your said daughter to write her name in some place, with similar words 'Camilla Guereria pingebat', so that one knows that it is the work of a woman, it can only be well done"). For Camilla Guerrieri Nati, see Eve Straussman-Pflanzer, "The Medici's First Woman Court Artist: The Life and Career of Camilla Guerrieri Nati", in: Barker (2016), 121-134.

¹⁰² Mary Garrard, "Identifying Artemisia: The Archive and the Eye", in: *Artemisia Gentileschi in a Changing Light*, ed. Sheila Barker, London and Turnhout 2018, 11-40: 22-23.

¹⁰³ Ann Sutherland Harris, "Introduction", in: Harris and Nochlin (1976), 13-44: 41-42.

¹⁰⁴ "By An(n)a Waser of Zurich / painted in the 12th year of her age / Anno 1691". For the painting, see *Kunsthhaus Zürich. Gesamtkatalog der Gemälde und Skulpturen*, Ostfildern 2007, 52.



7 Anna Waser, *Self-Portrait*, 1691, oil on canvas, 83 × 68 cm. Kunsthau Zürich, inv. 212 (© Kunsthau Zürich)

[37] This precociousness, however, is a consequence – positive in this case – of the exclusion of women from the workshop: At that age, their male colleagues at best would assist in the creation of their masters' works, apart from exceptional cases such as Dürer and Raphael, who also happened to be artists' sons. Since in Renaissance Italy even married men remained subject to the *patria potestas* unless they were expressly released from it by their father,¹⁰⁵ it is highly improbable that young women who still lived in the household and under the authority of their parents were able to pursue their artistic talent entirely on their own. Anna Waser's justified pride in her ability was undoubtedly shared by her parents and her teacher Johannes Sulzer, whose portrait is depicted on the easel; and it is fair to assume that the latter had guided her in the conception of both the self-portrait and the signature.

[38] That elements which I have identified as characteristic of signatures by women artists – in particular the mention of the father and the (youthful) age – are indeed primarily a sign of limited autonomy is suggested by the fact that some of the rare signatures of underage artists' sons display the same features. In 1577, for example, the sixteen-year-old Camillo Procaccini inscribed his earliest known painting, *Saint John the Baptist at the Spring*, with the words "Camillus / Her(culi): per(cacci) / ni fil(ius): Bon(oniensis): / fac(iebat): an(n)o E / tatis sue / XIX / 1577";¹⁰⁶ and in 1590, Cristofano Allori, aged only thirteen, signed a *Portrait of Count Ugo of Tuscany* as "adolescens Alexandri Bronzini All(ori) filius", similarly to Sofonisba and Lucia Anguissola.¹⁰⁷ It is unlikely that the two painters, who had barely outgrown boyhood, conceived and formulated these signatures on

¹⁰⁵ For this, see Thomas Kuehn, *Emancipation in Late Medieval Florence*, New Brunswick, NJ 1982.

¹⁰⁶ Daniele Cassinelli and Paolo Vanoli, eds., *Camillo Procaccini (1561–1629). Le sperimentazioni giovanili tra Emilia, Lombardia e Canton Ticino*, exh. cat., Cinisello Balsamo 2007, 136-138, no. 1. It remains unclear why Procaccini's age is increased by two years in the inscription.

¹⁰⁷ CHRISTOPHORVS / ALLORIVS ADOLESC / ENS ALEXANDRI BRO / NZINI ALL. FILIVS / FACIEBAT / A.D. MDLXXXX; cf. Miles L. Chappell, *Cristofano Allori 1577–1621*, exh. cat., Florence 1984, 30, no. 1 (with incorrect transcription).

their own. In all probability it was rather their fathers – Alessandro Allori and Ercole Procaccini – who urged them to use their youthful age and the established surname as an advertisement in order to launch them on the art market as their heirs.

[39] I suspect that, *mutatis mutandis*, this also applies to many women artists. The most emblematic case is that of Sofonisba Anguissola, which thus deserves further investigation. Central to the interpretation of her signatures is the definition as *virgo*, which appears no less than nine times in her paintings.¹⁰⁸ This expression as well as the explicit reference to the use of a mirror in the Boston self-portrait (Fig. 2) have often been associated with Pliny's account of the ancient painter Iulia of Cyzicus and the related chapter in Boccaccio's *De mulieribus claris* (where the artist's name is changed to Marcia owing to a translation error): she is said to have lived as a "perpetua virgo" and, among other works, painted her own portrait with the help of a mirror.¹⁰⁹ Pliny's brief passage about ancient women painters undoubtedly played a key role in shaping the image of the female artist in the early modern period as reflected in biographies, self-portraits, and signatures of women painters.¹¹⁰ In view of the fact that Sofonisba grew up in a highly educated patrician milieu, such a reference to an illustrious ancient model is plausible.

[40] However, the word *virgo* is not just a learned quotation from the antique but opens up a much more complex semantic field. First and foremost, it highlights the status of the artist as a young, unmarried, and chaste woman. In the aforementioned *Portrait of a Canon Regular of the Lateran*, the aspect of chastity is further emphasised by the words "coram Amilcare patre", which certify the presence of the father during the portrait session and thus protect the painter's reputation.¹¹¹

[41] Chastity was the fundamental female virtue in the early modern period;¹¹² the characterisation of the artist as *virgo* thus first of all indicates her general virtuousness. But since in Renaissance thought personal *virtus* and artistic performance were closely linked,¹¹³ it is also an indirect statement about the quality of her art. The attribute of virginity therefore became a central element of the early modern ideal image of the female artist, so that – in the wake of Pliny and Boccaccio – it not only plays an important role in contemporary biographies of many female

¹⁰⁸ See Cole (2019), nos. 1-3, 9, 10, 12, 14, 16, 33.

¹⁰⁹ Pliny the Younger, *Naturalis historia*, XXXV, 147; Giovanni Boccaccio, *De mulieribus claris*, LXVI. On this connection, see esp. Schweikhart (1992); Ghirardi (1994), 39-41; Christadler (2000), 114-116, 190-192, 223, 231.

¹¹⁰ With reference to biographies, see Dabbs (2009), 25. On Pliny's reception in the Renaissance, see the overview by Sarah Blake McHam, *Pliny and the Artistic Culture of the Italian Renaissance. The Legacy of the "Natural History"*, New Haven, CT et al. 2013; on his role for the image of the woman artist, esp. 6-7, 80-81, 227.

¹¹¹ Woods-Marsden (1998), 199; Cole (2019), 50.

¹¹² See Margaret L. King, *Women of the Renaissance*, Chicago 1991, 29, 93-94.

¹¹³ On this connection, see Jana Gaul, "Einleitung zum Leben des Andrea del Castagno und des Domenico Veneziano", in: Giorgio Vasari, *Das Leben des Filippo Lippi, des Pesello und Pesellino, des Andrea del Castagno und Domenico Castagno und des Fra Angelico*, ed. Jana Gaul and Heiko Damm, Berlin 2011, 45-51: 47-48.

artists,¹¹⁴ but appears even in inventory entries.¹¹⁵ The extent to which the idea of the youthful *virgo* still informed the image of the woman painter in the late seventeenth century is evidenced by the pseudo-signature on Galizia's portrait, which, as many authentic signatures from the Cinquecento, stresses both the author's young age and her virginal status.

[42] However, the emphasis on virginity also occurs in other fields of cultural production in the early modern period, for example in literature. Rüdiger Schnell has argued that women's writing for a larger audience was tolerated if they negated, as it were, their womanhood and renounced any sexual activity; thus, male editors often stated in their introduction that the author was a *virgo*.¹¹⁶ A comparable phenomenon is the idealisation of female humanists such as Cassandra Fedele, Alessandra Scala, and Isotta Nogarola as "non-women" by their male colleagues Guarino Guarini and Angelo Poliziano, who emphasise in their letters the virginity of their female correspondents.¹¹⁷

[43] Although the differences noted above in female signing practice in literary works on the one hand and paintings on the other suggest that women's activity in the visual arts generally enjoyed better social acceptance than in literature, at least in the sixteenth century women painters were nevertheless an unusual phenomenon that also triggered negative reactions.¹¹⁸ Therefore, the step into the public art world by artists such as Sofonisba Anguissola or Lavinia Fontana was still in need of legitimisation. The *virgo* signatures thus presumably also have an apologetic aspect: while emphasising her femininity, the artist at the same time underlines that she is not a sexually active woman and is therefore more entitled to engage in artistic activity like a man.

[44] Mary Garrard, on the contrary, has argued that by using the word *virgo* Sofonisba Anguissola intended to fashion herself as a *virago*: an independent, self-determined woman who wants to remain unmarried and is endowed with masculine qualities; in this reading, her self-portraits are "coded self-expression disguised as proper femininity", in that her presentation as a "not-woman" was meant to signify "like a man" for insiders.¹¹⁹ According to Garrard, Anguissola's pictures had

¹¹⁴ Both Marcus van Varnewijk (1568) and Karel van Mander (1603/04), for instance, emphasise in their short account of Margareta van Eyck that she remained a virgin until the end of her life (Diane Wolfthal, "From Margarethe van Eyck to Agnes van den Bossche: Writing of the Early Netherlandish Female Painters", in: *Essays on Women Artists. "The Most Excellent"*, ed. Liana De Girolami Cheney, Lewiston et al. 2003, 19-40: 22-23); and in very similar terms Cristofano Bronzini, c. 1620, characterises Barbara Longhi as "rarissima nel conservarsi Vergine sinché visse" (cit. in Sheila Barker, "The First Biography of Artemisia Gentileschi: Self-Fashioning and Proto-Feminist Art History in Cristofano Bronzini's Notes on Women Artists", in: *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz LX* [2018], 405-435, 429).

¹¹⁵ Michaelina Woutiers for example is twice qualified as a "Jungfraw" in the inventory of Archduke Leopold Wilhelm (1659): "Katlijne van der Stighelen, 'Prima inter pares'. Over de voorkeur van aartshertog Leopold-Wilhelm voor Michaelina Woutiers [ca. 1620–na 1682]", in: *Sponsors of the Past. Flemish Art and Patronage 1550–1700*, ed. Hans Vlieghe, Turnhout 2005, 91-116: 91.

¹¹⁶ Schnell (2011), 19-20.

¹¹⁷ See Lisa Jardine, "'O Decus Italiae Virgo' or The Myth of the Learned Lady in the Renaissance", in: *The Historical Journal* 28 (1985), 799-819. On the idealisation of the chastity of female humanists see also King (1991), esp. 193, 195-198.

¹¹⁸ See in particular Pino (1548), c. 12r.

¹¹⁹ Garrard (1994), 580-582, 589. Along the same lines, Christadler (2000), 222, suggests that the artist claimed masculinity by obscuring the letters G and O of the word VIRGO on the Boston self-portrait; cf. most recently

"dual meanings": one for the client, "who interpreted their expression in conventional terms", and a second "as daring, socially heretical critiques of those very conventions", which questioned the traditional image of women and the patriarchal social order.¹²⁰

[45] Yet as Joanna Woods-Marsden has already noted, such a perspective is somewhat anachronistic: it is rather unlikely that the young Sofonisba in her early twenties would have been able to recognise as acutely the misogynistic structures of the system in which she had grown up.¹²¹ The crucial point, however, is that she, too, was by no means autonomous in her image production, but was controlled and directed initially by her teachers and then by her father; and in her case, this assumption can be supported by several clues. We know from numerous documents that Amilcare Anguissola systematically promoted his daughters, introducing them to the neighbouring courts and sending their works to princes and other influential personalities, undoubtedly also in the hope of receiving benefits in return.¹²² How coveted Sofonisba's self-portraits were among collectors is documented most plainly by Annibal Caro's oft-quoted letter to Amilcare of December 1558, in which the writer asks for one of these works so that he can show his guests "due meraviglie insieme, l'una dell'opera, l'altra della Maestra" – that is, at the same time the marvellous artwork and the image of the prodigy that had realised it.¹²³ It is precisely this attitude that fostered the production of female self-portraits discussed above.¹²⁴

[46] Sofonisba therefore hardly painted her numerous self-portraits on her own initiative, as is commonly assumed, in order to confidently present her own image to the world, but at the request or behest of her father: "iussu patris", as two of her signatures bluntly state.¹²⁵ For this reason, it can be assumed that Amilcare at least approved of, if not actively contributed to shape, his daughter's self-presentation both in the picture and in the accompanying signature; and that he ensured that it met the expectations of the male recipients.

[47] For lack of firm evidence, it remains an open question whether Sofonisba agreed to the marketing of her image and person or whether she complied with her father's wishes with increasing reluctance.¹²⁶ That her self-portraiture was largely determined by Amilcare's agenda and not her own free will, however, can be deduced *ex negativo* from her later work. From the period

also Cole (2019), 14.

¹²⁰ Garrard (1994), 616.

¹²¹ Woods-Marsden (1998), 208.

¹²² Mina Gregori, "Fama e oblio di Sofonisba Anguissola", in: *Sofonisba Anguissola e le sue sorelle* (1994), 11-46: 12-13; Woods-Marsden (1998), 8, 193; Caroline P. Murphy, "The Economics of the Woman Artist", in: *Italian Women Artists from Renaissance to Baroque*, exh. cat., Milan 2007, 23-30: 25.

¹²³ Cit. in *Sofonisba Anguissola e le sue sorelle* (1994), 365. On that passage, see esp. Woods-Marsden (1998), 6.

¹²⁴ On the demand for female self-portraits, see also Borzello (2016), 28.

¹²⁵ Paternal control over Sofonisba's image production has been hinted at sporadically in the literature (for example by Christadler [2000], 192, and Cole [2019], 32), but without any consequences for its interpretation.

¹²⁶ Evidence for the second possibility could be the fact that in the summer of 1559, Amilcare Anguissola had to reclaim the self-portrait sent shortly before to Annibale Caro – clearly because he needed it for more important purposes and had no other self-portrait at hand. Cf. Caro's letter of July 14, 1559, in: *Sofonisba Anguissola e le sue sorelle* (1994), 365-366.

after 1559, when she left her parental home, only one recognised self-portrait survives, now kept in the Musée Condé, Chantilly.¹²⁷ Rather than in her youthful self-portraits, Sofonisba's emancipation is thus manifest in the fact that as a mature woman she increasingly eluded the demands for her portrait. A similar change is evident in her signatures – or more precisely in their muting. From the roughly five decades of her career after 1560, only five inscribed paintings are known, three times fewer than from the ten years before; and except for the double surname "Lomelina (et) Anguissola", their terse wording corresponds to the signing style of male artists.¹²⁸ In contrast, none of the large portraits from her Spanish period bears her name;¹²⁹ and since in the same years the court portraitists Alonso Sánchez Coello and Jorge de la Rúa signed a whole series of their portraits,¹³⁰ we can assume that Sofonisba's reluctance was not due to the new context in which she was working.¹³¹

[48] Evidence of a comparable, albeit less pronounced, emancipation can also be observed in Lavinia Fontana. After her marriage, she remained under the authority of her father, to whom she had to hand over her income according to the marriage contract.¹³² Although Lavinia continued to sign her paintings regularly until the end of her life, a closer look at the relationship between signed and unsigned works over the forty or so years of her career (Fig. 8)¹³³ reveals a significant change.

¹²⁷ Cole (2019), 122 and no. 37, who, however, expresses doubts about both the identity of the sitter and Sofonisba's authorship. Cole has convincingly shown, moreover (122), that that the painting once in the Hermitage which is documented by an engraving by Johann Nepomuk Muxel is not, as had been previously assumed, a self-portrait. The sudden ebb of Sofonisba's self-portrait production has been noted, as far as I can see, only by Woods-Marsden (1998), 8, and Cole (2019), 134. Woods-Marsden explains it by the fact they were functional in obtaining a court appointment for the artist and thus, after her arrival in Spain, were of no further use to her. This is certainly true, yet only part of the picture, since the demand for her image undoubtedly persisted.

¹²⁸ Cole (2019), nos. 4, 5, 32, 57, and Ruiz Gómez (2019), no. 49. For the dating of three signed paintings with debated chronology in the period before 1560, see *Sofonisba Anguissola e le sue sorelle* (1994), nos. 14, 19, 20, and Cole (2019), 119-122.

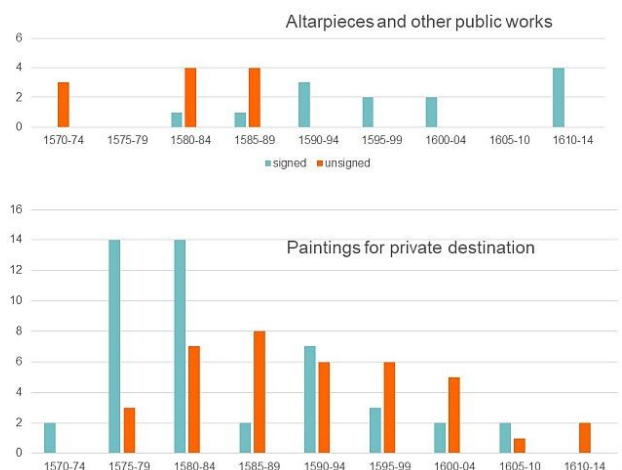
¹²⁹ On these works, see most recently Cole (2019), 123-133, and Almudena Pérez de Tudela, "Sofonisba Anguissola at the Court of Philip II", in: Ruiz Gómez (2019), 53-73.

¹³⁰ See the examples in Stephanie Breuer-Hermann, *Alonso Sánchez Coello y el retrato en la corte de Felipe II*, exh. cat., Madrid 1990, nos. 11, 12, 17, 24-27, 31, 33, 34, 38, 44.

¹³¹ Woods-Marsden (1998), 195, explains the lack of signatures on the Spanish works with the fact that Sofonisba, as a lady-in-waiting of noble rank, could not lower herself to the level of painters belonging to the artisan class. However, this restriction did not concern the manual work itself but only its payment. Mary Stuart, for instance, was famous for her embroideries, which she signed with her initials; cf. Michael Bath, *Emblems for a Queen. The Needlework of Mary Queen of Scots*, London 2008.

¹³² Cantaro (1989), 9; Caroline P. Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana. A Painter and Her Patrons in Sixteenth-Century Bologna*, New Haven, CT 2003, 43-44.

¹³³ The graphic is based on the catalogue raisonné by Cantaro (1989).



8 Distribution of signed and unsigned paintings in the oeuvre of Lavinia Fontana by destination and year of origin (author)

In the early years, she especially signed her paintings for private collections, while the majority of works on public display remained without inscription. This relationship gradually reversed in the course of the 1580s and especially the 1590s, until after the death of her father in 1596, the artist's signing practice largely aligned with that of her male colleagues. The decline in paintings for private destination in Fontana's final years that the graphic seems to document probably does not reflect reality but a problem of attribution: we know from the sources that she carried out numerous portrait commissions during her Roman years from 1604 onwards,¹³⁴ but almost none of them are known. This discrepancy must be due to the fact that most of them were not signed and thus are still awaiting discovery: a case in point is the recently resurfaced *Portrait of Bianca degli Utili Maselli with Six of Her Children* of 1604/5.¹³⁵

[49] These considerations warrant the conclusion that the signing practice of the young Sofonisba Anguissola and Lavinia Fontana was strongly conditioned by their male environment and that only as mature artists they freed themselves from this imprint. I suspect that this also applies to other women artists – for example to Catharina van Hemessen, who possibly did not abandon painting after her marriage in 1554, as is often assumed,¹³⁶ but no longer signed her works,¹³⁷ or to the young Artemisia Gentileschi. The authenticity of the signature on her earliest dated painting, *Susanna and the Elders* in Pommersfelden, has been repeatedly called into doubt because of the early date of 1610, when the artist was only seventeen years old,¹³⁸ yet in the light of what has been said above, it makes sense precisely for this reason. The fact that Artemisia did not learn to

¹³⁴ Cantaro (1989), 16.

¹³⁵ *Important Old Master Paintings and Sculpture*, Sotheby's, New York, January 26th, 2012, no. 48. Among my (not comprehensive) list of twenty-five plausible additions to Fontana's oeuvre published since 1989, only six paintings are signed, three of which were painted in the early years of her career up to 1582, while only two date from 1595 or later, and these are both altarpieces for public destinations. Conversely, of the nineteen unsigned paintings, twelve are dated around 1590 or later.

¹³⁶ De Clippel (2004), 72.

¹³⁷ Droz-Emmert (2004), 41.

¹³⁸ See the review of the literature by Judith Mann, in: *Artemisia Gentileschi e il suo tempo* (2016), 112, no. 17.

write until a few years later does not prove, as has recently been claimed, that the date in the inscription has been misread so far,¹³⁹ but is rather evidence of her father's role in affixing it. On the other hand, that women artists such as Marietta Robusti or Barbara Longhi seldom or never signed could be explained by their fathers' decision not to launch them for their own careers, but to employ them primarily as collaborators in the workshop.

[50] From a broader perspective, the study of women artists' inscriptions illustrates that the signature – like the self-portrait – should not be considered an autonomous self-expression of the artist, but rather as a kind of interface that mediates between the artist and his audience. Similar to a business card, whose appearance is governed by a number of conventions, the signature reflects not only the image that the artist wants to give of himself, but also that which his audience expects of him. This extends to the presence of the signature itself: the example of the young women painters shows that – contrary to the story-telling in early modern art literature from Filarete to Vasari, which sought to emphasise the autonomy of the *artifex*¹⁴⁰ – it was by no means always the artist who wanted to immortalise himself by inscribing his name on the work.¹⁴¹ This is an aspect that research on signatures should reflect more strongly in the future.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Giovanna Murano, "Artemisia Lomi Gentileschi (1593–1654 ca.)", in: *Autographa. Autografi di italiani illustri*, II.1: *Donne, sante e madonne (da Matilde di Canossa ad Artemisia Gentileschi)*, ed. Giovanna Murano, Imola and Bologna 2018, 210-221: 211.

¹⁴⁰ On the signature in early modern art literature, see Alessandro Della Latta, "'Vi scrisse il suo nome'. Literarische Rezeption der Künstlersignatur", in: *Die Namen der Künstler. Auktoriale Präsenz zwischen Schrift und Bild*, ed. Karin Gludovatz and Alessandro Della Latta (forthcoming).

¹⁴¹ An example of a corresponding case involving a male artist is the contract for a portrait commission between the Delft city government and Michiel van Mierevelt from 1624, which explicitly obliged the artist to sign his works (cf. Adams [1993], 584).

¹⁴² This article is a slightly expanded English version of a paper presented in January 2017 at the conference *Die Namen der Künstler. Auktoriale Präsenz zwischen Schrift und Bild* at the Gemäldegalerie and the Freie Universität in Berlin and forthcoming in German in the conference proceedings. I am very grateful to Alessandro Della Latta and Karin Gludovatz for inviting me to the conference and allowing me to publish my contribution beforehand in the *RIHA Journal*. Furthermore, I would like to thank all those who supported my research with advice and assistance, especially Adriana Augusti, Hannah Baader, Gianluca Bocchi, Cristina Bragaglia, Iris Brahms, Wolfgang Brückle, Michael W. Cole, Elena Fumagalli, Liesbeth Helmus, Rossella Lari, Angelo Maria Monaco, Jessica Richardson, Michael Rocke, Massimiliano Rossi, Elisabetta Scirocco, Jörn Steigerwald, Christina Strunck, Anchise Tempestini, Mary Vaccaro, and Evelyne Vitali. The article was essentially completed in January 2020; literature published since then could only be taken into account selectively.

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Samuel Vitali studied art history, history and Russian literature at the universities of Zurich and Bologna. In 1996 he completed his master's degree with a thesis on the reception of antiquity and the study of nature in the work of Nicholas of Verdun. From 1997–1999 he was a doctoral fellow at the Bibliotheca Hertziana, then a member of the Swiss Institute in Rome. From 2001–2004 Samuel Vitali worked as a freelance curator for the Galleria d'Arte Moderna in Bologna and from 2002–2004 as an assistant at the Kunsthistorisches Institut of the University of Zurich (chair of Prof. Peter Cornelius Claussen). In 2004 he earned his Ph.D. with a thesis on the Carracci's Romulus Frieze in the Palazzo Magnani, Bologna. After working as a curator at the Kunstmuseum Bern from 2004 to 2010, he has been editor of the *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* since 2010.

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