

# Domenichino Colorist? Malvasia, Modern Critical Reception, and a Letter to Angeloni

## Abstract

Although Annibale Carracci has been championed for his synthesis of northern-Italian *colore* and central-Italian *disegno*, the innovations in *colore* of his prominent student, Domenichino, have been largely overlooked by modern critics. Yet his early biographers, Carlo Cesare Malvasia and Giovan Pietro Bellori, praised his innovations as a colorist. This essay examines three factors that have contributed to the negative assessment of Domenichino's coloring. Beginning with an analysis of how Malvasia undercut his own positive assessment of Domenichino's modernity and originality, I turn to Roger de Piles's conception of what constitutes excellence in coloring and its persistence in modern views. To counter the prevailing notion that Domenichino's letter to Francesco Angeloni was a manifesto of his anti-colorist stance, I provide a close reading of that letter and its debt to Aristotelian philosophy. The essay concludes with a brief look at Domenichino's innovations as a colorist and proposes that his originality consisted of replacing the Carraccesque model of light and dark alternations with a unique way of grouping hues and organizing color in space.

## Introduction

The critical reception of Domenichino's coloring has been almost non-existent or skewed to the negative.<sup>1</sup> In their recent edition and translation of Carlo Cesare Malvasia's *Life* of Domenichino, the editors remarked on the inappropriateness of such negativity and suggested that Malvasia be construed as offering a corrective to the traditional view:

In this tantalizing brief comment about Domenichino's modern and distinctive use of color and of his appreciation of Castiglione, Malvasia offers a corrective to any simplistic view of Domenichino as a painter primarily focused on *disegno*. This passing glance casts him as an innovator within the coloring tradition initiated by the Carracci.<sup>2</sup>

Nearly two decades earlier, Kristina Herrmann-Fiore had made a similar suggestion near the end of her essay on Domenichino's *La caccia di Diana*. "Sembra alludere alla novità del colore del Domenichino anche il Malvasia," she wrote, and then quoted the same passage.

So let us now examine Malvasia's statement that Domenichino "invented a use of color that was also modern, distinctively his own, and formidable, halfway between the delicacy of Guido and the force of Guercino."<sup>3</sup> Considering that Malvasia sought to revise the history of painting by placing Bologna at the origins of a regional style that had *pastosità di colorito*, *tenerezza* and *morbidezza*, his praise of Domenichino's coloring seems at first surprising, for these Bolognese qualities are opposite the firmly modeled and distinctly contoured figures of Roman classicism for which he coined the adjective *statuino*.<sup>4</sup> Yet Malvasia went to great lengths to present a history based upon documents and testimony rather than pure opinion, and thus acknowledged Domenichino's reputation as one of the greats of Bolognese art. However, in regard to Domenichino's coloring, he was more negative than ambivalent despite the above quoted statement of praise.

In reconsidering Domenichino's importance historically as an innovator in coloring, I will also focus on why he has been viewed as a proponent of *disegno*. Given that the historical position of the Carracci was to forge a synthesis of *disegno* and *colore*, and Domenichino was one of their foremost students, I will argue that Zampieri also forged an innovative synthesis of *disegno* and *colore*. His path, however, departed from that of the Carracci. An impediment to recognizing his contribution to coloring is the modern view of a dichotomy between *disegno* and *colore*, in which Domenichino's letter to Francesco Angeloni, published in Giovan Pietro Bellori's *Life* of the artist, has been taken as a manifesto of his anti-colorist preference for *disegno*. A reevaluation of that letter will be undertaken here.<sup>5</sup>

The following discussion is divided into four parts. In the first, Malvasia's conflicted response to Domenichino as a colorist is examined. The second ad-

1 For a detailed chronological history of Domenichino's reception from his lifetime to modern times, see Perini Folesani 1996; on the charge of plagiarism, which stained his reputation in his lifetime, see Cropper 2005.

2 Malvasia (1678) 2013, p. 197, n. 263.

3 "Ma torniamo a Domenico che, benché s'inventasse un colorito anch'egli moderno, proprio e tremendo, mezzo tra la delicatezza di Guido e la forza di Guercino", Malvasia (1678) 2013, p. 109.

4 Summerscale 2000, p. 42; Malvasia (1678) 2013, p. 57; see also p. 162, n. 67. On the originality of Malvasia's terminology, Perini Folesani 1981, p. 227; on the anti-Classicism inherent in the concept *statuino*, Pericolo 2015. On the development of a critical vocabulary to describe facture, see Sohm 1991 and Suthor 2020, pp. 112–161. I regret that I did not have an opportunity to consult Alessandra Gallizi Kroegel's edition of Malvasia's *Life* of Francesco Francia which appeared in 2021.

5 The letter appeared at the end of Bellori's *Life* of Domenichino, Bellori 1672, pp. 358–359. All translations by this author.

dresses the heritage of later seventeenth-century attitudes towards excellence in coloring as due to virtuoso brushwork and sensuous surface, neither of which characterizes Domenichino's classicist approach but which have been used to dismiss his importance as a colorist. Part three presents a close reading of Domenichino's letter to Angeloni to argue against its misuse as testimony of an alleged anti-colorist attitude. The concluding section provides a brief overview of Domenichino's innovations in coloring.

### What Malvasia Saw

It is well-established that Malvasia preferred Guido Reni above all the other Bolognese artists but, in accepting Domenichino's international reputation, presented him as one of the four great painters of his native city. His praises, however, were mingled with criticism, not only for Domenichino's lacking as a colorist, especially in facture, but also for his failings in the qualities Malvasia had singled out as the artist's best: invention, the expression of the *affetti*, and erudition.<sup>6</sup>

The passage praising Domenichino's coloring is unabashedly positive in its choice of adjectives and in its position in the narrative of the artist's life. Malvasia distinguished Domenichino's coloring as a middle way between the two extremes: on one side was Guido's delicacy, which was a consistent thread throughout his life but especially significant in his second, so-called "white manner."<sup>7</sup> On the other extreme was Guercino's early style with its bold contrasts. In his *Life of Guercino*, Malvasia presented Guercino as the antithesis to Guido who had briefly toyed with Caravaggio's manner but chose to proceed in another direction. In Malvasia's words, Guercino "took up the strong coloring and naturalness of Caravaggio, [and] ennobled it with much exactitude, adding greater grace to it."<sup>8</sup>

Presenting Domenichino as a middle way between delicacy and fierceness, however, fails to convey the specific visual qualities of his art, nor does it tell us how his coloring was modern (*moderno*), uniquely his own (*proprio*), and formidable (*tremendo*). It does, however, place Domenichino in a privileged position because the path of moderation was the most virtuous and the most likely to lead to happiness, as Aristotle explained in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.<sup>9</sup> In optics, it was the middle or moderate range that allowed seeing to lead to certain knowledge; too much or too little of the essential conditions (distance, transparency, etc.) led to errors, untenable judgments, and, worse, to delusions.<sup>10</sup> Thus, while *mezzo* tells us little about coloring, it centers Domenichino on a virtuous path. Perhaps Malvasia, despite countering the bias of Vasari's *Lives*, recalled that Raphael was also characterized as the one who rose to prominence by selecting a mean between the two extremes.<sup>11</sup>

6 Malvasia (1678) 2013, pp. 40–41: "[...] Guido was a more profound draftsman and more refined and noble in the parts of painting, Domenichino was more expressive in rendering the emotions, more fertile in invention, and more erudite."

7 That Malvasia was also ambivalent towards Reni's white manner is analyzed in Puglisi 2021, pp. 175–180 and discussed in Malvasia 2019, II: pp. 36–45 but see also p. 24 on Malvasia's claim that Guido's lighter colors influenced Domenichino.

8 Malvasia 2019, II: p. 55 and n. 212.

9 See the discussion online at [www.plato.stanford.edu](http://www.plato.stanford.edu) by Richard Parry and Harald Thorsrud, "Ancient Ethical Theory", in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2021 Edition).

10 On the moderate range in the optics of Alhacen and his debt to Aristotle, see Smith's "Introduction" to Alhacen 2001, I: pp. xxvi–xxviii and lx–lxiii. On the delusory risks of vision, Clark 2007, especially pp. 329–364.

11 Williams 2017, p. 25 translates "Raphael, then, [...] having recognized that Fra Bartolomeo of San Marco had a passing good manner of painting, well-grounded draftsmanship, and a pleasing manner of coloring [...] took from him what appeared to him to suit his need and fancy, namely a middle course both in drawing and in coloring." Pericolo noted that Malvasia (Malvasia 2019, II: pp. 55–56 and n. 213) made a similar claim for the coloring of a minor painter, Ercole Fichi, who boasted of having combined the sweetness of Guido with the strength of Guercino.

Malvasia was hampered by the vagueness of a critical language to describe and evaluate coloring. While pictorial invention could be critiqued on the model of literary criticism, suitable models for discussing color were lacking aside from Pliny's account of acclaimed painters who worked in monochrome, in four colors, or who toned down the harshness of their colors with an *atramentum*.<sup>12</sup> Ancient color terms were similarly challenging to early modern humanists, and are still challenging today.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, a vocabulary of art critical terms developed by analogy: on the one hand was the ability of painted color to match the truth and beauty of color in nature; on the other hand were adjectives that implied expressive choices – strong, weak, fierce, robust, sweet, harsh, lively, and fresh.<sup>14</sup>

Bellori had already published his own *Life of Domenichino* (1672) which included one of his most eloquent and sensitive analyses of coloring in the description of Domenichino's altarpiece of *The Last Communion of Saint Jerome*.<sup>15</sup> Malvasia was less positive than his Roman compatriot in his discussion of that altarpiece.<sup>16</sup> He admitted that the work was generally regarded as "one of the most beautiful pictures ever made by a painter's brush"; yet, as Elizabeth Cropper pointed out, "he lost no opportunity to criticize it."<sup>17</sup> Certainly he considered it more important to defend Domenichino's invention against the charge of plagiarism than to defend the execution of the work, which had not been an issue of controversy.<sup>18</sup> His personal dislike comes through when he describes Domenichino's "sharp-edged, hard and forced" execution as inferior to the "softer ease" of Agostino's altarpiece of the same subject.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, although Malvasia assessed Domenichino as second to Guido among the four Bolognese artistic descendants of the Carracci, and developed an historical approach that combined biographical anecdotes, critical reception, letters, account books, and interviews to present a complex view, he could not free his critical views from his own taste.<sup>20</sup> He relied on the testimony of others, not as a dispassionate journalist committed to "two-siderism"; but selectively to build a

12 There has been much discussion of the *atramentum* described by Pliny; for a recent analysis, see Rinaldi 2020. For the importance of his discussions in early modern Italy, see McHam 2013.

13 The Bolognese naturalist Ulisse Aldrovandi explored the many color terms, on which see Mugnaini 2000 and Pugliano 2015. On the challenge of translating Greek color terms, see Bradley 2009.

14 Truth to nature in Caravaggio was the feature which Rosen 2019, pp. 82, 88, 97–98 suggested was Bellori's reason for including him among the select list of moderns. For an overview of praise of Caravaggio's coloring, see Bell 1993.

15 Bell 2002 provides a detailed analysis of the concepts underlying Bellori's praises.

16 He had adequate opportunities to see the work during his decade in Rome (1637–1647) and many subsequent winters; see Summerscale 2000, pp. 9–16 and n. 48.

17 Malvasia (1678) 2013, p. 18.

18 Cropper 2005 presents the history of this charge and examines its impact on the reception of Domenichino and on seventeenth-century ideas of originality and novelty.

19 Malvasia (1678) 2013, p. 56: "Tutta l'opra poi insieme mostrare così palesemente la fatica, così tagliente per tutto, così dura e forzata [...]." For criticism of Domenichino's invention, Cropper in Malvasia (1678) 2013, pp. 18–20. Earlier in the description he contrasted Domenichino's putti for lacking grace in contrast to Agostino's putti described as "tender, lively, and natural [...] who pose effortlessly."

20 Summerscale 2000, pp. 48–67 on Malvasia's historical method and use of documents and quotations. Cropper in Malvasia (1678) 2013, p. 1, subtitled her introductory essay "An Ambivalent Legacy" and wrote "Malvasia [...] also expressed a parallel detachment from, and sometimes even outright disapproval of, the painter's work [...] struggled against this disposition, recognizing the artist's undoubted qualities despite his critical ambivalence toward both the work and the man."

case with evidence.<sup>21</sup> His choice of adjectives betrays his lower valuation of Domenichino's color and facture. For example, when he highlighted the emergence of Domenichino's own style at Sant'Onofrio (when the artist was still working closely with Annibale), he described it as a mix of Guido's sweet manner tempered with the boldness of the Carracci but "diminished enough in force" to be recognizable as Domenichino's own.<sup>22</sup> By voicing criticisms in the words of others, despite not claiming them as his own opinions, he undercut positive assessments by failing to dismiss those criticisms as meritless. Passionate about defending his hero against the charge of plagiarism in *The Last Communion of Saint Jerome*, he rebutted criticisms of the lack of invention and defended a notion of imitation that allowed for improving on a model. No such vision supported his assessment of Domenichino's value as a colorist.

Malvasia's lengthy description of the *Martyrdom of Saint Agnes* provides a splendid example of his ambivalence. The enormous altarpiece hung in Bologna in the convent of Sant'Agnese, making it a prime example of Domenichino's Bolognese roots. One of four detailed analyses of paintings in a text that has very few descriptions (in contrast to Giovan Pietro Bellori, who employed ekphrases as paratexts in his *Vite* to praise and exemplify the unique qualities of each artist's approach), Malvasia used these scant descriptions to engage a critical issue that went beyond mere praise.<sup>23</sup> In the case of the *Martyrdom of Saint Agnes* (fig. 1), that issue was an expressive beauty that surpassed Raphael.<sup>24</sup> Opening with the colorful phrase "Let the malicious squawk [...]" he summarized their criticisms of the upper half. He then shifted to a totally different aspect in discussing the lower half. Thus, the critics' claim "that the upper part is too rough and sharp-edged without color perspective and that the figures of spectators on the loggia are too minute" is not mitigated by the praise of facture or of competent perspective in the lower part, which he introduced with words of praise: "yet the lower part is so miraculous that nothing but a brush from paradise could ever match it."<sup>25</sup> Description then centers on the expression of the *affetti* and the impact of the feigned actors on the beholder, leaving the reader to wonder if Malvasia also saw the limitations of the upper half but considered them offset by the success of the lower half.

Today, it is easy enough to see what critics objected to in the upper half in the artist's use of perspective, color perspective, and handling of paint. In looking through this lens, we see that there is no gradual degradation of diverse hues into blue as Leonardo da Vinci would recommend in his *Trattato della pittura* (1651),

21 Perini Folesani 1989; Summerscale 2000, especially pp. 18–19. See also Rosen 2018, pp. 89–90 for a sensitive analysis of Bellori's paraphrase of the opinions of others to frame his own interpretation of Caravaggio's historical importance between the criticisms of old-fashioned painters and the slavish imitation of his novel style by the young; Bellori used paraphrase and quotation more sparsely than Malvasia, effectively distancing himself from the judgments of others.

22 Malvasia (1678) 2013, pp. 50–51: "e nelle quali così imitò la maniera de' Carracci, se non fossero un po' diminuite, per di essi sariano prese, non essendosi per anche buttato alla dolce maniera di Guido e, tempratala colla carracesca, formatane la sua nuova e propria." For the Sant'Onofrio lunettes, see Spear 1982, I: pp. 137–138, cat. 15. For reproductions in color, Malvasia (1678) 2013, pp. 290–292, figs. 6–8.

23 On Malvasia's sparse inclusion of "descriptions", see Cropper in Malvasia (1678) 2013, p. 15; on Bellori's embrace of this approach and his refinement of ekphrasis, see Bernstorff in Bellori (Domenichino) 2022, pp. 322–324, with select bibliography in n. 19.

24 Cropper in Malvasia (1678) 2013, pp. 15 and 17.

25 Malvasia (1678) 2013, p. 77–78: "Gracchino pure quanto fanno i malevoli della parte superiore che sia troppo cruda, e tagliante, senza prospettiva del colore; le figure spettatrici su quella loggia troppo acuto al punto; ché questa parte di sotto è così miracolosa, che altro che un pennello di paradiso a quel segno non era mai per giungere."



- ◀ 1 Domenichino (Domenico Zampieri), *Martyrdom of Saint Agnes*, 1618–1622, oil on canvas, 533 × 342 cm. Bologna, Pinacoteca Nazionale (photo su concessione del Ministero della Cultura – Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna)



- 2 Guido Reni, *Assumption of the Virgin*, 1598–1599 c., oil on copper, 58 × 44,4 cm. Frankfurt, Städel Museum (photo Städel Museum, Frankfurt a.M.)

which Malvasia certainly knew and may have expected to see.<sup>26</sup> Instead, Domenichino used coloring to imitate recession into space by reducing the figures' clarity of contour and contrast. Guido had done the same in his early *Coronation of the Virgin with Saints Catherine, John the Baptist, John the Evangelist, and Benedict* (1597–1598), his lost *Vision of Saint Hyacinth* (1598–1599), and his small copper *Assumption of the Virgin* (fig. 2, ca. 1599).<sup>27</sup> The small copper in the Städel Museum, Frankfurt, makes a particularly instructive comparison due to a similar arrange-

26 Leonardo 1651, Chapter 165 may have been the most influential approach to color (and aerial) perspective, but there were many others, on which see the index to Farago/Bell/Vecce 2018 s.v. “aerial perspective, color perspective”. Although the *Trattato della pittura* was not published until 1651, it circulated in Rome, Florence, Bologna, and Lombardy, leaving open the possibility that Domenichino knew it, although there is no specific evidence pointing to this as there is for Guido Reni: see Barone 2015; Bell 2019. Malvasia included Vinci's volume in the tailpiece to his life of the artist as a reference to his learning (Malvasia (1678) 2013, II: p. 24, fig. 2). The artist would have known of Leonardo's writings through his friendship with Zaccolini, on which see Bell 1997b and Bell 2003.

27 For illustrations of Reni's works, see Malvasia 2019, II: fig. 5, p. 161; figs. 8–9, pp. 164–165.



3 Detail of fig. 1

ment of angels in the heavenly realm. Domenichino's diminutions are most evident in the distant angels above the musicians. Compared to Guido, however, the effect falls flat because most of the heavenly figures float at the same approximate distance from the front of the painting as the earthly protagonists on the ground below.<sup>28</sup> Only those in the deepest part of the semicircle and those in the second and third degrees of distance diminish in size and focus, in accordance with the principles of perspective.

A detail of three angels in heaven (fig. 3) shows us how these diminutions in coloring take place over three degrees of distance. The foremost angel receiving the palm of martyrdom is in the first degree of distance, where it is not diminished in size or color. The more distant angel playing the keyboard instrument appears with less contrast, softer contours, and slightly darkened hues. The most distant angel with a songbook has soft edges, blurred features, and lighter hues. These diminutions would have been sufficient had Domenichino not designed the spatial arrangement so that the heavenly and earthly scenes were at the same distance from the foreground plane. Instead of representing a steeply inclined plane into the heavenly depths with figures at regular intervals, as Guido had done, Domenichino feigned Christ to hover directly above Agnes. This makes the Holy Trinity more palpable but limits the number of figures that can fit onto the semicircular platform clouds, restricting the gradients of diminution.<sup>29</sup> The angel at the keyboard appears closer to the foreground angel who receives the palm of martyrdom; moreover, the physical proximity (on the surface) of the feet of Christ and God the Father to the angels playing string instruments draws them closer due to the equidistance effect.<sup>30</sup>

28 In comparison, in Reni's *Assumption* the angels diminished in acuity and contrast are also diminished in size and clearly situated at a greater distance than the distinctly modeled protagonists and music-making angels.

29 On platform clouds, derived from theatrical productions, see Buccheri 2014.





4 Domenichino (Domenico Zampieri),  
*The Flagellation of Saint Andrew*,  
 1608–1609, fresco, 405 × 610 cm. Rome,  
 San Gregorio al Celio, Oratorio di Sant'Andrea  
 al Celio (photo Soprintendenza Speciale  
 Archeologia Belle Arti e Paesaggio di Roma)

For similar reasons, the tiny figures on the balustrade above the architrave were criticized for being too small. Domenichino had reduced those distant figures in size and color to suggest the vastness of the colossal Roman building in which he conceived the event taking place. However, he failed to include enough intervening figures to clarify the spatial depth. In early modern optical theory, distance could be perceived accurately only when there were measured intervals that the intellect could add up to appraise the total. If a wall or other element blocks the position on the ground plane, the judgment of distance will err.<sup>31</sup> In a typical Albertian perspective, the pavement grid serves as a gauge when the viewer sees where the feet of the figures touch the ground. In the *Martyrdom of Saint Agnes*, however, the groupings of protagonists and onlookers standing on the ground allow only a few glimpses into the depth. The ground plane is obscured in darkness and unable to provide the measured intervals required for accurate judgment.

A decade earlier, in *The Flagellation of Saint Andrew* at San Gregorio al Celio (fig. 4), Domenichino successfully integrated the extreme diminution of distant figures to less than half the size of those in the foreground. The diminution worked effectively to imitate a great distance because the pavement grid provided the requisite measured intervals, and the young man seated on a high pier in the middle ground provided a scale of reference for the figures on the stage. Filippo Gagliardi (1606–1657), a Roman specialist in perspective who worked

30 Guido avoided this problem in his *Assumption of the Virgin* (London, National Gallery, dated 1606–1607 in Malvasia 2019, II: fig. 51) with larger groupings (three or four adjacent figures on a diagonal lead the eye into depth) and more empty space around the foremost figure of the Virgin; and in his *Assumption* for Genoa (1616–1617 in Malvasia 2019, II: fig. 143), where the ascended Virgin is also feigned to be directly above her empty tomb and flanked by semi-circular masses of angels. The equidistance effect was described by Gogel 1969.

31 Alhacen 2001, I: pp. xxxi–xxv and II: pp. 448–457 (3.66–3.93).



for the Barberini and collaborated with Andrea Sacchi, singled out Domenichino's competence in perspective in his unpublished *Trattato di prospettiva*.<sup>32</sup>

Domenichino demonstrated a similar competence in *La caccia di Diana* (Bellori's title for the large painting that shows Diana and her nymphs at play) (fig. 5), where he incorporated even more daring diminutions of the distant figures – one-third the height of those in the foreground.<sup>33</sup> He compensated for the absence of a pavement grid by subdividing the landscape into alternating bands of light and dark and masterfully employing color perspective in diminishing gradients of color intensity.<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, what the squawking critics viewed as failure in the *Martyrdom of Saint Agnes* was not due to any lack of competence but rather to a lack of knowledge of scientific optics, the study of which would have explained why those figures above the ground look too large or too small when judged in comparison to those in the foreground. Perhaps Domenichino's realization of his inadequacy led him to welcome instruction from the Theatine expert in optics and perspective, Matteo Zaccolini (1574–1630).<sup>35</sup>

Malvasia made only one remark about the coloring of the lower half: that it was “good.” This is a telling comment, and a reader familiar with Malvasia's subtle

5 Domenichino (Domenico Zampieri), *Caccia di Diana* (*Diana and Her Nymphs at Play*), 1616–1617, oil on canvas, 225 × 320 cm. Rome, Galleria Borghese (photo Scala/Ministero della Cultura/Art Resource, NY)

32 On Gagliardi's unpublished treatise in the Accademia di San Luca, Rome, see Fagiolo dell'Arco 1996, pp. 273–274 and Fara 2014, pp. 391–397. Praise of Domenichino also occurs on pp. 11 and 62 (also numbered 58).

33 Bernstorff in Bellori (Domenichino) 2022, pp. 393–395; Herrmann-Fiore 1996.

34 Herrmann-Fiore 1996, pp. 248–250, proposed that his mastery of color perspective arose from study with Zaccolini.

color analyses of Guido's *lividetti* will wonder whether his reticence was perhaps due to antipathy towards Domenichino's tight handling of paint. Was he unimpressed by the rich and subtle variety of hues and tones Domenichino obtained in the lower half?<sup>36</sup> Did he even notice that the reds range from orangish vermilion to deep scarlet to a shimmer of satiny pink, the blues from greyish to a cerulean sheen? Did he notice the innovative quality of Domenichino's approach to variable color modeling, more forceful in the central group to capture the intensity and drama of Agnes's death? He missed an opportunity to demonstrate why Domenichino's painting was "ten times lovelier than anything by Raphael" (quoting what Guido allegedly told a friend), since Raphael was Zampieri's model for these coloristic devices.<sup>37</sup> By describing his coloring as *tremendo*, Malvasia evokes the difficulties Domenichino attempted and the qualities of horror, severity, fierceness, and greatness associated with this word.<sup>38</sup> He makes clear the considerable skill and planning of Domenichino's approach, despite his lack of *facilità* that too often led to judgments of his art as "labored" and "forced".

## Part 2. Modern Critical Reception

Malvasia's assessment of good coloring as spontaneous brushwork and sensuous surface was not atypical, as the *querelle* of the French Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture makes clear.<sup>39</sup> Taste was already shifting, as evident in Roland Fréart de Chambray's disparagement of the *amateurs* of his time. In a slim volume from 1666, Chambray wrote:

They exaggerate magnificently in order to make one admire the Freshness and Loveliness of the Coloring, the Freedom of the brush, the bold Touches, the Colors thickly impastoed and well nourished, the separation of the Masses, the Draperies well cast, the rare Folds, the Masterful Strokes, the Grand Manner, the Muscles strongly felt, the beautiful Contours, the beautiful Tints, and the Softness of the Flestones, the beautiful Groups, the beautiful Passages, and a great many other chimerical beauties of this kind, that one never saw in the Works of the great Ancient Painters [...].<sup>40</sup>

35 Bell 2003, p. 84 and pp. 88–93. See also Bell 1997b. In my forthcoming edition of the manuscript, tentatively titled *Matteo Zaccolini – Prospettiva del colore – Color Perspective*, Vol. I: A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation, ed. Janis Bell and Margherita Quaglino; Vol. II: Color in Classicism, ed. Janis Bell, Turnhout, forthcoming, I return to the controversy surrounding the date of their interactions, but do not discuss the *Martyrdom of Saint Agnes*.

36 Malvasia 2019, II: p. 42 for Pericolo's analysis of Malvasia's sensitivity to Guido's coloring.

37 On Raphael's use and, perhaps, invention of these coloristic devices, see Bell 1997a. I address the importance of Raphael's coloring to Domenichino in my forthcoming edition of Zaccolini's *Prospettiva del colore* (Zaccolini 1622). Oy-Marra in Bellori (Sacchi) 2020, pp. 179–181, independently reached the same conclusion in her study of Bellori's *Vita* of Andrea Sacchi; Bernstorff in Bellori (Domenichino) 2022, p. 266, n. 471 remarked on Domenichino's possible inspiration from Leon Battista Alberti's description of the varied colors in a picture of Diana with her surrounding nymphs.

38 GDLI 1961–2002, XXI, pp. 302–303. Malvasia could not have been ignorant of Vasari's use of "*terribilità*" to describe Michelangelo's overcoming of difficulties, on which see Summers 1981, p. 236; Puttfarken 2005, pp. 109–114.

39 For the history of this debate or "quarrel", see Teyssèdre 1957 and Montagu 1996, who identified 1671 as the beginning of hostilities between two groups of academicians. Perini Folesani 2013, p. 267 suggested Malvasia was the first to emphasize *colore* over *disegno*. Oy-Marra in Bellori (Sacchi) 2020, pp. 171–181, considered the importance Bellori gave to Sacchi's coloring as a response to Malvasia and De Piles, independently reaching the same conclusion as this author.

40 Posner 1993, p. 584, quoting from Chambray's *Idée de la perfection de la peinture*, Le Mans 1666.

By the time Malvasia published *Felsina pittrice* in 1678, Roger de Piles (1635–1709) was advocating for the sensuous coloring of Titian and Peter Paul Rubens as a more emotionally and visually appealing approach to painting than the dominant trend supported by the Académie royale, who revered Nicolas Poussin.<sup>41</sup> These trends have a bearing on the modern reception of Domenichino’s coloring because he was devalued as a colorist, along with Raphael and other moderns who delineated contour and emphasized the solidity of forms with firm modeling.

At the turn of the century, in *Cours de peinture par principes* (1708), in an appendix called “Balance des peintures,” De Piles consolidated his assessments of nearly every painter of merit into four categories: composition, design, coloring, and expression. Domenichino received high scores in design and expression but only a 9 out of 20 in coloring. This grade was not one of the lowest (those went to Polidoro da Caravaggio who worked in monochrome [0], and Pietro Testa, who mainly produced prints [0]). Slightly higher grades were earned by Michelangelo Buonarroti [4], Giulio Romano [4], Leonardo da Vinci [4], and Eustache Le Sueur [4], and just a few points higher were given to Lucas van Leyden [6], Parmigianino [6], Frans Pourbus [6], Nicolas Poussin [6], and Pierino del Vago [7]. By contrast, Giorgione and Titian both got the highest scores in coloring [18], with Rubens, Van Dyck, and Rembrandt close behind at 17.

Data on prices in the art market shows that painters with De Piles’s highest total scores commanded the highest prices over the next two centuries – perhaps as much a result of his impact as his prescience.<sup>42</sup> As De Piles’s *Abrégé de les vies des peintres* and his *Cours de peinture par principes* were widely distributed pocket-sized books written for a general audience rather than for specialists, they quickly became the grammar books of wealthy gentlemen seeking to become connoisseurs and collectors; they were translated and reprinted in numerous editions.<sup>43</sup> Consequently, De Piles’s association of *coloris* with bold brushstrokes and the practice of massing chiaroscuro became entrenched in art criticism.

By 1671, the debate between the proponents of *dessin* and *coloris* became polarized around issues broader than the merits of the old masters as models.<sup>44</sup> The Académie royale controlled art instruction and, having been founded to raise the status of the fine arts, depended upon distinguishing the intellectual component of the fine arts from the mechanical crafts.<sup>45</sup> Leonardo da Vinci’s *Trattato della pittura*, with its French translation *Traité de la peinture*, was published in 1651 and soon adopted by the Académie as a teaching tool. Leonardo expounded on the progression of art education with a theoretical foundation, not as mere *techne* but as knowledge acquired from studying nature and art. He warned against the risks of young students plunging in too quickly without a solid foundation.<sup>46</sup> Thus, debates about the merits of the *Traité de la peinture* spurred debates on art education. Those promoting the freedom to draw directly on the canvas with colors challenged foundational practices and traditional working methods. Those who sided with Leonardo on the necessity of founda-

41 He published a French translation with commentary of Charles Alfonse Dufresnoy’s Latin poem, *De arte graphica – L’art de la peinture* in 1668, in which he applauded the painterly style of Titian and Rubens. His *Dialogue sur la coloris* (1674) brought debates about the Venetian school to the public. On De Piles’s knowledge of Bolognese trends, and particularly of Malvasia’s attention to *colore*, Perini Folesani 2013, pp. 267–268.

42 Ginsburgh/Weyers 2008; Graddy 2013, suggest he was prescient.

43 Jacques Thuillier, introduction to De Piles 1989, p. xxi; see also the historical evaluation by Alpers 1995.

44 Teyssèdre 1957 for the classic overview of the controversy in France; for early modern Italian debates, see Poirier 1987 and Lingo 2023.

45 Posner 1993, pp. 584–585, n. 13; for debates about working from a live model, Michel 2018, pp. 241–248.

46 Leonardo 1651, Chapters 1, 3, 4, and 12.

tional knowledge aligned with *dessin*, while the *coloris* faction promoted the freedom to work directly on the canvas.<sup>47</sup>

Although this brief synopsis overlooks many other factors that figured into the debates, what is critical for Domenichino's reception as a colorist (and for the reception of classicizing painters, especially Raphael and Poussin) is that a binary opposition between drawing and color was later systematized into the language of art history. In his *Principles of Art History (Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe: das Problem der Stilentwicklung in der neueren Kunst, 1915)*, Heinrich Wölfflin molded a modern formal analysis in the heritage of De Piles.<sup>48</sup> Among five complimentary structural principles underlying the visual language of art, Wölfflin contrasted a linear to a painterly style, a closed to an open form, and a planar structure to one built from diagonals into depth. Having associated the painterly, open, and diagonal orientations with the "Baroque," seventeenth-century painters like Domenichino and Poussin inadvertently became anachronistic representatives of the "classic." Wölfflin had summed up the principles of classicism in his *Classic Art (Die klassische Kunst: Eine Einführung in die italienische Renaissance)* of 1899; in that framework, drawing was dominant, and color was inferior.<sup>49</sup> Although the limitations of these dichotomies were soon pointed out by pioneering scholars of "Baroque classical" painters – Ann Sutherland Harris on Andrea Sacchi, Charles Dempsey on Annibale Carracci, and Elizabeth Cropper on Pietro Testa – these dichotomies nevertheless persist, especially outside the specialized field of Italian Seicento painting.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, it is no surprise that Domenichino's first modern biographer, Evelina Borea (1965), took the position that Domenichino's paintings reveal the "absolute pre-eminence of *disegno* over *colore*."<sup>51</sup> Nor is it surprising that Rudolf Wittkower, in his influential survey of Baroque art in Italy, presented Domenichino as a Carracci follower who supported the "classical-idealist theory" of Giovanni Battista Agucchi (1570–1632) and "sided, as one would expect, with the extreme classical point of view by exalting *disegno* (line) at the expense of *colore* (color)."<sup>52</sup> Richard Spear took a more balanced view in his unsurpassed monograph on the artist: he explored Domenichino's use of coloring to organize and subdivide the spaces at the Cappella dei Santi Fondatori in Grottaferrata, and he noted the artist's modal facture – rough brushstrokes for coarse actors and fine strokes for the refined ones.<sup>53</sup> As the decoration of this chapel was an independent commission obtained when Annibale was still alive, the considerable attention Spear gave to the coloring is noteworthy. Nevertheless, he concluded that Domenichino departed from his Carracci teachers by emphasizing *disegno* over *colore*.

47 Lingo 2023 convincingly argues for a focus on the direct application of color to canvas, refining the objections raised by Poirier 1987 to its modern reconstruction as a competition between the importance of *disegno* and *colore* in valuing the excellence of painters.

48 Alpers 1995, p. 299.

49 Wölfflin's *Classic Art and Renaissance and Baroque (Renaissance und Barock: Eine Untersuchung über Wesen und Entstehung des Barockstils in Italien, 1888)* presented these formal differences so articulately and convincingly as to inspire several generations of historians to focus on formal analysis, on which see Podro 1982, pp. 98–116.

50 Harris 1977; Dempsey 1977; Cropper 1984. As only one example of the persistence of this dichotomy, Golahny 2009, pp. 113–114 considered the rough/smooth dichotomy in Rembrandt and his critics as a transalpine continuation of the *disegno*–*colore* dichotomy in sixteenth-century Italy.

51 Borea 1965, p. 59, quoted by Herrmann-Fiore 1996, p. 252, n. 92.

52 Wittkower (1958) 1973, p. 39.

53 Spear 1982, vol. 1: pp. 53–54 considers this an innovation with roots in sixteenth-century Bolognese mannerism.

[Domenichino] could profit from their achievements [having synthesized Northern *colore* with Central Italian *disegno*] and strike out on his own more by means of selective emphases than anything one could call eclecticism. Secondly, his own theoretical position decidedly favored *disegno* over *colore*, which means there was no question of his searching for an even balance between what he considered to be unequal components of painting.<sup>54</sup>

He cited Domenichino's letter to Francesco Angeloni to support the artist's theoretical position and emphasized the affinity of his theory with Giovanni Battista Agucchi. Contemporary sources claimed Agucchi formed his ideas on beauty and perfection with input from Domenichino.<sup>55</sup>

Agucchi has been widely acknowledged as the first to formulate a "classic-idealist" theory in which the artist imitates nature selectively by forming an idea of beauty based upon nature refined by the study of Raphael and the antique. His ideas were recorded in a treatise on painting, part of which was published posthumously by Giovanni Antonio Massani in his edition of Carracci's prints of laborers (1646) and in an eloquent description of Annibale Carracci's *Sleeping Venus* (Chantilly) published in Malvasia's *Felsina pittrice*.<sup>56</sup> But did Agucchi favor *disegno* over *colore*? And was Spear justified in concluding that "the thrust of the letter is a defense of *disegno* as the foundation of art-making, or a Central Italian rather than a North Italian stance"?<sup>57</sup>

Historians before Spear had reached a similar conclusion, although Denis Mahon had viewed the letter as a repudiation of eclecticism and Rensselaer Lee as an embrace of it.<sup>58</sup> Lee also thought Domenichino's letter to Angeloni read as a rejection of the importance Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo (1538–1592) gives to *colore* in "making it equal in importance to *disegno*."<sup>59</sup> Lee erred in devaluing the importance of *colore* in the Carracci's approach, an importance well documented via their travels to Parma and Venice to copy works by Correggio, Titian, Tintoretto, and Veronese, artists whose importance Domenichino upheld through his study of Venetian paintings in the Aldobrandini collection in Rome.<sup>60</sup>

These questions raise two significant issues regarding the nature of the Carracci's synthesis and whether Domenichino departed from it conceptually.<sup>61</sup> Agucchi eloquently described the Carracci's practice of combining the best qualities of past artists to create something new. This paralleled a respected literary form of imitation which had precedents in art theory in the ancient story of

54 Spear 1982, vol. 1, pp. 33–34.

55 Spear 1982, vol. 1, p. 28. Malvasia (1678) 2013, pp. 51–54 on his early years with the Agucchi.

56 Massani (Mosini) 1646; Agucchi's treatise with annotations was published by Mahon 1947 in Appendix 1, pp. 235–258. The recent edition by Sapori 2015 brings much new information on the persons involved. On Malvasia's description of the *Sleeping Venus*, see Summerscale 2000, p. 52.

57 Spear 1982, vol. 1, p. 30.

58 Mahon 1947; Lee 1951, pp. 211–212. The term "eclecticism" is now understood more broadly as judicious or synthetic imitation (see ahead) and debunked as an anachronistic concept. Pericolo 2020 points out in his review of David M. Unger that Denis Diderot's definition of eclecticism still rings true (although Diderot is a century later than Carracci); however, the pejorative associations it took on in the nineteenth century make it a poor word choice for describing early modern Italian approaches to imitation. On the shortcomings of "eclecticism" to the theory of synthetic imitation embraced by Torquato Tasso and Agucchi, see also Hutson 2020.

59 Lee 1951, p. 211: "All Domenichino is saying is that Lomazzo's eclectic prescription makes color equally important with line." Note that Domenichino has already stated that by *disegno* he does not mean line.

60 On the latter, see Puglisi 2019. Barcham/Puglisi 2001, pp. 86–87 provide a list of Veronese's paintings in Rome in the first three decades of the seventeenth century.

61 Domenichino studied with Ludovico and Agostino Carracci in Bologna, arrived in Rome early in 1602 where he worked with Annibale until the latter's death in July 1609.

Zeuxis selectively combining features from beautiful maidens to compose a perfect beauty. Agucchi's formulation had considerable influence due to his connections in Rome with the Aldobrandini and with their nephew, Francesco Angeloni, Bellori's mentor.<sup>62</sup>

Bellori's *Lives* were once considered a manifesto of *disegno*, given his allegiance to Roman antiquarianism and his close friendships with Domenichino and Poussin. However, our view of Bellori has shifted in the last fifty years. Anna Palluchini's perceptive analysis of Bellori's sensitivity to coloring as an "evolution of taste" and Giovanni Previtali's emphasis on the importance of light and color in his introduction to Borea's edition of the *Lives* were significant turning points.<sup>63</sup> Bellori can no longer be characterized as a proponent of *disegno* over *colore*. This was made clear by Marieke von Bernstorff in her recent edition of Bellori's *Life* of Domenichino; she recognized that Bellori "assigned color a role equal to that of drawing and also sensitively considered the more painterly-technical aspects of the work of art, at the same time ascribing to them an importance that goes beyond craftsmanly bravura."<sup>64</sup> She credited Bellori with recognizing Domenichino's bravura when, in discussing his *Landscape with a Boy Spilling Wine*, he praised the painter's technical mastery while evoking the performative and transformative miracle of painting and considered his coloring an essential feature of his expression of the inner state of his characters.<sup>65</sup> Thus, it seems to me that interpreting Domenichino's letter as a declaration of the superiority of *disegno* to *colore* also merits revision, as does the concept of *colore* as weighted towards facility and facture.<sup>66</sup> In the remainder of this essay, we will look closely at Domenichino's letter to Angeloni before turning to the innovations as a colorist that mark him as both modern and moderate.

### Part 3. Domenichino's Letter to Angeloni: Text and Interpretation

Francesco Angeloni (1587–1652) was a novelist, antiquarian, and collector of considerable renown who developed a close friendship with Domenichino. He had close ties with Agucchi, and tutored the young Bellori, later appointing him as his

62 Bellori's debt to Agucchi was first recognized by Mahon 1947, pp. 265–271; on his relationship to Domenichino, see Ginzburg Carignani 1996; on his importance to Malvasia, see Summerscale 2000, p. 14, n. 40 and p. 52 on Angeloni's familiar relationship to Aldobrandini.

63 Palluchini 1971, pp. 287 and 293; Previtali, introduction to Bellori 1976, reprinted in Bellori 2009 with a postscript by Tomaso Montanari. The revision of Bellori's role is still underway, with the series of thirteen volumes edited by Elizabeth Oy-Marra, Tristan Weddigen, and Anja Brug printed by Wallstein Verlag. In the volume on Giovanni Lanfranco [Bellori (Lanfranco) 2019], Oy-Marra emphasized Bellori's ambivalence while highlighting as Lanfranco's best characteristics those associated with bravura coloring (*franchezza, prestezza, celerità, and facilità*); in the volume on Andrea Sacchi [Bellori (Sacchi) 2020], she stressed the importance given to coloring as the central theme of Sacchi's life.

64 Bernstorff in Bellori (Domenichino) 2022, pp. 387–388.

65 Bernstorff in Bellori (Domenichino) 2022, p. 385. Much thanks to the anonymous reviewers for recommending Bernstorff in Bellori (Domenichino) 2022 and specifying the following passages dealing with color: p. 17, n. 14 (on *lineamento*); pp. 36–37 (praise of coloring); p. 88, n. 155; p. 90 n. 147 (on aerial perspective); n. 151 (on *unione*, color harmony, and the parity of *disegno* and *colore*); and pp. 345–347 (on Lomazzo and the letter to Angeloni).

66 The limited view of color as facture and execution of material colors overlooks the importance of *chiaroscuro* as a part of coloring in Leon Battista Alberti, Leonardo da Vinci, and numerous Italian authors of the Cinque- and Seicento. Although later French theorists such as Roland Fréart de Chambray (*Idée de la perfection de la peinture*, 1666) distinguished *chiaroscuro* from color, the earlier Italianized painter and theorist Charles Alfonse Dufresnoy laid out the elements that fall under color in his *Observations sur la peinture* (lines 74–89, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des manuscrits, Français 12346, dated by Thuillier 1965, p. 193, to 1647) to encompass light, aerial perspective, weather, object color, color combinations, relief, union, fierceness, and other features that make for good painting.

heir.<sup>67</sup> Bellori thus inherited the letters Angeloni had received from Domenichino and published excerpts he considered significant. In the ensuing discussion, I reproduce the text of the letter with numbered sentences to facilitate reference.

[1] Sperava con la venuta a Roma del Signor Giovanni Antonio Massani d'aver nelle mani il discorso che scrisse Monsignor Agucchi, nel tempo che stavamo in casa. Mi adoperai nel distinguer, e far riflessione agli maestri, e maniere di Roma, di Venezia, di Lombardia, & a quelli ancora della Toscana. Se la cortese diligenza di V. S. non mi aiuta, ne dispero. [2] Io haveva due libri di pittura, Leon Battista Alberti, e Giov. Paolo Lomazzi, ma nel partire di Roma, m'andarono male con l'altre cose: mi favorisca di far diligenza se si trovassero a comprare. [3] Non so se sia il Lomazzo, che scriva che il disegno è la materia, & il colore la forma della pittura: a me pare tutto il contrario, mentre il disegno dà l'essere, e non vi è niente che abbia forma fuori de'suoi termini precisi (né intendo del disegno in quanto è semplice termine e misura della quantità); & in fine il colore senza il disegno non ha sussistenza alcuna. [4] Mi pare ancora che dica il Lomazzo che un'uomo disegnato al naturale, non sarebbe conosciuto per il solo disegno; ma ben si con l'aggiunta del colore simile, e questo è ancor falso; poichè Apelle col solo carbone disegnò il ritratto di colui, che l'aveva introdotto al convito, e fù subito riconosciuto, con istupore dal Rè Tolomeo; e tanto basta alla scoltura, che non hà colore alcuno. [5] Dice ancora che a fare un quadro perfetto sarebbe Adamo & Eva, l'Adamo disegnato da Michelangelo, colorito da Tiziano: l'Eva disegnata da Rafaello, e colorita dal Correggio. Ora veda V. S. dove va a cadere chi erra ne primi principij.<sup>68</sup>

### The Opening Lines

The opening lines indicate that Domenichino and Angeloni had previously discussed Agucchi's ideas. The two had been corresponding since Domenichino left Rome for Naples in 1631. Massani returned from Venice in October 1632, after his patron's death and on the papal curia's request.<sup>69</sup> Domenichino was aware of Agucchi's unpublished treatise and acknowledged his role in contributing ideas. He wrote:

[1] I hoped from the arrival in Rome of Sig. Giovanni Antonio Massani to have in hand the discourse Monsignor Agucchi wrote when we stayed at his house. I strove to distinguish and reflect on the masters and styles of Rome, Venice, Lombardy, and of Tuscany, too.

Domenichino did not repeat the question Angeloni had posed. However, it can be inferred that he was asked about the treatise because the letter opens regarding that period of his life and the things discussed.<sup>70</sup>

67 Perini Folesani 2002; Sparti 2002 on Montanari and the contested will.

68 Bellori 1672, pp. 358–359.

69 Sapori 2015, p. 47 and n. 79. Massani had a successful career in Rome: rising from Proto-notario to a position of Canonico at Saint Peters (Sapori 2015, p. 45), he became majordomo in the household of Urban VIII, and Cassiano Dal Pozzo's friend Leonardo Agostini helped him acquire the volume of drawings of tradesmen in 1643 (on these details, Summerscale 2000, pp. 13–14, n. 39). Massani also scooped out Veronese's paintings in Venice for Francesco Barberini before leaving Venice as per a letter dated 10 July 1632 discussed in Barcham/Puglisi 2001.

70 On the years spent in Agucchi's household, Spear 1982, I: pp. 9–10; Malvasia (1678) 2013, p. 65.



Giovanni Antonio Massani had been Agucchi's secretary during his seven years as papal nuncio in Venice (1624–1632). Angeloni knew that Massani had inherited paintings and manuscripts from Agucchi and probably knew of his desire to publish his patron's writings.<sup>71</sup> Angeloni's collection of drawings, antiquities, and curiosities was one of the great highlights of Rome.<sup>72</sup> It included an extensive collection of drawings by Annibale Carracci and was frequented by visitors. His unpublished treatise envisioned as a manifesto of the priorities of his collection, *Dello studio dell'opere più belle della natura e dell'arte: Dialogo* recalls Agucchi's views in its emphasis on the selection of the good and the best in nature.<sup>73</sup>

Domenichino followed this recollection by asking Angeloni for help in finding replacement copies of Alberti and Lomazzo:

[2] I had two books about painting, Leon Battista Alberti and Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, but in leaving Rome, these and other things went missing. I would be most pleased if you could take the trouble to find and purchase them for me.

This was the starting point for Domenichino to take a position contrary to Lomazzo, whom he remembered as having identified *disegno* as matter (*materia*) and *colore* as form (*forma*).

### Form and Matter

Domenichino recalled:

[3] I don't know if it was Lomazzo who writes that *disegno* is the *materia* and *colore* the *forma* of painting. It seems just the opposite to me, since *disegno* gives existence, and there is nothing that has form without definite boundaries; nor do I mean "drawing" as a simple delineation of contour and measures of quantity; and, after all, color without drawing has no existence at all.

The ideas expressed here evoke Aristotelian philosophy, not the history of debates about working procedures in the arts, nor about the relative importance of one part of painting over another. In *Physica*, Aristotle introduced the notion that substances are composed of form and matter. This explained changes in the natural world and was deployed in *Metaphysica* to argue that form unifies matter into a single object that is a compound of the two. It gave Aristotle a structure for treating soul and body as a particular case of form and matter in *De anima*.<sup>74</sup> The distinction also explained why, when the eye receives color – the object of vision – it does not become colored itself. Perception, according to Aristotle, is the reception of form *without* matter.<sup>75</sup>

Aristotle wished to explain the distinction between the essential properties of things and their accidental properties, which vary but do not change their essence. A change in quality or quantity is not a change in substance. For a modern example, take a stick of butter cut into two pieces; its quantity changes, as it

71 Sapori 2015, pp. 46–48. Publication was an expensive endeavor, especially with many full-sized engraved plates; only the very rich could do so without seeking funding and other support from friends; on the considerable expenses involved, Petrucci Nardelli 1985 on Barberini's payments for volumes he supported.

72 On Angeloni's life, friendships, and collection, see most recently Carpita 2009.

73 *Dello studio dell'opera più belle della natura e dell'arte: Dialogo*, discussed in Carpita 2009, p. 103.

74 Ainsworth 2020.

75 This distinction was likewise fundamental to early modern optics in the tradition of Alhacen, on which see A. Mark Smith's introduction to Alhacen 2001, I: p. lxiii.

is now two sticks, but its substance is still butter. Similarly, if the butter is left out in the sun until it melts, its quality changes, but its substance remains butter. However, when a substance changes, it either comes into being, or ceases to be.<sup>76</sup> When milk is made into butter, it changes in substance and ceases to be “milk”; and when butter is melted and burned in a lamp, it ceases to be “butter.”<sup>77</sup>

Lomazzo was not ignorant of Aristotle, but he misunderstood the relationship between *forma* and *materia*. In his *Trattato* of 1584, he assigned color the vital role of bringing ultimate perfection to painting so that things appear natural and are easily recognizable. He did not question the primacy of *disegno*. He wrote, “however skilled in coloring [painters] may be, if they do not possess *disegno*, they do not have the matter of painting and consequently lack the substantial part of it.”<sup>78</sup> His rationale for pairing *colore* with *forma* was based on the notion that painters should follow nature by proceeding according to the order of creation. Since nature created matter before forming it into things, and since painters made designs before executing paintings in color, *disegno*, by virtue of its primacy, had to be associated with *materia*.<sup>79</sup>

In advocating for the opposite, that is, in associating *forma* with *disegno* and *materia* with *colore*, Domenichino reveals a better understanding of Aristotle’s definition of substance.<sup>80</sup> Aristotle had developed the notion that things change accidentally in quality or quantity, giving the example of Socrates falling into a vat of blue dye (a change in quality) or gaining weight (a change in quantity).<sup>81</sup> However, something cannot change in substance (which is a unity generated from the imposition of form upon matter) unless it becomes something else; for example, an acorn becomes an oak tree or a pile of bricks a house.<sup>82</sup> *Forma*, however, is not equivalent to shape because a bronze statue can take the shape of a human but is not a human. Thus, *forma*, which Domenichino equated with *disegno*, is more than drawing as a delineation of contour, as he asserts in the letter. The early modern concept of *disegno* involves the intellectual visualization of a concept, the physical process of transforming it into something visual, and the final manifestation of those actions with marks on a surface.<sup>83</sup>

Domenichino’s take on the issue is that since *disegno* can exist without color, color must be associated with unformed matter. Aristotle provided an example in *Metaphysica* that distinguished the bronze and stone forming a circle as mat-

76 Ainsworth 2020.

77 Many thanks to Fabio Frosini, Professor of Philosophy, for reading to check my accuracy in interpreting Aristotle.

78 Lomazzo (1584) 1973–1976, II: p. 30: “E perciò avvertiscano che quantunque siano eccellenti e miracolosi in colorire, se non hanno disegno non hanno la materia de la pittura e conseguentemente sono privi de la parte sostanziale di lei.”

79 Lomazzo (1584) 1973–1976, II: p. 26: “Ed è imitatrice e come a dire simia de l’istessa natura, la cui quantità, rilievo e colore sempre cerca di imitare. Il che fa con l’aiuto de la geometria, aritmetica, prospettiva e filosofia naturale, con tanta e così retta ragione che non può essere più.” I thank Barbara Tramelli for sharing the written version of her conference paper on Lomazzo and color in advance of its publication. Bernstorff in Bellori (Domenichino) 2022, pp. 346–348 reached a similar conclusion independently.

80 He was undoubtedly aided in such understanding by living in the household of the erudite Agucchi. See ahead regarding his mentorship with Zaccolini who, while lacking a humanist education, was considered by his peers to be exceptional at discussing Aristotle.

81 Ainsworth 2020, summarizing *Categories*, 1–5, *Physics* I.7.

82 Ainsworth 2020, summarizing *Physics* I.7.190<sup>a</sup>13–191<sup>a</sup>22.

83 Estelle Lingo, in investigating the relationship between new working methods in the sixteenth-century and debates about the definition of *disegno*, identified considerable variation from Alberti’s identification of circumscription to Vasari’s identification of *disegno* as the foundation of all the visual arts. From her lecture delivered on 24 May 2022 at the Villa I Tatti, I learned that it is misleading to talk of an “early modern concept” due to regional and individual variations, see Lingo 2023. On Bellori’s understanding of the importance of *disegno* to Domenichino and to this letter, see Bernstorff in Bellori (Domenichino) 2022, pp. 345–349.

ter and the circle as form, which can exist independently of matter as a mathematical concept; this would suggest that the materials of sculpture, or, by extension, of painting, were the matter that would be shaped into form.<sup>84</sup> Yet Aristotle also questioned (in Book VIII) whether matter could be entirely separated from form in the case of a sculpture. This question undoubtedly led to a lively discussion about the distinction and its meaning.

Domenichino's use of the word *sussistenza* instead of the Aristotelian *sostanza* might initially seem to be an error, but on closer examination seems to have been a deliberate choice. Aristotle's cryptic definition of color as existing at the boundary of the transparent was further explained in *De sensu*, where he distinguished the fixed color of determinate, bounded bodies from the apparent color that indeterminate, unbounded bodies such as air and water might possess; when we see color at the extremity of a body, we are seeing the boundary of the translucent at that body.<sup>85</sup> Yet can color exist without a determinate body to make it visible? The question was analogous to whether colors exist in the dark where they cannot be seen.<sup>86</sup>

Today, we are comfortable with an abstract notion of color, especially hue, for we can discuss and imagine hues existing on a color chart or in the digital realm without connecting them to the objects where they are commonly found. For example, orange is a hue independent of the citrus fruit from which it gets its name. But scholars of Ancient Greece and Rome have shown that color names such as *flavus* and *glaukos* were not analogous to modern hues but encompassed properties of their objects such as light, dark, dull, shiny, virile, feeble, and so forth, confounding modern language translators.<sup>87</sup> Moreover, the atomist theories of Democritus, Lucretius, and Seneca captured the interest of seventeenth-century intellectuals, many of whom, in opposition to Aristotle and Ptolemy, considered color a secondary, subjective phenomenon.<sup>88</sup> Thus, philosophically speaking, it was not simply the case that colors are pigments and pigments are matter (as a painter might say from working with mineral and artificial colors), but that color must be embedded in something and illuminated to be perceived.<sup>89</sup>

Whether he read Aristotle directly or not, Domenichino was educated in Aristotelian philosophy through his friendship with Matteo Zaccolini. Their biographers emphasized the importance of their relationship. Zaccolini's mastery of Aristotle resulted from his early training in the *Lycæum* of Scipione Chiaramonti, a nobleman in Cesena with a doctorate in philosophy who later gained the accolade "the Aristotle of our times."<sup>90</sup> The Theatine historian and biographer Giuseppe Silos (1601–1674) praised Zaccolini's mastery of optics, writing that "even though he was not educated, he seemed to be able to follow authorities, especially Aristotle, and their interpretation when explained word for word, with the same intelligence as anyone else, and even better."<sup>91</sup> Zaccolini's research in natural philosophy was motivated by his passion to make the

84 Ainsworth 2020, in §4, discussing *Metaphysics* 1036<sup>a</sup>27–34.

85 Aristotle, *De sensu* 439<sup>b</sup>11–12: "We may define colour as the limit of the Translucent in determinately bounded bodies" (trans. by John I. Beare, Oxford: Clarendon edition; for discussion, see Sorabji 2004, p. 130).

86 Guerlac 1986 surveys the history of arguments from antiquity to Newton on whether color exists without light.

87 See the fascinating discussion of *flavus* and *glaukos* in Bradley 2009, pp. 1–6, and of *viridis*, pp. 6–9, which could mean green, or verdant, or virile.

88 Guerlac 1986, p. 9; Freedberg 1994.

89 And, if not perceived, how can they be proven to exist as something real rather than as a mental idea?

90 Benzoni 1981.

91 Silos 1666, III: p. 93.

pictorial practice of *colorire* as scientifically based as linear perspective. In two manuscript volumes, one a compendium of natural philosophy, mineralogy, and lore, the other a practical guide to applying scientific knowledge to painting, Zaccolini taught painters that color exists on the surface of objects and can only be seen accurately when the boundaries of that object are determinate. This is why Domenichino said color must have boundaries (*termini*), and since *disegno* provides the boundaries of form, color without *disegno* cannot exist.

### Color and Recognition

Domenichino's argument continued with examples proving that color is dispensable for recognition, an argument from Aristotle's theory that perception involves form but not matter. This idea persisted in optics for nearly two millennia based upon the experience that likenesses of objects are conveyed to the senses without transferring or depleting their matter. When the *Book on Optics* by the tenth-century polymath Ibn al-Haytham (Alhacen in the Latin West) was translated from Arabic into Latin, *forma* was used to designate what later writers called *species*.<sup>92</sup> *Forma* brought information about color, light, shadow, position, and other properties of objects to the eye. Thus, in Aristotle and later optics, the perception of color is part of the *forma* of the seen object, which differentiates color perception from the actual, physical color that exists in nature and that the painter employs to imitate it.

Lomazzo, however, had taken his distinction between *forma* and *colore* into the realm of recognition by arguing that color makes it possible to recognize an individual. He wrote:

But beyond drawing and proportional quantity, as appropriate and equal, when adding appropriate color, it now gives the final form and perfection; and when a figure is made this way, anyone who sees it discerns which man it is and can say, for example, that it is Emperor Charles V.<sup>93</sup>

Domenichino objected:

[4] It seems to me also that Lomazzo says that a man drawn from nature would not be recognized solely by his contours but only with the addition of natural color, and this, too, is false, given that Apelles, at a banquet, drew only with charcoal a portrait of a person he had met and he was immediately recognized with amazement by King Ptolemy. And it is enough to cite sculpture, which has no color at all.

Pliny told this recognition story in *Natural History*, Book 35, Chapter 89, and, by citing it, Domenichino brings the authority of the ancients to his argument.<sup>94</sup> The example of sculpture builds upon the fact that modern sculpture was the natural color of its materials, stone or bronze, and that portrait busts were quite the vogue. Yet there was a countercurrent from the *paragone* between painting

92 Pantin 2008 gives the many names for *species* in use. On the Latin translation, Alhacen 2001, I: pp. lxxx–lxxxii, and on *forma*, p. lxxvii.

93 Lomazzo (1584) 1973–1976, II: p. 310: “Ma quando oltre il disegno e quantità proportionata, giusta et uguale, aggiunge il color simile, allora dà l'ultima forma e perfezione e la figure e fa sì che ognuno che la vede discerne di qual uomo è, e sa dire, per esempio, che è de l'imperador Carlo quinto.”

94 When a storm forced Apelles's ship to land in Egypt and King Ptolemy demanded to know who had brought the stranger to dine at the palace, Apelles quickly sketched the man's appearance, and the king immediately identified him as the court jester.

and sculpture in which a man becomes unrecognizable after his face is painted white. Gian Lorenzo Bernini took up this anecdote as a testimony to the difficulty sculptors must overcome to create recognition and “color” their white marble forms with light.<sup>95</sup> Although there is no evidence that the story was part of workshop lore during Lomazzo’s lifetime, Warwick proposed that its appearance in different forms in remarks by Galileo Galilei (1611), Accolti (1625), and Bernini (1638) testifies to the role *colore* was assigned in recognition. To better grasp the principle, we must remember that light and shadow fall under the category *colore*, not under *disegno* or *invenzione*.

Domenichino’s response is a rebuttal of Lomazzo’s argument but not a rejection of the importance of *colore*. Given his training in the studio of the Carracci with their emphasis on synthesizing central Italian *disegno* with northern Italian *colore*, Domenichino would have learned that both are indissoluble components of the whole. Since both form and matter must coexist in everything, the association of color with *materia* does not diminish its importance; it only distinguishes its role. In other words, although *forma* is perceived by sense without *materia*, and although *forma* can exist in the mind, *materia* must combine with it for something to come into being. In plain language, we could say that a painter’s idea only becomes a painting when it is made tangible with monochrome or multi-hued materials.

Perhaps it is not irrelevant that the erudite Ludovico Dolce (1508–1568) and the painter-poet Charles Alfonse Dufresnoy (1611–1668) – both later championed as proponents of *colore* – equated *disegno/dessin* with *forma*.<sup>96</sup> Dolce defined an equivalence between *forma* and *disegno*, and Dufresnoy defined form as the focus of *dessin*. Both knew their Aristotle well, and in Dolce’s case, he was something of an expert and would publish *Somma della filosofia d’Aristotele e prima della dialettica* (Venice 1564) and a separate short treatise on color: *Dialogo nel quale si ragiona della qualità, diversità, e proprietà dei colori* (Venice 1565). Thus, Domenichino’s association of *disegno* with *forma* and *colore* with *materia* is wholly aligned with Aristotelian philosophy of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

### Synthetic Imitation

The last sentence of the letter [5] turns to the process of synthetic imitation, which Agucchi’s treatise addressed. Agucchi had characterized the Carracci reform of painting as a synthesis of Lombard-Venetian *colore* with central Italian *disegno*. Domenichino accepts Agucchi’s synthesis, but he debunks Lomazzo’s recipe for a perfect painting.

He [Lomazzo] also says that to make a perfect painting, were it to be Adam and Eve, Adam would be drawn by Michelangelo and painted by Titian, and Eve would be drawn by Raphael and painted by Correggio. Now Your Excellency sees wherein he who errs in first principles will fail.

On the surface, Lomazzo’s recipe parallels the synthetic approach of the Carracci, who drew from Michelangelo, Raphael, Titian, and Correggio to create something new. However, since Domenichino regards the recipe as a failure, the

95 Warwick 2014 relates versions of the story told and retold by Bernini in reports dated as early as 1639 and traces its origin to ideas about the role of light and shadow in creating the perception of form.

96 Poirier 1987, p. 54, quoting Dolce (“Dialogo della pittura intitolato l’Aretino”, 1557, “la forma non è altro che disegno”) and Dufresnoy (“Observations sur le peinture”, 1647) in Thuillier 1965 (“dessin est occupé entièrement sur la forme”).

necessary consequence of erroneous first principles, we must ask, “What are first principles?”

In philosophy, a first principle is an assumption that cannot be deduced from any other proposition or assumption; it is a truth that must be able to stand alone. Aristotle connected the first principles to knowledge: they are the basis, the building blocks by which a thing is known.<sup>97</sup> Reasoning by first principles removes the accretion of conventions and misinterpretations. Since Lomazzo had already erred by associating *colore* with *forma* and *disegno* with *materia* and stating that color was necessary for recognition, his recipe for success must necessarily be erroneous. This is what Domenichino means on one level, but his objection also goes deeper.

There is much evidence, if not a consensus, that Domenichino embraced the notion that perfection in art arises through a process of synthesis and refinement – a process long acknowledged as a path to excellence in literature and for which Raphael had been highly praised by his learned contemporaries.<sup>98</sup> The ancient trope of painting a superbly beautiful woman by combining the best features of many individual women was frequently brought up in sixteenth-century theory and criticism. As early as 1548, Paolo Pino, a working artist, proposed that a perfect painting could arise from combining the *disegno* of Michelangelo with the *colorito* of Titian.<sup>99</sup> Since art writers turned by necessity to the richer history of literary theory as art criticism emerged in early modern Italy, and since literary theorists were passionately debating how writing in the vernacular should be developed and judged, the recommendations of Pietro Bembo, Angelo Poliziano, and others to study many styles and take various approaches guided artists such as the Carracci, who sought a break from the traditional workshop model of teaching apprentices to perfectly imitate the master of the shop.<sup>100</sup> Domenichino’s training in the Carracci academy was thus the antithesis of the traditional workshop where the novice learned to imitate his master so perfectly that his contribution could not be readily distinguished from his teacher’s. The Carracci radically altered the teaching of artists by replacing the apprentice system with less authoritarian approaches. This environment prepared Domenichino to think of excellence in painting as an outcome of synthesis and refinement in all the parts of painting.

The tripartite division of painting into *invenzione*, *disegno*, and *colore* does not give priority of value to one part over the other. Color is third because of its temporal position: a painter typically makes decisions about color after the invention and design have been determined. However, painters working directly with colors from life might make design decisions in the process of coloring. Poussin transformed this order by sketching out masses of light and dark at the same time he developed the disposition and actions of his figures, but he too is not grouped among the great colorists for similar historiographic reasons as Domenichino.<sup>101</sup>

Some early writers referred to “color” as a part of painting in superlative terms: Pino called light “the soul of coloring”; it being widely understood that the soul was superior to the physical body.<sup>102</sup> Leonardo da Vinci asked which was

97 *Metaphysics* 1013<sup>a</sup>, 14–15.

98 Williams 2017, pp. 54–63 on the literary theory of imitation and its transfer to Raphael in sixteenth-century criticism.

99 Pino (1548) 1946, p. 131: “se Titiano e Michiel Angelo fussero un corpo solo, over al disegno di Michiel Angelo aggiuntovi il colore di Titiano, se gli potrebbe dire lo dio della pittura, si come parimenti sono ancho dei propri.” Blunt (1940) 1980, pp. 84–85 considered Pino a “hint at the theory of Eclecticism,” but Williams 2017, pp. 63–64 rightly places him within the history of synthetic imitation. Much thanks to Mary Pardo for responding to my inquiries.

100 Feigenbaum 1993, pp. 62–64.

101 Bättschmann 1990, pp. 3–15, drew attention to the significance of this practice.

more important, line or light and shadow, and answered in favor of light and shadow.<sup>103</sup> Zaccolini called color the noblest part of painting.<sup>104</sup> Even Vasari, the most vocal champion of Tuscan *disegno*, seemed to regret that the great Michelangelo had not broadened his mastery to encompass *colore* with its ability to capture light on surfaces, as he himself had struggled to master the reflections on armor in his portrait of Grand Duke Cosimo I.<sup>105</sup>

Although Domenichino rejected Lomazzo's recipe for combining incompatible styles, he did not reject the idea of attaining perfection by refining selective elements gathered from various sources. His paintings and drawings demonstrate that he understood the theory of imitation and embraced a synthetic approach. After practicing the filial approach in his youth, imitating Annibale so well that his early landscapes were mistaken for works by his master, he next turned to the sartorial approach, equally valuable but more complex, likened to combining elements from several masters the way a tailor sews together pieces of cloth. This emerged shortly after Annibale's death where, in the frescoes at the Cappella dei Santi Fondatori in Grottaferrata, he imitated Guido's facture, made use of a drawing by Annibale, and demonstrated the fruits of his study of Raphael's paintings in the Vatican Stanze.<sup>106</sup> The most difficult and praiseworthy approach to imitation was the apian, based on the metaphor of bees harvesting nectar from many flowers and transforming it into honey.<sup>107</sup> Domenichino's masterpiece for the Roman church of San Gerolamo della Carità, *The Last Communion of Saint Jerome*, exemplifies this seamless melding. Despite its superficial compositional debt to Agostino Carracci's painting of the same subject in the church of San Gerolamo della Certosa in Bologna, Domenichino integrated multiple sources, melding color, chiaroscuro, composition, expression, and disposition into a new whole.<sup>108</sup>

Domenichino's objection to Lomazzo's erroneous first principles – the misidentification of *forma* with *colore* and of *materia* with *disegno* – can be extended to the foundational concept of how to integrate and combine qualities and sources. Lomazzo's recipe is a hypothetical combination of disparate elements which, if put together without modifications, would be a pastiche. The history of late Cinquecento painting had shown how the borrowing of motifs and their clever reuse in reversals and inversions did not lead to perfection in art (at least not in the eyes of Seicento painters and dilettantes). The Carracci reform was conceptually different because it sought to absorb the best *qualities* of artists – the *charm* of Correggio, the *grace* of Raphael, the *anatomical mastery* of Michelangelo – digest them and generate a new synthetic style.

That new Carracci style was recognized almost immediately for its innovation and excellence. Elegiac remarks at the funeral of Agostino Carracci by Lucio Faberio praised him for combining “the *boldness and sureness* of Michelangelo, the *softness and delicacy* of Titian, the *grace and majesty* of Raphael, the *loveliness*

102 Pino (1548) 1946, p. 116: “il lume è l'anima del colorire”.

103 Leonardo 1995, §124: “Qual è più difficile, o l'ombre e lumi, o pure il disegno bono”; and §413: “Qual è più importante nella pittura, o l'ombre o i lineamenti suoi” (but he reached a different conclusion in §121: “Qual è più di discorso et utilità, o i lumi et ombre de' corpi, overo le loro lineamenti”).

104 Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence, Laur. Ash. Ms. 1212, 2, (Zaccolini 1622, fol. 3v: “e perciò fratanto, attendendo a questa più nobile parte che dagl'antichi in qua forse è stata occulta”; \*fol. 88r: “come parte più nobile”). In the forthcoming critical edition of *Prospettiva del colore* with numbered passages, these quotes are from I.3.6 and XII.3.3.

105 Manca 1994, pp. 112–113.

106 Spear 1982, vol. 1, pp. 159–171, cat. 35.

107 Pigman 1980, p. 4.

108 Cropper 2005 is the most thorough study of painting; see also Bell 2002 on Bellori's description of its coloring.

and facility of Correggio” [emphasis mine].<sup>109</sup> Agucchi developed the same idea in the excerpt of his treatise with which Domenichino was familiar. Describing how Annibale and Agostino reacted to the marvels of Rome, Agucchi wrote:

As soon as they saw the statues of Rome and the paintings of Raphael and Michelangelo, and as they especially reflected upon those of Raphael, they confessed that they found themselves in the presence of higher understanding and greater *delicacy of disegno* than in the works of Lombardy; and they decided that to establish a manner of sovereign perfection, it would be fitting to unite the *beauty* of Lombard *colorito* with the extreme *subtlety* of *disegno* of Rome [emphasis mine].<sup>110</sup>

The formula Domenichino attributed to Lomazzo allocated responsibility to each of the four painters – a situation any painter with experience in a well-organized studio would consider problematic, for workshop productions needed to appear integrated and unified in style and facture. For the three Carracci, the sharing of responsibilities was so well accomplished that, when asked about authorship in the Palazzo Magnani, they replied, “It is by the Carracci, we all did it together”; Gail Feigenbaum argues for accepting this anecdote as further evidence that the Carracci subordinated their individual propensities to the collective purpose, rejecting the hierarchical system of the past and making collaboration a truly synthetic endeavor.<sup>111</sup> The very idea that Domenichino regarded *colore* as inferior to *disegno* is antithetical to this training and his recognized status as Annibale’s “natural artistic heir.”<sup>112</sup>

### Domenichino’s Innovative Coloring

In this last section, I will examine the evidence of Domenichino’s paintings to demonstrate the importance he gave to *colore*. Foregoing bravura brushwork and the bold contrasts often associated with *colore*, Domenichino’s innovations appear in the disposition of color and its use for spatial and expressive effects. He also experimented with technique. His technical innovations have been identified over the past four decades of laboratory analysis and restoration. Those undertaken for the 1996 Domenichino retrospective found that the artist took extraordinary care to devise new combinations of pigments in fresco, using colors *a secco* that were commonly used in oil painting, and that he tinted the intonaco of his frescos with color to make the hues appear more saturated.<sup>113</sup> In oil paintings, he explored diverse colored grounds to find tones that would enhance the subtle differences of color perception to render distances with more remarkable finesse, and he varied the facture of his brushstrokes to render distant forms with a more liquid medium to dissolve color and form into the landscape surrounds and the pictorial ground.<sup>114</sup> Visitors to Palazzo Venezia were surprised by Domenichino’s dazzling colors and brilliant harmonies.<sup>115</sup>

109 Faberio’s oration is quoted in Malvasia’s *Life of the Carracci* and its importance discussed by Summerscale 2000, p. 50, n. 177, who proposed that it serves as documentation to support similar ideas and tropes in the author’s interpretation.

110 Translation by author, from Mahon 1947, pp. 115–116.

111 Feigenbaum 1993, p. 70.

112 Spear 1982, vol. 1, p. 30 and *passim*; Robertson 2012, p. 273.

113 Bernardini 1996 and Coliva 1996.

114 Herrmann-Fiore 1996.

115 The review by Stéphane Loire (1997, p. 221) marveled: “The next revelation was how seductive a painter Domenichino could so often be, at once a great colourist and a refined technician, a painter who knew how to capture the most beautiful and sensual effects of texture.”



Subsequent research on Domenichino's responses to what he learned from Zaccolini about color in nature and light showed that Domenichino calculated the effect of natural light on color when he worked at Sant'Andrea della Valle (1623–1628). Painters had long been sensitive to the direction of natural light in casting shadows but not to the differences in dominant wavelength between morning, midday, and sunset.<sup>116</sup> Domenichino was innovative in choosing dominant hues for each of the four pendentives of the crossing to enhance the tonality of the direct or indirect light they would receive; at the same time, he chose color pairs and tripartite juxtapositions to maximize the apparent purity of hue.<sup>117</sup> Moreover, to preserve the luminosity of the surface and intensity of hue, Domenichino developed a novel dotting technique in fresco in which he used pure hues of naturally darker shades of a color (such as yellow ochre to shade a bright yellow drapery); this technique was inspired by Zaccolini's practice as well as Carracci's gallery at Palazzo Farnese.<sup>118</sup>

The most important essay regarding Domenichino's innovations in coloring is Kristina Herrmann-Fiore's chapter on his Borghese masterpiece in the 1996 catalogue of the exhibition at Palazzo Venezia. Here the author proposed that Domenichino departed in *colore* from the Carracci tradition, in which he had been trained, and from the Venetian tradition that he had further studied at the Villa Aldobrandini. She drew attention to his transparent chiaroscuro and to the light-colored ground, which was painted before the figures themselves in *La caccia di Diana* (fig. 5). She emphasized that Domenichino distinguished degrees of depth by placing pure colors in the draperies of the foreground figures (including those in ornamental *cangianti* draperies) and reduced the chromatic intensity in accordance with the intrinsic lightness of hue.<sup>119</sup> He also reduced the thickness of the paint layer to achieve atmospheric effects. Describing the nymph holding a dog in the foreground, she noted that the figure is painted with noticeably impastoed brushstrokes and intense colors and that each successive plane in the distance has a thinner layer with more liquid paint until, at the most remote zone of the blue mountains, the paint layer is extraordinarily delicate.<sup>120</sup> Thicker foreground and thinner background paint layers had been used to enhance the effects of distance as early as fifteenth-century tempera paintings.<sup>121</sup> Even though thinning the paint layer was not Domenichino's invention, he approached it systematically with an awareness of graded diminutions leading back towards the attenuation of distant forms at the horizon. The author regarded these innovations as evidence of Domenichino's early study with Zaccolini but also suggested that these features were what Malvasia saw.<sup>122</sup> I wish to further develop these observations as evidence of Domenichino's modern, distinctive, and formidable way of coloring – to paraphrase Malvasia.

116 Gould 1981.

117 Sannucci 2011; Bell 1997b.

118 See Simona Rinaldi, "Zaccolini and Pictorial Technique", in *Color in Classicism*, vol. 2 of *Matteo Zaccolini – Prospettiva del colore – Color Perspective*, ed. Janis Bell, Turnhout, forthcoming.

119 Herrmann-Fiore 1996, pp. 248–250.

120 Herrmann-Fiore 1996, p. 249: "La ninfa, domatrice del cane in primo piano, è resa nella più intensa pastosità dei valori cromatici, con ricche pennellate spontanee e di straordinaria freschezza del tracciato, in cui si alternano il verde cangiante in giallo, il rosato purpureo e i bianchi serici della veste e si notano le corpose lumeggiature bianche o chiare. [...] ma più remota Diana e le figure vicine appaiono in colori meno intensi e diminuiscono nel carattere tangibile; passando al terzo piano, ancora ben maggiore sottigliezza della materia cromatica [...]."

121 Botticelli, *Madonna with Angels*, Naples, Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, email exchange with restorer Angela Cerasuolo on Botticelli's use of a resinous copper acetate that allowed for a very thin paint layer in the distant landscape.

122 Herrmann-Fiore 1996, p. 250. I explained why I disagree about the date of Zaccolini's influence in Bell 1997b and Bell 2003 and return to the issue in my forthcoming edition of *Zaccolini's Prospettiva del colore* (Zaccolini 1622).

Domenichino departed from his Carracci teachers by devising a more naturalistic and systematic approach to the disposition of color and chiaroscuro in space. The Carracci used alternating light and dark to structure recession into space. This was how Domenichino approached the color organization of his early landscapes, such as *Landscape with Women Washing and a Boy Spilling Wine* (Paris, Musée du Louvre).<sup>123</sup> The method, which the English visitor Edward Norgate credited to Paolo Bril and called it *camminare*, had allowed Domenichino to maximize contrast at the same time that it led the eye back into space.<sup>124</sup> The alternation of light and dark contrasts was an essential practice in Venice, particularly in the paintings of Tintoretto and Veronese.<sup>125</sup> In this respect, and in the apparent naturalism of the setting, his landscapes demonstrate the skills and ideals he learned from the Carracci without the need to posit any outside influence.

By the time he painted *The Last Communion of Saint Jerome* (fig. 6) for the Roman church of San Girolamo della Carità, Domenichino had begun to explore ways of organizing color in space that went beyond the paradigm of alternating light and dark bands and maximum contrast. While his study of Venetian *colorito* is apparent in the rich satin and brocaded draperies of his characters, he departed from the Venetian tradition of juxtaposing light against dark in sequential steps that create pictorial space through chiaroscuro oppositions. These observations further support Herrmann-Fiore's assessment of the significance of Domenichino's departures from typical Venetian dark grounds and evenness of color intensity throughout the pictorial space.<sup>126</sup>

Giovan Pietro Bellori emphasized the importance of Domenichino's coloring in his *Life of Domenichino*, where he devoted several pages to a description of this masterpiece and dwelt on the artifice Domenichino employed to temper the extremes.<sup>127</sup> Observing that Domenichino balanced the artificial light of three torches inside the church with indirect, diffused light from the sky at dusk, he noted that the dim crepuscular light diffusing through the arch and windows was sufficient to



6 Domenichino (Domenico Zampieri), *The Last Communion of Saint Jerome*, 1614, oil on canvas, 419 × 256 cm. Vatican City, Musei Vaticani, Pinacoteca (photo Scala/Art Resource, NY ART55662)

123 For an online image, see Wikimedia commons WGA 06395.jpg, URL: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/10/Domenichino\\_-\\_Landscape\\_with\\_a\\_Child\\_Overturning\\_Wine\\_-\\_WGA06395.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/10/Domenichino_-_Landscape_with_a_Child_Overturning_Wine_-_WGA06395.jpg) (accessed 23.02.2023).

124 Norgate 1919, p. 52, recorded a visit to Rome in 1620; Zaccolini, *Prospettiva del colore*, Laur. Ash. 1212, 2, fol. 62v, "Che le ombre degli obbietti distanti l'uno dall'altro, devono essere tramezzate con intervalli luminosi" (IX.11 and subsequent in the forthcoming critical edition and translation.)

125 Thornton 1992 emphasized the importance of these light and dark juxtapositions even in Veronese's "blond" paintings.

126 Herrmann-Fiore 1996, p. 248, esp. "Domenichino non tratta l'immagine con intensità coloristica omogenea come nella pittura veneziana."

127 For the full description, Bellori 1672, pp. 304–309; for analysis of his critical concepts about coloring, Bell 2002.



7 Agostino Carracci, *The Last Communion of Saint Jerome*, 1591–1592, oil on canvas, 376 × 224 cm. Bologna, Pinacoteca Nazionale (photo su concessione del Ministero della Cultura – Pinacoteca Nazionale di Bologna)

mitigate the harshness of torchlight. In normal circumstances, torchlight placed close to figures causes them to cast dark and broad shadows, but Domenichino's transparent shadows reveal color and form, harmoniously coexisting with the interpenetrations of light on flesh and clothing. The torches serve both as a narrative element and a formal element, creating foci for the eyes on both sides of the painting, illuminating architectural details, and signifying that the scene takes place at sunset, a fitting metaphor for the end of Jerome's days. Jerome's importance as the principal figure is demonstrated by being the only figure fully exposed to that light where "the eye stops first and remains."<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, the figures surrounding Jerome are in shadow – the priest, the matron who kisses his hand, the youth who holds up his arm – and they provide a darker ground for the lighter figure. These juxtapositions contribute to the effect of the saint's glow in the dim interior, a natural halo signifying his beatitude.

Such foci of light were nothing new in themselves; Caravaggio had used them effectively to draw attention to a few faces or gestures.<sup>129</sup> Domenichino's foci are based on the same principle but are more subtle and natural-looking. Crucial to their effect in the dim interior is that the dark field of shadow around Jerome is not impenetrable because the figures surrounding him are partly to fully shaded. One can still make out some color and detail.

It is instructive to compare Bellori's color analysis of Domenichino's painting to his analysis of Agostino Carracci's version of the subject (fig. 7). Bellori emphasized the role of light and dark alternations in Agostino's painting, both alternations of light and dark hues and alternations of light and shadow to create a counterpoint of contrasts.<sup>130</sup> He wrote:

The monk holding the torch projects farthest toward the foreground with his arm exposed to the light, while his white serge habit spreads in well-ordered folds over his leg and down to his bare foot, and at the same time his shoulder is exposed with his tawny cowl and scapular. As he turns, his profile falls in shadow [...] with his black beard in the deepest darkness. The dark part of this monk comes next to the light area of the priest's blue chasuble [...] and his hands stand out against it with the paten and the sacramental wafer, while the greatest whiteness and strongest light reside in the surplice on his arm. From the shadow of the chasuble, we pass to the other light form, which is the acolyte's white surplice, in which light and dark are smoothly tempered.<sup>131</sup>

128 Bellori 1672, p. 308: "Questa figura è il soggetto principale, dove prima l'occhio si ferma e resta però tutta esposta al lume, che le viene in faccia".

129 On Caravaggio's use of narrative foci, Pericolo 2011, pp. 97–99.

130 Bellori 1976, pp. 120–121; Bellori 2005, p. 120: "as the priest bends over he shades the head of the acolyte but leaves the temple and part of the forehead in daylight; and the same shadow spreads over the edge of Saint Jerome's red mantle and over his elbow, while the rest of the saint's body has power and intensity in the pure brightness of the light."

131 Modified from Bellori 2005, p. 120.

Bellori brings out the alternation of light and dark as an organizing principle, not just in space but also in focusing attention on specific elements.

In comparison, Domenichino's color organization is hue-based. His light and dark contrasts are mitigated and grouped around foci of light. In addition to mitigating the harshness of unopposed torchlight with diffused outdoor light, he avoided strong hue contrasts and mitigated juxtapositions with related, intermediate hues and tones. In the figure of Jerome, the flesh tones are intermediate between the white and red draperies, while the yellow component of the flesh is picked up in the draperies of the surrounding figures, all of which are darker than Jerome, who looks pallid and deathly in comparison. The group on the right uses a restricted palette. The foremost altar boy is depicted in a stronger contrast of white and gold, mitigated by a large swath of lighter gold in the priest's draperies. To lead the eye back into the pictorial space without the alternating light and dark bands, Domenichino diminishes the vivacity of hues with transparent shadows; this supports the recession of the rearmost figures in the tight multigure groupings. In the distant landscape, alternations of light and dark are created by landscape elements (a stream of water, a dark row of trees, and a medium-brown palace). However, these alternations are more subtle than anything in Bril or Agostino, capturing the dim light at sunset.

Domenichino's hue and tone-based approach to the spatial organization of color is already visible in his fresco of *The Flagellation of Saint Andrew* for San Gregorio al Celio where, in comparison to Guido Reni's *Martyrdom of Saint Andrew* (fig. 8) on the opposite wall, it can be identified as a factor distinguishing his approach from his older colleague. In Guido's fresco, several areas of bright white on the shallow foreground plane contrast the dark hill blocking our view into the depth. The hill forms a rugged arch above the heads of the central figures and dips in the center, bringing attention to Saint Andrew, who has dropped onto one knee to pray. Guido, like Agostino Carracci, makes alternating light and dark a central organizational principle.

Bellori also noticed this color organization in Lanfranco's ceiling fresco at Sant'Andrea della Valle, the *Assumption of the Virgin*. Inspired by an unpublished manuscript by Ferrante Carlo, both Carlo's and Bellori's descriptions of Lanfranco's coloring build upon the alternation of light and dark contrasts, as we might expect from another pupil of the Carracci whose training was deeply rooted in Venetian models.<sup>132</sup>

Domenichino did not organize his color relationships by light and dark contrasts. In *The Flagellation of Saint Andrew*, the color field surrounding each of Domenichino's figure groupings is not dark but an intermediate value, darker than the whites and yellows but lighter than most of the other hues. The principal group of Saint Andrew and his torturers is depicted in the shadow, the source of which is outside the picture but indicated by the diagonal edge of shadow on the side wall of the temple, and the background opens to a vista of illuminated buildings and a small grove of trees, all seen at midday.

Domenichino made a break from the Carracci tradition in his earliest independent works that was not a break away from *colore* but rather an embrace of its richness of hue. More than a decade later, in his frescoed pendentives at Sant'Andrea della Valle and San Carlo ai Catinari, he explored a radically different approach to color juxtapositions and pictorial space – still centered on hue rather than light and dark contrasts but based upon maximum color saturation rather than tonal variation.<sup>133</sup>

Bellori introduced the section on *colore* in his description of *The Last Communion of Saint Jerome* with a pronouncement of its importance (“Neither does

132 Turner 1971.

133 Bell 1997b; Sannucci 2011.



8 Guido Reni, *The Way to Calvary*, 1608, fresco, 418 × 640 cm. Rome, San Gregorio al Celio, Oratorio di Sant'Andrea al Celio (photo Soprintendenza Speciale Archeologia Belle Arti e Paesaggio di Roma)

color cede to drawing”; *né cede al disegno il colore*), and then went on to propose that color “takes first place in the efficacious and expressive action of many figures” (*ottiene il primo luogo in azione efficace ed espressiva di molte figure*).<sup>134</sup> This robust assessment promoted color from the ornamental role of adding beauty and attractiveness to the expressive role of conveying meaning and making an emotional impact. Bellori was well aware of currents in art criticism and theory but did not take a polemical stance for or against *bravura* brushwork or any particular approach to *colore*.<sup>135</sup> He saw the benefit of *prestezza* in the art of Lanfranco (who thereby won many commissions for painting cupolas), and he saw the difficulties Domenichino encountered by working slowly. However, he also recognized that both *disegno* and *colore* contribute essential parts to the communicative value of the whole.

In conclusion, Domenichino gave considerable importance to coloring in his paintings, despite eschewing the flashy execution and bold contrasts of contemporary painters later admired for their coloring. He pursued new directions at various stages of his career while always remaining cognizant of the role color must play in representation and in the imitation of nature. He pushed the boundaries of conventional practice to direct the gaze of his viewers, allowing color to clarify pictorial invention while adding charm and emotional force. However, he never allowed it to dominate our experience of the work. In this respect, he remains a true classicist, choosing balance and clarity over disruption and shock.

<sup>134</sup> Bellori 1672, p. 307.

<sup>135</sup> On Bellori’s awareness of developments in France, see the postscript by Montanari to Bellori 2009, pp. 1–43.

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