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The Feminine Renaissance: Examining the Implications of Disegno

By Kim Pokorny

THE FEMININE RENASSAINCE: EXAMINI

by

Kim Pokorny

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Master of
Arts in

Art History and Visual Culture
at

Lindenwood University

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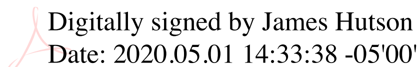
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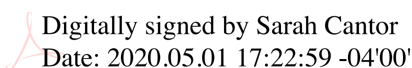
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THE FEMININE RENASSAINCE:
EXAMINING THE IMPLICATIONS OF DISEGNO

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Art and Design Department

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Master of Arts in Art History

at

Lindenwood University

By

Kim Pokorny

St. Charles, Missouri

May 2020

ABSTRACT

THE FEMININE RENASSAINCE

Kimberly Pokorny, Master of Art History, 2020

Thesis Directed by: Dr. James Hutson, PhD

This paper analyzes the concept of *disegno* in its effect on the success of the female artist in the early modern era. Achieving *disegno* effectively meant that an artist had reached a renowned level of intelligence and artistic mastery. Formulating this principle in one's art was taught in studios and academies by use of gradual monitored practice and the study of the human figure. *Disegno* elevated the social status of the artist, as wealthy patrons understood the talent behind the work of an artist that could display it in their paintings. As women were not admitted into most academies and were prohibited from viewing a nude model, understanding and applying *disegno* was especially difficult. This in turn made the art of women, and women themselves inferior to their male counterparts. Previous scholarship on the development of the artistic principles that underpinned *disegno* focused on its importance in the arts and its part in the edification of male artists, while this study argues that the routes notable female artist had to take to gain success despite their lack of training further hindered their chances of artistic success. Applying a feminist theory to the tropes of women artists in the early modern era provides an understanding to the concept of *disegno* as it related to their bodies of work.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my family and friends for their constant support throughout my research and writing process. I would also like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Hutson for all of his assistance throughout this process. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. Cantor and Dr. Cody for their direction and advice on my research.

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Introduction

There are not as many recognizable female artists throughout history as there are male due to the imbalance in art education between the genders. Women, even in modern times, have struggled with success in male dominated fields. The early modern era was a distinguished period for art of all media, but was a difficult time for female artists. It was the age of notable names like Michelangelo (1475-1564), Raphael (1483-1520), Titian (1490-1576), Caravaggio (1571-1610), and countless others. The early modern era was known for the mastery of human anatomy in sculptures and paintings that highlighted the physiognomy of man and they were constructed with immaculate accuracy. The works of art that have pervaded history texts and museums, as well as the minds of moderately informed art lovers, were all created by men. The names one can sound off from the early modern period do not include many female artists because the field did not allow them to permeate artistic environments with any ease. Talented women had their skills hindered by the lack of artistic education afforded to them that included the verboten study of nude models and the opportunity to be taught the all-important concept of *disegno*.

Disegno was first set as perfection in the arts by Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574). In his *Lives of the Artists* (1550) he defines this term as “the basis for all good art.”[1] He believed that artists and sculptors needed this skill in order to succeed in executing art’s fundamental goal of imitating nature. This ability to portray what one saw in the human world was combined with emphasis from the scholar that an artist should be able to possess a clear concept of the idea beneath his depiction. In order to be successful, one could not simply apprentice and train, one had to have technical knowledge; the ability to combine artist talent with creativity and design.

[1] Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists,* trans by Julia Conway Bondanella and Peter Bondanella (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), xi.

Disegno as a process offered an opportunity for artists to learn from the nature around them, most often, the nature of the human figure. The mastery of the human figure was the true test of artistic aptitude, and it was something that practicing women artists did not get to study. Artists drew from the figure and they learned about human anatomy. With this understanding, they were able to better capture the appearance of skin, balance, and movement, features that elevated their art to a genius standard. Their art was graceful and impressive and reflected nature, something Vasari deemed as ultimately important in the arts. These skills combined the concept of *disegno* as drawing with the concept of *disegno* the intellectual process.[2] Promising artists looked to master this concept, but studying the nude was a near impossibility for women, holding back their achievements in the arts. Compliments of *disegno* given to female artists were either accompanied with masculine characteristics or the suggestion that women were naturally connected to the creation of human beings, and that their skill shouldn't be taken as keen ability, but rather a woman's nature.[3]

Successful female artists in the early modern era often were often connected to the field through a man, most likely their husband or father. If their father was an artist, they had the potential to work closely to a master and learn from antiquity, such as Lavinia Fontana (1552-1614). Other female artists, like Sofonisba Anguissola (1535-1625), came from an upper-class family and grew up in a forward-thinking city.[4] The combination of support from her father as well as the acceptance of her studies to be a painter cleared a path for her career. Sofonisba's talent validated her career in the arts, but she had to carefully conduct herself as a chaste woman

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[2] Giorgio Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists.*

[3] Sylvia Ferino-Pagden and Maria Kusche, *Sofonisba Anguissola: A Renaissance Woman,* (Washington DC: The National Museum of Women in the Arts, 1995), 27.

[4] Ferino-Pagden and Kusche, *Sofonisba Anguissola: A Renaissance Woman,* 27.

to keep her standing in the field and was only afforded the opportunity due to her fortunate surroundings.[5] Artists like Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1653) had a father for an artist, but she was not taken under his wing like Lavinia.[6] Artemisia instead mostly learned from tutors hired by her father as well as herself, and her own figure, when it came to painting portraits. Elisabetta Sirani (1638-1665) surpassed nearly all the boundaries set for her gender as she took over her father's studio and opened an art academy for women, leading to a successful career for anyone who learned under her guidance.[7] In Bologna, where Sirani was from, drawing from the human figure was traditional and discernable among women artists.[8] These women were denied access to academies and studios, as well as the collaboration and the resources found within them and found success in the arts through their own routes.

The first recorded female artist of Bologna was Caterina Vigri (1413-1463). Her drawings as well as her popularity as a religious figure contributed to her impact on Bolognese art. Her example provided a precedent for female artistic activity centuries after her own, beginning in the seventeenth century, when Sirani lived around the corner from Vigri's convent.[9] While Sirani studied art professionally and created many preparatory drawings for her final works, "a key difference between Sirani and her male compatriots, however, was the practice of drawing the male nude from life."[10] As such hindrances were placed on her practice, historians

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[5] Ferino-Pagden and Kusche, *Sofonisba Anguissola: A Renaissance Woman,* 27.

[6] Patrizia Cavazzini, "Artemisia in Her Father's House," in *Italian Baroque Art,* ed. Susan M. Dixon (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 99.

[7] Adelina Modesti, *Elisabetta Sirani 'Virtuasoa'; Women's Cultural Production in Early Modern Bologna,* (Belgium: Prepols Publishers, 2014), 68.

[8] Babette Bohn, "Elisabetta Sirani and Drawing Practices in Early Modern Bologna," *Master Drawings* 42, no. 3 (2004): 208.

[9] Bohn, "Elisabetta Sirani and Drawing Practices in Early Modern Bologna," 208.

[10] Bohn, "Elisabetta Sirani and Drawing Practices in Early Modern Bologna," 215.

have found many revisions on her portraiture as she attempted to perfect her version of the human figure.[11]

As Sirani worked on her own ability to replicate nature, she passed those skills onto the students of her *Scuola.* Many of Sirani's drawings most likely served as prototypes for copying by her students.[12] As many of Sirani's paintings included religious, historical, and allegorical themes, those too were passed onto her pupils. She often drew in chalk, and it is reflected in a number of chalk studies by her students. One of Sirani's most gifted students, Ginevra Cantofoli, is known for her red chalk drawing *Head of a Young Woman Wearing a Turban* (figure 1). This drawing suggested that Sirani's academy practiced life drawings like their male counterparts in Bologna.[13] The idea of *disegno* was to successfully represent the human form, and it is what Sirani was trying to instill in her pupils.

These women artists from the early modern era attempted to defy their exclusion from *disegno* in a variety of ways. The focus of this research is to uncover the ways female artists of the early modern era found success despite their restriction from the teachings of *disegno* and to uncover how it truly hindered them. The concept was closely tied with depictions of the human figure as one was said to master *disegno* when they were able to replicate nature, more specifically, human anatomy.[14] This artistic principle elevated the practice of art from that of craftsmanship to an intellectual skill, showing viewers and patrons the intelligence and design that successful art required. *Disegno* brought artists to a higher social status, giving them respect

[11] Bohn, "Elisabetta Sirani and Drawing Practices in Early Modern Bologna," 215.

[12] Bohn, "Elisabetta Sirani and Drawing Practices in Early Modern Bologna," 216.

[13] Bohn, "Elisabetta Sirani and Drawing Practices in Early Modern Bologna," 228.

[14] Domenico Laurenza, "Art and Anatomy in Renaissance Italy: Images from a Scientific Revolution," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin,* 69, no. 3 (Winter, 2012): 8

and acknowledgement of the education and practice their career required. Artists who mastered the portrayal of the human figure, after extensive study of human anatomy and the male nude, were considered to have achieved *disegno* and were invited into a world of wealthy patrons and opportunities.[15] Drawing from a model and the study of *disegno* took place in academies and master's workshops, places female artists were not permitted. Previous scholarship has focused on women artists being seen as less than and has asked the why women were excluded from artistic excellence. This thesis will argue that women's exclusion from *disegno* is the reason they were not as successful as male artists in the early modern era.

[15] Nikalaus Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1973), 47.

Literature Review

To understand the female artists of the modern era, their upbringing and path through their careers must be studied. Some of these resources stem from scholars from centuries ago, who were closer to the time of the artists. While some women are mentioned in writings of their time, their lack of acknowledgement also gives insight to their hindrances in the art field. These scholars include Leon Battista Alberti (1402-1472), a Renaissance humanist author and artist, and biographers Giorgio Vasari and Giovanni Pietro Bellori (1612-1696). These scholars spanning the fifteenth to the seventeenth century, had a firsthand insight that current writers and historians must work from in order frame their understanding of these artists. Modern writers, like Paola Tingali and Theresa Huntley, wrote about all women of the Renaissance, and others focused on a specific woman and her life. Sylvia Ferino-Pagden and Mina Gregori wrote of Sofonisba, Liana De Girolami Cheney wrote of Fontana, and Patrizia Cavazzini and Mary D. Garrard wrote of Artemisia.[16] These works provide different perspectives on these artists in their youth, their early careers, and their professional accomplishments.

The concept of *disegno* was first articulated in the work of Giorgio Vasari, and was then expounded upon in the work of others like Vincenzo Borghini (1515-1580), and more modern scholars like Nikolaus Pevsner (1902-1983), Patricia Lee Rubin, Karen-edis Barzman, and Patricia L. Reilly[17]. The former established the definition of the intellectual concept that is

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[16] Theresa Huntley, Women in the Renaissance, (New York: Crabtree Pub., 2010); Ferino-Pagden and Kusche, *Sofonisba Anguissola;* Mina Gregori, "Fama e oblio de Sofonisba Anguissola," in *Sofonisba Anuissola e le sue sorelle,* (Cremona: Leonardo Arte, 1994), 11-47; Liana De Girolami Cheney, "Lavinia Fontana's Nude Minervas," Woman's Art Journal 36, no. 2 (2015); Patrizia Cavazzini, "Artemisia in Her Father's House," in *Italian Baroque Art,* ed. Susan M. Dixon (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2008); Mary D. Garrard, *Artemisia around 1622: The Shaping and Reshaping of Artistic Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

[17] Nikalaus Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present*; Patricia Lee Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari: Art and Art History,* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995); Karen-edis Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State; The Discipline of Disegno,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Patricia L. Reilly,

disegno and how it is mastered in the arts. Pevsner researched *disegno* as it was taught in the academies, and the goals for the artists within their intellectual walls. Patricia Lee Rubin discusses the praise that Vasari gave to the artists of his biography and how he used these compliments as the proof of the greatness of the visual arts. In his defense of the arts, Rubin notes that Vasari's focus was often on *disegno* in the works and artists he was acknowledging.[18] Karen-edis Barzman sees *disegno* as the principle that the academy was founded upon and discusses the implications that *disegno* brought to the arts, as it united sculpture and painting and it asked artists to debate with other contemporary matters of creation. Patricia L. Reilly takes the discussion *disegno* to gender as it stands as a masculine concept, while color, a lesser component of a work of art, is feminine. Modern scholars have taken this historical artistic concept and related it to the academies, the defense of art as an intellectual process, and how it translated to women.

Vasari defined the concept of *disegno* as a "complex activity based on intellection" and his version of the term was considered the guiding principle on which academies were founded.[19] His thoughts about the artistic practice implied the representation one could create to prove that they understand nature, rather than arguing for their own perception of the world. Barzman states that, according to Vasari, *disegno* combined one's knowledge of the universe and its forms with their ability to render them from their own hand.[20] She focuses on his insistence that the artist must draw from the live model in order to excel in the arts, in order to begin to master *disegno*.

"The Taming of the Blue: Writing Out Color in Italian Renaissance Theory," in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History,* ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, (Boulder: Westview Press), 88.

[18] Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari: Art and Art History,* 234.

[19] Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State; The Discipline of Disegno,* 145.

[20] Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State; The Discipline of Disegno,* 145.

Concepts that were constructed in the Renaissance influenced *disegno.* More than a century before Vasari's time, Alberti connected nature to the "vestigial female personification" as they were the carriers of human life.[21] Garrard quotes Alberti here to highlight the understanding of women in relation to the arts. Women weren't seen as capable artists, able to interpret and represent the human figure, but instead were only responsible for understanding life enough to create it within themselves. He believed the intention of art to be to compete with nature and as artists one should flawlessly reproduce the unseen principles of the natural world.

Disegno was born of masculinity. Vasari referred to *disegno* as "the very soul that conceives and nourishes within itself all the parts of man's intellect – already most perfect before the creation of all other things, when the Almighty God...shaping man, discovered, together with the lovely creation of all things, the first form of sculpture and painting."[22] Rubin quotes this definition of Vasari's to articulate the elevated status of the artist as their skills are comparable to creation itself. His definition of *disegno* is elaborate and expresses the importance of this concept when interpreting the work of artists. Vasari considered this concept of design to be the "father of our three arts" and believed that it came from one's intellect in order to create something that was "cognizant of the proportion of the whole to the parts and of the parts to each other and to the whole."[23] This meant that the artist had to understand the inner workings of the human body in order to depict them separately from one another. *Disegno* being the father of artistic mediums shows that it was born of masculinity, a skill intended for young male artists to undertake. He concluded that "from this knowledge there is born a certain conception and judgment, so that

[21] Mary D. Garrard, "Leonardo Da Vinci: Female Portraits, Female Nature" in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds., Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1992, 71.

[22] Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari: Art and Art History,* 241.

[23] Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari: Art and Art History,* 241.

there is formed in the mind that something, which when expressed by the hands is called design."[24] While design was one element of *disegno,* being able to construct the design of one's art in their mind was essential. Vasari believed that design only required ones hand and when an artist practiced for many years, their hand could learn to express what nature had shown them correctly. In order for *disegno* to manifest itself on the canvas the combination of the practiced hand and a knowledgeable male artist was required.

Nikolaus Pevsner gives a history of art within an academic framework in *Academies of Art, Past and Present* (1973). It was in the court that masters like Leonard, Raphael, and Titian received the veneration they were due.[25] Michelangelo found himself among the process of the arts becoming respected. When he began his father felt that "the profession of painter was below the ambitions of a Florentine family of some civic tradition."[26] Pevsner sites the social standing of an artist in the time of Michelangelo' youth, as it was not yet something to be respected. As he practiced art and transitioned from apprentice to protégé and finally to someone whose work was widely respected and desired. He felt that he was fundamentally different from his predecessors of the Quattrocento, and he was correct. This new view of the artist required a new concept of art education. The artist was also required to draw from nature by studying the human form with the intent to practice his own art.[27] Pevsner's scholarship details the transition of humanist and art education, showing the elevation of art as a practice, and showing what *disegno* did to make the arts something of merit.

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[24] Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari: Art and Art History,* 241.

[25] Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present*, 32.

[26] Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present*, 32.

[27] Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present*, 35.

Pevsner's overview of the *Accademia del Disegno* gives a view into the world of the academies as artists strayed from guilds. This academy was founded in Florence by Cosimo de' Medici, at the suggestion of Giorgio Vasari in 1563. It focused on the education of beginning artists and, more importantly establishing a society for the greatest Florentine artists of the age. Their intent was to disregard the guilds entirely and ignore the differences in medium because they were now all jointly concerned with *disegno.* Vasari had high expectations of this academy. As an artist, he did not want those in training to be dependent like a common craftsman. He believed that "to make him a member of an academy instead [of a guild] would demonstrate that his social rank was just as high as that of a scientist of another scholar."[28] Pevsner quotes Vasari's desire to bring respect to the arts, showing that this was a time for artists to be successful through patronage and social standing. While this was true, art was becoming a respectable career, it was only a realistic opportunity for young men.

The *Accademia del Disegno* had its regulations towards its artistic expectations, but they were amended often or not carried out at all. Regulations from January 1563 state that every year, three masters were to teach a group of boys in the art of *disegno.* The boys would have their work critiqued by them before being allowed to send it off and if they were advanced enough, they would be recommended as members of the Compagnia.[29] These accounted for some of the educational duties within the academy, but they do not site organized instruction. It appears that the only real courses dealt with were subjects like geometry, perspective, and anatomy.[30] As the academy slipped back into the parameters of a guild, something Vasari did

[28] Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present*, 54.

[29] Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present*, 47.

[30] Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present*, 48.

not want, reform was suggested. The painter, Federigo Zuccari (1539-1609) pleaded to reform the academy and bring in a room for life drawing, specific sculptors to work with a few students at a time, and a separation from teaching and administration.[31] In spite of these suggestions, the *Accademia del Disegno,* the rules of 1585 appear to be very similar to that of a guild or company. Due to this organization, Pevsner considers the academy to be the pre-history, rather than the first chapter of art academies.[32] The only mention of students, members, and masters of the *Accademia del Disegno,* were young men and boys, showing that women were not a part of this preliminary work towards the elevation of the arts.

The *Accademia di San Luca* of Rome was a different kind of institution, notes Pevsner. It was established in 1593 by Zuccari, who tried to reform the *Accademia del Disegno*. This institution created rules based on the "education side of the future institute" with an emphasis on morals.[33] There was an emphasis upon regularly attending academic meetings as well as lectures that discussed the theory of art. Subjects for lectures were decided upon like the precedence of painting or sculpture and the definition of *disegno.*[34] When it came to training, artists drew from plaster and from life and a professor was in charge of corrections for the betterment of the students. The primary focus of the *Accademia di San Luca* was educational. While many of their plans did not come about as Zuccari had planned, his focus on education combined with Vasari's focus on the representation of the arts, dictated the future of learned artists.

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[31] Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present*, 51.

[32] Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present*, 55.

[33] Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present*, 58.

[34] Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present*, 60.

In Bologna, The Carracci family started their own academy, that was influenced by the organization of the *Accademia del Disegno*. Their academy, referred to as the *Accademia degli Incamminati* was involved mostly with the art of painting and possessed its own rules and emblem as well as theoretical instruction.[35] This eclecticism in taking ideals from literary academies and combining it with the artistic instruction from Florence and Rome was the core of the *Accademia degli Incamminati.* It originated in the workshop of Ludovico, Agostino, and Annibale Carracci and the practices that took place inside were similar to other workshops.[36] Pevsner sites that Lucio Faberio (1550s-1610), the notary of the Bolognese Company of Painters, claimed the academy to established at the suggestion of Agostino Carracci. Within the Carracci Academy there were lectures on perspective, architecture, and anatomy, and prizes were given to the artists.[37] Pevsner states that "neither beginning nor end of the academy can be dated" but does note Ludovico Carracci went to Rome in 1602 to acquire recognition that the company of painters in Bologna were similar to that of Rome, and that they were adequate enough to be considered an academy.[38] The role of the Carracci family as well as their institution played a significant role in the history of art academies and brought the influential artistic teaching styles of Florence to Bologna. Pevsner's history of the growth of the status of the artist as well as the path from guilds to academies builds an understanding for the surrounding environment for female artists, as only young boys were permitted in the academies.

There were concepts in art that were credited to feminization, but they were seen to be controlled and formed by male concepts in art. The feminized concept of *colore* was discussed

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[35] Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present*, 77.

[36] Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present*, 77.

[37] Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present*, 77.

[38] Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present,* 69.

by author Patricia L. Reilly. Her work *The Taming of the Blue* (1992) highlights the connotations that color had in painting in comparison to *disegno.* Females in the modern era were held to a proper decorum, forcing modesty and regulation on their appearances and behaviors. Like color in art, the masculine figure felt responsible for controlling the feminine figure. The understanding of this balance of color and *disegno* highlights the woman's place in the society of the modern era, especially in art, the female side of things was seen as inferior and needed to be controlled by man's superior capabilities. Reilly's argument that where a woman belonged in art was in *colore* highlights that *disegno* was a masculine concept being withheld from them and that it was seen as something they would not be able to comprehend.

Patricia L. Reilly discusses *colore* in comparison to *disegno* in relation to gender in *The Taming of the Blue*. She describes the relationship of *colore* to *disegno* as antagonistic as well as beautiful and dangerous, easily finding itself in comparison with feminine qualities. Reilly compares the relationship of *colore* and *disegno* to that of matter and form. Form is seen as being ideal and it is equated to male qualities, and to form, matter is subservient. She cites the opinions of Alberti and Vasari, who believe that color plays its role in the arts, but it must be met with line and composition and overall *disegno.*[39] So, while color is significant, it is meant to be tamed, just as women are intended to be tamed by men. Reilly states that "by fashioning feminine identity through feminized materials, the painter fashioned himself as a creator."[40] The male painter becomes the creator of life through his understanding of *disegno,* taking the title from god and from women who bare life. The concept of color was seductive and was meant to be tamed by an

[39] Reilly, "The Taming of the Blue: Writing Out Color in Italian Renaissance Theory," 88.

[40] Reilly, "The Taming of the Blue: Writing Out Color in Italian Renaissance Theory," 89.

artist in order to achieve balance and harmony in his work. In this sense, and others, Reilly notes how women were seen as a threat to art rather than an inspiration or able in their own right.

Reilly also analyzes the use of the human figure in relation to gender dominance in the early modern era. This is where artists and critics alike seemed to agree that color held significance, but also where the masculinity of *disegno* reigns. Regarding the human form, it was the dabs of blood red and the pigments of flesh that made the works appear to be living rather than paint on a canvas.[41] The mastery of the human figure, male artists were able to become the source of "conception and generation" creating life that they would need a woman for in the flesh, but in this instance, only needed their own genius. [42] Reilly writes that "*disegno* provided the assurance of the greater guiding principle of order and intellect, and the viewer came to gaze upon the female body confident of a beauty that has been brought into line, that conformed to his desires."[43] Because these artists were able to create life without physical interaction with women, they felt that they had surpassed them. Reilly elaborates on the details of a work of art from the Renaissance and early modern periods, showing what femininity meant in the world of art. As *disegno* was allowing for a higher level of intellect, it excluded women artists and put them in a place of conformity and control.

Mary D. Garrard is a modern-day feminist scholar with an impressive body of work. In her article "Leonardo Da Vinci: Female Portraits, Female Nature" (1992) Garrard gives insight into the male opinion of the female in society and art in the Renaissance.[44] She cites Alberti's

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[41] Reilly, "The Taming of the Blue: Writing Out Color in Italian Renaissance Theory," 91.

[42] Reilly, "The Taming of the Blue: Writing Out Color in Italian Renaissance Theory," 92.

[43] Reilly, "The Taming of the Blue: Writing Out Color in Italian Renaissance Theory," 96.

[44] Garrard, "Leonardo Da Vinci: Female Portraits, Female Nature."

view of a woman being the personification of nature, which sounds like an honor, but is described as more of a way to control and adjust the woman as the man sees fit. She relates this to a work by Albrecht Dürer *Perspective Study: Draftsman Drawing a Reclining Nude* (figure 2) where a man draws a reclining woman who is the portrayal of nature. In this respect Garrard refers to her as "objectified, passive matter, a mere model, waiting to be given meaningful form in art by the powers of the artist."[45] Garrard analyzes woman's connection to nature, the mastering objective of *disegno.* This places women as the object of art, giving over their matter to be molded into the form of the artist while being left out of the encompassing *disegno.* Woman is seen as nature itself, while also being seen as an object for man to control and contort in order to compete with the natural world.

While this article by Garrard describes multiple works of art with deep rooted male dominated symbolism, she describes the convoluted opinions of Leonard da Vinci when it came to women. Her perspective helps to understand the environment surrounding female artists in the time of the Renaissance and shortly after with the Baroque and early modern periods. Leonardo "described female-identified nature as the greatest force in the universe" but he also "acknowledged and symbolized in positive terms a realm of female power that the majority of men in his era could acknowledge only inversely, through the repressive strategy of declaring women inferior beings."[46] Garrard believes Leonardo connected himself to women through his female portraiture and challenged the demeaning and inaccurate depiction of women. Garrard's work on the master of the Renaissance guides this research in its understanding of a rare supporter of women and their potential as artists. Her quote on women from such an influential

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[45] Garrard, "Leonardo Da Vinci: Female Portraits, Female Nature," 72.

[46] Garrard, "Leonardo Da Vinci: Female Portraits, Female Nature," 79.

artist like Leonardo shows that they were excluded from the art community in many ways, leaving them out from the opportunities that *disegno* brought to the field.

In *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State: The Discipline of Disegno* (2000), Karen-edis Barzman defines *disegno as* "the guiding principle upon which the academy was founded."[47] This definition cites the significance of *disegno* and how it led to a more constructed concept of art education. She discusses the implications that *disegno* had on the arts, as it united sculpture and painting and it invited them to debate with other contemporary matters of human thought, showing that not only was this concept about creation, it was about the intellect and understanding of that creation. The academies that taught and reflected *disegno* set a precedent in early modern Florence with their connection to court. Her chapter "*Disegno* as a Disciplinary Practice: The Academy School" discusses the path of importance of *disegno.* It was first institutionalized by the Medici in their formal school, and their power and patronage greatly affected the influence of this concept in the arts. Powerful families were supporting *disegno* and adding to its reverence, further leaving behind the women artists who did not have access to what it encompassed.

Barzman describes the true meaning of *disegno* beyond the simple translation. She states that it was meant to "signify drawing after other works of art, after the model, after nature, or from the imagination."[48] The arts are born from memory and experiences, requiring a universal understanding of nature and the surrounding world something that was not afforded to women. Barzman notes that while *disegno* demanded knowledge of objects for imitation, it primarily heeded the understanding of the forms of man as well as an understanding of mans'

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[47] Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State; The Discipline of Disegno,* 10.

[48] Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State; The Discipline of Disegno,* 145.

configuration.[49] She also acknowledges the connection from art to mathematics, as both required the understanding of the universal forms of nature.

The study of figure drawing was essential for achieving *disegno* as it was the basis for understanding the human form and movement. Barzman details the connected experience provided to those in the academy through figure drawing. She references Alberti and his belief that the most significant form of understanding human nature was not from sculpture or other works of art, but from nature directly.[50] While a model was the best way to draw the human figure, students of the academy were also required to participate in dissection, or at the very least an in-depth study of the human skeleton, to understand the inner workings of nature.

Adelina Modesti gives an insight to one of the most successful female artist in the early modern period in *Elisabetta Sirani 'Virusosa'* (2014). Modesti gives a background on Sirani, detailing how her birthplace of forward-thinking Bologna was an intellectual and creative haven for the future artist. Noblewomen in Bologna participated in public life and they supported the work of Sirani, especially that which worked toward the social upbringing of young women.[51] The edification of young women was Sirani's focus as she ran a private teaching academy for aspring female artists and established the *Accademia del Disegno for Women*. Modesti calls Sirani "the most important figure responsible for establishing avenues for the training of women who wanted to pursue a career in the visual arts."[52] Her status as educator broke the male-to-

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[49] Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State; The Discipline of Disegno,* 151.

[50]Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State; The Discipline of Disegno,* 162.

[51] Adelina Modesti, *Elisabetta Sirani 'Virtuasoa'; Women's Cultural Production in Early Modern Bologna,* (Belgium: Prepols Publishers, 2014), 63.

[52] Modesti, *Elisabetta Sirani 'Virtuasoa'; Women's Cultural Production in Early Modern Bologna,* 68.

female model of training in the arts, allowing women to learn from someone closer to themselves.

Many scholars studying female artists have an obvious feminist standpoint from which they write. Historians like Mary D. Gerrard, Linda Nochlin, and Whitney Chadwick focus on the female aspect of these artists' surroundings, and where the gender bias affected them the most. Garrard wrote articles on the specific issues of being a woman artist in the Renaissance, like, "Here's Looking at Me: Sofonisba Anguissola and the Problem of the Woman Artist," (1994) and Nochlin asked the infamous question with, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" (1971)[53] Chadwick searched through history, with *Women, Art, and Society* (1990), searching for comprehension in the combination.[54] These scholars broadened the understanding of the gender imbalance of the past and gave insight as to the struggles for the few women artists that broke through the cycle of male painters and sculptors.

Garrard's look into Anguissola depicts how the artist dissolved the barrier between the one looking in and the one looking out of the canvas. In her *Bernardino Campi Painting Sofonisba Anguissola* (figure 3)*,* she presents her teacher as the one who has brought her so much success, but also objectifies him as he is the image produced by an unseen artist's hand.[55] Garrard questions the motives of Anguissola, asking why she would have chosen to undermine her own value, and give the pride of her talent to her teacher, if that is in fact what this work was doing. While this may be an homage to her teacher, she is the one who portrays him as only having created her, while she paints both him and herself in this work. Garrard translates this

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[53] Mary D. Garrard, "Here's Looking at Me: Sofonisba Anguissola and the Problem of the Women Artist," Renaissance Quarterly 47 (1994) 556-622; Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" *ARTnews* (January 1971) 145-78.

[54] Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society,* (Vancouver, B.C.: Langara College, 2016).

[55] Garrard, "Here's Looking at Me: Sofonisba Anguissola and the Problem of the Women Artist," 561.

depiction to the sexualization of the artist-patron pairing as it mirrored the sexualization and gender-structuring of the entire creative process. Most often, the male artist was made to be the "creative shaper of the material model that he turned into art, just as man was understood to inseminate a woman physically."[56] In this gender relationship, women were brought under male control through the explanation that they were "exceptional to the natural order of things" and by "emphasizing their beauty and their virtue."[57] Garrard connects Anguissola to the plight of many women artists at the time, and analyzes how her work intended to question the power of the male artist over her talent.

Linda Nochlin's analysis about the lack of female artists finds that institutions and education kept women from being on par with the multitude of notable male artists. The fault is not from their genetic makeup or ability to create life, but rather, the education that was not offered to them because of those factors.[58] Nochlin also cites the misconceptions of what feminists believe art to be as a hindrance to the success of female artists. Many believe art to be the personal expression of individual experience, but rather, art involves "self-consistent language of form…which have to be learned…either through teaching, apprenticeship, or a long period of individual experimentation."[59] While many female artists are remarkably talented, their historical lack of institutional involvement and education left them without the change to be as great as their male counterparts.

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[56] Garrard, "Here's Looking at Me: Sofonisba Anguissola and the Problem of the Women Artist," 572.

[57] Garrard, "Here's Looking at Me: Sofonisba Anguissola and the Problem of the Women Artist," 573.

[58] Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" 150.

[59] Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" 149.

In Chadwick's book *Women, Art, and Society*, she discusses the famous female artists Sofonisba Anguissola, Artemisia Gentileschi, and Judith Leyster. In her focus on Anguissola's portrait *Bernardino Campi Painting Sofonisba Anguissola* (figure 3), she claims that is the "first historical example of the woman artist consciously collapsing the subject-object position."[60] She walks viewers through this painting in a new way by pointing out how subject and object fell upon many women artists in the Renaissance. She acknowledges that the fame of many female artists of the early modern era was tainted by their having "been forced into linguistic categories defined by traditional notion of male genius, and isolated as exceptions."[61] She notes that when Vasari spoke of Anguissola, he placed her in the light of growing up in a noble family, receiving a good education in her youth. He did this to signify the class in which she was raised, claiming that now the artist was one of elevated social status.[62] Chadwick claims that the entire category of women artists is still unstable, even in the twenty-first century. The meaning behind the phrase 'woman artist' is still used only in relation to male archetypes of art and feminism.

Previous scholarship has discussed women artists and the tropes that they met in their search for success. The view of women in the early modern era placed them as beautiful specimens meant to be displayed and appreciated for their softness and elegance, rather than believing that they were capable of creating beauty with artistic skill. Scholars from the past twenty years have begun to delve into women artists and the beautiful works of theirs that did not gain recognition, and even more contemporary scholars are looking into the imbalance of female representation in the museums. There has also been a number of works that discuss

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[60] Garrard, "Here's Looking at Me: Sofonisba Anguissola and the Problem of the Women Artist," 572.

[61] Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society*, 10.

[62] Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society*, 34.

disegno, ranging from the early modern period to now. Scholars like Vasari give the initial understanding and significance of *disegno* as it connected to the arts and the artists, and modern scholars quote him to outline their understanding of the progression of art and art education. This thesis takes *disegno* as the reason why female artists were not successful in the early modern era. They were withheld from the academic establishments that taught the concept, but they were also not believed to have the intelligence to grasp all the skills that *disegno* enveloped. This construct in art was withheld from women, keeping them from the same success as male artists in the early modern era.

Research Methodology

The research methodology in this scholarship will be qualitative with a feminist theoretical focus stemming from the ideals of the second feminist wave. The approach taken in the research is that of female artists of the early modern era and the restriction upon them within the concept of *disegno.* This principle is what elevated art from a simple craft to a career of skill and intellect, yet women were not able to learn it and join the male masters. *Disegno* was a masculine concept, bringing the offer of genius to that of the early modern male artist only. To find success in the arts, many female artists of the early modern era found routes around their exclusion from *disegno,* master's studios, and studying from nude models.

Scholars of the Renaissance and early modern eras like Vasari and Bellori used a biographical methodology in their research, Bellori taking up his own version of *Lives* a century after Vasari. They each researched the lives of the artists they sought to understand. Vasari discussed artists in relation to their capabilities of *disegno.* In his description of Titian's genius he felt the artist had been marred by a lack of design in his works.[63] Vasari felt that the artist failed to understand human anatomy, an essential quality of *disegno*. He also felt that proportion and perspective were necessary elements in the overall cohesion of a work was developed later in the Renaissance. Vasari specifically notes these elements in his biographical studies of Paolo Uccello (1397-1475) and Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446).[64] In the early modern era and earlier, scholars like these were focused on bestowing the importance of *disegno* upon the arts. Biographical works of the time that discussed *disegno* focused on how it was being taught in the academies and how artists were using it, either successfully, or with difficulty.

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[63] Vasari, *Lives of the Artists,* 501.

[64] Vasari, *Lives of the Artists,* 74, 113.

More modern scholarship of *disegno* has shifted from biographical accounts of how artists used the concept to identifying exactly what *disegno* meant and how far it reached. Nikolaus Pevsner wrote of *disegno* in his in depth scholarship of the history of the art academy. Much of his research looks back at the *Accademia del Disegno* of Vasari and how *disegno* was seen as the expression of a concept within one's soul.[65] Even more recent, Patricia Lee Rubin discusses *disegno* in relation to how Vasari wrote about his artists. Rubin details the significance of this concept in relation to how it directed his biographies. Another modern writing on *disegno* from Robert Williams looks to identify what all *disegno* encompassed in respect to Vasari and its connections to Aristotle and Borghini.[66] Williams establishes how history unified the arts and aligning the teachings of art with the intellectual concept of *disegno* put it on a path with higher learning. The following scholarship uses what these modern historians have gathered about the meaning and significance of *disegno* and applies it to how women in the arts were hindered without it in the early modern era.

In more modern times the study of women artists in the early modern era has shifted from surprise at their skill to an acknowledgement of the tropes they surpassed in order to make a name for themselves. Scholar Adelina Modesti wrote of Eliabetta Sirani and the legacy of her short life. She thoroughly researched Sirani's life, art, and school for women, and brought light to the joining of genius and female artist through biography.[67] Her research allows this scholarship to explain how *disegno* was taught to some women after the early modern era in academies like the one Sirani created. Patrizia Cavazzini focuses on life for Artemisia within the

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[65] Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present* 46.

[66] Robert Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy, From Techne to Metatechne,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1997), 34.

[67] Modesti, *Elisabetta Sirani 'Virtuasoa'; Women's Cultural Production in Early Modern Bologna*.

confines of her father's house.[68] Cavazzini specifically focuses on the circumstances in which Artemisia grew up, rather than just studying the art she created in a biographical study similar to historians well before her time like Vasari and Bellori. Her modern biographical work focuses on the difficulties Gentileschi surpassed throughout her youth to become an artist and how she honed her skill. This scholarship of Gentileschi's life and artistic education allows for this scholarship to understand how women of the early modern era were working around not being taught *disegno* in the academies.

The movements of feminism came in three waves. The first came about in the battle for women's suffrage. This wave began in the late nineteenth century by advocates who demanded women's right to vote and led to the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920 that allowed woman suffrage.[69] The second wave advocated for equality in education, in the home, and in the workplace. Those of the second wave were driven by their desire for equality and faced the dilemma of being self-sufficient, or focusing on a family. The third wave focuses on multicultural inclusion, the forming of political alliances, and overlapping systems of discrimination.[70] The second wave feminists carry on the values and aims of the first, while the third associates itself with correcting the lack of attention to race, class, religion, and other factors that differentiate women.[71] The third wave pushed for an understanding that "the

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[68] Cavazzini, "Artemisia in Her Father's House."

[69] Nancy A. Hewitt, "From Seneca Falls to Suffrage?: Reimagining a "Master" Narrative in U.S. Women's History," In *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism*, edited by Nancy A. Hewitt., (New Brunswick, New Jersey, London: Rutgers University Press, 2010) 15.

[70] Leela Fernandes, "Unsettling "Third Wave Feminism": Feminist Waves, Intersectionality, and Identity Politics in Retrospect," In *No Permanent Waves: Recasting Histories of U.S. Feminism*, ed. by Nancy A. Hewitt., (New Brunswick, New Jersey, London: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 99.

[71] Martha Easton, "Feminism," *Studies in Iconography* 33 (2012): 99.

category of 'woman' itself is not monolithic, that there is not just one 'feminism' but rather many 'feminisms,' and this idea of a fragmented feminism" is one of modern society.[72] This last wave attempts to look back into history and uncover past opposition to the patriarchy. Feminism and feminist theory advanced through these waves, beginning with basic rights and developing into a system of continuous change and advancement for all women.

Many female scholars have taken a feminist approach to writing about women artists. In their gender theory methodology, these historians focus on the sexism and gender exclusion of women. Linda Nochlin, specifically, asked the question, "why have there been no great female artists?" Nochlin looked into the hindrances placed on women and how their surroundings made it difficult for them to be successful in the art world.[73] The work on Artemisia Gentileschi by Mary D. Garrard also takes a strong feminist approach. Whitney Chadwick looks at the society surrounding women artists, and how all three are related, giving us a better understanding of the climate for women artists in the Renaissance. The preceding research touches on feminist methodology, as any writing focused on the differentiation between gender opportunities does, with a focus on the concept of *disegno* and the nude model.

Nochlin stated that "in general, women's experience and situation in society, and hence as artists, is different from men's."[74] The group has been treated with inequality throughout the centuries based on their gender, rather than their subject matter. The scenes they paint have been crafted by men as well, but it is looked at differently knowing that it came from the hand of a woman. It is regrettable that there are not female artists that one can compare to Michelangelo,

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[72] Easton, "Feminism," 101.

[73] Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" 145.

[74] Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" 148.

but it is due simply to the opportunities afforded to them distributed according to one's place in the world. Despite the overwhelming odds against women, so many have managed to achieve so excellence within realms of the masculine prerogative, like the arts.[75] Women's inequality stems from the nature of the institutional structures and the "view of reality which they impose on the human beings who are part of them."[76] Education, where one is invited into a world of "meaningful symbols, signs, and signals" is the reason for the lack of extraordinary female artists.[77] The following research focuses on these hindrances to women in the arts, due to the educational opportunities kept from them, but offered to their male counterparts. Nochlin is said to have been the first intersection of feminism and art history with "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" as she examined the social and educational restrictions on women.[78] While Nochlin and other feminist historians have rediscovered and represented many forgotten female artists, contemporary feminist artists continue to struggle for acceptance within the canon. While many other art historians did not follow the approach to feminist theory at first, there has been a boost in scholarship within the past thirty years.[79] Other theories like postmodern and post-structuralist have assisted feminist theory in order to deconstruct fixed meanings and shift meaning from artistic intention to viewer reception.[80]

The past scholarship of *disegno* and the female artist have mostly been separate. The waves of feminism have permeated art history in announcing the inequalities of women and

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[75] Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" 150.

[76] Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" 152.

[77] Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" 150.

[78] Easton, "Feminism," 100.

[79] Easton, "Feminism," 100.

[80] Easton, "Feminism," 101.

claiming that a lack of education and patronage led to their lack of success. *Disegno* was created from studying nature and understanding its rules. Artists took the information they studied and turned it into nearly perfect renditions on a page, the highlight of this perfection being the human figure. The following scholarship intends to place *disegno* as the significant reason for why women artists were not as successful as men in the early modern era. Women were not admitted into the spaces that taught *disegno* and the concept itself was a male construct that excluded them from its origin. Through the second wave of feminist theory, the following will study the exclusion of women in the artistic construct of *disegno* that would have allowed them to compete against male artists in the early modern era

Analysis

The idea of *disegno* acknowledged one's ability to draw as well as their ability to design their creation. This concept was especially focused on the nude figure and the artist's ability to display accurate human anatomy. This artistic concept "functioned as an authorized discourse, moreover, its practitioners were positioned socially and professionally within an entrenched system of patronage."[81] As Barzman describes, the mastery of *disegno* is what elevated art from a craft to something of intellect and respect, placing it on par with literature and music in the early modern period, but women were excluded from its teachings. *Disegno* is an artistic principle kept from female artists as they were not permitted to view the nude model and they were not assumed to be capable of understanding the intellect behind the concept. Vincenzo Borghini (1515-1580), writer of *Selva di notizie* (1564) that compared painting and sculpture, asserted that an artist must draw from the model to perfect the human figure.[82] Models were drawn in workshops and academies, artistic spaces where women were not permitted in the early modern era, placing a masculine label on artistic creativity. Women were not taught the masculine concept of *disegno* and were not able to find the same success as their male artist counterparts in the early modern era.

Disegno was described by Giorgio Vasari as "a complex activity based on intellection."[83] He described it as a process that "combined the acquisition of knowledge with the ability to suggest with the hand the 'universal forms' or 'ideas' of nature."[84] Vasari believed the goal of art

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[81] Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State; The Discipline of Disegno,* 7.

[82] Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State; The Discipline of Disegno,* 162.

[83] Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State; The Discipline of Disegno,* 145

[84] Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State; The Discipline of Disegno,* 145.

was to imitate nature, and for an artist to do that, they must study the art of the masters before them while developing their own style. In *Lives of the Artists,* Vasari states that

> Design cannot have a good origin if it has not come from continual practice in copying natural objects, and from the study of pictures by excellent masters and of ancient statues in relief…But above all, the best thing is to draw men and women from the nude and thus fix the memory by constant exercise the muscles of the torso, back, legs, arms, and knees, with the bones underneath. Then one may be sure that through much study attitudes in any position can be drawn by help of the imagination without one's having the living forms in view.[85]

It was with this belief that Vasari found great art to be made. One must practice and have access to the human figure in order to create *disegno.*

The idea of *disegno* advanced throughout the sixteenth century. In the early years of the century, it signified many different things, only some of which were connected to the actual concept of drawing. Something which we construe today as being of graphic work, after nature and the model, and from one's imagination.[86] Rubin notes that *disegno* "provided the technical and conceptual means to express the forms" of a work of art.[87] In order for one to be able to put pencil to paper successfully, they must understand what they are creating on an intellectual level. With this, Vasari implied that innate talent alone was not sufficient, in order to be successful, an artist had to study diligently and grasp *disegno.*[88] He pitied those that did not have the advantage of *disegno* and believed that artists who "failed to study the lessons of central Italy and antiquity…lacked the ability to understand or express the true profundity of art through

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[85] Stefano Pierguidi, "Vasari, Borghini, and the Merits of Drawing from Life," Master Drawings 49, no. 2 (2011): 171.

[86] Karen-edis Barzman, "Perception, Knowledge, and the Theory of *Disegno* in Sixteenth-Century Florence," in *From Studio to Studiolo: Florentine Draughtsmanship under the First Medici Grand Dukes* by Larry J. Feinburg (Oberlin and Seattle: Allen Memorial Art Museum and University of Washington Press, 1991) 38.

[87] Patricia Lee Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari: Art and Art History,* 234.

[88] Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari: Art and Art History,* 235.

disegno."[89] ′Rubin sites Vasari's sympathies as his knowledge that those not trained in *disegno* would ever be able to grasp it on their own. By the middle of the century *disegno* also implied theoretical discourse that came from *paragone,* the comparison of painting and sculpture. Both concepts were woven in with discussions that concerned the visual arts and their connection to human activity and perception.[90]

It was humanist Benedetto Varchi (1503-1565) who affected the shift in methodology in the discussion of art that made Vasari's definition possible. Varchi believed that *disegno* was *il principio* of painting and sculpture, in other words, it was the origin of the work.[91] In his lectures, he declared *disegno* to be a "process of cognition."[92] It was in his lectures that he built upon Aristotle's texts that had already framed a discussion of artistic theory and practice, and he added concepts of painting and sculpture. Previously, scholars connected the two fields as liberal arts, downplaying the manual application and function of art. Varchi claimed that according to Aristotle's framework, arts should be identified as "habits of the intellect."[93] Varchi united painting and sculpture under *disegno,* and proclaimed that they should be judged by their ends, and their ends were for one to make.[94] This initiated *disegno* as the origin of painting and sculpture and allowed Vasari to build upon it to direct the future of the arts.

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[89] Rubin, *Giorgio Vasari: Art and Art History,* 90.

[90] Barzman, "Perception, Knowledge, and the Theory of *Disegno* in Sixteenth-Century Florence," 38.

[91] Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State; The Discipline of Disegno,* 147.

[92] Barzman, "Perception, Knowledge, and the Theory of *Disegno* in Sixteenth-Century Florence," 38.

[93] Barzman, "Perception, Knowledge, and the Theory of *Disegno* in Sixteenth-Century Florence," 39.

[94] Barzman, "Perception, Knowledge, and the Theory of *Disegno* in Sixteenth-Century Florence," 39.

It was one's mental capacity for *disegno* that elevated art from the hobby of a craftsman to the profession of a genius. Vasari believed that *disegno* "arises a certain notion and judgment which forms in the mind that which, when expressed with the hands, is called design" and that design was "nothing other than a visible expression and declaration of that notion of the mind."[95] This tie from *disegno* to one's mind made it clear that this was not just a matter of art, but a matter of intellect. As society began to understand the inner workings of art, it began to accept the artist as an intellectual. "The disciplinary practices of *disegno* initially contributed to the formation of a new social order and the institutional framework within which these practices operated was contingent upon strategies of cultural politics."[96] This meant that one's understanding of *disegno* implied one's knowledge of the forms of nature as well as mathematics. Pevsner sites how Vasari felt that an artist "should not be in a dependent position, in the same way as a common craftsman. To make him a member of an academy instead would demonstrate that his social rank was just as high as that of a scientist of another scholar."[97] In this light, educated men were enveloped in a society of elite and noble patrons. As women were excluded from the teachings of *disegno,* as well as formal life drawing classes, the basic teaching tool in the development of a painter, it was believed that women artists did not, or rather, could not paint to the same degree as men.[98]

In Barzman's explaining of *disegno* she describes the Aristotelian construct that states that men of art understand the causes of the products they're making, while those that simply

[95] Williams, *Art, Theory, and Culture in Sixteenth-Century Italy, From Techne to Metatechne,* 33.

[96] Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State; The Discipline of Disegno,* 8.

[97] Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present*, 54.

[98] Modesti, *Elisabetta Sirani 'Virtuasoa'; Women's Cultural Production in Early Modern Bologna,* 179.

have experience do not. The artist of *disegno* was supposed to know more than just the cause, they also needed universal knowledge of what he was imitating.[99] This especially related to the imitation of man, if an artist was to create with *disegno* they were to understand the parts of the body as well as why they were configured in such a way. Through the experience of drawing bodies in a variety of states and poses as well as training in the rendering of a body, one could acquire this universal knowledge.[100] This understanding of *disegno* and how to achieve it outlines how women were excluded from success.

The lesser side of art, *colore,* was deemed more feminine, as it was dangerous, and it engaged in an antagonistic relationship with the masculine concept of *disegno.*[101] The antiquarian idea of form and matter began this separation of the two gendered concepts. Form, which is associated with *disegno,* was equated to the male, and matter to the female. It is believed to be superior to matter, as matter is subservient to form. Form provides the rules and norms while matter is simply "fleshing out the divine world of ideas."[102] Matter did not require the same intelligence as *disegno*, as one was not deeply interpreting what they were creating, but simply sketching out what they saw. While the integration of both is often required in art, form is considered to be more pure and definitive of skill. Aristotle compared these two concepts, which kept women out of the pure definition of *disegno,* as females provided the material, while men put the material into shape.[103] The belief of Aristotle and Vasari was that color, the feminine side

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[99] Barzman, "Perception, Knowledge, and the Theory of *Disegno* in Sixteenth-Century Florence," 41.

[100] Barzman, "Perception, Knowledge, and the Theory of *Disegno* in Sixteenth-Century Florence," 41.

[101] Reilly, "The Taming of the Blue: Writing Out Color in Italian Renaissance Theory," 87.

[102] Reilly, "The Taming of the Blue: Writing Out Color in Italian Renaissance Theory," 88.

[103] Reilly, "The Taming of the Blue: Writing Out Color in Italian Renaissance Theory," 88.

of painting, was to be suppressed in art, as it was used too often to cover up a lack of skill from the artist.

Matter was considered restricting to art and it was considered a feminine aspect of creation to the masculine form. Two approaches to art were established by Lucio Faberio, both of which required manipulating matter and imitating nature. Faberio was secretary to the Compagnia dei Pittori and involved with the Bolognese Company of Painters, beginning in 1599.[104] The first approach involves strict reproduction of nature while the other works to edit the shortcomings of nature and show it as perfection. Faberio believed the method of the Carracci's to be most successful as they were "those enlightened and discerning artists who study nature but aim to achieve a beauty and perfection not found in nature but that nature would attain if it were not restricted to matter."[105] This feminized concept in the arts was only considered to hold a work back, reiterating a woman's place in the field. It was artists capable of this understanding that went above the true appearance of nature into pure perfection. The perfection of nature was seen in works by the Carracci family, and it was taught to their students through theory and practice, but women were not admitted to their academy.

Vasari's understanding of *disegno* meant that one had to move from insight to intellection. The artist had to be able to change "from the objects of sense to the objects of thought."[106] To embody *disegno* was to express what was in your mind through your art. This level of intelligent design was not afforded to women artists, not allowing them to perform this

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[104] Anne Summerscale, *Malvasia's Life of the Carracci: Commentary and Translation* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2000) 50.

[105] Goldstein, *Visual Fact Over Verbal Fiction,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 29.

[106] Barzman, "Perception, Knowledge, and the Theory of *Disegno* in Sixteenth-Century Florence," 40.

change in the objects in their art. Vasari found there to be a distinct difference between perceiving an object and having knowledge of its form. In order for an artist to succeed in *disegno,* they must draw from real life examples to show their judgement and knowledge of the forms. While matter was involved in *disegno,* form was the ultimate composite subject, requiring control and interpretation from the creator. In order to create form, pure line is required, rather than color. Line is not perceived in nature, but is instead born of the intellect of an artist who has moved through induction and is within the realm of *disegno.*

Women were compared to this lesser concept of color in comparison to *disegno* by way of their expected behavior and appearance. Women were "subject to the rigors of decorum" and they were expected to be colored perfectly, just as a work of art.[107] The beauty of a women served in the creation of the understanding of beauty in art, keeping only their appearance aligned with artistic prowess, not their intellect or talent. "By fashioning feminine identity through feminized materials, the painter fashioned himself as a creator."[108] In order for an artist to master his *disegno,* he had to sufficiently suppress the use of color, using his masculine skills to subdue the feminine qualities of art. As women were compared to this lesser element in art, they were not believed to be capable of understanding the higher concepts like *disegno.*

The level at which genres of paintings were appreciated for their skill varied. While the official hierarchy was created in 1669 by Andre Felibien (1616-1695) of the French Academy, a ranking system began in the Renaissance as artists pursued mimesis in their work. [109] The

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[107] Reilly, "The Taming of the Blue: Writing Out Color in Italian Renaissance Theory," 91.

[108] Reilly, "The Taming of the Blue: Writing Out Color in Italian Renaissance Theory," 91.

[109] Colin B. Bailey, Philip Conisbee, Colin Bailey, Thomas W. Gaehtgens *The Age of Watteau, Chardin, and Fragonard: Masterpieces of French Genre Painting,* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003) 44.

hierarchy depended upon a Renaissance revival of ancient art theory that preferred allegory and history painting over portraiture, landscape, and still lives.[110] The academies enveloped these values from the Renaissance, and gave way to a system of rank towards these different categories of painting. The highest of genres were works with historical, religious, or mythological subjects, so artists of these kinds of works were seen as more skilled. This hierarchy set women at another disadvantage as they were not acquiring the artistic skills necessary for the more respected genres of art.

> In Italy, women artists did not generally specialize in history painting…such subjects demanded superior erudition of the arts, even as they produced greater edification for the viewer….since women were considered biologically incapable of true creation and portraits were seen as replications of nature rather than inventions, portraiture was viewed as the most appropriate female *métier,* avoiding, as it allegedly did, any necessity for real creativity.[111]

This hindrance kept women from the genres of art that were seen as being born of high intellect and *disegno.* After many female artists were mostly taught in portraiture, Sirani became the first female artist in Bologna to specialize in history painting, a path that was followed by most of women painters that she trained.[112] In the seventeenth century, when women finally became significant producers of history paintings, they developed a subspecialty with imagery of heroines from antiquity, something not often found in work by male artists.[113]

Art education and the teachings of *disegno* during the early modern period can be credited to the Humanists. "The individual, the city, and virtue were among the main issues

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[110] Keith Moxey, "Panofsky's Concept of "Iconology" and the Problem of Interpretation in the History of Art." *New Literary History* 17, no. 2 (1986): 270.

[111] Bohn, "The Antique Heroines of Elisabetta Sirani," Renaissance Studies 16, no. 1 (2002): 58.

[112] Bohn, "Elisabetta Sirani and Drawing Practices in Early Modern Bologna," 210.

[113] Bohn, "The Antique Heroines of Elisabetta Sirani," 56.

under discussion among the humanists in Florence" during Leon Battista Alberti's time.[114] A humanist scholar himself, he argued for the individual to "actively use his talents."[115] Humanism centered on the pursuit of classical studies in subjects such as literature, history, and philosophy. The humanist desire for accurate information led them to study original documents, rather than later translations, and they held the ideal that education was, "inherently valuable for everyone."[116] Yet women were not educated in the same way as men. Humanists did not believe that education should be hindered based on wealth or position of power. The term humanist was used frequently in the latter half of the fifteenth century, and it marked a "cycle of scholarly disciplines."[117] Humanist schools differed from preceding educational establishments by making better use of printed texts and written themes. Students were to study literary and artistic features of classical heritage, in addition to their other subjects. It was important to the humanists that students learned of their own culture and felt a connection to the traditions of their past. Humanism was considered to be "a scholarly, literary, and educational ideal based on the study of classical antiquity."[118] These scholars established the humanities, a broad area of learning that exercised a pervasive influence on Renaissance culture and the arts. While their educational rules gave Humanists the desire to teach everyone, their education was mostly offered to young boys.

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[114] Caspar Pearson, *Humanism and the Urban World : Leon Battista Alberti and the Renaissance City*. (University Park, Pa: Penn State University Press, 2011), 15.

[115] Pearson, *Humanism and the Urban World : Leon Battista Alberti and the Renaissance City*, 15.

[116] Arthur D. Efland, *A History of Art Education: Intellectual and Social Currents in Teaching the Visual Arts,* (New York and London: Teachers College Press, 1990), 26.

[117] Paul Oskar Kristeller, "Studies on Renaissance Humanism During the Last Twenty Years." *Studies in the Renaissance* 9 (1962): 21.

[118] Kristeller, "Studies on Renaissance Humanism During the Last Twenty Years," 22.

As the Humanists brought painting and sculpture to a new style of teaching, when they left out women, so did the arts.

Humanism took inspiration from classical antiquity and from the past they gained new standards for art principles. They began to praise works of art and the artists themselves, appreciating each in a more respected light than the former medieval tradition that saw painting and sculpture as simple crafts.[119] Humanist learning had a profound effect on the iconography and style of Renaissance art.[120] They required a painting to have a theme, emanating from the Bible or classic literature. This understanding of the skill it took to be a professional artist and the new conception of the artist's position in society required a new concept of how to educate an artist.[121] Until this change in conception, an artist was to apprentice for up to six years while doing manual labor at his master's house. After this, he would go out to journeyman before obtaining his own mastership certificate and could finally settle down as his own painter.[122] After the humanist alteration of the societal view of the painter, this education formed into a syllabus that focused on learning perspective, proportion, drawing from his master's works, then from nature, and ultimately practicing his own pieces.[123] These steps allowed for artists to work professionally after having learned everything necessary, and nothing unnecessary, about the arts, but women did not go through this process.

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[119] Pevsner, *Academies of Art,* 31.

[120] Kristeller, "Studies on Renaissance Humanism During the Last Twenty Years," 17

[121] Pevsner, *Academies of Art,* 34.

[122] Pevsner, *Academies of Art,* 34.

[123] Pevsner, *Academies of Art,* 35.

The permeation of humanistic beliefs and practices into the Renaissance raised the status of artists in the eyes of their culture. Philosophers, like Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), initiated the acceptance of artists as members of the elite in the fifteenth century. They were more respected as it became recognized that, to be an artist, one required an intellectual understanding of subjects like perspective and classical culture.[124] The painter was to be taught knowledge rather than skill in this humanist era of education.[125] This elevated practicing painters and sculptors from skilled craftsman to respected geniuses. With this change began the questioning of the adequacy of the exclusivity of the guilds. As the status of the artist was rising, they began to reconsider their association with guilds and whether or not it was necessary to align with them in order to advance their artistic career. In this respect, male artists were able to take their future success into their own hands, deciding which was the best avenue for education, and whether or not to associate themselves with a group of other artists. This independence allowed them to choose the best path for their own patronage and financial success in the arts, but women did not have the same opportunities to show their worth in the arts and involve themselves with high paying patrons as they did not learn *disegno* and therefore weren't considered as intelligent as the artists that had.

The shift from guilds to educational academies aligned with this idea that artists were geniuses rather than simple talented craftsman. Academies taught theory, philosophy, and artistic practice and were based upon the search for widespread knowledge and building upon classical ideals. The academies were made up of a variety of artists, from novices to masters. Their prospectus was filled with theories from the artists themselves, anatomy, and humanist inquiry

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[124] Godfrey Rubens, "Art education." *Grove Art Online.* 2003; Accessed 25 Oct. 2019, 2.

[125] Pevsner, *Academies of Art,* 35.

into classical antiquity, all requirements of the ultimate achievement of *disegno*.[126] This understanding and this achievement led to painting being praised as the art of *disegno,* a concept related to the respected sciences. These tenets bounding science and the arts were secured through the artist's work as well as contemporary writers and humanists that supported their new social position.[127]

This humanistic line of thinking led to a permanent change in the art education system of the early modern period. This system gave artists an education and an economic understanding of their rights as an independent artisan. In the late fifteenth century, Lorenzo de' Medici (1449-1492) asked Bertoldo di Giovanni (1420s-1491), a sculptor, to instruct an apprentice in Italy. He taught his trainee ancient and contemporary works, using the Medici collection as his classroom.[128] This led to informal gatherings of others interested in the arts and culture of sculpture and painting, or the first art academies. "As the academy came to give structure to a program of teaching under his watchful eye, it…included drawing after the live model as an essential component."[129] Drawing from a live model was established in the academies as fundamental to an artist's learning, a requirement for *disegno.*

Humanist educators, artists, and artist biographers agreed that studying from the nude figure was an essential element of *disegno*. This concept of bringing one's art to life by studying life flourished in the academies, but within the walls of figure drawing and specified practice,

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[126] Efland, *A History of Art Education: Intellectual and Social Currents in Teaching the Visual Arts,* 30.

[127] Pevsner, *Academies of Art,* 32.

[128] Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State; The Discipline of Disegno*, 163.

[129] Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State; The Discipline of Disegno*, 163.

women were restricted. "*Disegno* was the intellectual ability to perceive and the manual ability to transcribe the most beautiful parts of nature."[130] This meant that one was understanding nature and their proof was their visual representation. This opportunity of learning this intellectual ability was not offered to women artists. In his own written work, *Lives of the Artists*, "Vasari insisted on the need to draw from the live model in order for the artist to excel in painting and sculpture."[131] Vasari includes many figural artists and almost always references their study of anatomy, highlighting the importance of the practice to gain perfection. This statement by Vasari highlighted his insistence of drawing from the body in order to achieve *disegno* in one's art, something women were not permitted to view.

Leon Battista Alberti stated a century before Vasari that "only anatomical studies, together with figure drawing, would enable the painter or sculptor to understand the mechanics of human mobility."[132] Art making itself "both in terms of the development of the art maker and in the nature and quality of the work of art itself, occur in a social situation, are integral elements of this social structure, and are mediated and determined by specific and definable social institutions."[133] The academies focused on understanding the human figure and its inner workings, giving their pupils the chance to draw the human figure exactly how it acted in nature, allowing them to further develop their art. The ability to study from the human body in order to understand it, and how that translated to successful figural art had been understood by scholars

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[130] James Hutson, *Early Modern Art Theory: Visual Culture and Ideology, 1400-1700*, (Hamburg: Anchor Academic Publishing, 2016), 60.

[131] Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State; The Discipline of Disegno,* 163.

[132] Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State; The Discipline of Disegno,* 163.

[133] Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" 152.

for centuries, but it was not something in which women were able to partake. As McIver quotes Alberti's *Della Famiglia* (1432), while some cities supported the education of women, "above all, as Alberti and others stated, a woman's education should prepare her to be a virtuous and practical wife and mother and a gracious hostess."[134] Instead of being involved in the progressive humanist education system, women were only to be educated in order to fulfill the expectations of womanhood. Being excluded from these anatomical and figure drawing studies kept women from even beginning to grasp *disegno.*

The *Accademia del Disegno*, set up in 1563, was one of the first that had actual instruction and objectives, but little actual practice.[135] This Florentine academy was established by Cosimo I de' Medici after suggestion from Giorgio Vasari. The namesake of the academic institution showing the influential Vasari's belief in the importance of the concept of *disegno.* The creation of the academy was political as well as intellectual, as the prestige of the empires that supported the arts elevated as the arts themselves became more glorified. It was the intention with the establishment of this academy to begin a society of leading Florentine artists and do away with the guild system. Pevsner notes that the initial members were from different guilds, which were now negated, as they were now "all concerned with *disegno,* that all-important *espressione e dichiarazione del concetto che sia nell animo."*[136] This new way of educating artists aligned their formerly disjointed goals for the arts, leading the future of artists towards the concept of *disegno* and, in turn, the mastery of their craft. A mastery that left out women artists.

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[134] Katherine A. McIver, "Lavinia Fontana's "Self-Portrait Making Music"," *Woman's Art Journal 19*, no. 1 (1998): 3.

[135] Rubens, "Art education," 2.

[136] Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present*, 46. Translation of Italian text: "important expression and declaration of the concept that is in the soul"

The main concern of the *Accademia del Disegno* was the education of beginning artists. Regulations of the academy established that three masters each year were to choose a number of boys and teach them in the art of *disegno.*[137] Barzman notes that "the sculptor's commitment to dissection and anatomical studies…comprised an important part of the pedagogy in the *Accademia del Disegno*" as well, ensuring the pupils had a vast understanding of the human body.[138] Young boys were being taught from the very beginnings of art and it led them to a complete understanding of the human figure in order to draw it in any position from any angle. Drawing from a human skeleton was used as an alternative to dissection in the academy, providing artists with the ability to visualize the interrelated parts and bone structure of the body. The multitude of educational resources available to students of the academy led them to the culmination of *disegno,* a concept that left out women artists.

The *Accademia di San Luca* was founded in 1593, and was the first academy with a curriculum, tutors, lectures, and creation from its pupils.[139] Rubens notes that "students of these academies spent a high proportion of their time in lectures and discourse and learning drawing; they also had access to a reference library."[140] So, not only were they practicing their physical drawing skills, but they were enhancing their academic intelligence, acknowledging that achieving *disegno* in the arts required more than just observation and practice. This academy was complete with drawing from life, drawing from plaster, as well as learning from landscapes and

[137] Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present*, 47.

[138] Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State; The Discipline of Disegno,* 6.

[139] Rubens, "Art education," 2.

[140] Rubens, "Art education," 2.

animal subjects.[141] These types of academies created the future of Italian art instruction, providing unprecedented preparation for those accepted within their walls. This all-encompassing art education establishment allowed for its students to cultivate *disegno* in their works of art, but women were not instructed.

While women were not afforded the same acceptance into these artistic academies, there are some historical records that recognize women as members. In 1607, The *Accademia di San Luca* approved a set of governing rules for all that hoped to join their organization. In one of their chapters they mention that, "women of notable achievement in art shall be accepted as Academicians," with stipulations.[142] They were not allowed to vote in the governance of the academy and they were required to gift a work of their art to the establishment, which was required for all Academicians. While it doesn't give women complete equality within the academy, it does include them, and requires the same of men and women novices of the group. This admittance of women into an academy signifies the surrounding societal changes in Italy during the Renaissance. Questions were being raised about the role of women at this time, and some were beginning to be considered successful when it came to their artistic careers. Now that artists had a heightened social rank, the career path meant economic support for a family, a more convincing argument for the artistic educational right of women than simple equality.

A foundation of the art education of the Renaissance was the nude model. Figural artists like Leonardo and Michelangelo went so far as the dissection of cadavers, to have a more

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[141] Pevsner, *Academies of Art, Past and Present*, 61.

[142] Consuelo Lollobrigida, "Women Artists in Casa Barberini: Plautilla Bricci, Maddalena Corvini, Artemisia Gentileschi, Anna Maria Vainai, and Virginia da Vezzo" in *Artemisia Gentileschi in a Changing Light,* ed. by Sheila Barker, (Belgium: Brepolis Publishers, 2017), 119.

complex understanding of the human body, on top of their access to breathing and manipulative humans. Long before them, in the late fifteenth century, Antonio Pollaiuolo, created an engraving of nude men in combat, which became the study material for future Florentine artists.[143] Mimesis was important to these artists, and when it came to the human figure, artists felt it necessary to understand the bones and muscles in order to build their foundation of portraying the body and its movements. Leonardo, who was responsible for many discoveries of the body, saw "the study of the muscles and skeleton as part of the process of representing the nude in art."[144] These masters understood the importance of not only viewing the human figure but understanding the inner workings of human anatomy in order to produce accurate artwork and achieve *disegno*.

Viewing the figure was essential to understanding how to depict the angles at which joints bend and the affects that one appendage has on another. In a figure study of a reclining young boy by Ludovico Carracci, *Study of a Recumbent Nude Boy* (figure 4), author Carl Goldstein describes how "it was necessary to discover...how to suggest the altered structure of the lowered thigh as it drops onto the surface; the arm resting on the breast is otherwise disconnected from the body of which it must appear...and the head, too, had to be placed in proper relation to the body."[145] In this sense, an artist's general knowledge of a figure was hardly useful, as the intricacies of the human form alter at this myriad of angles. So whether or not a female artist had an understanding of a male figure, which they most likely did not, their

[143] Domenico Laurenza, "Art and Anatomy in Renaissance Italy: Images from a Scientific Revolution," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin,* 69, no. 3 (Winter, 2012): 8

[144] Laurenza, "Art and Anatomy in Renaissance Italy: Images from a Scientific Revolution," 11.

[145] Goldstein, *Visual Fact Over Verbal Fiction,* 90.

familiarity was nearly useless without a life study, and their understanding of *disegno* was out of reach.

Women could not draw from a nude model in the early modern era, and it was an essential piece of *disegno*. The societal constructs that hindered women from studying the nude ensured that the notion of artistic talent carried masculine connotations. Women would not be afforded this fundamental element of artistic training and education until centuries later, keeping those in the early modern era away from many opportunities in the arts. Works like history paintings and mythological works often required depictions of nude figures and they were placed high on the hierarchal scale of art. This hierarchy was constructed by men who considered works of certain subject matter to be lower than others in the male saturated art of the time.[146] This assigned the highest appreciation to a style of art women did not have access to depict accurately in early modern times.

One advantage that female artists had over males in the early modern era was access to the nude female form. While many male artists included nude women, a masculine physique shows through the effeminate features, as they studied a male nude during their creation. Works by the Carracci were often studied from life but they also included their imagination, as the combination was essential for *disegno.* In works like *Venus, a Satyr, and Two Cupids* (figure 5) by Annibale Carracci, a decidedly masculine back is shown on Venus.[147] While life study promotes the most accurate depiction of human anatomy, it is difficult for the artist to blend the interpretation of genders appropriately. When a male artist depicts a female in his art, but uses a

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[146] Moxey, "Panofsky's Concept of "Iconology" and the Problem of Interpretation in the History of Art," 270.

[147] Goldstein, *Visual Fact Over Verbal Fiction,* 106.

male model from which to draw, the male physique comes through as the artist is imitating the nature before him. Despite trying to convert certain obvious features to that of a woman, drawing from life turns the end result into one of masculine features. In *Venus, a Satyr, and Two Cupids*, it is argued whether Annibale was drawing from Ludovico as his model, or from his imagination, either way, his figure is not an accurate depiction of the female form.[148] As some female artists drew from their own body using mirrors, they would have had an opportunity to show Venus more accurately than this educated master of the arts, working their way around the academic skill of *disegno*.

Many women artists attempted to work their way around *disegno* as a formal piece of art construction. They were not believed to be capable of the depth of understanding required for it and were not taught professionally in academies that included *disegno.* Sofonisba Anguissola, an artist from Cremona, utilized her open-minded surroundings, her families place in society, and the support of her father to find success in the arts. Her artistic education was welcomed and normalized by her father, Amilcare Anguissola. Sofonisba had five sisters, and they were all educated as if they were male descendants of Amilcare. While the Anguissola girls did not come from parental painters, they were provided with a complete humanist education due to their father's support and their socioeconomic status. "Amilcare's decision to send his daughters away from home…to be trained in a painter's studio, was without precedent and had no sequel. Professional training was given to nuns, for devout practices, and to gifted daughters of artists, who might help the family business."[149] Sofonisba was sent to the workshop of a local master, Bernardino Campi, where she learned from a professional, an opportunity she knew was not

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[148] Goldstein, *Visual Fact Over Verbal Fiction,* 106.

[149] Luisa Vertova, "Lavinia versus Sofonisba." *Apollo: The International Magazine for Collectors,* January 1995, 44.

afforded to many women. She studied her master's works as well as from antiquity, but her paintings were mostly self-portraits, showing that the only figure she had to study from was her own. "Since young girls of the nobility were restricted in their activities" her teacher, Campi, most likely suggested that his young talent Anguissola practice with herself and with her family.[150] Her opportunities to master *disegno* fell short as she did not have a secondary model from which to draw, but she was able to learn from a successful artist.

Anguissola was trained by Master Bernardino Campi. Though he was not a remarkable artist and had departments of art that he struggled in, such as design and composition, he was willing to take on a female apprentice. His lacking abilities were passed to Sofonisba, who mostly painted portraits and studies from nature. Her portraits were often of herself, or her teacher, figures she had access to as she could not view a nude model for her portraiture. This style showed "her education and intellectual background, while demonstrating the qualities society expected from a woman: virtue, chastity, and humility."[151] Her themes were also quite different from Baroque artist Artemisia Gentileschi, who often created violent works with heroic women at the center. While her talent in depicting a remarkable likeness in her portraiture, it was perhaps Anguissola's formal training and connected social status that led her to fame, with her meager variety of subject matter, giving her the spotlight to showcase her imagery that often displayed a woman behaving as a patron would expect.

In her painting, *Bernardino Campi Paints Sofonisba Anguissola* (figure 5), she depicts her instructor painting her likeness. In the work, she shows herself larger than yet less distinct

[150] Ilya Sandra Perlingieri, "Sofonisba Anguissola's Early Sketches," *Woman's Art Journal* 9, no. 2 (1988): 12.

[151] Ferino-Pagden and Kusche, *Sofonisba Anguissola: A Renaissance Woman* 19.

than the painter himself, implying that her abilities to provide human accuracy are superior. She also depicts him using a mahlstick, a tool used to support and steady one's brush hand, an inferior tool that she only illustrated herself using in her initial self-portraits.[152] In this piece she covers the disadvantages of her artistic education. She uses two figures she is very familiar with, her own and her teacher, to work around her hindrance from figure study. As she was not trained by use of the nude model, she attempted to display another piece of *disegno* with clothed figures. An artist proficient in *disegno* was expected to understand how drapery fell upon the body, how the human figure would alter the fabric and how it would lay over different pieces of the figure.[153] Instead of highlighting the clothing of her two figures, though, Anguissola paints both in deep shadow, once again concealing what her artistic education has lacked. While her figures had life and accuracy, she was not painting with a deeper intellectual understanding of the human figure. Anguissola did not display *disegno* in her paintings.

Another opportunity that Anguissola used to her advantage in the arts was the city of Cremona. Cremona, Italy, where Sofonisba was born, was a more enlightened city than those in its surroundings. Women within this cultivated society were inspired to learn after the book *Il coregiano,* from Baldassare Castiglione (1478-1529) said that women should develop themselves just as men. Castiglione had a particular type of upper-class woman in mind, and Cremona was host to quite a few, Anguissola being one of them. "The education of men and women was no longer a matter of chance but the result of careful planning. Families took pride not only in the accomplishments of their sons but also their daughters, who were well versed in all the arts."[154]

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[152] Garrard, "Here's Looking at Me: Sofonisba Anguissola and the Problem of the Woman Artist," 564.

[153] Barzman, "Perception, Knowledge, and the Theory of *Disegno* in Sixteenth-Century Florence," 43.

[154] Ferino-Pagden and Kusche, *Sofonisba Anguissola: A Renaissance Woman,* 27.

So, while Anguissola was not getting an artistic academic education that included *disegno,* she was learning and her learning was encouraged. While Castiglione and the society he wrote for celebrated educated women, they were still encouraged to be modest about their talents. Sofonisba was born into a flourishing city, ready to educate her among her male counterparts, as long as she was not doing so with conceit. Confidence and the opportunity to fraternize with potentially wealthy patrons is what afforded male painters a chance at success. As *disegno* allowed for artists to accompany the upper-middle class and the elite to social and intellectual gatherings, they were able to secure patronage, yet similar behavior in a woman would not have been permitted.

As the Anguissola's were an upper-class family, Amilcare was following the current trend of giving women a prominent role, as it aligned with their social status. Humanists were beginning to acknowledge the accolades and abilities of women that laid beyond childbearing and caring for a home. Amilcare believed that his young daughters were capable and deserving of a first-rate education, and he hoped that it would result in financial support. Sofonisba was educated in the arts, but only truly trained in portraiture.[155] "In an age when women artists were rare and the opportunity for them to study with good teachers almost nonexistent, Anguissola was extremely fortunate not only to have had the support of her family members but also to have had them model for her."[156] The support of an upstanding man of society like her father, her other family members willing to sit for her, and her teacher Bernardino Campi, greatly helped Sofonisba's career and helped her navigate an art world where she was not afforded the same opportunity of *disegno* as her male counterparts.

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[155] Vertova, "Lavinia versus Sofonisba," 43.

[156] Perlingieri, "Sofonisba Anguissola's Early Sketches," 12.

Anguissola's education and professional artistic training led to her international fame, despite the lack of *disegno* in her oeuvre. The ecclesiastical dignitary and humanist, Marco Gerolamo Vida (1485-1566), considered her to be one of the most significant painters of the time, when she was just fifteen.[157] Michelangelo praised her work. Annibale Caro (1507-1566), an art critic and humanist, requested her work, along with local princes and regents.[158] Giorgio Vasari even included her in his famous *The Lives of the Artists*.[159] Vasari complimented her work and believed her portraits contained everything but the breath of life itself. While he complimented her skill, he believed that women's art making was a "natural anatomical function" and less creative than a man's work.[160] Sofonisba's name was intertwined with the art historians of her time, as they acknowledged her skill, they did not forget that she was a woman. While Vasari complimented the *disegno* and perfection of male artists like Michelangelo, he questioned how "women know so well how to make living men, what marvel is it that those who wish are also so well able to make them in painting?"[161] As Vasari appreciated the skill that women artists showed in their work, he considered it to be a marvel rather than intellection and *disegno*.

Lavinia Fontana, a female artist twenty years younger than Anguissola, took a different route to artistic success. Like Anguissola, she was born in progressive city for its time, Bologna, and she grew up in an established family. In Fontana's case, though, her supportive surroundings

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[157] Ferino-Pagden and Kusche, *Sofonisba Anguissola: A Renaissance Woman* 12.

[158] Ferino-Pagden and Kusche, *Sofonisba Anguissola: A Renaissance Woman* 12.

[159] Ferino-Pagden and Kusche, *Sofonisba Anguissola: A Renaissance Woman* 12.

[160] Garrard, "Here's Looking at Me: Sofonisba Anguissola and the Problem of the Woman Artist," 574.

[161] Fredrika H. Jacobs, "Woman's Capacity to Create: The Unusual Case of Sofonisba Anguissola," *Renaissance Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (1994): 78.

and her artistic opportunities had her artist father, Prospero Fontana (1512-1597), at the forefront. Lavinia Fontana "was acclaimed for her painterly skills which her father had taught her in the family house in Bologna."[162] Her household was cultured and often filled with visiting artists and intellectuals, and Fontana used that as her route around the masculine construct of *disegno*. Fontana's father had a painterly style of elegance and refinery, something she herself carried on in her works, learning from her teacher's works rather than a live model. In her teens and twenties, she was taking over commissions for her father in his workshop, and by the 1570s, she was painting independently.[163] This educational path led her to independent work and it helped her discover her own style, something a student of the academy would have been afforded after years of studying and practicing. This and the support from her father allowed her to flourish. Fontana is an example of a women artist whose opportunities came from a well-connected man. Through her father, she had access to the works of a master and works of antiquity, which were individual components of the vast *disegno.*

While Fontana was welcomed into her father's studio, she was "prevented from joining the academy founded by the Carracci family in the 1580s because of its emphasis on drawing from the nude male, an activity prohibited to females."[164] In this sect, her father's connections and belief in her artistic talent could not help her break the barrier of a classroom and did not allow her to study *disegno*. It did not, however, prevent her from painting nude figures, it just prevented her from studying one from a live model in a studio or classroom. Fontana painted works like *Minerva Dressing* (figure 6), that encroached on the capabilities of male painters

[162] Catherine King, "Looking a Sight: Sixteenth-Century Portraits of Woman Artists." Zeitschrift Für Kunstgeschichte 58, no. 3 (1995): 392.

[163] McIver, "Lavinia Fontana's "Self-Portrait Making Music"," 3

[164] McIver, "Lavinia Fontana's "Self-Portrait Making Music"," 3.

depicting nudes, as she had constant access to and superior understanding of the female form. It is possible that she took inspiration from her own body, and it potentially made her the first woman of her century to study from the female figure. In this form, Fontana had an advantage and a route around the formal teachings of *disegno,* as she had her own female form to portray.

Studying from Prospero Fontana was a great educational opportunity for Lavinia Fontana as he painted with influence from Raphael, Correggio, Vasari, and other notable artists of the time.[165] Drawing after masterful works of the past was seen as somewhat of a shortcut to *disegno,* but it was the closest Fontana would get to studying nature.[166] She discovered the heritage of the Renaissance by inspecting the work she saw created in front of her own eyes. Fontana had access to a library of prints, drawings, and engravings. As the study of antiquity was essential in one's mastery of *disegno,* the library was her way of independently gathering the information she would have been taught in the academy. Through her father's patronage, she had access to the collection of the Medici family, getting a firsthand at the material the elite commissioned. Prospero desired to "teach her rigorously professional standards as a woman artist."[167] This education would have taught Fontana to carefully monitor her social behavior as she would need to be noticed as devout and virginal, while appearing cultured and talented. Her home of Bologna was open to the advancement of women, but it had to be done with prescribed patience, unlike male artists who were encouraged to socialize and seek patronage in order to fuel their notoriety and financial success in the arts.

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[165] Vera Fortunati, *Lavinia Fontana: A Woman Artist in the Age of the Counter-Reformation,* (Milan: Electa, 1998), 13.

[166] Barzman, "Perception, Knowledge, and the Theory of *Disegno* in Sixteenth-Century Florence," 42.

[167] Fortunati, *Lavinia Fontana: A Woman Artist in the Age of the Counter-Reformation,* 13.

While she did not have *disegno* in her artistic education as she was not part of a formal academy, Fontana used the access she had to the arts through her father to learn new skills. Fontana had access to her father's studio, but she often took to training herself. In her work *Self-Portrait Making Music with a Maid-servant* (figure 7), Fontana makes an inscription detailing her process. In the upper left corner of the piece, she writes, "Lavinia virgo Prosperi Fontanae ex speculo imaginem sui expersi anno 1577," claiming that she drew herself by looking in a mirror.[168] In this work she is showcasing her success as a musician and an artist. She believes herself to be a woman of, character, not just beauty, as a male painter would have likely portrayed a woman. When a male artist constructs a portrait of a woman, especially when the patron is also a male, the work's purpose is of the male gaze. In Lavinia's case, it is to showcase her credibility and talents, and defend herself as a woman. Her inscription acts as a slight to any male viewers, claiming that she created a route around the hindrance of the establishment and her lack of formal education of *disegno* or the study of a true model. Lavinia used a mirror to elegantly portray her own likeness and illustrate the female form, a loophole to which a male artist would not have had access.

Fontana took up the fight for the edification of women with *Self-Portrait Making Music with a Maid-servant*. She wanted the same level of respect as musicians and poets, a social elevation that male painters were beginning to receive as society understood *disegno* and the intelligence it required to create a masterful painting. Fontana used this self-portrait to elevate herself to a professional status, showing that her skill set was equal to that of a musician or philosopher, just like male artists, and just like those that learned *disegno*. She was aware of the viewer's gaze in her work, and paints her hand touching her book of music, knowing it will

[168] McIver, "Lavinia Fontana's "Self-Portrait Making Music"," 4.

direct the eye. Her lack of artistic education within the walls of an academy did not keep her from understanding how to influence her patrons. Fontana learned to paint self-portraits by looking at herself, and she took heed from influential works, teaching her how to send a message to her viewers. The focus of her work was on subject matter and sending messages to her viewers through her understanding of the gaze rather than the overt mastery of *disegno.*

Fontana's gender prevented her artistic education in the 1580s, but she was able to continue to gain commissions, and even took over her father's studio. Her lineage allowed her this artistic opportunity that other women were not offered and she used this studio to once again navigate around *disegno.* She was able to join the painter's guild of Rome in 1603, which had just recently begun to allow women.[169] While most women operated within a court or a convent, Fontana owned a studio, making her career more "similar to that of many male artists."[170] Vasari identified her family as being among the educated elite of Bologna and Lavinia herself "was educated; university records indicate that she was made a *dotoressa* in 1580," and she was well connected with a number of professors.[171] Fontana's talent got her the attention of patrons, but her support system, the inheritance of her father's studio, and her education, made her success possible despite the lack of *disegno* in her repertoire. Male artists were able to dedicate themselves to a career in the arts and have a family, but a choice typically had to be made for a woman. Much of her life was similar to that of a man at the time. Her husband often promoted

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[169] McIver, "Lavinia Fontana's "Self-Portrait Making Music"," 3.

[170] McIver, "Lavinia Fontana's "Self-Portrait Making Music"," 3.

[171] McIver, "Lavinia Fontana's "Self-Portrait Making Music"," 3.
Dottoressa is translated in the writing as "doctor of letters"

her art, painted her frames, and tended to their many children, giving her the freedom to practice art that was not afforded to many married women.

Fontana was fortunate to grow up and make a career in Bologna, as it was an advanced city in regard to women's education. The cult of Caterina Vigri, an abbess and artist of the fifteenth century, created an "unusually supportive context for educated and skilled women" of Bolgona.[172] Vigri was undoubtedly an inspiration to Fontana. She was awarded an education that most women did not receive in the realms of a liberal education and an artistic one. "Sixteenth century literature…noted the implications of the social limitations for her artistic success."[173] This acknowledged the fortune of Fontana's educational path and how it helped her succeed in the arts despite not including *disegno.* The hindrance to the Carracci academy, as it was unheard of for a woman to be allowed to view a nude model to advance her education, could have greatly mired Fontana. She ended up surpassing the success of Anguissola, and forged a path for Artemisia Gentileschi. Her supportive husband, the chance to openly learn from her father, and the forward-thinking environment of Bologna elevated Lavinia's opportunities for success as a female artist and allowed patrons to focus on her background and success rather than a formal art education and *disegno*.

A female artist of the Baroque period, Artemisia Gentileschi, found new ways to gain success in the arts despite not receiving training in *disegno.* Like Fontana, her father was an artist, but unlike the previous artist, Orazio Gentileschi was not as skilled of a teacher. Artemisia took to tutoring, teaching herself, observing famous works of art and exchanging ideas with individuals from other artistic field to gain a better understanding of painting. Artemisia

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[172] McIver, "Lavinia Fontana's "Self-Portrait Making Music," 3.

[173] Cheney, "Lavinia Fontana's Nude Minervas," 30.

Gentileschi became known for her emotionally evocative works of art, but the superior status from her artistic achievement was often ignored. Being a woman from Rome's lower class of society, she had essentially no formal education.[174] She was recognized throughout her lifetime as she often painted women in heroine roles upon her large canvases, suggesting that she took her education into her own hands. Artemisia's work proves that artists exchanged ideas with different kinds of artists and performers, gaining knowledge of high and low culture, music, and theatre, as well as her own subject of art.[175] She absorbed inspiration for her metaphorical paintings through the literary culture of the Seicento, immersing herself in order to improve. Artemisia's surroundings, outside of her artistic home, is where she gained her understanding of history and society. Rather than studying from antiquity and gaining a grasp of *disegno*, like a student in the academy, she learned about the past through her diverse cohort.

Artemisia's artistic knowledge and training was very different from other female artists of her time. "Compared with Lavinia Fontana's, Artemisia's youth was one of limitations."[176] So while her father being an artist helped her enter the field, he was not a support system of her artistic future. She lived with her single father Orazio, who had was known for his strange temperament, rather than his art. Even after thirty years of living and working in Rome as an artist, he was not very successful, and was too poor to keep a servant.[177] The home of Orazio and Artemisia doubled as a workshop as there was nothing that separated the space for working and the one for living. This organization put Artemisia directly amidst the study of art, but it also

[174] Jesse Locker, "Artemisia Gentileschi: The Literary Formation of an Unlearned Artist" in *Artemisia Gentileschi in a Changing Light,* ed Sheila Barker (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2017), 89.

[175] Locker, "Artemisia Gentileschi: The Literary Formation of an Unlearned Artist," 98.

[176] Cavazzini, "Artemisia in Her Father's House," 99.

[177] Cavazzini, "Artemisia in Her Father's House," 99.

allowed a myriad of characters into her home. While most patrons of the workshop were not permitted to interact with Artemisia, the man and artist who would later rape her, Agostino Tassi, was permitted to teach her art. Her father wished her to rather become a nun and kept her quite contained throughout her youth. While she had access to working artists and tutors, Artemisia's upbringing added another obstacle for her to surpass in order to succeed in the arts, and more difficulties to weave through including her lack of teachings of *disegno*.

Artemisia was kept from a being a part of a professional artist's workshop, but she was exposed to artists constantly. It is also believed that her father used her for a model, requiring that she pose in the nude, a scene she could not look upon as an artist herself.[178] Studying from a nude model would have helped excel her understanding of human anatomy, and of *disegno,* but she played the role of being looked upon rather than being the one doing the looking. This lessened her to her gender role in art, expecting to be molded by the male artist, and used towards their mastery of *disegno,* rather than being in control of the brush. Her father did not find success in his own work and wished for her to stay in the confines of his home. This led to many rumors about Artemisia, as many visitors and painters saw her, but never interacted with her. As she was not allowed to go to another artist's workshop, as they did not hold female students, and her father could not afford a studio separate from their home, she was exposed to many men. Cavazzini notes how Artemisia has been described as "beautiful and provocative, with her unkempt hair and low-cut dresses, she stirred the imagination of many men."[179] Instead of being taken seriously as a descendent of a painter, and a potential professional artist, she was

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[178] Cavazzini, "Artemisia in Her Father's House," 101.

[179] Cavazzini, "Artemisia in Her Father's House," 102.

instead seen for her dangerous feminine qualities. While she cannot be held accountable for the uninvited male gaze, Artemisia would not have been exposed to it if she wasn't treated as a mysterious tenant to Orazio and was instead allowed to practice art among other modern professionals. While Orazio was not a master artist who held apprentices, he did surround himself with other successful artists, who undoubtedly understood *disegno* and could have used their skills to pass along the knowledge to the aspiring Artemisia.

While some women were not permitted to any sort of artistic education, Artemisia was tutored by artists like Agostino Tassi, a friend of her fathers. She also took on roles as an instructor herself, as Orazio was often away from home. "The traditional method of teaching to draw first was followed by Orazio and the people around him," so the instruction that Artemisia and her brother had passed onto them was as close as they would get to true artistic training.[180] This would have been a similar beginning of art education found in the academies, but it would not have included *disegno* or other more intellectual lessons. Her brother began when he was thirteen, so it is estimated that Artemisia may have begun artistic training from her father around 1607, with painting studied the following year. While Gentileschi's father was a practicing artist with an in home workshop, "Orazio was clearly not a teacher," as his house rarely held apprentices.[181] She was not being taught the skills found within the academies, and was not learning to adapt from antiquity and add in her own style. So, while Gentileschi's father taught her art in a traditional sense, beginning with drawing and slowly transferring to painting, he was not a capable educator, and yet hardly had an option as she was living in the space where he

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[180] Cavazzini, "Artemisia in Her Father's House," 104.

[181] Cavazzini, "Artemisia in Her Father's House," 104.

worked. Gentileschi was learning the practices of arts, but she was not being educated fully like young male artists of her time.

Orazio was heavily inspired by Caravaggio and moved away from drawing to paint from a live model. While the live figures were posing in the nude within the confines of the Gentileschi home, "Orazio shut himself in a room with them and did not let anyone else in."[182] Artemisia worked upstairs in the home, where the models were not allowed, therefore not gaining an understanding of drawing from the human figure. And while it is believed, like with most female painters with artist fathers that Orazio taught her, many of her works from their home were painted next to her room, suggesting that they may have often worked separately.[183] The home of an artist father and daughter would lead one to believe that the training was passed down, but in the case of Artemisia, she was often kept from the artists, and always kept from the models, to practice by herself. Her seclusion kept her from a student body to work alongside, but it did give her the opportunity to draw from her own figure. While she could not study from a third party, she could adapt the lessons of human anatomy in watching the movement of her own body in order to depict the posture of the female form that she went on to paint numerous times. Using her body for her figural works of art was a way that Gentileschi worked around her hindrance to *disegno,* and found success through her own skill in her work.

A lack of artistic education and drawing from a model left Gentileschi's initial work with something to be desired. Cavazzini sites critiques of her work as saying that "the absence of such implements would help explain Artemisia's rather inept rendering of anatomy, which is evident

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[182] Cavazzini, "Artemisia in Her Father's House," 105.

[183] Cavazzini, "Artemisia in Her Father's House," 105.

in her canvases at least until mid-1610s."[184] Her initial work displayed her overt lack of *disegno* and a formal artistic education. Later in her career, she began to work from other famous works of art. She practiced the proportions and the characteristics of the human figures from prints, as she did not often leave the house. Artemisia claimed to have access to female models, and it is believed that an acquaintance of hers, Tuzia, was the figure depicted for *Madonna and Child* (figure 8).[185] Artemisia would have also been exposed to work at her church, Santa Maria del Popolo, and she did go on a visit to the Palazzo del Quirinale, where she would have been exposed to the works of Guido Reni. She also spent time with her father's companion, Quorli, whose home she visited. The painting *Susanna and the Elders* (figure 9) may have come from inspiration from the one she would have seen there. Artemisia made an effort to seek out art when she left her home, and her exposure to work of great masters influenced her success. She built an understanding of the fundamentals of great art by using those she knew as models to draw from and closely looking at the work of masters before her, much like an apprentice in a workshop or a student at the academy. Though she was not formally invited into the understanding of *disegno* as a male artist would have been, Gentileschi used independent observation to find success.

ln her *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting* (figure 10) Gentileschi translates the allegories of Theory and Practice into her own form, combining *disegno interno* and *disegno externo.*[186] These two concepts of *disegno* were cited in Cesare Ripa's (1560-1622) *Iconologia,*

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[184] Cavazzini, "Artemisia in Her Father's House," 105.

[185] Patricia Simons, "Artemisia Gentileschi's *Sussanna and the Elders* (1610) in the Context of Counter-Reformation Rome" in *Artemisia Gentileschi in a Changing Light,* ed Sheila Barker (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2017), 50.

[186] Mary D. Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art,* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), 358.

as a distinction between the artist's intellect, *interno,* and their use of materials, *esterno.* The allegory of Theory shows a woman holding a drawing compass and looking towards the heavens as if she is receiving inspiration while the allegory of Practice bends over her canvas and uses the compass, rooted in her medium. In Gentileschi's *Self-Portrait,* she combines the two allegories in her own visage with one arm raised up with the other stretched out towards the canvas.[187] Rather than separating the concept of Theory and Practice, both key to *disegno,* in separate allegorical figures, Gentileschi manifests them simultaneously in herself. In this bold statement within her work, the artist shows that she is capable of inhabiting *disegno* in her works, despite being a female, and despite not undergoing a formal art education in the academies.

One of the most successful artists of the early modern era, Elisabetta Sirani, surpassed the concept of women not being capable of understanding and successfully portraying *disegno.* While formally teaching women in academies was not established at the onset of her career, she worked to change her opportunities as an artist. Like Fontana, she grew up in Bologna, where women's education was promoted, and they were engaged in the public sector. Also like earlier female artists Fontana and Gentileschi, her father was an artist, and his career focus for her was one of the overwhelming reasons she found so much success.[188] She was educated by her father in the teachings of painting and *disegno.*[189] Sirani had access to paintings, drawings, prints, plaster, pigment, and works from antiquity from which to study. She was exposed to classical works like the *Laocoön* and nude sketches from Michelangelo's *The Last Judgement.* Training from her father's studio was based on the fundamentals of drawing "by studying and copying

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[187] Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi: The Image of the Female Hero in Italian Baroque Art,* 358.

[188] Modesti, *Elisabetta Sirani 'Virtuasoa'; Women's Cultural Production in Early Modern Bologna,* 15.

[189] Modesti, *Elisabetta Sirani 'Virtuasoa'; Women's Cultural Production in Early Modern Bologna,* 101.

individual aspects of the human figure...before moving on to more advanced studies from the live nude figure."[190] While her father recognized the importance of drawing from the nude model, it is unlikely that Sirani would have been allowed to draw from one, but instead used family members as models and studied the contours of forms from antiquity. As Sirani was not allowed to travel outside of her city to study public art like her male colleagues, access to her father's studio materials was essential to her artistic future. She was taught *disegno,* but not in a formal academy, and as it was not a concept that men of society expected women to comprehend, it did not allow her surpass her male counterparts.

She was considered a humanist with her educational ideals and was a member of merit of the *Accademia di San Luca.* Sirani was one of the first women painters and the only female of her generation in Bologna to receive this status.[191] While she was not listed as an honorary member, which implies that one possesses original genius, isn't reliant on other's designs, and is an independent master of a workshop, Sirani was still considered a professional artist, and was permitted to run a studio and take on apprentices, like the male artists before her.[192] These restrictions placed upon women, despite their talent being acknowledged, especially when it came to life drawing, was Sirani's inspiration for opening her own academy for women.

Sirani not only worked to find her own way around the male centered teachings of *disegno,* she worked to bring this information to other women. She has been called "the most prolific painter and draftsperson of early modern Italy" as she took on a typical male role with

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[190] Modesti, *Elisabetta Sirani 'Virtuasoa'; Women's Cultural Production in Early Modern Bologna,* 103.

[191] Modesti, *Elisabetta Sirani 'Virtuasoa'; Women's Cultural Production in Early Modern Bologna,* 67.

[192] Modesti, *Elisabetta Sirani 'Virtuasoa'; Women's Cultural Production in Early Modern Bologna,* 67.

history paintings and gained attention for her ability in the genre.[193] This being a theme that required nude figure drawing, women did not often partake, even though it was considered one of the highest forms of painting in the hierarchal scale of art. Sirani's first major commission was in 1657 from the prior of the Carthusian church, she was nineteen at the time.[194] This was to be her first public work in Bologna, and the largest painting of hers. Connected with this commission were a multitude of drawings where Sirani planned out the composition of her work, much like any master painter would do before laying paint to plaster. By 1663 she was considered a professional artist and was financially supporting her family and her assistants through her art. Her participation in history painting, a genre rarely taken on by women, led to her commissions and her public success, despite not being taught *disegno* in an academy.

Elisabetta Sirani founded and taught in her own academy, *Accademia di Disegno,* for women in the seventeenth century. As Sirani "was recorded…as being both a member 'di merito' as well as 'di honore' of the painters' *Accademia di San Luca*" she was qualified to educate pupils of her own.[195] "Of the twenty-two professional women artists working in Bologna in the second half of the Seicento, over two thirds were taught by Elisabetta".[196] This shows Sirani's success in combatting the education of women in the arts in the early modern era. The opportunity for women to teach began with men who taught at home rather than in a lecture hall in the mid seventeenth century.[197] This led to women teaching in their own homes, eventually

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[193] Bohn, "Elisabetta Sirani and Drawing Practices in Early Modern Bologna," 209.

[194] Modesti, *Elisabetta Sirani 'Virtuasoa'; Women's Cultural Production in Early Modern Bologna,* 65.

[195] Modesti, *Elisabetta Sirani 'Virtuasoa'; Women's Cultural Production in Early Modern Bologna,* 67.

[196] Modesti, *Elisabetta Sirani 'Virtuasoa'; Women's Cultural Production in Early Modern Bologna,* 68.

[197] Modesti, *Elisabetta Sirani 'Virtuasoa'; Women's Cultural Production in Early Modern Bologna,* 67.

normalizing public female lecturing and teaching. Within the confines of Sirani's academy, students painted classical *istoria* and allegory, and many of them went on to create religious works for commission. Many of her pupils came from noble families who studied under Sirani as "part of an overall humanist education" and others were from artists families who chose to learn from her rather than their fathers "breaking the traditional male-to-female model of artistic training."[198] Elisabetta Sirani ensured that women who wanted careers in the arts were being trained, and she made the rising acceptance of women in the field in Bologna possible.

Sirani's establishment of the *Accademia del Disegno* for women influenced all levels of Bolognese society. Every pupil of Sirani's went on to practice professionally in their field and in their flourish was a golden age for women's artists in Bologna. She established her *Scuola* when she was twenty-two and may have been teaching four years prior.[199] Two years later she took over her father's studio and his apprentices, a role rarely taken on by a woman. This familial tie to the arts allowed for her career to reach heights women before her could not fathom. Within Sirani's school women had the opportunity for an artistic education from a master artist. It was Sirani's curriculum that promoted this golden age for female artists in the coming centuries. Her establishment allowed for women to learn of and incorporate *disegno* into their art, elevating them to a status near equal to their male counterparts. After centuries of not being expected to understand *disegno,* Sirani was bringing it to young women in the arts, giving them a chance at competing against male artists, unlike artists before them in the early modern era.

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[198] Modesti, *Elisabetta Sirani 'Virtuasoa'; Women's Cultural Production in Early Modern Bologna,* 69.

[199] Modesti, *Elisabetta Sirani 'Virtuasoa'; Women's Cultural Production in Early Modern Bologna,* 75.

Sirani worked to reform the gender gap between men and women in the art world, and to leave future female artists with better opportunities than those in the early modern era. Modesti notes that her work and teaching "introduced alternative avenues for the professionalization of women's artistic practices which challenged established studio practices and theoretical principles in the artistic education of her male peers."[200] This demonstrates a new view on *disegno* and the ability to teach the construct to women artists in the future. As a skilled female artist herself, Sirani believed that women were capable of producing a higher quality of art if they were introduced to the concept of *disegno.* Her paintings introduced allegorical and historical themes rarely seen in art from women, as they were usually taught to paint works that required less skill. With her work, Sirani brought a distinctive iconography of historical women to light. She brought *disegno* to a previously uneducated group and allowed them the opportunity to learn as the male artists before them.[201] Sirani successfully forged a path around the hindrances laid out for female artists. She took the education she received through her artist father who gave her access to prints of famous works in the stead of the male nude and left his studio in her charge, and she brought her own *invenzioni* to the canvas along, creating masterful works, on par with her male colleagues.[202] Sirani found a route around being formally taught *disegno* in an academy by learning from her father and advancing through the ranks as a master artist and operator of her own educational establishment.

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[200] Modesti, *Elisabetta Sirani 'Virtuasoa'; Women's Cultural Production in Early Modern Bologna,* 4.

[201] Modesti, *Elisabetta Sirani 'Virtuasoa'; Women's Cultural Production in Early Modern Bologna,* 79.

[202] Modesti, *Elisabetta Sirani 'Virtuasoa'; Women's Cultural Production in Early Modern Bologna,* 80.

Conclusion

Feminist historians have examined the work of women artists like these for centuries. Anna Jameson, a writer of the nineteenth century, said

> I wish to combat in every way that oft-repeated, but most false compliment unthinkingly paid to women, that genius is of no sex; there may be equality of power, but in its quality and application there will and must be difference and distinction. If men would but remember the truth, they would cease to treat with ridicule and jealousy the attainments and aspirations of women. [203]

As with so many subjects and strategies, *disegno* excluded women as the men who brought it to significance did not believe they were able to comprehend and display its qualities. It has been recognized that women had the potential to excel in certain realms of art, but that there was a definitive exclusion towards them, and this research shows that the marginalization from *disegno* prevented women from competing with surrounding male artists. [204] Even in the Renaissance, "the system of education and patronage during this time…precluded females from developing a full range of themes in art and, therefore, from achieving recognized excellence."[205] This scholarship shows that as their lack of artistic education overall left them without the same skills as men, *disegno* left women without the teachings of aligning their mind and their hand.

There was constant prejudice against women in the arts in the early modern era, even though a few individuals slipped into notoriety. Their art was often downgraded as being "women's work," as they were competing with men who did not want to risk their own commissions.[206] If they were complimented by art critics, their work was still only seen as

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[203] Adele M. Holcomb, "Anna Jameson on Women Artists," Woman's Art Journal 8, no. 2 (1987): 20.

[204] Holcomb, "Anna Jameson on Women Artists," 20.

[205] Cheney, "Lavinia Fontana's Nude Minervas," 30.

[206] Tommaso Cavlieri, letter of 20 Janunary 1562 to Cosimo I de' Medici. Complete text in Cremona 1994, 370.

"perhaps quite good for a work by a woman."[207] The Renaissance and Baroque were times where women had to endure the burden of the moral constraints in a wavering society and when they were being excluded from public instruction at academies and all forms of higher professional training.[208] Catherine King notes that a woman artist at the time would be, "practicing her skill in the private feminine sphere of the home, or sending representations to people outside the family circle, which had to assure the viewer, who associated the public sphere with the masculine."[209] As female artists of the early modern era were not taught *disegno,* could not be formally educated, and definitely could not view a nude model in a studio, they had to practice in alternate spaces and show their skills through other means. This imbalance in artistic training, especially in respect to *disegno* held women back from fully competing with their male counterparts.

The exclusion of women in the early modern era permeated many subjects, including art and the most important components of its teachings. "Humanist education and scholarly activity might plausibly endow a man with virtue, somehow enabling him to participate in the active life of his society; but the same kind of education and occupation for a woman almost inevitably led to suspicion of immorality, promiscuity, or even worse."[210] This style of education brought art into an organized structure of learning, but it left women out of its path. Many women that considered themselves humanists still could not fulfill their educational desires because of the

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[207] Tommaso Cavlieri, letter of 20 Janunary 1562 to Cosimo I de' Medici. Complete text in Cremona 1994, 370. Mina Gregori, "Fama e oblio de Sofonisba Anguissola," In *Sofonisba Anuissola e le sue sorelle,* 11-47. Cremona: Leonardo Arte 1994.

[208] Ferino-Pagden and Kusche. *Sofonisba Anguissola: A Renaissance Woman* 13.

[209] King, "Looking a Sight: Sixteenth-Century Portraits of Woman Artists," 394.

[210] Robert Black, "Italian Renaissance Education: Changing Perspectives and Continuing Controversies." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52, no. 2 (1991): 333.

stigma that befell them.[211] *Disegno* as a process of artistic intelligence was taught to young men in the art academies as they were trusted with the ability to link their mind and their hand, proving their intellect in their art. This concept brought men essential information from classical masters and taught them how to use that information to create art that showed their ability to design a work of art in their mind and produce it on the canvas, a process that was recognized and respected in society. *Disegno* was a masculine concept, and as such, women were prevented from learning how to construct their own art through the method. The most essential point of the teachings of *disegno* was creating art from nature. While some artists emulated what was before them and others worked to put their touch of intellectual perfection upon it, natural imagery began with the human figure, something even the most learned female artists were not permitted to view in the early modern era.

Female artists of the early modern era had to find their own routes around the educated male artists that surrounded them and the concept of *disegno* that loomed over them. The exclusion from *disegno* due to their expected level of intelligence held them back from the same artistic success as male artists in the early modern era. Women who made a name for themselves in the art field had to navigate around their missing understanding of *disegno* through progressive surroundings that allowed for their edification or a connection to the arts through a man of society. Women like Fontana and Anguissola were some of the first to bridge the gap between men and women in the arts, proving that if they had a proper access to the teachings of *disegno* and the components of its teachings, their work would be as visually and compositionally successful as the male artists of their time. Anguissola used strategies in works like *Bernardino Campi Painting Sofonisba Anguissola* (figure 3) to hide the components of

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[211] McIver, "Lavinia Fontana's "Self-Portrait Making Music"," 3.

disegno that she had not learned. In later years, Gentileschi took to using her own figure for drawing, showing the opportunity that women had to use their own figure to draw from nature, an essential element of *disegno*. In works like Gentileschi's *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting* (figure 10) she creates to prove her capabilities as a woman and as a painter. Sirani changed the arts for women of the future with her bold entrance into art by taking over her father's studio that was filled with apprentices, establishing an academy for women, and a forging a successful career that financially supported her family.

Women in the early modern era were put at a disadvantage in the arts due to their hindrance from *disegno* that kept them from the standard artistic educational process afforded to men at the time. Though previous research has provided the foundation to make the connection between women and the teachings of *disegno,* it has not discussed the direct link between the lack of notoriety for women of the early modern era and this artistic concept. *Disegno* would have allowed women to join the ranks of men in terms of artistic skill, patronage, and respect in society as an artist well versed in this intellectual process. This research demonstrates an original concept in discovering that, while many female artists took to different artistic strategies to hide the fact that they were not taught in *disegno,* it was not enough to give them the same success and acceptance as male artists in the early modern era.

Figure 1. Ginevra Cantofoli. *Head of a Young Woman Wearing a Turban,* chalk, The British Museum.

Figure 2. Albrecht Durer, *Perspective Study: Draftsman Drawing a Reclining Nude,* 1525, woodcut, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Figure 3. Sofonisba Anguissola, *Bernardino Campi Painting Sofonisba Anguissola*, 1550, oil on canvas, Minneapolis College of Art and Design

Figure 4. Ludovico Carracci, *Study of a Recumbent Nude Boy,* drawing, red chalk, Oxford, Ashmolean Museum.

Figure 5. Annibale Carracci, *Venus, a Satyr, and Two Cupids,* 112 x 142 cm. 1588, oil on canvas, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

Figure 6. Lavinia Fontana, *Minerva Dressing,* 102 3/8 in x 35 3/8 in; 1613, oil on canvas, Galleria Borghese.

Figure 7. Lavinia Fontana, *Self-Portrait Making Music with a Maid-servant,* 26in x 22in; 1577, oil on canvas, Accademia nazionale di San Luca.

Figure 8. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Madonna and Child,* 46 1/2 × 33 7/8 in; 1613, oil on canvas, Galleria Palatina, Palazzo Pitti, Florence.

Figure 9. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Susanna and the Elders,* 170 × 121 cm; 1610, oil on canvas, Schloss Weißenstein collection, in Pommersfelden, Germany.

Figure 10. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Self-Portrait as the Allegory of Painting,* 1638-3, oil on canvas, Royal Collection of the British Royal family.

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