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The Artist, the Author and Authenticity

1

This text deals with the emergence of the visual artist as an author and the changes in his economic, legal and social status that occurred due to the securing of privileges – as a predecessor to copyright – and the beginning of a collaborative and collective form of authorship in the artist's workshop that led to an unmistakable visual style, which served the artist's individual visibility. In practice, however, the replacement of the artists' guild system did not take place until the end of the sixteenth century, when the Carracci brothers founded the *Accademia degli Incamminati*, where they intentionally developed a new artistic education system that went beyond the long-standing career system of apprentices, journeymen, and master craftsmen.

In his famous book from 1435, simply entitled *De Pictura (About Painting)*, Leon Battista Alberti transformed the social function of the painter from artisan to artist, and likewise he redefined the artist to be a scientist. He argued that a shift needed to take place in the context of authorship – from the centuries-old educational system of craftsmen with apprentices, journeymen and masters, which had been practiced within strict guild rules, to the concept of the artist. The artist, then, was no blind practitioner like the craftsman; rather he resembled a scientist and theorist. The artist's training would be better placed at a university than a workshop. Alberti tried to prove that painting was not a craft (*techne*), but an art (*ars*) on the same level as the seven liberal sciences (Alberti 1972 [1435]). He argued that art was a language consisting of elements and possessing its own grammar, one that could be learned through study and application (Baxandall 1971). Painting was thus not like a handicraft, which had to be learned in a seven-year apprenticeship followed by several years as a journeyman in order for the craftsman to be allowed to open up a master workshop. Rather, it was a free art (*ars liberalis*), which should belong to the other humanistic sciences.

At that time, the scientific education at the universities in the *septem artes liberales*, the seven liberal arts, had been divided between what was referred to as the *trivium* (lat. "three-way"), the three language subjects grammar, dialectic and rhetoric, and the *quadrivium* (lat. "four-way"), the mathematical subjects arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy. In his book, Alberti pointed out that the visual arts contained both grammar and rhetoric and, beyond that, were based on the rules of arithmetic and geometry. Therefore, he argued, the visual arts

belonged to the seven liberal arts and not the medieval guild system of the craftsmen. It took a long time for that early theoretical insight to evolve into a new system of artist education, however. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the old craft system of apprenticeship, journeyman and master still prevailed. Only at the end of the sixteenth century did this system begin to erode.

Around 1580 in Bologna, the brothers Annibale and Agostino Carracci were the first artists to set this education reform into action. The Carracci brothers translated the old artist training into a modern, contemporary studio practice. This meant, among other things, shared drawing lessons in front of originals and plaster casts, training in art theory and practical skills as a group of students with equal standing. Thus, the hierarchical system gave way to students training with each other, building their skill sets in new ways that allowed them to take responsibility for what they had learned and could master. Later this could lead to the development of individualistic styles as a means of differentiation. What was once the style of the master became the invention of the artist trained in this new fashion.

2

A second important debate on the issue of authorship concerns the dispute over reprints and copies at the beginning of the sixteenth century. In this period of graphic reproduction, the question of the attribution of authorship arose. Printers would sometimes blatantly copy other engravers' works including their signature, the most famous example of which is Albrecht Dürer. He is seen historically as the first to be able to enforce copyright protection for his engravings, woodcuts and book illustrations. But as we shall see, his travails in protecting his good name resulted in an early form of distributed authorship, which was also tied up with an artist's or a printer's role as a craftsman.

In the second edition of his artists' biographies from 1565, Giorgio Vasari reports on a copyright dispute between Albrecht Dürer and the Italian engraver Marcantonio Raimondi (Fig. 1). Many researchers consider this episode apocryphal and therefore often disregard it. The story does contain numerous factual errors, but it nevertheless touches upon some of the central tensions and disputes of that time.¹

¹ Vasari mistakes Albrecht Dürer (a German from Nuremberg) to be a Flemish artist from Antwerp. He also seems not to know exactly which of Dürer's graphic cycles had been copied by Marcantonio Raimondi. As we know today, it was *The Life of Mary* and *The Small Passion*. One must add that Vasari, in telling this story, had to rely on reports from third parties. By the



Fig. 1: Plate of Marcantonio from *Le vite de' piv eccellenti pittori, scvltori, e architettori* (Florence: Appresso i Giunti, 1568) by Giorgio Vasari.

The story begins with Marcantonio Raimondi's move to Venice. At the Piazza San Marco, he saw engravings and woodcuts by Albrecht Dürer for sale. Vasari (2015) writes "[Marcantonio Raimondi] was so amazed at the manner and method of Albrecht's work that he spent almost all the money that he had brought from Bologna to buy those sheets." He subsequently began copying the graphics and the woodcuts of *The Life of Mary* in the medium of engraving, where he also included the signature of Albrecht Dürer, the famous AD:

[. . .] and they proved to be so similar in manner, that, no one knowing that they had been executed by Marc' Antonio [sic!], they were ascribed to Albrecht, and were bought and sold as works by his hand. News of this was sent in writing to Albrecht, who was in

time of Vasari's account, Dürer had already died in 1528 and Marcantonio Raimondi soon after, in 1534. The protagonists of the story had passed some 30 years prior.

Flanders, together with one of the counterfeit Passions executed by Marc' Antonio; at which he flew into such a rage that he left Flanders and went to Venice, where he appeared before the Signoria and laid a complaint against Marc' Antonio. But he could obtain no other satisfaction but this, that Marc' Antonio should no longer use the name or the above-mentioned signature of Albrecht on his works. (Vasari 2015)

According to Vasari, Dürer had failed to prohibit the unauthorized copy and sale of his woodcuts. He had merely obtained the right that his monogram be removed. Marcantonio Raimondi copied 17 sheets of *The Life of Mary*, including *The Glorification of Mary* (Fig. 2). Interestingly, however, this copper engraving contains not only the signature of Albrecht Dürer but also the monogram *MAF* (*Marc Anton fecit*) on the depicted candelabrum standing on the bed at the top left, and two characters of the publisher, the signature *yhs*, in the quatrefoil on the cabinet located in the middle ground, plus the two triangles with



Fig. 2: Marcantonio Raimondi, *The Glorification of Mary*.

the letters *ND FS* (Niccolò et Domenico Fratelli Sandro) on the shield at the bottom left (Vogt 2008, 82).

The monograms play a central role for the identification of authorship. They were a guarantee for the customer that what he was purchasing would have indeed been by Albrecht Dürer. The three different monograms refer to a form of distributed authorship, such as those later found in reproductive graphics: first, the inventor of the subject (*invenit*), then the engraver or etcher (*fecit*) and, finally, the publisher or editor (*excudit*). While apocryphal, this story is illustrative, and the engravings that bear these different marks reveal the difficulties surrounding authenticity and authorship attribution at the time of emerging graphic reproduction crafts.

The story of Vasari, however, is not just a tall tale. Albrecht Dürer had indeed been in Venice from autumn 1505 until spring 1506. And he complains at length about the fact that his works were being copied, in a letter to his friend and patron Willibald Pirckheimer on February 7, 1506 from Venice:

Among them, I believe, are the most unfaithful, mendacious and thievish villains, of all the people that exist on earth. [. . .] Here are also many enemies who copy my works in churches and obtain it from wherever they want. In addition, they criticize it and say it is not antique enough, therefore it is not good.² (Dürer 1956, 45)

Hence, Dürer therefore ceaselessly strove to protect his work against illegal copies and reprints. The city of Nuremberg had lent him support in various council decrees. A council edict exists, dated January 3, 1512, that prohibits an unknown person from offering reprints of the engravings and woodcuts of Albrecht Dürer for sale in front of the city hall. Upon infringement, the seller is threatened with the confiscation of his goods and prompted to remove the monogram AD from all reprints. This story is quite similar in content to Vasari's 'tale'. The difference lies in the fact that here we have an actual incident that is verifiable by a historical document:

The stranger who offers graphics in front of the town hall, including some that carry Albrecht Dürer's signature, which are imitated fraudulently, should take it upon himself to remove all of these characters and not offer them here, or, if he refuses, to confiscate all these pictures as counterfeits and hand them over to the Council.³ (Dürer 1956, 241)

Dürer knew about the imperial privileges that his friend, the humanist, Conrad Celtis, had received from Emperor Maximilian I. He now also tried to obtain

² Translation by the author.

³ Translation by the author.

such similar privileges to protect not only his texts and books but also his printed graphics. In a colophon to the print edition of *The Life of Mary* in 1511, he published a Latin warning very similar in wording to the letter to Willibald Pirckheimer from 1506:

Woe to you, fraudsters and thieves of foreign labor and ideas, let you not come to lay your brazen hands on these works! Because let you say that this privilege is issued by the Glorious Emperor of The Holy Roman Empire, Maximilian, that no aftercuts of these images may be printed and sold within the territory of the Empire. Should you act in disregard or criminal greed, rest assured that you must expect the strictest punishment after the confiscation of your possessions.⁴ (Vogt 2008, 85, footnote 368)

On the title page of his *Four Books On Measurement*, Dürer writes in 1525 that he had received an imperial privilege: “With imperial grace and finally incorporated liberty, so that every man knows how to guard himself against damages.”⁵ (Schoch et al. 2004, 171)

However, this privilege seems not to have yet been submitted by the time of publication, as Dürer announces on the last page that the privilege shall appear in the “next book on Proportion” (ibid., 471).⁶ It was presented to his widow Agnes Dürer only after his death. It has been preserved, as a document signed by the hand of Count Montfort, the Imperial Regent of Emperor Charles V from August 14, 1528. This imperial privilege states that nobody may reprint the books by Albrecht Dürer or sell them under his name for an entire decade. Nevertheless, there are obviously still illegitimate reprints and translations. On October 2, 1532, for instance, the city of Nuremberg wrote to the city of Strasbourg in a plea for administrative help: that some selfish persons had been translating parts of Dürer’s books into Latin and reprinting them for sale in France despite this privilege. In order to ward off damages, the city of Nuremberg asked the city of Strasbourg to issue an order that printed books by Dürer should not be offered or sold in Strasbourg or other places in the Holy Roman Empire (Dürer 1956, 239). The imperial privileges and liberties emphasized the position of the artist as a protected author and legally strengthened his position as an author. However, the assertiveness of these privileges were not as effective as modern-day copyright laws, as is evident in the number of illegal copies made in Italy or France despite the imperial prohibitions.

4 Translation by the author.

5 Translation by the author.

6 Translation by the author.

3

Style is an important category for the attribution of authorship and authenticity. It is a medium for increasing social visibility. During the Renaissance, it had become a strategic instrument of market positioning when artistic competition arose from free market forces that developed after the Reformation. Innovation and originality were the results of this increased competition in the art market at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Style had begun to take on the function of handwriting or signature, the basis on which the artist was clearly identifiable. Style had to be original, unusual and eccentric. Any artist aiming for a lasting position in the art market needed to develop an independent and unmistakable signature. Moreover, it should have been complex enough for it to be hard to copy or forge.

At the same time, the function of style in art as a signature of authorship was also being formulated theoretically. Baldassare Castiglione, a good friend of Raphael (Fig. 3), developed a theory of style in his book *Il Cortegiano* in 1524. The Italian term for a distinctive signature and increased social visibility of the



Fig. 3: Raphael, Portrait of Baldassare Castiglione, around 1516.

artist is *maniera*. This term encompasses much more of what we commonly understand under the term “style.” *Maniera* is a lifestyle that cannot be expressed in a painting alone, but rather it shows itself in the entire aesthetic preferences and attitudes of an artist.

With a distinctive, typical style, an artist can stand out from his competitors. He will become visible as an author in the art system. The expert and connoisseur are able to identify the author of an artwork by his style. Style is the crucial element within the elaboration of a distinctive identity of the author within a social discourse on art, which is a discourse of connoisseurship, expertise and knowledge. Artists invent difficult figures or hidden issues, which are in turn identifiable and interpretable only for the initiated connoisseur. These hidden, semantic subtexts allow the collectors to start a knowledgeable conversation with their friends about a painting they own and identify themselves as experts in the matter.

During this period, emperors, kings and princes in Europe began collecting art in a big way and sent their experts on shopping sprees to Italy. In the generation after Titian, Veronese and Tintoretto, an artist glut had been generated by the system, which in turn caused prices to fall. The artists, then, could only maintain their living standards through inflationary mass production. The unmistakable had become interchangeable and arbitrary. At the same time, radical shifts in the question of authorship and production of art had developed. Due to increased economic pressure from the art market, collective mass production had been created, which supplied the market in all price segments. Each and every work created in this system of mass production might have appeared to be unique, but the artists were actually following schematic production using individual modules. Detecting this could only be done with knowledge of their production. This field also included the production and distribution of engravings and etchings by well-known and famous star artists. New media, such as engraving, woodcut or etching were employed to spread motifs, themes and inventions of the superstars nationally and internationally.

Raphael had been one of the first artists to attain worldwide fame due to the dissemination of engravings of his paintings and drawings. The originator’s publicity is decidedly multiplied by the new reproduction media, indeed generated by it almost solely. The private *stanze* of Pope Julius II, displayed in the Vatican, could only be seen *in situ* by a few people at that time, but reproductions could be seen anywhere.

While artists like Albrecht Dürer or Michelangelo Buonarroti seem to have worked largely without a workshop, Raphael had created a completely new

system of collaborative or collective authorship. In principle, Raphael was merely the manager of a large workshop in which the commissions were executed according to his instructions, sketches and cartoons by his journeymen assistants. Raphael had been an incredible manager, who succeeded in assembling a top team of painters in Rome. He gave them a surprising amount of creative freedom in the execution of the work. He won many commissions with his big name, developed the templates for the frescoes in small-format sketches and original sized cartoons, which, after 1514, were then almost entirely painted by his team.

The most famous among them is Giulio Romano who, with his huge art collection comprising 20 shiploads and 40 packed workhorses of art objects and ancient sculptures, joined the services of the Duke of Mantua after Raphael's death. Romano brought the expertise of Raphael's workshop, its model of collaborative and collective authorship in particular, from Rome to Mantua, where the young artists of the region observed his work very attentively and curiously. The Venetian painter Paolo Veronese, having spent his youth 50 km away in Verona and having collaborated with other young artists in a team as a young man, probably adopted this kind of collective and collaborative work from Giulio Romano.

4

In *catalogues raisonnés* – compilations of all the known works of an artist, mostly a result of scholarship in the second half of the twentieth century – traditional art history differentiated mainly between single-handed works and workshop production. However, this distinction is highly ideological and problematic. *Catalogues raisonnés* suggest two classes of art: those works considered to be made single-handedly by the master himself represented the first class and therefore the best quality. The second class of works was then formed by the so-called workshop production. They were of a lesser quality and therefore yielded a much lower price on the art market. The distinction between single-handed authenticity and a workshop product is therefore primarily a distinction that allows auction houses to set prices differently. What misjudgements the desire for an authentic work by the master can produce, is shown in an essay by Annalisa Perissa Torrini on the restoration of Paolo Veronese's paintings from the church of San Giacomo alla Giudecca in Venice (Perissa Torrini 1988). In 1806, the church had been demolished by Napoleonic decree and the paintings stored in the Gallerie dell'Accademia between 1818 and 1821, where they are still located

Milano, Strada 6, Paolo Veronese, 17th century, *San Giacomo alla Giudecca*, Venice, Italy
 Catherine, St. Petersburg, Hermitage (Perissa Torrini 1988)

The second class of images in the *catalogues raisonnés* is usually referred to as the workshop production and represents the lower quality of the oeuvre. Examining the specific operations of an artist's workshop in the second half of the sixteenth century more precisely, it reveals that these art-historical distinctions from the second half of the twentieth century cannot be maintained in any case.

Only in very few cases did Paolo Veronese apply his hand to a painting. He received the commissions, signed the contracts, and then initially designed with small pen sketches how the panel should be painted in a very broad and sketchy manner. Often, he did no more than that. He would discuss these first, still very vague sketches with his younger brother Benedetto Caliari, who would then commission elaborately detailed drawings of the individual characters or let the workshop members adapt costume studies from live models. One small pen sketch (Fig. 5) thus even gave rise to at least six different paintings on the subject of the Holy Family with Saint John the Baptist, Saint Catherine and Saint Ann in various formulations – so much for maximum economic output of collaborative authorship.⁸

Subsequently, Paolo Veronese himself drew the outlines of the figures on the primed canvas with a thin, brown brush and marked the color with which these outlines had to be filled. It was a kind of “painting by numbers” method for “idiots.” Then, the apprentices began with the preparation of the painting. Only when the work had been almost finished did the boss come along for the personal, final touch. And even then, he primarily focused on the faces of the main characters, made a few important corrections and showed his extraordinary skill in the refined fabrics of the garments with their chromatic heightening.

One can also illustrate the mass production of the Veronese workshop statistically. Paolo Veronese worked as an artist for about 40 years between 1548 and 1588. According to the *catalogue raisonné* of Terisio Pignatti, there are 343 “auto-graphs,” 421 attributed works and 668 lost works, which are mentioned in the

⁸ The six paintings which resulted from the Rotterdam sketch are reproduced in Huber 2005, figs. 220–225. They are: 1. Paolo Veronese: *Madonna with St. Elizabeth, St. John the Baptist and St. Catherine*, San Diego, Timken Art Gallery (Pignatti/Pedrocco 1995, cat. no. A 65); 2. a lost original, engraved in copper in 1670 by Giacomo Barri as an invention of Paolo Veronese (Cocke 1984, p.140, fig. 26); 3. Paolo Veronese: *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine*, Montpellier, Musée Fabre (Pignatti/Pedrocco 1995, cat.no. A 54); 4. Paolo Veronese: *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine*, Hampton Court, Royal Collections (Pignatti/Pedrocco 1995, cat.no. A 30); 5. a seventeenth-century copy after a lost original by Paolo Veronese: *Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine*, Milano, Brera; 6. Paolo Veronese: *Holy Family with John the Baptist, Saint Elizabeth and Saint Catherine*, St. Petersburg, Hermitage (Fomiciova 1979, p.131, fig. 1).



Fig. 5: Paolo Veronese, Study for a Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine, Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans van Beuningen.

sources, resulting in a total of 1432 paintings in the course of 40 years. If we divide this number by the individual years and weeks, one painting must have been leaving the workshop almost every week for more than 40 years. Moreover, the paintings by Paolo Veronese were often not the smallest of formats. This estimated number of approximately one painting per week does not include the extensive decorative paintings at country villas on the Terraferma, Venice's territorial countryside on the mainland. The Veronese workshop probably decorated at least 20 different villas. Often, immense spaces had to be covered. They frequently included several rooms, such as in the Villa Maser.

None of this could have been achieved without an efficient and well-organized workshop numbering at least 10–15 employees. The workshop assistants had all been trained in the style of the master. First, they had to make black-and-white drawings of the finished paintings, called *ricordi*. These relatively large-scale drawings served as a kind of documentation of the delivered paintings. So, the workshop retained a “memory” of the paintings in one's own archive, possibly to be used again at a later date for another painting. They had been executed entirely with a thin hair brush on blue paper with gray ink and subsequently highlighted in white. Then, the apprentices and journeymen had to try to imitate all the techniques in the style of the master as accurately as possible: in quick pen sketches, chalk drawings, in the chiaroscuro technique, in the priming of a canvas, the application of flat underpaintings and the setting of colored heightening and chromatic shadows. Those who deviated too much from the style of the master by drawing or painting excessively in their own style had to leave the workshop. In Venice, Paolo Veronese provided mainly first-class work because he had been aware that one could easily compare the quality his works in the city. However, the farther a painting had been delivered abroad, the more it deteriorated in quality and the larger became the signature – the later was intended to prevent questions about the autography and authenticity of the work.

The workshop of Paolo Veronese had been one of the first artist workshops with a collective and efficient economic production method. At least three to five different people would work on the same painting. As one of the first artists in the history of art to do so, Paolo Veronese had succeeded in collectively producing a “unique” style and in distributing it on the market as authentic work by the master's own hand. The paintings had been results of a corporate design in which “the hand” had been institutionalized and delegated to many different co-workers. Peter Paul Rubens adopted this procedure from Veronese a century later, and differentiated and further perfected it.

5

We have seen that the artist as an author is first introduced through a discursive shift from the craft to the liberal sciences. His social, political and economic status is further reinforced by the granting of privileges, the so-called predecessor of copyright, in the direction of authenticity, originality and inimitable authorship. By 1525 at the latest, the artist's "handwriting" developed into an unmistakable style, which, however, was purposefully and collectively constructed by a large number of journeymen and apprentices. Raphael, Giulio Romano and Paolo Veronese are the leading innovators here. The economic situation of Mannerism leads to the development of a production system that insists on the contradiction or tension between the artist as having a recognizable, authentic style, brand name or corporate identity, and the almost medieval, hand-crafted production structure in the workshop.

To be an author in the visual arts in the sixteenth century not only meant having to develop a unique style in one's painting, which is clearly visible and recognizable to the outside. It also meant enjoying legal and economic protection, which forbade others from using work, diligence, effort and invention for their own benefit. The concept of an "original" artwork only arises in the context of counterfeiting and illegitimate imitation. Only when "thieving villains" customize illegal copies and earn money from them do privileges engage in the field of image production to protect the author's work and, more importantly, its invention. Privileges are the historical forerunner of the copyright. Furthermore, original and fake are two sides of the same distinction. They are born within the same second. Without forgery, there is no original, and without an original, there can be no counterfeit. At the same time, teams of staff are trained to collectively construct a distinctive "original." They are trained to imitate the master's style perfectly both in drawing as well as in painting, so it is difficult to distinguish a workshop's artwork from a work by the hand of the master himself. This is precisely the objective. Each picture should look unique and individual. It should look like an authentic original by the master's hand, although in reality it was a collective mass-production of modular units.

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¹ In particular in the context of literature, the relation between author and the authorial work as legal concepts have been extensively explored. In France 1802, since 1810 and Woodmansee 1994, just to name a few, the relation between authorship and the work is central.

² On concepts of authorship in French and German literature see, for example, Woodmansee 1994, 15–16.