

Una vista amirabile: Remarks on the Illusionary Interplay Between Real and Painted Windows in 16th Century Italy

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Various villas and palaces of the 15th and 16th centuries were decorated with illusionistic landscape frescoes that appear as real vistas seen through illusionistic window frames.¹ In current scholarship, these landscapes are seen as nothing more than imitations of preserved ancient mural decorations or reconstructions of Roman landscape paintings described by Vitruvius in *De Architectura Libri Decem* and Pliny the Elder in the *Naturalis Historia*.² Certainly, many Early Modern landscape frescoes show significant similarities to these sources. In some villas, such as the Venetian Villa dei Vescovi in Luvigliano decorated in c. 1542-1543 by the Dutch Lambert Sustris and the Paduan Gualtiero Padovano, there are "harbors, promontories, shores, rivers, springs, straits, shrines, groves, mountains,"³ as Vitruvius describes, and "lush

¹ The research for this article was supported by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the German Study Center in Venice that granted scholarships for completion of my PhD thesis on illusionistic landscapes in Venetian villas of the 16th century. See Sören Fischer, *Das Landschaftsbild als gerahmter Ausblick in den venezianischen Villen des 16. Jahrhunderts: Sustris, Padovano, Veronese, Palladio und die illusionistische Landschaftsmalerei*, (Petersberg: Michael Imhof Verlag, 2014).

² See, for example, Ernst H. Gombrich, "Renaissance artistic theory and the development of landscape painting," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 95 (1953): 335-360, esp. 344-345; Richard Turner, *The Vision of Landscape in Renaissance Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 207; Erik Forssman, "Palladio e la pittura a fresco," *Arte Veneta* 21 (1967): 71-76, esp. 73; Reinhard Bentmann and Michael Müller, *Die Villa als Herrschaftsarchitektur, Versuch einer kunst- und sozialgeschichtlichen Analyse* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1970), 44-45; Christine Jung, *Von der irdischen zur himmlischen Liebe, Die neuplatonische Liebesphilosophie des Pietro Bembo und das Bildprogramm der Villa Badoer in Fratta Polesine, errichtet von Andrea Palladio, ausgestattet von Giallo Fiorentino, 1556* (Ph.D. Diss., Frankfurt a. M., 1994), 90; Nils Büttner, *Die Erfindung der Landschaft, Kosmographie und Landschaftskunst im Zeitalter Bruegels* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2000), 155-156; Denis Cosgrove, *Il paesaggio palladiano*, (Verona: Cierre Edizioni 2004), 170. It is not clear how great the influence of ancient mural paintings was on Early Modern artists. Recently Jutta Allekotte, *Orte der Muße und Repräsentation: Zu Ausstattung und Funktion römischer Loggien (1470–1527)*. Elektronische Ressource (Bonn: Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Bonn, 2011), 134 convincingly asserted that illusionistic landscapes were primarily inspired by literary sources and not by ancient remains: "Vielmehr überlagert sich in den fingierten Ausblicken das durch Lektüre erlangte Wissen über antike Raumausstattungen mit den älteren Traditionen des Landschaftsmotivs im Innenraum und den zeitgleichen Errungenschaften der illusionistischen Malerei, zu deren bedeutendsten Vertretern Mantegna zählt." That literary sources were considered more useful in understanding the ancient art of painting than preserved fragments was indicated by Baldassare Castiglione. In referencing Roman painting and the *paragone* debate in *Il Libro del Cortegiano* published in 1528, Castiglione wrote: "Therefore painting seems to me nobler and more susceptible of skill, than sculpture. And I think that it, like other things, reached the summit of excellence among the ancients: which still is seen in the few slight remains that are left, especially in the grottoes of Rome; but much more clearly may it be perceived in the ancient authors, wherein is such honoured and frequent mention both of works and of masters, and whereby we learn how highly they were always honoured by great lords and by commonwealths." English trans. in Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, ed. Leonard Eckstein Opdycke, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1903), 67.

³ Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture*, ed. I. D. Rowland and T. Noble Howe, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999), VII: 5, 2. The Latin version used here is in Vitruvius, *Zehn Bücher über Architektur, De Architectura Libri Decem*, ed. Franz Reber, (Wiesbaden: Marixverlag 2009), VII: 5, 2: "... portus, promuntoria, litora, flumina, fontes, euripi, fana, luci, montes..." Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author.

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Fig. 1. Lambert Sustris and Gualtiero Padovano, Stanza del Fanciullo, Villa dei Vescovi, Luvigliano, c. 1542-1543 (Photo: Author).

forests, hills, ponds, canals, rivers, shores, and what can only be wished for, as well as various forms of walkers or travelers on ships,” as Pliny notes (Fig. 1).⁴ Yet, these images are more than mere recreations based on these ancient descriptions. The masters who rendered these paintings were interested in exploring the transitory potential of the wall’s surface and the incursion of the compositional elements into the viewer’s space. The landscapes were made to appear as real views seen through believable windows rather than purely decorative pictures.⁵

⁴ Plinius der Ältere, *Naturalis historiae libri XXXVII*, Naturkunde, Buch XXXV, ed. Roland König, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgemeinschaft 2007), XXXV, 116: “... *lucos, nemora, colles, piscinas, euripos, amnes, litora, qualia quis optaret, varias ibi obambulantium species aut navigantium...*”

⁵ For the aesthetics of the framed vista in the Venetian villa, see Sören Fischer, “*Fingere alcune aperture, in quelle far paesi da presto e di lontano*” – On the Concept of the Framed Vista in the Early Modern Italian Villa,” *Framings*, ed. Slavko Kacunko, Ellen Harlizius-Klück, and Hans Körner (forthcoming).



Fig. 2. Moretto da Brescia, Stanza delle Donne, Palazzo Martinengo-Salvadego, Brescia, 1543-1546 (Photo: Author).

The present study seeks to contribute to the discourse on optical illusions by investigating the motives for rendering illusionistic landscapes in the 16th century. The focus is on the landscape paintings in the Venetian villas dei Vescovi, Godi (Lugo di Vicenza) and Barbaro (Maser), decorated between 1540 and 1560 by Lambert Sustris, Gualtiero Padovano, and Paolo Veronese, respectively. These murals are key examples for understanding the Early Modern approach to optical illusion and *trompe-l'oeil*. The question as to why such a pronounced interest in these illusionistic landscapes existed during this time period is examined, as well as the motivations for creating the interplay between real and painted windows as part of villa decorations.

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ILLUSIONISTIC WALL DECORATION

Theoretical and practical achievements in both perspective and the science of optics motivated artists to cover walls and ceilings with illusionistic architecture, a painting type that was explored early on by Giotto in his fresco cycle in Assisi (Upper Church, S. Francesco, c. 1300), where the pictorial space seems to merge with that of the observer.⁶ Illusionistic architecture reached new heights in the late 15th and particularly 16th centuries.⁷ It often imitated the real architecture of the spaces it decorated and thusly created a striking relationship between fictive and real. This type of painted decoration was used in many Italian palaces, villas, and other spaces in both the religious and profane contexts to present historical scenes as theatrical performances. Notable examples are the frescoes in the Florentine Church Sant' Apollonia (1447) by Andrea del Castagno, the Libreria Piccolomini (1502-1507; Siena, Cathedral) by Pinturicchio, the Sala di Costantino (1520; Vatican) by Raphael and Giulio Romano, and the Sala Paolina (1545-1547; Rome, Castel S. Angelo) by Perino del Vaga and his workshop. In these examples, the narratives are separated by fictitious pedestals, pillars, and windows that enhance veracity through optical illusion.⁸ These frescoes added a new theatric quality to the decorated spaces that ultimately enhanced their diversionary and didactic functions.

Painters and patrons deliberately blurred the boundaries between the “image as surface” (“*Bild als Oberfläche*”) and the “image as representation” (“*Bild als Repräsentation*”).⁹ Therefore, the guiding principle of illusionistic wall decoration was a thematic interpolation that united the viewer's and painted spaces; in some cases, such as in Moretto's illusionary Stanza delle Donne (1543-1546; Brescia, Palazzo Martinengo-Salvadego), it is seemingly possible to enter the picture and become one of the protagonists (Fig. 2).¹⁰ The painted narratives were brought closer to contemporary viewers, inviting them to identify and adopt the morals the scenes imparted. Their illusionistic framework and architecture did not serve a purely decorative function. Rather they strengthened the work's *vera similitudine*—i.e. its similarity to nature—and

⁶ Samuel Y. Edgerton, *Giotto und die Erfindung der dritten Dimension. Malerei und Geometrie am Vorabend der wissenschaftlichen Revolution*, (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag 2003), 71: “Die Gegenstände in solch einem Bild scheinen sich plötzlich in einem dreidimensionalen Raum zu befinden, der sich durch die Bildfläche hindurch in einen virtuellen Raum auf der anderen Seite erstreckt.” See also Frank Büttner, *Giotto und die Ursprünge der neuzeitlichen Bildauffassung: Die Malerei und die Wissenschaft vom Sehen in Italien um 1300*, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2013), 51-72, 86-108.

⁷ Anthony Blunt, “Illusionistic Decoration in Central Italian Painting of the Renaissance,” *Royal Society of Arts Journal* 4 (1959): 309–326; Sven Sandström, *Levels of Unreality. Studies in Structure and Construction in Italian Mural Painting during the Renaissance*, (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1963); Michaela Krieger, “Zum Problem des Illusionismus im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert – ein Deutungsversuch,” *Bruckmanns Pantheon. Internationale Zeitschrift für Kunst* 54 (1996): 4–18; Fischer, *Das Landschaftsbild als gerahmter Ausblick*, 18-24, 78-157.

⁸ Julian Kliemann and Michael Rohmann, *Wandmalerei in Italien. Hochrenaissance und Manierismus 1510–1600*, (Munich: Hirmer 2004), 143-145, 352-369.

⁹ Günther Kebeck, *Bild und Betrachter. Auf der Suche nach Eindeutigkeit*, (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2006), 158–159.

¹⁰ Fischer, *Das Landschaftsbild als gerahmter Ausblick*, 128.



Fig. 3. Anonymous, Loggia dei Cavalieri di Rodi, Rome, 1471 (Photo: Author).

successful conveyance of the moral implications provided.

Landscapes rendered as part of the decoration in domestic settings began in c. 1400.¹¹ A notable example is the fresco cycle in the *piano nobile* of the Florentine Palazzo Davanzati by an anonymous artist which includes exterior views with stylized trees, flowers, and birds.¹² The

¹¹ For an overview of illusionistic landscape painting from 1400 to 1530, see Fischer, *Das Landschaftsbild als gerahmter Ausblick*, 18-24.

¹² On the painting decorations of the Palazzo Davanzati, see Walter Bombe, "Der Palazzo Davizzi-Davanzati in Florenz und seine Fresken," *Zeitschrift für bildende Kunst* N.F. (1911): 253-263; Maribel Königer, "Die profanen Fresken des Palazzo Davanzati in Florenz. Private Repräsentation zur Zeit der internationalen Gotik," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 34 (1990): 245-278; Monika Dachs, "Zur ornamentalen Freskendekoration des Florentiner Wohnhauses im späten 14. Jahrhundert," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 37 (1993): 71-129.

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landscapes, which are large scale and placed above eye level, are seen through a feigned filigreed loggia. In Early Renaissance art, nature was given a predominant role in fresco cycles, thus leading to its legitimization as an autonomous motif.

This theme of landscape views seen through architecture continued its development in the following decades. Particularly remarkable are the landscape frescoes in the Loggia dei Cavalieri di Rodi, executed in 1471 by an anonymous painter in the Roman headquarters of the Order of Malta (Fig. 3).¹³ Here colossal painted pilasters that stand on seven-foot high pedestals articulate the walls. Six feigned rectangular windows provide a view of landscapes with trees, lawn, and flowers. The painting complements the real views of nature and the Roman city seen on the west and north sides of the loggia, enhancing its pictorial veracity. The optical illusion created by the feigned wall openings transforms the interior into a belvedere.¹⁴ Hence the solid walls appear as *finestre aperte*, or open windows, and are therefore committed to the fundamental Renaissance notion of painting as window, as Leon Battista Alberti wrote in his *Della Pittura* in 1435-1436.¹⁵

As Gerd Blum has noted, the idea of representing the landscape through real architectural openings began with Luciano Laurana and Francesco di Giorgio Martini at around 1464, who, inspired by Alberti, offered views of the real landscape surrounding the Ducal Palace of Urbino not as a vast panorama, but framed by five rectangular windows.¹⁶ In the Loggia dei Cavalieri di Rodi, this idea was successfully translated into painting.

Mimesis is defined by the strong relationship between the illusionistic landscape and the painted architectural decoration. As frescoes situated on the walls, feigned landscape views become part of the buildings' architecture. Such interaction between real and fictive spaces reached its peak when painted windows were interspersed with real windows, as in the Stanza dei Semibusti in the Villa Imperiale in Pesaro, decorated at around 1530-1537 under the

¹³ An analysis of the decoration in the Loggia dei Cavalieri di Rodi is provided by Silvia Danesi, "La casa dei Cavalieri di Rodi: architettura e decorazione," in *Roma, centro ideale della cultura dell'Antico nei secoli XV e XVI*, ed. Silvia Danesi Squarzina, (Rome: Brill, 1989), 102-142; Allekotte, *Orte der Muße und Repräsentation*, 16-18, 119-142.

¹⁴ As Allekotte, *Orte der Muße und Repräsentation*, 124 stated in her study on the iconography of the Early Modern Roman loggia: "Im ganzen sind die Fresken als eine ideale Landschaft zu betrachten, der seltene Pflanzen und exotische Tiere den Reiz der Fremde verleihen, während typische Elemente wie ein beschatteter Hain, Vögel oder Gewässer das Idyll des locus amoenus evokieren."

¹⁵ Leon Battista Alberti, *Della Pittura. Über die Malkunst*, ed. Oskar Bätschmann and Sandra Gianfreda, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2002), II: 19, 92. For Alberti's concept of painting as window, see Klaus Krüger, *Das Bild als Schleier des Unsichtbaren. Ästhetische Illusion in der Kunst der frühen Neuzeit in Italien* (Munich: Fink, 2001), 27-45.

¹⁶ Alberti, *Della Pittura. Über die Malkunst*, II, 19, 92: "Principio, dove io debbo dipingere scrivo uno quadrangolo di retti angoli quanto grande io voglio, el quale reputo essere una finestra aperta per donde io miri quello che quivi sarà dipinto." Gerd Blum, "Fenestra prospectiva. Das Fenster als symbolische Form bei Leon Battista Alberti und im Herzogpalast von Urbino," *Leon Battista Alberti. Humanist, Architekt, Kunsttheoretiker*, ed. Joachim Poeschke and Candida Syndikus (Münster: Rhema, 2008), 116 stated: "Dass am Palazzo Ducale die antike Tradition des rechteckigen, auf einen Ausblick hin ausgerichteten Fensters wieder aufgenommen und dessen "fenestrae prospectivae" mit Hilfe eines Rahmungsschemas zeitgenössischer Gemälde eingefasst werden, verweist, im Modus einer Umkehrung von Albertis Definition des Gemäldes als "fenestra aperta", auf "Della Pittura." See also Gerd Blum, *Fenestra prospectiva. Architektonisch inszenierte Ausblicke: Alberti, Palladio, Agucchi, Habilitationsschrift Universität Basel 2010*, (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag Berlin, 2014), Ch. III, 7.



Fig. 4. Girolamo Genga, Dosso Dossi, Battista Dossi, Raffaellino da Colle, Angelo Bronzino, and Francesco Menzochi da Forlì, *Stanza dei Semibusti*, Villa Imperiale, Pesaro, 1530-1537 (Photo: Author).

direction of Girolamo Genga (Fig. 4).¹⁷ The artists who worked on this fresco cycle were Dosso Dossi, Battista Dossi, Raffaellino da Colle, Angelo Bronzino, and Francesco Menzochi da Forlì.¹⁸

Here, the juxtaposition of real and fictive, of the idealized painted natural setting and the

¹⁷ For the decoration of the Villa Imperiale, see Sabine Eiche, "The Villa Imperiale of Alessandro Sforza at Pesaro," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 29 (1985): 229-274; Sabine Eiche, "Prologue to the Villa Imperiale Frescoes," *Notizie da Palazzo Albani* 20 (1991): 99-119; Fischer, *Das Landschaftsbild als gerahmter Ausblick*, 20-23.

¹⁸ Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite dei più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti*, Firenze 1568, ed. Maurizio Marini (Rome: Newton, 2007), 1036, Vita di Girolamo Genga: "... e così fece quello [palazzo] che oggi si vede, che per esser fabrica bellissima e bene intesa, piena di camere, di colonnati e di cortili, di logge, di fontane e di amenissimi giardini..."

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real landscape provides an illusionistic interplay that conveys succinctly the Early Modern concepts of mimetic painting and the *paragone* between art and nature. In rooms decorated in such a manner, the viewer can easily compare the creative potential of nature with that of the artist. In 1549 and 1557, respectively, the Venetian authors Michelangelo Biondo and Lodovico Dolce spoke of landscape as having been “painted by God.”¹⁹ In the Stanza dei Semibusti, the painted windows provide a challenge to viewers when comparing the real landscape “painted by God” to its artificial counterpart painted by the artist. While contemporary observers heard the singing of birds and the rustling of leaves from the wind blowing in the trees and smelled the garden’s various scents, at the same time, they enjoyed the painted landscapes that were perhaps corrected and improved by the artist. In an almost modern approach, the image and its optical illusions motivated the viewer to reflect on his own position in the villa as well as on the deceptive potential of painting.

In rendering these decorations, the artist could present himself as a second creator. In his book *Da pintura antiga (On Ancient Painting)*, published in 1548, Francesco d’Olanda summarized this *topos* in the following terms: “Painting I would say is a statement of thoughts in visible and contemplative works, and according to nature: it is an apt imitation of God and nature.”²⁰ The use of illusionistic landscapes in such decorative programs in the Villa Imperiale and many other Italian villas of the period, especially in the Venetian Republic, transformed these places into the locus of contemporary discourse and debate regarding the mimetic potential of painting and the *paragone*, as well as the possibility of creating the three-dimensional illusion of a framed vista.

Significant contemporary sources that provide information on Early Modern attitudes toward villa landscapes answer the question as to what might have motivated artists and patrons to decorate their interior domestic spaces with feigned windows and *vedute*.²¹ These texts, authored by Francesco Doni, Agostino Gallo, Alberto Lollo, and Sebastiano Serlio, not only offer insight into the aesthetics of the framed view, but also help us understand the significance of the interplay between illusionary and real windows in a particular space. In his famed *Lettera in Laude della Villa*, published in 1544 and 1563, Lollo for example contrasts the real landscape with a fictitious view from an imagined villa,²² plainly stating that the painted landscapes not only fulfill a decorative function, but that they carry certain moods—a *Stimmungsträger* (“mood establisher”)—of the ideal villa life. Referring to the texts of Doni,

¹⁹ For the *topos* of the painter as a god, see Francisco d’Olanda, “Della Pittura Antica. Libro Primo. 1548,” in *Francisco d’Olanda, I Trattati d’Arte*, ed. Grazia Modroni (Livorno: Sillabe, 2003), 23-24; Michel Angelo Biondo, *Das Werk von der hochedlen Malerei. Traktat des Michel Angelo Biondo. Venedig 1549*, ed. Albert Ilg (Vienna: Braumüller, 1873), 15; Lodovico Dolce, *Aretino oder Dialog über Malerei, 1557*, ed. Cajetan Cerri and R. Eitelberger von Edelberg (Vienna: Braumüller, 1871), 34.

²⁰ Francesco d’Olanda, *Della Pittura Antica. Libro Primo*, 24: “La pittura direi io che sia una dichiarazione del pensiero in opera visibile e contemplativa, e secondo natura: è imitazione prontissima di Dio e della natura.”

²¹ Fischer, *Das Landschaftsbild als gerahmter Ausblick*, 41-45.

²² Alberto Lollo, *Lettera di M. Alberto Lollo, nel quale rispondendo ad una di M. Hercole Perinato, egli celebra la villa, et lauda molto l’agricoltura* (Ferrara: Gabriele Giolito de Ferrari, 1544), n.p.; Alberto Lollo, “Lettera di M. Alberto Lollo a M. Hercole Perinato in laude della villa,” in Alberto Lollo, *Delle oratione di M. Alberto Lollo Gentil’ Uomo Ferrarese. Volume Primo. Aggiuntavi una lettera del medesimo in laude della villa* (Ferrara: Valente Panizza, 1563), fol. 221r.

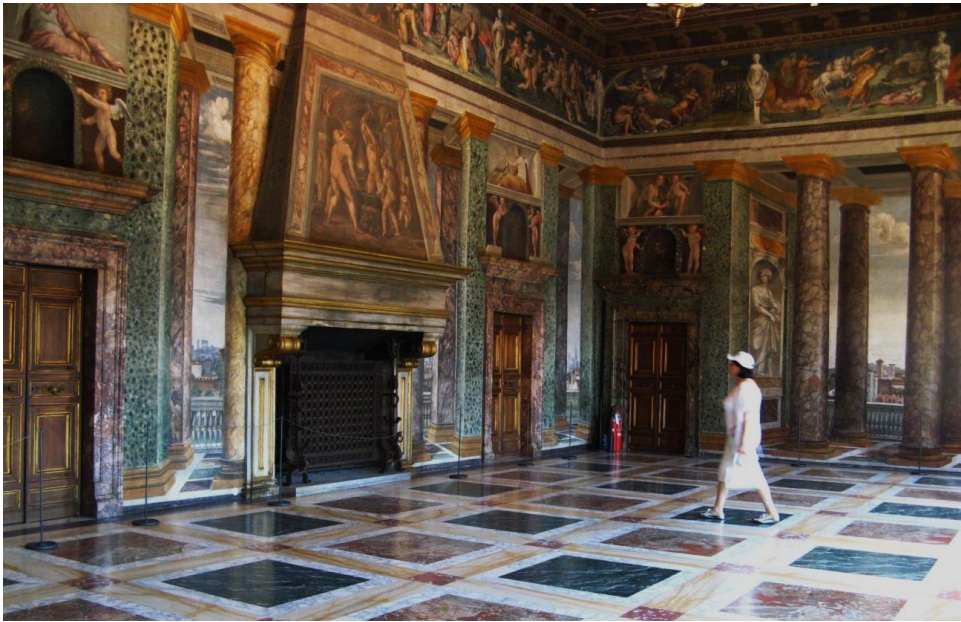


Fig. 5. Baldassare Peruzzi, Sala delle Prospettive, Villa Farnesina, Rome, bef. 1519 (Photo: Author).

Gallo, and Serlio, this particular point will be examined below in greater detail.

PAINTED ARCHITECTURE AS THE FOUNDATION OF OPTICAL ILLUSION: VITRUVIUS, SEBASTIANO SERLIO, AND FRANCESCO D'OLANDA

Since the most important element in creating a successful optical illusion of a landscape view is painted architecture, it is necessary to focus next on the tradition and contemporary perception of this particular illusory component and on how it was addressed in Early Modern art theory. In the fifth chapter in Book VII of *De Architectura*, Vitruvius, who defined painting as a replica of “that which exists or may exist,” provided the most detailed descriptions of ancient mural paintings and discussed the illusionistic potential of painted architecture. Vitruvius wrote: “Later they [the Roman artists of the Republican era] entered a stage in which they also imitated [“*imitarentur*”] the shapes of buildings, and the projections of columns and pediments into spaces.”²³ His exposition inspired Renaissance artists to consider this type of decoration as

²³ Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture*, VII: 5, 2; Vitruvius, *Zehn Bücher über Architektur, De Architectura Libri Decem*, VII: 5, 2: “*Postea ingressi sunt ut etiam aedificiorum figuras columnarumque et fastigiorum eminentes proiecturas imitarentur.*”

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worthy of imitation and legitimized their intent to fool the eye of the observer.²⁴ In particular, Vitruvius underlined the use of feigned architecture within the context of scenography, commenting that, for the observer, the flat wall dissolved into a relief even though the paintings were “beyond doubt flat.”²⁵ Thus Vitruvius substantiated the use of painted architecture as the prerequisite for illusionistic landscape painting.²⁶ Following the ancient author’s lead, Francesco d’Olanda wrote in his *Diálogos de Roma (Roman Dialogues)*, published in 1548, that draughtsmen and painters should also be masters of architecture, skilled in creating perfect correspondences (“*corrispondenze perfette*”) between painted and real structural elements.²⁷

In 1537, Sebastiano Serlio penned the *Libro Quarto*, which deals with domestic decorations, including painted architecture and its potential to create optical illusions. As a key example, Serlio referred to the Sala delle Prospettive, painted by Baldassare Peruzzi in the Roman Villa Farnesina for the wealthy banker Agostino Chigi shortly before 1519 (Fig. 5).²⁸ In this room, the walls seem to open out to deep loggias which, from afar, are difficult to identify as paintings. In fact, it almost seems possible to enter the landscape fresco. Serlio highlighted this illusionistic masterpiece as an example of a perfect deception:

And if the painter then wishes to elongate a hall or other room by using the art of perspective, he will be able to make that part that faces the entrance seem much longer than in reality by rendering some architectural orders. And this Baldassare [Peruzzi] did, so gifted in this [kind of] art...²⁹

²⁴ Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture*, VII: 5, 2; Vitruvius, *Zehn Bücher über Architektur, De Architectura Libri Decem*, VII: 5, 2: “... namque pictura imago fit euis, quod est seu potest esse ...”

²⁵ Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture*, VI: 2, 2; Vitruvius, *Zehn Bücher über Architektur, De Architectura Libri Decem*, VI: 2, 2: “Non enim veros videtur habere visus effectus, sed fallitur saepius iudicio ab eo mens. Quemadmodum etiam in scenis pictis videntur columnarum proiecturae, mutulorum echorae, signorum figurae prominentes, cum sit tabula sine dubio ad regulam plana.”

²⁶ Mimetism in painting was not theorized in treatises until the mid-16th century. See Francisco d’Olanda, “Dialoghi Romani o Della Pittura Antica, Libro Secondo, 1548,” in *Francisco d’Olanda, I Trattati d’Arte*, ed. Grazia Modroni (Livorno: Sillabe, 2003), 117-125; Dolce, *Aretino oder Dialog über Malerei*, 64-65.

²⁷ Francisco d’Olanda, “Dialoghi Romani o Della Pittura Antica, Libro Secondo, 37”: “Soprattutto il disegnatore o pittore di cui parlo sarà maestro di architettura, più di ogni altro capomastro moderno, per conoscere l’ordine e la simmetria dell’edificare, sia per dare gli schizzi e i progetti dei nobili edifici e fabbriche ai principi e capomastri, in una perfezione molto maggiore per l’antichità e novità e maestà rispetto a quella di ogni altro capomastro, sia perchè negli edifici che dovrà dipingere, e nelle colonne e negli elementi degli edifici, vi siano le misure e corrispondenze perfette ...”

²⁸ On the *Sala delle Prospettive*, see Sandström, *Levels of Unreality*, 102; David R. Coffin, *The Villa in the Life on the Renaissance Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1979), 97-100; Manfred Luchterhandt, “Im Reich der Venus, Zu Peruzzis Sala delle Prospettive in der Farnesina,” *Römisches Jahrbuch der Bibliotheca Hertziana* 31 (1996): 207-243; Kliemann and Rohmann, *Wandmalerei in Italien, Hochrenaissance und Manierismus 1510–1600*, 194-213; Sören Fischer, “Das Odeo Comaro, die Villa Farnesina und der Oecus kyzikenos: Wandmalerei und Architektur im Spannungsfeld zwischen vitruvianischer Textexegese und Interpretation,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 77 (2014), 199-220; Fischer, *Das Landschaftsbild als gerahmter Ausblick*, 21.

²⁹ Sebastiano Serlio, *I Sette Libri dell’Architettura*, Venice, 1584, 2 vols., reprint, (Bologna: Arnoldo Forni Editore, 1987), I: IV, 11, fol. 192r: “Et se’l pittor vorrà tal volta con l’arte della prospettiva far parere una sala, o altra stanza piu lunga;



Fig. 6. Girolamo Genga, Loggia, Villa Imperiale, Pesaro, 1530-1537 (Photo: Author).

As Serlio clearly stated, painted architecture is not only basic for illusionistic landscape painting, but it has the potential to visually change the room's appearance and dimensions.

“UNA VISTA AMIRABILE”: ILLUSIONISTIC AND REAL WINDOWS IN 16TH CENTURY ITALY

In c.1530, Francesco Maria I della Rovere, Duke of Urbino, commissioned the Villa Imperiale near Pesaro.³⁰ The site he chose for his building was the Monte S. Bartolo, north of

potrà in quella parte, che guarda all'entrata, con alcuni ordini d'Architettura, tirati con tal arte farlo parere assai più lunga, di quel che ella non sarà in effetto. Et questo fece Baldassare così dotto in questa arte...

³⁰ Fischer, *Das Landschaftsbild als gerahmter Ausblick*, 50-52.

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the city, where Alessandro Sforza, the former ruler of Pesaro, had constructed a fortified villa in 1469-1472. According to Vasari, the architect for the project was Girolamo Genga.³¹ The villa followed the modern country house design established ten years earlier by Raphael with the Villa Madama in Rome that included a two-tiered *giardino pensile*, a loggia, a grotto, and an open air theater.

These elements rendered the Villa Imperiale one of the most sophisticated of the period. It offered the patron and his guests an ideal setting for *otium* and therefore fulfilled the requirement of a modern idyllic retreat from city life, as later described by Agostino Gallo in his *Le dieci giornate della vera agricoltura e de' piaceri della villa*, first published in Brescia in 1564:

Who wouldn't want to live in a villa, not so much because here one can find good peace, true freedom, secure tranquility and a sweet resting place, but here one also enjoys fresh air, the tree leaves..., the purity of the springs... the fertility of the land... and the beauty of the gardens.³²

In 1558, Alvise Cornaro, the main sponsor of villa culture in 16th century Venice, used similar words in the Colli Euganei to describe villa life.³³

Aside from this, I have found another way to amuse myself, that I go in April and March, as well as September and October, for some days to enjoy my hill that is in these Colli Euganei, and in the most beautiful of its spots, which has its fountains and gardens, and above all a very comfortable and beautiful room...³⁴

The most important element that connected the Villa Imperiale to modern villa ideology was its orientation towards and interaction with the surrounding landscape. The villa is located on a hill slope facing a green valley. A roof terrace allows both a panoramic and several segmented framed views of the countryside (Fig. 6). The experience of beholding the landscape, along with the cultural and humanistic events that took place in the villa, closely followed Alberti's recommendations. In *De Architectura* (c. 1450), Alberti wrote on the ideal

³¹ Vasari, *Le Vite dei più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti*, 1036, Vita di Girolamo Genga.

³² Agostino Gallo, *Le dieci giornate della vera agricoltura e de' piaceri della villa*, (Venice: Domenico Farri, 1565), VIII: fol. 169r: "*Chi non dovrebbe adunque habitare in villa; poiche non tanto vi si trova la buona pace, la vera libertà, la sicura tranquillità, & ogni soave riposo; ma vi si gode anco l'aprico aere, le frondi de gli arbori, i frutti loro peregrini, la chiarezza dell'acque, l'amenità delle valli, la prospettiva de' monti, l'allegria de' colli; la vaghezza de' boschi, la spatiosità delle campagne, la fertilità delle possessioni; la utilità delle viti, e la bellezza de' giardini.*"

³³ For Alvise Cornaro, see Mirella Blason, "La vita di Alvise Cornaro," in *Alvise Cornaro e il suo tempo*, ed. Lionello Puppi (Padua: Comune di Padova, 1980), 18-26.

³⁴ Alvise Cornaro, *Trattato de la vita sobria del magnifico M. Luigi Cornaro Nobile Vinitiano* (Venice: San Luca al segno del Diamante, 1558), fol. 21r: "*Ho anchora oltre à questo un'altro modo di solazzarmi, che io vò l'Aprile e' Maggio, & così il Settembre, & l'Ottobre, per alquanti giorni à godere un mio colle, che è in questi monti Euganei, & nel più bel sito di quelli, che ha le sue fontane & giardini, & sopra tutto commoda et bella stanza...*"



Fig. 7. Girolamo Genga, Stanza del Giuramento, Villa Imperiale, Pesaro, 1530-1537 (Photo: Author).

villa for a ruler, indicating that the view of his territory was central to its design. Thusly, the view was to combine the enjoyment of nature (*Voluptas*) with political and aristocratic metaphors (*Dignitas*).³⁵

That ideally a villa should take advantage of the various landscape vistas was already

³⁵ Leon Battista Alberti, *L'Architettura. De re aedificatoria*, ed. Giovanni Orlandi and Paolo Portoghesi (Milan: Il Polifilo, 1966), I: V, 17, 415: "Caeterum tecta ingenuorum velim occupent agri non feracissimum sed alioquin dignissimum, unde omnis aurae solis aspectusque commoditas et voluptas liberrime capiatur. Faciles ad se ex agro porrigit aditus; venientem hospitem honestissimis excipiet spatiis; spectabitur, spectabitque urbem oppida mare fusamque planitiem, et nota collium montiumque capita, ortorum delicias, piscationum venationumque illecebras sub oculis habebit expositas." On the terms of *Voluptas* and *Dignitas* in Alberti, see Gerd Blum: "Palladios Villa Rotonda und die Tradition des idealen Ortes: Literarische Topoi und die landschaftliche Topographie von Villen der italienischen Renaissance," in *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 70 (2007): 159–200, esp. 171–172.

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embraced by Pliny the Younger in the ancient era.³⁶ In his epistles on the villas Laurentina and Tuscolana addressed to friends, he gave special attention to the visual connection between architecture and nature.³⁷ Nearly every room in his estates offered splendid views framed either by windows or porticos. This and similar ancient sources, such as Horace and Statius, were well known in humanistic circles from the early 15th century on.³⁸

In the loggia of Pliny's Laurentian Villa, which was located on the Ostian shore, the panoramic landscape was visually segmented by windows and other architectural openings:

At the far end of the terrace, the arcade, and the garden, is a suite of rooms that are truly my favorites, for I had them built myself. Here is a sun-parlor facing the terrace on one side, the sea on the other, and the sun on both. There is also a bedroom which has folding doors opening onto the arcade and a window looking out onto the sea... it [an alcove] is large enough to hold a couch and two arm-chairs, and has the sea at its foot, the neighboring villas behind, and the woods beyond, views which can be seen separately from its many windows or blended into one.³⁹

Clearly contemporary visitors to the Villa Imperiale would have recognized the character of its framed vistas as *all' antica*. In the *Giornate Soriane*, written in c.1572-1574 by composer, singer, and author Ludovico Agostini as a description of country life around Pesaro, the building and its two loggias are highlighted as ideal places for viewing the surrounding landscape.⁴⁰

Among the eight decorated rooms in the Villa Imperiale, two provide framed views of the landscape: the Stanza del Giuramento and the Stanza dei Semibusti. In the first room only four of the landscape views are real and the rest are illusionistically painted and seen through feigned windows (Fig. 7). In imitation of the loggias on the villa's roof, the wall paintings transform the enclosed spaces into open belvederes that seem to interact with the rivers, hills, woods, and verdant planes offered by the surrounding nature. The fact that the artist replicated the dimensions of the real windows in their fictive counterparts resulted in a more convincing rendering.

One of the most sophisticated optical illusions created by the interplay of feigned and

³⁶ Fischer, *Das Landschaftsbild als gerahmter Ausblick*, 26-31.

³⁷ Pliny the Younger, *Letters and Panegyricus*, ed. G. P. Gold, trans. Betty Radice, (London: Harvard University Press, 1989), II, 17; V, 6.

³⁸ Fischer, *Das Landschaftsbild als gerahmter Ausblick*, 15-16.

³⁹ Pliny the Younger, *Letters and Panegyricus*, II, 17, 20-21: "In capite xysti, deinceps cryptoporticus, horti, diaeta est, amores mei, re vera amores. ipse posui. in hac heliocaminus quidem alia xystum, alia mare, utraque solem, cubiculum autem valvis cryptoporticum, fenestra prospicit mare. [...] lectum et duas cathedras capit, a pedibus mare, a tergo villae, a capite silvae; tot facies locorum totidem fenestris et distinguit et miscet."

⁴⁰ Ludovico Agostini, *Giornate Soriane*, MS. Bibl. Oliv. Pe., ms. Oliv. 191; Laura Salvetti Firpo, ed., *Ludovico Agostini, Le Giornate Soriane* (Rome: Salerno, 2004), fol. 1v-2r. "[...] si vede poi nella maggior superficie di questo secondo palagio, in luogo de' tetti, corridori scoperti con bellissimo artificio sostenuti et arricchiti di finissimi marmi a balaustri, ordinati con due logge che coprono gli angoli della prospettiva di tutto l'edificio, che rendono una vista ammirabile così a quelli che di lontano le veggono, com'anco maggiormente agli altri ch'ivi presenti si trovano."

real windows was provided by Paolo Veronese and Andrea Palladio in Venice.⁴¹ In c. 1560-1561, Veronese was responsible for the decoration of the Villa Barbaro in Maser. With the aid of his workshop and most likely in collaboration with Palladio, the villa's architect, Veronese devised the most complex illusionistic mural decoration to have been created up to this point in the Terraferma.⁴² Although the vaults of the various rooms in the villa are decorated with figurative scenes, the real protagonists are the illusionistic landscapes on the walls. Fourteen real windows visually enframe the agricultural estate of the patrons Daniele and Marcantonio Barbaro, while twenty-six painted illusionistic views enhance the villa's idyllic character and evoke the model ancient villa type described by Pliny the Younger (Fig. 8).⁴³

This emphasis on the landscape reflects socio-cultural issues of the era that were unique to the Venetian territory. In c. 1540, Venice instituted a policy of land recovery and cultivation on the mainland.⁴⁴ Agricultural enterprises had become necessary when Ottoman offenses against Venetian foreign territories and trading posts (for example, Rhodes was conquered by the Ottomans in 1523) and the shifting of the international trade routes to the Atlantic region that started after 1492 compromised the republic's economic and social stability. Prior to these events, Venice's continuous provisions of corn and rice were guaranteed by shipping traffic in the Mediterranean Sea. Due to its geographic nature, Venice lacked large acreage that could be used for agriculture and its soil was for the most part an insalubrious marshland. To prevent further dependence on shipping traffic, in mid-16th century Venice had to devise an agricultural system that could feed its population on its own.

Alvise Cornaro wrote a letter to his friend Sperone Speroni in 1541⁴⁵ expressing his notions about the importance of land cultivation, the *Santa agricoltura*, as he called it, and

⁴¹ Giuseppe Pavanello and Vincenzo Mancini, *Gli affreschi nelle ville venete. Il Cinquecento* (Venice: Marsilio, 2008), 322-346; Sören Fischer, "Denn ein üppiger Rebstock strebt über das ganze Gebäude hin zum First und erklettert ihn"- Paolo Veronese, Andrea Palladio und die Stanza di Baccho in der Villa Barbaro als Pavillon Plinius des Jüngeren," *Kunstgeschichte. Open Peer Reviewed E-Journal* (2013), <http://www.kunstgeschichte-ejournal.net/329>; Fischer, *Das Landschaftsbild als gerahmter Ausblick*, 110-127.

⁴² For Andrea Palladio's role in the fresco decoration of his villas, see Fischer, *Das Landschaftsbild als gerahmter Ausblick*, 102-107. See also Howard Burns, "Paolo Veronese: Il pittore come innovatore dell' architettura," *Domus* 982 (July-August 2014): 2-6; Howard Burns, "Andrea Palladio e le architetture dipinte di Veronese," *Quattro Veronese venuti da lontano: Le Allegorie ritrovate*, ed. Vittoria Romani (Vincenza: Centro internazionale di studi di architettura Andrea Palladio, 2014), 29-35.

⁴³ That the architecture was partly inspired by Pliny's epistles has already been discussed by Fritz Burger, *Die Villen des Andrea Palladio. Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der Renaissance-Architektur* (Leipzig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1909), 108. See also Norbert Huse, "Palladio und die Villa Barbaro in Maser: Bemerkungen zum Problem der Autorschaft," *Arte Veneta* 28 (1974): 106-122, 115-118.

⁴⁴ Regarding land cultivation in 16th century Venice, see Salvatore Ciriaco, *Building on Water. Venice, Holland and the Construction of the European Landscape in Early Modern Times* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2006); Cosgrove, *Il paesaggio palladiano*; Gerrit Smienk and Johannes Niemeijer, *Palladio, the Villa and the Landscape*, (Basel: Birkhauser Verlag, 2011).

⁴⁵ Alvise Cornaro, *Lettera a messer Sperone Speroni*, in *Alvise Cornaro. Il suo tempo e le sue opere*, ed. Giuseppe Fiocco, (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1965), 193. See also Sören Fischer, "The Allegorical Landscape: Alvise Cornaro and his Self-Promotion by the Landscape Paintings in the Odeo Cornaro in Padua," *Kunstgeschichte. Open Peer Reviewed E-Journal*, 2013, <http://www.kunstgeschichte-ejournal.net/321>; Ciriaco, *Building on Water*, 113-115.

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Fig. 8. Paolo Veronese, Salone, Villa Barbaro, Maser, 1560-1561 (Photo: Author).

describing his recent agricultural achievements.⁴⁶ For Alvise, his method of agriculture would eliminate Venice's need to engage in war: "Venice will be able to let others make war, and stay to watch, and thusly always keep its state in peace."⁴⁷

This indicates that the painted landscape of the Venetian villa was intended as metaphor for successful land cultivation, which in turn would bring peace, security, and sovereignty to the Venetian state. Not surprisingly, Venetian villas of the period were characterized by their strong relationship to the surrounding landscape and the emphasis of

⁴⁶ For the notion of *Santa Agricoltura*, see Fischer, *Das Landschaftsbild als gerahmter Ausblick*, 60-64.

⁴⁷ Cornaro, *Lettera a messer Sperone Speroni*, 193: "Venezia potrà lassar far Guerra alli altri, et star a veder, et cosi tenir sempre lo suo stato in pace."



Fig. 9. Paolo Veronese, Stanza di Bacco, Villa Barbaro, Maser, 1560-1561 (Photo: Author).

these sceneries in its fresco decorations. In these structures there existed an interplay between the real arable land and the painted Arcadian landscapes on the walls that included green fields dotted by ancient ruins and peaceful rivers.

I have discussed elsewhere the Stanza di Bacco in the Villa Barbaro as example of this melding of real and fictive and how here Veronese wished to recreate the architectural elements

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of the ancient villas described by Pliny in his epistles (Fig. 9).⁴⁸ As a result of the painted decoration, the room was transformed into an elegant white marble garden pavilion. The illusionistic fresco accords with Palladio's real architecture and thusly it follows the directive provided by Francesco d'Olanda in 1548 that the painted architectural elements in a room must correspond exactly ("*corrispondenze perfette*")⁴⁹ to its real counterparts. Even the light entering through the windows was integrated into the painted architecture by the addition of fictitious shadows.

Veronese's fresco was intended to amaze viewers by providing a seemingly free-standing structure in the center of a villa. The effect of the illusion Veronese created is similar to that in Peruzzi's Sala delle Prospettive painted forty years earlier. As in the Roman example, the purpose of the decoration was "to conceal the solid structure, to make the spectator forget its existence and lead him to think that it has been spirited away and replaced by something different."⁵⁰ The illusionistic paintings, like the villa's architectural openings, offer "*una vista ammirabile*,"⁵¹ as Agostini expressed. This programmatic equivalence between the real and the simulated diminishes the mural's pictorial nature. The painted landscape becomes an ostensible view, as was described on several occasions by Pliny in his letters.⁵²

The special emphasis on illusionistic landscape views in Venetian villa culture was already seen in decorative projects executed prior to the Villa Barbaro. The aforementioned Villa dei Vescovi in Luvigliano, designed by Giovanni Maria Falconetto on a hill in the Colli Euganei shortly before 1535 and decorated in c. 1542-1543, is one of the earliest Venetian villas that gave landscape paintings a leading role within its decorations.⁵³ Intended as the summer retreat of Francesco Pisani, Bishop of Padua, and supervised by Alvise Cornaro, the villa featured two loggias that served as ideal spots for the enjoyment of the landscape. Based on models from central Italy, such as the Villa Medici in Fiesole (c. 1451-1458), this was the first instance of a Venetian country house that interacted with nature both from within and without and which established a true integration between interior and exterior spaces.⁵⁴

Here Sustris and Padovano transferred the aesthetics of the landscape view framed by

⁴⁸ Fischer, *Das Landschaftsbild als gerahmter Ausblick*, 119-125.

⁴⁹ Francesco d'Olanda, *Dialoghi Romani o Della Pittura Antica, Libro Secondo*, 37.

⁵⁰ Blunt, "Illusionistic Decoration", 309.

⁵¹ Agostini, *Giornate Soriane*, fol. 1v-2r.

⁵² See for example Pliny the Younger, *Letters and Panegyricus*, V: 6, 7-13: "*Regionis forma pulcherrima. imaginare amphitheatrum aliquod inmensum et quale sola rerum natura possit effingere. [...] magnam capies voluptatem, si hunc regionis situm ex monte prospexeris. neque enim terras tibi, sed formam aliquam ad eximiam pulchritudinem pictam videberis cernere; ea varietate, ea descriptione, quocumque inciderint oculi, reficiuntur.*"

⁵³ For the Villa dei Vescovi, see Fabrizio Magani and Chiara Gini, *Ville delle Provincia di Padova. Villa dei Vescovi, Luvigliano* (Padua: Provincia di Padova 1996); Fischer, *Das Landschaftsbild als gerahmter Ausblick*, 87-90.

⁵⁴ Erik Forssman, "Del sito da eleggersi per le fabbriche di villa. Interpretazione di un testo palladiano," *Bollettino del Centro Internazionale di Studi di Architettura Andrea Palladio* 11 (1969): 149-162, esp. 161. See also Christoph Bertsch, *Villa, Garten, Landschaft: Stadt und Land in der florentinischen Toskana* (Berlin: Gebrüder Mann Verlag, 2012), 278-289.



Fig. 10. Lambert Sustris and Gualtiero Padovano, Loggia frescoes, Villa dei Vescovi, Luvigliano, 1542-1543 (Photo: Author).

both loggias onto the mural paintings on their walls (Fig. 10). Although the frescoes are damaged, the overall composition can still be seen and it shows how effectively the painters linked the real and fictitious architecture by adding seven feigned arcades that extend the space. Each painted view was set next to a real vista to provide a vibrant interplay between reality and illusion, between the landscape that "God created" and its artificial manmade reflection. As in the case of the frescoes in the Villa Imperiale, the space in this example seems to be transformed into a belvedere that maximizes the perception of nature to its highest level. And as in the Villa Imperiale, here the skillful imitation of architecture through painting increases the optical effect of being surrounded by nature. These abundant views of bucolic landscapes

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convert the loggias into spaces where the literary ideals of the *locus amoenus* and *Paradiso terrestre* become reality.

This credible mimetic imitation relates to the Early Modern *paragone* between painting and architecture. By effectively imitating the real, Sustris and Padovano argued for the superiority of painting as it was not only able to create architecture, but also to exceed it through the art of perspective and the study of nature.⁵⁵ By taking on the role of builders, the way Andrea Mantegna (Camera degli Sposi, Palazzo Ducale, Mantova, c. 1464-1470), Baldassare Peruzzi, Giulio Romano, or Girolamo Genga had done, Sustris and Padovano created a seamless visual illusion. The feigned architecture legitimizes the openings as real windows and the views on the walls as factual, which clearly, when placed within the villa's interior, could never happen in reality.

That the painters saw themselves as competing with nature and with artists in other disciplines is also illustrated by the Stanza del Fanciullo, a small room painted by Sustris in the Villa dei Vescovi (Fig. 1). The walls of this small chamber are articulated with pillars, capitals, architrave with guttae and triglyphs, and sima—architectural elements that duplicate the villa's façade.⁵⁶ In this way, Sustris harmonized the exterior architecture with the interior fresco decoration. This suggests that the artist was familiar with the theoretical and practical principles of painted architecture and its affiliated idea of "*finge il vero*"⁵⁷ formulated by Serlio.

In one of the painted windows, Sustris included a nude boy eating grapes from a vine. This detail is of particular importance in that Sustris used it not only to further animate the illusionistic fresco, but also to recreate the painting of *The Boy with Grapes* attributed to the ancient painter Zeuxis. For Renaissance artists and authors like Francesco d' Olanda, Michel Angelo Biondo, and Lodovico Dolce, the ancient master was, along with Apelles and Parrhasios, the most gifted in imitating nature and deceiving the viewer.⁵⁸ As told by Pliny the Elder, Zeuxis entered into a contest with Parrhasios to assess which artist had the greatest mimetic skills. Zeuxis' painting of the boy eating grapes was the most lifelike since birds pecked

⁵⁵ See Alberti, *Della Pittura. Über die Malkunst*, I: 26, 102: "E chi dubita qui apresso la pittura essere maestra, o certo non picciolo ornamento a tutte le cose? Prese l'architetto, se io non erro, pure dal pittore gli architravi, le base, i capitelli, le colonne, frontispici e simili tutte altre cose..."

⁵⁶ As Alessandro Ballarin, "Una villa interamente affrescata di Lamberto Sustris," *Arte veneta* 20 (1966): 246 stated, "Le partizioni architettoniche finte dalla decorazione sono puntualmente ispirate a quella della villa; si rivela una unità di concepimento fra architettura e decorazione..."

⁵⁷ Serlio, *I Sette Libri dell'Architettura*, I: IV, 11, fol. 191v-192r.

⁵⁸ Francisco d'Olanda, *Della Pittura Antica. Libro Secondo*, 167; Michel Angelo Biondo, *Das Werk von der hochedlen Malerei*, 14-15; Lodovico Dolce, *Aretino oder Dialog über Malerei*, 64-65. See also Vasari, *Le Vite dei più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti*, Proemio della Parte Terza, 555, who compared Raphael to Zeuxis and Apelles: "Ma più di tutti il graziosissimo Raffaello da Urbino, il quale studiando le fatiche de' maestri vecchi e quelle de' moderni, prese da tutti il meglio, e fattone raccolta, arricchi l'arte della pittura di quella interna perfezzione, che ebbero anticamente le figure d'Apelle e di Zeusi e più, se si potesse dire o mostrare l'opere di quelli a questo paragone." On the reception of the Zeuxis anecdote in the Early Modern era, see Rensselaer W. Lee, "Ut Pictura Poesis. The Humanist Theory of Painting," *The Art Bulletin* 22 (1940): 197-269, esp. 205; Klaus Irlé, "Apelles, Zeuxis, Lysippos und die Malerei des Cinquecento," in *Antiquarische Gelehrsamkeit und Bildende Kunst. Die Gegenwart der Antike in der Renaissance*, ed. Gunter Schweikhart (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung König, 1996), 123-124.

at the fruits.⁵⁹ By making reference to this iconic painting, Sustris fashioned himself as the successor of the ancient artistic genius. Sustris' works in the Villa dei Vescovi could deceive viewers with their illusionistic landscapes in the same way as Zeuxis deceived the birds with his painted fruits.⁶⁰ The painted views have the same claim to reality as the real views seen from the room's windows.

That illusionistic landscapes in Renaissance villas were considered equal to the real landscape is addressed by Giovanni Tarcagnola in his *Del sito et lodi della citta di Napoli* of 1566.⁶¹ Published in Naples and written in the form of a classical humanistic dialogue, it provides a chronological narrative of the city's history. The introduction is a panegyric of the city as center of cultural, political, and artistic achievement. It begins with a dialogue between three *cavalieri* that takes place in the suburban *Villa del Monte* owned by Don Geronimo Pignatelli. Erected on one of the hills that surround Naples, this country house followed the ancient and now revived concept of the "villa with a view," formulated in particular by Vitruvius, Alberti, and Palladio.⁶²

While dining in the villa's fenestrated loggia, Pignatelli and his three guests enjoy a bird's eye view of "the sea and the entire city."⁶³ As the conversation ensues, the host brings his guests' attention to the windows and the beautiful view they offer by asking, "Have you ever in your life seen a more beautiful view than this? If you saw it portrayed in one of these Flemish paintings, who wouldn't say that this was the most delicate thing on earth?"⁶⁴ Pignatelli then points to the city and its theatrical setting: "The city is located and formed, as you can see, like a beautiful theatre, along with these amenable hills behind it and which surround it on this side."⁶⁵ Pignatelli did not describe the view as a wide, endless space. Instead, he likened the parts seen

⁵⁹ Plinius der Ältere, *Naturalis historiae libri XXXVII. Naturkunde. Buch XXXIV*, ed. Roderich König, (Munich: Artemis, 1989), 66: "fertur et postea Zeuxis pinxisse puerum uvas ferentem; ad quas cum adcolassent aves, eadem ingenuitate processit iratus operi et dixit: uvas melius pinxi quam puerum, nam si et hoc consummassem, aves timere debuerant."

⁶⁰ Jörg R. J. Schirra, "Täuschung, Ähnlichkeit und Immersion: die Vögel des Zeuxis," in *Vom Realismus der Bilder. Interdisziplinäre Forschungen zur Semantik bildhafter Darstellungsformen*, ed. Klaus Sachs-Hombach, (Magdeburg: Scriptorum-Verlag, 2000), 119-135; Constanze Peres, "Nachahmung der Natur. Herkunft und Implikationen eines Topos," in *Die Trauben des Zeuxis. Formen künstlerischer Wirklichkeitsaneignung*, ed. Hans Körner (Hildesheim, Zürich, and New York: Georg Olm Verlag, 1990), 1-39.

⁶¹ Giovanni Tarcagnola, *Del sito et lodi della citta di Napoli con vna breue historia de gli re suoi & delle cose piu degne altroue ne' medesimi tempi auenute* (Naples: G. M. Scotto, 1566). I thank Tanja Michalsky for bringing this source to my attention. See also Tanja Michalsky, "Gewachsene Ordnung. Zur Chorographie Neapels in der Frühen Neuzeit," in *Räume der Stadt. Von der Antike bis heute*, ed. Cornelia Jöchner, (Berlin: Reimer, 2008), 267-288.

⁶² Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture*, I: 4, 1; Alberti, *L'Architettura. De re aedificatoria*, I: 4; Andrea Palladio, *I Quattro Libri dell'Architettura* (Venice: Domenico De' Franceschi, al segno della Regina, 1570), II: 12, 45-46.

⁶³ Tarcagnola, *Del sito et lodi della citta di Napoli*, fol. 2v: "... perche da quella loggia si vedeva il mare, & la citta tutta..."

⁶⁴ Tarcagnola, *Del sito et lodi della citta di Napoli*, fol. 2v: "Vedeste mai per vita vostra la più bella prospettiva di questa? Se si vedesse ritratta in uno di questi quadri di Fiandra, chi non direbbe, che questa fosse la più delicata cosa del mondo?"

⁶⁵ Tarcagnola, *Del sito et lodi della citta di Napoli*, fol. 3r: "La città è situata, & formata, come vedete, à guisa di un bel theatro, insieme con questi ameni colli, che alle spalle le sono, & che la circondano da questa parte."

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through the fenestrations to Flemish painting, which was known for its panoramic landscape depictions, often from a bird's eye view.⁶⁶ Framed by the loggia's windows, the outside world is granted an artificial quality by comparing it to a man-made theater—a metaphor inspired by Pliny the Younger's writings.⁶⁷

Contemporaries were aware of the intellectual and aesthetic appeal of such juxtapositions, as evidenced by 16th century books on villas.⁶⁸ These texts were primarily intended to ennoble the art of agriculture, provide practical advice on how to improve the agricultural economy, and praise the idyllic villa life that was very often associated with landscape views. Lollo, for example, praised the villa's garden and natural landscape for their usefulness and especially their visual grace.⁶⁹ The hills are gentle; fields, valleys, and forests are fertile; and water runs steadily. His text almost reads as a description of frescoed villa landscapes, such as the ones in the Stanza del Fanciullo in the Villa dei Vescovi. Lollo in fact recognized this parallel when he wrote, "These [landscape motifs]... are so effective that even though they are not alive and truly made by the hands of Nature, but dead and faked by art, they brighten the spirit and please our eyes admirably."⁷⁰

This same assessment of the real and fictitious landscape is also found in Francesco Doni's *Le Cinque Ville del Doni*, written in 1566. In describing the interior decoration of the Villa Priuli in Treviso, the author praises its landscape paintings, which were likely staged as illusionistic views, for their beauty and potential to amaze, "... the Flemish landscapes painted by talented Flemish artists rendered in fresco will astonish you."⁷¹

Like Tarcagnola, Doni emphasized the northern character of the landscapes that were first introduced to Venetian villa culture by Sustris.⁷² In fact, from the late 15th century on, Venetian patrons had a predilection for the northern landscape style. In the first half of the

⁶⁶ Fischer, *Das Landschaftsbild als gerahmter Ausblick*, 13.

⁶⁷ Pliny the Younger, *Letters and Panegyricus*, V: 6, 7: "Regionis forma pulcherrima. imaginare amphitheatrum aliquod inensum et quale sola rerum natura possit effingere."

⁶⁸ For 16th century books on villas, see James S. Ackerman, *The Villa: Form and Ideology of Country Houses* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 108-133.

⁶⁹ Lollo, *Lettera di M. Alberto Lollo*, n.p.; Lollo, "Lettera di M. Alberto Lollo a M. Hercole Perinato in laude della villa," fol. 221r: "Nè crederò io mai, che alcuno sia così indiscreto, o tanto ostinato, che mi nieghi, che non sia di grandissimo & inestimabile contento cagione, il vedere una nostra Villa riuscire di giorno in giorno più ornata, più bella, & più fruttuosa. In cui siano arbori utili & dilettevoli d'ogni maniera. Vegganvisi vaghi animali di tutte le sorti. Sia cinta da qualche piacevol colle, vestito di boschi, & vergato da fonti, i quali con mormorio dolcissimo scorrendo per lo piano, irrighino i prati, riempiano le Valli, & adacquino i campi."

⁷⁰ Lollo, *Lettera di M. Alberto Lollo*, n.p.; Lollo, "Lettera di M. Alberto Lollo a M. Hercole Perinato in laude della villa," fol. 221r: "Le quai cose nel dilettarci hanno tanta efficacia, che non pur vive & vere fatte per le mani della Natura, ma morte & finte dall'arte, rallegrano gli spiriti, & confortano gli occhi nostri mirabilmente."

⁷¹ Anton Francesco Doni, *Le Ville del Doni* (Bologna: Appresso Alessandro Benacci, 1566), in *Le ville di Anton Francesco Doni*, ed. Ugo Bellocchi, (Modena: Aedes Muratoriana, 1969), 89: "... i paesi di Fiandra, da buoni maestri Fiaminghi coloriti in fresco, ti fanno stupire."

⁷² Fischer, *Das Landschaftsbild als gerahmter Ausblick*, 67-68.



Fig. 11. Lambert Sustris, Stanza dei Paesaggi, Odeon Cornaro, Padua, 1540-1541 (Photo: Author).

cinquecento, Domenico Grimani and Gabriele Vendramin, for example, collected figurative and landscape paintings (*paesi*) rendered by Albrecht Dürer and Hans Memling.⁷³ Further, when Marcantonio Michiel was invited to the Grimani's house in 1521 he saw a number of landscapes by Alberto de Holanda.⁷⁴

The special interest in Sustris' landscape style among Venetian patrons, which was

⁷³ Bernard Aikema, "Il gusto dei fiamminghi. Opere "ponentine" nelle collezioni veneziane del Rinascimento," in *Il Rinascimento a Venezia e la pittura del nord ai tempi di Bellini, Dürer, Tiziano*, ed. Bernard Aikema and Beverly Louise Brown, (Milan: Bompiani, 1999), 86–87.

⁷⁴ Marcantonio Michiel, *Der Anonime Morelliano*, ed. Theodor Frimmel, (Hildesheim and New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1974; first ed. 1888), 102–103: "Le molte tavolette de paesi per la maggior parte sono de mano de Alberto de Holanda..."

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Fig. 12. Gualtiero Padovano, Stanza dei Cesari, Villa Godi, Lugo di Vicenza, 1548-1549 (Photo: Author).

influenced by the work of Joachim Patinir, Albrecht Dürer, Albrecht Altdorfer, and Jan van Scorel, was largely due to the northern master's ability to render wide panoramic landscapes devoid of a dominant narrative. It was primarily Sustrius who combined the Venetian arcadian



Fig. 13. Gualtieri Padovano, Stanza di Bacco e Proserpina, Villa Godi, Lugo di Vicenza, 1537-1542 (Photo: Author).

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landscape type developed by artists such as Giorgione, Giovanni Bellini, Domenico Campagnola, and Titian in the first half of the 16th century with a panoramic view. In so doing, Sustris introduced to villa culture bucolic images of the countryside as the locus for relaxation and entertainment—the so-called *Piaceri della Villa*.⁷⁵ In his first Venetian villa project, the interior decoration of the Odeo Cornaro in Padua in c. 1540-1541, he painted large illusionistic landscapes in the Stanza dei Paesaggi (Fig. 11) where the illusion is so believable as to leave observers wondering whether the image is painted or real.⁷⁶

How much the literary *topos* of the humanist countryside was associated with effective optical illusions is also reflected in the Villa Godi, designed by Palladio for the Vicentinian nobleman Girolamo Godi and decorated in 1548-1549 by Gualtiero Padovano, who had worked with Sustris and was strongly influenced by him (Fig. 12).⁷⁷ In the villa, the Stanza di Bacco e Proserpina⁷⁸ is dedicated to the gods of Autumn and agriculture—the ideal theme for a villa that served as the administrative center for the family's agricultural estate.

Upon entering the room, the viewer is first confronted with the illusionistic landscape that visually opens the western wall. The painted windows imitate the Palladian architecture on the opposite side in every detail (Figs. 13-14). As in the case of the frescoes in the villas Imperiale, Barbaro, and Vescovi, and similar to Pliny's description of the cultivated landscape in the Villa Tuscolana, the interaction between *arte* and *natura* is key to the successful illusionism offered by these frescoes. The painted landscape, which the artist ordered, idealized, and staged through the use of painted architecture, becomes an alternate reality that reflects the patron's desire to enjoy the villa as the place of idyllic agricultural life.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Illusionistic landscape painting played an important role in 16th century villa decoration. The painted architecture that accompanied these images visually opened the walls to merge illusion with reality, motivating observers to become part of the interpretative process of its deceptive abilities. Illusionistic landscapes were primarily inspired by Pliny the Younger's notion of the ideal villa design where the boundaries between interior and exterior are blurred. Just as Pliny's villas Laurentina and Tuscolana opened onto the landscape, so too did the walls of the Renaissance villas here discussed. They did so, however, not only through the use of real architectural openings, but also painted windows through which rivers, ruins, herdsmen, and other similar features could be seen. This reflected knowledge of ancient villa aesthetics and resulted in a highly developed decorative style, particularly in the *cinquecento* villas of the Veneto. This indicates the need to re-evaluate the notion in current scholarship that the remains of ancient murals were the primary inspiration for illusionistic landscapes. Clearly, the ancient literary sources and *topos* of the framed vista, mainly in Pliny the Younger's epistles,

⁷⁵ Fischer, *Das Landschaftsbild als gerahmter Ausblick*, 63.

⁷⁶ Fischer, *Das Landschaftsbild als gerahmter Ausblick*, 74-78.

⁷⁷ Pavanello and Mancini, *Gli affreschi nelle ville venete. Il Cinquecento*, 272-286; Fischer, *Das Landschaftsbild als gerahmter Ausblick*, 100-110.

⁷⁸ Fischer, *Das Landschaftsbild als gerahmter Ausblick*, 144-151.



Fig. 14. Andrea Palladio, Stanza di Bacco e Proserpina, Window Detail, Villa Godi, Lugo di Vicenza, 1537-1542.

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were the main inspiration for these commissions.

The ideological notion of *villeggiatura* resulted in the prominent position of landscape painting in villa decoration at a time when the genre had not yet been accepted as a viable independent subject.⁷⁹ Painted windows and views clearly took on greater meaning than just visual entertainment intended to delight viewers. Following the ancient *topos* "*aut prodesse [...] aut delectare*" ("either to please or to educate")⁸⁰ phrased by Horace in his *Ars Poetica*, these optical illusions were intended to provide diverse meanings. They served to evoke the *locus amoenus* and *Paradiso terrestre* as allegories of successful land cultivation and vehicles for introspection. The painted windows placed visionary worlds on display and that these visionary worlds had the same claim to reality as the actual vistas surrounding the villa was expressed by the integration of real and painted windows. At the end of the 16th century, these villa frescoes became vital prototypes for Baroque *quadratura*.

As seen in the villas dei Vescovi, Godi, and Barbaro, the imitation of reality not only served to engage the painter and his craft in the *paragone* debate, but also to add plausible optical illusions to change the character of the interiors. The Stanza di Bacco takes on the appearance of an ancient belvedere, even though in reality its walls are solid. And since the proportions of the painted architecture in this room correspond exactly to the real architectural elements, we must assume collaboration between Palladio and Veronese.⁸¹ This indicates that architecture and mural decoration were in many cases planned as an overall concept.

The painted images in the Villa Barbaro and other country estates of the period reflect a poetic, multilayered approach toward nature. The landscape views they offer are intended to be experienced through all the senses, not just the eye. They translate the architectural concept of the Italian villa as open to nature into painting. In short, the window and its view, whether real or painted, became one of the most important features of the ideal *Vita in Villa*.

⁷⁹ Fischer, *Das Landschaftsbild als gerahmter Ausblick*, 12-14.

⁸⁰ Horace, *Ars Poetica. Die Dichtkunst*, ed. Eckart Schäfer, (Stuttgart: Reclam Verlag, 2005), 333-334: "*aut prodesse volunt aut delectare poetae/aut simul et iucunda et idonea dicere vitae.*"

⁸¹ Fischer, *Das Landschaftsbild als gerahmter Ausblick*, 127.