

***When the story is yours but the brush stroke is mine:* Replication practice seen through the lens of seventeenth-century sources**

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Summary

This paper considers the replication of paintings in the seventeenth century and the underlying issues of invention and imitation behind this practice, by analyzing primary sources such as theoretical treatises, letters, contracts, and inventories. Although attention has been given to particular cases of artists who replicated their work, seventeenth-century attitudes towards replication have not been systematically studied. I begin by reviewing the development of this practice, and then present a selection of representative examples of a variety of attitudes – often conflicting – towards the problem of exact copies. A close reading of seventeenth-century texts reveals a coexistence of seemingly contradictory attitudes towards copies: on the one hand, the status of copies was elevated and the *topos* of the copy's ability to deceive was reiterated numerous times; on the other, and often in a more practical sphere as reflected by letters and contracts, copies were not valued equally to originals. Interestingly, some inventories disclose a more nuanced position, closer to that of theoretical writings. Ultimately, these differences in attitude reflect an increasing awareness of the new issues introduced by the growing phenomenon of replicated paintings.

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When Petrarch wrote his renowned letter to Boccaccio on the subject of literary appropriation in 1373, he acknowledged his duplication of one of Boccaccio's texts: "the story is yours, but the words are mine," he claimed². With this bold statement, Petrarch was referring to a specific practice, that of retelling or translating an invention into one's individual style, while adding a few words here and there, a contribution that – in Petrarch's eyes – virtually transformed the story into a new work. Petrarch was consciously acknowledging his imitative act, while implying that he was producing a new creation through the very process of translation. The balance between imitation and invention was an ancient theme, but it became an evermore sensitive and inescapable topic for all following discussions on creativity. In many ways, it became the issue at stake during the late Renaissance and Baroque periods when replicated paintings first began trickling into the art market, and swiftly overtook the scene. For what began as a literary phenomenon acquired the same relevance in the visual arts only in the seventeenth century, when artists not only copied the work of others, but also created multiple copies of their own inventions.

Although attention has been given to particular cases of replication, seventeenth-century attitudes towards replication and the conflicting issues surrounding this practice have not been systematically studied³. I will begin

² For the Italian version, translated as "la storia è tua, ma le parole sono mie," see PETRARCA, Francesco. **Lettere senili**. Vol. II, Book XVII, letter iii, ed. Giuseppe Fracasetti. Florence: 1892, p. 543.

³ The most comprehensive discussion is MULLER, Jeffrey. "Measures of authenticity: The detection of copies in the early literature on connoisseurship". **Retaining the original. Multiple originals, copies, and reproductions. Studies in the History of Art**. Washington: National Gallery of Art, vol.20, 1989, pp. 141-149. Muller divides the commentators into those who accepted copies and those who did not. The placement of each text within its proper context is crucial for understanding the varying attitudes towards replication. By placing the writings in context with one another and by reading each text as a whole, one realizes that the issue is quite complex, since conflicting attitudes towards copies sometimes coexist even within one same text. Because these attitudes have not been studied as a whole, they are often cited and represented by modern scholars as a coherent attitude, but the final result appears contradictory. Compare for example Muller's references to Filippo Baldinucci and Jonathan Richardson to SPEAR, Richard citations of the same sources in a short article titled "Notes on Renaissance and Baroque originals and originality". **Retaining the original. Multiple originals, copies, and reproductions. Studies in the History of Art**, Washington: National Gallery of Art, Vol.20, 1989, pp. 97-99. See also SPEAR, Richard. "Di Sua Mano". **The "Divine" Guido: religion, sex, money, and art in the world of Guido Reni**. New

by looking at the history and development of this practice, and then analyze primary sources (such as theoretical treatises, letters, contracts, and inventories) as well as examples of artists involved in this procedure. This is by no means an exhaustive study, but rather a selection of representative examples of a variety of – sometimes contradictory – attitudes towards replication.

Replication of paintings became a widespread practice throughout Europe only in the seventeenth century. While it was habitual for Northern artists of the fifteenth century to operate *on spec* and to keep replicas available in their workshops, studies of fifteenth-century Italian art indicate that artists borrowed motifs from other artists and inserted them into their own work, just as they recycled some of their own, but exact copies were not part of the normal marketing strategy⁴. Beginning in the late fifteenth century and

Haven: Yale University Press, 1997, pp. 253-274. His discussion of Guido Reni's copies is "aiming less to 'solve' particular problems than to demonstrate the complexity and slipperiness of the issues arising from Reni's studio practice" (240).

Studies of other individual cases include: BRIGSTOCKE, Hugh. "Variantes, copies et imitations. Quelques réflexions sur les méthodes de travail de Poussin". In: MÉROT, Alain (Ed.). **Nicolas Poussin 1594-1665: Actes du colloque organisé au Musée du Louvre par le Service Culturel, du 19 au 21 octobre 1994**. Paris: La Documentation française, 1996, pp. 203-208. BRIGSTOCKE Hugh and SPEAR, Richard. "The Ratta Sibyl". **Artibus et Historiae**, n. 34, 1996, pp. 45-52. BROWN, Christopher. "Anthony van Dyck at work: The Taking of Christ and Samson and Delilah". **Wallraf-Richartz-Jahrbuch**, vol. 55, 1994, pp. 43-54.

⁴ The most comprehensive discussion of replication practice in fifteenth-century Northern art is DIJKSTRA, Jeltje. **Origineel en kopie**, 1990. For a summary in English, see pp. 265-274. Her first chapter discusses the reasons for the existence of exact copies, and concludes that copying was influenced and stimulated by patrons' demands. In 11 out of 31 fifteenth-century contracts, and in 25 out of 48 contracts from the first half of the sixteenth century, she finds that an already existing work is mentioned as the model for the newly commissioned work (266). She also concludes that the production of exact copies within a same workshop began only in the 1480's (268). For a discussion of the four exact versions of Rogier van der Weyden's renowned *St. Luke drawing the Virgin*, see chapter 5. For a discussion of the two versions of the Annunciation compositions by the Master of Flémalle (now in Brussels and at the Cloisters in New York) and the copies after them, see chapter 7.

See CAMPBELL, Lorne. "The art market in the Southern Netherlands in the fifteenth century". **The Burlington Magazine**, vol. 118, 1976, p. 193, for examples of contracts that stipulated that the commissioned work must be similarly executed to an existing work. See p. 194, note 69, on the reuse of tapestry cartoons in order to create multiple versions.

For a discussion of Jan van Eyck's popular St. Francis composition, see M. H. BUTLER. "Recognizing Jan Van Eyck, an Exhibition of his paintings of *St. Francis Receiving the Stigmata* and

early sixteenth century, examples of Italian artists replicating their work can be seen in Giovanni Bellini, Raphael, Andrea del Sarto, and Titian, to name only a few⁵.

The Renaissance notion of *ut pictura poesis* and its elevation of the artist's work to an intellectual activity coincided with the rise of replication in prints and painting. While this may initially seem contradictory with the heightened emphasis placed on individual style and on the artist's hand, it can also be understood as the natural result of the new status awarded to art during the Renaissance⁶. When art became an intellectual activity, the actual making of the object became somewhat less important. Thus, if the idea was deemed more valuable than the craftsmanship, the multiplication of inventions at the cost of quality was the natural result of these new conceptions. At the same time, this had to be reconciled with the growing preoccupation about the balance between imitation and invention.

In order to understand the complexities surrounding the development of copies, we should turn to contemporary writings that discussed the issue. It is meaningful that in writings previous to the seventeenth century, the distinction between copies and originals did not play a significant part in art

other related paintings by Jan van Eyck". In: VEROUGSTRAETE-MARCQ, Hélène and SCHOUTE, Roger van (ed.). **La peinture dans les Pays-Bas au 16e siècle. Pratiques d'atelier infrarouges at autres méthodes d'investigation. Le dessin sous-jacent et la technologie dans la peinture.** Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters, 1999, pp. 231-234.

While modern scholars continue to dispute over the identification of the originals, it may be that these were created as multiple originals, and that it is our bias that motivates us to distinguish one from the other. See for example John Shearman's suggestion that Andrea del Sarto's workshop did not necessarily create an original with multiple copies, but multiple originals, SHEARMAN, John. **Andrea del Sarto.** Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965.

⁵ See GIBBONS, Felton. "Practices in Giovanni Bellini's workshop". **Pantheon**, XXIII, 1965, pp. 146-55. For replication practice in Titian's workshop and specific examples of patrons requesting copies of already existing works, see COLE, Bruce. "Titian and the idea of originality in the Renaissance". In: LADIS, Andrew and WOOD, Carolyn (ed.). **The craft of art: Originality and industry in the Italian Renaissance and Baroque workshop.** Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995, pp. 103-105.

⁶ See BAROLSKY, Paul. "The artist's hand". In: LADIS, Andrew and WOOD, Carolyn (ed.). **The craft of art: Originality and industry in the Italian Renaissance and Baroque workshop.** Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995, pp. 5-24.

criticism. By the end of the seventeenth century, this had become an essential component of theoretical writings about art. Although writers were mostly dealing with copies by other artists or later copies rather than specifically discussing replication by the same workshop, their consideration of such issues can enrich our understanding of why and how copies, replicas, and other imitative works would have been valued.

In his *Considerazioni sulla Pittura*, written between 1614 and 1621, the Sieneese doctor and connoisseur, Giulio Mancini, dedicated a chapter to the “Recognition of Paintings”, where he explained how to identify a painting’s medium and dating, as well as the means to distinguish an original from its copy, and differentiate between paintings of better or lesser quality⁷. Mancini began his discussion of copies by warning the collector against frauds, pointing out that a copy might imitate an original so well that it could be difficult to distinguish one from the other. Close observation was the method recommended by Mancini in order to tell them apart; the master’s *franchezza* – which implies boldness and spontaneity in the brushstroke – cannot be imitated and is to be found in small details such as hair-locks.

A similar appreciation of copies was echoed in writings throughout the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth century. In his *Painting of the Ancients* of 1638, Franciscus Junius, the English philologist of German birth, commended the ability to distinguish between copies and originals, and cited ancient authors such as Cicero, Quintilian, and Pliny the Younger on the subject of imitation, asserting that copies never attain the freshness of the original, since copies are twice removed from nature⁸. In his *Sentiments* of 1649, Abraham Bosse, a French theoretician and print-maker, reinforced the idea that free brushstrokes are more difficult to imitate than a tightly finished painting. Bosse described how the creators of original works trimmed their brushes, giving them irregular borders so as to

⁷ See MANCINI Giulio. **Considerazioni sulla pittura**. Rome: Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1956-1957, pp. 134-135, for the discussion on copies.

⁸ JUNIUS, Franciscus. **The painting of the ancients in three bookes**. London, 1638, p. 349.

create varied and fluid details such as strands, clumps, and hair-locks. If the copyist were to try to imitate such details, it would take him one hundred brushstrokes to achieve what the original artist did in one⁹.

At the end of the century, Filippo Baldinucci, the Florentine collector, amateur artist, and writer, also carefully advised the art collector on how to distinguish copies from originals. In his letter to Marchese Capponi from 1681, Baldinucci spoke of a universal law of “major or lesser *franchezza*” by which one could distinguish copies from originals¹⁰. Arguing that it was the small details that betray the artist’s ‘hand’, writers such as Mancini, Junius, Bosse, and Baldinucci set the base for the essential principles used in connoisseurship. The emphasis on loose brush strokes and its implications – *sprezzatura*, ease, and talent as opposed to a tight touch and its connotations of arduous labor – goes back to Platonic philosophy in its distinction between the real object and its shadow, or mere reflection¹¹. This philosophical conception still shapes our contemporary approach, and is the predominant way in which copies and originals continue to be addressed today.

However, an in-depth analysis of seventeenth-century writings reveals that this was only one way in which copies were viewed at the time. When modern scholars have addressed seventeenth-century conceptions of copies and originals, the focus has been primarily on their discussions of quality, and other interesting aspects of seventeenth-century thought about

⁹ BOSSE, Abraham. **Sentiments sur la distinction des diverses manieres de peinture, dessin et gravure et des originaux d'avec leurs copies**. Geneva: Minkoff Reprint, 1973, p. 60.

¹⁰ BALDINUCCI, Filippo “Lettera di Filippo Baldinucci Fiorentino nella quale risponde ad alcuni quesiti in materie di pittura” (1681). In: BOTTARI, Giovanni Gaetano and TICOZZI, Stefano (ed.). **Raccolta di lettere sulla pittura, scultura ed architettura scritte da’ più celebri personaggi dei secoli XV, XVI, e XVII**. Milan: G. Silvestri, 1822-1825, pp. 2: 509-510.

¹¹ See MULLER, *op. cit.*, pp. 142-143 for a discussion of this tendency to value the original over the copy based on the master’s touch with all its philosophical implications and its roots in Platonic ideas. As Muller has pointed out, the need to distinguish an antique original from its modern copy became important in the Renaissance, and can be found in VICO, Enea, **Discorsi**, 1555, where he distinguished between fake coins and original ancient coins based on small details that would give away the fake.

copies have yet to be addressed on a deeper level. Close reading of the texts reveals an ambiguous attitude towards copies, or at least, one that is colored on many levels, and that is certainly more subtle and varied than our appreciation of copies is today¹². Writers such as Mancini and Baldinucci, for example, were sensitive to the difference between copies not only for their quality but also for their function.

Indeed, while Mancini's method for distinguishing a copy from the original has been frequently cited, it has not been discussed in its specific context. The recognition that copies, like originals, can be of various qualities is implicit throughout his entire discussion of the subject. Mancini's comments are preceded by the recognition that a copy's excellence is what makes it necessary to distinguish copies from originals. Mancini begins by addressing the problem of fraudulent copies, but then goes on to speak of the art of copying. He ends by stating that once one has established whether a work is a copy or the original, one must go on to determine whether it is a good or a bad work of art, and thus, implicitly acknowledges that copies are art works in themselves which can be of different qualities.

Mancini regarded the best copies as those that were practically indistinguishable from the original; in some cases, he claimed, it was difficult even for the informed purchaser and artist to distinguish one from the other. Mancini then quoted the Great Duke Cosimo as saying that such copies should be preferred over the original, since "they possess two arts: that of the original invention and that of the copyist"¹³. Thus both invention

¹² Muller distinguishes two ways of viewing copies at the time: on one hand, in negative terms, where the original is placed over the copy for the reasons just discussed. On the other side, he recognizes that there was an attempt to view copies in a positive light by differentiating them in type, quality and functions. Muller presents these as two opposing attitudes and proceeds to divide them into these two categories throughout his essay.

¹³ MANCINI, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-135. "Con tutte queste osservanze distinguendo / la copia dall'originale, nondimeno alle volte avviene che la copia sia tanto ben fatta che inganni, ancorchè l'artefice e chi compra sia intelligente, anzi, quello che è più, havendo la copia et l'originale, non sappia distinguere. Che in tal caso intesi il serenissimo granduca Cosimo di f.m. haver detto simil copie dover essere preferite all'originale per haver in sè due arti, e quella dell'inventore e quella del copiatore".

and exceptional ability are recorded in the copy. In Mancini's view, copies can be approached in a number of ways; he cautions the collector against fraudulent copies, and at the same time praises the artist's ability to imitate another style, to the point that a copy may be worthy of more admiration than an original.

Praise of copies for their ability to deceive became a recurring *topos* in discussions throughout the seventeenth century, and can be traced back to Vasari's renowned anecdote about Andrea del Sarto's replica of Raphael's portrait of *Leo X and his nephews* which had been secretly painted and given to Federigo Gonzaga, duke of Mantua, who believed that he was receiving the original as a present from Pope Clement VII. Vasari, who had seen Andrea executing the copy, relates that on a visit to Mantua, Giulio Romano proudly showed him the portrait in the Duke's collection. Vasari, knowing that this was not the original but Andrea's, said as much to Giulio. But because Giulio had helped Raphael in the portrait's execution, he refused to believe Vasari, until Vasari pointed out Andrea's mark on the painting. Finally convinced, Giulio replied that it was "cosa fuor di natura" (quite an extraordinary thing) that one man should be able to imitate another's manner so well, and that for this reason, he favored it over the original¹⁴.

Similar stories were later told about Rubens's copies after Titian, and student copies of Guido Reni, where not even Reni himself could distinguish his own creation from that of his pupil¹⁵. As Jeffrey Muller has

¹⁴ VASARI, Giorgio. **Le vite**. Florence: Salari, 1930, vol. IV, pp. 270-271. This anecdote appears in the life of Andrea del Sarto. Vasari records Giulio's response as: "lo non lo stimo meno che s'egli fusse di mano di Raffaello, anzi molto piu perchè è cosa fuor di natura che un uomo eccellente imiti si bene la maniera d'un altro, e la faccia così simile". This passage is discussed by BAROLSKY, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6; MULLER, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-145; and SHEARMAN, *op. cit.*, pp. 2: 265-267.

¹⁵ See BOSCHINI, Marco. **La carta del navigar pittoresco**. In: PALLUCCHINI, Anna (Ed.). Venice: Istituto per la collaborazione culturale, 1966, pp. 82-83, for the comparison between Titian and Rubens. See SPEAR, *op. cit.*, p. 232 for Malvasia and Baldinucci's anecdote that even Guido could not distinguish his paintings from those by Ercolino De Maria, whose exclusive work was to copy paintings. When Pope Urban VIII invited him to paint a work of his own, he declined the offer, stating that he was only a copyist, not an inventor. This confirms that there were people dedicated exclusively to this activity, and that copying was becoming an ever-increasing specialized field.

sensitively analyzed, such anecdotes served various purposes: they praised the copyist's ability to imitate even the individual qualities or hand of an artist, while reasserting the artist's power over the connoisseur, and affirming the value of copies as works of art¹⁶.

A different type of documents, however, reflect more practical concerns on the part of artists, collectors, and dealers. An example is Mancini's correspondence with his brother Deifebo, where the Mancini discuss negotiations of paintings bought by Giulio in Rome and sent to Siena for Deifebo to sell¹⁷. Amongst the paintings dispatched to Siena was a "Gypsy" by a "scholaro di Michelangelo [Caravaggio]" sent on December 30th, 1606. One week later, Giulio wrote to Deifebo urging him to try to sell it for 10 or 12 scudi: "to my understanding", he wrote, "Savini wants to have a copy made of a painting by Caravaggio's hand of St. Thomas when he touches Christ's side, so perhaps he would buy this one"¹⁸. In a letter of June 1613, we learn that the "Gypsy" sent in 1606 was a copy after Caravaggio's *Fortune teller* (probably the Louvre version) which had been recently sold for 300 scudi¹⁹.

In December of 1614, Mancini informs his brother that he will have copies secretly made from Cardinal del Monte's collection of Caravaggios. Amongst these is another "Gypsy" by Caravaggio (probably the *Fortune-*

¹⁶ See MULLER, *op. cit.*, pp. 144-146.

¹⁷ For a detailed discussion of the correspondence see MACCHERINI, Michele. "Caravaggio nel carteggio familiare di Giulio Mancini". *Prospettiva*, n. 86, 1997, pp. 71-92.

¹⁸ For a discussion of this particular passage see MACCHERINI, *op. cit.*, p. 75. See appendix 5 for the letter dated January 6, 1607: "Se trovarete da dar via quella Zinghara dello scholaro di Michelangelo, datela per 10 o 12 scudi et intendo che il Savini vuol far copiar un quadro di San Tommaso quando tocca il costato a Cristo mano del Caravaggio e forse piglierebbe questo". It is difficult to establish the quality of the copies, but the difference in price compared to an original is significant.

For the complicated issue of how Caravaggio's copies were created, see CHRISTIANSEN, Keith. "Caravaggio's second versions". *The Burlington Magazine*, n. 134, Aug., 1992, pp. 502-503. Also see BAUER, Linda and COLTON, Steve. "Tracings in some works by Caravaggio". *The Burlington Magazine*, n. 142, July, 2000, pp. 434-436 for a consideration of the use of tracings in Caravaggio's work and a discussion of seventeenth-century writers on tracings.

¹⁹ MACCHERINI, *op. cit.*, p. 75, appendix 25.

teller now at the Pinacoteca Capitolina in Rome), described by Mancini as the same invention as the *Gypsy* sent in 1606 (his expression implies that it is not an exact copy), as well as “il Gioco” (*The Cardshaps* at Fort Worth, Kimbell Art Museum) and “la Musica” (*The Musicians* at the Metropolitan). In a letter of February 1615, Mancini describes his mission in detail: he will have a copyist make the replicas at 15 scudi each, and give something to the custodian so that he consents to the copyist’s entry and remains silent²⁰.

Evidently, collectors—including the Mancini—were contrary to having their own paintings copied, but would simultaneously try to buy replicas of works in other collections. While Mancini was negotiating copies and sending them to his brother, he was continuously warning him against allowing their own paintings to be replicated: “Do not lend paintings at all, as their virginity is lost when they are copied”, Giulio wrote in 1608. He emphasized this once more a few months later, “as a rule, I want to conserve singular things singular”, and again in 1609, he vehemently cautioned Deifebo against permitting copies of the Caraccioli recently dispatched, as these “are virgin and I did not even allow them to be copied at the request of patrons”²¹. Just as copies were a way of possessing the invention of an unavailable original, originals might lose their value if copied.

²⁰ MACCHERINI, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-80. Mancini alludes to a possible buyer of these copies: “If the Signor Cavaliere wants them, since he likes these, for that which they will cost us, you can give them to him; if not, keep them for us”. The Signor Cavaliere is probably Agostino Chigi for whom Mancini had previously tried to copy a painting in del Monte’s collection but had been unsuccessful. See appendix 26, for the letter dated December 27, 1614: “Credo che haverò occasione di far copiar la più bella cosa che habbia fatto Michelangelo da Caravaggio, ch’è una Zinghara d’invention di quella che vi mandai...” and appendix 28, for the letter dated February 20, 1615: “se il Signor Cavaliere le vorrà, già che se ne compiace e gusta, per quel che ci costaranno, fatto ogni spesa, glieli potrete dare, se non, li terrete per noi. ... E diteli a presso che credo che il gioco, la musica e la Zinghara mi sarà fatta da un galantuomo per 15 scudi l’uno, con dar qualcosa al Guardaroba che questi dia comodo di stanza e stia quieto tale che per un 16 in 17 scudi fatto ogni spesa...”.

²¹ MACCHERINI, *op. cit.*, p. 80. Deifebo had allowed someone to copy a San Giovanni and Giulio was greatly displeased about this. The exact words from Giulio’s letter dated March 7, 1608 are: “Non prestare in alcun modo pitture per sverginarle con lassarle copiare”. The letter from October 22, 1608 reads: “Rammentandovi che voi non li lasciate copiare...e per regola le cose singolari le vo’ conservar singolari”. The letter from February 1609: “Vi torno a replicar, che le cose mandatevi del Caraccioli son vergine, né le ho volute lasciar copiare ad istanza di padroni...”.

One may wonder how this ties in with Mancini's evaluation of copies in his *Considerazioni*. Conceived as advice to collectors, Mancini's *Considerazioni* worked both ways: while he indicated how to tell a copy from the original, he also elevated the status of the copy so that it surpassed the original. In using Cosimo's comment as a way of validating copies as art works in of themselves, Mancini was also promoting the collection of copies, supporting his activity as dealer, and ensuring his success in selling copies. On the whole, Mancini's writings reflect the growing demand for copies, the existence of prospective buyers, and the beginning of a new marketing strategy where copies were made "on spec".

The fully documented exchange between Rubens and Sir Dudley Carleton, the English Ambassador at the Hague, also discloses some of the practical aspects behind replication and the complex negotiations surrounding the practice. Differently to the situation described by Mancini, where the artist copying was not the original creator, the correspondence between Rubens and Carleton's representatives is a well-recorded example of replicas created within the workshop, under the direction of the master, where Rubens provided the invention but did not necessarily execute work. In this case, the delicate issue becomes the extent of the artist's participation in the creation of workshop replicas.

In one of their first transactions, Carleton wanted to exchange an diamond chain for the *Wolf and Fox Hunt* now at the Metropolitan, but because the chain was worth 50 pounds and Rubens was asking for 100, the painting was sold to another purchaser. Without clarifying what had happened, Rubens proposed to trade Carleton's chain for a smaller replica. In a letter from December 1616, Toby Matthew, one of Carleton's representatives, reported to the ambassador that George Gage, another representative, had seen the replica in the process of its making and "saith he had rather geve threescore pound for this then fourscore for the other. For besides that he assureth himself that this wilbe better finished, he saieth that the other picture is so bigge that it cannot be hunge up in the house of less than a

Prince”²².

In letters dating from 1618, Rubens and Carleton negotiated the exchange of antique sculptures for works currently available in the studio. This time, Rubens provided a list of possible paintings, describing their subject, size, price, and process of creation. The works listed can be separated into various types: “original, by my hand....original, *entirely* by my hand....original by my hand except for a landscape by the hand of a master skillful in that department....[a painting] begun by my pupils, after one which I did in a much larger size...but this one, not being finished, would be entirely retouched by my *own* hand, and by this means, would pass as original....[paintings] done by my pupils from originals by my own hand....[and those simply] by my hand”²³. Thus, we can appreciate the fine line that distinguished one form of execution from another. As becomes apparent, Rubens did not consider the works by his hand as exactly the same as those *entirely* by his hand or those by his *own* hand. Moreover, works “by his hand” did not necessarily qualify as originals.

The exchanges that followed show that Carleton preferred the paintings entirely by Rubens’s hand, although he agreed to buy works where the studio assistants had painted certain parts, as well as those retouched by Rubens but at a lesser price²⁴. In response, Rubens tried to convince his patron that workshop replicas could be just as good as originals: “Yet Your Excellency must not think that the others are mere copies, for they are so well retouched by my hand that they are hardly to be distinguished from originals. Nevertheless, they are rated at a much lower price”²⁵.

²² NAKAMURA, Toshiharu. **Rubens and his workshop: The flight of Lot and his family from Sodom**. Tokyo: The Museum, 1994, p. 27. Carleton finally agreed to the exchange, and this is probably the painting now at Corsham Court in Wiltshire, since it corresponds in size to the one described by Gage.

²³ For a list of the specific paintings, see MAGURN, Ruth Saunders. **The letters of Peter Paul Rubens**. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1991, pp. 60-61. The emphasis on certain words is mine.

²⁴ NAKAMURA, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-30.

²⁵ MAGURN, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-62.

On another occasion, Lord Danvers asked Carleton to act as his intermediary with Rubens so as to exchange a painting by Jacopo Bassano for a work by Rubens. The Bassano was not of good quality, and although Rubens was initially reluctant to accept it, he finally agreed to exchange it for a copy of the *Tiger, Lion and Leopard Hunt* (now at the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Rennes) of the same size as the Bassano and charge an additional fee. However, once the painting arrived to London Danvers refused it, saying that unless Rubens guaranteed it as a “master peece” it could not be given to the Prince of Wales. Because Rubens had never been informed of this intention, he suggested to paint another work completely by his own hand, complaining to Carleton that he had not explained clearly “whether this picture was to be a true and entire original or merely retouched by my hand”²⁶.

In sum, these letters establish that Rubens kept multiple replicas of different sizes and quality in stock, often having them made while the painting was still in the studio. They also reveal that the painter’s ‘hand’ was essential for the work’s monetary value, and that copied paintings were more appropriate on certain occasions than others. Thus, the definition of an original and terms such as the “artist’s hand” become ever increasingly complex.

Guido Reni, who had one of the largest workshops of his time –no less than 80 assistants were reported in his Bolognese studio—engaged in a similar practice and produced large quantities of variants and replicas with varying degrees of quality. Contemporary sources show that what Reni and his patrons often meant by “an original work” was not what we necessarily think of as an original. Much like Rubens’s letter to Carleton where Rubens emphasized that his workshop pieces were not simply copies, Reni describes his working methods to Pope Paul V, assuring the pope of the quality of his works despite the collaboration of assistants: “the drawing, sketching and background painting [*il graffire, sbozzare e campire*] are not

²⁶ NAKAMURA, *op. cit.*, pp. 36-37.

the things that make up the work. They are just like a simple contract that, before you place your hand on it and sign it, is worthless. In addition to the ideas and designs [*i pensieri e disegni*] that are mine, I go over, finish and redo everything [*il tutto ricopro, finisco e rifaccio*] in a way that, if a work given to me does not turn out to be by my hand [*non riesca di mia mano*], I will be content to incur your indignation”²⁷.

In some instances, copies were requested by Reni’s patrons with precise demands: sometimes specifying a smaller size of a well known invention by the artist, or requiring the intervention of Reni’s hand²⁸. As Richard Spear has shown in his analysis of the various implications of the recurring contractual stipulation “di sua mano”, its meaning may be more subtle and varied than we might initially imagine. Contracts habitually required works entirely by the artist’s hand, but this was more often than not disregarded. Similarly, the distinction between “di sua mano” (of his hand) or “di sua *propria* mano” (of his *own* hand) furtherly suggests that “di sua mano” should not be taken literally. Thus, the recurring phrase appearing in numerous contracts of the Renaissance and Baroque periods seems to carry different levels of meaning. To begin with, “di sua mano” is a conventional contractual stipulation that binds the artist’s responsibility rather than his skill or direct intervention in the painting. In second place, as Spear has shown, the term evolved in such a way that by the sixteenth century, it was being used to refer to the artist’s *ingegno*, rather than his

²⁷ SPEAR, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

²⁸ See Spear’s chapter 13 on Guido’s studio, where he discusses a number of problematic issues surrounding replication. See 248 for the increasing replication of low quality towards the end of Reni’s life, when he was persuaded to make “facile” and hurried works as a way of resolving his debts. For a similar situation in another artist’s career, see Catherine Puglisi’s discussion of Francesco Albani’s replication, where a decline in quality is also noticeable, in: PUGLISI, Catherine. **Francesco Albani**. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999, pp. 39-41.

In one instance, Reni took revenge on one of his patrons, abbot Giovanni Carlo Gavotti, by creating a nearly identical replica of the work owned by the abbot, who had displayed the painting while still unfinished, a fact that had greatly displeased Reni. Reni then sold the replica to another patron (SPEAR, *op. cit.*, p. 240). Notwithstanding the problematic issue of how the abbot had in his possession an unfinished painting by Reni, this anecdote echoes Mancini’s image of copying as a “loss of virginity” of the original. Reni certainly knew this and did as much.

technical ability or style²⁹.

The Carracci brothers also produced innumerable copies, as reported by Carlo Cesare Malvasia, the Bolognese collector and lawyer, in his biographies of Bolognese artists, and indeed confirmed by Gail Feigenbaum's research, evidencing that an enormous number of copies are kept in museums but still largely ignored and not properly studied. Copying as learning experience had been a standard procedure of artistic workshops throughout time, but it was the Carracci who gave this practice a new twist³⁰. Traditionally, apprentices learnt to imitate their master's style so closely so that different hands could not be noticed within the painting, as was the case in Reni's workshop. The Carracci instead promoted copying as a way of assimilating eclectic styles, rather than as emulation of a single style³¹.

As Feigenbaum has thoughtfully analyzed, the Carracci's extensive copying of Renaissance masters went even further. From studies, the copies turned into commentaries on the replicated works, as a way of superceding the imitated model. Guido Reni, for example, described Lodovico's copies of Parmigianino as having something that was not in the originals, softer and meatier as is typical of the Carracci style³². Rubens proceeded similarly in his copies of Titian, Leonardo, and Caravaggio. In copying Titian's *Europa* or *Bacchanals* Rubens maintained the details and style, but shifted the color; in his copy of Caravaggio's *Entombment* however, Rubens maintained the invention but changed the style to the point that he

²⁹ For a succinct discussion of this subject, see SPEAR, *op. cit.*, pp. 254-255, 258-260.

³⁰ In: GIUSTINIANI, Vincenzo. **Discorsi sulle arti e i mestieri**. Florence: Sansoni, 1981, pp. 41-42. Giustiniani described copying as an essential part of the artist's learning process. He also recognized that the ability to copy denoted high artistic talent and that there are different degrees of quality in copies, to the extent that a copy may surpass the original.

³¹ FEIGENBAUM, Gail. "Practice in the Carracci Academy". **The artist's workshop. Studies in the History of Art**. Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1993. Also see FEIGENBAUM, Gail. "When the subject was art". **Il luogo ed il ruolo della città di Bologna tra Europa continentale e mediterranea**. Atti del Colloquio C.I.H.A. Nuova Alfa Editoriale, 1990, pp. 297-312.

³² FEIGENBAUM, *op. cit.*, 1990, p. 305, note 31.

appropriated Caravaggio's invention but transformed it with his brushstroke, into the manner of Rubens.

Inventories from the Farnese collection show that the Carracci's copies of Renaissance masters were exhibited in the most important galleries on the piano nobile, while authentic works by sixteenth-century masters were placed in less important locations within the palace³³. Marco Boschini recounted how Odoardo Farnese tricked the Carracci's critics by having them praise what they believed to be the originals by Parmigianino and Correggio³⁴. Like the earlier anecdotes on copies' ability to deceive, this story denoted both ability to copy or the art of the copyist as described by Mancini, as well as the importance of owning the invention. Contemporaneously, studies of seventeenth-century inventories show that these documents were more intent in identifying the subject of the works and listing them together in this fashion, rather than separating them by artist³⁵. Another curious example comes from one of Reni's Bolognese patrons, Cesare Locatelli, whose inventory from 1658 shows that he owned five original works by Reni together with six copies of each of them³⁶.

This presented a challenging problem to the distinction of originals from replicas based on the artist's hand. In many ways, it was the increasing number of copies that gave way to the creation of connoisseurship. As time proceeded, connoisseurs became ever more conscious of the need to distinguish copies from originals. However, this became evermore complex, and by the end of the seventeenth century, the issue had reversed itself; while writers differentiated between copies of different qualities, they had begun to acknowledge that loose brushstrokes were not necessarily

³³ FEIGENBAUM, *op. cit.*, pp. 299-300.

³⁴ BOSCHINI, *op. cit.*, pp. 517-519.

³⁵ See FILIPCZAK, Zirka Zaremba. **Picturing art in Antwerp 1550-1700**. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 65 for this recurring feature in inventories from Antwerp. See also SPEAR, *op. cit.*, pp. 267-268 for a discussion of inventories, including that of Cardinal Federico Borromeo's from 1618, where paintings are listed by subject matter and divided by originality and artistic importance.

³⁶ SPEAR, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

confined to the original creator of the work, and that copies too could exhibit spontaneity. Boschini, the defender of the Venetian style and its characteristic loose brushstrokes, claimed in 1674 that Giovanni Battista Zampezzi's copies of Bassano "appear to be the twins of the originals, and this is the most difficult style to imitate because it is executed with so bold a touch"³⁷.

Baldinucci reiterated a similar attitude, when he categorized the different types of copies that one might encounter: student copies retouched by the master and sold as originals, studies by great masters like the Carracci which are just as beautiful as the originals, and replicas by artists who specialize in copying. Towards the end of his text, Baldinucci defended the value of copies based on their functions: copies served as memories of lost originals, good copies provide great pleasure just by the incredible ability to imitate, and finally, copies increase our possibility of studying inaccessible paintings. Such was the case of Raphael's inventions, claimed Baldinucci; thanks to his students, Raphael's style was spread throughout Europe "like the rays of a new light"³⁸.

As Richard Spear has rightly pointed out, it is not so much about sorting out "who in seventeenth-century Italy liked copies than it is to emphasize the growing sensitivity to them"³⁹. Analysis of theoretical treatises, letters, contracts, inventories, and artistic practice establish that exact copies (produced both within the workshop or by an artist outside the workshop) were made for different reasons and with different functions in mind. In sum, quality was important, but not the primary issue for seventeenth-century viewers. Copies functioned in a number of ways: and were perceived differently depending on their quality, setting, and purpose. On

³⁷ MULLER, *op. cit.*, p. 146. Originally in BOSCHINI, Marco. "Breve istrvzioni per intender in qualche modo le maniere de gli auttori veneziani". In: 2nd ed. **Le ricche minere della pittura Veneziana**. Venice: 1674, p. 3.

³⁸ BALDINUCCI (1681), in: BOTTARI and TICOZZI, *op. cit.*, pp. 2: 504-506, 527-530.

³⁹ SPEAR, *op. cit.*, p. 269. The shift from Mancini to Baldinucci in sensibility towards copies is discussed by SPEAR, *op. cit.*, pp. 272-273.

the copyist's part it could be a demonstration of ability or even a challenge to the original; on the patron's part, this was a way of acquiring an important or desired work, sometimes at a better price. But copies could also be part of an artist's training, as well as the means to diffuse an artist's style and invention.

A close reading of these seventeenth-century texts reveals a similar coexistence of seemingly contradictory attitudes towards copies: on the one hand, the status of copies was elevated and the *topos* of the copy's ability to deceive was reiterated numerous times; on the other, and often in a more practical sphere as reflected by letters and contracts, copies were not valued equally to originals. Interestingly, some inventories disclose a more nuanced position, closer to that of theoretical writings. Ultimately, these differences in attitude reflect an increasing awareness of the new issues introduced by the growing phenomenon of replicated paintings.

At the same time, a general although subtle change in attitude may be detected as the seventeenth-century proceeds, and is well exemplified in Baldinucci's extensive discussion of copies, where he concentrated on the function and categories of copies. At the time when Baldinucci was writing, the master's brush stroke was no longer a guarantee for distinguishing copies from originals as proposed by Mancini. For, as the century proceeded, artists engaged in copying were not simply imitating, but could use copies as commentaries on the replicated work, as a way of superceding the imitated original, by maintaining the original invention or *istoria*, but adapting it with their personal brushstroke or style. Thus, copies provided new ways of thinking about creativity, and while writers differentiated between copies of different qualities, they began to acknowledge that loose brushstrokes were not necessarily confined to the original creator of the work, and that copies could also exhibit spontaneity.