Genio Bizzarro:

Guido Cagnacci & the Refashioning of Painterly Identity in Seicento Italy

by

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I first encountered the painter Guido Cagnacci by happenstance, on a post-
Christmas visit to the Frick Collection in New York. I initially made this trip with my
sister, Jessica, aunt, Kathleen, and two cousins, Ricky and Rebecca, to see an exhibition
on the gilder Pierre Gouthière. That day, it turned out that the museum was
simultaneously hosting yet another limited-time event: thanks to a loan from the Norton
Simon Foundation in Pasadena, Cagnacci’s late masterpiece *The Repentant Magdalen* had
been on display at the Frick for two months and would be there for one more. Upon
seeing this canvas in the flesh, I did a double take of sorts.

Only two weeks earlier, I had returned from a semester in Bologna, Italy. During
this time overseas, I took a class on Bolognese art from the fourteenth through
seventeenth centuries and became intimately familiar with the paintings held in Galleries
22-29 of the local Pinacoteca Nazionale, canvases by various big-name Bolognese
painters: the three Carracci – Ludovico, Annibale, and Agostino – Guido Reni,
Domenichino, Guercino, and others. While viewing Cagnacci’s canvas – with its
melodramatic air and synthesis of idyllic classicism and carefully observed naturalism – I
noted subtle resemblances to many of these works. Yet, all the while it seemed to bear an
indelible idiosyncrasy. I was struck most markedly by the picture’s palpably erotic figures,
as well as their undeniable likeness to one another. Equally striking was the fact that I
had never heard of Cagnacci, despite his ostensible activity in Bologna during the
seventeenth century.

Of the many Italian Baroque paintings I have had the pleasure of admiring, *The
Repentant Magdalen* holds for me a singular importance. Beyond igniting my fascination
with Cagnacci, it strikes me as an artful allegory of sorts, encapsulating many of the theories and practices that I believe pervaded his output. As I have studied Cagnacci over the past year, I have continually returned to *The Repentant Magdalene* perhaps on account of my connection to the work. Months after my Frick viewing experience, I opened my application for the John T. Paoletti Research Travel Fellowship (the grant which jump-started my investigation of the painter) with a description of the work, and I have done the same in the thesis at hand. The picture also makes its way, somehow, into many of this study’s sections. I seem to never tire of it, nor have I tired, for that matter, of the project it has inspired.

I have very much enjoyed working on this thesis. Cagnacci is a puzzle – as perplexing a man as he is a creator of art – and it has been beyond gratifying to try to decipher him, particularly as his life and works have just begun to pique the interest of American scholars. As I reflect on my research, I find I have a mighty hodgepodge of people to thank. My thesis could not have materialized without the support of Wesleyan University’s Art History Program, without the faculty and classes that have intellectually invigorated me and, of course, the resources so generously provided to me through the John T. Paoletti Research Travel Fellowship.

At Wesleyan, I would like to thank Professor Katherine Kuenzli, whose guidance and constructive pedagogy have been crucial to my formation as an aspiring scholar. My advisor, Professor Nadja Aksamija, deserves special mention: thank you, for guiding this project, keeping me grounded, being an empathetic mentor both here and abroad, and, above all, kindling my passion for seventeenth-century painting in the first place. Your support these past few years has been invaluable not only to this thesis, but to my general well being.
I would also like to express the warmest appreciation for my wonderful teachers in Bologna – namely Ivan Tassi, Elisabetta Cunsolo, and Lucia Corrain – as well as Wesleyan Professors Camilla Zamboni and F. Marco Aresu, who have collectively nourished my love for Italian language and culture.

I am grateful for my overwhelmingly supportive friends and family who have entertained my daily rants on Early Modern art history and managed to lift me up in my lowest moments of self-doubt. If I were to dedicate this study to anyone it would be my grandfather, Tom Sanders, who, after a nine-month fight against pancreatic cancer, passed away during the early stages of this project. Until he was no longer capable of expressing himself in words, no longer capable of lucid focus, he would engage with me about my thesis. In one of the last interactions we shared, I leaned over his shoulder for a while, a book on Cagnacci in hand, showing him my favorite pictures by the painter. As I have gone about this process of writing and research, the memory of Grandpa’s persistence as a thinker, communicator, and human has motivated me unquestionably.
INTRODUCTION

The Rediscovery of Guido Cagnacci

From October 25, 2016 to January 22, 2017, *The Repentant Magdalene* (ca. 1660-63, fig. 1, plate VII) – a painting by the seventeenth-century Italian painter Guido Cagnacci (1601-63) – was loaned from the Norton Simon Foundation in Pasadena to the Frick Collection in New York. The picture was, with very good reason, presented in this exhibition as a “Baroque masterpiece.” Likely painted during the last three years of the artist’s life, the composition is an undeniably stunning creation. It unfolds in an expansive, elegant room, a lavish space that has been rendered predominantly in shadow. Only a modest stream of soft, natural light – originating on the far right from a small window and a door opening to a balcony – illuminates the scene.

The titular character, Mary Magdalene, is found at the center of the image. Having cast aside her earthly belongings, she seems to be on the brink of a particularly melodramatic Christian conversion: she lays on the floor in an agitated state of eroticism, her face red and grief-stricken and her body barely covered by a white sheet. To the right, Mary’s sister Martha sits on a cushion attempting to console her, while two servants exit the room in the background, weeping in distress. It is believed that Cagnacci derived this iconography from two contemporary literary sources that stress the role of Martha in her sister’s conversion: *La humanità di Christo* (1st ed. 1535) by the Venetian author Pietro Aretino (1492-1556), and the religious play *Maddalena lasciva e penitente* (1652) by Giovan Battista Andreini (1576-1654).1 However, the central narrative

1 Xavier F. Salomon, *The Art of Guido Cagnacci* (New York: The Frick Collection, 2016), 97. Andreini’s *Maddalena lasciva e penitente* describes a scene very close to that painted by Cagnacci. Beyond stressing

Unless noted otherwise, all English translations of Italian texts are my own.
coexists with a scene that seems not to have any pictorial or literary precedent: behind Mary and Martha’s exchange, the allegories of Vice and Virtue – here painted under the guises of angel and devil – battle for Mary’s soul.

Those familiar with *The Repentant Magdalene* applaud Cagnacci’s sophisticated handling of light, as well as his skillful fusion of naturalism and classicism. These qualities are precisely what the Forlivese scholar Maria Pia Fabbri praises in her 2008 book *Guido Cagnacci. Il Maestro del Barocco in Romagna*. Within the painting, she observes

Martha’s role in her sister’s conversion, it names three of the Magdalene’s servants: Aurora, Rosa, and Stella. This play was probably derived in part from Aretino’s *La humanità di Christo*. This volume recounts various biblical episodes, including the events surrounding Mary’s conversion, and was very well known throughout Venice. In fact, other Venetian painters – such as Paolo Veronese (1528-88) – had based their own paintings of the Magdalene on this text. For Aretino’s full account as well as its relationship to Veronese’s *The Conversion of Mary Magdalene* (1548), see David Rosand, “Veronese’s Magdalene and Pietro Aretino,” *The Burlington Magazine* 153.1299 (2011): 392-94.

Figure 1. Guido Cagnacci, *The Repentant Magdalene*, ca. 1660-63, oil on canvas, 229.2 x 266.1 cm, Norton Simon Foundation, Pasadena.
“an equilibrium between classicism and poetry of naturalism, between diffuse light that recalls Vermeer and Italian and Romagnolo highlights.”\textsuperscript{2} These pictorial elements seem to function in the service of the artist’s figural renderings, which themselves have been subject to significant acclaim. According to Fabbri, the light which pours through the window and balcony, “models the human figures,” giving “life to M. Magdalene's white flesh and to the Archangel’s sculptural body.”\textsuperscript{3} With the exception of the devilish form of Vice, each of the depicted characters also seems to ascribe to an identical, peculiarly androgynous figural typology that the curator of the Frick show, Xavier F. Salomon, describes as “halfway between virile adolescent girls and effeminate young lads.”\textsuperscript{4} Upon first viewing the picture on September 16, 1985, it was most likely this striking combination of attributes that motivated the restorer Mario Modestini to boldly declare that it was “not only the greatest Cagnacci, but that it was absolutely the best seventeenth-century painting painted in Italy.”\textsuperscript{5}

Despite the enthusiastic accounts of viewers like Fabbri and Modestini, only select audiences have had the privilege of beholding the splendors of \textit{The Repentant Magdalene}. Since its conception in the late Seicento, the painting has remained more or less in obscurity. Prior to being put up for auction at Christie’s in London on December 11, 1981, the canvas had been in the possession of the Bentinck family in England since 1711. Simon Dickinson, a former specialist for old master paintings at Christie’s, claimed

\textsuperscript{2} Maria Pia Fabbri, \textit{Guido Cagnacci. Il maestro del Barocco in Romagna} (Cesena: Società Editrice Il Ponte Vecchio, 2008), 68: “Il quadro è costruito sull’equilibrio fra classicismo e poetica del vero naturale, fra luce diffusa che chiama Vermeer e accenti italiani e romagnoli…”

\textsuperscript{3} Ibid.: “… la luce che modella figure umane… dà vita alle bianche carni di M. Maddalena e al corpo scultoreo dell’Arcangelo.”


\textsuperscript{5} Ibid., 94.
to have found the work “in a stable storeroom stacked up from dozens of paintings where it had been undiscovered for 100 years.” Toward the end of 1981, the billionaire industrialist, Norton Simon, acquired the canvas from Colnaghi (the art-dealership that had originally purchased it at the London sale) for his expansive Pasadena collection, and it remained there permanently until the Frick exhibition in 2016. The presence of *The Repentant Magdalene* at such a prominent New York institution not only introduced a broader population of viewers to an otherwise under-recognized masterpiece, but also endowed its author, Guido Cagnacci, with a long-overdue moment in the sun.

The nature of Cagnacci’s reputation largely mirrors that of his late masterwork: the painter has, until recently long been relegated to the lackluster fringes of Baroque art historiography. Luisa Vertova claims the he was “judged as an eccentric by his contemporaries – capable, but unreliable and of doubtful morality.” Yet, he managed to retain a few posthumous admirers throughout the eighteenth century, the most enthusiastic of which was a painter from Rimini named Giambattista Costa (1697-1767), who recorded Cagnacci’s life through an eclectic compilation of letters and documents. In subsequent decades, he was once again scorned as a lowly, provincial artist, then forgotten entirely. Cagnacci was finally introduced into mainstream scholarship during the 1950s, when several of his works were displayed in exhibitions of seventeenth-century painting in Rimini (1952) and Bologna (1959). Since that moment, there have

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9 For the Rimini exhibition, see Francesco Arcangeli et al., *Mostra della pittura del ’600 a Rimini* (Rimini: Tipografia Garattoni, 1952). For the Bologna exhibition, see Francesco Arcangeli, et al., *Maestri della pittura*
been two exhibitions – held respectively in Rimini (1993) and Forlì (2008)\textsuperscript{10} – as well as accompanying exhibition catalogues devoted solely to Cagnacci. The painter has also been the subject of a few Italian monographs, the most expansive of which was written by Pier Giorgio Pasini in 1986.

It has taken American scholars a bit longer to jump on the “Cagnacci bandwagon.” Several of the artist’s works are held in collections outside Italy, and three of his paintings were even displayed in the 1986 U.S. exhibition called *The Age of Correggio and the Carracci*.\textsuperscript{11} However, prior to the showing of *The Repentant Magdalene* at the Frick, no event focusing primarily on Cagnacci had ever been organized beyond the Apennine peninsula. In conjunction with the Frick show, Xavier F. Salomon published *The Art of Guido Cagnacci* (2016), the first English text devoted to the artist in around thirty years. These two events coincided, furthermore, with an exhibition at the Italian cultural institute of Cagnacci’s *Dying Cleopatra* (ca. 1660-62, fig. 2) and the acquisition of a half-figure depicting the same subject (ca. 1645-55, fig. 3, plate VI) at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Soon after, the Met acquired yet another half-figure by the artist, *David with the Head of Goliath* (ca. 1650, fig. 4). Falling in line with this mounting enthusiasm, the Cincinnati Art Museum recently announced an exhibition on Cagnacci that will run from March to July 2018.


Among modern historians of Italian Baroque art, Guido Cagnacci remains a more or less unsolved puzzle. Because his life and works are still a rather new area of scholarly interest, studies on the painter appear glaringly underdeveloped when compared to those on the better-known masters of the Baroque, such as Caravaggio (1571-1610), Annibale Carracci (1510-1609), and Guido Reni (1575-1642). Since the 1950s, scholars who have endeavored to examine Cagnacci have been confounded by his biography, which was described by Daniele Benati in 2008 as “restless and dissolute, unruly and even disjointed.”¹² During his career, Cagnacci hardly ever enjoyed prolonged stability, moving capriciously throughout the Italian peninsula and beyond. The painter was born in 1601 in the tiny hamlet of Santarcangelo. His initiation into painting is altogether uncertain, but his eighteenth-century biographer Giambattista Costa went so far as to characterize the young artist as an autodidact. In a 1741 letter to the Florentine nobleman Niccolò Gabburi, he declared that Cagnacci “had inherited from nature such a marvelous talent for painting that he began to practice the noble Art by himself, one could say without a master.”¹³ This laudatory statement certainly approximates the sort of folkloric exaltation common to Early Modern biographies on artists. Nonetheless, it is generally accepted that the painter possessed a precocious talent, which at the very least motivated his family to support his artistic education and early travels.


¹³ Costa, Lettere varie, e documenti autentici intorno le opere e vero nome, cognome e patria di Guido Cagnacci pittore, 7: “Guido ebbe talenti si maravigliosi dalla natura a divenir a Pittore, che incominciò ad esercitare questa nobil’Arte da sé medesimo e quali può dirli senza maestro.”
Figure 2. Guido Cagnacci, *Dying Cleopatra*, ca. 1660-62, oil on canvas, 120 x 158 cm, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan.

Figure 3. Guido Cagnacci, *The Death of Cleopatra*, ca. 1645-55, oil on canvas, 95 x 75 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Figure 4. Guido Cagnacci, *David with the Head of Goliath*, ca. 1655, oil on canvas, 129.5 x 99 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Himself a well-off furrier, Guido’s father Matteo Cagnacci sent his son to live in Bologna with his business partner, Girolamo Leoni, from 1618 to 1621. During this stint, Matteo also funded two trips to Rome – on the second of which (1621-22) Guido stayed with the Baroque master Guercino (1591-1666) at his home on the Via Paolina. Cagnacci’s next documented activity dates to 1627, at which point he had returned to his native region of Romagna. The painter remained here until around 1647 and spent his time producing devotional works for churches, convents, and confraternities in towns such as Rimini, Forlì, Faenza, Saludecio, and his birthplace, Santarcangelo (fig. 5).

Figure 5. Map of Emilia Romagna, Italy, where Cagnacci was born and spent the grand majority of his early career.
This period was speckled with a variety of misadventures, mostly involving sordid affairs with women. The criminal records from Rimini show that, on October 20, 1628, Cagnacci fruitlessly attempted to elope with and acquire the dowry of an aristocratic widow named Teodora Stivivi. Another peculiar document, dating to April 5, 1636, shows that a certain Giovanna, an orphan from Serravalle, willingly signed away all her belongings to the painter without explanation. These oddities are made to seem even more off-color when one considers the contents of a letter from October 25, 1741 addressed to Giambattista Costa. In this text, the eighteenth-century painter Giampietro Zanotti (1674-1765) recalls: “when I was young I met some old people who had been friends of Cagnacci’s, and they told me that he always traveled with a young girl disguised as a man [“una Giovanetta vestita da Uomo”] that he claimed was his servant, and they told me he modeled the women he painted on her.”

Following his sojourn in Romagna, Cagnacci set his sights on Venice. As an artistic hub renowned for its cultural and social freedom, this city probably appealed to an artist preceded by such a scandalous reputation. By 1649, Cagnacci had apparently settled at the Venetian parish of San Giovanni Cristosomo, where he lived with Maddalena Fontanafredda – yet another woman, who is believed to have been the “giovanetta vestita da uomo” described in Zanotti’s letter. The artist remained in this locale for nearly a decade, enjoying what seems to have been a quiet sort of prosperity: he kept an active workshop close to his home at San Giovanni Cristosomo, took pupils,

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14 For a detailed account of these affairs, see Pier Giorgio Pasini, Le donne del Cagnacci, (Rimini: Editrice Romagna arte e storia s.a.s, 1993).

and painted a plethora of half-length figures (mainly of allegories as well as mythological and historical heroines) for private clientele. However, this unusually stable time of life was ultimately brought to a close in 1658, when the painter was called to the court of Emperor Leopold I (1640-1705) in Vienna. Although Cagnacci would die only five years later, this invitation represented the artist’s most illustrious instance of patronage and also led him to create some of his most celebrated works, *The Repentant Magdalene* and *Dying Cleopatra* included.

In confronting this peripatetic biography, historians of the past several decades have been stumped not only by its capricious nature, but also its patchiness. There exist significant stretches of time during which the painter’s activity has gone entirely undocumented. For instance, there is absolutely no documentation pertaining to the years 1622 through 1627. What has proved perhaps even more challenging is the task of characterizing his *oeuvre* and its exhibited painterly style (*maniera*). Style, as a concept in its own right, has long manifested as a tricky business in Baroque scholarship. The visual culture of seventeenth-century Italy has historically been (and, among certain viewers, still is) homogenized in the popular imagination, oversimplified according to sweeping concepts of period style. For many, the term “Baroque” elicits what the German scholar Erwin Panofsky long ago called a “lordly racket” – an archetypal array of visual qualities such as “unbridled movement, overwhelming richness in color and composition, theatrical effects produced by free play of light and shade, and indiscriminate mixture of materials and techniques.” However, this overarching, umbrella definition does not quite encapsulate the nuances of style, as it existed in Seicento Italy. As Panofsky admits

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himself, the qualities of the “lordly racket” really only manifest in works – such as Gianlorenzo Bernini’s *Cathedra Petri* (ca. 1666) – that represent a “culminating phase of the Baroque development.”17 In reality, seventeenth-century Italian artists and critics viewed style as something far more variable and ambiguous, a valuable currency associated with a broad range of meanings and merits. At least in the context of painting, style not only encapsulated an artist’s recognizable approach to form and composition, but also, to quote Philip Sohm, “could represent national character and power, or an artist’s identity and sense of self-worth.”18

Although modern art historians, like Sohm, have made great strides in examining the concept of style and its many layers of meaning, Cagnacci’s *maniera* remains overgeneralized in the existing scholarship. Cagnacci is notorious for the inconsistency of his output. In 1695, the renowned collector of drawings and prints Padre Sebastiano Resta (1635-1714) noted that “Cagnacci varied greatly in his manner, painting in *chiaroscuro*, but always from nature. He made ordinary paintings, that is botched ones, and other paintings that are extraordinary, marvelous.”19 Echoing these sentiments centuries later, Luisa Vertova wrote in 1993 that Cagnacci’s paintings at times “amount to little more than empirical juxtapositions in uncertain spaces.” Yet, “in moments of inspiration [he] succeeds in creating forceful images that are hard to forget.”20 Cagnacci’s earliest

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17 Ibid., 9.


canvases – from the 1620s and ’30s – display particularly erratic shifts in manner.

Encapsulating what Pier Giorgio Pasini described as the artist’s exceptional “oscillation of interests and intentions,” some were rendered with fresh, bright colors and rapid strokes while others appear dark and tenebrous, with a heavy impasto. Contrastingly, his late pictures of the 1640s, ’50s, and ’60s appear far more uniform. As seen in canvases such as *The Repentant Magdalene, Dying Cleopatra,* and even *David with the Head of Goliath,* this latter body of work consistently depicts “soft and somewhat disturbing… nudes” that, to quote Vertova once again, give “evidence of Cagnacci’s idiosyncratic combination of classicism and delicate naturalism.”

Tasked with rationalizing such marked stylistic discrepancies, modern historians have typically opted to judge the painter through these more homogeneous late pictures. Though seemingly nowhere to be found in his earliest paintings, the consistent pictorial qualities of the later works – their lascivious human forms, their eclectic integration of styles, etc. – are often enlisted as appellations that broadly distinguish Cagnacci from his contemporaries as an eccentric sensualist (*sensualista*) brimming with what the archaeologist Giovanni Bianchi (1693-1775) once described as “bizarre genius” (*genio bizzarro*).

Scholars are by no means blind to the unequal treatment of Cagnacci’s complete works. Especially in Italian publications released within the last two decades, art historians have even made a point to criticize this scholarly shortcoming. In the 2008 essay “Sugli inizi di Guido Cagnacci,” Mina Gregori asserts the importance of the artist’s early devotional paintings relative to his mature works, writing that to “understand

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Cagnacci, one should not immediately think of the notable heroines” of his later years. “Today,” she continues, “we are more aware of the tormented birth of these paintings and appreciate his works of religious subjects painted after his return to Emilia.”

In Misticismo del nudo – a 2011 catalogue published in conjunction with an exhibition in Cento of three late works by Cagnacci – Laura Muti similarly laments the tendency of scholars to separate their interpretations of the artist’s early from those of his late paintings. The historian claims that this practice “ends up nourishing… contradictions that are difficult to ascribe to a unified, poetic synthesis, capable of accounting for [Cagnacci’s] entire production.”

Responding to this inequity, some scholars have sought to identify concepts on which to anchor a discussion of Cagnacci’s complete works. For example, in his 2008 essay “Guido Cagnacci: il corpo e l’anima,” Daniele Benati writes that the painter’s entire oeuvre evokes an alluring sort of “interior theatre” (teatro interiore): despite the fact that his most celebrated works are those that were created later in his career, all of Cagnacci’s pictures, Benati claims, seem to reduce action to “its essential core,” which is “not an exterior action, but an interior one alive in a dialectic of opposites.”

Muti echoes this...

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24 Mina Gregori, “Sugli inizi di Guido Cagnacci,” in Guido Cagnacci: Protagonista del Seicento tra Caravaggio e Reni, 57: “Per intendere il Cagnacci non si deve subito pensare alle note eroine…Oggi conosciamo meglio il nascere tormentato di questi dipinti e apprezziamo le sue opera di soggetto religioso dipinte dopo il rientro in Emilia.”

25 The three works presented at this exhibition were the Rape of Europa (ca. 1650), the Allegory of Human Life (ca. 1655), and a second version of The Repentant Magdalene (ca. 1660-63). For more information on the show, see Laura Muti, Guido Cagnacci: Misticismo del nudo. Capolavori dalle collezioni Molinari Pradelli, Sgarbi, Guidi Bagno (Cento: Pinacoteca Civica “Il Guercino” di Cento, 2011).

26 Muti, Guido Cagnacci: Misticismo del nudo, 9: “… in quanto le immagini sacre conservano la loro manifesta sacralità, mentre quelle affidate alla nudità dei corpi e alla rosea piacevolezza degli incarnati si dischiudono in fieri anche ad altri orizzonti di pensiero, ma finiscono soprattutto per alimentare, all’interno di un sistema conchiuso, antinomie difficilmente riconducibili a una sintesi poetica unitaria.”

27 Daniele Benati, “Guido Cagnacci: il corpo e l’anima,” in Guido Cagnacci: protagonista del Seicento tra Caravaggio e Reni,” 28-29: “… in Cagnacci l’azione, ridotta al suo nocciolo più essenziale, non è esteriore al
interpretation in *Misticismo del nudo*, describing in her own words (and in greater depth) the lively “dialectic of opposites” observed by Benati:

> Darkness and light, tangible and intangible, body and soul, physical and metaphysical find in Cagnacci an incredible, profound synthesis, overcoming a dualism resolved in the levity of a thought capable of interweaving a dialogue on valor and content that hides itself beyond an ephemeral mirror.  

In the introduction to the earlier monograph *Guido Cagnacci. Hypóstasis* (2009), Laura Muti and Daniele de Sarno Prignano write that “the research conducted thus far on the painting of Cagnacci fails to arrive at the ‘touchstone’ of every great artist: poeticism (*la poetica*).”29 The interpretations outlined above – with their evocation of resolved aesthetic antitheses – certainly imbue scholarship on the artist with this ostensibly missing poetic vitality. However, they yet again apply mostly to his lascivious works. Because they are so strongly driven, as it were, by the nebulous task of uncovering the “poeticism” that unifies his life and works, these writings also fail to elucidate Cagnacci’s more concrete practices, artistic intentions, and relationships to his contemporaries.

The present thesis was conceived in response to this incomplete profile. Its objective is four-fold: (1) to arrive at a definition of Cagnacci’s *maniera* that takes into account and rationalizes both his early and his late output; (2) to contextualize this *maniera* within the traditions of seventeenth-century painterly practices; (3) to explore

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28 Muti, *Misticismo del nudo*, 6: “L’ombra e la luce, il tangibile e l’impalpabile, il corpo e l’anima, il fisico e il metafisico trovano nel teatro del Cagnacci una mirabile profondissima sintesi, a superamento di un dualismo risolto nella levità di un pensiero capace di tessere un dialogo sui valori e sui contenuti si celano oltre lo specchio effimero.”

29 Laura Muti and Daniele de Sarno Prignano, *Guido Cagnacci. Hypóstasis* (Faenza: Edit Faenza, 2009), 7-8: “Il cardine di ogni artista è la poetica e questa, per dirlo con franchezza, non emerge dalle ricerche fin qui condotte sulla pittura di Guido Cagnacci.”
how Cagnacci’s compositions would have been understood and defined by contemporary artists and theorists; and finally (4) to better delineate the intentions that ultimately fueled his painterly output. As one of the first English texts devoted to the artist, Xavier F. Salomon’s *The Art of Guido Cagnacci* naturally served as a crucial jumping off point in developing these investigations. Unfortunately, much like the Italian scholarship on Cagnacci, this book does not by any means attain the critical depth found in studies devoted to better-known Seicento artists. In his introduction, Salomon even admits himself that the volume “is neither a comprehensive monograph on the painter nor an examination of all of his paintings.” Above all, the text manifests as a collection of observations that introduce the understudied Cagnacci to a broader, international audience and, quite invaluably, invite us to ask productive questions about his life, works, and practice. In formulating the study at hand, I have effectively accepted this “invitation” and, in turn, have sought to elaborate on many of the themes – of style, artistic identity, and painterly practice – which Salomon’s text touches upon only lightly.

I have divided the present thesis into three parts. Chapter one (“Guido Cagnacci’s Signing Practices”) considers Cagnacci’s signature as an emblem of his artistic intentions. When I say “signature,” I refer to all denotative acts or forms that draw attention to an artist’s identity including, but certainly not limited to, verbal inscriptions on works of art, emblematic and literary transformations of an artist’s name, and an artist’s chosen title in records. With this multifaceted definition in mind, I examine two specific cases of self-naming that together form a plausible bridge between the painter’s

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quotidian experiences and his artistic output. I first analyze signatures in what would be considered a more “traditional” sense in the field of art history: as words painted on completed canvases. In particular, I scrutinize inscriptions in which the artist refers to himself as an “inventor.” Less conventionally, I also discuss Cagnacci’s pseudonym, “Guido Baldo Canlassi da Bologna,” which he used during his time in Venice. Examined in light of his peripatetic existence – which seems to have resulted from his failure to secure a respected artistic reputation and, by extension, prominent patrons – these signing practices, I argue, reveal the painter’s desire to refashion or, better, to reinvent his public image. With their invocation of the word “inventor,” the painted signatures examined in this chapter additionally bespeak what appears to be an ongoing preoccupation with invention (invenzione) – a term that, in the context of Seicento art theory, addressed a painter’s creative intelligence and his manifested iconographic innovativeness.32

After establishing his artistic intentions as revealed through signature and particularly his desire to prove himself through his art as a painterly inventor, I look to Cagnacci’s output for further ideas and clarity. I devote chapter two (“Cagnacci’s Aesthetic of Repetition”) to interpreting the painter’s compositions and style as a collectively evocative entity that bespeaks his ongoing artistic intentions. My analysis mainly ascribes to the view of style as manual production – a definition that, being particularly attentive to the root of the word maniera (“mano,” meaning “hand”) refers directly to concrete processes and strategies of making.33 Although style, or maniera, can


33 For a more comprehensive discussion of this definition of style, see Philip Sohm, “Maniera and the Absent Hand: Avoiding the Etymology of Style,” Anthropology and Aesthetics 36 (1999): 100-24.
encompass many categorical conditions – an inimitable painterly idiom, a stable repertory of forms and brushstrokes, a measure of quality, a means to classify works, artists, schools, periods, etc. – the ever-changing quality of Cagnacci’s œuvre hardly lends itself to such neat and tidy aesthetic classification. Nonetheless, a close examination of his early and late works alike reveal that the painter consistently designed his compositions by way of repetition, that is, a species of imitation by which different styles, themes, and/or details from other pictures are re-contextualized into the logic of a new painting.  

34 Within Cagnacci’s complete works, I have identified two categories of repetition, embodied most blatantly by the artist’s figures: emulative and self-referential. The former type encompasses the artist’s selective imitation of his more prominent contemporaries and predecessors, while the latter consists of the recycling of distinctive figural types and, in some cases, entire compositions. A consideration of these seemingly constant repetitive practices, I maintain, further illuminates the stylistic priorities that pervaded Cagnacci’s career and, more particularly, his concerns with artistic identity and reputation.

Today, most art viewers tend to ascribe to a modernist vision of originality, thus associating terms like “invention” with ideas of defiant, never-before-seen innovation. This definition of novelty considered, the arguments in the first two chapters might initially seem incompatible, even contradictory. Our modern sensibilities tell us that the works of a painter-inventor should, for all intents and purposes, exhibit qualities that defy the creative tendencies of their period or individual body of work. If Cagnacci wanted to achieve this status, why, then, would he continually pursue an aesthetic of

repetition? This question is the impetus for my third chapter (“Repetition as Invention in the Works of Cagnacci”). Seeking to reconcile the assertions of the previous two chapters, I examine the various acts of and critical reactions to repetition that ensued throughout the late Cinquecento and early Seicento. I primarily consider the curriculum of the *Accademia degli Incamminati* – the renowned school of painting established in Bologna in 1582 by the cousins Ludovico (1555-1619), Agostino (1557-1602), and Annibale Carracci (1510-1609) – as well as the treatises of the Venetian critic Marco Boschini (1602-81) and the Bolognese biographer Carlo Cesare Malvasia (1619-93), which include intriguing concepts on artistic creation. With these case studies in mind, I argue that Cagnacci’s predilection for repetition was not the product of a lack of originality. The artist’s approach to composition should be interpreted as a premeditated creative strategy – inspired by contemporary traditions of painting – that reflected his conscious effort to insert himself into a lineage of established painterly masters, forge a superior personal style, and brand himself as the painterly inventor he claimed to be in signature.

Through this tripartite study, I do not propose to solve the elusive puzzle of Cagnacci’s life and works. Synthesizing the disparate observations of those few scholars, both Italian and American, who have endeavored to investigate his works over the past few decades, I aim to investigate how – through seemingly systemized signing practices and compositional choices – the painter sought to refashion his identity. My investigations, in this sense, do not seek to define Cagnacci as a “sensualist,” a “bizarre genius,” or any other sort of character in a romanticized historical narrative, but rather to break down the concrete ways in which he responded to the circumstances of painterly practice and theory in Seicento Italy.
As mentioned earlier, historians are often stumped when judging Cagnacci’s earliest pictures due to his patchy chronology, as well as the pronounced inconsistency of his manner. The artist’s first known painting – a small devotional work depicting the *Last Supper* (ca. 1618, fig. 6) – is no exception to this rule.

Though now held in a private collection, the picture was originally displayed in Cagnacci’s birthplace, Santarcangelo, in the refectory of a local Capuchin church. Daniele Benati describes the canvas as “unresolved and difficult to value” primarily “due to its
Equally confounding is the apparent stylistic divergence between this work and practically the entire remainder of Cagnacci’s oeuvre. Regardless of their overarching differences in quality, the grand majority of the painter’s pictures exhibit a blatant predilection for naturalism that was likely inspired by the works of the Carracci in Bologna, as well as those of Guercino and the Utrecht and French Caravaggisti – such as Henrich Terbrugghen (1588-1629), Nicolas Tournier (1590-1639), and Simon Vouet (1590-1649) – whom Cagnacci encountered during his sojourn in Rome in 1621-22. Painted before this formative period, The Last Supper contrastingly demonstrates an “immature awareness of naturalism” that, according to Benati, can be seen in details such as the “shadows projected from the dishes onto the tablecloth.”

Yet, even amidst all this idiosyncrasy and all this cause for uncertainty, the work at hand bears one mark that is irrevocably connected to the identity of Cagnacci: toward the bottom of the composition, one finds the artist’s signature, GVIDVS CAGNACCIVS, flanked by the date of completion, 1618.

As they have increasingly attempted to make sense of his elusive oeuvre, art historians of the past few decades have regarded Cagnacci’s signature in a rather cursory fashion, treating it as an indicator of authorship and not much else. This approach is applied to the attribution of many of Cagnacci’s early works – The Last Supper included – as well as his abundance of later half-figures. Completed throughout the 1640s, ’50s, and ’60s, these sorts of compositions typically exist in multiples, some of which may have been created by Cagnacci’s Venetian pupils or other contemporary imitators.

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35 Benati, “Guido Cagnacci: il corpo e l’anima,” in Guido Cagnacci: protagonista del Seicento tra Caravaggio e Reni, 31: “Un quadro irrisolto e difficile da apprezzare compiutamente anche per il suo stato di conservazione precario…”

36 Ibid.: “… particolari senati da un’acerba consapevolezza naturalistica, ad esempio nella resa delle nitide ombre gettate dalle stoviglie sulla tovaglia.”
historians have gone about establishing the painter’s autographs by identifying the version that boasts the highest aesthetic quality and, in many cases, the artist’s name. In the realm of visual art, signatures have long been taken at face value in this fashion: they have commonly been understood as the names or monograms that are inscribed onto works of art to communicate an artist’s presence. Considering this association with creative authenticity, it is no surprise that – when mentioned in monographs, exhibition and auction catalogues, or other such publications – signatures often serve as proofs of value. This treatment, however, actually proves quite reductive.

A signature, on the one hand, cannot by any means provide irrevocably positive proof of authorship. Much like the painterly forms that are deemed “signature” in a more metaphorical sense – such as brushstrokes, figural types, specific subjects, etc. – literal signatures are often subject to forgery. It is also important to note that signatures can manifest as a multiplicity of things. Though most often associated with verbal apppellations inscribed onto paintings, sculptures, drawings, or other such art objects, they actually consist of any act or form that alludes to an artist’s identity and personal intentions. Giancarla Periti expounds this broadened definition at the outset of her

37 Creighton Gilbert, “A preface to signatures (with some cases in Venice),” in Fashioning Identities in Renaissance Art, ed. Mary Rogers (Aldershot and Brookfield: Ashgate, 2000), 79.

2004 article “Allegri to Laetus-Lieto: The Shaping of Correggio’s Artistic
Distinctiveness.” According to Periti, signatures can certainly manifest as the inscriptions
so familiar and conventional in the history of art. However, they may additionally occur
as “visual, phonetic, emblematic or literary transformations of… masters’ names,” found
not only on works of art, but also as the artist’s chosen name in records. Capable of
signifying “the cultural processes through which relationships between the self, art, and
historical context” were negotiated,” signatures, Periti maintains, also tend to highlight
the issues of painterly style and intentionality so pertinent to this study.39

The chapter at hand fully embraces this multifaceted definition. Amounting to “a
psychological approach to art history” – which, to quote Creighton Gilbert, “would see
signatures as an artist’s device for urging the viewers his assertion of an identity
conveyed through his work”40 – the pages that follow treat Cagnacci’s signature not
merely as a marker of his authentic presence, but rather as a portmanteau that
encompasses his concerns with public reputation and painterly tradition, as well as his
intentions as an artist. True to the many sorts of signing practices mentioned above,
Cagnacci referenced himself in a wide variety of ways throughout his career. The
painter’s name marks many of his canvases, with the format and spelling varying
between individual inscriptions. The various dogs41 found throughout his paintings have

40 Gilbert, “A preface to signatures (with some cases in Venice),” 79.
41 One finds dogs throughout many of Cagnacci’s compositions, even in places where they appear
superfluous to the painted narrative. In his early works, beautifully rendered canines appear at the feet of
St. Roch in the Montegridolfo altarpiece Virgin and Child with Saints Sebastian, Roch and Hyacinth (ca. 1620-
25) and on the right side of St. Anthony Abbot and Two Saints (ca. 1625). Blatantly suggesting a connection
between these creatures and Cagnacci’s identity, the later painting Jacob Peeling the Rods (ca. 1655) shows yet
another dog – this time wearing a color marked with the signature GVIDO CAGNACCI. The picture
Woman with Two Fighting Dogs (ca. 1655-60) has similarly been interpreted as a personal allegory,
representing how the artist is imprisoned and subjugated by a particular woman and/or the power of
also been regarded as “emblematic signatures,” defined as objects (or other nonhuman entities) that were integrated into artists’ compositions as iconic references to their names.\(^{42}\) (The cognomen Cagnacci, after all, is the pejorative, plural form of the Italian word for dog, “cane.”) Nonetheless, the chapter at hand considers only two of his signing practices. I begin by focusing on a few paintings that Cagnacci signed with some iteration of the phrase “Guido Cagnacci, Inventor,” and later shift my attention to the pseudonyms proliferated by the artist during his time in Venice. I maintain that these case studies collectively convey the painter’s ambition to alter his public image. Marking his early altarpieces as well as his lascivious late compositions, the painted signatures explored here additionally reveal what seems to be an ongoing preoccupation with invention, or *invenzione* – a conceit associated with iconographic innovation. I ground this reading of Cagnacci’s intentions as revealed through signature in certain facts of his eccentric biography, focusing particularly on those misfortunes – mainly in the realm of art criticism and patronage – that would have motivated any artist to fashion his identity anew.

I. *The Repentant Magdalene* (ca. 1660-63) and its Evocative Signature

\[^{42}\text{This definition is derived from Lubomir Konečný's piece on the signature of the Flemish painter, printmaker, and miniaturist Joris Hoefnagel (1542-1600). This artist tended to employ in his works the image of a hammer striking a nail on an anvil; this highly sophisticated signature not only references the sixteenth-century motif of a heart being struck by the hammer of fate on the anvil of life, but also the “homonymic qualities of the artist’s name.” The heart, after all, has been substituted by a nail, which translates to “nagel” in Dutch. For more on emblematic signatures as well as the specific case of Hoefnagel, see Konečný, “Joris Hoefnagel’s ‘Emblematic Signature’ Reconsidered,” 267-72.}\]
To jumpstart this analysis, I first turn to the late masterpiece expounded at the outset of this study: *The Repentant Magdalene* (ca. 1660-63, fig. 1, plate VII). The most noteworthy attributes of this painting have already been described; the composition, to reiterate, exhibits an eclectic, yet harmonious blend of classicism and naturalism, a masterful handling of light and shadow, and, most strikingly, the erotic (and seemingly identical) figures for which Cagnacci has become so well-known. Significantly, the painter's signature – GVIDVS CAGNACCIVS INVENTOR – is found at the bottom right of this captivating scene. Salomon suggests that Cagnacci probably signed his canvas in such an assertive manner not only to call attention to his authorship, but also to highlight the ingenuity of his iconography. According to Salomon, the combination of the Magdalene’s conversion with the allegorical figures of Vice and Virtue was, after all, “altogether new” in the seventeenth-century.\(^{43}\) Considering the associations of *invenzione* with iconographical innovativeness, this assertion is certainly convincing. However, I maintain that this signature encompasses yet another layer of meaning, linked not just to compositional innovation, but to professional redemption and reinvention.

Before elaborating on this interpretation, it is important to consider the reasons why painters of Cagnacci’s time (or, more generally, the Early Modern period) would have chosen to sign their canvases in the first place. Patricia Rubin elucidates this question in her 2006 essay “Signposts of Invention: Artists’ Signatures in Italian Renaissance Art.” Although she ultimately focuses on how the signatures of Michelangelo (1475-1564), Fra Filippo Lippi (1406-69), Donatello (1386-1466), and Titian (1488-1576) announced these artists’ specific professional ambitions, she begins this essay with a more general rationalization of Early Modern signing practices. Echoing

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the argument of Giancarla Periti mentioned above, Rubin claims that the placing of names onto paintings, sculptures, and other works was just one of “the many and various ways” that artists of this time “called attention to themselves,” and that even these kinds of signatures – “precisely because they are attached to products of ingenuity and invention” – cannot be bound by set rules.” 44 During the fifteenth century, names were regularly inscribed onto religious works both as marks of authorship and as pious supplications for prayer. 45 Being a crucial marker of value, the presence of an artist’s name also became an important consideration in the commerce of art. This trend was especially prevalent in Venice, where many workshops – such as that of Giovanni Bellini (1430-1516) – forged standardized trademarks that guaranteed either the master’s handiwork or the actual presence of his hand. 46 According to Rubin, these sorts of practices persisted well into the sixteenth century, growing ever more intricate and inventive in their manifestations. 47 However, many painters in central Italy (and Florence especially) seem not to have followed suit. After the early years of the Quattrocento, inscriptions rarely appeared in their pictures. 48 Between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, we in fact know of only a few examples in which masters from this area incorporated signatures into their compositions. According to Judith W. Mann, there were certainly some artists “who took opportunities to enhance their imagery” with their


45 Ibid., 567.

46 Ibid., 570.


48 Rubin, “Signposts of Invention: Artists’ Signatures in Italian Renaissance Art,” 566. In these locales, artists’ names were sometimes placed on frames; many of these objects have been lost, thus delimiting the evaluations of modern scholars.
names, but in general “these practices were infrequent and hardly typical. Caravaggio signed only once, in the blood of St. John the Baptist in his affecting painting of the saint’ beheading in Malta. El Greco delineated his initials in the fur of the head of St. Jerome’s lion, a creative self-identification that does not appear elsewhere in his oeuvre. Raphael was rarely so bold as when he placed his name in La Fornarina’s armband.”

Because they stand as exceptions to the ostensibly overarching trends of their time and place, anomalous acts of signing such as those mentioned by Mann have the potential to illuminate the intentions that motivated specific artists at certain points in (or perhaps throughout the entirety of) their careers. This is especially the case when the signatures in question have been conceived as active parts of the compositions in which they appear. Take for example, the sanguineous inscription found in Caravaggio’s The Beheading of St. John the Baptist (ca. 1608, fig. 7), cited above. Although he is known to have regularly inserted himself into his art, this painting is the only one the artist is known to have directly signed. Caravaggio’s name appears, furthermore, not as a simple monogram, but in the pooling of blood of Saint John. In “Signature Killer: Caravaggio and the Poetics of Blood” (2012), David M. Stone examines this arresting and unprecedented signature in the context of his connection with his patrons, the Maltese Order of Saint John, and ultimately defines the mark as a “proud defense of his honor in

49 Mann, “Identity Signs: Meanings and Methods in Artemisia Gentileschi’s Signatures,” 104.

50 Rubin, “Signposts of Invention: Artists’ Signatures in Italian Renaissance Art,” 570. This approach to anomalous cases is derived from the research strategy devised by Carlo Ginzburg “based on blurred edges, mistakes, and anomalies.” The historian argues, “while no norm can predict the full range of its transgressions; transgressions and anomalies, on the contrary always imply the norm and therefore urge us to take it into account as well.” See Carlo Ginzburg, “Family Resemblances and Family Trees: Two Cognitive Metaphors,” Critical Inquiry 30.3 (2004): 537-56. However, its application in this chapter to signing practices is most directly inspired by Rubin’s article.

the face of [a] noble world as well as a conceit about the artist’s role in making a painting.”

The now twice-mentioned quotation of Judith W. Mann appears in an article on the signatures of Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1656) – an artist whose idiosyncratic signing practices are perhaps even more illuminating in the current examination of Cagnacci. Unlike her predecessor Caravaggio and, for that matter, the majority of her contemporaries, Gentileschi signed her paintings frequently; her name appears on no less than nineteen of her forty-eight known paintings, most often as a crucial component of the pictorial space. According to Mann, the frequent appearance of these inscriptions,

Figure 7. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, detail showing the artist’s signature from The Beheading of Saint John the Baptist, ca. 1608, oil on canvas, 370 x 570 cm, St. John’s Cathedral, Valletta.


as well as their diverse forms and placement, reveal that the painter signed her works, not merely to identify herself but also to systematically manipulate her reputation, enrich her subjects, and amplify the enjoyment of her clientele. A tell-tale example of this tendency can be found in Artemisia’s 1632 depiction of the muse of history, *Clio* (fig. 8).

![Figure 8. Artemisia Gentileschi, *Clio*, ca. 1632, oil on canvas, 127.6 x 97.2 cm, private collection.](image)

In this image, the artist inscribed on the pages of a book of fame a dedication including her own name, as well as that of Francois Rosières, a deceased nobleman who narrowly escaped execution at the hands of King Henry III of France. Although scholars

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54 Ibid., 105.
such as Mary Garrard, Ward Bisell, and Elizabeth Cropper have disagreed on the exact connotations of this signature, Mann claims that there is a consensus that the inscription “carried meaning beyond the mere allegory of its subject, one that served to buttress her own self-presentation and show her actively reflecting on the vicissitudes of history and reputation.”

Much like these case studies, the signature found on *The Repentant Magdalene* certainly seems rich with implications about Cagnacci’s deep-seated artistic intentions. Its many layers of meaning become evident when one considers the circumstances surrounding the commission of the masterful painting in which it appears. The canvas, it is crucial to note, was completed during a rather pivotal moment in Cagnacci’s career. In July 1658, the recently elected Emperor Leopold I – or potentially his art-loving uncle, Archduke Leopold Wilhelm (1614-62) – had invited the artist, then living in Venice, to work as a painter at the imperial court in Vienna. Although it is altogether unclear how these men would have heard about Cagnacci, a taste for Venetian art had been mounting at this point for a few decades: for example, the painter, Pietro Liberi (1605-87), had traveled north to work for the emperor around the time of the latter’s coronation in 1658. Moreover, Leopold Wilhelm owned a rich collection of paintings held with the city of Venice itself.

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55 Ibid., 82.

56 Philip Sohm, *Pittoresco: Marco Boscini, his Critics, and their Critiques of Painterly Brushwork in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 89. Ostensibly, Marco Boscini – a Venetian critic whose writings I will imminently discuss in greater depth – dedicated his *La Carta del Navegar pittoresco* (1660) to the Archduke Leopold Wilhelm. This sentiment, as well as Boschini’s frequent praise of other prominent collectors and their collections, likely reflects his industrious motives as an art dealer.
By the seventeenth century, painters inscribed their canvases rarely, if ever. Although there are certainly significant exceptions to this rule,\(^{57}\) it was even more atypical for an artist to sign a work completed in the context of court patronage. Most Early Modern signatures were attached to works produced for art trade, for in these competitive circumstance painters often saw it fit to advertise themselves assertively. In contrast, artists commissioned by imperial courts enjoyed professional stability and, oftentimes, were treated as members of their patrons’ households; it was, therefore, not as necessary for them to boldly identify themselves in their works.\(^{58}\) Considering these tendencies, Cagnacci’s signature on his *Repentant Magdalene* certainly seems out of place. To make sense of its presence, one must therefore move beyond the vague, overarching trends (or lack thereof) defining the century’s signing practices, and look even closer at the conditions specific to Cagnacci as he set about creating the painting at hand.

Most of what little is known about Cagnacci’s brief Viennese sojourn is derived from four crudely written letters composed between 1660 and 1661 and addressed to the Venetian painter Francesco Gionima.\(^{59}\) Giambattista Costa refers to these documents in his *Lettere* on Cagnacci; however, mainly in an effort to save the painter’s posthumous

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\(^{57}\) Rubin, “Signposts of Invention: Artists’ Signatures in Italian Renaissance Art,” 570. In the ducal palace in Mantua, there is an inscription over the door on the west wall of the *Camera pietà* (1465-74) that declares the work of Andrea Mantegna (1431-1506). In a scene on the same wall, the artist’s signature is also found on the letter held by the depicted Cardinal Francesco Gonzaga. Titian similarly put his name on many of the pictures he sent to his noble patrons in Italy and Spain; he also inscribed his paintings for Alfonso d’Este’s *Camerino* in Ferrara.

\(^{58}\) Ibid.

\(^{59}\) Gionima was apparently a pupil of Cagnacci’s who was likely given control of the painter’s workshop once he had left for Vienna. For more on Gionima, his relationship with his master, and the four letters exchanged between them, see Jana Zapletová, “Francesco Gionima, Guido Cagnacci e le quattro lettere perdute,” *Studi Veneziani* 63 (2011): 575-91.
reputation, he did not publish them in their entirety. Fortunately for art historians today, the Count Francesco Algarotti (1712-64) – to whom Costa at one point showed this series of correspondence – published a few extracts from the documents himself. A sentence in one of these letters is thought to reference *The Repentant Magdalene*. Writing in 1661, Cagnacci wrote to Gionima, “I cannot come [to Venice] anymore, because his Imperial Majesty has asked that I promise to make him a painting of the repentant St. Mary Magdalene with four full-length figures.” When elaborating on how he would render these four figures, the painter adopted a tone of bitter sarcasm, claiming, “because I cannot paint feet, it would be better if Cavalier Liberi could come and paint them himself.”

This retort is particularly evocative, for it refers to an element of rivalry pertinent to Cagnacci’s experience as a mature artist. At the time he was called to the Viennese court, the painter, as previously mentioned, was living in Venice. Lasting for nearly a full decade (1649-58), his stint in the Adriatic city was by far the longest time he spent in any one place throughout his career, as well as a period during which he enjoyed an unusually constant stream of commercial success. At the workshop he kept near his home at San Giovanni Cristosomo, Cagnacci, as mentioned, painted a plethora of nude half-figures for private clients. Despite their popularity amidst this population of patrons, these pictures were criticized rather harshly by two men in particular. The first was the

60 Costa, *Lettere varie, e documenti intorno le opere e vero nome, cognomen e patria di Guido Cagnacci pittore*, 121-23; 141-42.


aforementioned painter (Cavalier) Pietro Liberi. Cagnacci apparently complained about Liberi often in his messages to Gionima. Beyond the instance of correspondence already discussed, Cagnacci writes on another occasion about how Liberi was commissioned to produce a painting of Virtue banishing Vice and comments bitingly, “for me there is nothing good in it, and it would be worth a lot more if the canvas was blank.”63 While contemporaneously painting in Venice, Cagnacci and Liberi were both known for their paintings of salacious imagery and, in turn, often found themselves in open competition for Venetian buyers. It is thus unsurprising that their relationship would be characterized by some level of discord. However, the sheer intensity and consistency of the bitterness expressed in Cagnacci’s letters suggests true enmity. As evidenced by the passage referencing *The Repentant Magdalene*, a great deal of this antagonism stemmed from Liberi’s injurious remarks that Cagnacci, as a painter of half-figures, did not know how to paint feet.

Cagnacci clashed with the Venetian critic and art dealer Marco Boschini for similar reasons. In 1660, Boschini published his account of Venetian art, *La Carta del Navegare pittoresco*. Throughout this text, the critic aligns Cagnacci with the “naturalists,” an altogether ill-defined group of painters. Boschini hardly ever refers to these artists by specific names. Yet, in collectively deeming them “naturalists,” he implies that they share certain key characteristics and tendencies as painters. Like Cagnacci, they were foreign to Venice – either by birth or artistic practice – and seemed to paint half-figures almost

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63 Ibid., 178: “che i suoi malevoli hanno ordine di farsi chiamare il divino Pietro Libero avendo fatto un quadro, che per me non vi è nessuna cosa buona, e valeria più se fosse imprimita. La favola è la virtù sollevata e discaccia il vizio. Se lui voleva fare bene, doveva fare per il vizio un Ebreo, un Luterano, un Turco, et uno Ateista. Così avrebbe fatta la vera Nolochia.” The English translation is from Salomon, *The Art of Guido Cagnacci*, 83.
exclusively. As their shared title suggests, they were also ostensibly unable to conceive their compositions without looking constantly to live models.\textsuperscript{64}

As I will discuss in the final chapter, Boschini often put the pictures of these artists at odds with works of art he deemed more iconographically complex and imaginative. For instance, following a laudatory description of Andrea Vicentino’s painting 1603 \textit{Victory at Lepanto} at the Palazzo Ducale, the critic turns to the designs of the naturalists as a point of contrast and laments the simplicity of their half-figures. Here, Boschini notably makes swipe at Cagnacci, when he writes, “Oh God, how much do I feel exactly like this, that it is diminishing to make half-figures and that one despises and blames those paintings that are called Curs, Bears, and Wildboars.”\textsuperscript{65} Evoking a mongrel, inferior dog, or even a detestable person, the word “curs” in this passage manifests as a cruel play on the painter’s cognomen, Cagnacci (\textit{Cagnazzi} in Venetian) – which in itself has bestial connotations. The association of his disparagingly transformed name with bears and wildboards suggests, furthermore, that his art is not only wholly reliant on nature, but knows only its most beastly, lowly forms.\textsuperscript{66}

In an earlier part of \textit{La Carta} Boschini makes another attack on painters of half-length figures. Although he once again does not refer to the artist by his true name, the critic clearly references Cagnacci’s approach to rendering the allegories and heroines that were so often the subject of his Venetian compositions. Boschini claims here that

\textsuperscript{64} I will return to Boschini’s “naturalists” in the last chapter. However, for an even more complete characterization of this group, see Sohm, \textit{Pittorese: Marco Boschini, his Critics, and their Critiques of Painterly Brushwork in Seventeenth and Eighteenth-Century Italy}, 100-10.

\textsuperscript{65} Marco Boschini, \textit{La Carta del navegar pittorese} (Venice: Baba, 1660), 467-68: “Oh Dio, quando che sento tali e quali,/ Che se sgionfa, per far meze figure,/ E che spreza che biasma ste piture,/ Che dirave Cagnazzi, Orsi, e Cingiali.” The English translation is from Sohm, \textit{Pittorese: Marco Boschini, his Critics, and their Critiques of Painterly Brushwork in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Italy}, 101.

painters of half-figures “are so miserable in their design and so feeble in finding an invention” that their pictures usually result as nothing more than the top half of the same female nude simply dressed in different costumes and accessories:

… for example, he will paint in a polished manner a half-figure of a nude Susanna; by adding two doves, he transforms her in a fine-looking goddess of beauty. And because she seems to him to be sweet and good, by adding one of those flowers, which with a blow of breath vanishes, among them he consoles and nourishes himself by saying: Now she is Human Life! And if by chance he feels like he is transforming her in some other figure, he carefully and judiciously paints a vase in her hands and she becomes Mary Magdalene.67

As his Viennese letters suggest, Cagnacci by no means took these criticisms lightly. Writing on these documents, Algarotti tells us that in these documents the painter “showed a considerable grudge against Boschini, whose [Carta] he calls a book of Sardines.”68 Although he was certainly not the only artist disparaged by his Venetian counterpart, the painter’s frustrations were doubtlessly warranted. By grouping Cagnacci with the vaguely-defined “naturalists” and criticizing him obliquely with allusions to his painterly practice, as well as pejorative transformations of his name, Boschini did something perhaps even more injurious than blatantly excluding Cagnacci from his treatise: he robbed him of his paintelry individuality and threatened his personal dignity.

In the previous passage on painters of half-figures, the critic’s comment on invention, or invenzione (invencion in the Venetian dialect), probably struck a particularly negative chord

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67 Boschini, Carta, 467-68: “I è tanto miserabili in desegno, / e tanto scarsi a trovar l’invenzione…Per esempio i farà con pulitezza / Meza figura/ una Susanna nuda; / Con farghe do Colombe, i la tramuda/ In la vezzosa Dea de la Belezza. / E perché la ghe par confeto e mana, / Col farghe un fior, che con el fià sparisse, / Tra loro i se consola e se nutrisse, / Col dir: adesso l’è la Vita umana. / E se per sorte ghe vien su la vena / De trasformarla in qualche altra figura, / I ghe fa un vaso in man con studio e cura, / E la deventa Maria Madalena.” The English translation is from Salomon, The Art of Guido Cagnacci, 65.

68 Bottari and Ticozzi, Raccolta di lettere, 484: “In esse mostra un grand’asito contro il Boschini il cui libro chiama libro di Sardelloni…” The English translation is from Sohm, Pittoresec: Marco Boschini, his Critics, and their Critiques of Painterly Brushwork in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Italy, 100.
with Cagnacci: iconographic innovativeness and creative intelligence were, after all, crucial for the success of any Seicento painter.

This background of harsh painterly competition and criticism considered, it seems that Cagnacci would have viewed the project of *The Repentant Magdalene* as an opportunity for redemption: the chance to paint a large, multi-figure image commissioned by the emperor would have enabled him to prove naysayers – especially his Venetian counterparts – wrong once and for all. The signature marking this composition (fig. 9) reflects this competitive spirit. A testament to his capacity for three-dimensional illusion and (contrary to what Boschini believed) unflappable iconographical innovation, Cagnacci’s name appears as if it has been etched into the surrounding tiled floor, linked permanently as it were to the appellation “inventor.” This inscription and, more specifically, the way it interacts with the surrounding pictorial space seems to have been influenced indelibly by the painter’s competition with Pietro Liberi.

![Figure 9](image_url) Guido Cagnacci, detail showing the artist’s signature from *The Repentant Magdalene*, ca. 1660-63.

As Salomon writes, the signature’s invocation of invention probably refers most directly to Cagnacci’s depiction of Vice and Virtue, as angel and devil. The inclusion of
these figures in a scene of Mary Magdalene’s conversion would have certainly been viewed by Seicento audiences as innovative in its own right. However, considering the aforementioned letter to Gionima that criticized Liberi’s representation of these allegorical figures, it is fair to say that Cagnacci conceived this rendering at least partially in the hopes of demonstrating his painterly superiority. Also related to this deep-seated rivalry is the signature’s placement, for it was placed directly beneath the exquisitely rendered foot of Mary’s sister Martha. In both its form and disposition, the painter’s signature thus seems to have been conceived strategically. Upon viewing *The Repentant Magdalene* in all its splendor and iconographical novelty, one cannot perceive and process the name of Guido Cagnacci apart from the conceit of invention – alluded to in his signature – and, of course, a foot that Seicento viewers might have thought was beyond the artist’s reach.

II. Guido Cagnacci, Inventor: Signatures as Assertive Self-Promotion

Although the construction of the signature analyzed above seems to have been the product of conditions specifically surrounding *The Repentant Magdalene* and its creation, it is not an entirely idiosyncratic inscription within Cagnacci’s oeuvre. About three more of the painter’s known signatures invoke the ideal of invention. Two of these paintings were created during the decade before the conception of *The Repentant Magdalene*. Cagnacci’s highly sensual rendering of the *Rape of Europa* (ca. 1650, fig. 10) was completed at the outset of his Venetian sojourn, and is signed with the phrase [CAGN]ACCI. INV. PI. at the bottom right. His *Lucretia* (ca. 1660, fig. 11), dated to the painter’s Viennese period, is likewise marked at the bottom left with the phrase GVIDVS CAGNACCIVS/INVENTOR FACIEBAT. Yet, one of these works – *St.
*Joseph, the Christ Child, and St. Eligius* (ca. 1635, fig. 12, plate II) – was painted decades before the other two, at the early outset of Cagnacci’s career.

Originally completed for the church of Santa Croce in Santarcangelo, this altarpiece is now preserved at the Chiesa Collegiata in the same city. In its bottom right corner, the canvas is inscribed with the phrase GVIDVS CAGNACCIVS FECIT INVENTOR/1635. Though all alike in their emphasis on invention, this earliest inscription is by far the most similar to that marking *The Repentant Magdalen*, for its form and placement evoke a uniquely competitive spirit. It is important to note that, in each of the three signatures listed, Cagnacci has incorporated verbs alluding to the act of creation. In the phrase marking the *Rape of Europa*, “PI.” is an abbreviation for *pinxit* – the perfect tense of the Latin verb *pingere* (to paint). As Louisa C. Matthew explains, this verb was popularly implemented among artists of the Late Middle Ages. However,
starting in the late fifteenth century, the term *fecere* (to make) was implemented far more frequently.⁶⁹ This verb appears in the remaining two case studies, in two different tenses respectively.

![Figure 12](image)

**Figure 12.** Guido Cagnacci, *St. Joseph, the Christ Child, and St. Eligius*, ca. 1635, oil on canvas, 245 x 163 cm, Chiesa Collegiata, Santarcangelo.

In the 1660 *Lucretia*, one finds *fecere* as the imperfect *faciebat*, while, in the Santarcangelo altarpiece, one finds it as the perfect *fecit*. The former term was, altogether, much more common in pictures of the Quattrocento, Cinquecento, and Seicento. This trend was primarily inspired by the discourse on painting included in Pliny the Elder’s (23–79 AD) treatise *Naturalis Historia* (77–79 AD). In this piece, the Roman philosopher

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expounds how ancient Greek painters – namely Apelles (4th century BC) – usually signed their paintings with the word *faciebat*. In doing so, these artists put on view an admirable sort of modesty. By using the imperfect form of “to make,” they implied that their works were themselves perpetually imperfect, eternally in need of revision and improvement. Renaissance and Baroque painters familiar with this tradition usually incorporated the work *faciebat* in their pictures not only to associate themselves with the practices of ancient masters, but also to declare that their work – much like those of the “god of painting” Apelles – was but another installment in the ongoing and noble pursuit of perfecting the art of painting.70

In the rare cases that Early Modern artists signed their paintings with the word *fecit*, their signatures were seen as particularly forceful statements of artistic achievement, boldly implying that their works had attained completeness and perfection. Titian ostensibly employed this form of the verb frequently in his paintings as an assertion of his supreme talent. In her signature (EGO ARTEMITIA/LOMI FEC.) marking the Uffizi *Judith Slaying Holofernes* (ca. 1620) Artemisia Gentileschi’s use of the emphatic form of “to be” as well as the past perfect form of *fecere* similarly suggests that she understood the depiction of a strong biblical heroine to be emblematic and affirmative of her own courage as a woman artist.71 Considering these connotations, Cagnacci’s signature on the Santarcangelo altarpiece seems, once again, eccentric.

It was by no means unheard of for an Early Modern artist to sign an altarpiece. As mentioned, painters often placed their names onto major devotional works as a humble expression of piety. However, Cagnacci’s use of the word *fecit* – with all its

70 Ibid., 638.
aggressive suggestions of artistic perfection – essentially lacks all humility. Equally important to note is the signature’s placement: Cagnacci inscribed his name directly onto an anvil located on the right of the composition (fig. 13). Beyond alluding to the role of St. Eligius, the patron saint of metalworkers, as well as the trade of the blacksmiths who partially commissioned the painting, this object suggests themes of creation; it evokes a process by which raw materials (metal) are altered, shaped by an expert artisan into a refined form. Perhaps a metaphor for the act of painting – whereby artists recreate details from the natural world and translate them into their own stylistic idioms – the anvil (and the man-made transformation it encapsulates) quite immodestly highlights the conceit of artistic invention alluded to in the signature marking it and, by extension, Cagnacci’s creativity.

Figure 13. Guido Cagnacci, detail showing the artist’s signature from *St. Joseph, the Christ Child and St. Eligius*, ca. 1635.

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72 Salomon, *The Art of Guido Cagnacci*, 33-34. The altarpiece of *St. Joseph, the Christ Child, and St. Eligius* was commissioned in August 1634 by a guild of carpenters and metalworkers. The patron saints of both these parties, Joseph and Eligius, are represented in the image, alongside an infant Christ and various symbols of their respective trades.
In signing the Santarcangelo altarpiece in such an unusually assertive fashion, it is fair to say that Cagnacci was probably concerned less with expressing piety than promoting himself as an inventive creator. This interpretation is corroborated by Louisa C. Matthew, who claims that altarpieces – as works that were frequently large, expensive, and intended for the relatively public space of churches – offered young painters lucrative opportunities to promote their reputations. The fact that such assertive signatures mark early works – such as *St. Joseph, the Christ Child, and St. Eligius* – as well as late works – including *Rape of Europa, Lucretia*, and of course *The Repentant Magdalene* – suggests that Cagnacci attempted to advertise his name and capacity for invention continually throughout his career. Although the paintings in which these inscriptions appear – with the exception of *The Repentant Magdalene* – are not connected with copious that would otherwise elucidate Cagnacci’s exact intentions, such a desire seems plausible when one considers the painter’s peripatetic existence and its likely causes.

III. Cagnacci’s Pursuit of Patronage: A History of Misadventures

As described in the introduction to this study, Cagnacci’s incredibly diverse output was, in a sense, mirrored by the restless nature of his existence. Before finally settling in Venice, the artist, to reiterate, spent the early years of his career traveling between a variety of locales, including Rome and Bologna – the purported centers of Baroque painterly production – as well as various smaller towns in Romagna. Although the generally poor documentation of the artist’s life makes it difficult to confidently pinpoint his true motivations, it seems likely that this near-constant movement was

perpetuated by his inability to attain a unanimously respected public reputation and, in turn, secure stable patrons.

In Seicento Italy, these conditions oftentimes operated in a sequence of reciprocal cause and effect. For painters of the time, there existed a few different systems of patronage. Though there were certainly “more nuanced arrangements” – the breadth of which cannot be fully analyzed in the space of this chapter – the relationship between an artist and the individual(s) who employed him generally ebbed and flowed between two diametrically opposed degrees of intimacy. On the one hand, an artist could be given lodging in his patron’s home and work almost exclusively for him and his noble circle of friends and family. On the other, an artist would paint pictures for no particular destination in mind and subsequently exhibit them in the hopes of finding a generous buyer. Among the most desirable patrons of the period were the popes and their ambitious nephews. As explained by Francis Haskell, the rise and fall of new papal families effectively “[molded] patterns of art patronage,” for they were “highly competitive and anxious to give expression to their riches and power as quickly as they could” before the reign of the next pope. While trying to establish themselves as promising and reliable figures in the competitive world of art, up-and-coming artists thus often made it their prerogative to gain the favor of a member of the papal entourage or, to borrow Haskell’s phrasing, a family that “had its hand in the treasury” at the very

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74 Francis Haskell, “The Mechanics of Seventeenth-Century Patronage,” in *Italian Baroque Art*, ed. Susan M. Dixon (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 141-42. According to Haskell, these “more nuanced arrangements” became more frequent as the century progressed; they usually involved “middle-men, dealers, and dilettantes as well as the activities of foreign travellers and agents.”

75 Ibid., 134.
least.\textsuperscript{76} It seems that Cagnacci ascribed to this mode of operation, but with little enduring success.

Especially during his early travels, the artist appears to have attempted to form relationships that would win him positive publicity and, in the best of cases, connect him to the current papacy. Because Cagnacci stayed with his father’s business partner, Girolamo Leoni, while training as a young artist in Bologna, he was able to connect during his subsequent sojourn in Rome with Clemente Leoni – Girolamo’s nephew and the cupbearer of the Bolognese Pope Gregory XV (reigned 1621-23). A later inventory of the Leoni family shows that they received four small works from Cagnacci – including two unfinished paintings and two sketches of heads.\textsuperscript{77} However, the artist must not have established the abiding relationships he had hoped for: a census of Guercino’s house shows that Cagnacci left Rome around 1623, a year after he had first arrived and without any significant commissions of which to speak. After ostensibly failing to make a prominent enough name for himself in Bologna or Rome, he mostly accepted modest commissions from local patrons throughout Romagna. Though not attached to the papacy, his most important and promising project from this period came in 1642, at which point he was living in Forlì and making his living by painting images of single figures, such as his exquisite \textit{St. Anthony of Padua Preaching} (ca. 1641-42, fig. 14).

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 142.

\textsuperscript{77} Pasini, \textit{Guido Cagnacci pittore (1601-1663)}, 19, doc. II.
During April of that year, he was fortuitously appointed to decorate the dome of the Madonna del Fuoco chapel in the Cathedral of Forlì. Commissioned by the organization of vestrymen (fabbriceri) in charge of this space, he was to complete two enormous canvases (quadroni) – devoted respectively to the glories of the Forlivese patron saints Valeriano and Mercuriale – that would decorate the drum of the dome, as well as to paint the dome itself with the “Assumption of the most Holy Virgin.”\textsuperscript{78} However, none of these assignments were carried out to their intended end: neither of

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., 23-24: “L’asumpzione della santissima Madonna, una Gloria d’angeli con Dio padre omnipotente nostro signore con altre figure stimate necessarie.” The English translation is from Salomon, The Art of Guido Cagnacci, 56.
the *quadroni* followed the pictorial guidelines of the *fabbriceri*, and Cagnacci left Forlì before even starting his decoration of the dome.

Following this peculiar misadventure, the painter’s next documented activity dates to October 1646 – when he was staying in Cesena – and September 1647 – the beginning of his one-year stint in Faenza. While staying in this second locale, it seems that Cagnacci had once again set his sights on making connections with the papacy. In Faenza, the painter was close with Monsignor Virgilio Spada (1596-1662), whose family had major ties to the recently elected Pope Innocent X (reigned 1644-55). This connection is revealed in a letter written by Cagnacci on October 22, 1647.79 Addressed to the Count Giuseppe Albacini, one of his main employers and confidants from this time, this document indicates that the painter was at that point in the process of completing two pictures: a *St. Andrew*80 for the Count himself and a *St. Peter* that, with the help of Monsignor Spada, he hoped to pass along to the current pope. The latter devotional painting was not the only work Cagnacci dedicated to the Spada family.

On December 30, 1647, the artist signed a contract committing to the creation of a marble cartouche that would frame an inscription honoring Virgilio’s brother, Cardinal Bernardino Spada (1594-1661). The painter had even provided a design for this project.81 However, much like the dome of the Madonna del Fuoco, this project never seems to have come to fruition. Aside from the original contract, there exists no evidence of

79 Ibid., 26.

80 This painting is usually identified with a *St. Andrew*, originally from the Albacini collection and now in the collection of Cassa di Risparmio of Cesena. For the picture, see Giulia Palloni, “Guido Cagnacci nel collezionismo forlivese,” in *Guido Cagnacci: Protagonista del Seicento tra Caravaggio e Guido Reni*, 343.

81 Pasini, *Guido Cagnacci pitore* (1601-1663), 16, doc. XVI. The design for this project was scrupulously detailed. The inscription honoring Cardinal Bernardino Spada was to appear on the façade of the local Palazzo Pubblico and would be adorned with the coats-of-arms of the Spada family, as well as the city of Faenza. The frame of this centerpiece was to be carved from Istrian stone or Verona marble. Upon completion, Cagnacci was to be paid 200 scudi.
Cagnacci’s prestigious commission: his drawing is nowhere to be found, and the inscription itself was either lost or, more likely, never carried out in the first place. Without copious documentation regarding this part of Cagnacci’s career, the cause of this series of misfortunes certainly appears murky. Nonetheless, his failure to acquire or maintain prestigious commissions primarily seems to be the result of a combination of two factors: the construction of a Seicento artist’s reputation and, by extension, his opportunities for employment were greatly shaped by his birthplace and his temperament. In Cagnacci’s case, neither of these attributes would have particularly boosted his chances of securing a consistent, prestigious patron, especially not the pope.

A painter’s place of birth, for one thing, could often make or break his chances of entering the favor of the papacy. Rome was a locale characterized by marked national rivalries, for, according to Francis Haskell, “the nobles whom formed the papal entourage still thought of themselves far more as Florentines, Bolognese, or Venetians rather than as Romans or Italians.”82 Because these individuals hoped to give their city of origin prestige, these allegiances greatly affected a painter’s chances of securing commissions. For instance, as the biographer Giovanni Battista Passeri (1610-79) recounts, after seeing some works by Pietro da Cortona (1596-1669), the Florentine Marcello Sacchetti (1586-1629), “asked [the artist] about himself and where he came from. And when he heard that [he] was from Cortona, he called him his compatriot, and put him up in his palace.”83 Being a native of the provincial hamlet Santarcangelo it was unlikely that Cagnacci would have felt any sort of genuine kinship with members of the

papal entourage, as Pietro da Cortona did with Sacchetti. Of course, the artist seems to have come close to winning the favor of the Romagna-based Spada family and reaping the benefits of their papal connections. However, this plan ostensibly never quite came to fruition.

This unfortunate outcome may have also resulted largely from the artist’s perceived temperament, which – by the time of his sojourn in Faenza – had surely tainted his reputation. This state of affairs is suggested by the contents of the aforementioned letter to Giuseppe Albacini. Cagnacci complains at the end of this note that “even though things have been written against me and by the people of Forlì – the truth will emerge, but I leave everything in the hands of God.” Due to the painter’s vague wording, it is unclear what exactly had been “written against” him or what “truth” he hoped would come to light. However, Cagnacci’s reference to the people of Forlì suggests that he was talking at least partially about the Madonna del Fuoco commission.

In going about this project, Cagnacci, as previously suggested, paid little heed to the instructions specified by his patrons. Now in the Forlì Pinacoteca Civica, his two quadroni were supposed to be completed by June 1643; however, about three months after this deadline, the painter had finished only a single painting that itself hardly ascribed to the iconographical program originally outlined by the fabbriceri. Upon being placed in the drum of the Madonna del Fuoco dome, the quadroni would have been viewed alongside two preexisting paintings: St. Sebastian (ca. 1636) by Francesco Albani (1578-1660) and St. Peter (ca. 1636) by Andrea Sacchi (1599-1661). Both of these pictures depict single figures, and Cagnacci’s patrons – knowing him to specialize in these sorts

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of compositions – hoped he would match their precedent by rendering two single saintly figures in the same size, shape, and format. However, his first canvas – *The Glory of St. Valeriano* (ca. 1642-44, plate IV) – resulted as an elaborate display not only featuring the titular saint, but also a page dressed in red, two soldiers, two horses, and, most strikingly, a sea of angelic creatures, with scandalously nude, androgynous bodies. For this reason, the *fabbriceri* drafted a second contract that proposed a new method of payment and agreed – with what may be construed perhaps as a tone of resignation – that the paintings were to be rendered “as Cagnacci will be best see fit.” Completed around a year later, the second picture, depicting the *Glory of St. Mercuriale* (ca. 1642-44, plate V), is thus very much cut from the same cloth as its counterpart; the angels, however (perhaps on the request of the disgruntled *fabbriceri*) have been rendered wearing clothes and with more “traditional” iconography, such as wings and musical instruments.

It is not so difficult to imagine a situation in which Cagnacci was fired from his most important project to date. This unfavorable outcome would explain why, before he could even finish the decoration of the Madonna del Fuoco, the painter left Forlì in disgrace. This departure may have also been linked to the arrival in Forlì of Guglielmo Gaddi, who was the governor of Rimini between 1641 and 1642 and may have brought news of the painter’s sordid affair with Teodora Stivivi mentioned in the introduction. Exacerbated by his tendency – rumored in the aforementioned letter of Giampietro Zanotti – to travel with young girls dressed as men, this incriminating past probably all but helped Cagnacci’s chances of maintaining a reputable public reputation in Romagna.

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IV. “Guido Baldo Canlassi da Bologna”: Pseudonyms as Signature

This unfortunate reputation considered, it is not at all surprising that Cagnacci would have, at various points in his career, seen it necessary to sign his works with inscriptions that assertively announced his capacity for artistic invention. Equally unsurprising is the fact that, after years of traveling and trying (and failing) to attain patrons on account of his ostensibly infamous reputation, the painter would venture beyond his native region and settle in Venice. Cagnacci’s first documented appearance in this city dates to around 1649. Although the exact reasons behind this move are, as per usual, uncertain, some believe that the painter’s migration was supported by the Venetian branch of the Moratini family, who had supported him during his time in Forli. In any case, Seicento Venice would have been an appealing locale for a struggling artist like Cagnacci to get a fresh start.

The city boasted a dynamic market for art, as well as a rich collection of Cinquecento paintings from which up-and-coming artists could learn. According to a 1741 letter written by Giambattista Costa, Cagnacci himself went to Venice in the hopes of studying “the most famous paintings by Titian, by Veronese, and by Tintoretto.” The locale must have also appealed to Cagnacci for its liberal cultural and social climate.

In migrating to Venice, Salomon claims that the painter was moving away from a world firmly rooted under papal authority and effectively run by ecclesiastical powers to a secular republic that took pride in its

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86 Linda Borean, “Cagnacci e il collezionismo a Venezia tra Sei e Settecento,” in Guido Cagnacci: Protagonista del Seicento tra Caravaggio e Reni, 89. The Moratini family was responsible for commissioning Cagnacci’s St. Anthony of Padua Preaching in the Cathedral of Forli. In fact, the painting is inscribed with a signature that indicates their patronage.

detachment from Rome. The libertine tolerance of Venice had long been one of the city’s many attractions.\textsuperscript{88}

While living in the Venetian lagoon, the Cagnacci’s past relations with women such as Teodora Stivivi and Giovanna certainly would not have been subject to the maliciously critical scrutiny experienced in Romagna. (It is probably for this reason that, on arriving in Venice, the painter seems to have resumed old habits and lodged with Maddalena Fontanafredda, the supposed “giovanetta vestita da uomo.”). Thus finding himself far-removed from his native region and in a refreshingly liberal environment, the artist was, figuratively speaking, given a blank canvas on which to reinvent himself and refashion his ideal artistic identity.

A letter by Costa written on August 25, 1742 to Giampietro Zanotti reveals that Cagnacci took full advantage of these freeing circumstances. According to this document, Giovanni Pedroni— the uncle of Costa’s friend from Santarcangelo, Antonio Baldini— had traveled to Venice with his friend Niccolò Bartoli around 1650 with the intention of visiting Cagnacci. Upon arriving at his home, they asked some young pupils for the painter, identifying him as “Signor Guido Cagnacci from Santarcangelo.” Curiously, this group “answered that that was the house of Signor Canlassi, a painter from Bologna, and not Signor Cagnacci from Santarcangelo.” Yet, “as they were leaving, Guido returned home, having been out, and they recognized him for the real Cagnacci.”\textsuperscript{89}

\textsuperscript{88} Salomon, \textit{The Art of Guido Cagnacci}, 65.

\textsuperscript{89} Costa, \textit{Lettere varie, e documenti autentici intorno le opere e vero nome, cognomen e patria di Guido Cagnacci pittore}, 144-45: “In Vinegia per diporto intorno all’anno 1650, era in quell tempo cola il Pittore Guido, e avendo volute andare a salutarlo come paesano, tentarono molto a trovare la casa dove abitava, e dopo averla trovata, chieso del Sig. Guido Cagnacci da Santarcangelo, alcuni giovani di lui scolari risposero, che ivi abitava il Sig. Canlassi Pittore Bolognese, e non il Sig. Cagnacci da S. Arcangelo, ove credendo essi di aver preso sbaglio, mentre stavano per partirsi sorpigiunse Guido, che era fuori, e i riconobbero per il vero Cagnacci.” The English translation is from Salomon, \textit{The Art of Guido Cagnacci}, 64.
As this anecdote suggests, Cagnacci began experimenting at this time with new modes of self-presentation. Probably taking advantage of his distance from Romagna and, by extension, the tainted reputation with which he had come to be associated there, he seized his relocation to the lagoon as an opportunity to assume a new title – “Guido Baldo Canlassi da Bologna” – and essentially refashion his identity in the most explicit sense. As indicated in the article by Giancarla Periti cited earlier, the career of the renowned Emilian painter Antonio Allegri, better known as Correggio (1489-1534), exhibited a similarly bold case of self-naming. Although his true cognomen was Allegri, between 1517 and 1519 the artist inscribed several of his paintings with the Latinized name “Anton.[i]s Laet.[u]s.” Between, 1521 and 1524 the Italian form of this title, “Antonio Lieto di Correggio,” even began to appear in several official documents. Although this pseudonym has been interpreted, quite simply, as a transformation of the artist’s original cognomen “Allegri,” Periti argues that these assessments have largely ignored the fact that the Italian words “lieto” and “allegro” – which both technically translate to “merry” – had very specific connotations during the Cinquecento: while the former was associated with “the joy expressed in faces or bodily motions or, alternatively, as fertile soil,” the former was connected to “a jocular, active spirit.”

Correggio was likely aware of the nuances inherent in these forms of merriment, as well as the fact that “names could be perceived as comments on the essence of things and as having the power to impress themselves on the characters of those who bore them.” Periti maintains that the creation of the pseudonym “Laetus-Lieto” should thus be

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91 Ibid., 459.
interpreted as a conscious effort to fashion an identity that both characterized him as an individual and spoke to the nature of his artistic creation:

Within this context, a change of name suggests a change in identity and role. Allegri’s self-constructed identity… marked his status as a fully-fledged artist and the achievement of an artistic distinctiveness that he integrated into his art as an aspect of lietessa (merriment) to affect the beholder.  

Cagnacci’s pseudonym “Guido Baldo Canlassi da Bologna” evoked a similarly conscious process of personal reinvention. Each of its components carried significant and evocative value. The replacement of “Cagnacci” (“bad dogs”) with “Canlassi” likely marked the painter’s attempt to remove himself from his pejorative patronym and, thus, all the lewd, bestial connotations that might have tainted his self-presentation. Much like the term “inventor” in his painted signatures, the word “baldo” – meaning “bold” or “daring” – was probably included in his title as an assertive advertisement of his character as an individual, and his distinctiveness, as an artistic creator. Most intriguingly, Cagnacci’s decision to frame himself as an artist from Bologna reveals his desire to dissociate himself from his provincial origins. Despite the fact that he was presumably no longer in an area of Italy where papal authority and patronage reigned supreme, Venetian collectors, such as Giovanni Donato, had a taste for Emilian art. Branding himself as a Bolognese painter was, therefore, a shrewd choice on Cagnacci’s part as he sought to attain professional success. 

During his time in Venice, Cagnacci evidently sought to proliferate this newly fashioned identity. Although he did not mark any of his paintings with the pseudonym, the artist signed all of his letters from this period as “Guido Baldo Canlassi da Bologna.”

92 Ibid., 459-60.

93 Borean, “Cagnacci e il collezionismo a Venezia tra il Sei e Settecento,” 91.
Yet, his concerted efforts to separate himself from his origins seem not to have paid off. The aforementioned fake name of Correggio arises in paintings as well as civic records and thus appears to have “gone beyond its origin as a personal and artistic matter to become an identification that was publicly accepted.”\(^{94}\) Cagnacci’s pseudonym, by contrast, does not seem to have been accepted by the Venetian art market. The painter’s name, granted, does not appear in any civic documents from the time. However, some of Cagnacci’s paintings have been recorded in Venetian collections from the Seicento, and in these records he is always referred to by his real name. The previous discussion of Pietro Liberi and Marco Boschini (who, as mentioned, even harnessed the pejorative connotations of Cagnacci’s true title to deride the artist in *La Carta del navegar pittoresco*), his art was also did not receive unanimous acclaim. It was not until his invitation to Vienna (when Leopold I or Archduke Leopold Wilhelm perhaps perceived the painter as a Venetian artist) that Cagnacci’s self-promotion truly paid off.

**V. Conclusion: The Making of a Name**

Due to factors of reputation that were both in and out of his control, Guido Cagnacci’s career was marred by professional misfortune. Because he hailed from provincial Santarcangelo, there existed, from the time of his birth, a degree of separation between him and the most lucrative opportunities available in major cities like Bologna and Rome. Ironically accentuated by the lewd connotations of his patronym “Cagnacci,” his ostensibly wayward temperament, and his rumored affairs with young women (at least during his time in Romagna) certainly did not help his chances for employment.

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\(^{94}\) Periti, “From Allegri to Laetus-Lieto: The Shaping of Correggio’s Artistic Distinctiveness,” 459.
The artist’s two signing practices discussed in this chapter bespeak Cagnacci’s desire to refashion his public identity for the better.

With their invocations of *invenzione*, the inscriptions found on early works, such as the 1635 Santarcangelo altarpiece, and late works, such as *The Repentant Magdalene* manifest as constant attempts on the part of the painter to “speak” through his paintings and assertively announce his innovativeness as a creator to critics and potential patrons. Formed after he migrated to the more liberal environment of Venice, the pseudonym “Guido Baldo Canlassi da Bologna” represents a similarly assertive pursuit of tailored self-presentation, this time in the context of his quotidian existence. Together, these cases demonstrate that Cagnacci – in both his life and his works, as well as in a literal and figurative sense – sought to make a name for himself that countered the less-than-favorable aspects of his identity. In particular, he intended to brand himself as being a bold (“baldo”) painterly inventor who, despite his provincial origins, was representative of the illustrious lineage of Bolognese painters. As will be demonstrated, these intentions were given visual form in Cagnacci’s repetitive approach to composition, the subject of the chapter that follows.
CHAPTER 2

Cagnacci’s Aesthetic of Repetition

A style – that is, in the most basic sense of a painter’s recognizable idiom and/or idiosyncratic devices of creation – can be understood as a metaphorical signature, a property that, much like the inscriptions and pseudonyms analyzed in the previous chapter, asserts an artist’s individual identity and, to quote Nelson Goodman, has the potential to increase “the dimensions of our comprehension”\(^95\) of their works. Yet, because they exhibit such marked changes in maniera, the paintings of Guido Cagnacci hardly lend themselves to such orderly discernment. Of course, Cagnacci was not the only painter of his time whose career was marked by extreme shifts in manner. For instance, the so-called “divine” painter Guido Reni is typically associated with two or, at times, three distinct stages of style.

In his 1999 essay “Guido Reni’s Practice of Repeating Compositions,” D. Stephen Pepper describes the Bolognese painter’s stylistic evolution as a tripartite progression. Starting around 1615, Pepper argues, Reni typically painted his figures with marked contrast and relief modeling. Come 1628, however, the artist ostensibly began to render his human forms with subtler colors and an overall lighter tonality.\(^96\) This second style, the scholar claims, eventually gave way to the painter’s non-finito manner.

\(^95\) Goodman, “The Status of Style,” 811.

characterized by cool colors, a thin application of paint, and – as the appellation *non-finito* implies – a largely unfinished quality.\(^7\)

Despite recognizing these decisive shifts, Pepper nonetheless manages to see unity in Reni’s *oeuvre*. Although the painter’s manner evolved throughout the entirety of his career – transitioning primarily from a dark to light tonality – the format of his compositions remained more or less constant. Citing the artist’s two *St. Sebastians* – in the Capitoline Museum in Rome and the Palazzo Rosso in Genoa; two *Lucrezias* – both in private collections; three *St. Rochs* – in the Museo Capodimonte in Naples as well as in two private collections, and others, Pepper demonstrates that once Reni “arrived at [a] basic composition, he saw no reason to change it.”\(^8\) Especially when creating single-figure paintings of the same subject, he merely recycled the arrangement, postures, and expressions of figures from his earlier pictures.

Beyond connecting his otherwise stylistically disparate works with the appearance of identical figures and forms, this practice of repetition, according to Pepper, reflects Reni’s primary goal as an artist: to create supernatural images that evoke their mortal subjects’ acknowledgment of and submission to the will of an immortal, Divine Universe. According to this view, it is fair to posit that Reni saw each of his compositions as a template, “a mold or pattern from which he [could] produce as many replicas as he [wished],” while also uninhibitedly altering “the space, the light, the palette,  


\(^8\) Pepper, “Guido Reni’s Practice of Repeating Compositions,” 32.
and modeling” in which his repeated figures were to appear.” Ultimately giving rise to the aforementioned non-finito manner – a style which Pepper deems the greatest realization his artistic vision – these constant formal experiments enabled Reni to give rise to ethereal figures that would “make ‘real’ for the viewer the relationship between the Divine and the mortal.”

Unlike the works of Guido Reni – or, for that matter, the majority of his better-known contemporaries – Cagnacci’s diverse output has yet to be convincingly interpreted as a collectively evocative whole. As has now been sufficiently explained, modern and contemporary historians have largely characterized the painter on the basis of his late works which, in addition to boasting more consistent pictorial qualities, encompass lascivious subjects that seem to very neatly mirror the more sensuous aspects of his biography (such as his famed “giovanetta vestita da uomo”). Inspired by Pepper’s ability to reconcile Reni’s ever-changing œuvre with a cogent and unifying artistic vision, this chapter proposes a new conceptual constant pertinent to the understanding of Cagnacci’s complete works and manner. My discussion similarly centers on the artist’s approach to composition and, in this vein, wholly ascribes to a concept of style, not simply as a recognizable, involuntarily conceived pictorial idiom, but as a mechanical and intentioned way of working. I specifically maintain that each of Cagnacci’s pictures exhibits systemized tendencies of painterly repetition.

My definition and application of the term “repetition” has been greatly informed by Maria H. Loh’s 2004 essay “New and Improved: Repetition as Originality in Italian Baroque Practice.” As its title implies, this paper explores the role of repetition in

99 Ibid., 32.

100 Ibid., 49-50.
seventeenth-century art practice and theory, as well as its relationship to ideas of artistic originality in Seicento Italy. Loh begins her analysis by elucidating the affinity between repetition and its close relative, imitation. She defines the latter as a “general category of artistic creation” that involves the deliberate emulation of another painter’s works. She describes the former, in turn, as a “demonstrative species of imitation” by which certain recognizable “objects of imitation” – including style (maniera), themes (concetti), and/or details (figure) – are re-contextualized and assimilated into the logic of a new painting.

Although repetition was certainly not recognized by all seventeenth-century artists and theorists as a universal aesthetic – nor, to quote Loh, should it be construed as the “dominant mode of overgeneralized Baroque perception” – the presence of words such as mixture (misto), wit (acutezza), novelty (novità), theft (furto), and pastiche (pasticcio) in the writings of Early Modern authors – including Carlo Cesare Malvasia, Giovanni Pietro Bellori (1613-96), and Giovanni Battista Passeri – demonstrates that a specific group of educated seventeenth-century viewers certainly took pleasure in the reception of demonstrative, painterly repetition.

Exhibiting an ever-changing array of pictorial qualities, the paintings of Guido Cagnacci certainly may appear disjointed at first glance. Nonetheless, I demonstrate in this chapter that his works continually exhibit a purposeful aesthetic of repetition. I bolster this claim primarily through a consideration of the artist’s figures: always adapted to fit the compositions in which they appear via a clever sort of painterly translation, his

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102 Ibid., 478.

103 Ibid., 477.

104 Ibid.
human forms consistently mimic those of his better-known Seicento contemporaries or ascribe to a figural typology of his own design. A closer examination of this predilection for both emulative and self-referential repetition not only allows one to frame Cagnacci’s disparate works into a more unified whole, but also offers a new lens through which his maniera, as well as the artistic intentions explored in the previous chapter, can be better understood.

I. The Earliest Repetitions: 1620-35

The grounds for Cagnacci’s aesthetic of repetition can be observed even in his earliest paintings, completed throughout the 1620s and ’30s. During these years, Cagnacci was primarily active in his native region of Romagna and was commissioned, above all, to complete religious works for local patrons. In the broader context of the painter’s discordant oeuvre, these canvases in themselves display exceptionally erratic shifts in style. Pictures such as the Saludecio St. Sixtus II (ca. 1628, fig. 15) display bright tones and rapid strokes. However, others, such as the aforementioned Santarcangelo altarpiece of St. Joseph, the Christ Child, and St. Eligius (ca. 1635, fig. 12, plate II), are more tenebrous with harsh gradations of light and shadow.

This state of affairs seems symptomatic of Cagnacci’s wandering artistic eye. According to Pier Giorgio Pasini, the early years of his career amounted to an “intense artistic and psychological quest” during which he encountered a wide array of painterly styles from which to derive inspiration. In this period, Cagnacci was ostensibly connected to a variety of painters from the provinces of Marche and his native Romagna, including Giovan Francesco Guerrieri (1589-1657), Cristoforo Serra (1600-

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105 Pasini, Guido Cagnacci pittore (1601-1663), 147.
89), and Giovan Francesco Nagli (1615-72), or Centino as he is more often called.\textsuperscript{106} As mentioned, the artist had also spent five years studying painting in Bologna and Rome. All these encounters doubtlessly affected the young painter to some degree. Pasini notes, for instance, that the young Cagnacci seems to have eagerly engaged with his painterly predecessors from Marche.\textsuperscript{107} However, his experiences beyond the provinces seem to have had the greatest impact on his manner.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Guido Cagnacci, \textit{St. Sixtus II}, ca. 1628, oil on canvas, 240 x 142 cm, Museo del Beato Amato, Saludecio.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{106} For discussions of these painters, their works, and overall contributions to the climate of seventeenth-century Italian art-making, see Angelo Mazza and Pier Giorgio Pasini, \textit{Seicento Inquieto. Arte e cultura a Rimini} (Milan and Rimini: Federico Motta Editore and Fondazione di Cassa di Risparmio di Rimini, 2004), 124-33.

\textsuperscript{107} Pasini, \textit{Guido Cagnacci pittore (1601-1663)}, 148.
Little is known of the period Cagnacci spent in Bologna, but various art historians affirm that the then teenage artist traveled to the city to attend the Accademia degli Incamminati established by the three Carracci cousins. In particular, many believe him to have been one the last students of the elder Ludovico. As mentioned, Cagnacci also had ties in Rome to the painter Guercino – who hosted him at his home on the Via Paolina – as well as the Caravaggisti. According to Pasini, it was due to the influence of these painters and particularly their predilection for naturalism, that Cagnacci’s early works – despite their overarching qualitative divergences – have come to be characterized by “their devotional austerity as well as their impassioned investigations of the natural, their lively luminism, and their rich elaboration of the picture in itself as something solid and essential, vibrant and attentive to the truth.”

Perhaps the product of the artist’s supposed inability to render figures without a live model, the grounding naturalism in these works seems to have continued to pervade Cagnacci’s output, forming a crucial part of the painterly idiom in his early, as well as his late works. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the artist’s reputation was largely staked on his tendency to paint naturalistically. According to one

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108 Ibid., 146: “la loro austerità devozionale, quanto per l’appassionata indagine naturalistica, per il vivace e per la ricca elaborazione della pittura in se stessa, solida ed essenziale, vibrante e aderente al vero.” Pasini writes that the presence of these qualities in the early works of Cagnacci indicates that he was less connected to the artistic culture of his native region than to those of Bologna and Rome.

109 Ibid., 26: I refer here to a statement in a letter written by Cagnacci on September 4, 1674 to the Count Giuseppe Albacini. In this document, the painter assures Albacini that he will receive a painting (thought to be the 1647 Madonna della Rosa) “because at the moment the weather is fine and so it will be easier to undress the child that I need to paint for your picture, and when the cold weather comes it will be impossible to undress him as children are tender and suffer much.” (“perché adesso è un poco bon tempo meglio si potrà spogliare il putto da farsi nel suo quadro per che come viene il freddo no si può spogliare per essere i puttini teneri e patischono assai.” The English translation is from Salomon, The Art of Guido Cagnacci, 62.
Bolognese poet, Cagnacci was an excellent “veristà” (realist), and Giambattista Costa’s correspondent Francesco Algarotti once proclaimed him “a great naturalist.” In his *Microcosmo della pittura* (1657), Francesco Scannelli (1616-63) similarly expressed that the artist, “a painter of truly good manner but too much attached to the natural rather than to the necessary fundaments of the common practice, was in fact the last of the school Ludovico Carracci.”

The connection to Carracci proposed by Scannelli is crucial to note: Cagnacci’s early travels – to Bologna in particular – seem to have not only inspired his predilection for naturalism, but also provided him with his first objects of painterly repetition. In many of his early paintings, Cagnacci regularly modeled the postures of his figures after those found in the works of his more accomplished Seicento contemporaries, especially his purported master Ludovico. This practice is exemplified in his 1620-25 altarpiece devoted to the *Virgin and Child with Saints Sebastian, Roch, and Hyacinth* (fig. 16). Located on the high altar of the Oratory of San Rocco in Montegridolfo, this juvenile work includes a total of five figures, plus a dog at the feet of St. Roch in the center. Cagnacci’s rendering of St. Sebastian, however, stands out as especially notable, for the saint’s posture seems to be an exact quote of Carracci’s single-figure painting of *St. Sebastian* (ca. 1599, fig. 17), completed some twenty years earlier.


In conceiving his contemporaneous picture of the *Calling of Saint Matthew* (ca. 1620-25, fig. 18), the young painter seems to have borrowed from his Bolognese master once again. Derived from a well-known passage in the Gospel of Saint Matthew (Matthew 9:9),\(^{113}\) the subject of this altarpiece was depicted by a wide variety of painters throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Between 1605 and 1607, Ludovico Carracci completed his own version of the scene for the church of Santa Maria della Pietà in Bologna (fig. 19). The composition shows Christ as a towering, regal figure; he stands at the left of the pictorial space, summoning Matthew effortlessly with the lax extension of his hand. An equally monumental, but far more subservient figure, Matthew responds to Christ’s spiritual invocation on the right with a deep, deferential bow. This pair of postures reappears in Cagnacci’s interpretation of the *Calling of Saint Matthew*. At the very center of the picture, one finds an upright, beckoning Christ and a deferential Matthew, both of whom are undoubtedly related to those found in Ludovico’s painting.

Although both of these pictures demonstrate the young Cagnacci’s knowledge of his teacher’s work, it is important to note that he has by no means mindlessly mimicked or plagiarized the latter’s creations. Cagnacci’s repetition of Carracci’s motifs manifests as a clever act of painterly translation in which he transforms the master’s figures into what Salomon calls “his own characteristic idiom;”\(^{114}\) this idiom, I maintain, is largely characterized by the authentic, down-to-earth naturalism described previously. The “balletic” pose of the Montegridolfo St. Sebastian may allude to that of Ludovico’s form;

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\(^{113}\) This passage recounts that “as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose and followed him.” Although the compositions of both Ludovico Carracci and Guido Cagnacci evoke the blind, subservient faith demonstrated by Matthew in this passage, by situating his pair in a naturalistic customs office as opposed to a majestic site of ancient ruins Cagnacci interprets the scene far more literally.

however, Cagnacci has rendered his own figures with softer, more luminous flesh, as well as a peculiarly effeminate, vulnerable quality. In his *Calling of Saint Matthew*, Cagnacci likewise transplanted the postures of Ludovico’s earlier painting into an entirely different environment. While Carracci had situated his statuesque Christ and Matthew in an immense landscape filled with ancient ruins and a sizeable crowd of onlookers, Cagnacci represented his figures on a more modest scale, transplanting them in a shadowy customs office. He rendered them with scrupulous naturalism, as well as the bold colors, sharp *chiaroscuro*, and heavy impasto characteristic of many of his earlier canvases.

![Figure 16. Guido Cagnacci, The Virgin and Child with Saints, Sebastian, Roch, and Hyacinth, ca. 1620-25, oil on canvas, 320 x 190 cm, San Rocco, Montegridolfo.](image1)

![Figure 17. Ludovico Carracci (1555-1619), St. Sebastian, ca. 1599, oil on canvas, 200 x 131 cm, Fondazione Ettore Pomarici Santomasi, Gravina di Puglia.](image2)
The characters in Cagnacci’s oeuvre referenced thus far embody not only this process of emulation, but also a second sort of repetitive practice that, altogether, seems to have been far less dependent on the painter’s predecessors and contemporaries. With his pale, glowing skin, slender frame, oval-shaped face, and curly red hair, the Montegridolfo St. Sebastian looks undeniably similar to St. Roch to his right, who, though bearded, has red hair, bright white skin, and a delicate oval face. The forms of Christ and St. Matthew in the Calling of Saint Matthew also seem to share a physiognomy with these two saintly characters. Aside from their costumes and their contrasting, Carracci-inspired postures, the pair appears identical: like Sebastian and Roch, they have shoulder-length red hair, slender bodies, and pale oval faces (which in this case are covered by thin layers of facial hair). Salomon interprets the likeness of these two figures...
as a sort of metaphor, writing that “it is as if by joining Christ and abandoning his job Matthew has become another Christ.” In contrast, I maintain that this figural analogy reveals more about Cagnacci’s general approach to composition than about his poetic interpretation of a biblical narrative.

The pale, red-haired character that appears as saints Sebastian, Roch, Matthew, and even Christ emerges on various occasions throughout the painter’s early oeuvre. He appears, for instance, as the rightmost figure flanking St. Anthony in the 1625 *St. Anthony Abbot and Two Saints* (fig. 20). He also poses as *St. Francis* in a single-figure composition completed around 1635; the upturned gaze, posture, and facial features of the represented saint are, in turn, very close to those of St. Eligius in the aforementioned Santarcangelo altarpiece (fig. 12, plate II), completed in the same year. These examples suggest that, in addition to demonstratively repeating the motifs of his predecessors (in this case Ludovico Carracci), Cagnacci recycled a figural typology (presumably derived from life drawing) both in disparate pictures and within a single pictorial space. In observing his pictures from the 1620s and ’30s, it seems that the painter had, in fact, built up an index of individual characters (even beyond the red-haired man described here) on which he would base the features of all the human forms in his multi-figure compositions.

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115 Ibid., 23.
Cagnacci’s *Virgin and Child with Three Carmelite Saints* (ca. 1630, plate I), probably the most ambitious picture of his early career, demonstrates, once again, this tendency of self-referential repetition. Completed for the Riminese church of San Giovanni Battista, the large canvas contains more characters than any other work conceived by the painter during the 1620s and ’30s. At the top of the composition, the Virgin and Child appear to St. Andrea Corsini. At the bottom, St. Teresa is visited by two angels – one of whom pierces her heart – and Maria Maddalena de’ Pazzi holds a piece of Eucharistic bread as a third angel gently places a crown of thorns on her head. All dressed in red robes and characterized, furthermore, by the pale, oval faces that recur so frequently in Cagnacci’s
earliest paintings, these three angels manifest as identically androgynous creatures whose facial features appear analogous, in turn, to those of the Virgin and St. Andrea of Corsini. In a similar vein, the figures of the female saints Teresa and Maria Maddalena wear the same cascading habits, hold their hands in nearly consonant gestures, and display the same facial features. In observing these various figural analogies, one can certainly imagine Cagnacci rendering one (or perhaps two) model(s) in various positions whom he would – through the use of distinct costumes and other such adornments – ultimately adapt to represent distinct devotional figures.

II. Cagnacci’s *Penitent Magdalene* (1637) and the Influence of Guido Reni

During the mid-1630s, Cagnacci suddenly embarked on what has been recognized as an entirely new stylistic trajectory. On December 6, 1637, a convent of Benedictine nuns linked to the small church of Santa Maria Maddalena in Urbania paid Cagnacci a sum of 56 scudi to paint the *Penitent Magdalene* (fig. 21, plate II). The image that has been connected to this commission presents a single figure – Mary Magdalene – against a rocky outcrop. At least initially, this character appears entirely unrelated to the saintly figures rendered before her. In 1635, only two years prior to the completion of the Urbania Magdalene, Cagnacci completed the Santarcangelo altarpiece of *St. Joseph, the Christ Child, and St. Eligius* now cited various times in this study (fig. 12, plate II).

This picture unfolds amidst a flat, nearly pitch-black backdrop. Understood to be the workshop of St. Joseph – the patron saint of carpentry – the depicted space is in fact lit only by a cloud containing the dove of the Holy Ghost. This glimmering mass bathes the painting’s cast of characters in an electric white light that makes them stand out harshly and starkly amidst their shadowy surroundings. This group of three appears
static, stony like sculptures; they seem distant not only from the viewer, but from each other. Despite sharing the same pictorial space, Cagnacci’s figures appear disjointed. On the left of the composition, St. Joseph leans toward the young Jesus in an attempt to train him as a carpenter; however, the child refuses to meet his gaze. Even more dissociated from this interaction, St. Eligius seems to occupy his own realm entirely: he stands resolutely on the right of the picture plane with his eyes directed toward the heavens.

Figure 21. Guido Cagnacci, *Penitent Magdalene*, ca. 1637, oil on canvas, 218 x 157 cm, Santa Maria Maddalena delle Benedettine, Urbania.
Unlike these characters, who appear altogether stiff and uneasy, the Urbania Magdalene has been rendered with soft, rosy flesh and, most strikingly, a palpable emotional power rivaled by no other figure in Cagnacci’s oeuvre except, perhaps, the two ecstatic female saints in the *Virgin and Child with Three Carmelite Saints*. She kneels subserviently before a makeshift wooden cross and looks up to heaven melodramatically, in a state of rapture and penitence. Captured in this pose with her mouth partially gaping and her upturned eyes nearly rolling back into her head, the saint looks strikingly erotic. Furthermore, she has been represented practically half-naked. Though she attempts modesty by concealing her breasts with her long swath of auburn hair, she appears to be covered just barely by a blue drapery and a creased, white shirt.

As mentioned, many historians view this painting as a turning point, a crucial moment in which Cagnacci’s “first fully recognizable painting style” manifests.\(^{116}\) Yet, despite its idiosyncrasy among the painter’s pictures of the 1620s and ’30s, I maintain that this canvas, in its practical conception, is undeniably kindred with the ones preceding it. Much like the altarpieces such as the Montegridolfo *Virgin and Child with Saints Sebastian, Roch, and Hyacinth* and the *Calling of Saint Matthew* – the Urbania Magdalene manifests as a site of emulative repetition, wherein the painter has evidently looked to the paintings of his Seicento counterparts as objects of imitation: the ostensible shift in style so prevalent in this painting was most likely inspired by the late paintings of Guido Reni.

Cagnacci’s connection to Reni – as with Ludovico Carracci – is altogether unclear. The artist’s period of training in Bologna and Rome certainly would have afforded him access to the works of many of his contemporaries, Guido Reni among

\(^{116}\) Ibid., 40.
them. By the 1630s – around the time Cagnacci was working on the *Penitent Magdalene* – Reni had also apparently sent altarpieces to towns in Romagna and Marche; an encounter with his output would have thus been possible even for a provincial painter. However, various Early Modern scholars suggest that the two artists had a more intimate bond. In his *Felsina pittrice* (1678), the Bolognese biographer Carlo Cesare Malvasia claims that Cagnacci was one of Reni’s pupils who “followed his manner and always sought to match him.” In a letter written to the seventeenth-century painter Giuseppe Ghezzi (1634-1721), the art collector Padre Sebastiano Resta similarly suggested that Cagnacci treated Reni as a “master and confidant.”

Whatever the nature of their relationship, Cagnacci’s works from the late 1630s onward are evidently indebted to Reni’s example. In the case of the *Penitent Magdalene*, the painter was undoubtedly influenced by the qualities of his contemporary’s late *oeuvre*. Encompassing both the second and *non-finito* manners touched on at the outset of this chapter, this stage of artistic creation encompasses tendencies that differed markedly from those connected with his early output. Between 1615 and the mid-1620s – the period recognized as the first phase of his career – Reni developed the majority of his compositions by attentively absorbing the formal precedents of antique sculpture, as well as the pictures of masters such as Raphael (1483-1520), the three Carracci, and even Caravaggio; this practice typically endowed his works with an uncanny sense of dynamism, fueled by bold colors, bright brushwork, powerful expression, and prominent

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117 Pasini, *Guido Cagnacci pittore (1601-1663)*, 150. Pasini writes that “l’incontro con Reni è inevitabile.”

118 Carlo Cesare Malvasia, *Felsina pittrice, vite de’ pittori bolognesi*, vol. 2, (Bologna, 1678), 58: “Seguirono la sua maniera, o cercarono accostarvisi sempre, non solo suoi allievi, come il Pesarese, il Gessi, il Sementi, il Cagnacci, il Lanfranchi e simili, ma que’ d’altr’ città, di contrarie anco scuole…”

relief and *chiaroscuro*. Starting around 1628, however, this robustness began to give way to the softer, more languid quality characteristic of his late *maniera*. According to Malvasia, this updated style exhibited a subtler tonality, as well as an unparalleled sense of clarity (*chiarezza*) and brightness. These changes apparently reflect how Reni, “contrary to the good masters of the past dared to use an immoderate quantity of white lead.” Notably, Malvasia also observed in these late works, “certain light greys and pale blues mixed with half-tints and flesh tones, a palette that was used perhaps too boldly by Cagnacci.” Although it is unclear which work (or works) inspired this critical comment, the style exhibited in Cagnacci’s *Penitent Magdalene* certainly corresponds to the biographer’s observations. Subscribing to what Pasini calls “the gray manner of Reni,” the ground of the painting has been built up with an amalgamation of blues, greys, and ochres that, in certain places, show through the subject’s luminous flesh. The iconographical program in this work also appears undeniably “Renian.”

In the wake of the Council of Trent (1545-63), Mary Magdalene became the foremost saintly paradigm for the sacrament of penance. Her importance stemmed from the fact that she had been forgiven by Christ and subsequently experienced several special favors. (For instance, she was the first to learn of the Resurrection.) The saint’s formerly negative reputation as a prostitute also rendered her an approachable figure with whom a sinful person could identify. Responding to this rise in popularity, post-Tridentine painters – working from 1600 onward – painted the Magdalene often. The

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121 Ibid., 58: “Certì lividetti e azzurrini mescolati fra le mezze tinte e fra e carnagioni; come poi forse troppo arditamente colle anche usar il Cagnacci.” The English translation is from Salomon, *The Art of Guido Cagnacci*, 40.

122 Pasini, *Guido Cagnacci pittore (1601-1663)*, 150: “… l’adesione alla maniera grigia di Reni.”
saint who inspired these artists was, in reality, a composite of three characters. The name “Magdalene” was associated, on the one hand, with the unnamed prostitute described in Luke 7:36-50 who, at the feet of Christ, was ultimately absolved of her sins. The saint was also linked to a woman described in the Gospels called Mary, who came from the small village of Magdala, ministered to Jesus, was present at his Crucifixion and burial, and finally encountered the resurrected Christ in the “Noli me tangere” scene. Probably linked most closely with the subject of Cagnacci’s *The Repentant Magdalene* (ca. 1660-63, fig. 1, plate VI), the third of these characters was Mary of Bethany, who was the sister of Martha and Lazarus.\(^\text{123}\)

Reni, who depicted the Magdalene repeatedly throughout his career, ostensibly did not pay much heed to the details of these various narratives. To quote Richard Spear, the painter most often depicted the saint alone, stressing “the essentials of penance through their emotional state, and frequent symbols of vanity (skull), conversion/sacrifice (Crucifix), mortification (grotto or cave, roots as good), and weeping (eyes, hands).”\(^\text{124}\) Nonetheless, his imagery seems to be partially inspired by the account featured in Luke 7:36-50 in which Mary, after turning to Jesus, kissed his feet, washed them with her tears, dried them with her hair, and was ultimately absolved of her sins. These emotionally charged events established the saint’s tears and hair as attributes that evoked her deeply contrite attitude and devotion to Christ. Thanks to the musings of Early Modern writers such as Paolo Pino (1534-65), these features also came to be associated in the Seicento with ideas of sin, submission, and sexual attraction. Reni, perhaps responding to these many layers of suggestion, rendered the majority of his


\(^{124}\) Ibid., 165-66.
Magdalenes with tears in their eyes and flowing tresses of hair. As a sign of their modesty and contrition, they were also typically depicted with one or both hands over their breasts. According to Spear, the features of these weeping figures were based on those of \textit{Niobe} (ca. 330-250 BC, fig. 22), an antique statue that the German eighteenth-century critic Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-68) saw as transcending human beauty even in its beseeching sorrow.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 175.}

In fact, Reni used the sculpted form as a model for many of his grieving human forms, including the crouching mother in the foreground of his \textit{Massacre of Innocents} (ca. 1611, fig. 23). We see many of these qualities intersect in the Urbania \textit{Penitent Magdalene}. Cagnacci depicted his subject more or less suspended from the narratives with which the saint had come to be associated in the Seicento. Much like Reni, he has simply represented her with attributes and emotions that symbolize her emphatic state of contrition and sacrifice. In a pose not unlike the sorrowful woman in Reni’s \textit{Massacre of...
the Innocents, Cagnacci’s figure kneels piously at the foot of a wooden cross, weeping in a melodramatic display of penance. She covers her breasts with her long mane of hair as well as delicately crossed hands – two conjoined gestures that tread ambiguously between modesty and sensuality.

![Image](image.jpg)

**Figure 23.** Detail from Guido Reni, *Massacre of the Innocents*, ca. 1611, oil on canvas 268 x 170 cm, Pinacoteca Nazionale, Bologna.

The combination of these features render this figure similar to many of Reni’s representations of this saint: with her cascading blue dress and white shirt, she specifically recalls his half-figure of *St. Mary Magdalene* (ca. 1627-28, fig. 24) at the Musée des Beaux Arts in Quimper. Yet, similarly to his repetitions of Ludovico Carracci, Cagnacci’s creation does not manifest as mere mimesis; he rather translates the master’s
style and iconography into his own pictorial language that is rooted in a palpable, grounding, and, this time, carnally erotic naturalism.

The majority of Reni’s Magdalenes appear with their breasts or, at the very least, a great deal of skin exposed. In most other canvases depicting the saint – such as Titian’s rendering in the Palazzo Pitti (ca. 1531, fig. 25) – this detail would be construed as sensual and suggestive. Reni’s figures, however, do not appear as objects of sexual desire. As with most of his depictions of feminine subjects, the artist’s partially nude Magdalenes demonstrate his inadequate grasp of the female anatomy: their breasts, if shown, are typically flat and/or oddly located, and their bodies, to borrow Spear’s words, generally appear “like putty, without skeletal underpinnings.” In turn, they do not seem
real or tangible enough to evoke true carnal desire. Their respective states of would-be erotic ecstasy result as introspective acts of mediation, which are altogether “sacred rather than profane in their purity, modesty and retreat from physical love, whether that be explicit in the flesh or implicit through spiritual ravishment.”

Figure 25. Titian, *Mary Magdalene*, ca. 1531, oil on canvas, 85 x 68 cm, Palazzo Pitti, Florence.

Although she possesses a sort of ethereal beauty, Cagnacci’s Urbania Magdalene, contrastingly, appears grounded in a very concrete bodily reality. As described by Francesco Arcangeli, she is “only ecstatic in a physical [rather than spiritual] ecstasy… to the point that those tears in her eyes given an almost odious emphasis to her

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126 Spear, The “Divine” Guido: Religion, Sex, Money, and Art in the World of Guido Reni, 77. According to Spear, Reni’s male nudes were typically rendered with immense anatomical specificity, undoubtedly the product of “assiduous life drawing.” Reni’s women, on the other hand, appear cartilaginous, like “putty,” and “seem to want the materiality that results from familiarity, if not with a model then with a lover or wife.” The inaccuracy of his representations is believed to have resulted from the painter’s fear of women that ultimately repelled him from any sort of contact with the female body.
penitence.”  

Likely the product of the painter’s reliance on live models, the saint has been represented with tangibly soft and supple flesh, flush cheeks, and an intensely authentic air of grief. If one observes her with enough concentration, one can almost hear this Magdalene sobbing, and breathing heavily, agitatedly, rapturously.

III. Translating the Language of Reni: Cagnacci’s Lascivious Half-Figures

Following the creation of the *Penitent Magdalene*, the manner and themes exhibited in Reni’s canvases seem to have continued to impact a great portion of Cagnacci’s late output. His most “Renian” canvases are his famous half-figures. As suggested in the previous chapter, these sorts of pictures are commonly associated with Cagnacci’s sojourn in Venice. However, it is actually believed that the painter first began creating them before this period; his earliest are a dramatic rendering of the Roman heroine *Lucretia* (ca. 1640, fig. 26) – completed at the end of a second stay in Bologna – as well as the *Cleopatra* (ca. 1645-55, fig. 3, plate VI) now exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which was probably created at the end of the painter’s stay in Forlì. Throughout his career, Reni designed at least ten different representations of these two heroines.  

They were probably painted for the open market (rather than specific patrons) and sold at high

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128 Spear, *The “Divine” Guido: Religion, Sex, Money, and Art in the World of Guido Reni*, 84. According to Spear, this number is based only on extant works and disregards the many variants of each composition, some of which were by Reni himself, while others were done by pupils in his studio or other imitators.
demand. Yet, despite their widespread popularity, these subjects were actually scarcely painted by Reni’s contemporaries.\(^{129}\)

One of the only other major painters of Reni’s generation to depict both subjects was Guercino, with whom Cagnacci lived during his brief sojourn in Rome (1622-23). Cagnacci’s half-figures were evidently inspired by the paintings of both of these masters. The 1640 *Lucretia* is particularly reminiscent of Reni’s rendering of the same character from 1626 (fig. 27), as well as Guercino’s *Cleopatra* from 1639 (fig. 28). In each of these

\(^{129}\) Ibid., 35. As Spear explains, none of Reni’s three known masters (Denis Calvaert, Annibale Carracci, and Ludovico Carracci) painted these subjects. Moving his discussion to Reni’s own generation of artists, he continues, “There is neither a *Cleopatra* nor a *Lucretia* by Albani. Domenichino never painted Cleopatra. He started, but did not complete just one Lucretia.”
compositions, the heroine is represented alone, emerging with exposed breasts from a mass of dark, cascading curtains. Wearing similar dresses of flowing orange and white fabric, all of these figures are shown either on the brink or in the wake of committing suicide (by dagger, in the case of Lucretia, and by asp bite in the case of Cleopatra); they appear not unlike actresses melodramatically performing their own tragic deaths.

Despite the theatrical spirit shared by this group of canvases, Guercino endows his figure with a unique gravitas. Unlike the *Lucretias* of Reni and Cagnacci who appear, in some way or another, to have lost themselves in their states of ecstatic suffering, this *Cleopatra* appears entirely self-possessed. To quote Spear, “the woman is alert, or pre-ecstatic, in no way outside her body or mind. Sexually attractive and in full control, she
responds fearfully to the imminent bite [of the serpent] with enlarged, erect nipples.”

Yet, not even the canvases of Cagnacci and Reni are entirely kindred. In Cagnacci’s
Lucretia, one can clearly observe the sort of naturalistic painterly translation enacted in
the Penitent Magdalen. Reni’s heroine unequivocally exhibits an eroticism that, much like
his depictions of Mary Magdalen, is derived not from the woman’s outward physicality,
but rather her internally felt “vulnerability,” “the pending plunge of a cold sharp dagger
into pale unblemished flesh.” Cagnacci’s figure, by contrast, is captured in a much
more tangible and carnally attractive rapture. Much like the Urbania Magdalen, she
exhibits “a sensual and ingeniously provocative naturalism” that could have only
resulted from the intimate observation of life.

IV. Late Self-Referentiality: The Proliferation of a Figural Typology

When it came to his half-figures especially, Cagnacci tended to recycle his
compositions. The 1640 Lucretia, for instance, is associated with four additional copies.
Although these iterations show the heroine in the moment immediately after (rather than
immediately before) she stabs her heart and, furthermore, seem to be of a lower quality
than the 1640 canvas, they display practically identical formats. In a similar vein, the
1645 Cleopatra is associated with several copies whose only differences are the size of the
canvas, the costume worn by each figure, and the background. For example, a larger

130 Ibid., 86
131 Ibid., 85.
132 Pasini, Le donne del Cagnacci, 27.
133 For these copies see Pasini, Guido Cagnacci pittore (1601-1663), 234-35, cat. 38.
version in the Collezioni Comunali d’Arte in Bologna portrays the same figure simply wearing a darker, burgundy outfit and set against a gray curtain.\(^{134}\)

The recurrence of these formats certainly recalls Guido Reni’s predilection for repeating compositions discussed at the beginning of this chapter. In this sense, the many iterations of Cagnacci’s half-figures could be viewed collectively as the emulation of another painter’s own repetitive practice. Yet, Cagnacci’s recycling of compositions was probably driven more by the necessity to survive a demanding art market than by the desire to emulate a painterly predecessor. This would have especially been the case while the painter was working in Venice, for at this point in his career Cagnacci’s half-figures would have been put in direct competition with artists – such as Girolamo Forabosco (1605-79), Sebastiano Mazzoni (1611-78), and of course Pietro Liberi – who were creating similarly salacious pictures for mostly private clientele.\(^{135}\)

In any case, by giving rise to various iterations of his works, Cagnacci established a marked and recognizable figural typology – not unlike the pale-faced, red-haired character of his earliest compositions – that has since come to be recognized as his signature. Although each is dressed in costumes specific to certain mythological or historical subjects and, in some cases, is set against distinct backgrounds, they all appear with the same facial features and naturalistic virgin bodies and are positioned in some kind of sensual and/or ecstatic posture. This sort of repetition is exemplified not only by Cagnacci’s renderings of heroines like Cleopatra and Lucretia, but also by his paintings of the allegory of human life, a subject that seems to have been his specialty. During his

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\(^{134}\) Salomon, *The Art of Guido Cagnacci*, 66. As discussed in the previous chapter, the dating and attribution of Cagnacci’s half-figures is complicated. None, in fact, are firmly dated. It has been suggested, for instance, that the Bologna Cleopatra was an earlier autograph version painted during the 1630s that was then replicated either in Forlì or Venice. However, others – noting the painting’s weaker quality relative to the Forlì canvases – believe it to be a later version, possibly by Cagnacci’s Venetian workshop.

\(^{135}\) Ibid., 66.
Venetian years (1649-58), Cagnacci ostensibly devoted several canvases to this theme, all of which fit the mold of one or two compositional prototypes. Represented by a pair of signed pictures located respectively in the Shanks Collection in Andalusia, Pennsylvania (ca. 1655, fig. 29) and the Fondazione Cavallini Sgarbi in Ferrara (ca. 1655, fig. 30), both of these variations depict identical nude women whose soft, virginal bodies emerge from a stark, black abyss of a background.

In the Andalusia canvas, the figure is shown from the waist up. Gazing dreamily into the distance, she rests her left arm on a rock marked by Cagnacci’s signature (GUIDO CAGNAC[CI]) and intimately clutches a skull and snuffed candle. Her right hand, meanwhile, clasps a pink rose and a dandelion. These objects, to quote Salomon, collectively symbolize “fleeting life” – “the delicate flower destined to whither; the
dandelion, which, with a single breath, can be dispersed in the air; and the candle recently extinguished.” In a similar vein, the skull serves to highlight “the inevitable passing of time.” In the Ferrara picture, this same nude has been rendered more frontally and is shown down to her thighs. Though she is represented alongside many of the same symbols present in the Andalusia iteration (the dandelion, the rose, the snuffed candle and the skull all make an appearance), Cagnacci has added two more objects to the scene, which also evoke the theme of time: the Ferrara allegory holds in her left hand an empty hour glass and looks up ecstatically to a hovering *ouroboros* – a serpent biting its tail – symbolizing eternity.

Throughout his career, Cagnacci also ostensibly repeated compositions of full-length subjects, such as his *St. Mustiola* (ca. 1640). The subject of this arresting picture was an early Christian noblewoman who was whipped to death due to her faith. Throughout the seventeenth century, she was venerated by a cult in the Tuscan city of Chiusi, as well as a few other small towns throughout Romagna, but she was an altogether rare subject for painters of the time. Cagnacci, nonetheless, completed a picture of the saint around 1640, at which point he was apparently living in the Bolognese parish of San Tommaso del Mercato. The original canvas is apparently lost; however, it has been linked with a painting of the same subject in Montpellier (fig. 31) – thought to be a copy – as well as two other versions – one in the Royal Albert Museum

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136 Ibid., 72.

137 Ibid., 72.

138 On 13 August 1640, Cagnacci was living at the Bolognese parish of San Tommaso del Mercato and countersigned as a witness (“Guidone Cagnati ariminesc pittore”) to the inventory of the collection of Giulio Cesare Conventi (1577-1640), a sculptor who had recently died. This collection included three paintings by Cagnacci himself: a *St. Agatha* without a frame, a Magdalene half-figure in a white frame, and the original *St. Mustiola*, also in a white frame. For more on this document, see Raffaella Morselli, “Episodi di collezionismo,” in *Guido Cagnacci*, 188-94.
in Exeter and one in a private collection in Vienna. These canvases, much like Cagnacci’s half-figures, all bear an identical format. In each, St. Mustiola – who is either dead or slowly dying – reclines in an erotic sort of ecstasy. Covered just barely by a blue sheet adorned with gold, her bright body contrasts starkly with the dark floor on which she lays. Amidst this disturbingly stunning display, the saint’s violent death is alluded to by the whip strewn beside her and the few drops of blood stippled, almost delicately, on her otherwise unblemished flesh.

These narrative details, however, merely take on a secondary importance to the astonishing beauty of St. Mustiola’s body, which, it is crucial to note, manifests in the broader context of Cagnacci’s oeuvre as a rather conspicuous object of repetition. A red chalk drawing now located in the Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes in Santiago (fig. 32) depicts a female nude slumped in a similarly languid fashion on a pair of cushions with her head thrown back in shadow. Aside from slight differences in the position of the arms, legs, and head, this figures is nearly identical to Cagnacci’s St. Mustiolas. Originally belonging to an album assembled in the late seventeenth century by the painter Giorgio Bonola (1657-1700), the drawing cannot be connected with complete confidence to these paintings: Cagnacci’s identity as a draughtsman, after all, requires further study and the sheet itself does not even bear his signature. Furthermore, the sketch lacks attributes – such as a whip – that would associate the nude represented with the martyr in question. The only revealing details are two inscriptions in Bonola’s handwriting that – on account of an earlier attribution by the contemporary collector Padre Sebastiano Resta – link the sketch to Cagnacci’s hand and identify the subject as St. Mustiola.139

139 The inscription reads, “La S.a. Mustiola, il più bel quadro che abbia fatto Guido Cagnacci e che in Galleria della fu Regina di Svetia resiste al Correggio.” (“St. Mustiola, the most beautiful picture painted by Guido Cagnacci, and which in the gallery of the former queen of Sweden withstands even Correggio.”)
This inscription is followed by the second, also in Bonola’s handwriting: “Così io stimo S.R.” The initials “S.R.” refer to Padre Sebastiano Resta, the drawing’s original attributor. The English translation is from Salomon, The Art of Guido Cagnacci, 41.
The reclining posture in question also appears in compositions devoted to subjects beyond the martyrdom of St. Mustiola. One such picture is the 1640-45 *Assumption of the Magdalen* (fig. 33) located in the Schloss Schleissheim in Munich – which, significantly, has a replica in the Florentine Palazzo Pitti.

Figure 33. Guido Cagnacci, *Assumption of the Magdalen*, ca. 1640-45, oil on canvas, Schloss Schleissheim, Munich.

The Munich canvas (as well as its twin) represents two apparently symbiotic figures: a fully nude Mary Magdalene is hoisted by an angel through a blue sky that ultimately transforms into a swirling mass of golden clouds. Though the Magdalene is
the named subject of this scene, in the context of our current discussion of painterly repetition the body of the angel who supports her manifests as our primary point of interest. Rendered with bold foreshortening, this celestial creature reclines with its head thrown back into complete obscurity. Aside from differences in the arrangement of the arms, this posture is undoubtedly kindred with that of St. Mustiola. Significantly, the figure of Mary Magdalene also seems to be derived from the same stock pose. Emerging from beneath cascading blue and red draperies, the saint’s crossed legs mirror those of her angelic counterpart.

The composition in question encompasses self-referential repetition of various kinds. By repurposing the posture of his St. Mustiola to represent the body of a generic angel, Cagnacci cleverly quotes his own forms in very much the same way that he quoted those of Lodovico Carracci decades before. Observed side by side, the legs of the angel and the Magdalene present a moment of “balletic” internal repetition, of pictorial anaphora. As previously mentioned, this entire composition itself is an object of repetition. The recycling of postures and figural types observed in this work seems to have provided the foundation for the designs of many of the painter’s late multi-figure works. In many of the paintings completed during the last decades of his career – such as The Repentant Magdalene – Cagnacci appears to have constructed his compositions by filling his pictorial space with iterations of the same poses and figures. The most exhaustive example of this practice is found in the quadroni (plates IV and V) of his Forlì period. As mentioned in the previous chapter, both of these canvases were supposed to be single-figure depictions of the patron saints of Forlì – Valeriano and Mercuriale. However, contrary to the wishes of his patrons, Cagnacci rendered them grandiose pictures filled with the same epicene forms. All the figures in these works – whether
intended to be angels, soldiers, deacons, or the saints – ascribe to the typology
established in Cagnacci’s half-length compositions: they each have round, wide-set eyes,
fair skin, full lips, button noses, and soft, virginal bodies.

V. Conclusion: Repetition as a Harbinger of Artistic Intentions

I am not by any means the first scholar to observe this predilection for repetition
in Cagnacci’s pictures. As indicated by the many citations referenced throughout this
chapter, various art historians of the past few decades have highlighted the artist’s
allusions to the works of painters such as Ludovico Carracci and Guido Reni. In his
1986 monograph of the artist, Pier Giorgio Pasini even takes note of Cagnacci’s
predilection for self-referential repetition:

It is not by chance that we discover in his works recurring poses, expressions,
models, and even themes: actually he was trying to bring to perfection ideas and
subjects through even slight alterations, almost afraid that new inventions might
have distracted his mind from his main concern, that is a concrete instinctive but
at the same time very attentive painting, the only method able to recreate and
rediscover a perfect nature.140

However, my analysis is novel in a few respects. Rather than discuss the two
aforementioned tendencies of emulation and self-reference as distinct approaches to
composition, I have categorized them under the umbrella of repetition. Both of these
practices evoke the process of painterly translation deeply pertinent to this kind of
creative imitation. In moments of emulative repetition, Cagnacci transformed the
postures, themes, and styles of his Bolognese predecessors and peers through his own
grounding naturalism. Similarly, by basing all his human forms on the same the model
(or group of models), he adapted distinct figural typologies of his own naturalistic design

140 Pasini, Guido Cagnacci pittore (1601-1663), 158.
and select compositional formats to fit a wide variety of painted narratives. By collectively considering these acts of self-reference and emulation as repetition, I have pinpointed a practice that manifests as a constant throughout Cagnacci’s *oeuvre*. In the absence of any other unifying pictorial qualities, this recurring approach to composition can very well be understood as a harbinger of Cagnacci’s prevailing artistic intentions as well as the visual manifestation of his quest to be perceived as a “bold” painterly inventor.
CHAPTER 3

Repetition as Invention in the Works of Cagnacci

The arguments presented in the previous two chapters – that Cagnacci, on the one hand, sought to brand himself as a (Bolognese) painterly inventor and, on the other, consistently designed his compositions through systematic repetition – might at first seem incongruous to twenty-first-century audiences. Today, the term “invention” suggests supreme originality, the creation of a thing or idea so imaginative that it differs from, and even surpasses, all other things in its class that preceded it. According to this definition, the pictures of a purported painter-inventor should exhibit an element of surprise, so to speak – a quality, usually of a stylistic or iconographic nature, that defies the creative tendencies of the period or individual body of work in question. The paintings of Guido Cagnacci do not necessarily fit this criteria. As I have characterized them, Cagnacci’s canvases manifest as sites of persistent painterly repetition; thus, they rarely consist of any qualities that would strike an informed viewer as particularly new in the context of either the artist’s oeuvre or, for that matter, Seicento art in general.

As demonstrated in his altarpieces – such as the Montegridolfo Virgin and Child with Saints Roch, Sebastian, and Hyacinth and the Calling of Saint Matthew – as well as works associated with the artist’s late manner – such as the Urbania Penitent Magdalene – Cagnacci’s images are filled with postural and stylistic allusions to better-known Seicento painters, especially Ludovico Carracci and Guido Reni. Derived from his observation of live models, the majority of the painter’s human forms – including the red-haired man of his early years and the epicene form of his later career – also tend to ascribe to a marked figural typology that recurs both within singular compositions and across distinct
canvases. It was precisely this second sort of self-referential figural repetition that motivated the criticism of the Venetian Marco Boschini; his 1660 *La Carta del navegar pittoresco* features a pointed attack on painters of half-figures – Cagnacci prominent among them – whom he claims “are so miserable in their design and so feeble in their invention”\(^{141}\) that their compositions continually result as nothing more than the top half of the same female nude dressed in different costumes and accessories specific to the represented character. In creating these half-figures – as well as other sorts of late pictures – Cagnacci also often repeated a prototypal compositional format.

Contrary to these conceptions of inventiveness, in this chapter I argue that Cagnacci’s aesthetic of repetition should not be chalked up to a dearth of artistic imagination. Rather, the artist’s seemingly redundant approach to composition should be interpreted as a premeditated creative strategy inspired by the traditions of painting that were (a) most prevalent in the cities to which he traveled throughout his career, and (b) ultimately scrutinized in contemporary art criticism. In the previous section, I established that repetition played a prominent role in the practice and theory of painting in seventeenth-century Italy. In contrast to the “classic modernist axis of originality versus repetition,” Loh claims, “pre-modernist discourse” often “addressed the question of innovation within the limits of imitation and emulation.”\(^ {142}\) Painters of the day regularly carried out imitation in creating their works, and their actions were subsequently recognized and valorized by a specific audience of educated Seicento beholders, such as Carlo Cesare Malvasia, Giovanni Pietro Bellori, and other contemporary theorists.


\(^ {142}\) Loh, “New and Improved: Repetition as Originality in Baroque Practice and Theory,” 477.
Considering this climate of art and art criticism, in the subsequent pages I take a closer look at various acts of and reactions to imitation and repetition throughout the Seicento. I primarily consider the curriculum of the Carracci Accademia degli Incamminati – which, from its founding in 1582, taught young artists to invent the art of the future by relying on an assortment of examples from the past and present.\textsuperscript{143} I then shift my focus to the discussions of artistic creation encompassed in the treatises of Boschini and Malvasia. Together, these case studies convey the extent to which imitative painterly practices were perceived as invention among artists and theorists of the Seicento and, by extension, inform our understandings of Cagnacci’s own repetitive aesthetic. Influenced as much by his predecessors as his own predilection for carnal naturalism, the synthesis of emulative and self-referential repetition found throughout his oeuvre, I maintain, reflects a conscious effort on the artist’s part to insert himself into a lineage of established masters, forge a superior personal style, and ultimately brand himself as the Bolognese painterly inventor who, as his signing practices tell us, he continually strove to be.

I. Evolving Imitation: From Renaissance to the Baroque

Before elaborating on the argument at hand, it is crucial to note that the concept of imitation was by no means formulated for the first time in Seicento art and theory. Much like the forms (the styles, postural details, narrative themes, etc.) that were so often transferred from composition to composition as re-contextualized objects of repetition, the imitative practices of the seventeenth century were derived from earlier creative processes – in art as well as literature – and adapted to fit the motivations and needs of

contemporary painters. These motivations, as I will demonstrate, mainly revolved around surpassing the seemingly unsurpassable artists of the High Renaissance and, in turn, perpetuating the idea of painterly progress.

As early as the fourteenth century, humanist writers characterized imitation as a crucial creative process; they maintained that the emulation of predecessors was, in fact, pertinent to the achievement of literary and/or poetic invention. Such a perspective was demonstrated in a letter attributed to Petrarch (1304-74). Writing to his friend and peer Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-75), the purported “father of Humanism” claims in this document that contemporary authors should make a point to reference the styles and ideas of earlier writers in their own texts. These allusions, he continues, should not manifest as mere mimicry, rendering the works in which they appear identical to their models as would a portrait. Instead, they should evoke vague resemblances – not unlike those observed between a father and son – and be arranged according to the writer’s own unique whims.

In expressing this point of view, Petrarch demonstrated his own indebtedness to classical rhetoric, which commonly professed that distinct styles take shape only after writers have gathered inspiration from other masters and cleverly united those sources into a single invention. He specifically used as a subtext the writings of the ancient Roman philosopher Seneca the Younger (4 BC-65 AD), who famously wrote on creative imitation in his eighty-fourth moral epistle. Himself quoting the writings of Vergil, Seneca insisted in this piece that writers looking to cultivate their own stylistic distinctiveness should behave similarly to bees making honey:

We should all follow, men say, the example of bees, who flit about and cull the flowers that are suitable for producing honey, and then arrange and assort in their cells all that they have brought in; these bees, as our Vergil says,
pack close the flowing honey
and well their cells to nectar sweet

It is not certain whether the juice which they obtain form the flowers forms at once into honey, or whether they change that which they have gathered into this delicious object by bending something there with and by a certain property of their breath. For some authorities believe that bees do not possess the art of making honey, but only of gathering it… Certain others maintain that the materials which bees have culled from the most delicate of blooming and flowering plants is transformed into this peculiar substance by a process.¹⁴⁴

Much like their literary counterparts, visual artists of the fourteenth century sought greatness by emulating their forebears from antiquity. This task, however, resulted far less burdensome and far less anxiety-provoking in the realm of pictorial creation. Pictures by ancient painters were known to have boasted enviable powers of illusionism and naturalism, as well as formidable narrative strength. Yet, by the Cinquecento, the majority of these masterpieces were lost. Early Renaissance artists learned of their compositional qualities through the written descriptions of ancient authors and, in turn, effectively needed only to create works that resurrected and rivaled an imagined ideal of mastery. Even as they sought to imbue their paintings with the values upheld and achieved by the ancients, Renaissance artists could therefore be sure that their creations would at least appear inventive.

By the end of the sixteenth century – the alleged onset of the Baroque – the situation had shifted somewhat; artists of course shared with their Early Renaissance counterparts the desire to invent new ways of painting and promote the idea of artistic progress. However, thanks to the innovations of their predecessors, their art was now preceded by a tangible history, a lineage of masterpieces (accessible either in collections

or known through prints) against which their own works would inevitably be judged as either inferior or superior. This tense awareness of and competition with history was exacerbated by Giorgio Vasari (1511-74), the Florentine painter, architect, and historian who authored *Le Vite de’ più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti*. First published in 1550 and subsequently revised in 1558, Vasari’s compilation narrates a trajectory of artistic evolution through select biographies of Italian artists active between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. The evolution he proposes can be briefly described as follows: after the fall of the Roman Empire, the arts reemerged in the historian’s native Tuscany and finally reached its perfect culmination in Rome, where artists of the Cinquecento – led by the Tuscan Michelangelo – ultimately developed the “modern manner” (maniera moderna).\(^{145}\)

Vasari defines this updated manner as being predicated on selective imitation, much like literary style. Inspired by the ancient Greek painter Zeuxis (fifth century BC) and his Crotonian woman,\(^{146}\) His ideal process of creation calls for artists to selectively copy the most beautiful things they observe in nature – i.e. the hands, head, torso, and legs of the most perfect bodies – and through masterful “design” (defined as the reproduction of what the eye sees), combine these elements into an appealing composition that surpasses in beauty both the natural world and, by extension, the works

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\(^{146}\) Cicero, “De inventione,” in *Cicero in Twenty-eight Volumes*, trans. H.M. Hubell, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), vol. 2.16 (2.1.3). According to Cicero, Zeuxis based his rendering of Helen (purportedly the most beautiful woman in the world) on a selection of five maidens because “he did not think all the qualities which he sought to combine could be found in one person, because in no single case, has nature made anything perfect and finished in every part.”
of antiquity which sought to accomplish that very same thing.\textsuperscript{147} According to Vasari, the maniera moderna had reached its highest level of refinement in the works of two artists in particular. In his view, the works of Raphael (1483-1520), with their “divine” illusionism, had not only attained the purported perfection of those by ancient painters, but also, if these earlier examples had been available for side by side comparison, would have been judged as far superior. He further corroborated this idea of Cinquecento supremacy with the example of Michelangelo (1475-1564), whose three-dimensional \textit{oeuvre} could actually be viewed against extant sculptural and architectural fragments from antiquity: these comparisons, Vasari wrote, demonstrate that the multi-talented artist “overcame and conquered not only those who had already conquered nature, but also those famous ancients themselves who had beyond doubt overcome her in such a praiseworthy way.”\textsuperscript{148}

This “Vasarian” conception of artistic creation imposed on seventeenth-century artists what Elizabeth Cropper has called a “double burden of influence.”\textsuperscript{149} In their respective pursuits of artistic greatness, Seicento painters were encouraged to travel to Rome where they would carry out a dual process of emulation: ideally, they would study the works of Raphael and Michelangelo, as well as learn from ancient statuary. However, in characterizing these Cinquecento artists as masters of practically mythic proportions who had, in their own right, already vanquished the ancients, Vasari essentially

\textsuperscript{147} For a more comprehensive discussion of Vasari and his views on imitation, see Sohm, \textit{Style in the Art Theory of Early Modern Italy}, 103-05.


foreclosed the possibility of any innovation beyond these objects of imitation.\textsuperscript{150} Throughout the \textit{Vite}, the historian also primarily apprized artists who lived and worked in central Italy. In doing so, he relegated his already delimited conception of artistic progress to a specific geographic area and largely dismissed the creative potential of painters hailing from northern parts of the Italian peninsula.

\section*{II. Early Responses to the \textit{Vite}: Lodovico Dolce’s \textit{L’Aretino} (1557) and the Carracci Academy}

In Vasari’s wake, artists and critics sought to conceptualize how artistic creation could reasonably progress past the ostensibly perfect \textit{maniera moderna} of Raphael and Michelangelo. Many aimed, furthermore, to reaffirm the value of the artistic traditions established beyond central Italy that had been neglected from the narrative of the \textit{Vite}. From the late sixteenth-century onward, these motivations would come to inspire new theoretical texts, as well as critical strategies of painterly practice that collectively aspired to redefine the idea of modern artistic creation.

In 1557, the Venetian writer Lodovico Dolce (1508-68) published his \textit{L’Aretino}, a book whose central argument proposed a considerable revision of the first edition of Vasari’s \textit{Vite}. The text manifests as a fictional dialogue between Pietro Aretino (1492-1556) – a Venetian writer to whom Dolce’s own works were greatly indebted – and the Florentine grammarian Giovanfrancesco Fabrini (1516-80), evidently intended to voice the Tuscan biases of Vasari. Mark Roskill has argued that the primary “substance” of this erudite conversation can be broken up into three distinct parts: Dolce first discusses the nobility of painting, as well as the attributes necessary to attain perfection in this sort of art. To render this theory more tangible, the writer then cites exemplary artists, both

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
ancient and modern. Finally, he applauds the artistic prowess of the Cinquecento master Titian. The aim of this tripartite structure – and especially the portion that focuses of Titan – was primarily to counter the opinion, heavily expressed in Vasari’s *Vite*, that the purportedly “divine” Michelangelo was one of the only sixteenth-century artists deserving of acclaim. At the outset of *L’Aretino*, Dolce puts this central objective in the mouth of Aretino who, on disagreeing with Fabrini’s interpretations of Venetian painters, says:

The man who has seen once only the pictures of the divine Michelangelo should not – in a manner of speaking – really trouble any more with opening his eyes to look at the work of any other painter whatever… You… do injustice to many painters of distinction: for example Raphael of Urbino, Antonio da Correggio, Francesco Parmigiano, Giulio Romano, Polidoro, and even more our own Titan… Andrea del Sarto, Perino del Vaga, and Pordenone – all of whom have been excellent artists and have been rated the distinction of having their works looked at and praised by means of judgment.

Although this argument, as demonstrated in this excerpt, clearly countered the biases of Vasari and even motivated Vasari to revise his treatment of Titian in the second edition of the *Vite*, *L’Aretino* is not entirely antagonistic. At one point in the treatise, Dolce commends the reader to the first edition of his Florentine counterpart’s series. Certain ideas and structural features prominent throughout *L’Aretino* are also undeniably reminiscent of this earlier text. Finally, despite calling for the admiration of artists besides Michelangelo, Dolce still encouraged a canon of seemingly unsurpassable

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152 Ibid., 85-87.

153 Ibid., 14.
masters (this time with Titian included) that once again delimited hope for artistic progress.

Several years after the publication of L’Aretino, Bologna became a site of a much more assertive sort of artistic innovation. Upon establishing their Accademia degli Incamminati in 1582, brothers Annibale and Agostino Carracci and their cousin Ludovico aimed to formulate a curriculum of painterly training that countered the narrow notion of artistic excellence upheld by Vasari. The polemical standpoint of this triumvirate is conveyed, quite forcefully, in the margins of their copy of the 1568 edition of the Vite, now preserved in Bologna at the Biblioteca Nazionale dell’Archiginnasio. Here, there appear annotations (postille) that aggressively react to Vasari’s partisan views on artistic creation. As explained by Charles Dempsey, these notes seem to have been produced by different hands, and it remains to be seen whether one, two, or all three of the Carracci authored them. Nonetheless, Dempsey argues, “[T]he content of the postille… is remarkably like-minded.” Something that comes under constant scrutiny in these notes is Vasari’s tendency to laud central Italian – mainly Florentine and Roman – art at the expense of works from northern Italy. Much to the chagrin of critics like Dolce, the manner of Venetian painters, specifically, was not simply ignored in the Vite, but subject to pointed derision. For instance, in a memorable passage the historian writes that Giorgione (1444-1510) has a “fine style,” but his compositions ultimately fall short because he

still used to work by setting himself in front of living and natural objects and reproducing them with colors applied in patches of harsh or soft tints according to life; he did not use any initial drawings since he dimly believed that to paint directly with colors without reference to drawing was the truest and best method

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of working and the true art of design. Giorgione failed to see that, if he wants to balance his compositions and to arrange his various inventions well, the painter must first do sketches on paper to see how everything goes together… Moreover the use of drawings furnishes the artist’s mind with beautiful conceptions and helps him depict everything in the natural world from memory; he had no need to keep his subject in front of him all the time or to conceal under the charm of this coloring lack of knowledge of how to draw as for many years (having never seen Rome or any completed perfect works of art) did the Venetian painters, Giorgione, Palma, Pordenone, and the rest.  

In commentaries such as this one, Vasari establishes a number of interrelated artistic polemics. First and foremost, he draws a stark contrast between creative processes based in drawing (disegno) and those based in coloring (colorito), praising the former to the detriment of the latter. Furthermore, he respectively associates these divergent modes of creation with the regional styles of central Italy and Venice, as well as the seemingly diametrically-opposed values of imagination and naturalism. Vasari argues that, by rigorously developing their compositions in detailed sketches, central Italian painters accrue a mental repertoire of “beautiful conceptions” from which they are able to create inventive pictures that recall the natural world, even while relying solely on their imagination and memory. By contrast, he portrays Venetian painters as mediocre creators who are enslaved by nature and, in turn, use coloring as a crutch. Neglecting any sort of preparatory drawing, they render their images spontaneously and subsequently build them up with layered patches of color that, according to Vasari, are intended to

155 Vasari, Le Vite de’ più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori, vol. 7, 427-28: “tendendo per fermo che il dipingere solo con i colori stessi senz’altro studio disegnare in carte fusse il vero e meglio modo di fare il vero disegno. Ma non s’accorgeva che egli è necessario a chi vuol venire disporre i componenti ed accomodare l’invenzioni ch’è fa bisogno prima in più modi differenti parla in carta per cedere come il tutto torna insieme… Per non dire null’anche, disegnando in carta, si innanzi, o ad avere a nascer sotto la vaghezza de’ colori lo stento e il non sapere disegnare; nella maniera che fecero molti pittori viniziani…” The English translation is from Sohm, Pittorese: Marco Boschini, his Critics, and their Critiques of Painterly Brushwork in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Italy, 107.
“conceal their lack of knowledge of how to draw.” Never letting their models leave
their sight, they then gradually soften these tones so that they come to match nature
exactly.

As Emilian painters who were themselves neglected in the Vite and, additionally,
openly admired Venetian artistic tradition, the Carracci devoted a great many of their
postille to protesting Vasari’s blatant regional biases. Echoing the sentiments of Dolce’s
L’Aretino, one note responds directly to Vasari’s statement that Titian was nothing more
than a good portraitist; it declares that the Cinquecento master was indeed excellent “in
this part of painting and in others too, but because he did not avail himself of the odious
rules of the Florentine painters Vasari thumbs his nose at him as a man who never had
good taste in painting.” The same writer comments on the historian’s praise for the
living and natural colors in Titian’s Rape of Europa (ca. 1560–62), asserting, “[n]ote well
that whosoever follows Titian in such tings must have great disegno, something one never
finds in the works of the Florentines.” This criticism is a particularly bold one, for it
reverses the dichotomy of artistic values professed by Vasari: lifelikeness and naturalism
– attributes that figure prominently in the paintings of Venetians and are practically
nonexistent in the those of central Italians – have now been named necessary functions
of masterful disegno.

This apparent predilection for naturalism stemmed from a number of factors.
Published in Bologna during year of the Accademia’s founding, the Discourse on Sacred and
Profane Images (1582) had a marked impact on the Carracci’s curriculum. This Counter-

156 Ibid., 428.
157 Postilla to Vasari, 817.
158 Ibid.
Reformation treatise was written by the cardinal, Gabriele Paleotti (1522-97), after he was charged at the Council of Trent to draw up regulations governing the production of religious art. Born from the idea that this sort of art should be devotional as well as educational and actively explore nature, the aesthetic proposed in this text upholds a verisimilar imitation of the natural world that would ideally lead the observer to be moved by the actions and emotions in the represented narrative.\footnote{Paolo Prodi, introduction to Gabriele Paleotti, Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images, trans. William McCuaig (Los Angeles: the Getty Research Institute, 2012), 19-20.} The Carracci were similarly repelled by the unnaturally hard, statue-like manner exhibited in paintings by Mannerist artists of Vasari’s generation (and even by Vasari himself).\footnote{Dempsey, “The Carracci Postille to Vasari’s Lives,” 76.}

These aversions, as well as the triumvirate’s general refusal to allow their Florentine counterpart to stall artistic progress with his biased ideal of central Italian art, fueled the formulation of the Accademia’s curriculum of painting. Although scholars of the mid-twentieth century have devoted a great deal of energy to dissociating the Carracci from emulative practices of any kind,\footnote{During the late eighteenth century, the reputation of the Carracci fell into disrepute. Ascribing to the perspective that invention precludes imitation, writers such as Johann Joachim Winckelmann derisively described the curriculum of the Carracci, with its encouragement of imitating past and living masters, as the work of “Nachamer” (thieves). Still upholding the modernist conception of originality expressed by Winckelmann, historians, such as Denis Mahon, sought to revive these painters’ celebrity by renouncing the centrality of imitation to their practice. Finally, in 1977, Charles Dempsey established that a significant component of the Carracci reform of painting derived from systematic analysis and imitation of particular excellences in painting. For a more comprehensive overview of these scholarly trends, see Cropper, The Domenichino Affair: Novelty, Imitation and Theft in Seventeenth-Century Rome, 102-3.} it is now widely accepted that imitation and repetition formed a significant part of their academic curriculum. These compositional strategies, however, were fundamentally different from those practiced by Renaissance masters. The primary characteristic that distinguished the emulation of the Carracci from that of their predecessors was the sheer range of influences they adopted...
as their objects of imitation. Unlike the great painters of the Cinquecento who attained fame through the dual emulation of nature and the “more-or-less absent ancients,”\textsuperscript{162} Annibale, Agostino, and Ludovico asserted their originality by rejecting the precedents of antiquity and referencing a broad “range of judiciously selected abstract stylistic possibilities, geographically and temporally varied in origin.”\textsuperscript{163}

The Carracci’s repudiation of the ancients partially stemmed from their predilection for naturalism. They believed that imitating ancient sculpture – as opposed to “living flesh” \textit{(viva carne)} – ultimately gave rise the aforementioned “hard style” found in the works of the Mannerists and certain central Italian artists. This belief is expressed in the following \textit{postilla} which once again, upholds lifelikeness as a crucial value of \textit{disegno}:

“The ignorant Vasari is not aware that the good ancient masters took their things from life, and he would have it instead that it would be better to copy secondary sources in antique rather than primary and principal things in life.”\textsuperscript{164} In accordance with these sentiments, the Carracci encouraged a diligent practice of life drawing.\textsuperscript{165} Their commitment to this practice is heavily emphasized in Malvasia’s \textit{Felsina pittrice} (1678).

The biographer claimed that, before establishing their own academy, Ludovico, Agostino, and Annibale learned to draw from life at the school of Bernardo Baldi (1553-1617). After coming home from lessons at this “accademia del nudo,”\textsuperscript{166} they would refuse to eat until they had redrawn the pose they had been studying entirely from

\begin{itemize}
  \item\textsuperscript{162} Cropper, \textit{The Domenichino Affair: Novelty, Imitation and Theft in Seventeenth-Century Rome}, 107.
  \item\textsuperscript{163} Ibid.
  \item\textsuperscript{164} \textit{Postilla} to Vasari, 806.
  \item\textsuperscript{165} For a more complete examination of drawing practices in the Carracci Academy, their divergence from mannerism, and the artistic intentions of Annibale Carracci, see Clare Robertson, “Annibale Carracci and \textit{Invenzione}: Medium and Function in the Early Drawings,” \textit{Master Drawings} 35.1 (1997): 3-42.
  \item\textsuperscript{166} Malvasia, \textit{Felsina pittrice}, vol. 1, 334.
\end{itemize}
memory. In the event that they believed themselves incapable of reproducing an attitude well enough, they would apparently pose for each other in order augment their understanding of it. While seeking to combat the hardened quality of Mannerist and central Italian painting, the Carracci rendered this discipline a crucial component of their curriculum. As indicated by numerous extant sketches which show living nudes in the same pose but from different angles, painters at the Accademia drew models constantly and collaboratively. In doing so, they (much like Cagnacci) built up a repertoire of poses that could be reused for characters in disparate paintings.

Along with this assiduous life drawing, the Carracci encouraged the repetition of a wide array of past and living masters of painting. Although they recognized the supreme artistic achievements of the ancients (primarily encapsulated in extant statuary), as well as the mythologized Raphael and Michelangelo, Vasari’s proposal that their works should stand as the only examples for developing artists struck the Carracci as preposterous. They thus taught their pupils to develop their own personal styles by embracing a wide of influences that not only included the purportedly unsurpassable central Italian masters, but also the manners of painters associated with the Lombard school (such as Correggio) and the Venetian school (such as Tintoretto, Veronese, and of course Titian). The Carracci also encouraged these students to study the styles of contemporary artists in their native Bologna. According to Gail Feigenbaum, the Accademia rendered itself extremely permeable to the outside world of painterly production. In contrast to the classic bottega (workshop) system in which young artists were expected to submit to the authority of a single, more experienced painter, many of
their pupils came to the academy past the age of twenty, long after they had picked up skills in other studios. As evidenced in the account books of one Giovampolo Bonconti, the Carracci also invited many local painters to contribute to their pedagogical agenda (known as the honoraria).

The many manners that ultimately came to serve as the academy’s objects of repetition reflect the personal creative philosophy of Ludovico Carracci who, as Malvasia recounts, once offered his younger cousin Annibale the following critical pearl of wisdom: Now this, my dear Annibale… is the style I like: this is what you must hold onto, because to imitate a single master is to make oneself a follower and his inferior, while to draw from all four of them and also select things from other painters is to make oneself their judge and leader.

Much like the humanist authors mentioned at the outset of this chapter, Ludovico clearly maintained that an inventive, personal style resulted not from the emulation of one unsurpassable master, but the selective imitation and rationalization of many painters whose manners aspiring artists could translate to fit their own pictorial idioms. This far-reaching practice of repetition often went intimately hand in hand with the aforementioned discipline of life drawing: after they studied the works of past or

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167 Feigenbaum, “Practice in the Carracci Academy,” 89. According to Feigenbaum, artists of twenty years of age and older “comprised a sizeable segment of the academy: Lucio Massari, for example, joined at age twenty-four, after training under Bartolomeo Passerotti…When Alessandro Tiarini tried unsuccessfully to gain admission, he was already twenty and Francesco Albani was in his late teens…”

168 Ibid., 87, 91. Giovampolo Bonconti was ostensibly the first pupil of the Accademia. The account books of his father include the earliest known reference to the Carracci’s school – descriptions of the institutions start-up expenses – and also record various gifts given to Bolognese painters, such as Bartolomeo Passerotti, as well as Ercole and Camillo Procaccini. The latter sort of documentation indicates that the Carracci both endowed their students with the agency to learn from other artists (in the case of Passerotti) and welcomed other painters to teach in their Academy.

present artists, the Carracci and their students would pose a model in the posture of a painted figure they hoped to emulate, then sketch it in the flesh.\footnote{Feigenbaum, “Practice in the Carracci Academy,” 93.}

In establishing this curriculum, the Carracci gave rise to a way of working alternative to the Vasari’s maniera moderna that, despite its similar emphasis on imitation, advocated for continual artistic progress. In this sense, the Carracci did not strive to be unsurpassable. “For their critical revolution to succeed,” Cropper writes, they were well aware that they and their pupils to come “had to be both imitable and inimitable.”\footnote{Cropper, The Domenichino Affair: Novelty, Imitation, and Theft in Seventeenth-Century Rome,” 115.} By setting the example of imitating the greatest past and contemporary masters at their disposal as well as drawing from life, they forged “their own styles out of the best that that the tradition had to offer,” contributed to the history of art, and, in the process, attacked the partisan account of Vasari.\footnote{Ibid., 116.}

III. Marco Boschini, \textit{La Carta del navegar pittoresco} (1660), and Modern Artistic Creation

Several decades following the deaths of the three Carracci, the rebellious spirit of the Academia’s curriculum was given crucial public expression in the writings of two critics in particular: the Venetian Marco Boschini and the Bolognese Carlo Cesare Malvasia. Boschini’s \textit{La Carta del navegar pittoresco} encompassed ideas on artistic creation and superiority that would have struck most audiences as particularly radical. A sweeping work of around 700 pages, the book takes the form of a dialogue between Ecelenza, a foreign nobleman, and Compare, a Venetian painter and art dealer who was doubtlessly
crafted in the critic’s own image.\footnote{Jon R. Snyder, “Strokes of Wit: Theorizing Beauty in Baroque Italy,” in The Insistence of Art: Philosophy and Aesthetic, 208. According to Snyder, Boschini’s knowledge of Venetian painting as well as the city of Venice in general, was “unmatched.” He was therefore frequently enlisted to guide visiting artists and dignitaries.} The two men journey throughout Venice by gondola, treating the city as what Jon R. Snyder calls an “open-air art museum,” they travel together for eight days, “from church to palace to monastery,” discussing the works of the greatest Venetian painters, from the present as well as the recent past.\footnote{Ibid., 208.}

The form of Boschini’s text was likely inspired by a variety of literary and poetic precedents. It is, on the one hand, greatly indebted to the writings of Giovan Battista Marino (1569-1625). Much like Marino’s \textit{Adonis} – a rambling work of verse encompassing 40,000-plus lines – the book consists of 5,370 rhymed, four-line stanzas (quatrain) that are themselves divided into eight cantos, called “winds.”\footnote{Ibid., 222n.} Its conversational structure is also probably the product of a variety of influences. In classical antiquity, Cicero published a variety of intellectual dialogues in which he developed his own views on a multitude of topics through the speeches of the interlocutors. Imaginary dialogues were also commonly used as literary devices in Early Modern Venetian art criticism. As mentioned, Dolce’s \textit{L’Aretino} takes the form of a conversation between Pietro Aretino and Giovanfrancesco Fabrini, and this treatise was itself influenced by the \textit{Dialogo della pittura}, yet another interlocution on painting written in 1548.\footnote{Roskill, \textit{Dolce’s Aretino and Venetian Art Theory of the Cinquecento}, 9.}

Boschini probably wanted to situate his treatise in this lineage of quintessentially Venetian dialogues on art: each and every page of \textit{La Carta}, after all, is imbued with a
sense of unbridled, almost propagandistic civic pride. Beyond writing exclusively on the art, artists, and sites of Venice, the critic chose to compose his text entirely in the Venetian dialect. Boschini even admits that these decisions were the product of his unabashed patriotism. In the preface, he asks rhetorically, “[am] I as a Venetian, talking about Venetian painters supposed to disguise myself?”

The undeniable “Venetian-ness” of La Carta bespeaks Boschini’s antagonism toward Vasari, a sense of antipathy not unlike that which fueled the curriculum taught at the Bolognese Accademia degli Incamminati. Throughout much of his treatise, Boschini endeavors to separate his compatriots form the Florentine historian’s offensive characterization of the so-called Venetian colorito. He largely does so by deflecting Vasari’s attacks against the naturalism in Venetian painting onto the “naturalists” described in the first chapter of this study. To reiterate, these artists manifest in La Carta as an altogether ambiguous group; however, they are all generally characterized as foreigners who can create nothing more than half-figures copied from life. By savaging this group of painters, Boschini effectively establishes a category against which he can favorably convey the superiority and distinctiveness of Venice and its art. This constructed opposition is best demonstrated by the following excerpt in which the critic, to quote Philip Sohm, envisions, “Venetian painters fishing in the deep seas of imagination, while the naturalists are stranded on the docks, literally grounded to the earth with their half-figures.”

177 Boschini, Carta, 8: Mi che son venezian e che parlo di Pitori veneziani, ho da andarme a stravestir?” The English translation is from Snyder, “Strokes of Wit: Theorizing Beauty in Baroque Italy,” 208.

178 Sohm, Pittorese: Marco Boschini, his Critics, and their Critiques of Painterly Brushwork in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Italy, 100-10.
Because these Venetians have such command [of their art] and their ideas are so well impressed in it from their past studies, they can print money in front of frayone [i.e., they can paint from their imagination.] They can compose a large painting with just two strokes of charcoal and without continually referring back to nature… If in painting a story with hundreds of figures one had to portray each from nature, one would never attain fame. He who lacks artifice and is always indebted to nature will be wealthy only with half-figures… They [naturalists] know only how to set four figure figures in relief; nor do they know the language of light and reflections in which Venetians are so expert in.

(Ecelenza:) And so it is. The Venetian leaves the dock and goes fishing in the high seas. He gives the finger to those stupid hacks [left behind] and produces marvels with his hands.¹⁷⁹

Despite his antagonism toward Vasari, in this passage Boschini clearly borrows many of the historian’s theoretical principles. Evidently, he seeks to separate Venetian painters from their deep-rooted associations with naturalism. Yet, rather than do away completely with the dichotomy of creative processes (disegno and colorito) that figure so prominently in the Vite, the critic simply transfers the positive values – of imagination, invention, etc. – that Vasari had linked to disegno onto the colorito, and casts the ambiguous “naturalists” as scapegoats in turn. This redefinition of Venetian painterly style for the better certainly recalls the contents of the Carracci postille which, seeking to reaffirm the art of Venice, assigned new pictorial values to the ideal of disegno. However, Boschini’s commentary differs from these earlier critiques in one fundamental way:

unlike the postille and their emphatic praise of naturalism, his discourse upholds artifice.

According to Sohm, the term “artifice” (artificio), seen in the previous excerpt, as well as the adjective “artificial” (artificioso) were two of Boschini’s favorite words as an art

¹⁷⁹ Boschini, Carta, 98-99: “Perché sti veneziani ha in patronia,/ E cusì ben impreso in la so idea/ El studio fato zà, che sta monea/ I puol stampar, presente che se sia.;// El più che vogia far, per esemplar,/ Xe’l do segni con zesso e carbon;/ E dispone con queli ogni quadron,/ Senza d’gnora el natural retrar… Se qunado i forma quadri con istorie,/ Dove gh’è centenera de figure,/ Dal natural i fasse positure,/ No i averave al mondo tante glorie…” The English translation is from Sohm, Pittoresco: Marco Boschini, his Critics, and their Critiques of Painterly Brushwork in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Italy, 102.
critic. Their frequent appearance throughout *La Carta* yet again reflects his desire to
dissociate his compatriots from naturalism and, in turn, convey their painterly
superiority. As argued by Jon R. Snyder, Boschini understands the originality of Venetian
the painting “in relation to the singularity of the Venetian Republic.” The critic
maintains that neither the city’s painting nor its politics are bound to the codes – such as
classicism and absolutism – that seem to constrain the remainder of the Appenine
peninsula. Furthermore, neither makes itself subject to “the tyranny of nature and its
laws.”

Composed of islands and interweaving canals – many of which are manmade – the
layout of Venice, Boschini claims, is one-of-a-kind and demonstrates the dominance
of artificial creations over nature. He explains that the modern manner of Venetian
painters functions similarly. When viewed at a distance, their compositions might appear
as mere illusions of the natural world, no different from those images conceived by
countless other Early Modern painters. However, because the basis of their *disegno*
consists of networks of colorful, sketchy stains (*macchie*), if beheld in close proximity,
these representations ultimately dissolve into a mass of vigorous brushstrokes that call
attention to the act of painterly creation and, by extension, the fact that the work at hand
is artificial, made at the hands of an artist. According to Boschini, these *macchie* are are
truly what make Venetian painting so superior.

Although in this case Boschini’s emphasis on the superiority of Venetian painters
is, as I have argued, undoubtedly reminiscent of the philosophy of the *Accademia degli
Incamminati*, his exaltation of artifice is absolutely not. In order to avoid the “hardness”

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180 Sohm, *Style in the Art Theory of Early Modern Italy*, 145. According to Sohm, Boschini uses *artificio* and *artificioso* in his text more frequently than any other writer.

181 Snyder, “Strokes of Wit: Theorizing Beauty in Baroque Italy,” 211.

182 Ibid.
associated with mannerist painting, the Carracci encouraged their pupils to adopt a rigorous practice of life drawing, not unlike that of the naturalists whom Boschini so outwardly condemns. Different too are the Venetian critic’s views on artistic progress. In his Carta, the critic boldly claims, “[t]here is old painting and there is new painting”183 thus conveying his belief in progressive creative evolution, as well as the unparalleled originality of contemporary artistic representation (which in his view is Venetian painting). Yet, his treatise never comprehensively explains how the art of his own time is at all distinct from what came before it.

Boschini’s history of artistic progress seems to come to a halt at the end of the Cinquecento. He claims that the works of Renaissance masters – including Giorgione, Titian, Jacopo Bassano, and especially Paolo Veronese epitomized the very best qualities of Venetian painting. Of these artists, Boschini writes, “we know that there are five vowels; so too are there five painters. Without the style of one of them, you cannot make a painting of value.”184 By this logic, the critic characterizes seventeenth-century artists as creators who can do nothing but work in the shadows of their superior predecessors. For this reason, he finds precious little to say about them in his text: he only begins discussing Seicento painting on page 372 of his 700-page treatise. Living artists, similarly, do not make an appearance until page 473. 185 This stark inequity between the recent past and present ironically recalls Vasari’s own preclusion of artistic evolution beyond the

183 Boschini, Carta, 378: “Che x’è pitura vechia vechia e ghe x’è moderna.” The English translation is from Snyder, “Strokes of Wit: Theorizing Beauty in Baroque Italy,” 199.

184 Ibid.: “Savemo che le lettere vocal/ X’è cinque, cusi gh’è cinque Pitori,/Che senza la maniera d’un de lori/Certo no se puol far quadro val.” The English translation is from Sohm, Pittoresco: Marco Bochini, His Critics, and Their Critiques of Painterly Brushwork in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Italy, 109.

innovations of Raphael and Michelangelo and, without a doubt, contrasts markedly with the Carracci’s desire for ongoing and critical artistic progress.

IV. Carlo Cesare Malvasia, the *Felsina Pittrice* (1678), and the Engine of Artistic Progress

The Carracci’s practice and its theoretical backbone are far more kindred with the ideas of Carlo Cesare Malvasia, the Bolognese author of the 1678 *Felsina pittrice*. The critic, on the most basic level, might seem similar to Boschini. Malvasia was one of the few authors of his time to truly appreciate his Venetian contemporary’s contributions to Seicento art theory. He likely met Boschini on a visit to Venice, and thereafter came to serve as one of his most faithful and useful correspondents. Malvasia alludes to this relationship in his *Felsina*, when he thanks the critic for sending him an account of the life and works of Odoardo Fialetti (1573-1638) – a Bolognese painter who moved to Venice – and subsequently praises him as the “faithful and devoted disciple” of Venetian painting. Beyond providing him with crucial information on artists who were otherwise inaccessible, Boschini also seems to have actively promoted Malvasia’s writing. In a book released after *La Carta* – titled *Le ricche minere* (1674) – he even chose to include an advance notice of the *Felsina*’s publication.

The camaraderie of these two writers was strengthened by a shared antagonism toward Vasari. Like Boschini (and of course the three Carracci), Malvasia conceived his own treatise on painting to counteract the Tuscan-Roman bias that colors Vasari’s writings: his main prerogative as an author was to reaffirm the artistic achievements of the northern painters neglected in the *Vite*. In doing so, he expressed constant

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admiration for the Venetians. However, similarly to Boschini, his commentary on art mainly aimed to bolster the achievements of his compatriots. In particular, he exalted Ludovico Carracci as the epitome of modern (Bolognese) art. Yet, even while expressing this clear bias in favor of specific masters, Malvasia still managed to outline a progressive trajectory of painterly evolution. According to Sohm, the Bolognese critic greatly valued novità as an “engine of artistic progress.” Such dynamic novelty, in his eyes, manifested in the thick (pastoso) style honed in the Accademia degli Incamminati that convincingly gave the impression of natural, living flesh. Derived from their imitation of Venetian and other northern Italian models, as well as their commitment to life drawing, this updated manner perpetuated the movement away from the artificial maniera statuina of the Mannerists – who, according to Malvasia, “deserve more pity than praise” because they “rely wholly on memory and spirit, working from imagination and inspiration instead of study and imitation.”

V. Conclusion: Cagnacci’s Bologna-Centric Repetition

Having outlined these various perspectives on Seicento artistic creation and emulation, Guido Cagnacci’s own aesthetic of repetition should not seem as such a surprising approach to composition. Although there exists no documentation confirming how the painter himself conceived of artistic originality, through his purported training in Bologna with Ludovico Carracci (and even Guido Reni, a one-time pupil of the Carracci) it seems altogether likely that he would have absorbed the prevailing

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perspectives on painterly repetition. Just as the imitation taught in the Bolognese
Accademia degli Incamminati was adapted from that practiced by the masters of the High
Renaissance in order to promote artistic progress, the creative strategies adopted by
Cagnacci, it is fair to suggest, were drawn from his contemporary models to cater to his
most pertinent artistic goal – that is, to refashion himself as a “bold” Bolognese inventor
in the art of painting.

Considering the dearth of documents related to Cagnacci’s life, the treatises of
Boschini, and especially of Malvasia, have been crucial to new interpretations of the
artist. Cagnacci read Boschini’s La Carta del navegar pittoresco at the end of his career;
Malvasia’s Felsina pittrice was published nearly two decades after his death. It would
therefore be anachronistic to suggest that the exact theories of artistic creation
expounded in these texts shaped Cagnacci’s aesthetic of repetition in any direct way.
However, because Boschini and Malvasia were writers who lived and worked precisely
within the painter’s generation, their writings are a profoundly telling
of the diverse
modes of Seicento perception and can, by extension, approximate Cagnacci’s own views
on painting. Seeing as the Romagnolo artist derided Boschini’s Carta (as mentioned
earlier, he cantankerously called the text a “book of Sardines”) and – as indicated by his
psuedonym “Guido Baldo Canlassi da Bologna” – seems to have invested himself in
the manners of painting ultimately eulogized in the Felsina pittrice, the views of the
Bolognese patriot Malvasia serve as a particularly illuminating source of ideas in this
regard.

This being said, I maintain that to better grasp the formulation of Cagnacci’s
own creative practice it is imperative to reconsider the objects of his imitation in relation
to the aesthetic values respectively prized and disparaged by Seicento critics, in particular
Malvasia. Thanks to his near-constant travels, Cagnacci doubtlessly observed a vast breadth of works and painting styles that would have inspired his own practice. However, his approach to emulative repetition most often incorporated the figural postures of Ludovico Carracci in his early work and the style of Guido Reni in his later paintings. The rationalization of these two Bolognese masters within Cagnacci’s oeuvre is significant, for their renown came to be staked on entirely different values.

As mentioned earlier, Malvasia spoke of the Carracci and their academic practice with the utmost admiration in his Felsina. Beyond exalting their novel pastoso manner as a marker of artistic progress, Malvasia praised their unparalleled capacity for iconographical innovation, or invenzione. This aptitude, the critic wrote, stemmed largely from the diligent habit of drawing. Because they scrupulously prepared their compositions through preliminary sketches (mainly of live models) all three of the Carracci managed to give rise to an exceptional variety of figures. Malvasia claimed that among Ludovico’s pictures in particular no two human forms were alike. As demonstrated by a side-by-side comparison of his three versions of the Martyrdom of St. Ursula, this condition holds true even when compositions depict the same subject.189 Considering the impressive diversity of figures that it engendered, the critic declared that Ludovico’s thorough method of working was “indeed the right way to paint, let slackers say what they will about knocking one’s brains in making so many drawings that the intellect is exhausted.”190

189 Malvasia, Felsina pittrice, vol.1, 345.

190 Malvasia, Felsina pittrice, vol.1, 345. The English translation is from Summerscale, Malvasia’s Life of the Carracci, 293.
Reni, contrastingly, was recognized as being deficient in the skills ostensibly mastered by the Carracci. Citing the artist’s careless and simple treatment of iconography, many Seicento critics deemed him a poor inventor who seemed to hardly attend to the details of his subjects. As mentioned, Reni frequently portrayed subjects from the classical world (e.g. Cleopatra and Lucretia), as well as religious figures (e.g. Mary Magdalene), all of whom were rendered with remarkably little attention to historically specific settings or attributes. In some cases, the painter’s treatment of iconography was not merely “lazy,” but flat-out incorrect. For instance, in painting a fresco at the Pauline Chapel in Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, Reni substituted an angel for the Virgin Mary, the figure to whom the space was dedicated in the first place.\(^{191}\)

In observing the Reni’s later works, Malvasia lamented his aforementioned tendency to recycle preconceived poses, typologies, and compositions as a problem intimately related to his “lazy” approach to iconography.\(^{192}\) Considering the *Triumph of Job* (ca. 1636), for example, he wrote that one could easily mistake the titular character, St. Job, for Christ, and the ancillary old man holding a gold vessel for St. Peter because the attributes of these figures were not designed with any specific subject in mind. Malvasia further complained about the presence of two male figures who appear to be nude for no apparent reason and are shown straining more than is realistic given their actual actions.\(^{193}\)

These contrasting receptions of the Carracci and Guido Reni suggest that Malvasia deemed certain kinds of repetition positive and others negative, even lazy. In

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191 Bohn, “The Construction of Artistic Reputation in Seicento Bologna: Guido Reni and the Sirani,” 524. This mistake apparently occurred in the *Virgin Mary Appearing to St. Ildefonso.*

192 Ibid., 526.

193 Ibid.
the case of the Carracci, repetition was invention, a driving force for artistic evolution. As discussed earlier, at the Accademia degli Incamminati, Ludovico and his cousins encouraged their pupils to carry out the mode painterly translation wherein they could study the works that most compelled them, sketch from life, then incorporate their many scrupulously prepared forms into a compositional space characterized by their unique painterly idioms. In Reni’s case, on the other hand, Malvasia saw repetition as careless, monotonous mimesis. Regardless of how well-suited they were to a given subject, the painter would continually recycle a preexisting set of figures and compositions. Unlike the Carracci, Reni often encouraged his students to do little more than copy his own compositions and style.

Although Cagnacci, as previously mentioned, died before the Felsina’s publication and thus would not have been privy to Malvasia’s evaluations of his masters, being the critic’s contemporary and someone who spent a great deal of time in Bologna, he was certainly exposed to these sorts of ideas. It is worth reiterating that Cagnacci was himself subject to criticisms not unlike those imposed on Reni: we should recall that Boschini’s passive-aggressive commentary on his half-figures highlighted the tendency of both Reni and Cagnacci to repeat their forms and treat iconography as an afterthought. Supposing that he had a knowledge of the sorts of repetition that were respectively accepted and rejected by various critics, it certainly seems peculiar that Cagnacci, an artist with aspirations toward individual inventiveness, would have emulated both Ludovico Carracci and Guido Reni.

In confronting this apparent paradox, it is helpful to consider that neither of these masters was given uniformly positive or negative criticism. Despite Malvasia’s irrevocable praise, the three Carracci were often criticized by contemporaries for their
predilection for naturalism. For instance, upon releasing his first two public commissions — the Crucifixion (ca. 1583) now in S. Maria della Carità, and the Baptism of Christ (ca. 1585) in San Gregorio — the young Annibale was derided by the older generation of Bolognese artists for his failure to idealize his sacred figures:

They said they were in too trivial a manner, and thus easy to any uneducated person; that being without foundation and poor in resolve, he could well strip a workman, or put drapery over him and copy him bodily onto the canvas. To those who understood little, this would achieve great honor with little skill. This was a style to be practiced in drawing class, not to be used in an altarpiece. The good and beautiful in art did not consist in looking at and studying figure by figure in the work itself, thus groping one’s way, and working haphazardly, but in putting down appropriately the whole and making use of things already seen and studied, showing in the resolution of them the fruit of efforts already overcome and saved in the obedient memory…

In all his un-inventiveness, Reni was contrastingly praised for the ideal beauty of his manner and figures. Young artists were typically motivated to imitate the painter in the first place because they were inspired by the chiarezza (clarity) of his paintings and the grace of his figures. These pictorial qualities often caused Seicento critics to forgive any of Reni’s iconographical shortcomings. This point of view is conveyed in Malvasia’s commentary on the artist’s decoration of the Quirinal Chapel (ca. 1610) for the Pope Paul V Borghese. In this passage, the critic disagrees with contemporary writers that this commission completely surpasses other cycles of a similarly grand scale, such as Michelangelo’s Last Judgment, Raphael’s Villa Farnesina frescoes, and

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194 Malvasia, Felsina, vol.1, 267: “… come di un modo triviale troppo, dicevano, e in conseguenza facile ad ogni imperito, che sentendosi senza fondamento e povero di partiti, ben poteva, nudato un facchino o postogli un panno indosso, copiarlo di peso sul quadro, e presso a’ poco intendenti farsi un grand’onore con poco capital d’ingegno: esser quello uno stile da praticarsi nell’accademia del nudo, non da servirsiene in un quadro d’altare: che il buono e il bello dell’arte non consisteva nel porsi sull’opra medesima ad istudiare e vedere figura per figura, camminando in tal guise a tentone, ed oprando a caso, ma scaricar di proposito tutta la massa, e valendosi delle cose già viste e studiate, mostrar nella risoluzione di esse il frutto delle fatiche già superate e della memoria serbatane, ed ubediente…” The English translation is from Robertson, “Annibale Carracci and Invenzione: Medium and Function in the Early Drawings,” 3.
Annibale’s Farnese Gallery, claiming that it is praiseworthy more for beauty and nobility than for invention:

I will certainly not report those insolent hyperboles which passed from mouth to mouth at that time – whether more from adulation or from merit I know not – to the effect that Reni’s work along by its sheer excellence had reduced to silence Michelangelo’s Last Judgment in the Vatican, Raphael’s frescoes in the Farnesina, and those by Annibale Carracci in the Farnese Gallery. I will say freely and with all sincerity that if it did not achieve the profundities and inventiveness, if it did not equal the majesty, the greatness, and the bravura of those gigantic works of high renown, yet certainly it surpassed them in its loftiness, tenderness and nobility, and I will say that it constituted the greatest magnificence and greatest perfection in painting than any century has ever achieved.195

Invention, of course, was essential to the achievement of artistic excellence in Seicento Bologna; however, this passage reveals that it certainly was not the only pictorial quality given primacy. As the case of Reni reveals, an artist whose iconography was ostensibly uninventive could potentially be saved by their technical prowess and their ability to render their subjects beautiful, graceful, and ideal. This valorization considered, Cagnacci’s joint emulation of Ludovico Carracci and Guido Reni is made to seem far more sensible. To reiterate once again, Cagnacci would not have been familiar with Malvasia’s interpretations of the Quirinal Chapel; he many not even have heard those criticisms of Annibale’s early altarpieces. Yet, as a Seicento painter, he was undoubtedly conscious of the relative merits of naturalism and idealism, as well as their manifestations in the works of his contemporaries and predecessors. In fact, much like his self-referential repetition of figure types and compositions, Cagnacci’s predilection

for the natural was often cited as a shortcoming of his work. For instance, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Francesco Scannelli wrote in his *Microcosmo della pittura* that Cagnacci was “a painter of truly good manner, but too much attached to the natural rather than to the necessary fundaments [invention] of the common practice.”

For a developing artist to achieve invention by way of creative imitation, Ludovico Carracci, as mentioned, deemed it necessary to selectively emulate and rationalize the best qualities he observed in the works of his more established contemporaries and predecessors. For this reason, it is not surprising that one finds, in Cagnacci, a dual emulation of the inventive forms of Ludovico Carracci and the ostensibly “divine” style of Guido Reni. However, it would be reductive to halt the rationalization of the painter’s repetitive practices here. As suggested by the signing practices covered in the first chapter, throughout his career Cagnacci intended to brand himself not just as an inventor, but as a “bold” Bolognese inventor. Considered in the context of this goal, the painters who inspired Cagnacci were noteworthy not only for the strengths of their compositions, but also in their role as representatives of the diverse modes of painting available in Bologna. By harnessing the figural and stylistic influences of the Carracci and Guido Reni, Cagnacci not only achieved the harmonious balance of naturalism and classicism that is now so often perceived in his late works, but also arrived at a manner of painting that, in combination with his carnally erotic figures, can be rightfully interpreted as his own inventive combination and reformulation of the Bolognese artistic tradition.

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CONCLUSION

Compositional Cross-Dressing and Other Considerations

In 1952, Cesare Gnudi concluded an essay on the Forlì quadroni – then exhibited in Rimini – with the following eulogy:

A sensuous beauty, an exuberant life that expands into a spectacular vision, a magnificent and joyful ballet; a world that delights itself in an enchanted game of brilliant colors, of dazzling light, of sounds, and at the same time discovers a reality that is closer and more earthly, a new, and much abbreviated, relationship with nature: all of these, we have seen, are typical seventeenth-century notes but expressed in such singular form that it can be easily said that they add a new accent to the history of Italian painting.197

These words doubtlessly capture the importance of Guido Cagnacci for art history. Although his biography is confounding, and his variable maniera (at least at first glance) seemingly ineffable, the painter and his oeuvre certainly contributed what Gnudi calls a “new accent”198 to our understanding of seventeenth-century Emilian painting. The popular understanding of Baroque art has been prominently shaped by the developments that took place in major cities such as Bologna and Rome, as well as the contributions of big-name masters like Caravaggio, the Carracci, and Guido Reni. This canon, however, results exclusionary, often ignoring the innovations that took place on the periphery of these major centers and, by extension, the contributions of “provincial” artists – like Cagnacci – who arose there. Yet, for Cagnacci to truly reshape our approach

197 Cesare Gnudi, in Mostra della pittura del ‘600 a Rimini, 28: “Una bellezza sensuale, una vita esuberante che si espande in una spettacolare visione, un balletto pomposo e festoso; un mondo che gode di un gioco incantato di accesi colori, di luci abbaglianti, di suoni nel tempo stesso che scopre una più vicina, una più terrena realtà, un nuovo, assai più abbreviato rapporto con la natura: tutte queste son note, si è visto, tipicamente sensentesca ma espresso in una forma così singolare, che può ben dirsi che aggiungano un inedito accento nella storia della pittura italiana.” The English translation is from Salomon, The Art of Guido Cagnacci, 17.

198 Ibid.
to the Baroque canon, far more nuanced and inclusive processes of research must be carried out.

As mentioned several times in this study, the main shortcoming in existing scholarship on Cagnacci is a tendency to overgeneralize his seemingly disjointed maniera. In very much the same way that Italian Baroque art is stereotyped among popular audiences according to sweeping conceptions of period style (dating back to Panofsky’s 1936 discussion of the “lordly racket”199 and even the “magnificent and joyful ballet” evoked in the citation of Gnudi), art historians of the past few decades have tended to characterize the artist almost exclusively on the basis of the pictorial qualities in the lascivious pictures completed in the later phase of Cagnacci’s career. Even in recent projects devoted to the artist, this trend continues to manifest. The titles of monographs – such as Federico Giannini’s 2010 Passione e Sensualità. La Pittura di Guido Cagnacci (Passion and Sensuality: The Painting of Guido Cagnacci) – associate Cagnacci and his paintings with eroticism and lust, qualities that figure most prominently in his nude half-figures and mature masterpieces such as The Repentant Magdalene. Exhibitions organized within the last several years have followed suit: in 2017, Carracci was featured prominently in a show in Perugia called Seduzione e potere. La donna nell’arte tra Guido Cagnacci e Tiepolo (Seduction and Power: Women in Art between Guido Cagnacci and Tiepolo). Advertised online with the striking picture of the Dying Cleopatra, the forthcoming exhibition at the Cincinnati Art Museum has, in a similar vein, been melodramatically dubbed Cagnacci: Painting in Beauty and Death.

These characterizations are certainly attractive, the product of the inherently human tendency to organize history into a coherent narrative filled with legible

characters and clear-cut events. Cagnacci’s late paintings – with their images of salacious female nudes or epicene angelic creatures – seem the perfect analogy to his scandalous existence – characterized by perpatetic movement, an eccentric temperament and, of course, his frequent affairs with women. They offer a means to define Cagnacci, in other words, as a historical actor whose works reflected his life, and vice versa. In the most fundamental sense, my goals in writing this thesis are not idiosyncratic. Much like the scholars who have previously written on the painter, I have sought to make sense of Cagnacci and to rationalize his life with his elusive oeuvre. However, I have endeavored to dissociate him from the caricatured image of a sensualista and to discover some nuance in his “genio bizzarro.” I have aimed to achieve four objectives in this thesis: (1) to define Cagnacci’s maniera in a way that applies to both his early and late output; (2) to situate this maniera within Italian (and in particular Emilian) Seicento painting; (3) to explore, in this sense, how his compositions might have been understood and defined by contemporary artists and theorists; and (4) to delineate his artistic intentions.

As the progression of my chapters indicates, I worked through these goals in a more or less backwards fashion. In chapter one, I looked to Cagnacci’s signing practices – namely his painted signatures that invoke invenzione and his pseudonym “Guido Baldo Canlassi da Bologna” – in order to pinpoint his most pressing and persistent artistic intentions. Examined in the context of his continual migration, struggles with patronage, and antagonistic relationships with individuals like Pietro Liberi and Marco Boschini, these case studies reveal Cagnacci’s persistent desire to reshape his reputation – as an ill-tempered painter from provincial Santarcangelo – and publicly present himself as a bold painter-inventor who evoked the best of Emilian of painting.
This ostensibly constant artistic intention is expressed through the aesthetic of repetition, described in the second chapter, that seems to characterize Cagnacci’s *maniera* in his early, as well as his late works. Likely inspired by the creative imitation professed in the Bolognese *Accademia degli Incamminati* (discussed in chapter three), the painter’s dual emulation of Ludovico Carracci and Guido Reni, as well as his self-referential recycling of naturalistic figural typologies, should be understood as a means through which he sought to achieve a style that was not only inventive, but superiorly representative of the Bolognese painterly tradition. Of course, the dearth of records on the painter’s life prevents us from completely grasping his true artistic goals and perspectives on painting. However, the theories expressed in the writings of his contemporaries, such as Marco Boschini and particularly Carlo Cesare Malvasia, have served as useful approximates to the way Cagnacci might have perceived the values in the works of his predecessors and, in turn, shaped his own style.

The portrait of Cagnacci that arises from this is tripartite analysis is by no means complete. Much like Salomon’s *The Art of Guido Cagnacci*, this thesis serves as an invitation to consider the painter’s life and works more holistically. Cagnacci was not simply a sensual eccentric, the sum of his lascivious late paintings, but an ambitious creator whose practice was influenced by his time and place and whose complete works reflect his continual pursuit to refashion himself according to his vision of what the ideal painter should be. All the areas explored in this study – including Cagnacci’s signing practices and aesthetic of repetition – warrant further attention. In approaching the latter
topic particularly, it will ultimately be imperative to confront the artist’s identity as a printmaker and a draftsman, a realm that has been scarcely researched thus far.

A concept that I believe also deserves greater exploration in the context of Cagnacci is cross-dressing. Themes of cross-dressing and transvestitism emerge consistently throughout the painter’s biography, often in association with the his torrid affairs with women. The “giovanetta vestita da uomo” mentioned in the letter of Zanotti is the best-known manifestation of this act. Furthermore, at the conclusion of the infamous Stivivi affair Cagnacci’s mistress Teodora was found hidden in the Riminese contrada of Sant’Agostino “dressed in red… as a man.” However, I maintain that this interaction with cross-dressing also curiously seeped into Cagnacci’s artistic output.

Throughout this study, I have described painterly repetition as a type of translation. However, especially in the context of Cagnacci, “compositional cross-dressing” might serve as a more apt analogy for this practice. Both Early Modern critics and contemporary scholars have likened creative imitation to playing dress-up. In his Discorsi del poema eroico (1594), the Cinquecento writer Torquato Tasso – a figure who, incidentally, greatly impacted the formulation of the Accademia degli Incamminati – claimed that an epic poet must concern himself, primarily, with three things: the choice of material, or argument, capable of being given the best form; giving that form to the material chosen; and dressing that form with the appropriate ornament. In her article “New and Improved: Repetition as Originality in Italian Baroque Practice and Theory,”

For more on what little is known about Cagnacci as a printmaker, see Nicolas Teeuwisse, “A Rediscovered Print by Guido Cagnacci,” Print Quarterly 26.2 (2009): 153-56.

Pasini, Guido Cagnacci pitore (1601-1663), 313: “vestita di rosso…vestita da homo.”

Maria H. Loh refers to emulative repetition as “identifiable stylistic masquerading.”

These correlations are certainly compelling: when people play dress-up, after all, they inhabit external identities, assuming the attributes – the costumes, accessories, and even mannerisms – of other characters and ultimately adjusting said features to make sense in the context of their own bodies. This process, without a doubt, recalls that of painterly repetition, wherein artists build up their compositions with citations of preexisting forms – of styles, figures, and themes derived from other canvases – and subsequently transform them to suit divergent subjects and compositional spaces of their own innovative designs.

The word “identifiable” mentioned by Loh is particularly important to note: a crucial aspect of Seicento repetition was the moment in which viewers (who were presumably well-versed in contemporary visual culture) would notice and take pleasure in a painter’s allusion to a preconceived composition. As suggested in Laura Giannetti’s article “On the Deceptions of the Deceived: Lelia and the Pleasures of Play,” a similar element of recognition contributed to an audience’s enjoyment of the 1532 Renaissance situational comedy (comico d’intreccio), Gl’Ingannati (The Deceived). In this anonymous play, the female protagonist, Lelia, cross-dresses as a male page, Fabio, in order to both escape the marriage plans of her father and to get closer to her true love, Flamminio, who had forgotten her. This case of masquerading gives rise to enjoyment on a variety of levels. In the world of the play itself, Lelia views her cross-dressing as a game (gioco): dressed as a man, she is endowed with privileges that otherwise would not be conferred to her – a woman in Cinquecento Italy – and she relishes the opportunity to push the limits of her

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newfound freedom of movement. The audience, meanwhile, takes great pleasure in the dramatic irony of this gioco: unlike certain characters in the play, viewers are privy to the protagonist’s deceptive and goal-oriented masquerading.

Cagnacci may have never played dress-up himself, nor is it certain that he would have had the opportunity to witness the playful cross-dressing featured in Gl’ingannati and other such Italian situational comedies. Nonetheless, his life and works seem to exhibit many of the themes featured in the case of theatrical masquerading described above. His practices of emulative and self-referential repetition can be interpreted, respectively, as two sorts of compositional cross-dressing. The former – involving the creative imitation primarily of Ludovico Carracci and Guido Reni – manifests as the more figurative form of stylistic masquerading described by Maria H. Loh and, much earlier, Torquato Tasso. The latter results as a much more literal representation of cross-dressing, for the analogous figures that appear throughout his œuvre – both across distinct compositions and within individual pictorial spaces – were most likely based on live models who, in order to serve as specific characters, probably had to pose for Cagnacci in different costumes. Much like Lelia – who became Fabio in order to achieve a specific end – these approaches to composition were motivated by an artistic intention reminiscent of playing dress-up; as I have characterized it, Cagnacci’s aesthetic of repetition was driven by his desire to assume a refashioned, superior identity. Although such a nuanced investigation does not fit in the context of the present study, a further examination of cross-dressing – especially as it manifested in Renaissance comico d’intreccio – seems to offer a promising new mode of conceptualizing the life and complete works

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205 Ibid., 60-61. At the outset of the play, Lelia’s father had locked her in convent, strictly delimiting her freedom.

206 Ibid., 58.
of the elusive Guido Cagnacci in an interdisciplinary manner that would engage theories of performance, gender, and sexuality.
PLATES

The following illustrations have been arranged in chronological order. All works are by Guido Cagnacci.

Plate I.

*Virgin and Child with Three Carmelite Saints*, ca. 1630. Oil on canvas. 335 x 210 cm.
San Giovanni Battista, Rimini.
Plate II.

*St. Joseph, the Christ Child, and St. Eligius*, ca. 1635. Oil on canvas. 245 x 263 cm. Chiesa Collegiata, Santarcangelo.
Plate III.

*Penitent Magdalene*, ca. 1637. Oil on canvas. 218 x 157 cm. Santa Maria Maddalene delle Benedettine, Urbania.
Plate IV.

*Glory of St. Valeriano*, ca. 1642-44. Oil on canvas. 410 x 231 cm. Pinacoteca Civica, Forlì.
Plate V.

*Glory of St. Mercuriale*, ca. 1642-44. Oil on canvas. 410 x 231 cm.
Pinacoteca Civica, Forli.
Plate VI.

The Death of Cleopatra, ca. 1645-55. Oil on canvas. 95 x 75 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
Plate VII.

*The Repentant Magdalene*, ca. 1660-63. Oil on canvas. 229.2 x 266.1 cm. Norton Simon Foundation, Pasadena.
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