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Pirro Ligorio as a draftsman : The Catalogue raisonné of his drawings

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CENTER 38

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART CENTER FOR ADVANCED STUDY IN THE VISUAL ARTS

Record of Activities and Research Reports
June 2017–May 2018

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REPORT OF THE DEAN JUNE 2017 – MAY 2018



This year the Center for Advanced Study in the Visual Arts welcomed fellows from France, Italy, Japan, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The topics of their research ranged from the meanings of aesthetic production of the Nahua people of Central Mexico to artistic encounters with Byzantium during the expansion of Aragon, from Venice's architectural program under Doge Leonardo Donà to the reemergence of narrative in 1970s performance art in the United States, and from the Italian architect Pirro Ligorio to a history of photography of the Swahili coast.

In 2017 the Center accepted responsibility for the organization of the Sydney J. Freedberg Lecture on Italian Art. This annual lecture offered by the National Gallery of Art, which features original research presented by distinguished scholars of Renaissance and early modern Italy, began in 1997 and is named after the great specialist of Italian art Sydney J. Freedberg (1914–1997). For the twenty-first lecture in the series, Beverly Louise Brown presented on the topic “Sugar and Spice and All Things Nice? Titian's Portrait of Clarice Strozzi.” The lecture was released as audio and video presentations on the Gallery's website.

In the program of special meetings, CASVA sponsored a concentrated study day for invited specialists in connection with the exhibition *Vermeer and the Masters of Genre Painting: Inspiration and Rivalry* at the National Gallery of Art. The study day brought together a small international group of curators, conservators, and art histo-

Members of the Center
with Albert Bierstadt's
Mount Corcoran,
December 5, 2017



Pirro Ligorio, *Woman Standing at Left Looking at Three Women Standing on Platform*, mid-sixteenth century, photoreproduction. David Robbin Coffin Papers, 1918–2003, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, DC

GINETTE VAGENHEIM

PIRRO LIGORIO AS A DRAFTSMAN: THE CATALOGUE RAISONNÉ OF HIS DRAWINGS

The initial step in preparing the publication of the first catalogue raisonné of the drawings of Pirro Ligorio (1512–1583) was to review thoroughly the collection of three hundred drawings published by David Coffin in his posthumous monograph of 2004 (*Pirro Ligorio: The Renaissance Artist, Architect, and Antiquarian*). That undertaking was made possible by an earlier fellowship at CASVA in the summer of 2015. At that time, I showed that the drawings were attributed to the artist on the basis of John Gere's 1971 article on Ligorio's early drawings. I also demonstrated the limitations of Gere's thesis on Polidoro da Caravaggio's influence on Ligorio's first period of activity (1534–1550), finding that one of the key works he attributed to Ligorio, *Diana and Apollo Killing the Children of Niobe* (National Gallery of Art), should in fact be excluded from Ligorio's oeuvre.

During my second residency at CASVA, I concluded that the only way to define Ligorio's style was to begin by studying the drawings that are dated with certainty; I thus determined that, even if Ligorio's style evolved over time, the fundamental characteristics of his early style are still present in the drawings of his maturity. I was able to show the evolution of Ligorio's manner during the three essential moments of his life: the first Roman period (1534–1554), linked with his activity as a painter of facades after Polidoro and also marked by his only extant painting, *The Dance of Salome*, preserved in San Giovanni Decollato; the second Roman period (1555–1567), when he served as papal architect in Saint



Pirro Ligorio, *Three Women Standing, One Woman Sitting*, mid-sixteenth century, verso of drawing on page 184, photoreproduction. Schrafl Collection, Zurich, n.1; David Robbin Coffin Papers, 1918–2003, Dumbarton Oaks, Trustees for Harvard University, Washington, DC

particular graphic style and then created a new visual vocabulary in line with the need both for self-affirmation and for the glorification of his illustrious patrons (popes, cardinals, and princes). Through drawings, he also shaped the architectural and pictorial repertoire that would be used in the decoration of palaces and gardens of the late Renaissance (Vatican gardens, Villa d'Este, Caprarola, Villa Lante, Bomarzo). These works reflected the stylistic preferences he summarized in his *Trattato . . . di alcune cose appartenente alla nobiltà delle antiche arti, et massimamente dela pittura, dela scoltura, et dell'architettura*, where he wrote that "in painting Raphael must be followed and in style and drawing, Michelangelo and Polidoro."

Another opportunity provided by my most recent fellowship at CASVA and the scholarly connections it offers was my first exploration of Coffin's archives, preserved at Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collections. I discovered that they contain documents essential to

Peter's and produced designs for the Casino of Pius IV and for the villa and gardens in Tivoli; and the Ferrarese period (1568–1583), when he was an antiquarian at the court of Duke Alfonso d'Este and his work included important iconographic programs for the Este Castello and the Palazzo Ducale in Mantua.

I had the opportunity to test my new methodology in an article on Ligorio drawings in the Morgan Library and Museum, to be published in *Master Drawings*. There, I showed how Ligorio elaborated upon the iconographical language of Roman antiquity. After carefully scrutinizing the meaning of each ancient work of art, he expressed that language in his

completing my catalogue raisonné, including photographs of drawings from auction houses or private owners that are completely inaccessible today. That is the case, for example, for a drawing that was preserved in Coffin's time in a private collection in Zurich, only the verso of which had been published in an auction catalog. Thanks to Coffin's letter of request to the owner, a reproduction of the recto is now available in his archives, adding to the known corpus of Ligorio's drawings.

Université de Rouen-Normandie
Paul Mellon Visiting Senior Fellow, November 1–December 28, 2017

Ginette Vagenheim returned to her position as professor of Latin language and literature at the Université de Rouen-Normandie. She will continue her work on Pirro Ligorio's drawings with the support of a research award at Dumbarton Oaks during August 2018, and she is a recipient of a Matilde D. Mascioli Short-Term Fellowship at the Folger Shakespeare Library for academic year 2018–2019.