

- 37 Fokker, *Roman Baroque Art*, cit., p. 327.  
 38 Fokker, *Roman Baroque Art*, cit., p. 339.  
 39 Het Maniërisme lijkt Fokker niet als een afzonderlijke stijlperiode gezien te hebben.  
 40 Fokker, *Roman Baroque Art*, cit., pp. 219-229, 222, 231 en 336.  
 41 Fokker, *Roman Baroque Art*, cit., pp. 233 en 328.  
 42 Fokker, *Roman Baroque Art*, cit., pp. 246 en 248.  
 43 Jean Squilbeck in: *Revue belge d'archéologie et d'histoire de l'art* 8 (1938) pp. 365-66; Ludwig Schudt in: *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 8 (1939) pp. 87-88 en Ellis K. Waterhouse in: *The Burlington Magazine* 72 (1938) p. 245.  
 44 R. Wittkower, *Art and Architecture in Italy 1600 to 1750*, Harmondsworth, 1975, 1958, p. 589

en B. Treffers, "'Een zweven door ether en zwemen door glans". Wat Nederlanders vonden van de latere Italiaanse schilderkunst van de 16e tot de 18e eeuw. Oordeel en Vooroordeel' in: Tentoonstellingscatalogus Rotterdam (Museum Boymans-van Beuningen) *Van Titiaan tot Tiepolo. Italiaanse schilderkunst in Nederlands bezit*, 1989.

45 T. H. Fokker, 'The career of Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini as sculptor' in: *The Art Quarterly* 3 (1940) 245-266.

46 E. Grasman, 'Raimond van Marle: een kort leven in de kunst' in: *Incontri. Rivista europea di studi italiani* (NS) 16/3-4 (2001) pp. 167-179.

47 W. R. Juynboll en V. Denis (red.), *Winkler Prins van de kunst: encyclopedie van de architectuur, beeldende kunst, kunstnijverheid* III, Amsterdam/Brussel 1959, p. 214.

EDWARD GRASMAN

TIMON FOKKER (1880-1956), AVVOCATO OLANDESE  
 DEL BAROCCO ROMANO

L'articolo presenta Timon Fokker, autore olandese del *Roman Baroque Art* (Oxford 1938), come uno sconosciuto pioniere dello studio del Barocco romano, ingiustamente sconosciuto perfino a molti storici dell'arte. L'obiettivo principale di Fokker in questo suo studio era l'analisi delle forme, sulle orme di Heinrich Wölfflin. La premessa di Fokker era che il Barocco, come ogni stile, segue un determinato sviluppo in tre fasi, nascita, fioritura, declino. Concetti centrali nella sua definizione del Barocco erano 'mass' e 'space', volume e spazio, rispettivamente introdotti come elementi espressivi autonomi nella pittura da Annibale Carracci e Caravaggio. Fokker, che si distingue dagli storici d'arte olandesi di questo periodo sia per la scelta di occuparsi del Barocco romano, che per la sua carriera oltre il mondo accademico, rimase una figura estranea nella storiografia olandese dell'arte, sotto questo rispetto comparabile con Raimond van Marle, l'autore del *Development of the Italian Schools of Painting* che suscitava reazioni paragonabili.

MATTHIJS JONKER

## PRACTICES AND ART HISTORICAL MEANING

### THE MULTIPLE MEANINGS OF GUIDO RENI'S

#### 'ABDUCTION OF HELEN' IN ITS EARLY YEARS\*

Guido Reni's *Abduction of Helen* (fig. 1) was one of the most celebrated paintings by one of the most famous artists of the seventeenth century. In 1627 the painting was commissioned by King Philip IV of Spain at a time when Reni was working in Rome for Pope Urban VIII. However, it was never shipped to Madrid because the deal broke down after an argument between the painter and the Spanish ambassador in Rome. Within the first few years of its existence several copies were made of it for high-placed figures throughout Europe and more than two dozen poetical letters of praise, so-called 'encomia', were written exclusively about this painting and published in Latin, Greek, and Italian, and even in Bolognese dialect. Around 1634/5 the *Abduction of Helen* (from now on: *Helen*) was acquired by the French secretary of state, Louis Phélypeaux de La Vrillière (1598-1681).

In the past, art historians have suggested that the historical meaning of the painting should be connected to the politico-diplomatic situation in Europe.<sup>1</sup> This is precisely the conclusion of Anthony Colantuono, who, in his *Guido Reni's 'Abduction of Helen'* (1997), has carried out the most elaborate analysis of this painting. His suggestive and remarkably detailed examinations of the politico-diplomatic background, the textual sources, the iconography, and the production of the encomia lead him to conclude that the *Helen* was 'conceived, perceived, and actively deployed as an instrument of political influence and diplomatic manipulation.'<sup>2</sup> Colantuono's interpretation is attractive because it reduces all the known facts surrounding Reni's *Helen* to a single meaning or function.

However, in my opinion, Colantuono's interpretation is too one-sided (or reductive), because it assumes that the painting has an intrinsic or essentialist meaning that is somehow attached to it. In this article I examine Colantuono's analysis and his presuppositions as to the meaning of this work of art. And I offer an alternative and multi-purpose understanding of Reni's *Helen* by using a practice theoretical approach. In short, in this approach the meaning of a work of art is conceived as related to its function in a 'social practice', rather than as an intrinsic or essential property it somehow possesses. It can be shown that the *Helen* had different functions, and thus meanings, in three distinct practices in the early years of its existence: diplomatic practices, painting practices and literary practices. These practices can be distinguished from each other because different skills were required from and different

goals were pursued by the participants of each practice.<sup>3</sup> Finally, the practice approach that is carried out in this article is not limited to Reni's *Helen*; it can become a new perspective in art historical research.

#### *Single versus plural meanings*

When in December 1627 Vincenzo II Gonzaga, Duke of Mantua and Montferrat, died, both the French Duke of Nevers and the Spanish Duke of Guastalla claimed to be his legal successor. Because of the strategic positions of these states the dispute between France and Spain over the succession that followed – which is known as the Third War of the Mantuan Succession (1628–1631) – was in fact a contest for control of northern Italy. In order to maintain a strong position in that area Philip IV commanded Don Gonzalo de Córdoba, the Spanish governor of Milan, to lay siege to the fortress of Casale in Montferrat in February of 1628.<sup>4</sup> Although the actual warfare took place between the Spanish and French armies, the papacy participated in the diplomatic negotiations. The reason for this was that the dispute concerned two Catholic nations that were fighting about Italian territory bordering on the Papal States. The pope saw the Duke of Nevers as the rightful claimant to the duchies and, therefore, the Spanish military campaign as illegitimate and immoral.<sup>5</sup>

According to Colantuono, the Spanish commission of the *Helen* provided an excellent opportunity for Urban VIII to show Philip IV the papal standpoint through its image. He argues that, in the eyes of the pope, Spain was about to 'abduct' the duchies of Mantua and Montferrat from the Duke of Nevers. And therefore, Urban VIII made Reni paint the story of the abduction of Helen in such a way that it would function as a 'silent diplomat' and persuade the Spanish king to cease his military campaign in the north of Italy. According to Colantuono, the iconography of the painting implies that Philip IV could be responsible for a war no less horrific than the Trojan War – and that he, just as the Trojans, might therefore deserve divine punishment.

Furthermore, he suggests that this was one of the reasons why the negotiations between Reni and the Spaniards broke down after a dispute between the painter and the Spanish ambassador.<sup>6</sup> As the king of Spain never was able to see the painting, it could not fulfil this original diplomatic function.<sup>7</sup> According to Colantuono, it is highly significant that, in the end, the painting was acquired by a professional diplomat. He suggests that La Vrillière was not only aware of its intended diplomatic meaning but also that the nine paintings he later commissioned to accompany it in the gallery of his Parisian townhouse may have been conceived to participate in the same sort of political discourse.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, according to Colantuono, there was no single theme that united these paintings; there was no 'program' in the usual sense. Instead, the paintings functioned as independent political exempla that the owner could use in his diplomatic discourses and negotiations.<sup>9</sup> Colantuono concludes that although the *Helen* had a unique historical meaning – based on its original thought of anti-Spanish rhetoric – it could also be meaningful to La Vrillière insofar as he could use the painting as he wanted.

However, it seems highly unlikely that the pope would be so bold as to let the Spanish king pay for a painting with an explicit anti-Spanish and

admonitory message. Colantuono has noticed this problem himself and he, therefore, suggests that the pictorial

[...] argument has been cast in deliberately enigmatic, even obscure, pictorial terms, as though to cushion its force. It is pure visual innuendo, a pictorial insinuation that the Spanish could certainly read but never read with certainty. In this sense, it is the epitome of diplomatic rhetoric. Guido was ideally suited to paint this argument, for his style is *at once supremely clear and supremely illegible*.<sup>10</sup>

Colantuono uses this paradox as a permit to interpret apparently neutral – although not self-evident – elements of the painting as subtle allusions to its anti-Spanish content. The problem with this type of argument is that the alleged extreme subtlety makes it possible to read almost everything into the painting and at the same time, impossible to 'prove' any reading.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, it makes it difficult to uphold the claim that the painting had one single historical meaning and diplomatic function. And indeed, in his discussion of the function of the *Helen* in La Vrillière's gallery Colantuono seems to give up on his stated quest for a single meaning. For, as an 'exemplum' the French secretary of state could have used the painting as he pleased.

What is more, this also shows that Colantuono's notion of iconographic meaning as such is ambiguous. For he seems to rule out such a multi-purpose function of the *Helen* in the Madrid Alcázar. Apparently Philip IV would not have been able to use the painting in the way he wanted because he would have been influenced by its beauty, which purportedly was such as to render the argument irresistible, dissuading him from going to war in northern Italy, and thus making him give up his own plans. In short, it would have turned Philip IV into a passive and submissive viewer.

However, Colantuono does not make clear why the Spanish king would not have been able to actively incorporate the painting in his discussions with visitors. And, if Colantuono allows for different meanings, why does he search for *the* historical meaning in the first place? This question is crucial, because, as we will see, his search for a single meaning leads him to go beyond the available evidence on several occasions. A practice approach to these iconographical questions can help to solve these problems by allowing for multiple meanings in different practices, beginning with diplomatic practice.

#### *The diplomatic practice*

The goals that were pursued and the skills that were required by participants of contemporary diplomatic practices can be gathered from Garrett Mattingly's and Matthew Anderson's studies on Renaissance diplomacy.<sup>12</sup> An important goal of early modern diplomatic practices was to maintain friendly relations with other states while at the same time serving the best interest of the own state in negotiations and disputes – about issues of peace-making, trade, war, economics and culture.<sup>13</sup> As far as skills are concerned, ambassadors, who were almost always noblemen, had to possess the same or similar skills as courtiers. These abilities were documented in contemporary treatises on this subject, such as Castiglione's *Il libro del Cortegiano* (1528) and Henry



Guido Reni, *Abduction of Helen*, 1627-29. Oil on canvas, 2.53 x 2.65 m. Paris, Musée du Louvre (source D. S. Pepper, *Guido Reni: a Complete Catalogue of his Works with an Introductory Text*, Oxford, Phaidon, 1984)

Peacham's *The Compleat Gentleman* (1622). Moreover, in the seventeenth century certain standards for ambassadors emerged, requiring that they have large residences, host lavish parties, and play an important role in the court life of the host nation. Mattingly discusses several treatises that were written especially for ambassadors.<sup>14</sup> Finally, Renaissance diplomacy itself relied on oratory. Anderson claims that 'Renaissance ambassadors were first and foremost understood to be professional orators' and they were supposed to be able to speak well about virtually any topic.<sup>15</sup>

Examples of works of art that had specific functions in the seventeenth-century diplomatic practice can be found in a collection of papers brought together under the title *The Diplomacy of Art* (2000).<sup>16</sup> From these papers two main functions can be derived. First, works of art were used as *ice-breakers* in diplomatic relations. That is to say, they were sent to foreign courts as gifts in order to establish and maintain friendly relations with other states. This function is not only in accordance with the goal of the diplomatic

practice as described above, but also with the required skills of the ambassador. For, art was one of the topics he should be able to speak well about. Moreover, a work of art could be an excellent first subject of conversation insofar as it was not politically charged, that is, when its iconography or content was politically neutral. Diplomats could show their erudition and establish a bond before turning to the more serious and precarious subjects.<sup>17</sup>

Second, artworks could present an argument to the receiver of the gift in order to persuade him of the standpoint of the gift-giver. This means that some sort of argument, relevant to the situations of the giver and receiver, is present in the iconography of the work of art. This function is in accordance with the skills that ambassadors had to possess, namely eloquence and rhetorical skills. It also coincides with the goal of serving the best interests of one's own states in negotiations and disputes. As such works of art could themselves fulfill the function of ambassador at a foreign court. This is, of course, the function Colantuono ascribes to Reni's *Helen*.

However, as discussed, it seems unlikely that the sender of a diplomatic 'gift' would openly reprimand the receiver – much the less if he were a king and paying for it. And, indeed, the function that Colantuono ascribes to the *Helen* would conflict with the goal of the diplomatic practice to maintain *friendly* relations with other states. What is more, other examples of 'argumentative' works of art do not present a specific admonitory message to the receiver.<sup>18</sup> They rather make their point in a loose and more general way. For our understanding of Reni's painting in the diplomatic practice this entails that we should see it as a *general anti-war image*, instead of as a specific reprimand directed at Philip IV.

This interpretation is in line with one of the two meanings that the art historian Steven Orso suggests for the *Helen* in his book on the decorations of the Alcázar palace in Madrid. If Reni's painting would have been shipped to Spain, it would have been placed in the New Room in this palace. The paintings in this room expressed a sophisticated program of ideas about the king and his family. It was 'an extensive visual proclamation of the glorious achievements of the Hapsburg rulers who had governed the Spanish realms in a manner befitting virtuous Christian princes'. In short, it was a 'Hall of Princely Virtue'.<sup>19</sup> However, in the room the theme of *princely virtue* was expressed in two ways: both by the portrayal of behaviour worthy of emulation and by scenes of ignoble actions that were to be avoided. According to Orso, Reni's *Helen* could have been understood in *both* ways, that is, as a warning against the conflicts and destruction that intemperate love might bring (general anti-war image), but also as a reference to the 'the many displays of valor that marked the Trojan War, which Helen's abduction precipitated'.<sup>20</sup>

Taking a step beyond Orso's interpretation, I suggest that Philip IV could interpret the *Helen* in both ways – admonitory and exemplary – depending on the situation. This means that I take over from Colantuono his interpretation of the function of the paintings in La Vrillière's gallery and I claim, against Colantuono, that it also holds for the meaning of the *Helen* in the New Room in the Alcázar. This interpretation of the painting is more stable, because it replaces Colantuono's ambiguous *concept* of meaning (both single and plural



meanings) with a univocal one, according to which a work of art can have plural meanings in a specific social practice. Moreover, in the next paragraphs we will see that this concept of meaning also entails that a work of art can have plural meanings when and because it functions in distinct social practices.

### *Painting practices*

We know about the failure of the deal between Reni and the Spanish ambassador from the painter's seventeenth-century biographer, Carlo Cesare Malvasia. He tells us that at first the negotiations were not proceeding smoothly because the parties could not agree on the location for examining the painting and determining its price. Later, when a neutral place had been found, the painter and the ambassador argued over its value. Because Reni hoped to be 'royally rewarded by the King' he did not want to put a price on the painting. 'And', Malvasia writes, 'to the appeal that there was no lack of painters in Rome who would be able to appraise the painting, Reni resolutely replied that he did not know of anyone who could or should appraise his works, especially those that were done for the king of Spain'. Finally, after continued disagreements with the Spanish ambassador, Reni withdrew the painting from sale.<sup>21</sup>

Whereas Colantuono does not deny that mutual distrust and Reni's own professional ambitions were important reasons for the breakdown of the negotiations, he suggests that this distrust itself was fuelled by the anti-Spanish iconography of the painting and the anti-Spanish sentiments of the painter. According to Colantuono, just as other papal subjects, 'Reni probably harbored resentment towards the Spaniards (...) because of Spain's ever-expanding hegemony in Italy'.<sup>22</sup>

Colantuono's argument concerning the iconography of the *Helen* consists of two steps. First, he attempts to show that the Trojans are the *bad guys* in the image. Second, he claims that they can be linked to the Spaniards. The first step involves a study of the painting's possible textual sources and a comparison with other works depicting this subject, that is, the iconographic tradition. I will not go into this part of Colantuono's argument because his second step is more relevant here.

He argues that Reni – helped by an anonymous learned advisor – very subtly connected the Trojans to the Spaniards through the African boy with the marmoset on the foreground (fig. 1). He identifies this figure as Eurybates, who was seen by seventeenth-century scholars as the prototype of an evil individual – someone capable of trickery and deceitfulness.<sup>23</sup> And Colantuono claims that it was a 'commonplace in seventeenth-century Italian political discourse for anti-Spanish propagandists' to imply 'that African and Moorish influences were to blame for Spain's presumed moral corruption.' Furthermore, Colantuono suggests that Eurybates is the link between the painted Trojans and the real Spaniards because he is portrayed 'in the company of the Trojans'.<sup>24</sup> However, this is a puzzling observation, since, as can be seen in the painting, Eurybates clearly stands on the side of the Greeks.

Concerning Reni's alleged anti-Spanish attitude, Colantuono suggests that the painter's actions in relation to the commission of the *Helen* – that is, not putting a price on it and eventually cancelling the entire deal – were

(also) meant as politically motivated insults to the Spanish ambassador.<sup>25</sup> However, there is no evidence in the sources that Reni had any anti-Spanish feelings. Moreover, we can understand Reni's behaviour during the negotiations better if we look at Malvasia's comments from the point of view of the contemporary painting practice. In order to establish the specific role that Reni and the *Helen* played in the seventeenth-century painting practice it is necessary to reconstruct this practice by identifying the skills that were required and the goals that were pursued by the participants.

From a recently published book by Patrizia Cavazzini it can be concluded that in Rome in the first part of the seventeenth century there existed, in fact, two distinct painting practices.<sup>26</sup> Her study of contemporary court records and other sources show that there was a difference between minor artists or artisan-painters, who were called *pittori grossi* and who worked for the market, and major artists who (mainly) worked on commission and were described as *valenthuomini*. The *pittori grossi* participated in a practice in which the profession of painting was conceived as a manual labour or a craft. This practice can, therefore, be called the painting-as-craft practice. And, because the *valenthuomini* were considered to be liberal artists, I will call their practice the painting-as-art practice. According to Cavazzini, on the one hand, the *pittori grossi* 'damaged major artists in financial and social terms by selling their cheap paintings on the market'.<sup>27</sup> This suggests that their practices, indeed, should be distinguished. On the other hand, the *valenthuomini* were also assisted by minor artists, for example, in the production of copies of their masterpieces.<sup>28</sup> This implies that their activities also partly overlapped.

What counts for both practices is that, since painting was a profession, making a profit was an important goal. Painters had to make a living with their brush. However, according to Cavazzini, some of them worked only part-time as a painter and were also active in the picture trade.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, in order to make a profit, artists were obliged to meet demands. For major artists this meant that they had to finish their paintings on time and follow the terms of the contracts. If demands are not met, no (or less) profit was made. Generally speaking, for minor artists demands were made by merchants or by the market.

However, for the *valenthuomini* being honoured for their work was probably just as, or even more important, as making a profit, precisely because it affirms the higher status of the artist in comparison to the artisan. One can think of non-monetary rewards such as expensive gifts or even special privileges and noble titles.<sup>30</sup> This means that honour was an additional goal in the painting-as-art practice. However, it should be noted that receiving honours and financial independence usually went hand in hand.

Finally, in dealing with patrons and possible buyers painters had to express a certain mood and attitude. For example, when confronted with high-placed patrons painters were supposed to display the attitude and composure of courtiers. It is important to realize that the goals that were pursued, the skills that were required and the moods that had to be expressed were somewhat different in the two painting practices. These differences are, of course, precisely what makes them distinct practices.

Although Reni's refusal to name a price and his withdrawal of the painting from sale would seem to go against the goal of making a profit and the prescribed attitude towards patrons, this was actually not the case. Malvasia writes that Reni often did not put a price on works done for the wealthiest and most powerful patrons. In this way he received a considerable higher reward for his paintings than was the custom, and also more than he would have asked himself. Moreover, according to Malvasia, Reni even abhorred the 'mention of price in a profession in which, he said, it should be obligatory to negotiate on the basis of an honorarium or a gift'.<sup>31</sup> This shows the importance of honour for Reni and, thus, his self-understanding as a liberal artist.

And, according to Richard Spear, by threatening to cancel and actually cancelling the commission when he was not satisfied with the manner in which he was treated or with the amount of money that was offered, Reni got a reputation for being arrogant and difficult with prices. Thus, most patrons, probably in fear of not receiving a painting by one of the most famous artists of the era, paid more than they would have in more explicit negotiations.<sup>32</sup> That this strategy in the painting-as-art practice, which Reni also employed in the case of the *Helen*, was successful can be shown from the fact that he received commissions from important figures until the end of his life. What is more, according to Malvasia, Philip IV regretted that the *Helen* would not be coming to Madrid and he ordered another painting from Reni.<sup>33</sup> This shows not only that Reni's aggressive strategy did not make his paintings less popular, but also that even after the failure of the *Helen* the Spanish king did not see him as an anti-Spanish painter as Colantuono suggests. Otherwise this later commission to Reni would be unintelligible.

#### *The literary practice*

Apart from discussing the political circumstances of the painting, Colantuono has also made a detailed study of the poems and letters of praise that were written about the *Helen* in 1632-1633. According to him, all these texts 'belong to a single literary enterprise, that of the encomiastic display piece', in which 'describing and interpreting Guido's *Abduction of Helen* [was] a pretext for the display of their own virtuosity'.<sup>34</sup> As such, each author attempted to surpass the others in exalting the perfection of the painting, inventing 'ingenuous *concelli*'.<sup>35</sup> And, according to Colantuono, this even went so far that in the end the epistles themselves became subjects of rhetorical praise.

Furthermore, Colantuono shows that most poets belonged to one of two literary academies in Bologna: the Accademia dei Gelati or the Accademia della Notte. In seventeenth-century literary academies the members discussed classic and modern poetry, and wrote poems of their own. According to Colantuono, the literary praise in the case of the *Helen* did not stand on its own. 'Indeed this pattern of correspondence was not unique to the case of the *Abduction of Helen*; it can be demonstrated that the same individuals often created such chains of epistolary panegyrics'.<sup>36</sup>

Two other art historians interpret the encomia that were written about Reni's *Helen* in the same way. José Luis Colomer argues that the *Trionfo del pennello*, the book in which eight of the epistles were brought together by

Giovanni Battista Manzini in 1633/4, is actually more an oratory tournament than a glorification of Reni's painting.<sup>37</sup> Colomer claims that whereas the authors praise the painting and the painter in comparison with other pictures and artists from both modern and classical times (Apelles and Zeuxis), their own struggle for the unofficial title of best poet is the more important one. In other words, the glory of painting is inextricably connected with a literary competition.<sup>38</sup>

Richard Spear has also reached this conclusion in his discussion of the epistles on the *Helen*. He writes that 'ultimately the poetical praises promote more the skill of the poets than of the painter'.<sup>39</sup> Thus, contrary to what the title of Manzini's book suggests, the encomia in praise of the *Helen* were actually an expression of the 'trionfo della penna', because in their glorification of Reni's painting they were, in fact, praising themselves.

The interpretations of Colantuono, Colomer and Spear coincide, insofar as they emphasize the competition between the authors of the epistles. However, Colantuono adds a more profound meaning to the encomia from the point of view of his politico-diplomatic understanding of the *Helen*. He notes that Antonio Santacroce and Lanfranco Furietti, respectively the Cardinal-legate and vice-legate of Bologna, were among the individuals involved in the production of the encomia. The former commanded Annibale Marescotti to write an epistle to praise the painting; the latter even wrote a letter of his own.<sup>40</sup>

According to Colantuono, this shows that the large amount of encomia written about the *Helen* was 'a carefully orchestrated "media event"' created by the papal office through the deployment of literary patronage.<sup>41</sup> He claims that 'it is certain that the *office of the papal legislation* in Bologna was actively promoting this literary phenomenon'.<sup>42</sup> Colantuono holds that the papacy had given the impetus for the emergence of the encomia and only afterwards did the correspondence take a life of its own. As reason for the active roles played by the papal legate and vice-legate of Bologna in the emergence of the more than two dozen encomia in 1632-1633 Colantuono names the goal of emphasizing the 'moral "rightness" of Guido's anti-Spanish pictorial argument', an argument that was about to be forgotten after the failure of the negotiation with the Spaniards.<sup>43</sup>

By describing Santacroce and Furietti as *papal agents* Colantuono is able to understand the production of the encomia as part of Urban VIII's diplomatic strategy regarding the War of the Mantuan Succession. Thereby he is also able to uphold his interpretation of the *Helen* as having a single and essentialist meaning, that is, its specific admonitory function. However, Colantuono's claim that the *papacy* was actively involved in the production of the encomia is not warranted. For, there is no known document in which Furietti or Santacroce were commanded by the pope to organize a 'media-event'. Nor is there any reference to the papal involvement in the encomia's, which is to be expected since most poets address their epistles to their 'commissioners'.<sup>44</sup>

Moreover, not only is Colantuono's addition of another layer of meaning – from the diplomatic perspective – to his interpretation of the encomia unwarranted, it is not necessary either. This becomes clear if we dismiss the assumption that every work of art has a single and constant function, which seems to be his motive for adding this more profound meaning to his

interpretation of the encomia. In my opinion, the function of the encomia about Reni's *Helen*, and Santacroce's and Furietti's involvement in their production, can be adequately understood if we see the authors as participants of the *literary practice* rather than as participants of *diplomatic* or *painting practices*.

That these practices can and should be distinguished and that the *Helen* had a different meaning in each of them, becomes clear if we reflect on the different skills that were required and goals that were pursued in these practices. For one thing, the fact that it was neither necessary for successful painters to be skilled writers, nor for artists' biographers, theoreticians and poets to have any advanced training in painting, is an indication that we are dealing with different social practices.<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, whereas the function of the *Helen* in the diplomatic and the painting practice was related to its physical presence, this was not the case in the literary practice. The praises of the poets were artistic expressions in their own right and their meaning did not depend on the presence of the painting. This is precisely what Colomer, Spear and Colantuono emphasize in their interpretations of the encomia when they write that the composers of the encomia in the *Trionfo del pennello* were supposed to display their own virtuosity and wit by reading different and even contradictory meanings into the painting.<sup>46</sup>

These goals are, of course, very different from the ones Reni had as a participant of the painting-as-art practice. In that context the *Helen* was understood as an object with a certain price and (artistic) value; and in the diplomatic practice its physical presence was also important, since La Vrillière (and Philip IV) would point to it in his (their) diplomatic discussions. These reflections, indeed, justify a distinction between diplomatic, painting and literary practices in the seventeenth century.

A remark should be made about my distinction between the painting practice and the literary practice. For, the frequent repetition and discussion of Horace's simile *ut pictura poesis* in seventeenth-century art theoretical treatises might suggest that the goals that the participants pursued in both practices were very similar if not equal. This is an important point because the alleged convergence of literary and painting practices seems to be the foundation of many twentieth-century art historical studies of Baroque art. It has led art historians to believe that *the* meaning of a Baroque artwork is to be found in ancient or contemporary literature (poetical, historical, and religious texts).<sup>47</sup>

However, in my opinion this conclusion is not warranted. Jan Emmens, for instance, argues that the frequent occurrence of the *ut pictura poesis* analogy in seventeenth-century art theoretical texts show that in general poetry and painting were *not* seen as equal – and that, therefore, the repetition of the analogical argument was necessary.<sup>48</sup> And, in his famous essay on Horace's simile, Rensselaer W. Lee claims that painting expresses another kind of knowledge than poetry, 'a knowledge that the painter does not acquire from books, but from associations with the traditional language of the arts of representation'. In other words, he claims that painters and poets possessed different skills.<sup>49</sup> I follow Emmens' and Lee's works about the *ut pictura*

*poesis* analogy in concluding that painters and poets participated in distinct practices.

### Conclusion and future research in art history

The critical discussion of Colantuono's analysis of Reni's *Helen* in this article served two goals. On the one hand, the aim was to offer a more convincing interpretation of this particular painting. Instead of following Colantuono in assuming that the painting has a sole, diplomatic function – that of reprimanding Philip IV for his military campaign in northern Italy – I have argued that it had distinct functions in the diplomatic practice. To be more precise, it could be used both as an anti-war image and as an allusion to the heroic deeds of the Trojan War. But what is more important, I have argued that this analysis should be further complemented by interpretations of its meanings in painting and literary practices. In the painting practice it was used to affirm both the status of the painter as a liberal artist and the status of his profession as a liberal art; and in the literary practice it was an 'excuse' for the poets to enter in a literary competition with one another and with the visual arts. By relating the meanings of the *Helen* to distinct social practices without reducing it to one of them, my interpretation is more convincing than Colantuono's because it helped to dissolve the ambiguities in his analysis.

On the other hand, the aim of presenting my analysis in a critical dialogue with the philosophical (or methodological) presuppositions of Colantuono's study has also been to introduce a new approach for future art historical research. In this practice approach, social practices are the starting point of the analysis of works of art. For example, in the study of the first art academies in Italy, instead of regarding the institution as the central object of analysis, the practices that were carried out in it, i.e. artistic, educational, juridical and religious practices, will be distinguished and interpreted in relation to each other. These practices can be identified by archival research of statutes and financial documents, and by analyzing the sketches and completed works of art that were made in the academies. From these sources the art historian can derive the skills that were required from, rules that were followed, and goals that were pursued by the academics. In this way the art historian can reconstruct the practices and activities carried out by the academics at that time. Moreover, in an application of this approach, the artworks' meaning itself is no longer to be considered an intrinsic quality, primarily (or even solely) connected to the artists' intentions or the culture's mentality – as in Panofskian iconography – but should also be related to its function in a social practice.<sup>50</sup> And so, in an introduction of this social practice approach, I hope to deliver art historical research completely from this form of essentialism.

### Notes

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*tics, Painting and Poetry in the Seventeenth Century*, University of Amsterdam 2009, research master Art



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1 See Exh. cat. Bologna/Los Angeles (Pina-coteca Nazionale Bologna, Los Angeles County Museum of Art), A. Emiliani (et al.), *Guido Reni 1575-1642*, Bologna 1988, pp. 114-115.

2 A. Colantuono, *Guido Reni's Abduction of Helen: The Politics and Rhetoric of Painting in Seventeenth-Century Europe*, Cambridge 1997, p. 2.

3 My use of the notion 'social practice' is based on the practice theory of the American philosopher Theodore Schatzki. The focus on skills and goals is also derived from his work. See T. R. Schatzki, *Social Practices: A Wittgensteinian Approach to Human Activity and the Social*, New York 1996 and T. R. Schatzki, *The Site of the Social: A Philosophical Account of the Constitution of Social Life and Change*, University Park 2002. See, for an art historical interpretation of Schatzki's general account of social life my 'Meaning in Art History: A Philosophical Analysis of the Iconological Debate and the Rembrandt Research Project', *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 24 (2008), nr. 2, pp. 146-161.

4 See R. A. Stradling, 'Prelude to Disaster: the Precipitation of the War of the Mantuan Succession, 1627-1629', *The Historical Journal* 33 (1990), nr. 4, p. 776.

5 See, for instance, R. Bireley, *The Jesuits and the Thirty Years War: Kings, Courts, and Confessors*, Cambridge 2003, p. 95, n. 175.

6 Colantuono, 'Guido Reni's Abduction of Helen', cit., esp. pp. 97-98.

7 At the time of the breakdown of the negotiations Count Monterey had replaced Count Oñate, who originally gave the commission to Reni, as the Spanish ambassador to the Holy See.

8 These paintings all represented episodes of classical mythology or history: *Camillus and the schoolmaster of Falerii* (Paris, Louvre, 1637) by Poussin, *Coriolanus Supplanted by his Mother Before the Siege of Rome* (Musée de Caen, 1643), *Hersilia Separating Romulus and Tatius* (Paris, Louvre, 1645), and *Cato Utensis Bidding Farewell to his Son* (Musée de Marseille, 1637) by Guercino, *The Death of Cleopatra* (Paris, Louvre, ca. 1640) by Alessandro Turchi, *Augustus and the Tiburtine Sibyl* (Musée de Nancy, 1660), *Faustulus Consigning Romulus and Remus to Larentia* (Paris, Louvre, 1643), and *Caesar Restoring Cleopatra to the Throne of Egypt* (Musée de Lyon, ca. 1637) by Pietro da Cortona, and *The Peace of Augustus* (Musée de Lille, ca. 1655-57) by Carlo Maratta. See S. Cotté, '250 x 265: il sogno simmetrico di Louis de La Vrillière', *FMR* 69 (1989), pp. 34 and 37. According to Cotté, the only thing the pictures had in common with respect to their content was that they showed exemplary virtue ('esempi di virtù').

9 Colantuono, 'Guido Reni's Abduction of Helen', cit., p. 178.

10 Ibidem, p. 176. My emphasis.

11 Cfr. Bedaux's criticism of Panofsky's notion of 'disguised symbolism' (J. B. Bedaux, *The Reality of Symbols. Studies in the Iconology of Netherlandish Art 1400-1800*, Den Haag/Maarssen 1990, pp. 5-28). Bedaux argues that the theory of disguised symbolism is based on the paradox that a perfect disguise of a symbol as an ordinary object makes it impossible to prove its presence.

12 G. Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, London 1955 and M. S. Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy 1450-1919*, London 1993.

13 Mattingly, 'Renaissance Diplomacy', cit., p. 55.

14 Ibidem, pp. 211-223. The most important of these are Torquato Tasso's *Il Messaggero* (1582) Alberico Gentili's *De legationibus* (1585) and Don Juan Antonio De Vera's *El Embajador* (1620).

15 Anderson, 'The Rise of Modern Diplomacy', cit., pp. 16-17.

16 E. Cropper (ed.), *The Diplomacy of Art: Artistic Creation and Politics in Seventeenth-Century Italy* (papers from a colloquium held at the Villa Spelman, Florence, 1998), Milan 2000. Anthony Colantuono has also contributed to this book. See his 'The Mute Diplomat: Theorizing the Role of Images in Seventeenth-Century Political Negotiations', pp. 51-76. In this article Colantuono not only returns to his interpretation of Reni's *Helen*, but he also discusses other examples of works of art in diplomatic contexts. However, compared to these artworks his interpretation of the *Helen* is unique in its explicit negative meaning for its intended owner.

17 See, for instance, S. Madocks Lister, "'Trumperies brought from Rome': Barberini Gifts to the Stuart Court in 1635", in: Cropper, 'Diplomacy', cit., pp. 151-175, in which the author describes how Pope Urban VIII attempted to restore the diplomatic relations with the Stuart court by giving works of art. See also I. Broekman and H. Helmers, "'Het hart des Offraers'" – The Dutch Gift as an Act of Self-Representation', in: *Dutch Crossing* 31 (2007), nr. 2, pp. 223-252. In this case it was the Dutch States General who tried to establish a friendly relationship with the English with their gifts of 1636 and 1660.

18 See, for instance, E. Oy-Marra, 'Paintings and Hangings for a Catholic Queen: Giovan Francesco Romanelli and Francesco Barberini's Gift to Henrietta Maria of England', in: Cropper, 'Diplomacy', cit., pp. 177-193, in which the author describes how Romanelli's *Bacchus and Ariadne* was supposed to bring Queen Henrietta Maria hope in her difficult situation, being a Catholic queen in a protestant court. And, according to Inge Broekman, the Dutch States General presented themselves as worthy allies to English court in 1610 through a gift of two paintings, which depicted the *Battle of Gibraltar* and a *Sea Storm*. Broekman argues that the

ship on the second painting symbolized the 'Ship of the Dutch State', and that both pieces should be seen as pendants: the *Battle of Gibraltar* portrayed the Dutch victory after the political, religious and economic hardship under Spanish occupation referred to by the *Sea Storm*.

19 S. Orso, *Philip IV and the Decoration of the Alcázar of Madrid*, New Jersey 1986, p. 89.

20 Ibidem, pp. 100 and 109.

21 See C. C. Malvasia, *The life of Guido Reni*, (transl. and introd. by Catherine and Robert Engass), University Park 1980, pp. 83-84.

22 Colantuono, 'Guido Reni's Abduction of Helen', cit., pp. 22 and 26-27.

23 Ibidem, pp. 88-90.

24 Ibidem, pp. 99-100.

25 Ibidem, p. 27.

26 P. Cavazzini, *Painting as Business in Early Seventeenth-Century Rome*, University Park, 2008. Although Cavazzini's study is relevant in this context, because Reni worked in Rome from 1601-1614 and later from 1626-1628, it is not certain that her findings can be extrapolated to Bologna, the city in which the painter was born, educated and where he lived for the most part of his life. However, since Bologna belonged to the Papal States and artistic exchange between both cities was common – as in Reni's case – we may assume, albeit with caution, that the painting practices in both cities were similarly organized.

27 Ibidem, p. 5.

28 Ibidem, p. 27.

29 Ibidem, p. 19.

30 For example, the engraver Hendrik Goudt (ca. 1585-1648) and the painter Johannes Moreelse (after 1602-1634) both received the title of 'comes palatinus' from the pope, after their sojourns in Rome. See G. van Niekerken, 'Willem Goudt en zijn familie', *De Nederlandsche Leeuw* 121 (2004), p. 384 and G. N. Westerouen van Meeteren, 'Op zoek naar de pauselijke adel', *De Nederlandsche Leeuw* 118 (2001), pp. 482-483. I thank Marten Jan Bok for drawing my attention to these texts.

31 Malvasia, 'The life of Guido Reni', cit., pp. 114.

32 R. Spear, *The 'Divine' Guido: religion, sex, money and art in the world of Guido Reni*, New Haven/London, 1997, p. 212. According to Spear, Reni was gambling on the 'liberalitas', i.e. generosity, of the wealthy buyer. In this context, Spear also quotes Mancini who holds that "'a painting in itself cannot have a definite price" because its value "is partly linked with the quality of the patron who owns it and the artist who makes it".'

33 Malvasia, 'The Life of Guido Reni', cit., p. 104. According to Malvasia, this painting, representing the fable of *Latona*, remained unfinished in Reni's studio after his death. This story is corroborated by G. P. Bellori, with the exception that commissioned painting was to portray Samson, in-

stead of *Latona*. See G. P. Bellori, *The Lives of the Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects* (A new Translation and Critical Edition; transl. A. S. Wohl, notes by H. Wohl, intro. T. Montanari), Cambridge 2005, p. 366.

34 See Colantuono, 'Guido Reni's Abduction of Helen', cit., p. 132. To give just one example, one of the poets compares the African to Helen: his physical ugliness is a reflection of her character; and as he has the marmoset on a leash, she holds Paris captive with her beauty (ibidem, p. 161).

35 For instance, both Paolo Macchi and Emanuele Vizzani point to the fact that the 'weapons' of both Cupids in the picture are made useless. The torch of the one in the air has gone out, and the string of the bow of the other is untied. According to Macchi and Vizzani, this implies that the Cupids have carried out their work to perfection, and that they will never do it better. See ibidem, pp. 157-158.

36 Ibidem, p. 120.

37 G. B. Manzini, 'Il Trionfo del Pennello. Raccolta d'alcune Composizioni nate a gloria d'un ratto d'Helena di Guido' (in Bologna, Per Nicolò Tebaldini, 1633), in: M. Pieri and D. Varini (eds.), *Il buratto ed il punto. Concettismo, retorica, e pittura fra Genova e Bologna, 1629-1652*, Trento 2006, pp. 47-75.

38 J. L. Colomer, 'Un tableau "littéraire" et académique au XVIIe siècle: L'Enlèvement d'Hélène de Guido Reni', in: *Revue de l'Art* 90 (1990), p. 81.

39 Spear 'The "Divine" Guido', cit., p. 33.

40 Colantuono, 'Guido Reni's Abduction of Helen', cit., p. 120.

41 Ibidem, p. 111-112. Colantuono also notes that Pope Urban VIII was the official protector of the Accademia dei Gelati and also cultivated the loyalty of the Accademia delle Notte.

42 Ibidem, p. 121. My emphasis.

43 Colantuono, 'Guido Reni's Abduction of Helen', cit., pp. 139-140.

44 For example, both Giovanni Battista Manzini (1599-1664), the composer of the *Trionfo del pennello*, and Giacomo Gaufrido addressed their poems to the French-born 'Abbate Claudio Fieschi', who did not seem to have any other motives for commanding these epistles than genuine interest for the iconographic features of the painting, which he had not seen. See Colantuono, 'Guido Reni's Abduction of Helen', cit., pp. 114-116.

45 However, the existence of professional artists who also wrote biographies and art theoretical treatises, such as Vasari in the sixteenth, and Baglione, Passeri and Sandrart in the seventeenth century shows that it was possible to participate in both practices.

46 This does not mean that the encomia could not also obtain a function in painting practices. However, this would be a different function from the one they had in literary practices.

47 For example, in his article on Reni's *Helen* Colomer even goes as far as saying that the meaning of works of visual art were determined by commentators, dilettantes and humanists in the context of literary academies. See Colomer, 'Un tableau "littéraire"', cit., p. 74. More in general, the presupposition that the meaning of works of art can be derived from contemporary textual sources is present in most, if not all, art historical studies based on Panof-

skian iconography.

48 See J. A. Emmens, 'Ay Rembrant, maal Cornelis stem', in: idem, *Kunsthistorische opstellen I*, Amsterdam, 1981 (1964<sup>1</sup>), pp. 61-97, esp. pp. 65-68.

49 R. W. Lee, *Ut Pictura Poesis: The Humanistic Theory of Painting*, New York, 1967 (1940), p. 49.

50 See Jonker, 'Meaning in Art History', cit.

MATTHIJS JONKER

PRATICHE E SIGNIFICATO NELLA STORIA DELL'ARTE

MULTIPLI SIGNIFICATI DEL 'RATTO D'ELENA' DI GUIDO RENI

NEI SUOI PRIMI ANNI

Quest'articolo presenta una nuova interpretazione del Ratto d'Elena di Guido Reni da una prospettiva 'pratico-teorica'. Questa prospettiva parte dal presupposto che il significato di un'opera d'arte sia concepito in relazione alla sua funzione di 'pratica sociale', piuttosto che come una proprietà intrinseca o essenziale. Anthony Colantuono ha analizzato in un suo contributo il significato essenziale del *Ratto d'Elena* di Reni. In quest'articolo viene fatta una discussione critica dell'analisi di Colantuono e si avanza una nuova interpretazione in contrasto con quella proposta dalla stesso Colantuono.

Nel saggio si rileva che il Ratto d'Elena aveva differenti funzioni, e quindi significati, in tre pratiche distinte. Nella pratica diplomatica il dipinto fu usato come riferimento a entrambe le azioni virtuose e immorali relazionate alla Guerra di Troia. Nella pratica, esso fu utilizzato per affermare la posizione sociale dell'artista come pittore liberale e la professione della pittura come arte liberale. Infine, nella pratica della pittura il quadro offrì una buona 'scusa' ai poeti per iniziare una competizione letteraria.

Infine, dal punto di vista metodologico, l'interpretazione dei significati del Ratto d'Elena dal punto di vista 'pratico-teorico' presentata in quest'articolo può essere applicata nel futuro per ricerche simili nel campo della storia dell'arte.

MATTEO BRERA

IL VIAGGIATORE, IL GIARDINO E LA CANTINA

IL PRIMO GIORNO DI PRIMAVERA

DI ROBERTO SANESI (1930-2001)

'April is the cruellest month'

T. S. Eliot, *The Burial of the dead* (1921-22)

Di Roberto Sanesi (18 gennaio 1930 – 2 gennaio 2001), colpevolmente, si continua a dire e scrivere troppo poco. Critico letterario e d'arte, artista – e di primissimo piano – egli stesso, traduttore impareggiabile da Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare, John Milton, William Blake, Lewis Carroll, William Butler Yeats, James Joyce, Dylan Thomas, T. S. Eliot tra gli altri. Sanesi è stato artista, poeta e traduttore poliedrico e apprezzatissimo in Italia e all'estero, direttore del 'Centro internazionale delle arti e del costume' di Palazzo Grassi a Venezia, docente all'Accademia di Belle Arti di Urbino, Venezia, Verona e, per trentaquattro anni, professore di Storia dell'arte e Letteratura comparata presso l'Accademia di Belle Arti di Brera. Scorrendo rapidamente la vasta mole di carte d'archivio che lo riguardano si può ricostruire una fitta rete di amicizie e scambi culturali tra il poeta milanese e molta parte del mondo intellettuale novecentesco, col quale ebbe strettissime relazioni: da Ceri Richards a Arnaldo Pomodoro, da Lucio Del Pezzo a Graham Sutherland, da Seamus Heaney a Jorge Luis Borges, da Salvatore Quasimodo a Vernon Watkins, da Henry Moore a Enrico Baj e Joe Tilson, solo per citarne alcuni.

Sanesi muore nel 2001, a soli pochi mesi dalla pubblicazione della sua ultima silloge poetica: *Il primo giorno di primavera*. Queste liriche sono, da un lato, il dono poetico alle generazioni del nuovo millennio e, dall'altro, un omaggio finale al maestro T. S. Eliot, la cui lezione è vivissima in molti luoghi della raccolta.

Per introdurre le eccellenti prove traduttorie di Heather Scott (qui ne abbiamo selezionate cinque, l'edizione complessiva vedrà la luce nel 2011)<sup>1</sup> si potrebbe partire dalla breve nota posta in appendice alle poesie da Sanesi stesso. Essenzialmente le liriche del *Primo giorno di primavera* sono sospese tra la vita, la primavera che genera e rinnova, e la morte, solo accennata da presenze intermittenti quanto insistenti. Sanesi stesso dichiara la volontà, seguita alla lettera dall'editore, di coagulare attorno alla poesia che dà il titolo alla raccolta una serie di liriche 'nel segno della transitorietà, dello spostamento e perfino sostituzione del soggetto, dell'incompiutezza del ritorno, con molto inverno e neve per le fioriture successive [...]'.<sup>2</sup> Di poesiel' editore ne metterà insieme ventuno, segno del destino, stando al