



# imagines

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THE GALLERIA DEGLI AUTORITRATTI IN THE UFFIZI

Notes on a research project on the conditions of artistic production,  
modes of reception and systems of organisation  
in the context of an early modern 'special collection'  
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In his 2007 article on the Early Modern pictorial genre of artists' self-portraits, Andreas Beyer wrote:

What is still lacking is [...] a systematic, comprehensive study of how accessible self-portraits were, how they were collected and exhibited, and thus of what their function was<sup>1</sup>.

Unfortunately, Beyer's observation was, and remains, essentially correct: precious little is known about the original context of artists' self-portraits in the Early Modern Period. The function of a great many paintings remains obscure, as do their intended and actual audiences. It is thus particularly gratifying that we do have fairly detailed information on at least *one* such context: the special collection of self-portraits in the Uffizi, assembled from the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century onward, almost completely preserved and comparatively well documented. The *Galleria degli autoritratti* is by far the most ambitious and comprehensive collection of artists' self-portraits from the Early Modern Period. Founded by Cardinal Leopoldo de' Medici (1617-1675, fig. 1), who also endowed it with its specific focus on the intrapictorial negotiation of artistic 'self-creation'<sup>2</sup>, the *Galleria* was expanded considerably by Grand Duke Cosimo III (1670-1723, fig. 2), at whose behest the paintings were classified and arranged systematically in a process which deliberately included the works of foreign artists, both male and female. In effect, Cosimo transferred an encyclopaedic notion of maximal completeness to this special collection<sup>3</sup>.

Over the course of the last decades, the Medici's collection of artists' self-portraits has continued to attract scholarly attention. Published in 1971, Wolfram Prinz's monograph *Die Sammlung der Selbstbildnisse in den Uffizien* constitutes one of the more substantial surveys dealing with the special collection<sup>4</sup>. As a result of Prinz's intensive source studies in the Florentine archives, his work has lost none of its relevance and has proved fundamental for subsequent research. Published as one of three projected volumes, Prinz's effort remains the most important and comprehensive contribution



1

Giovanni Battista Gaulli detto Baciccio, Ritratto del cardinale Leopoldo de' Medici, 1667, olio su tela, 73 x 60 cm, Gallerie degli Uffizi, inv. 1890, n. 2194

to the overall body of scholarship on the *Galleria*. Yet, inevitably, some of Prinz's findings are partially obsolete after the passage of close on fifty years, not to mention incomplete: volumes two and three were planned as fully illustrated critical catalogues containing the works of Italian and non-Italian artists, but the project never came to fruition – in the end, not even the archive material edited by Anna Maria Ciaranfi was published<sup>5</sup>. At first, the planned catalogue of Dutch and Flemish self-portraits likewise remained unfinished: initiated by Karla Langedijk, it was the then director of the KHI, Gerhard Ewald, who finally saw the project to completion in 1992<sup>6</sup>.

A complete overview of all the works in the *Galleria*, a large number of which were exhibited since 1973 in the *Corridoio Vasariano* under severely limited access (figs. 3, 4) and were moved to the museum's depository in 2017 for conservational reasons, was provided in Luciano Berti's *Catalogo Generale* of the Uffizi's collections from 1979<sup>7</sup>. In its wake, Miriam Fileti Mazza investigated the criteria that governed the acquisition of paintings for Leopoldo's collection in a series of four volumes published under the title *Archivio del Collezionismo Mediceo. Il Cardinal Leopoldo*, in which she analysed Leopoldo's extensive correspondence with his various 'agents'<sup>8</sup>. In the following years, research remained focussed on individual self-portraits and continued to adhere closely to Prinz's central



2

Giovanni Gaetano Gabbiani, *Ritratto di Cosimo III de' Medici*, 1722, olio su tela, 141 x 118 cm, Gallerie degli Uffizi, inv. 1890, n. 2250

premises. Particularly noteworthy in this context are Caterina Caneva and Maria Sframeli, whose works shed light on the exacting criteria paintings had to meet in order to qualify for purchase and inclusion in Leopoldo's collection<sup>9</sup>. Giovanna Giusti Galar-di provided further notable treatments of specific groups of self-portraits<sup>10</sup>. Another scholar who deserves particular mention is Silvia Meloni Trkulja<sup>11</sup>, who examined the ways in which individual paintings were exchanged with other noble houses. That the collection of artists' self-portraits has now become the object of further research in a project financed by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG)<sup>12</sup> is due to two main reasons.

First, the last years have seen the publication of a multitude of documents edited and transcribed under the supervision of Paola Barocchi via the website *Memofonte*, for example various inventory lists pertaining to the House of Medici<sup>13</sup>, a large part of Leopoldo de' Medici's correspondence<sup>14</sup>, but also a rich variety of source material referring to the history of the collection under the Habsburgs and the museum's first directors<sup>15</sup>. In cooperation with Gloria Chiarini de Anna, Barocchi also published the letters written by Leopoldo's and Cosimo's 'agents', along with a study of the Medici's preferences in terms of the Italian regions represented by the artworks that were



## 3

Veduta interna  
del Corridoio Vasariano

purchased for their collection<sup>16</sup>. The Florentine *Archivio di Stato*, too, has made a large quantity of documents available online in a digital format, an archival treasure trove that is still awaiting detailed analysis<sup>17</sup>. What is more, the body of research on the development of the Uffizi into a ‘modern’ public collection has grown substantially<sup>18</sup>, with recent scholarship proposing a re-evaluation of long-established explanatory paradigms<sup>19</sup>, particularly in regard to the ‘rupture’ that was traditionally thought to have occurred around 1800 in the wake of the establishment of state-run museums. A second reason is to be found in the fact that the theoretical framework of research on (self)portraiture has shifted considerably in the recent past, which in turn has had a substantial impact on the interpretation of the *Galleria*’s specific structure and composition. Prinz himself remained firmly embedded in a tradition which subscribed to Waetzoldt’s<sup>20</sup> notion of the “autonomous” (self-)portrait as the quintessential expression of a self-aware subject qualifying as a precursor of the “modern artist”<sup>21</sup> – it was only logical for him to consider the Florentine *Galleria* as a continuation of the collections of paintings of *uomini famosi*. Prinz also conceptualised self-portraits as “painted autobiographies” [“gemalte Selbstbiographien”] to which the viewers’ interest in the depicted “personalities”<sup>22</sup> corresponded, an approach based on a genuinely



### 4

Veduta esterna  
del Corridoio Vasariano

bourgeois 19<sup>th</sup> century aesthetics of expression that has come in for well-deserved criticism in the more recent past<sup>23</sup>. Regrettably, when Prinz interpreted the Medici's interest in genuine self-portraits (as opposed to portraits of artists by other artists) along the lines of the 19<sup>th</sup> century discourse of originality, this led him to largely overlook the paintings' focus on the process of artistic production, along with all aspects of artistic self-fashioning in the Renaissance mould<sup>24</sup> – a concept that has since brought about a veritable paradigm shift in research on self-portraiture in general<sup>25</sup>. Given the abundance of well-documented self-portraits in the Florentine collection, the *Galleria* seems singularly well-suited to deploy this momentous concept. The project seeks to reconstruct the relevant practices associated with the establishment, the organisation and the public display of this collection of paintings, taking into account the fact that the *Galleria* is a special case in that it focuses on just one particular genre. The period being examined stretches from the collection's establishment and systematisation by Leopoldo and Cosimo III to the completion of its transformation into a well-published, state-run collection accessible to the general public towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Based on the various written sources in which the paintings are discussed, the project seeks to establish the modes of re-



3

Johannes Gump, Autoritratto, 1646,  
olio su tela, Gallerie degli Uffizi, inv. 1890, n. 1901

ception of Early Modern artists' self-portraits in exemplary fashion. It is further assumed that the existing evidence will make it possible to indirectly reconstruct the conditions under which the artists were producing their works.

The project's goal is to come to an understanding of the structures and practices associated with the establishment of the collection, with the way in which the self-portraits were classified and displayed, as well as with the conditions under which the paintings were produced and viewed. In order to fulfil this task, the research perspective will alternate between a macroscopic view of the collection as a whole and a microscopic view that focuses on individual paintings.

Two closely linked research areas will be examined: the pictorial object, or the self-portrait *qua* genre; and the self-portrait in its functional context as part of a collection. In regard to the first field of inquiry, the project draws on the fact that numerous documents referring to the purchasing and/or commissioning of the artworks and to the response they elicited are extant, documents which reveal the ways in which the paintings were perceived and discussed, and which also shed light on how they were traded, performatively staged, publicly presented or bestowed as a gift. Remarkably, the paintings in question are part of a subgenre of portraiture for which no concise terminology existed at the time of their creation – all that was available were circumscriptions such as “ritratto” or “fatto di sua mano”<sup>26</sup>. The documents allow us to reconstruct to a large extent the discursive framework within which these paintings were situated. Both Leopoldo and Cosimo III set out their preferences in regard to the thematic direction of the paintings, explicitly requiring them to make visible the process of artistic production. On this basis, a persistent strand of scholarship is revealed as having its roots in the bourgeois 19<sup>th</sup> century notion of the supposedly “autonomous” self-portrait as the product of an essentially “modern” artistic subject, its purpose being the “expression” of the latter’s self-image and personal experiences. Inextricably linked to 19<sup>th</sup> century aesthetics of originality and expression<sup>27</sup>, this concept cannot simply be transferred to an Early Modern context. On the contrary, the project will follow the lead of recent research<sup>28</sup> in demonstrating that a large part of the appeal of producing a self-portrait with the help of a mirror (fig. 5) lay in the fact that it provided an occasion to reflect on the act of artistic production as such – after all, before the invention of the genre of the gallery picture, the artist’s self-portrait was practically the only pictorial genre which allowed for this type of self-reflexivity to be displayed.

A second field of inquiry is dedicated to the analysis of the *Galleria*’s relevant structural properties, along with the associated practices in terms of its organisation, presentation and publication, but also its treatment in academic research. This involves a survey of the collection’s genesis and systematisation, with a particular focus on an acquisition policy that was governed by regional and national criteria, as well as by an historical interest that changed over time. The latter aspect is to be explored via an examination of when and under which circumstances artworks produced in earlier centuries were purchased. The project’s findings will be brought into relation to the large-scale historiographical projects of the time, especially Filippo Baldinucci’s *magnum opus* on the lives and works of notable artists<sup>29</sup>, which replaced Vasari’s Tuscan perspective with an awareness of the pluriregionality and plurinationality of art – a corresponding focus on both Venetian and Dutch painting is clearly evident in the *Galleria*’s collection<sup>30</sup>. Further issues to be examined are the criteria and patterns according to which the paintings were organised and hung, including the fact that the canvasses were trimmed to a uniform format<sup>31</sup>, as well as the ‘mobility’ of individual works wi-

thin the collection: which principles guided the distribution of paintings between certain locations in the Medici's residence such as the Grand Ducal apartments, the *Stanza dei Pittori*, the *Guardaroba* at the Palazzo Vecchio, and later also the depot<sup>32</sup>? A further desideratum is a detailed analysis of practices of exchange with a particular focus on how the collection was integrated into the courtly system of patronage and gift-giving, and which role the canvasses played in the public staging of princely conduct. Leopoldo's correspondence with his 'agent' Paolo del Sera clearly suggests that the paintings formed part of a system of reciprocity: for example, high-quality Tuscan wine was given in exchange for self-portraits<sup>33</sup>. Artists, too, frequently received medals, coins or vials containing physic as a token of gratitude for their self-portraits. As Meloni Trkulja has demonstrated, Cosimo III continued this practice: in 1682, Carlo Maretto was rewarded for his self-portrait with a silver bowl filled with 100 *scudi* and fresh fruit, a small box containing medicinal oils and a fine gold medal<sup>34</sup>.

In yet another step, the various forms in which the collection was published will be examined based on existing research on the structure and function of catalogues and illustrated anthologies (*Galeriewerke*)<sup>35</sup>. In this context, the main focus will be on the implicit logic underlying the selection of objects, the specific form in which they were presented (especially in regard to the relationship between paintings and scholarly apparatus on the one hand, and to the works' conformity with certain norms, e.g. in terms of composition, on the other hand) and the intended effects.

A final key issue is how the visibility of the artists' self-portraits was regulated, or in other words, which groups of visitors – e.g. artists seeking to copy the paintings, connoisseurs, “ordinary” citizens – had access to the collection and under which circumstances. Anna Floridia's research on the way in which the collection was opened up to a wider public has proved seminal in this context<sup>36</sup>. Using visitor lists compiled by the collection's first antiquary and director, Antonio Cocchi, Floridia was able to reconstruct the number of visitors and their social and professional backgrounds. Since her findings apply to the Medicean collections *in toto*, no specific conclusions as to the accessibility of the collection of artists' self-portraits can be drawn. We do know, however, that artists who wanted to visit the collection for study purposes were required to submit a self-portrait of their own<sup>37</sup>.

All of these research areas will be investigated against the backdrop of the Uffizi's transformation from a princely collection to one that was under public administration, but still remained under Grand Ducal aegis. In so doing, the project's guiding question will be who became the key figures in the running of the *Galleria* after the “Elettrice Palatina”, Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici (fig. 6), gifted the collection to the city of Florence<sup>38</sup> – the directors, Florence's lower nobility or the Habsburg-Lorraine Grand Dukes – and how power and authority were distributed among these groups of stakeholders. By keeping a keen eye on the continuities involved in the processes of change that took pla-



6

Giovanni Gaetano Gabbiani, *Ritratto di Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici*, 1726, olio su tela, 143 x 118 cm, Gallerie degli Uffizi, inv. 1890, n. 2256

ce in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the project aligns itself with recent tendencies in museographical research in that it seeks to demonstrate that the narrative of a linear development from a predominantly representative and largely inaccessible private collection to a 'modern' (i.e. public and state-owned) one can no longer be sustained.

*Translation from German by Martin Bleisteiner*

## NOTES

- 1 Beyer 2007, pp. 9-13, p. 13: “Noch fehlt [...] eine systematische, übergreifende Studie über die Zugänglichkeit, die Sammelpraxis, die Ausstellung und damit die Funktion des Selbstportraits.” (transl. Martin Bleisteiner).
- 2 For a recent discussion of Leopoldo de’ Medici’s collection interests, see Conticelli *et alii* 2017.
- 3 See also the articles by Anna Maria Procajlo and Isabell Franconi, soon to be published in the next magazine.
- 4 Prinz 1971.
- 5 Meloni Trkulja 1997, pp. 429-434.
- 6 Langedijk 1992.
- 7 Berti 1979.
- 8 Fileti Mazza 1987; Ead. 1993; Ead. 1998; Ead. 2000.
- 9 Caneva 1990, pp. 15-45; Id. 2002; Sframeli – Giusti Galardi 2007; see also Osano 2010.
- 10 Giusti Galardi 2010, pp. 212-221; Ead. 2010 and Ead. 2013; Ead. 2014.
- 11 Meloni Trkulja 1994, pp. 596-625.
- 12 The project is carried out under the direction of Prof. Dr. Valeska von Rosen and her assistants, Dr. des. Isabell Franconi and Anna Maria Procajlo M.A.; inaugurated in June 2018 at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum, it was transferred to Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf following Prof. von Rosen’s appointment to a professorship there in spring 2019. The project is a collaborative effort with the Galleria degli Uffizi (Dr. Eike Schmidt) and the Zentralinstitut für Kunstgeschichte in Munich (Prof. Dr. Ulrich Pfisterer).
- 13 <http://www.memofonte.it/ricerche/collezionismo-mediceo/#inventari>
- 14 <http://www.memofonte.it/ricerche/collezionismo-mediceo/#cardinal-leopoldo-de-medici>
- 15 <http://www.memofonte.it/ricerche/collezionismo-lorenese/>
- 16 Barocchi – Chiarini de Anna 1976; see also note 6.
- 17 <http://www.archiviodistato.firenze.it/archiviodigitali/complesso-archivistico/?id=22>
- 18 Spalletti 2013, pp. 122-131; Id. 2010; Brugnoli 2010; Fileti Mazza 2009; Ead. *et alii* 2007; Ead. – Tomasello 2003; Fileti Mazza 1999; Barocchi 1983, pp. 49-150; C. Acidini Luchinat 1998, pp. 17-30.
- 19 Savoy 2015, pp. 13-45; Marx – Rehberg 2006; Sheehan 1994, pp. 855-874.
- 20 Waetzoldt 1908.
- 21 Prinz 1971, p. 13.
- 22 Idem, p. 14.
- 23 Pfisterer – von Rosen 2005, pp. 12-16; Groebner 2004, pp. 16-21; Bredekamp 2000, pp. 191-240; Woods-Marsden 1998, pp. 13-15.
- 24 Greenblatt 2005.
- 25 Stoichiță 1998; Woods-Marsden 1998; Preimesberger 1999, pp. 13-64; Beyer 2002; Pfisterer – von Rosen 2005; Calabrese 2006; Cazzola 2013.
- 26 Leopoldo de’ Medici’s estate inventory (ASF, CM 826, 1675-1676) lists about 75 paintings referred to as “(fatto) di sua mano”. For detailed information, see the essay by Anna Maria Procajlo soon to be published in the next magazine.
- 27 Abrams 1971, esp. pp. 21-23.
- 28 Cazzola 2016, pp. 41-56, pp. 372-373; Ead. 2013; Calabrese 2006; Beyer 2002; Preimesberger 1999, pp. 13-64; Stoichiță 1999; Woods-Marsden 1998; Woodall 1997; Raupp 1984.
- 29 Baldinucci 1681-1728; see also Franconi 2018.
- 30 Langedijk 1992.
- 31 In the course of the collection’s reconstruction and reorganisation, two standardised formats and uniform frames featuring a small plaque with the artist’s name were established (72 x 58 cm or 35 x 30 cm). As a result, some paintings had to be trimmed and others enlarged: “L’anno 1709, avendo voluto il Serenissimo Granduca Cosimo ridurre tutte le tele de’ ritratti de’ pittori della sua Real Galleria ad una maggiore ed eguale misura, ed essendovi già fra quelli di minor misura il ritratto del nostro Onorio, fatto da esso in sua gioventù e perciò in questo tempo poco somigliante attesa la maggiore età del pittore, volle che ne facesse un altro della destinata grandezza. Il quale fatto e ricevuto, con somma soddisfazione dello stesso Serenissimo Granduca, diedegli questi una nobil ricompensa, oltre al primo ritratto: che gli fu restituito e poi, per buon prezzo, veduto a Carlo Ughi dal Medesimo Onorio”. (Baldinucci – Matteoli 1975, p. 56).

- 32 The self-portrait of Andrea del Sarto, for example, was recorded as being located in the Guardaroba as early as 1609 and was moved to the Tribuna the following year. When it was included in the collection of self-portraits is unclear. However, it is not yet listed as part of the *Stanza dei Pittori* in the Palazzo Pitti in Leopoldo's estate inventory. See Berti 1979, n. A23, p. 789; Caneva 2002, n. 1, p. 181.
- 33 Goldberg 1983, p. 69.
- 34 Meloni Trkulja 1994, p. 596.
- 35 Polleroß 2015, pp. 117-157; Bähr 2009; Valter 1995.
- 36 Florida 2007.
- 37 Meloni Trkulja 1994, pp. 596-597.
- 38 With the *Patto di Famiglia* of 31 October 1737, Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici endowed all the possessions of the Medici to Florence and stipulated that these should never leave the city. For additional information on the *Patto di Famiglia*, see Acidini 2006, pp. 18-23; Casciu 2006, pp. 30-57; Conticelli 2006, pp. 94-97.

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