“Fame,” Virgil wrote, “is an ache.” It was swift. And it was terrifying. But it could also make gods of men. Quoting and adapting Virgil's line, early modern definitions of "fame" often distinguished between its good and bad forms (the English equivalency of "fame" as opposed to "infamy"). The sixteenth-century Tuscan painter, architect, and biographer of artists Giorgio Vasari was especially sensitive to the dangers of slander, which he often portrayed as a trumpet on fire, suggesting the violence and alacrity of gossip or maledicenza. In its positive form, however, fama buona (like its corollary gloria) represented the reward bestowed upon those who performed illustrious deeds that benefited the public. In the sixteenth century, artists joined the ranks of these uomini illustri, or men of virtue.

With the publication of the first edition of Vasari's Lives of the Painters, Sculptors, and Architects in 1550, the narrative of fame was opened up to a new social category of men and women who were capable of transcending their class position and gender restrictions through the sheer force of their ambition and talent. For the first time, readers were hearing about how the son of a stable hand became a luminous somebody working for popes and kings, about how an aristocratic teenager struggled with his disapproving father in order to become a world famous sculptor, and about how the straitlaced pupil of a second-rate provincial painter grew up to be one of the most celebrated portraitists of her time. As with the lives of other illustrious groups (saints, kings, poets, etc.), these tales would come to fill early modern imaginations with fantasies of what it meant to be an "Artist."

The development of new media, such as oil paint (with its mimetic potential) and print (with its capacity for rapid distribution), enabled a mid-sixteenth-century boom in portraiture. The portraitist Leone Leoni announced enthusiastically, "Everyone is now having a portrait made." Vasari, however, expressed concern that even "lowly types" were starting to do so; along similar lines, the self-agrandizing Italian poet Pietro Aretino lamented, "How it is to your shame, oh century, that you allow
even tailors and butchers to appear living here in paintings.” Anyhow, so it seemed, could become somebody through the power of portraiture.

Artists, however, occupied a unique position within this shifting image economy—they were in theory and practice “self-made” men and women. With the publication of the second edition of the Lives in 1568, which included 144 woodcut portraits, readers were able to affix specific faces to illustrious names. At the time, no other portrait book had been attempted on such a scale—the appeal of and fascination with these icons of desire were, from the start, part of the draw. For some readers the portraits may have been even more alluring than the biographies: We know of two abridged versions of the Lives—Ritratti de’ più eccellenti pittori, scultori et architetti (1568) and Effigie di celebri pittori, scultori et architetti la cui vita fu descritta dal signor Giorgio Vasari (1629)—that were published without any of Vasari’s prefaces or biographies so as to showcase the 144 artist portraits. The Ritratti devoted one page to each portrait, while the Effigie grouped the portraits into rows of four placed on a single sheet. Sometimes these pages were then cut into strips, as was done with the copy in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France in Paris (fig. I.1). This horizontal format evokes the kind of group portraits that artists were known to keep in their homes, such as the panel in the Louvre of Five Florentine Renaissance Masters (fig. I.2). The Louvre painting is believed to have been on display in the house of Paolo Uccello in the fifteenth century and was acquired later by the Florentine architect Giuliano da Sangallo. Inscriptions beneath each face tell the viewer that the men are Giotto, Uccello, Donatello, Antonio Manetti, and Filippo Brunelleschi. These five men form a miniature canon of Florentine Old Masters, and the presence of each figure reinforces the greatness of the group. The lineup in the Effigie, in which Francesco Salviati, Daniele da Volterra, Taddeo Zuccaro, and Michelangelo have assembled together, creates a similar effect. The woodcuts held a fascination unto their own. Well into the nineteenth century, Vasari’s portraits could be found hanging in a hall of fame (fig. I.3) or reconfigured into a dazzling, cosmic constellation of icons being carried up to the heavens (fig. I.4). Images could bring fame and glory to their subjects, but they could be unruly and labile too, appearing and reappearing in new contexts that went well beyond the artist’s intentions.

Still Lives examines the subgenre of artist portraiture that came into being during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a period characterized by technological and epistemological flux. Drawing from what Joseph Koerner identified as the singular “moment of self-portraiture”—in which the boundaries between artistic process and artistic end product become blurred—the following chapters will explore the bumpy process of how an entire profession came to be defined through newly developed visual tropes. Both self-portraits as well as portraits of artists (by other artists) will be examined. What happened to artists and artistic practice when image makers started becoming images themselves? What did it mean to be a printmaker like Giulio Bonasone and to profit from making portraits of art stars such as Michelangelo? Alternatively, what was it like to be Michelangelo, trying to keep a low profile in the midst of a critical frenzy around the recently unveiled Last Judgment fresco in the Sistine Chapel, and know that lesser artists were selling unauthorized prints of you?

And what did it mean to be Daniele da Volterra, a trusted friend who was allowed on more than one occasion to render Michelangelo’s portrait for posterity?

The acquisition of fame in life also imposed a certain form of death in life. In a sense, Michelangelo was one of the first international art celebrities in history—an artist whose legend and reputation could be matched to an instantly recognizable face produced by an industry beyond his immediate control. In contrast to his contemporaries, such artists as Albrecht Dürer, Baccio Bandinelli, and Sofonisba Anguissola, Michelangelo couldn’t be bothered to—or, rather, didn’t want to—portray himself in art. (He invested that psychic energy into his sub-Petrarchan sonnets instead.) However, despite his own wishes, by the middle of the sixteenth century both his name and his face were public property. Painted, sculpted, drawn, and printed portraits of Michelangelo were already circulating in his own lifetime, and the artist had to cohabit with these illegitimate doubles that claimed to represent him.

Michelangelo didn’t particularly like being a celebrity. He seemed to think people were always out to get him, whether it was the quarrymen in Carrara and Pietrasanta, who might switch marble blocks on him, or the deliverymen who “lost” his precious care packages of Tuscan wine and cheese, or the nun whom he suspected was trying to scam him by claiming to be a poor aunt in need of money. Niccolò Martelli’s effusive sonnets, addressed to Michelangelo like early modern fan mail, caused the sculptor some embarrassment, as satirists such as Aretino and Francesco Berni lined up to ridicule his infatuated fans and their false idol. But like it or not, this was the image culture in which he lived and within which he had to work through his own creative practice. While different artists employed different coping strategies in the slide from being a subjective agent to an objectified sign or a still life, the constant negotiation that took place between the artist’s multiple internal and external egos was an inherent part of the creative process.

While intentionality has fallen out of favor among certain scholarly circles, artists and artistic motivation cannot be so easily written off in the history of art, nor should it simply be rebranded as “agency.” However, rather than making a claim to reveal the autonomous mind of the master, Still Lives is governed by an abiding interest in what happens when intentions fail to materialize, when desires and wishes change, when well-laid plans get derailed by external circumstances, and when fantasy and reality fail to coincide. Not everyone became Michelangelo, but this point does not disallow the historical fact that becoming Michelangelo was suddenly an aspiration for many young artists from the sixteenth century onward. At the same time, being Michelangelo, as it turns out, was often a burden for the man who had to bear that name. Thus, while Still Lives does not turn a blind eye to the triumphant master narrative of genius, success, and fame, it does focus, first and foremost, on an aesthetic of disappointment, on the necessity of labor, on the inescapability of death, and on the survival of the artist in the work of art.

In this regard, the artist is not cast as an omnipotent deus artifex (a divine creator), as Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz suggested but (to follow another model they put forth) as a “magician.” However, I would push Kris and Kurz’s heroic model slightly off kilter and recast the artist not as a supreme illusionist but rather as a skittish
necromancer whose powers are often unpredictable, whose artworks traffic in the tenebrous space between death and the desire for immortality, and whose portraits possess the ability to conjure the spirits of the absent and/or departed for those who remain. On the one hand we are dealing with the experiential, the visceral, and the fallible body that is destined to disappear, and on the other with the portrait or the immortal avatar that persists long after its maker. In some instances, the artist and the sitter are one and the same; in other cases, one artist is handed the responsibility of rendering the portrait of a fellow artist (for friendship, for profit, and on occasion for both). The portrait of the artist stands, therefore, as a poignant site of experimentation, projection, vulnerability, mourning, and haunting—a site, in short, where momentary lives atrophy into the immortal stillness of images.

**BASICS**

Chapter 1, "The Treachery of Images," considers the bloodless virtual realm of representation. Who was, or rather what was, Vasari's Michelangelo? How did Vasari's representation revise, enhance, or suppress other portraits of the artist? In an age before photography, in a historical moment before the face came to stand as an indisputable marker of identity, what did resemblance consist of? And what can be said of those artists who were sabotaged in Vasari's gallery of faces—of Correggio or Sofonisba Anguissola, whose images were omitted; of Pontormo and Titian, whose portraits were distorted for effect? Rather than focusing on how portraits seek to preserve faithful likenesses, this chapter explores the power of images to create and impose identities upon subjects, the meaning invested in and the desire projected upon these facial landscapes, and Vasari's role in this fantastic enterprise. Artists were not passive victims, however. Chapter 1 also explores the means of resistance and retaliation demonstrated by artists.

Chapter 2, "The Artist's Body of Work," turns to the dripping, visceral actuality of work. If chapter 1 focuses on portraits as free-floating images, symbolic icons that exceed and supersede the body of the artist, chapter 2 steps back from the abstraction of representation and refocuses on the physical and psychic demands of the artistic body at work. This chapter reinterprets the expression "every painter paints himself" as a claim that every work is a vestige or a repository of the artist's active, lived-in, working body, rather than as a comment about the projection of the artist's likeness onto the subject or into the style. As such, artist portraits will be considered first and foremost as "touch relics." This condition is especially poignant in images made by one artist of another, a process that links the genre with the politics of friendship. Painting, as Leon Battista Alberti wrote so beautifully in his treatise On Painting, was said to operate like friendship in its ability to reanimate the dead through its visual vigilance. Hence, this chapter reads as an elegy, first, to the artist in the instance of making, which is at once mechanical and detached yet overflowing with pathos, and second to the artwork that endures to preserve the memory of moments and bodies that have long since departed.
Chapter 3, "Exquisite Corpse," looks at the representation of the body at work. Building upon the attention to the perfidious nature of representation developed in chapter 1 and to the fallibility of bodies in chapter 2, chapter 3 turns to the "joy of drawing" (dilettarsi del disegno) and the "sweat and labor" (sudore e fatiche) of art making. The artist will be considered as both an "action hero" struggling on his or her own and an "exquisite corpse" working within a collective. Even if writers, then and now, claim that painters, sculptors, and architects were becoming a new class of liberal artists, the reality was often far from this ideal. The dream of the Academy, in its inception, was to provide a safe haven where young artists might be provided with the necessary training and support network that would enable them to eke out a living. The utopian fantasies of communal theory and practice will be explored through "meta-images" about art making, such as the prints and drawings of the shadowy academia dei pittori that emerged from the circle of Baccio Bandinelli in the first half of the sixteenth century and the visual biography of Taddeo Zuccaro, made on the cusp of the new century by its subject’s younger brother, Federico Zuccaro, the first director of the Accademia di San Luca in Rome.

Chapter 4, "A Body Too Much," turns to the bloodless actuality of history. Spoiler alert: The recurrent plot element in the final chapter is the academic funeral, and all the characters will die by the last page. Chapter 4 opens with the banality of Michelangelo’s death in Rome on a dark and stormy February night and the melodrama of the academic funeral in Florence staged later that summer. In death, we all become still lives. The death of the artist, however, was often a work of art in itself (the staging of the deathbed, instructions to mourners, wills and testaments, last works, etc.). The corpse of the artist sometimes became an artwork that could be stolen, divided, and even replicated through death masks and casts. The shift of emphasis from the importance of the artist’s corpse to the ascendancy of the academic body ensured that the talent of the individual parts was subsumed by the glorious authority of the whole. The posthumous monuments erected for Michelangelo (the saintly relic), Raphael (the perfect corpse), and Titian (the missing remains) demonstrate the various strategies by which different communities attempted to co-opt the dead. Death opened up marvelous possibilities for storytellers—especially for those belated nineteenth-century bards of the Italian Risorgimento, haunted as they were by a melancholic patriotism that sought refuge in the golden light of the Renaissance. The tales that are told in this chapter float among fairy tales, forensic reports, hagiographies, fiction, and history, falling at times into the cracks in between them.

ADVANCED FEATURES

The following keywords and phrases occur frequently in Still Lives and are highlighted and summarized below for easy referral.

Portraiture as Still Life. Vasari recounts the moving tale of how Luca Signorelli sought to preserve the murdered body of his beloved young son by using the “work of his hands” to make a portrait so he would always be able to see his child as he had
been. While histories of portraiture traditionally focus on the face and on resemblance, portraiture is also about the body and about the process by which living, breathing, sentient subjects become images. A portrait is a lifeless thing—a painting, a sculpture, a cameo, a relief, a drawing, a print, a photograph, and even a video or film—and yet a ghost haunts the dead material, reminding the spectator of his or her own mortality and duty to commemorate those who have left first. “Before the image,” Georges Didi-Huberman mused, we must acknowledge “that it will probably outlive us, that before it we are the fragile element, the transient element, and that before us it is the element of the future, the element of permanence.” Furthermore, if—as Alexander Nemerov wrote of Raphaelle Peale’s still-life paintings—there is always a shadow of the artist’s departed body lingering in the image, this sense of “bodily residuum” or “phenomenological carnality” is doubly present in portraiture, which more so than images of burning candles, decaying fruits, withering bouquets, and hollowed skulls stands as the ultimate memento mori. To speak of portraiture as “still life” then is to speak of this ambivalent nature.

Technologies of Fame. If the “frenzy of renown” was grounded in the achievements and exploits of the illustrious men of antiquity, the modern concept of celebrity finds a crucial, early moment of consolidation in Vasari’s biographies and—in more important—in the portraits of the artists. “The dissemination of the unique,” as Leo Braudy argued, enabled the “democratization of fame,” and reproductive media such as printing “allowed the negotiable face, previously the possession of only the rich, to become a medium of more general cultural exchange.” As such, Still Lives is less interested in the historical data that can be gleaned from the hundreds of pages of Vasari’s text (that is, what the stories tell us about patrons, commissions, and individual trajectories) and more concerned with what the immediately consumable, easily portable, and wildly delectable three-volume “Renaissance Facebook” contributed to the glamorization of the profession and the “celebrification” of artists as people who were not only famous but were also facially famous. Portrait medals had served this purpose and continued to do so through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but printing accelerated that process. Oil painting—which might be termed the “CGI [computer-generated imagery] of the Renaissance”—allowed for increasingly vivid depictions, portraits that would be described as “living flesh” (carne viva). Sculpted portraits, too, immortalized the faces of artists through the permanency of stone and bronze. These media helped to transform the kinds of messages that portraits could tell.

Viscera vs. Representation. Instead of likeness and resemblance, the emphasis in Still Lives is placed upon the psychodynamics between the artist’s laboring body and the representational avatar. The poignancy of this binary lies in the fact that while the artist is capable of bringing to life his or her own image (or the portrait of another), the flesh-and-blood author must eventually cede to the image in death. This tension, I will argue, lies behind Alberti’s enigmatic comparison (in his treatise On Painting) of the painter with Narcissus and of painting with the gesture of “embracing the pool.” Thus, instead of revisiting old narratives about portraiture and stylistic naturalism, Still Lives will consider portraiture in relation to phenomenological sensation, psychological affect, and historical haunting. Chapters 2 and 4 focus upon
the “desperate vitality” of the body (a beautiful phrase coined by Pier Paolo Pasolini) that pours itself into the artwork; while chapters 1 and 3 grapple with the tenacity of the image that survives to mourn its maker but that is capable, in other instances too, of betraying its owner. However, rather than seeking to privilege the one over the other, the discussion of viscera and representation focuses on the dynamic, at once tender and cruel, between the pairing.

Pothos, Punctum, and the Ça-a-été (Theories of Death and Desire). Portraiture was invented by Butades’ lovesick daughter, who traced her lover’s shadow on the wall as he slept. The story of the ancient Greek potter’s daughter was, for Maurizio Bettini, the foundational myth that underlies classical theories of portraiture. Contrary to the celebratory model of the portrait of the humanist individual first introduced by Jacob Burckhardt in 1860 in The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy, Bettini outlined a different literary tradition based on pothos and desiderium, or ancient theories of desire, which frequently inspired some rather morbid fantasies, such as those of the young widow Laodamia, who slept with an effigy of her dead husband (a hero of the Trojan War); Allius, who was consoled and haunted by the portrait of his deceased wife; and Menelaus, who was plagued by portraits of Helen when she abandoned him for another land. Thinking about portraiture as the shadows, simulacra, and phantoms of the absent beloved introduces questions about contiguity, analogy, surrogacy, loss, and desire that are both anthropological (in their concern with ritual) and semiotic (in terms of how recipients read the signs on the surface).

Two of the key conceptual features in Still Lives come from ideas first developed by Roland Barthes in Camera Lucida: punctum (the wounding detail in an image); and the ça-a-été (the “that-has-been”). While Barthes wrote of punctum as an essential affective quality of the photographic medium, its application as a concept to a history of portraiture will become evident in chapter 2. The ça-a-été, in turn, allows for a more affective theory of portraiture sensitive to the operation of psychic and intimate time rather than focusing upon social identity and status alone. These ancient and modern theories of the portrait may seem overtly romantic in their emphasis on loss, absence, and longing to the twenty-first-century reader, but they nevertheless embrace a profoundly necromantic impulse mitigated by the anxiety of oblivion and the finality of death, a tradition, moreover, with which early modern poets and artists would have felt right at home.

History and Hauntology (The Portrait’s Work of Mourning). Ghosts are beautiful, anachronistic, and anarchic specters for the historian. We stalk them, we chase after them; they guide us, they leave us in the dark. In spite of their unruly nature, it is our ethical duty to be vigilant so their stories do not disappear into the dust of archives and storerooms. Ghosts and portraits are bound to each other etymologically by the Latin term effigies. Furthermore, as ghosts do, portraits bring back the dead and make present the absent. As ghosts do, portraits dwell within an elliptical timescape where the melancholic past of the artist and subject and the insistent present of the spectator—the fuit hic (“he or she was here”) and the hic et nunc (“here and now”)—collapse into each other. Both ghost and portrait require a spectator—an other external to themselves to come and to be haunted by them—in order for their presence to
be felt once more. Jacques Derrida's concept of “hauntology” functions, therefore, as a heuristic device here. A neologism that conflates haunting with ontology, “hauntology” enables me to extend the study of early modern portraiture into narratives about the politics of friendship, about the work of mourning, about haunting, and about an atavistic sense of community.28

TROUBLESHOOTING

Two points should be flagged about previous histories of artists and of portraiture. Standard accounts argue for the metamorphosis of the artist from craftsman/artisan to humanist/intellectual; indeed, many early modern painters, sculptors, and architects fashioned themselves as more than manual laborers and some even came to be regarded by their contemporaries as intellectuals. However, the material actuality of this newly acquired professionalism remained covered in perspiration and dust, encapsulated most commonly in the Italian term *fatica*. Everyday realities and practices remained little changed for most artists: Materials still had to be sourced; apprentices still had to be trained; commissions still had to be won; obsequious letters still had to be penned to stingy patrons and self-interested agents; art still had to be made. Even for upper-crust geniuses such as Michelangelo, who was born and who died wealthy, the day-to-day business of being an artist was physically draining, intellectually taxing, and financially challenging.

What was achieved in the first half of the sixteenth century, however, was the transformation of the artist's profession into the stuff of dreams. And, as in Hollywood, while a lucky minority managed to rise above the majority, there remained nevertheless an entire cultural-industrial complex in which all manner of practitioners could ply their trades as pigment grinders, canvas stretchers, agents, dealers, reproductive printmakers, critics, biographers, copyists, forgers, hacks, curators, specialists in the depiction of landscape details or animals, and so on.

In the place of status, this book focuses on sweat. Instead of revisiting the standard tale of upward social mobility, *Still Lives* moves beyond the “status thesis” in order to consider how the grim realities of everyday practice were often at odds with the dream of change in the rarefied domain of theory. To be sure, the pressing issues of class and status are not abandoned but will be mitigated instead through the analysis of the works at hand rather than pursued as overarching rubrics predetermined by the social historical context.

A second note regarding previous models: Burckhardt’s formidable nineteenth-century construction of the “Renaissance individual” has long dominated certain histories of portraiture from John Pope-Hennessy onward.29 While this concept provided a much-needed entry point into a more engaged social-historical approach to the genre in the second half of the twentieth century, it has now become a methodological ready-made—what Georges Didi-Huberman referred to as a Miss Marple or Sherlock Holmes style of art history driven by a contextualist “passion for identifying,” asking always “who is it?”30 Such concerns privilege the collector (consumer)
before the artist (producer), and ultimately shift old conversations about intentionality from one agent to another. As with a pewter serving dish or a homely estate, portraits become an extension of the owner's social identity, and little attention is given to the more aesthetic and existential labor that is being done by the artwork itself. In stark contrast to a “consumerist art history” obsessed with patrons, collectors, and shopping that would reduce the artwork to a delectable consumer good, Still Lives proposes a “consumptive art history” that turns instead to a concern with embodied artistic process, performance, and pathos and that acknowledges the artwork first and foremost as a relational object that must outlive both its subject and maker.

This book does not seek to reconstruct a total truth about the historical past, but to offer a careful reading of it based on the evidence on hand. Standing alongside (and in no way denying the necessity of) the historian’s ideal and pursuit of “euchronistic consonance,” my approach is based on a form of “sympathetic montage.” As a methodological strategy, “sympathetic montage” draws upon Sir James G. Frazer’s concept of “sympathetic magic,” with its laws of similarity and contagion, and Bertolt Brecht’s radical deployment of Verfremdungseffekt (“alienation effect”). Both concepts enable new ways of seeing that result from the juxtaposition of unexpected sympathies. Thus, in the pages that follow, Annibale Carracci will find a certain sympathetic—if not deliberatively disjunctive—attachment to Lee Friedlander, Sol LeWitt to Vincenzo Borghini, Leon Battista Alberti to Jacques Derrida and Winnie the Pooh, and so on. Contextualist purists and hardcore recreationists are advised, therefore, to proceed with a grain of salt and a spoonful of sugar.

Despite the predilection for cross-period structural parallels, “sympathetic montage” is decidedly not an abnegation of the commitment to and responsibility of historical specificity; it is quite the opposite (and there is plenty of fodder in the notes to satisfy any such hunger). However, as a generation of beleaguered scholars cries “crisis” in the face of the easy allure and instant authority of the contemporary, it is the duty of the historian to find new means to make the beautiful strangeness of the distant past resonate once more in a manner that is productive for the pedagogic benefit and pleasure of those in the present who will build the future. As Walter Benjamin warned, “Every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.” But Benjamin’s times are not ours. This book is, therefore, also about the potentiality of the premodern period and what it means to be a scholar in this field today. Standing in the early twenty-first century, one should proceed less like Benjamin’s blighted Angel of History and stand more firmly like Janus, the ancient god of transitions, passages, and thresholds, looking forward with confidence even as we gaze steadily backward in time.

FAQs

What should the reader expect from this book? Please be forewarned: Leonardo da Vinci and Caravaggio will not be making extended appearances within these pages; fans of these two superstars can consult the flood of publications dedicated to

For general queries, contact webmaster@press.princeton.edu
them. Issues of class, gender, and identity in relation to the genre of artist portraiture, the iconographic sources for and the historiographic invention of the concept of the Artist, as well as the institutional history of the Academy in the *longue durée* are not overlooked or dismissed in this study; however, as so much excellent work has already been done in these areas, *Still Lives* seeks to ask new questions.

At the heart of the book remains the crucial issue: How can we write critically and responsibly today about artists without slipping into the kind of effusive encomium encouraged by the monograph or the psycho-biographical analysis of the life? There will be praise and blame of individual actors in the chapters to come, but the power of the artwork—as representation, as image, and as object (or as discourse, the visual, and the material)—remains my central concern. Addressing historical concerns specific to the sixteenth century (above all), *Still Lives* asks: How does the introduction of new media transform the eloquence and authority of portraits and the early modern definition of the Artist? Taking into consideration the circumstances of technological innovations, how do these changes impact artistic practice for those who grew up in such an advanced image economy? Can we contemplate another more embodied, less heroic, more entangled, less teleological Old Master narrative that speaks about the everyday realities of being and becoming artists? And, finally, can we make room for a history of sweat and tears, blood and guts, disappointment, boredom, and failure in the portrait of the Old Master? These are the specific questions that *Still Lives* seeks to answer.

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