



TO HAVE AND TO HOLD: POSSESSING THE SACRED IN THE LATE RENAISSANCE

Erin E. Benay

Abstract

Private devotional art of the early 17th century often found its place in the galleries of noblemen and women whose diverse collections were symbols not only of stylistic taste, but of their owners' exhaustive curiosity. In these domestic settings, boundaries between sacred and secular were permeable, as the unprecedented physical intimacy portrayed in popular religious subjects such as St Matthew and the Angel, the Stigmatisation of St Francis, or Christ's Agony in the Garden reveal. Representations of the latter reminded viewers of Christ's human, corporal suffering and suggested a model of resolve strengthened by prayer. The Agony in the Garden appears on the interior of Jacopo Ligozzi's virtuosic Portable Altar with Carrying Case (1608), likely a Medici gift presented to the Austrian court in anticipation of the marriage of archduchess Maria Maddalena to soon-to-be grand duke Cosimo II. Adorned with lavish botanical motifs on its exterior, the Altar's potency as a sacred possession was redoubled by the owner's tactile revelation of the portrayal of Christ supported by an Angel contained inside the case. Comprised of wood, oil on copper, and pietre dure inlay, it is an object intended to be held, opened, and experienced. This paper suggests that Ligozzi's selective combination of sumptuous materials and choice of subject matter – botanical illustration and Christological iconography – allowed the object to appeal to the full sensorium, and therefore to function as efficaciously as a devotional aid as it did as a curiosity among other rare collectibles.

Keywords: Jacopo Ligozzi, pietre dure, Maria Maddalena, Habsburg, history of collecting, Agony in the Garden, somaesthetic, Galleria dei Lavori, Opificio delle Pietre Dure

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Biographical note

Erin E. Benay is assistant professor of southern renaissance and baroque art at Case Western Reserve University, Ohio. Her research examines the relationship of empiricism and the senses to early modern painting, the history of collecting in 17th-century Europe, and global currents of exchange and mobility in early modern cultural history. Together with Lisa M. Rafanelli, she is the author of *Faith, Gender, and the Senses in Italian Renaissance and Baroque Art: Interpreting the Noli me tangere and Doubting Thomas* (Ashgate, 2015). Her other publications include essays in *Arte Veneta* and *Caravaggio: Reflections and Refractions* (Ashgate 2014). Her next book (under contract with Giles) will focus on Caravaggio's *Crucifixion of St Andrew* at the Cleveland Museum of Art and reveals the ways in which imperial movement in part obfuscated 'original' locations of production, collection, and consumption, in this case between Italy and Spain. Benay's current research project, *Italy By Way of India: Routes of Devotional Knowledge in the Early Modern Period*, will consider how travel between Italy and South Asia complicated the iconological construction of saints' lives.

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The Italian renaissance wedding began years before the actual date and was accompanied by pomp and fanfare the likes of which would make even the most indulgent of modern-day brides blanch. Parades, processions, performances, games, and meals accompanied the celebration and ratification of marriage, as has been explicated by Andrea Bayer (2009) and Jacqueline Musacchio (2009). Cassone, portraits, and fresco cycles honoured the nuptial vows. Prior to the event, however, an exchange of gifts marked the progression from courtship to betrothal and lubricated the mechanism by which families became unified. Delicately embroidered belts associated with fertility and with Virginal chastity both, elaborately ornamented jewelry, or maiolica inscribed with Petrarchan verses promised a life of divinely sanctioned love. Evoking the beauty of an absent wife-to-be, or the pain of yet unrequited love, these objects straddled an evasive line – glorifying the communion of man and wife in holy matrimony, while alluding to the baser, sensorial promise of consummation.

To these whimsical gift options may be added those offerings that articulated the financial, material, and spiritual fruits of marriage in more strictly devotional terms. Instead of evoking an absent love, or the political advantage of wedding families, for instance, Jacopo Ligozzi's sumptuous *Portable Altar in a Carrying Case* (Figure 6.1; Allen Memorial Art Museum) rouses pious devotion in the viewer. Nevertheless, as William

Hood has suggested,¹ the altarpiece, nestled in its velvet-lined womb, was likely a Medici gift presented to the Austrian court in anticipation of the marriage of archduchess Maria Maddalena (1589–1631) to soon-to-be grand duke Cosimo II (r. 1609–21). Perhaps arriving in Maria Maddalena's Austrian home of Graz on the metaphorical eve of the couple's wedding in 1608, one imagines a multisensory and revelatory unpacking of the precious parcel: the ebonised wood case is festooned with painted flowers, which elegantly encircle a cartouche bearing Christ's monogram and the emblem of the Jesuit order – a cross and heart pierced with three nails. Outfitted with metal handles and a small latch, the floral exterior is easily penetrated to reveal the true prize: a small altar, embellished with *pietre dure* inlay in lapis, colored glass, gilded metal, coral, mother of pearl, and agate (Bacci, 1962, pp.47–55). Weighing about five pounds, the altar could be easily lifted from its carrying case by its recipient and set atop a table. Two lead putti with gilded wings and wreaths rest languidly atop the pediment, looking down at the scene below. At its centre, Ligozzi has painted Christ's *Agony in the Garden* in prismatic, jewel tones on copper; a tiny depiction of Abraham's *Sacrifice of Isaac* appears below the central scene and is painted on a precious piece of lapis lazuli.

Adorned as it is with lavish botanical motifs on its exterior, the Altar's potency as a sacred possession was, I argue, redoubled by the owner's tactile revelation of the portrayal of Christ supported by an angel contained inside the case. Comprised of wood, oil on copper, and *pietre dure* inlay, it is an object intended to be held, opened, and experienced. The Viennese provenance of the Allen altar, coupled with its auspicious date of 1608, signed by Ligozzi in the lower-left corner of the painting, provide compelling circumstantial evidence of the object's intended function. Advertising the merits of Florence's famous hard-stone inlay, the little altar must have been a strategic offering, not unlike other chivalric gifts given to members of the Habsburg court. Although Hood noted this potential function during

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¹ William Hood, email message to the author, July 16, 2012, and as discussed in two unpublished papers: William Hood, 'A Diplomatic Gift for the Medici Wedding of 1608', The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, April 2006; and William Hood, 'A House-Altar by Jacopo Ligozzi', The University of Georgia Symposium on Italian Renaissance Art in Honor of Andrew Ladis, September 2006. Although Hood has found no corroborating textual evidence to support the association of the altarpiece with this particular Medici-Habsburg wedding, I believe this function can be even more firmly argued when the iconographic program, medium, and its appeal to the sensorium are taken into consideration, as I have done in this essay.



Figure 6.1 (a): Jacopo Ligozzi, *Portable Altar in a Carrying Case (Agony in the Garden)*, closed position, 1608, Ebony, ebonized wood, and hardstones; oil on copper; silver mounts; case of painted wood with metal fittings, Image: 26.7 x 15.9cm, Overall: 58.4 x 33.7 x 8.3cm. (Photo: Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Ohio; R.T. Miller Jr. Fund)

his tenure at Oberlin College, no publication yet addresses the complex ways in which Ligozzi's portable altar operates as far more than a harbinger of Florentine craft. In fact it was, I contend, Ligozzi's selective combination of sumptuous materials and choice of subject matter – botanical illustration and Christological iconography – which allowed the object to appeal to the full sensorium, and thus to function as efficaciously as a devotional aid as it did as a curiosity among other rare collectables. As such, and as I will propose, the Allen altar signals a mergence not so much of Habsburg and Medici dynasties, but of the profane and sacred, the material and immaterial. By situating Ligozzi's diminutive and understudied portable altar at the centre of this case study, we might better understand how objects like this one defied typical conventions of marriage and devotional art, whilst



Figures 6.1 (b) and (c): Jacopo Ligozzi, *Portable Altar in a Carrying Case (Agony in the Garden)*, 1608, open position and removed from carrying case. Ebony, ebonised wood and hardstones; oil on copper; silver mounts; case of painted wood with metal fittings, Image: 26.7 x 15.9cm, overall: 58.4 x 33.7 x 8.3cm. (Photo: Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Ohio; R.T. Miller Jr. Fund)

simultaneously appealing to a somaesthetic mode of viewing that would have been particularly appealing for female consumers.

Flowers made firm: botanical illustration and *pietre dure*

In order to appreciate the multivalence of such an object, the altar might first be replaced in its case, closing the doors to reveal the emblematic painted garden. Further, it is necessary to reverse the shipping process, thus beginning where this object did: in the Galleria dei Lavori, or the Opificio delle Pietre Dure as it was renamed in the 19th century (Tomasi and Hirschauer, 2002, p.60). Founded by Medici grand duke Ferdinando I in 1588, the Galleria was organized under the direction of Jacopo Ligozzi (1547–1627), who oversaw the production of goldsmiths, jewelers, mosaicists, cabinetmakers, embroiderers, and herbalists. Ligozzi had already proven himself invaluable to the Medici under Ferdinando's brother, Francesco I, who invited Ligozzi to join the court in 1577 (Tomasi and Hirschauer, 2002, p.57). Trained as a draughtsman in Verona, Ligozzi was employed by the Habsburg Court of the Austrian Empire in Vienna prior to his return to Italy and subsequent position as court painter to grand duke Francesco I de' Medici. While in Vienna, he became known not only for his mythological and religious paintings, but also for his illustrations of flora and fauna (Kauffman, 1995, p.197). Executed from life, Ligozzi's botanical drawings and paintings (Figures 6.2 and 6.3) earned the attention of the great Bolognese naturalist, Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522–1605), who exchanged specimens and illustrations with the artist for years to come (Conigliello, 2005, p.6).

As David Freedberg (2003), Georgina Masson (1972), Elisabeth MacDougall (1994), and others have shown, such illustrations revealed the collaboration between artists and scientists of the period, and were rapidly absorbed into the cultural contexts of collecting, where botanical and zoological facsimiles stood in place of specimens that collectors were wont to obtain for their gardens and *Wunderkammern*. As Renata Ago and Paula Findlen have shown, the accumulation of natural history specimens into museum-like assemblages, such as that of Athanasius Kircher or Ulisse Aldrovandi, and the artistic endeavors of Federico Cesi's Lincean Academy demonstrated a new attitude toward nature, knowledge, and the visual world (see Ago, 2006 and Findlen, 1996 for example). Printed or drawn illustrations accompanied these collections of 'real' objects, and as Susan Dackerman has explained, did more than simply record observations (2011, pp.26–31). Instead, we might understand Ligozzi's



Figure 6.2: Jacopo Ligozzi, *Dictamnus Albus*, sixteenth century, drawing, Gabinetto disegni e stampe degli Uffizi, Florence. (Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY)

drawings of birds and bulbs as mobile objects, capable of transmitting meaning about the natural world as they were passed among the hands of similarly minded connoisseurs.

Indeed, the cultivation of botanical knowledge and humanistic garden design had long been ingrained in the Medici dukedom, culminating in the publication of numerous specialized studies on flora, and the famous series of paintings of Medici properties and gardens by Giusto Utens for grand duke Ferdinando I in 1599–1602 (Figure 6.4). Claudia Lazzaro has traced a complex relationship between the development of garden design, botanical collecting, and the Medici dukedom (1990). Medici sponsorship of the study of natural history and the practice of horticulture began with the support of Cosimo I the Elder (1389–1464), nearly 200 years prior to the reign of Ferdinando. This included the collecting, translating, and studying of ancient natural histories, including that by Pliny the Elder, *Historia naturalis*, and medical-botanical texts by ancient Greek authors such as Dioscorides (Tomasi and Hirschauer, 2002, p.16). Motivated by this new



Figure 6.3: Jacopo Ligozzi, , *Psittacus Ararauna*, sixteenth century, drawing, Gabinetto disegni e stampe degli Uffizi, Florence. (Photo: Scala/Art Resource, NY)

'scientific humanism', generations of Medici family members merged the study of scientific, specifically botanical texts, with the patronage of art. These commissions took several forms: one manifestation of the dual interest in the study of nature and that of art came in the form of villa and garden construction. During the 15th and 16th centuries the Medici family built, acquired, or renovated numerous villas outside the city centre of Florence. In each of these locations, painstakingly depicted by Utens, garden and landscape design were elevated out of the realm of service and were intended to function as stimulating sites of delight for the mind and body. Another iteration of the taste for scientific and botanical knowledge may be seen in the increasingly naturalistic depiction of flora and fauna in devotional paintings of the period, a point to which I will return. Finally, botanical illustration became an increasingly important genre of other mediums, including that of *pietre dure*.

In each of these instances, the Medici (among other elite families in Florence), encouraged artistic production that reflected their scientific knowledge of the natural world. As such, the display of nature – whether in the form of a garden, botanical illustration, or flower-adorned altarpiece – was clearly part of Medici branding and announced their commitment to the propagation of humanistic learning. Similarly, Lorenzo de' Medici collected carved gemstones and later Francesco I amassed a large collection of rare minerals and semiprecious stones; the



Figure 6.4: Giusto Utens, *Villa Poggio a Caiano*, c.1599–602, tempera on canvas, Museo Storico Topografico, Florence. (Photo: Gianni dagli Orti/The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY)

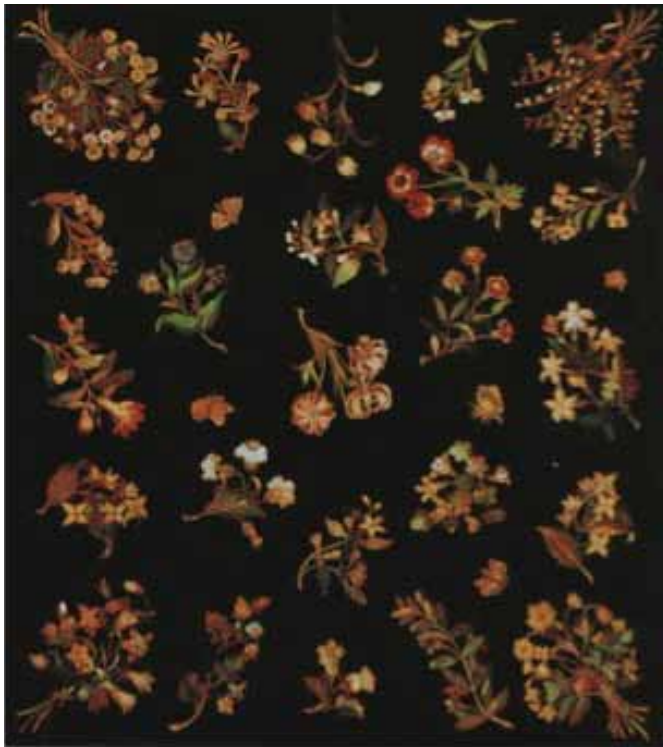


Figure 6.5: Jacopo Ligozzi, *Design for a tabletop depicting flowers*, Galleria dei Lavori, Florence, c. 1610–20, oil on paper, 78 x 88cm (30 3/4 x 34 5/8in), Museo dell'Opificio delle Pietre Dure, Florence. (Photo: author)

rarity and natural wonder of these rocks and their quasi-alchemical properties suggested a compelling intersection of collecting and knowing the natural world. These two prerogatives seem to converge in finely wrought Florentine *pietre dure*, which combined the natural, mineral 'specimen' with the artistic enterprise applauded in Renaissance culture.

Sixteenth-century *pietre dure* inlay work, or *commesso* was an imitation of *opus sectile*, a technique described by Pliny the Elder himself (Pliny, 1938, p.51). Although early examples of Renaissance stone inlay exhibit abstract designs, Florentine mosaicists quickly achieved astonishing *trompe l'oeil* conceits. The process began with a model drawing, and was followed by the careful selection of stones (Tomasi and Hirschauer, 2002, pp.59–60). Once the proper variety of colour, grain, and textured stones were selected, they were cut with drills into very thin pieces. These pieces were then fitted into a larger panel of black marble that served as the base. Increasingly drawn from the natural world, the subjects of *pietre dure* made permanent the ever-wilting floral sample and assembled diverse species into a beautiful object d'arte. An elaborate tabletop (now lost) was, for instance, commissioned by



Figure 6.6: Design by Jacopo Ligozzi, assembled by Jacopo Monicca, *Tabletop depicting flowers*, hardstone and gold, 37 x 44 3/4 x 63 3/4in, Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. (Photo: Scala/Art Resource)

Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II of Hapsburg in 1589 and displayed an array of trophies, birds, landscape, and vases of flowers in rich jaspers (Koepppe and Giusti, 2008, p.172). Celebrated for its seamless rendering of flora and fauna as one, continuous whole, the table was an illusionistic masterpiece that at once heralded the craftsmanship of its maker, Stefano Caroni, and the intelligence of its patron as a collector of art and science.

Jacopo Ligozzi's naturalistic drawings and paintings of flowers, birds, and insects (Figures 6.2 and 6.3) became the dominant new themes in Florentine stone inlay during the late 16th century (Figure 6.5) and would remain popular for over a century thereafter – solidifying the artist's reputation for botanical accuracy and the significance of Florentine *pietre dure* on the international market. Completed in 1621, a tabletop executed by Jacopo Monicca from Ligozzi's design



Figure 6.7: Galleria dei Lavori manufacturer; *Cabinet*, c.1650–75, Ebony, marble, jasper, lapis lazuli and various hardstones, and bronze with gilding, Victoria and Albert Museum. (Photo:Victoria and Albert Museum)

(Figure 6.6, now in the Uffizi), features an elaborate scattering of flowers across an ebony ground. The specificity of individual petals implies perfect mimetic transcription – an illusion that it is made all the more impressive when the viewer understands these to be crafted from minute slivers of precious stone. The convergence of this virtuosic medium and its potential to convey accurate information about natural specimens was later epitomised in elaborately inlaid curiosity cabinets made during the last years of the 17th century. An example now in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London reveals the enduring influence of Ligozzi's naturalistic flora and fauna, rendered carefully in *pietre dure* panels (Figure 6.7). Individual doors set in the cabinet feature flowers and birds – their brightly coloured petals and wings of different stones offset by the black ground.

Members of the Medici and Habsburg courts – including Ferdinando I (r.1587–1609), father to Cosimo II, Maria's betrothed, and Emperor Rudolf II (r.1552–1612) – were also avid collectors of art and science. As Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann has shown, the Habsburg court in Prague was a magnet for Johannes Kepler and many other intellectuals including astrologers, alchemists and naturalists (1995, p.196). This interest in scientific advancement was mirrored in the Prague *Kunstammer*, which included the nature studies of Hoefnagel, Arcimboldo, and Ligozzi. Ferdinando and Cosimo II de' Medici were similarly interested in both the progress of 'scientific' enterprise and the collecting of art, as was evidenced by Galileo Galilei's illustrated *Sidereus Nuncius* dedicated to Cosimo II himself, and by Cosimo II's continued employment of Ligozzi, a specialist in botanical illustration (and on Ferdinando see, for example, Suzanne Butters, 2002, pp.66–75). Ligozzi's *Portable Altarpiece* may thus be situated at the centre of a circle of patrons for whom botanical themes and elaborate inlay held special appeal.

From the moment the Galleria dei Lavori was founded by Ferdinando in 1588, the Medici became inextricably linked to an industry that combined sumptuous, rare, natural materials with the artistic judgment and discernment so valued in the humanist milieu. By sending rare and precious gifts to foreign courts, previous generations of Medici dukes forged a tradition of public relations dependent on craftsmanship. During the late 1570s, for example, Francesco de' Medici (Ferdinando's brother) forwarded porcelain works to Portugal and Spain, where the new medium was met with great astonishment (Giusti, 2002, p.105). Sending exquisite examples of the medium to foreign courts in distant lands became a viable mode of diplomatic expression and the Austrian Habsburgs

had, by the middle of the 16th century, been the happy recipients of numerous such intricately worked objects (Kaufmann, 1994, pp.137–54). Although archduke Charles II (father of Maria Maddalena) did not have the political power or wealth of Holy Roman emperor Rudolf II he was, like the more illustrious members of the Habsburg court in Vienna and Prague, dedicated to the collection of art and to the appreciation of craftsmanship. The archduke was in fact a joiner (Kaufmann, 1995, p.186) and was thus particularly primed to appreciate the fine artistry of the *Portable Altar*. Further, Charles and Maria Maddalena's home of Graz was the location for three important armories, producers of elaborate armor for the emperors. As such, the relevance of good craftsmanship, and the imperial history of collecting finely wrought objects would not have been lost on the *Altar's* likely recipients. The pending marriage of Cosimo II de' Medici to Maria Maddalena in the autumn of 1608 would have constituted an ideal occasion to forward an example of Florentine excellence and artistic skill, and to further cement the first royal dynastic marriage in the Medici family.

The Allen *Altar* is, however, a careful assemblage of media and meanings – and although it has not been recognised as such, is rather distinctly *unlike* other, more typical products of the Galleria. For example, the *Portable Altar* is contained within an unusually extant case, offering additional evidence of how an early modern portable possession might be received, unpacked, and displayed. But in this instance, the case is, I suggest, a meaningful feature of the iconographic program of the *Altar* as a whole. Ligozzi employed the botanical illustrative techniques of his early fame to endow the carrying case of the *Portable Altar* with a veritable bouquet of blossoms, replete with roses, tulips, lilies, an elegantly foreshortened dove of the holy spirit, and two cherubs (Figure 6.1). The floral paintings on the case are set against a black ground, quite obviously reminiscent of the *pietre dure* inlay for which Ligozzi was best known. Alluding to one medium with the use of another, Ligozzi fulfilled his moniker as the new Apelles (Giusti, 2002, p.109). The exterior of the carrying case thus functions as a clever nod both to the more expensive material of *pietre dure* (concealed within the case), and to the practice of botanical illustration that Ligozzi first learned at the Habsburg court. By evoking rather than utilizing the *pietre dure* medium, Ligozzi also entered into a theoretical discourse with the *paragone*, the longstanding debate regarding the relative merit of sculpture or painting to best imitate nature. In this case the draughtsman emulates the effect of stone inlay, proving the painter's

ability to usurp the sculptor at his trade. A further sensorial pun is made through the fragrant allusion to the floral garlands often used to adorn altarpieces during feast days and which became the subject of Flemish still-life paintings during the same decade. Imagining that ambrosial context, the viewer/recipient would undoubtedly be delighted to discover that the painted surface was in fact not cool stone, but wood.

Interior view: fecundity and faith in Ligozzi's *Portable Altar*

The inclusion of naturalistic depictions of flowers and gardens in the context of sacred art in late 16th and early 17th-century Italy performed in two concurrent ways: simultaneously suggesting the empirical documentation of natural phenomena, and evoking potent visual reminders about the delicate and fleeting realities of life. Detailed flowers in religious art of the 15th and 16th centuries were often symbolic – according to the Dominican friar Giovanni Dominici for instance, the white rose signified virginity, the red martyrdom (Tomasi and Hirschauer, 2002, p.19 and more generally, Findlen, 1996). The purple iris was associated with the Virgin and the incarnation of Christ, and of course the white lily signified the city of Florence herself. Taken together, the flower-strewn garden was a common analogy for the enclosed *hortus conclusus* of the Virgin and Child. Depictions of the *Virgin and Child* by Domenico Veneziano (1445, National Gallery of Art, Washington) and Pseudo Pier Francesco Fiorentino (1455–7, Philadelphia Museum of Art) seat Mary and Christ in a garden and include naturalistic and accurate depictions of flowers, while simultaneously evoking the Song of Songs as the basis for Mary's virginal, untouched womb.

Functioning in a similar way to the rose latticework of earlier Renaissance *Virgin and Child* paintings, the floral garland encircles the Jesuit monogram in a fragrant aureole. Unlike those altarpieces, however, Ligozzi has set the devotional image, this time iconic, within a visual framework of natural specimens, illustrating his virtuosic skill and evoking the passage into an enclosed garden. The encyclopedic complexity of his floral choices is indicative of the new attitudes toward collecting and natural history delineated in the first half of this essay. Moreover, as Susan Merriam has recently explained with regard to the Flemish still-life tradition, painted floral garlands represented a trope in which art and nature were cast into competition (Merriam, 2012, p.2). If painted flowers signaled the artist's triumph over nature, they did so precisely because the painter rendered permanent that which was inevitably mortal. This was a theme taken up by

Counter-Reformatory theologians, including the Jesuit-sympathizer, archbishop Federico Borromeo. In his *Musaeum Bibliothecae Ambrosianae* (1625), Borromeo writes that 'when winter encumbers and restricts everything with ice, I have enjoyed from sight – and even imagined odor, if not real – artificial flowers... expressed in painting,' noting that 'their beautiful appearance is not fleeting, as some of the flowers that are found in nature, but stable and very enduring' (cited in Merriam, 2012, p.23). Borromeo's vivid, multisensory evocation of such fictive blossoms was also informed by his attitudes toward devotional art.

Succinctly summarized in his treatise on the topic (*De picture sacra*, 1624) Borromeo 'nurture[d] belief in obeying...the decrees of the sacred Council of Trent, which impresses Bishops to teach the populace the truth of the Faith and sacred history, not merely with words, but with painting and whatever other representation succeeds in inspiring (*excitare*) the soul and senses of the faithful to the mysteries of religion' (cited in Merriam, 2012, p.21). The senses – including sight and smell – are particularly activated by depictions of minutely rendered flowers.

Not coincidentally, the first known floral garland painting was made for Borromeo's impressive collection in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana (Figure 6.8) in 1608; at its centre is a tender portrayal of the Virgin and Child in an idyllic landscape. Painted with the astounding detail typical of Jan Brueghel, the garland encircles a framed image; it is an image framed within another, thus implicitly challenging the authority of sight as the parameters of the floral wreath encroach upon the 'real' image (Merriam, 2012, pp.2–4). Ligozzi favoured a similar compositional device, situating the Jesuit monogram in an illusionistic gold frame. Both images recall the draping of real flowers over altars and their adornment of floats in processions for the Corpus Christi. Since it can be opened, Ligozzi's carrying case also seems reminiscent of a Eucharistic tabernacle. Indeed such a conflation – of floral still life and Eucharistic tabernacle – was to reach its apotheosis later in the century when Flemish artists popularised this type of still life (Merriam, 2012, pp.125–46).

Perhaps a fitting allusion to the virginal chastity of its proposed recipient, it is not insignificant that once open, the Eden of Ligozzi's case gives way to another garden scene, albeit one that is decidedly less fecund. Crossing the symbolic threshold of the paradisiacal exterior, the private devotional image is experienced as one might a precious relic – an analogy that would not have been lost on a member of the Austrian court more generally, or Maria Maddalena in particular, whose



Figure 6.8: Jan Brueghel and Hendrick van Balen, *Virgin and Child in a Garland of Flowers*, 27 x 22cm, oil on panel, 1608, Milan, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana. (Photo: Dea/Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana/Art Resource, NY)

Florentine collection of ornately crafted reliquaries (Figure 6.9) would become among the most significant domestic assemblages of this type in ducal record (Chiarini, 2002, pp.77–83, and Sanger, 2014, pp.71–91). Like many reliquaries that featured hinged doors, rock crystal, or other literal or figurative openings, the Allen altar is best understood once opened.

The central devotional image of Ligozzi's altar (Figure 6.10) is an especially intimate depiction of Christ's

consolation by an angel in the garden of Gethsemane. Recounted in all four gospels, the Agony in the Garden or Christ on the Mount of Olives takes place immediately after the Last Supper and prior to Christ's arrest (Matthew 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42; John 18:1–27; and Luke 22:39–46). Accompanied by Peter, James, and John, Christ stops to pray at Gethsemane, asking God three times if it is his will that he should accept the chalice, a symbol of his pending Passion. Ligozzi has



Figure 6.9: Simone Pignoni, *Reliquary of St Sixtus*, 1614, embossed silver, chiseled and carved, partially cast, 36 x 43 x 19cm, Basilica di Santa Maria all'Impruneta, Impruneta. (Photo: Alinari/Art Resource, NY)

avored Luke's version of the episode, in which Christ is comforted by an angel who holds him aloft as he sweats rivulets of blood, his body and soul anguished by prayer. It is only in Luke's gospel that an angel appears to console Christ: 'And there appeared an Angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground' (Luke 22:43–44). Christ's acceptance of his bitter fate is symbolised by the artist's representation of the chalice at the upper left of the composition. The savior's weakened body, draped as it is across the angel's knee, foreshadows his ultimate death and sacrifice for the sins of mankind. Traditionally part of large Passion cycles and a crystallisation of the spiritual struggle between the human and divine sides of Christ's nature, the theme became increasingly common as a subject for small-scale private devotional pieces during the later 15th and 16th centuries (McCluer, 1987, p.101).

Christ's sacrifice has already been predicted – both theologically and visually – by the typological pairing with the *Sacrifice of Isaac* (Figure 6.10b) at the base of

the altarpiece. Here Ligozzi renders a sacrificial fire at the left of the composition, while the hand of yet another intervening angel stays Abraham's upraised arm. Allowing the naturally occurring veins in the lapis ground to show through the painted surface, the angel seems to swirl in on a bank of clouds. A tiny ram waits at far right, a welcome replacement for Isaac's vulnerable, juvenile flesh. Although lapis lazuli was not an uncommon ground for small paintings incorporated into *pietre dure* conceits, this particular choice might have been influenced by a small, oval lapis painting of 'Cristo nel orto' (Christ in the Garden) by Il Cigoli, now lost, formerly in the Medici Guardaroba. Anna Matteoli has suggested that this painting on lapis was a grand-ducal gift to a relative or foreign prince (1980, p.309 and p.436), and in that way it is also similar to the *Allen Altar*.

Because it is painted on copper, the colours and details of Ligozzi's *Agony* are particularly vivid. Around 1600 painting on copper became a widespread practice and likely reflected a number of factors including changes in connoisseurship, which favoured technical

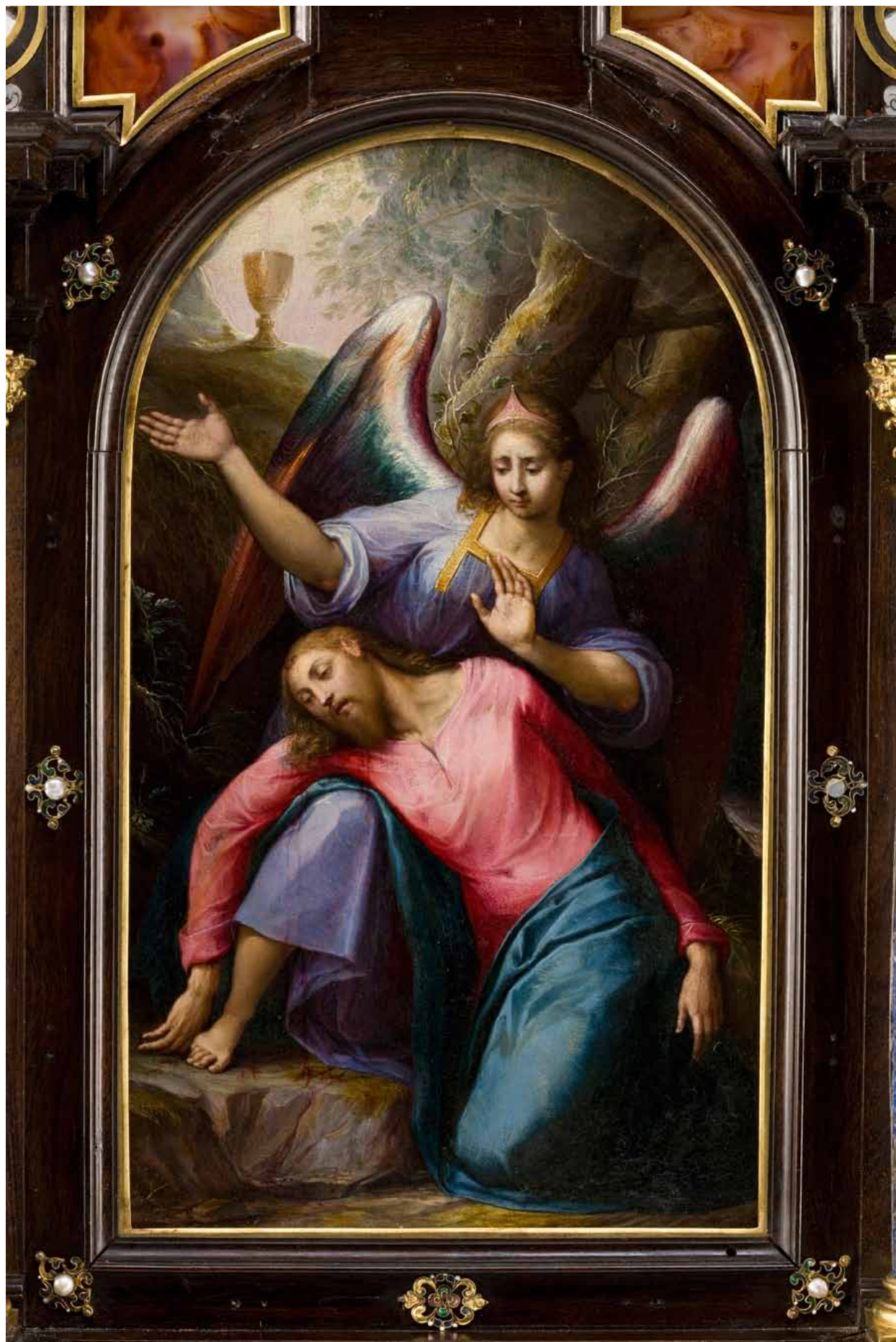


Figure 6.10a: Detail, Jacopo Ligozzi, *Agony in the Garden*, *Portable Altar in a Carrying Case* 1608, ebony, ebonised wood and hardstones; oil on copper; silver mounts; case of painted wood with metal fittings, Image: 26.7 x 15.9cm, Overall: 58.4 x 33.7 x 8.3cm (Photo: Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Ohio; R.T. Miller Jr. Fund)



Figure 6.10b: Detail, Jacopo Ligozzi, *The Sacrifice of Isaac, Portable Altar in a Carrying Case* 1608, ebony, ebonised wood and hardstones; oil on copper; silver mounts; case of painted wood with metal fittings, image: 26.7 x 15.9 cm, overall: 58.4 x 33.7 x 8.3cm. (Photo: Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin College, Ohio; R.T. Miller Jr. Fund)

virtuosity, advances in the mining and manufacture of copper that ultimately led to its reduction in cost, and most importantly, the potential for dazzling visual effects accomplished with oil paint on a very hard, perfectly smooth surface (Bowron, 1999, p.10). Paintings on copper were treated in much the way precious objects made of ivory, amber, and rhinoceros horn were, and were installed alongside small bronzes, medallions and coins in *Kunstkammern*. Grand duke Francesco I de' Medici collected allegorical and mythological scenes on copper by Vasari (1511–74), Bronzino (1503–72), and Alessandro Allori (1535–1607) and must have appreciated their intimate scale and jewel-like colouring alongside other *objects de vertu* such as reliquaries, rock crystals, nautilus cups and porcelains in the Medici cabinets (Bowron, 1999, p.11). Both the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian II (1527–76) and Rudolf II employed Bartholomäus Spranger (1546–1611), who transmitted the technique from Italy to other parts of Europe (Bowron, 1999, p.12). Once more, the Medici dukes and the Habsburg emperors shared a similar taste for the fine quality and curious detail made possible by an unusual and relatively new medium.

Both the *Agony in the Garden* and the *Sacrifice of Isaac* – one painted on copper and the other on lapis

– take place in landscapes, their central protagonists kneeling or standing on the ground. The recollection of the natural environment or garden was an especially important component of *Agony* iconography. In earlier versions of the subject, artists like Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506) (Figure 6.11) and Giovanni Bellini (1430–1516) (Figure 6.12) suggested the imagined topography of Gethsemane as a barren desert, the angel as an ethereal messenger. Ligozzi was likely influenced instead by a version of the *Agony* painted by Paolo Veronese in c.1583, now in the Brera in Milan (Figure 6.13) (Askew, 1969, pp.292–93). Set in a verdant landscape punctuated by the ruined remains of Corinthian columns, the angel holds Christ's weary weight as God's presence illuminates the foreground in a dramatic spotlight. Christ's physical fatigue is especially palpable as his limp right hand grazes the stony earth. Ligozzi adopts a similarly intimate Christ and Angel relationship in a drawing of the subject dated to around 1608 (Figure 6.14), and in an earlier painting of the same theme, dated to the 1580s (Figure 6.15). Ligozzi's earlier painting of the *Agony in the Garden* (1580s) is in a private collection and appeared in the exhibition *Magnificenza alla corte dei Medici: Arte a Firenze alla fine del Cinquecento* in 1997 (Conigliello, 1997, p.66). In all three cases, Ligozzi



Figure 6.11: Andrea Mantegna, *The Agony in the Garden*, c. 1458-60, tempera on wood, 63 x 80cm, National Gallery, London. (© The National Gallery, London)



Figure 6.12: Giovanni Bellini, *The Agony in the Garden*, about 1465, tempera on wood, 81 x 127cm, National Gallery, London. (© The National Gallery, London)



Figure 6.13: Paolo Veronese, *The Agony in the Garden*, 1584, oil on canvas, 108 x 180cm, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan. (Photo: Alinari/Art Resource, NY)

has envisioned Christ's encounter with the angel as a physical, sensorial communion, and as a reminder of the corporal reality of Christ's anguish. But it is only in the *Portable Altarpiece* that Ligozzi excises the lush, vegetal environ in order to focus solely on Christ's mortal collapse. Further, by redacting the botanical fecundity of his earlier versions of this subject, Ligozzi allowed the exterior of the case to function as part of the revelatory viewing and handling process.

Perhaps recalling the Jesuit convictions of Maria Maddalena and her father, the archduke Charles II, Ligozzi's *Agony in the Garden* suggests a visual corollary with verses from St Ignatius of Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*. In his daily directives, Ignatius advises devotees upon getting up and dressing to 'anguish with Christ in anguish,' while contemplating the episode of the Agony in the Garden (Ignatius of Loyola, 1991, pp.200–3). In the post-Tridentine milieu, such a focus on the somatic, experiential interpretation of Agony iconography would have been particularly apropos. This interpretation is further emphasized by Ligozzi's depiction of two angels within the very small space of

the altar. Both the angel that halts Abraham's upraised hand, and the angel that supports Christ's limp body, reiterate the significance of such celestial intervention on earth and confirm the relevance of the corporeal experience of faith and the prerogatives of the Jesuit Order more generally.

The Jesuit Order played an increasingly important role in cult devotion to angels during the last years of the 16th century and the first two decades of the 17th century (Bailey, 2003, pp.243–7; Johnson, 2006, pp.191–5). Prominent followers of St Ignatius, including St Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621), were instrumental in the establishment of the Office of the Holy Guardian Angels by Paul V Borghese in September of 1608 (Johnson, 2006, p.192), and in the consolidation of the Confraternity of Guardian Angels (*Sodalizio dell'Angelo Custode*), which began meeting at the Gesù in 1614. Despite their procrastinated formal recognition, believers in the cult of the guardian angels had long sought such validation. St Aloysius Gonzaga (1568–91), Francesco Albertini (1542–1619), and Cornelius of Lapide (1567–1637), all published commentaries on the



Figure 6.14: Jacopo Ligozzi, *The Agony in Garden*, c.1606, pen and brown ink, brown wash, gold heightening, on paper washed in brown; black chalk lines; vertical crease in the right half of the sheet, 33.9 x 44.8cm, Louvre, Paris. (Photo: RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY)



Figure 6.15: Jacopo Ligozzi, *The Agony in the Garden*, 1580s, oil on panel, 165 x 130cm (65 x 51 1/8in), Private Collection. (Photo:Wikimedia Commons)

influence of angels in the *Spiritual Exercises*, and on the relevance of angels as divine protectors (pp.194–5).

Such angelic fervor was fueled by Protestant antagonism toward the popular winged guardians. Although Martin Luther could not refute the some 260 references to angels in the Old and New Testaments, it was clear that *guardian* angels – in their roles as intermediaries, and in their potential to subvert the doctrine of Justification via faith alone – were problematic (Soergel, 2006, pp.64–5). If Protestant Reformation theologians sought to actively debunk the validity of angels, Catholic Reformers like Bellarmine recognized the potential to reiterate the *positive* intercessory power of angels; the corporal reality of angels served to confirm faith and eradicate uncertainty via a direct, sensorial experience of heaven on earth. Not yet recognized in this context, Ligozzi undoubtedly knew about and perhaps accounted for this Jesuit-informed interpretation of angels in his *Agony in the Garden*. In the late 1580s Ligozzi painted a cycle of angelic subjects in the Cappella degli Angeli (Chapel of Angels) in San Giovannino, the Jesuit church in Florence (Bailey, 2003, pp.243–4), a project that must have necessitated a familiarity with rudimentary angelology.

Other early 17th-century representations of saints and angels similarly imply direct contact between the

angelic consort as a representative of God, and the mortal devotee. Depictions of *St Matthew and the Angel* (Figure 6.16), for instance, often dramatised the physical immediacy of the angel's dictation of the Gospel. An even more compelling visual analogy exists in representations of the *Ecstasy of St Francis*. In his enigmatic depiction of the theme, Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio emphasises the conciliatory role of the angel, who bolsters the suffering Saint's body and soul (Figure 6.17). Pamela Askew has suggested a typological relationship between depictions of the *Agony in the Garden* and the *Stigmatization of St Francis* and *Ecstasy of St Francis* (1969, p.292); a link that is also highlighted in exegetical and hagiographic sources that proposed St Francis to be an *alter Christus* or 'another Christ', and which delineated the sanctity of angels in the *vita* of Francis. Caravaggio, like Ligozzi, placed unusual pictorial emphasis on the supportive role of the angel in his depiction of St Francis. Bert Treffers and Stuart Lingo convincingly propose that such artistic choices were motivated in part by the significance of angels in Counter-Reformatory Italy (Treffers, 1988, pp.159–60, and Lingo, 1998, pp.195–210). The angel, Treffers argues, represents a sort of bridge between the sensorial



Figure 6.16: Nicolas Régnier, *St Matthew and the Angel*, c. 1625, oil on canvas, Ringling Museum of Art. (Photo: Collection of The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, the State Art Museum of Florida, Florida State University)

experience of Stigmatization (in the case of St Francis), and the metaphysical way in which such wounding occurred (Treffers, 1988, p.159). The emotional anguish of Francis on Mount Alverna, like that of Christ on



Figure 6.17: Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Ecstasy of St Francis*, c. 1596, oil on canvas, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford. (Photo: Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford)

Mount Olivet, recalled the imperative of sacrifice and axiomatic divine love. Both would be apt reminders for a pious bride-to-be and her family.

Such reminders were often issued in the *angelogia* of the period, further emphasizing the way in which Ligozzi's *Agony in the Garden* might have resonated with a female owner. The Florentine cleric Giovanni Maria Tarsi had, for instance, geared his angelology of 1576 toward virginal women; a message that was repeated by Andrea Vittorelli in his 1605 edition. Vittorelli writes that 'the angels strive with greater vigilance and diligence to guard virgins or other chaste people, since these resemble more than others do the nature of the angels themselves' (Johnson, 2006, p.198). In his commentaries on angels, Cornelius a Lapide underscores that 'angelic life is virginity', forging an unequivocal analogy between the purity of angels and that of chaste women. If the visual recollection of angels implicitly evoked associations with purity and chastity, the pious archduchess (or a similarly minded, Jesuit recipient) would have seen in Ligozzi's *Altar* a fitting mnemonic.

Consumed by a private patron in what was likely a domestic setting, pictures such as Ligozzi's small-scale altarpiece or Caravaggio's *Ecstasy*, were viewed differently than were altarpieces found in public churches. In fact, the Ligozzi altar with which the present essay is occupied is hardly an altar at all. It did not serve as a container for relics nor as the backdrop for communion placed atop an altar. As such it, like the Caravaggio painting, is a private devotional image. In his *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane* (1582), cardinal Gabriele Paleotti argued convincingly for the utility of art in the face of Reformation antagonism toward images. Laying open what has been called an 'ecclesiastical justification for collecting', Paleotti established the groundwork for the collection of sacred art outside the church establishment, but he also suggested the means by which art should stimulate the viewer and encourage faith (Schildgen, 2011, pp.8–16). The senses, and particularly those that were traditionally considered more base (touch, smell, taste), resonated in discourses about the manufacture and collecting of devotional art (Benay, 2009).

In his *Discorso* Paleotti was particularly concerned with how objects in private collections, such as that of the Medici or the Habsburg court, might be consumed or enjoyed without the oversight of the bishopric. Paleotti suggests that the first, most elemental level of delight (*diletto*) is generated by the senses – taste, smell, touch and so on (see Paleotti, book 1, chapter 22, 1582 (2012), pp.111–14). This category of *diletto* is followed by the rational, which originates in the senses

but moves into the realm of the abstract; finally, the realm of spiritual cognition, as Paleotti calls it, is born from 'divine light, the medium for faith through which we believe and know things that exceed not only the capacity of the senses but also all human discourse and rational intelligence' (Paleotti, 1582 (2012), p.113)). Thus, any good Christian viewer can experience a work of sacred art on three levels: sensual, rational, and spiritual. As for the sensuous, writes Paleotti, 'this is the most evident to all because having the sense of sight, most noble of all, from paintings we observe the variety of colors, the shadows, the figures, the ornaments, and other things represented, like mountains, rivers, gardens, cities, countryside, and other things that give us marvelous pleasure and recreation' (p.113). Paleotti goes on to suggest that 'spiritual cognition' allows the viewer to see with *occhio purgato*, or with clean or purged eyes. The roles of the other senses are relegated to the periphery of his discourse on cognition and sacred images.

Paleotti's descriptions of 'spiritual cognition', do not place great stock in the physical experience of art. But this assessment seems at odds with much art of the period, which emphasised the saints' direct encounters with Christ, angels, and sources of divine inspiration. Indeed, I contend that Ligozzi's depiction of Christ's *Agony* reflects this interest in the tactile revelation of faith. Paleotti's acknowledgement of the senses in the viewer's cognitive process, no matter how small, is significant and is in some ways similar to the role the senses play in the *paragone* debate of the sixteenth century.

Although Renaissance painters and theorists often cited the tactility of sculpture as evidence of its lesser position in the *paragone* with painting (Johnson, 2011, pp.59–84), such devaluing of touch does not accurately represent attitudes toward the senses at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Even in ancient and medieval sources, the primacy of sight was not uncontested and the dangerous powers of illusion troubled philosophers and theologians alike (Johnson, 2002, p.63). Extramission theory, in which vision and touch are linked through an impression of images onto the retina, endured well into the seventeenth century, ensuring a continued link between seeing and touching. Giordano Bruno even suggested that memory is a series of 'carved, tactile statues that could be mentally re-encountered' (Johnson, 2002, p.63). In his *Idea*, published in 1607, Federico Zuccaro described the relationship between perception, intellect, and memory as a process by which images are the origination of ideas that are progressively honed and clarified (Cropper, 2005, pp.125–7). Each

idea or *concetto* enters the imagination and sparks 'a series of mental responses by which the senses are lit up. In turn, the senses bring back information about particulars to the imagination, or fantasy, from whence, through cogitation, they are introduced by the light of the active intellect as universals to the knowing eye of the intellect' (Zuccaro, 1961). The senses, according to Zuccaro, act as foot soldiers, carrying experience to the safe house where they may be stored, mined, remembered. Not coincidentally, Zuccaro was also favorite painter of the Jesuits in Rome, where his frescos of angelic intervention adorn the Cappella degli Angeli in the Gesù. The *Idea* also detailed a theory of 'angelic design' (*disegno angelico*) in which artists actualized 'angelic perception,' enabling angels to function as specific sources of cognitive inspiration (Fiore, 1997, p.89–110).

As an artist might cull from the mental stockpile of images described by Zuccaro, so too would the viewer of devotional art complete a performative act by viewing and recalling parts of a biblical narrative not depicted within the frame of a picture. Similarly, when one imagines early modern devotees engaged in an act of beholding these images – that is, not simply viewing, seeing, or witnessing an image but instead binding these activities with the more tactile, manual act of holding – it is possible to understand the durational, epistemological impact of images with greater profundity. The somatic multiplicity of the subject who 'beholds' versus 'sees' contributes to the way that 'sight becomes central to the acquisition of knowledge and certainty', as Erin Felicia Labbie and Allie Terry-Fritsch have shown (2012, p.2). This distinction might be further extrapolated to imply the other senses as well, for it was in the early modern period that touch, smell, even taste, took on greater empirical relevance.

Although a small-scale portable object was not subject to the same performative viewing as was a large altarpiece or fresco cycle, such objects could operate in similarly interactive ways. Sarah Blick and Laura Gelfand have usefully delineated three categories of devotional interaction in particular: active physical interaction, purely imaginative interaction and performative interaction (2011, pp. xxxv–xxxvi). Active physical interaction requires physical movement around or through the work of art or building; imaginative interaction requires that the viewer complete a meditative or emotional act via the contemplation of a visual image; and finally performative interaction suggests a conflation of both types, enabling the viewer or beholder to engage physically *and* emotionally within a space-mind continuum. While their rubric is written with the late Medieval pilgrim in mind, it might easily be

applied to the consumption of an early 17th-century portable altarpiece.

As previously noted, the *Altar's* light weight – a quantitative factor too often overlooked in the field of art history – makes it especially easy to handle and transport. In this way, it could be experienced in a very literal, direct way as it was manipulated in space. Unlike the bronze statuettes collected for Renaissance *studioli*, which were often turned in the hand (Johnson, 2012, pp.183–98) in a sensory, even sensual manner, it was not, to my knowledge, customary to handle in so intimate a way paintings in such collections (although, in her essay in this issue, Catherine Lawless describes the 'kissing and hugging' of a crucifix by a holy woman in the fourteenth century, the context of such a pious rapture was entirely different). In so doing, a viewer/worshipper would quite directly behold the image. Moving between spaces intended for epistemological contemplation (the *Wunderkammern*, for instance), and the private chambers or chapel, the altar could thus become the locus of meditational focus in a number of diverse physical contexts. Geraldine Johnson has proven the relevance of such mobility for female collectors in particular, in her important essay on the statuettes owned by Isabella d'Este (2012, pp.183–98). Although the archduchess Maria Maddalena could not yet be deemed a 'collector' in 1608, it was perhaps with this in mind that Ligozzi crafted the unusual *Portable Altar* and the Medici shipped it to the Habsburg court.

A devout daughter to her father, archduke Charles II, Maria Maddalena adopted the militant teachings offered by the Jesuits brought to her court in the 1570s, and was well educated in the arts and sciences (Harness, 2006, p.21). Already a patron of religious art at Graz at the age of 19, Maria's interests were described by the court poet, Andrea Salvadori, who documented her taste for devotional subjects and her name saint, Mary Magdalene (p.21). Her education and familial background uniquely primed Maria Maddalena to understand the intricate merging of naturalistic botanical illustration on the exterior of the case, *and* meditative devotional image on the altarpiece itself. This likely Medici-commissioned gift did not allude to the sensual promise of nascent love, but it must have made an impression on the youthful duchess nevertheless: Ligozzi was among her favorite artists after her arrival in Florence (Chiarini, 2002, p.87).

Indeed, Maria's marriage to Cosimo II merited one of the most lavish weddings in the early modern period (Poole, 2011, p.384, and Bertelà and Tofani, 1969, pp.102–5). Advertising the diplomatic allegiances fostered by their union, a triumphal procession marked the entrance of the bride to the city of Florence on

18 October 1608 (Bertelà and Tofani, 1969, pp.102–7). Such grand-ducal weddings drew from traditions associated with medieval royal entry, the classical Roman triumph, and local festivals and were demarked by ephemeral installations and in the case of Maria and Cosimo II, a grand *naumachia* (mock sea battle) in the Arno. These triumphal marriage celebrations reminded audiences that their ducal rulers were heirs to the glory of Rome, and as such, manifested the most public, spectacular culmination of courtship. Concretised by engravings and etchings of the events, this message could be reenacted by each subsequent viewing of the print, thus forging an intimate reminder of the raucous festivities while imprinting the larger message of ducal triumph on the communal memory of the citizenry.

If her courtship began with small gifts and included the Ligozzi *Altarpiece*, and culminated in a grand marital spectacle the likes of which had not yet been seen, such strategies worked well to ensure Maria's continued dedication to the shared interests of the Medici-Habsburg dynasty. Gifts given in anticipation of marriage could function on an intimate, personal scale, but they also had the potential to subtly, and even subliminally, foster the prosperity of a happy court. Maria's pious devotion and her patronage of the arts continued once she was in Florence. In 1622 she purchased the Baroncelli Villa outside San Pier Gattolini gate, today known as the Porta Romana. Upon the completion of Giulio Parigi's renovations, she renamed the building Villa del Poggio Imperiale (Villa of the Imperial Hillock). Completing her project with the commission of frescos, paintings, stucco work and furniture, she subsequently hired Ligozzi to furnish a series of four Passion scenes (1620–1), which included a now-lost depiction of the *Agony in the Garden* (Hoppe, 2012b, pp.19–25). The inclusion of this subject, possibly the fourth by Ligozzi, indicates the enduring relevance of the theme, perhaps for Maria Maddalena in particular.

Ligozzi also painted an intimate, tenebrist depiction of the *Crowning with Thorns* and an elaborate *pietre dure* prayer kneeling bench with a small version of the *Baptism of Christ*, painted on copper, at its centre, for the newly reconstructed Villa del Poggio Imperiale (pp.337–8). Together, these commissions suggest a continuity of styles and thematic interests that may have begun with one small, precious object.

If Maria Maddalena was in fact the intended recipient of the *Portable Altar*, she would have seen and even felt moved to smell the fictive flowers emblazoned on the cover. Here, painted exterior yields to inlaid interior, where the warmth of wood and stoniness of lapis would have been felt under hand as the recipient unpacked the altar. This portable possession marries the intricacy of a novel medium, the botanical specificity of a delicate specimen, and the devotional fervor of a religious image, creating a virtual cabinet of curiosity on a miniature scale. Like those rooms and repositories, the little altar in its case seems to contain a world of 'wonders in one closet shut', a phrase used to describe Ulisse Aldrovandi's collection (Findlen, 1996, p.17). In so doing, it also renders a vanishing type – that of the portable altarpiece – relevant within cultural lexicons of collecting, where natural history and devotional art, sacred and profane, were stored on the same shelves. By removing the case, Maria Maddalena could enter the garden of Christ's anguish, where she would be confronted with an image at once beautiful in its sumptuous colors and *pietre dure* framing, and sorrowful in its intimate, tactile depiction of Christ's torment. Thus, she could experience the very comingling of joy and suffering intended by representations of Christ's agony. Indeed, by combining the technique for which his workshop was best known, with the experiential piety favored by the court of its presumed recipient, Ligozzi had crafted a pre-marital gift worth giving.

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