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Erstmals publiziert in:

Rafael i jego spadkobiercy. Portret klasyczny w sztuce nowożytnej Europy ; materiały sesji naukowej, 24 - 25 X 2002. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, 2003 (Sztuka i kultura, Bd. 4), S. 157-183

Hinweis:

Die Seitenzählung der vorliegenden elektronischen Version weicht von der Paginierung der Druckfassung ab.

Zitierfähige URL:

<http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/artdok/volltexte/2006/169/>

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**Leonardo da Vinci's Portraits: Ginevra de' Benci, Cecilia Gallerani, La Belle Ferronière, and Mona Lisa**

In dealing with Leonardo's achievements as a portrait painter one comes across three distinct aspects: tradition, innovation and stylistic variety. In fact, all of his portraits have both traditional and innovative features, and they also show a considerable variety. For example, if we did not have fairly reliable attributions on the basis of some documents, we would hardly think that the portraits of Ginevra de' Benci, Cecilia Gallerani and Mona Lisa had been painted by the same artist. This variety is undoubtedly due to Leonardo's capacity to adopt different modes of style and to handle the tradition of the genre of portraiture with great ease and, at the same time, to comply to the requirements of his patrons. In order to appreciate this accomplishment I shall, in the following paper, deal with Leonardo's portraits in typological terms, that is, in terms of the history of the genre of portraiture.<sup>1</sup>

Leonardo's ability to emulate a particular style of painting (in this case a Flemish style) becomes already evident in his "Ginevra de' Benci".<sup>2</sup> This small portrait (ill. 1) represents a first truly fixed point of reference in Leonardo's painted Oeuvre, since it is the earliest extant work which can be linked with two well-documented individuals: the sitter, Ginevra de' Benci (1457-c. 1520), a young woman very well known in Florence, and Bernardo Bembo (1433-1519), who in all likelihood commissioned the picture between July 1479 and May 1480.<sup>3</sup> The Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci is Leonardo's first secular painting. Much more than his religious paintings, it succeeds in breaking away from the pictorial conventions of Verrocchio's workshop. The most striking feature of the portrait is the immediate proximity of the sitter both to the viewer and to the vegetation behind her; together they share virtually the entire pictorial plane. The young woman is brought right to the front of the picture. She is seated in front of a juniper bush, which seems to surround her head like a wreath.

Comparable "close-ups" were already to be found in Flemish portraits of the type introduced by Jan van Eyck (c. 1390-1441) a generation earlier, and subsequently popularised by Hans Memling (1435-1494) and Petrus Christus (c. 1410-1472/73). Thus the landscape background may be inspired by portraits such as Memling's Man with an antique coin showing the emperor Nero (Antwerp) and the overall composition and the pale complexion of Ginevra by portraits like Petrus Christus's Portrait of a Young Lady, now in Berlin but in the 15th century known in Florence (ill. 2).<sup>4</sup>

There are echoes of Flemish portraiture, too, in the format (the panel was originally longer, but was at some point trimmed along the bottom), in the naturalistic rendition of the juni-

per bush and in the sitter's pose. In contrast to her head, which faces almost frontally towards the viewer, Ginevra's upper body is angled almost diagonally to the pictorial plane, lending her a certain dynamism. It is perhaps worth noting that Ginevra's genteel pallor was possibly determined by both antique sources, which emphasize the value of a pale complexion<sup>5</sup>, and also by her sickly constitution, something expressly mentioned in a number of sources.<sup>6</sup> The same sources also document Ginevra's aspirations as a poet and her admiration for Petrarch, interests which she shared with her platonic lover, Bernardo Bembo.<sup>7</sup>

The juniper bush that, in conjunction with Ginevra's luminous face, dominates the portrait is more than a mere decorative accessory. Like a number of other plants, it was also a symbol of female virtue.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the Italian word for juniper, 'ginepro', makes a play on the name of the sitter, Ginevra. More such allusions are explored on the reverse of the panel, where a number of different plants are portrayed in meaningful combination: against a background painted to look like red porphyry marble, we see a branch of laurel, juniper and palm, connected to each other by a scrolling banderole bearing the words "VIRTUTEM FORMA DECORAT" - "Beauty Adorns Virtue" (ill. 3). The inscription and the plant attributes thus underline the connection between virtue and beauty. In its imitation of red, durable and very rare porphyry marble<sup>9</sup>, the reverse of the portrait speaks of the resilience of Ginevra's virtue. The laurel and palm branches that frame the scroll are associated with Bernardo Bembo, who commissioned the painting. His personal arms consisted of a laurel branch and a palm branch and, between them, the inscription "VIRTUS ET HONOR".<sup>10</sup> Recent investigations have revealed that the inscription originally painted on the back of the portrait read not "VIRTUTEM FORMA DECORAT", but "VIRTUS ET HONOR".<sup>11</sup> Since this was Bembo's motto, one could assume that Bembo had initially commissioned his own portrait from a Venetian artist, the back of which Leonardo then altered and finished off, before proceeding to execute the portrait of Ginevra de' Benci on the front.<sup>12</sup>

The emblem on the reverse of the portrait, with its laurel, juniper and palm branches, thus represents a cleverly adapted modification of Bembo's own motto: in exactly the same spot as the inscription which originally filled the space between the branches of laurel and palm, we now see a branch of juniper in allusion to Ginevra's name and virtue. The laurel and the palm also refer to Ginevra's literary leanings, since in poetry inspired by Petrarch, their evergreen branches represented the ultimate expression of poetic aspiration. The palm frond is also another traditional symbol of virtue. Lastly, the inscription "VIRTUTEM FORMA DECORAT", so closely intertwined with the plants symbolic of virtue, establishes a connection between beauty and virtue which, as well as being a theme of contemporary literature, is also found on the front of the panel, where Ginevra's physical beauty is to be understood as an expression of her virtue.<sup>13</sup> The front and back of this portrait could thus hardly be connected more closely. On the front, the ju-

niper bush frames Ginevra's beauty, while on the back the laurel, palm branch and inscription surround the juniper which represents the young woman portrayed on the front.

The importance of the Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci lies above all in the fact that Leonardo here broke away from the profile view traditionally employed in Florence for portraits of women.<sup>14</sup> Such portraits, known from artists like Antonio del Pollaiuolo (ill. 4)<sup>15</sup>, Alesso Baldovinetti<sup>16</sup> or Filippo Lippi<sup>17</sup>, often served as wedding gifts or as part of a bride's dowry and had to reflect a relatively rigid ideal of female behaviour, leaving virtually no room for dynamism in their composition. Ginevra de' Benci, by contrast, is portrayed by Leonardo not as a bride<sup>18</sup>, but as the partner and literary equal of Bernardo Bembo. For this reason the artist portrays her in three-quarter view - something previously reserved primarily for portraits of men and granting the sitter greater personal presence in the picture. Not least as a result of this innovation, Leonardo succeeds in lending a psychological dimension to his sitter - something that would become the hallmark of Renaissance portraiture.

Undoubtedly crucial to this new development were Leonardo's interest in the possibilities of oil painting and his preference for dynamic figural composition, already apparent in his angel in *The Baptism of Christ* (Florence, Uffizi) and in his drawings. The man who commissioned the portrait, Bernardo Bembo, may well also have had a part to play in the proceedings, however. He had earlier spent time as a Venetian envoy at the court of Charles the Bold in Burgundy<sup>19</sup>, from where he returned with new expectations of portraiture, expectations which, in Florence, it needed Leonardo to fulfil.

A few years after Leonardo had gone to Milan, most likely in 1489, he painted the portrait of Cecilia Gallerani (ill. 5), possibly one of his first commissions as a court artist of Ludovico Sforza.<sup>20</sup> In this portrait as well Leonardo broke away from the compositional format prevailing in Upper Italian portraiture of his day. Thus he did not adopt the profile view typically employed in nuptial portraits such as Ambrogio de Predis' Bianca Maria Sforza (ill. 6)<sup>21</sup>, since he did not have to portray Cecilia as a bride. In fact, at the time when the portrait was painted, Cecilia was the favourite mistress of Ludovico Sforza. Leonardo also distanced himself from the traditional, rather static pose in which head and upper body face the same way. In the Portrait of Cecilia Gallerani, the two are angled in different directions: the upper body is turned to the left, the head to the right. The painting thereby corresponds to the dynamic style of portraiture which Leonardo was already working towards in his Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci and which is explicitly formulated in his treatise on painting.<sup>22</sup> This desire to infuse the portrait with a sense of movement emerges not only in the positioning of Cecilia's head and body, but also in the dynamic pose of the ermine, which echoes that of the young woman. Cecilia's elegantly curved but at the same time somewhat overly large hand in turn corresponds with the figure of the ermine.

The presence of the ermine within the composition is on the one hand an allusion to Cecilia's

surname, since the sound of Galle-rani is reminiscent of the Greek word for ermine, 'galée'. On the other hand, the ermine was also a symbol of purity and moderation, for according to legend it abhorred dirt and only ate once a day. Leonardo refers specifically to these qualities of the ermine in his writings, where he makes notes on the allegorical significance of other animals, too.<sup>23</sup> The legendary purity of the ermine is also the starting-point for a pen drawing probably dating from around 1490. In this allegory, Leonardo illustrates the traditional belief that an ermine would rather be killed than sully its white fur in dirty water as it flees.<sup>24</sup>

From the late 1480s onwards, moreover, the ermine could also be read as an allusion to Ludovico Sforza, who used it as one of his emblems. In the figurative sense, therefore, this portrait shows Ludovico, in the shape of his symbolic animal, being tenderly stroked in the sitter's arms. The comparatively complex symbolism of this portrait, and the delicate situation it portrays, have their explanation in the fact that the young woman was Ludovico Sforza's favourite mistress. Born Cecilia Bergamini in 1473, at the age of ten she was betrothed (*pro verba*) to Giovanni Stefano Visconti. This betrothal was dissolved in 1487. Not long afterwards Cecilia became the mistress of Ludovico Sforza, who for his part had been betrothed to Beatrice d'Este (1475-1497) since 1480.<sup>25</sup> The official solemnization of Ludovico's marriage to Beatrice d'Este seems to have been delayed from 1490, as originally planned, to 1491 as a consequence of Ludovico's affair with Cecilia. Thus the Ferrarese envoy in Milan, Giacomo Trotti, wrote in November 1490 that Ludovico was not at all looking forward to the arrival of his lawful bride Beatrice, because his mistress Cecilia was as lovely as a flower and, moreover, pregnant.<sup>26</sup> In order to avoid angering his future wife Beatrice, in February 1491 Cecilia was removed from the ducal place as a precaution and taken to a new location, where on 3 May she gave birth to a son, Cesare. There is documentary evidence that the present portrait, which was probably finished quite some time earlier, remained in her possession<sup>27</sup> and perhaps served to remind her of the premarital and extramarital pleasures she and Ludovico shared. Perhaps it was also intended to make up, in some small way, for the inconveniences that Cecilia had to suffer in view of the impending marriage between Ludovico and Beatrice.

Of the nuptial and prenuptial conflicts and pleasures which possibly find expression in Leonardo's Portrait of Cecilia Gallerani there is naturally no mention in the panegyric poetry written for the court. Before his death in 1492, for example, court poet Bernardo Bellincioni composed the following effusive ode to Cecilia and her portrait:

"Di che te adiri, a chi invidia hai, natura?"  
'Al Vinci, che ha ritratto una tua stella,  
Cecilia sì bellissima hoggi è quella  
che a' suoi begli ochi el sol par umbra oscura.'  
'L'honor è tuo, se ben con sua pictura

la fa che par che ascolti et non favella.  
Pensa quanto sarà più viva et bella,  
più a te fia gloria in ogni età futura.

Ringratiar dunque Ludovico or poi  
et l'ingegno et la man di Leonardo  
che a' posterì di lei voglian far parte.

Chi lei vedrà così ben che sia tardo,  
vederla viva, dirà; basti ad noi  
comprender or quel che è natura et arte."

("The poet: 'Nature, who stirs your wrath, who arouses your envy?'

Nature: 'It is Vinci, who has painted one of your stars!

Cecilia, today so very beautiful, is the one

Beside whose beautiful eyes the sun appears as a dark shadow.'

The poet: 'All honor to you [Nature], even if in his picture

She seems to listen and not talk.

Think only, the more alive and more beautiful she is,

The greater will be your glory in future times.

Be grateful therefore to Ludovico, or rather

To the talent [ingegno] and hand of Leonardo

Which allows you to be part of posterity.

Everyone who sees her - even if too late

To see her alive - will say: that suffices for us

To understand what is nature and what art."")<sup>28</sup>

In his fictitious dialogue, Bellincioni takes up the popular theme of the rivalry between nature and the artist, who tries to compete with nature in his works. To this he adds the usual references to the beauty of the lady in the portrait and the generosity of the patron, and in this case also implies that only in the painting are we seeing the sitter behave in the appropriate manner for young women. Only in her portrait, in other words, is she no longer talking (*favella*) but listening! Apart from this joking allusion to ideal female behaviour, which apparently consists of polite silence, Bellincioni's poem also sheds light on contemporary attitudes towards the function of the portrait: it was to hand down a likeness of the young woman for posterity.<sup>29</sup>

Alongside the Portrait of Cecilia Gallerani, Leonardo's early works as court painter also include the so-called *Belle Ferronière*, whose attribution to Leonardo is today rarely doubted (ill. 8).<sup>30</sup> In compositional terms, the painting is closely related to a portrait type found across northern Italy, in which a stone parapet separates the viewer from the pictorial space. This same type surfaces in the works of Antonello da Messina (c. 1430-1479) (ill. 7)<sup>31</sup>, and Giorgione (1477-1510), for example, and is ultimately indebted to earlier Flemish models. Uncertainty continues to reign, however, over the dating of the portrait and the identity of the sitter. The portrait may show Lucrezia Crivelli, another of Ludovico Sforza's mistresses. If this is indeed the case, then

the following lines by another contemporary poet can be related to the painting:

"Ut bene respondet naturae ars docta, dedisset  
Vincius, ut tribuit cetera, sic animam.  
Noluit, ut similis magis haec foret, altera sic est:  
possidet illius Maurus amans animam.  
    Hujus quam cernis nomen Lucretia, divi  
omnia cui larga contribuere manu.  
Rara huic forma data est, pinxit Leonardus, amavit  
Maurus, pictorum primus hic, ille ducum.  
    Naturam et superas hac laesit imagine divas  
pictor; tantum hominis posse manum haec doluit.  
Illae longa dari tam magnae tempora formae,  
quae spatio fuerat deperitura brevi.  
Has laesit Mauri causa, defendet et ipsum  
Maurus, Maurum homines laedere diique timent"

("How well high Art here corresponds to Nature!  
Da Vinci could, as so often, have depicted the soul.  
But he did not, so that the painting might be a good likeness.  
For the Moor alone possessed her soul in his love.  
    She who is meant is called Lucretia, and to her the gods  
Gave everything with a lavish hand.  
How rare her form! Leonardo painted her, the Moor loved her:  
The one, first among painters, the other, first among princes.  
    Surely the painter has offended Nature and the high goddesses  
With his picture. It galls her the latter that the human hand is capable of so much,  
The former that a figure that should quickly perish  
Has been granted immortality.  
He did it for the love of the Moor, for which the Moor protects him.  
Both gods and men fear to upset the Moor.")<sup>32</sup>

The poet - probably Antonio Tebaldeo - here reflects upon the rivalry between art and nature even more clearly than Bellincioni. He also stresses the gracious patronage bestowed by Ludovico Sforza (also known as Ludovico il Moro, 'the Moor'), who alone is able to protect the painter from Nature, whose jealousy has been aroused by his art. The poet also raises the issue of the portrayal of the soul, a central aspect of the individual portrait of the modern age. While affirming that Leonardo could easily have portrayed the sitter's soul, the poet emphasizes that it belongs to the patron and ruler, in this case Ludovico il Moro.

The soul has a jealously preserved and distinctive status, for the poets hesitate to yield the soul of the sovereign's mistress to the mimetic-artistic realm of the artist. The poets thus state a certain reluctance concerning the potential of rendering spiritual and temperamental qualities.

This scepticism of the poets may be understood to mean that the portrayal of soul was an difficult matter even on the rather harmless level of courtly panegyrics. The artificial and eventually mechanical image of the core of a human being probably had to be understood as a special access to the person portrayed. Ludovico del Moro may have felt this about the portrait of his mistress, about whose body and soul he was wont to rule unlimitedly, firstly as a sovereign and secondly as a man. The poems therefore suggest the impression as if a depiction of the soul could have been understood as an intrusion into the realm of sovereignly power. Indeed, not only the slightly exaggerated panegyrics provide hints that the necessity to limit the artists' representational powers has at times been clearly recognised. In 1504 Pomponius Gauricus, for example, describes the effect of 'animation' or animism ("animacio") in a piece of art<sup>33</sup>: the animism or 'animation' of a portrait may have enormous power and therefore Alexander the Great forbade all artist, except Lysippus, to portray him.

Amongst the portraits associated with Leonardo's first period in Milan is lastly the Portrait of a Musician<sup>34</sup> (ill. 9), whose attribution to Leonardo is the subject of controversy, however. Compared with the more elegant portraits of the Belle Ferronière and Cecilia Gallerani, the painting of the young man looking out of the picture towards the right seems rather wooden, partly due to the fact that the musician's upper body is facing in the same direction as his gaze. But despite the rather less dynamic pose of the Musician, both it and the two other portraits from the Milan period convey a certain atmosphere, one which arises out of their subtle shading and which would shortly be encapsulated in the term "sfumato". Contours and outlines hereby begin to dissolve as objects no longer rely on crystalline focus and sharp-edged definition to convey themselves to the viewer. The portrait now takes its meaning less from the realism with which it portrays its sitter than from its constitution of atmosphere, a shift in emphasis which was in turn accompanied by increasing autonomy on the part of the painting. Still, it is difficult maintain the attribution to Leonardo.

After having left Milan in 1499 and having returned to Florence again, Leonardo, in the spring of 1503, accepted a commission from Francesco del Giocondo (1460-1539) to paint his wife Lisa Gherardini (1479-after 1551).<sup>35</sup> It is possible that the commission for the Mona Lisa or "La Gioconda" (ill. 10), as the portrait would become known, resulted from personal contacts similar to those which gave rise to other of Leonardo's works, such as the Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci and the Adoration of the Magi.<sup>36</sup> The Giocondo family belonged to the same social class as Leonardo himself and Ser Piero da Vinci, Leonardo's father, was acquainted with members of Francesco del Giocondo's close circle.<sup>37</sup> In addition, the Giocondo family chapel was located in SS Annunziata in Florence, the same church, in other words, for which Leonardo had begun the cartoon of the Virgin and Child with St Anne at the start of his second Florentine period.



We are relatively well informed about the genesis of the Mona Lisa. Lisa del Giocondo, born in 1479, was the daughter of Antonmaria Gherardini. On 5 March 1495 she married Francesco del Giocondo, born in 1460, the son of a wealthy family of Florentine silk merchants.<sup>38</sup> We can assume that a man like Francesco del Giocondo did not commission paintings simply on a whim and regardless of their subject (as high ranking persons from Renaissance courts would occasionally do). As a rule, members of the urban middle classes had specific reasons for commissioning works of art, and this is also true of the portrait of the Mona Lisa. In the spring of 1503 Francesco del Giocondo had purchased a new house for his young family, while Lisa had given birth to her second son, Andrea, a few months previously – reason enough, in the Florence of the 15th and 16th century, to commission a portrait. In the case of the Giocondo family, moreover, Andrea's safe delivery must have carried particular significance. Levels of infant mortality and death in childbirth were in those days very high, something of which both Francesco and Lisa del Giocondo would have been painfully aware. Francesco had already lost two wives prior to Lisa, on each occasion after about a year of marriage. One of these wives is known to have died shortly after the birth of a child, and it seems likely that both of Francesco's previous wives died either in childbirth or in the weeks immediately following their confinements. Francesco's third wife, Lisa, had evidently survived the birth of her first son Piero (1496), but in 1499 lost a daughter at birth. Childbirth was thus an occasion overshadowed by tragedy for the del Giocondo family. When, in the spring of 1503, some four months after Andrea's birth, mother and son were still doing well, Francesco could allow himself to assume that both would safely survive the happy event. It was this confident hope which in all probability prompted Francesco to commission a portrait of his wife to adorn their new home. The portrait of Lisa del Giocondo would never hang in the house for which it was intended, however, since Leonardo did not complete the painting until several years later, probably towards 1510, by which time he was no longer living in Florence.

Leonardo clearly draws in the Mona Lisa upon the formal vocabulary of Florentine portraiture of the late 15th century. The half-length figure is turned two-thirds towards the viewer, and a balustrade carried on slender pillars provides the point of transition between the foreground and the background landscape. Formally similar half-length portraits of young women from the period before 1500 include those by the so-called Master of Santo Spirito in the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin<sup>39</sup>, the Costanza Caetani from the workshop of Domenico Ghirlandaio (London, National Gallery; ill. 11)<sup>40</sup> and a female portrait by Lorenzo di Credi (Forlì, Pinacoteca Civica).<sup>41</sup> These in turn look back to earlier Flemish prototypes such as Jan van Eyck's portrait of Isabella of Portugal, now lost, which already comes very close to the arrangement of Lisa's portrait (ill. 12).<sup>42</sup>

Leonardo's Mona Lisa is deeply indebted to a type of portraiture popular in Florence in

the years shortly before and shortly after 1500 (a fact, which ultimately confirms the traditional identification of the portrait's sitter as Lisa del Giocondo<sup>43</sup>). But Leonardo went far beyond his predecessors: the portrait of Lisa del Giocondo is very much larger than known Flemish prototypes, and larger too than most examples of contemporary Florentine painting. The unusually large dimensions put Leonardo's painting into a class of grand Florentine portraits such as Sandro Botticelli's 'Giuliano de' Medici' of 1476 or 1478<sup>44</sup>, Piero Pollaiuolo's 'Galeazzo Maria Sforza', painted in Florence in 1471<sup>45</sup>, Botticelli's so-called 'Simonetta Vespucci' with its famous antique cornelian 'Apollo and Marsyas' from the Medici collection<sup>46</sup>, the same painter's portrait of Smeralda Brandini<sup>47</sup>, Domenico Ghirlandaio's 'Giovanna degli Albizzi', wife of Lorenzo Tornabuoni<sup>48</sup>, and Lorenzo di Credi's 'Portrait of a Woman' in Forli.<sup>49</sup> Also, in the Mona Lisa the landscape background suggests greater spatial depth and atmospheric density. Jagged mountains disappear into the distance against a greenish-blue sky. Within the rocky landscape, a track can be seen on the left and, on the right, a dried-up river bed whose connection to a body of water higher up is not altogether clear.<sup>50</sup> If there is indeed water, this may be understood as a reference to a lake of primordial times, mentioned both by Giovanni Villani and Leonardo himself.<sup>51</sup>

The individual components of the landscape, bereft of vegetation, are reminiscent of similar rock formations in sacred paintings, such as the Madonna of the Yarnwinder that Leonardo had begun not long before or the St Anne finished some years later. There can be no denying the formal affinity between the Mona Lisa and depictions of the Virgin, something evident in many Renaissance portraits of women. The Mother of God was regarded as the ideal to which every honorable woman aspired, and the formal parallels between paintings of the Virgin and portraits of women corresponded to this fact. The smile worn by the Mona Lisa is thus related to the smile of the Virgin and as such formed part of the standard repertoire of painters in the late 15th and early 16th century. Lisa del Giocondo's smile also corresponds to the notion, current in Leonardo's day, that outer beauty was an expression of inner virtue.<sup>52</sup> The beauty of her serenely and modestly smiling face thus serves to reflect her virtuous character. Leonardo had already taken up this idea in his Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci, with its explicit message that "Beauty Adorns Virtue". Even the way in which Lisa del Giocondo has positioned her hands conceals a reference to the virtue of the young female sitter; according to contemporary treatises, hands laid one on top of the other signified chasteness.<sup>53</sup>

The expressive power of the Mona Lisa arises not just out of its reinterpretation of older artistic formulae, but also out of its meticulous attention to detail. A gossamer veil covers the sitter's free-flowing hair, while her dark gown reveals intricate embroidery and vertical pleats, particularly below the neckline. The heavier-looking fabric of the mustard-coloured sleeves is lent a natural sheen. Leonardo's subtle use of shading invokes an overall impression of great plasticity, in particular in the face and hands. It is this plasticity, together with the skilfully deployed light-

ing, which falls across the landscape background and against which the sitter emerges as a three-dimensional volume, which lends the portrait its suggestive quality. Such sophisticated handling of light and shade had been in evidence since the middle of the 15th century, above all in oil paintings by Flemish masters, whose portraits revealed a greater intensity of expression than their Florentine counterparts.

The expressive power of portraiture north of the Alps may have been one of the reasons why Leonardo made such a detailed study of light and shade in his treatise on painting. It is in this context, too, that certain formal elements of the *Mona Lisa* may be understood. Leonardo had been developing his ideas on light and shade since about 1490, and following his return to Florence in 1500 took up the subject with renewed intensity. Around 1505, for example, he described in his treatise on painting the effect of light falling from the front on the shading of a face. It is a passage which comes remarkably close to describing the illumination of the forehead, nose and chin of the *Mona Lisa* and the corresponding shading of her face: "The throat or other straight perpendicular, which has some projection above it, will always be darker than the perpendicular face of that projection; this occurs because that body will appear most illuminated which is exposed to the greatest number of rays of the same light. You see that *a* is illuminated by no part of the sky *F-K*, and *b* is illuminated by *I-K* of the sky, and *c* is illuminated by *H-K* of the sky, and *d* by *G-K*, and *e* by the whole sky from *F* to *K*. Thus, the breast will be of the same brightness as the forehead, nose, and chin".<sup>54</sup>

In another example, Leonardo describes the specific lighting effects that result when the rays of the midday sun from the south fall on a road running towards the west: "In streets that lead to the west, when the sun is at noon, and the walls are so high that the one turned toward the sun does not reflect on bodies which are in shadow, then the sides of the face take on the obscurity of the sides of the walls opposite to them, and so will the sides of the nose, and all of the face turned to the entrance to the street will be illuminated." Leonardo goes on to describe the effect produced by indirect rays of light that manage to pass below the roofs of the houses and between the walls, and which are reflected onto faces from the pavement and the sides of the houses: "To this there will be added the attractiveness of shadows with pleasing dissolution, which are entirely devoid of any sharp outline. This will come about because of the length of the rays of light [...]. The length of the above-mentioned light from the sky confined by the edges of the roofs and their façades, illuminates almost as far as the beginning of the shadows which are below the projections of the face, gradually changing in brightness, until it terminates over the chin with imperceptible shading on every side."<sup>55</sup>

Evidently, the distribution of the shadows in the face of the *Mona Lisa* closely follows Leonardo's observations in his treatise on painting. The setting of the *Mona Lisa*, however, is somewhat different than the situation described in the *Treatise on Painting*. Therefore, the ques-

tion arises as to whether Leonardo was trying in his portrait to simulate specific lighting conditions which could never have existed in Lisa's loggia in real life. The illumination of the face does not correspond with the natural lighting of a loggia, which would normally receive the large part of its light from the side opening onto the landscape. In the portrait, however, Lisa is illuminated by a light source located above and to the left of the upper edge of the panel and not too far from the surface of the painting. The illumination of her face, the genteel window onto her inner nature, thus reveals itself to be an artificial arrangement, one which testifies to the importance, in Leonardo's thinking, of the use of lighting and shading for specific artistic ends. The artificially created situation and the expressive modelling by means of shading are thereby given precedence over the natural lighting conditions of the scene portrayed. It was no longer a question, in Leonardo's painting, of simply the exact reproduction of nature; the artist also sought to achieve an autonomous, painterly effect which, in the case of the Mona Lisa, served the expressive power of the portrait.

The portrait of Lisa del Giocondo exerted a significant influence upon Florentine painting even before it was finished. The young Raphael, who visited Leonardo's workshop on numerous occasions, immediately adopted the compositional format of the older master and established, on the basis of the Mona Lisa, a type of portraiture that was to hold good for decades. Examples thereby include the *Lady with the Unicorn* of c. 1504 (ill. 13)<sup>56</sup>, the portrait of Maddalena Doni completed soon afterwards, and later portraits such as *La Donna Velata* and *Baldassare Castiglione* (ill. 14).<sup>57</sup>

None of Leonardo's works would exert more influence upon the evolution of its genre than the Mona Lisa. It became the definitive example of the Renaissance portrait, the archetype of modern portraiture as such, and perhaps for this reason is seen not just as the likeness of a real person, but also as the embodiment of an ideal.

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#### LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci, c. 1479-1480, oil and tempera on wood (poplar), 38,8 x 36,7 cm, Washington DC, National Gallery of Art (Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund, 1967), inv. 2326.
2. Petrus Christus, Portrait of a Young Lady, tempera (and oil?) on wood (oak?), 29 x 22,5 cm, Berlin, Gemäldegalerie.
3. Leonardo da Vinci, Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci, back of no. 1.
4. Antonio del Pollaiuolo, Portrait of a Young Woman, c. 1465-1470, tempera on wood (poplar),

52,5 x 36,5 cm, Berlin, Gemäldegalerie.

5. Leonardo da Vinci, Portrait of Cecilia Gallerani, c. 1489-1490, oil on wood (walnut?), 55 x 40,5 cm, Krakov, Czartorychi Muzeum, inv. 134.

6. Ambrogio de Predis, Portrait of Bianca Maria Sforza, 1491, tempera and oil (?) on wood, 51, x 32, 5 cm, Washington, National Gallery of Art.

7. Antonello da Messina, Portrait of a Young Man, 1474 (signed), tempera (?) and oil on wood (poplar?), 32 x 26 cm, Berlin, Gemäldegalerie.

8. Leonardo da Vinci, Portrait of a Lady (La Belle Ferronière), c. 1490-1495, oil on wood (walnut?), 63 x 45 cm, Paris, Louvre, inv. 778.

9. Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio (?) and Leonardo (?), Portrait of a Musician, c. 1485, tempera and oil on wood, 44,7 x 32 cm, Milan, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, inv. 99.

10. Portrait of Lisa del Giocondo (Mona Lisa), 1503-1506 and later (c. 1510?), oil on wood (poplar), 77 x 53 cm, Paris, Louvre, inv. 779.

11. Workshop of Domenico Ghirlandaio, Portrait of Costanza Caetani, c. 1480-1490, tempera on wood, 57,2 x 37,5 cm, London, National Gallery, inv. 2490.

12. Unknown Artist of the 17th Century (?), Drawing after Jan van Eyck's Portrait of Princess Isabella of Portugal, location unknown.

13. Raphael, Lady with a Unicorn, c. 1504, tempera and oil (?) on wood, 65 x 51 cm, Rome, Galleria Borghese.

14. Raphael, Portrait of Baldassare Castiglione, c. 1515-1516, oil on canvas, 82 x 67 cm, Paris, Louvre.

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J. Walker, Ginevra de' Benci by Leonardo da Vinci, in: National Gallery of Art. Report and Studies in the History of Art 1967, [2], 1968, pp. 1-38.

J. Woods-Marsden, Portrait of a Lady, 1430-1520, in: D. A. Brown et al. (ed.), Virtue and Beauty, exhibition catalogue, Princeton 2001, pp. S. 63-87.

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F. Zöllner, Leonardo da Vinci. Mona Lisa. Das Porträt der Lisa del Giocondo. Legende und Geschichte, Frankfurt 1994.

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## Notes

1. For this approach see for example F. Zöllner, Leonardo's Portrait of Mona Lisa del Giocondo, in: Gazette des Beaux-Arts, 121, 1993, pp. 115-138; F. Zöllner, Leonardo da Vinci. Mona Lisa. Das Porträt der Lisa del Giocondo. Legende und Geschichte, Frankfurt 1994; S. Kress, Das autonome Porträt in Florenz, Ph. D. thesis, Gießen 1995; J. Woods-Marsden, Portrait of a Lady, 1430-1520, in: D. A. Brown et al. (ed.), Virtue and Beauty, exhibition catalogue, Princeton 2001, pp. S. 63-87.

2. Portrait of Ginevra de' Benci, c. 1479-1480, Oil and tempera on wood, (poplar), 38,8 x 36,7 cm, Washington DC, National Gallery of Art (Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund, 1967), inv. 2326. - E. Möller, Leonardos Bildnis der Ginevra dei Benci, in: Münchener Jahrbuch der bildenden Kunst, 12, 1937/1938, pp. 185-209; J. Walker, Ginevra de' Benci by Leonardo da Vinci, in: National Gallery of Art. Report and Studies in the History of Art 1967, [2], 1968, pp. 1-38; J. Fletcher, Bernardo Bembo and Leonardo's Portrait of Ginevra

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3. Walker, 1968; Fletcher, 1989; F. Zöllner, Leonardo da Vinci, Cologne 2003, pp. 37-39, and cat. no. VII.

4. Petrus Christus, Portrait of a Young Lady, Berlin, Gemäldegalerie, tempera (and oil?) on wood (oak?), 29 x 22,5 cm. - Gemäldegalerie Berlin. Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin 1975, no. 532.

5. See for example Horace, Carmina, 3.10; Ovid, Ars amatoria, 1.729. - The "pallor" of a woman's face and its "candida lux" as a metaphor for both love and chastity can also be found in contemporary poetry in the circle of Bernardo Bembo, quoted at length by Walker, 1968, Appendix III, pp. 28-29.

6. Florence, Archivio di Stato, Catasto, S Croce, 1480, 0/2, c. 82 (quoted at length by Möller, 1937, p. 198), where Ginevra's husband, Luigi di Bernardo di Lapo di Giovanni di Lapo Niccolini, complains about the ill health of his wife.

7. Möller, 1937; Walker, 1968; Fletcher, 1989.

8. See M. Levi d' Ancona, The Garden of the Renaissance, Florence 1977, pp. 197-199, 201-204, 279-289.

9. E. J. Mundy, Porphyry and the "Posthumous" Fifteenth Century Portrait, in: Pantheon, 46, 1988, pp. 37-43, pp. 38-39.

10. Fletcher, 1989.

11. Brown, 1998, p. 121.

12. For a similar suggestion see J. Shearman, Only Connect... Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance, Princeton 1992, p. 118.

13. For the relationship between virtue and beauty see for example a poem by Alessandro Braccesi to Ginevra de' Benci, reprinted by Walker, 1968, appendix IV.I, p. 36. For some comments on these poems see Brown, 1998, pp. 104 and 200. - More generally on portraits and poetry see E. Cropper, On Beautiful Women. Parmigianino, 'Petrarchismo', and the Vernacular Style, in: Art Bulletin, 58, 1976, pp. 374-394; Shearman, 1988, pp. 104-148.

14. Patricia Simons, Women in Frames. The Gaze, the Eye, the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture, in: N. Broude/ M. D. Garrard (ed.), The Expanding Discourse. Feminism and Art History, New York 1992, pp. 39-57 (originally published in History Workshop Journal 1988, pp. 4-30); Kress, 1995, pp.237-255; Paola Tinagli, Women in Italian Renaissance Art: Gender, Representation, Identity, Manchester/ New York 1997, pp. 87; Woods Marsden, 2001, pp. 70-74.

15. Antonio del Pollaiuolo, Portrait of a Young Woman, tempera on wood (poplar), c. 1465-1470, 52,5 x 36,5 cm, Berlin, Gemäldegalerie, no. 1614. By the same artist see also Portrait of a Young Woman, c. 1460-1470, tempera on panel, 46 x 34 cm, Milan, Museo Poldi-Pezzoli.

16. Alesso Baldovinetti, Portrait of a Young Lady, c. 1450-1460, tempera on panel, 63 x 40,5 cm, London, National Gallery.
17. Filippo Lippi, Portrait of a Young Woman and a Young Man, c. 1440-1460 (?), 63 x 41 cm, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art; Portrait of a Young Woman, c. 1440-1460 (?), tempera on panel, 46 x 31,5 cm, Berlin, Gemäldegalerie.
18. For this reason Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci was certainly neither painted in 1474 on the occasion of Ginevra's wedding with Luigi di Bernardo Niccolini, as some authors have argued (e.g. P. Marani, Leonardo. Una carriera di pittore, Milan 1999, p. 46), nor executed as a portrait for Ginevra's betrothal (Brown, 1998, p. 105-106). - For this point see already P. Tinagli, Women in Italian Renaissance Art, Manchester/ New York 1997, p. 88.
19. N. Giannetto, Bernardo Bembo umanista e politico Veneziano, Florence 1985, pp. 121-131; Kress, 1995, p. 251.
20. Leonardo da Vinci, Portrait of Cecilia Gallerani, c. 1489-1490, oil on wood (walnut?), 55 x 40,5 cm, Krakov, Czartorychi Muzeum, inv. 134. - For this portrait see F. Malaguzzi-Valeri, La corte di Lodovico il Moro, 4 vols., Milan 1915-1923, I, 1915, pp. 37, 503-504; D. A. Brown, Leonardo and the Idealized Portrait in Milan, in: Arte Lombarda, 67, 1983/ 1984, pp. 102-116; D. A. Brown, Leonardo and the Ladies with the Ermine and the Book, in: Artibus et Historiae, 11, 1990, pp. 47-61; J. Shell/ G. Sironi, Cecilia Gallerani: Leonardo's Lady with an Ermine, in: Artibus et Historiae, 13, 1992, pp. 47-66; K. Moczulska, Najpiękniejsza Gallerani i najdoskonalsza Gallen w portrecie namalowanym przez Leonarda da Vinci (The Most Graceful and the Most Exquisite gallee in the Portrait of Leonardo da Vinci), in: Folia historiae artium, 1, 1995, pp. 55-76 (Polish), pp. 77-86 (English); B. Fabjan/ P. C. Marani (ed.), Leonardo. La dama con l'ermellino, exhibition catalogue, Rome 1998.
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23. J. P. Richter (ed.), The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci, 2 vols., 3rd ed., Oxford 1970, § 1234.
24. A. E. Popham, The Drawings of Leonardo da Vinci With a New Introductory Essay by M. Kemp, London 1994, no. 109A; Zöllner, 2003, no. 399.
25. Shell/ Sironi, 1992; Fabjan/ Marani, 1998, pp. 51-65 [J. Shell].
26. Malaguzzi Valeri, I, pp. 503-504; Moczulska, 1995, pp. 59, 79; Fabjan/ Marani, 1998, p. 54.
27. E. Villata, Leonardo da Vinci. I documenti e le testimonianze contemporanee, Milan 1999, nos. 129-130.
28. Bernardo Bellincioni, Rime, 1493, c. 6v-7r, Italian text quoted after Villata, 1999, no. 72c.
29. For the memorial function of portraits see A. Wright, The Memory of Faces: Representational Choices in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Portraiture, in: Art, Memory, and Family in Renaissance Florence, ed. by G. Ciapelli, Cambridge 2000, pp. 80-130 (with further references).



30. Leonardo da Vinci, *Portrait of a Lady (La Belle Ferronière)*, c. 1490-1495, oil on wood (walnut?), 63 x 45 cm, Paris, Louvre, inv. 778. - A. Ottino della Chiesa, *Leonardo da Vinci*, Milan 1967, no. 28; Brown, 1983 (see note 20); Marani, 1999, pp. 178-187.
31. Antonello da Messina, *Portrait of a Young Man*, 1474 (signed), tempera (?) and oil on wood (poplar?), 32 x 26 cm, Berlin, Gemäldegalerie. - Gemäldegalerie Berlin. Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin 1975, no. 18A.
32. Villata, 1999, no. 122, for the date see C. Pedretti, *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci. Commentary*, 2 vols., Oxford 1977, II, pp. 386-387.
33. Pomponius Gauricus, *De sculptura* (1504), ed. André Chastel/ Robert Klein, Genève 1969, pp. 204-205.
34. Giovanni Antonio Boltraffio (?) and Leonardo (?), *Portrait of a Musician*, c. 1485, tempera and oil on wood (walnut?), 44,7 x 32 cm, Milan, Pinacoteca Ambrosiana, inv. 99. - D. A. Brown, *Leonardo and the Idealized Portrait in Milan*, in: *Arte Lombarda*, 67, 1983/ 1984, pp. 102-116; G. Bora, *Due tavole leonardesche. Nuove indagini sul Musicista e sul San Giovanni dell'Ambrosiana*, Vicenza 1987, pp. 299-304; M. Rossi/ A. Rovetta, *La Pinacoteca Ambrosiana*, Milan 1997, p. 71; Marani, 1999, pp. 160-166.
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36. For Leonardo's acquaintance with the Benci family see Giorgio Vasari/ Poggi, 1919, pp. 14 and 33; Pedretti, 1977, I, p. 168; II, pp. 241, 331-332, 361; Zöllner, 1995, pp. 60-61.
37. G. Aizzi (ed.), *Ricordi storici di Filippo di Cino Rinuccini*, Florence 1840, pp. 256-263, 260; Zöllner, 1993, p. 118; F. Zöllner, *Karrieremuster: Das malerische Werk Leonardo da Vincis im Kontext der Auftragsbedingungen*, in: *Georges-Bloch-Jahrbuch*, 2, 1995, pp. 57-73, 70-71.
38. For the following see Zöllner, 1993 and 1994.
39. Master of Santo Spirito (?), *Portrait of a Young Lady*, tempera on wood (poplar?), 45 x 29 cm, Berlin, Gemäldegalerie. - Gemäldegalerie Berlin. Staatliche Museen Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin 1975, no. 80 (attributed to Lorenzo di Credi). Recently attributed to Agnolo or Donnino del Mazziere.
40. Workshop of Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Portrait of Costanza Caetani*, c. 1480-1490, tempera on panel, 57,2 x 37,5 cm, London, National Gallery, inv. 2490.
41. Lorenzo di Credi, *Portrait of a Young Woman*, c. 1490, tempera on wood, 75 x 54cm, Forlì, Pinacoteca Civica; see G. Viroli, *La Pinacoteca Civica di Forlì*, Forlì 1980, p. 258.
42. Unknown Artist of the 17th Century (?), *Drawing after Jan van Eyck's Portrait of Princess Isabella of*

Portugal, location unknown. - For this portrait of Isabella, which has never been mentioned in connection with Mona Lisa, see V. Herzner, *Jan van Eyck und der Genter Altar*, Worms 1995, pp. 118-119.

43. For a critical discussion of alternative identifications, none based on solid evidence, see D. A. Brown/K. Oberhuber, "Monna Vanna" and "Fornarina": Leonardo and Raphael in Rome, in: *Essays Presented to Myron P. Gilmore*, ed. by S. Bertelli and G. Ramakus, 2 vols., Florence 1978, II, pp. 25-86, pp. 61-64; Shell/ Sironi, 1991, pp. 98-99; Zöllner, 1993, pp. 115-116, 130-131.

The only plausible alternative to Lisa Gherardini as sitter of Leonardo's portrait is Isabella d'Este (see for example R. S. Stites, *The Sublimations of Leonardo da Vinci*, Washington 1970, pp. 329-337; H. Tanaka, *Leonardo da Vinci. La sua arte e la sua vita*, Suwa 1983, pp. 141-146, 286-287). However, the correspondence of Isabella d'Este suggests strongly that Leonardo only made a portrait cartoon and some drawings of the marchioness, but never a painting; for the relevant documents see Villata, 1999, nos. 144, 149-151, 154, 190, 191, 192, 200, 210, 227.

44. Sandro Botticelli, *Portrait of Giuliano de' Medici*, tempera on panel, 75,6 x 52,6 cm, Washington, National Gallery of Art; R. Lightbown, *Botticelli*, 2 vols., London 1978, II, cat. no. B20.

45. Piero Pollaiuolo, *Portrait of Galeazzo Maria Sforza*, tempera on wood, 65 x 42 cm, Florence, Uffizi; see L. Ettlinger, *Antonio and Piero Pollaiuolo*, Oxford 1978, cat. no. 12.

46. Sandro Botticelli, 'Simonetta Vespucci' (?), tempera on panel, 82 x 54 cm, Frankfurt, Städtisches Kunstinstitut. For the paintings from Botticelli and from his school see Lightbown, 1978, I, cat. no. C3; *Virtue & Beauty*, cat. no.28.

47. Sandro Botticelli, *Portrait of Smeralda Brandini*, tempera on panel, 65,7 x 41 cm, London, Victoria and Albert Museum; see Lightbown, 1978, cat. no. B15.

48. Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Portrait of Giovanna degli Albizzi*, tempera on wood, 77 x 49 cm, Madrid, Thyssen-Bornemisza-Collection; see J. K. Cadogan, *Domenico Ghirlandaio. Artist and Artisan*, New Haven/ London 2000, no. 46, and pp. 174-175.

49. Lorenzo di Credi (?), *Portrait of a Woman*, Forli, Museo civico, tempera on wood, 75 x 54 cm (see note 41). Other larger portraits of c. 1490 to 1510 are: Piero di Cosimo's, *Portrait of a Woman as Maria Magdalena*, Rome, Galleria Nazionale, 72 x 53 cm (see de G. de Logu/ G. Marinelli, *Il ritratto nella pittura italiana*, 2 vols., Bergamo 1975, I, p. 252), Giorgione's *Portrait of Antonio Broccardo* (?), Budapest, Museum of Fine Arts, 72,5 x 54 cm (see J. Anderson, *Giorgione. Painter of Poetic Brevity*, New York 1997, S. 307-308).

50. On the Mona-Lisa-landscape see A. Perrig, *Leonardo: Die Anatomie der Erde*, in: *Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunstsammlungen*, 25, 1980, pp. 51-80; W. Smith, *Observations on the Mona Lisa Landscape*, in: *Art Bulletin*, 67, 1985, pp. 183-199.

51. M. Kemp, *Leonardo da Vinci. The Marvelous Works of Nature and Man*, London 1981, p. 265. Leonardo mentions a primordial lake of the upper Arno Valley in the *Codex Leicester*, 9r.

52. Zöllner, 1993, p. 128.

53. *Decor puellarum*, Venice 1461, c. 52r-v: 'lo bello costume de le mane sie non toccare mai ni si: ni altri: ni ninna parte del corpo: saluo per summa necessita cum tutta la honesta che se puol: & cosi stando et

andando sempre cum la man dextra sopra la sinistra: al mezo del cenzer uostro dauanti: et manzando et beuando cum quella grauita che conuene a tutte le donne uirtuose.' See also M. Barasch, *Giotto and the Language of Gesture*, Cambridge/ London etc., pp. 49-51 and 91-95.

54. "Sempre la gola od'altra perpendicolare derittura, che sopra di se abbia alcuno sporto, sara piu oscura ch'ella perpendicolare faccia d'esso sporto. [...] Vedi in *a* che non v'alumina parte alcuna del cielo *fk*. et in *b* v'alumina il cielo *ik*; et in *c* v'alumina il cielo *hk*; et in *d* il cielo *gk*; et in *e* il cielo *fk* integralmente. adunque il petto sara di pari chiarezza della fronte, naso e mento". Leonardo, *Libro di pittura*, § 466.

55. "Allora qui fia veduto li lati de' volti partecipare dell' oscurita delle parieti di muri à quello opositi, e cosi li lati del naso. E tutta la faccia volta alla bocca della strada sara aluminata. [...] Et à questa s' aggiongiera la grattia d' ombre con grato perdimento, private integralmente d'ogni termine spedito. E questo nascera per causa della lunghezza del lume. [...] E la lunghezza del gia detto lume del cielo stampato dalli termini de tetti, cola sua fronte, che sta sopra la bocca della strada, alumina quasi insino vicino al nascimento delle ombre, che stano sotto gli oggetti del volto, e cosi di mano in mano si vanno mutando in chiarezza, in sino che terminano sopra del mento con iscurità insensibile". Leonardo, *Libro di pittura*, § 422.

56. Raphael, *Lady with a Unicorn*, tempera and oil (?) on wood, 65 x 51 cm, c. 1504, Rome, Galleria Borghese.

57. Raphael, *Portrait of Baldassarre Castiglione*, oil on canvas, 82 x 67 cm, c. 1515-1516, Paris, Louvre.