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The Female Nude from Life: On Studio Practice and Beholder Fantasy

Erna Kok*

Arnold Houbraken painted in 1700 a small and ambiguous representation of an artist's studio (fig. 1). In it we see a painter at work behind his easel portraying a nude young woman. The model is turned with her back towards the beholder whilst leaning with her knee on a stool. Her clothes lie in a heap on the floor and her slippers are cast aside as if they have just been taken off. The scene gives the impression that the model has just undressed and not yet taken her position. We watch without any embarrassment, as if through the painter's eyes. He looks, after all, with impunity, because as the painter he is allowed to; indeed, he must study her since she is the means to his creation. However, the painter sits far too close to her to appreciate the model's proportions, and the table placed between them further prevents him from seeing her completely. That is one reason why we should refrain from jumping to the conclusion that this is a realistic representation. We can read in the grinning, direct gaze of the old man how we may interpret the painting: this is an unabashed invitation to the beholder to study the model with him. The private studio has thus changed into a public stage, transforming the painting's beholder into a legitimized Peeping Tom of the titillating image of the nude young woman. Moreover, we must not disregard the erotic implications of beholding this scene that are implied by the drawing of an embracing nude couple, which is fastened to the window shutter. Also the monkey – a symbol of sin – peering from underneath the stool means that we are not merrily looking at an innocent artistic practice. The explicit and implicit erotic meaning with which the painting has been charged influences the beholder's perception. Art, viewing and eroticism are intriguingly interwoven and so stimulate the fantasy of the beholder as to what is happening in the artist's studio.

What happened is not left to the imagination when Houbraken recalls an anecdote, which he describes in his *Life of Rembrandt*. He writes that one of Rembrandt's pupils who *required a female model, brought her himself to his compartment, shut off by a cloth*. Other curious pupils, as well as Rembrandt, peeping through a small tear in the cloth, saw the painter and the model as naked lovers together. Rembrandt watched the fun until he heard the pupil say: *Surely now it's even as if we are Adam and Eve in Paradise, for we are both naked*. At which instance Rembrandt barked with loud voice: *Because you are naked,*

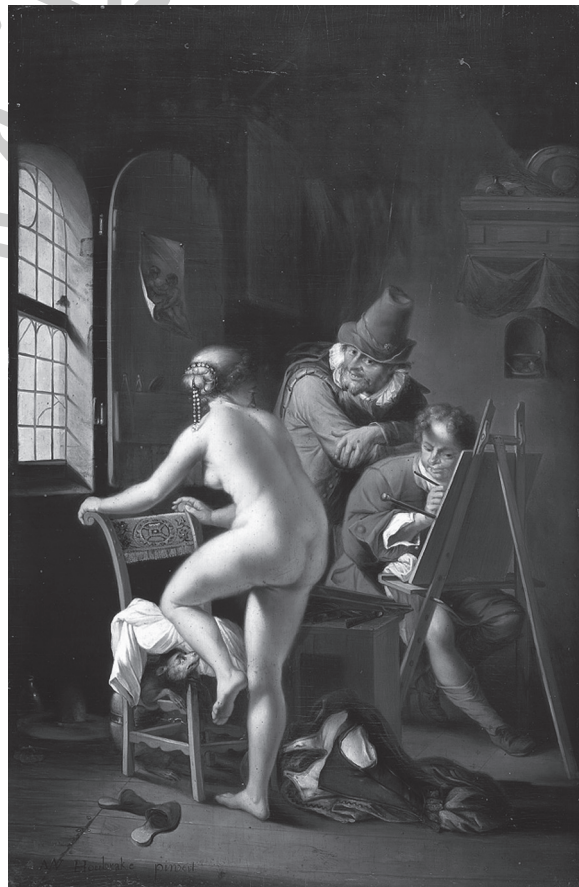


Fig. 1. Arnold Houbraken, *The Painter and his Model*, c. 1700. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.



Fig. 2. Joos van Winghe, *Apelles and Campaspe*, 1604. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum.



Fig. 3. Praxiteles, *Venus and Knidos*, Roman copy c. 390 BC. Rome, Vatican Museum.

that's why you have to leave Paradise, as he caned the lovers onto the street.¹

The painting as well as Houbraken's anecdote is part of an age-old tradition of fascination with and fantasy concerning the relationship between the artist and his model. The nearness of the painter to a nude female model – in the intimacy of the studio where he has to study her body closely – has led for centuries to wild speculation about the nature of their relationship and the identity of the model. The tension between this fascination and the artist legends it has fostered, and the actual reality of the nude woman who is so often believed to have been portrayed *nae 't leven* (from life) in regular studio practice in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, is the subject of this article.

The Classical Origin: Artist Legends and Imitation

The fascination with the relationship between the artist and his model finds its origin in artist legends that have been repeated in

many variations in both literature and the visual arts ever since classical antiquity. Like Pygmalion, who enlivened his ivory female nude through the passionate love that he felt for his own creation (fig. 5). It is also true of Praxiteles, who made his most famous sculpture when he modelled the *Venus of Knidos* after his mistress Phryne (fig. 3). But this is especially evident in the anecdote of Apelles, who fell in love while painting Campaspe, who became his lover (figs. 2, 6, 7).²

The essence of these anecdotes is the inspiring role the model performs in the creation of the work of art. The artist's love and desire are so aroused by the beauty he beholds that this inspires him to achieve the masterwork. This is the topos of erotic inspiration in which love as generator of artistic inspiration is combined with artistic mastery and leads to great art. These anecdotes of artists who fell in love with their models have formed and kept alive the stereotypical image of the erotic relationship between the artist and his model. Also in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries we find examples that stir the imagination, such as those of Fra Filippo and Lucretia, Titian and



Fig. 4. Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, *Raphael and La Fornarina*, c. 1814. Cambridge (Massachusetts), The Fogg Art Museum.

his courtesan, Raphael and La Fornarina, Cellini and Catarina, Rubens and Hélène, and Rembrandt with Hendrickje.³

However, the erotic topos achieved its greatest popularity at the end of the nineteenth century when the female posing nude gained in acceptance and stature, both in the studio as well as in the life of the artist.⁴ At that time romantic historical episodes were popular subjects in the visual arts, as artists looked back at these legendary artist-model relationships. This is well illustrated by the double portrait of the infamous lovers *Raphael and La Fornarina* (fig. 4) by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres. La Fornarina sits on Raphael's lap, who looks at his own creation of her nude portrait on his easel.⁵ Also, literature found an inspirational source in the relationship between the artist and his model, as is evinced in contemporary novels that give lively insight into this rather complicated relationship between love and the arts.⁶

The Topos in the Italian Image Tradition

Contrary to the nineteenth century, we hardly find the erotic topos visually expressed during the Renaissance. Of all artists' legends, that of Apelles enjoyed by far and away the

largest following in painted eyewitness accounts. This is not surprising since he was the legendary hero in antiquity's art, and there was no greater compliment than for an artist to be praised as a 'second' Apelles.⁷ This idea was introduced in the sixteenth century as a result of the growing self-consciousness of painters and their wish to raise the status of the arts.⁸ The anecdote recalls how Alexander the Great commissioned his court painter Apelles to paint his (Alexander's) favourite mistress Campaspe in the nude. Whilst painting, Apelles fell in love with her, and Alexander gave his mistress to the painter out of gratitude and respect for his great artistry.

Because of Campaspe's explicit role the anecdote functioned extremely well as legitimation of painting the female nude. Moreover, thus portraying perfect beauty confirmed the mastery of art, since as court painter Apelles was considered unsurpassed in the representation of the grace and beauty of the female nude.⁹ The Apelles and Campaspe scene could function iconographically for one or more aspects of the legend. Thus the painter at work, the burning love for the nude woman, and the ruler's gift of her could all be pictorially developed. The choice of one of these aspects depended on the meaning that the patron or painter wanted to communicate.

For rulers and artists in the Italian Renaissance the attraction of the scene lay particularly in the status of Apelles as court painter, and of Alexander as great ruler and patron of the arts. By identifying with Alexander and Apelles they positioned themselves next to their classical and mythical predecessors, thereby adopting their historical fame, esteem and symbolic status. Therefore the legend of Apelles and Campaspe was used in Italy primarily in programmatic series. Vasari used the anecdote several times as a theme in the iconographic programs of his own home, as well as for the design of Francesco I de Medici's Studiolo in the Palazzo Vecchio.¹⁰

In the Italian pictorial tradition the erotic character of the relationship between the artist and his model is subordinate to the rulership and artistic exaltation. In the Netherlands we do not see this iconography of exaltation, presumably through lack of rulership patronage. On the other hand, the heavily enamoured Apelles watching and painting his nude mod-



Fig. 5. Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Pygmalion and Galatea*, c. 1890. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

el did appeal to the Dutch imagination. The theme of the erotic relationship between an artist and his nude appears there for the first time at the end of the sixteenth century.

Erotic Imagery in the Netherlands

In the drawing by Frans Badens of 1595, the painter's burning love is indicated by Cupid's intervention when he aims his arrow at the heart of Apelles (fig. 6). However, the most blatant portrayals of the enamoured Apelles are two life-sized and practically identical oil paintings by Joos van Winghe of 1600 and 1604 in Vienna (fig. 2). Van Mander in his *Schilder-boeck* already noticed these: *Joos van Winghe has also made two good pieces of the same subject, but of differing composition, namely, the situation in which Apelles paints the delightfully beautiful Campaspe, as his love for her ignites.*¹¹

It is the gaze, 'the seat of lust',¹² that ignites Apelles' love at the sight of the nude's perfect beauty in Van Winghe's paintings. Apelles has stopped painting and leans back as he observes Campaspe enthralled. Eros, positioned between the painter and his model, casts his arrow directly in Apelles' heart as he unites the loving

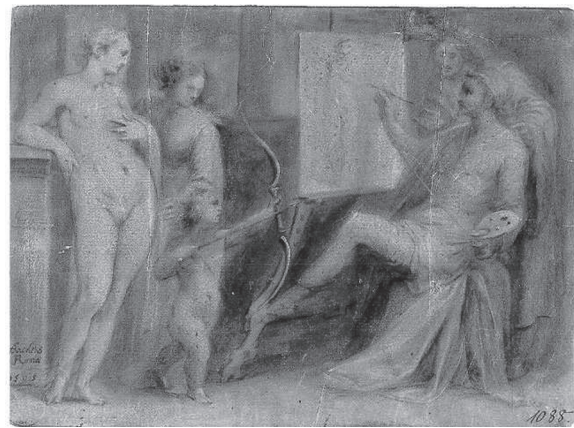


Fig. 6. Francesco Badens, *Apelles paints Campaspe*, 1595. Whereabouts unknown.

couple with his glance. Alexander hardly plays a meaningful role, having been pushed into the background. Van Winghe refers with this imagery to the familiar sixteenth-century views that the observation of beauty leads to divine inspiration and that Eros functions as the motivator of creative power.

Apparently Van Winghe had a predilection for the theme of inspiration from burning love, for he made several versions of it with a prominent nude model in each.¹³ In his inventions the nude model attains for the first time its own artistic meaning, which is anonymous, since it is idealized nudity. However, this anonymity does not apply to the painter; various authors have recognized in Apelles the self-portrait of Van Winghe himself. Also Werner van den Valckert portrayed himself as Apelles, a drawing from around 1620 has been attributed to him because of the individualized features of his face (fig. 7).¹⁴

The topos of erotic inspiration is intermingled with these artistic self-portraits. Self-consciously standing in for Apelles, both artists thereby seek the honour and fame related to this painter's legendary representation of female beauty and grace. Thus they present themselves as the 'Appellian painter': their self-portraits function much like business cards.

Van Winghe was the first to paint the Apelles and Campaspe scene as an explicit rendering of the artist's erotic inspiration, which was enflamed by his burning love for the nude woman in front of him. This had no follow-up in the Netherlands, which is surprising since



Fig. 7. Attributed to Werner van den Valckert, *Apelles paints Campaspe*, c. 1620. Whereabouts unknown.

there were numerous art lovers and collectors of paintings with erotic connotations.

Reality, however, competed with morality. After all, such paintings were at odds with moral codes of chastity and honour, and the general rejection of nude scenes. Eric Jan Sluijter has studied this tension. He has found that nude scenes with respectable mythological or biblical stories were chosen and encouraged because they communicated the ambiguous tension of erotic pleasure and dangerous seduction. Especially the scenes of *Bathsheba Bathing*, *Suzanna and the Elders*, *Diana and Acteon*, and *The Judgement of Paris* enjoyed wide interest. These were scenes through which the beholder could identify with the voyeur of the nude in the painting, thereby legitimizing his own voyeurism and enjoyment of nudity. However, the beholder was also aware that these stories' fatal endings meant that nudity's attraction had serious and far-reaching consequences. An ambiguous union of erotic pleasure and severe moralism was thus established which enhanced the tension of viewing. Precisely this tension contributed strongly to the attraction and popularity of these subjects.¹⁵

The Apelles and Campaspe theme lacks this tension between moralism and eroticism; the

story does not end in disaster. On the contrary, Apelles made his best painting and earned eternal fame by *constantly observing* this beautiful nude woman and being overcome by *unchaste love* whilst painting, as Van Mander writes.¹⁶ Precisely through erotic inspiration Apelles created his beautiful Venus and this gave him the fame of being the exemplary painter of the female nude. Potentially, therefore, the story was suitable for the Dutch market, but it missed the moralistic twist that this market demanded.

Visual testimonies of erotic inspiration arising from the burning love for a nude woman are not found in the Italian pictorial tradition of the Apelles and Campaspe theme, and they are limited in number in the Netherlands. Also there are very few sources from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that can confirm an existing practice of posing nude. And about a sexual relationship between the artist and his model, there is even less documentation.¹⁷ How then can we explain the persistent erotic fantasies about the artist and his nude model? Even more than in the limited painted evidence, we may find an answer in the literary traditions, and particularly the artists' biographies, which appear to have become an important vehicle for the survival of the erotic topos.

Anecdotal Motifs in the Artist Biography

The earliest and richest source in which an artist describes his sexual relationships with a number of models is the autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini from 1558–1562.¹⁸ However, the question is how seriously we should take Cellini's rather rough description of his affairs with his models. Nonetheless, he is the first writer, indeed artist, who situates himself within this topical image of the artist and his nude model. In uncouth language Cellini nourishes the fascination for the sexual relationship between the artist and his model; with his explicit descriptions of sex in the studio he has concretely shaped our image of the lustful artist with his willing model. Cellini's anecdotes can be placed in a broader literary tradition that has established the legends and the images of the artist and his nude model.

These legends have enjoyed their own tradition within which the artist's biography fulfils a key role.¹⁹ The biography depends significantly on the anecdote, as appears from the study by Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz. They demonstrate how the anecdote works as a standard formula to highlight – and stereotype – notions of the artist or his work: *...from the moment when the artist made his appearance in historical records, certain stereotyped notions were linked with his work and his person – preconceptions that have never entirely lost their significance and that still influence our view of what an artist is.*²⁰

Already in the period of the Greek biographical tradition the anecdotes were used as a source, or as literary method. Thereafter we see how it was adopted, changed and applied to all biographies, including those of artists. This repetition made them exceptionally powerful, as is demonstrated by Apelles' legendary fame, which he owes exclusively to the descriptions of his work, for none have survived the centuries.

Moreover, the anecdote is psychologically so powerful since it contains a hidden suggestion that unknown aspects of the artist's secret life will be exposed. This creates the illusion that we will gain a deeper understanding of his life, and hence of his work. It stimulates the fascination to know more of the mysterious process of artistic creation and of the intriguing genius behind it all. Kris and Kurz situate the relationship between the artist and his model within – as they define it – the biographical motif of the sexual meaning of the work of art.²¹ This motif, or standard formula, communicates a stereotyped image of the artist, within which his creative activity is considered to be a sublimation of his sexual drive, which results in a work of art that is seen as being 'his child'.²²

A popular variant on this theme is the assumption that every beautiful woman depicted in a work of art could be the artist's mistress. The desire for the model is matched with the sexually free character of the artist, and related to the idea that he enjoys greater sexual liberty than the average man.²³ This stereotyped image enjoyed its zenith in the nineteenth century.²⁴ However, halfway through the fifteenth century a related story was told about Fra Filippo Lippi. Jeffrey Ruda begins his mon-

ograph of the artist, published in 1993, as follows: *Fra Filippo Lippi is better known for his personality than for his art. The idea that a friar-artist seduced a nun, who was his spiritual charge but also his model was irresistible to writers from Vasari to Browning and the whole generation of Romantic painters.*²⁵

The supposition that Fra Filippo ran off with his model was fully in line with the artist's passionate character, at least if we may believe Vasari's anecdote about him: *It is said that Fra Filippo was so lustful that he would give anything to enjoy a woman he wanted if he thought he could have his way; and if he couldn't buy what he wanted, then he would cool his passion by painting her portrait and reasoning with himself.*²⁶

With this anecdote Vasari sketches the image of an artist whose unfulfilled love leads to creative activity, with a work of art as the result. Vasari thus places Lippi's free sexual behaviour in the light of his artistry, which was – as he states – so excellent that no one surpassed him in his time.²⁷ The fact that Fra Filippo kidnapped his model from the convent can be seen as an exceptional event. Still, it is precisely this exciting event that is repeated over and over again, even in current popular literature, thereby confirming the image of the amorous artist.²⁸ Vasari also used the biographical motif of the licentious artist in the *Life of Raphael*, who apparently had an equally liberal sexual character: *He was indeed a very amorous man with a great fondness for women, whom he was always anxious to serve. He was always indulging his sexual appetites; and in this matter his friends were probably more indulgent and tolerant than they should have been.*²⁹

Vasari relates the fact that Raphael was a great lover of female beauty to his excellent artistic qualities in the lifelike depiction of female grace and beauty: *In fact whereas pictures by others may be called simply pictures, those painted by Raphael are truth itself: for in this figures the flesh seems to be moving, they breathe, their pulses beat, and they are utterly true to life.*³⁰

In various other anecdotes Vasari continues to sketch the image of Raphael as a man with an easily inflammable disposition. He intermingled the artist's life with his work. The reader understands that the painter, who knew how to value beauty in his work, was also in his personal life susceptible to the attractions of female beauty: an ambiguous mixture of



Fig. 8. Raphael, *La Fornarina*, 1518-1519. Rome, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome.

aesthetic notions and amorous anecdotes. These have fed the romantic myth about Raphael and the painting that became known in history as *La Fornarina* (fig. 8). For ages art historians have speculated whether Raphael chose his mistress as the model, and who this woman may have been. However, there are no sources that can convincingly identify this legendary model or determine her relationship to the painter.³¹

Vasari used in his *Lives* these titillating anecdotes as an effective narrative style and thus contributed to fashioning the stereotype of the erotic relationship between the artist and his model. This, incidentally, did not apply to all artists, but only to those, like Apelles, who were seen as excellent portrayers of female beauty and grace.

Vasari's stylistic form of merging art, character and anecdote became an established literary pattern that found its widest following

among biographers.³² Also Van Mander and Houbraken used the erotic anecdote to explain the extraordinary qualities of artists from events in their lives. On several occasions we find the union of love and art in Van Mander. Thus he writes in his *Life* of Hugo van der Goes that the painter was so deeply in love with the girl whom he was painting from life, that Cupid, his mother Venus and the Graces guided his brush, which resulted in a painting of outstanding quality.³³ In Van Mander we find anecdotes in which love as generator of artistic creativity is combined with mastery and excellent art, as, for example, in the *Lives* of Quinten Matsijs, Jan van Scorel, Antonis Moro, Cornelis Ketel, Bartholomeus Spranger and Abraham Bloemaert.³⁴

The topos of erotic inspiration, starting with the Apelles legend, has found throughout the centuries its natural home in the stylistic form of the erotic anecdote. The repetitive power of the anecdote in literature, as well as in the visual arts, has shaped a stereotyped image in the beholder's consciousness: that of an erotically driven artist and his seductive nude model. It is this fascinating idea that stimulates the fantasy and steers expectations when the beholder views a painted female nude. The erotic topos has constructed the perception of the beholder in how the relationship between the artist and his model should be seen. And, by projecting his fantasies the beholder transforms the image into reality: namely that this beautiful woman, the mistress of the painter, actually posed nude in front of him. But, how does this fanciful image relate to the actual situation in the artist's studio?

The Studio Practice: Fact or Fiction?

When we consider the large production of paintings, drawings and prints with female nudes at the end of the sixteenth and during the seventeenth centuries in Italy and Northern Europe, it may seem self-evident that artists worked with live nude models. However, there are reasons to argue that this was not the case. Until about 1650, neither written nor visual sources are sufficiently convincing to reconstruct a studio practice of females posing in the nude, and certainly not on a regular basis.

In Italy, contrary to what often has been suggested, even working with nude male models may not have been widespread. Carl Goldstein has argued that working after such models was not current in the Carracci Academy. Those artists' drawings of single nude figures predominantly show males, but according to Goldstein they are seldom from life. Concerning the female nude Goldstein concludes: *There is no female figure, drawn or painted, by any of the Carracci, that can be said unequivocally to have been done from a live model.* Goldstein argues that this applied equally to other Renaissance studios.³⁵ This opinion is shared by Francis Ames-Lewis, who proposed that in the few instances in which this may have been the case, it probably concerned male pupils: the so-called *garzoni*.³⁶ If the use of a male nude model was questionable, a female nude model must have been even more unlikely. After all, she was excluded from the apprentice system in the studio and, moreover, social and moral codes made it virtually impossible for women to pose.

We can assume that also in Northern Europe working from live female nude models rarely happened until well into the seventeenth century. Anne Marie Bonnet, who researched the nudes by Albert Dürer, rules out the possibility that Dürer worked from live female nude models and argues that, instead, he made use of his (partly) uncovered male apprentices.³⁷ According to Anne Marie Logan this also applied to Rubens, who followed the Italian practice and only worked from nude male models.³⁸ From research by Volker Manuth and Sluijter we know that in the Northern Netherlands, as well, there was no such regular practice until halfway through the seventeenth century.³⁹

The few facts that we do have from the Netherlands are based on legal documents from the late 1640's, from which we can deduce that sometimes there was nude posing, but then exclusively by prostitutes. For example in 1658 the painters Ferdinand Bol, Govert Flinck, Nicolaes de Helt Stockade, Willem Strijker and Jacob van Loo stated for court

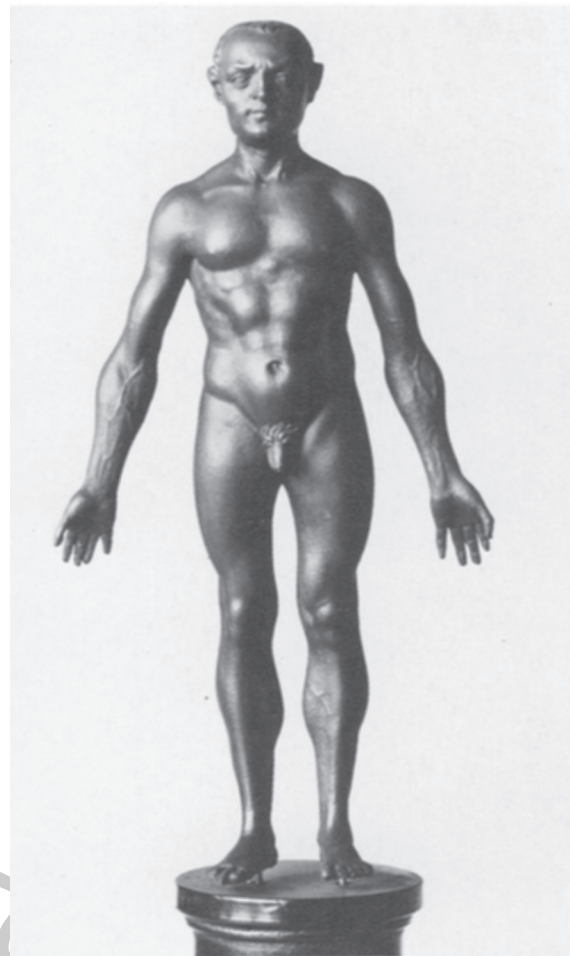


Fig. 9. German school, *Male Manikin*, c. 1530. Vienna Kunsthistorisches Museum.



Fig. 10. South-Germany, *Female Manikin*, c. 1520. Berlin, Bodemuseum.

that, *Catarina Jans sat stark naked before these witnesses and other colleagues as a model, and that they, the witnesses, drew and painted her thus.*⁴⁰

Apparently, there was a need for female nude models, but this was in conflict with morality; in all these court cases posing in the nude was indicative of the immorality of the women in question, and the resulting loss of respectability was socially disastrous.⁴¹ The severe moral code thus stood in the way of nude posing. However, artists had various other working methods available – formed after all by a long tradition of education and training – through which they learned to render the female nude convincingly.

We know much of studio practices and artistic training at the time. First and foremost this meant endlessly drawing: from model books, after prints and drawings of great masters, from antique sculpture and plaster casts. One also learned to draw after specially constructed manikins of both nude males and females (figs. 9 and 10).⁴² These aids for apprentices were found in all studios. Endlessly drawing after examples was meant to train the hand, to teach the eye to choose and select the most beautiful out of nature, and to fill the mind with a stock of motifs.

As a result of this training the artists knew by heart the antique prototype of the human form and its various poses. Moreover, apprentices were surrounded by easily available studio aids that supplied sufficient information about the naked body. These models were, considering the preference for idealization after examples from antiquity, even better than live models. In this regular studio practice a live model was redundant.

Artists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were too skilled and professional to be dependent on nude live models. They did not draw each figure every time from scratch: that notion would underestimate their skills. Moreover, such a working process would have been too labour-intensive and hence too expensive for a commercially organised studio that had to compete for commissions or in the free marketplace. The thorough artistic training produced an internalized ‘mental image gallery’, from which at any specific moment motifs and compositions could be recalled and executed in a routine amalgamation of mind and hand.⁴³

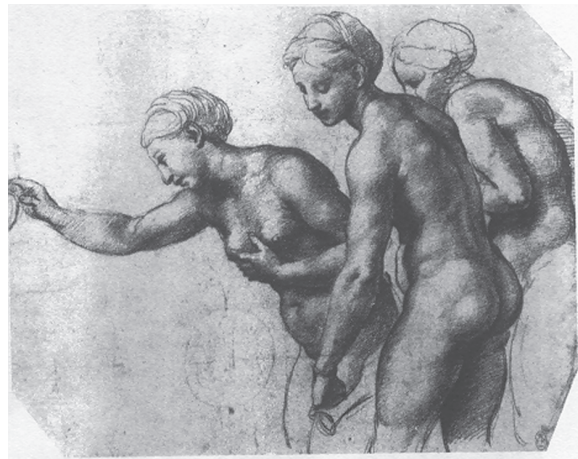


Fig. 11. Raphael, *The Three Graces*, c. 1517–18. Windsor Castle, Royal Library.

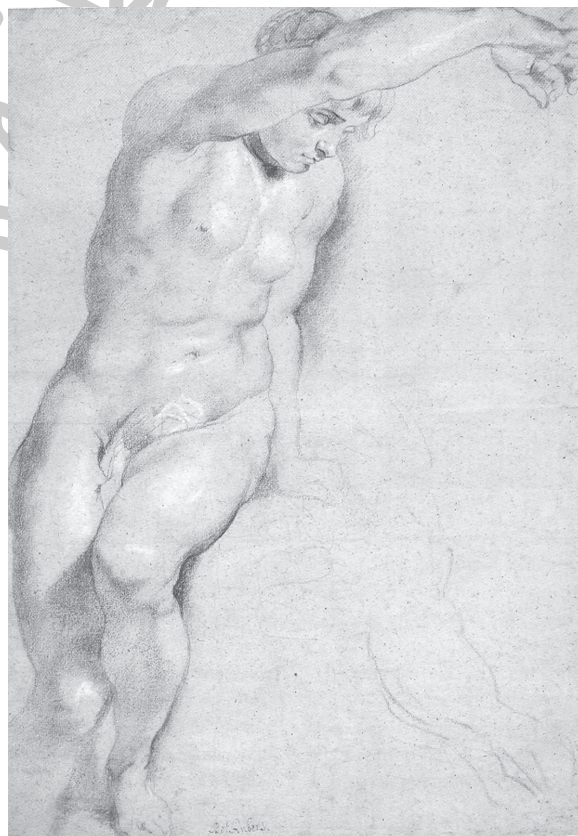


Fig. 12. Peter Paul Rubens, *Female Nude: Study for Psyche*, c. 1609–12. Windsor, Royal Library, Collection Queen Elisabeth II.



Fig. 13. Annibale Carracci, *Study of a Girl with a Basket*. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Cabinet des Dessins.



Fig. 14. Albrecht Dürer, *Nude Woman with a Staff*, 1495. Paris, Musée du Louvre.

We should revise the idea of working from women posing in the nude during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This becomes immediately apparent when we consider drawings by the great specialists in the portrayal of the female nude: Raphael, the Carracci, Rubens and Dürer (figs. 11, 12, 13, 14). All show female bodies that are strikingly masculine in the execution of structure and tension of the muscles. The anatomies are adapted from classical standards and the poses are also based on old formulae. These nudes, in other words, could simply have been drawn from the imagination and/or after amply available examples. For these no nude female models were required.

Hendrick Goltzius' Early Drawing from the Female Nude

Generally it is accepted that Goltzius' *Study of a Nude Woman Sleeping* of 1594 is the earliest dated drawing in the Netherlands of a *vrouwenaeckt nae 't leven*, a female nude from life (fig. 15).⁴⁴ Following its discovery in the mid-1970's, this drawing led to lively debates over its meaning, debates that last to the present day and that have also led to a considerable amount of literature.⁴⁵ The iconographic interpretations of the drawing vary from an allegory of the night to a moralizing warning against the overheating of the libido, and from a nymph



Fig. 15. Hendrick Goltzius, *Study of a Sleeping Nude Female*, 1594. United States, Private collection.

and the personification of an abstract platonic idea to an erotic and voyeuristic scene that fits into a 'canonized' category.⁴⁶

E. K. J. Reznicek explicitly focused on the relationship between the artist and the portrayed woman. According to him, her unrestrained pose implies a concern with both an intimate drawing *and* intimate relationship. He mentions Goltzius' relationship with women and names Goltzius' wife, the widow Matham, as well as the maid Geesken Vriesen, with whom Goltzius was falsely accused of having had an illicit relationship.⁴⁷ However, next to nothing is known about the relationship of the artist with either woman. And the false accusation of having had an affair with the maid may be a titillating piece of biographical information, but it does not prove that Goltzius worked from a live female model.⁴⁸ The value that has been assigned to this event confirms the fascination for the erotic anecdote combined with the artist's work. Indeed, it shows that Reznicek was susceptible to the effects of the erotic topos. His fanciful interpretation has enlivened this nude, but this effect was not limited to him, since none of the scholars, regardless of their various iconographic interpretations, seem to doubt that this female nude was indeed drawn *nae 't leven*.⁴⁹

However, the female model posing in the nude was not to enter the artist's studio until the middle of the seventeenth century. This would make Goltzius' *Study of a Nude Woman Sleeping* exceptionally early and an absolute novelty. Since sources are lacking the necessary evidence has to be deduced from the drawing itself.

The first impression of the *Study of a Nude Woman Sleeping* is of its naturalness, which is enhanced by the apparently effortless pose and frank exhibition of the genitals. The lifelike character of drawings is often seen as being typical for model studies. However, is this drawing indeed so natural that we may conclude that it must have been drawn from a nude female model posing for the artist?

The reclining posture of the sleeping nude with bent arms behind her head fits a pictorial tradition going back to classical antiquity. We see this same posture in the *Barberini Faun*, in Giorgione's *Sleeping Nude*, and also in a drawing of a nude boy by Ludovico Carracci (figs. 16-17). Goltzius may have certainly



Fig. 16. Ludovico Carracci, *Study of a Recumbent Nude Boy*. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum.

known this posture of the sleeping nude from prints, which were also quite explicit in the exhibition of genitals.⁵⁰ According to Van Mander, Goltzius had a superb memory, and the paintings he had seen in Italy were *pressed into his memory like an image in a mirror*.⁵¹ So, in order to draw this posture he hardly needed a live model.

Furthermore, if one carefully studies the anatomy of the depicted woman, it appears that the relationship between the various body parts is quite peculiar. For example, the connection between the upper and lower parts of the torso seems wrong. The left upper leg is too short and strangely fixed to the torso; the curve of the hipbone, indicated by light and shadowy areas, should have been positioned higher to the waist. The raised right leg is affixed to the curve of the right hip. One would see this curve when viewed frontally, but not from this perspective. The hip should be situated behind the stomach and leg. Moreover, the connection of the right leg with the pubic area is not well defined. The frank depiction of the genitals is often mentioned as an argument for calling this a life drawing, but they are too schematic to have been drawn from a live model.



Fig. 17. *Barberini Faun*, c. 3rd century BC. Munich, Glyptothek.

When drawing a body in particular the parts that are not completely visible – here the neck and right shoulder – are difficult to draw from memory. To bring the invisible into a correct relation to the visible body requires careful observation. In this case the connection between the upper arm and the shoulder is too short and compact. It seems as if they have been stuck like loose components to the rest of the body. Accurate observation of a live model would have led to a more convincing result; this also applies to the breasts. Anatomically they should be further apart, since breasts in this posture will fall to the side. Besides, here they are not a natural part of the body, but lay on top like round cups, just like the breast of the German manikin (fig.10).

A drawing from a live model can be recognized by the correct anatomy in the accurate

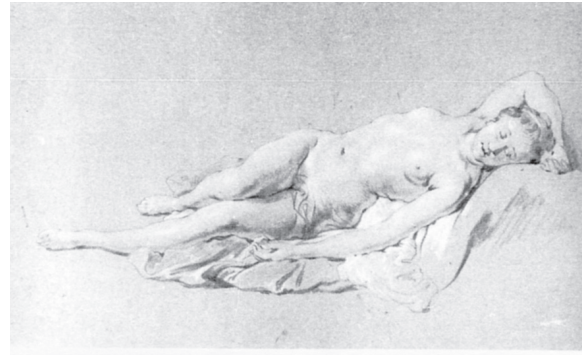


Fig. 18. Govert Flinck, *Recumbent Female Nude*. The Hague, F.Lugt Collection.

realization of a complex composition or movement, since these require careful observation from life. This is clearly demonstrated when comparing Goltzius' drawing with Flinck's *Recumbent Female Nude* (fig. 18). Although his nude has a different posture, the upper part of the body is comparable to Goltzius' drawing. Flinck does succeed in portraying a convincing female nude from life.

Flinck's *Recumbent Female Nude Seen from Behind* is also conclusive (fig. 19). This drawing has a surprising pose and must have been carefully observed from life by Flinck, which is evinced in the rendering of the skin in subtle shades of light. Also in this case the upper part of the body, despite the complex pose, is proportionally correct. Since we do not see the neck it is important to establish that the relationship between head and body is right. And indeed; the way the head fits the body is entirely convincing. This also applies to the left arm. We cannot see how the shoulder joins the torso, and yet the arm is plausibly connected to the body. We know from written sources that around 1658 Flinck worked from live nude models, and this is visually confirmed by his drawings.⁵²

Back to Goltzius: I believe that something else is the matter with this so-called earliest female nude from life. To be sure, the modelling of the torso, the subtle detailing of the ribs, the dimple in the midriff, and the bend of the waist in a slightly upward stance all seem to be drawn from a live model. However, in my



Fig. 19. Govert Flinck, *Recumbent Female Nude from Behind*. Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin-Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Kupferstichkabinett.

opinion this clearly illustrates the studio practice of the posing *garzoni*. How artists transformed their male models into a female figure and even a female nude, can be demonstrated by Federico Barocci's study for his *Madonna del Popolo* and *Annunciation* (figs. 20, 21).⁵³

In other words, Goltzius' *Recumbent Female Nude* is a boy's body dressed up with female characteristics. And precisely the portrayal of the added female parts – the breasts and pubic area – is problematic. Here the painter clearly had to rely on his imagination.

Conclusion

In this essay I argued that we have to revise our stereotyped image of the artist's practice where it concerns working from nude live models before 1650, the female nude in particular. Essentially, the argument is centred on the ability, acquired by diligent training, to draw from memory and with studio aids. Moreover, for reasons of morality, women will rarely have posed in the nude. At the same time I argued that because of the age-old tex-

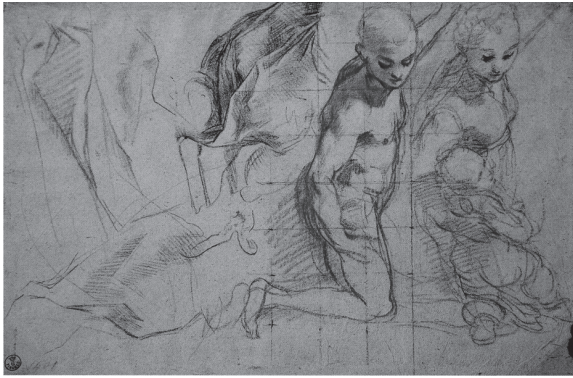


Fig. 20. Federico Barocci, *Study for the Madonna del Popolo*, c. 1579. Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi.

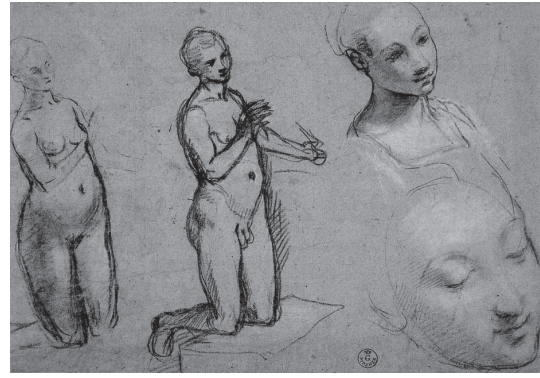


Fig. 21. Federico Barocci, *Study for the Annunciation*, c. 1592-1596. Florence, Gabinetto Disegni e Stampe degli Uffizi.

tual traditions, viewers, including connoisseurs and biographers, assumed that some artists used nude female models. The myth of the erotic relationship between the artist and his model was too attractive. Apart from a few exceptions, it was only later than the mid-seventeenth century that posing in the nude became a standard practice.

The drawing by Goltzius is exemplary in this respect. It was thought to be the first Dutch

drawing from life in which the nude was clearly depicted, but on closer inspection it becomes evident that it is not. There are too many anatomical mistakes for an artist known for his superb technical abilities.

Unless evidence to the contrary is provided, we should assume that before the middle of the seventeenth century, portrayals of the female nude came from the artist's mind, not from the model.

Notes

* I am grateful to Eric Jan Sluijter for his expertise and support; on earlier drafts he made many valuable comments, which enriched this essay. I wish to thank Paul Rijkens and Worth Bracken for translating and editing this text, as well for their help and critical comments.

¹ A. Houbraken, *De Grootte Schouburgh der Nederlantsche Konstschilders en Schilderessen*, 1, Amsterdam, 1718-1721: 257.

² The most important source on the lives and work of classical artists is the thirty-fifth book of the *Historia Naturalis* by Pliny the Elder: Pliny, *Natural History. Part IX, Book 35*, Loeb Classical Library, London, 1912; for Pygmalion see P. Ovidius Naso, *Metamorphoses, Book X, with an English translation from the Latin by F. J. Miller*, Cambridge (Mass.), 1999; for Pygmalion in the visual arts, literature and music, see H. Dörrie, *Pygmalion. Ein Impuls Ovids und seine Wirkungen bis in die Gegenwart*, Opladen, 1974.

³ For a discussion of the three anecdotes in the Renaissance, see E. Kok, *Het Topos van erotische inspiratie. Fascinatie en werkelijkheid van de kunstenaar en zijn model*, unpublished master's thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2005: 12-26, 28-31, 39-45. See for Rembrandt and Hendrickje: E. J. Sluijter, *Rembrandt and the Female Nude*, Amsterdam, 2006: 327-331.

⁴ F. Borzello, *The Artist Model*, London, 1982.

⁵ For paintings with romantic episodes from the lives of famous artists that appeared at the Salon, see R. Rosenblum, *Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres*, New York, 1999: 82.

⁶ Novels about the relationship between the artist and his model: H. de Balzac, *Le chef d'oeuvre inconnu*, Paris, 1832; E. and J. de Goncourt, *Miette Salomon*, Paris, 1866, and E. Zola, *L'oeuvre*, Paris, 1885.

⁷ The limited interest for the legend of sculptor Praxiteles and Pygmalion may find its source in the Paragone: the comparison of the arts in which Leonardo asserted that painting had a higher standing than sculpture. The sculptor, who with toil and sweat realized his work of art, was not an ideal role model for the painter in his effort to achieve higher status for visual arts during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

⁸ G. W. Költzsch, *Der Maler und sein Modell*, Cologne, 2000: 73.

⁹ E. J. Sluijter, 'Venus, Visus and Pictura', *Seductress of Sight. Studies in Dutch Art of the Dutch Golden Age*, Zwolle, 2000: 138 (Sluijter 2000a). See for the Apelles anecdote also Sluijter 2006: 281-283 and 317-319.

¹⁰ See images and iconographic interpretation: Költzsch 2000: 90-94 and L. Cheney, *The Paintings of the Casa Vasari*, New York, 1985; for the iconographic program of the Sala della Fortuna: 159-200; how Vasari legitimized himself as successful and virtuoso painter: 111, 129, 195.

¹¹ K. van Mander, *The Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters, from the first edition of the Schilder-boeck (1603-1604)*, trans. and introd. H. Miedema, Doornspijk, 1994: fol. 24v (Life of Joos van Winghe).

¹² 'The seat of lust', freely translated from: '...ogen de zetel der begeerte', K. van Mander, *Den grondt der edel vrij schilder-const*, ed. and trans. H. Miedema, Utrecht, 1973: part VI, 26; Sluijter 2000a: 119-121 illustrates the notion of 'the eyes as the source of seduction' with many examples in contemporary literature.

¹³ Two drawings that are strongly related to the Viennese paintings are in Basel and Paris, whilst there are also drawings in Dessau, Düsseldorf and Paris that are attributed to Van

Winghe. See for a description: K. Gallwitz and G. W. Költzsch (eds.), *Maler und Modell*, exh. cat., Baden-Baden, Staatliche Kunsthalle, 1969: text with catalogue, nos. 8-9-10.

¹⁴ Identification by H. J. Raupp, *Untersuchungen zu Künstlerbildnis und Künstlerdarstellungen in den Niederlanden im 17. Jahrhundert*, Hildesheim, 1984: 196, 198, note 127; see also Költzsch 2000: 115.

¹⁵ Sluijter 2000a: 118-126, and Sluijter 2006: chapter V. For the Judgement of Paris and Diana and Actaeon, see E. J. Sluijter, *De 'heydensche fabulen' in de schilderkunst van de Gouden eeuw. Schilderijen met verhalende onderwerpen uit de klassieke mythologie in de Noordelijke Nederlanden circa 1590-1670*, Leiden, 2000: chapter VII and VIII (Sluijter 2000b); for Suzanna and Bathsheba, see Sluijter 2006: chapter IV and XII.

¹⁶ Miedema / Van Mander 1994: 79r. 'constantly observing': 'stadich aen te sien', and 'unchaste love': 'oncuyscher liefden'. See also Sluijter 2000a: 138, who stresses the point that Apelles, the connoisseur of female beauty, was exposed all the more intensely to sexual arousal precisely because painters are the judges of beauty by means of their eyes, which makes them, even more than others, prey to the power that beauty wields over sight.

¹⁷ J. Bernstein, 'The Female Model and the Renaissance Nude', *Artibus et Historiae*, 13 (1992): 49-63, spec.: 60, 61 and note 2; V. Manuth, "'As Stark Naked as One Could Possible Paint...': the Reputation of the Nude Female Model in the Age of Rembrandt", in: J. Lloyd Williams (ed.), *Rembrandt's Women*, exh. cat., Edinburgh, National Gallery of Scotland - London, Royal Academy, 2001: 48-54.

¹⁸ *The Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini*, trans. and introd. G. Bull, Harmondsworth, 1977. The handwritten manuscript was remained unpublished during Cellini's lifetime, though it circulated in a number of copies among contemporaries, friends and fellow artists. Giorgio Vasari mentions the existence of Cellini's autobiography and that's even why - as he notes - he did not include a detailed biography of Cellini in his *Lives* of 1568. Benedetto Varchi, another in the Medici circle, may also have read it. The manuscript was believed to be lost, though imperfect seventeenth-century copies existed and circulated to Filippo Baldinucci and Antonio Cocchi, who issued an edition in 1728. The first English translation appeared in 1771 by Thomas Nugent, who had used the Cocchi version. Goethe translated it into German (1796), followed by translations in French (1822), and Dutch (1843). The rediscovery of the original manuscript in 1805 allowed Francesco Tassi to issue a reliable edition in 1829. From then on the manuscript enjoyed wide circulation and therefore significance.

¹⁹ Költzsch 2000: 6, 132.

²⁰ E. Kris and O. Kurz, *Legend, Myth and Magic in the Image of the Artist. A Historical Experiment*, New Haven 1979: 5. Kris and Kurz pay scant attention to the artist-model relationship, but the study is important because it exposes fixed patterns and motifs within the artist biographical tradition that have formed and transferred the stereotyped image of the artist.

²¹ Kris and Kurz 1979: 116-119.

²² This biographical motif is based on the classical anecdote of the Roman painter Lucius Malius, and is recorded in the *Saturnalia* by Macrobius. The motif found its way into art literature: in the fourteenth century it was cited in one of Petrarca's letters, and was related to Giotto. See Kris and Kurz 1979: 115-116. In the sixteenth century this anecdote

was attributed by Vasari, in a different form, to Michelangelo: 'I've always had only too harassing a wife in this demanding art of mine, and the works I leave behind will be my sons. Even if they are nothing, they will live for a while.' In: G. Vasari, *Lives of the Artists. A Selection Translated by George Bull*, 1, London, 1987: 428 (Life of Michelangelo); Van Mander used the metaphor in the Life of Spranger: Van Mander / Miedema 1994: fol. 274. In Hoogstraten we find the quote about Michelangelo by Vasari cited almost literally: S. van Hoogstraten, *Inleyding tot de Hooge Schoole der Schilder-konst*, Rotterdam, 1678: 349.

²³ Kris and Kurz 1979: 116-117

²⁴ See notes 4, 5 and 6.

²⁵ J. Ruda, *Fra Filippo Lippi: Life and Work with a complete Catalogue*, New York, 1993: 10. Paul Delaroche painted the lovers in 1822: Paul Delaroche, *Filippo Lippi en Lucrezia Buti*, 1822. Dijon, Musée Magnin.

²⁶ Vasari / Bull 1987: 216

²⁷ Vasari / Bull 1987: 220.

²⁸ Even Filippino Lippi, Fra Fillipo's son, carried this 'shameful' stamp, as is apparent when he is introduced in popular literature as 'the fruit of the shameful relationship between brother Filippo Lippi and sister Lucrezia Buti.' In: *La pittura italiana*, Milan, 1997.

²⁹ Vasari / Bull 1987: 312 (Life of Rafael).

³⁰ Vasari / Bull 1987: 304 (Life of Rafael).

³¹ A selection from the large amount of literature on the painting: for an excellent review of the reception and iconography, see L. Mochi Onori, 'La Fornarina Biography of a Painting', in: C. Naso and T. Stroud (eds.), *Raphael. Grace and Beauty*, exh. cat., Paris, Musée du Luxembourg, 2001: 134-140. Results of a technical investigation of the painting were presented in an exhibition, accompanied by a catalogue: L. Mochi Onori, *La Fornarina di Raffaello*, exh. cat., Milan, Fondazione Arte e Civiltà ai Musei di Porta Romana, 2002. On *La Fornarina* as marriage portrait for Agostino Chigi, see C. Strinati, *Raphael's La Fornarina*, The Frick Collection, New York, 2004; D. A. Brown and K. Oberhuber, 'Monna Vanna and Fornarina. Leonardo and Raphael in Rome', in: G. Ramakus and S. Bertelli (ed.), *Essays Presented to Myron P. Gilmore*, Florence, 1978: 26-86.

³² The merging of work and life is an biographical approach that has greatly influenced all other biographical formulae. Kris and Kurz 1979: 119-120.

³³ Van Mander 1973: fol. 203v/r. '...hier oock het affect der Liefden mede in ghewrocht / en Cupido de Pinceelen heeft helpen stieren / in gheselschap van zijn Moeder en de Gratien / want Hüge noch vrij gheselle wesende / daer ten huysse vrijdde de dochter / daer hy seer op verliefte was.'

³⁴ Miedema / Van Mander 1994: fol. 137v (Quinten Matsijs); fol. 155r (Jan van Scorel); fol. 230v-27/29 (Antonis Moro); fol. 276r-28-40 (Cornelis Ketel); In a more metaphorical sense – the artist love for Pictura – we find this in fol. 297r04-10 (Abraham Bloemaert); fol. 274r/v (Bartholomeus Spranger).

³⁵ C. Goldstein, *Visual Fact over Verbal Fiction. A study of the Carracci and the Criticism, Theory and Practice of Art in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, Cambridge, 1988: 67-70, 106.

³⁶ F. Ames-Lewis, 'The Renaissance draughtsman and his models', in: D. Dethloff (ed.), *Drawings. Masters and Methods Raphael to Redon. Papers presented to the Ian Woodner Master Drawings Symposium at the Royal Academy of Arts London*, London, 1992: 1-2; Bernstein 1992: 49-63, 50-51.

³⁷ A. M. Bonnet, 'Akt' bei Dürer, Cologne, 2001: 222, 224, 226, 297.

³⁸ A. M. Logan and M. Plomp, *Peter Paul Rubens. The*

Drawings, exh. cat., Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005: 148.

³⁹ Sluijter 2006: 292-305 and 311-333, specifically 292 and 319; Manuth 2001: 48-55.

⁴⁰ Quoted by Manuth 2001: 50. 'Catharina Jans, 'moedernaect als model geseten heeft, en dat sij (de schilders) getuygen daernaer geteeckent en geschildert hebben.' This document in: A. Bredius, *Kunstlerinventare: Urkunden zur Geschichte der Holländischen Kunst des XViten und XVIIten und XVIIIten Jahrhunderts*, 4, The Hague, 1915-1922: 1255.

⁴¹ See for more examples: Sluijter 2006: 322-324, and Manuth 2001: 51-53.

⁴² See for the use of the manikin in the studio: H. P. Chapman, 'The Wooden Body: Representing the Manikin in Dutch Artists' Studios', *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, 58 (2007-2008): 188-215; A. Kwakernaak, 'Leeman', in: M. Haveman et al., *Ateliiergeheimen. Over de werkplaats van de Nederlandse kunstenaar vanaf 1200 tot heden*, Lochem – Amsterdam, 2006: 89.

⁴³ E. Kok, *Van droommodel naar realiteit. Tekenen naar vrouwelijk naaktmodel in het atelier van de zeventiende eeuw*, unpublished master's thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2006.

⁴⁴ Both in private collections. See E. K. J. Reznicek, *Die Zeichnungen von Hendrick Goltzius*, Utrecht, 1961: cat. no. K446, and E. K. J. Reznicek, *Hendrick Goltzius. Drawings Rediscovered, 1962-1992*, New York, 1993: K422a.

⁴⁵ Among others Sluijter 2006: 320-321; H. Leeftang and G. Luyten (ed.), *Hendrik Goltzius (1558-1617). Tekeningen, prenten en schilderijen*, exh. cat., Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum – New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art – Toledo, Toledo Museum of Art, 2003: 252-253; Sluijter 2000a: 154-159; J. Briels, *Vlaamse schilders en de dageraad van de Hollandse Gouden Eeuw 1585-1630*, Antwerpen, 1997: 35; Reznicek 1993: 6 and 78-79; Peter Hecht in *Cultural Supplement NRC Handelsblad*, 15 January 1989: 111-112; P. Schatborn, *Figuurstudies. Nederlandse tekeningen in de zeventiende eeuw*, exh. cat. Amsterdam, Rijksprentenkabinet, 1981: 21, 34-35; A. Blankert, *God en de Goden*, exh. cat., Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, 1981: 187, note 4; H. Miedema, 'De nimf en de dienstmeid: een realistische genre?', *Oud Holland*, 90 (1976): 262-266; E. K. J. Reznicek, 'Het leerdicht van Karel van Mander en de acrie van Hessel Miedema', *Oud Holland*, 89 (1975): 106.

⁴⁶ In the following order: Miedema 1989; Hecht 1989; Miedema 1976; Sluijter 2000a.

⁴⁷ Reznicek 1975: 106.

⁴⁸ Sluijter is of the opinion that precisely the fact that Goltzius depicted many female nudes made this false accusation of people who wished to harm Goltzius credible. Sluijter 2000a: 155-156.

⁴⁹ Miedema and Sluijter raise the possibility that the imperfection in connecting the lower body could be the result of the cover-up of the intimate body parts; H. Miedema, *Kunst historisch*, Maarsen, 1989: 111; Sluijter 2006: 320.

⁵⁰ Sluijter shows some very explicit examples, among them prints of Caraglio and Agostino Carracci, and points out that the classic sleeping position fits into a 'canonized' category and that it was in Italy, especially Venice, that one found the pose for erotic-voyeuristic scenes. Sluijter 2000a: 155-158 and note 216.

⁵¹ Miedema / Van Mander 1994: 285v (200rb), 'als in eenen spiegel soo vast in zijn ghedacht ghedrukt'.

⁵² See Manuth 2001: 50; Bredius 1915-1922: 1255, and *supra*.

⁵³ *Federico Barocci, 1535-1612. L'incanto del colore. Una lezione per due secoli*, exh. cat., Siena, Santa Maria della Scala, 2009: 77, figs. 44, 72 and 45, 178.