GUMENTATIVE,
QUARRELSOME,
LITIGIOUS, EX-
JUSTIBLE, BEL-
DISPUTATIOUS,
IRASCIBLE, ILL-
SIVE, LOOKING
QUICK-TEMPER-
JUNKYARD DOG,
### Polemical objects

**Contents**

5 EDITORIAL  
PHILIP ARMSTRONG, STEPHEN MELVILLE, and ERIKA NAGINSKI  
Ad Rem

9 WHITNEY DAVIS  
Visuality and pictoriality

33 ALEXANDER NAGEL  
Fashion and the now-time of Renaissance art

53 TOMOO MATSUBARA  
Battle, controversy, and two polemical images by Sodoma

73 JOSEPH KOERNER  
Impossible objects: Bosch’s realism

99 STEPHEN J. CAMPBELL  
Counter Reformation polemic and Mannerist counter-aesthetics: Bronzino’s *Martyrdom of St. Lawrence* in San Lorenzo

121 VICTOR STOICHITA  
Beautiful Helen and her double in the *Galeria* by Cavalier Marino

135 ERIKA NAGINSKI  
Julien’s *Poussin*, or the limits of sculpture

155 CHRISTOPHER WOOD  
Riegl’s *Mache*

173 PHILIP ARMSTRONG  
Rodchenko’s monochromes and the perfection of painting

185 STEPHEN MELVILLE  
Richard Serra: Taking the measure of the impossible

202 HOWARD SINGERMAN  
Sherrie Levine: On painting

221 ROSALIND E. KRAUSS  
“Specific” objects

225 MEL BOCHNER  
Ten predicaments
DOCUMENTS AND DISCUSSIONS

226  EDWARD D. POWERS
    Bodies at rest—or, the object of surrealism

247  KENT MINTURN
    Dubuffet, Lévi-Strauss, and the idea of art brut

259  JEAN DUBUFFET
    In honor of savage values
Figure 7. Maestro delle Storie di Elena, *The Abduction of Helen*, detail, Courtesy of The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore.
Beautiful Helen and her double in the *Galeria* by Cavalier Marino

**VICTOR I. STOICHTHA**

The *Galeria* by Cavalier Marino (fig. 1) was published in 1619, at almost exactly the same time that the so-called picture gallery paintings (fig. 2) were being created and disseminated. Starting with the allegories by Jan Brueghel and the artists in his studio, these developed into a distinct genre, the *cabinets d'amateur*. There are many parallels between the gallery that Marino describes in words and those that Brueghel painted in his allegories, including the predominance of painting: in Marino's text and the first painted picture galleries, sculpture is banished to a kind of appendix. The frontispiece of the first known edition of the *Galeria*, printed under the supervision of the author and published in Venice in 1620 (fig. 1), is a bit misleading in this regard, giving the fleeting impression of a more or less balanced relationship between painting and sculpture. The two art forms are personified as two female artists on the right and left side of the frontispiece, one completing a picture, the other a statue. Of course, through a typographical *argutezza*—a printing trick—Marino reveals the true relationship between both disciplines as they appear in his work:

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LA
GALERIA
DEL
CAVALIER
MARINO
Distinta
IN PITTURE & Scultura, etc.
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The layout of the title page, with the conspicuous distinction between the uppercase *PITTURE* and the lowercase *scultura*, reflects the content of the work as a whole, which in fact contains poetic descriptions of 322 paintings and only 36 statues. The same ration *mutatis mutandis* can be observed in the picture gallery paintings.

In Jan Brueghel's work, for instance, painting dominates the foreground, with statues banished to a corridor-like annex. Sculpture is sometimes integrated more effectively in later galleries—such as that of Cornelis van der Geest, painted by Willem van Haecht in 1628 (fig. 2)—but the discrepancy between the number of paintings and sculptures continues to exist. From time to time we encounter a skillfully created discourse between both art genres in the well-established tradition of *paragone*. In any case, it is difficult to believe that the statue of *Venus pudica* was arranged beside van Eyck's painting of a bathing woman (famous at the time but now lost) by pure accident. We know from old sources that a convex mirror in van Eyck’s painting made it possible to see the nude from the front and the rear. One element that enhanced the effect of the *paragone*, sharpening it and making it more complex, was a statue to draw a visitor's attention. It would be arduous now to attempt to identify the person responsible for this presentation. Was it the collector van der Geest himself, or perhaps the artist van Haecht, who—as it were—painted the paintings? What seems more important is the interplay created among the portrayed art objects, with the goal of achieving theoretical and aesthetic effects.

Marino anticipates some of these concerns when he explains his intentions in the foreword of the *Galeria*:

> ... è da sapere che l'intenzione [sic] principale dell'Autore non è stata di comporre un Museo universale sopra tutte le materie, che possono essere rappresentante dalla Pittura, & dalla Scultura, ma di scherzare intorno ad alcune poche, secundo i motivi Poetici, che ala [sic] giornata gli sono venuti in fantasia.

3. Concerning the entire thematic complex of the first edition see the "nota al testo e al commento" by Mario Pieri in Marino 1979, XLVII–LIV.
5. For a fundamental discussion, see Larsson 1974 and Mendelsohn 1982; Lepper 1987, and Munich-Cologne catalogue 2002.
7. Marino 1979, 3.
(... it should be noted that the author's principal intention was not to create a universal museum with all the objects that can be portrayed by painting and sculpture, but rather to play around with a few, reflecting the poetic motifs that occur to him [the author].)

One is encouraged by this preamble to take a renewed, ad hoc look at Marino's work in the hope of clarifying a few obscure aspects of his aesthetic along with their ramifications for art history. In what follows, I will analyze the three madrigals uttered by one of the imaginary statues in Marino's gallery. In view of the small number of sculptures commented on (36 all told), it is significant that the poet dedicates not one, but three poems to a statue of Helen of Troy. The first madrigal:

Deh chi mi torna in vita?
E perché cont'or son, non fui di marmi
quando Paride mio venne a mirarmi?
Ché s'io tal era allora,
stata sarei, quanto al pregare constante, tanto al rapir
pensante.
Ma tal qual sono ancora,
This attempt to breathe life into a statue by rhetorical and poetic means is the key to understanding the monologue held by the statue of Helen in Marino's *Galeria*. This madrigal is the least complex of the three in the series. Sculpture as an art form brings Helen back to life, and she now regrets not always having been made of marble, for then she would have been able to resist Paris's overtures. But even being made of marble would not have helped much since—as one learns in the last line—as a statue she still would have aroused desire and could possibly have been abducted. An erotic displacement of this sort could be interpreted as the symptom of a purely rhetorical pygmalionism;\(^{13}\) however, the second madrigal clearly disproves it:

Son la famosa figlia  
del sommo Giove e de la bella Leda  
Or volga in me le ciglia  
l’irato sposo, e veda

se lo scarpel de l’Arte, che m’intaglia,  
nel pennel di Natura il pregio aggiuglia.  
Conceda pur, conceda  
l’altra al troiano, e senza sangue e morte  
una n’abbia l’amante, una il consorte.\(^{14}\)

(I am the famous daughter  
Of Jove the great and Leda the fair  
Let my irate spouse  
Turn his eyes on me and see  
If the artist's chisel that carved me  
Rivals in skill nature's generating brush.  
Deliver, oh deliver  
This other to the Trojan, avoid the blood, the deaths  
Let lover have the one, and husband the other.)

What is astonishing here is not our encounter with a living, talking statue, but rather the content of her speech, which starts off with a dilemma and ends with a conceptual solution. The talking statue, created with the sculptor's chisel, is as “alive” as the true Helen, a work

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13. Rossi 1999, 82-87. For the broader context, see Bettini 1992 and Hinz 1998.

positively delicious the way Homer's story of the origins of the Trojan War is contested with the remark that Helen, as a mere mortal, could not have been beautiful enough to be the cause of a ten-year war between nations. . . . [the claim is that] the war was not waged because of the imperfect beauty of a real woman but because of the perfect beauty of a statue, which Paris took to Troy. . . . but they [those living in ancient times] could hardly have dreamed that a time would come when this myth would be disputed because only a work of art, and never a real woman, seemed worthy of a ten-year conflict."

As far as I can see, neither Panofsky nor those writing after him noticed that the motif of doubling Helen as a statue already appears in Marino's work. The co-existence is so striking, and the theme's presence in the two texts (far apart in time and purpose) so unusual, that a more in-depth study seems warranted. But first a look at Marino's third madrigal:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Gelido e freddo marmo} \\
\text{ne l'immagine viva} \\
de l'Adultera Argiva \\
d'Asia e d'Europa il fiero incendio esprime. \\
Pensi ingegno sublime \\
se la bella ch'io dico \\
tu de l'impero antico, \\
dandosi in preda a la mortal rapina \\
o reina, o ruina! \\
\end{align*}
\]

(Frosty and cold marble Expresses the terrible blaze of Asia and Europe In the living image of The Argive adulteress. Consider, sublime spirit, Whether the beautiful woman of whom I speak Comes from the old empire, Since she surrendered herself as a sacrifice to the fatal abduction, O queen, O ruin!)

The style and concetti of this madrigal operate by special means. The synonyms in the line "gelido e freddo marmo" emphasize the materiality of the observed object and create a powerful double opposition: on the one hand through allusion to the paradox of this cold, marble image being alive; and on the other through reference to the burning of Troy, which the statue possibly caused. As in the first madrigal, this one contains a phrase—"il fiero incendio esprime"—that can be read on two different levels. On both interpretive

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levels the unleashing of the fire by the "gelido e freddo marmo" constitutes the *meraviglia* of the *concetto*. The conclusion is entirely different from that of the first two madrigals, characterized by a playful alliteration that employs the rule-breaking correspondence between *reina/rina* and refuses to offer a solution to the dilemma.

Marino’s intentions and the message conveyed by his three madrigals are more easily understood if we recall that the baroque poetics of *Facezie* could also bring to bear on serious subject matter despite their slight levity—their "leggiadria delle acutezze." Emanuele Tesarconcerns himself with this topic in his 1673 *Filosofia Morale*, in which he makes direct reference to Marino’s style. The section in which Tesaro analyzes the connection between *motti faceti* and *motti seriosi*—between jovial and the serious statements—is relevant:

> se ne’ Motti serioci è più di sodezza; ne’ Motti faceti è più di acutezza: in quegli è più di giudizio; in questi è più d’ingegno, perche quelli nascono dalla verità delle cose; questi si portuscono della fecondità dell’intelletto; il qual riconoscodoli per propri parti, meggiormente ne gode.

(If the *motti serioci* are more subtle, then the *motti faceti* are wittier; in the first there is more power of judgment, in the second more intellect, for the first emerges from the truth of things, the second from the fertility of the creative mind. The pleasure is all the greater if one recognizes the corresponding portion of each.)

I believe I am not mistaken in assuming that the natural seeming *motti faceti* in the Helen madrigals cloak *motti serioci*. The search for lastingness, for power of judgment and the truth of things (*sodezza, giudizio, verità delle cose*) can only be successful for us if we leave the realm of baroque rhetoric and attempt to approach the matter from a different perspective. An examination of the history of the term "representation" (or "simulacrum") and of the iconographic history of the abduction of Helen provides such a perspective, illuminating a number of important aspects of the poetics of doubles. These two histories are so closely related that a brief study appears worthwhile. Prior to this, though, a short methodical observation is in order concerning both the difficulty and the necessity of determining the point at which aesthetics, poetics, and iconography intersect. The findings will enable us to read the madrigals as *acuti* portrayals of a theme already codified in the iconographic tradition.

Various sources, including Plato’s *Phaedrus* (243 A) and *Republic* (586 C), recount the story of the poet Stesichorus, who was struck blind by Helen for defamation of character and only given back his sight after recanting—the *Palinodia*. In the *Republic*, the reader is given to understand that Stesichorus saves himself through the fiction of an *eidolon*, a perfect double, who supposedly traveled with Paris/Alexander to Troy, while the real Helen remained true to Menelaus.

Of course, this notion of Stesichoros’s counter-myth does not resolve the difficulties of the discussion, the first and foremost being the extraordinary complexity of the term *eidolon*. One looks in vain for this word in another version of the tale, told by Herodotus (II, 112–120), in which Helen is also portrayed as innocent. Even in Herodotus’s version, Helen never makes it to Troy. She is fascinated by Paris, but then shipwrecked off the coast of Egypt by unfavorable winds. There, protected by King Proteus, she awaits the end of the war and her husband’s arrival. The historian Herodotus, whose reliance on Stesichoros was never successfully established, does not speak of a double who fools her abductors and travels to Troy, but he does tell of Paris landing in Egypt with his female victim and countless treasures. Using both these versions of the Helen counter-myth, Euripides wrote a late, eponymous drama, focusing on the reunion between Menelaus and his wife seven years after the fall of Troy. A chaste Helen awaits him in Egypt, the Trojan War being triggered by a deceptive double created by Hera.

**HELEN:** Look!—what more clear assurance needest thou?

**MENELAUS:** Like her thou art: this will I not deny.

**HELEN:** Who then shall better teach thee than thine eyes?

**MENELAUS:** As I stumble, another wife I have.

**HELEN:** To Troy I went not: that a phantom (*eidolon*) was.

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21. For a more detailed discussion, see Schulz-Buschhaus 1967, 218–222.
MENELAUS: But who can fashion living phantom-forms?
HELEN: Aether, whereof thou hast a wife god-shapen.
MENELAUS: Shapen of what God? Passing strange thy tale!
HELEN: Hera, to baffle Paris with my wraith.
MENELAUS: How wast thou here then and in Troy withal?
HELEN: My name might be in many lands, not I.  

Aspects of this telling of the story can be seen in
countless medieval and Renaissance depictions of the
abduction of Helen, including the illustrations in Roman
de Troie by Benoît de Saint-Maure and Historia
Destructionis Troiae by Guido delle Colonne.

Almost all of the miniatures in the manuscripts of
Historia Descriptions Troiae—studied intensively by
Hugo Buchtal—shift the scene of encounter to a temple
visible on both sides of a statue of naked Venus. Through
this portrayal, Venus becomes the tutelary goddess of
adultery. This motif reappears in the paintings of the
Quattrocento, e.g., in the work of the anonymous
Venetian Maestro delle Storie de Elena (fig. 7).  

The statue theme—portraying Venus, not Helen—
does not establish a paradigm of the perfect double, as

is the case in the iconography of antiquity, but manifests
itself in complex examples and parallels. One such
example is the illustration to be found in the Historia
Destructionis Troiae in the Biblioteca Nacional in
Madrid (fig. 8). On the far right-hand side of the page,
Helen is being led onto a waiting ship manu militari.
The Venus statue, located in the middle of the page,
seems to have come to life to resist one of the attackers,
who intends to throw her over his shoulder and carry
her onto the ship. In other words, the viewer is witness
to a double abduction, the kidnapping of Helen on the
one page and her idol on the other. The text says
nothing about this dual tale, and one could possibly
interpret it as the brainchild of a talented illustrator who
was able to give the textual scene a bit more color and
movement through these images.

It surely would be mistaken to ascribe to Cavalier
Marino an iconographic education that acquainted him
with the evolution of such a motif, and yet it is without
doubt legitimate to assume that he was familiar with the
significance of this motif and that of the “living” statue
in the tradition of the counter-myths revolving around
Helen; and that this tradition of counter-myths subtly
runs through his madrigals.

It is significant in this context that the sixteenth-
century representations of the abduction of Helen—in

29. King 1939, 55–72.
their iconography and, more importantly, rhetoric—contain some of the elements that crop up in the Galeria. The most important example of this is the large painting Panoramic Fantasy with the Abduction of Helen, dated 1535, by Maerten Van Heemskerck (figs. 9, 10). It is not possible to analyze the extremely complex composition in detail here.30 Suffice it to say that it has its origins in a more general paradigm, one that dominated the design of the wonder cabinets31 of the same age and later led to the development of imaginative taxonomies such as Marino’s Galeria. The focal point of the composition is the kidnapping scene. A procession is moving to the right, where ships lay at anchor in the harbor. These ships will bring the beautiful daughter of Zeus and Leda to Illium along with many treasures, including a large statue of gold-plated, polished bronze, visible in front of the rest. This position within the composition signals that it is a detail di rilievo, one that the viewer cannot understand as such but must move closer to grasp. In keeping with tradition, the statue portrays Venus, presented in a supine position with a golden apple in her hand. This staged paragone with the beautiful Helen is highly conspicuous. With the exception of the material of which the robbed statue is made—gold-plated bronze instead of marble—all its elements correspond to those in Marino’s poetic descriptions. Instead of listing them here, though, I would like to undertake a more detailed study of the specific “language” in this dialogue between woman and statue, as created by the painter.

The first element of this dialogue exists on the level of an inner-narrative allusion: with the apple in her hand, the statue of Venus—at this point it would perhaps be more apt to call it an agalma or simulacrum—becomes an analeptic reference to the beauty contest that caused the Trojan War. Thus the statue of gold-plated bronze becomes a special kind of simulacrum, since in all its splendor it represents the most beautiful denizen of Mount Olympus, whereas Helen, for her part, is the loveliest inhabitant of earth. The one, of flesh and blood, and the other, of bronze, are connected through their beauty and drawn into a web of relations that the viewer is challenged to discover. Presumably, longing is the most important commonality that is addressed, suggested, concealed, or uncovered.

In the descriptions of Helen by Guido delle Colonne, which, as we have repeatedly ascertained, form the basis of Heemskerck’s painting,32 metaphors for the color white such as frons lactea et niusa abound with those for shining light such as crinium aureorum

cumulus. There is even one point at which bronze is mentioned, or one suspects it is meant because of its specific properties and its durability and hardness. This is in the section in which Guido moves from a description of the visible body to that of the immaginabile, i.e., Helen’s naked body. At this very place the author evokes beautiful Helen’s breasts, which—no surprise—resemble two bronze fruits: “duo poma surgencia aeris natura.”

The new, bold metaphor is subsequently explained:

Et demum statutam eius eque proceritatis attendens presstanciori forma putat et concipit esse membra latencia, dum uere putet et patenter inspiciat in eius composizione persone naturam in aliquo nullatenus delirasse.34

(And finally, while observing her tall, harmonious build, he thought and understood that the parts of her body concealed therein were of a greater beauty; for this reason he thought and saw that nature had made no errors when forming her appearance.)

Heemskerck’s rendering is highly ingenious. According to legend, the dispute centered on an apple, which was not of bronze but of gold. By giving the apple the materiality that is the nonspecified materiality of the statue in its entirety, the artist deals a shattering blow. The analeptic allusion—the primary function of this fruit—gives way to a second and perhaps more important function, namely a referential function based on the similarity between the apple and the breasts—a similarity that is, by the way, created with paramount skill. The fruit is presented by the artist and perceived by the viewer as a genuine trophy and also as a symbol that must be understood, i.e., interpreted in its complexity. In keeping with decorum and convenienzia, Helen’s breasts are half concealed. The artist initiates a subtle game by showing and at the same time concealing nudity—concealing it sufficiently so as to prevent the viewer from seeing the perfect form of her bosom; and showing it sufficiently for him to enjoy the poetic play with erotic comparisons.

Above all, it appears significant that all of this occurs in Heemskerck’s work in the name of a paragone between Helen and Venus, which is realized by means of a transfer, through ingenious stylistic transformations. For in the game intimated by the painting, the immortal woman unveils that which the mortal leaves concealed.

I am not certain whether Marino ever knew of the painting himself, but I would prefer to assume he did.

34. Guido von Columnis (ed. Griffin) 1936 f.39r (p. 73).
not. The question, posed in this manner, is misleading, since in my opinion what is more important than any direct knowledge is a preestablished iconographic formulation or, if you will, the existence of a similar stylistic matrix for the antitheses of iconography and painting that find figurative expression in Heemskerck’s painting and perfect literary expression in Marino’s text.

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