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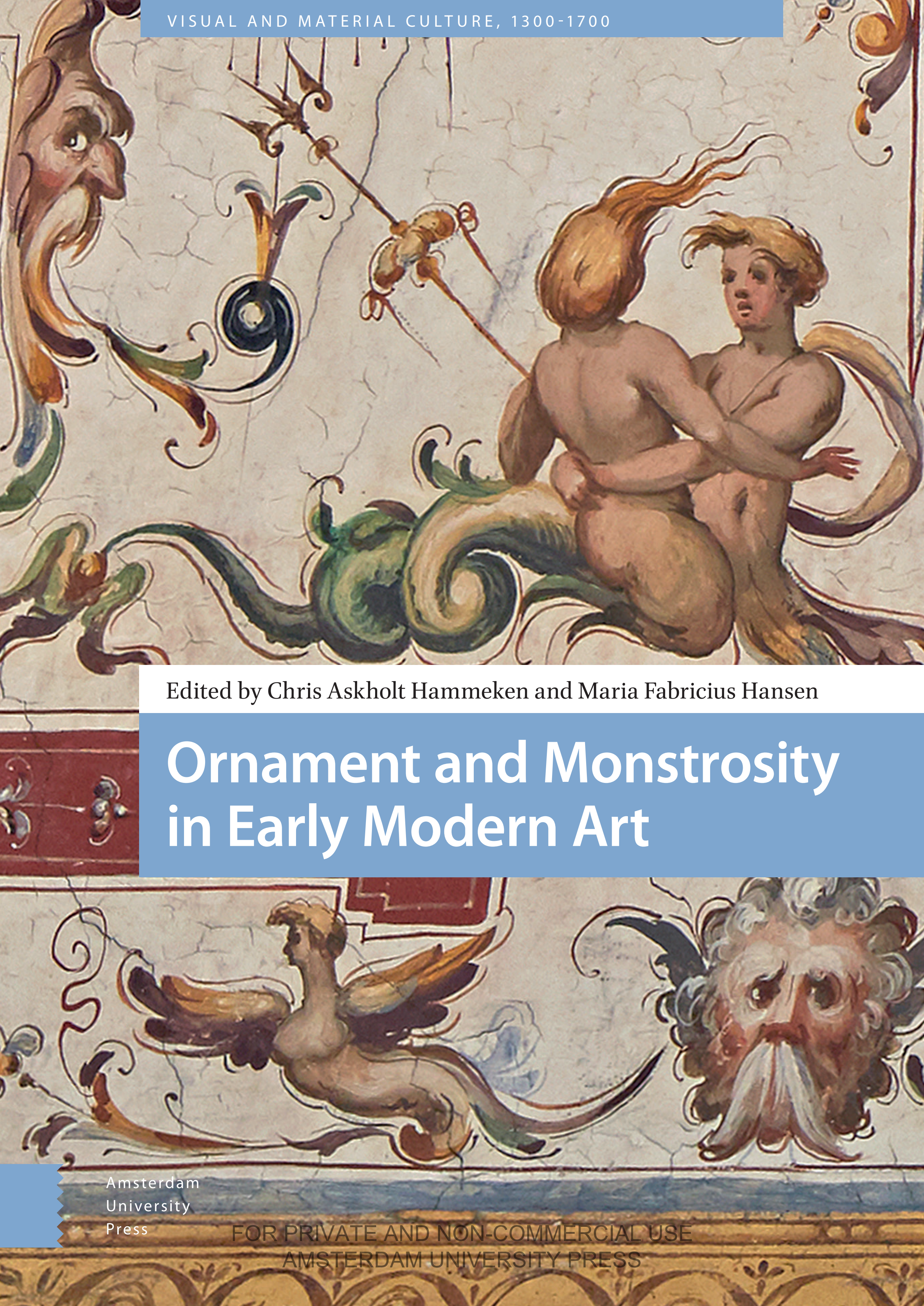

Edited by Chris Askholt Hammeken and Maria Fabricius Hansen

Ornament and Monstrosity in Early Modern Art

Amsterdam
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Ornament and Monstrosity in Early Modern Art

VISUAL AND MATERIAL CULTURE, 1300–1700

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Introduction

Chris Askholt Hammeken and Maria Fabricius Hansen

Early Modern art – in the sixteenth century and beyond – features a remarkable fascination with ornament, both as decorative device and compositional strategy, across artistic media and genres, and in all cultural centres of the Western world.[1] Interestingly, the inventive, elegant manifestations of ornament throughout the period often include layers of disquieting paradox, creating tensions – monstrosities even – that manifest themselves in a variety of ways. The monstrosity of ornament is brought into play through strategies of hybridity and metamorphosis or through ambiguous and discomforting treatments of scale, proportion, and space which diverge from the laws of nature. In some cases, dichotomies between order and chaos, artificiality and nature, or rational logic and imaginative creativity emerge from the decorative frameworks. Elsewhere, a sense of agitation undermines structures of statuesque control or erupts into wild, unruly displays of continual genesis.

The ultimate monstrosity is achieved when abstract, decorative forms are joined with human-naturalistic ones. Particularly in vogue in the sixteenth century are grotesques, or *grottesche* as they were called in Italian around 1500, that manifest themselves as monstrous ornaments par excellence (Ill. 0.1-0.5). Such colossal ornamental attitudes thrived within sixteenth-century art, expressing an interest in strange exaggeration and curious artifice while engaging in constant interaction between centre and periphery, content and ornament, or *ergon* and *parergon*, to employ a Kantian vocabulary.[2] A *parergon* is a framework in the broadest sense and appears as that which surrounds or supports the *ergon*, which is the centrepiece, in terms of form, content, or argument. The *parergon* is not, however, a superfluous or superficial addition to the work, but is a precondition for the *ergon*.

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[1] This introduction is based on material from the two authors' ongoing research on the subject, partly presented in Chris Askholt Hammeken's unpublished PhD dissertation, *Unruly Ornament: On Artificial Moments in Sixteenth-Century Visual Art* (Aarhus University, 2016), and in Maria Fabricius Hansen, *The Art of Transformation: Grotesques in Sixteenth-Century Italy* (Rome: Accademia di Danimarca and Edizioni Quasar, 2018).

[2] Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, § 14; Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, pp. 42–43, 56–118; see also Chapter 9 by Jacob Wamberg in this volume, p. 243.

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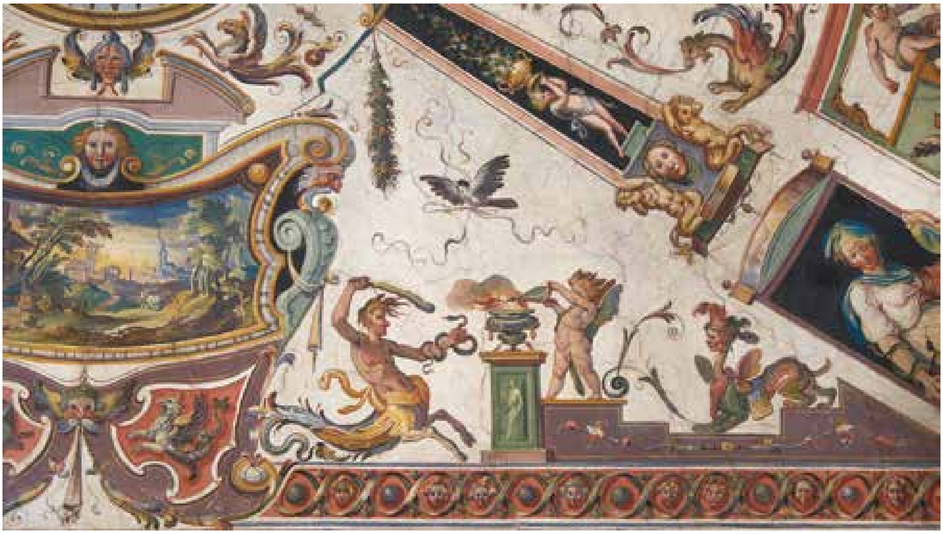

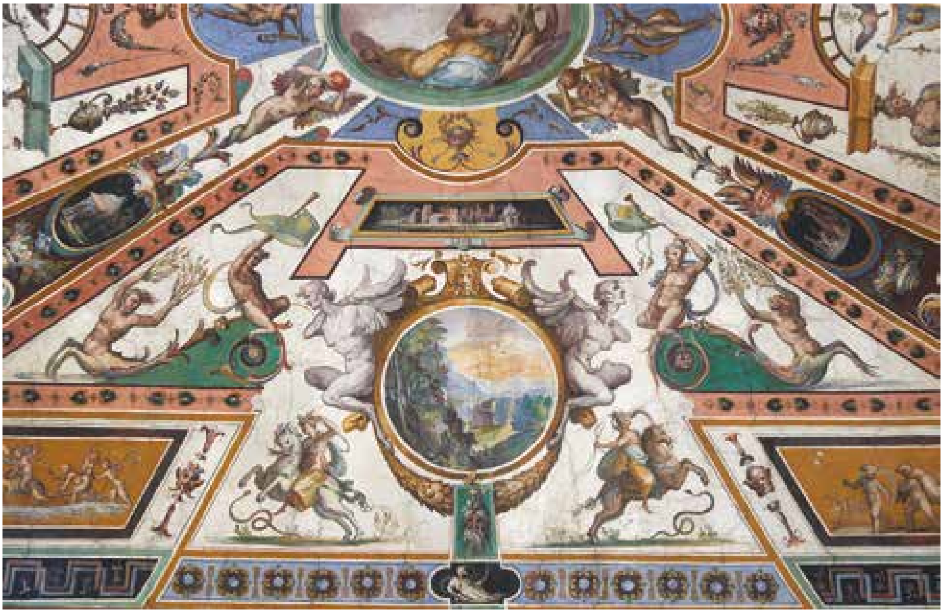

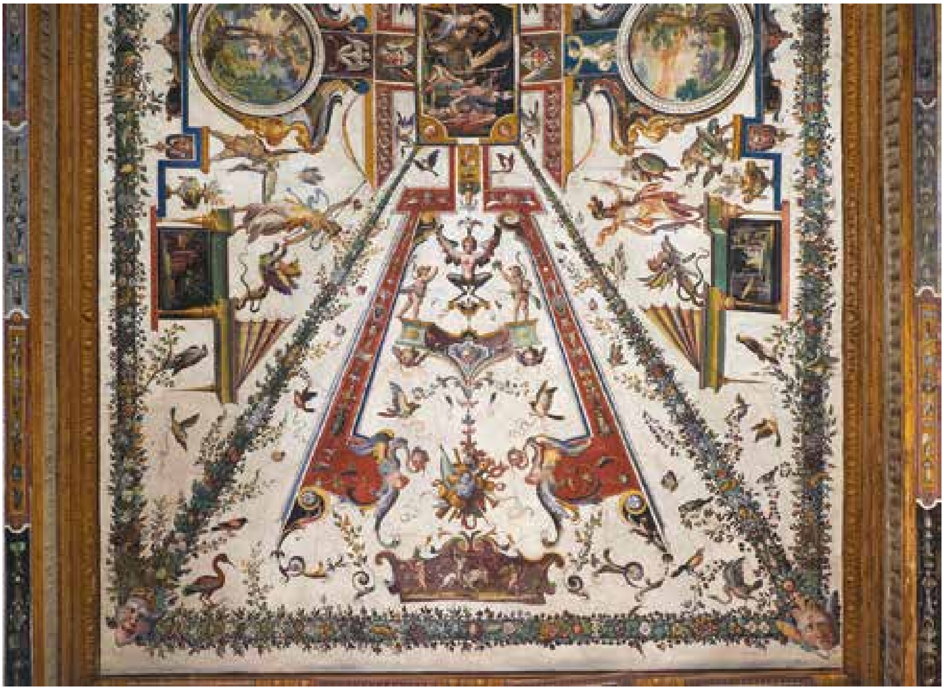

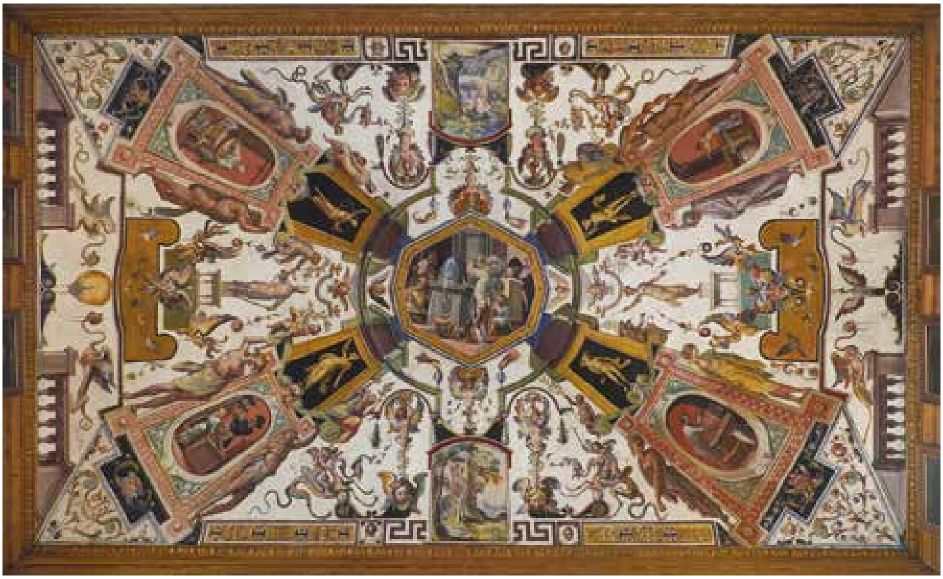

Ill. 0.1–0.4: The Uffizi Gallery and details from the grotesques of the ceiling, Antonio Tempesta and Alessandro Allori, *c.* 1580, Florence. Photo: Pernille Klemp. Courtesy of Musei Civici di Firenze.

The conventional divide between decorative and fine art often results in ornament being overlooked as accessory, an attitude that dovetails with modern notions regarding the autonomy of easel painting. Seeking to further alternatives within this field, we have invited contributions to this book that investigate the monstrous qualities of ornament within visual art from various media and genres (e.g. painting, architecture, gardens, and decorative art). The contributions are mainly anchored in the sixteenth century, but move beyond as well in order to map some of the wider perspectives of monstrous ornament within a broader historical horizon. The chapters focus on the meaning, function, and affect of monstrosity in ornament; on its relationship to the divide between fine art and craft; on the associations of the monstrous with ambiguity and anxiety, with ornaments that oscillate between apparent objective presence and artificiality; on the gendered monstrosity of ornament (according to ancient rhetoric, ornament is considered to be feminine, in contrast to the masculinity of the argument); and on themes of hybridity, sexuality, and bodily awareness in the monstrosity of ornament. All in all, the book addresses why this special relationship between ornament and monstrosity proved so crucial to artistic endeavours of the Early Modern period. When some of the chapters expand their analyses of material from the sixteenth century outward into contemporary art and culture, it is based on the observation that monstrosity and ornament are arguably gaining momentum as fields of cultural and intellectual importance in our own, Postmodern era. After having been expelled as irrational or artistically insignificant in the modernity that emerged from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, it has taken on a renewed relevance in present-day visual culture.

But before we continue with a presentation of the chapters that constitute this book, let us reflect first on the concept of ornament and, second, on the concept of monstrosity.

On Ornament: Framed between Cosmos and Cosmetics

Today ornament is often characterized as something superfluous, marginal, or simply insignificant. It has come to be seen as visual addendum that does nothing but embellish or decorate a work of art, which is why it is conceived as something that can be added or omitted at will. Such an understanding represents a direct continuation of a modernist tradition derived from architects such as Adolf Loos, Mies van der Rohe, and Le Corbusier, and is accordingly in line with perspectives on ornament as useless coating or extravagant glaze overlaid upon pure form.[3] Advocating smooth and clear surfaces, unblemished by excess of any kind, the modernist sentiment positions itself against ornament. Early Modern views, in contrast, tend to praise and lionize ornament, even though the concept of ornament is vague and difficult to define, encompassing as it does a range of artistic approaches.[4] Ornament might refer to certain formal aspects in a work or even communicate its entire aestheticism. As such, ornament takes its place within an open terrain of possibilities. Although denoting a decorative and surplus quality, ornament nevertheless carries a blurred meaning that is difficult to grasp as a complete concept since it figures in a field of related discourses.

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[3] See for instance, Loos, 'Ornament und Verbrechen'.

Etymologically, for the ancient Romans, *ornare* simply meant to honour or praise; *ornatus* related to distinction, excellence, and useful resources; and *ornamentum* had a dual meaning consisting of decorative adornment on the one hand and military weaponry, arms, and equipment for warfare on the other.[5] Ancient cosmology makes explicit that ornament is associated with far greater activities than art alone. The Greek concept of *kosmos* synthesizes the idea of world order and world ornament: the cosmic and the cosmetic are related through an affinity toward the ordering of empty space in defined, decorative compositions, creating limits and displaying contrasts.[6] Early Western cosmology positions ornament as filling and framing pattern through stages of coming into being, such as harmony, rhythm, and dance.[7] In Plato's *Timaeus* (*c.* 360 BC), ornament is thus the perfection and beauty of demiurgic creation, which completes the making of the world from the pre-existing four elements.[8] The Christian conception in the Book of Genesis has God creating the world out of nothing, *creatio ex nihili*, followed by the replenishing of the land, sky, and seas, thereby adorning the world and giving substantial form to matter – which, as a process, has become known as *ornatus mundi* or *exornatio mundi*.[9] Ornament is consequently understood in relation to the completeness of form. This ancient notion is echoed in the fifteenth-century writings of Leon Battista Alberti. His architectural treatise *De Re Aedificatoria* (*editio princeps*, 1485) is modelled on the Roman architect Vitruvius, who also grants ornament a central – indeed, a crowning – role in the art of building. As such, cosmic order is only achieved when ornament is added to structure.[10] These ideas of ornamental architecture are repeated in sixteenth-century theoretical writings, now in richly illustrated ways: Sebastiano Serlio and Pieter Coecke van Aelst, for instance, ornament their pages with words set within portals, complete with herms, pediments, and other curious architectural fragments.

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[4] Recent studies devoted to the Early Modern understanding of ornament include: Guest, *The Understanding of Ornament*; Necipoglu and Payne, *Histories of Ornament*; Zamperini, *Ornament and the Grotesque*; and Zorach, *Blood, Milk, Ink, Gold*. Gombrich, *The Sense of Order*, remains a classic account on the field.

[5] Van Eck, *Classical Rhetoric and the Visual Arts*, p. 25.

[6] Fletcher, *Allegory*, pp. 108–109.

[7] Guest, *The Understanding of Ornament*, pp. 21–66.

[8] Plato, 'Timaeus'.

[9] Guest, *The Understanding of Ornament*, pp. 21–66. See also Genesis 1: 1–8.

[10] Alberti, *On the Art of Building*, pp. 154–319.

Suffice it to say, the Early Modern understanding regards ornament as serving to enhance the beauty of a work of art, not to smother it. Such an understanding is in line with ancient rhetoric as well, where ornament is anything but extraneous. Cicero and Quintilian, whose works had been extensively read up through the sixteenth century, consider ornament crucial for giving brightness and presence of life to forms that have been transformed through the creation of oratory or art. Rhetorical ornament thus enlivens the subject and enhances its eloquence.[11] Ornament is a prerequisite to an effective, emotionally persuasive style that can move an audience.[12] However, as Frances S. Connelly has argued, in the classical understanding, excessive use of ornament exerts a sensual allure and has the capacity to subvert and obscure traditions, and even threaten societal norms. For instance, in oratory, painting, and drama, it is possible for ornament and figures of speech to disrupt and overpower logical argument whenever the persuasive or compelling character mesmerizes for its own sake.[13] Connelly observes how the opposition between sensual ornament on the one hand and structured and reasoned argument on the other resembles common binaries, such as femininity versus masculinity and body versus mind.[14] When kept in balance, no harm is done, but the bodily response to overly abundant and indulgent ornament is capable of overwhelming and distorting order.

This freedom of imagination is exactly what Immanuel Kant criticizes in his *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790) when he argues that the lawless character of ornament has a tendency to produce nonsense.[15] Kant's work and its immense impact on modern aesthetics and the autonomy of art positions ornament as supplementary to subject: As such, ornament is understood firstly as enhancing the tastefulness through form (e.g. drapery on statues and columns in architecture) and, secondly, as merely attached finery (e.g. in the gilding on a frame, which does nothing but lead the eye astray through its shiny, golden colour and alignment with sensory matter).[16] Again, as in ancient rhetoric, ornament is defined through its sensual appeal. For Kant, the bodily response evoked by ornament might distract the contemplative mode of aesthetic detachment with its eye for form.[17] As a result, hierarchy, order, and separation constitute the differentiation between the central and the periphery, between *ergon* and *parergon*.[18]

In his reading of the framed or ornamented image in *La vérité en peinture* (1978), Jacques Derrida deconstructs these categories by emphasizing the *parergon* as absolutely fundamental to the work, exposing the very lack that it fills.[19] Derrida's understanding of the theoretical issues posed by Kant argues that *parerga* are not just mere *Außenwerke* or *Beiwerke* (outside or next to the main work) but are to be seen as much wider phenomena, potentially constituting a variety of significant and meaningful ornaments.[20] The physical borders of the frame thus evaporate inasmuch as ornament partakes of the subject matter. Through sustained interrogation, Derrida polemically asserts:

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[11] Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, pp. 93–96.

[12] Van Eck, *Classical Rhetoric*, p. 22.

[13] Connelly, *The Grotesque in Western Art and Culture*, pp. 30–31.

[14] Ibid., p. 30.

[15] Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, § 50.

[16] Ibid., § 14.

[17] Ibid., §§ 42, 59.

[18] Ibid., § 14.

[19] Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, pp. 42–43, 56–118.

> I do not know what is essential and what is accessory in a work. And above all I do not know what this thing is, that is neither essential nor accessory, neither proper nor improper, and that Kant calls *parergon*, for example the frame. Where does the frame take place. Does it take place. Where does it begin. Where does it end. What is its internal limit. Its external limit.[21]

Derrida's doubt makes perfectly clear that centre and periphery cannot be separated from one another but are continually entangled in unstable relations. Furthermore, Derrida highlights how the erratic character of *parerga* makes them so extraordinary, strange, and exceptional that they sometimes come to represent the focal point of departure in a work.[22] His handling of Kantian aesthetics resonates nicely with the aforementioned concerns in ancient rhetoric that ornament is capable of snatching the power of argument in a move that is at once epistemological and subversive. Discussing the role of ornament as a framing device that mediates between the viewer's space and the surrounding visuality, thereby establishing itself as representation and not reality, Rebecca Zorach notes that 'ornament seems to become dangerous when it stops mediating a relation to something else and starts asserting the prerogative of the object of the viewer's attention.'[23]

By returning to Kant, we can better consider the relationship between ornament and artistic licence – the freedom to dare – a relationship that is crucial to the untamed ornament in sixteenth-century art. Notably, as Winfried Menninghaus has shown, the dangerous irrationality and lawless character that Kant sees in overpowering ornament can be related to the rise of a poetics of nonsense and incoherence in early Romanticism, a trend quite at odds with Enlightenment thinking.[24] Menninghaus discusses how the free play of imagination in Romantic literature and art sculpts alternative worlds in chaotic fairy tales as well as in poetic and visual arabesques.[25] These genres are indeed ornamental, and the arabesque in particular can be read as a free and purely aesthetic beauty, in line with Kant's accumulations of foliage, blossoms, shellfish, hummingbirds, wallpaper decorations, and musical fantasies.[26] Leafwork and flowers in intertwining, elaborate compositions and filigree forms constitute the arabesques that feature so prominently in ornamental interior designs of Rococo art. These merge with the ornamentation of the previous centuries through the incorporation of putti, cameos, hummingbirds, candelabra, shells, and floral bouquets in ribbons, pedestals, and strapwork. The decorative variations in the frame are thus expanded upon, making space for a fantastical field of twirling lines, frivolous curves, and floral waves in structures of harmony and order. As Alessandra Zamperini observes, the very emergence of the term *ornemanistes* to describe artists dedicated to creating ornaments in eighteenth-century France reveals the decorative arts as a specialized field of great importance.[27] The embellishment of interior rooms develops over the course of the eighteenth-century Rococo, with a taste for expanding the arabesques by incorporating exotic, Far East scenes of *chinoiseries* and the traditional comic genre of *singeries*, in which monkeys ape human behaviour.[28] Yet again, these eighteenth-century ornaments charm and ease in pastel shades and elegant decorative patterns of tapestries and fabrics, rather than argue through untamed unease. At issue in Kant's criticism is, however, that meaninglessness and madness are lurking threats when the arabesque is no longer a peripheral phenomenon, subdued as a framing device.[29] Menninghaus analyses these concerns as symptomatic of the potential for semantic hollowness when the frame takes charge and spatial relations become unstable and chaotic through shifts in ornamental scale.[30]

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[20] Ibid., pp. 37–82; see also Wamberg, 'Trafficking the Body', Chapter 9 in this volume, pp. 243–275.

[21] Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p. 63.

[22] Ibid., pp. 57–67.

[23] Zorach, *Blood, Milk, Ink, Gold*, p. 152.

[24] Menninghaus, *In Praise of Nonsense*, pp. 15–50.

[25] Ibid, pp. 1–3, 32–50.

These threats to the established order nonetheless appear already in the ornamental attitude of sixteenth-century visual art, which breathes new life into impulses from Antiquity with regard to questions of ornament. A tearing down of structure, hierarchy, norms, and worldview thus occurs through an artistic licence based on the very notion of ornament. The meandering lines of ornament create unstable spatial relations, characterized by vigorously overgrown ornament. The precarious and volatile spatial constructions that emerge through ornament are unsettling in different ways, yet all point to ornament as a decisive vehicle for visual expressiveness materialized in miscellaneous forms and ideas.

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26 Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, § 16, in which he distinguishes between these free beauties (corresponding to pure judgements of taste) and the dependent beauties – such as figurative art, man, architecture, and horses (corresponding to intellectualized judgments of taste). For a reading of the similarities between the free beauties and arabesques, see Menninghaus, *In Praise of Nonsense*, pp. 15–31. Notably, Kant's idea of free beauties and the connection between ornament and music without theme or lyrics lays the groundwork for modernist visual art, in which images are no longer associated with poetry but instead are likened to music; see Cheetham, *The Rhetoric of Purity*.

27 Zamperini, *Ornament and the Grotesque*, p. 220.

28 Ibid., pp. 231–236.

29 Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, § 50.

30 Menninghaus, *In Praise of Nonsense*, pp. 72–76.

Our efforts to analyse ornament in an expansive field of sixteenth-century visual art involve accepting a wide, monstrous scope of ornament, one that encompasses works that predominant art-historical narratives would suggest have little or nothing to do with ornament. Because the sixteenth century's ornamental attitude has had major implications for understandings of ornament, the phenomenon cannot simply be designated mere peripheral adornment. Returning to the concept of ornament would seem to be a productive approach to attaining a better understanding of such strange visual phenomena as artificial garden grottoes, fully ornate rooms, or hybrid works of arts and crafts. An awareness of the workings of ornament has been requested by David Summers, whose theory of ornament renders it indistinguishable from artifice:

> Ornament, visual or rhetorical, runs counter to one of the most deeply and confidently held articles of modern taste, and we have lost – or rejected – the language for taking it seriously. In this respect ours is different from the tradition that nourished Michelangelo […] To take an example, the greatness of the Sistine Ceiling is not lessened by the degree to which, in Renaissance terms, it was consciously and overwhelmingly ornamental. […] Ornament works, and its workings must be understood if we are to appreciate the conscious steps that lead to such great artistic accomplishment.[31]

The fact that ornament is inseparable from a Renaissance understanding of artifice of supreme difficulty, *difficultà*, gives way to an array of thought-provoking perspectives and analytical possibilities with regard to ornamental forms and their meanings. Ornamentation such as grotesques and arabesques give weight to the idea that this peculiar phenomenon has neither a beginning nor an end but is in a continual state of flux and flow.[32]

The persuasive expressiveness in visual arts, which can make it appear as though the image was alive, is effectively furnished with the artificiality of exaggerated movements in ornament. When Leonardo da Vinci, among others, considers the persuasion of painterly movements as similar to persuasive words in oratory, it only highlights the rhetorical perspectives of visual art.[33] With regard to the dual conception of rhetorical eloquence and visual experience in ancient oratory, Quintilian fascinatingly positions *enargeia* as an ornament:

> The ornate is something that goes beyond what is merely lucid and acceptable. It consists firstly in forming a clear conception of what we wish to say, secondly in

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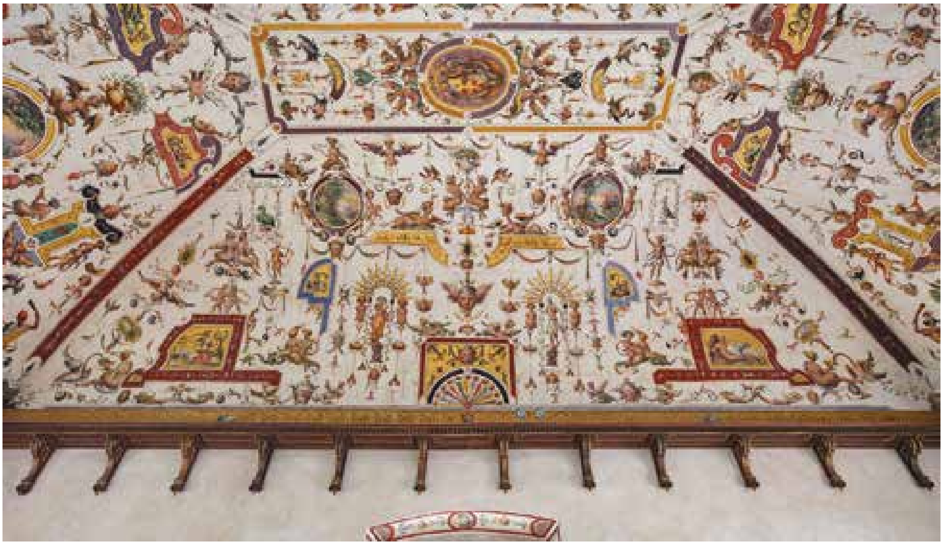
[31] Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, p. 90.

[32] Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, pp. 21, 26–27, 52.

[33] Da Vinci, *Treatise on Painting*, 1956, I, p. 385. Although posthumously compiled by Leonardo's pupil Francesco Melzi, the fragmentary text has for centuries been regarded as an original. See Farago, *Re-Reading Leonardo*.



Ill. 0.5: Tommaso di Battista del Verrocchio, Bianca Cappello's *Camerino*, *c.* 1581–1582, Palazzo Vecchio, Florence. Photo: Pernille Klemp. Courtesy of Musei Civici di Firenze.

> giving this adequate expression, and thirdly in lending it additional brilliance, a process which may correctly be termed embellishment. Consequently, we must place among ornaments that 'enargeia' which I mentioned in the rules which I laid down for the statement of facts, because vivid illustration, or, as some prefer to call it, representation, is something more than mere clearness, since the latter merely lets itself be seen, whereas the former thrusts itself upon our notice.[34]

Following Quintilian, ornament becomes closely associated with the visual through the realm of fantasy, bearing in mind that the process of *enargeia* triggers vividness in the mind. When Ludovico Dolce discusses artistic invention in his dialogue on painting, *L'Aretino* (1557), he makes use of these issues in a quite novel manner that further enhances its relevance in visual art. According to Dolce, from the intellect of the artist appears: 'the poses, the variety, and (in a manner of speaking) the energy of the figures.'[35]

This idea of *energia della figura* in the Italian terminology – which is often roughly translated as 'dynamism' but probably comes closer to 'energy', 'movement', or even 'animation' – bears witness to the development and confusing interchangeability of

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34 Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, III, VIII.3.61–4.1. Summers also mentions that Quintilian considers *enargeia* an ornament and sees it as the highest attainment of rhetorical skill, but makes no further point with regard to its possible implications: see Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, p. 96.

35 The Italian phrase 'l'attitudini, la varietà, e la (per così dire) energia delle figura' appears in Roskill, *Dolce's Aretino*, pp. 128–131.

enargeia and *energeia*. In his unravelling of Dolce's metaphoric phrase, John Shearman uses energy as a more plausible translation of *energia*. Shearman finds Dolce's adaptation of the concept to be derived from two Venetian publications on romance from 1554 by Giovambattista Giraldi and Giovanni Battista Pigna. Whereas Pigna defines *enargeia* and *energeia* separately as the shining vividness of living presence, as opposed to the actuality in a force of detail or emphasized movement, Giraldi combines the dual qualities into *energia*, which he considers an artificial clarity associated with hyperbole: an intensifier used as a rhetorical device or an exaggerated figure of speech.[36] Shearman proceeds to characterize the visual rhetoric in sixteenth-century heroic or epic figure painting and sculptural works, for which Michelangelo's *David* (1501–1504) – by way of its colossal limbs – is exemplary in deploying energetic hyperbole as visual distortions of enlargement, extravagance, and eccentricity.[37]

In this respect, colour can be perceived as an ornament that seizes a visual moment in fleeting movement whereby it becomes integral to sixteenth-century ornament. Often appearing in disharmony and strong contrasts of change, illumination, and concealment, colour is an ornamental quality that highlights effects of ambiguous spatial relations. Characteristically, ornament can be defined as a movement in space that creates temporal tension. As Adeline Grand-Clément has beautifully shown when defining the aesthetics of the Archaic period in ancient Greece, the notion of *poikilia* (which can be translated variously as 'marking with various colours, embroidering, being marked with various colours, striped, spotted; varied aspect, diversity; variety, intricacy, ornamentation') signifies a taste for ornamentation through polychrome spectacles and sensory perception.[38] Metallurgy, weaving, and painting all involve *poikilia* inasmuch as these arts display and transform a variety of colours and materials, thereby appealing to the senses and pertaining to synaesthesia. Referring to adornment, the very root of the word *poikilia* means to prick, to mark, to cut, or to incise; and in Latin, the term turns into *pictura* and *pingere*, to paint.[39]

The understanding of ornament as a cosmic and overarching component in sixteenth-century art as well is formulated by David Summers:

> Ornament and artifice are usually indistinguishable. This meant that the *difficultà* – those things which, in the nature of an art – required the greatest mastery, both because they were 'brilliant' in themselves when accomplished, and because the recognition of their brilliance presupposed an audience able to appreciate them, rapidly came to be regarded as ornament, and within this definition became practically inseparable from such more apparent ornament as colour or *contrapposto*. Figural movement, the supreme difficulty of art, was, as we have seen, ornamental in

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[36] Shearman, *Only Connect*, pp. 208–212.

[37] Ibid., pp. 212–226.

[38] Grand-Clément, 'Poikilia', pp. 406–421.

[39] Ibid., pp. 406–408.

> this sense […] Foreshortening, integrally related to the representation of movement, is perhaps a more familiar example of *difficultà* which came to be used quite for its own sake, embellishing a theme just as metaphor or alliteration might embellish in poetry or rhetoric. […]
>
> Ornament and artifice overlapped questions of license and freedom, and it was within the rules of such assumptions that a new understanding of artistic freedom was gained.[40]

In this line of thought, ornament is far from marginal. It endangers argument and casts doubt upon accepted truths and values. The demonstrative licentiousness of ornament in sixteenth-century visual art appears as an ocean of figurations in which the love of complex, labyrinthine, and enigmatic layers of meaning fluctuates continuously in bizarre metamorphoses, emphasizing the relativism of vision and the cruciality of paradox in regard to perception.

On Monstrosity: Reality, Imagination, and Licence

The monstrous is what differs from the known or normal, with the human body serving as the fundamental point of comparison.[41] The otherness constitutive of monstrosity only makes sense when put in relation to a notion of normality. Monstrosity may be achieved through a combination of incompatible elements or uncanny effects, for instance by fitting naturalistic figures into artificial, symmetrical compositions or by fixing dynamic, animated forms within static frameworks (Ill. 0.6). Monstrous ornaments juxtapose incongruous pictorial elements – oscillating between art, technology, and life. These ornaments are figures of ambiguity and transformation, taking issue with what we expect and thematizing our perception of the world. Deriving from the Latin verbs *monstrare* or *monere* (to show or to demonstrate, to draw attention to the wondrous, to warn), the monstrous has intriguing implications, suggesting that visuality and visual art are potentially disquieting.[42]

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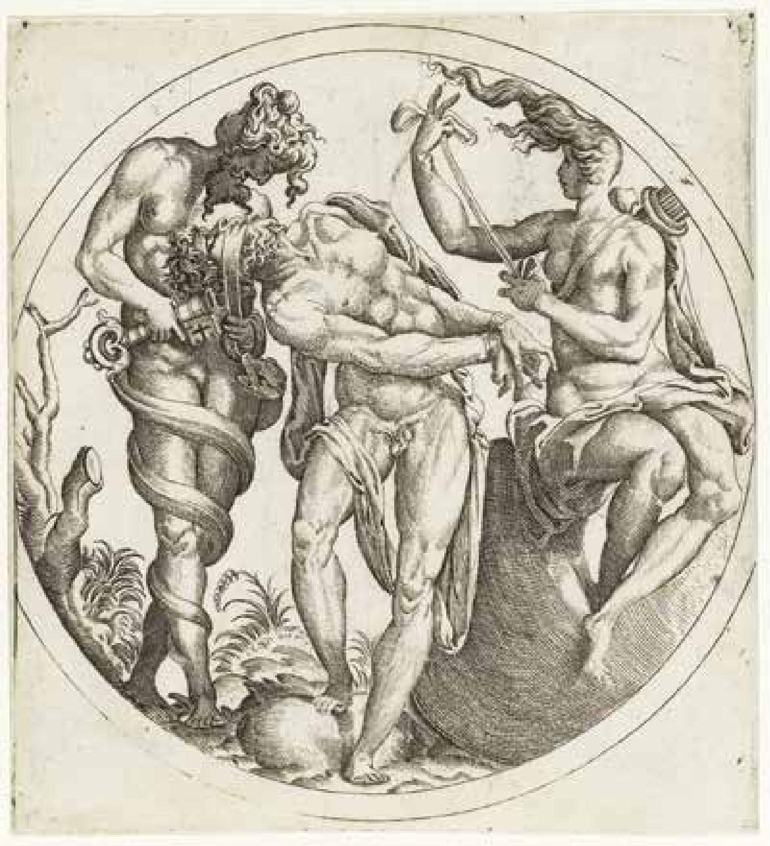
[40] Summers, *Michelangelo and the Language of Art*, pp. 89–90.

[41] Tønsberg and Wamberg, *Monster*; see also the essay in that volume by Wamberg, 'Det Monstrøse', pp. 7–43. For reflections on the characteristics of the monstrous, see Cohen 'Monster Culture'; on late medieval notions of monstrosity, focusing on English literature, see Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality*, especially pp. 1–26.

[42] The etymology of monster deriving from *monstrare* is advanced by Augustine, *The City of God*, VII, XXI.viii, who develops their meaning as signs or portents. See also Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, p. 6; Dorrian, 'On the Monstrous and the Grotesque', pp. 312–314; Jacobs, *The Living Image*, pp. 159–167; Wamberg, 'Det Monstrøse', p. 19; Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, pp. 173–214. For a late fifteenth-century etymological explanation which links *monstrum* with *monere* as a warning of something in the future, see the *Cornu copiae seu linguae Latinae commentarii* by Niccolò Perotti (written in the late 1470s, *editio princeps* 1489): 'monstrum a monstrando, uel quasi monestrum, quod moneat aliquid futurum', in Perotti, *Cornu copiae*, II, p. 724. Thanks are due to Marianne Pade for this reference.



Ill. 0.6: Francesco Salviati (attributed to), Allegorical composition. Engraving (perhaps by the workshop of René Boyvin, Angers), 1550s. Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum.

The deconstruction of the logics of the real, physical world, constituent of the monstrous ornament, evokes the creation of the imagery in the mind of the artist, celebrating the human mind's capacity to embrace fluctuations between images that exist in mental as well as physical realms.[43] In this sense, Early Modern monstrous ornaments were manifestations of artists' ability to transform ambiguities of perception into images, and were inextricably linked with reflections upon artistic licence.[44]

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[43] Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*, p. 56; Kemp, *Behind the Picture*, pp. 229–239; Bredekamp, *The Lure of Antiquity*, p. 46; Kris and Kurz, *Legend, Myth, and Magic*, pp. 61–90, Summers, *The Judgment of Sense*, pp. 186–193; Battisti, *L'Antirinascimento*. On the capacity of transformation as a new property of monsters originating in the late medieval period, see Oswald, *Monsters, Gender and Sexuality*, pp. 116–158, whose analysis is based on English literature, especially *Mandeville's Travels* from the mid-fourteenth century.

[44] Campbell, *The Cabinet of Eros*, pp. 156–160; Vasari, *Le vite*, I, pp. 143–145, and the lives of, for example, Morto da Feltre and Giovanni da Udine in Vasari, *Lives*, I, pp. 924–926 and II, pp. 486–497; Serlio, *On Architecture*, I, IV.ix, p. 379; Lomazzo, 'Trattato dell'arte', 1584, in Barocchi, *Scritti d'arte del Cinquecento*, III,

In a discussion that has been taken up again and again in the history of aesthetics, from the time of Plato onward, two positions were argued – one accepting and admiring artistic imagination and encouraging unrestricted artistic licence, and the other arguing the contrary. Hybrid creatures were repeatedly at the centre of attention within both lines of argumentation, making it clear that distinctions between monsters, chimeras, grotesques, and similar categories are irrelevant in this context. The criticisms of unnaturalistic strategies in visual art launched by Vitruvius and Horace, both from the first century BC, became particularly influential. Vitruvius's treatise on architecture features a description of contemporary wall decorations, known in art history as the Fourth Pompeian style. Vitruvius objected to irrational connections between motifs as well as representations of impossible architectural compositions that defy natural law:

> But these paintings, which had taken their models from real things, now fall foul of depraved taste. For monsters [*monstra*] are now painted in frescoes rather than reliable images of definite things. Reeds are set up in place of columns, as pediments, little scrolls, striped with curly leaves and volutes; candelabra hold up the figures of aediculae, and above the pediments of these, several tender shoots, sprouting in coils from roots, have little statues nestled in them for no reason, or shoots split in half, some holding little statues with human heads, some with the heads of beasts. Now these things do not exist nor can they exist nor have they ever existed, and thus this new fashion has brought things to such a pass that bad judges have condemned the right practice of the arts as lack of skill.[45]

Vitruvius mainly targeted artistic transgressions against naturalism, implying a dislike for depictions that deviate from his experience of that which objectively exists. Alongside this criticism of contemporary frescoes as unnatural figments of the artist's imagination, Horace, in his *Poetics*, characterized indecorous hybridity as nightmares, which became a common *topos* in discussions of the legitimacy of monstrosity in art:

> If a painter chose to join a human head to the neck of a horse, and to spread feathers of many a hue over limbs picked up now here now there, so that what at the top is a lovely woman ends below in a black and ugly fish, could you, my friends, if favoured with a private view, refrain from laughing? Believe me [...] quite like

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pp. 2692–2694; Armenini, 'De' veri precetti della pittura', 1587, ibid., p. 2699; Ligorio, 'Libro dell'antichita', in Dacos, *La Découverte de la Domus Aurea*, pp. 161–182; Danti, 'Trattato delle perfette proporzioni', in Barocchi, *Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento*, I, pp. 235–236.

[45] Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture*, pp. 91–92. In his *Natural History*, Pliny the Elder actually mentions the painting in the Domus Aurea but only in passing, during his account of the artist Famulus, and with no characterization of Famulus's work in the palace: Pliny, *Natural History*, IX, XXXV.120.

> such pictures would be a book, whose idle fancies shall be shaped like a sick man's dreams [*cuius, velut aegri somnia, vanae fingentur species*], so that neither head nor foot can be assigned to have a single shape. 'Painters and poets,' you say, 'have always had an equal right in hazarding anything.' We know it: this licence we poets claim and in our turn we grant the like; but not so far that savage should mate with tame, or serpents couple with birds, lambs with tigers.[46]

In line with Horace, combinations of heterogeneous elements – i.e. figures such as centaurs and mermaids – were seen as images of artistic licence. According to the critics of imaginative creativity, it was problematic when 'idle fancies' and 'a sick man's dreams' led to monstrous extravagances.[47] As David Summers has observed, the inversion of the ancient authorities' perspective in order to legitimize artistic licence (*licenzia*) gained momentum in the sixteenth century.[48] Just as sixteenth-century artists chose to be blind or disobedient to ancient authorities' cautious remarks on grotesque, hybrid, and 'unnatural' imagery, they apparently saw no problem with producing ornaments that were immensely more monstrous in their artful, heterogeneous juxtapositions of naturalistic elements than had been seen before, including the ancient Roman art which the sixteenth-century artists purportedly wished to imitate.

The categorization of grotesques as an imagery of artistic invention is complex since the distinction between 'real' monsters and fictitious ones was not an issue – or was, at least, less obvious as an approach to this imagery than we might expect today. The monstrous creatures of sixteenth-century art, both the female ones and other variants, are not straightforwardly categorizable as dangerous or 'natural', and there is no clear distinction between their coming into being in the imagination of the artists and their actual existence in the physical world. Their imaginative forms did not dissociate the grotesques from the contemporary ideal of imitating nature since a wide range of monstrous creatures were readily accepted as actually existing, including creatures that we today generally understand as belonging to the realm of the imagination.[49] Animals known from personal experience were not yet systematically distinguished from creatures known only from literature or from representations in art, such as centaurs, sphinxes, griffins, and other hybrids. Indeed, the boundaries between human, animal, and creatures from mythology were fluid – as can be seen in a continual tradition throughout the Middle Ages and into the Early Modern period.[50] Dense, inaccessible, uncultivated forest and mountain regions in particular were thought to be inhabited by bestial wild men or satyric creatures, just as the mysterious depths of the sea were believed to contain innumerable strange and monstrous beings.[51] Such creatures were partly known from descriptions by ancient authorities, especially Pliny the Elder, and partly understood as a logical consequence of interbreeding – in other words the result of sexual encounters between different species (such as man and animal), or simply as a result of a pregnant woman looking at something monstrous, which could impress monstrous qualities upon the foetus.[52]

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[46] Horace, *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica*, pp. 450–451.

[47] This was precisely because these represented exaggerated distortions of that which was possible in nature. In the Romanesque period, the employment of figural reliefs on capitals featuring numerous monstrous forms led to the oft-quoted critical observations by St. Bernard of Clairvaux on the application of these ornaments to monastic surroundings: 'In the cloister, under the eyes of the Brethren who read there, what profit is there in those ridiculous monsters, in that marvellous and deformed comeliness, that comely deformity? To what purpose are those unclean apes, those fierce lions, those monstrous centaurs, those half-men, those striped tigers, those fighting knights, those hunters winding their horns? Many bodies are there seen under one head, or again, many heads to a single body. Here is a four-footed beast with a serpent's tail; there, a fish with a beast's head. Here again the forepart of a horse trails half a goat behind it, or a horned beast bears the hinder quarters of a horse. In short, so many and so marvellous are the varieties of divers shapes on every hand.' Bernard de Clairvaux in: Davis-Weyer, *Early Medieval Art*, p. 170.

[48] Summers, 'Michelangelo on Architecture'; Summers, 'Contrapposto', p. 343.

Although monsters were disquieting, we have already touched upon how the etymological origins of the word is indicative of the conception of hybrid, strange creatures as 'marvels', as literally *remarkable*, rather than as unequivocally violent, dangerous, or aggressive, as they would be represented in modern fiction. Clear-cut distinctions between the evidently good and the decisively evil are thus inadequate when seeking to understand the monstrosity of the sixteenth century.[53]

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[49] Jacobs, *The Living Image*, pp. 133–167; Guest, *The Understanding of Ornament*, pp. 501–510.

[50] Agamben, *The Open*, p. 25. On Paracelcus's observations that nymphs are human and animal at one and the same time, see Agamben, *Nymphs*, pp. 40–41; Paracelsus, 'Liber de Nymphis'.

[51] Wittkower, 'Marvels of the East'; Randall, *Images in the Margins*, Plate CXXXV, pp. 643–644; Große and others, *Monster*; Le Pogam, 'Tête de Feuilles', p. 41. Only toward the end of the seventeenth century was a 'scientific' distinction between man, wild men, and other marginal creatures suggested by Edward Tyson, who explained all strange creatures as identical to different species of monkeys: see Tyson, *Orang-Outang*; also Agamben, *The Open*, p. 24. Accordingly, Carl Linnaeus, *Systema naturae*, I, listed various monkeys as Satyrus, Sylvanus, Sphinx, Silenus, Faunus, etc. and an Ethiopian species of monkey was actually called 'sphinx' in the ancient tradition: see Wittkower, 'Marvels of the East', p. 168, note 1.

[52] This notion was sometimes attributed to Empedocles: see Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*, pp. 4–5.

[53] In the sixteenth century, Augustine's careful reflections on monstrous creatures and their origins in relation to God remained a forceful, philosophical point of departure from which nature's variety was understood. While not excluding the possibility that these creatures did not exist at all, and while bearing in mind that they might be categorized as animals and not as humans, Augustine nevertheless concludes that God's Creation includes monstrosities. This was, after all, a common experience in terms of monstrous births, which could, according to Augustine, be seen as evidence of the existence of monstrous races. In line with Augustine's worldview in general, he accepted the diversity of God's Creation, for instance in noting that light would make no sense if darkness did not exist. See Augustine, *Of True Religion*, XL.76. In general, this philosophy represented a union of an unconditioned belief in an almighty, benevolent God with an earthly life filled with turmoil, dangers, and, ultimately, death. See Augustine, *The City of God*, V, XVI.viii; Wittkower, 'Marvels of the East', pp. 167–168; Jacobs, *The Living Image*, pp. 159–167. Compare Michel de Montaigne, who comments with regard to some monstrous births that he has seen (for instance, Siamese twins) that – in line with Augustine – nothing is 'against nature'. Only God can fathom all relationships and order, and it is merely ignorance when people perceive some things as marvels: Montaigne, *Essays*, pp. 450–451.

The learned scholar Benedetto Varchi (1503–1565) still found it relevant in the middle of the sixteenth century to lecture on the likeliness of the existence of such monstrous creatures as satyrs and centaurs, though he concluded that it was unlikely they existed.[54] The natural historian and collector Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522–1605) in Bologna included all of the old mythological variants of marvellous humans and animals, hybrid species (humans with animal-like lower bodies or animals with human faces), and double-gendered figures – together with humans with various kinds of deformed body parts, excessive hairiness, dermatological diseases, Siamese twins, etc. – in his huge (nearly 800-page long) woodcut-illustrated volume on monsters, *Monstrorum Historia*, without distinguishing between or discussing the reality or fictionality of the creatures.[55]

In his *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images* (1582), the Bolognese cardinal and archbishop Gabriele Paleotti, who spoke in favour of the Counter-Reformation perspective on art formulated at the Council of Trent's final meeting in 1563, argued that the painting of grotesques – with their mere 'caprices', 'vain phantasms', and 'irrational imaginings' – was irreconcilable with religious art.[56] At the same time, he explicitly stated that his opposition was aimed only at monsters conceived in the minds of the artists.[57] Thus, his objections did not include *real* monsters. He was not bothered by artistic representations of monstrosities that (in his view) actually existed.

In the sixteenth century, respect for sources of authority from Antiquity still thrived alongside the production of truly bizarre ornament, which would have made both Horace and Vitruvius turn in their graves. This complex relationship with the past was epitomized by Giorgio Vasari's apparently straightforward observation in the preface to the third part of his *Lives* that the great achievement of his own age was freedom from rules while basing one's work on rules.[58] Monstrous ornament developed from around 1500 in a period of great artistic licence, but also in a period in which artistic imagination – overly explicit personality and overly personal style – was still perceived as potentially dangerous, with monstrous imagery appearing challenging and indecent. This historical context contributed to the special properties of the monstrous ornament relative to strategies both prior to and after the sixteenth century.

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[54] Varchi, *Lezzioni*, pp. 85–132: for instance, 'Se i centauri sono', pp. 125–126, and 'Se di femmina si puo diventar Maschio', pp. 130–132.

[55] Aldrovandi, *Monstrorum Historia*.

[56] Paleotti, *Discourse*, II.37–42, pp. 262–280 (quotations from p. 262). For statements on art formulated at the Council of Trent, see Tanner and others, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, II, pp. 774–776.

[57] Paleotti, *Discourse*, II.37, p. 262: 'By the term "grotesques" we do not mean those leaf clusters, trunks, festoons, or various other things that are sometimes depicted and may conform to nature […] Nor do we mean those monsters, marine or terrestrial, or whatever they may be, that nature sometimes does produce, transgressing her own order. By grotesques we mean exclusively those forms of men or animals or other things that never did or could exist in the manner in which they are represented and are the mere caprices of painters, vain phantasm, irrational imaginings on their part.' See also Jacobs, *The Living Image*, pp. 159–167.

[58] Vasari, *Le vite*, IV, p. 5: 'Nella regola una licenzia, che, non essendo di regola, fosse ordinata nella regola e potesse stare senza fare confusione o guastare l'ordine.'

However, the broadly liberal attitude toward artistic licence in the early decades of the 1500s was gradually (and with great local variance) supplanted by a more cautious approach from the middle of the century, growing in influence toward 1600.[59] In tandem with the formulation of Counter-Reformation image policy, the voices emphasizing problematic aspects of artistic imagination grew stronger toward the end of the century, leading to serious attacks on monstrous ornament as ambiguous, unnatural, and licentious.

Historical Perspectives

The monstrous aspects of sixteenth-century ornament link them to reflections upon visuality. Sixteenth-century society was markedly absorbed with visuality and optics in all fields of knowledge.[60] Apparently, this period leading up to the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century was particularly concerned with perception, including the fundamental questions: Can we believe what we see with our own eyes? Can we take visual impressions at face value?[61]

At least as far back as we have extant written sources that reflect upon images, there have been concerns about the relationship between image and reality. Although vision was predominantly ranked highest in the hierarchy of the senses, its problematic nature was an ongoing theme in philosophical thinking from the ancient Greeks onward.[62] Indeed, such concerns are arguably a defining feature of being human. As such, the sixteenth century did not invent the focus on vision as a cognitive field. There is nevertheless abundant evidence for a unique preoccupation with visuality, optical science, and related fields in this period, continuing well into the seventeenth century, relative to both the ancient and the medieval periods as well as to subsequent centuries.[63] Along with the strong reluctance to believe in visual evidence, there was a propensity to 'see more' than would later be discernible to people of the Enlightenment or the Industrial Age. It was a time in which the paradox was cultivated as a literary-poetic genre, angels and demons were incontestable realities, and your neighbour could easily turn out to be a witch.[64]

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[59] MacCulloch, *The Reformation*, pp. 307–336.

[60] Payne, *Vision and its Instruments*; Kleinbub, *Vision and the Visionary in Raphael*, pp. 2–9; O'Malley, *Praise and Blame in Renaissance Rome*, p. 130; Damisch, *A Theory of Cloud*; Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, p. 72; Foucault, *History of Madness*, pp. 157–165; Kemp, *Leonardo da Vinci*, pp. 107–121.

[61] This position is brilliantly argued by Clark, 'Demons'.

[62] Summers, *The Judgment of Sense*, pp. 182–193; on the historical hierarchy of the senses, see Jütte, *Geschichte der Sinne*, pp. 65–83.

[63] Clark, 'Demons', with further bibliography p. 224, note 3.

[64] Bundy, *The Theory of Imagination*; Camille, 'Before the Gaze'; Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh*, pp. 117–136; Clark, 'Demons'.

The sixteenth century saw the culmination of the predilection to see the potential for metamorphosis in form and content, a tendency that developed gradually from Early Christianity and increasingly so from around the twelfth century.[65] The inclination to see the agency of magical or demonic power in the everyday world went hand in hand with a propensity to read figurative genesis into nature's phenomena. It was based on an age-old perception of nature as the creator of images. As urban societies grew more complex, new efforts were made to tame and systematize these dangerous powers, coinciding with a re-formation of the concepts of nature and science, beginning in the sixteenth century and reaching into the first half of the seventeenth century. The notion of nature as an active force, involved in the genesis of images, was gradually replaced by a notion of nature as passive, ruled by natural laws that man might eventually uncover and govern. In the sixteenth century, the tradition of seeing nature as latent with potential images was on its way to being substituted by the empirical, scientific perspective of nature as passive and governed by natural laws, a perspective that gained momentum in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and that eventually resulted in ornaments being tamed into the non-monstrosity of modern decorative art.[66]

As a radically new practice of scientific (and artistic) endeavour that took the sense of vision seriously, the empirical approach received strong support from the accumulation of knowledge facilitated by printed books and images. The sixteenth-century shift in visual culture from the older perception, characterized by the appeal of generating and transforming images, to a more 'objective' visual regime which began to dominate from the early seventeenth century onward was linked with the development of these new media of mechanically reproduced images.[67] The ability to reproduce brought about by woodcuts and other types of print from the fifteenth century onward enabled systematic classifications based on observations 'seen by one's own eyes'. Printed books and the mechanical reproduction of images were technological preconditions for new attempts to order the world and its phenomena by norms and categories, resulting in new standards of uniformity.[68] These taxonomies were dependent upon images, which could be repeated and exchanged throughout the known

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65 Bundy, *The Theory of Imagination*; Camille, 'Before the Gaze'; Barkan, *The Gods Made Flesh*, pp. 117–136; Scot, *Discovery of Witchcraft*, with chapters on, for instance, 'Of Transformations, ridiculous examples brought by the Adversaries for the confirmation of their foolish doctrine' (V.1) and 'That the body of a man cannot be turned into a body of a beast by a Witch, is proved by strong Reasons, Scriptures, and Authorities' (V.5); Gaukroger, *Emergence of a Scientific Culture*, pp. 253–262, 289–303. On the potential of transformation and change as a new theme from the twelfth century onwards, see Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity*, pp. 15–36, 86–100, 113–162.

66 Blume, 'Beseelte Natur und Ländliche Idylle', p. 191: Bredekamp, *The Lure of Antiquity*, p. 39; Bredekamp, 'Die Erde als Lebewesen'; Gaukroger, *Emergence of a Scientific Culture*, pp. 253–262, 289–303.

67 Eisenstein, *The Printing Press*; Dackerman, 'Introduction'.

68 With regard to conceptions of time, Eisenstein, *The Printing Press*, I, p. 16, highlights synchronization as a new ideal, replacing temporal eclecticism with new endeavours toward uniformity; see also McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy*.

world and thus laid a common groundwork for that which was defined as 'true' and 'normal'. The naturalization of uniformity and seriality coincided with the development of the new scientific approach to describing and mapping the physical world. It would be meaningless here to distil cause from effect.[69] The Reformation and Counter-Reformation's efforts to encourage unequivocality and to discourage paradox and the enigmatic, labyrinthine trajectories of monstrous ornament developed alongside the growth in empirical approaches and the exaltation of vision as the most important source of knowledge.

The Counter-Reformation's explicit condemnation of monstrous ornament in terms of grotesques and 'disorderly' and 'confusedly arranged' imagery was formulated in the decades when grotesques began to go out of fashion.[70] The ambiguities of the sixteenth century were replaced, so to speak, by the rhetorically demonstrative, easily graspable compositions of the seventeenth century, an art characterized by a clear perspective, precise hierarchies, and unambiguous directions. The astonishingly licentious 'abnormalities' were expelled from ornament from around 1600 and censured in art theory, just as efforts were made to define and expel eccentricity and 'otherness' from society.[71] Intolerance of the bizarre, extraordinary, licentious, and grotesque came to reign in visual art at the same time as society worked to exclude difference through the Inquisition and through new institutions of internment, 'cleansing' society of the presence of 'the other'.[72] At a time when society could no longer accommodate strange personalities and outsiders – who were declared insane, extraordinary, or particularly insightful, and who were then in turn declared to be witches – the increasingly absolutist power of the Church and of secular authority could no longer tolerate ornament that was 'out of order'.

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[69] Mitchell, *Image Science*, pp. 125–137; McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, pp. 7–23.

[70] This passage from the Council of Trent is quoted in Klein and Zerner, *Italian Art 1500–1600*, p. 121; for a thorough critique of these 'disadvantages' of grotesques, see Paleotti, *Discourse*, II.xxxvii – xlii, pp. 262–280. For René Descartes, writing about architecture and cities (*Discourse on Method*, 1637), it is self-evident that uniformity is preferable to irregularity and the accidental or disordered phenomena caused by the spans of construction time: Descartes, 'Discourse on Method', pp. 44–45. An example of an earlier proponent of 'a bit of disorder and of the accidental' is Annibal Caro, *Apologia degli academici di banchi di Roma, contra M. Lodovico Castelvetro da Modena* (Parma 1558), who writes that 'si richiede taluolta un poco del disordinato; & de l'accaso' – a 'magnificent style' should avoid too much precision and 'exquisiteness', should even be a bit disordered, just as 'in a painting, a great master does not bother greatly to imitate hairs, eyelashes, and fingernails of a person'; quoted by D'Elia, 'The Decorum of a Defecating Dog', p. 130.

[71] In the early sixteenth century Baldung Grien still represents witches as attractive women (Städel Museum, Frankfurt), not as old and ugly, as in subsequent times. Likewise, in *Orlando Furioso*, Ariosto writes of various dangerous, seductive sorceresses – for instance in the story of Alcina, who transforms her previous lovers into trees and fountains in her garden. In his *History of Madness*, pp. 25–40, Foucault describes 'insanity' as a concept that is historically and culturally determined, and that began to be defined in the sixteenth century. That some early-sixteenth century artists might officially use nicknames such as 'Sodoma', as testified by Vasari's biography of the artist Giovanni Antonio Bazzi (1477–1549), would be difficult to imagine in a seventeenth-century context.

[72] Trevor-Roper, *The European Witch-Craze*, pp. 1–45 and 90–192. On a gradual change in notions of witches as in a pact with the Devil to witches as ill, see Styers, *Making Magic*, pp. 3–24; Foucault, *History of Madness*, pp. 44–77.

Painting came to be organized into large, readable compositions, with a *unifying* effect, as described by Heinrich Wölfflin in his century-old observation of the formal distinctions of the Baroque. Brought about by fundamentally coherent relationships between figure and space, this new unity was independent of any particular representational idiom, handling of paint, or other technical aspects pertinent to each individual painter.[73] Sixteenth-century painting has been described as rich in movement and turning bodies that, however, lead to no action, no narrative.[74] In contrast, one of the innovations of seventeenth-century painterly compositions was their display of a unified narrative, complementing the epic genre in literature, which was gaining ground at the time. By the late sixteenth century, the singular period of artistic licence had come to a close, and monstrous ornaments that empathically and sensuously attract attention grew into naturalistically detailed decoration, devoid of their earlier ambiguities. The tremendously controlled, ritualized, ordered, and hierarchical tendencies in seventeenth-century culture curbed the unpredictability that was constitutive of the monstrous ornaments of the sixteenth century. The sixteenth-century fascination with monstrous ornament reflects that the creative process and the distance – even an ironic distance – between the artist and his work were gradually becoming the primary quality of creative production.[75]

These transformations in worldview and ideas concerning humankind were evident in a new self-awareness, historical awareness, and artistic awareness, all of which required a certain sense of distance and relativism. The seventeenth-century development of new forms of knowledge and scientific insight caused the ambiguity, humour, and sometimes disquieting qualities of ornament – which had challenged absolutes in our visual world – to become outmoded. Monstrous ornaments were transformed into an issue of 'either/or' – either caricature or terror – or were simply turned into innocent decoration.[76] As the demonic power of magic was being expelled from images and belief systems, painting was being transformed from artefact to art. A kind of distillation separated aestheticism from utilitarianism and divided art from technology. With its modern parergonal status, ornamentation finally lost the esteem it had gained in the sixteenth century.

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[73] In the German terminology, Wölfflin, *Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, p. 16, writes of *Einheit* as characteristic of the Baroque, acquired 'durch ein Zusammenziehen der Glieder zu *einem* Motiv oder durch Unterordnung der übrigen Elemente unter ein unbedingt führendes', and furthermore, p. 166, on 'die Gesamtheit der Formen'. For Morel, *Les Grotesques*, p. 18, it is the relationship between painting and frame that is crucial, as the frame in the seventeenth century becomes clearly separated from the picture plane or field of painting.

[74] Nagel, *Medieval Modern*, p. 147.

[75] Boysen, *At Være en Anden*; Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image*.

[76] On the origins of the genre of caricature at this time, see Gombrich and Kris, 'The Principles of Caricature'; Gombrich and Kris, *Caricature*; Emison, *Low and High Style*, p. 120, note 374; Porzio, 'Lomazzo e il realismo grottesco'; Bredekamp, *The Lure of Antiquity*, p. 83. In parallel to this, the concepts of pure horror and disgust only reached their present definitions in the nineteenth century: see Menninghaus, *Ekel*; Menninghaus, *In Praise of Nonsense*.

These historical perspectives permit a wider appreciation of sixteenth-century ornament: the monstrosity of ornament is not just an isolated stylistic phenomenon of the period, but is linked to significant aspects of visual culture. If we set aside our modern preference for conceptualizing art in terms of the autonomous easel painting and works attributable to famous artists, and if we assign ornamental frameworks a more decisive role, we may gain a new appreciation of the nature of image making in Early Modernity.

A Brief Survey

The chapters of the book are structured in four thematic sections that have different takes on ornament and monstrosity. The grotesques of sixteenth-century Italy are approached as a point of departure. By focusing on a particularly popular motif within the grotesques, the female monster, Maria Fabricius Hansen sets out to characterize the special character not only of the decorative frescoes and this particular motif but also of the visual culture of the sixteenth century in general. Her analysis includes reflections on femininity and hybridity and artistic licence as well as changing concepts of art throughout the period. Luke Morgan goes on to illustrate the monstrosity in garden ornament by focusing on Pirro Ligorio's theoretical writings on the grotesque and his designs for the Villa d'Este. The fact that Pirro Ligorio was both the author of an unusually detailed theory of *grottesche* and the designer of a garden that incorporates grotesque imagery makes his work an important, but neglected, case study of sixteenth-century attitudes towards monstrous ornament, both in general and, more specifically, in landscape design.

Chapters focusing on sacred space and narrative are up next: Tianna Helena Uchacz analyses the passion print series by the Bruges artist Marcus Gheeraerts and the unconventional use of monstrous ornament in this context. The monstrous ornament in these unusual passion prints raises questions about the nature of sacred images, the role of the grotesque, and the future of the artist in a city still traumatized by the iconoclasm of 1566 and the 'silent iconoclasm' of 1581. Barnaby Nygren discusses the unknown within known structures in colonial Mexico when he questions the ornamental grotesque in the frescoes of San Miguel Arcángel. Would the Augustinian monks have encouraged the use of the monumental grotesque as an organizing schema in order to allow a simultaneous pictorial presence of wildness and control, fear and wonder? Lastly, Maria-Anna Aristova studies the monastic body in her analysis of ornament in the religious context of the Certosa di San Martino in

Naples. Through a consideration of the paradoxical role of ornament at the Certosa di San Martino, she explores the ways in which its unstable, ambiguous nature questions assumptions about the role of art and architecture in the Early Modern period.

Agency and ornament enlivened are explored in the subsequent section. Lisa Andersen traces the mask as instrument of concealment and transformation in court masquerades through the animated stucco ornamentation of the Galerie at Fontainebleau, revealing a process of animation that blurred the boundaries between the art object and its viewers, and between persons and things. She argues that this animation of the King's ornamental repertoire created both competing and complimentary opportunities for appropriation and subversion for masquerade participants. Chris Askholt Hammeken studies the strange event of a whale carcass displayed in the Florentine Loggia dei Lanzi in order to reflect more deeply on questions of lifelikeness and metamorphosis through the framework of ornament and monstrosity ignited by the whale. Finally, Frances S. Connelly discusses Giambattista Vico's notion of grotesques as poetic monsters that appear in times of crisis and have the ability to speak through a fusion of ornament and argument. Arguing that Vico's ideas can be applied to other periods of radical change, Connelly explores their emergence in contemporary art with ornamented and contradictory figures that embody the unprecedented cultural intermixtures and competing narratives of our world today.

The concluding chapter by Jacob Wamberg frames the book by both analysing the concepts of ornament and monstrosity and placing their sixteenth-century momentum in a wider historical perspective. This chapter takes Wilhelm Worringer's groundbreaking essay *Abstraction and Empathy* (*Abstraktion und Einfühlung*, 1907) as its point of departure in a post-anthropocentric reflection on ornament and monstrosity.

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Through the varied material of its case studies, this anthology seeks to demonstrate the extraordinary degree to which the monstrous ornament of the Early Modern period investigated what images were, where they came from, and how they worked. This book thus contributes to the investigation of the themes of ornament and monstrosity that have attracted increasing attention in recent years but that have thus far not been brought together into a single field of analysis. As a counterpart to research into the sophisticated and elitist aspects of court culture, the present collection of chapters acknowledges and investigates the qualities not only of playfulness but also of ambiguity and anxiety. We understand the Early Modern period as representing a passage between an ancient and medieval concept of art and nature into a modern one, resulting in the unique notions of ornament and monstrosity characteristic of the time. Particularly, sixteenth-century monstrous ornament makes clear the waning of the old worldview and the dawn of the new one, as geocentrism becomes heliocentrism and brings with it the mind-boggling concept of infinity, intangible and difficult to grasp. In monstrous ornaments, appreciation of movement, transformation, flexibility, and stylistic excess is arguably inseparable from these cultural conditions. Excessive ornament flourishes when known stabilities grow fragile.

The preoccupation with the potentials and limitations of the visual that was so typical of the Early Modern period is arguably matched only by that of our own culture today.[77] The notion that the sense of vision is unreliable is related to the challenging of absolutes, an activity that has been identified in various ways as the core of the Late Modern era. There seems to be a movement away from the *l'art pour l'art* paradigm of past centuries, once more making it increasingly difficult to distinguish between art and other fields of creation and production.[78] Recent decades have indeed been marked by a tendency toward explorations of hybridities of art, technology, and nature in ways that seem more familiar to the conditions and connections between these domains in the sixteenth century than in the centuries in between.[79] These trends seem to be accompanied by ruptures in our perception of nature, including the tendency to once more perceive our environment as a living force, questioning the notion of nature as a passive entity governed only by natural laws that are destined to be uncovered and subsequently controlled by humans.[80] At the same time, issues of human identity and normality have emerged with new impetus, making fascination with monstrosity a powerful presence in today's culture.

When Early Modern monstrous ornament attracts our attention today, with its mixture of knowns and unknowns, combining observations from nature and imaginative figurations, this fascination thus seems dependent upon a certain correlation across history. Uncertainty with regard to perceptions of reality – especially typical of Early Modern visual culture – reminds us of our own world and the status in our own time of the visible's relationship to truth and knowledge.

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[77] Clark, 'Demons'.

[78] Reichle, *Art in the Age of Technoscience*; Fehrenbach, '*Compositio Corporum*'; Bredekamp, *The Lure of Antiquity*, pp. 109–113; Nagel, *Medieval Modern*, pp. 133–154; Paldam and Wamberg, *Art, Technology and Nature*.

[79] On Mannerism as a transepochal phenomenon, see Hofmann, *Zauber der Medusa*.

[80] Bredekamp, 'Die Erde als Lebewesen'; Blumenberg, 'Das Verhältnis von Natur und Technik'; Holm and Poulsen, *Nature Strikes Back*; Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature*, p. 15; Bensaude-Vincent and Newman, 'Introduction'.

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About the authors

Chris Askholt Hammeken received his PhD degree in Art History from Aarhus University in 2017 on a dissertation entitled *Unruly Ornament: On Artificial Moments in Sixteenth-Century Visual Art*. He has had research stays in Rome and Vienna, and is now a lecturer in visual art and literature at Gammel Hellerup Gymnasium in Copenhagen, Denmark. His research interests include ornament, animation and artificiality, as well as art historiography and questions of style, space, and time.

Maria Fabricius Hansen is an Associate Professor of Art History in the Department of Arts and Cultural studies at the University of Copenhagen. She received a PhD from the University of Copenhagen in 1997 (on the imagery of ruins in fifteenth-century Italian painting) and a DPhil from Aarhus University in 2005 (published as *The Eloquence of Appropriation: Prolegomena to an Understanding of Spolia in Early Christian Rome* (Rome: 'L'Erma' di Bretschneider, 2003)). Her primary field of research is art and architecture from late antiquity until *c.* 1600, with a focus on Italian art. Her recent publications include *The Art of Transformation: Grotesques in Sixteenth-Century Italy*, Analecta Romana Instituti Danici, IL (Rome: Edizioni Quasar, 2018).