

Angela Oberer

The Life and Work of Rosalba Carriera (1673-1757)

The Queen of Pastel

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VISUAL AND MATERIAL CULTURE, 1300–1700

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Cover illustration: Rosalba Carriera, *A Young Lady with a Parrot*, around 1730, pastel on blue laid paper, mounted to laminated paperboard, 60 × 50cm. Regenstein Collection, Chicago (II), Art Institute of Chicago
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Table of Contents

List of Figures	7
Introduction	13
1 Rosalba Carriera – An Independent Single Artist in Eighteenth-Century Venice	27
Carriera's Early Years	27
Influential Friends	35
The Beginning of a Career: Carriera, an Exceptional Venetian Miniature Painter	39
Carriera's Membership in the Accademia di San Luca in Rome	52
A New Reading of Carriera's World <i>en miniature</i>	61
Carriera's Portrait of Philip Wharton (1698–1731)	61
Carriera's Daring Eroticism	64
The Young Gardener in Munich	65
Miniature Mythologies	69
Carriera and the Sister Arts	78
Carriera's <i>Lady Putting Flowers in her Hair</i>	86
Carriera's Clients of Erotic Art	89
2 Carriera's Discovery of Pastel Painting	97
A Short History of Pastel Painting	97
Successful Ambassador of a Neglected Technique	
Carriera in the Art World of Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Venice	101
3 Carriera's International Network	115
Attacked by the British	115
Carriera and the French	119
German Travellers on the Grand Tour	120
The Italianate Climate in Düsseldorf	124
The House of Wittelsbach	126
The Importance of 'Owning a Carriera'	128
4 Carriera's Stay in Paris	135
Carriera's Admittance into the Académie de Peinture et de Sculpture	148



5	Carriera's Oeuvre in Pastel	165
	Carriera's Portraits within the Venetian Tradition	165
	From Unifying Formula to Character Studies	167
	The Importance of 'Being a Carriera'	171
	Carriera's 'Galleries of Beauty'	176
	Character Studies and Erotica	182
	Carriera's Favourite Pupil, Felicita Sartori	186
	Carriera's <i>Young Lady with a Parrot</i>	190
	Portrait or Allegory?	195
	Mythological Subjects	198
	The Reception of Carriera's Erotic Pastels	205
	Carriera's Religious Works for Dresden	213
6	The Single Woman, the Spinster	217
7	Carriera's Last Journeys – The End of an Envable Career	249
	Carriera in Modena	249
	Carriera in Vienna	251
	The End of an Envable Career	256
8	Carriera's Ways of Self-Fashioning	259
	Carriera's House on the Grand Canal, a Fashionable Space of Self-Representation	259
	Self-Fashioning through Self-Portraits	272
	Carriera's Earliest Self-Portrait	273
	Carriera's Self-Portrait in the Uffizi	274
	Carriera's Self-Portrait as Winter in Dresden, 1730–31	286
	Carriera's Self-Portrait in Old Age in Windsor Castle, c.1744	290
	Carriera's Self-Portrait in the Accademia in Venice, 1746	292
	Conclusion	297
	Bibliography	299
	Index of Names	319

List of Figures and Plates

Figures

- Figure 1 Carriera's house on the Grand Canal
Archive of the author
- Figure 2 Rosalba Carriera, *Portrait of Anton Maria Zanetti*
c.1700, pastel on paper, 45 × 31.5 cm. Stockholm, National Museum, NMB
2102. © National Museum permission.
- Figure 3 Rosalba Carriera, *Girl with a Dove*
1705, watercolour, gouache on ivory, 15 × 10 cm. Rome, Accademia Nazionale di San Luca, inv. 442. © Courtesy Accademia Nazionale di San Luca.
- Figure 4 Rosalba Carriera, *Portrait of Philip, Duke of Wharton*
1720–25, tempera on ivory, 8.2 × 5.7 cm. Venice, Museo del Settecento, Ca' Rezzonico.
- Figure 5 Rosalba Carriera, *Young Girl as a Gardener*
1709, watercolour and gouache on ivory, 10 × 7.6 cm. Munich, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, inv. D 620a. © Bayerisches Nationalmuseum, Munich.
- Figure 6 Rosalba Carriera, *Venus and Cupid*
1707–11, oil on ivory, 9 × 7.1 cm. Originally in Dresden, Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden, miniature not part of the collection since 1924. © Reproduction: H. Pfau, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.
- Figure 7 Rosalba Carriera, *Venus and Cupid*
Before 1709, watercolour and gouache on ivory, 10.3 × 8.5 cm. Copenhagen, National Gallery of Denmark, inv. KMS4837.
- Figure 8 Paolo Veronese, *Venus and Adonis*
c.1586, oil on canvas, 68 × 52 cm. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, GG 1527. © KHM-Museumsverband.
- Figure 9 Rosalba Carriera, *Armida and Rinaldo*
About 1715, tempera on ivory, height 8 cm. Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth, inv. MIN108. © Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth.

- Figure 10 Federico Bencovich, *Hercules and Omphale*
Eighteenth century, oil on canvas, 130 × 108 cm. Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Staatsgalerie in der Residenz Würzburg. © Fotoarchiv, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen.
- Figure 11 Anton Raphael Mengs, *Portrait of Frederick Christian Saxony*
1750–52, pastel on paper, 55.5 × 44.5 cm. Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, inv. P 174. © Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.
- Figure 12 Rosalba Carriera, *Portrait of Clemens August of Bavaria*
1727, pastel on paper, 57 × 45 cm. Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, inv. P 21. © Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.
- Figure 13 Hyacinthe Rigaud, *Portrait of Louis XV as a Child*
1715, oil on canvas, 208 × 154 cm. Musée National de Versailles, MV 3695. © bpk/RMN – Grand Palais/Gérard Blot.
- Figure 14 Rosalba Carriera, *Portrait of Antoine Watteau*
1721, pastel on paper, 55 × 43 cm. Treviso, Musei Civici di Treviso – Museo di Santa Caterina. © Musei Civici di Treviso.
- Figure 15 Rosalba Carriera, *Nymph from Apollo's Retinue*
1721, pastel on paper, 61.5 × 54.5 cm. Paris, Louvre, Cabinet des dessins, inv. 4800. © bpk/Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden/Elke Estel/Hans-Peter Klut.
- Figure 16 Detail of François Girardon, *Apollo Attended by the Nymphs*
Marble, 1666–73. Versailles, Apollo Grotto. Archive of the author.
- Figure 17 Leonardo da Vinci, *Saint John the Baptist*
1513–16, oil on panel, 69 × 57 cm. Paris, Louvre, inv. 775. © Louvre, Paris.
- Figure 18 Rosalba Carriera, *Portrait of Lucrezia Mocenigo*
c.1708, pastel on paper, 52 × 41 cm. Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, inv. P 23. © Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.

- Figure 19 Rosalba Carriera, *Portrait of Caterina Sagredo Barbarigo*
1735–40, pastel on paper, 42 × 33 cm. Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, inv. P 16. © Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.
- Figure 20 Rosalba Carriera, *Portrait of Suor Maria Caterina*
1732, pastel on paper, 44 × 35 cm. Venice, Museo del Settecento, Ca' Rezzonico. © Museo del Settecento, Ca' Rezzonico, Venice.
- Figure 21 Nicolas Largillière, *Portrait of a Woman, Possibly Madame Claude Lambert de Thorigny (Marie Marguerite Bontemps, 1668–1701), and an Enslaved Servant*
1696, oil on canvas, 139.7 × 106.7 cm. New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession no. 03.37.2. © bpk/The Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- Figure 22 Rosalba Carriera, *Portrait of Faustina Bordoni*
c.1724–25, pastel on paper, 44.5 × 33.5 cm. Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, inv. P 118. © Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.
- Figure 23 Rosalba Carriera, *Portrait of Faustina Bordoni*
c.1731–40, pastel on paper, 47 × 35 cm. Venice, Museo del Settecento, Ca' Rezzonico. © Museo del Settecento, Ca' Rezzonico, Venice.
- Figure 24 Rosalba Carriera, *Apollo*
1740–46, pastel on paper, 67 × 52 cm. Saint Petersburg, the State Hermitage, inv. OR-17961. Photograph © The State Hermitage Museum. Photo by Konstantin Sinyavsky.
- Figure 25 Bust of Antinous
2nd century AD, marble, 80 cm. Venice, Museo Archeologico Nazionale – Museo di Palazzo Grimani, inv. 382. © Museo di Palazzo Grimani.
- Figure 26 Rosalba Carriera, *Madonna with Downcast Eyes*
Pastel on paper, 29 × 23 cm. Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, inv. P 57. © Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.
- Figure 27 Anton Maria Zanetti, *Caricature of Rosalba Carriera*
1720–30, brown ink on paper, 9 × 6.9 cm. Venice, Fondazione Giorgio Cini. © Fototeca della Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice/Matteo de Fina.

- Figure 28 Rosalba Carriera, *Portrait of Enrichetta Anna Sofia d'Este*
1723, pastel on paper, 55 × 42 cm. Florence, Gallerie degli Uffizi, inv. 1890:829. © Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence.
- Figure 29 Rosalba Carriera, *Portrait of Empress Wilhelmine Amalie*
1730, pastel on paper, 65.5 × 51.5 cm. Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, inv. P 20. © Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.
- Figure 30 Rosalba Carriera, *Self-Portrait*
c.1708, red chalk on paper, 35 × 26.6 cm. Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Kupferstichkabinett, inv. kdZ 28844. © bpk/Kupferstichkabinett, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin/Jörg P. Anders.
- Figure 31 Rosalba Carriera, *Self-Portrait in Old Age*
c.1744, pastel on paper, 56.7 × 45.8 cm. Windsor Castle, The Royal Collection Trust, RCIN 452375. © Royal Collection Trust/Her Majesty the Queen Elizabeth II 2018.
- Figure 32 Rosalba Carriera, *Self-Portrait*
c.1746, pastel on paper, 31 × 25 cm. Venice, Gallerie dell'Accademia. © Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice.

Plates

- Plate 1 Rosalba Carriera, *Lady Putting Flowers in her Hair*
c.1710, watercolour on ivory, 8.6 × 10.5 cm. Cleveland Museum of Art, inv. 1940.1203.
- Plate 2 Rosalba Carriera, *Portrait of Frederick Christian Saxony*
c.1738–40, pastel on paper, 63.5 × 31.5 cm. Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Gal.-Nr. P 2. © bpk/Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden/Elke Estel/Hans-Peter Klut.
- Plate 3 Rosalba Carriera, *Portrait of Louis XV*
1720–21, pastel on paper, 50.5 × 38.5 cm. Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, inv. P 9. © bpk/Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden/Elke Estel/Hans-Peter Klut.

- Plate 4 Rosalba Carriera, *Portrait of Felicita Sartori*
1740–41, pastel on paper, 70 × 55 cm. Florence, Gallerie degli Uffizi, inv. 1890:9988. © Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence.
- Plate 5 Rosalba Carriera, *A Young Lady with a Parrot*
c.1730, pastel on blue laid paper, mounted to laminated paperboard, 60 × 50 cm. Regenstein Collection, Chicago, Art Institute of Chicago © 2018, The Art Institute of Chicago/Art Resource, NY/Scala, Firenze.
- Plate 6 Rosalba Carriera, *Diana*
1740–46, pastel on paper, 67 × 52 cm. Saint Petersburg, The State Hermitage, inv. PO-17960. Photograph © The State Hermitage Museum. Photo by Konstantin Sinyavsky.
- Plate 7 Rosalba Carriera, *Self-Portrait*
1708–9, pastel on paper, 71 × 57 cm. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi, inv. 1890:1786. © Gallerie degli Uffizi, Florence.
- Plate 8 Rosalba Carriera, *Self-Portrait as Winter*
1730–31, pastel on paper, 46.5 × 34 cm. Dresden, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, inv. P 29. © Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.

Introduction

The Life and Work of Rosalba Carriera (1673–1757): The Queen of Pastel is the first extensive biographical narrative in English of Rosalba Carriera. It is also the first to provide a scholarly investigation into the external and internal factors that helped to create this female painter's unique career in eighteenth-century Europe. It documents the difficulties, complications and consequences that arose then, or that more generally can also arise today, when a woman decides to become an independent artist. This book contributes a new, in-depth analysis of the interplay between society's expectations, generally accepted codices for gendered behaviour, and one single female painter's astute strategies for achieving success as well as autonomy in her professional life as a famed artist.

I have written this study with the intention of presenting this outstanding and fascinating painter to a wider, English-speaking audience, as to date, there are surprisingly few publications on this artist in English.¹ Furthermore, it is intended to offer a basis for future investigations into Carriera's contributions to the fields of art history, history, gender and sociology.

Over forty years have passed since Linda Nochlin published her famous and groundbreaking essay with the provocative title 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Painters?'² Her presentation of the social factors that held women back in their pursuit of an artistic career has provided a theoretical ground for a new scholarly approach to the subject. Ever since then, feminist and gender studies have explored the historical process of artistic production and the lives and careers of those women who, generally with great unconventionality, pursued their aims in the artistic realm. New questions have been asked about their private, social and public environments. After the publication of the first compendia of forgotten names of female artists across various cultures and ages in the 1970s,³ new methodological approaches in the various academic disciplines began further opening up this new field of scholarly investigation. The resulting momentous paradigm shift has raised our awareness, and has also changed, and is still changing, how we evaluate women's contributions to the arts.⁴

1 While seventeenth-century artists like Camilla Guerrieri Nati (1618–post 1690) or female painters under Grand Duke Cosimo III de' Medici (1642–1723) were included in the 2016 publication on *Women Artists in Early Modern Italy*, edited by Sheila Barker, no chapter was dedicated to Carriera, being born only in 1673; she was only mentioned in passing.

2 The article appeared in the January issue of *ARTnews* in 1971.

3 See Pollock's introduction to Parker and Pollock, 2013 [1981], p. xvii.

4 In the same introduction mentioned above, Pollock gives an overview of the most important and influential publications in the field from the 1970s onwards, Parker and Pollock, 2013 [1981], pp. xvii–xxvii.

In the light of these four decades of rigorous research, as well as of increased public interest in female artists, it is difficult to understand why a figure such as Rosalba Carriera has almost disappeared from view, the one artist who was more celebrated in her day than any female painter before her. As Nochlin and Sutherland Harris have observed,

Although several women painters of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had international reputations, none enjoyed as great a success nor had as much influence on the art of her contemporaries as Rosalba Carriera.⁵

Even today she is barely known outside a relatively small circle of art lovers and connoisseurs whereas, in the eighteenth century, the mere mention of her first name was enough to evoke an enthusiastic response in Italy, Germany, France and England. Only in Venice, her birthplace, does she still enjoy a certain degree of fame, but beyond the lagoon, she has all but sunk into oblivion. Not even art historians seem to have been particularly intrigued by Carriera, exhibiting little or no interest in her life, her outstanding achievements, or her pioneering role in the realm of the arts. The limited number of books, papers and articles (especially in English) dealing with Carriera stand in stark contrast to her erstwhile fame.⁶ One reason for Carriera's dwindling reputation may simply be the long fall from grace of eighteenth-century art and eighteenth-century culture in general. Even when academic disciplines concerned with social, political, historical, cultural and gender studies rediscovered the Rococo period in the late twentieth century, the Venetian artist seems to have escaped notice. Another reason for this lack of enthusiasm among the majority of art historians or connoisseurs may be her preferred medium, pastel. This technique had been neglected in favour of the better-researched areas of old master drawings and oil painting, as Jeffares writes in his introduction to his *Dictionary of Pastellists before 1800*.⁷

Nevertheless, some scholars have worked on her, basing their accounts primarily on the first biographical account of the artist's life by Dézallier d'Argenville (1762). In Julia Dabbs's anthology, *Life Stories of Women Artists, 1550–1800* (2009), which makes more accessible some of the fundamental biographical sources on female artists from approximately 1400 to 1800, the author republished and translated d'Argenville's text, adding for the first time an insightful commentary on this source.⁸ As regards early art history contributions to Carriera's recovery and acknowledgement, we must mention two monographs dating from the early twentieth century that marked an

5 Sutherland Harris and Nochlin, eds., *Women Artists*, 1976, 161.

6 Neither the 1995 exhibition nor the respective catalogue, Levey, ed., *Splendori del Settecento veneziano*, 1995, dedicated an extra section to Carriera. Merely four pastels and three miniatures were taken into consideration.

7 Jeffares, <http://www.pastellists.com/Articles/Carriera.pdf> (accessed on 7 February 2017).

8 Dabbs, 2009, 337–47.

initial, promising revival of interest in the painter. The first was published by Emilie von Hoerschelmann (1908)⁹ and the second by Vittorio Malamani (1910).¹⁰ Both scholars studied her work in conjunction with written sources, including some of her letters and diary entries. Yet in the decades that followed, hardly any other scholarly literature on the Venetian artist has appeared. It was not until 1985, when Bernardina Sani produced an edition of most of the surviving literary sources, including Carriera's correspondence, her diaries and other documents concerning her life, that a decisive basis for research into her life and work has come into existence.¹¹ Fortunately, Catherine Sama and Julia Kisacky are preparing the long-awaited translation into English of this unique treasure.¹² Sani then wrote numerous articles on the subject and published a comprehensive monograph on the painter with the artist's first catalogue raisonné in 1988, which the author later expanded and updated to reflect the latest research in a 2007 edition.¹³

Shortly before this, Ursula Mehler had published a short monograph on Rosalba Carriera in Germany in 2006.¹⁴ To her credit, she added contemporary documents pertaining to Johann Caspar Goethe (1710–1782), father of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), and how he knew about Carriera and praised her work. This material further illustrated the artist's reputation and fame in eighteenth-century Germany.

The same year, Neil Jeffares published his groundbreaking *Dictionary of Pastellists before 1800*, in which he reassembled and presented pastels executed by artists of all schools in the eighteenth century and before. This ambitious and fundamental publication has been made available as an online version (Pastellists.com) that is regularly updated. It remains the largest and most complete source of information regarding pastels and pastel artists ever published.

In honour of the 250th anniversary of the artist's death, the Galleria di Palazzo Cini in Venice hosted an exhibition in September and October 2007; and in the context of this event, a conference was held entitled *Rosalba Carriera, 'Prima pittrice*

9 Hoerschelmann, 1908.

10 Malamani, 1910. The author added an appendix with 104 letters of Carriera's correspondence.

11 Sani, 1985. These documents are now part of the Ashburnham collection of manuscripts in the Laurentian Library in Florence, a 'holding which consists of approximately 2,000 manuscripts once belonging to the mathematician and bibliophile Guglielmo Libri (1802–1869) who sold them in 1847 to Lord Bertram, fourth Count of Ashburnham. After the latter died in 1878, the Italian government bought the library and gave it to the Laurenziana in 1884. Most Ashburnham exemplars can be dated well before the eighteenth century and are often of Italian origin. Some of these codices had been stolen by Libri from various libraries in Italy and elsewhere.' See the online catalogue of the library, <https://www.bmlonline.it/la-biblioteca/cataloghi/fondo-ashburnham-catalogo/> (accessed on 26 April 2016), and Hoerschelmann, 1908, 7–8. Carriera's diary, instead, was published before by Alfred Sensier in 1865.

12 The book project is entitled *Rosalba Carriera: Correspondence of an Eighteenth-Century Venetian Artist*, ed. and introduced Catherine Sama, trans. Julia Kisacky and Catherine Sama. I thank Catherine Sama for the communication of this project.

13 Sani, 1988, 2007b.

14 Mehler, 2006.



de l'Europa. The exhibition catalogue (2007)¹⁵ and the publication of the proceedings of the conference, the *Atti del Convegno* (2009), are the most comprehensive publications on Carriera to have been completed in recent years.¹⁶ The contributions addressed a range of topics, including the painter's artistic formation, her relationship with contemporary artists, collectors and commissioners both in and outside of Venice, her activity as a miniature painter, the most famous collections of her paintings in Dresden, and the presence of her works in museums in Russia, Venice and England.

Also in recognition of Carriera's anniversary in 2007, Harald Marx, at the time director of the Staatliche Kunstsammlungen in Dresden, which holds the largest collection of her pastels, and Andreas Henning, curator of Italian paintings of the same collections, published a book entitled *Das Kabinett der Rosalba*.¹⁷ Half of it concentrates on the artist herself, giving a detailed and updated account of her life, including some of the eighteenth-century protagonists with whom Carriera was acquainted, and discussing those of her works which are still kept in Dresden; but the authors also incorporate chapters on ten contemporary or later pastel painters like Jean-Etienne Liotard (1702–1789), Maurice Quentin de La Tour (1704–1788), Therese Concordia Maron (1725–1806), Anton Raphael Mengs (1728–1779) and many more, whose works are part of the Kunstsammlungen.

Thea Burns' book on *The Invention of Pastel Painting* was also published in 2007 in which the author follows a technical art history approach relating the materials and techniques of pastel paintings to their functions as cultural signs. She dedicated two insightful chapters to the pastels of Carriera.¹⁸

As for the analysis of eighteenth-century Venetian art in general and for the more specific study of Carriera herself, two publications need to be mentioned as being extremely illuminating and helpful. The first one is entitled *Italian Culture in Northern Europe in the Eighteenth Century* (1999) and was edited by Shearer West. In her introductory essay, West underlines the importance of studying the impact of Italian culture in northern Europe, an attempt for which her book was the first example. West's multidisciplinary approach as well as her own insightful essay in the same compendium, 'Gender and Internationalism: the case of Rosalba Carriera', are particularly interesting in the context of my study. In her essay West also asks questions that are relevant to my research regarding the artist's bourgeois background, on the one hand, and her public manner as an aristocrat on the other, her well-staged role as a modest, saintlike spinster which seems to contrast with her erotic and eroticizing art, and the limits of representation and self-representation.

15 Pavanello, ed., *Rosalba Carriera 'prima pittrice de l'Europa'*, 2007.

16 Pavanello, ed., *Rosalba Carriera 1673–1757: Atti del Convegno*, 2009.

17 Henning and Marx, 2007.

18 See Burns, 2007, chs. 5 and 6.

The second volume that is worth mention is Richard Spear and Philip Sohm's path-breaking book of 2010, *Painting for Profit: The Economic Lives of Seventeenth-Century Italian Painter*. This volume gains by exposing the role that money had on the artists' personal and professional lives. Even though Carriera is hardly ever mentioned in the book, the main fields of interest laid out in Sohm's introduction – including the ethics and psychology of money, the market value that involves gifting and the average of prices of artworks – are of crucial importance to the analysis of Carriera's position in her hometown. Sohm's separate examination of the general situation for painters in Venice is equally helpful in putting the most successful of the female artists of the lagoon into a wider context.

My inquiry centres on the Venetian artist who in the eighteenth century was also called the 'queen of pastel'. It examines her oeuvre and creative processes and, for the first time, constructs a more intimate, personal, as well as professional, history of this unique female painter. This expanded and illustrated monograph questions previous assumptions, myths and stereotypical generalizations made regarding her career, her art and her life. In contrast to previous explorations, this research ascertains specific traits and attributes of Carriera that, once discovered and spelled out, become visible in all of the roles she assumed in her daily life: those of artist, businesswoman, intellectual, head of the family and single woman.

Fundamental questions I ask are: What kind of artist was Carriera? How did she manage to build up her career? How did she run her business and organize her own workshop? Which role did she play within her family structure? What are the specific characteristics of her paintings? Which external and internal factors helped her achieve success? What do additional professional and private writings further reveal through the analysis offered in this book of the kind of person Carriera was in her public and private life? In which ways did the house where she lived become part of her self-fashioning? Finally, what do her self-portraits reveal in terms of self-enactment and possibly autobiographical turning points?

The respective observations and thoughts are heavily based on the analysis of her letters and private notes that include diary entries and letters she collected from the year 1700 until her death in 1757. All offer a vast array of information rarely to be found elsewhere, especially on the life of a painter. As Michael Levey asserts, 'No comparable literary treasure exists for any other artist of the era, and it is hard to imagine that any such ever existed in such scope.'¹⁹

Diaries serve as an inner monologue and represent the most intimate form of autobiographical reflection, whereas letters offer an opportunity for self-expression and for the exchange of personal and intellectual ideas between women. Letter writing in general, and epistolography in particular as a personal and empowering form

19 Levey, 1995, 30.

of communication for and between women, was, especially during the eighteenth century, of huge significance.

The private letter, not the scholarly, official or business letter, and not even the fictive artistic product, but the personal, often spontaneous letter [...] gave women the opportunity to cultivate social [...] contacts and build friendships with other women, and – in a more restricted way – with men; to write about their own sphere of life gave women relevance and valorized, upgraded them. The letter documented and enlarged the living space of women, their mentality, their problems; it could be an authentic testimony, a genuine ego-document.²⁰

As such, epistolary communication has been dealt with in numerous studies since the 1980s.²¹ To date, the sources regarding Carriera have been primarily used to reconstruct the chronology of her oeuvre and the identification of some of her portraits, but they offer much more to discover. Whether the artist planned to follow the example of the astonishing number of Italian women who published their letter collections is unclear but it does remain a possibility.²² The mere fact that the artist decided to conserve them is evidence – as Sani justly points out – of her interest in conserving the single steps, the various phases that led to her success: from the commissions, observations about her art, to the documentation of an international following that included a growing number of well-known and influential people from all over Europe.²³

Furthermore, this book represents the first attempt to interpret some of Carriera's most intriguing miniatures and pastel paintings, works whose astonishing popularity greatly enhanced her role as a Venetian artist. These pieces show that she was well-aware of the weight of local painting tradition, as well as the new possibilities it offered. Equal emphasis is put on the analysis of two important aspects of her artistry with these miniatures and pastel paintings: her capacities as an erudite history painter and her pioneering position as one of the first, if not the first internationally regarded female painter who produced erotic and eroticizing art.

20 Becker-Cantarino, 2000, 150. See also Adam, 2004, 8; Geyer-Kordes, 2009, 179.

21 For a broad history of letter writing from the ancient Egyptians until the twentieth century, see Petrucci, 2008, and Kaborycha, 2016, 2–8. Regarding the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Petrucci, 2008, 111–28. On different theories as well as the role and significance of writing letters in the eighteenth century see Robert Heinz Vellusig, *Schriftliche Gespräche: Briefkultur im 18. Jahrhundert* (2000), and the extensive bibliography in Becker-Cantarino, 2000. The volume *Per lettera: La scrittura femminile tra archivio e tipografia seoli XV–XVII*, published in 1999, and edited by Gabriella Zarri, concentrates on letters as a fundamental part of female self-representation and ideal documents reflecting major questions in social history, but is less poignant in our context, having excluded the eighteenth century.

22 For a list of Italian women's single-authored letter collections published since the mid-fifteenth century see Kaborycha, trans. and ed., *Corresponding Renaissance*, 2016, 18.

23 Sani, 1985, I, 6.

The opening chapter of this study, ‘Rosalba Carriera – An Independent Single Artist in Eighteenth-Century Venice’, introduces the protagonist within an exploration of how Carriera started her artistic career. It is inextricably linked to the discussion of some of her miniatures, the production of which marked the beginning of her professional life of a painter. Not surprisingly, her miniatures are even less known and studied than the pastel paintings she began executing at a later date. The smallness of these items does not make them easy to exhibit, which often leads institutions to close them away. This tendency has made it even more difficult for a broader public to become aware of them. Until the beginning of the twenty-first century, miniatures in general were largely overlooked in the art and museum world, as the word ‘portrait’, unless specified otherwise, is often tacitly understood to mean a tempera or oil painting. A newborn interest in those small-scale paintings among the art historians, however, has led to a series of exhibitions, catalogues, conferences and articles. Still, only an astonishingly small number of these new publications have concentrated on Carriera’s contributions to the field.²⁴ What is primarily underlined in these writings is her innovative role in the development of technical aspects of these works, such as her use of ivory plates as a painting support or her unusually broad brush strokes;²⁵ to date, hardly any of her pieces have been examined in depth from an art historical, more, specifically, iconographical point of view, and hardly any attempt has been made to place her works in a larger social context. Particularly helpful in this context are Marcia Pointon’s enlightening studies, ‘Surrounded with Brilliants: Miniature Portraits in Eighteenth-Century England’ and ‘Accessories as Portraits and Portraits as Accessories’.²⁶

This inquiry continues with how Carriera became a member of the Accademia di San Luca in Rome and is followed by an analysis of her small-scale paintings in the section entitled ‘A New Reading of Carriera’s World *en miniature*’. An unsuspectedly high level of erudition and creativity is revealed in these pieces when compared with some oil paintings by Federico Bencovich (1677–1753) and especially by Paolo Veronese (1528–1588). The conspicuous qualities of her paintings are evident in her methods of adaptation and her reinterpretation of their works. Carriera was consciously inserting herself into the tradition of the ‘golden age’ of Venetian painting,

24 One of the first attempts to reconsider and study miniatures from a modern art historical point of view was the exploration of the Collection Tansey in Germany in Pappe and Schieglitz-Otten, eds., *Miniaturen aus der Sammlung Tansey*, 2000. The analysis of the numerous pieces led to a more specific catalogue that concentrated on the miniatures of the Rococo period, *Miniaturen des Rokoko aus der Sammlung Tansey*, also prepared by Bernd Pappe and Juliane Schieglitz-Otten, published in 2008. Two years later, Stephen Duffy and Christoph Martin Vogtherer presented their study on the *Miniatures in the Wallace Collection*. In 2016, Pappe and Juliane Schieglitz-Otten published another catalogue presenting *Miniatures from the Baroque Period in the Tansey Collection*. The various paintings executed by Carriera in those collections found little consideration, and in 2018, the same scholars presented their latest study, *Portrait Miniatures*.

25 See especially Bernardo Falconi’s contributions published in 2008 and 2009.

26 Pointon, 2001, 2016.

while also proving she was aware of the contemporary innovations of her colleagues. I argue that Carriera was also familiar with both ancient myths and Renaissance literature, which she drew upon in adapting her colleagues' works to her own witty inventions.

One of the most fascinating aspects of some of her pieces is their eroticism, either thinly veiled or overt. Mary Sheriff's study on *Fragonard: Art and Eroticism* has been fundamental in illuminating this aspect of Carriera's work.²⁷ Interesting also were the reactions of some of her clients or the complete silence in her correspondence about her titillating art. Owners' effusive responses reflect the ways her commissioners and the artist interacted, but they are equally precious indicators of the specific handling and specific function of miniatures in general. They were objects of mainly private consumption and were all haptic – two aspects that play an important role when discussing the subject matters depicted on them, especially when they offered erotic or eroticizing images.

Chapter 2, 'Carriera's Discovery of Pastel Painting', elucidates the second phase of the artist's career, which led to a real milestone: her discovery of pastel painting. The discourse on this history of her preferred medium is based on scholarly contributions by Kosek, McCullagh, Shelley, Burns and Jeffares.²⁸ These investigate the various advantages the technique offered, and the role Carriera played in its historical agenda. The fact that during the lifetime of Carriera an explosion in theoretical literature on pastel painting appeared on the market is another topic of this chapter.²⁹ The artist herself played a pivotal role in the writings on her preferred medium. Evidence of this role appears in her personal notes and recipes, either copied or invented by herself, for the making of colours and pastel sticks. These technical issues, which read as if written in a handbook, were published by Manlio Brusatin in 2005 under the title *Maniere diverse per formare i colori nella pittura tratta dalle memorie manoscritte della pittrice Rosalba Carriera*.³⁰

The same chapter analyses 'Carriera in the Art World of Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Venice'. Based on the above-mentioned publication *Painting for Profit* (2010), it is possible to illuminate the painter's role as a woman artist within the Venetian art world and art market. Comparing the prices of her works of art with contemporary artists shows that, despite being a miniature and pastel painter,

27 Sheriff, 1990.

28 Besides the information Jeffares included in his dictionary of the history of pastel painting, Kosek in her 1998 article on the heyday of pastels in the eighteenth century and McCullagh's contribution to the study of French portraits executed in the same medium have summarized the development and increasing fame and popularity of the technique. See <http://www.pastellists.com/Articles/Carriera.pdf> (accessed on 10 March 2018); Kosek, 1998; McCullagh, 2006; Burns, 2007; Shelley, 2011.

29 See the list of treatises in Jeffares, www.pastellists.com/Misc/Treatises.pdf#search=%22historyof%20pastel%22.

30 Brusatin, 2005, 91.

Carriera managed, not only to make a living, but also to reach unprecedented success as a woman. Krellig's research on her lifestyle, her financial situation – including the various forms of investments she made – is another helpful source to give a bigger picture of what 'success' meant and implied for Carriera.³¹ From a purely entrepreneurial point of view, an important part of her achievement was to rely more on foreigners than on local clients, taking advantage of the continuous flux of travellers who came to Venice to visit the city, to enjoy the many forms of entertainments and to buy art.

Chapter 3, 'Carriera's International Network', gives voice to the artist's surprising and singular career. It delineates the various figures and relationships that helped her to assert herself as a painter both locally and internationally. The final section of this chapter, 'The Importance of "Owning a Carriera"', explores a particularly interesting aspect of her international success that can be gauged from her correspondence: the artist's widespread fame led to a new aesthetic convention. At a certain point, the ownership of a work by Carriera began to count more than her ability either to depict a specific subject or to execute a painting with a specific technique. And this exceptional aspect, I argue later in Chapter 5, led to 'the importance of "being a Carriera"', which denotes the phenomenon of acquiring and presenting a recognizable identity that clients desired to associate themselves with.

Chapter 4 focuses on what was probably the most influential time in Carriera's life: her stay in Paris during the years 1720–21. Central to the account of her experiences in France is the analysis of the procedure of her admittance to the *Académie de Peinture et Sculpture*. My interpretation of the reception piece that Carriera submitted reveals fundamental aspects of the artist's intellectual and methodological approach. She makes references to ekphrastic discourses and alludes to outstanding examples of Italian and French art in this piece in ways that, I argue, prove her to be an excellent and erudite history painter. These qualities are even more pronounced than Mary Sheriff shows in her study on Elisabeth Vigée-Lebrun and Angela Rosenthal in the context of Angelica Kauffmann.³²

Carriera sent a letter to Paris that contains a detailed description of her reception piece and reveals how she drew upon Italian Renaissance and French Baroque art. This letter further offers the possibility of inserting this event into the sister-arts and *paragone* debate which follows the discourses that have been opened primarily by Hagstrum's pioneering work of 1958, *The Sister Arts: A History of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray*. Regarding the eighteenth century, the collection of essays in *Articulate Images: The Sister Arts from Hogarth to Tennyson*, edited by Richard Wendorf in 1983, represents one of the main contributions to the field. The

31 Krellig, 2017.

32 Sheriff, 1996, and Rosenthal, 1996.

most recent study of the sister-arts debate that analyses the relationship between visual arts and literature is Thora Brylowe's book *Romantic Art in Practice*, in 2019. Even though the author focuses on the English cultural world between 1760 and 1820, the way she describes how the sister-arts practice reveals both inconsistent and flexible notions of what the 'sisters' were reveals key features of how Carriera went about building her own artistic authority. The mechanisms that the respective artists and craftsmen used show interesting parallels to what Carriera was doing in Venice.³³ She not only highlights the parallels between painting and poetry following the Horatian formula *ut pictura poesis*, but she introduces the relational complexities of her personification to celebrate the supremacy of the visual arts and to define herself and her role as female painter in eighteenth-century Venice.

A central contribution of this study is Chapter 5 in which Carriera's oeuvre in pastel will be examined. In the first part of the inquiry I focus on her specialty, that is, pastel portraits. My aim is to convey that her success is based on the ways her paintings can be inserted both within the tradition of Venetian painting since the Renaissance and current discourses about various identity-shaping mechanisms. I reflect upon how much the famed 'Venetian myth' played a role in her artistic production and also on how her flattering depictions of most of her clients can be understood as the creation of Carriera's group identity. By referring to what has become known as the 'Kneller mask', and by drawing upon Thea Burns' research on the role of make-up in the eighteenth century,³⁴ I develop a discourse on the 'Importance of Being a Carriera'. The high status of owning 'a Carriera' explains why critics, connoisseurs and art lovers during the artist's life did not criticize the uniformity in some of her works in the same harsh way that modern art historians or critics have done in the past and still do.

Yet there do exist individualized portraits in which the artist abandoned a unifying formula; her likeness of Sister Maria Caterina and her portraits of the mezzo-soprano Faustina Bordoni (1697/1700–1781) are discussed as outstanding examples of Carriera's capacity to make character studies and to mingle allegorical images with portraits. A particularly beautiful and captivating example is her portrait of her favourite student, Felicita Sartori (c.1714–1760), in which various levels of meaning are subtly combined.

I also analyse other themes treated by Carriera in the pastel painting technique: she contributes to theme of the 'galleries of beauty', a discourse profoundly explored by Wenzel,³⁵ that became particularly popular during the eighteenth century. Subject matters arising from mythology and paintings with religious content will be investigated as well.

33 See Brylowe, 2019, 5.

34 See Burns 2002b and 2007.

35 See Wenzel 2001, 2003, 2004 and 2006.

Among Carriera's pastel portraits and mythological works are some particularly fascinating eroticizing pieces that I read, as in the case of some of her miniatures, in combination with comments by her contemporaries. I use these interpretations to reflect on how clients and collectors in her own lifetime perceived and treated these outstanding works and to highlight the kind of confidence and openness that existed between them and the artist.

Another question discussed in this chapter is how Carriera and her clients and friends inserted the artist and her paintings into the *paragone* debate, especially in its focus on the advantages of painting versus writing. I argue that her role in this debate is another contribution to the numerous studies on the sister arts I have mentioned.

Chapter 6, 'The Single Woman, the Spinster', centres on Carriera's status as an unmarried woman, a topic of frequent discussion among her contemporaries and early biographers. I explore the possible reasons behind Carriera's unconventional decision not to enter into marriage; I also take a close look at the advantages she experienced by remaining single. It will not be possible to establish how much the artist was involved in emancipatory discourses of her time, such as Moderata Fonte's (1555–1592) *Il merito delle donne* (The worth of women) or Lucrezia Marinella's (1571–1653) *Le nobiltà e l'eccellenza delle donne co' difetti e mancamenti di gli huomini* (The nobility and excellence of women with the defects and deficiencies of men).³⁶ But the fact that Carriera was introduced to one of the most fundamental English feminist texts of the day, Judith Drake's *Essay in Defence of the Female Sex* (1669), and had even translated parts of it, is convincing evidence that she was indeed aware of the feminist issues of her time.

Equal attention is given to the artist's personal approaches; that is, she carefully chose the tactics she used to create such an exceptional position for herself in the complex cultural world she inhabited. This chapter explores and documents, how Carriera came to market herself as a 'curiosity' of Venice, advertising her work consequently as something quite literally extraordinary.

Like other eighteenth-century women, Carriera constructed her own social network to compensate for being excluded as a single woman from those networks occupied by women with supportive husbands and patrons. Studies with a sociological approach, like Hufton's article 'Women, Work and Family' (1995),³⁷ or Slatkin's comprehensive book on *Women Artists in History* (2001, first published in 1985) and her *Voices of Women Artists* (1993)³⁸ as well as Borzello's *A World of Our Own: Women as Artists* (2000)³⁹ are just four of the fundamental texts used in this analysis.

36 The first edition was revised and expanded in 1601 and 1621; V. Cox, 1995, 513. See also Malpezzi Price/Ristaino, 2008.

37 In Hufton, 1995, 15–45.

38 Slatkin, 1993, 2001.

39 Borzello, 2000.

In Chapter 7, I depict the last journeys and final years of Carriera's life, which includes a trip to Mantua, another to the Habsburg court in Vienna, and a description of her devastating illness before dying in 1757.

The final chapter explores other unique strategies of self-fashioning that Carriera adopted to become so uniquely successful. The discourse starts off with a discussion of how the palace on the Grand Canal she lived in represents a three-dimensional self-portrait, where furniture, wall decorations and household items play together in the creation of a *persona*.

Rosenthal's study of Angelica Kauffmann and Modesti's book on Elisabetta Sirani with their respective reflections on the role of the workshop for a woman painter also contain important information for this inquiry.⁴⁰ Particularly helpful as well is Rosenthal's article 'She's Got the Look' that offers fundamental considerations regarding the complicated position of a female portraitist working in the same room with male clients.⁴¹

Recognizing her house as a multifunctional space where the artist lived and worked, and where she and her family regularly received a conspicuous number of guests, scholarly discourses on the function and meaning of *salons* since the seventeenth century are considered as well. The early research by Molmenti, 'Galanterie e salotti veneziani' (1904), is the first attempt to reconstruct parts of the Venetian salon culture. In 2003, a conference on Italian salons between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries took place in Milan, the proceedings of which were published in 2004 in a book edited by Elena Brambilla and Maria Luisa Betri that is the first and to date the most comprehensive study of Italian salon culture and the role that women played in it, with a comprehensive bibliography.⁴² Tiziana Plebani, whose studies cover various aspects of the culture of conversation during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, contributed to the latter publication with an analysis that includes not only the salons in Venice but also the role of other places and spaces of social and conversational life such as the *casini*, the theatres, and the *botteghe da caffè* (coffee houses) or the squares.⁴³ Following Tiziana Plebani's studies on public space and public and social life, Irene Zanini-Cordi published an article in 2013 on the *botteghe da caffè* as a locus of Venetian (engendered) sociability. Hers is a more recent study on another phenomenon like the salon where conversation and social gatherings catalysed social change and cultural shifts.⁴⁴ Renate Unfer Lukoschik edited a revealing volume entitled *Der Salon als kommunikations- und transfergenerierender*

40 Rosenthal, 1996, and Modesti, 2014.

41 Rosenthal, 1997.

42 *Salotti e ruoli femminile in Italia tra fine Seicento e primo Novecento*, in 2004.

43 Plebani, 2004, 153. For some of the numerous articles and books published by Plebani, see the bibliography at the end of this book.

44 See for example Plebani's article on social life and conversations in Venice (2004) or on the relationship between the state and the emotions (2012) as well as her book on chocolate (1991). See also Zanini-Cordi, 2013, 26–50.

Kulturraum, with contributions on primarily Italian salons arising from two conferences held between January 2007 and May 2008.⁴⁵

The second part of this chapter examines some of Carriera's most famous self-portraits in which I agree with De Girolami Cheney et al. in regarding this specific, artistic form of self-representation as a 'source of revelation, not merely a signature'.⁴⁶ By leaving this discussion to the end, I intend it to complete the picture of Carriera I paint in preceding chapters on her role as a female painter and her well-calculated tactical moves intended to promote a specific image of herself. Based on the findings of the previous chapters, I bring my reading of Carriera's self-portraits to bear on the more general discussion of eighteenth-century female portraits in studies such as Frances Borzello's *Seeing Ourselves: Women's Self-Portraits* (1998)⁴⁷ and the comprehensive study *Self-Portraits by Women Painters* by Liana De Girolami Cheney, Alicia Craig Faxon, and Kathleen Lucey Russo, first published in 2000 and then again in 2009.⁴⁸ Susan Sidlauskas' article, "Not-Beautiful: A Counter Theme in the History of Women's Portraiture" (2008),⁴⁹ and Roziska Parker and Griselda Pollock's *Old Mistresses: Woman, Art and Ideology* (2013)⁵⁰ are further helpful sources in the examination of some of Carriera's self-portraits. Also Woods-Marsden's book on Renaissance self-portraiture (1998),⁵¹ Brown's study *The Painter's Reflection* (2000)⁵² as well as the exhibition catalogue on *Italian Women Artists from Renaissance to Baroque* (2007)⁵³ are taken into consideration in the exploration of Carriera's different ways of depicting herself.

Particularly intriguing in this context are two paintings: her self-portrait in the Uffizi and her last self-portrait in the Accademia in Venice that appears in the respective literature as a depiction of Tragedy. The painting in Florence is discussed, for it showcases in the most conspicuous way the strategies the artist used to create a specific image of herself, while her work in Venice reveals other aspects. The way was pointed to the discovery of a fundamental key to a code I use for reading this fascinating piece by Sohm's influential study *The Artist Grows Old* (2007) in which artists' experience of ageing is explored in conjunction of how collectors, clients, critics and biographers dealt with old painters, Campbell's research on portraits of old women in early modern Italy (2010) and Dabbs' insightful article on portraits of the aged women artist (2012). Dabbs study offers the possibility of contextualizing the

45 Unfer Lukoschik, 2008. Surprisingly, although the focus was on the Italian peninsula, none of the scholars participating in the debate published an inquiry on Venice.

46 De Girolami Cheney et al., 2009, p. xxvi.

47 Borzello, 1998.

48 De Girolamo Cheney et al., 2009.

49 Sidlauskas, 2008.

50 Parker and Pollock, 2013 [1981].

51 Woods-Marsden, 1998.

52 Brown, 2000.

53 Fortunati Pietrantonio et al., 2007.

painting in Venice within a specific genre; it is the exploration of the link between the painting and Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia* – though, first published in 1593, and again in 1603 – leading to a new interpretation of the work. Instead of representing 'Tragedy', it more likely is the depiction of 'Melancholy' and of 'Old Age'.

Unless otherwise noted, all the translations from Italian and French into English were made by Martino Trexler, the ones from German into English are mine.

