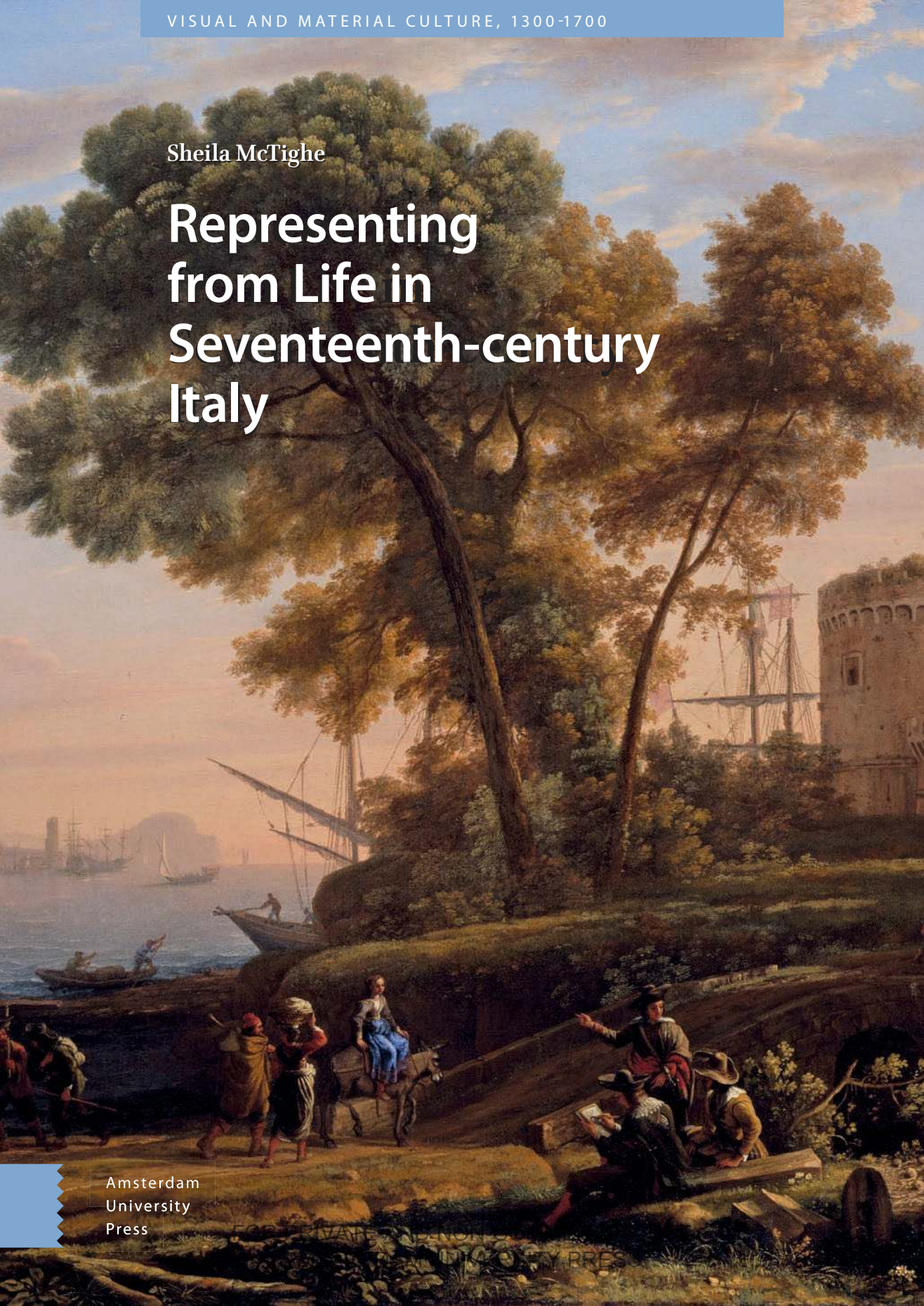


Sheila McTighe

# Representing from Life in Seventeenth-century Italy

Amsterdam  
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Representing from Life in Seventeenth-century Italy

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*Sheila McTighe*

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This book grew out of a very long project, which was focused on the role of genre imagery in French and Italian seventeenth-century art. Chapter 4 in particular, on Claude Lorrain's *View in Rome with Trinità dei Monti*, was initially written while I held a Leverhulme Major Research Fellowship awarded for that book on genre, and I am very grateful for the Leverhulme Foundation's support. The book on genre depictions, however, has taken on a separate life as its own publication. It became clear that the issue of depicting from the live model, as Caravaggio was said to do, needed its own book-length study, set apart from the broader topic of depicting everyday contemporary scenes. This book took shape alongside that project on genre art.

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# Introduction: From Life

## Abstract

What place does an eye-witnessing form of representation have in the development of European arts since the Renaissance? How can we make sense of images that clearly depart from actuality but nonetheless were labelled or described as 'depicted from life'? The relationship between natural history illustrations and religious icons, portraiture and the reporting of news, inform our view of this distinctive practice of representing. Long associated solely with Dutch and Flemish art in this period, Italian practices of working *dal naturale* go beyond the infamous example of Caravaggio and help to put his art in a new perspective.

**Keywords:** indexical signs, Renaissance mimesis, imago contrafactum, ad vivum, Dürer's rhinoceros

Is it ever really possible to depict something 'from life'? When artists work in direct confrontation with their model in the workshop, or while immersed in the very landscape that they are depicting, their creative process differs from the depiction of imagined or remembered models. It yields a different result, as well, ending usually with a more detailed image. The painting or drawing made from life may, in the end, convey more of that elusive sense of presence we get from actual people and sites. But even while painting or drawing with the model before their eyes, the artist is never quite depicting 'from life'. Every time their gaze turns away from the model and towards the paper or canvas, they leave behind the model's living presence to enter the realm of memory and imagination. They may reduce the distance between observation and memory, but the gap will persist, and it is in that gap that representation takes place. In that gap, as well, is born the personal style of an artist, their distinctive 'handwriting'.

Even if representation in any period or any medium is always mediated through an individual's thought and memory, the urge to create images in direct contact with the model, and to make images that *seem* unmediated, was a distinct feature of early modern arts. It may now be more easily discerned as part of Northern art, inherent in Dutch and Flemish practices. Yet it had a particular surge in popularity across Europe at the end of the sixteenth century. Speaking the language of semiotics, we could call it a search for an indexical image, one perfectly transparent to its subject. What follows from creating the indexical image is the suppression of authorship or artistry:

nature made the image, not the human hand and mind. This aspect of depicting 'from life' had a paradoxical relationship with artistic ambition. To succeed at this form of artistic activity was to deny the very signs of a distinctive style by which an artist could be judged.<sup>1</sup>

As a practice, it carried a burden of assumptions about representation, about the artist, and about the viewer. The essays that follow will address the practice of depicting from life in seventeenth-century Italy, in order to explore its possibilities and contradictions, its contexts and reception. The focus is on Italy, because it is in Italian cities that the artists resided who are the subject of the five chapters that follow. Even though originally French-speaking and born in the Duchy of Lorraine, Jacques Callot and Claude Lorrain practiced their art in the cultural context of Florence and Rome, for an Italian and an international audience, just as the Dutchman Pieter van Laer or his Italian follower Michelangelo Cerquozzi worked in that same milieu and for a similar combination of local and international patrons.

My interest in these artists and this artistic practice is not focused solely on the way that images were made, nor on the realist appearance that some of them achieved, nor on the literal relationships between images and actual realities. I am interested also in its reception, in the effect that images made from life were thought to have on their viewers. It was evidently a difficult effect to capture in words. Early modern treatises on the arts, even those sympathetic to the practice of depicting directly from the model, were for the most part silent on its visual effects—except when they complained about too much naturalism. The critical response of Giovan Pietro Bellori to Caravaggio's work, for example, blended disapproval with wonder when he spoke of Caravaggio creating art 'miraculously without art'. Imaginative inventions, particularly those that aimed to narrate stories, were more amenable to the practice of *ekphrasis*, the rhetorical description of an image on which most art writing relied.<sup>2</sup>

Even long after their creation paintings, drawings and even prints that have been made from study of the live model seem to have a distinct effect on viewers. I first became interested in this effect when I saw a small, apparently informal oil sketch by the nineteenth-century painter Thomas Eakins that depicted his sister-in-law's face twisted in profound grief.<sup>3</sup> Trying to analyze why I found this work so riveting when I encountered it in the midst of a group of American paintings on view in Paris, I thought it was because it presented an impossible scenario for the artist and his model. There was a paradoxical gap between the immediacy and the apparent spontaneity of the model's expression of grief, and the dispassionate care and slow work it must have taken for the artist to capture it. How could one confront that look

1 For depicting from life in Northern Europe, see Parshall, 'Imago Contrafacta'; Swan, 'Ad Vivum'; Melion, 'Hendrick Goltzius's Project' and 'Karel van Mander's Life of Hendrick Goltzius'; For the role of style in Italian art writing, Sohm, *Style* (2001).

2 Alpers, 'Ekphrasis and Aesthetic Attitudes'.

3 The Thomas Eakins oil sketch appeared in Silver, Birdsall and Lee, *Un Nouveau Monde*.

of grief over hours, perhaps days, in order to painstakingly convey its utter abandonment to feeling? How could the model persist in the emotion long enough to be captured in paint? The painting made a claim for its instantaneous apprehension of what it represented, even as its subject made that instantaneity seem improbable. Yet this improbability heightened to a curious degree the emotional effectiveness of the painting, even though it was a relatively informal oil sketch.

Years later, I encountered in another exhibition an oil sketch by Antonie van Dyck made 'from life', depicting a model posing as an apostle.<sup>4</sup> The sketch was paired with a more finished copy of the same image of the apostle. How puzzling it seemed that the sketch from life appeared so much more alive, so much livelier than the second, more finished work. The second, copied work looked more authoritative, and more perhaps like a painting of a Biblical figure. The oil sketch made from life, by contrast, evoked the seventeenth-century model playing the role of the apostle—acting, feigning, and yet somehow more immediate. I went back to the paintings again and again, peering at the paint surface to see if it was on the microscopic level of paint strokes that this effect of liveliness and immediacy was produced. Perhaps it was. The brushstrokes in the work made directly from life tended to be laid on the canvas more haphazardly, changing in direction, more visibly distinct rather than melded into one another. By contrast, there was more system, less serendipity, in the brushwork of the copied image. In the sketch from life, the movements of the brush seemed to indicate, even if on almost a subliminal level, a sense of ongoing discovery.

Finally, it was in working with students in front of paintings by Caravaggio that these thoughts about the effect of painting from life came together into the idea for this book. The National Gallery of London's *Supper at Emmaus* exemplifies Caravaggio's practice of observing posed models (Fig. 1). There are few unblended brushstrokes here—Caravaggio erases the passage of his brush, and he seems to efface his own presence as the maker of the work. Explaining to students that his seventeenth-century biographers criticized his failures in composition, I ask them to find some glaring disparities in the relationship of the figures to one another. It always takes a surprisingly long time to notice them. Once students seem them, they are shocked by their own failure to notice that the hand of the pilgrim at right, thrusting into space away from us, is immense in relation to the other hand in the foreground. Then they see that the foodstuffs on the table are tiny in relation to the figures at the table. Why do we not see this immediately, I ask the students? There is no absolute answer to the question.

It seems that this jump of scale from one motif to another results from Caravaggio's repeated scrutiny, that is, from the sequence of many moments of perception that make up his depiction. Yet somehow as we look at the painting the disparities of scale

4 The two van Dyck paintings appeared in Brown, *The Genius of Rome*; for a discussion of Van Dyck's head studies made from the live model, see Eaker, 'Van Dyck', p. 173–191.



Fig. 1: Caravaggio. *The Supper at Emmaus*. c. 1601–1602. Oil on canvas. National Gallery of Art, London. Presented by the Hon. George Vernon, 1839. © 2019. Copyright The National Gallery, London/Scala, Florence.

disappear under the onslaught of convincing surface details. I would go further even, to propose that the very jump between one form and another, like the unblended brushstrokes in van Dyck's oil sketch, somehow make the image more compellingly life-like. On a level perhaps slightly below our conscious awareness, these disparities engage us in the process of perception that the artist himself followed. Our viewing follows along the path of the artist's making, which is, mysteriously, the source of a great deal of pleasure. I know that there are parallels between this kind of viewing and what Roland Barthes wrote about as the pleasures of a *scriptible* or 'writerly' as opposed to a 'readerly' text—the kind of text that is both complex but somehow open, inviting an ongoing intervention by the reader rather than a passive consumption.<sup>5</sup> I have left that parallel implicit in the essays that follow, in order to focus on the relations between the artistic practice of depicting from life and its early modern viewers.

We tend to identify the art of the seventeenth century in Italy and, by extension the art made by French-speaking artists working in Italy and emulating Italian classicism, with terms that describe stylistic trends, like 'Baroque' and 'classic', which categorize the appearance of the artworks, or their 'style'. I want to set these categories aside, at least temporarily, in order to look at this phenomenon, which has less to do with the finished appearance of the works and more to do with the processes

5 Barthes, S/Z.

by which they were made. When working ‘from life’ enjoyed a vogue across Europe at the turn of the seventeenth century, it was called by a number of names that were of much longer standing: depicting *ad vivum*, *dal vivo*, *au vif*, and *naer het leven*, that is, representing from life or from the live model. Depicting from life often—though not always—created an image that appeared more naturalistic than stylized, and at times so much so that we might call the result a form of realism.<sup>6</sup> Dutch and Flemish art has been closely associated with the terms and the practice, so closely that the investigation of working *ad vivum* has rarely gone outside of northern Europe. One of my aims in this book is to correct that situation. It has been discussed as part of a Dutch ‘art of describing’, as a characteristic of a visual culture of mapping and of recording, and as caught up in the methods of new sciences as well as the realm of curiosity and wonders. In the Italian and French examples that I will be looking at, depicting from life was also bound up with religious and political aims, and a courtly context, all aspects that have been less explored in relation to northern European art.

The one artist from southern Europe who was infamous for his reliance on live posed models was Caravaggio. An enormous literature on Caravaggio and his followers has burgeoned over the last two decades, with an important strand of technical studies focused on his practice of painting from life. An odd aspect of the Caravaggio-mania of the present day, however, is the isolation it has imposed on this very singular artist. Only recently has more information emerged about the relations between Caravaggio’s practice of painting from life and those of his contemporaries, mainly in relation to Caravaggist artists who emulated his manner. Overall, the elevation of Caravaggio to the status of maverick genius has meant there is little appetite to relate his methods to work done *dal vivo*, from life, by his contemporaries or later artists who were not explicitly Caravaggist. The realism of plein-air painting and drawing as it was practiced in the early Seicento in Italy has had less appeal than Caravaggio’s art, not only in Italy but also in the Anglo-Saxon world.

An example of Caravaggio’s work around 1601–1602, *Victorious Love*, juxtaposed with a near-contemporary drawing probably made in 1606–1607 by the less well-known Flemish artist Roelant Savery gives us an entry to the central issue of representing from life around the turn of the seventeenth century. Neither artist is *only* representing the posed model. But both have taken pains to present their images as the product of direct and unmediated transcription (Figs. 2 and 3). In the case of Caravaggio, as we will see, the artist took care to keep the image’s portrait-like resemblance to the individual model, his studio assistant. The confrontational pose and gaze, and the proximity of the body to us as viewers, lends immediacy to the staging of the composition. And the quantity of transcribed details—down to the feathers delicately tickling the leg of the model—go further toward convincing us that the

6 Some historians of early modern art avoid using the term realism, as opposed to the more generic term naturalism, and some claim it simply doesn’t exist in early modern art except as a category of subject matter. Summers, *The Judgment of Sense*, p. 3.



Fig. 2: Caravaggio. *Victorious Love*. c.1602. Oil on canvas. Gemäldegalerie, Berlin. Photographer: Joerg P. Anders. © 2019. Photo Scala, Florence/bpk, Bildagentur fuer Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte, Berlin.

artist is translating lived experience into paint. In Roelant Savery's drawing, by contrast, we see a less individualized, more generalized figure of a peasant sketched in typical rural dress from his region. The visual observations are, however, augmented by the Flemish inscriptions on the sheet. They tell us that the man is observed *naer het leven*, from life. And they render in words the invisible but apparently eye-witnessed details of the colours of the costume.

The drawing and painting are united by a deliberate invocation of paradox, however. Both not only root their work in direct observation, but also insistently recall earlier works of art. The pose of the nude Cupid or Amor in Caravaggio's painting recalls the twisting nude figures or *ignudi* that decorate Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling, which were not only visible in Rome, but were being widely disseminated in engravings at the end of the sixteenth century (including several prints made by Caravaggio's friend, Cherubino Alberti). Printed images of the *ignudi* mediated the enormous influence of Michelangelo's flame-like spiraling bodies on sixteenth-century art. It is highly likely that Caravaggio's audience would recognize his allusion to Michelangelo and juxtapose his work *dal vivo* with his predecessor's idealized figures.





Fig. 3: Roelant Savery. Drawing of a Tyrolean peasant, labelled *naer het leven*. c. 1603–1607. Courtauld Gallery, London. © The Samuel Courtauld Trust, London.

Prints also magnified the impact of Pieter Bruegel the Elder's figures on later art. Roelant Savery's peasant figure doesn't just loosely imitate his predecessor's manner and the characteristic peasant subjects. So closely did Savery's drawing imitate Bruegel that they were thought to have been drawn around 1560 by that great founding figure of Netherlandish art rather than, as we now know, to have been executed on Savery's travels in Bohemia and the Alps in 1603–1607, at the behest of the great collector Emperor Rudolf II. The so-called *naer het leven* drawings were attributed to Bruegel until the 1970s, when two art historians established their link to Roelant Savery.<sup>7</sup> Today one still sees Savery's Bruegelesque drawings sometimes referred to

<sup>7</sup> Orenstein, *Pieter Bruegel the Elder*, p. 285–288, gives the history of this change of attribution, proposed nearly simultaneously by Joaneath Spicer and Frans van Leeuwen between 1967 and 1971. Orenstein suggested reattribution of the Tyrolean landscape drawings from this group of Bruegelesque works to a 'Master of the Mountain Landscapes' rather than to Savery. I would rely more on the evidence of Joachim von Sandrart's discussion of Savery's mountain landscapes for Rudolph II, and would be wary of any attribution based solely on style, as the very concept of style is what these drawings made from life while emulating Bruegel are calling into question.

as forgeries, made to trick collectors and to capitalise on the upsurge in taste for collecting Bruegel's works around 1600. The sophisticated court patronage of Savery by Emperor Rudolf II in Prague shows, however, that Savery's play with working simultaneously from life and from exemplary works of past art was likely to have been deliberate. Rudolf II collected many representations made *naer het leven* in the framework of his vast *Kunst- und Wunderkammer*—specimens of rare animals and objects figured in the collection, and also vivid images drawn or painted after the same things. In sponsoring works by Joris van Hoefnagel, Jacques de Gheyn, and others, Rudolf showed his passion for images that blurred the boundaries between the arts and natural history. But at the same time he was putting enormous effort into collecting works by the great Northern artists of the past who were renowned for their naturalism, particularly Albrecht Dürer but also Pieter Bruegel. And here lies an important aspect of representing from life around 1600: to combine references to exemplary past art with extreme fidelity to the model, which appealed to a very cultivated taste.

So too Caravaggio's dual imitation of the human model and the model in past art, setting his painting against that earlier namesake Michelangelo, addressed a sophisticated Roman collector who purchased the *Victorious Love*, marchese Vincenzo Giustiniani. It was Giustiniani who was to cannily define this practice of combined imitation and emulation. In his *Discourse on Painting*, the nobleman remarked that both Caravaggio and his great contemporary Annibale Carracci had worked *dal naturale*, from live models, but at the same time 'con l'esempio davanti', with the example of past art before their eyes.<sup>8</sup>

I will return to the comparison of Caravaggio and his Flemish contemporary Savery. If here at the outset of my study I stress the sophistication and internationalism of this practice of representing from life in the early seventeenth century, it is in part because there is a tendency among historians of Italian art either to discount the veracity of early modern claims to work from life (although most seventeenth-century writers on art have an opinion about its worth), or to see it, when it does occur, as too simple and too common a part of artistic practice to need scrutiny.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the role of observation from life has been at the very heart of more philosophical or theoretical discussions of representation, cognition, and style. It is part and parcel of any discussion of the nature of artistic realism, and it drives the arguments about the historicity of perception. This study moves between the historical and pragmatic issues of artistic practice and the philosophical issues raised by

8 Vincenzo Giustiniani, letter to Teodoro Ameyden ca. 1620–1630, published as 'Vincenzo Giustiniani al signor Teodort Amidenò', [Letter on Painting to Teodoro Ameyden], in *Raccolta di Lettere sulla Pittura*, ed. by Giovanni G. Bottari, 6 vols., (Milan: Per Giovanni Silvestri, 1822) 6, p. 121.

9 For an example of someone downplaying or denying the significance of artists depicting *dal vivo*, see Ebert-Schifferer, *Caravaggio*.

representation from life. Both the art historical context and these issues of representation require a brief introduction here.

### Art, Miraculously, without Art

The time frame for the material presented here extends roughly from the 1590s through the 1640s. In Italy this is a period of great changes in the practice of painting and printmaking, accompanied by the rise of new forms of writing about the arts among elite collectors and intellectuals. These texts tended to present contemporary art in relation to the arts of classical antiquity as well as the Renaissance. And the ideal of beauty embodied in classical sculpture was the intellectual model used to measure the value of artistic practice in the present day. An ideal synthesis of forms from nature and past art, using the example of antique figures, was prescribed by such writers as Franciscus Junius (François du Jon) or Giovanni Battista Agucchi. To represent from the live model was, to such writers, merely a stage in the production of this synthesis of forms. Remaining with this way of depicting and not passing further into creative idealization, according to their views, a debasement of art and a failure to use the artist's intellect and judgment. It is fair to say that the parallel view among many artists at the time was that it took greater education, and social skills, to become such an artist of ideals and ideas. Thus the rise of a classicizing 'theory' of the arts (which Panofsky long ago investigated as an odd hybrid of neoPlatonic ideas and Aristotelian doctrines) accompanied the creation of the art that I will investigate in the five essays that follow.<sup>10</sup>

There was probably a degree of opposition to these ideas among the artists that play a role here—it is difficult to know for certain as they left little verbal testimony. Within their images, we will see at times a self-aware play with the very idea of depicting from life, which may seem a kind of theorizing without words, a theorizing within the visual image itself. They may thus have been well aware they were placing their works slightly apart from the mainstream history of the arts, as Giorgio Vasari had defined it, though often their divergence was expressed playfully or ironically. The idea that Nature was author of the image was a challenge to the principles of Italian Renaissance art and the aspirations of Renaissance artists. Nonetheless, artistic ambition and self-expression found their way back into the practice of depicting from life, both subtly and overtly. Self-advancement through self-denial was a strategy that many of these artists had in common. A crucial social context that unites many of these artists, in both Florence and Rome, is that of court culture and the notion of the artist as an aspiring courtier rather than a would-be intellectual.

<sup>10</sup> Panofsky, *Idea*; Blunt, *Artistic Theory in Italy*.

To use modern terminology, the essays investigate the creation of images that were to some degree indexical, in that their origins were supposed to lie not in the artist's invention but in nature itself.<sup>11</sup> The image was made to seem transparent to nature, not to be (on first sight) expressive of the artist's style or identity. There is therefore one issue that all five essays raise to one degree or another, namely that the artistry involved in creating these works was paradoxically best revealed by being hidden, as in the old adage *ars celare artem*.

When Jacques Callot drew Florentine courtiers in the street during festivities in 1617–1620, or when Filippo Napoletano painted on site the waterfalls at Tivoli near Rome around 1622, or when Claude Lorrain painted a wooded view while working outside in the Vigna Madama in the 1630s, they knew they were engaging in a distinct form of artistry. Their biographers commented on the origins of these images, noting it as significant that they were made in the presence of the model or motif that they represented. In the Italian context, depicting from life was a practice that was relatively unusual at the time. There was more at stake in it than fidelity to appearances.

Some of the artists studied here represented on site and in front of their model in order to give a compelling vivacity or *vivezza* to the finished image. Others worked in this way to give a particular kind of authority to their subject, to verify its truth, and to make images that serve as witness to events, rather than testimony to the artist's imagination. And yet in many instances what was important was a foregrounding of artistry, a display of skill in mimesis, paradoxically achieved by withdrawing the overt signs of artistry to leave an image seemingly made by nature itself.

The essays that follow will look at how some seventeenth-century paintings, drawings and prints functioned in relation to their viewers, as a result of this creative process. My claim is that many images drawn from life were staged in such a way as to communicate ideas and to express values, using a range of visual tactics. For example, we will see images by Jacques Callot and his contemporaries in Florence with elaborate framing motifs at the edges and tops of image, a trait that makes for tension between self-conscious artistry at the margins and the self-effacing indexical image at the centre. Striking contrasts of opposites, to give an example of a technique used many times by Caravaggio, was another way of composing images that signified through juxtaposition. This sort of technique is amenable to structural analysis. It needs to be combined, however, with an investigation into the social and intellectual context of the artist and audience, which restores to us a part of the contemporary associations with depicted figures and places. Historical research allows us to see the practice of visually foregrounding motifs that were charged with contemporary meaning. The most common function of these tactics, whether we reach them

11 Further on the indexical sign, see Peirce, 'Logic as Semiotic', in his *The Philosophy of Peirce*, p. 98–119; Kraus, 'Notes on the Index', p. 58–67.

through structural analysis or contextualisation, was to make the image communicate by means of figural *allusion*, rather than to use the play of substitutions of forms for ideas or emotions, which would lead toward allegory or narrative. These were ways of making an indexical image 'speak', and we will see them a number of times in the pages that follow.

Yet during this same period, the writing about art increasingly vilified representation from life for being bereft of all communication. The so-called 'classicizing idealist' critics, ranging from Giovanni Battista Agucchi in the early seventeenth century to Giovan Pietro Bellori and André Félibien in the 1660s and 1670s, stressed instead the value of creating ideal forms, whose model was to be found in antique art. These critics usually adopted the notion of the sisterhood of painting and poetry, or the *ut pictura poesis* tradition, and they exalted the use of expressive faces, the *affetti*, and gestures within narrative images. Their notion of expression, whether of ideas or emotion, was presented as antithetical to depicting 'dal naturale' as Bellori made clear in his life of Caravaggio. When Bellori describes Caravaggio rejecting the study of classical sculpture, he says the artist took a random gypsy woman off the street and put her in his workshop to paint from life. Requiring the model's presence so that he might depict from life, Caravaggio's mind went empty when the model was not in front of him—at least, according to Bellori.

This practice of depicting in the presence of a model was under particular critical stress throughout this period, when it was seen as anti-intellectual and uncultured. Caravaggio's career as Giovan Pietro Bellori presented it is only the best known of such examples—but even he was willing to admit of Caravaggio's work that he 'made art, miraculously, without art'. To depict from life in Italy was nearly always a deliberate counter-current, knowingly adopted in opposition to textual accounts of how the visual arts should work. At times the inspiration to represent from the live model came from Northern works of art, particularly prints, for which there was a lively market in southern Europe. And, as we will see in chapter four, Northern artists in Rome created complex and appealing paintings for a local audience, based on working from life. But it is by no means merely due to the stylistic influence of Northern art that artists working in Italy took up the practice of representing from life. There is a great deal more than style or influence to the exchange between North and South on this issue, as we shall see.

In seventeenth-century Italy, the practice of drawing or painting in the presence of a model inspired a small lexicon of terms, most of which are now translated by the English phrase 'to depict from life'. Italian and French-speaking artists had a similar, but not identical vocabulary for this. It was called depicting *dal vivo*, *dal vero*, *dal naturale*, *d'après la nature*, *après le vif* or *au vif*—from life. The verbs used were a cluster of terms: *dipingere* (to depict), but also *ritrarre* (to portray) and *colorire dal vero* (to colour from the real), and in French the phrases *tracer d'après la nature*, (to trace from nature), and *tirer au vif* (to pull [an image] from a living being), were terms

that—as we will see in chapter four—lent themselves to some visual-verbal punning in representations that were made from life.

The term *contrafactum* in Latin and *conterfeytsel* in Flemish was clearly in widespread usage in Northern Europe through the sixteenth century, and its significance has been investigated in relation to Northern arts, as we shall see shortly. The term pointed to a particular form of portrayal from life, functioning as a witness to something observed. The term itself also existed in an Italian form, *contrafatta*, but in Italy its use seems to have been very rare, and never to have been used as a verb to signify a certain kind of making. Instead we find 16<sup>th</sup>-century Italian texts using other words to signify portrayal in effigy and the creation of a simulachrum—*ritrarre dal naturale*, for example, which yields the noun *ritratto* or portrait. In France, too, the terminology based on *contrafactum* became less common by the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In place of that word and its connotations of vivid presence, the phrases for nature and life as the source of the image became more important.

By the time of Michel de Montaigne's essays in the third quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the phrase for portraying from life was most often *tirer au vif*, which was exactly the same phrase used for hunting and shooting a wild animal. Jean Nicot's 1606 *Trésor de la langue française* cites the terms *au vif* and *d'après la nature*, giving the example 'Images faites au vif, et naïvement' (images made from life, and naively). But under the term *tirer*, Nicot also states that 'Tirer signifie aussi Pourtraire' (to pull also means to portray). Examples of its usage included 'Tirer un homme au naturel, le tirer en vif, le tirer en cire, le tirer en plâtre, il s'est fait tirer par un excellent Peintre' (To trace a man from nature, to trace from life, to fashion in wax, to fashion in plaster. He had his likeness taken by an excellent painter).

The slight shift in language toward the terms *tirer* and *tracer au vif* in French and *ritrarre dal vivo* in Italian, accompanies a shift of emphasis at the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, at the point where my study begins.

Depiction from life, whatever it might be called, sometimes took place in a workshop, where a posed model was studied intently by a group of artists. Or it might take place out in the countryside, on a mountain top, or on a city street, with a draftsman sketching a panoramic view of a town or a well-known site. Depicting from life is often associated in early modernity with draftsmanship, but it was also at times used in painting in oil on canvas, famously in the case of Caravaggio, but also by other seventeenth-century artists, who even carried awkward equipment out into the field to paint in front of the motif, long centuries before the Impressionists with their tubes of commercial pigments. It is of course not uncommon that artworks begun with images sketched on site, in the presence of the model, were finished and embellished later in the workshop. It was, however, the very origin of the image in that primary moment of its capture on paper or canvas that defined its essential nature as work from life.



Life drawing was taught at an advanced stage of any artist's training. It led to the institutionalization of the type of figure study called an 'academy', so called from the site of life drawing work, which in Italy was called the 'accademia del nudo', a place where the live model could be posed for several artists to work from. Given how ubiquitous such life-drawing training was, it may seem that I am stressing a banal aspect of artistic practice in early modernity. So banal that it has become a modern cliché of how pre-modern artists work, standing in front of the easel or the sheet of paper staring at their model. But it was exceptional to produce the *finished* work of art by this means in sixteenth and seventeenth century Italy and France. Drawn studies from life were usually an early part of the creative process that led to the final work.

In seventeenth-century Italy, the effect of the real was supposed to be mitigated, as it was filtered through a process of idealization and stylization, and moulded into expressive forms. A well-known example of an artist who was criticized for moving too quickly from a drawing made from life in the workshop to the finished altarpiece is found in Carlo Cesare Malvasia's *Lives of the Carracci*. He described older artists in Bologna carping at how Annibale Carracci had depicted a *facchino*, a market labourer, in his 1583 altarpiece of *The Baptism of Christ*. The semi-nude young boy, depicted lifting his shirt over his head, made his way only slightly altered into the figures around the baptism scene, whereas according to these painters his effigy should have been suited only to the *accademia del nudo*, not a church.<sup>12</sup>

## Art and Illusion: the problematic history of representing the real

The image made in the presence of its model may have been only one part of the process of making a work of art in the seventeenth century, and idealization may have gotten far more press at the time. However, within twentieth-century thought about the role of naturalism in European art, representing from life is the very paradigm of pre-modern depiction. To make an image in this way, constantly striving toward greater accuracy in rendering the model, was the process that seemed to drive forward the history of art between Cimabue and Michelangelo, and subtly or overtly coloured the achievement of later periods of art as deviations from the norms of nature or persistent 'returns' to nature. This development supposedly found its end point in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century invention of the photograph.

The history of styles was famously analyzed in this way by E.H. Gombrich's *Art and Illusion* (1960). Gombrich presented a dialectical process of 'making and matching', wherein artists both matched a visual impression against images from past art, and made new images that matched their own visual impression. Period style is one result from this dialogue between the direct vision of the model and an awareness

<sup>12</sup> Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, 1, p. 267

of past images. And a notion of period style helped to explain why artists in the past somehow couldn't achieve a proto-photographic naturalism, or at least not to our modern eyes. In Gombrich's argument, artists working in direct confrontation with their model were the engine for artistic momentum, in the quest for ever more perfect illusions of the real. There have been brilliant refutations of that paradigm, perhaps most strikingly in studies of photography, and in Joel Snyder's demolition of the idea of photography as the culminating point of naturalist representation in his study 'Picturing Vision' (1980).<sup>13</sup> Nowhere does Gombrich's work retain its appeal more strongly, however, than in discussions of the disparity between pre-modern images and their models. How could such un-naturalistic pictures claim to be made from direct observation?

The thirteenth-century drawing of a lion by Villard de Honnecourt, often reproduced, is perhaps the most famous example mentioned in Gombrich's text.<sup>14</sup> The inscription proclaimed the beast in the drawing, despite its schematic underlying geometry that was evidently drawn by a compass, to be '*contrefais al vif*' or portrayed from life. Gombrich remarked of the 'curiously stiff picture of a lion' that the late medieval artist 'can have meant only that he had drawn his schema in the presence of a real lion. How much of his visual observation he allowed to enter into the formula is a different matter'. Villard's lion-formula nonetheless stood at the 'beginnings of illustrated reportage' according to Gombrich. More recent studies of Villard's drawings have refuted this idea that Villard was a medieval version of a documentary photographer. They have pointed instead to a different range of meanings for the phrase '*al vif*' in French usage between 1300 and 1500, namely that it did not mean Villard drew while confronting an actual lion, but that it denoted a life-likeness in the image, and a liveliness in its effect, all while conveying information about the animal that had been gleaned from textual sources.<sup>15</sup>

The recent literature on depicting from life, from Villard's time through the early seventeenth century, is in agreement about a paradigm shift that took place during the sixteenth century. If in the 13<sup>th</sup> century Villard's term *al vif* signified a Pygmalion effect of bringing the inert image to life, increasingly from the year 1500 the phrase signified an indexical, that is causal, relation between the image and its prototype. The other term Villard used, *contrefais*, has also been explored as part of the language used to describe the practice of working from life, and has been tied to this larger issue of defining early modern naturalism. Peter Parshall's 1993 study of the term 'Imago Contrafacta' in relation to sixteenth-century representation from life brought

13 Snyder, 'Picturing Vision', p. 499–526.

14 Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, p. 78–79.

15 Turel, 'Living Pictures', p. 163–182; Bugslag, 'Contrefais al Vif', p. 360–378. Turel's argument is far wider ranging than Bugslag's, though both point to the notion of vividness as the connotation of "*al vif*" in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. For the view that Villard's term *contrefais al vif* conveyed negative connotations, see Perkinson, 'Portraits and Counterfeits', p. 13–28.

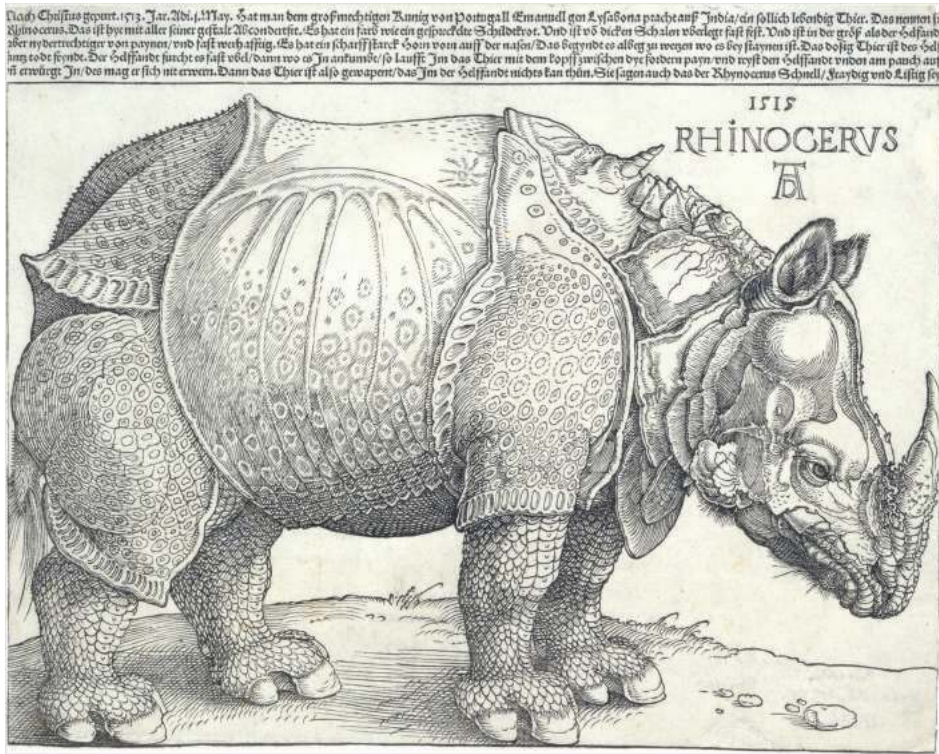


Fig. 4: Albrecht Dürer. *Rhinoceros*. 1515. Woodcut. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

out its ties to the rise of empirical observation and to the value of objectivity in the emerging natural sciences.<sup>16</sup>

The modern English cognate to the term *contrafactum* is counterfeit, signifying today a thing that is inauthentic and false. But it denoted the opposite in sixteenth-century terms. It was instead the image seemingly stamped by nature or by divine agency in its own shape, without the intervention of human subjectivity. An *imago contrafacta* was so designated because it had a role different to that of aesthetic portrayal. It was an effigy or simulacrum, a substitute for the living thing, giving an enhanced sense of presence. Its earliest usage may have been primarily in inscriptions on portraits, to certify their living likeness to their sitters. But the term spread in the early sixteenth century to religious portrayals and to landscape, as well as to the broadsheet dissemination of wondrous or uncanny events. Above all, however, the term *contrafactum* and its vulgate variants were applied to images of *naturalia*, in the context of authenticating and disseminating knowledge of the natural world.

16 Parshall, 'Imago Contrafacta', p. 554–574.

The sixteenth-century corollary to Villard's lion is thus Albrecht Dürer's *Rhinoceros*, drawn in 1515 and inscribed 'Das hab jch dir van wonders wegen müsen abkunterfet schicken' (because it is such a wondrous thing, I had to send you its counterfeit) (Fig. 4). Despite implying that he had drawn the rhino from life, calling it *abkunterfet*, an *imago contrafacta*, Dürer had never actually seen the animal. He probably drew from a sketch sent from Lisbon to Nuremburg by a German printer. Despite the many inaccuracies—the animal's improbable armour plating, for one—Dürer's rhinoceros was not only made into a woodcut, published as a broadsheet and widely disseminated in a series of sixteenth-century editions, it continued to be copied in various formats through the nineteenth century, even as an illustration in natural history texts.<sup>17</sup> It had the stamp of authenticity in the artist's own assertion of its life-likeness.

According to Parshall's argument, the term *contrafactum* was used primarily in relation to Northern art in the sixteenth century, although as Villard de Honnecourt's inscribed lion shows, the French version of the term was current in the late medieval period. The term *imago contrafacta* alerts us to images 'specially designated as bearers of visual fact', and the intention to convey 'some particle of information deemed transmissible through a picture'. The image so designated is thus not determined by the degree of faithfulness to its subject, but rather by its function.

Other studies of early modern representations from life make the same point, but with greater focus on the parallels between empiricism in the natural sciences and the value—economic as well as intellectual—given to the image drawn in the presence of its model. Claudia Swan's 1998 essay 'Ad Vivum, Naer het Leven, From the Life' extends Parshall's focus beyond the sixteenth century and beyond Northern realism.<sup>18</sup> She points out that terms for the concept of depicting from life were international. To use the phrase *ad vivum* or its local counterparts was 'to exercise an internationally valid password in a community spread across a continent and joined by correspondence and publications'. Swan looked at the way such images worked not only within the networks of natural scientists but also within the curiosity cabinets and wonder collections of the time. She stressed the substitution value of the image made from life, its function as simulachrum, so closely was it modelled on its prototype. This was, as Swan put it, 'vital in relation to the esthetics of possession'. Owning the album of drawings or prints of animals made *ad vivum* was thus on the same footing as owning the menagerie of rare animals themselves. She points out that collectors like the Emperor Rudolf II in Prague would have not only the real exotic animals in their menageries, but also a multitude of wondrous representations of them in their *kunstkammer*, many of them labelled as images made *naer het leven*, *ad vivum*, from life.

17 Bartrum, *Albrecht Dürer*, chap. 11 on Dürer's rhinoceros drawing and its long afterlife; Dackerman, *Prints and the Pursuit of Knowledge*.

18 Swan, 'Ad Vivum', p. 353–372. Taking up the theme most recently: Balfe, Woodall, Zittel, *Ad Vivum?* (forthcoming, 2019). Although I participated in the conference at which these essays were presented, I have not seen them in written form; my understanding is that they are focused primarily on Northern European art, and continue the exploration of *ad vivum* depiction in relation to the empirical study of nature.

Parshall's and Swan's research overlapped in the area of natural science and the early modern wonder cabinet. But there are two groups of images discussed by Parshall that go beyond the realm of early science. They focus attention on the suppression of authorship in indexical images, an issue that has an important bearing on several of the essays in this book, and thus I would like to look more closely at them here.

The first is a pair of engravings made between 1495 and 1500 by Israhel van Mecklenem, both depicting an *Imago Pietatis*, Christ crucified. The inscription on both prints assures us that 'Haec imago contrafacta est', (this image is portrayed from life). In what sense portrayed from life? The prints were based on a sacred image in Rome's Sta. Croce in Gerusalemme, a mosaic that had been commissioned by St. Gregory the Great to commemorate his vision of Christ during Mass, in one of the miracles most associated with his reign as pope. Thus Israhel's print is perhaps the very earliest 'reproductive print': it copies an already existing image in order to disseminate its appearance. But the print also portrays the spiritual vision 'from life'—for an image, too, can be depicted *ad vivum* in another image, that is, the image can be a product of eye-witnessing and yet a copy of that image can equally serve as an authentic account of that initial experience. Further complicating the relation between engraved images and their prototype, the sacred image in Rome had also been drawn from life after a fashion. That is, it was drawn from a vision witnessed and verbally authenticated by Gregory the Great himself. Neither the saint nor the anonymous artisan who crafted the image in Sta. Croce in Gerusalemme could be called authors of the image, whose true origin lay in the supernatural rather than the natural world.

Israhel's images are caught up in what Christopher Wood has called an 'iconic chain'.<sup>19</sup> The engravings themselves existed in two versions, drawn on two different plates; each version then existed in multiple impressions. Beyond that, each impression individually was a copy of a copy. Nonetheless, at the same time each was still an indexical stand-in for a vision in the mind of a saint. Printed images always complicate the distinction between copy and original, to be sure; Wood describes this as prints' 'disruption of the iconic chain'. But the print as *imago contrafacta*, as Israhel labeled his print with this term, involves above all a suppression of the function of the artist, as agent of the image's making. Israhel's crafting of the image was not overtly its *raison-d'être*. At every point in the chain of images engaged by the print, the reference is to an ineffable, immaterial prototype, the divine vision. There are clear parallels between the status of an *imago contrafacta*, as Israhel's engravings proclaimed themselves to be, and that of the sacred icon in the Byzantine church. St. Luke's original depiction of the Madonna served to ground subsequent icons in a chain that referred the viewer toward a single, originating sacred referent. What is new here in Israhel's images is the coming together of the sacred referent with this term *contrafactum* and its connotation of verifiable experience. The word could

19 Wood, *Forgery*, esp. p. 15–17 concerning 'pre-modern culture' with its 'presumption of artifacts' mutual substitutability' versus the binarism of original and replica in the modern era.



apply in the realm of spiritual ‘realities’ as well as in the empirical study of nature. In one very influential work made from life that will be discussed in chapter 2, Jacques Callot’s *The Fair at Impruneta*, the nature of sacred icons is alluded to in both the printed image—where a miraculous icon of the Madonna is carried in procession—and its dedicatory inscription. The analogy between icons and images made from life was probably quite apparent to 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>-century artists.

Another group of prints that Parshall refers to in his study of the 16<sup>th</sup>-century *imago contrafacta*, become important toward the end of the period his study covers, and is quite different in subject to Israhel’s engravings. The so-called *Small Landscapes* series of engravings was first published in Antwerp by Hieronymous Cock in 1559.<sup>20</sup> The prints depict villages, roads and fields typical of the Brabant region. There are no specific identified places, and the emphasis is on the typical and local identity of the land. The title page does not give an artist’s name, and we know from the few surviving drawings for the series that the anonymous draftsman’s work was freely altered and added to by the publisher—augmented with some figures, and certain motifs emphasized or minimized. The authorship of the images was apparently less important than the nature of their subject. Their title page declared the images to be ‘Al te samen gheconterfeyt naer dleven’ (altogether portrayed from life). That phrase *naer het leven* was rising in popularity, alongside the term *conterfeyt*.

Several decades later (and a great deal of warfare having ravaged the province depicted in the prints), the images were republished in 1601 by Theodor Galle. They were still not attributed to any particular artist. But perhaps due to nostalgia for a lost peace represented in the scenes, which showed the landscape that was no longer accessible to many Flemish exiles to the northern Netherlands, the series proved immensely popular for a Dutch urban public. In Amsterdam during 1612, Claes Jansz. Visscher produced a new set of prints closely copied from the Cort 1559 publication, but the title page now attributed the series to the great 16<sup>th</sup>-century figure, Pieter Bruegel the Elder. This publication in turn set off the production of numerous print series of landscapes, by Willem Buytewech, Jan van de Velde and others. As if to underscore the idea that the scenes were drawn from life, these series now sometimes included figures of draftsmen at work within the landscapes. They draw what they, and we, are engaged in seeing. They verify or authenticate the new terrain of man-made farmland, but also make visible the objects of nostalgia, the lost landscape of the past.

In several studies in this volume we will see similar topographic landscapes and imagined views, which were presented as images made from life, complete with artists at work in the landscape sketching what we see. The motivations for topographic view-making in Florence and Rome were also, like the Small Landscape series, caught up in a sense of regional identity and the needs of local authorities. Yet when

20 The literature on the Small Landscapes series includes Freedberg, *Dutch Landscape prints*; Onuf, ‘Envisioning Netherlandish Unity’; Onuf, ‘Small landscapes’, p. 190–193.



we look at a topographic work such as Claude Lorrain's *Siege of La Rochelle* made for a French king to celebrate a French victory, it clearly diverges from the suppression of authorship that was such a striking feature of the early versions of the Bruegelsque landscape views. Claude represents a draftsman at work in the foreground of his painted siege view. The figure is generic rather than serving as a literal self-portrait. The motif of the draftsman at work, busy sketching the scene before our eyes, had long been used in sixteenth-century maps and topographic views to signify that the view was witnessed and verified. In that context, it was not the authorship of the scene that was stressed by this motif, but the transparency of the image to its model in nature, as in the *Small Landscapes* series. However, Claude brings the authorship of the scene to the fore: a reward for the viewer's close looking is the appearance of a small signature, 'Claudio', written upside down on the sheet held by the seated draftsman. Inverted, the signature both does and does not belong to the represented draftsman. It signifies instead the role of authorship that Claude retains for himself, a sign for artistry and representational cunning that balances with the indexical function of a siege view. Working from the motif or the model should be an act of eye-witnessing, yet it isn't. The artist's fictional presence and literal absence from the topographies he created is one issue raised by the studies that follow. That some such unity of imitation and imagination is always at work in the practice of representing 'from life;' is my basic premise.

In the final decade of the sixteenth and opening years of the seventeenth century the motif of the draftsman quickly comes to be a shorthand statement about the origins of the image in work from life. I will have more to say about how this motif of the draftsman at work is elaborated by both Italian and French-speaking topographic draftsmen, Jacques Callot, and Claude Lorrain. Here I want to introduce it as one of the ways in which a revival of Pieter Bruegel's art at the turn of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and not just in the *Small Landscapes* series, was a conduit for new ideas about representing from the model, ideas that had an effect on art produced in Italy, whether by Italians or French artists.

Just as the emperor Rudolf II in Prague ignited a revival of interest in Albrecht Dürer's art around 1600, so too did his voracious collecting seem to set off a Bruegel Renaissance. One example of the way the Netherlandish master's art is reworked to make it even more strongly connected to the practice of working *naer het leven* can be found in Simon Novellanus's 1595 engraving after a Pieter Bruegel Alpine scene (Fig. 5). It represents the tiny draftsman at work, engulfed within the panoramic mountain and river view that opens before our eyes. In the sky directly above the draftsman, Novellanus inserts the mythological figures of Mercury and Psyche. The fanciful realm of myth is juxtaposed with the ordinary earthly realm of the artisan making his image. These particular mythological symbols were a favourite motif for Rudolf II, where Mercury and Psyche were represented within his collections in sculptures and in virtuoso prints by Adrian de Vries. It has been suggested recently that the figures of Mercury and Psyche



Fig. 5: Simon Novellanus, after Pieter Bruegel. *Landscape with Mercury and Psyche*. 1595. Engraving. British Museum Dept. of Prints and Drawings, London. © Trustees of the British Museum.

were employed in the context of Rudolf's fascination for alchemy, where they stood as symbols for the alchemical transformation of matter. In Novellanus's reworking of Pieter Bruegel's landscape, the draftsman seated on the ground transforms nature into art, as in a celestial realm the gods make matter into gold. Their combination here in one Bruegel-like print makes for an image that both effaces Novellanus the executor of the scene behind the persona of the great Netherlandish artist, while it also makes great artistic claims for the process of representing from life.

Depictions of the artist at work, within the very work he seems to be making, form a common thread joining a number of works studied in this book. A particularly rich example occurs in the commission Rudolf II gave to the Flemish specialist in animal and floral painting, Roelant Savery.<sup>21</sup> As we saw earlier, from about 1603 to 1608, Savery made drawings that he labelled 'naer het leven', made from life, but which had the appearance of being in the manner of Pieter Bruegel the Elder. Some of these drawings date from the time of a study trip to the Tyrol region, which Joachim van Sandrart later described as a mission given to the artist by Rudolf II himself. Savery's task was to collect images of rare flora and fauna for the emperor's collection. The drawings

21 On Savery's art, see Bartilla, *Roelant Savery*; Mai, *Roelant Savery*.



Fig. 6: Roeland Savery. *Mountain landscape with an artist sketching*. 1603–1606. Drawing. Courtauld Gallery, London. © The Samuel Courtauld Trust, London.

that Savery produced, however, were on the one hand studies of Bohemian peasants inscribed ‘nae’t leven’, and on the other Alpine landscape views, some including that pointed motif of draftsmen sketching (Fig. 6). It is easy to see why Savery’s drawings were confused with those of Pieter Bruegel the Elder for centuries, as we saw earlier.<sup>22</sup> The Courtauld Gallery’s Alpine landscape by Savery even has an old inscription attributing it to Bruegel. The visible similarity of Savery’s drawing to Bruegel’s famous Alpine scenes, so praised in Karel van Mander’s life of Bruegel, is no accident. Savery drew a landscape that presented itself as made on site, in direct transcription of the view—with an image of the artist at work included within the scene, as a stamp of authentic witnessing. And yet the drawing also imitated Bruegel’s views to a degree that resembles forgery of the earlier artist’s work. Intense mimesis of a view coincided with intense emulation, in a paradoxical blending of two forms of imitation. The type of viewer that Savery had in mind, however, was probably meant to savour the paradoxical link made in the drawing between imitation of nature and emulation of past art. The presence of the artist at work in this context becomes not only a marker of eye-witnessing, an indicator of veracity, but also a pointer toward the self-conscious display of artistry that was at play in this dual form of imitation, and a self-conscious form of viewing.

<sup>22</sup> Spicer, ‘The *Naer Het Leven* Drawings’, p. 63–82. See also Spicer, ‘Referencing Invention’; Spicer, ‘A pictorial vocabulary’, p. 22–51; Spicer, ‘The Star of David’, p. 203–224.

The role of Rudolf II's court in Prague in promoting this novel form of representing from life, predicated on the emperor's taste for Dürer and Bruegel, is a rich topic that goes beyond the bounds of my present study. There has been fascinating work done on the Rudolfine court, its collecting and its patronage, and the ties between the aesthetics of curiosity and the taste for new forms of artistic naturalism based on study from life. The relationship between artistic ideas at the court in Prague and artistic practice in the United Provinces at the turn of the 17th century is still being clarified. In all of these areas, natural science and its adoption of empirical study has been presented as the common ground underlying the artistic practice of representing from life and a new realism in Dutch and Flemish art. However, for my purposes in the studies that follow, it is essential to stress a different context for representing from life in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. The bridge between artists like Savery in Prague around 1600 and artists in Italy at roughly the same time is primarily court culture, albeit courts that gave protection and patronage to scientists such as Tycho Brahe and Galileo Galilei as well as to artists.

In some of the studies that follow I will be looking at how the practice of working *dal vivo* or *tiré au vif* was embedded in courtly artistic cultures that prized complexity, representational wit, and virtuoso artistic performance. Several elements in court life that have a bearing on the popularity of representing from life. One is simply the resonance of artistic style with the self-styling of a courtier, and thus the nonchalance—*sprezzatura*, the deliberate self-effacement of the skilled courtier—seemed to be aligned with the self-effacement of the image made as if from life. The very style-lessness of the image made from life was the subject of intense interest in the circle of Rudolf II, reaching an apogee in the achievements of Hendrick Goltzius.

Van Mander's life of Hendrick Goltzius portrays him as a Proteus figure, a shape-shifter who could take on the artistic identity of any master. His style was the appropriation of all styles. His virtuoso emulation of famous artists' work in his *Master-pieces* print series, for example, was a witty extension of the notion of a reproductive print, which entailed not copying a pre-existing image but rather adopting the manner of the earlier artist so completely as to fool the eye of connoisseurs.<sup>23</sup> His *Circumcision of Christ* engraving in the Master-pieces series radiates the manner of Dürer, and recalls the composition of Dürer's woodcut of the same subject. However, Goltzius does not cross the line toward outright plagiarism, like the infamous early example of Marcantonio Raimondi pirating Dürer's woodcuts in his engravings made in Venice in 1506. Goltzius instead does something even more difficult, a metamorphosis of his own hand into that of another artist's, and a transformation of his own artistic vision into someone else's way of seeing the world.

This Protean quality had comic as well as serious manifestations in van Mander's biography of Goltzius. Travelling disguised as a cheese-salesman, under an assumed name, Goltzius hid himself and eavesdropped on people discussing his works, in

23 Melion, 'Hendrick Goltzius's Project', p. 458–87; Melion, 'Karel van Mander's Life', p. 113–33.



order to hear the unvarnished truth of their criticism—an anecdote derived from a story in Pliny, which Van Mander also recounted of Pieter Bruegel. The trope at work in both biographies emerges from the paradox of great skill at imitation. In Van Mander's lives, artistic identity for both Bruegel and Goltzius involved suppression of their identity. Nonetheless, in his Circumcision scene engraved in the manner of Dürer, Goltzius inserted a self-portrait looking out at the viewer from the right background. Though striving to be invisible at the level of handling or manner, the artist's self re-emerges, as if paradoxically portrayed by his long-vanished predecessor, Dürer. The self-effacing and self-promoting functions of Goltzius's *Master-pieces* joined the properties of individual style and the properties of the indexical image, in a display that was both serious and playful. Similar displays characterize Jacques Callot's drawings made from life for the Medici court in Florence between 1617 and 1621, as we shall see.

If a notion of *sprezzatura* might inform courtly taste for self-effacing artistry in the realm of image-making, a different aspect of court life sheds light on other aspects of drawing and painting from life in Florence during Callot's time there. The verbal contests or intellectual debates that were such a feature of polite society in a number of European courts shaped the presentation of scientific discoveries, which had to be couched as witty, inventive performances. So too were there friendly contests at drawing from life in Florence, in which Callot and his friend Filippo Napoletano participated. It is controlled performance that links these competitive displays of skill to the court. Virtuoso performance was a key element in any courtier's rise to prominence at court, and it was a type of artistry that led musicians, actors and dancers to rise far more dramatically than artists or artisans in a court setting. Performers could not be separated from the product of their art, which was embodied and ephemeral: how could you separate the dancer from the dance? Poet and writer could also read and discourse in person, uniting their presence with their works.<sup>24</sup> The ephemerality of performance at court inspired the prince to honour the performer themselves. But the visual artist did not need to be present for their fruits of their artistry to be appreciated, and if they were uneducated or uncouth, the separation of their performance from their actual presence was all the more apt. Taking their cue from musicians and actors, some artists would present their skills as an enactment of their art, in the presence of the prince. Goltzius would paint in the presence of Rudolf II, in a room next door to erotic paintings that had been made from life. And so too would Filippo Napoletano produce his miniature images at the bedside of the mortally ill Grand Duke Cosimo II in Florence, who found them a source of virtuous entertainment.

The court was one social context in Italy and France for the creation of images made from life. The other pertinent social context is less well-defined. The urban environment in which artists openly competed for patronage and custom also gave some notoriety to

24 Welch, 'Painting as Performance', p. 9–18.

the practice of representing from life. Rome and Paris had thriving markets for realist paintings and prints in the seventeenth century, served by Dutch and Flemish emigrés but also by indigenous artists. A smaller subset of these artists became renowned for their naturalistic representation of low life. It is in the context of the urban artists' academies, first in Rome and later in Paris, that we find the critical backlash against the supposedly ignorant and unlearned practice of realism. Caravaggio's fame for working *dal naturale*, from the model, was first mentioned in print in 1606 by Karel van Mander, and set the stage for later debates about its value as a practice. Chapter five studies Claude Lorrain's work from life in relation to the phenomenon of the Bamboccianti and the Bentveughels, Northern painters working in Rome between 1620 and 1660, whom critics sought to denigrate with the same tools used against Caravaggism. The Northern artists in Rome flaunted their practice of working in the presence of their models, and engaged in overt opposition to the rhetoric of idealization and—importantly—to the professional taxation of Rome's Accademia di San Luca. It was in this urban marketplace for images that battle lines were drawn between images made idealized and perfected, which were supposedly for elite patrons, and images depicted from life, raw and unmediated, which were supposedly for the low in society. Caravaggio's practice of painting from posed models in actuality refuted that scenario. His meteoric rise to fame was brokered through the great and the good in Rome between 1598 and 1606. He was then guided through the process of attaining a knighthood on Malta and a return to the papal court in Rome by very high patronage indeed.

Chapter 1 will discuss Caravaggio's retention of the portrait likeness of his models and his juxtaposition of their faces with those of animals and plants, studying his practice in the context of popular ideas about physiognomy. The idea that Caravaggio's realism grew out of his earliest Roman patrons' involvement with the natural sciences has dropped out of recent scholarship on this most studied of 17<sup>th</sup>-century artists. Here I want to bring it back under discussion, but in the context of his practice as a painter. The longstanding relation between work *ad vivum*, *dal naturale*, and the transmission of knowledge comes to the fore in this study. But I will argue that Caravaggio undermines the belief that images made from life give unmediated access to nature, and that the *imago contrafacta* conveyed privileged knowledge of the visible world. Physiognomy gives one account of Caravaggio's models' faces, but their painted contexts work against that account. Caravaggio's practice of depicting his models, whether from life or from memory, is rarely placed into the large context of other 17<sup>th</sup> century artists working from life. I hope in doing so to shed light on the strongly divided reception of Caravaggio's realism as well as the very curious way his paintings address the viewer.

If Karel van Mander praised Caravaggio's painting solely from nature, *naer het leven*, the initial reception of the Lombard artist's images by artists in Rome put the emphasis instead on his hidden reliance on previous artists' work and his overt rejection of past art. 'I see nothing here but the ideas of Giorgione', Federico Zuccari is reported as saying on visiting the Contarelli Chapel with its cycle of St. Matthew paintings. Joachim von Sandrart noticed Caravaggio's use of Dürer's and Holbein's



prints. It was not until Bellori's life of Caravaggio much later in the century that Caravaggio was presented as relying exclusively on painting from the posed model, scorning any model in classical sculpture and past art. Bellori wanted to schematize the development of seventeenth-century arts, with Caravaggio representing one flawed side of its achievement, the return to naturalism after an overemphasis on *maniera* or style. Stereotyping Caravaggio's *dal vivo* realism was a necessary step in the creation of Bellori's notion of the artist's *Idea*, the all-important process of idealization, defined in opposition to depicting *dal naturale*, from life.

Much good work has been done to clarify the false dichotomy of real versus ideal in Northern seventeenth-century art. What the artist and writer Karel van Mander extracted from Netherlandish practice around 1600 did not so much hierarchize as alternate the two ways of working, finding value in both. The more polemical Italian writing asserted a clear hierarchy of imaginative creation over 'mere' imitation of the real. Giovan Pietro Bellori's writings in Rome in the second half of the seventeenth century hardened the position of earlier writers when he summed up this view in his lecture on the 'Idea' or ideal beauty in art, delivered at the Académie Française de Rome in May 1664. The use of the terms *ad vivum*, *naer het leven*, *dal vivo*, *au vif*, *d'après le naturel*, which became so frequent at the turn of the seventeenth century, falls to near silence by the final decades of the century. This could be interpreted as the triumph of classicising idealization in both theory and practice, in a so-called 'academic' doctrine of the arts, even if in the realm of natural history illustration the terminology remains common. We who have come after that watershed have accepted Bellori's account of *seicento* art as the pursuit of ideal beauty too literally. As a result we may have written out of our history of this period the examples of a different attitude and a different set of artistic practices, indeed a different form of address to the viewer.

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