

A Company of Artists Watching a Mountebank Show: studies in seventeenth-century caricature

Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius



Figure 1 Formerly attributed to Francesco Albani, *A Company of Artists Watching a Mountebank Show*. Red chalk drawing, 20.8 x 30.3 cm. Private collection.*

Introduction: a complex historiography

When the self-taught collector and bibliophile Charles Rogers, member of a coterie of connoisseurs which included Charles Townley, Arthur Pond, and of course Horace Walpole, was selecting master drawings from British private collections to be reproduced in his *Collection of Prints in Imitation of Drawings*, he included two striking Italian caricatures.¹ Both of them belonged to him by the time his book was published in 1778. One was a self-portrait by the preeminent eighteenth-century caricaturist Pier Leone Ghezzi, which concluded the section of Roman Old Master drawings in the first volume. The second, a red chalk caricature of a group of artists

* The illustrations to this text may be found by clicking this link: [Illustrations](#).

¹ Charles Rogers, *A Collection of Prints in Imitation of Drawings to which are Annexed Lives of their Authors with Explanatory and Critical Notes*, London: J. Nichols, 1778. Roger's collection of drawings has been decimated by sale after his death, but his enormous collection of prints and books has been preserved in the Cottonian Collection in Plymouth largely intact. See, Antony Griffiths, 'The Rogers Collection in the Cottonian Library, Plymouth', *Print Quarterly* 10:1, 1993, 19-36; Nicholas Turner, 'The Gabburi/ Rogers Series of Drawn Self-Portraits and Portraits of Artists', *Journal of the History of Collections*, 5: 2, 1993, 179-216.

watching a mountebank show which, entitled *Caricatures of Painters*, was placed among the Bolognese school in volume two (fig. 1). Both drawings were reproduced and accompanied by individual entries in the lengthy textual parts of the volumes (figs 2 & 3).² Unexpectedly, Rogers turned the entry on Ghezzi's self-portrait into a comprehensive history of the art of Italian *caricatura*.³ This solid, three-page long investigation into the origins and strategies of caricature was based on Rogers's careful reading of what had been written on the subject in Italy, and it could safely be counted today as the first attempt in English to sum up the state of knowledge on Italian *caricatura*.⁴ It drew from the books by Giovanni Antonio Massani, Pietro Bellori, Giulio Cesare Malvasia and Filippo Baldinucci, that is virtually from all art scholars who had taken part in the debate on caricature, running throughout the second half of the seventeenth century.⁵ Following Baldinucci, Rogers traced the origins of caricature to Florence and Leonardo's grotesque heads, but he devoted also a substantial part to the Carracci in Bologna, followed by a brief paragraph on 'Cavalier Bernino' and Salvator Rosa in Rome, and ending with Pier Leone Ghezzi and the popularity of his work with the Grand Tourists. Rogers also engaged with the task of defining caricature's relationship to Carracci's notion of 'perfect deformity' and to Hogarth's 'character', rounding up his account by reflecting on the presence of the mode of caricature in literature.

Rogers's truly pioneering account of Italian caricature shared the fate of the book which, valued by connoisseurs of Old Master drawings for its reproductions,

² Rogers, *A Collection of Prints*, vol. 1, 171-176 (Ghezzi); vol. 2, 82 (Albani).

³ Ghezzi's self-portrait is showing him in front of the easel while painting an image of the Virgin Mary, but pointing towards a procession of priests, seen through the window, and drawn in caricature-like manner. The print included an elaborate frame and a Latin phrase taken from Horace *Ridentem dicere verum: vetat quid?* (What prevents a person from speaking the truth while laughing?), which must have been added by Charles Rogers, as a motto for his evaluation of caricature. I did not manage to identify the present location of Ghezzi's original drawing.

⁴ Rogers, *A Collection of Prints*, vol. 1, 173-76. Among other theoretical reflections on caricature in the eighteenth century, see short but interesting entry on 'Carricatur' as one of the arts of drawings (*zeichnende Künste*) was given by Johann Georg Sulzer in his *Allgemeine Theorie der Schönen Künste* [1771], Leipzig: Weidemann, 1773, 261-62. See also Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, who despised caricature for its promotion of ugliness in his *Laokoon: oder über die Grenzen der Mahlerey und Poesie. Mit beyläufigen Erläuterungen verschiedener Punkte der alten Kunstgeschichte*, Berlin: Christina Friedrich Voss, 1766, 11-12.

⁵ Giovanni Atanasio Mossini [Giovanni Antonio Massani], *Diverse figure al numero ottanta, diseguate di penna nell'hore di ricreatione da Annibale Carracci*, Rome, 1646; Cesare Carlo Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice: Vite de' pittori bolognesi*, Bologna 1678; English translation of the Carracci biography in Malvasia, in Anne Summerscale, ed., *Malvasia's Life of the Carracci: Commentary and Translation*, University Park, Penn, 2000; Filippo Baldinucci, *Vocabolario toscano dell'arte del disegno*, Florence, 1681. An avid collector of books, Rogers assembled the major primary sources in his own library, and was able to quote from them directly. On the historiography of caricature, see Sandra Cheng, *'Il bello dal deforme': Caricature and Comic Drawings in Seventeenth-Century Italy*, PhD Dissertation, University of Delaware, 2008, 39-108.

has hardly received attention as regards its textual contents.⁶ Subsequent histories of caricature, which multiplied in Europe throughout the nineteenth-century, broadened its meaning considerably, by aligning caricature with satire, grotesque, humour and popular imagery, as well as projecting it back onto antiquity and the middle ages. They moved far away from the medium-oriented notion of caricature, which had been devised by the Seicento theorists as a critical art form, displacing the search for ideal beauty with a quest for the for the bodily-based deformity.⁷ It was not before the 1930s, when an international group of Warburg Institute scholars launched a new research on caricature's origins and its intricate mechanisms, restoring the role of the Carracci, and redefining the field of its studies. They adopted the method of psychoanalysis and posed new questions, such as Gombrich's inquiry into 'the theoretical difference between likeness and equivalence', and Wittkower's thesis on caricature's potential to undermine 'the classical tradition'.⁸ What all of them shared was the turn to the same primary sources which had earlier been analysed by Charles Rogers.

This article focuses on the second of Rogers's caricatures, portraying a group of artists watching a mountebank show, entitled by him *Caricatures of Painters*, which, as I want to claim, has been closely intertwined with the discourse on caricature across the centuries. An old inscription at its verso 'Various painters caricatured by Fran[cesco] Albano, that is Lanfranchi, Sisto Badalocchio, Gessi, his friend Dottor Albertinelli, Cavedone, Tiarini, and other painters of that time', testified to its origins within the circle of the Carracci students and followers in Bologna, prompting a discourse on Francesco Albani the caricaturist, which has

⁶ For the negative opinion of the book, see Johannes Dobai, *Die Kunstliteratur des Klassizismus und der Romantik in England*, Bern: Benteli Verlag, vol. 2 (1750-1790), 1975, 1289.

⁷ See, for instance, Thomas Wright, *A History of Caricature and the Grotesque in Literature and Art*, London: Virtue Brothers, 1865; several volumes of Champfleury's history of caricature include *Histoire de la caricature antique*, Paris: E. Dentu, 1865; and *Histoire de la caricature moderne*, Paris: E. Dentu, 1865. For the issue of deformity, see Sheila McTighe, 'Perfect Deformity, Ideal Beauty, and the "Imaginaire" of Work: The Reception of Annibale Carracci's "Arti di Bologna" in 1646', *Oxford Art Journal*, 16: 1, 75-91.

⁸ Heinrich Brauer and Rudolf Wittkower, eds, *Die Zeichnungen des Gianlorenzo Bernini*, Berlin: H. Keller, 1931, 144-47, 180-84; W.R. Juynboll, *Het Komische Genre in de Italiaansche Schilderkunst Gedurende de Zeventiende en de Achttiende Eeuw: Bijdrage tot de Geschiedenis van de Caricatuur*, Leyden, 1934; Ernst Kris and H. E. Gombrich, 'The Principles of Caricature', *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, 17, 1938, 319-42; Ernst Gombrich, 'The Experiment of Caricature', in *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* [1956], London: Phaidon, 290; Rudolf Wittkower, *Art and Architecture in Italy 1600 to 1750*, Harmondsworth [1958], 1986, 71. On caricature and the Warburg Institute, see Rachel Dedman, 'The importance of being Ernst: a reassessment of E.H. Gombrich's relationship with psychoanalysis', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 7, December 2012, <https://arthistoriography.wordpress.com/7-dec2012/>; Louis Rose, *Psychology, Art, and Antifascism: Ernst Kris, E.H. Gombrich, and the Politics of Caricature*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016; Sybille Moser-Ernst and Ursula Marinelli, 'The Unfinished Caricature Project by Ernst Kris and Ernst Gombrich - Open Questions and an Attempt at Answering Them', in *Art and the Mind - Ernst H. Gombrich: Mit dem Steckenpferd unterwegs*, eds Sybille Moser-Ernst with Ursula Marinelli, Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2018, 179-204.

developed in Anglophone art history for almost two centuries and a half.⁹ Having passed through the most distinguished collections in Britain,¹⁰ the drawing entered the Warburgian circle when it was acquired by the collector and art historian Paul Oppé, and documented in the Institute's photographic archives (figs 4 and 5),¹¹ as well as discussed by the Dutch scholar Willem Juynboll in the first modern history of Italian caricature, published in 1934.¹² When it resurfaced again, at the Paul Oppé collection sale in 2006, it was renamed *A Company of Artists Watching a Mountebank Show*.¹³

This article aims to introduce the Company of Artists to a critical strand of studies on Italian art and caricature.¹⁴ I want to argue that this drawing, fortified by its inscription, is exceptional in every respect. It raises a set of fundamental issues that range through the field of caricature studies as a whole, concerning production, consumption and historiography, but it also connects further with a range of current debates in the broad multidisciplinary field of Italian early modernity. *A Company of Artists* provides a visual commentary on the centrality of caricature-making in the Carracci studio in Bologna, as well as positioning itself right at the core of the much

⁹ *Varij Ritratti di Pittori Caricati da Franc. Albano; cioè, Lanfranchi, Sisto Badalochio, il Gessi, il Dottor Albertinelli suo amico, il Cavedone, il Tiarini, & altri Pittori di quel Tempo*. For Albani the caricaturist, see Nicholas Turner, 'Some Thoughts on Francesco Albani', in *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Craig Hugh Smyth*, ed. Andrew Morrogh, Fiorella Superbi Gioffredi, Piero Morselli, and Eve Borsook, 2 vols, Florence: Giunti Barbèra, 1985, vol. 1, 495-98, esp. 496.

¹⁰ For a detailed inquiry into the drawing's provenance, attribution, the identification of the figures and dating, see K. Murawska-Muthesius, *Varji pittori caricati da Francesco Albani*, url tbc.

¹¹ The information at the black and white photograph of this caricature at the Warburg Institute's Photographic Collection, probably supplied by Paul Oppé, attributes the transcription to Thomas Lawrence, once the owner of the drawing. On Paul Oppé's collecting, see 'Paul Oppé (1878-1957)', in *Master Drawings from the Oppé Collection*, Christie's, London, 5 December 2006, 7-16. His archive was acquired recently by Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art.

¹² Juynboll, *Het Komische Genre*, 117-18. Juynboll refers to his exchanges with Paul Oppé about this and other caricatures appearing in London auction houses. The information at the black and white photograph of this caricature at the Warburg Institute's Photographic Collection, probably supplied by Paul Oppé, attributes the transcription to Thomas Lawrence, once the owner of the drawing.

¹³ *Master Drawings from the Oppé Collection*, lot 18. My numerous efforts to see the original drawing, hidden in a private collection, failed.

¹⁴ Among the critical studies on Italian caricatures, see Irving Lavin, Irving, 'Bernini and the Art of Social Satire', in Irving Lavin and others, *Drawings by Gianlorenzo Bernini from the Museum des Bildenden Künste in Leipzig, German Democratic Republic*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981, 27-54; Irving Lavin, 'High and Low before Their Time: Bernini and the Art of Social Satire', in *Modern Art and Popular Culture: Readings in High and Low*, eds Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1990, 18-50; McTighe, 'Perfect Deformity'; Giacomo Berra, "'Il ritratto 'caricato in forma strana, e ridicolosa, e con tanta felicità di somiglianza.'" La nascita della caricatura e i suoi sviluppi in Italia fino al Settecento', *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 53: 1, 2009, 73-144; Cheng, *Il bello dal deforme*; Joris van Gastel, Joris, *Il Marmo spirante: Sculpture and Experience in Seventeenth-Century Rome*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag; Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2013, 62-73; Xavier Vert, *L'Adresse du portrait: Bernini et la caricature*. N.p.: éditions 1: 1 (ars), 2014.

discussed topic of the early modern street as a performative space.¹⁵ It demonstrates the ways in which caricature, by redefining the body as the locus of meaning, and by adopting deformation as its *modus operandi*, allows both for a visual re-articulation of artists' collegiality and the codes of their self-representation, which abandon the usual preoccupation with social status, emphasizing performativity as the principle shared by both painters and street performers.¹⁶

Importantly, *A Company of Artists* is closely tied to various stages of the historiographical reflection on caricature. Not only does it appear to be drawn in response to what had been written about caricature by the first historian of Bolognese art, Carlo Cesare Malvasia, but its inclusion into a connoisseur publication of drawings in eighteenth-century Britain coincides with the beginning of Anglophone historiography of caricature. Moreover, its acquisition in the 1930s by the member of the Warburg Institute circle of scholars comes at the time of the reinvigorated interest in Italian caricature. Given the drawing's multifarious relationship to art writings and art writers across the centuries, I am approaching the *Company of Artists* as a unique art-historiographical source, reading it alongside both the early modern and more recent discourses on caricature.

Usate tanto nella sucola de' Carracci: Malvasia on caricature

A group of mountebanks, itinerant pedlars who perform on overturned benches in city piazzas to sell their remedies, address a group of spectators. A close-up of the event, sketched briskly in red chalk, records a trestle stage with a plain curtain at the back, a guitar player on a large chair, a vendor showing a small item to the audience, and a third performer behind them. However, instead of presenting the audience as a generic anonymous crowd (fig. 7),¹⁷ the drawing pays an unusual attention to a group of men in the foreground, observed from a close distance. The relaxed ways in which they stand, not assuming classical poses, exude a sense of companionship, which is reinforced by the use of caricature to individualize their bodies. Their large bellies, skinny legs, long noses and puffy faces reveal the familiarity with the portrayed. They must have stopped to watch the show while taking a stroll through the city. What unites the figures is the performance, but they appear only nominally interested in the show. They turn away from the spectacle, looking sideways, as if something else has caught their attention. What draws them away from the show? Nothing characterizes those figures as artists, and so it comes as a surprise that the inscription at the back of the drawing identifies the image as a group caricature of the Emilian painters, listed by their names, made by Albani.

¹⁵ Nicholas Terpstra, 'Creations and Re-creations: Contexts for the Experience of the Renaissance Street', *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, 16: 1/2, 2013, 221-29.

¹⁶ For mountebanks, see, among others, M.A. Katritzky, 'Marketing Medicine: the Image of the Early Modern Mountebank', *Renaissance Studies*, 15: 2, 2001, 121-53.

¹⁷ Katritzky, 'Marketing Medicine'; M.A. Katritzky, *Women, Medicine and Theatre, 1550-1750: Literary Mountebanks and Performing Quacks*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007; David Gentilcore, *Medical Charlatanism in Early Modern Italy*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

The medium is the message here. For this seemingly diverse group of painters, coming from Bologna and Parma, some active locally, others working for major commissions in Rome and Naples, caricature was their shared heritage, a staple diet of their years of training under the Carracci, either as apprentices, or as students of the Accademia degli Incamminati which, as testified by the first chronicler of the Bolognese school Carlo Cesare Malvasia, was established by Ludovico Carracci in 1582, and run jointly-with his younger cousins Agostino and Annibale.¹⁸ It was an unconventional art school, reputed for its emphasis on drawing from the live model rather than casts, for its jovial atmosphere, but also for using caricature as a teaching tool.¹⁹ Thus, while opposed to the normative discipline of the art academy, caricature originated within precisely that milieu.²⁰ Giacomo Cavedone, possibly Sisto Badalocchio, as well as the presumed author of the caricature, Francesco Albani, all attended the Carracci Academy in the early 1590s. Giovanni Lanfranco and Badalocchio studied first with Agostino in Parma until the latter's death in 1602, and moved on to work and study with Annibale in Rome. Both Cavedone and Alessandro Tiarini, continued their education under Ludovico, becoming his principal assistants, and subsequently the Academy's leaders themselves. Francesco Gessi is the odd one out here, connected to the company only indirectly, through his teacher Guido Reni, who was also a student of the Incamminati.²¹ Some of the represented artists, like Lanfranco and Tiarini, might have reverted to caricature in their later activities,²² but those sketches were not valued at the time, likely to be thrown out, or used to wipe a frying pan clean, as noted by Malvasia.²³

Malvasia's comments on the role of caricature in the fun-packed teaching regime at the Carracci studio help to illuminate several aspects of *A Company of Artists*, referring also directly to artists represented in this sketch. Although not the first among the Italian art scholars writing about caricature, Malvasia was the first to associate it with the Bolognese heritage. The paradoxes of this novel art form were noted by virtually all major Seicento art authors, from the Roman doctor Giulio Mancini and Giovanni Antonio Massani (who wrote under the pseudonym Giovanni Atanasio Mossini), to the defender of the classical ideal Giovan Piero Bellori and to the Florentine Filippo Baldinucci. All of them devoted at least a few paragraphs to caricature in their diverse types of art-writings, which, considering the ephemerality of the medium, constitute today the major sources for

¹⁸ Malvasia, *Life of the Carracci*, 121, 123.

¹⁹ See, among others, Gail Feigenbaum, 'Practice in the Carracci Academy', *Studies in the History of Art*, 38, 1993, 58-76; Cheng, *Il bello dal deforme*, 28-29.

²⁰ Wittkower, *Art and Architecture in Italy*, 71.

²¹ For general information on the represented painters, see *The Age of Correggio and the Carracci: Emilian Painting of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

²² Lanfranco's *Sheet of Studies*, in the Louvre, was discussed by Kristel Smentek, 'The Collector's Cut: Why Pierre-Jean Mariette Tore up His Drawings and Put Them Back Together Again', *Master Drawings*, 46: 1, 2008, 52, Figs 15 and 16. For Tiarini, see Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, 2:211.

²³ Malvasia, *Life of the Carracci*, 265; Feigenbaum, 'From the Frying Pan to the History of Art', 222.

understanding both the precepts and the reception of *caricatura* by the Seicento art world.²⁴ The central issue discussed was the principle of bodily deformation and its aesthetic, cognitive and ethical repercussions: caricature's outright elevation of deformity; its puzzling ability to procure likeness by distorting bodily features, a likeness superior to a conventional portrait, as well as caricature's community building potential.

If the major objective of Malvasia's *Felsina Pittrice* was to recuperate the Bolognese school, and especially the Carracci contribution to Italian art, hijacked by Roman scholarship, his remarks on caricature are also clearly underscored by the same strategy.²⁵ Malvasia borrowed from Massani and Bellori, but he expanded the scholarship in his own way, by interviewing the former disciples of the Accademia and collaborators of the Carracci. He thus situated the origins of caricature firmly in Bologna.²⁶ His major source was Massani's preface to the luxurious edition of prints after Annibale's figures of tradesmen and labourers, published as *Diverse Figure* in 1646, which included the earliest and the most daring conceptualisation of caricature.²⁷ Most likely conceived by Annibale himself, it stood the classical *Idea* on its head by defining caricature as motivated by the search for *perfetta deformità*, in a provocative analogy to the quest for ideal beauty.²⁸ Historian by temperament rather than theoretician, Malvasia might have flattened the theoretical sharpness of Massani's arguments, but he carefully acknowledged his authorship.²⁹ This was not the case, however, with his obvious borrowings from Bellori.³⁰

Malvasia's own approach to caricature is reflected in his entry devoted to it in a very detailed index to *Felsina Pittrice*, which fills over eighty pages of the second volume.³¹ The heading *caricature*, in the plural, contains several subcategories,

²⁴ Mossini [Massani], *Diverse figure*, 15-16; Bellori, *The Lives of Modern Painters, Sculptors and Architects: A New Translation and Critical Edition* [1672], trans. by Alice Sedgwick-Wohl, notes by Hellmut Wohl, introduction by Tomaso Montanari, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 97; Baldinucci, *Vocabolario*, 29; Filippo Baldinucci, *The Life of Bernini* [1682], trans. Catherine Enggass, University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1966; 74; Filippo Baldinucci, *Lezione di Filippo Baldinucci nell' Accademia della Crusca*, Florence: Pier Matini all'Insegna del Leone, 1692, 17; Filippo Baldinucci, *Notizie de' professori del disegno da Cimabue in qua* [1681-1728], 6 vols, Milan: Società Tipografica de' Classici Italiani, 1811, vol. 5, 32.

²⁵ Giovanna Perini, 'Carlo Cesare Malvasia's Florentine letters: Insight into Conflicting Trends in Seventeenth-Century Italian Art Historiography', *The Art Bulletin*, 70: 2, 1988, 273-299; Anne Summerscale, 'Part One. Context', in Malvasia, *Life of the Carracci*, 2-76; Elizabeth Cropper, 'Malvasia's anti-Vasarian History of Art: A Tradition, Not a Rebirth', in *Gifts in Return: Essays in Honour of Charles Dempsey*, ed. Melinda Schlitt, Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, Victoria University in Toronto 2012, 415-43.

²⁶ On Malvasia's interviews, see Summerscale, 'Part One', 17-21. The Bolognese pedigree of caricature was questioned by Baldinucci, who claimed its Florentine origins, tracing it back to Leonardo: Baldinucci, *Lezione*, 17.

²⁷ Mossini [Massani], *Diverse figure*; McTighe, 'Perfect Deformity'.

²⁸ Mossini [Massani], *Diverse figure*, 15-16.

²⁹ Malvasia, *Life of the Carracci*, 121-24.

³⁰ Bellori devoted to caricatures by Annibale a page of his biography: Bellori, *The Lives*, 97. On the rivalry between Bellori and Malvasia, see Summerscale, 'Part One', 23, 26-27.

³¹ Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, 2, 523-606; the entry on 'caricature', 534.

revealing the hierarchy of the issues discussed. The top item acknowledges the aforementioned Massani's *discorso erudito*, and is followed by Malvasia's own emphasis on caricature being the test of skills (*ben fatte, segno di grande inclinazione alla Pittura*) and a portent of a great career, such as that of Annibale himself, or that of Pietro Faccini, whose talent had been recognized by the former on the basis of his caricatures, and who died early, before Annibale. The following categories relate to the conventions of caricature-making, i.e. the reduction of human features to animals and to inanimate objects, as well as to the widespread use of caricature in the Carracci's school (*usate tanto nella Scuola de' Carracci*). A separate category stresses the ephemerality of caricature, the habit of throwing the caricature sketches away (*per la maggior parte lacre, e guaste*). The index ends, optimistically, by naming Lelio Orsini as the collector of caricatures, and with references to all the caricature drawings described in *Felsina*.³²

The paragraphs related to caricature are divided between two major parts of the book: featuring first within the triple biography of the Carracci which discusses the establishment of the Academy, and later in a long description of the *costumi* of the Carracci.³³ Explaining the origins of caricature in the Accademia, Malvasia presented them as a reaction against the intensive study of theoretical questions taught by Agostino, while associating caricature-making with leisure-time, often outside the studio.³⁴ The following passage reads almost like the narrative underscoring the event depicted in the *Company of Artists*: 'And when because of weariness or the late hour, they finally left off working and took a stroll through the city, or went outside the city gate for some fresh air, their favourite and fruitful pastime was to take note of especially unusual sites, or delightful landscapes, or chance encounters with people, making caricatures of the defects they observed in them'.³⁵ Another passage, from the *costumi* section of the life of the Carracci, likewise brings attention to the regime of compulsive sketching: 'Whether they were eating, drinking, resting, or going about, every operation, every motion, every act, every gesture would compel them to take a charcoal-holder in hand to record the experience'.³⁶ The informality of caricature made it particularly suitable for that task.

A remarkable drawing of *Picture Sellers* by the Bolognese Pietro Faccini from the Praun collection in Budapest, which shows a group of young men standing in a street, in front of a wall tightly covered with what looks like unframed drawings and prints, makes, as I would like to contend, an intriguing record of artists' outdoor activities (its image available at <<https://www.mfab.hu/artworks/picture-sellers/>>).³⁷

³² The note on Orsini Malvasia borrowed from Bellori, *The Lives*, 97. Under 'caricatures described', Malvasia listed the names of Tiarini and, surprisingly, of the mural painter Pietro Pancotto. On Pietro Pancotto, see Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, vol. 1, 575.

³³ Summerscale, 'Part One', 49.

³⁴ Malvasia, *Life of the Carracci*, 120, also 270. On the use of caricature as a pedagogical tool, see Cheng, *Il bello dal deforme*, 39-108.

³⁵ Malvasia, *Life of the Carracci*, 120-21.

³⁶ Malvasia, *Life of the Carracci*, 266.

³⁷ Andrea Czére, *17th Century Italian Drawings in the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts: A Complete Catalogue*, Budapest: Szépművészeti Múzeum, 2004, cat. 137. On Faccini, see Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, vol.1, 562-69. On Faccini's caricatures: Emilio Negro and Nicoletta Roio, *Pietro Faccini 1575/76-1602*, Modena: Artioli, 1997, 48, 53; Per Bjurström, *Drawings from the Age of the*

The contents of the works on display, marked by a few strokes of the pen, are hardly visible, but the recurring combination of small circles supported by the body-like wavy vertical lines suggests a profusion of figurative scenes. Some of the works resemble caricatures, especially a large profile of a face in the upper row. The three male figures, standing with their backs to the wall look as if they were trying their luck in selling their own works, and this might be the reason why they are hiding their faces under large hats and mantles, tightly wrapped round their bodies.³⁸ In early modern Italy, picture-selling was one of the options for the urban poor, the low-class street vendors, as testified by a representation of a humble seller of religious images, *Vende quadri*, included in Annibale's series of traders and artisans.³⁹ Faccini's caricature sketch, as if in response to Annibale's image, seems to present the artists themselves selling their own works, displayed on a wall. Instead of boasting connections with mighty patrons, or stressing any intellectual credentials, or, at least depicting the act of art-making, it brings attention to the unspoken aspects of the profession, the necessity to sell. The image of the empty street, and the embarrassed poses of the artists waiting for potential buyers might be considered therefore as an unprecedented visual record of the economics of art production and art marketing in Bologna c. 1600, yet another challenge to the conventions of artists' self-representation coming from the Carracci entourage. The caricature act was performative, but it was also tied to self-reflection, and was liable to represent the unrepresented, to evoke, as argued by Gombrich, 'something complex (...) by means of just a few lines', providing an unexpected commentary on the economic conditions of art and the art world.⁴⁰

As mentioned above, Faccini was the one who had been invited by Annibale to join his Academy, just on the strength of his caricatures. Malvasia reports that Faccini popped in accidentally to the Carracci studio, and when faced with merciless caricatures of him drawn by students, 'he gave a lick to a charcoal, and [even if working] with his untrained hand, he appeared to know how to aggravate their profiles with suitable deformities, which stunned and confounded all'.⁴¹ The anecdote of recognising Faccini's talent through his amateur caricature sketches is built of course on one of the classical topoi, used by Vasari and others, which stress the innate talent with which great artists are born.⁴² What is remarkable here is the employment of caricature as the test of greatness. Malvasia returns many times to

Carracci: Seventeenth Century Bolognese Drawings from the Nationalmuseum, Stockholm, Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 2002, cat. 55.

³⁸ Zsuzsa Gonda identified the figures as picture dealers, Zsuzsa Gonda *Kép a Képben: Művész és közönség öt évszázad grafikusművészetében Burgkmairtól Picasséig/ Pictures within Pictures: The Artist and the Public Over Five Centuries of Graphic Art from Burgkmair to Picasso*, Budapest: Szépművészeti Múzeum, 2005, 145.

³⁹ Mossini [Massani], *Diverse figure*, no 19.

⁴⁰ Malvasia, *Life of the Carracci*, 269. Compare with Gombrich's concept of 'condensation, the telescoping of a whole chain of ideas into one pregnant image': Ernst H. Gombrich, 'The Cartoonist's Armoury', in *Meditations on a Hobby Horse and Other Essays on the Theory of Art*, London: Phaidon, 130.

⁴¹ Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, vol. 1, 564.

⁴² Ernst Kris and Otto Kurz, *Legend, Myth and Magic in the Image of the Artist: A Historical Experiment* [1934], New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979, 26-38.

this issue in his account, stressing caricature's usefulness in giving 'very clear evidence a draftsman's judgement and ability'.⁴³ Or, in many more words, in the later part of the book: 'It became such a widespread practice to draw caricatures that whether done in fun or in spite, even those who had never learned the rudiments of drawing sometimes felt an urge to try their hand at some, and it would happen that if a ready disposition could be detected even in these innocent marks, a person would then be encouraged to devote himself to the art of painting, and was supported and advanced, so that he became a master, as was the case with Camullo and with Lionello Spada, as I have heard Cavedone say many times'.⁴⁴

The Faccini story is also one of the instances recorded in *Felsina Pittrice* where caricature was used as a weapon against irony, or when the people caricatured felt offended by the deformation of their bodies. Malvasia, however, went into great lengths to emphasize caricature's affinity with friendship rather than malice. While admitting that Annibale 'would spare no one, sometimes making tacit jabs at the people he loved most', such as Ludovico's plump body, he would instantly rush to explain that 'his good nature' would 'excuse it as a thoughtless childish prank rather than a malicious act of insolence'.⁴⁵ The ambiguity of caricature which could equally be 'done in fun or in spite'⁴⁶ and which straddles both positive and negative emotions, would come also to the fore in the *Company of Artists*.

As Bellori before him, Malvasia also associates caricature with the jovial atmosphere which dominated the classes in the Carracci workshop. He begins a long list of all kinds of *allegrie, facezie e burle* performed by all the Carracci,⁴⁷ from the account of the 'line puzzles, or pictorial guessing games, of which they drew so many'. Not only does he describe in detail the ways in which 'just a few lines or marks' stood for a bricklayer, a knight, or a blind man behind the wall and a Capuchin monk who takes a rest on a pulpit, but he also includes an image of it.⁴⁸ In the same paragraph Malvasia feels obliged to comment on the scarcity of those delightful caricatures, which are 'scattered far and wide in large numbers', and are rarely preserved, 'crumpled and torn out by the Carracci themselves, or by the very persons they had caricatured'.⁴⁹

As argued by Summerscale, Malvasia did not shun from the occasional use of the Bolognese dialect, he deliberately printed his *Felsina Pittrice* on cheap paper, and he used a cheap technique of simple woodcuts for inserting portraits.⁵⁰ He claimed that he wanted to make his volumes affordable to artists, contesting in this way the elitism of Bellori's *Vite*, which was published as a luxurious album on

⁴³ Malvasia, *Life of the Carracci*, 121-22.

⁴⁴ Malvasia, *Life of the Carracci*, 270.

⁴⁵ Malvasia, *Life of the Carracci*, 121.

⁴⁶ Malvasia, *Life of the Carracci*, 270.

⁴⁷ Malvasia, *Life of the Carracci*, 266-90. *Facezie, burle, partite* are listed as a separate concept in Malvasia's index: Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, vol. 2, 534, 548.

⁴⁸ The four geometrical sketches reproduced in the same paragraph look like Malvasia's copy of an original drawing which survived from the Incamminati time, and might have entered his own collection: Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, vol. 1, 468.

⁴⁹ Malvasia, *Life of the Carracci*, 269, also 265 and 267. See also Feigenbaum, 'From the Frying Pan to the History of Art'.

⁵⁰ Summerscale, 'Part One', 3, 25 and further.

expensive paper, lavishly illustrated with elaborate engravings and vignettes, to address the top echelons of the virtuosi. Thus, one of the first books which recognizes caricature as a legitimate mode of artistic production is also 'designed' in the rough poetics of caricature, challenging the canon, deliberately uncouth, and explicitly polemical. Such an anti-classical drive constitutes precisely the idiom of the *Company of Artists*, applied to both form and contents.

The company of artists

Given the absence of any other collective portrayal of the disciples of the Carracci Academy, *A Company of Artists* is unique in assembling such a group, and it provides an unrivalled visual evidence of their social links. There are no props, and all the figures are defined solely through the features and defects of their bodies. Their middle-aged appearance, enlarged bellies, bold patches and saggy faces suggest an encounter at the time when their own careers had already been established, and the cursory lines of caricature contribute to the sense of immediacy. But is this drawing a contemporary record of such an encounter of the former *Incaminati*, a snapshot taken by one of the artists during their outing to watch street performers, or, is it an invention, a bric-a-brac made by someone else, a witty homage to the Carracci heritage?

The first name listed in the inscription is that of Giovanni Lanfranco. The first figure from the left, with a hat tucked under his arm, a protruding nose, bald patch, furrowed forehead and a long side lock, is indeed very close to the artist's *Self-portrait* in Giovan Pietro Bellori's *Vite* (1672).⁵¹ This affinity makes the artist instantly recognisable, raising a suspicion that the caricature followed the print. The caricaturist, however, goes further, representing Lanfranco in full length, exposing his large belly, in agreement with Bellori's description of the artist's physique: 'he was short of stature, but of ample body'.⁵² The prominence of Lanfranco's body in the composition accords also with his reputation as one of the most successful students of both Agostino and Annibale, subsequently employed on major commissions in Parma, Rome and Naples. The persuasiveness of this figure validates the inscription on the verso, giving credit both to the names and to the order of figures, listed from left to right.

Accordingly, the second figure, of a slim man with a long nose standing next to Lanfranco, should be Sisto Badalochio. The gesture of his left hand wrapped in his cloak, which mirrors that of Lanfranco's, indicate a closeness between the two men. Both of them were born in Parma, studying there under Agostino and, after the latter's death, both moved to Rome and worked under Annibale's tutelage, where they continued to collaborate. The preface to their series of prints after Raphael's

⁵¹ Bellori, *Le vite*, 366. The print is based on *Portrait of Giovanni Lanfranco as a Knight of the Order of Christ*, dated to c. 1629 (Columbus Museum of Art).

⁵² 'Fù egli di statura bassa, ma pieno di corpo, calva lá fronte, neri, e piani i capelli, e di aspetto e costumi facili, & accorti': Bellori, *Le vite*, 380; Bellori, *The Lives*, 288. On Lanfranco, see Erich Schleier, ed. *Giovanni Lanfranco: un pittore barocco tra Parma, Roma e Napoli*, Milan: Electa, 2001.

Vatican Loggie (1607) declared the artists' debt to Annibale as the teacher and a 'living example of kindness'.⁵³

The third person from the left, a chubby character in the centre who is looking out of the image, with a large head and a dwarf body, must be Francesco Gessi. Born to a rich family in Bologna, Guido Reni's student and his troublesome collaborator,⁵⁴ Gessi was active there for most of his life. His relationship with the Carracci was not direct, but mediated by the eminent Carracci disciple Guido Reni. He is an outsider here, as if he just happened to join the group. Malvasia reported that Gessi was well-known for his restlessness, impatience, and the ability to get into trouble, especially when claiming the authorship of Guido's paintings.⁵⁵ Baldinucci described him as 'impulsive in his conversations and stubbornly attached to his opinions, and so he was often the subject of jokes among his colleagues and friends'.⁵⁶ If Malvasia left the frame for his portrait empty, Gessi's black chalk *Self-Portrait* in a fur hat from Nicola Pio's collection, today in the Kupferstichkabinett in Berlin, appears to be a likeness of the very same person, with wide nostrils and arched eyebrows, even if deprived of puffy cheeks.⁵⁷ The explicit dwarfing of Gessi's body turns him, accordingly, into the butt of a joke. Significantly, the artist's plump body and square face are 'shared' by the mountebank who presents a small item to the crowd. He could probably be identified as Gessi's friend, *Dottor Albertinelli*, who is listed in the inscription most likely under his stage name, rather than as a medic. The bodily affinity is symptomatic and I will return to this issue below. An unidentifiable figure next to Gessi, seen from the back while reaching to the stage, must have fallen for the mountebank's persuasion, and is probably buying a remedy.

Next to the bespectacled bulky character opposite to Gessi, who might be one of the 'other painters of that time', stands a man with long curly hair, pressing a

⁵³ '(...) vivo esempio della (...) bontà', in *Historia del Testamento Vecchio, dipinta in Roma nel Vaticano da Raffaello di Urbino, et intagliata in rame da Sisto Badalocchi et Giovanni Lanfranchi Parmigiani al Sig. Annibale Carracci*. Rome: Giovanni Orlandi, 1607, 2; Bellori, *The Lives*, 107-08. For potential portraits of Badalocchio, see Wittkower, *The Drawings of the Carracci*, 117-18, no. 131, Pl. 31, and Anthony Clark, 'The Portraits of Artists Drawn for Nicola Pio', *Master Drawings* 5:1, 1967, 14

⁵⁴ On Gessi, see Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, vol. 2, 345-52; its English translation 'Lives of Francesco Gessi and Giovan Giacomo Sementi, and of Giovan Battista Ruggeri, Ercole de Maria and other students of Gessi', in Carlo Cesare Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice: Lives of the Bolognese Painters. A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation*, vol. 13: *Lives of Domenichino and Francesco Gessi*, critical edition by Lorenzo Pericolo; translation by Anne Summerscale; with an essay by Elizabeth Cropper; historical notes by Anne Summerscale et al., London: Harvey Miller Publishers, an imprint of Brepols Publishers, 2013, 122-36, 210-20.

⁵⁵ Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, vol. 2, 346, 351; Malvasia, 'Lives of Francesco Gessi and Giovan Giacomo Sementi', 125, 135.

⁵⁶ 'Fu Francesco Gessi altiero di natura, ne' suoi discorsi impetuoso ed al proprio parere si tenacemente attaccato, che ne divenne bene spesso soggetto di burla appreso i suoi coetanei, ed amici [...]': Baldinucci, *Notizie*, vol. 5, 330-31.

⁵⁷ See Clark, 'The Portraits of Artists Drawn for Nicola Pio', no. 18. An unpublished drawing of *Dotore Gesi* by Giuseppe Maria Mitelli in the Archiginnasio in Bologna, Cartella Gozzadini I/IV, e.102, seems close, but it represents a young man, while Mitelli was fifteen when Gessi died aged sixty.

hat to his chest. He is the only one among the identified artists who pays attention to the performance. His sketchy profile, outlined in just a few bold lines, his eyes raised towards the mountebank with a guitar, suggest absorption in the music coming from the stage. According to the inscription, it should be Giacomo Cavedone, of humble background, who in 1591 earned a scholarship from his hometown Sassuolo near Bologna to study in the Accademia degli Incamminati, to be appointed as the Academy's *caposindaco* after Ludovico's death in 1619.⁵⁸ Malvasia reports that Cavedone gave him drawing lessons, claiming also the authorship of his portrait in *Felsina Pittrice* with an intense stare.⁵⁹ By contrast, the absent-minded expression and his disappearance in the crowd in the *Company of Artists* conveys a sense of alienation from the group, 'a pious resignation', perhaps due to his many misfortunes, such as his fall from scaffolding and the death of his wife and children in the plague of 1630, as reported by Malvasia.⁶⁰

In a marked contrast, the self-assured character on the far right, with a high forehead and a particularly long nose,⁶¹ represented in a *gagliardo*-type of pose, his right arm on his hip, his left hand on the head of his rapier, fits Malvasia's characterisation of Alessandro Tiarini. Born in Bologna, but not accepted initially by the Carracci Academy, he went to study in Florence. Returning to Bologna at the request of Ludovico around 1606/07, he became one of the city's most eminent painters, *sindaco* of the painter's guild and professor at the Ghisilieri Accademia del Disegno.⁶² Malvasia, who often relied on Tiarini's memories, described him repeatedly in laudatory terms, as well-educated, dressed in silks, and in demand by the most powerful patrons. When evoking Tiarini's 'great authority, skinny body, melancholic temperament, and serious looks', Malvasia claimed that these features are visible on the woodcut in *Felsina Pittrice*, for which he himself supplied a

⁵⁸ Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, vol. 2, 215-20; Emilio Negro and Nicoletta Roio, *Giacomo Cavedone 1577-1660*, Appendice documentaria Carlo Giovannini, Modena: Artioli, 1996.

⁵⁹ Summerscale, 'Part One', 5, note 10. The published woodcut bears however an obvious affinity to Cavedone's *Self-Portrait* in the Uffizi, dated to post 1630, see Negro and Roio, *Giacomo Cavedone*, 152-53, no. 107.

⁶⁰ Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, vol. 2, 215-20. On Cavedone's low social status, see Raffaella Morselli, 'Bologna', in *Painting for Profit: The Economic Lives of Seventeenth-Century Italian Painters*, eds Richard E. Spear and Philip Sohm, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010, 154-55. See also Laura M. Giles, 'Giacomo Cavedone', in *The Age of Correggio and the Carracci: Emilian Painting of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 408. For a very different evaluation of Cavedone's character, see Giovanna Perini-Folesani, 'Caravaggio non era il solo: profile criminali di artisti bolognesi di antico regime', in *Les enfants de Caïn: la représentation du criminel en France et en Italie, de la Renaissance au début du XXe siècle*, ed. Amélie Bernazzani, Turnhout: Brepols, 2016, 159-82. I would like to thank Giovanna Perini-Folesani for sending me this article before its publication.

⁶¹ In Rogers's words, with 'eyes (...) at an enormous distance from his mouth', in Rogers, *A Collection of Prints*, 82.

⁶² Daniele Benati and Barbara Ghelfi, *Alessandro Tiarini: L'opera pittorica completa e i disegni*. 2 vols, Milan: Federico Motta, 2001; Daniele Benati and Angelo Mazza, *Alessandro Tiarini: La grande stagione della pittura del '600 a Reggio*, Milan: Federico Motta, 2002; Morselli, 'Bologna', 156-57.

drawing based on Tiarini's *Self-portrait* in the Uffizi.⁶³ Tiarini's skinniness and his self-awareness define him even more convincingly in *A Company of Artists*.

The caricature act: record or invention?

There is one more person who belongs to this company. It is the maker of the drawing who brings the artists together by the very act of caricaturing them. His presence seems to be reflected in the staring eyes of the surrounding crowd. Gessi, who turns his head towards the viewer, must be looking directly at him. Two other faces in the crowd, who are popping up from behind the shoulders of Lanfranco and Badalocchio, and marked with just a few faint touches of chalk, also turn in the same direction. They are barely visible, but the angle of their stretched heads, large spectacles, puzzling smiles and raised eyebrows connote the curiosity of spectators. Foregoing the pleasures of the mountebank show, the bystanders obviously turned their attention to something as captivating as the charlatans' wit and eloquence, which must have been a rival performance given by the caricaturist, who acts as both the company-maker and the performer at the same time.

This exchange of the gazes not only draws the caricaturist into the picture, but it also asserts his agency. If the mountebank show would just draw the passers-by into the circle, the caricaturist is capable of drawing them in both senses of the term: by pulling them in as well as by representing them. It is the very act of drawing which draws the crowd, attracting the spectators, and stealing attention away from the performing quacks. Its pulling force is enhanced significantly by the bag of tricks available for the draftsman as the caricaturist, who enlarges the large bellies, shortens the short legs, or elongates the long noses, making each person instantly recognisable, more animated, and lively. The 'caricature act', as the *Company of Artists* asserts in visual terms, is irresistible and could easily compete with the mountebank performance. As provocatively explained by Annibale Carracci, and duly reported both by Massani and Malvasia, 'the viewer gets great pleasure both from the quality [of the bodily defects] that prompts his laughter and from the imitation, which is extremely enjoyable itself'.⁶⁴ The entertainment potential of caricature derives precisely from the principle of the exaggeration of bodily deformities 'without sacrificing resemblance'. When 'effectively employed', caricature 'gives delight to others' and arouses 'laughter in the viewer'.⁶⁵ By representing the painters as the viewers of a mountebank show, the caricaturist points to performativity as a strategy shared by both artists and mountebanks.

The deformed bodies, however, are not just the topic of the caricaturist's performance here, but they also testify to the links of friendship, the sense of

⁶³ 'Fu Alessandro di statura grande, di corporatura asciutto, di temperamento malinconico, di aspetto grave, quale appunto da a vedersi nel suo ritratto cavato dall'originale fatto da se stesso, che fra tanti altri possiede il Serenissimo Sig. Principe Cardinal Leopoldo, che benignamente me n'ha mandato il disegno': Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, vol. 2, 203. For the Uffizi *Self-Portrait* of Tiarini, see Benati and Mazza, *Tiarini*, 233, no. 108.

⁶⁴ Mossini [Massani], *Diverse figure*, 15-16; Malvasia, *Life of the Carracci*, 122-124.

⁶⁵ Mossini [Massani], *Diverse figure*, 15; Malvasia, *Life of the Carracci*, 123.

collegiality between the artists. By pointing to their bodily imperfections, the large bellies, skinny legs and long noses, caricature indicates familiarity and intimacy with each other's physique, as well as to a licence to poke fun at them. Thus, the act of deforming rather than idealising their bodies confirms the painters' companionship, and attests to their friendship rather than to animosity. The gesture of Gessi, who is turning his spade towards the caricaturist, might indicate that there was a limit to the liberties taken, or, inversely, it could also be read as a habitual and perfunctory gesture of a 'vengeful' response to such an insult among the company of friends. Pushing it further, one might risk a thesis that, at the time when the classical conceptualisations of friendship, inherited from Aristotle and Cicero were being redefined by new ethics systems of early modernity, such as those ruling the 'overcrowded piazza', caricature, as much as theatre and popular poetry played a role in redefining the rituals of friendship, replacing affirmation with critique, adulation with banter, approving smile with laughter, and the concept of the 'perfect friend' with that of the companion.⁶⁶

Who was the caricaturist then? Although the question of attribution is not the principal objective of this text, it connects with the historiographical record of the *Company of Artists*. The very inclusion of the drawing as Albani into Rogers's *Collection of Prints*, invested the inscription with an authority of a primary source, providing both the visual and textual evidence of the painter's activity as a caricaturist. If its inscription has proven accurate in identifying the artists, would that also refer to its naming of the classicist Francesco Albani as the author, who caricatured his colleagues enjoying mountebank the show?

Bolognese by birth, Albani studied at the Incamminati from 1595, moving to Rome in 1601 as Annibale's assistant, and specialized in idyllic landscapes and cabinet mythologies with his signature *amoretti*.⁶⁷ After the return to his native city in 1617, he turned into a major persona within the Bolognese art community. Having shared his early Roman years with Lanfranco and Badalocchio, and his mature career in Bologna with Cavedone and Tiarini, as well as acting as Gessi's protector at the beginning of his apprenticeship with Reni, Albani would have been well-positioned to comment on all of the caricatured artists. Malvasia, who used him as one of his major informers, stressed Albani's affability, but also his '*mala lingua*', the habit of inventing cheeky nicknames for his fellow artists, so close to the strategies of the caricature maker.⁶⁸ This would have provided the strongest argument for Albani's authorship, to confirm the claim made by the inscription. He was indeed exposed both to the fun of caricature-making in the Carracci studio, as well as capable of converting visual caricatures into words. Furthermore, Catherine

⁶⁶ Carolyn James and Bill Kent, 'Renaissance Friendships: Traditional Truths, New and Dissenting Voices', in *Friendship: A History*, ed. Barbara Caine, London, Oakville: Equinox, 2009, 152-54; Daniel T. Lochman, Maritere López, Lorna Hutson, eds, *Discourses and Representations of Friendship in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1700*, Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2011. The issue of banter as an expression of friendship in early modern Italy deserves a separate study, which transgresses the limits of this text, but it relates to the rough poetics of mountebanks' performance.

⁶⁷ Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, vol 2, 223-94.

⁶⁸ Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, vol. 2, 265. Juynboll, *Het Komische Genre*, 117.

Puglisi argued that even if Albani's conception of painting was too lofty to attempt low genre subjects, caricature drawings, by belonging to a different mode, would not necessarily compromise the dignity of high art.⁶⁹ From the early twentieth century, the *Company of Artists*, even if known only from Ryland's print, has served as a reference for ascribing to Albani a diverse group caricatures representing singers or musicians. By the 1980s, a profile of Albani the caricaturist seemed firmly established.⁷⁰

However, given Albani's reputation as a staunch defender of the classical canon, and his harsh critique of the Bamboccianti for their choice of low-class topics, which often included the mountebanks, the inscription is more than puzzling. Neither the tiny and contested portfolio of Albani's drawings, nor a total silence on his activity as the caricaturist in Italian historiography, could help to substantiate this attribution.⁷¹ Is it an error made by a collector, who identified the caricatured, but was wrong about the caricaturist? Or, could it be a joke, a *burla*, made by the author of the drawing? I will return to this issue in the last part of this text.

Painters and mountebanks

In his catalogue entry on the *Company of Artists*, Rogers was keenly interested in the portraits of artists, and for him the value of this sketch consisted in the unconventional representation of a group of artists.⁷² Trying to make sense of the image, he wrote that 'Albani proposed to laugh at them all, as being only Pigmies in their different Arts; and at the Painters in particular, for requiring the assistance of Doctor in a Malady they might have contracted by those Irregularities of which they were too frequently culpable'.⁷³ Rogers's presumption of debauchery and venereal disease as a routine feature of artists' conduct was a stereotype of his own age, informed by the discourse on sexuality and peril, disseminated by eighteenth-century popular prints.⁷⁴ It did not escape Rogers's attention that the caricature of painters included also mountebanks, but he reduced his comment to a disappointment that a 'beautiful Girl, which Mountebanks usually had on their Stages to draw company and attract the eyes of the Spectators, is here humorously caricatured by an old, ugly, long-chin'd Hag darting amorous Glances on her captivating Lutanist'.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Puglisi, *Francesco Albani*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999, 53.

⁷⁰ Turner, 'Some Thoughts on Francesco Albani', 495-98, esp. 496.

⁷¹ Francesco Malaguzzi Valeri, 'Burle, bizzarrie e caricature petroniane', in *Arte Gaia*, Bologna: Case Editrice Apollo, 1926, 1-41, went into great lengths to assert the special relationship between the Bologna and caricature, listing names of many artists, but not Albani's.

⁷² Rogers's biographies of artists in his *Collection of Prints* paid a close attention to their appearances; he owned a large collection of artists' portraits, many of them preserved in the Cottonian Collection in Plymouth. See Griffith, 'The Rogers Collection'.

⁷³ Rogers, *A Collection of Prints*, vol. 2, 82.

⁷⁴ Vic Gatrell, *City of Laughter: Sex and Satire in Eighteenth-Century London*, London: Atlantic Books, 2006.

⁷⁵ Rogers, *A Collection of Prints*, vol. 2, 82.

Rogers might have been wrong about the gender of the third performer,⁷⁶ and, most certainly, he misinterpreted the term *dottor*, which must have been the stage name of one of the mountebanks, *Dottor Albertinelli*. Nonetheless, his recognition of the scene's major components was accurate. The *Company of Artists* intersects two distinct and seemingly incompatible iconographies: the collective self-portrayal of artists, and the mountebank imagery.⁷⁷ Not only does it insert a group of the leading painters into the anonymous crowd surrounding the mountebanks, but it also suggests, as I have signalled before, the emergence of a complex relationship between them, marked by seduction, rivalry, friendship, and above all, by the emerging awareness of performativity as their shared artistic practice.

The self-fashioning strategies of early modern artists attracted an enormous literature over the recent decades.⁷⁸ Likewise, the social reception and imagery of the mountebanks aka charlatans, has been amply discussed by Peg Katritzky, Robert Henke, David Gentilcore and others, with many references to street performers in Bologna.⁷⁹ Since the fifteenth century, it was an imperative for the artists to assert their high social and intellectual status, which led to the development of the diverse iconographies of self-representation, distinguishing them from the mere craftsmen. For the mountebanks, who sang, played music, and harangued in city streets in order to sell miraculous ointments and other commodities, the issue of representation was also of fundamental importance, and was enacted first and foremost by performance. Known as *ciarlatani*, *ciurmatori*, *montimbanchi*, they were indistinguishable from other street performers, the *cantimbanchi*, *cantastorie*, *saltimbanchi* and *buffoni*, often switching from one job to another. In the words of Robert Henke, their primary task was to attract attention of an amorphous and ambulatory audience 'with a virtuosic and oral and visual performance'.⁸⁰ Accordingly, they were represented as performers, who may equally rub shoulders with the *Commedia dell'arte* actors and with the lowest rank of quack doctors.

The juxtaposition of the two widely circulated prints: one, the manifest example of artists' self-fashioning, depicting students of the sculptor Baccio Bandinelli (fig. 6), and the other, the already mentioned image of charlatans' performances in Piazza San Marco in Venice (fig. 7) by Giacomo Franco, demonstrates the social and cultural gap between the humanist ideal and the mercenary sphere. The disciples of Bandinelli are shown as detached from the

⁷⁶ For female mountebanks, see M. A. Katritzky, *Women, Medicine and Theatre, 1550-1750: Literary Mountebanks and Performing Quacks*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007.

⁷⁷ The Wellcome Library website lists Ryland's print from the *Imitations* primarily as an example of marketing medicine, as 'An itinerant medicine vendor on stage promoting his wares with the aid of a guitarist to an amused audience', no.20452i: <http://catalogue.wellcomelibrary.org/record=b1178323>, accessed 1 May 2016.

⁷⁸ On artists' self-portraits, among others, Joanna Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture: The Visual Construction of Identity and the Social Status of the Artist*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998; Maria Loh, *Still Lives: Death, Desire, and the Portrait of the Old Master*, Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015.

⁷⁹ On the mountebanks imagery, see Katritzky, 'Marketing Medicine', 2001, 121-53; Katritzky, *The Art of Commedia*, 2006.

⁸⁰ Henke, 'The Italian Mountebank and the *Commedia dell'arte*', *Theatre Survey*, 38: 2, November 1997, 16.

outside world, enclosed by a comfortable interior with fire and a glowing lamp, and surrounded by the high rank signifiers of classical art and science: books, plaster casts, skulls and a skeleton, all of them indispensable in art-making.⁸¹ Their contemplative poses enhance the aura of silent intellectual endeavour. By contrast, as Franco shows in his image and explains in its caption, the mountebanks work with their bodies in the noisy environment of the city. They are defined by the paraphernalia of their trade: trestle stages, extravagant dress, exaggerated gestures, and exotic props, such as snakes and the obligatory chests filled with their wares. They play music, sing, and act several times a day, and have to compete with others for the attention of the international public.

Due to the economic prosperity of the city built on its silk trade, as well as to the unusual degree of autonomy secured by the painters' guild, *Compagnia dei Pittori*,⁸² Bolognese painters, even if of diverse social backgrounds, stood a good chance to command high prices for their work, buy houses and land, provide dowries for their daughters, and teach at the academies and schools, etc.⁸³ In fact, every one of the *Bolognesi* caricatured in the *Company of Artists* did well in terms of financial prosperity and positions. Their good fortunes were not always stable, however, as in the case of Cavedone who, once a professor in another Bolognese private academy and appointed to top posts of the painters' guild,⁸⁴ had to sell his house to cover the debts incurred by the illness of his wife and son.⁸⁵ Albani, to follow the names listed in the inscription, was 'by far the richest painter in Bologna', well-born and richly-married, boasting several properties in Bologna and the countryside, plus a rich collection of books.⁸⁶ The *Parmigiani*, gathered on the left, did not stay far behind. If Badalocchio opted for a modest career in his native Parma, his friend Lanfranco, one of the best paid artists in Rome and Naples, used his wealth to advance his social standing. He acquired large houses in Naples and Rome, topped by a vineyard and a casino which he decorated with his own murals; like Albani, Lanfranco was happy to uphold his status by entertaining his friends 'at an indescribable cost'.⁸⁷

While, by and large, the Seicento artists stood many chances to climb the social ladder, the charlatans' destinies varied enormously, but, on the whole, were much closer to the anonymous street sellers. There was no corporation looking after the rights of quack doctors and itinerant performers, and no academy could educate them. Hiding behind their stage names, such as *Dottor Albertinelli*, they could not, and did not, aspire to the same social honours as painters. Recent scholarship reassessed, however, the social and cultural roles played by the charlatans. Challenging the existing preconceptions, it has acknowledged the pivotal role of

⁸¹ Ben Thomas, 'The Academy of Baccio Bandinelli', *Print Quarterly*, 22: 1, 2005, 3-14.

⁸² Morselli, 'Bologna', 152.

⁸³ Morselli, 'Bologna', 153.

⁸⁴ Morselli, 'Bologna', 154-55.

⁸⁵ Malvasia, *Felsina Pittrice*, vol. 2, 215-20.

⁸⁶ Morselli, 'Bologna', 157.

⁸⁷ Richard Spear, 'Rome', in *Painting for Profit: The Economic Lives of Seventeenth-Century Italian Painters*, eds Richard E. Spear and Philip Sohm, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010, 71-72.

those marginalized street performers in the dissemination of medicines, offering health care to a wide sector of the population, as well as in the promotion of humanist texts, the plots and verses from which were incorporated into their songs.⁸⁸ Above all, the mountebanks were widely admired for their linguistic bravura and wit, and, as proved by Henke and Katritzky, it was their lively mercenary performances with music and costumes which led to the development of *Commedia dell'arte*.⁸⁹ The playwright and satirist Pietro Aretino applauded the oratorical skills and verbal repertoire of Jacopo Coppa, the charlatan of Bolognese origins, who 'goes around with his sack full of jokes, chatter, presumptions, persuasions, lies, ravings, intrigues, tall tales, and curses'.⁹⁰ Some of the street performers reached the equivalent of 'celebrity status', such as the blacksmith son and street singer Giulio Cesare Croce of Bologna, often compared to Annibale Carracci in terms of his interest in the 'common man'. He transformed the oral tradition of *piazza* into a literary form; his *canzoni*, dialogue and riddles, commenting on topics often drawn from every-day life, were printed by major Bologna publishers.⁹¹

But, at the same time, it cannot be denied that the mountebanks were spurned by the church and city authorities, despised by professional actors, ridiculed by licensed physicians and pharmacists, notoriously prosecuted for frauds and deception, and banned from cities in cases of plague or other calamities.⁹² A letter written by the famous actress of the *Commedia dell'arte* Isabella Andreini to the Governor of Milan in 1601, asking him to ban the mountebanks from performing comedies in the city piazzas, is a good example of an outright hostility between actors and charlatans.⁹³ And, as argued recently by Bella Mirabella, Shakespeare, when he 'needed a villain who could fool everyone around him' in *Othello*, he modelled his Iago on the stereotypical mountebank, a master orator and a 'scum of the earth' at the same time.⁹⁴ Both actors and playwrights felt obliged to define the high culture credentials of their theatre against the low register of the street performance.⁹⁵ This attempt of maintaining the high-low divide mirrors the battle

⁸⁸ Gentilcore, *Medical Charlatanism*, 64-68; 200-33; Rosa Salzberg, 'In the Mouths of Charlatans. Street Performers and the Dissemination of Pamphlets in Renaissance Italy', *Renaissance Studies*, 24: 5, 2010, 638-53.

⁸⁹ M.A. Katritzky, 'Was *Commedia dell'arte* Performed by Mountebanks? *Album amicorum Illustrations and Thomas Platter's Description of 1598*', *Theatre Research International*, 23: 2, 1998, 104-26.

⁹⁰ Henke, 'The Italian Mountebank', 8.

⁹¹ Angelo Mazza, 'Transcendeno in facette, in motti, in rime e in ridicolosi passaggi. Pitture ridicole a Bologna al tempo di Giulio Cesare Croce', in *Le stagioni di un cantimbanco: vita quotidiana a Bologna nelle opere di Giulio Cesare Croce*, ed Zita Zanardi, Bologna: Compositori, 2009, 97-125.

⁹² Gentilcore, *Medical Charlatanism*, 11-63.

⁹³ After Henke, 'The Italian Mountebank', 2, 18, note 4; Robert Henke, 'Meeting at the Sign of the Queen: The *Commedia dell'arte*, Cheap Print, and Piazza Performance', *Italian Studies*, 71: 2, 2016, 176.

⁹⁴ Bella Mirabella, "'A Wording Poet": Othello among the Mountebanks', *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, 24, 2011, 150, 168.

⁹⁵ Henke, *Meeting at the Sign of the Queen*.

fought earlier by the renaissance artists to differentiate themselves from craftsmen and artisans.

The unbridgeable social gap between artists, and street sellers or performers is captured in a series of nineteen prints representing arts and trades which, fittingly, were practiced in Bologna, entitled *Virtù et arti essercitate in Bologna*. Dated to the early 1640s, it was the product of the team of *Bolognesi* artists, the painter Giovanni Maria Tamburini and the etchers Francesco Curti and Agostino Parisini (figs 8 and 9).⁹⁶ Tamburini studied under Pietro Faccini and Guido Reni, and his series referred directly to Annibale's *Diverse Figure*.⁹⁷ He went beyond the Carracci formula by assembling a number of professions in quasi narrative scenes, set in hierarchized cityscapes, and by including artists and mountebanks, the occupations that had been missed by Annibale. One of the early plates in Tamburini's series reserves a substantial part to a representation of artists, and the last one includes a barely visible mountebank spectacle. The assumed privileges of artistic professions, echoing the rhetoric of the Bandinelli studio, could not have been advertised more strongly. A palatial interior with columns, draperies and potted plants in a rich area of the city with porticoes and gardens, visited by well-dressed merchants and messengers, amply defines the status of the four artists at work. All of them are neatly labelled: a painter portraying a gentleman, a sculptor adding the final touches to an allegorical statue, a marble carver making ornaments to its pedestal, and an engraver pushing his burin into a metal plate. They are dressed smartly and seated comfortably, but the hierarchy of the arts is duly reflected in their outfits and chairs, the stone carver being positioned directly on the floor.

The image of a mountebank show, by contrast, is set in a different part of the city, far away from the centre: peasants working in the field are seen behind the wall, and a carriage with travellers rushes across. The emphasis is on hard manual labour, and the trades conducted in the street, bringing together a blacksmith who works on a wheel for a carriage, a turnip vendor, a bird-seller, a hunter, and two women, one making buttons, the other lace collars.⁹⁸ At the very back, a thick crowd surrounds a mountebank, who is brandishing a bunch of snakes and a healing potion, with three other performers on a neighbouring stage. The most respectable building is the one of the printers, advertising their services both for wood and copper: *Qui si stampa et in rame e in legno*. The stylish printmaker, *intagliatore in rame* from the previous plate, must have frequented this area in order to have his impressions made. Would he join the crowd of commoners around the mountebank spectacle, accompanied by his sophisticated companions? And if so, would they care

⁹⁶ Dwight Miller, 'Virtù et arti essercitate in Bologna', *Culta Bononia*, 4:1, 1972, 1-14. The series was published in Bologna by Francisco Curti and Agostino Parisini.

⁹⁷ Alessandro Molinari Pradelli, *Gli antichi mestieri di Bologna nelle incisioni di A. Carracci, G.M. Mitelli e G.M. Tamburini*, Rome: Newton Compton, 1984, 141-61; Marina Cellini, 'Giovanni Maria Tamburini', in *La scuola di Guido Reni*, eds Emilio Negro and Massimo Pironi, Modena: Banco S. Geminiano e S. Prospero/ Artioli, 383-90. Daniele Benati, 'Pittura di genere basso e di mestieri a Bologna nel XVII secolo', *Nuovi Studi*, 3: 6, 1998/1999, 145-57, reproduced paintings in private collections, ascribed to Tamburini and representing liberal arts, which share many motives with the plates in *Virtù et arti*.

⁹⁸ Molinari Pradelli, *Gli antichi mestieri di Bologna*, 158.

for a visual record of their outing? According to the hierarchy imposed by *Virtù et arti*, the gap in status between the world of successful painters and mountebanks, including the hierarchy of city spaces allocated to them, the grand studio versus the street, appears insurmountable.

And yet, *A Company of Artists* ignores this gap unreservedly. It raises against the established iconographies, boundaries between genres, the debates on decorum and social hierarchies, almost as if it was driving precisely against the claims made by the *Virtù et arti* series. It throws artists out of their comfortable studios into the street, deforms their bodies and poses, and it deletes mercilessly any signifiers of intellectual endeavour or success, social and professional, inserting the group of painters instead into the crowd watching a performance of the despised quacks. Moreover, it deliberately presents the caricaturist as a rival performer, and, given the suggested kinship between Gessi and the mountebank *Dottor Albertinelli*, it erases the boundary between the mountebank troupe and the painters altogether. Those are truly audacious statements which snipe and sneer at all the arguments that have been made for the elevation of the artist's social status throughout the last two centuries.⁹⁹ Are there any precedents for such outrageous claims?

In her fascinating study of the shifts in the portrayal of the artistic profession after Vasari, Maria Loh's abandoned the standard tale of the 'metamorphosis from craftsman/artisan to humanist/ intellectual' as the dominant trajectory, underscoring the patterns of self-fashioning of early modern artists, looking instead for a 'more embodied, less heroic, more entangled, less teleological Old Master narrative that speaks about the everyday realities of being and becoming artists'.¹⁰⁰ Annibale's *Butcher's Shop* (1583), portraying his family of painters as assistants in a Bolognese *macelleria*, a seminal example of the anti-heroic artists' genre, but also Faccini's *Picture sellers*, as well as *A Company of Artists* form part of this narrative. There is no need to argue that such an anti-heroic drive has underscored the practices at the Accademia degli Incamminati, which sent artists to the street and introduced the malformed bodies of street labourers into the draughtsman's manual for teaching purposes.¹⁰¹ Clearly, the Carracci's promotion of caricature was a significant part of this process. From its inception, caricature was devised as anti-art, focused on targeting art itself. It is more than symptomatic that Carracci's provocative conceptualisation of caricature alongside the precepts of the classical theory was used by Massani when turning the draughtsman's manual into a book, the already mentioned *Diverse Figure*. The latter, widely copied and paraphrased, gave rise to the specifically Bolognese iconography of itinerant artisans and street vendors as the subject matter on its own right, not bordering on the comic, but turned into a marker of the communal identity.¹⁰²

There is no shortage of informal drawings of artists and their studios, made or associated with the Carracci workshop, which feed into this strand. They are mostly insiders' drawings, belonging to the community in which they were made, not destined for circulation outside the workshop, many of them caricatures, or

⁹⁹ Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture*.

¹⁰⁰ Loh, *Still Lives*, xxi.

¹⁰¹ McTighe, 'Perfect Deformity', 77.

¹⁰² Molinari Pradelli, *Gli antichi mestieri di Bologna*.

bordering on its conventions. The habit of sketching evokes a critical self-reflection, and the off-shoot is an extension of the limits of what constitutes the image of the artist. Numerous drawings by Annibale, representing his assistants in informal poses, asleep, or bending indecorously, give an insight into the unseen reality of the artist's studio, stripped of its aura of a busy workshop and, even more provocatively, contesting all the truths professed by the Bandinelli studio.¹⁰³ A good number of other informal images and caricatures by Seicento artists, such as Salvator Rosa, or Pier Francesco Mola, record also leisure activities outside their studios, when they sketch themselves running on the beach in a company of friends, sharing the after-effects of binge drinking, poking fun at or complaining about their patrons, or even cementing their friendship by urinating in a corner of their patron's garden.¹⁰⁴ The *Company of Artists* belongs to a similar category. It also celebrates companionship, but it focuses on performativity. If Carracci represented artists as artisans, Faccini as street sellers, *The Company of Artists* has anointed them as performers.

Painters as mountebanks: caricature as performance

Annibale Carracci's early paintings, such as *Butcher's Shop* and *Beaneater* (1580-82), have frequently been discussed as 'exercises in self-identification',¹⁰⁵ inspired by popular imagery and street performances. Recently, Sybille Ebert-Shifferer named the figure of *Beaneater*, so far interpreted as a self-image of Annibale, as a portrait of the aforementioned Bolognese *cantastorie* Giulio Cesare Croce.¹⁰⁶ The body of a commoner would serve thus as an avatar both for the artist and for the street performer, annihilating - at least at the level of the art-historical dialogue - the social gap between those professions. What is of even greater relevance, when discussing this painting as a 'revolution' in representational hierarchies, is that Ebert-Shifferer positioned it half-way between a regular portrait and a caricature.¹⁰⁷ There is even a textual precedent for such a classification, since a seventeenth-century inventory of

¹⁰³ Such as *Interior with Four Figures on a Bed* in Ashmolean Museum, ascribed to Annibale's circle, in which four men, half-dressed and sprawled on a messy bed, are playing pranks with their bodies. Loh juxtaposed it to Bartolomeo Passerotti's *Anatomy Lesson* (c.1570s) to emphasize the ludic spirit cultivated in the Carracci workshop as 'a necessary balance to the stressful demands of the artistic profession' - Loh, *Still-Lives*, 164-69, fig. 3.38.

¹⁰⁴ For this kind of images, see Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture*, 54-57, 60-62, 244-47; Alexandra Hoare, *Salvator Rosa as amico vero: The Role of Friendship in the Making of a Free Artist*, PhD Dissertation, University of Toronto, 2010, 40-75; Marta Cacho Casal, 'Bologna *alla stanza o in casa mia*: Mobility and Shared Space in the Circle of Francesco Albani', *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, 19: 1, 2016, 41-62.

¹⁰⁵ Sheila McTighe, 'Foods and the Body in the Italian Genre Paintings about 1580: Campi, Passerotti, Carracci', *The Art Bulletin*, 86: 2, 2004, 316.

¹⁰⁶ Sybille Ebert-Shifferer, 'Quando mangiare fagioli fa una rivoluzione: Considerazioni su realismo e "genere"', in *Nuova luce su Annibale Carracci*, eds Sybille Ebert-Schifferer and Sergio Ginzburg, Rome: De Luca, 2011, 20-39.

¹⁰⁷ Ebert-Shifferer, 'Quando mangiare fagioli fa una rivoluzione', 28-29, 35.

the Galleria Colonna, recorded the *Mangiafagioli* as a *caricatura*.¹⁰⁸ The boundary between the term *caricatura* and *pittura ridicole* has never been properly fixed, but the persuasive mode of caricature, then and now, seems to have been invested with special powers to liberate the dissenting drive of the image, transforming it into a manifesto. Thus, the association between the artist and the street performer, enabled by means of caricature, has already become an art-historical trope.

A Company of Artists provides a tangible articulation of this trope. It presents artists as the public, friends and rivals of the mountebanks, moreover, its inscription declares candidly the friendship between Gessi and *suo amico Dottor Albertinelli*. As I have argued earlier, the caricature suggests, in purely visual terms, the affinity between mountebanks and painters, by identifying the caricature act with performance, a performance staged in direct rivalry with the mountebanks' spectacle. In other words, the artist as caricaturist has assumed the identity of a performer.

Much has been written on the strained relationship between mountebanks and medics, as well as actors, poets and musicians, in which the first were almost exclusively cast as inferior imitators, unreliable and fraudulent, motivated by commercial gains rather than knowledge and high professional skills. By contrast, the relationship between street performers and early modern artists has not been studied at all. This would only become a widely discussed topic in modern art.¹⁰⁹ *A Company of Artists* provides an intriguing early evidence of such a liaison, in which, remarkably, aversion is displaced by affection. It shows the privileged who acknowledge rather than deny their links with mountebanks, presenting themselves as readily stepping into the shoes of the mercenary performers. Surely, none of the artists depicted by Tamburini could drag his tools into the piazza. It was the medium of caricature, an ephemeral sketch, unassuming, provocative and effortless, a street-art par excellence, which made such a declaration possible.

If *A Company of Artists* is a unique visual record which declares kinship between the artists and street performers, there are manifestations of this affinity throughout the Seicento, almost invariably as the gestures of resistance against the mainstream culture. As widely commented upon, the mountebanks were given an unprecedented visibility in mainstream art by mid-seventeenth century, when the Bamboccianti, a group of immigrant painters from the Netherlands, striving to establish their professional identity in Rome, turned to low-life topics. The

¹⁰⁸ After Aldo Foratti, *I Carracci nella teoria e nella pratica*, Città di Castello: S. Lapi, 1913, 251-53. A rare Italian broadsheet which caricaturizes the *Beaneater*, in the collection of Herzog Wilhelm August Library in Wolfenbüttel, has escaped attention of the Carracci scholarship. It brutalizes the facial features of the peasant, exaggerating the dribble from his spoon, and it adds a male face looking in through the cross-grilled window. A *canzone* inscribed onto the image exposes the peasant as a selfish glutton who does not want to share his meal with the hungry. It is reproduced in Wolfgang Harms, with Barbara Bauer and Cornelia Kemp, eds, *Deutsche Illustrierte Flugblätter des 16 und 17 Jahrhunderts: Die Sammlung der Herzog August Bibliothek in Wolfenbüttel. Part I. Ethica. Physica*, Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1985, 162.

¹⁰⁹ Jean Starobinski, *Portrait de l'Artiste en Saltimbanque*, Paris: Gallimard, 2004 [1970]; Renzo Guardenti, 'Iconography of the *Commedia dell'arte*', in *Commedia dell'arte in Context*, eds Christopher B. Balme, Piermario Vescovo, Daniele Vianello, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, 222-23.

Bamboccianti's commercial success, which confirmed the considerable shift in patrons' demands, shifting towards images of rogues and pick-pockets, was met with indignation from the defenders of decorum and morality in visual arts, among others, from Albani, the presumed author of the *Company of Artists*.¹¹⁰ The charlatans depicted in the variety of their roles, seducing the public in villages and on the outskirts of cities, either performing scenes from *Commedia dell'arte*, or accompanying a humble tooth-puller, were among the favourite subjects of the Bamboccianti. Almost invariably, the audience was given as much attention as the performers, diverse in terms of gender, but mostly composed of plebeian figures, the poorly dressed *villani*, children, prostitutes, and occasionally artisans. Symptomatically, it was also the Bamboccianti, who established their own professional community, the Bentveughels in Rome, and who portrayed themselves as a group of friends, enjoying their companionship in a tavern, or in their patron's garden.¹¹¹

The attraction which the mountebanks held for painters transcended the subject matter. As narrated by the authors of artists' biographies, a number of the major Seicento artists, tried their skills in acting, taking to the stage and performing roles from the *Commedia dell'arte* as mountebanks would do. Giovanni Battista Passeri recorded that the Neapolitan artist Salvator Rosa, in a conscious attempt to establish a strong artistic persona on his move to Rome, took on the role of a mountebank. During the carnival of 1639, he moved from one Roman piazza to another with a group of friends, playing the role of Formica, a Neapolitan character from the *Commedia dell'arte*. 'Performing as a *saltimbanco*, displaying pots with ointments and making some ridiculous gestures', he managed to attract '*in questo modo tutto il popolaccio di Roma*'.¹¹² As argued by Alexandra Hoare, Rosa's charlatan performances were motivated by a conscious strategy of self-fashioning, an attempt to enter the elite Roman art world by adopting the position of the Other, and juxtaposing himself to Bernini, 'the consummate courtier artist'. It is significant, that both Rosa and Bernini were writing comedies and drawing caricatures, even if operating for diametrically opposed audiences.¹¹³

What attracted visual artists to mountebanks was the allure of performance and the sense of mastery over the audience. Performativity, however, has not been linked with visual arts before modernism. As summed up by the relentless classicist, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, visual arts were defined as associated with space rather than time.¹¹⁴ Evelyn Welch has argued, however, that visual artists employed at renaissance courts were forced to compete with musicians and jesters in providing

¹¹⁰ For the critique of Bamboccianti, Wendy Roworth, *Pictor Succensor: A Study of Salvator Rosa as Satirist, Cynic and Painter*, New York: Garland, 1978, 111-55; Puglisi, *Albani*, 45-84.

¹¹¹ David A. Levine, 'Pieter van Laer's Artists' Tavern: An Ironic Commentary on Art', in *Holländische Genremalerei im 17. Jahrhundert*, eds Henning Bock and Thomas W. Gaehtgens, special issue of *Jahrbuch Preussischer Kulturbesitz*, 4, 1987, 169-91.

¹¹² Giuseppe Passeri, *Vite de' pittori, scultori ed architetti che hanno lavorato in Roma, morti dal 1641 fino al 1673*, Rome: N. Barbiellini, 1772, 42; Hoare, *Salvator Rosa*, 40-75.

¹¹³ Joris Van Gastel, 'When the Curtain Falls: Social Satire in Bernini's Caricatures and Comedies', unpublished paper at the 2016 Renaissance Society of America conference in Boston, session *Italian 'caricatura': Material Practice, Collectors and Art Theory*.

¹¹⁴ Lessing, *Laokoon*.

live entertainment for courtiers, and had to transform their art 'into ephemera, a moment that merged entertainment with artistry'. 'By the end of the sixteenth century, Welch wrote, it was the performance of artistry as much as the artistic product itself that proved the key to success'.¹¹⁵ Artists performed their draughtsmanship skills, designed ephemeral decorations, and even turned the processes of making a painting or a sculpture such as Velázquez and Bernini, into a live performance, conducted over many days.

More than any other art form, caricature lent itself to being performed, whether 'in fun or in spite', as noted by Malvasia.¹¹⁶ When improvised in front of the viewers, conjuring likeness through deformation, caricature could also mesmerize the public, whether courtly or plebeian, in much the same way as charlatans did. Performed in just a few strokes of the pen, and raising against the rules of beauty, harmony and grace, it expanded the limits of visuality and the repertoire of forms, elevating the ugly, disharmonious and uncouth. It was cherished both by the artists, their patrons and their critics for its effortless speed, for confidence, which Baldinucci called *franchezza di tocco*, the boldness of touch.¹¹⁷ It shared its audacity, bravura and penchant for transgression, with mountebank' eloquence and wit, with their 'improvisatory harangues from a mental repertoire of words, phrases, tales, set speeches, jokes, dialogues, proverbs, curses, riddles, insults, blessings and songs ... patched together in ever-new combinations'.¹¹⁸ Affinities could be multiplied: both caricature and street performance were ephemeral displays of skills, both were self-referential, 'genre-blurring' and intermedial, both combined the ritual with playfulness or dissidence, deliberately positioning themselves against mainstream art. Both straddled the realm of the arts and the everyday, and both expressed meaning through embodiment. Both were participatory and contributed to shaping identities. Moreover, caricaturists were consistently attracted by the topic of performance and the figures of performers, from mountebanks and the actors of *Commedia dell'arte*, to dwarfs, opera singers, castrati, and all kinds of celebrities.

What differentiates the caricaturist from the performer, then and now, is the unique ability to both perform the caricature act and record it at the same time. Caricature is the only art form in which the performative act is inseparable from its product. In *A Company of Artists*, the performative wizardry of caricature is brought fully to the fore: it claims to record both the show of mountebanks and the

¹¹⁵ Evelyn Welch, 'Painting as Performance in the Italian Renaissance Court', in *Artist at Court: Image-Making and Identity, 1300-1550*, ed. Stephen Campbell, Boston, MA: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 2005, 28, 32.

¹¹⁶ Malvasia, *Life of the Carracci*, 270.

¹¹⁷ Baldinucci, *The Life of Bernini*, 74. For early sources confirming the relationship between caricature and performance, see Paolo Giordano II Orsini, *Satira VIII*, in *Paralello fra la città e la villa satire undici*, Bracciano, 1648, 65-66, which describes a party in his castle in Bracciano, with both Bernini and Orsini himself drawing caricatures of the guests. See, Adriano Amendola, *La Collezione del principe Lelio Orsini nel palazzo di Piazza Navona a Roma*. Rome: Campisano, 2013; Van Gastel, *Il Marmo spirante*, 63-64; Adriano Amendola, 'Of What It Is To Caricature, and the Art: Paolo Giordano II Orsini and the Caricature', unpublished paper prepared for the 2016 Renaissance Society of America conference in Boston, session *Italian Caricatura: Material Practice, Collectors and Art Theory*.

¹¹⁸ Henke, 'The Italian Mountebank', 7.

performance of the caricaturist. Although not included in the drawing, he makes himself present in the gaze of the caricatured figures, including the anonymous spectators that he has stolen from the mountebanks. The caricaturist is the master of representation and the master of performance at the same time.

The performer

So who was the caricaturist and when was this drawing made? I have already raised my doubts about Francesco Albani, named in the inscription, stressing that the discourse on Albani the caricaturist has developed entirely within the English speaking world, and solely on the strength of this inscription. The latter was added to the verso of the drawing sometime after it had been made, as indicated by the phrase *altri Pittori di quel Tempo*, hence, one might presume that, for its author, the task of recognising the painters' faces and bodies might have been easier than guessing who caricatured them. It is also tempting to approach the inscription as a variant of a historiographical *glossa*, perhaps a joke, scribbled at the back by an artist or a collector who knew the milieu well enough to recognize the artists, as well as to crack a joke about Albani being the caricaturist.

The snapshot effect of this image, convincing as it is, appears to testify to its immediacy. The trajectory of looks confirming the caricaturist's presence, the roughness of the lines, the lack of *chiaroscuro* modelling, and the low point of view, imposes a sense of 'here and now'. And yet, if the practice of caricature itself unlocks many signifying strands of this image, it might equally deceive the viewer. The effect of *non-finito*, and the sense of contingency, of catching a fleeting moment, all belong to caricature's conventions. Moreover, the 'caricature act' is not reduced to performance in front of live audiences, but it includes also the act of conjuring up the performance on a piece of paper, complete with the admiring gaze of the viewers. As any artifice, caricature implies being a witness to events which are invented from scratch. So, is the *Company of Artists* a record of a meeting of a group of the Carracci students at a mountebank show in Bologna, or is it an invention, following caricature's own rules of commenting on friendship and social status?

Weighing up all pros and cons, including the details of the artists' dress, notably their bib-fronted collars not introduced to Bologna before the second half of the seventeenth century, as well as the problematic date of their assumed encounter in a street in Bologna,¹¹⁹ it is likely that the *Company of Artists* was drawn long after Albani's death. If Lanfranco's profile was indeed based on the print in Bellori's *Vite*, the *Company of Artists* would be datable to the 1670s. Such a date would coincide with the publication of Malvasia's *Felsina Pittrice* which stressed the Bolognese origins of the art of caricature. This was the time when the generation of the disciples of the Carracci practiced caricature as an art form suitable for social networking.¹²⁰ If pressed for suggesting an author of this caricature, Giuseppe

¹¹⁹ I owe this insight to Catherine Loisel-Legrand, who suggested the date around mid-seventeenth century in a conversation in July 2015. For more details, see Murawska-Muthesius, *Varji pittori caricati da Francesco Albani*, url tbc.

¹²⁰ See Bruce Davis, 'Pier Francesco Mola's Autobiographical Caricatures: A Postscript', *Master Drawings*, 29: 1, 1991, 48-51.

Maria Mitelli arises as a potential candidate.¹²¹ A student of Faccini and Albani, an ardent dedicatee of Bologna, and an amateur performer of the *Commedia dell'arte*, Mitelli was fully committed to the Carracci ethos, cultivating his concern for the underprivileged and paying his tribute to Annibale Carracci through his *L'arti per via* (1660), representing craftsmen and street sellers of Bologna. The author of complex visual constructs hybridising the everyday with the allegorical, Mitelli practiced also caricature, and his satirical prints of the society and the art world, far from eulogising the artistic profession, were often premised on the principle of a *burla*, which would go as far as inventing fictional artistic identities, by adding captions to his etchings.¹²²

Thus, what promised an unmediated access to an informal meeting of artists in a Bolognese piazza, and a virtuoso record of the caricaturist performance, turns out to be an invention, a bric-a-brac which merges seamlessly the immediacy of caricature sketch with the existing portraits and the iconographies of artists' leisure time. What is certain is that the *Company of Artists* follows into Annibale's footsteps and celebrates the artists' friendship by teasing rather than elevating its protagonists. Aware of the liberties, as well as the tricks intrinsic to caricature, it turns into a conscious commemoration of the Carracci heritage. Whoever made it, must have had an insider knowledge of the milieu of the Carracci followers, as well as of the Bolognese art world with its hierarchies, jealousy and witticisms, as well as a penchant for *burle*, recorded with such a documentary zeal by Malvasia.

Conclusion

Rough and indecorous, *A Company of Artists* belongs to the category of fringe type imagery, originating in the Carracci studio in Bologna, likely to be discarded, unless saved by a fellow artist or a collector. By turning the painters' bodies into a cipher of meaning, and by comparing painters with mountebanks, admired for their oratorical skills but prosecuted for quackery, *A Company of Artists* broke free from the obligations to elevate the artists' status, stressing instead their companionship and a penchant for performance.

Anti-canonical, performative, and equally effective in expressing aversions and affections, *caricatura* was to be adopted as the tool in the internal communication within artist circles, as their slang juxtaposed to the 'desiccated speech' of mainstream art, to borrow an expression from Adam Gopnik.¹²³ The caricature act was eagerly practised by emerging artists' brotherhoods in modern

¹²¹ Giuseppe Maria Mitelli's name was suggested by Adriano Amendola; Marta Cacho Casal pointed to Pier Francesco Mola; Ellena Rossoni to Pietro de' Rossi.

¹²² In his set of twelve etchings of 1686, which included a deeply sardonic visions of an Art Academy, all of them are captioned as made after an enigmatic *pittore romano* Pietro de' Rossi. Hemphill called Pietro de' Rossi 'an artist without biography' and, considering the absence of archival data and any other references to this artist, it would be worth investigating whether his identity was not one of the many *burle* procured by Mitelli. See, Richard Hemphill, 'Comic Drawings by Pietro de' Rossi Etched by Giuseppe Maria Mitelli', *Master Drawings*, 34:3, 1996, 279-92.

¹²³ Adam Gopnik, 'High and Low: Caricature, Primitivism, and the Cubist Portrait', *Art Journal*, 43: 4, 1983, 373.

Europe and beyond. Performed in alternative venues for art making, such as streets, taverns, and dinner parties, caricature was to assert its agency at a time when modern art was becoming undistinguishable from caricature, and later, when art would be redefined as performance.

A Company of Artists was an instalment in the long process of blurring the boundaries between high and low culture and in transforming the hierarchies of the art world. It emerged as a catalyst in a long process of refashioning artistic identities, which, as remarked by Wittkower when discussing Annibale's caricature as a counter-practice to the rules of art making, were to become more pronounced at the time of 'a Hogarth or a Goya'.¹²⁴ Honoré Daumier's series of *Le Charivari's* caricaturists as mountebank performers (fig. 10),¹²⁵ or Picasso's families of *saltimbanques*, were to follow the same trajectory. *A Company of Artists*, as I have argued, constitutes also a unique historiographical record. Not only was it closely associated with the first account of the origins of caricature in Bologna, but it also prompted the first history of Italian caricature in Britain, as well as providing a tangible visual reference to theoretical statements about the mechanisms and the subversive drive of caricature, formulated by Gombrich and Wittkower. I would also claim that this remarkable sketch has still a lot to offer for forthcoming studies on caricature which, as a critical art form, targeting art itself, has helped to realign the field in the most fundamental way, displacing eulogy with critique.

Earlier versions of this text were presented at Stiftung Brandenburger Tor, Berlin, in 2014 and at the Renaissance Society of America conference in Boston in 2016. For their help at various stages of the preparation of this text, I would like to thank to Charlotte Oppé, Adriano Amendola, Cristina Bersani, Elisabeth de Bièvre, Hans Bredekamp, Marta Cacho Casal, Liana Cheney, Sandra Cheng, Martin Clayton, Marzia Faietti, Zsuzsa Gonda, Józef Grabski, Catherine Loisel-Legrand, Sheila McTighe, Angelo Mazza, Sergiusz Michalski, John Mitchell, Stefan Muthesius, Emma Philip, Simonetta Prospero Valenti Rodinò, Ellena Rossoni, Daniela Schiavina, Harriet West and Jessica Wolfe.

Katarzyna Murawska-Muthesius teaches art history at Birkbeck College, University of London. She was Curator and Deputy Director of The National Museum in Warsaw, as well as Guest Professor at the Humboldt University Berlin. Her publications include *Borders in Art: Revisiting Kunstgeographie* (2000) and *From Museum Critique to the Critical Museum* (2015, with Piotr Piotrowski). One of her current research projects focuses on caricature as a critical art form of early modernity.

k.murawska-muthesius@bbk.ac.uk



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

¹²⁴ Wittkower, *Art and Architecture in Italy*, 71.

¹²⁵ Richard Thomson, *Seurat's Circus Sideshow*, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2017, 29.