

Lavinia Fontana's *Prudence*: A Personification of Wisdom

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The first section of this essay deals with an iconographical analysis of Lavinia Fontana's (1552-1614) *Prudence* or *Personification of Wisdom* of 1590, while the second part provides an iconological interpretation, demonstrating Fontana's application of emblematic significations. This painting is presently on display at the Galerie Maison d'Art in Monte Carlo. At this time there is lack of knowledge about the patronage of this commission, except from the art gallery's records showing that it acquired the painting from a private collection in New York.¹

Keywords: Prudence, Venus, Urania Bolognese culture, theories about art, beauty, wisdom, Renaissance emblematic traditions, personification, female creativity, astronomy

Iconographic Analysis

Lavinia Fontana's *Prudence* was composed against the intellectual background of the Bolognese humanists (Murphy, 2003; Cantaro, 1989; Fortunati, 1998; Galli, 1940; Malvasia, 1678/1971) (Figure 1). Complex cultural, iconographical, and iconological significations are unveiled when analyzing the painting.

The setting for the imagery is an interior space, a regal boudoir.² The décor of this private room demonstrates the artistic mastery of Fontana's mature period, before she departed for Rome in 1603. At this time she was expanding her artistic ability in emblematic and mythological imagery, as can be seen in *The Visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon* of 1600, at the National Gallery of Ireland, where courtly ladies with fancy attire and luxurious jewelry parade through a large hall, passing by an open loggia that shows a garden in the first bloom of Spring.³

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¹ See Alessandro Zacchi, "Lavinia Fontana," <http://www.oldmasters.com/document300.html?lang=fr> (accessed December 2017), an essay explaining the attribution as well as the literature and exhibitions.

² Discussion about the condition and restoration of the painting is not part of this author's analysis. There are obvious losses of pigmentation, adjustments, and restorations.

³ The imagery of this painting depicts Vincenzo I Gonzaga and his wife, Leonora de' Medici, as King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. The Gonzaga family of Mantua selected the Old Testament story because of their ancestors' claim that they were descended from the Queen of Sheba. Fontana connected the family with their historical event in 1600, when the dukes of Mantua passed through Bologna on their way to Florence in order to participate in the wedding of their relative, Maria de' Medici, and Henry IV of France.



Figure 1. Lavinia Fontana, *Allegory of Prudence*, 1590s. Galerie Maison d'Art, Monte Carlo.

In the boudoir of the *Prudence*, a large red brocade canopy with gold fringes hangs above the bed with its double mattress covered with blue and gold silk embroidery. Two red velvet pillows are displayed on the bed. The skirt of the bed's frame is adorned with a green satin cover decorated with eight golden fringes and fancy inserted jewels. A wood frame supported by wooden legs raises the bed. Next to one of the bed's legs, a small lap dog observes the action of the mistress. Across from the canopy bed, a large square mirror rests on a dressing table covered with a red velvet cloth that matches the ornamentation of the bed canopy. Displayed on the dressing table are various types of jewels, e.g., a long pearl necklace with a brooch, a long gold necklace, also with a large brooch at one end, and a velvet black ribbon—in the shape of a love knot—at the other end. Another velvet black ribbon is placed next to the gold necklace. In observing the reflection of these objects in this large mirror, there is a discrepancy between the black ribbon placed on the dressing table and the one

reflected in the mirror. The mirrored image of the black love knot does not reflect the same image of the loose black ribbon on the side of the dresser. Fontana teases the viewer with actual versus reflected painted images. She makes the viewer wonder: Which of the two images is real, which is fictional?

Between the dressing table and the canopy bed stands the mistress of the bedroom, a tall nude female. Pearl earrings dangle from her lobes, the only jewelry embellishing her beautiful body. A dark mantle hangs from her left shoulder, partially draping the back of her body. The handling of this drapery appears to imitate props from ancient marble statues, where drapes or trees were added to the carved statue to ensure support and stability for the weight of the sculpture. A long transparent gold veil, tied up to her fancy hairdo, flows down along her back and wraps around the front of her body to cover her pudenda. This figure rests her left arm on red pillows in order embrace a hand mirror, while with her right hand she measures her nude thigh with an opened compass. The figure has raised her knee to rest her foot on a celestial globe in order to ensure stability and support so she can accurately measure her upper leg.

The large mirror on the wall is bordered with a gold frame, whose sides are decorated with projecting handles. The mirror reflects an image of the nude's back and buttocks, which are partially covered by a golden veil. The reflected image also shows the back of the figure's head and its elaborate coiffure of encircled golden braided tresses that form a layered crown. The jewelry displayed on the dresser is also reflected in the mirror. Interestingly, this mirror shows the reflected image of the back view of the nude female and also a frontal female portrait located on the upper right side of the mirror. This frontal portrait appears to be an image projected from the blurry female portrait reflected in the oval hand mirror that the nude female holds. However, this frontal reflected portrait is not fuzzy. On the contrary, it appears as a distinct portrait. Has Fontana painted another self-portrait? If so, in this manner perhaps Fontana included a visual signature in her artwork? (Cheney, Faxon, & Russo, 2000/2009, Chapter on Mannerism; Bohn, 2004b; Woods-Marsden, 1998).

Fontana teases the viewer in her experimentation with depicted images that are reflected in mirrors. In this work she composed three different types of mirrors. Two of the mirrors are depicted inside in the painting, while the third one is an external visual form. The large square mirror rests on the dressing table behind the nude figure. The small oval mirror is held by the nude figure with her left hand. The third mirror is a fictive composition, partaking of the entire picture plane of the painting, hence an external mirror.

With these observations on mirror reflections, Fontana demonstrated her interest in studying optical illusions and applying her investigations to her painting (Ilardi, 2007). In *Prudence*, Fontana continued to experiment with mirrored images as she did in her *Self-Portraits*, in particular the one at the Uffizi, which is similar to her fellow artist Parmigianino's *Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror* of 1540, at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna; both are engaged in the study of ambiguity in reflected images (Cheney, Faxon, & Russo, 2000/2009, pp. 57-61). Fontana as well is anticipating a type of interplay of duplication of self-imaging that later became popular in the 17th and 18th centuries in such works as the *Self-Portrait With a Mirror on an Easel* of 1646 by the Austrian Johannes Gump, *Self-Portrait* of 1674 by the Florentine Carlo Dolci, and *Self-Portrait* of 1709 by the Venetian Rosalba Carriera, all located in the Gallery degli Uffizi in Florence.

The smallest of the three mirrors in *Prudence* is the small oval mirror, which is designed as a portable mirror. Its handle ends with an elaborately gilded round holder. This mirror is decorated as a cartouche with a fancy frame encasing a reflected image. On the edges of the cartouche's frame are three grotesque masks with comical expressions; perhaps they fear being bitten by the green snake encircling the mirror? This type of green snake, with stripes and a long red forked tongue, is usually found in gardens and not in boudoirs (Rossman,

Ford, & Seigel, 1996). The serpent wraps itself around the mirror and looks into it.⁴ Thus there are two reflected images in this oval mirror: the face of the woman and the snake. The reflected image of the nude female is shown as a blurry face in a three-quarter-view profile. The reflected image of the snake shows the snake with its red tongue caressing the cheek of the woman's face. By contrast, the snake curling around the mirror's frame is depicted sticking out its red tongue at the blurry reflected face in the mirror, with this action taking place at eye level on the woman's reflected face. This amusing conceit shows Fontana using artistic license to play with reflected and refracted light effects in a mirror. The reflection of the snake encircling the mirror, however, does not visually correspond to the snake depicted inside the mirror. Although there is only one snake, its reflections are deceptive, since the serpent, here associated with a facial portrait of a woman, engages into two different actions: kissing her on the cheek and looking into her eyes (Ceregato, 2008; Conigliello, Cecchi, & Faietti, 2014).⁵

Fontana's third mirror is a fictive mirror. Although not physically visible in contrast to the square (mirror on the dresser) and oval (mirror held by Prudence) mirrors, its reflection is the representation of the entire picture plane of the painting, where the artist (or viewer) stands in front of it in order to create the scene (or to perceive the painting). As with her plaster casts, marble and bronze sculptures, and prints that assisted her in studying human proportions, so too did Fontana use the mirror as another artistic instrument that guided her in composing reflections of reality. Perhaps in order to depict the nude female in the painting, Fontana employed the mirror to view and study her own body. As yet there is no clear information as to whether Fontana was able to practice drawing from live models.

During the Italian 16th century, female artists could and did become honorific members of an academy; Fontana was enrolled as a member of the Accademia di San Luca in Rome before she died in 1614 (Cantaro, 1989, pp. 27-54; Tufts, 1982, pp. 129-134). However, in the Academy's drawing classes, female artists were not permitted to attend and participate in classes with their fellow male artists, let alone draw from nude models (Llewellyn & Romalli, 1992; Bambach, 1999; Bohn, 2004a). With her painting of nude females, Fontana anticipated, half a century earlier, the nude drawings and paintings of Artemisia Gentileschi (1593-1652), composed while studying her own body in the mirror or by having private access to nude models (Harris, 2010; Mann, 2009; Garrard, 1989). No doubt Fontana, as an artist and mother of 11 children, was familiar with and observed as well as studied her children's nude bodies and her own body before, during, and after its transformation caused by her gestations.

Fontana's treatment of the nude female also recalls the interest in anatomical studies during the 16th century, in particular in Bologna, where the physician Andreas Vesalius (1513-1564) taught human anatomy at the University of Bologna between 1540 and 1543 (Heseleer, 1959). During his time in academia, Vesalius also wrote a treatise on human anatomy, *De Humani Corporis Fabrica Librorum Septem*, with a compendium of

⁴ Dante's *Divine Comedy: Inferno*, xxv. 112-114; and see 133-138: "And his tongue, till now a single thing/and fit for speech, divides, and the other's/forked tongue joins, and the smoke stops." The allusion about a forked tongue signifies saying one thing and meaning another, as seen by the snake's reflection in the mirror.

⁵ Fontana's familiarity with herpetology derives from her connections with Ulisse Aldrovandi's library and curiosity cabinet. See Alessandro Ceregato, "Herpetological Iconography in 16th Century: The Tempera Paintings of Ulisse Aldrovandi," *Journal of the History and Bibliography of Herpetology*, 7, No. 2 (2008), 4-12, in particular Fig. 2, for a type of European Glass Lizard/snake, and Fig. 6, representing the Italian snake called Cervone (*Elaphe quatuorlineata* Lacepède), both in Aldrovandi's collection and illustrated book on terrestrial animals, *Animali* (IV c. 136 and IV, c. 135) in the Biblioteca Universitaria Bolognese. See also Aldrovandi's illustrator of flora and fauna, Jacopo Ligozzi's drawings of snakes, folio 135 in L. Conigliello, et al., *Jacopo Ligozzi. Pittore universalissimo* (Florence: Sillabe, 2014), cat. exh.

seven volumes on the human body (*The Epitome*), as seen in Folio 10v of *Fabrica*, representing a female nude (Siraisi, 1994).⁶ Fontana was aware of the importance of Vesalius's medical text, as she depicted one of Vesalius's human skeletons in an open text held by a medical scholar in the portrait of the Bolognese physician and philologist, *Girolamo Mercuriale* (1530-1606) of 1580s, now at the Walters Museum of Art in Baltimore (Murphy, 2003, pp. 70-71, Fig. 72) (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Lavinia Fontana, *Girolamo Mercuriale* (1530-1606), 1580s. Walters Museum of Art, Baltimore, MD.

Fontana's *Prudence* is a painting with a brilliant orchestration of colors—blues, gold, greens, and reds. It depicts paradoxical juxtapositions between inanimate and animate objects. It draws parallels between painted motifs such as the encircling serpent around the mirror and the serpentine movement of the human body. It reveals reflections and refractions within the same visual plane. It envisions artistic license as the interplays of visual discrepancies between the real and the imaginary. Fontana was an ingenious Maniera painter.

⁶ Joannem Opoerinum published the book in Basel in 1543.

Iconological Interpretation

Of all the virtues, Prudence was the dearest to Renaissance humanists and artists, who followed the classical and medieval cultural traditions on the signification and symbolism of this moral virtue. According to classical literary sources, wisdom derives from the Greek word *sophia*, originally referring to the practical arts and then later viewed as knowledge and reason. Plato understood wisdom to be one of the chief virtues. For him, wisdom was the faculty required for both scientific knowledge and practical experience. Aristotle, however, distinguished between speculative and practical wisdom, or between *sophia* (wisdom) and *phronesis* (prudence).⁷ While practical wisdom (*phronesis*) related to the conduct of life behavior and moral conduct, speculative wisdom (*sophia*) requires elements of intuitive reason.

Moreover, the virtue of Prudence was connected with the liberal arts. For Aristotle, it was a virtue that is not distinct from art (Aquinas, 1993, p. 74).⁸

Art is right reasoning about certain works. But diversity in kinds of works does not result in any loss of the nature of art, for the different arts concern widely different works. But since prudence is a kind of right reasoning about works, it seems that produced should be called an art.

It belongs to Prudence to deliberate well. But deliberation also takes place in some of the arts. Therefore, Prudence is not distinct from art.⁹ (Aquinas, 1993, p. 74)

In another passage, Aristotle commented: "Good deliberation, sagacity and equitable judgment adjoin Prudence. Therefore, good deliberation is not a virtue joined to Prudence but rather is Prudence itself" (Aquinas, 1993, p. 74).¹⁰ Like the virtue of Prudence, art was associated with the mental power of selectivity, measurement, and judgment; hence sagacity and judgment were employed in the creation of an image and in the evaluation of its aesthetic completion.

In ancient Rome, the outspoken lawyer and persuasive orator Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-143 BCE) put forth the notion that history was a mirror of life, that is, its true spirit; this was based on the pleasure of seeing the past as through a mirror, whereas the present showed individuals how to employ good judgment in dealing with practical and moral matters, thus, actions of prudence (Fox, 2007, p. 236). In the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), the Italian Dominican friar and Doctor of the Church, assimilated the Aristotelian tradition in his Fifth Article on the Nature of Prudence. Aquinas stated:

Prudence is a virtue that is most necessary for human life, for a good life consists of good deeds. Now doing good deeds not only involves what a man does but also how he does them, namely that he does them from right choice and not merely out of impulse or passion.

Consequently, an intellectual virtue is needed in man's reason, which perfects reason so that it is suitably disposed toward the things that are for the end and this virtue is prudence. Hence prudence is a virtue that is necessary in order to lead a good life. (Aquinas, 1993, pp. 74-76)

In assimilating these ideas, Renaissance humanists emphasized the philosophical significance of wisdom. The German philosopher, theologian, and astronomer Nicholas de Cusa (1401-1464), for example, defined

⁷ See Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (1121b 31).

⁸ See Thomas Aquinas, *Treatise on the Virtues*, trans. Jon A. Oesterle (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), p. 74, quoting Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, 7 (1140b 35).

⁹ See Aquinas, *Treatise on the Virtues*, p. 74, quoting Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, 7 (1140a 25) and III, 3 (1112b 3).

¹⁰ See Aquinas, *Treatise on the Virtues*, p. 74, quoting Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, 7 (1140a 25) and III, 3 (1112b 3).

wisdom as *learned ignorance*, whereas his follower, the Florentine philosopher and physician Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), explained and elaborated on the concept of wisdom through the Neoplatonic notion of reason and the manifestation of wisdom (*mens intellectus*), e.g., wisdom controls ignorance (nature). In this light, the notion of wisdom incorporates both the physical and metaphysical realms of a person, since the human soul is composed of instincts (natural world) and reason or intellect (supernatural—higher world—*mens*) (Dillon & Zovko, 2008, p. 169, n. 24; Kahn, 1985).

Inspired by the ancient writings of Aristotle, the Platonists, Plutarch, and Pliny the Elder, the medieval treatises—namely, Thomas Aquinas's 12th-century *Summa Theologia* and Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum Morale* and *Somme le Roi* (both 13th century)—included and associated the personifications of virtues with a specific animal (Deonna, 1954). A serpent was associated with the virtue of Prudence because of the reptile's natural process of ecdysis or shedding the skin in order to grow, which implied metaphorically leaving behind the past (old skin) and focusing on the present (the new skin).

In the art of Middle Ages and the Renaissance as well, the images of the cardinal virtues were accompanied by the traditional attributes, and, moreover specific animals were associated with their allegories, e.g., the serpent as a symbol of knowledge was associated with Prudence. Typically, Prudence was depicted as a woman with a double or triple head, holding a mirror, a serpent, or a sieve, with Solomon at her feet. Proto-Renaissance and Renaissance artistic examples in which Prudence is depicted with a serpent and a mirror are Giotto's *Prudence* of 1305, in the dado of the Scrovegni or Arena Chapel in Padua, and Piero Pollaiuolo's *Prudence* of 1470, in Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence (Figures 3 and 4).



Figure 3. Giotto, *Prudence*, 1305, dado. Scrovegni (Arena) Chapel, Padua.



Figure 4. Piero Pollaiuolo, *Prudence*, 1470. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

Furthermore, in the Renaissance, humanists and artists alike assimilated the ideas of antiquity, portraying in art the fusion of the personification of Wisdom with the medieval personification of Prudence but also expanding the attributes to include a compass, a globe, or a key (Tuve, 1963; Pollard, 2007; Ragghianti, 1970) (Figure 5).¹¹

¹¹ Artistic examples are numerous in all media. See Rosemund Tuve, "Notes on the Virtues and Vices," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 26 (1963), 246-247; John Graham Pollard, *Renaissance Medals. The Collections of the National Gallery of Art Systematic Catalogue*. 2 vols. (Washington, DC: National Gallery Publications, 2007), 1, No. 486, about the Milanese bronze medal of 1500 century, https://images.nga.gov/en/search/do_quick_search.html?q=%221957.14.1017.b%22 (accessed December 15, 2018); and C. L. Ragghianti, *Gli affreschi di casa Minerbia Ferrara* (Pesaro, 1970), for Prudence holding a compass and a globe.



Figure 5. Unknown, *Allegory of Prudence*, 1395. Salone delle Allegorie, Palazzo Minerbi-Da Sale, Ferrara.

The artist's eyes became associated with Prudence's mirror—as both perceiving and reflecting an image. Prudence's reflection and perception were marked by wisdom and judgment as well as by an ability to evaluate the past through careful inspection. The artist, like the personification of Prudence, relied on viewing the past to visually examine and judge the art of the present. The painter's visual judgment relied on the observation of past artistic endeavors. Following Prudence's guidance, the painter visually witnessed the historical evolution of art and the fascination of artists in imitating nature from antiquity to the present; the multifaceted depiction and conception of Prudence revealed the assimilation of the emblematic and humanist significations of Prudence.

For artists of the Italian 16th-century like Fontana, having or achieving the virtue of Prudence also suggested a desire to comprehend the laws of nature requiring perception, insight, perseverance, and constancy. These qualities of wisdom were considered to be prerequisites for a creative mind and for a successful artistic career. The forms in nature visually guided Renaissance artistic creations. But the ability to perceive, invent,

and judge, hence conceiving art, intellectually motivated the painters of the 16th century. Thus the role of Prudence was associated with Wisdom (practical and speculative) for 16th-century artists.

Fontana endowed her *Prudence* as a personification of Wisdom with ancient cosmological, philosophical, and psychological connotations. In the *Personification of Wisdom or Prudence*, she framed the nude female with attributes such as mirrors, a snake, a compass, and a celestial globe. She combined two types of personifications in the female form: beauty and wisdom. The depiction of the nude female is a symbol of beauty that is connected with the mythological figure of Venus, the ancient Goddess of Beauty, herself a symbol of an ideal female form and the embodiment of physical beauty (Cropper, 1976; Bull, 2005).¹²

For the personification of Prudence, Fontana selected and appropriated the image of Venus by employing a natural or real body: probably her own. Fontana embodied the image of Prudence with physicality, creating a natural and tactile form. She also suggested a personification of Beauty (Allen & Rees, 2002; Jayne, 1945; 1985);¹³ classical representations of Venus depicted her holding a mirror (*speculum*) for reflecting her beauty (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Venus, Roman Mosaic, 3rd Century CE. Musée National du Bardo, Tunisia.

Prudence as Venus is gazing at the viewer—not at the mirror, as traditionally represented in art, but through Fontana's fictive mirror, an external mirror composed by the viewer when perceiving the painting. Prudence as Venus is partially veiled and holds a hand mirror; the figure's back is reflected in a large mirror

¹² See Elizabeth Cropper, "On Beautiful Women, Parmigianino, Petrarchismo, and the Vernacular Style," *Art Bulletin*, 58, No. 3 (Sep. 1976), 374-394, <http://www.jstor.org> (accessed December, 2017), p. 274. See Malcolm Bull, *Mirror of the Gods* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 220, for the development of the iconography of the Toilet of Venus, originating in Venice because of the association of the city with the sea, commerce, and prostitution, paralleling these aspects with Venus, born from the sea and Goddess of Love and Pleasure.

¹³ In ancient Latin, the word *Venus* (*phosphorous*) means *the luminous one*. This appellation alludes to Venus as both planet and a goddess.

behind her. However, Prudence as Venus does not look into either of these two mirrors but faces the viewer and poses for the viewer's gaze and arousal.

Fontana's *Prudence* recalls artistic theories about beauty and proportions from ancient times to the time of Mannerism. In the Italian 16th-century, for example, one of the aspects of art theory was the concept and depiction of beauty and the beautiful. Beauty embodied two components: physical beauty (*venustas*), which was commensurable; and metaphysical beauty, which was an abstract form of the good (moral good). Beauty was an entity composed of proportionate parts to form a perfect form—an ideal canon. Thus a perfect form is a beautiful form. These notions about beauty and proportion originated in Platonic writings, with Plato's *Timaeus* (87 BCE), "beauty is not without regular proportion" (Johansen & Lee, 2008; Hackforth, 1972),¹⁴ and were further expanded by his followers, e.g., Plotinus, who in the *Enneads*, Part 1 (6:1), referred to beauty as "the harmonious proportion of parts to each other and to the whole" (Kalligas, 2014).¹⁵ Ancient Roman treatises on architecture, in particular Vitruvius's *Ten Bookson Architecture*, compared the human body and human parts to architectural forms, e.g., fingers, feet, or arms, were employed as tools for accurate proportions, as visualized in Renaissance artist Leonardo da Vinci's drawing of *The Vitruvian Man* of 1500, at the Galleria della Accademia in Venice. Earlier, the humanist and art theorist Leon Battista Alberti commented on Vitruvian architectural notions in his book *On Architecture (De re aedificatoria)* of 1485 (Aiken, 1980; Rykwert, Tavernor, & Leach, 1988; Rowland & Howe, 1999; Cheney, 2016).¹⁶

The Platonic and Vitruvian notions were visualized and expounded upon in 16th-century Mannerist treatises, such as the creation of painting, visualized in Giorgio Vasari's (1511-1574) *Fine Arts* for his houses in Arezzo (1542) and Florence (1560). In his writings (*The Lives*), Vasari composed criteria for aesthetic judgment—the five attributes, called the five additions (*i cinque aggiunti*)—when creating or viewing a work of art. These visual additions were also referred to as a visual *componimento*, consisting of rule, order, measurement, drawing, and style (*regola, ordine, misura, disegno, and maniera*) (Bettarini & Barocchi, 1971-1986; Cheney, 2007).¹⁷ In Fontana's *Prudence* as Venus, the nude figure is measuring her thigh with a

¹⁴ The full passage reads: "Everything that is good is beauty, and beauty is not without relations or regular proportions." Plato's discussion about measurement and proportion or symmetry as part of perfection and beauty is continued in *Philebus* 64c.

¹⁵ See Paul Kalligas, *The Enneads of Plotinus: A Commentary, Volume 1*, trans. Elizabeth Key Fowden and Nicolas Pilavachi (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), Chapter 16 on Beauty. Plotinus commented further that "beauty illuminates good proportions, rather than the good proportions themselves", see Kalligas, *The Enneads*, p. 197.

¹⁶ See Alberti's original Latin edition, *De re aedificatoria*, first printed posthumously in Florence in 1485. See edition by J. Rykwert, R. Tavernor, and N. Leach, eds. and trans., *De re aedificatoria* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988). Vasari's humanist friend Cosimo Bartoli published the Italian translation in 1550 as *L'architettura di Leonbatista Alberti, tradotta in lingua fiorentina da Cosimo Bartoli, gentil uomo e academico fiorentino*. See also Jane Andrews Aiken, "Leon Battista Alberti's System of Human Proportions," *Journal of the Courtauld Institutes*, 43 (1980), 68-96. For Vitruvius, see Ingrid Rowland and Thomas Noble Howe, eds., *Vitruvius: Ten Books on Architecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and Liana De Girolami Cheney, "Giorgio Vasari and Mannerist Architecture: A Marriage of Beauty and Function in Urban Spaces," *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, 6, No. 10 (October 2016), 1150-1171.

¹⁷ See Rosanna Bettarini and Paola Barocchi, *Giorgio Vasari, Le vite de' più eccellenti architetti, pittori, et scultori edizioni 1550 e 1568* (Florence: Sansoni, 1971-1986) (hereafter Bettarini-Barocchi), Preface Two, III, 5, and Preface Three, IV, 7-9. In the Third Preface of the *Vite*, Vasari made clear that of the five elements or standards, three of them—*misura, ordine, and regola*—relate in particular to the creation of *disegno* (drawing) in architecture and derive from antiquity. However, his articulation of these three standards in relation to architecture indicates his familiarity with Leon Battista Alberti's writings on architecture. For example, in Vasari's section on Architecture in *Alle Tre Arti del Disegno: Architettura, Scultura e Pittura* of the *Vite*, he cites the importance of the treatises of Vitruvius and Alberti in referring to the principles of architecture: "Già descritti da Vitruvio e dal nostro Leon Battista Alberti" (already described by Vitruvius and by our Leon Battista Alberti). See Bettarini-Barocchi, I, 31; and Liana De Girolami Cheney, "Giorgio Vasari's Fine Arts From the *Vite* of 1550: The Splendor of Creativity and Design," *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, 7, No. 2 (February 2007), 140-178.

compass, alluding to the concept of measurability for the formation of composing a proportionate, beautiful form.

At one level, the cultural humanistic and artistic traditions in the depiction of the *Personification of Prudence* provided Fontana with visual awareness of the artistic theories postulated in ancient and Mannerist times, while at another other level, the emblematic tradition based on several sources available in Bologna's erudite circle enticed her to further conceive new artistic innovations, e.g., Andrea Alciato's (1492-1550) *Emblemata* (Alciato, 2017; 1551)¹⁸ and Achille Bocchi's (1488-1562) *Symbolicae Quaestiones* (Bocchi, 1574; Urbini, 1994, p. 207; Watson, 2004; Cheney, 2015).¹⁹ Alciato, a renowned teacher of humanist jurisprudence, was invited to teach civil law at the University of Bologna in 1537. He received a substantial annual stipend of 1,200 gold scudi plus 200 scudi for moving expenses (Grendler, 2002; 1999).²⁰ But Alciato was only able to reside in Bologna for four years, from 1537 until 1541, because the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V summoned him back to his permanent academic teaching post at the University of Pavia. During Alciato's sojourn in Bologna, the Florentine artist, architect, and writer Giorgio Vasari, assisted by Cristofano Gherardi (1508-1556), was commissioned by the Olivetan monks to decorate their refectory (dining hall) in the Church of San Michele in Bosco in Bologna (Cheney, 1993). The frescoed side-walls contain apocalyptic views surrounded by grotteschi, while the central wall is comprised of three large panel paintings on biblical suppers. While Vasari was painting his cycle (1539-1541), Alciato met with him and wrote an honorific inscription for him, which is still in situ at the entrance off the refectory (Cheney, 2011; 2009).²¹ During the stay in Bologna, Vasari also befriended and collaborated with Prospero Fontana, Lavinia's father, on artistic projects.

¹⁸ See Alciato at Glasgow University Library for editions of Alciato's *Emblemata*, <http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/alciato/> (accessed December 2017); and Andrea Alciato, *Emblemata* (Lyons: Macé Bonhomme for Guillaume Rouille, 1551).

¹⁹ See Achille Bocchi, *Symbolicae quaestiones* (Bologna: Giulio Bonasone, 1574). The engravings were composed after the drawings of Prospero Fontana, assisted by his daughter, Lavinia Fontana. See Silvia Urbini, "Lavinia Fontana," Exhibition catalogue entry, 74, ed. Vera Fortunati, *Lavinia Fontana* (Milan: Electa, 1994), p. 207. See also Elizabeth Watson, *Achille Bocchi and the Emblem Book as Symbolic Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Liana De Girolami Cheney, "Lavinia Fontana's Two Minervas," *Woman's Art Journal*, 36, No. 2 (2015), 30-40.

²⁰ See Paul F. Grendler, *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), section on Bologna in the Sixteenth Century; and Paul F. Grendler, "The University of Bologna, the City, the Papacy," *Renaissance Studies*, 13, No. 4 (1999), 475-485.

²¹ See Liana De Girolami Cheney, "The Decorative Religious and Secular Cycle," in Liana De Girolami Cheney, *Giorgio Vasari: Artistic and Emblematic Manifestations* (Washington, DC: New Academia, 2011), 141-150, in particular, p. 142. Alciato's Latin inscription reads:

Otonis mensibus opus ab Aretino Georgio
pictum, non tam
praecio, quam amicorum obsequio et honoris
voto, anno 1539
Phillipus Serralius pon.curavit

(In the months of autumn of the year 1539, the painting from Georgio [Giorgio] from Arezzo received both praise and esteem from friends and a mark of indulgence from Pope Filippo Serragli.)

See also Liana De Girolami Cheney, "Giorgio Vasari's *Allegory of Prudence*: Mirroring Alciato and Valeriano's Emblems," *Emblem Studies*, 7 (2009), 26-37.



Figure 7. Andrea Alciato, Emblem 22, *Custodiendas Virgines* (Maidens must be guarded) in *Emblemata* (Lyon, 1550). By permission of the University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.



Figure 8. Andrea Alciato, Emblem 20, *Maturandum* (All in Good Time) in *Emblemata* (Lyon, 1550). By permission of the University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

Andrea Alciato strongly admired the virtue of Prudence, as evidenced by the numerous emblems of this virtue in his book, e.g.: Emblem 18, *Prudentes Problema* (The Wise. A Problem); Emblem 19, *Prudens magis quam loquax* (Wise Head, Closed Mouth); Emblem 22, *Custodiendas virgines* (Maidens Must Be Guarded or The Serpent Protects the Maidens, Figure 7); Emblem 23, *Vino prudentiam augeri* (Wisdom Increased by Wine); and the most popular, Emblem 20, *Maturandum* (Making Good Speed or All in Good Time) (Alciato, 1551; Daly, 1985; Glasgow Emblem, 2017) (Figure 6).²² This latter emblem is of a snake-fish wrapped around an arrow pointing perpendicularly down to a vast landscape with trees, rivers, and ancient ruins. The motto of the emblem was appropriated from various types of ancient Greek and Roman mottoes alluding to *Festina lente* (Make Haste Slowly or More Haste and Less Speed) (Van Nostrand, 2016; Deonna, 1954). In Renaissance artistic and literary traditions, the motto usually depicted a dolphin, not a fish-snake, around an anchor or an arrow. In the writings and description of hieroglyphs by Francesco Colonna in the *Dream of Poliphilo*, the motto is further illustrated as a dolphin wrapped around an anchor, coupled with the motto *Festina lente*. In 1499, the Venetian printer Aldus Manutius appropriated this maxim as his printer's mark (Grendler, 1984). Ingeniously, for Alciato's arrow, Fontana substituted an oval mirror as an instrument to slow down the actions of the serpent (compare Figures 1 and 8).

Fontana's other important Bolognese emblematic source was Achille Bocchi's *Symbolicae quaestiones* of 1555 (reprinted in 1574 in Bologna) (Praz, 1975, pp. 23, 29).²³ Both Fontana and her father, Prospero, were commissioned to create drawings for the engravings in Bocchi's emblematic volume (Cheney, 2015; Watson, 2004). Bocchi, a close friend of Fontana, was a Bolognese humanist and teacher at the University of Bologna (Urbini, 1994, p. 207; Murphy, 2003, pp. 16, 18, 52, 54).²⁴ As a consequence of her cultural academic milieu and her father's artistic and patronage contacts, Fontana was aware of the literary and printed traditions associated with emblematic and mythographic sources.

There are two emblems from Bocchi's book that seem to relate to Fontana's *Prudence*: Emblem XI, *Sapientiae Species Inenarrabili* (The Indescribable/Ineffable Beauty of Wisdom) and Emblem LXII, with the motto: *Philosopho Dialecticae Praestantia, et Divisio* (Dialectic Is the Cornerstone of the Sciences/Learning) (Figures 9 and 10). Fontana and her father may have prepared drawings or sketches for these emblems. Fontana's connection with Bocchi made her aware of these emblems. The first, Emblem XI, contains numerous

²² See Alciato's series of emblems on Prudence in *Emblemata* (Lyons: Macé Bonhomme for Guillaume Rouille, 1551). This Alciato edition is employed throughout this essay. See also Peter Daly, *Andreas Alciatus, Emblems in Translation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985); and the Glasgow Emblem website, <http://www.emblems.arts.gla.ac.uk/french/> (accessed in December 2017). In Renaissance art, Emblem 20, *Maturandum* [Making Good Speed or All in Good Time]—an anchor and a dolphin, coupled with the motto *Festina lente* [Make Haste Slowly] and maxim—is appropriated from the writings and descriptions of hieroglyphics by Francesco Colonna in the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* [*The Dream of Poliphilo* or *The Soul in Love*], published by the Venetian printer Aldus Manutius in 1499. In turn, Aldus employs this motto as his printer's mark.

²³ The engravings for Bocchi, *Symbolicae quaestiones* were composed after the drawings of Prospero Fontana, assisted by his daughter, Lavinia Fontana. Other drawings for Bocchi's emblems were composed by Agostino Carracci.

²⁴ See Urbini, "Lavinia Fontana," entry, 74, p. 207; and Murphy, *Lavinia Fontana*, pp. 16, 18, 52 and 54, for the association of Bocchi with the artists Prospero and Lavinia Fontana.

Latin mottoes (Figure 9). This emblem was dedicated to Cosimo I de' Medici, Duke of Florence.²⁵ In it, Bocchi alluded to the quest for a perfect form. The image or *pictura* depicts an open landscape on the top of a hill with a bench or classical coffin on which a nude female sits, holding a mirror. The figure's fancy hairdo is formed of braided tresses coiled around a crown. A veil springs from the crown down to her back. This short veil contrasts with the long veil that partially covers her pudenda and buttocks. With outstretched arms she holds a mirror, which reveals her self-reflection surrounded by a luminous sky. The figure reacts, surprised at the reflection, and gazes at it with a stern expression. The mirror has an unusual frame, decorated with astral forms of planets and stars. A Latin inscription is incised on a lapidary fragment that hangs from a heavenly chain, reading "Dereb. Optime Iudicat" ("She judges best on matters of Beauty" or "Best judge of Beauty"). The figure, a nude Venus type (similar to Fontana's *Prudence*), is proportionally designed, alluding to a canon of beauty. On her bench there is another Latin inscription, "Semper eadem" ("Always the same"), an allusion to the eternal recurrence of the seasons as well as the passing of time. Behind the figure, in a fertile landscape, there is a blooming tree, which suggests the season is Spring, Venus's season.

²⁵ I am grateful to William Wanbaugh for his Latin translation of the text (*subscriptio*). This is a general translation to understand the meaning of the text.

Who, pray, presents herself? Who is this who arises so bright, and so
Fair? Is it the spouse of Tithonus* drawn on a rosy chariot: or Phoebe
Dazzling white? Or rather the golden Sun which with unexhausted torch
Purifies the flaming walls of the world? Or Venus herself
Bringing back a lustrous light to ailing mortals?

By your leave, spouse of Tithonus, and dazzling white Phoebe,
And Sol, and let me tell thus far the portents of the Sun.
Lo! A greater splendor arises to which all the stars do yield,
For which the gods rise up, Olympus arises.

Come hither O beauty of the age: ah! unfold to me that serene
Famed forehead beneath which two lights (eyes) shine
Which put to flight the sad darkness and cloudy weather.
Show those comely temples contending with the roses of spring,
Which bring back perpetual spring, and with sweet modesty
Surpass beauty itself, or what is more beautiful than she.

Come hither and overwhelm me with sweet flames,
Transpierce our breast with six hundred arrows,
Wound, sear, slay. Thus it befits to perish evermore.
This death is far sweeter to me than life.

* Spouse of Aurora.



Figure 9. Achille Bocchi, Emblem XI, *Sapientiae Species Inenarrabili* (The Indescribable/Ineffable Beauty of Wisdom) in *Symbolicae quaestiones* (Bologna, 1574). By permission of the University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

Bocchi's emblem foreground is most intriguing: It represents an ancient monster, the hydra, which is being crushed by Venus stepping on it (Wheeler, 1856; Evelyn-White, 1914; Van Veen, 2006),²⁶ while opposite to the hydra is a coiled snake biting his tail, an *ouroboros* (a Greek word for "he who eats the tail") forming the letter "C". Bocchi's text, or *subscriptio*, of the emblem is the *clavis interpretandi* to the foreground collection of reptiles—hydra and snake. The emblem is dedicated to Cosimo I de' Medici, Duke of Florence, hence the letter "C" formed by the snake and the alchemical formation of the snake biting on his own tale, an

²⁶ See Hesiod's *Theogony*, 3:10-14, in *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica With an English Translation*, by Hugh G. Evelyn-White (Cambridge, MA., Harvard University Press; London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1914); Horace's *Epistle* 2.7.6 to Augustus, where he praised the emperor for his heroic tasks like Hercules killing the ancient monster with several heads, the Hydra, "contudit hydram." See *Q. Horatii Flacci Opera. The Works of Horace*, with notes by George B. Wheeler, 2 vols. (Dublin: McGlashan and Gill, 1856), 1:378; and Henk Th. van Veen, *Cosimo I de' Medici and His Self-Representation in Florentine Art and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 192, associating Horace's dictum for Emperor Augustus, "contudit hydram," to Duke Cosimo.

allusion to the cosmos (Plato's *Timaeus* 33) or the name of the duke as well as a reference to an eternal return because of its circular form—like the season of Spring (“Semper eadem”), the cycle of life and death, is constant. Venus strikes the hydra with her left leg, hence the dark treatment of the engraving to denote evil, while with the right leg in full bright light protects the snake from being harmed by the monster. This is a parallel allusion to Cosimo I being protected by his prudence and wisdom in his governance of the Florentine duchy. The Latin inscription, “Sapientia Species Inenarrabilis” (“The Indescribable Beauty of Wisdom”), gives a clear explanation about the importance of Wisdom or Prudence in the affairs of life such as the radiant reflection seen in the mirror.

When Bocchi's emblem is compared with Fontana's painting, there are significant correspondences. The robust treatment of the body and overall design of the drapery and veil enveloping the figure, which is similar in both of images, suggests that Fontana was involved in the drawing of this image; for certain she was familiar with the emblem because of her close professional relationship with the Bocchi family. In the painting, Fontana replaced Bocchi's oval mirror with her oval hand mirror, and Bocchi's coiled snake became Fontana's snake encircling the mirror, embodying aspects of the Platonic concept of the Good, a moral reference associated with the personification of Prudence (McCoppin, 2015, p. 200).



Figure 10. Achille Bocchi, Emblem LXII, *Philosopho Dialecticae Praestantia, et Divisio* (Dialectic Is the Cornerstone of the Sciences/Learning) in *Symbolicae quaestiones* (Bologna, 1574). By permission of the University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

Bocchi's second emblem, Emblem LXII, with the motto *Philosopho Dialecticae Praestantia, et Divisio* (Dialectic Is the Cornerstone of the Sciences/Learning) refers to the abstract aspects of Prudence as an abstract symbol of dialectic, which is of higher learning (Figure 8).²⁷ Bocchi's emblem comments on Plato's *Republic* 532b and 534e, where the philosopher discusses the discipline required to learn abstract concepts as mathematical constructs in saying: "Dialectics above all other studies to be as it were the coping stone and that no other higher kind of study could rightly be placed above it" (534e).²⁸ The *pictura* of the emblem symbolizes a quest to compose a perfect form. In an open landscape at the top of a hill stands a female dressed *all'antica*. Use of the wet-drapery motif both reveals and conceals her body, while her windblown mantle provides her

²⁷ I am grateful to William Wanbaugh for his Latin translation of the text (*subscriptio*). This is a general translation to understand the meaning of the text. The long epigram of Emblem LXII reads:

Tell, pray, who thou art? I am called Dialectic, she
Whom Plato dubs the highest summit of learning. Why
Dost thou display instruments in thy hand? By these
I clearly teach the signs and marks of the true and the false,
And of the probable. But what dost thou think
Must be attempted by all zealous (minds)? Relate!
Thus faithful minds may quickly grasp and hold thee.

They must first know the power of words, the nature, all types
Of things simple and complex.
Then how each and every rule must be designed. By what reason
It may be true or considered false, besides, what
And in what way it is to be done, and when what follows and to what
The contrary may be, and in what manner of ambiguities
It is necessary for words to be divided and explained.

And because our mind must often be shown what is hidden,
And in unraveling the twisted meaning of a matter, it is necessary
To define briefly what it is, and what it is about: then
It must be seen when the type of one or each has been explained
What are the forms or parts of each type, so that into all those
The composed speech may be distributed.

But where the matter demands, the wise man distributes, and divides
Every type into certain categories: and thus so that clearly none
Of them may passed over, nor be redundant.
Whereas it is of account that each divides suitably, so that
If such a one formerly could perchance be seen
With Socratic eyes, he (it?) would easily have been worthy of all
Allegiance, and like a god worthy to be venerated by a cult.

On the Same

This divine faculty brings light to the arts:
It suffers no perturbation, nor any doubt.
It puts down a foot everywhere: it does not limit itself
To be overcome anywhere. It wages wars with intrepid breast.

²⁸ I want to express my gratitude to Dr. Aphrodite Alexandrakis, emeritus Professor of Philosophy at Barry University in Florida, for providing the translation of the Greek inscriptions and the source of its meaning.

balance. She looks at a cityscape in the distance. In one hand she holds measuring instruments such as a square, a compass, and a pendulum, used to compose a design with rules, order, and accurate proportions. In addition, in the same hand, she holds a torch, a source of artificial light contrasting with the natural light of the day, assisting in dimensional contrasts. With her other hand, the female controls a serpent wrapped around her arm. At her feet there is a large sieve, a symbol associated with selectivity and judgment because of its function of separating coarser from finer substances. Abstractly, the sieve alludes to the faculty of wisdom where practical and speculative judgment is applied, as in the actions of a prudent person; hence the sieve, because it is an attribute of the personification of Prudence. Along with the tools of measurement, the square and the compass, the sieve serves as a discriminatory device for practical designs such as architectural forms and philosophical constructs such as the dialectic of mathematical and geometrical considerations. The serpent is also a symbol of knowledge, but of a scientific nature; it is indicated by the figure holding a torch, alluding to the effects of physical effects of light or fire. The close connection between the entwined snake and the windblown veil may suggest an association with Mercury, the Messenger of the Gods and also the God of Communication and Divination.

Thus, after designing emblems for Bocchi, Fontana incorporated these emblematic conceits about prudent behavior and dialectic knowledge in her depiction of the *Prudence* or *Personification of Wisdom*. Fontana's nude image of Prudence holds a compass, not only to measure the beauty of her body, according to the Maniera theory of art expounded by Vasari's five additions (*cinque aggiunti*), but also to show prudent actions and comportment (Cheney, 2007). In turning her back to the elements of vanity (*vanitas*)—i.e., jewelry, ribbons, pillows, and mirrors—Prudence discards them. Her disrobing reminds the viewer about the unveiling of truth, while her nude body is a symbol of Beauty or of Platonic Goodness (Plato, *Republic*, Book VI). Joining together these virtues—truth and goodness—metaphorically refers to aspects of the personification of Prudence—Fontana's painting.

It is not a mere coincidence that Fontana's *Prudence* is in part an appropriation of Alciato's emblems. But in Fontana's painting, Prudence is surrounded with all her attributes of practical and speculative wisdom: a mirror and a serpent (Cheney, 1995; 2007).²⁹ These traditional attributes so often seen in paintings of the 16th century reflect the artistic tradition of Mannerist painters such as Agnolo Bronzino (1503-1572), Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574), who also depicted personifications of Prudence in various drawings and paintings (Cecchi, 1987) (Figures 11 and 12).³⁰

²⁹ The three paintings are: (1) the *Neapolitan Prudence* of 1544, part of the religious decorative cycle in the Refectory of Monteoliveto in Naples; (2) the *Roman Prudence* of 1546, for Cardinal Riario's coat-of-arms in the Sala dei Cento Giorni of the Palazzo della Cancelleria in Rome (Liana De Girolami Cheney, "Giorgio Vasari's Sala dei Cento Giorni: A Farnese Celebration," *Exploration in Renaissance Culture*, 21 [1995], 121-151); and (3) the *Aretine Prudence* of 1548, for the Chamber of Fortune in Vasari's house at Arezzo (Cheney, "Giorgio Vasari's Fine Arts from the Vite of 1550," pp. 177-184).

³⁰ It is of interest to note that in Vasari's house at Arezzo, a painting of Agnolo Bronzino's *Allegory of Prudence* of 1564-1565 is displayed. It is uncertain if and when Vasari acquired Bronzino's painting. See Alessandro Cecchi, "La Prudenza del Bronzino per Ser Carlo Gherardi," *Antichità viva* (1987), pp. 19-22; and Vasari's *Neapolitan Prudence* of 1544, part of the religious decorative cycle in the Refectory of Monteoliveto in Naples. The beautiful drawing is in the Collection F. Lugt of the Institut Neerlandais in Paris (inv. 7777). See also Federico Zuccaro, drawings of *Justice* and *Prudence* of 1575 at the Musée du Louvre in Paris, which are studies for the cupola decoration of Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence and of the Church of Sant'Angelo in Vado in Umbria.

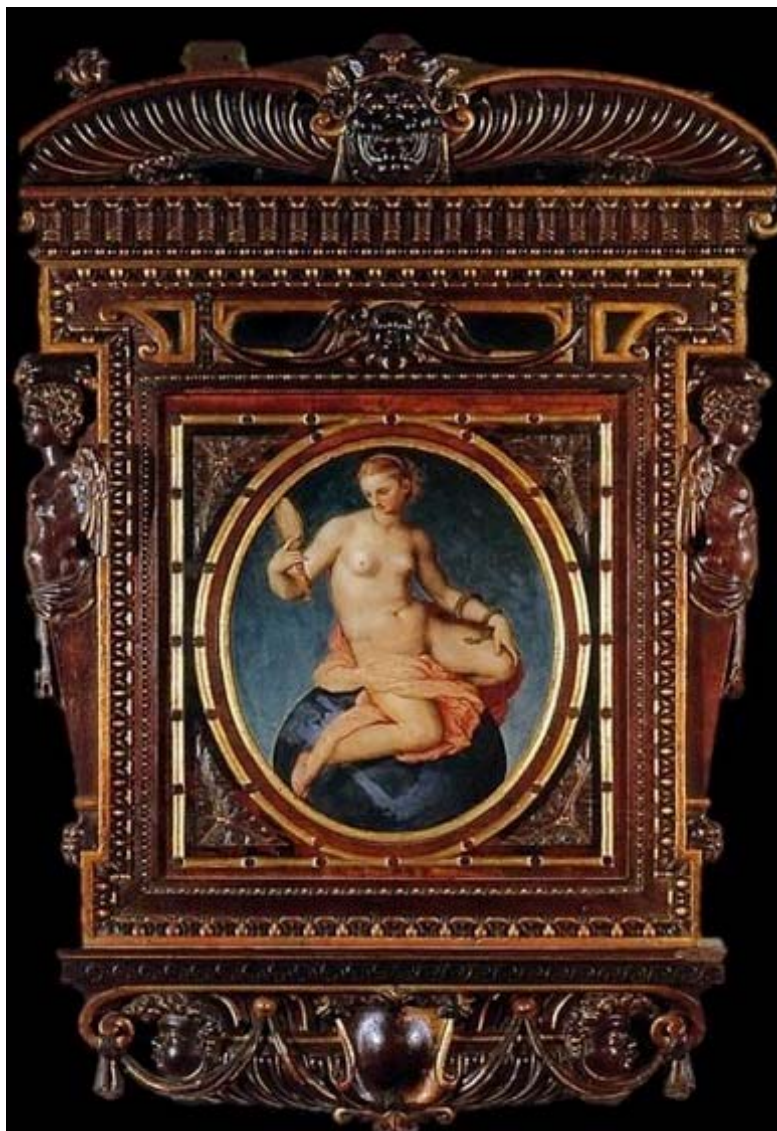


Figure 11. Agnolo Bronzino, *Mirror With the Image of Prudence*, 1540. Casa Vasari, Arezzo.



Figure 12. Giorgio Vasari, *Prudence*, 1545, drawing. Collection F. Lugt, Istitute Neerlandais, Paris.

Fontana included Christian iconography in this work by including the snake, a symbol of caution and wisdom recalling Matthew (10:16): “Be prudent [wise] as serpents”³¹. The word *serpent* derives from the Latin *serpens* “because the animal creeps by secret approaches and not by open steps”, alluding to his custodial or protective task (White, 1960, p. 165). In their emblematic commentaries, Horapollo (late 5th century), Alciato, and Pierio Valeriano Bolzani (1477-1558) also alluded to the watchful signification of the serpent. In Hieroglyph 3, *The Guardian King*, Horapollo deemed the serpent to be a symbol of vigilance (Horapollo, 1505/1993, pp. 1, 61, 70; Horapollo, 1505/1991, pp. VIII, 197). As the king watches the wall, so the snake guards the area. According to Horapollo, King Solomon, in Psalm 120:4, referred to Prudence as *spicelgium solesmense* (vigilant serpent) because a measure of prudent behavior is to always be watchful. Like Horapollo, Alciato expressed this view in Emblem 22, *Custodiendas virgines* (The Serpent Protects the Maidens), focusing

³¹ See Alciato, *Emblemes*, Emblem 22; and Daly, *Alciatus*, Emblem 22.

on the diligent and vigilant aspect of the serpent accompanied by Pallas Athena, the Goddess of Wisdom. Valeriano recalled that, according to the ancient Greeks, the snake is a symbol of tutelage and vigilance because of its sharp and deep vision (Hieroglyph XV and IX) (Valeriano, 1556). Valeriano reflected as well on ancient writings, noting that the snake not only examined present events but also measured those of the past (Valeriano, 1556, p. 213). Thus these serpents' qualities became accepted as attributes of the personification of Prudence.

At other times, Prudence is portrayed carrying a compass as a sign of her measured judgment or a book alluding to the Scriptures, and rarely with a dragon, a substitute for a serpent, to suggest the evasion of evil pursuers. Atypically, Alciato substituted a dragon for a serpent in Emblem 22, as also seen in Albrecht Dürer's *Prudence*, a pen drawing of 1495 in the Département des Arts Graphiques (Inv. 18958r) at the Musée du Louvre in Paris (compare Figures 7 and 13).



Figure 13. Albrecht Dürer, *Prudence*, 1495, pen drawing. Musée du Louvre, Paris (RMN-Grand Palais, Photo T. Ollivier).

As Fontana included the attribute of a mirror, she appropriated Valeriano's understanding of the symbolism of the mirror. For Valeriano, when Prudence carries the mirror, its reflections allude to past events, which are evaluated in the present. From the teaching of past events, the present provides an awareness of what might happen in the future. For Valeriano, events to come are evaluated in the present, because they are perceived as if they are reflected in a mirror (Valeriano, 1556, p. 206). Valeriano endowed the snake with these attributes similar to those of the mirror.

Furthermore, Fontana visually elaborated with the words *mascherare* ("to mask") and *specchiare* ("to reflect"). The mirror reflects a copy of the image, whereas the mask camouflages the frame of the mirror. In both aspects, there is a transformation or transmutation, as revealed in the life of a serpent through the process of shedding its skin. Fontana's grotesque masks are depicted around the mirror's frame contrast with the blurry image of the reflected face. With this imagery, Fontana composed another conceit or pun by depicting the past with masks on the frame of the cartouche and the future with the reflection of the fuzzy female's face. This might be the reason why Fontana decided not to depict a Janus head for the conceit of past and future, because in using the mirror she conveyed the concept of the duality of time, past and present, as well as the real and imaginary realms, what is present and was an evasion of the past, as the masks look away from the viewer and the figure of Prudence.

The painting also reveals moral reflections as seen in the displayed objects throughout the bedroom: bed, pillows, dresser holding jewelry, ribbons, frames with masks, and mirrors—all symbols of *vanitas*, earthly goods, which are futile in a transient life (Ecclesiastes 1:2 and 12:8: "Vanitas Vanitatum Omnia" or "Vanity of Vanities, All Is Vanity").³² These *vanitas* elements are in counterpoint to the globe and compass, which are instruments of celestial measurability (Barolsky, 1994, p. 10, Fig. 5).³³ The mirror, in Christian symbolism, represents the conventional attribute for truth for its transparent reflection and refraction of light and is traditionally carried by the personification of Prudence. Fontana added Christian meanings to her imagery, manifesting an assimilation of Renaissance Neoplatonism, that is, the Christianization of pagan myths or the secularization of Christian religion. She also followed religious prescriptions and implications of the Counter-Reformation imparted by the Bolognese Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti (1522-1597), who proclaimed that even profane images must contain a moral meaning (Paleotti, 2012, pp. 177-181, 234-239).

In addition to the Christian and mythological allusions, Fontana's *Prudence* comprises astral and cosmic connotations. She engages the viewer further to understand why she is nude and why she is resting her left foot on a celestial globe, where a zodiac band marks the signs of Taurus, Gemini, and Cancer. While Fontana incorporated many of the personification of Prudence's attributes in her painting, except for the Janus head, she also added a new symbol to her image: the celestial globe with the band of the zodiac, a cosmic attribute that contrasts with the terrestrial elements of the snake and the mirror. The globe is a symbol of ubiquity, as portrayed in ancient Roman copies of original Greek marble sculptures of the 4th century BCE, e.g., as found in Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli and Cartari's emblem, *Bonus Eventus* or Felicity.³⁴

³² In the imagery of other Maniera painters such as Vasari, Prudence is depicted at a vanity table, with an elaborate holder for the mirror, and with a comb and a brush.

³³ In representing the ambiguity of Vanity and Prudence, who both traditionally are shown looking into a mirror, Fontana may have thought about Michelangelo's drawing on the *Allegory of Prudence* at the British Museum in London.

³⁴ See Cartari, *Imagini*, p. 255.

In these astral and astronomical representations of Urania, the Muse of Memory, and the Goddess of Astronomy, her attribute of the globe is associated with the concept of cosmic time as well as terrestrial past and present time, hence connecting with the conceit of time of the personification of Prudence. As the Goddess of Astronomy, Urania's attributes are the globe, constellations, and the compass as seen in the Albrecht Dürer's engraving of *Urania* of 1502, for *Prognosticon of Johannes Stabius* (Nuremberg, 1503) and Raphael's *Urania* of 1510 in the ceiling of the Stanza della Segnatura in the papal apartments at the Vatican (Fletcher, 2013, pp. 133-164; Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1994, pp. 226-227; Cooper, 1978, p. 4) (Figures 14 and 15). Urania as the Muse of Astronomy embodies the Platonic concept of the World Soul "being in the center of the celestial heaven she permeates everywhere even enveloping the external world (*Timaeus* 36E) as visualized by Dürer (Via, 1987, p. 180).

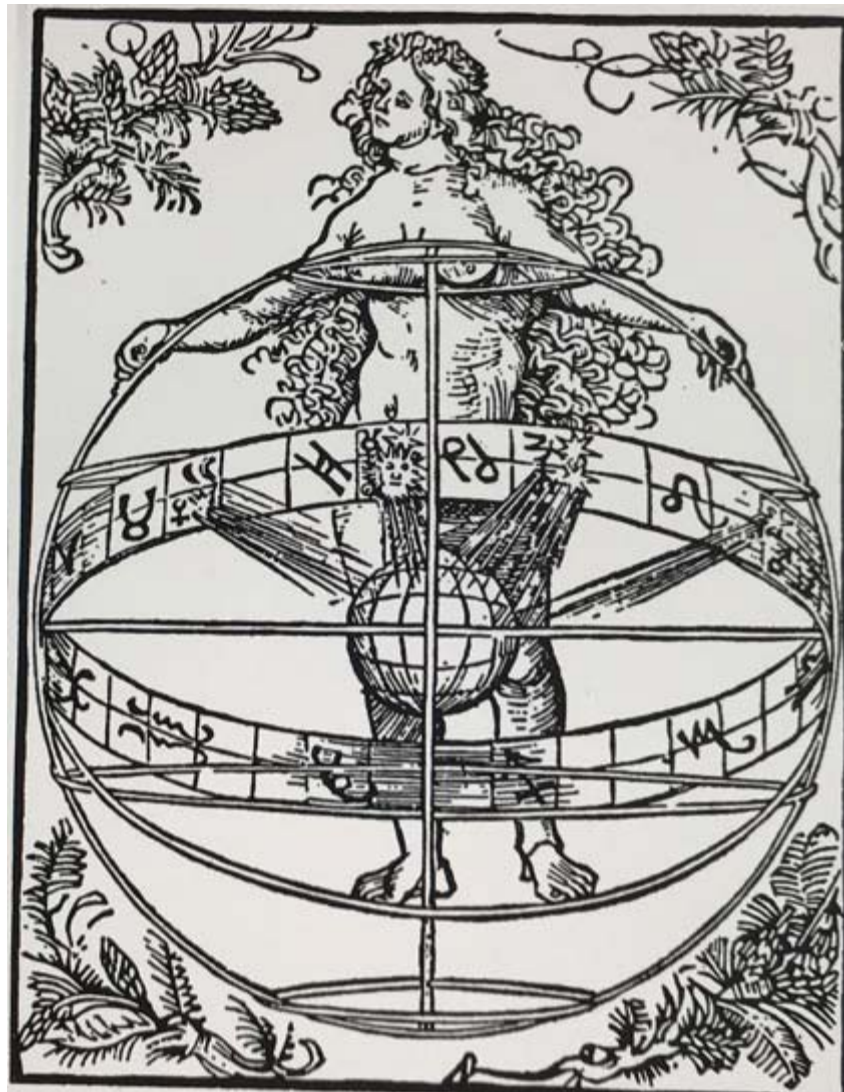


Figure 14. Albrecht Dürer, *Urania*, 1502 engraving for *Prognosticon of Johannes Stabius* (Nuremberg, 1503).



Figure 15. Raphael's *Urania*, 1512, ceiling. Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican.

Urania prophetic ability to read the stars suggests the ability that Prudence professes in foreseeing the future because of her understanding of past actions—celestial wisdom (*sophia*). In Fontana's painting, Prudence as a prophetess with her compass and globe is forecasting the terrestrial and celestial realms (compare Figures 1, 5, and 15).

Conclusion

In the painting of Fontana's *Personification of Wisdom*, Prudence's engaging action denotes her existence in the present. With her right hand she holds a compass, a measuring device for accurate proportions. At the practical level Prudence is gauging the size of her thigh to form a perfect and beautiful body referring to the Maniera theory of art, while at the theoretical level the measuring action of the compass, designing a triangular form, refers to the balance between the body and the soul, that is, the transcendental knowledge achieved by Prudence (Biedermann, 1994, p. 75).

Fontana's *Prudence* or *Personification of Wisdom* demonstrated her mastery in artistic and intellectual achievement by creating a painting that combines the style and conceits of the Italian 16th-century art.

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