Pictures fit for a Queen: Peter Paul Rubens and the Marie de' Medici Cycle

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Peter Paul Rubens devoted a significant portion of his artistic career to painting images either for or of women. He painted his two wives on many occasions and he was commissioned to paint religious works and portraits for important female patrons such as Archduchess Isabella, ruler of the Spanish Netherlands, and the Countess of Arundel. At the same time, in his mythological-allegorical works created almost exclusively for male patrons, Rubens painted innumerable nymphs and goddesses, often nude or only partially-clad. Indeed, Rubens's development of a pictorial rhetoric based primarily on the display of the bare female body is so closely tied to his artistic identity that the adjective "Rubensian" is still current to this day. It was only in the twenty-four canvases he painted for one of the two long galleries of Marie de' Medici's newly-built Luxembourg Palace in Paris, however, that Rubens combined these two aspects of his art: a female patron and his usual visual language.[1] The Medici cycle is the only major example in this period of a large-scale, semi-public cycle dedicated exclusively to glorifying the life of a contemporary woman. When Rubens fulfilled this unusual commission by using a visual rhetoric of exposed female bodies to represent history-as-allegory or myth, he inadvertently created a situation in which the cultural presuppositions of the cycle's contemporary viewers—mainly members of the French court and important visitors from abroad—ran headlong into the personal and political messages the Queen had hoped the cycle would project.[2] It is precisely the uniqueness of the Medici cycle in terms of what is represented as well as how it is represented that acts to reveal the gender-specific nature of Rubens's strategies for visual representation in general.

The Medici cycle's tensions are particularly well illustrated by one of the most interesting images in the series, the *Presentation of Marie de' Medici's Portrait to Henri IV*.[3] This painting demonstrates the consequences of Rubens's decision to use his usual visual rhetoric in the special case of a woman who is both the patron and the portrayed, the viewer as well as the viewed. (Fig. 1)

In this image, the French King, Henri IV, gazes adoringly at the portrait of his bride-to-be, Marie de' Medici, proffered to him by a group of heavenly deities. Marie de' Medici, meanwhile, stares out directly at the outside viewer. The Queen is circumscribed by the black, painted frame around her image which serves to turn her presence into a "mere" work of art which can be scrutinized at leisure by the outside beholder, by Henri IV, and by the gods and goddesses. At the same time, Marie de' Medici breaks out of being "merely" artificial and decorative through her confident and unflinching outward gaze which gives her the power of direct communication with the audience, a power denied most of the other figures in the image including the King himself. Male and female, subject and object, levels of reality and artifice: the complexities of the *Presentation of the Portrait* can serve as an introduction to the ambiguities which exist between the representation of women and women as representation in seventeenth-century culture.

Ever since the seventeenth century, viewers of Rubens's Medici cycle have commented on the contrasts between the artist's imagery and the historical circumstances surrounding his patron, Marie de' Medici. In the later part of the century, Félibien lamented: "For, I beg you, just what do Cupid, Hymen, Mercury, the Graces, Tritons, [and] Nereids have to do with...Marie de Médicis?"[4] More recent critics have also remarked on the disjunctions between Rubens's rhetoric of allegory and the historical realities of Marie de' Medici's life.[5] Even Rubens himself complained that some visitors to the Medici gallery had "not grasped the true meaning" of some of the paintings and had "taken amiss" certain subjects.[6] One important factor in these problems, indeed, an important factor in the cycle's lack of immediate influence both artistically and politically, is the inherent conflict between Rubens's visual language and the fact that his patron was a woman.[7] Although some scholars have explored Marie de' Medici's role as a female patron, most of the extensive research on the cycle has concentrated on deciphering what its individual images mean. The personal and political references of the allegorical figures, the links to classical texts and emblem books, and the relationship to traditional "female" iconographies have all been assessed, but even recent studies have largely ignored how Rubens's language of visual representation was itself also affected by his patron's history and gender and how this in turn might have affected contemporary viewers of the

cycle.[8] In other words, deciphering *what* the images mean is not enough; one must also explore *how* they mean.[9]

The Medici cycle, completed in 1625, falls roughly at the midpoint of Rubens's artistic career.[10] The apparent contradictions between Rubens's representational strategies and the special demands of having a female patron can be explained in part by the history and circumstances of the commission. The surviving contracts and correspondence suggest that the project was to a certain extent a commission by committee.[11] The Abbé Maugis, Richelieu, Peiresc, Rubens and Marie de' Medici herself as well as others at the French court all played at least some role in the final choice of subjects. In addition, the fact that much of the planning and execution had to be done in two different places, Paris and Antwerp, over more than three years (January 1622 to May 1625), further explains some of the cycle's inconsistencies. Even more importantly, over the course of the project, the delicate political situation between Marie de' Medici and her son, Louis XIII, was in constant flux, and her aims and tactics for personal propaganda through the Medici cycle were repeatedly adapted to the changing political climate.

Following the assassination in 1610 of her husband, Henri IV, Marie de' Medici had ruled as Regent for her minor son for four years until he gained his majority. At first, Louis XIII had been content to allow his mother to continue to exercise her power and he readily praised the "widow who happily governs the people,...sends the armies,...chooses the captains,...goes on campaign,...[and] directs the triumphs."[12] By 1617, however, relations between mother and son had deteriorated to the point that Marie de' Medici had been banished to Blois and in 1619 she was openly supporting the grandees who were trying to start a rebellion against the King. By 1620, Louis XIII and his mother had reconciled and in 1621, Marie de' Medici was asked to rejoin the King's council. It was during this truce that the Queen Mother commissioned Rubens to paint his series of large canvases for the main west gallery of her new Parisian palace, the Luxembourg, a space which was to serve as a grand approach and waiting area for visitors to her state apartments.[13] She chose this prominent setting in order to impress upon visitors from the French court and especially upon her son, the King, the veracity of her carefully selected and edited version of her life's main events, an important part of her

attempts to regain her son's trust and hence some of her former power and influence.[14] The reconciliation of mother and son was only temporary, however, for by 1631, Marie de' Medici was forced to flee permanently from France and had to live out her days in exile.[15] In terms of solidifying her personal and political position in France, the Medici cycle had not been effective or, at least, not effective enough as an act of visual propaganda.[16]

Before the cycle and continuing after its completion, Rubens developed a pictorial language for allegory which was ultimately based on the symbolic display of nude female bodies. When he adapted this rhetoric to the Medici cycle commission in which the primary heroic subject was a woman, Rubens's deployment of nude female bodies as allegorical figures inevitably created friction between the messages he and his patron intended the paintings to project and the visual language used to represent them. In the *Education of Marie de' Medici*, for example, Rubens used the instantly-recognizable image of the nude Three Graces as an attribute of the Queen's childhood education. (Fig. 2) The instrument-playing male god, Orpheus,[17] assumes the role of the implied heterosexual male viewer by gazing directly at the nude women, whose bare flesh is highlighted all the more by the sharp contrast between their brightly-lit pale skin and the much darker surrounding space. One of the Graces looks coyly out to the viewer and thus it is she alone, the only one implying an awareness of the presence of the beholder standing before the painting, who teasingly tries to hide her nudity.[18]

The *Education of Marie de' Medici* seems to illustrate the relationship found in many of Rubens's mythological-allegorical works in which a male viewer (implicitly standing before the work and, in many cases, explicitly depicted within the work) scrutinizes a female nude. Unlike Rubens's many *Judgments of Paris* or his *Nymph and Satyr* or *Shepherd* paintings intended primarily for the decoration of the private apartments of male patrons, however, the projected audience for the *Education of Marie de' Medici* included two very different categories of viewers, namely, the Queen herself as patron of the cycle and, equally importantly, the male courtiers of the French court who made formal visits to the Luxembourg Palace. The inclusion of the Three Graces was a means of asserting the Queen's femininity. At the same time, the young Marie de' Medici is depicted turning

her back on these women and instead concentrating intensely on the lessons of the goddess of Wisdom, Minerva, dressed in armour. It is the figure of Orpheus who summarizes the inherent problems of using nude female bodies in conjunction with a message about a woman pursuing the then still primarily masculine arts of learning:[19] like the implied hetereosexual male viewers of the painting as envisioned by Rubens, Orpheus can only concentrate his gaze on the enticing nude Graces, not on the young Marie de' Medici who should be the work's main focus. Thus, by using his usual visual rhetoric of the allegorical female nude and by including a viewer in the person of Orpheus who acts out the normative heterosexual male response to this visual language, Rubens has unwittingly demonstrated how distracting his representational strategy based on the nude female body can be to the painting's viewers. Rather than proving to the French courtiers that Marie de' Medici's primary interest lies in learning the art of wise government, Rubens's nude female allegorical figures act instead as distractions from the Queen's intended message by reminding male viewers of the dangers associated with female sexuality in seventeenth-century culture in general.

The motif of the exposed female body, especially the exposed breast, occurs in several other paintings in the Medici cycle. In the *Meeting of Marie de' Medici and Henri IV in Lyons*, Marie de' Medici looks down submissively and presents her bare breast to her husband as a sign of her acceptance of her role as wife and mother subservient to her King.[20] The composition echoes a Coronation of the Virgin and, in fact, Marie de' Medici's exposed breast is Virgin-like, the ultimate symbol of woman as nurturer and procreator in an ordered, male-dominated universe.[21] Indeed, this image is one of several in the cycle which explicitly link Marie de' Medici to her namesake, the Virgin Mary.[22] In the *Peace of Marie de' Medici and Louis XIII Confirmed in Heaven*, the allusion is to an Assumption of the Virgin. Like the Virgin, Marie de' Medici becomes both the mother and mystical bride of her son, her bare breast acting as a sign of this dual role. Rubens in fact used the bare breast as an attribute of the Virgin in several paintings he produced on the theme of the Virgin and Child.[23] In both the *Meeting in Lyons* and the *Peace Confirmed in Heaven*, the Queen Mother's bare breast emphasizes her feminine and motherly qualities. Rubens used these attributes to depict Marie de' Medici as powerful precisely because of her gender, because of her ability to bear and

nurture the King's children thereby ensuring the continuation of the dynasty.[24] This image of a woman defined, empowered and sanctified through the attributes of her gender appears in other works painted by Rubens throughout his career which also accentuate the nurturing breast as the principle attribute of such a woman. In the Dulwich *Mars, Venus and Cupid* or the Rijksmuseum *Cimon and Pero*, a woman's breast gives life to both a young male child and an old male prisoner. In paintings such as the *Allegory of Peace and War* in London or the *Origins of the Milky Way* in Madrid, the mother's breast is the symbol of the establishment (or re-establishment) of an ordered world, indeed, an ordered universe.

In other paintings by Rubens, however, bare breasts carry much more negative associations. Instead of being positive symbols of the submissive and nurturing wife and mother, bare breasts allude to the dangers of female seduction. This is seen perhaps most powerfully in Rubens's London *Samson and Delilah*.[25] In this painting, Delilah's provocatively bared breasts, emphasized by the luminously-painted flesh tones which are highlighted all the more by the contrast with the much darker surrounding space, are symbols of a woman's ability to use her sexuality to incapacitate and emasculate an unwary man. Delilah uses her passive female sexuality symbolized by her bare breasts in order to exercise vengeance and control, traits associated in this period primarily with active male heroes and a very different type of meaning for the exposed female breast than that associated with the Virgin as wife and mother.[26]

Seventeenth-century culture in general seems to have held similarly ambiguous views about the significance of the bare female breast.[27] The bare breast was depicted as a positive attribute in images of the Virgin Mary as well as in the tradition of heroic female portraiture. Moralizing works such as Juvernay's *Discours particulier contre la vanité des femmes de ce temps*, on the other hand, stressed the horrible fate which awaited any woman who dared to bare her breasts in public.[28] The frontispiece of this book shows a woman baring her breasts in a low-cut dress about to be attacked by a devil rising up out of the mouth of Hell. Other works such as Polman's 1635 sermon on *Le Chancre ou Couvre-sein féminin* viciously attacked women who displayed their bare breasts in public, calling them whores who "fling out carnal thoughts between those two mounds of flesh; they

let villanous desires lodge in the trough between those bare breasts."[29] This type of vitriolic assault on the bare female breast crops up in French texts published throughout the seventeenth century.[30] In addition to the textual evidence provided by sermons and pamphlets, the pervasive notion in this period that the female breast was something powerful and potentially dangerous can be detected in the wide-spread practice of putting babies out to nurse, often to wetnurses in the country, thereby keeping even the nursing breast of middle and upper class women controlled by husbands and hidden from public view.[31] Thus, although Rubens and his patron certainly intended the Queen's bare breasts in paintings such as the *Meeting at Lyons* and the *Peace Confirmed in Heaven* to be viewed positively as signs of her submissive and nurturing role as wife and mother, seventeenth-century culture in general and Rubens in works such as his *Delilah* in particular would have conditioned male viewers to see this attribute as potentially negative in its dangerous associations with female seduction, sexuality and power.

The problems contemporary visitors to the Medici gallery faced in trying to interpret Marie de' Medici's bare breasts are intimately related to the question of context: if the Queen was clearly portrayed as exclusively Virgin-like when exposing her breasts, the cycle's viewers would have understood this display in a positive context. In several of the images, however, Rubens and his patron chose to pair bare female breasts with attributes normally associated in the seventeenth century with male power, a combination which would have reminded viewers instead of the well-known topos of the dangerous power of women.[32] In the *Felicity of the Regency* and the portrait of *Marie de' Medici as Queen Triumphant*, for example, the Queen's exposed breast is juxtaposed with attributes usually associated with male rulers (scales of justice, sceptre, orb, throne chair) in the case of the former and with male warriors (helmet, armour, cannon, guns) in the latter. (Fig. 3) Although Rubens and his patron clearly wanted these paintings to act as positive affirmations of the Queen's abilities, in spite of her gender, to govern wisely and lead France to glory, the seventeenth-century view of women as potentially dangerous temptresses like Delilah who used their femininity to gain power over men meant that these images at the same time inadvertently allowed for very negative interpretations of Marie de' Medici's intentions.

In France, the Salic law specifically prohibited women from inheriting the throne.[33] The fact that this law was circumvented three times in less than a century—for the regencies of Catherine and Marie de' Medici and for Anne of Austria later in the seventeenth century—simply confirmed male courtiers' fears of women gaining power at their expense.[34] A text published at the same time that Rubens was working on the Medici cycle made clear allusion to the perceived dangers of Marie de' Medici's assumption of power when it condemned the

> ...true trickery [of] that superb Assyrian Queen Semiramis,
> who massacred her husband and son...in order to rule over
> men and, so much did she want to imitate men's actions, she
> even dared to renounce woman's dress and clothe herself in
> the royal mantle.[35]

The combination of bare female breasts with the clothing and attributes normally associated with male rulers in paintings such as the *Felicity of the Regency* or the *Queen Triumphant* would thus have reminded contemporary viewers of the then-current topos of the Queen as a woman trying to usurp traditional male power. The fact that some of the cycle's images could easily have been (mis)interpreted in this way points to a fundamental problem: as an unusual, indeed, unique type of project in this period, the Medici cycle as a whole was unable to provide its seventeenth-century viewers with a sufficiently stable or unambiguous context which would prevent such negative readings of its images and its patron's intentions.

This friction between Marie de' Medici's desire to regain political power and the suspicion seventeenth-century patriarchal culture had of powerful women is reflected in the conflicting portrayals of women in printed books of the period. A popular literary genre in the seventeenth century was the so-called "gallery" of famous women, biographical compilations of the lives of female "worthies" from the Bible, mythology and history which served as positive examples for contemporary women.[36] At the same time that authors such as Pierre Le Moyne in *La gallerie des femmes fortes* (1647) and Jacques Du Bosc in *La femme héroïque* (1645) used women of the past as heroic examples for the female sex, other texts of the period afforded much more negative readings

of many of these same exemplary women. In works such as the anonymous *Les Singeries des femmes de ce temps descouvertes* and the *Tableau historique des ruses et subtilitez des femmes*, both published in 1623 while Rubens was designing the Medici cycle, famous women from the past were presented as dangerous figures whose deceitful seductions allowed them to tempt and then triumph over men.[37] Thus, while the biblical Susanna or Judith or the ancient Queen Semiramis could be praised as worthy models in some (con)texts, they could also serve as dire warnings of the dangers of female sexuality and power in other (con)texts. By combining images of female nudity with images of female power on behalf of a female patron, the Medici cycle therefore inevitably created a context which evoked many of this period's complicated and often contradictory notions of the nature of female sexuality and its relationship to power.

This wide range of meanings associated with female nudity can be further illustrated by another project undertaken by Rubens shortly before he began the Medici cycle. In about 1620, Rubens designed an engraving of *Susanna and the Elders* which he dedicated to Anna Roemer Visscher, an important member of Dutch humanist-literary circles who was also particularly admired for her virtue.[38] The dedication included an appropriately chaste and moralizing inscription calling Susanna, whose nude body forms the focal point of the composition, a "Pudicitiae exemplar." Originally, however, Rubens had planned to dedicate a different *Susanna* print to Anna Visscher. This print was finally executed in 1624 but, instead of a chaste dedication to Anna Visscher, it had a rather bawdy inscription which would have been much less appropriate for association with a highly-respected woman even though the nude figure of Susanna remained basically the same in both prints.[39] Instead of a comment about female chastity and virtue, this latter print was inscribed with the motto "Turpe Senilis Amor," a warning about the absurdity of old men being tempted to lust after pretty young girls.[40] The heterosexual male viewer, included symbolically within these images in the figures of the lecherous old men about to assault the cowering Susanna, could have interpreted either depiction of female nudity as potentially dangerous. It was only thanks to the prints' different inscriptions that a viewer was able to determine whether Susanna's nudity was to be understood as a sign of innocent virtue or as a sign of seductive vice. Rubens was able to use very similar

compositions for quite different purposes only because a text was included in order to provide the interpretive context necessary for a "correct" reading of the significance of each image's nudity.

In other instances, even the presence of an inscribed text was inadequate for ensuring that an exposed female body was understood "correctly." This appears to have been the case in Rubens's title-page design for Balthasar Cordier's edition of commentaries on St. Luke's Gospel, the *Catena sexaginta quinque graecorum patrum in S. Lucam*, published in Antwerp in 1628. Here, even the context provided by the title-page's text was not enough to prevent Cordier from misreading the exposed legs and breasts of the figure of Truth negatively and demanding that the figure be covered up.[41] With neither a single, authoritative text to accompany it nor previous painted examples of this type of project to refer to, the context for interpreting the entire Medici cycle was inevitably much less clear than in the case of the title-page of a religious treatise. The ever-changing personal and political situation of Marie de' Medici, as evidenced by the continuous modifications made to the list of subjects she wished to have painted, meant that a certain degree of ambiguity in the cycle was probably willed by both patron and painter. Nevertheless, the volatility inherent in using a visual rhetoric based on the nude female body in a cycle commissioned by a woman seeking to regain power meant that the positive context in which the Queen wished her cycle to be framed could easily have been misunderstood by contemporary male viewers conditioned to view female nudity as something potentially dangerous and threatening.

In creating the Medici cycle, Marie de' Medici and Rubens must have been aware to a certain degree of the possible problems involved in developing a series of paintings which would extoll the Queen's abilities to govern France without suggesting that she was a dangerously aggressive woman intent on seizing traditional male power. The original plans for both the Marie de' Medici gallery and the never-executed parallel gallery planned for Henri IV called for the "heroic deeds" of the Queen and the "triumphs" of her dead husband to be the main themes of the cycles.[42] This theme of triumph is made more explicit in the second plan of April 1622, when the most prominent position on the far end wall of the Queen's gallery was reserved for Marie de' Medici's *Triumph at Jülich*, a painting in the tradition of the quasi-historical royal equestrian portrait.[43] This initially clear focus on Marie de'

Medici as a triumphant Queen, however, became increasingly obscured as modifications were made to the subjects and their placement in the gallery in response to changing political circumstances. For instance, the ignoble *Flight from Paris* (which, in the end, was never executed), the *Escape from Blois*, and the *Full Reconciliation of Hostilities* were subjects suggested for the cycle later in 1622 which depicted the recent low-points in the Queen's relations with her son followed by the current truce.[44] These subjects were unlikely to enhance the theme of the Queen Triumphant, but signaled instead a new, perhaps less aggressive approach by the patron to regaining the King's confidence. As the Queen's political aims and tactics changed, Rubens modified his original plan to represent Marie de' Medici as a clearly heroic and triumphant ruler and instead added scenes which would have been less threatening to the cycle's most important male viewer, Louis XIII.

The essence of the problem facing both Marie de' Medici and Rubens in creating a gallery dedicated to a Queen seeking to regain her lost powers can be reduced to a single question: over what could and should Marie de' Medici be shown to be triumphant? In the course of the Medici cycle project, answers to this question fluctuated, leading to a sense of uncertainty in the message being projected by the gallery as a whole. In scenes such as the *Triumph at Jülich*, the *Consignment of the Regency*, or the *Exchange of Princesses* (a painting of Marie de' Medici's carefully arranged political marriages for her children), the triumphs of the Queen were clearly military or political. Like any male ruler, Marie de' Medici demonstrated through these paintings her ability to soldier, govern and negotiate marital alliances. In other paintings in the cycle, the Queen's triumph was over her own gender and its limitations in the eyes of seventeenth-century patriarchal culture. As previously discussed, Marie de' Medici turns her back on the nude Graces in the *Education of Marie de' Medici* and focuses instead on the lessons of the armour-clad Minerva. Similarly, in the *Disembarkation at Marseilles*, Marie de' Medici not only symbolically walks away from her earlier political attachments to Tuscany but also literally walks over the frothy nude Nereids frolicking in the sea below. (Fig. 4) In the *Apotheosis of Henri IV and the Assumption of the Regency*, the disheveled nearly-nude female Victory in the centre of the long rectangular canvas is a sign of the disordered world which Marie de' Medici's enthronement as Regent on the right side of the painting is meant to reorder.[45] The

violently-abducted nude female figure of Truth in the *Triumph of Truth* and the bare-breasted female Virtues who row the symbolic ship of state in the *Majority of Louis XIII* are literally depicted beneath the person of Marie de' Medici, thus signalling that, like any male ruler, she too can use the visual rhetoric of the nude female allegorical figure to signify her power over her sex as well as over truth and virtue.[46]

Unlike a man, however, Marie de' Medici's use of nudity in the context of a series dedicated to returning a woman to a position of power left her open to highly critical interpretations of her intentions by the male courtiers from the French court who came to visit the Luxembourg Palace and who were used to equating certain kinds of female nudity and seductiveness with a dangerous loss of male potency and power. Even without reading the paintings in such a negative context, the implied heterosexual male viewers, like Orpheus gazing at the nude Graces, could have been distracted altogether from the personal and political messages the Queen was trying to put forth in the cycle by the repeated display of nude female bodies in one painting after another. This emphasis on female nudity was heightened by the formal strategies used by Rubens, strategies which were particularly important when one considers the fact that these canvases, measuring nearly 4 m in height, would have been viewed mainly from below by the gallery's visitors.[47] Many of the nude women in the Medici cycle are either near the centre or in the forwardmost plane of the image as, for example, in the *Education of Marie de' Medici*, the *Disembarkation at Marseilles*, the *Apotheosis and Assumption of the Regency*, and the *Triumph of Truth*. Rubens further accentuated the bare female bodies he painted in luminous shades of pink and white by contrasting them with often much darker surrounding spaces. By using these types of compositional and colouristic tactics, Rubens in effect was privileging a reading of these nudes as merely seductively-painted bodies prominently displayed for the heterosexual male gaze's visual consumption rather than as essential figures in a complex iconography devised to vindicate the Queen.

This problematic relationship between female subject and male viewer, between art and beholder, is made most explicit in the Medici cycle in the *Presentation of Marie de' Medici's Portrait to Henri IV* discussed briefly above. It is in this scene that the problems of viewing, and, in

particular, of viewing a woman who is both subject and patron, are brought most clearly to the surface. In the *Presentation of the Portrait*, the two opposed ends of the spectrum of the woman as object of the male gaze are condensed into a single image: woman as seductive Venus and woman as chaste Virgin. Even Rubens's formal approach stresses this duality with the restrained colour and composition of Marie de' Medici's portrait contrasting sharply with the exuberantly-painted, bare-breasted figure of Juno floating directly above the Queen's image. Unlike earlier allusions in the cycle to Marie de' Medici's sacred namesake, the portrait within the painting recalls not the historical events associated with the Virgin Mary's life but rather refers specifically to other depictions of the Virgin in works of art, namely, in icons. Rubens's painting for the Roman church of S. Maria in Vallicella, for instance, is one of several works by him which are actually paintings about paintings of the Virgin.[48] (Fig. 5) In this image, putti hold up a painting of the Virgin and Child for both the outside viewer and the angels within the composition to adore. The Medici cycle's *Presentation of the Portrait* echoes this type of painting: winged deities hold up the portrait of Marie de' Medici-as-Virgin Mary to be admired from below by the outside viewer as well as by the figures within the image including her future husband, Henri IV.

Besides the references to Marian prototypes, the *Presentation of the Portrait* also recalls traditional depictions of the Virgin's pagan opposite, Venus. In Rubens's *Venus at her Mirror* in Vaduz (Liechtenstein), for instance, the mirror reflection of the goddess looks out directly at the viewer with a knowing and almost challenging gaze, much as Marie de' Medici looks out from her portrait.[49] (Fig. 6) The allusions to the dangers of feminine vanity and the seductiveness of the female gaze which are implicit in such depictions of Venus and her mirror are somewhat lessened in the *Presentation of the Portrait* by the fact that the person who looks into the mirror-like painting is not a woman but the King of France, Henri IV. Indeed, the composition may well allude to the literary genre known as the "Mirror of the Prince," a type of book devoted to describing appropriate royal conduct. The title-page of one such book published in Brussels in 1655, Belluga's *Speculum Principum*, in fact depicts a prince looking into a black-framed mirror in which he sees a reflection of himself accompanied by Virtues.[50] By seeing Marie de' Medici in the painting-as-mirror, the

implication is that Henri IV sees himself in her, a point which the Queen was eager to stress in her claims to be her husband's legitimate successor. While paintings such as the *Consignment of Government*, the *Coronation*, and the *Apotheosis and Assumption of the Regency* all overtly sought to legitimize Marie de' Medici's claims to the regency, it is only in the *Presentation of the Portrait* that she is transformed into the mirror-image of the King, a somewhat subtler but perhaps even more effective plea for the legitimacy of her rule than the depiction of any single historical event could ever be.

Early seventeenth-century texts and images took up this notion of Marie de' Medici as the mirror-image of her husband, the King, and made it explicit. Even before the death of Henri IV, emblems were designed which emphasized this mirror-like relationship. An emblem of 1609, for example, shows a sun reflected in a rectangular framed mirror with a somewhat later description explaining that this scene

> Allegorically represents the [Queen's]...wise recognition
> that all her lustre comes from that of the King...[who]
> planned to make her Regent in his absence and to give her
> all the honours which she could hope for.[51]

In the 1615 *Harangue panegyrique a la reine sur l'heureux succez de sa regence*, the author Balzac wrote that it "seems to us that he [Henri IV] reigns still under a face of a woman and such that we must call him Queen in you, or call you King."[52] A pamphlet extolling the Queen's virtues which was published in 1612 asserts that

> ...our King is not dead, but seeing himself decaying, he
> wanted...to take new life...in order to lengthen the stretch
> of his years...[therefore] you [Marie de' Medici] seeing him
> before your eyes, only hav[e]...changed of degree.[53]

And Jean Prévost's 1613 text on the *Apothéose du très chrestien Roy de France et de Navarre Henri IIII* says that Henri IV has built his mausoleum in the very person of Marie de' Medici.[54]

At the same time that the King seems to search for a mirror image of himself in the portrait of his bride-to-be, Marie de' Medici's own gaze in the *Presentation of the Portrait* is self-consciously directed outwards: she is a woman who is fully aware of being looked at both from within the painting and from without by the outside viewer. In one sense, as the patron of the cycle, the represented Marie de' Medici's outward gaze acts as a kind of mirror reflection of the real Marie de' Medici standing before the painting. As importantly, however, her unflinching gaze serves to acknowledge the other key viewers of the cycle, namely, the male courtiers on official visits to her palace and especially her son, the King. It is through her awareness of her position as the object of the male gazes of her courtiers and King (Henri IV as well as Louis XIII) that Marie de' Medici gains power. By calmly and steadily returning the outside viewer's gaze, Marie de' Medici adopts a position which is equal to that of the men who view her. Indeed, as the only figure in the scene (besides the putto directly beneath her) who seems to be aware of the presence of an outside viewer, it is she who communicates most powerfully and directly with the spectator, like an icon of the Virgin whose outward gaze allows her to affect directly the worshipful viewers gathered before her image.[55] The force of Marie de' Medici's gaze should have played an important role in her attempts to use the Medici cycle in her quest to regain the personal and political authority which she had recently lost.

In fact, the theme of Marie de' Medici's powerful and empowering gaze was developed in several texts published during her regency. The Queen is described as the "Beautiful regent of our lands/Whose rich gazes of female charms/...Gives life or death" and "Her favorable gaze is all powerful/May it pour over us a saintly influence."[56] But, in the same way that seventeenth-century culture could read the biographies of famous women of the past or could view bare breasts in negative as well as in positive terms, Marie de' Medici's gaze was also described very critically by some contemporary writers, especially after her first fall from power. *Les Singeries des femmes de ce temps descouvertes*, published in 1623, says in a passage which alludes to Marie de' Medici that

> ...the woman hides under a deceitful face all that one can
> imagine in this world which is perfidious and evil...there is

> nothing more inconstant than her face...the head of Medusa
>
> turns all things to stone...[including] men.[57]

In an anonymous text published while Marie de' Medici was still in power, she is described as

> This beautiful French Astraea [who] has totally changed:
>
> She has removed her blindfold, *she now sees clearly*...her
>
> [outer] dress is...chameleon-like in order to allow her to
>
> take on whatever colours her passion demands.[58]

The gaze of the powerful woman could be threatening as well as life-giving in the opinion of seventeenth-century writers.

One must assume that both Rubens and Marie de' Medici intended her assertive outward gaze in the *Presentation of the Portrait* to be interpreted in a positive manner. One of the problems faced by contemporary viewers of the painting, however, was trying to determine the appropriate context in which to place the portrait of the bride-to-be who eventually ruled as Regent. Marie de' Medici's portrait collapses within itself two quite distinct portrait traditions: depictions of beautiful women intended to be admired by their male lovers as well as portraits commemorating male patrons who wanted a visual affirmation of their worldly fame and power which would impress their peers.[59] This ambiguity about how to understand the Queen's portrait in terms of its implied function and audience could, of course, be seen as a felicitous combination of the dual roles—loving wife and mother as well as powerful ruler—Marie de' Medici wished to adopt at the time of the cycle's commission. Once again, however, the patron's lack of control over her audience's actual responses could just as well have led contemporary male viewers to regard very negatively her attempts to mask her quest for power under the guise of the seductive female gaze. It is perhaps ironic, then, that Marie de' Medici's empowering gaze out towards the male viewers before the painting is only affected through the mediation of artifice: like the painting of the *Icon of the Virgin and Child* in S. Maria in Vallicella or the Liechtenstein *Venus*, the Queen's assertive gaze seems to be possible only when it issues forth from a painting within a painting, from a mirror within art's mirror.

The ambiguities associated with the female gaze, with the role of art in depicting female sexuality and power, are also part of the broader issue of Rubens's understanding of visual representation in general. The fact that the black frame around the Queen's portrait in the *Presentation of the Portrait* echoes the black frames which encased the entire Medici cycle allows this particular image to function even more explicitly as a painting which mirrors the painted cycle as a whole.[60] Like Gide's "mise en abyme," the text which includes within itself a representation of itself, or Schlegel's notion of a "poetry of poetry," Rubens's *Presentation of the Portrait* recapitulates in the painting within the painting some of the artist's ideas on the nature of visual representation.[61] While the "mise en abyme" usually is used to highlight the internal structure of a text or other work of art, in the case of the *Presentation of the Portrait*, it also acts to bring to the surface the gender-specific tensions inherent in Rubens's strategies of visual representation and in seventeenth-century culture in general.

Rubens produced other images which illustrate his on-going interest in thematizing the problems of representing representation and of exploring the relationship between art and the viewer. One of these is the title-page he designed for Blosius' *Opera* in 1632. Like the painting within the painting in the *Presentation of the Portrait*, this engraving depicts an open book on the title-page of the book which the reader holds in his or her hands.[62] It too includes an active viewer-reader within the composition who looks up to the book held aloft by heavenly beings, a book which echoes the larger opus the reader is about to peruse. In the *Christ and Doubting Thomas* triptych painted for Nicolaas Rockox in *c.* 1613-15, Rubens used a sacred narrative to represent the ideal relationship between image and spectator.[63] (Fig. 7) At the same time, this work could also be interpreted as a comment on the relative positions of male versus female viewers. St Thomas and the other apostles gathered around Christ have direct physical as well as visual access to the subject itself, while secular viewers, both those standing implicitly before the painting and the two donors depicted explicitly in the side panels, are relegated to a space clearly outside the sacred scene. The apostles' gazes and gestures demonstrate the properly reverential viewing relationship the spectator should have to Christ's sacred body. The viewers before the painting, however, are also made aware of the distance

between themselves and this image by the separated figures of Nicolaas Rockox and his wife, Adriana Perez. The spectator is both drawn into the work by Adriana Perez's inviting outward gaze as well as simultaneously excluded from the sacred central core to which only Nicolaas Rockox, intensely gazing at Christ's body, seems to have visual access. Adriana Perez is empowered by her direct visual communication with the outside viewer but at the same time she remains excluded from the true centre of power, the sacred body of Christ, which is accessible only to the male gazes of her husband and the apostles.

In projects such as the Rockox triptych or the Blosius title-page, as Frank Stella has accurately observed, "Rubens came to believe that he could make painting about painting."[64] The crucial difference between such images and the *Presentation of the Portrait*, however, is that in the latter work, Rubens creates a painting not about representation in general but about a very particular problem, namely, how to depict a woman seeking power in seventeenth-century France. As the first (and only) example in this period of a large-scale series dedicated to glorifying the life of a contemporary woman, the Medici cycle had no precedents. Its viewers, therefore, had no frame of reference, no clearly-defined context in which to interpret the cycle. Indeed, the ever-varying combinations of female imagery, from the Queen's assertive gaze and occasionally bared breast to the nude Graces and Nereids, could easily have been misinterpreted by seventeenth-century male visitors to the gallery conditioned to assess the female gaze as well as the female body in highly ambiguous ways. To understand the elusive relationships between gender and representation brought to the surface by the Medici cycle, one must go beyond deciphering its Classical and Christian iconography, beyond trying to determine *what* individual images mean, and instead focus on *how* they mean, that is, on the mechanisms which create meaning. Rubens's essentially patriarchal visual rhetoric encompasses not just iconography but also the dynamic interaction of allegory, myth and history, the tactical use of colour and composition, and references to the repertoire of female images available to his contemporaries. It is only by dissecting these strategies for visual representation and analysing them within the context of seventeenth-century culture that one can begin to understand the inevitable problems

which arose when Rubens applied this rhetoric to the project of depicting a once-powerful woman trying to regain her influence in a male-dominated society.

List of Illustrations

Fig. 1: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Presentation of Marie de' Medici's Portrait to Henri IV*, oil on canvas, 1622-25. Musée du Louvre, Paris. [Cliché des musées nationaux, © Photo RMN]

Fig. 2: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Education of Marie de' Medici*, oil on canvas, 1622-25. Musée du Louvre, Paris. [Cliché des musées nationaux, © Photo RMN]

Fig. 3: Peter Paul Rubens, *Marie de' Medici as Queen Triumphant*, oil on canvas, 1622-25. Musée du Louvre, Paris. [Cliché des musées nationaux, © Photo RMN]

Fig. 4: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Disembarkation of Marie de' Medici in Marseilles*, oil on canvas and on copper plate (over older fresco), 1622-25. Musée du Louvre, Paris. [Cliché des musées nationaux, © Photo RMN]

Fig. 5: Peter Paul Rubens, *Icon of the Virgin and Child adored by Angels*, oil on slate, 1608. S. Maria in Vallicella, Rome. [Photo: Alinari/Art Resource, New York]

Fig. 6: Peter Paul Rubens, *Venus at her Mirror*, oil on panel, c.1616. Collection of the Prince of Liechtenstein, Vaduz Castle.

Fig. 7: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Rockox Triptych*: *Christ and Doubting Thomas* (center), *Nicolaas Rockox* (left), and *Adriana Peres* (right), oil on panel, c.1613-15. Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp.

Short Biography

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[1]The Medici gallery was a well-lit and richly-decorated space measuring 58 by 7.60 m. Rubens's paintings would have towered over the gallery's visitors: most are nearly 4 m high with the bottom edges of the frames originally at least 1.30 m above the floor. Twenty of the canvases were hung between the windows on the long sides of the gallery with the remaining four on the two short ends of the space. See Deborah Marrow, "The Art Patronage of Maria de' Medici," Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania, 1978, 66-9; Marie-Noëlle Baudouin-Matuszek, et. al., *Marie de Médicis et le Palais du Luxembourg*, (Paris: Délégation à l'action artistique de la ville de Paris, 1991), 220 and 225; and Jacques Thuillier and Jacques Foucart, *Le storie di Maria de' Medici di Rubens al Lussemburgo*, (Milan: Rizzoli Editore, 1967), 65-6, and the illustrations on 33, 35 and 68-9.

[2]On seventeenth-century visitors to the gallery, see Baudouin-Matuszek, *Marie de Médicis* (as in n. 1), 218-22, and Thuillier and Foucart, *Le storie* (as in n. 1), 10, 120, 122-6, and 130ff. Except for the Queen herself and the female members of the court mentioned in a description of the gallery's opening in 1625, only male visitors are recorded in the surviving documents. One assumes, however, that female members of the court continued to visit the cycle as well. In any case, the Queen's primary concern would have been to impress the male courtiers who, in a highly patriarchal culture, wielded the most power and influence. On the women in the Queen's entourage and her relationship to the male grandees, see Baudouin-Matuszek, 125-30.

[3]Portraits of potential brides were often sent to kings and noblemen in this period. Marie de' Medici herself requested such works for her second son. See Marrow, "Art Patronage" (as in n. 1), 107-11.

Ronald F. Millen and Robert E. Wolf, *Heroic Deeds and Mystic Figures: A New Reading of Rubens' Life of Maria de' Medici*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 49-50, mention portraits of Marie de' Medici sent to Henri IV during marriage negotiations. Some portraits of the Queen similar to the one in the *Presentation of the Portrait* survive. See Karla Langedijk, *The Portraits of the Medici: 15th-18th Centuries*, vol. II, (Florence: Studio per edizioni scelte, 1983), 1245 and 1250-1.

[4]Marrow, "Art Patronage" (as in n. 1), 105.

[5]For example, see Svetlana Alpers, "Manner and Meaning in some Rubens Mythologies," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 30 (1967): 295, and Thuillier and Foucart, *Le storie* (as in n. 1), 36.

[6]From letters to Jacques Dupuy in 1626 and to Peiresc in 1625, respectively. See Ruth Saunders Magurn, *The Letters of Peter Paul Rubens*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1955), 149 and 109.

[7]Alpers, "Manner and Meaning" (as in n. 5), 295, calls the cycle a "striking failure." Politically, the series was unable to solidify Marie de' Medici's precarious position at the French court. Millen and Wolf, *Heroic Deeds* (as in n. 3), 13, suggest that if the Queen's "...fall can be attributed to any single misstep, it would be the overconfidence with which she commissioned and conceived the Luxembourg paintings." Thuillier and Foucart, *Le storie* (as in n. 1), 38-40; Marrow, "Art Patronage" (as in n. 1), 105; and Anthony Blunt, *Art and Architecture in France 1500-1700*, (London: Penguin Books, 1982), 361, all comment on the cycle's failure to inspire any contemporary artistic imitations.

[8]For instance, Millen and Wolf, *Heroic Deeds* (as in n. 3), and Susan Saward, *The Golden Age of Marie de' Medici*, (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), have seen emblems and classical literature, respectively, as the iconographic keys which will unlock the cycle's meaning. Beverly Heisner, "Marie de Medici: Self-Promotion through Art," *The Feminist Art Journal*, 6, no. 2 (1977): 21-6; Marrow, "Art Patronage" (as in n. 1); *idem*, "Marie de' Medici and the Decoration of the Luxembourg Palace," *Burlington Magazine*, 121 (1979): 783-91; Elaine Rhea Rubin, "The Heroic Image: Women and Power in Early-Seventeenth Century France, 1610-1661," Ph.D., The George

Washington University, 1977; and Mary D. Garrard, *Artemisia Gentileschi*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 157-9, have analysed the Queen as a female patron and her use of "female" iconographies.

[9]See Joseph L. Koerner, "The Mortification of the Image: Death as a Hermeneutic in Hans Baldung Grien," *Representations*, 10 (1985): 52-101, on the notion of *how* images mean as opposed to *what* they mean.

[10]There is a vast literature on Rubens. For overviews of his career, see: Christopher White, *Peter Paul Rubens: Man & Artist*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), and Michael Jaffé, *Catalogo completo: Rubens*, (Milan: Rizzoli, 1989). See also the on-going *Corpus Rubenianum Ludwig Burchard*, begun in 1968.

[11]The project is well-documented by Thuillier and Foucart, *Le storie* (as in n. 1), especially 131 and 91ff. See also Ewald M. Vetter, "Rubens und die Genese des Programms der Medicigalerie," *Pantheon*, 32 (1974): 355-73, and Marrow, "Art Patronage" (as in n. 1), 92-9.

[12]Rubin, "Heroic Image" (as in n. 8), 84-5.

[13]On the gallery as a waiting area for visitors, see Marrow, "Art Patronage" (as in n. 1), 66, and Thuillier and Foucart, *Le storie* (as in n. 1), 31.

[14]Rubens describes Louis XIII's first visit to the gallery in a letter to Peiresc on 13 May 1625. See Magurn, *Letters* (as in n. 6), 109.

[15]On Marie de' Medici's relationship to Louis XIII, see Victor-L. Tapié, *France in the Age of Louis XIII and Richelieu*, trans. D.M. Lockie, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), and Geoffrey Parker, *Europe in Crisis: 1598-1648*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 128ff.

[16]See note 7 above.

[17]Although early guides to the cycle call this figure both Apollo and Orpheus, a text possibly dictated by Rubens himself calls him by the latter name. See Jacques Thuillier, "La 'Galerie de Médicis' de Rubens et sa genèse: un document inédit," *Revue de l'art*, 4 (1969): 56.

[18]Rubens's interest in exploring the nuances of the female gaze is suggested by the preparatory oil sketches for the *Education of Marie de' Medici* and the *Presentation of the Portrait,* which do not yet show either the Grace or the Queen looking outwards. See Julius Held, *The Oil Sketches of Peter Paul Rubens*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

[19]Although Marie de' Medici had a relatively liberal education for a woman of her time, the emphasis was mainly on the visual arts and skills such as precious stone connoisseurship rather than on history, literature or politics. On her education and cultural formation in Florence, see Thuillier and Foucart, *Le storie* (as in n. 1), 13; Marrow, "Art Patronage" (as in n. 1), 7-13; Baudouin-Matuszek, *Marie de Médicis* (as in n. 1), 38-84; and Sara Mamone, *Firenze e Parigi: due capitali dello spettacolo per una regina: Maria de' Medici*, (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 1987).

[20]The Queen's interest in emphasizing her position as wife as well as mother is demonstrated by her commissioning numerous images of marriages and mothers. See Marrow, "Art Patronage" (as in n. 1), 48-9, 71-3, and 155-9.

[21]John B. Knipping, ed., *Iconography of the Counter Reformation in the Netherlands*, vol. II (Leiden: De Graff, 1974), 258 and 263ff, and Margaret R. Miles, "The Virgin's One Bare Breast: Female Nudity and Religious Meaning in Tuscan Early Renaissance Culture," in *The Female Body in Western Culture*, ed. S.R. Suleiman, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 193-208, explore the sometimes ambiguous meanings associated with the Madonna's bare breast in art.

[22]The *Birth of Marie de' Medici*, the *Education of Marie de' Medici*, the *Marriage by Proxy*, the *Birth of Louis XIII*, the *Coronation*, and the *Apotheosis of Henri IV and Assumption of the Regency*, which shows the Queen enthroned, all recall a traditional iconography of the Virgin. On the cycle's Marian imagery, see Heisner, "Marie de Medici " (as in n. 8), 23-4; Marrow, "Art Patronage" (as in n. 1), 149-55; F. Hamilton Hazlehurst, "Additional Sources for the Medici Cycle," *Bulletin: Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique*, 6 (1967): 114; Millen and Wolf, *Heroic Deeds* (as in n. 3), 34,

61-2, and 217-18; and Robert W. Berger, "Rubens and Caravaggio: A Source for a Painting from the Medici Cycle," *Art Bulletin*, 54 (1972): 473-7.

[23]See, for example, Rubens's *c.*1635 painting of the *Virgin and Child* in Cologne.

[24]It is ironic but not unexpected that the Queen was never the principle wetnurse or caretaker of her son. On Louis XIII's childhood, see Elizabeth Wirth Marvick, *Louis XIII: The Making of a King*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

[25]See White, *Rubens* (as in n. 10), 99-102, on this commission.

[26]A similarly dangerous display of female breasts is seen in Rubens's *Judith* in Braunschweig. Knipping, *Iconography* (as in n. 21), vol. I, 47, discusses the popular theme of "the fatal influence of women." See also H. Diane Russell, *Eva/Ave: Woman in Renaissance and Baroque Prints*, (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1990), 147ff, and Simon Schama, "Wives and Wantons: Versions of Womanhood in 17th century Dutch Art," *Oxford Art Journal*, 3 (1980): 9. On the notion of the passive female versus the active male hero, see Rubin, "Heroic Image" (as in n. 8), *passim*.

[27]Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes*, (New York: Viking Press, 1978), 187-99, suggests that bare breasts went from alluding primarily to virtuous maternity in fifteenth-century art to being increasingly associated with sexual pleasure and desire by the seventeenth century.

[28]First published in 1635. See Ian Maclean, *Woman Triumphant: Feminism in French Literature 1610-1652*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 218. This book was so popular that a third edition had been printed by 1637 with a different title, *Discours particulier contre les femmes desbraillees de ce temps*, which focused even more clearly on the dangers of female nudity.

[29]Cited in Pierre Darmon, *Mythologie de la femme dans l'ancienne France, XVIe-XIXe siècle*, (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1983), 42. (my translation)

[30]For example, see the anonymous 1617 texts *Discours nouveau de la mode* and *La Courtisane déchiffrée* or the 1675 books by Père Louis de Bouvignes, *Le Miroir de la vanité des femmes mondaines*, and Jacques Boileau, *Abus des nudités de gorge*, which all continue to harangue women who bare their breasts. Darmon, *Mythologie* (as in n. 29), 41-3. Although it is unclear whether Marie

de' Medici or Rubens knew the specific texts cited here, the fact that a work like the *Discours particulier* had three editions in as many years, as mentioned in note 28 above, does imply a relatively wide-spread interest in such tracts. In addition, the Queen's active promotion of the Catholic reform and her links to Catholic devotional politics in Paris speak to an interest on her part in the kinds of issues raised by these types of religious sermons and moralizing works. On the Queen's religious habits and pro-Catholic policies, see Baudouin-Matuszek, *Marie de Médicis* (as in n. 1), 108-9, 112-13, 121-2, 134-6 and 139-45.

[31]On the use of wetnurses by even the artisan class in the early modern period, see Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, "Blood Parents and Milk Parents: Wet Nursing in Florence, 1300-1530," *Women, Family, and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, trans. L. Cochrane, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 132-64, and Jaques Gélis, "L'individualisation de l'enfant," *Histoire de la vie privée: De la Renaissance aux Lumières*, vol. 3, ed. P. Ariès and G. Duby, (Paris: Seuil, 1986), 315 and 320-1. See also note 24 above.

[32]On this topos, see note 26 above.

[33]See Rubin, "Heroic Image" (as in n. 8), 8-10, and Maclean, *Woman Triumphant* (as in n. 28), 58-62.

[34]On earlier French female rulers, see Marian F. Facinger, "A Study of Medieval Queenship; Capetian France 987-1237," *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, 5 (1968): 1-48, and Claire R. Sherman, "Taking a Second Look: Observations on the Iconography of a French Queen, Jeanne de Bourbon (1338-1378)," in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, ed. N. Broude and M. Garrard, (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 100-17. Marrow, "Art Patronage" (as in n. 1), 159-60, discusses Marie de' Medici's interest in earlier French Queens.

[35]*Les Singeries des femmes de ce temps descouvertes*, (1623), 12. (my translation) See Rubin, "Heroic Image" (as in n. 8), 105-6, and Garrard, *Artemisia* (as in n. 8), 156-7.

[36]On this literary genre, see Maclean, *Woman Triumphant* (as in n. 28); Rubin, "Heroic Image" (as in n. 8); and Marrow, "Art Patronage" (as in n. 1), 160-1. Some of these texts included engravings

which depicted each woman in a full-length portrait. Several painted galleries dedicated to women "worthies" were also commissioned in this period but, despite their "female" iconography, they differed from the Medici cycle which alone focused on the life of a contemporary woman rather than on virtuous women from the past. On these galleries, see Maclean, *Woman Triumphant* (as in n. 28), 210-11; Marrow, "Art Patronage" (as in n. 1), 162-5; Garrard, *Artemisia* (as in n. 8), 158; and Bernard Dorival, "Art et politique en France au XVIIe siècle: la galerie des hommes illustres du Palais Cardinal," *Bulletin de la société de l'histoire de l'art français*, (1973): 43-60.

[37]See Rubin, "Heroic Image" (as in n. 8), 104-9 and *passim*; Maclean, *Woman Triumphant* (as in n. 28); and Darmon, *Mythologie* (as in n. 29), on seventeenth-century "anti-feminist" texts.

[38]See Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 408-10.

[39]Susanna is placed a bit further back in space and her crouching pose is reversed in the later engraving, but the overall compositions of the two prints are quite similar.

[40]See Elizabeth McGrath, "Rubens's 'Susanna and the Elders' and Moralizing Inscriptions on Prints," in *Wort und Bild in der Niederländischen Kunst und Literatur des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts*, ed. H.Vekeman and J.M.Hofstede, (Erftstadt: Lukassen Verlag, 1984), 81-5, on these inscriptions.

[41]Cordier's condemnation of Truth's nudity is known from a letter to him by his publisher, Moretus. See J. Richard Judson and Carl van de Velde, *Book Illustrations and Title-Pages (Corpus Rubenianum, Part XXI)*, (London: Harvey Miller, 1978), vol. II, 382, and vol. I, 249-53, figs. 199-200. See also Knipping, *Iconography* (as in n. 21), vol. I, 63.

[42]See Thuillier and Foucart, *Le storie* (as in n. 1), 95-6 and 68-70, for the first contract of February 1622 and for the plans for the Henri IV gallery. See also Ingrid Jost, "Bemerkungen zur Heinrichsgalerie des P.P.Rubens," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, 15 (1964): 175-219, and Baudouin-Matuszek, *Marie de Médicis* (as in n. 1), 222-3.

[43]Thuillier and Foucart, *Le storie* (as in n. 1), 85-6; Millen and Wolf, *Heroic Deeds* (as in n. 3), 155-9; Marrow, "Art Patronage" (as in n. 1), 166-74; and Otto von Simson, "Politische Symbolik im

Werk Rubens," in *Rubens: Kunstgeschichtliche Beiträge*, ed. E. Hubala, (Constance: L. Leonhardt, 1979), 26-7, discuss this painting and the theme of triumph throughout the cycle.

[44] See Thuillier and Foucart, *Le storie* (as in n. 1), 12, and the chart on 131.

[45]On the "disorderly" or "misused" woman as a sign of societal disarray, see Natalie Zermon Davis, "Women on Top," *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), 124-51.

[46]On the violently-abducted or "rapt" woman in seventeenth-century culture, see Sarah Hanley, "Family and State in Early Modern France: The Marriage Pact," in *Connecting Spheres: Women in the Western World, 1500 to the Present*, ed. M.J. Boxer and J.H. Quataert, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 58-61, and Margaret D. Carroll, "The Erotics of Absolutism: Rubens and the Mystification of Sexual Violence," *Representations*, 25 (1989): 3-30.

[47]See notes 1 and 2 above.

[48]The icon of the Virgin and Child was painted on a removable copper plate beneath which was an allegedly miraculous fresco of the Madonna. On this project, see: Fernanda Castiglioni, "'Non sono, dunque, si' mala cosa le immagini' (C. Baronio). Stato degli studi, considerazioni e ipotesi sui Rubens della Vallicella," *Annuario dell'Istituto di Storia dell'Arte*, *Università degli Studi di Roma*, n.s. 2 (1982-83): 14-22; Michael Jaffé, "Peter Paul Rubens and the Oratorian Fathers," *Proporzioni*, 4 (1963): 209-41; White, *Rubens* (as in n. 10), 50-1; Kerry Downes, *Rubens*, (London: Jupiter Books, 1980), 68-72; Pierre Georgel and Anne-Marie Lecoq, *La peinture dans la peinture*, (Dijon: Le musée, 1983), 63; and Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult: Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*, (Munich: C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1990), 541-5.

[49]Edward Snow, "Theorizing the Male Gaze: Some Problems," *Representations*, 25 (1989): 32-4, emphasizes the male viewer-female object relationship in the Liechtenstein *Venus*. G.F. Hartlaub, *Zauber des Spiegels: Geschichte und Bedeutung des Spiegels in der Kunst*, (Munich: R. Piper & Co. Verlag, 1951), 79-80 and 107-8, examines the role of mirrors in this and other images of Venus.

[50]On this genre, see J. A. Emmens, "Les Menines de Velasquez: Miroir des Princes pour Philippe IV," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek*, 12 (1961): esp. 60-2.

[51]Jacques De Bie, *La France metallique*, (Paris: Jean Camusat, 1636), 309. (my translation) Illustrated as medal IX (Marie de' Medici section). See also Millen and Wolf, *Heroic Deeds* (as in n. 3), 141. Another emblem in De Bie on the theme of the King's reflection in a mirror is medal LXXXV (Henri IV section). The Queen is said to reflect her son, Louis XIII, in medal XXXI (Marie de' Medici section).

[52]Rubin, "Heroic Image" (as in n. 8), 75.

[53]From the anonymous pamphlet *Prosopopée historique et alitographie du bon heur de regente de Frances.* Rubin, "Heroic Image" (as in n. 8), 71.

[54]*Ibid.*, 79. In François de Rosset's 1612 text, *Le Romant des chevaliers...*, Morpheus appears before Marie de' Medici's eyes as Henri IV. See *Ibid.*, 71-2.

[55]See Belting, *Bild und Kult* (as in n. 48), *passim*, on the intercessory functions of Madonna icons and on the power of the Virgin's gaze.

[56]The first passage is from the 1614 *Vers divers sur le Ballet des dix Verds*; the second is from the 1615 *Ballet de Madame, soeur aisnée du roi*. Rubin, "Heroic Image" (as in n. 8), 76 and 87.

[57]*Les singeries* (as in n. 35), 9-10. (my translation) See Rubin, "Heroic Image" (as in n. 8), 104-5.

[58]*La Cassandre françoise*, (1615), 14-15, with emphasis added in my translation. See also Rubin, "Heroic Image" (as in n. 8), 88.

[59]Elizabeth Cropper, "The Beauty of Woman: Problems in the Rhetoric of Renaissance Portraiture," in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourse of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. M.W. Ferguson, et al., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 175-90, and Patricia Simons, "Women in Frames: the gaze, the eye, the profile in Renaissance portraiture," *History Workshop*, 25 (1988): 4-30, explore issues of gender in Italian portraiture.

[60]Unlike the present frames, the original black wood frames also had some decorative motifs in gold painted on them. See Thuillier and Foucart, *Le storie* (as in n. 1), 131-2.

[61]On Andre Gide's theory of the "mise en abyme," see Lucien Dällenbach, *The Mirror in the Text*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), who also quotes Friedrich Schlegel on poetry, 175-6.

[62]Julius S. Held, "Rubens and the Book," in *Rubens and His Circle: Studies by Julius Held*, ed. A.W.Lowenthal, et. al., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 179, says that "the very book...has become its own title page." See also Judson and van de Velde, *Book Illustrations* (as in n. 41), vol. I, 260-5, and vol. II, figs. 208-11.

[63]See White, *Rubens* (as in n. 10), 102-6, on this commission. Rockox also owned Rubens's *Samson and Delilah*. Both works are shown in an imaginary view of Rockox's collection by Frans Franken the Younger. Gerard Thomas included the triptych's central panel in another imaginary gallery with an artist pointing at Christ thus further supporting a reading of this work as a paradigmatic image on the relation between art and the viewer. See Zirka Z. Filipczak, *Picturing Art in Antwerp: 1550-1700*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 58-9, figs. 30 and 94, and White, *Rubens* (as in n. 10), 99-100, fig. 115.

[64]Frank Stella, *Working Space*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 40.