Combating Voyeurism: Domenichino and the Protofeminist Artistic Tradition of Bologna

Tiffany Nicole Wixom
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Combating Voyeurism: Domenichino and the Protofeminist

Artistic Tradition of Bologna

Tiffany Nicole Wixom

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

Combating Voyeurism: Domenichino and the Protofeminist Artistic Tradition of Bologna

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Master of Arts

Domenichino (1581-1641), a Bolognese artist, painted a unique interpretation of Ovid’s myth of the goddess Diana and mortal hunter Actaeon in 1616 titled, Archery Contest of Diana and her Nymphs. This image depicts the goddess and her nymphs actively engaged in various activities. This portrayal is drastically different from common depictions of the time period, in which the goddess is portrayed as vulnerable, weak, and subjected to male voyeurism. In contrast, Domenichino painted his female warriors as physically strong and empowered with their weapons in hand. Compared to the art of his contemporaries, Domenichino’s painting clearly evidences that he was influenced and inspired by a well-established, protofeminist artistic tradition originating in Bologna.

Bologna offered several contributing factors which created a receptive environment for female artists to thrive. Artists like Lavinia Fontana were able to create strong careers that were both profitable and competitive with those of their male contemporaries. Fontana’s depictions of female subjects deliberately pushed against the stereotype of painting heroines as passive objects exposed to male voyeurism. In Archery Contest of Diana and her Nymphs, Domenichino approaches Diana and her nymphs in the same fashion as the Bolognese protofeminists. The women depicted are no longer passive objects to be gazed upon; rather they are actively engaged and have physically fit bodies. Domenichino and the protofeminist tradition redefined how heroines are depicted by empowering the women as dynamic participants in brave pursuits.

Keywords: Domenichino, protofeminism, male gaze
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DEDICATION

To my sister, Kylee, for all those late-night editing sessions.
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Introduction

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, art commissions were anxiously sought out as artists competed heavily for patronage.\(^1\) Bologna in particular was rivaling Florence and Rome in producing some of the most talented painters in Italy. This was enhanced when the Bolognese cardinal, Ugo Buoncompagni, became Pope Gregory XIII in 1572, providing artists from his home town with the prospect of receiving ample commissions from the papal state.\(^2\) This improved Bologna’s already-receptive environment for artists to thrive.\(^3\) It is here in Bologna where many great artists originated and became successful, including the renowned Carracci Family (Ludovico, Agostino, and Annibale), Guido Reni, Francesco Albani, and – the subject of this master’s thesis – Domenichino Zampieri.\(^4\)

Native to the city of Bologna, Domenichino studied under the Carracci Academy working in a classical Baroque style. Previous scholars, such as Richard Spear and Elizabeth Cropper, have researched Domenichino and have contributed significant research on the artist and his work.\(^5\) These scholars and others have primarily looked at Domenichino’s style and have argued that he was an important follower of the Carracci’s; this criticism has led to a tainted perspective on his oeuvre that views his art as largely unoriginal. Nevertheless, more scholarship is needed in looking deeper into Domenichino’s artistic approach, as it was not all just mere imitation of his instructors. As his work progressed and evolved over the course of his career, his style took on a new and progressive attitude toward the depiction of female subject matter. I

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\(^{4}\) Born Domenico Zampieri, more commonly referred to by his nickname Domenichino, meaning little Domenico as a reference to his height as he was short in stature.

argue that this change in attitude toward female subjects is a result of Domenichino receiving inspiration not only from his male contemporaries but also from his female contemporaries. In fact, Bologna was a thriving art city and an unusually important epicenter for male and female artists alike. Notable women such as Properzia de’ Rossi, Lavinia Fontana, and Elisabetta Sirani, to name a few, prospered in the Bolognese art market, and some of these women even became a force in Rome. Bologna had a long-standing tradition of educating woman since the Middle Ages that allowed women to flourish intellectually and artistically. These Bolognese women have been rediscovered and researched by scholars in recent decades; however, no scholarship has considered or examined their significant impact on the artistic world and specifically their effect on male artists. This master’s thesis will concentrate on the influence of Bologna’s strong, protofeminist tradition on Domenichino. Protofeminism is a term I will be using in relation to female artistic traditions that were creating art with a progressive attitude toward the empowerment of women in a time period before modern feminism was defined. I argue that it was this influence of the protofeminist tradition in Bologna that prompted Domenichino to redefine how a female heroine should be depicted—empowering her, rather than objectifying her for the male gaze. I will focus on the cultural significance of Domenichino’s 1616 painting, Archery Contest of Diana and her Nymphs (Figure 1). Compared to the art of his contemporaries, Domenichino’s painting clearly evidences that he was influenced and inspired by this well-established, and until recently, forgotten protofeminist artistic tradition originating in Bologna.

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6 For brief Biographies on all of these women as well as others, please consult Julia Kathleen Dabbs, Life Stories of Women Artists, 1550-1800: An Anthology (Farnham, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009).
This thesis is composed of five sections. The first gives a detailed description of Domenichino’s painting, *Archery Contest of Diana and her Nymphs*, which will explore the subject matter, style, and iconography of the work. It will also discuss the narrative of the image and the way the characters within the image are depicted.

Section two will explore the complex background of Domenichino’s life, legacy, and patronage. It will include his time at the Carracci Accademia degli Incamminati in Bologna, his early years in Rome, and the controversy surrounding his *Archery Contest of Diana and her Nymphs*, which resulted in a brief imprisonment. I will also introduce contemporary artists known to have been working with or closely around Domenichino in order to evaluate their influence on the artist.

Section three will compare Domenichino’s art to that of his male contemporaries. Focusing specifically on the mythical subject matter of Diana and Actaeon, these comparisons will explore the style of the works as well as the interpretation of this titillating narrative. I will closely examine how each artist portrays Diana and Actaeon within the myth. Moreover, there will be critical analysis of the power structures within these paintings. These comparisons will yield an understanding of Domenichino’s unique interpretation of portraying a heroine as strong and empowered.

Finally, the last two segments of this thesis will more generally explore the long-forgotten protofeminist tradition of female artistry in Bologna. The fourth section will look specifically at Bologna and the various factors which created a more receptive environment for female artists who were working and competing with male contemporaries for the same patrons and artistic status. Section five will concentrate on one female artist in particular—Lavinia Fontana. She stands out above the rest in terms of influence on Domenichino. Fontana was a
contemporary of Domenichino and her depictions of strong female characters clearly influenced him. The female subjects in her artwork are active and empowered rather than objectified. It becomes clear that Fontana’s art and style, as well as that of other female artists from Bologna, inspired and influenced her male counterparts while working alongside them. As seen in Domenichino’s work, his heroines are, in fact, just as active and empowered as those found in Fontana’s art. Through such comparisons, the influence of these female artists on Domenichino becomes apparent. Overall, this analysis will reveal the import of this strong protofeminist tradition in Bolognese art during this era.

Archery Contest of Diana and her Nymphs

Domenichino’s Archery Contest of Diana and her Nymphs currently resides in the Galleria Borghese in Rome. This large painting, measuring 225 cm x 320 cm (7.38 ft x 10.49 ft), was originally commissioned by Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandini for his villa in Frascati. This picturesque mythological scene depicts the goddess Diana in a stunning landscape surrounded by her warrior nymphs engaged in a variety of activities. The goddess stands near the center of the work, with golden bow and quiver in hand, raising her arms triumphantly. The warrior nymphs closest to the goddess Diana are participating in an archery contest, bows raised and arrows in flight. More nymphs are depicted running and hunting in the distance, while two nymphs in the foreground are bathing—one watching the archery contest and the other facing the viewer. Two other nymphs are on the left side of the bathing party; one sits on a rock while another in beautiful flowing robes restrains two hounds as they leap to chase a fallen bird. On the far side of the image is a dense clump of trees amongst which two male figures can be seen peeking through, watching the women in secret. Despite the commotion and movement within the scene, the goddess Diana commands the focus of the composition.
Virgil provides an important description of Diana’s character in the *Aeneid*.\(^8\) She is a complex deity, sometimes referred to as the “Trivia,” or “three-faced goddess,” because of her three dominating attributes. First and foremost, Diana is the goddess of the forest and the hunt. Second, she is the goddess of the moon. Third, most importantly, Diana is the protector of virgins, she is also considered the goddess of women and childbirth.\(^9\) Diana and her twin brother Apollo were born to the god Jupiter and the mortal woman, Latona. Of all the qualities accredited to Diana, she is most commonly depicted with the attributes of the hunt, including a golden bow and the crescent moon shaped headpiece. She is also often presented wearing a tunic-like garment with hunting boots and hunting dogs at her side.

One of the reasons that Diana became a popular mythological subject during the seventeenth century was that she appealed to both men and women. Male artists were drawn to the goddess, as it gave them an outlet to showcase their abilities painting the female nude. The capability to paint the nude figure was a sign of one’s skill and an indicator that one had been trained in the classical tradition. It was also a sign of one’s abilities if you could produce a convincing seductive female depiction that had voyeuristic possibilities. Women, on the other hand, seem to have identified with Diana’s attributes of female power and virtue. This was especially true in Northern Europe, where portraits often personified women as mythological or literary figures like Diana. Dutch women were particularly drawn to Diana because she emblematized perfect virtue. These “role portraits” suggested parallels between the sitters own qualities and “those of the literary or historical figure whom they impersonated.”\(^10\) The intention

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\(^8\) Diana is the Roman Goddess of the hunt; In Greek mythology, she is known as Artemis.  
of role portraits as Diana was to enhance the sitter’s image and associate her with beauty and virtue. Diana became a personification that would “outshine the likeness and individuality” of the sitter and show her as the ideal woman.11 One example of a woman portrayed as Diana in a role portrait can be seen in the Dutch artist Adam Camerarius’s *Portrait of a Woman as Diana* (1644) (Figure 2). The woman’s virtue in this portrait is enhanced by her portrayal in the guise of the goddess Diana, with iconic weaponry in hand and adorned with the delicate crescent moon headpiece.

One of the most famous accounts of the goddess Diana derives from the Latin narrative written by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*. Contained within the *Metamorphoses* are over 250 myths, one of which describes the goddess Diana and her nymphs encounter with the mortal man named Actaeon, a hunter trained by the great centaur Chiron. The myth recounts that Diana and her nymphs were bathing peacefully in the goddess’s sacred and secluded grove after a long hunt. The poem reads:

Down in a vale with pine and cypress clad,
Refresh’d with gentle winds, and brown with shade,
The chaste Diana's private haunt, there stood
Full in the centre of the darksome wood
A spacious grotto, all around o'er-grown
With hoary moss, and arch'd with pumice-stone.
From out its rocky clefts the waters flow,
And trickling swell into a lake below.
Nature had ev'ry where so plaid her part,
That ev'ry where she seem'd to vie with art.
Here the bright Goddess, toil'd and chaf'd with heat,
Was wont to bathe her in the cool retreat.

Here did she now with all her train resort,
Panting with heat, and breathless from the sport;
Her armour-bearer laid her bow aside,
Some loos'd her sandals, some her veil unty'd;

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Each busy nymph her proper part undrest;
While Crocale, more handy than the rest,
Gather'd her flowing hair, and in a noose
Bound it together, whilst her own hung loose.
Five of the more ignoble sort by turns
Fetch up the water, and unlade the urns.

Now all undrest the shining Goddess stood,
When young Actaeon, wilder'd in the wood,
To the cool grott by his hard fate betray'd,
The fountains fill'd with naked nymphs survey'd.
The frighted virgins shriek'd at the surprize
(The forest echo'd with their piercing cries).\(^{12}\)

As the poem indicates, while the goddess and her nymphs are relaxing, the hunter Actaeon accidentally stumbles upon the bathing party and hides until discovered by the goddess. When Actaeon is revealed by Diana, she becomes enraged that he has caught her off guard in such a vulnerable state. With her weapons out of reach, she hastily splashes water on her intruder causing Actaeon to transform into a stag. Once the transformation is complete, Diana sends Actaeon’s own dogs, now unable to recognize their master, to chase and tear Actaeon apart.\(^{13}\)

This narrative appeared frequently in historical paintings. In particular, the myth of Diana and Actaeon became prevalent for its moral associations. It was often read as a warning to men that they should not lust after women or they will be punished. The general formula to painting this narrative of Diana and Actaeon typically included a wooded area, a pool of water in which Diana and her nymphs bathed with their weapons aside, and Actaeon in mid-transformation.\(^{14}\) Artists during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries started to become more innovative in depicting this common subject. The usual focus for such paintings was the intrusion of Actaeon, and thus he became the focal point. As a result, Diana became a passive


object, no longer Ovid’s powerful goddess capable of punishing Actaeon, but an object of male voyeurism.

In spite of this tradition, Domenichino’s rendition of this myth depicts a very different point in the narrative—the moment before Actaeon is discovered. This noteworthy change shifts attention from Actaeon to Diana. The goddess and nymphs are portrayed as active and strong, not helpless and vulnerable, while they bathe. Consequently, the operations of power and objectification in the scene are significantly altered. Reasons for this singular interpretation will become clear through a full analysis of Domenichino’s artistic development.

**Domenichino Zampieri**

Famous seventeenth-century artistic biographer, Giovanni Pietro Bellori describes Domenichino Zampieri as an artist who “truly deserve[s] to live in man’s memory.” Modern day scholarship hardly lives up to this injunction. In fact, Domenichino’s contribution to Baroque art normally only gets briefly treated by scholars. Taking a closer look at Domenichino’s life, art, and legacy reveals that he is an artist who achieved a depth of compositional and stylistic skill that needs to be and explored.

There is very little documentation of Domenichino’s early life. Bellori states that he was born in Bologna in 1581, only three years before the Carracci family started their art academy. Domenichino was the second child of Zampiero Giampietro, a well-to-do Bolognese shoemaker. Originally, he was not destined to be an artist. Instead, his older brother Gabrielle was training with the artist Denis Calvaert, a Fleming living in Bologna. Domenichino, by contrast, was studying other liberal arts disciplines but would draw in his free time. After a few years it became clear that Domenichino had the artistic talent in the family and not Gabrielle. The latter

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gave up the arts and the former began training under Calvaert in Gabrielle’s place. By the time
Domenichino was in his early teens, he was studying how to depict the human body with
accurate proportions and perspective. Calvaert was a strict teacher with a fierce temper. A few
of his students, including Guido Reni and Francesco Albani, had transferred to the Carracci
Accademia degli Incamminati, because of Calvaert’s difficult temperament.\(^{16}\)

Domenichino was around fourteen years old when he fled from Calvaert due to his anger
at the young artist for copying works done by the Carracci family. Shortly thereafter,
Domenichino followed in Reni and Albani’s footsteps and switched to the Carracci academy.\(^{17}\) It
was during his time with the Carracci family that Domenichino truly started making a name for
himself. Ludovico Carracci was particularly fond of Domenichino. He noticed Domenichino’s
talent to create “lyricism in his landscapes” even at a young age.\(^{18}\) Domenichino was a “faithful
interpreter of the new genre” of classism, as well as having the capability of including
“psychological characterization.”\(^{19}\) Domenichino stayed and trained in the Carracci Academy
until 1602. It was around this time that he made his first trip to Rome and began building his
reputation in earnest. Rome was the art capitol of Italy, and artists flocked there from all over
the world to learn the idealized style of classical antiquity.

Between the years of 1602 and 1617, Domenichino lived in Rome and traveled back to
Bologna for short trips and various commissions. While in Rome, he enjoyed the sponsorship
and patronage of Cardinal Aldobrandini, who originally commissioned him to paint the goddess

\(^{17}\) For a more comprehensive biography of Domenichino’s life consult Richard E. Spear, *Domenichino* (New Haven:
Yale University Press, 1982).
\(^{19}\) Ibid.
Diana and her nymphs. Domenichino finished *Archery Contest of Diana and her Nymphs* in 1616, but Aldobrandini unfortunately never received this work.

Wealthy patrons and art collectors of the time became so aggressive that, on occasion, these powerful men would pursue a work that was already intended for another owner. Sometimes they would try to outbid the original patron, and in some extreme cases they would take the work by force. This was the circumstance surrounding Domenichino’s *Archery Contest of Diana and her Nymphs*. Indeed, the work became an object of desire for multiple collectors. Cardinal Aldobrandini never received the painting because, upon seeing it in Domenichino’s studio, Cardinal Scipione Borghese, the powerful papal-nephew of Pope Paul V, wanted to obtain the piece. When Domenichino refused Borghese, he took the work by force.\(^{20}\) As punishment for denying the cardinal’s request, Domenichino was sent to prison for a brief time. Domenichino was also never fully paid for this work.\(^{21}\)

During the years 1617-1631, Domenichino saw the peak of his career with a surge of commissions. He was living off-and-on in Bologna and other neighboring cities working on various projects. The last years of his life were spent in Naples until his death in 1641, during which time his classical Baroque style began to go out of favor in the face of increasingly dynamic and dramatic artistic trends. As a result, he received less work later in life. Domenichino’s final commission was a six-paneled altarpiece for a local Neapolitan. As he was starting on the fifth panel, he died suddenly. His widow later reported she thought he was poisoned by a competing artist.\(^{22}\)

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\(^{22}\) Ibid., 15-22.
Although Domenichino had a long artistic career, it was unfortunately was eclipsed by controversy and lawsuits. Beginning in Bologna and later in Rome and various other cities, Domenichino was over-shadowed by other more successful Bolognese artists like Guido Reni and Francesco Albani. However, Domenichino’s work was revolutionary for its time; his paintings were unique in their approach to female subjects, as will be explored with his *Archery Contest of Diana and Nymphs*. Comparing Domenichino’s painting to that of his male and female contemporaries, it becomes clear that he was deeply influenced by the strong female artistic tradition of Bologna that portrayed females as strong and empowered heroines in contrast to the male tradition of using female subjects as a means of male voyeurism.

**Domenichino’s Male Contemporaries**

Cardinal Borghese must have been intrigued by Domenichino’s painting of Diana and his portrayal of the story in such a new and unique manner—hence his intense desire to obtain the work. Domenichino’s depiction was indeed surprising and original compared to other Italian versions of this subject.

Typically, male artists during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries would depict mythological goddesses as well as other female figures as objects for the voyeuristic male gaze. Since historical subject matter was considered of the highest import in paintings, mythological scenes were exceedingly popular. Such subjects allowed artists to demonstrate their skill in rendering the human body. And specifically, the depictions of the goddess Diana provided the artist an opportunity to depict the sensualized female figure, as the story already indicated that she was the object of male voyeurism. Before attempting his own version of the Diana theme, the highly influential Venetian painter Titian had already set the standard for representing the reclining female nude in his *Venus of Urbino* of 1534 (Figure 3). In this work, he displays the
female nude as sexually open and available to the male gaze. Moreover, she is a stagnant and passive object. One of her primary purposes is to fulfill the sensual desires of male viewers.

In 1559, Titian continued this voyeuristic tradition in his painting of *Diana and Actaeon* (Figure 4). His version of the theme depicts the moment in which Diana and her nymphs are disconcerted by Actaeon. This scene differs from the description in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, as the bathing party is located not in a forest but in an architectural complex. Actaeon startles the women by pulling back the curtain to reveal them bathing. The nymphs and the goddess struggle to cover their exposed bodies, but they are unable to do so. Diana is clearly identified with her gold, crescent moon headpiece, seated on the right side of the image. And while Diana is the goddess of the hunt, Titian instead portrays her as hunted; she is a helpless, exposed, and powerless being. This is especially emphasized by Actaeon striding over Diana’s golden bow. It lies out of reach on the ground, which leaves Diana weaponless and unprotected. Actaeon, on the other hand, has a full sheaf of arrows on his back portraying him as the most powerful figure in the image. The arrows act as a phallic symbol to convey Actaeon’s lust for Diana as he lunges towards her.

Titian magnifies Actaeon’s power by emphasizing his musculature, and portraying him as the epitome of a fit hunter. In contrast, the female figures in the scene look weak and vulnerable with thin limp arms – not the arms of fierce, forest huntresses. In this manner, Titian makes a conscious effort to diminish the power of the goddess. Then he further minimizes her mythical power by eliminating the narrative of her splashing water on Actaeon to turn him into a stag. Titian does allude to the hunter’s eventual transformation—a stag skull is positioned on a pillar above one of the nymphs. In addition, there is a deerskin hanging just above Diana in the trees

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that foreshadows Actaeon’s fate. However, these two symbols are the only indication of Diana’s triumph. These symbols have been transformed into mere objects, similarly Diana herself also becomes an object in this image. Due to this de-emphasis on Diana’s power, Titian forces her into a position of vulnerability and subjects her to the male gaze from both Actaeon and the intended viewer.

This same phallocentric attitude is witnessed in the art of another Bolognese artist, Francesco Albani, who trained alongside Domenichino at the Carracci’s Academy and later moved to Rome where he spent most of his career. Albani was well-known for his depictions of “sensuous” female nudes. Looking at Albani’s rendition of Diana and Actaeon of 1617 (Figure 5), there are noticeable similarities to Titian’s painting. Albani chooses to depict the same moment in the myth as Titian did. Once again, Actaeon is shown catching the vulnerable, bathing nymphs and Diana by surprise. In Albani’s painting, the composition locates Diana and her nymphs on the left-hand side of the canvas. The artist chooses to depict the goddess and nymphs completely nude and exposed to their intruder, Actaeon. Diana is placed in the center of the composition and is distinguished by her characteristic crescent moon headpiece; she is situated in the front of the group of nymphs with her left arm gesturing towards Actaeon. Her iconic golden bow and sheaf of arrows are behind her hanging in the trees and out of reach, which is consistent with Ovid’s account. In similar fashion to Titian’s painting, this leaves Diana without her weapon. Actaeon is on the far right side of the image standing in a powerful and masculine pose as he voyeuristically gazes upon the scene of female flesh before him. His stance suggests appraisal as if he is looking upon a prize he has just won. There is no fear in

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Actaeon’s face and therefore, no indication that he is aware of his disastrous fate. This is despite the fact that close examination of Actaeon’s head reveals the emergence of stag antlers. Nevertheless, he is still unaware of his transformation because of his avid preoccupation with the nude women. While his transformation is being downplayed in the composition, Diana’s weapons are highlighted as being out of the goddess’s reach.

Notwithstanding the painting’s similarities with Titian’s version, it also has some major differences. Albani endows Diana with greater power due to the fact that Actaeon is in the process of receiving punishment for his forbidden voyeurism. Nevertheless, he still paints Actaeon standing firm and unyielding as he gazes upon Diana in a fashion that cannot be ignored; his gaze holds Diana and objectifies her. Furthermore, the nymphs around Diana are frantically turning to cover themselves but are unable to do so. These actions suggest that the goddess and her nymphs are powerless under the male gaze. The female bodies in this painting are again depicted with very little muscle definition, while Actaeon is shown as the strongest and most powerful figure within this scene. It is important to note that this attitude is not just an Italian tradition; Northern depictions of Diana reveal a similar treatment of gender stereotypes.

In addition to the Italian tradition, Domenichino was notably influenced by the Northern Flemish tradition. Indeed, his first art instructor was the Flemish artist Denis Calvaert, who was born in Antwerp and later moved to Bologna. From Calvaert, Domenichino learned both the Northern naturalistic style of painting, as well as the idealized style of Italian classicism. Domenichino would have also been aware of other Flemish artists like Peter Paul Rubens. Rubens traveled throughout Europe painting for the royal courts and Catholic churches of Spain, England, and Italy. During his travels, Rubens was heavily influenced by the Venetian painter
Titian. Indeed, he frequently observed, studied, and copied his works. In Rubens’s depiction, *The Bath of Diana* (1635–40) (Figure 6), he employs Titian’s same subject matter and even depicts the same moment in the story, just before the climax of the narrative. The nymphs react as their attention is drawn to the left of the scene where Actaeon has presumably been discovered out of the frame. Hence, the nymphs hastily attempt to cover their goddess. Diana is recognizable with her crescent shaped headpiece in the center of the painting. While three of the goddess’s attendants focus on Actaeon, Diana herself directs her attention towards the viewer. During the seventeenth century, the story of Actaeon and Diana appears to have held moral significance for Flemish viewers. While Actaeon was not penalized for accidentally coming upon the goddess, he was ultimately punished for his voyeuristic spying. The Flemish viewer would have related to the emphasis on moral behavior. Hence, the story warns that Actaeon’s lust led to his downfall, and Diana’s confrontational gaze toward the intended male viewer in Rubens’s painting further underscores this moral. Actaeon is not visible, which shifts the focal point to Diana. The male viewer becomes a second voyeur and is accused of the same offense as Actaeon. This is evident when the goddess confronts the viewer with her pointed gaze. In this manner, Rubens indicts male voyeurism, but he still disempowers the goddess who appears without her weaponry.

Each of the artists discussed so far followed the Ovidian account of Diana and Actaeon in a general sense; however, they chose to focus on Actaeon’s intrusion during a very intimate moment for the unsuspecting goddess. Domenichino is the exception. He elected to change the

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moment in the narrative in a unique and creative way, departing from predecessors and contemporaries.

Domenichino’s *Archery Contest of Diana and her Nymphs* is atypical among other Baroque depictions due to its portrayal of a notably empowered Diana. Domenichino elevates Diana to the status of a warrior goddess. Instead of reproducing a scene of Diana caught off guard in a vulnerable state, undressed and weaponless, Domenichino’s interpretation is less phallocentric. His painting has much more depth and complexity, creating characters who are no longer objects but subjects involved as they are all actively engaged in physical activities. At first glance, the painting shows a playful archery contest taking place in an idyllic landscape. The nymphs involved in the contest are shooting at a pole situated on the right side of the image. On the pole is a ribbon with a bird attached. There are arrows in motion with one hitting the pole, another cutting the ribbon, and a third striking the bird. Below the falling bird is a clump of dense bushes concealing the two men spying on the nymphs’ activities, one of whom is Actaeon. Domenichino uses continuous narrative to comment on the present and to anticipate the future of this scene. In doing so Domenichino foreshadows the men’s eventual death. One man within the bushes looks to the viewer with a finger to his lips, thus keeping the viewer from revealing their hiding place. In the background, however, the narrative skips ahead as two nymphs can be seen carrying a dead stag between them, as if the men in hiding have already been slaughtered. The dying bird is another representation of the men’s fate as it falls directly

30 Ibid., 18-19.
over their heads. Moreover, a hunting dog is shown leaping after the dead bird—or perhaps after the concealed Actaeon—in fulfillment, of Ovid’s words that dogs tear the young hunter apart.33

Domenichino reinterpreted the story of Diana and her bathing nymphs to the point that he actually alters the presentation to empower his female subjects rather than objectifying them. Far from passive objects, many of his female subjects wear warrior clothing, and in this particular composition Diana appears fully clothed in a golden, Roman tunic. Domenichino consciously reacts against the sexualized stereotype that was so common among his contemporaries.34 It is also significant that Diana is presented displaying her weapon. She is no longer unarmed but now empowered by the presence of her golden bow, raised high in triumph over her head. This alone is pointedly different from other artists renditions, in which Diana’s weapons have been depicted far out of reach. Moreover, many of the surrounding nymphs are actually in the processes of using their weapons contributing to their power and authority in this painting. Significantly, Actaeon and the other spy are hidden in the far right bushes with no weapons, taking up the least amount of space in the scene.

In this new interpretation, Domenichino shows these female heroines with a much more defined physique. Their limbs are muscular, a significant change from images where the females are weak, passive objects for male voyeurism. Domenichino portrays his female subjects as powerful and engaged warrior women. They look more like Amazons than docile objects of nude flesh.

“Archenemies” to the Ancient Greeks, the Amazons were a mythical race of female warriors. They were daughters of Ares, god of war, but unlike their father, the Amazons did not

represent the chaos and violence of battle but instead militaristic strength and strategy. They only fought as a last resort. These women are revered in literature and art, and are described in the *Iliad* as equal to men in battle. Amazon warriors are unique in their capability to retain their independence and virtue while still having the ability to fight with weapons against men. These bellicose women were both desirable and beautiful. As a formidable opponent to the Greeks, their strength and power were often emphasized to showcase the Greek dominance in their capacity to defeat the women. The subject of the Amazon’s battle against the Greeks was revived in Renaissance art and continued through the Baroque period. Works like Rubens’s *The Battle of the Amazons* of 1615 (Figure 7), portray an extremely brutal conflict between the powerful Amazonian women and the Greek soldiers. Rubens showcases suffering on both sides, there is no clear victor. It is a tense composition, but significantly there is no erotic tension between the fighting men and women, but instead a tension of equal force and strength. The Amazons have a more masculine physique that enables them to compete with the Greek soldiers.

Domenichino uses similar tactics to Rubens in the *Archery Contest of Diana and Her Nymphs*. The female figures have strong, muscular bodies that are capable of hunting and fighting. Depicting them with an Amazon-like physique empowers the nymphs and Diana to retain their virtue while having the capability to wield weapons and defeat their adversaries. As the protector of virgins, Diana is portrayed with the strength to protect her charges. Not only is Domenichino able to physically empower his female heroines; he is also able to grant his subjects power over the male gaze.

37 Ibid., 97.
One of the most intriguing aspects of this painting is Domenichino’s manipulation of the gaze. The painting is about looking and seeing and also looking and not seeing. The composition focuses on consciousness and acute awareness of one’s surroundings. Most of Diana’s nymphs gaze purposefully in the direction of the concealed Actaeon, and yet they do not seem to see the shrouded intruders. Diana’s sharp gaze, moreover, is in the direction of the victor of the archery contest, and she seems equally unaware of the spying men. The young bathing nymph in the foreground is gazing straight out at the audience of this painting, indicating an accusatory awareness of her audience. This confrontational exchange between the nymph and viewers of the painting heightens their own self-awareness and consciousness that they are now intruders, like Actaeon. As viewers gaze upon Domenichino’s sophisticated drama, they are offered a choice. The piercing gaze of this young, innocent nymph makes the viewer, along with the two men in the bushes, a voyeur. The viewer can choose to remain an intruder or to join the goddess. The viewer is prompted to join the narrative and to look away from the bathing nymph and to instead look at the powerful goddess Diana and the archery contest. This unique approach to the popular Ovidian tale is dramatically different and significantly more complex than renditions by Domenichino’s male predecessors and contemporaries. I argue that one of the primary reasons for this is that he was indeed gleaning inspiration from another source – the protofeminist art tradition of Bologna.

**Bologna’s Receptive Protofeminist Environment**

Bologna’s prominent female art tradition has only been explored in the past few decades. Female artists in general were excluded from the cannon of art history without much rationale...
until Linda Nochlin and her famous article from 1971, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists,” sparked the feminist art history movement to reclaim and research long-forgotten female artists.\(^{40}\) Today, scholarship has expanded the feminist approach by adjusting the historical perspective.\(^{41}\) More evidence of female artistic traditions has been discovered and the sexual biases and distortions of bygone eras are increasingly being recognized.\(^{42}\) Despite the abundant scholarship from the past several decades, more investigation is needed on the historic impact of female artists, especially the Bolognese protofeminists.

My thesis attempts to fill part of the void in literature on sixteenth and seventeenth century Bologna. Rather than merely reclaiming these women painters, I will explore the environment that allowed them to rise to the status of artist, as well as to survey their important impact on the larger artistic tradition of the Baroque. Specifically, I will demonstrate that Domenichino was influenced by this strong protofeminist tradition.

Many factors contributed to the fertile environment in Bologna for the arts. The prosperity for male artists was efficacious for females as well. One of the most important factors


was Bologna’s location. Situated in Northern Italy, along the commercial route to Rome, Florence, Milan, and Venice. Bologna is also extremely close to Trent, where the Counter Reformation proceedings took place. During the Tridentine Reform there was a surge in the production of religious works of art. Under the direction of Giovanni del Monet, the council encouraged art that was didactic, dramatic, and appealed to the emotions as a means of bringing people to the fold of the Catholic Church. The Church sought to shepherd Protestants back to the faith but also to rekindle the devotion of the faithful. The Council of Trent was held between 1545 to 1563 and, for a season, was transferred to the city of Bologna to avoid a plague outbreak in Trent. With Bologna in such close proximity to these theological debates, the artists from the city were heavily affected by the council’s dictates on how art should inspire and communicate Church doctrine.\footnote{Caroline Murphy, \textit{Lavinia Fontana: A Painter and Her Patrons in Sixteenth-Century Bologna} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) 1-2.} This aided the expansion of the art market in Bologna, making it an important cultural center.

The art scene further expanded when Ugo Boncompagni, a native from Bologna, became Pope Gregory XIII in 1572. This brought additional papal commissions from Rome. Bolognese artists began moving to Rome to produce art for the pope and cardinals. Bologna’s bishop, Gabriele Paleotti, was appointed to the status of archbishop by the pope. An active contributor to the discourse on art at the Council of Trent, Paleotti was also a strong supporter of women and encouraged them to actively participate in social activities exemplifying virtue.\footnote{Ibid., 2-3.} He was fully committed to making Bologna the paradigm of a post-Tridentine city.

Another contributing factor to Bologna’s successful art market was the absence of a formal royal court. In 1506, the Bentivoglio family was removed from power by Pope Julius II,
and the city was reclaimed by the papal state.\textsuperscript{45} With no ducal family in control, lesser nobles in Bologna could gain new freedoms and powers. It also permitted women to become more involved in both secular and religious activities, including various artistic enterprises.\textsuperscript{46}

Lastly, Bologna was particularly receptive to female artists due to one of its most beloved patron saints: St. Caterina de’ Vigri, also known as St. Catherine of Bologna.\textsuperscript{47} St. Catherine was a devout Poor Clare nun who, throughout her life, experienced intense visions. She wrote down these visions and, because she was also an artist, painted what she saw in her divine communications. Some of these apparitions included the Virgin Mary giving her the Christ Child to hold.\textsuperscript{48} St. Catherine was regarded as the patron saint of painters, the only saint—either male or female—to hold this title.\textsuperscript{49} St. Luke had long been invoked as the patron saint of artists in general, due to the panels he had painted of the Virgin and Child. Interestingly, among the Madonna and Child images made by St. Catherine, there is one in particular that hearkens back to these famous, “miracle-working icons” attributed to St. Luke.\textsuperscript{50} In this way, St. Catherine functioned as a Lukan figure for her day, and the special favor the Bolognese obtained through her patronage was manifested her miraculously uncorrupted body, enshrined in the Monastery of Corpus Domini.\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{47} St. Caterina de’ Vigri (8 September 1413—9 March 1463) was a Poor Clare nun who was beatified in 1524 by Pope Clement VII and later canonized in 1712 by Pope Clement XI. Her feast day is celebrated on March 9th. She is known as the patron saint of Bologna, Artists, Liberal Arts, and Against Temptations.
\textsuperscript{49} St. Catherine de’ Vigri is the only saint of painting, St. Luke who is often associated with painting and is believed to have painted the Virgin Mary is the patron saint of artists, writers, and physicians. He is not associated with painting exclusively but artists in general making, St. Catherine unique in her title as patron saint of painting.
\textsuperscript{50} St. Luke was said to be the only person to draw a true representation of the Virgin Mary from life.
\textsuperscript{51} Hans Belting, \textit{Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014) 330. Incorrupted bodies are considered a miracle from heaven, it is when a body does not
Indeed, after St. Catherine’s death, her ongoing presence via her preserved body became an ensign of faith to the city and a point of civic pride; she was considered a ‘community saint’ (Figure 8).\(^{52}\) Over the years St. Catherine’s life and death inspired Bologna through her miracles, mystical writing, artwork, and her incorrupted body, leading to the official authorization of her cult in 1524.\(^{53}\) The influence and legacy that St. Catherine left behind was unprecedented for a female saint.\(^{54}\) Her reputation spread throughout Italy and drew pilgrims to a burgeoning cult in Bologna. This following had a substantial influence on the city, especially on its women. It seems that St. Catherine’s very physical presence in Bologna helped create support and tolerance for educating woman in both academics and the arts.\(^{55}\) In this sense, Bologna is unique compared to its neighboring Italian cities.\(^{56}\) Remarkably, the Università di Bologna had been accepting women since the early thirteenth century.\(^{57}\) Long before the Baroque period, the city had a tradition of empowering women with knowledge in the pursuit of a more active role in society and the liberal arts.

decompose or decay after death. It is thought to be a blessing from God that the body has been preserved in death becoming a gateway where heaven and earth meet. For more information see Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*. Enl., 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015) and Paul Koudounaris, *Heavenly Bodies: Cult Treasures & Spectacular Saints from the Catacombs* (New York, New York: Thames & Hud., 2013).

\(^{52}\) St. Catherine died March 9\(^{th}\), 1463 at 49 years old. Shortly after her burial, her sisters and fellow community noticed sweet scents coming from her grave and miraculous healings to those who visited. The sweet smells coming from a holy saints’ grave is an indication of holiness or blessing and is called the Odor of Sanctity. Catherine’s body was exhumed eighteen days after she was buried and was found to be incorrupted. Since then St. Catherine’s body has been sitting in the Corpus Domini church in Bologna for five hundred and fifty-five years. She sits regally upon a golden ornate throne, where she reigns supreme as the patron saint to the city of Bologna. Also Jeryldene Wood, *Women, Art, and Spirituality: The Poor Clares of Early Modern Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 121.


\(^{54}\) Ibid, 78.

\(^{55}\) Incorrupted or Uncorrupted Saints were highly venerated during the Tridentine Reform. Some other famous saints include: St. Cecelia, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Francis Xavier, St. Filippo Neri, St. maria Maddelena of Pazzi, to name a few. These saints, like St. Catherine of Bologna, were found after death to be uncorrupted, a miracle considered to be from God indicating the persons holiness.


\(^{57}\) The Università di Bologna was founded in 1088 A.D and is the oldest university to still be in operation today.
Female Art Tradition of Bologna

Despite Bologna’s relatively inclusive art scene, female artists throughout Italy had a difficult time receiving proper training, as compared to their male counterparts. Women often pursued their art careers in unconventional ways. Women’s capacity as “creators” was limited to producing children, not art.⁵⁸ In the days before women were allowed entrance to acclaimed art academies, most could only access materials and training if a family member were involved in the art business. It was considered socially acceptable for a woman to learn the trade before she was married, but once married, her family became her first priority. Female artists struggled to gain proper training to improve their talent; however, a few exceptional women were able to push through the stereotypes to become well-known, and even profitable, artists.

This was the case for a few select Bolognese artists. Some of the most celebrated women from Bologna were St. Caterina de’ Vigri (1413 – 1463); Properzia de’ Rossi (1490 – 1530) the first female Bolognese sculptor; Lavinia Fontana (1552 – 1614), the first professional female painter to be competitive in the art markets of both Bologna and Rome; and Elisabetta Sirani (1638 – 1665), an accomplished painter and print maker.⁵⁹ These exceptional women were only mentioned briefly by contemporary historians such as Vasari, Malvasia, and Bellori, but they nevertheless “pushed the envelope” in pursuing careers that, had they been born in another city, might not have been an option for them. In terms of their influence on male contemporaries, I will focus on Lavinia Fontana’s work in comparison to that of Domenichino.

As previously mentioned, mythological heroines were a popular theme for all artists, both male and female; however, Bolognese women routinely painted their female subjects differently

⁵⁹ For Biographies on all of these women please consult Julia Kathleen Dabbs, Life Stories of Women Artists, 1550-1800: An Anthology (Farnham, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009).
from their male contemporaries. Artists such as Lavinia Fontana and Elisabetta Sirani opposed
the socially constituted restrictions on their sex and produced paintings that reversed the
“normative female models.” These artists were strong and courageous, and they painted
women in this same fashion. It is likely that female artists connected with these heroic
characters on a deeper level and portrayed these heroines in a way that gave their subjects
power. As active artists themselves, they painted active and engaging warrior women, rather
than passive heroines, objectified by male voyeurism. Their female subjects were strong and
empowered. It is important to note that these female artists used the same painting style as their
male counterparts in Italy. What made them different from the men was their interpretation of
the female heroine.

Laura Mulvey, a contemporary film theorist, was one of the first scholars to emphasize
the importance of the gaze. She contends that it is the male gaze that is often in control. The
viewer is encouraged to identify with the male hero and, in doing so, make the heroine within the
narrative a “passive object of erotic spectacle.” This is the case with female heroines depicted
by male artists in mythological narratives such as Diana and Actaeon. There is a sexual
imbalance where the male figure becomes active while the female figure becomes a passive
object. The male figure’s gaze is the crucial component in transforming a female figure into an
object of desire; how the male character is portrayed within a scene can influence the viewer to
follow his example and project a lustful desire on the female figures.

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60 Norma Broude, and Mary D. Garrard, *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History After Postmodernism*
61 Babette Bohn, “The Antique Heroines of Elisabetta Sirani,” In *Reclaiming Female Agency Postmodernism*, ed. by
63 Shohini Chaudhuri, *Feminist Film Theorists: Laura Mulvey, Kaja Silverman, Teresa De Lauretis, Barbara Creed*
Diana and Actaeon, Diana’s facial expressions, body language and clothing, or lack thereof, implies eroticism while Actaeon’s gaze draws implicit lines that force the viewer to gaze upon Diana in the same fashion. It forces the viewer to look at her in a sexual way. Diana no longer becomes a strong warrior goddess in and of herself, but instead represents a kind of power in others—the lust she inspires in Actaeon as well as in the viewer. In Domenichino’s work, however, the male gaze shifts, forcing the viewer to focus on Diana and her virtuous and empowering attributes rather than on her eroticized body.

Regarding Domenichino’s use of the gaze, there is one Bolognese female artist who stands out in particular as a probable influence—Lavinia Fontana. Fontana was born in Bologna in 1552, nearly thirty years before Domenichino, and died in Rome in 1614, the very time that Domenichino was living and working in that city. Because of her artistic skill, Fontana became her family’s primary source of income. She was the first professional female artist from Bologna to flourish in both Bologna and Rome. She established her own network of patronage and became competitive in the art market with her male contemporaries. Fontana’s paintings make up the largest surviving body of work by any female artist before 1700. Wealthy noble families loved Fontana for her aptitude in portraiture. She herself was born to a noble family, providing her with strong social connections to other aristocratic families. One patron in particular was the Bolognese archbishop mentioned earlier, Gabriele Paleotti. Paleotti was close with the Fontana family and gave Fontana some of her first large church commissions.

Over the course of her artistic career, Fontana painted multiple depictions of the heroine Judith slaying Holofernes. Her story comes from the deuterocanonical book of Judith in the

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Apocrypha, which recounts that Judith’s home city of Bethulia was being threatened by an invading Assyrian army. She decides to save her city and people by entering the Assyrian general Holofernes’s tent. When Holofernes is asleep, Judith beheads him. She appears as a particularly strong heroine in two of Lavinia’s paintings where she is depicted as a strong heroine capable of overcoming her adversary.⁶⁷

Fontana’s earlier rendition of this theme was created in 1592–94 (Figure 9). In this painting, she chose the moment right after Judith beheaded Holofernes. Judith is front and center and leaning forward, which creates strong, dynamic lines as her body twists away from Holofernes’s corpse, as she grasps his head. She follows the archetypal guise of conquering heroes like David and Perseus, who hold the decapitated head of their foes. Her dramatic and diagonal stance conveys strength and effort, causing Judith to command the entire painting. A baldacchino-type canopy above the scene casts dark shadows over the corpse of Holofernes, while also honoring Judith as the triumphant victor of the narrative. A bright light shines on Judith’s face, and some scholars have even suggested that the figure of Judith is a self-portrait of Lavinia Fontana.⁶⁸ Comparing this image of Judith with the artist’s Self-Portrait from 1577 (Figure 10), similarities in the nose, facial structure, and eyebrows are apparent.⁶⁹ The artist’s combination of her own virtues with those of Judith creates a complex and psychological depth to her work.

Fontana depicts Judith wearing a tunic, a garment commonly associated with warriors and Amazonian women and the dress Diana routinely wears while hunting. On a more

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⁶⁹ Ibid., 24-25.
functional level, the tunic galvanizes Judith allowing her more room to move in this short skirt. She further empowers Judith by portraying her in the act of beheading Holofernes with ease. Far from being a passive woman, Judith emblematizes the strong heroine that liberates her people.

Lavinia Fontana painted a second rendition of the theme, *Judith with the Head of Holofernes*, in 1600 (Figure 11). In this portrayal, Fontana depicts a dignified version of Judith staring out at the viewer. She appears as a victor, holding the sword in her left hand and the severed head in her right. Here, “womanly strength, not weakness, underlies Fontana’s rendering of the heroine.” Fontana dresses Judith as an upper-class woman; she looks regal and proper. With a pointed gaze toward the audience, Judith projects confidence and capability. Fontana continually empowers her female subjects by giving them weapons and showing them in active feats of heroism. This creates active and dynamic women, contrasting noticeably with the passive female models used by many of her male contemporaries. As a matter of fact, the story of Judith was extremely popular with female artists like Artemisia Gentileschi (1593 – 1656), likely because it depicts a woman overcoming a male enemy. Other female artists from Bologna would follow in Fontana’s footsteps and paint their female subjects as strong, capable heroines.

During the seventeenth century, female artists from Bologna began to receive more recognition for their historical paintings. These artists actively painted rare and unique depictions of uncommon heroines. These representation became popular with art collectors as it

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was seen as a rare and unique piece to add to their collections. They were also seen as valuable because they were created by women.72

Elisabetta Sirani was an artist that particularly epitomized the protofeminist tradition in Bologna. She and her fellow female painters developed a “sub-specialization in pictures of heroines from antiquity.”73 She became an artist like her father, Giovanni Andrea Sirani.74 Elisabetta Sirani lived a very short life but was able to produce a voluminous amount of art. She often addressed distinctly feminine virtues such as chastity, beauty, and piety. Her style was bold and “even ferocious.”75 This is seen in Sirani’s *Porcia Wounding Her Thigh* of 1664 (Figure 12). Porcia, the daughter of Marcus Porcius Cato Uticencis was married to Marcus Junius Brutus, the same Brutus who betrayed Caesar and helped in his assassination. Brutus would not reveal the conspiracy to Porcia, so to prove her trustworthiness, she took a knife and stabbed herself. Sirani shows the moment Porcia has pierced her skin. The blood is trickling down her leg, but Porica shows no pain in her face. Sirani emphasizes Porcia’s trustworthy devotion to her husband that she would withstand any torture.

Another work by Sirani, *Timoclea* of 1659, also shows a woman overcoming a man (Figure 13). The storyline comes from Plutarch, who wrote of a woman named Timoclea who was raped by a captain of an evil invading army. Later, Timoclea lures the captain to a well where she claims she has hidden money. It is here at the well that the heroine pushes the captain in and proceeds to throw heavy stones down upon him until he dies. In Sirani’s painting she

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74 Julia Kathleen Dabbs, *Life Stories of Women Artists, 1550-1800: An Anthology* (Farnham, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009) 121. Note: Elisabetta Sirani’s father interestingly enough was very opposed to her becoming an artist even though she obviously had the skill and talent for the family business.

75 Ibid., 122.
depicts the moment in which a strong courageous woman throws her adversary into a well. During this era, if a woman were raped it was often considered her own fault, but here Sirani is showing that if a man sexually assaults a virtuous woman, he will be punished for the deed. Timoclea looks especially regal in her expensive dress and headpiece as she thrusts her rapist into the well’s depths with amazing strength. The heroine’s face is determined with a brow furrowed in concentration as she completes her task. Timoclea has astonishing strength and a muscular body. These attributes co-opt notions of empowerment often connected with masculinity. Since Sirani chose her subjects carefully, it is quite possible that she felt a connection with the strong female type. Moreover, her female perspective gives her heroines more strength and power than was typical with male artists. This gender reversal gives her female heroines the ability to convey a sense of empowerment. Like Domenichino, Sirani was following the protofeminist art tradition of Bologna that had been established for years and was particularly popularized by Lavinia Fontana.

With Fontana’s acclaimed status it would have been highly likely that her male contemporaries, especially the artists coming from Bologna, were familiar with her work. Domenichino and Fontana were both competing for commissions in Bologna and Rome at the same time and must have been acquainted. This is evident in an altarpiece commissioned in the mid-1590s for the Rosary Chapel of the Basilica of San Domenico, one of the major churches in Bologna (Figure 14). This altarpiece completed in 1601, contained fifteen small depictions of the mysteries of the rosary that were painted by prominent Bolognese artists. The artists involved

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78 Ibid., 93.
included both Lavinia Fontana and Domenichino, along with Ludovico Carracci, Guido Reni, Francesco Albani, Denis Calvaert, and Bartolomeo Cesi. Domenichino was commissioned to deliver one image: *The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin*. Fontana, on the other hand, was commissioned to produce two of the fifteen mysteries: *The Coronation of the Virgin* and *Jesus among the Doctors*. It is fitting that a female artist would produce *The Coronation of the Virgin* in a city so encouraging of women.

This altarpiece reveals that Fontana and Domenichino were aware of one another and that they were familiar with each other’s works. The orientation of the altar aligns Domenichino’s *Assumption of the Blessed Virgin* and Lavinia’s *Coronation of the Virgin* one on top of the other. Not only were Domenichino and Fontana commissioned by the same patron for the Rosary altarpiece, they also shared another mutual patron, Cardinal Scipione Borghese. It was this same Cardinal Borghese who took Domenichino’s *Archery Contest of Diana and her Nymphs* by force. Furthermore, in 1613 – 1614, Borghese commissioned Fontana to create a work dealing with the goddess Minerva. She produced *Minerva in the Act of Dressing* (Figure 15) in 1613, which was the last known work created by Fontana before she died.

In this painting, Fontana depicts a standing female nude in the guise of the warrior goddess. Minerva is painted in the act of dressing, which is representational of her “putting on” her symbols of power, including her shield, spear, helmet, and breast plate. The inclusion of Minerva’s armor and weapons, even if she is not in the process of using them, indicates the goddess’s strength and virtue. As the Bible references “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye

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81 Minerva is the Roman goddess of wisdom, strategic warfare, and weaving. Her Greek mythological counterpart is the goddess Athena.
may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”

Fontana displays her skill in depicting the female nude, while keeping the goddess’s virtue and modesty intact, this is further emphasized by the inclusion of the spear. Spears are weapons used from a distance and have often been employed as a symbol for combating temptations. Spears are also closely associated with Amazon warriors. Returning to Rubens’s image of *The Battle of the Amazons*, the majority of the Amazons were using spears or lances in combat. In Fontana’s work, not only does she include the goddess’s important weaponry but also her sacred animal, an owl perched in the window, as a symbol of wisdom. Fontana further emphasizes the goddess’s powers with the intricately painted robes Minerva is putting on, which are a reference to her aptitude in weaving. The beautiful draperies also allude to Fontana’s own skill as a painter, suggesting that she, like Minerva herself, creates divinely beautiful textiles.

It is important to note that despite the fact that the goddess’s nudity puts her in a state of vulnerability, she is actively donning her warrior garb. This imbues her with attributes of wisdom, reason, and virtue. Moreover, these actions emphasize her role as protectress of the arts and industry, and they also signify her agency as an active and virtuous woman. Her nude body is positioned in a way that keeps her modesty and chastity intact. Looking at the goddess’s face, she gazes out at the viewer with an interesting expression. Vera Fortunati has suggested that the young goddess “gazes with erotic ambiguity toward the observer, while the emblematic symbols – shield, helmet, and spear – are arranged with mirror-like clarity, as if to reflect the conceptual relationship between virtue and honor…with subtle sensuality.”

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83 KJB Ephesians 6:11
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
This is an incredibly unique depiction of the goddess and it was considered valuable by the fact that a well-established female artist produced it.\(^8\) These rare types of images were sought out by Cardinal Borghese to add to his collection. Borghese saw this same exclusive appeal in Domenichino’s *Archery Contest of Diana and her Nymphs*, which prompted his desire to obtain the work by any means necessary. Domenichino’s painting approaches his female subjects in the same unique manner as is found in the art of Lavinia Fontana. He understood the financial profit that came with producing images that deviated from the common approach; he also saw the impact and importance of empowering female figures and instilling them with virtuous traits. This is particularly seen with the nymph in the water at the front of the image, staring directly out at the viewer (Figure 16).

Domenichino’s water nymph is the most difficult to interpret of all the figures in this composition. The young and innocent nymph is positioned in the water between the main archery scene and the beholder. The nymph’s nude body has often been read as inviting the viewer to gaze upon her, placing the viewer as an intruder like Actaeon himself.\(^9\) I argue that this nymph is actually an indicator of the goddess Diana’s immense power. She is the protector of virgins. Diana is placed directly above this young nymph in the composition, she is an extension of Diana and will be protected from intruders. Domenichino’s depiction, as previously mentioned, is unconventional in illustrating the tale of Diana and Actaeon, which is about looking and seeing, looking and not seeing, as well as the penalties for voyeurism.\(^10\) Diana is also looking forward but in her case, she does not see them, as she is focused on the archery


\(^10\) Ibid.
contest in process. The nymph in the water, on the other hand, pierces the observer with her confrontational gaze. Considering that Diana is a protector of females and virgins, this water nymph is a virgin who is safeguarded by Diana. The nymph is protected from Actaeon by Diana herself. As previously discussed, the foreshadowing of the intruder’s fate is painted throughout the scene. This nymph almost dares the viewer to test Diana’s power. The nymph becomes an innocent youth who is defended by the sheltering goddess.

In like manner, Fontana’s heroines—including Minerva—possess a deep, psychological undercurrent that both expresses the artist’s skill while simultaneously upholding the subject’s empowerment and dignity. I suggest that this “female perspective” in Domenichino’s work comes from Fontana and other women artists. Taking into account the influence of these women’s on Domenichino’s Archery Contest of Diana and her Nymphs, it is clear that the defining of the female heroine is a protofeminist tradition had a significant impact on this artist. By giving Diana masculine qualities, such as clothing her in a warrior garment and arming her with a golden bow, Domenichino transforms the narrative to showcase the power and virtue of the goddess of the hunt.

**Conclusion**

Bologna provided an extremely profitable market for both male and female artists. The protofeminist tradition thrived in the city’s fertile artistic environment and was influenced by the Council of Trent, the lack of a royal court, and the historic import of St. Caterina de’ Vigri. This protofeminist tradition actively searched out and painted unique female subjects to produce a trend of strong heroines that rejected male voyeurism. These images were considered unique and extremely valuable because of their novelty as having been painted by a female artists. Many
art collectors sought out images that were rare for their collections, which increased these female artists’ fame and recognition.

Scholars have researched the protofeminist tradition of Bologna, but never in regards to their influence on their fellow male artists. It is through comparisons between the male and female interpretations of the heroine during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that I reveal how the artist Domenichino was deeply impacted by this protofeminist tradition. These accomplished female artists were active in the art market, working and thriving alongside their male counterparts. Domenichino was aware of the artist Lavinia Fontana and her popularity, as they both worked in the same cities as well as under mutual patrons. Over the course of Domenichino’s artistic career, his view of the heroine shifted. He began producing images of strong female figures. I believe he saw this as a profitable investment to produce images that were unique among his male contemporaries. Furthermore, his adopted perspective gave praise to the Bolognese protofeminist tradition and the women artists that created it. A similar respect for strong female heroines can be found in his depictions of ancient Sibyls and his St. Cecilia cycle. Nevertheless, his *Archery Contest of Diana and her Nymphs* best employs this sympathetic view of powerful women. Domenichino changed the narrative of what had become a consistently objectified and voyeuristic scene into an illustration of empowerment and strength for Diana and her nymphs.

Domenichino approaches his heroines in the same fashion as the female artists of Bologna. The women are no longer passive objects to be gazed upon; instead they are depicted as actively engaged warrior huntresses. Domenichino and the protofeminist tradition redefined how heroines were depicted by empowering the women as dynamic participants in brave
pursuits. It is my hope that this thesis will inspire more research on the Bologna protofeminist tradition in terms of its broad influence on early modern art and patronage.
Figure 1: Domenichino, *Archery Contest of Diana and her Nymphs*, 1616, Galleria Borghese, Rome, Italy
Figure 2: Adam Camerarius, *Portrait of a Woman as Diana*, 1644

Figure 3: Titian, *Venus of Urbino*, 1534
Figure 4: Titian, *Diana and Actaeon*, 1559
Figure 5: Francesco Albani, *Diana and Actaeon*, 1617
Figure 6: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Bath of Diana*, 1635-40
Figure 7: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Battle with the Amazons*, 1615

Figure 8: Incorrupt body of St. Catherine de Vigri, 1463, Chiesa della Santa chapel of Corpus Domini, Bologna, Italy
Figure 9: Lavinia Fontana, *Judith and Holofernes*, c.1600

Figure 10: Lavinia Fontana, *Self Portrait*, 1577
Figure 11: Lavinia Fontana, *Judith with the Head of Holofernes*, 1600

Figure 12: Elisabetta Sirani, *Porcia Wounding Her Thigh*, 1664
Figure 13: Elisabetta Sirani, *Timoclea*, 1695

Figure 14: Rosary Altarpiece, San Domenico Basilica, 1601, Bologna, Italy
Figure 15: Lavinia Fontana, *Minerva in the Act of Dressing*, 1613

Figure 16: Detail from Domenichino, *Archery Contest of Diana and her Nymphs*, 1616
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