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978-0-521-66496-7 - Defining the Renaissance Virtuosa: Women Artists and the Language of Art History and Criticism

Fredrika H. Jacobs

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Leonardo, Raphael, and Michelangelo are familiar names that are often closely associated with the concepts of genius and masterpiece. But what about Sofonisba Anguissola, Lavinia Fontana, and Irene di Spilimbergo? Their names are unfamiliar, and their works are literally unknown. Why?

*Defining the Renaissance "Virtuosa"* considers the language of art in relationship to the issues of gender difference through an examination of art criticism written between 1550 and 1800 on approximately forty women artists who were active in Renaissance Italy. Fredrika Jacobs demonstrates how these theoretical writings defined women artists by linking artistic creation with biological procreation and by asserting a connection between an artist's sex and her style. She also examines the ambiguity of these women as both beautiful objects and creators of beautiful objects. Jacobs's study shows how deeply the biases of these early critics have affected both subsequent reception of these Renaissance *virtuose* and modern scholarship.

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# Defining the Renaissance

## *Virtuosa*

WOMEN ARTISTS AND THE  
LANGUAGE OF ART HISTORY  
AND CRITICISM

Fredrika H. Jacobs

*Virginia Commonwealth University*



**CAMBRIDGE**  
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*For Paul and Jessica*

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But, what shall I say to them now,  
Our women, who assume this profession,  
Who adopt paint, pen, chalk  
And then explain the flight of their fame?

– Giulio Cornelio Gratiano,  
*Di Orlando Santo vita*, 1636

I say that even later someone will  
Remember us . . .

– Sappho



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