# Jusepe de Ribera's *Five Senses* and the Practice of Prudence

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*Painted in Rome around 1615, Jusepe de Ribera's series of half figures personifying the five senses invites a diplomatic audience associated with the Lincean Academy to a performance of prudence, a virtue meant to characterize the judgment of both art and of sensory experience. Ribera's series is new evidence for how the demonstration of prudence in conversation motivated ownership and display of art and shaped art's contribution to natural philosophy. Ribera's "Five Senses" articulates the distinction between sense and prudence, and reveals the importance of discussion, dissimulation, and social performance to the way early Seicento art was produced and consumed.*

## INTRODUCTION: THE NEARSIGHTED TELESCOPE

**IN A LETTER** to his friend Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) from 13 August 1613, the Venetian diplomat, connoisseur, and amateur scientist Gianfrancesco Sagredo (1571–1620) wrote about Galileo's telescope not in terms of its intellectual or scientific potential, but in human and interpersonal terms, pointing to the kinds of sight that the instrument cannot enhance:

> I can well believe that the Grand Duke [of Tuscany, Cosimo II de'Medici] may be pleased to go about with one of your telescopes looking at the city of Florence and some nearby place; but if through some important requirement of his he must look at what goes on in all Italy, in France, in Spain, in Germany, and in the near East, he will put aside your telescope. And even if by your skill you shall discover some other instrument useful for these new purposes, who will ever be able to invent a spyglass for distinguishing madmen from the wise,

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> good men from those of evil counsel, the ingenious architect from the obstinate and ignorant foreman?[1]

As Sagredo points out, the telescope's enhancement of physical sight is of no help in discerning truthfulness or inherent value. By contrasting the powers of the telescope with a diplomatic understanding of events in other countries, or with discernment of people's character and motives, Sagredo emphasizes the separation between sense and the judgment required in its processing.[2] The difference between sight and perspicacity, and more particularly between sight and prudence, was a central feature of the discourse surrounding optical instruments; the telescope itself in this period was as much a metaphor for the unreliability of one's perceptions of other people as it was a tool for the enhancement of physical sight.[3]

The first visual representation of Galileo's telescope considers the instrument, not as a tool for detecting new aspects of the heavenly bodies, but as a conversation piece on the nature of perspicacity, and as a marker for the distinction between physical sight and prudence.[4] In Rome around 1615, the Spanish artist Jusepe de Ribera (b. Xátiva 1591–d. Naples 1652) painted, for an unnamed compatriot, a series of five canvases depicting the bodily senses. In this set of paintings, Ribera turned the still-rare Galilean telescope, owned only by a select coterie to whom Galileo had presented the instruments as gifts, into the key attribute of the sense of *Sight* (fig. 1).[5] On the one hand, a depiction of a specifically Galilean telescope in 1615 brings to mind Galileo's hotly debated contributions to optics and astronomy published in the years immediately prior. On the other hand, both Ribera's image of *Sight* and the series to which it belongs need to be analyzed more in terms of the telescope's resonance as a conversation piece about the distinction between sense and prudence than in terms of the more specialized scientific arenas in which telescopic observations were being used and debated.

In the foreground of Ribera's depiction of *Sight*, arrayed across the table between the viewer and the painted figure, are a set of items that have no narrative purpose but are meant to be considered and compared: a feathered cap, a pair of spectacles with a case for them, and a mirror. The play of homophones

[1] Drake, 68. For the Italian, see Galilei, 11:170–72.

[2] The complexity of the issue in early modern Italy is mapped out in Summers, 30–47.

[3] As Santo-Tomás, 3–4, demonstrates, noting the similarities between the aforementioned letter from Sagredo and descriptions of telescopes as tools and figures of deception by Spanish authors from Miguel de Cervantes to Diego de Torres Villaroel.

[4] See Pereda, 2015, which connects Ribera's *Five Senses* with his highly sophisticated commentary on the difference between sight and perspicacity in the contemporaneous *Saints Peter and Paul*.

[5] Milicua, 2011; Tosi, 177–80; *El Joven Ribera*, 150–51 (cat. no. 20).

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Figure 1. Jusepe de Ribera. *The Sense of Sight*, ca. 1615–16. Oil on canvas, 114 x 89 cm. Image courtesy of Museo Franz Mayer, Mexico City.

between the spectacles, *occhiali*, and the telescope, or *occhiale*, highlights the similarities and differences between the two sight-enhancing instruments. Furthermore, the game is a bilingual one for a bilingual audience: as Enrique García Santo-Tomás demonstrates, the term for the telescope most commonly used in Spanish, *anteojo* (lens), occupied a rich set of shared meanings with eyeglasses (*anteojos*) but also with *antojo*, which had a range of meanings from *craving* to *extravagance* and *madness*.[6] Ribera invites viewers to ponder how this particular version of the telescope differs from the more prosaic lenses, and what each sight-enhancing device says about sight itself. Both sorts of lenses

[6] Santo-Tomás, 14–15, 71–74.

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simultaneously underscore and supersede the limitations of human vision. Ribera also invites reflection on the contrast between the telescope and the mirror, a juxtaposition that further emphasizes the incapacity of the physical sense of sight to impart wisdom or understanding.[7] The mirror, yet another implement for enhancing and expanding sight, is also a figure for a different kind of sight altogether, the self-knowledge and immaterial perspicacity of prudence. Like Sagredo in the letter quoted above, Ribera presents the Galilean telescope as a figure for the double-edged gift of perception itself: the more acute the bodily senses, the greater the temptation to overestimate what can be known by them. The very superhuman sharpness of sight that the telescope offers is a distortion of perspective and a temptation to blindness, increasing rather than allaying the need for true perspicacity.

Ribera's *Five Senses* are canvases of startling vivacity depicting the senses of sight (fig. 1), touch (fig. 2), taste (fig. 3), smell (fig. 4), and hearing[8] through life-sized half figures.[9] Painted during Ribera's early years in Rome, the series of *Five Senses* constitutes an achievement of remarkable ambition and originality. The painter, then in his mid-twenties, was at this point one of a large group of non-Italian artists working in Rome and advancing along a stylistic path opened up by the recently deceased Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1571–1610). Born in the small town of Játiva near Valencia, Ribera appears to have arrived in Rome at the age of fifteen, in 1606, and to have spent most of the following decade there, with the exception of an unspecified period of travel in Emilia and Northern Italy, before permanently settling in Naples in 1616.[10] The

[7] On the wider range of connections between telescopes and mirrors, see Reeves, 2008.

[8] Examples of Ribera's *Hearing* continue to appear on the art market (see, for instance, https://arsmagazine.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/escuela-esp-s.xvii-segun-jose-de-ribera-trovador-con-laud-alegoria-del-oido.jpg). Three of the main versions on which the scholarly discussion has focused are in a private collection in Pully, Switzerland (Spinosa, 497–98), in the Europahaus, Vienna (Scholz-Hänsel, 24), and in the Koelliker collection in Milan (Papi, 2007, 162–63).

[9] *Jusepe de Ribera*, 60–64 (cat. nos. 2–5); Lange, 197–201 (cat. nos. A13–A17); *El Joven Ribera*, 148–53 (cat. nos. 19–21); Milicua, 2011; Payne and Bray, 70–71. Multiple versions exist of each one of the *Five Senses*, with complete sets of copies confirming the general appearance of the whole series. In the case of *Hearing* there is no scholarly consensus on the status of a single version as the original, but early and high-quality copies such as those in a Swiss private collection and in the Koelliker Collection in Milan provide reliable guides to the general aspect of Ribera's initial version. Gianni Papi has proposed to treat the Koelliker version of *Hearing* as the original, but the discrepancy of its facture from that of the accepted versions of the other four senses is difficult to overlook: Papi, 2007, 162–63 (cat. no. 45).

[10] Milicua, 1992; Finaldi, 1992a and 1992b; Lange, 9–23, 31–66; Danesi Squarzina, 2006; Porzio and D'Alessandro; Estevez.

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Figure 2. Jusepe de Ribera. *The Sense of Touch*, ca. 1615–16. Oil on canvas, 115.9 x 88.3 cm. The Norton Simon Foundation, Pasadena, CA. Artwork in the public domain. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

scholarly narratives that have accrued around Ribera's *Five Senses* have gone in two main directions: on the one hand, a specialist investigation of the pictures in the context of Caravaggesque painting has focused on delineations of attribution and style.[11] On the other hand, the paintings' unmistakable invocation of new developments in optics, astronomy, and natural philosophy—most notably via the Galilean telescope held up by Ribera's personification of

[11] Milicua, 2011; *El Joven Ribera*, 148–53; see also the overview in Lange, 80–97; and the pioneering connoisseurial work by Longhi.

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Figure 3. Jusepe de Ribera. *The Sense of Taste*, ca. 1614–16. Oil on canvas, 114 x 88 cm. Image courtesy of the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, CT. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund, 1963.194. Photography credit: Allen Phillips / Wadsworth Atheneum.

*Sight*—has brought the series into an interdisciplinary discussion about the role of the visual arts in the discoveries and controversies surrounding Galileo and other figures associated with the Accademia dei Lincei, the renowned scientific academy based in Rome and Naples.[12] What both accounts have undervalued is the profound interdependence of the strictly artistic features of the paintings with their contribution to the ambitious intellectual culture around the

[12] Santucci; Ferino-Pagden, 172–73; Tosi; Tongiorgi Tomasi, 2009; *El Joven Ribera*, 150–51 (cat. no. 20); Mason, 2012; Sanger and Walker, 6; Sapir; Santo-Tomás, 22–23.

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Figure 4. Jusepe de Ribera. *The Sense of Smell*, ca. 1615–16. Oil on canvas, 115 x 88 cm. Colección Abelló, Madrid. Photography credit: HIP / Art Resource, NY.

Lincean Academy. Returning to the interests that this series held for its initial audience opens up new perspectives, not only on Ribera's art, but also on the nature of art's participation in the scientific and philosophical developments occurring in the early seventeenth century.[13]

Both the scientific/philosophical and the artistic/connoisseurial interests to which the paintings catered were at least as anchored in strategies of social performance as they were in more supposedly disinterested aesthetic or intellectual

[13] Excellent introductions to this large and lively body of scholarship are Reeves, 1997; Findlen, 2002; *Il cannocchiale e il pennello*.

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goals. The two main lines of inquiry that scholars have pursued with regard to Ribera's series—the psychology of perception and the assessment of art—were closely interlinked ideas in the early Seicento Roman milieu. Their connection is clearest through the concept of *prudence*, which was both a philosophical term applied to the psychology of perception and a key term for the making and assessment of art. What has been missing from both art historical and more interdisciplinary discussions of Ribera's series is an analysis of prudence and its importance to artistic and intellectual culture alike in early Seicento Rome. As I shall argue, prudence was a category of analysis that pertained to three closely overlapping arenas: sensory perception; the appreciation and understanding of works of art; and reading one's interlocutors in conversation. There existed a close affinity between prudence in judging art and prudence in recognizing people's expressions and intentions; this is evident in seventeenth-century writings on art that conflate and overlay the two. These include anecdotes in which a spoken narration of the expressions and actions in a painting becomes not only an act of discernment in its own right, but also the basis for a performance of prudence in assessing a picture's merits.[14] Likewise, Ribera's *Five Senses* provides a working model of the deliberate and inventive ways in which paintings could stage rehearsals of the recognition and dissimulation of feelings and intentions. Such management of expression was a sine qua non of social survival, particularly for the diplomatic and multicultural audience for which painters like Ribera often worked. The double-edged virtue of prudence, which is the central theme of Ribera's series, resonates within the closely connected spheres of the artistic and the philosophical, the scientific and the courtly. Prudence designated both dissimulation and the ability to counteract or see through the dissimulations of others. By drawing his audience into practices of prudence through the forms of conversation, evaluation, and social confrontation that his paintings invite, Ribera has given us a rich and hitherto untapped body of primary evidence as to how works of art participated in complex early modern economies of expression and dissimulation.

## THE PATRONAGE OF RIBERA'S *FIVE SENSES* AND THE ACCADEMIA DEI LINCEI

The only known reference to the *Five Senses* from Ribera's lifetime is in the biography of the artist by the Sienese physician Giulio Mancini (1559–1630), a central figure in the art world of early Seicento Rome, a forward-

[14] A famous example compares the frescoes by Domenichino (1581–1641) with those by Guido Reni (1575–1642) for the Oratory of Saint Andrew at San Gregorio Magno al Celio in Rome; see Bellori, 245–46.

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thinking member of the city's cultural and scientific elite, and one of the most original art theorists of the seventeenth century.[15] Mancini reports that Ribera painted a series of the *Five Senses* for a certain "spagniolo," a Spanish patron whose name is left blank in all the surviving copies of Mancini's manuscript.[16] Scholars have proposed two plausible candidates as the series' patron. Both are Spanish diplomats who were verifiably present in Rome in 1615: Pedro Cosida (or Cussida, d. 1622), and Juan de Tassis y Peralta, the second Count of Villamediana (1582–1622).[17] The case for each of these men as the patron of the *Five Senses* is at once persuasive and inconclusive (though I find the arguments for Villamediana more compelling than those for Cosida). Like many of Ribera's Roman patrons, both Cosida and Villamediana were avid art collectors with a taste for contemporary Caravaggesque easel pictures.[18] Furthermore, both men were in Rome in a diplomatic capacity.[19] This makes the likeliest original context for the *Five Senses* a residence decorated with several distinct obligations in mind: to represent Spanish cultural identity while also showcasing fluency in Italian fashions and values; to engage with one's possessions in a way that demonstrates courtly virtues of taste and prudence; and to provide occasions for polite conversation on topics that will test visitors and allow the pictures' owner to gain social ascendancy through displays of wit and erudition.[20] While Cosida and Villamediana must have taken personal pleasure and interest in their respective art collections, both men would have had a strong awareness of the strategic and cost-effective professional advantages of displaying and discussing easel pictures. It is in this context of art collecting as a prompt for conversation and as a form of social performance that Ribera's series demands further analysis. This aspect of the series' purpose, both from the point of view of the artist and of the patron, is especially germane to the scientific subject matter that the paintings invoke. Far from being passive advertisements of a fashionable set of interests on the part of their owner, Ribera's *Five Senses* draw ideal viewer-discussants into a playful but high-stakes social performance.

[15] De Renzi and Sparti; Gage, 2016, 5–6.

[16] Mancini, 1:251.

[17] Further bibliography on Cosida is in Aznar Recuenco; and on Villamediana, in Ruiz Casanova. The case for Villamediana as Ribera's patron for the *Five Senses* is in Lange, 102–09, with support from von Bernstorff, 174; the case for Cosida as the patron is outlined in Papi, 2011.

[18] Lange, 77–87.

[19] Ruiz Casanova; Papi, 2007, 46–47, 52–53.

[20] See Bouza's excellent case study arguing that another of Ribera's diplomatic patrons used his art collection to demonstrate virtues of good government, notably including prudence: Bouza, 46.

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The series' unknown patron is also likely to have had ties to, or at least an interest in, the Accademia dei Lincei, Europe's first scientific academy. Founded in 1603, the academy had branches in both Rome and Naples by the time Ribera's *Five Senses* were painted (around 1615), and the Lincei's prestigious roster included controversial celebrities old and new, from established figures such as the Neapolitan polymath Giovambattista Della Porta (ca. 1535–1615) to still-rising stars such as Galileo.[21] The *Five Senses*' most obvious connection to the Linceans is the fact that Ribera's personification of *Sight* (fig. 1) holds a recognizably Galilean telescope.[22] There is no evidence to indicate whether the impetus for the pictures' Lincean references, including the telescope, came from the artist or the patron, or even whether Ribera's depiction of the Galilean instrument was based on firsthand study or detailed secondhand description. However, at the very least, Ribera's Galilean telescope indicates that the series was created for an audience that would be in a position to recognize this prized (and in the 1610s, still rare) version of the instrument, whose fame had so recently grown with the stir caused by Galilean publications such as the *Sidereus Nuncius* (Sidereal messenger, 1610) and his polemical report on sunspots, the *Istoria e dimostrazioni intorno alle macchie solari e loro accidenti* (History and demonstrations concerning sunspots and their properties, 1613).[23] However, Ribera's series might also invoke Lincean ideas more subtly, for instance in *Sight*'s aquiline features, which Della Porta's immensely successful book on physiognomy associated with the eagle's keen sight.[24]

These multiple Lincean references suggest, as one possibility, that the *Five Senses*' patron had either actual connections or intellectual affinities with Lincean circles in Rome, and that Ribera could have been made to share these connections, or at least been asked to incorporate them into the pictures. Villamediana had verifiable ties to the Linceans through his residence in Naples from 1611 to 1614, where he came into contact with Della Porta through their mutual membership in the literary Academy of the Oziosi.[25] Ribera himself appears to have had Roman acquaintances in contact with the Lincei and with access to telescopes from an early date, such as the artist's first biographer Mancini, who also took an active interest in the telescope and in current debates in natural philosophy and astronomy.[26] Ribera's work was also collected from an early date by some of the elite patrons to whom Galileo had sent his telescope

[21] See, for instance, Solinas; Baldriga, 2002, 7–35.
[22] See the detailed discussion in Mason, 2012.
[23] Gabrieli, 1:347–72; Tosi, 177–80.
[24] *El Joven Ribera*, 150.
[25] Ruiz Casanova; Green; Lange, 104–05; von Bernstorff, 174.
[26] Lange, 93; Gage, 2017.

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as a gift, the well-known cardinals and eminent art collectors Scipione Borghese (1577–1633) and Francesco Maria del Monte (1549–1626).[27] In these rarefied social circles, the telescope was less a scientific tool than a curiosity, a luxury item that could be brought out and passed around to prompt conversation and wonderment.[28] Likewise, in his image of *Sight*, Ribera highlights the gentlemanly rather than the astronomical applications of the telescope, as Peter Mason perceptively indicates, associating the figure with hunting rather than with celestial observation.[29]

The *Five Senses* call forth social sensibility, rather than specialized scientific knowledge, from their viewers. The unsophisticated appearance of the figures in Ribera's five paintings is in fact a finely calibrated fantasy of plebeian directness, crafted for the benefit of an elite audience. The intelligence that these figures manifest on Ribera's part is of a different sort than the scientific fluency shown by other artists in Lincean circles, such as Ludovico Cardi, called Cigoli (1559–1613), or Adam Elsheimer (1578–1610), whose personal interests in astronomy became key elements of their paintings.[30] Indeed, while Ribera's series offers an insightful exploration of the relationship between the senses as a philosophical topic and the subject's application to making and viewing art, the specific arenas of optics and astronomy, to my mind, are less relevant to the series than discussions of the distinction between sensing and understanding.

For example, one can detect another Lincean connection—which has nothing to do with optics or astronomy—in Ribera's play on the *paragone*, the contest between painting and sculpture, in the figure of *Touch* (fig. 2), which recalls some of Galileo's ideas on the subject as expressed in a famous letter to the aforementioned painter and astronomer Cigoli.[31] Writing in June of 1612 to Cigoli, his friend and fellow member of Florence's Accademia del Disegno, Galileo showed both his deep familiarity with art's academic discourse and his penchant for novel approaches to hoary debates such as the painting-sculpture *paragone*. Galileo's letter is a script for his friend to defend painting's ascendancy over sculpture by inverting a commonplace about the contrast between sight and touch: "Who would believe that a man, when touching a statue, would think that it is a living human being? Certainly nobody; and a sculptor who, being unable to deceive the sense of sight, would want to show his prowess

[27] Tosi, 177–80; Lange, 82–87.

[28] Biagioli, 2006, 81–92.

[29] Mason, 2012, 54.

[30] See Tosi; Chappell.

[31] Translated and transcribed in Panofsky, appendix 1, 32–37; for the original, see Galilei, 11:340–43 (letter of 26 June 1612, no. 713). Santucci, 32. On Galileo and the senses, see also Wade, 301–07; Piccolino.

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by trying to deceive the sense of touch would place himself in a most awkward position, since he would ignore the fact that not only projections and depressions (which constitute the relief in a statue) come within the province of this sense but also softness and hardness, warmth and coolness, smoothness and roughness, heaviness and lightness, all of which [would be] criteria of the statue's power to deceive."[32] This is part of a longer passage in which Galileo sets painting and sculpture on equal footing in terms of what they can convey to the senses, emphasizing that both arts would have the same difficulty in deceiving the sense of touch.[33] Galileo here suggests to Cigoli a creative riposte to the Cinquecento tradition that aligned sculpture's greater truthfulness with the certainty and universality of the sense of touch, and aligned the deceitfulness of painting with the less reliable and less concrete sense of sight.[34] This defense of sculpture was famously articulated by Benedetto Varchi (1503–65), who described each art as addressing a different bodily sense, and illustrated the contrast with the image of a blind man touching a painting and a statue, as depicted by artists such as Livio Mehus (1630–91).[35]

Instead of framing the comparison in terms of real three-dimensionality versus painterly illusion, Ribera takes a more or less Galilean approach to the comparison, framing it in terms of animation and vivacity versus inert material, and promoting painting's greater capacity to approximate an illusion of liveliness, particularly as the living figure in the painting is, of course, himself a painterly illusion.[36] The proximity and sympathy in which Ribera places the blind man and the sculpted head lead one to compare the two, highlighting the contrast between what is alive and what is not. Unlike Mehus's quite different approach to the same situation (a blind man faced with a statue and a picture), Ribera's image emphasizes the sculpture's distinction from a real head, echoing Galileo's take on this scenario in his letter to Cigoli. Touch, the very aspect of sculpture that makes it intelligible to the blind man (for whom painting is a mere flat surface), is for Galileo as irrelevant to sculpture as it is to painting, both of which are premised on illusion and imitation: the blind man's tactile scrutiny reveals the statue's head as a block of marble, not as living flesh, just as it would reveal the painting to be a paint-encrusted flat surface.

[32] Panofsky, 35–36.

[33] Panofsky, 32–33.

[34] See also Panofsky, 7–9.

[35] For the image, see https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lieven_Mehus_-_Blind_Man_of_Gambassi.jpg. Varchi's formulation of the issue is in Barocchi, 1:533–35. On Mehus, see Hecht, 129–35; Ferino-Pagden, 164–65 (cat. no. 6.11); Chiarini, 68–69 (cat. no. 3).

[36] Perceptively discussed in Fried, 2016, 52–53.

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What matters here is not primarily the presence of Galilean ideas in Ribera's picture, but rather the application of a scientific and philosophical line of questioning to a standard topic for sophisticated conversation going back to Baldassare Castiglione's (1478–1529) *Book of the Courtier* (1528).[37] Ribera is couching a subtle, fashionable idea about the five senses in terms of a well-known subject for academic debate of a kind he can expect viewers to recognize and rehearse, and also in terms proper to the evaluation and discussion of art objects. The painting-versus-sculpture topic is a perfect example of Ribera's invitations, across the *Five Senses*, for viewers to engage in a thickly signposted discussion of a familiar subject. Ribera's invocation of the *paragone* is a cue for the very situation that prompted Galileo's letter to Cigoli: a more or less ritualized debate as a form of competitive social performance. For the subject of the *paragone*—and the originality of its treatment—to be recognizable to viewers presupposes at least a notional ideal beholder who is ready to turn the experience of looking at works of art into an opportunity to speak well on a topic of common interest. In other words, Ribera is not merely producing an inert set of collectible decorative objects, but is maximizing the key arena in which owning art paid off: as an occasion to display prudence, judgment, and taste. Ribera's witty and philosophical approach to the *paragone* in the *Sense of Touch* points to a profound and seemingly obvious aspect of all five paintings: the artist designed them to act as prompts for conversation.

The *paragone* debate, with its joint roots in academic discourse and in ideal versions of *civil conversazione* such as represented in Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*, is only one instance of the connection between what one might broadly describe as the culture of connoisseurship (an anachronistic term that I will unpack in the following section) and the context of conversation at the turn of the seventeenth century.[38] A central theme of texts pertaining to polite conversation, from Castiglione onward, is prudence, a virtue that ranges from the notions of measure and decorum to those of dissimulation and social performance. The social arena of conversation, which is a central focus of Ribera's *Five Senses*, is a context that was as vital to Lincean intellectual circles as it was to the Seicento's culture of collecting, art criticism, and connoisseurship, and the specific virtue of prudence was essential for both the Lincei and the judgment of art. Regarding the Accademia dei Lincei in particular, the issue of prudence, understood both as a virtue of good judgment and of adept management of expression and dissimulation in polite society, emerges as a vital concern.[39]

[37] Castiglione, 96–102. While Castiglione was not the first to discuss the *paragone*, his text is the locus classicus for its inclusion in courtly conversation.

[38] See especially Fumaroli; Ho; Gage, 2010 and 2014; Strunck; Honig.

[39] De Renzi, 1996; Fosi; De Renzi, 2007; Baldriga, 2008.

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Mario Biagioli makes a persuasive argument that prudence and the management of one's social persona were not merely necessary evils or separate concerns from the real business of the Linceans (particularly Galileo), but that practicing the often ambiguous social virtue of prudence was a generative and integral part of their scientific achievements.[40]

Historians of science have also underscored how steeped the Linceans were in the period's culture of art collecting, criticism, and connoisseurship. As early as the 1950s, when Erwin Panofsky published *Galileo as a Critic of the Arts*, scholars recognized the connections between early modern practices of connoisseurship and the activities and expectations of the Lincean intellectual sphere.[41] In this sphere, there even existed a literal connection between telescopes and the judgment of art, as for instance Galileo's friend Sagredo is known to have used short telescopes (*cannoncini corti*) to assess the quality and authorship of paintings[42]—an assessment that also constituted a social performance.[43] One point to take away from Ribera's series is that such a practice of judging art would have been as relevant to the viewers of Ribera's telescope as optics or astronomy.[44] For these fields, and for the underlying strategies of thought, reading, and observation that made up the practice of natural philosophy more broadly, many key tactics of sight, comparison, memory, and evaluation were shared with the superficially less scientific cultural spheres of conversation, art criticism, and artistic patronage.[45]

Once one thinks of Ribera's paintings as prompts for conversation, loaded equally with trick questions, subtle jokes, and unmissable occasions for showing off, one can begin to ask in what direction Ribera's paintings orient their own discussion. Within the semi-public space for the display of pictures in a Spanish diplomat's home in Rome, what kind of conversation did these paintings invite, and how did they invite it? Any attempt to answer these questions reveals a fusion of what one might call artistic and philosophical preoccupations. This is evident, for instance, in Ribera's formulation of a standard way of discussing the five senses, like the comparison between touch and sight, in terms of the

[40] Biagioli, 1993.

[41] Panofsky, 4–10, 16–31; Baldriga, 2002, 171–95; Olmi, 2007; Tongiorgi Tomasi, 2009. On Panofsky, see Tongiorgi Tomasi, 2007, with further bibliography.

[42] Cited in Tongiorgi Tomasi, 2009, 34–35; for the original, see Galilei, 12:400 (letter of 28 July 1618, no. 1335).

[43] As Wilding, 9, argues regarding a poem written for Sagredo by Guido Casoni, in which the viewing and discussion of a painting become the occasion for a poetic dialogue with Sagredo's friend Sebastiano Venier.

[44] Strunck, 220, observes that optical instruments and their depictions in paintings were often featured in galleries as ways "to experiment with vision itself."

[45] See Tongiorgi Tomasi, 2009, 39; Lincoln, 211–36.

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*paragone* debate, a standby of academic art theory since the sixteenth century. To appreciate Ribera's approach to the *paragone*, or to note subtleties in the figures' facial features and expressions, is inevitably also to discuss the nature of sensory perception. Ribera's novel way of bringing a commonplace of art theory to bear on the sense of touch anticipates and signposts a conversation. It is this crucial aspect of the series as a whole that has been missing from previous analyses of the paintings.

Whether the series' patron was Cosida, Villamediana, or a different and unsuspected figure, the paintings themselves reveal careful tailoring to a certain social milieu. Ribera's *Five Senses* cater to an intellectually refined audience, both by invoking fashionable topics of conversation like Galileo's telescope, the painting-sculpture *paragone*, and the hierarchy among the senses, and by staging artistic comparisons and evaluations, as I shall discuss further. Ribera's paintings give little reason to suppose that the patron and his circle had specialized interests in optics or astronomy. Rather, the paintings invoke recent developments in these fields in a way that suggests an audience with general awareness of them rather than deep insider knowledge. Overall, Ribera's *Five Senses* appeal just as overtly to an interest in conversation and connoisseurship as to an interest in optics or natural philosophy. What is striking is the way the paintings connect these spheres of interest, which were far from distinct in the social and intellectual settings for which Ribera painted the series.

## PRUDENCE, PICTURES, PERCEPTION

As a double-edged virtue to be exercised in conversation, prudence held immediate interest for Lincean circles, for the paintings' initial audience in the Roman home of a Spanish diplomat, and for Ribera himself. For all of these actors, conversation represented a key sphere of professional activity. To the extent that conversation was the fundamental arena in which owning and knowing about art paid off, it should come as no surprise to find in art a corresponding preoccupation with the pressures bearing on conversation. Prudence in particular constitutes an immediate hinge between the Lincean context around Ribera's *Five Senses* and the strategies of discussion that applied to art. The virtue that Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* designates as φρόνησις (*phronêsis*) is usually rendered in English with the term *practical wisdom*, but was translated in the early modern period as *prudence*.[46] The dictionary of

[46] Compare, for instance, translations of the chapter on prudence in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* 6.5 in Aristotle, 2014, 105–06; Aristotle, 1962, 3:fol. 84$^{r–v}$; Figliucci, fols. 272$^{v}$–278$^{r}$. For other early modern editions of Aristotle, see Schmitt, 121–33, 149–51 (appendixes A and C).

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the Florentine literary academy, the *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca*, offers a wide-ranging set of definitions for *prudenza*: as an understanding of good and bad that enables right decisions; as a virtue capable of distinguishing and moderating even other virtues; as an ordering agent discriminating, through reason, between one thing and another; as an exercise of discernment; and as a princely virtue, essential to good government.[47] In its applications to wise rule and to courtly standards of social behavior, prudence was a double-edged, equivocal virtue. Designating the action of a ruler or a courtier as prudent was a term of praise, but it could also indicate outright lying, dissimulation, or the manipulation of expression and truth at need.[48]

How and why might prudence come into depictions of the five senses? A salient feature of Ribera's approach, most likely based on both his patron's input and his own intelligence, is the inclusion of potentially conflicting answers to the same question. Rather than articulating a single perspective on a subject, Ribera's series brings up multiple aspects of a topic of conversation. This is another way in which Ribera's *Five Senses* clarifies the relationship between art and science in the 1610s: far from being a visual manifesto in favor of one approach to the senses as a topic, Ribera's series assembles and compiles ideas old and new about the five senses, and offers them as refined exhibits in a social display, much the way natural historians (including the Linceans) collected specimens and information.[49] Thus, the Galilean telescope in *Sight* coexists unproblematically with the Della Portan physiognomy in the man's aquiline features, and also with what I shall presently argue is a fundamentally traditional and Aristotelian view of the five senses overall.[50]

The salient emphasis throughout Ribera's series is on the distinction between mere sensation and its conversion into qualities of prudence and judiciousness. This distinction is spelled out in the locus classicus in early modern thinking on the five senses, Aristotle's *On the Soul* (book 3, part 3).[51] One of the numerous Renaissance glosses on this text, the paraphrase by the Florentine humanist Bernardo Segni (1504–58), clarifies the difference between raw sensation and the judicious processing thereof by noting that while "sensing is only ever done well," understanding is subject to qualitative judgment, and can be foolish or wise, sloppy or skillful. He wrote: "Let there be here no debate as to the terms, I say, between understanding [*l'intendere*] and having prudence; it being the case that both the one and the other belong to the intellective parts. Let us therefore

[47] Accademia della Crusca, 662.

[48] Villari, 1–48; Zagorin, 1–14; Cavaillé, 11–38, 332–69; Snyder, 27–44.

[49] See, for example, Findlen, 1994; Olmi, 2007 and 2009; Kusukawa.

[50] Despite Galileo's oppositions to Aristotle, on which see Redondi.

[51] Aristotle, 1957, 154–63, esp. 155, 157.

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declare that sensation [*il sentire*] and understanding [*l'intendere*] are not the same thing; for sensation is shared among every animal, and understanding among few: I say among few, for besides men, it seems that a few animals have some modicum of prudence, although it is improper to call it thus. For yet another reason, sensation is not the same as understanding, because understanding can be performed either well or badly, while sensing is only ever done well."[52] This distinction between raw sensation and its prudent understanding—a difficult nuance to spell out even in a philosophical text—might appear altogether beyond the scope of the visual arts to convey.[53] Yet the elusive tipping point between bodily experience and its judicious processing is not only a defining feature of Ribera's approach to the *Five Senses*, but also a shared preoccupation between an Aristotelian psychology of perception and a burgeoning arena of art criticism, which one might designate as a capacious and open-ended early modern practice of connoisseurship. The term that Segni uses for understanding, *l'intendere*, was also essential to early formulations of what sort of activity it was to look at art. Both Segni and the earliest theorist of connoisseurship, Ribera's aforementioned biographer Giulio Mancini, use the terms *intendere* / *intendente* in tandem with *prudenza* / *prudente*, as I shall discuss.

Ribera's way of drawing out both the distinctions and the overlap between sensation and prudence is anchored in his series' deft manipulation of early modern practices of displaying, discussing, and assessing art. This set of what one might broadly designate as connoisseurial activities should not be understood in the narrow sense of "how people determined the attribution and stylistic chronology of art objects," but rather in the more inclusive sense in which Ribera's contemporaries tended to write about the practice of looking at and judging art. Most notable among these contemporaries is Mancini, a physician from Siena who settled in Rome in 1592 and rose to the rank of personal doctor to Pope Urban VIII (r. 1623–44). Mancini was an avid art collector and a well-connected high-end broker/trader who personally knew many of the foremost painters of the early Seicento, almost certainly including Ribera.[54] His most important manuscript treatise on art, the *Considerations on Painting*, written soon after Ribera's series was completed (mostly around 1619–24), puts the central focus on connoisseurship and makes it the subject of systematic study in its own right for the first time.[55] Yet in contrast with present-day connoisseurship's narrow preoccupation with attribution and chronology, the early

[52] Segni, 131.

[53] See the concise overview in Summers, 266–82.

[54] De Renzi and Sparti; Maccherini, 1997 and 2004.

[55] As noted by von Schlosser, 536. See the outstanding studies of Mancini by Gage, especially Gage, 2016, 3–6, 17–36.

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modern connoisseurship outlined by Mancini encompassed a more variegated set of concerns, which were shared by artists and *intendenti* (connoisseurs). Mancini addresses a range of approaches to pictures that are not principally concerned with—and certainly are not limited to—attribution of authorship.[56] The broader term *expertise* better indicates the range of topics addressed in the *Considerations*:[57] for example, how to tell in which era a painting was produced; judgment of how that era painted; on what to base the price of a painting, in philosophical as well as practical terms; what makes a painting meritorious; wherein the difference between types and styles of painting consists; what makes the great painters great and the lesser painters lesser; how the setting in which a picture is seen affects its evaluation; what materials and techniques are used in painting and their respective merits; what has been said about important artists and their works that one should know before approaching other works; and what makes a painting beautiful. All of these questions are examined in turn. Mancini's *Considerations* indicates a cultural preoccupation with what it meant to look at pictures, together with an insistence on the socially edifying and gentlemanly nature of assessing art as a form of conversation. The prudence of the connoisseur is at once an ennobling practice to be cultivated and an expression of inherent virtues of judgment and taste.

In Mancini's key term for the sort of judgment that should be applied to art, one may recognize the same action, *intendere*, that Segni had used to distinguish understanding from mere sensation in his paraphrase of Aristotle quoted earlier. Early modern connoisseurial practice, in its earliest formal and systematic articulation (i.e., Mancini's *Considerations*), draws on a philosophy of perception and adopts the Aristotelian terms that distinguish sensation from understanding. Like Segni, Mancini uses the terms *intendere* / *intendente* in tandem with *prudenza* / *prudente*. The term *prudente* comes up no fewer than six times in the brief introduction to Mancini's *Considerations*, and appears alongside another Aristotelian term, *peritia*, identifying a faculty of judgment based in balance of mind rather than specialized knowledge.[58] Throughout his *Considerations on Painting*, Mancini designates the connoisseur as both *intendente* and *prudente*.[59] Both terms are central to Mancini's understanding of how

[56] Sparti, 59–65, rejects the idea of Mancini's *Considerations* as formulating a practice of connoisseurship. For a compelling counterargument in favor of Mancini's investment and expertise in connoisseurship as a practice of attribution specifically, see Pierguidi.

[57] On expertise, see the excellent analysis of Mancini's use of *peritia* and *peritus* by Frigo, 424–32.

[58] The terms are used almost interchangeably; see, for example, Mancini, 1:10.

[59] See, for example, Mancini, 1:6–7.

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to approach art. This choice of words, culled from an Aristotelian understanding of perception, is consistent with a mingling of the rational and the sensory in art theory, which used terms such as *gusto* (taste) and *giudizio* (judgment) with increasing overlap. As Paolo D'Angelo notes in his excellent survey of the issue, the turn of the seventeenth century was a transitional moment in which taste was "recognized as comprehending an autonomous capacity for judgment," neither "reducible to intellectual judgment nor to that of one of the external senses," so that, "so to speak, pleasure is intellectualized while judgment is sensualized."[60] Far from introducing a distinction between surrender to art's sensory effects and dispassionate assessment of its merits, the ideas of taste and judgment reflect the inextricable entanglement of the sensory with the rational.[61] By the early seventeenth century, the words *gusto* and *giudizio* appear as ways of designating both the judiciousness with which a work of art was produced and the skill with which it was assessed by a viewer.[62] This language demonstrates a convergence between the kind of judgment that enables the creation of an excellent work of art and the kind of judgment that enables the recognition of its excellence.

The Aristotelian distinction between *il sentire* (sensation) and *l'intendere* (understanding) has a particular resonance when it comes to judging art. The terms *prudence* and *understanding* map out the overlapping intellectual ground shared between discussions of the bodily senses and a discourse of art criticism in the late 1500s and early 1600s. In treatises on art from this period, the terms *giudizio* and *gusto* simultaneously designate a sensory experience and its apt evaluation.[63] The idea of sense perception done well, which Segni distinguishes from mere animal sensation, also applies to the process of interacting well with art.[64] One finds the same bridging of sense and judgment in the terms *intendere* and *prudenza* that Mancini uses to define the range of activities that I have been designating broadly as early modern connoisseurship. As terms of art criticism, both *understanding* and *prudence* sketch a double-jointed gesture encompassing at once the bodily experience of art and its parsing by the use of reason. These terms place the activity of considering painting at the intersection of a virtuous exercise of judgment, a social performance, and the application of discernment to a sensory experience. The practice of looking at art effected a transfer from sensation to its wise evaluation, while also exemplifying the interdependence of the rational with the sensory.

[60] D'Angelo, 14.
[61] Fumaroli, 53–63.
[62] Gage, 2000, 379–404.
[63] See Klein, 161–69; Summers, 21–31, 54–109; Baader; Fick, 876–83; Grassi.
[64] Segni, 131.

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## "COSE DI ESQUISITISSIMA BELLEZZA"

As noted, the existence of Ribera's *Five Senses* was first reported around 1620, at the end of Mancini's biography of Ribera in the *Considerations on Painting*: "he [Ribera] made many things here in Rome, and in particular for . . . a Spaniard, who has five very beautiful half figures for the five senses, a Christ taken down from the cross, and other [works] that in truth are things of most exquisite beauty [*cose di esquisitissima bellezza*]."[65] As Mancini never provided the name of the Spaniard in question, the pressing tasks of identifying both the unnamed patron and the paintings themselves have long eclipsed the choice of words that Mancini applied to paintings such as the senses of *Taste* (fig. 3) or *Smell* (fig. 4), whose grimy, lower-class male figures are counterintuitive examples of "most exquisite beauty." The first written evidence of Ribera's *Five Senses* thus places the paintings squarely in the context of historical practices of evaluating painting, and holds the series up as an example of the distinction between beauty in painting as such, and beauty in whatever the painting represents.

In this passage, Mancini is not filling in an artist's biography with random details about pictures that he happens to have seen or heard of, but is demonstrating his own proficiency in the kinds of qualitative judgment that he describes and theorizes throughout the *Considerations on Painting*, a treatise in which artists' biographies are only one among many components. In a famous passage in the *Poetics* (4.1448), Aristotle distinguishes the intrinsic merit of imitation from the qualities of the things imitated: "The instinct for imitation is inherent in man from his earliest days; he differs from other animals in that he is the most imitative of creatures, and he learns his earliest lessons by imitation. Also inborn in all of us is the instinct to enjoy works of imitation. What happens in actual experience is evidence of this; for we enjoy looking at the most accurate representations of things which in themselves we find painful to see, such as the forms of the lowest animals and of corpses."[66] According to this principle, which Mancini explicitly adopts from Aristotle, beauty does not consist in the inherent loveliness of the thing depicted, but can extend to images of dreadful and ugly things through the excellence of their imitation.[67] To recognize "things of most exquisite beauty" in the inherently less-than-beautiful subject matter of scruffy men and of the Deposition of Christ (the main feature of which is a corpse, albeit a holy one) is an instantiation of the Aristotelian principle that Mancini claims as a guideline. For Mancini, the viewer with sound judgment (*peritia*) and *mediocre ingegno*, evenness or balance

[65] Mancini, 1:251.
[66] Aristotle, 1965, 35.
[67] Mancini, 1:121.

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of mind, can weigh the quality of a work of art based on discernment of its expert execution rather than experiencing mere seduction by a picture's attractive subject. Ribera's series appeals to a connoisseurial practice like Mancini's by locating its beauty in the judicious eye of the beholder, who can appreciate an excellent imitation of an unlovely subject. Thus, the earliest written account of Ribera's *Five Senses* presents the series as an object lesson in judging the nature of beauty and quality in art according to Aristotle's views on imitation. By invoking the Aristotelian distinction between beauty based on simple attractiveness and a beauty of artistic merit found in an excellent imitation of something unattractive, Mancini is making a point about the attitude toward sensory experience that one should bring to the consideration of painting. In his introduction to Ribera and his work in particular, Mancini is demonstrating a discernment beyond the merely seductive experience of seeing an attractive subject depicted, to recognize in homely or distressing subjects the "most exquisite beauty" of a fine imitation.

Ribera's *Five Senses*, like the rest of his work in Rome (so far as can be ascertained), belong to a category of picture that was uniquely suited for inviting such an exercise of artistic discernment on the part of viewers. Like most of the so-called Caravaggisti, Ribera was an adept producer of modestly sized easel pictures, using readymade canvas formats and an earth-tone range of colors that kept initial costs for materials at a minimum and were more often destined for sale in shops on the open market than produced on commission.[68] Their inauspicious prices and sale venues notwithstanding, such pictures became favorite items not only among purchasers of modest means, but also among Rome's elite collectors.[69] Men of the social and financial eminence of Cardinal Scipione Borghese, Cardinal Benedetto Giustiniani (1554–1621), and his brother the Marquis Vincenzo Giustiniani (1564–1637), for instance, all possessed several works by Ribera within impressive collections of Caravaggesque easel pictures.[70] This particular branch of art collecting was a favored means of performing taste and connoisseurial ability within Roman society. As recent research into Roman collections from this period indicates, the fact that Caravaggesque paintings were as often as not acquired for modest sums on the open market, and valorized small human dramas from the streets and taverns of Rome, enabled these paintings to signal a kind of ambitious and open-minded discernment on the part of high-end collectors.[71] Several factors

[68] Cavazzini, 119–51. On Ribera's early specialization in *mezze figure*, see Lange, 80–81; Farina, 37–38; Fried, 2016, 29–71.

[69] Cavazzini, 81–118.

[70] See, for instance, Danesi Squarzina, 2001.

[71] See, for instance, Cavazzini, 119–51; Olson, 16, 28–29.

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contributed to this association of modern gallery pictures and historical practices of connoisseurship. First, easel pictures such as Ribera's *Five Senses* were by younger living and often non-Italian artists, rather than established Cinquecento masters; thus, buying such pictures demonstrated progressive taste rather than adherence to obviously established values. Second, the pictures lent themselves to curatorial plays of rearrangement and provocative combination, and patrons could stage competitive comparisons within their collections, for instance by commissioning an agonistic pendant that would compete with an existing painting both in artistic style and in subject matter.[72] Third, while Ribera's *Five Senses* were made on commission, they belong to a category of easel picture that was typically acquired on the open market, thereby testing the purchasers' discernment more heavily than their wallets. The idea that such pictures possessed a quality that required seeing past their lowly subject and materials echoes Aristotle's distinction between a picture whose beauty comes from the attractiveness of what it depicts, and one whose beauty resides in the excellent imitation of an ugly subject. Likewise, the cachet attached to Caravaggesque easel painting did not derive from its costliness or material splendor, but represented a category of luxury and refinement based on artistic merit, of a kind that implied counterintuitive perspicacity and taste on the part of the owner.

It is in the context of interactive display and conversation that the ownership of such an art collection could be translated into social value.[73] The idea of connoisseurship as an ennobling social practice rooted in a context of conversation is explicit in Mancini's *Considerations on Painting*, the full title of which included, additionally, "a few considerations pertaining to painting as delightful to a noble gentleman and as an introduction to that which one ought to say."[74] For diplomats in Rome such as Cosida and Villamediana, whose professional agency was conditioned on their ability to command respect and acceptance in the right quarters, both collecting art and knowing how to display and discuss it were strategic career tools, regardless of the personal interest that such men doubtless also took in their paintings. Ribera's sensitivity to the way art could orchestrate a display of taste and prudence is one of the central features of his work. The way the *Five Senses* invites an intricate series of comparisons and

[72] A famous example is Benedetto Giustiniani's acquisition of Giovanni Baglione's *Divine Love Triumphant over Earthly Love* as a witty antithetical pendant to Caravaggio's *Amor Vincit Omnia*, owned by his brother Vincenzo Giustiniani. An overview with further bibliography is in Danesi Squarzina, 2001, 282–87 (cat. no. D3), and 298–301 (cat. nos. D7 and D8).

[73] Ago, 128; Ho, 699–711.

[74] Mancini, 1:1: "Alcune considerazioni appartenenti alla pittura come di diletto di un gentilhuomo nobile e come introduttione a quello si deve dire."

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distinctions makes the series into an ideal arena for a performance of prudence through discussion. These paintings tether an ambitious comparison between different sorts of sensory experience to well-defined forms of artistic achievement, in a way that puts the *Five Senses* on the cutting edge of how artists in this period could engage with the simple fact that paintings were expected to be discussed.

## INVITING COMPARISON, PERFORMING PRUDENCE

As I have argued thus far, Ribera's *Five Senses* posit an ideal viewer-interlocutor who, by assessing the paintings as works of art, uncovers the nuances of the series' intellectual approach to the theme of the five senses. The foundation of any such connoisseurial practice in the seventeenth century was comparison.[75] Whereas some artists chose to represent the subject of the five senses in a single picture, Ribera adopted a serial format that combines contiguity and individuality across canvases whose impact is amplified when they are viewed together. This joint effect of variation and repetition prompts the series' audience to compare Ribera's paintings, weighing them as a set of easel pictures and also as a group of personifications representing an idea. Ribera applies to the subject of the five senses the comparative strategies that increasingly structured Roman collectors' approaches to easel painting, pressing the estimation of the paintings as art objects into the service of an intellectually ambitious consideration of the sensory subject. A key way of assessing works of art in this period was through a dynamic comparison with other works of art that they resembled, challenged, or invoked in some way.[76] This mode of assessment was at once characteristic of a strategic approach to images within the Lincean Academy, and of the emerging practices of collecting and connoisseurship that Mancini and others exemplify.[77]

Subjecting Ribera's series to the kind of comparison that would have come the most easily to its initial audience immediately places the series in the context of Caravaggesque easel painting. In each of Ribera's *Five Senses*, a vividly present and physical male figure, lit by a diagonal shaft of raking light, confronts the picture's beholders from behind a wooden table. This diagonal shaft of light is a signature effect of Caravaggio's Roman work, appearing in the comparably scaled *Boy Bitten by a Lizard* (ca. 1594–95) (fig. 5) and *Boy with a Basket of Fruit* (ca. 1593–95), as well as in larger public works such as the *Calling of Saint Matthew* (1599–1600) in San Luigi dei Francesi. Ribera's adoption of this

[75] Ho.
[76] Gage, 2014, 212–14; Desmas and Freddolini.
[77] Baldriga, 2002, 123–48; Gage, 2010, 137–39.

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Figure 5. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. *Boy Bitten by a Lizard*, ca. 1594–95. Oil on canvas, 66 x 49.5 cm. National Gallery of Art, London. Artwork in the public domain. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

visual device so closely identified with Caravaggio spells out the Spanish artist's competition with his predecessor's powerful invocation of the sensate body.[78]

[78] Fried, 2016, 47–58. There is even evidence that Ribera, like Caravaggio, was expected to reimburse his landlords in Rome for having broken the ceiling of his apartment to create a skylight, as an aid to creating similar high-contrast light effects: Danesi Squarzina, 2006, 244. For interpretations of Caravaggio's pictures in terms of the five senses, see Spear; Ferino-Pagden, 37–38 and 136–40 (cat. nos. 5.3–5.5). Puglisi, 107, advances the frequently held view that

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With this in mind, it is worth revisiting the often-repeated comparison between Ribera's *Five Senses* and Caravaggio's Roman work, which is usually presented as a matter of diffuse stylistic affinity.[79] The comparison takes on a different character, however, if one approaches it with an eye toward specific images and points of contrast. For instance, Ribera's *Taste* (fig. 3) invokes Caravaggio's ca. 1596 Uffizi *Bacchus* (fig. 6), as both paintings feature the offer of wine, vividly painted food on a table spanning the foreground, and figures making frank eye contact, each posed with one hand in front of the body and the other raising a wine glass. The comparison is as sustained and deliberate as it is incongruous: nothing could offer a more puckish contrast to Caravaggio's alluringly ephebic youth than the portly tavern dweller in Ribera's painting. In anticipating that his viewers will recognize the blatant references to Caravaggio's *Bacchus*, Ribera incorporates the contrast between that painting and his own into his rendition of *Taste*. The uncouth open mouth, meaty hands, and snugly fitting shirt of Ribera's figure acquire a piquant humor through the recollection of the languid elegance and unforced sex appeal of Caravaggio's semi-nude figure. The memorable grace of Bacchus's gesture, as he seductively proffers a brimming glass of wine, undergoes an abrupt descent into slapstick as Ribera's *Taste* lifts the carafe in a ham-fisted grip. As though distracted in the process of refilling a glass, Ribera's figure tilts the decanter forward into the viewer's space, with the bottom of the carafe resting on the table. The allusions to Caravaggio's *Bacchus* not only accentuate the humor and interest of Ribera's painting, but also enrich the painting's address of the subject of taste by hinting that one might choose, as it were, very different sorts of drinking companions from within the picture galleries of Italy. Ribera's allusion to Caravaggio's more refined figure applies the issue of taste to the painting itself, inviting viewers to extend the evaluation of the painting as an art object to the subject it depicts—*subject* here meaning both the male figure and the sense that he personifies.

In his depiction of *Taste*, by eschewing an inherently attractive and refined figure in favor of a distinctly crude one, Ribera presses viewers to consider the Aristotelian distinction between attractive subject matter and excellent imitation. The very terms in which Mancini first read Ribera's series, insisting on their beauty and merit as imitations, reward the ambitious self-imposed contest into which Ribera has entered against his illustrious predecessor Caravaggio. Ribera's *Five Senses* come across as a daring attempt to out-Caravaggio

"although he never painted a cycle of the Five Senses, Caravaggio appealed to sensory experience in many of his early genre pictures."

[79] See, for instance, the catalogue entries on *Sight* and *Smell* in *El Joven Ribera*, 150–53.

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Figure 6. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. *Bacchus*, ca. 1596. Oil on canvas, 95 x 85 cm. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence. Artwork in the public domain. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Caravaggio, whether through the figures' physical immediacy, the vivid depiction of sensory experience, the lavish attention to still-life objects, the nuances of lighting and texture, the innovative and slightly ambiguous combination of genre scene and allegorical subject, or the pictures' basic format and stylistic features, from the color palette to the life-sized half figures.[80] Ribera was well aware of sharing an audience with Caravaggio and his many other imitators and

[80] Fried, 2016, 47–58.

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interpreters, so there is nothing remarkable per se about the Spanish painter courting comparison with the Lombard master. What is startling is Ribera's success in making Caravaggio appear to stand for a kind of prettified idealization, with his own work claiming to demand a more discerning viewer who can look beyond the superficial appeal of a beautiful subject to recognize an excellent imitation. Caravaggio's place in seventeenth-century painting is often presented as the defiant embrace of the crudely present over the selectively beautifying work expected of the artist. The artist, critic, and theorist Giovanni Pietro Bellori (1613–96), for instance, contrasted the selective imitation practiced by his hero Annibale Carracci (1560–1609) with Caravaggio's refusal of art's guiding principle: "It is said that the ancient sculptor Demetrius was so intent upon the likeness that he took more pleasure in the imitation of things than in their beauty; we have seen the same in Michelangelo Merisi, who recognized no other master than the model; and without selecting from the best forms of nature, what is astonishing to say, it seems that he sought to surpass art without art."[81] Ribera neatly snatches, from the one painter who had most strongly imposed himself as the imitator of nature unidealized, the signal accolade of painting that distinguishes the beauty of merit from a more facile appeal. Nevertheless, while Caravaggio's critics increasingly emphasized his refusal to improve on what he saw, his early reception in particular confirms that the view of him as a blunt imitator of nature was not unanimous. Bellori's much later perspective on Caravaggio is in contrast with that voiced by the aforementioned connoisseur and collector Vincenzo Giustiniani.[82] In his famous "Discourse on Painting," penned in a letter to his friend Theodor Ameyden (1586–1656), Giustiniani outlines within the art of painting twelve levels or "modes" of increasing merit.[83] The eleventh and penultimate mode, "painting from directly observed natural objects" ("con avere gli oggetti naturali davanti"), notably includes Ribera, whose work Giustiniani collected extensively.[84] Caravaggio is to be found instead—along with colleagues usually deemed more idealizing, including Guido Reni (1575–1642) and Annibale Carracci—among the painters of the twelfth and "most perfect" mode, which unites the observation of nature with the beautifying method of painting *di maniera*.[85]

Ribera's counterintuitive and ambitious approach to competing with Caravaggio appears across the *Five Senses*, as for instance in *Hearing*. This

[81] Bellori, 179.
[82] Feci et al., with further bibliography; see also Cropper and Dempsey, 64–105.
[83] Giustiniani, 41–45.
[84] Giustiniani, 43–44.
[85] Giustiniani, 44.

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painting likewise courts a comparison to Caravaggio, whose various images of musicians form an immediate point of reference for Ribera's figure. Once more, Ribera structures the comparison so that Caravaggio's work appears effete and decorously beautified, while his own picture stakes a claim for reliance on meritorious imitation for its appeal. The best dressed of Ribera's *Five Senses*, the personification of *Hearing* serenades his audience from a book, as might a professional court musician rather than a busker or tavern entertainer.[86] One cannot say for certain whether Ribera's original painting of *Hearing* had the awkward smile and bad gums that one sees in extant copies; what is plain from the contrast with Caravaggio's images of lute players is the change in tone and social register, from a refined lyrical interlude to a less-than-promising audition.[87] The lavish array of books and musical instruments in Caravaggio's *Lute Player* (ca. 1600) (fig. 7), for example, is in sharp contrast to Ribera's shabby songbook that has been folded down the middle to be carried in a pocket or tucked in a belt. Here, as in the plain references in *Taste* to the Uffizi *Bacchus*, Ribera sets up a comparison between his painting and Caravaggio's that neatly inverts the role that typically devolved to Caravaggio in such visual contests. By invoking Caravaggio's languid, elegant musicians with a guileless and gauche figure for *Hearing*, Ribera usurps the palm for frank imitation of nature from the very painter who had come to represent the ne plus ultra of unvarnished naturalism.

On the one hand, the level of ambition and sophistication that this implies on Ribera's part invites reconsideration of the way Caravaggesque painters in this period thought about imitation. The *Five Senses* are some of Ribera's most Caravaggesque pictures; what these paintings indicate about the Spaniard's relationship to his famous Lombard predecessor is less a stylistic affiliation than a set of witty, purposeful citations deployed to strategic effect, and an intention to displace and outdo rather than to follow Caravaggio. Of great significance in this connection is the link between fidelity to unvarnished nature and the idea of the discerning viewer. Mancini's emphasis on the potential for exquisite beauty to reside (as per Aristotle's view) in a masterful imitation of the inherently ugly confirms the clear link, in the Roman art world of the 1610s and 1620s, between the taste for naturalistic easel pictures and the idea of the collector as connoisseur, as noted earlier. Both Ribera and his fellow Caravaggisti invoked Caravaggio's images (and one another's) in ways that hinge on many of the connoisseurial practices discussed above, expecting an audience attuned to subtle comparisons and equipped with a mental image bank on which to base judgments and draw parallels.

[86] Vodret and Strinati.

[87] On Caravaggio's lute player, see Cropper, 1991, 195–98; Cropper, 2006.

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Figure 7. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio. *The Lute Player*, ca. 1600. Oil on canvas, 102 x 130 cm. Private collection, on long-term loan to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Artwork in the public domain. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

On the other hand, the comparison that Ribera's work invites with Caravaggio's also reveals a key difference in the sort of imaginative interaction that the two artists invite between figures and viewers. Both painters create powerful illusions of physical presence and immediacy; both artists invite a kind of bodily identification between painted figure and live audience, a shared impression of sensory awareness.[88] Yet while both painters invite viewers to share in or identify with the physical experience of a painted figure, Ribera creates as much incentive to resist this identification as to surrender to it.[89] The grapes, flowers, goblets of wine, tender love songs, and sultry glances that Caravaggio's young men tend to proffer beyond the paintings are unproblematically inviting compared to the clumsy offer of wine and the dubious tavern food in *Taste*, the startling pungency of *Smell*, or the maladroit eagerness to please in *Hearing*.

What emerges is a kind of triple pun on the subject, execution, and reception of the paintings: Ribera's *Sense of Taste* (an image personifying one of the bodily

[88] Fried, 2016, 19.

[89] A paired dynamic of immersion and distancing also animates the analysis of Caravaggio in Fried, 2010.

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senses) is also Ribera's sense of taste (his choices in creating the painting), and is Ribera's *Sense of Taste* again (an art object reflecting the taste of its owner and eliciting that of its viewers). Ribera works a similar joke on the idea of performance—and surely too on the slippage between *gusto* and *giudizio*—into his depiction of *Hearing*, which is at once an artistic performance on the painter's part, a musical performance by the figure depicted, and an invitation for the audience to perform, in turn, their own good taste through connoisseurship. In this image, Ribera doesn't quite allow viewers to assume that what they hear is a clear-voiced declaration of love. The beholder instead becomes the somewhat reluctant recipient of a performance that seems more aspirational than accomplished, and which one prepares to judge rather than enjoy.[90] The shift in the viewer's role between Caravaggio's early half figures and Ribera's *Five Senses* is from immersion in a sensory experience to a strong impulse to judge the quality of that experience.[91] The *Sense of Hearing*, for instance, not only blurs the lines between Ribera's performance and the figure's, but also adroitly combines the judgment of art with the judgment of music. By invoking Caravaggio's refined and seductive musicians, Ribera also suggests an imaginative exercise of musical discernment or comparison between performers. Both Caravaggio's and Ribera's musicians should also be considered in the context of musical connoisseurship, an arena in which the two artists' important common patron, the Marquis Vincenzo Giustiniani, was a prominent and innovative voice. Giustiniani's *Discorso sopra la musica* (Discourse on music, 1628) was a key intervention in the emerging discourse that made the discerning listener a guiding concern for how music was made and understood, a concern fundamental to the development of connoisseurship both in music and in the visual arts.[92]

## SENSIBLE FELLOWS

Ribera's two-part maneuver of invoking well-known works by Caravaggio and then positioning his own work as the more raw and unvarnished rendering of nature posits an ideal viewer-connoisseur in several ways. First, Ribera locates much of the wit and appeal of his *Five Senses* in their pert inversions of specific works by Caravaggio, a move that presupposes an audience with a mental bank of pictures and a taste for Caravaggio's work. Second, by displacing Caravaggio from the role of frank naturalist to that of purveyor of the inherently refined, Ribera locates his own paintings' virtue in the Aristotelian idea of excellent

[90] On judging music, see Dell'Antonio, 2005 and 2011.

[91] On Caravaggio's immersive effects, see Fried, 2010, 39–67.

[92] Dell'Antonio, 2011, 52–60, 88–91. Further bibliography is in Feci et al.

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imitation, which requires and rewards discernment and can make a picture of ugly subjects surpass an image of the merely pretty. Third, Ribera invites viewers to share in (real or notional) bodily experiences that elicit a response of evaluation rather than unproblematic enjoyment or identification. The comparisons that the *Five Senses* invoke with Caravaggio throw into sharp relief Ribera's emphasis on the distinction between undergoing physical sensation and judging it. This is the very distinction that Aristotle's *On the Soul* underscores, as noted earlier. In other words, Ribera asks viewers of his *Five Senses* to discuss the subject of the bodily senses (for which a traditional distinction between mere sensation and its understanding is crucial) in terms of the paintings of the bodily senses as art objects, for which the inextricable commingling of taste and judgment is no less crucial.

How does Ribera formulate the distinction between sensation and prudence? More explicitly than Caravaggio had done, Ribera constructs visual metaphors for the non-visual experiences he depicts, clearly marking the pictorial terms through which his paintings convey multisensory experience. A great deal of the visual interest of Ribera's series lies in the explicit articulation of these visual metaphors (for mostly non-visual sensations), rather than in the suggestion of sensory experience per se. The way Ribera's *Five Senses* cues a practice of comparison and evaluation connects the strategies of seventeenth-century connoisseurship to the painter's intellectual take on the subject matter. One remarkable way in which this connection plays out is in Ribera's translation of sensory experience into forms that can be identified and evaluated as artistic decisions. The gender of Ribera's figures, their particularity as individuals, and their lack of social distinction, all participate in a broader transition away from a pictorial tradition dominated by female allegorical figures. Lombard and Bolognese depictions of sensory experience (with famous examples by Caravaggio and the Carracci), whether or not they were meant to represent the five senses as a subject, offer models for invoking a subject through suggestion and poetic devices such as simile rather than through allegorical or emblematic representation.[93] A robust allegorical tradition for depicting the five senses also persisted alongside the more genre-based approach, as in the famous series that Jan Brueghel the Elder (1568–1625) and Peter Paul Rubens (1577–1640) produced for the archdukes of Flanders in 1617–18.[94] A comparison between

[93] See Ferino-Pagden.

[94] On the largely Northern allegorical tradition, see Nordenfalk; on Brueghel's and Rubens's series, see Ertz and Nitze-Ertz, 3:1108–53 (cat. nos. 533–38). Konečný, 44, sees Ribera's *Sight* and *Touch* as innovative and the rest of the series as fairly typical. On Ribera's series as a point of transition, see Longhi, 76; Lange, 88–97; Milicua, 2011, 142; Sanger and Walker, 6; Payne and Bray, 89.

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an image of smell such as Jacob de Backer's (ca. 1555–ca. 1585) etching (fig. 8) and Ribera's *Smell* (fig. 4) reveals a drastic shift in tone and genre, from a rather generic female figure smelling flowers to a strikingly peculiar male figure smelling an onion. Beyond the transition from idealized allegory to unidealized personification, there is a change from showing a figure who does and experiences something to proffering the experience depicted to the viewer. For instance, the figure through whom Ribera depicts the bodily sense of smell seems quite pungent himself.[95] Even as one starts to wonder whether the man or the onion smells stronger, one may see how much they look alike: Ribera goes out of his way to make the fraying skin and scraggly tuft of roots on the onion look like the tattered layers of the man's clothing (fig. 9).[96] The red snippet of cloth at his waist mimics the bit of skin that peels off of the onion on the table, and pale green shoots from the cut onion rhyme with the dangling strands of gray fabric that hang below the man's wrist. The act of looking at Ribera's picture of *Smell* is deliberately likened to an act of smelling. One might say that Ribera manages to depict not only *Smell* but also smells, conveying in visual form a sensory experience of a different nature than sight, and personifying the sense experientially rather than allegorically. This effect is not directed toward synesthesia so much as toward creating a clear visual vocabulary by which to articulate non-visual sensations. Thus, a conversation about a picture in a gallery can map out a discussion of what something smells, tastes, sounds, or feels like.

In fact, each of the paintings in the series not only presents a figure having a sensory experience, but also foregrounds the comparison between the figure's experience and the viewer's. In *Taste*, for instance, the texture and color of the saltshaker are identical to those of the man's gray shirt; just as *Smell* looks rather like the onion and twice as smelly, so also *Taste* looks like the salt he's put on his own food (fig. 3). The buttons of his shirt, the round moles on his chest, and the olives on the table also are drawn into a three-way simile. *Touch* turns away from the viewer, so that the profiles of the figure and of the sculpted head that he holds appear in stark relief against the painting's flat background, enacting in painted *rilievo* the protrusions that the blind figure probes with his fingertips (fig. 2). The profile orientation of the figure, unique to *Touch* within the series, would immediately invoke to an early modern audience the visual conventions of relief portraiture in sculpture, medallions, and coins, adding a dimension to the *paragone* comparison that the painting invites. Ribera's innovative combination of the theme of the bodily senses with its application to the painting-sculpture *paragone* hinges on an

[95] As noted by Milicua, 2011, 152.

[96] Payne and Bray, 88–89.

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Figure 8. Jacob de Backer. *The Sense of Smell*, ca. 1570–90. Etching, 15.2 x 19.8 cm. Rijksprentenkabinet, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Image courtesy of the Rijksmuseum: http://hdl.handle.net/10934/RM0001.COLLECT.200098.

examination of art itself.[97] The viewer's own activity of looking at a painting thus becomes one term in a comparison whose other half is the figure's activity of not looking at a painting. One's own act of looking can be weighed against the man's probing of the head of sculpture that he holds up, while the figure's pointed obliviousness to the painting in front of him heightens the beholder's awareness that one is looking at an image of the same sort.[98]

In both *Smell* and *Sight*, Ribera locates much of the pictorial interest in the exactingly detailed objects that are displayed in the foreground with all the care and declarative ceremony of museum objects. In *Smell*, the onion is not the only item to be smelled: a closed bulb of garlic and an open blossom plucked from an orange tree are neatly aligned across the painting's foreground. Isolated from a narrative setting—there is no kitchen larder, no clutter of the man's other oddments on the table—these items' raison d'être is to be contemplated, compared, and assessed. What is true of the items on the table in front of *Smell* is also true

[97] As pointed out by Aragó Estrasser, 140.
[98] Fried, 2016, 52–53.

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Figure 9. Jusepe de Ribera. Detail of *The Sense of Smell*. Photography credit: HIP / Art Resource, NY.

of the paintings as a group. The very format of the half figure easel painting lends itself to an emphasis on arrangement and order as a central issue, permitting multiple configurations, and locating the payoff for the viewer more in the discussion of a mutable order than in the reading of a set hierarchy. The visual contiguity among the five paintings anticipates their display as a group. Such displays were flexible, and easel paintings could be rearranged at will; new combinations and juxtapositions among images could tweak their meaning or direct their discussion.[99] Ribera's series exploits this particularity of the medium, connecting the discursive practices applicable to easel pictures in general to the philosophical problem of arranging and comparing the body's means of perception. The importance, in Ribera's time, of visualizing order among the senses is indicated by the recourse to diagrams in glosses on Aristotle's *On the Soul*, such as those in Segni's paraphrase (figs. 10 and 11), illustrating the arrangements

[99] Feigenbaum, 4–5, 17.

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among the five senses and the *senso commune*, or the categorical divisions of the senses according to the nature of what they perceive.[100] Ribera calls forth an ideal viewer who is at once a curator and a partner in dialogue, alternating between mental rearrangement of the pictures as a series and a kind of imaginary social interaction with the individual figures.

The assessment of art most closely corresponds to a practice of prudence in the reading of expression and character. In artistic theory and practice going back at least to the Quattrocento, expressivity, and the recognizable conveyance of feeling and character, were the bedrock of artistic achievement and quality.[101] Recognizing the emotions and implied personalities or inclinations of painted figures was fundamental to any interaction with painting.[102] At this crucial juncture, Ribera throws his prudent and visually adept audience for a loop: the most visibly emotional of the *Five Senses*, the weeping protagonist in *Smell* (fig. 12), displays both obvious tears and a flagrant obfuscation of the figure's emotion by the artist. While Nicola Spinosa found in the countenance of Ribera's *Smell* a melancholy and pathetic plea for compassion,[103] the figure's expression is made up of contradictory cues. Alongside a dimpled, lopsided grin, slightly raised eyebrows, and a good-humored glance, there is a delicate yet conspicuous tear running from the corner of his right eye, while a glint of light on the left eye hints at a second tear hidden under the shadow of the man's hat. Playing the expression against what ought to be its most persuasive sign, Ribera opposes tears to affect, separating the internal movements of the soul (*moti dell'anima*) from the external physiological signs in which they would normally be legible. Tears were the bearers par excellence of expression in painting. In Leon Battista Alberti's (1404–72) *On Painting* (1435), for instance, a painting's capacity to make its viewer share in the emotions depicted guarantees its rhetorical efficacy: "we weep with the weeping, laugh with the laughing, and grieve with the grieving."[104]

Whereas ordinarily there would be no need to specify a distinction between tears and weeping, Ribera's *Smell* seizes on a rare case in which the two are quite unrelated: the strange pairing of the figure's tears with his air of equanimity is explained by the sliced onion that has prompted his emotionless crying. The man's tears are more likely to cause laughter than empathetic weeping, and they parody the traditional pattern of prompt and response to which Ribera

[100] See Segni, 120.
[101] A foundational example is in Alberti, 76–77.
[102] For instance, Bellori, 245–46.
[103] Spinosa, 45.
[104] Alberti, 77.

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ne (rispondendo alla obbiezzion fatta sopra) chè ella in vn medesimo tempo diuenti bianca, e nera, e calda, e fredda; mà quando i Sensi proprij han fatto ogni loro vffizio, & apportatogliele innanzi interiormente, essa dico come prencipessa, e regina gli giudica tutti e cinque: non altrimenti chè vn Giudice, ò vn Prencipe, che stando pro tribunali consideri, e giudichi in vn medesimo tempo diuersi vffizij de' suoi ministri. Onde (com'io hò detto) questo Senso comune è il veramente chiamato Senso, e gli altri cinque di fuori gli sono in vece di seruidori, che tutte le lor faccende gli apportino innanzi; e però questa sola potenza, e facultà è quella, che giudica, chè noi veggiamo col senso del Viso, & vdiamo con quello dell'Vdito: e così discorrendo per gli altri. E non è vero quello, che disopra dicemmo, chè noi sentiamo di vedere con la potenza visiua, nè sentiamo d'vdire con l'vditiua; perchè questo è veramente vffizio della potenza sensitiua comune: anzi dipiù vo' dire, chè il giudizio, che fanno i Sensi proprij intorno alle differenze de' proprij sensibili, essi non lo fanno senon in virtù di questa potenza comune, e come participanti di lei, che è radice, e fonte di tutto'l Senso. E quì pongasene la Figura.



Figure 10. Diagram of the arrangement of the external senses and the common sense from Bernardo Segni, *I tre libri d'Aristotile sopra l'anima: Trattato di Bernardo Segni gentil'huomo, & accademico fiorentino* (Florence: Giunti, 1607), page 128. LODGE 1607 Se37, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Libraries, New York, NY.

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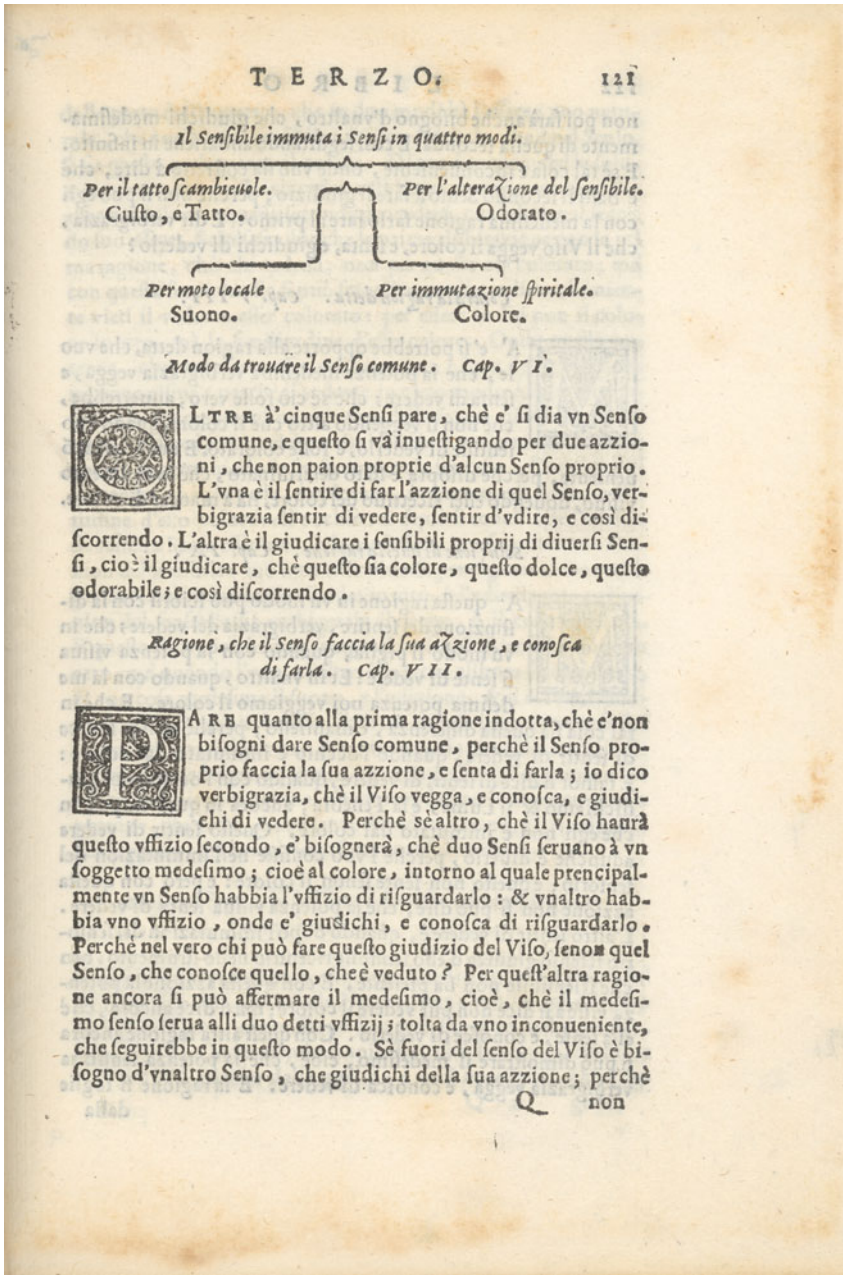

TERZO. 121

*Il Senſibile immuta i Senſi in quattro modi.*

*Per il tatto ſcambieuole.* Cuſto, e Tatto.

*Per l'alteraZione del ſenſibile.* Odorato.

*Per moto locale* Suono.

*Per immutazione ſpiritale.* Colore.

*Modo da trouare il Senſo comune. Cap. VI.*

OLTRE à' cinque Senſi pare, chè e' ſi dia vn Senſo comune, e queſto ſi và inueſtigando per due azzioni, che non paion proprie d'alcun Senſo proprio. L'vna è il ſentire di far l'azzione di quel Senſo, verbigrazia ſentir di vedere, ſentir d'vdire, e così diſcorrendo. L'altra è il giudicare i ſenſibili proprij di diuerſi Senſi, cioè il giudicare, chè queſto ſia colore, queſto dolce, queſto odorabile; e così diſcorrendo.

*Ragione, che il Senſo faccia la ſua aZzione, e conoſca di farla. Cap. VII.*

PARE quanto alla prima ragione indotta, chè e'non biſogni dare Senſo comune, perchè il Senſo proprio faccia la ſua azzione, e ſenta di farla; io dico verbigrazia, chè il Viſo vegga, e conoſca, e giudichi di vedere. Perchè sè altro, chè il Viſo haurà queſto vffizio ſecondo, e' biſognerà, chè duo Senſi ſeruano à vn ſoggetto medeſimo; cioè al colore, intorno al quale precipalmente vn Senſo habbia l'vffizio di riſguardarlo: & vnaltro habbia vno vffizio, onde e' giudichi, e conoſca di riſguardarlo. Perchè nel vero chi può fare queſto giudizio del Viſo, ſenon quel Senſo, che conoſce quello, che è veduto? Per queſt'altra ragione ancora ſi può affermare il medeſimo, cioè, chè il medeſimo ſenſo ſerua alli duo detti vffizij; tolta da vno inconueniente, che ſeguirebbe in queſto modo. Sè fuori del ſenſo del Viſo è biſogno d'vnaltro Senſo, che giudichi della ſua azzione; perchè

Q non

Figure 11. Diagram of the senses according to what they perceive from Segni, *I tre libri d'Aristotile sopra l'anima*, page 121. LODGE 1607 Se37, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University Libraries, New York, NY.

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Figure 12. Jusepe de Ribera. Detail of *The Sense of Smell*. Photography credit: HIP / Art Resource, NY.

and his patrons were attuned in depictions of tears. While the importance of weeping and the rhetorical power of tragedy have roots going back to classical and Renaissance texts, Spain and Italy in the early Seicento were sites of heightened sensitivity to depictions of emotion. Pictures that depicted and provoked strong emotions had taken on strategic importance within defenses of the utility of religious images in particular. This was of paramount importance in tying the value of art to its capacity to convey and cause emotions, as is clear from the *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images* (1582) by Archbishop Gabriele Paleotti (1522–97): in chapter 25 of book 1, Paleotti argues that "Christian images have great power to move the feelings of persons," and quotes an example from Metaphrastes's life of Saint Terasius: "Who is not drenched with tears upon viewing, expressed in color, one who fights on, scorning the clouds of

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whips and the fire, confident in his creator?"[105] This is only one prominent manifestation of a long-standing preoccupation with depictions of weeping as litmus tests for art's capacity to stir the feelings, a capacity that Paleotti's treatise parlays into a social utility in the case of religious images, whose purpose was nothing less than "to move the hearts of observers to devotion and the true cult of God."[106]

In Ribera's depiction of *Smell*, the usual indicators of deep emotion become signs of a prosaic bodily reaction, as the picture invites its viewers to identify with a mechanical response to a vegetable rather than a movement of the soul. The painting extends the external rather than the internal cause of the tears to the viewer, as the onion's meticulously rendered white and pink flesh prompts one to recall the stinging sensation that a cut onion can produce. In Ribera's image of *Smell*, the reciprocity of feeling between figure and viewer applies to smell, and not to the tears themselves: instead of weeping with those who weep, one smells with those who smell. The joke would not be wasted on a Roman or Spanish audience in 1615. Ribera's bread and butter for several decades consisted of penitent saints, martyred saints, and scenes of lamentation, such as the Christ being taken down from the cross that Mancini mentions in the same breath as the *Five Senses*.[107] From his earliest activity in Italy onward, Ribera had built his career on such depictions of earnest and difficult emotion. The penitent Saint Peter—a subject explicitly identified with tears and designed to cause empathy and emulation as the apostle, having recognized his betrayal of Christ, "wept bitterly"[108]—was a specialty of Ribera's from an early date, and his various renditions of the subject, such as his etching of 1621 (fig. 13), were widely copied.[109] The point of Ribera's joke is the inversion of the type of reaction that the tears demand from the viewer. Empathy and emulation such as a penitent Saint Peter ought to provoke would be misplaced to say the least when there is no repentance or grief with which to empathize. Instead, Ribera asks viewers to evaluate rather than emote, and the ordinarily expressive tears prompt one to exercise discernment, not compassion. The painting's display of emotion in the form of tears invites not only recognition, but also detection as a veneer. At the same time, the veneer is, in a sense, of the viewer's own making: the figure in *Smell* is reacting quite straightforwardly to the sensory experience that he is having. The contrast between the viewer's expectation (attuned to reading emotion) and the prosaic lack of emotion

[105] Paleotti, 119.
[106] Paleotti, 48.
[107] Mancini, 1:251.
[108] Matt. 26:75; Luke 22:62.
[109] Brown, 68–69 (cat. no. 6).

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Figure 13. Jusepe de Ribera. *The Penitence of Saint Peter*, 1621. Etching and engraving, 32.5 x 24.6 cm. Image courtesy of the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC, Alisa Mellon Bruce Fund.

(and lack of dissimulation) on the painted figure's part create together a parody of courtly prudence, with the ideal viewer ready to read what is there (a tear) as something it isn't (a sign of emotion), only to see all the sensitive perspicacity demanded of polite society brought to nonsense by an onion.

In this connection, Ribera's attentiveness to the expressions and countenances of his figures, and his placement of the ideal viewer (so to speak) at table with each of them, push viewers to figure out whom and what they are interacting with, however figuratively. The prompts to unwind the riddles of the figures' social standing and expressions are red herrings, insofar as the

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figures, unlike the participants in courtly settings, can simply feel what they feel. In Ribera's *Five Senses*, one can surmise that the protagonists' lower social rank expresses some *nostalgie de la boue* that looks wistfully, or at least with a modicum of respect, at the blithe directness with which social outsiders (at least as imagined here) can receive and express sensations. The sting of Ribera's witty conceit is that there is no dissemblance to unmask: the tear in *Smell* is not just a fake tear in the sense of not really showing emotion, but a real tear, a sincere reaction that is, paradoxically, just what it appears to be. Simplicity and truthfulness, in the social space of the gallery, are as incongruous in the context of civil conversation as the uncouth figures are among the polite company standing before the pictures. The ideal, prudent viewer's elaborate discernment in considering the paintings is at once thwarted and rewarded by the directness with which the painted figures feel what they feel. The ostentatiously uncouth figures in Ribera's paintings appear to flout social norms, while hyperconsciously enforcing them. The coarse and (at best) sketchily groomed men in the paintings draw out a performance of social distinction through prudence, taste, and discernment beyond surface appearances. Ribera's personification of the precious, multivalent faculty of taste through an especially tasteless figure proposes an ideal of simple enjoyment and of indifference to courtly values that is itself an adroit performance of open-mindedness.[110] Likewise, with the onion-induced weeping of *Smell*, Ribera uses the figure's unthinking directness to make nonsense of a sophisticated social and connoisseurial approach to reading emotions, whether in paintings or in real interactions with people. Fantasies of simplicity and of indifference to the nuances and pressures of dissimulation and self-censorship become the basis for performing both discernment and insouciant openness to new experiences. Ribera's figures advertise a straightforward embrace of uncomplicated feeling, while actually forming the occasion for a subtle performance of prudence.

## CONCLUSION

Recent scholarship has rightly begun to explore the connections between the telescope in Ribera's *Sense of Sight* and artists' wider participation in the Lincean Academy's investigations of optics and astronomy. Yet this gaze, so to speak, into Ribera's Galilean telescope has perhaps made the matter of astronomy itself appear too large while eclipsing the wider import of the full series of the *Five Senses* to the relationship between early Seicento painting and contemporary developments in natural philosophy. While historians of

[110] A notion given forceful and original articulation by Vincenzo Giustiniani: Cropper and Dempsey, 90–92.

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science have demonstrated the generative roles played by prudence, *dissimulazione onesta*, and social performance in the Linceans' activities, Ribera's series demonstrates how dynamically these social and intellectual arenas intersected with the oral and evaluative practices of connoisseurship that were flourishing in Rome's picture galleries at the same moment. The *Five Senses* also exemplify an underexplored facet of art's relationship with the period's evolving practices of scientific inquiry in their presentation of a malleable, inclusive, and multivocal set of approaches to their subject matter. The paintings manifest a Lincean set of interests in the way they prompt debate and performative discussion among several viewpoints, rather than visually formulating a single argument.

If interdisciplinary studies of Ribera's *Five Senses* have missed the artistic and connoisseurial import of the series as a whole, some art historical studies have also interpreted Ribera's Roman period as a more or less average contribution to a collective search for ways of adapting Caravaggio's artistic legacy.[111] What the *Five Senses* reveal is a barely twenty-five-year-old painter of remarkable assurance and exceptional wit, a socially strategic operator in the competitive Roman art world who understood his audience to perfection, successfully forged connections in elite circles, and mounted an ambitious attempt to commandeer the position previously occupied by Caravaggio within Roman easel painting. Ribera's smart, humorous inversions of Caravaggio's legacy in the *Five Senses* give a different picture of the young Spaniard's relationship to his predecessor than histories of Baroque painting usually suggest. The level of sophistication that Ribera demonstrates in this artistic contest invites reevaluation, not only of Ribera's contribution to Roman art, but also of the broader ways in which citation and emulation functioned across Caravaggesque painting in the early decades of the Seicento. Ribera's series suggests an alternative to common scholarly approaches that treat similarities and citations either in terms of influence (meaning a top-down relationship of dependence or debt) or in terms of attribution.[112] If nothing else, the variegated modes of connoisseurship and comparison practiced in the early Seicento confirm the relevance of more supple art historical methods for understanding imitation and originality in Caravaggesque painting.

Ribera's level of participation and responsibility in crafting the intellectual work of his own pictures is sometimes downplayed even in art historical

[111] Notable even in positive interpretations of Ribera's Roman work, such as Danesi Squarzina's assessment of this career stage as a "brief but fruitful apprenticeship" prefacing his more mature and original work in Naples: Danesi Squarzina, 2006, 249. Notable exceptions are Papi, 2007, 16; Fried, 2016, 47–58.

[112] Though many fruitful avenues of inquiry have opened up in the past two decades; see, for example, Loh; Campbell.

analyses of his paintings that focus on their theoretical import.[113] While the sophisticated artistic choices that inform Ribera's treatment of the five senses as a subject are unlikely to have been reached without input from the series' patron, they are inconceivable without the decisive input and creative agency of the artist. If anything, Ribera's undeniable divergence from the common idea of the intelligent or intellectual painter (with examples ranging from Cigoli and Poussin to Federico Zuccaro and Rubens) invites a broader reassessment of the way art historians interpret the participation of apparently less refined artists in the intellectual culture surrounding them.[114] The bias toward treating certain forms of textual and material evidence as inherently superior to the visual evidence of art fuels a tendency to associate knowledge and intelligence with the written while undervaluing the impact of oral culture and training across a wide range of contexts.[115] Ribera's *Five Senses* shows the acumen with which a painter with no apparent bookish inclinations or literary legacy engaged with the vibrant oral culture around him.

Most importantly for studies of the early Seicento across disciplines, Ribera's series demonstrates the vital relevance of conversation to the way art was consumed and produced. The shared interests of art's makers and viewers in taste, prudence, discerning emotions and intentions, and in all aspects of conversation as a social performance merit far greater attention from art historians. Furthermore, the robust historical scholarship on prudence, dissimulation, and civil conversation in this period, while dynamic and interdisciplinary, remains almost entirely founded on textual evidence. Given the wit and subtlety with which Ribera draws out a performance of prudence on the part of his audience, even in this very early set of paintings, it would be absurd to view the *Five Senses* as merely illustrating or somehow acting out ideas whose genuine articulation was in writing. Rather, the *Five Senses* exemplify the largely unexplored vitality of the visual arts as historical evidence for how people thought about conversation, dissimulation, and prudence.

The relevance of Ribera's witty, offbeat take on the five senses as a subject extends well beyond the niche of Caravaggesque painting in Rome. The series speaks eloquently of the period's overriding preoccupation with the relationship

[113] See, for instance, the resistance to the idea of Ribera as a subtle thinker in Aragó Estrasser, 136–40; Clifton, 111. A contrario, see the convincing arguments in Pereda, 2015; Mason, 2017.

[114] Gage's discussion of Guido Reni offers an excellent model for approaching this issue: Gage, 2017, 659–62. I thank Peter Mason for noting that the hyperintellectualized view of Poussin is also debatable. See Verdi.

[115] A bias famously countered in Smith; Long.

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between appearance and truth.[116] The problems of natural philosophy and psychology that were part and parcel of the bodily senses as a topic of erudite discussion were of equal relevance to the broader social imperatives of discerning how one's perceptions translated to judgment and understanding, particularly in the context of conversation. The specific concern with prudence, understood especially as a courtly management of one's emotions and expressions, has been identified correctly as fundamental to Spanish and Italian culture.[117] Paintings like Ribera's *Five Senses* exemplify the range and relevance of what the history of art can contribute to our understanding of this period, affording an invaluable glimpse into a visual, oral, and performative aspect of early modern culture beyond the reach of written evidence yet still vividly sensible.

[116] See the indispensable study, including ample evidence about Ribera, by Pereda, 2017.

[117] See the seminal study by Zagorin; more recent bibliography is in Eliav-Feldon and Herzig.

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