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'Beauty adorns virtue'

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Introduction

It was a top news story in 2006: Mona Lisa was pregnant when she posed for Leonardo. The Centre de Recherche et de Restauration des Musées de France had joined forces with the National Research Council of Canada to conduct extensive technical research on the *Mona Lisa*. New scanning techniques revealed a fine veil on top of Mona Lisa's dress that was interpreted by the researchers to be a *guarnello*, a garment worn during pregnancy, they believed. Thus Lisa was either pregnant or had just given birth. The Associated Press concluded that 'maybe they should call it the *Mama Lisa*', and this was picked up by all major international newspapers.¹ The researchers and, following their lead the media, ignored other hypotheses on Mona Lisa's dress, a disparate group of interpretations ranging from widow to a fashionable Florentine lady wearing Spanish style dress.² The researchers' observation that 'Mona Lisa's clothing has not been much studied', also failed to elicit any special attention.³ Obviously, the enigma of Mona Lisa's dress had not been solved yet.

Two years after *Mona Lisa* made the headlines, I was struck by the dress in Leonardo's portrait of Ginevra de' Benci (figs. 1-2). I had set out to write a dissertation on women's dress in Italian city-states in the fifteenth century, tracing regional styles and customs. Since most scholarship concentrated on Florence, I had harboured hope that this city could be used as a reference point, extending my research from there to other cities, such as Milan, Naples and Rome. However, during a stay in Florence in spring 2008, I quickly learned that much remains to be said on Florentine Quattrocento dress, especially in portraiture. When the extant Florentine portraits of women are put in chronological order, the portrait of Ginevra de' Benci immediately stands out. Whereas her contemporaries in the 1470s boast colourful silk clothes and costly jewels, Ginevra is wearing a dull brown garment and no jewellery. By the 1480s this austere mode of portraiture seemed to have become more popular in Florence. By contrast, in these very years dowries and material wealth were growing. Ginevra's family, the Benci, were a classic example, earning an immense fortune as bankers. Why did they not show off their wealth in Ginevra's portrait?

Joanna Woods-Marsden asked similar questions regarding Leonardo's cartoon with the portrait of Isabella d'Este and his *Mona Lisa* (figs. 5-6). Again, in both portraits, the absence of jewellery begs an explanation. Would Isabella, Marchioness of Mantua, really have consented to a likeness that deprives her of the adornment indispensable to her rank? Similarly, would a Florentine merchant have found it acceptable for his wife to be portrayed without the insignia of his status? Without further elaborating on the matter, Woods-Marsden speculated that 'Leonardo was able to impose this unadorned state upon his sitters'.⁴

These questions were sufficiently intriguing to warrant a shift of focus in my research: dress in Leonardo's portraits of women became the new subject. Even though Leonardo's oeuvre has been studied intensively, the fact that we know very little about his depiction of dress should come as no surprise. In 1993 when Agatha Lewin wrote a dissertation on dress in a

¹ 'Was Mona Lisa pregnant when she posed?', press release Associated Press, 27 September 2006. <http://www.nbcnews.com/id/15029288> (accessed: August 2014).

² All theories on Mona Lisa's apparel are discussed extensively in chapter 5, p. 143-151.

³ Mottin 2006, p. 66.

⁴ Woods-Marsden 2001, p. 77-80.

selection of Dürer's paintings and drawings, she noted that, notwithstanding many decades of Dürer research, this particular subject had never been studied before.⁵ Dürer is certainly not the only one. In fact, hardly any early modern painter has been studied from a dress historical perspective, Van Dyck and Rembrandt being the two major exceptions.⁶

This thesis concentrates on dress in Leonardo's portraits of women: his *Ginevra de' Benci*, the *Lady with an Ermine*, *La Belle Ferronnière*, the portrait cartoon of Isabella d'Este and *Mona Lisa* (figs. 1-6). Leonardo's only extant male portrait, known as the *Portrait of a Musician*, is not included because it is unfinished (fig. 7). Although the young man's face and hair are nearly completed, his brown robe consists of nothing more than coarse brush strokes of the underpaint. In addition, his jerkin was probably overpainted at a later date and was originally red.⁷ A second portrait that I have not included is the profile of a woman on vellum, known as *La Bella Principessa*, because its recent attribution to Leonardo by Martin Kemp is not generally accepted (fig. 8).⁸ Moreover, there are dress historical grounds to doubt Leonardo's authorship, a subject that will be dealt with later on.⁹

1. Leonardo's life and his interest in dress

Leonardo da Vinci was born on 15 April 1452 in Anchiano, near Vinci, the illegitimate son of the notary ser Piero and a woman named Caterina. There is a record of Leonardo living in Florence in his grandfather's house with his father in 1469.¹⁰ Vasari informs us that ser Piero apprenticed his son to the Florentine painter and sculptor Andrea del Verrocchio, probably around 1466.¹¹ Verrocchio had started his career as a goldsmith, but due to a lack of income decided to turn to painting and sculpture. He also made designs for embroidery and tournament banners.¹² In 1472 Leonardo was registered as a member of the Florentine painter's guild, although he stayed in Verrocchio's workshop as a co-worker. Leonardo's first documented works date from this period. He probably received his first commissions through his father's network, for instance the *Annunciation*, painted for the monks of San Bartolomeo a Monteoliveto, who had turned to ser Piero to settle some legal affairs in 1470 (fig. 9). Other clients of Leonardo's father were the Benci family and they may have had a hand in the commission for the portrait of Ginevra de' Benci, painted between c. 1475 and 1480 (figs. 1-2).¹³ Through Verrocchio, Leonardo is likely to have been introduced to the Medici, who it is sometimes suggested may have ordered the *Madonna of the Carnation*, dated around 1475 and now in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich (fig. 10).¹⁴

⁵ Lewin 1993, p. 13. In 2008 Philipp Zitzlsperger devoted more in-depth study to Dürer's self-portrait in a fur coat (Munich, Alte Pinakothek, inv. no. 537). Zitzlsperger 2008.

⁶ On dress in Anthony van Dyck's portraits, see: Groeneweg 1997, p. 212-216; Gordenker 2001. On dress in Rembrandt's oeuvre, see: De Winkel 2006.

⁷ Keith 2011, p. 60-61; Luke Syson in: London 2011, p. 95.

⁸ For the attribution to Leonardo, see: Kemp and Cotte 2010.

⁹ See: chapter 3, note 79.

¹⁰ Unless otherwise stated, facts about Leonardo's life in this paragraph are drawn from Carmen Bambach's documented chronology of Leonardo's life: Bambach 2003, p. 227-241, where further references to primary sources can be found.

¹¹ There are no primary sources that record the year in which Leonardo entered Verrocchio's workshop. In 1466 Leonardo was thirteen or fourteen years old, the average age of a starting apprentice. See: Brown 1998, p. 7. Marani suggested the earlier date of about 1460-1464, see: DBI vol. 64 (2005), s.v. 'Leonardo da Vinci', p. 440. Ser Piero and Verrocchio knew each other at least from 1465, when Piero became the latter's notary. See: Cecchi 2003, p. 124-125.

¹² On Verrocchio's workshop, see: Brown 1998, p. 7-10.

¹³ On these relations, see: Cecchi 2003, p. 127-131.

¹⁴ On the possibility of a Medici commission, see: Syre 2006, p. 40-41, with further references.

The earliest evidence of Leonardo's interest in dress also dates from the 1470s. In 1479 Bernardo di Bandini Baroncelli was sentenced to death by the Florentine *Signoria*. He was one of the Pazzi conspirators who attempted to murder Lorenzo de' Medici in April 1478. Bernardo was the only one to escape, but was captured on 23 December 1479 in Constantinople where he had sought refuge and brought back to Florence. The Florentine patrician Lionardo di Lorenzo Morelli described in his *Cronaca* how Bernardo was put to death six days later in the Bargello: 'On the 29th, two hours before sunrise, he was hanged, wearing a Turkish gown with a blue overgown in the Turkish style, as he was caught in Turkey'.¹⁵ The exotic attire appealed to Leonardo and he made a drawing of Bernardo's clothed body, carefully penning down the material and colour of every garment (fig. 11):¹⁶

a tan-coloured small cap / a doublet of black serge / a black gown lined / a blue coat lined / with fur of foxes' breasts / and the collar of the jerkin / covered with black / and red stippled velvet / Bernardo di Bandino / Baroncelli / black hose¹⁷

A few years later, in 1482 or 1483, Leonardo moved to Milan. His presence is first recorded on 25 April 1483 in the contract for the altarpiece known as *The Virgin of the Rocks*, executed in two versions, currently in the Louvre in Paris and the National Gallery in London (figs. 12-13). During this first Milanese period, Leonardo's versatility reached its full growth. Besides painting and sculpture, he was also working on scientific projects, examining and drawing the human body, occupied himself with architecture and hydraulics, designed stage decorations for ducal festivities, and started collecting notes for what was to become a treatise on painting. From about 1490 onwards, he received ducal commissions for paintings and portraits in particular, notably *The Lady with an Ermine* and *La Belle Ferronnière* (figs. 3-4). Having become a valued court painter, Leonardo's workshop expanded and he hired assistants, including Gian Giacomo Caprotti, known as Salai, who would stay with him until Leonardo's death in 1519.

Another important court commission was a fresco in the refectory of the Santa Maria delle Grazie, representing the Last Supper, painted between 1492 and 1498. The Ferrarese poet and writer Giambattista Giraldi, nicknamed 'Il Cinthio', described in 1554 how Leonardo had gone about depicting all the different characters of Christ and the twelve apostles:

Whenever he would paint some figure, he considered first its quality and its nature, that is, whether the person should be noble or plebeian, joyous or grave, troubled or gay, old or young, of irate or tranquil mind, good or evil; and then, knowing its being, he went where he knew persons of such quality congregated and observed diligently their faces, manners, clothes and bodily movements. Having found that which seemed to him befitting to what he envisaged to create, he drew it with his stylus in the little book that he always kept at his belt.¹⁸

¹⁵ 'a di 29 detto fu impiccato due ore avanti giorno con una turcazzana indosso - con una veste alla turchese indosso azzura, come ne venne preso in Turchia', cited from: Bayonne 2004, p. 17.

¹⁶ The subject of the drawing was first identified as Bernardo Baroncelli by: Richter no. 664. See further Françoise Viatte in: Bayonne 2004, p. 15-17, cat. 2.

¹⁷ 'Berrettino tanè / farsetto di raso nero / cioppa nera foderata / di gole di volpe / e 'l collare della giubba / soppannato di velluto appicchiet[-] / tato nero e rosso / Bernardo di Bandini / Baroncigli / calze nere'. Transcription and translation: Richter no. 664.

¹⁸ 'Questi, qualhora uoleua dipingere qualche figura, consideraua prima la sua qualità, e la sua natura: cioè se dueua ella essere nobile, o plebea, gioiosa, o seuera, turbata, o lieta, uecchia, o giouane, irata, o di animo tranquillo, buona, o maluagia: et poi, conosciuto l'esser suo, se n'andaua oue egli sapeua, che si ragunassero persone di tal qualità; et osseruaua diligentemente i lor uisi, le lor maniere, gli abiti, et i

Cinthio's remark that Leonardo paid attention to the coherence of a figure's character and his clothes, recording this in a booklet, calls to mind his drawing of the hanged Bernardo Baroncelli with the meticulous notes on his garments (fig. 11). Apparently, this was part of Leonardo's working method.

In 1499, after the French invasion of Milan, Leonardo left the city. Several years of travelling followed. Via Mantua, where he drew a portrait of the Marchioness Isabella d'Este in the winter of 1499-1500, he reached Venice in the spring of 1500 (fig. 5). In April he was back in Florence, but after two years he left the city, accepting an offer to become Cesare Borgia's 'architect and general engineer' in August 1502. In February or March the following year Leonardo settled in Florence again. Around this time, he accepted a commission to paint the portrait of the wife of the Florentine silk merchant Francesco del Giocondo, the *Mona Lisa* (fig. 6). At the same time he was working on cartoons for the altarpiece *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne*, currently in the Louvre (fig. 14). Leonardo continued to rework both paintings over a long period of time. A commission on a far bigger scale was a fresco of the battle of Anghiari in Palazzo Vecchio for the Florentine *Signoria* which did not survive. Vasari praised the cartoon extensively, in particular the attention Leonardo had paid to the depiction of dress, stating: 'It is not possible to describe the invention that Leonardo showed in the garments of the soldiers, all varied by him in different ways, and likewise in the helmet-crests and other ornaments'.¹⁹

In 1506 and 1507 Leonardo lived alternately in Florence and Milan. Both the Florentine *Signoria* and the French rulers in Milan requested his services. Eventually, Leonardo settled in Milan in 1508 and was paid a regular fee by the French king. Besides working on *Mona Lisa* and *The Virgin and Child with Saint Anne*, he finished the second version of *The Virgin of the Rocks* (fig. 13). During this second Milanese sojourn, he made many studies of landscapes, hydraulics and geological subjects. A new member of Leonardo's workshop in these years was the nobleman Francesco Melzi (1491/93-c. 1570). Starting as a pupil, he would become an important companion and the heir of Leonardo's written legacy. When the French were defeated by the Swiss army in 1511, Leonardo and his associates retreated to Melzi's estate in Vaprio d'Adda, a small town between Milan and Bergamo.

In 1513 Leonardo found a new patron, Giuliano de' Medici, and he joined the latter's household in Rome by December that year. Between 1513 and 1516 Leonardo devoted much time to the study of classical ruins, engineering work for his patron, and his planned treatise on painting. In 1516 he accepted an invitation from the king of France, Francis I (r. 1515-1547), to become court painter. Together with Salaì and Melzi he left Italy for France. He lived at Chastelet du Cloux, near the court in Amboise. Leonardo probably suffered a stroke in 1517, which paralysed his right side. Since this prevented him from painting, he spent his last two years designing scenery for court festivals and architecture. He also undertook a final attempt to organise his notes on painting, but was unable to finish the treatise before his death on 2 May 1519. In his will he bequeathed his paintings to Salaì and all his notes, drawings and painter's tools to Melzi. He also made a final reference to dress, for his maid Maturina was to receive his

mouimenti del corpo: et truata cosa, che gli paresse atta a quel, che far uoleua, la riponeua collo stile al suo libbricino, che sempre egli teneua a cintola.' Giovambattista Giraldi Cinthio, *Discorsi... intorno al comporre de i Romanzi, delle Comedie, e delle Tragedie*, Venice 1554. Cited from: Kwakkelstein 1994, p. 86-87 (translation), app. A, p. 139 (original text).

¹⁹ 'Né si può esprimere il disegno che Lionardo fece negli abiti de' soldato, variatamente variata da lui', Vasari 1966-87, vol. 4, p. 33. Translation: Vasari 1996, vol. 1, p. 637.

‘gown of good black cloth lined with fur’ and ‘an overgown of woollen cloth’ in addition to two ducats for her good service.²⁰

As the heir of Leonardo’s written legacy, Francesco Melzi decided to finish the huge task of assembling a treatise on painting. He compiled a manuscript entitled *Trattato della pittura* from eighteen notebooks, all listed at the end of the text. Today, the treatise – known as the Codex Urbinas Latinus 1270, usually abbreviated as CU – is in the Vatican Library. Many of Leonardo’s notebooks used by Melzi are now lost. Many of the sheets containing sketches were cut up to obtain the drawings and the pieces of paper bearing notes were discarded. Less than half the text of the Codex Urbinas can be traced back to Leonardo’s extant manuscripts. Thus, Melzi’s compilation is the only form in which many of Leonardo’s writings have come down to us.²¹

Melzi carefully copied Leonardo’s text, but he rearranged fragments following his own judgment. In chapter four of the *Trattato della pittura*, entitled ‘De panni et modo di vestir le figure con grazia et de eli abiti, et nature de panni’, Melzi collected notes on dress and drapery. Leonardo had already shown the intention to do so. When he compiled a list of subjects around 1510, he included ‘a discourse on cloths and vestments’ (see app. 1, no. 14).²² In Appendix 1, all of Leonardo’s extant notes on dress and drapery, both from original notebooks and the *Trattato della pittura*, have been assembled in chronological order, following the dates suggested by Carlo Pedretti.

2. Historiography of Italian Renaissance dress

The interest in Italian dress from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries dates back to the second half the nineteenth century. Jacob Burckhardt was one of the first to pay attention to the subject in his *Cultur der Renaissance in Italien*, published in 1860, commending the becoming costumes depicted in artworks of the period. At the same time he pointed out that we cannot be sure whether painters depicted dress faithfully, an important methodological notion, since fifteenth-century Italian garments have not survived. Burckhardt’s view on Quattrocento dress is determined by the concept of the rise of the individual in the Renaissance. Along this line he emphasizes the diversity of both individual and regional styles, praising their beauty and richness, and regards foreign influences at the end of the fifteenth century as a decline.²³ Burckhardt also claimed that a woman’s status was equal to that of a man in Renaissance Italy, thus inspiring growing attention for the great women of the era.²⁴ As a result, the nineteenth century saw a boom of newly discovered archival sources relating to women’s lives and dress, often transcribed and published by Italian archivists.²⁵

Monographic studies on dress did not appear until the start of the twentieth century. Hanns Floerke published his *Moden der Italienischen Renaissance* in 1917. Strongly influenced by

²⁰ ‘una veste de bon pano negro foderato de pelle: una socha de panno’, last will of Leonardo da Vinci, Royal Court in Amboise, 23 April 1519. Published in: Beltrami 1919, p. 152-154, no. 244. Since dress and textiles were quite expensive, they were often included in last wills.

²¹ For a general introduction to the *Trattato della pittura*, see Heydenreich’s introduction in: McMahon 1956, p. xi-xliii.

²² Pedretti 1977, vol. 1, p. 287-288. See also Pedretti 1964, p. 144-145, where he still dates the sheet slightly earlier to after 1505.

²³ Burckhardt 1860, p. 365-366.

²⁴ Burckhardt 1860, p. 391-395.

²⁵ Some examples are the publication of the trousseaux of Bianca Maria Sforza (Ceruti 1875), Elisabetta Gonzaga (Gandini 1893), Lucrezia Borgia (Beltrami 1903), the letters of Alessandra Macinghi (Macinghi Strozzi 1877), and the many publications by Alessandro Luzio and Rodolfo Renier of archival documents relating to Isabella d’Este.

Heinrich Wölfflin's formalistic approach, Floerke attempted to apply the art historical concepts of Gothic and Renaissance style to dress.²⁶ He combined this stylistic approach with a focus on anecdotes about dress derived from literary sources such as Dante, Sacchetti's *Trecentonovelle* and Castiglione's *Libro del cortegiano*, in order to – as he puts it – add the voice of the documents to the language of the pictures.²⁷ However, a true confrontation of written and visual sources, connecting depicted garments with their contemporary names, had not yet been realized. This was done seven years later in a study by Egidia Polidori Calamandrei that remains important today.

Polidori Calamandrei laid the basis for modern-day research on Florentine dress with her book *Le vesti delle donne fiorentine nel Quattrocento*, published in 1924. Using a wide variety of sources, such as household inventories, bridal trousseaux and sumptuary laws, she recovered the most important terminology used for dress in fifteenth-century Florence. Although it is not always easy to distinguish the differences between the various garments, she was nonetheless able to identify the major items of a lady's wardrobe and recognize them in paintings. She based her definitions on the characteristics of each garment as described in the numerous inventories and letters she consulted, as well as descriptions of garments in sumptuary laws.²⁸ Polidori Calamandrei was careful not to regard artworks as a fully reliable visual source. She pointed out that, however faithful to reality fifteenth-century art usually was, artists could change lines and colours according to their aesthetic principles or add more luxurious and beautiful dress than the sitter owned.²⁹ Polidori Calamandrei's research, founded on a multitude of written and visual sources that complement and correct each other, makes her book invaluable for any student of Quattrocento dress.³⁰

Contrary to Polidori Calamandrei, Elizabeth Birbari believed dress in fifteenth-century Italian painting to be exceptionally realistic. In her book *Dress in Italian Painting 1460-1500*, published in 1975, she stated that the renewed interest in depicting nature in this era led to a true to life depiction of dress and tried to show that artists possessed a knowledge of garment construction that enabled them to do so. According to her, it is solid proof of a painting's veracity if a garment can be recreated from it, even if the subject is Biblical or mythological.³¹ This theory has found wide acceptance, possibly partly due to the fact that it was the first book on Quattrocento dress available in English. Even though previous scholars, starting with Burckhardt, stressed the need to be cautious when using painting as a visual source, Birbari's work has remained highly influential and many art historians still regard the depiction of dress in fifteenth-century painting as utterly realistic and reliable.³²

A new line of research was explored by Stella Mary Newton in 1988. She made an in-depth study of Venetian dress in the years 1495-1525. Focusing on social hierarchy, she carefully unfolded its written and unwritten rules. Regarding dress as a means of communication or

²⁶ See especially: Floerke 1917, p. 5, 42-43, 54.

²⁷ Floerke 1917, p. 82.

²⁸ Because sumptuary laws were often violated or served as a means to impose an extra tax on wealth, they are usually not regarded as a reliable source for what was actually being worn or not being worn. However, they do provide us with descriptions that help identify different types of dress. On the ineffectiveness of sumptuary laws, see: Bridgeman 2000, p. 215-221.

²⁹ Polidori Calamandrei 1924, p. 10-11.

³⁰ Rosita Levi Pisetzky used a similar approach, comparing visual and textual sources, for her volume on Quattrocento dress in the comprehensive series *La storia del costume in Italia*. Levi Pisetzky 1964-69, vol. 2. Another survey on dress in fifteenth-century Italy that draws on the work of Polidori Calamandrei and Levi Pisetzky, is: Herald 1981.

³¹ Birbari 1975, p. 3-5.

³² Scholars who referred directly to Birbari are for instance: Dempsey 1992, p. 65-67; Brown 1998, p. 12.

‘language’, she was able to show how the Venetians maintained a strict dress code, controlled by law, while at the same time allowing a certain degree of individual expression.³³ Newton was extremely cautious when examining artworks as visual source, even more so than previous scholars, for she not only had to make sure actual dress was depicted, it had to be Venetian as well. She therefore preferred those works that are known to have been commissioned for a specific church or institution in Venice.³⁴ A very similar approach was applied by Jane Bridgeman, who studied Florentine men’s dress between 1400 and 1470 in her dissertation, which unfortunately remained unpublished.³⁵

In the past two decades, a group of Anglo-Saxon scholars have shifted their attention to economic aspects, in particular the consumption of luxury goods. Carole Collier Frick’s *Dressing Renaissance Florence. Families, Fortunes and Fine Clothing*, published in 2002, is a fine example. Inspired by the work of economic historian Richard Goldthwaite on the Florentine demand for art and of social historian Anthony Molho on the aristocratization of the Florentine elite, she asked similar questions with regard to dress. She explored subjects such as the high cost of dress, spending patterns, cost and status, and the relationship between consumer and artisan.³⁶

The new approaches taken since the 1980s have significantly broadened dress historical research and are welcome additions to the field. However, the basal question of how to deal with artworks as a visual source, already touched upon by Polidori Calamandrei and other early scholars, still divides opinion. Frick more recently pointed out the fundamental challenges again: the difficulty of matching names and garments, while a correct depiction of clothes is not necessarily a primary concern for the artist and the impossibility of rendering, let alone recognizing, the subtle differences in colour hues of textile in paint.³⁷ What is more, we are practically ignorant of the workshop practice of portrait painting. It is not known whether a painter received the garments that were to be portrayed, as often happened from the mid-sixteenth century onwards, or how common the use of workshop props was.³⁸ These questions are rarely raised by dress historians working on the fifteenth century. It is here that the history of dress meets art historical methodology.

3. Approaching dress in fifteenth-century portraiture

Art historians have traditionally used the history of dress only as a means of dating artworks. Rapidly changing dress styles can indeed provide a *terminus post quem*. An example relevant to the subject of this thesis is Leonardo’s *Lady with an Ermine*, a portrait that for a long time was thought to have been executed c. 1483-1485, until in 1921 the art historian Attilio Schiaparelli recognized the sitter’s dress as Milanese fashion from the 1490s. He therefore justly pushed the dating of the portrait forward to c. 1490.³⁹

Yet, dress history occasionally finds a wider use in the field of art history. Some art historians, especially those engaged in gender studies, have used dress and jewellery in portraiture as a means to distinguish the sitter’s standing, marital status or social position. For

³³ Newton 1988, p. 5-8.

³⁴ Newton 1988, p. 7.

³⁵ Bridgeman 1986.

³⁶ Frick 2002. Studies on Italian dress from the fourteenth to the early sixteenth century in a similar vein are: Welch 2000, p. 101-119; Mosher Stuard 2006; Welch 2008, p. 241-268. See also: Rublack 2010, on the German area in the early modern period.

³⁷ Frick 2002, p. 149.

³⁸ On painters receiving garments of their sitters to be included in a portrait, see: Jones and Stallybrass 2000, p. 34.

³⁹ Schiaparelli 1921, p. 135-142. This subject is addressed in chapter 3, p. 94-97.

instance, Patricia Simons, and in her footsteps Adrian Randolph, has stressed the importance of representative dress and jewellery during betrothal and marriage ceremonies. Both stated that the presence of lavish jewellery, expensive garments and bound hair in fifteenth-century profile portraits of women signalled the sitter's married status.⁴⁰ Jennifer Craven objected to this line of scholarship, which tends to single-mindedly imagine sumptuously dressed up women as 'victims' of a male dominated society that imposes certain types of decorations on the female body. By contrast, she revisits Burckhardt and argues that dress should be recognized as an instrument of women's individual self-expression.⁴¹

Simons and Craven each singled out one of two distinctly different functions of fashion that were formulated by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. The latter has shown that dress can either serve to express adherence to a certain group, the male dominated family lineage in the case of Simons, or as an expression of individualism, as stressed by Craven.⁴² Can dress in portraiture always be seen in this way, that is, as an immediate reflection of reality? In his study on Renaissance portraits, Lorne Campbell cautioned that ascertaining the status of an anonymous sitter through dress and jewellery can be hazardous. Sitters could have rented garments or the painter may have resorted to workshop props. Moreover, there are sitters who are known to have been wealthy, but were nonetheless portrayed in modest dress.⁴³ Most art historians have supposed a one-to-one relationship between the portrayed garments and those owned and worn by the sitter. However, unless there is an inventory listing dress and jewellery of the sitter that appears in the portrait, we cannot simply assume that the painter depicted the sitter's actual dress.

This issue reaches beyond the dress historical question of whether artworks can be reliable visual sources, although it does intersect with it. Most dress historians, whether they are working from a stylistic, social or economic perspective, do not also scrutinize the sartorial choices in portraiture.⁴⁴ However, as any other work of art, a portrait is in principle a construction in which the sitter is intentionally represented in certain dress. Obviously, this attire does not by nature carry the same meaning as in real social intercourse. For instance, as is argued in chapter 2, to appear in public in a relatively cheap and unadorned garment as depicted in the portrait of Ginevra de' Benci would have been intolerable for a lady of her standing (fig. 1). Yet in her portrait it was apparently acceptable. From an art historical point of view, it is not only relevant to know whether this garment existed or at least could have existed. It is equally important to decipher the message it was meant to convey to the beholder.

The only art historian to date who has written extensively on the relationship between the meaning of dress in the social context and the portrayal of dress in art is Philipp Zitzlsperger. Studying Dürer's self-portrait in a fur coat, currently in the Alte Pinakothek in Munich, he has pleaded for the use of a 'dress historical methodology' within art history.⁴⁵ His proposed methodology takes its lead from Panofsky's well-known model disentangling iconography and iconology and could be described as a 'vestimentary iconology', although not in the allegorical, humanist sense. Zitzlsperger distinguishes dress as insignia and as symbol. An example of the first category is the tiara, immediately identifying the wearer as pope, in

⁴⁰ Simons 1988, p. 9; Randolph 1998, p. 182-200. See also chapter 1, p. 26-29. Compare also: Tinagli 1997, p. 49-53.

⁴¹ Craven 1997, p. 200-204.

⁴² Bourdieu 1979.

⁴³ Campbell 1990, p. 139.

⁴⁴ An exception is Frick's useful last chapter, 'Visualizing the Republic in Art. An Essay on Painted Clothes': Frick 2002, p. 201-219.

⁴⁵ Zitzlsperger 2008. See also: Zitzlsperger 2006, p. 36-51.

ecclesiastical ceremony as much as in art. In short, it means that the fabric, cut and colour of garments are not meaningless. Established by social codes, they denote a person's identity as for instance a nobleman, patrician or merchant. A sermon by the preacher Bernardino of Siena may serve as a fifteenth-century Italian illustration here. In 1427 he fulminated against people wearing dress that did not conform to their identity, condemning for instance merchants who wore short tunics that were only appropriate for soldiers or married women dressing like prostitutes. He then explained:

Well, how do you recognize shops? By their insignia [insigne]. [...] How do you recognise if a woman is good? By her comportment. So you recognize the draper's shop by its sign [segno]. So you recognize the shop of the merchant by its sign. And how do you recognize friars? By their sign too. How do you recognize the monk when he is wearing black, grey or white? By his sign. That what is on the outside shows what is on the inside.⁴⁶

The symbolic and more polyvalent function of dress is best explained through Panofsky's example of the hat, also cited by Zitzlsperger. Panofsky describes meeting an acquaintance on the street who greets him by doffing his hat. From a formal point of view, the beholder distinguishes only line and colour. The recognition of the gentleman raising his hat is a first step of interpretation that Panofsky has designated as iconography. To understand the intention or symbolic value, a salute, the beholder must have a deeper knowledge of customs and culture.⁴⁷ According to Zitzlsperger, an understanding of the symbolic meaning of dress is required in order to uncover its meaning in art. He justly states that dress in art is firmly rooted in the sartorial reality of the beholder, without being a mirror image of it. The art historian's task then is not only to recognize the signal and symbolic functions of dress, but also to reconstruct possible shifts of meaning that occur when the insignia is moved from the social context into art.⁴⁸

The observation that art does not necessarily mimic a vestimentary reality, even when depicting real dress, is worthy of elaboration. To come to a better understanding of the relationship between dress in the social context and dress in painting, I am indebted to Michael Baxandall's concept of 'the period eye'. Baxandall published his classic *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* in 1972. In this study, he showed the importance of various social factors to pictorial style. One of the topics he explored is the 'visual skills' of the patronizing class that originate from their daily lives. He convincingly argued that the beholder brings to the picture his own assumptions, which are modelled by experience and cultural background. For instance, Baxandall is interested in the meaning of the gestures of the angel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary in several Annunciation scenes that are not immediately recognizable to the modern-day beholder. By analysing descriptions of Mary's state of mind during the Annunciation in fifteenth-century sermons and a study of the contemporary ideas on the physical expression of a mental state in the writings of Alberti and Leonardo, amongst others, he is able to connect the movements in painting to sources such as treatises on dance and conduct literature for young girls. Baxandall is obviously not arguing that painters depicted the Virgin as if she were dancing,

⁴⁶ 'A che si cognoscon le buttighe, eh? Alle insegne. [...] A che si conosce una donna quand'ella è buona? alla portatura sua. Così si conosce la bottiga di quello lanaiolo al suo segno. Così il mercatante si conosce la sua bottiga al segno. E frati a che si conoscono? pure al lor segno. El monaco a che il cognosci quandi'elli è o nero o bigio o bianco? al segno loro. Quello di fuore dimostra quello che è dentro.' Bernardino da Siena 1853, p. 247-248. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by the author.

⁴⁷ Panofsky 1939, p. 3-5; Zitzlsperger 2008, p. 153-154.

⁴⁸ Zitzlsperger 2008, p. 146-153.

but he shows how they made use of a commonly known visual language, which included familiar dance movements, to express an emotion or a virtue.⁴⁹ In short, Baxandall's point is that the painter depends on the cultural assumptions, or as he designates it, the 'period eye', of his patron or beholder.

Baxandall's methodology is very helpful when studying dress in painting. Using the idea of the 'period eye', my approach is twofold. On the one hand I studied the use of garments in social interaction. When were garments worn and by whom? What was considered appropriate or inappropriate? Whereas Zitzlsperger especially recommended sumptuary laws as a source for reconstructing the insignia function of dress, I turned to a much wider range of sources, such as conduct literature, ego-documents and poetry. Furthermore, inventories of trousseaux provide an image of the garments that were actually worn. Sumptuary legislation was often ineffective or simply did not apply to the higher social classes who had their portraits painted. On the other hand, I focused in on the painter. How did he make use of dress to convey his message? Is this similar to the sitter's use of dress in reality, and, if not, why?

From the painter's point of view, four major factors influenced his work. First of all, there are the patron's wishes and expectations. Although little is known about the choice of dress in portraits, we may fairly assume that in most cases the patron requested costly, representative attire. Secondly, the depiction may have been influenced by a pictorial tradition, either because the artist followed it or because he broke away from it. The aforementioned portrait of Ginevra de' Benci is a break with the tradition of sumptuously dressed female sitters. Another important factor is workshop practice. Did the painter draw from life or did he use workshop props, design drawings or other resources? Finally, artistic theory is a focal point in this thesis. The representation of beauty, a woman's in particular, is a subject of considerable importance in artists' writings and Leonardo is no exception. He had specific ideas on ornament and female beauty, which he put into practice in his portraits.

4. Aim and structure of the thesis

The first chapter provides an analysis of dress in Florentine female portraiture of the years 1440-1475, the period preceding Leonardo's portrait of Ginevra de' Benci. It includes a survey of extant profile portraits of Florentine women and an introduction to the fashions and luxury fabrics depicted, as well as an assessment of the function and meaning of costly attire in Florentine female portraiture. This is the background for the second chapter, which deals with Leonardo's *Ginevra de' Benci*, exploring the social connotations of Ginevra's humble dress as well as the literary sources and the art-theoretical principles that provide a context for its representation in portraiture (figs. 1-2). The primary question to be answered here is why Leonardo represented Ginevra in plain dress.

Because the available sources for each of the portraits covered in my research are entirely different in nature, I was able to explore Leonardo's depiction of dress from a different angle in each of the respective chapters. Thus, the sources pertaining to the Milanese portraits consist of numerous letters from and to people at the Milanese court and several late fifteenth-century bridal trousseaux, which provide extraordinary insight into the splendour of Milanese court dress. The aim of the third chapter is to make a careful comparison of Milanese fashion and court portraiture on the one hand and Leonardo's *Lady with an Ermine* and *La Belle Ferronnière* on the other hand. This shows the artist's persistent preference for austerity and his

⁴⁹ In a similar vein, Baxandall relates mathematical developments relevant to the fifteenth-century merchant to his religious experience and pictorial style, in particular linear perspective. Baxandall 1972, p. 29-108.

adjustments to existing dress as a consequence of that (figs. 3-4). To grasp Leonardo more fully, his personal dress preferences in real life is analysed against the backdrop of his depiction of dress in art. Are the two related or not?

The fourth chapter is dedicated to Leonardo's relationship with one of his patrons, Isabella d'Este. A substantial volume of correspondence between Isabella and her agents, as well as family members, merchants and artists has survived. This rich material illustrates in great detail the importance of possessing the latest fashion, the costliest jewels and the best art. Isabella's letters also reveal the characteristic way she dealt with artists and artisans. This illuminates the background against which we should view the pressing question of why she accepted being depicted without the finery indispensable to her rank (fig. 5).

In the last chapter I reassess the prevalent hypotheses on Mona Lisa's attire (fig. 6). The recently discovered workshop copy and the scientific analysis of both the *Mona Lisa* and the copy facilitate the reconstruction of the painting process of the dress, from underdrawing to finished painting, and provide further insight into Leonardo's workshop practice. After tracing the pictorial sources of Mona Lisa's dress and hairstyle, I conclude the chapter by relating Leonardo's writing on dress and drapery to *Mona Lisa* to assess the meaning of her dress.

Why Leonardo represented women in plain dress is the question that is at the heart of this research. Might this preference for austerity have been related to his art theory? How did he go about painting dress? How did he respond to his patrons' wishes? As these questions are addressed by studying the portraits chronologically, a picture will emerge of Leonardo's approach to dress in portraiture and how that approach developed over time.

