The Invisibility of the Old Woman Artist:

Van Dyck's Portrait of Sofonisba Anguissola

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In 1624, the twenty-five-year-old Anthony Van Dyck met the ninety-six-year-old painter Sofonisba Anguissola.[1] Van Dyck recorded this encounter in a notebook, in which he sketched Anguissola and scribbled down pieces of advice she gave to him (fig.1). While Van Dyck drew the old artist as wrinkled and hunched, his writings reveal his admiration for Anguissola's vivacity and enthusiasm in sharing her expertise. Based on this sketch, Van Dyck later produced an extremely unusual portrait of the Cremonese artist Anguissola (fig.2). Unlike most of her self-portraits in which she portrays herself as a young woman (fig.3), Van Dyck's painting captures the artist as old. Van Dyck's image records two extraordinary phenomena. Firstly, it represents the rare figure of an extremely successful woman artist. The poet Angelo Grillo acknowledged how Anguissola's talent defied the limitations of her sex, calling her a 'miracle of nature'.[2] Secondly, the portrait depicts her as an old woman. If a highly skilled woman artist such as Anguissola was already considered as an exception by her contemporaries, an image of her as an old woman artist was singular. In their biographies, women artists were often said to die of heartbreak, sadness or were simply denied an existence after the age of fifty, forever bound by identification to their youthful years.[3] Therefore, Van Dyck's simple but blunt depiction of Anguissola's malfunctioning eyes, which nonetheless pay tribute to years of looking, and her relatively unwrinkled, textured skin remains an oddity among the accepted depictions of women artists throughout the whole of the early modern period.

While surviving portraits of elderly women artists are otherwise unheard of, images of old women did circulate both as paintings and prints. Saints Elizabeth and Anne were often depicted as elderly in popular representations of the Holy Family (fig.4).[4] In certain cases, an older nun who was particularly venerated became the subject of a glorifying portrait (fig.5), as did elderly women, especially widows, from elite families (fig.6).[5] Biblical heroines such

[1] R. Soprani:*Le vite de' pittori, scultori ed architetti che hanno lavorato in Roma,* Rome 1674, I, pp.306-10.
[2] A. Grillo:*Rime,* Bergamo, 1589), I, p.120.
[3] G. Vasari:*The Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, Oxford 1991, III, p.341.
[4] E. Campbell:*Old Women and Art in the Early Modern Italian Domestic Interior,* New York, 2016, p.80
[5] Campbell, *op. cit.* (note 4), p.56.

as Judith or Salome were depicted with old maids assisting them (fig.7) and were also a common feature of domestic scenes, as in Anguissola's painting *The Chess Game* (fig.8). Vulgar and comic images of old women presented as witches and hags were also widely spread throughout Italy and Northern Europe (fig.9). The characteristics attributed to old women meant they were never just portrayed as elderly, but that their age was visibly encrusted in preconceived notions. The wrinkles on Saint Elizabeth's face indicated how old she was when she miraculously gave birth to Saint John the Baptist, while exaggeratedly wrinkled breasts and swollen faces ridiculed the vanity of the aged woman. By contrast, Van Dyck presents Anguissola in a portrait in which the signs of ageing are not negatively weighted with such stereotypes. The signs of old age do not invite the viewer to place the sitter within the limited spectrum of pious souls, servants, tokens of lineage or ridiculous figures. Pre-empting Griselda Pollock's desperate call for 'a face and, we should add, a body that would itself be a record of time lived, an embodiment of its history, each mark and fold, each change the register of experience'[6], Van Dyck provides us with an image of a woman whose old age is acknowledged and embraced rather than used to satisfy visual and social conventions - a testimony to a life lived.

Anguissola in old age is the sole subject of the painting. The portrait is closely cropped around the sitter's face, emphasising the stifling effect of her white collar and cream-coloured veil. Her eyes stare out vacantly in different directions, possibly evoking the blindness mentioned in Van Dyck's sketchbook. Nonetheless, they echo an earlier emphasis on the power of her sight. There is thoughtfulness behind the blindness, a testimony to her capacity as an artist. Her pale face is propelled towards the viewer by the black, plain background and her white veil prevents her black habit from blending into the darkness surrounding her. The image is unsettlingly stark. The pyramidal form of her figure occupies the whole canvas as her head nearly touches the top border of the frame. We cannot see what her hands are doing, although her eyes suggest she is not engaged in any kind of manual activity. Escaping the preconceived models of old age in contemporary representations of elderly women, Anguissola is simply depicted as a woman who lives her old age and the slow decay of her body.

[6] G. Pollock: 'The Grace of Time', *Art History 26*, no. 2 (2003), p.20.

The function of the image remains perplexing. If Van Dyck's only aim was to make a portrait in order to record his encounter with another important artist, would not his sketch have sufficed? If, on the other hand, Van Dyck had wanted to create a portrait to prove he had met such an illustrious artist in order to increase his own reputation, wouldn't he have glorified her appearance rather than showing her simply as an old woman? If portraits were designed to celebrate their sitters, an old woman could hardly have been considered an appropriate subject, unless dignified by wealthy possessions or other signs of high status. Why then did Van Dyck represent Anguissola as an "unappealing" old woman and how did his portrait engage with contemporary beliefs about age? By further investigating the singularity of Van Dyck's portrait, this essay seeks to investigate how gendered assumptions about ageing were applied to the rare and 'miraculous' women who were admired in their role as artists. The essay will first question how the meeting between the two artists influenced Van Dyck's depiction of Anguissola. It will then focus on the way in which Van Dyck's stylistic approach to old age makes his portrait of Anguissola resist accepted notions about old women promoted in images produced between the early sixteenth and mid seventeenth-century. Finally, the essay will question the invisibility of old women artists throughout the early modern period.

Because the talent of women artists was often associated with their beauty, grace and virtue, most biographies denied them any existence as old women.[7] For instance, Vasari's biography of Properzia de' Rossi concludes with her dying at a relatively young age, heartbroken by unrequited love.[8] Mancini mistakenly explains how Lavinia Fontana died 'because of the pain of the death of her daughter … at the age of approximately fifty years'[9] - Fontana, in fact, died at the age of sixty-two.[10] By contrast, Raffaele Soprani unusually decides to describe Anguissola's later years in his 1674 biography of the artist. The main reason Soprani mentions Anguissola's old age is because of the visit she received from Van Dyck. Married, blind, and thus unable to paint, Anguissola's later years were otherwise biographically unimportant. Soprani explains how 'Van Dyck used to say that he considered

[7] C. King:*Renaissance Women Patrons: Wives and Widows in Italy, c. 1300-1550* Manchester, 1998, p.138.
[8] Vasari, *op. cit.* (note 3), p.341.
[9] G. Mancini:*Considerazione sulla pittura,* Rome, 1956, p.233.
[10] J. Dabb:*Life Stories of Women Artists 1550-1800,* New York, 2009, p.80.

himself very indebted to have conversed with Sofonisba, and confessed to having received much greater instruction from the words of a blind woman, than from the works of the most esteemed painters'.[11] The validation of Anguissola's expertise by a male, up-and-coming artist justified the rest of Soprani's biography in which he establishes Anguissola as a great artist. Soprani concludes the biography by writing 'I don't know how better to make evident the merit of such a glorious painter than with the testimony of a virtuoso whose works we see idolized by everyone'.[12] This statement enables Soprani to link two different generations of artists, inscribing Anguissola as a lasting influence within the broader narrative of art history.

Rather than wanting to consolidate her already widespread reputation, Van Dyck was more concerned with creating a record of his encounter with Anguissola. He first drew her in the sketchbook he used during his first three years in Italy, between February 1622 and 1625. Out of the sketchbook's 122 pages, only 4 have been identified as preparatory drawings for commissioned works.[13] Rather, Van Dyck used the book as a 'visual diary'[14] in which he drew scenes and artworks he witnessed during his travels. Anguissola appears at the end of the sketchbook, on page 119. Her portrait is literally inscribed within Van Dyck's writings. Anguissola's body floats amongst the lines of handwriting. Her crouched torso propels her figure forward from the text while the same coloured ink unifies sketch and text. Nonetheless, it is clear that the words surround the image, revealing that Van Dyck's first reflex during his encounter with Anguissola was to sketch her, before writing down the advice she gave him.

Van Dyck kept his sketchbook in his possession throughout his life. Found in his workshop after his death, it 'served as a source of inspiration and as a pattern book throughout his career'.[15] Likewise, his later painting of Anguissola is believed to have stayed in his possession until his death, as no contract describing its commission or sale has been found. In fact, the painting was only identified by Oliver Millar in 1969 as Van Dyck's portrait of Anguissola. The lack of information about the production of the painting and provenance contribute to the assumption than Van Dyck never sold or separated himself from the portrait.[16]

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[11] Soprani, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.310.
[12] Soprani, *op. cit.* (note 1), p.310.
[13] X. Salomon: exh. cat. *Van Dyck in Sicily,* London (Dulwich Picture Gallery) 2012, p.72.
[14] R. Blake:*Anthony Van Dyck,* Chicago, 2009, p.6.
[15] Salomon, *op. cit.* (note 13), p.72.
[16] Salomon, *op. cit.* (note 13), pp.74-76.

The rough sides of the canvas inform us that the existing painting was possibly cut down from a larger portrait which would have shown Anguissola's hands and bust, following the pose seen in the sketch.[17] Yet, both drawing and painting suggest that it is unlikely that Van Dyck depicted the older artist engaged in any activity. If this portrait was indeed an image Van Dyck painted for himself, he would not have needed to include any attributes which would have enabled the viewer to immediately identify Anguissola as an artist. Moreover, Van Dyck's desire to witness the state in which he saw Anguissola explains why he would have not depicted her with the equipment she would no longer have been using. Van Dyck creates a personal image that immortalises his own encounter with Anguissola, while making his sitter's old body the central subject of the work.

Van Dyck studied with Rubens from 1613 until his departure for Italy in October 1621.[18] When painting Anguissola in 1624, Van Dyck would have still been under the influence of his master's style and technique. Northern art was extremely popular in Sicily, and Van Dyck would have remained under the influence of works such as Jordan's 1620 *Head of an Old Woman* (fig.10), which recalled Rubens' depiction of wrinkled flesh.[19] Yet, by the time he came to paint Anguissola's portrait, we see how radically he had departed from Rubens' manner of depicting old skin. Rubens' treatment of fleshy skin can be observed in his 1618 *Holy Family*, where the fiery cheeks of the older Saint Elizabeth contrast with the pale uniformity of the Virgin Mary's complexion (fig.11). Rubens used the painterly quality of his brushstrokes to depict the wrinkles stretching over the saint's face. A 1616 oil sketch by the painter of another old woman uses the sitter's profile position to place the viewer directly in front of a large mass of textured, ageing skin (fig.12). The profile allows the painter to clearly depict the woman's sagging double chin, the weight of which is accentuated by the shape of her awkwardly falling veil. Unlike Anguissola's misaligned eyes, Rubens' sitter's gaze is turned downwards so that the skin remains the clearest indicator of age. Bright pink tones contrast with paler yellow hues to create a voluminous face and underline the roundness of the cheek. The yellow allows the flatter parts of the face to recede. The lack of female attributes imbues the sketch with a certain level of androgyny, suggesting how age has de-sexualized the woman. The heavy grey shadow placed beneath her cheekbone and jaw, as

[17] Salomon, *op. cit.* (note 13), pp.74-76.
[18] C. Brown:*Van Dyck 1599-1641,* London, 1999, p.17.
[19] Salomon, *op. cit.* (note 13), p.72.

well as the white highlighting of her nose, the inner corner of her eye and the top of her cheek, further emphasise Rubens' moulding of the face. The artist's focus is on the woman's skin rather than on her clothes or veil. Indeed, both the sitter's dress and veil are heavily outlined and filled in with visible brushstrokes, contrasting with the much smaller and more precise brushwork used for her face.

Painting in his master's workshop, Van Dyck would have studied the way in which Rubens created such textured skin. However, while Van Dyck adapts Rubens' technique of alternating skin tones to emphasise texture, he uses much paler colours which contrast more subtly with one another. This is particularly apparent on Anguissola's right cheek, where Van Dyck only applied a touch of darker paint above her pale cheek-bone to intensify the concavity of face. Closer to her nose, he added a very small amount of red which enriches the surface of her old skin. Anguissola's face thus appears both hollow and uniform, instead of round and fleshy. Unlike Rubens' depiction of Saint Elisabeth, Van Dyck does not rely primarily on wrinkles to mark age. Rather, it is Anguissola's vacant eyes and pale complexion that most reveal her elderliness.

Interestingly, the fact that Van Dyck refrained from using a mass of wrinkles to depict his ninety-six-year-old sitter was not due to the fact he wanted to hide his sitter's age. Rather, it may have acknowledged a piece of advice given to him by the older painter herself. Around his sketch of Anguissola, Van Dyck wrote some of the 'various recommendations' the Cremonese artist had made to him. He noted that she advised him 'not to take the light too high, so that the shadows in the wrinkles of old age should not be too strong'.[20] While in his sketch, Van Dyck recorded his sitter's wrinkles with discreet, thin straight lines, he follows his interlocutor's advice in the painted portrait. The frontal light protects the face from being disfigured by deeply incrusted wrinkles, escaping the fate of Ruben's' *Old Woman with a Basket of Coal* (fig.13).

Van Dyck's decision to apply Anguissola's advice on the depiction of wrinkles suggests that one way for Van Dyck to immortalise his meeting with Anguissola was not only to portray her, but also to directly integrate her technique with his own. Furthermore, this shows his willingness to work against the canons of old age established since the early

[20] Salomon, *op. cit.* (note 13), p.73.

Renaissance. Anguissola's wrinkle-free face places the portrait in an ambiguous position within contemporary gendered discussions on the benefits of not representing wrinkles in women's portraits.

Representations of wrinkle-free faces functioned as a shield against all the stereotypes of old age that circulated widely during the Renaissance. They were therefore adopted by many women who relied on their public image to either justify their power or express their virtue. The consensus on old age was extremely harsh. In his 1586 book, *L'Hospidale de' Pazzi Incurabili*, Tommaso Garzoni included an old woman in his list of 'incurable mad people'. After looking at herself in the mirror, the old woman in question becomes mad and desperate, 'unable to believe this ruined image of herself'.[21] Garzoni's book was later translated into French in 1620 by a doctor, suggesting that pejorative assumptions about old women were accepted as medical certainties.[22] Meanwhile, the French poet François de Maynard stated that 'out of the toothless mouth' of an old woman 'comes a putrid smell which makes the cat sneeze'.[23] The Italian satirist Ruzzante clearly identified the two extents of age that shaped the life of a woman. While her early years resembled 'a lovely flowery bush where all the birds flock to sing', her older years reduced her to 'a skinny dog pursued by swarms of flies who devour her ears'.[24] Performed for the elite circles of Padua and Venice, Ruzzante's plays would have resonated within an extremely ageist society.[25] In her 2008 essay, 'The Old Woman as Critic', Sheila McTighe examines an anecdote told by Annibale Carracci in which he was asked to choose the best out of two paintings.[26] Unable to decide, he turned towards the most unlikely advisor, 'a little old woman'.[27] Because of her sex and age, the painting she preferred would by definition be the weakest of the pair. The presumed foolishness of the *vechiarella* and her inability to provide a worthy verdict underlines how stupidity and misjudgement were understood as fundamental characteristics of old women.

[21] T. Garzoni:*L'Hospidale de' Pazzi Incurabili,* Venice, 1594, 7v-8r.
[22] P. Sohm:*The Artist Grows Old,* Cambridge, 2009, p.20.
[23] G. Minois: *History of Old Age,* Chicago, 1989*,* p.249.
[24] Minois, *op cited* (note 23), p.240.
[25] F. Fido: 'An Introduction to the Theatre of Angelo Beolco', *Renaissance Drama 6* (1973), pp.203-218.
[26] S. McTighe, 'The Old Woman as Art Critic',*Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes71* (2008), pp.239-260.
[27] S. McTighe, *op. cit.* (note 26), p.239.

Old men were also targeted as ridiculous and laughable figures. Ruzzante commented that old age, whether attacking a woman or a man's body, was in both cases 'a swamp where every sort of unhealthy water gathers'[28], and Baldissare Castliglione opened the second book of his *Libro del Cortegiano* by criticising old people for living in a state of nostalgic abandonment, longing for 'bygone times' and constantly 'denouncing the present'.[29] But it was women who were particularly targeted as victims of old age because of their alleged vanity. Indeed, Garzoni's old character turns mad because she is a woman whose vanity and self-image has been shaken. The same pattern re-appears in Quentin Matsys' *Ugly Duchess* (fig.14), where the old woman's vanity blinds her from realising how monstrous she has become. This contrasts pointedly with Van Dyck's treatment of Anguissola's blindness, which was not symbolically caused by vanity but by a lifetime of serious looking.

Leonardo da Vinci also distinguished between the ideal depiction of old women and old men. While 'old men ought to be represented with slow heavy movement', 'bending low with the head leaning forwards', Da Vinci stated that 'old women should be represented with eager, swift and furious gestures, like infernal furies'.[30] While his ideal depiction of an old man acknowledges a decaying body, its calmness and dignity allow the man to take on the role of a wise, experienced elder. By contrast, Leonardo presents the elderly female as a hysterical madwoman. A woman's decaying body was associated with her loss of beauty, virtue and even sanity. Consequently, the portraits made of wise and dignified old masters left no room for 'old mistresses'.[31]

Van Dyck's decision to apply Anguissola's advice on not depicting wrinkles was clearly not an attempt to suggest that she is actually a young woman because her age is certainly made visible. Rather, the lack of wrinkles prevents Anguissola from looking grotesque, and minimises the chance that the image would have her categorised as a witch or other negative female figure. Whilst in Sicily, Van Dyck drew a witch in his sketchbook (fig.15). He might have seen her in 1624 in front of the Church of San Domenico, during the only public humiliation ceremony performed while Van Dyck was in Palermo. Archives inform us that a witch was one of the four punished heretics and it is possible that witnessing

[28] Minois, *op cited* (note 23), p.241.
[29] B. Castiglione:*il libro del Cortegiano,* New Work, 2002, p.66.
[30] *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci,* ed. J. Richter, London, 1970, n.1163.
[31] R. Parker and G. Pollock:*Old Mistresses,* London, 1981.

this ordeal may have occasioned Van Dyck's sketch.[32] The large, cloaked, wrinkled figure and hunchback figure wears a pointed hat decorated with the figure of the devil. The Spanish Inquisition was particularly relentless in its condemnation of witchcraft, and Sicily, under Spanish control, was a major centre for the exposure of witches.[33] The sketch presents the kind of stereotype against which Van Dyck worked when depicting the not too heavily wrinkled, but still clearly ageing Anguissola.

While wrinkles were evidence of an elderly man's wisdom and experience, the absence of wrinkles in a woman's portrait asserted her capacity to escape the indignities of old age. Isabella d'Este was very satisfied with Titian's second portrait of her, in which her sixty-two-year-old-self was idealised as a teenage girl (fig.16). Isabella d'Este sent Titian an earlier portrait painted by Francesco Francia, as well as precise written instructions, so the artist could portray her in a manner she thought befitted her public identity and flattered her private vanity. Titian's painting was 'not really a portrait at all but the ultimate derivation of the games of likeness, identity and creative invention' which revealed the ideal traits Isabella wanted to embody.[34] This idealistic portrayal of a powerful woman as young was common in images of ruling women, who needed to assert their power as monarchs while justifying their capacity to rule despite their gender. Writing about *The Rainbow Portrait* of Queen Elizabeth, Mary E. Hazard notes that the queen's 'Mask of Youth' asserts that the 'monarch lives in a perpetual present' (fig.17).[35] Nicholas Hilliard, Queen Elizabeth's official miniaturist, reports how the monarch specifically asked to sit for her portraits 'in the open ally of a goodly garden, where no tree was neere, nor anye shadowe at all'.[36] This would have prevented any unflattering facial markings, a vital aesthetic decision as any wrinkle would have compromised Elisabeth's power as the absolute monarch. Most contemporary portraits of Elizabeth present this ideal.[37] The flatness of the paintings is due to the absence of any identifiable source of light, as well as to the accurate depiction of the mask of her white, pasty made-up face. Such fidelity to the lie of the mask accounts for the queen's toneless and unwrinkled face.

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[32] Salomon, *op. cit.* (note 13), p.20.
[33] Salomon, *op. cit.* (note 13), p.20.
[34] S. Hickson: 'To see ourselves as others see us', *Renaissance Studies23* (2009), p.305.
[35] M.E. Hazard, 'The Case for "Case" in Reading Elizabethan Portraits', *Mosaic23* (1990), p.62.
[36] N. Hilliard: 'Art of Limming', c. 1600, in R. Strong, *Nicholas Hilliard,* London, 1975, p.24.
[37] D. Fischlin: 'Political Allegory, Absolutist Ideology, and the "Rainbow Portrait" of Queen Elizabeth I', *Renaissance Quarterly50* (1997), p.179.

Unlike female rulers who had to legitimise themselves as capable of fulfilling a role normally consigned to men, an aristocratic woman could sometimes assert her old age in order to suggest the strength of her lineage, or to contribute to her family's reputation. These portraits of old matrons, who were often widowed, became increasingly widespread throughout the seventeenth century,[38] and Van Dyck played an important role in establishing their popularity.[39] In 1621, he produced a full-length portrait of an elderly Genovese lady (fig.6). Seated in a wooden armchair, she gazes directly and enigmatically out at the viewer, her slight smirk suggesting her awareness of her own elevated status. The painting is dark and bare. The woman's black dress merges into the indecipherable dark background and she wears no eye-catching jewellery or precious pearls. Nonetheless, the lush rendition of her velvet dress, the colourful carpet beneath her feet and the fine detailing of her ruff all convey the woman's wealth. Her age suggests that she is the progenitor of a rich and successful family, emphasised by the doric columns, sign of a venerable heritage. The sitter's red cheek, smooth hands and slightly greying hair minimise the physical signs of old age, without denying it completely. The portrait is therefore rather an image of a noble or wealthy individual than a depiction of an old woman.

Another way to understand Van Dyck's portrait of Anguissola is through the veil she wears. As Erin J. Campbell explains, old women would sometimes identify with the figure of the pious woman who, having fulfilled her role as progenitor, was bound to a life of chastity and piety.[40] In his 1546 manual, *De l'institutione de la Femina Christiana*, the author Juan Vives suggests that once a woman was 'freed from earthly cares', she should 'turn the eyes of her body to the earth, to which she must render her body', in order to 'raise all her sense, her mind, and soul to the Lord'.[41] This view was re-asserted by the Venetian engraver Cesare Vecellio, who insisted that old women should renounce 'the vanities of the world' by 'dedicating themselves to the life of the spirit', as well as by adopting a 'simple, pious dress'.[42] Saintly figures such as Saint Elisabeth or Saint Anne would have emphasised this ideal.

Anguissola's costume and pose recall images such as the 1557 portrait of Lucrezia Vertova by Giovanni Battisti Moroni (fig.5). Campbell describes this painting as depicting

[38] Campbell, *op. cit.* (note 4), p.100.
[39] J. Lawson: *Van Dyck,* Michigan, 2009, p.77.
[40] Campbell, *op. cit.* (note 4), p.52.
[41] J. Vives:*De l'institutione de la Femina Christiana,* Leiden, 1998, p.197.
[42] C. Vecellio:*The Clothing of the Renaissance World,* London, 2008, p.136.

the moment where 'female old age emerges as a stage of sanctity'.[43] Moreover, Anguissola's dark habit also evokes depictions of widowed women, whom Vives suggested should likewise dedicate themselves to a spiritual existence.[44] Anguissola's black outfit and tight white collar are also indicative of the Spanish Hapsburg court's preferred style of dress, which would have been worn in Sicily.[45] Therefore, we could argue that Anguissola's costume functions as much as a political and geographical indicator than as a sign of widowhood or piety.

The Platonic idea that the old woman's body could free itself from 'earthly cares' contrasts with the Aristotelian description of the physical decrepitude of the old individual. Sohm underlines this difference by comparing the ageing body's 'physical, mental, and psychological decline' with its 'spiritual liberation from its corporeal limitations'.[46] Van Dyck's portrait of Anguissola bridges these 'two incompatible views'[47], as her old eyes reveal her as physically present, but her lost gaze frees her from the earthly realm. Indeed, her ageing body is expressed through her marbled skin, with her pale complexion intensifying the darkness of her bulging, malfunctioning eyes. Her blindness is seen in the slightly off-centre reflection of light in her right eye, which fixes her stare in perpetual emptiness. Jean-Paul Sartre defined the gaze as the action through which an individual understands himself as a subject in relation to another person.[48] The viewer of Van Dyck's portrait is confronted by the unsettling presence of a body that does not acknowledge its role as the subject of the painting, nor as the object of the viewer's gaze. Anguissola's eyes enable her to resist the objectification inherent to portraiture, as her blind gaze cannot register the artist painting her, nor the viewer observing her. Impenetrable, her eyes offer no access to her soul. Her eyes both reveal her decaying body and her absence from any form of engagement which would bind her to the earthly realm her viewer occupies. She becomes both a physical ageing body and metaphysical presence.

Van Dyck's relaxed style could suggest the sitter's imminent passage to Heaven, and escape from her earthbound life. While Anguissola's eyes reveal both her presence and her

[43] Campbell, *op. cit.* (note 4), p.9.
[44] Vives, *op. cit.* (note 41), p.197.
[45] J. Colomer:*Spanish Fashion,* Madrid, 2014, pp.77-105.
[46] Sohm, *op. cit.* (note 22), p.7.
[47] Sohm, *op. cit.* (note 22), p.7.
[48] J. P. Sartre:*L'Être et le Néant,* Paris, 1943.

absence from the earthly realm, the looseness of Van Dyck's brushstrokes intensify the sensation of his sitter's liberation from the material world he was accustomed to painting. Anguissola's sharp eyes emerge from the same broad brushstrokes Van Dyck uses for the rest of the portrait. The veil is coarsely painted and heavily outlined. Rather than suggesting the fluidity of its material, Van Dyck simply fills in its contours and the supposedly transparent part of the veil is actually depicted using an opaque dark grey. The border of the collar disappears behind the veil. Her black dress is even less detailed, adorned only by two brown bands. Compared to the richness of the black fabric in Van Dyck's *Genovese Lady,* Anguissola's black dress consigns her body to the dark background.

Therefore, while Van Dyck made Anguissola's age visible, his portrait paradoxically reveals the invisibility of old women. Painting it for himself, Van Dyck must have wanted to portray the artist as she really appeared in order to create an accurate souvenir of their encounter. He depicts her as an old woman, but, unusually, unburdened by any of the roles normally assigned to elderly females in the early modern period. Van Dyck reveals Anguissola uninvolved in and unconcerned by the world she cannot see. The portrait presents her as unapologetically old while dismissing preconceived assumptions about age. Anguissola's ageing body binds her to the viewer's material world, yet Van Dyck's depiction suggests a sense of remove from that world. Facing us without seeing us, Van Dyck's Anguissola defies the ignored existences and depictions of old women artists.

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List of Illustrations:

Please note all images were accessed through the museums' respective websites.

- Figure 1: Anthony Van Dyck, *Sketch of Sofonisba Anguissola accompanied by text*, 1624, ink on paper, 19.9cm x 15.8 cm. British Museum, London.

- Figure 2: Anthony Van Dyck, Portrait of Sofonisba Anguissola, c. 1624, oil on canvas, 41.6cm x 33.7cm. Sackville Collection, Knole.

- Figure 3: Sofonisba Anguissola, *Self-Portrait at the Easel Painting a Devotional Panel*, 1556, oil on canvas, 66cm x 57cm. Muzeum-Zamek, Lancut.

- Figure 4: Orazio Borgianni, *The Holy Family with Saint Elizabeth*, c. 1609. oil on canvas, 257cm x 202cm. Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome.

- Figure 5: Giovanni Battista Moroni, *Lucrezia Algliardi Vertova*, 1557, oil on canvas, 91.4cm x 68.6cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

- Figure 6: Anthony Van Dyck, *Portrait of a Genovese Lady*, c. 1621, oil on canvas, 203cm x 118,3 cm. Gemäldegalerie, Berlin.

- Figure 7: Caravaggio, *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, c.1598, oil on canvas, 145cm x 195cm, Palazzo Barberini, Rome.

- Figure 8: Sofonisba Anguissola, *The Chess Game*, 1555, oil on canvas, 72cm x 97cm, National Museum, Poznan.

- Figure 9: Albrecht Dürer, *The Witch,* c. 1500, engraving, 117.7cm x 7.2 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

- Figure 10: Jacob Jordaens, *Head of an Old Woman*, c. 1620, oil on wood, 58.5cm x 65.5cm. Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nancy.

- Figure 11: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Holy Family with Saint Elizabeth,* c. 1618, oil on canvas, 151cm x 113cm. Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.

- Figure 12: Peter Paul Rubens, *Sketch of an Old Woman*, c. 1616, oil on canvas, 49cm x 32cm. Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

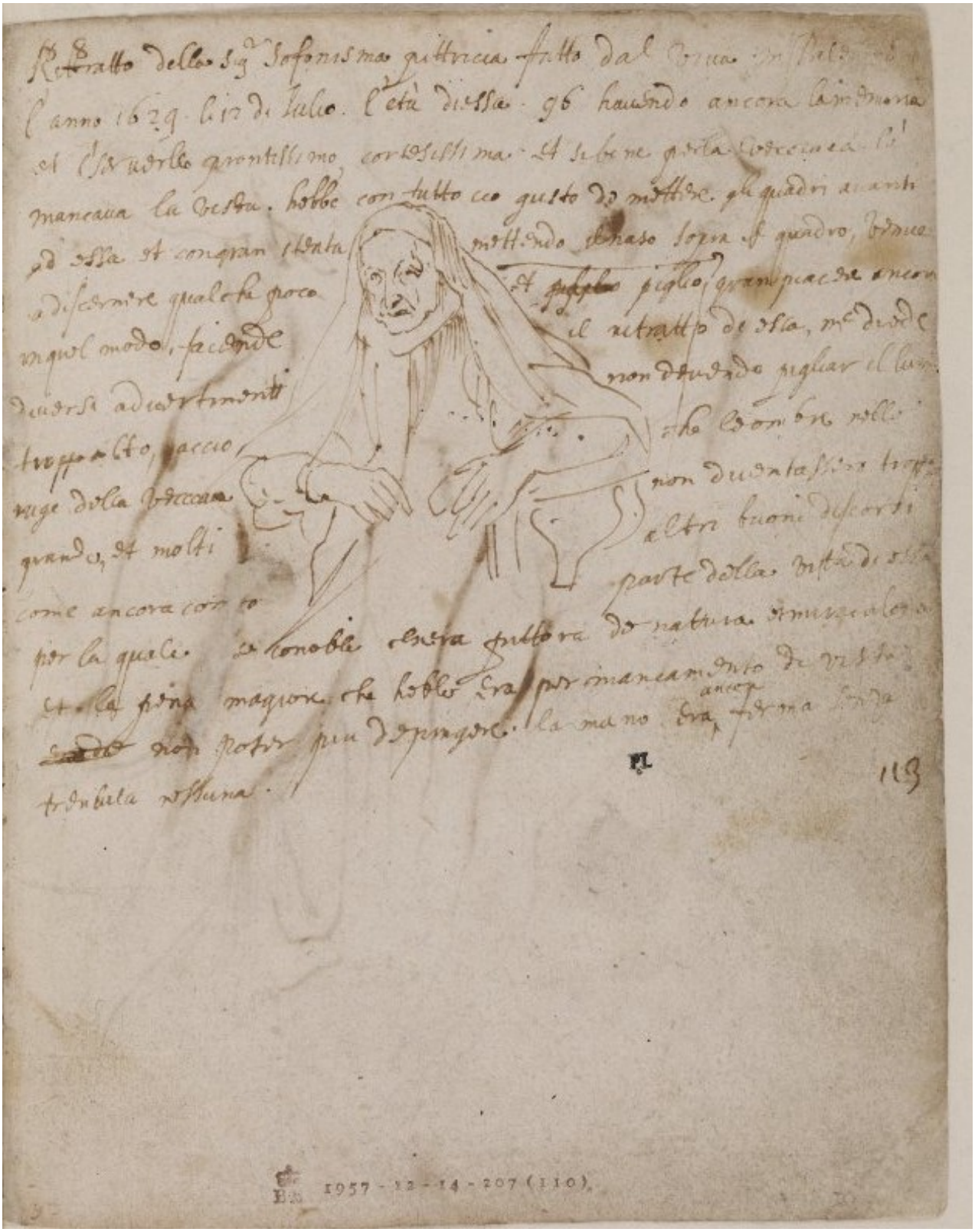
- Figure 13: Peter Paul Rubens, *Old Woman with a Basket of Coal,* c. 1616, oil on canvas, 116cm x 92cm. Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden.

- Figure 14: Quentin Matsys, *The Ugly Duchess,* c. 1513, oil on oak, 64.2cm x 45,4cm, National Gallery, London.

- Figure 15: Anthony Van Dyck, *Witch*, 1624, ink on paper, 19.9cm x 15.8 cm, British Museum, London.

- Figure 16: Titian, Portrait of Isabella d'Este, c. 1534, oil on canvas, 125.5cm x 87.5cm. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

- Figure 17: Attributed to Isaac Oliver, *The Rainbow Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I*, oil on canvas, 127cm x 99.1cm. Collection of the Marquess of Salisbury, Hatfield House.



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