



front cover yet merits not one word of exposition. The author gently criticizes those art historians who, he believes, endow artists like Hans Holbein the Younger and Anthony van Dyck with a well-nigh mystical virtuosity manifestly unattainable by others, to whom they have consequently paid scant attention. But he himself falls victim to insidious value judgments when he writes of those who “lacked [Holbein’s] skill or imagination” (5). Presuming that an anonymous (to us) Lincolnshire painter’s portrait of a notable “was hardly, in its subtlety or composition, an elegant work” (90), the author does not illustrate it, thereby denying readers the opportunity to form their own opinions. There were varying provincial standards, varying metropolitan standards, and yet apparently no failures of representation. The painters under examination possessed an expertise that distinguished them as a group, and it is both unnecessary and unproductive to hint at deficiencies. Nevertheless, this book fruitfully documents why and how these artisans’ wide-ranging services were sought and carried out.

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Playful Pictures: Art, Leisure, and Entertainment in the Venetian Renaissance Home. Chriscinda Henry.

University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2021. xii + 268 pp. \$104.95.

Chriscinda Henry’s *Playful Pictures* effectively unravels the dynamic meaning of pictures displayed in Venetian Renaissance homes. The book points to the rhetorical function of inventive subject matter in collections and the mutual reinforcement of cultural and artistic practices. Its argument addresses a visual interplay that, depending on a picture’s audience and location within an elite residence, could reflect multifaceted forms of pleasure and entertainment—high and low. Henry’s scholarship underscores the interconnectedness of the early modern world, citing visual, literary, and performative examples that generated dialogic exchanges with collected imagery. And her book reveals the ways in which collectors and artists intentionally blurred distinctions between art and life in Renaissance Venice. Henry presents readers with a refined approach to early modern studies, and she accomplishes this with an ever-present keenness of eye anchored to the work of art, as she interweaves the intricate sociohistorical, cultural backdrop from which the images emerge.

Centered on Vittore Carpaccio’s once unified panel painting of *Two Women on a Balcony* and *Fishing and Fowling on the Lagoon*, chapter 1 convincingly asserts that the painting’s function as a practical household furnishing in the liminal space between *studiolo* and bedroom parallels its duality as a pictorial comedy of manners for female and male audiences. The following two chapters highlight the interests of select young, male clients belonging to elite fraternities in Venice known as *compagnie della calza*. As

Henry asserts in chapter 2, Titian's *Pastoral Concert*, among other printed and painted works, self-reflexively alludes to the owners'/beholders' erudition and the classically informed poetic (and musical) enactments of virtuosi within Venetian homes. Moving chronologically forward, chapter 3 examines typologically similar works often displayed in a bedroom, such as Bernardino Licinio's now missing *Group Portrait (Love Triangle)*, to show the blurred lines between the imaginative characters played out in theatrical comedy and the leisurely pastimes of the individuals who owned and beheld them. In analogous fashion, the artists of these pictures collapsed the subversive character types depicted (mismatched and illicit lovers, paramours, and women with questionable morals) with the painting conventions of portraiture. Related to this, yet taking a different approach to the collecting and display of art, chapter 4 examines three well-inventoried homes, including that of a successful courtesan, and each collection's engagement with the celebrated and celebratory season of carnival within the home's *portego*. This distinctive Venetian space, a central multifunctional room, could accommodate the entertainment of numerous guests. As Henry demonstrates, the ludic art displayed and the musical performances enacted within the room mutually reinforced sociable festivity and the owner's identity.

The book's approach and content expand the fields of art history and early modern studies. It exemplifies high-quality research translated into accessible writing, and its multidisciplinary and intermedia analyses hold value for scholars from a broad range of fields. Henry's argument regarding the intentional playfulness of images to elicit multidimensional and dynamic readings contributes to longstanding scholarly considerations of select well-studied imagery that moves away from singular iconological readings. In keeping with her argument, imagery forms the centerpiece of each chapter; given the strength of Henry's visual analyses, the works of art function as *tableaux vivants*—living pictures—that bring the argument to life. In addition, the book's transparent yet sophisticated methodological approach and visible reference to a range of sources, both primary documents and influential secondary scholarship, make it an excellent resource and model for graduate students and advanced undergraduates. In conclusion, and worth emphasizing given the merit of this publication, *Playful Pictures* presents a compelling argument and fresh insights into collecting, collectors, inventive pictures, and the vibrant culture of leisure and entertainment in which Venetian elites engaged across the sixteenth century. Just as Henry notes that Carlo Ridolfi, the seventeenth-century art critic and biographer, called pictures "delights of the home," so too Henry's book delights as it engages readers and advances understandings of the Renaissance and Venice.

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