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Drawing Comparisons: Cellini’s Perseus Liberating Andromeda and the Paragone Debate

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Résumé de l'article

L'analyse porte sur Persée libérant Andromède, relief en bronze qui fait partie intégrante de l'ensemble sculpté entre 1545 et 1554 par Benvenuto Cellini pour la Loggia dei Lanzi de Florence. Ce relief, rajouté à la fin du projet, offre la clef de la signification théorique et polémique du colossal Persée monté sur son piédestal orné de figures. En bas du monument, encadrée de marbre comme un tableau, la Libération d'Andromède fait ainsi entrer le spectateur avisé dans la querelle de l'époque sur la valeur respective des arts, le fameux débat du paragone, mais elle ne se borne pas à une simple évocation de ce débat, et elle n'affirme pas seulement l'inferiorité de la peinture par rapport à la sculpture. Le nu mystérieux et sans profondeur du centre du relief fonctionne en tant qu'agent provocateur pour lancer une comparaison entre la sculpture en relief, qui ressemble à du dessin, et une autre sculpture plus en profondeur comme celle d'Andromède à ses côtés. Cette comparaison peu flatteuse pour les arts bidimensionnels concerne aussi l'architecture, comprise par Cellini comme un art de la surface apparenté au dessin et à la perspective. Pour l'orfèvre-sculpteur qu'est Cellini, la preuve à la fois de la bonne peinture et de la bonne sculpture réside dans leur capacité à libérer la beauté plastique et humaine des contraintes de la surface. Enchaînée au mur littéralement et figurativement, son Andromède en relief illustre certes le plus haut degré de la peinture, mais en même temps l'impuissances et les limites de cet art féminin. Si l'autobiographie et les écrits théoriques de Cellini donnent bien à la sculpture en ronde bosse la première place parmi les arts, encore fallait-il prouver sans recours aux mots, donc à un autre art, cette supériorité : c'est ce que fait voir, et de façon systématique, le monument du Persée, à condition d'en considérer l'ensemble.

Citer cet article

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Résumé
L’analyse porte sur Persée libérateur Andromède, relief en bronze qui fait partie intégrante de l’ensemble sculpté entre 1545 et 1554 par Benvenuto Cellini pour la Loggia dei Lanzi de Florence. Ce relief, rajouté à la fin du projet, offre la clef de la signification théorique et polémique du colossal Persée monté sur son piedestal orné de figures. En bas du monument, encadrée de marbre comme un tableau, la Libération d’Andromède fait ainsi entrer le spectateur avisé dans la querelle de l’époque sur la valeur respective des arts, le fameux débat du paragone, mais elle ne se borne pas à une simple évocation de ce débat, et elle n’affirme pas seulement l’infériorité de la peinture par rapport à la sculpture. Le nu mystérieux et sans profondeur du centre du relief fonctionne en tant qu’agent provocateur pour lancer une comparaison entre la sculpture en relief qui ressemble à du dessin, et une autre sculpture plus en profondeur comme celle d’Andromède à ses côtés. Cette comparaison peu flatteuse pour les arts bidimensionnels concerne aussi l’architecture, comprise par Cellini comme un art de la surface apparenté au dessin et à la perspective. Pour l’orfèvre-sculpteur qu’est Cellini, la preuve à la fois de la bonne peinture et de la bonne sculpture réside dans leur capacité à libérer la beauté plastique et humaine des contraintes de la surface. Enchaînée au mur littéralement et figurativement, son Andromède en relief illustre certes le plus haut degré de la peinture, mais en même temps l’impuissance et les limites de cet art féminin. Si l’autobiographie et les écrits théoriques de Cellini donnent bien à la sculpture en ronde bosse la première place parmi les arts, encore fallait-il prouver sans recours aux mots, donc à un autre art, cette supériorité: c’est ce que fait voir, et de façon systématique, le monument du Persée, à condition d’en considérer l’ensemble.

The focus of this essay is the function and significance of the bronze bas-relief (fig. 1) that formed part of Benvenuto Cellini’s *Perseus and Medusa*, the sculptural ensemble that has occupied the east arcade of the Loggia dei Lanzi in Florence’s Piazza della Signoria since it was unveiled in 1554 (fig. 2).1 Our aim is to assess the ways in which the relief, as a gloss representing art forms other than sculpture, can be seen to impact, enhance, and alter the art-theoretical content of Cellini’s *Perseus and Medusa* as a whole.

The depiction of *Perseus Liberating Andromeda* was Cellini’s final contribution to his public masterwork and may be considered the finishing touch to a monumental statuary group supported by an elaborate base or pedestal. The relief was not cast until 1552, whereas *Medusa* and the colossal *Perseus* were cast in June of 1548 and during the winter of 1549, respectively.2 Although *Perseus and Medusa*’s white marble base was designed but not actually carved by Cellini, the smaller bronze statues in its four niches are entirely his work, and date to April of 1552; that is, they are believed to have preceded the relief (fig. 3).3 The curious bronze relief does not seem to have figured in the early plans for the monument, nor does Cellini discuss it in any detail in his autobiographical writings.

Descriptions of the *Perseus and Medusa* on its marble base, including that of Giorgio Vasari in the 1568 edition of the *Lives*, often also omit to mention Cellini’s *Perseus Liberating Andromeda*.4 Photographs, old and more recent, usually exclude it.5 And perhaps such an omission is justified, because the work in relief appended to the Loggia’s parapet beneath the pedestal seems an unnecessary footnote to a sufficiently embellished and elaborate ensemble. Moreover, the visually expendable relief constitutes a radical departure from the type of art that towers above it, for the 90 by 81 cm bronze panel is framed in marble as though it were a painting, and, like poetry, it relates a story unfoldng in time. No such sustained narrative intention has been discerned in the mythological figures of the *Perseus and Medusa*.

Like an open book, the relief’s narrative splits down the middle into different pages, which, despite the semblance of unity, refer to two chronologically distinct but contiguous Ovidian passages. First, on the left-hand side, *Perseus* plunges earthward to save Andromeda from the monster as, on the facing side, the anger of her fiancé and his men gathers momentum, heralding the battle to come. The relief’s later date, bookish character, and differing form (relief) and genre (narrative) suggest that it functions as a commentary or gloss on the *Perseus*, one analogous to that afforded by Cellini’s autobiography, the *Vita* (1558–66) or his treatises on the arts, the *Trattati* (1565–67). The expansion of Cellini’s artistic practice into the literary domains of narration and art theory is symptomatic of the phase of his career following the completion of his major work of sculpture, the *Perseus and Medusa*.6

Visible accomplishment followed by verbal explanation is a leitmotif of Cellini’s writings about his art. His five-hundred folio autobiography contains several instances of the artist first allowing his jewellery and sculpture to speak for itself, to make an aesthetic impact before it is glossed for admiring patrons.7 Narration, explication, and evaluation of one’s life and work is subsequent to actual achievement and ought not to be necessary; states Cellini about the writing of his autobiography: “It is true enough that men who have worked hard and shown a touch of genius have already proved their worth to the world. They have shown that they are capable men and they are famous, and perhaps that should be sufficient.”8 If the relief—like
Cellini’s autobiography—comments and promotes however reluctantly the works that preceded it, how then is this bronze “text” to be read? What did it communicate about the artist’s deeds, the sculptures above it, whose worth and fame had already been proven? 

Asking and answering these questions represents a task different from that of examining the iconographic treatment of the Ovidian myth pictured in the relief in the terms set out in 1939 by Erwin Panofsky in his famous methodological schema. Instead of matching Renaissance literary themes to likely counterparts in the visual arts, the present study explores the theoretical and functional relationships among three units of an individual goldsmith-sculptor’s singular work of art. Accordingly, texts written by Cellini rather than external sources are privileged as supporting documents. And because the present essay’s aim is to determine how an artist theorizes his artistic creation non-verbally, one might say sculpturally, through the addition of a very specific element to a complex ensemble, considerable emphasis is placed on the analytical gaze of the viewer and on purely visual aspects of Cellini’s ensemble in its setting. At stake is the intrinsic coherence and auto-sufficiency of Cellini’s Perseus and Medusa, an aesthetic object so resolutely self-reliant that it supplies the standards by which it is to be judged.

Rather than denying the existence of more traditional and textual iconographic content, such as the relief’s commemoration of the reign of Cosimo de’ Medici symbolized by Perseus (the Medici prince) rescuing Andromeda (Florence), our approach to Cellini’s Perseus Liberating Andromeda postulates multiple layers of meaning. However, in terms of effective Medici propaganda, neither the Perseus on its base nor the relief has ever functioned very satisfactorily, as several commen-
tutors have pointed out.\textsuperscript{11} John Shearman deemed the work's general opacity of content to be an attribute of a mannerist or aestheticizing style, disdainful of political or literary meaning. As a consequence of this position, Shearman's classic \textit{Mannerism} and his later essays stopped short of analyzing in detail symbolic elements of the relief or the ensemble.\textsuperscript{12} Michael Cole's \textit{Cellini and the Principles of Sculpture} has the considerable merit of being the first study to tackle \textit{Perseus Liberating Andromeda} as both richly signifying and as art about art. Drawing predominantly upon Aristotle, Cole reads the relief as an allegory of the processes of an art of sculpture whose aim is virtue. Central to his interpretation is the designation of the naked man who runs toward the spectator shouting and gesticulating as fury, a divine or demonic poetic frenzy\textsuperscript{13} (fig. 4).

The running figure has long been the stumbling block for a traditional iconographic interpretation because, although the mythological Greek hero Perseus, the sacrificed heroine Andromeda, and Andromeda's grieving parents can be identified easily, no consensus has been reached concerning his identity. He has been labelled variously as Andromeda's jealous uncle Phineus, as a Medici forefather (hence the child holding his hand), as a second Perseus, and even as an alter ego of the artist. If, instead of hastening to put a name or abstract label to this figure—a relatively minor actor of Cellini's complicated sculptural ensemble in the piazza—it is considered as a locus of iconological tension akin to Aby Warburg's nymph,\textsuperscript{14} the previously puzzling detail unlocks a system of formal expression. The mute discourse launched visually by the nameless male nude turns out to be less a philosophical exposition on the mental and technical processes of making art than a polemical demonstration of the superiority of the art of sculpture. In other words, the addition of the relief causes the ensemble to function

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image1.png}
\caption{Figure 2. Benvenuto Cellini, \textit{Perseus and Medusa}, 1545-54, view of the ensemble. Bronze and marble. Loggia dei Lanzi, Florence (Photograph by David Finn).}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{image2.png}
\caption{Figure 3. Benvenuto Cellini, base of Perseus and Medusa, 1545-54, view with Jupiter and Minerva. Marble and bronze, 199 cm. Now in the Bargello Museum, Florence (Photograph by David Finn).}
\end{figure}
effectively as a polemical contribution to the paragone (comparison) debate.\(^{15}\)

The controversy surrounding the ranking and relative importance of the different arts was lively at mid-century when Cellini returned to Florence, and would become again quite bitter at the time of Michelangelo’s funeral in 1564.\(^{16}\) Alessandro Nova has demonstrated that several sixteenth-century fresco cycles participate as gemahlte Theorie (painted theory) in the paragone debate and has suggested that Cellini’s marble Narcissus refers to it as well.\(^{17}\) Consequently, there is ample cause to consider the ensemble of Cellini’s work for the piazza as “sculpted theory.” The question for the sculptor then becomes how to defend his own art without recourse to another art form and the implicit recognition of its authority. How can forms be made to speak without the superimposition or substitution of language as a superior conceptual vehicle? What exactly is Cellini’s nude male silently shouting as he rushes headlong toward confrontation with the viewer of the relief?

Sculpture and Drawing

Although the running man’s uncertain identity, inappropriate nudity, and display of excessive emotion have tended to capture the attention of commentators, the manner in which the figure is sculpted is perhaps its most meaningful aspect.\(^{18}\) One art historian, Charles Avery, has observed that the naked figure “is scarcely in relief at all” and that its treatment is “deliberately, almost perversely, anti-spatial.”\(^{19}\) For Avery, Cellini’s running man illustrates the draughtsmanly characteristics of a type of Renaissance relief sculpture whose initial form was obtained...
by cutting into a wax surface with a sharp implement. He cites
Donatello and Baccio Bandinelli as other Florentine sculptors
who favoured this type of “drawing” in wax.

The shallow relief, graphic quality, and sketchiness of Cel-
lini’s figure evokes thus the work of two other Renaissance
sculptors, Donatello and Bandinelli, both associated in different
ways with the art of drawing and connected to Cellini’s compet-
tive efforts on the piazza.20 Cellini affirms that Perseus and Me-
dusa was intended to be compared to, and to rival in a worthy
way (degnamente a paragone), Donatello’s Judith and Holofernes,
which resided at that time at the other end of the Loggia.21 Do-
natello, praised by Cellini as a “true painter,”22 was known for
his flattened relief, or rilievo schiacciato, and he had used bronze
bas-reliefs to decorate the triangular base of his Judith and Ho-
lofernes. Since Cellini’s base contained no sculptural relief ex-
cuted by his own hand, the addition of a relief in bronze to the
parapet under the base of the Perseus created an additional point
of comparison between the sculpture of the fifteenth-century
Florentine master and Cellini’s sixteenth-century work. More
pointedly, the running figure at its center challenged the ear-
lier sculptor in kind by mimicking the graphic and pictorial
qualities of relief sculpture seen for example in Donatello’s St.
George and the Dragon for Orsanmichele (fig. 5). Furthermore
the adjunction of the Andromeda relief with its “sketched”
figures allowed Cellini to import art forms other than relief
sculpture per se into the statement made by his Perseus in the
paragone debate.

If Donatello was a draughtsman in stone and metal, Bandi-
nelli prided himself for his drawing on paper. Bandinelli, whose
father had been a goldsmith, staked his claim to be the foremost
sculptor in Florence on his talents as draughtsman and favoured
instruction based on the graphic arts.23 His autobiography, the
Memorie, makes explicit his preference for drawing, writing,
and even painting over the art of sculpture.24 A self-portrait
painted in the 1530s and now in the Isabella Stuart Gardner
Museum in Boston25 shows the sculptor dressed as a nobleman
and holding a preparatory sketch for his larger than life marble
Hercules and Cacus, which had stood opposite Michelangelo’s
David at the entrance to the ducal palace since 1534 (fig. 6).
Although Vasari’s otherwise highly critical biography of Bandi-
nelli conceded the cavaliere a merited fame in drawing, Cellini’s
Vita is not so generous; it caricatures Bandinelli as disegno-obs-
essed.26 When the abundant defects of his Hercules and Cacus
are enumerated by Cellini before the duke, Bandinelli can only
cry out, “Oh, you wicked slanderer, what about my disegno?27
Cellini then dismisses Bandinelli’s disegno summarily—in terms
of both draughtsmanship and project or design—with the de-
preciatory reply that anyone good at disegno would never make
a bad statue, and therefore Bandinelli’s disegno must be of the
same quality as his marble Hercules.

Arguably the most pleasing element of Bandinelli’s statue
group in the piazza is not its blocky statues in the round, but
rather the ingeniously grotesques carved in bas-relief on its large
cubic base (fig. 6). Nor does the autobiographical Cellini mock
these four bearded and turbaned herms, whose flattened torsos
resemble parchment curling at the bottom edges like posters peeling from a wall. Bandinelli excelled in this draughtsmanship type of sculpture of the planar surface, and Cellini’s deeply carved base containing fully rounded statues in bronze in deep niches does not seek to rival his predecessor’s base in this field of endeavour. And yet, during the years 1549–63, Cellini competed with Bandinelli for relief commissions, first for a part of the reliefs to decorate the choir of Santa Maria del Fiore already begun by Bandinelli, then for bronze reliefs for the pulpit or the doors of the cathedral. Neither man wished the other as an equal partner on these projects, as a letter written by Bandinelli to the duke of Florence makes clear: the older artist complains that even as small as Cellini’s figures for the project were, they were nevertheless “full of errors; and the reason is that he does not command any draughtsmanship.”

Given that Cellini’s relief in bronze appears to have been added expressly to measure his expertise in this specialized field of sculpture against that of his closest competitors, past and present, one wonders what constitutes the relief’s superiority. Perseus Liberating Andromeda, as Avery observed, is a failure in terms of pictorial or graphic relief possessing the depth of illusionistic painting or perspectival drawing. His connoisseur’s eye seized upon its apparent shortcoming: the shallow relief of the central running figure creates a flagrant lack of depth at the center of the composition. Instead of allowing the viewer’s eye to move naturally and gently into the far background toward a vanishing point, as do Donatello’s or Ghiberti’s gradually flattened pictorial reliefs, the low relief of the angry figure blocks penetration of the picture plane’s surface while at the same time it implies an awkward recession in depth and distance. But this may well be the point: the relief’s formal incongruity reveals the limitations of the genre. Bas-relief remains an art of surface, a kind of sculptural sketching closer to the two-dimensional arts of drawing and painting. And Cellini’s purpose is not so much admiring imitation, as critical appraisal of the nature of his predecessors’ accomplishments.

Adding greatly to the anti-spatial quality of the naked man is his proximity to the fully rounded figure of Andromeda. The contrast between figural relief sculpture, which is modelled in depth and projected outward toward the spectator, and relief sculpture, which is barely scratched on or into a surface to create the illusion of depth, could not be more marked. The male nude functions as a foil for the three-dimensional beauty of Cellini’s Andromeda who, though a chained captive, nevertheless moves freely in space, twisting her torso and face toward the foreshortened runner with splendid plasticity. Rather than assuming the standard pose of a petrified victim chained upright to a rock or cliff, Cellini’s Andromeda is seated and almost fully modelled in the round. Her seated pose answers the runner’s upright pose, for both raise their right arms above their heads. As Andromeda swings toward the angry man, only her left side, the chained side nearest him, remains embedded in the surface of the relief. She appears to be a mobile, three-dimensional volume in space with air circulating about it, whereas the running man is ghostly, a mere ripple across the plane of the relief. Together they form a pair of contraries at the heart of Cellini’s bronze relief.

Andromeda’s freedom of movement and palpable, tangible form condemn to the unreal space of graphic or pictorial art the male nude with whom she disputes the geometric center of the relief. Viewed at close range, his irruption may appear to have pushed her to one side of her rocky perch, but seen from a distance the aggressive runner is quite simply invisible, leaving blank the center of her pedestal and of the relief. This strategic lack of symmetry along the frontal axis of the ensemble of the monument is explained by Cellini’s desire to challenge the masters of drawing and the planar art of relief sculpture while at the same time comparing unfavourably their draughtsmanship and graphic sculpture with figural sculpture in the round, deemed by him superior, and far more difficult to execute. Following the sculptor’s visual logic, only the “real” hero of the relief, the projecting air-borne Perseus, can save Andromeda, since the running nude lacks the existence conferred by the third, the heroic and sculptural, dimension. “Being born of relief, I must raise it up and praise it for it is the most marvellous of all things,” affirms Cellini in Sopra l’arte del disegno.

Sculpture and Architecture

Drawing and painting are not the only arts referred to in the relief for the sake of comparison, of introducing paragoni. The decidedly two-dimensional architecture in the upper right corner of Perseus Liberating Andromeda (fig. 1) has little mythological justification, and like the naked runner, it has probably been included as much to invoke another art form as to enhance the political content of the relief. Architecture’s place in Cellini’s oeuvre has scarcely been studied nor has his attitude toward it received much attention, for the goldsmith-sculptor did not actually practice architecture, which does, though, figure in his later technical and theoretical writings. In Cellini’s brief commentary tracing the genealogy of the arts in a proposal for a seal for the Florentine Accademia del Disegno, architecture occupies a dependent and derivative position. It is described as the “sister” of painting, and “second daughter” of sculpture, the father of the arts.

The inclusion of a series of antique monuments in the background of the “sketched” half of Cellini’s relief encourages reflection on the unequal relationship between the arts of sculpture and architecture, and helps to define the latter as an art of line akin to drawing and painting. Disembodied monu-
ments float above the heads of the figures rather than serving to demarcate a ground line and to effect a rational and measured recession in depth. The tiny cityscape is no more effective than the running figure at capturing the viewer’s attention from a distance or leading the eye into the pictorial surface toward a distant vanishing point deep behind it.

Cellini’s short treatise on architecture, Della architettura, provides additional evidence of the inequality existing between the arts of sculpture and architecture. Written before 1567 and meant to complement his theoretical and technical writings on art, Della architettura affirms that painters and sculptors alike have practised architecture successfully as, indeed, have button-makers. The tale of a Ferrarese merciaio, who turned architect on the strength of a few sketches and a little reading, and adopted the name maestro Terzo to indicate he was the third great architect after Bramante and Antonio Sangallo, does little to recommend the art.35 Architecture, according to Cellini, is like button-making a “utilitarian” art, whose primary purpose is to protect and shelter man as do clothes and armour. It becomes an admirable thing, cosa mirabile, when it serves as a support for “ornaments,” that is, for sculpture.36 The supporting role of architecture in relation to sculpture is echoed perfectly in the overall structure and content of Cellini’s treatise, which ends with an encomium of his Perseus. Similarly to admirable architecture, the treatise serves as a context or framework for the display of sculpture.37

The history of architecture contained in the treatise is largely a history of writing about architecture, which reinforces the notion of a draughtsmanly and book-learned art, and affords Cellini an opportunity to discuss a copy of a Leonardo da Vinci manuscript that he had acquired in France. As described by Cellini, Leonardo’s manuscript is devoted mainly to the science of perspective, that is, to the drawing of illusionistic buildings on a two-dimensional support, rather than to the construction of actual buildings in space. In fact, the manuscript belonging to Cellini epitomizes what might be called the painter-draughtsman’s approach to the art of writing on paper by a painter, rather than a stone edifice or even a wooden maquette. And it describes the art of creating with line drawn on a surface the illusion of three-dimensional buildings—the very type of virtual architecture present in the Andromeda relief, and implied by the placement of the relief on the flat wall of the Loggia. The weightless buildings of Cellini’s relief are not designed for habitation and lack sculptural ornamentation. If architecture’s role is to accommodate, protect, and frame mankind and his sculpture, this is the useless, imaginary architecture of pure line. And it is flawed similarly to the running figure because it projects unconvincingly outward toward the spectator rather than drawing the eye into the background as do the “sketched” facades of Donatello’s St. George relief (fig. 5). As a consequence, the background architecture of Cellini’s relief seems to attempt in vain what his deeply carved figures successfully achieve.

If the architecture pictured in Perseus Liberating Andromeda is intangible and uninhabitable, if it is the linear architecture of the draughtsman-painter, then Perseus’s marble base is better—more sculptural and three-dimensional—architecture, custom built to house sculpture, as prescribed in Cellini’s treatise. Possessing volume and molding space to serve statuary, the base is nonetheless defined by plane geometry, by flat walls or planes bounded by lines (figs. 2, 3, and 7). It resembles a miniature cubic house with four distinguishable faces or facades, each perforated by an arched niche containing a small bronze statue. It functions as utilitarian and real architecture vis-à-vis the statues, but of an especially ornamental type deriving from sculpture and deferring to the human figure. As such, it teaches the viewer the proper relationship between sculpture and architecture, a relationship in which sculpture dictates architecture’s form and function.

The exemplary, sustentative architecture of the base symbolizes the superiority of sculpture in a second way, since Cellini designed it to have the principal quality distinguishing sculpture from the other arts.38 Sculpture, the most difficult of the arts, must possess “eight views” (“otto vedute”), all “equally good” (of “equale bontà”), declared Cellini in a now famous letter to Benedetto Varchi.39 In later writings he would increase this number upwards to forty, to one hundred, and to infinity.40 Cellini’s pedestal was designed to be seen advantageously from eight not four angles, the four faces of the cube and its four corners. Ephesian Dianas, enriching the corners of the base, serve to mark the four additional or subsidiary viewpoints. Because it possesses only one veduta, the Andromeda relief marks the point of departure for assessing the challenge involved in executing sculpture as opposed to art in two dimensions. The single optimal viewpoint of the relief completes a progression from ground to summit that could be expressed in terms of the formula: $1 > 4–8 > 40–100 > ∞$. Thus, instead of limiting to one the number of angles from which the Perseus on its base was meant to be appreciated, the relief underlines the incompleteness of the pictorial arts to which, in Cellini’s theory, even admirable architecture belonged, inasmuch as it was not an art of the living figure, but of the static and flat wall, a planar construction with a finite number of viewing angles.

The bronze relief thus serves to fix the Perseus statue on its pedestal within a two-dimensional, architectural frame, orienting them frontally through the creation of an Albertian pictorial or one-point perspective. But the relief sculpture of Perseus Liberating Andromeda adheres to the sculptural ensemble above without being necessary to it or enjoying the freedom in space of either the statue’s or the pedestal’s three-dimensional forms. And even from a frontal perspective the Perseus does not respect
the wall fixed by the plane of the relief and the masonry balustrade of the Loggia, since the giant statue leans forward and out from under the Loggia’s roof, just as all the male statuettes transgress the walls of the base by stretching up or reaching out from their niches. Mercury (Perseus’s half-brother) escapes simultaneously from the smoothing protection of clothes, armour, and from his architectural niche, a fact underlined by the inscription underneath him: “So you may bear a brother’s arms, I fly naked to the stars”41 (fig. 7). The goldsmith-sculptor’s desire to liberate statuary from surface is even more evident in the small wax model for the Perseus than in the finished bronze, since the slender wax hero seems to have alighted only momentarily on the earth’s crust before beginning again to climb skyward.42

Liberating Andromeda

In Cellini’s monument there is a gradual release of the sculpted figure from architectural incarceration. Compared to the relief figures in Perseus Liberating Andromeda, the small bronze statues relate in a less conflictual and more harmonious manner to the “better” architecture of Perseus’s base. They appear able to move away from the concavities in the base’s walls, which nevertheless shelter them and hide their backs. Their capacity to pull away from surface and wall is in between that of the tiny figures in relief and the giant Perseus. However, even the relative independence of the figures cast in the round compared to the figures cast in relief does not explain entirely why a goldsmith-sculptor, intent on asserting sculpture’s ascendency over architecture, would go to great lengths to attach bronzes sculpted in the round to an edifice.
An autobiographical passage helps to clarify the issue. In the *Vita*, Cellini tells of displaying to his patrons, the Duke and Duchess of Florence, the four small bronzes for the base, figures of Jupiter, Mercury, Danaë, and Minerva, as though they were autonomous works. But this preview backfired when the Duchess exclaimed, “I don't want you to waste those statues by throwing them away on the pedestal down in the piazza, where they’ll risk being spoilt.”\(^{44}\) To prevent his monument from losing several of its key elements, the artist promptly soldered the small bronzes into their niches in the marble base. He thus chose to forge chains of his own fashioning, rather than to allow his works to be imprisoned by the Duchess in her apartments.\(^{45}\) Recounting the episode after the fact in the *Vita* operates both to assert his statues’ independent beauty and to justify their relative thralldom.

The aesthetic appeal and self-sufficiency of freestanding statuary, though desirable, make it vulnerable to the designs of others. And Florentine sculptors had every reason to fear the usurpation or displacement of their works, since Donatello’s *Judith and Holofernes* had already been moved twice before it was settled in the arcade on the west end of the Loggia, from which it would be ousted by Gianbologna’s *Rape of the Sabine* in 1583.\(^{46}\) Today the *Judith* is not even present in the form of a copy in the piazza, and resides instead inside the Palazzo Vecchio, formerly the ducal palace. Michelangelo’s *David*, now in the Accademia museum, was never placed in the ecclesiastical niche for which it had been intended. Upon the statue’s completion, a committee that included Cellini’s father studied the problem of its placement before the decision was finally reached to position it to one side of the entrance to the Palazzo della Signoria. Michelangelo’s companion piece to the *David*, which was to have stood at the other side of the entrance, was supplanted by Bandinelli’s *Hercules and Cacus* before it had advanced beyond the stage of a clay model. Although, after the return of the Medici in 1512 and 1530, Michelangelo’s republican *David* was allowed to retain its position of sentinel before the Palazzo Vecchio, Bandinelli’s much-resented *Hercules* might not have survived the disappearance of the dynasty that commissioned it. At the age of 45 in 1545, Cellini was old enough to have witnessed the ups and downs of the House of Medici and to fear that vicissitudes of political fortune might affect a work commemorating Cosimo de’ Medici’s despotic regime. Soldering his *Perseus* to the Loggia with the bronze relief, as he had the smaller bronzes to the base, helped to prevent it from being re-appropriated and moved about the city like a piece on a chessboard. Paradoxically, to insure the large bronze’s autonomy, the monument as a whole was rendered to a greater degree immoveable and site-specific through the addition of *Perseus Liberating Andromeda*, which at the same time pleaded eloquently for the emancipation of sculpture from the domination of architecture and the other arts.

At close range, at “reading” distance for the spectator standing in the piazza, the eye is drawn into the debate concerning relationships of dependence and inferiority among the arts by way of the sketchy running man and his fully rounded partner at the center of the relief. These two figures serve not only to introduce two disparate and unequal approaches to relief sculpture, but also to contrast drawing with sculpture and sculpture with architecture. Moreover, in relation to the rest of the monument, the pair sets in motion a series of comparisons that distinguishes varying degrees of excellence within the graphic arts and sculpture. In other words, the allegory of the arts built into the piazza is hierarchical in its presentation of the arts of sculpture, painting and drawing, and architecture, and discriminatory in its establishment of a scale of values applicable within these artistic domains. Drawing and architecture are to be admired insofar as they distance themselves from the tyranny of the picture plane and imitate sculpture in the round. The modelled and tactile three-dimensional human form represents the highest expression of the visible, tangible, and divinely ordered Creation, whose acme, central actor, and “ornament” is man; therefore sculpture becomes the standard by which all the other arts must be judged, which is why Bandinelli’s *disegno* could not serve as a measuring stick for evaluating his *Hercules* statue.\(^{47}\)

Sculpture and Painting

Freeing sculpture from the hegemony of the other arts also meant freeing it from subservience to painting and the literary arts. The humanist and amateur painter Leon Battista Alberti had in his *On Painting* hailed painting as “the mistress of all the arts” including architecture, maintaining that architects, stonemasons, sculptors, and “artificers” were merely “guided by the rule and art of the painter” and lacked the distinction accorded since time immemorial to painters.\(^{48}\) Alberti and others argued for painting’s entrance into the Liberal Arts on the basis of its mathematical foundations and of the recent advances in the science of geometric perspective. Donatello had studied perspective with Brunelleschi, to whom *On Painting* was dedicated, and many of Donatello’s works, especially those in relief, espoused a form of sculpture that seemed to allow painting to be sculpture’s mistress. Because in Cellini’s gendered vision of the arts, sculpture was lord and father, whereas painting occupied a derivative and dependent position, *Perseus and Medusa*’s reversal of the female-male relationship of Donatello’s *Judith and Holofernes* overturned symbolically the dominance painting seemed to have gained over sculpture during the quattrocento.\(^{49}\)

But the reversal of power relations between the sexes in the piazza also responded to the more current debate claiming the place of honour for *disegno*, a position that surreptitiously increased the prestige of two-dimensional art. If *disegno* as
design, project, intention, idea, or concept could claim to be fundamental to all three visual arts, as *drawing* it was necessarily an art of the pen, like poetry, which had more in common with the two-dimensional arts of painting and architecture than with sculpture. Drawing was clean, quiet, and physically undemanding and thus more easily defended as a noble, intellectual pursuit. Il Cavaliere Bandinelli’s cry of “what about my *disegno*” is symptomatic of a sixteenth-century trend that devalued technical and material aspects of art and art-making in favour of spiritually or intellectually inspired content. The successful artist became more than ever a designer, teacher, and courtier at the head of a workshop who supplied apprentices and collaborators with plans to be executed. Consequently, a draughtsman-painter like Rosso or Primaticcio might produce the studies for the sculptural components of a decorative program. Repeatedly, Cellini insists in the *Vita* that he is not interested in making jewellery or sculpture from others’ designs, especially non-sculptors’ verbal instructions or drawings.

In this social context, the *paragone* debate becomes a struggle for control over all the phases and the ultimate fortune of one’s art, rather than an empty parlour game. Cellini, who had been, according to his enemy Vasari, “in every action spirited, proud, vigorous, most resolute, and truly terrible,” could not have allowed the *disegni* of a would-be gentleman painter-writer like Bandinelli to interfere with his work in the cathedral or elsewhere. It is also unlikely that Cellini’s relief sculpture was intended to ape in an adulatory fashion any other art form in a high profile public setting. However, his *Perseus Liberating Andromeda* is framed like a painting in an obvious allusion to that form of art. Although the allusion has not gone unnoticed by art historians, the nature of painting’s relation to sculpture as articulated by Cellini’s ensemble on the piazza has not been examined in sufficient detail or depth. After all, the precise question debated by artists at the behest of Benedetto Varchi in 1546 was which of these two art forms was nobler, painting or sculpture, and Cellini’s quarrel in 1564 with the other organizers of Michelangelo’s funeral concerned the symbolic displacement of sculpture by painting.

Given painting’s perceived close link to poetry in Renaissance theory, it is appropriate that the handling of the traditional iconographic theme of Cellini’s relief, as well as its form, bear on painting’s case. Moreover, in the sixteenth century, Ovid’s verses describing Perseus’s rescue of the Ethiopian princess Andromeda from the sea monster Cetus furnished a topos, a ready-made site or context, for comparing the arts, especially the art of painting to that of poetry. Perseus symbolized the painter who, aided by the tutelary deities Minerva and Mercury, could vivify, could bring both colour and movement to the pallid flesh of Ovid’s marmoreal, frozen heroine. Allegorically, Andromeda was Beauty liberated by the painter’s love and chivalric value from nature’s monstrosity. Thus, the very subject matter of Cellini’s bronze relief, like its framed and flattened form, evoked the art of painting for his contemporaries, even though the relief remained sculpture.

Not content with the conventions of an allegory tailored to praise painting, Cellini reinvented the pictorial theme of the Liberation of Andromeda in terms of both *forme* and *fondi*. Andromeda became in his hands a specifically sculptural Beauty freed from the picture plane, and therefore from the constraints of point, line, and plane. This beauty is called into being not through the application of thin veils of colour bounded by line in the fictive depth of a window-like space, but rather through the molding of tangible substance and shape in the real space *in front* of the pictorial plane. Andromeda rises from the shiny surface of the relief to penetrate the viewer’s space as does Perseus, both her rescuer in the relief and the thoughtful giant above.

The giant Perseus looks reflectively downward directing the viewer to consider what lies beneath his feet: Medusa’s dying body, the mirroring surface of Minerva’s shield lying upon his cape, and below these the watery nether regions of Cellini’s base, with its Ephesian Artemises whose feet are framed by puddles. Artemis-Diana was a pagan nature goddess and planetary

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**Figure 8. Giorgio Vasari, *Perseus Liberating Andromeda*, 1570-72. Oil on slate, 117 x 100 cm. Palazzo Vecchio, Florence (Credit: Scala / Art Resource).**
deity associated more than any other with the element of water, an element which takes up much of the left side of Perseus Liberating Andromeda. In Ovid's myth Perseus catches sight of the abandoned Andromeda when he is in flight above the shimmering surface of the sea. Cellini tilts this body of water toward the viewer in an archaic fashion that emphasizes its surface. Instead of stretching out obliquely toward a distant horizon the sea flows over the relief plane as if the water were a wavy, second skin. Flying Perseus looks toward this liquid surface, the princess, and the right side of the relief, rather than at his immediate foe, the monster he is supposed to be fighting. The reflective capabilities of water played a role in the allegorization of the art of painting in the Renaissance. Painting was thought of as a reflecting surface, a sheet of water or mirror, which reproduced the illusion of Nature's inexhaustible and shifting colours, shapes, and forms. According to Book II of Alberti's On Painting, painting is the "act of embracing by means of art the surface of the pool." And by the middle of the cinquecento Alberti's definition of painting had become a well-worn metaphor exploited by Vasari and other painters in renditions of the Andromeda theme. Perseus's shield lies on the ground reflecting the landscape as though it were Alberti's pool in Vasari's painted version of the rescue (fig. 8).

Alberti also identifies Narcissus, who admired lovingly his mirror image in a fountain, as the "inventor of painting." The resemblance between the poses of Cellini's Perseus and his marble Narcissus has been noted. Both statues seem to gaze downward toward their mirrored images, but in Perseus's case the most obvious mirror is Minerva's shield or aegis rather than the other liquid surfaces, which helps to identify him as personifying Prudence. The virtue prudence was particularly associated with the armoured maiden Minerva, who could be identified by her mirror and Janus-face, as well as her shield and lance. Raphael's Stanza della segnatura shows the goddess between Temperance and Fortitude looking into her mirror of self-knowledge while an old man gazes from the back of her head. But if Cellini confiscates Minerva's mirror as well as her shield for Perseus, it is not simply to supplant a female personification of wisdom with a male one, but to connect the two heroines of Ovid's myth, Medusa and Andromeda, in a double
The parallel between Medusa's body seen from above and certain of Bronzino's paintings, such as the Allegory with Venus and Cupid in the National Gallery (fig. 10), has long been apparent to art historians, who have nonetheless failed to consider the top plane of Cellini's base as a second allegory of painting. Understood as a second bas-relief, Medusa's dying body forms the pendant to Andromeda's almost entirely quickened and liberated form. From Perseus's point of view both are "faceless," female nudes with "mirrors," in Medusa's case the mirror of Minerva's shield and in Andromeda's that of the sea. And both female nudes exemplify the best and noblest type of painting, painting with sculptural values, which is exactly what Bronzino's statuesque figures with their hard, polished contours represented for his friend Cellini.

Only the head of Medusa, saved by the sculptor's art from the limitations of surface, from Alberti's pool, will survive in its terrifying dimensions. Fittingly, Medusa's head enjoyed an afterlife in myth and legend that her body did not possess. Its blood gave birth to the precious marine "mineral" coral, which was believed to be capable of warding off the evil eye, and it became a potent weapon used by Perseus to slay his enemies. Then he made a gift of it to Minerva-Athena, female goddess and protectress of the polis, who placed it as an apotropaic motif, the Gorgoneion, on her shield or aegis. But the reflective surface the goddess lent to Perseus was only a blank field allowing the hero to trick the monster by gazing at her unreal and thus harmless reflection, instead of succumbing to the fatal stare of her very real head. Minerva, traditionally the patroness of painter-architects, as Raphael's School of Athens attests, aided Perseus in his quest, but it is the sculptor-hero who has wielded Mercury's curved sword to provide to Minerva's aegis, to painting, its real force, the seductive terribilità of the third dimension.

The difference between painting and sculpture for Cellini is the difference between a real and tangible thing and its reflection or shadow. Drawing and the other two-dimensional arts may assist Perseus in the performance of artistic feats, but they are subordinate compared to the act of modelling in clay and casting fully three-dimensional figures in bronze. Mutable maternal Nature is the raw material of the sculptor's art, as the Ephesian Dianas on Perseus's base suggest, but the sculptor must transform the four Aristotelian elements comprising the natural world rather than passively mirror nature's monstrous, external appearance. Even the hideous gorgon, transmuted by the sculptor's know-how, can become a gorgeous human being made not in the image of nature, but in that of God and man. Perseus's crowning accomplishment as artist-hero is as sculptor holding the astonishingly beautiful, fully three-dimensional head of Medusa out into the open air of the piazza and of the world. At the moment of his ultimate triumph the head has lost its feminine specificity and is a sphere dangling almost free in space from above and visible from 360 degrees. Its silent lesson is that sculpture in the round possesses potency and immortality, which arts like bas-relief and painting, deriving from it, can never hope to match. Medusa's head was after all also an astral body, the bright and baleful star Algol, part of the constellation of Perseus.

The scale of aesthetic values established in the public piazza is identical to that in the Saltcellar for Francis I and in Cellini's later autobiography and his treatises (fig. 11). On the base of the Saltcellar are reclining figures representing the Times of Day, quoted in golden relief from Michelangelo's Medici tombs in the church of San Lorenzo. But Michelangelo's reclining allegories are slaves of the picture plane, whereas Cellini's own versions of the reclining male and female nude emerge trium-
phant into the ambient air to be admired from all angles. The fact that the *Salcellar* possessed tiny ball bearings in its base, and could be rolled about on a table, made even more apparent its homage to sculpture in the round, to sculpture that stands free of the plane or wall and seems capable of moving freely in space.

The superiority of mobile, freestanding statuary is further illustrated in the *Vita*’s account of Cellini’s unveiling of his lifesized silver Jupiter in the Gallery of Francis I at Fontainebleau. The silver statue, draped and holding a candle, seemed to advance toward the king and his entourage of its own volition due to the little rollers the artist had placed under its base. The long hall was lined with other statues, but also decorated with paintings and stucco reliefs by fellow Italians, among them Rosso and Primaticcio, painter-decorator and favourite of the king’s mistress, the duchess of Etampes. Cellini’s work triumphed because it *stood out from* these works as from so many lifeless wall-flowers. And when the duchess of Etampes attempted to draw attention away from the Jupiter to the sculpture along the walls, Cellini angrily ripped the veil from its loins to reveal his statue’s masculine relief. This provocative gesture, the revelation of the statue’s hidden relief, silenced for once Cellini’s bitter critic, the duchess, who could only sputter in anger.

Metaphorically removing the veil from his splendid *Perseus*, Cellini hoped in Florence to silence forever all enemies and detractors as he had his nemesis in France. As picture plane, the Andromeda relief at the bottom of the *Perseus*, borrowing from both painting and poetry, is this metaphorical veil or gloss on the true beauty of the male nude. It is painting’s deceitful, feminine surface without depth, which hides the self-evident “masculine” body from both sculpture and the visible world. Painting is for Cellini a lie, “bugia,” but one instructive as a point of reference for the truth of sculpture. As one looks along the monument’s vertical axis upward from the running man with his flattened sail-like drapery to the *Jupiter* and then to the *Perseus* on top, the “veil,” the obscuring plane, is gradually lifted and is at the male nude to reveal integrally his relief (fig. 2). The partially draped figure of *Jupiter* on the base of the *Perseus* constitutes an intermediate phase of masculine unveiling, whereas the angry runner—lowest on the totem pole of statuary—remains completely “veiled” despite his nudity: he is rendered bidimensional and emasculated by the femininity of the form of art in which he is executed. Considered within Cellini’s gendered hierarchy of the arts, the running nude’s body is less sculptural than are even the imperfectly liberated “painted” bodies of Andromeda or Medusa. Compared to victorious *Perseus*, he is a lie, whereas the women are merely half-truths.

**Killing Medusa**

Bodies fused to the pictorial field are not the only formal characteristics that reveal Andromeda and Medusa to be opposite sides of the same bad coin. The two female nudes are linked formally by the streaming and gushing movement of their hair and blood. Andromeda’s sculpted hair flows out from the back of her head in an aggressive point or arrow toward Perseus and the monster (fig. 1), much as Medusa’s blood sprouts from her truncated neck into the piazza toward the spectator (fig. 2). The beauty of female hair, that sinuous and linear quality, was the cause of both Medusa’s and Andromeda’s misfortunes.

Medusa had once been so beautiful that the sea god Poseidon raped her in Athena’s temple; similarly Andromeda’s mother, boasting of her and her daughter’s beauty, had brought about Juno and the Nereids’ wrath. Medusa was punished for the sacrilege by the transformation of her proud locks into repulsive snakes, whereas Andromeda was to be sacrificed to atone for her mother’s hubris.

More significant still, for apprehending the complementarity of the two heroines, is Andromeda’s offering of her forelock to the angry running figure in a gesture common to sixteenth-century personifications of *Occasio*, Good Fortune or Opportune. Andromeda, in the role of capricious but attractive Good Fortune has turned away from the hero, whereas Medusa in the role invidious Ill Fortune has twisted toward him to use her deadly gaze. The beautiful face of Good Fortune, Andromeda, favours the irate runner rather than Perseus, who will nonetheless win her through his courageous efforts. Again and again the *Vita* stresses that the goldsmith and his unlucky *Perseus*, “[i]sfortunato *Perseo*,” unlike Cellini’s Medici patrons and fellow artists, are not aided by Fortune and the stars. When Cellini loses the commission for the Neptune statue in Florence he sends the winner of the contest, Bandinelli’s follower Ammannati, a message urging him to “work very hard so that he could show his gratitude to Fortune for the very great and undeserved favours she was showing him.”

Victory, no matter how virtuous and well deserved, was believed by Cellini and his contemporaries to provoke poisonous envy. The goddess of earthly happenstance, Fortuna, became jealous of those whom she had favoured and dashed down that which she had lifted on high. To remain victorious thus meant to vanquish envy, whether it was the envy of celestial forces like Fortuna, or of the gods, or of one’s fellow mortals. In Vasari’s painting, on the ceiling of his house in Arezzo, *The Triumph of Virtue over Fortune*, Virtue must seize the forelock of the fortunate Opportunity, a beautiful, young woman, while trampling underfoot Invidia, an ugly old woman with untidy hair and serpents coiled about her (fig. 12). Bronzino’s painting, too, includes a dishevelled Medusa-like head of an old woman be-
hind his lovely Venus to suggest that envy or madness succeeds love or lust (fig. 10).

Judging from both Vasari’s and Cellini’s testimony, envy was an especially fierce and frequent motivation in artistic circles. Vasari blames Bandinelli’s envy and enmity for the destruction of Michelangelo’s celebrated Battle of Cascina cartoon. For Cellini, disegno generated rivalry. In the commentary on what was presumably his final proposal for the seal of the Accademia del Disegno, disegno is of two kinds, one of the imagination and one of line. The disegno of line, fiery like the burning rays of the sun god Apollo, goads men to compete with one another. In assessing drawing’s Apollonian “temperament” Cellini may be remembering the already legendary fresco competition that took place between Leonardo and Michelangelo at the beginning of the century in the Sala del Gran Consiglio of the Palazzo Vecchio. What was to have been a painting contest became effectively a drawing contest since both men finished only the cartoons for battle scenes, and these cartoons spawned further rivalry as Bandinelli’s alleged theft of one of them proves.

Envious rivalry is also a major theme of the myth of Perseus and Andromeda as told by Ovid. The demi-god Perseus, son of Jupiter and Danaë, catches sight from the sky of a beautiful princess who has been abandoned by her people to appease a sea monster named Cetus. Juno and the Nereids, jealous of her and her mother’s beauty, have condemned the daughter to death. In exchange for Andromeda’s hand in marriage, Perseus kills the monster and liberates the maiden, to the grateful joy of both watching parents. But much of Ovid’s tale is not devoted to the romantic rescue, but to its grisly aftermath, the ambush of Perseus at his wedding banquet by Andromeda’s uncle and former fiancé, Phineus, at the head of his army. The jilted suitor seeks to murder the newcomer for stealing his bride and future kingdom. After having already slain monsters, Perseus must take on a whole battalion of furious warriors. Ovid’s bloody verses recount how the hero dispatches them valiantly one after another before he concludes the unfair competition by resorting to the magical gaze of Medusa’s head.

In concentrating the right half of his relief on the anger and envy of Perseus’s numerous enemies, Cellini does not depart from Ovid in the narrative of his relief. But he does depart from the customary depiction of the myth of Perseus and Andromeda that separates, spatially and temporally, the rescue of the princess from the less frequently depicted battle scene. Typical, for example, is Perino del Vaga’s frieze in the Castel Sant’Angelo where the themes of Perseus Liberating Andromeda and Perseus Battling Phineus and his Men are shown in two distinct scenes. In one the hero kills the monster and in another he petrifies an army of assailants with Medusa’s head. Similarly, Polidoro da Caravaggio’s sketch shows only Perseus Battling Phineus and his Men in a separate scene (fig. 13). But Cellini need not destroy the spatial unity of his composition by recounting this second episode in the fictional genre of relief sculpture (i.e., in “painting”), since his colossal Perseus performs it in the public arena of the piazza. In the scenario enacted by Cellini’s statues, blood flows copiously in the direction of potentially inimical spectators who are “turned to stone,” mesmerized, in real space and time by the sight of the freestanding bronze holding out the magical “sculpted” head. Not tiny warriors in relief, but flesh and blood spectators in the piazza are these Perseus’s victims, as well as the freestanding giants of Michelangelo and Bandinelli, whose petrified state did not escape the notice of sonneteers praising Cellini’s bronze warrior. A similar desire for expedient artistic vengeance of the one against the many is expressed in the Vita when Cellini boasts, “By showing my skill in this way [making steel medals] and not with my sword, I added, I would slaughter all my enemies.” Although the goldsmith-sculptor’s best revenge on a multitude of various enemies, some personal, others cosmic, professional, or political, is the intimidatory gesture of his beautiful Perseus, his smaller Jupiter also aims a retributive thunderbolt in the direction of the piazza and of the men at arms below in the relief. Jupiter’s inscription warns: “If anyone harms you, my son, I will avenge you.”

The armed men in the relief thus function also as a crowd of inimical spectators, but one not yet petrified by victorious Perseus’s secret weapon. Either they are viewing the statuesque Andromeda from several vantage points, as Cole has suggested, or they are witnessing the rescue scene as a whole taking place on the left. Because Perseus Liberating Andromeda functions as an allegory of the arts, the shallow figures are the invidious enemies of art and virtuous artists, that is, of art defined as an es-

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Figure 12. Giorgio Vasari, Sala del Camino frescoes with the Triumph of Virtue on the ceiling, Casa Vasari, Arezzo, 1548 (Credit: Scala / Art Resource, NY).
sentially sculptural enterprise. Even the growling dog on the far right edge of the relief is a traditional symbol of the deadly sin of envy. In strictly visual terms these ill wishers are “painted” or “sketched” observers of the heroic “sculpted” tableau, for apart from Andromeda’s distressed parents in deeper relief, the angry men are cast in low relief and shout and brandish their weapons in the direction of the deeply carved figures of Andromeda, Perseus, and Cetus.

In his short discourse entitled Sopra l’arte del disegno Cellini speaks scornfully of non-sculptors who, in praising painting, have spoken “like painted men, without relief.” Phineus’s army is flattened and linear, as are its arms—lances or pikes like parallel lines that form a picket fence around the sketched city they seem to defend. Like the demonic warriors in the sky borrowed from Donatello and Leonardo, this army has sound and fury, but no real materiality. The running figure at the center of the relief speaks or rather shouts “like a painted man, without relief,” promoting through his very lack of substance the pictorial arts of drawing, painting, and architecture. His furia and terribilità are more caricature than compliment.

Nonetheless there is for Cellini perhaps also some measure of self-recognition in the competitive rage of the running figure, which has sometimes been read as a second Perseus, or as the alter ego of the artist. Despite belittling Bandinelli’s disegno as a means to achieving sculptural fame and as a substitute for good sculpture, Cellini, too, claimed excellence in draughtsmanship, especially in his youth, and competed to some extent with Bandinelli in this area, as the letter cited above suggests.

In the second edition of the Lives Vasari immortalized Cellini in relation to Bandinelli as half of a warring pair. Vasari reinforces this image of Cellini in the only known portrait of the artist, which shows him in the background behind the duke of Florence nose to nose with Bandinelli. Both men wear long white beards. Cellini’s rivalry with Bandinelli and with artists whom he did not respect did not enhance his reputation. Ultimately, the competition with Bandinelli dishonoured Cellini since competing degnamente with Bandinelli was impossible, which is perhaps why Cellini never completed any reliefs for the cathedral. Just as Cellini was linked to but diminished by his arguments with Bandinelli before the duke, so, too, is the flying Perseus linked to the men on horseback of the diabolical skirmish overhead who, like the running nude, are almost without relief. To take up arms that were not sculptural in defense of his art was to a certain degree to stoop to the level of his adversaries—although it also made more solid Cellini’s nuanced claim to universality. Instead of producing his best work, as when in competition with Antiquity, Donatello, Michelangelo, or with his own earlier efforts, he sunk to name-calling and threats of violence. Perseus Liberating Andromeda was not his most perfect piece nor was it’s aim to eclipse his previous sculpture.
In life as in art the sculptor joined reluctantly and belatedly the verbal fury surrounding the arts. Moreover, Cellini’s relief as sculpted response conformed perversely to Michelangelo’s advice to artists to stick to their art rather than wasting time on disputes about the paragone.\footnote{Andromeda with Medusa, the artist had sought to place himself symbolically, like the old Michelangelo, hors concours and beyond the reach of envy. It is this destructive vice that his sculpture eradicates preemptively before the eyes of those who would attack it. And if the victory of Perseus over this vice was not already clear to the viewer, the gloss inherent in the relief’s addition re-stated it in more emphatic terms.}

In the dynamic of the tripartite Perseus monument, the pictorial arts are overcome in order for the sculptural beauty of the free-standing male nude to assert its rightful place in the piazza.\footnote{This place is claimed through aesthetic fact preceded by action and deed, not by word and concept. Verbal disputes among the arts and among artists, like so many venomous strands of Medusa’s writhing locks, pose no real threat to sculpture’s and the sculptor’s dominance in the piazza. For when the spectator’s eye and the poet’s pen neglect the contentious Perseus Liberating Andromeda to marvel in silence on the colossal bronze statue with his sculpted trophy, the goldsmith-sculptor has already, according to his own terms of engagement, won honour and avenged his art.}

Dedication

This article is dedicated to my mother, Ann Alder.

Notes

1. The original marble base or pedestal of the Perseus and Medusa is now in Museo Nazionale del Bargello, as are the base’s small bronze figures and the Perseus Liberating Andromeda relief.

2. For the chronology of the casting of the various parts of the monument, see Michael W. Cole, Cellini and the Principles of Sculpture (Cambridge, UK, 2002), 48 and 72; and by the same author, “Cellini’s Blood,” Art Bulletin 81, 2 (June 1999): 215–33; and John Pope-Hennessy, Cellini (New York, 1985), 181–82.

3. Michael Cole cites Willem De Tetrode and Francesco del Taddd as two scarpellini in Cellini’s employ who may have been responsible for carving the marble base. See Cole, Cellini and the Principles of Sculpture, 83.

4. “… whereupon he executed in metal the statue of the Perseus that has cut off the head of Medusa, which is in the Piazza del Duca, near the door of the Ducal Palace, upon a base of marble with some very beautiful figures in bronze, each about one braccio and a third in height.” Giorgio Vasari, Lives of the Most Eminent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects, trans. Gaston de Vere, notes David E. Kuekjian (New York and Toronto, 1996), 885.

5. An exception is Color Plate 85 in Pope-Hennessy’s Cellini, one of the few complete photographs showing the original marble base and the relief in situ. Today it is no longer possible to photograph all three elements of the original monument together, since the base and relief have been replaced with replicas. But the fact remains that photographs—older or more recent—of the ensemble as a whole are rare.


11. For the relief’s narrative characterized as “puzzling,” see John Pope-Hennessy, Cellini, 181.


14. In Warburg’s theory the Boticellian ninfa or dancing maenad was
a key locus for experiencing the conflict (Auseinandersetzung) between Dionysian movement and Apollonian stasis in quattrocento Florentine art. In opposition to Panofsky's third and iconological level of interpretation, Warburg's kritische ikonologie considers verbal or textual meaning to be an aid in the apprehension of visual expression, with formal and visual meaning arising from antagonistic energies manifest in the work. See the collected work in Aby Warburg, The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance (Los Angeles, 1999).

Warburg considered his interdisciplinary approach to art history to be, fundamentally, a stylistic approach, as a fragment published by Gombrich reveals. See E.H. Gombrich, Aby Warburg: an Intellectual Biography, 2nd ed. (Chicago, 1986), 141–44.


For the paragone debate as having two epochs of intensity, see Stephan Moré, “Der paragone im Spiegel der Plastik,” in Nova and Schreurs, Benvenuto Cellini, 203–15.


Giorgio Vasari, Lives, II, 885–86.

Ferrero, Opere, 823.
37 Ferrero, Opere, 820–21.
38 Stephan Morét comments on the theoretical character of the base, but does not consider the relief in his discussion of viewpoints, “Der paragone im Spiegel der Plastik,” in Nova and Schreurs, Benvenuto Cellini, 19–36. In his Persèo and Medusa (Stuttgart 1961), Wolfgang Braunfels notes the frontality of the Persèo on its base viewed from the piazza, which he relates to the Donatello revival of the 1540s and 1550s, but not to the paragone debate.
39 Avery and Barbaglia, L’Opera completa del Cellini, 95.
40 Morét signals this progression in Cellini’s writings and discusses the influence of his vedute on other sculptors in “Der paragone im Spiegel der Plastik,” in Nova and Schreurs, Benvenuto Cellini, 19–36.
41 “Fr(atri)us ut arma/geras nudus ad/stra volo”
42 For photographs of the wax model, see Pope-Hennessy, Cellini, plates 87 and 88.
43 On the restoration, see Cristina Acidini Luchinat, “Il recente restauro del Persèo,” in Nova and Schreurs, Benvenuto Cellini, 171–79; and Lorenzo Morigi, “Cellini’s Splendor. The Reversible Theory of Restoration,” Sculpture Review 48, 3 (Fall 1999): 14–19. Photographs of the statue taken while it was indoors are reproduced in Antonio Paolucci, Cellini (Florence, 2000), 28–33.
44 Cellini, Autobiography, 366.
45 “I discovered that the Duke and Duchess were out riding, and as the base was already prepared I had the little statues brought down and straight away soldered them in, each one in its right place,” Cellini, Autobiography, 367.
51 Vasari, Lives, 886.
52 For Michelangelo’s funeral, see Rudolf Wittkower, The Divine Michelangelo: The Florentine Academy’s Homage on His Death in 1564, a facsimile edition of Eseque del Divino Michelangelo Buonarroti, Florence 1564 (Greenwich, CT, 1964).
55 For Diana-Artemis as goddess of the moon and the tides, see Jean Scncc, The Survival of the Fagan Gods (New York, 1953), 46.
56 According to Cole, the small, flying Perseus’s gaze is directed at Andromeda, but it is worth noting that what the hero in the relief sees is very similar to what the large, free-standing Perseus sees underneath him, namely a reflective surface and a faceless female form. See Cole, Cellini and the Principles of Sculpture, 130 and 137.
59 The squaring off and flattening of Medusa’s body was most apparent when it was possible to mount the scaffolding and gaze down upon the large bronzes during their recent restoration. However one excellent photograph for viewing Medusa’s body folded around Minerva’s shield exists, that taken by David Finn and reproduced with his kind permission in fig. 9.
60 Pope-Hennessy, Cellini, 183.
61 For Cellini’s praise of Bronzino, see Pope-Hennessy, Cellini, 183, and Cellini, Autobiography, 378.
62 Ferrero, Opere, 825.
63 “… una pittura vive molti pochi anni, e quella di scultura è quasi eterna,” Sopra la differenza, in Ferrero, Opere, 824.
64 For this variable star, which is now known to be three stars, see Stephen R. Wilk, Medusa: solving the mystery of the gorgon (Oxford, UK, 2000), 107–28.
65 Cellini insists in Sopra la differenza that man made by God is “di riesce tutto rondo.” See Ferrero, Opere, 822.
66 For Cellini’s imitation of Michelangelo in the construction of his autobiography, see the chapter entitled “Benvenuto Buonarroti,” in Paul Barolsky, Michelangelo’s Nose. A Myth and its Maker (University Park, PA, and London, 1990), 141–44.

72

69 “La pittura non vuol dir altro che bugia …” See Cellini’s discourse entitled “Sopra la differenza nata tra gli scultori e pittori circa il luogo destro stato dato alla pittura nelle esequie del gran Michelagnolo Buonarroti,” in Ferrero, Opere, 823.


71 Cellini, Autobiography, 394.

72 For the allegory of Virtue and Fortune on the ceiling in Vasari’s home in Arezzo, see Liana Cheney, The Paintings of the Casa Vasari (New York and London, 1985), 166–70; and more recently her The Homes of Giorgio Vasari (New York, 2006), 140–44. See also Rudolf Wittkower, Allegory and the Migration of Symbols (Boulder, CO, 1977), 105–06.

73 Cellini, Lives, 267.

74 “… perché il disegno e di due sorte, il primo e quello che si fa nell’Imaginativa e il secondo tratto da quello si dimostra con linee, e questo ha fatto l’uomo tanto ardito che egli si è messo a gheareggiare con questo grand padre Apollo …” For the complete text of this seal, see Avery and Barbaglia, Opera Completa, 100. For Cellini’s treatise on the art of drawing, see Patricia L. Reilly, “Drawing the Line. Benvenuto Cellini’s On the Principles and Method of Learning the Art of Drawing and the Question of Amateur Drawing Education,” in Margaret A. Gallucci and Paolo L. Rossi, Benvenuto Cellini: Sculptor, Goldsmith, Writer (Cambridge, UK, 2004), 26–50.

75 On the contrast between Leonardo and Michelangelo, see Goffen, Renaissance Rivals, 143–44.

76 Reactions to the piece, especially in the poetry of the period, are discussed in Shearman, Only Connect, 55–57.

77 Cellini, Autobiography, 117.

78 Cole, Cellini and the Principles of Sculpture, 134.


80 “E quelli uomini che hanno altre volte scritto in lode della pittura, talvolta si sono dimenticati di non essere loro stessi di scultura; e come uomini dipinti, e non di rilievo, hanno parlato.” Ferrero, Opere, 812.

81 For Cellini’s persona in the Vita as imitative of Michelangelo’s furore and terribità, see “Benvenuto Buonarroti,” in Paul Barolsky, Michelangelo’s Nose: A Myth and its Maker, 141–44.

82 See note 28 above.

83 Curiously, the chapter devoted to the artistic rivalry between Ban-