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Ritratto di un uomo con simboli: Lorenzo Lotto on Vice and Virtue

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Abstract

The art of Lorenzo de Tomasso Lotto (1480-1557) has until recently gained critical attention. Lotto, born in Venice to Tomasso Lotto, lived and traveled throughout Italy. The *Portrait of Man with Allegorical Symbols* on display at the El Paso Museum of Art is one of Lotto's most elusive paintings. A man of about thirty years of age is portrayed on a neutral background and divides a set of six allegorical symbols in axially. He gestures toward a set of three symbols hanging from a festoon of laurel leaves: an armillary sphere, intertwined palm branches, and a full-blown bladder. A number of scholars have attempted to identify Lotto's *Ritratto* as a self-portrait, a portrait of Marcello Framberti, or an Italian alchemist. These interpretations, however, are not supported by the available evidence. Confining the sitter to a particular identity limits interpretive possibilities and ignores historical and cultural contexts. Thus, this piece examines the portrait as a whole, situating it within its historical, cultural, and artistic contexts, and proposes that Lotto's *Ritratto* alludes to a meaning that is philosophical, open-ended, and universal rather than specific and particular.

Keywords

social justice, medieval art, Renaissance art

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Abstract: The art of Lorenzo de Tomasso Lotto (1480-1557) has until recently gained critical attention. Lotto, born in Venice to Tomasso Lotto, lived and traveled throughout Italy. The Portrait of Man with Allegorical Symbols on display at the El Paso Museum of Art is one of Lotto's most elusive paintings. A man of about thirty years of age is portrayed on a neutral background and divides a set of six allegorical symbols in axially. He gestures toward a set of three symbols hanging from a festoon of laurel leaves: an armillary sphere, intertwined palm branches, and a full-blown bladder. A number of scholars have attempted to identify Lotto's Ritratto as a self-portrait, a portrait of Marcello Framberti, or an Italian alchemist. These interpretations, however, are not supported by the available evidence. Confining the sitter to a particular identity limits interpretive possibilities and ignores historical and cultural contexts. Thus, this piece examines the portrait as a whole, situating it within its historical, cultural, and artistic contexts, and proposes that Lotto's Ritratto alludes to a meaning that is philosophical, open-ended, and universal rather than specific and particular.

Research Keywords: social justice, medieval art, Renaissance art



1. Lorenzo Lotto, *Portrait of a Man with Allegorical Symbols* (1545).

Lorenzo di Tomasso Lotto's *Portrait of a Man with Allegorical Symbols*, or *Ritratto di un uomo con simboli*, is one of Lotto's most enigmatic paintings (Fig. 1). Executed circa 1545, in the final stages of his career, the painting has been part of the El Paso Museum of Art's permanent European Kress collection since 1954. A man, of about 40 years of age, wearing a black overgown and red doublet, is seated in a neutral background. He divides a set of six allegorical symbols axially and gestures to a set of three symbols on his left: an armillary sphere, crossed palm branches, and a full-blown bladder. Our interpretation of these artifacts is key in interpreting the painting itself. The meaning of Lotto's *Portrait* has eluded scholars; some claim it is a self-portrait of the artist while others hypothesize it is a portrait of Marcello Framberti—a sixteenth-century physician—or a portrait of an alchemist. However, the meaning of the *Portrait*, a testament to a humanist Italy that was also engulfed in cultural flux and religious reform, was intended to be universal and open-ended rather than specific to a self-portrait or particular to a sitter. This piece analyzes Lotto's *Ritratto* and argues that the evidence in question points to an interpretation that is much more complex, universal, and allegorical in its presentation.

Lotto, a rediscovered master of the Renaissance, was Venetian by birth. He was born in 1480, to Tomasso Lotto; both of his parents were from Bergamo, Italy. Biographical material treating Lotto is extensive and rich. From 1538-1556 he kept a book of accounts, entitled *Libro di spese diverse*.¹ A series of letters written to the Consorzio della Misericordia in Bergamo also reveals important information about Lotto's commission of the *intarsie*—wooden panels executed using

¹ Lorenzo Lotto, *Libro di Spese Diverse 1588 – 1556* (Venice: Istituto Per La Colloborazione Culturale).

a wood layering technique—in Santa Maria Maggiore in Bergamo.² A surviving will drafted upon his final return to Venice from in 1546 provides some insight into Lotto’s life at this time.

Lotto lived during the High Venetian Renaissance, a period in which numerous gifted painters were active, including Raphael, Veronese, Tintoretto, Titian, and Giorgione. Lotto’s oeuvre, however impressive, was overshadowed by those of his contemporaries. Many scholars posit that Lotto remained an “outsider” of the Venetian painterly scene. Lotto, however, was involved in the social sphere of painting and a series of documents discovered by art historian David Rosand challenge this prevailing notion.³ One document related to unpaid rent describes Lotto as a *Pictor celebrimus*, “a very famous painter” in 1505. Additionally, Pietro Aretino, a contemporary Italian painter, described Lotto as the epitome of “goodness, good; as talented, talented.”⁴ In spite of these accolades, Lotto did not receive much more critical acclaim until rediscovered by renowned art historian Bernard Berenson, who published a pioneering monograph treating Lotto’s artistic personality and oeuvre. In *Lorenzo Lotto: An Essay in Constructive Art Criticism*, first published in 1895, Berenson notes that Lotto’s work exhibits the influence, not only of Bellini, as noted by Renaissance biographer Giorgio Vasari, but also of Palma Vecchio and Alvise Vivarini.⁵

Just as many Italian Early and High Renaissance artists became itinerant, traveling extensively to complete a number of commissions; Lotto too traveled throughout Italy.⁶ His career arguably began in Treviso, where he painted the portrait of Trevisan Bishop Bernardo Da Rossi, in 1505 (Fig. 2). Seated in three-quarter pose, Da Rossi turns to his spectator. His alert eyes catch those of the beholder as his lips twitch as though speaking. He holds a scroll in his right hand, which features an emblematic ring on his index finger. The ring itself exhibits the coat of arms of Da Rossi, which Lotto conspicuously placed on the leaning shield in his 1505 *Allegory* meant to accompany the Da Rossi portrait (Fig. 3).

² For the *intarsie* at Santa Maria Maggiore in Bergamo see Mauro Zanchi, *Lorenzo Lotto e l’immaginario alchemico. Le imprese nelle tarsie del coro della Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore in Bergamo* (Clusone: Ferrari, 1997).

³ David Rosand, *Painting in Cinquecento Venice: Titian, Veronese, Tintoretto* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982): 12.

⁴ Frank Hewitt Mather Jr. *Venetian Painters* (New York: Henry Hold and Company, 1936): 313.

⁵ Bernard Berenson, *Lorenzo Lotto: An Essay in Art Criticism* (New York: Putnam and Knickerbocker Press, 1895); Bernard Berenson, *Lorenzo Lotto* (London: Phaidon Press Ltd., 1956).

⁶ See David Young Kim, *The Traveling Artist in the Italian Renaissance: Geography, Mobility, and Style* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014): 11-26.



2. Lorenzo Lotto, *Portrait of Bishop Bernardo Da Rossi* (1505).

On exhibit at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, the *Allegory* illustrates Da Rossi's own philosophical values concerning vice and virtue. In the *Allegory*, Lotto depicts two figures on either side of a tree trunk. A shield, featuring Da Rossi's coat of arms, leans toward the figure on the right side of the composition signaling Bishop Da Rossi's predilection for *virtu*. To the left of the tree trunk, a satyr lewdly hugs a jug of wine. Beside him, another jug spills contents within, namely salt or grain. In the darkened background, there is a gloomy, but peculiarly lush landscape, and a shipwreck. This side of the complex allegory symbolizes a life of idleness and vice.

On the opposite extreme, a chubby *putto*, painted amid a sunny, although deserted landscape, contemplates instruments of humanist learning and the liberal arts. In stark contrast to the satyr, the *putto* applies itself to a virtuous path. The background of the *Allegory* showcases another *putto* ascending an arduous hill to immortality. This extreme of the composition symbolizes virtue and intellectual pursuit. Thus, scholars agree that the painting *in toto* contrasts a life of vice and virtue and underscores Da Rossi's philosophy devoted to virtue.

The pictorial tradition of vice versus virtue was inspired by motifs from Northern Europe which arrived in Venice during the High Renaissance.⁷ Engravings by Albrecht Dürer would have been familiar to Italian itinerant artists who traveled to Northern Europe, including Venetian citizens

⁷ Giovanna Nepi Scire, Fritz Koreny, Andrew John Martin, Bert W. Meijer, and Stefania Mason. *Renaissance Venice and the North: Crosscurrents in the time of Bellini, Dürer, and Titian*. Rizzoli: New York, 2000.

such as Jacopo De'Barbari who lived in Nuremberg near Dürer.⁸ Artists in Northern Europe and Italy consciously borrowed motifs, such as reclining nudes in Dürer's 1498 *Hercules at the Crossroads* (Fig. 4) and those in Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* published in 1499 in Venice.



3. Lorenzo Lotto, *Allegory* (1505).

Dürer's *Hercules at the Crossroads* was executed in 1498, a few years prior to Lotto's 1505 *Allegory*. In Dürer's *Hercules*, the mythological hero decides between two paths, one guided by virtue and the other by vice. The engraving features a satyr—lust personified—accompanied by a nymph seated on its lap. Goddess Diana strikes the group with a club and condemns the scene of worldly pleasure and vice. Dürer masterfully placed Diana's figure in the middle of the composition in order to juxtapose two paths in the background, one of which Hercules favors. In the *Crossroads* allegory, Hercules chooses the long arduous journey to immortality on the right side as he rejects the left. The dichotomy between right (*dextra*) and left (*sinistra*), good and evil, vice and virtue, damned and saved, recalls compositions of the *Last Judgment* where Christ typically presides above, hovering in a *mandorla*, as he saves figures to the right and condemns those on his left. The theme diametrically opposing vice vs. virtue was explored in

⁸ Larry Silver, "Forest Primeval: Albrecht Altdorfer and the German Wilderness Landscape," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 13, no 1 (1983): 4-43.

Lotto's 1505 *Allegory* in which, not unlike Hercules, Bishop Da Rossi extolls *virtu* over vice. A similar theme appears in Lotto's *Ritratto*, which I will formally examine later.

Lotto not only lived during the age of the Venetian Renaissance but also during an age of religious pandemonium in Europe at large. While many Italians were on the verge of declaring their alliances and choosing where their loyalties lay, Pope Leo X excommunicated Martin Luther in 1520.⁹ Nevertheless, Protestantism, originating in modern-day Germany, spread far and wide in Italy becoming a threat to the Pope in Rome.

By 1542, Pope Paul III deeply mistrusted Venice itself, suspicious of a number of German students in Vicenza, a city on the Veneto overseen by the Republic of Venice. Pope Paul III worried that Venice, being at the heart of the Aldine printing press in Italy, would consider influencing the "minds of the faithful."¹⁰ Lotto would have been responsive to the religious situation in Europe. He would have been anguished by the moral and political upheaval in Europe, and as a result, painted his portrait subjects with penetrating psychological intensity.¹¹

Lotto's portraits, executed in the 1500s, demonstrate a modern sensibility and mastery of psychological realism, through which he revealed the inner psyche of his sitters. A pioneer of psychological portraiture and a master of moods, Lotto tended to paint his sitters with deep expressiveness and psychological intensity, revealing the wear and tear of an anxious age. This tendency heightened during Europe's reform and counter-reform movements in the sixteenth-century.¹² Lotto's portrait of *Bishop Tomasso Negri* (1527), for example, emphasized Lotto's sympathy for the Reform movement rendering Bishop Negri in solemn, intense contemplation of the divine. Indeed, Bishop Negri was a reformer in sixteenth-century Venice at the height of the reform movement. Other *Cinquecento* Lotto paintings express sympathy with the Lutheran tenet of an unmediated relationship between God and humans such as in the *Nativity* (1523). Joseph, Mary, and the Christ child are depicted close to the picture plane with a crucifix, which was unconventional for sixteenth-century paintings that did not usually feature crucifixes.¹³ Though in spite of Lotto's sympathy to Protestant teachings, he remained loyal to the Dominican order.¹⁴

⁹ Peter Humfrey, *Lorenzo Lotto* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997): 153.

¹⁰ John Julius Norwich, *A History of Venice* (New York: Vintage Book, 1982): 458.

¹¹ Norbert Huse & Wolfgang Wolters. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. *The Art of Renaissance Venice: Architecture, Sculpture, and Painting, and Painting 1460-1590* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990): 247.

¹² Wendy Stedman Sheard, "The Portraits" in *Lorenzo Lotto: A Rediscovered Master of the Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998): 49.

¹³ One of Luther's ideas was the discontinuation of crucifixes. This painting suggests Lotto's Lutheran sympathies, although demonstrating his loyalty to the Dominicans through the inclusion of a crucifix.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*



4. Albrecht Dürer, Hercules at the Crossroads (1498).

Lotto's oeuvre reveals cultural transformations embodied not only in religious reform, but also in the rise of humanism. By the time of Lotto, humanism had begun in Italy, starting in the *Trecento* and reaching an apex in the *Cinquecento*. A number of Greek and Roman texts were being translated and widely disseminated in Venice aided in part by the new Venetian printing press. Humanist learning was promoted in Renaissance schools, classical authors such as Cicero and Aristotle were taught in the classroom, and a renewed interest in the forms of Greece and Rome flourished.¹⁵ In 1499, Fra Francesco Colonna wrote the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, a story of dream, love, and strife, embodying the Renaissance ideal of antiquity and courtship. Hermes Trismegistus' *Hermetica*, Alciati's *Emblematica*, and Pierio Valeriano's *Hieroglyphica* influenced Renaissance thought with new ways of interpreting the world, and encouraged humanist exploration of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, emblems, hermetic thought, and alchemy. The mystical symbols in the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* were believed to have introduced more inventive architectural designs to Venice. Occult hieroglyphic language was deployed in state architecture and the art of Tintoretto, Veronese, and Lotto.¹⁶ In Lotto's *Ritratto*, the inventive pictorial language of Renaissance hieroglyphics is discernible in the form of symbols.¹⁷

The *Ritratto* is a testament to the Renaissance past, a portrait that communicates Renaissance humanism, religious conflict, and vice and virtue dichotomies to its beholder unbounded by

¹⁵ William Harrison Woodward, *Studies in Education during the Age of the Renaissance, 1400 – 1600* (Cambridge University Press, 1924).

¹⁶ Patricia Fortini Brown, *Venice and Antiquity* (Yale University Press, 1996): 207 – 222. See also David Rosand, *Painting in Cinquecento Venice*.

¹⁷ Jean Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological tradition and its place in Renaissance Humanism and Art* (Princeton University Press, 1995): 121.

space and time.¹⁸ Lotto's portrait exhibits an unidentified weary man of about forty years of age. He stands in three-quarter view and in *contrapposto*, shifting his body weight and pointing to a set of three objects hanging from a festoon of laurel leaves. Three more artifacts hang from the festoon on the opposite extreme. Painted against a neutral background, the sitter encourages the beholder to participate in an interpretation of the symbols above through his gesture. In order from left to right, these objects are a half-blown bladder, what seems to be a sapphire and a pearl or a pearl tied with a blue ribbon, an ox-head, an armillary sphere, crossed-palm branches, and a full blown bladder. Do these objects stand for universal themes and subjects? Do they refer to the sitter's profession or activities?

In 1910, Herbert Cook offered an interpretation of the set of objects, assigning symbolic meaning to each.¹⁹ The half-blown bladder denoted poverty; the sapphire and pearl, wealth; the ox-head, labor, or intemperate stupidity; the armillary sphere, intellectual, humanist pursuit; the cross-palm branches, renown, and in the Christian sense, immortality; the full-blown bladder – standing for fame, and festoon – victory. Cook posited that the position of the six symbols suggests that the sitter has run the gamut of these life circumstances, ranging from poverty to fame. Thus, Cook not only suggests that the *Ritratto* is a self-portrait, but he also suggests the theme of time, which was common among Venetian painters of the High Renaissance as in Giorgione's *La Vecchia* (1505). However, there is weakness in his interpretation. Even though the sitter's gesture might suggest that he is in a later life stage, his extolling of the symbols to the beholder's right, and the composition's axial symmetry suggests a structure of opposites rather than a continuum of time.

Other interpretations have been proposed by Elsa Dezuanni, Diana Galis, and Mauro Zanchi. While Dezuanni believes the sitter is Marcello Framberti, Galis addresses the self-portrait question, and Zanchi posits that the sitter is a Renaissance alchemist. To support this view, Zanchi proposes that the *Ritratto*'s symbols refer to the cosmos, alchemical processes, and material transformations. To Zanchi, the sitter holds the salts from Heaven in his fist while the sapphire and pearl represents the crystallized divine liquid from the Sea of Philosophers; the bull's head, the zodiacal sign of Taurus; armillary sphere, an emblem of astronomical influence; and crossed-palm branches, spiritual victory containing the secrets of nature and God.²⁰ His interpretation intrigues as humanist interest in understanding the divine, alchemy, and mystical hermetic thought was prevalent in the High Renaissance. If we accept Zanchi's thesis, Lorenzo Lotto exemplified the artistic and literary tendency to consolidate pagan, Classical quasi-sciences with contemporary Christian traditions particularly at the height of the Counter-Reformation.²¹ In effect, scholars, literati, and artists attempted to consolidate humanist Neoplatonism and classicism, on one hand, and Christian philosophies on the other.²² Placing an armillary sphere, indicative of intellectual pursuit, and crossed-palm branches, suggesting immortality, might have been understood by careful observers as an effort to juxtapose rather than diametrically oppose humanism and Christian traditions.

¹⁸ Jodi Cranston, *The Poetics of Portraiture in the Italian Renaissance* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹⁹ Herbert Cook, "Venetian Portraits and Some Problems," *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, 26 (1909).

²⁰ Mauro Zanchi, *L'Opera Ermetica di Lorenzo Lotto* (Clusone: Ferrari, 1999).

²¹ Walter Pater, *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2010): 18-28.

²² Charles G. Nauert, Jr. "The Clash of Humanists and Scholastics: An Approach to Pre-Reformation Controversies," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 4, no. 1 (1973): 1-18.

While Zanchi's interpretation proposes that the sitter is a Renaissance alchemist, an interpretation that is not easily dismissed, art historian Diana Galis addresses the self-portrait question. In her 1977 dissertation, Galis responds to earlier contributions which rejected Herbert Cook's self-portrait interpretation. While Hook's self-portrait analysis has not been challenged, modern scholars have implicitly rejected it based on dating the portrait to 1545. The *Ritratto* features a man of about forty, but no older. At this time, Lotto restlessly traveled between Treviso and Venice and was 66 years of age, casting doubt on the self-portrait theory. Following Cook, Luigi Colletti in 1954 dated the painting to the 1520s, when Lotto was the age of the man in the portrait, yet did not engage in self-portrait debates. Coletti's dating, however, is imprecise. Stylistic evidence makes it clear that the painting was not painted in the 1520s when Lotto was in his forties. The rather loose brushstrokes, frontal pose, vertical lines, and neutral background differ significantly from his earlier portraits, in which the sitter is in an enclosed space, and horizontally arrayed composition coupled with identifiable landscapes or domestic interiors.²³ Elsa Dezuanni, on the other hand, argues that the El Paso painting portrays Marcello Framberti, a sixteenth-century physician from Mantua.²⁴ Based on an entry to Lotto's *Libro*, Dezuanni theorizes that the symbols represent Framberti's tools of trade, the bladder is used to store bodily liquids by contemporary doctors and the sapphire and pearl to cure epilepsy and other ailments. Indeed, it was conventional for Lotto to place emblems that identified the sitter's profession in portrait compositions. Yet, Dezuanni's interpretation is not supported by the available evidence. In another entry to Lotto's *Libro* in 1545, he noted that he had completed a portrait of Framberti, but that he had also restored it. Though the Lotto painting in El Paso exhibits 20th-century restoration, it does not show any by Lotto himself, and so does not seem to be the Framberti portrait he mentioned.²⁵ It cannot be ascertained whether the sitter of Lotto's painting is Framberti, yet Dezuanni's interpretation is currently favored by the El Paso Museum of Art.²⁶

²³ Galis, 263; Peter Humfrey, *Painting in Renaissance Venice* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995): 176-183.

²⁴ Elsa Dezuanni, "L'uomo con simboli di Lotto a El Paso," *Art e Dossier* (2006): 42-45.

²⁵ El Paso Museum of Art, Condition Report, accessed January 2018; Francesco De Carolis, "Lorenzo Lotto e Il Libro di spese diverse: da Venezia a Loreto," *Universita Degli Studi di Trieste* (2017): 678.

²⁶ Didactic label, El Paso Museum of Art, El Paso, TX. EPMA's tentatively titled the Lotto as *Portrait of Marcello Framberti (?)*.



5. Titian, *Gentleman in Blue* (1510).

The painting's meaning cannot be resolved by identifying it as a portrait of Marcello Framberti or a self-portrait of Lotto; it beckons a reading that is open-ended and philosophical, and considers the composition as a whole within historical and cultural contexts. The sitter's position creates a dichotomous structure of opposites. Placed in clusters of three, divided by the sitter, these objects, ranging from a half-blown bladder to a full-blown bladder, suggests not a linear continuum of life events, but a dichotomy of polar opposites. The compositional arrangement creates a contrast between two inimical extremes as it appears in the iconography of choice between *dextra e sinistra*, right and left, good and evil, and vice and virtue. In effect, two figures fighting each other, according to prolific art historian Erwin Panofsky, symbolizes the eternal battle between vice and virtue.²⁷ But rather than two figures fighting, the battle between vice and virtue is implied in Lotto's *Ritratto* through the juxtaposition of two clusters of symbols one of which is chosen by the sitter through his gesture. Symbols to the right of the sitter represent wealth, poverty, and empty fame, in sum the mundane.

Symbolic elements to the left of the sitter, which he clearly extols, stand for intellectual pursuit, eternity, and fame. The dichotomy recalls early Lotto paintings treating the same vice versus virtue theme such as the portrait of *Lucrezia Valier as Lucretia* (1533). Valier, a lavishly dressed Rubenesque woman, gestures to a drawing of Lucretia, a mythological figure who chooses death over the loss of virtue.²⁸ A Latin inscription on the table reads "no shameless women shall live by the example of Lucretia."²⁹ Lucrezia Valier, in other words, mirrors her own virtue in that of Lucretia, who shares her namesake. The same was implied in the *Allegory* of 1505

²⁷ Erwin Panofsky, *The Meaning of the Visual Arts* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1955): 29.

²⁸ Humfrey, *Painting in Renaissance Venice*, 179.

²⁹ "nec villa impvdica lucretia exemplo vivet."

accompanying the portrait of Bishop Da Rossi in which two extremes, divided by a tree trunk, juxtaposes vice, symbolized by the satyr, and virtue by the *putto*. Not unlike Lucrezia Valier, Bishop Da Rossi mirrored his own virtue on the *Allegory* inspired by classical allegory. In effect, the *Allegory* resonates in thematic variants of the allegory of *Hercules at the Crossroads* by Dürer in which Hercules favors an arduous path to immortality rather than *voluptas* and vice. Just as Lucrezia, Da Rossi, and Hercules exemplify virtue, Lotto's sitter rejects material wealth in favor of intellectual pursuit on the path to immortality embodied in both the armillary sphere and the cross-palm branches. Having selected a virtuous path, the sitter then confronts the viewer blurring the distinction between the viewed and viewer, eliciting a personal response, and inviting the viewer to participate in the sitter's choice.

Renaissance portraits progressively confused the distinction between viewer and viewed, subject and object, in order to invite a personal interpretation and encourage a sitter-beholder dialogue.³⁰ Portraits, such as Lotto's, address and intentionally interact with the viewer through gesture and gaze. A sitter-viewer dialogue in the *Ritratto* is enabled in part by the absence of a *parapet*—a low wall—which typically functioned to divide space and exclude the interpretative dialogue. For instance, the *parapet* in Titian's portrait of a *Gentleman in Blue* (1510) emphasizes the status and class of the sitter, himself a member of the aristocracy, and delineates an "I-thou, here-there" spatial arrangement (Fig. 5).

Lotto's *Ritratto*, rather than demarcate space, eliminated the air of aristocratic reserve and rendered his sitter psychologically-present, albeit distant through symbolic devices. The sitter's expression, tired gaze, and gesture, ridden with pathos—not uncommon for Lotto's portraits of laymen—invites an interpretation that is personal and intimate. This sitter-viewer dialogue would have been encouraged not only by the sitter's frontal pose, gesture, and sympathetic gaze, but also by the mirrored composition. Lotto positioned the sitter so that his favored side on his left, *sinistra*, mirrored the viewer's favored side on his right, *dextra*. This compositional device creates, in Jodi Cranston's words, a "dyad of exchange," a dialogue in which the viewer accesses the sitter's message unbounded by temporal and spatial constructs. The sitter invites participation in his imparted decision through the encrypted language of symbols. This language would have been understood by a close circle of viewers who were attuned to symbolic thinking. For Lotto's sitter to be seated close to the picture plane facing the viewer frontally, the intended viewers were likely humanists or those close to Lotto's inner circle. To the viewer, the message would have transmitted messages about Renaissance culture; the interpretation being intentionally ambiguous to those outside Lotto's immediate circle just as the truth of Egyptian hieroglyphs were inaccessible to a wide audience.

Lotto's El Paso painting captures historical, artistic, and cultural tendencies and reveals a message that intended to be evocative, universal, philosophical, and open-ended rather than particular to a self-portrait or specific to Marcello Framberti. One such cultural tendency was the vice vs. virtue dichotomy. As established, Lotto's paintings and Dürer's *Hercules*, extolling virtue

³⁰ Jodi Cranston, "Dialogues with the Beholder: The Poetics of Portraiture in the Italian Renaissance," PhD Dissertation (Columbia University, 1998).

and good and condemning the caducity of men and evil was part of Italian literary culture and humanist learning, which was widely disseminated via the Venetian printing press. Humanist Leon Battista Alberti in *De Pittura*, rejected material wealth and money-making in favor of acquiring fame through righteous acts, good deeds, and the virtues of a painter.³¹ Hermes Trismegistus in the *Hermetica* commented on vice, extolled religious, and philosophical teachings, and contributed to new knowledge of hermetic thought and astronomy. Many of these discoveries were inspired by a revived interest in classical philosophies of Plato, a movement coined as Neoplatonism.³² Tantamount to the revival of Classical forms in Renaissance art and architecture, the transmission of humanist literature inspired poets, physicians, philosophers, theologians, and most importantly, artists.³³ Such was the case of literature relating to the eternal battle between vice and virtue and the contrasting philosophies of *vita attiva* and *vita contemplativa*, a Renaissance debate referring to a life of active service to the state and contemplative intellectual pursuits.³⁴ Giorgione took these themes to heart when painting his famous 1510 fresco at the Castelfranco Veneto and Casa Maria-Pelizzari, near Venice (Fig. 6). Evidence shows that Giorgione collaborated with a renowned Renaissance humanist, Giovan Battista Abioso on the fresco painting titled *Il Fregio delle Arti liberali e meccaniche*. The work features armillary spheres—as in Lotto's *Ritratto*—armature, open books, numismatic portraits, entwined motifs, and other objects relating to astronomy, war, and intellectual pursuit. Lotto's iconographic program looks akin to Giorgione's fresco in the use of celestial symbols including the ox head and the armillary sphere, with which Lotto was likely familiar. Indeed, in his 1546 will, Lotto wrote of the "significance of the active and contemplative life with spiritual meditation above all things terrestrial," which recalls Giorgione's fresco in the Veneto.³⁵ As such, Lotto was not only responsive to the religious reform but also to artistic conventions related to humanist thought.



6. Giorgione, *Fresco in Main Hall, Castelfranco, Veneto* (1510).

Lotto's *Ritratto* embodies a humanist Italy. Lotto's painting reveals both Italian humanism and the unsettled atmosphere of the mid-16th century. Its iconography reflected a Renaissance humanist culture oriented to the instructive principles of the Counter-Reformation and manifest in the vice and virtue dichotomy. He produced a mirrored composition which evokes an "I—though" correspondence between sitter and viewer bespeaking the Renaissance humanist endeavor to study the individual through psychologically intense painting compositions. In so doing, Lotto exemplified the pioneer psychological painter studying the individual experience and hence the complex and universal. Lotto's sitter in *Portrait of a Man with Allegorical Symbols* is far from being identified as Lotto himself or specifically Marcello Framberti. Confining the sitter to a particular identity, as is the case with identifying the sitter as Framberti, limits interpretive possibilities and ignores historical and cultural contexts.

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Victor Hurtado recently earned his B.A. in Art History with a minor in Intelligence and National Security Studies from The University of Texas at El Paso. His research interests include Venetian Renaissance art and cultural security. Victor has delivered conference papers titled *A Turn of the Century Building: U.S. Post Office* at the 3rd Annual Art History Symposium, *Daesh: A Threat to Cultural Security* at the National Security Studies Colloquium, *A Portrait of a Man with Allegorical Symbols: Lorenzo Lotto on Vice and Virtue* at the HSI Pathways Cross Institutional Conference, and *The Rhetoric and Practices of Cultural (In)security* at the 2018 International Studies Association Convention in San Francisco, California. He studied abroad in both Morocco and Italy, where he traveled and conducted research on late medieval and Renaissance art. A supporter of historic preservation in El Paso, Victor is a student intern at the Texas Trost Society's Architectural Preservation Committee and former intern at the Texas Historical Commission in Austin.