

The Hidden Figures: Old Women and Art in the Early Modern Italian Domestic Interior

In the bustling streets and grand palaces of early modern Italy, the role of women in art was often relegated to the sidelines. But within the private confines of domestic interiors, a different story unfolds—one in which old women played a vital role in the making and meaning of art.



Old Women and Art in the Early Modern Italian Domestic Interior (Visual Culture in Early Modernity)

by Caryl Churchill

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

Language : English
File size : 10986 KB
Text-to-Speech : Enabled
Screen Reader : Supported
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled
Print length : 215 pages



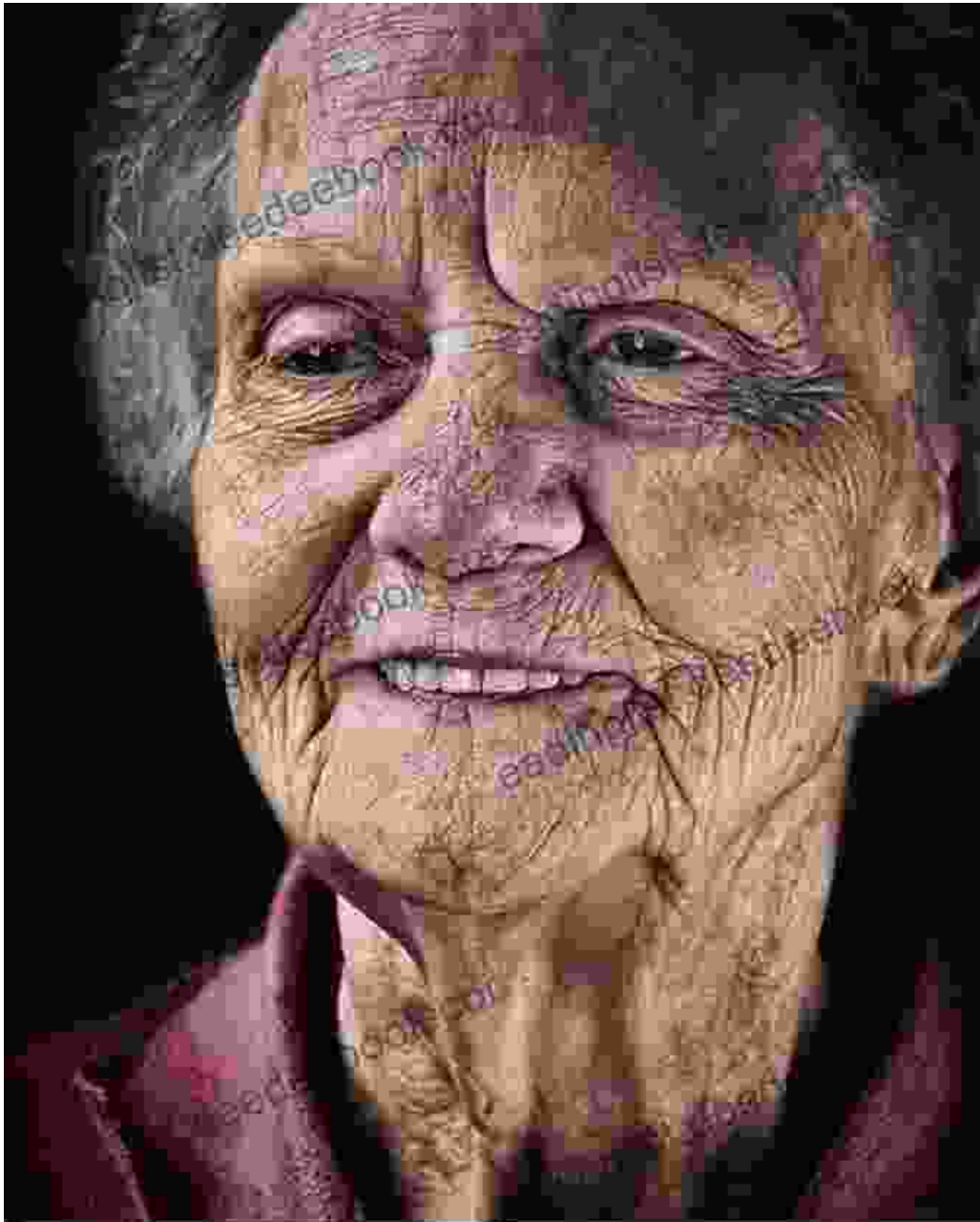
Far from being mere bystanders or caretakers, old women in early modern Italy were active participants in the creation and consumption of visual culture. They commissioned paintings, tapestries, and sculptures; they advised on artistic matters; and they even painted themselves.

A Space of Their Own

The domestic interior was a space where women, particularly old women, could exert a degree of control over their surroundings. Here, they could

display their own works of art, as well as those commissioned or inherited from others. These artworks often reflected the women's own interests and experiences, offering a glimpse into their private worlds.

For example, the



Another work of art that speaks to the role of old women in the domestic interior is the



The inclusion of an elderly woman in this depiction of the Holy Family is significant. It suggests that old women were not only respected members of the household, but also played an important role in the religious life of the family.

Advisors and Patrons

In addition to commissioning and displaying their own works of art, old women in early modern Italy also played an active role in advising on artistic matters. They were often consulted by their husbands, sons, and other family members about the purchase and placement of artwork.

For example, the letters of Lucrezia Gonzaga, Duchess of Urbino, reveal that she was a keen collector of art and an advisor to her husband, Federico da Montefeltro, on the decoration of their palace.

Old women also acted as patrons of artists, providing financial support and commissions. This support was essential for the careers of many artists, who relied on the patronage of wealthy individuals to survive.

One of the most famous examples of an old woman patron is Isabella d'Este, Marchioness of Mantua. Isabella was a passionate collector of art and commissioned works from some of the most famous artists of her time, including Leonardo da Vinci and Titian.

Artists in Their Own Right

In addition to commissioning and advising on art, some old women in early modern Italy were also artists in their own right. These women often learned to paint from their husbands or fathers, and they produced a wide range of works, from portraits to religious scenes.

One of the most well-known female artists of the early modern period is Sofonisba Anguissola, who was born in Cremona, Italy, in 1532. Anguissola was a talented painter who studied under the renowned artist Bernardino Campi.

Anguissola's work is characterized by its realism and attention to detail. Her portraits often depict strong and independent women, including her own sisters and other members of her family.

The role of old women in the making and meaning of art in early modern Italian domestic interiors was complex and multifaceted. They were not only passive recipients of art, but active participants in its creation and consumption.

Through their commissions, advice, and own artistic endeavors, old women helped to shape the visual culture of their time. Their contributions to art are a testament to their creativity, intelligence, and power.



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