Portraits played a key role in the rediscovery of Lorenzo Lotto by Bernard Berenson, who in 1895 hailed them as the epitome of the psychological depth and symbolic dimension of his oeuvre. Although Berenson’s opinion remains valid today, little attention has been paid to Lotto’s creative process, which will be examined in this essay. This task is aided by objective data—the invaluable information provided in the artist’s account book, the Libro di spese diverse—but hindered by the dearth of in-depth technical studies carried out to date.

Behind every portrait there is a motive. Lotto painted his for the usual reasons: among others, to leave a memento of the sitter, to highlight their social or professional status, to produce the likeness of an absent person, or as a testament to love, bereavement. There are examples of all of the above in the exhibition. The portraits on view were executed throughout his entire career except during his last four years in Loreto, when the records suggest that he abandoned the genre.1 As for the identity of the people who hired his services, it should be pointed out that Lotto, unlike Raphael, Titian, and Bronzino, was not a court portraitist. No Italian court—or indeed the papal and imperial courts—ever enlisted his services and he failed to arouse any particular interest among the Venetian aristocracy. He did, however, attract the attention of the elites of the other cities where he lived and this explains why he painted bishops, senior officials, and rich merchants, in addition to skilled craftsmen and professionals. There is furthermore evidence that several of his sitters were related to each other, and that others were friends or acquaintances of his who also commissioned him to execute religious works2—a fact which stresses the importance of personal relations in the advancement of his career. He was no different to other artists of the day with respect to the variety of his clientele or the abundance of male likenesses in his output compared to those of women, though in Lotto’s case this has been attributed on occasion to his alleged misogyny.3 His portraits nevertheless possess a number of distinctive features; they are characterised by the many paintings he made of professionals proudly exhibiting the tools of their trade and a certain sensitivity towards a few marginal groups, which led him to paint

FIG. 23
Lorenzo Lotto, Andrea Odoni
[cat. 25 detail]
poor people and Jews. Equally striking is the large number of pictures of clergymen in his oeuvre (no other artist is known to have painted so many), particularly though not only Dominicans—an order with which he sympathised, especially the Observant branch. Lotto’s religiousness, remarked on since early times, did not prevent him from painting Luther and his wife [see fig. 11]. More than as indications of his possible religious affinities, the likenesses of Martin Luther and Katharina von Bora, executed for Lotto’s nephew Mario Armano in 1540, interest us here as evidence that he painted not only from the life but also from earlier pictures by other artists. This was not Lotto’s only connection with other artists’ work. In 1542—though he turned down the commission shortly afterwards—he agreed to make a portrait of Nicolò Marcello, doge from 1473 to 1474, to be modelled on Gentile Bellini’s (London, National Gallery); and the following year Giovanni Lippomano entrusted him with painting the humanist Giovanni Aurelio Auregello, who died in 1524, taking as a basis a portrait owned by Bartolomeo Avolanti, a physician of Treviso. He is furthermore known to have restored at least two likenesses made by colleagues.

HOW DID LOTTO PAINT HIS PORTRAITS?

It is difficult to carry out a technical study of these works because the artist’s first steps are usually concealed by the final execution. The large quantities of lead white in the flesh tones and women’s clothing make it hard to detect possible traces of underdrawings using infrared reflectography, and the black garments worn by many of the male figures do not help either. Nevertheless, the technical examinations conducted on a few portraits, coupled with an analysis of the drawings on paper and a careful reading of his account book, shed essential light on their genesis.

Lotto started out as a painter in the Veneto region at the turn of the fifteenth to the sixteenth century, a time when artists were seeking and experimenting with novel procedures to breathe new life into the stagnant art scene. The geographical and political situation of Venice and its territory made it particularly receptive to new materials, techniques, and sources of inspiration—and both visual and written—which were often introduced by artists from the rest of Italy and Europe. Lotto’s heterogeneous procedures reflect this environment, which witnessed the development of oil painting alongside the continuation of earlier practices. His annotations in the Libro di spese diverse show him to be an obsessive painter whose methods conformed to the traditional recommendations laid down in Cennino Cennini’s Il libro dell’arte (The Book of the Art of Cennino Cennini, about 1410), as well as those cited in Giovan Battista Armenini’s De’ veri precetti della pittura (On the True Precepts of the Art of Painting, 1587), the most important treatise of the second half of the sixteenth century. Although the first entries in his account book are dated 1538, Lotto must have adopted similar guidelines—relatively standard procedures akin to those followed by Sebastiano del Piombo, Titian, and Raphael—to prepare his paintings throughout his career. His practice of certain artisanal tasks and constant travels around Italy polished his technical skills, which he progressively adapted to his needs. The different hand ‘movements’ involved in illuminating miniatures, producing intricate intarsia designs [see figs. 8 and 65], modelling in wax and clay, and carrying out restoration, for which he needed to imitate other artists’ styles, led Lotto to build up one of the most versatile repertoires of devices of the period.

Although Lotto was not unaware of contemporary artists from Giovanni Bellini and Raphael to Titian, including Gian Girolamo Savoldo and Bonifazio de’ Pitati, we do not find any explicit references to them in his oeuvre, but rather a reworking of their techniques to create a language of his own. Like them, he introduced innovations in his portraits, though they are often less noticeable. His experiments were thus conducted ‘silently’ and can be seen, for example, in the use of unusual substances—rare pigments, binders, and compounds which caused oil to dry faster or more slowly—which enabled him to control the properties of the paint layer and, accordingly, how light was reflected on it. His versatility is visible in the huge variety of drawing materials he acquired—charcoal, natural black chalk, white chalk, and tailor’s chalk, as well as ink and even vitriol to make it with—for working on paper and also for transferring compositions to canvas.
Lotto began his portraits by making brief pen-and-ink sketches on paper to work out the position of the subject or subjects. It is not known whether the client visited the artist’s studio for this purpose or the painter executed these preparatory drawings in the sitter’s house, though both possibilities are likely, as the Libro di spese diverse mentions at least two occasions when Lotto visited a client’s home. Some of these sheets, such as the preparatory study for the Portrait of a Married Couple in the Hermitage [cat. 18 and 19], are squared in red chalk, suggesting that the painter preferred this method for transferring scenes to larger supports. Once he had arranged the composition on the canvas, Lotto would continue working either from the life or using other drawings in black chalk or oil on paper to characterise the subject in greater depth [see for example fig. 30.1 and cat. 41]. The latter were also made from the life and had fewer details and less shading than those which can be considered sketches in their own right [cat. 5 and 30]. Lotto continued to work from his studies, be they drawings or teste (heads)—as he repeatedly calls them in his account book—coloured in oil paint. These abbozzi, executed on different supports, were common in Venice from the early sixteenth century onwards at least, as borne out by the head of a German merchant of the Fugger family ‘coloured in oil’ by Giorgione, which formed part of Giorgio Vasari’s collection of drawings, and the Self-Portrait Palma Vecchio sketched on the back of a panel displaying a female portrait dated 1515 (Florence, Uffizi). Having a good likeness of the subject, even if it was a quick sketch, enabled an artist to set to work on the canvas with

FIG. 24
Infrared reflectogram of the portrait Messer Marsilio Casotti and his Wife Faustina [see cat. 17]
a very clear idea of what to do and avoid long sittings. The painter would use this model to work out the initial arrangement of the tones on the canvas. As we have seen with Giorgione’s work, oil sketches were often kept and later sold as works in their own right. The painterly quality of these heads can be appreciated in the X-ray images of the double portrait of Messer Marsilio Cassotti and his Wife Faustina in the Prado [cat. 17] and in that of Friar Angelo Ferretti as Saint Peter Martyr in the Fogg Museum [cat. 45], in which the underpainting recalls the Berlin Head of an Old Man [cat. 41]. Finally, the artist would have worked on individual features such as the hands or the clothing, for which there are a few surviving drawings in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, though they are quite brief. The care taken over the more finished sketches explains the absence of a clear underdrawing and major pentimenti (which are, however, found in his larger religious works) in the early stages of Lotto’s portraits.

The scant traces of preliminary drawing that have been detected in Lotto’s works under infrared reflectography were executed in carbon-based substances over not very dark grounds. In the double portrait in the Prado he used a dry medium—possibly finely sharpened black chalk—keeping carefully to the contours, with no apparent shading [fig. 24]. This ties in with other studies that point out how from the 1520s onwards the painter progressively shunned drawing in liquid media like ink or oil for dry media such as black chalk or charcoal. Although he transferred a few compositions in red chalk using a grid—invisible under infrared rays—as in the Nativity fresco in the chapel of San Giorgio in Credaro, he worked freehand, later going over the lines to unify the drawing. When the underdrawing is executed in black, it has the appearance of, and can be mistaken for, tracing lines under infrared reflectography. However, the use of tracing would have been uncommon in portraits unless the artist intended to make replicas, as was Titian’s custom. There are
no known repeated versions of Lotto’s portraits, though he did use the facial features of the woman in the husband-and-wife portrait in the Hermitage [cat. 19] to paint Mary in the Virgin and Child with Saints Jerome, George, Sebastian, Nicholas of Bari, Anthony Abbot and Catherine of Alexandria [cat. 20], probably basing both works on the same drawing.

In Lotto the underdrawing is a brief backbone of the composition and never an integral part of the visible image, unlike in the work of his contemporaries and immediate predecessors such as Carlo Crivelli, Andrea Mantegna, Giorgione, and Titian. These artists used all the stages in the creative process to build up the painted scene, so that both the work on canvas and the underlying drawing are integrated into it and contribute to the overall effect. In Lotto, however, the paint layers are more important. Indeed, the strokes of his underdrawing, lightly executed so as not to show through the paint, are not detected by short-wave infrared radiation and are only barely visible when certain filters are applied to reduce light intensity.

When Lotto started out as a portraitist, he progressively shunned wooden panels for textile supports. Panel paintings were prevalent in Lotto’s oeuvre until 1520; by 1530 he was mainly using textiles, and nothing else from 1540 onwards. This tendency was followed by other painters of the Veneto, though there are important exceptions such as Giorgione, Titian, and Paris Bordone, who preferred to use canvases throughout their career. As for the size of Lotto’s supports, none is larger than the 138 cm of the portrait of Giovanni dalla Volta with his Wife and Children [cat. 43], and he must have used very small ones too, as the records mention a ‘small picture with his portrait’ (quadretto piccolo di suo ritratto). His small formats and portraits made on paper [cat. 36] and subsequently glued to canvas may have derived from his activity as a miniaturist and from the Flemish custom of mounting portraits executed on parchment or paper onto a wooden support. The Libro di spese diverse does not mention panels, which he no longer used by then—its records date from 1538 onwards—not is it very explicit about textiles either. He appears to have preferred plain-weave, fine-grained canvases, though he sometimes used twill, herringbone, or even damask weave. Their texture is seldom visible throughout the painted surface and their effect, only perceptible from a short distance, is limited to very specific areas. To prevent the grain of the fabric interfering too much, Cennini advised sanding the surface of the canvas with pumice stone or scraping it with a special knife; Lotto purchased such a tool in 1532. Further details of how he prepared his canvases are known: he acquired stretchers, fabrics, nails, and substances used for the ground (gesso and glue, the most widely employed at the time), but also imprimaturas and ready-prepared canvases. In a few cases, such as the Portrait of a Man with a Lizard [cat. 28], there is a layer of glue between the ground and the outer layers, as recommended by Cennini, by Filarete (Antonio Averlino) in his Trattato di architettura (Treatise on Architecture, 1450–65), and by Vasari in his Vite (Lives, 1550). When an imprimatura is present, it is an oily lead-white layer to which other substances are sometimes added: drying agents, calcium carbonate to help the paint spread more smoothly, or various colorants. These imprimaturas cannot have been very thick, as the figures are clearly perceptible in the X-ray images of nearly all the portraits. They are generally pale, though in the painting of Giovanni Agostino and Nicolò Della Torre [cat. 12] and in the Portrait of a Woman inspired by Lucretia [cat. 27] they are greyish, composed of lead white and carbon black. This type of base reduced the reflective glare of an underlying white ground and allowed the artist to start modulating the areas of shadow. Lotto pioneered this procedure along with Sebastiano, Titian, and Raphael.

While painters of the Veneto had access to substances from many places, Lotto’s palette is surprisingly varied. It includes both traditional pigments and others that were relatively rare in Venice, such as malachite, asphalt, saffron, and Naples yellow. When he was working in faraway places, he had colours brought from Venice; though he also relied on local merchants and even purchased pigments from friends or colleagues. He used nearly all the blue pigments available. The colour most often mentioned in his accounts is lapis lazuli, which he sometimes pledged as security for payments. He purchased it in bulk—in mineral...
FIG. 26
Detail of The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, with Nicolo Bonghi [see cat. 16]

FIG. 27
Detail of the Portrait of a Young Man with a Lamp [see cat. 8]
form—and purified it himself. He also bought azurite—‘azzurro grosso […] de Alemania’ or ‘todesco’—as well as indigo for dying paper and an ‘azzurro biadetto’ that is difficult to identify.  

His yellows are especially strange and vibrant and many are the result of combining common substances such as lead-tin yellow (‘giallorino’) with black pigments, but he also employed unusual ones such as saffron. A controversial colour detected in his Allegory is lead antimonate (Naples yellow), a synthetic pigment whose earliest use had been dated to 1620 until only recently. It could be the ‘zalolin da vasarj’ Lotto purchased in March 1541, though he used it in earlier works. His reds are more traditional. Prominent among them is cinnabar, which he usually glazed—following medieval recommendations—with lakes made of kermes, madder (a vegetable product easier to obtain from Venetian dye merchants), or cochineal, which became available in Venice in the 1540s. Lotto referred to kermes, which is very dark, as lake of ‘Firenza’. It was one of the costliest pigments and he used it on its own or glazed with less deeply coloured lakes. Technical examinations have revealed further pigments—the ‘colli de più sorte’ to which he refers in the Libro di spese—such as earths (yellow ochres, reds, and browns) and orpiment and realgar, which are responsible for the warm golden oranges that are so characteristic of his work. One of the most interesting materials recorded in his account book is asphalt or bitumen. Although it is associated with seventeenth-century techniques, it is mentioned in sixteenth-century treatises as being used for shadows on flesh tones and the varied handling of oil paint in the same work, even in smaller pictures. His ‘touch’ in portrait painting evolved significantly from his early pictures, which he executed in thinner layers. The skin of the sitters in his first works contrasts with that of his elderly saints of the 1520s and that of Nicolò Bonghi in the Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine, which is fleshier and looser in texture and markedly graphic. In Bonghi’s portrait the shadows, hair, and wrinkles—incised on the forehead—are rendered in perfect detail. The layers soon became thicker, though the artist always used a combination of thinly and densely painted areas.

Lotto’s portraits attest to his technical prowess. They are notable for the variety of brushstrokes in the textiles and flesh tones and the varied handling of oil paint in the same work, even in smaller pictures. His ‘touch’ in portrait painting evolved significantly from his early pictures, which he executed in thinner layers. The skin of the sitters in his first works contrasts with that of his elderly saints of the 1520s and that of Nicolò Bonghi in the Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine, which is fleshier and looser in texture and markedly graphic. In Bonghi’s portrait the shadows, hair, and wrinkles—incised on the forehead—are rendered in perfect detail. The layers soon became thicker, though the artist always used a combination of thinly and densely painted areas.

Lotto’s keen eye for capturing the interaction of matter with light developed as a result of lengthy periods of observation, which must have caused his eyesight to deteriorate and required him to buy distance glasses to ‘veder luntano’. His visual acuity and ability to translate what he saw to canvas are borne out by the powerful characterisation of his sitters—which, paradoxically, contrasts with
the slight blurredness of the flesh tones and the softness of the textiles. In some portraits the sitters undergo a process of idealisation from the early stages of execution to the final painted image. This can be seen in the painting of Marsilio Cassotti and his wife in the Prado [cat. 17], in the picture of Friar Angelo Ferretti [cat. 45], and also in the double portrait in the Hermitage [cat. 19], where the natural interaction between the spouses in the first sketch on paper [cat. 18] is no longer present. The technical studies of the Prado portrait show that Lotto softened Cassotti’s sharp chin, the appearance of his flesh, and his gestures. This idealisation suggests that the sitters were not present during the final execution of certain details. Infrared reflectography reveals a subtle underdrawing executed with a very sharp instrument and limited to very brief contours; this would appear to indicate that it was transferred using the grid method from a sketch similar to that made for the double portrait in the Hermitage. Marsilio’s and Faustina’s bodies display only slight adjustments to the outlines compared to the more significant changes detected in the position of Cupid’s wings and the direction of his gaze. Like Titian and Raphael, Lotto rearranged the space in a few strokes and eliminated discarded elements using dark paint.

Lotto did not treat faces drawn on paper any differently to those he painted on canvas. In both cases he combined crisply contoured areas with softer lines. His characterisation of facial features stems not only from the degree of detail but also from how the expressions are enlivened by the illumination, which is diffuse and changing in some cases and instantaneous in others. The artist avoids anatomical challenges and concentrates on depicting the skin. Not only is his handling of female and male flesh very different; that of his male figures varies too. A
Few painters modified the reflection of light by means of grooved base layers (Raphael, Andrea del Sarto) or very coarse supports with minimal preparation (Giorgione, Titian, and Sebastiano); others, like Lotto, used bases with local colour, building up the outer layers with short, paint-laden strokes that run into each other and applying glazes to the grooves. He thus created the effect of discontinuous colour—only perceptible when the work is viewed close-up—where the surface has a flickering appearance caused by the interaction of the paint rather than by the mixture of pigments. He used this device in the portrait in the Staatliche Museen [fig. 32] and in his supposed self-portrait [cat. 10], where the modulation of the curtain of red lake in the former and the green background in the latter contrast with the continuous black plane of the clothing. These are vibrant areas and in other paintings they are located in the shadowy parts where the painter accentuates the effect by leaving the mark of his fingers or the palm of his hand [see fig. 27], a device also found in Bellini’s works.

The quality of Lotto’s pictures lies in the execution of the paint layers and this sets him apart from Venetian painters’ abovementioned practice of integrating all the layers of the work, including the support, into the effect of the final image and causes many of his portraits to lack the harmony of those of Giorgione and Titian. Lotto does, however, resemble these artists in the soft brushwork advocated by Pliny, Francesco Bocchi, and Ludovico Dolce, who called for tonal painting and the disappearance of sharp contours. In some portraits the outlines blend into the setting; in others they are marked by translucent lines or by a slight break with the adjacent areas, a device later used by Tintoretto, Caravaggio, and Annibale Carracci. The texture of the canvas is more evident in these areas,
contributing to the effect of a transition between light and shadow, especially in the more lightly painted anatomies. Despite Dolce’s criticism of his poor colours (‘cattive tinte’), Lotto convincingly recreated the material qualities of the sitters’ bodies, a recurring theme in the artistic literature of antiquity which Paolo Pino defined as proprie-tà. His ability to simulate textures and relief, using brushwork to modify the colours, the direction of light, and the base tone, conforms closely to these precepts. His mastery is furthermore noticeable in the dim glow of his backgrounds, in the shadows cast, and in the transitions from the most luminous planes to semidarkness, which counter the powerful effect of the vividly coloured textiles. These shadows with vague outlines are positioned beyond the figures and connect them with the background. They allow the artist to create space without needing to paint it and also appear in discreet places such as on hands and a few accessory elements. The illumination is carefully calculated, from the palest and most intense light which obliterates the details to that which creates the deepest shadows or half-tones.

TYPES, GESTURES, AND OBJECTS

Lotto was a versatile artist who painted various types of portraits: face-, bust-, half- and three-quarter length. Yet he never tried his hand at full-length portraits, even though he would have known about them from Moretto da Brescia (Alessandro Bonvicino), whose famous male portrait of this kind is dated 1526 (London, National Gallery), two years before he collaborated with Lotto in Bergamo. Instead he produced fascinating husband-and-wife portraits, painting the spouses either on different supports or sharing the same space in landscape format. Although double portraits were first made in Venice by Giorgione, joint depictions of a man and his wife were unprecedented in Italy before 1520, and it is therefore tempting to attribute their appearance to Lotto during his period in Bergamo. This may be the case, and it seems equally logical to assume that, having proved his efficiency at portraying married couples, Lotto then began using the landscape format for individual portraits. It should none-
afford greater dynamism to his sitters, who tend to be situated slightly off-centre in unstable poses that upset the balance of the scene, especially in pictures made during the 1530s. The young man in the portrait in the Gallerie dell’Accademia [cat. 28], the Cleveland gentleman [cat. 29], and the architect in the picture recently sold at Sotheby’s London [see fig. 40.1]° are standing, but the weight of their bodies is supported by a bent arm leaning on a table. This was not the only device Lotto used to enliven his sitters: in several vertical portraits, such as those of Laura da Pola [see fig. 39], Leonino Brembati [see fig. 59], and brother Gregorio Belo [cat. 44], he depicted them leaning slightly forward towards the spectator. They all appear to be caught in mid-action (Wendy Stedman
Sheard speaks of ‘interrupted action portraits’), a device Lotto learned from Giorgione to lend them an immediate and natural appearance. These casual gestures could denote a rapid execution to capture the immediacy of an action or, on the contrary, the use of the abovementioned device of wooden mannequins, as it would have been difficult for the sitters to hold such poses for long.

The dynamism of Lotto’s portraits is also largely due to the sitters’ body language. The artist used gestures and movements more often than his Italian colleagues to make his portraits vividly eloquent. The subjects communicate with the spectator through a display of actions that attests to his adoption of Quintilian’s well-known assertion about the expressiveness of the hands: ‘manus ipsae loquuntur’. The hands are one of the most complex parts of the anatomy as they are intrinsically difficult to portray and compete with the face in colour and size, and artists therefore tended to conceal them. As Anna Banti pointed out, Lotto was a superb painter of hands and, far from hiding them, made a point of showing them off, sometimes studying them from the life and sometimes, as the Libro di spese diverse suggests, turning to sculpted models such as the ‘par de mane’ for which he paid the Florentine sculptor Bartolomeo Ammannati, then in the service of Jacopo Sansovino, in April 1542. Whatever the case, his expressive hands which not only convey messages and ideas about the sitter but also play an important compositional role, sometimes appearing in the immediate foreground, at other times drawing attention to distant objects and people, or moving towards the spectators and creating a space between them and the sitter. This repertoire is, however, relatively limited and one gesture is predominant over the others as it is repeated in various portraits: the outspread right hand placed over the heart. It is probably the most common gesture in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century portraits, no doubt because its self-referential meaning made it particularly relevant to this genre. In his Institutio oratoria (Institutes of Oratory, about 95 AD), Quintilian wrote that an orator could bring his hand close to his body to speak about himself and specified three cases in which it was particularly appropriate to place his hand on his breast: ‘to speak words of exhortation, reproof, or commiseration’. It is not difficult to detect these feelings in some of Lotto’s sitters who place their hands on their chest, be it the melancholy man in the Galleria Doria Pamphilj [fig. 30] or the goldsmith in
Vienna [cat. 32]. The gesture is sometimes accompanied by an outstretched arm that holds or points to an object or scene, thus performing the role of denoting the identity, beliefs, or character of the sitter, as in those of Leonino Brembati and Andrea Odoni [see fig. 59 and cat. 25], among others. These are not the only gestures in Lotto’s repertoire: whereas some are standard—for example, the hands of the Croatian bishop Tommaso Negri clasped in prayer [cat. 24] and the clenched fist with which the penitent brother Gregorio Belo beats his chest [cat. 44]—others are more enigmatic, such as the left hand of the gentleman in the Galleria Borghese, which is held at his waist [cat. 34]. The elegiac context of this portrait—the petals scattered on the table and the small skull touching the gentleman’s right hand—leads us to assume that the position of the left hand, close to the spleen, alludes to melancholy, which was believed to originate from this organ.17 In no other portrait do the gestures seem as decisive as in the Portrait of a Woman inspired by Lucretia [cat. 27], where, as Rona Goffen points out, the sitter’s character and determination are defined by gestures that are more consonant with masculine vigour, gagliardia, than with leggiadria or feminine gracefulness.18 The gazes are inseparable from the gestures. As well as equally intense—this is what is so special about the Viennese portrait of the goldsmith, one of Lotto’s few sitters who is so self-engrossed that he ignores the spectator—the sad gaze of the husband in the Hermitage portrait, the Berlin architect’s look half-concealed by the shadow of his hat, and the divergent gazes of Febo da Brescia and his wife [cat. 19 and 40, and figs. 38 and 39] reveal that, when necessary, the painter used the eyes as a powerful vehicle for expressing emotions.

Just as eloquent as the gestures and gazes are the objects, which are extraordinarily important in Lotto’s portraits on account of their symbolic role as indicators of the sitter’s temperament (this is how Daniel Arasse interpreted the zampa di leoncino held by Leonino Brembati)19 or status, and always as a testament to the material culture of the period. They are painstakingly rendered, as befits an artist who was a modest collector of objects,20 and are sometimes singled out by Lotto himself in the records, such as when he refers to the sumptuous attire of Marsilio Cassotti and Faustina: ‘The painting of the portraits, that is messer Marsilio and his wife with the little Cupid, with the desire to rival in silk clothes, headresses, and necklaces … d. 30’.

Marsilio and Faustina are portrayed sporting their own clothing and jewellery, but sometimes the objects depicted must have belonged to the painter. Scholars have suggested that he owned the plaster casts accompanying Andrea Odoni21 and some of the carpets featured in portraits [see for example cat. 19 and 35].22 Indeed, the objects and the spaces that house them are not so much a depiction of reality as the expression of a desire for representation. Perhaps this is why in some of Lotto’s most fascinating portraits the sitters display the attributes of the figure with whom they are identified, be it a classical deity like Venus (Venus and Cupid, New York, Metropolitan Museum) or a saint to which they were particularly devoted. There are various examples of the latter in the exhibition and the subject is examined in depth by Enrico Maria Dal Pozzolo in this catalogue.

Nevertheless, the objects in Lotto’s portraits do not vie with the figures for visual importance; on the contrary, they complement and emphasise aspects of their personality. They are still a far cry from the personaggi-stemma Federico Zeri mentions in connection with court portraits of the last third of the sixteenth century, where objects—armour, clothing, jewellery, and curtains—overpowered the sitter’s personality.23 The objects are also interesting with respect to the role they sometimes play in the compositional scheme, such as the curtains, which in early portraits function as screens that project the sitters towards the spectator, the tables on which people lean, and the carpets Lotto used to organise the space, position the figures, and establish colour associations.24

Lotto’s portraits are not always limited to a likeness of the sitter. Some, such as the splendid picture of a young man in the Accademia Carrara [cat. 2], display painted decoration on the reverse, whose red veins bring to mind jasper [see fig. 2.1]. This is an obvious reference to the Entombment and Resurrection, whose emergence in the genre goes back at least to Jan van Eyck and was continued in Venice by Jacometto.
Indeed, thanks to Lotto’s account book we know of a survive therefore provide only partial information about the sitters. Many more portraits were designed with coperti or covers that protected the sitter’s image [see fig. 31]. They could be laid out as a diptych or one atop the other with a sliding mechanism, as suggested by the original frame of the portrait of Tommaso Negri [see cat. 24]. No other painter is documented as having produced more portraits of these characteristics. This does not mean to say that he painted the highest number of portraits with covers (the exceptional fact that the Libro di spese is preserved distorts any comparison with other artists), but nor can we ignore the fact. Lotto painted portraits with covers throughout his entire career (the first known example is that of Bernardo de’ Rossi in 1505 [cat. 3 and 4]; the last to be documented is the lost portrait of Vincenzo De Nobili executed in 1551)\(^{60}\) and not only for small vertical pictures but also for larger works in landscape format.\(^{70}\) The very existence of portraits with covers is significant in itself, as it indicates that some of the extant examples are in fact ‘mutilated’ and therefore provide only partial information about the sitters. Indeed, thanks to Lotto’s account book we know of a surviving portrait which originally had a cover that is no longer preserved: that of Giovanni dalla Volta and his family, completed in 1547 [cat. 43]. It is worth comparing it with other extant family portraits by Lotto: that of Marsilio Cassotti and Faustina in the Prado [cat. 17] and the one of the married couple in the Hermitage [cat. 19], which almost certainly were not designed with a cover, as there is no mention of them in early documents. These two Bergamo pictures have a notable allegorical significance that is perceptible, for example, in the Cupid who yokes the newlyweds in the Madrid canvas, and in the squirrel and the turbulent landscape in the St Petersburg painting. Certain elements of the London family group can probably be interpreted symbolically, but if such symbolism exists it is less explicit than in the other two works. It is tempting to think that this is due to Lotto’s closer relationship with the Dalla Volta couple, his landlord and landlady, which would explain the familiar and even anecdotal tone of the scene, where the children are depicted eating cherries. But it is also true that it is missing its cover, an element that Lotto—and his clients—regarded chiefly as a support for the sitter’s impresa. The result is that whereas all the information Lotto and his sitters wished to convey in their portraits is preserved in the Madrid and St Petersburg canvases, only part of what Giovanni dalla Volta intended to transmit to us has survived.

A study of the portraits whose covers are preserved provides interesting information on certain aspects of Lotto as a portraitist. I shall focus on that of the abovementioned Bernardo de’ Rossi [cat. 3],\(^{71}\) a powerful half-length picture of the then bishop of Treviso (it was painted in 1505) against a background of green drapery. Rossi wears his bishop’s vestments and a ring alluding to his ecclesiastical dignity; the piece of paper in his hand has been linked to the trials and tribulations of his mission in Treviso.\(^{72}\) The cover adds to this image a sophisticated allegory of Virtue and Vice that alludes to the sitter’s moral qualities. A no longer extant inscription on the verso stated Rossi’s age, name, and position as well as the painter’s identity.\(^{74}\) It is worth comparing it with another work executed in Treviso around the same time: the Vienna portrait of a young man posing against a white curtain [cat. 8].\(^{75}\) It is appealing to think that Lotto dispensed with a cover here because he included the symbolic elements in the portrait itself, as the curtain is drawn slightly to one side to reveal a night sky with an enigmatic flaming lamp that has given rise to various interpretations.\(^{76}\) Lotto would return to this compositional scheme for other portraits. In that of Lucina Brembati [cat. 14], painted around 1520–23, once again the curtains are pulled open to reveal a nocturnal landscape lit by a moon (luna in Italian) and the letters ‘CI’, which provide clues to the sitter’s name, ‘Lu-ci-na’. Lotto would carry on using the same scheme in the following decade, such as in the Berlin portrait of a young man [fig. 32], where a chink in the curtain reveals a fragment of a coastal scene with boats. This landscape must have held a special meaning for the sitter, who points to it with his hand. Although it would be easy to conclude that the likeness and the impresa were designed from the outset
to show the sitter’s two sides, physical and spiritual, this was
certainly not always so. In some cases the imprese was a
later addition, as in the portrait of Ludovico Avolanti in
1544,\textsuperscript{77} and it is likewise known that Lotto even painted a
cover for a portrait made by a colleague.\textsuperscript{78}

Covers were not always canvases or panels. Sometimes
they were textiles affixed to a stretcher which covered the
painting. Known as timpani (not to be confused with cur-
tains), they could feature heraldic motifs, emblems, or chi-
arescuro decorations imitating reliefs,\textsuperscript{79} and there is at least
one documented example of a cover made of mirror glass.
The female portrait in question was commissioned by the
Florentine merchant Donato De Nobili in Ancona in 1552.\textsuperscript{80}
Portrait covers made of mirror glass must have been part of
an amorous/erotic or friendship ritual and, although not
abundant, they were not rarities either, as Lina Bolzoni has
documented other examples in Venice.\textsuperscript{81} Lotto’s could have
been commissioned by a lover, whose reflection in the mir-
ror when he gazed at it would have formed a diptych with
the image of his beloved; its small size (it is described as ‘un

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig32}
\caption{Lorenzo Lotto, \textit{Portrait of a Young Man before a Red Curtain}, about 1526.
Oil on canvas, 47.5 x 37.5 cm.
Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Gemäldegalerie, 320}
\end{figure}
Vasari had to write a letter to explain the posthumous portraits which he extended to other painters of the Veneto and attributed to German influence. In fact it was a more widespread practice than thought and, to cite an example, Pietro Valeriano, the author of the Hieroglyphica (1556),54 and it is easy to think of Lotto’s more complex portraits as ‘hieroglyphics’, though the obvious presence of symbols should not lead us to overinterpret them.55

We have already mentioned the words on the reverse of the cover of the portrait of Bernardo de’ Rossi; Lotto sometimes included inscriptions on his portraits to clarify or emphasise their content. They are deliberately aimed at the spectator, as they are always there to be read, sometimes going against the logic of the object that contains them.56

Most of these inscriptions allude to the character, beliefs, or profession of the sitter, such as the ‘Galenus’ that is visible on the large tome held by the Bergamo physician Giovanni Agostino Della Torre [cat. 12] and the beginning of the Nicene creed, ‘Credo in unum Deum’, on the one displayed by the Dominican Angelo Ferretti in the portrait at the Fogg Museum [cat. 45], where the use of red pigment deliberately recalls the words Saint Peter Martyr wrote with his own blood before dying. Lotto sometimes relied on literary sources, as in the Portrait of a Woman inspired by Lucretia [cat. 27], whose inscription, ‘Nuc ulla impudica Lucretia exemplo vivet’ (no unchaste woman shall hereafter claim Lucretia’s example), comes from Livy (Ab urbe condita, I). Some inscriptions pose few doubts as to his intentions, such as the ‘Pro posteris memoria / patris’ on the portrait Ludovico Grazioli commissioned as a keepsake for his loved ones [cat. 46].58 In others, however, they are less obvious, and critics are still divided as to the meaning of the ‘Homo Numquam’ held by the husband in the double portrait in the Hermitage [cat. 19].57

LOTTO AND TITIAN

In the mid-1530s, and especially after 1540, Lotto’s portraits can be seen to undergo a significant transformation which is perceptible in their greater compositional, symbolic, gestural, and chromatic sobriety. Expressions become more solemn and settings are simplified, while interiors with neutral backgrounds are predominant and references to landscape or nature disappear save for a few exceptions such as the portrait of brother Gregorio Belo [cat. 44]. Like so many of his contemporaries, the artist espoused the Plinian precept of reducing the palette to ensure that ‘nothing would offend the eye’, and this led him to shun the bold secondary colours of the earlier years for blacks and earths. Titian’s influence during those years seems evident and has been pointed out since early times. However, the reasons and timing of the phenomenon have not been analysed: Why then and not earlier? Did this aggiornamento stem from Lotto’s own initiative or was it a requirement of his clients? It is not easy to answer these questions, but we can venture a few hypotheses. It should be remembered that, although Titian was always an extraordinary portraitist, Giorgione, Raphael, Sebastiano del Piombo, and Parmigianino had championed other extremely highly regarded types of portraits since the beginning of the sixteenth century. In the 1530s, however, Titian emerged as the ‘protagonist, setting the fashion for a particular type of portrait in Italy and even in Europe. Titian’s unquestionable hegemony thereafter made him an unavoidable example for his colleagues and the public alike, and this would explain both the impact he had on Lotto himself and the wishes of Lotto’s clients to adopt the codes of representation then in vogue. Lotto’s late works thus display attitudes and elements of Titian’s court portraits, such as the armour in the lost portrait of the Condottiere Tommaso Costanzo of 1546; the luxurious attire and gloves in those of Febo da Brescia [fig.
38] and the supposed Liberale da Pinedel [cat. 40], both in Brera, the flamboyant and dynamic curtains in that of Laura da Pola (very different from the more static drapery that is abundant in early portraits) [see fig. 39]; and the curtain and column reminiscent of Habsburg portraits in that of the surgeon Gian Giacomo Bonamigo and his son in Philadelphia [cat. 42]. It is worth examining two of these portraits more closely, starting with that of Tommaso Costanzo. Although this picture is no longer extant, the related entry in the Libro di spese provides enough information about its appearance for us to imagine it to be an imitation of Titian’s splendid portrait of Francesco Maria della Rovere (Florence, Uffizi): ‘life-sized, armed with all his weapons and on a table the coat of arms and the helmet with the visor raised’. Although this characterisation is interesting, even more so perhaps is the fact that Costanzo rejected the portrait because he did not consider it a good likeness: ‘because the painting has the fact that Costanzo rejected the portrait because he did not resemble him nor was he recognisable in the portrait’. This provides an indication of the difficulty Lotto had in accounting for some of his portraits. The second work is the portrait of Gian Giacomo Bonamigo and his son, as in no other is there such an evident contrast between the humility of the sitters and the sumptuousness of the props, including a column and curtains, which are worthy of emperors. It might be said that at some point the sitters decided they wished to give the impression of a higher status, though there is no trace of malice or irony in the artist’s portrayal of them. However, the portraits by Titian that most influenced Lotto at the time were more austere. Peter Humfrey cites those executed in the 1520s, such as that of the Man with a Glove (Paris, Louvre), but due to their closeness in time we are more inclined towards the so-called portraits of friends, such as those of Daniele Barbaro (Madrid, Prado and Ottawa, National Gallery) and Sperone Speroni (Trevise, Museo Civico), all of which were painted in about 1544–45. Lotto may have been familiar with these portraits as they were executed around the time of his repeated stays in Venice and while he was particularly close to members of Titian’s circle, especially Pietro Aretino and above all Jacopo Sansovino. The similarities with these portraits are technical, compositional, and chromatic. Like Titian, in his last portraits Lotto used canvases with a more open weave that allowed him to play with the texture and darker grounds. Whereas in Portrait of a Woman inspired by Lucretia the ground is light grey, it is dark grey in those of the Berlin architect, Febo da Brescia, and the uomo malinconico in the Doria Pamphylj.

What Lotto did not borrow from Titian was the systematic use of portraiture as a self-promotion strategy (perhaps because he did not have an apologist like Aretino on his side), though he did use it for more mundane purposes such as to pay debts or the rent, as with the portrait of the Dalla Volta family in the winter of 1547. In these cases the initiative came from the painter, as with the portrait of Fioravante Avogadro ‘because I asked him if he would let me make a portrait of him’, though his complaints about the meagre sum received reveal that it was not a gift. Indeed, although portraits accounted for a significant portion of Lotto’s output (in Treviso, for example, he painted nine in three years, between 1542 and 1545), they did not provide him with much of an income (less than his religious works, to be sure); what is more, we do not believe it is mistaken to state that all together they earned him less than any single portrait Titian painted for the Habsburgs. Whereas in January 1549 Philip, then still prince, paid Titian 1,000 scudi for ‘certain portraits he is making on my orders’. Lotto’s portraits fetched much lower sums. None of those whose prices are known earned him more than 30 ducats and most were purchased for more modest amounts. Indeed, Nicholas Penny’s statement that the price of a Lotto portrait depended above all on the number of figures depicted in it, each of which was worth roughly 10 ducats, seems correct. Further factors nonetheless came into play, such as the intrinsic quality of the portrait and whether costlier or cheaper pigments had been used. This may be deduced from some of the entries in the Libro di spese. On one of the rare occasions where a portrait is stated to be ‘made with all my knowledge and diligence’ (‘fatto con ogni mio saper et diligencia’, suggesting that Lotto was aware of the uneven quality of his portraits), the artist valued it at 25 ducats, a very considerable sum. He likewise accounted for the 50 ducats he deemed his portrait of the Dalla Volta family to be worth as follows: ‘for its elegance and for its delicate
colours, with the timpano cover over it, it is valued at 50 and more by unbiased experts'. The use of expensive pigments pushed up the cost, and for the portrait of the malmsey wine merchant Mattia Antonino da Candia, executed in Venice in 1546, Lotto recorded an expenditure of two gold ducats ‘for ultramarine blue to paint the dark blue doublet’. It was customary for the materials to be included in the price of a portrait and Lotto undertook to execute his ‘at my expense canvas, frame, and colours’, though his account book sometimes records separate payments for the pigments, the canvas, the stretcher, and even the nails.

Lotto’s economic expectations were often dashed. It seems evident that he thought more highly of his work as a portraitist than his clients did. The Libro di spese reveals that he often executed portraits without previously establishing the price (‘non fu fatto precio’), confiding instead in the quality of the product and his client’s decision, though this does not mean to say that he was not sometimes paid an amount in advance. This procedure caused him many troubles. Occasionally a client might reject his portrait, though at least in one case Lotto was able to sell it after transforming it into a saint, as occurred in 1542 with that of the apostolic protonotary in Ancona, Giovanni Maria Pizzoni, whose image was converted into a Saint Bartholomew for the precious metalsmith Bartolomeo Carpan.

However, he was usually paid less than he deemed appropriate, for example for the portraits of Febo da Brescia and his wife Laura da Pola: ‘that money [30 ducats for both] does not pay for the time devoted to the work’. He fared no better when he enlisted the aid of professionals, and in Venice in 1548 both the painter chosen by him (Paris Bordone) and the client (Giovanni Pietro Silvio) appraised the portraits of Francesco Canali and his family for a lower sum than Lotto expected. The portrait of the Dalla Volta family [cat. 43] is a good example of how Lotto valued his portraits and illustrates the gulf between his aspirations and reality. He came to ask 50 ducats for it—no doubt considerably more than for any others—because, as Penny pointed out, it was the only one that included four figures. In the end, however, he had to settle for 20.

Lotto did not always ask to be paid in cash for his portraits. He sometimes combined money with payment in kind. The Libro di spese diverse states of a previously mentioned portrait of the Jew Isaac, made in Ancona in December 1551 with an established price of two gold scudi, that ‘half was paid in money and the rest in cordovans’. Other times payment was even more diversified, as in October 1551 with the portrait of Ludovico Grazzioli, for that [portrait] he should give me wine or other things that seem good and money and pay me very well. He is known at least once to have exchanged a portrait for a work by another artist, as when in December 1542 in Venice he gave the jeweller Bartolomeo Carpan ‘a head painted in oil of the protonotary messer Giovanni Maria Pizzoni’; in exchange, Carpan ‘had to remunerate him with a piece of his art’.

We stated at the beginning that Lotto was not a court artist and this no doubt limited his earnings, but it was not necessarily a bad thing in the field of portraiture; on the contrary, his heterogeneous clientele with diverse personal ambitions and social aspirations allowed him to explore a variety of registers that were beyond the scope of court portraiture, which was bound to very specific codes of representation. It might be said that most of his sitters needed to convey a message, and Lotto enabled them to speak through gestures, objects, gazes, inscriptions, and emblems which, when combined, accorded his portraits a role that goes beyond mere mementos or representations and endows them with a narrative dimension. As Goffen stated of the Portrait of a Woman inspired by Lucretia, it ‘is an action portrait that becomes in effect a new narrative’—to which we would add that few portraits inspire the spectator to imagine the vicissitudes of the sitter’s life as much as those painted by Lotto.
Indeed, the *Libro di spese diverse* does not record any portraits later than those painted at Ancona in June 1512 (see Lotto–De Carolis 2017, p. 221; all references to Lotto’s account book are taken from this critical edition by Francesco De Carolis). The reasons for this abandonment are difficult to ascertain, but given that in Loreto the artist took on assignments of all kinds, some very minor, it might be thought that none were commissioned from him.

There are repeated references to friends in the *Libro di spese diverse* and in some cases, such as that of the portrait of Maria, Antonio Durante’s widow, painted in Ancona in 1512, he refers to them as ‘very dear friends’ (‘carissimi amici’; Lotto–De Carolis 2017, p. 221). See also note 9.

Banti and Boschetti 1993, pp. 44–46.

He did so to include it in the large altarpiece of *The Alms of Saint Antoninus of Florence* (cat. 35) (Lotto–De Carolis 2017, p. 288).

In December [1511], messer Abraam, Portuguese Jew with a business in Pessaro, debtor for a portrait of himself from the life’ (‘Adì dicembre [1511], die dar misser Abraem hebroe portugheiz sa bancho in Pessaro per un ritrar- to suo de naturale’); Lotto–De Carolis 2017, p. 122.

‘7 October, two small portraits of Martin Luther and his wife which messer Mario gave to Titian with gilded ornaments at a good price of 6 ducats’ (‘7 ottobre due quadreti del retrato de Martin Luter et suo moier che misser Mario donò al Titian con li ornamenti dorati a bon mercato ducati 6’); Lotto–De Carolis 2017, p. 274.

Lotto–De Carolis 2017, p. 182. It is likely that the commission went to Titian after Lotto turned it down and that this is the portrait in the Musei Vaticani, in which his studio had a large hand.

Ibid., p. 188. On Augurillo and his portrait, see Dal Pozzolo 2011, pp. 71–73 and 267.

In Ancona in 1549 in both cases: ‘die dar mastro Marco profumier de contro per conzair una tella de un retrato de dona che era norta, et refar el campo e vernicarla tuta paoli quatro’, and ‘Item die dar per racontuara de un suo ritrato fato da altri’; Lotto–De Carolis 2017, pp. 116 and 148.


These are the portraits of the wife and son of the dye merchant Francesco Canali, executed in Venice in October 1548. Whereas nothing is specified in the entry on the portrait of the father, it is stated that of his wife and son: ‘went to make them at his house’ (‘er andato a farli a casa sua’) and ‘made at his house’ (‘faij a casa sua’); Lotto–De Carolis 2017, p. 162.


The first painting on canvas that can be attributed to Lotto with certainty, the *Holy Family with Angel Gabriel* (Princeton University Art Museum), dates from 1531.


‘On 29 June 1532 in Ancona, master Batista, Venetian turner, debtor for a small picture with his portrait, for which no price was given on account of his being a friend, worth 4 scudi’ (‘Adì 29 junio 1532 in Ancona, die dar mastro Batista torridor venitiano per un quadretto piccolo di suo ritrato del qual non fu fatto precio per esser amico valse scuti 4’); Lotto–De Caro- lis 2017, p. 134.


A common ground for panels but unsuitable for canvases on account of its rigidity, as its movements increased the risk of craquelure.


Dunkerton, Penny and Roy 1998, p. 58 and note 16.

The ‘blue-green’ he acquired in Venice from ‘maestro Gaspar depentor’ could be malachite, which has been detected in a few Venetian works such as *Saint Nicholas in Glory with Saints John the Baptist and Lucy* (Venice, Santa Maria dei Carmini) and *Saint Lucy before the Judges* (Jesi, Pinacoteca Civica); Bensi 1983–85, p. 76 and note 32, and Lotto–De Carolis 2017, p. 305.


See, for example, his *Crucifixion* for the church of Santa Maria in Telusianu in Monte San Giusto and the *Madonna of the Rosary* (1537) for the church of San Domenico in Cingoli.

Dunkerton and Spring 2015, pp. 23–33.

Poldi 2011, p. 287 and note 44.

In the portrait of *Giovanni della Volta with his Wife and Children* he combined kermes and cochineal; Kirby and White 1996.

Bensi 1983–85, p. 83 and note 32.

He sometimes bought walnuts to extract the binding medium from them; Lotto–De Carolis 2017, pp. 287 and 295–96.


Lotto–De Carolis 2017, p. 296.


It should be pointed out that specialists disagree on this point, as some inter- pret certain expressions in the *Libro di spese diverse*, such as ‘life-size’ (‘grande una natura sua’) and ‘the same size as him’ (‘grande quanto a lui’), as relating to full-length portraits (see, for example, Frapiccini 2014, p. 263), for the current state of affairs see Lotto–De Carolis 2017, pp. 315–12.

Examples of this type are the portraits of Febo da Brescia and Laura da Pola [see figs. 38 and 39], but the *Libro di spese records* at least one other case dated October 1548 in Venice, which included even a third canvas featuring the family’s son: the portraits of the dye merchant Francesco Canali, ‘his wife’ (‘la sua donna’) and ‘his son messenger Domenece’ (‘de su fio miser Domenece’); De Carolis 2017, p. 162.

In addition to the extant examples featured in the exhibition, there is an- other that Ridolfi mentions as being owned by Giovannico and Jacopo van Buren in Antwerp: ‘two of a husband and wife, that of a Gentleman, and of a Woman, his wife, holding a small dog’ (‘due di marito e moglie, quello d’un Cavaliere e d’una Dona sua sposa con cagnolino in mano’); Ridolfi 1648, vol. I, p. 146.

See, for example, Sheard 1997, pp. 46–47; ‘For these conjugal portraits Lot- to adopted a new format, a rectangle that is a very slight bit wider than it is high and yet appears much wider than it really is, so that the terms “horiz- ontal” or “broad” format have been applied to it.’

See Gianmarco Petti’s essay in this catalogue, pp. 159–19.


7–10 December 2016, lot 12.


‘For other portions of the body merely help the speaker, whereas the hands may almost be said to speak’; Quintilian, book XI, chs. III, 81–86, here 85, cited from Quintiliani Complete Works, Delphi Classics, 2015.

Campbell 1990, pp. 95–96.

‘Hands […] were his greatest concern. He looked at them over and over again, he painted them, he modified them’; Banti and Boschetti 1993, p. 45.

Giovanni Aurelio Augustello, a person close to Bishop Rossi (Dal Pozzolo Pozzolo, who instead relates the Washington work to the lost portrait of Contiatura de un suo ritratto fato da altri et un coperto in esso con doi figu-
ti e una tavoletta de un suo ritratto fato da altri et un coperto in esso con doi figu-
ti et l'elmetto senza altro de sotto la guarda de l'arnese in suso'; Lotto–De Carolis

Fortune, worth at a good price for a friend

for a cover for that work with two small figures, the battle of Strength against

Lotto–De Carolis

impresa sul paese nel quadro del suo ritratto lui in mare con Cupido');

picture with his portrait, of him on the sea with Cupid'


• Lotto deployed the carpet motif in his work as a site for thinking about such complex problems as spatial setting, color placement, and figural organiza-


• The male portrait preserved in Nîvà was also decorated on the back, which

was lost after an intervention in the support [see cat. 13]. Mundy 1988.

• No surviving portrait, however, displays a coat of arms on the reverse like

that of Battista Suardi and his wife on the verso of a picture with his portrait, of him on the sea with Cupid'

woman

• In Ancona di messer Vincenzo de Nobili, lord of Ancona, nephew of his holiness, a picture

of his person from the life and with its ornament and cover' ('In Ancona dì messer Vincenzo de Nobili, signor in Ancona nepote de suo santità un quadro de suo

• In Ancona on April 10, 1552, already a year or more ago I made a portrait of

messer Vincenzo de Nobili, lord of Ancona, nephew of his holiness, a picture of

his person from the life and with its ornament and cover' ('In Ancona di
to aprile 1552, notto che già un anno o più feci un rettratto al signor Vincen-
tio de Nobili, signor in Ancona nepote de suo santità un quadro de suo

rettratto naturale et con suo ornamento et coperta'; Lotto–De Carolis 2017, p. 216.

• Compared to the dimensions of the portrait of Bernardo de’ Rossi (54.7 x

43.5 cm), those of the portrait of the Dalla Volta family in London, whose

cover is not preserved, are 104.5 x 53.8 cm.

• The National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC, houses another cover

(Allegory of Chastity) that is often associated with the Dijon Portrait of a

Woman [fig. 41]. However, there is no unanimous opinion and the two works

in fact differ in size (43.9 x 33.7 cm the Washington work and 36 x 28 cm that of Dijon); this association is refuted by Enrico Maria Dal Pozzolo, who instead relates the Washington work to the lost portrait of

Giovanni Aurelio Augustello, a person close to Bishop Rossi (Dal Pozzolo 1992, p. 191); among those who support it are David Allan Brown (in Wash-


• Gentili 1983b, pp. 76–81.


• The stiter was formerly identified as Broccardo Malchietto, secretary to

Bishop Rossi, to whose striking brocade of the drapery alludes (Gentili 1983b, pp. 79–81).

• Ibid. For the meaning of the lamp, see the entry by Enrico Maria Dal Poz-

zolo [cat. 8].

• Item for another intervention [to modify or finish] on the landscape in the picture with his portrait, of him in the sea with Cupid’ ('Item per un’altra

impresa sul paese nel quadro del suo ritratto lui in mare con Cupido');


• Item, debtor for the completion of a portrait of him painted by others and for

a cover for that work with two small figures, the battle of Strength against

Fortune, worth at a good price for a friend a 4 scudi’ ('Item die dar per rac-

tiatura de un suo ritratto fato da altri et un coperto in esso con doi figu-

rine, lo abitamento de la fortezza con fortuna vale a bon mercato da amico


• The cover of the portrait of the Dalla Volta family was of this type. The

timpano was a fixed cover as opposed to a curtain (Penny 2004, pp. 99–100).

• In June, master Domenico Salimbene, master carpenter, furnished wood

for a small panel with a walnut frame and a mirror cover, like the one done

previously for messer Donato de Nobili, a Florentine merchant, whom I

contacted to make a small portrait of him, which he did not like and the

painting stayed in my possession, the aforementioned master Domenico tells

me it is worth half a scudo’ (‘Adì junio die haver mastro Domenico Salim-
bene mastro de lignum je fu per farli un rrettatone che non passò efeeto et il quadretto mi rimase, disemi dito mastro Domenico meritar mezzo scudo’); Lotto–De Carolis 2017, p. 151.

• Bolzoni 2010, p. 122; see also De Carolis 2015, pp. 83–85.


• Pommier 1998, pp. 87–92. See Peter Lüdemann’s essay in this catalogue, pp. 85–92.

• Mauro Luca (Luco 2004) warned about this tendency to over-interpret.

• De Carolis 2015, pp. 75–76.

• Hired on 10 October 1551 ‘to leave his heirs a memento of himself’ (‘per

lasciar ali soi heredi memoria di sé’). Grazioli died shortly afterwards (Lotto–

De Carolis 2017, p. 204). The portrait is owned by the Fondazione Cavallini

Sgabbi.


• Banti wrote about the supposed portrait of Da Padella: ‘Lotto’s old man has

the language, features, and noble impassivity of Titian’s clients’; Banti and

Buschett 1993, p. 47.

• ‘Grande quanto el natural armato a tute arme et su una tavola el saio d’amar

erlmeno senza altro de sotto la guarda de l’arnese in suouo’; Lotto–

De Carolis 2017, p. 246.

• ‘Perché el quadro non se li somigliava né se conossea per sua egìte’, Lotto–

De Carolis 2017, p. 246.

• These props bring to mind a statement made by Lomazzo, who was scan-
dalised by the fact that merchants and bankers had their portraits painted in

armour and holding a baton of command: ‘[it is] a truly ridiculous thing, and it

manifestly shows a lack of sense and judgement, on the part of both the

painted and the painter’, Lomazzo 1584, p. 434.

• Humfrey 1997, p. 145.

• Foldi 2011, pp. 283–86.

• Other artists such as Tintoretto did do it (Palomir 2009, pp. 66–71).

• Penny 2004, pp. 94–95.

• ‘Perché ço lo rechiesi chel si lasasse retrare’, Lotto–De Carolis 2017, p. 158.


• Penny 2004, pp. 94–95.

• The portrait had been painted in November 1538 (Lotto–De Carolis 2017, p. 180). On the meaning of the expression in Lotto, see Dal Pozzolo 2000, p. 183.

• ‘Judicato e per bontà e per colori finissimj con el coperto suo sul timpano di


• Per azueto oltrammarin per far el zupon paonazo’, ibid., p. 214.

• ‘A tuta mia spesa tella, telar e colori’, ibid., p. 216.

• From 1546, 13 March, given by messer Vicenzo Frizierë de l’Alboro for a

portrait painting of him, for the stretcher 16 soldi, canvas 20 soldi, brushes

2 soldi’; (‘Del 1546 adì 13 marzo die dar misser Vicenzo Frizierë de l’Alboro

per un quadro de rettratuo suo per el telar soldi 16, tella soldi 20, broche

soldi 2’); ibid., p. 252.

• For example, the abovementioned Francesco Canali paid a certain amount

of money in advance for the portraits of himself, his wife, and his son: ‘on

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