

LVN

Sara Benaglia



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4 — THE HORNED GOD PAN
5 — THE VOICE OF THE MAIDEN

AS POINT

OF ARRIVAL

6 — AMAZONS
7 — THE NATURE OF THE VENUS

2 — AS LYNETIC AS EARLY MODERN
3 — DIANA IN NORTHERN ITALY

1 — THE ALPHABET

8 — THE ARISTOCRATIC V
9 — THE PRINCIPLE OF NEGATIONISM

2 — AS LVNATIC AS

Hans Sebald Beham,
The Moon (1539),
Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit

Hans Baldung Grien,
The Witches (1510),
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Hans Baldung Grien,
*The Three Fates: Lachesis,
Atropos and Klotho* (1513),
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Hans Baldung Grien,
Aristotle and Phyllis (1513)

Hans Baldung Grien,
The Holy Family and St Anne (1511),
British Museum, London

Sandro Botticelli,
Madonna con Bambino e san Giovannino
(1495 ca.),
Palazzo Pitti, Firenze

EARLY

MODERN

2 – AS LVNATIC AS EARLY MODERN

3 — DIANA IN NORTHERN ITALY
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What follows is a short draft of a book that I started to re-write few months ago. The first edition of the book was written by my partner in 2015. It was titled *Sotto il Segno di Diana*. *Tiziano, Palma il Vecchio e i misteri della Grande Dea*. The book was the result of an area of research that we had in common.

I can see how much that text was and is informed by my research on language through a feminist lens, for I recognise Marija Gimbutas and Carla Lonzi in his argument. I can still read that the book was dedicated to me, and to his daughter Sophia. Perhaps I am lunatic (as in Luna, the Italian translation of the word “moon”) in thinking that the book belongs to me too, that I am there in those pages not just in intuition but with a whole body of thought.

Nevertheless, some months ago I re-read his book and decided to rearrange the composition with new additions, since the critical structure of the subject is based on a feminist position but undermined by the preservation of contradictory historical constructions.

What you are going to hear is a passage that caused me to realize the lack of criticism of certain subjects in art history. Such a deficiency derives from the fact that art is also an important part of the capital of the country where I was born, Italy.

The iconographic apparatus stems from and then builds upon the text by Mauro Zanchi, *Sotto il Segno di Diana*. *Tiziano, Palma il Vecchio e i misteri della Grande Dea* (2015), but these arguments diverge from the original.

I will comment on some pictures, which glorified the patriarchal history in the Venetian Renaissance. I will comment on the visual hidden elements of a particular collusion.



9 — THE PRINCIPLE OF NEGATIONISM
1 — THE ALPHABET AS POINT OF ARRIVAL

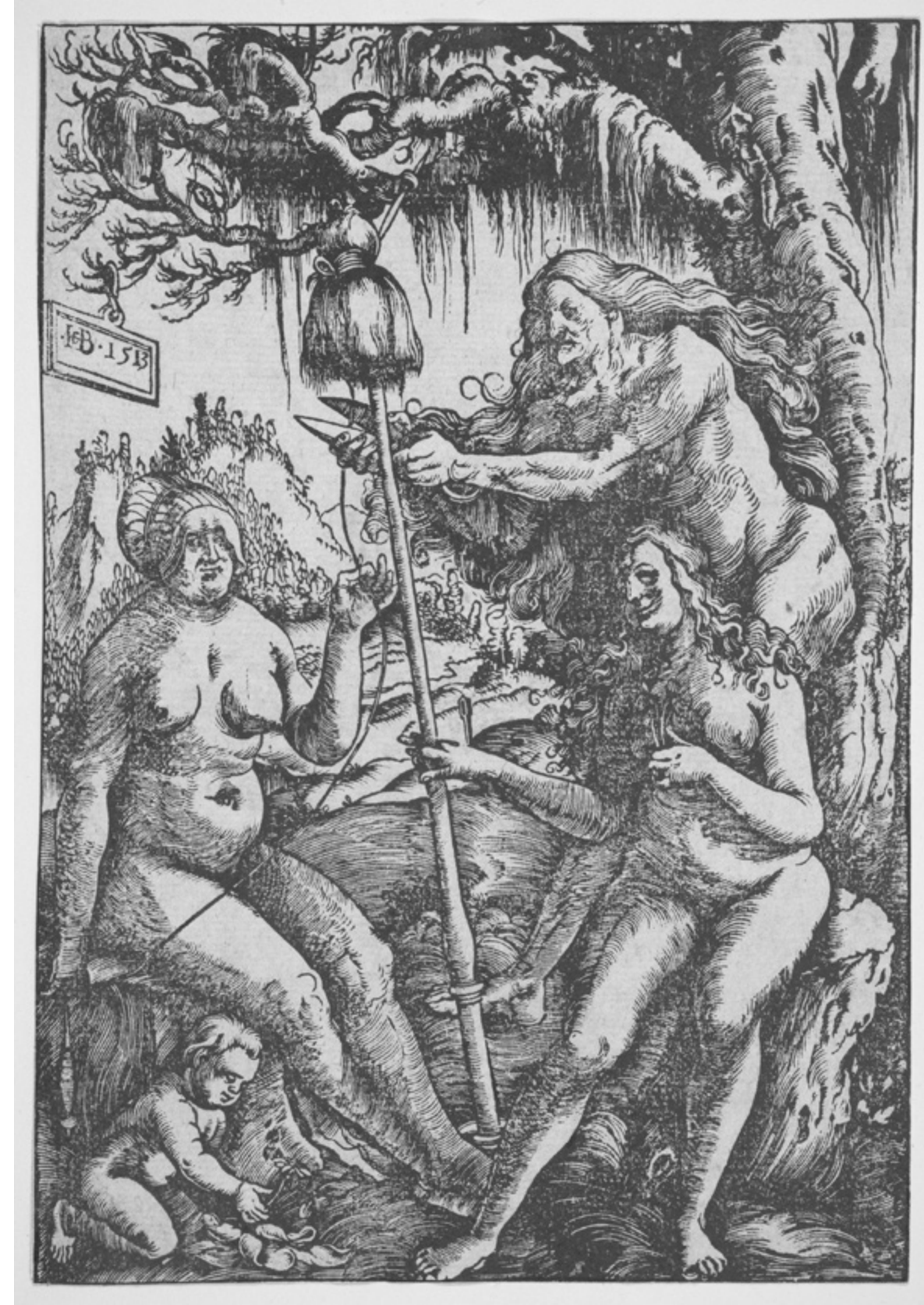
5 — THE V OF THE MAIDEN
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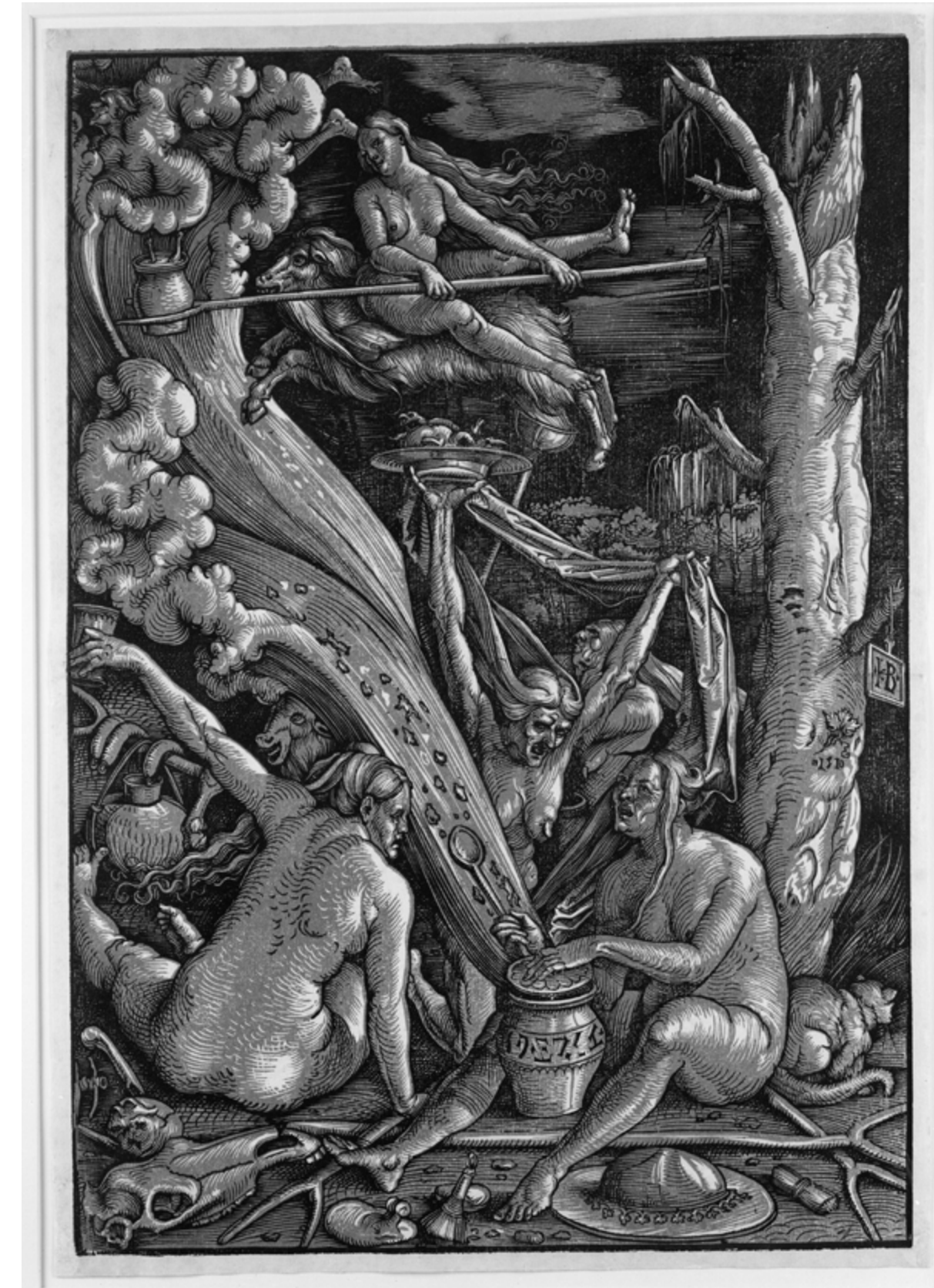
2 – AS LVNATIC AS EARLY MODERN

Woman fought violently with various weapons in 14th and 17th century Christianity, which came to label her as a witch during the transition from feudalism to capitalism. The aim was the privatization of the bourgeois woman or the transformation of the working-class woman for the common good.

Hans Baldung Grien's woodcuts on witchcraft display the influence of a context justified by the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1487).



- 3 — DIANA IN NORTHERN ITALY
- 4 — THE HORNED GOD PAN



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- 6 — AMAZONS

- 9 — THE PRINCIPLE OF NEGATIONISM
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2 – AS LVNATIC AS EARLY MODERN

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Aristotle and Phyllis (1513) is another xylography of the German painter. This story was an exempla used in sermons by the Dominican John Herold in the 14th century, warning men of the threatening power of women, who had the ability to reduce even the wise Aristotle to a rude animal.



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2 — AS LVNATIC AS EARLY MODERN

He said that men make the gods while women love them.

Hans Baldung Grien painted a *Holy Family* (1511) in which St. Anne, the mother of the Mother of God, performs an apotropaic genital manipulation, imposing a nod to "V" on the testicles of the infant Jesus.

3 — DIANA IN NORTHERN ITALY

4 — THE HORNED GOD PAN



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2 – AS LVNATIC AS EARLY MODERN

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4 — THE HORNED GOD PAN

An inverted or horizontal V-shaped sign is present in some works made by painters from Veneto in the early decades of the 16th century. In this work by Botticelli it is still executed by a Madonna with Child.

In most of the works in which the V-sign appears, however, the gesture is made by Diana, or a nymph embodiment of her. It is a pagan gesture; the hypothesis of this research is that it was distinctive of an esoteric or heretical circle in the 16th century, which at first made me think of proto-feminist positions. I now think that my initial association was wrong.

It is a sign that seems to refer to the lunar horns of the goddess, and a gesture that inevitably entered into Christian religious subjects, given that since 432 AD the Council of Ephesus, in the city where Diana was venerated, the Church has imposed adoration of the Virgin Mother of God in place of the goddess of the pagans.



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3 — DIANA

Palma il Vecchio,
Bath of Diana (1520 ca.),
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

Benvenuto Cellini,
Nymphe de Fontainebleau (1542),
Musée du Louvre, Paris

IN

4 — THE HORNED GOD PAN
5 — THE V OF THE MAIDEN

NORTH L ERN

ITALY

1 — THE ALPHABET AS POINT OF ARRIVAL
2 — AS LYNETIC AS EARLY MODERN

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In the Italian Renaissance an esoteric world was camouflaged, dispersed in details of private collections. The “aristocratic” environment opened a secret door to the “Diana society”, whose members elaborated social customs of indecent refinement.

In 1520 Palma the Elder painted *Bath of Diana and the Nymphs*, set in a mythological dimension in which the nymph is a force of nature, and beauty a myth that emerges from the privatization of the woman.

The pictorial motif of Diana was also a pretext for showing female nudes; allowing the possession of things for as long as we look at them.

In the foreground of the open-air gynoeceium Diana directs the scissor-like fingers of her left hand down into the earthly cavity.



1 — THE ALPHABET AS POINT OF ARRIVAL
2 — AS LYNETIC AS EARLY MODERN

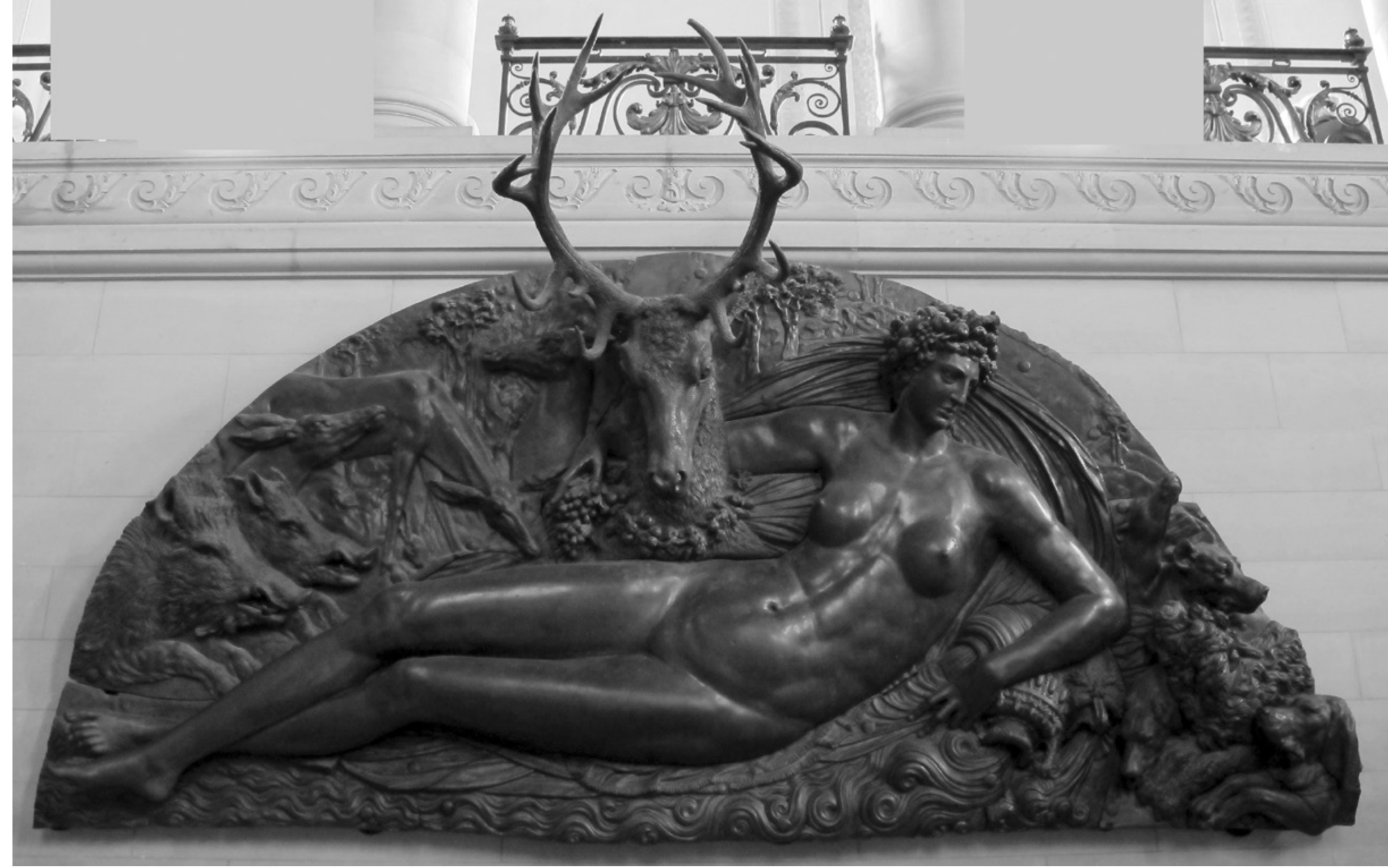
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The relation of the V-sign to Artemidea's virginity is confirmed in Benvenuto Cellini's *Nymphe de Fontainebleau* (1542), now in the Louvre. In the bronze high relief the nymph embraces the head of a deer, while with her left hand she turns her V-shaped fingers into waves of water pouring out of vases.



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The presence of deer, dogs, and water makes her a Diana: the deer is the sacred animal of the goddess, and the scene refers to Atteone, the man who saw the goddess naked and was therefore transformed into prey to be devoured by her dogs.



1 — THE ALPHABET AS POINT OF ARRIVAL
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4 — THE

HORNED

GOD

Luca Signorelli,
The Education of Pan (1490 ca.),
The painting of “nude gods” was destroyed
in a fire in May 1945 in Berlin

The God Pan with the bagpipe,
from *Secreta Secretorum Philosophorum*,
(1460-1465 ca.),
Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Firenze

Palma il Vecchio,
Bath of Diana (1520 ca.),
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna (detail)

Fürstenportal,
the Princes’ Portal (1237),
Bamberg (detail of the Damned)

Marco Dente,
Pan and Syrinx (1516),
Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen,
Rotterdam

PAN

4 – THE HORNED GOD PAN

5 — THE V OF THE MAIDEN
6 — AMAZONS

It is not only Diana who is depicted with lunar horns, but also the god of cosmic harmony. This is evident in the *Education of Pan*, painted by Luca Signorelli around 1490. Here the “V” refers to the horned God, whose worship was only discredited by the emergence of Christianity.



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In the 14th century, the Church associated Pan and Diana with Satan and his demons and considered the sabbaths and esba of witches and benandanti to be dangerous pagan rituals.



5 — THE V OF THE MAIDEN
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2 — AS LYNETIC AS EARLY MODERN
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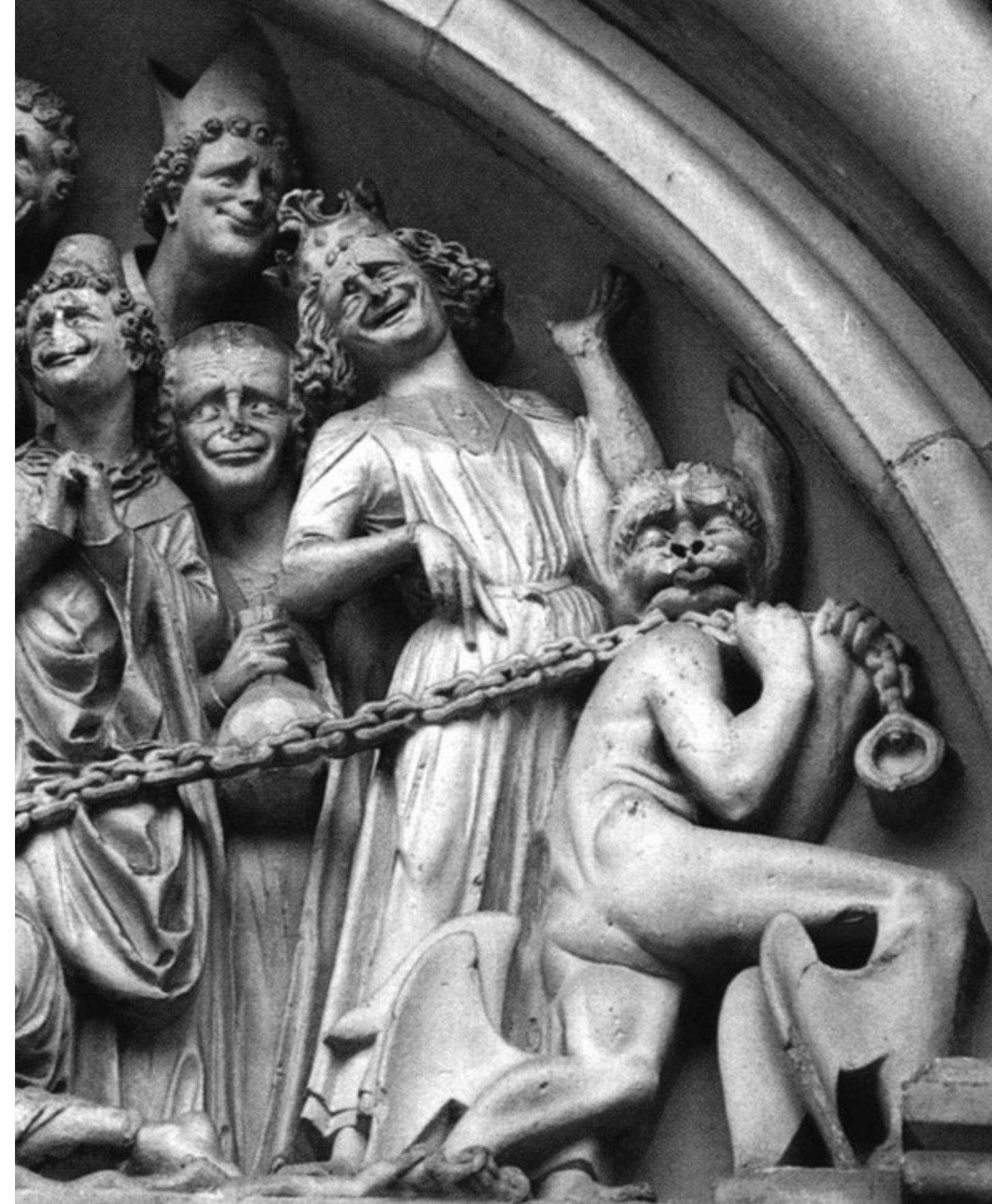
9 — THE PRINCIPLE OF NEGATIONISM
1 — THE ALPHABET AS POINT OF ARRIVAL

4 – THE HORNED GOD PAN

Over time the gesture has been transmitted through initiation, becoming both a sign of belonging to a heretical sect and a gesture of defense against the curse. In this sense it was used in the *Last Judgement* of the Princes' Portal of Bamberg Cathedral (before 1228).

Here the king, who makes the gesture by pointing the V-shaped fingers of his right hand downwards, is placed among the damned, next to a bishop and a rich man holding a bag full of money, who are all depicted with decidedly bitter smiles and imprisoned within the chain pulled by a demon. The King directs the upside-down V next to the devil who will lead him into hell.

5 — THE V OF THE MAIDEN
6 — AMAZONS



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5 — THE

V

OF

THE

Guercino,
Diana cacciatrice (1658),
Fondazione Sorgente Group, Roma

MAIDEN

5 – THE V OF THE MAIDEN

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7 — THE NATURE OF THE VENUS

The witch hunt becomes a clash between the culture of Church and State and an alternative culture in which the magical is a route to knowledge. During the conflict the Church inculcates terror, which not only goes so far as to kill the women of this culture but also to import such magic into the living rooms of the princes. In the official Church of the early sixteenth century there were commissions of artistic works in which magic is personified by Greek-Roman divinities, including Diana. The best known have been translated into paintings by illustrious artists of Mannerism.



8 — THE ARISTOCRATIC V
9 — THE PRINCIPLE OF NEGATIONISM

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1 — THE ALPHABET AS POINT OF ARRIVAL
2 — AS LYNNATIC AS EARLY MODERN

6 — AMAZONS

Tiziano,
Flora (1515 ca.),
Galleria degli Uffizi, Firenze

Palma il Vecchio,
A Blonde Woman (Flora?) (1522-24),
National Gallery, London

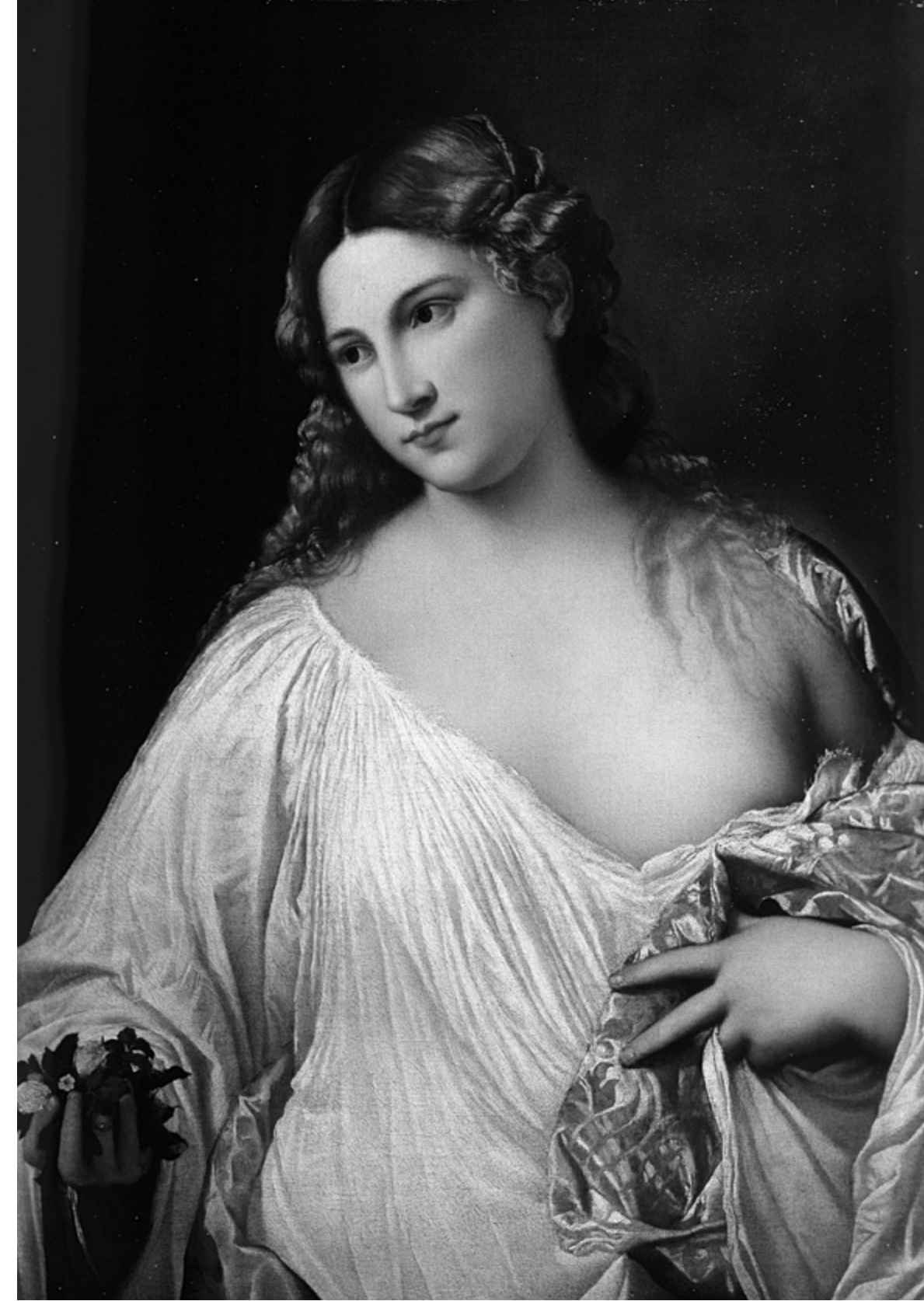
Wounded Amazon,
copy of an original by Fidia of the fifth
century BC,
Musei Capitolini, Roma

6 – AMAZONS

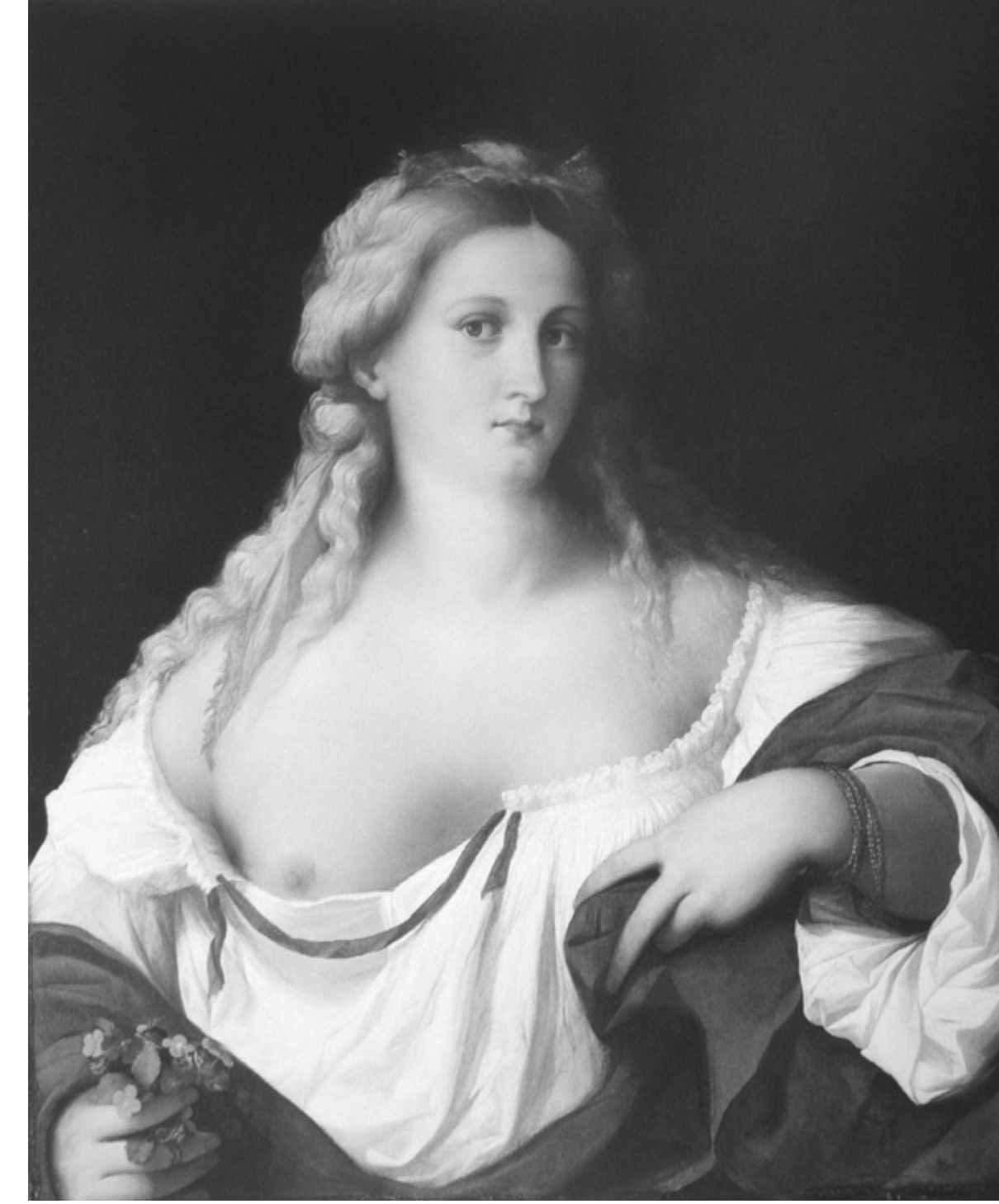
In the 16th century Flora refers both to Flora-Primavera, the goddess of flowers and gardens, and to Flora-Meretrice, a courtesan of ancient Rome rehabilitated through deification.

The Flora-Diana, painted by Tiziano and Palma il Vecchio between 1515 and 1524, nods to V and bears witness to the figure of the “healer”, heir to a tradition that used healing herbs and natural magic, and demonized by the Council of Trent (1545-1663). In the aristocratic salons the subjects painted by Tiziano and Palma il Vecchio show a closeness to the representation of the Amazons, signified by both the V-shaped symbol/gesture and the bare breast.

Among the spring wildflowers that the young blonde Flora (c. 1522-1524), depicted by Palma, has in her hand, is a yellow flower with four petals. This celandine, a herb considered prodigious since ancient times, was used by alchemists in the Middle Ages as an indispensable ingredient for the manufacture of philosopher’s stone.



7 — THE NATURE OF THE VENUS
8 — THE ARISTOCRATIC V



4 — THE HORNED GOD PAN
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The Amazons were represented with bare breasts and scissor fingers. The Wounded Amazon of the Capitoline Museums is an example of the warrior virgin dedicated to the cult of Diana. One of the interpretations of the etymological “amazòn” considers the term to mean “priestess of the moon”, coming from the Caucasian “masa”.

7 — THE NATURE OF THE VENUS
8 — THE ARISTOCRATIC V



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Here my argument starts to diverge from Mauro Zanchi's text.

Mentioning a sect means reading these paintings without excluding the tradition of a sacred prostitution dating back to the Middle Ages. It means admitting that in the Renaissance there still were Christian sects preaching the community of women, such as those of the first Nicolaiti, Fibioniti, Leviti and Barboriti. It was a sacred prostitution because it supported the sanctity of illicit voluptuousness. But it was also an aesthetic prostitution, in which Christianity and Paganism merged in aristocratic salons. Think of the text *Treaty of sacred polygamy*, in which mention was made of the lasciviousness of the cardinals' servants, and of the cardinals themselves.

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NATURE

OF

Giorgione,
Sleeping Venus (1510 ca.),
Gemäldegalerie, Dresden

Palma Il Vecchio,
Nymph in a landscape (1520 ca.),
Gemäldegalerie, Dresden

Tiziano,
Venus of Urbino (1538),
Galleria degli Uffizi, Firenze

VENUS

7 – THE NATURE OF VENUS

8 — THE ARISTOCRATIC V
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The *Sleeping Venus*, begun by Giorgione and completed by Tiziano (1508 - 1512), is a work that re-proposes inner atmospheres, and the idealized description of the pastoral world that becomes a model for many lagoon painters. The female nude is here said to represent the desire for a “return to nature”.

The female nude reproduces here also what Carla Lonzi in 1971 called a "celebrative moment of male creativity". The woman as a subsidiary human being is denied any intervention that implies the recognition of her as a subject.



5 — THE V OF THE MAIDEN
6 — AMAZONS

1 — THE ALPHABET AS POINT OF ARRIVAL
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In Palma il Vecchio's *Nymph in a landscape* (c. 1518-1520), the gesture of the inverted V is inserted into a representation in which the female nude becomes a private collector's item. The archaic landscape context seduces Neoplatonists and important private Venetian collectors. For this reason it is found in various works with mythological, symbolic subjects, in which the female nude is represented in languid poses.

The woman is conditioned in a category that guarantees a priori to the artist, the protagonist of creativity, the appreciation of his work.

Art is institutionalized and with it a neutral counterpart that witnesses the gestures of others.



5 — THE V OF THE MAIDEN
6 — AMAZONS

1 — THE ALPHABET AS POINT OF ARRIVAL
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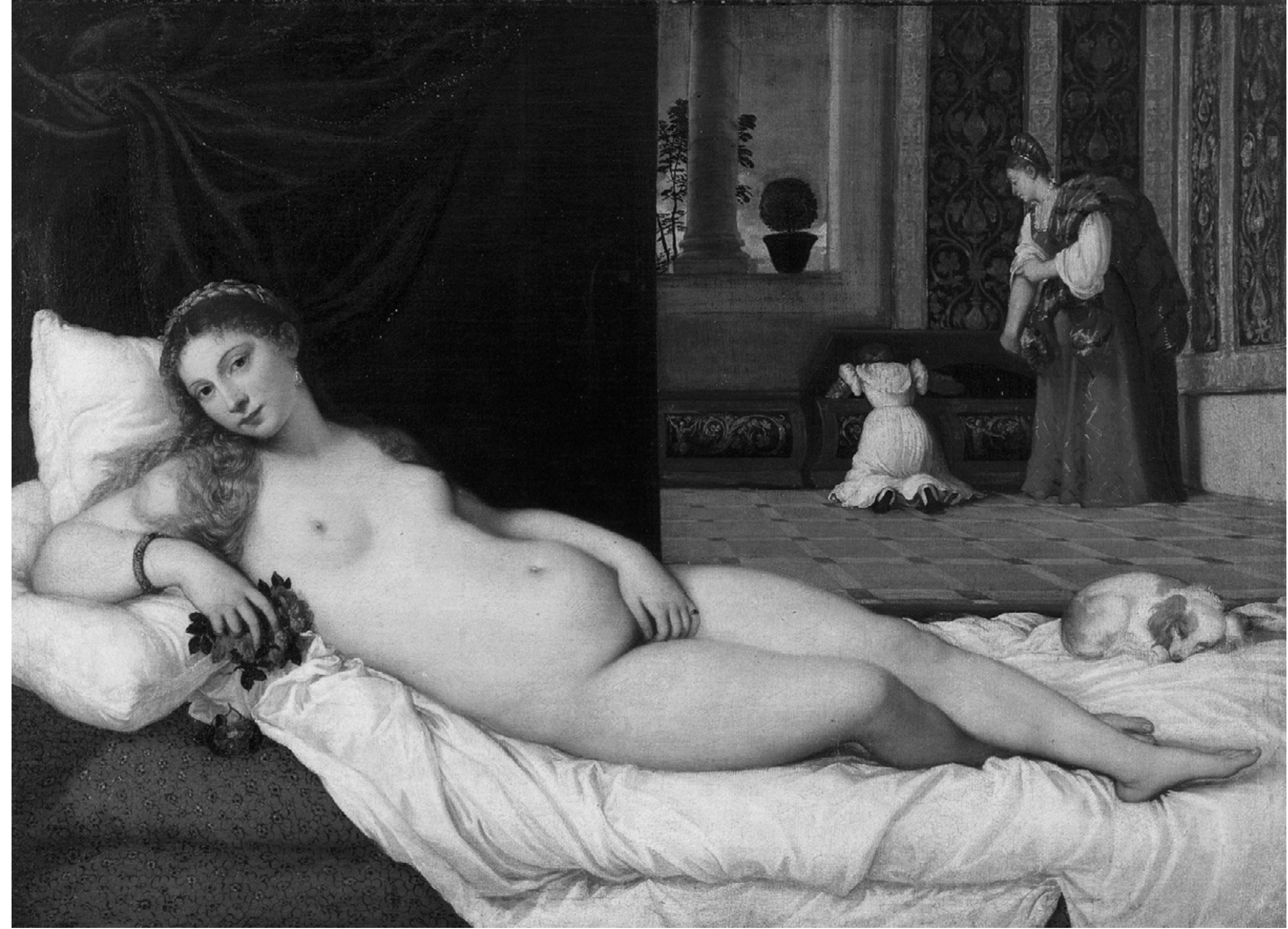
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Titian's nude, *The Venus of Urbino* (1538), seems to be a charming courtesan and an affiliate of the circle of the Madona Horiente, judging by the allusion to V that she makes.

In this picture, patriarchal creativity is stimulated by the unarmed acceptance of women. In order not to lose the confidence of a myth, the work of art had to adapt to our exclusively receptive role.



5 — THE V OF THE MAIDEN
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Sebastiano del Piombo,
Dorotea (1512),
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

Tintoretto,
Veronica Franco (1575 ca.),
Worcester Art museum, Massachusetts

Tiziano,
Diana and Actaeon (1556-1559),
National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh

8 – THE ARISTOCRATIC V

In Venice Meretricio was not considered something dirty or sinful, and did not affect the idea of belonging to a wealthy caste, even if it was practiced by a noblewoman. In fact, it was often precisely this ability that enabled the females of the house to raise families and increase their status. And so many married women rounded off their husbands' income for a fee. Out of a population of 140,000 souls, 11,000 were courtesans and yet only a part of them were honoured.

A regulation of 1543 made a clear distinction between infamous whores, unworthy of sitting among the faithful, and women of high lineage for whom mercenary love was an art, and who could occupy the first pews in a church.

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9 — THE PRINCIPLE OF NEGATIONISM
1 — THE ALPHABET AS POINT OF ARRIVAL

In *Portrait of a young woman with basket of fruit and flowers* (1512) by Sebastiano del Piombo [at the left], a woman draws a V, caressing a lynx fur. They write that it could be Francesca Ordeaschi, the lover of Agostino Chigi. The V gesture, which at first I interpreted within gender struggle, was turning out to be a symptom of class survival.

The V sign was also known by a famous 16th century courtesan, *Veronica Franco*, painted by Tintoretto [at the right]. Of bourgeois birth, she was the most admired and desired poetess of the lagoon. She would have enjoyed a freedom reserved for a few women. At least until, in revenge, she was exposed to witchcraft and sent to jail. Once freed, she fell in love with the painter Federico Contarini who would soon be accused of sodomy and hung by the testicles in St. Mark's Square.

Man's strength is in his identification with culture; ours is in rejecting it.



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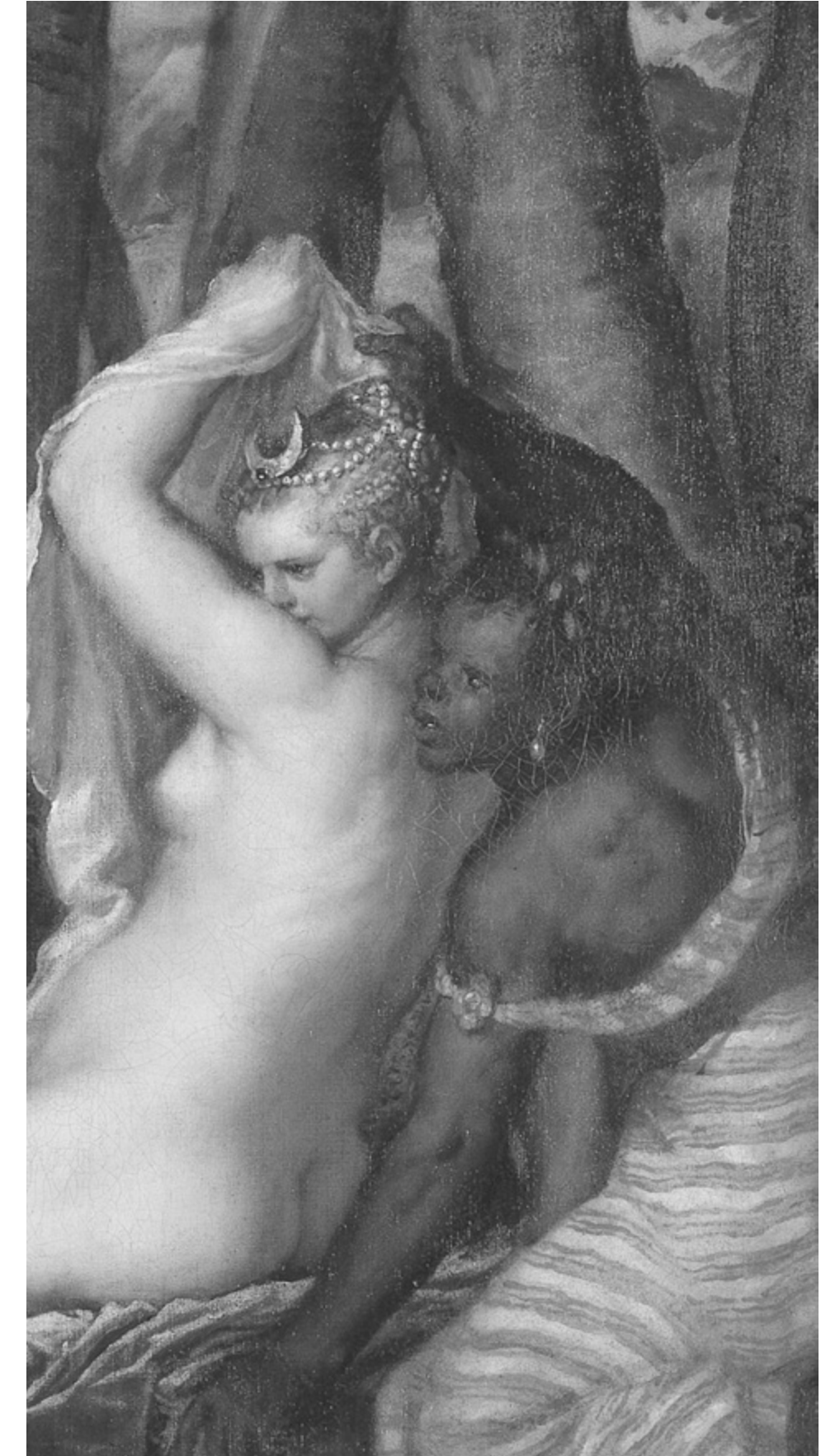
9 — THE PRINCIPLE OF NEGATIONISM
1 — THE ALPHABET AS POINT OF ARRIVAL

In the never-ending circle, where some goddesses dance with capital, something was there to disappear. What is revealed in the collections of women, trapped in the all-male gaze of Renaissance painting, is the aesthetic of a racial distinction.

The Diana goddess is served here by a victim of the conversion of Africa into a European preserve for the commercial hunting of black-skins at her disposal.

While poor women were associated with Diana and burned at the stake, private collectors, among which we remember popes, were hanging the sacred symbols of their rebellion on the walls of expensive and luxurious palaces.

The conservation of these symbols goes hand-in-hand with a classification of the subhuman.



6 — AMAZONS
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9 — THE

PRINCIPLE

OF

Cristoforo de Predis,
Luna, miniatura dal codice De Sphaera
(1470 ca.),
Biblioteca Estense Universitaria, Modena

Artemisia Gentileschi,
Judith Slaying Holofernes (1620),
Galleria degli Uffizi, Firenze

Andrea Mantegna,
Judith and Holofernes (1495),
National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin

Paolo Veronese,
Judith and Holofernes (1582-85),
Musei di Strada Nuova, Genova

Agostino Carracci,
Portrait of Olimpia Luna as Judith and
Melchiorre Zoppio as Holofernes (1590-95),
Private Collection

Tiziano,
Portrait of Laura Dianti (1529),
Private Collection

Cristóvão de Morais,
Joana, Princesa de Portugal (1551),
Musée Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique,
Brussels

St. Helena, copy after Titian (late 16th century),
Collection Doria Pamphili, Roma

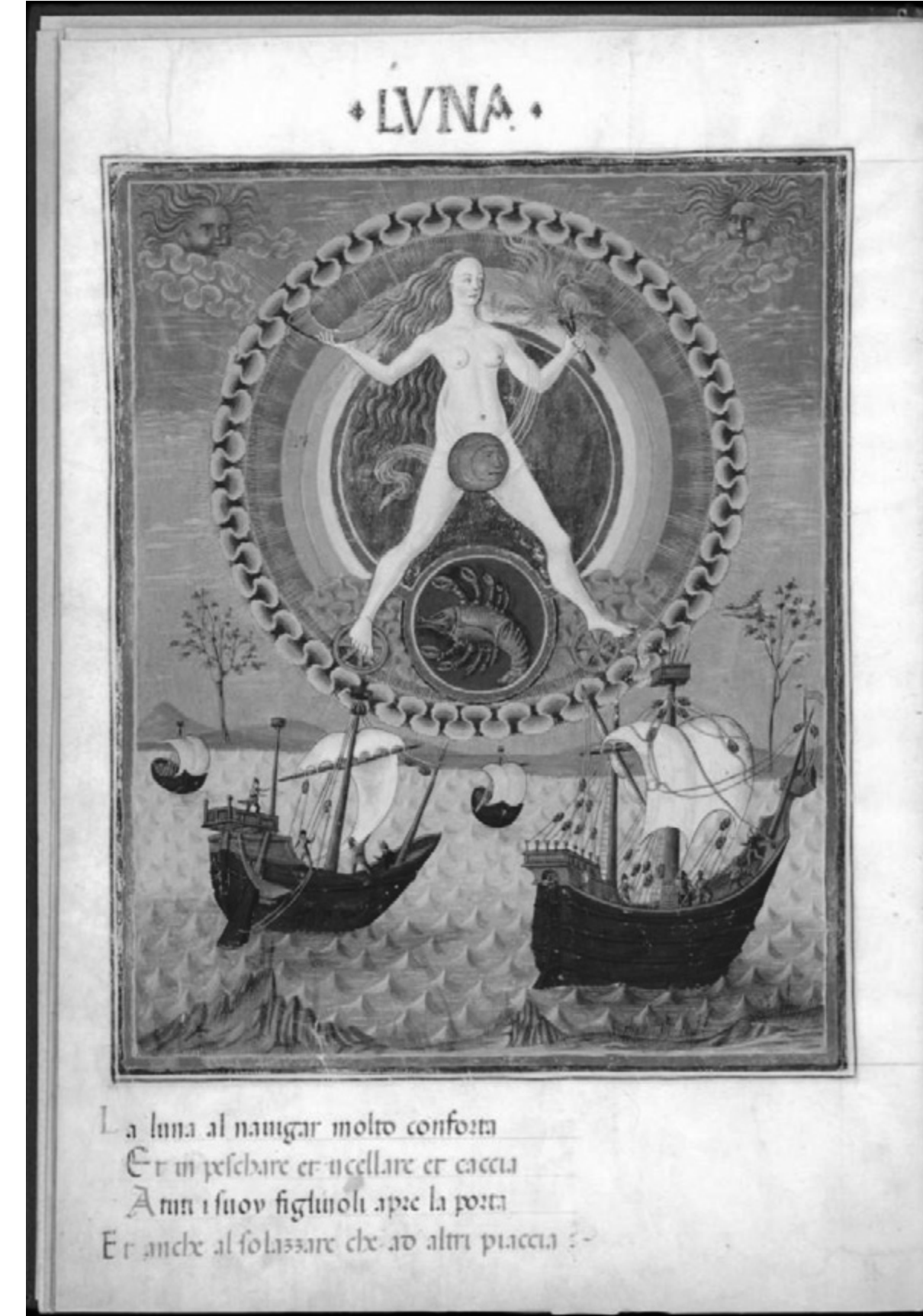
NEGATIONISM

9 – THE PRINCIPLE OF NEGATIONISM

In the *De Sphaera Codex* (c. 1470), the Moon is depicted as a young woman who, by the light of a torch, governs navigation.

So, the V of the goddess, the V of the moon, became the V of the violence. The privatized courtesan came to advocate imperialism, to symbolize its natural grandiosity.

1 — THE ALPHABET AS POINT OF ARRIVAL
2 — AS LVNATIC AS EARLY MODERN



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Judith Slaying Holofernes was a subject that crossed the artistic production of many artists in and after the Renaissance, and probably the most well known are those painted by Artemisia Gentileschi in the 17th century; in her case the subject was interpreted as the female desire for revenge against the sexual violence suffered by Agostino Tassi, a painter like her.

But I would like to link *Diana and Actaeon* painted by Tiziano with the *Judith and Holofernes* painted by Andrea Mantegna (1495), Paolo Veronese (1582-85) and Agostino Carracci (1590-95). In these three painters' works the handmaiden who accompanies Judith to kill Holofernes, and that will help her by hiding his slayed head in a bag, is a black woman.



3 — DIANA IN NORTHERN ITALY
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- 1 — THE ALPHABET AS POINT OF ARRIVAL
- 2 — AS LVNATIC AS EARLY MODERN

While Mantegna and Veronese were living and working in the territories of la Serenissima, whose capital was Venice, Carracci took inspiration by Veronese and somehow copied him. In the three examples we see a white woman painted next to a black enslaved one. From the Old Testament we don't have any detail regarding a black handmaiden in the city of Betulia. As such this is a free interpretation by these painters, who depicted something that they were probably seeing in the reality of their time. But why is a handmaiden imagined as a black subject in Renaissance, Mannerist and pre-Baroque painting?

Artemisia Gentileschi in the 17th century didn't represent any bag and in her painting the white handmaiden is helping Judith to kill Holofernes



7 — THE NATURE OF THE VENUS
8 — THE ARISTOCRATIC V

3 — DIANA IN NORTHERN ITALY
4 — THE HORNED GOD PAN

6 — THE V OF THE MAIDEN
AMAZONS — 6

9 – THE PRINCIPLE OF NEGATIONISM

1 — THE ALPHABET AS POINT OF ARRIVAL
2 — AS LVNATIC AS EARLY MODERN

Tiziano's *Portrait of Laura Dianti* (1529), the lover of Alfonso I d'Este, shows us the V gesture and the African presence in the Renaissance Mantova. In the 15th and 16th centuries Europe's ties to Africa, forged during the heyday of the Roman Empire, were renewed.

Next to white serfs, black children were particularly popular as servants in the court of Mantova. Isabella d'Este, the wife of Alfonso I d'Este, specifically requested agents to seek out black children for her court. African servants were used as status symbols. They were dressed in white or brightly coloured clothing and bejeweled with gold or pearl earrings, but remained in a position of servitude and inferiority.

While Laura Dianti's left hand draws a V, her right hand rests as a sign of protection on the shoulder of the child resting at her side. Inside a pictorial construction - which is the projection of a male gaze, in which the woman herself is moulded according to a protocol and a label whose destiny is the same as that of furnishing accessories. Nothing can give the sense of piety more than the benevolence of a white and rich woman, a subject that can decide whom to protect, how and when.

The woman is defined here in relation to the man who owns her. The black child is only painted in the presence of the woman. The myths of complementarity and benevolent piety are used here to justify a hierarchy of power.



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The whiff of moralization brought by the Council of Trent no longer made anyone feel secure before the Inquisition.

So, while the painting model of a woman with a young black enslaved child shows the collusion of the application of coercive forces that commodifies bodies, the V gesture will no longer be isolated. It will be accompanied by gestures that exemplify Christian charity, to ward off the punishments of sin.

Here *Joana, Princesa de Portugal*, painted by Cristóvão de Morais in 1551, blesses with her hand the head of one of her servants.

It became fashionable for noblewomen to do charitable deeds towards the most miserable ones. This allowed them to show themselves closer to the needs of poor people and earn a well-deserved place in Heaven.



3 — DIANA IN NORTHERN ITALY
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The humanist idea of slavery was built on a perversion of Platonic and Aristotelian ideas of slavery. Depending on them, Europeans justified that the uncivilized societies of the Dark Continent had been ordained by nature to be ruled by white, civilized men.

Slavery in European countries, beyond the ancient age, saw the persistence of servile forms in the High Middle Ages and a resumption of slavery, especially of Afro-descendants, from the 13th century to the whole of the 15th century. The development of the Atlantic trade never extinguished this phenomenon in Europe by the 16th century and there is certainly a discomfort in admitting that slavery was admitted in the Old Continent even beyond the French Revolution until the whole Napoleonic age.

[on the right: *St. Helena*, copy after Titian (late 16th century), Collection Doria Pamphili, Roma]

Re-reading a context and an aesthetics that do not reveal their secrets, is a way for us to take a lot of the credit given to culture.



7 — THE NATURE OF THE VENUS
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6 — AMAZONS

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