

# The Erotics of the Axillary Pose

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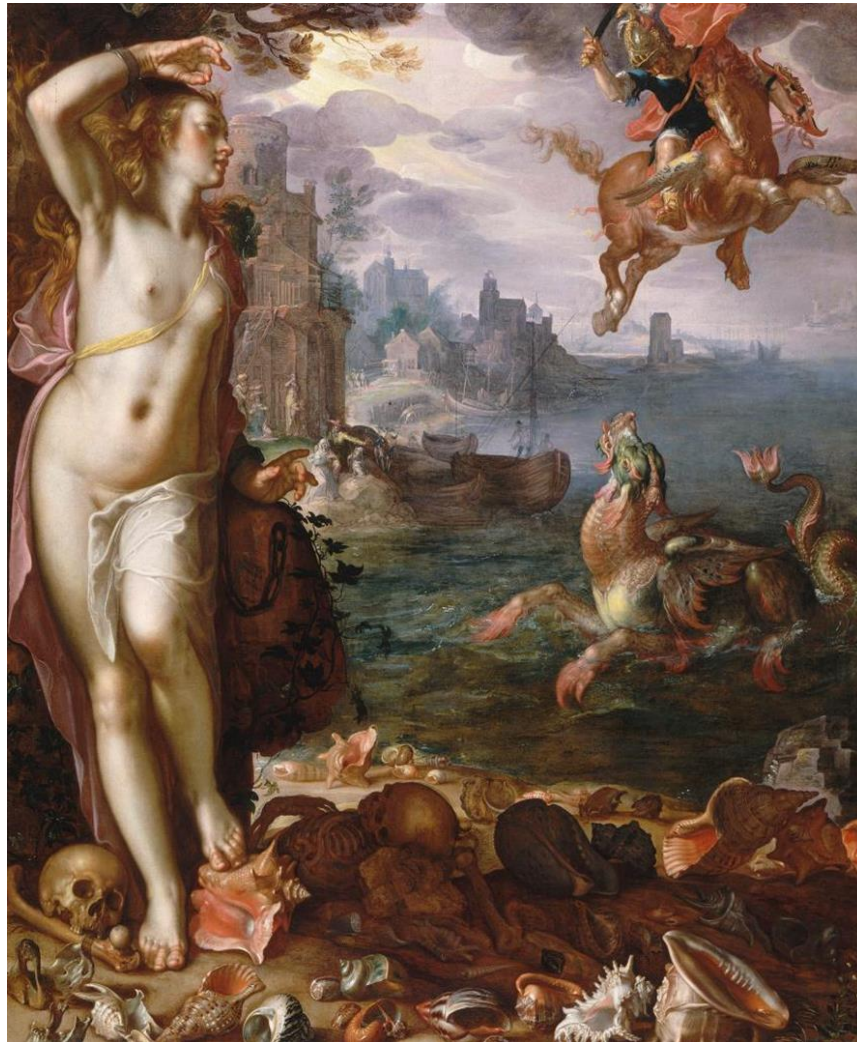


Fig. 1. Joachim Wtewael, *Andromeda and Perseus*, 1611, oil on canvas, 180 x 150 cm, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

*Axilla, feminine noun. The hollow part of the human body that is under the shoulder at the juncture of the arm, and which ordinarily has hair.*

—Antoine Furetière<sup>1</sup>

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Perseus's rescue of the princess Andromeda from a sea monster was represented numerous times in the second half of the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth century, north as well as south of the Alps, here in examples by Joachim Wtewael (1611), Peter Paul Rubens (ca. 1638), and the Cavaliere d'Arpino (ca. 1593–94) (Figs. 1–3).<sup>2</sup> The well-known narrative, told most influentially by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*, hinges on Andromeda's beauty: it was the subject of her mother's boast that angered Neptune and led to his demand for her sacrifice.<sup>3</sup> And it was what drew Perseus's attention and provoked his difficult battle with the monster: Perseus's passion was ignited, and he was stunned by her beauty—Ovid's text literally says he was “stupefied and seized by the image” (*stupet et visae correptus imagine formae*)—and almost forgot to move the wings on his feet,<sup>4</sup> so that Andromeda was able to effect, if only momentarily, the petrifying force that Medusa could not. Before he agreed to save her, Perseus demanded of Andromeda's parents that she be given to him—this was a negotiation rather than an altruistic act—and thus, as Ovid put it, she was both cause and reward of all his labor. The artist's task, then, was to present Andromeda

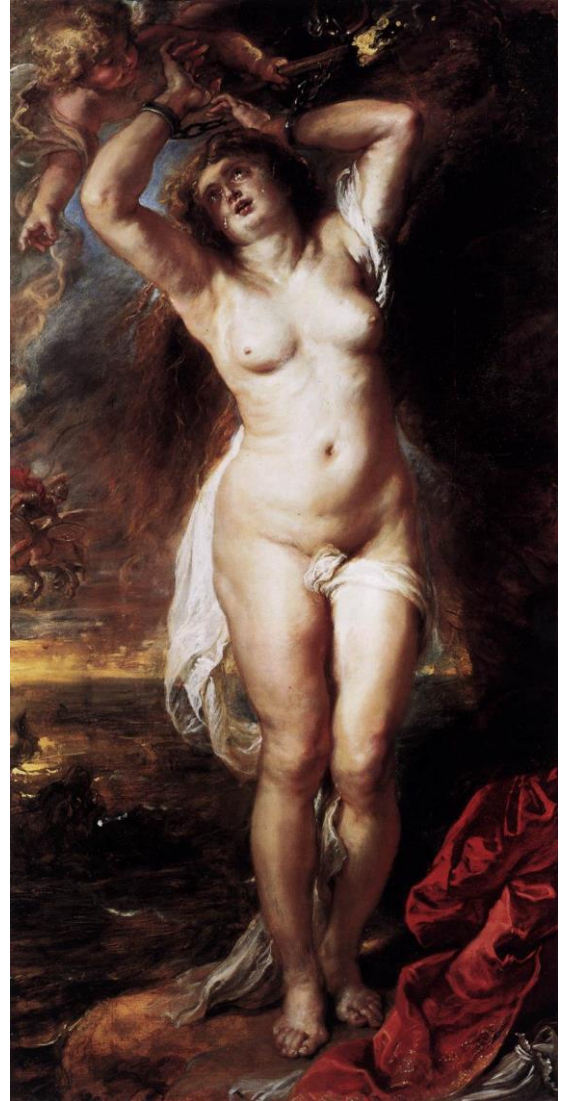


Fig. 2. Peter Paul Rubens, *Andromeda*, ca. 1638, oil on oak, 189 x 94 cm, Staatliche Museen, Berlin.

as exceedingly beautiful and enticing, to both Perseus and the viewer of the artwork. Various interpretations of paintings of the subject are possible, and an artist might be able to satisfy more than one brief simultaneously—Wtewael's painting, for example, has been read as a political allegory, with Andromeda as the Dutch republic threatened





Fig. 3. Cavaliere d'Arpino (Giuseppe Cesari), *Perseus Rescuing Andromeda*, ca. 1593–94, oil on lapis lazuli, 20 x 15.4 cm, Saint Louis Art Museum 1:2000.

by the Spanish empire and liberated by the Princes of Orange, and, more subtly, as an allegory of painting in the Netherlands—but my interest here is entirely basic (or base, if you will), focused on the affective qualities of Andromeda's body and those of similar figures, consistent across a large group of pictures.

Andromeda was almost always foregrounded, depicted nude and

facing the viewer, her hands chained to a seaside cliff or large rock behind her, usually standing in contrapposto, but sometimes partially seated. These three paintings offer us the three main conventions for the positioning of her arms, which is my primary concern here: one arm down and one up over her head; both up over her head; and both down and behind her. My contention is that there is

an erotic appeal—that is, an additional erotic appeal, given the conventional nudity of the figure, its contrapposto stance, and its helplessness—in the exposing of one or both armpits (the axillae) in what I refer to as the axillary pose. This appeal has, to my knowledge, scarcely been noted in the literature on representations of Andromeda or similar figures, especially Saint Sebastian, although European art of antiquity and the early-modern era is replete with exposed axillae, from the *Wounded*

*Niobid* and the *Barberini Faun* to Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus*, Michelangelo's *Dying Slave*, and beyond. They are especially common in the work of Joachim Wtewael, a leading painter in Utrecht at the turn of the seventeenth century, who thus provides a convenient touchstone for the considerations that follow, but are in no way specific to him: *The Golden Age*, for example, features half a dozen nude figures reaching languidly upward for ever-available fruit (Fig. 4), while his various versions of Mars and



Fig. 4. Joachim Wtewael, *The Golden Age*, 1605, oil on copper, 22.5 x 30.5 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.





Fig. 5. Joachim Wtewael, *Mars and Venus Surprised by Vulcan*, 1604–08, oil on copper, 20.3 x 15.5 cm, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles.

Venus caught *in flagrante delicto* by Venus's husband, Vulcan, clearly situate the exposed axilla in an erotic context (Fig. 5).<sup>5</sup> The axillary pose may not quite be the "long-suppressed matter of fact" assigned to oblivion—nor carry the theological import—of images of Christ's sexuality observed by Leo Steinberg, but the *ostentatio axillarum* abounds and deserves a reckoning.<sup>6</sup>

The axillary pose works in several ways: 1) lifting one arm over the head (a half-axillary, so to speak) tends to complicate and exaggerate the contrapposto of the figure, enhancing its eroticism; 2) it exposes a normally hidden, tender part of the body, enhancing the figure's vulnerability; 3) by visual analogy, it suggests other erotic parts of the body; 4) it suggests olfactory as well as visual sensations; 5) lifting both arms (a full-axillary) raises the breasts and flattens the stomach<sup>7</sup>; and 6) for some viewers, it may carry an inherent erotic appeal, based in part on any or all of the foregoing or other factors.

Owing to the ubiquity of works of art including the axillary pose, in depictions of Andromeda and elsewhere, it is not necessary to describe its pictorial genealogy. Yet a couple of engravings from Agostino Carracci's series known as the *Lascivie* from the early

1590s may usefully demonstrate that both the subject of Andromeda and the axillary pose were apparently considered inherently erotic in the early-modern period (Figs. 6–7).<sup>8</sup> It is furthermore worth noting, with regard to Carracci's *Satyr and Sleeping Nude*, that a substantial portion of figures in the axillary pose, dating back to antiquity, are sleeping. Such figures—"perfectly passive objects of our gaze," to use Bette Talvacchia's phrase<sup>9</sup>—suggest not only a kind of abandonment, of un(self)conscious openness, but also of vulnerability, and this vulnerability—shared by bound figures like Andromeda—plays a role in their eroticism.

The sensuality of the axillary pose is not at all limited to the female figure, nor is it limited to figures whose iconography is inherently erotic.<sup>10</sup> Wtewael anticipated Andromeda's pose with a painting, also monumental, of the *Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* in 1600 (Fig. 8).<sup>11</sup> In fact, if the attribution to Wtewael of a drawing of *Andromeda and Perseus* in Vienna is accurate, the artist initially translated quite directly the pose from the male Sebastian to the female Andromeda, reworking it later for the painted figure while maintaining its essential form and affect (Fig. 9), suggesting, perhaps, a conceptual as well as formal link





Fig. 6. Agostino Carracci, *Andromeda and the Sea Monster*, ca. 1590–95, from the *Lascivie*, engraving, 15.4 x 10.9 cm.

Fig. 7. Agostino Carracci, *Satyr and Sleeping Nude*, ca. 1590–95, from the *Lascivie*, engraving, 15.2 x 10 cm.

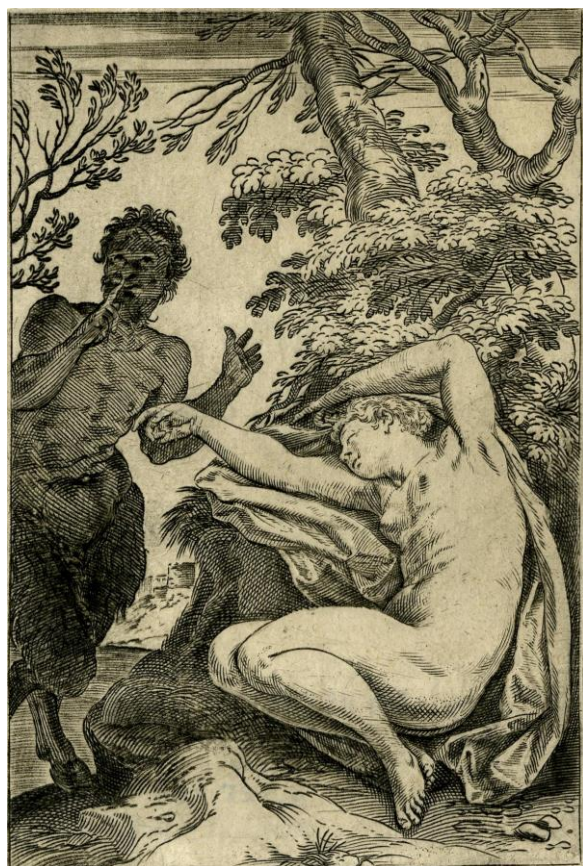






Fig. 8. Joachim Wtewael, *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian*, 1600, oil on canvas, 169.2 x 125.1 cm, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri.





Fig. 9. Attributed to Joachim Wtewael, *Perseus and Andromeda*, ca. 1605, pen and brown ink with brown wash and white heightening, 15.8 x 20.3 cm, Graphische Sammlung Albertina, Vienna.

between the Christian martyr and the pagan princess.<sup>12</sup> Hendrick Goltzius's 1583 engraving of *Andromeda and Perseus* has often been adduced as a source for Wtewael's *Andromeda* (Fig. 10), but Lynn Orr has suggested that it also lies behind Wtewael's *Saint Sebastian*, which might, she further suggests, explain in part what she calls "the exceedingly androgynous character" of the saint.<sup>13</sup> Wtewael almost certainly knew the engraving, although there are many other potential models.

The Cavaliere d'Arpino consistently depicted Andromeda with her arms down, but he made use of the full-axillary pose in his *Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian*, dated variously to the 1590s or around 1617 (Fig. 11).<sup>14</sup> Like Andromeda, Sebastian is usually shown nude, standing, with his arms bound behind him—in his case, to a tree or post—with both arms down, one up, or both up. Facing the viewer in d'Arpino's painting, he carries considerable erotic force and appeal.<sup>15</sup> With his "soft, sensual, and feminine body,"<sup>16</sup>



Fig. 10. Hendrick Goltzius, *Perseus and Andromeda*, 1583, engraving, 19.8 x 14.5 cm, British Museum, London.

Fig. 11. Cavaliere d'Arpino (Giuseppe Cesari), *Saint Sebastian*, 1590s/ca. 1617 [?], oil on panel, 96 x 69 cm, Quadreria dei Girolamini, Naples.





d'Arpino's Sebastian echoes what Elizabeth Bartman has called the "sexy boys" of Hellenistic and Roman sculpture and anticipates the ephebic youths of French neoclassical painting and Thomas Mann's Tazio, whose "armpits were still as smooth as a statue's."<sup>17</sup>

As with Andromeda, regardless of which conventional pose an artist used to depict Sebastian, the compositions almost invariably present the youthful saint's beautiful nude body to the viewer and are thus about that nude body and its relationship to the viewer, even though there was no iconographic justification for Sebastian's sensuality. As Jacobus de Voragine told it in *The Golden Legend*, Sebastian was a commander of a Roman cohort attached to the emperor's personal retinue who was condemned to death when his Christianity was discovered. Bound and shot with so many arrows that his body looked like a porcupine, he miraculously survived and avowed his faith again, only to be clubbed to death.<sup>18</sup> It was only over the course of the early-modern period that he developed from a mature man to a tender youth and the traditional reading of the Roman archers' arrows as metaphors of the plague was "contaminated" by a conflation with Cupid's arrows of love. Concomitantly, the depiction of the saint was increasingly eroticized.<sup>19</sup>

The exaggeration of the contrapposto—jutting the hip farther off-axis, deepening the figure's S-curve, twisting the body into a *figura serpentinata*—may enhance the eroticism, but that eroticism can be further amplified by raising an arm, which in Wtewael's painting may be its primary purpose: the saint's left arm is not yet bound, but it rises to expose the axilla in a gesture with no obvious narrative justification.<sup>20</sup>

Sebastian's sensuality is sometimes emphasized by complete nudity, as in d'Arpino's painting and iterations of Alessandro Vittoria's sculpture of the saint, first realized as a life-sized work in stone for an altar in San Francesco della Vigna in Venice, but then circulated widely, including in the north, as copies or casts of a small bronze version.<sup>21</sup> Paolo Veronese's portrait of Vittoria with a (possibly whitewashed terracotta) model for the figure reminds us of the tactile qualities of the sculpture—that it was meant to be held, caressed even (Fig. 12).<sup>22</sup> Comparably, our eyes are meant to linger over—visually caress—the body of Saint Sebastian in paintings of the subject.

Concerns about the sensuality of images of Saint Sebastian were expressed already in the sixteenth century, most saliently in Giorgio Vasari's well-known account of a large painting of *Saint Sebastian* by



Fig. 12. Paolo Veronese, *Alessandro Vittoria* (1524/25–1608), ca. 1580, oil on canvas, 110.5 x 81.9 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Fra Bartolomeo, executed for San Marco in Florence around 1514–15. According to Vasari, he had been criticized more than once for his inability to depict nudes and thus committed himself to demonstrate his skill in this regard, more than, one infers, to satisfy a devotional brief, his own fidelity to Savonarola notwithstanding. This life-sized nude Sebastian with a “sweet air” was removed from its place in the church by the friars who had heard in the confessional from “women who in looking at it had sinned [“were corrupted” in Vasari’s first edition] through the lovely and lascivious imitation of the living person given him by the

skill of Fra Bartolomeo.”<sup>23</sup> The painting is untraced, having entered the collection of King Francis I of France and subsequently disappeared, but the composition, known from a reduced copy in Fiesole, features the nude, nubile saint reaching upwards for his martyr’s palm in a half-axillary pose recalling that of the monumental *Salvator Mundi* that the Frate also completed around that time, but with far less clothing.<sup>24</sup> Toward the end of the century, Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo repeated Vasari’s story and recommended that artists depict the saint shot with arrows and covered with blood so that he wouldn’t appear as the “beautiful, lovely, and white nude that he was.”<sup>25</sup> Hideous figures like a Grünewald Christ were not forthcoming, however, and Lomazzo may have underestimated the erotic appeal of the violated, bloody body anyway. What is also unstated in the sixteenth-century literature on Saint Sebastian and other male nudes that might give cause for scandal is their potential homoerotic appeal, which Richard Spear emphasized in connection with Guido Reni’s paintings of the subject, such as the canvas of around 1615 in the Pinacoteca Capitolina (Fig. 13), although others have disputed it.<sup>26</sup> The identity of the original owner of Wtewael’s *Saint Sebastian* is unknown, but it is an





Fig. 13. Guido Reni, *Saint Sebastian*, ca. 1615, oil on canvas, 130 x 99 cm.  
Roma, Musei Capitolini, Pinacoteca Capitolina. © Roma, Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali.  
Photo: Archivio Fotografico dei Musei Capitolini.

unusual picture in the artist's oeuvre and was almost certainly painted for someone in particular. The patron was probably—though not necessarily—male, possibly a namesake of the saint, and, in any case, surely aware of—and receptive to—the erotic qualities of the picture. It is perhaps no surprise that male figures in an axillary pose are most often passive, disempowered, and vulnerable, enacting the feminization of the male figure, or at least the proposal of an alternative masculinity. Sebastian's axillary pose in Reni's painting merits only a glancing but perceptive mention by Spear in a catalog of the figure's qualities: his "soft flesh, full lips, defenseless armpits, supple belly, and bare groin."<sup>27</sup> I contend that the pose contributes greatly to Sebastian's eroticism, and perhaps it is no mere chance or compositional necessity that induced Reni to plunge an arrow precisely into the "defenseless armpit." Here the armpit may substitute for Sebastian's even more tender, vulnerable parts, hidden from our view. Wtewael's painting may include an additional substitution, beyond his body: the steeply foreshortened nude angel approaching Sebastian at the upper right—a more extreme version of an analogous putto in Titian's *Rape of Europa*—may also manifest a displacement

of the martyr's sexuality, offering the viewer another point of entry into the subject.

Such an extra-corporeal substitution has been discerned in Wtewael's *Perseus and Andromeda* as well, in that the conch on which Andromeda rests her foot in Wtewael's painting acts as a visual metaphor for her concealed genitalia, displaced and exposed, and thus a "startlingly direct route of entry into the figure," as Joanna Woodall has put it.<sup>28</sup> But might one also suggest that her proffered armpit—a part of the body not usually exposed—may play that role, substituting for Andromeda's unavailable pudenda, featureless in Goltzius's print and draped in Wtewael's painting?<sup>29</sup> This is not to say that the armpit cannot act on its own behalf, rather than as a proxy for some other body part. In Wtewael's *Adam and Eve* (Fig. 14), for example, the female body is presented simultaneously to the viewer of the painting and a figure within the painting, that is, Adam—who functions as a surrogate for the viewer, as it were, in both the narrative and the composition, so that the viewer interacts doubly with Eve's form. Before they ate of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, Adam and Eve were naked but innocent; afterwards, they were naked and ashamed. For most Bible



commentators from Early Christian times at least through the Renaissance, the Edenic couple's sin introduced into the world sexuality as we now know it, full of lust and uncontrollable desire. In some apocryphal accounts, exegetical commentaries, and heretical versions of the Fall, Eve's deception by the serpent (who was sometimes understood as a fallen angel) included sexual intercourse, or Eve's temptation of Adam was enacted through sexual seduction.<sup>30</sup>

In Wtewael's depiction of the subject, a painting on copper from around 1610—that is, contemporaneous with the *Andromeda*—Eve's right hand, aloft, holds an apple at the mouth of the serpent. Her left hand brings another apple to Adam. Her two arms form an elegant S-curve, framing her two delicate breasts. Reaching around her waist and placing his left hand on her cocked hip, Adam takes the apple from her with his right, so that their two arms are extensions of each other, joined by the Forbidden Fruit. While she looks at the apple in their hands, he gazes up into her eyes. But he is also nestled beneath her arm, confronting her naked breast, pomaceous in its shape, size, and color. Each pair of legs is an echo of the other. The two figures, though scarcely touching, work in unison, one with each other, bone of bone and flesh of

flesh. The dynamic balance of the two nude figures reads as sexual tension, anticipated union, perhaps, rather than the actual union of Mars and Venus (Fig. 5). It is reminiscent of Michelangelo's similarly meaningful compositional entwining of figures on the Sistine ceiling, albeit with the positions of Adam and Eve reversed—an entwining that unspools in the Expulsion. In Wtewael's painting, there is something specific about Eve's raised arm that makes his composition particularly compelling. To this we might contrast an engraving of the subject by Jan Saenredam after Abraham Bloemaert, from 1604, which may have been a source for Wtewael—note the relationship of the serpent, apple, and Eve's lifted right hand as she hands Adam a second apple with her left—but a source greatly transformed (Fig. 15). Bloemaert's Adam and Eve are at a distance from each other, and there is no complementarity between the figures. Adam looks down, his arms hanging limply, withdrawn into himself and away from Eve. It is as if they have already entered their post-lapsarian alienation from each other.

A still from David O. Russell's 1996 film *Flirting with Disaster*,<sup>31</sup> with Patricia Arquette and Josh Brolin, may prompt one to see Wtewael's *Adam and Eve* in a whole



Fig. 14. Joachim Wtewael, *Adam and Eve*, ca. 1610, oil on copper, 39.5 x 28.7 cm, private collection.

Fig. 15. Jan Saenredam after Abraham Bloemaert, *Adam and Eve*, 1604, engraving, 27.2 x 19.7 cm.





new light and take seriously the possibility that Wtewael is using not only Eve's armpit but also Adam's proximate engagement with it to enhance the eroticism of the painting (Fig. 16).<sup>32</sup> What is Adam's next move here?<sup>33</sup>

Wtewael's painting, with Adam's nose nestled beneath Eve's upraised arm, evokes a sense other than sight, perhaps calling to mind references to smell like a passage from Junichiro Tanizaki's 1924 novel, *Naomi*, about the narrator's dance instructor, whom he calls "the white countess," taller than he by a head:

[H]er body had a certain sweet fragrance. "Her armpits stink," I heard the students in the mandolin club say later. I'm told that Westerners do have strong body odor, and no doubt it was true of the countess. She probably used perfume to hide it. But to me, the faint, sweet-sour combination of perfume and perspiration was not at all displeasing—to the contrary, I found it deeply alluring. It made me think of lands across the sea I'd never seen, of exquisite, exotic flower gardens.

"This is the fragrance exuded by the countess's white body!" I told myself, enraptured, as I inhaled the aroma greedily.<sup>34</sup>



Fig. 16. Still from *Flirting with Disaster* (1996; dir. David O. Russell).

Most human body odor originates in the armpits; there apocrine glands produce a fluid that is broken down by bacteria into fatty acids and steroids that smell musky.<sup>35</sup> In an important article in the journal *Psychiatry* in 1975, titled “The Sexual Significance of the Axillae,” Benjamin Brody attempted to redress the previous lack of attention to the armpit, especially with respect to its role in sexual attraction. As he succinctly put it: “The only function of the apocrine gland is as a sexual lure or as a sexual identification.”<sup>36</sup>

Most important for our purposes, Brody pointed out that “[t]he axillary hair, and the usual position of the arms hanging over the axillary cavity, creates a scent box that conserves the odor until released by sexual stimulation *and the raising of the arms*.”<sup>37</sup> He noted that in human beings, in contrast to most animals, because of our erect position, axillary odors are easier for us to detect than genital odors,<sup>38</sup> and “[t]he scented secretion is conserved within the axillae and becomes perceptible, for the most part, *only when the arms are raised*, a gesture that, for this reason, may become a sexual signal.”<sup>39</sup>

The term “pheromone,” which was not used by Brody but was known from studies of non-human species since the late 1950s, was introduced into the field.

Pheromones have been defined as “odiferous substances secreted to the outside environment by an individual and received by a second conspecific individual to release a specific reaction such as a definitive behaviour or a developmental process.”<sup>40</sup> Whether or not human pheromones exist remains an open question,<sup>41</sup> but great claims have nonetheless been made for their potency in enhancing sexual attraction, and the primary locus for the production of such (putative) pheromones is the armpit. Synthetic pheromones in cosmetic and aftershave additives have been marketed by the Athena Institute for decades as conspecific attractants (that is, attracting members of the same species), although the taglines differ for men and women in a stereotypical way. For men, it is “Let pheromones power your sexual attractiveness,” and for women, it is “Let the power of human pheromones increase the romance in your life!”<sup>42</sup>

The early-modern sources I have adduced here in arguing for eroticized axillae have been visual rather than textual, implicit rather than explicit. In fact, textual references to armpits of any kind are scarce. For their *Vocabolario*, the Accademici della Crusca excavated from Dante’s *Inferno* a couple of bland references to the armpits of a beast.<sup>43</sup> Noting that the most



dangerous tumors (*apostumes*) are those in the armpit because they are closest to the heart, Antoine Furetière provided an example of use only in the etymology, reaching back to Catullus's well-known assertion that no woman wants to come to his rival's arms because rumor had it that he harbored a smelly goat in his armpit.<sup>44</sup> A passage in Seneca's Epistle 114 on the concomitant degradation of morals, dress, and verbal style is provocative: he compares those who are unreasonably elaborate in their speech to people who pluck the hair of their legs and those who are unreasonably negligent in their speech to people who don't even bother to pluck the hair of their armpits.<sup>45</sup> Whether this particular metaphor of style might inform the images treated here is unclear, although an intersection of corporeal form and aesthetic form within a rhetoric of style is feasible, as Elizabeth Cropper has demonstrated for the Florentine *litteratus* Agnolo Firenzuola's *Dialogue on the Beauties of Women*, completed in 1542 and first published, posthumously, in 1548.<sup>46</sup> But if we take Firenzuola's *Dialogue* as exemplary, if not definitive, no one included armpits in the catalog of beautiful body parts. In speaking of the "beauty, utility, use, reason, artifice, and proportion of all the members,"<sup>47</sup> Firenzuola addressed

the head and its various parts—hair, eyes, eyelashes, cheeks, ears, nose, mouth, teeth, tongue, and chin—and on down to the throat, neck, shoulders, arms, hands, chest, breasts, legs, and feet. The arms of one of the interlocutors in the dialogue are praised as proportionate in length, very white in color with a slight shadow of carnation, fleshy and muscular, though with a certain softness—not the arms of Hercules squeezing Cacus, but of Athena disguised as a shepherd boy—full of a natural juice that gives them a certain liveliness and freshness that begets a firmness—but there is no indication that they might be lifted above her head to expose her armpits.<sup>48</sup> Further along a certain literary spectrum, Pietro Aretino's pornographic *Sonetti lussuriosi* have a much more limited range of *loci corporali*, focusing almost exclusively on the genitals, with occasional calls for the tongue and forays into the buttocks.<sup>49</sup> Several of Marcantonio Raimondi's prints after Giulio Romano's compositions that prompted Aretino's poems, known as *I modi*, provide a prominent view of the woman's armpit, but the attention of her companion is likely elsewhere, and Aretino's text makes no mention of it. The absence of written references to the eroticized (or aestheticized) armpit is no proof, of course, that

early moderns did not think of it. How could they not? Once you start looking for exposed armpits in erotic contexts, you find them everywhere. And the visual—right under our noses, as it were—should not be ignored, even if it has sometimes gone tastefully unmentioned.

*The 2018 Icons session at CAA focused on the Cavaliere d'Arpino's Perseus and Andromeda from the Saint Louis Art Museum.*



<sup>1</sup> Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire universel, contenant généralement tous les mots françois, tant vieux que modernes, & les termes de toutes les sciences et des arts*, vol. 1 (The Hague and Rotterdam: Arnout & Reinier Leers, 1690), s.v. "Aisselle": "AISSELLE, subst. fem. Partie creuse du corps humain qui est soul l'épaule à la jointure du bras, & qui a ordinairement du poil."

<sup>2</sup> See Eric Jan Sluiter, *Seductress of Sight: Studies in Dutch Art of the Golden Age* (Zwolle: Waanders, 2000), 48–61, and Sluiter, *Rembrandt and the Female Nude* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006), 75–97, especially for Goltzius and his circle.

<sup>3</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.687: "quantaque maternae fuerit fiducia formae." See also Hyginus, *Fabularum Liber* (Basel: Apud Ioan. Hervagium, 1535), 24 (no. 64): "Cassiope filiae suae Andromedae, formam Nereidibus anteposuit, ob id Neptunus expostulavit, ut Andromada Cephei filia ceto obiceretur."

<sup>4</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 4.675–677: "trahit inscius ignes / et stupet eximiae correptus imagine formae / paene suas quaterne est oblitus in aere pennas."

<sup>5</sup> For Wtewael's versions of this subject, see Liesbeth M. Helmus, "Love and Passion: Wtewael's Personal Statement," in James Clifton, Liesbeth M. Helmus, and Arthur K. Wheelock, *Pleasure and Piety: The Art of Joachim Wtewael* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2015), 18–21.

<sup>6</sup> Leo Steinberg, *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* (New York: Pantheon, 1983), 1.

<sup>7</sup> One gains some sense of these shifts from Robert Douglas Lockhart's photographic attempt to demonstrate the elasticity of the skin, reproduced by James Elkins, *Pictures of the Body: Pain and Metamorphosis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 257.

<sup>8</sup> On the *Lascivie*, see Diane DeGrazia Bohlin, *Prints and Related Drawings by the Carracci Family: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1979), 289–305 (cat. nos. 176–90).

<sup>9</sup> Bette Talvacchia, *Taking Positions: On the Erotic in Renaissance Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 153.

<sup>10</sup> Michelangelo's *Dying Slave* is a case in point. Regardless of its iconographic meaning, presumably allegorical but already identified diversely by Vasari and Condivi during Michelangelo's lifetime, the figure's erotic affect is manifest, recognized by, *inter alia*, Christian K. Kleinbub, *Michelangelo's Inner Anatomies* (University Park: The Pennsylvania University Press, 2020), 43, who describes the figure as "plunged in an internal world of sensual fantasy." I suggest that the upraised arm and exposed axilla play an important role in this sensual fantasy.

<sup>11</sup> Lynn Federle Orr, "Joachim Wtewael, *Saint Sebastian*," in *Great Dutch Paintings from America*, ed. Ben Broos (The Hague: Mauritshuis, 1990), 491. Woodall ("Wtewael's *Perseus and Andromeda*," 64–66) attaches considerable significance to the similarity and also suggests, albeit tentatively, that Wtewael's *Saint Sebastian* may also be

an allegory of visual representation (193 n. 122). Sebastian's pose may derive in part from Michelangelo's *Dying Slave* and *Rebellious Slave*, already in Paris during Wtewael's French sojourn around 1590.

<sup>12</sup> Patrick Le Chanu, *Joachim Wtewael: Persée et Andromède* (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1999), 14.

<sup>13</sup> Orr, "Joachim Wtewael, *Saint Sebastian*," 491. See also Lowenthal, *Joachim Wtewael*, 93: "The saint's voluptuous pose flaunts his androgynous beauty."

<sup>14</sup> On the painting, see Herwarth Röttgen, *Il Cavalier Giuseppe Cesari D'Arpino: Un grande pittore nello splendore della fama e nell'incostanza della fortuna* (Rome: Ugo Bozzi Editore, 2002), 159, 414 (cat. no. 175).

<sup>15</sup> Richard E. Spear pointed to the small size of Sebastian's penis in this particular painting: "In design, Cesari's *St. Sebastian* is quite similar to Reni's, although the saint's genitals are entirely exposed, potentially inviting greater arousal unless their bantam size is off-putting" (*The "Divine" Guido: Religion, Sex, Money and Art in the World of Guido Reni* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997], 75). But, as he points out in an endnote (341 n. 115), "Most of Reni's men have quite small genitals, which was customary, especially for religious figures, in Renaissance and Baroque art, probably as a consequence of the ancient tradition that equated large genitals with satyric, animal passion, as well as the assumption that any obvious genital display connotes sexual aggression."

<sup>16</sup> Röttgen, *Il Cavalier Giuseppe Cesari D'Arpino*, 159: "il corpo morbido, sensuale e femminile."

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Bartman, "Eros's Flame: Images of Sexy Boys in Roman Ideal Sculpture," in *The Ancient Art of Emulation: Studies in Artistic Originality and Tradition from the Present to Classical Antiquity*, ed. Elaine K. Gazda (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 249–71; cited by Jenifer Neils, "Praxiteles to Caravaggio: The *Apollo Sauroktonos* Redefined," *The Art Bulletin* 99 (2017): 23; Thomas Mann, "Death in Venice," in *Death in Venice and Seven Other Stories*, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Vintage Books, 1954), 44. On (sometimes suffering) ephebes around 1800, see Alex Potts, "Beautiful Bodies and Dying Heroes: Images of Ideal Manhood in the French Revolution," *History Workshop Journal* 30 (1990): 1–21; Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "The Other Side of Vertu: Alternative Masculinities in the Crucible of Revolution," *Art Journal* 56 (1997): 55–61.

<sup>18</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 1:97–101. On the iconography of Saint Sebastian, see, in addition to other sources cited here, Johanna Jacobs, *Sebastiaan: Martelaar of Mythe* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1993); Jacques Darriulat, *Sebastien Le Renaisant: Sur le martyre de saint Sébastien dans la deuxième moitié du Quattrocento* (Paris: Éditions de la Lagune, 1998).

<sup>19</sup> On the development of Sebastian's iconography, see Karim Ressouni-Demigneux, "The 'Imaginary' Life of Saint Sebastian" in *The Agony and the Ecstasy*:



*Guido Reni's Saint Sebastians*, ed. Piero Boccardo and Xavier F. Salomon (Milan: Silvana Editoriale, 2007), 17–31. On Sebastian's beauty, see also Natasha Seaman's essay in this issue.

<sup>20</sup> On the *figura serpentinata*, a figure type associated with Michelangelo by G. P. Lomazzo in 1584, see John Shearman, *Mannerism* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1967), 81–91; David Summers, "Maniera and Movement: The *Figura Serpentinata*," *The Art Quarterly* 35 (1972): 269–301; Paula Carabell, "Figura Serpentinata: Becoming over Being in Michelangelo's Unfinished Works," *Artibus et Historiae* 35 (2014): 79–96.

<sup>21</sup> It makes an appearance in various paintings, including Jan Steen's *The Drawing Lesson* (ca. 1665) in the Getty, in which, according to Leo Steinberg, "a paragon of manly valor becomes something else: a stud with no clothes on striking a pose" ("Steen's Female Gaze and Other Ironies," *Artibus et Historiae* 11 [1990]: 113).

<sup>22</sup> On the painting, see Andrea Bayer, Dorothy Mahon, and Silvia A. Centeno, "An Examination of Paolo Veronese's *Alessandro Vittoria*," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 52 (2017): 117–27.

<sup>23</sup> Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' piv eccellenti pittori scvltori et architettori* (Florence: Giunti, 1568), vol. 3, pt. 1, 39: "Et così sene tornò a Fiorenza, doue era stato morso più volte, che non sapeua fare gli ignudi. Volse egli dunque mettersi a prououa, & con fatiche mostrare, ch'era attissimo ad ogni eccellente lauoro di quella arte, come alcuno altro. La onde per proua fece in vn quadro vn san Sebastiano ignudo con colorito molto alla

carne simile, di dolce aria, & di corrispondente bellezza alla persona parimente finito: Doue infinite lode acquistò appresso agli artefici. Dicesi, che stando in chiesa per mostra questa figura, hauuano trouato i frati nelle confessioni, donne, che nel guardarlo haueuano peccato ["s'erano corrotte" in the 1550 edition] per la leggiadra & lasciaua imitazione del viuo datagli dalla virtù di Fra Bartolomeo: Per il che leuatolo di chiesa, lo misero nel capitolo: Doue non dimorò molto te[m]po che, da Giovan Batista della Palla co[m]prato, fu mandato al Re di Francia." Cited by Janet Cox-Rearick, "Fra Bartolomeo's St. Mark Evangelist and St. Sebastian with an Angel," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 18 (1974): 340; Spear, "Divine" Guido, 70; Karim Ressouni-Demigneux, *Saint-Sébastien* (Paris: Éditions du Regard, 2000), 61; Valeska von Rosen, *Caravaggio und die Grenzen des Darstellbaren: Ambiguität, Ironie und Performativität in der Malerei um 1600* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2021), 253.

<sup>24</sup> See Cox-Rearick, "Fra Bartolomeo's St. Mark Evangelist and St. Sebastian with an Angel."

<sup>25</sup> Gio. Paolo Lomazzo, *Trattato dell'arte de la pittvra* (Milan: Paolo Gottardo Pontio, 1584), 366 (6:35): "Ne gli huomini altresì si uogliono hauere le medesime considerationi; percioche egualmente con gli spettacoli lasciui d'huomini, si possono contaminare gli animi delle donne; & però fanno à santo Sebastiano, quando è saetato all'arbore le membra tutte tinte & sparse di sangue per le ferite, acciò che non si mostri ignudo bello, uago & bia[n]co come egli era; come lo dipinse già frate Bartolomeo dell'ordine di santo Agostino pittore

eccellente, il qual lo fece tanto bello, & lasciuo, che le donne, & poncelle andando da i frati per confessarsi uedendolo, come racconta il Vasari, se ne innamorauano ardentissimamente; peril che conuenne leuarlo fuori della chiesa, & mandarlo à Francesco Rè di Francia.”

<sup>26</sup> Spear, *The “Divine” Guido*, 67–76. See also Valerie Hedquist, “Ter Brugghen’s *Saint Sebastian Tended by Irene*,” *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 9 (2017): 9–11, who adduces Wtewael’s *Saint Sebastian*. For homoerotic readings, see also Ressouni-Demigneux, “The ‘Imaginary’ Life of Saint Sebastian,” 29–30. Fiona Healy dismisses such implications in early-modern images of Saint Sebastian based on a lack of specific documentary evidence and citing Vasari’s account of Fra Bartolomeo’s *Saint Sebastian* on women (“Male Nudity in Netherlandish Painting of the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries,” in *The Nude and the Norm in the Early Modern Low Countries*, ed. Karolien De Clippel, Katharina Van Cauteren, and Katlijne Van der Stighelen [Turnhout: Brepols, 2011], 141). Healy here follows Daniela Bohde, “Ein Heiliger der Sodomiten? Das erotische Bild des Hl. Sebastian im Cinquecento,” in *Männlichkeit im Blick: Visuelle Inszenierungen in der Kunst seit der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Mechthild Fend and Marianne Koos (Cologne: Böhlau, 2004).

<sup>27</sup> Spear, *The “Divine” Guido*, 76.

<sup>28</sup> Woodall, “Wtewael’s *Perseus and Andromeda*,” 41; see also Helmus, “Love and Passion,” 23; Marisa Anne Bass, “Shell Life, or the Unstill Life of Shells,” in *Concophilia: Shells, Art, and Curiosity in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Marisa Anne

Bass, Anne Goldgar, Hanneke Grootenboer, and Claudia Swan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 87–90.

<sup>29</sup> On the depilated and featureless *mons Veneris*, see Ann-Sophie Lehmann, “The Missing Sex: Absence and Presence of a Female Body Part in the Visual Arts,” in *Fluid Flesh: The Body, Religion and the Visual Arts*, ed. Barbara Baert (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2009), 107–22.

<sup>30</sup> Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 72–143; James Clifton, “Gender and Shame in Masaccio’s *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*,” *Art History* 22 (1999): 642–45. Lucas van Leyden included the subject, unusually, in his *Power of Women* series of woodcuts; see Ellen S. Jacobowitz and Stephanie Loeb Stepanek, *The Prints of Lucas van Leyden & His Contemporaries* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1983), 107–9 (cat. no. 33).

<sup>31</sup> *Flirting with Disaster*, dir. David O. Russell (1996; Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Video, 1999), DVD.

<sup>32</sup> Of course, not all nasal/axillary proximity is erotic; one might contrast similar images of professional armpit smellers (e.g., “Deoderant Testing & Antiperspirant Testing,” Princeton Consumer Research Global Product Testing, accessed November 17, 2021, <https://www.princetonconsumer.com/deodorant-and-antiperspirant-testing/>).

<sup>33</sup> Alternatively, the relationship of the two figures might be seen as nurturing—more mother and child than a pair of lovers—in which Adam is poised to



(re-)experience the pleasurable sensory experiences of snuggling between arm and breast; the artist thus infantilizes and emasculates him, “mak[ing] visible the *pleasures* of loss and disempowerment,” as Lisa Rosenthal has suggested for Rubens’s *Hercules Mocked by Omphale* in the Louvre (*Gender, Politics, and Allegory in the Art of Rubens* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005], 135). (I am grateful to Cristelle Baskins for this insight.) One might add, however, that infantilization and the erotic are not mutually exclusive, as Richard Pryor has indicated (*Richard Pryor: Live on the Sunset Strip*, dir. Joe Layton [1982; Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2000], DVD).

<sup>34</sup> Junichiro Tanizaki, *Naomi*, trans. Anthony H. Chambers (New York: Vintage International, 2001), 69. The comic passage manifests the narrator’s racialized notions of beauty and culture, exemplifying a longing for Europe in early-twentieth-century Japan. That Tanizaki uses axillary odor as a trope simultaneously raises the possibility of axillary erotic attraction and asserts (possibly ironically) its transcultural limitations. On the role of the white countess and her body odor in Tanizaki’s novel, see Atsuko Onuki, “Multiple Refractions: The Metamorphosis of the Notions of Beauty in Japan,” *European Review* 8 (2000): 598; Vera Mackie, “The Taxonomic Gaze: Looking at Whiteness from East to West,” *Critical Race and Whiteness Studies* 10, no. 2 (2014): 6.

<sup>35</sup> Benjamin Brody, “The Sexual Significance of the Axillae,” *Psychiatry: Interpersonal and Biological Processes* 38, no. 3 (1975): 279; Irving Bieber, Toby B.

Bieber, and Richard C. Friedman, “Olfaction and Human Sexuality: A Psychoanalytic Approach,” in *Science of Olfaction*, ed. Michael J. Serby and Karen L. Chobor (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1992), 396–409; Roy L. Levin, “Smells and Tastes—Their Putative Influence on Sexual Activity in Humans,” *Sexual and Relationship Therapy* 19, no. 4 (2004): 455; Mark J. T. Sergeant, “Female Perception of Male Body Odor,” in *Pheromones*, ed. Gerald Litwack (London: Elsevier, 2010), 25–45.

<sup>36</sup> Brody, “The Sexual Significance of the Axillae,” 279. On axillary eroticism, see Desmond Morris, *The Naked Woman: A Study of the Female Body* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004), 120–23.

<sup>37</sup> Brody, “The Sexual Significance of the Axillae,” 279 (emphasis added).

<sup>38</sup> Brody, “The Sexual Significance of the Axillae,” 279–80; Barbara Sommerville, David Gee, and June Averill, “On the Scent of Body Odour,” *New Scientist* 111, no. 1516 (10 July 1986): 43, explained the axillary location of the apocrine secretions somewhat elliptically: “Sex hormones may influence sweat from this area [the armpits], and this secretion may well have developed a role in communication, as it comes from the group of apocrine cells most accessible to the nose of a bipedal primate.”

<sup>39</sup> Brody, “The Sexual Significance of the Axillae,” 280 (emphasis added).

<sup>40</sup> Levin, “Smells and Tastes,” 451.

<sup>41</sup> Warren S. T. Hays, “Human Pheromones: Have They Been Demonstrated?,” *Behavioral Ecology and*

*Sociobiology* 54, no. 2 (2003): 89–97; Levin, “Smells and Tastes,” 451–62.

<sup>42</sup> “Athena Pheromone 10X™: Unscented Aftershave Additive for Men,” Athena Institute, accessed February 9, 2018, <https://www.athenainstitute.com/10x.html>; “Athena Pheromone 10:13™: The Unique Cosmetic Fragrance Additive for Women,” Athena Institute, accessed February 9, 2018, <https://www.athenainstitute.com/1013.html> Likewise, on a now-defunct website, Jōvan scents carried the overall tagline, “It’s what attracts.” Jōvan Musk for Men claimed to work “with your body’s natural chemistry to make a sexy scent. A blend of exotic spices and woods meets with the seductive power of musk. The result is a masculine, powerful persuasive fragrance” (“Jōvan Musk for Men,” Jōvan, accessed February 9, 2018, <https://www.jovanmusk.com/muskfor-men.html> [site discontinued]). And Jōvan Musk for Women offered “A delicate floral accord of jasmine, neroli, and bergamot blend[ing] with the earthy, seductive scent of musk. This mysterious fragrance unleashes your own natural powers of seduction” (“Jōvan Musk for Women,” Jōvan, accessed February 9, 2018, <https://www.jovanmusk.com/muskforwomen.html> [site discontinued]).

Not surprisingly, the issues surrounding body odors and their role in a sexualized market have been addressed in contemporary art. For an exhibition entitled “Smell Me” in New York in 2012, for example, Martynka Wawrzyniak collected aromatic elements of her body, concentrated into essences, to create “an olfactory-based self-portrait”; a publicity photograph on the artist’s website shows her with

raised left arm with her face adjacent to her exposed armpit (“Martynka Wawrzyniak,” Alchetron, accessed September 29, 2017, <https://alchetron.com/Martynka-Wawrzyniak-896573-W#->). Two years later, in a work entitled *Eau de M*, she inserted a fake fragrance advertisement in *Harper’s Bazaar* that included a perfume strip of her sweat essence. As she noted, “In a guerilla gesture, I used the magazine as an accessible exhibition site for the general public to view the work, which served as both art object and commodity. Invading the commercial space, *Eau de M* caused an unwitting mass market to consume art/my scent, commenting on the consumerist cultural aversion to the smell of the human body.” She said that department stores “received queries from customers interested in purchasing the non-existent perfume, proving that when presented in the form of a commercial fragrance, the scent of human sweat can actually be a desirable commodity.” In the published image, the artist presented herself—for she was the model—as an object of desire, a desire activated by her sweat (“Eau de M,” Martynka Wawrzyniak, accessed September 6, 2017, <http://www.martynka.com/eau-de-m/>). For an interview with Marynka Wawrzyniak, see “Smell Me: Capturing Sweat for Art,” ABC News Australia, broadcast March 21, 2014, accessed September 6, 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/booksandarts/smell-me/5299330>. See also Chelsea Zalopany, “Vain Glorious: Get a Whiff of This Girl,” *T Magazine*, October 18, 2012, accessed September 6, 2017, <http://tmagazine.blogs.ny-times.com/2012/10/18/vain-glorious-get-a-whiff-of-this-girl/>; Barbara Herman, “New York Artist Debuts Her Own Armpit ‘Perfume’ in Harper’s Bazaar,”

*Newsweek*, June 26, 2014, accessed September 5, 2017, <http://www.newsweek.com/2014/07/04/new-york-artist-debuts-her-earrings-perfume-harpers-bazaar-256321.html>; Ana Finel Honigman, "Martynka Wawrzyniak Turns Daily Meals into Conceptual Art," *T Magazine*, September 5, 2014, accessed September 6, 2017, <http://tmagazine.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/09/05/martynka-wawrzyniak-turns-daily-meals-into-conceptual-art/>.

<sup>43</sup> Accademici della Crusca, *Vocabolario degli Accademici della Crusca* (Venice: Appresso Giovanni Alberti, 1612), s.v. "Ascella," citing the *Inferno* 17.13 and 25.112.

<sup>44</sup> Furetière, "Aisselle," citing Catullus 69: "valle sub alarum trux habitare caper." On the poem, see J. D. Noonan, "Mala bestia in Catullus 69.7–8," *The Classical World* 73 (1979): 155–64.

<sup>45</sup> Seneca, *Epistulae* 114.14: "Utrumque diverse genere corruptum est, tarn mercurius quam nolle nisi splendidis uti

ac sonantibus et poeticis, necessaria atque in usu posita vitare. Tam hunc dicam peccare quam ilium: alter se plus iusto colit, alter plus iusto neglegit; ille et crura, hic ne alas quidem vellit." I am grateful to Marisa Bass for this reference.

<sup>46</sup> Elizabeth Cropper, "On Beautiful Women, Parmigianino, Petrarchismo, and the Vernacular Style," *The Art Bulletin* 58 (1976): 329–54.

<sup>47</sup> Agnolo Firenzuola, *Dialogo delle bellezze delle donne* (Venice: Per Giovan. Griffio, 1552), 25r: "belleza, utilità, uso, cagione, artificio, & proportion di tutte le membra."

<sup>48</sup> Firenzuola, *Dialogo*, 45r.

<sup>49</sup> The prints are now mostly fragmentary, but known through copies. For Arretino's text, with an English translation, along with the images, see Talvacchia, *Taking Positions*, 198–227 (202–3, 208–9, 214–15 for the compositions featuring an armpit).