

SECAC Paragone In Honor of Sarah Lippert

Session Title: The Art of Depicting Paragone of Life

Abstract: This session examines the ways in which artistic manifestations reveal parallelism with aspects of life through human emotions, nature or cosmic transits.

Chair: Liana De Girolami Cheney, University of Bari, Italy
lianacheney@earthlink.net

Bio: Liana De Girolami Cheney, PhD is presently a Visiting Scholar in Art History at the Università di Aldo Moro in Bari, Italy, and Investigadora de Historia de Arte, SIELAE, Universidad de Coruña, Spain. She received her BS/BA in Psychology and Philosophy from the University of Miami, Florida, her MA in History of Art and Aesthetics from the University of Miami, Florida and her Ph.D. in Italian Renaissance and Baroque from Boston University, MA. Dr. Cheney is Renaissance and Mannerist scholar, author, and coauthor of numerous articles and books, including: *Botticelli's Neoplatonism in his Mythological Paintings*; *Giorgio Vasari's Teachers: Sacred and Profane Love*; *Giuseppe Arcimboldo: The Magic Paintings*; *Readings in Italian Mannerism*; *Giorgio Vasari's Art and Art Theory*; *Giorgio Vasari's Artistic and Emblematic Manifestations*; and *Agnolo Bronzino: The Florentine Muse*. For coming is "Readings in Italian Mannerism II: Architecture" and "Giorgio Vasari's Sala degli Elementi: An Iconological Study."

1. William Levin, Professor of Art History (emeritus), Centre College, KY
william.levin@centre.edu

Art Answers Anguish: At-Risk Children and the Fourteenth-Century Florentine Misericordia

Long version

Abstract: In lieu of complete archival records, artworks themselves must serve as documents revealing the intentions of persons or groups that commissioned them and the meanings they held for their original audiences. At the fourteenth-century headquarters of the well-funded confraternity of the Misericordia in Florence, prominently situated opposite the city's famous baptistry, five reliably dated artworks from that century—including both paintings and sculptures—stand largely on their own as documents of institutional purpose and action, indicating one of the charitable services provided by that association. While changes in aesthetic taste and message, and as a result location, have long obscured the original context of and meaning attached to the earliest of these representations, the others remain in situ, leaving no doubt about the significance that each held for the Misericordia. And although textual documentation variously regarding prosaic matters such as patronage, expense, and placement does exist contemporaneous with the date of manufacture for all but the second oldest among them, in no case does it spell out the rationale for the image to which it refers, or justify its formal appearance,

nor does it connect that particular image to others of the group. Despite limitations in the written record, all but the latest among these several pieces share, in varied form, a single crucial iconographical element expressing visually what only belated archival notices, aided by that final artwork, establish in regard to what became one of the Misericordia's chief philanthropic aims: providing support for the city's abandoned children and orphans. Considered together, the items in question allow us to retreat past the relevant documents, moving back in time the moment when the Misericordia first performed that particular good work. Together, too, they emphasize the early importance of this service within the broader, multifaceted charitable mission of the confraternity.

Short version,

Abstract: Aided by archival records, early-modern artworks impact viewers for the messages they convey. But when textual documentation is ambiguous, incomplete, or altogether lacking, an artwork must transmit through its appearance alone whatever meaning and intention it had for its original audience. At the fourteenth-century headquarters of the Misericordia confraternity in Florence, five such pieces from that century, four of them still *in situ*, inform us of that charitable association's support for homeless children. All but the latest one predate written records of such activity, allowing us to move back the moment when the Misericordia first performed that good work.

Bio **WILLIAM R. LEVIN:** *Long version*

William R. Levin, a specialist in Italian Late Medieval and Renaissance art, served as the lone art historian at Centre College in Danville, Kentucky, from 1986 to 2010, following briefer periods teaching initially for the semester-abroad program in Florence, Italy, of the Associated Colleges of the Midwest, and then at Minnesota State University at Mankato (formerly Mankato State University). He has offered courses covering the entire chronology of the Western artistic tradition. An undergraduate history major at Northwestern University, he also completed many courses in the history of art, graduating Phi Beta Kappa in 1970. He earned master and doctoral degrees in the Department of the History of Art at the University of Michigan in 1973 and 1983, respectively. Throughout his career—which continues in retirement—his research, public lectures, conference presentations, and publications have centered on expressions of the concept of charity in art, history, and literature, as well as the artistic patrimony of philanthropic organizations in Italy, with particular emphasis on the Misericordia Company of Florence. He regards images of neighborly love as important manifestations of the profound societal changes sweeping Western Europe in the early-modern period. Currently he is exploring the impact of Saint Francis of Assisi and his followers on this development. For the past decade and a half, he has also been investigating the programs of architectural sculpture on Florence's Piazza del Duomo and more recently has probed the field of nineteenth-century American architecture. A long-time member of a number of professional associations, since 1987 he has been especially active in various capacities in SECAC, the Southeastern College Art Conference. In 2004 he received that organization's Award for Excellence in Scholarly Research and Publication and in 2010

its Award for Excellence in Teaching as well as its highest honor, the Award for Exemplary Achievement.

WILLIAM R. LEVIN: BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY - *Short version*

William R. Levin, a specialist in Italian late-medieval and Renaissance art and emeritus SCRC member, taught the entire chronology of Western art history at Centre College in Danville, Kentucky, from 1986 to 2010, following briefer postings elsewhere. His research, public presentations, and publications have centered principally on expressions of the concept of charity in art, history, and literature, as well as the artistic patrimony of philanthropic organizations in Italy, with particular emphasis on the Misericordia Company of Florence. He regards images of neighborly love as important manifestations of the profound societal changes sweeping Western Europe in the early-modern period.

2. Charles Burroughs, SUNY Geneseo
burroughs@geneseo.edu

Cyclops in the Landscape: From the Renaissance Imaginary to Olmsted Parks.

Abstract Long: The misshapen, one-eyed figure of the *cyclops* has haunted the European imaginary since his appearance in the *Odyssey*. Homer's savage, cave-dwelling Polyphemus eats raw flesh, including human if he can get it. Consistently for ancient philosophers the *cyclops* becomes a figure of pre-social life, exemplifying George Boas's "hard primitivism." But ancient authors also present the *cyclops* as a pathetic herdsman in the universe of pastoral. Raphael and Sebastiano del Piombo bring to life the Cyclops Polyphemus and the beautiful object of his ardor, the sea nymph Galatea. Other artists show how she spurns his advances, arousing his basic savagery and provoking his murder of her lover; images of Polyphemus as lover and killer prominently bracket Annibale Carracci's ceiling in the salone of Palazzo Farnese. In images by Poussin and others, the generalized pastoral landscape contains not only sheep and shepherds but also mountains, some of them volcanoes, which according to another myth mark the subterranean forges of the Cyclopes as metal workers, makers of Aeneas's shield. The surprising juxtaposition of the pastoral world and industry recurs in various sites into the age of steam, in part through the economic exploitation of natural resources as water flow and timber. In a park in Rochester, NY, by the great landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted it becomes a central design motif.

Abstract Short: The Cyclops is a creature of contrasts: a savage killer and a sometimes pathetic denizen of the pastoral landscape (in images bracketing Carracci's fresco of the *Loves of the Gods* he is both). Cyclopes also labor in the forges of Vulcan beneath smoking mountains, in a juxtaposition of industry and the pastoral world evoking the early modern exploitation, lasting into the age of steam, of such natural resources as the flow of water and abundant timber. The great landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted made such a juxtaposition of apparent opposites a central motif within one of his major designed landscapes.

Bio: Charles Burroughs retired in 2014 as Smith Professor of Humanities in the departments of Classics and Art History at Case Western Reserve University; currently he teaches part-time in the Art History Department at SUNY Geneseo. His major publications include *From Signs to Design: Environmental Process and Reform in Early Renaissance Rome* (MIT Press, 1990) and *The Italian Renaissance Palace Façade* (Cambridge University Press, 2002 and 2009), as well as articles on Alberti, Michelangelo, Serlio, Pope Sixtus V, and Botticelli, on whom he is writing a book. He has also published on historic landscapes in the Americas, and an article on Alexander Hamilton's house is in the press.

3. Emily White

The Portrait Medal of Isabella d'Este by Gian Cristoforo Romano: Paragone in Renaissance Courts"