

## The Academy of the Blenio Valley self-fashioning identity in the Milanese *Cinquecento*

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### **Abstract**

In the present paper I analyse the Milanese Academy of the Blenio Valley, founded in 1568 by the engraver Ambrogio Brambilla, through the idea of the construction of the artist's identity in the so-called Renaissance. By using the grotesque-realism mechanism, this group of artists and artisans adopted a carnival-like mask, the *facchino*, a peasant character drawn from the Milanese everyday life. In their grotesque poetry, the academics make it clear that this ignoble character was nothing more than an outermost encasement of a noble inner essence. Merging the carnival mask and Neoplatonic thought through the translation of carnival elements into a more intellectual form, that is to say, the Platonic text, the academics constructed and reinforced their divine status on a par with poets.

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In 1560, the Duchy of Milan, which comprised the region of Lombardy, was part of the Spanish Empire ruled by Phillip II. Geographically located in the vast Padan Plain, the plateau stretches across from the Montferrat hills to the Venetian lagoon. Set in the Po river basin, the north is marked by the Alpine chain. With its majestic rivers, colossal mountains, rolling hills and austere city walls, its landscape was once depicted by the words of Alessandro Manzoni and inhabited in the dreams of Stendhal. Likewise, this scenario is the backdrop of this paper.

North of the prominent city of Milan, where the Alpine chain begins, lies Canton Ticino, that embraces the Blenio Valley. In the early sixteenth century, peasants of this region, to escape starvation and poverty, were drawn to more dynamic cities set in the Padan plateau. Once there, they were absorbed by the “minor” workforce which set them off to sweep chimneys, split logs, sell chestnuts, carry wine, and so forth. A group of Milanese artists drew inspiration from such workers, giving rise to a strange kind of academy<sup>2</sup>.

### ***The Blenio Valley Academy***

In 1560, the Milanese engraver Ambrogio Brambilla founded the *Accademia dei facchini della Val di Blenio*. Among the academy’s members were painters, sculptors, engineers, actors and artisans of all branches, different from other literary academies of the period of which associates were exclusively scholars and poets<sup>3</sup>. In the *Rabisch* (1589), set of verses written by the Blenio Valley academics, the academy’s statute is spelled out and members are recorded<sup>4</sup>. Among the members of the council were the

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<sup>2</sup> See ISELLA, Dante. “Per una lettura dei Rabisch”. In: **Rabisch. Il Grottesco nell’arte del Cinquecento**. Milan: Skira, 1998, p. 111. ISELLA, Dante. **Lombardia stravagante: testi e studi dal Quattrocento al Seicento tra lettere e arti**. Torino: Einaudi, 2005, p. 78; LYNCH, J.B. “Lomazzo and the Accademia della Valle di Bregno”. **The Art Bulletin**, 48, 210-211, 1966.

<sup>3</sup> TRAMELLI, Barbara. “Artists and Knowledge in Sixteenth-Century Milan: The Case of Lomazzo’s Accademia de la Val di Blenio”. **Fragmenta**, 5.2011, 2014, pp. 121-138.

<sup>4</sup> LOMAZZO, Giovanni Paolo. **Rabisch dra academiglia dor compa Zavargna, Nabad dra Vall**

embroiderer Scipione Delfinone, the sculptor Annibale Fontana, the painter Ottavio Semino, the engineer Giacomo Soldati, the astrologer Gerolamo Vicenza, the blacksmith Francesco Giussano, and the musician Giuseppe Caimo. The painters Paolo Camillo Landriani and Aurelio Luini, the crystals and cameos carver Francesco Tortorino, the humanist and poet Bernardino Baldini, the poet Lorenzo Toscano, the scholar Bernardo Rainoldi and the actor Simone da Bologna are also quoted among the associates.

According to the *Rabisch*, the famous art theoretician and painter Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo was nominated the abbot of the Blenio Valley Academy on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1568. Under Bacchus' protection the academics proclaimed art to be fruit of creative fury, opposed to the Aristotelian idea of art as essentially technique, and drunk with wine they gave life to the "grotesque" poetry, as alive, organic and metamorphic as the Roman imagery *grottesca*.

Through switching of identity, they achieved a state of total liberation. No longer men of arts, within the academy they were humble and joyful peasants, the *facchini*. They assumed *facchini*'s names and clothes, and used an invented dialect – mixing Milanese, Bergamasch, Genoese and Bolognese – to write and communicate. As a sort of friendly mockery, they made caricature drawings of one another during their assemblies, though probably these graphical exercises, which yielded physiognomic experimentations, were their *modus operandi* for creative flow. The physiognomic deformity in their caricature drawings were inspired by Leonardo, whose notebook containing several grotesque heads was known to be in the hands of the painter Aurelio Luini, one of the academy's members<sup>5</sup>.

In his commemorative self-portrait as the academy's abbot painted in 1568, Lomazzo displays their dress code (Figure 1). Lomazzo depicted himself

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**d'Bregn.** Milano: Paolo Gottardo Pontio, 1589.

<sup>5</sup> LOMAZZO, Giovanni Paolo. "Trattato dell'arte della pittura". In: CIARDI, R. P. **Scritti sulle arti**. Florence: Marchi e Bertolli, 1973, vol. II, p. 315.

framed from the chest up, showing the left hand side of his body. The neutral background, clothes and beard display a gradation of tones of black and brown, ensuring the tonal unity of the painting. A warm light penetrates from the left hand side down over the sitter's face, neck, skin cloak, staff, hat and hands. This selective light leads the beholder's eyes to the key elements in order to decode the image, a luminous treatment that would be entirely developed by Caravaggio about twenty years later. However, as to thoroughly comprehend the painting is mandatory either to be a member of the Academy or to unravel their grotesque verses in the *Rabisch*<sup>6</sup>.



Figure 1

**Lomazzo**

*Self-portrait as the Abbot of the Accademia del Val di Blenio*, c.1568

Oil on canvas, 56 x 44 cm

Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan

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<sup>6</sup> Dante Isella (1993) first translated these verses and discovered the explanation to the garments.

The straw hat and the skin cloak symbolise the humility of the abbot's peasant status. The goat-skin cloak also refers to Bacchus, to whom goat was conventional for sacrifice. The hat exhibits a laurel wreath, sign of the eternity of his governance, whilst the vine branches refer to the ecstasy by drinking wine. The staff can be compared to the Bacchic thyrsus, displaying branches of ivy, another symbol of perpetuity, and it was handed over to the new abbot by the high chancellor Giovanni A. Brambilla (the *compà Borgnin*). The staff should be given and received with the left hand ("the one of the heart") and this is the reason why Lomazzo holds it with his left hand in the self-portrait. In the golden medallion attached to the hat's flap, a container used to drink wine in large amounts (*galigliogn*, or *galeon*) is depicted. The ring on his index finger, placed between a compass and a canvas, likely represents the union between theory and practice, the gist of his theory on painting<sup>7</sup>.

In his self-portrait, Lomazzo translated into colours the basis of his theory of art, revealing his adherence to Horace's principle "painting as poetry", adapted from literary criticism by the Venetian art theoreticians Paolo Pino and Ludovico Dolce a few years earlier. The self-portrait represents at once the painter and the poet, which is attested not only by its iconographic elements but also by the inscription at the bottom: "Zavargna Nabas Vallis Bregni Et Paulus Lomatius Pictor"<sup>8</sup>. In addition to synthesise the Horatian principle *ut pictura poesis*, the self-portrait regards the man and the mask as ontologically equals, both worthy of being portrayed.

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<sup>7</sup> PORZIO, Francesco. "Lomazzo e il realismo grottesco: un capitolo del primitivismo nel Cinquecento". In: **Rabisch. Il Grottesco nell'arte del Cinquecento**. Milan: Skira, 1998, pp.179-180.

<sup>8</sup> In the Milanese-Italian dictionary of Francesco Cherubini, *Zavagna* or *zavajà* means "Canzonare, Burlare, Celiare. Scocoveggiare. Scipperare". See ISELLA, Dante, "Per una lettura dei Rabisch", *op. cit.*, 1998, p. 113. About the self-portrait: PORZIO, Francesco. "G.P. Lomazzo, Autoritratto in veste di Abate dell'Accademia della Valle di Blenio". In: **Pinacoteca di Brera, Scuole lombarda, figure e piemontese 1535-1796**. Milan: 1989, pp. 254-256. LYNCH, J.B. "Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo's self-portrait in Brera". **Gazette des Beaux-arts**, n. 244, 1964, pp.189-197. CARD, M.V. "Intorno all'autoritratto in veste di Baco di Giovan Paolo Lomazzo". **Storia dell'arte**, Florence, n. 81, 1994, pp. 182-193.

In the period between 1560 and 1564, Lomazzo wrote the *Libro dei sogni* (which was never published) and his set of verses *Rime ad imitazione dei grotteschi* (published in 1587), where he sketched out his “theory of the governors of painting” inspired by Natural Magic authors and Cabalistic thinking<sup>9</sup>. According to this theory, there is an original connection between art and the cosmic order, in which the seven canonical artists, for their perfect harmony with the seven cosmic planets, can capture the divine influence from the heavens and enforce it into matter. Cosmic alignment is only achieved on condition that the artist, aside from having been born an artist, combines theory, practice and self-knowledge. Grounded on Neoplatonic thought, Lomazzo states that the real artist conveys emotions to the audience because he partakes in the chain of beings, whereby the divine Idea is transmitted to the earthly world.

Artistic creation thus corresponds to a metaphysical operation that takes place first in the realm of *Eidos*. The allusion to Bacchus, god of wine and poetic frenzy, in Lomazzo’s self-portrait points to the Neoplatonic basis of his writings and to the Blenio Valley Academy’s theoretical framework. This self-portrait, thereby, embodies symbolically his multifarious identity as painter, theoretician and head of the Bleniese academy.

### ***Bacchus and the King Carnival***

Mikhail Bakhtin connected the Ancient bacchanalia to the medieval carnival, period when pandemic folly released society from the Establishment<sup>10</sup>. As Francesco Porzio highlighted, the figure of King Carnival with his protruding belly, drunk-flushed face and universal laughter, announced a season of collective frenzy, and his image was frequently associated with Bacchus, god of ritual madness.

In “The fight between Carnival and Lent”, Pieter Brueghel the Elder

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<sup>9</sup> CIARDI, R. P. **Scritti sulle arti**. Florence: Marchi e Bertoli, 1973, vol. I, p. LIV.

<sup>10</sup> BAKHTIN, Mikhail. **Rabelais and His World**. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1965.

represents King Carnival as a fat-bellied figure, seated astride a barrel of wine, followed by a procession of fools (Figure 2). Ambrogio Brambilla depicted the fat King Carnival as a sort of Arcimboldesc allegory, smiling and boasting garments made up of all sorts of meats, poultry and pork, symbols of the Carnival feast (Figures 4, 5). Images representing Silenus, the companion of Bacchus, are found featuring the very same elements: reference to wine and drunkenness, to the abundance of food, feast, and the fat belly (Figures 3, 6, 7).



Figure 2

**Pieter Bruegel the Elder**

*The Fight between Carnival and Lent* (detail), 1559

Oil on panel, 118 x 165 cm

Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna

Figure 3

**Amico Aspertini**

*Trionfo di Bacco e Arianna* (detail), 1490-1552

Pinacoteca Comunale, Gubbio (Fondazione Federico Zeri).



Figure 4  
**Ambrogio Brambilla**  
*Carnival*  
Bibliothèque Nationale de France



Figure 5  
**Arcimboldo**  
*Autumn*, 1573  
Oil on canvas, 76 x 64 cm  
Musée du Louvre, Paris



Figure 6  
**Niccolò Frangipane**  
*Bacchanal*, second half of the 16th century  
Unidentified location



Figure 7  
**Andrea Mantegna**  
*Bacchanal with Silenus*, early 1470s  
The Metropolitan Museum of art, New York



As Porzio observed, the *Accademia della Val di Blenio* dialogues both with the Ancient world and popular culture. The academy's quintessence encompasses the principle of grotesque-realism, whose roots lie in carnival, working through a mechanism of de-hierarchisation. The *facchino*, inspired by carnival mask, operates a process of debasement of the high stratum (a scholar, or a poet) and elevation of the humble stratum (a peasant, or the *facchino*), as described by Bakhtin.

The real life *facchini* helped to boost the grotesque imagery. Their association sponsored public festivals, religious and profane, before Carlo Borromeo's catholic reformation campaign in Milan (1565-1584)<sup>11</sup>. During these festivities, the comic and grotesque universe of popular culture came to the fore. For instance, in the *mosgètt*, a public festival taking place every 3<sup>rd</sup> August when the corporation of the *facchini* made donations to the *Opera del Duomo*, it was traditionally built the *cavalazz*, a wooden horse which had its bowels replaced by sausages, salami, and mortadellas. This horse was driven all the way from the Porta Ticinese to the Cathedral square, where it was attacked by the mob and had its contents plundered out from its womb, a truly grotesque spectacle<sup>12</sup>. By means of the association between Bacchus and King Carnival, Lomazzo and the Blenio Valley Academy shaped carnival elements into a more intellectual form, merging their highly intellectual basis to carnival mask<sup>13</sup>.

Robert Klein (1963) analysed the way Humanist authors such as Alberti (Momus) and Erasmus (Praise of Folly) had adapted the figure of the medieval fool, grounded on Socratic irony and Lucian laughter<sup>14</sup>. The fool,

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<sup>11</sup> BERNARDI, C.; CASCETTA, A. "Dai *profani tripudi* alla *Religiosa Magnificenza*. La ricostruzione del sistema cerimoniale nella Milano borromaica". In: **Carlo Borromeo e l'opera della Grande Riforma. Cultura, religione e arti nel governo nella Milano del pieno Cinquecento**. Milan: Silvana, 1997, p. 234. BORA, G. "Milano nell'età di Lomazzo e San Carlo: riaffermazione e difficoltà di sopravvivenza di una cultura". In: **Rabisch. Il Grottesco nell'arte del Cinquecento**. Milan: Skira, 1998, p. 52.

<sup>12</sup> ISELLA, Dante, "Per una lettura dei Rabisch", *op. cit.*, 1998, p. 111. BERNARDI, C.; CASCETTA, A. *Ibidem*.

<sup>13</sup> PORZIO, Francesco. **Pitture ridicole. Scene di genere e tradizione popolare**. Milan: Skira, 2008.

<sup>14</sup> KLEIN, R. "Le thème du fou et l'ironie humaniste". In: **La forme et L'intelligible**. Paris: Gallimard,

being detached from the regular world order, could see normal society with more clarity. Erasmus and Alberti adapted the fool's wisdom transforming it into irony. Knox (1989), quoting from Aristotle, highlighted irony's nature as a rhetorical weapon<sup>15</sup>. In Medieval and Renaissance authors, irony is praised for its expressive quality, used by orators to elicit the audience's attention.

Socratic irony implied self-deprecation, used as a means to elicit the truth. By observing how the French humanist Germanus Brixius uses irony against Thomas More, Knox draws the conclusion that "not only did *ironia* surpass straightforward expression or abuse, it could also be more effective than argument". Martin Terence (2015) examined the Socratic irony in Erasmus through Alcibiades' comparison between Socrates and the ugly Silenus, "cruder than men and yet somehow wiser, combining mischief with wisdom". Speaking in a totally ridiculous manner, Socrates hides a perspicacity superior to other men<sup>16</sup>. By perceiving a double side between appearance and content, Erasmus adapted Socratic irony as a means of touching the deep truth of human existence and opening up to self-knowledge.

The inscription in *Rabisch's* cover, which features a disproportioned human figure, is: "Here you see my face, and inside, the work, my fury"<sup>17</sup> (figure 8). Socratic self-deprecation and the idea of double side between appearance and content are detected here. Like Plato's Socrates-Silenus, the *facchini* of the Blenio Valley hides the deepest ken under an unworthy outward appearance. Thus, through this wit game of switching identities the academics constructed their status of divine artists inspired by poetic fury, grounded on Neoplatonic thought and Humanist irony.

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1970.

<sup>15</sup> KNOX, Dilwyn. **Ironia: medieval and Renaissance ideas on irony**. Leiden; New York: Brill, 1989.

<sup>16</sup> MARTIN, Terence J. **Truth and Irony: philosophical meditations on Erasmus**. Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015.

<sup>17</sup> *Guarda qui il viso, e qui, dentro l'opera, il mio furore.*

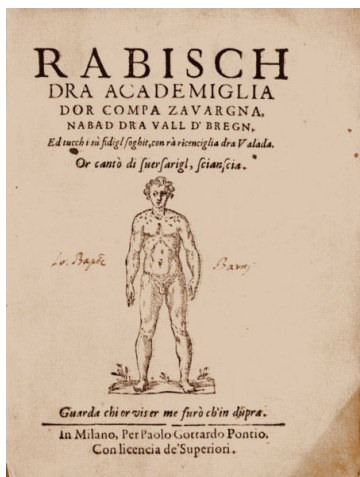


Figure 8  
*Rabisch dra academiglia dor compa Zavargna*  
Nabad dra Vall d'Bregn. Milano: Paolo Gottardo Pontio, 1589.

### ***The status of the artist in the Milanese Cinquecento***

Unlike the courts of Urbino, Florence, Mantua and Ferrara, where one can detect an artist-prince relationship, artists did not hold a privileged position at the Milanese court. There was no court painter or architect living under the Milanese ruler's protection. As Evelyn Welch and Luke Syson demonstrated, not even Leonardo achieved such a position at the Sforza court<sup>18</sup>. In the early-modern Milan, painters had no precedence over other craftsmen such as goldsmiths, blacksmiths or metalworkers. Items regarded as 'art' nowadays were bought in the same way as were 'decorative arts' by the Milanese patronage<sup>19</sup>.

In the end of the fifteenth century, Milan came to become an important

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<sup>18</sup> SYSON, L. "Leonardo and Leonardism in Sforza Milan". In: **Artists at court: image-making and identity, 1300-1550**. Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 2004. WELCH, E. **Art and authority in Renaissance Milan**. New Haven: Yale University Press: 1995. WELCH, E. "Patrons, artists, and audiences in Renaissance Milan, 1300 – 1600". In: ROSENBERG, C. M. (ed.). **The court cities of Northern Italy**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 21-70.

<sup>19</sup> WELCH, *op. cit.*, 2010, p. 247.

European trading centre, known for silk and woolen manufacture, arms, armors and exquisite articles such as carved crystals and gems<sup>20</sup>. As a major exporter of luxury goods and decorative arts, there was a network of Milanese artists commissioned to work for the courts of Paris, Turin, Prague, and Madrid in those days<sup>21</sup>.

In the quarter of Porta Ticinese, around the parishes of Santa Maria Beltrade, Santa Maria Segreta and San Giorgio al Palazzo, weavers, tailors, jewellers, blacksmiths, gem and crystal carvers, painters, sculptors and engravers worked intensively to meet local and international demands. The studio of Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo's family was also located in the area of Santa Maria Beltrade. A line of kinship connects the families of local artists all living in this same region. For instance, the daughter of Scipione Delfinone, the famous embroiderer and member of the Blenio Valley Academy, was married to Cesare Lomazzo, Giovanni Paolo's brother. Vincenzo Figino, a notable blacksmith and armourer, was the father of Ambrogio Figino, who, in turn, was Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo's pupil from January 1564. Figino goes on to become one of the most exceptional Milanese painters of the Lombard *Cinquecento*<sup>22</sup>.

Evelyn Welch argues that Milanese artists worked in a collaborative, workshop-based system because of the lack of secure positions and institutional protection offered by the Lombard guilds<sup>23</sup>. In addition, the competitive marketplace, in which patrons favoured low prices and fast production, fostered the formation of family and friendship connections.

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<sup>20</sup> VENTURELLI, P. "*E per tal variar natura è bella. Arti decorative a Milane tra Leonardo e Lomazzo*". In: **Rabisch. Il grottesco nell'arte del Cinquecento**, Milan: Skira, 1998. ROMANI, Marzio Achille (ed). **Made in Milano. Le botteghe del Cinquecento**. Parma: Grafiche Step Editrice, 2015.

<sup>21</sup> See BORA, Giulio. "Milano nell'età di Lomazzo e San Carlo: Riaffermazione e difficoltà di sopravvivenza di una cultura". In: **Il grottesco nell'arte del Cinquecento. L'Accademia della Val di Blenio, Lomazzo e l'ambiente milanese**. Milan: Skira, 1998, pp. 37-56. VENTURELLI, *ibidem*; ROMANI, *ibidem*; WELCH, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-63.

<sup>22</sup> GIULIANI, Marzia; SACCHI, Rossana. "Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo e fratelli Lomazzo: Regesto dei documenti". In: **Rabisch. Il grottesco nell'arte del Cinquecento. L'Accademia della Val di Blenio, Lomazzo e l'ambiente milanese**. Milan: Skira, 1998, pp. 329 ss.

<sup>23</sup> WELCH, *op. cit.*, 2010, p. 24.

In considering Lomazzo family ties, it is not surprising his leadership of an academy made up, for the most part, of local artisans. Moreover, the intricate social network between them and their prominence in the international market likely aroused a sense of local pride and union. The Blenio Valley Academy, by bringing together all sort of artists, mirrored the structure of workmanship organization in Milan in the mid-sixteenth century where there was no hierarchical division between arts and crafts.

### ***Leonardesque tradition and laughter: Self-fashioning the local artist***

Throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth century, one can observe the blooming of awareness of individual identity and social status. According to Joanna Woods-Marsden's analysis<sup>24</sup>, through self-portraiture, painters self-fashioned their identities, struggling to establish the liberality of their profession by alleging equality of status with poets. Likewise, Lomazzo's self-portrait is an exemplification of this practice.

Both the academic's caricature drawings and the *facchino* mask share two essential characteristics: grotesque-realism and laughter. On the one hand, there is a marked interest in reality by representing a character from daily life<sup>25</sup>. On the other hand, the caricature representation of peasants either in their theatrical performance and graphical distortion are means of provoking laughter. Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo associated the physiognomic distortions of peasants faces to the Leonardesque tradition in Milan in the *Trattato dell'arte*:

It is necessary to give a reason for laughter and express it in such a way to make the onlooker laugh when he sees it, even if nobody is laughing in the painting, as it often

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<sup>24</sup> WOODS-MARSDEN, Joanna. **Renaissance self-portraiture: the visual construction of identity and the social status of the artist**. New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1998.

<sup>25</sup> PORZIO, *ibidem*.

happens (which I consider a default of the artist). That what is expressed must induce to an extreme laughter, showing unworried faces, some of them looking up, others looking sideways, and so forth, in such a way that when they gaze one another, they laugh exhibiting the teeth, wide opening their mouth in many ways, extending the nostrils and narrowing the eyes, which became red, unstable, turbulent, inattentive... In this way, laughter grows progressively, flowing from one to the other, until it reaches the peak, making it possible even for the dead to laugh. And this is the power of painting, as Leonardo said, who had great pleasure in drawing old men and villains so deformed to arouse laughter<sup>26</sup>.

Further on, in this same chapter, Lomazzo assigns the invention of comic painting to the Milanese painter Michelino da Besozzo.

The 1560s and the following decades are a period of reappraisal of local artistic culture in Milan. On the one hand, the artistic values related to Leonardo's legacy, on the other, the naturalistic tradition inspired by Vincezo Foppa (Zenale, Bramante and Bramantino). In 1560, Lomazzo executed a copy of the *Cenacolo Vinciano* for the Santa Maria della Pace's refectory<sup>27</sup>. There is evidence that Lomazzo planned to write a "Life of Lombard Artists" based on Vasari's *Vite*, starting with Girolamo Figino, heir of the Leonardesque tradition in Milan<sup>28</sup>.

Northern-Italian traditions relied on naturalistic experimentations, which can be observed in the Brescian painters Moretto and Moroni, in painters associated to the Milanese school such as Vincenzo Foppa, and in luminous experiments by Antonio and Vincenzo Campi. The same attitude

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<sup>26</sup> Book VI, chapter XXXIII.

<sup>27</sup> LOMAZZO, Giovanni Paolo. **Rime**, p. 109. BIACONI, C. **Nuova Guida di Milano per gli amanti delle Belle Arti**. Milano: 1787, p. 111. BORA, Giulio; KAHN-ROSSI, Manuela; PORZIO, Francesco. **Rabisch. Il grottesco nell'arte del Cinquecento. L'Accademia della Val di Blenio, Lomazzo e l'ambiente milanese**. Milan: Skira, 1998, p. 329.

<sup>28</sup> LOMAZZO, Giovanni Paolo. **Rime**, 1587, p. 113.

can be detected in the *facchini* of the Blenio Valley. In their poetry, drawings and mask, they sought inspiration in a specific stratum of the Milanese society, vernacular literature (namely the maccaronic poet Teofilo Folengo) and carnivalesque festivals. Kim-Ly Moynihan (2012) investigated the use of vernacular literature by the Cremonese Vincenzo Campi<sup>29</sup>, where resumption and renewal of local artistic values was carried out through the adaptation of elements from vernacular literature, which deals with aspects of daily life and popular speech.

The jocose Blenio Valley Academy stood against orthodox academies, deriding their rules and denouncing scholarly pretentiousness. By breaking up the hierarchical segmentation between artists and artisans, this local association congregated a variety of Milanese craftsmen who claimed a high social standing by transforming themselves into *facchini-sileni*. In addition, they celebrated local culture by drawing inspiration from dialectical poetry and the Leonardesque tradition.

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<sup>29</sup> MOYNIHAN, Kim-Ly. **Comedy, science, and the reform of description in Lombard painting of the Late Renaissance: Arcimboldo, Vincenzo Campi, and Bartolomeo Passerotti**. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2012.