CHAPTER 6

Early Modern Discipline and the Visual Arts

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Until now, there have been no systematic studies investigating the visual arts of the early modern period from the macroperspective of disciplining, a perspective now largely established in general history. This essay, therefore, has an exploratory character. Just to demonstrate the usefulness of the disciplinary perspective for interpreting historical works of art already means a considerable achievement. The enterprise is made difficult because of the great variety in the source material and the heterogeneous character of existing publications, so the main emphasis here must be on my own field of expertise.

When studying the visual arts in relation to early modern discipline, we must distinguish two categories among the works to be considered. One, a series of works originated in the service of early modern discipline. Some of them merely documented corresponding activities, whereas others literally functioned as propaganda instruments for the institutions of social control. Two, a number of works were subjected to censorship and hence the object of social control. This may have been because they unwittingly disregarded existing regulations or because they called for resistance against the agents of early modern discipline.

We can identify examples of both categories within all Christian denominations, but most of the works discussed in this essay originate from Catholic areas and the Hispanic world in particular. Although this selection cannot be considered representative for Europe as a whole, it must be emphasized that until about 1640 Madrid had supremacy in Europe and that the Hispanic world included extensive territories in Italy and the Netherlands.

This article is divided into four sections. The first contains a short research overview of investigations into early modern discipline and the history of art in the Catholic world, highlighting special problems for research in the process. The second introduces the Inquisition as the most important institution of control in the Hispanic world, giving some examples of its influence on the arts. Here, works in the service of the Inquisition and those works censored by it will be differentiated in the way mentioned earlier. The artistic assessors of the Inquisition
are ascribed an important role. This role will be discussed in greater detail using the example of Francisco Pacheco in Seville.

The third section asks to what extent artists were able to negotiate within the Inquisition system. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, they seem to have practiced primarily a strategy of surrendering and avoiding. By the eighteenth century, however, we can observe individual cases of resistance. The last section attempts to demonstrate once again—against the persistent criticism of art historians—how important the subject of discipline is for an understanding of the visual arts in early modern Europe. In this case, too, it is primarily a matter of identifying an important topic for future research.

General Fundamentals

There is considerable common ground between questions of early modern discipline and a history of art of the early modern age. In fact, the spectrum of themes has hardly expanded substantially since Emile Mâle’s *L’art religieux en France après le Concile de Trente* (1932). The key question remains that of the influence of the Picture Decree passed at the last meeting of the Council of Trent.

The discussion concentrated very clearly on artistic theory. Definite examples were raised only rarely. This had two main reasons. On the one hand, there was extensive secondary literature about authors who tried, in the wake of the Council of Trent, to get their own writings into a canon of correct depictions comparable with the Index of Forbidden Books. The most famous texts here included the *Discorso delle imagine sacre e profane* (1582) from Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti (1522–1597) of Bologna. On the other hand, we find that the same examples are discussed over and over again when it comes to church censorship, namely the painting over of Michelangelo’s (1475–1564) *The Last Judgement* (1536–41) in the Sistine Chapel ordered by Pope Pius IV (1559–65) and the Inquisition trial in 1573 against Paolo Veronese (1528–1588) because of his supposedly overly luxurious *Feast in the House of Levi* arranged with genre subjects (figure 1). David Freedberg and the historian Roberto Zapperi have collected some further examples from this context, Freedberg in his book *The Power of Images* (1989) and Zapperi primarily connected with his research into Annibale Carracci.

Until now, early modern discipline in a broad sense did not interest art historians. For this reason, there is research from a historical point of view, but hardly any from that of art history. Consequently, such research merely documents the forms of early modern discipline. There are some publications on works that either served the purposes of propaganda for early modern discipline or belong to the category of censored works. These, though, are not explicitly written from an early modern discipline perspective and, as was already mentioned, generally just relate to the influence of the Council of Trent.
Two circumstances help explain why the discussion is advancing so slowly in the field of early modern discipline and the history of art. First, research into Italy dominates the history of art of the early modern era. Second, the archives of the Roman Inquisition were not precisely accessible for scholarly investigation.13

Fortunately, with documents on the work of the Spanish Inquisition it is a completely different story. That is why I will be primarily interested in its controlling influence on the arts in the following section. The Consejo de la Inquisición worked extensively, independently from the Vatican, and was primarily an instrument of censorship on the part of the Spanish monarchy. Its archives have been open for the scientific public for a considerable time. Moreover, there are standard publications on the Spanish Inquisition, which enable art historians to investigate the rather heterogeneous material on a sound footing.

The Role of the Spanish Inquisition

The original Inquisition arose at the beginning of the thirteenth century in order to fight heretic movements in southern France and northern Italy.14 The Spanish Dominican monk Domingo de Guzmán (1170–1221) is considered its founder. His work was legalized by the popes and initially Emperor Frederick II (1212–1250). The Spanish Inquisition, by contrast, was not founded until 1483. The background to this was the wish of the Catholic kings to use a joint authority to unite Spain. The country had just been newly united following the royal marriage in 1469. It was precisely this state idea that caused a series of unusual features distinguishing the modern Spanish Inquisition from the old one.

Only a few persons fell victim to the Spanish Inquisition, if measured in the
number of burned heretics. There was also much criticism of its work in the Hispanic world at the time of its founding and even some hidden forms of resistance. For this reason, its disciplining effect on the population was more decisive than the punishments it meted out. In this way, a special form of self-censorship can be seen in many areas of social life on the Iberian Peninsula from the fifteenth century onward because of the “pedagogy of fear” (pedagogía del miedo), in the words of Bartolomé Bennassar or, as the historian Angel Alcalá described it, the “inquisitorial mentality” (mentalidad inquisitorial).  

Pictures serving the Inquisition included portraits of its representatives, scenic documentations of trials of heretics, and works composed either with the purpose of justifying the disciplinary measures of the court or ostracizing particular population groups. Inquisitors could be art patrons demonstrating not just aesthetic taste but also their interest in new ideas regarding the process of awarding portrait orders. This is shown by El Greco’s (1541–1614) portrait of Cardinal Fernando Niño de Guevara (figure 2) from around 1600.  

![Figure 2 El Greco, Portrait of a Cardinal (Fernando Niño de Guevara), about 1600, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York](image)
of some twentieth-century interpreters, the artist is not trying to ridicule the Great Inquisitor with the prominent glasses. It is much more the case that he is trying to demonstrate the cardinal’s modernity. This is because the thread glasses depicted were the latest fashion in the Hispanic world at the time, and visual aids were considered a status symbol anyway.

Pedro Berruguete’s *Burning of the Heretics* was painted 1490–1496 as part of a larger picture program for the Santo Tomás Monastery in Avila, the first...
official seat of the Inquisition (figure 3). The painter probably received inspiration through a trial that preoccupied all of Spain at the time and may have made a decisive contribution to the decision to expel the Jews in 1492. In this trial, diverse Jews and their already converted coreligionists (conversos) were charged with kidnapping a Christian child in La Guardia near Toledo and killing it in an act of ritual murder. The autos-da-fé were important events, documented in extensive descriptions as well as pictorial portrayals. It can be assumed that the Inquisition’s propagandist intentions lay behind the exemplary series painted by Berruguete. The picture program was probably intended to win the King’s support for permanent institutionalization of the Inquisition. That the King stayed in Avila several times makes this supposition plausible. Moreover, the institutionalization of the Inquisition still was hotly debated at the time.

The attempt to justify the heretic court is behind the frequent depiction of St. Pedro Arbués. He was inquisitor in Aragon before being murdered by a group of conspirators in 1485 (figure 4). Although the perpetrators also included some Old Christians (those who belonged to families who had always been
Christians, not converted Jews), who feared they might lose certain privileges, the murder was blamed solely on the conversos.  

Also well documented is a series of censored pictures, which became victims of the Inquisition. Two groups of works were under special control here: first, works that broke the decoro or completely contradicted official church teachings; second, all forms of nude painting, even in profane areas. An example of the first group was supplied by *The Vision of Father Simon* (figure 5) from Francisco Ribalta (1565–1628). Here, the central figure was painted over, probably on the orders of the Inquisition. This was because the saint, who was so admired by the people, was considered a malingerer by the Church.  

The relatively small number of nude paintings in the Hispanic world in comparison with other regions of Europe resulted from early modern discipline through the Inquisition. Rosa López Torrijos proved this in her extensive research *La mitología en la pintura española del Siglo de Oro* (1985). A large number of people will
already be familiar with examples, primarily from the eighteenth century, which show that the heretic court proceeded against both painters and collectors of nudes. Also mentioned is the well-documented case of the paintings of the *Nude Maja* (around 1796) and the *Dressed Maja* (around 1805), painted by Francisco de Goya (1746–1828) for the First Minister Manuel Godoy. For a while, the latter also owned the famous picture *The Toilet of Venus* (before 1651) from Diego Velázquez (1599–1660) (figure 6).23

Interestingly, we have personal statements from several artists, in which they ascribe to themselves the function of assessor of the Inquisition. In all cases, the sources are artistic tracts. Thus, in 1693 the painter and author José García Hidalgo (1645–1717) described himself as *Corrector y Calificador* of painting on behalf of the Tribuna.24 Similarly, in 1724 Antonio Palomino de Castro y Velasco (1655–1726), a biographer of artists of eminent importance for the Hispanic world, reported that the Great Inquisitor had made him *Censor y Veedor de las pinturas.*25

However, the case of Francisco Pacheco (1564–1644) deserves special attention because this artist and art theoretician had a pivotal role in all the art of the Siglo de Oro.26 He, too, reports in his major work, *Arte de la Pintura* (1649), that the control of picture works was assigned to him on March 7, 1618, by the Inquisition.27 Referring to this passage, Palomino concluded that, from this moment on, Pacheco held the function of *Censor y Veedor de las pinturas,* just as he himself did.28

Now, so far we still have no sources for active censorship activity on the part of Pacheco. However, it should give us food for thought that he printed the reference to his link to the Inquisition practically as an introduction to the *Adiciones.* It is precisely in that part of his art tract that he gives artists very exact instructions about how they should represent particular religious themes. Isn’t

![Figure 6](image_url)
a “pedagogy of fear” being deployed here, completely in the meaning of the Tribunal? What could an artist expect who did not adhere to Pacheco’s rules?

Actually, Pacheco possessed astonishing authority in Seville, which can hardly have been based on his rather stiff art. When he supported reintroducing depictions of Christ on the cross using the older four-nail type rather than the three-nail variety in vogue in those days (figure 7), he was followed by a whole series of artists, including Alonso Cano and Diego Velázquez. Was it his close relationship to the Inquisition that ensured him this influence?

Possibilities for Negotiating

If we ask about forms of resistance to this early modern disciplining of the arts, then we must emphasize from the start that none of the art theory writings mentioned
manage to assert themselves as a generally accepted set of rules for assessing aesthetic works. Not even those from Paleotti and Pacheco manage this. However, the reason for taking up resistance is not to be found in the protests of the artists. What was decisive, though, was rejection by important patrons and customers of artists, the nobility and propertied bourgeoisie. These social groups were not interested in having their artistic collections examined by church inquisitors, and their power represented a risk that was difficult to calculate for the Inquisition as well. Jaime Contreras is able to demonstrate this most recently using the example of successful resistance against the heretic court in the Spanish town of Murcia.29 One unusual attempt to still place pressure on patrons of depictions of nudity was represented by a survey on the matter among university professors and its subsequent publication.30

The artists themselves appear, as a rule, to have avoided possible censorship measures and to have carried out the desired corrections. El Greco, however, constituted a definite exception in Spain. His pugnacious spirit, in dealing with excessively narrow-minded customers, already drew the attention of his
contemporaries, and in the eighteenth century Palomino, the artist’s biographer, devoted some critical comments to him.\textsuperscript{31} However, for Greco it was probably much less a matter of defending his at times very self-willed iconography for its own sake and much more a matter of preventing his deviations from tradition from being misused to force down the negotiated prices.\textsuperscript{32} His example showed that you could succeed with legal protest in Spain after all. Moreover, in the case of the depiction criticized, the \textit{Disrobing of Christ} painted for the Toledo Cathedral (1577–1579), it can be shown that he did not carry out the changes demanded by the customers (figure 8).

Caravaggio (1573–1610) was always characterized as being independent, but it is particularly noticeable in comparison with El Greco that he fulfilled all correction wishes only too willingly.\textsuperscript{33} There is an idea that the painter repeatedly provoked his patrons, so as to be able to sell two pictures in the end, as in the case of \textit{St. Matthew with the Angel}, where he sold the picture found objectionable to a private art collector (figure 9) and the second version to the location planned. However, this appears to me to overrate his intellectual capacity and to underrate the general social conditions.\textsuperscript{34} The latest theory about Caravaggio’s death—that he was murdered in a joint plot between the Maltese Orders and the pope—is certainly too far-fetched.\textsuperscript{35} It should not be forgotten...
that he was probably allowed to experiment so freely only because it was known that he operated as a lone wolf and with an artistic interest and not from within a circle of ideologically like-minded people.

The reverse was true with Annibale Carracci (1560–1609). In his case, the political power of his patron, Odoardo Farnese, allowed him to create a highly erotic program in the deeply “puritanical” Rome of Clement VIII (1592–1605) for the Palazzo Farnese (figure 10). Was it really a case here of the artist seeking to push through his ideas against the trend? Or was it much more the customer, who understood how to use this concept to show who had the power in Rome to his adversary on the Papal Throne, Pope Aldobrandini, a man known for his rigid censorship policy against the arts?36

We really have to wait until the eighteenth century again for the first artist who can be said to have made a conscious act of resistance against early modern discipline from above. Also, with Goya the conflict took place more in the media of graphic reproduction and drawing than painting.37
Over all it would be worth asking whether the art of drawing had already provided an important field for strategies of evasion in earlier centuries. At least, it appears that artists like Jusepe de Ribera (1591–1652) and Carracci, to name just two examples, picked out things as central themes in this medium whose depiction in oil painting was prohibited for reasons of necessary self-censorship. I am thinking here equally of depictions of nudity and examples of everyday violence. One execution scene from Ribera supplies an especially extreme example of the latter (figure 11).

Goya, after all, was able to paint his *Nude Maja* contrary to the Rules of the Royal House and the Inquisition only because the customer, Manuel Godoy, was the queen’s favorite. With the critical depiction of the *Caprichos* (1799), however, he knew that he had the support of the Spanish Enlightenment. Logically, as this support crumbled, he immediately had problems with the censor. By contrast, drawings that clearly spoke out against early modern discipline, such as those showing the artist Pietro Torrigiani (1472–1528) in jail (figure 12), arose solely for private use, as in the case of Carracci and Ribera.

**New Fields of Research**

Until now, art historians have had difficulties in seeing examples of the influence of early modern discipline on artistic objects as relevant. Art historians seldom make direct statements and are satisfied with ignoring corresponding research. They willingly argue that in the case of the Spanish Inquisition, in the known trials, most of the artists were not persecuted because of their art, but because of their change in way of life.

In this process, critics of Inquisition research also never really question whether Inquisitional discipline exercised a lasting influence on early modern Spanish
society. The debate centering on the term “social control” focuses on contradictions between the normative level and actual conditions and so cannot be applied to the heretic court.44

The considerable number of Inquisitional persecutions of individual artists that have been traced in the Hispanic world alone show how much this social group must have learned to fear early modern discipline. No major show trials were needed in order to exercise artistic censorship. The smallest punitive actions rapidly led to the desired self-censorship against a pedagogy of fear. In addition, as a rule, the existence of assessors of the Inquisition influenced artistic development to such an extent that those who were close to the censors probably experienced more possibilities for expanding than those who did not enjoy this privilege.

There is one case documented of an inquisitor confiscating public pictures with depictions of the Archangel from one of Madrid’s most important streets, the Calle Mayor, because he considered them unusual.45 The works might pos-

Figure 12 Francisco de Goya, “No comas celebre Torrigiano,” 1814–24, drawing, Madrid, Museo del Prado
Possibly have been returned later because the assessor considered them acceptable after all. Even so, it is easy to imagine that afterward the many other picture sellers resident in this street checked very precisely what they were offering.46

Velázquez, on the other hand, was able to provide so many innovative contributions to Spanish art precisely because he had less to fear than others from the grip of the Inquisition. After all, his teacher and father-in-law was an assessor of the Inquisition and author of an art tract providing artists with very exact instructions when creating certain religious works. In the secular area, Velázquez himself exercised control functions through his position as court painter. For this reason, we can tell from documents that in October 1633 he assessed portraits of the royal family together with the painter Vicente Carducho (1576–1638). These had been confiscated at various locations in the city on behalf of the court administration.47 Only a handful of the eighty-four paintings was found to be admissible. In most of the others, the heads had to be removed because they disfigured the royal family. With one whole-figure portrait, it was also demanded that a more decent tone be used instead of the green color chosen for the clothing. The measure was intended to more strongly control or improve the quality of the portraits of the royal family circulating in the city. We do not know if the action was repeated. However, that the poet Lope de Vega (1562–1635) picked out portrait control as a central theme not once, but twice in his work seems to speak against its being a one-time event.48

The viceroyalty of Naples interestingly illustrates how strong the influence of an inquisitional mentality was even in places where the Inquisition did not exist as an institution, but where men who had been molded through its presence exercised power. The city’s art collection had a very different character from that of the neighboring Vatican State but showed many parallels to developments on the Iberian Peninsula.49 For example, Naples has a much smaller share of pictures with mythological contents and far more with religious themes in the confessional period compared with Rome.

However, we should not pretend that censorship simply limited the development of arts. It could also have a thoroughly innovative effect. This is probably best illustrated by the example of Bartolomé Esteban Murillo (1618–1685), although he was in a special situation in Seville. The port was frequented by many foreign merchants and sailors, so economic interests forced Madrid to allow far greater tolerance to prevail than on the Castilian Plateau.50 It has been rightly pointed out that some of Murillo’s pictures contain a hidden eroticization of genre pictures that only appear to be harmless. In fact, the artist has probably very consciously violated the most rigidly controlled ban of the Inquisition in the Hispanic world, that of erotic portraits.51 One example of this is the work *Two Women at a Window* (figure 13). The way the figures look at the viewer was unusually direct for the time; something makes them stand out.52 In an eighteenth-century reproduction graphic, the painting was described as *Las Gallegas*. It is worth noting that Galician women had a general
reputation for working as prostitutes and that in the seventeenth century there were already sayings indicating that women at windows in Spain rapidly provoked sexual connotations. Murillo may have been animated to the theme by Dutch examples, as in other cases of his work. However, by making it less obvious, Murillo converted the indecent aspect, making it acceptable for the underlying situation in Spain. In doing so, he created a personal iconography that is charming precisely because of the greater ambivalence. This shows that early modern discipline could partly lead also to very definite comprehensible modernization in the history of art. Similarly, in the early modern era it is possible to find innovative working adaptation processes by artists under state control in almost all countries. However, here we must limit ourselves to these examples for the reasons identified in the introduction.

One period outside my present analysis that still needs bearing in mind is that of the Franco dictatorship. There are several reasons for this. First, there is now a whole series of important investigations dealing with the discipline of the arts. Furthermore, this research shows that censorship was an important factor in the development of a distinctly “Spanish” picture language. This was because it was often precisely those works that were especially controlled at the time—films by Carlos Saura, pictures from Antoni Tàpies, and so forth—that seem to us today to be particularly valuable examples of a “national” contribution to the history of art.
It is possible only to a limited extent to extrapolate from the structures of the control of art in the twentieth century to similar structures in the early modern era. Nevertheless, this example illustrates once more just how important this new macroperspective is. In fact, anyone taking context research in the history of art seriously will have to adopt this approach in the future, along with everyone else interested in artistic “modernization” factors and the reasons lying behind special developments in individual “art landscapes.”

Notes


2. Here I summarize some results from my unpublished thesis Kunst und Inquisition, submitted for the Certificate of Habilitation to the Philipps Universität Marburg in 1995. Another summary of this work can also be found in my following publication: “Pictorial Propaganda against the Others.”

3. On the term “Hispanic world,” cf.: Elliott, ed., Hispanic World; Bennassar, Spanien. 16. und 17. Jahrhundert. I have based my work here on an even broader concept of the Hispanic world, covering all territory ruled from Madrid in the seventeenth century.


5. Mâle, L’art religieux en France après la Concile de Trente.

6. For a history of the Council of Trent and on the importance of the picture decrees, cf.: Jedin, Geschichte des Konzils von Trient; Belting, Bild und Kult; O’Malley, Trent and All That.

7. For the most recent publication on this, cf.: Hecht, Katholische Bildertheologie im Zeitalter von Gegenreformation und Barock.


12. Publications about the “iconoclasm” form an important exception here, though these can only be partly subsumed under the aspect of early modern discipline. A congress was
held in the University of Berne (Historisches Institut) on this theme in January 2000 entitled *Macht und Ohnmacht der Bilder*.

13. The recent release of the corresponding documents is a further argument for taking greater account of the macroperspective of early modern discipline as demanded here.

14. The authoritative work on the history of the Spanish Inquisition was last published in a revised edition, ref. Kamen, *La Inquisición española*. Secondary literature on the Inquisition expanded to such an extent that it became hard to survey. The following are interesting for their new methodical approaches: Villanueva, ed., *Historia de la Inquisición en España y América*; Alcalá, ed., *Inquisición española y mentalidad inquisitorial*; Contreras, *Sotos contra Riquelmes*; *Los Inquisidores*, exhibition catalog (in his article, José Martínez Millán uses the term "confesionalización"). For a recommended introduction to the subject, ref. Peters, *Inquisition*.


22. López Torrijos, *La mitología en la pintura española del Siglo de Oro*.

23. Tomlinson, “Burn It, Hide It, Flaunt It.”


30. *Copia de los pareceres y censuras de los reverendísimos padres, maestros y señores catedráticos de las insignes Universidades de Salamanca y Alcalá*. For an early assessment of this text, cf.: Octavio Picón, *Observaciones acerca del desnudo y su excasez en el arte español*.


34. John Varriano, in *Saints and Sinners*, exhibition catalog, 203, correctly certifies Caravaggio as having rather limited understanding of the religious debates of his day. This runs completely contrary to many other perspectives.


38. Both Carracci and Jusepe de Ribera depicted many things in their drawings, including observations of everyday life, for which there are no equivalents in their oil paintings.


40. Rose Wagner, *Manuel Godoy*


42. This recently happened again to Zapperi. Research into Carracci cannot be imagined without him, but he is frequently accused of overinterpretation. On this, cf. the assessment of him in the research report: De Grazia, “Carracci Drawings in Britain and the State of Carracci Studies,” 302, note 13.

43. Agustín Bustamante García supplied one exception recently with an unusually polemic stance, providing considerable food for thought bearing in mind the documents he found: “El Santo Oficio de Valladolid y los artistas.” Clearly, some art historians still believe that their task consists solely in publishing their material and not in its further reaching iconological interpretation.

44. Cf. ibid.


46. Unfortunately, the documents do not make it clear what happened with the pictures after the valuators had testified their harmlessness.

47. Herrero-García, “Un dictamen pericial de Velázquez y una escena de Lope de Vega.”

48. Ibid., 66.

49. Labrot, *Etudes Napolitaines*.

50. There are examples in Kamen, *La Inquisición española*, of tolerance for economic reasons.

51. Brown, “Murillo, pintor de temas eróticos”


53. Neuschäfer, *Macht und Ohnmacht der Zensur*. 54. On this most recently, cf.: Llorens, “Zwei Anmerkungen über die spanische Kunst.” In contrast, the influence of discipline in the Franco Era is seen more critically in: García Felguera, “Saura, Millares und die ‘Leyenda negra.’”

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