

Sofonisba Anguissola

As a young woman, and with only three years of artistic training under Bernardino Campi, Sofonisba Anguissola should have experienced greater difficulty breaking into the artistic community in the sixteenth century. Women living in the sixteenth century were not traditionally given the opportunity to become educated in the arts, but Anguissola's father, a wealthy and prominent man in his community, "decided to educate his seven children according to the humanist ideals of the Renaissance in the belief that they would bring honor to the city" (Chadwick, 78). Anguissola's father went so far as to reach out to the renowned artist Michelangelo in order to gain support for his daughter's artistic career.



Sofonisba Anguissola, *Bernardino Campi*
Painting Sofonisba Anguissola, 1550

Anguissola produced a number of self-portraits, one of her most famous being **Bernardino Campi Painting Sofonisba Anguissola**. The image she creates is one of Campi painting a portrait of herself; the artist becomes the model. This piece "suggests that not only was she aware of her own image as an exemplar of female achievement, but also that she understood the importance of the artistic lineage between pupil and master, and her unique role as a producer of images of women" (Chadwick, 78). Anguissola had a unique opportunity within the artistic community, she was a female whose art was respected and admired, and therefore had the chance to honestly represent herself, her sisters, and other women to the rest of the world.

The sophistication of this double portrait implies that Anguissola was very aware of her exceptional situation. While it could be considered that Campi is the focus of the portrait and that Anguissola is merely an object that is being painted, the subtlety she uses within the piece paints a different story. Anguissola makes the image of herself larger than Campi, and by using what is known as the hierarchical scale, "Anguissola's image competes with Campi's in importance, not only from its larger size but also from its position in the design. Higher on the surface she seems taller. Aligned with the central axis that is emphasized by the vertical stack of hands and head, she is more imposing" (Garrad, 29). By making herself larger than Campi, Anguissola asserts herself as more important than Campi,

reinforcing that idea by giving Campi a mahlstick, a painting aid that would imply he was a weak artist. Anguissola continually uses subtle gestures within the painting to imply her importance and stature in her society, showing the artistic community that despite being female, she was not simply an object but also a creator.