

Susanna Maria von Sandrart: Women Artists in 17th-Century Nürnberg

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In the preface to her first book of embroidery patterns, published in Nürnberg in 1666 by her father, Paul Fürst, Rosina Helena Fürst (1650-1710) wrote:

*Though/ respective this little book, it is/ as You well know/ not really new/ nor was it begun by myself; but because my dear father, some time ago had it in his publishing house and wished to enlarge the edition and republish it/ and because it gave me pleasure to insert my trifling works that I made and collected within my modesty and pleasure...so that I could not refuse my dear father this dutiful obedience. Therefore/ expecting that others would consider me immodest and conceited so that they would jeer at me/ I contradict those with utmost insistence/ with the intention of learning further from those/ who have more practice/ I feel a great desire.<sup>1</sup>*

Rosina Fürst here expresses pride on the one hand and modesty and submission on the other. Such circumlocutions were common in women's publications. Be they artists, scientists, or writers, women whose work left the private sphere walked a tightrope: confidence and capability had to be balanced against modesty and moderation. Why did so many women describe their work so similarly in relation to their household skills and to God? And why did they feel the need to justify their artistic occupations as an alternative to "dangerous" and "reproachable" idleness? Through such rhetoric these women seemed bent on confirming the sinfulness of such an occupation that would lead them to become artists first and women second.

In the preface to the third edition, Fürst wrote:

*As I always refused unpleasant idleness/ which is the root of all evil/ whereas I always felt the aspiration and longing to learn and know all that is fitting for an honorable woman/ so that my dear parents allowed me/ to satisfy my desire to comprehend art and science: Thus I made the one and the other piece—in addition to the work that had to be done—as befitting for my honor and status—that was my greatest pleasure.<sup>2</sup>*

With this preface Fürst acknowledges her interest in art and science. Even though female authors tried to represent their occupations as secondary and virtuous, their seriousness of purpose is often subtly revealed. In contrast, their male colleagues had no need to hide their ambition or commitment; on the contrary, they could be proud of these qualities. Women's peculiar position led them to schizophrenic arguments that had to be settled repeatedly.

Among Fürst's contemporaries were many female writers, translators, publishers, artists, illustrators, collectors, embroiderers, copper-etchers, and cameo, gem, and jewel cutters. Most worked in the home, where, during the 17th century, there was little division between living and working areas, although this was beginning to change. In Nürnberg,

# SUSANNA MARIA VON SANDRART

## Women Artists in 17th-Century Nürnberg

By Sabina Leßmann

which was a "Freie Reichsstadt" with no craft guilds to limit participation in professional activities, women were able to work in a number of enterprises. Women's participation in each family differed, but they were paid for their work.

Fürst's text shows, however, that this professionalism was being called into question as newer, stricter norms led her and the other women to self-contradiction and conflict. These were not women of the upper classes who, as dilettantes, could easily resolve any conflict by representing their occupations as pleasurable, nonremunerative pastimes. Most 17th-century women art workers, for reasons both practical and

financial, were vital to their family workshops. All interested and talented family members were put to work. An exceptionally large number of women were employed in various supporting roles in the many successful publishing houses in the Nürnberg region. By the end of the century, the situation was beginning to change as the rigid convention of the female as housewife and mother took hold.<sup>3</sup> The split found in women artists of Rosina Helena Fürst's generation was informed by this changing context. Women were torn between self-confidence and self-justification. The woman artist or artisan as an integral part of the family workshop, which for so long had been the "norm," was gradually becoming the exception.

The contrast in education and working conditions between men and women in 17th-century Nürnberg can be elucidated by examining the career of reproduction illustrator Susanna Maria von Sandrart (1658-1716). Born in Nürnberg, she was the third of nine children of Jacob and Regina Christina (born Eimmart) von Sandrart. Jacob von Sandrart, a copper-etcher, graphic-art dealer, and bookseller, moved from Regensburg to Nürnberg in 1656 for the better economic conditions there. The Sandrart name soon became important in the city's artistic circles, especially after 1612, when Joachim von Sandrart (Jacob's uncle) and his wife, Esther Barbara (born Bloemmaert), a Nürnberg native, moved to the city. Joachim was a respected painter and copper-etcher and later became famous as the author of the two-volume *Teutsche Academie der Edlen Bau-Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste* (German Academy of the Architectural, Sculptural, and Pictorial Arts).

Like other home production units of the period, the women in the Sandrart family workshop were engaged where they were needed.<sup>4</sup> The production and sale of graphic arts required a variety of skills: screen making, etching, paper cutting, printing, and drying; and these Susanna Maria began learning at an early age. It seems that an important criterion in the family workshop was the order or arrangement of siblings. In the von Sandrart household, three of the nine children worked as artists: oldest son, Johann Jacob, the third oldest child, Susanna Maria, and the seventh child and second son, Joachim, born ten years after Susanna Maria. (Because of the big age difference, Joachim was no competition for his older sister.) In families where girls were numerous or among the

first born, they were more likely to receive training for art careers.

Susanna Maria von Sandrart produced several hundred drawings and prints, most of which have been preserved in books as illustrations or as single prints or series. The numerous editions of these books account for the rather good condition of the prints. Her *Folioband*, a folio volume containing most of her drawings and prints, which she bound herself, is preserved at the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nürnberg. In a handwritten preface she explained:

*Myself Susanna Maria, daughter of the deceased Jacob von Sandrart, though taught by my now deceased mother from an early age to do domestic and other work, had an inclination also to draw, making in idle times the drawings presented in this book, begun also by my own impulse to etch in copper. When my late father saw that I held a natural inclination for this occupation, he encouraged me and gave me copper to train, at least those copper works that he could use for his art trade. This work was interrupted when I was married in 1683 to my first husband Johan Paul Auer. After his early death, when I had been married only four years and ten weeks, I had the advantage that I could support my father's and brother's work so I could earn my living and was not a burden to anyone. All the copper etchings in this book were made by myself, most of them while I was a widow. In 1695 I was married for a second time—because of divine guidance and my parents' advice—to the widower Wolfgang Moritz Endter; I had to stop my occupation then because of the extensive housework. Nearly all I produced I collected in this book to see what I did in my youth and especially in my seven years of widowhood. This book I gave my dearest husband Wolfgang Moritz Endter for my kind memory wishing him benevolence for body and soul.<sup>5</sup>*

As indicated, Susanna Maria von Sandrart's father recognized and supported her interest and skill. Several conditions, it seems, were necessary for a girl to develop the ambition needed to pursue independent work. Susanna Maria speaks of her "inclination to draw" and "my own impulse to etch in copper." In fact, many of the drawings in the *Folioband*



**Fig. 1. Susanna Maria von Sandrart, Allegories, black ink on paper, in *Folioband*, p. 24. After Francesco Villamena *La pompa funerale* (1591).**



**Fig. 2. Susanna Maria von Sandrart, Colosseum at Rome, black ink on paper, in *Folioband*, p. 85. After an unknown etching.**

are her copies of drawings by her father or granduncle. The availability of work to study is of obvious importance to a budding artist.

Another important influence was the artist's immediate circle, and several females in the Sandrart family were busy professional artists. Antoinette von Sandrart, the sister of Jacob, was a copper-etcher. Esther Barbara Bloemmaert, the wife of Uncle Joachim, cut jewels and cameos and collected art and curiosities. Maria von Brecht, the wife and then widow of Johann Jacob, taught embroidery and drawing. A cousin, Maria Clara Eimmart, received an extensive education from her father in drawing, painting, languages, mathematics, and astronomy. So during her formative years Susanna Maria was surrounded by many women accomplished in the arts. Nevertheless, the basis of Susanna Maria's work was the reproductive graphics done to meet the demands of the family business. In fact, the distribution of the different tasks may account for her many ink sketches, which, perhaps, served as models for reproductive work done by another family member. Such could be the case with the drawing in Figure 1, after a copper etching by Francesco Villamena, first published in 1591. The drawing is not an exact copy, as she used broad brushstrokes rather than the fine lines of the etching technique.

Susanna Maria makes very clear in her preface another, fundamental gender restriction. Before even discussing her artistic affairs, she writes about her training in domestic matters. Because of extensive household responsibilities during her second marriage to Endter, a widower with six daughters aged ten to twenty, Susanna Maria had to give up her art work. In fact, she did not work during either marriage, and her career came to a halt after her marriage to Endter, whom she predeceased.

The fact that her first husband was a painter and her second a bookseller and publisher did little to advance her career. Only in youth and widowhood was Susanna Maria able to realize her creativity; all of her drawings and etchings that can be dated were produced before or between her marriages, a situation quite common during this period. Her family connections did, however, serve to record her name and work for posterity. In his



**Fig. 3. Susanna Maria von Sandrart, *Male Nude*, pencil and white chalk, in *Folioband*, p. 83. Probably after Joachim von Sandrart.**

*Teutsche Academie*, Joachim von Sandrart mentions his grandniece Susanna Maria, who also was one of his pupils.<sup>6</sup> Besides the theoretical writings about architecture, painting, sculpture, and antique art, the author includes a prescription for training young artists. Following the acceptable patterns for the period, he described three stages: first, copying two-dimensional patterns, meaning drawings, etchings, or paintings; second, copying three-dimensional objects, especially antique sculpture; and third, drawing from nature, either landscape or the human form.

In the “vitae” portion of the book, Joachim described both his grandniece and grandnephew Johann. It is interesting to compare the two texts. Of Susanna Maria, he wrote:

*Susanna von Sandrart, a 20-year-old virgin, Jacob von Sandrart’s daughter, born in Nürnberg as in the art lover’s home, besides being well-experienced in domestic affairs, has a great understanding of drawing and then of her own accord started to realize her ambition to etch in copper, so that after only a few years she has become capable and perfect that she—without neglecting domestic affairs—knows how to create buildings, landscapes, and other pretty things, nice historical themes too, making them all in a quick and good manner. I hesitate to tell more about her because of our relationship and I let her works speak further about her character, her figures from the old and the new testament, the fountains and other works exhibited in this “Academie.” The art expert may judge of the fruit after a few years that is to be expected where youth shows us those blossoms.*<sup>7</sup>

Of his grandnephew, Joachim von Sandrart wrote:

*Johann Jacob von Sandrart, born at Regensburg, is educated with diligence to his studies, especially to painting and drawing at the academy, also to perspective, architecture, geometry, and other subjects necessary to complete his accomplishments. He is well experienced and now eager to learn more in the subject of painting so that, with regard to his youth and because of a proper continuation, there will be much to expect.*<sup>8</sup>

Both texts describe serious young artists. The description of Susanna Maria, which is more detailed, was inserted only in the second edition of *Teutsche Academie*, published in 1679, four years after the consideration of Johann Jacob. However,

there is a marked difference between the two passages: with Susanna Maria, Joachim prefaces her art training with her training in domestic affairs; with Johann Jacob, he cites his training at the academy. Too, whereas Susanna Maria remained within the family and the family business, for her brothers this area played a role only at the beginning of their studies. As expected, brother Johann Jacob was also trained outside the family and journeyed out of the country. He visited Italy and younger brother Joachim lived several years in London. It is not known whether Susanna Maria ever set foot outside the Nürnberg area.

Women were not allowed to take part in the academy meetings, which Joachim mentions in his text about Johann Jacob. The Nürnberg Malerakademie, which was founded by, among others, Susanna Maria’s father and granduncle, was a meeting place for artists, both professional and amateur. Men could theorize and draw from the nude there. What is most ironic, between about 1662, when the meetings began, and 1672, they took place at Jacob von Sandrart’s home—where he and his family (including Susanna Maria) lived and worked. Since the meetings were considered “public” events, women, of course, were not invited. Thus, while her brother was offered the stimulation necessary for a developing young artist, Susanna Maria was required to remain behind closed doors, even in her own home.

Joachim von Sandrart’s texts about his grandniece and grandnephew both end with allusions to what can be expected in their careers: “the fruit after a few years that is to be expected where the youth shows us those blossoms” for Susanna Maria, and “because of a proper continuation, there will be much to expect,” for Johann Jacob. Though both descriptions seem hopeful, this is an illusion. For a female, a “proper continuation” was not possible; by virtue of her gender, her development was limited.<sup>9</sup>

Deceptively, a first look at Susanna Maria’s oeuvre suggests that she received “classic” art training, the kind described by her granduncle. The work ranges from reproductions of German, Italian, and French patterns to sketches of antique busts, animals, and landscapes (including southern landscapes



**Fig. 4. Susanna Maria von Sandrart, *Holy Family* (1714), black ink on paper, Graphic Collection, Coburg. After an etching by Sebastian Bourdon.**

and ruins as seen in Figure 2), to drawings of human models. The latter include portraits, complete figures, studies of hands or backs, and even nudes—both male and female, like the chalk drawing in Figure 3, probably after Joachim von Sandrart. Upon closer examination, however, one discovers that most of her works were exact copies—even of the faults—of works by other artists, especially her father and granduncle. Of her six hundred documented works, in fact, only six are not copies. It seems she never was permitted to pursue the three stages of training promoted by her own family. She was never taught perspective, composition, or how to draw from life. What she learned was to copy the type of art training promoted by her own family but closed to her as a woman. Not only was Susanna Maria essentially walled in from all communication, training, and stimulation, she also had to depend for her education on works produced behind that wall. In what seems to be a contradiction, she even learned in this way to draw the male nude. This leads one to believe that the taboo against women drawing the male body is not the nakedness itself but rather the idea of women gazing at and drawing the subject in the presence of men.<sup>10</sup>

From the beginning Susanna Maria von Sandrart's training was limited to copying paintings and drawings, which, for all practical purposes, led her to work exclusively as a reproductive illustrator. This was not a typical female domain, as both men and women worked in this area. But what becomes clear in the case of Susanna Maria and her female contemporaries is that few other channels were open to them. Even many of the works found in the *Folioband* that seem to have been done for personal reasons were copies, as is the pen-and-ink drawing of the Holy Family after Sebastian Bourdon (Fig. 4). She wrote on the drawing: "Dedicated to my aunt Esther Barbara von Sandrart, I made this drawing at the age of 56 years, with (ill and) nearly black eyes."

Among the few exceptions are two delicate pencil drawings of her two sons who died in childhood. These intimate sketches, one of which is Figure 5, are of a quality that makes you wonder why Susanna Maria did not do more works of her own invention. (On this drawing she wrote: "Johann Friedrich Auer born 31st December 1684 died 20th June 1687.")

There were both benefits and limitations in Susanna Maria's situation, of course. Had she not been born into an artistic family, she probably would have received no training. In fact, most women artists born before the 19th century had artist fathers. One has to ask, however, whether she was aware of the proscriptions on her life and work created by her gender. Each woman artist had to find her own degree of free space, mode of adaptation, and method of resistance.

Rosina Helena Fürst wrote: "Thus I made one piece and then another—in addition to the work that had to be done—as befitting my honor and status. That was my greatest pleasure."<sup>11</sup> Perhaps she found harmony between that which she regarded as "fitting for my honor and status" and that "which was my greatest pleasure."

In 1713, three years before her death, Susanna Maria von Sandrart added at the bottom of a pen-and-ink drawing:

***I, Susanna Maria Wolfgang Moritz Endter, have made this drawing, which shows God, metamorphosed as three men, appearing to Abraham, when I was 55 years old because in this year I felt pleasure again to draw, which made my mind healthy again after so much sorrow and fear, forgetting all these past matters.***<sup>12</sup>



**Fig. 5. Susanna Maria von Sandrart, *The Dead Son Johann Friedrich Auer*, pencil on paper, in *Folioband*, p. 76.**

That same year she wrote beneath another drawing:

***I, Susanna Maria Wolfgang Moritz Endter, have drawn the last period of Christ's suffering, namely the holy funeral, when I was 55 years old, already losing weight now after I had not drawn anything for my years, thinking that perhaps this may be my last drawing, because I become older and lose my body's force and my senses' vigor even because after passing those sad years there is no hope anymore for a more fortunate time and for something better than the quiet and calm grave, in which God may lay me at this time.***<sup>13</sup>

The drawings, texts, and prayers written beneath some of her graphic works during the last years of her life show a great deal of sorrow and symbols of death. The reasons for her sadness and affinity with death and the grave as a redemption are not known. To suggest that these are linked to the situation of the female artist might be stretching the point. But the fact that Susanna Maria relates her sorrow and her hunger for death to the drawing that gives her consolation demonstrates the complex situation of women artists during this period. The conflict between her ambitions on the one hand and restrictions on and even the disruptions of her art production on the other seems to have been accepted by Susanna Maria von Sandrart, but with a distinct degree of sadness. Looking at her work, one would guess that it reflects the same training and working conditions as those of her brother. Only from her writings and those of her granduncle do we get a sense of the vast differences between the sexes in education, mobility, feelings of self-worth, and hope for the future.

Research on Susanna Maria von Sandrart was made possible by access to the *Folioband* containing her complete graphic work, autobiographical texts, and manifestoes of her contemporaries. But such research was not easy. During each of my several journeys to the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nürnberg, where the *Folioband* is preserved, the same obstacle arose: the folio could not be found. Although the book has a reference number, it is not listed in the catalogue. Therefore, it was necessary to have seen the book and to know its reference number, St. N. 237, in order to request it. This experience at Nürnberg demonstrates one of the difficulties of doing research on women artists. Although many destroyed their records (or their families did posthumously) or, indeed,

never kept any, so convinced were they of their worthlessness, even when records and documents do exist, they are often hidden from art historians and other scholars. •

#### NOTES

This essay is based on my Ph.D. thesis in art history for the University of Bonn. It was published as *Susanna Maria von Sandrart. Arbeitsbedingungen einer Nürnberger Graphikerin im 17. Jahrhundert* (Susanna Maria von Sandrart. A woman artist's working conditions and her graphic production in Nürnberg in the 17th century) (Hildesheim/New York: Olms Verlag, 1991).

1. Rosina Helena Fürst, *DaB Neue Modelbuch* (The New Model Book) (Nürnberg: Paul Fürst Verlag, 1666). All translations are by the author.

2. Rosina Helena Fürst, *Model Buchs Driter Theil* (The Model Book's Third Volume) (Nürnberg: Paul Fürst Verlag, 1676).

3. Although the Protestant Reformation and the Catholic Counter-Reformation are partially responsible for this new ideal of womanhood, a deteriorating economy was the primary reason women were forced to retreat from the workplace.

4. See Barbara Becker-Cantarino, *Der Lange Weg zur Mündigkeit. Frauen und Literatur in Deutschland 1500 bis 1800* (The long way to majority. Women and literature in Germany 1500 to 1800) (München: Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung und C.E. Post Verlag, 1989), 178.

5. Susanna Maria von Sandrart, preface to *Folioband* (Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg, n.d.).

6. Joachim von Sandrart, *Teutsche Academie der Edlen Bau- Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste* (Nürnberg, 1675, 1679).

7. *Ibid.* (1679), 82.

8. *Ibid.* (1675), 338.

9. This inequity in training and expectations did not lead to very much difference in results, however. Both Susanna and Johann Jacob produced and sold large quantities of work. Each is praised in 17th-century literature on the graphic arts, but always added to the critiques of Susanna's work is praise for her womanly virtues. The only difference in their oeuvres, in fact, was that his original works were created for a commercial market; hers were for private contemplation.

10. Concerning the gender-specific valuation of gazing at the naked body during the 17th century, see Thomas Kleinspehn, *Der flüchtige Blick. Sehen und Identität in der Kultur der Neuzeit* (The Fickle View. Seeing and Identity in 17th-century Culture) (Reinbek: Rowohlt Verlag, 1989), 109ff.

11. Fürst, *Model Book*, third volume, 1676.

12. von Sandrart, *Folioband*, added sheet to p. 479.

13. *Ibid.*, added sheet to page 480.

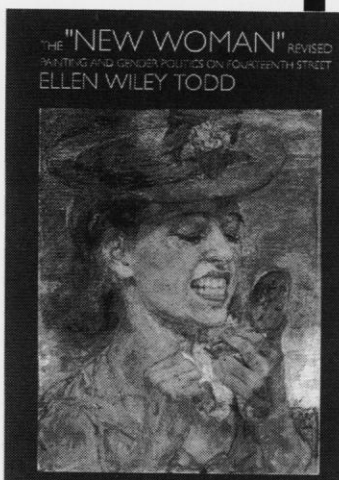
**Sabina Leßmann** is a curator in the contemporary art department at the Kunstmuseum Bonn. She has also published articles about 17th-century German women artists and about women photographers. In February 1993 she organized a conference on women, c.1700.

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