To a great extent, historians of early modern European art, even feminist ones, have focused on what Patricia Skinner has termed “the great and the good”: aristocratic women, wives of wealthy merchants, and female artists, saints, and nuns. Like Skinner, I would like to move away from these and instead explore early modern women who are largely invisible to us today, that is, unremarkable working women. Since the early twentieth century, historians have successfully examined women workers. But how can art historians study a group that is not only too poor to commission art, but is also often too poor to buy even the cheapest, mass-produced...
sort of imagery? Sometimes women workers appear in early modern art as mere staffage. Like animals, rocks, or trees, they function as insignificant space fillers in compositions devoted to other, more important subjects. These women tend the stove, lug water for baths, or carry loads on their heads in the backgrounds of paintings. At other times, working women serve as negative foils to set off the youth and beauty of elite women, especially in portraits of aristocrats or paintings of religious figures, such as Judith (figs. 1, 5). Still other images employ women workers to make a moralizing point. Lazy or lustful servants, for example, are common motifs (fig. 2).

This essay, by contrast, will examine another type of imagery, which has long been neglected: portraits of female household servants. It will not discuss aristocratic servants, such as ladies-in-waiting to the queen, nor examine wet nurses, governesses, and cooks. Instead it will focus

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6 I follow Anne Curry and Elizabeth Matthew in defining a “servant” as someone who performs service, “whether paid or unpaid . . . for his or her lord or lady, master or mistress.” See their *Concepts and Patterns of Service in the Later Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2000), xiv.

7 Portraits exist of La Dame Longuet de La Giraudière, wetnurse to Louise XIV, and Katherine Elliott, first Nurse to the infant James II and then Dresser and Woman of the Bedchamber to both his wives. For the latter, see Oliver Millar, *The Tudor, Stuart, and Early Georgian Pictures in the Collection of Her Majesty the Queen* (London: Phaidon Press, 1963), 1.140. I shall not discuss the numerous cooks whose portraits appear in
on portraits of girls and women, whether slaves or salaried employees, who performed household duties. Few such portraits survive from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in part because these servants were generally of little importance to those with the means to commission a portrait. But for those portraits that do exist, the name of the sitter and the circumstances of production are often known, and in every case the image

manuscripts compiled by two retirement homes in Nuremberg, in part because they are so numerous that they deserve a paper dedicated solely to them and in part because they are depicted as professional artisans, not domestic servants. For Die Mendelschen und Landauerschen Hausbücher, see http://www.nuernberger-hausbuecher.de/index.php?do=page&mo=2, Stadtbibliothek Nürnberg, accessed 19 November 2012.

It is almost impossible to distinguish servants from slaves, since many servants, especially those who were very young, received no pay for their service, only room and board. See R. C. Richardson, Household Servants in Early Modern England (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), 80.
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portrays the servant in a more positive light than the representations that have received the most attention in the past.

This project counteracts the common tendency among art historians to identify with the elite. For example, Ruth Mellinkoff, in her fine book *Outcasts*, asserts, “While we who live in the era of the common man publicly extol his virtues, privately we admire and covet the attributes of the upper class. . . . [F]ew would not be delighted to have a titled guest at table, no matter how tarnished the title might be.” Even feminist scholars recently labeled a painting *Self-Portrait with Still-Life*, thereby erasing the second woman in the image, the fruit seller (fig. 3). The accompanying text explores the artist’s brilliant chiaroscuro, the inviting display of fruits and vegetables, the role of the self-portrait, the references to the senses and to the seasons, but not one word mentions the fruit seller. Closely tied to the art market and to wealthy donors and collectors, art history has often been the conservative sister among the humanities disciplines. In part for this reason, working women have traditionally been overlooked.

But another problem arises when women workers are discussed. Art historians generally know so little about the real lives of working women and the ideology in which they are embedded, that images of them become blank slates on which to inscribe their preconceptions. For example, in 1555, at the right edge of a painting showing her sisters playing chess, Sofonisba Anguissola depicted an older woman (fig. 4). The identity of this woman as a servant is revealed by both the inscription written across the edge of the chessboard and a statement in Giorgio Vasari’s *Vite.*

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11 The inscription on the chessboard relates that the artist shows here the “true likeness of her three sisters and a servant” (*sephonisba angussola. virgo. amilcaris filia. ex vera efigie tres suas sorores. et ancillam pinxit. MDLV*). For “ancilla” as a common term for servant, see P. J. P. Goldberg, “What Was a Servant?” in Curry and Matthew, eds., *Concepts and Patterns of Services*, 1–2. Vasari, who saw this painting in Sofonisba’s home only thirteen years after it was completed, described it as showing portraits of three of her sisters playing chess and also “an old lady of the Anguissola
But if scholars agree that the woman is a servant, their interpretations of her differ widely. In 1992, Ilya Sandra Perlingieri, noting that the same woman recurs in a self-portrait by Sofonisba (fig. 5), concluded that her “face is depicted with great sensitivity. . . . The artist must have had a strong bond with this servant.” Six years later, Joanna Woods-Marsden agreed that the woman was “obviously a well-loved retainer.” But in 2007, Anne Sutherland-Harris voiced a very different interpretation, noting “Sofonisba’s painting . . . celebrates the intellectual accomplishments of her household” (“una vecchia donni di casa”). See Le Vite de’ più eccellenti pittori scultore e architettori nella redazione del 1550 e 1568, ed. Rosanna Bettarini (Florence: Studio per Edizioni Scette, 1966), 5. 427.

12 Perlingieri, Sofonisba Anguissola, 87. This idea is repeated on page 138.
In fact no evidence indicates either a “strong bond” or an “illiterate servant.” Some servants could read; one study estimates the literacy rate at fifteen per cent. In addition to a lack of knowledge about servants, there is often a lack of interest. Emblematic of this problem is Perlingieri’s comment that


Yet she fails to examine the works to test her thesis. A closer look reveals striking similarities: both show thin lips, low cheek bones, a long nose, graying hair parted at the center, and a furrowed brow. Perlingieri further writes that the servant is “Simply dressed, as was proper to her position.”

The servants in Anguissola’s paintings “may be the same person.” Yet she fails to examine the works to test her thesis. A closer look reveals striking similarities: both show thin lips, low cheek bones, a long nose, graying hair parted at the center, and a furrowed brow. Perlingieri further writes that the servant is “Simply dressed, as was proper to her position.” The

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16 Perlingieri, Sofonisba Anguissola, 87.
17 Ibid.
woman wears a plain black dress and white cap and shawl, which is how contemporary household servants are often portrayed. But it differs slightly from Cesare Vecellio’s description of Venetian servants as wearing a white veil over their head and shoulders. This raises another problem in investigating household servants: they are not easily identifiable. Unlike prostitutes who were frequently shown wearing red or yellow, or Jews who were visually marked by a yellow badge, female domestic workers were not distinguished by clothing and so cannot be easily identified without the sort of documentary evidence available in the case of the servant depicted by Anguissola. As Diana de Marly observes, unlike male servants, who often wore livery, female servants dressed in garments that were “no different from what was worn by ordinary housewives.” Some servants, in fact, must have been indistinguishable from upper-class women since mistresses sometimes gave their servants their cast-off clothes.

This raises a final problem: all too often scholars view the so-called lower class as an undifferentiated mass. But peasants differed from urban beggars, and household servants led quite different lives from those who labored primarily outside the home. Even among domestic workers there were different strata. Rather than attempting to generalize about female servants, this essay will aim to explore each portrait or group of portraits separately, asking why a particular sitter was portrayed and what we can learn from a close analysis of her portrait.

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18 See Phillis Cunnington, Costume of Household Servants from the Middle Ages to 1900 (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1974), 54–64 and note 75.
20 See, for example, Mellinkoff, Outcasts.
22 Richardson, Household Servants, 87, 104; Cunnington, Costume of Household Servants, 42–43.
Albrecht Dürer’s Katharina

The earliest portrait of a servant may well be a drawing of a black woman that Albrecht Dürer made on his trip to the Netherlands in 1520–21 (fig. 6). During these years Dürer kept a diary, whose text survives in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century copies. One of its entries has long been linked to the drawing. The diary was initially conceived as an account of the artist’s economic transactions. However, especially when he was in Antwerp, he also listed the places he visited, the people he met, and the sitters he portrayed. An entry logged between March 16 and April 5, 1521, refers to João Brandão, the Factor, or commercial agent of the Portuguese king, who, according to Philip Troutman, was the artist’s “most constant friend in Antwerp.”

The diary also mentions Rodrigo Fernandez d’Almada, Brandão’s secretary and successor, as well as an unnamed black woman in the Factor’s service. Dürer’s entry reads, “Item Ruderigo presented my wife with a little ring. . . I made the portrait in charcoal of the factor Brandão. I portrayed in metal point his Moor. And I did the portrait of Rodriguez on a large paper in black and white with a brush.”

In short, the drawing of the black woman was part of a series of three portraits made of the Factor and people close to him. The drawings may have been sparked by Rodrigo’s gift of a ring, but Dürer distinguishes the portraits in two ways. First he refers to the two white male financial agents by name, but the black female servant remains nameless. Second, he chooses a different technique for each portrait. He generally adopted charcoal or paint for finished works that he gave to others. But for the black


servant, he chose silverpoint, a more durable and more exacting medium that he employed for images intended for his own use. This drawing may well have served that function. Confirming the identification of this drawing with the citation in the diary are the image’s inscribed date, 1521, its silverpoint technique, and its subject, a black woman. Unlike the reference in the diary, however, the inscription on the drawing reveals not only its date, but also the sitter’s name and age, “1521 Katharina aged 20.”

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26 The inscription reads “1521 Katherina allt 20 jar.” See Rupprich, ed., *Dürer schriftlicher Nachlass*, 194, n. 544. The fact that she has a Christian name suggests that
Although disassembled today, Dürer’s sketchbook of his trip to the Netherlands can be reconstructed with the help of his diary. Dürer generally filled both sides of the pages of his sketchbook with silverpoint drawings, and when he drew portraits, such as the one of Paulus Topler and Martin Pfinzing, he usually arranged them in pairs, side-by-side (fig. 7). Troutman justly observes that Dürer’s drawing of Katharina is unlikely to have originally been part of the sketchbook since it is a “single portrait drawn on an upright sheet” and its verso is blank. Nevertheless it shares many similarities with the sketchbook drawings. Its size is only a few centimeters larger, and its silverpoint technique is the same. In addition, Dürer


27 Troutman, Albrecht Dürer, 13, 38.
renders Katharina, like the portraits in the sketchbook, in bust length and with great attention to the specificity of her physiognomy and clothes. Just as Dürer describes the garments of Topler and Pf inzing in great detail, so he carefully observes Katharina’s clothes: the chain of her necklace, her close-fitting cap adorned with a jewel, and her shimmering, bordered moiré jacket, probably made of silk. Even the inscription on Katharina’s portrait corresponds to those in the sketchbook. Like that on the drawing of Topler and Pf inzing, it includes the drawing’s date, the artist’s initials, and the name and age of the sitter. In short, Katharina is treated much the same as other subjects in the sketchbook.

Katherine is not the only servant mentioned in Dürer’s records. His own servant accompanied him on his trip to the Netherlands when she was in her mid or late teens. Scholars have assumed that since Susanna generally ate with Dürer’s wife at their inn while the artist dined out with illustrious friends, potential clients, or his landlord, that she functioned in part as a companion to Agnes. Hans Rupprich, in fact, believed that she was almost like a daughter to the childless couple. While in the Netherlands, Dürer bought Susanna a mantle, and she and Agnes occasionally accompanied the artist to important dinners, such as that hosted by the painters of Antwerp. In 1524, several years after the Netherlandish journey, Susanna married one of Dürer’s assistants. But no portrait of Susanna has been

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28 She was born between 1502 and 1506 according to Dürer schriftlicher Nachlass, 185, note 222. For tips and gifts she received on the journey, see J.-A. Goris and Georges Marlier, Albrecht Dürer: Diary of his Journey to the Netherlands 1520–21. Accompanied by the Silverpoint Sketchbook and Paintings and Drawings Made during his Journey, ed. Dieter Kuhrmann, trans. Philip Troutman (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1971), 8, 65, 84, 85, 90.


30 Dürer schriftlicher Nachlass, 185, n. 222.

31 For the mantle, see Goris and Marlier, Diary, 65. For the dinner, see Troutman, Albrecht Dürer, 18.

32 She married Jorg (Georg) Schlenkin according to death notices kept at St. Lorenz; see Dürer schriftlicher Nachlass, 185, n. 222. Yet Goris and Marlier name Georg Pencz as her husband in their introduction to Albrecht Dürer: Diary of his Journey, 65, marginal note.
securely identified, and nothing suggests that Dürer viewed Katharina, the servant of his friend Brandão, in the same way as his own servant.

Several scholars describe Katharina as a slave, but by this time a large community of both slaves and free blacks lived in Lisbon.\(^{33}\) It is unclear whether Katharina was the slave of Brandão, but she was certainly his servant. This raises an important issue: the globalization of the servant class in early modern Europe. Black men also functioned as servants and slaves, and portraits of them were produced. In 1634, the Medici court painter Justus Sustermans painted a scene, described in a letter and an inventory, of two old women, Domenica dale Cascine and a “blind woman of Pratolino,” bringing produce to a court servant called Pietro Moro (fig. 8).\(^{34}\) Here Sustermans has Pietro make an obscene gesture with his right hand, which causes the viewer to laugh at the working women. By contrast, Dürer’s drawing of Katharina shows no such denigration. But this comparison also reveals that black servants play normative gendered roles. Whereas Pietro’s mocking gesture grants him agency, Katharina’s demure expression with eyes cast down suggests that she is modest and submissive.

Unlike images of black men, which could serve as models for St. Maurice or one of the three Magi, there was little practical use for a drawing of a black woman and no evidence suggests that Dürer envisioned this portrait as a preparatory sketch. Erwin Panofsky believed that the artist probably made it for his own use since it is an informal portrait of a size


intermediate between the drawings he made for others and those he kept for himself. Panofsky grouped it together with two other silverpoint sketches of the same size, those of the poet Sebastian Brant and the artist Lucas van Leyden. Dürer seems to associate Katharina with two sets of people: first, those close to the Portuguese Factor as evidenced by the list of drawings

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made at the same time and recorded together in his diary, and second, outstanding figures whose likenesses he wanted to keep in his possession.

But why did Dürer deem Katharina so exceptional as to be worthy of a drawing that he would keep for himself? Dürer was interested in a broad range of phenomena: beached whales, objects from Mexico, and people from different places and classes. Was it Katharina’s exoticism that made her memorable to the artist? After all, the entry in his diary reduced her to a category and a possession by referring to her as the Factor’s Moor. Dürer’s drawing of a rare walrus suggests an interest in portraying unusual sights with a combination of humane sympathy and scientific detachment, characteristics also found in the image of Katharina, drawn the same year (figs. 6, 9). Dürer drew two other female household workers in the sketchbook of his Netherlandish journey, the “maid and old woman” of Jan de Has (fig. 10). Although Peter Hess describes Katharina as wearing the

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37 This drawing is inscribed “1521 / Das dosig thÿr van dem jch do das hawbt / contrefett hab ist gefangen worden / jn die niderlendischen see vnd/ was XII ellen lang / brawendisch mit für fussene” (1521 / That stupid animal of which I have portrayed the head was caught in the Netherlands sea and was twelve Brabant ells long with four feet). For the translation, see http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_details.aspx?objectid=720549&partid=1&searchText=Durer+walrus+drawing&fromADBC=ad&toADBC=ad&numpages=10&origin=%2fresearch%2fsearch_the_collection_database.aspx&currentPage=1 The British Museum, accessed 19 November 2012. Gerd Unverfehrt translates “dosig” as “hiesig,” meaning “represented here,” due to its cognate “dasig.” See “Da sah ich viel köstliche Dinge: Albrecht Dürers Reise in der Niederlande,” (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006). Bartrum, *Albrecht Dürer and his Legacy*, 208, translates “dosig” as sleepy.

38 For the identity of the figures in this drawing and the reference in the diary to “die magdt und die alt fraw” see Dürer schriftlicher Nachlass, 163, 190 n. 381, and Troutman, *Albrecht Dürer*, 86.

Figure 10. Albrecht Dürer, *Maid and Old Woman of Jan Has*, silverpoint, Musée Condé, Chantilly. © RMN – Grand Palais / Photo by Michel Urtado /Art Resource, NY.
dress of a Dutch maid, her garments are quite different from those of de Has’s servants. Unlike the plain clothing of these women, Katharina’s jewels and moiré jacket are quite luxurious. Furthermore, rather than covering her hair with a cloth in the European manner, she wears a turban, a type of headdress associated with African men. Perhaps Katharina’s garments are meant to suggest both the wealth of the Portuguese Factor and the exoticism of his servant.

Although Dürer sometimes denigrated Africans, that element is absent here. A German catalogue of 1971 argues that Katharina is “ugly according to European notions,” but to my eyes she certainly seems more attractive than the broken-nosed Pfinzing or the crooked-mouthed older servant who appear in the contemporary sketchbook (figs. 7, 10). Furthermore, although Dürer was fascinated by ethnographic costumes and his diary categorizes Katherina as a Moor (“sein morin”), he does not reduce her to a type in his drawing. Whereas he labels a figure in another sketch a Turk, (“ein türgin”), his drawing of Katharina identifies her by name, which is not surprising, considering that he probably knew her, since he was a good friend of her master, whom he visited often. Jean Devisse and Michel Mollat do not err when they characterize the drawing as a “warmly human work of art.”

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40 For African men in turbans, see Kaplan, “Italy, 1490–1700,” 100 (fig. 40), 112 (fig. 45), 114 (fig. 46), 116 (fig. 48), 146 (fig. 70), 169 (fig. 87), and especially Koerner “Epiphany,” 52 (fig. 16).
41 For Dürer’s denigration of Africans, see Koerner “Epiphany,” 85 (fig. 30).
43 For this drawing, see Troutman, *Albrecht Dürer*, 84.
Charles Beale, Jr.’s Sketchbooks

Like Dürer, the English artist Charles Beale, Jr., also drew at least one image of a servant. But unlike Dürer, who was a mature artist with an international reputation when he portrayed Katharina, Beale was young and little known when he sketched his family’s servant. The painter Mary Beale was probably her son’s first art teacher. He then received additional training from the miniaturist Thomas Flatman, and he was further shaped by his father’s art collection, which included works by the Flemish painters Peter Paul Rubens and Anthony van Dyck as well as the Dutch-born portraitists Adriaen Hanneman and Peter Lely. On at least one occasion, Lely, who was a family friend, instructed Beale in painting.

Beale’s sketchbooks, which he filled over the years 1679–80 when he was 19 and 20 years old, consist of two types of drawings, both rendered in red chalk, sometimes reinforced with black. Some are copies of works by other artists (fig. 11), but others are original sketches that are surprisingly free from the conventions of English portrait painting practiced by his mother, his teacher Flatman, and the dominant figure in the field, Lely (figs. 12–20). As numerous scholars have noted, Beale’s original

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46 Charles Beale, Jr., painted some of the draperies and oval sculpted frames that appear in her portraits. See Walpole, Anecdotes, 2. 158; Croft-Murray and Hulton, Catalogue, 1. 148.

47 Walsh and Jeffree, “Mary Beale,” 12.

48 Walpole, Anecdotes, 2. 157.

49 This technique is more common in the Netherlands than in England. See Croft-Murray and Hulton, Catalogue, 1. 149.

50 Croft-Murray and Hulton, Catalogue, 1. 149; Lindsay Stainton and Christopher White, Drawings in England from Hilliard to Hogarth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 214.
drawings seem informal, spontaneous, and full of life. They capture the sitter’s expression and pose with a striking immediacy. His sitters’ eyes are luminous, and their fly-away hair lifelike as Beale focuses on the face of the sitter, leaving the rest sketchy.


Some of the sitters in Beale's original drawings can be identified from his inscriptions: his father Charles Sr.; George Carter, who sold Mary pigments; Carter’s mother, shown smoking a pipe; Thompson Norris, the Beale’s porter, frame maker, and handyman; and Tom’s son and daughter (figs. 12, 14). Scholars have long noted that Beale primarily drew his family and their friends, tradesmen, and servants, rather than his mother’s paying clients. ⁵²

Many drawings in his sketchbooks show girls or young women whose plain dress marks them as members of the working class. But little is known about these figures beyond the names inscribed on some of the sketches.

⁵² Walsh and Jeffree, ”Mary Beale,” 15.
As early as 1898 Laurence Binyon identified eleven of these as portraits of servants, although he argued without justification that they all portrayed the same girl. More recently Anne French identified the servants as Su Jaxon, Mary Waller, “Dowdy,” “Buttermilk,” “Mumping Kate,” and Anne Meeles, also known as “Mumping Nan” (figs. 13, 15–16). But French cited no evidence. Several factors suggest that at least some of these girls and young

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53 Laurence Binyon, Catalogue of Drawings by British Artists and Artists of Foreign Origin working in Great Britain preserved in the British Museum (London: Oxford University Press, 1898), 86.

54 French, “Servants as Artists’ Models,” 106. The OED (1970), vol. 6, 623 and 764, defines “dowdy” as “a woman or girl shabbily or unattractively dressed” and “mumping” as grimacing, begging, or toothless.
women were household servants. First, in England sixty to seventy percent of those aged fifteen to twenty-four worked as live-in servants, and London, where the Beales lived, had the highest concentration, estimated at twenty-five percent of the nation’s total. Furthermore, several of these young women recur multiple times in the sketchbooks, which increases the probability that they lived in the Beale home. For example, one labeled “Dowdy.”

55 See Richardson, Household Servants, 63, who also notes that forty percent of English households had servants (64) and that “Even the poorest of households often had a live-in servant to help with household chores” (64). By comparison, only ten to twenty percent of Dutch homes had servants according to Klaske Muzelaar and Derek Phillips, Picturing Men and Women in the Dutch Golden Age: Paintings and People in Historical Perspective (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 14.
who is recognizable by her thick lips, light-colored eyes, and pronounced overbite, appears in two different sketchbooks dated in two different years. She is shown with a cap looking up to the right (fig. 15); without a cap leaning to the left; reclining on a pillow; bare headed and gazing to the right; looking towards the artist with a slightly open mouth; and asleep (fig. 16).\footnote{For those in the British Museum, dated 1680, see Croft-Murray and Hulton, \textit{Catalogue} (1960), 1. 162–63, nos. 43–47. Others appear in Beale’s first sketchbook, dated 1679, in the Morgan Library, call no. B3 031 A26, record no. 122762, access no. 3. 6–11, fols. 56, 61, and 62.}

Another girl wearing working-class clothes, “Su Jaxon,” is depicted at least
three times (fig. 13). Although many figures in the sketchbooks have dark skin due to Beale’s technique of dense cross-hatching, the texture of one girl’s hair suggests that she is of African descent, which increases the odds that she is a servant (fig. 18). Few black girls or women were brought to early modern England, but most came at a young age to work as domestic slaves.\textsuperscript{58}

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\textsuperscript{57} All are in the British Museum. See Croft-Murray (1960), 164, nos. 50–52.

actions of Beale’s girls and young women vary, but few seem work-related. One sews and another pours a drink, but the rest pet the family cat, sit, or sleep (figs. 16, 17, 19).

Why did Beale draw these girls and women? Certainly working-class sitters were inexpensive and readily available models, and a young artist

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like Beale needed practice in drawing, since he was still perfecting his craft. Vast improvement is noticeable in his sketchbooks over the years 1679–80 (figs. 12, 17). But how are we to interpret these images? If Beale shows a girl smiling broadly does this suggest a genuine bond of affection between sitter and artist, or has Beale asked her to pose this way (figs. 18–19)? Do nine drawings depict working-class girls sleeping because they could ill afford to take time off from their usual duties to pose for him (figs. 16, 17)? Or did they lack private sleeping quarters, as so many servants did, and instead slept in public spaces where Beale could easily see them? Did Beale sketch them without their knowledge? Or did he ask them to pose as

59 Richardson, Household Servants, 97–98.
if they were asleep? Although sleeping maids were often a sign in art of servants’ idleness or laziness (fig. 2), and poor people were sometimes depicted with open mouths to show that they were uncouth, Beale’s sketches do not seem condemnatory. But it is significant that he and other contemporary portraitists do not depict middle- and upper-class sitters asleep or with broad smiles (fig. 11). We must conclude, then, that however refreshing

60 See, for example, Annibale Carracci’s Bean Eater, ca. 1584–85, Rome, Colonna Gallery, and The Master of the Angerer Portraits (Max Reichlich), The Jester, ca. 1519–20, New Haven, Yale University Art Gallery.

61 See, for example, Anna Riehl, The Face of Queenship: Early Modern Representations of Elizabeth I (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2010), 165–66.
Beale’s intimate and informal drawings are to modern viewers, they bear clear markers of these sitters’ working-class status.\textsuperscript{62} Beale lived in a world permeated by an ideology that was invested in seeing the prevalent class hierarchy as natural and ordained, and his drawings, however appealing, are not free of that ideology.

\textsuperscript{62} This is not a gendered issue. Two boys and one man (Carter) are shown asleep in Beale’s sketchbook (Croft-Murray and Hulton, \textit{Catalogue}, 1. 156, 169–71, cat. nos. 14, 78, 83) and two boys are shown smiling (Croft-Murray and Hulton, \textit{Catalogue}, 1. 159–60, 170, cat. nos. 29, 81).
Only one of Beale’s sketches is documented as showing a family servant, that of Susan Gill, their maid (fig. 20).\(^63\) According to the notebook of Mary Beale’s husband, Charles Senior, Gill was paid seventeen shillings, six pence quarterly in the year 1677.\(^64\) She seems to have soon left the Beales’ home.\(^65\) This was typical of young English servants, who generally stayed in a household for only a year and then moved on to another home.\(^66\) Gill, identified by an inscription, is shown in three-quarter length, seated on a chair, wearing a simple dress and a cap with a decorated border, and holding a besom, a broom composed of twigs bound together and attached to a long handle. Here the evidence is a bit stronger to suggest that Beale posed her, since brooms are normally held with the bristles down. Someone used to sweeping would avoid bringing so close to her face and hair the broom’s bristles, which might be dusty and dirty. Perhaps Beale thought of the broom as Gill’s attribute, much as ladies in other portraits hold their fine gloves or finger their pearl necklaces.\(^67\) Beale portrays Gill in a positive manner with no sign of denigration. She seems young, sturdy, and attractive with long lashes and shiny, wavy hair as she gazes off to the right. Another drawing, which Beale labeled “S. Gill,” shows a young woman with a cat named “Poor Puss Bun,” according to the artist’s inscription (fig. 21). This woman, whose facial features do not match the Susan Gill of the first drawing, is perhaps a relative who shares Susan’s first initial and last name. She wears a simple dress but a much more complex head covering.

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\(^63\) In 1676–77 the Beales had another maid, Mary, whom Susan may have replaced. See Barber, “The Drawings of Charles Beale Junior,” 71. Gill is not mentioned in the 1681 account book, but a gap in the account books prevents us from determining when she left the Beale’s employ. See Elizabeth Walsh, “Mrs. Mary Beale, Paintress,” Connoisseur 131 (April 1953): 7.

\(^64\) Stainton and White, Drawings, 217. This was a low salary compared to other servants; see Jeremy Musson, Up and Downstairs (London: John Murray, 2009), 78, and below, the discussion of the portrait of Bridget Holmes.

\(^65\) Stainton and White, Drawings, 216.


\(^67\) See, for example, a portrait, dated 1601, at the Yale Center for British Art, inv. no. B1975.1.9.
Her collar resembles that in a drawing of a kitchen maid by Inigo Jones, designed for a masque in 1638.\(^6^8\)

Beale’s sketches are rooted in the beliefs of his family. Mary and her husband were intellectuals who were friends with clergymen, poets, civil servants, and scientists, including members of the Royal Society.\(^6^9\) Like Charles Jr., these scientists believed in close observation as a means to

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\(^6^9\) Walsh and Jeffree, “Mary Beale,” 12.
achieve “realism, accuracy, and honesty.” The poet Abraham Cowley, in his verse introduction to Thomas Sprat’s *History of the Royal Society*, advised each artist to “before his sight . . . place / the natural and living face.”

Another contemporary author similarly recommended that artists should include moles and scars as well as the “glancing of the eyes, and the effect of laughter on the face.” Beale’s drawings of working-class girls conform to these ideals. Furthermore, Mary and Charles Sr. were Parliamentarians who came from Puritan families, and Puritans valued “honest plainness” in their portraiture.

Beale’s drawings of working-class girls conform to these ideals. Furthermore, Mary and Charles Sr. were Parliamentarians who came from Puritan families, and Puritans valued “honest plainness” in their portraiture.

By 1672 the Beale home, to quote Elizabeth Walsh and Richard Jeffree, was a place where “social barriers seem to have been relaxed, as Mary and her husband entertained courtiers and commoners together.”

Her *Discourse on Friendship*, moreover, written two years before her son filled his sketchbooks, advocated friendships based on equality rather than on the powerful imposing “their owne opinions as Laws, esteeming themselves injured if not punctually obeyed.” It is not surprising, then, that her son’s drawings should treat female servants not as foils for wealthy beauties, not as signs of laziness, but rather as individuals, full of life, and at center stage.

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73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
75 Walsh, “Mrs. Mary Beale, Paintress,” 4.
John Riley’s Bridget Holmes

Dürer and Beale made drawings of servants for their own benefit, but other artists produced oil paintings of servants because they were commissioned to do so. One such painting, dated 1686, is John Riley’s portrait of Bridget Holmes, who was a “Necessary Woman,” that is, the servant responsible for cleaning the king’s privy chamber, which comprised his bedroom, library, study, and toilet (fig. 22). According to Olivia Fryman, Holmes was a lower-ranked court servant who was responsible for “cleaning and laying the fires, dusting and polishing furniture, mopping and sweeping, and emptying and cleaning chamber pots and close stool pans, . . . [and] bed making.” Far from the realm of Beale’s servant girls, Holmes supervised three to four servants who performed the most menial tasks, and although her pay was far beneath that of higher status servants, it was much greater than that of Susan Gill. Whereas Gill was paid £3, 10s a year, Holmes was paid £60 in salary alone, and in addition £10, 10s for her lodgings, and £21, 5s for “all kind of necessaries in lieu of Bills.” According to her tombstone in the north cloister of Westminster Abbey, she was a widow who had served all the English monarchs from Charles I until her death at the age of one hundred in 1690 under William and Mary, that is, for at least thirty-five years. Because the portrait of Bridget Holmes was completed during the brief reign of James II and its earliest provenance is the royal collection,

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77 Riley, a native Englishman, rose to prominence after the death of Lely in 1680. Although his figures sometimes have a wooden quality, his faces are strong, often expressing the interior thoughts and feelings of the sitter. See Christopher Lloyd, *The Queen’s Pictures: Old Masters from the Royal Collection* (London: Royal Collection Enterprises, 1994), 66.


80 See Jodocus Crull, *The Antiquities of St. Peter’s or the Abbey-Church of Westminster*, 4th ed. (London, 1741), 2.163: “Near this another Grave-stone with this Inscription/ Here lies the Body of/ Bridget Holmes, Widow,/ Who died the 23rd of Octob. 1691./ Aged 100 Years on St. Luke’s Eve last,/ And served kin/ Charles I. and II./ King James II. And King William.”
Figure 22. John Riley, *Bridget Holmes*, Royal Collection, Windsor Castle, 1686.
scholars assume that the king commissioned it. The painting is certainly one of Riley’s most important commissions. A rare full-length portrait, over seven feet high, its grand size makes clear that it must have been displayed in one of the more public rooms of a major palace. The portrait is not listed in the inventories of the royal collection undertaken during James’s reign. However, the sections of this inventory for Whitehall Palace, the main residence of the English monarchs in London, were compiled in

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81 James reigned from 1685 to 1688. Riley’s portrait of Holmes is first mentioned at Windsor Castle in the inventories of Queen Anne (r. 1702–14). At first it was kept in storage, but soon it was granted a prominent position over the fireplace in the prince’s eating room. See Millar, *The Tudor, Stuart, and Early Georgian Pictures*, 1.140; Anne French and Giles Waterfield, “Loyal Servants,” in Waterfield and French, eds., *Below Stairs: 400 Years of Servants’ Portraits*, 69; Andrew Barclay, “The Inventories of the English Royal Collection, temp. James II,” *Journal of the History of Collections* 22.1 (2010), 5–6.
1685, before the portrait was painted.\textsuperscript{82} It is quite possible, then, that this painting was commissioned for one of the new apartments being built by James at Whitehall just about this time.\textsuperscript{83} Its importance is underlined not only by its large size, but also by its two inscriptions, which indicate the artist’s name and profession, the date of the work, and the sitter’s name and age, 96 years.\textsuperscript{84}

The painting shows Holmes wearing a plain red skirt, black jacket, and white sleeves, cap, neckerchief, and apron, much like the garments worn by the female servants in the middle ground of Gillis van Tilborgh’s \textit{The Tichbourne Dole}.

\textsuperscript{85} Her apron is pinned up at her waist, however, a motif that recurs in contemporary English art in dummy boards showing a woman sweeping and a drawing of a servant supervising the slaughter of a fowl (fig. 24).\textsuperscript{86} The apron’s function in these cases is to protect the servant’s skirt. The white apron is raised to keep it sparklingly clean while the maid performs a messy task. The position of Holmes’ apron, then, suggests that she is at work, a fact confirmed by the long-handled brush with stiff bristles that she brandishes towards a page who peeks at her from behind a curtain.\textsuperscript{87}

\textsuperscript{82} Barclay, “Inventories,” 5–6, 10.

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 10.


\textsuperscript{85} The painting, dated 1671, is in Tichborne House in Alresford.


\textsuperscript{87} Oliver Millar deems the cleaning tool a broom; see \textit{The Tudor, Stuart, and Early Georgian Pictures}, 1. 140. By contrast, Ellis Waterhouse terms it a mop. See \textit{Painting in Britain, 1530–1790} (London and Baltimore: Penguin, 1953), 137. It does not resemble a mop in the print \textit{Betty the cook maid’s head drest} (London: W. Humphreys, 1776). Christopher Lloyd, \textit{The Queen’s Pictures}, correctly terms it “the brush that is the attribute of her duties” (66). For the elite close stools, see Lawrence Wright, \textit{Clean and Decent: The History of the Bath and Loo} (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), 50; Mark Girouard, \textit{A Country House Companion} (New Haven: Yale University Press,
Figure 24. English, *Dummy Board of Woman Sweeping*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, ca. 1640.
According to Olivia Fryman, the Necessary Women of the English monarchs were skilled workers. For this reason, they focused on those chores requiring expertise, such as cleaning fragile and costly furnishings, and left to their assistants more menial tasks, such as removing ashes from fireplaces. The Necessary Women probably emptied and cleaned the chamber pots and close stools, since this required great care so as to avoid “splashes or spillages” or crossing paths with high-ranked servants and visitors in the hall or on the backstairs. Necessary Women were highly valued because they contributed to the health and comfort of the king by keeping his rooms clean, because they saved money by maintaining valuable furnishings in good condition, and because they could be trusted to keep secret those intimate details that they might learn in the course of performing their duties. As Fryman concludes, although the practices of Necessary Women “are seemingly everyday and mundane, they were nevertheless a vital underpinning for the use of the royal bedchambers as a space in which royal power was expressed and as a home where comfort and respite could be sought.”

Riley does not show Holmes carrying a chamber pot or making beds. Instead she holds a round-haired, long-handled whisk of the type that was used to reach high up, to clean ceilings, wall hangings, and curtains, such as the one portrayed near Holmes. This chore was normally performed by cleaners other than Necessary Women. In fact the setting for the painting is not the privy rooms, but rather a terrace. Much like Susan Gill, Bridget Holmes holds a cleaning tool that serves as her attribute (fig. 20).

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88 Fryman, 215, 216.
89 Ibid., 239.
90 Ibid., 204, 230.
As scholars have long recognized, Riley, or perhaps his patron, envisioned this painting as a parody of fashionable Baroque portraits.\textsuperscript{91} By incongruously inserting a housekeeper with her brush into a grandiose setting, Riley aimed to produce a comic effect. Holmes stands before a magnificently draped, richly patterned, fringed and lined curtain and beside a large vase filled with flowers. Decorated with dancing nymphs, the vase is a variant of one in Cherubino Alberti’s engraving, dated 1582, after a fresco painted by Polidoro in the 1520s.\textsuperscript{92} Below the vase is a heroic relief of Roman soldiers, and Holmes’s act of brandishing her brush is meant to be mock heroic (fig. 23).\textsuperscript{93}

But within the parameters of this parody, Riley grants Holmes great dignity. He shows her firmly gripping the brush with strong arms and standing with an erect posture despite her advanced age. Furthermore, Riley paints Holmes with a far-off, introspective expression. As Ellis Waterhouse notes, this is “amongst the most sympathetic portraits of this depressing period. . . . Riley was most at home below stairs.”\textsuperscript{94} Indeed, in part due to this successful commission, Riley was appointed royal painter two years later.

One reason why James commissioned a portrait of Holmes was that her advanced age was unusual and noteworthy. Her age is inscribed on her portrait in part for that reason. Most portraits of older women show them at around age sixty, which is not surprising considering that a seventeenth-century sixty-year-old Englishwoman could expect to live only another twelve years.\textsuperscript{95} A woman of 96 would, then, have been quite unusual.

\textsuperscript{91} Christopher Lloyd, \textit{The Queen’s Pictures: Royal Collectors through the Ages} (London: National Gallery, 1991), 112, states that she is “playing a game with a Page of the Downstairs.” She does not seem amused, however. Nor does she glance at the page or advance towards him.


\textsuperscript{93} The subject has never been identified. The relief shows one figure raising a sword threateningly, the central seated soldier grabbing another warrior’s arm, and a man lying on the ground, his arm reaching up.

\textsuperscript{94} Waterhouse, \textit{Painting in Britain}, 135, 137.

\textsuperscript{95} See, for example, in Roy Strong, \textit{The English Icon: Elizabethan and Jacobean Portraiture} (London: Routledge & Kegan and New York: Pantheon, 1969), 209, 231, for
But, as Anne French and Giles Waterfield justly observe, Holmes was also painted because of her long years of service: “The central motivation of servant portraits is loyalty. This is an old concept of loyalty, derived from the medieval idea of lord and vassal. . . . It was expected that these bonds would be equally strong on either side: the vassal or servant served his lord . . . and in return the master protected his servant, looked after his interests and regarded him as a member of his extended family.”96 Their prime example of a portrait of the ideal loyal servant, before capitalism transformed that role into a short-term contract worker, is that of the long-serving, elderly Bridget Holmes. As French and Waterfield relate, Holmes “must also have stood out as one of a minority of women employed in a royal household which had recently undergone extensive retrenchments.”97 Especially since R. C. Richardson concludes that “long service among servants, especially maidservants, was not the norm,” it is remarkable that the only known commissioned portrait of a female servant shows such a woman.98

This work is also telling for another reason. This portrait aligns with the political ideals of James II. Holmes had served the Stuart line through tumultuous times, from Charles I to Charles II and James II. For this reason, it was not simply the length of time that she had served, but also her extraordinary loyalty to the royal family that gave her pride of place among James’s servants. Little is known about the art patronage of James II, but he did commission a similar, full-length portrait a year later of the Chinese Jesuit Shen Fu-Tsung, which, like that of Bridget Holmes, is often

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96 French and Waterfield, “Loyal Servants,” 57. See also Rosemary Horrox, “Service,” in Rosemary Horrox, ed., Fifteenth-Century Attitudes: Perceptions of Society in Late Medieval England (Cambridge, 1994), 61–78. Note Orlando’s words in William Shakespeare’s As You Like It, act 2, scene 3: “O good old man! How well in thee appears / The constant service of the antique world, / When service sweat for duty, not for meed! / Thou are not for the fashion of these times, / Where none will sweat but for promotion.”

97 French and Waterfield, “Loyal Servants,” 69. For cutbacks in the number of servants, see also Cunnington, Costume of Household Servants, 8.

98 Richardson, Household Servants, 76.
dismissed as a mere curiosity.\textsuperscript{99} James displayed this work at Windsor, in his presence chamber, the room in which he received guests and assemblies.\textsuperscript{100} Since by this time James had converted to Catholicism, this pair of publicly displayed, full-length, life-size portraits must have represented to James and to his petitioners his twin ideals of loyalty to the sovereign and to the Catholic faith.

But there may be another reason why Bridget Holmes was the first housekeeper to be the subject of an independent portrait. Mark Girouard notes that at the end of the seventeenth century, country houses underwent major architectural changes. He writes of the “revolutionary invention of backstairs — and of closets and servants’ rooms attached to them. . . . The gentry walking up the stairs no longer met their last night’s faeces coming down them. Servants no longer bedded down in the drawing room, or outside their master’s door or in a truckle bed at his feet. They became, if not invisible, very much less visible” (fig. 25).\textsuperscript{101} Sir Roger North, who wrote an architectural treatise in the late seventeenth century, advised that a house should be planned so that “your freinds [sic] and persons of esteem should pass without being annoyed by the sight of foul persons. . . . [The house should be] so contrived . . . that the ordinary servants may never publicly appear in passing to and fro.”\textsuperscript{102} Indeed at this time servants began to dine separately from their master and sleep in attic garrets.\textsuperscript{103} A full-length, life-size portrait of Holmes would have made her image visible at just the time when real servants of her class were becoming less visible.


\textsuperscript{100} Barclay, “Inventories,” 5.


\textsuperscript{102} See Musson, \textit{Up and Downstairs}, 86–87, and 54 for the quotation.

Another servant portrayed for similar reasons, Alice George, was a laundress or bedmaker of Wadham College, Oxford University. She was interviewed by three distinguished contemporaries: the Oxford antiquary William Fulman, the diarist Anthony Wood, and the philosopher and physician John Locke (figs. 26–27). These sources record George's

Figure 25. Backstairs, Nether Lypiatt Manor, Gloucestershire.

**Alice George**

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maiden name, birthplace, husband’s name, the age of death of her parents and grandmother, her age at marriage (thirty), the number of her children (ten sons, five daughters) and grandchildren (thirty-nine), her favorite foods (cheese, bread, butter, ale, and roasting pig), and the year of her death (1691). They further agree that her eyesight and mental capacities were intact despite her advanced age, but they disagree as to her exact birth date, and Wood suggests why. After she turned one hundred, he relates, “shee doubled every yeare.” George informed Locke that “she was able to have reaped as much in a day as a man, and had as much wages,” which suggests that she had not always been a domestic servant. William Huddesford’s

Figure 26. William Sonmans, Alice George, Wadhum College, University of Oxford, Oxford.

106 King, The Life and Letters of John Locke, 131.
edition of Wood’s biography, published some ninety years after George’s

Her legendary status is confirmed by three portraits that were made of her. A portrait by William Sonnans, which is just under two and a half feet high, has been in the possession of Wadham College for centuries and is reported to have been donated by the artist (fig. 26).\footnote{For the portrait of Alice George, see William Combe, A History of the University of Oxford, Its Colleges, Halls, and Public Buildings (London: R. Ackerman, 1814), 2.162; Walpole, Anecdotes, 2. 520; Jackson, Wadham College, 149–50; Catalogue of a Loan

\begin{figure}
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\caption{Bernard Lens II, after M. Powell, Alice George, mezzotint, National Portrait Gallery, London, ca. 1670.}
\end{figure}
another connection to the college; he also painted portraits of its founders. A second portrait, a print by Bernard Lens II, is copied after a painting by Martin Powell, now lost (fig. 27). Sonmans’ portrait shows George with arms placidly folded before her, but Lens’s print and presumably Powell’s painting depict more ragged clothes and what is presumably laundry held over her arms, perhaps her attribute as laundress or bedmaker. Like Bridget Holmes, her extraordinary age goes a long way in explaining the existence of these portraits. These images further demonstrate that servitude was not always a temporary stage that girls and young women went through before marriage.

Women bedmakers were employed at the college, but they were required to be “ancient women of good report,” according to a statute of 1649–50. Presumably younger women and those of ill repute were thought to be too tempting for the college’s male students. In short,

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Combe, A History of the University of Oxford, 2. 162. Combe reports that he saw the portrait of Alice George in the college’s Common Room.

For Martin Powell, see Poole, Catalogue of Portraits, vol. 3, part 3, 218. A portrait of Alice George, perhaps the one painted by Powell, was in the possession of a “Gentleman” of New College, Oxford, in 1772; see Anthony Wood, The Life of Anthony à Wood from the Year 1632 to 1672, Written by Himself (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1772), 255. This “Gentleman” was later identified as George Huddesford; see Clark, ed., The Life and Times of Anthony Wood, 3. 367 n. 3. Poole, Catalogue of Portraits, 218, relates that “Another and older picture of mother George inscribed matrona george æetat suae 120. mar. powell pinxit is in the possession of Miss Strangways, of Shapwick, near Bridgwater.” For William Sonmans, see F. M. O’Donoghue, rev. Arianne Burnette, “Sonmans [Sunman], William [Willem],” in Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, 51. 630.


Jackson, Wadham College, 150 n. 2. In 1893 it hung in the Common Room opposite the window.
George’s age lent honor to the college, and Sonmans’ version, displayed there, would have made this virtue visible. By showing older women rather than young and attractive ones, the portraits of Bridget Holmes and Alice George performed the cultural work of counteracting an embarrassing reality: female servants and slaves were, in fact, often sexually harassed, seduced, and even raped by their masters.113

Conclusions

Jan Siberechts’ painting of Wollaton Hall, commissioned by its owner, Sir Thomas Willoughby, emphasizes his magnificent house and gardens, but includes white laundry in the distance, spread out over a field and surrounding bushes, bleaching in the sun (figs. 28–29).114 The laundress, however, is gone. This detail seems emblematic of the problems that arise when studying household servants. Do the portraits discussed in this article reveal only the desires of their artists and patrons? I would argue instead that they enable us to move beyond the generalized images of servants that art historians usually discuss. Along with their written words, these portraits allow us to see servants as individuals — white or black, young or old, poor or more comfortable, who work with a besom, brush, or


Figure 28. Jan Siberechts, Wollaton Hall and Park, Nottinghamshire, Paul Mellon Collection, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, 1697.
bed linens. These portraits clearly mark their sitters as domestic workers, yet despite the ideology in which they are embedded, they are still largely positive images that show the sitter at center stage and not as a negative foil or sign. If they play a role in a morality play, they stand for such traits as loyalty and honor, not laziness. Furthermore, if the backstairs, servants’ quarters, and Siberechts’ laundry are signs of the desire to keep the servant invisible, then the portraits that this article has explored serve, by contrast, as visual traces of the lives that they once lived.