

A Driving Force. On the Rhetoric of Images and Power

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An Exercise of Style and Power Hans Holbein the Younger and the Painted Facade of the Hertenstein House in Lucerne (1517)

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Abstract The exercise of power through art will be presented with the case of the Hertenstein house in Lucerne (Switzerland), whose decoration was destroyed in 1825. Owner and patron Jakob von Hertenstein (1460-1527) asserted his authority in the city with signs of prestige. The facade's exterior embellishment, done by Hans Holbein the Younger, is based on a complex set of visual means underpinned by political rhetoric (*exempla, Gesta romanorum*, heraldry). Faux architecture builds rapport and expresses the owner's ethics. Hertenstein linked himself to Caesar's grandeur with a variation on Mantegna's Triumphs of Caesar, painted for the Marquis of Mantua.

Keywords Painted facade. Lucerne. Holbein. Power. Rhetoric.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 A Patron, a Talented Artist and a Blank Canvas. – 3 The Iconography: Between Antiquity and Modernity. – 4 The Iconographical Message. – 5 For a Rhetoric of Power. – 6 Conclusion: Imitation, Opulence and Influence.

Doing and making things appear: "Things do not happen because of what they are, but because of what they appear to be. To be worth and to know how to show it is to be worth twice. What is not seen is as if it were not".

Baltasar Gracián, *El oráculo manual y arte de la prudencia*, 1647

1 Introduction

The imminent destruction in 1825 of the Hertenstein house (Lucerne), decorated by Hans Holbein the Younger, precipitated the urge of art amateurs to gather as much information from the house as possible. At the end of the nineteenth century, Schneller (1873), Vögelin (1884-87) and von Liebenau (1888) looked at the history of the Hertenstein family and of the house itself with a timid attempt to put in relation the iconographic composition with the organization of the walls and windows. The question of attribution is addressed at the end of the century by Woltmann (1864) and La Roche (1884-87). The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed a shift in the research with Schmid (1913) organizing the documents available (drawings or letters mentioning the house) and bringing some elements of explanation, like a supposed travel of Holbein from Lucerne to Italy.¹ The research is refined in terms of stylistic discourse: Hugelshofer's research (1929) shows that Holbein's formative years in Augsburg were put into practice by the skilful application of Renaissance innovations on facades. Most of the following research focus on the decoration via copies before the house's destruction.² Later, scholars will discuss influence and innovation of the iconography (Salvini 1984; Azzi Visentini 1986).³ The focus on the patron's ambition and desire is a breakthrough in research (Jehle-Schulte Strathaus 1985; Bättschmann 1989). Eventually, an important exhibition is organized in Lucerne in 1992, giving the opportunity to researchers to publish extensively on Holbein (Hermann, Hesse, Wechsler 1992; Weder 1992), raising anew the interest for the Hertenstein Haus (Hermann, Hesse 1993). This article follows in the footsteps of Bättschmann (1989) and Hermann and Hesse (1993), launching the debate on communication

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1 See Gauthiez (1897-98) and Ganz (1909) for presence in Italy, paternity of present works and influences.

2 See Lauber 1942; 1962; Reinle 1954; Riedler 1978.

3 See Salvini 1984; Azzi Visentini 1986 for Holbein's travel to Italy and circulation of motifs.

between the materiality of the facade and the dynamism of the decoration, serving the client's purposes.

The case study here presented will be the entry point and conducting line to apprehend the way the patron (Hertenstein, influential nobleman and skilful politician) and the artist (Holbein, promising painter) work together to establish an image of the self in the urban landscape to assert his power while Renaissance ideas are circulating via important centres. The iconographic themes will reveal Hertenstein's intentions: probity, legacy, and influence. Besides, the porosity of spaces and points of encounter in terms of image and culture highlight the dialogue between painting and architecture.

2 A Patron, a Talented Artist and a Blank Canvas

The Hertenstein family is one of the ancient Swiss patrician families that have played a key role in Switzerland's political and cultural history (Herman, Hesse 1993, 173): the family counted many dignitaries,⁴ contributing to several of the country's most important peace treaties and taking part in the Diet in the name of Lucerne in the sixteenth century. The family wished to preserve its history, but a series of fires⁵ at the end of the fifteenth century (von Liebenau 1888, 1-3) destroyed one of the precious family archives. This loss shows just how important the House of Hertenstein was to this notable family, whose reputation Jakob wished to perpetuate: in this way, the frescoes presented here are a 'concreteness of image' which, when affixed to stone, become a chronicle-monument at the service of the family's posterity. Jakob von Hertenstein (1460-1527) was a prominent merchant and rentier who held crucial political positions, including Grand Councilor in 1485 and Councilor from 1486 until his death. He was also Treasurer (1514-19) and Provost (1516-19). From 1502, he was a member of the Diet on several occasions, and his skilful alliances through four marriages enabled him not only to make a fortune but also to participate in the political life of the city and the country (Klinger, Hoetler 1998, 267).

Lucerne was a prosperous city due to its position and expansion between the fourteenth and sixteenth century. Noble and powerful families, such as the Hertenstein's, played an important role in the emergence of the city of Lucerne as they were confronted with

⁴ Twenty Grand Councilors, thirteen Councilors, three Governors General and three Provosts. See von Liebenau 1888, 2; Messmer, Hoppe 1976, 13-23; Lischer 2006.

⁵ Fire at Caspar von Hertenstein's house (Lucerne, 1481) and Buonas Castle (near Zug, 1478).



Figure 1 Benedikt von Hertenstein, *Hans Holbein the Younger*, 1517.
Oil and gold on paper mounted on wood, 51.4 × 37.1 cm.
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, no. inv.06.1038

foreign and domestic political turmoil (Walter 2016, 65-71).⁶ As a result, they took part in the campaigns, assuming leading positions.⁷ Furthermore, the economic expansion of the city, via the entry of booty and later in the fifteenth century, via pay and pensions, followed the military victories. Thus, some families switched careers, moving from trading to banking, for instance. This special position in the city life also implied a more central voice in the affairs of the city when it came to active participations in political events, a status that they wished to pass on to their offspring (Messmer, Hoppe 1976, 16-17).

Hans Holbein the Younger,⁸ was born in Augsburg, Bavaria, in 1497. This city was the creative cradle of many influential Renaissance artists, such as Albrecht Dürer, Martin Schongauer, Hans Burgkmair and the Holbeins, particularly the young Hans, who encountered the world of painting from an early age.⁹ In 1515, he went to Basel as an apprentice to the Basel painter Hans Herbster. There, he developed his knowledge of engraving, in the company of his brother Ambrosius, and even received the honour of drawing in the margins of a copy of Erasmus's *In Praise of Folly* (Buck 1999, 10-13; Bättschmann, Griener 2014, 15-16), who was himself interested in this artist and commissioned him to illustrate his work. Two years later, father and son went to Lucerne to paint the interior and exterior of Jakob von Hertenstein's residence. During the winter of the same year, Holbein the Younger might have travelled to Milan,¹⁰ where he could have been in contact with Andrea Mantegna's cartoons and engravings on the theme of Caesar's Triumphs. The influence of the Italian Renaissance, which Holbein had experienced first-hand, became apparent, but he was able to free himself from it in his works, producing pieces which demonstrated of his ability to incorporate ideas and make them his (Wilson 1996, 65): it may be said that Holbein the Younger was a link between the Northern and Southern Renaissance. Holbein, evolving in the rich and inspirational cultural cluster of Augsburg, known for its painted facades (Buff 1886, 58-9; Riedler 1978, 25-6), demonstrated virtuosity by painting the portrait of Benedikt von Hertenstein [fig. 1], Jakob's eldest son. With the portrait, Holbein showed his sensitivity to the Italian style: a three-quarter view, in a less formal pose, looking at the viewer (Wilson 1996, 61-2). In the background, there is a frieze showing a triumph, directly

6 Battle of Ravenna (1512), Battle of Marignano (1515).

7 The Hertenstein men will be present in the Marignan Battle (1515) and the Pavia battle (1525).

8 For an extensive collection of research on Holbein the Younger: Michael 1997.

9 See Wilson 1996, 9-32; Bättschmann, Griener 2014, 7-8.

10 For a discussion on Holbein's presence in Italy, see Wilson (1996, 64-5), Bättschmann, Griener (2014, 109-12).

inspired by Mantegna's *Triumphs of Caesar* (Buck 2001, 60-3),¹¹ a theme chosen by Holbein to highlight Benedikt's victories in Swiss campaigns¹² (von Liebenau 1888, 150; Ainsworth, Waterman 2013, 131). The painting underlines the prestige of the House of Hertenstein (Bätschmann, Griener 2014, 210). Besides, this double use of the same motive connects the interior (the face of Benedikt superimposing over the frieze) and the exterior of Jakob's house, the building as extension of his persona. The theme of Caesar's Triumphs had already been treated by Mantegna, between 1486 and 1492, for the Marquis Francesco Gonzaga in his palace of Mantua.¹³ This material from the court of the Gonzagas, to materialize the triumph of the Prince, can be seen as an imperial theme, which can be paralleled with the Diet of Constance, where the Empire sought advice from the notables on military, political and judicial matters, and in which the town of Lucerne and, by extension, the Hertenstein family took part.

The city of Lucerne enjoyed an attractive position on the river Reuss, with a rocky plateau on the right bank, leading to the Monastery of Im Hof in addition to well-developed connections for mercantilism thanks to the creation of bridges and the setting up of a weekly market. The city is also a crossing point from Basel to Italy via the Lake of Lucerne and the Gotthard Pass. The house is located on the Kapellplatz, a few steps from the Kapellbrücke, a fourteenth-century medieval wooden bridge spanning the River Reuss to the Chapel of Saint Peter. This was Lucerne's central point for trade from the north to Italy, as the town had a busy port where goods were loaded for distant lands or arrived in Switzerland before being transported inland. The city continued to expand from around 1300 to the sixteenth century when we started having depiction of the city, notably Martin Martini's bird's eye engraving, dating of 1596 and with details of luxurious town houses, such as the one belonging to Jakob von Hertenstein and built in 1510 (Manetsch 2013, 399-401). [fig. 2] Moreover, this panoptic map of Lucerne also shows the importance of the city by means of a multiplication of coats of arms of the local patrician families in the lower part, the upper part surmounted by a phylactery held by angels, placing the city under the auspices of the protecting divinity. Hertenstein, being an influential man, used the central area after crossing the bridge to stage the story of his family, until the building's destruction in 1825. The only surviving traces

11 Andrea Mantegna, *The Triumphs of Caesar*, 1484-92, tempera on linen canvas, 268 × 278 cm (for each painting), Hampton Court Palace, London, inv. 403961.

12 Benedikt von Hertenstein (ca. 1495-1522) served with Swiss Mercenaries and died on April 27, 1522, during the Battle of Bicocca.

13 Bätschmann 1989, 2-4; Wilson 1996, 64-5; Campbell 2002, 91-105; Bätschmann, Griener 2014, 108-12.

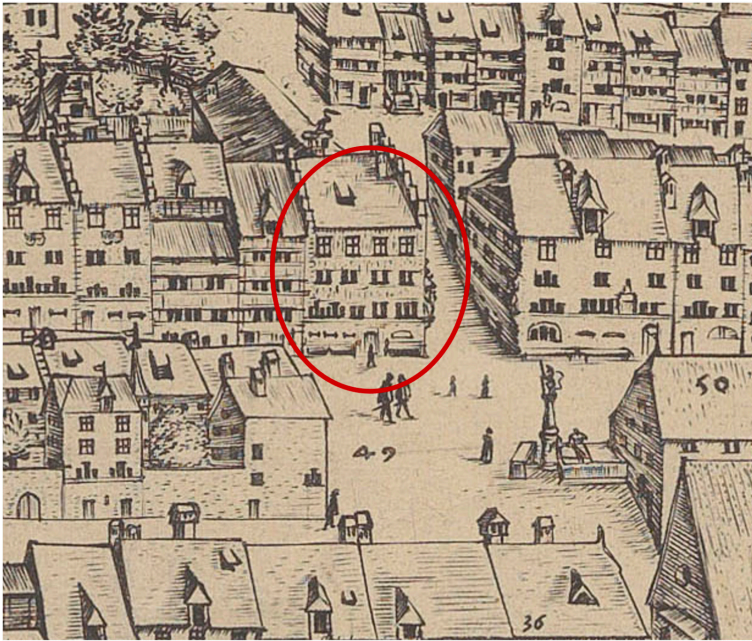


Figure 2 Martin Martini (1566-1610), *Map of the city of Lucerne*, 1597. Detail of the map showing the Hertensteinshaus. Staatsarchiv Luzern, no. inv. PL 5255/1-3

are watercolours and letters from members of the Fine Arts Society describing the decoration and a few drawings by Holbein.¹⁴ On top of being strategically placed, this house was of particular importance because it allowed its owner to establish his prestige physically in an urban frame. The house as a *domus* is not just a material construction but also a social entity, represented by the owner, or *dominus*.¹⁵ The building becomes an open book telling the story of the family through chosen compositions and figures, developed, and painted by Holbein, and which will translate the ambition of the Hertensteins. Thus, family values and the power of ancestry are portrayed on the facade, which remains an ambivalent and highly porous place: it is not only a wall, but also a metaphorical projection surface on which

¹⁴ For a thorough account of the history of the house until its destruction: Schneller (1873), Vögelin (1884-87) and von Liebenau (1888); Herman, Hesse 1993, 173-5; Buck 1999, 20.

¹⁵ Cicero in *De officiis* (44 BC): *nec domo dominus, sed domino domus honestanda est*. The house is fit to the master inhabiting it, underlining the relationship existing between the house (*domus*) and the building (*dominus*). See Benveniste 1969, 300-4; Richard 1971, 759, Koering 2016, 196.



Figure 3
Albert Landerer, *Facade of the Hertensteinhaus*. 1871.
Watercolour,
55.5 × 68 cm. Prints
and Drawings Department,
Basel Art Museum,
no. inv. 1871.1.a

oppositions between private and public, inside/outside or past/present/future are played out while being also an outer face, with the associated lexicon (Koering 2016, 215).¹⁶

After having his house built in 1510 in the vibrant centre of Lucerne, Jakob von Hertenstein called on the Holbein family to decorate it: the works took place between 1517 and 1519. Holbein the Elder, a respected artist, travelled to Lucerne and asked his two sons to help him. The father was responsible for the interior decoration, while the sons, notably Holbein the Younger, oversaw the exterior with mainly public themes (Bätschmann, Griener, 2014, 104-5). The relationship between private (inside) and public (outside) is highlighted by the decoration and the choice of corresponding iconographic themes, and thus the private is made public. The Hertenstein House decoration was one of a kind in terms of innovation and decoration, thanks to Holbein and Hertenstein's vision. Indeed, from the end of the Middle Ages and until the beginning of the nineteenth century, the decoration was mainly religious, with depictions of the Virgin Mary or Saints related to the activity of the house. Furthermore, distinctive characteristics were used to signal the house: we would

¹⁶ Alberti (1443-52) uses the word *cortex*, referring to the vegetal world while Vasari (1550) and Aretino (1538) think of facade as a face, *faccia* in Italian, making parallels with facial features.

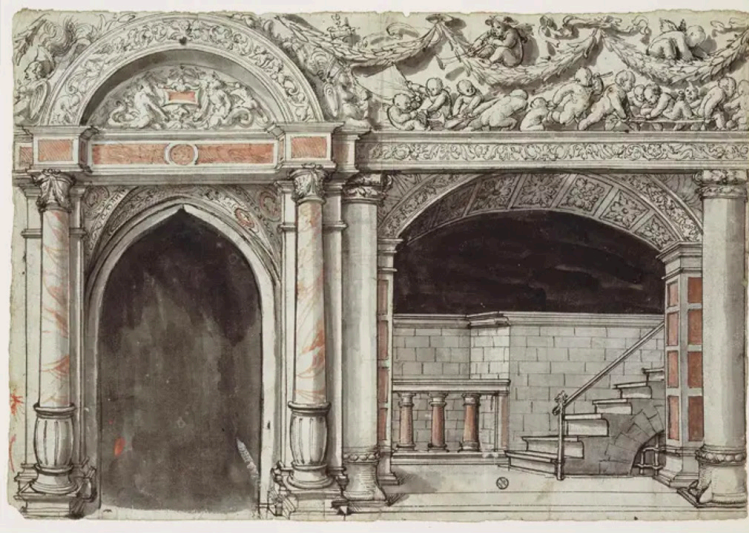


Figure 4 Hans Holbein the Younger, *Drawing for the Ground Floor of the Hertenstein House in Lucerne*, ca. 1517-18. Pen drawing in brown and black ink, grey wash, 30.9 × 44.4. Basel Art Museum, no. inv. 1662.131

find house signs, coats of arms or symbols of the trade in place. The peculiarity of the Hertenstein House resides also in the fact that few buildings offered such a surface to deploy a grand iconographic programme and that few artists were able to complete such a monumental task. This adds to the prestige of the house and to Hertenstein, who knew how to get the best out of exercising power in his city (Hermann, Hesse 1993, 180-1).

3 The Iconography: Between Antiquity and Modernity

On the ground floor, Holbein's sketch shows a *trompe-l'œil* to the right of the front door [figs 3-4].¹⁷ This interplay of perspectives and illusions greatly enriches this apparently simple ground floor and now invites passers-by to enter, if only in spirit. These partial openings fire our imagination to recreate spaces on the other side of the wall. The illusion is created by the representation of columns judiciously placed in the foreground, bringing out the panelled arch that stands

¹⁷ For records of the facade decoration and further details, see Schwegler's (1870) one image per plate, Landerer's (1871) building in its entirety, Schmid (1913). See Riedler 1978, 149-50; Hesse 1999, 20. Original sketches: Holbein's ground floor and Leaina before the Judges (1517-18). See Schmid 1913, 173-206; Riedler 1978, 15-38, 134-7; Bättschmann, Griener 2014, 107-14.

out against the pillars and steps (Bätschmann, Griener 2014, 112-13). Holbein's sketches indicate that the painter would have drawn on the border motifs of architectural prints for printed books, such as the *Isagoge in musicen* by Henrich Glareanus (1516). Similar motifs can be found in the friezes of the Hertenstein house, particularly the putti on the facade, discussed later in this article.

On the first level are mock statues, in *grisaille*, representing the Virtues. On this facade, there are three of them: Prudence (cardinal virtue), Fortitude (cardinal virtue) and Hope (theological virtue) (Heinz-Morh 1971, 294-5; Riedler 1978, 21). By personifying the virtues, Holbein enables Hertenstein to legitimize his position within society, because, if we follow the reasoning of a facade-face, the virtues presented are an extension of his personality, making him fit to govern in the eyes of the population. The scenes with the battle of young boys, on the right above the windows on the first level, and the putti on the left, evoke passions. According to Dempsey (2001, 63-4), these playful cherubs are akin to fleeting thoughts, moments of panic or uncontrolled desires. The notable therefore needs to control or eliminate them to govern well. Moreover, the dynamic serves a formal goal: the putti surround the building, creating a subtle *gestaltist* link, between form and meaning, subject and architectonic use.

The main scene, in the centre of the facade, is an episode taken from the *Gesta romanorum*, a medieval work of legends compiled in Latin in the late thirteenth/early fourteenth century (*Dictionnaire des lettres françaises*; Bätschmann, Griener 2014, 107), the German edition of which was published in Augsburg in 1489. This story was mainly depicted in the Middle Ages and Renaissance in the form of illuminated manuscripts, which were later engraved or painted (Stechow 1942, 213-23; Riedler 1978, 21). In this episode, three sons must compete in a shoot-out over their father's corpse to prove who will be the rightful heir to the throne. The last son, the most loyal, reveals himself by refusing to shoot the body. The presence of this theme, associated with the noble exercise of arms, is a warning from the owner to his children: you must be the one to respect your father.¹⁸ The moment Holbein chose to depict is that of the legitimate son emerging as he breaks the bow and refuses to take part in this challenge. The depiction extended, unlike the others, to the first-floor windows, is the largest image on the entire facade. Holbein succeeded in conveying the family's desire for transparency.¹⁹ In the foreground, a man, his face hidden by a column, is leaning against a

¹⁸ See *Gesta romanorum* (Oesterley 1872, 91).

¹⁹ There is a sense of warning from the patriarchal power, hence the importance of understanding the notion of *home* from an anthropological point of view in relation to kinship structures.

false ledge to take part in the scene, like the viewer. Normally the gaze is directed from the inside (fiction) to the outside (the 'reality' of the street) (Serlio 1537): the spectator in the street is fictionalized and takes part in the *gesta*. It's all about aiming, not seeing. Panofsky (1975, 161-2) argues that the use of perspective draws the viewer nearer to what it is to be seen and draws a focus on the abolition of distance: perspective creates a distance between man and things. But in return it abolishes this distance by bringing into the human eye that world of things whose autonomous existence was asserted in front of man. On the right, a curtain pulled back next to the old man indicates the privilege to access this family scene in the loggia: the private/public discourse extends out into the street through this space, which acts as a buffer between the two spheres.

Jakob von Hertenstein perhaps had a particular reason for issuing this warning, with the story of the three sons, being the crux of the entire facade, making it very performative: this fictitious opening contributed to the readability of the message. Having married four times with offspring each time (Klinger, Hoetler 1998, 267), the central image was between the family coat of arms, revealing a desire for continuity between the history of the family, Lucerne, and the owners, who, through their virtues, are well-placed to serve the *res publica*, the common good.²⁰ The coats of arms are double, a characteristic often found in Switzerland (Hartmann 1956, 53-62), particularly on stained-glass windows or everyday objects, such as plates or cake moulds (Koering 2021, 193-201, 251-66, 435-9). The coats of arms of the facade evoke the unions of Jakob von Hertenstein (gold with lion sable) at different times in his life, from left to right: Hertenstein and Seevogel 1489, Hertenstein and Mangolt 1495, Hertenstein and von Wattenwyl 1512 and Hertenstein and von Hallwyl 1514 (DHS; Riedler 1978, 21-2, 150).

The Triumphs of Caesar cycle covers the entire space between the second and third floors. In the vertical continuity of the windows framing the scenes, the artist has chosen to extend the frames with engaged columns to give the story a multi-episodic rhythm, as in Serlio's theatrical model, where the architectural elements "articulate, subdivide and even enlarge the space".²¹ The figures move from right to left, to reproduce the movement of the procession coming from the lake gate where the Swiss soldiers disembarked on their return from Italy and entered the city, heading towards the town hall and the town centre. Holbein drew direct inspiration from the cycle

²⁰ Maggi 1998, 13; Burroughs 2002, 14-15; Pastoureau 2004, 249-54; Belting 2011, 63-83; Koering 2013, 66-7.

²¹ "Perspective is used to represent, by means of artificial lines, all the things - as Vitruvius also says - to be found in a place" (Scamozzi 1615, 47).



Figure 5 Hans Holbein the Younger (workshop of), *Mary and Child*. 1519. Preparatory drawing on paper, ink, chalk, grey wash and white highlights, 42.2 × 46.6. Basel Art Museum, no. in.v 1662.36

of Mantegna, one of the first Italians to translate these paintings into engravings, popularizing this technique and enabling a wider distribution and exchange of motifs, associated with a new link being created between engraving and painting. As for the theme of triumph, during the Renaissance, it was highly valued because, according to Campbell, it was part of a *translatio imperii*: the relocation of material culture, the superiority of the City.²²

From right to left, in the direction of the procession's entrance, Holbein has partially taken up these themes. The difference between the work of Mantegna and Holbein lies in the transformations made by Holbein, who simplifies the composition of the historiated scenes by removing Caesar himself, leaving him to the viewer's imagination as being in a space flanking the house. Could this be a way of letting

²² In relation to Rome, which had fallen. One could also reflect on the hegemony of imperialism. See Campbell 2002, 98-9.

Jakob von Hertenstein subtly take Caesar's place in the viewer's imagination? Holbein replaces Mantegna's fifth vignette with bearers of military trophies and booty, echoing the history of the Hertenstein family: the ancestors of Jakob von Hertenstein and his last wife, Anna von Hallwyl, took part in the Battle of Grandson in 1476, during which Charles the Bold's Burgundian armies were defeated near Lake Neuchâtel, and as a result the Confederation received the greatest war booty in its history (Bätschmann, Griener 2014, 108-10).

The scenes on the top level are *exempla*, inspired by Aristotle (*Constitution of the Athenians*, ca. 328-322 BC) and Thucydides (*History of the Peloponnesian War*, late fifth century before BC), and play on the moral theme. The lessons we learn from them include both masculine and feminine aspects, providing examples for the master of the house and his wife (Baur-Heinhold 1975, 27-8). The themes depicted here, from left to right on the upper part of the building, are: The schoolmaster Falerii punished for treason. This is an episode from the Roman History of Titus Live (*Ab urbe condita*, 5.27, 27-9 BC), which recounts the greatness of the soul of Camillus, a Roman soldier, who refused to take hostage the children brought to him by the treacherous schoolmaster. Camille's behaviour is an *exempla virtutis* of antiquity. In this depiction, the schoolmaster is led back to town by the boing pupils. For the master of the house, this episode is a reminder of his values of clemency and justice. The second story is that of Leiana, who, according to Pliny the Elder (*Natural History*, 7.87, AD 77), bites her tongue to keep from denouncing her two lovers, Armodio and Aristogitone, who were involved in the murder of the tyrant Ipparchus.²³ This episode highlights the model for the virtue of silence. The third episode on the theme of morality is mentioned again by Titus Livius (2.12): a young patrician by the name of Caius Mucius Scaevola seeks to kill the Etruscan king Porsenna, who is sitting in Rome.²⁴ After his arrest, he shows his bravery in front of Porsenna and sacrifices his right hand to the fire, his body being of no importance in the eyes of glory. The representation of Scaevola, as well as being an example of valour, is a hidden signature of Hans Holbein. Holbein, who is also left-handed, identifies with this ancient figure. Bätschmann and Griener prove the link between Scaevola and Holbein by means of a signature on a sketch for a stained-glass window [fig. 5]. To the left of the medallion, he places the following inscription: MVCIVSFEZ (*Mucius fec[it]*). The next featured exemplum is of

²³ See Kapparis 2017, 99-100. A sketch by Holbein of this episode is kept in the Drawing Room of the Lucerne Art Museum (Inv. 1162.159).

²⁴ Similar motif on wood engraving (Holbein 1516, Ausstellung Katalog Basel 1997, fig. 160). Reuse of framing motifs for the printing of books and facade projects (Bätschmann, Griener 1997, 70, fig. 19): Scaevola with a triumph of children on the title page for Johann Froben in Basel. See Schmid 1941-42, 249; Garen 2002, 104-5.

Lucretia's honour and is found in Titus Livius' *Roman History* (1.58). Lucretia, wife of Collatinus,²⁵ is raped by the king's son, Sextus. Instead of living in dishonour, she kills herself in front of her husband. Finally, the last *exemplum* presented is that of Marcus Curtius, who throws himself into the abyss on Rome's forum as a sign of self-sacrifice (Liv. 7.6). By also jumping into Lucerne, the sponsor's dedication is at the heart of the scene, with a moral injunction to dedicate oneself to the greater good, i.e., the City of Lucerne. The monumental dimension of the jumping character, crossing the aesthetic frame, is valid both pictorially and morally, which confirms the porosity of the two spaces and gives a focal point to the viewer (the crucial angle point of the building). Moreover, the crossing of the liminal border creates a connection between the public and private spheres.²⁶ What's more, by stepping outside its assigned frame, the horse is invested with a force of its own and wants to leave the narrative space. This creates a formal approach and a tension in the architectural order of the painted facade. In this way, the subject, and the form work together to 'animate' the house.

4 The Iconographical Message

The Hertenstein house offers a reflection on the dialogue which exists between painting and architecture, but also a dialogue with the wishes and aspirations of the client. We see a connection between the private, the internal space of the owner's place and the public, a connection that is made through illusionist architecture. The *trompe-l'œil* on the ground floor marks an 'availability', giving the illusion of political 'transparency'. This is also the case in the central scene, where the human-sized figures appear to be real, close to a balustrade that is like an opening onto the interior. In this way, the facade programme acts as a membrane, translating the permeability of the spaces. Once crossed, this membrane gives the client access not only to the domestic level but also to the private level, in terms of values.

This double dialogue is activated by Hans Holbein the Younger's choice of composition, which transforms the partially articulated facade through an architectural structure. Initially, a rhythm is created

25 The only direct evidence of Holbein's work is a fragment of the facade depicting Collatinus from behind: oil on plaster, 136 x 65 cm, Lucerne Museum of Art, Inv. Nr. 27x. For an in-depth approach of Lucretia's theme, see Kraft (2020) and De Riedmatten (2022).

26 For a more detailed account of *exempla virtutis*, see Langlands 2018. Scaevola and Curtius refer for instance to the "the nature of the archetypal Roman exemplum and the moral values with which it is typically associated and decisive acts of patriotic self-sacrifice, always violent and usually disturbing" (Langlands 2018, 5).

by feigned architectural elements (bays, engaged columns, friezes, etc.). Then, thanks to this feigned architecture, the stories unfold, in the form of exemplary images, like paintings to ponder but taking the path of illusionist representation.

The discourse is tiered: we move from the general to the particular. The virtues are the foundation of the ethics of the owner and his wife, who emphasize the cardinal and theological virtues. The putti in the decoration on the second floor represent the passions that people must fight against. To do this, the virtues come into play, virtues that are later exemplified by the scenes at the top of the facade. Between these two levels, the virtues are deployed: the mayor and his wife govern themselves well and, in return, they can govern well, as can also be seen in the enactment of the *exempla et gesta*. The distribution of the scenes and the organization of the facade give rise to the development of a domestic and political programme (the place of the patrician in the city and within the community).

Apart from the virtues and qualities of good government, the basis of the programme remains genealogy. A superimposition of registers works to legitimize the power of Hertenstein and his descendants. The *trompe-l'œil* balcony is the crux of the story told on this facade. It depicts an episode from the *Gesta romanorum*, a story set in antiquity, but which returns to the level of the family, through an illusionist treatment that directly links our view of this family with the interior of the house, in other words the private sphere. The owner, through this opening, is conveying a message of virtue and transparency, as well as warning people to show themselves worthy of the values handed down by the father of the family. In order to link the exemplary ancient history with that of the family, the temporality between the two periods is achieved through the clothes: it's Roman history with updated clothes. Finally, the coats of arms are full of meaning, as they represent, around the scene of filial fidelity, the unions with the four families and indicate that the descendants are linked to the history being played out at the centre, signifying the responsibility incumbent on the descendants of the master of the house. The illusion of transparency makes the political programme with the family and the urban space topical and puts it into action.

As for the stylistic aspect, the Hertenstein facade is a meeting point between two image cultures. The northern part of the Alps is represented using heraldic elements in the form of the *Allianzwappen*, and the Italian part by a programme based on the theme of Triumph, with an antique slant, via the pictorial programme of Mantegna. On this facade, we are indeed at a crossroads of visual cultures, both stylistically and conceptually. There is a dialogue here between 'small' local history (that of the Hertenstein family) and 'big' ancient history (Republican or Imperial). This configuration of time and spheres is made possible by the specific nature of the facade, which acts as a

surface in the urban space, allowing a programme to be constructed through an accumulation of images of different origins.

It is also worth noting how the facade combines images of different origins, such as the representation of virtues, coats of arms and elements of ancient culture and history as they were understood during the Renaissance, particularly in Italy. As an element of comparison, we can mention the Casa Cazuffi²⁷ of Trento and the Adlerhaus am Weinmarkt in Augsburg (1515). The Casa Cazuffi (Trento, 1531-36) bears similarities with the Hertenstein House in terms of central positioning and choice of iconographical themes: it is situated on piazza del Duomo, a vast area where streets converge and is bordered by buildings. The owner, Tommaso Cazuffi, Doctor of Law, and consul of the town chose to modernize the building from the gothic style (as proven by the remaining frieze in the upper part) to a Renaissance style. The artist, Marcello Fogolino, continued in the lineage, fashionable in Rome at the beginning of the sixteenth century, of simulating architectural apparatus. He also produced allegorical and symbolic images with moral admonitions, set up in friezes, inspired by Andrea Alciati's *Emblematum liber*, in the first edition published in Augsburg in 1531. The values exhibited here are for instance Justice, Chance, Mercy, Generosity. The second example is Adlerhaus am Weinmarkt, now Maximilianstrasse, 46 in Augsburg. The house was destroyed, but some engravings give us an idea of the decorative programme (Hascher 1996, 375-88). Like the Hertenstein Haus, the facade, completed in 1500, bears illusionistic architecture. Virtues and prestige are emphasized via large allegorical female statues and male figures in armour, representing rulers and monarch. The artist gave an idea of verticality by combining small, seated figures in the niches between the statues. The ornament of this facade served the ambitions of the highly respected merchant and financier, Philipp Adler, who evolved in the entourage of Maximilian I. (Hascher 1996, 54, 393-6).

5 For a Rhetoric of Power

To apprehend the way architecture and painting can be put at the service of the powerful, we shall start with an overview of the phenomenon. According to Burroughs (2002, 12-13), Renaissance became an interesting turning point in terms of decoration as we moved from “the fluid space” of a medieval house to an “even rectilinear surface”. During this period, self-representation was central, and it was important to be seen from the outside. In this context, the facades

²⁷ For a more detailed account of the Casa Cazuffi, see Dal Prà (1985, 1: 5-52).

ceased to be a mere wall belonging to the physical house but became a public canvas on which the patron could design his ideas and assure strong visibility. The notion of visibility on the public space was framed by the development of new media and ways of communication, which served the spreading of ideas and motifs²⁸ to help the patron express his design on the wall of his house.

In Trento, the Palazzo Geremia²⁹ uses similar themes and composition to share the vision of the patron, Giovanni Antonio Pona. Here, we can see new spaces created on the surface, with the use of colour and the complicity of the existing architectural elements. On this example, we will focus first on the upper part of the building and the space between the windows. The artist invented another dimension which gives the illusion of the inhabitants of the building facing out behind a balustrade. The viewer has the impression of being part of the celebration or event taking place beyond these walls. In this instance, it seems to be a type of loggia and we can guess subtly a landscape in the background. The effect is emphasized using tapestry and carpets which seem to be in movement, hanging from the balustrade, giving to the composition an even more dynamic outcome. The middle part, on the left side of the facade, shows an intimate setting, with a group of persons seated around a table. Behind them is a window with four panels. The window is opened, and we distinguish once more a landscape. The artist has played on a superposition of spaces with the exterior (the facade) representing an interior (the sitting space of the building) with an exterior (created with the opened windows). The result of this composition is a *mise en abyme* of the story that the patron and the artist wish to display, with a reference to the *storia* being developed, in the lines of the Albertian theory of windows.

Furthermore, we can observe, as in the Hertenstein case, the use of the figure of Marcus Curtius, sacrificing his life for the city and jumping into the chasm. Again, the illusionist treatment of the figure is executed with vibrant colours and movement, resulting in an interaction between the viewer's space and the painted surface, which stops being flat and becomes animated and transparent, with intermediate spaces created with the colours. Further thematic compositions present on the Hertenstein House can be found on the Palazzo Geremia such as the suicide of Lucretia or the sacrifice of Mucius Scaevola. These stories are *exempla virtutis* showing that the patron

28 "The dynamics of migration are complex and difficult to classify chronologically; they escape the identification of linear evolutionary traits. The influences often come directly from Italy, but these processes can also be the result of shared affinities or specific objectives on the part of the patron, as shown by certain examples" (Frommel 2016, 118).

29 For further details on Palazzo Geremia (end of fifteenth/beginning of sixteenth century), see Castelnovo, Bellabarba (1988).

of the house adheres to antique and noble values and wish them to be displayed on the facade of this house, bringing together the message and its reception.

This way of creating new spaces on a wall can also be found in exterior in the case of our painted facade on the Hertenstein House, more specifically on the ground floor or the balustrade of the central scene. The creation of intermediate spaces between the viewer and the scene allows the patron once more to assert its ascendance on his subjects: he allows the viewer to penetrate, with the eye only, in his space, by his goodwill. Moreover, this fictitious space proposes a two-fold theatricality: on the one hand, an *exemplum virtutis* (via the scene of the balustrade where the virtuous son is worth bearing the legacy of his father) and on the other, a link with dynastic stakes where the viewer understands that the heir of the family will carry the noble work of Jakob von Hertenstein (Riedler 1978, 21). The consent he gives demonstrates his power and allows him to get closer to his subjects, within the limits that the patron chooses to establish, just like the liminal modalities.

Another example will be the one of Nuremberg's townhall. The anonymous artist of one drawing³⁰ gives an idea of the illusionist effect with architectural elements. On the wall, two spaces are created, an intermediate one with characters close to the balustrade, then the idea of an interior with doors and windows inserted in the central pilasters, framing the central arcade/scene. Behind, we distinguish yet another area with doors in the background, creating a multidimensional composition, mixing interior and exterior. The faux architecture is integrated into the existing architecture of the facade. The painter proposes an effect of transparency that perfectly translates the term 'porosity of spaces' as we are projected towards the inside, which enters the outside through illusionist architecture and *trompe-l'œil* effects.

In the case of the Hertenstein house, it's the same principle but in reverse, with an exterior that gives the illusion of an interior. It should be noted that the inside of the house featured wall decoration on the theme of hunting or procession, so once again the outside enters the intimacy of the household (Riedler 1978, 26-38). In instances of illusionist architecture depicting an exterior or interior, the effect of transparency is perfect, making the wall disappear, moving from the status of support due to its consistency to that of a surface on which to develop the patron's discourse and assertion of his power. Another instance of interior/exterior dichotomy is the of flight of stairs on the ground floor of the house: the solid surface becomes transparent, the wall giving place to a multi-layered space, the stairs

30 Anonymous, *Nuremberg Town Hall around 1530*, Albertina, Vienna.

enticing the viewer to enter the house.

Another means of expressing power is via the display of grandeur. In this scope, the patron will have to choose a strategic place to build the house, symbol of his domus/lineage land prestige to gain great visibility. As a converging point, the Platz or Piazza is a place of choice. In Verona, the Piazza delle Erbe is the place of an important market, dating back to the Middle Ages. The pictorial composition adheres to the owner's activity (apothecary) and the business carried out on the square.³¹ On the other hand, Kapellplatz is essential for the city as a point of convergence for the surrounding streets, the end of the bridge route leading from the outside to the inside of the city. The location of the church on the square and the Hertenstein house on the chapel square creates a religious association for this pious family. Once again, we find the dialogue between the physical and spatial position of the house and the message conveyed by the patron: it'll be a message of probity, military distinction, and moral virtues, all to be taken as examples by the passer-by on top of being a token of good faith for his roles in city affairs.

6 Conclusion: Imitation, Opulence and Influence

This case study has given us a better understanding of the stakes involved in representing power in the form of an iconographic programme, and we have been able to define the methods of the rhetoric of power, which can be translated in three areas: imitation, opulence, and influence. Hertenstein imitated the Duke of Mantua by using the Triumph of Caesar that he had had painted by Mantegna in his palace. He also associated himself with ancient history by using the theme of Caesar and his triumphal entry into the city. By doing so, he makes a reference to the military feats of arms of the family and inserts the latter into the greater Swiss history.³² The choice of theme also shows that Hertenstein is aware of the new fashions of Italy's prestigious courts, Italy being of importance in setting artistic

31 The Mazzantis were apothecaries having business on the piazza. A scene on the facade shows the giving of a gift from above. These two elements can be associated and translate as a dialogue between the physical space of the building and the intention behind the choices of themes and ambition of the patrons.

32 Ulrich von Hertenstein, (1384-1454), father of Kaspar: battle of Milan (1425) and lord of Buonas. Kaspar von Hertenstein (1416-86), father of Jakob and Peter (1450-1522): knight and leader of the Confederate rearguard in battle of Murten (1476); Jakob (1460-1527): captain in Pavia campaign (1512) and battle of Marignano (1515). Peter (1450-1522): recruiter for Pope Julius II of men for the pontifical Swiss Guard. For a detailed history of the Hertenstein's family, see von Liebenau 1888 (29-38 for Ulrich the Eldest, 55-64 for Ulrich the Youngest, 65-92 for Kaspar, 93-6 for Peter and 100-23 for Jakob; *Dictionnaire historique de la Suisse*).

and cultural trends. For opulence, Hertenstein used colour to give the impression of elaborate architecture on a simple wall. Finally, he called on a painter who was gaining increasing attention, Hans Holbein the Younger. From 1516 onwards, the latter painted portraits of influential members of the commercial bourgeoisie, such as the Meyer family, whose husband Jakob also commissioned Holbein to paint the Madonna of Darmstadt. Both examples of Holbein's work show how the artist used feigned architecture as part of his composition. Hertenstein could exert his influence by the continuity of his lineage, using heraldry. As Alberti mentioned in *De re aedificatoria* (IX 1), the aim of such an undertaking is to leave wisdom and power to posterity. Moreover, noble values are conveyed by the choice of iconographic themes. In our case, it is choosing *exempla* and *Gesta romanorum* to show his probity and legitimacy to rule or have his say in the *res publica*. Finally, the effect of transparency shows his probity in the sense that he has nothing to hide. He uses *trompe-l'œil* to show his interior, but what he chooses to display, i.e., scenes of the *exempla* type, drawing on the father, etc. while using a *trompe-l'œil* on the door. Lastly, for the patron, it is a proof of knowledge in terms of materials and production to use simulated materials intelligently to serve the owner's cause, i.e., show one's power in the city. The use of characters in 'exemplary' scenes show the capacity of proposing a good government, also in relation to 'negative' scenes. The use of colour and faux architecture give the illusion of an extraordinary building when in fact it is a flat surface. Even if this deceives the viewer, we can still admire the patron's intelligence in making his facade stand out from the other buildings around it.

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