

Agnolo Bronzino's *Pygmalion and Galatea*: The Dialectic Between Petrification and Flesh

Min-Ling Tsai

Department of Art History, Tainan National University of the Arts
E-mail: mling@tnnua.edu.tw

Abstract

Agnolo Bronzino was a famous Renaissance painter and poet, and very active in Florentine literary and artistic circles. He studied classical and contemporary literary and art theories. During the years 1529 through 1532, Bronzino painted a mythological work *Pygmalion and Galatea*, which functioned as a cover for a portrait painting completed by his teacher Jacopo da Pontormo. Through the legend of Pygmalion, Bronzino subtly draws on the theme of creator's (artists') love and the transformation of inanimate statues into living humans, combining the love theme and Medusa effect of petrification and de-petrification prevalent in poetic and artistic theories since the 14th century. In so doing, Bronzino creates a painting rich in art theoretical discourses. On the one hand, the work expresses the artist's reflections and judgements on a controversy over the artistic creativity and conception hotly debated since the theorization of the fine art, while on the other hand, creating a dialogue between the cover panel and portrait painting in praise of Pontormo's lifelike (*vivacità*) portrait, emphasizing the perfection of the painting and the artist's superb skill and intelligence.

Key Words: Venus-Galatea, Laura-Medusa, Petrarch, Ovid, art theory