

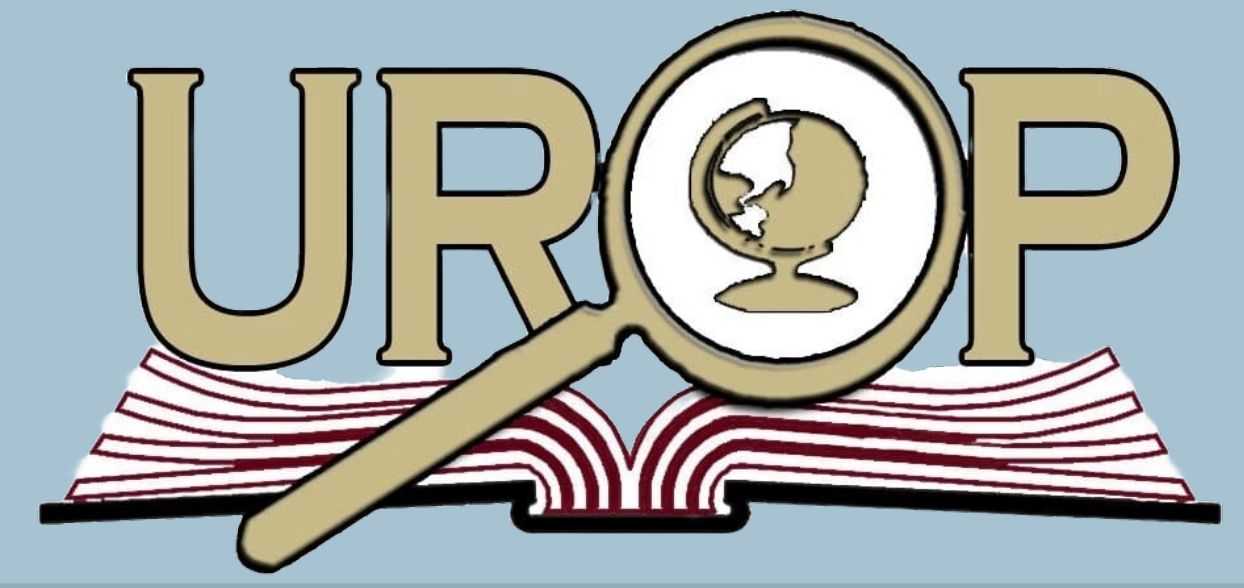
# Culture, Conversations, and Social Networks in 18<sup>th</sup> - and 19<sup>th</sup> - Century Italy



## Artful Networks:

### Angelica Kauffman and Isabella Teotochi Albrizzi's Salons

Kelsie Fernandez and Dr. Irene Zanini-Cordi



#### Introduction

- The Age of the Enlightenment ushered in the era of the *salonnière* –affluent women opened their homes to conversation and fostered cultural discourse. These women experienced freedom of expression within the setting of their salon.
- The promise of cultivating valuable interpersonal networks enticed many people to attend different salons. “Who you are in touch with” became a concrete form of social currency in the salons and through the networks created by the salons.
- Social Network Theory takes a “bird’s eye view” of networks — mapping out connections between individuals who have corresponded through letters, a social gathering, a book they have read, a mutual friend, etc.
- The celebrated painter Angelica Kauffman studied painting and received an education while traveling frequently at a young age through Italy and England and experiencing different cultures and social networks, thus empowering her career. Her lively social and cultural life was integral to her art. They allowed her to earn her livelihood as a painter, a career with many limitations for women that, until then was considered, at best, a pastime.
- Isabella Teotochi Albrizzi became a renowned *salonnière* in Venice – a notable stop on the Grand Tour. She also acquired notoriety through her writings, many of which involved a keen sensibility for art. Her descriptions of the sculptor Antonio Canova’s masterpieces rendered her a patron of the artist and his de facto publicist, affording her recognition.
- There is currently little to no research that applies Social Network Theory to the work of notable *salonnières*. This cross-referencing between the lives and work of Kauffman and Albrizzi has also not been researched. However, there are readily available sources that analyze the careers of these women separately.



Isabella Teotochi Albrizzi, by Vigée Lebrun



Angelica Kauffman, Self Portrait (1753)  
[Kauffman’s first self-portrait]

#### Methods

My research involved analysis of primary texts, including Albrizzi’s *Opere di Antonio Canova* (1783) and Kauffman’s paintings and portraits of famous people of her time. The former is a narrative description of Canova’s sculptures correlated with prints of the original source material. Kauffman’s paintings vary in topic but are all united by her neoclassic style. I cross-reference these works with secondary critical sources. The research is also characterized by an interpretive reading of the *salonnières*’ work through the lens of Social Network Theory.

#### References

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#### Results

- Kauffman and Albrizzi’s mutual friendship with the sculptor Antonio Canova (1757-1822) demonstrates the scope of their social networks. Although it is unclear whether Albrizzi and Kauffman knew each other personally, their shared social circles suggest that they would have at least engaged in epistolary correspondence.
- Albrizzi assumed the role of Canova’s advertiser in her *Opere di Antonio Canova* - she mobilized her social networks to pen detailed descriptions of paintings that she had never seen in person. *Opere di Antonio Canova* was a collaborative work because she relied on her interpersonal relationships to produce it. The individuals who contributed to the production of the work were knowledgeable about Canova and more inclined to promote the book, thus simultaneously promoting the painter’s works and Albrizzi’s.
- Because of the collaborative nature of *Opere di Antonio Canova*, Albrizzi’s writings are a visual representation of female belonging and networking.
- Kauffman’s relationship with Canova was mutually beneficial as the two entered the social milieu of Rome around the same time (c. 1782) - although Kauffman already had pre-existing networks within the city. Kauffman’s portrait of Canova depicts him holding his beautiful, “Cupid and Psyche.” Similar to Albrizzi’s *Opere di Antonio Canova*, Kauffman’s painting and distributing a portrait of Canova holding his sculpture contributes to the circulation of his name along with her own.
- The way that Kauffman represents her identity through her self-portrait is indicative of her desire for her mind to be lauded over her physical appearance. Her self-portraits often do not depict her as an artist, but rather point to greater talents, such as singing or engaging with literature, which demonstrates her impulse to distance herself from the title of “female artist” and to become a more well-rounded version of herself through her art. Albrizzi, through her descriptions of Canova’s artwork, manifests a similar desire to be appreciated also for her mind.
- Although Angelica Kauffman was lauded for her prowess in the realm of history painting, portrait painting was more profitable for her in her early career. Kauffman’s engagement in portrait painting gave her the power to portray her subjects however she pleased. Kauffman’s paintings of famous women, specifically women with unfavorable reputations, show them without any prejudice. She painted women as individuals first and foremost, applying the same principle to her subjects that she does to her self-portraits.
- The environment of the salon put both Albrizzi and Kauffman in a position of power within their sphere of influence – this enabled them to develop and cultivate social and cultural connections that would contribute to their visibility in and around the arts.

#### “Women Shaping the Canvas”



#### Conclusions

- I will integrate the experience gained while conducting this research in a scholarly article on pedagogics that has already been accepted for publication in a special issue of the journal *Eighteenth-Century Studies* focusing on women. “Conversations that Shape Identity: What 18th-Century Italian *Salonnières* Can Teach Modern Students,” will be written in collaboration with my UROP teammates and Prof. Zanini-Cordi.
- In addition, my research will be expanded into a larger project that involves the production of a podcast series on salon culture in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

