Abstract

This thesis deals with representation of animal and their meaning in European portrait painting of the period spanning from second half of 15th century till the beginning of 17th century and it sets to describe relationship between humans and animals occurring in the symptomatic space of portraiture as well as the renaissance culture in general. Among the art genres it is portrait where we can trace immediate interaction of humans and animals as the later are usually included in the painting on demand of the submitter of the artwork and are positioned there as a symbol though which the portrayed person communicates with viewer. The fundamental characteristic of animal symbolic is its ambivalence and multiplicity of meaning shaped over centuries as the renaissance iconography of animal have been dominantly formed by ancient manuscripts and medieval bestiaries. From the wide specter of animals represented in this period my thesis is focusing in detail on the case of ermine which was one of the less commonly represented animals. Symbolism of the ermine is further discussed in case study on two particular master pieces of renaissance art – Lady with an Ermine by Leonardo da Vinci and Young Knight in a Landscape from venetian painter Vittore Carpaccio - where the appearance of the animal plays key role in artwork’s interpretation. The contemporary context of renaissance art production in Europe and development of its iconography specifically focused on animals is the theoretical basis for the following thesis.

Keywords:
Renaissance, portraiture, painting, animals, depiction, iconography, symbols, ermine, Leonardo da Vinci, Vittore Carpaccio