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History, origins, recovery : Michelangelo and the politics of art

Keizer, J.P.

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HISTORY, ORIGINS, RECOVERY: MICHELANGELO AND THE POLITICS OF ART

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Promotores:

Prof. dr. R.L. Falkenburg

Prof. dr. H.Th. van Veen (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen)

Referent:

Dr. E. Grasman

Overige leden:

Prof. S.J. Campbell (Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, VS)

Mw prof. dr. C.A. van Eck

Prof. dr. B. Kempers (Universiteit van Amsterdam)

Prof. dr. G.J. van der Sman (Universiteit Leiden
en Nederlands Interuniversitair Kunsthistorisch
Instituut in Florence)

Voor
&

Eva
Chris (I.M.)

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Introduction

THE POLITICS OF ART

When Michelangelo returned to Florence from Rome in the early spring of 1501, he returned to a city that had not yet recovered from a profound artistic crisis. The number of commissions for painting, sculpture and architecture had been dropping for over half a decade; signs of recovery were shimmering on the horizon, but a full restoration of a once glorious artistic culture was not in sight. Many artists had fled the city to seek economic refuge elsewhere, and with the deaths of Verrocchio in 1488, Bertoldo in 1491, Domenico Ghirlandaio in 1494, Piero Pollaiuolo in 1496 and Antonio Pollaiuolo in 1498, it must have seemed like a certain era had come to an abrupt end. That the last decade of the fifteenth century in Florence witnessed the ceding of one artistic idiom to another in the first decade of the next century is an idea familiar to us. It can be found in Renaissance surveys from Heinrich Wölfflin to the present but was, of course, really born in Vasari's *Vite*, where the years around 1500 mark the transition from the Second to the Third *Età*.

Michelangelo often features as the protagonist in these histories. In the pre-dominant writing of our field, he is seen almost single-handedly transforming the styles of representation practiced by a past generation of Florentine artists, inaugurating the era we now call the High Renaissance. And although recent writing makes an effort to deconstruct the artist's dominance in our definition of sixteenth-century painting,¹ the focus on Michelangelo, at the cost of other practicing artists of the period – save, perhaps, for Leonardo and Raphael – is one that finds

¹ Franklin. Unless otherwise attributed, translations are my own.

some historical validation: his name features prominently in contemporary chronicles, histories of the city and family, in *ricordi* and *ricordanze*.

In contrast to the image of the socially disengaged artist we encounter in modern accounts of the stylistic revolution of the early sixteenth century, where that revolution is said to have occurred *in spite* of the artist's social world rather than *because* of it, Michelangelo's Florentine contemporaries saw him as a Florentine citizen whose painting and sculpture formed an integral part of the city's social and political fabric. Michelangelo is mentioned in the midst of discussions of Florentine politics, history, family business, wars, and the high politics of international negotiations that marked the years around the turn of the century. In 1509, in a digression from recording the politics of the day, the chronicler Bartolommeo Cerretani paused to register Michelangelo's social identity: "In those times ... there was Michelangelo di Francesco [sic] di Buonarroto Simone, citizen [*ciptadino*], who in sculpture made many things, foremost a David of marble, 7 ½ braccia high, which they placed on the *ringhiera* of the *Signori* in front of the door of the Palazzo [della Signoria]." Cerretani understood Michelangelo's work as a form of social engagement, his name – family name and all – worthy of the *addendum* "*ciptadino*." Cerretani placed Michelangelo in civic life by contrasting him with Leonardo da Vinci, an artist he places outside of society. In the same account, he added that Leonardo "was not legitimate." That illegitimacy then becomes a symptom of a kind of work ethic, a sign of Leonardo's social disengagement: Michelangelo, "citizen," is said to have "worked more and well" than Leonardo "illegitimate," which is also why Michelangelo earned more than his direct competitor.² For Cerretani, money served as a barometer for social success.

² Cerretani, *Ricordi*, ed. Berti, 212: "In questi tempi era due fiorentini primarii ed ecelnti in ischoltura et pictura, l'uno de' quali si chiamava L[eonar]do di ser Piero da Vinci, non era legiptimo, stava col re di Francia a Milano e prima era stato chol signore L[odovi]co; tra l'altre ecelenti cose vi fece un cenaculo molto celebrato; lavorava poco. L'altro era Michelagnolo di Franc(esc)o [sic] di Bonaroto Simoni ciptadino, il quale in ischoltura fece molte cose, maxime uno Davit di marmo di braccia 7 ½ che si pose in sulla ringhiera de' signori avanti a la portta del palagio, et così in pitura, ed era a Roma e dipigneva la capella di Sixto e faceva la sepultura di Iulio secondo, vivente esso, che v'andava 72 fighure al naturale di marmo c[i]oè e 12 apostoli e molte altre cose. Et ghuadagnavano assai ma più Michelagnolo perché lavorava più e bene, ed io molte volte parlai loro e vidigli lavorare."

This book argues that the works Michelangelo produced in Florence in the half decade after 1501 engaged with the function of art in Florentine society, at a moment when the dominance of painting and sculpture in communicating and representing religious and political beliefs had lost much of its former self-evidence. The seven years prior to Michelangelo's return witnessed an unprecedented decline in commissions for art and the organized burning of existing paintings and sculptures, claiming the works of stellar artists like Donatello and Botticelli among the casualties.³ Artists who did stay in Florence in these years, such as Perugino, Piero di Cosimo and the Ghirlandaio shop headed by Davide, remained without documented commissions from Florentine patrons. The years around Michelangelo's relocation were among the most benighted in the city's cultural history; the silence in Florentine workshops at the time must have stood in sharp contrast to the booming artistic culture of the Quattrocento. When, in the early summer of 1501, a French marshal asked the Florentine government for a copy of an early-fifteenth-century bronze statue by Donatello in their possession, the Florentines had to admit that "today there is a lack of similar good masters." They left the marshal's request unfulfilled until the next summer when Michelangelo was awarded the commission.⁴ It was a situation unthinkable a decade earlier, when Lorenzo de' Medici

For the social problem of illegitimacy in Renaissance Florence, see Thomas Kuehn, *Illegitimacy in Renaissance Florence*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002. Leonardo's mother was indeed not his father's legitimate wife; see Emil Möller, "Der Geburtstag des Leonardo da Vinci," *Jahrbuch der Preussischen Kunstsammlungen* 60 (1939), 71-75.

³ For the bonfires, see Horst Bredekamp, "Renaissance Kultur als 'Hölle': Savonarolas Verbrennungen der Eitelkeiten," in *Bildersturm: Die Zerstörung des Kunstwerks*, ed. Martin Warnke, Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat, 1973, 41-64, and below.

⁴ Gaye, 2: 54: "Noi abbiamo cercato di chi possa gittare una figura di Davit, come voi ricerchate per il Maricial di Gies, e ci è hoggi charestia di simili buoni maestri; pure non si mancherà di ogni diligentia." See Gaye, 2: 52, for the request of the French, made through the Florentine ambassadors in France. At the time of the request, Michelangelo was probably in Siena. He received the commission for the Piccolomini altar in the Sienese Duomo on May, 22, 1501. In the final contract signed on June, 5, the artist promised to go to Siena to measure the altar; see Harold R. Mancusi-Ungaro, Jr, *Michelangelo: The Bruges Madonna and the Piccolomini Altar*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967, 67. And he seems to have done so that summer. On August, 16, he accepted the commission for the *David*, and there is no indication that Michelangelo left the city while at work on that statue, finished in an incredibly short time.

sent Florentine artists all over Italy to work for his allies.⁵ Tellingly, when Leonardo da Vinci returned to Florence after an eighteen years absence in 1500, he received no commissions, leaving the city again in the early summer of 1501 to work for Cesare Borgia as a military engineer.⁶

The devastating criticism launched against the culture of artists and patrons by the Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola from 1494 to 1498 has often been proposed as an explanation for the decline in artistic commissions and the bonfires of 1497 and 1498. His critique seems indeed to have functioned as a kind of catalyst for the crisis in Florentine art at the end of the century. But Savonarola's diatribes against current artistic practice also formed part of more deeply cutting reconsiderations of Florentine society, politics and culture, critiques that went far beyond the preacher's sphere of influence and continued almost a decade and a half after his death in 1498. Artistic commissions only fully recovered in 1503, five years after the friar was executed.⁷

Cultural reappraisal resulted directly from the constitutional change that came with the expulsion of the house of the Medici from Florence on November 9, 1494. On that day, to the sound of the people crying "*popolo e libertà*," sixty years of political and cultural hegemony under Cosimo "*Il Vecchio*," his son Piero, grandson Lorenzo "*Il Magnifico*" and great-grandson Piero di Lorenzo came to an abrupt end. Although modern scholarship demonstrates that the Medici had always managed to maintain a careful balance between dynastic rule and republican traditions, gradually re-forming the city's republican system to their own benefit without ever completely subjecting Florentine government to their rule,⁸ post-Medicean Florence announced the family as pure tyrants and their stewardship as one of willful usurpation of

⁵ For instance, when Ludovico Sforza needed skilled artists to execute his famous bronze horse, Lorenzo de' Medici supplied him with the necessary masters; see Laurie Fusco and Gino Corti, "Lorenzo de' Medici on the Sforza Monument," *Achademia Leonardi Vinci* 5 (1992), 11-32.

⁶ For Leonardo's itinerary in these years, see Carmen C. Bambach, "Documented chronology of Leonardo's life and work," in *Leonardo da Vinci* (2003), 233-34.

⁷ Hall offers the most profound analysis of the crisis in Florentine art during and after Savonarola's ascendancy.

⁸ Nicolai Rubinstein, *The Government of Florence under the Medici (1434 to 1494)*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966.

republican traditions. The reason that the Medici were expelled from Florence, Piero Parenti wrote in 1494, was that “it was now intolerable that they had usurped both the ecclesiastic and the civic [spheres].”⁹ In the months after the expulsion, the city-government abolished the political bodies founded by the Medici in order to free the city from any trace of “tyranny.” In their place, it instituted the *Governo Popolare*, with the *Gran Consiglio* at its chore, the Great Council consisting of 3000 men that permitted a far greater and socially more-encompassing part of the Florentine populace to participate in government than had been possible under the Medici. Included were members of the lesser guilds, such as artists, and of course families who had been opposed to the Medici regime in the fifteenth century, such as the Pazzi, Pitti, and Strozzi, and that were now recalled from exile.¹⁰

Florence fashioned her newly discovered identity – for many her newly found freedom – in sharp contrast to the preceding years of Medici hegemony. The eighteen years between the expulsion of the Medici and their return in 1512 were marked by a strong sense of historical rupture, of cultural displacement and replacement. This is not just the opinion of a modern historian writing with the benefit of hindsight; it permeates the writings of the period itself. Machiavelli, whose career was colored by the dramatic occurrences around 1500, counts as an especially acute observer. For him (and many others), the death of Lorenzo *Il Magnifico* in 1492 had already announced the end of a culture. He ended his *Storie fiorentine* with a note on cultural rupture: “soon after the death of Lorenzo, those evil plants began to germinate, which in a little time ruined Italy, and continue to keep her in desolation.”¹¹ Raised to the office of Second Chancellor of the Republic in 1498, the position that caused his expulsion from Florence in 1512 on the Medici’s return, Machiavelli was frustrated by the politics of the *Governo Popolare* but also ambivalent about a Florence with the Medici. In a well-known letter of September 16, 1512, written in the days

⁹ Parenti, ed. Andrea Matucci, 103: “*tale Casa, usurpato avendosi lo ecclesiastico e il civile, ormai più sopparture non si potea.*”

¹⁰ For the reform of the Florentine constitution, see Rubinstein, 1960.

¹¹ Machiavelli, ed. Martelli, 844 “*subito morto Lorenzo cominciorono a nascere quegli cattivi semi i quali, non dopo molto tempo, non sendo vivo chi gli sapesse spegnere, rovinorono, e ancora rovinano, la Italia.*”

following the Medici return, he wrote of the Florentine culture during the Medici-less period of 1494-1512 as a culture displaced from a continuum established by Cosimo de' Medici in 1434 and continued by the family again in 1512. Still confident of maintaining his position at the *cancelleria*, he explained the Medici's reclaiming their former political dominance as a return in *history*. "The city is quite peaceful and hopes, with the help of the Medici, to live no less honored than it did in times past, when their father Lorenzo *Il Magnifico*, of most happy memory, governed."¹² In February of the next year, he was found guilty of having conspired against the Medici, imprisoned for 21 days, and eventually expelled from Florence. In exile, he would produce the body of work about cultural replacement, anxiety, and desire for historical restoration that established his epochal importance in the history of political thought.¹³

Based on Machiavelli's writings in part, the period of the *Governo Popolare* has often been understood as one of an ideology of republicanism. Political historians like Felix Gilbert and, perhaps to a lesser extent, P.G. Pocock have pin-pointed the dawn of modern democratic thought in the years after the Medici expulsion, in studies reminiscent of Hans Baron's epoch-making study of civic humanism, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny* of 1955.¹⁴ More recent historians of humanism have done much to deconstruct such meta-historical claims, pointing to the rhetorical traditions inherent in humanist writing, the culture of panegyric at the basis of the humanist endeavor to find patronage, and other literary *topoi* governing humanist texts of the period.¹⁵ They removed the sting of ideology from the skin of

¹² Machiavelli, ed. Martelli, 1128: "Et questa città resta quietissima, et spera non vivere meno honorata con l'aiuto loro che si vivesse ne' tempi passati, quando la felicissima memoria del magnifico Lorenzo loro padre governava." Tr. in *Machiavelli and his Friends. Their Personal Correspondence*, ed. James B. Atkinson and David Sices, DeKalb (Ill): Northern Illinois University Press, 1996, 217.

¹³ See John M. Najemy, *Between Friends: Discourses of Power and Desire in the Machiavelli-Vettori Letters of 1513-1515*, Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press, 1991.

¹⁴ F. Gilbert, 1965; Pocock.

¹⁵ For a balanced overview of criticism against the idea of Renaissance Civic Humanism, see James Hankins, "The 'Baron Thesis' after Forty Years and Some Recent Studies of Leonardo Bruni," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56 (1995), 309-38. And for an alternative to a Baronian

humanist writing. To be sure, when the Florentine people cried “*popolo e libertà*” they were not thinking of a liberty for the people in our modern, democratic understanding of “people” and “liberty.”¹⁶ In Florence, Nicolai Rubinstein points out, *Libertas* denoted a city without princes, a republic defined by a civic identity differentiated from seigniorial states.¹⁷

Although they do not describe social reality in the way that we understand that reality, expressions like *libertà* do engage with ideology. Humanism does have its place in political change and the making of ideologies – that is, if we follow Clifford Geertz and understand ideology as a cultural system. For Geertz, political change remains beyond social understanding, even beyond social reality, if its underlying ideology is not symbolized or figured. “The function of ideology,” Geertz writes, “is to make an autonomous politics possible by providing the authoritative concepts that render it meaningful, the suasive images by means of which it can be sensibly grasped.” And: “it is ... the attempt of ideologies to render otherwise incomprehensible social situations meaningful ... that accounts ... for the ideologies’ highly figurative nature.”¹⁸ Political change, Geertz’s model maintains, can only be *figured*. This pushes humanist writing to the forefront of ideological image-making. But it reserves an even greater share for the visual arts, often produced in the public arena where the change of regime was made socially palpable.

In the following chapters, I understand Michelangelo’s art as ideological image-making, as giving a visually understandable form to the political and cultural breach that came with the Medici expulsion. Rather than considering his work as a *reflection* of politics, I understand it as *producing* the ideological system through which those politics could be grasped. Indeed, in the case of the Governo Popolare, the act of figuration claims an even greater part in the making of ideologies than in many other periods that saw political revolutions, for the period is

view of Florentine humanism, see Ronald Witt, *‘In the Footsteps of the Ancients’: The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni*, Leiden: Brill, 2000.

¹⁶ Recorded in Rinuccini, ed. G. Aiazzi, cliii.

¹⁷ For the meaning of the term *Libertas* in late medieval and Renaissance Florence, see Rubinstein, 1986.

¹⁸ Clifford Geertz, “Ideology as a Cultural System,” in *Ideology and Discontent*, ed. David E. Apter, London: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964, 47-76, with quotations on pp. 63 and 64.

characterized by a certain discrepancy between the reality of politics and those politics symbolized. Prosopographic research into the composition of the Florentine ruling class after the Medici expulsion has shown that many of the men who were in power in Medicean Florence were still serving the city's political offices after 1494 (which is not to claim that there were no men who bore a sincere love for the politics of the *Governo Popolare*).¹⁹ Since the composition of individuals on the new government was not very different from the preceding regime, this revolution needed to be symbolically figured in order to survive.

One function of the decline in commissions and the burning of existing works of art was the visualization of political rupture, to render a once dominant regime invisible. Iconoclasm was specifically aimed at Medici property. Portraits of the family were removed from the churches of Santissima Annunziata and San Salvatore; a memorial to the murdered Giuliano de' Medici († 1478) at Florence Cathedral was destroyed; and what was not taken apart was appropriated by the *Governo Popolare* and put on display as visual signs of a suppressed political age.²⁰ The sheer visual silence of the years after the Medici expulsion became a figure for the contrast between the present and the visually rich Medici epoch, an age that had championed such artists as Donatello, Filippo and Filippino Lippi, Botticelli, the Pollaiuolo brothers, Ghirlandaio, and Verrocchio. A visitor to Cosimo de' Medici's Florence in 1460 had indeed found there "a living paradise full of those visible, palpable forms that speak and respond when others speak"; he wondered whether Florentines didn't "live only to look, smell and speak, without being subject to any other natural passion," and asked whether "someone who tested this would not end up living just from the power of the visual."²¹

¹⁹ See Roslyn Pesman Cooper, "The Prosopography of the 'Prima Repubblica'," in *I ceti dirigenti nella Toscana del Quattrocento*, ed. Donatella Ruggiadini, Monte Oriolo, Impruneta: F. Papafava, 1987, 239-55.

²⁰ For the appropriation and destruction of Medici property, see below, Chapter 1.

²¹ "Poy trovammo veramente il paradiso, io dico el vivo e vero, pieno di quelle visibile e palpabile forme e che parlano e rispondono, quando altri parla, e maravigliòme assai come che vi sta non vive solamente di veddere, odire e parlare senza essere subiecto ad alcun'altra passione naturale e non posso credere che chi ne facesse prova che non gli venisse ad effetto che si viverebbe solo dela virtù visiva." Quoted in Beverly Louis Brown, "L' 'Entrata' fiorentina di Ludovico Gonzaga," *Rivista d'Arte*

That the Florentine government and the guilds, followed by private patrons, completely refrained from commissioning new works of art after 1494 signals that they considered the current tradition of Florentine art, the Quattrocento tradition born from Medici politics, no longer able to serve a society that had replaced those politics. Post-Medicean iconoclasm understands the work of art as a register of a specific kind of politics. The breaking of art grew from a conviction that its social integrity had been harmed beyond repair by the culture of the Medici, especially that of Lorenzo *Il Magnifico*, who presided over the city from 1466 to 1492. Examples quoted throughout this book show that Savonarola and others believed that artists of the Laurentian years had tried to deceive their public with compelling images of their own artistic selves and of patrons wishing to forward their own and family's identity. Quattrocento artists, the argument went, were exclusively interested in exploring and advertising the capacity of their profession to render visible highly personalized fantasies beyond belief, and their work was thought to instantiate a culture of seeing and being seen that only served a small group of men gathered around the Medici powerbase, not society at large.²² For Savonarola, works of art produced in the Medici era served a culture that was itself politically dysfunctional.

Social and political utility was at the heart of cultural criticism in these years. For instance, the reconsideration of humanist rhetoric in the hands of Marcello Virgilio Adriani, who held the chair of poetry and rhetoric at the Florentine *Studio*, was informed by a perception of Medici culture as one divorced from political utility. Adriani began his lessons for the sons of the city's ruling elite with a debunking of the philological approach championed by that Medicean house humanist Agnolo Poliziano; philology, Adriani claimed, only served its own needs. For him, *utilitas* served as a standard to set the "unapplied" humanism of Poliziano apart from the civilly engaged humanism of pre- and his own post-Medicean scholarship. In a language rich in reference to the "applicable" studies of humanists such as Salutati, who were active before the year 1434, he spoke of the utility of the *studia humanitatis* he

42 (1991), 216-17. Tr. in Patricia Lee Rubin and Alison Wright, *Renaissance Florence: The Art of the 1470s*, London: National Gallery Publications, 1999, 15.

²² See for instance *SE*, 1: 343, and the famous sermon preached on Ascension Sunday, both studied below, in Chapter 3.

was to re-introduce in Florence. The historical specificity of Adriani's arguments requires emphasis. For him, humanism had fallen into decline when Cosimo de' Medici returned from exile, when the Republic was deprived of her freedom (*libertas*) and when the seeds were sown for Poliziano's self-fulfilling philology, that was "of no use to the Republic." "I have decided to speak to you today," he lectured, "about their [the humanities'] *utilitas*: the one and only word that (I hope) may make you prick your ears."²³

In order to reintegrate art into Florentine society, an artist like Michelangelo had to rethink the social, religious and political function of the artwork under the new political order, a task he had in common with a scholar like Adriani. That rethinking structures the sculpture, painting and drawing that Michelangelo made between his return to Florence in 1501 and his departure in 1506, works produced in the midst of the period of the Governo Popolare: the public commissions for the *David* (1501-04), the *Cascina Cartoon* (1504-05), and the *Saint Matthew* (1506); and the private commission for the *Doni Tondo* (1504-06), albeit a work of public authority.²⁴ These works take the historical conditions of the Governo Popolare as a problem. Faced with a political turnover that threatened the survival of the work of art, Michelangelo set out to completely re-fashion the history of the political image in order to save it from extinction.



²³ BRF, MS 811, fol. 19r: "... constituimus de utilitate eorum hodie apud vos dicere, in quo speramus uno hoc 'utilitas' verbo non fore vos in audiendo negligentes, ex eo maxime, quod omnes institutione hac patria et ingenio estis, ut in omnibus agendis rebus numeretis statim quanta sit vobis ex ea reditura annona." Cited and translated in Godman, 163, 165.

²⁴ I therefore neglect five projects Michelangelo was also commissioned to complete in the period, and for the following reasons: The Piccolomini altar (commissioned for Siena Cathedral), the *Bruges Madonna* (commissioned by a Flemish merchant for the church of Onze Lieve Vrouwe in Bruges), and the bronze *David* (sent to France), all contributed little to figuring a visible form of a politically reformed Florentine society that is the subject of the present book. And the two marble *tondi* (ultimately acquired by Bartolommeo Pitti and Taddeo Taddei but done on Michelangelo's own initiative in second-rate marble), are only mentioned in passing; it remains uncertain whether Pitti and Taddei acquired them during the period studied here.

The idea that Michelangelo's work operated on a political and social level is not new; political interpretations abound in Michelangelo studies, including some of the works Michelangelo produced for the *Governo Popolare*. A work like the *David*, according to some of the most authoritative arguments, boasted a powerful political iconography.²⁵ Though consensus is hardly a hallmark of Michelangelo studies, the majority of scholars contends that the *David* served as a symbol of anti-Medici politics (even of republican liberty in general), as if iconography is art's most trustworthy political index. The insistence on the political meaning of iconography per se rather than the way in which it was given visual shape ("style," so to speak) has produced an apparent split in the study of High Renaissance art. Whereas modern survey books focus on stylistic development but leave out social, religious and political interpretations of those styles, the industry of "contextual studies" calls attention to the relevance of an individual work of art's political iconography and ignores the ways in which the specific *form* of that subject-matter might have contributed to political meaning. In short, stylistic change is made independent of historical and political transformation, while the meaning of iconography is made completely dependent on history.

The idea that High Renaissance art itself bares a stylistic quality that is historically resistant is firmly grounded in the historiography of our discipline. In 1898, in the pages that open the most influential survey of High Renaissance art after Vasari, Heinrich Wölfflin wrote of the painting of Michelangelo and his contemporaries as an art of radical detachment of lived historical experience. Comparing Michelangelo to the visual culture embodied by the enthusiastic "naturalism" of Ghirlandaio, Wölfflin felt himself "removed from the living, colorful world to a vacuous space, where only shades live, not people with red, warm blood. '*Klassische Kunst*' appears to be the Ever-Dead, the Ever-Old; the fruit of the academies, a testimony to the rule, not to life."²⁶ For the Swiss historian, the art of the High Renaissance epitomizes the idea

²⁵ Among specialist studies are Levine; Lavin, 1993, Seymour, 1967b.

²⁶ Wölfflin, 1: "Man fühlt sich von der lebendigen bunten Welt hinweggehoben in luftleere Räume, wo nur Schemen wohnen, nicht Menschen mit rotem, warmem Blut. '*Klassische Kunst*' scheint das Ewig-Tote zu sein, das Ewig Alte; die Frucht der Akademien; ein Erzeugnis der Lehre und nicht des Lebens."

of “Classical,” a concept, of course, invented to account for the very timeless and universal artistic values that he found to be so immune to historical change. According to him, the Classical lives a slumbering life on the underside of history, revived only at moments of extreme artistic maturity and certainly not as the result of political change. Wölfflin, followed by Sydney Freedberg and others, believed that the historical chill of Classicism with which Michelangelo replaced the warm-blooded naturalism of Quattrocento art somehow reflected a radical detachment of art from its historical context.²⁷ When art ceased to imitate life, it also removed itself from the social world in which it was given shape and the societal needs it was once designed to serve. Civic life was visualized in Ghirlandaio’s Tornabuoni Chapel (Fig. 1), not in the art of Raphael and Michelangelo. A Wölfflinian bias still haunts present-day scholarship on High Renaissance art. In a recent essay on the periodization of Italian Renaissance art, Giovanni Previtali remarks that the early Cinquecento had witnessed “the greatest divergence between political and cultural events that had so far occurred in the history of Italy.”²⁸

This book argues that Michelangelo’s work for the post-Medicean Republic was marked by a deliberate shift of meaning from the *what* to the *how* of representation, although that shift never entailed subject-matter entirely losing its meaning. The specific *ways* in which iconography were given visual form became a matter of concern in and of itself. Remarkably enough, many iconographical themes employed in the period of the Governo Popolare were not very different from the ones in use under the Medici. There was no such thing as an iconography of post-Medicean republicanism. Thus the painting, sculpture and drawing that Michelangelo produced in that period include such venerable “Medicean” subject-matter as the Old Testament giant slayer David, the Apostle Matthew, the Holy Family with Saint John the Baptist and a scene of war. To give works like Michelangelo’s *David* political iconicity on the basis of their subject-matter alone is

²⁷ Freedberg, 1: 3-71.

²⁸ Giovanni Previtali, “The Periodization of the History of Italian Renaissance Art,” in *History of Italian Art*, 2 vols, ed. Peter Burke, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994, 2: 53-54. And for an important attempt to connect some of the defining features of High Renaissance art with political crisis, now see Jill Burke, “Meaning and Crisis in the Early Sixteenth Century: Interpreting Leonardo’s Lion,” *Oxford Art Journal* 29.1 (2006), 77-91.

therefore historically odd. This is not to claim that art of the Medici period attached no political meaning to the “how” of representation; the first chapter in fact shows how the Medici propagated a certain style of representation that others even understood as Medicean. Michelangelo took up that “how” and subsequently reversed it, literally reformed it.

Reform was a political act. The reconsideration of humanist rhetoric, political theory, prose and poetry, the social function of religious confraternities, and the culture of carnival and civic processions – all these were understood in political terms. Even in Savonarola’s thought, for all its emphasis on Christian reform, questions of religious decorum became questions of political propriety. The preacher, who was also the author of a treatise on the Florentine government, never argued for religious reform for its own sake but always for the reform of Christian belief as a *means* to social and political refashioning.²⁹ According to Girolamo Benivieni, writing in 1498, Savonarola had “reformed our city [of Florence] in great part, ... not only in respect to living uprightly and the things of the spirit, but also with respect to those things which are necessary for the public and civil government thereof.”³⁰ In that sense, Savonarola stood much closer to Machiavelli’s analysis of the political function of religion than has often been recognized.³¹ Donald Weinstein has done a lot to show how much Savonarola’s writing depended on Florentine political traditions, and

²⁹ See, for example, Savonarola’s remarks on the socially unifying function of religion in the so-called “renovation sermon” of 14 December 1494; SAT, 213: “e se voi farete questo, la città vostra sarà gloriosa, perchè a questo modo la sarà riformata quanto allo spirituale e quanto al temporale, cioè quanto al popolo suo, e d’ate uscirà la reformazione di tutta la Italia.” And, *ibid.*, 218: “dove è maggiore unione è maggior fortezza, ma chi è in grazia e carità ha maggiore unione è maggior fortezza.” “le città circunstante temano più della città ben regolata e unita in sè medesima; item volentieri con quella li vicini circunstanti pigliano amicizia.” And *ibid.*, 227: “Se voi fate questa pace tutti insieme e’ cittadini e site uniti, crediate a me che, udita questa unione, tutti e’ nimici vostri vi temeranno e sarete in questo modo più sicuri e più forti di loro. Or, volendosi fare questa pace universale infra tutti e’ cittadini, così del vecchio come del nuovo Stato, bisogna ricorrere prima a Dio, dal quale viene ogni grazia e ogni dono; però facciasi orazione per tre giorni continui in ogni luogo, acciò che Dio disponga e’ cuori di ciascheduno a farla volentieri.”

³⁰ Benivieni, ed. del Lungo, xvii-xxv. Tr. in SSW, 245.

³¹ But see for Machiavelli’s almost anthropological approach to religion, J. Samuel Preus, “Machiavelli’s Functional Analysis of Religion: Context and Object,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 40.2 (1979), 171-90.

recent scholarship has done little to change that view.³² That modern art history is still inclined to consider Savonarola's remarks on art in isolation from the political content of his sermons has much to do with the fact that Gustave Gruyer published those remarks as isolated excerpts in the nineteenth century.³³

Take for example the bonfires of vanities. For all of their time-honored connotations of religious purification, the fires served a calculated political effect. Organized at Carnival, they replaced the traditional festivities that Laurentian Florence had been famous for and through which Lorenzo de' Medici had consolidated his power.³⁴ Contemporaries attributed meaning to the bonfires by *comparing* and *contrasting* them to the past. If Richard Trexler is right and the Medici effected political change in Florence through "a shift in ritual space, times and objects," then Savonarola exploited those politics to the maximum when he replaced the ritual space, time and objects of Carnival with those of iconoclasm.³⁵ Yet the bonfires did not just destroy Medici imagery, they served themselves *as* image, one of a conquered visual politics. "Surrounding the structure [of the stake]," one witness wrote, "were seven tiers, one above the other at equal intervals, on which were set all the aforesaid objects with a not disagreeable artfulness. ... The aforesaid items were set out in such an overall order, and yet so separated as to make each distinct, that this edifice, which was as decorative as it was appropriate, was rendered pleasing and

³² Weinstein, 1970. And for an overview of the literature up to the early 1990s, see *ibid.*, "Hagiography, demonology, biography: Savonarola studies today," *The Journal of Modern History* 63 (1991), 483-503. The 500th anniversary of Savonarola's death in 1998 has produced an astonishing flow of Savonarola studies and new editions of his work, especially in Italy; see Konrad Eisenbichler, "Savonarola Studies in Italy on the 500th Anniversary of the Friar's Death," *Renaissance Quarterly* 52 (1999), 487-95.

³³ *Les illustrations des écrits de Jérôme Savonarole publiés en Italie au xv^e et au xvi^e siècle, et les paroles de Savonarole sur l'art*, 4 vols, Paris: Firmin-Dido, 1879.

³⁴ For the politics of carnival in Lorenzo's Florence, see Paolo Orvieto, "Carnevale e feste fiorentine del tempo di Lorenzo de' Medici," in *Lorenzo Il Magnifico e il suo tempo*, ed. Gian Carlo Garfagnini, Florence: Olschki, 1992, 103-24; and Konrad Eisenbichler, "Confraternities and Carnival: The context of Lorenzo de' Medici's 'Rappresentazione di SS. Giovanni e Paolo'," in *Medieval Drama on the Continent of Europe*, ed. Clifford Davidson and John H. Stroupe, Kalamazoo (Mich): Western Michigan University, 1993, 128-39.

³⁵ Trexler, 1978, 297. And also see, K.J.P. Lowe, "Patronage and territoriality in early sixteenth-century Florence," *Renaissance Studies* 7 (1993), 258-71.

delightful to the eyes of everyone in its entirety no less than in its parts.”³⁶ The bonfires of vanities, especially the first one of February 1497, were as much a politics of the aesthetic as the visual propaganda of Laurentian Carnival. Neither a mere destruction of art nor a simple cleansing of sinful objects, Savonarolan iconoclasm served a carefully calculated orchestration of visual contrast to Laurentian culture.



Political self-consciousness was at the basis of Michelangelo’s work. No other artist was better equipped to review the political history of Florentine art, a man not only knowledgeable of the history of his own profession but also involved in Florentine politics. The political history of Michelangelo’s family became of renewed interest after the change of regime in 1494. The Buonarroti-Simoni had served political offices since the fourteenth century, when they were part of the oligarchic ruling elite that would force the Medici into exile in 1433. That involvement excluded them from political office after 1434.³⁷ In the period of Medici hegemony their fortunes declined, a fact that must have fostered a certain negative opinion of Florence’s ruling family within the Buonarroti ranks.³⁸ After 1494, family members began to be selected for political offices again. But they were disqualified from occupying these positions because of a tax debt that had been caused by the decline in family fortunes in the fifteenth century.³⁹ Michelangelo, obsessed with family honor, invested the income he received from the works that are the subject of this book in paying off his family’s debt. In 1506 the Buonarroti started to fill the city’s political magistrates again after a seventy years absence. Michelangelo, too, was elected for political office in the period, but declined because of absence from the city.⁴⁰ The fact that the Governo Popolare returned the Buonarroti to political

³⁶ Benivieni, ed. del Lungo, xvii-xxv. Tr. in SSW, 248.

³⁷ The foundational text on the Buonarroti’s political fortunes is still Spini. Also see, *Carteggio indiretto*, 1: ix-lix; and, more recently the comprehensive account in Hatfield, 2002, 201-12.

³⁸ Spini, 115.

³⁹ Hatfield, 2002, 212.

⁴⁰ Hatfield, 2002, 213. In 1529, Michelangelo accepted his office on the Gran Consiglio and a membership of the Nine of Ordinance and the Militia; see *ibid.*, 217; and in 1529 he accepted his office as Governor of Fortifications; see *ibid.*, 97, 156, 206, 210, 218, 222.

prominence must have fostered Michelangelo's proclivity for a Florence without the Medici, a preference that would last a lifetime.⁴¹

More important than Michelangelo's personal political ideology – which can never be proven to have ended up in his work – is the sense of history that structured republican politics in Florence and Michelangelo's political thought no less. A family's participation in politics was closely tied up with the political history of the city. In order to be nominated for office in one of the city magistrates, a man had to demonstrate his family's political pedigree. That is why all Florentine families kept *ricordanze*, books of memoirs that contained important information about the family's participation in the city's political history.⁴² This is what set Florence apart from other republics such as Venice, where the families eligible for political office had been fixed in a senate since the thirteenth century and where historical validation was thus rendered unnecessary.⁴³

⁴¹ Panic raged through Michelangelo's family in the fall of 1512, when the Medici returned from exile. In a letter to his brother written from Rome in the weeks after the Medici's return, Michelangelo advised his brother Buonarroto to keep a low profile in the city and "not to make friends with anyone"; see *Carteggio*, 1: 136 (18.ix.1512): "*Oro s'è decto di nuovo che la casa de' Medici è ntrata in Firenze e che ogni cosa è achoncia; per la qual cosa chredo che sia cessato il pericolo, cioè degli Spagnuoli, e non credo che e' bisogni più partirsi. Però statevi in pace, e non vi fate amici né familiari di nessuno, se non di Dio, e non parlate di nessuno né bene né male, perché non sis a el fine delle cose.*" After having spoken badly of the Medici, Michelangelo was quick to reconcile with Giuliano de' Medici. But he told his father to "sell what we've got and go and live elsewhere" in case a reconciliation with Giuliano would not have the desired effect; see *Carteggio*, 1: 140 (x/xi.1512): "*Io scriverò dua versi a G[i]uliano de' Medici, e'quali saranno in questa [lettera]; leggetgli, esse e' vi piace di portargniene, e vedrete se gioveranno niente. Se non gioveranno, pensate se si può vendere ciò che noi abbiāno; e anderno a abitare altrove.*" Although he assured Lodovico that he "never said anything against them [the Medici], except what is said generally by everybody," the panic that bespeaks his letter suggests else wise; see *Carteggio*, 1: 139 (x/xi.1512): "*Del chaso de' Medici, io non ò mai parlato contra di loro chosa nessuna, se non in quell modo che s'è parlato generalmente per ogn'uomo, come fu del caso di Prato; che selle pietre avessin Saputo parlare, n'arebbono parlato.*"

⁴² See, among other publications, Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, "L'invention du passé familial à Florence (XIV^e – XV^e s.)," in *Temps, mémoire, tradition au moyen âge*, Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, 1983, 95-118; Giovanni Ciappelli, "Family memory: Functions, evolution, recurrences," in *Art, Memory and Family* (2000), 26-83; and *ibid.*, "Famiglia e memoria familiare," in *Storia della civiltà Toscana*, vol. 2 (*Il Rinascimento*), ed. Michele Ciliberto, Florence: Le Monnier, 2001, 563-78.

⁴³ See James S. Grubb, "Memory and identity: Why the Venetians didn't keep *ricordanze*," *Renaissance Studies* 8 (1994), 375-87.

After the fall of the Medici, politics acquired an even more important historical dimension. Families who had been excluded from office under Medici hegemony, like the Buonarroti, were allowed back into the ruling elite on the basis of their participation in Florentine government prior to 1434. Political participation amounted to historical investigation; family history became political history. It prompted someone like Francesco Guicciardini in 1508 to use his family archive to develop his *Istorie fiorentine* from, indeed a landmark of Florentine political thought.⁴⁴ The fact that Michelangelo descended from a family with an important political pedigree, combined with a genuine obsession with that pedigree, made him a student of his city's political history no less than the ruling group he served with his imagery, a unique position among his fellow artists.⁴⁵

The success of Michelangelo's politics of art was measured by his patrons, who, paying for the work, decided about its political functionality. They included some of the key figures in the Governo Popolare. Giuliano Salviati, of crucial importance in awarding the commission for the *David* to Michelangelo, was a protagonist on the political stage shortly before Savonarola's execution; Piero Soderini, involved with the *Saint Matthew* and the *Cascina Cartoon*, and identifying himself with the *David*, was head of the city-government from 1502 to 1512; and Agnolo Doni's anti-Medici politics eventually led to his imprisonment by the Medici, but not before he commissioned Michelangelo's *Holy Family with Saint John the Baptist*. These men did not demand that Michelangelo translate a specific political agenda into imagery; at least, no proof of such demands survive. Artistic contracts for the *David* and the *Saint Matthew* are still extant, but, as Michelle O'Malley recently demonstrated in regard to the commissioning process in general, contracts were only drawn up to legally fix subject-matter, the cost of material, deadlines, destination, and the amount of money an

⁴⁴ See Nicolai Rubinstein, "The 'Storie Fiorentine' and the 'Memorie di Famiglia' by Francesco Guicciardini," *Rinascimento* NS 4 (1953), 171-225; *ibid.*, "Family, Memory, and History," in *Art, Family, and Memory* (2000), 39-47.

⁴⁵ For the rare number of other politically active artists in Florence, see Hatfield, 2002, xxxvii-xlix.

artist would earn, but certainly not the *ways* in which subject-matter was given visual form.⁴⁶

I submit that there is good reason to assume that Michelangelo's work for the Governo Popolare was not produced under the traditional terms of patronage described in and determined by those contracts.⁴⁷ In Chapters 2 and 3, I show that Michelangelo's relationship to the patrons discussed in this book can best be described as one of privilege, mutual understanding and shared interest. Here it is enough to point out that what Michelangelo and a patron like Soderini shared was an effort at legitimization. Michelangelo's effort was one of art, Soderini's was one of politics. Soderini's political integrity was measured by the extent to which he was able to contrast his government to the one of a perceived tyranny, appropriation, and the privatizing of public goods that his contemporaries associated with the Medici epoch. The success of Michelangelo's art was judged by the ways in which *he* contrasted his art with and found a solution to the then problematic history of the fifteenth century.

This is not to claim that Michelangelo produced a uniform style that was markedly anti-Medicean or even pro-Savonarola, nor is it to say that the 1494–1512 regime was somehow visually defined by a politicized style of representation. Readers familiar with the historiography of the period will be aware, however, of a long-standing interest in defining a "Savonarolan style." That interest is fading now; the diversity of Florentine painting styles resists the definition of a univocal pictorial language of Savonarolism.⁴⁸ It is now more common to

⁴⁶ See Michelle O'Malley, *The Business of Art: Contracts and the Commissioning Process in Renaissance Italy*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005.

⁴⁷ In a letter to his nephew, Michelangelo famously wrote himself out of that traditional "business of art"; *Carteggio*, 4: 299 (2.v.1548): "... che se un cictadino fiorentino vuol fare dipigniere una tavola da altare, che bisogna che e' truovi un dipintore: ché io non fu' mai pittore né scultore come chi ne fa boctega."

⁴⁸ As Burke, 2004, 155-57, recently reminded us. For earlier attempts to tie a Savonarolan agenda to individual artists, see, for Lippi, Timothy Verdon, "Girolamo Savonarola e il conservatorismo dell'arte fiorentina della *fin de siècle*," in *Girolamo Savonarola: storia, fede, arte*, ed. Giovanna Uzzani, Florence: Le lettere, 1999, 9-18; for Botticelli, Ronald Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli*, 2 vols, London: Elek, 1978, 1: 139-46; Paul Joannides, "Late Botticelli: Archaism and ideology," *Arte Cristiana* 83 (1995), 163-78; and Rab Hatfield, "Botticelli *Mystic Nativity*, Savonarola and the Millenium," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 58 (1995), 88-127; and for Fra Bartolommeo, R. Steinberg, 1978, 82-105.

speak of “crisis imagery,” of images that in some way *register* the religious and social crisis of the times in which they were produced.⁴⁹ This notion returns a capacity of critical reflection to the artist that older scholarship, focusing on the patron’s share, had deprived him. It avoids the question of a uniform “Savonarolan style” by making cultural reflection a more individual concern. What is problematic about the notion of crisis imagery, however, is that it constructs an art *of* crisis rather than one of a *solution* to crisis. It makes artists reflect on cultural change without providing an answer to it. By granting Michelangelo a personal, reflective vantage point on his own profession, I do not take his art as registering the content of Savonarola’s sermons or any other kind of writing of the period. Michelangelo invented highly original solutions to problems raised by the cultural reversals of the day.

Yet throughout this book Savonarola’s sermons and writings are often quoted, and I feel I have to say a word on Michelangelo’s specific relation to Fra Girolamo and the artist’s possible access to the content of the sermons. Condivi, later echoed by Vasari, wrote of Michelangelo’s intimate knowledge of Savonarola’s preaching, adding that “he had always felt a great affection” for the friar, “the memory of whose vivid voice [*viva voce*] still remains in his mind.”⁵⁰ Whereas it can no longer be maintained on the basis of Condivi’s words that Michelangelo was among the preacher’s followers (the *piagnoni*),⁵¹ there is good reason to assume that the artist attended some of the sermons.⁵² He could have heard the friar’s “*viva voce*” in 1493, before the expulsion of the Medici,

⁴⁹ See, for instance, Charles Burroughs, “The altar and the City: Botticelli’s ‘Mannerism’ and the Reform of Sacred Art,” *Artibus et historiae* 36 (1997), 9-40.

⁵⁰ Condivi, ed. Nencioni, 62: “[Michelangelo] *ha similmente con grande studio ed attenzione lette le Sacre Scritture, sì del Testamento Vecchio come del Nuovo, e chi sopra di ciò s’è affaticato, come gli scritti del Savonarola, al quale egli ha sempre avuta grande affezione, restandogli ancor nella mente la memoria dell sua viva voce.*” Vasari, 6: 112: “*Dilettossi molto della Scrittura Sacra, come ottimo cristiano che egli era, et ebbe in gran venerazione l’opere scritte da fra’ Girolamo Savonarola, per avere udito la voce di quell frate in pergam.*”

⁵¹ The idea of Michelangelo as a *piagnone* painter is especially tenacious in older scholarship; see, for instance, Henry Thode, *Michelangelo: Kritische Untersuchungen über seine Werke*, 3 vols, Berlin: G. Grote, 1908-13, 2: 275-76. Yet there is no proof to substantiate such statements. What is more, in a letter to Piero Gondi (26.i.1524), Michelangelo complained about the *piagnoni*; see *Carteggio*, 3: 27.

⁵² The best case for Michelangelo’s knowledge of Savonarola’s ideas, either expressed in spoken word or in print, is made by Hatfield, 1995.

preaching on the psalm *Quam bonus*, and in the spring of 1496, when Michelangelo was visiting Florence for a few months (receiving no commissions).⁵³ The latter visit allows for the possibility that he attended Savonarola's devastating criticism against the painters of naturalism, his diatribes against the cult of outward vision and his long expositions on the Augustinian inner eye – the famous sermons preached around Easter quoted mainly in Chapter 3. Attracting unprecedented crowds at Florence Cathedral, Savonarola's sermons must have had an enormous impact in the city; printed versions already circulated before the end of the century.⁵⁴

Published editions of the friar's other sermons issued from the Florentine presses in the early sixteenth century, and his treatises were reprinted during his life.⁵⁵ The publication industry of Savonarola's sermons suggests his impact on Florentine culture in the decades after his death, a suggestion affirmed by Lorenzo Polizzotto's study of Savonarola's legacy.⁵⁶ Indeed the authors mentioned in the pages that follow (the Benivieni cousins, Nesi, Gianfrancesco Pico, Francesco Guicciardini), continued to voice the cultural criticisms raised by Savonarola during his short stewardship in Florence long after his execution. Traces of their thinking can also be found in Michelangelo's poetry.

Although the following four chapters uncover a certain stylistic regime that governs Michelangelo's work for the Governo Popolare – a pictorial and sculptural language that denies the quotidian realism of the Quattrocento and one peculiarly restrictive in its capacity of storytelling – I also maintain that an apparent uniformity in solutions resulted from a plurality of problems. Those problems might be loosely defined by the notions of history, origins and recovery. Chapter 1 ("History") shows how Michelangelo's *David* dissolves the history of fifteenth-century art and the Medici politics that Quattrocento imagery once affirmed in an

⁵³ Michelangelo probably returned from Bologna to Florence after the fall of 1495. He stayed in Florence until late June. On 25.vi.1496, he arrived in Rome; see *Carteggio*, 1: 1-2.

⁵⁴ For instance *Prediche dalla pasqua al avvento dell'anno 1496*, Florence: Antonio Tubini, Lorenzo de Alopa Veneziano, and Andrea Ghirlandi, ca. 1499.

⁵⁵ For the publication history of Savonarola's sermons, see Vincenzo Romano, "Predicazioni Savonaroliane e attività redattrice dei primi editori," *La Bibliofilia* 69 (1967), 277-308.

⁵⁶ Polizzotto, 1994.

image of the timeless and atemporal. Chapter 2 (“Origins”) interprets the *David* and the *Saint Matthew* as attempts to counteract the belief expressed by Savonarola that images had become more about their artists than about subject-matter; in them, Michelangelo announced artistic ingenuity as something that mediates between human making and divine authorship, a claim that was also a path to the artist’s *divinità*. Chapter 3 (“Recovery”), shows how in the *Doni Tondo* Michelangelo recovered a vision of pre-Renaissance naturalism in response to contemporary critique against the kind of veristic painting produced in the fifteenth century. The last chapter (“A Model for History”) attempts to pull all three notions together in Michelangelo’s *Cascina Cartoon*, which, I argue, formulates a theory of the history of art in drawing and *disegno* with the exclusive aim to write its own reception, a reception of a visual force strong enough to eclipse a former Medici history of art.

HISTORY

Broken History

A profound serenity is at the heart of Michelangelo's *David* (Fig. 2), carved between 1501 and 1504 in the shadow of Florence Cathedral. Three times human size, completely naked and with a perfect anatomy, the sculpture stands unmotivated by action – David's body describing little more than a smooth S-curve. At least at first instance, we are left with a statue of narrative irreferentiality, a state of affairs complicated by the seeming absence of iconographical attributes. The missing attributes have led some art historians to deny that a contemporary audience could have understood the statue as David, the identification that today accompanies the sculpture in the Galleria dell' Accademia in Florence and in every art history textbook.¹ It has prompted others to argue that the work simultaneously represents a conglomerate of identities: David, Hercules, Orpheus and Adam.² Yet recent art historical skepticism was not shared by the sculpture's contemporary audience, among them Michelangelo's patrons, who identified the work simply as "*Davit*,"³ the

¹ Shearman, 1992, 44, believed that contemporary viewers identified the statue foremost as a giant or even Orpheus, and not as David. Michelangelo's statue is identified as an *Orpheus* only once, in 1536, by Johannes Fichard, an identification that, I think, was occasioned by Fichard's acquaintance with Bandinelli's *Orpheus* of circa 1519, which indeed translates the pose of Michelangelo's *David* into Orpheus.

² Paoletti, 2001, 637-42, maintained that Michelangelo's statue represents simultaneously a David, an Adam and a Hercules; and Seymour, 1967b, 51, opined that it was also an Adam.

³ The Opera del Duomo documents referring to the statue as a David, are Poggi, 1: 83-84 (doc. 448); Milanese, 620; Frey, 1909, 107 (docs 14, 15, 18), 109 (doc. 30). In addition, the statue

Old Testament King-*cum*-giantslayer, who had entered Florentine iconographical tradition some hundred years earlier and enjoyed an immense popularity in the Quattrocento.

Pitched against the history of Davidean iconography in Florence, Michelangelo's *David* stands out. Iconographical tradition, grounded in the first book of Samuel, had prescribed several stock attributes to enable identification: the head of Goliath, whom David had overcome with a sling and the help of God; the sword, which he had taken from the unfortunate Goliath to chop off his head with; and the shepherd's outfit that identified David as the seemingly unlikely victor over the well-trained warrior Goliath. Michelangelo's *David* relates to that tradition only in the most fragile way. An iconographical pedigree is merely evoked at a closer look, which reveals Michelangelo's colossus holding an object over his left shoulder, hardly visible though, for it disappears behind his back. We have to walk around the statue to discover that the object is the sling that David used to hit Goliath's head with a stone. The device describes a diagonal line over the sculpture's back, from upper left to lower right, from David's left hand to his right (Fig. 3). But the sling does little to disturb a profound iconographical silence. Circular movement around the colossus is counteracted by the statue's strict frontality, as some of Michelangelo's contemporaries recognized.⁴ This is no turning body that invites us to admire the sculpture from all sides. Michelangelo carved it within a single plane, conceived it almost as a relief at a time when artists had been favoring multiple viewpoints in their statuary for decades. With his decision, then, to carve the sling over David's back, while at the same time maintaining the statue's peculiar two-dimensionality, Michelangelo intentionally hid the only iconographical attribute from sight, rendering his giant sculpture nearly unidentifiable, and forcing a radical break with the history of Florentine David as it was known by then.⁵

was identified as a David by Cerretani, *Ricordi*, ed. Berti, 212; Lapini, 61; Borghini, 2: 164; Vasari, 6: 19; and Condivi, ed. Nencioni, 22.

⁴ For example, in 1504, during the consultation of the statue's future site discussed below, Giovanni Cellini found the statue unsuitable for the Loggia de' Lanzi, because "it would be necessary to go around it there"; see Seymour, 1967b, 152-53.

⁵ The popularity of David in Florence has been studied by Volker Herzner, "David Florentinus 1: Zum Marmordavid Donatello im Bargello," *Jarbuch der Berliner Museen* 20

The idea that Michelangelo's *David* marks an epochal turning point in the history of art informs the earliest testimonies about the sculpture. For Vasari, the *David* broke radically enough with history to resist any form of comparison at all. He refuted to Biblical language instead, suggesting that historical time does not suffice to describe the art historical rupture the statue represented. "Michelangelo resurrected one who had been dead And verily, who sees it does not want to see any other work of sculpture, produced neither in our times nor in others wherein artists will exist."⁶ The notion, however, that the *David* inaugurated a new era in image-making ultimately dates back to 1501, to Michelangelo himself.

Michelangelo knew that he was making his *David* under the historical conditions of post-Medici culture. On a sheet of *circa* 1502, now in the Louvre, he wrote next to a study after Donatello's bronze *David* and a drawing for the right arm of the marble *David*: "*Rocta lalta collona e elverd,*" "Broken the high column and the green ..." (Fig. 4). The words quote the first line of Petrarch's sonnet 269: "Broken are the high column and the green laurel." On Michelangelo's sheet the word "*lauro*" is cut off by the boundaries of the paper; there is no evidence that the drawing has ever been cropped so Michelangelo's omitting the word must have been intended.⁷ Furthermore, the marginal lines do not just document a quick and coincidental thought, penned down in haste when the paper was at hand. Michelangelo's handwriting is carefully crafted, marked by an aesthetic quality distinct from the more sloven hand we find in his letters; Michelangelo's words are therefore meaningful.

In Petrarch's poem, "*Rotta l'alta colonna e 'l verde lauro,*" "*colonna*" refers to his patron Cardinal Colonna, and "*lauro*" to the poet's

(1978), 43-115; and *ibid.*, "David Florentinus," *Jahrbuch der Berliner Museen* 24 (1982), 63-142. In addition, Butterfield, 1995, warned against exaggerating the popularity of David as a typical Florentine phenomenon, pointing to the iconography's existence elsewhere at European courts. Yet, in what follows, the popularity of the Victorious David in fifteenth-century Florence will be partly explained through the artistic exemplarity of Donatello's bronze *David*.

⁶ Vasari, 6: 20: "*E certo fu miracolo quello di Michelagnolo, far risuscitare uno che era morto E certo chi veda questa non dee curarsi di vedere altra opera di scultura fatta nei nostri tempi o negli altri da qualsivoglia artefice.*"

⁷ For the drawing see Paul Joannides, *Inventaire general des dessins Italiens*, 6 (*Michel-Ange: Elèves et Copistes*), Paris: Édition de la Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 2003, 68-73.

beloved Laura. The sonnet laments the death of both figures, the grief over which is evoked in the closing lines of the work, "Oh our life that is so beautiful to see, how easily it loses in one morning what has been acquired with great difficulty over many years!"⁸ Yet in Michelangelo's case, the cut off "lauro" is a phonetic pun on Lorenzo de' Medici, who had passed away in 1492.⁹ Michelangelo was not the first to make the equation between laurel and Lorenzo. During and after *Il Magnifico's* life it had become a trope in the circles of Agnolo Poliziano and Luigi Pulci.¹⁰ The theme of the never-dying laurel, always giving life to new sprouts even after it had been cut off, had the great potential of associating the Medici with immortality and dynastic eternity, an idea that of course acquired more urgency in Medici circles after Lorenzo had passed away.¹¹ "The Laurel suddenly struck by a thunderbolt lies there; the laurel, celebrated by choirs of all the muses, by dances of all the nymphs," wrote Agnolo Poliziano shortly after Lorenzo's death, in the hope that Medici's cultural program would not be buried with his body, but continued in the patronage of Lorenzo's son, Piero.¹² In the world of poetry and pageantry, the symbolism of unbroken vegetal growth lent comfort to the realities of the irreversibility of death. Under the protection of that inexhaustible plant the Laurentian age of cultural prosperity would never pass.¹³ By the time Poliziano composed his poem, the continuity of the Medici dynasty was a reality not yet given way to myth. At Lorenzo's death, family rule over Florence passed on to Lorenzo's son Piero, whom many hoped would fulfill what the laurel prophesized: a golden age of culture under the protection of the family that had shaped Florentine culture since 1434.

⁸ Petrarca, *Petrarch's Lyric poems. The Rime Sparse and Other Lyrics*, tr. and ed. Robert M. Durling, Cambridge (MA) and London: Harvard University Press, 1976, 442-44.

⁹ Seymour, 1967b, 5-6; and Lavin, 1993, 51-58.

¹⁰ For Lorenzo de' Medici and the laurel theme, see Cox-Rearick, 1984, 19-31.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹² The text is *Stanza 3* of "Quis dabit capiti meo aquam?," published in *Poeti latini del Quattrocento*, ed. Francesco Arnaldi, Lucia Gualdo Rosa and Liliana Monti Sabia, Milan: Ricciardi, 1964, 1068: "laurus impetu fulminis / illa illa iacet subito, / laurus omnium celebris, / Musarum choris, / nympharum choris ..." Cited and translated in Cox-Rearick, 1984, 55.

¹³ See Poliziano, *Stanze cominciate per la giostra di Giuliano de' Medici*, ed. Vincenzo Pernicone, Turin: Loescher-Chiantore, 1954, 1: 4; quoted in Cox-Rearick, 1984, 55nt49.

However, by the time Michelangelo penned his lines in 1502, the politics of dynastic continuity had been radically cut short by the Medici expulsion. The mythic laurel was broken, and the Laurentian age broken off – no recovery in sight. Far from being an expression of personal loss,¹⁴ Michelangelo's words give voice to the rupture with Laurentian culture that colored politics at the time. A breach is visualized – albeit by denial – by omitting the word "*lauro*" from the sheet. Petrarch's poem can only be completed in the imagination of the informed beholder, in this case, Michelangelo himself, very much like the age of Lorenzo could only be imagined because its visual traces were lost in the project of *damnatio memoriae* that preceded Michelangelo's return to Florence. Michelangelo's words were directed towards the passing away of a *culture*, not just a *person*, however much this culture had come to be personified by Lorenzo di Piero di Cosimo de' Medici. *Il Magnifico* had become a symbol of his age, of an epoch defined by certain cultural values that were only given their definite shape after Medici's death. Whether writing from the perspective of pro- or contra-Medici, Lorenzo's death was thought to have marked a watershed in Florentine history, considered to have sparked the ensuing circumstances of the Medici expulsion, the invasion of the French and the establishment of the Governo Popolare. The perception of historical rupture catalized some of the most interesting and heated discussions on the nature and nurture of history that the sixteenth century produced. It is to those discussions, I submit, that Michelangelo's words pertain.

The official politics of reversing Medici culture practiced at the Palazzo della Signoria soon led to a counter-movement in the circle of Bernardo Rucellai, a Medici loyalist who began to plead for a return to the golden age of Lorenzo around the time Michelangelo was

¹⁴ Seymour, 1967b, 6, wrote: "Whatever his reason, it seems clear that the contemplation represented by this fragment of verse was concerned with serious thoughts about the patronage of artists. Only ten years earlier the great Lorenzo, ruler of Florence before the fall of his house in 1494, had been Michelangelo's patron and protector. In that relationship there was not only inspiration for the artist, but a kind of security which the impersonal patronage of the republican institutions around 1500 did not approach. It is possible also that Lorenzo's death was a painful personal loss to the young sculptor. In that case the parallel with Petrarch's earlier relationship to the Colonna would have been extraordinary close and complete."

commissioned to sculpt the *David*.¹⁵ What is so interesting about this counter-movement is the way in which culture came to be considered a product of political history. For Bernardo and his allies, gathering in the *Orti Oricellari*, a healthy culture of art and literature started to show the signs of malady in 1494.¹⁶ The writers of the *Orti* often used medical metaphors to bring their arguments across. Giovanni Corsi, in the dedicatory letter to Bindaccio Ricasoli of his Ficino biography of 1506, thus explains how Florence's cultural prominence in the fifteenth century was not just due to the intensity of Florentine literary studies itself, but was born naturally from the politics of "Doctor Lorenzo [*Medices Laurentio*]." "And that is why," Corsi continues,

the calamities of our times make me so miserable, since in our city there dominates clumsiness and ignorance instead of the discipline of the Fine Arts [*bonis artibus*], instead of liberty there is avarice, instead of modesty and self-restraint, ambition and extravagance. And also, entirely not according to a Republic, not faring on the ancient laws but on lechery, the old senate [*optimus*] is besieged by the mockery of the people [*plebs*].¹⁷

¹⁵ F. Gilbert, 1944. Piero Parenti noted a pro-Laurentian sentiment in the city in the summer of 1501; see his *Storia fiorentina*, BNCF, II.IV.170, fol. 190v: "*Questo disordine faceva comandare e tempi di Lorenzo de Medici, et molti appetivano si tornassi a simile stato et seminavano per il vulgo la buona stagione preterita, biasimando la presente.*"

¹⁶ See for example, Crinito, *De Honesta Disciplina* (Book 16, Ch. 9): "*Nescio quo fato superiore anno evenerit; quo Francorum rex Carolus Italiam cum infecto exercitu et instructis copiis invasit: ut principes viri in literis atque in summis disciplinis clarissimi perierunt: hoc est Hermolaus Barbarus, Jo. Picus Mirandula et Angelo Politianus: qui omnes in ipso statim francorum adventu et conatibus immaturo obitu ad superos converunt, sed enim literae ipsae ac studia bonarum artium simul cum Italiae libertate coeperunt paulatim extinguere barbaris ingruentibus cum deesset hi homines qui illis suo patrocinio assiduisque studiis mirifice faverent: qualis inter alios vir summa sapientia et egregio animo Laurentius Medices ... felicissime tunc ageretur cum literis atque literatis.*" "[Laurentius Medices] qui Florentinam rempublicam non minore tum consilio quam fortuna gubernabat" Cited in F. Gilbert, 1944, 120nt3.

¹⁷ Corsi, in the letter of dedication of Ficino's biography to Bindo Ricasoli, published in Filipp Villani, *Liber de civitatis Florentiae famosis civibus*, ed. Gustavi Camilli Galletti, Florence: Mazzoni, 1847, 189: "*appellataque tunc passim Florentinorum urbs ex conventu doctissimorum virorum Athenae alterae. Unde non immerito sane a quodam e doctioribus ita scriptum: debere quidem literarum studia Florentinis plurimum, sed inter Florentinos Medicibus, inter veros Medices Laurentio: quocirca nostrorum temporum calamitas maxime miseranda; quandoquidem in nostra Civitate pro disciplinis ac bonis artibus inscitia et ignorantia, pro liberalitate avaritia, pro modestia et continentia ambitio et luxuria dominantur; atque adeo ut nihil omnino cum Republica, nihil cum*

Healthy political bodies produce sane art, artistic production attends to the pulse of a sane politics. The first symptoms of political disease therefore appear in the arts, here defined as an index of politics. In Corsi's argument, a political breaking-point stands out with marked clarity as a rupture in literary and artistic production, even, he implies, for an audience unacquainted with the political circumstances of the city of Florence.

Modern scholarship has also recognized the epochal watershed drawn in Florentine culture after 1494. They have, for example, noted a decline in the appreciation of Ficino's writings, a decline that for some marked a "crisis in Florentine humanism."¹⁸ It still needs emphasis, though, that the broken off history that Corsi and even some modern historians lamented was part of a systematic campaign of cultural reversal organized as an official politics of the Governo Popolare. What modern historians too easily label "crisis" was instead a self-conscious cultural strategy, designed to produce a kind of culture that could reclaim its place in politics exactly because of the ways in which it registered *as* historical rupture. The self-consciousness of that strategy bespeaks the state-oriented humanism of Marcello Virgilio Adriani, who not only occupied a chair at the Florentine *Studio* but also the First Chancellorship at Palazzo della Signoria. In his lectures, in 1496, he displayed a striking understanding of the interrelation between arts and politics. The demise of Rhetoric in the preceding decades in the hands of that Medicean Poliziano, he informed his audience, had been due to the fact that "it had been studied and practiced in a city that had been unfree for sixty years."¹⁹ To his informed listeners that day, the reference was clear. These sixty years pointed to the period 1434–1494, the epoch of

legibus agatur, sed pro libidine cuncta, ita ut optimus quisque a plebe per ludibrium oppugnetur. Quam veluti saevissimam novercam detestatus nuper Bernardus Oricellarius, exsulandum sibi duxit potius quam diutius esse in ea urbe, unda una cum Medicibus omnium bonarum artium disciplinae atque optima majorum instituta exsulerent." Cited in F. Gilbert, 1944, 121nt1.

¹⁸ For a good overview and additional bibliography, see Godman. Also helpful, is Christopher Celenza, *Piety and Pythagoras in Renaissance Florence. The Symbolum Nesianum*, Leiden, Boston, Cologne: Brill, 2001, 1-34.

¹⁹ BRF, MS 811, fol. 6r: "*Est enim Rhetorica nobis velut encyclios quedam disciplina et in orbem reditus super his studiis a nobis traditus.*" And then: "*... illi hactenus non rem, sed ambram persecuti sunt. Nec minus qui eam sexaginta annis in civitate parum libera studiosius didicerunt.*" Cited and translated in Godman, 156-57.

Medici rule. Under the pressure of new historical circumstances, Adriani fashioned his humanism in contrast to the one produced under the Medici. And for him the path to renewal lay in a re-orientation toward those utilitarian humanists of the pre-Medicean age.

When Michelangelo quoted Petrarch in the margins of the sheet in the Louvre, he understood that he produced his sculpture in the midst of political rupture. Visualizing a breach with art's former history – literally broken down in the stripping of attributes – the statue was informed by and lent interpretative weight to the politics of historical discontinuity practiced at the church for which it was originally commissioned. On August 16, 1501, Michelangelo committed to carve the *David* for one of the buttresses of the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore (Fig. 5). While some added works of former Medici ownership to their possessions, others did away with them. In an organized effort of *damnatio memoriae* carried out in the years preceding Michelangelo's commission, Florence Cathedral broke more than it commissioned. At a location cluttered with the remains of Medicean memory, iconoclasm was selective but necessary. However much the Florentine authorities had sought to prevent the filling up of the church with private chapels and burial places – those unambiguous markers of family identity –, when Lorenzo de' Medici died in April 1492, Santa Maria del Fiore had become a "Laurentian church."²⁰ In an interior deliberately left sober in decoration, the traces of Medici dominance stood all the more visible. An epitaph to the memory of Giuliano de' Medici was installed there in 1479 to commemorate Lorenzo de' Medici brother, murdered by the Pazzi conspirators while attending mass. Lorenzo had escaped from his attackers by fleeing into the Sacrestia delle Messe, not only saving his life but also managing to ward off the overthrow of his family for another fifteen years. By installing the epitaph, Lorenzo not only commemorated

²⁰ F.W. Kent, 2001. For Medici patronage of the chanting chapels, see Frank A. d'Accone, "The Singers of San Giovanni in Florence During the Fifteenth Century," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 14 (1961), 307-58; and for Cosimo de' Medici's presence at Santa Maria del Fiore, see D.V. Kent, 2000, 10-12; and Haines, 1989, 121. For the Medici control over the Opera del Duomo, the institution in charge of the maintenance and decoration of the church, see Fabbri, 2001. Documents indicating the presence of the Medici at the church are published in Poggi, 1: 201-02 (doc. 1004), 2: 131 (docs 2080-81), 133 (doc. 2086), 134 (docs 2090, 2094), 135 (doc. 2099), 153 (doc. 2186).

his dead brother, the plaque also became an unequivocal sign of the Medici's political dominance and victory over its enemies in Florence, which was further advertised in a medal bearing on one side the Cathedral's choir and on the other Giuliano de' Medici's portrait (Fig. 6). That victory was recognized and undone in 1495, when the authorities ordered the destruction of the epitaph, not only to erase the memory of Lorenzo's brother but also that of the victorious Lorenzo himself, who after his brother's death celebrated his greatest political successes at the very spot where Giuliano had died.²¹

Whereas Giuliano's memorial was broken into pieces, and thus rendered useless, other cleansing efforts at Santa Maria del Fiore consisted of the radical transformation of former Medici materials. When marble stock at the Duomo was low in 1500, marble "coming from the house of Lorenzo de' Medici" was allocated to the Capomaestro, the head of the cathedral's building works, which he was to use to replace the wooden floors and altar tables with.²² Although the practical reasons for using the material are crystal clear, it is still telling that Lorenzo's name is mentioned in connection with the marble. It indicates that dead material could carry personalized memory, and that memory was legendary and therefore relevant. Without much doubt the stone awarded to the Capomaestro in 1500 can be identified with a large amount of marble stored at Palazzo Medici that *Il Magnifico* had been using to build his private library, already half built by 1494.²³ Although it has long since disappeared from the map of modern Lorenzo studies, the library was probably among Lorenzo's most significant building campaigns. For Lorenzo and his contemporaries, building a library was not just an act of building a depository for books; the costly marble architecture housing rare books also expressed the idea of *Magnificenza*, the magnificence that came to constitute *Il Magnifico's* public *persona*. In

²¹ Poggi, 2: 168 (doc. 2272); and Parenti, ed. Matucci, 259-60.

²² Poggi, 1: 228 (doc. 1144): "... marmore existentia in dicta opera et que venerunt ex domo Laurentii de Medicis."

²³ F.W. Kent, 2004, 7. See Condivi, ed. Nencioni, 11: "E facendo *Il Magnifico* Lorenzo in quel luogo allora lavorare i marmi, o vogliàn dir conci, per ornar quella nobilissima libreria ch'egli e i s[u]oi maggiori racolta di tutto il mondo aveano (la qual fabrica, per la morte di Lorenzo e altri accidenti trasandata, fu doppo molti anni da papa Clemente ripresa, ma però lasciata imperfetta, sì che per ancora i libri sono in forzieri)...."

the 1480s Lorenzo begun to collect rare manuscripts and classical texts at a more rapid pace (for which reason he was probably building the library), and managed to purchase some of the greatest antique books. “To own such rare and valuable objects,” F.W. Kent explains, “was itself a decidedly magnificent, not to say princely way of behaving.”²⁴ No traces of Lorenzo’s half finished library remain, and this suggests that it was demolished after the Medici expulsion, just as the collection of books and antiquities he planned to house there were burnt on the bonfires organized by Savonarola or otherwise alienated from Medici property. In using the marble for the less magnificent purpose of constructing altar tables, the Opera del Duomo destroyed the last material remains of *Il Magnifico’s* dream of *Magnificenza*.

In the end, everything pertaining to Medici art and patronage at Florence Cathedral was cleansed, including the constitutional structure of the Opera del Duomo, the institution responsible for the church’s maintenance and decoration. Lorenzo de’ Medici had instituted some far-reaching changes in the Opera, which were all undone after 1494. The Laurentian office of the *Six provveditori* was abolished within a month after the Medici expulsion, on December 5, 1494,²⁵ and on the same day the consuls of the Wool Guild abolished the “*Borsellino*,” the “little bursar,” instituted in 1477 that contained the names of a select group of loyal Medici clients, “... because one wants to take away the reasons of justified complaints, as well as for the vigor of the present times [*per vigore della presente*].”²⁶ Times had changed and Florence’s cathedral workshop had changed with it. These decrees did more than dissolve two superfluous institutions. They also brought back the institution of the Opera del Duomo to its former glory, to a point in time considered uncorrupted by the Medici epoch. The office of the *provveditore* was abolished in order to bring back the Opera to a state “in accordance with

²⁴ F.W. Kent, 2004, 148.

²⁵ ASF, Arte della Lana, vol. 54, fols. 167r-v; and F.W. Kent, 2001, 368.

²⁶ ASF, Arte della Lana, vol. 54, fols. 168r-v: “... *p[er]ch[e] si tolgavia cagione de giuste querele, et[iam] p[er] vigore della p[rese]nte*.” Additional documents register the increase of the number of *operai* from two to three as of January 1497; ASF, Arte della Lana, vol. 39, fol. 44v. This decision might have been motivated by a wish to render the commissioning process at the Duomo more “republican.” Post-Medicean Florence considered the limited number of people involved in public decision-making a sign of Medici tyranny, as the deliberations surrounding the reform of the Florentine constitution make clear.

the ancient orders of the Guild, “*gli ordini antichi dellarte*.”²⁷ The dissolution of Medici offices gathered meaning as a process of historical purification. Art was politics. Art *and* its commissioning process changed with the winds of political change. Institutional reform at the cathedral was carried out using the same language as the constitutional changes designed at the Palazzo della Signoria.²⁸ As the abolishment of Laurentian offices at the cathedral aimed to bring back the Opera to “*gli ordini antichi dellarte*,” the creation of the Gran Consiglio, the central organ of the Governo Popolare, was called a restoration of the “*antico vivere popolare*.”²⁹

The fact that reform at the Cathedral building works was so closely related to constitutional reform was a direct consequence of its composition. Apart from the Capomaestro, three *operai* served office. The latter were largely in charge of the commissioning process.³⁰ They were elected for only one year, with one new *operaio* installed in January and two others in July in order to prevent the formation of power bases within this republican body. Their decision-making and language of conduct grounded in Florentine electoral politics and characterized by the typical Florentine “politics of consensus,”³¹ the full structure of governing the Opera asserted its political importance. The officers were drawn from one of the city’s major guilds, the Wool Guild, which also supplied candidates for political office at Palazzo della Signoria. Most of the *operai* therefore combined their duties within the Opera with offices

²⁷ ASF, Arte della Lana, vol. 54, fol. 167r.: “...*deputati secondo gli ordini antichi dellarte*.” The Medicean institutions within the Opera del Duomo that were abolished in 1495 were reinstalled by the Medici in 1512 within weeks after the Medici’s return; see ASF, Arte della Lana, vol. 55, fols. 86v-87r.

²⁸ For constitutional reform after the Medici, see Rubinstein, 1960, 151-52.

²⁹ Cited in Felix Gilbert, “Florentine Political Assumptions in the Period of Savonarola and Soderini,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 20 (1957), 211.

³⁰ For the functioning of the Opera del Duomo in relation to the Wool Guild and city government, see Saalman, 173-95; Haines, 1989; and Fabbri, 2001. The documents relevant for Michelangelo’s David suggest that the Opera del Duomo regulated the payments for the decoration and was mostly in charge of the selection of site, artist and medium; see Poggi, 1: 83-84 (docs 448-49). See besides Poggi, the documentation in Gaye, 2: 455-62, supplemented and partly corrected by Milanesi, 620; Frey, 1909, 107 (docs 14-15); and Seymour, 1967b, 134-55.

³¹ The term is from John Najemy, *Politics and Consensus in Florentine Electoral Politics, 1280 – 1400*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982.

in the city-government. In the unpublished ledgers that hold the names of the individual *operai* after 1494, we constantly encounter family names that had a decisive share in the constitutional reforms that shaped the period as a whole: the Capponi, Ridolfi, Benci, Pitti, Giugni, Salviati, Corbinelli, Carnesecchi, Paganelli, Filighiara, and Niccolini.³² And it is not surprising to learn that the name of the Medici has completely disappeared from these records between 1494 and 1512.³³

The names of the *operai* responsible for Michelangelo's commission are still unknown. The unpublished ledgers of the Wool Guild, however, reveal that one of the three *operai* was Giuliano di Francesco Salviati, appointed for one year on January 1, 1501.³⁴ It seems that Giuliano had a more decisive share in Michelangelo's commission than the other two *operai*. Not only a key player in the Governo Popolare, his family name is familiar to Michelangelo students. Throughout his life, the Salviati provided Michelangelo with the necessary conditions to work through recommendations and powerful relationships. Extensive evidence for the artist's relationship with this family survives in his *Carteggio*. A letter recently published by Michael Hirst shows that the Salviati must have entered the artist's life much earlier in the sixteenth century. We learn from the letter, which was written by Francesco Alidosi to Alamanno Salviati, that in the early spring of 1505 the latter had recommended the artist to Julius II in the most laudatory terms; no other guarantors were needed to convince the Pope of Michelangelo's skills.³⁵ Alamanno's confidence strongly suggests that connections between his family and the artist's antedate the recommendation to Pope Julius II.³⁶ Indeed, in the

³² ASF, Arte della Lana, vol. 39, fols. 44v-45r.

³³ The first mention of a Medici *operaio* occurs only in 1519, seven years after the Medici restoration, when a Galeotto di Lorenzo di Bernardo de' Medici was appointed; ASF, Arte della Lana, vol. 39, fol. 45v.

³⁴ AOSMF, serie II, vol. 2, nr. 9, Deliberazione, 1498-1507, fol. 28r., for the official record of Salviati's election. For the documentation of the appointment in the administration of the Wool Guild, see ASF, Arte della Lana, vol. 39, fol. 45r., and for the record of the city government, see ASF, Tratte, 1488-1508, Filza 905, bobina 6, carte 92.

³⁵ Hirst, 1991, 763: "[II] Nostro Signore ..., per il testimonio havete dato del dicto Michelangilo resta contento et riposato." Some days later, we encounter the artist in papal employ, working on a salary disbursed to him by the Salviati bank; see *ibid.*, 765-66 (Appendix A).

³⁶ Karl Frey, *Sammlung ausgewählter Briefe an Michelagnuolo Buonarroto, nach den Originalen des Archivio Buonarroto*, Berlin: 1889, 117, without having knowledge of the Alidosi letter,

Opera del Duomo documents we find one member of the Salviati family, Giannozzo, inspecting marble on Michelangelo's behalf in 1504.³⁷ Furthermore, a letter of 1519 places Michelangelo, "fifteen years ago," in discussions at Palazzo Salviati.³⁸ This sequence of events suggests that Giuliano Salviati could have had a share in awarding the block of marble to Michelangelo in the summer of 1501. Having just returned from Rome, Michelangelo lacked a good Florentine network in these months, and, as Vasari and Condivi recall, it was in no way certain that Michelangelo would be awarded the commission for the *David*.³⁹ Michelangelo and Giuliano were practically neighbors: the artist had moved in with his father again, who lived only a stone's throw from the Palazzo Salviati. Indeed ties of neighborhood would structure the relations between the Salviati and the Buonarroti for the rest of the century.⁴⁰

Giuliano Salviati's influence at the Opera del Duomo was substantial in the years Michelangelo was working on the *David*. He had exercised control at least half a year before it was decided to inspect whether the marble at the Opera was suitable on July 2, 1501. His importance for Michelangelo's work on the *David* is supported by additional archival evidence which shows that he was *camerlengo*, or treasurer, to the Opera del Duomo from January 1 to July 1, 1502.⁴¹ His appointment directly followed his office as *operaio* which ended on the day he accepted his new post, making Salviati a crucial figure at the Opera for the full span from January 1501 to July 1502. In its most rigid definition, the office of treasurer entailed the institution's bookkeeping and the allocations of funds to those working in its employ or on basis of

believed that Jacopo Salviati had known the artist from very early. I owe this reference to Michael Hirst.

³⁷ Poggi, 1: 146 (doc. 2154).

³⁸ *Carteggio*, 2: 176 (Letter Tommaso di Tolfo in Adrianopoli to Micheangelo in Florence, 1.iv.1519).

³⁹ Vasari 6: 18; Condivi, ed. Nencioni, 21.

⁴⁰ *Carteggio*, 1: 237-39, 290, 337-38; 2: 55, 84, 116, 136-37, 143-44; 3: 125, 158, 162, 178-79, 355-56. Jacopo Salviati's participation in the San Lorenzo projects has been studied by Wallace, 1994, 22-23 and *passim*.

⁴¹ AOSMF, serie VIII.3, vol. VII., Entrata e Uscita, 1499-1502, no. LI, unnumbered folio preceding fol. 1r. For the disbursements made during his term of office, see *ibid.*, fols. 1r.-73v.

a piecemeal salary.⁴² The office put Giuliano Salviati in charge of the first payments for the *David*. On March 5, 1502, he disbursed to Michelangelo thirty *fiorini larghi d'oro in oro* and on June 28, he paid him another thirty.⁴³ More broadly defined, the *camerlengo* could also exercise his influence in assessing the value of works produced for the cathedral. Giuliano probably used this influence when the *David* was re-evaluated and its price fixed to the large sum of 400 *fiorini larghi d'oro in oro* to be paid to the artist at completion.⁴⁴

Giuliano Salviati's involvement placed politics at the heart of Michelangelo's commission. In January and February of 1498, Salviati filled the highest office of Gonfaloniere di Giustizia in the Florentine Government.⁴⁵ During his tenure as Gonfaloniere, he ordered Savonarola to compose the *Trattato circa el reggimento e governo della città di Firenze*, a theoretical treatise on the Governo Popolare dedicated to Salviati himself.⁴⁶ The complete treatise highlights the importance of the restoration of traditional forms of government predating the period of

⁴² For the office of *camerlingo*, see Andreas Grote, *Das Dombauamt in Florenz, 1285-1370. Studien zur Geschichte der Opera di Santa Reparata*, Munich: Prestel, 1959, 43-67, 99-104; and Saalman, 177. The official document outlining the tasks of this office, dated December, 24, 1331, was published by Cesare Guasti, *Santa Maria del Fiore: La costruzione della chiesa e del campanile secondo i documenti tratti dall'Archivio nell'Opera Secolare e da quello di Stato*, Florence: M. Ricci, 1887, 33 (doc. 37). The text of the document makes clear that the treasurer disbursed the money allocated by the commune for the building and decoration of the church and "... *ac etiam ad petendum recipiendum et confitendum omnem quantitatem pecunie que deputata esset vel deputaretur seu relicta esset vel relinqueretur vel quocumque alio modo vel causa debetur vel deberetur in edificatione et pro edificatione et constructione et opera dicte ecclesie Sancte Reparate vel eius occasione*"

⁴³ For the payments, see Frey, 1909, 107 (docs 14-15).

⁴⁴ For the documents, see Milanese, 622: "*Operarii declarare et fecere dictam mercedem et salarium; et audita petitione tam facta per dictum Michelangelum, quam voluntate dictorum Consulum ..., declaraverunt dictum pretium et mercedem dicti Michelangeli pro faciendo et conficiendo plene et perfecte dictum Gigantem deu David, existentem in dicta Opera et iam semifactum per dictum Michelangelum, fuisse et esse florent. 400 largorum de auro in aurum, et iedem dictam summan persolvendam per camerarium dicte Opere, finito dicte Gigante*"

⁴⁵ Cambi, 11: 125.

⁴⁶ SAT, 435: "*Composito ad istanzia delli eccelsi Signori al tempo di Giuliano Salviati gonfaloniere di giustizia.*" For Giuliano's support of Savonarola, see Hurtubise, *Une famille-témoin, les Salviati*, Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1985, 63-68. And for the *Trattato*, see Weinstein, 1970, 289-316; and Giovanni Silvano, "Florentine republicanism in the early sixteenth century," in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, ed. Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner and Maurizio Viroli, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 41-70.

Medici rule, with the aim of creating a city free from the tyranny. “For many years, we have been governed by tyrants [who] usurped the [city’s] liberty and common good,” Savonarola wrote.⁴⁷ Additional political offices Salviati held show him to have been directly in touch with the problem of defending the city against the concrete threats of Medici return and the approaching armies of Cesare Borgia, who was trying to benefit from Florence’s fragile political situation. Giuliano was among the first men to hold office in the *Dieci di Balìa* or *Libertà*, the Ten of War reinstalled in 1496, which discussed and designed the policy of war and defense.⁴⁸ His prominence in that office is documented around the years Michelangelo was working on the *David*; he served terms of half a year in 1497, 1500 and in 1502.⁴⁹ In a political consultation of June 1502, when the Borgia troops were nearing the city’s gates, we get a glimpse of Giuliano’s personal concerns with the liberty of Florence. “It is a thing of great importance,” he wholeheartedly agreed with a fellow member on the *Dieci*, Piero Tosinchi, when the latter feared that “we are in clear danger, nor do we know if our forces are enough to defend ourselves.”⁵⁰

The Material of Memory

It is no coincidence that Michelangelo’s “Rocta lalta cholonna” appears exactly there, on a preparatory sketch for the *David*. The history with which the sculpture breaks condensed in the block of marble he inherited in that summer of 1501. Michelangelo’s material boasted a long memory. It had been found in the Carrara quarries in 1464. In that year, the sculptor Agostino di Duccio was commissioned to carve a statue from it for one of the buttresses of Santa Maria del Fiore. After having worked on it for two years, Agostino left the marble unfinished in the courtyard of the Opera del Duomo. An attempt in 1476 to finish the sculpture that involved Antonio Rossellino did not lead anywhere

⁴⁷ SAT, 448-49: “... siano stati già molti anni governati da tiranni.”

⁴⁸ ASF, Tratte, 1488-1508, filza 105, bobina 6, carte 180. For the *Dieci di Balìa* in this period, see Butters, 1985, 1-46 *passim*.

⁴⁹ ASF, Tratte, 1488-1508, filza 105, bobina 6, carte 198-99.

⁵⁰ *Consulte e pratiche* (1498 – 1505), 2: 558: “siamo in pericolo manifesto, né sa le forze nostre sono bastante a difendersi”

either.⁵¹ Agostino had been asked to produce a figure “in the form and manner of a prophet,”⁵² and a text drafted a month before Michelangelo received his commission identifies this “prophet” as a “man of marble called ‘David’.”⁵³ Apparently, Agostino di Duccio had spent enough work on it to enable iconographic identification. Michelangelo hence not only inherited the material from 1464, but also his iconography. And like Agostino’s, Michelangelo’s *David* was commissioned to stand on one of the buttresses surrounding the cupola of Santa Maria del Fiore, although it was eventually installed at the Piazza della Signoria.⁵⁴

The moment of Agostino di Duccio’s commission, awarded in the midst of the Medici epoch, raises questions about the sculpture’s relation to Florence’s ruling family. Admittedly, conclusive evidence for Medici interference in the Duomo commission is lacking. Commissions for Florence Cathedral were corporate, and no private commissions were allowed at the church. From the fourteenth century onwards, the building and decoration of Santa Maria del Fiore was financed with public monies the city-government allocated to the Opera del Duomo via the Wool Guild. The church stood symbol for a corporate Florentine identity, “able to cover in its shadow all the peoples of Tuscany,” in the words of Alberti.⁵⁵ Associating oneself with that church through

⁵¹ For the documents pertaining to the pre-Michelangelo phase of the project, see Poggi, 1: 80-83 (docs 437-47).

⁵² Poggi, 1: 81-82 (doc. 441). Agostino’s contract for a preparatory model signed a year before the contract for the marble version applies the phrase “*in forma et maniera di profeta*”; Poggi, 1: 80-81 (doc. 437).

⁵³ Poggi, 1: 83-84 (doc. 448): “*homo ex marmore vocato Davit*.”

⁵⁴ Although some scholars – most notably Levine – have argued that the *David* was commissioned to be installed in front of the Palazzo della Signoria, contemporary sources make clear that the statue was originally destined to be installed on one of the buttresses of Santa Maria del Fiore, probably for the south side of the church. A document of July, 2, 1501 already suggests a high location; it records the wish of the Duomo’s authorities to put the statue “high up”; Poggi, 1: 83-84 (doc. 448). When the decision was made in early 1504 to install the statue in another location one contemporary was amazed by that decision, for he believed that Michelangelo’s colossus “was made to be placed on the pilasters outside the church, or else on the buttresses around it.” And see below.

⁵⁵ Alberti, *De Pictura*, ed. Grayson, 32: “...*ampla da coprire con sua ombra tutti e’ popoli toscani*.” For the civic importance of Santa Maria del Fiore, see Margareth Haines, “La grande impresa civica di Santa Mara del Fiore,” *Nuova rivista storica* 86 (2002), 19-48; and Suzanne Butters, “The Duomo perceived and the Duomo remembered: Sixteenth-century descriptions of

patronage could hence be understood as a political investment in that identity. In the fifteenth century, the Medici had tried several times to control the Opera del Duomo through a careful manipulation of its election procedures, those manipulations which were undone by the post-1494 *operai*. Lorenzo Fabbri has recently demonstrated that Cosimo had actively sought to subject the Opera to his politics between 1459 and his death in 1464, the very period that saw the birth of Agostino di Duccio's giant.⁵⁶ Fabbri explains how Cosimo and his heirs gained influence in corporate institutions like the Opera not only by changing its constitution but also by exercising control through their political friends, a system that had already proven its effectiveness in the city-government.⁵⁷ The names of the *operai* in the ledgers kept by the Guild in the years 1463-64, when the first mentions of Agostino di Duccio's commission appear, feature some of Medici's most trusted friends. They include degli Albizzi, Salviati, Carnesecchi, Ridolfi, and members of the Pitti family favorable to the Medici. Evidence of the contact between these men and the Medici survives in letters that use those familial forms of address we find in the correspondence between the Medici and their closest allies, such as "your beloved and greatest brother [*tuo charo et maggior fratello*]." ⁵⁸

Santa Maria del Fiore,' in: *La Cattedrale come spazio sacro: Saggi sul Duomo di Firenze*, ed. Timothy Verdon and Annalisa Innocenti, Florence: EDIFIR, 2001, 457-501.

⁵⁶ Fabbri, 2001, 331-35.

⁵⁷ The Medici managed to establish their political power through the mobilization of friends, family and neighbors, that holy trinity structuring social relations in the Renaissance. See D. Kent, 1978; F.W. Kent, "Ties of Neighbourhood and Patronage in Quattrocento Florence," in *Patronage, Art, and Society in Renaissance Italy*, ed. Kent and Patricia Simons, Canberra and Oxford, 1987, 47-62. Lorenzo de' Medici's political success was largely based on his capacity to run the Florentine Republic like a painter runs his workshop. See F.W. Kent, "Patron-Client Networks and the Emergence of Lorenzo as 'Maestro della Bottega'," in *Lorenzo de' Medici: New Perspectives*, ed. Bernard Toscani, New York, 1994, 279-313; and for a slight adjustment on Kent's thesis see the analysis of Melissa Marien Bullard, "Heroes and their Workshops: Medici Patronage and the Problem of Shared Agency," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 24 (1994), 179-98, who argued that *Il Magnifico* was not so much master of his *bottega*, but a master *in* the *bottega*, dictating his network from within.

⁵⁸ ASF, Medici avanti Principato, filza 10, carte 93 (Letter Ruggieri di Tommaso di Andrea Minerbetti to Giovanni di Cosimo de' Medici, 5.ix.1460). Minerbetti was *operaio* from 22 December 1462 to 22 April 1463, when plans for the *Tribuna* program were launched; ASF, Arte della Lana, Vol. 39, fol. 44r. For the language shaping political patronage in the Renaissance, see Kent and Kent, 1982, 1-12.

By the time Antonio Rossellino was commissioned to finish Agostino di Duccio's aborted project in 1476, Lorenzo had taken more drastic measures to control the artistic patronage at the cathedral than his father and grandfather. In 1472, he had completely subordinated the Opera del Duomo to the office of the *Six Provveditori of the Alum Reserves*, of which he was himself a member, a measure that put him and his friends in full control over the artistic patronage at Santa Maria del Fiore, and one that was again undone immediately after the Medici expulsion.⁵⁹ It comes as no surprise that Medici's greatest projects for the Duomo sprang from the years following these reforms. In 1476 he organized a competition to finish the church's façade, launched just months after Antonio Rossellino was commissioned to finish the statue of *David*.⁶⁰ It is tempting to assume that Antonio's commission and the façade competition originated as parts of a single project launched by Lorenzo. Indeed, plans to put statues on the buttresses around the *cupola* and to finish the church façade had formed part of one and the same building campaign since the early fifteenth century.⁶¹

That Michelangelo carved his *David* out of a block of marble that physically registered the remains of Medici culture which his contemporaries tried so hard to erase places the lines on the Louvre sheet in an almost iconoclastic light. Work on the *David* amounted to an endeavor of historical self-awareness as Michelangelo cut away the material signs of history with every blow of the hammer. Here, carving might well be understood as an act of historical purification, not much different from the historically motivated aggression directed at the Medici memorial inside the church for which he carved the statue and the efforts of restoring the Opera del Duomo to a state deep in time. Michelangelo's was a notable kind of anger. A few days before he began

⁵⁹ F.W. Kent, 2001.

⁶⁰ For Lorenzo's plans with the façade, see Philip Foster, "Lorenzo de' Medici and the Florence Cathedral Façade," *The Art Bulletin* 63 (1981), 495-500; Louis A. Waldman, "Florence Cathedral: The Façade Competition of 1476," *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 16 (1996), 1-6; and S.E. Zuraw, "Mino da Fiesole's Lost Design for the Façade of Florence Cathedral," in *Santa Maria del Fiore* (2001), 79-93.

⁶¹ Margaret Haines, "The Builders of Santa Maria del Fiore: An Episode of 1475 and an Essay Towards its Context," in *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Graig Hugh Smyth*, 2 vols, ed. Andrew Morrogh et al., Florence: Giunto Barbéra, 1985, 1:89-115, suggested that a lack of funds at the Duomo in the 1470s prevented Lorenzo from carrying out his projects.

work on the statue proper, a marginal notation in Michelangelo's contract records, he climbed the scaffolds around the statue, hammer in hand, and gave the man of marble called David, "one or two blows with his hammer, to strike off a certain knot [*nodum*] that it had in its breast."⁶²

Digging through superfluous marble hence became a removal of cultural excess. If the *David* is already visually purged – purged from iconographical attributes, narrative input and clothing – then purging becomes a historical cleansing if we understand the history of the block as Michelangelo did. Machiavelli, writing fifteen years after Michelangelo finished the sculpture, used the *David* as exactly such a metaphor for cultural purification. "And without doubt whoever should want to establish a Republic in the present era, would find it more easy to do so among men of the mountains where there is no civilization, than among those who are used to living in the City, where civilization is corrupt, as a sculptor more easily extracts a beautiful statue from crude marble than of one badly sketched out by others," wrote Machiavelli, bringing a long argument on the use of religion in politics to a close. For that former chancellor of the Governo Popolare, spending his working life in the building where the *David* guarded the entrance, "*male abbozzato*" (the exact same term also used in a reference to the *David* of 1501) becomes a metaphor for a corrupt civilization.⁶³ Michelangelo's artistic purification is now read as one of political cleansing. If we follow

⁶² Poggi, 1: 84 (doc. 449): "*Incepit dictus Michelangelus laborare et sculperre dictum gigantem die 13 settembris 1501 et die lune de mane, quamquam prius videlicet die 9 eiusdem uno vel duobus ictibus scarpelli substulisset quoddam nodum quem habebat in pectore: sed dicto die incepit firmiter et fortiter laborare, dicto die 13 et die lune summo mane.*" Irving Lavin, "Bozzetti and Modelli. Notes on Sculptural Procedure from the Early Renaissance through Bernini," in *Stil und Überlieferung* (1967), 3: 98, argued that the *nodum* was a transferpoint, an argument that suggests that Michelangelo's iconoclasm was not just directed at the statue proper but at the design at its basis.

⁶³ Machiavelli, ed. Martelli, 94 (*Discorsi*, Book 1, §11): "*E senza dubbio, chi volesse ne' presenti tempi fare una repubblica più facilità troverrebbe negli uomini montanari, dove non è alcuna civiltà, che in quelli che sono usi a vivere nelle cittadi, dove la civiltà è corrotta: ed uno scultore trarrà più facilmente una bella statua d'un marmo rozzo, che d'uno male abbozzato da altrui.*" And for the document, see Poggi, 1: 83-84 (doc. 448): "*Operarii deliberaverunt quod quidam homo ex marmore vocato Davit male abbozzatum et sculptum existentem in curte dicte opere et desiderantes tam dicti consules quam operarii talem gigantem erigi et elevari in altum per magistros dicte opere et in pedes stare ad hoc ut videatur per magistros in hoc expertos possit absolvi et finiri.*"

the Renaissance definition of sculpture as an art of cutting away excess (and then we follow Michelangelo) then the removal of marble becomes an art of removing historical excess.⁶⁴

Michelangelo literally stripped David until he was left with a basic, anatomically correct nude man of pristinely blank marble. Draped over his right shoulder and describing an elegant diagonal over his back, the sling is too stylized to make it ready for use. Seemingly more subjected to Michelangelo's concern for artistry than anything else, this biblical hero could have never been able to slay a giant with it. And when would he? Or has he perhaps already killed Goliath? A lack of narratively relevant details – head of Goliath and so forth – renders these question impossible to answer. If the absence of Goliath's decapitated head suggests that the sculpture shows the moment *before* battle, substantiated by the figure's worrying frown which hints at an approaching enemy from his left, then these same references are immediately undone by the relaxed, unalert stance of the body, more suggestive of the moment *after*. Not interested in a storytelling David, Michelangelo also made no effort to render correctly the shepherd's age at the time of his encounter with Goliath; he is neither the young boy we encounter in the book of Samuel, nor the youthful chap of the Quattrocento type, produced by Donatello (Fig. 8), Verrocchio (Fig. 11) and Ghirlandaio (Fig. 7). Compared to both text and image, Michelangelo's *David* must have appeared strikingly too old.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ See Michelangelo's famous exposition in Saslow, 302 (no. 151): "*Non ha l'ottimo artista alcun concetto, / ch' un marmo solo in se non circonscriva / col suo soverchio, et solo à quello arriva / la man, che ubbidisce all' intelletto ...*" And for interpretations, see Karl Borinski, *Die Antike in Poetik und Kunsttheorie von Ausgang des klassischen Altertums bis auf Goethe und Wilhelm von Humboldt*, 2 vols, Leipzig: Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1914-24, 1: 169-70; Panofsky, 1924, 65-71; and Charles de Tolnay, *The Art and Thought of Michelangelo*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1964, 96-97.

⁶⁵ See Paoletti, 2001, 636nt9, a point suggested to him by Jonathan Nelson. Yet I do not agree with Paoletti's claim that "Michelangelo – or his patron(s) – were less interested in the biblical narrative than in its propagandistic value for the new Republic." Michelangelo tampered with the age of a biblical figure before, in the Roman *Pietà*. In this case, Condivi recorded Michelangelo's own theological explanation for representing the Virgin too young, a kind of argument that makes it impossible to exchange the woman of the *Pietà* with women of flesh and blood, and one that is therefore close to the kind of argument I make in respect to the *David*. Condivi, ed. Nencioni, 20, recorded Michelangelo's words as follows: "*Non sai tu, mi rispose, che le donne caste molto più fresche si mantengano che le non caste? Quanto*

It was the lack of clearly recognizable temporal correlations in Michelangelo's sculpture that marked its most obvious break with the history of Davidean iconography. That history was embodied by Donatello's bronze *David* (Fig. 8), the most well-known of Florentine Davids. A drawn copy of Donatello's work accompanied a sketch for the right arm of Michelangelo's version on the Louvre sheet (Fig. 4), a piece of paper that now becomes a point of reference for the separation of time, for the past and future of *David Florentinus*. Commissioned in the early 1430s,⁶⁶ Donatello's work stood out as something of an unicum for the greater part of the Quattrocento, generating a copious copying industry of small scale bronzes that asserted and ascertained its canonical status (see for example, Fig. 9). Commissioned by Cosimo de' Medici early in his ascendancy, perhaps within a year after his return from exile, the bronze ephebe bodied forth much of the visual politics through which the Medici affirmed their power, probably first installed in a niche at Cosimo's old palazzo and from the 1450s onwards placed on a richly decorated column in the courtyard at the new Palazzo Medici. Though sharing with Michelangelo's version the striking aspect of nudity, the corporeal realism advertised in this body of softness and boyishness marked a sharp contrast between the then of the Medici past and the now of that past forgotten in Michelangelo's counter-image. But Michelangelo's departure from Donatello was not more radical than Donatello's departure from tradition. One important way to look at the bronze *David* is as a statue of usurpation, appropriation and eventually transformation.

maggiormente una vergine, nella quale non cadesse mai pur un minimo tal freschezza e fior di gioventù, oltra che per tal natural via in lei si mantenesse, è anco credibile che per divin' opera fosse aiutato, a comprobare al mondo la verginità e purità perpetua della madre. Il che non fu necessario nel figlio, anzi più tosto il contrario, perciò che, volendo mostrare che 'l figliuol de Iddio prendesse, come prese, veramente corpo umano e sottoposto a tutto quell che un ordinario omo soggiace, eccetto che al peccato, non bisognò col divino tener indietro l'umano, ma lasciarlo nel corso e ordine suo, sì che quell tempo mostrasse che aveva apunto. Per tanto, non t'hai da maravigliosa se, per tal rispetto, io feci la Santissima Vergine, madre Iddio, a comparazion del figliuolo assai più giovane di quell che quell' età ordinariamente ricerva, e 'l figliluolo assai più giovane di quell che quell' età ordinariamente ricerca, e 'l figliuolo lasciai nell'età sua."

⁶⁶ The most comprehensive dealing with the interrelated questions of dating and patronage is Caglioti, 2000, 1: 153-222. Also useful is Pfisterer, 344-55.

By the 1430s, the iconography of David boasted a venerable history, one Donatello himself had helped to shape. Some twenty years earlier, he had carved a David in marble (Fig. 10). That statue is clothed; and despite its contrapposto pose and size this marble *David* has little in common with the naked bronze in Medici possession. Donatello's marble version had been installed in one of the council rooms at Palazzo della Signoria, where it carried an inscription that once read, "For those who fight for the fatherland, God will offer aid, even against the most terrible foes."⁶⁷ The text refers to the power of God in the protection of Florence. It harks back to the first book of Samuel, which highlights divine providence in David's battle with Goliath (1 Samuel 16) and touches the heart of the specific political meaning of David for Florence. The image of a young, inexperienced shepherd's boy conquering a giant philistine with just a sling, but under the full protection of God, served the Florentine state well, a small Republic under constant threat from the seigniorial state of Milan. David was known as a symbol of a people's divine protection since the times of Dante, who tried to convince his readers of the ever-presence of divine providence in battles with reference to David's victory over Goliath, "for it is very foolish to suppose that strength sustained by God in a champion might be unequal to the task."⁶⁸

The bronze Medici David usurped the ideology of freedom – in Geertz's understanding of ideology – in an inscription of comparable phrasing, "The victor is whoever defends the fatherland. God crushes the wrath of an enormous foe. Behold! A boy overcame a great tyrant. Conquer, o citizens!"⁶⁹ Victor becomes Medici. A *David* stood in *their*

⁶⁷ Donato, 91: PRO PATRIA FORTITER DIMICANTIBUS ETIAM ADVERSUS TERRIBILISSIMOS HOSTES DUES PRESTAT . VICTORIAM. See Janson, 1957, 2: 3-7, for the documents pertaining to Donatello's marble statue. And for a convincing interpretation of the documents, see Seymour, 1967a.

⁶⁸ Dante, *De Monarchia* (Book 2, §9): "Stulum ... est valde vires quas Deus confortat, inferiores in pugile suspicari." Quoted in Donato, 94.

⁶⁹ VICTOR EST QUISQUIS PATRIAM TUETUR / FRANGIT IMMANIS DEUS HOSTIS IRAS / EN PUER GRANDEM DOMUIT TIRAMNUM / VINCITE CIVES. See Christine M. Sperling, "Donatello's 'Bronze David' and the demands of Medici politics," *The Burlington Magazine* 34 (1992), 218-24, on the inscription and the occasion of the wedding, where the guests of honor were seated at tables grouped around Donatello's statue. Caglioti, 2000, 2: 397-99, records more versions of the original inscription in manuscripts not mentioned by Sperling.

courtyard, symbolizing the shift of power from Palazzo della Signoria to Palazzo Medici, some 600 meters further northwards, where Cosimo de' Medici, his health deteriorating, began to conduct the politics of the Florentine state that he *de facto* ruled from within the walls of his palace.⁷⁰ In family possession until the expulsion of 1494, the bronze *David* visualized the idea that God's aid in the defense of the Republic now worked through the Medici, the family chosen by God to rule the city.

Donatello's naked ephebe formed part of a larger program of cultural usurpation by the Medici, a program that intensified in the late 1460s, when Lorenzo de' Medici followed in the footsteps of his father, Piero di Cosimo, as *de facto* leader of Florence. The young giant-slayer started to appear in several manuscripts in the Medici collection,⁷¹ and another bronze statue was commissioned from Verrocchio in the early 1470s (Fig. 11). Around the same time, Pietro Collazio dedicated his poem *De duello Davidis et Goliae* to Lorenzo. And in Platina's *De optimo cive*, dedicated to *Il Magnifico* in 1474, a fictive dialogue was staged wherein the old Cosimo instructed his grandson Lorenzo on the art of statecraft using David's subjection of his people as an example. Platina had Cosimo urge his grandson to keep a good relationship with God: "We owe much to our Lord. We should consider his acts of kindness to our country, which he has defended many times against enemy armies, and which he has also often liberated from famine and plague."⁷² Thus building on the familiar trope of divine providence, Platina makes a former emphasis on the collective citizenry evoked in the inscription on Donatello's marble *David* at Palazzo della Signoria shift to the exclusivity of Lorenzo's rule. Platina re-makes God to select *one* chosen family to lead the city of Florence to the path of victory, in a gesture that parallels

⁷⁰ D. Kent, 2000, 239.

⁷¹ In an evangelistary decorated by Filippo di Matteo Torelli (Biblioteca Laurenziana, MS. Edili 115, fol. 1); in an breviary decorated by Francesco d'Antonio del Cherico (Biblioteca Laurenziana, 17.28, fol. 180); and in the *Expositio psalmi 'Miserere Mei'* also decorated by del Cherico (Biblioteca Laurenziana, 19.27, fol. 23v). For the miniatures, see Ames-Lewis, 1979, 141-42 and pls 27-29.

⁷² "Multum profecto Deo nostro debemus. Inspicienda igitur sunt eius merita erga patriam nostram, quam toties ab hoste et quidem gravissimo tutatus est, quamque etiam a peste et fame persaepe liberavit." Translation in Andrew Butterfield, *The Sculptures of Andrea del Verrocchio*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997, 31.

the shift in the physical location of Florentine government from Palazzo della Signoria to Palazzo Medici. From a communal symbol of divine protection in the early fifteenth century, David entered the domain of privacy under Medici hegemony. In this sense, to borrow the words of Sarah Blake McHam, the commissioning of Donatello's bronze *David* "represented an unprecedented appropriation by a single family of a corporate symbol of the state."⁷³

But appropriation existed no less in *how* the statue appeared than in *what* it represented. The bronze *David* breaks with the past once symbolized by Donatello's marble version. The first freestanding bronze statue since antique times and the first freestanding nude since then, is held up for veneration in a new version that negates an old tradition. The novelty of its nudity (with nudity only emphasized by the boots he wears), was less iconographically determined than historically informed. The book of Samuel does not account for David's undressed body. The text simply implies that the young boy was wearing his shepherd's outfit, an implication understood by visual traditions preceding and following the bronze (compare Figs 7, 10 and 11). Nudity is its most decided artistic feature, fixing its historical significance in the history of Florentine art. It struck the first writer of that history, Giorgio Vasari, who wrote of Donatello's Medici *David*: "this figure is so natural in its lifelines [*vivacità*] and softness [*morbidezza*] that it appeared impossible to artists not to have been cast directly after life."⁷⁴ Vasari's statement fits the bronze well. The realism of the *David* is corporeal enough to make us believe that it was actually cast after a workshop apprentice. The statue's size corresponds exactly to a fifteenth-century boy of around fourteen, the age of a workshop apprentice. Even more to the eye of an early Quattrocento Florentine not as conditioned to naturalism in art as we are and as Vasari was, the statue must have appeared like a youngster from the streets of Florence, posing naked in Donatello's workshop.

Donatello highlighted verism to the extreme. It is as if he makes his statue say: note my anatomical correctness, the wrinkles in the skin under my armpits; note how my long hair falls naturally over my

⁷³ Blake McHam, 2001, 34.

⁷⁴ Vasari, 1: 210: "... la quale figura è tanto naturale nella vivacità e nella morbidezza che impossibile pare agli artifici che ella non sia formata sopra il vivo."

shoulders and how the texture of my hair is differentiated from that of my skin through a rougher polishing of the bronze; don't forget to notice how much effort was put in casting the tassel that hangs from my hat; note even the grooving of the sword I'm holding to suggest the long use by the Philistine I just overcame; note how the feathers of his helmet bend as they push against my thigh; pay attention to the suggestion of death in the rendering of Goliath's face, framed by facial hair that covers in part my foot that trembles him; and note how my foot is richly embellished with scratched-in decoration. Donatello makes us ask: are we looking at a representation of the young man from the book of Samuel, or at a contemporary boy *playing* David?⁷⁵

Some of the statue's details affirm that the *David* was meant to be understood as a Florentine boy in the guise of David, and not as a biblical figure acting in the pages of Samuel under God's command. Take the boots for example. Lavishly decorated with a flourish motif at the height of the calfs and the balls of David's feet, they are more the footgear of a historically specific soldier than that of the unarmed shepherd's boy in the book of Samuel. More to the point, the decorative band around the calfs includes the Florentine heraldic lily (Fig. 12), a contemporary reference that pushes the bronze away from the world of the Bible into the contemporary time of Renaissance Florence.⁷⁶ There is simply no way that the Biblical David could have worn footwear supporting the Florentine lily. And he could not have sported that hat either, because it was produced after the latest Florentine fashion, which would not have gone unnoticed in contemporary Florence.⁷⁷

Donatello was already famous for such anachronisms in his own lifetime. Filarete, in his *Treatise on architecture* of 1461, viewed it as a breach in decorum. In a passage compressed between an unprecedented criticism of Donatello's *Gatta Melata* and his *San Lorenzo Apostles*, Filarete writes: "When you make a figure of a man who has lived in our times [*che sia de' nostri tempi*], he should not be dressed in the antique fashion but as he was." "It would be the same to make the figure of Caesar or Hannibal and make them timid and dress them in the clothes

⁷⁵ This is a question that also occupied Randolph, 183.

⁷⁶ For the Florentine lily, see Melinda Hegarty, "Laurentian patronage in the Palazzo Vecchio: The frescoes of the Sala dei Gigli," *Art Bulletin* 78 (1996), 279-80.

⁷⁷ Randolph, 188.

that we wear today." "If you have to do Apostles, do not make them appear fencers as Donatello did at San Lorenzo in Florence, that is, in the two doors in the [old] sacristy. It is well to pose the figures in such a way that their nature shows to advantage, but [one should] not wish to show so much skill that he falls into the vice of deformity."⁷⁸ Filarete blames Donatello's deliberate anachronism on a highly competitive market that values anachronistic combinations as artistic *tours des forces*. He implies that temporal disruptions undermine iconographical exactness and therefore corrupt the *functionality* of the image, whether this be religious or historical.

Anachronism often leads directly from naturalism because the latter is the result of the close study of the present, not of historical models. In the years of Medici hegemony, the veristic ambitions of Donatello's art measured art's success, not its failure. The kind of quotidian realism exhibited in the bronze ephebe secured Donatello's entrance into the history of art that was rewritten by Florentine humanists at the time. Writers set the short history of Florentine naturalism into the much older histories of Greco-Roman art that define naturalism as the measure of historical success. They understood Donatello's works as a kind of archeology of the once glorious naturalistic past described in texts collected by the Medici, such as Pliny, acquired by Cosimo in 1421. Bartolomeo Fazio wrote in 1456 that Donatello "seems to form faces that live, and to be approaching very near to the glory of the ancients."⁷⁹ Somewhat later in the century Cristoforo Landino noted that "Donato the sculptor can be counted

⁷⁸ Filarete's *Treatise on Architecture: Being the Treatise of Antonio di Piero Averlino, known as Filarete*, 2 vols, ed. and transl. John R. Spencer, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1965, 1: 306: "Così è ancora gli abiti e loro stare. E non fa come el sopradetto, che fece uno cavallo di bronzo a memoria di Gatta Melata, ed è tanto sconforme che n'è stato poco lodato. Perché, quando fai una figura d'uno che sia de' nostri tempi, non si vuol fare coll'abito antico, ma come lui usa così fare. ... Se tu hai a fare apostoli, non fare che paiono schermidori, come fece Donatello in Santo Lorenzo di Firenze, cioè nella sagrestia di due porte di bronzo. Vuolsi bene atteggiare le figure, per modo stieno bene il loro essere, ma non tanto che volere mostrare magistero che caschi nel vizio della sconformità. E non fare come molti ha già veduti, che hanno tramutato atto degli abiti, che molto volte hanno alle figure antiche fatto abito moderni. E in questo peccò Masolino, che molte volte faceva santi e vestivagli alla moderna. Non si vuol fare per niente e anche di quegli, che son bene per altro buoni maestri, che hanno armato uomini di questa età al modo antico, che rispetto è stato questo? ... E di questo è da biasimare el cavallo antedetto."

⁷⁹ Baxandall, 1971, 109.

among the ancients, admirable in composition and in variety, ready [*prompto*] and with great vivacity [*vivacità*] in pose [*ordine*] as well as in situating his figures, who all seem to move.”⁸⁰ The list of such praise goes on and on well into the sixteenth century.⁸¹

Donatello cast himself in a direct lineage with antique art in his *David* for the Medici. He modeled his almost pretentious realism on that of the *Spinario* (Fig. 13), a work produced in the second century B.C. which was on public view in Rome and among the most imitated and well-known classical statues in the Quattrocento.⁸² A pedigree is cast on the basis of a shared corporeal realism, given form through the suggestion of soft flesh in stiff, cold bronze. Compare, for example, the wrinkles in the flesh, the differentiation between hair and skin and minute details such as the fingernails with the Medici bronze. The earliest Renaissance description of the *Spinario* recognizes precisely this suggestion of living flesh in cold metal that Donatello rivaled. “One will find nothing in our times, wrought weaker [*mollis*] from marble or earth,” wrote Giovanni Tolentino in the late fifteenth century.⁸³ It was the same quality that Vasari admired in Donatello’s bronze. In the *Vite*, the Latin “*mollis*” translates into the Italian “*morbidezza*.”

A peculiar detail strengthens the statue’s historical claims (and reinforces an already disturbing anachronism). A relief of putti carrying an enthroned figure of Bacchus (?) is displayed on Goliath’s helmet (Fig. 14). It is believed to have been derived from an antique cameo or a plastercast after it. A piece from the collection of Cardinal Barbaro that Lorenzo de’ Medici acquired for his own collection of antiquities in the late 1450s comes remarkably close to Donatello’s antiquarian

⁸⁰ Landino, ed. Cardini, 1: 124-25: “Donato sculture da essere connumerato fra gl’antichi, mirabile in composizione e in varietà, pronto e con grand vivacità o nell’ordine o nel situare delle figure le quali tutte appaiono in moto; fu grande imitatore degl’antichi e di prospettiva intesi assai.” And see, Ottavio Morisani, “Art historians and art critics – III: Cristoforo Landino,” *The Burlington Magazine* 95 (1953), 270.

⁸¹ Sixteenth-century texts are gathered in Pfisterer, 594-97.

⁸² For imitations of the statue, see Barkan, 146-58.

⁸³ Richard Shonfield, “Giovanni Tolentino goes to Rome: A description of the antiquities of Rome in 1490,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 43 (1980), 252: “Nullum sane marmor aevae mollius illo exculptum nostris invenitur temporibus.”

digression.⁸⁴ It is likely that the relief on the helmet was a mark of Donatello's antiquarianism rather than David's iconology. The scene must have been unreadable when the statue stood high on its pedestal in the Medici courtyard, only visible from the second floor of the Palazzo Medici, from where it could appear antiquarian, but never iconographical.⁸⁵

By owning Donatello's bronze *David*, the Medici claimed possession of a certain history of (Florentine) art, one of an antique-oriented realism. The viewing circumstances at Palazzo Medici further pitched the statue against that history. It was placed on a column richly decorated with antiquarian motifs such as harpies and garlands,⁸⁶ reminiscent of the classical *Säulenmonument*, like the *Marcus Aurelius*. Donatello's *David* was presented as a substitute antique, installed in the middle of a courtyard decorated with *all'antica* medallions with scenes from classical mythology, such as the *Fall of Icarus* (Fig. 15), and to be viewed on the same axis as an antique bust of Hadrian, an antique sculpture of the virility God Priapus and two ancient statues of Marsias.⁸⁷ Even the inscription, although advertising subject-matter, asserted the statue's antiquarian pedigree. Almost certainly written in Roman capitals – it no longer survives – the inscription satisfied the hunger for textual fragments of the Renaissance antiquarian. One can even get the impression that in their hunt for classical remains, inscriptions were all men like Poliziano cared about.⁸⁸

Shaping and reshaping the visual language through which the Medici asserted their dominance, the history of art was politicized in Donatello's statue of realism, anachronism and antiquarianism. If

⁸⁴ Ames-Lewis, 1979, 143 and pl. 31. Although some historians have tried to see narrative coherence between the iconography of David and what they see depicted on the cameo, it is more likely that the relief on Goliath's helmet was to serve Donatello's antiquarianism, not David's iconology. Indeed as Caglioti, 2000, 1: 199nt196, has wittedly remarked, the antiquarian relief must have remained unreadable when the statue stood high on its pedestal in the Medici courtyard.

⁸⁵ Caglioti, 2000, 1: 199nt196.

⁸⁶ Caglioti, 2000, 1: 101-52.

⁸⁷ Francis Ames-Lewis, "Donatello's bronze David and the Palazzo Medici courtyard," *Renaissance studies* 3 (1989), 235-51.

⁸⁸ Michael Koortbojian, "Poliziano's Role in the History of Antiquarianism and the Rise of Archaeological Methods," in *Poliziano nel suo tempo*, ed. L. Secchi Tarugi, Florence: F. Cesati, 1996, 265-73.

Donatello's bronze marked the transformation of "Florentine David" into "Medici David" then it also visualized the even more radical metamorphosis of the Florentine history of art into the Medici history of art. Donatello's sculpture was known as the crowning achievement of a mimetic tradition already a millennium and a half old, but it was an achievement that the Medici usurped. That famous edition of Dante's *Divina comedia* by Landino, in whose preface, cited above, Donatello appeared as "Donato the sculptor [who] can be counted among the ancients," was dedicated to Lorenzo *Il Magnifico* in 1481. In 1491 Lorenzo de' Medici commissioned a commemorative bust of Giotto that was installed in Santa Maria del Fiore (Fig. 16), a gesture that cast Lorenzo in the role of protector, preserver and true patron of Florentine culture. And at Lorenzo's funerary ceremony the following text, composed by Aurelio Bienato was read:

Long after the invasions of the Barbarians Italy had put literary education to sleep, which appeared almost extinguished for many centuries, Francesco Petrarca and Dante, Florentine poets, were the first to open the doors of the Houses of the muses, a large threshold across, to evoke, so to say, that light [of knowledge] from the underworld to the present again. And around the same time Giotto, comparable to any Apelles, revived the art of painting. And Donatello, equal to Zeuxis of Heraclea, created living faces of marble.⁸⁹

The favorite son of Florentine art history that Donatello had become, his name proudly advertised as "Donato Florentinus" on several works, was also "Donatello Mediceae," his name arguably the most common Medici household item (the argument would be over Bertoldo). At Cosimo's death in 1464, Antonio Benivieni already attested to the good relationship between the sculptor and *Il Vecchio*.⁹⁰ Later in the century, Vespasiano da Bisticci presented Donatello as something

⁸⁹ Aurelio Bienato, *Oratio in funere Laurentii Medice*, fol. aiii v.: "quom ingruentibus in Italiam barbris: litterorum eruditio iam multis seculis sopita penitusque extincta videritur: superioribus annis Franciscus Petrarcha: & Dantes florentini poete: veluti longo post liminio primi pierias domos aperuerunt & quasi ab inferis ad superps lumen hoc evocavere. Et picturam tempestate eadem iottus cuilibet apelli vonferendus animavit. & Donatello Herocleonto zeusi equiparandus. vivos duxit de marmore vultus." Cited in Pfisterer, 505-06 (no. 38).

⁹⁰ ΕΓΚΩΜΙΟΝ Cosmi ad Laurentium Medicem, 32; cited in Pfisterer, 496 (no. 21).

like a Medici court artist, a model later followed by Vasari. Da Bisticci wrote:

He [Cosimo] was great friends with Donatello ... and because in his time that art of the sculptors was little practiced, Cosimo, to withhold Donatello from doing the same, allocated to him certain pulpits of bronze for San Lorenzo, and he had him make certain doors which are in the sacristy, and he ordered the bank to pay him a certain amount of money every week, enough to provide for himself and his four assistants, and in this manner [Cosimo] supported him. Because Donatello didn't dress as Cosimo wished him to, Cosimo gave him a red mantel and a hat, and he made him [wear] a cape under his mantel, and he dressed him all anew....⁹¹

Note how Vespasiano casts Cosimo in the role of a patron of the arts in the proper sense of the word: Medici helps Donatello out because "*ne' tempi sua questa arte degli scultori alquanto venne che gli erano poco adoperati,*" and gives him clothing as further support (which Donatello only wore once or twice). Building on the classical model of Maecenas, Vespasiano presents Cosimo as a disinterested patron who creates the circumstances in which the arts could flourish in Florence, seemingly without having direct personal benefit from this support. It does not matter that this account postdates Cosimo's and Donatello's deaths by at least twenty-five years, nor that the story is perhaps apocryphal; what is relevant here is that towards the end of the century the view was promoted that Donatello's statuary and therefore Florentine art could not have survived without the support of Cosimo. Perhaps Medici's claim to Donatello fame is best illustrated by the fact that the artist was

⁹¹ Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Le vite*, ed. Aulo Greco, 2 vols, Florence: Istituto Palazzo Strozzi, 1970, 1: 193 (*Vita di Cosimo de' Medici*): "*Fu molto amico di Donatello e di tutti pittori e scultori, et perché ne' tempi sua questa arte degli scultori alquanto venne che gli erano poco adoperati, Cosimo, a fine che Donatello non si stessi, gli alogò certi pergami di bronzo per Sancto Lorenzo, et fecegli fare certe porte che sono nella sagrestia, et ordinò al banco ogni settimana, ch'egli avessi una certa quantità di danari, tanto che gli batassino a lui et a quatri garzoni che teneva, et a questo modo lo mantenne. Perché Donatello non andava vestito come Cosimo avrebbe voluta, Cosimo gli donò uno mantello rosato et una capuccio, et fecegli una cappa sotto il mantello, et vestillo tutto di nuovo, et una matina di festa glieli mandò a fine che le portassi. Portolle ua volta o dua, di poi li ripose, et non gli volle portare più, perché dice gli pareva essere dilegiato. Usava Cosimo di queste liberalità a uomini che avessino qualche virtù, perché gli amava assai.*"

buried in the Medici parish church of San Lorenzo near the Chapel of Saints Cosmas and Damian, Cosimo de' Medici's patron saints, after careful mediation on the part of Cosimo's son, Piero. Donatello's status as a Medici artist was fixed in his death, a Florentine turned into a Medici commodity.⁹²

The perception of the Medici, and especially Lorenzo *Il Magnifico*, as an arbiter of Quattrocento taste is as much part of the modern myth of a "Laurentian age" as it belonged to the Renaissance itself.⁹³ A hyperbolic appraisal of Lorenzo's share in shaping and reshaping Florentine artistic culture not only informs the writings of men like Poliziano, seeking his patronage, but also the accounts of those hostile to the regime, like Raffaele Maffei.⁹⁴ After Lorenzo's death, it had become virtually impossible to distinguish between Lorenzo as a historical figure and as a symbol of his age. "Lorenzo loved and valued those unique in every art," Cerretani wrote years after *Il Magnifico's* death.⁹⁵

The Governo Popolare recognized that Medici politics stood visualized in the artworks the family had once commissioned and owned. It therefore engaged in a project of return and restitution, of replacement and displacement. The bronze *David* was confiscated from Medici property by the Florentine government in 1495, together with Donatello's *Judith* and large parts of the Medici collection of antiquities and put on display at Palazzo della Signoria.⁹⁶ Appropriating the material remains of Medici rule in Florence, the Governo Popolare displayed a kind of territorial behavior that marked the shift in power with the recuperation of the works of art that had given shape to Medicean hegemony. Thus the moving of Donatello's *Judith* (Fig. 17),

⁹² Caglioti, 2000, 2: 429.

⁹³ See Melissa Meriam Bullard, "The Magnificent Lorenzo de' Medici: Between Myth and History," in *Politics and Culture in Early Modern Europe: Essays in Honor of H.G. Koenigsberger*, ed. Phyllis Mack and Margareth Jacob, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, 25-58.

⁹⁴ Maffei is quoted in E.B. Fryde, *Humanism and Renaissance Historiography*, London: Hambledon, 1983, 131.

⁹⁵ Cerretani, *Storia*, ed. Berti, 186: "[Lorenzo] amava e valenti et gl'unichi in ogni arte."

⁹⁶ For the mechanisms of this confiscation, see Luca Gatti, "Displacing Images and Devotion in Renaissance Florence: The Return of the Medici and an Order of 1513 for the David and the Judith," *Pratiche di scrittura e pratiche di lettura nell'Europa moderna* (Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Classe di Lettere e Filosofia 23 (1993), 2), ed. Armondo Petrucci, 349-73.

commissioned by Piero de' Medici of Donatello in the late 1450s, from the garden of Palazzo Medici to the Piazza della Signoria was described by one contemporary in 1495 in his unpublished diary "(a)s a sign of justice, for having oppressed the tyrant, they placed on the *ringhiera* to the entrance of the Palazzo [della Signoria], the *Judith* of bronze, an excellent work by Donatello."⁹⁷ It was a view publicly promoted by the city-government, which had a former Medici inscription on the *Judith*'s base replaced with the words "The citizens put this here as an example of the Republic's well-being [EXEMPLUM. SAL(US). PUB(LICAE). CIVES. POS(UERUNT)]." Like his *Judith*, Donatello's bronze *David* symbolized the removal of power from the Palazzo Medici back to the Palazzo della Signoria. Installed in the courtyard of the town hall, visible from the adjacent Piazza for every passer-by, the former Medicean connotations of the statue were muted when the arms of the people and the commune were attached to its base in 1498,⁹⁸ emphasizing the conversion of private ownership into public property. There it stood as a sign of a conquered politics.

Michelangelo was well aware of those politics, and even involved in them when he reclaimed a work from the house of the Medici, in August 1495. In Bologna at that time, he asked his godfather, Francesco Buonarroti, to reclaim a marble *Hercules* from the house of the Medici.⁹⁹ Michelangelo had probably carved the *Hercules*, now lost, for Piero di Lorenzo de' Medici after Lorenzo's death in 1492.¹⁰⁰ Like *David*, *Hercules* was a time-honored symbol of republicanism, of a republic free from one-man rule. An image of *Hercules* featured on the seal of the Republic since the beginning of the fourteenth century with an

⁹⁷ ASF, Manoscritti, 117 (*Diario storico di quello ch'è seguito nella Città di Firenze Cominciando l'anno 1435 – a tutto il 1522*): fol. 66r (new 77r): "Il Vescovo di Volterra [Francesco Soderini] et Giovacchino Guasconi con [tu]tte trubolenze di fuori, si fece nella n[ost]ra citta di Firenze nuova riforma circa al Governo della Città, ed in segno di Giustizia, di 'avere oppresto il Tiranno, riposti in sulla Ringhiera della Porta del Palazzo, la Giudicta di Bronzo, op[er]la egegria di Donatello. [In the margin:] 1495."

⁹⁸ ASF, Operai di Palazzo, vol. 8, fol. 111r; and Caglioti, 2000, 2: 404.

⁹⁹ *Le collezioni medicee nel 1495. Deliberazioni degli ufficiali dei ribelli*, ed. Outi Merisalo, Florence: S.P.E.S., 1999, 60. See Caglioti, 2000, 1: 263nt163, for corrections of Merisalo's transcriptions.

¹⁰⁰ This has been suggested by Elam, 1992, 58, 60. The restitution of the *Hercules* to Michelangelo contradicts the accounts by Vasari and Condivi, who wrote that Michelangelo had carved the statue in private as a remedy for the sadness he felt after Lorenzo de' Medici had passed away.

inscription that identified Florence *as* Hercules.¹⁰¹ Goro Dati, writing around 1400, exclaimed Hercules “*giogante, che andava spegnendo tutti i Tiranni, e inique signorie, e così hanno fatto i Fiorentini.*”¹⁰² And again like David, Hercules became subject to Medici appropriation. The family commissioned four large-scale canvases of the hero’s deeds from Antonio Pollaiuolo, which, unsurprising, were seized from Palazzo Medici in 1495 and installed at Palazzo della Signoria.¹⁰³

Michelangelo gave the *Hercules* to the Strozzi family sometime before 1506,¹⁰⁴ the year it was recorded at Palazzo Strozzi. If only for the fact that the Strozzi had been among Cosimo de’ Medici’s most fanatical opponents and had just returned from sixty years of exile, Michelangelo’s gift was suggestive of the statue’s portent as a symbol of conquered Medici rule, no less than Donatello’s *David*. Since Palla Strozzi had plotted to murder Cosimo de’ Medici in 1434, Palla’s family had been driven out of the city, and deprived from political office for the remainder of the fifteenth century; the Strozzi only resumed political office in 1494 after their enemies had been expelled.¹⁰⁵ Only because of

¹⁰¹ Ettlinger, 1971, 121: HERCULAE CLAVA DOMAT FLORENCIA PRAVA.

¹⁰² Cited in *ibid.*, 125.

¹⁰³ See Alison Wright, “The Myth of Hercules,” in *Lorenzo Il Magnifico* (1994), 323-39. And for the installation at Palazzo della Signoria, see Caglioti, 1: 292-313, 2: 441-51.

¹⁰⁴ In a letter by Lorenzo Strozzi to Buonarroto Buonarroti (20.vi.1506), Strozzi mentions the statue at his palazzo; see *Carteggio indiretto*, 2: 323: “*La figura intendo si truova a casa, che sta bene; et mi riserberò altra volta a rringratiarti.*” In his note on the letter, Michael Hirst, 323-24, convincingly argues that the statue mentioned in the letter concerned Michelangelo’s *Hercules*. He also points out that the part of the Strozzi palace where Lorenzo and Filippo were to live was brought to completion at the time Lorenzo wrote the letter, and further suggests that Michelangelo’s brother, who worked in the Strozzi wool firm, had helped move the statue from the old to the new Palazzo Strozzi. Michelangelo’s contact with the Strozzi brothers was frequent during the first years of the sixteenth century. In 1508, he offered a dagger refused by its original patron, Piero Aldobrandini, to the Strozzi as a gift. See William E. Wallace, “Manoeuvring for patronage: Michelangelo’s dagger.” *Renaissance studies* 11 (1997), 20-26.

¹⁰⁵ Thus when Filippo sought a rapprochement between his family and the Medici in 1508 by marrying the deceased Piero de’ Medici’s daughter Clarice de’ Medici, letters of concerned Strozzi family members arrived in Florence from all over the peninsula. And when Filippo pleaded his case for the Otto di Guardia, the magistrate that tried to undo his marriage, he stressed that he had married Clarice for no other reason than the love he felt for her, recalling the harm done to his family by Clarice’s family in the past to bring his point home; see Melissa Meriam Bullard, “Marriage Politics and the Family in Renaissance Florence: The Medici-Strozzi Alliance of 1508,” *American Historical Review* 84 (1979), 668-87.

the Medici's expulsion could the Strozzi own Michelangelo's sculpture, and only because of the Medici expulsion could the Strozzi rise to political prominence again (like Michelangelo's family).

The meaning of the statue as a symbol of a re-conquered liberty surfaces in extreme clarity in the year 1529, when the Medici had been expelled from the city once more but were on the verge of a glorious return. Florence could only retain her liberty by the grace of the King of France. In an attempt to keep Francis I on Florence's side, the Florentine Battista della Palla – an outspoken anti-Medici republican who was imprisoned after the Medici return of 1530 and subsequently murdered in prison in 1532 – provided the king with antiquities and modern works of art, to which end he approached his long-term Strozzi friends. In a letter of January 1529, he asked for Strozzi's cooperation, which would be "to the utility and necessity of the preservation of that most happy liberty." Typically, della Palla made an appeal with reference to Strozzi's own share in keeping the city's freedom against Medici forces in 1527. "As an instrument of Our Lord god to the liberation of our *patria*," he wrote, "we are very appreciative of you and your wife, for which cause I in particular recognize and confess to you as an instrument of god not only [for your share in] my return from exile and the recuperation of liberty, but also the salvation of the state"¹⁰⁶ It had been Filippo who had forced Cardinal Passerini and Ippolito de' Medici out of the city in 1527, contributing to the foundation of the second Florentine anti-Medicean republic.¹⁰⁷ In order to preserve *Libertas* and keeping the

¹⁰⁶ Caroline Elam, "Art in the Service of Liberty: Battista della Palla, Art Agent for Francis I," *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance* 5 (1993), 82-83 (Appendix 4): "[Vi scrivo] solamente per havermi voluto guardare in tutto di non aggiungere impedimenti a una commessione infra molte altre ricevuta di costà dal Cristianissimo et dalle cose sue Madre et sorella d'una cosa gratissima et acciottissima alloro, utilissima et necessaria alla conservatione di questa libertà felicissima a il particolare stesso che si ricercharia et honestissima et desiderabile da quegli che gli attenevono" "... io non ho taciuto nè tacerò giamai che come a instrumenti di N.S. dio per la liberatione della patria noi siamo più tenuti a voi et alla felice memoria di vostra consorte che a tutti gli altri cittadini insieme, sia detto con pace loro, et non solo della recuperatione della libertà ma della conservatione dalla desolatione et dalla disfazione sua" "... per la qual cosa io in patriculari riconosco et confesso da voi come da instrumento di dio non tanto la mia restitutione dallo exilio et la recuperatione della libertà ma la salvatione della patria della disfazione sua, il quale tale et tanto immortale beneficio se io non reconosciessi et non confessassi, almeno con la lingua non potendo con le opere, crederrei che la terra non mi sostenessi, che mi inghiettissi lo habisso etc."

¹⁰⁷ Cecil Roth, *The Last Florentine Republic*, London: Methuen & co., 1925, 196.

Medici out, Strozzi offered the *Hercules* as a gift, although della Palla had initially offered to pay. He deprived his family collection and his city from one of its most famous works of art, but the gift would promise a gift in return that was beyond any repayment: the gift of liberty. The statue was sent to France that same year, where it perished in a fire in the eighteenth century.¹⁰⁸

In Florence, works of art were made and remade as registers of the political history from which they arose, shifted from family to family to mark political change. This counts for artists, not less than for the works themselves. Artist's names had to be re-appropriated, too. To that end, the culture of the Governo Popolare made the Mediceanized Donatello back into a republican artist. At least part of him: Florentines had never forgotten that the city's sculptural prodigy had worked at Florence Cathedral prior to 1434, that he had produced sculpture that could not have been commissioned by the Medici because it predated Cosimo's ascendancy. To stress Donatello's pre-Medicean origins, they reinvented the identities of some of Donatello's Campanile Prophets. A popular legend emerging at some point during the Governo Popolare identified two of the statues as the likenesses of the artist's political contemporaries. It described the *Jeremiah* (Fig. 18), commissioned in 1427, as a portrait of Francesco Soderini and the *Habakkuk* (Fig. 19), commissioned in 1423, as a portrait of Giovanni di Barduccio Cherichini.¹⁰⁹ Both Soderini and Cherichini could be considered

¹⁰⁸ The statue is documented in a drawing by Israel Silvestre at Fontainebleau in 1649, and in later copies; see Janet Cox-Rearick, *The Collection of Francis I: The Royal Treasures*, Antwerp and New York: Fonds Mercator and Harry N. Abrams, 1995, 302-13.

¹⁰⁹ The identification first surfaces in written form in the 1520s in Billi, ed. Benedettucci, 47: "...e [Donatello fece] due figure nel campanile di detta chiesa [di Santa Maria del Fiore] verso la piazza, ch'è una ritratta al naturale, che è Giovanni di Duccio Ruchini [Cherichini], e l'altra Francesco Soderini giovane: allato l'una e l'altra." Other sixteenth-century accounts include the *Codice Magliabechiano*, ed. Frey, 76; Giovambattista Gelli, *Vite d'artisti*, ed. Giulio Mancini, in *Archivio Storico Italiano* 17/5 (1896), 32-62; Vasari, 3: 209. In addition, Janson, 1957, 2: 40-41, argued that the myth must have originated in the years of the Governo Popolare. Hans Semper, *Donatellos Leben und Werke. Eine Festschrift zum Fünfhundertjährigen Jubiläum seiner Geburt in Florenz*, Innsbrück: Verlag der Wanger'schen Universitaets Buchhandlung, 1887, 23, 24, was the first to comment on the political identity of the two men: "Im Zuccone hat uns Donatello da Porträt des Florentinischen Bürgers Giovanni di Barduccio Cherichini hinterlassen, eines erbitterten Gegners der Medici, welcher im Jahre 1433 Mitglied der 'Balìa' war, die Cosimos Verbannung beschloss ... [Der Jeremiah] stellt den tödlichen Feind Cosimos, Francesco Soderini, dar, welcher im

defenders of republican liberty. In 1433 they had contributed to the conspiracy against the Medici that led to Cosimo's expulsion. One fifteenth-century chronicler even wrote that Francesco Soderini would have rather seen Cosimo de' Medici strangled than expelled. Donatello, Francesco Soderini and Giovanni Cherichini were indeed contemporaries. Post-Medicean Florence could not only date these statues to the era prior to 1434, it was also able to relate them to a certain political history, able to politically contextualize their history, as it were.

The Antiquity of Sculpture

Where others recuperated and returned, Michelangelo undressed history. In Michelangelo *David*, the boots inspired by the footwear of Roman soldiers, the antiquarian digression in the scene of putti on a cart that features on Goliath's helmet in the Medici bronze are gone, as are deliberate anachronisms such as the Florentine lilies and the hat in contemporary fashion – both references to contemporary Florence. Michelangelo made sure that his David can never be understood as a Florentine boy playing David. Granted, beyond the artist's reach, the *David* is simply too large to be confused with a real boy. But, and intentionally, any possible copula between art and life is further undone by the idealized physiognomy of Michelangelo's version, far removed from the portrait-like face Donatello had put on his figure (Figs. 20 and 21). Whereas we could place Donatello's statue in the historical time of Renaissance Florence, and believe with Vasari that the boy really represents a dressed up apprentice in fifteenth-century boots, with added antiquarian embellishments fashionable in the 1430s and reminiscent of Medici cultural politics, it is simply impossible to think of Michelangelo's *David* as a document of history.

Jahre 1433 nicht Verbannung, sonder Tödtung des gefangenen Medizaers wünschte und sich selbst mit einigen anderen Parteigenossen dazu erbot, ihn im Gefängniss zu erwürgen. Auch hatter er als Kommissär der Regierung ihn, als er die Verbannung zog, bis über die florentinische Grenze zu führen." For a contemporary account of Cherichini's and Soderini's share in the political upheavels of 1433, cited by Semper, see Giovanni Cavalcanti, *Della carcere, dell' ingiusto esilio e del trionfal ritorno di Cosimo, padre della patria etc.* di Giovanni Cavalcanti, Florence: Magheri, 1821, 44.

That Michelangelo's sculpture lacks any documentary qualities does not mean that it is devoid of reference accept to itself. The statue easily slides into written narratives of Greco-Roman art and those of its fifteenth-century rebirth. At least on a generic level it conforms to some of the most important features of unearthed Roman sculpture: it was nude, like all ancient statuary found in Rome around the time; it was colossal, like the statuary described by Pliny and Strabo; it was of marble, like almost all classical sculpture known to the Renaissance; it was placed on a public square, reviving ancient customs of honoring illustrious men described by Pliny; and it carefully imitated the contrapposto pose that marked the classical canon. What is more, *David's* head, with its characteristic nose and head-dress, evokes antique portrait busts.¹¹⁰ Michelangelo's statue might have also reminded the Renaissance viewer of the anatomical perfection that features so often in antique accounts of ancient statuary.¹¹¹ At the same time, Michelangelo's statue resists direct comparison to individual examples of antique art, even for Vasari.¹¹² After having delved into the *Census of antique art known to the Renaissance*, art historians remain empty-handed.¹¹³ Michelangelo's sculpture nestles more comfortably in *theories* of imitating Roman antiquity than in the objects of antiquity proper.

After the Medici expulsion, the imitation of classical models was rendered more problematic and imitation theories more controversial yet

¹¹⁰ Seymour, 1967b, 47.

¹¹¹ On the classical canon of anatomical perfection in the Renaissance, see Pfisterer, 412-25.

¹¹² Vasari, 6: 21.

¹¹³ Usually the colossal Horsetamers on the Quirinal are cited as a source. In addition, Michael Kwakkelstein, "The Model's Pose: Raphael's Use of Antique and Italian Art," *Artibus et historiae* 46 (2002), 57nt10, proposes a figure on the extreme left on a sarcophagus of the *Lion Hunt* in the Cortile del Belvedere, as an alternative antique source for the *David's* pose; for an illustration of this figure, see Bernard Andreae, "Die Sarkophage im statuenhof des Belvedere," in *Il Cortile delle Statue. Der Statuenhof des Belvedere im Vatikan. Akten des internationalen Kongresses zu Ehren Richard Krautheimer*, ed. Matthias Winner, Bernard Andreae, Carlo Pietrangeli, Mainz am Rhein: P. von Sabern, 1998, 386 (fig. 19). Charles Seymour, 1967b, 55, traced Michelangelo's *David* back to Trecento images of *Hercules* that transform antique prototypes into heroic figures, one of which is on the Porta della Mandorla at Santa Maria del Fiore close to the location for which Michelangelo carved his sculpture; Eugenio Battisti, "The Meaning of Classical Models in the Sculpture of Michelangelo," in *Stil und Überlieferung* (1967), 2: 77, also connects Michelangelo's conception of David's body to the Florentine Hercules type.

more elaborate, a shift in the understanding of antiquity that also offers an explanation for the difference between Michelangelo's *David* and Donatello's. The change of regime produced some serious wrinkles in the *rinascità* of antique culture. The open celebration in Laurentian Florence of classical heroes, such as Aemilius Paulus after his conquest of Macedonia, on Saint John's Day disappeared after the expulsion of the Medici,¹¹⁴ only to return after the Medici had come back in 1512.¹¹⁵ Savonarola was partly responsible for that decline in classical learning. Yet the friar never advocated a wholesale rejection of imitating antique models. Schooled in the humanist tradition, Savonarola's sermons were largely structured according to classical rhetoric.¹¹⁶ He did, however, question the self-evidence of classical learning as a universal model of imitation. In a sermon of March 1496, he explained the problems with imitating Livy. The *Histories*, Savonarola explained, although conveying important information about the past, were incapable of serving contemporary Florentine society. Fixed forever in the times that produced them, they "were neither made nor written to signify something else."¹¹⁷ For the friar, true allegorical meaning could of course only be read in the histories of the Bible, where typological thought ruled over historical thinking, where distant moments in time were connected by that supra-historical force of the History of Salvation – forever

¹¹⁴ Aemilius Paulus appeared on stage in 1491; see Trexler, 1980, 451-52, 486; Sylvia Nerid Newbiggin, "Piety and Politics in the *Feste* of Lorenzo's Florence," in *Lorenzo Il Magnifico* (1994), 23; and Hörnqvist, 2002, 164.

¹¹⁵ Heidi L. Chrétien, *The Festival of San Giovanni: Imagery and Political Power in Renaissance Florence*, New York: Lang, 1994, 63; cited in Hörnqvist, 2002, 165.

¹¹⁶ See Hall, 494.

¹¹⁷ SAZ, 1: 75-76: "[Dio] ha fatto scrivere quelle scritture e quelle istorie con quelli nomi e con quelli loci (come abbiamo dichirato di sopra) non solo per dimostrare che così elle fussino, ma per significare altro. Non è così delle altre scritture: vedi Livio che non scrisse perché quella scrittura significasse cose future, ma solo le passate; non lo può fare ancora nessuno questo ... Però nessuna altra scrittura, se non la Sacra, ha allegoria: non la poesia, come dicono alcuni, perchè tre cose si richiedono alla allegoria: prima, la istoria; secondo, la significazione di altre cose; terzo, che quella istoria sia statta fatta per significare quello. Dunque le favole de' poeti non hanno senso allegorico, perchè in esse non è verità di storia. Similiter, non lo hanno le istorie de' pagani, perchè non furono fatte nè scritte per significare altro, ma se qualche volta pare che si allegorizzino, è quella allegoria senso letterale ... Dunque dobbiamo credere che la Scrittura solo ha la allegoria, e bisognati, quando tu vuoi cavare allegoria della, Scrittura intendere bene prima la storia, e la verità di quella servare immobile, e sopra quella fondare el senso morale e allegorico, el qual senso è vago e puossi pigliare in più modi, ita che non sta fermo come la istoria."

relevant for the now and the future.¹¹⁸ The stories narrated in both Livy and the Bible are firmly grounded in history – they really happened, so to speak –, but Livy’s remain fixed there *in* history, whereas the meaning of a biblical history “does not stay still” and “is vague and can appear in various guises,” and therefore never loses its relevance for the history we live in.

The distinction between a literal and allegorical interpretation was in itself not new; but Savonarola’s arguments were. His words firmly belong to the Renaissance. Livy occupied a central position for the renewed interest in history that came with Florentine humanism. A copy of his *Histories* was kept at Cosimo de’ Medici’s library at San Marco, where Savonarola was a prior.¹¹⁹ What was so original about Savonarola’s claim was his argument that Livy’s historical examples bore no social relevance for contemporary Florence because those examples were born from historical circumstances that were radically different from those of the present. In Savonarolan thought, antique models were never able to transcend their specific, historical fixity. History remained fixed, “*sta fermo*,” in the time it was written. Imitation of the antique had become problematic precisely for a recognition of the historical context of the imitated model. No less than the humanists he was criticizing, Savonarola expounded a historicist argument.

An unprecedented sense of historicism also colors some of the discussions on the imitation of antiquity by humanists more favorable of antique models than Savonarola. Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola, in his famous letter of 1512 to Pietro Bembo, introduced a novel argument into the century-old debate *De imitatione*.¹²⁰ Although thrusting himself

¹¹⁸ For figural thought, see Erich Auerbach, “Figura,” in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, tr. Paolo Valesio, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984, 11-76; and Friedrich Ohly, “Außerbildlich Typologisches zwischen Cicero, Ambrosius und Aelred von Rievaulx (1976),” and “Halbbiblische und außerbiblische Typologie (1976),” reprinted in his *Schriften zur mittelalterlichen Bedeutungsforschung*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1977, 338-400.

¹¹⁹ For the centrality of Livy in Renaissance culture, see Giuseppe Billanovich, *La tradizione del testo di Livio e le origini dell’umanesimo*, Padua: Antenore, 1981. And for the manuscript copy of Livy’s *Histories* in Cosimo’s library, see Berthold Louis Ullman and Philip Austin Sadtler, *The Public Library of Renaissance Florence: Niccolò Niccoli, Cosimo de’ Medici and the Library of San Marco*, Padua: Antenore, 1972, 40, 86-87.

¹²⁰ For the debate *De imitatione*, see Pigman.

into the anti-Ciceronian camp that had formerly included the Medicean Poliziano, favoring the imitation of many different authors instead of Cicero alone, Pico curbs Poliziano's enthusiasm with the introduction of several reservations. Poliziano was famous for his effort to recover the full spectrum of the classical past, including enthusiastic discoveries of strange, and in Pico's eyes, useless words such as the Greek word for "mole."¹²¹ "We must remember," Pico wrote, "not to become apes who choose fault for imitation. There are those who desire to paint moles, scars, defects, with little or no idea of strength or grace. Not unlike these are the writers whose greatest care is to find some new word which perchance slipped out when Cicero was hurried or which has come into his books by the fault of time." And then, in full recognition of the differences between classical and contemporary societies and showing himself a true historicist, Pico brings his point home:

Some of these geniuses are so torn and distorted that they present the appearance of a ghost or empty shadow rather than a mind. Themes increase rather than decrease, for many things have happened in our own age and the one preceding which that learned antiquity did not know There are some who wish to walk in the tracks of the ancients. But if the tracks should be found to be larger than ours would our feet be firm in them or would we slip?¹²²

¹²¹ For Poliziano as the inventor of philology, see Grafton, 1991, 47-75.

¹²² For the Latin text, see *Le epistole 'De imitatione' di Giovanfrancesco Pico della Mirandola e Pietro Bembo*, ed. Giorgio Santangelo, Florence: Olschki, 1954, 29-30, 31-32: "*meminerimus tamen nos simias non esse oportere, quae deteriora sibi deligunt ad imitandum. Sunt enim qui nevos, qui cicatrices qui maciem, qui excrementa etiam effingere velint, vel nulla vel minima ratione habita et lacertorum, et vividum roboris, et gratiae. Ab iis non dissimiles, quibus magna est cura, ut rara quaeque vocabula, quae forte aut Ciceroni exciderunt multa scribet, aut vitio temporum fuere in eius libros introducta, adeo ut si ab inferis exciteratur, a se prompta negaret, gestientis surripiant*" And: "*Ita enim macerate sunt nonnulla, et quasi tabe consumpta: alioqui suapte natura formosa, ut simulacra et evanidae umbrae magis quam vivi animi effigiem praeseferant. Crescunt (ut mea fert opinio) verius quam decrescant ingenia. Multa enim quae ad rerum spectant notitiam, et nostrum saeculum, et huic proxima novere, quae docta illa ignoravit antiquitas. ... Nam nec cursu solum veteribus similes, nec gressu vel esse vel videri volunt quidam: sed ita incedere, ut eorum in vestigiis ponant vestigial. At si veterum maiora vestigia fuerint, ut etiam corpora: num in illis minor pes firmabitur, an labascet, si solum maxime subudum fuerit?*" Tr. in Izora Scott, *Controversies Over the Imitation of Cicero in the Renaissance as a Model for Style and Some Phases of Their Influence on the Schools of the Renaissance*, New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1910, Part 2: 3, 4.

Pico's is a typical anti-Ciceronian argument in his recognition of the historical distance between himself and his model. The anti-Ciceronian, Thomas Greene pointed out, "will tend to found his case on some form of historicism," whereas "the Ciceronian ... will tend to deny any effective discontinuity between himself and his master."¹²³ But for Pico that distance remained a problem. In contrast to Poliziano, Pico sees temporal distance as something that cannot be overcome by hard labor or a *virtuoso* combinations of sources. A model's usefulness depended on the historical context in which it was produced. And it was for the changes in that context – change of regimes, for instance – that antique culture possesses many elements unfit for modern society to follow. For Pico, historical knowledge *increases* rather than *decreases*. The historical changes that had occurred between the fall of the Roman Empire and contemporary Florence called for a new sense of historical decorum.¹²⁴ Perhaps Pico's remark that classical antiquity should be treated with care because "many things have happened in our own age and the one preceding" refers to the expulsion of the Medici, a historical moment Pico himself lived intensely since he had been one of Savonarola's closest allies.¹²⁵

Skeptical attitudes towards the imitation of the classics past went far beyond a simple dichotomy between the religious and profane. In the discussions surrounding Machiavelli's plans to introduce a civic militia in Florence in the years following 1506, skepticism entered the high politics of Florentine state, that realm where antique imitation had ruled in the fifteenth century. Leonardo Bruni could still freely mine the history of classical Rome in his discussion on the militia, published in 1421, but after 1494, such free explorations became restrained, as

¹²³ Greene, 175.

¹²⁴ The term "historical decorum" was coined by Pigman, 29, for Erasmus's critical thinking about the imitation of classical models in the *Ciceronianus*. Although Erasmus himself claimed that he did not know the Pico-Bembo debate, the *Ciceronianus* shows in-depth knowledge of the debate. Erasmus had visited Rome in 1509, at which occasion he heard the Ciceronian sermons that alarmed him so much; see Pigman, 25-26.

¹²⁵ On Gianfrancesco Pico, see Charles Bernard Schmitt, *Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola (1469 – 1533) and his Critique of Aristotle*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhof, 1967; and Werner Raith, *Die Macht des Bildes: Ein humanistisches Problem bei Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola*, Munich: Fink, 1967, 7-21, 95-105.

examples gathered by Mikael Hörnqvist show.¹²⁶ Initially, in the *Del modo di trattare i popoli della Valdichiana ribellati* of 1503, Machiavelli had suggested suppressing a public revolt in Arezzo by sending new settlers to town with reference to the Roman conquest of Latium and the subsequent speech of Camillus, told in Livy, where Camillus argued for a complete dominance over the Latin peoples by destroying the province.¹²⁷ However, in 1506, Piero Guicciardini opposed to Machiavelli's proposed measurements with the simple objection that this "was a Roman thing [*era cosa de' Romani*]" that was not practiced anymore."¹²⁸ Guicciardini thought Machiavelli's model was unfit to follow because it was born from the historical conditions of imperial Rome, which could not be practiced by the Florentines of the Governo Popolare. Although the model itself might be worthy of imitation, the historical circumstances that had given rise to it rendered that imitation impossible because Florence had recently exchanged imperialism for republicanism. This was exactly the point made by Bernardo del Nero in Francesco's Guicciardini's *Dialogo del reggimento di Firenze*, written circa 1521-25 but set in the days after the Medici expulsion. Del Nero argued against introducing a citizen's militia since it had been established in Rome in the monarchic period, "so that when the city became free, it was not difficult, or something new, to maintain a profession which had nourished the city for hundreds of years already."¹²⁹ "And don't quote the Romans to me [*né mi allegare e' romani*]," Bernardo ended the discussion. Even Machiavelli, that champion of antique imitation, dared no longer quote the Romans after his *Del Modo*, at least not in the political context of the Governo Popolare. In a letter of September 1506 to Giovan Battista Soderini, now known as the *Ghiribizzi*, he breaks off a long exposition on the historical change of cultures, initially taking the ancient characters of Hannibal and Scipio as examples but now

¹²⁶ See C.C. Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence: The De Militia of Leonardo Bruni*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961.

¹²⁷ Livy, *Histories*, 5.51-54.

¹²⁸ *Consulte e pratiche* (1505 – 1512), 77: "*fornire la fortezza, guardare bene la città et governarli bene. Che mandarci nuovi habitatori era cosa de' Romani, et che non si usa al presente.*" Quoted in Hörnqvist, 2002, 166. Guicciardini said so in the midst of discussions in the *consulte e pratiche* over the revolt of Arezzo on January 28, 1506.

¹²⁹ Guicciardini, ed. and tr. Brown, 150; quoted in Hörnqvist, 2002, 168.

introducing two modern examples to proof his point, “since it is not common practice to quote the Romans...”¹³⁰ As different as Savonarola, Gianfrancesco Pico, Francesco Guicciardini and Machiavelli might have been, in post-1494 Florence, they all had to come to terms with the problem of culture’s historicity in their discussions of antique imitation. The political divide of 1494 had forced a similar divide in the reception of the Roman past, a past now distinguished between monarchic and republican.

If an understanding of the original historical context from which texts like Livy’s arose rendered the imitation of literary models increasingly difficult, then a recognition of the historical context of ancient statuary made antique imitation in the visual arts almost impossible. Antique sculpture in its original Roman context becomes, after all, an instrument in ancient religion. Yet this was exactly the way that Pomponio Gaurico understood ancient statuary. In his *De Sculptura* published with the Florentine Giunti press in 1504, he encouraged artists to imagine ancient statuary on their original altars and to become historians of antique religion, not just admirers of pleasing antique forms: “[the sculptor] must also be an antiquarian who knows for example why the Romans worshipped Mars in two forms, Gravidus and Quirinus, one of which was outside in the Campo, and the other inside the city in the forum.”¹³¹ Gaurico’s enthusiasm for the historicity of antique art was shared by many in Rome in the early sixteenth century. Raphael’s proposal to Leo X to make a historically correct reconstruction of the ancient city was part of this enthusiasm,¹³² as was Julius II’s campaign, launched in the teens of the Cinquecento, to put ancient

¹³⁰ Machiavelli, *Lettere*, ed. Franco Gaeta, Milan: Feltrinelli, 1961, 229: “Ma perché non si usa allegare i Romani, Lorenzo de’ Medici disarmò il popolo per tenere Firenze; messer Giovanni Bentivoglio per tenere Bologna lo armò.” Quoted in Hörnqvist, 2002, 170-71. Machiavelli’s words mark an exception in the rest of his writings. For Machiavelli’s use of Roman models, see Mikael Hörnqvist, *Machiavelli and the Romans*, Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1996.

¹³¹ Gauricus, ed. Chastel and Klein, 55: “*Antiquarium quoque qui sciat, Cur uerbi gratia Mars apud Romanos duplex, Gradius, et Quirinus, Alter in Campo olim extra, Alter in foro Intra urbem colebatur....*”

¹³² Proposed in the famous letter to Leo X of 1519, supposedly written in collaboration with Baldassare Castiglione; see John Shearman, *Raphael in Early Modern Sources (1483 – 1602)*, 2 vols, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003, 1: 500-45. For the letter, see Ingrid Roland, “Raphael, Angelo Colocci, and the Genesis of the Architectural Orders,” *The Art Bulletin* 76 (1994), 81-104.

statuary on altars at the *Corte Belvedere*, which was intended as an actual historical reconstruction of Roman cult statuary.¹³³ But that enthusiasm was not the air that the early sixteenth-century Florentine breathed. After having visited the *Corte* in 1512, that child of the *Governo Popolare*, Gianfrancesco Pico, saw historical reconstruction as a problem of idolatry. In a letter to his friend Lilio Giraldi, accompanying his poem *De Venere et Cupidine Expellensis*, he complained. “Lilius,” he wrote, “do you know Venus and Cupid, the gods of those vain ancients? Julius II, Pontifex Maximus, has procured them from Roman ruins, where they were recently discovered and has placed them in that most fragrant citrus grove, paved with flintstone.” Instead of admiring the beauty of the Venus or making an effort to reconcile the cult of the pagan deities with Christianity, as the Roman circle around Johannes Goritz was attempting at the time,¹³⁴ this advocate of historicism saw Venus placed there in the context of her original function as a pagan cult statue, installed on her pagan altar: “Everywhere ... antique statues are placed, each on its little altar.”¹³⁵ Pico saw idols rather than aesthetics.

¹³³ For a reconstruction of the Vatican Statue Court, see Hans Henrik Brummer, *The Statue Court in the Vatican Belvedere*, Stockholm: Kungl. Boktryckeriet PA Norstedt & Söner, 1970, 20-42. Also see Bram Kempers, “Tot de verbeelding sprekende beelden: de permanente renaissance van het theater van de oudheid,” in *Beeld voor beeld: Klassieke sculptuur in prent*, Amsterdam, exh.cat., Allard Pierson Museum, 2007, 61-70.

¹³⁴ For Goritz and the *Coryciana*, see Jozef IJsewijn, “Poetry in a Roman Garden: The Coryciana,” in *Latin Poetry and the Classical Tradition: Essays in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, ed. Peter Godman and Oswyn Murray, Oxford: Clarendon, 1990, 211-31; and Julia Haig Gaisser, “The Rise and Fall of Goritz’s Feasts,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 48 (1995), 41-55.

¹³⁵ The Latin text of the letters and English translations can be found in E.H. Gombrich, “Hypnerotomachiana,” in *Symbolic images: Studies in the art of the Renaissance*, London: Phaidon Press, 1972, 105-07: “Nostin Lili Venerem atque Cupidinem vanae illius Deos vetustatis? Eos Iulius secundus Pont. Max. accersivit e romanis ruinis, ante paululum erutos, collocavitque in nemore citriorum illo odoratissimo constrato silice, cuius in meditullio Caerulei quoque Thybridid est imago colossea. Omni autem ex parte inqtuae Imagines, suis quaeque arulis super impositae.” Also see, Luba Freedman, *The Revival of the Olympian Gods*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 232-33, who in addition quotes part of Pico’s second letter to Giraldi. Gianfrancesco Pico’s diatribes against the pagan cult have often been explained as the result of a religious fanaticism that he supposedly inherited from Savonarola; see, for instance, Richard Cocke, *From Magic to High Fashion: The Classical Traditions and the Renaissance of Roman Patronage*. Norwich: Mill Hill Publications, 1993, 72. However, underlying Pico’s, Savonarola’s, del Nero’s, Machiavelli’s, Michelangelo’s and many others’ standpoint lies a dawning historicism. Gombrich (*Supra*), 107, indeed believed that Pico was reacting against a *real* historical reconstruction of the pagan cult: “Maybe we should dismiss this interpretation

Earlier, fifteenth-century writers had not forgotten about the original function of antique art which their culture tried to recuperate, although for them that posed no problems. Both Ghiberti, writing in the mid 1400s, and Alberti, publishing in the 1480s, knew that the revival of antique statuary conflicted with a Christianity that had battled for centuries against the pagan idolaters.¹³⁶ Some antique works of art were still understood as idols. A statue of Mars that stood next to the Ponte Vecchio was described as “*l'idolo di Marte*” far into the Renaissance,¹³⁷ whereas two inscriptions on the south side of the bridge warned the Florentines against idolatry.¹³⁸ A notary inventorying the Medici collection in 1516 labeled one of the items in that collection as “an idol of bronze on a column [*un idolo di bronzo in su una palla*].”¹³⁹ But what does the Renaissance idol look like?

It looks like Donatello's Medici *David*. Fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century artists still used it as a model for the pagan cult statue.

[of Pico] as the mere expression of Savonarolean prejudice. But is it not also possible that the philosopher's eyes, sharpened as they were by critical hostility, saw deeper? Can we exclude the possibility that Bramante was really trying to construct a kind of pagan grove behind the tremendous structure of the Belvedere, encouraged as he might have been by the equivocal religiosity of the Hypneromachia with its talk of ‘*Sancta Venere?*’,” to which question Gombrich answered a well-founded “yes” in the closing pages of his article.

¹³⁶ Ghiberti, ed. Bartoli, 83: “*Adunche al tempo di Constantino imperadore et di Silvestro papa sormontò su la fede Christiana. Ebbe la ydolatria grandissima persecutione in modo tale, tutte le statue et le picture furon disfatte et lacerate di tante nobilità et anticha et perfetta dignità et così si consumaron colle statue et picture et vilumi et comentarij et liniamenti et regole davano amaestramento a tanta et egregia et gentile arte. Et poi levare via ogni anticho costume di yolatria costituirono i templi tutti essere bianchi. In questo tempo ordinorono grandissima pena a chi facesse alcuna statua o alcuna pictura et così finì l'arte statuaria et la pictura et ogni doctrina che in essa fosse fatta. Finita che fu l'arte stettero e templi bianchi circa d'anni 600.*” And Alberti, ed. and tr. Rykwert, 241-42 (Book 7, Ch. 17): “There are those who maintain that a temple should contain no statues. ... Yet instructed by our elders and appealing to reason, we would argue that no one could be so misguided as to fail to realize that the gods should be visualized in the mind, and not with the eyes. Clearly no form can ever succeed in imitating or representing, in even the slightest degree, such greatness.”

¹³⁷ For that statue, see Lucca Gatti, “The Art of Freedom: Civic Identity and Devotion in Early Renaissance Florence,” PhD diss., University of London, 1992, 135nt432; cited in Geraldine Johnson, “Idol or Ideal? The Power and Potency of Female Public Sculpture,” in *Picturing Women* (1997), 228.

¹³⁸ See Luca Gatti, “Il mito di Marte a Firenze e la ‘pietra scema’: Memorie, riti ascendenze,” *Rinascimento* 35 (1995), 201-30. I thank Stephen J. Campbell for this reference.

¹³⁹ John Shearman, “The Collections of the Younger Branch of the Medici,” *The Burlington Magazine* 117 (1975), 27 (doc. 80).

When commissioned to illustrate idolatry in scenes of the lives of the martyr saints who suffered a violent death by pagan emperors, painters often represented pagan statuary that looked like Donatello's. The idols painted by Piero della Francesca, Masolino, Botticelli and others are made of a bronze-like metal and are always infused with the animation so characteristic of Donatello's interpretation. Even Donatello himself choose his own statue as a model for a pagan statue in the background of *Christ before Pilatus* on one of the San Lorenzo Pulpits (Fig. 22). Filippino Lippi, painting in the first years of the sixteenth century, modeled the contrapposto pose and the armakimbo of an idol in his predella of the *Lamentation over Lucrezia* in Florence (Fig. 23) on the *David*; and when commissioned to paint *Saint Philip the Apostle before the Altar of Mars* in 1504, the same painter took the base of the ex-Medici bronze to place his pagan deity on (Fig. 24).

When commissioned to imagine idols in their original context of the pagan cult, Florentine artists fashioned their "historical reconstructions" after the Medici bronze, including its peculiar setting in a courtyard on a richly decorated column. In other words, they understood the most decisive features of Donatello's statue as those of an idol: the statue's *all'antica* style, its nudity, its bronze, and the way it was displayed in the courtyard of the Palazzo Medici on a column.¹⁴⁰ Artists went quite a step further than writers. The antiquarian aesthetics of Donatello's art highlighted by men like Landino and Fazio were historicized by the painters, who placed aesthetic in their original functionary context. Central to medieval and Renaissance thinking about idols was the belief that these figures appear driven by a force outside of themselves; they were believed to be possessed by demons that caused the apparent animation of dead material.¹⁴¹ In Filippino Lippi's *St. Philip before the altar of Mars*, in the Strozzi Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, we witness a dragonlike demon being exorcised from an animated statue of

¹⁴⁰ See the medieval definition of idols as "image + column" in W.S. Heckscher, *Sixtus III Aeneas Insignes Statuas Romano Popolo Restituendas Censuit*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1955, 46; cited in Barkan, 353nt146.

¹⁴¹ See Michael W. Cole, "Cellini's Blood," *Art Bulletin* 81 (1999), 215-33; and *ibid.*, "The Demonic Arts and the Origin of Medium," *Art Bulletin* 84 (2002), 621-40. Renaissance painters understood this tradition of demonic possession and that is why they sometimes depicted little creatures coming out of pagan statues.

Mars (Fig. 24). For the painters, the suggestion of lifelikeness in dead bronze seems to make the work *susceptible* to demonic forces.

It is important to emphasize how much this is a *visual* question and how difficult it is to define the qualities of the Renaissance idol on paper. When Pico and others recognized the original cult function of ancient statuary under the pressure of a mounting historicism, they started to force a clear divide between images of the pagan Gods and images of Christian subject-matter without ever pointing out how that divide operated aesthetically. It was left to artists to point out the difference. With the awareness that statues of the pagan cult belonged to one distinct category, images of Christian subject-matter had to be made their visual counterparts.

Michelangelo worked out the difference between historical reconstructions of a pagan statue and an Old Testament giant-slayer within his own oeuvre, and within five years: in the *Bacchus*, carved in 1496 in Rome (Fig. 25), which, as a freestanding male nude, directly preceded the *David*. Pose unbalanced, expression unpredictable and contrapposto inverted, the statue shared much with the painted tradition of pagan statuary “in historical context” mentioned above. And like Quattrocento painters, Michelangelo went back to Donatello’s bronze *David* to model his pagan god on, carving the sculpture as if it were tilting over.¹⁴² Michelangelo’s statue shares with its bronze predecessor that unmistakable softness of body, boyish and female at the same time. Vasari already described the androgynous appearance of the *Bacchus* as a combination of “the slenderness of masculine youth and the fleshiness and roundness of the feminine [*la sveltezza della gioventù del maschio e la carnosità e tondezza dell femina*],” just as he had written of “the softness [*la morbidezza*]” of Donatello’s bronze.¹⁴³

¹⁴² The Medici *David* not only preceded the *Bacchus* as an important example of a life-size, freestanding figure conceived in the round, Christoph Luitpold Frommel, “Raffaele Riario, la Cancelleria, il teatro e il Bacco di Michelangelo,” in *Giovinezza di Michelangelo*, ed. Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt, Cristina Accidini Luchinat, James David Draper, and Nicholas Penny, Florence and Milan: Skira, 1999, 143-48, has also pointed out that the original patron of Michelangelo’s sculpture, Cardinal Riario, had admired the Medici bronze eighteen years earlier, when it still stood in the center of the *cortile* at Palazzo Medici.

¹⁴³ Vasari, 1: 210.

Historicism was a driving force behind the making of the *Bacchus* from the start. Michelangelo had come to the attention of the statue's patron, the Roman cardinal Riario, as a talented forger of antique sculpture. In 1496, the young artist had tried to sell a statue of a *Sleeping Cupid*, now lost, as an original antique to the cardinal; he had even put it under ground to make it look older. The cardinal suspected Michelangelo's deceit and sent an associate to Florence, who confirmed the suspicion. This associate was Jacopo Gallo, who, impressed by Michelangelo's capacities as a forger of antiquities, adopted him in his Roman household. And although Michelangelo's *Bacchus* had originally been commissioned by Riario, Jacopo Gallo eventually ended up purchasing it.¹⁴⁴ The *Bacchus* remained in Gallo's sculpture garden, comfortably nestled between the unearthed remains of ancient Rome. Tellingly, stories about the statue's supposed antiquity started to develop soon after completion, and, even more informatively, some evidence indicates that Michelangelo himself was behind them, now having managed to forge an antique twice.¹⁴⁵ Forgers are historicists by necessity, able to produce believable reconstructions of past forms by suggesting a past use.

Michelangelo's sculpture registered as a recently unearthed antique. When Maarten van Heemskerck made a drawing of it in 1533-36, he portrayed the sculpture with its right hand broken off and its genitals missing (Fig. 27), marks of the wear and tear of time that characterized the fragmentary status of antique sculpture in general.¹⁴⁶ Perhaps Michelangelo had initially obliterated the arm we can now see holding the cup of wine to make his "forgery" more convincing.

¹⁴⁴ Early sources pertaining to the statue are conveniently gathered and intelligently interpreted in Michael Hirst, "The Artist in Rome," in Hirst and Dunkerton, 1994, 29-35.

¹⁴⁵ Hence Francisco de Holanda wondered whether he was looking at an antique or modern work; see Luba Freedman, "Michelangelo's reflections on Bacchus," *Artibus et historiae* 24.47 (2003), 121; and J.J. Boissard, *Topografia Romae Urbis, qua succincte Describuntur omnia* [1597], Frankfurt: Matthew Merulan, 1627, 1: 18, thought that Michelangelo purposefully broke the statue in order to pass it off as an antique. Boissard lived in Rome between 1550 and 1561. Much modern scholarship is of the same opinion as de Holanda and Boissard; they include Wind, 1968, 180-82; Joachim Poescke, *Michelangelo and his World: Sculpture of the Italian Renaissance*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1996, 75; Barkan, 201-04; and Freedman (*Supra*).

¹⁴⁶ On the fragmentary state of antique sculptures as an attribute of their pastness, see Barkan, 119-207.

Considering Michelangelo's defacement of the *Cupid* with mud in the same year, this is not unthinkable. The cup might have been "restored" to the sculpture prior to the 1550s, when Condivi and Vasari saw the god holding it, perhaps by the master himself. Its penis, however, was never restored. And it looks as if Michelangelo never carved it. The phallus seems meticulously chiseled away and not broken off; its scrotum was left intact.¹⁴⁷ However carefully carried out, in suggesting that the god's phallus had been removed, Michelangelo also insisted that it had been made subject to some violent act that had occurred in the sculpture's fabricated "history." Michelangelo knew that antique statues were often unearthed with their genitals missing. The *Torso Belvedere* and the *Apollo Belvedere* are just two famous examples. And he must have also known that it was a kind of damage that could boast more powerful meanings than other missing parts: missing members registered not just the anonymous traces of aging but bore witness to a historically motivated sort of aggression, which had taken place at a precise moment in the past. This moment was when Pope Gregory ordered all pagan gods to be knocked of their columns, an episode in the history of art not forgotten in the Renaissance, as Ghiberti's *Commentarii* demonstrate.¹⁴⁸ Some medieval images that document early-Christian iconoclasm show how the genitals of these statues were often singled out for special attention by their iconoclasts (Fig. 27); and others convey how the pagan sexuality embodied in pagan art could be illustrated through an enlarged penis (Fig. 28). One of few ancient statues that remained with its genitals intact was the bronze *Spinario* (Fig. 13). Penis still attached, its sexuality stands as a symbol of its idolatrous nature. For the twelfth-century Master Gregory the genitals of this "ridiculous *Priapus*," or fertility god, denoted its idolatry. "If you lean forward and look up, you discover genitals of extraordinary size," Gregory found out on his trip to Rome.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Imagine Michelangelo's *Bacchus* falling over. Wouldn't other parts than its phallus break off first?

¹⁴⁸ For Pope Gregory's charges against pagan cult statuary, see Tilmann Buddensieg, "Gregory the Great, Destroyer of Pagan Statues," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 28 (1965), 44-65.

¹⁴⁹ *The Marvels of Rome*, tr. John Osborne, Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1987, 23; quoted in Camille, 85.

Michelangelo didn't make his *Bacchus* as an argument in favor of a return to medieval prudery, but presented it as an artifact that *registers* art's history. The history that Michelangelo recreates in this image runs from the times of his statue's (artificial) origin in the classical world, to its defacement in the centuries of medieval iconoclasm, all the way into late fifteenth-century Rome. While establishing itself as a *recreation* of an antique sculpture in Gallo's sculpture garden, it at the same time evidences the violent *history* of antique art. For Michelangelo, the forgery of antique art was not just an act of imitating an antiquated style, it also entailed a thinking through of the historical trajectory by which it had arrived in the present.

In the *David*, Michelangelo avoided all efforts at historical reconstruction that are so evident in the *Bacchus* and his interpretation of Donatello's bronze, an avoidance that makes the *David* the absolute counter-image of both. Michelangelo contrasted a hieratic, static pose to the distorted and contorted, idol-like body of the ex-Medici bronze, a semiotics that had been operating in the contrast between positive imagery of saints and their idolatrous counterparts for centuries.¹⁵⁰ Michelangelo's *David* corrects the fragile imbalance of the god of wine and, by implication, that of the Medici version. From firmly placed feet rises the straight body of the Old Testament youth. No belly protrudes outward. Abdomen, profiled head, legs, even the arm that holds the sling, are contained within the limits of a shallow marble block, a fact recognized by Vasari and Condivi.¹⁵¹ Tamed by the limits of the marble, head upright and the contrapposto *Spielbein* safely placed within the body's contour, Michelangelo's *David* is governed by a sculptural order resistant to the psycho-machia of the Donatello and the pagan possession of the winegod – both figures who seem to break free from their material containers. The *David* reintroduced the definition of sculpture as buttress that Donatello and the Michelangelo of the *Bacchus* had deliberately reversed. In Donatello the buttress is replaced by the feather of Goliath's helmet, that caresses David's thigh instead of suggesting physical support, and the pansic in Michelangelo's Roman statue leans against

¹⁵⁰ For the semiotics of such contrastig postures, see B. Abou-El-Haj, "Feudal Conflicts and the Image of Power in the Monastery of St. Amand de Eleone," *Kritische Berichte* 1 (1985), 11; quoted in Camille, 122.

¹⁵¹ Vasari, 6: 20; and Condivi, ed. Nencioni, 21.

the sculpture instead of offering support, completely subverting the definition of this sculpture as “freestanding.”¹⁵²

If Thomas Greene is right in arguing that the Ciceronianism of someone like Bembo “draws its absolute rigor from the atemporal,” then Michelangelo’s *David* is the ultimate visual example of such atemporal classicism.¹⁵³ This is not to claim Michelangelo as a Ciceronian.¹⁵⁴ The atemporality of the *David* emerged from a sense of historical decorum that was informed by the discussions of antique imitation within the Governo Popolare. Overcoming the problems of historical time that Savonarola, Pico, Guicciardini and Machiavelli saw as an impediment to the imitation of the antique, Michelangelo produced his *David* through recourse to classical art, imitating its premises but not copying its history. That move was informed by historicism. One first has to become a historicist before being able to produce a statue that is consciously de-historicized.

Comparison and Contrast

A culture replaced by new cultural values can only be defined the Cultural Other if some of the former culture’s most defining visual tokens remain visible under the new order. Tzvetan Todorov has shown how the Spanish colonists conquering America and the Mesoamerican Indians in the sixteenth century left some of the Indians’ gods intact, visually displaying the Religious Other as a negative value in contrast to their own Western religion. In Todorov’s precise words, “for idolatries to

¹⁵² The reversal of the function of the buttress figure was noted by Nagel, 2000, 92, who also suggested that this essentially anti-classical feature was at the basis of Riario’s refusal of the work. The pose of Michelangelo’s *David* has reminded many critics of Donatello’s *St George*, a statue governed by the same conception of freestanding sculpture. Thus Justi, 1909, 141, wrote: “Die Ähnlichkeit mit dem hl. Georg ist nicht zu leugnen; in der Frontstellung mit den gespreizten Beinen, dem herabhängenden Arm, dem durchdringenden Blick mit den gerunzelten Brauen.”

¹⁵³ Greene, 175.

¹⁵⁴ Wind, 1968, 182nt14, claimed that Michelangelo was a Ciceronian, strikingly enough on the basis of the *Bacchus*: “Michelangelo, from his first visit to Rome, clearly belonged to the intransigent party” For a more balanced view, see Robert J. Clements, “Michelangelo and the Doctrine of Imitation,” *Italica* 23.2 (1946), 90-99.

be uprooted they must first be recognizable.”¹⁵⁵ What Todorov observes in *The Conquest of America* seems part of a more widespread anthropologic phenomenon. Michael Camille writes that medieval man could never fully abolish the images of idols because they were needed in a culture defined by comparison and contrast: “no matter how fearful idols seemed to people in the Middle Ages, they were necessary, and therefore represented, in order to assert the dominance of another set of images – those of the Christian Church.”¹⁵⁶ And in his remarkable book on Protestant iconoclasm, Joseph Leo Koerner explains that the spoils of the iconoclasts were sometimes left visible for the church community to behold as a negative image in contrast to the true image of the reformed church. Koerner also points out a less destructive but no less effective example of the same mechanism. Some prints of the German reformation criticize the meaning of Catholic models through a strategy of visual reversal and distortion. While at once taking care to maintain the compositional structure of the Catholic model, to keep the model recognizable, these prints speak a “resounding no” to the culture represented by the model. “The Protestant woodcut strikes a blow both against the things it depicts and the framing depiction it paradoxically appropriates,” writes Koerner. By building upon visual affinities, such prints offer both a critique of the Church as institution as well as the means through which this institution asserts its authority (by giving indulgence). “The Church stands condemned by its own representations.”¹⁵⁷

The comparison and contrast between Donatello’s bronze *David* and Michelangelo’s version works along a similar strategy. Comparison with Donatello’s *David* is at once encouraged through the shared feature of nudity, the same nudity that also works as the contrasting feature between both artworks. Michelangelo himself had made this comparison, when drafting a copy of the bronze from memory next to a study for the right arm of his own *David*. The private nature of that comparison was put to work publicly on September 9, 1504 when Michelangelo’s sculpture was installed in front of the Palazzo della

¹⁵⁵ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America. The Question of the Other*, tr. Richard Howard, New York: Harper & Row, 1984, 203.

¹⁵⁶ Camille, 71-72.

¹⁵⁷ Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image*, London: Reaktion Books, 2004, 116-17.

Signoria, with Donatello's statue less than five meters behind it, making visible the visual language the Medici had politicized and Michelangelo now counteracted. The famous discussion leading up to the decision to install the *David* next to the entrance to the Palazzo and in front of Donatello's bronze and not on the cathedral for which site it was commissioned, centered on issues of artistic comparison and contrast; they adduce the sculpture's social functionality from the success of Michelangelo's interpretation in contrast to the Donatello bronze.

On January 25, 1504, in the headquarters of the Opera del Duomo behind the cathedral, a substantial group of artists and artisans gathered to give advice about the future location of the *David*. Among goldsmiths, woodcarvers and master-embroiders, were Leonardo da Vinci, Botticelli, Piero di Cosimo, Filippino Lippi, Davide Ghirlandaio, Cosimo Rosselli, Pietro Perugino, Lorenzo di Credi, Giuliano da Sangallo, and his brother Antonio, the Capomaestro to the Opera del Duomo and two *operai*. Also present were the masters of ceremony of the city-government, the First and Second Herald. Their invitation makes clear that the Palazzo had been a serious alternative for the cathedral from the moment the meeting was organized. After the *operai* had explained the proper way of presentation, the floor was given to the individual speakers. Their arguments were recorded in the vernacular. The opening lines of the document give the following motivation for the meeting:

Considering that the statue of David is almost finished, and desiring to install it and give it an appropriate and acceptable location, with the installation at a suitable time, and since the installation must be solid and structurally trustworthy according to the instructions of Michelangelo, master of the said Giant, and of the Consuls of the Arte della Lana, and desiring such advice as may be useful for choosing the aforesaid suitable and sound installation, etc., they decided to call together and assemble, to decide on this, competent masters, citizens, and architects, whose names are listed below in the vernacular, and to record their opinions, word for word.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ "*Viso qualiter statue seu David est quasi finita, et desiderantes eam locare et eidem dare locum commodum et congruum, et tale locum tempora, quo debet micti et mictenda est in tali loco, esse debere locum solidum et resolidatum ex relatu Michelangelis, magistri dicti gigantis, et consulum artis lane, et desiderantes tale consilium mitti ad effectum et modum predictum etc., deliberaverunt convocari et coadunari ad hoc eligendum magistros, homines et architectores, quorum nomina sunt vulgariter*

First of all, the text indicates that, for reasons as yet unstated, the location of *David* had become open for discussion. That a decision about the future site could only be made after a public debate bears witness to the statue's public function, in evidence already when the statue was not even properly finished. Aware of the relatively narrow place of the buttress and the difficulty of installing a heavy marble sculpture on a location thirty meters above ground – still unprecedented at that time in Florence –,¹⁵⁹ Michelangelo and the consuls sought advice on a “structurally trustworthy installation.”

The persons present at the meeting suggest five possible locations for the *David*. Three-quarters of the speakers whose opinion was recorded favored the site of the Loggia,¹⁶⁰ and only two out of twenty-one proposed the cathedral as the best location. From the start of the meeting, the latter site seemed no longer a serious option, to the surprise of at least one speaker, a woodcarver named Monciatto who recalled that the statue “was made to be placed on the pilasters outside the church, or else on the buttresses around it,” only then to utter with irritated amazement: “I don't know your reasons for not putting it there.”¹⁶¹ Reading through the other comments suggests why the buttresses were no longer an option. Arguments connect the control of the statue's viewability and the protection of the marble against the elements with socio-political motivation. All are rooted in the public status of the statue, explicated in Giuliano da Sangallo's exclamation that day that Michelangelo's *David* was a “*cosa pubblica*.” “And, consider that this is a public thing,” Giuliano urged his colleagues, “and consider the weakness of the marble, which is delicate and fragile; then if it is placed outside and exposed to the weather, I think that it would not endure.”

notata, et eorum dicta adnotari de verbo ad verbum.” I have slightly altered the translation in Seymour, 1967b, 141.

¹⁵⁹ Donatello's *Joshua* was made of terracotta. Donatello's marble *David* and Nanni di Banco's *Isaiah* were much smaller.

¹⁶⁰ A postscript to the document announces: “*Li altri Signori nominate e richiesti chol ditto loro, per più brevità qui non si scripsono. Ma el ditto loro fu che si riferirono al ditto quelli di sopra, et a chi uno, et chi a un altro di sopra detti senza discrepanza.*”

¹⁶¹ Seymour, 1967b, 144-45: “*... fu facta per mettere in su e pilastri di fuori o sproni intorno alla chiesa: la cause di non vele mettere, non so, et quivì a me pareva stessi bene in ornamento della chiesa et de' consoli, et mutato loci.*”

He suggested placing it under cover in the Loggia de' Lanzi.¹⁶² The statue's public importance becomes political in the words of the First Herald of the Signoria (speaking prior to Giuliano's alarming advice and hence unaware of the material's vulnerability). He opined that

there are two places where such a statue might be erected. The first is where the *Judith* is, and the second the center of the courtyard of the Palazzo, where the *David* [by Donatello] is. The reason for the first is because the *Judith* is an emblem [*segno*] of death, and it is not fitting for the Republic – especially when our emblems are the cross and the lily – and I say it is not fitting that the woman should kill the man. And even more important, it was erected under an evil star, for from that day to this, things have gone from bad to worse: for then we lost Pisa. The David of the courtyard is a figure which is not perfect, because the leg that thrusts backwards is faulty. For these reasons I would advise putting this [i.e. Michelangelo's] statue in one of the two places but with my preference for where the *Judith* is now.¹⁶³

When the herald qualified Donatello's *Judith* as a false emblem (of death, personified by a woman) he implied that Michelangelo's *David* was a true emblem; otherwise he could not have suggested to put the latter in the former's place.

But the herald's ideas do not purely rest on the general acknowledgement that all images of David could serve as emblems of the Republic, that the iconography of David itself served politics better than that of Judith. Here we have a rare documented case where artistic failure leads to emblematic impossibility and where artistic success secures political iconicity. It is not iconography itself that counts for the herald, but the way it is given interpretive value by Michelangelo. Only

¹⁶² Seymour, 1967b, 145-46: "... *ma poi che è cosa pubblica, veduta la imperfectione del marmo per essere tenero et chotto, et essendo stato allaria, non mi pare fussi durabile: per tanto per questa causa ò pensato che stia bene nell'arho di mezo della loggia de' Signori....*"

¹⁶³ Seymour, 1967b, 142-45: "*Havete due luoghi dove può supportare tale statua, el primo dove è la Iuditta, el secondo el mezzo della corte del palazzo, dove è el Davit: primo perchè la Iuditta è segno mortifero, e' non sta bene havendo noi la + per insignia et el giglio, non sta bene che la donna uccida lhomo, et maxime essendo stata posta chon chattivaa chonstellatione, perchè da poi in qua siate iti de male in peggio: perdessi poi Pisa. El Davit della corte è una figura et non è perfecta, perchè la gamba sua di drieto è schiocha; per tanto io consiglierei che si ponesse questa statua in una de' dua luoghi, ma più tosto dove è la Iuditta.*"

Michelangelo's version was reserved for a political task, a statue that performs its political creed better in *comparison* to Donatello's, "which is not perfect." It was only by installing the marble *David* in the vicinity of the bronze that a comparison could become fully apparent.

Giuliano da Sangallo's opinions on the bad state of the marble and the herald's comments on the politics of artistic perfection blended into one argument when the other attendants began to speak about controlling the viewing circumstances of Michelangelo's sculpture. Taking da Sangallo's suggestion to shelter the statue as a point of departure, they advised that the *David* could best be viewed inside the Loggia de' Lanzi. A goldsmith proposed that "it is better under cover, because the people would go and see it, rather than having such a thing confronting the people; as if we and passersby should go to see it, rather than having the figure come to see us."¹⁶⁴ At a distance from the public, under an arch that at the same time dwarves the sculpture and provides it with a shrine for appreciation, the statue served its purpose most effectively.

Thus proximity to the street where the people rush to their destinations would not do Michelangelo's *David* justice. Better to move it away a little from the busy stream of pedestrians, carts and horses trying to get from one side of town to the other. "(I)f it is not exactly on the street," said Antonio da Sangallo, "passersby would take the trouble of going to see it there." He proposed to install the *David* in the Loggia, where it would be best to enshrine it in "a sort of tabernacle [*cappelluza*]," against the back wall, where people would have to make an effort to go see it, first climbing a flight of stairs and crossing the space of the Loggia.¹⁶⁵ The goldsmith's and Sangallo's arguments show a concern for shaping the viewer's response, for a prolonged kind of looking. In a city that was full of visual impulses, they strove for an installation that avoided the cursory glance. Stimulating the viewer to pause on the aesthetics of Michelangelo's art, they argued against an inflation of the image that had rendered art an empty ornament deprived of social

¹⁶⁴ Seymour, 1967b, 148-49: "... et stare meglio al coperto, et e viandanti andare a vedere, et non tal cosa andare incontro a'viandanti, et che noi et e viandanti landiamo a vedere, et non che la figura venghi a vedere noi."

¹⁶⁵ Seymour, 1967b, 146-47: "... dallato dentro presso al muro nel mezo, chon un nichio nero di drieto in modo di cappelluza"

relevance. Visual inflation was a problem that arose in the Quattrocento; too many images were looked at only in passing, which corrupted their meaning. In a sermon of 1497, Savonarola had told the Florentines already that “if you put [a work of art] often in front of the eyes, and therefore you don’t make it a habit to look at it, it then incites you nothing.”¹⁶⁶

Silence fell in after the meeting closed. Nothing is heard about the statue until April 1, 1504. On that day, the Consuls of the Wool Guild and the *operai* of Santa Maria del Fiore ordered Simone del Pollaiuolo to move the *David* to the Piazza della Signoria.¹⁶⁷ This location would come to no surprise of a reader of the minutes, since the vast majority of the speakers opted for the Piazza. Nevertheless the statue remained at the Duomo for a few weeks. By the end of April the Capomaestro received more detailed instructions about the procedures of the move,¹⁶⁸ and assisted by Antonio and Giuliano da Sangallo, Baccio d’Agnolo (the Capomaestro of the *Opera del Palagio*), and the architect Bernardo della Ceccha, he prepared for the important and dangerous undertaking of the journey, designing an ingenious device that could still rouse Vasari’s admiration.¹⁶⁹ On May 14, at midnight, the statue began its journey to the Piazza, to arrive there on the 18th at noon, after being stoned by vandals at night.¹⁷⁰ Ten days later, the city-government ordered Donatello’s *Judith* to be taken from its pedestal to make room for Michelangelo’s colossus, which was finally installed there on June 3, albeit on an ephemeral pedestal for which a marble replacement was commissioned

¹⁶⁶ SRM, 2: 372-73: “che ti fusi spesso innanzi alli occhi, ma non però che tu ne facessi uno abito di vederla, e che poi la non ti movessi nulla.”

¹⁶⁷ Frey, 1909, 107 (doc. 17).

¹⁶⁸ Frey, 1909, 107-08 (doc. 19).

¹⁶⁹ Vasari, 6: 20.

¹⁷⁰ Luca Landucci, ed. 1969, 268: “E a dì 14 di maggio 1504, si trasse dell’ Opera el gigante di marmo; uscì fuori alle 24 ore, e ruppono el muro sopra la porta tanto che ne potessi uscire. E in questa notte fu gittato certi sassi al gigante per fare male; bisognò far la guardia la notte: e andeva molto adagio, così ritto legato che ispenzolava, che non toccava co’ piedi; con fortissimi legni, e con grande ingegno; e penò 4 dì a giugnere in Piazza, giunse a dì 18 in su la Piazza a ore 12: aveva più di 40 uomini a farlo andare: aveva sotto 14 legni unti, e quali si mutavano di mano in mano.” Hirst, 2000nt30, publishes the names of the vandals, recorded in ASF, Otto di Guardia, Repubblica 129, vols. 38r-39r, and notes correctly that none of them was part of a pro-Medicean faction. The stoning of the statue was probably a case of arbitrary vandalism.

from the Opera eight days later.¹⁷¹ On September 5, Michelangelo was paid for the finishing touch,¹⁷² and around the same time his statue was further embellished with a silver laurel wreath, a symbol of victory.¹⁷³

Concerns about the vulnerability of the statue were overruled (or perhaps it was recognized that the marble wasn't vulnerable at all) and the political arguments of the herald granted.¹⁷⁴ But the selected location still respected the statue's artistic iconicity and the interrelated concerns for its viewing circumstances, so carefully articulated by some of the speakers in favor of the Loggia. Michelangelo's *David* was installed on the southern end of the *ringhiera*, a platform that folded around the Palazzo della Signoria until it was demolished in the nineteenth century, at the exact spot where that structure opened to a flight of steps that provided the main access to the building, as we still see in a late fifteenth-century painting (Fig. 29). After the expulsion of the Medici, the stairs and southern end of the platform had again become the visual focus of the square when a ramp connecting the palace to the Loggia that had been placed there on Medici orders was taken away in order to allow for traffic from the Arno to the Palazzo. At that time, too, Donatello's *Judith* was installed "(a)s a sign of justice, for having oppressed the tyrant," in the words of the anonymous diarist quoted above.

The *David* was installed on a simple, square pedestal, consisting of a red plate framed by white Carrara marble similar to the sculpture's present support, fully integrated into the corner of the parapet.¹⁷⁵ The base is unusual. Earlier freestanding statuary was often put on a high, lavishly decorated and inscribed columns, like the spiral one of the *Judith*

¹⁷¹ Milanesi, 620; and Gaye, 2: 463.

¹⁷² Frey, 1909, 109 (doc. 30).

¹⁷³ Payments for these additions are recorded on October, 31, 1504; see Renzo Ristori, "L'Aretino, il David di Michelangelo e la *modestia fiorentina*," *Rinascimento* 26 (1986), 85-86.

¹⁷⁴ The 2004 restoration of the *David* revealed that the statue was in a remarkable good state, considering the fact that it had been exposed to the elements for four centuries. It was also noted then that the statue's hair-style had served to shelter the marble against the rain, like an umbrella.

¹⁷⁵ For a reconstruction of the *David*'s original installation and its pedestal, see Kathleen Weil-Garris, "On pedestals: Michelangelo's *David*, Bandinelli's *Hercules* and *Cacus* and the sculpture of the Piazza della Signoria," *Römisches Jahrbuch für Kunstgeschichte* 20 (1983), 381-93.

and *Holofernes* (Fig. 17). The pedestal of Michelangelo's *David* is austere, lacks an explanatory text, and is small compared to other pedestals. Its austerity avoided distraction from the sculpture it supported.¹⁷⁶ Meaning is located in Michelangelo's statue exclusively, not in the antiquarian context of the columnar monument and not in an explanatory inscription that shaped the meaning of Donatello's works. Raised above street level and thus kept from the daily bustle of traffic, it stood at least twice as high as the present copy on the Piazza. Michelangelo's sculpture was exclusively accessible from the palace steps or from the *ringhiera*. The viewer had to make an effort to see it, had take a few steps back to give it a second glance. The concerns that the statue would fall victim to a fleeting glance were overcome.

Installed there and framed by the simple brickwork of the city palace, Michelangelo's *David* became the object of prolonged attention on special occasions throughout the year. On important feast-days and in the case of weighty political decision-making, the eight *priori* and the Gonfaloniere of the Signoria, the central organ of the Florentine government, were displayed next to Michelangelo's sculpture like statuary, exhibited in an elaborate *Tribuna* while the city notables walked by in solemn procession and mass was celebrated on an improvised altar – all in the eye of the Florentine populace gathering in their Piazza. The *ringhiera*, then, had no other function than being a focal point for *display*, the display of politics, social spectacle, and imagery. Spectacle peaked there on September 8, 1504, when Michelangelo's *David* was unveiled on the same day as the new Signoria accepted their offices. The fact that the unveiling and inauguration rituals happened on one day and were described in tandem by contemporary witnesses suggests that their meanings were orchestrated to be connected.¹⁷⁷ While the new Signoria sat on show for the gathered citizenry to behold – enthroned without speech, like imagery – Michelangelo's statue was officially unveiled. Still partly covered by some enclosure, or maybe even a kind of fabric, "they laid it completely bare," in the words of one contemporary.¹⁷⁸ The ritual

¹⁷⁶ See *ibid.*, 392, for a similar point.

¹⁷⁷ Cambi, 2: 12: "*Di detto mese schropisse detto Giughante, e finito tutto addi 8. di Settenbre 1504. la mattina chentrorono e' nuovi Ghonfalonieri.*"

¹⁷⁸ Lapini, 34: "*Et a' di 8 di settembre 1504 fa finito di fabbricare in tutto e per tutto il gigante Davit in Piazza, e tutto si scopese.*"

made Michelangelo's *David* the first statue in art history to have been officially unveiled. It put unprecedented emphasis on the *act* of viewing. If John Shearman is right and Renaissance art demanded a more engaged beholder, then Michelangelo's *David* was where the viewer's attentiveness was condensed to the maximum.¹⁷⁹

Installation and artistic interpretation demand the attention of an eye trained to understand. And here understanding needs comparison. Before Wölfflin made the one to one comparison the basic tool for our discipline, the herald already compared one artistic interpretation to the other, championing Michelangelo's version over Donatello's, and for political reasons. A concern for contrasting forms of the same subject-matter found a parallel in political writing of the period, where superficial similarities between the Medici past and the post-Medicean present were demonstrated to show a profound difference by a learned eye. In his dialogue concerning the government of Florence set in the days after the Medici expulsion, Francesco Guicciardini wrote that

(T)he world is so constituted that everything which exists at present has existed before, under different names, at different times and different places. Thus everything that has existed in the past is partly in existence now and partly will exist at other times, returning into being every day, but in different disguises and different colors [*sotto varie coperte e vari colori*], so that without a very good eye one takes it for new and fails to recognize it. But someone with a sharp eye, who knows how to compare and contrast [*applicare e distinguere*] one event with another and considers what the substantial differences are and which matter less, easily recognizes it.¹⁸⁰

It is remarkable that Guicciardini adduces painterly metaphors to make his point come across, as if his reading audience could best understand a

¹⁷⁹ Shearman, 1992.

¹⁸⁰ Guicciardini, ed. Lugani Scarano, 1: 314: "... *el mondo è condizionato in modo che tutto quello che è stato per el passato, parte è al presente, parte sarà in altri tempi e ogni dì ritorna in essere, ma sotto varie coperte e varie colori, in modo che chi non ha l'occhio molto buono, lo piglia per nuovo e non lo riconosce; ma chi ha la vista acuta e che sa applicare e distinguere caso da caso, e considerare quali siano la diversità sustanziali e quali quelle che importano manco, facilmente lo riconosce, e co' calculi e misura delle cose passate sa calcolare e misurare assai del futuro.*" Tr. in Guicciardini, ed. Brown, 16.

comparison between different historical moments when the writer offers visual metaphors. The politics of comparing and contrasting stand at the heart of his example, as much as it stood at the center of Michelangelo's *David*, which true meaning only came across to those with "a sharp eye." Superficially similar to Donatello's – in subject-matter, that is – Michelangelo's *David* gathered meaning at the deeper level of style.

A Political Icon

For centuries, a people dependant on divine protection in a period of economic, political and military hardship were symbolized by the iconography of the Victorious David. Important themes for political survival – victory in battle, the protection against tyranny, the right of conquest, a good harvest, civic prosperity – were firmly grounded in the book of Samuel, in David's psalms, and the interpretation of David's battle with Goliath by Dante and other writers.

Political meaning has been attributed to Michelangelo's *David* since 1504, when the herald suggested replacing Donatello's *Judith* with Michelangelo's *David* at the meeting of January 25. He could have only proposed that replacement if he thought that Michelangelo's version would help remedy the loss of the harbor city and hence bring back Florence to its former military glory. In 1504, the war against Pisa, a territory lost to the Florentines in 1494 following Piero de' Medici's failed negotiations with the French king, was indeed the most acute political issue at Palazzo della Signoria, not least because it drained so much of the city's tax money.¹⁸¹

To this military meaning of Michelangelo's statue were added others. At the unveiling ceremony, the eight *priori*'s political conduct was set in a direct symbolic relation to the statue, installed just a few meters to the right of their *Tribuna*. That this ritual took place on September 8 is also no coincidence, for it was the feast day of the Virgin. Contemporary witnesses attached particular meaning to the fact that both inaugurations were conducted under the protection of the Mother of God.¹⁸² I recall

¹⁸¹ For the financial and political strains which the war with Pisa put on the Florentine city-government, see Butters, 1985, *passim*.

¹⁸² See above, note 177.

here that the importance of the statue's moment of unveiling had already been hinted at in the opening lines of the 1504 meeting, organized, among other reasons, to advise on the installation of the statue "at a suitable time."

As a representation of divinely sanctioned rulership unveiled on the feast day of the mother of God, the *David* lent sacrosanctity to the office of the eight *priori* and the Gonfaloniere of the Signoria. Sacrosanctity was further strengthened by the function of the *ringhiera*, built in the thirteenth century as the city's main outdoor shrine exclusively to endow the Signoria's political actions with sacred authority, similar to the use of a church altar.¹⁸³ In fact, the city's fathers were sometimes described as saints by contemporaries, who acquainted these men of flesh and blood with the lifelike statues of saints on view in the Florentine streets and churches.¹⁸⁴ Their almost divine exemplarity resonated with that of David, who was often recommended as a model for the ideal ruler and who had slayed a tyrant to set his people free.

Art historians since Charles Seymour have attributed very specific political meanings to the *David*, even presenting particular political and military circumstance to account for the statue's commission in August 1501. Some have considered the sculpture in the context of the Pisan war, others have interpreted it as a warning against those trying to overthrow the Governo Popolare – including the Medici and Cesare Borgia.¹⁸⁵ And there is probably good reason to believe that Florentines thought such statuary as the *David* to be capable of giving aid in particular instances. How could the herald have otherwise believed that replacing the *Judith* with the *David* would help gaining back Pisa? And for what other reason would the eight *priori* have been inaugurated on the same day as Michelangelo's statue? Yet these contemporary accounts also suggest that the *David* could fulfill a much greater spectrum of needs. The *David* surely did not lose its operational value in 1503, when Cesare Borgia was imprisoned and Piero de' Medici drowned, and neither after 1509 when the Florentines had won the Pisan war. The *David* stood as a symbol of

¹⁸³ Trexler, 1980, 49.

¹⁸⁴ Geraldine Johnson, "The Lion and the Piazza: Patrician politics and public statuary in central Florence," in *Secular sculpture, 1350 – 1550*, ed. Philip Lindley and Thomas Frangenberg, Stanford: Shaun Tyas, 2000, 54-73.

¹⁸⁵ See for example, Seymour, 1967b; Levine; Lavin, 1993, 51-58.

the divine protection of the Florentine Republic in *every* respect of its political conduct and at any given moment in the future of the Republic, its divine symbolism secured in Michelangelo's radical interpretation of an inherited artistic tradition. Michelangelo's reflection on the history of statuary would ultimately initiate an investigation into the origins of artistic inspiration, an investigation that forms the subject of the next chapter.

ORIGINS

Marks of Invention

“One says that every painter paints himself [*ogni dipintore dipinge se medesimo*],” Savonarola preached at Florence Cathedral in February 1497, repeating a famous Florentine aphorism. “He does not as much paint himself as a man, because he makes images of lions, horses, men and women who are not himself, but he paints himself as a painter, that is, according to his concept [*concetto*]; and though they may be different fancies and figures of the painters that they paint, yet they are all according to his concept.” Artists were “vain like the philosophers.”¹

To a packed church, Savonarola criticized a whole generation of Florentine painters: those who advertised their craft in church, instead of producing images of sincere religious belief, the artists that demanded the viewer’s contemplation of their private *fantasie* instead of the religious mysteries figured through the brush. Present in every image he produced, Savonarola’s artist fashioned self-portraits of his profession in churches originally reserved for the communication of religion, not for the articulation of the artistic self. In his view, the time-honored role of the artist as mere mediator of religious subject-matter had given way to

¹ SE, 1: 343: “E’ si dice che ogni dipintore dipinge se medesimo. Non dipinge già sè in quanto uomo, perchè fa delle immagini di leoni, cavalli, uomini e donne che non sono sè, ma dipinge sè in quanto dipintore, idest secondo il suo concetto; e benchè siano diverse fantasie e figure de’ dipintori che dipingono, tamen sono tutte secondo il concetto suo.” I have partly adjusted the English translation of this passage in *Italian Art* (1992), 159.

one who announced that the painted and sculpted images of Christ, the saints, the prophets and religious mysteries have no other origin than in the artist's own conception, *concetto*.² That commissions for imagery dropped in the years Savonarola preached indicates that Florentine patrons concurred with the preacher that the current state of the discipline had come to corrupt the religious image.

Savonarola had discovered a divide in the image between a cult of religion – articulated in subject-matter proper – and a cult of the artist's name and self – painting to claim his place in a history of art that favored a personal, subjective view of things, including religion. It was against a burgeoning interest in art's *history* and her historical personages that Savonarola was arguing. Ten years earlier, the split of the Renaissance image had been explained by Cristoforo Landino, though in laudatory terms. In his commentary on Dante's *Divina Comedia*, Landino paused on Dante's pausing at a painting on his way to Purgatory. Halting on the halted traveler, Landino tries to understand how the poet saw. He wrote:

And he found delight in those images for the love of the *painter*, that is of the master that had made them, and for how much he signifies historically [*quanto a l'istoria significa*], that the artifice and authority of the artificer moved him to behold [those images], as they do in us. While looking at the painting, and hearing that it is by the hand of Giotto, it awakens much in us the authority of that man. And allegorically it shows that he was looking at the examples of humility for the love of their maker, that is, for the love of God. The one who says: "Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart."³

² For the theoretical notions at the basis of "*Ogni dipintore*," see Robert Klein, "'Giudizio' et 'gusto' dans la théorie de l'art au Cinquecento," *Rinascimento* NS 1 (1961), 105-16; Martin Kemp, "'Ogni dipintore dipinge se': A Neoplatonic echo in Leonardo's Art Theory?," in *Cultural Aspects of the Italian Renaissance*, ed. Cecil Clough, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975, 311-23; Green, 153; David Summers, "Aria II: The Union of Image and Artist as an Aesthetic Ideal in Renaissance Art," *Artibus et historiae* 20 (1989), 15-31; and from the perspective of women artists, Fredrika Jacobs, "The construction of a life: Madonna Properzia de' Rossi, 'schultrice' Bolognese," *Word and Image* 9 (1993), 122-32.

³ Cristoforo Landino, *Commento sopra la Comedia*, 4 vols, ed. P. Procaccioli, Rome: Salerno editrice, 2001, 3: 1209: "*Et dilectavasi di quelle imagini per amore del fabbro, cioè del maestro, che l'haveva facte, et questo quanto a l'istoria significa, che l'artificio et l'auctorità dell'artefice lo muvea a guatarla, chome veggiamo in noi. Imperoché se guardiam la pictura, et udiamo quella essere di mano di Giotto, può molto in noi l'auctorià de l'huomo. Et allegoricamente dimostra, che guatava gl'exempli*

Landino's words mark a shift in the perception of imagery, a split of the image in two faces which origins can indeed be situated in the kind of culture produced by Dante's *Divina Comedia*. At once an allegorical system of reference that discloses the "examples of humility," the painting at the same time asserts the presence of its author, Giotto. Landino distinguishes between how an image operated *allegorically* – evocative of meaning that transcends historical time – and *historically* – the painting understood as a link in a historical development that can be written as a history of art. Art's historical claim mainly lay in its imitation of the natural world, in naturalism and illusionism. The vast production of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century texts celebrating Giotto's name and fame, affirm and confirm that he owed his historical significance to his contribution to the Florentine mimetic tradition.⁴

Artists made historical claims through signatures. The rise of the signature bears witness to the historical weight of the image, which it defines as "artist made."⁵ In the case of religious works of art, they fix a subject-matter as fabrication instead of divine revelation. Rather than stabilizing the viewer's gaze exclusively on the timeless divinity of the subject *represented*, signatures return the image to history, to the subject that *made* it. Giovanni Bellini, for instance, signed his name on a *cartellino*, pricked on a twig in the foreground of his *Transfiguration*, that reads IOANNES BELLINUS MEPINXIT (Fig. 30). Looking at that painted piece of paper that advertises Bellini's skills in naturalistic representation, toiling and moving in the wind and inviting us to grab it, we become aware of the work's author and come to understand the painting's illusionism as *his*, asserting his claim to the historical success that naturalism secured.⁶

de l'humilità per amor del maestro, cioè per l'amore di Dio. El quale dixe: 'discite a me, quia mitis sum et humilis corde'." The biblical reference is to Matthew XI, 29.

⁴ For Giotto's literary reception, see Peter Murray, "Notes on Some Early Giotto Sources," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 16 (1953), 58-80; Baxandall, 1971, 51-78; Enid T. Falaschi, "Giotto: The Literary Legend," *Italian Studies* 27 (1972), 1-27; and Hayden B.J. Maginnis, "The Problem with Giotto," in *Painting in the Age of Giotto: A Historical Reevaluation*, University Park (PE): Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997, 79-102.

⁵ Claude Gandelman, "The Semiotics of Signatures in Painting: A Peircean Analysis," *American Journal of Semiotics* 3.3 (1985), 76.

⁶ For Bellini's signature, see Rona Goffen, "Signatures: Inscribing Identity in Italian Renaissance Art," *Viator* 32 (2002), 317.

One symptom of the shift from allegory to history was the collecting of artwork by historically lauded names. In 1490, nine years after Landino published and seven years prior to Savonarola's sermon, Piero de' Medici acquired a painting with the Deposition on one side and Saint John and the Virgin on the other from the nuns of San Benedetto. Although the letter documenting the acquisition described the subject-matter of the work at great length, it also mentioned its maker: it was "painted by the hand of Cimabue," "*dipinta di mano di Cimabue*."⁷⁸ By 1490, Cimabue was chiefly known as the founding father of Florentine art, as a historical figure. He featured in almost every tale about the origins of Florentine naturalism told in texts dedicated to Piero and his family. "Cimabue," wrote Landino in his *Commento*, "rediscovered the natural forms [*lineamenti naturali*] and true proportion, the which the Greeks called mathematics [*simetria*], and the figures in the [paintings of those] superior dead painters he made alive again, and in various poses, through which he acquired much fame."⁹ Fame was only dimmed by Cimabue's being Giotto's teacher. "But even greater would he have been if he had not had such a noble successor in the person of Giotto the Florentine," Landino glossed Dante's famous words, "Cimabue thought to hold the field in painting and now Giotto holds the cry, and now his fame is obscured."¹⁰ Piero's acquisition of Cimabue's panel was an investment in a *uomo famoso* and hence in the glorious art history of his own city.

That investment was only one symptom of an ever strengthening Medici identity politics. Around the time that Piero acquired "the

⁷ *Italian Art* (1992), 236-37.

⁸ The letter is published in L. Pagliai, "Da un libro del monastero di S. Benedetto," *Rivista d'Arte* 2 (1905), 153: "Piero di Lorenzo di Piero di Cosimo di Giovanni di Bicci de Medici intese che noi avamo apud nos una tavoletta dipinta di mano di Cimabue, dipinta da ogni lato: dall'uno lato era una Dispositione di Croce colle Marie e altri sancti: da l'altro lato era Christo che metteva l'una mano in sul collo a Nostra Donna, e l'altra a Giovanni vangelista. E mandò acchiederla in compera, dove don Niccholo di Lionardo Biadi priore gliela donò personalmente a dì 20 di novembre 1490" The painting is lost.

⁹ Landino, ed. Cardini, 1: 124: "Fu adunque el primo Ioanni fiorentino cognominato Cimabue che ritrovò e' lineamenti naturali e la vera proporzione, la quale e' Greci chiamano simetria, e le figure ne' superiori pittori morte fece vive e di vari gesti, e gran fama lasciò di sé."

¹⁰ Landino, ed. Cardini, 1: 124: "Ma molto maggiore la lasciava se non avessi avuto sì nobile successore quale fu Giotto fiorentino." Dante, *Purgatorio*, XI, 94-96: "Credette Cimabue ne la pintura / tener lo campo, e ora ha Giotto il grido, / sì che la fama di colui è oscura."

Cimabue," his father, Lorenzo *Il Magnifico*, had installed commemorative monuments to famous Florentines in Santa Maria del Fiore, including Giotto – monuments to names more than anything else. "I am the one [*Ille ego sum*] that brought the extinguished art of painting back to life," read the opening words of Giotto's epitaph (Fig. 16).¹¹ Medici identity and artistic identity were also tied up in inscriptions on Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes*. On the bronze cushion that supports the figure group, Donatello signed his names in Latin capitals: OP[US] DONATELLI (Fig. 31). And on the column that supported the statue prior to its dislocation to the Piazza della Signoria, Piero de' Medici's name appeared: "Piero de' Medici son of Cosimo dedicated this statue of a woman both to liberty and to fortitude, whereby the citizens with unvanquished and constant heart might return to the republic."¹² An image of an Old Testament woman who had secured the freedom of her people, can now be seen to focus attention as well on the artist's virtuoso design and its dedication to the individual patron's fearless politics.

Savonarola understood well that the politics of self-fashioning practiced by artists were intimately related to those employed by patrons. For him, the presence of the artist's hand and *persona* in the work of art could not be separated from the patron's presence in the chapel. "(Y)ou don't want to know the interior cult of God," he addressed Florentine patrons in a sermon on Ascension Sunday 1496, "but you only attend to outward ceremonies, and you believe that to endow a chapel or parapet will be fully in honor of God, not understanding that God only looks at the heart, not at the hands [*mani*]."¹³ And the friar knew well that the identity politics he was

¹¹ ILLE EGO SVM PERQVEM PICTVRA EXTINGCTA REVIXIT CVI QVAM RECTA MANVS TAM FVIT ET FACILIS NATVRAE DEERAT

¹² SALUS PUBLICA. PETRUS MEDICES. COS. FI. LIBERTATI SIMUL ET FORTITUDINI HANC MULIERIS STATUAM, QUO CIVES INVICTO CONSTANTIQUE ANIMO AD REM PUBLICAM REDDERENT, DEDICAVIT. Tr. in Blake McHam, 2001, 36.

¹³ SRM, 1: 95 (15.v.1496): "Cosi fanno ancora oggi i tepidi, che non vogliono conoscere il culto interiore di Dio, ma solo attendono alle ceremonie di fuori, e credono che li fare una cappella o paramento sia tutto l'onore di Dio, e non conoscere che Dio risguarda il core, non le mani, e pero ogni volta che si scuoprono le loro reti da tirare denari, loro si adirano, e sono i quest' errore per la loro superbia e malignita." Cited in Hall, 515nt11. The combined attack against both producer and buyer had been a stable combination since the early fifteenth century, when the Florentine bishop Antonius had attacked both painters and patrons for indecorous religious behavior;

arguing against had grown from Medici culture. In a sermon of that same year he talked about the rich spending more money on a chapel than on donations to the poor, taking the church of San Marco, cluttered with Medici coat of arms and works of art, as an example. "If I would say to you: give me ten ducats to give to a poor man, you would refuse to," Savonarola challenged his public, "but if I say: spend a hundred on a chapel there in San Marco, you would do so with the aim to put your coat of arms there, and you would do so for your own honor, and not for the honor of God."¹⁴

However generic a saying "*Ogni dipintore dipinge se medesimo*" was (it occurred almost everywhere in art theoretical writings, including Michelangelo's), Florentine culture had never forgotten that Cosimo de' Medici had invented the dictum; the attribution first appears in written form in a list of aphorisms gathered by Poliziano in the 1470s.¹⁵ It makes Savonarola's introductory words "one says [*si dice*]" translate into "Cosimo says." On another occasion, Savonarola had made a similar pun, again without mentioning Cosimo explicitly by name. When the preacher launched his criticism against Medici's aphorism, "the state is not governed by paternosters," he added: "that is the saying of tyrants, not of true princes."¹⁶ Even though he cleverly avoided calling his "tyrant" by name, the reference would have been clear to an audience well-acquainted to aphorisms.



Only once did Michelangelo surrender to an overt identity politics. He signed his work for the first and last time in 1500, on the strap of fabric

see Creighton Gilbert, "The Archbishop on the Painters of Florence," *Art Bulletin* 41 (1995), 75-87.

¹⁴ SAZ, 1: 22-23: "*Se io ti dicessi: dammi dieci ducati per dare a uno povero, tu nol faresti; ma se io ti dico: spendine cento in una cappella qua in San Marco, to l' farai per mettervi l' arme tua e farailo per tuo onore, non per onore di Dio.*" For Medici presence at San Marco, see William Hood, *Fra Angelico at San Marco*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993, *passim*; D.V. Kent, 2000, 141-59.

¹⁵ Albert Wesselski, *Angelo Polizianos Tagebuch (1477-1479): Mit vierhundert Schwänken und Schnurren aus den Tagen Lorenzos des Grossmächtigen und seiner Vorfahren*, Jena: Eugen Diederichs, 1929, 72 (no. 150): "*Diceva Cosimo che si dimenticano prima cento benefici che una ingiuria. E chi ingiuria non perdona mai. E che ogni dipintore dipigne se.*"

¹⁶ SAT, 126. See Weinstein, 1970, 147.

across Mary's chest in the Roman *Pietà*: MICHEL.A[N]GELVS.BVONAROTVS.FLORENT[IUS]. FACIEBA[T] (Fig. 32), that was finished in Rome less than a year before he started the *David*. Not an afterthought as Vasari wrote,¹⁷ but original to the sculpture, this inscription affirmed the authorship of the statue as Michelangelo's, his family name and place of birth added to supply a specificity to the origins of the invention in his own historical persona. Yet his claim to historical significance was partly undone by the peculiar spelling of the name. With an interpunct between "michel" and "angelus," it translates into "Michael the Angel." The phrasing linked Michelangelo's artistic call to the heavenly role of angels as messengers from God.¹⁸ It withdrew his invention in part from the historical conditions of artmaking – by Michelangelo of the Buonarroti family, born in Florence – to relocate his conception (*concetto*) in the realm of the divine. The relocation was intentional. Its spelling deviated from the way the artist signed his letters, where Michelangelo remains a mere name. A belief in the divinity of Michelangelo's *concetti* became a trope of literary praise in the sixteenth century, but that praise must have had an origin in the artist's own sustained effort to present his work as divine. When Lodovico Ariosto wrote of Michelangelo's *divinità*, in the 1516 preface to his *Orlando Furioso*, he constructed that divinity exactly on the same separation between Michael and Angel as the artist's own inscribed words: "Michael, more than mortal, Angel Divine."¹⁹ Ariosto's words suggest an intimate connection between Michelangelo's fashioning his artistic self as divine and the reception of that divinity by contemporaries.²⁰ While inscribing himself into the tradition of "Every painter paints himself" through the bold advertisement of Christian and family name, the Michelangelo of the Roman *Pietà* also insisted that his rôle was merely consigned to that of a vehicle of inventions born

¹⁷ Vasari, 6: 17. And see Wang, 452-54, for the technical evidence of the inscription's originality.

¹⁸ See the excellent analysis of Michelangelo's signature in Wang.

¹⁹ Ariosto, *Orlando Furioso*, ed. Lanfranco Caretti, Milan and Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1954, 852 (Canto 33.2): "*Michel, più che mortale, Angel divino.*"

²⁰ That is why I do not agree with Patricia Emison, *Creating the 'Divine Artist': From Dante to Michelangelo*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004, who argues that calling Michelangelo divine was a mere literary trope.

elsewhere, from a divine source firmly located outside his own, subjective *concetto*.

Michelangelo's *David* and his *Saint Matthew* of 1506, introduced later in this chapter, evidence more radical concerns with authorship and the origins of manufacture, ones (unnoticed in previous scholarship) that engage directly with the historical conditions of the Governo Popolare. This chapter explains that the divine authorship present in both works operated as an alternative to Savonarola's critique against advertising the human hand as the origin of art. Unlike the *Pietà*, they are unsigned, and, as opposed to works by Donatello and his peers working under Medicean patronage, they carry no written testimonies to the patron as owner or "co-author." These sculptures announce themselves as perfect images of their maker and, by analogy, of their patron.

New David

On the sheet in the Louvre, just above his reference to Lorenzo's *lauro*, Michelangelo jotted down the now famous words (Fig. 4):

Davicte colla fromba

e io collarcho

Michelagniol[o]

(David with the sling and I with the bow, Michelangelo)

The lines equate artist with subject-matter by establishing a link between David's tools and Michelangelo's. The "*archo*" refers to the sculptor's drill, a device used to remove large parts of marble prior to the actual carving. And the sling represents David's tool in overcoming the giant.²¹ At first, the comparison between the tools of divinity and those of the sculptor is difficult to fathom. Michelangelo simply places one word above the other, connects the two phrases with an insignificant "and [*e*]," then signs to make sure that "I [*io*]" refers to himself, but offers no further qualification as to the interrelations between the self and David. We have to turn to the narrative in the first book of Samuel, a text

²¹ Marcel Brion, *Michel-Ange*, Paris: Albin Michel, 1939, 119-21; Seymour, 1967b, 7-8; and Lavin, 1993, 31-50.

Michelangelo would have consulted, to make sense out of this equation.²² There we read everything about divine agency in human action. The battle was God's, and David merely acted as an agent of divine providence. In addition to Samuel, the Book of Psalms is full of prayers in which David recognizes the divine agency in his greatest feats. Michelangelo knew the text of the Psalms intimately. He copied the first lines of Psalm 53, which was believed to have been composed by David after his battle with Goliath, on a sheet with studies for the Apostle commission of 1503, "*Deus in nomine tuo saluu[m] me,*" Save me, O God, by your name (Fig. 33).²³

Michelangelo could have only identified with David on the grounds of divine agency in overcoming "giants." His was not an act of self-portraiture *as* David. He did not cast David's head in his own likeness as Giorgione did (Fig. 34). Michelangelo's is not so much a personal identification with the Old Testament figure but one that understands David's battle with the giant Goliath as a figuration of his own *act* of sculpture, his battle with the giant block of marble. Similar to David but not completely as him, Michelangelo perceived of his creating self as a mere mediator of heavenly ideas. Artistic inspiration was not fully his; it was not born from the personal phantoms of Savonarolan *fantasia* but received directly from God. As David was chosen to affect God's will on earth, an election narrated as the anointing ceremony in 1 Samuel 16:13 ("So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power"), Michelangelo fashioned himself a vehicle that made divine inventions visible for us to see.

In the *David*, divinity becomes visible as iconography by making beauty palpable to the mortal eye. No narrative digression distracts from

²² Condivi, ed. Nencioni, 62, claimed that Michelangelo studied both the New and the Old Testament, a claim substantiated by Hatfield, 1995, who showed that Michelangelo consulted the Bible translated into Italian by Nicolò Malerbi which was printed in Venice in 1498, when designing the *Sistine Ceiling*. And see Vasari, 6: 112.

²³ British Museum, 18959-15-496r. That the line refers to Psalm 53 was first pointed out by Otto Kurz, "Review of Charles de Tolnay, *The Youth of Michelangelo*," *The Burlington Magazine* 86 (1945), 52; quoted in Wilde, 1953a, 4. According to Luitpold Dussler, *Die Zeichnungen des Michelangelo: Kritischer Katalog*, Berlin: Gebr. Mann, 1959, 109; Wilde, 1953a, 5; Enzo Noé Girardi, *Rime*, Bari: Laterza & Figli, 1960, 473; and Amy, 1997, 795, the handwriting is Michelangelo's own.

David's beautiful nude body, beauty incarnated as the sculpture's only attribute – as art historians from Vasari to the present day recognized but never explained.²⁴ "Who has ever seen," Raffaello Borghini wondered in 1584, "or thinks that he will ever see a figure more perfect, executed with more ease, and with a more beautiful pose?"²⁵ Beauty of form and beauty inherent to subject-matter can no longer be separated. Beautiful sculpture becomes a metaphor for a divinity that can only be visualized as beauty.

David's handsomeness was a sign for his divine election in the Bible. It enters the First Book of Samuel at the moment of David's election for anointment as king of Israel. After God has turned down all Jesse's other sons, Jesse sent for David, who "was ruddy, with a fine appearance and handsome features. Then the Lord said [to Samuel], 'Rise and anoint him. He is the one' (1 Samuel 16:12)." And in Psalm 44 beauty is put forth as both a sign of David's divinity and the reason for him being singled out for eternal blessing: "You are the most handsome of the sons of men; grace is poured upon your lips; therefore God has blessed you forever [*decere pulchrior es filiis hominum effusa est gratia in labiis tuis propterea benedixit tibi Deus in aeternum*]." The strand of thought set in this Psalm was continued in Saint Jerome's *Liber de nominibus hebraicis*, where we read under David's entry "David: strong of hand and Beloved [*fortis manu, sive desiderabilis*]." ²⁶ It was introduced in Michelangelo's time in a sermon by Savonarola of March 1498 on Psalm 44. "We have lauded David, who is interpreted *manu fortis* and *pulcher aspectu*, that is our Savior, who is strong of hand and of beautiful experience: strong for the greatness of his works, of which he has done many and miraculously, of beautiful appearance, because there never was a more divine [*piu gratioso*] part than his. *Spetiosus forma pre filiis*

²⁴ Vasari, 6: 21. And see, for instance, Seymour, 1967b, 51-54, who brought the perfect anatomy of *David's* nude body in line with Leonardo da Vinci's canonical *Virtuvius* man and, in yet another attempts to read the statue on a multi-iconographical level, as Adam, who served as the perfect image of mankind in Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's much cited *On the dignity of man*, a text published in 1490.

²⁵ Borghini, 1: 512: "*chi ha mai veduto, ò chi pensa mai vedere una figura piu perfetta, con piu facilità condotta, e con piu bella posatura.*"

²⁶ In *Patrologia Latina*, xxiii, cols. 813, 839; cited in Shearman, 1992, 23nt19.

huminum [Psalm 44:3], and he is the most beautiful of all sons of man.”²⁷ Again, outward beauty reflects divine presence. Almost a century ago, in 1909, Heinrich Brockhaus recognized the affinity between Michelangelo’s statue and Savonarola’s sermon. “Whoever, with such words of the moving preacher in mind, approached the *David* by Michelangelo, will find that Michelangelo has represented the *David* for the corporeal eye, just like Savonarola imagined for the spiritual eye: a brilliant figure, strong and beautiful. David is Christ as he should be, beautiful to behold, that is with clear beautiful consciousness, strong and of audacious decisiveness,” wrote this German scholar in a passage tucked away in a book on the Medici Chapel and perhaps for that reason ignored by a century of scholarship on the *David*.²⁸

It is at the point of making visual an (almost) invisible divinity that Savonarola’s text and Michelangelo’s image intersect. The representation of invisibility had haunted Renaissance art for at least a century when Michelangelo set to work on the *David*.²⁹ Some, like Alberti, believed that “perfect beauty” could be measured, and Alberti added tables with numbers to proof his point.³⁰ Numbers pushed beauty into the realm of mathematics, and it is in mathematical treatises that we find the most sustained efforts to discover that perfect proportion of the body that was the sign of divinity. Luca Pacioli’s *La Divina Proportione*, published in 1509 and dedicated to the head of the Governo Popolare, Piero Soderini, mines the history of mathematics from Pythagoras to the present for the ultimate key to divine beauty. But that mining only served one purpose:

²⁷ Savonarola, *Prediche sopra l’Esodo*, 2 vols, ed. Pier Giorgio Ricci, Rome: Angelo Belardetti, 1956, 2: 57: “*Habbiamo a laudare David, che è interpretato manu fortis et pulcher aspectu, cioè el nostro salvatore, el quale è forte di mano et bello di aspecto: forte per la grandezza delle opere sue, le quali ha facte tante et si mirabili, bello di aspecto, perche non fu mai el piu gratioso aspecto del suo. ‘Spetiosus forma pre filiis hominum’ [Psalm 44,3], egli è piu bello di tutti li figliuoli degli huomini. Questo adunque ci significa questo nome David nel titolo di questo psalmo.*” Quoted in Brockhaus, 16nt1.

²⁸ Brockhaus, 16: “*Wer, solche Worte des hinreißenden Redners in Gedanken, vor den David Michelangelos hintritt, wird finden, daß Michelangelo den David so vor die körperlichen Augen, wie Savonarola ihn vor die geistigen Augen gestellt hat: ein Prachtgestalt, stark und schön. David ist der Christ, wie er sein soll, schön anzusehen, d.h. mit reinem schönen Gewissen, starker und kühner tatkraft.*”

²⁹ See Jack M. Greenstein, “On Alberti’s ‘Sign’: Vision and Composition in Quattrocento Painting,” *Art Bulletin* 79 (1997), 669-98.

³⁰ Alberti, *De Statua*, ed. Grayson, 133-35 (§12).

to show the divine proportions distributed by God alone. And that is why, Pacioli says, the title included the word “*divina*.”³¹ There is no need for us to submit the *David* to any rationale of numbers and proportions. Vasari already saw divinity shine through David’s marble skin. “With such measure [*misura*] and beauty [*bellezza*] and with such goodness [*bontà*],” he wrote, “Michelangelo finished it. In her [the sculpture] there are the contours of the beautiful legs, the slender flanks divine, and such a serene pose has never been shown again, nor a grace [*grazia*] that equals it, and neither feet, hands and head that accord to all the members with such goodness [*bontà*], artifice, and parity, and *disegno*.”³² In Michelangelo’s *David*, the *grazia* of form becomes the grace of God and begins to denote the divinity of its subject, form assuming a programmatic meaning previously reserved for iconography alone.

Michelangelo’s effort to visualize David’s divinity in marble was not occasioned by subject-matter only, but also allowed him to present his own professional identity as divine. In the lines on the Louvre sheet, Michelangelo insisted that the beauty of David could have only been generated by a divinely inspired hand. Michelangelo’s *David* offered a path to the divinity of both subject-matter and artist. Both are presented and represented as mediators of God’s will and design.



In a sermon of 1493, Savonarola took David as an example of just such a model for the perfect Christian. “The Christian people is divided in two parts, in the perfect [Christians], who are strong of hand and of beautiful appearance [*pulcher aspectu vel manu fortis*], because they act with force and [because they] have a clear and beautiful conscience, and in those who are imperfect.”³³ Michelangelo was not the first to model his

³¹ Luca Pacioli, *Divina proporzione*, Venice: Paganus Paganinus, 1509, 3v-4r.

³² Vasari, 6: 21: “*con tanta misura e bellezza e con tanta bontà la finì Michelagnolo; perché in essa sono contorni di gambe bellissime et appicature e sveltezza di fianchi divine, né ma’ più s’è veduto un posamente sì dolce né grazia che tal cosa pareggi, né piedi né mani né testa che a ogni suo membro di bontà, d’artificio e di parità né di disegno s’accordi tanto.*”

³³ Savonarola, *Sermoni sopra il Salmo Quam Bonus*, ed. Claudio Leonardi, Rome: Angelo Belardetti, 1999, 9-10: “*David enim in hoc loco significant quembilet Christianum, quia interpretatur pulcher aspectu vel manu fortis. Nam populus Christianus dividitur in perfectos, quia sunt manu fortes et pulchri aspectu, et in imperfectos, quia etsi sint pulchri conscientia, non tamen*

professional identity on the example of David. Statesmen in Florence and elsewhere had long used the Old Testament ruler to argue for the sacrality of their political conduct.³⁴ Among them was Lorenzo de' Medici, once owner of Donatello's bronze statue, whose future statesmanship was compared to that of David in Platina's dialogue quoted in Chapter 1. In the case of Michelangelo's version, carved under completely different historical conditions, the association of an individual ruler with the Old Testament figure became more complex.

The last chapter explained how a symbolic link was established between the *David* and the *priori* of the Florentine city-government, who resided at Palazzo della Signoria during their bi-monthly terms of office. Physical proximity to the statue made for easy association. One of the speakers at the gathering in January 1504 proposed installing the statue under the eastern arch of the Loggia dei Lanzi, as close as possible to the seat of the *priori*, and thus "be honored on account of the Palace," that is on those who held office there.³⁵ Yet the identification of the politics of those eight *priori* with David was undone every two months, when they changed office.

A more permanent connection was established between the *David* and the head of the city-government, the Gonfaloniere di Giustizia. In 1502, the office of Gonfaloniere was transformed from the traditional bimonthly term into tenure for life, in the hope of creating a more stable city-government, less susceptible to the winds of political change that came with replacing the Gonfaloniere six times a year. The man elected to the post was Piero di Tommaso Soderini.³⁶ He took office on November 1, 1502 and moved into the Palazzo della Signoria with his wife Argentina Malaspina later that year. Soderini organized an extensive building campaign that converted the rooms reserved for the earlier Gonfalonieri into luxurious living quarters. New furniture was commissioned, gates were installed, public spaces were converted into private quarters, and women belonging to Argentina's entourage started

adhuc sunt manu fortes ad tollerandum et defendendum alius ab incursu et demonio meridiano."
Quoted in Brockhaus, 102-03.

³⁴ See Butterfield, 1995.

³⁵ Seymour, 1967b, 148: "... nell' archo presso al Palazzo, et quivi stare coperta et essere honorata per chonto del Palazzo." I have slightly altered Seymour's translation.

³⁶ For Soderini, see Pesman Cooper, 1978.

to populate the stairs and hallways of a Palazzo where women had always been denied access.³⁷ The communal Palazzo della Signoria became Piero Soderini's new home. And with the *David* installed below his apartments, it comes as no surprise that a tradition going back to Vasari, ever the expert on the politics and art at the Palazzo, considers Soderini the patron of Michelangelo's *David*. Vasari wrote that Soderini awarded Michelangelo the commission in 1501, "when he was already Gonfaloniere."³⁸ Pace Vasari, Piero was only elected to the *gonfalonierato* a year after Michelangelo received his commission, and there is no further evidence that he was involved with the contract signed by the notary of the Opera del Duomo on August 16, 1501; nothing suggests, moreover, that Soderini had been actively involved in artistic projects prior to his election in September 1502. It bears repeating that Giuliano Salviati had almost certainly been responsible for giving the old block of marble to Michelangelo. Soderini's relation to Michelangelo's *David* therefore needs arguing.

Certainly not involved in *commissioning* the sculpture, Soderini's installment as head of the Signoria for life made him by far the most influential man in Florence. It was indeed right after his appointment that we start to witness his active share in public commissions. Besides furnishing his new apartments with painting and furniture, he commissioned two battle scenes from Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo for the Sala del Gran Consiglio at Palazzo della Signoria, in 1503 and 1504 respectively; and in 1510 he ordered Fra Bartolomeo to paint an altarpiece for the same room (Fig. 43). An exchange of letters

³⁷ For the refurnishing of the Palazzo della Signoria by Soderini, see Rubinstein, 1995, 43-45, 76-77, 97-100. Also see Alessandro Cecchi, "Diario del Palagio dei Signori dalla Prima alla Seconda Repubblica (1494-1530)," in *La Difficile Eredità. Architettura a Firenze dalla repubblica all'assedio*, ed. Marco Dezzi Bardeschi, Florence: Alinea, 1994, 76; Cecchi, Antonio Natali and Carlo Sisi, "La prima repubblica (1494-1512): Savonarola e la scuola di San Marco. Soderini, Adriani e la scuola del mondo," in *L'officina della maniera. Varietà e fierezza nell'arte fiorentina del Cinquecento fra le due repubbliche 1494-1530*, ed. Cecchi and Natali, Venice: Marsilio, 1996, 10-11. Documentation of Soderini's rebuilding program can be found in Frey, 1909, 127-34.

³⁸ Vasari, 6: 18. Some authors still maintain that Soderini was the statue's original patron. Notoriously influential is Levine. For a critique on Levine's arguments, see Parks, "The Placement of Michelangelo's *David*: A Review of the Documents," *The Art Bulletin* 57 (1975), 561-70. A very recent exponent of the "Soderini school" is Lorenzo Polizzotto, 2006. Seymour, 1967b, 21-41, still presents most conclusive evidence against Soderini's patronage in 1501.

furthermore shows his active involvement in the later history of Michelangelo's bronze *David* that was sent to France in 1508 and, like the marble *David*, commissioned long before Soderini's appointment.³⁹

Soderini's absence in the negotiations of 1501 does not exclude the possibility that he intervened sometime between his election in the fall of 1502 and the moment when the advisory committee was called on January 25, 1504. Although not present in person that day, we can be sure that the two heralds proposed locations sanctified by the Gonfaloniere, for they worked under his direct command. Indeed, by the end of the meeting, the second herald advised consulting the Signoria, presided over by Soderini, before making a definitive decision.⁴⁰ The statue's final location could certainly count on Soderini's approval. Placed directly below the windows of his private apartments on the south-west corner of the Palazzo, Michelangelo's *David* stood physically close to him.

A crucial piece of evidence documents Soderini's attempt to foster personal control over the Palazzo's building works. A year before the *David* was unveiled, he relieved the *operai del palagio* of their responsibility over the payments for decoration of the palace and handed the responsibility over to the Signoria. With the eight *priori* of the Signoria changing office every two months but Soderini staying on, this reform endowed the Gonfaloniere with effective legislative power over the building and decoration projects at the Palazzo and its adjacent square, as Alessandro Cecchi recently pointed out.⁴¹ And given the fact that Michelangelo's statue stood in the Piazza della Signoria, hence within Soderini's jurisdiction, for ten days before a definitive decision was made about its final location, strongly indicates that the Gonfaloniere was behind the *David's* final move.

³⁹ For the letters, see Luca Gatti, " 'Delle cose de' pictori et sculptori si può mal promettere cosa certa': La diplomazia fiorentina presso la corte del re di Francia e il Davide bronzeo di Michelangelo Buonarroti," *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome: Italie et Méditerranée* 106 (1995), 433-472.

⁴⁰ Seymour, 1967b, 148-49: "*et avanti che si disponghino le magnificentie V. dove à a stare, lo conferiata chon li Signori, perchè vi à di buoni ingiegni.*"

⁴¹ The account books in ASF, *Operai di Palagio*, vol. 10, fols 54v-56r, suggests this. See Alessandro Cecchi, "Review of Nicolai Rubinstein, *The Palazzo Vecchio 1298 – 1532. Government, Architecture and Imagery in the Civic Palace of the Florentine Republic*," *The Burlington Magazine* 138 (1996), 331.

Soderini had every reason to model his rulership on that of an Old Testament figure whose political actions were sanctioned by God. At his election, expectations were high and failure to live up to them almost unavoidable. In that hothouse of suspicions against one-man-rule, Soderini's *gonfalonierato* was vulnerable to severe criticisms and outright attacks for the long ten years it lasted. Florentine patricians discontent with Soderini's broad-based politics conspired against him and attempted to restore the Medici to Florence in the hope of restoring a more oligarchic city-government. Others accused the Gonfaloniere of aspiring to become a *Signore*, a prince, even a tyrant wanting to subject the rest of Florence to his personal lordship.⁴² As the official head of a republic that was only slowly recovering from the successful attempts by the Medici in the fifteenth century to form a personal power-base, critics always found a cause to accuse Soderini of acting like a tyrant. Already in 1503, Piero Parenti noted that some Florentines thought that their leader acted "no longer as a Gonfaloniere but as a *Signore*."⁴³ After Soderini had survived an assassination attempt in 1510, he defended his politics against such claims in a moving public speech before the Gran Consiglio, which he had to break off several times overwhelmed by emotions. The speech is revealing for the way Soderini perceived of his politics and how he wanted his rule to be remembered:

I confessed and went to communion and I have always lived as a good Christian. ... I am 58 years old and cannot go on anymore. I regret that I have done wrong to this liberty of yours, to this Republic of yours, to this state of yours, to this way of living in freedom of yours. ... I am not inclined to guard myself and to keep followers or grooms around in the way of an armed tyrant, for I am used to live in freedom and without protection. ... I have wanted to confer you these things because I am not certain that I will live; I have powerful enemies, and of a quality that is apparent. And only to save your liberty, there is nothing left for me

⁴² The question has also occupied modern scholarship. Bertelli, 1971, thought that Soderini indeed tried to become prince of Florence. But Pesman Cooper, 1978, sufficiently corrected that view. She showed that Soderini always respected republican traditions. His lack of interest in personal gain and power made him quite vulnerable to his enemies, as Machiavelli later famously recognized.

⁴³ Piero Parenti, *Storia fiorentina*, BNCF, II II 133, fols. 133v, 144: "... non più da gonfaloniere ma da Signore." Cited in Pesman-Cooper, 1978, 178.

personally, abandoned by everyone, nobody hears of me; one takes away to guard this truly magnificent gift [of the free Florentine Republic].⁴⁴

Placed directly below Soderini's private apartments, Michelangelo's *David* could serve as the most acute example of the perfect, anti-tyrannical leader of republican freedom that the Gonfaloniere claimed to be. David had slayed a tyrant under divine protection, ruled at the command of God, and had won many battles – all issues pertaining directly to a ruler who had to battle ten odd-years against accusations of tyranny and who had spent the first seven years of his tenure trying to return Pisa to Florentine territory.

The divine sanctioning of Soderini's mission to maintain republican freedom was at the heart of contemporary perception of his *gonfalonierato*. In a letter written shortly after Piero's election, Matteo di Cascia, Canon at San Lorenzo wrote to his colleague at Santa Maria del Fiore, Marco Strozzi, of that "divine gift" of Soderini's election that would oblivate all tribulations, understanding his rule as one of divine mediation. He compared Soderini to David to make his point. To save the Florentine people from recent tribulations, Matteo wrote, "God has given a Gonfaloniere di Giustizia, whose merit, one could already call him the Standardbearer of the *Or[di]ne di iusti*, will always conform to the divine will."⁴⁵ As a mediator of God's divine will on earth, he comes closest to David:

⁴⁴ Cerretan, *Storia*, ed. Berti, 401-02: "Io mi sono confessato et comunichato et ho sempre vixuto come bono cristiano ... Io sono a 58 anni e non posso piu. Duolmi che io vegho ire male questa vostra liberttà[,] questa vostra republica[,] questo vostro statto[,] que[s]to vostro libero vivere (N)on sendo atto a ghuardarmi e tenere satellite o staffieri intorno a uso di tiranno armati perchè sono uso a vivere libero e senza guardia Ho voluto dirvi et conferire queste cose perchè io non sone certto del vivere; ho nemici potentti, e di che qualità voi vedete, e solo per salvare la libertà vostra e non ho nessuno che per me sia, abandonato da c[i]aschuno nessuno si risentte, si leva al chustodire questo sì mag[nific]o dono."

⁴⁵ ASF, Carte Stroziane, serie III, 138, fol. 59r.: "Dio ... ha p[er] questa bonta exandite, et salvate leprefate perore et ovile ha aquello dato uno Gonfaloniero deiustitia, ilq[u]ale merito, sipuo dire ancora Gonfaloniere delle Or[di]ne de iusti, conforme tutte semp[re] alla volunta divina, accioch[e] delle migliaia lui pop[o]lo, et non noi, sapendo et potendo celo sciegliesse buono." The reference to the letter was published by Polizzotto, 2006, 273, without furnishing a complete transcription. I thank the author for supplying me with the archival reference before the publication of his article.

But the aspect that the people of every profession of your city see most, will show through his just government, neither through force nor through violence, but unconstrained and voluntary and happy. For *Caritas* and love of the *patria*, they bring you treasures of full wombs. And, just like that raging lion was defeated by the First Church in virtue of the omnipotent Lion of the Tribe of Juda, in the same virtue, by that humble people and not haughty and strong in faith, he will be exterminated and that people saved through the grace of God. The proof is David's, who says *quoniam tu divine populum humilem, salvam faries, et oculos superborum humiliabis* [Psalm 17,28], open your eyes Florentine people to Italy and see how David the prophet reprimanded *Superbia*.⁴⁶

Given to Florence to administrate God's grace in just government, Soderini becomes the people's "substitute shepherd," *substituto pastore*. The childless Gonfaloniere was never able to found a dynasty in a city who had just expelled one, watching over the Florentine people like a father over his children, and being offered "treasures of full wombs."⁴⁷

⁴⁶ ASF, Carte Stroziane, serie III, 138, fol. 59r.: "Mapiu laspecta q[u]e vedrai gli huomini dogni p[ro]fessione della tua citta, mossi daltuo giusto governo, no[n] p[er]forza, ne p[er]violentia, ma sponte et voluntarij et lieti, p[er] Carita et amore della p[at]ria, tiporteran[n]o ethesori cogrembi pieni. Ala come lui leone rabbioso fu dalla prima chiesa vincto, in virtu dello o[mn]ipotente Leone della tribu de juda, nella medesima virtu, daq[ue]sto p[o]p[o]lo humile, et no[n] superbo, et forte nella fede, sara exterminato, et d[ec]to p[o]p[o]lo p[er] bonta di Dio salvato. Testimone Davit dicendo quo[ni]am tu d[ivi]ne p[o]p[u]lu[m] humilem, salvo[am] faries, et oculos sup[er]bor[um] humiliabis [Psalm 17,28], volgi p[o]p[o]lo fioren[tin]o gliocchi p[er]lla Italia et vedi se Davit p[ro]pheta apunto pesuperbi, & vedi p[er]qualvia et done sono gia gran parte detua adversarij, hai tu veduto, quello han conosciuto, et visto insino aciechi, e gran prudenti et sani ate intrarij, et detua, et della stali[a] subtrahendo Dio loro lasua virtu et mano, essere restati albuio et ruinati i[n]temebras exteriores? & ch[e] q[u]esta pro sapientia humana, se monstra loro itultitia, etenebre, dicens apopolo, stultam fecit deus sapientia[m] mundi huius. Concludi adunq[ue] ch[e] senza lui, tucta lan[ost]ra sapientia e uno abisse ditenebre, come mostra lo exemplo di prefati cose. Aspecta ancora armato digran patientia, aspecta dico adogni cosa iltr[o]po suo et leva lamente a Dio sempre, ilq[u]ale tifara vedere elresto, et dentro et difuora date, p[er]simile via indursi p[er] infusione"

⁴⁷ Ibid.: "Pensavano forse molti ch[e] Dio piu horamai, a Piero Soderino, no[n] volessi dare figliuoli, ne eressere losplendore et dilui et della nobili[si]ma casa, et degli excellent[tissi]mi fratelli sua: & ecco ch[e] e facto Ill[ustris]mo padre ditutta LaCitta, & dipiu figliuoli ch[e] mai fussi alcuno altro fioren[tin]o nella sua p[at]ria et co[n]tanta maesta consiglio et ordine factolo tutti edi della sua vita suo substituto principe, et pastore."

God governed Florence through Soderini. Just like in David's divine mandate, the image of God could be read in Piero's *gonfalonierato*.⁴⁸

Divinity of government brought forth in divinity of art, both Michelangelo and Soderini discovered the origins of their art and politics in the realm of the divine, comparing the arts of statecraft and sculpture to David's divinely ordained acts. There, safe from accusations against the idolatry of art and the tyranny of government, they hid, as mere mediators of God's grace in Florence. For who could criticize those who merely translated God's design on earth?

What's In a Name?

Michelangelo continued his politics of divine manufacture in his statue of *Saint Matthew* (Fig. 35), carved two years after he had finished the *David* and now in the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence. The only sculpture he began out of a series of Twelve Apostles commissioned by the Opera del Duomo and the Florentine Wool Guild on April 24, 1503, he left it unfinished in the Opera's courtyard in November 1506, when he was called to Bologna by Pope Julius II.⁴⁹

Michelangelo's radical representation of Matthew's pose defies the unfinished state of the sculpture. A bearded figure stands contorted, mouth half-opened, a book pressed firmly against his left side. Fabric is hardly capable of covering his animated body. In some places, it slips off, laying bare arms, legs and abdomen. Wild, almost uncontrolled animation breaks open the contours of the block on the front and left sides: Matthew's left foot placed on a rock invites the knee to protrude into the viewer's space, and as neck muscles strain, the Apostle's head violently moves to his right, to a source unseen by a viewer in front of the statue.

In 1506, the movement, torsion and extreme contrapposto of the *Saint Matthew*, all qualities we now consider the hallmarks of

⁴⁸ Compare Giovanni Pico della Mirandola's words, published in Benivieni, 1512, fol. 47v.: "*E primi Angeli da Dio immediatamente illuminati & quasi admaestrati admoniscono & consigliano gli Angeli inferiori, come etiam dio in David propheta si legge.*"

⁴⁹ For the dating of the *Saint Matthew*, see Amy, 2000.

Michelangelo's art, had no precedent in the artist's oeuvre.⁵⁰ The statue breaks radically with what came before. It nestles uncomfortably in a pedigree of Apostle imagery. Apostle statues at Santa Maria del Fiore consist of static, inanimate figures. They include the fourteenth-century statuettes on the Porta del Campanile and the pinnacles of the lancet windows in the eastern radiating chapels and sacristies, and those on the church façade,⁵¹ in addition to the hieratically conceived Quattrocento Apostles with the crosses of the consecration, painted in the cathedral's radiating chapels. And Michelangelo's statue shows no affinity with Ciuffagni's *Saint Matthew*, then installed in the façade of the cathedral as part of four Evangelists, a statue that sits unmoved, fixing a penetrating gaze at a point just above his beholder (Fig. 36).

Whereas it offers no precedent for the statue's wild movement, iconographic tradition does suggest why Matthew turns his attention to his right, to something we cannot see. A genealogy of images stretching from Ghiberti and Donatello to Ghirlandaio shows Matthew attended by his iconographical attribute of the Angel, who supplies him with the divine inspiration needed to compose the first gospel. In some fifteenth-century cases, as for example in Donatello's San Lorenzo stucco (Fig. 37) or in Ghirlandaio's Tornabuoni Chapel (Fig. 38), there is a slight interaction between angel and evangelist, although the angel cannot be understood as anything more than a symbol – a sign for iconographical identification, employed with the same indicative value as the bull attending Saint Luke, the lion accompanying Saint Mark, and the eagle Saint John.

At first instance, then, the movement of the *Saint Matthew* seems to function as a substitute iconography of sorts, the turning pose standing in for an iconographical attribute that, though absent, is implicated by it. But that explanation does not take into account Michelangelo's subsequent obsession with representing the male body in extremely animated poses for reasons quite separate from subject-matter and more suggestive of Michelangelo's artistic identity. Animated bodies appear

⁵⁰ As also recognized by David Summers, 1981, 86: "The titanic furia, the psychic and physical movement which has awed critics of Michelangelo's art from his own time to ours is first pervasively evident in it [the *Saint Matthew*], and evident with a clarity of realization scarcely forecast by earlier essays in the same direction."

⁵¹ Amy, 1997, 7-8.

everywhere in the artist's oeuvre, in the *Sistine ignudi* for instance (Fig. 39), designed just a few years after the *Saint Matthew*. Edgar Wind and David Summers have already claimed that the *ignudi* serve to announce that the hand who painted them was divine in origin.⁵² In suggesting life in dead material, Michelangelo modeled his art of painting and sculpture on that of God's creation, who infused life in inanimate clay in the days of Creation, famously immortalized by Michelangelo on the Sistine vault.⁵³ Indeed much of the sixteenth-century industry of calling Michelangelo divine was based exactly on the artist's capacity to suggest animation in lifeless stone and paint. The notion found an especially articulate expression in Francesco Lancilotti's definition of the artist as a second God, who can "make a dead thing appear alive."⁵⁴ Much of Vasari's praise also engaged with Michelangelo's ability to bring dead matter to life.

Michelangelo modeled this concept of divinity suggested by animation on the *Laocoön* (Fig. 40), unearthed in the artist's presence in January 1506 in Rome, just a few months before he started work on the *Saint Matthew*. It has long been recognized as a source, making Michelangelo's *Apostle* the first in an endless chain of artworks that incorporates the dramatic suffering of the Trojan priest.⁵⁵ Laocoön's head

⁵² Summers, 1981, 69, 175; and Edgar Wind, "Michelangelo's Prophets and Sibyls," in *Art and Politics in Renaissance Italy*, ed. George Holmes, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, 280-91.

⁵³ For the analogy between Michelangelo's creation and God's on the *Ceiling*, see Charles Burroughs, "Michelangelo at the Campidoglio: Artistic Identity, Patronage, and Manufacture," *Artibus et historiae* 28.14 (1993), 85.

⁵⁴ Francesco Lancilotti, *Tractato di picture* (Roma 1509), ed. Hessel Miedema and Pieter de Meijer, Amsterdam: Kunsthistorisch Instituut van de Universiteit van Amsterdam, 1976, 14, 18: "Et sappi che chi dir vorrà pittura, / Per dir correcto el proprio nome, dica / Un altro Iddio e un'altra natura." And: "Fare una cosa morta parer viva / Quale iscienza è più bella che questa? / O felice colui che quì arriva!" And see Campbell, 2002, 597-98.

⁵⁵ O. Ollendorff, "Der Laokoon und Michelangelo's gefesselter Sklave," *Repertorium für Kunstwissenschaft* 21 (1898), 114-15, was the first to identify the *Laocoön* as a source. The definitive dating of the statue by Amy, 2000, in the summer of 1506, takes away all previous doubts. The universal potential of the *Laocoön*'s extreme pathos has been famously described by Aby Warburg, "Dürer und die Italienische Antike (1905)," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, 2 (*Die Erneuerung der heidnischen Antike*), Leipzig and Berlin: G.B. Teubner, 1932, 448-49: "... den ganz fälschlich sieht man in der Ausgrabung des Laokoon im Jahre 1506 eine Ursache des beginnenden römischen Barokstils der großen Geste. Die Entdeckung des Laokoon ist gleichsam nur das äußere Symptom eines innerlich bedingten stilgeschichtlichen Prozesses und steht im Zenit, nicht

directed towards heaven, as if begging for divine intervention, his hair vigorously curled around his tortured face, struggling for life against the snakes who strangle him, he stretches his body to the limit, as if not only battling the serpents – at the level of textual narrative – but the enclosure of the marble itself – at the level of artistic expression. For Michelangelo, Laocoön's breaking free from the marble was a sign of the divinity of the artist(s) who made him. In words recorded by the French humanist

am Anfang der 'barocken Entartung'. Man fand nur, was man längs in der Antike gesucht und deshalb gefunden hatte: die in erhabener tragik stilisierte Form für Grenzwerte mimischen und physiognomischen Ausdrucks. ... es war das Volkslatein der pathetischen Gebärdensprache, das man international und überall da mit dem Herzen verstand, wo es galt, mittelalterliche Ausdrucksfesseln zu sprengen." It might indeed be fruitful to consider Michelangelo's employment of the ancient sculpture's extreme pathos in Christian subject-matter as a highly motivated use of Warburg's *Pathosformel*. The adaptation of these formulas, as Warburg saw it, was not so much motivated by an antique revival per se, but by a need felt by Renaissance artists to heighten the expressive powers of their art. Interestingly enough, an iconographic pedigree for Michelangelo's sculpture exists in some Byzantine images that draw their pathos from the kind of Hellenistic art represented by the *Laocoön*. Animated Apostle bodies enjoyed particular favor in book illumination of the Carolingian renaissance and in eighth-century Byzantine art. Some of them are catalogued by Hugo Buchthal, "A Byzantine Miniature of the Fourth Evangelist and its Relatives," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 15 (1961), 127-39. There is little reason to believe that Michelangelo knew these images, but it is still useful to point out that both Michelangelo and these Byzantine illuminators looked at antique art in order to invest their imagery with new expressive possibilities. Buchthal points out that that Byzantine illuminators based their images of divinely inspired Apostles on images of inspired poets, images Erwin Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1939, 165, rubricated under the heading "supernatural persuasion." And although the animated Apostle stayed alive in book illumination until the fourteenth century, when it was replaced by the more static type that we encounter at Santa Maria del Fiore and elsewhere, images of "supernatural persuasion" lived on in the Renaissance in pagan subjects. Important examples exist in the art of Titian for example. As a result of its afterlife in secular iconography, many discussions about that Renaissance cliché of "inspired genius" treat artistic inspiration in the context of Panofsky's "humanist themes in the art of the Renaissance." Thus art historians working in a Panofskian vein are still inclined to think of the revival of "poetic inspiration" in the visual arts of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as part of the programmatic and rational effort to revive classical antiquity, an effort exemplified by the Renaissance humanism of Ficino, Pico and others. In short, they perceive it in the context of Neoplatonism. And although some interesting work has recently been done on the Neoplatonic input in Michelangelo's idea about artistic inspiration, I insist below that we should understand Michelangelo's *Saint Matthew* in the context of divine, Christian inspiration. Later images of Saint Matthew indeed build on the theme of divinely infused animation; for these, see Irving Lavin, "Divine Inspiration in Caravaggio's Two *Saint Matthews*," *Art Bulletin* 56 (1974), 59-81, who, however, fails to mention Michelangelo's version as a precedent for Caravaggio's.

Boissard in 1550, he recommended the sculpture as a model for divine making. The *Laocoön* "... was a singular miracle of art wherein we should attend to the divine *ingenium* of the craftsman rather than try to make an imitation of it."⁵⁶ Michelangelo's opinion was shared by others. In a poem published in the year of the unearthing, Jacopo Sadoletto defined the Roman sculpture as just this "work of divine craftsmanship [*divinae simulacrum artis*]," a definition deserved by the artists of the Roman work, who were "the greatest at giving life to the inflexible stone with living figures and at introducing living breaths into the vibrating marble: we see the movement, the rage, the sadness, and almost hear a groan."⁵⁷ Both writer and sculptor make the *Laocoön* to represent a certain relationship between authorship and artwork, one that understands animation as a sign of a divinely endowed maker.

If the animation of the *Saint Matthew* served to define Michelangelo's art, and not only its subject-matter, then this raises some pressing questions about the status of the absent angel. If the angel in preceding representations of the apostle served as a source of divine revelation, revealing to Matthew word for word the contents of the first gospel, doesn't Michelangelo want us to believe that this messenger from God was also the inspiration of his invention, of *his* divine *concetto*?

For Jacopo da Voragine, in the much read *Lives of the Saints*, Saint Matthew's name could be explained as a composite of "*manus* (hand) and *theos* (God), hence the hand of God," a status he had acquired according to da Voragine "by the writing of his gospel."⁵⁸ Jacopo does not distinguish between Apostle and Evangelist. Matthew, in both capacities, owed his divinity to the intervening angel, who had planted God's words into the writer elect. Like Saint Matthew, Michelangelo was accompanied by the angel, an integral part of his persona originating in the name his father had given him. "Michael the Angel," he had signed his name on the *Roman Pietà*. "*Michel Angiolo*," a 1504 entry into an

⁵⁶ J.J. Boissard, *I (-VI) pars Romanae urbis topographiae et antiquitatum...*, Frankfurt: S.N., 1597-1602: "*Hanc Michael Angelus dicti esse miraculum artis singulare; in quo divinum artificum debeamus suspicere ingenium, potius quam ad imitationem nos accingere.*" Cited in Bober & Rubinstein, 1986, 152 (no. 122); and Amy, 1997, 465-66. The passage was published in 1559.

⁵⁷ Sonia Maffei, "La Fama di Laocoonte nei testi del cinquecento," in *Laocoonte* (1999), 118.

⁵⁸ Da Voragine, *The Golden Legend. Readings on the Saints*, tr. William Granger Ryan, 2 vols, Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press, 1993, 2: 183.

unpublished Florentine diary registered the author of the *David*, splitting his Christian name into two components and adding capitals to make sure that the notation reads “Michael the Angel.”⁵⁹ And with the words “Michael more than mortal, angel divine,” Ariosto later affirmed that the divinity of the artist’s works was inscribed into his name.

What’s in a name? The copula between Michelangelo’s Christian name, which marks his persona independent from his work, and that name as a label of a specific kind of cultural production is better understood using Michel Foucault’s theory of the author. According to Foucault, “the proper name and the author’s name are situated between the two poles of description and designation: they must have a certain link with what they name, but one that is neither entirely in the mode of designation nor in that of description; it must be a *specific* link.” The author’s name is therefore understood not as a proper name like the rest, for the former defines and is defined by the works attributed to him. To make the argument bear on our case: Michelangelo would not be Michelangelo anymore if we would attribute the Sistine Chapel to another artist. “The author function,” Foucault adds, “is therefore characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and function of certain discourses within a society.”⁶⁰ Twisting Foucault’s definition a little, I make discourse historically specific. The re-fashioning of Michelangelo’s name in contemporary discourse depended on a perception of his work as divine. He was renamed, produced by his work, for the qualities attached to Michelangelo the artist by the culture he lived in and helped to shape.

In a gesture quite similar to that of the *David*, Michelangelo makes subject-matter into a pretext for presenting his artistic persona as divine. The angel, invisible, becomes a figure for both Matthew’s and the artist’s divinity. Matthew’s movement to answer the angel’s call – on the level of iconography – double up with the movement Michelangelo infused into

⁵⁹ ASF, Manoscritti, 117 (*Diario storico di quello ch’è seguito nella Città di Firenze Cominciando l’anno 1435 – a tutto il 1522*), fol. 80r (new 85r): “In q[ues]to tempo fù sculpto il David di Michel Angiolo Buonarroti, Giovane di non piccola stima....”

⁶⁰ Michel Foucault, “What is an author?,” tr. Josué V. Harari, in *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, Ithaca (NY): Cornell University Press, 1979, 141-60, with quotation on 146 and 148. For discourse analysis, also see *ibid.*, *L’archéologie du savoir*, Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1969.

the dead stone – at the level of artistic interpretation. As Matthew answers the call of the angel in writing, as the communicator of God's design, Michelangelo answers a design born from divinity in image, which was also communicated through an angel. The absent angel here works as a kind of absent signature. *Concetto* is translated into angelic inspiration as Saint Matthew responds both to the angel and the hand that made him, and both remain beyond representation. It can no longer be claimed that Michelangelo portrayed himself in his sculpture. Though animation could be understood as a sign of Michelangelo's artistic self, the origins of that sign, of that signature, are placed outside the work. Like an angel, Michelangelo merely mediated divine inventions.⁶¹

Michelangelo's appeal to the divine origins of his *Saint Matthew* was not just an attempt to broadcast his artistic identity to an audience interested in artistic greatness. Nor was it a mere effort to advertise his skills in emulating a work of art that others considered of divine craftsmanship. Michelangelo sincerely believed that he received his inspiration directly from God. He often prayed while he was working and he even asked his father to pray with him.⁶² Sometimes these prayers appear scribbled in the margins of study sheets, as documented witness of private moments of authentic devotion at the moment of creation. In 1503, he noted the first lines of Psalm 53 on a sheet mentioned above that contains the first studies for the *Saint Matthew*: "*Deus in nomine tuo saluu[m] me.*" Included in the Roman Missal, the psalm evokes God's intervention in human affairs. The Bible completes its first

⁶¹ That Michelangelo's *Saint Matthew* was a kind of self-portrait, albeit one of mediated divinity, was understood by contemporaries, at least by fellow-artists. So much is suggested by the sculptures Jacopo Sansovino and Andrea Ferrucci were commissioned to execute as part of the project to finish Michelangelo's cycle of twelve in 1511. Both Sansovino and Ferrucci decided to carve their namesaints, Saints James and Andrew. In sculptures close in date, location and inception to Michelangelo's sculpture, albeit less elaborate than Michelangelo's effort, they made their names collapse into their subject-matter, a rarity in the history of Italian Renaissance sculpture only matched by Michelangelo's later self-portraiture as Nichodemus in the Florence *Pietà*, and Bandinelli's own grave memorial, which was of course modeled on Michelangelo's example.

⁶² Michelangelo's intimate relation with Christ and God through private prayer has been variously noted. Robert J. Clements, "Prayer and Confession in Michelangelo's Poetry," *Studies in Philology* 62 (1965), 101-10, was one of the first to study it in relation to Michelangelo's art and writing. For the intimacy between Michelangelo and Christ expressed in the presentation drawings for Vittoria Colonna, see Nagel, 1997.

lines as follows: "Save me, O God, by your name; vindicate me by your might. Hear my prayer, O God; listen to the words of my mouth." That Michelangelo wrote it down in the margins of a study sheet while at work in the private confines of his home suggests an intimate relation with God at the stage of invention, when inspiration was needed most; it evidences Michelangelo's most personal believes in the divinity of his art.

Michelangelo was known to have lived in imitation of Christ, living in poverty in 1506, despite his tremendous wealth.⁶³ In 1512, he wrote his worrying father that he should be content with the basic necessities of life and "live well with Christ, and in poverty, as I do here [in Rome], for I live wretchedly, and I care neither about life nor about honor, that is about the world, and I live with the greatest effort and with a thousand worries."⁶⁴ Michelangelo perceived of his mission on earth as the authentic and truly elected messenger of God's inventions, and he lived by it. The *David* and the *Saint Matthew* pay public testimony to the close relationship between that life and his works. The sincerity of that relationship was doubted by some, among them Rosso Fiorentino. But Rosso changed his mind and apologized for his doubts in a letter to Michelangelo of 1526, in which he offered his excuses for having previously mocked Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling. Calling Michelangelo divine, wrote Rosso, was not to be attributed to "vile adulation, for I am absolutely certain that you yourself are aware of it, since without that awareness you would not be able to work." Rosso insists that Michelangelo and his art are authentic images of one another, authenticated by divinity.⁶⁵

⁶³ On Michelangelo impoverished way of living, see Hatfield, 2002, 186-88.

⁶⁴ *Carteggio*, 1: 140-41: "Attendete a vivere; e se voi non potete avere degli onori della terra come gli altri cictadini, bastivi avere del pane e vivete ben chon Cristo e poveramente, chome fo io qua, che vivo meschinamente e non curo n'dello onore, cioè del mondo, e vivo chon grandissime fatiche e chon mille sospetti. E già sono stato così circha di quindici anni, che mai ebbi un'ora di bene"

⁶⁵ *Carteggio*, 2: 236: "Per che per questa vi dico che chi ardisce di così adfermare, i' dico che mente della parola sua, et per questa paratissimo ad ogni paragone; et non solo questo, ma che i' habbi mai altro che sì come di cosa divinamente facta parlato: et sì di quella et sì di voi et de ogn'altra opera vostra, se non di quanto merita, almeno di quanto io son capace. Né questo penso che ad vile adulatione [m]e adtribuirete, con ciò sia cosa che certissimo sono il cognoscete da per voi – ché senza non 'l posseresti operare –, perchè la pura mia intentione so cognoscerete esser questa." Quoted and translated in Campbell, 2002, 596.

Long before Michelangelo was accused of excessive pride by Aretino and others on the basis of his *divinità*, the *Saint Matthew* fused the ability to create divine forms with artistic *hubris*. The sculpture discovered a daring solution to the vexed problem of an artist's presence in the work of art, a solution that Savonarola's accusations in those post-Medicean years had called for. If Michelangelo painted a portrait of "himself," of "*se medesimo*," then that self remains absent as he relocated invention to the divine.⁶⁶

The Absent Hand

Michelangelo's *Saint Matthew* mediates two poles of the religious image: artist-made and divinely wrought.⁶⁷ The notion of the image that draws acute attention to its production by a human hand surfaced with particular force in the Renaissance. Piero de' Medici's acquisition of the "Cimabue," itself a designation inherited from the Renaissance, was for instance motivated by a recognition of artworks as testimonies to individual artistic personae. An emphasis on manufacture – in that precise meaning of the word – acquired particular intensity in late Medicean Florence, and came under attack by Savonarola. The preacher's criticism, in turn, can be set in a long tradition of theological arguments that consider the signs of human fabrication as obstructing an object's divinity. That tradition was ultimately founded in the New Testament, where it is announced that "all things were made by him and without him was made nothing that was made" (John, 1:2). Grounded in

⁶⁶ Later in life Michelangelo made similar claims on authorship, and probably also in response to cultural criticism. He obliterated his namesaint the Archangel Michael in the final design of the *Last Judgment*, a gesture that not only went against an established iconographical tradition but which also deviated from the preliminary drawings for the fresco. Campbell, 2002, 614, called Michelangelo's deliberate obliteration of his namesaint from the biblical drama a form of "authorial disengagement or absence," an effort to withdraw himself as author from the naked bodies featuring on the altar wall of Christianity's central chapel in order to shelter against mounting criticism against those bodies. Also see Nagel, 2000, 195-99, who argued that the deliberate lack of "art" in Michelangelo's self-portrait points to the artist's awareness of the mounting criticism against the "artfulness" of the resurrected bodies in the fresco's. And for the self-referentiality of the *Last Judgment*, see Charles Burroughs, "The *Last Judgment* of Michelangelo: Pictorial Space, Sacred Topography, and the Social World," *Artibus et historiae* 32.26 (1995), 55-89.

⁶⁷ The distinction between the two poles is the subject of Belting, 1994, 458-90.

the ancient notion that human labor was base and unworthy, it claimed that the fabricated image could not serve the edifying purposes and needs of the holy one.⁶⁸ And as the words in Saint John's Gospel had motivated much of the early-Christian prosecution of idolatry and the breaking of images in its wake, Savonarola's articulation of the problems of the artist's hand contributed to iconoclasm as well.

Early Christianity had invented a powerful alternative for the "work of men's hands" (Psalm 13:15). It invented the *acheiropoetos*, "the image made without human hands," believed to have been generated out of nothing, miraculously, without the intervening hand of the artist, like Christ "painting" his self-portrait on Veronica's sudarium on his way to Calvary.⁶⁹ Other images were thought to have been painted by saints, such as Saint Luke's painting of the Virgin. Because of their supposed divine origins, these paintings stood as the most authoritative objects in the history of image-making, performing miracles and providing aid in politics, marriage, war, *et cetera*. *Acheiropoetoi* had far from disappeared from the face of the Renaissance world. They existed side by side of the works of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century artists.⁷⁰ Fifteenth- and sixteenth-century guidebooks, diaries, chronicles, histories and official government papers pay witness to their central status in early sixteenth-century Florence. Arguably the most important Florentine *acheiropoetos* was the *Madonna dell' Imbruneta*, an image believed to represent a perfect likeness of the Virgin herself, supposedly

⁶⁸ Camille, 30.

⁶⁹ On the *acheiropoetos*, see Edwyn Robert Bevan, *Holy Images: An Inquiry into Idolatry and Image Worship in Ancient Paganism and Christianity*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1940, 79; E. Kitzinger, "The Cult of Images in the Age Before Iconoclasm," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 8 (1954), 112-15; Joel Snyder, "What Happens by Itself in Photography?," in *Pursuits of Reason: Essays in Honor of Stanley Cavell*, ed. Ted Cohen, Paul Guyer and Hilary Putnam, Lubbock (Tex): Texas Tech University Press, 1993, 361-73; *The Holy Face and the paradox of representation*, ed. Herbert L. Kessler and Gerhard Wolf, Bologna: Nuova Alfa, 1998; and Wolf, *Schleier und Spiegel: Traditionen des Christusbildes und die Bildkonzepte der Renaissance*, Munich: W. Fink, 2002. And for the incorporation of the notion of the *acheiropoetos* in a modern conception of the image, see Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture in German Renaissance Art*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993, 80-125.

⁷⁰ See among his other publications, Richard Trexler, "Florentine Religious Experience: The Sacred Image," *Studies in the Renaissance* 19 (1972), 7-41. Now also see, *The Miraculous Image: In the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, ed. Erik Thunoe and Gerhard Wolf, Rome: L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2004.

painted by Saint Luke. The *Madonna* was brought to Florence from Impruneta when divine intervention or counsel was needed. It was placed on a provisional altar on the *ringhiera*, between the *Tribuna* of the priors and the Gonfaloniere and, from 1504 onwards, next to Michelangelo's *David*. Mass was celebrated by a priest in front of it and divine intervention called for the issue at hand.⁷¹

In the years following the expulsion of the Medici, the *Madonna dell' Impruneta* was called upon more often than ever before. In the eight years after 1494, at the moment when the number of commissions for artificially wrought imagery was dropping to unprecedented lows, the miraculous painting was brought to the city seven times, compared to a rate of two in the preceding ten years under Lorenzo de' Medici's stewardship.⁷² More important than an unqualified increase in use, however, was a shift in the purposes of bringing the *Madonna* to the *ringhiera*. Whereas it was generally ordered to Florence under *Il Magnifico* to make it stop raining, it was transported to the city after 1494 to stimulate divine aid in affairs of state. According to the chronicler Luca Landucci, the panel was brought to help Florence in February 1499, for example, to the end that the city would take a "good part in the league [with the other Italian city-states]."⁷³ Good participation in the League would secure the city's liberty and independence as a republican city-state at a moment she faced severe military resistance from seigniorial states and monarchies. And in September 1502, when the city's electorate gathered to elect the Gonfaloniere for life, the Madonna was brought to the *ringhiera* to secure that "God would provide us with a good and wise head of state [*doge*]."⁷⁴

Bringing the *Madonna* to Florence was a government decision. The Signoria was the only political body that could decide upon the moment and purpose of its coming. Their orders survive in the official papers of

⁷¹ For the *Madonna dell' Impruneta*, see Trexler, 1980, 63-80.

⁷² Luca Landucci's *Diario fiorentino* is a reliable guide when counting the number of times the image was brought to Florence.

⁷³ Landucci, ed. del Badia, 193: "E a dì 17 di febraio 1498 [NS 1499], si feciono venire la Tavola di Nostra Donna di Santa Maria Impruneta, per pigliare buon partito di lega e di lasciare el Re di Francia."

⁷⁴ Landucci, ed. del Badia, 250: "E a dì 21 di settenbre, ci feciono venire la Tavola di Nostra Donna di Santa Maria Impruneta a fine che Dio ci concedessi un Doge buono e savio."

the Republic.⁷⁵ Landucci continuously employed the phrasing “and one ordered to come” In other words, in the days the artificially wrought image had lost its former dominance in the political life of Florence, the *acheiropoetos* was *officially* pushed to the fore as the only politically licensed representation, put on the *ringhiera* in the public eye of the whole population to behold and ordered by the Florentine Signoria in the moment of political need.

Concerned with the social and political function of Florentine art, Michelangelo recognized that the notion of the image made without human hands offered the road to re-integration, eventually leading him back to a world wherein the artificially manufactured artwork was returned to its social and political authority. Michelangelo’s solution was not one of returning the image to its pre-Renaissance state. The *Saint Matthew*, like the *David*, was a very modern work. Michelangelo suggested divine manufacture by employing the *formal* characteristics of a recently unearthed antique sculpture, which formal language spoke to him in a voice somewhere in between human making and the divine “authorship” at the basis of the *acheiropoetos*.

Gifts of Liberty

Here, as in the other instances studied in this book, Michelangelo’s reflections on the structures of artmaking were by no means an instance of an artist’s private musing on the status of his profession. Artistic reform evolved within the parameters of a civic enterprise. Michelangelo’s *Saint Matthew* was commissioned as part of an Apostle cycle that stood as the largest and most expensive sculptural project launched in Florence so far. Commissioned for the cathedral, it was to be paid with communal funds. If the cycle were completed, the artist would be given his own palazzo, to be built according his wishes by the Capomaestro of the Duomo (Simone del Pollaiuolo), an unusual clause in an artist’s contract that denotes the importance of both commission and artist as civic commodities; and it claimed Florence as the artist’s

⁷⁵ See the examples used in Trexler, 1980, 63-80.

domicile.⁷⁶ The public importance of the commission was broadly advertised in the lengthy contract Michelangelo signed on April 24, 1503, which tells that the Apostles were commissioned “to the honor of God, the fame of the whole citizenry, and as an ornament to this city and the church of Santa Maria del Fiore.”⁷⁷ This was not a meaningless formulaic passage; city and citizenry were rarely mentioned in commissioning documents from the period.⁷⁸ If only for reasons of public responsibility, civic importance and finance – the Apostles were ordered at a moment in history when Florence was facing a severe economic crisis –,⁷⁹ Michelangelo’s commission was among the most publicly charged projects in the city to that date, rivaled only by the *David*.

The civic meaning of Michelangelo’s *Saint Matthew* at the level of cost and prestige was complimented, I add, by the political dimension of its iconography and the peculiar interpretation it received in the hands of Michelangelo. However, to give the iconography of Saint Matthew central stage in a commission that was to feature eleven more Apostles is heuristically odd, at least at first instance. It implies an emphasis on Matthew unaccounted for in the contract. That the *Saint Matthew* was the only sculpture carved out of twelve was the direct consequence of factors outside the power of Michelangelo and his patrons (the delay in marble supply and the pressure of the pope), the same factors that made Michelangelo abandon the sculpture unfinished. Obviously, the *Saint*

⁷⁶ Contratti, 20: “Et etiam promiserunt ut supra, dare et tradere et consignare Michelangelo predicto situm quandum unum per eos hodie emptum, in angulo vie pinti, in conspectu monasterii Cestelli, a Bernardo Bonaventure Ser Zelli, longitudine brachiorum viginti quator per viam Pinti predictam versus angelum montis lori, et brachiorum in via, quae vadit ad monasterium Servorum, et sita quinque et loca quinque situum domorum designatorum cum hostiis per dictam viam, quae vadit ad dictum monasterium Servorum, prout de ... facta per dictum Bernardum Bonaventure [pro?] dictus Operarii constat manu Ser Stephani Antonii Pacis Bambelli, notarii dicte opere.”

⁷⁷ Contratti, 18: “... in honorem dei, famam totius civitatis, et in ornamentum dicte civitatis et dicte ecclesie Sancte Marie del Fiore.”

⁷⁸ Paoletti, 2001, 651, wrote of these civic declarations: “It would be wrong, I believe, to read these documentary references merely as familiar tropes in which grand works of architecture – and in this case public sculpture – redound not only to the fame of the patron, but to the city as well. That would merely serve to aestheticize the commissions and to remove them from the charged political situation in Florence which seems to have motivated their commissions after the turn of the century.”

⁷⁹ For the crisis, see L.F. Marks, “La crisi finanziaria a Firenze dal 1494 al 1502,” *Archivio Storico Italiano* 112 (1954), 40-72.

Matthew has often been treated as an isolated work, a trend rooted in the sixteenth century. Writing in 1564, Benedetto Varchi, for example, singled out the unfinished sculpture for showing the “profundity and excellence of [Michelangelo’s] intellect and talent,” without mentioning the commission of 1503.⁸⁰

And yet, all these factors laid aside, additional evidence suggests that the emphasis on the Apostle Saint Matthew was no historical coincidence but was intended from the moment Michelangelo started carving. First, that sculpture was reserved a more prominent location than the other eleven Apostles. Shortly after the contract was signed, the authorities appointed the crossing biers and pillars in the nave of the church, where Apostles were painted, as the future location of the sculptures.⁸¹ The projected location for the *Saint Matthew* was the last pier of the nave to the right, where Vincenzo de’ Rossi’s *Saint Matthew* (Fig. 41) was eventually installed (in place of Michelangelo’s, which remained in the Opera del Duomo until 1834).⁸² Projecting into space from its niche in a marked contrapposto, Michelangelo’s sculpture would have been visible both for the lay public assembling for mass in the nave and the clerics who sat within the choir.⁸³ This was an advantage it had above the other sites reserved for Apostles statues, which would have been either not visible for those within the choir enclosure or obscured from sight by the height of that same choir elevation for those standing in the nave. Even if we imagine twelve

⁸⁰ Varchi, MS 1564, 28.

⁸¹ Michelangelo’s contract stated that his statues were to replace the existing painted Apostles in the church, or elsewhere in the church; *Contratti*, 18-19: “...ponendorum in dicta ecclesia in loco picturarum, que in presenti sunt in dicta ecclesia, vel alibi ubi videbitur et placebit et expediens et commodius prefatis Consulibus et Operariis pro tempore existentibus.” As Michaël J. Amy, “The Revised Attributions and Dates of Two 15th Century Mural Cycles for the Cathedral of Florence,” *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 62 (1998), 176-89, points out, the painted Apostles referred to in the contract can be identified with the painted figures carried out by Bicci di Lorenzo and his team of painters between February 17 and March 19, 1436 on the pilasters of the crossing and the nave of the church, probably ephemeral in nature. These Apostles were painted for the occasion of the consecration of the Duomo by Pope Eugenius IV on March 25, 1436; see Poggi, 2: 195 (doc. 2368): “... duodecim apostolos pro consecrazione fienda dicte ecclesie.”

⁸² Amy, 2001, 161-62.

⁸³ Amy, 2001, 154-58, demonstrated that niches were intended for Michelangelo’s statues from the start.

Apostle statues in their intended locations, Michelangelo's *Saint Matthew* would remain the most prominent among them. In 1568, the prominence of its intended site was affirmed when, on the occasion of Francesco de' Medici's wedding to Johanna of Austria, an Apostle was temporarily installed there and on the opposite bier, while the other locations were left open.⁸⁴

The site imbued Michelangelo's decision to open up the cycle with Saint Matthew with prominence, a prominence he had infused with sacrosanctity in his interpretation of divine manufacture but one that was really born from political motivations, which tied iconography directly to patronage. On Saint Matthew's day 1502, September 21, the city of Florence affected the reform of their government that was to result in Soderini's election to the *gonfalonierato a vita* the next day. The weeks prior to the election had been among the worst in the city's history. Cesare Borgia had approached the city's borders in his attempt to subject Florence to his lordship, the Florentine economic situation was severely compromised, and the town of Arezzo was rising to revolt. The city found herself on the threshold between "liberty and ruin," as Bernardo da Diacceto said at one of the *consulte e pratiche*: "It is liberation or ruin And I pray to God to liberate us of so much tribulations."⁸⁵ In an ultimate effort to get God on their side, the city-government called for divine intervention. It staged an elaborate procession to ask for help from above in electing their new leader. The procession was described by many chroniclers, among them Neri Rinuccini:

On the feast day of the glorious Apostle and Evangelist Saint Matthew, they brought to Florence the panel of the image of the glorious virgin Mother of God Mary, called the *tavola di Santa Maria Impruneta*, and for that occasion they made a beautiful and devout procession, to which attended many people, both men and women. And before that, they had also made many orations at all the religious sites, made both by religious and secular men, to the end that the Highest God and his

⁸⁴ Lapini, 147, 180, informs us that two statues were installed in ephemeral aediculae in December 1565, on the last piers of the nave. See Amy, 2001, 157nt19.

⁸⁵ *Consulte e pratiche* (1498 – 1505), 2: 816: "... o la liberatione o la ruina ... preghò Idio ci liberi da tante tribulationi." On the moment of crisis Bernardo is referring to, see Sergio Bertelli, "La crisi del 1501: Firenze e Cesare Borgia," In *Essays Presented to Myron P. Gilmore*, ed. Bertelli and Gloria Ramakus, Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1978, 1-19.

glorious Mother concede grace to this [Florentine] people in electing as Gonfaloniere di Giustizia for life such a man able to direct this frightened city on the path of God and in the observance of justice and the good laws.⁸⁶

In Florence, the economy of divine intervention operated through a stable combination of rituals: procession, miraculous imagery, and time – ingredients which on that Wednesday in the fall of 1502 translated into a beautiful parade that passed by Florentine churches and ended in front of the *ringhiera*, where mass was celebrated on an altar endowed with the miraculous image from Impruneta. All was conducted in divine time, on “the feast day of the glorious Apostle and Evangelist Saint Matthew.” Chroniclers agree that the intervening Matthew and the miraculous power of the image brought to Florence the preceding day led to the appointment of Soderini. To put it in other words, Soderini’s *owed* his appointment to the Virgin, mediated through an image “not made by human hands,” and the Apostle Matthew, for which no image existed yet.

Saints were essential to Soderini’s *gonfalonierato*. A most moving testimony of his devotion to the Virgin survives in a letter Piero wrote to his wife on September 11, 1512, during his flight from Florence after the Medici had returned to their native city with the help of the Spanish armies. He thanked the Virgin for pointing out to him the right road, which saved him from being imprisoned or murdered by his enemies.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Rinuccini, ed. Aiazzi, clxviii-clxix: “Il dì della festa del glorioso Apostolo ed Evangelista Santa Matteo, si fece venire in Firenze la tavola della imagine della gloriosa vergine Madre di Dio Maria, chiamata la tavola di Santa Maria Imprumeta, e fecesi per tal cagione una bella e devota processione, alla quale fu grande concorso di popolo di uomini e di donne, ... accioche l’Altissimo Iddio e la sua gloriosa Madre concedessino grazia a questo popolo di ellegere per gonfalonier di giustizia a vita uno tale uomo che fusse atto a dirizzare questa affanata città nella via di Dio e nella osservanza della giustizia e delle buone leggi; e dipoi il dì seguente, cioè giovedì a dì 22 Settembre 1502, si raguno il consiglio maggiore nel quale furono più che uomini 2000 per fare la detta elezione; e finalmente dopo lungo squittino di molti e molti che andorono e partito in detto consiglio ... resto eletto nel terzo squittino e per le più fare Piero di Messer Tommaso, al quale priego Idio che per sua misericordia conceda grazia di esercitare tale magistrato in tal modo che ne resulti gloria e laude dal Paradiso.”

⁸⁷ See Bertelli, 1971, 358: “Io me ne andavo a Roma, come ti havevo significato, ma havendo inteso Rinieri della Sassetta e altri venirmi dietro per farmi disonore, e non havendo possuto havere salvocondotta dal Pontefice, che volentieri andavo a Roma, presi questa via e mi sono raccomandato alla gloriosa Madonna, mi indirizzi a prendere cammino più salutare e più quieto per me che si

But Soderini wasn't alone in his veneration. The Governo Popolare presented its politics as ones of divine mediation. Crucial political decisions were made on important religious feast days and the city's political success attributed to individual saints. The visual arts often served to articulate the share of saints in Florence's political history. Andrea Sansovino was commissioned a statue of *San Salvatore* on 10 June 1501 for the hall of the Great Council at Palazzo della Signoria, "to the eternal memory of the Holy Savior, on whose day we celebrate his feast [*in memoria eterna diej Sancti Salvatoris, in qua die celebratur festiuitas eius*]." ⁸⁸ The feastday of the Holy Savior was declared a public holiday after the Medici had been expelled on that day, November 9, 1494. ⁸⁹ In commissioning a *San Salvatore*, the Republic paid their dues to the Savior who had liberated the Republic. When Soderini commissioned Leonardo da Vinci the *Battle of Anghiari*, also for the Sala del Gran Consiglio, the artist was asked to include Saint Peter on a cloud. ⁹⁰ The victory at Anghiari against the Milanese took place on the feast day of Saint Peter and Saint Paul. Figuring Peter in the composition would have borne witness to his share in Florentine victory. ⁹¹ That he was to feature in Leonardo's composition alone, without Paul, makes history collapse into the present. Saint Peter was of course also Piero Soderini's namesaint; the Gonfaloniere had commissioned a panel from Saints Peter and Paul for his *Udienza* at Palazzo della Signoria in that same year (Fig. 42). ⁹² The narration of Florentine political history through individual patron saints was completed in Fra Bartolommeo's *Saint Anne Altarpiece*,

potessi, m' ha inspirato me ne vadia alla via di Ragugia, come luogo quieto, e sicuro, secondo spero, dove se potrò stare, mi fermerò tanto ch'io veggia se a Roma si potrà star sicuro, e quando sarò in luogo sicuro, e fermo, se vorrai venire sarò contento, e se vorrai restare costì sarò contento, non ho mai havuto novelle di te poi mi partì. Iddio ci conservi sani."

⁸⁸ Frey, 1909, 126 (doc. 28).

⁸⁹ Frey, 1909, 113 (doc. 1).

⁹⁰ Leonardo, ed. Richter, 1: 381-82 (§669): "*El Patriarca la mattina di buon' ora montò in su un monte per scoprir il paese, cioè colli, campi, e valle irrigate da uno fiume, e uide dal Borgo a San Sepolco venire Niccolò Piccinino con le genti con gran polvere, e scopertolo tornò al campo delle genti e parlò loro; Parlato ch' ebbe pregò Dio ad mani giunte, e vide una nugola, dalla quale usciva san Piero che parlò al Patriarca."*

⁹¹ Saint Peter's mediating function in the Florentine victory was also emphasized in the original dispatches, published in Iida Masetti-Bencini, "*La Battaglia d'Anghiari*," *Rivista della biblioteche e degli archive* 18 (1907), 106-27.

⁹² Frey, 1909, 128 (doc. 149).

commissioned for the Sala in 1510, again by Soderini (Fig. 43). The altarpiece included, according to Vasari, all the “protectors of the city of Florence and those saints on whose feast days she has achieved her victories.”⁹³

Although the authentication of politics as sanctioned by God had long been part of Florentine government-administration, including Medicean times, Soderini still went a step further. His politics can be understood as an almost complete dissolution of human interference in political decision-making. In moments that other rulers acted without a second thought, Soderini remained almost invisible. This was what Machiavelli later blamed him for: the Gonfaloniere’s complete refusal to acknowledge the *necessity* of violent intervention expected from a head of state when the liberty of the republic was at stake.⁹⁴ Soderini enacted a politics *without* intervention. For him, the belief that Florence had received her new constitution from God – as an inscription in the *Sala del Gran Consiglio*, “This council was established by God and ill will befall him who tries to destroy it,” reminded the Florentine patriciate –⁹⁵ was not just a convenient metaphor to shield his politics from any further criticism; it had direct practical consequences for his political conduct. When he defended himself against the claims of tyranny in that moving speech referred to above, he did so as someone who claimed to have never intervened in the city’s legal system, although he was well aware of the fact that he was allowed to do so. “And only to save your liberty, there is nothing left for me personally,” he told the Gran Consiglio.⁹⁶ Soderini dissolved his private self and presented his rule as one of personal disengagement. In contrast to the Medici who practiced the politics of state in a highly visible manner (suppressing conspiracies with

⁹³ Vasari, 4: 103: “... nella quale sono tutti e’ protettori della Città di Fiorenza, e que’ Santi che nel giorno loro la città ha aute le sue vittorie.”

⁹⁴ For an analysis of Machiavelli’s political criticism against Soderini, see Daniel R. Sabia Jr, “Machiavelli’s Soderini and the Problem of Necessity,” *Social Science Journal* 38 (2001), 53-67.

⁹⁵ The inscriptions in the *Sala del Gran Consiglio* are recorded by Landucci, ed. del Badia, 126: “Nella quale sala fu poste due epigraffi di marmo, l’una era in volgare e in versi; l’altro in latino. El vughare ... in sentenza diceva: Chi vuol fare parlamento vuol torre al popolo e’ reggimento. L’altro ch’era in latino diceva, che tal Consiglio era da Dio, e cho lo cerca guastare capiterà male.” Cited in Rubinstein, 1995, 73nt246.

⁹⁶ Cerretani, *Storia*, ed. Berti, 402: “... e solo per salvare la liberttà vostra et non ho nessuna che per me sia.”

violence), Soderini acted out a politics in which personal gain seemed absent, his person completely subjected to the service of that venerable Florentine liberty.⁹⁷ His election mediated through Saint Matthew but born from God's design, he lived by a divine mandate. He understood his politics as bridging government by the one and rulership "without human hands." Michelangelo's sculpture not only fashioned its artist as mere mediator of ideas originating in heaven, it also articulated Soderini's tenure, performed, in the words of Matteo di Cascia, in conformity "to the divine will."⁹⁸

Granted, Soderini's patronage of the statue needs arguing; the Gonfaloniere was not involved in the commission itself, just as he was not involved in the commission for the *David*.⁹⁹ In his testament, Piero left some money to the Opera del Duomo, but he never enrolled in the Florentine Wool Guild and was therefore never an *operaio* himself.¹⁰⁰ Yet, he carefully monitored progress on Michelangelo's Apostle commission. In late August 1506 he wrote to his brother, Cardinal Francesco Soderini, that Michelangelo had "begun ... 12 Apostles of 4 ½ to 5 braccia a piece, which will be an excellent work."¹⁰¹ Although Michelangelo's contract had designated the height of the sculpture as four braccia, Soderini was essentially right about the *Saint Matthew's* measurements: the sculpture raises to 263 centimeters, or four and a half braccia.¹⁰² So precise was Soderini's information that I would not be surprised if he had visited Michelangelo at work in the courtyard of the Opera.

⁹⁷ See the analysis of Soderini's politics in Pesman Cooper, 1978.

⁹⁸ See above, note 45.

⁹⁹ This has not hindered other scholars to attribute the commission to Soderini. They include Gaye, 2, 477; Martin Weinberger, *Michelangelo the Sculptor*, 2 vols, New York: Columbia University Press, 1967, 1: 99; John Pope Hennessy, *High Renaissance and Baroque Sculpture*, 4th ed., London: Phaidon, 1996, 41; George Bull, *Michelangelo: A Biography*, Harmondsworth 1995, 54; and Paoletti, 2001.

¹⁰⁰ Soderini's testament of 1511 is published in Silvano Razzi, *Vita di Piero Soderini gonfaloniere perpetuo della repubblica Fiorentina scritta dall' abate d. Silvano Razzi monaco camaldolese*, Padua: Giovanni Manfr , 1737, 149: "Item jure legati reliquit operi Ecclesiae S. Mariae de Flore Civitatis Florentiae, & constructioni novae Sacristae dictae Ecclesiae, ac etiam constructioni murorum Civitatis praescripte libras tres Florenarum parvarum, secundum ordinam.^{1a} de materia disponentia."

¹⁰¹ Gaye, 2: 92: "... ha prinipato una storia per il pubblico che sar  cosa ammiranda, et cosi XII apostoli di braccia 4½ in v l'una che sar  opera egregia." The "storia per il pubblico" refers to Michelangelo's *Cascina* cartoon.

¹⁰² Amy, 2000, 495-96.

Soderini asserted his presence in artistic commissions through indirect involvement, attending to the pulse of the arts in a more disinterested role, one more suggestive of a true patron of the arts, an enabler rather than a buyer. In the years prior to Soderini's *gonfalonierato*, the flow of Carrara marble to the Opera del Duomo had dropped to a dangerous minimum, to the great distress of the Opera's Capomaestro, Simone del Pollaiuolo, who had been complaining for quite a while.¹⁰³ But within a month after Soderini assumed his office, Pollaiuolo's complaints were answered. Substantial shiploads of white Carrara marble reached the cathedral's *fabbrica* in the first winter of Soderini's *gonfalonierato*, part of it destined for Michelangelo.¹⁰⁴ There is no coincidence here. Piero's wife, Argentina Malaspina, was the daughter of Gabriele Malaspina of Fosdivino, who ruled over Carrara and held a monopoly over the marble quarries.¹⁰⁵ City-states and seigniorial states, private individuals and artists alike, had to negotiate for marble through the Malaspina family. Letters of conduct and recommendation to Argentina's family were needed to secure the best material. Soderini's easy access to the marble supply through his in-laws at Carrara, at a time when demand for marble was high, offers the best, if not only, explanation for the high pace at which marble arrived in Florence in late 1502 and continued to arrive until 1512. Indeed, letters of recommendation to the Malaspina survive, both from Argentina and from Piero himself; most of them concern Michelangelo.¹⁰⁶ Between 1506 and 1508, Soderini wrote to his brother-in-law several times in order to secure a gigantic block of marble, to be awarded to Michelangelo to

¹⁰³ See Poggi, 1: 229 (doc. 1154). The use of Lorenzo de' Medici's marble in 1500, was also connected to a shortage at the Duomo.

¹⁰⁴ On November, 28, 1502, the Opera del Duomo decided to order a large amount of marble, to be delivered in the coming two years. As Hirst, 2000, 488-90, who discovered the documents, argued, this material was probably destined for Michelangelo's Piccolomini commission. As is well-known, Michelangelo had always been keen to get his hands on the best marble. See for example, Michael Hirst, "Michelangelo, Carrara, and the Marble for the Cardinal's *Pietà*," *The Burlington Magazine* 127 (1985), 154-59.

¹⁰⁵ For the Malaspina's monopoly there, see Klapisch-Zuber, 1969, 107-49, *passim*.

¹⁰⁶ For these letters, see William E. Wallace, "Michelangelo in and out of Florence between 1500 and 1508," in *Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Raphael in Florence from 1500 to 1508*, ed. Serafina Hager, Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1992, 55-88, who also pointed out that Soderini's easy access to the marble quarries reinforced the relation between him and Michelangelo.

carve a pendant to his *David* from. The project was never realized; the letters are discussed below and further studied in the Coda.

Soderini's rule witnessed a true revival of marble sculpture in Florence: beside the gigantic Apostle commission, Andrea Sansovino placed marble statues over one of the doors of the Baptistery (Fig. 44); plans were made to embellish the drum of Brunelleschi's *Cupola* with marble, a project that involved Michelangelo;¹⁰⁷ the artist was asked to carve a pendant to the *David*; marble devotional tondi and altarsculpture made their reappearance in the city; and parts of the wooden interior of the Duomo were transformed into marble. Soderini's rule generated an atmosphere that prompted the return of many sculptors to Florence, among them Jacopo and Andrea Sansovino, Francesco Rustici and Andrea Ferrucci. In the first decade of the Cinquecento the ground was prepared for stellar artists like Cellini and Pierino da Vinci. The first lines of a poem by Paolo Orlandini dedicated to Soderini on his election in 1502, although often refuted as a hollow literary trope taken from Suetonius, were lived up to by the Gonfaloniere: "Just like Caesar Augustus you transform our earth from bricks into marble, for the custom and learning you possess. Then, Mars has ended the war, Mercury will come in greatest peace, that the Golden Age will be maintained in your age."¹⁰⁸ The politics of art set to work in the service of peace and prosperity, Soderini's rule inaugurated a new golden age of marble sculpture.

And at the heart of Piero Soderini's marble politics stood Michelangelo, lonely star in Piero's galaxy of stellar artists. When informing us of Michelangelo's projects for the Florentine Republic, Ascanio Condivi called Soderini Michelangelo's "*grande amico*."¹⁰⁹ How the two men met is not completely certain. It must have been sometime around September 1504, when Michelangelo's *David* had fallen into Soderini's hands and the Gonfaloniere commissioned the *Battle of Cascina*

¹⁰⁷ The *operai* wrote Michelangelo a letter for advice on July 31, 1507; see Renzo Ristori, "Una lettera a Michelangelo, 31 VII 1507," *Rinascimento*, 33 (1983), 169-71.

¹⁰⁸ Humfrey Butters, "Soderini and the Golden Age," *Italian studies* 33 (1978), 62: "Come Cesare Augusto ridurrai / Al marmo da mattoni la nostra terra, / Per costumi et doctrina qual tu hai. // Poi che harà Marte finita la guerra, / Mercurio ne verrà con large pace, / Che 'l secolo d' oro nel tuo tempo afferra."

¹⁰⁹ Condivi, ed. Nencioni, 22.

from Michelangelo. Soderini's admiration for Michelangelo's work is substantiated for the first time in letters written in the summer of 1506, when Michelangelo was working on the *Saint Matthew* and Soderini wrote of the young sculptor that "he is a decent young man, and in his profession unique in Italy, maybe also in the universe."¹¹⁰ In a letter of 1508 to his brother-in-law, Alberigo Malaspina, in which he tried to secure the marble for the pendant to Michelangelo's *David*, the Gonfaloniere insisted that Michelangelo should get it, for "there is not [another] man in Italy apt to execute a work of such quality."¹¹¹

An exchange of letters dating from 1518, with Soderini in exile in Rome six years after the fall of his regime and Michelangelo at work in Florence, provides intimate documentation of the nature of their relationship from up close. Soderini had asked for Michelangelo's cooperation in a project for a tabernacle for the relics of Florence's patron saint John the Baptist at San Silvestro in Rome. In all of the letters, he called his friend "most loved Michelangelo [*Michelangiolo carissimo*]."¹¹² In one he confides in the artist that "I have as much faith in you as I have in myself." He offered his friend a room in his Roman palazzo.¹¹³ Three years later, their friendship was further cemented, when Michelangelo was made godfather to the newborn son of Piero's nephew, Niccolò Soderini.¹¹⁴ Since there is no documented contact between Niccolò and Michelangelo, we might assume that Michelangelo's godparenthood resulted from the love Soderini felt for his protégé. This remarkable instant anyhow shows how Michelangelo at least by the early 1540s had been completely adopted into the Soderini *consorteria*.

¹¹⁰ Gaye, 2: 92: "... lui essere bravo giovane, et nel mestieri suo l'unico in Italia, forse etiam in universo."

¹¹¹ Gaye, 2: 107: "Et non essendo homo in Italia apto ad expedire una opera di cotesta qualità"

¹¹² Carteggio, 2: 20, 31, 39, 102. For the dynamics of the friendship between Soderini and Michelangelo expressed in these letters, see Wallace, 1999.

¹¹³ Carteggio, 2: 102: "Io confido in voi come in me medesimo E sse fussi possibile venire perfino qua, io sarò contento pagarvi la spesa del venire et del ritorno et qui v'offero un stanza in chasa mia."

¹¹⁴ Carteggio, 2: 323 (Letter Niccolò Soderini to Michelangelo of 13 October 1521). Also See Ernst Steinmann, *Michelangelo in Spiegel seiner Zeit*, Leipzig: Poeschel & Trepte, 1930, 3nt; and Wallace, 1999, 425nt14. For the meaning of godparenthood in the Renaissance, see C. Klapisch-Zuber, "Compérage et Clientélisme," *Ricerche Storiche* 15 (1985), 61-76; and Louis Haas, " 'Il mio buon compare': Choosing Godparents and the Use of Baptismal Kinship in Renaissance Florence," *Journal of Social History* 29 (1995), 341-56.

The formative moment of the friendship between Soderini and Michelangelo can be located in times of personal depravity, in the summer months of 1506, when work on the *Saint Matthew* was also begun. In the first week of May, Michelangelo had fled Julius II's employ in Rome and had sought a safe refuge in Florence. Allegedly, he had overheard a conversation between the Pope and the master of ceremony, to whom, Michelangelo believed, Julius had expressed his plans to shelve the project of the grave memorial. Michelangelo had blasted out in a rage, offensive enough to make the young sculptor fear for his life. "If I had stayed in Rome," he confessed to a friend some days after his flight, "there would sooner be my own sepulcher than the pope's."¹¹⁵ And although his Roman friends tried to persuade Michelangelo to return to the pope's employ,¹¹⁶ he remained in Florence to the pope's great displeasure. A month after Michelangelo had taken refuge in his native city, Julius sent his first papal bull to the Signoria.¹¹⁷ At this point, Soderini intervened in person. Although the bull promised Michelangelo forgiveness for his flight, the Gonfaloniere was not convinced by that promise. A letter he sent to an unknown gentleman of July 1506 bears witness to his close personal contact with Michelangelo: "Michelangelo the sculptor is frightened, for in spite of the bull of Our Lord [the pope], it is necessary that the Cardinal of Pavia will make us a letter, signed in his own hand, and will promise us his security and safety from harm."¹¹⁸ Demanding more than the Pope initially offered, Soderini risked to call Julius's rage over himself and his city. And though he could not do more than negotiate Michelangelo's return to papal patronage, his efforts to secure Michelangelo's safety and his refusal to hand over his friend at any price still strike a moving note to the modern reader. The

¹¹⁵ *Carteggio*, 1: 13 (Letter Michelangelo in Florence to Giuliano da Sangallo in Rome, 2.v.1506): "... s'ì stavo arRoma, che fussi facta prima la sepultura mia che quella del Papa."

¹¹⁶ *Carteggio*, 1: 15 (Letter Giovanni Balducci in Rome to Michelangelo in Florence, 9.v.1506), 16 (Letter Pietro Rosselli in Rome to Michelangelo in Florence, 10 May 1506).

¹¹⁷ Steinmann, 1901-05, 2: 695-96.

¹¹⁸ Gaye, 2: 83: "Michelagnolo iscultore è in modo impaurito, che non obstante il breve di N.S. sarebbe neccessario che il Rmo. di pavia facesse una lettera, soscripta di mano propria a noi, e ci promettessi la sicurezza sua et inlesione; et noi habbiamo adoperato et operiamo con tucti mezzi da farlo ritornare, certificando la S.V. che si non si va dolcemente, se anderà via di qui, come già ha voluto fare due volte."

Gonfaloniere went on to write his brother the cardinal, again, to make sure that no harm would be done to his frightened citizen:

We have had with us here Michelangelo, and no diligence lacks to persuade him to come your way. And we've done so frequently – if only we could trust you, for His Highness has not promised anything for certain. ... We will continue to do so, and although he can be volatile, we will realize his return. But, as has been said, nothing certain will be promised ¹¹⁹

Meanwhile, Julius became extremely irritated with the position of the Florentines. In August, he sent a second bull.¹²⁰ That same month, letters were sent back and forward between the Signoria and Alidosi, the Cardinal of Pavia who had also recommended Michelangelo to the Pope in the previous year.¹²¹ In one of these, the Signoria expresses that Michelangelo “is much loved by them.”¹²²

Apparently, Alidosi had worked miracles to gain Soderini's and Michelangelo's trust. In November the dispute with the Pope was finally settled. On November 27, the artist was finally on his way to Bologna, to meet Julius with the express purpose to make the giant papal bronze for San Petronio, now lost. In order to completely secure his safety, he carried with him a letter of recommendation from Piero Soderini to his brother the cardinal, who traveled to Bologna in the pope's entourage. In it, Soderini described Michelangelo's personality in unprecedented intimate terms:

We ensure His Highness that he is a decent young man, and in his profession unique in Italy, maybe even in the world. We cannot recommend him with more force: he is of the inclination that with good words and caressing, if you speak them, he will make every thing. It is

¹¹⁹ Gaye, 2: 84: “... *Habbiamo havuto a noi Michelagnolo, et non manchato di diligentia alcuna per persuaderli di venire di costà; et in somma l'habbiamo trovato – ad non se volere fidare, perchè la S.V. non ne promette cosa alcuna certa. Noi andremo continuando, et essendo lui pure vario, lo porremo ricondurre. Ma, come è detto, non ne prometterà cosa certa, perchè ci diffidiamo di poterlo mutare.*”

¹²⁰ Steinmann, 1901-05, 696-97.

¹²¹ For Alidosi's role in recommending the artist to Pope Julius II in March 1505, see Hirst, 1991.

¹²² ASF, Signori Missive I Cancelleria, bobina 55, c. 358; Gaye, 2: 85, 91.

necessary to show him love, and do him favors, and he will make things that enchant him who sees these.¹²³

These are not the words of an unconcerned patron. In the months Michelangelo was working on the *Saint Matthew*, its progress monitored by the Gonfaloniere, Soderini had come to know and appreciate the artist's difficult character. With pressure mounting from Rome and Soderini working hard to steer clear of a quarrel between his city and the pope, he still kept the artist under his protection for another three months after the first papal bull had reached his government. The Gonfaloniere became personally involved in what was initially just a matter of state. But how does an artist work under such terms of friendship and how does a patron effect his demands?

With the intimate relationship between Soderini and Michelangelo we have strayed far from a traditional, fifteenth-century relationship between patron and artist. Theirs was no longer confined by contractual clauses, deadlines and money and no longer restricted exclusively to the patronage of art. In short, Soderini acted as a patron proper. Friendships between artists and patrons were uncommon in the Renaissance; they have only recently been studied as a social phenomenon by scholars such as Melissa Meriam Bullard, Dale Kent and Jill Burke.¹²⁴ Artists were

¹²³ Gaye, 2: 92: "Noi certifichiamo la S.V. lui essere bravo giovane, et nel mestieri suo l'unico in Italia, forse etiam in universo. Non possiamo più strectamente raccomandarlo : lui è di modo che colle buone parole et colla carezza, se li fanno, farà ogni cosa; bisogna monstrargli amore, et farli favore, et lui farà cose che si maraviglierà chi le vedrà. Significando alla S.V. che ha prinipato una storia per il pubblico che sarà cosa admiranda, et così XII apostoli di braccia 4½ in v l'una, che sarà opera egregia."

¹²⁴ Studies have mainly focused on Medici patronage. Melissa Meriam Bullard, "Marsilio Ficino and the Medici: The Inner Dimensions of Patronage," in *Christianity and the Renaissance* (1990), 467-92, studies the ties of loyalty that connected Lorenzo de' Medici and Marsilio Ficino. Relations between artists and Cosimo de' Medici based on friendship have been studied by D. Kent, 2000, 7-8, 332-42. And Burke, 2004, 85-98, has investigated the friendship between Piero del Pugliese and Filippino Lippi. For broader discussions of Renaissance friendship, see Reginald Hyatte, *The Arts of Friendship: The Idealisations of Friendship in Medieval and Early Renaissance Literature*, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994; F.W. Kent, *Bartolommeo Cederni and his Friends*, Florence: Olschki, 1991; Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, tr. Lydia Cochrane, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985, 68-93; Weissman, 1982, 26-34; Trexler, 1980, 131-58; D. Kent, 1978; K.J.P. Lowe, "Towards an Understanding of Goro Gheri's View on *amicizia* in Early Sixteenth-Century Medicean Florence," in *Florence and Italy: Renaissance Studies in Honor of Nicolai Rubinstein*, ed. Peter Denley and Caroline Elam, London: Westfield College, 1988, 91-105; and

rarely part of that magic trinity of *amici*, *vicini* and *parenti* (friends, neighbors and family) that defined Renaissance patronage networks.¹²⁵ Relations with patrons were grounded in an economy of hard currency, which the very idea of friendship resists. True friendship rested in virtue, Alberti maintained in his *Della famiglia*, not in money.¹²⁶ It is expressed in immaterial goods, such as freedom and love, exchanged by men of like spirits. Soderini offered Michelangelo protection, kind words, personal support, trust, and later godfatherhood; and it might be meaningful that Michelangelo never received hard currency for the work done on the *Saint Matthew*, not even a compensation for expenses.¹²⁷ Michelangelo rarely worked for anything else than money and if he did work without repayment, it was under the conditions of friendship, two important examples being the presentation drawings for Tommaso Cavalieri and Vittoria Colonna. Michelangelo also supplied Soderini with the design for the relique tabernacle at San Silvestro for free, despite the fact that his friend had offered him an infinite amount of money. Because Michelangelo was working for the Medici in Florence at that time, he was seriously risking his freedom by communicating with exiles; Soderini recognized that the artist was doing him a favor that no money could repay. He wrote: "That God will give you His grace for a gift that can not make me more grateful."¹²⁸ It is not unthinkable that when Niccolò Soderini made Michelangelo godfather to his newborn son that this gesture served as partial "repayment" for Michelangelo's services. "I wish, according to the promised faith, that you will be Godparent [emphasis mine]," Niccolò wrote to his uncle's friend in 1521.¹²⁹

Guy Fitch Little, "Friendship and Patronage in Renaissance Europe," in *Patronage, Art and Society in Renaissance Italy*, ed. F.W. Kent and Patricia Simons, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, 47-61.

¹²⁵ For a good introduction to Renaissance networks, see Kent and Kent, 1982, 1-12.

¹²⁶ Leon Battista Alberti, *The Family in Renaissance Florence [Della famiglia]*, tr. R. Neu Watkins, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1969, 286.

¹²⁷ I have deduced this from Hatfield, 2002, 318.

¹²⁸ *Carteggio*, 2: 20: "Che Iddio vi presti di sua gratia per uno servitio non potete farmi el più grato."

¹²⁹ *Carteggio*, 2: 323: "Amatissimo compare, ha più perpetua nostra amicitia, è piaciuto a Nostro Signore Idio donarmi, di mia mogliera, uno figlio mastio, e questo giorno ne ha partorito; e disederando, secondo la promessa fede, che ne siate compare, disiderrei sapere dove la persona vostra fia domani doppo desinare, a fine possi adurre insieme con li altri per fare simile hopera."

Art historians often see friendship between patron and artist as a kind of preemptive of artistic freedom. They grant an artist working for a friend considerably more leeway and license than one working on a one-time contractual basis, tied to issues of time and money. Yet in friendship, nothing is given for nothing. In order to be a good friend, Michelangelo had to repay the favors bestowed on him, in this case Soderini's political protection.¹³⁰ And the work of art of course served the function of a return-gift. Soderini was referring to precisely such a relationship with the sculptor in the letter of 1506 to his brother in which he wrote that Michelangelo "is of the inclination that with good words and caressing, if you speak them, he will make every thing. It is necessary to show him love, and do him favors, and he will make things that enchant him who sees these." This is not to argue that Michelangelo physically gave the sculpture to Soderini; the statue only left the Opera del Duomo in the nineteenth century. Michelangelo's repayment for Soderini's protection existed in the immaterial but purposeful iconography of Saint Matthew and the powerful interpretation he had given it. In granting the iconography of Saint Matthew central place in the cycle, Michelangelo celebrated Soderini's divinely hallowed rule, "given" by God on Saint Matthew's day 1502. He repaid Saint Matthew's mediation on Soderini's behalf, repaying the protection that the Gonfaloniere had offered him in return.

¹³⁰ The obligation to return favors is studied by Marcel Mauss, *Essai sur le don: forme archaïque de l'échange*, Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1925. Michelangelo understood the obligation that came with receiving gifts; see Vasari, 6: 112: "*né voleva presenti di nessuno, perché pareva, come uno gli donava qualcosa, d'essere sempre obbligato a colui.*" Later in life, the artist, together with Vittoria Colonna, developed a more complex understanding of the gift. On the initial impulse to refuse Colonna's gift, Michelangelo changed his mind, writing his friend in 1541 (or 1542): "*Voleva, Signioria, prima che io pigliassi le cose che Vostra S[ignioria] m'a più volte volute dare, per riceverle manco indegnamente ch'I' potevo, fare prima qualche cosa a quella di mia mano; dipoi riconosciuto e visto che la gratia d'Iddio non si può comperare, e che 'l tenerla a disagio è pechato grandissimo, dico mie colpa, e volontieri dette cose accetto. E son certo, quando l'arò, non per ave[r]le in casa, ma per essere io in casa loro, mi parrà essere in paradiso*" (Carteggio, 6: 122). This letter and the organization of the gift as divine grace within Michelangelo's relationship with Vittoria Colonna and the exchange of drawings that resulted from it are discussed by Nagel, 1997. Citing Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, tr. David Willis, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995, 95, Nagel also pointed out that gifts given in economically well-developed societies such as that of sixteenth-century Italy, effects "a sort of economy in itself."

The benefits of the subject-matter of Saint Matthew shared between artist and patron relaxed the traditional, business-like relationship between the two. They suggest quite a different communication of iconography from patron to artist than what is usually assumed from Renaissance patronage. Here, the prominence of Matthew was not fixed contractually, but arose from a personal exchange and a balance of interest between patron and artist that superseded monetary gain. The very idea that the patron's demands are *contrary* to the artist's wishes – an unacknowledged assumption of modern artistic patronage studies – were alien to friendship. Its very definition does not allow for conflicting interests. Conflicts between Michelangelo and his patrons only arose when friendship was not an issue, with men like Julius II and Giulio de' Medici, who indeed more often than not communicated with Michelangelo through intermediaries rather than in person.¹³¹



Michelangelo's work on the *Saint Matthew* was the last he conducted in the service of the First Florentine Republic. In November 1506 he left Florence, first for Bologna, and then, in 1508, he returned to Rome, where he commenced work on the Sistine Ceiling. The Ceiling occupied Michelangelo until 1512, the year Soderini's Republic fell. Michelangelo only relocated to his native city in 1516, long after Soderini had fled.

In 1501, Michelangelo had arrived in Florence as a talented sculptor, among many others, who had suffered his defeats: the *Bacchus*, for example, had just been refused by its original patron – a trauma,

¹³¹ The conflicting interests between Michelangelo and Pope Julius II serve as a locus classicus of the quarrel between patron and artist. Michelangelo's flight from Rome to Florence in May 1506 was only one consequence of the conflict between the pope and the artist. For the genesis of that project, see Geor Satzinger, "Michelangelos Grabmal Julius' II. in S. Pietro in Vincoli," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 64 (2001), 177-222. Conflicting interests between Giulio de' Medici and Michelangelo arose when Michelangelo was commissioned the family memorial at San Lorenzo. Although Giulio insisted on a wall monument, Michelangelo argued for a freestanding memorial in the center of the chapel. For the problematic genesis of the Medici Chapel and the patron's share in that, see Andrew Morrogh, "The Magnifici Tomb: A Key Project in Michelangelo's Architectural Career," *Art Bulletin* 74 (1992), 567-98; Estelle Lingo, "The Evolution of Michelangelo Magnifici Tomb: Program versus Process in the Iconography of the Medici Chapel," *Artibus et historiae* 16.32 (1995), 91-99; and Wallace, 1994.

Michael Hirst contends, that had made Michelangelo especially receptive to his patrons' wishes.¹³² On his arrival in Florence in March 1501, he still had to battle for the David commission with others, Sansovino and Leonardo supposedly among them. By 1506, however, he was the most sought-after artist on the Italian peninsula, and maybe in the universe (to use Soderini words). He acted on a par with powerful patrons, among them the Florentine head of state. His name appeared in print in 1504,¹³³ and surfaced in many a diary and *ricordo*. Michelangelo had become a cultural commodity of the Governo Popolare, *cittadino* as Cerretani called him, working on a regular income from the Florentine Republic, as a republican "court"-artist, and advising for Florence Cathedral.¹³⁴ What Donatello had been for the Medici, Michelangelo had now become for the Governo Popolare. And although the meteoric social rise of Michelangelo is a story familiar as any in the historiography of Italian Renaissance art, it is often forgotten that it developed at a time when the social and political authority of the image was heavily debated, when artists chose to flee from the city by the Arno instead of staying there. Cutting through the history of statuary, in the *David*, and pointing to the divine origin of his art in that statue and the next, Michelangelo managed to invent an image that could function under the new historical conditions of the post-Medicean Republic. An awareness of the history of sculpture and a search for divine origins in manufacture would eventually lead to a recovery of painting – in the *Doni Tondo*, studied in the next chapter.

¹³² See his entry on the *Pietà* in *La Basilica di San Pietro in Vaticano / The Basilica of Saint Peter in the Vatican*, 2 vols, ed. Antonio Pinelli, Modena: Panini, 2000, 1: 733-34.

¹³³ Gauricus, ed. Chastel and Klein, 257.

¹³⁴ Michelangelo was on a regular salary income when doing work on the *Battle of Cascina*; see the documents published in Frey, 1909, 133 (docs 205, 208); and Hatfield, 2002, 151-52, who also noted that Michelangelo's situation was unusual and might have been instigated on Soderini's personal urging. Michelangelo is mentioned as having been present at the restoration of glasswork in the cathedral on December 24, 1504; see Poggi, 1: 167 (doc. 862). The document has gone unnoticed in Michelangelo scholarship, probably because the reference slipped the otherwise reliable index compiled by Margaret Haines on Poggi's publication.

RECOVERY

The Time of Painting

A profound strangeness marks Michelangelo's painting of the Holy Family with Saint John (Fig. 45), commissioned by Agnolo Doni early in 1504, when work on the *David* was nearing completion. Against a background of six nude men, who almost completely screen a hazily painted backdrop of mountains and water, the Holy Family sits compact on a shallow plain. The small Saint John the Baptist peeks at Christ from behind the main figure group, placed on the same lower level as the ephebes. Remarkably detached from both fore- and background, he goes unnoticed by the protagonists and the naked youngsters. Mary sits closest to the picture plane. Yet she turns away from us, concentrating her attention on the Christ Child behind her and leaving the viewer with a mere glimpse of her strongly foreshortened face. The child presses his hands on Mary's crown as he hovers in between stations, between her and Saint Joseph, whose body folds around the Mother of God as he fixes his gaze on the baby.

The actions of the protagonists remain hard to grasp, at least when we try to force them into narrative consistency. To which direction is Christ moving? Is Joseph handing him to Mary, who thus reaches backwards to receive her child, or is the Virgin giving the child to the old

man, as Vasari thought?¹ Mary's left arm suggests an act of receiving, her fingers seemingly reaching out for the baby, but that suggestion is undone by her right hand, which carefully presses against Christ's right shoulder, instead of offering support. And neither can we know for certain that Mary is giving the Child to Joseph: Michelangelo made sure that the old man's left hand offers no insight in the meaning of the narrative in which he participates. Although Joseph's hand folds around the child's chest, the artist explains little more.

Who is offering to whom? Is it necessary to pose the question? Is it helpful to enforce a consistent narrative order on a painting that seems to resist any form of storytelling?

The image itself resists any explanation of the actions of Joseph, Mary and the Christ Child in terms of realistic representation, that is, as a scene that convincingly registers lifelike figures engaged in a "real" moment defined by the time of the world. Although consisting of multiple figures in contact and thus far removed from the traditional, static arrangement of earlier Madonna imagery, it is also not a painting conceived as an Albertian *historia*. Michelangelo did not set out to represent a scene in which "everything the people in the painting do among themselves, or perform in relation to the spectators, [fits] together to represent and explain the '*historia*'."² Michelangelo's image neither explains the actions of its protagonists, nor is it understood in terms of Alberti's analogy of a window onto a world that is continuous with our own.

Rather than freely acting in an unrestricted natural world comparable to ours, the figures are governed by an order that only exists within the painting's elaborately gilded frame, their movements and appearances submitted to a pictorial order that suppresses references to the here and now of the viewer that the Albertian model recommended. Michelangelo's protagonists are subjected to the space and time of painting. The figures fit exactly in the tondo. Their contours, reinforced with dark lines, are determined by the tondo format. Joseph's head and

¹ Vasari, 6: 22: "... cominciò un tondo di pittura, dentrovi una Nostra Donna, la quale, inginoc[c]hiata con amendue la gambe, ha in sulle braccia un putto e porgerlo a Giuseppe che lo riceve."

² Alberti, *De Pictura*, ed, Grayson, 80-83 (Book 2, Ch. 42). For similar remarks, see *ibid.*, 78-85 (Book II, Chs 40-43).

the tip of Mary's pink gown stop short just a centimeter from the picture's lower border. It is as if Joseph bows to conform to the pictorial order. His right leg fills the two-dimensional void in between Mary and the golden frame instead of seeking stability. Mary's left arm bends, first, to frame her child in two dimensions; second, to continue the contour of Joseph's elongated leg; and third, to make sure that it curves parallel to the frame. She does not *hold* the Christ Child, but simply places her arms around him, as a two-dimensional frame instead of a physical, three-dimensional support. And when Christ places his right foot on the blue fabric of Joseph's gown, he does not do so to find physical support; the blue fabric on which he "stands" serves to distinguish the flesh colors of the foot from the pink of Mary's sleeve, *avoiding* confusing within the order of painting, while *causing* it in the mind of a Renaissance viewer schooled, after all, to read paintings as naturalistic representations.

That understanding is further cut short by the illogically constructed space that the Holy Family occupies. The ledge behind Mary is too shallow to allow for Joseph's reclining pose. And then, in a final gesture of suppressing any reference to the real, Michelangelo sacrificed the correct anatomy he was famous for – that he had advertised in the *David*, finished in the year he started the *Doni Tondo*, that had occupied him in his anatomical drawings, that he had planned to publish a treatise on, and that same anatomical correctness which marked the nude figures in the so-called *Bathers Cartoon* (studied in Chapter 4) he was working on contemporaneously with the *Holy Family*.³ Joseph's right leg is almost twice as long as it should be, stretched to fill vacant two-dimensional space. Mary's left arm is elongated to serve as a better frame for the Christ Child in two dimensions, in the world of the picture.

Michelangelo's painting technique puts additional restrictions on our inclination to see this painting as a representation of "real" figures acting in "real" time. Art historians have often commented on the un-

³ Both Vasari, 6: 108, and Condivi, ed. Nencioni, 52-53, wrote of Michelangelo's infinite studies in anatomy, flaying many a cadaver to perfect his studies, to show off his knowledge of anatomy in his painting and sculpture. Condivi added that the artist planned to publish a treatise on anatomy. A few of Michelangelo's early anatomical studies survive in the Teylers Museum, Haarlem. For these, see Carel van Tuyll van Serooskerken, *The Italian Drawings of the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries in the Teyler Museum*, Haarlem, Ghent and Doornspijk: Snoek-Ducaju & Zoon and Davaco Publishers, 2000, 108-16 (nos 51-55).

naturalistic, non-descriptive quality of the technique employed here. The painting's enamel-like coloring makes no effort to describe all the different materials present: there is no differentiation between grass, skin, hair, textile, and sky – a lack that has led some scholars to maintain that the group seems carved from a marble block and subsequently covered with a thin layer of paint. "The lapidary, gem-like quality in the *Doni Tondo* evokes a different sort of marriage in the picture, that of painting and sculpture," writes David Franklin. And whereas Franklin adds that the painting "also marries the high-pitched clarity expected of a fresco-painting to a panel painting," most art historians insist that Michelangelo's primary profession of sculptor persistently shines through a superficial paint layer, as if sculpture tries to seek its way to primacy in the artist's oeuvre through a thin film of paint to make its case for the importance of marble in the contemporary *Paragone* between painting and sculpture.⁴ Such an argument is of course seriously hampered by the lack of volume in the figures, their ambiguous relation to space, and the way they act in accordance with the frame. If Michelangelo wanted us to believe that his painting was "sculptural" he would have taken more care to make it spatially convincing, for space is the sculptor's tool.

Close study of the *Tondo* partly shows what provoked Michelangelo's non-descriptiveness. Recent restoration of the work has revealed that Michelangelo used oil paint, the dominant medium around 1500, but applied it in a tempera-like way, an application which had gone hopelessly out of fashion by the end of the Quattrocento.⁵ From the 1460s onwards, Florentine painters following Flemish examples had begun to apply thin, transparent layers of oil paint over a light opaque under layer, leaving the different layers to dry before applying the next

⁴ Franklin, 72. De Tolnay, 1947, 167, was among the first and most influential to define Michelangelo's painting as "colored marble."

⁵ For the restoration report, see Ezio Buzzegoli, "Relazione sul restauro del dipinto," and Mauro Matteini and Arcangelo Moles, "Alcune indagini sulla tecnica pittorica," both in *Il Tondo Doni* (1985), 57-70 and 77-80. And for additional remarks on Michelangelo's technique as a panel painter, see Jill Dunkerton, "Michelangelo as a Painter on Panel," in Hirst and Dunkerton, 1994, 83-133.

film.⁶ Michelangelo, instead, blended his paint layers on the panel while they were still wet, building the relief of figures from dark to light, as if he was shading a drawing. He obtained tonal variation by mixing the pigments with varying amounts of white before applying them on the panel. In his application of oil in a tempera technique, Michelangelo resisted the qualities of oil paint that others had embraced it for: the description of nature in her most diverse manifestations with a verisimilitude unmatched in the history of art, every stuff differentiated from the other in texture and color. In Flemish painting and its Italian followers, we encounter minutely rendered descriptions of grass, flowers, trees, birds, hair, jewelry, but also of wrinkled and irritated skin and tears. In the last decades of the Quattrocento, this hunger for realism had come to dominate Florentine workshops, as artists such as Michelangelo's teacher Domenico Ghirlandaio, together with the Pollaiuolo brothers and the Verrocchio workshop started to emulate their Northern contemporaries in their pursuit for what Aby Warburg has called "the pictorial conquest of the world," trying to catch nature's most varied manifestations with their brush.⁷

Pitched against recent developments in Florentine art, Michelangelo's *Doni Tondo* not only worked against the practice of realism deployed in the late fifteenth-century Florentine workshops, but also against the full body of humanist texts praising it. In Netherlandish painting, humanists found the epitome of a centuries old quest for naturalistic representation.⁸ In 1449, Ciriaco d'Ancona claimed that "(a)fter that famous man from Bruges, Johannes [Jan van Eyck] the glory of painting, Rogier in Brussels [Rogier van der Weyden] is considered the outstanding painter of our time." In his painting "you could see those faces come alive and breathe which he wanted to show as living,

⁶ For this technique see, Jill Dunkerton, Susan Foister and Nicholas Penny, *Dürer to Veronese: Sixteenth-Century Painting in the National Gallery*, London: Yale University Press and the National Gallery, 1999, 237-63.

⁷ Manuscript note in the proofs of *Flandrische Kunst und Florentinische Frührenaissance*, published in Ernst Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1986, 166. For an elaboration on the notion, see Nuttall, 2004, 193-229.

⁸ Italian Renaissance texts on Netherlandish painting are collected in Keith Christiansen, "The View from Italy," in *From van Eyck to Bruegel: Early Netherlandish Painting at the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, ed. Maryan Ainsworth, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998, 39-61.

and likewise the deceased as dead, and in particular, many garments, multicoloured soldiers' cloaks, clothes prodigiously enhanced by purple and gold, blooming meadows, flowers, trees, leafy and shady hills, as well as ornate porticoes and halls, gold really resembling gold, pearls, precious stones, and everything else you would think to have been produced not by the artifice of human hands but by all-bearing nature itself."⁹ By the end of the Quattrocento, Flemish painters were considered superior to their Italian counterparts even by writers of Italian soil. Florentine patrons started to collect early Netherlandish painting at a rapid pace. Almost half of the paintings the Medici owned was produced in Flanders, and Flemish works were valued more highly in the family's inventory of 1492 than their Italian counterparts in the same collection.¹⁰ One recent writer even went as far as to describe the last four decades of the fifteenth century in Florence as one giant effort to keep up with the realism of imported Netherlandish painting.¹¹

Michelangelo's criticism of Flemish painting is of course well-known, although it is rarely applied to his painting practice and the criticism contained in that practice. The master's devastating words were recorded in the most often quoted passage of Francisco de Holanda's *Dialogues de Roma*, set in 1539, in Rome. After Vittoria Colonna had posed that famous question to Michelangelo – "I much wish to know ... what thing Flemish painting is and whom it satisfies, because it appears to me more devout than the Italian manner" – the Portuguese humanist and painter de Holanda recorded Michelangelo's answer as follows:

'Flemish painting will,' slowly answered the painter, 'please the devout better than any painting of Italy, which will never cause him to shed a tear, whereas that of Flanders will cause him to shed many; and that not through the vigor and goodness of the painting but owing to the goodness of the devout person. It will appeal to women, especially to

⁹ Translated by Stechow, *Northern Renaissance Art, 1400 – 1500: Sources and Documents*, Englewood Cliffs (NJ): Prentice-Hall, 1966, 8-9. For the original source, see Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origin and Character*, 2 vols, Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press, 1953, 361.

¹⁰ Paula Nuttall, "The Medici and Early-Netherlandish Painting," in *The early Medici and their artists*, ed. Francis Ames-Lewis, London: Birkbeck College, University of London, 1995, 135-52.

¹¹ Nuttall, 2004, 193-229.

the very old and the very young, and also to monks and nuns and to certain noblemen who have no sense of harmony. In Flanders, to be honest, they paint to deceive the external eye [*para enganar la vista exterior*], or such things as may cheer you and of which you cannot speak ill, as for example saints and prophets. They paint stuffs and masonry, the green grass of the fields, the shadow of trees, and rivers and bridges, which they call landscapes, with many figures on this side and many on that. And all this, though it pleases some persons, is done without reason or art, without symmetry or proportion, without skillful choice or boldness and, finally, without substance or vigor.’¹²

The Michelangelo of de Holanda’s dialogues detests what Ciriaco had held up as the greatest merit of Flemish painting: the “blooming meadows, flowers, trees, leafy and shady hills ... and everything else you would think to have been produced not by the artifice of human hands but by all-bearing nature itself.” And it is not difficult to see how the artist had painted his criticism of such painting that “deceives the eye” twenty-five years earlier in the *Doni Tondo*, a painting that resists the temptation to indulge in the fancies of landscape painting and the painting of “gold really resembling gold [*ostro atque auro vestes*]” that pleased a viewer like Ciriaco. The seam of the Virgin’s garment seems certainly not of gold.

The painted criticism offered in the *Doni Tondo* was not so much directed at Flemish painting *per se* but more generally at the seductive qualities of oil painting which were adopted and emulated by Italian artists. After all, de Holanda was not unbiased, and he might have put

¹² De Holanda, ed. Mendes, 18-19: “Muito desejo de saber, pois estamos nesta matéria, que cousa é o pintar de Flandres, e quem satisfaz, porque me parece mais devoto que o modo italiano. A pintura de Flandres, respondeu devagar o pintor, satisfará, senhora, geralmente, a qualquer devoto, mais que nenhuma de Itália, que lhe nuca fará chorar uma só lágrima, e a de Flandres muitas; isto não pelo vigor e bondade daquela pintura, mas pela bondade daquele dal devoto. A mulhere parecerá bem, principalmente às muito velhas, ou às muita moças, e assim mesmo a frades e a freiras, e a alguns fidalgos desmúsicos da verdadeira harmonia. Pintam em Flandres pròpriamente para enganar a vista exterior, ou cousas que vos alegrem ou de que não possais dizer mal, assim como santos e profetas. O seu pintar é trapos, maçonarias, verduras de campos, sombras de árvores, e rios e pontes, a que chamam paisagens, e muitas figuras para cá e muitas para acolá. E tudo isto, ainda que pareça bem al alguns olhos, na verdade é feito sem razão nem arte, sem simetria nem proporção, sem advertência do escolher nem despejo, e finalmente sem nenhuma substância nem nervo.” I have slightly adjusted the translation in de Holanda, ed. and tr. Folliero-Metz, 76-77.

his own personal disdain for the Flemish style in the mouth of Michelangelo whose art he considered to be, with many others in 1539, as the embodiment of the Italian style of painting. What is more, when the Portuguese quoted Michelangelo, Italian painting had regained its dominance over Netherlandish art on the Italian peninsula, but not in the Iberian world, where Flemish art still ruled artistic culture and where our Portuguese painter aimed to introduce the “Italian manner.”¹³ The Michelangelo of the *Doni Tondo* spoke against the *effect* of Flemish painting, not the nationality of such painting *per se*.¹⁴ Vasari indeed recounts some of the artist’s abusive remarks against oil painters of Italian soil. One, directed against Lorenzo Costa and Francesco Francia, he situated in 1506, the year Michelangelo finished the *Doni Tondo*; another, better known, concerned Sebastiano del Piombo who prepared the altar wall in the Sistine Chapel to be painted in oil, which caused Michelangelo to burst out in a rage that caused the definitive fall-out between the two friends.¹⁵

¹³ De Holanda, ed. and tr. Folliero-Metz, 69, 80.

¹⁴ For the most advanced arguments in favor of a reading of the *Dialogues* as a trustworthy source of Michelangelo’s opinion, see John Bagnell Bury, *Two notes on Francisco de Holanda*, London: Warburg Institute, 1981. In recent articles, Laura Camille Agoston, “Male/Female, Italy/Flanders, Michelangelo/Vittoria Colonna,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 58 (2005), 1175-1219; “Holanda’s Michelangelo and the drama of cultural difference,” *Word & Image* 22 (2006), 54-67; and “Michelangelo as Voice versus Michelangelo as Text,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 36 (2006), 135-67, has attacked a reading of Francisco de Holanda as “taperecorder” through close reading of the texts as a whole and its (failed) reception, attributing the negative views of de Holanda’s Michelangelo of Flemish art to gender conventions dominant at the time and to de Holanda’s own cultural agenda. She also pointed out that de Holanda reverses his negative opinion on Flemish art at other points in the text. As important it is to study the literary conventions that shaped the text, any testing of the *Dialogues* as a trustworthy source of Michelangelo’s theory of art must involve an investigation of the image theories the works themselves reveal. This Agoston fails to do. For a successful attempt to connect Michelangelo’s opinion in the *Dialogues* to contemporary works of art, such as the *Last Judgment*, see Nagel, 2000, 192-93.

¹⁵ Vasari, 6: 32: “Va’ al bordello, tu [Francia] e ‘l Cossa [sic], che siete due solenissimi goffi nell’arte.” And Vasari, 5: 101-02: “il colorire a olio era arte da donna e da persone agiate et infingarde, come fra Bastiano.” For the fall-out between Sebastiano and Michelangelo, Michael Hirst, *Sebastiano del Piombo*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981, 123-24. And see Nagel, 2000, 193.

The Time of the World

A viewer visually educated in a culture of naturalism would have immediately been struck by the anomalies of the *Tondo*. She or he would note that both the suppression of actors performing meaningful action in a convincing spatial setting and the reversal of the descriptive mode that Michelangelo sets forth in the painting upset a centuries long history that favored an art of verisimilitude, a history that ran from Greek to Roman painting – celebrated in the pages of Pliny, Ghiberti and many other authors –, to a short eclipse in the Middle Ages, to return with a vengeance in the Renaissance, not only under the pressure of a growing humanism purported to support it, but also owing to the great technical advances of the oil painting technique. It was a history that found its ultimate fulfillment in the kind of painting Leonardo da Vinci advertised with some confidence in the years Michelangelo worked on the *Tondo*.

In the spring of 1501, just returned from Milan, Leonardo exhibited a cartoon with Saint Anne, the Virgin, the Christ Child and a Lamb at the Florentine church of Santissima Annunziata. According to Vasari, “men and women, young and old, like on a feast day [came] to see the marvels of Leonardo who stupefied the whole of that [Florentine] people.” They came to see the work for two days long.¹⁶ Leonardo’s cartoon is now lost, although in general appearance it must have looked like the one now preserved in the National Gallery, London (Fig. 46). A copy of the lost composition, attributed to Andrea del Brescianino and now in the Prado, registers the artist’s original composition, although not its features as a cartoon (Fig. 47). In the copy, Mary sits on Saint Anne’s lap, slightly bending towards the Christ child, who, placed to the Virgin’s left, plays with a lamb, gently swinging his right foot over the animal’s neck while holding it by its fur (or perhaps ear). Leonardo’s cartoon stands as an essay on the boundaries of narrative possibility. The Christ child reacts to his mother’s touch (almost like children do when they are touched by their mothers’ hands), returning a mollifying smile to his mother, which

¹⁶ Vasari, 4: 29: “Finalmente [Leonardo] fece un cartone, dentrovi una Nostra Donna et una S. Anna con un Cristo, la quale non pure fece maravigliare tutti gl’ artefici, ma finita ch’ ella fu, nella stanza durarono due giorno d’ andare a vederla gl’ uomini e le donne, i giovani et i vecchi, come si va le feste solenni, per veder le maraviglie di Lionardo, che fecere stupire tutto quel popolo”

is more clearly visible in a now-lost copy formerly in the Kaiser Friedrich Museum (Fig. 48). Psychological drama rules Saint Anne's gesture. She embraces *her* child, though with some hesitation. As she casts a reassuring gaze at the playful *putto* and lamb, her eyelids lower, as a universal sign of care, anxiety, and emotional disturbance. Hesitation is even more powerfully visualized in her hands, the right one holding fast to the Virgin, while the left one clings somewhat clumsily to the Virgin's side – tentative, insecure.

At least two of Michelangelo's drawings document his awareness of Leonardo's composition and his reaction to Leonardo's explorations in narrative. One, in Oxford, maintains the vertical format (Fig. 49). Probably produced in the spring of 1501, in direct response to Leonardo's composition, it already reads like an effort to break down the narrative consistency of Leonardo's essay in human emotions. Michelangelo's Virgin does not interact with her mother, on whose lap she sits. Instead she stares at the lower right corner of the composition, into nothingness. Saint Anne looks to the lower left corner, also staring into vacant space. And although it is hard to tell, for Michelangelo's drawing is much worn, both mothers' facial expressions seem conspicuously blank, dark areas of condensed ink putting shadow where expression ruled in Leonardo's faces. Michelangelo's Christ Child is restless; he turns and twists but does so unmotivated by any narrative input coming from within the boundaries of the sheet. He assumes a pose that responds neither to Mary, nor to saint Anne. This Christ, like this Virgin, looks down into a vacuum, the place where Leonardo had put the narrative locus of infantile play.

A second drawing by Michelangelo that takes Saint Anne, the Virgin and the Christ Child as its subject (now in the Louvre; see Fig. 50), adapts the vertical format of Leonardo's composition to the demands of a circular frame and therefore offers a bridge from Leonardo's rectangular cartoon to the *Doni Tondo*. Saint Anne now sits on the ground, in profile, with the Virgin, who is engaged in breast-feeding the Christ Child, sitting in her lap. Mary bends, the contour of her arm, neck and head forming a curve that suggests a round frame.¹⁷ Mary's right

¹⁷ De Tolnay, 1947, 190, points out that the drawing conforms to the tondo format, proposing, however, that Michelangelo made it as a preparatory study for a never executed project.

foot dangles at the bottom of the composition, seemingly placed there to fill up vacant two-dimensional space at the underside of the perceived tondo, like the piece of fabric of Mary's gown does in Michelangelo's painting (Fig. 51). Again, the protagonists do not interact. The Christ Child sucks, the Virgin seems to seek contact with her mother, but Saint Anne stares remotely into blank space.

Produced just prior to the *Doni Tondo*, these drawings prepared Michelangelo for the task of re-interpreting Leonardo's essays in multi-figure compositions within the realm of religious panel painting. That re-interpretation was one function of the painting. The rapport between the two most famous artists living in Florence in these years has been illuminated by a venerable historiography;¹⁸ but the relationship between the two, I add, was also meant to be recognized by contemporaries. Of course, the publicity of the *Saint Anne Cartoon* – on show with countless Florentines flocking to it, “like on a feast day” – can be taken for granted; but Michelangelo's *Tondo* was on public view as well, if in the slightly less accessible house of its first owner, Agnolo Doni. At Palazzo Doni important citizens met (including artists), business was conducted, and cultural and political information exchanged. There, with more important artworks on view, among them two paintings by Raphael and a bronze by Donatello, Michelangelo's panel would have been surrounded by a particular discourse. However, this is to anticipate the argument. For we first have to know what kind of discourse is locked in Leonardo's work and the tradition bodied forth in

Among others, Rona Goffen, *Renaissance Rivals: Michelangelo, Leonardo, Raphael, Titian*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002, 164, suggests that the Louvre drawing was made as preparation for the *Doni Tondo*.

¹⁸ For specialized studies on the encounter, see, among others, Wilde, 1953b; Claudia Echinger-Maurach, “ ‘Gli occhi fissi nella somma bellezza del Figliuolo’: Michelangelo im Wettstreit mit Leonardos Madonnenconcetti der zweiten Florentiner Periode,” in *Michelangelo: Neue Beiträge* (Akten des Michelangelo-Kolloquiums veranstaltet vom Kunsthistorischen Institut der Universität zu Köln im Italienischen Kulturinstitut Köln, 7. – 8. November 1996, ed. Michael Rohlmann and Andreas Thielemann, Munich: Deutscher Kunstverlag, 2000, 113-50; and Thomas Krämer, *Leonardo, Michelangelo, Raphael: Ihre Begegnung 1504 und die ‘Schule der Welt’*, Stuttgart: Mayer, 2004. And Rona Goffen, “Mary's motherhood according to Leonardo and Michelangelo,” *Artibus et historiae* 20.40 (1999), 220-21, suggests a Freudian interpretation of Leonardo's and Michelangelo's different conceptions of the Virgin in their Madonna panels. Much of the arguments put forward in the present chapter serve to argue against such a thesis.

it, before we can understand Michelangelo's take on things. In what follows, I take the existence of a rapport between the two for granted and continue to point to Leonardo's and Michelangelo's difference in the perception of the religious *functionality* of the work rather than just a difference in formal solutions or artistic personalities. I argue that Michelangelo did not just paint against Leonardo "the artist," but against the veristic tradition as a whole, the essentially fifteenth-century tradition that he, and some of his contemporaries, found incompatible with religious praxis.

Leonardo's practice was intimately bound up with his theoretical reflections on painting. Although he filled thousands of leafs with written comments on sight and perception, panel painting remained the privileged area of theoretical investigation throughout his life. In the case of the *Saint Anne Cartoon*, experiment consisted of a testing of narrative consistency and accurate description of movement and human interaction. The first description of the cartoon dates to the exhibition year, and highlights that experiment in narrative.¹⁹ It was written down by Fra Pietro da Novellara, a Carmelite, in a letter to Isabella d'Este of April 3, 1501:

After his return to Florence he has only made a drawing on a cartoon [*uno schizo in uno Cartone*], which feigns [*finge*] a Christ Child of about one year old, who almost escapes from his mother's hands and reaches for a lamb, and it is as if he strangles it. The mother almost rises from the

¹⁹ It has sometimes been doubted that Fra Pietro saw Leonardo's cartoon in the exhibition mentioned by Vasari. And even Vasari's statement that Leonardo put his work on display to the public, "for two days," while the cartoon was still unfinished, has sometimes been refuted as a fable. Some have wondered whether an exhibition of and (unfinished) work of art could have taken place in this period. Michael Hirst's discovery of the 1503 exhibition of Michelangelo's *David*, strengthens my assumption that even unfinished works of art were put on display (a phenomenon to which I return in the next chapter). Michelangelo's statue had been debuted for the public on San Giovanni, implying that these kind of happenings were often organized on civic festivals. In this respect it might be relevant that Vasari wrote of people gathering around Leonardo's work, as if on a feastday. Fra Pietro was writing to Isabella d'Este on April 3, 1501. Might it be that Leonardo exhibited his cartoon a week earlier, on March 25, 1501, the day of the Annunciation, which was celebrated at Santissima Annunziata by the whole Florentine populace? Such a thesis remains purely speculative until more documentation surfaces, but is at least in line with what we know about the later exhibition of the *David*.

lap of Saint Anne who reaches for the baby to separate it from the little lamb (the sacrificial animal) that signifies the Passion. It seems that Saint Anne, getting up from sitting, wants to restrain her daughter from separating the baby and little lamb. Which maybe serves to signify the Church that does not want to impede with the Passion of Christ. And these figures are big of natural size [*grande al naturale*] although they exist in a little cartoon, for all of them either sits or stands bowed and one stand in front of the other, to the left. And this cartoon is not yet finished.²⁰

Novellara's description bears all the characteristics of a true *ekphrasis*, that literary genre of lifelike description so particularly fitting for the purpose of informing the distant Isabella about an image she did not have before her eyes. True, the genre is governed by literary conventions, but not every work of art lends itself to *ekphrasis*. The work under review calls for a certain narrative consistency and a lifelike rendering of subject-matter. More than to anything else, *ekphrasis* is tied to the mimetic tradition. (That is also why the genre fails to describe so much modern art.²¹)

In ways that remain as yet unrecognized, Leonardo's work does not only invite *ekphrasis*; it is a kind of *ekphrasis* itself.²² By taking *mimesis* to the extreme, it feigns a reality that in truth only exists by the grace of chalk and cartoon. While acknowledging the fact that the actions he is

²⁰ Da Novellara's letter is published in Villata, 134-35 (no. 150), which corrects the edition in Beltrami, 1919, 65-6 (no. 107): "À facto solo, dopoi che è ad Firenci, vno schizo in uno cartone: finge uno Christo bambino de età cerca vno anno, che uscendo quasi de bracci ad la mamma piglia uno agnello et pare che lo stringa. La mamma quasi levandose de grembo ad Santa Anna piglia el bambino per spicarlo dalo agnellino (animale inmolatile) che significa la passione. Santa Anna, alquanto levandose da sedere, pare che voglia retenere la figliola che non spica el bambino da lo agnellino, che forse vole figurare la chiesa che non vorebbe fussi impedita la passione di Christo. Et sono queste figure grande al naturale ma stano in piccolo cartone, perchè tutte o sedeno o stano curve, et una stae alquanto dinanti ad l'altra verso la man sinistra. Et questo schizo ancora non e finito."

²¹ See George Rait, "Ekphrasis and illumination of painting: The end of the road?," *Word & Image* 22 (2006), 14-26.

²² Therefore, I do not agree with Nagel, 1993, 14, who thought that the loss of traditional subject-matter in Leonardo's art made it impossible to describe these images in an *ekphrastic* way, because Leonardo's painting "could no longer be used to describe a kind of painting that had made its own processes an integral part of its inventions." This is to misunderstand the purpose of Leonardo's *mimesis*, which, although often negating traditional religious subject matter, invites an understanding of the represented figures as *real*, just like *ekphrasis*.

describing consist of “a sketch on a cartoon,” which “is not yet finished,” Fra Pietro soon exchanges fact for fiction, chalk for flesh and – in the words of Norman Land – suspends his awareness of the medium.²³ It is therefore important to realize that the definition of *ekphrasis* as merely a “description of a work of art” is a modern one; in Fra Pietro’s time, *ekphrasis* could include a lifelike description of *anything* – battles, landscapes, *et cetera* –, not necessarily of something painted.²⁴ For a moment, the three figures and a lamb share their space with Fra Pietro. Differences in medium between text and image dissolve. Words and chalk find an intimate affiliation in their evocation of a highly convincing “real” presence. It is helpful to quote Shara Bram’s recent definition of *mimesis* in respect to both *ekphrastic* painting and writing to illustrate my point. “The use of mimesis,” Bram recently explained,

acts as an inclusive, connecting, and explanatory device drawing analogies between the media of the sister arts. According to the mimetic tradition, the *differences* between the various *media* fade away, given the strong similarities between them as representations. What maintains the analogy between the ‘sister arts’ and makes it altogether possible, however, is the analogy between our understanding of space and our understanding of time. This analogy is preserved by ekphrasis as a mimetic form. Ekphrasis functions here as a mediator, forming an order of similarities between space and time [emphasis mine].²⁵

Leonardo’s cartoon called for a willing suspension of disbelief for the moment.²⁶ Depicted in a lifelike manner, the drawn figures seem real. They are “big of natural size [*grande al naturale*] although,” the Carmelite added, “they exist in a little cartoon.”

²³ Norman Land, *The Viewer as Poet: The Renaissance Response to Art*, University Park (PA): Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994, 125.

²⁴ See Ruth Webb, “*Ekphrasis* ancient and modern: The invention of a genre,” *Word & Image* 15 (1999), 7-18.

²⁵ Shara Bram, “Ekphrasis as a shield: Ekphrasis and the mimetic tradition,” *Word & Image* 22 (2006), 376. This is of course the premise of post-structuralist thought, which insists on a suspension of medium in confrontations between word and image: Texts, like images, have a spatial quality, and images, like texts, acquire reading, hence time.

²⁶ The phrase is by Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 2: 6; cited in Walter Pater and Frederick Burwick, “Aesthetic Illusion,” in *Aesthetic Illusion: Theoretical and Historical Approaches*, ed. Pater and Burwick, Berlin and New York: Walter Gruyter, 1990, 1-15.

By the time Leonardo was working, the naturalistic tradition in painting had existed in intimate relation to Christian religion for at least a century. *Mimesis* made belief palpable; it substantiated faith in an invisible God. Alberti, in an almost anthropological take on the history of art, went as far as to point out that naturalism was born from the notion of faith in general, not just from that of Christianity specifically. He quoted Trismegistus's words to Asclepius to bring his point home: "Man, mindful of his nature and origin, represented the Gods in his own likeness [*deos ex sui vultus similitudine figuravit*]." ²⁷ He and others could claim thus on the basis of the Holy Writ. ²⁸ If God "made mankind according to our image and likeness" (Genesis 1:26), then we can fashion Him, His Son and the Saints in our own likeness. The Incarnation offered the indisputable truth of that claim and the mimetic tradition the perfect means to embody that truth in paint. Naturalism became the privileged site for exploration of God's visibility. Visual artists had to plot out the many parts of Christ's body of which the Bible had remained silent, such as His toes, nose or genitals. In other words, the visual artist had to *create*, make *present*, instead of *re-present* Christ's body to a far greater extent than the Bible facilitated. "The rendering of the incarnate Christ ever more unmistakably flesh and blood is a religious enterprise," writes Leo Steinberg. ²⁹

But as the Renaissance was gathering momentum, the dangers inherent to *mimesis* also started to surface, robbing Christianity of some of its dearest iconographies. For instance, the motif of the Madonna Lactans, so popular in Florence before the rise of naturalism, ³⁰ collapsed under the pressure of the mimetic project. Where Mary's bared breasts had posed no problems to the public of Duecento and Trecento art and the less naturalistic painting of the early Quattrocento (see, for example

²⁷ Alberti, *De pictura*, ed. Grayson, 62-63. The reference is probably to Caecilius Firmianus Lactantius, *De divinis institutionibus*, 2, 10, 3-15.

²⁸ Alberti's is, of course, an attempt to push back the interconnection between religious belief and naturalism to a point far deeper in time, prior to the rise of Christianity, and for him and many other Florentine humanists such a claim did not tamper with Christianity's authority, but served as re-affirmation of that authority. See Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness: Humanity and Divinity in Italian Humanist Thought*, 2 vols, London: Constable, 1970.

²⁹ Steinberg, 1996, 12-13.

³⁰ For the popularity of the iconography of the *Madonna Lactans* in Medieval Tuscany, see Millard Meiss, "The Madonna of Humility," *Art Bulletin* 18 (1936), 435-65.

Fig. 52), they had come to be equated with living women's flesh when painters like Masolino, Filippo Lippi and Leonardo da Vinci began to figure them in an ever more lifelike fashion. By the 1440s, the Nursing Virgin disappeared from Florentine iconography altogether, probably because it had been equated too much with real nursing women and the discourse on the "bare-breasted woman" or prostitute. When painted in the veristic mode, the Madonna became the object of sexual desire instead of authentic devotion.³¹

The disappearance of the *Madonna Lactans* from the Renaissance world implicates a beholder, who, unlike Fra Pietro, could no longer distinguish between images of the Madonna and those of a real woman. It was the lack of distinction that Michelangelo avoided and Leonardo celebrated. In a note of 1505, Leonardo took the confusion between a religious God and a person of flesh and blood as one of the greatest merits of the mimetic tradition, even putting it forward as one more argument in favor of painting in the *paragone* between artist and poet:

And, if the poet says that he kindles love in men, this is the principle thing in all species of animals. The painter has the power to do the same, and much more because he puts the actual effigy of the thing loved in front of the lover. Often the lover kisses the effigy and speaks to it, which he would not do if the same beauties were put in front of him by the writer. [The painter] overpowers the *ingegni* of men even more, for he makes them love and fall in love with a painting that does not represent any living women. Once I happened to make a painting which represented something divine that was bought by someone who loved it, who wanted to remove the representation of the deity so he would be able to kiss the painting without misgivings. But in the end his consciousness rose above his sighs and lust, and he was forced to remove it from his house.³²

³¹ Megan Holmes, "Disrobing the Virgin: The *Madonna Lactans* in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Art," in *Picturing Women* (1997), 167-95, 283-90.

³² Leonardo, ed. and tr. Farago, 230-31 (§25): "... e se 'l poeta dice di fare accendere gli homini ad amare è cosa principale della spetie di tutti gli animali, il pittore à potenza di fare il medesimo e tanto più che vi mette inanzi a l'amante la propria effigie della cosa amata. Il quale speso fa con quella bacciandola e parlando con quella, quello che non farebbe con le medesime bellezze postole inanzi dello scrittore. E tanto più supera l'ingegni de li homini, ad amare et innamorarsi de pittura che no rapressenta alcuna donna viva. Et già interviene a me fare una pittura che rapresentava una cosa divina, la quale comperata dall'amante di quella, volse levarne la rapressentazione de tal Deità per

It is only an apparent paradox that an art which tries to suspend its medium conditions in the face of an exchange between “painted” and “real” figures puts unprecedented emphasis on a painting’s condition *as* material. Someone like Fra Pietro da Novellara extolled the real presence of Leonardo’s figures not *in spite of* the fact that they existed as chalk on cartoon but exactly *because* of their material status. The painter’s suggestion that overcomes those material conditions and that makes us suspend our disbelief for a moment, at once makes us aware that Leonardo, to quote Novellara again, “feigns [*finge*]” these figures “in a sketch on a cartoon.”

Mimesis’s paradoxical claim to materiality brought Leonardo to distinguish between devotion directed towards the saints represented and devotion directed towards the painting proper. “At the moment of unveiling, the great multitude of people who have assembled there immediately throw themselves to the ground, worshipping the painting and praying to the one who is figured in it, in order to acquire the health that they have lost and for their eternal salvation, as if in their minds such a god were alive and present. This does not happen with any other science or other works of man,” Leonardo described the traditional understanding of the function of religious panel painting, then adding to his account a twist of idolatry: “if you would claim this is not due to the virtue of the painter, but to the inherent virtue of the thing imitated, it may be implied that if that were the case, the minds of men could be satisfied by staying in bed, rather than going either to tiring and dangerous places or on pilgrimages as one continually sees being done.”³³ And in another note, also included in the *Paragone*, he comes

poterla bacciare senza sospetto. Ma in fine la conscientia vinse li sospiri e la libbidine, et fu forza che lui ceta leva lei di casa.”

³³ Leonardo, ed. and tr. Farago, 187-89 (§8): “Le scientie che sono inimitabili in tal modo che con quelle il discepolo si fa eguale allo hautoire e similmente fa il suo frutto, queste sonno utile allo immitatore, ma non sonno de tanta eccelentia quanto sonno quelle che non si possono lasciare per heredita come l’altre sustantie, infra le quali le pittura è la prima. Questa [arte della pittura] sola si resta nobile, questa sola onora il suo Autore e resta pretiosa e unica e non partorisce mai figlioli equali a sè. E tal singularita la più eccellente che quelle che per tutto sono publicate. Hor non vedemo noi li grandissimi Re dell’ Oriente andare velati e coperti, credendo diminuire la famma loro col publicar e divulgare le lore pressentie? Hor non si vede le pitture rapresentarici delle divine deita essere al continuo tenute coperte con coperture di grandissimi prezzi, e quando si scoprono prima si fa grande solennita ecclesiastiche, de vari canti con diverse suoni. E nello scoprire, la gran moltitudine de populi che qui vi concorrono immediate si gittanno a terra quella adorando e pregando per cui tale

even closer to a celebration of idolatry. Defending the merits of painting against the poet's question, "O painter, you say your art is adored, but do not impute the virtue to yourself, but to the thing the painting represents," Leonardo poses another: "Oh poet, you who are also an imitator in what you make, why do you not represent things with your words so that the letters of which your words consist will be adored, too?"³⁴

The real object of adoration was the mimetic success itself. It would not be far from the truth to claim that the naturalism of Leonardo's art and the process through which it was achieved had become a subject of the painting itself, one that, at least in Leonardo's own perception, pushed away from traditional religious subject-matter. Although still allowing for the "making present" of religious figures and hence substantiating Christian faith, Leonardo makes *mimesis* in and of itself a subject worthy of representation.³⁵ More than just a painting that imitates something in the likeness of nature, Leonardo's painting reveals the process of natural creation, and leaves that process visible.³⁶

The cult of *mimesis* was grounded in a cult of the eye. Sight, Leonardo argued against the philosophers, is man's only trustworthy organ. It can never be subject to dispute, and therefore he contrasted it with the doubt of "things which rebel against the senses, like the knowledge of God, and the soul and the like, things about which there are always disputes and contentions."³⁷ The Leonardo of the notebooks reveals himself as a true observer. And, believer in the powers of sight

pittura, è figurata, de l'aquisto della perduta sanita e della eterna salute, non altra mente che se tale Iddea fusse lì presente in vitta. Questo non accade in nissun'altra scientia od altra humana opera, et se tu dirai questa non esser virtù del pittore, ma propria virtù della cose immitata, si rispondera, che in questo case le mente dell homini pò sattisfare standossi nel letto, e non andare nè lochi faticosi e pericolosi nè peligrinaggi al continuo far si vede."

³⁴ Leonardo, ed. and tr. Farago, 233-35 (§26): "Tu dicem o pittore, che'lla tua arte è adorata. Ma non inputtare a te tal virtù, ma alla cosa di che tal pittura è rapresentatrice. Qui 'l pittore risponde: o tu, poeta, che ti fai anchora to imitatore, perché non rappresenti tu con le tue parole cose che le lettere tue, contenitrice d'esse parolle, anchora loro sieno adorate? Ma la natura ha più favorito il pittore ch'el poeta, e meritamente l'opere del favorito debbono essere più honorate che di quello che non è in favore."

³⁵ This is also argued by Nagel, 1993, 13.

³⁶ See, for instance, Leonardo, ed. and tr. Farago, 191 (§9). And see the analysis in Janis Bell, "Sfumato, Linien und Natur," in *Leonardo da Vinci. Natur im Übergang*, ed. Frank Fehrenbach, Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2002, 229-56.

³⁷ Leonardo, ed. and tr. Farago, 251-55 (§33).

that he was, the truth of his observations could only be tested in painting – the realm of seeing – and not in writing. On panel, sensory knowledge received palpable form and could hence become subject to revision and improvement: never a finished product, but an experiment that can last a lifetime (of which the Mona Lisa of course offers the most direct proof).³⁸ Experiments evolved mostly around *Sfumato*, again more descriptive of a specific visual quality belonging to Leonardo's artistic practice than purely grounded in theoretical texts.³⁹ Covering figures in smoke (*sfumo*), the technique produces a kind of indeterminacy of sight, a quality that, according to Leonardo, was true to the working of the pupil itself but that remains very hard to theorize outside the visual realm.⁴⁰

Traces of *Sfumato* must have been present in Leonardo's *Saint Anne Cartoon*, as they are in the surviving cartoon in London; but the technique was most fully explored in oil paintings. The qualities of oil Leonardo borrowed from Flemish painting (soft contours, subtle gradation in color and the differentiation of material), he put to work in his endless explorations in the properties of sight. Even using oil when painting on the wall,⁴¹ Leonardo was one of oil paint's most enthusiastic

³⁸ That is why Robert Zwijnenberg, *The Writings and Drawings of Leonardo da Vinci: Order and Chaos in Early Modern Thought*, tr. Caroline van Eck, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, could think of Leonardo's notebooks as a private attempt to order and understand the chaos of natural phenomena.

³⁹ For the centrality of *sfumato* in Leonardo's thought, see Gombrich, "Blurred Images and the Unvarnished Truth," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 2 (1962), 172-74, who wrote that "*Sfumato* sums up the nature of Leonardo's achievement." See also Nagel, 1993.

⁴⁰ Leonardo, ed. and tr. McMahon, 270-71 (§ 806): "*Liveri termini deli corpi opachi mai savano veduti con ispedita cognicione. E' questo nasceper che la virtu nissina non si causa, in punto ...; La virtu visiva esser in fusa per tutta la popilla dell' occhio(E)' così e' provato la causa della confusione de termini ch'anno li corpi ombrosi.*" In 1505, when Michelangelo was well underway painting his *Tondo*, da Vinci started to jot down most of the notes on the properties of sight in his so-called *Libro A*; see Carlo Pedretti, *Leonardo da Vinci on Painting: A Lost Book (Libro A)*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964.

⁴¹ For Leonardo indebtedness to Flemish painting, see Paul Hills, "Leonardo and Flemish Painting," *The Burlington Magazine* 121 (1980), 609-15. The *Last Supper* stands as his most important experiment in applying oil on plaster. The failure of that experiment must have been visible already by 1500, when the oil paint started to loosen from the wall. Less well known is that Leonardo also experimented with oil in Florence, in the Hall of the Great Council at Palazzo della Signoria, where he was painting the Battle at Anghiari in direct confrontation with Michelangelo, who was commissioned the *Battle at Cascina*. Da Vinci's notebooks and the Palazzo's account books record his use of special oil ingredients; see Claire Farago, "Leonardo's Battle of Anghiari: A Study in the Exchange between Theory and

champions and therefore a true exponent of the Quattrocento tradition he was trained in. His so-called *Madonna of the Yarnwinder* (Fig. 53), produced with help of assistants around 1501 and painted in oil,⁴² looks more like a study in perception than anything else. A bigger contrast with Michelangelo's *Doni Tondo* is hardly thinkable. Whereas Michelangelo emphasized, thickened and retraced his contours in 1504, Leonardo made them blur into the background. "O painter! do not surround your bodies with lines," he advised his fellow artists.⁴³ The subtlety of Leonardo's blending contours is unmatched, especially in the areas of Christ's lower body. Figures, landscape, and fabrics are all toned-down, more suggestive of Netherlandish oil paintings than the hard-etched colors of early fifteenth-century art produced by Masaccio and others that Michelangelo adopted and brought to an extreme in the *Doni Tondo*. Even the distorted physiognomy of Leonardo's Christ Child is the result of an ambitious exercise in the properties of sight, flattened like a face in anamorphic perspective Leonardo drew on a sheet in the Codex Atlanticus (Fig. 54). A viewer in front of Leonardo's Christ needs to be the kind of spectator that Leonardo once described in a notebook;

Practice," *The Art Bulletin* 76 (1994), 301-30. Leonardo's commitment to technical experiments is evident in a document of 1504 that tells of his insistence to carry out the mural with his own hand, not allowing any other painter, nor assistant to carry out his *disegno* – in both meaning of the word (drawing and design); Beltrami, 87 (no. 140): "*Et perchè e potrebbe ancora essere, che Lionardo fra quello tempo, che lui ha preso a fornire el cartone, non havessi occasione di dipignere in detto muro, ma seguitassi di finire tal cartone, secondo l' obbligo soprascripto, allora son contenti detti magnifici Signori non potere tal cartone così disegnato et fornito alloghare a dipignere a uno altro, ne alienarlo in alcuno modo da detto Lionardo, senza expresso consenso suo, ma lasciare fornire tal dipintura a Lionardo detto, quando sia in termine da poterlo fare et dargliene a dipignere in sul muro, per quella subventionione ciascuno mese, che allora seranno dachordo et che sara conveniente.*" Instead of illustrating Leonardo claim to copyright, the document tells of Leonardo determination to put theory to practice.

⁴² Martin Kemp, "Leonardo's *Madonna of the Yarnwinder* – the making of a devotional image," in *Leonardo da Vinci. The Mystery of the Madonna of the Yarnwinder*, ed. Kemp, Edinburgh: Trustees of the National Galleries of Scotland, 1992, 22.

⁴³ Leonardo, ed. Richter: 1: 129 (§ 49): "*Li termini delli corpi sono la minima cosa di tutte le cose // provasi essere vero quel che si propone, perchè il termine della cosa è una superfitie, la qual non è parte del corpo vestio di tal superfitie, nè è parte dell' aria circu[n]datricie d' esso corpo, ma 'l mezzo interposto infra l' aria e 'l corpo Ma li termini laterali d' essi corpi è la linia termine della superfitie, la qual linia è di grossezza invisibile; adu[n]que tu pittore no[n] circu[n]dare li tua corpi di linie*" And for the dating see Carlo Pedretti's *Commentary on the Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, compiled and edited from the original manuscripts by Jean Paul Richter, 2 vols, Oxford: Phaidon, 1977, 1: 126-27.

in order to overcome the visual confusion of the customary glance, she or he needs to peek through a small hole at the image.⁴⁴ Imagine a devotee doing that.

Despite Fra Pietro da Novellara's attempt to bring theological consistency into the *Saint Anne Cartoon*, the work registers more easily as an experiment in narrative and *mimesis* than as an illustration of a pre-conceived theology. The Carmelite indeed built some instability into his description, when he adds an insecure "maybe [*forsi*]" when putting forth his interpretation of Saint Anne's movement as signifying "the Church that does not want to impede with the Passion of Christ."⁴⁵ Yet without leaning too much on Fra Pietro's description, there is one other fact that places Leonardo's cartoon outside the economy of religion in which the altarpiece ought to have participated at the time, even leaving aside the fact that the cartoon was just that and not a finished altarpiece. There is no commission documented around 1501 for an altarpiece with Saint Anne from Leonardo. Novellara does not mention a patron, although he does mention one for another work described in the same letter to Isabella.⁴⁶ There is no proof that the Servite brothers of Santissima Annunziata, where Leonardo put his cartoon on exhibit, commissioned a painting of him for their high altar, as Vasari once thought;⁴⁷ the dedication to Saint Anne would have been wholly out of place since the altar of the church had been consecrated to the Crucifixion, for which Filippino Lippi and Perugino completed the work now in the Galleria dell'Accademia in Florence in 1507.⁴⁸ That Leonardo displayed his latest exercise in naturalism at the Annunziata could have been no more than a matter of convenience, since the artist was lodging there at the time.⁴⁹ It is therefore reasonable to assume with Martin Kemp and others that Leonardo never intended to work out his cartoon

⁴⁴ Leonardo, ed. Richter, 1: 159-60 (§108).

⁴⁵ Villata, 136 (no. 151): "*Santa Anna, alquanto levandose da sedere, pare che voglia retenere la figliola che non spica el bambino da lo agnellino, che forse vole figurare la chiesa che non vorebbe fussi impedita la passione di Christo.*"

⁴⁶ Villata, 136 (no. 151): "*Ma che ad ogni modo, fornito ch'egli havesse un quadretino che fa a uno Roberteto favorito del Re de Franza, farebbe subito el retrato, e lo mandarebbe a vostra excellentia.*"

⁴⁷ Vasari, 4: 29.

⁴⁸ Jonathan Nelson, "The altarpiece of Santissima Annunziata in Florence: History, form and function," *The Burlington Magazine* 139 (1997), 84-94.

⁴⁹ Carmen Bambach, "In the footsteps of Leonardo," *Apollo* 162.521 (2005), 34-43.

on panel and never conceived it to operate as altarpiece.⁵⁰ All this strongly suggests that the cartoon was done on Leonardo's own initiative, and that it might be defined as an experimentation piece of sorts. Fra Pietro's account of Leonardo's activities to Isabella indeed suggests that the artist was almost exclusively concerned with experimenting. "Leonardo's life is volatile and undetermined, that is, he appears to be living by the day"⁵¹ and he is "working hard on geometry, being impatient with the brush."⁵² "All in all," Novellara wrote in a second letter to Isabella, "his mathematical experiments have distracted him so much from painting that he doesn't want to pick up the brush."⁵³

What we know about the *Saint Anne Cartoon* is that it bore all the traces of a try-out. Leonardo did not develop its subject matter out of the clear purpose of figuring Saint Anne, the Virgin and the Christ Child, whom, as principle figures, would have been outlined in the artist's contract.⁵⁴ Instead, he began with a composition of Leda and her offspring, which after several tracings, he developed into the composition on display that day in the spring of 1501. Leonardo's design process is documented on a sheet at Windsor, which can be dated just prior to the cartoon (Fig. 55). He first drew Leda lightly in chalk (almost invisible to our eyes; but see Fig. 56). He then transformed her body into that of the Virgin, adding Saint Anne, Saint John the Baptist and the Lamb in chalk. Recognizing the possibilities of human interaction between these figures, Leonardo once more returned to where he began: he took a pen in hand and retraced the contours of the Virgin's body, which again becomes Leda's; added Leda's babies coming out of their eggs to her left; and put one baby in her right hand.⁵⁵ He ignored the

⁵⁰ Martin Kemp, *Leonardo da Vinci: The Marvellous Works of Nature and Man*, 2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, 217.

⁵¹ Villata, 134 (no. 150): "...per quanto me occorre, la vita di Leonardo è varia et indeterminata forte, sìchè pare vivere a g[i]orna."

⁵² Ibid., 135 (no. 150): "Dà opra forte ad la geometria, impacientissimo al pennello."

⁵³ Ibid., 136 (no. 151): "Insumma li suoi experimenti mathematici l'hano distracto tanto al dipingere, che non può patire al pennello."

⁵⁴ For the contractual obligations in altarpiece design, see Charles Hope, "Altarpieces and the requirements of Patrons," in *Christianity and the Renaissance* (1990), 535-71.

⁵⁵ The sequence of drawing has been entangled by Johannes Nathan, "Some Drawing Practices of Leonardo: New Light on the *St. Anne*," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 36 (1992), 85-101.

difference in significance between mythological mother and the grandmother of Christianity. Entirely unrelated in subject-matter, Leda and Anne find affiliation in Leonardo's exercise in narrative. For him, subject-matter merely formed an excuse for explorations in art.

Because of their experimental status Leonardo's paintings often look less mimetic than the artist had once envisioned them. Try-outs frequently ended in failure, and that is why so many of Leonardo's works remained unfinished or started to deteriorate within years after their completion, like the *Last Supper*. Even when finished and well-preserved, Leonardo's *Sfumato* paintings convey for some a powerful sense of disrupted naturalism, as figures appear to exist in a dream state, emerging from a world of gathering darkness that is unlike ours. Yet despite bearing the visible marks of an overlabored painting process that often entailed several years per panel, Leonardo's art of an almost impenetrable fuzziness always stands in intimate relation to essays in perception. What we might mistake for a strikingly unrealistic vision of the visible world, the Leonardo of the notebooks understood as the most truthful perception of things visible – not of vision.

Michelangelo's painting of the Holy Family resists the mimetic qualities of painting Leonardo celebrated, a resistance, I pointed out above, that is often associated in modern scholarship with a sculptural perception of painting. Leonardo would have probably also understood the painting as sculptural, although for exactly the same reasons Michelangelo countered the mimetic tradition. For Leonardo, painting celebrated an art of deception and fiction, suggestive of more than itself, whereas sculpture indexed nothing more than it was. Painting is for Leonardo the greater art, for its "prime marvel" is

that it appears detached from the wall, or some other plane, and that it deceives [*inganare*] subtle judges about that thing that is not divided from the surface of the wall. In this [specific] case, when the sculptor makes his works, what appears is as much as there is. ... (S)culpture shows what painting appears [to show], the miraculous thing of making impalpable things appear palpable, giving relief to flat things, distance to things nearby.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Leonardo, ed. and tr. Farago, 281-85 (§45): "*La prima maraviglia che apparisese nella pittura è il parer spicchato dal muro, od altro piano, et inganare li sottili giudicij con quella cosa che non è divisa*

Painting is both closer and farther from reality than sculpture. Looking more like reality in its imitation of the different stuffs that our world consists of, through color, shadow, light and modeling, it also requires more “work” than sculpture, which, rather than imitating reality, merely consists of reality itself – enveloped by and consisting of space. Painting *is* flat and without space, but *appears* three-dimensional. The *Doni Tondo*, like Leonardo’s definition of sculpture, presents nothing more than what we see: a Holy Family never to be confused with real human beings, set in an environment that cannot be exchanged for our own, painted by an artist who in de Holanda’s *Dialogue* criticized those painters who “paint to deceive the external eye.”

The Gaze

In Leonardo’s art, a subjective viewer assumes central stage, a viewer – a man in Leonardo’s case – willing to exchange paint for flesh and ready to celebrate that exchange as the painter’s greatest merit. Leonardo’s lover becomes not only a lover of woman’s beauty but one of painting itself, removing iconographical attributes to remain with paint and woman alone. In Michelangelo’s *Doni Tondo*, in deliberate contrast to Leonardo, we are no longer able to exchange the Virgin for a real woman. If desire for beauty was part of this painting’s subject, then Michelangelo made sure that the object of such desire can never be completely reached.

Somehow, Michelangelo’s painting places *us*. Mary sits closest to the picture surface, her lap could not be much nearer to us, but Michelangelo withholds her. Contemplation on her beauty is rendered impossible since she turns away, Mary’s face represented with a sharp foreshortening that is unprecedented in the history of art as it was known by then. Previously, the Virgin was either depicted en face or at a small angle. Her turning pose conveys a strong sense of temporality, in a way that reverses the common *ritratto delle spalle*, where the portrayed

dalla superfitie della pariete. Qui in questo caso lo scultore fa l'opere sue, che tanto paiono quanto elle sonno.... S'un volesse dire solamente della pittura fatta in tavola, di questo me accordarei anch'io con la scultura, dicendo così, come la pittura è più bella et di più fantasia e più copiosa, et la scultura più durabile ch'altro non ha. La scultura con poco fatica mostra quel che la pittura pare, cosa miracolosa a far parere impalpabili, rilevate le cose piane, lontane le cose vicine."

looks over his or her shoulder *towards* us (for example, Fig. 57). Possession of Michelangelo's Virgin will remain an impossibility forever. And Michelangelo's rendering derives its strength exactly from that impossibility in the face of a near possibility.⁵⁷ It is the kind of tension between possession and absence that features so prominently in Petrarch's poetry, in Canzoniere 159 for instance:

He who looks in vain for divine beauty
who never saw her eyes,
how sweetly she turns them; ⁵⁸

And in Canzoniere 6:

So far astray is my mad desire,
in pursuing her who has turned in flight
and light and free the snares of Love,
flies ahead of my slow running ⁵⁹

Her eyes forever hidden from the mortal viewer's gaze, Petrarch – and Michelangelo – put the beauty of the divine forever *there*, at a safe remove from the viewer's desires.

For Petrarch, woman's beauty is never really attainable on earth, although he thought that a portrait of his beloved Laura, painted by Simone Martini "*in paradiso*," came close to being a substitute for true beauty's absence.⁶⁰ Elizabeth Cropper has argued that High Renaissance

⁵⁷ That tension is well described in Jodi Cranston's study of male portraiture, "Desire and Gravitas in Bindo's Portraits," In *Raphael, Cellini and a Renaissance Banker: The Patronage of Bindo Altoviti*, ed. Alan Chong, Donatella Pegazzano, and Dimitrios Zikos, exh. cat. Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston and Museo Nazionale del Bargello, Florence, 2003 – 04, Milan: Electa, 2003, 115-31. For the unattainability of beauty in the face of a near possession in Petrarch's poetry, see Giuseppe Mazzotto, *The Worlds of Petrarch*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1992, 33-57.

⁵⁸ Petrarca, 869: "*Per divina bellezza indarno mira, / Chi gli occhi de costei già mai non vide, / Come savemente ella gli gira*"

⁵⁹ Petrarca, 269: "*Sí traviato è 'l folle mi' desio / A seguitar costei che 'n fuga è volta, / E de' lacci d'Amor leggera e sciolta / Vola dinzanzi al lento correr mio, ...*"

⁶⁰ Petrarca, 577-78: "*Ma certo il mio Simon fu in paradiso, / Onde questa gentil donna si parte; / Ivi la vide, e la ritrasse in carte / Per far fede qua giù del suo bel viso. / L'opra fu ben di quelle che nel cielo / Si Ponno imaginar, non qui tra noi, / Ove le membra fanno l'alma velo*"

artists began to offer painted substitutes for the Petrarchan absence of beauty by rendering female beauty ever more perceptible to the viewer's gaze.⁶¹ She also pointed out that in some cases a woman's beauty became a figure for the beauty of painting itself. In those instances, a sitter gave up her or his own identity to a kind of painting that is only concerned with art's capacity to render beauty visible to the mortal eye. Leonardo's lover removing the religious attributes of his image is only one powerful example of that trend, one verging close on idolatry. That the portrait could actually stand in for the absent beloved, either mortal or divine, was an invention of Renaissance artists, not of Petrarch, who had always felt a strong sense of absent beauty in his earthly life. In that sense, then, Michelangelo was more of a Petrarchan artist than any other artist before or after him.

Michelangelo knew Petrarch's oeuvre intimately. Literal quotations from the poet's corpus – his sonnets and the *Trionfo della Morte* – start to appear in the artist's writings around 1501, and at least one of Michelangelo's sheets suggests that he was able to repeat Petrarch's poetry verbatim.⁶² His biographer Condivi wrote that at the time Michelangelo was finishing the *Doni Tondo*, he "remained for some time doing almost nothing in these arts [of sculpture and painting], dedicating himself to the reading of poets and vernacular orators and to

⁶¹ Elizabeth Cropper, "The Beauty of Woman: Problems in the Rhetoric of Renaissance Portraiture," in *Rewriting the Renaissance. The Discourse of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1986, 175-90, 355-59. And also see her "On Beautiful Women: Parmigianino, Petrarchismo, and the Vernacular Style," *Art Bulletin* 58 (1976), 374-94; and "The Place of Beauty on the High Renaissance and its Displacement in the History of Art," in *Place and Displacement in the Renaissance*, ed. Alvin Vos, Binghamton (NY): Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1994, 159-205.

⁶² The first is a fragment from Petrarch's *Trionfo della Morte*, 2: 34. It is Saslow, 502 (no. A1), which must have been composed shortly after his arrival in Florence, in May 1501. Further literal references to Petrarch's poetry are Saslow, 507 (no. A13), composed *ca* 1505-06, which is, again, a quotation from Petrarch's *Trionfo della Morte*, this time slightly altered; and Saslow, 509 (no. A16), of unknown dating, quotes from Petrarch's same work; Saslow, 508 (no. A14), composed in 1505-06, which accompanies the Saint Anne drawing in the Louvre, recalls a line from Petrarch's Sonnet 129, 1: "*Di pensier ... / Chi dire' ch'ella f ... / di mie mano / Di pensier in pensier*" An almost verbatim transcription of Petrarch's sonnet no. 236 is Saslow, 515 (no. A31), which is perhaps composed *ca* 1534. Michelangelo quotes Petrarch once in a letter to Vittoria Colonna; *Carteggio*, 4: 102.

writing sonnets for his own pleasure.”⁶³ It is no coincidence that Michelangelo started writing Petrarchan poetry when he painted the *Doni Tondo*. Petrarch’s *Rime* offer a reflective mode on the limits of art’s ability to represent what remains essentially beyond representation. Such a reflection must, as a rule, first occur within a written medium, before it can be transposed to the visual realm.

Much of Michelangelo’s poetry is concerned with the dangers of sight and the need to control it.⁶⁴ His poems reveal an artist torn between a constant desire for the beauty he sees in mortal men and women and a need to control, stabilize and even reject sensory experience. At once his greatest love, beauty also is the “enemy,” his *beltà nemica*.⁶⁵ Of course, Michelangelo felt “split in two halves [*in due parte mi tiene*],” because of the opposition between the kind of earthly love that Leonardo’s Madonnas embrace and true religious piety that resists the love for mortal beauty.⁶⁶ In his poetry, we discover a Michelangelo who is highly skeptical of the capability of his eyes to behold truly divine beauty and the capacity of the visual arts to represent it. Because his sight only seemed to unleash uncontrollable desire and a need for possession, he grew increasingly hostile to sensory experience as a trustworthy source for religious and intellectual knowledge, as paradoxical as that may seem for a visual artist. This conflict once made him wish he was blind.⁶⁷

In a poem to Vittoria Colonna composed in the early 1540s, Michelangelo claimed that,

Even though rash and foolish minds derive
beauty (which moves every sound mind
and carries it to heaven) from the senses,

⁶³ Condivi, ed. Nencioni, 22: “*Se ne stette alquanto tempo quasi senza far niuna cosa in tal arte, dandosi alla lezione de’ poeti e oratori volgari e far sonetti per suo diletto*”

⁶⁴ The way that Michelangelo’s writing forms a poetic frame of reference for understanding the problems of sight, which are so central in his religious painting, remains unstudied. For helpful remarks on the relation between Michelangelo’s poetry and portraits of mortals, see the excellent essay by James Saslow, “The Unconsummated Portrait: Michelangelo’s Poems About Art,” in *The Eye of the Poet: Studies in the Reciprocity of the Visual and the Literary Arts from the Renaissance to the Present*, ed. Amy Golahmy, Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1996, 79-101.

⁶⁵ Saslow, 194 (no. 82).

⁶⁶ Saslow, 326 (no. 168).

⁶⁷ Saslow, 188 (no. 77).

unsound eyes can't move from the mortal to the divine,
and in fact are fixed forever in that place
from which to rise without grace is vain thought.⁶⁸

Michelangelo locates beauty elsewhere, not on earth but in the divine realm of God's creations, where it remains incomprehensible for the "unsound eyes" of a carnal viewer whose gaze remains "fixed forever" on earthly matter, that is, the gaze that Leonardo takes to be *his* God.

Desire is generated by a meeting of gazes at the moment a woman stares back. In Michelangelo's poetry, eyes sometimes feature as "magnets" of lustful distraction and at other instances, he finds them "burning."⁶⁹ In one of his first poetic exercises, rich in references to Petrarch and datable to the year he was working on the *Doni Tondo*, he wrote of a beautiful woman's "fair eyes," that would kill him on the return of his gaze.⁷⁰ Michelangelo's Petrarchan sonnets offer an interpretive frame for the turning pose of the Doni Madonna, who fixes a powerful stare at the Christ Child, at his "*somma bellezza*" in Vasari's words, and *not* on the viewer. Michelangelo took great care that the Virgin's pupils are barely visible. No Madonna in art history turns her pupils so far to the corner of her eyes.

Traces of Michelangelo's careful plotting out of the position of the Virgin's eyes are documented in one of only two surviving preparatory drawing for the *Tondo*, now in the Uffizi (Fig. 58). The drawing is made after an Alexandrian head, in the same collection, which it faithfully copies in its extreme foreshortening (Fig. 59). After copying the head, Michelangelo translated the drawing to panel, again paying more attention to the eyes than anything else. He slightly distorts the face in an attempt to force the Virgin's right eye in, which remains hidden behind the nose from the perspective he studied the Alexandrian work. It is as if that eye's near invisibility, still partly covered by Mary's nose, needs just

⁶⁸ Saslow, 322 (no. 164): "*S'e' giudizi temerari e sciocchi / al senso tiran la beltà, che muove / e porta al cielo ogni intelletto sano, / dal mortale al divin non vanno gli occhi / infermi, e fermi sempre pur là d'ove / ascender senza grazia è pensier vano.*" The poem was composed ca 1541-44 for Vittoria Colonna

⁶⁹ Saslow, 214-15 (no. 91), composed ca 1534-36. And Saslow, 113 (no. 34), composed ca 1526.

⁷⁰ Saslow, 68 (no. 3). The words accompany a drawing of horses for the Battle at Cascina Cartoon Michelangelo was working in the fall of 1504, around the time he was also occupied with the *Doni Tondo*.

enough visibility in order to claim that its essence – the pupil – remains beyond vision. In other words, a viewer can only know that this image of the Virgin is about the invisibility of her eyes, when eyes are represented at the verge of disappearance.

Not the Things of This World

Bringing the turning, anti-naturalistic Madonna of Michelangelo's *Tondo* in line with a Petrarchan mode of seeing, not only pushes Michelangelo's art back into the realm of the vernacular and away from the high-brow, Neo-Platonic humanism that is often read into his painting and sculpture;⁷¹ it also forces the artist back into the Christian tradition from which both Petrarch's poetry and Michelangelo's derived, the tradition that had always drawn a strong demarcation between this world and His, from the Bible and the writings of Augustine onwards.

In the years Michelangelo painted the *Doni Tondo*, the visibility of Christ in our world became the subject of debate, one of an unheard fanaticism, and as we will discover, intimately connected to the dramatic historical occurrences after the expulsion of the Medici. If Medici Florence put her faith in the visible and the kind of painting that substantiated that faith, then the culture of post-Medicean Florence left

⁷¹ For the supposed Neo-Platonic notions at the heart of Michelangelo's art and thought, see Panofsky, 1924, 65-71. And for an elaboration on Panofsky's thesis, see Summers, 1981, *passim*. Leaving aside the impossibility of Michelangelo discussing Plato with Lorenzo's de' Medici's Neo-Platonists in Latin (a language he did not master), the model of Petrarch offered above, supplies us with a more useful poetic frame in which to view Michelangelo's anti-sensory painting, especially when we study the artist's representation of female beauty (which is, of course not to claim that Petrarch remained untouched by Plato's writings). All the more since the invisibility of the Virgin's beauty was a theme that Michelangelo's contemporaries such as Bembo directly borrowed from Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, and not from Plato. Two important representatives of the Petrarchan understanding of the Virgin's beauty are Niccolò Franco, *Dialogo dove si ragiona delle bellezze*, Venice: Gardane, 1542, and the less well-known Notturmo Neapolitano, *Opera nova amorosa nele quale vi son uno capitolo di dolcezza e uno de le bellezze di Madonna*, Venice: G. de Rusconi, 1518. The idea, however, of Michelangelo as an artist-cum-Neoplatonic philosopher is especially tenacious in the Italian language publications; see, for example, Guglielmo Gorni, *Temi platonici in Michelangelo*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1995; and Maria Forcellino, "La corrente 'sprituali' nei disegni, dipinte e sculture di Michelangelo negli anni Quaranta," PhD diss., Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2007.

little of that belief intact. By the turn of the fifteenth century, seeing had become politics.

For Savonarola, God was invisible and of a nature beyond human measurement and understanding. "Come now, we want to imitate God, whom we do not see," he had exclaimed from the pulpit at San Marco already in 1493.⁷² In March 1496, he glossed the works of Augustine to bring his point home. "(M)any," he paraphrased the twelfth book of the *Literal Interpretation of Genesis*, "don't know that His doctrine was divine, because they don't have a good eye, nor a good hearing." In putting their sole faith in seeing, "that is, what first presents itself to the eyes," Savonarola says, Florentines had forgotten that sensory experience was incomplete knowledge and that it called for interpretation in the mind. Sensory knowledge was of a derivative kind; it was what he called seeing "by accident." True knowledge of God could only be registered by the mind's eye. As he explained, "Saint Augustine says that our eyes in Paradise will see the majesty of God, not that the eye sees the object proper, but it sees the light that is reflected by the bodies, which the intellect will judge and it will know that there is present God's majesty."⁷³ Privileging the mind's eye over exterior sight, this *de facto* leader of the Florentine Republic related the latter to the superficial way animals behold the world, easily deceived because lacking intellect. And he used the example of naturalistic painting to illustrate his argument: "There are certain painters who make figures appearing to be alive, but whoever has a good eye and a good imagination [*fantasia*], judges as soon as he sees that figure, that it is dead and does not have life, but whomever has a bad eye [*cattivo occhio*] will be deceived [*ingannato*] many times, and they will judge, when they see a man a little far off, that he were to be a living man." And so "the little pigeon that has no good eye would remain deceived, thinking that a painted grape were a natural one, every time he sees it."⁷⁴

⁷² SQB, 159: "Volumus ergo Deum imitari, quem non videmus."

⁷³ SAZ, 2: 275: "Dice santo Agostino vedrà la maestà di Dio, non che l'occhio la vegga per obietto proprio, ma vedendo la luce che nelli corpi resplenderà, iudicherà l'intelletto e conoscerà che quivi è presente la maestà di Dio."

⁷⁴ SAZ, 2: 275-76: "Verbigrazia, e' son certi dipintori che fanno figure che paion vive, ma chi ha buon occhio e buona fantasia, subito che vede quella figura, iudicia che la è morta e non è viva; ma chi avessi cattivo occhio saria qualche volta ingannato e giudicheria, vedendo là una figura d'un uomo un poco

What Savonarola held up as painting's greatest vice, Leonardo had of course understood as its virtue. "What would satisfy a painter more," the painter asked, "if not paintings that conform to the thing imitated so much that they deceive both men and animals?"⁷⁵ The fact itself that Savonarola's references are Plinian *topoi* is less interesting than what it shows about the historical specificity of the friar's art criticism, a man no less knowledgeable of the tropes of art writing than Leonardo.⁷⁶ Critique was pointed to the actuality of current artistic practice: to naturalism. And Savonarola's words on deception come strikingly close to the words de Holanda later attributed to Michelangelo, where the preacher's *ingannato* translated into Portuguese *engañar*, but surely also to Leonardo's positive use of the verb *ingagnare* when he compared painting to sculpture. The lack of *judicium* Savonarola attributed to animals and people of superficial sight, Michelangelo would later attribute to women, especially nuns, who are easily deceived by exterior appearances.

Savonarola's criticism formed part of a more widespread culture that questioned faith in sensory experience, a culture that cut deep enough to convert a humanist like Giovanni Nesi, a former member of Ficino's circle, who had dedicated one of his works to Piero de' Medici.⁷⁷ Once a believer in the truth of seeing, Nesi ventilated his distrust of sight as a source of trustable knowledge in his *Oraculum* of 1496, written in defense of Savonarola. Where philosophy first thought to claim the only true knowledge, the Christian faith now "unfolds to expose what is true of truth, which corporeal sensation [*sensui*] only partly reveals and to which our eyes are subjected."⁷⁸ Somewhat later, the call for a return to a

discosto, che 'l fussi un uomo vivo. ... Ma l'ucellino che non ha buon occhio, qualche volta resta ingannato e crede che quella uva dipinta sie naturale."

⁷⁵ Leonardo, ed Richter, 1: 56 (§22): "*ho visto ... una scimmia fa infinite pazzie contro ad un' altra scimmia dinpinta. Ho veduto le rondini volare e possarsi sopra li ferri dipinti, che sportano fori delle finestre delli edifitii.*" And Leonardo, ed. Farago, 215 (§19): "*Ch'el pittore non sattisfaccia più, no s'egli intanto pitture hauto tanta conformita con la cosa imitate che la ingannato homini et animali.*" And see the comments made by Farago, 318-20.

⁷⁶ Pliny, *Natural History*, 35.36.67.

⁷⁷ For Nesi, see Polizzotto, 1994, 102-08.

⁷⁸ Giovanni Nesi, *Oraculum de novo seculo*, ed. Cesare Vasoli, "Giovanni Nesi tra Donato Acciaiuolo e Girolamo Savonarola," *Memorie Domenicane* NS 4 (1973), 166-67: "... *christianem fidem ... tam aperto ostendit vero esse veriore, ut qua etiam sensui patent, oculisque nostris subiecta*

culture that privileged the mind's eye above corporeal seeing was articulated by Domenico Benivieni as a "searching for the interior simplicity of the soul by purifying it from all earthly infection, as also of the intellectual part and of the will as also of all the sensory parts of the whole body."⁷⁹ Benivieni's views were subscribed to by many writers of the period, including Michelangelo the poet. And yet, even without all those written sources, the sheer visual silence that came with the drop of artistic commissions after 1494 speaks most loudly of Florentines' distrust of exterior visuality.

Savonarola's, Nesi's and Benivieni's words go to the heart of the (Florentine) veristic tradition. The practice of representing divine figures under the conditions of naturalism was understood by these men as an impossible bridge between this world and that of God. That copula is deceiving for its failure to properly distinguish between the time of the world and eternal time. The true image of Christ and the saints in heaven is not one of the aesthetics of lived experience.⁸⁰ Once again citing Augustine, Savonarola emphasized the distinction between eternity, *aeternitas*, which has "neither beginning nor end and is perpetual and immobile," and the time of the world, *tempus*, which is subject to change and decay and has no "stability whatsoever, ... because the things of this world, which are measured by time, don't have any firmness whatsoever, as you can see [*come tu vedi*]."⁸¹ Michelangelo subscribed to

sunt, quae prima a philosophis principia nominantur minus sint omnino vera." Quoted in Brown, 2004, 33-34nt38.

⁷⁹ Ed. Garfagnini, in *Savonarole: Enjeux, Débats, Questions*, ed. A. Fontes, J.-L. Fournell and M. Plaisance, Paris: Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1997, 166: "*Dimostra [questo nuovo lume della fede] che non solamente l'uomo debbe amare e con sollecitudine cercare la semplicità interiore della anima per purificazione da ogni infeziane terrena, così nella parte della intelletto e della volontà come ancora nella parte sensitiva di tutto el corpo, ma che etiam debba volentieri abbracciare la semplicità esteriore, dimostrando che chi quella non ama e seguita secondo lo stato suo non può vivere da cristiano.*"

⁸⁰ For the "aesthetics of lived experience," see Hans Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, 3rd rev. ed., Tübingen: Mohr, 1972, 52-76.

⁸¹ SAT, 36-37: "*Pongano questi telologi disputando e fanno tre distinzioni, cioè aeternitas, aevum et tempus, cioè tre termini e tre misure. La prima, che è la eternità, questa non ha principio nè fine ed è perpetua e immobile quoad esse, cognoscere et operari, et haec soli Deo convenit, et est interminabilis vitae perpetua possessio. E quello che Dio conobbe ab aeterno, conosce ora e sempre conoscerà; e ab aeterno volse e determinò mandare in questo tempo queste tribulazioni per rinnovare la sua Chiesa. L'altra misura la chiamano aevum, e questa è delli angeli, e' quali hanno principio, ma non fine, di potenza ordinaria, benchè di potenza assoluta potrebbero aver fine, quando Dio volesse, e ancora*

the same view, albeit only in words in the late 1530s, in a poem for Tommaso Cavalieri reminiscent of Savonarolan thought:

For if my soul weren't created equal to God,
it would wish for nothing more than outward beauty,
which pleases the eye [*c' agli occhi piace*]; but since that's so deceptive
[*fallace*],
it rises beyond that, to the universal form.

I say that, for one who lives, whatever dies
cannot appease desire; nor can the eternal
be sought in time, where human flesh still alters.⁸²

Fashioning religious figures in the image and likeness of the things of this world confused the temporalities of time and eternity that Savonarola and Michelangelo tried to keep separated. Whatever freedom in realistic representation the Incarnation had allowed the Quattrocento painter, by the time Savonarola was preaching and the Medici were expelled from Florence, faith in the veristic tradition had started to waver. What could really excite Savonarola's discontent was "that Florentine custom" of making "the images of your gods in,

the likenesses [*similitudine*] of the figures you have painted in the churches; and youths go about saying of this woman or that one, 'She is the Magdalene, there is St. John, there's the Virgin;' because you have the figures in the churches painted to look like this or that woman, the which is ill done and contemptuous of holy things. You painters do ill: if

hanno qualche mutabilità circa medium, cioè in quanto alle operazioni loro. L'altra misura chiamano tempus, el quale tempo non ha stabilità alcuna, e però le cose di questo mondo, le quali misura el tempo, non hanno, come tu vedi, fermezza alcuna. L'intelletto dell'uomo ed el lume della ragione naturale è discosto dal lume della eternità in infinito. El lume della fede è lume sopranaturale, ed è più certo che non el lume naturale dello intelletto umano ed è dono di Dio dato all'uomo, che lo eleva più alto ch'el lume della ragione naturale. Così sono e' doni dello Spirito santo, come el dono della sapienza e del timore e gli altri; ed è questo lume sopranaturale una partecipazione del lume eterno. El lume de' beati è poi più alto e più certo ch'el lume della fede; ma all' uomo viatore, che vuole esser vero cristiano, è dato questo lume della fede, e sta fisso in quella, e crede certamente che la sia vera, ed è in lui più stabile questo lume che non è quello della ragione. E benchè le persone semplici non sappino così discorrere come e' dotti, niente di manco questo lume della fede è più fisso in loro che la ragione nei sapienti di questo mondo."

⁸² Saslow, 236-37 (no. 105).

you knew what spiritual confusion comes of it, as I do, you would not paint these things. ... And now the cult of God is destroyed!⁸³

Savonarola's rage against the understanding of God and the saints as *similar* to us, preached in March 1496 from the pulpit of Florence Cathedral, gained approval from an unexpected contemporary voice a year later. The humanist Adriani, no friend of Savonarola's, fulminated in his lectures at the Florentine *Studio* against the current understanding of God in the likeness of an ordinary Florentine patrician, a God who administrated power like a patron to his clients. But whereas Savonarola still argued for a certain reformed measurability of God, promising his audience richness, power and a beautiful city if they would subject themselves to God's laws, Adriani completely broke down that commensurability in his 1496 lectures for the patriciate's youth. Beginning his quest to re-establish the societal value of pagan authors (arguing against Savonarola), Adriani insisted on a purer conception of God, claiming, in Armando Verde's words, "God's non reducibility to human measure."⁸⁴ God was not the merchant Florentines had made him into. "God is not like us [*non esse eum similem nobis*]," Adriani lectured, and that is why God should not be "treated impiously because he is slow to punish."⁸⁵ Slowly distributing his punishments and

⁸³ SAZ, 2: 24-25: "Guardate che usanza ha Firenze: ... Le immagini dei vostri dei sono le immagini e similitudine della figure che voi fate dipingere nelle chiese, e i giovani poi vanno dicendo a questa donna ed a quell'altra: Costei é la Maddalena, quello é San Giovanni, ecco la Vergine; perché voi fate dipingere le figure nelle chiese alla similitudine di quella donna o de quell'altra, il che é molto mal fatto e in gran dispregio delle cose di Dio. Voi dipintori fatte male, ché se voi sapesse lo scandalo che ne segue, e quello che so io, voi non le dipingeresti. Voi mettete tutte le vanità nelle chiese. Credete voi che la Vergine Maria andasse vestita a questo modo come voi la dipingete? Io vi dico che ella andava vestita come una poverella, semplicemente e coperta che appena se gli vedeva il viso. Così, Santa Elisabetta andava vestita semplicemente. Voi fareste un gran bene a scancellarle queste figure che sono dipinte così disonestamente. Voi fate parere la Vergine Maria vestita come meretrice. Or sì che il culto di Dio é guasto!" Quoted in Hall, 516nt19.

⁸⁴ Armando Verde, *Lo Studio Fiorentino, 1473 – 1503: Ricerche e documenti*, 5 vols, Florence: Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, 1973-94, 4.3: 1310-11: "... affermazione della non riducibilità di Dio a misura umana."

⁸⁵ BRF, MS 811, fol. 20r: "Deumque non tam ob magnitudinem imperii superstitione colere et ob tarditatem suppliciorum impie de eo aliquid cogitare quam dare opera ut intelligamus non esse eum similem nobis." Cited in Brown, 2004, 28nt17.

blessings, God was more like a pharmacist, whose carefully administrated medicine takes some time to cure.⁸⁶

Not *simile* to us: the key word here is “likeness,” *similitudo*. Around the time Savonarola was preaching and Michelangelo was painting, a century of painting Christ and the saints in our image and likeness had passed without eliciting questions about its premises and consequences. And although the naturalism in such painting cannot be completely conceived of apart from the highbrow culture of Florentine humanism that praised it and its Netherlandish role models,⁸⁷ it was even more closely tied to the popular tradition of civic spectacle, which promoted the supreme visibility of God in our world. In the culture of pageantry, Florentines dressed up like saints, Christ or the Mother of God on the streets of Florence, giving a radical twist to the understanding of God in our image and likeness. Before the Medici expulsion, every three years on January 6, an elaborate Epiphany play was staged at San Marco. Florentines acting out the roles of the Virgin, Joseph and the Christ Child greeted a rich procession of kings and their entourage that started at the Piazza della Signoria, where Herod’s palace was located, and moved along the Via Larga past the Palazzo Medici to offer their gifts to the newborn.⁸⁸ If the Incarnation had made it possible for God to dwell in the time of the world, witnessed at least by contemporaries for thirty-three years, then Renaissance Florentines repeated that possibility in their own streets, moving the site of “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us (John, 1:14),” from the timeless world of the Bible to that of Renaissance Florence.

Pageantry was politics in Medici Florence. Members of the Medici family “played” religious figures on some occasions, rendering the saints in their *exclusive* likeness. They most often dressed up like religious characters on the day of the Epiphany, which was organized by the *Compagnia de’ Magi* operating under Medicean control. Florentines could

⁸⁶ BRF, MS 811, fol. 25v: “*Pena autem Deus utitur quasi pharmaco ... sic profecto divina nobis ingognita sunt.*” Cited in Brown, 2004, 28nt17.

⁸⁷ As was, of course, famously pointed out by Baxandall, 1971.

⁸⁸ Hatfield, 1970. For a good overview of the *Sacra rappresentazioni* in Florence in the third quarter of the fifteenth century, see Nerida Newbigin, “ ‘The Word Made Flesh’: The *Rappresentazioni* of Mysteries and Miracles in Fifteenth-Century Florence,” in *Christianity and the Renaissance* (1990), 361-75.

witness Cosimo, Piero, and Lorenzo dressed up like the Holy Kings (the Magi were considered holy since the Middle Ages) in a religious drama.⁸⁹ It was a drama re-represented, in turn, in the private chapel at Palazzo Medici, where the same members of family appear in the guise of the three Magi (Fig. 60). More than a visible rendition of the Word of the Bible, Gozzoli's decoration stood for the re-incarnation of that Word in Medicean Florence.⁹⁰ The chapel's decoration stands at a double remove from biblical truth, double because it is not a representation of the Magi but one of the Medici *playing* them.

Dressing up in the streets of Florence or appearing in fresco in a private chapel as one of the Three Holy Kings was one thing, representing a Medici sibling as the Christ Child quite another. Yet this was exactly what happened on the Feast of Epiphany in 1449, with Lorenzo de' Medici. Although Lorenzo was born on January 1, Piero postponed his son's baptism five days and orchestrated luxuriously dressed entourage to accompany him and his newborn from Palazzo Medici to the Baptistery in a procession not unlike the Magi giving their tribute to the Christ Child. And we may presume that they offered the newborn the customary gifts after baptism. The literal meaning of Epiphany as the first *visual* presentation of the Incarnate God to the world was translated that day into the deliverance of Lorenzo as the future leader of the Florentine Republic to the eyes of the Florentine citizenry, an epiphany claiming unprecedented symbolic space and time by a single Florentine family.⁹¹ But the staging also allowed for the even more radical possibility that the baptism of a newborn on January 6 cast that child explicitly in the role of the Christ Child, for it was on the Feast of the Epiphany that Christ was baptized in the Jordan by Saint John the Baptist. That day in January 1449 could thus be understood as a

⁸⁹ For the celebration of the Three Kings as saints, see E. Kehre, *Die heiligen drei Könige in Literatur und Kunst*, 2 vols, Leipzig: Seemann, 1908, 1: 75-95. As Kehre, 1: 75, points out, the Magi were canonized through popular culture, to become patrons in the broadest meaning of the word. The collection of relics in the great European cities probably contributed to their "canonization." For Lorenzo de' Medici's political use of the *feste*, different from that of his father and grandfather, see Nerida Newbigin, "Piety and Politics in the *Feste* of Lorenzo's Florence," in *Lorenzo Il Magnifico* (1994), 17-41.

⁹⁰ For Gozzoli's frescoes as a representation of the feast of the Magi and the portraits incorporated in the paintings, see D.V. Kent, 2001, 313-315.

⁹¹ See Trexler, 1978, 293-308.

celebration of the Epiphany of baby Lorenzo *as* the Christ Child. It was through gestures like these that the populace under the Medici regime put their political and religious faith in the Medici. After the Medici expulsion, the public mystery plays disappeared from the Florentine streets, the *Compagnia de' Magi* was abolished and the Feast of the Epiphany only celebrated within the impenetrable confines of the convent of San Marco, where the former confusion between heaven and everyday reality celebrated under Medicean politics was reduced to an interior cult, whose celebration was only visible through cracks in the church's doors.⁹²

I do not think that the political dimension of Savonarola's arguments against the cult of the outward eye, the "*ceremonie di fuori*", was lost on his audience.⁹³ The criticism of the saints painted like contemporary Florentines quoted above, for instance, was included in the sermon, already referred to in the last chapter, in which he launched his critique of the family that patronized San Marco.



Post-Medicean unease with visuality as a carrier of political, religious and social truths cast painting in the privileged but difficult role of re-defining that visual truth. Any kind of Florentine painting produced after 1494 therefore wrestled with the same problem that Charles Barber recognized in the imagery produced in the wake of Byzantine iconoclasm. Artists, Barber writes, "tried to provide an answer to the iconoclasts' question as to how the icon could truthfully show the things it purported to describe."⁹⁴ Such an answer of necessity entailed a shift from *what* the image shows to *how* it shows. The making of images hence became a matter of the truth of painting.

How true is knowledge gained from the senses and presented in a painting? The question forced a clear divide between those who argued for the completion and perfection of visual knowledge and those who argued against it. Leonardo, of course, was in the first camp, presenting

⁹² Hatfield, 1970, 121-22.

⁹³ Savonarola used the term *ceremonie di fuori* in SRM, 1: 95; cited in Hall, 515nt11.

⁹⁴ Charles Barber, *Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm*, Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press, 2002, 62.

his panel painting as a form of finished knowledge, as a source of knowing in and of itself that *substitutes* for the thing it claims to *represent*. Michelangelo, on the other hand, claimed that visual knowledge was never complete and finished. While limiting sight itself *in* the painting through an anti-descriptive manner and rendering the Virgin visible in her near invisibility, he gave just enough signs to stimulate meditation, without ever pretending that the visibility of this Holy Family was completed in the painting itself. It is only through contemplating the sensorily indifferent representation of the figures that knowledge of God can truthfully be attained. Associating facile visual understanding with the naturalistic painters he came to oppose, the Michelangelo of the *Doni Tondo* argues that true understanding only exists in the way that painting limits its own visibility. We hear Michelangelo arguing against the deceiving nature of oil paint and in favor of a kind of painting that restricts its own visible access through, what he called, in De Holanda's *Dialogues*, "the difficulty of a perfection which is bound up in union with God." It is a kind of art that finds its only parallel in another invisible form of expression, "it is a music and a melody which only intellect can understand, and that with great difficulty."⁹⁵ For Michelangelo, the difficulty of understanding *how* and not just *what* an image represents, generates meaning in itself. He defined painting not simply as a medium that hides behind what it represents but as a vehicle that relates to and defines its own mediating function. With its emphasis on contour, flat surface, impossible poses, "wrong" anatomy, unnatural colors and metallic surface, he made sure that his painting does not collapse into the world of the viewer *in front of it*, but moves *backwards*, to a beyond that is not made "of the things of this world."

The intellectual basis of painting Michelangelo claimed in his *Doni Tondo* and in the presence of de Holanda is a familiar one in the historiography of Italian Renaissance art, a claim that is often tied to the social rise of the artist. That rise is often measured in relation to the culture of literary production the artist supposedly became more and more engaged in. The better an artist's knowledge of texts and the kind of knowledge enclosed in them, the more advanced his social position. It is the kind of historical construction, of course, that implies an artist

⁹⁵ De Holanda, ed. and tr. Folliero-Metz, 77.

working towards an abnegation of his own *visual* profession in favor of one that is *literary*.⁹⁶ Such a reconstruction, by implication, denies the ever expanding emancipation of the artist's profession that features in Vasari's *Lives* and in the foundation of professional strongholds such as the Accademia del Disegno in the sixteenth century. It needs emphasis that Michelangelo, and artists like him, presented visual knowledge as a distinctive kind of knowledge, a form of knowing that cannot be retrieved from any other medium. Michelangelo tried to define his profession as a special mission within the society of sixteenth-century Florence, one that consciously set painting apart from other containers of meaning, such as books and sermons, and as such enjoyed quite an autonomous place in history.

In that sense, then, the project of Michelangelo's *Doni Tondo* presents a pre-modern case of the aesthetics that Hegel was later to define: the work of art as a source of knowledge contained within the frame and thus independent from text or the rest of the world's natural and cultural production. And Hegel was certainly right in claiming that the modern conception of the picture arose from church painting.⁹⁷ Yet Michelangelo's was a historical mission, and one pointed towards the utilitarian function of art, which a Hegelian claim to autonomy, of course does not allow for. His call was to define once and for all the place of panel painting in the religious life of post-Medicean Florence, and, with it, the place of imagery in Florentine society. In a world that had recently begun to lose faith in the visual arts altogether, that rather listened to sermons and, as we shall see, prayed without the aid of imagery than commissioning new works of art, Michelangelo could not do otherwise than define the devotional image in relation to other imagery instead of in relation to text. By thus showing that true knowledge of the Incarnate God could only be seen within the boundaries of Doni's *Tondo*, Michelangelo argued for the autonomy of *his* painting, as the only authoritative path to theological truths. As such, the painting itself

⁹⁶ An important recent example of measuring an artist's social emancipation in relation to literary professions is Francis Ames-Lewis, *The Intellectual Life of the Early Renaissance Artist*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000. And see the review by Stephen J. Campbell, in *The Art Bulletin* 83 (2001), 150-52.

⁹⁷ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Aesthetics*, transl. T.M. Knox, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.

speaks most eloquently of its unique status in the society of early sixteenth-century Florence.

A New Vision

Michelangelo claimed his *Tondo* to be the perfect theological image, one that always points beyond what is readily visible. Such a claim is directed at a viewer who is ready to see beyond. It is, however, extremely difficult to find words for the kind of relationship between viewer and artwork that the painting posits. Sixteenth-century art theory never found an eloquent way to articulate it. I think that the incapability to find words for Michelangelo's *Tondo* is a direct result of the theological arguments the painting makes. If we understand theology as occupying itself with what Saint Paul called the "substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" and painting as dealing with the visible,⁹⁸ we start to see how badly equipped art theory is to describe something beyond visibility, even more so since much of Quattrocento and Cinquecento writing on art is exactly concerned with the art-after-nature-cliché at which Michelangelo directed his criticism. And of course we are not much helped by the recent history of our own discipline either. Ernst Gombrich replaced vision – the occupation of the theologian – with perception – the domain of a scientifically grounded looking at images and displaced the religious devotee with the scientifically oriented viewer of Leonardo's notebooks. Such an approach claims the Renaissance as a proto-scientific age, with Leonardo as its pinnacle, at the cost of the Christian foundation of religious imagery. Gombrich seems to have forgotten about the *function* of Christian imagery.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ For a discussion of the problem in relation to medieval art, see Jeffrey Hamburger, "Introduction," in *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, ed. Hamburger and Anne Marie Bouché, Princeton (NJ): Princeton University Press, 2006, 8.

⁹⁹ In a recent study of Italian Renaissance art, Klaus Krüger recently tried to find a way out of the tradition founded by Gombrich, although never mentioning his opponent by name. Defining the image as "a veil of the invisible [*Schleier des Unsichtbaren*]," Krüger essentially pushed back the early modern image into the domain of image theology formerly considered the exclusive domain of the un-modern middle ages. According to Krüger, the Renaissance image performs a mediating function, both between Renaissance art theory and medieval theology and between the visible and the invisible. "What presents itself here is a concept of the image [*Bild*] as a surface, which frees itself from the material tangibility and, to a certain

If we define Michelangelo's painting as a work for personal devotion, a definition substantiated in the last section of this chapter, we must know how an early sixteenth-century devotee used it. Clear cut rules for the use of religious art did not exist in the period; preachers merely pointed out deficiencies. But at least we know that people prayed in front of paintings. Prayer manuals often remain frustratingly vague about what is actually going on between image and devotee. Yet what cannot be described in words, not in religious and art theoretical treatises, can be expressed in paint. A long tradition visualized the relationship between devotee and devotional painting, that is in pictures that include a suppliant. In Masaccio's *Trinity*, the donors are depicted in profile, spatially emancipated from the "space" where Masaccio envisions the Trinity (Fig. 61). They have their eyes opened but are not looking at the Trinity; they stare at each other. Having represented them in the act of prayer, Masaccio unveils for *our* corporeal eye what remains for *them* beyond sight. The Trinity becomes vision, not perception. The device used by Masaccio carried a somewhat universal value in Western European painting of the early modern period. It found an intimate Venetian counterpart in Titian's *Pesaro Madonna* (Fig. 62), for instance, where the profiled donors do not actually register the Madonna and saints with their eyes but are only able to see in meditative prayer what remains beyond sensory perception.¹⁰⁰

extant, comes to exist without its own 'body,' without its own reality." While the image at the same time hovers between its " 'existence [Seinsart]' as medium and membrane," that is, it simultaneously affirms and grows above its medium conditions; see *Das Bild als Schleier des Unsichtbaren: Ästhetische Illusion in der Kunst der frühen Neuzeit in Italien*, Munich: Fink, 2001, with quotations at 31, 95: "Was hier vor Augen steht, ist letztlich ein Konzept vom Bild als einer Fläche, die sich der stofflichen Faßbarkeit enthebt und gleichsam ohne eigenen 'Körper,' ohne Eigenwirklichkeit besteht." And "seine 'Seinsart' als Medium und Membran. " Although he addresses the problem I think the *Doni Tondo* occupied itself with – although not studying that painting – Krüger does not explain the consequences of his study for the functionality of early-modern art and fails to make his arguments historical (most of the sources he mentions to substantiate his claims date to the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, whereas his visual material dates to the fifteenth and sixteenth).

¹⁰⁰ See Philipp Fehl, "The *Pesaro Madonna*," in *Decorum and Wit: The Poetry of Venetian Painting. Essays in the History of the Classical Tradition*, ed. Józef Grabski, Vienna: IRSA, 1992, 30-43 (37). Originally published as "Saints, Donors and Columns in Titian's *Pesaro Madonna*," in *Renaissance Papers 1974*, ed. Dennis G. Donovan and A. Leigh Deneef, Durham (NC): Duke University Press, 1975, 75-85. And for early Italian examples of the suppliant in painting, see

Their eyes fixed on nothingness, these donors receive images exclusively from mental effort. What these painters represent can be defined as the figuration of aniconic prayer, devotion that no longer needs an image because imagery is generated by the mind's eye. It is the subject of many a prayer manual published in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern era, both North and South of the Alps. Savonarola published one in scholastic style in 1492, the *Treatise in Defense and Commendation of Mental Prayer*, excerpts of which had already circulated in his sermons and continued to do so until his death.¹⁰¹ Rather than instructing the devotee in practicalities such as the offices of the holy mass, Savonarola wrote in defense of the practice of mental prayer itself. It is a typical product of the Governo Popolare; not concerned only with the subject of prayer proper but also with its historical erosion in the Quattrocento. Savonarola laments the decline of the private and secluded prayer of the "Primitive Church," which he thought the fifteenth century had replaced with the public ceremonies of spoken and outward piety. Praying, Savonarola argued, had become a question of seeing and being seen, of perception and showing, of a devotee who privileged the high visibility of earthly goods above the invisibility of spirituals ones.¹⁰² In its place, Savonarola plead for a return to the kind of devotion that fashioned the image of God in one's heart: "God ... is in the minds of all the people ... and that is why he is neither to be sought

Victor M. Schmidt, *Painted Piety: Panel Paintings for Personal Devotion in Tuscany, 1250 – 1400*, Florence: Centro Di, 2005, 107-40.

¹⁰¹ Published in Savonarola, *Operette spirituali*, 2 vols, ed. Maria Ferrara, Rome: Angelo Belardetti, 1976, 1: 159-85.

¹⁰² Ibid., 176, 184-85: "[Nostro Salvatore] s'intendo chiaramente che Dio cerca da noi el culto interiore sena tante cerimonie; e così nella primitiva Chiesa si servava che gli cristiani allora intanto vacavano al spirito che non si ricordavano delle cose mondane, e non gli bisognava canti né organi a levare la mente loro in alto." "E questo vediamo a' tempi moderni per esperienza chiara: che molti uomini e donne, domandati spirituali, sono perseverati molti anni nella orazione vocale e in questo cerimonie esteriore, e nientedimeno sono quel medesimo che prima. Noi gli veggiamo essere senza spirito, senza gusto, amatori delle cose terrene, sensuali nel vivere; cicalano volentieri e massimamente de' fatti d'altri, e fannosi beffe dell' altri, dileggiando li semplici e retti di core; non si compungono de' loro peccati; partigiani de' religiosi di diversi ordini; vanagloriosi, invidiosi e superbi, e più duri di core che tutti gli altri uomini; portano loro la trave nell' occhio e vanno guardanda la festuca del compagno. E questo avviene a loro perché, non facendo orazione mentale, non sono illuminati da Dio, né hanno alcuna deletteazione interiore, e però si diffondono nelle esteriore consolazione."

in Heaven nor on earth, but in your own heart.”¹⁰³ Again building on a long Christian tradition, he spoke for a return to an internalized cult and an interiorized image of God that remains beyond corporeal perception.¹⁰⁴ And interestingly enough, Savonarola compared knowledge of God to a desire for an absent love, an absence that makes itself present in prayer only after long and lonely contemplation. “It is impossible that the lover doesn’t delight himself in the presence of the thing loved, and that is why there is not a thing that he who lives in charity loves more than God, and who is made present in prayer.”¹⁰⁵

In the *Treatise on mental prayer*, Savonarola came close to a practice of prayer that made do without the image altogether. In other writings, however, he did allow for devotion to commence with corporeal sight, but only as a starting point for mental vision. In his *Triumphus Crucis* of 1497, he explained how an image of a Crucifix might serve as a convenient point of departure. He still added that although knowledge of God must necessarily start from the senses, true knowledge of the divine can only be achieved by the mind, which interiorizes sensory impulses and transforms these into internal imagery.¹⁰⁶ For Savonarola, such a use of imagery did not necessitate complex visual constructions; in most cases he indeed recommended images that invite relatively easy visual access. For Michelangelo, in contrast, devotion started with visual complexity. Michelangelo defined painting itself as an image of mental effort, as a vision acquired through long contemplation on the difficulties of understanding an art that is not the direct result of perception. In a way, then, Michelangelo’s image was not very different from the images received by the supplicants in the paintings discussed above, the

¹⁰³ Ibid., 166-67: “Dio è per tutto e in ogni luogo, e in tutte le mente umane, e maxime abita per grazia nelle anime de’ giusti; e però non è da cercarlo né in cielo né in terra, ma nel proprio core.”

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 168: “... così come l’anima umana può essere senza il corpo, così la orazione mentale può essere senza la vocale”

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 173: “Item, non è possibile che lo amante non si diletta della presenza della cosa amata; sed sic est che colui che è in carità, non ha cosa che più ami che Dio, e nella orazione Dio si fa presente.” The idea of imagining absence in the heart after intense contemplation was familiar to Michelangelo. In some of his poems he spoke of beauty that can only be imagined in the heart, and in another of no mortal face that can equal the one “painted in the heart.” See Saslow, 118-19 (nos. 38 and 49).

¹⁰⁶ Savonarola, *Triumphus Crucis: testo in latino e volgare*, ed. Mario Ferrara, Rome: Angelo Belardetti, 1961, 295-99. See Steinberg, 1978, 47-48, and Burke, 2004, 169, for comments on the role Savonarola attributes to imagery in this passage.

intensity of their mental efforts readable in their faces as they fix their eyes on nothing at the moment when interior contemplation detaches them from the world. Yet the *Doni Tondo* places *us* as the physically detached devotees of the supplicant paintings. With unprecedented profundity, the Holy Family is presented to us as a vision.

The painting's elaborate frame serves to substantiate that presentation. First, the gilded piece of carpentry makes sure that we understand the figures as separated from our world, a separation that their conformity to the limits of the frame only emphasizes. Whereas painters like van Eyck, Bellini, Titian and others of a naturalistic bent, deny the frame's separating function by making the "real" frame congruent with the painted architecture wherein the religious figures are painted, that of the *Doni Tondo* could not announce the boundaries between paint and reality more clearly. Second, and even more to the point, the frame offers a model for the way in which we see the Holy Family. The five carved heads, probably designed by Michelangelo himself and executed by Francesco del Tasso, can be identified as prophets and sibyls and the one at the top as Christ,¹⁰⁷ at the age of the Crucifixion (Fig. 63). (The latter identification is substantiated by its similarity to the head of the *Santo Spirito Christ* Michelangelo produced some ten years earlier [Fig. 64], a similarity that also argues in favor of the attribution of the frame's design to Michelangelo.) Carved prophets and sibyls in the frame were rare yet meaningful.¹⁰⁸ Bowing their heads towards the picture plain, they look at what unfolds in the image: the Incarnation of God which they had prophesized. Outside the image but peeking in, they are carved as recipients of the mental vision that cannot be seen in the world *ante legem* with the corporeal eye. As prophets of the coming of Christ, they therefore stand as the epitomes of vision.

Direct witnesses of the Incarnate God were few. Most fellow-inhabitants of the world in which Christ lived his incarnated life were

¹⁰⁷ De Tolnay, 1947, 166. But also see Natali, "L'antico, le Scritture e l'occasione. Ipotesi sul Tondo Doni," In *Il Tondo Doni* (1985), 21-37, who, in an ultimate attempt to argue that the Incarnation stands at the center of the *Tondo's* iconography, contended that the two later, feminized heads represent Annunciate angels.

¹⁰⁸ Precedents for Michelangelo's frame can be found in Timothy J. Newberry, George Bisacca and Laurence B. Kanter, *Italian Renaissance Frames*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1990, 34-35 (Catalogue numbers 2 and 3).

unable to understand that what they witnessed with their corporeal eye was nothing less than God Made Flesh. The most privileged and first witnesses of the Incarnation were the Virgin and Joseph. In Michelangelo's painting, all eyes are fixed on the newborn; the Christ Child forms the focus of a scene of viewing that takes the properties of sight as its subject. Joseph stares, almost obsessively; the little Saint John pauses on his way to maturity – maturity displayed by his proleptic cross – to peek from behind the figure group, doing nothing more than looking; and no Virgin in the history of art makes such a hard effort to look as the Doni Madonna, her pupils nearly disappearing in the corners of her eyes. Here, *within* the frame, sight is perception and *not* vision.

And this brings us back to the iconography of the painting. Many reasons could have led Michelangelo to transform the theme of Saint Anne, from which, I argued earlier, the Doni composition departed (from the drawing in the Louvre), into a Holy Family, and the role of the patron (as we will see, just planning a family for himself) can be accounted among the most plausible of these. However, Michelangelo's radical interpretation of that subject-matter can surely not be attributed to Doni. Saint Joseph's role is crucial. Nourisher of Christ's human body, he was also the first to behold the Incarnation. Bernard of Clairveaux had been instrumental in spreading the importance of Joseph's extraordinary role across Europe, substantiating it with reference to Christ's words to the Apostles (Luke 10:24): " 'I tell you, many prophets and kings wished to see what you see but did not see, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it'." According to Bernard, Saint Joseph "was not only given to see and hear [the Incarnated God], but also to carry in his arms, to lead by the hand, and to nourish and watch over the infant Saviour."¹⁰⁹ What

¹⁰⁹ "Sancti Bernardi Abbatis Clarae-Vallensis Sermones de Tempore," *In Adventu Domini. De Laudibus Virginis Matris: Super verbu Evangelii: 'Missus est angelus Gabriel', Homilae II: 16*, in Migne, 1862, CLXXXIII, cols. 69D-70A: "Non est dubiam quin bonus et fidelis homo fuerit iste Joseph, cui Mater desponsata est Salvatoris. Fidelis, inquam, servus et prudens, quem constituit Dominus suae matris solatium, suae carnis nutritium, solum denique in terris magni consilii coadjutorum sibi fidelissimum. ... et dedit illi non ignarum esse mysterii, quod nemo principum hujus saeculi agnovit: cui denique datum est quod multi reges et prophetae, cum vellent videre, non viderunt; audire et non audierunt; non solum voidere et audire, sed etiam portare, deducere, amplecti, deosculari, nutrire et custodire." Translation cited in Carolyn C. Wilson, *Saint Joseph in Florentine Society and Art: New Directions and Interpretations*, Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2001, 4. Bernard of Clairveaux's teachings were known in Florence. He

remained mere vision for extra-pictorial bystanders placed *after* the Incarnation in time and for the prophets and sibyls placed *before* is revealed to the senses of Joseph, the Virgin and the little Saint John. Their corporeal seeing was, however, always enhanced by knowledge of what they saw: the Christ Child born into this world with the sole purpose of dying at the cross, the ultimate sacrifice that would redeem mankind. The idea that seeing is knowing is exemplified in the little Saint John, whom at first sight although still a child *knew* that he *saw* the sacrificial lamb of God (*Ecce Agnus Dei*) in Christ's humanity. And it is knowledge visualised, again, in the carved head of Christ in the frame, where the God of the Crucifixion stares at his own infancy – a temporal pull across the time of the painting that serves as yet another attempt to upset any reading of the image in terms of historical narrative. It is theological and not corporeal sight that Michelangelo put to work here. In his commentary on Girolamo Benivieni's *Canzone dello Amor celeste e divino*, published in the opening years of the Cinquecento, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola thought that the example of prophetic vision was sufficient to explain what theological sight was: "There are two kinds of seeing, one corporeal and the other non-corporeal The other is that of the capacity of the mind ..., with that sight saw Moses, saw Paul, saw many other elected the face of God, and the one our theologians call intellectual understanding [*cognitione intellettuale*], not intuitive understanding."¹¹⁰

Seeing and showing find intimate affiliation in the way that Mary's arm frames Christ's humanity, in two dimensions like an image within an image. Leo Steinberg already noted the act of showing that happens

served as the patron saint of the chapel of the Signoria at Palazzo della Signoria, which altar carried Filippo Lippi's *Vision of St Bernard*, now in the National Gallery, London; see M. Lesche. " 'The Vision of St Bernard' and the Cult of the Priors: Private and Public Images of Bernard of Clairveaux in Renaissance Florence," PhD diss. Columbia University, 1979. For the reception of Bernard's writings in Early Modern Europe, see the essays collected in *Bernhard von Clairveaux: Rezeption und Wirkung in Mittelalter und in der Neuzeit*, ed. Kaspar Elm, Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1994.

¹¹⁰ Benivieni, 1512, fol. 23r.: "Sono due visi, luno corporale, laltro incorporale Laltro e quella potentia dell'anima ..., co[n] questo viso vide Moyse, vide Paulo, viddono molti altri eletti la faccia di Dio, & questo quello che nostri Theologi chiamana la cognitione intellettuale, cognito ne intuita, con questo viso Giovanni evangelista dice, e giustihavere ad vedere el sommo Dio, & questa essere tutta la mercede nostra."

there, which highlights Christ's genitals. He explained that these genitals are the very symbol of human frailty, concluding that they therefore stand as the most univocal declaration of what he so aptly called the "humanization of God."¹¹¹ Michelangelo, if he had indeed wanted to, could have easily covered the genitals by painting Mary's hand over them. Covering would have only involved a shift of that hand by less than a few centimeters, as prudish publishers discovered early in the last century, when they retouched Mary's hand in photographs of the tondo, moving it a little to the left, where it comfortably covered the child's member.¹¹²

The Restoration of Painting

In the *Doni Tondo* Michelangelo restored vision and perception to their respective domains in image making. His effort to reverse the trend of naturalism conveyed a sense of retrospection, a willingness to return the present state of imagery to a point further back in history than the Medici intervention. Savonarola often spoke of the year 1434, when Cosimo returned from exile and founded his ruling dynasty, as the year wherein religious, cultural and political pollution had set in.¹¹³ For the preacher, reversing that culture meant a return to primitive Christianity, to a faith uncorrupted by recent historical developments. For his call to a more "primitive" social order Savonarola was most remembered. Bartolommeo Cerretani summarized the friar's impact in Florence by calling attention to his "new way of preaching, like an Apostle, reverting to the simplicity of the primitive Church."¹¹⁴ We have seen in Chapter 1 how a similar kind of return in history informed post-Medicean political reform and the reform of institutions such as the Florentine Wool Guild and the Opera del Duomo.

For Michelangelo the path to historical recovery led him deep in time, to Giotto and his contemporaries. His drawings after Giotto are

¹¹¹ Steinberg, 1996, 11, 64.

¹¹² Ibid., 192-94 (figs 223-24).

¹¹³ For instance, SAT, 256-57: "*Considera un poco e rècati a memoria dall'anno del '34 in qua quante ruine e subversioni sono state nella tua città, e quante mutazioni e revulazioni ci sono state.*"

¹¹⁴ Cerretani, *Storia*, ed. Berti, 192: "... *introduxi quasi nuovo modo di pronuntiare il verbo d' Iddio, cioè al' apostolescha ... il suo fine era ... introdurre la semplicità della primitiva chiesa.*"

well-known, and his veneration for the old master is recorded by contemporaries.¹¹⁵ As modern as Michelangelo's *Tondo* might have looked at completion in 1506, and in spite of all its ambitious turning figures and foreshortenings, the high-pitched clarity of its technique evokes medieval panel painting and thus works against the self-proclaimed modernism of contemporary naturalistic art. Standing out as a fluorescent exception for viewers used to the toned-down colors of Flemish painting, its Florentine equivalents and Leonardo's *Sfumato*, the image is best compared to Duecento and Trecento panel painting. In its coloring, Michelangelo's painting stands close, for instance, to the polyptych Giotto had produced in 1300-02 for the high altar of the Badia fiorentina, the oldest abbey in the city (Fig. 65). Giotto's Saint John the Evangelist, although now in need of restoration, still shows the glimmering contrast between the blues of his robe and the pinkish color of the fabric draped over his left shoulder that Michelangelo adopted in the remarkable paring of the same colors in his Madonna. Michelangelo added a strikingly disrupting green that nestles in and around Mary's lap, between these colors only to heighten their contrast. Bearing no likeness to the greens of nature, Michelangelo's green is of the same unnaturalistic sort that Giotto employed in so many of *his* panel paintings; among them the large Madonna panel at Ognissanti, the ambitious *Dormition of the Virgin* at the same church and the altarpiece for the Baroncelli Chapel at Michelangelo's parish church of Santa Croce. But the *Doni Tondo* stays close to two other aspects of the Badia altarpiece as well. Michelangelo modeled the facial features of his Saint Joseph on those of Giotto's Saint Francis, at the extreme right of the polyptych (Figs 66 and 67): head inclined, bearded, his eyes cast down and sporting a long nose. In addition, Giotto had used the same device of the frame to announce that his painted figures should be understood as a vision. The Trecento frame also includes five figures. Four angels – one of them looking at the Madonna in the central panel – flank a figure of Christ, represented at the age of the Crucifixion, like Michelangelo's.

¹¹⁵ Giovanni Battista Gelli, for example, recorded Michelangelo staring for hours at Giotto's fresco in the Bardi Chapel, Santa Croce, and at Giotto's now lost paintings at Piazza Gianfigliuzzi; see Girolamo Mancini, "Vite d' Artisti di Giovanni Battista Gelli," *Archivio Storico Italiano* (5th series) 17 (1896), 32-62 (41-42).

Michelangelo only replaced the divine messengers announcing the coming of Christ with four prophets who do and see the same.

Michelangelo's acquaintance with medieval art went deeper than copying its hard-edged color-scheme or its perception of painting as vision. He also knew the technique of pre-Renaissance panel painting intimately. Just before he set out to paint the *Doni Tondo*, he had experimented with the medieval tempera technique in a now lost altarpiece of *Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata*, produced in 1496 for San Montorio in Rome. The panel, now lost, is recorded in several sources as painted in tempera. That contemporaries cared enough to mention the medium implies that they considered the panel as an exception in a world dominated by oil paintings. More important, that exception was understood as an archaism. In the first edition of Michelangelo's *Vita*, Vasari wrote that the panel was "painted in the old manner [*nella maniera antica*]... in tempera," and Varchi, too, described its *maniera antica*.¹¹⁶ That *antica* should not to be rendered here as *all' antica*, in the classical manner, is clear from these texts, as well as a Spanish source that reports the *Saint Francis* as "being in that delicate manner of the tempera painters of that time [*aquella manera delicada de los templecistas en cuyo tiempo se hizo*]." ¹¹⁷

But Michelangelo's exercise in archaism was not a great success. Criticism mounted in the sixteenth century already, and some writers came to doubt that Michelangelo had been responsible for its execution. Such archaism, the argument presumably went, could not be attributed to the painter of monuments in the *maniera moderna*, such as the Sistine Chapel. Alternative attributions were put forward, even acribing the panel to Perugino, that epitome of old-fashioned painting in sixteenth-

¹¹⁶ Vasari, 6: 15: "Dipinse nella maniera antica una tavola a tempera d'un San Francesco con le stimate" Varchi, MS 1564, 16: "Lascierò indietro una tavola, che egli dipinse a tempera secondo la maniera antica, dove è un divotissimo San Francesco, quando egli chiese a M. Domeneddio e meritò d'avere le stimate; la quale tavola si ritrova in Roma, nella prima cappella a mano sinistra quando l'uomo entra nella chiesa di San Piero a Montorio; né si può lodare degnamente se non col dire che ella fu fatta da Michelangelo."

¹¹⁷ All these sources are collected in Giovanni Agosti and Michael Hirst, "Michelangelo, Piero d'Argenta and the 'Stigmatisation of St Francis'," *The Burlington Magazine* 138 (1996), 683-84.

century art historical accounts.¹¹⁸ Perhaps in defense of the hero of his *Vite*, Vasari changed his 1550 account in his new edition of 1568. He attributed the design of the painting to Michelangelo and its execution in tempera to an assistant, Pietro d'Argenta.¹¹⁹ It seems that Michelangelo had already anticipated that criticism in the *Doni Tondo*. Ever hypersensitive to criticism, he made sure that the *Tondo* partly hides its archaic agenda by maintaining the old fashioned technique but applying it with the modern oil medium.

And yet, Michelangelo was not alone in his veneration for old painting at that time. In the post-Medicean years, Florentine patrons ceased to commission new works of art and started to shift their attention to pre-Renaissance ones, of which the *Madonna dell' Imbruneta* referred to in Chapter 2 is only one example. For instance, a much venerated late fourteenth-century frescoed image of the Madonna, painted on the interior wall of the main entrance to Florence Cathedral, became the renewed center of attention in 1501, when a new tabernacle was made around it (Fig. 68). Three years later, the Virgin was redressed in a little mantle made of green cotton and to the tabernacle was added a curtain with golden stars. The curtain would have secured controlled viewing at pre-determined moments, heightening the miraculous nature of the image at the moment of unveiling. A decorated proscenium and cornice were attached to the tabernacle in 1510.¹²⁰ The practice of reframing the ancient Madonna rose from a need to heighten the religious veneration of the painting, not to update it for aesthetic reasons. Except for the addition of a little mantle to the figure, the fresco itself remained untouched. The recorded restorations made no attempt to update the Madonna herself for new stylistic tastes, as sometimes was the case;¹²¹ instead, we may assume, architectural frame and proscenium served to heighten the original Madonna's "pastness," contrasting a new tabernacle with an outdated style of painting.

¹¹⁸ See, for example, the critique of Perugino's style by Paolo Giovio, in *Scritti*, 1: 19. For the demise of Perugino's reputation, also see Andrew Ladis, "Perugino and the Wages of Fortune," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 131 (1998), 221-34.

¹¹⁹ Vasari, 6: 15.

¹²⁰ Poggi, 1: cvi-cix, 210-13 (docs 1046-1061).

¹²¹ Neri di Bicci, *Le ricordanze (10 marzo 1453 – 24 aprile 1475)*, ed. Bruno Santi, Pisa: Marlin, 1976, 382-83.

The practice of reframing old cult imagery understood old-fashioned stylistic properties as the signs of a more authentic religious devotion, uncorrupted by the aesthetic impulse generated by the *rinascità* of naturalistic art. Already at the inception of the new style, in 1403, Fra Giovanni Dominici foresaw that it corrupted the religious meaning of panel painting. In still another yet early instance of warning the visually unlearned against the dangers of naturalism, he advised parents to have their children direct devotion to “old, smoky” paintings, lest the young “become more idolatrous than faithful.”¹²² Fra Dominici’s advice is an early and at that time still isolated instance of associating authentic devotion with anti-modern painting, which only gathered momentum in the late sixteenth century. In 1587, Giovanni Armenini could write, with some discontent, of the widespread practice of stuffing Italian churches with “panels with certain figures painted in the Greek manner, rude [*goffissime*], sentimental and completely smoked, ... put there with no other reason than to move [the people to] devotion, instead of being an ornament to those places.”¹²³

By the time Michelangelo painted the *Doni Tondo* we are still far removed from the organized effort to install archaizing painting in churches that Armenini noted. The call for a reordering of priorities issued in post-Medicean Florence was not so much an attempt at producing a correct historical reconstruction of the primitive Church; instead, it was a search for a new origin, a point back in history which might not have existed at all, but that, of necessity, looked completely different from the culture of Medici dominance. A return in time is here not so much understood as a return to a historical period but as a return to an idealized time that paradoxically is still to come. The past is in the

¹²² *Regola del governo di cura familiare*, ed. Donato Salvi, Florence: A. Garinei, 1860, 133. Translated in *Italian Art* (1992), 146.

¹²³ *De’ veri precetti della pittura* [1587], ed. Marina Gorreri with a preface by Enrico Castelnovo, Turin: Giulio Einaudi, 1999, 213-14 (Book 10.3: 188-89): “Né voglio quivi lasciare in dietro quello che, non ci essendo, è sopra modo biasimevole, conciosiaché io (come s’è detto) avendo praticato per diverse città et essendo stato menato per molti palagi e case, e fino nelle camere secrete, le quali ho trovato splendidissime et abondevoli d’ adobamenti di tapez[z]arie, di borccati e d’ altre massarizie minute, e tutte ho veduto essere con mirabil arte fornite, eccetto di pitture delle sacre imagine, le quali erano la maggior parte quadretti di certe figure fatte alla greca, goffissime, dispiacevoli e tutte affumicate, le quali ad ogni altra cosa parevano esservi state poste, fuori che a muover divozione ovvero a fare ornamento a simil luoghi.”

future here. It is the kind of paradox Domenico Benivieni described in 1497 when trying to define Savonarola's historical position. Savonarola had taught Florence "what had always been in Christ's Church, so it ought to be called an ancient rather than a new light, ... a Christian form of good living ... brought newly back to light."¹²⁴

The idea of constructing a new society by looking beyond recent history to an idealized past sounds modern. It would indeed be very hard to claim that Michelangelo's *Doni Tondo* is an anti-modern work of art. It is re-revolutionary in the true meaning of the word, for it hinges on the paradox of counter (*re*) advancement (*volutio*) in order to claim its modernity. It counters the technological progress of oil paint that had supposedly impeded the religious image. The decline of societal values as the result of technological progress is a historical drama familiar to any twenty-first-century reader: the exploitation of the working class in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the technological age and the loss of authenticity in the age of mechanical reproduction feature prominently in many books on the rise and fall of modernism.¹²⁵ However, it must have been a drama familiar to Michelangelo's culture as well. After all, Pliny's notes on the history of art were part of the author's *Natural History*, a *magnus opus* that reads like an almost modern history of the decline of culture and the pollution of nature under an aggressively progressing technological agenda, in which art, society and nature suffered, according to Pliny, from a loss of authenticity that came with the technical advancements in the making of metals.¹²⁶

Technical advancements, the Plinian model and the politics of the Governo Popolare contended, forced a breach between culture and society. If art had become a matter of technical advancements *only* – as

¹²⁴ *Dialogo della verità della dottrina predicata da frate Ieronimo da Ferrara nella città di Firenze*, ed. Garfagnini, in *Savonarole: Enjeux, Débats, Questions*. ed. A. Fontes, J.-L. Fournell and M. Plaisance, Paris: Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1997, 165: "... el lume e la dottrina che questo padre ha insegnata e in scritto publicata non è altro lume né altra dottrina che quella la quale è sempre stata nella chiesa di Cristo ... Onde questa sua dottrina più presto si debbe dire lume antico che nuovo ... el quale ben vivere cristiano è suto nuovamente da questo padre ridotto al luce." Benivieni was responding to critics doubting the truth of Savonarola's preaching. See Brown, 2004, 33nt36.

¹²⁵ See T.J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea. Episodes from a History of Modernism*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999.

¹²⁶ This was argued by Barkan, 66-80.

naturalistic painting had tended towards – then it had also become too narcissistic an enterprise, referring only to itself and hence removed from the basic societal needs (religion, politics) it had been commissioned to serve. In short, it lost its social utility. (When Armenini said that medieval painting had exclusively been hung in churches to stimulate devotion, he, of course, was arguing against art's utilitarian purpose, as his words imply that painting should have an aesthetic appeal that transcended its base functional needs.) A utilitarian approach to cultural production was perhaps best articulated in the period in Marcello Virgilio Adriani's lectures at the Florentine *Studio*, referred to in the Introduction. For Adriani, the great utility, *utilitas*, of pre-Medicean humanism had fallen in decline when Cosimo de' Medici returned from exile, when the Republic was deprived of her freedom and the seeds were sown for the self-fulfilling philology of the Medicean Poliziano, "of no use to the Republic." "I have decided to speak to you today," he said in his lectures to the patrician youth in 1497, "about their [the humanities'] *utilitas*: the one and only word that (I hope) may make you prick your ears."¹²⁷

Michelangelo's *Parergon*, Or: The Culture of Excess

Such was the culture in which Michelangelo painted the *Doni Tondo*: cultural production excelled in her strict civic functionality. A purity of communication had no need of elaborate digressions and additions. Like the philology of languages and words never spoken in the daily management of the republic, art without a concern for social creed had no place in post-Medicean Florence.

The distinction between essentials and cultural ornaments had informed artistic practice for centuries. One way indeed to define the painter's historical task was as a negotiation between the primacy of the foreground figures and subordinate background details, between the place where meaning resides and the skillful digressions that so often fill the background of fifteenth-century painting. In the history of the distinction between primary meaning and all the rest, the latter came to be defined as *parergon*, by-work. The *locus classicus* of *parergon* appears in

¹²⁷ Cited and translated in Godman, 163, 165.

Pliny, who writes of the painter Protogenes adding tiny warships to the background of his painting, which he termed *parergia* (παρέργια).¹²⁸ Before Pliny, in Strabo, we find a definition of *parerga* as a corruption of primary meaning. Strabo tells of another painting by Protogenes, of Ialysus and the Satyr, in which a partridge was painted so beautifully that it attracted more attention than the protagonists. And “when Protogenes observed that the principal [*ergon*] had become the subordinate part [*parergon*] of his work,” he had the partridge removed.¹²⁹ The idea of the background as something separated from the rest of the work and sometimes even in contrast to it, had grown naturally from the painter’s practice. The protagonists were often prescribed in elaborate contracts by patrons, but the compositional residue of the background fell outside such stipulations – that “*vacuo delli quadri*,” as one fifteenth-century contract described it.¹³⁰ They hence belonged to a locus of digressions rich in fantasy. More often than not, digression consisted of exercises in naturalism, as indeed Strabo’s example makes clear enough.

Victor Stoichita has recently argued that fifteenth- and sixteenth-century imagery emphasized the separation between fore- and background by framing the latter, pointing to paintings like van Eyck’s that frame the background scenes through windows and other peek-throughs.¹³¹ He adds that what they frame is naturalism. We already find the fifteenth-century Italian humanist tradition pointing out the merits of such condensed exercises in naturalism. Men like Ciriaco d’Ancona described the still-life-like images *within* Early Netherlandish painting almost as a separate genre within the religious image, often not recounting what the foreground figures display.

¹²⁸ “... adiecerit parvolas naves longas in iis quae pictores *parergia* appellant, ut apperet et quibus initiis ad arcem ostentationis opera sua pervenissent.” Cited and translated in Pliny, tr. Jex-Blake, 136-37 (Book 35.101).

¹²⁹ Strabo, *Geography*, 14.2.5.

¹³⁰ The phrasing is used in a contract for a commission awarded to Pinturicchio; for the document, see G.B. Vermiglioli, *Di Bernardino Pinturicchio pittore Perugino de’ secoli XV. XVI.*, Perugia: Bartelli, 1837, vi. Cited in Jeroen Stumpel, “On grounds and backgrounds: Some remarks about composition in Renaissance painting,” *Simiolus* 19 (1988), 221.

¹³¹ Victor I. Stoichita, *The Self-Aware Image. An Insight into Early Modern Meta-Painting*, tr. Anne-Marie Glasheen, Cambridge, New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 22.

Parerga share much with the Renaissance notion of ornament: the two exist in the margins of a dominant *ergon*, and both are deprived of a clear narrative meaning to assume a state that, at least in most Florentine painting of the Quattrocento, is not directly tied up to the main iconography but serves as a supplement to it. Vasari, on several occasions, defined the anti-utilitarian backgrounds of Renaissance paintings as ornaments, defining the *parergon* of Italian painting as still-life added, but not integral to, the main scene.¹³² The Renaissance did not endeavor to formulate a clear theory of ornament, although architectural treatises made some attempts. In his *De Re Aedificatoria* (Florence, 1486), Alberti defined architectural ornament as something added, as a complement to beauty:

The precise nature of beauty and ornament, and the difference between them, the mind could perhaps visualize more clearly than my words could explain. For the sake of brevity, however, let us define them as follows: beauty is that reasoned harmony of all the parts within a body, so that nothing may be added, taken away, or altered, but for the worse. ... If this is conceded, ornament may be defined as a form of auxiliary light and complement to beauty. From this it follows, I believe, that beauty is some inherent property, to be found suffused all through the body of that which may be called beautiful; whereas ornament, rather than being inherent, has the character of something attached or additional.¹³³

Although Alberti and his contemporaries, like the ancient text by Quintilian they turned to, could think of a certain persuasive function that ornament fulfilled in architecture, the strictest definition of *ornamentum* remained one of a purely anti-utilitarian nature. Ornament

¹³² For instance, Vasari's description of a Madonna panel by Andrea Mantegna, now lost, distinguishes between the Madonna and the *campo* to focus attention on the latter's digression into ornamental naturalism; see Vasari, 3: 554: "*Andrea ... dipinse in un quadretto piccolo una Nostra Donna col Figliuolo in colle che dorme, e nel campo, che è una montagna, fece dentro a certe grotte alcuni scarpellini che cavano pietre per diverse lavori, tanto sottilmente e con tanta pazienza che non par possibile che con una sottil punta di pennello si possa far tanto bene.*"

¹³³ Alberti, ed. and tr. Rykwert, 165 (Book 6, Ch. 2). For Alberti's use of the term *ornamentum*, see

Veronica Bierman, *Ornamentum: Studien zum Traktat 'De Re Aedificatoria' des Leon Battista Alberti*, Hildesheim: Olms, 1997.

was extra to a work's function proper. The division of Alberti's book in ten parts makes the distinction between utilitarian architecture and ornament clear: books one to five are about "usefulness" (*utilitas*), and the other five on "beauty" (*pulchritudo*) and "ornament" (*ornamentum*).

Alois Riegl may have been right in arguing that a culture defined itself in ornament. More than anything else, ornaments might indeed be considered as shaping a specific culture's stylistic idiom. Pace Riegl and following Alina Payne, ornament in the Renaissance, the period that the *Stilfragen* (1893) are not concerned with, did not act as the un-self-conscious fingerprint he thought to have discovered in other cultures. Renaissance ornament was a highly self-conscious cultural construct.¹³⁴ It was in the background of painting that Renaissance artists enjoyed the greatest license, and it was there, free from contractual obligations, that they could thus articulate the distinction of their cultural product.

In the arena of artistic distinction that was the background of his painting, Michelangelo replaced landscape and the props of nature and cultivation that populate the fields of Renaissance painting with something that looks like a faintly colored relief, a substitution that served as the ultimate argument against the kind of anecdotal realism the *Tondo* as a whole opposed. Flemish artists "paint stuffs and masonry, the green grass of the fields, the shadow of trees, and rivers and bridges, which they call landscapes ...," Michelangelo later ranted in the *Dialogues de Roma*.¹³⁵ In front of and thus screening the landscape, five naked men *hide* instead of *reveal* the locational specificity of the Incarnation, the things of this world. And where landscape peeps through behind these figures, it is almost beyond vision, of a haziness that verges on transparency. Never before in Renaissance painting had landscape been painted so transparently.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ See Alina A. Payne, *The Architectural Treatise in the Italian Renaissance: Architectural Invention, Ornament, and Literary Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 1-11.

¹³⁵ De Holanda, ed. Mendes, 18-19. Leonardo kept lists of naturalistic details; see his notes on botany, plants and landscapes in Leonardo, ed. Richter, 1: 275-300 (§393-481A), 367 (§652).

¹³⁶ That is why I do not agree with Simmaco Percario, "Indagini sul *Tondo Doni* di Michelangiolo," *Critica d'Arte* 66.20 (2003), 54-67, who identifies the hill on the right with Mount Verna. Michelangelo's almost invisible mountain simply does not look like the location where St Francis received the stigmata.

Vasari was the first, and last, to interpret Michelangelo's background figures *as* background. Long before modern iconology overloaded them with iconographical meanings that denied their visual detachment from the foreground figures, Michelangelo's naked ephebes entered published art history as an addition *to* rather than an integral part of the painting's meaning. Vasari wrote that Michelangelo in order "to show even more that his art was the greatest, made in the background [*campo*] of this work many nude figures, leaning, standing and sitting."¹³⁷ A will to explain the existence of the background figures iconologically in relation to the protagonists has haunted Doni Tondo studies at least since 1851, when G.T. Corsi saw in them the five major prophets of the Old Testament.¹³⁸ A long pedigree of Michelangelo scholars followed, including art historians such as Carl Justi, Colin Eisler and Leo Steinberg proposing interpretations of a scope, variety and creativity unmatched by any other explanation of "just" background detail.¹³⁹ The flow has been staunch now, as most scholars accept Charles de Tolnay's explanation of the five naked men as a representation of the world *ante legem*. With the protagonists symbolizing the world *sub gratia*, de Tolnay makes the *Tondo* convey a movement from back- to foreground that matches the progress of the world according to Biblical time. Of course, the image itself resists such a movement. Michelangelo took care to emphasize the separation between fore- and background that had always defined image-making. Their actions are meaningless, their bodies naked, not undressing but plainly

¹³⁷ Vasari, 6: 23: "... fece nel campo di questa opera molti ignudi, appoggiati, ritti a sedere, e con tanta diligenza e pulitezza lavorò questa opera"

¹³⁸ *La filosofia del concetto in opere d'arte specialmente di sacro argomento*, Florence: Typografia Tofani, 1851, 36-44.

¹³⁹ A selection of interpretations include Girolamo Mancini, *Vita di Luca Signorelli*, Florence: Carnesecchi, 1903, 70, who interpreted the figures as shepherds; Marcel Reymond, *Michel-Ange*, Paris: Henri Laurens, 1906, 36, as iconographical nonsense in a religious painting; Justi, 1909, 182-83, as the various ages of man; Valerio Mariani, *Michelangelo*, Turin: Unione tipografico-editrice torinese, 1942, 55, as people awaiting baptism; Wilde, 1953b, 59, as wingless angels holding the shroud of Christ (followed by Leo Steinberg, "Michelangelo's Divine Circle," *Vogue Magazine* [December 1974], 138-39); Colin Eisler, "The Athlete of Virtue. The Iconography of Asceticism," in *De artibus opuscula XL. Essays in Honor of Erwin Panofsky*, 2 vols, ed. Millard Meiss, New York: New York University Press, 1961, 1: 82-97, as the athletes of virtue; and Mirella Levi d'Ancona, "The Doni Madonna by Michelangelo: An Iconographic Study," *Art Bulletin* 50 (1968), 43-50, as homosexuals.

pulling at some sort of fabric, as if caught up in a nonsensical game, the background nudes forever remain an isolated group. *Added* to the scene instead of *prefacing* it, they read more like an after-thought than as an integral part of an overarching iconography. And Saint John does not mediate fore- and background, as de Tolnay thought.¹⁴⁰ He simply stares at the Christ child, unaware of the nude figures behind him.

It is to antique reliefs that Michelangelo ephebes most easily compare, even to the point that their painted faintness evokes the weathered reliefs Michelangelo and his contemporaries encountered in the streets and sculpture gardens of early sixteenth-century Italy. A Roman sarcophagus that was used as a basin in the Sacristy of the Sienese Duomo shows a similar constellation of narratively disconnected figures (Fig. 69). It contains figures that slightly twist and turn, and that, unaware of the viewer, make contact with one another without ever revealing what meaning such contact generates.¹⁴¹ The relief was visually exploited since the times of Nicola Pisano;¹⁴² Michelangelo had probably seen it on one of his trips to Siena. It is not my intention to suggest that a viewer ought to recognize the source of Michelangelo's invention; what is at stake here is the five naked men understood as a *kind* of classical ornament. Perhaps the ancient artist already perceived these figures as ornament. Commissioned to represent a portrait of the deceased in a medallion at the center of the composition, he chose to fill the rectangular void to the left and right of the portrait with a variety of nude figures that seem to serve no other purpose than ornamenting empty space. Like the Roman artist filled his void with narratively meaningless figures, Michelangelo chose to fill the vacuum of his painting with similar ornament. Michelangelo's Holy Family is projected against a scene deprived of reference to daily Florence, a city where nude men pulling at sheets did not occupy the outdoor benches.

¹⁴⁰ De Tolnay, 1947, 164-66.

¹⁴¹ Bober and Rubinstein, 134-35 (no. 104).

¹⁴² Max Seidel, "Studien zur Antikenrezeption Nicola Pisanos," *Mitteilungen des kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 29 (1975), 307-92 (343-44nt120).

Doni's Possession

Possession and viewership are at the heart of the *Doni Tondo*, a painting that still has its original ownership by Agnolo and Maddalena Doni inscribed in its gallery title and that has the coat of arms of Doni and his wife Maddalena Strozzi carved into its frame (Fig. 70). An image that limits its own visibility in a society that had politicized visuality, representing a Madonna that places the viewer instead of the viewer placing her, a painting that locates “interpictoriality” at the heart of the visual endeavor, a work that theorizes ornaments visually – all this implicates a society in which looking and showing were invested with social meaning. Michelangelo's *Tondo* defined its patron as someone willing to look at and use images both in relation to other works of art and in relation to the society they seek to interpret, in short, a man willing to build discourse around his possession.

Agnolo Doni commissioned the painting from Michelangelo early in 1504, on the occasion of his marriage with Maddalena Strozzi. Twenty-nine years old, he had married the sixteen years old Maddalena on January 31, 1504.¹⁴³ In order to accommodate his newly established family, he built a palazzo which needed furnishing. Among the furnishings was Michelangelo's *Tondo*. The Palazzo Doni no longer exists. It once stood in the Corso de' Tintori, Quartiere of Santa Croce, probably on the eastern side of the street, close to the Canto degli Alberti. In Vasari's time it was still there; and Alessandro Cecchi recently found some evidence of its former glory.¹⁴⁴ A seventeenth-century inventory of the house survives, but by the time that document was composed, Michelangelo's painting had already found its way into the Ducal collections. We have no secure evidence of the *Tondo*'s precise location at Palazzo Doni; Vasari saw it there, but failed to mention the exact room. On the basis of information from Florentine inventories, we must assume that the painting was in the couple's bedroom, where such large-size *tondi* of the Madonna were usually kept.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Lorenzo Grottanelli, *Ricordi storici dell famiglia Doni Fiorentina*, Florence: G. Ramella & Co, 1907, 15-23, for Agnolo's date of birth; and Cecchi, 1987, 432, on the date of the marriage.

¹⁴⁴ Vasari, 4: 162-63; Cecchi, 1987.

¹⁴⁵ Roberta J.M. Olson, *The Florentine Tondo*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, 223-26.

Although it does not disclose the exact location of Michelangelo's painting, the Seicento inventory yields much information on the use of Doni's house. That information, still unstudied, points to the circumstances under which the painting would have been viewed. The inventory gives the impression that not much was changed to the house between the time of Agnolo's death in 1539 and the date the document was composed in 1633; the text is quite precise about later additions of furniture, and explicitly mentions old objects still in their original location.¹⁴⁶

Typical of Florentine palazzi, Doni's stood three floors high. The ground floor furnished several service compartments, four bigger rooms (*camere*), a more representative room (the *sala*), and two loggia's, one opening up to the garden and one presumably to the street. Between the ground floor and the *piano nobile* were located two rooms halfway the stairs (*due camere a mezza scala*). The third floor, located directly under the roof and hence unbearably warm in summer, was probably left as good as empty. The couple lived and invited guests on the *piano nobile*, located on the second floor. Here were located the *Sala grande*, a *salotto*, the palace chapel (an exception for the time), the *scrittoio* (the intellectual heart of the Palazzo), a terrace, a kitchen and three more rooms: the "room of the chapel," and a "room of the *sala*" with its adjacent *anti-camera*. Furniture was concentrated in the *camera della sala*, which indicates that the couple slept there. In that room, the compiler of the inventory mentions "a parament ... of walnut, decorated with gilded inlay, to which are attached three cupboards of similar wood and a daybed also in walnut, and another chest." The parament was especially valued and not to be moved in order not to damage it.¹⁴⁷ The room was embellished by Francesco del Tasso with "pilasters of beautiful wood carving," and it was here that Cinelli later saw the "lattice of the *cassoni*

¹⁴⁶ The inventory is kept in several versions in BNCF, Fondo Tordi 365, faste 1, fols. 24r – 28v. It has been read and partly transcribed by Cecchi, 1987, with many mistakes, and Francesco Caglioti, 2005, 66-68, whose reading is selective. Both authors are only interested in the document as a source for the physical appearance of the house and the location of its furniture, not in the *casa* as a place of social exchange.

¹⁴⁷ BNCF, Fondo Tordi 365, Faste 1, fol. 24v: "Nella camera dalla sala un paramento o vogliam dire legname di noce messo a' oro, a quali sono appicati tre armadi del med[esi]mo legname et un lettuccio medesimani[en]te di noce, et una cassa ancora, a ogni cosa la sua chiave con un cora allo scrittoio, qual paramento dorato non si possa tramutare p[er]che non ci guasti."

embellished with grotesques [*spalliere di cassoni rabescate di grottesche*]," which, according to Vasari, Morto da Feltre had painted around the time of the Doni marriage.¹⁴⁸ Keeping with Florentine practice, such woodwork transformed the *camera* into a densely decorated space, much denser than the other rooms in the Palazzo, which were kept relatively empty.¹⁴⁹

In its double function of living and receiving guests, the *camera* defined its owner in relation to society.¹⁵⁰ It was a place of seeing and being seen. The *camera* was a place of conversation, reading, and eating with guests. Sometimes business was conducted there. In the case of the Doni palace, the bedroom was certainly not a place of seclusion, for one had to pass through it in order to reach the *anti-camera*, a room not located *before* the *camera*, but always behind it.¹⁵¹ The most exuberant pieces of art were kept in the *camera*, and, as the examples of Vasari and Cinelli mentioned above indicate, these were expressly shown to visitors.¹⁵² Thus when Giovanbattista Doni, Agnolo's son, wrote a letter to his friend Alberto Lollio in 1549 to inform him about the most important public monuments in the city Lollio was planning to visit, he included in a postscript Michelangelo's painting: "Above all, you will be shown a tondo of Our Lady in the house of Agnolo Doni, and it suffices if I say: it is by the hand of the master of masters," the *maestro de' maestri*.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ Francesco Bocchi ed ora da Giovanni Cinelli ampliate, ed accresciute, *Le bellezze della città di Firenze dove a pieno di pittura di scultura di sacri templi, di palazzi, i più notabili artifizi, e più prezioso si contengono*, Florence: Gio. Gugliatini, 1677, 565; and Vasari, 4: 519. Additional archival evidence for Tasso's work in the couple's *camera* is furnished by Lucia Aquino, "La camera di Lodovico de Nobili: opera di Francesco del Tasso e qualche precisazione sulla cornice del Tondo Doni," *Paragone: Arte* 56.59 (2005), 93-96.

¹⁴⁹ See John K. Lydecker, "The Domestic Setting of the Arts in Renaissance Florence," PhD diss. Johns Hopkins University, 1987.

¹⁵⁰ Michael Lingohr, "The Palace and Villa as Spaces of Patrician Self-Definition," in *Renaissance Florence: A Social History*, ed. Roger J. Crum and John T. Paoletti, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 240-72.

¹⁵¹ For the Florentine *anti-camera*, see Preyer, 2006, 36.

¹⁵² For the *camera* as a place of invitation, see Brenda Preyer, "Planning for visitors in the Florentine palace," *Renaissance studies* 12 (1998), 357-74; and Preyer, 2006, 34-49.

¹⁵³ *Raccolta di lettere sulla pittura, scultura ed architettura*, 8 vols, ed. M. Gio. Bottari and Stefano Ticozzi, Milan: Giovanni Silvestri, 1872, 3: 347: "Postscritta: Sopra tutto fatevi mostrare un tondo d'una nostra Donna in casa d'Agnol Doni, e vi basti solo che io dica: Egli è di mano del maestro de' maestri."

The function of the bedroom as a place of exhibition was prefaced, as it were, by the *salotto* directly preceding it in the lay-out of the house. The *salotto* was a late invention of the Renaissance, connected to the increasingly social function of the house. It was here where guests were first received and waited to be invited into the *camera*. Plays were performed and conversation held. The *salotto* was a place of sociability, a notion that resists any distinction between public and private, since, as Amanda Vickery puts it, its very function is to integrate the two.¹⁵⁴ Again, like the *camera*, the couple's *salotto* was a richly decorated room. It included a statue of bronze set on a mantelpiece above a fireplace, a substantial collection of old books (*libri antichi di casa*), two wooden tables, and two benches-*cum*-daybeds.¹⁵⁵

If the *salotto* and the Renaissance *camera* blurred the distinction between private and public, the *loggia* erased that distinction altogether. The structure facilitated an easy osmosis between life on the neighborhood streets and life in the *casa*. Quite a rarity in the early sixteenth century, the Doni loggia re-affirms the importance of Agnolo's palace as a place of social exchange. The *loggia* was a gathering place of the extended family, or *consorteria*, a place of neighborhood interaction and legal action; it drew acute attention to the family's political share in the city-government and Doni's social and political preeminence within the *gonfalone*, the neighborhood district.¹⁵⁶

Besides Michelangelo's painting, Doni owned a variety of art works, new and old ones,¹⁵⁷ that served as its visual frame of reference. Doni was driven by a desire to invest in high quality objects produced by the best masters of the day and the past. The objects which he gathered show that he indulged in works of contrasting meaning, exactly the kind of contrast a work like Michelangelo's needed in order to have its

¹⁵⁴ Amanda Vickery, *The Gentleman's Daughter: Women's Lives in Georgian England*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998, 195-97; quoted in Marta Ajmar-Wollheim, "Sociability," in *At Home in the Renaissance* (2006), 206-21.

¹⁵⁵ BNCF, Fondo Tordi 365, Faste 1, fol. 24v.

¹⁵⁶ On the Renaissance *loggia*, see F.W. Kent, "The Rucellai Family and its Loggia," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 35 (1972), 397-401; and Charles Burroughs, "Spaces of Arbitration and the Organization of Space in Late Medieval Italian Cities," in *Medieval Practices of Space*, ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt and Michal Kobialka, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000, 64-100.

¹⁵⁷ Vasari, 6: 22.

meaning come across. Among Agnolo's most valued possessions were the portraits of himself and his wife, commissioned from Raphael around the time of their marriage (Fig. 71). More meticulous Florentine oil paintings than these were hard to find. Raphael worked out hair, fabrics, jewelry, skin, landscape and everything else to the finest details – all differentiated in the rendering of fabric. It is difficult to imagine more fitting contemporary counter-imagery to the kind of painting Michelangelo's panel propagated.

Raphael's portraits do not allow for easy understanding. The backsides of both panels were painted in grisaille with iconographically puzzling scenes taken from Ovid's myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha, probably by the so-called Maestro di Serumido (Fig. 72). The reverse of Agnolo's bares an image of the flood initiated by the Olympian gods to punish mankind, showing Zeus in divine company, including Saturn, Mercury and a deity with the moon, either Diana or Juno. The verso of Maddalena's portrait shows Pyrrha and Deucalion throwing the stones from which new bodies were formed after the flood had caused the extinction of mankind.¹⁵⁸ These scenes – not depicted elsewhere in Renaissance art – take the idea of renewal after a devastation as their subject, which, expressed through a couple like Agnolo and Maddalena, whose coat of arms are included in the verso of Agnolo's portrait, gathers further meaning as an allegory of fertility, a subject fitting for the Renaissance couple trying to found *their* family at a moment when Florentine history underwent cultural renewal. That the stories of Deucalion and Pyrrha were painted on the backsides of the portraits implies an active kind of viewing and showing, for the portraits needed to be physically turned around. The portraits originally formed a diptych,¹⁵⁹ showing the Ovidian scenes when closed, which suggests that they were kept in a luxurious bag, in which comparable Flemish portrait diptychs were kept.¹⁶⁰ It must have been Agnolo or Maddalena who had

¹⁵⁸ Ovid, *Metamorphosis*, Book 1, verses 274-380. See Cecchi, 1987, 436; and Serena Padovani, "I ritratti Doni: Raffaello e il suo 'eccentrico' amico, il Maestro di Serumido," *Paragone: Arte* (3rd series) 61.663 (2005), 3-26, for the identification of the scenes.

¹⁵⁹ For the technical information substantiating that claim, see *Raffaello a Firenze* (1984), 112.

¹⁶⁰ For an example, see *Prayers and Portraits: Unfolding the Netherlandish Diptych*, ed. John Oliver Hand, Catherine A. Metzger and Ron Spronk, Washington, New Haven and London: National Gallery of Art and Yale University Press, 2006, 82-83.

to take the diptych out of its hypothetical container, to unfold it and to reveal the portraits to their visitors. The act of unfolding might have led to an active sort of discourse on the meaning of these scenes, in the presence of the couple, who could have further explained the relation between their historical selves and themselves allegorized.

That Doni possessed such works of venerable naturalism together with one that tried to upset the careful plotting out of life as we experience it (Michelangelo was famous for his refusal to paint portraits) makes viewing at Palazzo Doni a contested enterprise. With comparison and contrast at the heart of visual experience, Doni's was not an ideological agenda of anti-naturalism, but one in which differences invited discourse on the merits of individual works of art. An invitation to break the silence is surely what marks another work of Agnolo's and Maddalena's. It is the bronze *Putto* cast by Donatello in the 1430s (Fig. 73), recorded by Vasari at Palazzo Doni.¹⁶¹ The inventory of the palace mentions a "*statua di bronzo*" on the mantelpiece in the *salotto* that is identifiable as the Donatello.¹⁶² Recently gathered evidence suggests that Agnolo Doni acquired the work in the first years of the Cinquecento, either from the authorities in charge of the dispensation of the Medici collection (where the bronze might have ended up during Lorenzo de' Medici's lifetime) or directly from the collection of the Bardolini who were the statue's original patrons (the Bardolini *stemma* are pressed on the little boy's belt).¹⁶³ Engaging the viewer with gesture and smile, it invited reaction from the men and women waiting in the *salotto* to be invited into the adjacent *camera*. *Putti* like Donatello's probably did not possess meaning in and of themselves but added meaning to meaning elsewhere.¹⁶⁴ Traditionally gathered in the margins of Renaissance art, they functioned as "discourse pieces" that gave further expression, emphasis or a pointed explanation to the subject-matter represented in

¹⁶¹ Vasari, 3: 219: "*In casa ancora di Giovambattista d'Agnol Doni, gentiluomo fiorentino, è un Mercurio di metalli di mano di Donato alto un braccio e mezzo, tutto tondo e vestito in un verto modo biz[z]aro, il quale è veramente bellissimo e non men raro che l'altre cose che adornano la sua bellissima casa.*"

¹⁶² BNCF, Fondo Tordi 365, Faste 1, fols. 24v: "*Nel salotto sopra al camino una statua di bronzo.*"

¹⁶³ Caglioti, 2005, 56-70.

¹⁶⁴ Charles Dempsey, *Inventing the Renaissance Putto*, Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

the main scene, as they had done in the antique art the Renaissance recuperated. Donatello's *Putto* represents the first and one of the few emancipated versions of that *all'antica* tradition. The statue therefore marks an epochal turning point in the history of art. It was the first freestanding work of art with a pagan subject since classical times and, together with Donatello's bronze *David*, the first freestanding statue in bronze since antiquity, a historical status that could have hardly gone unnoticed. Doni's purchasing of the seventy-year old statue shows him sensitive to the history of Florentine art that Michelangelo reinterpreted.

Michelangelo integrated the bronze putto into the visual discourse of High Renaissance art, a fact that has gone thusfar unnoticed. A sheet he used around 1504 contains drawings of *putti* that are remarkably similar to Doni's *putto* (Fig. 74). Two of them adjust the strangely, unbalanced contrapposto that is so characteristic of the Donatello. Drawn in profile, Michelangelo lowered the bronze baby's arms that would have otherwise blocked the face from the point of view Michelangelo copied it. The *putto* Michelangelo sketched in the right margin's center even bares the vestiges of the bronze statue's wings, which Michelangelo indicated with a few lines. Like the Donatello, Michelangelo's babies wear a kind of fabric around their waist, pulled up a little higher than in Donatello's *putto*; finally, one of the drawn *putti* carries a diadem on his head that looks like its bronze model. Not previously used as evidence for an early presence of the Donatello bronze in the Doni collection, Michelangelo's drawing suggests that the artist had access to it around 1504, the date of the drawing and indeed the year when he was working on the *Doni Tondo*. Michelangelo eventually used his drawings as studies for the little Saint John in a marble *tondo* for Taddeo Taddei (Fig. 75). Displayed in Doni's house and re-presented by Michelangelo, the Donatello bronze served no other purpose than that of the discourse of art itself, which had spread from Agnolo's palazzo to include Taddeo's.

Scholars of High Renaissance painting have often written of the artistic dialogue implied by visual evidence. The battle in Madonna imagery conducted by Leonardo, Michelangelo and Raphael – all present in Florence between 1504 and 1506 – is well known; the visual exchange between the *Doni Tondo* and the *Saint Anne Cartoon* was only one

instance of this conflict. The paintings by these three show a constant borrowing and emulation of the others' compositions, all images displayed in various Florentine houses. In a *Holy Family* painted around 1506 for Antonio Canigiani (now in Munich; see Fig. 76), Raphael situated his invention between Leonardo's *Saint Anne Cartoon* (as prototype) and Michelangelo's *Holy Family* (as anti-type). From Leonardo, he borrowed the narrative interaction between the Christ Child and a third actor, in this case Saint John, adding more figures than Leonardo dared to handle and heightening the narrative tension by depicting Saint Elisabeth in the moment of interaction with Saint Joseph. From Michelangelo he took the low seated pose of the figures, together with the color scheme; and like Michelangelo, he exchanged the Virgin's mother for her husband. The images of Leonardo, Michelangelo and Raphael remain mute in isolation. In juxtaposition, however, it is apparent that they keep what they borrow visible and that they always remain close to the theme of multi-figure composition established by Leonardo. These paintings not only suggest a tight network in which an artistic dialogue provided for ever better Madonna imagery, but also that such a dialogue was itself of some value.

That value was social. Because most of the paintings implicated in this visual conversation were in private houses, artists needed to get access to artworks not through other artists but through patrons. This is especially true in the case of an artist wanting to see a work by Michelangelo, who at the time was without that traditional locus of artistic exchange in the Renaissance, a workshop. Apparently, Raphael was allowed to study Michelangelo's painting *in situ* at Palazzo Doni. His copying of the turning Doni Madonna's pose for one of the figures in the background of his *Entombment*, painted in Florence in 1507, offers definitive evidence for that claim (Fig. 77). Raphael had of course access to Doni's house because he had painted its owners' portraits. But granting artists access to one's palazzo was more than just a friendly invitation; it was a self-conscious gesture, performed with the express purpose of furthering a young artist's career. Raphael's clientele at this time, for instance, consisted of a tight network of patrons, all acquaintances, in business, politics or related by kin, who recommended

the artist to friends and family.¹⁶⁵ Traces of artworks in the collections of friends and associates remained visible in new ones commissioned from the young painter.

The artistic exchange conducted in these images was often the result of the owner's business network. A glimpse at Doni's network can be gained from his unpublished *Libro di ricordi*. In one *ricordo*, we find Doni in business with Francesco del Giocondo, who had commissioned a portrait of his wife Mona Lisa del Giocondo from Leonardo da Vinci (Fig. 78).¹⁶⁶ Raphael must have known that painting well. His portrait of Maddalena Doni was modeled on it, and a drawing documents Raphael's direct study of the work (Fig. 79).¹⁶⁷ Agnolo might have provided Raphael with an introduction to his client Francesco, and hence to Leonardo's work.

What is suggested in and by these paintings claims a changing role for the Renaissance patron of art, a person who recognized the specific *artistic* qualities of the art in his possession and the historical importance of those qualities. No longer just the disinterested fifteenth-century buyer and consumer of works of art, he was a man (or sometimes woman) personally involved in supporting artists and showing an active interest in artistic progress in and of itself. Especially in the years after Lorenzo de' Medici's death, discussions about such support raged throughout the city. Many a loyalist of that supposedly culturally engaged Lorenzo deplored the alleged lack of interest in the arts and letters during the years of the Governo Popolare, an understandable accusation, considering the drop in commissions in the opening years of the new regime.¹⁶⁸ This rendered not just artworks themselves, but also the conduct of the patron, a political concern. Doni's and others' act of opening their houses to young artists like Raphael could have thus served as an argument that the politics of the Governo Popolare were

¹⁶⁵ For Raphael's informal network during his Florentine years, see Alessandro Cecchi, "Raffaello fra Umbria e Firenze," in *Raffaello a Firenze* (1984), 37-46.

¹⁶⁶ BNCF, Fondo Tordi, 4 (Registro originale in parte autografo di messer Angiolo Doni riguardante anche affari di madonna Maddalena Strozzi suo moglie), fol. 204r. For the most substantial evidence arguing for the identification of Francesco as the portrait's patron, see Zöllner.

¹⁶⁷ Paris, Louvre, Inv. 3882.

¹⁶⁸ See F. Gilbert, 1944, for contemporary criticism against the Governo Popolare.

healthy enough to create a progressive artistic milieu, much like Soderini had tried by supporting the sculptural revival during his *gonfalonierato* by smoothing the Michelangelo's path to Carrara and by cultivating a personal friendship with the artist.¹⁶⁹ Doni modeled his behavior as patron on the kind of culturally engaged man that the Medici-loyalists had thought the anti-Medici culture incapable of producing.

Vasari indeed suggests such a relationship between Michelangelo and Agnolo, writing that Doni was the artist's "friend, ... who, as someone much delighted in beautiful things, both by antique and modern artificers, wanted to have something [by the hand] of Michelangelo" (only the to add a disdainful note on Agnolo's supposed greediness and, by implication, his poor knowledge of the true value of the master's art, a disdain which that Medici court artist also attributed to Piero Soderini and other champions of the anti-Medicean Republic).¹⁷⁰ No further documentary evidence exists to substantiate Vasari's claim that Michelangelo was a social companion to Agnolo Doni. But we know that in 1504, Michelangelo was a regular discussant at Palazzo Salviati, located just a stone's throw from the Doni *casa*.¹⁷¹ What is of interest here, is that Michelangelo's discussions (*ragionamenti*) were conducted in the *house* of the patrician and not in the artist's workshop. Exchanging the workshop for the patron's house entailed a shift away from the contractual nature of the patron-client relationships developed there towards a more informal relationship in the *casa*, where friends gathered to discuss the issues of the day. Informal networks were a necessary preemptive for the kind of artist Michelangelo was. Claiming never to have been "a painter or sculptor as those who run workshops," Michelangelo announced his freedom from the disengaged consumption of panel painting of the earlier Renaissance to define himself and his art as an integral part of the natural exchange of knowledge that marked the

¹⁶⁹ See above, Chapter 2.

¹⁷⁰ Vasari, 6: 22: "*Venne volontà ad Agnolo Doni, cittadino fiorentino, amico suo, sì come quello che molto si dilettaua aver cose belle così d'antichi come di moderni artefici, d'auere alcuna cosa di Michelagnolo*" And for the critique on Soderini's bad judgment, see Vasari, 6: 20.

¹⁷¹ *Carteggio*, 2: 176 (Letter Tommaso di Tolfo in Adrianopoli to Micheangelo in Florence, 1.iv.1519). And see above, Chapter 1, for more on the relationship between Michelangelo and the Salviati.

politically informed culture of the social networks of Renaissance Florence.¹⁷²

Although he imitated his conduct as a patron on the Laurentian epoch, Doni practiced his politics as a true child of the Governo Popolare. He was actively involved in the politics of the day. In 1511, at the politically delicate age of 36 (35 was the minimum for public office), he sat on the Signoria as *priore* under Piero Soderini's government.¹⁷³ Doni was among the few men that grew to political maturity in the post-Medicean world and held fast to an anti-Medici ideology for life. He was willing to suffer for that fragile freedom that Adriani had so often spoken of in the lecture room. When the moment came to defend the city against the Medici during the Second Florentine Republic (1527–30), Doni, unlike many of his fellow Florentines, did not give up. Educated in the politics of warfare and defense as a member of the *Dieci di Libertà* in 1527 and, again, as *priore* of the anti-Medici city-government in 1529, his never faltering republican sympathies eventually got him imprisoned by the Medici on their second return to Florence in 1530.¹⁷⁴ Perhaps Doni's anti-Medicean sentiment was bolstered by his marriage into the Strozzi family, whose members had suffered exile under the fifteenth-century Medici regime.¹⁷⁵ And we know from records of his formal contacts that Doni moved in circles of supporters of Soderini's government. He was in business with Francesco Soderini, the highly influential brother of Piero Soderini, who, as a cardinal in Rome and confidant of the French king, defended the politics of the Governo Popolare in the papal city and in France.¹⁷⁶ Francesco del Giocondo was also among the supporters of Soderini's *gonfalonierato*.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷² *Carteggio*, 4: 299 (Letter Michelangelo in Rome to his nephew Leonardo in Florence, 2.v.1548): "... che se un cictadino fiorentino vuol fare dipigniere una tavola da altare, che bisogna che e' truovi un dipintore: ché io non fu' mai pictore né scultore come chi ne fa boctega."

¹⁷³ Cambi, 2: 260. For age requirements in Florentine politics, see Trexler, 1980, 391.

¹⁷⁴ Scipione Ammirato, *Istorie fiorentine di Scipione Ammirato con l'aggiunte di Scipione Ammirato Il Giovane*, 2 vols, Florence: Amador Massi da Furli, 1648, 2: 372-73; Benedetto Varchi, *Storia fiorentina*, 3 vols, ed. Gaetano Milanesi, Florence: Le Monnier, 1857-1858, 2: 200-01; and Cecchi, 1987.

¹⁷⁵ See above, Chapter 1.

¹⁷⁶ BNCF, Fondo Tordi, 4, fol. 10v. On Francesco, see K.J.P. Lowe, *Church and Politics in Renaissance Italy: The life and Career of Cardinal Francesco Soderini (1453 – 1524)*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

¹⁷⁷ For Francesco del Giocondo's political career, see Zöllner, 118-19.

The political network established through business associates was extended through Agnolo's membership in the confraternity of the Misericordia, one of the most influential in Renaissance Florence.¹⁷⁸ Confraternity membership shaped what Ronald Weissman has called "ritual brotherhood."¹⁷⁹ It provided Doni with a tight network of highly influential men whom he could call his "fellow brothers," his *cofratelli*. The *Compagnia della Misericordia* was one of selection and seclusion; membership was limited to only seventy-two men at one time. Doni was among the Compagnia's most influential members. In 1534, he was elected one of the brotherhood's *capi*, the highest office.¹⁸⁰ And among Doni's *cofratelli* were key figures within the Governo Popolare, like Lorenzo Pitti, the cathedral's canon Niccolò Tosinghi, Pierfrancesco de' Medici (called *Il Popolano* because of his republican sympathies), Jacopo Salviati and his brother Averardo, Pierfrancesco Pugliese, Giovanni Dei, Luca degli Albizzi, Simone Gondi, and Bernardo Vettori (son of Francesco).¹⁸¹

In addition to providing a political network, the *Compagnia della Misericordia* shaped Doni's religious identity as an authentic follower of Christ. The company's *capitoli*, newly drawn up in 1501, outline the members' creed as Christ's true followers, exercising their duties of charity in Florence and its environs, "like God created seventy-two disciples who went to preach for the world and exercised their merciful works and charity."¹⁸² As religious reform was sweeping through the

¹⁷⁸ BNCF, Fondo Tordi, 4, fol. 211r, records the presence of the *fratelli della misericordia* at Doni's deathbed, a privilege only enjoyed by the very poor and fellow *fratelli*.

¹⁷⁹ Weissman.

¹⁸⁰ AAMF, Capi di Guardia per Anzianità Elezione (1779), fol. 16v. I thank padre Foresto Niccolai for his help in locating Doni's name. A register containing the *compagnia's* members was published by the Venerabile Arciconfraternità della Misericordia di Firenze in the early twentieth century as *I Fratelli propriamente detti del Pio Salizio dall' anno 1338 all'anno 1905*, Florence: Tipografia Domenicana, 1905. I consulted a copy of that publication at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² *Documenti inediti e poco noti per la storia della Misericordia di Firenze (1240 – 1525)*, Florence: Arciconfraternita della Misericordia, 1940, 87: "... i quali come Dio creo septanta dua discepoli che andassino predicando perlo mondo et exercitando lopere della misericordia e charita, Così vogliamo che decti septantadua vadino perla citta di firenze et fuora, come da esuperiori sia loro ordinato exercitando lopere della misericordia et charita iuxta il loro potere con quelli ordini e modi che ne presenti capitoli si dira."

city in the wake of Savonarola's *de facto* stewardship, the members of the Misericordia reformed their institution to a state in accordance with the Savonarolan "Primitive Church." Although never explicitly referring to the fragile political situation of contemporary Florence, the impetus of the reform that the text of 1501 documents was certainly motivated by the dramatic political change that had forced the *cofratelli* to rethink their place in Florentine society.¹⁸³ In the course of the fifteenth century, the brothers' true mission of serving the poor and the sick and burying the dead had been abandoned, and the *Compagnia* was rendered a self-fulfilling organization that distributed alms exclusively among its members and not to the poor. The new *capitoli* were composed to reverse this decline and to recover the institution's original aim of charity and good works. This proved not just a hollow trope; in the years following the composition of the new statutes, the brothers began to act accordingly, helping the poor and taking care of the sick as they had never done before.¹⁸⁴

Agnolo died on January 5, 1539. Present at his deathbed were his family and a priest of the *Misericordia*. After having repeated the words of the priest twenty-five times, he passed away, most likely in the room in which Michelangelo's *Tondo* was hung. Two days later, at the eleventh hour, his fellow *fratelli* put him in his sepulcher in the Badia.¹⁸⁵ Thirty masses were celebrated by the monks of the church for the happy memory of Doni's soul.¹⁸⁶ Three days before his death, with his final hour drawing close, Agnolo had donated a substantial number of candles and torches to the same church, some of which for the brothers and priest to carry at his funeral service.¹⁸⁷ Now providing for his

¹⁸³ Other Florentine confraternities also reformed their statutes in response to social change in the years around 1500; see Nicholas A. Eckstein, "Words and Deeds, Stasis and Change: New Directions in Florentine Devotion Around 1500," *The Journal of Religious History* 28 (2004), 1-18.

¹⁸⁴ John Henderson, "Charity in late Medieval Florence: The role of religious confraternities," in *Florence and Milan: Comparisons and relations* (Acts of two conferences at Villa I Tatti in 1982 – 1984), 2 vols, ed. Craig Hugh Smyth and Gian Carlo Garfagnini, Florence: La Nuova Italia editrice, 1989, 2: 67-84.

¹⁸⁵ Agnolo's death was described by his son in the *Libro di ricordi* he continued from his father. See BNCF, Fondo Tordi, 4, fol. 211r.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., fol. 14v.

afterlife, the Badia had earlier served as a link between Doni's religious practice and his artistic patronage. Doni commissioned the frame of his *Tondo* from the woodcarver Francesco del Tasso, who had also carved the wooden choir at the Badia just a few years before. The conception of the frame was certainly Michelangelo's, but the rest of the woodwork adopts many of the decorative motives present in the choir,¹⁸⁸ thus providing a visual bridge between Agnolo's house and church, one only reinforced by the fact that Doni commissioned the decorative woodwork for his *camera* also from del Tasso. And every time Agnolo attended mass at the abbey, he beheld the priest raising the host in front of Giotto's polyptych at the high altar, which, in turn, had served as the basis of Michelangelo's recovery of painting in Doni's *Tondo*. Michelangelo's image was interpreted *by* and lent interpretive scope *to* the social and religious change that marked existence in the Governo Popolare, and Doni's more than most.

Postscript to a Certain End

When the historical moment of the Governo Popolare passed in 1512 with the subsequent changes of regime and their cultural reversals, and as the memory of those eighteen years began to fade under a dominant Medici politics, the meaning of Michelangelo's *Tondo* eroded with it. The painting lost its moment. From the 1520s onwards, the religious agenda of Michelangelo's anti-naturalistic painting was transformed into a hallmark of the Florentine style, the *Tondo* treasured as a relic imprinted with Michelangelo's artistic persona rather than understood as a vision of theological incommensurability, and recommended to the early modern tourist as "by the *maestro de' maestri*."

Michelangelo's panel became de-historicized within a decade of its completion. It was the text of Vasari's *Vita* that contributed most to making Michelangelo into an artist bigger than history and the transformation of the *Doni Tondo* into a relic of artistic greatness. Completely blind to the historical moment of the Governo Popolare that opposed the Medici supremacy the *Vite* attempt to substantiate, but still at pains to glorify the artistic treasures that period produced, Vasari

¹⁸⁸ Cecchi, 1987, 435.

made his *Terza maniera* begin in a historical void. When Michelangelo's republican patrons, like Soderini and Doni, occupy his pages, the Medici court writer is quick to point out their poor appreciation of Michelangelo's art. Although paying for Michelangelo's painting and sculpture – sometimes hesitantly, like Vasari's Doni –, they remain ignorant of the true meaning of their investments.

In spite of the recent industry of debunking Vasari, his narrative still looms large in present-day accounts of Michelangelo's art. The anti-historical reading of the great hero's early sixteenth-century oeuvre in the *Vite* makes the modern art historian interpret the style of works like the *Doni Tondo* as a style of an almost impossible narcissism, merely operating to celebrate its author's skills and to point out other artists' failures.¹⁸⁹ As a consequence of what might be called the Vasarian de-historicizing process, the style of Michelangelo's art became separated from its "content." Stylistic development, the Vasarian argument goes, has little to do with historical change, whereas iconographical interpretation is somehow dependent on it. For instance, in Vasari's thought, the style of the *David* was without comparison, while its subject-matter became "a symbol [*insegna*] of the Palazzo [della Signoria], ... in the way that just as he [David] had protected his people and governed them justly, so whoever ruled Florence should vigorously defend the city and govern it with justice."¹⁹⁰ Whereas Vasari still allowed a certain historical grounding for earlier Renaissance styles of painting (Giotto and his contemporaries were said to produce a painterly manner "*secondo che tempi*"),¹⁹¹ Michelangelo's style looms larger than life, transcends lived experience and hovers above historical context. Vasari never made Michelangelo's *visual* interpretation serve his subject-matter. And modern-day art historians keep the Vasarian separation alive, some exceptions aside. They historicize iconography and leave style in a historical vacuum. Thus we find one recent interpretation trying to find iconographical meaning in the relationship between the Virgin and St

¹⁸⁹ For instance, Justi, 1909, 178; Herbert von Einem, *Michelangelo*, transl. Ronald Taylor, London: Methuen & Co., 1973, 15-36; S. Freedberg, 1: 42-44.

¹⁹⁰ Vasari, 6: 19: "*la insegna del Palazzo ..., acciò che, sì come egli aveva difeso il suo popolo e governatolo con giustizia, così chi governava quella città dovesse animosamente diffenderla e giustamente governarla.*"

¹⁹¹ Vasari, 6: 410.

Joseph by pointing to texts by Ficino, Pico and others on the sacrifice of Christ, without ever giving a second thought to *how* that meaning would have operated *visually* in a historical context, or how the writings of these same humanists could be indicative of a shift in thinking about *visual* theological knowledge rather than *written* theology.¹⁹² If recent Michelangelo scholarship is in any way indicative of the field, then stylistic development belongs to the anti-historical agenda of the artist monograph and iconographic interpretation to that of the micro-historical, interdisciplinary scholarship of the journal article.

To be sure, the separation between “form” and “content” that Vasari’s *Vita* and subsequent scholarship enacts was explicated around the same time by critics of Michelangelo’s work, such as Pietro Aretino. In his famous letter of critique against the *Last Judgment*, sent to Michelangelo in 1545 and published in the same year, Aretino asked how that pious Michelangelo could “have wanted to show no less religious impiety than artistic perfection,” implying that artistic perfection impedes rather than substantiates religious subject-matter.¹⁹³ Still, like Vasari’s narrative, Aretino’s criticism says more about *his* historical moment, and even his personal frustrations, than the meaning of Michelangelo’s painting. Praising the painting in extenso in an earlier letter,¹⁹⁴ Aretino’s later criticisms were informed by the mounting counter-reformational politics of the days after the death of Pope Paul III and the poet’s frustrated attempts to acquire a drawing from the master.¹⁹⁵

Giovanni Andrea Gilio’s criticism of Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment* makes explicit that the separation between the fresco’s style and content was a question of reception. In his *Degli errori de’ pittori* (1564), he argued

¹⁹² Timothy Verdon, “ ‘Amor ab Abspectu’: Maria nel Tondo Doni e l’Umanesimo cristiano,” in *Vivens Homo: Rivista Teologica fiorentina* 5 (1994: *Teologia nell’età di Giovanni Pico della Mirandola*), 531-52.

¹⁹³ Carteggio, 4: 215: “... Adunque quel Michelangelo stupendo in la fama, quel Michelangelo notabile in la prudentia, quel Michelagnolo ammiranno nei costumi ha voluta mostrare a le genti non meno impietà di irrelegione che perfettion di pittura.”

¹⁹⁴ Transl. in Robert Klein and Henri Zerner, *Italian Art, 1500 – 1600. Sources and Documents*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1966, 56-58.

¹⁹⁵ See Melinda Schlitt, “Painting, Criticism, and Michelangelo’s *Last Judgment* in the Age of the Counter-Reformation,” in *Michelangelo’s Last Judgment*, ed. Marcia Hall, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, 126-31.

that Michelangelo claimed a theological knowledge in his painting *extra* to the Biblical text supporting it, creating a kind of artistic excess outside the truth of the written word. Gilio does not say that the artist himself brought about that separation; he could have only argued against Michelangelo's claim that theological truths *could* exist independent of text if he really believed that Michelangelo had argued for the *unity* of content and style. For Gilio, the painter of *historia* (in which category he had placed Michelangelo's fresco) was a mere translator of written language into a visual one.¹⁹⁶ Incapable by the definition of his profession of adding theological meaning to the supreme truths contained in the Bible and its textual exegesis, Gilio's painter should keep his hands clear of theological argument added to text. Anything added becomes a mark of self-aggrandizement, of digressions into artistic virtuosa – i.e. Michelangelo's Sistine nudes – that serve no other purpose than a claim to artistic fame. Gilio's arguments suggest a prior culture in which theological truths *could* be and *were* articulated visually outside the texts in the Bible or in literary exegesis.

Michelangelo was aware that the separation of art and religion loomed dangerously large in his work. He probably knew early on that his art was destined to be misunderstood. Recent authors have pointed out that he had already anticipated criticism in the *Last Judgment* in the flayed anti-portrait that Aretino-cum-Saint Bartholomew holds and the absence of his patron saint the Archangel Michael.¹⁹⁷ And yet, in 1504, although less fully articulated than later in the century, the separation of art and Christian belief already informed the criticism of someone like Savonarola, who could voice his critique against the naturalistic painters as: "You painters do ill: if you knew what spiritual confusion comes of it, as I do, you would not paint these things. ... And now the cult of God is destroyed!" And the aphorism "Every painter paints himself" that Savonarola used as a springboard for further criticism a year later, points to a similar incompatibility between *artistic* claims and *theological* truth.¹⁹⁸ In response to the separation between art and religious society,

¹⁹⁶ Giovanni Andrea Gilio, *Dialogo nel quale si ragiona degli errori e degli abusi de' pittori circa l'istorie*, in *Trattati*, 2: 39: "... 'l pittore istorico altro non è che un traslatore, che porti l'istoria da una lingua in un'altra, e questi da la penna al pennello, da la scrittura a la pittura."

¹⁹⁷ See above, Chapter 2, note 66.

¹⁹⁸ *SE*, 1: 343.

Michelangelo set out to re-align painting and personal devotion once and for all in the *Doni Tondo*, claiming the kind of visual knowledge in painting that Gilio was later to doubt and depicting the theological void that text was unable to articulate. Gilio later questioned the truth and sincerity of that endeavor, not the endeavor itself. Doubt, however, was already built in the *Tondo*, a painting that is remarkably restrictive in what it shows and shows only once. Soon celebrated as something other than Michelangelo painted, the *Tondo* marks a dead end. Michelangelo would never make a religious panel painting again. He sought a safe haven in sculpture, a medium that in Renaissance art criticism remained exempt from the kind of religious criticism painting suffered from, because stone could not “deceive the eye.”

A MODEL FOR HISTORY

The last three chapters studied Michelangelo's effort to re-define the social function of the image, an effort that resulted in far-reaching explorations in the history of image-making and that was marked by an acute sense of historical awareness. The idea that the history of art registers social, political and religious history is familiar to us. It features in some of the most influential accounts of Florentine culture produced in the last few decades, notably those by Nicolai Rubinstein, Dale and F.W. Kent, Jill Burke, Henk van Veen and Patricia Rubin.¹ These scholars did more than argue that art produced political meaning. Their writings have now made it impossible to write the history of Florentine politics without recourse to the history of art. Thus a patron's oeuvre, to keep Dale Kent's terminology alive, produces a much more penetrating image of his political self than the conduct of politics allowed for at Palazzo della Signoria, where politics remained veiled behind a façade of impenetrable bricks, to paraphrase Francesco Guicciardini.²

¹ See, among other publications, Nicolai Rubinstein, "Political ideas in Sienese art: The frescoes by Ambrogio Lorenzetti and Taddeo di Bartolo in the Palazzo pubblico," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 21 (1958), 179-207; Rubinstein, 1995; D.V. Kent, 2000; F.W. Kent, 2004; Burke, 2004; Van Veen; and Patricia Rubin, *Images and Identity in Fifteenth-Century Florence*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007. And for a geographically broader perspective on Italian artistic patronage, see Bram Kempers, *Painting, Power and Patronage: The Rise of the Professional Artist in Renaissance Italy*, London: Lane, The Penguin Press, 1987.

² Guicciardini, ed. Lugani Scarano, 1: 768 (*Ricordo* 141): "Non vi maravigliate che non si sappino le cose delle età passate, non quelle che si fanno nelle provincie o luoghi lontani: perché, se considerate

These historians were hardly the first to write the visual history of Renaissance politics. Vasari already did. In the *Vite*, painting, sculpture and architecture are folded into the political world of Renaissance Florence as the visual disciplines are made dependent on patronage and the moments of artistic commissions recounted as part of the history of marriages between powerful families – such as the Doni-Strozzi marriage – and set in the context of important events in the city's political history – such as the *David*. For Vasari, the *political* image of Lorenzo's golden age, for example, stood visible only in the visual image that "Lorenzo's" artists had produced. Vasari made the biographies of artists dependent on the biographies of their patrons, who, on their part, thanked their political "visibility," so to speak, *exclusively* to their participation in the art history of the *Vite*. It is the kind of copula between art and politics already in evidence in early sixteenth-century Florence, as discussed in Chapter 1.³

The Governo Popolare could boast her own version of the political history of art. In 1510, Francesco Albertini published a guide to Florence that seamlessly stitched together an image of art and patronage to suggest that patrons painted, sculpted and built their own political identity through the mere mediation of artists' hands (without, however, compromising the artists' geniuses). San Marco is called that "great convent and church ..., the greater part made by the house of the Medici [*facto la maior parte della casa de' Medici*],"⁴ the tabernacle of the Miraculous Virgin at Santissima Annunziata that Michelozzo designed, "*facta dalla casa de' Medici*,"⁵ and the rebuilding of San Lorenzo becomes co-authored by the Medici and Brunelleschi.⁶ Albertini made the

bene, non s'ha vera notizia delle presenti, non di quelle che giornalmente si fanno in una medesima città; e spesso tra 'l palazzo e la piazza è una nebbia sì folta o uno muro sì grosso che, non vi penetrando l'occhio degli uomini, tanto sa el popolo di quello che a chi governa o della ragione perché lo fa, quanto delle cose che fanno in India. E però si empie facilmente el mondo di opinione erronee e vane." Tr. in Guicciardini, ed. Brown, 174.

³ For the visual politics of Lorenzo in Vasari, see Patricia Rubin, "Vasari, Lorenzo, and the Myth of Magnificence," in *Lorenzo il Magnifico* (1994), 427-42.

⁴ Albertini, ed. Murray, 8: "*Nel magno Conve[n]to & chiesa s[an]c[t]o Marcho, facto la maior parte dalla Casa de Medici, visono assai cose buone.*"

⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 6: "*laqual chiesa bellissima dall i fondamenti e' stata rinovata dalla preclara & nobile casa d[e] Medici p[er] Filippo Brunel[eschi] architectore*"

authorship of the artist interchangeable with that of the patron, sometimes even allowing the patron *more* authorship than the artist; it was an exchange Rudolph Agricola already made in the fifteenth century on the basis of Aristotle.⁷

The publication of the social history of art by Albertini and Vasari, in turn, boasted powerful precedents. Lorenzo Ghiberti, writing at mid-fifteenth century, inaugurated his history with a paragraph that understands the rise and fall of art-making as the result of social change. Art declined, “books, commentaries, outlines and rules” were lost, as the result of a radical cultural reversal that came with the advent of “the Christian faith,” “in the times of the emperor Constantine and of Pope Sylvester.”⁸ But the understanding of artistic change as a result of social reversals ultimately goes back to that ur-father of the social history of art, Pliny. Writing from the perspective of the politically corrupt times of Tiberius and Nero, Pliny looked back at the golden age of the arts under the regimes of Augustus and the Roman Republic with a sense of nostalgia that set the standard for much art history writing of the early modern period.⁹

Art historians from Pliny to Vasari made their particularized histories of individual artists and patrons subject to a historical design that cut much deeper than the historical fabric of isolated artist’s lives. An artwork was thought not only to have been the product of a specific historical moment; but that moment was itself made subject to a source much bigger than the individual or particular – deeply buried in the fabric of history. Artists didn’t shape history, but history shaped artists. The tensions between individual works of art and the meta-historical design that gave them shape is dramatized in Vasari’s devision of history

⁷ For Agricola’s definition, see Michael Baxandall, “Rudolph Agricola on patrons efficient and patrons final: A renaissance discrimination,” *The Burlington Magazine* 124 (1982), 424-25.

⁸ Ghiberti, ed. Bartoli, 83: “*Adunche al tempo di Constantino imperadore e di Silvestro papa sormontò su la fede christiana. Ebbe la ydolatria grandissima persecutione, in modo tale, tutte le statue e le picture furon disfatte e lacerate di tanta nobilità et anticha e perfetta dignità, e così si consumaron colle statue e picture, e vilumi, e comentarii, e lineamenti, e regole davano amaestramento e tanta et egregia e gentile arte. E poi levare via ogni anticho costume di ydolatria, costituirono i templi tutti essere bianchi. In questo tempo ordinorono grandissima pena a chi facesse alcuna statua o alcuna pictura, e così finì l’arte statuaria e la pictura et ogni doctrina che in essa fosse fatta. Finita che fu l’arte, stettero e templi bianchi circa d’anni 600.*”

⁹ Barkan, 68-70.

in three *età*, each indicative of a specific historical condition. In the prefaces, Vasari wrote, "I shall discuss the matter of modes and styles in general terms, paying more attention to the nature of the times [*la qualità de' tempi*] than to individual artists. ... I have divided the artists into three sections or, shall we say, periods [*età*], each with its own recognizable distinct character"¹⁰ Although Vasari's division still determines much of our own periodization, his was not just an effort to conveniently group artists with a common style in one *età*, which is only possible with the benefit of hindsight. He also thought that the *qualità de' tempi* helped to produce that style.¹¹

In Vasari, art is made representative for the social conditions of a certain epoch. Such epochal thinking rests on the idea that the products of a distant past register the societal values of that past, that the social, political and religious conditions of the period produced a recognizable style of representation.¹² This is more a question of style than

¹⁰ Vasari, 3: 5-6: "*per avere nelle Vite de' particolari ragionato abbastanza de' modi de l'arte, de le maniere e de le cagioni del bene e neglio ed ottimo operare di quelli, ragionerò di questa cosa generalmente, e più presto de la qualità de' tempi che de le persone, distinte e divise da me, per non ricercarla troppo minutamente, in tre parti, o vogliamole chiamare età, da la rinascita di queste arti sino al secolo che noi viviamo, per quella manifestissima differenza che in ciascuna di loro si conosce*"

¹¹ See Sohm, 45.

¹² For epochal thought in art and literature, see Theodor E. Mommsen, "Petrarch's Conception of the 'Dark Ages'," *Speculum* 17 (1942), 226-42; *Antiqui und Moderni: Traditionsbewußtsein und Fortschrittsbewußtsein im späten Mittelalter*, ed. Alfred Zimmermann, Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 1973; Antonio Thiery, "Il Medioevo nell' Introduzione e nel Proemio delle Vite," in *Il Vasari Storiografo e Artista: Atti del Congresso Internazionale nel IV Centenario della Morte*, Florence: Grafistampa, 1974, 351-81; Eckhard Kessler, "Die Ausbildung der Theorie der Geschichtsschreibung im Humanismus und in der Renaissance unter dem Einfluß der wiederentdeckten Antike," in *Die Antike-Rezeption in den Wissenschaften während der Renaissance*, ed. August Buck and Klaus Heitmann, Weinheim: Acta Humaniora, 1983, 29-49; Arnold Nesselrath, "Raphael's Archaeological Method," in *Raffaello a Roma: Il convegno del 1983*, Rome: Edizione dell'Elefante, 1986, 367-71; Walter Haug, "Die Zwerge auf den Schultern der Riesen: Epochales und typologisches Geschichtsdenken und das Problem der Interferenzen," in *Epochenschwelle und Epochenbewusstsein*, ed. Reinhart Herzog and Reinhart Kosselleck, Munich: Fink, 1987, 167-94; Klaus Schreiner, "'Diversitas temporum.' Zeiterfahrung und Epochengliederung im späten Mittelalter," in *Epochenschwelle* (Supra), 381-428; Martin L. McLaughlin, "Humanist concepts of Renaissance and middle ages in the tre- and quattrocento," *Renaissance studies* 2 (1988), 131-42; Heinz Schlaffer, *Poesie und Wissen. Die Entstehung des ästhetischen Bewußtseins und der philologischen Erkenntnis*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990; Grafton, 1991, 47-75; Hans-Werner Goetz, *Geschichtsschreibung und*

iconography. No Renaissance source mentions a kind of “period iconography,” not even Ghiberti. Although aware of a difference in subject-matter between the products of the pagan past and his own age of Christianity, he passes over the aspect of subject-matter to lament the loss of the *rules* of that “masterful, great and gentle art.”¹³ The past was locked in the *how* rather than the *what* of representation. Michelangelo’s *David* and the *Doni Tondo* acquired meaning in relation to past traditions exactly in the way they departed from the *style* of that tradition, or better, the *interpretation* of subject-matter rather than subject-matter *per se*.

It must be emphasized that insights into the social circumstance of a certain period can be acquired from works of art no less than from written sources. After the Greek scholar Manuel Crysoloras had seen the visual remains of ancient Rome in 1411, he exchanged the authority of the textual histories by “Herodotus and the other historians” for the historical truth of the visual, “in which one can *see* all that existed in those days among the different races, and thus this history [based on the image] is complete and accurate.” He could claim thus because art “is not history, so much as the direct and personal observation [*autopsía*] and the living presence [*parousía*] of all the things that happened then.”¹⁴ The kind of thinking Crysoloras displayed makes history collapse into the present, as Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood have aptly observed.¹⁵ Art does not offer a historical *reconstruction* but an *autopsy*, that is, in its literal meaning, a “seeing for yourself” of a distant past in the present. Michael Baxandall rendered *autopsía* as “exhibition,” which brings us right to the heart of the problem. For the very idea of exhibition, of the immediacy of personal observation, denies the idea of historical distance; modern exhibitions of course still try to make time collapse. Humanists like Crysoloras worked to erase the gap between the *then* and *now*, and pointed to the visual arts to substantiate their

Geschichtsbewußtsein im hohen Mittelalter, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1999; and David Galbraith, “Petrarch and the Boken City,” in *Antiquity and its Interpreters* (2000), 17-26.

¹³ Ghiberti, ed. Bartoli, 83.

¹⁴ For the original Greek text, see Baxandall, 1971, 148-49 (Appendix VI). I have used the English translation in Nagel and Wood, 2005, 408, who modified the one by Baxandall with the help of the Italian translation offered in Salvatore Settis, *Memoria dell’antico nell’arte italiana*, Turin: Einaudi, 1986, 3: 457.

¹⁵ This is also the point made by Barkan, 120-36; and Nagel and Wood, 2005, 408-09.

arguments. Literary histories needed the mediation of translation and decoding before they could be understood; art did not. “If you tell a story with your pen,” Leonardo da Vinci later added, “the painter with his brush can tell it more easily, with simpler completeness”¹⁶

The Subject of History

This chapter further studies Michelangelo’s reflections on history. It focuses on the *Battle of Cascina*, commissioned as a fresco in 1504 by the Signoria for the Sala del Gran Consiglio of their palace to commemorate the moment in 1364 when the Florentines restored Pisa to their dominion, and only worked out in a cartoon. In the execution of the only commission for a painting of a historical subject he was ever awarded, Michelangelo, paradoxically, disintegrated history at the level of iconography, telling little about what actually happened at Cascina in 1364, and exchanging a narrative of military history for one of the history of art. Like the other works this book focuses on, Michelangelo’s *Cascina Cartoon* acquired meaning not for the subject-matter Michelangelo was asked to depict but for the *way* that work related to the history of art. But here history lay more in the future than in the past. Michelangelo, I submit, designed a blueprint of art for future generations to come. And it was in its educational role, I conclude, that the cartoon became political.

Michelangelo received the commission for the *Battle of Cascina* for the Sala del Gran Consiglio nearly a year after Leonardo was asked to paint the *Battle of Anghiari* for the same room in 1503.¹⁷ Almost certainly, both scenes of war were designed for the west wall of the Sala, where they would have flanked the *Tribuna* of the Gonfaloniere and the eight *priori* of the Signoria and would have been visible above the benches of

¹⁶ Leonardo, ed. Richter, 1: 367-68 (§653): “L’occhio che si dice finestra della’anima é la principe via do[n]de il comune se[n]so può piu copiosa e ma[n]gnificame[n]te co[n]siderare le i[n]finite opere di natura, e l’orechio è il seco[n]do il quale si fa nobile per le cose raco[n]te, le quali è veduto l’occhio; se voi istoriografi o poeti o altri matematici no[n] aveste col’occhio viste le cose, male le potreste riferire per le scritture, e se tu poeta figurerai una storia colla pittura della penna, el pittore col pennello la farà di piu facile sadisfatione e me[no] tediosa a essere co[n]pressa”

¹⁷ Like that of Michelangelo, Leonardo’s contract does not survive. However, on October 24, 1503, da Vinci received the keys to the *Sala del Papa* at Santa Maria Novella, where he began working on his cartoon; he was probably awarded the commission shortly before. For the document, see Beltrami, 81 (no.130).

the city's most important political magistrates.¹⁸ Leonardo began his fresco in 1505 but left it unfinished; Michelangelo never started and only produced the now-famous preparatory cartoon, which was torn to shreds in the course of the sixteenth century by artists eager to copy the figures contained in it.¹⁹ Aristotile da Sangallo produced a painted copy of the whole cartoon, now kept at Holkham Hall (Fig. 80). It shows nineteen men, drawn in various poses and larger than life; most of them are nude.²⁰ Panic rules. Naked men climb out of a pool of water just visible on the lower border of the composition, others try to dress, hastily, apparently in the face of approaching danger. The source of that threat is not figured in the Holkham painting, but it survives in another copy from the collection of the British Museum, tucked away in the upper left corner of the composition, where cavalry approaches the nude men from behind, in the direction where the man on the left is pointing (Fig. 81). The subject of bathing Florentine soldiers who are surprised by the approaching Pisan forces is featured in the fourteenth-century chronicle of Filippo Villani and also in Bruni's *Historiae Florentini populi* of 1416 – 1442. Both texts cite the refreshing pool as the Arno and locate the site of panic at Cascina.

Commissioned for the room that functioned as the heart of the Governo Popolare, few other works of art invite such a direct political interpretations as Michelangelo's – at least at first instance.²¹ The building of the Sala was directly tied up with the political events of the day. When the Florentine constitution was reformed after the expulsion of the Medici, the Gran Consiglio, consisting of no less than 3000 men,

¹⁸ For the archeological evidence, see H. Travers Newton and H. Spencer, Jr, "Appunti sulla Battaglia di Anghiari di Leonardo," *Prospettiva* 19 (1977), 99-101; and *Ibid.*, "On the location of Leonardo's Battle of Anghiari," *Art Bulletin* 64 (1982), 45-52. And for the archival evidence, see Rubinstein, 1995, 73. The altar should hence be situated on the opposite east wall, which is only natural considering that altars were often oriented to the east. Wilde, 1944, 80, had previously argued that the battle scene were destined for the eastern wall.

¹⁹ See Vasari, 6: 25. Pieces of the cartoon were dispersed over various Italian collections; its traces are documented into the seventeenth century; see de Tolnay, 1947, 211-12.

²⁰ That Michelangelo's figures were larger than life appears from a description of fragments of the cartoon in Turin in a seventeenth-century inventory: "*Huomo ignudo in faccia; altro vestito di corazza in schena col randocchio, e la spada sotto a' piedi: grandi più del naturale*" and "*Tre huomini ignudi più grandi del naturale.*" See *Le Gallerie Nazionali Italiane: Notizie e documenti*, vol. 3, Rome: Ministero per la pubblica istruzione, 1897, 62; cited in de Tolnay, 1947, 211-12.

²¹ Wilde, 1944, 65.

was instituted to replace former Medici magistrates to become “the soul of the Governo Popolare,” that “foundation of liberty,” to cite Guicciardini.²² Including more men in government than ever before, the Council was in need of a new room from the moment of its foundation. Construction on a space behind the Palazzo della Signoria was begun in May 1495 and continued with unparalleled speed. In April 1496, it accommodated the first meeting of the Great Council. Rectangular in shape, articulated by three windows in the short northern and southern walls, two in the east side and four on the west side, the floor was covered with bricks and the ceiling with gilded wood work, including a centerpiece with the arms of the people. The Sala stood as one a giant structure of political meaning. Benches several stories high ran along the walls to provide seats for the main magistrates, pierced on the west wall by the elaborately carved *Tribuna* with a statue of the Saviour planned (yet never installed) on top, mirrored in turn on the east wall by an altar, its frame designed by Filippino Lippi and executed by Baccio d’Agnolo, complete with candelabra and pulpit, but never exhibiting the altarpiece commissioned from Filippino Lippi in 1498 and partly executed by Fra Bartolommeo in 1510.²³

In the Sala an image of political rupture was visualized. Two inscriptions above the entrance door set the tone for the new political system in contrast to the old order.²⁴ The breach between new and old was further expressed by appropriated works of art from the Palazzo Medici: twenty-six busts and Lorenzo *Il Magnifico*’s famous bronze horse’s head were put on display in the Sala like war booty, “in honor and as an ornament to the new *Sala Grande* and in honor of the Florentine people.”²⁵ On the altar, still awaiting a definitive altarpiece, was placed Filippo Lippi’s *Virgin Adoring the Christ Child with Saints Johns and*

²² Guicciardini, ed. Lugani Scarano, 1: 401: “la anima del governo popolare.” And *ibid.*, 398: “fondamento delle libertà.”

²³ The best overview of the Sala’s furnishing is still Wilde, 1944. But see the recent corrections included in the publications cited above, in note 18.

²⁴ The inscriptions are cited above, Chapter 2, note 95.

²⁵ Frey, 1909, 118 (doc. 30): “per ornare et in ornamento della nova sala grande a honore di questo florentissimo popolo.”

Bernard (Fig. 82), which had been appropriated from the altar of the Medici's palace chapel shortly after Piero de' Medici's flight.²⁶

No surprise, then, that Michelangelo's commission has invited political interpretations. In 1991, Nicolai Rubinstein attempted to align the *Cartoon's* iconography with the military politics of Machiavelli.²⁷ Around the time Michelangelo was commissioned to paint the *Bathers*, Machiavelli was occupied with founding a citizen's militia in Florence to win the war with Pisa, to heal once and for all the city's "fourth mortal wound."²⁸ Lost to the Florentines thanks to Piero di Lorenzo de' Medici's failed negotiations with the French King in 1494, attempts to recover the harbor city drained the Republic of most of its tax monies. To financial problems were added those of a failing mercenary system. Discord over the choice of condottiere pervaded the politics of the day, even seriously upsetting the position of Piero Soderini.²⁹ Machiavelli aimed to solve that problem by replacing the mercenary army with troops composed of Florentine soldiers and men from the *contado*.³⁰ Rubinstein reads Michelangelo's cartoon as supporting Machiavelli's plans by interpreting its iconography as one of citizen's virtue, which Rubinstein recognized in Villani's description of the Cascina battle. He discovers the fourteenth-century Villani anticipating Machiavelli's later criticisms of the mercenary system. According to Villani, the Florentine troops at Cascina included not only a mercenary army supported by the soldiers of Florentine subject towns (such as Arezzo), but also "Florentines who had voluntarily joined on horseback in order to do honor to their fatherland." "*Per onorare loro patria di volontà erano cavalcate,*" these men represented, as Rubinstein called it, the "basic human factor in war," much like

²⁶ Lippi's work is mentioned in the Sala del Gran Consiglio by Albertini, ed. Murray 11; and Billi, ed. Benedettucci, 89-90, who wrote: "*Nel palazzo de' Medici fece una tavola, la quale è oggi nel palazzo d'i Signori, che vi si messe quando loro furno fatti rubegli*" See Rubinstein, 1995, 70-71nt225.

²⁷ Rubinstein, 1991.

²⁸ Machiavelli, ed. Martelli, 945: "*Né sare' tanto aiuto a tempo stato / se non fussi la 'ndustria di colui / che allora governava 'l vostro stato, / forse che venavate 'n forza altrui; / perché quattro mortal ferite avevi / che tre ne fur sanate da costui: / Pistoia in parte rebellare vedevi, / e di confusion Firenze pregna, / e Pisa e Valdichiana non tenevi. ... costui Pistoia in gran pace ridusse; costui Arezzo e tutta Valdichiana / sotto l'antico iugo ricondusse.*"

²⁹ Butters, 1985, 83-114.

³⁰ See Hörnqvist, 2002.

Machiavelli's men, who would, in the words of that architect of civic virtue, "*onorare sé e la patria loro.*"³¹ War was the stuff of Florentine politics. And according to Rubinstein historical victories could stimulate the Great Council and awaken their civic virtue so that they would support a war fought with the *patria's* own men by looking at Michelangelo scene in the room where they convened.

A few years later, Alessandro Cecchi refuted Rubinstein's *militia* thesis. Cecchi introduced an alternative and more convincing textual source for Michelangelo's image, relieved Machiavelli of his influence, but maintained a reading of Michelangelo's (and Leonardo's) projected scenes in the context of the Pisan war.³² In place of Villani's *Cronica*, Cecchi proposes Leonardo Bruni's *Historiae Florentini populi* as the source for Michelangelo's *Bathers*. He convincingly points out that the approaching soldiers Michelangelo planned for the left background (indicated in a preparatory drawing for fighting soldiers in Oxford for the upper right corner of the composition; see Fig. 83), are closer to the account in Bruni than to Villani. The former speaks of a direct violent confrontation after the Pisans surprised the bathing Florentines, whereas the latter tells of the Pisan troops approaching the Florentine camp only to cause confusion and *not* to fight. Cecchi points out, moreover, that Bruni's text was kept in an Italian translation by Donato Acciaiuoli within the walls of the Palazzo della Signoria in the "*tabernacolo dell'Audientia de' Magnifici Signori*," where it was easily accessible for the Signoria and Gonfaloniere responsible for the commission. The *Historia Florentine populi*, in contrast to Villani's text, celebrates the mercenary system and attributes victory to the *condottiere*. Cecchi seems convincing in his arguments that the representation of the success of the mercenary system in two historical examples could have served as *exempla* for the *condottieri* currently conducting the Pisan war. Machiavelli has no place in Cecchi's reconstruction. More abroad on diplomatic missions than able to exercise his influence within the palace walls, this opponent of the mercenary system was an unlikely candidate for designing the Sala's program. Always at Palazzo della Signoria and never leaving Piero Soderini's side

³¹ Machiavelli, *Arte della guerra e scritti politici minori*, ed. Sergio Bertelli, Milan: Feltrinelli, 1961, 100: "*Per onorare loro patria di volontà erano cavalcati.*"

³² Cecchi, 1996.

to run the government's daily business, was that architect of the Governo Popolare's image of *Libertas*, Marcello Virgilio Adriani, combining his chair at the *Studio* with a position as First Chancellor of the Florentine Republic where Machiavelli was only Second.³³ Adriani, Cecchi insists, and not Machiavelli, was the driving force behind the Sala's iconographical program, providing the artist with textual advice. While holding Adriani responsible for drawing up a supposed though no longer surviving iconographical program, Cecchi identifies Soderini as the project's patron. Commissioned by the Signoria at large, the Gonfaloniere for life was the only man who was not replaced every two months and therefore able to attend to the project for its full duration. Moreover, he had just reformed the office of the *operai del palagio*, granting the financial responsibility over artistic projects to the Signoria, but of course really to the permanent head of state alone.³⁴

Still, despite all its political contexts and patronage, it is iconographically strange to attribute political allegory to Michelangelo's naked soldiers, and not only because his representation of panic serves civic virtue badly. Rereading Bruni's text that Michelangelo's work follows, one wonders why the artist, his patron, or his possible advisor chose to depict the moment of the bathing soldiers in the first place. In Bruni, the episode is given a strangely apolitical and almost unheroic interpretation. Bruni first tells of the Pisan commander's clever deceit. He writes:

His plan for initiating the battle was as follows. He would often send horsemen up to the Florentine camp who would start an uproar, then suddenly flee. By doing this he saw to it that the Florentines acquired the habit of paying no attention to their coming and their antics. Having achieved this and by means of his clever plan, he suddenly went on in the afternoon, and, with all his troops keeping wonderful silence and disguising their movements, he arrived without warning at the Florentine camp. The heat was tremendous, and a large part of the soldiery was unarmed or lying down in their tents or bathing in the river that flowed nearby. There was no thought or suspicion of the enemy at that moment. Then, suddenly, the enemy fell upon the defense

³³ See Godman, 131-32.

³⁴ Cecchi, 1996, 112; and see above, Chapter 2.

works, hoping to break through to the camp with the first onslaught and crush the unarmed and resting soldiers. The Aretines were stationed on that side, who, though thrown back by the sudden attack, by no means gave way, but, armed and unarmed, threw themselves on the foe and checked their first onslaught. Now the clamor that arose drove the rest to arms, and all the bravest men hurried to turn back the assault.³⁵

Victory, however, was not yet the Florentines'. Bruni proceeded to tell that mutiny raged through the Florentine camp shortly after the battle. Unwilling to fight, the Florentine soldiers succeeded in little more than countering the Pisan attack, which Bruni really attributes to the willingness of the Aretine forces and not to the Florentine. The Pisans were left unharmed within the walls of the harbor city. Diplomacy ultimately secured Florentine victory, not the battle itself.³⁶

In the context of Bruni's narrative, then, Michelangelo's moment of the bathing soldiers led to nothing more than a prevention of looming disaster inflicted by the clever English commander John Hawkwood, whose military tactics Bruni clearly championed. And what is even more remarkable from a political point of view is the fact that the Aretine forces to whom Bruni attributed the survival of the Florentine camp in 1364, would feature in a painting in 1504, when Arezzo was rebelling against Florence. Suppressing the Aretine revolt was a much discussed issue at Palazzo della Signoria. In 1503, Machiavelli even dedicated a treatise to it, the *Del modo* cited earlier. In 1506, the topic was still hotly debated.³⁷

In Bruni, the bathing scene reads like a strange digression without follow-up. He did not develop the potential of the story to show that the Florentines were willing to defend their city with bare hands, unarmed, David-like, under the protection of God only; and this scenario is not played out in Villani's chronicle either. Heroism is only read into Michelangelo's work by later, twentieth-century historians. The text Michelangelo was asked to visualize served to implicate the laziness of

³⁵ Bruni, ed. and tr. Hankins, 2: 460-63 (Book 8, § 69).

³⁶ Ibid., 465-67 (Book 8, § 71-72).

³⁷ See Guicciardini's remarks in *Consulte e pratiche (1505 – 1512)*, 77. And for the rebellion, see Butters, 1985, 44, 51, 55.

the Florentines, more willing to rebel than fight. In Michelangelo, even more than in Bruni, heroism cedes its place to outright panic.

This is not to argue that the iconography of Michelangelo's cartoon is completely deprived of political reference. One of the soldiers in the upper right corner of the composition carrying a shield wears a headdress that unmistakably shows the coat of arms of the Parte Guelfa, Florence's only political party (Fig. 84). The Parte had been instrumental in the Florentine victory over the Pisans in 1364.³⁸ Previously unnoticed, the appearance of the party's *stemma* in the cartoon hints at the possibility that some historical perspective governed Michelangelo's interpretation.³⁹ The victory at Cascina took place on July, 28, the feast day of Saint Victor, whom the Parte Guelfa subsequently adopted as its patron saint. Celebrations in honor of Victor and hence the victory over the Pisans were organized by the Guelph Party until the time of Michelangelo.⁴⁰ Saints carried a programmatic importance in the decorations of the Sala; Leonardo was asked to paint Saint Peter on a cloud appearing to the Florentine commander in his *Battle of Anghiari*.⁴¹

But the inclusion of the Parte Guelfa reference in Michelangelo's cartoon was not just an attempt at historical reconstruction; the Parte's history existed with a penetrating force in the present. After the flight of

³⁸ Filippo Villani, ed. Porta, 737-38 (Book 11, §99); cited in Rubinstein, 1991, 284.

³⁹ Cecchi, 1996, 108-09, points out that Piero Soderini might have been crucial in the choice to commission a scene of war in which the Parte Guelfa was implied, remarkably enough without mentioning the Guelph Party's coat of arms on the soldier's headdress. It is not mentioned either in André Chastel, "Les capitains antiques affrontés dans l'art Florentin du XV^e siècle," *Mémoires de la Société des antiquaires de France* 9th series, 2 (1954), 279-89.

⁴⁰ See ASF, Capitani di Parte Guelfa, Numeri Rossi, 4, fol. 40v: "Eldi xxvi del mese diluglio unaltra oferta nella festa disa[n] victorio nella chiesa cathedrale enella capella della detta parte etutta lacera delle parte predetta." In addition to these ordinances, the Parte organized a palio every year in honor of Saint Victor; see ASF, Capitani di Parte Guelfa, Numeri Rossi, 4, fol. 41r.: "Delpalio chesi decorere nella festa dis[ant]o Victorie ... / Alascui[n] a[n]ni ahonore et rivere[n]za delo[mn]ipotere rolo delbeato / vittorio esse fatto corvinato ficeba allespese dideta parte / uno palio bellissimo divaluta disesanta fiorini doro eno[n]piu / eno[n]piu che neldi disa[n] vittorio prefato sia tenuto apresso alla / chiesa di sansice i[n]piaza difire[n]ze. E diquello sia fatto elcorso / dechavagli chome e consueto che i[n]torno sono dafare. Echa / pitani disparte dordinare debano secondo laco[n]suetudine / daquinci i[n]drieto diprossimo obs[er]vata. Elcamarlingo del / la parte predetta della pecunia della parte adiliberazio[n]e dedetti / signori capitani eledue parti diloro pagare causcita porre / possa lecitame[n]te esa[n]za pena i[n]sino nella detta qua[n]tita defio / rini sesanta doro e no[n]piu."

⁴¹ Leonardo, ed. Richter, 1: 381-82 (§669).

the Medici, it propagated the ideology of republican freedom through which the Governo Popolare defined itself. The Parte Guelfa became the self-acclaimed defender of *Libertas*, of a city without princes, without tyrants as the post-Medicean world would say. In the fourteenth century, Matteo Villani, Filippo's father, wrote of the party as "truly the fundament and firm and stable rock of the liberty of Italy, and contrary to all [sorts] of tyrannies, in such a way that if any Guelph would become a tyrant, he would by force be converted into a Ghibelline."⁴² This was the kind of language Bruni also used when drafting the Parte's statutes anew in 1420. "The glorious Guelph Party is attached to the Church of Rome in divine and to liberty in human matters. It is doubly praiseworthy: for its catholic faith, because, following the true religion, it does not deviate from the Church; and for its civil policy, because it is dedicated to liberty, without which no Republic can survive."⁴³ That is also why Bruni could write that the city acquired its freedom in 1251 with the death of Frederic II and why chroniclers from Giovanni Villani in the fourteenth century to Bartolomeo Cerretani in the sixteenth wrote of the city reclaiming her *libertà* at expelling the Duke of Athens in 1343.⁴⁴ When Piero de' Medici was expelled, "*popolo e libertà*" was heard through the streets of Florence.⁴⁵

Because of its political power, the Medici had limited the Parte Guelfa's political influence to a minimum, confiscating some of its goods and subjecting the appointment of the Parte Captains to a system that secured the family's full control in the course of the fifteenth century; two attempts to abolish the Parte altogether failed.⁴⁶ All this was of course undone in 1494. The Parte must have experienced its escape from the yoke of Medici dominance as a kind of liberation, as a return to the

⁴² Matteo Villani, 25 (Book 8, §24): "*E di vero la parte guelfa è fondamento e rocca ferma e stabile della libertà d'Italia, e contraria a tutte le tiranie, per modo che se alcuno guelfo divien tiranno, convien per forza ch' e' diventi ghibellino*"

⁴³ *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni: Selected Texts*, ed. and tr. Gordon Griffiths, James Hankins and David Thompson, Binghamton (NY): Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1987, 48-49.

⁴⁴ Bruni, ed. and tr. Hankins, 1: 108-09 (Book 2, §2); and Villani, 341 (Book 13, §17); both cited in Rubinstein, 1986, 5, 7; and Cerretani, *Storia*, ed. Berti, 128.

⁴⁵ Rinuccini, ed. G. Aiazzi, cliii.

⁴⁶ Alison Brown, "The Guelph Party in fifteenth-century Florence: The transition from communal to Medicean state," *Rinascimento* 20 (1980), 41-86.

old order. So much is at least suggested by the formulation in one of the party's documents. "On the day of the ninth of November 1494 was made a revolution and renovation of the constitution in the city of Florence," reads an unpublished note in a ledger.⁴⁷ The change was perceived not as renewal but as renovation, a bringing back of the constitution to a state prior to Medici interference. The present state of liberty folded into the liberty of a never forgotten past.

And then it folds into Michelangelo's family history. Documents show that from 1501 onwards, members of the Buonarroti family began to fill important offices within the Parte Guelfa. Michelangelo's favorite brother Buonarroto, his uncle Francesco, and his grandnephew Lodovico di Leonardo served the party in the offices of *priori di pecunnia* and *secretario credentia*, supervising its finances and possessions and standing by the four Parte captains in difficult matters.⁴⁸ Michelangelo's representation of the Guelph Party's coat of arms in his composition was thus not merely a sign of the artist pondering the political history of Florence or an iconography of republican politics but also a reflection on his own place in both. After all, Michelangelo descended from a family that had enjoyed considerable political influence in the city before their fortune declined in the fifteenth century. In 1392, before the Buonarroti fell into debt, Michelangelo's great grandfather Buonarroto was *Capitano di Parte Guelfa*.⁴⁹ Michelangelo's work for the Sala del Gran Consiglio – the council, on which members of the Buonarroti family took seats and to which Michelangelo himself was nominated more than once – was thus tied up with his own family's political history.⁵⁰ Plotting out the pre-fifteenth-century history of Florence led to a pondering of family

⁴⁷ ASF, Capitani Parte Guelfa, Numeri Rossi, 18, fol. 23r.: "Ex die viiii m[en]s[ibus] Novemberis 1494 facta fuit revolutio et renovatio statuis incivitate Flor[entia]...."

⁴⁸ ASF, Capitani Parte Guelfa, Numeri Rossi, 18, fols. 83v, 90r, 103v, 107r, 172r-v, 187r, 190v. The purpose of these offices are described in the Parte statutes of 1335, published in F. Bonaini, "Della Parte Guelfa in Firenze," *Giornale storico degli archivi italiani* 2 (1858), 171-87, 257-59; 3 (1859): 77-99; 167-84.

⁴⁹ *Carteggio indiretto*, 1: xi.

⁵⁰ For these nominations, see Hatfield, 2002, 201-22.

history.⁵¹ And in Michelangelo case, the histories of family and politics concentrated in an image of both.

Although referencing the Parte *stemma* was Michelangelo's path to historical understanding, the supposed political meaning of the Parte Guelfa could have been given equal space in an image of battle as in one of male nudes busy pulling fabric over wet skin. To allow Michelangelo's cartoon political iconicity on the basis of one headdress alone tempers the structure of the drawing as a whole, where political victory still stands at a far remove. Even though Michelangelo's cartoon developed from a moment in Florence's military history, it remains a very apolitical work, at least considered from an iconographic point of view. Even more so since the very practice of writing political history around 1500 evolved exactly around the kind of battles Michelangelo chose *not* to represent. In contrast to Michelangelo's picture of war, the histories by his contemporary writers included detailed descriptions of the encounters between enemy troops. When Bernardo Rucellai set out to write his *History of the French Invasion* in 1495, and sought advice with the Neapolitan humanist Pontano, he was told that true history only existed in the description of military battles, of the clamor of weapons that determined history's course.⁵²

Unlike Uccello before and Leonardo contemporary with him (Figs 85 and 86), Michelangelo pushed the historical battle itself to the background to focus on history's by-work, favoring a digression in Bruni's *History of the Florentine People* above the spectacle of battle that forms the core of Bruni's account. It tells history elsewhere, in nude figures. Political iconography is perhaps better served by the representation of battle than by a group of panicking nude ephebes in the midst of dressing and climbing ashore, an image that registers more comfortably as art history than as the representation of political history. While it is clear that Michelangelo was sensitive to the history of Florence, as indicated by the Parte Guelfa reference, his sensitivity amounts less to a pondering of military history than to an archeology of art.

⁵¹ Spini, 116, already noted the "coincidence" of the fact that Michelangelo was commissioned to represent a moment in Florentine history that corresponded with the flourishing of his own family history.

⁵² See F. Gilbert, 1965, 209.

Art's Future History

A work of art history: the belief that the cartoon marked an epochal turning point in the history of art, that it somehow inaugurated a new origin in Florence's visual history, was at the heart of the copying industry it set in motion and the written narratives of Florentine art history it came to determine. Artists gathered to draw after Michelangelo's figures when the cartoon was on display in the Sala del Gran Consiglio, probably already from the summer of 1505 onwards.⁵³ Vasari mentions the names of those who drew after the work: Aristotile da Sangallo, Ridolfo Ghirlandaio, Raphael, Francesco Granacci, Baccio Bandinelli, the Spaniard Alonso Beruguete, Andrea del Sarto, Franciabigio, Jacopo Sansovino, Rosso, Maturino, Lorenzetto, Tribolo, Jacopo da Pontormo and Perino del Vaga. For good reason, he baptized it "a school for craftsmen."⁵⁴ Cellini later called it "a school for all the world."⁵⁵ Attending to the visual lessons Michelangelo had to teach, these artists took the *Bathers* as a point of departure in their formulation of the pictorial language by which we now define High Renaissance and Mannerist art. In so doing, they understood Michelangelo's cartoon as the beginning of the future history of Florentine art.

Of all the drawings after the cartoon that survive only two copy the composition as a whole: the one produced by da Sangallo, on commission by Vasari, and the copy at the British Museum, which is a little more complete in its addition of the aforementioned background figures.⁵⁶ All other copyists consistently focused on individual figures and paid little attention to the cartoon's compositional structure, in contrast to drawings after Leonardo's battle scene which attempt to catch the narrative structure of the work.⁵⁷ Michelangelo's narrative can be

⁵³ For the dating of the installation of the cartoon in the Sala, see below. And for drawings after the cartoon, see Wilhelm Köhler, "Michelangelos Schlachtkarton," *Kunstgeschichtliches Jahrbuch der k.k. Zentral-Kommission für Erforschung und Erhaltung der Kunst- und historischen Denkmale* 1 (1907), 150-66.

⁵⁴ Vasari, 6: 25: "essendo questo cartone diventato uno studio d'artifice"

⁵⁵ *The Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini*, ed. and tr. George Bull, London: Penguin, 1956, 31.

⁵⁶ Vasari, 6: 24, also described some additional background figures.

⁵⁷ For the drawings after Leonardo's cartoon, see Paul Joannides, "Leonardo da Vinci, Peter-Paul Rubens, Pierre Nolasque Bergeret and the 'Fight for the Standard'," *Achademia Leonardo Vinci* 1 (1988), 76-86.

seen to break up in the hands of Raphael, who, already in 1506-07, copied the turning figure in the center of the composition and the seated man next to him (Fig. 87).⁵⁸ Ignoring the way in which Michelangelo's figures enact their movements in the service of narrative, Raphael seems only interested in the educational potential of the poses of individual nudes, which are unprecedented and ambitious.

Shortly after Raphael made his drawing, Marcantonio Raimondi produced two prints that again isolated individual figures from any possible narrative logic. The first, datable to 1508, copies the naked man climbing ashore at the extreme left (Fig. 88); the second, dated 1510, includes the figure pointing to the left and the one reaching for the water (Fig. 89). The addition of the two figures in the later print radically alienates the narrative. In the absence of water, or better, in the absence of the *Bathers'* iconographical register, the gesture of the figure who bends towards the river is drained of any narrative meaning. In Michelangelo's cartoon, his reaching for the river could still be explained as giving a hand to a fellow soldier swimming under the surface; but in Raimondi's print he reaches at a hand sticking out of a rock. Perhaps Raimondi's separation of Michelangelo's design from iconography is the direct result from the function of the print medium at that time, which advertised designs rather than iconography. The "invenit clause," documenting the name of the artist in whose mind the design originated, is one symptom of that function.⁵⁹ On the rocks of his 1508 print, Raimondi inscribed "[I][N]V[ENIT] MI[CHAEL] A[N]G[ELO] FL[ORENTINUS]." It is the first print to use the term "invenit" in the history of printmaking and it therefore marks a turning point in the advertisement of artistic inventions.⁶⁰ It was, however, not so much one of the nature of the print *per se*, as it was one of the qualities inherent in Michelangelo's work that

⁵⁸ Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Inv. Vat. Lat. 13391. See Eckhart Knab, Erwin Mitsch, Konrad Oberhuber, with the assistance of Sylvia Ferino-Pagden, *Raphael. Die Zeichnungen*, Stuttgart: Urachhaus, 1983, 571 (no. 160).

⁵⁹ See Silvia Gavuzzo-Stewart, "Sull'uso di *invenit* nelle stampe," *The Italianist* 10 (1990), 103-10; and Lisa Pon, *Raphael, Dürer, and Marcantonio Raimondi: Copying and the Italian Renaissance Print*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004, 80.

⁶⁰ Wolfgang Braunfels, "Die 'Inventio' des Künstlers," in *Studien zur Toskanischen Kunst* (1964), 20, thought that Raphael's *Massacre of the Innocents* could claim that honor. See now David Landau and Peter Parshall, *The Renaissance Print, 1470 – 1550*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994, 144.

made Raimondi decide to produce a print after Michelangelo's design in the first place. Raimondi's decision to publish the invention signals that Michelangelo's isolated nude figures were of more importance than the iconography they enact. Whereas other prints identify iconography, Raimondi's after Michelangelo identifies *invention*. By reproducing an artist's design, especially when isolated from iconography, Raimondi fixed the artist's place in the history of art.

By the end of the first decade of the sixteenth century, Michelangelo's figures had reached such canonical status that quoting them in the margins of fresco cycles became something of a common practice among the artists of the *maniera moderna*. Raphael reproduced the soldier carrying fabric and a lance on the extreme right of the cartoon in reverse as the running figure at the extreme left of his *School of Athens* (Fig. 90).⁶¹ Andrea del Sarto mirrored the man lying in the lower right corner of Michelangelo's composition as a beggar on the left side in his own *Presentation in the Temple* at Santissima Annunziata (Fig. 91). The turning figure in the center of the *Bathers* appears in the background of del Sarto's *modello* for an Adoration, again in reverse (Fig. 92). And in Rosso Fiorentino's *Assumption of the Virgin*, Michelangelo's "running" soldier reappears, reversed, in the third figure from the left (Fig. 93). What is striking about all these quotations, is that they appear extraneous to the narrative in which they are inserted. As bystanders irrelevant to the story, they stand deprived of any meaning other than references to Michelangelo's canon. In their iconographical irrelevance – beggar, youngster posing on a ledge, a mere *Rückenfigur* – they announce the pedigree of their art more than anything else.

This focus on isolated passages rather than the composition as a whole has important parallels in the writing of art history. Reading Vasari, we get the impression that the history of art exists in a succession of excerpts. It is almost as if art's history can only come into being when the object of inquiry is severed from the textual narrative that governed fresco cycles. We find the pre-history of our discipline focusing on Giotto's digressions into naturalism. In the frescoes at Assisi, for instance, Vasari was mesmerized by "a thirsty man, in whom the desire for water is vividly seen, drinking, bending down on the ground by a

⁶¹ See the comment by Matthias Winner in Hirst, 1986, 49.

fountain with very great and truly marvelous expression, in a manner that it almost seems a living person that is drinking.”⁶² From the origins in Giotto’s lonely figures, Vasari’s history moves to the excerpts of Masaccio’s painting. The historical importance of that *agon* of the second *età* condenses in the Saint Peter of the *Tribute money*, “whom, while working to draw the money out of the belly of the fish, has his head suffused with blood from bending down; and he is even more wonderful as he pays the tribute, for here we see his expression as he counts it and looking at the money in his hand with the greatest pleasure.”⁶³ And then there is the nude man in Masaccio’s *Baptism*, “who shivers and trembles with cold among the other baptized.”⁶⁴ For Vasari, an artwork’s historical status can be measured by the influence it had on later generations of artists. Masaccio’s shivering nude “has always been held in great esteem and admiration,” by artists “old and modern.”⁶⁵ As a proto-academy of art, the Brancacci Chapel was visited by the leading masters of the second and third *età*, shaping the history of art to come, where Masaccio has “given order through his art to the beautiful manner of our times.”⁶⁶

The history of art was still more the business of artists than of writers, a claim that Vasari himself underwrote.⁶⁷ The fact that Michelangelo already worked out Vasari’s historical scheme in drawings of the 1490s after Giotto and Masaccio, has been pointed out by others,

⁶² Vasari, 2: 100: “E fra l’altre è bellissima una storia dove uno assetato, nel quale si vede vivo il desiderio dell’acque, bee stando chinato in terra a una fonte con grandissimo e veramente meraviglioso affetto, intanto che par quasi una persona viva che bea. Vi sono anco molte altre cose dignissime di considerazione, nelle quali, per non esser lungo, non mi distendo altrimenti.”

⁶³ Vasari, 3: 131: “... et il San Pietro massimamente, il quale nell’affaticarsi a cavari i danari del ventre del pesce ha la testa focosa per lo stare chinato; e molto più quando e’ paga il tributo, dove si vede l’affetto del contare e la sete di colui che riscuote, che si guarda i danari in mano con grandissimo piacere.”

⁶⁴ Ibid.: “... nell’istoria dove San Piero battezza si stima grandemente un ignudo che triema tra gl’altri battezzati asiderando di freddo, condotto con bellissimo rilievo e dolce maniera.”

⁶⁵ Ibid.: “...il quale dagli artefici e vecchi e moderni è stato sempre tenuto in riverenza et ammirazione; per il che da infiniti disegnatori e maestri continuamente fino al dì d’oggi è stata frequentata questa cappella”

⁶⁶ Ibid.: “Laonde le sue fatiche meritano infinitissime lodi, e massimamente per avere egli dato ordine nel suo magisterio alla bella maniera de’ tempi nostri. E che questo sia il vero, tutti i più celebrati scultori e pittori che sono stati da lui in qua, esercitandosi e studiando in questa cappella sono divenuti eccellenti e chiari”

⁶⁷ See Sohm.

and the historical thought at the basis of Michelangelo's copies has also been noted.⁶⁸ I add here that Michelangelo, too, focused on the isolated passage, caring little for the complete narrative structure by which our discipline today defines Giotto's and Masaccio's historical importance.⁶⁹ Michelangelo's *Saint Peter* is severed from the narrative Masaccio's figure enacts (Figs 94 and 95). Michelangelo left out the tribute collector, leaving even the collector's right hand that Masaccio had painted below Peter's undrawn. If we didn't know Masaccio's fresco, we would have had no clue what Michelangelo's figure is doing. And in a drawing now in Paris, Michelangelo divorced the bystanders in Giotto's *Ascension of Saint John the Evangelist* at the Peruzzi Chapel (already exempted from the main narrative in Giotto), even further from Giotto's story (Figs 96 and 97). Whereas the bending figure in Giotto's fresco peeks into the tomb from which Saint John ascended, the man in Michelangelo's drawing stares into nothingness. For Michelangelo, as it would later be for Vasari, the history of art is locked in the excerpt.

The difference between Giotto's and Masaccio's frescoes on the one hand and Michelangelo's *Cartoon* on the other was that the latter was itself already a conglomeration of disconnected figure studies. The focus on the excerpted figures of Michelangelo's cartoon rather than on the iconographical narrative these purport to enact was therefore not just a fetishism of the cartoon's reproduction industry; it was true to Michelangelo's original intentions. Michael Hirst points out Michelangelo's deliberate suppression of narrative components during the design process in favor of a focus on individual figures, who, more often than not, do not participate in storytelling.⁷⁰ Michelangelo's decision to abstract from narrative consistency can be traced by comparing a preliminary compositional drawing at the Uffizi with the Holkham copy (Figs. 98 and 80). The seated figure turning away from us

⁶⁸ Nagel, 2000, 3-10.

⁶⁹ A modern example of highlighting Giotto's and Masaccio's narrative qualities is Jules Lubbock, *Storytelling in Christian Art from Giotto to Masaccio*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006. But see Hans Bloemsma, "Bellissimi favellatori: De verhalende schilderkunst van het Duecento en de *stil nuovo*," PhD diss., Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 2006, for a correction on the modern view.

⁷⁰ Hirst, 1986, 45; and Hirst, 1988, 44. This was also pointed out by Freedberg, 1: 46-47; and Gould, unpaginated.

in the center of the cartoon was first drawn looking at the bending man, who in turn seemed to answer the turning man's gesture; but in the definitive version the bending soldier stares at the water, leaving his erstwhile companion as nothing more than an isolated demonstration of Michelangelo's skill in representing the male nude in virtuoso contrapposto. The rest of the figures in the cartoon also fails to interact. They are remarkably self-contained. Some are busy dressing, others point into the distance. Narrative inconsistency determines the limits of the composition on the right, where the running soldier that Raphael and Rosso copied runs towards the composition's center, his flowing hair suggestive of fast movement, depicted just seconds before colliding with the figures at center. This "forest of marble statues," as Johannes Wilde called the cartoon long ago, might even be better described as an assembly of isolated figure drawings. It is the antidote to Alberti's coherent *historia*.⁷¹ Few large-scale compositions are indeed further removed from Alberti's definition of a history painting than Michelangelo's *Bathers*, whose actions do not "fit together to represent and explain [*ad agendam et docendam*] the *Historia*."⁷² Alberti's idea of *Historia* presumes the translatability of text into image that Michelangelo denies. It is almost as if Michelangelo's figures themselves actively work against the narrative consistency Alberti recommended. They literally embody compositional chaos. The man on the left reaches for the water to offer a helping hand, but that gesture is badly placed in time; hands

⁷¹ Wilde, 1953b, 77.

⁷² Alberti, *De Pictura*, ed. Grayson, 1972, 82-83. Alberti's implicit emphasis on the origins of invention in text rather than the visual tradition is echoed by Armenini, *De' veri precetti della pittura* [1587], in *Scritti*, 2006: "E prima è da avertire colui che si pone al disegno, che inanzi egli sappia leggere e scrivere bene, perciocché a chi pulitamente si è avezzo di far bel carattere, si giudica che, come quasi ciò sia un non so che di buon principio, che quanto ciò faccia meglio, tanto maggiormente si prometta di lui nel disegno e nelle altre cose che dovranno passare pe le sue mani, perché si considera che quel poco aiuto, che pel continuo uso si acquista da' fanciulli nel maneggiar bene la penna e nel far le lettere bene, li sia per far più agevole l'immitazion del disegno, trovandosi ad immitare scrivendo in parte le cose altrui, né meno che lo scrivere ha di bisogno le molte lettere, per dover aver col tempo ben notizia di quelle cose che li fia necessarie senza il bisogno altrui per mettersi in opera ovvero in disegno, acìò la gente poi non lo tenga come un ignorante et un da poco. E per certo pachissimi si sono trovati i giovani, i qualli siano stati valenti nel disegno, che prima non fossero ben versati nell'istoria e bellissimi scrittori, ornamento in vero molto decante a queste bell'arti."

begging for help appear further downstream to the right, where a man is busy trying to put on his pants, unaware of his drowning companion.⁷³

The isolated status of these figures derives directly from Michelangelo's working procedure. He began to roughly sketch the composition with stylus and chalk, of which one version survives in the Uffizi sheet, and then continued to draw the individual figures from life on separate sheets, placing his models in poses similar to those he had outlined in the compositional study. A sheet kept in the Teylers Museum, Haarlem, shows two life drawings in black chalk that are preliminary to the running figure at the far right of the composition and the naked figure visible behind him (Figs. 99 and 100). The life drawings were certainly drawn *after* Michelangelo had outlined the whole composition: when drawing them, Michelangelo left the parts that would have been invisible on the cartoon, such as the running man's lower left leg and the other's left arm, undrawn or only faintly indicated with chalk. Both drawings, and two additional life studies in Vienna and London (Figs 101 and 102), show a consistent emphasis on contours. The contours in the Haarlem and Vienna drawings are reinforced by retracing them repeatedly with chalk and those of the turning figure in London are doubled and sometimes tripled with the pen, as if to emphasize their self-containedness.

At the moment of re-integrating these separate figure studies into the composition, the figures retained some of the individual status they had acquired in the design stage of drawing after life. Disconnected and separated, their contours thickened, they pose unaware of the others as they had once done in Michelangelo's workshop. That so many art historians thought that the cartoon's copyists were in fact drawing after Michelangelo's life studies instead of the cartoon itself is a result of the identity of Michelangelo's *Bathers* as a gathering of unconnected figure studies. Michelangelo's cartoon *reveals* the process of its making. The emphasis is on making instead of finishing, on design rather than finished subject-matter, on image rather than text, on drawing as end rather than means.

⁷³ I owe this observation to Reindert Falkenburg.

Drawing as End

Much of what I have argued above and what will follow below rests on the premise that Michelangelo's cartoon – a drawing – functioned as a self-sufficient work of art, that it was somehow finished, its disintegrated composition not just the result of its status as a work in process. That premise needs arguing.

Michelangelo was probably commissioned to paint the *Battle of Cascina* in fresco in August or early September 1504. He began drawing the cartoon at the Dyers' Hospital of Sant' Onofrio, not far from his fathers' house in the Quartiere di Santa Croce.⁷⁴ In October, he finished the better part of his preparatory studies, since the cartoon was glued together that month.⁷⁵ Payments to assistants are recorded throughout that month and December.⁷⁶ In December we also find payments for the making of a trestle to adjust the scaffolding in height, a device which enabled the artist to move the scaffolding along the length and height of the cartoon.⁷⁷ Vasari described a similar device in use by Leonardo.⁷⁸ The cartoon must have been finished by February 1505, when Michelangelo received his final payment.⁷⁹ Sometime before the end of August that year, the drawing was transported to the Sala at Palazzo della Signoria. A document of August 31 registers payments for three little slats (*panchoncelli*) that were used to "put the cartoon by Michelangelo up on the *ballatoio*."⁸⁰ Although some scholars have argued that the *ballatoio* (a gallery or platform of some height) must have been a structure at Sant' Onofrio (an argument that cannot be substantiated because that building no longer exists), it is more reasonable to assume that the *ballatoio* referred to in the document was at the Sala del Gran Consiglio (a room Vasari rebuilt into the present Sala del Cinquecento in the 1560s). The

⁷⁴ See Morozzi.

⁷⁵ Frey, 1909, 133 (docs 193-94).

⁷⁶ Beltrami, 95 (no. 154).

⁷⁷ Frey, 1909, 133 (doc. 199). And see Hirst, 1986, 46-47, 52, 54-55, for speculations on the nature of Michelangelo's "ponte."

⁷⁸ Vasari, 4: 33.

⁷⁹ Frey, 1909, 133 (doc. 208). That these payments document the completion of the cartoon is also argued by Hugo Chapman, *Michelangelo Drawings: Closer to the Master*, London: British Museum Press, 2005, 78.

⁸⁰ Frey, 1909, 135 (no. 234).

document that tells of the installation of the cartoon can only be read in relation to other payments for work at the Palazzo, not for work at Sant' Onofrio. The text closes with the mention of "other [*altre*] things for the Palazzo." A notary would have never added "*altre*" if he thought that the *panchoncelli* were not for the Palazzo.⁸¹ *Ballatoio* should then be rendered as an elevation or podium, perhaps even as the podium where the Twelve Buonomini sat during council meetings or a structure built on top of that.⁸²

If this reconstruction is correct, then the cartoon was installed at some height above the Sala's floor already in the late summer of 1505, outside the protective environment of the artist's workplace at the Dyers' Hospital and within the view of the 3000 men of the Gran Consiglio. Francesco Albertini still saw it there in 1510.⁸³ With the change of the constitution in 1512, the *Bathers* was transported to the Sala del Papa at Santa Maria Novella, and probably from 1515 onwards it could be found at Palazzo Medici.⁸⁴

Circumstantial evidence suggests that Michelangelo never planned to use his cartoon as a means of transferring his design on the wall, a function previously reserved for that medium. Transferring was a destructive procedure that entailed attaching the cartoon to the wet plaster, pricking the contours of the drawing with a sharp object, and powdering the ground chalk over the pricked holes, which left a dotted pattern on the plaster. Carmen Bambach has demonstrated that Leonardo produced a so-called *ben finito* cartoon for his *Battle of Anghiari*. A *ben finito* cartoon was not used for physically transferring the design onto the wall. Although initially functioning as a model for the composition, it was primarily appreciated as an independent work of art. The actual transfer of Leonardo's design, Bambach shows, happened through the use of a so-called substitute cartoon, which, traced from the

⁸¹ Frey, 1909, 135 (doc. 234).

⁸² Morozzi, 322, contended that the *ballatoio* mentioned in the document was located in the Sala del Gran Consiglio. Christian Adolf Isermeyer, "Die Arbeiten Leonardos und Michelangelos für den grossen Ratsaal in Florence," in *Studien zur Toskanischen Kunst* (1964), 123, had earlier argued that *ballatoio* referred to a structure at Sant' Onofrio. See the Renaissance uses of the term collected in *Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana*, vol. 2, Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1962, 15-16.

⁸³ Albertini, ed. Murray, 11.

⁸⁴ See de Tolnay, 1947, 210-11.

outlines of the *ben finito*, was used for the destructive act of pricking, thus leaving the latter fully intact. She calculated that Leonardo received double the amount of paper for the surface his cartoon was to cover and argued that the extra amount was used for the substitute cartoon. Bambach concluded that Michelangelo also produced a *ben finito* cartoon.⁸⁵ That Michelangelo did not receive a double amount of cartoon paper can be explained by the fact that he never reached the painting stage, when the substitute cartoon was needed; Leonardo had only received the extra paper when painting could actually commence.

Bambach's conclusion can be substantiated by Vasari's description of the *Bathers*, as a showpiece "of how much he knew about his craft," with "many groups of figures drawn in different ways, some outlined in charcoal, others sketched with a few strokes, some shaded gradually and heightened with lead-white."⁸⁶ Later, in 1587, Giovanni Armenini defined the *ben finito* cartoon exactly as this kind of demonstration of the art of drawing:

And one sees in a *ben finito* cartoon there being expressed all things of an extreme difficulty, in a manner which, in following in its footsteps, one walks in the safest streets with a most perfect example and a model for all the things you have to make. Even better, one can say that such is the same work [as painting], except for the colors, and that is why one sees these always being made with every industry and study by Michelangelo, by Leonardo da Vinci, by Raphael, by Perino [da Vaga], by Daniele [da Volterra] and by other excellent [masters].⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Carmen C. Bambach, "The Purchases of Cartoon Paper for Leonardo's *Battle of Anghiari* and Michelangelo's *Battle of Cascina*," *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance* 8 (1999), 105-33; Bambach, 1999, 249-95.

⁸⁶ Vasari, 6: 24: "V'erano ancora molte figure aggrupate et in varie maniere abbozzate, chi contornato di carbone, chi disegnato di tratti, e chi sfumato e con biacca lumeggiato, volendo egli mostrare quanto sapesse in tale professione."

⁸⁷ Armenini, *De' veri precetti della pittura* [1587], in *Scritti*, 2026-27: "(S)i vede in un *ben finito* cartone esserci espresse di tutte le cose le difficoltà più estreme, di maniera che, a seguir i termini di quello, si camina in sicurissima strada con un perfettissimo essemplio et un modello di tutto quello ch'egli ha a fare. Anzi si può dire che quello sia l'istessa opera, fuor che le tinte, e per ciò questo con ogni industria e studio si vede esser sempre stato operato da Michelangelo, da Leonardo Vinci, da Raffaello, da Perino, da Daniello e da altri eccellenti. E s'iam lecito in questi da me, come veduti, il dar loro ogni possibile perfezzione d'incredibile maestria intorno; e ci sono testimoni di quelli le molte reliquie, che ci restano in diverse città, che sono sparse per le case de' nobili cittadini, le quali come cose meravigliose si tengono da loro carissime e con molta riverenza e risguardo."

Central to the status of the *ben finito* cartoon stands the fact that they were being collected in the sixteenth century.⁸⁸ Yet, drawings were collected and appreciated as independent works of art prior to the moment Leonardo and Michelangelo exhibited their cartoons at Palazzo della Signoria. They were produced as finished works of art in the North of Italy already in the fifteenth century. Probably because drawing in Venice and its environs had never enjoyed the prominence as a subsidiary stage of design that it did in Florence, it was easier to emancipate the medium in the North.⁸⁹ The practice of Bellini, Mantegna and their peers was fundamentally different from their Florentine contemporaries. Vasari's description and Armenini's words indicate that Michelangelo's cartoon was not characterized by the kind of finish as those Northern examples. Displaying different techniques of drawing, even maintaining the sketchy nature of some figures ("sketched with a few strokes") Michelangelo not only foregrounded drawing as medium, but also the very idea of design – of *disegno* – that drawing stood for in the Florentine workshop. Appreciating Michelangelo's cartoon means appreciating *process* more than finished product.

The sheer radicality of that appreciation is not easily overestimated. Although Leonardo had exhibited his cartoon of *Saint Anne* in the spring of 1501 at Santissima Annunziata for a few days, Leonardo's and Michelangelo's cartoons of war were permanently installed in a governmental council hall, where they substituted for finished paintings without pretending to be finished themselves. We learn from a revised contract that Leonardo signed in May 1504 that the artist was given the opportunity to produce nothing more than the cartoon. A first clause obliges da Vinci to finish the cartoon and a second leaves open the possibility that Leonardo would actually work out the composition in paint. That second clause remains a mere *possibility*, not

⁸⁸ For the practice of collecting cartoons, see Bambach, 1999, 276-77.

⁸⁹ See Francis Ames-Lewis, *Drawing in Early Renaissance Italy*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982, 2-3. The first documented instance of a commission for a drawing in Florence dates to 1503-04, when Fabio Segni ordered from Leonardo a drawing of Neptune. See Alessandro Cecchi, "New Light on Leonardo's Florentine Patrons," in *Leonardo da Vinci* (2003), 121-39. Famous are Michelangelo's late drawings for Tommaso Cavalieri and Vittoria Colonna, but these show exactly the kind of finish that the cartoon does not.

an obligation.⁹⁰ This is not to argue, of course, that Leonardo and Michelangelo never intended to put paint to wall, nor that their patrons pushed them to stop working the moment they finished their cartoons. Still, looking back at the project from the perspective of 1523, Michelangelo confided a friend that he had done half of the work on the *Sala*, save for the painting.⁹¹ Michelangelo would not have thought that he did “half of the work” if he counted the cartoon as a mere workshop piece. Rather, the cartoon counted as *part* of the work and, in case the artist was unable to reach the stage of painting, could *stand in* for the painting.

It was the Signoria, and not the artist, that ultimately decided to make the cartoon substitute for the absent painting. The Signoria ordered it to be installed in the *ballatoio* when Michelangelo was absent from Florence. The artist had left the city in March 1505 to work for Julius II in Rome; and by August 1505, when the cartoon was moved to the Palazzo, there was no indication that he would soon return to Florence and resume work.⁹² The drawing remained in the Sala until 1512, where it served a more permanent function than Leonardo’s work. Whereas Francesco Albertini could still find Michelangelo’s “*disegni*” in the room in 1510, he only saw Leonardo’s “horses (*cavalli*)” there, that is, the horses figured in the painting that da Vinci had begun in 1505 (and which survives in a few copies).⁹³ Albertini saw Leonardo’s “*disegni*,” presumably the cartoon, at the Sala del Papa in Santa Maria Novella, which suggests that the *Anghiari Cartoon* had left Palazzo della Signoria when Leonardo began to paint.⁹⁴ It is also worth noting that Albertini used an iconographic designation for Leonardo’s painting in the Sala,

⁹⁰ The phrasing is: “*Et potrebbe essere, che a detto Lionardo venissi bene cominciare e dipingere et colorire nel muro della sala detta, quella parte che lui havessi disegnata et fornita in detto cartone, però sono contenti, quando questo achaggia, e prefati magnifici Signori darli quel salario ciascuno mese che sarà conveniente per fare tal dipintura et quello di che dallora saranno d’accordo con detto Lionardo.*” Beltrami, 87 (no. 140).

⁹¹ *Carteggio*, 3: 7-9: “*Perché quando mandò [Giulio II] per me a Firenze, che credo fussi el sechondo anno del suo pontifichato, io avevo tolto a fare la metà della sala del Chonsiglio di Firenze, cioè a dipigniere, che n’avevo tre mila ducati, e di già era facto el cartone, che è noto a ctucto Firenze: che mi parevon mezzi guadagnati.*”

⁹² For Michelangelo’s itinerary that year, see Hirst, 1991.

⁹³ Albertini, ed. Murray, 11.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

whereas he used one of *medium* when describing Michelangelo's. It serves to show that Michelangelo's cartoon registered more easily as drawing than as "bathers" or "Battle of Cascina."

Not History Proper, But a Theory of History

The appreciation of an unfinished drawing as finished foregrounds a shift in emphasis from the *what* to the *how* of representation with unprecedented force. In the place of a telling of a story of war, Michelangelo's cartoon raised the *making* of art as a subject of representation. Drawing lays emphasis on what was *prior* to the finished painting. In drawing, with ease and fluency, an idea, a *conchetto* moves from mind to hand and back again, independent of subject-matter. In drawing, meaning resides foremost in *style*, expressed with the pen, or *stylus*.⁹⁵ Pliny already spoke of Apelles who marked his presence in Photogenes' workshop in one "line of extreme delicacy," and the *Natural History* further develops the instance into a narrative wherein drawing remains without representational responsibility save for itself.⁹⁶ Protogenes recognized the stroke of delicacy as Apelles's and managed to draw an even slimmer one upon the second, left his workshop only to discover on his return that Apelles added an even more delicate third line, upon which Protogenes admitted himself beaten. The artists decided to keep the work for posterity as, "a marvel to all, but especially to artists," disclosing "nothing save lines which eluded sight, and among the numerous works by excellent masters it was like a blank."⁹⁷ Nothing declares itself so far from traditional subject-matter as that of the drawn line – that is, as long as these lines do not attempt at the kind of finish most Renaissance painting is famous for.

The drawn line stands for a theory of making that precedes all other media. The theory of *disegno* – in its meaning of "drawing" and "design" – looms large here.⁹⁸ An informed reader might think

⁹⁵ See Wilibald Sauerländer, "From Stylus to Style: Reflections on the Fate of a Notion," *Art History* 6 (1983), 253-70.

⁹⁶ Rosand, 7.

⁹⁷ Pliny, tr. Jex-Blake, 121-23.

⁹⁸ Among other publications, see M. Poirier, "The Role of the Concept of *Disegno* in Mid-Sixteenth-Century Florence," In *The Age of Vasari*, ed. Michael Milkovich and Dean A. Porter,

immediately of that famous sixteenth-century discourse that makes *disegno* labor between the polarizing quantities of intellect and hand, between *idea* and execution, ultimately announcing their complete resolution in *disegno*. She or he might be reminded of Vasari's claim that "*disegno* is nothing else than an apparent expression and a making knowable [*dichiarazione*] of the concept [*concetto*] you have in your mind."⁹⁹ Or a scholar might recall Romano Alberti's statement, made towards the end of the century, that "*il disegno*, in its primary meaning, in substance is nothing else than an objective [*oggetto*] and at the same time an end [*termine*] of our mind [*intelligenza*], in which as if in the clearest mirror the intellect clearly and explicitly sees the things represented in him through the intelligible forms giving orders to that same intellect."¹⁰⁰ Or perhaps there springs to mind Federico Zuccari's distinction between *disegno esterno* (the physical act of drawing and its visible manifestation on paper) and *disegno interno* (an idea formed in the mind), a distinction Zuccari himself dissolved in that one sentence: "And see the necessity that our mind attains from the senses in order to know and more profoundly to form its *disegno interno*."¹⁰¹ Those same authors thought Michelangelo's work substantiated the theoretical claim of *disegno*. Again, Vasari's words are famous and so is Michelangelo's

Notre Dame (Ind), 1970, 53-66; Williams, 29-72; and Joselita Ciaravino, *Un art paradoxal: La notion de disegno en Italie (XV^{ème} – XVI^{ème} siècles)*, Paris, Budapest and Turin: L'Harmattan, 2004. And for the history of the English translation of *Disegno* in "design," see Michael Baxandall, "English Disegno," reprinted in his *Words for pictures: Seven papers on Renaissance art and criticism*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003, 83-97. And for a critical note on the *Disegno – Colore* debate, see Edward Grasman, *In de schduw van Vasari: Vijf opstellen over kunstgeschiednschrijving in 18^e-eeuws Italië*, PhD diss., Universiteit Leiden, 1992, 83-117.

⁹⁹ Vasari, "Che cosa sia disegno, e come si fanno e si conoscono le buon pitture [1568]," in *Scritti*, 2: 1912: "*disegno altro non sia che una apparente espressione e dichiarazione del concetto che si ha nell'animo, e di quello che altri si è nella mente imaginato e fabricato nell'idea.*" See the discussions of Vasari's *Disegno* in Williams, 48-57.

¹⁰⁰ Romano Alberti, "Origine et progresso dell'Accademia del Disegno de' pittori, scultori et architetti di Roma [1593-94]," in *Scritti*, 2: 1593-94: "*diciamo che il disegno, quanto al suo principale significato, altro non è in sostanza che un oggetto et insieme un termine della nostra intelligenza, in cui come in lucidissimo specchio l'intelletto chiaramente et espressamente vede le cose rappresentate in lui per le forme intelligibili ornanti l'istesso intelletto.*"

¹⁰¹ Federico Zuccari, "Eccellenza e necessit  del disegno [published 1607]," in *Scritti*, 2: 2078: "*Ecco la necessit  che tiene l'anima nostra dei sensi per intendere e principalmente per formare il suo disegno interno.*"

posthumous honorary membership of the *Accademia del Disegno* in 1564. Vincenzo Danti, in the year before Vasari's second edition of the *Vite* was sent to press, wrote that Michelangelo's art "is nothing else than a treatise [*trattato*], in which it is demonstrated in a clear manner how one can proceed through rule with all the parts of the art of *disegno*, but above all and in particular with the proportions of the human figure."¹⁰²

The theoretical pretensions of *disegno* were not a sixteenth-century invention that post-dated Michelangelo's cartoon, although they found especially articulate expression in the Cinquecento. As in the sixteenth century, Lorenzo Ghiberti equated painting and sculpture with practice and drawing (*disegno*) with theory. In the mid-Quattrocento he wrote: "That theory [*teorica*] is the origin and fundament of every art," and therefore the artist "should be an expert in the theory of the aforesaid art, that is *disegno*."¹⁰³ But instead of considering *disegno* as something that mediates between mind and hand, as Cinquecento writers had done, Ghiberti thought of the notion as a principle of *historical* order. Drawing had guided the history of art since its earliest beginnings. In his account of the historical origins of art, largely borrowed from Pliny, Ghiberti wrote that the first artistic act of tracing a shadow of man should be understood as "the principle [*principio*] and first origin [*l primo origine*]" of the arts. He adds that "Philocles was the inventor [of drawing] and ... he gave principles [*principi*] to drawing [*disegno*], and to that most dignified theory [that is drawing]."¹⁰⁴ Ghiberti uses the word *principio*, which means both "principle" and "beginning." The meaning of *principio* as an ordering principle of history survived into the sixteenth century. Hence Agnolo Bronzino says in Allori's dialogue: "When *disegno* has a beginning [*principio*] there occurred in this case what happened to many

¹⁰² Vincenzo Danti, "Il primo libro del Trattato delle perfette proporzioni. Di tutte le cose che imitare e ritrarre si possano con l'arte del disegno [1567]," in *Trattati*, 1: 212: "La quale non è altro che un trattato, nel quale si dimostra chiaramente come si possa con regola procedere dintorno a tutte le parti dell'arte del disegno; ma soprattutto et in particolare nelle proporzione della figura dell'uomo."

¹⁰³ Ghiberti, ed. Bartoli, 47, 49-50: "detta teorica è origine e fondamento di ciascuna arte." And: "bene d'esser perito nel teorica di detta arte, cioè il disegno."

¹⁰⁴ Ghiberti, ed. Bartoli, 81: "Gli Egyptii dicono essere stati essi, s'accordano l'ombra del sole liniata intorno a detta ombra fosse il principio e 'l primo origine dell'arte statuaria e delle pictura. F[i]llocle [Philocles] fu lo inventore e fu d'Egypto; costui dié principi al disegno et alla teorica di tanta dignità."

other things, to a little beginning [*principio*] thing were added and things grew with the duration of time.”¹⁰⁵

A theory of drawing is a theory of history. Ghiberti's words followed a long tradition of writing that located art's historical origin in the drawn line. Pliny summarized the history of representation from the perspective of the second century as beginning “with the outlining of a man's shadow; this was the first stage, in the second a single color was employed, and after the discovery of more elaborate methods this style, which is still in vogue, received the name of monochrome;” history was fulfilled in the application of colors.¹⁰⁶ Pliny's story acquired a somewhat aphoristic meaning in the Renaissance. On several occasions in his *Commentarii*, Ghiberti mentioned that art was discovered by Egyptians “through the shadow of the sun outlining the contours of a man.”¹⁰⁷ Leonardo later abbreviated: “The first picture was of only one line, which circumscribed the shadow of a man cast by the sun on a wall.”¹⁰⁸ The historical claims attributed to the drawn line made drawing easily applicable to more histories of artistic origins. Long before Vasari, the rise and fall of Florentine art was structured through drawing. Ghiberti claims that Cimabue discovered the *dolce stil nuovo* in the hills when he saw Giotto, still a shepherd boy, drawing a sheep.¹⁰⁹ Leonardo, writing towards the end of the century, recounted a similar story, with Giotto now beginning “to draw all the animals that were to be found in the country.”¹¹⁰

The history of representation found its origins in drawing, but *disegno* was not itself made of the stuff of history. *Disegno* lays bare the

¹⁰⁵ Allori, “Il Primo Libro de' ragionamenti delle regole del disegno d'Alessandro Allori con M. Agnolo Bronzino [1565],” in *Scritti*, 1945: “quando ebbe principio il disegno, è avvenuto in questo come in di molte altre cose, che da un picciol principio son poi sempre venute ampliando e crescendo con la lunghezza del tempo, dalla quale gl'ingegni degli uomini si sono industriosamente affaticati”

¹⁰⁶ Pliny, tr. Jex Blake, 85-87.

¹⁰⁷ Ghiberti, ed. Bartoli, 51: “... essere trovato colla ombra del sole parata innanzi alla forma dell'huomo virile.” And see other versions of the story in *ibid.*, 53-54, 81.

¹⁰⁸ Leonardo, ed. McMahon, §98, c. 49v.

¹⁰⁹ Ghiberti, ed. Bartoli, 83: “Cominciò l'arte della pictura a sormontare in Etruria. In una villa allato alla città di Firenze, la quale si chiamava Vespignano, nacque uno fanciullo di mirabile ingegno, il quale si ritraeva del naturale una pecora. In su passando Cimabue pictore, per la strada a Bologna, vide el fanciullo sedente in terra, e disegnava in su una lastra una pecora.”

¹¹⁰ Leonardo, ed. Richter, 1: 371-72 (§660).

process at the basis of history, but is not history itself. It *produces* the objects of history but is not itself a historical product. It was in existence as a pre-history before the arts of painting and sculpture, all springing from its source, as Petrarch already wrote.¹¹¹ Although history added colors,¹¹² the single line persisted as a pervasive force throughout history, as an underground stream from which historical artists tapped their inventions. It was from the drawn line that representation first arose; it was in drawing, Ghiberti and Leonardo explained, that Giotto's genius first became apparent, and it was from drawing that Donatello acquired his genius, Gaurico informs us half a century before Vasari.¹¹³ Every Florentine painter and sculptor (or goldsmith or woodcarver) started his profession with the art of drawing, the medium that inscribed him into the principles of his profession and that he would fall back on during the design process of every commission.¹¹⁴ This was exactly what Ghiberti meant when he declared that *disegno*, "unites the causes of both the sculptor and the painter," and that "*disegno* is the fundament and theory of these two arts."¹¹⁵ When Michelangelo (and his patrons) declared the *Cascina drawing* a self-sufficient work of art, that fundament of history was rendered physically present.

¹¹¹ See Baxandall, 1971, 61.

¹¹² See, for instance, Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria*, X, ii, 7-8. The notion is given a nostalgic twist in Dionysios of Halikarnassos, *De Isaeo*, 4: "In ancient paintings the scheme of colouring was simple and presented no variety in the tones; but the line was rendered with exquisite perfection, thus lending to these early works a singular grace. This purity of draughtsmanship was gradually lost; its place was taken by a learned technique, by the differentiation of light and shade, by the full resources of the rich colouring to which the works of the later artists owe their strength." Quoted by E. Sellers in her introduction to Pliny, tr. Jex Blake; and also see Rosand, 7-8.

¹¹³ Gauricus, ed. Chastel and Klein, 207.

¹¹⁴ Cennino Cennini, ed. Brunello, 8 (§5), recommended drawing to every young apprentice: "*dal disegno t'incominci. Ti conviene avere l'ordine di potere incominciare a disegnare il più veritevile.*" In 1522-26, Michelangelo addressed his student Antonio Mini on a sheet of drawings (London, British Museum, 1859-5-14-818) as follows: "*Disegna antonio disegna antonio /disegna e no[n] p[er]der[e] te[m]po.*"

¹¹⁵ Ghiberti, ed. Bartoli, 47.

The Subject of Art

A desire to uncover the historical foundation of art was what also drove Michelangelo to fashion a composition of nude men. If drawing offered one way to lay bare history's *principio*, then the male nude provided another. Like drawing, the male nude was grounded deep both in time and in design, more fundamental than the dressed male. A consciousness of its roots in time developed because the oldest works of art known to the Renaissance were the nude sculptures unearthed in Rome; the male nude's importance in design derived from the fact that every artist trained himself through nude drawing and every new commission started from that practice, even when the project asked for dressed figures. In preparing the work, artists undertook an archaeology of the body. "Just as for a clothed figure," Alberti wrote, "we first have to draw the naked body beneath and then cover it with clothes"¹¹⁶ At the initial stage of design, Cellini wrote later, "one always makes nudes [*ignudi*] and only later dresses them."¹¹⁷ The sheer number of nude studies that survive from the Renaissance workshops, usually of apprentices and always of boys, shows how deeply Alberti's words were ingrained in the practice of Florentine workshops, from which perspective Cellini was clearly writing.¹¹⁸

In the course of the fifteenth century, nude drawing came to be intimately connected with the study of human anatomy. Writers like Alberti and later Lorenzo Ghiberti, advised their artist-readers to learn the structure of the bones, muscles, and tendons. The human figure, Alberti claimed, was nothing more than a skeleton dressed with muscles and skin.¹¹⁹ Michelangelo is often associated with the study of the

¹¹⁶ Alberti, *De Pictura*, ed and tr. Grayson, 1972, 75 (§36).

¹¹⁷ Cellini, ed. Maier, 850: "...sempre si fanno prima ignudi e poi si vestono."

¹¹⁸ For the practice of drawing after the male nude see Philippe Costamagna, "The formation of Florentine draftsmanship: Life studies from Leonardo and Michelangelo to Pontormo and Salviati," *Master Drawings* 43 (2005), 274-91. And for nude drawing before Michelangelo, mainly in the work of the Pollaiuolo brothers, see Alison Writght, *The Pollaiuolo Brothers. The Arts of Florence and Rome*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005, 153-88.

¹¹⁹ Alberti, ed and tr. Grayson, 1972, 75 (§36). Alberti's advice is carried far into the sixteenth century. See, for example, Allori, in *Scritti*, 1947-48: "E quanto a me (come puoi molte volte avermi sentuto dire trattando de' principii dell studio nostro), sono stato et ancor tengo questa opinione, che cominciassero gli studiosi, tanto gli scultori quanti i pittori, dall'ossature parlando

anatomical structure of the human body.¹²⁰ A few anatomical drawings survive, although these did not necessitate dissection.¹²¹ A macabre yet telling story about Michelangelo's dissection of a human body surfaced earlier in the sixteenth century, in the Anonimo Magliabecchiano, who dated it to the years of Michelangelo's work on the *Cascina Cartoon*. According to the story, Michelangelo secretly flayed a corpse, somewhere in a vault where many dead bodies were stored, not knowing that he was really cutting apart a member of the important Corsini family, "which created a great uproar." Soderini, "already Gonfaloniere di Giustizia," and never hesitant to help out the young Michelangelo, stepped up to his defense, arguing that Michelangelo had cut open the body "to improve his art."¹²² The story is perhaps fictional but revealing: disclosing not only Michelangelo's practice, one rooted in

dell'uomo, trattandosi dello ignudo, che mi par la più bella e forse la più difficile imitazione che si faccia da noi; e che quelle, sì come sono il fondamento nella fabbrica de' corpi umani e parimente in tutti gli animali, così siano il fondamento de' nostri studi, e tanto più che elleno appariscano alla superficie della pelle in tutte quelle congiunture che chiamano gli anatomisti essere di moto manifesto, et anco [in] quelle [che] da i medesimi son chiamate di moto oscuro in buona parte si manifestina; laonde che è molto utile il possederle."

¹²⁰ See Karl Frey, *Michelagnolo Buonarroti. Quellen und Forschungen zu seiner Geschichte und Kunst*, 1 (*Michelagniolos Jugendjahre*), Berlin: Curtius, 1907, 106-10; Alessandro Paronchi, *Opere giovanili di Michelangelo*, 2 (*Il paragone con l'antico*), Florence: Olschki, 1975, 191; Summers, 1980, 397-404, 567nt2; Ghislain Kieft, "Het brein van Michelangelo: Kunst, kunsttheorie en de constructie van het beeld in de Italiaanse Renaissance," PhD diss., Universiteit Utrecht, 1994, 189-203; and for a critical note, see James Elkins, "Michelangelo and the human form, his knowledge and use of anatomy," *Art History* 7 (1984), 176-86. Leonardo da Vinci was perhaps the only one to conduct dissections before 1500 and perhaps with less an artistic than a scientific aim. Laurie Fusco, "The nude as protagonist: Pollaiuolo's figural style explicated by Leonardo's study of static anatomy, movement, and functional anatomy," PhD diss., Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, 1978, 136-67, argued that Leonardo was the first to do so. To this Michael W. Kwakkelstein, "New copies by Leonardo after Pollaiuolo and Verrocchio and his use of an 'écorché' model: Some notes on his working methods as an anatomist," *Apollo* 159.503 (2004), 21-29, recently added convincing evidence that Leonardo made use of an écorché model and hence attended dissection less often than hitherto assumed.

¹²¹ Vasari, 6: 12-13, suggests that in the mid 1490s the artist was allowed by the prior of Santo Spirito to dissect bodies in exchange for the wooden crucifix he produced for that church.

¹²² Anonimo Magliabecchiano, ed. Frey, 115: "*Michelagnolo, quando era interdetto per sparsione di sangue di uno de' Lippi, entrò là in una volta dove erano molti depositi di morti e quivi fece notomia di asai corpi e tagliò e sparò; a' quali a caso prese uno de' Corsini, che ne fu gran rumore, fatta dalla casata de' detti Corsini; e funne fatta richiama a Piero Soderini, allora gonfaloniere di iustizia, del che ei rise, veggendo averlo fatto per acquisitare nell'arte sua."*

anatomy, these words also reveal the patron's understanding of Michelangelo's artistic practice, and of the process through which Michelangelo arrived at the cartoon that was to adore the Sala of Soderini's government.

Michelangelo's preparatory drawings and the copies after the *Bathers* argue that the work was *about* the kind of human anatomy figured in the male nude. After all, anatomy was what particularly mesmerized students such as Raphael. Like the medium of drawing, anatomy works to push the *making* of art to the fore. What Michelangelo presented his patrons with was an image of the origins of art. Rather than dressing his figures as Alberti and everyone before had suggested, Michelangelo stopped short before the end of design – leaving the unfinished as finished. The panicking male nudes trying to dress stand in as figures for the dressing of art itself during the process of design. In representing the act of dressing, Michelangelo left that process visible. The *Cascina Cartoon* reads like the undressed history of design, with the principle of Florentine art history stripped bare in nineteen naked men.

Michelangelo's work is sometimes understood as a declaration of the autonomous work of art, a drawing produced purely for its own and art's history's sake, separated from any social and political needs at the moment iconography was exchanged for style. Sydney Freedberg, for instance, writes of "a constraint of the subject of the artist's interests and will," and later, Cecil Gould, the author of the only monograph on the cartoon, guessed that Michelangelo had the last word in determining subject-matter.¹²³ For them Michelangelo emancipated his work from iconography – the area where the patron ruled – to establish the *Cascina Cartoon* as little more than a testament to the "Michelangelosque nude," a gesture not only of the utmost narcissism but also one of extreme political disengagement. The interpretation forwarded in the preceding pages – that Michelangelo's work was more about the theory of art and its history than subject-matter proper – might also be taken as the argument substantiating Hans Belting's thesis that the new focus of the Renaissance image on art theory pushed subject-matter out of the image. For Belting, who does not mention the *Cartoon*, the burgeoning industry of Renaissance art theory marked the transition of the era of the image

¹²³ S. Freedberg, 1: 46; and Gould, unpaginated.

(*Bild*) into the era of art (*Kunst*), a transition in which the image lost its pertinent value for (religious) society.¹²⁴ Becoming more *about* art theory than subject-matter per se, Belting's art of the Renaissance was already well on its way to the institution of the autonomous – hence unsocial, unreligious and unpolitical – work of art that Hegel was to discover on the threshold of *his* modernity. For Belting, and for Hegel, the capacity of art to theorize its own history became a path to its emancipation from social and political needs.

Yet it was exactly in its theoretical capacity that art could enter other histories. The sixteenth-century polemic surrounding the “true” meaning of *disegno* conveys a consistent attempt to attribute ontological value to it which governs and has always governed the being of the world, not just painting, sculpture and architecture. According to Michelangelo in de Holanda's *Dialogues*, everything man does in this world ultimately springs from *disegno* – “dressing variously,” “cultivating the fields and ploughing the land,” “sailing over the sea,” “fighting and ordering an armed host,” “deaths and funerals and all other movements, actions and occasions.”¹²⁵ “Who governs and maintains the Republics and States” without *disegno*?, asked Romano Alberti towards the end of the sixteenth century.¹²⁶ A theoretical claim to art's history arose from the will to make the disciplines of painting and sculpture germane to other areas.

An urge to discover the underlying force of history also informed the other disciplines at the time, which now begin to move closer to the visual arts. Francesco Guicciardini, who wrote shortly after Michelangelo had finished his work (and who was also a member of the Council that met in the room of the *Cartoon*), expounded a theory of history that came close to the fifteenth-century notion of *disegno* as a principle that governs historical products – in that same passage quoted in Chapter 1. Important for our argument again is the writer's use of a pictorial vocabulary: “Thus everything that has existed in the past is partly in

¹²⁴ Belting, *Bild und Kult. Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst*, Munich: C.H. Beck, 1990, 510-45. Translated as Belting, 1994.

¹²⁵ De Holanda, ed. and tr. Dolores Folliero-Metz, 93.

¹²⁶ Romano Alberti, in *Scritti*, 2048: “chi governa e mantiene le Repubbliche e gli Stati? ... et in somma, chi dà ogni agio e commodo all'uomo e di più dà a tutti noi modi possibili a farsi scienziati e dotti in terra, se non questo singolarissimo e dignissimo disegno?”

existence now and partly will exist at other times, returning into being every day, but in different disguises and different colours," *sotto varie coperte e vari colori*. And it takes "someone with a sharp eye" to recognize that underlying force of history which assumes that "everything which exists at present has existed before, under different names, at different times and different places." Comparing and contrasting the events of history makes it possible to know the design of history. "With calculations and measurements of past events" we will know "how to calculate and measure quite a lot of the future ... and we shall be able to predict much of what is going to happen in this new political system."¹²⁷

Theorizing history is an important function of making history relevant for the present, theoretical analysis being the exclusive instrument used to unearth the *laws* of politics.¹²⁸ Political theory of the early sixteenth-century was geared towards a direct political use. A need to find patterns in history arose in response to the refractory political history of recent times, colored by the Medici expulsion that had also provided the space for Michelangelo's historical reflection. The calm historical continuity that four succeeding generations of Medici's brought about, was shattered in the year 1494. For Bernardo Rucellai, writing in the year after, Charles VIII's invasion of Italy, which had importantly contributed to the expulsion of the Medici, was "by far the greatest event of this age, which had an impact on the entire human race."¹²⁹ And to the invasion could be added Cesare Borgia's attempt to further upset the balance of power on the peninsula in the early sixteentens, the Medici's attempts to return to their native city and the impact of a severe economic crisis. All these circumstances made Florentines painfully aware of history's contingency and left them looking for a an understandable design.

¹²⁷ Guicciardini, ed. Lugani Scarano, 1: 314: "... el mondo è condizionato in modo che tutto quello che è stato per el passato, parte è al presente, parte sarà in altri tempi e ogni dì ritorna in essere, ma sotto varie coperte e varie colori, in modo che chi non ha l'occhio molto buono, lo piglia per nuovo e non lo riconosce; ma chi ha la vista acuta e che sa applicare e distinguere caso da caso, e considerare quali siano la diversità sustanziali e quali quelle che importano manco, facilmente lo riconosce, e co' calculi e misura delle cose passate sa calcolare e misurare assai del futuro." Tr. in Guicciardini, ed. Brown, 16.

¹²⁸ F. Gilbert, 1965, 235.

¹²⁹ Bernardo Rucellai, *De bello italico*, London: Gulielmi Bowyer, 1733, 3: "... rem hujus aevi longe omnium maximam, neque sine motu maximo generis humani." Cited in F. Gilbert, 1965, 259.

J.G.A. Pocock writes that the dramatic circumstances following the year 1494 made the Florentines partly lose their trust in the “timeless” world of the Bible and look for the intelligibility of time through historical analysis. To Pocock, early republican theory is an essay in historicist thought.¹³⁰ But, as Pocock himself acknowledges at other points in his argument, historical thought was never formulated in complete contrast to the timelessness of the Bible, but as a compliment to it. The attempts studied in Chapter 2 that placed the history of the *Governo Popolare* under divine protection were still part of an effort to find divine intelligence in the course of history. Rather than marking the dawn of modern historiography, Pocock’s historicism should be understood as co-ordinating the two main axes of historical thought in the period: that of biblical typology, which makes one instance in time exist simultaneously with another (David in Christ and so forth) and historicist thought, that recognizes the singularity of a historical event.

And like the veneration of specific saints, understanding the laws of history not only enables one to “predict what is going to happen,” as Guicciardini said, but also to *make* future history. The culture of historical reflection of which Michelangelo’s *Cartoon* was part, theorized history in order to produce the future. The *Governo Popolare* witnessed an unprecedented publication of political blueprints, not just published as essays in the boundaries of historical thought, but treatises that could serve as concrete models for future politics.¹³¹ With the *Governo Popolare* just three and a half years old, the Signoria commissioned a treatise on its government. For the first time in the history of Florence, political theory became a matter of state. It was no coincidence that this happened in 1498, at a moment when Pope Alexander VI increased his pressure on the Florentine government, which was still providing a safe haven for that fanatical friar under excommunication for over a year, and it was no coincidence either that they commissioned the treatise from

¹³⁰ Pocock, 1.

¹³¹ And for the practice of writing political treatises in early sixteenth-century Florence, see John M. Najemy, *A History of Florence, 1200 – 1575*, Malden (MA): Blackwell, 2006, 381-90; and James Hankins, “Humanism and the Origins of Modern Political Thought,” in *Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, ed. Jill Kraye, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 118-41.

Savonarola himself.¹³² Despite all its emphasis on God, the *Trattato circa il reggimento e governo della città di Firenze* demonstrates for once and for all that the city also thought that it could not operate without a theory of its political history at the moment liberty was at jeopardy. The treatise moves from the general governing of state to the specific case of Florence and the Governo Popolare, a move that entails a shift in the nature of argumentation, from anthropological (people living together in tents), biological (bees), and biblical examples to *historical* ones. Florence cannot be governed by one leader, Savonarola upholds, because it is contrary to the city's historical nature. He argued that a republican way of living was *historically* pressed into the minds of the Florentine people, and the years of tyranny had done little to undo that.

(T)he people of Florence, having selected a civil regime since antiquity, have invested so much habit into it that for them it is more natural and agreeable than any other form of government, since through habit it is so deeply impressed in the minds of the citizens that it would be difficult and indeed almost impossible for them to do away with such a government.

The distant past was closer than the recent six decades:

Since the form of civil government by the people [*governo civile nel popolo*] remained intact, it has become so natural to them that to try to alter it and give them another form of government would be nothing less than to make them go against their nature and against their custom; to do so would generate such perturbation and dissension in this community that it would be put in danger of losing all its liberty, to which experience, the master of all arts, best attests.¹³³

¹³² The dedication of the treatise mentions that it was commissioned by the Signoria; SAT, 435: "Composto ad istanza delli eccelsi signori al tempo di Giuliano Salviati gonfaloniere di iustizia."

¹³³ SAT, 448-49: "Ora el popolo fiorentino, avendo preso antiquamente el reggimento civile, ha in questo fatto tanta consuetudine, che, oltre che a lui questo è più naturale e conveniente di ogni altro governo, ancora per la consuetudine è tanto impresso nella mente de' cittadini, che saria difficile e quasi impossibile a rimuoverli da tale governo. ... E però essendo rimasa la forma del governo civile nel popolo, è tanto a lui fatta naturale, che, a volerla alterare e dare altra forma di governo, non è altro che fare contra al suo naturale e contra la antiqua consuetudine; la qual cosa genereria tale turbazione

Fourteen years later, in the months prior to the fall of Soderini's Republic, Guicciardini wrote a political treatise, the *Del modo di ordinare il Governo Popolare*, that was also composed with political *utilitas* in mind. The "How to Order the Governo Popolare" delves into the history of mankind from the Romans to the present in a search for historical laws in order to save the Governo Popolare from falling. "It is essential," Guicciardini wrote, "to provide an overall solution for our problems, so that everything would be molded into something appropriate, and to introduce a fundamental reform of our constitution in stages." Guicciardini realized that republics exist in time and that they were subject to contingency. Didn't the Roman and the pre-Medici Republics demonstrate that republics were doomed for failure? It would be better to know the causes of these historical failures and extract a theory from them.¹³⁴ History provided a path for future reform. When narrating the dramatic events of 1494 in his *Istorie fiorentine* of 1508, Guicciardini interrupted his narrative to insert a moment of historical reflection, which lends his account of the years following an analytical twist: "I endeavor to demonstrate not only the effects and causes in general, but

e dissensione in questa comunità, che la metteria a pericolo di farli perdere tutta la libertà: e questo molto meglio dichiara la esperienza, che è maestra delle arti." Tr. in SSW, 183.

¹³⁴ Francesco Guicciardini, ed. Lugani Scarano, 1: 249-50: "Due ragione principale mi fanno credere che la nostra città in processo di non molti anni, se Dio evidentemente non la aiuta, abbi a perdere la libertà e stato suo. La prima, che doppo tanti naufragi delle cose di Italia e poi che questi principi aranno combattuto assai, pare ragionevole che in qualcuno sia per rimanere Potenza grande, el quale cercherà di battere e' minori e forse ridurre Italia in una monarchia; il che ancora mi è più capace, considerando con quanta fatica al tempo che in Italia non erano principi esterni si diffendeva la commune libertà, ora quanto più sarà difficile, avendo sì grandi uccelli nelle viscere sue; e in questo caso io veggio le cose nostre in grave pericolo, perché noi non abbiamo forze sufficienti a diffenderci, vivendo disarmati e trovandosi la città, a rispetto de' tempi passati, con pochi danari, per essere declinate le mercatantie, e' quail ci hanno più volte tenuti vivi. La seconda ragione è che el vivere nostro civile è molto difforme da uno ordinato vivere di una buona repubblica, così nelle cose che consernono la forma del governo, come nelli altri costume e modi nostri: una amministrazione che porta pericolo o di non diventare tirannide, o di non declinare in una dissoluzione popolare Queste ragione mi fanno male sperare di noi ma non desparare, perché io crederrei che se ne potessi sanare una gran parte e che se bene la cura è molto difficile, non sia però impossibile." Tr. Russel Price, in *Cambridge Translations of Renaissance Philosophical Texts*, vol. 2 (*Political Philosophy*), ed. Jill Kraye, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, 201-02.

also, in the most particular way possible, the origins [*origine*] and sources [*fonte*] of all these evils."¹³⁵

The Politics of Education

If the writings of these men offered a theoretical model for future political reform conducted at the Sala del Gran Consiglio, then Michelangelo offered one for artistic change in the same room. But how does Michelangelo's drawing become one of politics? Where exactly can the political be located in Michelangelo's reflection on art's history? In its educational value.

There is nothing original in claiming the cartoon a school of art; Vasari and Cellini already propagated its educational function. And granted, many fifteenth-century altarpieces and fresco cycles lived second lives as proto academies of art. Alternative to being a work in the service of religion in the traditional, iconographical sense, the Brancacci Chapel, for instance, lived a life as pre-modern academy. Art historians often point out the similarities between Masaccio's chapel and Michelangelo's cartoon, one even suggesting that Michelangelo's replaced Masaccio's as an academy for Florentine artists.¹³⁶ But the educational purpose of Masaccio's chapel remained purely one of reception, whereas Michelangelo's drawing was produced with the aim of being a kind of school piece for the principles of art.

Yet, the cartoon's academic function was controlled by state. An artist's visit to the Sala del Gran Consiglio was a regulated ritual. Entrance was tied to restrictions, access reserved for its members exclusively (exclusively: 3000 men were allowed). Artists not elected to the Gran Consiglio had to acquire permission to enter the room from either one of the heralds (with Michelangelo's consent) or from the commander of the Palazzo, all acting on Soderini's behalf. In the first years after the installation of the cartoon, artists who were allowed entrance, like Raphael, enjoyed an exclusive right. Letters sent to and by

¹³⁵ Francesco Guicciardini, *Storie fiorentine*, ed. Roberto Palmarocchi, Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1931, 84: "... io mi ingegnerò di mostrare non solo gli effetti e le cagione in genere, ma ancora, quanto più particolarmente potrò, le origine e le fonte di tutti e' mali."

¹³⁶ Freedberg, 1: 46.

Michelangelo in 1508 document two cases of painters seeking access. The first, written by Tommaso di Balduccio, the *commandatore*, to Michelangelo in Rome, mentions an unnamed artist who was permitted to see the cartoon without Michelangelo's consent. Tommaso had been out of town for eight days and he had left the key to the room with the First Herald, Angelo Manfidi. Angelo had allowed the lucky artist in, for which the unhappy commander had to apologize to Michelangelo at length.¹³⁷ A second letter documents Michelangelo's recommendation of "a young Spaniard" (probably Alonso Beruguete) from Rome to his brother Buonarroto, who is asked to provide the foreign painter with the key, presumably from the Commander.¹³⁸ For unknown reasons, the Spaniard was eventually denied access.

These documented instances show how much the viewing of Michelangelo's cartoon was a process of selection and exclusion. Some artists were able to view Michelangelo's work and some were not. The list of those fortunates is supplied by Vasari, and the drawings of these masters offer additional proof of access. All of them were of notable talent – Raphael, del Sarto, Rosso – or of the intention to publish Michelangelo's invention, name and all, like Raimondi. Exclusivity secured the work's iconicity and controlled reception. Allowing certain artists in while keeping others out, the Signoria, through the heralds, assured a secure reception in the hands of the few.

Education was politics and learning a powerful tool of cultural control. Michelangelo's *Cartoon* replaced and displaced a former Medici politics of education, vestiges of which were put on display in the Sala. The portrait busts and probably also Lorenzo's famous bronze horse head (Fig. 103) exhibited there had once offered Florentine Quattrocento artists models for the antiquarian style Lorenzo had propagated by allowing artists access to his collections.¹³⁹ Laurentian politics of visual education were concentrated at the *Giardino di San Marco*, the sculpture garden that *Il Magnifico* had founded in the 1470s. Long considered a Vasarian myth, Caroline Elam found proof of its once glorious existence

¹³⁷ *Carteggio*, 1: 83.

¹³⁸ *Carteggio*, 1: 70.

¹³⁹ See Laurie Fusco and Gino Corti, *Lorenzo de' Medici, Collector and Antiquarian*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

on the east side of Piazza San Marco.¹⁴⁰ According to Vasari, Lorenzo had founded the garden – “which was like a school and academy for young painters and sculptors and for all those others who attended to *disegno*” – because he was of the opinion that “in his time one couldn’t find celebrated and noble sculptors like one could find painters of great esteem and fame.”¹⁴¹ It was a claim reminiscent of Vespasiano da Bisticci’s words about Cosimo de’ Medici’s support of Donatello, uttered a hundred years earlier. According to Vespasiano, Medici had commissioned the San Lorenzo pulpits and doors from Donatello “because in his time that art of the sculptors was little practiced.”¹⁴²

Lorenzo was an enabler of art with a political aim. As an “arbiter of taste” instead of a disinterested consumer of panel painting and sculpture, Lorenzo fashioned a political image of himself as a man in full control of the visual language that his politics produced, nurturing and controlling the style of young artists by providing them with the artistic examples in *his* possession.¹⁴³ If Lorenzo cultivated a preference for antiquarianism, then he made sure that “his” artists shared that preference in the antiquities on display in the garden.¹⁴⁴ Lorenzo’s politics made artists into cultural commodities whose artistic origins belonged to Medici culture. Indeed in a letter of October 14, 1494, written shortly before Piero de’ Medici’s flight, Michelangelo is mentioned as “Michelangelo, sculptor, from the garden [*Michelagnolo ischultore dal g(i)ardino*],”¹⁴⁵ a statement that offers proof for Vasari’s claim that Michelangelo learned sculpture there.¹⁴⁶ It was the kind of active and

¹⁴⁰ Elam, 1992. The *Giardino* was already mentioned in the *Codice Magliabechiano*, ed. Frey, 110, in connection with Leonardo da Vinci’s education: “Stette da giovane col Magnifico Lorenzo de Medici; et dandoli provisione per se il vaceva lavorare nel giardino sulla pizza di San Marcho di Firenze.”

¹⁴¹ Vasari, 4: 124: “erano come una scuola et academia ai giovanetti pittori e scultori et a tutti gl’altri che attendevano al disegno” Vasari, 6: 9: “ne’ suoi tempi non si trovassero scultori celebrati e nobili, come si trovavano molti pittori di grandissimo pregio e fama.”

¹⁴² See above, Chapter 1, note 91.

¹⁴³ See F.W. Kent, 2004, for Lorenzo’s role as an arbiter of Florentine taste.

¹⁴⁴ For a reconstruction of possible antiquarian objects on display there, see *Il Giardino di San Marco: Maestri e compagni del giovane Michelangelo*, ed. Paola Barocchi, Florence: Silvana editoriale, 1992.

¹⁴⁵ The letter is published by Giovanni Poggi, “Della partenza di Michelagnolo Buonarroto da Firenze,” *Rivista d’arte* 4 (1906), 34.

¹⁴⁶ Vasari, 6: 9-10.

engaged participation in the city's artistic culture that men like Soderini and Doni tried to emulate after the group at the *Giardino Oricellari* had claimed that the Governo Popolare was incapable of truly advancing art and letters. The Signoria's assertion in a letter of 1506 that Michelangelo is "our citizen, and is loved much by us," re-claimed Florence's favorite son for the Republic after Medici had initially claimed Michelangelo's artistic upbringing.¹⁴⁷

In the days after the Medici expulsion, Lorenzo's garden of education was deprived of its objects of learning; and his politics of artistic upbringing came to an end. At the *Giardino di San Marco*, the Laurentian epoch was brought to a symbolic close.¹⁴⁸ Michelangelo fled from the garden in 1494, perhaps, as Vasari wrote, because he was discontent with Piero de' Medici's "bad politics [*mal modo di governo*],"¹⁴⁹ but surely inaugurating his change in loyalty. The Medicean house humanist Poliziano died there in 1494; and the garden was sacked by the *popolo* two years later. Lorenzo's *giardino* was officially confiscated by the Florentine government and sold in November 1494.¹⁵⁰ But a true symbolic close of Lorenzo's program only came in the summer of 1505, when Michelangelo's *Cascina Cartoon* was installed in the symbolic heart of the government which had replaced Lorenzo's. Now not only Michelangelo was returned to the Republic, his art was to secure a new direction in Florence's visual future, a direction aimed to eclipse Lorenzo's cultural propagation. The post-1494 Republic government could claim a new blueprint for art.

The politics of that gesture were understood by the returning Medici in 1512. The Sala del Gran Consiglio was dismantled within weeks of their return and turned into soldiers' barracks, for many a Florentine a sign of disregard for the city's republican system.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Gaye, 2: 85: "*Michelagnolo Buonarroti, scultore, Cittadino nostro, et amato grandemente da noi*" And see above, Chapter 2.

¹⁴⁸ Elam, 1992, 50.

¹⁴⁹ Vasari, 6: 13.

¹⁵⁰ Elam, 1992, 50.

¹⁵¹ See, for instance, Landucci, ed. del Badia, 333, on the dismantlement of the hall: "*la qual cosa dolse a tutto Firenze – non la mutazione dello stato, ma quella bella opera di legname di tanta spesa. Ed era di grande riputazione ed onore della città avere sì bella residenza. Quando veniva una ambasceria a visitare la Signoria, faceva stupire chi la vedeva quando entravano in sì magna residenza e in sì grande cospetto di consiglio de' cittadini. Sia sempre a laude e Gloria di Dio ogni*

Michelangelo's *Cartoon* was taken out of the room and put on display at Palazzo Medici, where its educational purpose continued to be propagated. Vasari tells of the many artists drawing after it there, eager enough to tear it to pieces.¹⁵² It was a gesture meant to return the control of artistic education to the Medici proper. In 1513, the family had reacquired the Giardino di San Marco and restored it to its old function. And the Medici would continue to claim their dominance over the education of sculptors and painters for the better part of the sixteenth century. But before drawing – or I should say *disegno* – became the regulated business of Cosimo I's cultural politics in the Accademia del Disegno,¹⁵³ it began its life in the Florentine Republic, where Michelangelo put visual education at the heart of republican politics in a drawing of the principle of art that would determine Florentine art history to come.



cosa." In his memorable "Discourse on the Florentine government after the death of Lorenzo de' Medici the Younger," Machiavelli, ed. Martelli, 29, advised Leo X: "*Senza satifare all'universale, non si face mai alcuna repubblica stabile. Non si satisfarà mai all'universale dei cittadini fiorentini, se non si riapre la sala.*"

¹⁵² Vasari, 6: 25.

¹⁵³ For the Accademia del Disegno in the context of Medicean politics, see Karen-edis Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State: The Discipline of Disegno*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000; and van Veen, 2006, 171-84.

Coda

On July 20, 1525, a large block of marble arrived in Florence from Carrara. It was destined for the sculptor Baccio Bandinelli, who had paid for the transport a year earlier. Bandinelli had been commissioned by Pope Clement VII to carve a *Hercules and Cacus* out of it for the Piazza della Signoria (Fig. 104), as a pendant to Michelangelo's *David*. The arrival of the enormous block of Carrara marble excited some attention in the city. At least one Florentine mentioned it in his *libro di ricordi*. And he added something more:

And at that time, there was in Florence a Michel Agnolo, sculptor and painter, a Florentine citizen, and the best master one could find in those times and of which was made notice. The People [*il Popolo*] asked him to work it [the block of marble], for he had made the Giant ... and therefore they desired him to make it, because they hoped he would make something, condescending a Hercules who crushes the giant Antaeus. And since he was working the sepulchers of the Medici, that Clement VII made him do, the aforesaid Pope decided that another Florentine sculptor would make it, to the end that his sepulchers would not remain unfinished.¹

¹ BRF, 1864 (*Vari ricordi di Firenze sino al dominio de' Medici*), fols 128-29: "A dì 20 luglio 1525 il Commune di Firenze fece venire da Carrara un pezzo di marmo di br. 8½ lungo et alto br. 2½, che era quasi quadro, per fare una figura per metter poi in Piazza, e venne per iscafa e tenevano due venti da ogni banda del fium d'Arno e rompendosene una cascò di su la scafa in Arno e penorono parecchi giorni a cavarlo, che v'era tal giorno parecchi Uomini e quasi 200 e lo portorono a S. Donnino e quivi l'associorono a un vetturale per fiorini 100 d'oro posto nell'Opera di S.^{ta} Maria del Fiore et il commune lo serviva de' canapé e delle taglie e lo tiravano con gl'argani in su i panconi d'asse in cambio di curri tondi con 4 paia di buoi all'argano e si disse che costava all'Opera più di fiorini 400. Et avevamo allora in Firenze un Michel Agnolo scultore e dipintore, cittadino fiorentino, et il miglior

The *anonimo*'s words are unequivocal. The *Popolo* wanted Michelangelo to carve a pendant for his own giant, whereas Giulio de' Medici kept him from doing so. We hear that the Pope wanted to keep the artist for his own project at the New Sacristy. Pope is pitted against *Popolo*. The latter consisted of the group of Florentine citizens which did not rule *with* the Medici but was subjected *to* their dominance. "*Popolo e libertà*," sounded through the streets of Florence when Piero de' Medici had fled in 1494, and the government that replaced him was not called the Governo Popolare for nothing. Like *Libertà* defined a city without princes, *Popolo* described a Republic governed by the many.

In a letter of October 1525, Clement VII explicitly forbade Michelangelo to answer the People's wishes. Through Gian Francesco Fattucci he informed the artist: " 'I would like him to think of my things, because I would like him to make a sepulcher for Leo [X] and one for me, and also [to think] of a ciborium on top of the altar of San Lorenzo on four columns. And inside [the ciborium] I want him to put all our vases that were the Magnificent Lorenzo the Elder's ..., and I want these things to go inside it, as to be able to show those relics to the *popolo*'." ² The representation of dynastic continuity was at stake, and the *Popolo* was not to interfere. At the Medici Chapel, that venerated idea of Time's return was given shape in an iconography of Dawn, Dusk, Day and Night to show that the Medici would always return,³ and dynastic

maestro che si trovasse ne' tempi suoi di che se n'avesse notizia. Di che il Popolo desiderava lo lavorasse lui, perché avevo fatto il Gigante ... e però desideravano che lo facesse lui, perché speravano fusse per fare qualche cosa, degna d'un Ercole che scopiasse Anteo Gigante: e perché lavorava le sepolture de' Medici, che faceva fare Clemente VII, disegnava detto Papa che lo facesse un altro scultore fiorentino, acciò i suoi sepolcri non rimanessero imperfetti." The document was partially cited in Gaye, 2: 464-65, and fully transcribed in Waldman, *Baccio Bandinelli and Art at the Medici Court: A Corpus of Early Modern Sources*, Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2004, 79 (doc. 148), who also discovered that Bandinelli had paid for the transport of the marble to Florence; see *ibid.*, 71-72 (doc. 137).

² Carteggio, 3: 170-71 (14.x.1525): "'Io vorrei che e' pensassi alle cose mia, perché vorrei fare una sepulture al Leone et una per me, et alsì a uno ciborio sopra l'altare di San Lorenzo in su quarto colonne. Et voglio mettervi dentro tutti e' nostri vasi che furono del magnifico Lorenzo vecchio, et dentro vi voglio mettere molte belle reliquie; et voglio che e' vi si possa andare intorno, per potere mostrare dette relique al popolo'"

³ See Richard Trexler and Mary E. Lewis, "Two Captains and Three Kings: New Light on the Medici Chapel," *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 4 (1981), 91-177, for the iconography of dynastic continuity.

continuity was further emphasized in the exhibition of *Il Magnifico's* vases, markers of that never forgotten Laurentian golden age that the Governo Popolare had tried so hard to erase. The Pope was eager to know the names of those who had approached Michelangelo, those men who had tried to impede with the artist's work on the family chapel. "I have been asked by many people," Michelangelo answered Clement through Fattucci, "but among those whose province it is, Lorenzo Morelli is one who has sought to learn my mind in this connection. ... I replied that, although I recognize their kindness and that of the whole people [*tucto il popolo*], I couldn't repay them, except by making it, and doing so as a gift [*in dono*], if the Pope would agree; as I was already committed, since I was committed to him, I could not work on anything else without his permission."⁴ Medici power overruled that of the *Popolo*. Michelangelo was willing to offer his service to the *Popolo* for free but was obliged to continue work at San Lorenzo. Bandinelli, and not Clement's stellar sculptor, started to carve for the people, and at Clement's explicit desire.

The episode puts us in the graveyard of Soderini's Republic. That contested marble block once belonged to the Governo Popolare. It had been quarried in Carrara in the summer of 1506. Soderini had immediately written to his brother-in-law, Alberigo Malaspina, to claim the material for his city after he had been informed about the find.⁵ From a letter written a year later we learn that the Gonfaloniere had promised the block to Michelangelo, who was working for Pope Julius II in Bologna at that time and would, Soderini believed, "soon return."⁶

⁴ Carteggio, 3: 183 (before 10.xi.1525): "Io sono stato richiesto da più persone, ma di quegli a chi s'appartiene. Lorenzo Morelli è uno di quegli che à voluto intendere lá nimo mio, in questo modo: Francesco da Sangallo venne amme, e disse mi che Lorenzo decto arebe avuto charo d'intendere se io ero per servigli, quando lui ne facessi impresa, io risposi che, visto la benivoglientia loro e di tucto el popolo, che io non gli potevo rimeritargli se non chol farla, e farla in dono, chome già fu' obrigato, quando al Papa piacesse; al quale send'io obrigato, non posso fare altro che le chose sua, senza sua licentia."

⁵ Published in Klapisch-Zuber, 1969, 112nt26: "Come per altre le dicemo pare che cotesti maestri de marmo habbiamo spicchato un pezo di marmo molto grande il quale desideriamo che la S[igno]ria V[ostra] ce lo facci salvare che lo satisfareno convenientemente et ce ne farà cosa molto grata et accepta ché desideriamo farne una statua quanto maggiore ne eschi."

⁶ Published in Carlo Frediani, *Ragionamento storico di Carlo Frediani su le diverse gite fatte a Carrara da Michelangelo Buonarroti*, Massa: Fratelli Frediani, 1837, 33 (doc. 2): "... aspectiamo qui in breve M.^o Michelagnolo Buonaroti scultore, il quale è stato a Bologna più mesi per gittare là di

Another letter informs us that the giant block of marble was destined for the Piazza. Preserving the block would be to the gratitude of “all the people [*a tucto il popolo*],” Soderini said.⁷ Yet Michelangelo was the only sculptor capable of carving the statue, and Soderini shelved the project as soon as Michelangelo started work on the Sistine Ceiling. To Malaspina the Gonfaloniere wrote: “(W)e are never able to dispose of the master Michelangelo, our citizen, who moved on after having been here for only 25 days. And there is not a man in Italy able to execute a work of such quality; it is necessary that only he, and nobody else, comes to see and guide it [the roughening out of the marble block], for someone else, not knowing his *fantasia*, could ruin it.”⁸

The marble belonged to Michelangelo alone; and twenty years later the Florentine people still knew of Soderini’s decision. Asking Michelangelo to make a *Hercules and Antaeus* therefore marked a deliberate return to those plans born in the period of the Governo Popolare, when Michelangelo had envisioned just that subject-matter, as a drawing bears witness to (Fig. 105).⁹ The project was born from Soderini’s Republic and destined for Soderini’s favourite, the artist the Medici had now appropriated (*re-* appropriated: in his youth Michelangelo “belonged” to Lorenzo *Il Magnifico*). But for Michelangelo, too, the block still *belonged* to the *Popolo*. He offered to carve it for free, as a gift to the Florentines. After all, it remained rightfully *theirs*. Here we find ourselves in the midst of that spectacle of appropriation and restitution that I located at the center of the politics of Florentine art.

Florentine history existed as a continuum of never-forgotten pasts. Clement continued the culture of *Il Magnifico* as if it had never been cut

bronzo il pontefice, ed è horamai alla fine della opera.” The document was rediscovered by Amy, 1997, 148.

⁷ Gaye, 2: 107: “Quello Marmo, se si può senza molto sconcio di V. S., ci sarebbe grato ci conservassi, che ne vorremo fare una statua che stessi in sulla piazza di questa Città, et per questo ne verrebbe la V.S. a gratificare atucto questo popolo.”

⁸ Gaye, 2: 107: “E non si è mandato ad fare bozzare il marmo, perchè la S. di Nostro Signore non ha mai permesso a maestro Michelagnolo, nostro cittadino, che si transferisca per insino qui solamente per 25 giorni. Et non essendo homo in Italia apto as expedire una opera di cotesta qualità, è necessario che lui solo, et non altri, là vengha ad vedere et dirizzarla, perchè ogni altro non sapendo la fantasia sua lo potrebbe guastare”

⁹ Now see Paul Joannides, “Two Drawings Related to Michelangelo’s *Hercules and Antaeus*,” *Master Drawings* 41 (2003), 105-18.

short by those eighteen years of the Governo Popolare.¹⁰ Michelangelo produced for him an image of this continuity, not only in iconography, but also in his architectural language. The Medici Chapel spoke to Brunelleschi's Old Sacristy, commissioned in the early fifteenth century by the founder of the Medici dynasty, Giovanni di Bicci, who still lies buried there. Vasari wrote that Michelangelo designed the Medici Chapel "*ad imitazione della Sagrestia Vecchia che Filippo Brunelleschi aveva fatto*"¹¹ The imitation was already noted by Antonio Billi, who added that the Old Sacristy had been "commissioned with the church from Filippo di ser Brunellescho."¹² Albertini, publishing in 1510, believed that the architecture of San Lorenzo had been co-authored by Brunelleschi and the Medici.¹³ There, in the privacy of the New Sacristy (only opened to the public in the 1540s), Michelangelo showed himself no less of an expert in the visual history of Florentine politics than during the period of the Governo Popolare.

In 1527, Florentine history lapsed into another past. The Medici regime fell, and the Second Florentine Republic continued where Soderini's government had left off in August 1512. The Gran Consiglio was reinstituted and the soldiers' barracks removed from its Sala in the hours after the expulsion. Michelangelo terminated his work on the Medicean chapel, in spite of Clement's efforts to make him continue.¹⁴ Bandinelli was released from the Hercules project, and it was quickly re-assigned by the Signoria to Michelangelo. On August 22, 1528, he signed his contract, the text of which is steeped in the rhetoric of restitution and therefore deserves full quotation:

¹⁰ For the politics of dynastic continuity under Leo X, Clement and Cosimo I de' Medici, see Cox-Rearick, 1984.

¹¹ Vasari, 6: 54. For Michelangelo's imitation, see David Hemsoll, "The Laurentian Library and Michelangelo's Architectural Method," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 66 (2003), 34, who also adds alternative models for Michelangelo's architectural vocabulary. The point I wish to make here, however, is that contemporaries recognized the New Sacristy as an imitation of the Old.

¹² Billi, ed. Benedettucci, 104: "*Nella architettura, [Michelangelo] ha composto tante altre cose, fuori del modello della nuova sagrestia di s.^{to} Lorenzo, dove si potrebbe dire, che nella maggiore parte abbia àuto esempio dalla vecchia fatta in decto s.^{to} Lorenzo, ordinate insieme con la chiesa da Filippo di ser Brunellescho*"

¹³ Albertini, ed. Murray, 6.

¹⁴ See *Carteggio*, 3: 255.

The aforesaid Signoria and Standardbearer, wish that a certain block of marble, that can be found at the Opera [del Duomo], brought to Florence about three years ago from Carrara to make an Image and figure of Cacus and destined for a public site as an ornament to the City, that a beautiful statue will be made for them, and nonetheless that it will be carved by a man excellent in that profession, and knowing the unheard expertise and command [*scientia*], both in the art of Sculpture and that of Painting, being an esteemed and unique example of someone of those two virtues, Michelangelo Buonarroti, their most cherished citizen, they deliberate on their solemn part, and observing that whatever their lordships decide should be observed, that aforesaid marble, apart from the fact that it had been allocated to others, one is obliged to give and concede, and as well for the aforesaid resolution to give and concede the aforesaid marble to the aforementioned Michelangelo Buonarroti, whom is obliged to carve and make out of it one figure together and connected to another, as it appears to and pleases the aforesaid Michelangelo, to be installed in the location that will be decided upon by that Signoria ¹⁵

Unable to carve the *Hercules and Antaeus* that he and the *Popolo* had initially planned from a block prepared for a *Hercules and Cacus*, Michelangelo designed an overtly ambitious group of *Samson and two Philistines*. Yet although he produced a clay model (Fig. 106), he never began the actual carving.¹⁶ The defense of the Republic against the Medici forces was at stake and that proved more important than finishing the *Samson*. By the spring of 1529, the pro-Medicean imperial forces had laid siege to the city. On April 6, 1529, Michelangelo was

¹⁵ Gaye, 2: 98-99: "*Prefati excelsi domini et vexillifer simul adunti, desiderando che duno certo marmo, che si truova allora allopera, facto venire circa tre anni sono da Carrara per farne la Imagine et figura di Cacco, et costituirla in luogo publico per ornamento della Città, se ne facci qualche bella statua ... et però si lavori da huomo eccellente in tale mestiero, et cognoscendo la perita et scientia inaudita, così nella Scultura come nel la pictura, dello egregio et unico exemplo di qualun che di decta dua virtù, Michelagnuolo Buonarroti, loro dilectissimo cittadino, deliberorno per loro solemne partito, et osservato quello che per loro signorie si doveva osservare, chel decto marmo, non obstante che pel passato fussi stato allogato ad altri, si debba dare et concedere, et così per il dicto partito dectono e concedono el prefato marmo al prenominato Michelagnuolo Buonarroti, el quale ne debba cavare e farvi drento una figura insieme e congiunta con altra, che et come parrà et piacerà a Michelagnuolo decto, per collocarla in quel luogo e modo che per questa Signoria sarà deliberato*"

¹⁶ For the copies after the lost model, see Eike D. Schmidt, "Die Überlieferung von Michelangelos verlorenes Samson-Modell," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 40 (1996), 78-147.

made Governor General of the Fortifications of Florence, an office he owed to his expertise in architecture. The office of Governor was specifically created for Michelangelo.¹⁷ It combined his duties as a politically eligible Florentine citizen with those of his artistic profession. Suddenly, Michelangelo was not only engaged in the political function of art but in politics proper. While defending the city at San Miniato, he sat on the Gran Consiglio several times and accepted an office on the Nine of Ordinance and the Militia, a strictly republican magistrate that only existed from 1506 to 1513 and 1527 to 1530, instituted at Machiavelli's insistence.¹⁸ On the Nine, Michelangelo was responsible for military appropriations. Whereas Buonarroti under the Medici regime had steadfastly refused political office, now he served his political rights.¹⁹

In August 1530, the Second became the Last Florentine Republic. The Medici returned and Michelangelo went into hiding, afraid that he would be accused of conspiracy and executed. Yet Clement showed *clementia*. By November the artist was back to his work on the Medici Chapel. Meanwhile, Bandinelli was re-awarded the block of marble. In 1534, his *Hercules and Cacus* was unveiled at Piazza della Signoria in Alessandro de' Medici's Florence – satiric poems mocking Bandinelli's achievement attached to its base in the following days.²⁰

By the time of the unveiling, Michelangelo left Florence for good with the Medici projects at San Lorenzo unfinished. His voluntary exile was politically motivated, driven by the tyrannical stewardship of Alessandro de' Medici. In the century preceding Alessandro's rise to power, the Medici had always respected that Florence was a republic, although manipulating the republican magistrates to their own benefit. From Cosimo *Il Vecchio* to Clement, the city had maintained a republican constitution, whatever the rhetoric of *libertà* and *popolo* designed in those two *intermezzi*. Always attending to the pulse of the city's history, republicanism produced what Savonarola in 1498 called "the habit" of

¹⁷ See the document published in *Le opere di Giorgio Vasari*, ed. Gaetano Milanesi, 9 vols, Florence: Sansoni, 1906, 7: 367. And see Hatfield, 2002, 156-57.

¹⁸ Hatfield, 2002, 217.

¹⁹ See Hatfield, 2002, 215.

²⁰ For the poems, see Louis A. Waldman, " 'Miracol' novo et raro': Two unpublished contemporary satires on Bandinelli's 'Hercules'," *Mitteilungen des kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 38 (1994), 419-27.

the Florentine people; it was “deeply impressed in the minds of the citizens,” deep enough that even the “tyrannical” Medici had been forced by history to respect it.²¹ But in an unprecedented gesture of political reversal, Alessandro abolished centuries of republican history and crowned himself Duke of Florence, the first Medici Duke in a long succession. For Michelangelo, that gesture meant more than the changes of regime in 1494, 1512, 1527 and 1530: it subverted the city’s historical make-up, root and all. In voluntary exile – ideologically driven exile – he promised in 1542 to make the French King Francis I a bronze horse for the Piazza della Signoria as a gift if Francis would liberate Florence from the Medici dukes, an offer colored by an acute understanding of the politics of art.²²

A sense of extreme deprecation also informs a group of sonnets Michelangelo composed in the 1540s. Clad in the clothes of a beautiful lady, Florence becomes the captivated subject beyond the reach of the longing lover of republican *libertà* that Michelangelo has now become. “Meaning by the lady, Florence,” Luigi del Riccio introduced the publication of the following:

For many, even a thousand lovers, Lady,
were you created, with an angelic form;
now heaven must be sleeping,
if one can appropriate [*s'appropia*] what was given to many.
Give back to your weeping eyes
the sun of your eyes, which seems to be avoiding
those born in such misery without its gifts.

Michelangelo imagined the appropriating tyrant living “in great terror,” unable to “enjoy his great sin.”²³ In another sonnet Michelangelo

²¹ See above, Chapter 4.

²² See *Carteggio*, 4: 84 (letter Luigi del Riccio to Roberto Strozzi, 21.vii.1542): “[Michelangelo] dice ha obbligo con Vostra Signoria che la casa l’ha mantenuto vivo, e vi prega a darli qualche nuova, ricordando al Re quanto li mandò a dire, per Scipione [Gabbrielli], e poi per Deo corriere, che, s’e’ rimetteva Firenze in libertà, che li voleva fare una statua di bronzo a cavallo in su la piazza de’ Signori a sua spesa”

²³ Saslow, 423 (no. 249): “Per molti, donna, anzi per mille amanati / create fusti, e d’angelica forma; / or par che ‘n ciel si dorma, / s’un sol s’appropia quel ch’è dato a tanti. / Ritorna a’ nostril pianti / il sol degli occhi tuo, che par che schivi / chi del suo donno in tal miseria è nato. / Deh, non turbate I vostri

compared himself to that other victim of exile, Dante.²⁴ And in those same years, he even pictured the Medicean statue of *Notte* closing her eyes to a Florence deprived of liberty – liberty in that Florentine meaning of a city *sibi princeps*. In response to a poem by Giovanni di Carlo Strozzi praising the liveliness of the sculpture, Michelangelo made his sculpture utter four last lines before falling into a deep sleep:

Sleep is dear to me, and being of stone is dearer,
as long as injury and shame endure;
not to see or hear is a great boon to me;
therefore, do not wake me – pray, speak softly.²⁵

Yet before Michelangelo removed his politics into poetry, he fashioned them once more in stone. As part of a group of exiled Florentine *fuorisciti* that clustered around the Cardinal Ridolfi including that architect of republican theory, Donato Giannotti, he was asked in 1539-40 by the latter to carve what was to become his most political work of art: the *Bust of Brutus* (Fig. 107) for the cardinal.²⁶ A portrait of tyrannicide, it addressed contemporary issues of tyranny to the full. In 1537, Alessandro de' Medici had been murdered by Lorenzino de' Medici, an act of republican sacrifice that was compared to that of Brutus by writers both on Florentine and Roman soil.²⁷ The statue's politics did not go unnoticed in the period. When the bust was displayed in the Ducal collections in the seventeenth century, after it had been acquired by Grand Duke Francesco I in the 1570s or '80s, it was furnished with an inscription that explains its unfinished state as the result of political renouncement:

desir santi, / ché chi di me par che vi spogli e privi, / col gran timor non gode il gran peccato; / ché degli amanti è men felice stato / quello. Ove 'l gran desir gran copia affrena, / c'una miseria di speranza piena." I have slightly adjusted Saslow's translation.

²⁴ Saslow, 421 (no. 248).

²⁵ Saslow, 419 (no. 247): "*Caro m'è 'il sonno, e più l'esser di sasso, / mentre che 'l danno e la vergogna dura; / non veder, non sentir, m'è gran ventura; / però, non mi destar, deh, parla basso.*"

²⁶ Vasari, 6: 104.

²⁷ See the excellent discussion of tyrannicide in D.J. Gordon, "Giannotti, Michelangelo and the Cult of Brutus," in Fritz Saxl (1890 – 1948). *A Volume of Memorial Essays from his friends in England*, ed. Gordon, London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1957, 281-96.

CODA

While the sculptor
Carves the image of Brutus
Out of the marble,
The crime enters his mind,
And he abstains²⁸

The text was of course really a gesture of re-appropriation, attached to the sculpture a century after Cosimo I de' Medici had restored the artist to Florence on a cold winter day in February: dead. With his funeral celebrated under the auspices of the Grand Duke and his achievements pushed into the context of a long, seemingly unbroken history of Medici patronage, Michelangelo was politically re-fashioned in his death.

²⁸ DUM BRUTI EFFIGIEM / SCULPTOR DE MARMORE / DUCIT / IN MENTEM SCELERIS VENIT / ET
ABSTINVIT

ABBREVIATIONS AND BIBLIOGRAPHY OF FREQUENTLY CITED SOURCES

Abbreviations

AAMF	Archivio Arciconfraternità della Misericordia, Firenze
AOSFM	Archivio Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore, Firenze
ASF	Archivio di Stato, Firenze
Beltrami	<i>Documenti e memorie riguardanti la vita e le opere di Leonardo da Vinci</i> . Ed. Luca Beltrami. Milan: Treves, 1919.
BNCF	Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Firenze
BRF	Biblioteca Riccardiana, Firenze
<i>Carteggio</i>	<i>Il carteggio di Michelangelo</i> . 5 vols. Ed. Paola Barocchi. Florence: Sansoni, 1965-83.
<i>Contratti</i>	<i>I contratti di Michelangelo</i> . Ed. Lucilla Bardeschi Ciulich. Florence: Studio per Edizione Scelte, 2005.
Gaye	<i>Carteggio inedito d'artisti dei secoli XIV, XV, XVI</i> . 3 vols. Ed. Giovanni Gaye. Florence: Giuseppe Molini, 1839.
Milanesi	<i>Le lettere di Michelangelo Buonarroti</i> . Ed. Gaetano Milanesi. Florence: Le Monnier, 1875.

Saslow	Saslow, James. <i>The Poetry of Michelangelo: An Annotated Translation</i> . New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991.
SAT	Savonarola, Girolamo. <i>Prediche sopra Aggeo con il Trattato Circa il Reggimento e Governo della Città di Firenze</i> . Ed. Luigi Firpo. Rome: Angelo Belardetti, 1965.
SAZ	Savonarola, Girolamo. <i>Prediche sopra Amos e Zaccaria</i> . 3 vols. Ed. Paolo Ghiglieri. Rome: Angelo Belardetti, 1971.
Scritti	<i>Scritti d'arte del Cinquecento</i> . 3 vols. Ed. Paola Barocchi. Milan and Naples: Ricciardo Ricciardi, 1971-77.
SRM	Savonarola, Girolamo. <i>Prediche sopra Ruth e Michea</i> . 2 vols. Ed. Vincenzo Romano. Rome: Angelo Belardetti, 1962.
SE	Savonarola, Girolamo. <i>Prediche sopra Ezechiele</i> . 2 vols. Ed. Roberto Ridolfi. Rome: Angelo Belardetti, 1955.
SSW	Savonarola, Girolamo. <i>Selected Writings of Girolamo Savonarola: Religion and Politics, 1490 – 1498</i> . Ed. and tr. Anna Borelli, Maria Pastore Passaro and Donald Beebe. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005.
Trattati	<i>Trattati d'arte del Cinquecento fra manierismo e controriforma</i> . Ed. Paola Barocchi. Bari: Laterza, 1960-62.
Villata	<i>Leonardo da Vinci: I documenti e le testimonianze contemporanee</i> . Ed. Edoardo Villata. Milan: Castello Sforzesco, 1999.

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NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING

In de lente van 1501 keerde Michelangelo terug naar zijn geboortestad Florence, ooit de stad die zichzelf had uitgeroepen tot bakermat van cultuur, van schilder- en beeldhouwkunst – haar inwoners, in de woorden van een vijftiende-eeuwse bezoeker, “levend van het visuele.” Maar het Florence dat Michelangelo zeven jaar eerder op negentienjarige leeftijd had verlaten, had nu haar geloof in kunst verloren. Het aantal opdrachten voor schilderijen, beeldhouwwerk en architectuur daalde tot een dramatisch laag peil; tekenen van een volledig herstel waren nog niet in zicht. Veel kunstenaars ontvluchtten de stad om elders hun werkzaamheden voort te zetten. En met de dood van Verrocchio in 1488, Bertoldo in 1491, Domenico Ghirlandaio in 1494, Piero Pollaiuolo in 1496 en Antonio Pollaiuolo in 1498, moet het geleken hebben alsof er een abrupt einde was gekomen aan een cultuur die welhaast onsterfelijk leek.

Nu is het een bekend verhaal: precies in de jaren van Michelangelo's terugkeer maakte het stilistische idioom van de vijftiende eeuw plaats voor dat van de “Hoog Renaissance.” De omslag speelt een voorname rol in Heinrich Wölfflin's boek *Klassische Kunst* van 1898, maar de dramatiek ervan was al aanwezig in Vasari's *Vite*, waarvan de eerste druk in 1550 in Florence ter perse ging. Vasari liet zijn derde en laatste periode (*Età*) aanvangen rond 1500. Michelangelo speelt vaak de hoofdrol in besprekingen van die stilistische omslag; dat deed hij al in Vasari. Dikwijls wordt Michelangelo voorgesteld als een kunstenaar die bijna eigenhandig de stijl van een vorige generatie deed vergeten: alledaags realisme wordt idealisme, aandacht voor omgeving wordt aandacht voor regel. Bloedeloos vond Wölfflin de nieuwe stijl. Hoewel er recent pogingen zijn ondernomen om Michelangelo's dominante positie in die stijlomslag te nuanceren, en woorden als bloedeloos nu ook niet meer in de mond worden genomen, wordt de aandacht voor Michelangelo gerechtvaardigd door eigentijdse documenten. Zijn naam duikt veelvuldig op in eigentijdse kronieken, stads- en familiegeschiedenissen en in *ricordi* en *ricordanze*.

Terwijl moderne overzichten van de periode spreken van een stilistische revolutie die zich *ondanks* de maatschappelijke, politieke en religieuze veranderingen in die tijd voordeed – toch nog steeds dat “bloedeloze” van

Michelangelo's stijl interpreterend als het levens-, het geschiedenisloze; het weinig maatschappelijk betrokkene – verhaalden Michelangelo's tijdgenoten zijn leven en werk in vertellingen over de Florentijnse politiek, geschiedenis, en wapenfeiten. In de onderhavige dissertatie laat ik zien dat het werk van "*cittadino*" onlosmakelijk was verbonden met de ingrijpende politieke, religieuze en maatschappelijke veranderingen die de stad Florence in de jaren rond de eeuwwisseling doormaakte. Maar niet enkel verbonden, voeg ik daaraan toe. Michelangelo's werk speelt een actieve rol bij het bepalen van de functie van kunst binnen die veranderingen. De vaak zo eigenaardige stilistische kenmerken van de werken die hier worden besproken – de *David* (1501–04), het *Cascina Carton* (1504–06), de *Heilige Mattheus* (1506) en het *Doni Tondo* (1504–06) – zijn het resultaat van die actieve rol.

In de zeven jaar vóór Michelangelo's terugkeer had de maatschappelijke, politieke en religieuze functie van kunst veel van haar oorspronkelijke vanzelfsprekendheid verloren. Niet alleen zagen Michelangelo's stadsgenoten af van nieuwe opdrachten; ze brachten ook veel bestaande kunstwerken – werken van Botticelli, Donatello en anderen – naar de beruchte brandstapels van 1497 en '98. De vernietigende kritiek die de Dominicaanse monnik Girolamo Savonarola vanaf 1494 tegen de cultuur van kunstenaars en opdrachtgevers lanceerde, wordt vaak als verklaring voor de daling in opdrachten en het verbranden van kunstwerken aangevoerd. Hoewel zijn preken inderdaad als een soort katalysator lijken te hebben gefunctioneerd, maakte Savonarola's kritiek ook deel uit van een meer wijdverbreide herziening van de Florentijnse cultuur, een herziening die veel verder strekte dan Savonarola's directe invloedssfeer en die doorzette tot lang na de executie van de prediker in 1498.

Culturele hervormingen waren het directe resultaat van de politieke veranderingen die zich in de stad voltrokken. Op 9 november 1494 werd de Medici familie uit Florence verbannen en kwam er een abrupt einde aan zestig jaar politieke overheersing. In de overtuiging dat de Medici de republikeinse tradities van Florence hadden gecorrumpeerd, poogden de Florentijnen elk spoor van de Medici geschiedenis ongedaan te maken. De politieke instituten die in de loop van de vijftiende eeuw door de Medici waren gesticht werden ontmanteld. Daarvoor in de plaats werd de Governo Popolare gesticht, "de regering van het volk" die tot 1512, toen de Medici naar Florence terugkeerden, standhield. De Governo Popolare legde zich toe op een politiek van uitwissen en opschonen, van iconoclasme en vergetelheid: kunstwerken herinnerend aan de Medici werden kapotgemaakt, zes decennia geschiedenis ongedaan gemaakt. Het besef dat er zich in 1494 een historische breuk had

voorgedaan drong door tot de gehele Florentijnse maatschappij, zo laten allerlei dagboeken, familiegeschiedenissen en andere documenten uit de tijd zelf zien.

De daling in opdrachten en het verbranden van bestaande kunstwerken kan alleen maar worden begrepen in politieke termen. De Governo Popolare herkende de kunst gemaakt voor de Medici als representatief voor Medici politiek. Met dat herkennen kreeg de geschiedenis van de Florentijnse kunst een uiterst politieke lading. Maar die politiek lag in de jaren voorafgaand aan Michelangelo's terugkeer in visuele stilte. Blijkbaar konden de stilistische registers die onder de Medici-overheersing gangbaar waren na 1494 niet langer de politiek van een anti-Medici maatschappij ondersteunen.

Michelangelo herinterpreteerde de geschiedenis van de Florentijnse kunst en maakte kunstwerken die politiek konden functioneren in een nieuwe politieke orde. Het toekennen van een politieke betekenis aan Michelangelo's werk is niet nieuw; de poging om die betekenis niet te zoeken in iconografie zelf, niet in het onderwerp, maar in de wijze (*maniera* zouden zijn tijdgenoten hebben gezegd) waarop Michelangelo dat onderwerp vormgaf is dat wel. Opvallend genoeg waren de iconografische thema's die ten tijde van de Medici werden ingezet niet anders dan de onderwerpen die Michelangelo's anti-Medici opdrachtgevers voorstelden. Daarom betoog ik dat Michelangelo in zijn werk voor de Florentijnse Republiek de betekenis van zijn kunst liet verschuiven van het *wat* van de representatie (het onderwerp) naar het *hoe*, naar stijl. De onderhavige dissertatie is een eerste poging om de oorsprong van de (Florentijnse) Hoog Renaissance te zoeken in politieke veranderingen.

Hoewel mijn proefschrift een zeker stilistisch register blootlegt waaraan al Michelangelo's werken voor de Governo Popolare aan onderworpen lijken – een beeldtaal die loodrecht staat op het bijna alledaagse naturalisme van de vijftiende-eeuwse kunstenaars en een taal die opvallend terughoudend is in haar verhalende capaciteiten – betoog ik niet dat Michelangelo's werk in die jaren werd gekenmerkt door een bepaalde stilistische uniformiteit die een intrinsieke anti-Medici waarde zou hebben. Stilistische eenzijdigheid was de uitkomst van een veelzijdigheid aan problemen waarvoor Michelangelo probeerde een oplossing te vinden. Die problemen worden per hoofdstuk besproken aan de hand van drie noties, te weten: “geschiedenis,” “oorsprong” en “herstel,” om in het laatste hoofdstuk te convergeren in Michelangelo's eigen samenvatting: een tekening die mijn opvatting van een politieke geschiedenis van kunst lijkt te prefigureren.



Hoofdstuk 1 bespreekt de *David* (1501–04). Vrijgemaakt van al die attributen die tot dan toe met David werden geassocieerd (het hoofd van Goliath, een zwaard, een herdersoutfit, en zelfs een jeugdig uiterlijk) en ontdaan van elke verwijzing naar handeling of narrativiteit, breekt Michelangelo's oudtestamentische figuur met de vijftiende-eeuwse beeldtraditie. Dat die breuk zelfbewust en politiek gemotiveerd was laat ik zien aan de hand van een fragment van een aan Petrarca ontleend gedicht dat Michelangelo naast een voorstudie voor het beeld schreef.

Michelangelo maakte de *David* voor de Dom van Florence. Juist op die plek kwam de breuk met het Medici-verleden tot uiting in de vernietiging van kunstwerken die aan de familie deden herinneren. Ook het orgaan dat de opdrachten voor de Dom verzorgde, de Opera del Duomo, blijkt nauw verbonden te zijn geweest met de politieke veranderingen in de stad. Aan de hand van ongepubliceerde bronnen laat ik zien hoe de Opera probeerde haar constitutie te hervormen tot een staat die overeenkwam met haar eigen vóór-Medici geschiedenis. Verder toon ik aan, ook met behulp van ongepubliceerd archivalisch materiaal, dat de Florentijnse bankier Giuliano Salviati van cruciaal belang is geweest bij het toekennen van de opdracht aan Michelangelo. Salviati was een van de belangrijkste politieke figuren van de Governo Popolare.

Teneinde uit te komen bij die ongeschonden, witte, in perfecte anatomie uitgehakte jongeman, naakt en ontdaan van elke referentie naar heden en verleden, hakte Michelangelo letterlijk een eerdere Medici-geschiedenis aan stukken. Die geschiedenis werd belichaamd door Donatello's bronzen *David*, een beeld waarvan het onderwerp weliswaar met dat van Michelangelo overeenkomt maar waarvan het alledaags, letterlijk zijn omgeving citerend realisme ver af staat van Michelangelo's idealiserende kolos van vier meter tien. Donatello's beeld was in het begin van de jaren 1430 door de Medici in opdracht gegeven, waarschijnlijk kort na het moment dat Cosimo de' Medici de politieke macht van zijn familie vestigde. Toen Michelangelo aan zijn *David* werkte, kon Donatello's beeld gelden als *het* symbool van de Medici's culturele overheersing. De herinnering aan de bronzen *David* moet in Michelangelo's achterhoofd hebben gezeten, want hij tekende een kopie ervan uit zijn herinnering naast de dichtregels over de "gebroken laurier."

Het verschil tussen Donatello's *David* en Michelangelo's versie spitst zich toe op een verschil in de imitatie van de klassieke oudheid. De bronzen Medici *David* werd al door vijftiende- en vroeg zestiende-eeuwse kunstenaars geïmiteerd als was het een getrouwe reconstructie van een antiek beeld. In afbeeldingen van heidense afgoderij werden de formele aspecten van

Donatello's meesterwerk overgenomen en gepresenteerd als een getrouwe *historische* reconstructie van het afgodsbeeld in haar oorspronkelijke historische en functionele context. Ook Michelangelo herkende Donatello's beeld als een historische reconstructie. Toen hij in 1496 zijn *Bacchus* maakte, modelleerde hij de vorm van zijn eigen *heidense* beeld naar Donatello's *bijbelse* beeld. Michelangelo's *David*, daarentegen, ontkent alle formele kwaliteiten van Donatello's versie: het extreme naturalisme wordt onderdrukt, het ongebalanceerde *contrapposto* gecorrigeerd, en verwijzingen naar tijd en handeling vermeden. Wat overblijft is een beeld van een bijna tijdloos classicisme. In het proefschrift laat ik zien hoe de tijdloosheid van het beeld niet los kan worden gezien van de heftige discussies over de imitatie van de antieken die in het eerste decennium van de zestiende eeuw werden gevoerd, discussies die een bijzonder politieke lading hadden. Michelangelo's tijdgenoten, onder wie Machiavelli, beweerden dat een antiek voorbeeld niet nagevolgd diende te worden wanneer de historische omstandigheden waarin dat model was ontstaan anders waren dan die van de *Governo Popolare*. Zo konden, in scherp contrast met de voorgaande Medici periode, voorbeelden die stamden uit de tijd van de Romeinse keizers niet meer worden nagevolgd, natuurlijk omdat ze begrepen werden als de historische producten van een monarchie en niet als die van een republiek. Dat maakte de imitatie van de antieke oudheid in de jaren van de *Governo Popolare* veel minder vanzelfsprekend dan in de jaren 1434–1494. Hoewel Michelangelo's *David* als een ijkpunt in de imitatie van de antieken kan gelden, bood juist dat tijdloze van die imitatie een creatieve oplossing in het imitatiedebat. Michelangelo imiteerde zogezegd wel de regels van de antieken maar niet hun historische producten. De *David* werd dan ook door tijdgenoten nooit opgevat als een geslaagde “kopie” van een heidens afgodsbeeld.

In 1504 werd Michelangelo's *David* naast de ingang van het Florentijns stadspaleis, het Palazzo della Signoria, geplaatst. Negen jaar eerder hadden de Florentijnse autoriteiten Donatello's Medici *David* uit de binnenplaats van het Palazzo Medici verwijderd en op de binnenplaats van het Palazzo della Signoria geplaatst als symbool van de onderwerping van het Medici-bewind. Donatello's beeld was goed zichtbaar achter dat van Michelangelo. De discussie voorafgaand aan de installatie van Michelangelo's *David* laat zien dat de politieke betekenis van dat werk grotendeels tot uitdrukking kwam in de directe confrontatie met Donatello's Medici beeld.

Hoofdstuk 2 verplaatst de aandacht van Michelangelo's historisch denken over artefacten naar zijn denken over de oorsprong van het artistiek scheppen zelf. In een preek van februari 1497 had Savonarola de relatie tussen

het scheppingsvermogen van de kunstenaar, de *fantasia*, en de religieuze en maatschappelijke functionaliteit van het kunstwerk aan de kaak gesteld. Volgens de prediker schilderden Florentijnse kunstenaars enkel nog voorstellingen van hun eigen, subjectieve scheppingsvermogen (*fantasia*) in plaats van oprechte en authentieke afbeeldingen van Christus, Maria, heiligen en profeten die konden functioneren in een Christelijke geloofseconomie. In tegenstelling tot de Christelijke traditie, verklaarden kunstenaars hun werken tot ingenieus gefabriceerde illusies van vakmanschap en fantasie, vaak voorzien van signaturen op de plekken waar die illusie het best werkt. Savonarola betoogde in zijn preek hoe de toenemende aandacht voor het kunnen van de kunstenaar het religieuze primaat van het beeld had ondermijnd: nu “schildert elke kunstenaar zichzelf” in plaats van God. In de *David* en de *Mattheus* zocht Michelangelo naar een ingenieuze oplossing voor het probleem dat Savonarola signaleerde. In plaats van te suggereren dat deze werken het resultaat waren van Michelangelo’s eigen verbeelding suggereerde hij dat het ontwerp, het *concetto* van deze werken, in het bovennatuurlijke van God gezocht moet worden en dat hij als kunstenaar enkel een middelaar was van in God geboren ideeën.

Op een studieblad in het Louvre waarop ook de aan Petrarca refererende dichtregels staan, vergeleek Michelangelo zijn werk aan de *David* met Davids overwinning over Goliath die in de bijbel aan God zelf wordt toegeschreven. Zoals David enkel als instrument van God handelde zo deed Michelangelo dat ook. Michelangelo maakte de goddelijkheid van zijn beeld zichtbaar in de schoonheid ervan. Tijdgenoten spraken inderdaad van de onovertroffen schoonheid van de *David*. Ze gebruikten termen als “*grazia*,” een term die zowel “gracieus” betekent als “de gratie van God.” De schoonheid van Michelangelo’s *David* wordt daarmee een iconisch attribuut van David in de Bijbel, wiens goddelijkheid doorscheen in zijn schoonheid – zo legt de bijbel uit en zo benadrukte Savonarola nog maar eens in Michelangelo’s tijd.

Michelangelo’s mediale opvatting van zijn kunstenaarsschap vond haar evenbeeld in de politiek van Piero Soderini, vanaf 1502 hoofd van het Florentijns stadsbestuur en wonend in het Palazzo della Signoria waarvoor de *David* stond opgesteld. Soderini riep een heersersbeeld van zichzelf op waarin goddelijke presentie doorklonk. Nooit persoonlijk interveniërend in het Florentijnse stadsbestuur en enkel de politiek van het bovenaardse ten uitvoering brengend, presenteerde hij zichzelf als slechts een middelaar van Gods heerschappij, als een tweede David, met wie hij door tijdgenoten inderdaad werd vergeleken.

Michelangelo's beeld van Mattheus, in de zomer van 1506 onder Soderini's toezicht oog gehouwen, wordt gekenmerkt door een zelfde strategie, hoewel de *Mattheus* verder weinig formele kenmerken met de *David* deelt. Het beeld suggereert een tot dan toe ongekennde beweging. Ik betoog dat Michelangelo's tijdgenoten die suggestie begrepen als goddelijk: beweging suggereert het inblazen van leven in dode materie naar analogie van de Schepping. Michelangelo's apostel draait wild naar rechts, in de richting van de plek waar we de engel zouden verwachten; de engel was immers een iconografisch attribuut van deze apostel-evangelist. Dat Michelangelo de engel niet afbeeldde is opvallend. Was het niet juist de engel, "*agnolo*" in het Italiaans, die deel uitmaakte van Michel-Agnolo's naam? Signeerde de kunstenaar zijn *Pietà* in Rome niet MICHEL.ANGELUS, als Michael de Engel, met een welgesitueerde punt tussen "Michael" en "Engel"? En getuigde Ariosto in 1516 niet van Michelangelo's goddelijkheid met de woorden "*Michel, piu che mortale, Angel divino*," "Michael, meer dan sterfelijk, een goddelijke engel"? Was die engel niet Michelangelo's weg naar goddelijk scheppen, naar zijn *divinità*? Zoals Mattheus het woord Gods kreeg ingefluisterd door zijn engel bij het schrijven van het eerste bijbelboek, zo kreeg Michelangelo zijn *concetti* als door een engel ingefluisterd. De *Mattheus* reageert niet alleen op de engel die we niet zien – op het niveau van iconografie – maar ook op de goddelijke hand die hem maakte – op het niveau van stijl. Net als bij de *David* vallen iconografie en stijl hier samen om de goddelijkheid van zowel het kunstwerk als de kunstenaar te suggereren.

In het proefschrift betoog ik dat Michelangelo's *Mattheus* kan worden beschouwd als een poging om de twee uiterste polen in de geschiedenis van Christelijke afbeeldingen te verenigen, namelijk het beeld dat door de mens werd vervaardigd (waarover Savonarola zo negatief sprak) en het beeld dat door God zou zijn gemaakt, de zogenaamde *acheiropoetos* (letterlijk "gemaakt zonder handen"). Die laatste categorie genoot een bijzondere populariteit in het Florence van die tijd. Het meest populair in dat opzicht was de zogenaamde *Madonna dell'Impruneta*, een beschilderd paneel waarvan werd geloofd dat het door de heilige Lucas was vervaardigd. Die *Madonna* werd bij belangrijke politieke besluiten naar Florence gebracht en op een altaar voor het Palazzo della Signoria geplaatst. Toen Piero Soderini tot hoofd van het stadsbestuur werd verkozen werd de *Madonna* daar geïnstalleerd, "met als doel dat de Allerhoogste God en zijn glorieuze Moeder dit Florentijnse volk gratie verlenen tijdens hun verkiezing van het hoofd van het stadsbestuur," in de woorden van een tijdgenoot. Opvallend genoeg gebeurde dat op de feestdag van de Heilige Mattheus (21 september 1502). Net als de *Madonna* uit

Impruneta werd die heilige van groot belang geacht voor Soderini's verkiezing. Ik concludeer dat Michelangelo's beeld ook wel begrepen kan worden als een eigentijds alternatief voor zo een miraculeus werk, als dankbetuiging voor de dag waarop God, via Mattheus, de stad Florence van een nieuwe leider voorzag.

Het derde hoofdstuk bespreekt het *Doni Tondo*, een schilderij dat Michelangelo tussen 1504 en 1506 voor de Florentijnse koopman Agnolo Doni vervaardigde. Ik betoog dat het *Tondo* op een radicale wijze breekt met de in de vijftiende eeuw gangbare traditie van naturalisme. Elk verband met de aardse, ons omringende wereld dat die eerdere traditie in verf probeerde vast te leggen verstoorde Michelangelo. De recente restauratie van het schilderij heeft laten zien dat Michelangelo weliswaar het medium van olieverf van de Quattrocento schilders overnam, maar dat hij dat medium aanwendde op de ouderwetse manier van de tempera schilders – schilders uit de pre-renaissance periode die inderdaad een stuk minder illusionistisch te werk gingen dan Michelangelo's vakgenoten uit een meer recent verleden.

Uit zijn gedichten blijkt dat Michelangelo wist dat een extreem doorgevoerd verisme en illusionisme tot verwarring kon leiden, tenminste wanneer zij worden doorgevoerd in een religieus schilderij. Niet alleen modelleert de naturalistische schilder zijn religieuze figuren naar de hem omringende wereld en laat hij daarmee de scheiding tussen aardse en hemelse werkelijkheid gevaarlijk vervagen; de religieuze figuur *in* het schilderij begint nu zoveel op ons te lijken dat we haar of hem beginnen te verwarren met ons zelf. Het was het soort verwarring dat Savonarola in één van de Vastenpreken van 1496, die Michelangelo bijwoonde, als voornaamste argument inbracht tegen de vijftiende-eeuwse, in de Medici-periode zo gangbare wijze van afbeelden en het was diezelfde verwarring, betoog ik, die Michelangelo probeerde te voorkomen. Ik toon aan dat een vreemde vorm van welbewuste restrictie van visuele exuberantie niet alleen centraal stond in Michelangelo's schilderij, maar ook in de cultuur van de Governo Popolare, in de geschriften van figuren als Gianfrancesco Pico della Mirandola en de gebroeders Benivieni, en in de ongepubliceerde lessen van de leerstoelhouder Retorica en Poëzie aan de Florentijnse *Studio*, Marcello Virgilio Adriani. Die restrictie wordt nog eens geëxpliciteerd in de lijst van het schilderij, waar vijf uit hout gesneden figuren aanschouwen wat zich in het schilderij zelf afspeelt. Zij zijn twee profeten, twee sibillen en Christus zelf, de Christus van de Passie die terugkijkt op zijn eigen jeugd. De profeten en sibillen voorzien de komst van Christus, niet via zintuiglijke waarneming maar als in een visioen. Die figuren

verschaffen ons, de beschouwer, een model om te kijken – niet met ons uiterlijk oog maar door middel van innerlijke schouwing.

De laatste pagina's van Hoofdstuk 3 plaatsen dat spel van zien en schouwing terug in het huis van Michelangelo's opdrachtgever, Agnolo Doni. Aan de hand van de ongepubliceerde inventaris van Palazzo Doni toon ik aan hoe Michelangelo's schilderij oorspronkelijk onderdeel was van een specifieke kijkcultuur. Het huis was rijk aan ontvangstkamers en kunstwerken. Onder de Florentijnen die het Palazzo bezochten, zo blijkt uit Doni's ongepubliceerde *ricordi*, waren belangrijke opdrachtgevers; maar onder hen waren ook sleutelfiguren van de Governo Popolare, mannen die samen met de eigenaar van Michelangelo's *Tondo* in het Florentijns stadsbestuur zitting hadden. Doni zelf was niet alleen politiek betrokken; hij maakte ook deel uit van een religieuze broederschap die nauw betrokken was bij de religieuze hervormingen die Michelangelo in het *Doni Tondo* interpreteert.

De concepten van "geschiedenis," "oorsprong" en "herstel" die vormgaven aan de eerste drie hoofdstukken komen samen in Michelangelo's *Cascina Karton*, dat wordt besproken in Hoofdstuk 4. Van de voorzichtigheid waarmee Michelangelo in de eerdere werken de nadruk van het "wat" naar het "hoe" liet verschuiven is hier geen sprake meer. Michelangelo kreeg de opdracht voor de *Slag bij Cascina* in het voorjaar van 1504, nadat de *David* was voltooid. Die opdracht was voor een frescoschildering, bedoeld voor de zaal van de Grote Raad in het Palazzo della Signoria, voor het politieke hart van de Governo Popolare. Michelangelo begon echter nooit met schilderen en voltooide slechts het voorbereidend karton, dat overigens wel op ware grootte was uitgevoerd. Die tekening werd uiteindelijk geïnstalleerd op de plek waarvoor de schildering oorspronkelijk was bedoeld. De permanente installatie van een tekening was op dat moment nog zonder precedent. Niet eerder functioneerde een tekening – dat medium dat eerder alleen als onderdeel van het ontwerpproces werd beschouwd – als zelfstandig werk in een politieke context. Het vierde hoofdstuk betoogt dat de politiek van het werk echter niet zozeer wordt uitgedragen door de iconografie ervan maar door de exemplarische waarde van Michelangelo's tekenkunst zelf.

Michelangelo's tekening ging verloren in de loop van de zestiende eeuw, maar niet voordat er een kopie van werd gemaakt. Daarin zien we negentien naakte mannen bij een rivier. Er heerst paniek. Sommigen bevinden zich nog in het water of klimmen op de oever. Anderen zijn druk doende zich aan te kleden. De scène heeft haar oorsprong in Leonardo Bruni's *Historiae Florentini populi* van 1442, waarvan een Italiaanse editie in het Palazzo della Signoria werd bewaard. Maar zoals ik laat zien, wordt er in Bruni's tekst niet

van heroïek verhaald; Bruni vertelt zelfs dat de Florentijnse soldaten die dag begonnen te muiten.

De figuren in Michelangelo's *Karton* werden veelvuldig gekopieerd. Opvallend genoeg verkozen kunstenaars nooit het hele karton te kopiëren, één uitzondering daar gelaten. Hun tekeningen van geïsoleerde figuren trekken Michelangelo's compositie uiteen in verschillende fragmenten. Het belang van Michelangelo's *Karton* voor de geschiedenis van de Florentijnse kunst, zo doen deze tekeningen vermoeden, ligt niet in de volledige compositie. Juist dat fragmentarische is kenmerkend ook voor de eerste pogingen tot het schrijven van kunstgeschiedenis. Vasari's *Vite* beschrijven de geschiedenis van de (Florentijnse) kunst aan de hand van geïsoleerde passages in grote frescocycli, alsof die geschiedenis alleen maar kan bestaan wanneer haar hoogtepunten los worden verteld van de verhalen die schilderijen verbeelden, van de teksten die zij illustreren: van het onderwerp. Maar in tegenstelling tot de werken die Vasari beschrijft, was Michelangelo's *Karton* zelf nooit een narratief geheel. Het werk was vanaf het begin geconcipeerd als een conglomeraat van los van elkaar staande figuurstudies. De negentien naakte mannen zoeken geen contact met elkaar. Hun geïsoleerde status is het directe resultaat van Michelangelo's manier van werken, van het werken naar naaktmodellen die Michelangelo één voor één de houdingen van zijn figuren liet aannemen. Op het moment dat hij die afzonderlijke figuren weer in de compositie integreerde liet hij die integratie maar gedeeltelijk slagen; de afzonderlijke naakte mannen behielden hun afzonderlijke identiteit.

Daaruit concludeer ik dat Michelangelo's *Karton* over het proces van maken zelf gaat. Het legt het werk bloot dat voorafging aan het eindresultaat, aan de schildering zelf. Die bewering breng ik in verband met de theorie van *disegno* – hetgeen zowel tekenkunst als ontwerp betekent – zoals die gangbaar was in Michelangelo's tijd. *Disegno*, zei Ghiberti al rond 1450, was kunsttheorie. Niet alleen een theorie van kunst zelf, maar ook van haar geschiedenis. Hij voegde daaraan toe dat *disegno* begrepen moet worden als het *principio*, het principe en historisch begin van de kunst. Toen Michelangelo's *Karton* in de late zomer van 1505 werd geïnstalleerd in het Palazzo della Signoria werd dat principe van de Florentijnse kunstgeschiedenis fysiek aanschouwelijk gemaakt. En niet alleen in de tekenkunst, voeg ik daaraan toe, maar ook in de naaktheid van de figuren. Het mannelijk naakt gold namelijk al vanaf het begin van de vijftiende eeuw als het principe, het *principio* dat de Florentijnse kunst vooruit bracht. Niet alleen waren de voorbeelden van het eerste begin van kunst naakt (de ongeklede

antieke beelden die het oude Rome ooit sierden), maar ook tekende de Florentijnse kunstenaar naakten ter voorbereiding van elk nieuw kunstwerk.

Hoofdstuk 4 concludeert dat Michelangelo's werk zich het best laat begrijpen als een zoektocht naar het model waaraan de toekomst van de Florentijnse kunst kan voldoen. Het is een ontwerp voor een toekomstige kunstgeschiedenis. Ook laat ik zien dat een tijdgenoot als Francesco Guicciardini in zijn politiek-theoretische verhandelingen over de *Governo Popolare* op zoek was naar soortgelijke modellen waaraan *zijn* geschiedenis (van de politiek) kon voldoen. Opvallend genoeg deed hij dat in een taal rijk aan metaforen die aan de beeldende kunst waren ontleend.

In het *Cascina Karton* schreef Michelangelo zijn eigen receptie – en met groot succes. Tot ver in de zestiende eeuw bestudeerden kunstenaars het werk – Florentijnen, Venetianen, Romeinen, Spanjaarden. In de eerste jaren na voltooiing deden zij dat in de zaal van de Grote Raad. De politieke betekenis van Michelangelo's werk lag precies in die bijna academische functie die zijn naakten aannamen. Het bewind dat in die jaren de Medici-heerschappij verving blijft zichtbaar in de geschiedenis van de zestiende-eeuwse kunst, een geschiedenis die haar oorsprong heeft in de blauwdruk van kunst die Michelangelo had ontworpen voor het politieke hart van de *Governo Popolare*.

CURRICULUM VITAE

I was born in the late evening of December 15, 1978, in Winschoten, where I completed my VWO (*voorbereidend wetenschappelijk onderwijs* = preparatory academic education), eighteen years later. I received my Bachelor and Master in Art History *cum laude* at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen in 2003. Half of that same year was spent in Florence as a pre-doctoral GWO-research fellow at the Istituto Interuniversitario Olandese di Storia dell'Arte in Florence. In 2004, I started my tenure as AiO (*assistent in opleiding* = PhD candidate) at the Universiteit Leiden. As of September 2008, I will be a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow and Lecturer in the Department of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University, New York.

At Leiden, I taught classes on High Renaissance art and artistic patronage in Italy and the North in the early modern period. I delivered papers at conferences there and in Nijmegen, Florence, San Francisco, Chicago and Toronto, and co-organized the conference *Formulating a Response* at the Universiteit Leiden in 2006. I published in the *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, have one essay on Michelangelo's *David* and one on Michelangelo's "blindness" forthcoming; co-edited *Poliptiek: Een veelluik van Groninger bijdragen aan de kunstgeschiedenis* (Waanders, 2002); and will be co-editing and contributing to an interdisciplinary volume on *Cultivating the Vernacular* (Brill, 2010).

ILLUSTRATIONS



Fig. 1. Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Birth of the Virgin*. Fresco. Florence, Tornabuoni Chapel, Santa Maria Novella.

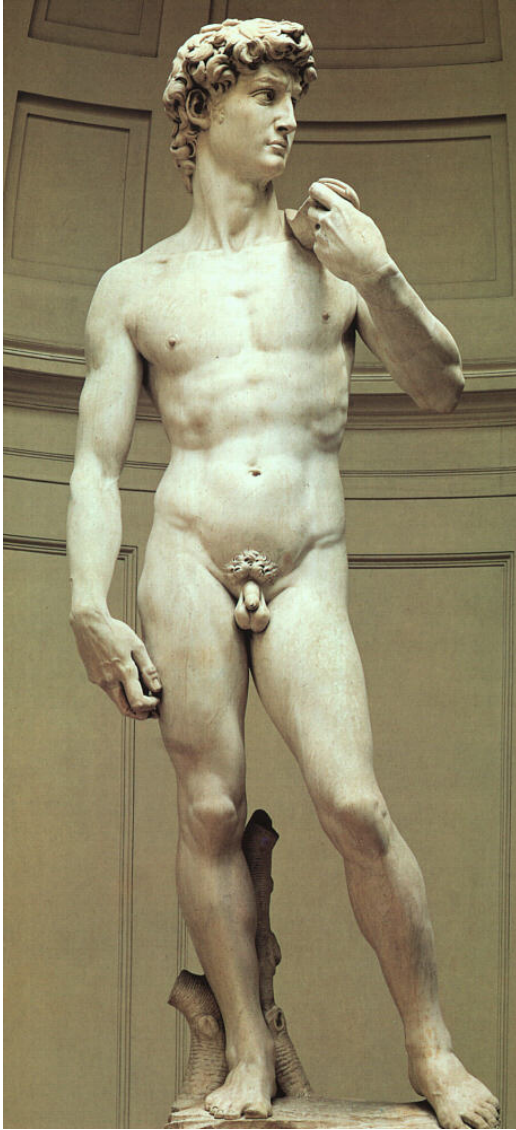


Fig. 2. Michelangelo, *David*. Marble. Florence, Galleria dell'Accademia.



Fig. 3. Detail of Fig. 2.



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Fig. 11. Verrocchio, *David*.
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Fig. 19. Donatello, *Habakkuk*.
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Fig. 20. Detail Fig. 2



Fig. 21. Detail Fig. 8



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Fig. 24. Filippino Lippi, *Saint Philip before the
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Fig. 25. Michelangelo, *Bacchus*. Marble.
Florence, Museo Nazionale del Bargello.

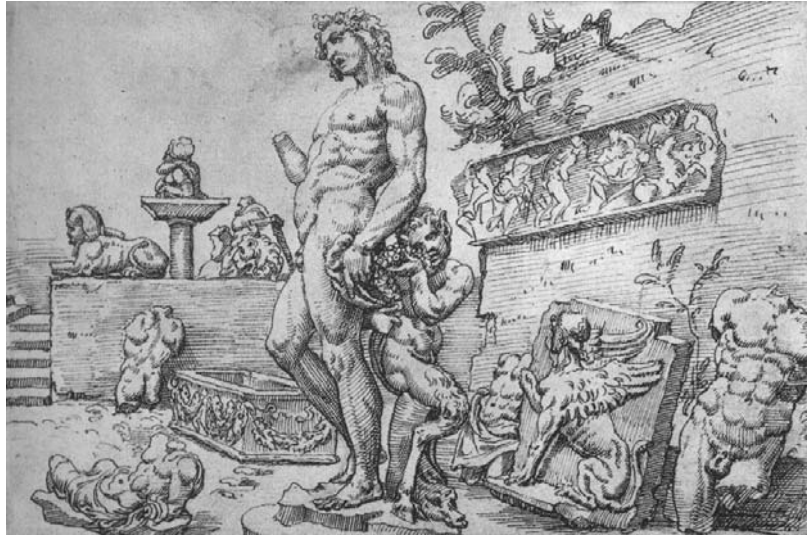


Fig. 26. Maarten van Heemskerck, *The Gallo Sculpture Garden*. Drawing. Berlin, Staatliche Museen.



Fig. 27. *Nude with Genitals Erased*. Illumination. London, British Library (The Oscott Psalter).



Fig. 28. *The Abominations Witnessed by Ezekiel and their Interpretations*. Illumination. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale (Bible Moralisée).

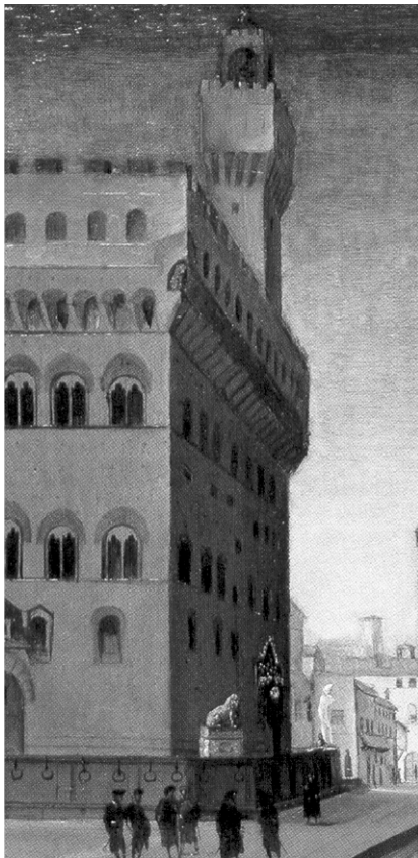


Fig. 29. Attributed to Francesco Granacci, *Portrait of a Man* (detail). London, National Gallery.



Fig. 30. Bellini, *Transfiguration*. Panel. Naples, Museo Nazionale di Capodimonte.



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Fig. 32. Michelangelo, *Pietà* (detail). Marble. Vatican, Saint Peter's.



Fig. 33. Michelangelo, *Studies for an Apostle Statue*. Drawing. London, British Museum.



Fig. 34. Giorgione, *Self-portrait as David*. Panel. Braunschweig, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum.



Fig. 35. Michelangelo, *Saint Matthew*.
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Fig. 36. Ciuffagni, *Saint Matthew*.
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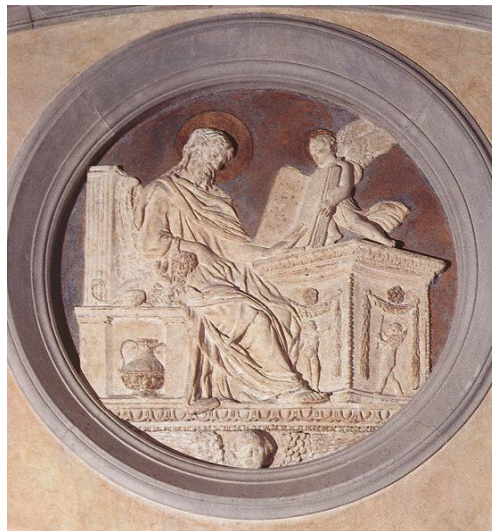


Fig. 37. Donatello, *Saint Matthew*. Stucco
relief. Florence, Old Sacristy, San Lorenzo.



Fig. 38. Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Saint Matthew*. Florence. Tornabuoni Chapel, Santa Maria Novella.



Fig. 39. Michelangelo, *Ignudo*. Fresco. Vatican, Sistine Chapel.



Fig. 40. *Laocoön*. Marble. Vatican, Vatican Museums.



Fig. 41. Vincenzo de' Rossi, *Saint Matthew*. Marble. Florence, Santa Maria del Fiore.



Fig. 42. Ridolfo del Ghirlandaio, *Saints Peter and Paul*. Panel. Florence, Galleria Palatina.



Fig. 43. Fra Bartolommeo, *Saint Anne, the Virgin and Saints*. Panel. Florence, Museo di San Marco.

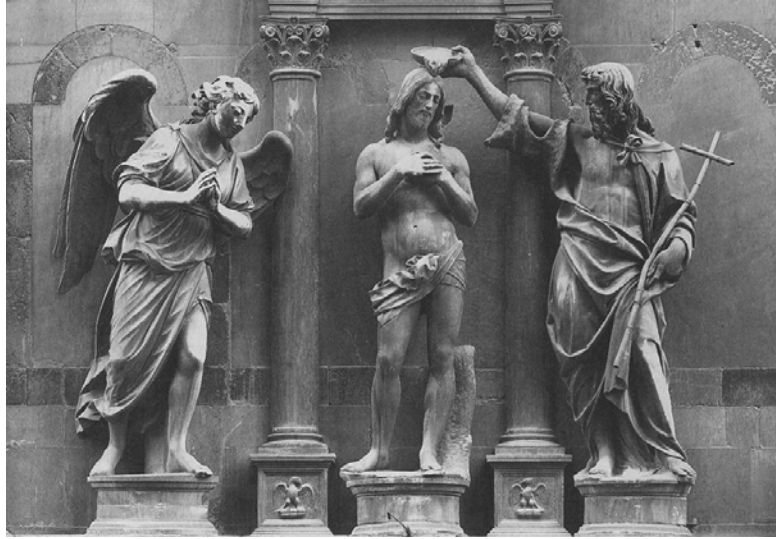


Fig. 44. Andrea Sansovino, *Baptism of Christ*.
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Fig. 45. Michelangelo, *Holy Family with Saint John (The Doni Tondo)*.
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Fig. 46. Leonardo, *Saint Anne*. Cartoon. London, National Gallery.



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Fig. 52. Ambrogio Lorenzetti, *Madonna Lactans*. Panel. Siena, Palazzo Arcivescovile.



Fig. 53. Leonardo, *Madonna of the Yarnwinder*. Panel. Collection of the Duke of Buccleuh.

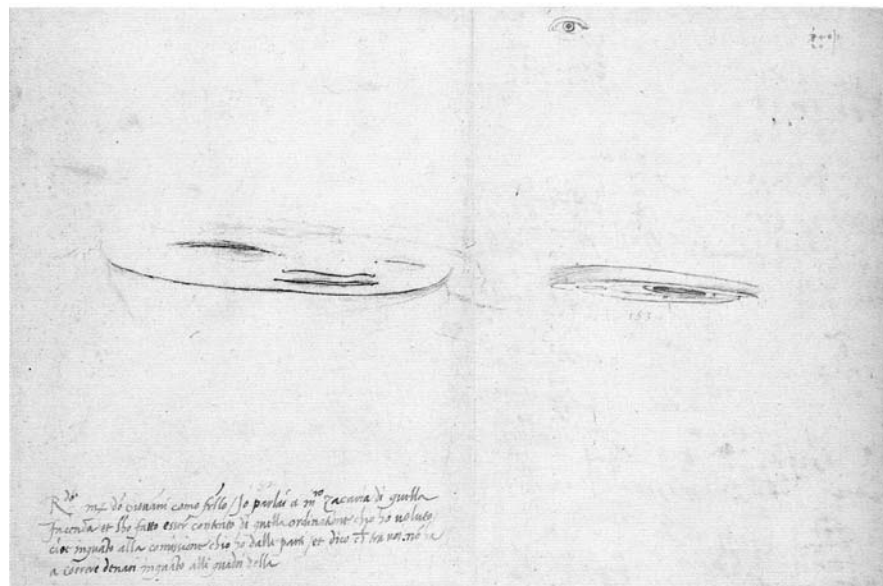


Fig. 54. Leonardo, *Anamorphosis of a Baby's Face and an Eye*. Drawing. Milan, Ambrosiana (Codex Atlanticus, fol. 35v).

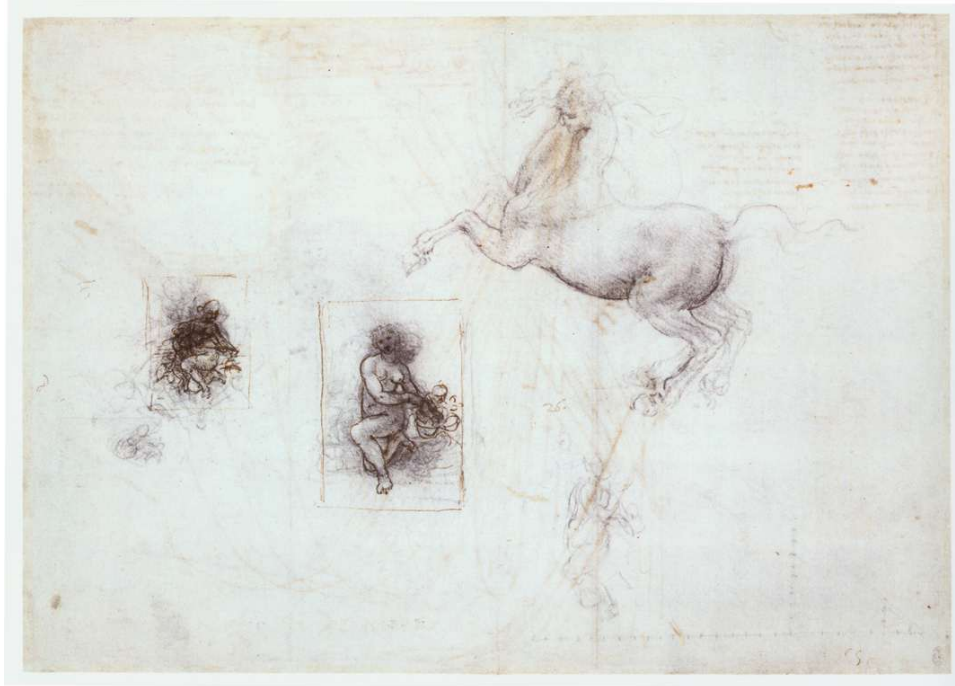


Fig. 55. Leonardo, *Studies for a Saint Anne and a Leda*. Drawing. Windsor, Royal Library.

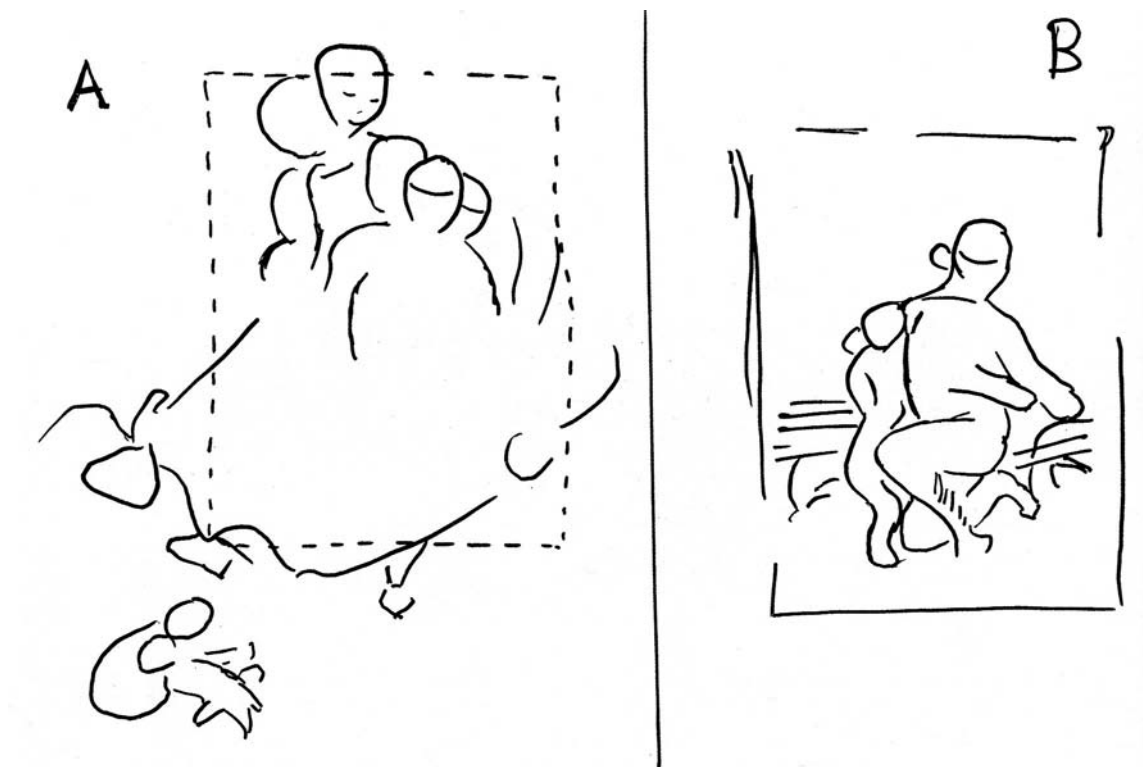


Fig. 56. Reconstruction by Jonathan Nathan of Fig. 55.



Fig. 57. Raphael, *Portrait of Bindo Altoviti*.
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Fig. 58. Michelangelo, *Study for the Face of Mary*. Drawing. Florence, Casa Buonarroti.



Fig. 59. *Alexandrian head*. Marble.
Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi.



Fig. 60. Benozzo Gozzoli, *Adoration of the Magi*. Fresco. Florence, Palazzo Medici.

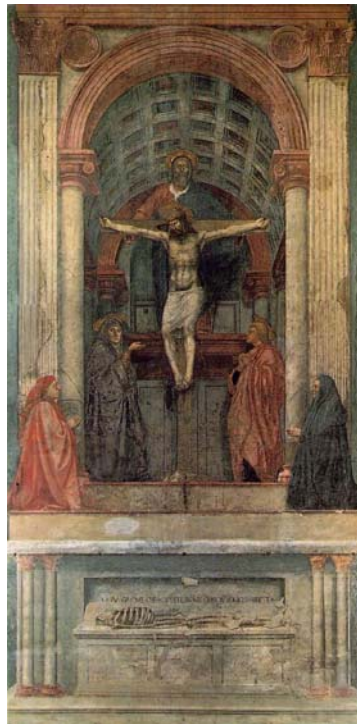


Fig. 61. Masaccio, *Trinity*. Florence, Santa Maria Novella.



Fig. 62. Titian, *Jacopo Pesaro Being Presented to the Madonna*. Canvas. Venice, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari.



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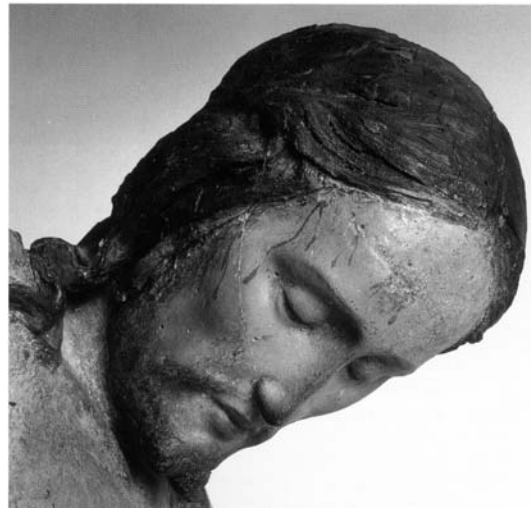


Fig. 64. Michelangelo, *Crucifixion* (detail). Wood. Florence, Santo Spirito.



Fig. 65. Giotto, *Madonna and Saints*. Panel. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi.



Fig. 66. Detail of Fig. 45.



Fig. 67. Detail of Fig. 65



Fig. 68. *Madonna*. Fresco. Florence, Santa Maria del Fiore.



Fig. 69. *Nereids and Sea-Centaurs*. Sarcophagus relief. Siena, Museo dell' Opera del Duomo.



Fig. 70. Detail of Fig. 45



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Fig. 72. Maestro di Serumido, *The Flood and Pyrrha and Deucalion* (verso's of Fig. 71).



Fig. 73. Donatello, *Spiritello*. Bronze. Florence, Museo Nazionale del Bargello.



Fig. 74. Michelangelo. *Studies after Donatello's Spiritello*. Drawing. London, British Museum.



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Fig. 76. Raphael, *Holy Family (The Canigiani Madonna)*. Panel. Munich, Alte Pinakothek.



Fig. 77. Raphael, *Entombment*. Panel. Rome, Galleria Borghese.



Fig. 78. Leonardo, *Portrait of Lisa del Giocondo*. Panel. Paris, Louvre.



Fig. 79. Raphael, *Study after Leonardo's Portrait of Lisa del Giocondo*. Drawing Paris, Louvre.



Fig. 80. Aristotile da Sangallo, *Copy after Michelangelo's Cascina Cartoon*. Panel. Norfolk, Holkham Hall.



Fig. 81. Copy after Michelangelo's *Cascina Cartoon*. Drawing. London, British Museum.



Fig. 82. Filippo Lippi, *Virgin Adoring the Christ Child with Saints Johns and Bernard*. Panel. Berlin, Staatliche Museen.



Fig. 83. Michelangelo, *Study for a Battle Scene*. Drawing. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum.



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Fig. 85. Paolo Uccello, *Battle at San Romano*. Panel. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi.



Fig. 86. Sixteenth-Century Italian Artist,
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Leonardo da Vinci's Battle of Anghiari*.
Drawing. Paris, Louvre.



Fig. 87. Raphael, *Study after Michelangelo's
Cascina cartoon*. Drawing. Vatican,
Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana.



Fig. 88. Marcantonio Raimondi, *Copy after Michelangelo's Cascina Cartoon*. Engraving. London, British Museum.



Fig. 89. Marcantonio Raimondi, *Copy after Michelangelo's Cascina Cartoon*. Engraving. London, British Museum.



Fig. 90. Raphael, *School of Athens* (detail). Fresco. Vatican, Vatican Museums.

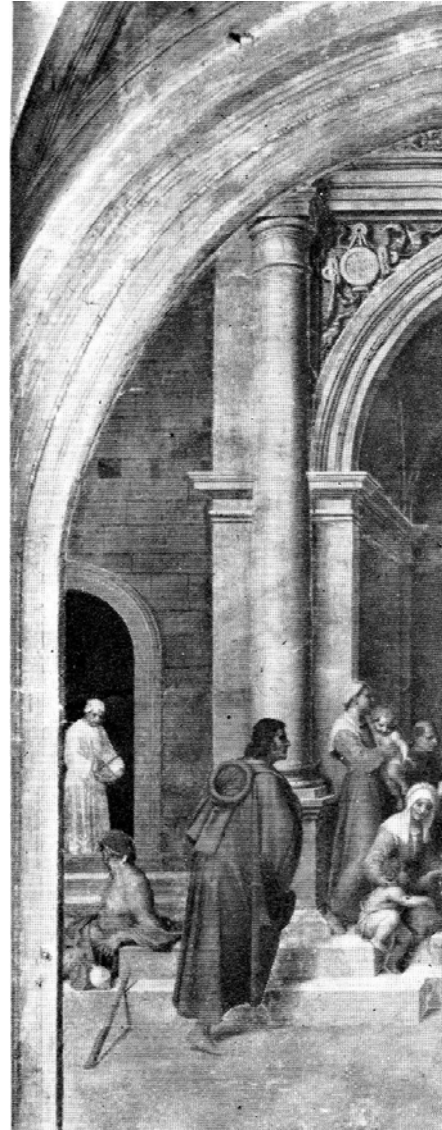


Fig. 91. Andrea del Sarto, *Presentation in the Temple* (detail). Fresco. Florence, Santissima Annunziata.



Fig. 92. Andrea del Sarto, *Modello for an Adoration*. Drawing. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi.



Fig. 93. Rosso Fiorentino, *Assumption of the Virgin* (detail). Florence, Santissima Annunziata.



Fig. 94. Michelangelo, *Copy after Masaccio's Tribute Money*. Drawing. Munich, Graphische Sammlung.



Fig. 95. Masaccio, *Tribute money* (detail). Fresco. Florence, Brancacci Chapel, Santa Maria del Carmine.



Fig. 96. Michelangelo, *Copy after Giotto's Ascension of Saint John the Evangelist*. Drawing. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi.



Fig. 97. Giotto, *Ascension of Saint John the Evangelist*. Fresco. Florence, Peruzzi Chapel, Santa Croce.



Fig. 98. Michelangelo, *Study for the Battle of Cascina*. Drawing. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi.



Fig. 99. Michelangelo, *Nude study*. Drawing. Drawing. Haarlem, Teylers Museum.



Fig. 100. Michelangelo, *Nude study*. Haarlem, Teylers Museum.

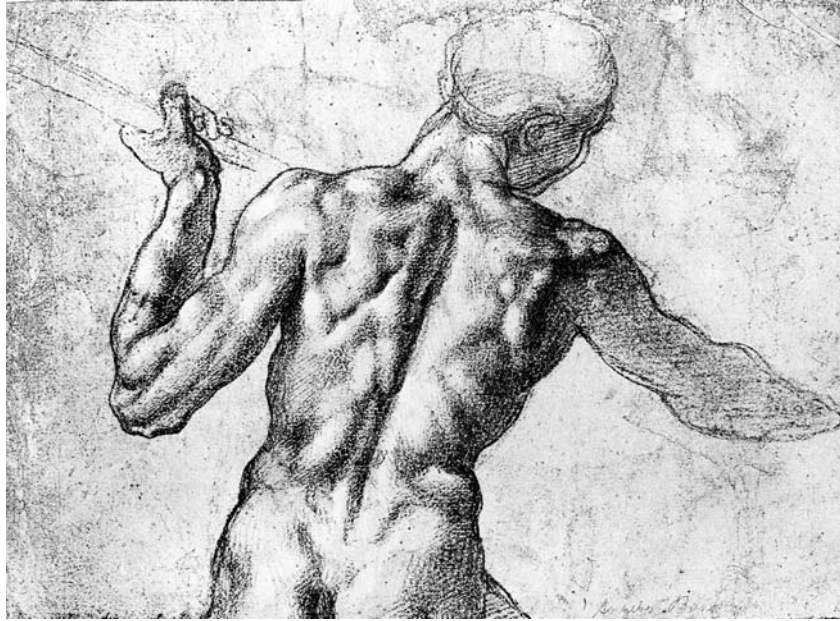


Fig. 101. Michelangelo, *Nude study*. Drawing. Vienna, Albertina.



Fig. 102. Michelangelo, *Nude study*. Drawing. London, British Museum.



Fig. 103. *Horse's head*. Bronze.
Florence, Palazzo Medici Riccardi.

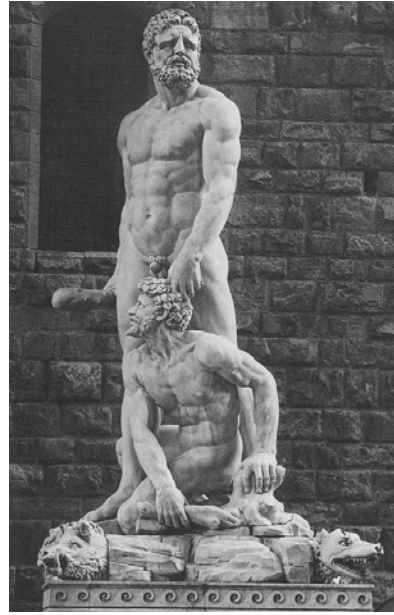


Fig. 104. Baccio Bandinelli, *Hercules and Cacus*. Marble. Florence, Piazza della Signoria.



Fig. 105. Michelangelo, *Study for a Hercules and Antaeus*. Drawing. Washington (DC), National Gallery of Art, O' Neal Collection.



Fig. 106. Michelangelo, *Model for Samson and two Philistines*. Clay. Florence, Casa Buonarroti.



Fig. 107. Michelangelo, *Brutus*. Marble. Florence, Museo Nazionale del Bargello.