

# **Poetry and the Rise of the Renaissance Artist**

**An investigation into the Interdisciplinary Nature  
of the Renaissance**

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To Drs. Francesco Borghesi and John Gagné, who have become a formidable supervising-duo over this past year: You are not only brilliant academics, but truly *insegnanti divini*. I thank you for your teaching and supervising over the past two years. If any of this thesis makes sense, it is all thanks to you both.

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## Illustrations

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3b. Priamo della Quercia, *Canto X of Purgatorio*, 1444 - 1452, Yates Thompson 36, in the British Library Catalogue of Illustrated Manuscripts. p. 59.

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University Press), p. 76.

## Introduction

Was there one Italian Renaissance or were there a series of independent progressions in different disciplines that we group together because they all occurred in a similar time period, centred on one geographic area?

The ambitious German historians of the nineteenth century like Jacob Burckhardt and Georg Voigt attempted to answer this question, combining all the developments of the period and presenting a hypothesis that is now called the Italian Renaissance. These historians invented the notion of a Renaissance man, an exemplary figure who excelled in multiple disciplines and embodied the Renaissance. The Renaissance was thusly defined as a singular cultural phenomenon that manifested in the literature, history, politics and art of the period.

How can the growth of one discipline influence another? Inter-disciplinary relationships are not obvious today in the era of academic specialisations. I, for example, managed to study the Italian Renaissance for a considerable period of time only through its literature. It would appear that such an experience is not uncommon. Recently a fellow Renaissance studies student found me reading a book on fifteenth-century painting and

proceeded to ask if I were now studying art history. Academic specialisation may have blinded younger scholars to the existence of inter-disciplinary relationships altogether. The German historians of the nineteenth century, however, were obviously able to recognise and explore these relationships.

The inter-disciplinary nature of the Renaissance is important because it plays a fundamental role in defining the period. I only realised the importance of the non-literary aspects of the Renaissance when a question arose in class: was Dante part of the Renaissance? This question has been a proverbial thorn in the side of Renaissance studies. Dante does not fit easily into the idea of the Renaissance; he is essentially a Medieval poet. Yet something draws many scholars to include Dante as part of the Renaissance. But why? There is little textual support for Dante's inclusion. He did admittedly play a pivotal role in the revival of classical poetry, which was vital to the idea of the Renaissance. Guido da Pisa, in the 1320s, mentioned in his commentary of the *Comedy* that Dante had "brought back dead poetry from the darkness to the light".<sup>1</sup> In fact in this instance, Guido da Pisa is using one of the first metaphors for the Renaissance, from darkness to light.<sup>2</sup> This language foreshadows Giorgio Vasari's use of *rinascita* ("rebirth") which ultimately led to the name Renaissance (*rinascimento* in Italian). This is the

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<sup>1</sup> "Ipse enim mortuam poesiam de tenebris reduxit ad lucem", Guido da Pisa, *Expositiones et Glose super Comediam Dantis*, ed. Vincent Cioffari (Albany: University of New York Press, 1974). p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Nicola Gardini, *Rinascimento*, Piccola biblioteca Einaudi. Mappa (Torino: Einaudi, 2010). p. 25.

type of evidence that scholars use when the present Dante as being either part of the Renaissance, or foreshadowing the Renaissance.<sup>3</sup> However, there is a wealth of counter-arguments to Dante's inclusion. Goerg Voigt, one of those nineteenth century German historians who pioneered our understanding of the Renaissance, argues that Dante was not a part of it or the humanist culture which dominated the period, because his understanding of Antiquity was incorporated into his Christian outlook.<sup>4</sup> For example, Virgil in the *Comedy*, is Christianised by Dante. To Dante, Virgil is "*il poeta divino*" ("the divine poet") and a prophet for Christ, as in the Fourth Eclogue.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, Dante could not appreciate the pagan world on its own merits and definitely could not see it as the ideal model for his contemporary society. Other scholars have pointed to Dante's limited knowledge of Greek and Latin literature in comparison with more recognised humanists, as well as a series of historical errors in the *Comedy*, to suggest that Dante should be considered a Medieval poet.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Rocco Montano, *Dante e il Rinascimento* (Naples: Guida, 1942). Also Augustin Renaudet, *Dante humaniste* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1952).

<sup>4</sup> Georg Voigt, *Il Risorgimento dell'antichità classica, ovvero Il primo secolo dell'Umanismo*, Edizione anastatica a cura di Eugenio Garin. ed., Biblioteca storica del Rinascimento, nuova ser., 5. (Firenze, G. C. Sansoni, 1968). p. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Simon A. Gilson, *Dante and Renaissance Florence*, Cambridge studies in medieval literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). p. 2.

Given the lack of textual evidence to support the claims for Dante's inclusion in the Renaissance canon, there must be some deeper reason which attracts scholars to consider him for it. Nicola Gardini noted in 2010 that in the Anglo-Saxon world, where the Renaissance is envisioned as a "very long arc of time", stretching right up until the mid-seventeenth century, Dante is commonly categorised as part of the Renaissance.<sup>7</sup> In Gardini's own periodisation of the Renaissance, beginning with Petrarch in the early fourteenth century and concluding with the Council of Trent in the mid-sixteenth century, Dante is very much excluded. Generally in the Italian literature tradition, Dante has always been excluded from the Renaissance. However, it is unlikely that national schools of thought influence this debate as even this trend seems to be ending: Carlo Vecce's *Piccola storia della letteratura italiana*, a 2009 Italian publication, includes Dante in the Renaissance.<sup>8</sup>

The reason why scholars want to include Dante in the Renaissance is tied to our opening question. In the era of academic specialisation, where studying the Italian Renaissance is divided into disciplines, there is less focus on what ties the great philosophers to the great poets and to the great painters of the time. The most obvious connection is that they were all

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<sup>7</sup> Gardini, *Rinascimento*. p. XVII.

<sup>8</sup> Carlo Vecce, *Piccola storia della letteratura italiana* (Napoli: Liguori, 2009).

geniuses and outstanding achievers in their respective fields. Therefore, influenced by this understanding of the Renaissance, why should Dante not be included? Was he not also a great Florentine poet and from the fourteenth century?

Recognising that the Renaissance was more than just a period of great achievers is the real aim of this thesis; to discover the inter-disciplinary relationships that made the Italian Renaissance a singular cultural phenomenon. A study that considers all disciplines that flourished during the period was taxing even for Burckhardt and company. This study, therefore, adopts a much narrower search – looking for just one piece of the Renaissance puzzle. It is an examination of the relationship between poetry and art. These two disciplines are easily separated when considering the Renaissance. This separation produces a literary Renaissance, starring Petrarch and Pico della Mirandola, and a visual Renaissance, including the likes of Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci.

These two disciplines are also the clearest examples of cross-disciplinary influence. Since Antiquity, the similar nature of poetry and art has been well articulated. There are two particular phrases from classic authors that have been quoted time and time again, throughout the Renaissance and period and even in modern day studies. The first is from the ancient Greek poet

Simonides: "Painting is mute poetry, and poetry is painting that speaks".<sup>9</sup> This idea was later echoed by the Roman poet Horace: "As is painting, so is poetry".<sup>10</sup> The relationship between poetry and art is based on the fact that pictures and words fulfil many of the same representational functions. I can describe a chair in words, and I can draw a picture of the same chair. To an extent, that picture and those words are the same thing, in that they *represent* the same object. However, irrespective of my artistic talent or elegant prose, those words and that picture are not the same thing. The undeniable similarity yet obvious difference between pictures and words simultaneously breakdown and rebuild the boundaries between poetry and art.

There are two aspects of this relationship between poetry and art to be investigated in this thesis. The first investigation is how both poetry and art drew from one another during the Renaissance. There are two clear cases of this occurring in the poetry and the artworks of the period. Poetry drew on art to develop two of its expressive literary techniques: ekphrasis and the metaphor of the divine artist. Artists, on the other hand, began to use poetry as subject matter in their work. This element was a mutually beneficial part

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<sup>9</sup> Plutarch, *De Gloria Atheniensium*, ed. D. Campbell, vol. III, Greek Lyric (Cambridge: Leob Classical Library, 1991). p. 363.

<sup>10</sup> "Ut pictura poesis", Horace, *Epistles, book II; and, Epistle to the Pisones (Ars poetica)*, ed. Niall Rudd, Cambridge Greek and Latin classics. (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989). p. 186.

of the relationship between the two 'sister arts', as they have been called since Antiquity.<sup>11</sup>

The second investigation is based on the status that poets and artists held during the Renaissance. Despite the similar natures of poetry and painting, poets commanded the lion's share of respect and esteem in comparison to their artistic counterparts at the beginning of the fourteenth century in Italy. However, by the middle of the sixteenth century, artists like Michelangelo (1475 – 1564), Raphael (1483 – 1520) and Leonardo da Vinci (1452 – 1519) were easily as respected, if not more, than the poets of the time. These three artists in particular practised poetry themselves.<sup>12</sup> The central claim of this thesis is that this process, 'the rise of the artist', was influenced by the cross-disciplinary relationship that existed and developed between poetry and art.

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<sup>11</sup> Associating poetry and painting extended beyond the cited quotes from Simonides and Horace. Plato, for example, said in the *Republic* that "The poet is like a painter". Horace invented the phrase *ut pictura poesis* ("as a painting, so a poem"). These ideas were developed in the Italian Renaissance as *paragone*, the competitive debates about the merits of poetry and painting. For a full history of the unfolding debate between the 'sister arts', see Jean H. Hagstrum, *The Sister arts : the tradition of literary pictorialism and English poetry from Dryden to Gray* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

<sup>12</sup> For Michelangelo's poetry, see Leonard Barkan, *Michelangelo : a life on paper* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011). For Raphael's poetry, see John K. G. Shearman, *Raphael in early modern sources (1483-1602)*, *Römische Forschungen der Bibliotheca Hertziana* (New Haven ; London: Yale University Press, 2003). For Leonardo's poetry, see Robert Zwijnenberg, *The writings and drawings of Leonardo da Vinci : order and chaos in early modern thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

The 'rise of the artist' ought to be clarified, so as not to let it become a generalised and meaningless term. The one artist who embodies this notion, whose contemporaries argued had reached the peak of artistry, was Michelangelo Buonarroti. Michelangelo was the most praised artist of his time and of the Renaissance. Therefore, in this investigation of the rise in the esteem and respect for an artist, Michelangelo will be taken as the prime example of the praised artist and as the end product of this process. It is also necessary to define the specific adulation that also embodies the esteem and respect that Michelangelo commanded. Giorgio Vasari's biography of the Life of Michelangelo, which he included in his seminal work, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori* ("The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptures and Architects", or Vasari's *Lives*), will be taken as the model praise for Michelangelo. Not only did Vasari dub Michelangelo *il divino* ("the divine one"), but his entire collection of biographies on the artists of the Renaissance was moulded to present Michelangelo as the pinnacle.

Michelangelo is not only the pinnacle of Renaissance praise, but he is also the clearest example how these two disciplines, poetry and art, influenced individuals in the Renaissance. As Leonard Barkan argues, "we cannot understand Michelangelo without a radical sense of the way that picture and words entangled themselves within his creative imagination".<sup>13</sup> The almost

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<sup>13</sup> Barkan, *Michelangelo : a life on paper*. p. ix.

revolutionary approach of Barkan is genius in its simplicity: one should not consider that there were poets who studied art, or that there were artists who practiced poetry. There were only individuals who chose to “reveal their soul” through one discipline or the other.

Barkan’s approach is ideal for individuals like Michelangelo, who had both the capacity and opportunity to become both poets and artist. This phenomenon did not occur until the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and even so, was limited to only the most talented Renaissance individuals. Before the era of Renaissance polymaths, however, there were instances of poets who seemingly understood the relationship between word and image and who described art in their poetry. This literary technique was called ekphrasis, where a poet describes an artwork. This technique will be discussed in Chapter One, ‘The Artist before the Renaissance’. This chapter will show how artworks themselves can be mini-narratives that express ideas and reflect themes. Poets in the epic tradition described these artworks in order to establish meaningful moments of symbolism within the grander narrative of their poems. Furthermore, these poets consistently relied on the metaphor of the divine artist to assist the reader to imagine the artistic masterpiece that is described. This metaphor is significant because it invented on a conceptual level, the idea of the divine artist, in a period when artists commanded little respect in society. This metaphor was to later become the crowning glory of Michelangelo, *il divino*.

Chapter Two, 'The Learned Artist Creator', investigates the cross-disciplinary influence that poetry had on art and artists, particularly in the fifteenth century. There were artists who lacked the education to study literature but who clearly desired to introduce poetry into their art. The first Renaissance polymath, Leon Battista Alberti (1404 – 1472), radicalised the relationship between poetry and art by encouraging painters to engage with literature in the creation of art. This chapter concludes with an analysis of Sandro Botticelli's illustrations of the *Divine Comedy* that displays how Botticelli took up Alberti's challenge. Whilst Botticelli himself never became skilled in different disciplines like some of his later counterparts, he was part of the generation of post-Albertian painters to express the narrative power of the written word through illustration.

Chapters One and Two investigate the cross-disciplinary relationship between poetry and art using textual and visual evidence. They show that the relationship between word and image was understood even by those who had not become masters of both. Chapter Three, 'The Intellectual Artisan?', illustrates how the cross-disciplinary influences between poetry and art became invigorated arguments for art to be recognised as more than just a manual skill, as it had been thought of since Antiquity. The key writers who advocated for the reconsideration of the status of art and the artist included in this chapter are Leon Battista Alberti, Leonardo da Vinci and Baldassare Castiglione. Their writings argued that art was a dignified profession, an

intellectual activity and, in Leonardo's writing, even superior to literary skills. These arguments were realised in practice through the establishment of academies of art, which aimed to separate artists from the guilds and workshops where manual labourers worked, and introduce them into an environment modelled on the intellectual academies in fifteenth-century Florence. The reality of these academies, particularly the failed *Accademia di San Luca* in Rome, shows that not all artists were comfortable living and working in intellectual environments..

Chapter Four, 'The Divine Artist', shows how the question of an artist's skill, and not his intellect, was vital to Vasari's praise of Michelangelo as *il divino*. The balance between an artist's skill and the need for intellectual development through study and education was debated by classical authors in regards to many disciplines. The Renaissance writers like Alberti and Leonardo, who argued for art being an intellectual activity, tried to mould these debates to present study and education as the more important element in the development of an artist. However, Vasari's appraisal of Michelangelo was entirely focused on the artist's skill and even criticised the belief that study and education could compare to a naturally-talented artist. This analysis is based on tracing the history of the word 'grace' in the writings on art from Antiquity to the Renaissance.

Ultimately, this thesis shows the interdisciplinarity of the Renaissance. The instances of poetry and art drawing on one another illustrate that the skilled practitioners of one discipline maintained a deep appreciation of the other. Furthermore, the influence of poetry on artists contributed to the rising status artists held in Renaissance society. Therefore, the interdisciplinarity of the Renaissance is also evidenced on a societal level, and not just in poems and artworks. Therefore, the idea that there were separate 'visual' and a 'literary' Renaissances is refuted by this thesis. The Renaissance was the one singular cultural phenomenon that manifested itself in both poetry and art.

## Chapter One

### The Artist before the Renaissance

The status of the artist in the fourteenth century was considerably lower than what a modern reader might expect. Our twenty-first century view of art has been so influenced by the Renaissance that it becomes almost absurd to imagine a time when art was not respected and artists were not part of the cultural bourgeoisie. This is because the idea of the artist, as we use it today, inseparable from the idea of culture, is ultimately a product of the Renaissance. As Francis Ames-Lewis points out, the way we use 'artist' to describe a practitioner of the visual arts today would have been "unintelligible" in the fourteenth century.<sup>14</sup> *Artista*, in that period, denoted a student of the liberal arts.<sup>15</sup> To avoid confusing the term, and to appreciate that the term 'artist' is the vestige of the rise of the artist, I will refer to specific artisan that concern this thesis, painters and sculptors.<sup>16</sup> Painting

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<sup>14</sup> Francis Ames-Lewis, *The intellectual life of the early Renaissance artist* (New Haven ; London: Yale University Press, 2000). p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Many of the painters and sculptors mentioned in this thesis were skilled in many of the visual arts, and hence it would be more accurate to refer to them as visual artists. However, it would become rather complicated if I called them as such, given that I later need to address the practitioners of the liberal arts: liberal artists. Therefore, rather than risk confusing 'visual artist' with 'liberal artist' and 'artist', I shall call them painters and sculptors. Architects have not been included, even though many of the painters and sculptors in this thesis were also architects. This is because architecture enjoyed a different status to painting and sculpture, and will be more fully explained in Chapter Three .

and sculpture before the Italian Renaissance were not dignified professions. It was, and had been since Antiquity, a trade or a manual skill. Painting, along with the other visual arts like sculpture, was categorised as job one did with one's hands. Lucian of Samosata, a Greek rhetorician of the second century, expressed the opinion of both the Latin and Greek cultures in one of his writings, "The Dream" (*Somnium sive Vita Luciani*, Περὶ τοῦ Ἐνυπνίου ἤτοι Βίος Λουκιανοῦ). He writes that after one day of training as a sculptor, the Lady of Sculpting came to him in a dream. She had unkempt hair, calluses on her hands, was ill-spoken, and she urged him to emulate the great sculptors like Pheidias and Polykleitos. The Lady of Education then appeared, well-dressed, beautiful and graceful. She said to him:

"Even if you become a Pheidias or a Polykletios and create wonderful masterpieces, the world will acclaim your art – but not one of your admirers, if he has any sense, would ask to be in your shoes...people will still think of you as a worker, a manual labourer, a man who makes his living with his hands".<sup>17</sup>

The advice that the Lady of Education gives Lucian is exactly how Antiquity seems to have thought of the visual arts. The ancients acclaimed the great artists of their time, but they did not respect them. There is considerable textual evidence to support this notion. Pliny the Elder, a

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<sup>17</sup> Lucian, *Selected Satires*, trans. Lionel Casson (New York: Anchor Books, 1962). p. 3.

Roman from the first century A.D. and author of the encyclopaedic *Naturalis Historia*, wrote at length on art in the Classical world. Pliny's chapters on art history in the *Naturalis Historia* became the model that Vasari adopted in writing his *Lives* in the 1540s, making the two an effective way to compare Renaissance and Classical art history. Pliny was also the only surviving source on Classical art history for the Renaissance. Therefore, all of Renaissance art criticism takes Pliny as a point of departure, especially when considering the legends of artists whose artworks that were lost before the Renaissance. Patricia Emison notes that in all of Pliny's praise of the great artists of Antiquity, there is no mention of the dignity of the profession or esteem for its artists.<sup>18</sup> If the most important 'art historian' of Antiquity does not advocate the dignity of art, then it is unlikely that anyone did. Plato excludes painters (as well as poets) from his idealised city in the *Republic* (fourth-century B.C.). Painting, for Plato, was only an imitation of reality. It could not depict truth and therefore was not needed.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Patricia A. Emison, *Creating the "Divine" Artist: From Dante to Michelangelo* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2004). p. 33.

<sup>19</sup> Plato, *The republic*, trans. Paul Shorey, rev. ed., Loeb classical library. (Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press ; Heinemann, 1930). p. 605.

The praise for painters and sculptors in Antiquity was always limited by the cynicism expressed by Plato and Lucian. Furthermore, the majority of classical writers avoided praising any artist as divine.<sup>20</sup> Divine praise was more commonly given to great achievers in other fields, and even specific aspects of artwork, but very rarely to the artist himself.<sup>21</sup> For example, Pliny praises Theophrastus, “a mortal whose eminence as an orator won him the title of ‘the divine’”.<sup>22</sup> Plato praises the divine Homer.<sup>23</sup> Cicero too, praises the orator Servius Galba, “a man who spoke as a god”.<sup>24</sup> Cicero also praises Achimedes’ *divinum ingenium* in his explanation of the soul’s divinity.<sup>25</sup> Virgil is the exception. In his *Eclogues*, he refers to “the divine art of Alcimedon”, being two beech wood cups Alcimedon made for Damoetas.<sup>26</sup> The overwhelming trend, however, was to avoid praising an artist in divine terms.

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<sup>20</sup> Emison, *Creating the "Divine" Artist: From Dante to Michelangelo*. p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> Reflecting the domination of males artists in both Antiquity and the Italian Renaissance, this thesis, like many academic studies, adopts the masculine pronoun ‘he’ in addressing the artist in the singular. My apologies to the Italian Department, whose language agrees its pronouns to the gender of the object, not the subject, and therefore, avoids this problem.

<sup>22</sup> Preface, 29: “hominem in eloquentia tantum ut nomen divinum inde invenerit”, Pliny, *Natural History*, trans. H. Rackman, vol. I, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1949). p. 38.

<sup>23</sup> Plato, *Ion*, 530B, Plato, *Plato on poetry : Ion; Republic 376e-398b9; Republic 595-608b10*, ed. Penelope Murray, Cambridge Greek and Latin classics. (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996). p. 182.

<sup>24</sup> I, X, 40: “divinum hominem in dicendo”, Cicero, *De Oratore*, trans. H. Rackham (London: Heinemann, 1960). p. 86.

<sup>25</sup> ———, *Tusculanarum disputationum libri quinque*, ed. Thomas Wilson Dougan (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1905). I, XXV. p. 36.

<sup>26</sup> Virgil, *The works of Virgil*, ed. James Kinsley, trans. John Dryden (London: Oxford University Press, 1961). *Eclogue III*. p. 77.

It should be noted, however, that hesitation in praising an artist as divine in Antiquity may also reflect classical attitude towards the divine. Lucian is particularly critical of heaping divine praise onto anyone:

“It is not true that a man becomes greater if he is likened to a god, as that the divine is inevitably minimised by being forced down to match what is defective.”<sup>27</sup>

### Painting's exclusion from the Liberal Arts

Painting and sculpture were relegated to the status of a manual skill in Antiquity. They were excluded from the list of liberal arts. The practitioners of the liberal arts, unlike painters and sculptors, drew praise and respect from the Ancient Greek and Roman societies. The basic scheme of the liberal arts were detailed in a popular allegorical handbook from the fifth century written by Martianus Capella. Capella's seven liberal arts were: grammar, dialectic, rhetoric, arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy.<sup>28</sup> The concept of the liberal arts pre-dates Capella. Seneca, a Roman Stoic of the first-

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<sup>27</sup> Lucian, *Works of Lucian of Samosata : in four volumes*, trans. H. W. Fowler and F. G. Fowler (Charleston, S.C.: Bibliobazaar, 2006). p. 114.

<sup>28</sup> William Harris Stahl, Richard Johnson, and E. L. Burge, *Martianus Capella and the seven liberal arts*, 2 vols., *Records of civilization, sources and studies* (New York,: Columbia University Press, 1971). p. 32.

century,<sup>29</sup> describes the liberal arts as “studies worthy of a free-born gentleman”.<sup>30</sup> They were the *liberalibus studiis*, coming from the Latin *liber*, “free”.<sup>31</sup> The opposite of the liberal arts were the duties of a slave, technical and manual skills which required no education. For Seneca, the liberal arts are based on the teaching of virtue. He explains:

The *grammaticus*<sup>32</sup> busies himself with investigations into language...he works on history...on poetry. But which of these paves the way to virtue? What is there in all this that rides one of fear, roots out desire, or bridles the passions?<sup>33</sup>

He continues onto the question of Homer’s *Odyssey* and where it transmits virtue:

You raise the question, “Through what regions did Ulysses stray?” ...  
Show me rather, by the example of Ulysses, how I am to love my

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<sup>29</sup> Lucius Annaeus Seneca was honoured by Dante in the Divine Comedy as he was placed in Limbo with the virtuous pagans. Alongside Seneca are all the wisest men of Antiquity, such as Homer, Ovid, Lucian, Cicero, Aristotle and Socrates to name a few. See Canto IV of *Inferno*.

<sup>30</sup> “Quare liberalia studia dicta sint, vides; quia homine libero digna sunt”, Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Ad Lucilium epistulae morales*, trans. Richard M. Gummere, The Loeb classical library. Latin authors (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979). LXXXVIII: p. 348.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. LXXXVIII, p. 348.

<sup>32</sup> *Grammaticus* in classical Greek means “one who is familiar with the alphabet”; in the Alexandrian age a “student of literature”; in the Roman age the equivalent of *litteratus*. Seneca means here a “specialist in linguistic science.” See *ibid.* p. 350.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. LXXXVIII: “Grammaticus circa curam sermonis versatur et, si latius evagari vult, circa historias, iam ut longissime fines suos proferat, circa carmina. Quid horum ad virtutem viam sternit? Syllabarum enarratio et verborum diligentia et fabularum memoria et versuum lex ac modificatio -- quid ex his metum demit, cupiditatem eximit, libidinem frenat?” p. 350.

country, my wife, my father, and how, even after suffering shipwreck, I am to sail toward these ends, honourable as they are.<sup>34</sup>

This is the guiding principal of the liberal arts. Cicero too summarises the liberal arts along similar, although less specific, lines. They are “all arts which have any bearing upon the common life of mankind”.<sup>35</sup> They are not so much a strict list of dignified fields of knowledge, but rather concern the transmission of wisdom and teaching of how one ought to live a virtuous life. Thus the visual arts, painting, sculpture and marble-working, are not liberal arts for they have nothing to do with virtue and only contribute only to luxury.<sup>36</sup> The other insight from Seneca’s writing is that poetry was not necessarily considered a liberal art. Seneca was not alone in holding such a view as poetry did not make Capella’s list either. The exceptions for poetry were cases when poetry transmitted wisdom and virtue.

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<sup>34</sup> “Quaeris Ulixes ubi erraverit potius quam efficias ne nos semper erremus? Non vacat audire utrum inter Italiam et Siciliam iactatus sit an extra notum nobis orbem (neque enim potuit in tam angusto error esse tam longus): tempestates nos animi cotidie iactant et nequitia in omnia Ulixis mala inpellit. Non deest forma quae sollicitet oculos, non hostis; hinc monstra effera et humano cruore gaudentia, hinc insidiosa blandimenta aurium, hinc naufragia et tot varietates malorum. Hoc me doce, quomodo patriam amem, quomodo uxorem, quomodo patrem, quomodo ad haec tam honesta vel naufragus navigem”, *ibid.* LXXXVIII: p. 352.

<sup>35</sup> “omnes artes, quae ad humanitatem pertinent”, Cicero, *Pro Archia Poeta*, trans. N. H. Watts (London: Loeb, 1923). i, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> “non enim adducor ut in numerum liberalium artium pictores recipiam, non magis quam statuarios aut marmorarios aut ceteros luxuriae ministros”, Seneca, *Ad Lucilium epistulae morales*. LXXXVIII: p. 358.

This is the precedent that Antiquity set in regards to the status of the painter and the sculptor. However, the cross-disciplinary influence between poetry and painting created another textually-based precedent which conflicted with the relatively low status of the painter and sculptor in Antiquity. The development of ekphrasis in the epic poetry of Homer and Virgil, and much later of Dante, is the product of poets drawing on the visual arts to achieve a particular expressive technique. Ekphrasis is a moment where the poet freezes the narrative and describes an artwork at length. It allows the poet to draw on the strength of the visual arts as a means of imitating nature. Furthermore, ekphrasis was inevitably tied to the idea of a divine artist, which these poets all used as creators of the aforementioned artworks. Therefore, whilst painters and sculptors were not respected in society, the poet invoked the notion of the divine artist on a conceptual level. It would not be until the sixteenth century that painters and sculptors were praised in such a way.

## Ekphrasis

The term *ekphrasis*, is composed of the Greek *ek* (out) and *phrazein* (tell, declare, pronounce) and literally means, “telling in full”.<sup>37</sup> In antiquity, ekphrasis was a rhetorical technique: “a speech that brings the subject matter vividly before the eyes”.<sup>38</sup> In epic poetry, ekphrasis became more than just description of a landscape or a person. It specifically describes an artwork, and in doing so, “makes listeners into viewers”.<sup>39</sup> James Heffernan defines ekphrasis as “verbal representation of visual representation”.<sup>40</sup> In other words, if an artwork is a visual representation of an event, of different objects and people, then an ekphrasis is of that artwork and in turn, an indirect representation of those actual events, objects and people. This technique allows poets focus on a moment frozen in time; to break with their narrative and focus on a single instance, just as an artwork does.

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<sup>37</sup> James A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of words : the poetics of ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). p. 191.

<sup>38</sup> Ruth Webb, *Ekphrasis, imagination and persuasion in ancient rhetorical theory and practice* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009). p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* p. 8.

<sup>40</sup> Heffernan, *Museum of words : the poetics of ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*. p. 3.

Robert Birss argues that ekphrasis in epic poetry served as an analogy for the poem within the poem.<sup>41</sup> Borrowing D. P. Fowler's terminology, it is a "narrative pause" where "the plot does not advance, but something is described".<sup>42</sup> This description allowed the poet to leave the main narrative aside and reflect the themes on the poem. The classic instance of ekphrasis in epic poetry is the Shield of Achilles in Homer's *Iliad*. The author pauses in the middle of an unfolding war to describe Hephaestus forging an astoundingly artistic shield for Achilles (Book 18. 478 – 606). As Jas Elsner argues, Homer's Shield description brackets itself from the primary narration.<sup>43</sup> It presents scenes of peace, festival and agriculture amidst war. It is a microcosm that emphasises what the *Iliad* is not, juxtaposing the entire text against a miniature opposite. The shield itself, however, plays a role itself in the narrative as well as Achilles uses it in the violent rampages of Books 20 – 22. The twin-purpose of ekphrasis, being both a part of the narrative and reflecting the narrative, prefigured the role of ekphrasis in later tradition.<sup>44</sup> In the *Aeneid*, Virgil's Shield of Aeneas is clearly modelled on Homer's Shield of Achilles.<sup>45</sup> As Elsner states, Virgil was making a deliberate and obvious

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<sup>41</sup> Robert Craig Birss, "'Imaginary work' : the functions of ekphrasis in narrative poetry" (Ph D, University Microfilms International, University of Iowa, 1977). p. 2.

<sup>42</sup> D. P. Fowler, "Narrate and Describe: The Problem of Ekphrasis," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 81(1991). p. 25.

<sup>43</sup> Jas Elsner, "Introduction, The genres of ekphrasis [Paper in: The Verbal and the Visual: Cultures of Ekphrasis in Antiquity. Elsner, Jas (ed.)]," *Ramus* 31, no. 1-2 (2002). p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* p. 4.

<sup>45</sup> In the *Iliad*, Thetis appeals to Hephaestus to make a shield for Achilles. In the *Aeneid*, Venus appeals to Vulcan, who is the Roman equivalent of Hephaestus, to make a shield for Aeneas.

effort to participate in tradition.<sup>46</sup> Dante, too, follows in the tradition of *ekphrasis* in the *Divine Comedy*.

Dante's two ekphrasises are found in Cantos X and XII of *Purgatorio*, the second cantica in his epic poem, *The Divine Comedy*. Both ekphrasises are descriptions of sculptures that Dante and Virgil see in their journey through the afterlife. These ekphrasises develop upon the tradition of Homer and Virgil. Given that the Dante's journey covers Heaven and Hell, the ekphrasises reflect themes of the first cantica, *Inferno*, and foreshadow the themes of the third cantica, *Paradiso*. Significantly, Dante stresses more than Homer and Virgil, the quality of these sculptures. The depicted figures deceive Dante senses, and he believes they can talk. This notion of sculpture having such a profound effect on a viewer became a part of Alberti's treatises on painting in the fifteenth century, as will be discussed in Chapter Two. Furthermore, Dante emphasises the role of the divine artist who created these sculptures, God. The divine artist, which will be discussed in Chapter Four, was to become the greatest acclaim given to Michelangelo in the sixteenth century. Therefore, these ekphrasises were conceptually important, as they were drawn on by the literature that influenced the rise of the Renaissance artist.

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Venus even refers to the plea of "the daughter of Nereus" ("*te filia Nerei*"), Thetis. Virgil invites the reader to see the inter-textuality between Aeneas' and Achilles' shields. It is evident therefore that Virgil was not merely borrowing a useful literary technique. See Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (London: Harvill, 1984). 8:383, p. 243.

<sup>46</sup> Elsner, "Introduction, The genres of ekphrasis [Paper in: *The Verbal and the Visual: Cultures of Ekphrasis in Antiquity*. Elsner, Jas (ed.)]." p. 4.

In both ekphraseis, Dante and his guide Virgil are travelling through the first terrace of Purgatory. Its inhabitants slowly climb the terrace, doing penance for the sin of pride. Amongst the proud penitents, Dante recognises Oderisi da Gubbio, a successful fourteenth-century manuscript illustrator (*Purg.*, XI, 67–108). Oderisi warns Dante that “worldly fame is nothing but a gust of wind” (“*Non è il mondan romore altro ch'un fiato di vento*”, *Purg.* XI, XI, 100). Oderisi mentions as examples Giotto surpassing Cimabue in painting, as well as Guido Cavalcanti taking “the glory of our tongue” from Guido Guinizzelli (*Purg.* XI, 94-99).<sup>47</sup> The passing nature of worldly fame is countered by the divine artist God, who on this terrace of Purgatory sculpted two sets of reliefs that Dante and Virgil encounter.

Upon entering the first terrace of Purgatory, Dante and Virgil sees three sculptures depicting examples of humility. They are the Annunciation of the Virgin (*Purg.*, X, 34-35), David bringing the Ark of the Covenant into Jerusalem (*Purg.*, X, 55-69) and the Emperor Trajan fulfilling a widow’s wishes (*Purg.*, X, 73-93). Dante is astounded by the quality of these sculptures that deceive the senses and appear to talk:

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<sup>47</sup> Most commentators agree that Dante also presents himself as the poet who will in turn surpass both Guidos. Oderisi says to Dante, “and he, perhaps, is born who will drive one and then the other from the nest” (“*e forse è nato chi l'uno e l'altro caccerà del nido*”, *Purg.* XI, 98-99). See Robert Hollander, “Dante’s Self-Laureation (*Purgatorio* XI, 92),” *Rassegna europea di letteratura italiana*, 3, (1994 ). pp. 35 – 48.

[L'angel] dinanzi a noi pareva sì verace  
quivi intagliato in un atto soave  
che non sembiava imagine che tace.  
Giurato si saria ch'el dicesse "Ave!"

[The angel] appeared before us so vividly  
Engraved in gracious attitude  
it did not seem an image, carved and silent.  
One would have sworn he said: "Ave!"  
(*Purg.* X, 37-40)

Dante concludes that only "he in whose sight nothing can be new [God] wrought this speech made visible" ("*Colui che mai non vide cosa nova, Produisse esto visible parlare*", *Purg.*, X, 94-95). Later in Canto XII, Dante and Virgil see thirteen sculptures that are also the work of God. However, these sculptures depict pagan and biblical figures punished for their pride, beginning with Lucifer (XII, 25-27) and finishing with the city of Troy (XII, 61-63).

These ekphrasis first serve the immediate narrative. They are images of pride and humility, sculpted by God. Virgil explains later that they are "whips" ("*lo fren*", *Purg.*, XIII, 40), intended to guide the penitent to moral righteousness, and "bridles" ("*camo*", *Purg.*, XIV, 143) for curbing the penitent's sinful tendencies.

Secondly, the *ekphraseis* reflect their location, with respect to Purgatory being between Heaven and Hell, and with respect of the structure of the text itself. These two cantos lie almost at the midpoint of both *Purgatorio* and *The Divine Comedy* itself.<sup>48</sup> It is therefore an appropriate place for a reflection on the complete text. Dante uses this moment to preview for the reader what lies ahead in the second half of the poem, and to remind them of the first half of the journey that is now coming to an end. The journey of the two pilgrims, Dante and Virgil, has thus far seen them descend into the depths of Hell. There they saw biblical, pagan and contemporary Italian figures being punished for their various sins. Thus at this point in the poem, the pilgrims (and the readers) have only encountered melancholy imagery. Every soul they have seen has been condemned either to eternal punishment in Hell or is serving lengthy years of penance in Ante-Purgatory. The first ekphrasis of humility, the Virgin, David and Emperor Trajan, is therefore the first moment in which the pilgrims encounter something remotely optimistic. It serves as a preview for divine part of their journey: Dante's entry into the Garden of Eden (*Purg.* XXVIII) and then Heaven itself (the third cantica, *Paradiso*). The sculptures on the floor in the second ekphrasis take the pilgrims and reader alike back to what they have just witnessed. The pilgrims have even encountered some of the sculpted figures, such as Lucifer and the giants Nimrod and Briarèus (*Inferno*, XXXIV and XXXI). Homer uses the ekphrasis of Book 18 of the *Iliad* to much the same affect. The murder ambush of

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<sup>48</sup> The actual midpoint of *Purgatorio* is Canto XVII. The midpoint of the entire *Divine Comedy* lies between Canto XVI and XVII in *Purgatorio* (there are 100 cantos in total).

shepherds on Achilles' shield (18.518-19) recalls Achilles' own slaughtering of seven brothers when they were tending to their sheep (6.421-24). So too the city besieged by armed forces on the shield (18.514-15) evokes the plight of Troy.

Thirdly, the *ekphraseis* are a means of participating in tradition. By characterising Virgil as his guide through the afterlife, Dante establishes an ongoing parallel between the *Divine Comedy* and the *Aeneid*. Commentators see it as a sign of Dante's admiration for Virgil and the epic tradition.<sup>49</sup> Earlier in the *Inferno*, Dante explicitly salutes Virgil as his *maestro* and *autore* (teacher and author, *Inf. I, 85*). However, Dante goes beyond mere tribute. Heffernan argues that Dante's ekphrasis show his competition with tradition, "ultimately and implicitly with Homer, directly and explicitly with Virgil".<sup>50</sup> The traditional struggle in ekphrasis, between word and image, is intensified by Dante's attempt to build on yet surpass tradition. As many commentators have argued, Dante alludes to the *Comedy* bettering Virgil's works in the first ekphrasis. As Dante-protagonist is looking at the sculptures on the wall, he overtakes Virgil to see more of the sculptures ("*per ch'io varcai Virgilio, e fe' mi presso, acciò che fosse a li occhi miei disposta*", X, 53-54). This pause in describing the sculptures to point out a seemingly irrelevant detail, that

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<sup>49</sup> Teresa Hankey, "The Clear and the Obscure: Dante, Virgil and the Role of the Prophet," in *Dante and the Middle Ages : literary and historical essays*, ed. John C. Barnes and Cormac Ó Cuilleaináin (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1995). p. 216.

<sup>50</sup> Heffernan, *Museum of words : the poetics of ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*. p. 39.

Dante 'goes past' Virgil, is also symbolic. Dante is 'going past' or 'going beyond' Virgil; his *ekphrasis* surpasses Virgil's.

The metaphor of the divine artist is fundamental to Dante's *ekphrasis*. Not only is God's nature a juxtaposition for the passing of worldly fame, but his artistry overcomes the limits of sculpture. Dante refers to the sculptures as *visible parlare*, that is, speech made visible. It is sculpture endowed with the gift of speech. Dante first notices this in the sculpture of the Annunciation, where Dante swears he the Angel says 'Ave'. In the sculpture of Emperor Trajan, the widow "seemed to say: 'My lord, avenge my murdered son for me. It is for him I grieve' " ("*pareva dir: Signor, fammi vendetta di mio figliuol ch'è morto, ond' io m'accoro*", *Purg.*, X, 83-84). Dante continues to recount an entire conversation between the Emperor and the widow that he can seemingly hear from simply looking at the sculpture. God's status as the ultimate divine artist who can manipulate nature and make *visibile parlare* is also the context of the sculpture of the Annunciation. In Christian theology it is both the moment in which the Virgin conceives and the Word becomes Flesh, the *logos* becomes *sarx* (Jn 1:14). Furthermore, God being a divine artist overturns the classical disdain for sculpture as a manual skill, appropriate for slaves. God's 'craftmanship' is the work of divine hands. By adding a divine element to sculpture, Dante dignifies the entire profession, much as Vasari will in Chapter Four.

Ekphrasis highlights the limits of both poetry and the visual arts. Firstly, it shows that a painting or a sculpture is rarely self-explanatory and lacks the means to explain itself to a viewer. Comprehending a sculpture of the Annunciation, for example, demands prior knowledge of the biblical scene on the part of the viewer. Poetry, however, can be an authoritative voice for an artwork. Through ekphrasis, poetry simultaneously describes and explains an artwork. Secondly, an artwork is frozen in time and space. As the eighteenth century German writer Gotthold Ephraim Lessing argues, the visual arts can only represent a single moment of an action “and must therefore choose the one which is most suggestive and from which the preceding and succeeding actions are most easily comprehensible”.<sup>51</sup> The visual arts are therefore considerably more limited than poetry in telling a narrative.

Ekphrasis allows the poet to describe an artwork and in doing so, interpret it. Simon Goldhill argues that ekphrastic “poems dramatize the viewing subject seeing himself seeing”.<sup>52</sup> The focus of the ekphrasis is not the sculptures themselves but Dante (protagonist) looking at the sculptures. This difference was present from the first ekphrasis in epic poetry. In Homer’s description of Achilles shield, he writes “The earth darkened behind them

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<sup>51</sup> Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoon : An essay upon the limits of painting and poetry, with remarks illustrative of various points in the history of ancient art*, trans. Ellen Frothingham (Boston, Roberts Brothers, 1874). p. 78.

<sup>52</sup> Simon Goldhill, "What Is Ekphrasis For?," *Classical Philology* 102, no. 1 (2007). p. 2.

and looked like earth that been ploughed / *though it was gold*" (18.548-49).<sup>53</sup> By reminding the reader that the earth in the shield was coloured gold, Homer "implicitly draws our attention to the *friction* between the fixed forms of visual art and the narrative thrust of his words".<sup>54</sup> This point is also re-enforced in the *Comedy* in much the same way. Dante's first-person narration makes the reader even more conscious that they are seeing through the protagonist's eyes. Goldhill likens ekphrastic poetry to a modern gallery visitor who comments a painting. Those comments are an interpretation of the painting: providing background information, identifying the depicted characters, explaining the painter's intentions and judging the effectiveness of the painting.<sup>55</sup> They are a crude ekphrastic poem. What the modern gallery visitor is using is exactly what a poet uses: critical gaze. A critical gaze is key to any art critic or art historian. It is the "selection of what to look at and how to look – and by parallel exclusions too".<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Taken from the Lattimore translation of Homer's *Iliad*, as quoted in Heffernan. Heffernan's emphasis has also been included. See Heffernan, *Museum of words : the poetics of ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*. p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. p. 4.

<sup>55</sup> This author has expanded considerably on Goldhill's very effective yet brief parallel between ekphrasis and a modern gallery visitor stops at the visitor feeling "the need to make an intelligent, precise, witty, public remark to a friend, this visitor is – however belatedly or unconsciously – an heir of the Hellenistic *sophos* and his epigrams." See Goldhill, "What Is Ekphrasis For?." p. 2.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. p. 2.

Tied to the fact that ekphrastic poetry dramatises the viewing subject seeing himself seeing is its narrating voice. Not only does the poet choose what to describe, but he or she inevitably “animates the fixed figures of visual art, turning the picture of a single moment into a narrative of successive actions”<sup>57</sup> Thus one needs to be attentive in using terminology like ‘narrative pause’. In one sense, it is true that the grander narrative pauses, or at least slows, in the lengthy description of an artwork. However, within that description, there is a mini-narrative which taking place: the narrative in the visual artwork. Some scholars, such as Murray Krieger and Wendy Steiner, overlook the mini-narrative and see ekphrasis as a freezing of time in space, or a moment “in which a poem aspires to the temporal ‘eternity’ or the stopped-action painting”.<sup>58</sup> Such a view undermines the genius of ekphrasis by seeing it as a poetic attempt to be like art. Returning to Simonides definition of painting as “mute poetry”, then it becomes clear that ekphrasis, to a degree, overcomes one of the limitations of painting, as it narrates for the eye.

How did ekphrasis influence the reputation of painters and sculptors in the Renaissance? Ekphrasis in epic poetry developed the idea of the divine sculptor. It was more than just a way to present a fictional sculpture as

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<sup>57</sup> Heffernan, *Museum of words : the poetics of ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*. p. 4.

<sup>58</sup> Wendy Steiner, *Pictures of romance : form against context in painting and literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988). pp. 13-14.

perfect. Rather, the sculptures in these ekphraseis, particularly Dante's, are presented as divinely created to highlight the fact that they surpass the limitations of sculpture. Sculpture, which by nature is silent, is given a voice by a divine sculptor. Even though the sculptors of the fourteenth century were still considered tradesmen, the divine artist already existed on a conceptual level. God, as well as being divine, was an artist. His artistry was clearly more than just a manual trade but an art that appeared to defy the laws of nature as it was *visibile parlare*. It was not the product of a working-class man, but of a being greater than man. On a conceptual level, this opens the door for the Vasari's praise of Michelangelo in the sixteenth century. However, the more immediate impact was that Dante portrayed the sculptor as something more than a craftsman. In fact, Dante is the first Italian author to introduce the term *artista* in the sense of a practitioner of the visual arts.<sup>59</sup> Ames-Lewis was not wrong in asserting that the term *artista* in the fourteenth century denoted a student of the liberal arts.<sup>60</sup> However, he did not realise that Dante uses the term *artista* in both senses, once denoting a student of the liberal arts (*Par. XVIII, 51: "qual era tra i cantor del cielo artista"*) and then in referring to an artisan (*Par. XVI, 51: "pura vediesi ne l'ultimo artista"*).<sup>61</sup> The next occasion of an author using *artista* to refer to an

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<sup>59</sup> "Grande dizionario della lingua italiana," ed. Salvatore Battaglia and Giorgio Barberi Squarotti (Torino: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1961). vol 1., p. 718.

<sup>60</sup> See *artista*, *ibid.* vol. 1. p. 718.

<sup>61</sup> *Par. XVI, 51: "was then found pure in the humblest artisan", Par. XVIII, 51: "his artistry was among the singers of heaven".* Alighieri Dante, *Paradiso*, ed. Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander, 1st Anchor Books ed. (New York: Anchor Books, 2008). pp. 289 – 294.

artisan, according to *Grande dizionario della lingua Italiana*, is not until Michelangelo himself, over two hundred years later.<sup>62</sup> The aspirations of painters and sculptors, realised in the great artists of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, already existed on a conceptual level in Dante's poetry. Furthermore, many of those painters and sculptors would have known the *Comedy* very well, especially as it was written in the vernacular. How could they not have been inspired by Dante's notion of the divine artist, who broke down the barriers that stood between word and image, and made *visible parlare*?

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<sup>62</sup> "Grande dizionario della lingua italiana." p. 718.

## Chaper Two

### The Learned Artist Creator

The previous chapter showed how Dante's poetry opened up a way to imagine a 'divine artist', who could overcome the social and manual limitations of his craft in a time when painters and sculptors were considered little more than tradesmen. From the late fourteenth century onwards, the standing of the visual arts grew. By the mid-sixteenth century, the artisan had become the "learned artist creator", as Cecil Grayson puts it.<sup>63</sup> The learned artist creator is the artisan whose knowledge has expanded beyond the 'mechanical arts' and who incorporates this intellectual acumen into his art. Ames-Lewis argues that the expanding intellectual activities of "fifteenth century artists... encouraged a wider recognition among their public of the validity of claims that painting and sculpture should be seen as liberal arts".<sup>64</sup> This chapter shows how the artisan, through these 'expanding intellectual activities', became the learned artist creator who demanded the respect of his contemporaries. This culminates with an examination of Sandro Botticelli's illustrations of the *Divine Comedy*, which showcase the newfound philological interests of the Italian Renaissance painter.

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<sup>63</sup> Leon Battista Alberti, *On painting and On sculpture. The Latin texts of De pictura and De statua*, ed. Cecil Grayson (London: Phaidon, 1972). p. 8.

<sup>64</sup> Ames-Lewis, *The intellectual life of the early Renaissance artist*. p. 1.

The expanding intellectual life of painters and sculptors in the fifteenth century began as many revolutions do, with the writings of a single person. The first person to propose that painters open their minds to wider intellectual pursuits was Leon Battista Alberti (1404 – 1472). Alberti was one of the Renaissance humanist polymaths, ‘a jack of all trades’. He has been recognised as an author, artist, architect, poet, linguist, philosopher and cryptographer.<sup>65</sup> In 1436, Alberti wrote his artistic manifesto, *De pictura*. It was essentially a textbook for painters, explaining technique and perspective, as well more general advice on painting. It was exceedingly influential. Rudolph Altrocchi argues that in the fifteenth century, *De Pictura* became “one of the standard texts, indeed the most important, on the technique of painting”.<sup>66</sup>

Cecil Grayson claims that Alberti was largely responsible for “the shift from the artisan to the learned artist creator”.<sup>67</sup> Alberti did this by showing how painters could benefit from expanding their learning. He writes that “it

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<sup>65</sup> Anthony Grafton’s book on Alberti is sub-titled ‘Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance’. Giulio Dolci’s book on Alberti is sub-titled ‘Scrittore’ (“Writer”). Grafton’s book has been referred to more commonly in this thesis, but Dolci’s work shows that Alberti was clearly capable enough in both writing and architecture, as well as other disciplines, that there is no one category that universally describes him. See Giulio Dolci, *Leon Battista Alberti* (Avezzano: Studio bibliografico A. Polla, 1983).

<sup>66</sup> Rudolph Altrocchi, “The Calumny of Apelles in the Literature of the Quattrocento,” *PMLA* 36, no. 3 (1921). p. 469.

<sup>67</sup> Alberti, *On painting and On sculpture. The Latin texts of De pictura and De statua*. p. 8.

will be of advantage if they [painters] take pleasure in poets and orators".<sup>68</sup> In doing so, artists would be able to draw on literature in their paintings. This would give painters a whole range of rich sources to depict, from the comic to the tragic, from Greek, Latin and contemporary sources. Painting in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was dominated by religious subjects and biblical depiction. As Michael Baxandall states, the painter was essentially a "professional visualizer of the holy stories".<sup>69</sup> To bring the abundance of literature of Antiquity to contemporary art, Alberti had to first introduce contemporary painters to the classics.

Alberti had no Renaissance precedent for creating a textbook which advocated such a use of literature in painting, nor were there any sources from antiquity that could help.<sup>70</sup> Thus he had to create his own framework for his arguments. He adopted language usually used reserved for rhetorical treatises to convince his readers that painting artists could benefit from literature.

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid. p. 94.

<sup>69</sup> Michael Baxandall, *Painting and experience in fifteenth century Italy : a primer in the social history of pictorial style*, 2nd ed., Oxford paperbacks. (Oxford Oxfordshire ; New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). p. 45.

<sup>70</sup> David Cast, *The Calumny of Apelles : a study in the humanist tradition*, Yale publications in the history of art (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981). p. 34.

Painting, to Alberti, was a means of persuasion. All the elements of painting “could work together, pleasing the viewer and persuading him of one truth or another”.<sup>71</sup> In other words, paintings could be visual rhetoric. Here we should adopt Alberti’s terminology to understand his point. *Inventio* (or *invenzione* in Italian), is an oratorical term, referring to “the material of the speech before it has been subjected to the refinements of rhetorical practice – arrangement, diction, memory and delivery”.<sup>72</sup> *Historia* (*istoria*), as Alberti uses it, means a story told in an artwork or ‘visual narrative’.<sup>73</sup> It is the application of the artist’s skill and creativity in telling a story; his delivery of the *inventio*. Alberti’s argument is that a good artist must combine both *historia* (“visual narrative”) and *invention* (“subject material”). In his words, an artist is successful if his painting “holds and charms the eyes and minds of spectators”.<sup>74</sup> So for Alberti, the visual, which holds the eyes, must in turn have a deeper effect on the inside – it must move the mind and soul. Alberti explains that “literary men, who are full of information about many subjects, will be of great assistance preparing the composition of an *istoria*, and the great virtue of this consists primarily in its *inventio*.”<sup>75</sup> This is how Alberti

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p. 35.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>73</sup> Anthony Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti : master builder of the Italian Renaissance*, 1st ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000). pp. 127 – 128.

<sup>74</sup> ‘Id quidem assequer pictor dum eius picture oculos et animos spectantium tenebit atque movebit’, Alberti, *On painting and On sculpture. The Latin texts of De pictura and De statua*. p. 94. ‘Animos’ can be translated as ‘mind’ or ‘soul’ in English.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

shifted the role of the artist from the artisan to the learned artist creator – by showing how successful an artist can be if the subject matter of his painting is capable of invoking a deeper response in the viewer, just as spoken rhetoric did.

Where did Alberti get this idea from? It would seem that Alberti took the wording for his ground-breaking idea from the *Divine Comedy*. Dante refers to the sculpture of Emperor Trajan and the widow as an “*istoria*” (*Purg. X*, 71), the exact passage discussed in Chapter One: the sculpture that was so well fashioned that Dante could recount the dialogue between the Emperor and the widow. Therefore it was Dante who first used *istoria* to refer to a ‘visual narrative’.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, Alberti seems to have borrowed from Dante the idea of a painting that “holds and charms the eyes and minds of spectators”. In Canto XXVII of *Paradiso*, Dante makes what we could call a simple statement on the purpose of art. It is in the context of Dante’s amazement as the inexplicable beauty of Beatrice:

e se natura o arte fé pasture  
da pigliare occhi, per aver la mente,  
in carne umana o ne le sue pitture

tutte adunate, parrebber niente

And if nature or art have fashioned lures  
of human flesh, or of paintings done of it,  
to catch the eyes and thus possess the mind,

all these would have seem as nothing  
(*Par. XXVII*, 91-93)

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<sup>76</sup> Grafton observes that *istoria*, in the sense of a ‘visual narrative’, began to be used in the Tuscan and French languages of the fourteenth and fifteenth century. See Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti : master builder of the Italian Renaissance*. p. 128.

My focus is Dante's phrase: "*da pigliare occhi, per aver la mente*" – to take the eyes to have the mind.<sup>77</sup> Alberti uses almost the exact same phrase and certainly expresses the same idea in *De Pictura*. We need to qualify this statement with 'almost' because there is no autograph manuscript of *De Pictura*, but rather a whole range of early copies. There are twenty Latin and three vernacular manuscripts in existence, dating from 1435 to 1468.<sup>78</sup> The issue for editors and translators is how to reconcile the differences between each manuscript, as it is not clear which was the intended master copy. The best known Italian version of *De Pictura* is not Alberti's work, but is in fact a translation from the Latin made by Lodovico Domenichi in 1547.<sup>79</sup> Alberti did write a version of the text in Italian, but it has largely been dismissed by modern scholars as a poor vernacular translation of what was originally a Latin work. This certainly was the position of Cecil Grayson, whose well-known English translation of *De Pictura* (1972) was based on several Latin manuscripts. Grayson considered the Italian versions translations.<sup>80</sup> However, Rocco Sinisgalli has argued recently that Alberti first composed in Italian, and the Latin is a more refined and presentable copy, written at least one year later.<sup>81</sup> If Sinisgalli is right, then the dismissed Italian manuscripts

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<sup>77</sup> This translation is my own.

<sup>78</sup> Leon Battista Alberti, *Leon Battista Alberti : On painting : a new translation and critical edition*, ed. Rocco Sinisgalli (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011). pp. 4 – 7.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* p. 11.

<sup>80</sup> ———, *On painting and On sculpture. The Latin texts of De pictura and De statua*. p. 3.

<sup>81</sup> Sinisgalli's argument is very convincing. He points to the fact that the Italian version is filled with phrases such as "read my work with diligence", "to be amended", "do correct me" and "I

would show whether or not Alberti took his phrase from Dante word for word. Of the three Italian manuscripts, only one is legible: MS II.IV, 38 in the *Biblioteca Nazionale*, Florence.<sup>82</sup> Unfortunately, I have been unable to consult it myself during this project. The closest I can come to Alberti's original Italian then is Luigi Mallè's *Della Pittura* (1950), which was based on the Florentine manuscript. In Mallè's edition, the relevant line in Alberti reads as follows: "*Et seguiranno questo i pittori ove la loro pittura terrà li occhi et l'animo di chi la miri*".<sup>83</sup> John R. Spencer's translation, based on Mallè's edition, reads as: "If painters will follow this, their painting will hold the eyes and the soul of the observer".<sup>84</sup> It would appear that Alberti substituted the verb *tenere* for Dante's *pigliare*, (the words are synonymous), and replaced Dante's *mente* with *animo* ("mind" and "soul").

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would like to be corrected". This would suggest it was an early draft, written in Alberti's native tongue. Furthermore, he argues that other commentators have confused the order in which Alberti wrote because he originally referred to the Italian version as *De Pictura* as well. The trend of giving Latin titles to treatises that were written in the vernacular was not uncommon. Piero della Francesca's *De prospettive pingendi*, for example, was also originally written in the vernacular. See ———, *Leon Battista Alberti : On painting : a new translation and critical edition*. p. 8.

<sup>82</sup> The other two manuscripts, according to Grayson and Sinisgalli, were written in such messy handwriting that they are illegible. This only strengthens Sinisgalli's argument. See *ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>83</sup> ———, *Della Pittura*, ed. Luigi Mallè (Firenze: G. C. Sansoni, 1950). p. 103.

<sup>84</sup> ———, *On painting*, ed. John R. Spencer (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1967). p. 89.

*De Pictura* was written for both artists as non-artists alike. Whilst Alberti aimed to educate artists, he also tried to convince those who doubted the value of art that it was deserving of attention, learning and praise. As Cast argues, *De Pictura* was “a demonstration that painting was as valuable in its own way as poetry or rhetoric or grammar or any of the other parts of the system of the *studia humanitatis*”.<sup>85</sup> But if we incorporate Sinisgalli’s arguments into our view of the text, a new picture emerges: to promote his work amongst both artists and non-artists, he wrote Latin and Italian versions in quick succession. This meant his work was accessible to the less-educated artists as well as the learned humanists, who would have very probably dismissed anything written only in the *volgare* (“vulgar”, i.e. Italian) at that time.

Latin was a fundamental part of excluding painters and sculptors from intellectual circles and relegating them to the artisan-class. Ames-Lewis writes that fluency in Latin was “an essential qualification of the cultured, literate man who sought to move within the higher social circles”.<sup>86</sup> The education of children from the artisan-class, however, was limited in comparison to the humanist schools of the time. Most of the Renaissance painters and sculptors finished their education at age eleven, after acquiring

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<sup>85</sup> Cast, *The Calumny of Apelles : a study in the humanist tradition*. p. 34.

<sup>86</sup> Ames-Lewis, *The intellectual life of the early Renaissance artist*. p. 20.

basic literacy and useful mathematical skills (including geometry), so that they could take up apprenticeships or work in family workshops.<sup>87</sup> The young artisans therefore, had no access to many important classical texts which would not be translated until much later in the fifteenth century. Alberti accommodates this situation not only by writing in both Latin and the vernacular, but by advising painters that literary men would be of great assistance in choosing subject matter from the classics, as he knew these painters could never read them on their own. However, there is little doubt that these painters and sculptors aspired to learn Latin, to become literate men and enter the intellectual circles of Renaissance Italy. The personal libraries of a whole range of fifteenth century painters testify to that ambition.<sup>88</sup> Even Leonardo da Vinci, who proudly claimed he was "*uomo senza lettere*" ("not a man of letters") and that experience served him more than bookishness, possessed a number of standard Latin grammar books.<sup>89</sup> Some painters and sculptors in the fifteenth century, such as Lorenzo Ghiberti and Andrea Mantegna, had managed to learn Latin and advocated for others to do the same, but they were exceptions to the general trend.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid. p. 20.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. p. 21.

<sup>89</sup> L. Reti, "The Two Unpublished Manuscripts of Leonardo da Vinci in the Biblioteca Nacional of Madrid - II" *Burlington Magazine* CX (1968). pp. 81 – 89.

<sup>90</sup> Ames-Lewis, *The intellectual life of the early Renaissance artist*. p. 22.

The desire of Italian painters and sculptors to engage with literature was retarded by their lack of instruction in Latin. Alberti however, as well as being such an influential figure in their artistic instruction, was also leading the fight for the recognition of the Italian vernacular as a language worthy of esteem. Alberti followed in Dante's footsteps, who had previously given the *volgare* the same dignity that was usually reserved for Latin in his *De vulgari eloquentia* (1302-1305). Alberti argued that the language of the people had been turned back into a cultivated language by the three crowns of Florence, Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio.<sup>91</sup> He fashioned the "Etruscan myth", claiming that the Tuscan dialect was a revival of the language of the Etruscans who inhabited Tuscany before the Romans did.<sup>92</sup> In addition to contributing to the Italian-Latin debate, which was unfolding in Florence in the 1430s, Alberti wrote *Grammatica della lingua toscana* ("Grammar of the Tuscan Language") which was both a textbook on vernacular grammar and evidence of the arguments for the vernacular being as structured as Latin.<sup>93</sup> Therefore, Alberti joined a tradition of valorising the vernacular as a practical alternative for artisans to use in engaging with literature.

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<sup>91</sup> Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti : master builder of the Italian Renaissance*. p. 170.

<sup>92</sup> Alberti's "Etruscan myth" was considerably popular amongst the Florentines who supported the recognition of the Tuscan dialect. See *ibid.* p. 170. Also see Giovanni Cipriani, *Il mito etrusco nel Rinascimento fiorentino*, Studi e documenti - Biblioteca di storia toscana moderna e contemporanea (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1980).

<sup>93</sup> Grafton, *Leon Battista Alberti : master builder of the Italian Renaissance*. p. 170.

The enthusiasm that fifteenth-century painters showed in response to Alberti's encouragement that they engage with literature, particularly through the vernacular, was substantial. In *De Pictura*, Alberti reflected at length on the question of literary inspiration through the lens of the ancient Greek poet Lucian, the author of 'The Dream' that was discussed in Chapter One. Alberti quotes from Lucian's '*On Calumny*' in a vernacular translation of the original Greek and describing a painting by the legendary Apelles.<sup>94</sup> Alberti finishes by inviting his readers to contemplate how beautiful the original painting must have been, given that this "*historia* seizes the imagination when described in words".<sup>95</sup> Having read Alberti, more than forty Renaissance painters, illustrators and sculptors brought the lost painting alive, including Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael and Botticelli, whose illustrations I examine below.<sup>96</sup> These artistic efforts are the proof that fifteenth century artisan aspired towards a higher intellectual status and wanted to become learned artist creators.

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<sup>94</sup> Also known as '*On Not Believing Rashly in Slander*', Περὶ τοῦ μὴ ῥαδίως πιστεύειν Διαβολῆ, *Calumniae non temere credendum*.

<sup>95</sup> "Quae plane historia etiam si dum recitatur animos tenet, quantum censes eam gratiae et amoenitatis ex ipsa pictura eximii pictoris exhibuisse?", Alberti, *On painting and On sculpture. The Latin texts of De pictura and De statua*. p. 97

<sup>96</sup> For a complete list, see Cast, *The Calumny of Apelles : a study in the humanist tradition*. p. vii.

Alessandro di Mariano di Vanni Filipepi (1444/5 – 1510), more commonly known as Sandro Botticelli, was a Florentine artist who worked under the patronage of Lorenzo de' Medici.<sup>97</sup> He worked on the Sistine Chapel in Rome, alongside some of the other great artists of the Renaissance. He is one of the few whose artworks, particularly *The Birth of Venus*, would appear familiar to many people today.<sup>98</sup>

I am particularly concerned with Botticelli's pen-and-ink illustrations of the *Divine Comedy*. Vasari writes that Botticelli, "being a man of inquiring mind, completed and printed a commentary on a part of Dante, illustrating the *Inferno*".<sup>99</sup> Vasari is openly critical about this project: "He wasted a great deal of time on this, neglecting his work and thoroughly disrupting his life". Vasari's criticism is seemingly in response to the fact that Botticelli dedicated much time to illustrating a poem when he could have been undertaking more large-scale projects. Botticelli had in fact "rushed" from Rome back to Florence to work on his illustrations of the *Divine Comedy*.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, it

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<sup>97</sup>Jane Turner, *Encyclopedia of Italian Renaissance & Mannerist art*, 2 vols., Grove encyclopedias of European art. (New York: Grove's Dictionaries, 1999). p. 236.

<sup>98</sup> Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, one of his most famous work, appears in an episode of the American animated sitcom *The Simpsons*, "The Last Temptation of Homer", 1F07, 1993.

<sup>99</sup> "Dove per essere persona sofistica, comentò una parte di Dante, e figurò lo Inferno e lo mise in stampa, dietro al quale consumò di molto tempo, per il che non lavorando fu cagione di infiniti disordini alla vita sua." Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori*, ed. Rosanna Bettarini and Paola Barocchi (Firenze: Sansoni: S.P.E.S., 1966). p. 513.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. p. 513.

reflects the fact that the illustrations had done little for Botticelli's reputation. Vasari, writing sixty years after Botticelli had completed them, did not even know that he had completed illustrating the entire *Comedy* and not just the *Inferno*. It also reflects the length of time Botticelli took to complete the illustrations. It appears that Botticelli began the illustrations in 1480, finishing around 1500.<sup>101</sup> Botticelli was also not alone in dedicating time to Dante's poetry (or wasting it, according to Vasari). Michelangelo too, it has been claimed by many of his biographers, had a thorough knowledge of Dante's poetry to the point of nearly memorising it.<sup>102</sup> Michelangelo even includes an obvious reference to Dante's *Inferno* in his own masterpiece, *The Last Judgement*.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, Michelangelo is supposed to have illustrated the margins of a printed edition of the *Divine Comedy*, which was unfortunately lost in a shipwreck in the eighteenth-century.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> F. Lippmann, *Drawings by Sandro Botticelli for Dante's Divina commedia : reduced facsimiles after the originals in the Royal Museum, Berlin, and in the Vatican Library* (London Lawrence and Bullen, 1896). p. 25.

<sup>102</sup> Bernadine Ann Barnes, *Michelangelo's Last Judgment : the Renaissance response*, California studies in the history of art. Discovery series (Berkeley, Calif. ; London: University of California Press, 1998). p. 102.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.* p. 102.

<sup>104</sup> Lippmann, *Drawings by Sandro Botticelli for Dante's Divina commedia : reduced facsimiles after the originals in the Royal Museum, Berlin, and in the Vatican Library*. p. 24.

Botticelli's sketches are the fruits of an artist who had truly become the "learned artist creator" that Alberti had envisioned. However, it is important to remember that Botticelli was not a Renaissance polymath. Botticelli represents a category of painters who were interested in Alberti's innovation but who did not attempt to become literary men themselves. They saw Alberti's arguments as an encouragement to deepen the possibilities of painting through technique and responding to the limitations of image. These sketches are, according to Friedrich Lippmann, some of "the most significant artistic renderings ever given to poetry, and not the least among the many marvels of the Italian Renaissance".<sup>105</sup> There had been since the Middle Ages an industry of manuscript illustration. Dante encounters one of the most famous manuscript illustrators, Oderisi da Gubbio, in Canto XI of *Purgatorio*, as discussed in Chapter One. Manuscript illustration continued to be popular right up until the sixteenth-century amidst the rise of print. The *Divine Comedy* was first printed in 1472, yet manuscript illustrations continued as print was considered a cheap substitute.<sup>106</sup> Botticelli's illustrations Botticelli's sketches were supposedly intended to be part of a manuscript of the *Divine Comedy*, illustrated for Lorenzo di Pier Francesco de' Medici, cousin of Lorenzo 'the Magnificent'. The illustrations themselves had been separated and forgotten until the majority found their way independently to the Berlin Museum in the late nineteenth-century. Once together, they were

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid. p. 14.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. p. 13.

recognised as the work of Botticelli and the remaining papers were found in the Vatican Library.<sup>107</sup> On the reverse side of each illustration is the poem's text, meaning that they were designed to be read side-by-side with Botticelli's sketches. Whether or not these illustrations are the finished manuscript which was mysteriously separated, or whether they were draft sketches for a manuscript which was either never finished or lost, is unclear. Alessandro Parronchi contends that the sketches were actually intended for the internal decoration of dome of the Santa Maria del Fiore cathedral in Florence (*Il Duomo*), and he makes some valid claims.<sup>108</sup> Firstly, if Botticelli thought he would have the opportunity to decorate the iconic cathedral, it would justify why he "wasted" so much time on his sketches of the *Divine Comedy*. Secondly, Vasari writes that Botticelli rushed back to Florence after finishing his work in the Vatican. Possibly he was inspired by the grandiose Sistine Chapel. There certainly was a significant movement at the end of the fifteenth century to recognise Dante in the *Duomo*, which will be discussed in Chapter Three. Regardless of the validity of Parronchi's claims, Botticelli clearly took his sketches very seriously. They are, as we shall see now, incredibly detailed visual representations of a poem that he must have known very well.

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid. p. 15.

<sup>108</sup> Alessandro Parronchi, *Botticelli fra Dante e Petrarca*, Arte e restauro. (Firenze: Nardini, 1985). p. 7.

Canto X of *Purgatorio*, represented by Botticelli in Figure 1, is an artistic tour de force in which Botticelli plays with the relationship between word and image in the ekphrasis tradition. He creates what could be called “reverse ekphrasis”. Botticelli visually represents the protagonist Dante looking at a series of sculptures which we analysed in Chapter One. Therefore, the verbal representation of visual representation, ekphrasis, deepens into another level. Botticelli now visually represents the verbal representation of a visual representation. It is a picture of a poem about a picture.

Attempting to depict an image described in words would have been a daunting task for Botticelli. It is comparable to a modern film director turning fiction into film. Botticelli, however, had more than just Dante’s verbal description of the sculptures at his disposal in creating this sketch. Dante had chosen three iconic images: the Annunciation of the Virgin, David and the Ark of the Covenant and the Emperor Trajan with the widow, because they would have been familiar to the reader. Therefore, the reader could understand their symbolic role in the narrative, but also imagine the sculptures as they were described in the poem. Therefore, Botticelli could rely on familiar images in re-creating the sculptures of Canto X. Botticelli, however, was not only familiar with these images, but had depicted them himself.

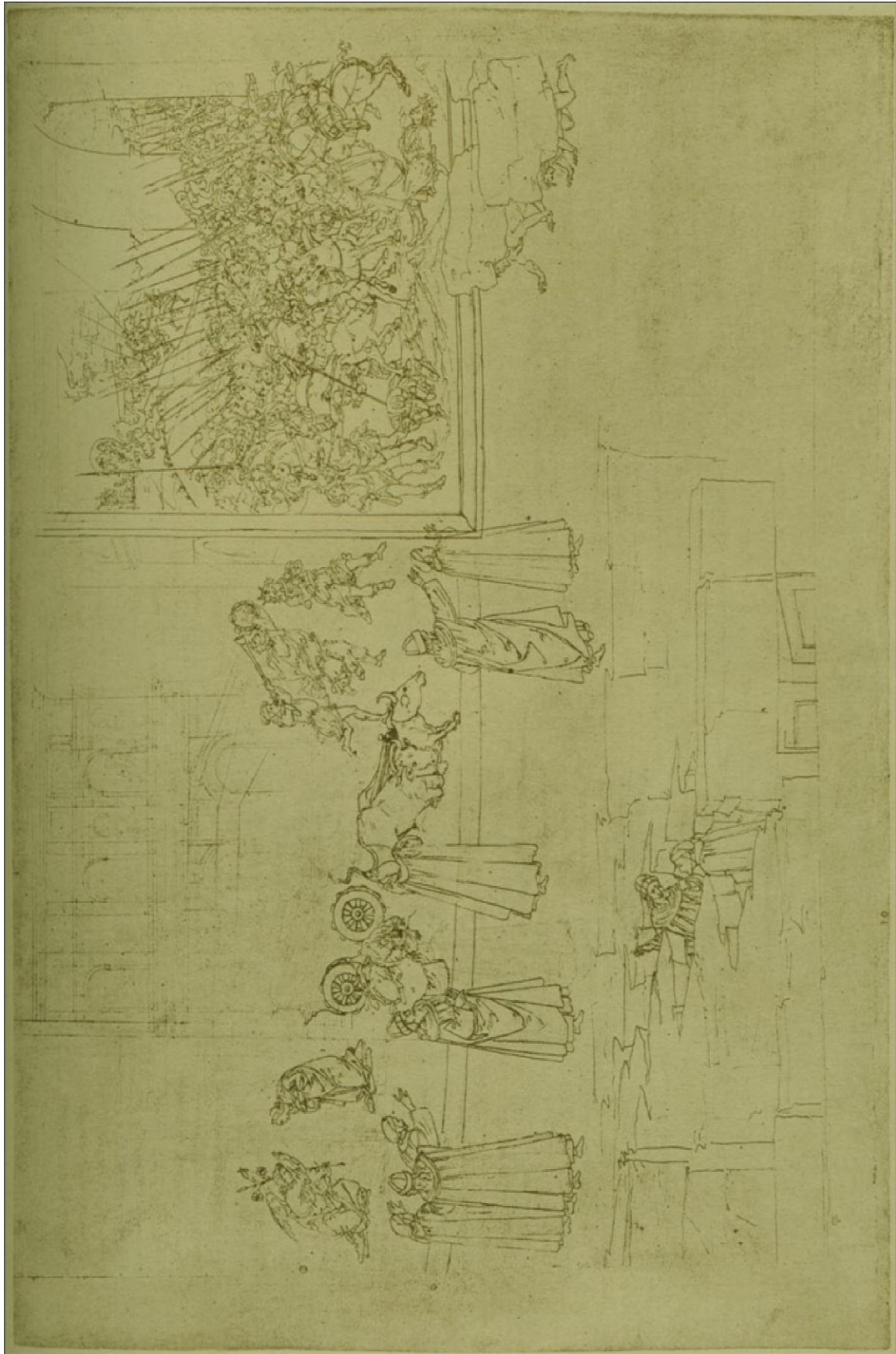


Figure 1 – Sandro Botticelli, *Canto X of Purgatorio*.

The Annunciation (on the left of Figure 1) resembles Botticelli's own *Cestello Annunciation* (Figure 2), which was painted circa 1489 – 1490. Therefore, Botticelli would have painted the *Cestello Annunciation*, now in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, whilst he was working on his ongoing Dante project. Botticelli's illustrations are therefore self-referential, as Botticelli places himself in the poetry of Dante. Thus, his own painting is the model for the *visibile parlare*, made with such fine artistry that they almost speak to speak.



Figure 2 – Sandro Botticelli, *Cestello Annunciation*

It is also worth noting that in Cantos X and XII, Dante and Virgil appear multiple times in the one scene. This technique was common in manuscript illustrations. However, Botticelli's illustrations are not limited by the presence of the text on the same page, like most manuscript illustrations were, as in Figures 3a and 3b.<sup>109</sup> These two illustrations, from the Yates Thompson 36 manuscript, were done by the fifteenth-century miniaturist Priamo della Quercia.<sup>110</sup> They were completed almost thirty years before Botticelli began his project. By choosing to separate the illustrations from the text, Botticelli obliges his illustrations to become more independent from the text. The re-appearance of Dante and Virgil multiple times in the one scene allows the narrative to unfold in the illustration.

It would appear to a modern reader like a comic strip without frames. One potential problem would be confusing the reader as to the chronology of the illustration, given that they have no indication of which figures to look at first and in what directions the narration 'moves'. In fact, Botticelli changes the visual movement of the narrative from canto to canto.

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<sup>109</sup> Figure 3b is a depiction of Canto X of *Purgatorio*, the same canto Botticelli depicts in Figure 1. Figure 3a is of another canto (Canto I of *Inferno*) and has been included to show how most illustrations in manuscripts were positioned around the text of the poem.

<sup>110</sup> Peter Brieger, Millard Meiss, and Charles S. Singleton, *Illuminated Manuscripts Of The Divine Comedy* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969). p. 54.



Figure 2 – Sandro Botticelli, *Canto XII of Purgatorio*.

In Canto X, the characters move from left to right, beginning at the Annunciation and finishing as they see the punished penitents carrying rocks. In Canto XII, however, Dante and Virgil begin in the bottom right, looking down upon the sculpture of Lucifer, and then continuing to the top left. What Botticelli does is have the characters bodies face the direction their moving in. Therefore, even as Dante and Virgil turn their heads and point their hands in different directions, the reader can follow the illustration without having to refer back to the relevant canto constantly. Botticelli's decision to depict Dante and Virgil multiple times in each illustration radically impacts upon



Figure 3b (above) - Priamo della Quercia, *Canto 10 of Purgatorio*, 1444 – 1452, Yates Thompson 36.

Figure 3a (left) - Priamo della Quercia, *Canto I of Inferno*, 1444 – 1452, Yates Thompson 36.

the focus of the illustration by making the narrative dynamic rather than static. The impact is best seen by comparing Botticelli's illustrations to one of the most famous illustrators of the *Divine Comedy*, nineteenth-century French artist Gustave Doré. In Doré's depiction of Canto X (Fig. 3), the focus is on a single moment that Doré has considered the most memorable, or alternatively, the most 'pregnant' with meaning. The impact that this difference has on the two illustrations is that Doré's illustration loses its affinity with Dante's poem, whilst Botticelli's illustration maintains it. Doré's illustrations appears more like a memory or a review – it recalls a single moment from the narrative. Botticelli's illustrations, however, re-tell the narrative. They have a unique relationship with the text. They are not as dependent on the text as most manuscript illustrations were, yet they still narrate it.



Figure 4 – Gustavo Doré - *Trajan*

## Chapter Three

### The Intellectual-Artisan?

Chapter One established how the skills of painters and sculptors were considered manual labour and the work of a tradesman in Antiquity. Chapter Two explored how, through an increasing familiarity with literature and through the arguments made by Leon Battista Alberti, painters and sculptors explored the idea of 'visual narratives' in their art. Whilst this had a positive influence on the individual status of those more literate artisans, it did not break the stigma of working with one's hands. Chapter Three follows the theories put forward by Renaissance writers in order to dignify the skills of painters and sculptors and the realisation of these theories in the academies of art in the fifteenth century. These academies separated painters and sculptors from the guilds and the workshops where manual labourers worked, and put them in an environment modelled on the intellectual academies of the same period. However, one particular academy in Rome, the *Accademia di San Luca*, failed because there were too few painters and sculptors who were willing to lecture on their professions. Its failure suggests that most painters and sculptors were not comfortable living and work in such an intellectual environment. These academies, inspired by writings of Alberti and others like Leonardo da Vinci on the intellectual aspects of painting, did not take into account that painters and sculptors in the sixteenth century were still artisans, and not trained orators.

The low status of painting and sculpting skills in Antiquity was always tied to their exclusion from the liberal arts. The free men of the upper-classes had no need for money, and hence dedicated themselves to the study of the liberal arts. As Emison argues, “the liberal artist was free of mercenary motivation; his labor, and his rewards, were mental rather than physical”.<sup>111</sup> Painters and sculptors, however, were no different from the smiths who secured income through physical labour. This mentality carried on into the Renaissance period. The social norms of the Italian courts in the fifteenth century, for example, forbade a nobleman from earning a living through physical labour.<sup>112</sup> Therefore, drawing parallels between the visual arts and the liberal arts was the logical aim for Renaissance writers who wanted to promote painting and sculpture in society. Alberti and Leonardo are two of the major writers in this area. Alberti focused on the use of geometry in painting to argue that painting specifically ought to be considered a liberal art. Leonardo too focuses on only on painting. He argues that painting is an intellectually demanding activity, requiring knowledge of many concepts that today are considered a part of the discipline of Physics. Both arguments present the painter (and not the sculptor) as the intellectual equivalent of the noblemen who studied the liberal arts. Furthermore, the freedom that some patrons gave to the elite painters and sculptors to create and design as they saw fit in the Renaissance meant that their skills could hardly be considered a trade. The realisation of these arguments is the artistic academies which

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<sup>111</sup> Emison, *Creating the "Divine" Artist: From Dante to Michelangelo*. p. 65.

<sup>112</sup> Martin Warnke, *The court artist : on the ancestry of the modern artist*, Ideas in context. (Cambridge ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1993). p. 165.

began in the late fifteenth century. These were equivalent to the humanist academies that began in fifteenth-century Florence. The artistic academies put into practice what Alberti and Leonardo advocate in their writing: painting is an intellectual activity and should be treated as such. The success and failure of the artistic academies shows that Alberti and Leonardo were both right and wrong in believing painting was more than just manual labour, and I will analyse the artistic academies later in this chapter. But first, I will establish why Alberti and Leonardo believed painting was more than a 'craft'.

The majority of Alberti's *De Pictura* is a textbook on the use of optics and perspective in painting. Alberti writes, "It would please me if the painter were as learned as possible in all the liberal arts, but first of all I desire that he know geometry".<sup>113</sup> Understanding geometry was vital to being able to reproduce perspective in painting. Again Alberti cites Pliny's account of Pamphilos, the fourth century B.C. painter teacher of Apelles, who thought that "no painter could paint well who did not know much geometry".<sup>114</sup> Alberti was not alone in seeing the link between painting, geometry and the liberal arts. Architecture was the widely accepted link between the skills of painting and sculpture and the prestige of the liberal arts. Vasari writes that "architecture can never be practised to perfection save by those who have an

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<sup>113</sup> "Doctum vero pictorem esse opto, quoad eius fieri possit, omnibus in artibus liberalibus, sed in eo praesertim geometriae peritiam desidero", Alberti, *On painting and On sculpture. The Latin texts of De pictura and De statua*. p. 94.

<sup>114</sup> "Assentior quidem Pamphilo antiquissimo et nobilissimo pictori, a quo ingenui adolescentes primo picturam didicere", *ibid.* p. 94.

excellent judgment and a good mastery of design, or have laboured much in painting and sculpture".<sup>115</sup> Therefore, painters and sculptors commonly added architecture to their repertoire during their career if they were not already familiar with it.<sup>116</sup> Giotto was appointed as *capomaestro* of *Il Duomo* after first establishing himself as a painter.<sup>117</sup> Alberti himself is in fact most commonly remembered as an architect.<sup>118</sup>

Leonardo argues for painting to be considered a "*vera scientia*" ("true science") as opposed to a "*scientia meccanica*" ("mechanical science") on account of the painter understanding light, distance and motion. According to Leonardo, painting is firstly a series of "scientific and true principles", such as shadow, position, motion and rest.<sup>119</sup> He writes, "These are comprehended only by the mind, without manual operations, and this is the science of painting".<sup>120</sup> He even laments, "O writers, for what twisted reason have you

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<sup>115</sup> "Nell'architettura, la scienza della quale non è stata esercitata da parecchi anni a dietro, se non da intagliatori o da persone sofistiche, le quali aspirano a le cose della prospettiva, e non può nientedimanco perfettamente esser fatta, se non da quegli che hanno giudizio sano e disegno buono, che o in pitture o in sculture". Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori*. p. 609.

<sup>116</sup> Emison, *Creating the "Divine" Artist: From Dante to Michelangelo*. p. 64

<sup>117</sup> Ames-Lewis, *The intellectual life of the early Renaissance artist*. p. 67.

<sup>118</sup> James Beck, "Leon Battista Alberti and the "Night Sky" at San Lorenzo," *Artibus et Historiae* 10, no. 19 (1989). p. 9.

<sup>119</sup> "Della qual pittura li suoi scientifici et veri principij prima ponendo che cosa é lume, cioè tenebre, luce, colore, corpo, figura, sito, remotione, propinquità, moto e quiete", Leonardo da Vinci, *Paragone*, ed. Claire Farago (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992). pp. 252 – 255.

<sup>120</sup> "Le quali solo con la mente si comprendono senza opera manuale, e questa sia la scientia della pittura, che resta nella mente de suoi contemplanti", *ibid.* p. 252.

left her [painting] outside the number of the liberal arts?"<sup>121</sup> He blames writers who are ignorant of the scientific aspects of painting and who are unable to express in words the nobility of painting, for "painting possesses nobility in itself without the aid of other languages, not unlike the way the excellent works of nature do".<sup>122</sup> Leonardo, unlike Alberti, does not attempt to reconcile painting to the humanist culture. Whilst Alberti may not have been alone in lamenting the exclusion of visual arts from the accepted liberal arts, he is the only one who put forward a convincing programme for its acceptance into the philologically-based intellectual circles of the Italian Renaissance.

The question of payment for work remained a thorn in the side of Renaissance writers trying to claim that painting and sculpture was a liberal art and not a mechanical trade. As Emison points out, "few practicing artists could claim that they worked other than for monetary recompense".<sup>123</sup> Even if the visual arts could be dignified themselves on a theoretical level, their practitioners were still paid workmen. Ironically, this same dilemma was facing humanists, who were compromising their own status as practitioners of the liberal arts by being paid. As Emison argues, this dilemma meant painters, sculptors and humanists shared the same lot, "the conundrum of

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<sup>121</sup> "onde a' ttorito, o scrittori, l'avete lasciata fori del numero delle dett'arti liberali?", *ibid.* p. 236.

<sup>122</sup> "...non l'hanno nobilitata perché per sè medesima si nobilita senza l'aiutto del'altrui lingue, non altrimenti che si facciano l'eccecenti opere di natura", *ibid.* pp. 254 – 255.

<sup>123</sup> Emison, *Creating the "Divine" Artist: From Dante to Michelangelo*. p. 66.

transferring the concept of the liberal arts into a mercantile era”.<sup>124</sup> What they all needed to do was to “shift the definition of the liberal artist away from litmus tests about income towards ideological issues”.<sup>125</sup>

For painters and sculptors, the only way to be accepted as a liberal artist and yet continue to be financially supported by patronage was to change the definition of a liberal artist. This meant changing the relationship that they had with their patrons. If the painter or sculptor who follows the instruction of a patron is mechanical, then they must exert exclusive authority over their work. The transformation meant changing the definition of the liberal arts from a material one, money, to an immaterial one, intellectual freedom. A liberal artist in antiquity was free to study what he or she desired, as opposed to slaves who were forced to learn mechanical trades and work. In the Renaissance, the artisan who had sole authority of his own work was the new liberal artist as he was free to design as he wished.<sup>126</sup> Since the fourteenth-century, artists who were granted such freedom boasted about it. Lorenzo Ghiberti, who designed the doors to the Battistero di San Giovanni in Florence, which Michelangelo later dubbed “The Gates of Paradise”, boasted that in making the doors, “I was allowed to proceed in that way which I

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<sup>124</sup> Ibid. p. 67.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. p. 67.

<sup>126</sup> The masculine pronoun ‘he’ is used when referring to Renaissance artists as mentioned in Chapter One. However, both pronouns are used when referring to the liberal artist in antiquity as both young men and women in the Roman Empire of free birth were educated in the liberal arts. See Henri Irénée Marrou, *A history of education in antiquity* (London ;: New York : Sheed and Ward, 1956). p. 266-267.

believed would turn out most perfect, embellished, and rich”.<sup>127</sup> Vasari recounts how Michelangelo once told Pope Julius II, after the pontiff persistently queried him about the progress of Sistine Chapel ceiling, that it will be finished “when it satisfies me as an artist”.<sup>128</sup> By the mid-sixteenth century, Vasari felt free to go so far as to claim that “no artist had a duty to work; he works whenever and for whomever he chooses”.<sup>129</sup>

The status of the painter and sculptor in society undoubtedly increased as appreciation grew for the intellectual demands of their skills. By the sixteenth century, figures outside artistic circles began to reconsider the value of painting and sculpture and advocate for the dignity of the visual arts. Baldassare Castiglione was one of the first Italian Renaissance courtiers to promote painting as a liberal art. In his *Cortegiano*, or *The Book of the Courtier* (1528), Castiglione explains all the qualities that make the ideal courtier. Castiglione belonged to one of the upper social circles that painters and sculptors aspired to. He spent most of his working life under the service of Guidobaldo di Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino.<sup>130</sup> By the early-sixteenth

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<sup>127</sup> “la quale mi fu data licenza [che] io la conducessi in quel modo ch’io credessi tornasse più perfettamente e più ornate e più ricca”, Lorenzo Ghiberti, *I Commentari*, ed. Otavio Morisani (Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1947). p. 45.

<sup>128</sup> “...dimandandogli il Papa importunamente quando e’ finirebbe. Dove una volta fra l’altre gli rispose che ella sarebbe finita «quando io arò satisfatto a me nelle cose dell’arte».” Vasari, *Le vite de’ più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori*. VI, p. 37.

<sup>129</sup> “...gia non e niuno artefice obligato a lavorare, se non quando e per chi gli pare”, *ibid.* IV, p. 280.

<sup>130</sup> Baldassarre Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, ed. George Bull, Penguin classics. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976). p. 1.

century, some painters and sculptors had entered into respectable positions in the various Italian courts.<sup>131</sup> In *Cortegiano*, Castiglione writes that every courtier should study painting, “even if nowadays it may appear mechanical and hardly suited to a gentleman”.<sup>132</sup> They should studying painting because:

“in the ancient world, and in Greece especially, children of gentle birth were required to learn painting at school, as a worthy and necessary accomplishment, and it was ranked among the foremost of the liberal arts; subsequently, a public law was passed forbidding it to be taught to slaves.”<sup>133</sup>

The attitude was not isolated to courts. An increased respect for painters and sculptors existed in republics as well, whose wealth patrons distributed favour, wealth and increasing creative freedom to their preferred artists. However, the newfound respect shown to painters and sculptors, which put them on a societal par with the intellectuals of society, did not lead seamlessly to these painters and sculptors actually becoming intellectuals. It was, after all, only a small group of writers that were trying to convince society of the intellectual aspects of painting and sculpture. Both Alberti and Leonardo, in fact, were singled out by Burckhardt as ‘Renaissance’ men, being astoundingly talented in many disciplines. The expanding intellectual

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<sup>131</sup> For the full list of painters and sculptors who held positions in the Italian courts, see Warnke, *The court artist : on the ancestry of the modern artist*. p. 16.

<sup>132</sup> Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*. p. 96.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. p. 96.

activities of painters and sculptors discussed in Chapter Two, specifically their increasing philological interests, may reflect a mere curiosity rather than a deep desire to become intellectuals. The failure of one particular academy of art in sixteenth-century Rome contradicts the idea that all painters and sculptors wanted to become intellectuals themselves, even if they wanted the same level of respect.

Considering painters and sculptors as manual labourers was tied to the fact that they developed their skills in workshops as apprentices, as any other smith would have done in the fifteenth century. Therefore, leaving the workshop behind and studying at an academy of art was a vital step in the rise of the artist. These academies of art were, at least in theory, to be the equivalent of the intellectual academies of the fifteenth century, like Marsilio Ficino's *Accademia Platonica*, which was established under the patronage of Cosimo de' Medici.<sup>134</sup> The first academy of art was the *Giardino di San Marco* in Florence, established by Lorenzo 'the Magnificent' de Medici in the late-fifteenth century.<sup>135</sup> It was an opportunity for promising young sculptors, including Michelangelo, to study under Lorenzo's 'house sculptor' Bertoldo di Giovanni, with the aid of classical sculpture from Lorenzo's private collection.<sup>136</sup> However, there were very few parallels between this first

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<sup>134</sup> Ames-Lewis, *The intellectual life of the early Renaissance artist*. p. 59.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid. p. 58.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid. p. 58.

academy and the intellectual academies of the time. It is unlikely that there was any formal, systematic programme of study at the *Giardino*.<sup>137</sup> It is important to note, however, that this academy was not a workshop. Young artists did not perform manual labour in support of their master, like an apprentice in any trade would usually do. Rather, the young artists were simply there to learn.<sup>138</sup> The *Accademia del Disegno* was more like the *Giardino* than any of the intellectual academies of the time. Between 1575 and 1578, one of the members of the *Accademia*, Frederico Zuccaro, wrote a letter pleading for reform of its goals.<sup>139</sup> Zuccaro wrote that the *Accademia* should separate teaching from administration, weekly life-drawing lessons and a more comprehensive study of subjects such as mathematics and physics.<sup>140</sup> None of these suggestions were taken on board. Nikolaus Pevsner and Emison both argue that the *Accademia* only *seemed* to offer change from the guild system.<sup>141</sup> It was an academy in name more than in structure. Zuccaro's frustration led him to found a new academy of art in Rome, the *Accademia di San Luca*.

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid. p. 59.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. p. 59.

<sup>139</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, *Academies of art, past and present* (New York ;: Da Capo Press, 1973). p. 51.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. p. 51.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. p. 51, also see Emison, *Creating the "Divine" Artist: From Dante to Michelangelo*. P. 65.

Frederico Zuccaro (1543 – 1609) was born in Urbino and had worked as a painter throughout Italy, France, the Netherlands and England. Zuccaro was one of the painters who attempted to re-create the *Calumny of Apelles*; the lost painting Alberti had mentioned in *De Pictura*, discussed in Chapter Two. François Quiviger argues that Zuccaro believed painting was a noble pursuit on the same level as the sciences, echoing the writings of Leonardo.<sup>142</sup> The situation in Rome for painters and sculptors was relatively similar to the situation in Florence: painters and sculptors had remained in their various guilds since the Middle Ages.<sup>143</sup> Zuccaro's *Accademia di San Luca* opened in 1593 and began with lectures on art theory, including *grazia*, *historia*, Leonardo's *paragone* (the debate over the precedence of painting and sculpture) and regular "*conversazione virtuosa*" ("virtuous conversations"), for they were "the mother of all studies and the true source of every science".<sup>144</sup> Such a syllabus embodies all the notions in the treatises of Alberti and Leonardo. Ultimately, however, the *Accademia di San Luca* failed in 1602.<sup>145</sup> Zuccaro had asked painters and sculptors to lecture on many of these subjects. However, as these guest lecturers cancelled after accepting the invitation, Zuccaro was forced to lecture in many subjects in which he was not an expert. Romano Alberti, who attended some of these lectures,

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<sup>142</sup> François Quiviger, "Italian academies of the sixteenth century," in *Warburg Institute colloquia*, ed. David Chambers (London: The Warburg Institute, University of London, 1995). p. 110.

<sup>143</sup> Pevsner notes that the one difference between Rome and Florence is that the rise of the artist began with the sculptor in Rome, due to the works of Michelangelo. See Pevsner, *Academies of art, past and present*. p. 56.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid. p. 60.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. p. 61.

wrote in 1595 that the classes went nowhere, and that Zuccaro was running out of material.<sup>146</sup> None of the biographers of the painters who studied at the *Accademia* mention any role that the academy played in the formation of those painters.<sup>147</sup> Quiviger argues that Zuccaro was demanding too much from painters and sculptors who had received little training in public speaking, that is, in the art of rhetoric, so central to the liberal arts. Possibly many painters and sculptors were not as interested in being accepted in the literary world as Zuccaro would have thought. The failure of the *Accademia di San Luca* ultimately suggests that maybe it was only the elite painters and sculptors of the Renaissance who were really interested in and capable of expanding their intellectual horizon. For the rest, the goal of the learned artist creator may have seemed too ambitious.

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<sup>146</sup> “...non si fece niente, di sorte, che li buoni studji, incaminati dal S. Zuccaro bene presto mancarono”, *ibid.* p. 63.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.* p. 63.

## Chapter Four

### The Divine Artist

The rise of the Renaissance artist has thus far been seen through the influence of literature and particularly poetry, in order to show the cross-disciplinary connections that existed in the Renaissance. However, the metaphor of the divine artist in Dante's ekphrasis has been set aside since Chapter One. Although Alberti borrowed much from *The Divine Comedy*, he never invoked the image of the divine artist. Nor did Leonardo. Primarily, these two aimed to promote the rationality and the intellectual aspects of painting. The divine artist was therefore, of no use. However, it was this very metaphor given to Michelangelo that became the crowning glory of the visual arts. Once Michelangelo was dubbed *il divino* by Vasari, painters and sculptors no longer had to envy the respect given to other professions. The epithet *divino* had been used in Antiquity, as discussed in Chapter One, but historical roots of Michelangelo's *divino* lie in the term *grazia* ("grace"). It was the traditional definition of "grace" that, through generations of Renaissance art theorists, became the *divino* given to Michelangelo.

Grace, in ancient writings on the visual arts, was used to refer to the natural talent of an artisan. It was an unteachable skill and, just as the word suggests, it was a God-given gift. It was the opposite of *disciplina*, which meant study or education. Grace was an obstacle for writers like Alberti and Leonardo, who wanted to promote the rationality of the visual arts. Therefore, Alberti transformed it in *De Pictura*. It came to mean ‘art concealing art’, modelled on Horace’s “ars celars artem”. This was Albertian *grazia*, a learned skill (*disciplina*) that hides the painter’s efforts and translates as gracefulness, characterised by elegance, poise and subtlety. Albertian *grazia* opposed Plinian *gratia*, which is more like ‘grace’ in the sense of a divine blessing.<sup>148</sup> Plinian *gratia* is a God-given natural talent. The two definitions of *grazia* differ over the question of study and education (“*disciplina*”). Plinian *gratia* was the opposite of study, where Albertian *grazia* could be achieved through study. Vasari’s *divino*, which he bestows on Michelangelo, is the descendent of Plinian *gratia*; a God-given talent that cannot be taught or matched. This Chapter shows how Renaissance writers expanded upon Pliny’s notion of *gratia* and arrived at *divino*, the highest compliment paid to the Renaissance artist.

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<sup>148</sup> *Gratia* is the Latin equivalent of the Italian word *grazia*. Except in cases where I specifically refer to Pliny, I will use *grazia* to discuss the concept as the majority of writers discussed were writing in Italian.

Alongside Pliny’s chapters on art history in his *Naturalis Historia*, discussed in Chapter One, we should consider the writings the Roman architect Marcus Vitruvius Pollio (first-century B.C.). Vitruvius’ multi-volumed treatise, *De architectura*, became one of the most influential and enduring sources on Roman design and architecture. Leonardo da Vinci would later use Book III of the *De architectura* to sketch his famous ‘Vitruvian Man’ (see figure 5). Pliny and Vitruvius had disagreed over the importance of study and education (“*disciplina*”) with respect to one’s natural talents (Plinian *grazia*).

Vitruvius wrote that the architect, and by extension the artist, “must have both a natural gift and also readiness to learn. (For neither talent without instruction nor instruction without talent can produce the perfect artisan).”<sup>149</sup> Vitruvius’ belief that artistry required both study and natural talent was a

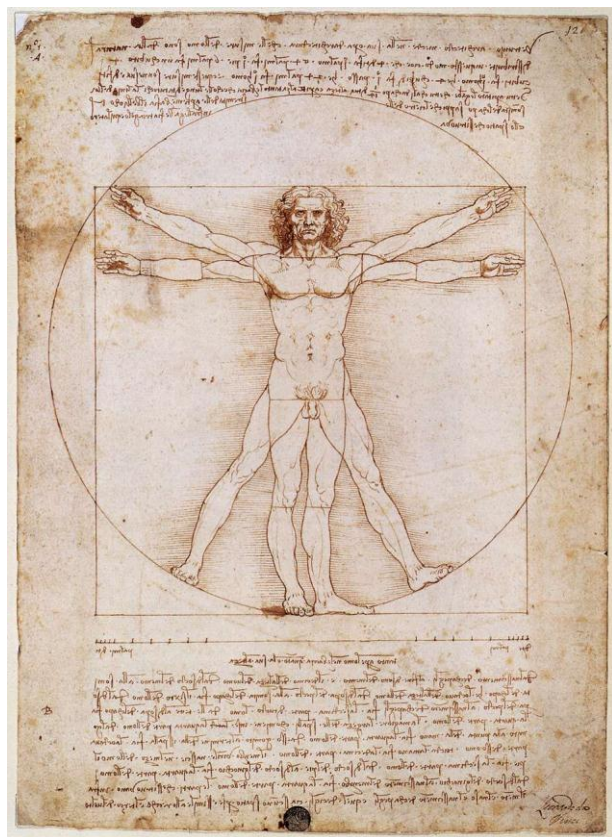


Figure 5 – Leonardo’s *Virtruvius Man*

<sup>149</sup> “Itaque eum etiam ingeniosum oportet esse et ad disciplinam docilem. Neque enim ingenium sine disciplina sine ingenio perfectum artificem potest efficere”, Pollio Vitruvius, *On architecture*, trans. Frank Granger, The Loeb classical library (London, New York: Heinemann; G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1931). I,i,3, p. 81.

widely-held attitude in Roman society, as it applied to many fields.<sup>150</sup> In oratory, for example, Quintilian wrote that “without natural gifts, technical rules are useless”, but similarly natural gifts “are of no profit in themselves unless cultivated by skilful teaching, persistent study and continuous and extensive practice in writing, reading and speaking”.<sup>151</sup> Quintilian even quoted Cicero as having said that even he relied on diligent study to substitute where he lacked talent.<sup>152</sup> Pliny, in *Naturalis Historia*, used different terminology but developed a similar division between unteachable skills, such as *audax* and *gratia*, and the more basic skills of painting, *ars*, which could obviously be developed with training. Pliny, however, placed greater value on the unteachable skills. Pliny introduced *miraculum* in art, meaning something that is miraculous and beyond ordinary accomplishments. It is best realised in Pliny’s version of the story of Protogenes, who was a Greek painter from the fourth-century B.C. and a rival of the legendary Greek painter Apelles. Protogenes grew frustrated with his attempt to paint the mythological figure Ialysos with his dog. His attempts seemed unnatural and it was clear to the observer that they were looking at a

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<sup>150</sup> Emison, *Creating the "Divine" Artist: From Dante to Michelangelo*. p. 20.

<sup>151</sup> “Illud tamen in primis testandum est, nihil praecepta atque artes ualere nisi adiuuante natura. Quapropter ei cui deerit ingenium non magis haec scripta sint quam de agrorum cultu sterilibus terris. Sunt et alia ingenita cuique adiumenta, uox, latus patiens laboris, ualetudo, constantia, decor, quae si modica optigerunt, possunt ratione ampliari, sed nonnumquam ita desunt ut bona etiam ingenii studiique corrumpant: sicut haec ipsa sine doctore perito, studio pertinaci, scribendi legendi dicendi multa et continua exercitatione per se nihil prosunt.”, Quintilian, *The major declamations ascribed to Quintilian: a translation*, trans. Lewis A. Sussman, Studien zur klassischen Philologie, (Frankfurt am Main ; New York: Verlag P. Lang, 1987). I, Preface, pp. 26-27.

<sup>152</sup> “Si quid et ingenii in me, quod sentio quam sit exiguum, et quo ingenio minus possum, subsidium mihi diligentia comparavi”, *ibid.* XI, I, 19, pp.165-67.

mere painting.<sup>153</sup> In his frustration he threw a sponge at the painting, which by chance, provided the perfect finish to the dog's foaming mouth. Pliny continues to recount how Protogenes' 'Ialysos' left Apelles speechless and later saved Rhodes in 305 B.C., as the invading Macedonian ruler Demetrios Poliorketes was moved by the townspeople's appeal to spare the city for it housed Protogenes' painting.<sup>154</sup> Pliny explains that "the dog in this picture is the outcome as it were of a miracle, since chance and not art alone, went to the painting of it".<sup>155</sup>

Here Pliny uses the term *mire* (uncommonly, wonderfully). In other occasions he uses the more explicit *miraculum* (miracle, wonder). They are both part of Pliny's way of expressing the inexplicable genius of particular artworks; art beyond rules, created by chance in this case. Pliny believed that there were artists who possessed an unteachable talent. The exemplar of this artist was Apelles. In his portrayal of Apelles, Pliny paved the way for the new category of the divine artist in the Renaissance.

Alberti, as discussed in Chapter Two, encouraged painters to expand their literary knowledge in order to find new *inventio* ("subject matter") to paint.

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<sup>153</sup> "displcebat autem ars ipsa nec minui poterat et videbatur nimia ac longius a veritate discedere", Pliny, *Natural History*, I. XXXV, p. 103.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid. XXXV, p. 102.

<sup>155</sup> "est in canis mire factus ut quem partier et casus pinxerit", ibid. XXV, 102.

Alberti believed that painters were capable of entering into the intellectual circles of the fifteenth century. His oft-quoted motto, “man can do all things if he wills”, was fundamental to Burckhardt’s choice of Alberti as the archetypal Renaissance man.<sup>156</sup> Attached to this optimistic outlook towards the capacity of man in general was the outright rejection of Pliny’s notion that there are some artists that possess an unteachable natural talent. Emison argues that Alberti could not “tolerate an excellence which is a peculiar talent of one person and not obtainable through education”.<sup>157</sup> Alberti’s theory of painting, the combination of *historia* and *inventio*, was an attempt to validate the logic and rationality of painting. This way Alberti could present painting “as an extension of humanism rather than anything remotely connected with mysticism”.<sup>158</sup> As Alberti stated himself: “the gifts of Nature should be cultivated and increased by industry, study and practice”.<sup>159</sup> This directly opposes Pliny. It is best seen in Alberti and Pliny’s differing perspectives on the work of Zeuxis, a fifth-century B.C. painter. Zeuxis had reportedly gathered a series of maidens to work as models in a painting of Helen of Troy. Pliny lamented Zeuxis’ use of so many models as overly-diligent (“*tantus*

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<sup>156</sup> Jacob Burckhardt, *The civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, Penguin classics. (London, England: Penguin Books, 2004). p. 103.

<sup>157</sup> Emison, *Creating the "Divine" Artist: From Dante to Michelangelo*. p. 32.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid. p. 33.

<sup>159</sup> “naturae dotes industria, studio atque exercitatione colendae”; “conviensi cultivare i beni della natura con studio ed essercizio”, Alberti, *On painting and On sculpture. The Latin texts of De pictura and De statua*. p. 103.

*diligentia*").<sup>160</sup> Alberti, on the other hand, praised Zeuxis for his diligence: "the most eminent, learned and skilled painter of all...not trusting rashly in his own talent like painters do now".<sup>161</sup>

Overcoming Pliny's notion of unteachable artistic talent was fundamental to Alberti's new theory. It conflicted with Alberti's entire argument. The logical target for Alberti was Apelles, the legendary Greek artist who, according to Pliny, surpassed all preceding and subsequent artists and epitomised *charis*, or grace.<sup>162</sup> The peculiarity of Apelles' legacy is that it was effectively indisputable in the Renaissance. None of Apelles' paintings had survived by the time Alberti wrote *De Pictura* in 1436. Pliny recounts how Apelles would admire his contemporaries' work, "praising every beauty and yet observing that they failed in the grace, called *charis* in Greek, which was distinctively his own".<sup>163</sup> Pliny presents Apelles not only as the greatest painter of Antiquity, but also as inseparable from *gratia*. As an historical precedent, Apelles was a considerable obstacle for Alberti. He could not

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<sup>160</sup> "Tantus diligentia" could also be translated as "with great care" but given that Pliny is criticising Zeuxis, the negative "too much care" or "overly diligent" is appropriate. See Pliny, *Natural History*, I. XXXV, 64. p. 138.

<sup>161</sup> "praestantissimus et omnium doctissimus et peritissimus pictor...non suo confisus ingenio temere, ut fere omnes hac aetate pictores", Alberti, *On painting and On sculpture. The Latin texts of De pictura and De statua*. p. 99.

<sup>162</sup> Pliny was writing some 400 years after Apelles' lifetime, hence he could compare him to both preceding and subsequent artists.

<sup>163</sup> "quorum opera cum admiraretur omnibus conlaudatis, deesse illam suam Venerem dicebat, qual Gracie Charita vocant, cetera omnia contigisse, sed hac sola sibi nemium parem", Pliny, *Natural History*, I. XXXV, 97. p. 141.

challenge the legend of Apelles nor dispute the claims of his innate gracefulness. Alberti, therefore, minimised Apelles as discussed in Chapter Two, referring to one of his lost works as a worthy *inventio* (“subject matter”). However, Alberti’s great moment of finesse, to borrow Emison’s phrasing, was in shunning *gratia* into a secondary role, dwarfed by the importance of *historia* (“visual narrative”) and *inventio*.<sup>164</sup> Alberti presents *gratia* as a synonym of elegance or poise, instead of using it in the sense of a blessing. He advises his reader: “let all the movements be restrained and gentle, and represent grace rather remarkable effort”.<sup>165</sup> Alberti’s *grazia* is Horace’s *ars celans artem*, “art is to conceal art”. Alberti, therefore, takes Horace’s theme and applies it to Pliny’s term *gratia*. In doing so, Alberti engages with the ancient precedent, yet he remoulds them both to fit his vision of painting. *Grazia* is no longer an innate talent but the painter’s skill in concealing his own skill.

Albertian *grazia* survived in Renaissance art writing well into the sixteenth century. Baldassare Castiglione, the courtier who advocated for the dignity of painting in Chapter Three, introduced the term *sprezzatura*, which could be translated as gracefulness or nonchalance. *Sprezzatura* is key to all the responsibilities of the ideal courtier, whose behaviour ought to reflect the nobility of the court. Therefore, *sprezzatura* applied to a courtier’s painting as

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<sup>164</sup> Emison, *Creating the "Divine" Artist: From Dante to Michelangelo*. p. 32.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid. p. 32.

well. The courtier should “conceal all art and make whatever is done or said appear to be without effort and almost with any thought about it”.<sup>166</sup>

*Sprezzatura* is therefore the heir to Albertian *grazia*, but also echoes the orator’s capacity to improvise and seem as if he has not prepared. As Quintilian explained, improvising is a skill aided by study: “we must develop it by gradual stages from small beginnings, until we have reached that perfection which can only be produced and maintained by practice.”<sup>167</sup> Castiglione continues: “from this [*sprezzatura*] I believe comes ample grace; because everyone knows the difficulty of things that are rare and well done; wherefore facility in such things causes the greatest wonder...we may call that art true art which does not seem to be art”.<sup>168</sup> Undoubtedly, Castiglione was too referencing the Horatian *ars celars artem*, art concealing art.

At the core of Albertian *grazia* and Castiglioneian *sprezzatura* is Horace’s art concealing art. This concept replaced the inimitability that was associated with Plinian *gratia*. When Pliny discusses Apelles’ *gratia*, he is essentially referring to Apelles’ inimitability; the fact that no other artist can imitate Apelles’ work. Pliny attributed this skill specifically to Apelles. It was a

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<sup>166</sup> “che nasconda l’arte e dimostri ciò che si fa e dice venir fatto senza fatica e quasi senza persarvi”, Baldassarre Castiglione, *The book of the courtier*, trans. Leonard Eckstein Opdycke (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2003). p. 35.

<sup>167</sup> “ets facilitatem quoque extemporalem a parvis initiis paulatim perducemus ad summam, quae neque perfici neque contineri nisi usu potest”, Quintilian, *The major declamations ascribed to Quintilian: a translation*. X, vii, 18. p. 72.

<sup>168</sup> “Da questo credo io che dirivi assai la grazia; perchè delle cose rare e ben fatta ognun sa la difficoltà, onde in esse la facilità genera grandissima meraviglia...sì o dir quella esser ver arte che non par esser arte”, Castiglione, *The book of the courtier*. p. 35.

natural gift that Apelles was endowed with. There is a subtle yet fundamental difference in Horace's *ars celans artem*. If art conceals that it is art, as Horace believed it should, then it is logically very difficult to imitate. To use a modern example, it is like an illusionist at a magic show who conceals what really happens with false ceilings and mirrors. If the illusionist reveals his or her methods (or 'art') then it is much easier to imitate. However, if all is concealed, then the audience members have very little hope of repeating the same illusion themselves. It is essentially the same relationship between inimitability and art. If the artist conceals his methods, then his work is difficult to imitate. However, this is not because of the natural talent of the artist, as Pliny's suggested with Apelles. Rather, it is a skill that one artist can teach another. This concept that Alberti and Castiglione drew from Horace allows inimitability in art to be treated like any other teachable skill. Therefore art could be considered as a rational activity, which Alberti thought was necessary to reconcile art into the humanist culture.

Presenting painting as a rational and intellectual discipline was Alberti's aim. Others in the sixteenth century, like Leonardo, continued to argue along the same lines as Alberti. The failed *Accademia di San Luca* discussed in Chapter Three testifies to the fact that whilst painters and sculptors wanted the respect that intellectuals received, the vast majority did not necessarily want to be intellectuals themselves. In the early-fifteenth century, that is, when Alberti was writing *De Pictura*, painters and sculptors may have never even dreamt of enjoying the status of intellectual in society. However, two

centuries later, the status of intellectuals may have not appeared the unachievable goal that it once was. Botticelli, Leonardo, Raphael and Michelangelo, to name but a few, had illustrious careers and were sought out throughout the Italian peninsula and beyond by the courts and patrons of the republics. To put it simply: why should the artist be content with being equal in society to the intellectual? Could he not become something more and something greater? Vasari undoubtedly believed something along these lines. Vasari placed artists above all others. He considered them to be the re-discoverers of the 'perfection of the arts', which was to him, the Renaissance. Furthermore, he placed the finest artist, Michelangelo, above all men. Michelangelo was not only abundant with Plinian *gratia* ("natural talent"), but he was *il divino*, who according to Vasari, was sent down to earth by "the benign ruler of heaven...to teach us how to achieve perfection in design".<sup>169</sup>

Giorgio Vasari's *Lives* was first published in Florence in 1550, and later partially re-written and published again in 1568. It is, as Ernst Gombrich argues, "perhaps the most famous, and even today the most-read work of the older literature of art".<sup>170</sup> It is overwhelming similar to Pliny's chapters on painting from his *Naturalis Historia*. It is, however, the differences between

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<sup>169</sup> "il benignissimo Rettore del cielo volse clemente gli occhi alla terra, e veduta la vana infinità di tante fatiche...per cavarci di tanti errori si dispose mandare in terra uno spirito che universalmente ni ciascheduna arte et in ogni professione fusse abile, operando per sé solo, a mostrare che cosa sia la perfezione dell'arte del disegno...", Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori*.VI, p. 3.

<sup>170</sup> Ernst Gombrich, "The Literature of Art," *Art documentation : bulletin of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 11, no. 1 (Spring 1992). p. 665.

Pliny and Vasari that reflect the epochal differences between Antiquity and the Renaissance.

Vasari's history of art was a series of biographies of contemporary artists. The careers of those artists were grouped into three artistic ages. The third age, which Vasari calls "*moderna*", is typified by "*disegno perfetto e grazia divina*" ("perfect design and divine grace").<sup>171</sup> The problematic nature of *grazia* and its now altered definition is clear in Vasari's biography of Raffaello da Urbino, or more commonly known in English as Raphael. Raphael, in Vasari's opinion, is a man "accompanied by such grace, industry, looks, modesty, and excellence of character", and he attributes both Raphael and his works as "accompanied by much grace".<sup>172</sup> However, Vasari's use of *grazia* follows neither of the precedents set by Pliny or Alberti. It would translate as literally as graceful but does not carry with it the Horatian idea of concealing the painter's efforts. Raphael was not the most naturally gifted artist in Vasari's eyes, but rather a diligent student, who wasted time in trying to surpass the God-given talents of his peers, particularly Michelangelo. Vasari finishes his biography of Raphael on a cynical note to the over-zealous painter:

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<sup>171</sup> Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori*. IV, p. 8.

<sup>172</sup> "accompagnate da tanta grazia, studio, bellezza, modestia e costumi buoni", *ibid.* IV, p. 156.

Everyone should be content to do what he feels is natural to him and should never, merely to emulate others, want to try his hand at something for which he has no natural gift; otherwise he will labour in vain, and often to his own shame and loss. Moreover, when he has done his best a painter should not try to do even better in order to surpass those whom God and nature have made so gifted that their work seems almost miraculous. For if he lacks the ability, whatever his efforts he will never be able to achieve what another painter, with the help of nature, can take in his stride.<sup>173</sup>

Far from finding Alberti inspirational, Vasari disagrees with his predecessor's warning against the over-reliance on one's own natural talent. Instead, Vasari reinforced the Plinian criticism of the over-zealous Zeuxis and devalues study ("*disciplina*"). For Vasari, all the study in the world could not match a God-given talent. This triumphant statement of the Plinian ideal laid the groundwork for Michelangelo to become *il divino*.

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<sup>173</sup> "Dovrebbe ciascuno contentarsi di fare volentieri quelle cose alle quali si sente da naturale istinto inclinator, e non volere por mano, per gareggiare, a quello che non gli vien dato dalla natura, per non faticare invano e spesso con vergogna e danno. Oltre ciò, quando basta il fare, non si dee cercare di volere strafare per passare innanzi a coloro che, per grande aiuto di natura e per grazie patricolare data da loro da Dio, hanno fatto o fanno miracoli nell'arte: perciò che chi non è atto a una cosa, non potrà mai, et affatichisi quanto vuole, arivare dove un altro con l'aiuto della natura è caminato agevolmente", *ibid.* IV, p. 207.

## Epilogue

### Word and Image

The difference between word and image lies at the heart of this thesis. It not only divides modern academic Renaissance study into the literal and the visual, but it conditioned the position of poets and artists held in the Renaissance. Since Antiquity, the similarity between word and image has been well articulated through writers like Simonides and Horace. However, these commonalities did not translate into equality for those who mastered these disciplines. The fact that painted and sculpted images were the product of one's hand meant that the intellectual processes involved were disregarded. The written word was considered to be the product of the mind, whilst the painted or sculpted image was the fruit of manual labour. Convincing society that the visual arts were the product of the mind as well as the trained hand was the challenge taken up by Alberti and later by Leonardo. Did they succeed? In certain aspects, they certainly did. Painters responded enthusiastically to Alberti's encouragement that they should engage with literary sources, as evidenced by those who depicted the *Calumny of Apelles*: artists like Botticelli, whose late-fifteenth-century response to the Albertian programme, as we saw in Chapter Two, was profound and sophisticated. However, when Frederico Zuccaro attempted in the 1590s to realise the arguments that Alberti and Leonardo had made in his *Accademia di San Luca*, it ultimately failed because there were not enough painters and sculptors who wanted to lecture and take part in such an intellectually-based environment. It is unlikely that very many Renaissance

painters and sculptors truly became learned artist creators. Therefore, the inter-disciplinarity of the Renaissance should not be exaggerated. Apart from the elite few that we call 'Renaissance men', most painters and sculptors never became as talented with the written or spoken word as they were with the brush or chisel.

How much credit for the rise of the Renaissance artist can be attributed to Alberti's and Leonardo's writings? This question is much more difficult to answer. By the time painters and sculptors rose to positions of nobility in the courts of the Italian peninsula and were granted such creative freedom by patrons, their position in society had undoubtedly increased.<sup>174</sup> However, were these princes and patrons convinced of the value of art, and the nobility of the artist, because Alberti and Leonardo had written that art was an intellectual activity? It is unlikely. Textual evidence is generally more accessible to the historian and, according to Ames-Lewis, more concrete and less open to interpretation than the visual image.<sup>175</sup> Therefore, it is easy to exaggerate the importance of textual evidence and in this case, the influence that these treatises may have had. It is far more likely that the patrons and princes were convinced by the artworks produced.

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<sup>174</sup> See Stephen J. Campbell and Evelyn Welch, *Artists at court: image-making and identity, 1300-1550*, Fenway Court (Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 2004).

<sup>175</sup> Ames-Lewis, *The intellectual life of the early Renaissance artist*. p. 13.

This thesis is primarily focused on textual evidence. The Botticelli illustrations in Chapter Two serve a secondary purpose - to prove that the writings of Alberti did influence painters and sculptors in the fifteenth century and that Botticelli in particular had become a most studious Dante-scholar. The difference between word and image, therefore, affects this thesis itself. The accessibility of textual evidence means that this thesis has favoured 'words about art' over 'images of art'. Just like the painters and sculptors who did not show to lecture in Zuccaro's *Accademia*, I am more comfortable and capable doing what I have been trained to do, that is, writing essays and reading books. However, this does not make textual evidence superior to visual evidence. Jacob Burkhardt, the father of Renaissance studies, originally set out to write a history of Renaissance art. The project eventually became 'The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy' (*Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*).<sup>176</sup> Therefore, it was the visual evidence of the Renaissance that inspired the first comprehensive studies of the Renaissance. This experience is probably even more common today, as most people could name more Renaissance artists than Renaissance poets. The paintings, sculptures and architectural feats of the Renaissance, at least in popular culture today, are far more familiar than any of its literary achievements.

Finally, I would like to reflect briefly on the impact that word and image have on modern historical understanding of the Renaissance. Undoubtedly, the visual evidence of Renaissance art testifies for itself of the grandeur of

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<sup>176</sup> Burkhardt, *The civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. p. ix.

this period. It overcomes all language barriers and has been appreciated by centuries' worth of visitors to the galleries, museums, basilicas and churches of Western Europe. In the textually-based approach of this thesis, I took Vasari's written praise of Michelangelo to be the pinnacle of praise for an artist. But was it? Certainly in the realm of literature, it was. But if textual and visual evidence are both considered, side by side, which has really done more for the reputation of Michelangelo? Do we consider Michelangelo great because we read he was great, or because we came to that conclusion ourselves after seeing his art? Vasari took a particular line from Virgil's *Aeneid* that he included at the beginning and end of his *Lives*. It reads: "I will make known that in this safe haven these men never perished, nor were vanquished by death".<sup>177</sup> The 'safe haven' that Vasari gave to Michelangelo was his *Lives*, which has endured to today. The indirect textual evidence of Michelangelo's career may have very well done as much for Michelangelo's reputation as the direct visual evidence, his art. Ultimately, Vasari's *Lives* is a lot like Dante's ekphrasis. It does not show the artwork in question, but describes it and its divine maker at length. It positions the reader to contemplate how impressive the artwork must be. What Dante did with imaginary sculptures, Vasari does for the reader who is not yet familiar (or only vaguely familiar) with Michelangelo's work. Words have an incredible power to condition how one sees an image.

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<sup>177</sup> "Hac sospite nymquam hos perisse viros, victos avt morte fatebor", Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architettori*. VI, p. 418.

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