Contents

Introduction  1

I  Franciscanism, the Laity, and Portraits  19
The Munich Crucifixion — Giotto and the portrait — The Franciscan impulse —
On Francis and self-loss — Incommensurability of human and divine spheres

II  The Democratization of the Portrait, 1270–1320  43
Varieties of supplicant portrait — Hegel on embedded portraits

III  Historiography and Method  67
Rumohr and Burckhardt on Giotto — Twentieth-century views of Giotto —
Sociologies and anthropologies of art — The art of praise — Art and beauty —
Allegories and narratives — Sacred art and secular modernity

IV  Witnesses  113
The Presentation of Christ in the Temple — Witnessing and recognition —
Witnessing and the portrait — The midwives — The Lamentation over
the Body of Christ — Proto-portraits
v Interlopers 157

Vasari on the Trecento — Stefano Fiorentino and Giotto di Maestro Stefano — The San Remigio Pietà — The Ponce Annunciation — The Lamentation on panel — Vasari on the three manners of Trecento painting — Giotto and compagnia — The mourners — I Niccodemi — The original installation of the panels — The funerary image — Harmony and discord — Doublings and merisms — The superimposed chessboards — Unity of person and unity of picture — Opacity of the embedded portrait — Open and closed form

vi The Classic Art History of the Portrait 233

Erwin Panofsky, 1953 — Bridget of Sweden and iconography — Alois Riegl, 1902 — Erich Auerbach on realism — Aby Warburg, 1902

vii Fra Angelico and the Portrait 263

Giotto, Giottino ... — Fra Angelico and Rogier van der Weyden — Vasari’s “Giottino romance” — Last remarks on the modern sacred art

Excursus: Reference and Likeness 295

Acknowledgments 312

Notes 314

Index 357

Credits 366
Introduction

Two Florentine paintings, roughly contemporary, depict, alongside the holy personages, modern supplicants—decorous, attentive figures, kneeling, with palms pressed together in prayer. In the altarpiece by Agnolo Gaddi from the Dominican church of Santa Maria Novella in Florence and now in Parma, dated 1375, the outsider is a small kneeling woman in the lower left in a grey robe and white wimple. She is recommended to Christ, by way of his mother, by St. Peter Martyr (ill. 0.1). The saint, blood still dripping from his wounds, signals his sponsorship of the supplicant with an inclusive gesture of his right arm. Mary acknowledges the request and relays it to Christ with a similar gesture. On the right side of her throne, a kneeling St. Thomas Aquinas mirrors Peter Martyr’s gesture. But the place he points to is unoccupied. Perhaps the painter left an open slot for a future, still undetermined candidate.

The painter has adjusted the sizes of the beings such that there are four or even five different scales. Mary, should she stand up, would tower over everyone. The standing saints—Dominic, the two Johns, and St. Lawrence—are larger than the kneeling Dominicans, Peter Martyr and Thomas Aquinas. The angels are pint-sized, and the female supplicant still smaller. The variations in scale give the artwork a pulsing but discreet musicality, and a sense of hierarchy and artificiality sustaining the overall solemn, expectant tone.

The supplicant inhabits a shallow layer of pictorial space, secured by a strip of ground plane (detail, p. x). Her capacity to share that space symbolizes access to the sacred figures, who are presented in a state of alertness, as if in audience. The depicted or virtual space does not describe any place: it is just a painting, a way of making available to the senses an ideal or desired relation between this world and another. The painting diagrams the opening of lines...
of communication between the living and the dead, and between the profane and the sacred spheres.

Agnolo’s altarpiece is a large work, measuring two meters across, and would be larger still if it had not lost its old frame, the gilt and carved wooden pinnacles that once enclosed the three arched compartments. The work once stood on an altar. An older-style altarpiece would have been literally compartmentalized, figures penned in by internal frames. Agnolo and his patrons dispensed with the internal furniture, such that the figures occupy a unified space. Still, the values of surface pattern prevail; the pendulum-like arms, the tilting flower, staff, sword, and book, and the cut of the robes all create pattern, giving the picture its hieratic yet gravely animated tone. The painter learned this art of pattern from the magnificent Strozzi altarpiece (1354–57), also at Santa Maria Novella, by Orcagna (ill. 5.7).

One is reminded of the writer Harold Acton’s admiration for the “rhythmic movement . . . strength, swiftness, grace and, in a word, significance of line” of the Trecento painters: “With the simplest means they achieved the most powerful effects.”3 The stiffness and limited interaction—the non-psychological character of the encounters—is a vestige of the old physical compartmentalization. The figures ease into the space now opened up for them, as if awakening brightly from a slumber.

The small kneeling woman in grey wears what appears to be clerical garb (detail, p. x). But costume can be misleading. This was also the typical dress of a Dominican tertiary—a kind of adjunct member of a religious order—or a member of a confraternity, a community of lay devout. An inscription still visible in the eighteenth century said that the painting had belonged to a suppressed compagnia associated with Santa Maria Novella, a term referring perhaps to a confraternity, perhaps to a trade association.

In the second painting, in Ponce, Puerto Rico, the man in blue is also diminished in scale (ill. 0.2). This picture is similar in size to the work in Parma, but it is completely different in kind.4 It depicts not a hierarchical company of saints, but an event: the Annunciation to Mary. Values of pattern give way to a drama of the relation of bodies, and an experience of encounter and shock hinted at by postures and gestures. The kneeling figures, angel and man, and the enthroned Virgin are not submitted to a compartmentalized design, but rather plausibly placed on a ground plane, occupying a convincing space that is interrupted at the rear, however, by a sheer wall of gold. The painting’s original location as well as its author are unknown. The work may have stood on an altar mensa, for by this time the Annunciation was established as acceptable subject matter for an altarpiece. But it may also have been mounted independently, on a wall, perhaps in association with a tomb. The painting is in poor condition and has been heavily restored. But its concept is legible. The person kneeling in the center is a layman. He wears a hooded blue cloak over a blue tunic. He presses his hands together in prayer, facing the Virgin Mary seated on a throne. Behind the man looms the angel Gabriel.
0.2 Jacopo di Cione, *Annunciation*, 1370s?
Panel, 131.5 × 132.1 cm. Ponce, Museo de Arte.
The supplicant is stationed between the two historical actors, conveying the vividness of the man’s mental recreation of the biblical event. The picture publishes an increasingly widely shared tendency among laypersons no longer to be content with formal submission to rite and custom, symbolizing subordination to God, but instead to cultivate—as clerics did—religious experiences.

Neither angel nor Mary takes any notice of him—it would be unthinkable! Narrative pictures such as this one never depict, as Agnolo Gaddi’s altarpiece did, interaction between a modern intruder and the historical actors. The hooded man in blue is lodged in the scene—not just perched on the edges and spying in his mind’s eye on the event, but right there, really occupying space on the floor. There is no depicted interaction in the Ponce Annunciation because the modern mortals and the historical characters occupy the same space. The unreal, abstract space of the Dominican polyptych, by contrast—and paradoxically—permitted just such an interaction.

The supplicants in both these paintings are barely particularized, if at all. Yet they are not generic or symbolic worshippers but rather the images of real persons. Images that refer or point to real persons are called portraits. The incursion into a narrative scene of a portrait of a modern devout is not a depiction of time travel but rather an affirmation of the worshipper’s psychic and emotional involvement with the scriptural stories. Both pictures also represent the urgent pleas of their patrons—the woman in grey and the man in blue very likely paid for these works—for recognition by the saints and an ensuing salvational preferment.

Agnolo Gaddi’s work depicted a hierarchical system, a cosmos, within which all entities have their place. The structure of this system is immutable, but the occupants are in motion. The living are always becoming the dead. There is the triage of the saved, the damned, and those sent to wait in Purgatory. The woman’s prayer and its acknowledgement by the saints represent a short circuit in the system, an attempt to jump the queue and win an early guarantee of salvation. Contact is made between one vessel or compartment and another, compartments that—according to some theologians—ought to remain separate. The physical partitioning of the old polyptychs represented the distinctness and independence of the levels of reality. In Agnolo’s modular painting, the short circuit or contact is represented by a transgression of the boundaries between the painting’s compartments, now no longer enforced by carpentry. In the Annunciation in Ponce, by contrast, the devout patron’s bid for advancement is represented by a sharing of virtual space that interferes with the realist logic implied by that space.

The Annunciation in Ponce is usually attributed to Jacopo di Cione, one of the brothers of Andrea di Cione, known as Orcagna, author of the Strozzi altarpiece. At least one authority, however, Raimond van Marle, assigned it to Agnolo Gaddi, the painter of the Parma altarpiece. Agnolo and the brothers Cione were collaborating in these years. The merchant of Prato, Francesco Datini, commissioned works from both Jacopo di Cione and Agnolo Gaddi. They represent the
second generation of the succession to the pioneer Giotto, the fountainhead of the Florentine tradition. Jacopo had been trained by his older brother Andrea, who had worked under Giotto. Agnolo was the son of Taddeo Gaddi, Giotto’s principal disciple, and he himself was the teacher of Cennino Cennini, the painter and author of a treatise on painting, the *Libro dell’arte*.

The big breakthroughs in the democratization of portraiture came during Giotto’s lifetime. Since antiquity, likenesses had been fashioned only of the most worthy and distinguished subjects. Elites were portrayed, more or less lifelike, on tombs, in the mosaic apses of churches, and in illuminated Books of Hours and other prayer books. Beginning in the late thirteenth century, affluent but non-noble Christians could for the first time also aspire to portrayal. Paintings and sculptures pictured for the first time the pious longings of lay worshippers. Inscriptions specifying prayer formulas were sometimes in the vernacular. What do we call these people? They are patrons, donors, founders, owners, supplicants, petitioners, votaries, or witnesses, depending on whether they are paying for something, giving something, asking for something, hoping for something, or testifying to something. Communication between the living and the dead was achieved by prayer, meditation, and participation in ritual. Now for the first time these existential engagements were fixed and broadcast as images.

This book tracks the portrayals of modern devout appended to or embedded in sacred painting, especially in Florence and Siena, throughout the fourteenth century and into the next. The embedded portrait is read as an index of the pressure of laywomen and laymen claiming for themselves what for centuries had been the privilege of a superelite, princely and cleric. Artists were asked to accommodate the portrait of the layperson, which enters sacred painting alongside the image of St. Francis of Assisi, carrying with it the tumultuous impulses introduced into religious life by Francis. Artists later on will learn to lean into those impulses, may even locate art’s vocation in confusion or move to the arrhythmy of the inner chaos; but at this point, not so much. Religion could only tolerate so much freedom of the divergent, formless sort, as opposed to the convergent freedom associated with “truth” (ἀλήθεια, the unconcealed) in John 8:32.

The narrative of this book moves from Giotto at the start of the fourteenth century, to the powerful but little-understood mid-century painter Giotto di Stefano (known as Giottino, an artist who worked side by side with Agnolo Gaddi and perhaps as well with Jacopo di Cione), to Fra Angelico, the Dominican friar-painter who carried themes and techniques from Giotto’s century into the next. The book is not a catalogue or survey of this material, but an argument about fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century painting structured around the concept of embedded portraiture. There are,
in fact, innovative and significant examples from all over the Italian peninsula, and in the interest of telling a coherent story I have not done justice to them. A famous example is the lunette-shaped panel by Paolo Veneziano (1339) mounted on the tomb of the Doge Francesco Dandolo in the church of the Frari in Venice (ill. 0.3, and see below, pp. 20, 198). St. Francis, bending inward with the frame, presents the Doge. The infant Christ offers recognition and blessing. Mary looks out at us and points to the Doge. On the right, St. Elizabeth of Portugal (or Hungary) presents her protégée the Dogaressa. Angels stretch a cloth behind the Virgin. There is also important fourteenth-century material from beyond Italy, especially in Avignon, Spain, and Bohemia.

But the Tuscan focus of this book is not arbitrary, nor is it, I hope, an unthinking historiographical reflex. It is justified, I believe, by the radicality and often priority of the extant Florentine examples, and the many variations on the new formulas that relayed the problem of the portrait forward into the fifteenth century and beyond.

The topics of the revival of portraiture in the late Middle Ages as well as the phenomenon of lay piety have hardly been neglected by recent scholarship. The desires, the aspirations, and the initiatives of the laity, as well as of the ordinary, nonaristocratic clergy, have been the focus of arguably the most innovative research in the entire field of late-medieval art history over the last decades. The present book builds on this scholarship.
Art history is also the history of artistic form. Whatever contribution to culture (collective mentalities, symbolic economies, ideology) an artwork makes is accomplished by form. Artistic form, in premodernity, was above all beautiful form. The purpose of a sacred artwork was to present an image of a beautiful reality (the divine sphere), to adorn and so upgrade prosaic environments and routines, and finally to translate the dramas and conflicts of history and myth into the language of form — good form and bad form, harmony and dissonance. Artistic beauty is anything but a simple affair. It is difficult to create, and it is difficult to assess. Broken forms, grotesque or diabolical affronts to harmony, may also contribute to the overall and decisive beauty of the work. The purpose of artistic beauty, the purpose of art itself, was (and in many ways still is) to stir the emotions.

At the heart of the book is a famous painting by the painter known as Giottino, a Lamentation over the Body of Christ, or Pietà, a work that emerged, I will argue, out of a milieu of innovation in the middle decades of the fourteenth century in Florence, involving an exchange of ideas among several painters including Giovanni da Milano and the brothers Cione, among them Jacopo di Cione, the presumed author of the Annunciation in Ponce. I will further propose that the Ponce Annunciation was a complement or even a pendant of Giottino’s Lamentation. The work by Giottino was extravagantly praised by Giorgio Vasari, the sixteenth-century historian of Italian art (ill. 0.4). The beauty of the painting for Vasari was its unity, a melding of tones and softening of contours overriding the contrasts between the composed and the distressed figures, and between the competing psychological themes of anguish and resignation. The artist introduced into his work the portraits of two modern female figures. Vasari, in his description of the painting, did not mention the portraits, as if they did not properly belong to the work.

The rebus-quality of some devotional pictures, the diagramming of devotional commitments, the patrons’ desire for publicity — all this may conflict with an artist’s will to beauty. The portraits interrupt the beautiful surface, for modern votaries, no matter how finely clothed or decorously posed, can never compete with the holy personages. The petitioners, by barging in, risk adulterating the very artifacts they have sponsored. The referential anchor of the portrait mars the works. The portraits’ content is supposedly the humility, even the nullity, of the devout, especially in the Franciscan context. This clashes with the basic drive to create fine artifacts. By the same token, however, the disjunction between the portraits and their pictorial hosts figures an unbridgeable chasm between humans and God. So, the artworks are expressions of a longing to communicate with divinity, expressions that also suggest the futility of such attempts.

The translation (< Latin *translatio*, a carrying across) of the devout’s body into the painting both measures the distance and concedes the immeasurability. This corresponds to the distinction between the literary translation that strives to close the gap between two languages, and the translation that honors that gap by making it visible.
Vasari prized the unity of an artwork, and the embedded portrait threatened just this. Referential, undercoded (because striving for fidelity to appearance), and a direct link to reality, the portrait threw into relief the symbolic, overcoded (because governed by conventions), and unreal quality of the depictions of Christ, Mary, and the saints. The portrait was linked to a lifeworld, a real world either directly known to the painting’s first beholders or more or less imaginable to later beholders or even to us today. By contrast, the rest of the picture renders personages, situations, and events completely unknown to any of us, glimpses of a mythic reality or, if you prefer, a more real reality beyond the sensible phenomena. The portrait creates a schism within a religious painting, splitting it into hierarchically organized levels of reality. The embedded portrait provokes, even awaits, a levelling by art, a flowing together on the level of painted form of the sacred and the profane. The painters will seek to integrate the portraits into art. Increasingly dissatisfied—or responding to the dissatisfaction of their clients and patrons—with the collage or modular approaches, and with the unreal discrepancies of scale, artists will learn to fold the portraits not only into the scene, but also into the composition. The artists will learn to modulate the patron’s ego-driven requests by merging them into the formal logic of the artworks. The reconciliation of sacred and profane will be justified by style, pattern, harmony, and the beauty that was the essential content of even the simplest sacred pictures, whose basic responsibility was to praise God. Beauty was an offering.

In the long run, under the pressure to unify the depiction as an artwork, the patron will just have to withdraw. She or he is all too present and too competitive with the artist. The conflict of wills between patron and artist, still latent in the Middle Ages, emerges into the open in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The resolution of this struggle in favor of the artist—that we call modern painting, and eventually Modernism. A modern painting is entirely under the control of its maker. Symbolic of this principle is the integration of all forms and depicted bodies into a single overall gestalt. Already the Mannerist painting of the sixteenth century and its spokesperson Vasari strove for such an integration. The first art theorist to spell out this ideal clearly was Roger de Piles in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. De Piles wrote of a work’s “unity of effect” and of the aesthetic impact of the tout ensemble. Thomas Puttfarken in his commentary on De Piles makes it clear that the threat to the unified composition was the depicted body. The composition called for an “overall way of looking—aspective, perspectival, au coup d’oeil, an artificial kind of looking—while an illusionistically present body would not.” The image of the body, borrowing its presence from real bodies, makes a claim upon a form of attentiveness that would detach the body from its less interesting surroundings.

The potential insubordination of the body becomes for some modern painters a theme. They make paintings that hang together but are threatened by rifts between body and surroundings, or between body and body. I am
thinking of a work such as the *Feast of Bacchus* by Diego Velázquez (1628–29) (ill. 0.5). Bacchus, god of winemaking and of festivity, and another seminude figure hold court in the lordly manner known from depictions of the Greek and Roman myths. They preside over a rowdy company of modern working-class men as well as two or three soldiers and a beggar. The painting’s other title is *Los Borrachos* (The Drunkards). Velázquez restores anachronistically the modular, paratactic, and hierarchical approach to composition that we saw in Agnolo Gaddi’s altarpiece in Parma (ill. 0.1). The painter draws a distinction, within his painting, between the less real and the more real, so exposing the fault lines concealed by the axiom of integrated composition. The painting’s overall formal coherence is secure. The rift opens on the level of content. The drinkers are avatars, or beings who have “crossed over” from another sphere. The picture generates the uncanny effect of an entanglement of levels of reality, a confusion and contamination that—this supreme artist is telling us—is not an exceptional trick but the very nature of art. The art of painting, according to Velázquez, is built around the gradient between more and less fictional realms. Velázquez summons the memory of the sacred paintings breached by lay donors. He goes on to suggest that creativity itself is bacchic, a sacred intoxication encouraging a disrespect for borders, and a habitation, all at once, of real and more real spheres. The exposure of the seams in this painting reveals both the holistic power of the aesthetic force field—the capacity of
an image to hold it all together—and the artist’s answering power to switch off that force field if he so desires. In general, this book is an attempt to think about portraits from the point of view not of the patrons but of the artists.

What follows is the plan of the book—perhaps better, the floor plan. The reader may choose to linger in one room, then cross the hall and explore another room, avoid some rooms altogether, and so forth.

Chapter 1, “Franciscanism, the Laity, and Portraits,” presents a painting attributed by some to Giotto himself, by others to his workshop: a Crucifixion with St. Francis of Assisi and two modern worshippers, depicted in the same scale as the historical figures. This relatively small picture introduces several of the book’s themes: the new desire of nonaristocratic laity, as well as non-elite clergy, to see themselves portrayed; the technical achievement of the depiction of physiognomic likeness—or even the appearance of clothes, because a man or a woman’s robe may also be portrayed; and Francis’s teachings as a paradoxical context for many early portraits, encouraging the individual to picture for herself or himself the sacred personages, to join them in their sorrows and their trials, and yet to draw from those inner experiences the lesson of one’s own lowliness. The portraits seem to acknowledge the fragility of a public, social self even as they present an ordered image of that self.

Chapter 2, “The Democratization of the Portrait, 1270–1320,” sketches the emergence of the institution of the supplicant portrait in the last decades of the thirteenth and first decades of the fourteenth centuries. The basis was the portraiture of superelites, lay and clerical, especially in the circles of the French royal court in Paris and the Île-de-France, and of the papacy in Rome, in tombs, mosaics, ivories, and illuminated manuscripts. Nonaristocratic (though still privileged and affluent) devout encroach upon this domain, commissioning similar if less splendid works. The chapter concludes with a discussion of comments by G. W. F. Hegel, in his Lectures on Fine Arts (1820s), on a sixteenth-century Dutch religious painting with several portraits of devout patrons. Hegel saw the faces of these moderns as divided between piety and worldliness. This equivocality interferes with the artwork’s essential function, which was to express Spirit as carried by the Christian faith. The depicted apostles and other saints with their single-minded fervor do this more ably. The partial failure of the portrait is for Hegel emblematic of the predicament of a “Romantic” or modern Christian art, which must fall away from the Ideal because Christianity itself is no longer confident that beautiful artistic form is capable of conveying Truth. Modern art’s best chance of expressing Truth is to take as its models the most spiritual faces found in real life, and, failing that, to represent the traces of the Truth in Christ’s life on earth, namely, his Passion and destruction and the laments it provoked. Christianity no longer supports beautiful form. Hegel thus frames the modern attitude to religion and art:
Chapter 3 comprises a series of reflections on historiography and method, which may be read as a response to Hegel’s challenge. The first part of this chapter is about the nineteenth- and twentieth-century understanding of Giotto. I do not wish to give the impression that this book is mainly about Giotto. It is not—but the reception of Giotto, the most famous artist of his century, is revealing of more general modern attitudes to premodern sacred art. Modernity, increasingly alienated from the content of sacred art and ever less likely to interact with it in ecclesiastical or devotional contexts, developed new criteria for evaluating Giotto. In the nineteenth century, he was depreciated as a mere realist and storyteller; in the twentieth century, he was prized first as a pure painter, a poet of masses and volumes, and later as a humanist, a poet of human nature. More recently still, however, scholarship on late medieval and early Renaissance art tends to set Giotto aside and instead chart the movements of images and artifacts within the entire social scene of devotion, stressing the psychological and behavioral impulses that drove piety. The artistic qualities of the best paintings are left unarticulated because the later privileged reputation of those works interferes with a description of the real historical practice of piety. To escape the impasse of a modern historiography of sacred art that is hesitant to approach art as such, I turn to two modern thinkers, Shoshana Felman and Bruno Latour, who, in their respective interpretations of a work of narrative prose dealing with ghosts and of a work of art dealing with the resurrected Christ—works that prompt their readers or beholders to take a position on the reality of ghosts—encourage us not to try to settle this question from the outside, but rather to plunge right into the works, recreating through our interpretations something of the initial psychic and libidinal cross-wirings that gave rise to the works in the first place, so putting us in a position to re- pose the problems of the reality of ghosts or deities from somewhere else, namely, from the vantage point of a non-place inside art.

The origin point of this train of thought—for me, at least, if not for Felman or Latour—is St. Francis’s relativization of everything human. Francis did not take seriously any human pursuits outside surrender to God. His teachings deconstruct the very devotional habits of mind and behaviors that were meant to respond to those teachings. I stress the negativity of Franciscan art. I am not saying that we should read sacred images as if they were modern artworks whose negativity, paradoxicality, or criticality is constitutive. That would be anachronistic. The artistic qualities of these images lie elsewhere (wholeness, brightness, balance, pattern). The shortfall of the images is a matter of their having been produced under conditions of alienation from God. To think this way about God, as the indispensable hypothesis without which the nullity of the individual is impossible to grasp, is no anachronism, for the crisis of humanness, alienated from its only possible ground, is not a historical phase but a permanent reality.
Chapter 3, on historiography and method, and on theology, is conceived as a parenthesis, and therefore not indispensable to the main argument of the book. A reader impatient to look again at paintings can skip straight from chapter 2 to chapter 4, entitled “Witnesses.” That section begins with an interpretation of a mural painting in the Lower Church at Assisi, the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, part of a narrative cycle attributed to Giotto or his workshop. The key figure in this composition, it is argued, is a young man who kneels and hails the infant Messiah. Such a witness-bearing figure, who is not mentioned in any scriptural or apocryphal narrative and indeed does not seem to appear in any surviving prior depiction of the scene, is connected to modern witnesses outside the picture. He anticipates and, in effect, “holds the place” of a future lay patron. He tests the ground for an embedded portraiture.

The motif of the character in a scriptural narrative who seems to stand in for lay involvement with the scenes is pursued to Siena, in a discussion of marginal figures in a work by Ambrogio Lorenzetti, and in several works involving the figure of Nicodemus, a biblically attested layperson who participated in the preparation of Christ’s body for the tomb, alongside Joseph of Arimathea, another layman. These two men are the counterparts of the two midwives who prepared Christ’s newborn body, and who in their own way modelled the choice between skepticism and faith. Such examples attest to an interest on the part of the artists in liminal figures who model not exemplary devotional constancy but rather more ambiguous states of mind like hesitation or perhaps open-mindedness, states of mind documented in canonical and apocryphal texts.

Chapter 5, “Interlopers,” is the core of the book. Here the Lamentation or Pietà once in the church of San Remigio and attributed by Vasari to the painter Giotto di Stefano (Giottono) is interpreted at length. In a sense, the entire book is a gloss on this one painting. It is hardly an unknown painting, and indeed is increasingly an object of attention in both the Italian- and English-language scholarship. My hypothesis that the picture’s pendant at San Remigio was the Annunciation in Ponce is new, however. The significance of the San Remigio Pietà is manifest in Giorgio Vasari’s laudatory account, but also latent in the sketch of a history of Trecento art with which Vasari opens his Life of Giottino. I read Vasari’s Life of Giottino as a counternarrative to his own main story. Vasari’s overall history moves forward by sudden leaps: Giotto, Masaccio, Leonardo. The alternative story glimpsed in Vasari’s Life of Giottino allows for more continuity between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

My own reading of the San Remigio Pietà, in a nutshell, is that the painter, profound innovator that he was, found two ways to knit together his composition: first, a soft blending of colors creating a continuous surface of smooth transitions carrying emotion from body to body — this is what Vasari found precocious — and second, an infrastructure of doublings and rhymes among the personages, heightening the sense of the great meaningfulness of
the pictured event. Symmetrical as well as unequal, imbalanced doublings, reproducing the binarism of sacred and profane, are the key to the painting. Such integrating devices pull the portraits of the modern patrons into the compositional mesh. This fusion of sacred and profane, and the convergence in appearance of the historical characters and the modern interlopers, prepare the defining challenge of the sacred painting of the next century.

The book tries to assess fourteenth-century portraits without looking ahead to the future. But that is hard to do. The embedded portrait plays a major role in Renaissance art. In the fifteenth century, the potential of the device was unleashed by oil technique. All at once, it seems, there is likeness. Ambiguities proliferate because the historical personages—the saints and the witnesses—also take on a quality of likeness, or rather a rhetoric of likeness, for the painter did not know what these personages actually looked like. Chapter 6 is a discussion of fifteenth-century embedded portraits framed by a consideration of the outsized role the device of the embedded portrait plays within the modern historiography of Renaissance art. The centerpiece—and the frontispiece—of Erwin Panofsky’s magnum opus *Early Netherlandish Painting* (1953) was the portrait of the patron Pieter Bladelin introduced by Rogier van der Weyden into a Nativity triptych (c. 1450). In his pages on this painting, which in effect consign the destiny of modern art history to the bourgeois subject with his or her inexhaustible capacities for introspection and imagination, Panofsky was responding to the pioneering researches of the turn-of-the-century art historians Aby Warburg and Alois Riegl, who dedicated some of their most innovative pages to the embedded portraits of the members of the Medici and Sassetti families by the Florentine painter Domenico Ghirlandaio (early 1480s), and the embedded portraits of the brothers of the Order of St. John in Haarlem by Geertgen tot Sint Jans (1480s). Here, Hegel’s thesis that Spirit in modernity has migrated into subjective consciousness is tested. Riegl stressed the corporate identity of the Johannite patrons. Warburg ascribed an atavistic, quasi-magical potency to the Medici portraits. In Panofsky’s narrative, by contrast, the modern person’s piety, his meditation on the mystery of Christ’s Nativity, becomes an aspect of his more generally introspective, self-aware disposition. The patron no longer seems troubled by God’s absence. Panofsky himself, anthropocentric, welcomed such signs of the loosening of the grip of the phantom “God” on the European mind. The “New Man” of the fifteenth century had other preoccupations. In this way, the embedded portrait, although barely acknowledged as an art historical category, is written into modern Western self-understanding. Faith and fear are replaced by “religion,” a mere suite of behaviors, a repertoire of states of mind, such that the events and the eschatology described in scripture come to seem like the mere content of someone’s religious experience.

The only thing left out of Panofsky’s account is the ongoing, confounding, indeed confounding afterlife of the artwork itself, which may yield the stored “knowledge” of the world it emerged from only many years later, in the
plurality and infinite differentiation of its reactivations by its future behold-
ers. By letting the mural or the retable unfold in our presence as an artwork, we
give ourselves the chance to recapitulate the originary conjectures, fantasies,
and misprisions out of which any artwork emerges. The imperfection of the
translatio of person into artwork represented by the supplicant portrait is our
opportunity. The sovereign painting by Velázquez, invoked above, oscillates
like all modern art around the caesura between reality and fiction, between
characters known too well to the artist, and characters known less well.

Chapter 7 revolves around Fra Angelico, whose innovations were mys-
teriously doubled, in a way that history cannot fathom, by Rogier van der
Weyden. Among Angelico’s many schemes, whose boldness is masked by the
conscientiousness of his painting manner and the sweet sincerity of his tone,
was the integration of the portrait into the sacred image, made possible not
only by Fra Angelico’s own direct studies of the physiognomies of live models
but also by his soft and blended handling of colors not so very different from
Giottino’s. Again, a close reading of Vasari reveals that he was well aware of
this through line connecting the Trecento and the Quattrocento.

An attempt to define the early portrait, and a comment on the recent
historiography of late medieval portraits, are placed at the end of the book as
an excursus entitled “Reference and Likeness.”
INDEX

Page numbers in italic type indicate illustrations.

Acton, Harold, 3
Adoration of the Magi, 130
Agnolo di Lorenzo, 279
Alberti, Caroccio (Caroccino) di, 200–201, 266
Alberti, Jacopo di Caroccio, 200–201
Alberti, Leon Battista, 93–94, 200, 299–300, 310
Alberti, Niccolò di Jacopo degli, 202
Alberti family, 200–202
Albertini, Francesco, 162, 164
Albertus Magnus, 215
Aldighieri family, 186
allegory, 94–97
altarpieces, iconography of, 180
Andrea da Firenze (Andrea di Bonaiuto), 158, 310
Andrea di Bartolo, 146; Lamentation over the Dead Christ, 146, 147
Andrea di Bonaiuto (Andrea da Firenze), 158, 310
Andrea di Cione. See Orcagna
Angela da Foligno, 84, 179–80, 209; Memorial, 32, 147, 180
Angelico, Fra, 6, 16; Burckhardt on, 71; and color, 16, 266, 272, 283–84; and Giotto, 264, 270, 287–88, 292; influences on, 281; life of, 264; and modern art, 109, 266–71, 282; name of, 264, 351n2; and portraits/embedded portraits, 267, 269, 271, 275, 288, 292; and realism, 291–92; and sacred art, 288–89, 291–92; and Trecento art, 276, 281–84.
Angelico, Fra, works: Coronation of the Virgin, 289, 290, 292, 294 (detail); Crucifixion (New York), 281, 285, 287; Crucifixion (San Marco), 271; Deposition of Christ from the Cross, 252, 262 (detail), 264, 265, 266–70, 268 (detail), 289, 292; Entombment of Christ, 274, 275; Head of a Man, 269, 270; high altarpiece, San Domenico, Fiesole, 90; Lamentation over the Dead Christ, 189, 272, 273, 275 (detail), 289, 292, 293 (detail); Resurrection and the Three Marys at the Tomb, 107–8, 207
Angelis, Luigi de, 144, 147–48
Anna (prophetess), 100, 116, 120, 122–23, 126–28
Andrew, Anna (mother of Mary), 74, 148, 210, 222
Annunciation to Mary, 3, 5, 133, 169–70, 215
Anonymous Maglabechiano. See Maglabechiano manuscript
Anonymous Bohemian painter, Dormition of the Virgin, 153, 155
Anonymous Florentine painters: Madonna and Child with Angels, 52, 52; Miraculous Madonna of Orsanmichele and Worshippers, 33–34, 34
Anonymous Roman mosaicist, Madonna and Child with St. Francis, 47, 48
Anonymous Roman painter, St. Lucy, 42 (detail), 47–48, 49
Anselm of Canterbury (saint), 96
Antelami, Benedetto, 191
Anthoni of Padua (saint), 28, 45
Aquinas, Thomas (saint), 1, 97, 134, 161, 165, 174, 204
Arena Chapel, Padua, 19, 23, 72, 96, 116
Arnolfo di Cambio, 89; tomb of Cardinal de Braye, 44
Art: beauty as goal and ideal of, 8, 12, 40, 93–94; Christianity and, 60–61, 67–68, 80–81, 86, 102–4, 291; conventions regulating, 68, 170, 219–20, 225; engagement with notion of hierarchy in, 1, 10, 11–12; Franciscan influence on, 12, 13, 32, 68, 102, 258; and freedom, 109, 134, 269, 297, 309–10; Hegel on, 60–64; Hofstadter’s chessboard metaphor applied to, 248–51; humanist conception of, 73; individuality and, 109; inside and outside of, 19, 35, 39; Latour on effects of, 106–9; as luxury, 206–7; order imposed by, on disorderly reality, 58–40, 87; 92–93, 171, 208, 265; poetry compared to, 60, 69, 87–88, 149, 288, 307–8; portraits as, 296–97, 306–8, 312; praise as function of, 86–88, 92–93, 96–100, 102, 176, 227, 255, 289, 292, 326n58; realism as goal of, 98; religion in relation to, 106–7; skeptical views of, 73, 75. See also artists; embedded portraits; formal/compositional features of art; portraits; sacred art; unity
Art history and historiography: behaviorist approach to, 81–82; 104, 110; embedded portraits in, 233–59; functionalist approach to, 80–84, 104, 110; genealogical approaches in, 78, 80; Giotto’s place in, 13–14, 67–75; as history of form, 8;
funerary images, 198, 200, 202, 204–6, 210, 303

Gabriel (angel), 3, 170, 171, 210, 215


Gaddi, Gaddo, 160

Gaddi, Giovanni, 160, 183

Gaddi, Taddeo, 6, 68, 85, 94, 144, 159, 160, 169–73, 283, 284, 288, 289, 307; Annunciation, 194–95, 249; Entombment of Christ, 174, 177; Natività di Cristo, 113, 156, 241; Pietà, 227, 228, 239

Gaddi, Zanobi, 186

García Márquez, Gabriel, 228

Garrin, Eugenio, 73

Garrison, Edward, 80

Geertgen tot Sint Jans, 15, 243, 245–47

Gehrig, Thomas J., 123

Gentile da Fabriano, 281; Adoration of the Magi, 270

Gentile da Fabriano, 281; Adoration of the Magi, 270

Gentile da Montefiore, 128–29

gestures, 1, 78, 95, 136; Angelico’s use of, 269, 272, 288; compositional role of, 175–76; conventions for, 62, 221, 272; crossed-hands, 221, 239; Giotto’s use of, 189–90, 208, 222; Giotto’s use of, 40, 116, 177, 179, 127–28, 141; inter-active/dialogue panels, 52; intercessory, 1, 168; of modern figures in sacred art, 62, 128–29, 130, 146, 179, 189–90; 221; natural, 272; of prayer, 127, 222–23, 266–67, 272

Ghiberti, Lorenzo, 122, 131, 158, 160, 162, 164, 178, 181

Ghirlandaio, Domenico, 15, 236, 263, 269, 280, 284; Confirmation of the Rule of St. Francis, 249–53, 250, 255, 258–60

Ghirlandaio, Ridolfo, 263

Ghislli, Francesco Giusserano, 281; Confirmation of the Rule of St. Francis, 250–51, 257, 258–60; Crucifix, Rimini, 90; Crucifix, Santa Maria Novella, 27, 90; Crucifixion, 187; Crucifixion with St. Francis, 127; Dormition of the Virgin, 90, 91, 112 (detail), 284; Dream of Joachim, 73–74, 77; Early Childhood of Christ, 115, 117, 155–56, 219–20; Entombment of Christ, 155–56, 154, 155 (detail); Lamentation over the Dead Christ (Assisi), 141–42, 141, 148, 176; Lamentation over the Dead Christ (Padua), 142–44, 141, 148, 173–74; Last Judgment, 23, 24, 41 (detail), 87, 90, 110, Natività, 136; Ognissanti Madonna, 54, 89, 89; Presentation of Christ in the Temple (Assisi), 14, 112 (detail), 116–17, 117; Presentation of Christ in the Temple (Padua), 116, 128, 123, 222; see also Giotto and workshop

Giotto and workshop: Crucifixion with St. Francis, 28, 29; Presentation of Christ in the Temple, 122–23, 123; Teobaldo Pianto and Mary Magdalene, 25, 25, 166. See also Crucifixion (Munich Crucifixion)

Giotto di Stefano. See Giotto

Giovanna di Damiano, 150

Giovanni (archbishop), 183

Giovanni dal Ponte, 278, 280

Giovanni da Milano, 8, 68, 147, 158, 165, 178, 184, 213; Expulsion of Joachim, 210, 211, 211 (detail); Madonna and Child, 146–47, 198, 199; panel with eight scenes including Lamentation over the dead Christ, 184, 185, 187 (detail), 218, Pietà, 78, 79, 80

Giovanni del Biondo, 158, 184; Lamentation over the Dead Christ, 186

Gigliano di Rimini, Madonna and Child with Saints, 54–55, 58, 65 (detail)

Giunta Pisano, 157

Giusto de’ Menabuoi, 87, 158

Gnudi, Cesare, 89

God/the divine belief in, 74–76, 102–3, 255; functionalist approach to, 81; humans’ relationship to 1, 3, 5, 8, 12, 13, 21, 31, 40, 80–87, 92, 97, 102, 247–49; psychological conception of, 82; reality of, 75, 82, 104

Goes, Hugo van der, 243; Portinari Altarpiece with Nativity with the Shepherds, 242

Goethe, J. W. von, 77, 93

Gogh, Vincent van, 92

Golden Haggadah, 153

Gombrich, E. H., 256, 299, 301

Goodhart Master, Madonna and Child, 52

Goodman, Nelson, 301, 302

Gospel of Nicodemus, 190

Gospels, stories in, 111, 113–34, 114, 148, 203, 217

Gozzoli, Benozzo, 251

Greek culture, 101–2

hairstyles, 146–47, 205, 214

Hals, Frans, 243

Hegel, G. W. F., 12–13, 15, 60–64, 67, 237, 249, 258, 270

hidden portraits, 267–69, 288, 299, 341n12

hierarchies: Christianity and, 40, compositional, 1, 10, 11, 92; cosmic, 5, 10, 40, 92–93; 100; in fourteenth-century art, 158; and the sacred and profane, 92; tangled vs. cybernetic, 218–19

historiography. See art history and historiography

Hofstadter, Douglas R., 218–19, 241

Holbein, Hans, the Younger, 302

Honorius III (pope), 250

humanism: art criticism in fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, 178–193, 237, 279–87; and art of praise, 93, 97; Francis’s teachings and, 129; Giotto and, 13, 73–75, 97, 157; and history, 100; and human nature, 101, 247; and literature, 94, 97; Panofsky and, 246; religious foundation of, 97.
sacred and profane: in Angelico’s Deposition, 269; beauty as means of reconciling, 10, 276, 288, in Christian response to the problem of death, 230; devotional perspective on, 37; embedded portraits and, 10; in Giottino’s Lamentation, 14–15, 168, 179, 205; Giotto’s art and, 67; in Giotto’s Presentation of Christ in the Temple, 121, 128; hierarchy and, 92; pairing of, 15, 28–29, 168, 210, 212–13, 230; topological conception of, 114–15; Trecento art and, 71; unity of, 10. See also secular sphere

sacred art: Angelico and, 288–89, 291–92; beauty as goal and ideal of, 8; humanist approaches to, 97; laity in relation to, 19, 60, 64; Manierism and, 263; modern attitudes toward, 13, 67, 77–78, 83–84, 99–110, 219–20; patrons’ desires in conflict with conventions of, 219–20; purpose of, 8, 40, 98–99; realism and, 198, reality and truth in, 99; subjectivity and, 241; viewer’s implication in, 75, 103–5, 108, 171, 242–43. See also praise, as function of

saints, intercession of, 5, 50–51, 202–25, 253. See also relics

Salome (midwife), 133–34, 136–37

Sassetti, Nera Corsi, 255

Lamentation over the Cross, 30; saints (or Mary or Christ) as intercessors in, 5, 19, 40, 50, 204–5, 253, 255. See also embedded portraits as means of achieving, 5, 202, 253; as mediators in securing, 5, 202, 253; as theme of Arena Chapel’s narrative cycle, 96–97

Sandberg-Vavalà, Evelyn, 173, 186

San Miniato al Monte, Florence, 45

San Remigio, Florence, 14, 165, 167, 186–98, 197, 200–201, 206

San Remigio Pietà. See Lamentation over the Dead Christ (San Remigio Pietà)

[Giotto]

Sasseti, Francesco, 250, 252–55, 258, 269

Sassetti, Nera Corsi, 235

Sassetti family, 15, 250–51

satire, 308–9

Schlosser, Julius von, 26, 164, 167, 224, 279, 288

Schubring, Paul, 165, 200, 266

Scrovigni, Enrico, 23–24, 45, 301, 302, 310; secular sphere: conceptions of, 99–100, 239; epistemological significance of, 99–100; Francis/ Franciscans and, 21; Giottto and, 71–75; neo-humanism and, 73; Warburg and, 258–60; Western culture as, 101. See also laypersons; sacred and profane

Seiler, Peter, 302

self. See individuality; subjectivity

self-denial/self-loss, 30–32

Seneca, 102

Shearman, John, 266

Sherr, Dorothy C., 122, 127

Sienese art, 146, 172, 177

Silvestro dei Gherarducci, Christ as Man of Sorrows, 198, 199


Simmel, Georg, 237

Simone de’ Crocefissi, 133

Simone Martini, 98, 128, 129, 159, 160, 179, 299, 307, 310; Annunciation, 173, 174; Lamentation over the Dead Christ, 248, 249, 258

Siri, Oswald, 165

Skaggs, Erling, 184

Slovakj, Peter, 306

Soni, Susan, 82

soul, doubling of figures as representation of, 210, 212

space: in Munich Crucifixion, 34–35, 39; realistic representation of, 3, 5, 10, 22; virtual, 1, 5, 22, 34–35

Spinello Aretino, 101, 279

Stefanesi, Bertoldo, 45

Stefanesi, Giacomo Gaetani, 99

Stefanesi, Jacopo, 25, 45


Stein, Gertrude, 87, 264

Steiner, Wendy, 297

St. Nicholas Chapel, Lower Church, Assisi, 128–29

Strozzi, Alessio degli, 267

Strozzi, Bartolommeo, 269

Strozzi, Palla, 264

subjectivity: art as ordering of, 38–39; Christianity and, 60, 291; devotion and, 36–37; Dutch group portraits and, 245–46; embedded portraits and, 15, 40, 60, 64, 226, 230, 237, 242–43; emotion and, 59; Franciscan conception of, 38; Giotto and, 72–73; Kant and, 72–73; modern, 15; patrons and, 247; pictorial perspective and, 124–25; realizations and, 15, 237, 242, 247; and the question of life and death, 230; ritual as abstraction from, 224; sacred and profane realms, 10; temporal, 168, 173, 179; Vasari on, 8, 10, 178–79, 182–83; women’s clothing and hairstyles in, 146–48, 205, 214. See also Finorente art after Giotto

Tesser, Richard C., 76

Uberti, Farinata degli, 248, 299

Ugolino di Nerio, 144

unity: achieved by color and contour, 8, 14, 177–78, 182–83, 209, 280; embedded portraits as threat to, 263; in Giotto’s Lamentation, 8, 14, 165, 178–81, 188, 209, 224, 264; of person, 221–24; portraits in, 224; Vasari on, 14, 159–60, 176–79, 181–83; women’s clothing and hairstyles in, 146–48, 205, 214. See also Finorente

Umbertini, 150

Tecreto art: ambiguous character of, 71; Angelico and, 276, 281–82, 286–87, 289; beauty in, 93; formal qualities of, 3; perspective in, 124–25; portraits in, 224; Vasari on, 14, 159–60, 176–79, 181–83; women’s clothing and hairstyles in, 146–48, 205, 214. See also Finorente

art after Giotto

Vedder, Richard C., 76

Uberti, Farinata degli, 248, 299

Ugolino di Nerio, 144

unity: achieved by color and contour, 8, 14, 177–78, 182–83, 209, 280; embedded portraits as threat to, 263; in Giotto’s Lamentation, 8, 14, 165, 178–81, 188, 209, 224, 264; of person, 221–24; of sacred and profane realms, 10; temporal, 168, 173, 179; Vasari on, 8, 10, 178–79, 182–83; women’s clothing and hairstyles in, 146–48, 205, 214. See also Finorente

Upper Church, Assisi, 28, 140–41

Urban V (pope), 183, 204

Valle, Guglielmo della, 172, 177

Varro, 99

INDEX

art, 14, 16, 23, 68, 77, 80, 98, 159–60, 176–79, 182, 208–9, 263–64, 278–85; on Lorenzo de’ Medici, 255; on Masaccio, 98; and modern painting, 264, 282; as painter, 279–80; on Puccio Capanna, 158; and realism, 263, 278; on rood screens, 197; sources used by, 335n36; on Stefano Fiorentino, 161–62; and Toscani, 278–82; on Trecento painters, 14, 159–60, 176–79, 181–85; on unity in art, 8, 10, 178–79, 182–83; 188, 224, 257, 263, 280; on van Eyck, 276

Vauchez, André, 51, 76, 77, 320n4

Vavalà, Evelyn. See Sandberg-Vavalà, Evelyn

Velázquez, Diego: Feast of Bacchus (The Drunkards), 11, 11, 16, 252; Pope Innocent X, 311

Ventura, Monna Tora di, 198

Verrocchio, Andrea del, 253, 255

viewers: embedded portraits in relation to, 108, 227, 229–30, 243; human body as focus of attention of, 10–11; implication of, in sacred art, 75, 103–5, 108, 172, 242–43; paintings’ shaping of the experience of, 36, 125, 227; pictorial perspective and, 124–25; subjectivity of, 229; transference performed by, 105, 229

Villani, Filippo, 93, 160, 298, 299

Villani, Giovanni, 22, 93, 98, 178; Nuova cronica, 33

Vinia di Giovanni Capocci, 47

Volpe, Carlo, 167, 175, 178, 184, 287

Volto Santo, Lucca, 190

votive portraits, 26, 36, 47, 51, 59, 86, 98–99, 242, 253, 255, 275

Waldensians, 83

Warburg, Aby, 15, 249–60, 288

wax effigies, 98, 253–56

Weyden, Rogier van der, 16, 242, 246–47, 252, 264, 275–76, 288; Deposition, 275; Entombment of Christ, 279, 272, 276; Medici Madonna, 276; triptych with Crucifixion, 15, 212 (detail); 235, 256, 247, 275; triptych with Nativity, 233, 214, 234 (detail); 235–37, 249–41, 247, 256, 275

White, John, 167, 301

widows, 20

Wilson, Edmund, 103–4

witness figures, 14, 113–54; absence of, from certain Christological episodes, 132–33; as a chorus, 142, 150; doubt and belief explored through depictions of, 59, 129–31, 133–37, 141, 147; embedded portraits foreshadowed by, 131–33; in Giottino’s Lamentation, 168, 190; in Giotto’s Allegory of Obedience, 114; in Giotto’s Presentation of Christ in the Temple, 126–29; legal vs. psychological conceptions of, 127; midwives as, 133–37; Nicodemus as, 190; as placeholders for lay beholders/portraits, 113, 129–31, 150, 154, 241; as proto-portraits, 150–54; recognition experienced by, 121, 147–30; women as, 134, 136–37, 139, 141–44, 146–48, 150–51, 153

Wölflin, Heinrich, 114

women: associated with the body, 134, 137; clothing and hairstyles of, 146–47, 205, 214; at Death of the Virgin, 150–52; at Lamentation over the Body of Christ, 137, 139, 141–44, 146–48; pairing of, 210, 212–13; as patrons, 151, 153; as proto-portraits, 150–53; as witnesses, 134, 136–37, 139, 141–44, 146–48, 150–51, 153

Wycliffe, John, 83

Žižek, Slavoj, 257

Zwingli, Ulrich, 190