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# 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

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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 — Giottino 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

Detail of ill. 0.4

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# 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).[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.[2]

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

Detail of ill. 0.1



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0.1 Agnolo Gaddi, *Madonna and Child with Saints*, 1375. Panel, 159 × 198 cm. Parma, Galleria Nazionale.

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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.

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0.2 Jacopo di Cione, *Annunciation*, 1370s?
Panel, 131.5 × 132.1 cm. Ponce, Museo de Arte.

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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.[5] 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

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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.[6] 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,

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0.3 Paolo Veneziano, *Madonna and Child with Saints*, 1339. Panel, 145 × 223 cm. Venice, Santa Maria Gloriosa dei Frari.

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.

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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.

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0.4 Giottino, *Lamentation over the Body of Christ*, after 1363. Panel, 195 × 134 cm. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi.

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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—this 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."[7] 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

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0.5 Diego Velázquez, *Feast of Bacchus* (The Drunkards), 1628–29. Oil on canvas, 165 × 225 cm. Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado.

thinking of a work such as the *Feast of Bacchus* by Diego Velázquez (1628–29) (ill. 0.5).[8] 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.[9] 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

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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:

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art is still capable of beauty but no longer has a high calling. The portrait of the patron brings this all out.

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.

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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 (Giottino) 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

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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, compounding, 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

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plurality and infinite differentiation of its reactivations by its future beholders. 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 mysteriously 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."

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# 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 Giottino, 264, 270, 287–88, 292; influences on, 281; life of, 264; and modern art, 109, 266–71, 282; name of, 264, 351n2; and perspective, 289, 291; 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, 286–87, 289; van der Weyden and, 275–76; Vasari on, 267, 269–71, 278, 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*, *273* (detail), 289, 292, *293* (detail); *Resurrection and the Three Marys at the Tomb*, 107–8, *107*
Angelis, Luigi de, 144, 147–48
Anna (prophetess), 100, 116, 120, 122–23, 126–28
Anne/Anna (mother of Mary), 74, 148, 210, 222
Annunciation to Mary, 3, 5, 133, 169–70, 215
Anonimo Magliabechiano. *See* Magliabechiano manuscript
Anonymous Bohemian painter, *Dormition of the Virgin*, *152*, 153
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
Anthony 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, 218–19, 241; 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, 38–40, 87, 92–93, 171, 208, 263; poetry compared to, 60, 69, 87–88, 249, 298, 307–8; portraits as, 296–97, 306–8, 311; 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;




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art history and historiography (*cont'd*):
role of the concept of convention in, 302; skeptical strains of, 73, 75, 110; sociological and anthropological approaches to, 76–85, 87, 109–10; and understanding sacred art, 103–9; Vasari and, 14, 16, 23, 68, 77, 98, 159–60, 176–79, 182, 263–64, 278–85
artists: and conventions, 309; desires of, in relation to those of patrons, 10, 12, 38–39, 310; freedom of, 269, 297, 309–10; modern, 10, 264; public's ignorance of, 86. *See also* art
Assunto, Rosario, 97–98
Auerbach, Erich, 32, 96, 180, 247–49
Augustine (saint), 99–100, 102, 203, 308

Bacon, Francis, *Three Studies for Figures at the Base of a Crucifixion*, 33
Baldinucci, Filippo, 164
Balthasar, Hans Urs von, 83
Barasch, Moshe, 222
Barna da Siena, *Christ Carrying the Cross*, 131, *132*
Barth, Karl, 83, 101, 258
Bartoli, Bellozzius, 192
Bartolo di Fredi, 146, 191
Basilica of St. Francis, Assisi. *See* Lower Church, Assisi; Upper Church, Assisi
Baxandall, Michael, 325n29
beauty: as artistic goal and ideal, 8, 12, 40, 93–94; Christianity in relation to, in the modern period, 12–13; classic art history and, 243; defined, 93; Giottino's *Lamentation* and, 208–9; Giotto and, 69; Hegel on, 60; as means of reconciling sacred and profane, 10, 276, 288; modern art and, 12–13; public's and patron's appreciation of, 86; purpose of, 8; reality and, 93–94, 208; Vasari on, 94, 208–9, 230
Beccafumi, Domenico, 257, 284
Beffremont, Pierre de, 235
behaviorism, 81–82, 104, 110
Belcari, Feo, 222
belief. *See* doubt and belief
Bell, Clive, 72
Bellacci family, 200–202
Bellaccio di Puccio, 200, 201
Bellini, Giovanni, 78, 80; *Madonna and Child and Saints*, 277–78, *277*
Bellosi, Luciano, 137, 158, 167, 281, 286
Belting, Hans, 51–53, 77, 78, 80–81, 98–99, 226, 242, 301
Benedetto di Bindo, 144, 146, 147
Benedict (saint), 169, 209
Benedicta (abbess), 26
Benedictine Order, 168, 201
Benedictional of Æthelwold, 151
Benintendi, Sebastiano, 272
Benjamin, Walter, 75, 325n29
Beno de Rapiza, 47
Benvenuto da Imola, 159
Berenson, Bernard, 72, 165, 182, 191
Berliner, Rudolf, 309
Bernard, Émile, 92
Bernard of Clairvaux (saint), 30, 96
Bicci di Lorenzo, 195
Billi, Antonio, 161, 162, 164, 182, 189, 272
Birkmeyer, Karl, 167, 180, 200, 209, 227
Black Death, 157
Bladelin, Pieter, 15, 233, 235–37, 239–43, 245–47, 267, 275–76
body: Angelico and, 289, 292; as disruption of unity of art works, 10–11; ex-votos and, 254; in patrons' intercessory images, 51; viewers' attention to, 10–11; women associated with, 134, 137
Boehm, Gottfried, 304
Boldrone, 29
Bonaccorso di Vanni, 207
Bonaventure (saint), 83–85, 97
Bonconte da Montefeltro, 221
Boniface VIII (pope), 23, 45, 302
Bonsi, Giovanni, 184
Boskovits, Miklós, 136, 150, 182, 184, 192–93, 286, 288
Botti, Beata Villana delle, 271, 272
Botticelli, Sandro, 251
Bouyer, Louis, 101
Braye, Cardinal de, 44
Brenz, Johannes, 190
Bridget of Sweden (saint), *Revelations*, 203, 224, 239–41, 291
Bronzino, Agnolo, 257
Brunelleschi, Filippo, 286
Buffalmacco, Buonamico, 85, 113, 159
Burckhardt, Jacob, 69, 71, 73, 81, 114, 259, 288
Burial of the Virgin, 150–51
Byzantine art, 68, 137, 139, 143, 198
Byzantine icons, 35

Calasso, Roberto, 101, 106
Calvin, John, 190
Cambio, Domenico di, 254
Campin, Robert (Master of Flémalle), 240, 242
Cappella di Santa Rosa, Santa Maria Aracoeli, Rome, 47
*Carmina regia*, 222
Carrà, Carlo, 72, 324n22
Carrying of the Cross, 131
Cassirer, Ernst, 73, 257–58
Castelnuovo, Enrico, 310, 320n6
Caterina (daughter of Giotto), 164
Cathars, 83, 102
Catherine of Alexandria (saint), 272
Cavalcanti, Cavalcante de', 248
Cavallini, Pietro, 45, 47; *Presentation of Christ in the Temple*, 122, *122*
Cenni di Francesco di ser Cenni: *Lamentation over the Dead Christ*, 186, *186*; *St. Catherine Disputing with the Doctors*, 213, *213*
Cennini, Cennino, 6, 98, 175, 266, 283
Cézanne, Paul, 72
Charles of Anjou, 44
Chellini, Pietro, 165, 288
Chiappelli, Alessandro, 182
Chiara (Clare) [saint], 26
Chiara della Croce (abbess), 150
Christianity: and art, 60–61, 67–68, 80–81, 86, 102–4, 291; Giotto and, 68, 71; and modern art, 12–13; status of, at its origin, 35; and subjectivity, 60, 291
Cicero, 308
Cimabue, 68, 85, 124, 139, 140, 143, 299; *Crucifixion*, Upper Church, Assisi, 28; *Madonna of the Angels*, 28; *Maestà* (Louvre), 88; *Maestà* (Uffizi), 88
Ciriaco d'Ancona, 275
Clark, T. J., 73–76, 82, 325n29
Clement (saint), 47
Clement IV (pope), 310
Clement V (pope), 307
clergy: clothing of, 19; laity in relation to, 20, 21; portraits of, 12; regular vs. secular, 21
clothing: in Angelico's *Deposition*, 266–69; black, 27, 28, 47, 50, 62, 148, 150, 168–69, 198, 201, 210, 212, 213, 235–36, 239, 245, 267, 271, 288; in fourteenth-century paintings, 146–47; Francis and, 37; in Giottino's *Lamentation*, 168, 201; of laypersons, 28; of men, 19–20; of patrons, 28–29; spiritual meaning of, 214; of widows, 20; of women, 146–47
Collaborator of Francesco da Rimini (Maestro di Veruccio?), *Adoration of the Magi*, *220*, 221
color: Angelico and, 16, 266, 272, 282–84; Cennini and, 266, 284; Giottino and, 14, 160, 162, 182–83, 188, 209, 279–80, 284–85; unity achieved by means of, 8, 14, 177–78, 182–83, 209, 280; Vasari on, 177–78, 182–83, 279–80, 284–85
*compagnia* (cooperative), 184
composition. *See* formal/compositional features of art
Confraternity of the Oratory of the Croce al Tempio, 271
Confucius, 206
connoisseurship, 77
Contarini, Elisabetta, 7, 20, 198
conventions and conventionalism, 34, 54, 68, 87, 181, 209, 221, 245, 256, 269, 272, 297, 301–3, 309
Coppo di Marcovaldo and Salerno di Coppo, *Crucifix*, 137, *138*, *138* (detail), 139, 173, 229
Cornell, Henrik, 240

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*corpus mysticum*, 202
Cosmas (saint), 271
Crown of Thorns, 186–87, 189, 267–68
Crucifixion, 26–29, 30, 129, 131
*Crucifixion* (Munich Crucifixion) [Giotto and workshop], 12, *18* (detail), *20*, 51, 271; attributions of, 315n4; the Cross in, 34; doubling in, 212; emotions in, 28–33, 40, 131; Francis in, 21, 29; identity of patrons in, 19–22; order and pattern underlying, 39; original context for, 19, 314n3 (ch1); representational conventions in, 25, 62; status of embedded portraits in, 35–36, 38; viewers' intended experienced shaped by, 36
crypto-portraits, 251, 267, 269, 275, 288, 299–300, 354n12
Cubism, 264

Daddi, Bernardo, 33, 85, 178; *Annunciation*, 215, *215*, 222; *Crucifixion*, 54, *55*; *Madonna dell'Opera*, 53–54, *53*, 212; *St. Paul*, 55, 59, *59*
Dandolo, Francesco, 7, 198
Dante Alighieri, 96, 98, 190, 201, 205, 221, 247–49, 298; *Commedia*, 22, 32, 37–38, 180, 202–3, 248–49, 309
Datini, Francesco di Marco, 5, 206–7, 254
David, Gerard, 235
death, Christian meaning of, 230
Death of the Virgin, 150–53
Demuth, Charles, *Dove*, 308
Deposition of the Body of Christ, 266
devotion: images associated with, 47, 53, 76, 78, 102, 171, 205, 207–8, 220; intercessory hopes linked to, 51, 202; of the laity, 5, 21, 33, 36–37, 133, 154; models of, 180, 205, 219, 241; personalization of, 37, 77; temporality of, 36–37. *See also* piety
dialogic panels. *See* interactive/dialogic panels
*disegno*, 80, 175, 278
divinity. *See* God/the divine
Domenico Veneziano, 282, 284
Dominic (saint), 1, 271, 272
Dominican Order, 1, 3, 6, 16, 108
donors, 314n6. *See also* patrons
doublings/pairings: in Christian myth, 217; of figures in paintings, 28–29, 168, 212–14, 221; gender in, 210, 212–13; in Giottino's *Lamentation*, 14–15, 168, 186, 209–17, 223; of life and death, 230; as representation of the soul, 210, 212; of sacred and profane, 15, 28–29, 168, 210, 212–13, 230; theological and ontological significance of, 213–14
doubt and belief: and God, 74–76, 102–3, 255; Lamentation over the Body of Christ and, 230; modern psychology of, 73–76; witness figures and, 39, 129–31, 133–37, 141, 147
Drea (Andrea) degli Albizzi, 167
Duccio di Buoninsegna, 68, 86, 144; *Madonna of the Franciscans*, 30, *31*, 51, 88; *Madonna Rucellai*, 52, 88, 89, 94; *Maestà* (Siena Cathedral), 88, *122*
Dürer, Albrecht, 275
Eco, Umberto, 301, 302
effigies, 24, 44–45, 98, 206, 253–56, 259, 301. *See also* tombs
elites: among laity, 47–48; gender as factor in portraits of, 26; portraits of, 12, 43–45; roles of, in hierarchies, 40
Elizabeth of Portugal (or Hungary) [saint], 7, 198
embedded portraits: Angelico and, 267, 269, 275, 288; as anomalous elements in a work, 8, 12, 19, 35–36, 38, 40, 60–64, 84, 168–71, 181, 220–21, 225, 263; and the art of praise, 99; classic art history of, 233–59; depicted contact of, 198; doublings/pairings of, 168, 214; in early Netherlandish painting, 235, 275; emotions of, 28–33, 59, 62–63; in Ghirlandaio's *Confirmation of the Rule of St. Francis*, 251, 253, 255; in Giottino's *Lamentation*, 167–69, 171, 179–81, 187–88, 201, 204–6, 210, 221–24, 227, 237, 241, 263, 264; Hegel on, 12, 60–64, 237; and human-divine relationship, 1, 3, 5, 8, 10; intercessional character of, 204–5, 344n205; meaning of, 225–27, 229; of patrons, 5, 6, 7, 12, 14, 314n6; in Ponce Annunciation, 3, 5, 169–71; and realism, 181; and reality, 10, 62, 64, 225; in Renaissance art, 15; representational conventions for, 33, 62–63, 129, 131, 171, 179–80, 221, 224; and the sacred and profane in art, 10, 168, 212; salvation as goal of, 5, 19, 40, 50, 204–5, 253, 255, 345n211; scale of, 1, 3, 10, 12, 23, 34, 36, 43, 45; and subjectivity, 15, 40, 60, 64, 226, 230, 237, 242–43; van der Weyden and, 233, 235, 237, 242, 247, 269, 275–76, 352n27; varieties of, 51–59; Vasari on, 251; viewers in relation to, 108, 227, 229–30, 243; witness figures as precursors of, 131–33, 150–54. *See also* patrons
emotion: art's goal of eliciting, 8; associated with the Crucifixion, 30; of embedded portraits, 28–33, 59; Giotto and, 72, 116–17; in Munich Crucifixion, 28–33; preparation of the soul through, 30; ritual/representational conventions for expression of, 33, 36, 127–28, 171, 179–80, 219–21, 224. *See also* subjectivity
Engebrechtsz, Cornelis, *Lamentation over the Dead Christ*, 62–63, *63*
Entombment of Christ, 153–54
Este, Francesco d', 240
ex-votos, 76, 254–55, 298
Eyck, Jan van, 242, 247, 252, 264, 275, 276, 302; *Madonna of Canon Joris van der Paele*, 275, 276

Fatinelli, Iacopo, 204
Fazio, Bartolommeo, 275
Felman, Shoshana, 13, 103–6, 108, 229
*Fioretti di San Francesco*, 100
Florentine art after Giotto, 5–7, 71, 157–60, 175–76. *See also* Trecento art
Follower of Duccio, triptych with Madonna and Child, 54, *58*
formal/compositional features of art: Angelico's *Deposition*, 266–67; asymmetry, 39, 89, 216, 218; beauty as goal of, 8, 12, 40; of Byzantine art, 68; Christian art and, 12, 13, 60–61; closed compositions, 30, 71, 139–40, 143, 227, 229, 256–57; compartmentalization, 3, 5, 54, 62, 90, 94, 168, 169, 173–74; conventional, 34, 219–21; frontality, 39, 47–48, 116, 122–25, 157, 267; Giottino's *Lamentation*, 176, 229; of modern art, 10; open compositions, 143–44, 176, 229; order and pattern, 3, 39–40, 51, 71, 87–91, 171, 208, 216, 263; of premodern art, 8; symmetry, 15, 39, 87–88, 92, 119, 122, 124–25, 158, 214. *See also* pattern
Forteguerra, Monaldo, 48
Francesco da Rimini, 221
Franchi, Rossello di Jacopo, 289
Francia, Francesco, 283
Franciscan Order: and human nature, 8, 13, 38–39, 96, 101; influence of, on art, 8, 12, 13, 32, 68, 102, 258; organization of, 21; and paganism, 101; papal confirmation of, 250–51
Francis of Assisi (saint): on human-divine relationship, 12, 13, 21; images of, 6, 7, 21, 26, 28–29, 45, 47, 95, 96–97, 173, 198, 305, 317n35; and imitation of Christ, 21, 29, 77; and lay associations, 21; life story and teachings of, 21, 37–38, 43–44, 96–97, 133, 206, 221–23; and portraiture, 12, 32; stigmatization of, 29; subjectivity and human nature in the thought of, 38–39; teachings of, 12, 21
Franco, Matteo, 250
Frazer, J. G., 256
freedom: art and, 109, 134, 269, 297, 309–10; of individuals, 64, 73, 109, 246; religion and, 6, 93, 134; secularism and, 99–100
Friedländer, Max J., 252
Fry, Roger, 72, 91, 179
Frye, Northrop, 87–88, 106, 214
functionalism, in art history, 78, 80–84, 104, 110

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funerary images, 198, 200, 202, 204–6, 210, 303

Gabriel (angel), 3, 170, 171, 210, 215
Gaddi, Agnolo, 5–6, 160, 165, 178, 184, 191, 201, 207, 281, 285; *Entombment, of Christ*, 186, *187*; *Madonna and Child with Saints*, 1, *2*, 3, 5, 11, 158
Gaddi, Gaddo, 160
Gaddi, Giovanni, 160, 183
Gaddi, Taddeo, 6, 68, 85, 94, 144, 159, 160, 172–73, 183, 184, 198, 299, 307; *Annunciation*, 194–95, *194*; *Entombment of Christ*, 172, *173*; *Nativity of Christ*, *135*, 136, 241; *Pietà*, 227, *228*, 229
Gaddi, Zanobi, 186
García Márquez, Gabriel, *Love in the Time of Cholera*, 297
Garin, Eugenio, 73
Garrison, Edward, 80
Geertgen tot Sint Jans, 15, 243, 245–47; *The Burning and Recovery of the Bones of John the Baptist*, 243, *244*, 245–47
Gentile da Fabriano, 281; *Adoration of the Magi*, 270
Gentile da Montefiore, 128–29
gestures, 3, 78, 95, 136; Angelico's use of, 269, 272, 288; compositional role of, 175–76; conventions for, 62, 221, 272; crossed-hands, 221, 239; Giottino's use of, 189–90, 208, 222; Giotto's use of, 40, 116, 117, 119, 127–28, 141; in interactive/dialogic panels, 52; intercessory, 1, 168; of modern figures in sacred art, 62, 127–28, 130, 146, 179, 189–90, 221; natural, 272; of prayer, 127, 222–23, 266–67, 272
Ghiberti, Lorenzo, 77, 131, 158, 159, 161, 162, 164, 178, 182
Ghirlandaio, Domenico, 15, 256, 263, 269, 280, 284; *Confirmation of the Rule of St. Francis*, 249–53, *250*, 255, 258–60
Ghirlandaio, Ridolfo, 263
Ghissi, Francescuccio, *Man of Sorrows and Nativity*, 215, *216*
ghosts, 13, 103–6
Giacomo di Giovanni Capocci, 47
Giordano da Rivalto, 190–91
Giorgio di Andrea, 146
Gioseffi, Decio, 123
Giottino (Giotto di Stefano), 6; Angelico and, 264, 270, 287–88, 292; and color, 14, 160, 162, 182–83, 188, 209, 279–80, 284–85; emotional expression in the works of, 285–86; historical sources on, 162, 164, 183; influence of, 272; and modern painting, 264; name of, 162, 164, 335n31; payment of, 183; reputation of, 68; unity in the paintings of, 178–79, 264; Vasari on, 8, 14, 159, 160, 162, 164–65, 167, 176–79, 181–82, 187–90, 208–9, 224, 264, 278–80, 283–85
Giottino (Giotto di Stefano), works: attributions of, 336n41; *Head of Saint*, 285, *286*; *Madonna and Child with Saints*, 162, *163*, 181–82, 184. See also *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* (San Remigio Pietà)
Giotto: allegories painted by, 94–97; and Christianity, 68, 71; daughter of, 164; emotional expression in the works of, 116–19; figures in the art of, 22–23; France as source for the art of, 43–44, 89; Hegel on, 63–64; and humanism, 13, 73–75, 97, 157; influence of, 6, 55, 157–65, 171–72, 176, 178–79, 272, 283; Legend of St. Francis cycle, 118; modern interpretations of, 13, 63–64, 67–76, 78, 82, 92, 96, 98, 116, 324n2, 324n22 (*see also* premodern reputation of); narrative quality of works by, 13, 23, 68–69, 72; portraits by, 23–24, 128–29, 298–99, 301, 302, 310; premodern reputation of, 22, 67–69, 94, 97, 98, 159–60 (*see also* modern interpretations of); Rome as source for the art of, 45; and secular sphere, 71–75; and subjectivity, 72–73; at transition between systems of painting, 125–26; Tuscany as source for the art of, 44–45; Vasari on, 23, 67, 68, 69, 89, 90, 96, 117, 123, 159–60, 298–99
Giotto, works: *Allegory of Obedience*, 94–95, *95*, 114, *114* (detail); Altarpiece of Cardinal Stefaneschi, 91–92, *91*, 175, 179; *Annunciation*, 222; *Ascension of Christ*, 223; Baroncelli Polyptych, 68, *69*, 90, 92; *Christ Among the Doctors*, 123–24; *Confirmation of the Rule of St. Francis*, 250–51, *251*, 258–60; Crucifix, Rimini, 90; Crucifix, Santa Maria Novella, 27, 90; *Crucifixion*, 187; *Crucifixion with St. Francis*, 127; *Dormition of the Virgin*, 90, *90*, *111* (detail), 284; *Dream of Joachim*, 73–74, *74*; Early Childhood of Christ cycle, 115–19, *115*, 328n7, 329n9; *Entombment of Christ*, 153–54, *154*, *155* (detail); *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* (Assisi), 141–42, *141*, 148, 176; *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* (Padua), 142–44, *143*, 148, 171–73, 180; *Last Judgment*, 23, *24*, *41* (detail), 87, 90, 310; *Nativity*, 136; *Ognissanti Madonna*, 34, 89, *89*; *Presentation of Christ in the Temple* (Assisi), 14, *112* (detail), 116–29, *117*; *Presentation of Christ in the Temple* (Padua), 116, *118*, 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 Pontano and Mary Magdalene*, 25, *25*, 168. See also *Crucifixion* (Munich Crucifixion)
Giotto di Stefano. *See* Giottino
Giovanna di Damiano, 150
Giovanni (archpresbyter), 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*, *185* (detail), 218; *Pietà*, 78, *79*, 80
Giovanni del Biondo, 158, 184; *Lamentation over the Dead Christ*, 186
Giuliano da Rimini, *Madonna and Child with Saints*, 54–55, *58*, *65* (detail)
Giunta Pisano, 137
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, 86, 104
Goes, Hugo van der, 243; Portinari Altarpiece with Nativity with the Shepherds, 252
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, 131, 133–34, 134, 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, 354n12
hierarchy: 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, 158–59, 253, 327n97; and art of praise, 93, 97; Francis's teachings and, 258; 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;

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separation of thought and action in, 76, 83. *See also* neo-humanism
human nature: conservative religious view of, 101; divine nature in relation to, 1, 3, 5, 8, 12, 13, 21, 31, 40, 80–87, 92, 97, 102, 247–49; Franciscan conception of, 13, 38–39, 96, 101
Hus, Jan, 83

icons, 21, 242, 304–5. *See also* Byzantine icons
ideality/the ideal: art and, 1, 60–62; art history/historiography and, 82; Burckhardt and, 69, 71; Hegel and, 12, 60–62
individuality: of aesthetic response, 109; artistic unity vs., 139, 158, 245; convention/tradition vs., 181; existential questions linked to, 230, 247; Franciscan teachings and, 12, 32; freedom associated with, 64, 73, 109, 246; icons and, 21; modern, 243, 246, 248; portraits as vehicles for portraying, 22–23, 50–51, 64, 181, 226, 243, 306, 308, 310; portrayed in fourteenth-century art, 50, 72, 81, 223; and public-private dilemma, 190, 246; quasi-, 23, 214; and relationship to the divine, 205. *See also* human nature; subjectivity
Infancy Gospels, 126, 217
Ingres, J. A. D., *Monsieur Bertin*, 311
Innocent III (pope), 96
interactive/dialogic panels, 51–54, 80, 235–36
intercession, 50–51, 102, 202–6, 230, 253
interpassivity, 36, 257, 291
Isaac Master, 142

Jacopo da Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 120, 125, 202
Jacopo di Cione, 5–6, 8, 160, 165, 184, 207, 281, 285; *Annunciation* (Ponce Annunciation), 3, *4*, 5, 8, 14, *17* (detail), 169–71, *170*, 176, 191, 194–95, 201–2, 222, 239; *Coronation of the Virgin*, 147, 158, 222, 239
Jacopone da Todi, *Lauds*, 31–32
James, Henry, *The Turn of the Screw*, 103–5
Jansz., Jan Willem, 243
Jean II le Bon (king), 302
Jerome (saint), 134
Jesus Christ: birth of, 130, 133–37, 233–40; carrying the Cross, 131; crucifixion of, 129, 131; death of, 230; deposition of the body of, 266; entombment of, 153–54; God's incarnation as, 82, 86–87; imitation of, 21, 29, 77, 206; intercession of, 203–4; lamentation over body of, 137–50, 169, 171–74, 180–81, 184, 186–89, 209, 216, 218, 229, 272; presentation in the Temple, 116–17, 119–29
John (saint), 1, 28, 30, 39–40, 143, 144, 153, 186, 189, 217, 218, 267, 285
John, gospel of, 6, 26, 129, 148, 153, 188, 204, 214
John II "Sebastokrater," 200
John the Baptist, 1, 47, 174, 182, 245
Joseph (husband of Mary), 121, 123, 125–26, 134, 209, 216–17, 239
Joseph of Arimathea, 14, 30, 142–43, 186, 188–89, 209, 217, 218, 221, 229, 266–69
Julian (emperor), 245
Kant, Immanuel, 72–73, 257
Keller, Harald, 301, 302
kitsch, 82–83
Knightly Order of St. John the Baptist, 243
Komnenos, Isaak, 200
Kris, Ernst, 256
Kristeller, Paul Oskar, 73
Kroos, Renate, 204
Kugler, Franz, 71
Kurz, Otto, 256

Lamentation over the Body of Christ: Angelico's version of, 272; Byzantine versions of, 137, 139, 143; comparisons of paintings of, 137–50, 172–73; Giotto's versions of, 141–44; meaning of, 230; women as witnesses to, 137, 139, 141–44, 146–48
*Lamentation over the Dead Christ* (San Remigio Pietà) [Giottino], *9*, *166*, *231* (detail); anomalous elements of, 168–69, 171, 181, 209–18; clothing in, 168, 201; commissioning of, 200–201; comparisons of other works to, 184–87; dating of, 184; doublings in, 209–17, 223; embedded portraits in, 167–69, 171, 179–81, 187–88, 201, 204–6, 210, 221–24, 227, 237, 241, 263, 264; formal/compositional features of, 176, 229; history and original installation of, 165, 167, 191–202; influence of, 184, 218, 272, 288; intercessional character of, 204–5; meaning of, 14–15, 180–81, 205, 208; models for, 173, 176; Nicodemus in, 188–90; overview of, 14–15, 165, 167–69, 171–76; Ponce Annunciation as pendant to, 8, 14, 169–71, 191, 194, 201–2; and realism, 181, 264; sacred and profane in, 14–15, 168, 179, 205; size of, 167, 173; unity of, 8, 14, 168, 178–81, 188, 209, 224; witness figures in, 168, 190
Landau, Horace de, 192
Landino, Cristoforo, 161
Lanzi, Luigi, 140
Lateran Basilica, Rome, 45
Latini, Brunetto, 298
Latour, Bruno, 13, 103, 106–10, 217
Lawrence (saint), 1, 50
laypersons: associations formed by, 21; Biblical counterparts of, 14; burials of, 48; clergy in relation to, 20, 21; clothing of, 28; devotion to the Cross, 26–27; elites among, 47–48; incorporation of, into the gestalt of paintings, 170; piety of, 5, 7, 21, 28, 33, 36–37, 76; portraits of, 26, 242; religious/ethical choices facing, 113, 129–33; witness figures as placeholders for, 113, 129–30, 241. *See also* patrons; secular sphere
Le Fèvre de St.-Remy, Jean, 235
Leo IV (pope/saint), 299
Leo X (pope), 299
Leonardo da Vinci, 284
liberal arts, 99–100
lifelikeness, 6, 23, 89, 99, 237, 250, 297–99, 301, 303–4, 306. *See also* likeness
likeness: concept of, 297; funerary images and, 43; mechanical means of producing, 24, 304, 308; psychological attraction of, 300; realism in art and the issue of, 298, 308; reference in relation to, 296–97; typicality vs., in portraits, 5, 15, 22–24, 26, 43–44, 114, 150, 205, 214, 237, 301–3. *See also* lifelikeness; portraits
Limburg brothers, 240
Lippi, Filippo, 215, 282, 284
Lippo, 278
Lippo di Benivieni, 172
Lippo Memmi, *Annunciation*, 173, *174*
Lippo Vanni, reliquary triptych with Annunciation and Madonna and Child with saints, 225, *226*
*Little Flowers of St. Francis*, 28, 221–23
liturgy: abstraction from the personal and everyday as feature of, 36–37, 87; meaning of early Christian, 101; memory of the dead sustained by, 202
Longhi, Roberto, 165, 177, 178, 184, 191, 286, 288, 289
Longinus, 129
Lorenzetti, Ambrogio, 14, 131; *Annunciation*, 191, *193*, 194; predella with *Lamentation over the Dead Christ*, 144, *145*, *145* (detail), 146, 146–48, 210
Lorenzetti, Pietro, 129, 159, 160, 226; *Birth of the Virgin*, 174
Lorenzo di Niccolò, 207
Lorenzo Monaco, 178, 189, 264, 270, 285, 289; *Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane*, *66* (detail), *70*, 71; Processional Cross, 29
Lotario dei Segni. *See* Innocent III
Louis (saint), 43
Lower Church, Assisi, 14, 25, 28, 92, 94–96, 114–16, *115*, 165
Luca di Tommè, *Adoration of the Magi*, *136*, 137
Lucy (saint), 47
Ludovico da Pietralunga, 96
Luke, gospel of, 71, 100, 116, 119–21, 127, 142, 148, 203, 210, 214

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Lupicini, Goccio, 201
Luther, Martin, 102

Maestro della Croce di Trevi, or Maestro del Dittico Poldi Pezzoli, diptych with Crowning with Thorns, Flagellation, and Crucifixion, 54, *56*
Magdalene Master. *See* Master of the Magdalen
magic, 15, 82, 204–6, 253–56, 259
Magliabechiano manuscript, 162, 164, 281
Mâle, Émile, 136, 240
Mander, Karel van, 245
Mannerism, 10, 187, 256–57, 263
Man of Sorrows iconography, 78
Mantegna, Andrea, 78, 80
Marguerite de Provence, 43
Maria de Rapiza, 47
Mark, gospel of, 142, 146, 148, 214
Marle, Raimond van, 5, 191
Mary, Virgin: annunciation to, 3, 5, 133, 169–70, 215; birth of, 210; birth of Jesus, 133–37, 239–41; clothing and hair styles of, 146–47; Crucifixion, 39; death and burial of, 150–53, 217; gestures of, 222; husbands of, 216; at lamentation over Jesus, 139, 144, 186, 227; Last Judgment, 23; Madonna and Child, 1, 7, 30, 80, 182; patrons depicted before, 1, 3, 5, 7, 43–45, 48, 50–51, 53, 169; presentation of Jesus in the temple by, 116, 119–21, 125, 128, 129; purification of, 116, 119–21
Mary Magdalene, 25–29, 54, 94, 113, 131, 146, 209–10, 217, 218, 235, 267
Marys, in the Gospels, 148
Masaccio, 98, 278, 281–85, 288
Maso di Banco, 40, 93, 158, 159, 162, 164–65, 167, 178, 181, 191, 272, 278
Masolino, 281, 288
Master of 1310, *Madonna and Child*, 34, *35*, 36, 51, 212
Master of Flémalle (Robert Campin), 240, 242
Master of San Francesco, *Lamentation over the Dead Christ*, 139–40, *140*, 229
Master of San Lucchese, 240
Master of Santa Verdiana, *195*
Master of the Annunciation of the Accademia, 195
Master of the Ashmolean Predella, *Birth of the Virgin*, *156* (detail), 210, 212, *212*
Master of the Codex St. George, 222
Master of the Corsi Crucifixion, 27
Master of the Dominican Effigies, *All Saints*, Laudario of St. Agnese, 93
Master of the Fogg Pietà (Maestro di Figline), *Lamentation over the Dead Christ*, 172, *172*
Master of the Griggs Crucifixion, 280
Master of the Legend of St. Catherine, 235
Master of the Magdalen, 51; *Crucifix*, 27, *27*
Master of the Misericordia, 184
Master of the Orcagnesque Misericordia, *Annunciation*, 194, *195*
Master of the Piani d'Invrea Crucifixion, 240
Matthew, gospel of, 33, 37, 131, 142, 146, 148, 203, 214
Maximilian of Bavaria (king), 63
Medici, Cosimo de', il Vecchio, 251, 271, 275, 276, 288
Medici, Giovanni de', 251
Medici, Giuliano de', 251, 255
Medici, Lorenzo de', 250–56
Medici, Piero de', 251
Medici family, 15, 251, 306
*Meditations on the Life of Christ*, 30, 96, 117, 127, 134, 222, 240, 317n45
Meiss, Millard, 73, 157–59, 167, 175, 191, 240
memorial portraits, 54, 98–99, 302
Menologium of Basil II, 122
merism, 213–14, 223, 230, 292
Michelangelo Buonarroti, 71, 90, 190, 252, 263, 284
Michelozzo, 267
midwives, 14, 133–37, 210, 241
Milanesi, Gaetano, 182, 192
modern art: altarpieces and, 88; Angelico and, 109, 266–70, 282; artists' role and status in, 10, 264; and beauty, 12–13; Christianity and, 12–13; critiques of, 81; Giottino and, 264; Giotto and, 71–72, 76, 283; Hegel on, 12–13, 60; interpretation of, 100–101; kitsch in relation to, 82; negative/paradoxical/critical character of, 13, 106, 109; portraits in, 311; and reality, 16, 60–61; Renaissance art as, 233; and subjectivity, 15, 243; Vasari and, 264, 283
Montesecco, Giambattista, 254
Moretti, Franco, 94
Munich Crucifixion. See *Crucifixion* (Munich Crucifixion) [Giotto and workshop]

nails, from the Cross, 186–89, 191, 209, 267–68, 272
Nanni di Banco, 271
Nardo di Cione, 158, 160, 165, 176, 182, 184, 191, 209; *Last Judgment*, 146; *Paradise*, 87, 212
Nativity of Christ, 130, 133–37, 233–41
Naumburg Cathedral, Saxony, 300
Navicella, St. Peter's, Rome, 45
Nazarenes, 324n2, 324n22
Nelli, Pietro, 201
neo-avant-garde, 81
neo-humanism, 73, 75–76, 82–84, 110, 247–48
neo-paganism, 71
Netherlandish art, portraits in, 15, 61, 235, 237, 242, 252–53, 269, 276–77
Niccolò di Pietro Gerini, 158, 187, 207, 215, 285; *Annunciation* (Ponce Annunciation), 195, *196*
Niccolò di Tommaso, 191, 239, 281; *Coronation of the Virgin*, 158, 239; triptych with Nativity, *238*, 239
Nicholas III (pope), 45
Nicholas IV (pope), 45, 50, 140, 168
Nicodemus, 14, 30, 142–43, 153–54, 186–91, 209–10, 218, 221, 229, 266–69, 276
nobility. *See* elites
Nodelman, Sheldon, 301
Nuzi, Allegretto, *Man of Sorrows and Nativity*, 215, *216*

Oertel, Robert, 157
Oexele, Otto Gerhard, 204, 302
Offner, Richard, 165, 193, 281
Orcagna (Andrea di Cione), 5–6, 8, 34, 68, 85, 158, 160, 165, 174–76, 184, 191, 200, 299; *Annunciation*, 191–94, *192*; *Crucifixion*, 150, *151* (detail); *Enthroned Christ and Saints* (Strozzi altarpiece), 3, 174–75, *175*
Order of St. John, 15
Origo, Iris, *Merchant of Prato*, 206
Orsini, Giangaetano, 128–29, 203
Orsini, Napoleone, 128–29, 148, 150, 203
Orsini family, 239
otherness, 75, 105

Pacino di Bonaguida: tabernacle with Crucifixion and scenes from the Life of Christ, 54, *57*; *Carmina regia*, 92; *Tree of Life*, 92–93
paganism, 101. *See also* neo-paganism
pairings. *See* doublings/pairings
Panofsky, Erwin, 73, 78, 80, 82, 110, 233–43, 246–47, 258; *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 15, 233, *234*, 242, 246
Paolo Veneziano, *Madonna and Child with Saints*, 7, *7*, 20, 198
parallelism, 214
Paris Pericope Book, 150–51
Parmigianino, 284
Passavant, J. D., 324n2
patrons: and the art of praise, 99; bodies of, 51; as candidates for sainthood, 21; clothing of, 28–29; desires of, for painted commissions, 10, 12, 38–39, 50–51, 59, 99, 288, 310; of Giottino's *Lamentation over the Dead Christ*, 168; piety of, 7; portraits of, 5, 6, 7, 12, 14, 314n6; proto-portraits of, 150–54; salvation as goal of, 5, 19, 40, 50, 204–5, 253, 255, 345n211; and subjectivity, 247;

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women as, 151, 153. *See also* embedded portraits; laypersons
pattern, 3, 10, 39–40, 71, 87, 89, 91–92, 171, 208, 214, 216–17, 225, 292, 309. *See also* formal/compositional features of art; repetition
Paul (saint), 45, 55, 258, 291
perspective, 124–26, 284, 289, 291
Perugino, Pietro, 283
Peter (saint), 45, 174, 209
Peter Martyr (saint), 1
Petrarch, 96, 98, 307, 327n97
Pfaller, Robert, 257
Pfirt, Johanna von, 153
photography, 304, 308
Picasso, Pablo, *Portrait of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler*, 308
Piero della Francesca, 280, 282, 284, 289, 291
Pietà. *See* Lamentation over the Body of Christ
Pietro d'Abano, 22, 304
piety: Hegel on artistic expressions of, 61–64; lay, 5, 7, 21, 28, 33, 36–37, 76; non-intellectualized, 83; psychological/behavioral study of, 13, 15, 81–83. *See also* devotion
Piles, Roger de, 10
Pindar, 87, 99
Pini, Umberto, 192–93
Pisano, Giovanni, 86, 89, 160
Pisano, Nicola, 160, 198; *Presentation of Christ in the Temple*, 126, *126*
Pliny, 23, 306
poetry, 60, 69, 87–88, 249, 298, 307–8
Poliziano, Angelo, 250
Ponce Annunciation. *See* Jacopo di Cione: *Annunciation*
Pontano, Teobaldo, 23, 25, 128–29, 168
Pontormo, Jacopo, 257, 284
Pope-Hennessy, John, 275
Porte Rouge tympanum, Notre-Dame, Paris, 43
Portinari, Tommaso, 252
portraits: Alberti on, 311; Angelico and, 269, 271, 288, 292; artistic quality of, 296–97, 306–8, 311; artist-sitter relationship in, 304; and the art of praise, 98–99; crypto-, 251, 267, 269, 275, 288, 299–300, 354n12; in Dante's *Commedia*, 309; defining, 296–97; democratization of, 6, 12, 48, 50–64, 304; of elites, 12, 43–45; framing of, 305–7; funerary images as, 204–5; gender and, 26; Giotto and, 23–24, 298–99, 301, 302, 310; Giotto's *Presentation of Christ in the Temple* (Assisi) and, 128–29; Hegel on, 60–61; hidden, 267–69, 288, 299, 354n12; icons compared to, 304–5; in illuminated prayer books, 44; individuality signaled by, 22–23, 50–51, 64, 181, 226, 243, 306, 308, 310; in late medieval period, 43–44; likeness vs. typicality in, 5, 15, 22–24, 26, 43–44, 114, 150, 205, 214, 237, 301–3; memorial vs. votive, 98–99; modern, 311; in Netherlandish art, 15, 61, 235, 237, 242, 252–53, 270, 276–77; in panel paintings, 47; photography and, 304; in profile, 25–26; proto-, 150–54; quasi-, 269, 271, 277, 288; reference in, 170, 295, 303; in relation to Francis's teachings, 12, 32; retrospective, 271; and subjectivity, 15, 237, 242, 247; terminology related to, 304, 310; in three-quarter view, 25–26; unique qualities of, compared to typical sacred art, 237. *See also* embedded portraits; likeness; memorial portraits; votive portraits
Postmodernism, 81
praise, as function of art, 86–88, 92–93, 96–100, 102, 176, 227, 255, 289, 292, 326n58
prayer, 202–4, 222–24
Pre-Raphaelites, 324n2
Presentation of the child, 116–17, 119–29, 131
profane. *See* sacred and profane
Protestantism, 102, 190
Proto-Evangelium of James, 134
*Psalter-Hours of Yolande de Soissons*, 44
Pseudo-Jacopino: *Death of the Virgin*, 153; *Nativity and Adoration*, 222, *223*; Polyptych with Pietà and Presentation of Christ in the Temple, 129, *130*
Pseudo-Matthew (apocryphal gospel), 73, 100, 131, 134
psychological realism, 64, 72, 148, 245, 272
Puccio Capanna, 158, 160, 161, 298–99; *Coronation of the Virgin*, 178–79
Puccio di Simone, 144; *Death of the Virgin*, 151, 153, 212
Pulci, Luigi, 250
Purification of the mother, 116, 119–21, 128, 131, 137

quasi-portraits, 269, 271, 277, 288
Qur'an, 215

Ranieri (saint), 45
Rank, Otto, 210
Raphael, 71, 299
rationalism, 106, 110
realism: aesthetic pleasure evoked by, 256; Angelico and, 291–92; art associated with, 98; Dante and, 249; embedded portraits and, 181; Giottino's *Lamentation* and, 181, 264; Giotto and, 13, 72, 75, 97; modern art and, 64; in Netherlandish art, 252–53, 276–77; and open compositions, 144; as philosophical/scholarly approach, 81–82; Piero della Francesca and, 291; premodern, 76; psychological, 64, 72, 148, 245, 272; and sacred art, 289; salvational preferment in relation to, 205, 253, 256; in Simone Martini's *Lamentation*, 148; theories of, 256; Vasari and, 263, 278; votive effigies and, 253. *See also* reality
reality: beauty in, 93–94, 208; divine/true, 8, 10, 38–40, 75, 82, 102, 291–92; embedded portraits and, 10, 62, 64, 225; Giotto and, 13, 22, 35, 38, 72, 75; of God, 75, 82, 86, 104; modern art and, 16, 60–61; perpendicularity in composition associated with, 176; perspective and, 291; reference to, 225, 295, 297; representation of conflicting concepts of, 10–11, 26, 38, 62; spatial representation and, 3, 5, 10, 22. *See also* lifelikeness; likeness; realism
reference: fiction in relation to, 309; likeness in relation to, 296–97; mechanism of, 295–96; pictorial, 295–96; in portraiture, 170, 295, 303; reality as object of, 225, 295, 297
relics, 187, 189, 205–6, 209, 221, 225–26, 269, 272
reliquaries, 225
Rembrandt van Rijn, 243
Remigius (Rémy) [saint], 169
Renan, Ernst, 32
repetition, 68, 71, 83, 87, 87–90, 98, 104, 214. *See also* pattern
retrospective portraits, 271
Ricco di Lapo, 164
Richa, Giuseppe, 191, 200
Ricuccio di Puccio, 94
Riegl, Alois, 15, 243–47, 249–50, 258; *The Dutch Group Portrait*, 243, 249
Rintelen, Friedrich, 72
Rio, Alexis-François, 89–91, 94, 287
ritual: abstraction from subjectivity as feature of, 33, 36, 119; conventions regulating emotional expression in, 33, 36, 127–28; funerary images and, 255; Giotto's *Presentation of Christ in the Temple* (Assisi) and, 116, 118, 119; lay interest in, 21; as means of communication between human and divine worlds, 6, 121; truth and, 257
Robert d'Anjou, 222
rood screens, 196–98
Rosselli, Stefano, 200
Rosso Fiorentino, 257, 284
Rufinus (saint), 25, 168
Rumohr, Carl Friedrich von, 63–64, 67–68, 71, 73, 85, 86, 90, 91, 117, 165, 167, 184, 288, 324n2
Ruskin, John, 116, 117

Sacchetti, Franco, 85, 93, 146–47, 157, 158, 191, 204, 206, 255, 325n51

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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; Mannerism and, 263; modern attitudes toward, 13, 67, 77–78, 83–84, 99–110, 219–20, 233; patrons' desires in conflict with conventions of, 219–20; purpose of, 8, 40, 98–99; realism and, 289; reality and truth in, 309; subjectivity and, 291; viewer's implication in, 75, 103–5, 108, 171, 242–43. *See also* praise, as function of art
saints, intercession of, 5, 50–51, 202–5, 253, 255. *See also* relics
Salome (midwife), 133–34, 136–37
Salutati, Coluccio, 21, 87
salvation: artistic realism in relation to, 205, 253, 256; embedded portraits as means of achieving, 5, 19, 40, 50, 204–5, 253, 255, 345n211; preparation of the soul for, 30; saints (or Mary or Christ) as intermediaries 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, 196–98, *197*, 200–201, 206
San Remigio Pietà. See *Lamentation over the Dead Christ* (San Remigio Pietà) [Giottino]
Sassetti, Francesco, 250, 252–55, 258, 269
Sassetti, Nera Corsi, 255
Sassetti family, 15, 250–51
satire, 308–9
Schlosser, Julius von, 26, 164, 167, 224, 279, 288
Schubring, Paul, 165, 200, 266
Scrovegni, Enrico, 23–24, 45, 301, 302, 310
secular sphere: conceptions of, 99–100, 259; epistemological significance of, 99–100; Francis/Franciscans and, 21; Giotto 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
Shorr, Dorothy C., 122, 127
Sienese art, 146, 172, 177
Silvestro dei Gherarducci, *Christ as Man of Sorrows*, 198, *199*
Simeon, 116–17, 119–23, 127–28
Simmel, Georg, 237
Simone de' Crocefissi, 133
Simone Martini, 98, 116, 129, 159, 160, 179, 299, 307, 310; *Annunciation*, 173, *174*; *Lamentation over the Dead Christ*, 148, *149*, 218
Sirén, Osvald, 165
Skaug, Erling, 184
Sloterdijk, Peter, 316n19
Sontag, 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, 191, 279
Stefaneschi, Bertoldo, 45
Stefaneschi, Giacomo Gaetani, 99
Stefaneschi, Jacopo, 23, 45
Stefano Fiorentino, 85, 96, 158–62, 164–65, 167, 178, 279, 281, 286
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, 291; portraits and, 15, 237, 242, 247; and the question of life and death, 230; ritual as abstraction from, 33, 36, 119; and self-denial, 30–32; truth and, 257; unity of person and, 221–24, 247; of viewers, 229. *See also* emotion; individuality; psychological realism

Taldi, Giorgio, 280
Taldi, Lazzaro, 280
Tessa de' Bardi, 172
thanatopraxis, 301
Third Order, 21
Thode, Henry, 175, 240, 258–59
Thomas of Celano, 37, 43, 222
Tignosini, Bonagiunta, 48, 198
Tino da Camaino, 45
Toesca, Pietro, 157, 165, 167
tombs: paintings associated with, 3, 7, 20, 44–45, 48, 50, 99, 198, 200–201, 255; sculptures/effigies associated with, 6, 24, 43–45, 98–99, 206, 254–55, 301
Tommaso (sculptor), 164
Tommaso del Mazza, 158
Tommaso di Stefano Fortunatino, 335n32
Torriti, Jacopo, 45, 47, 50, 122, 142; *Worship of the Cross*, *46*, 51, 168
Toscani, Giovanni di Francesco (also called Giovanni Tossicani), 278–84, 285; *Pietà*, 279–81, *281*; *St. John the Baptist and St. James*, 281, *282*
Tosinghi-Spinelli Chapel, Santa Croce, 117
Tossicani, Giovanni. *See* Toscani, Giovanni di Francesco
tragedy, 180
Traini, Francesco, 113
transference, 105, 229
Transitus Mariae, 150
Trecento art: ambiguous character of, 71; Angelico and, 276, 281–84, 286–87, 289; beauty in, 93; formal qualities of, 3; perspective in, 124–25; portraits in, 242; Vasari on, 14, 159–60, 176–79, 181–83; women's clothing and hairstyles in, 146–48, 205, 214. *See also* Florentine art after Giotto
Trexler, 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 Giottino's *Lamentation*, 8, 14, 168, 178–81, 188, 209, 224, 264; of person, 221–24, 247; of sacred and profane realms, 10; temporal, 168, 173, 179; Vasari on, 8, 10, 178–79, 182–83, 188, 209, 224, 257, 263, 280
Upper Church, Assisi, 28, 140–41
Urban V (pope), 183, 204

Valle, Guglielmo della, 116, 144
Varro, 99
Vasari, Giorgio: on Angelico, 267, 269–71, 278, 281–84; and *Annunciations* related to Giottino's *Lamentation*, 191–94; art historical project of, 77; on Barna da Siena, 131; on beauty, 94, 208–9, 230; on color, 177–78, 182–83, 279–80, 284–85; on embedded portraits, 251; on Fra Angelico, 16; on Giottino, 8, 14, 159, 160, 162, 164–65, 167, 176–79, 181–82, 187–90, 196, 208–9, 224, 264, 278–80, 283–85; on Giotto, 23, 67, 68, 69, 89, 90, 96, 117, 123, 159–60, 298–99; on history and theory of

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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, 181–83; on unity in art, 8, 10, 178–79, 182–83, 188, 209, 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, 171, 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*, *274*, 272, 276; Medici Madonna, 276; triptych with Crucifixion, 15, *232* (detail), 235, *236*, 247, 275; triptych with Nativity, 233, *234*, *234* (detail), 235–37, 240–41, 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, 39, 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, 129–30, 150, 154, 241; as proto-portraits, 150–54; recognition experienced by, 121, 127–30; women as, 134, 136–37, 139, 141–44, 146–48, 150–51, 153
Wölfflin, 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

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