The Patron's Payoff ∾

CONSPICUOUS COMMISSIONS IN ITALIAN RENAISSANCE ART

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On title page: Michelangelo, *Guiliano de' Medici*, New Sacristy, San Lorenzo, Florence (Archivi
Alinari/Bridegman, Florence), detail.

Part I ॐ *The Commissioning Game*

PATRONS, ARTISTS, AND AUDIENCES

Introduction: Game Theory

THE INTERACTION between patron and artist, leading to the creation of a conspicuous work of art, can be compared to a game in which the payoff for each player depends on the behavior of the other. The presentation of commissioned art to an audience, together with its response, is a crucial second component of the game; thus the audience also constitutes an important player. There is usually a strong cooperative element among the players in this game. As the citation for the 2005 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics puts it: "almost all multi-person decision problems contain a mixture of common and conflicting interests, and . . . the interplay between the two concerns could be effectively analyzed by means of non-cooperative game theory."[1] We find both common and conflicting interests between patrons and artists, and also between that "creative duo" and its audience.

Game theory analyzes interactive situations in which players usually try to influence the behavior of one another, much as patrons strive to affect the behavior of artists and vice versa. To do this, players need to assess how others will behave. Similarly, the artist and patron need to predict how the audience—often comprising multiple groups—will react to a commissioned work. The importance of this conjectured reaction makes the patron-artist game worth playing. In this chapter, we focus first on the relationship between patrons and artists, and then turn our attention to their audiences.

The Principal-Agent Relationship

In a study that was fundamental to the development of art history, focusing on fifteenth-century portraits of the Florentine "bourgeoisie," Aby Warburg employed business terms to describe how "works of art owed their making to the mutual understanding between patrons and artists. The works were, from the outset, the results of a negotiation between client and executant."[2] The structure of the relationship between these players can be described more accurately today by using a concept that is central in both game theory and the economics of information: the principal-agent relationship. In the standard formulation, the principal pays another individual for work and defines the main outlines of the task; the agent fulfills his responsibilities to the prin-

cipal and gets paid. For example, we find the principal-agent relationship in the world of modern medicine, between patient and doctor. The patient knows what symptoms need to be alleviated, the doctor which examinations to take and treatments to administer.

This model, in which "agents typically know more about their tasks than principals do, though principals may know more about what they want accomplished," applies neatly to the relationship between patron and artist in Renaissance Italy.[3] A patron might have wanted a palace to signal his (or less frequently her) status, or an image to highlight a battle victory.[4] The architect, sculptor, or painter, acting as agent, might have proposed solutions that the principal literally could not have imagined. In the art-commissioning game, the principal knew what he wanted to accomplish with the commission, but the artist had the skills required to produce the art and achieve the goals.

In many Renaissance commissions, intermediary agents played an extremely important role as liaison between patrons and artists.[5] Though Mantegna's *Madonna of Victory*, the subject of chapter 8, was made for Francesco Gonzaga, the marchese himself left most details of the project to members of his family and court. Intermediaries also played a well-documented role in the creation of the Laurentian Library in Florence, discussed below, designed by Michelangelo for Pope Clement VII. In our analysis, however, the term "agent" generally refers to the artist, working for the "principal" or patron.

An individual patron sometimes acted as the representative of his family, brotherhood, or guild, who played the role of off-the-scene principals in the commission. This was probably the case of some Alberti projects in the Florentine church of Santa Croce, discussed in chapter 6. Even when the patron was acting "on his own," he often represented and respected the traditions and needs of groups. The desire for honor and status, to mention only the most obvious benefits, was common to nearly all families and institutions. As a result, a private chapel in a church ordered by a single merchant still reveals the "social identity" of a group. In addition, as principal, the commissioner might have needed to negotiate with the religious order that had jurisdiction over the church, and with the *opera* or board of works responsible for the building. But, at the same time, the patron also played prime roles as *agent* in a series of separate relationships: he was the agent for his multiple audiences, including the heavenly one, his clan, and his fellow citizens.

This web of relationships imposed requirements—discussed in the next chapter as constraints—on both principals and agents, limiting their actions in the commissioning game. Thus, many individuals and groups influenced the strategies of the patron and artist, and their relation to their audiences.[6] Nevertheless, Renaissance sources recognized that the individual patron usually had a unique and leading role. Writing in the midfifteenth century, the architect Filarete explained that the patron "generated" the original idea or the seed for a building. The architect, like a mother, then "gestated" the seed

for seven to nine months while he produced various designs for the project.[7] To follow this biological metaphor, commissions usually led to a symbiotic collaboration between patrons and artists. Each benefited from the presence of the other; both were critical to the creation of the work.

In her book on the patronage of Cosimo de' Medici the Elder, the historian Dale Kent offered a new theoretical approach to the topic of patronage.[8] Building in part on several fifteenth-century texts that explicitly refer to a patron as the "author" or creator of individual monuments, she argued that the entire body of works purchased or commissioned by an individual can be considered, to cite her pithy subtitle, the "patron's *oeuvre*." This approach helps us understand, for example, the artistic commissions of Pope Clement VII, Cosimo de' Medici's illegitimate grandson. These works not only signaled Clement's status as a wealthy, cultured patron but also highlighted his membership in the Medici family.[9] To have made this claim convincing by means of one or a few works would have been difficult at best, blatant at worst. But when looking at Clement's entire oeuvre, the favorable message about the principal's central role comes across loud and clear. Subtle signals can proclaim loudly. When used in combination, these two complementary models—the commissioned works of a major patron as his oeuvre, and the patron as principal—enable scholars to secure a broad picture of how individuals used art to convey messages about themselves. We turn now to the instruments used by principals to fashion their intended messages, and to control their artist agents.

Contracts and the Role of Patrons

Contracts provide a starting point for understanding the role played by patrons in the commissioning game. A controversial and often-cited article of 1998 by Creighton Gilbert describes these documents as "disappointing," and notes that contracts rarely extend "beyond specifying pigments, sizes, and delivery dates. . . . The one variant in each contract is the subject matter . . . limited to a standard formula," such as the representation of a major saint or a well-known biblical story. On occasion, patrons provided "special descriptive texts" for unfamiliar subjects. At other times, however, they gave artists considerable freedom, especially in selecting subsidiary figures and scenes. Indeed, in several documented cases the artists proposed the main subjects. "The one further specification found fairly often is the relative placing of such elements, to the right or left of others or the like." Though allowing for this minor exception, Gilbert concludes that artists made most of the important decisions regarding the works they created, and criticizes "the widespread opinion that Renaissance patrons usually kept creative control over works they commissioned."[10] Gilbert shares this position with Charles Hope, another well-known art historian, who even finds it "difficult to substantiate the idea that early Renaissance pa-

trons were knowledgeable about the art they commissioned."[11] Both authors indicate that patrons relinquished a desirable degree of control. Game theory would regard such behavior as anomalous. This suggests that the lack of documentation about patrons' knowledge says more about the paucity of surviving evidence than it does about the prevalence of the phenomenon.

More important, perhaps, a nuanced reading of these records does indicate some patrons' "hands-on" approach to commissions. All scholars agree that the patron specified the materials, dimensions, basic subject, general organization of the composition, budget, compensation, and deadline. The patron also established the intended location for works, and thus the audience. For a religious painting, the location might range from a private chapel or bedroom to a high altar, street tabernacle, or civic building. In unusual cases, such as the Laurentian Library, the patron was involved deeply in deciding aspects of a work's appearance. And when Leone Leoni commissioned an ornate façade for his own palace in Milan, a project discussed in chapter 7, the patron-sculptor provided the plan, though he did not execute it personally. Here the principal understood the task better than his handpicked agent.

Patrons usually had a major impact on the viewing conditions for a work. They commissioned, for example, frames and pedestals in a wide range of sizes, materials, and shapes. They also transformed lighting effects by purchasing curtains and candles, and sometimes even adding new windows to a church. Taken together, these decisions strongly suggest that patrons maintained a significant degree of direct "creative control over works they commissioned," and were indeed "knowledgeable about the art they commissioned."

A recent major study of contracts by Michelle O'Malley now provides more concrete support for the widespread assumption that patrons played a central role in commissions, and allows us to better understand the nature of their interaction.[12] These documents regularly refer to previous works of art and, for large works, sometimes stipulate that figures be life-size. In several instances, we even discover that patrons, before selecting the most appropriate artist for a commission, carried out research on his previous works. Principals thus made many of the key decisions that limited and shaped their agents' solutions, and thereby influenced the final appearance of commissioned works.

Detailed drawings set the stage for the dialogue between the main players in the art-commissioning game, and gave each of them an instrument to influence the choices made by the other. More than a quarter of the painting contracts after 1450 studied by O'Malley called for drawings.[13] In commissions for sculptures and buildings, three-dimensional models were often used. The drawing or model helped the agent secure the appointment and clarify how he intended to carry out his brief; it also gave him an opportunity to justify a deviation from the patron's requirements—a requirement to show, for example, an unreasonably large number of figures, or to represent all of them life-size. Such "previews" of the final work allowed the principal to approve

and, if necessary, modify the proposal. Some contract drawings even suggested colors; other drawings and models offered more than one solution to a given problem.

In a composition drawing made for Cardinal Oliviero Carafa, Filippino Lippi included two possibilities for the lower part of the fresco depicting the triumph of Saint Thomas Aquinas over the heretics, which is painted on the side wall of the patron's chapel in Santa Maria sopra Minerva, Rome (figs. 1.1 and 1.2).[14] A balustrade appears on the lower left side of the drawing, a series of simple engaged piers on the lower right; in the center, a dramatic flight of steps leads up to a platform where the main action takes place. Perhaps Carafa found these ingenious plans too distracting. In the end, Filippino left out the stairs and brought the actors closer to the viewer.

Several other differences between the drawing and fresco also reflect a move toward clarity and simplicity. Only the former, for example, shows two dogs examining each other and includes a few figures sitting casually in the center. Though either the principal or the agent might have proposed these stylistic changes, other modifications are surely attributable to Carafa himself. He certainly asked Filippino to remove the portrait of the cardinal found in the drawing, in order to include those of several other figures, and to add the plethora of explanatory inscriptions in Latin found in the fresco. Carafa must have also given the artist specific indications about the use of personal and familial devices. These features, together with portraits and texts, nearly always indicate the direct intervention of the principal or his adviser. When they appear in a final work of art but not in preliminary drawings, the probability rises that there was patronal intervention. The inclusion of identifiable contemporary figures and easily legible inscriptions often reflects a strong desire to influence the reaction of the audience.

Unfortunately, we rarely have widespread documentation on the patron's involvement. Moreover, for the early modern period as well as our own, we hardly expect legal and financial records to include many important aspects of agreements between parties. The patron of a portrait might ask the artist to show the sitter as dignified or relaxed; an architectural patron might request a building that fits harmoniously within its neighborhood, or one that stands out and makes a statement. Such indications would rarely appear in a modern contract, and never in one drawn centuries ago.

We can compare the relationship between the Renaissance patron and artist with that between a modern company executive and an advertising agency. The CEO, as principal, stipulates the medium, budget, and timing of the ad campaign to the agency, which acts as the agent. In meetings between them, the executive probably also discusses the target audience, general message, and the qualities to be signaled. But the executive may take a further step, into what we call signposting, and identify qualities to be highlighted and issues to be omitted or glossed over, or may indeed even propose stretching, whereby

Within the fresco, inscribed text reads:

DECLARATIO SERMON
TVORVM ILLVMINAT

ETINTELLECTVM
DAT PARVVLIS

FIG. 1.1.
Filippino Lippi,
*Triumph of St.
Thomas*, Carafa
Chapel, Santa
Maria sopra
Minerva, Rome
(Photoservice
Electa, Milan)

some qualities are exaggerated. Signaling, signposting, and stretching, discussed in chapters 3 and 4, are primary strategies for using art to convey favorable information about the patron. The less straightforward the message to be conveyed, the more we would expect the executive today or the patron in Renaissance times to be involved. Often such involvement comes through conversations with the agent, at times through a wink and a nod. At other times, the principal exercises control simply by hiring an agent who understands his needs, or whose usual tendencies reflect his desired approach. In response to explicit and implicit requests, the agent provides the creative input to produce an image that meets the needs of the company (or art patron). The company reviews the proposed product and may provide input, but does not make suggestions so stringent as to stifle the agency's creative energies. Most of this crucial interaction would leave no paper trail.

CHAPTER ONE
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The different types of messages conveyed by Renaissance commissions sug-

FIG. 1.2. Filippino Lippi, drawing for *Triumph of St. Thomas*, British Museum, London (British Museum, London). © Copyright the Trustees of the British Museum

gest alternative types of collaboration between principals and agents. Most often, the patron wanted his commissions to signal wealth or status; in these cases, he could leave most stylistic decisions to the expert in such matters, namely the artist. In these cases, our study supports two of Gilbert's main

conclusions. First, what Renaissance "patrons wanted to buy from artists . . . was enhancement of their honor and splendor."[15] Second, artists, not patrons, knew best how to signal these qualities. Sometimes, the agent knew better than the principal how much should be spent on a project and, in one extreme case, even misled him in order to achieve a mutually satisfying, better outcome. This was recognized by Pope Pius II in a letter to Bernardo Rossellino, whom he praised for "telling me falsehoods about the cost of the work. Indeed, if you had told the truth, you would have never convinced me to undertake a similar expense . . . and this noble palace and this cathedral, as splendid as there are in Italy, would not exist. Because of your trickery, these illustrious buildings were constructed."[16] Even in this example, however, the principal authorized the additional payments for the buildings in Pienza. He thus played an active role in determining the final appearance of a work by establishing the practical parameters for the artist's activity.

In contrast to many art historians, both Gilbert and Hope maintain that few patrons considered works of art as appropriate venues for expressing complex philosophical, theological, or political views. We concur, but that hardly implies that patrons used art to promote only the general characteristics of honor and splendor. For works employing signposting and stretching, we expect a far greater incidence of patronal intervention. If a painting or sculpture signposted some specific pieces of critical information while omitting others, such as selecting which ancestors or events in the family history to represent in a fresco cycle, the principal probably had a better feel than the agent both for what historical events and accomplishments were available and for what images would be most appropriate. Consider a fresco cycle painted from 1571 to 1573 at the Palazzo Vitelli, in Città di Castello, that depicted members of a noble clan. The patron, Paolo Vitelli, asked the painter *not* to show an order of knighthood given to a family member, since such titles had become too common and thus laughable.[17] If a painting or sculpture "stretched" the truth through misrepresentation or exaggeration—for example, the invention of family histories or coats of arms, both of which grew more frequent in the sixteenth century—the principal was best equipped to evaluate the potential risk and reward associated with any degree of stretch. It "is difficult to infer direct connections between aspects of the lives of illustrious patrons and particular works they commissioned," as Kent rightly observed.[18] Nevertheless, examples of signposting and stretching provide particularly fertile terrain for finding such links, and identifying the consequent degree of interaction between patrons and artists.

Principals often cannot monitor the agent's actions with any precision. This inability proves important across an array of principal-agent relationships. The need to control hard-to-monitor agents has led economists to study methods of inducement and enforcement. In modern society, principals often employ a carrot-and-stick strategy. In the example of the modern executive and his advertising firm, the principal might offer financial bonuses for unusually good observable outcomes, such as big sales increases, and terminate relationships, impose penalties, and even launch lawsuits after bad ones. The agent has the motivation to secure future commissions from the same firm, and to establish its reputation so as to win business from other firms.

Renaissance contracts between patrons and artists reveal parallel strategies. Some contracts mention a range within which the fee would be paid, which implies more money for better work.[19] Though very few surviving contracts specify additional payment for superior products, O'Malley's research firmly establishes that value was a flexible concept. Especially for works by respected artists, one cannot simply measure the work and count the figures portrayed in order to estimate the price. O'Malley has found firm evidence that the artist's reputation and place of instruction contributed significantly to the value of his works. Among "commissions for which the painters received the very high price of 200 florins or more . . . almost half of these high fees were paid to men trained in highly renowned artistic centers who undertook commissions in provincial towns."[20] These painters reaped benefits from having studied in cities famous for artistic production, and probably they also profited from the good reputations of their masters.

The major force assuring that the unmonitored artist would produce high-quality work was his desire to enhance his reputation, both for professional success and artistic satisfaction, and to bolster future income. In information economics, reputation plays a major role in guaranteeing quality output from hard-to-monitor agents.[21] At the upper end of the market, a high-status reputation will both boost prices and increase commissions. Hence, it was valuable for Renaissance Italian artists, not merely their patrons, to have commissioned works on display. The reasons, though, were substantially different: patrons sought secure status and success; artists sought a reputation for artistic skill, which would ultimately lead to material reward.

Fifteenth-century Florence provides an instructive case. It saw little change in payment for most professions, including the vast majority of painters who produced simple devotional works at standard prices. If an artist reached an elite status, however, he could ask for and expect much higher compensation.[22] The preface to the third book of Vasari's *Lives*, introducing what we now consider the "High Renaissance," mentions the "extraordinary rewards" enjoyed by some artists, surely a reference to Michelangelo and perhaps to Raphael as

well.[23] In a fascinating passage, Vasari states that higher prices provided incentives for higher quality: "if, in this our age, there were a due need of remuneration, there would be without a doubt works greater and much better than were ever wrought by the ancients."[24] The author, himself an artist, provides the patrons among his readers with a clear message: they can develop talent and obtain better works if they pay higher compensation.

A very large carrot for agents was the hope of future work, from both the same principal and others. Though not specified in contracts, Renaissance artists assuredly understood this in the same way that plumbers and professors understand it today: a task done well stimulates solicitations for future tasks. Renaissance principals had the luxury of selecting the most appropriate agent, and that made artists strive for excellence as they competed for commissions. A famous letter written to the Duke of Milan, probably in 1493, describes the four major artists then working in Florence; the anonymous agent specifically mentions the work done for the pope and Lorenzo de' Medici, indicating that such illustrious patrons provided some assurance of quality.[25] Especially in major cultural centers, artists developed reputations, which we can still often trace in great detail centuries later. An established Renaissance artist had a body of works that local patrons, in most cases, could see repeatedly and for many years. Principals had a range of opportunities to evaluate the agents they might employ.

The most secure way to learn about quality in a principal-agent relationship is through personal experience, a possibility offered by repeat transactions. Not only does repeat business enhance incentives to the current agent, who can hope for future work after doing a good job, it relieves the principal of the task of shopping around for a new agent, and reduces the time and effort required to inform the agent about what he desires. Across Italy, many Renaissance patrons chose the same artist for many different projects over a period of years. Courts provide the clearest examples, as seen in the careers of Leoni and Mantegna. In such continuing relationships, artists created works in a style and with an iconography that they hoped and expected would not only continue to satisfy the patron but would lead to new commissions from others as well.

As for sticks—that is, punishing an agent for falling short—surely the most feared was rejection of a finished work. Beyond the artist's loss of reputation, a rejected painting or sculpture would have little or no value. Artists nearly always made major works to be site-specific and with details selected by the patron. Often they had to assume the considerable costs of the materials as the project progressed. The possibility of rejection, documented in numerous examples, added a significant instrument to artist-patron relationships. Principals could also wield the "stick" of humiliation against their agents. In 1515, the friars at the Florentine church of the SS. Annunziata were so unhappy with Rosso Fiorentino's recently completed fresco, the *Assumption of the*

Virgin, that they asked Andrea del Sarto to repaint it.[26] Just three years later, the disgruntled patron of Rosso's *Uffizi Altarpiece* did not place the work in its intended location, on the altar of a prestigious chapel in the Florentine church of Ognissanti, but rather exiled it to a small church in the countryside, and then commissioned a new painting for the Ognissanti. Moreover, he paid Rosso less that the contracted amount, after getting an appraisal that valued the disputed altarpiece at a modest amount.[27]

Other dissatisfied patrons also clubbed with this financial "stick." As we shall see in chapter 4, Elisabetta Aldovrandini refused to pay the full amount she had contracted with Domenico Ghirlandaio for an altarpiece. After Ghirlandaio's death, the painting was completed by his workshop, and in 1496 a court ruling established that the substandard quality and lack of verisimilitude of the portraits lowered its value.[28] Across Renaissance Italy, many documents stipulated that the established compensation for an artist could be decreased after his work was appraised.[29] The combined threats of rejection, humiliation, and reduced compensation discouraged artists from skimping on effort, and from turning out work of low or unacceptable quality. Moreover, these threats also encouraged artists to create works that would meet the ambitions of patrons. After his inauspicious beginnings in Florence, and partly in reaction to them, Rosso first sought work outside the city and then radically changed his style. He eventually became extremely popular and even worked for the king of France.

The agency relationship worked enormously well for commissioned art in Renaissance Italy. Quality was generally considered to be very high, and patrons were most often satisfied. Beyond carrots and sticks, a major element that kept artists faithful to their patron-principals was their own professional pride, the desire to produce outstanding works and achieve high status. This motivation was apart from and in addition to the material rewards that a fine reputation would bring. Artists were as concerned about their reputations as their patrons were concerned about the quality of the works that they commissioned. On this point, then, the interests of principal and agent were relatively well aligned. To be sure, the effort costs that went into the commission were overwhelmingly borne by the artist. Some of the benefits to him from a high-quality work, mainly future commissions, were also disproportionately his, whereas others, such as lasting fame, would be enjoyed by both principal and agent. Given that the benefits were great, artists had a strong incentive to turn out their best work.

While patrons and artists both sought high quality, they were more likely to diverge on the need to convey the ideal message. Presumably, artists wanted to produce the best possible works from the standpoint of aesthetics; making sure that a patron was presented in the most favorable light was surely a secondary consideration. We assume, however, that painters, sculptors, and architects tried to discern the interests and needs of their patrons, sometimes

through direct discussion, at other times by distilling indirect comments and evidence. In some instances, we can reconstruct such dialogues. When Pope Clement VII needed to communicate with Michelangelo about plans for the addition of the Laurentian Library at San Lorenzo, the patron, residing in Rome, and the artist, living in Florence, exchanged a large number of letters. This unusual circumstance allows us to "overhear" the pope's numerous and remarkably specific requests and questions.[30] Loosely translated, they include: Choose a location for the new library that destroys the least number of priests' rooms. Create one staircase that occupies the entire *ricetto* (vestibule.) How many books can fit at a desk? How is the lighting? The remarkable survival of these letters allows us to appreciate the library, perhaps the most famous example of Renaissance secular architecture, as more than the expression of the artist's aesthetic vision. Instead, "the form of the *ricetto* must be seen as the complex product of three exceptional factors: Michelangelo's creativity, Clement's ambition, and the restraints imposed by the preexisting structure on whose foundation the library was built."[31] Only further research and fortunate archival finds will let us know what kinds of explicit demands and inquiries were normal fare for major commissions.

The Roles and Reactions of Audiences

Clement sought to impress visitors to the Laurentian Library. Indeed, works of art often powerfully affected viewers. Thus, as argued by Alfred Gell in his 1998 book *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*, these objects operate as inanimate agents for patrons, agents, and audiences.[32] The returns to a commission (i.e., its benefits) depend strongly on the reaction of audience members. They will view, learn from, and value works of art, or so patrons and artists hope. In that sense, the patron and artist "work" for their common principal, the audience. In a noble court, for example, even when a courtier ordered decorations for his private residence, his primary interest, and that of the artist, might be to please the duke or prince. If the courtier commissioned works for the royal palace, then he acted as principal in relation to the artist, but as agent in relation to the head of state.

Every patron-artist pair must consider its audiences, assessing how different types of viewers will react to the work produced, including the negative possibility that they will ignore it or, worse, scorn it. We can classify the main types of audience as contemporary, future, and heavenly; the first two, in particular, have numerous subdivisions of crucial importance to principals and artists alike. Many works have multiple audiences, and different aspects of a commission might be targeted at different groups. The patron's first law of commissions is to attend to one's audiences, starting with what their members know about you and proceeding to what you want them to know. If the three

prime elements of real estate are location, location, location, those for patronage are audience, audience, audience.

For all patrons of religious works during the Italian Renaissance, one primary audience was in Heaven. As discussed in chapter 5 (on private chapels), patrons wanted God and the saints to see their devotion, and hoped that their commissions would help them reduce their time in Purgatory. Naturally, patrons knew it was a good deed to commission objects that inspired or aided worship, and expected that such actions would help them in the afterlife. In the early 1500s, Paolo Cortesi explained that "the more erudite are the paintings in a cardinal's chapel, the more easily the soul can be excited by the admonishment of the eyes to the imitation of acts, by looking at [painted representations of] them."[33] As examples, he gave two painting cycles in Rome, the one in "Cardinal Oliviero Carafa's Chapel in S. Maria sopra Minerva," mentioned above, and that "in the votive chapel built by the most illustrious Sixtus IV in the Vatican." The patrons of the Carafa and Sistine chapels surely hoped their works would achieve exalted results, and they did.

Those who commissioned religious works presumably also believed in an omniscient God, one who could read the hearts and minds of all. That is, celestial beings hardly needed to see the coats of arms on the frame of an altarpiece or the inscription on the wall of the church to identify the donors. The frequent and prominent displays of personal emblems thus indicate that patrons had a second audience in mind, namely viewers here on earth. Naturally, within this audience only a few were influential, most were not affluent, and many were not male. Several recent studies have directed attention to the young, the poor, and especially to women as viewers of art.[34] Patrons wished to communicate with those elites, especially those in their own city or region, who could identify the banners, plaques, and symbols that accompanied so many commissions.

This point was not lost on Fra Girolamo Savonarola, who in the late 1490s raged in Florence against the self-promotion of patrons: "you know why they put their [coats of] arms on the back of vestments, because when the priest stands at the altar, the arms can be seen well by all the people."[35] For patrons seeking to affirm or increase their status, the local audience thus played a crucial role. Viewers came into a church, piazza, or bedroom; they saw the impressive altarpiece, palazzo, or portrait; and they perceived magnificence. For this quality, desired by the wealthy and influential across Italy, there was no absolute standard; it existed only as beheld by an audience. Practical experience and historical insight make it clear that the same signals can produce a wide range of reactions in different individuals and groups within the viewing audience.

Academic studies on the economics of information too often ignore the question of heterogeneity among those who receive the information.[36] In contemporary society, however, the most professional signalers—advertisers, mar-

keters, and public relations firms—have studied this question with intensity, making market research a science. In Renaissance Italy, many artists, architects, and patrons were good intuitive market researchers: they understood how different audiences would receive their signals. They were aware that audiences differed in sophistication, and in their sense of decorum. Many commissions, including those visible to the general public, targeted elite viewers. In the passage about chapels quoted above, Cortesi mentioned two examples in Rome. Andrea Mantegna, in a letter of 1489 to Francesco Gonzaga, discussed another in the same city, the chapel he decorated for Pope Innocent VIII. The patron for and size of that commission brought the artist honor, and "most of all in Rome where there are so many worthy judges."[37] In 1546, the gentleman and knight Sabba di Castiglione wrote about the proper decoration of a noble palazzo, and observed that some prefer the works of Piero della Francesca or of Melozzo da Forlì, "who for perspectives and their artistic secrets are perhaps more agreeable for the intellectuals than they are appealing to the eyes of those who understand less."[38]

Agents often put their greatest efforts into major commissions, such as those for important principals. Even works out of view of the general public, such as those just discussed by Sabba di Castiglione, found in the private residences of prominent individuals, might be seen by the audience that counted most, the elite. This group included, among others, potential future patrons for the artist. Nevertheless, we encounter exceptions to this pattern: strong efforts were sometimes made for modest audiences. For example, Vasari recounts how Perino del Vaga accepted a fresco commission in Florence "although the place was out of the way, and the price was small," for reasons of art: "he was attracted by the possibilities of invention in the story and by the size of the wall."[39] But still this work offered the possibility of marketing. Perino's friends hoped it "would establish him in that reputation which his talent deserved among the citizens, who did not know him."

Sometimes, though more rarely, commissions were pitched to "ordinary" members of society. In his architectural treatise published in Venice in 1537, Sebastiano Serlio noted that painters adapted their works for less sophisticated patrons. He discussed the importance of perspectival adjustments or foreshortening for figures painted on ceilings, but noted that "skillful workmen in our time have shunned such shortening for that (in truth) it is not so pleasing to the eyes of the common sort of people."[40] Major artists and patrons knew how to adapt commissions for the portions of their audiences considered most important.

As noted by Wolfgang Kemp, researchers must recognize that viewers' reactions will vary. They will reflect not only their diverse backgrounds and expectations but also the varied "conditions of access" to a given work. This concept, which Kemp helped develop within the theory of German reception aesthetics, refers to "circumstances in which the work of art appears, from

the communicative characteristics of the medium used; through positioning, format, and contextualization; to the encompassing institutions."[41] Studies addressing audience reactions to art need to bear in mind which groups saw the works, and under what circumstances.

We should expect a range of reactions to the same work, for example Donatello's *David*, from different viewers (such as the patron, female members of his family, government officials), and in different settings and circumstances. Surely the sculpture had a different impact when seen in the courtyard of a private palace during a wedding than when seen in the town hall, where it was moved after the revolution of 1494.[42] To be sure, we often cannot state with confidence how different audiences, especially those many centuries ago, reacted to a given work of art. But it would surely be surprising if there were not significant variations, and if Renaissance artists and patrons did not anticipate that.

In addition to their contemporary audiences in Heaven and on earth, many patrons had a concern for future viewers. Consideration of this additional audience allows us to identify a major benefit that distinguishes works of art and architecture from other forms of conspicuous consumption. Banquets, clothing, and funerals are transient. Paintings, sculptures, and buildings often endure for many generations. In the late 1400s, Agnolo di Bernardo Bardi declared in his will that his donation to obtain a chapel in the Florentine church Cestello should serve as "an example to other benefactors."[43] Clearly, he intended the space and its decorations to both enhance his own status and inspire commissions by other patrons. As we should expect from a commission stipulated in his last testament, Bardi considered the reaction of viewers after his death. The Venetian humanist Ermolao Barbaro made this point explicit in a letter of 1489, when he wrote to a friend that stone tombs were made not for the dead but for the future.[44] Similarly, donors of buildings to universities today, particularly those who are quite elderly or who leave monies in their wills, are also playing to the future.

Just as Renaissance patrons had to speculate about the reactions of their intended audiences, art historians must speculate as well when seeking to determine the intent of those who commissioned art, or how varying types of people reacted to a work. But speculate we must if we are to understand the patronage process. Doing so, we must recognize that any conclusions we reach will derive from an amalgam of evidence, theory, and inference, and that findings about some commissions must be extended to yield insights into other, similar commissions. Although ironclad documentation will never be available, we strive here to understand the motivations and strategies of the players in the commissioning game. The players' expected benefits, and the reactions from their audiences, constitute two of the key elements in our analytical framework, the subject of our next chapter.

Notes

1. The citation also stated that Thomas Schelling's work offered "a unifying framework for the social sciences"; see <http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/economics/laureates>.

2. Aby Warburg, "The Art of Portraiture and the Florentine Bourgeoisie: Domenico Ghirlandaio in Santa Trinita; The Portraits of Lorenzo de' Medici and His Household" [1902], in *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, trans. David Britt (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1999), 187.

3. John W. Pratt and Richard J. Zeckhauser, preface in *Principals and Agents: The Structure of Business*, ed. John W. Pratt and Richard J. Zeckhauser (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1985), 3.

4. Though women regularly commissioned and produced art in Renaissance Italy, the vast majority of individual patrons and artists were men; therefore we often employ the male pronoun for patrons in this volume. For more on female patrons see Catherine King, *Renaissance Women Patrons: Wives and Widows in Italy, c. 1300–1500* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1998); Sheryl E. Reiss and David G. Wilkins, eds., *Beyond Isabella: Secular Women Patrons of Art in Renaissance Italy* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2001); and the discussion of Elisabetta Aldovrandini in chapter 3. For women patrons in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, see chapter 9.

5. On intermediary agents see Sheryl E. Reiss, "Raphael and His Patrons: From the Court of Urbino to the Curia and Rome," in *The Cambridge Companion to Raphael*, ed. Marcia B. Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 36–55 and esp. 52–53, 319 note 12.

6. For a subtle analysis of this dynamic see Jill Burke, *Changing Patrons: Social Identity and the Visual Arts in Renaissance Florence* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), and Patricia Lee Rubin, *Images and Identity in Fifteenth-Century Florence* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007).

7. Martin Kemp, "From 'Mimesis' to 'Fantasia': The Quattrocento Vocabulary of Creation, Inspiration and Genesis in the Visual Arts," *Viator* 8 (1977): 358–61. For the Renaissance notion of "generating" a work of art, also see Dale Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici and the Florentine Renaissance: The Patron's Oeuvre* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 5–6.

8. Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici*.

9. Sheryl Reiss presented this research in her lecture "To Be a Medici: Proclaiming Status, Identity, and Legitimacy in the Art Patronage of Giulio de' Medici (Pope Clement VII)" at the 2002 annual conference of the College Art Association, in the session chaired by Nelson and Zeckhauser. Unfortunately, external circumstances did not allow her to submit her study to this volume. For Clement VII, see *The Pontificate of Clement VII: History, Politics, Culture*, ed. Kenneth Gouwens and Sheryl E. Reiss (Aldershot, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005). In "Raphael," 319 note 11, Reiss observed that Kent's thesis applies to "major, elite patrons with many commissions to examine. It is more problematic for less active patrons who might have commissioned a single work or works of modest ambition."

10. Creighton E. Gilbert, "What Did the Renaissance Patron Buy?" *Renaissance Quarterly* 51 (1998): 392.

11. Charles Hope, "The Myth of Florence" (review of Michael Levey, *Florence: A Portrait*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), *New York Review of Books*, 31 October 1996, 55.

12. Michelle O'Malley, *The Business of Art: Contracts and the Commissioning Process in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005). For litigation between patrons and artists, also see Mareile Büscher, *Künstlerverträge in der Florentiner Renaissance* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2002).

13. O'Malley, *Business,* 197.

14. For the drawing (British Museum, inv. n. 1860-6-16-75) and fresco, see Jonathan K. Nelson, "I cicli di affreschi nelle Cappelle Carafa e Strozzi," in *Filippino Lippi*, ed. Patrizia Zambrano and Jonathan K. Nelson (Milan: Electa, 2004), esp. 541–46, 579–83 cat. no. 39.

15. Gilbert, "What Did the Renaissance Patron Buy?" 446.

16. Christof Thoenes, "'L'incarico imposto dall'economia.' Appunti su committenza ed economia dai trattati d'architettura," in *Arte, committenza ed economia a Roma e nelle corti del Rinascimento (1420–1530)*, ed. Arnold Esch and Christoph Luitpold Frommel (Turin: Einaudi, 1995), 57–58.

17. Julian Kliemann, *Gesta dipinte. La grande decorazione nelle dimore italiane dal Quattrocento al Seicento* (Milan: Silvana, 1993), 85.

18. Kent, *Cosimo de' Medici,* 3.

19. O'Malley, *Business,* 122–25.

20. Ibid., 154.

21. See, for example, George J. Mailath and Larry Samuelson, "Who Wants a Good Reputation?" *Review of Economic Studies* 68, no. 2 (April 2001): 415–41, and Paul Resnick and Richard Zeckhauser, "Trust among Strangers in Internet Transactions: Empirical Analysis of eBay's Reputation System," in *The Economics of the Internet and E-Commerce*, ed. Michael R. Baye (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science, 2002), 127–57.

22. Susanne Kubersky-Piredda, "Immagini devozionali nel Rinascimento fiorentino: produzione, commercio, prezzi," in *The Art Market in Italy, 15th–17th Centuries*, ed. Marcello Fantoni, Louisa C. Matthew, and Sara F. Matthews-Grieco (Modena: Franco Cosimo Panini, 2003), 115. For the price of art, and the great difficulty in comparing different forms of compensation, see Guido Guerzoni, *Apollo e Vulcano. I mercati artistici in Italia 1400–1700* (Venice: Marsilio, 2006), 231–64.

23. On Michelangelo's income, see Rab Hatfield, *The Wealth of Michelangelo* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2002).

24. Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, trans. Gaston du C. de Vere, ed. David Ekserdijan (London: Everyman's Library, 1996), 1:633 (preface to part 3).

25. O'Malley, *Business,* 148; Nelson, "Gli stili nelle opere tarde: interpretazioni rinascimentali e moderne," in Zambrano and Nelson, *Filippino,* esp. 392–93.

26. The *Assumption* was not repainted, however, perhaps because Del Sarto would not work at the same low rates as Rosso. See David Franklin, *Rosso in Italy: The Italian Career of Rosso Fiorentino* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 20. We will address the question of rejected works in our paper "Quality Control for

Commissions: the Potential for Rejection or Replacement," to be given at the annual meeting of the Renaissance Society of America (Chicago, 2008) in the session we organized titled "Unacceptable Art: Rejected Commissions in Renaissance Italy."

27. Ibid., 35–42. The patron, Leonardo Buonafé, acted as executor to the estate of the Catalan widow Francesca Ripoli. Thus, Buonafé served as principal to Rosso but as agent to Ripoli.

28. Jean K. Cadogan, *Domenico Ghirlandaio: Artist and Artisan* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 270–73, 377–78.

29. O'Malley, *Business*, 122.

30. See Caroline Elam, "Michelangelo and the Clementine Architectural Style," in *Pontificate of Clement VII*, 199–225. In most of the letters, the pope's opinions and requests were expressed via an intermediary.

31. Silvia Catitti, "Michelangelo e la monumentalità nel ricetto: progetto, esecuzione e interpretazione," in *Michelangelo architetto a San Lorenzo. Quattro problemi aperti*, ed. Pietro Ruschi (Florence: Mandragora, 2007), 94.

32. For the application of Gell's notions to Italian Renaissance art, see Michelle O'Malley, "Altarpieces and Agency: The Altarpiece of the Society of the Purification and Its 'Invisible Skein of Relations,'" *Art History* 28, no. 4 (2005): 417–41.

33. Kathleen Weil Garris and John F. D'Amico, "The Renaissance Cardinal's Ideal Palace: A Chapter from Cortesi's *De Cardinalatu*," in *Studies in Italian Art and Architecture, 15th through 18th Centuries*, ed. Henry A. Millon (Rome: American Academy in Rome, 1980), 92; for discussion see Nelson, "Cicli," in Zambrano and Nelson, *Filippino*, 548, 576 note 173.

34. See, for example, Rubin, *Images and Identity*, 98–112, 180–81, 333, and Adrian Randolph, "Regarding Women in Sacred Space," in *Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, ed. Geraldine A. Johnson and Sara F. Matthews Grieco (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 17–41, both with further bibliography.

35. Girolamo Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Amos e Zaccaria*, ed. Paolo Ghigheri (Rome: A. Belardetti, 1971–72), 2:26.

36. See the classic text by David M. Kreps, "Topics in Information Economics," in *A Course in Microeconomic Theory, Part IV* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 575–719.

37. Creighton E. Gilbert, *Italian Art, 1400–1500: Sources and Documents*, 2nd rev. ed. (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1992), 13.

38. Robert Klein and Henri Zerner, *Italian Art, 1500–1600: Sources and Documents* (1966; reprint, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1989), 23.

39. Vasari, *Lives*, 2:166.

40. Sebastiano Serlio, *The Five Books of Architecture: An Unabridged Reprint of the English Edition of 1611* (New York: Dover Publications, 1982), 66.

41. Wolfgang Kemp, review of John Shearman, *Only Connect . . . Art and the Spectator in the Italian Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), *Art Bulletin* 76, no. 2 (1994): 366. See Rubin, *Images and Identity*, on the importance of considering how and why observers engage in different types of seeing.

42. For two quite disparate approaches to the different audience reactions to the work, see Francesco Caglioti, *Donatello e i Medici: storia del David e della Giuditta*

(Florence: L. S. Olschki, 2000), esp. 101–52, 182–218, 291–319, and Adrian W. B. Randolph, *Engaging Symbols: Gender, Politics, and Public Art in Fifteenth-Century Florence* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 139–92.

43. Alison Luchs, *Cestello: A Cistercian Church of the Florentine Renaissance* (New York: Garland, 1977), 40.

44. Martin Gaier, *Facciate sacre a scopo profano: Venezia e la politica dei monumenti dal Quattrocento al Settecento*, trans. Benedetta Heinemann Campana (Venice: Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti, 2002), 93.