

**REPRESENTING THE PERFECT PRINCE: PONTORMO'S
*ALESSANDRO DE' MEDICI***

by Vanessa Walker-Oakes

Two portraits of Alessandro de' Medici, first duke of Florence, have often served, in art criticism of the twentieth century, as examples of the differences between the public and private portrait: the public, by Giorgio Vasari, painted in 1533–1534 (fig. 1) and the private, by Jacopo Pontormo, painted in 1534–1535 (fig. 2).^{*} Art historians—led by their characterization of Pontormo's portrait as a private gift, their emphasis on its recipient, Alessandro's lover, and their desire to read the portrait as an index of the mind of the duke or of the artist—have read this image solely within the personal sphere, neglecting the potential for public propaganda that emerges when the historian asks a different set of questions. It is instructive, therefore, to consider anew Pontormo's *Portrait of Alessandro de' Medici*, to ask how it might have functioned in a public capacity as a ruler portrait, that is, as a constructed persona presented by the ruler via the fiction of the naturalistic portrait. Reconsideration of the likely location of the finished work and the potential associations that the costume, pose, gaze, and action of the sitter might have held for a contemporary viewer will lead to a different interpretation of this image, one that suggests that Pontormo's flexible imagery might have been read in turn as an entreaty to love to one particular viewer, the duke's lover, and as an image of the perfect prince to others.

In the past, scholars, ignoring the essentially constructed nature of portraiture, have based their reading of these likenesses on two primary assumptions, which must be evaluated before any new interpretation of the painting is proposed.¹ First, scholars have asserted that Pontormo's

^{*}This paper began as a report for a seminar on Renaissance ruler portraiture offered in the winter quarter of 2000 by Professors Joanna Woods-Marsden and David Kunzle at the University of California, Los Angeles. A previous version of this paper was presented in November 2000 at the annual meeting of the Art Historians of Southern California held at the Getty Center. I should like to express my deepest gratitude to Professor Woods-Marsden for her intellectual guidance and constructive criticism. I would like to dedicate this paper to my husband, without whose babysitting skills the time for its preparation might never have been found.

¹See Harry Berger, Jr., "Fictions of the Pose: Facing the Gaze in Early Modern Portraiture," *Representations* (Spring 1994) 106, for one of several recent articles ad-

portrait must have been private, as, according to Leo Steinberg, “what a political portrait [of the duke] ... looked like ... we know from Vasari,” referring of course to Vasari’s likeness of 1533–1534 (fig. 1).² His assumption that Renaissance propaganda took only one form, militaristic, is certainly hazardous. I shall argue that, to the contrary, Pontormo’s image complemented Vasari’s and also portrayed a perfect prince by advertising a different set of equally essential princely virtues.

The second assumption shaping past interpretation has been drawn from the only surviving written record of Pontormo’s painting, which is contained in Vasari’s *Lives of the Artists*:

Jacopo [Pontormo], having executed ... the portrait from life of Amerigo Antinori ... and that portrait being much extolled by everyone, Duke Alessandro had him informed that he wished to have his portrait taken by him in a large picture. And Jacopo, for the sake of convenience, executed his portrait in the time being in a little picture of the size of a sheet of half-folio, and with such diligence and care ... From that little picture, which is now in the guardaroba of Duke Cosimo, Jacopo afterwards made a portrait of the same duke in a large picture, with a style in the hand, drawing the head of a woman; which larger portrait Duke Alessandro afterwards presented to Signora Taddea Malaspina ...³

Given this information, authors have largely assumed that the image was intended exclusively as a private gift for Taddea, the duke’s lover, professing, in the words of one art historian, Alessandro’s constancy and singular devotion.⁴ Other scholars have similarly assumed that the image conveys to us, the viewer, the emotional unconscious of the duke, revealing his insecurities, his hesitancy, his youth.⁵ The implication that the formal characteristics of Pontormo’s portrayal exposed to the viewer a vulnerable, intimate psychological aspect of the duke would suggest that such an image should have had little subsequent

dressing the constructed nature of portraiture. According to Berger, “... the orthopsychic subject has exchanged his merely natural and sullied flesh for a glorified body of paint, has passed through the looking glass into the pure ideality of an icon. It is as an icon, an other (not a self), that he gives himself to be observed, admired, commemorated, and venerated.”

²Leo Steinberg, “Pontormo’s Alessandro de’Medici, or, I Only Have Eyes for You,” *Art in America* 63 (January–February 1975) 63.

³Giorgio Vasari, *Lives of the Painters, Sculptors and Architects*, trans. Gaston du C. de Vere, vol. 2 (New York 1996) 363.

⁴Steinberg (n. 2 above) 63.

⁵Steinberg (n. 2 above) 63; and Carl Brandon Strehlke, “Pontormo, Alessandro de’ Medici and the Palazzo Pazzi,” *Philadelphia Museum of Art Bulletin* 81, no. 348 (1985) 13.

cause for public reproduction. To the contrary, however, the small image taken by Pontormo in the presence of the duke, which has recently been identified as a portrait of Alessandro now in Chicago (fig. 3), was subsequently widely known.⁶ At the time Vasari wrote his *Lives*, it was in the *guardaroba* of Alessandro's successor, Duke Cosimo I. Many copies were produced by the workshop of Bronzino, suggesting their wide dissemination, perhaps as gifts of a diplomatic nature, but certainly confirming that Alessandro's successor saw nothing in the facial expression to suggest his predecessor's weakness or hesitancy, or the privacy or intimacy of this depiction.⁷ Rather, functioning as a diplomatic gift, the representation was used for its propagandistic potential.

Further, the visual dynamics of the final, large composition preclude the possibility that the woman being drawn represents Taddea gazing back into the eyes of her lover. The woman drawn by Alessandro, carefully and purposefully termed by Vasari "the head of a woman"—not, that is, "Lady Taddea," whose physiognomy he would have known—was fashioned in profile. The object of Alessandro's scrutiny would not have been able to return his gaze as her glance was directed parallel to the picture plane. Vasari's text reads clearly: the portrait of the duke drawing the head of a woman was a workshop creation, a conceit. It neither depicted an actual moment, nor was the head in silverpoint necessarily Taddea's. In sum, I argue that this painting was not intended to be viewed as a depiction of an actual moment, nor was it intended for only one viewer, nor was it private or intimate in our modern sense of these terms. Rather, given the likely location of the finished portrait, the clothing and the action of the duke, this likeness represented, like Vasari's slightly earlier panel, an idealization, the sitter as a paragon of courtly and dynastic virtue. The portrait should be viewed as a construct, a fiction garbed in the deceptive cloak of naturalism, that offered the viewer a duke shown to his advantage, carefully and pointedly addressing the public relations problems of the first absolutist ruler of

⁶For identification of this portrait with the original panel by Pontormo, an attribution supported by Sydney Freedberg and Janet Cox-Rearick, see Christopher Lloyd, *Italian Paintings before 1600 in The Art Institute of Chicago* (Princeton 1993) 200. The coat of mail worn by the duke in this portrait was added later by another artist, perhaps at the request of Alessandro's successor, Duke Cosimo I. See Lloyd 200–201.

⁷For Cosimo I's use of family portraits as "pictorial diplomacy," see Robert B. Simon, "Bronzino's Portrait of Cosimo I in Armor," *The Burlington Magazine* 125 (August 1993) 532. For a more in depth discussion, see also Robert B. Simon "Bronzino's Portraits of Cosimo I de' Medici" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University 1982).

Florence.

The model for reading Pontormo's portrait as an idealization, along the lines of Vasari's image, rather than as a depiction of physical or emotional reality, is not simply a manifestation of twentieth-century skepticism. The sixteenth-century artistic theorist Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo discussed in detail the specific problems faced by the artist in depicting rulers: "Kings desire majesty and to seem to ... breathe nobility and gravity, even when they are not naturally so inclined ... Herein lies the painter's skill in his art: to represent not the acts a certain pope or emperor by chance did, but those he *should have done*, in accordance with his majesty and the dignity of his estate [my italics]."⁸ Realism or naturalism in portraiture—the sense that we are looking in a mirror reflecting actual events—works to the sitter's and artist's advantage: it naturalizes as actual that which was most certainly a fiction.

An understanding of both Vasari and Pontormo's portraits compels a consideration of the political climate in which they were conceived. In 1534–1535, when Pontormo's portrait was painted, Alessandro was engaged in the creation of an absolutist state, erected on the foundations of a long history of representative government, a state forced upon the citizens of Florence, weary of siege and war. Placed in power in 1531 by collusion of Pope Clement VII de' Medici and the Emperor Charles V, the first actions of the young duke did little to calm the fears of impending tyranny among Florentines. He ordered the removal of the great bell, used to call *Parlamenti*, from the Palazzo Signoria to mark the end of the republic, and confiscated all weapons belonging to private citizens, even including those hanging in churches. In July 1534, he began work on a fortress, the *Fortezza da Basso*, which a contemporary historian characterized as "... a yoke of a kind never experienced before; a citadel, whereby the citizens lost all hope of ever living in freedom."⁹

As a result, Alessandro—to put it mildly—faced a public relations problem. His regime challenged the Florentine tradition of liberty, regardless of whether such a history of liberty was real or imagined. His efforts to control the city branded him a tyrant. His private life, as well, offended the citizens. Benvenuto Cellini, in his autobiography, referred

⁸Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo, *Trattato dell'arte*, quoted in Marianna Jenkins, *The State Portrait: Its Origin and Evolution* (New York 1947) 44.

⁹Quoted in J. R. Hale, *Florence and the Medici: The Pattern of Control* (New York 1978) 124.

to the duke's debauchery, only one among many claims of his womanizing, which did not cease at the walls of the convents or the homes of the great families of the city.¹⁰ Certainly, his private life lacked the decorum and grace ostensibly expected of a leader in his position and did little to stop widespread rumors of his ill-suitedness to govern. Alessandro's "tyranny" ended abruptly, however, in 1537, when he was murdered by his cousin. So hated was Alessandro that in the later sixteenth century, his coffin, blackened by smoke from the candles placed around it following his death, was assumed to have been blackened by the evil emanating from the tyrant within.¹¹

Both paintings, then, Vasari's and Pontormo's, were commissioned at approximately the same moment by a leader in a new, politically-charged situation. Vasari's portrait, the first of a Medici in armor, is generally read as a first attempt at the development of an imagery appropriate to the new Medici regime, an imagery focused on military might and the ostentatious display of power.¹² In a letter to Ottaviano de' Medici, to whom Alessandro gave this portrait, Vasari explained the iconography of the panel in detail, elucidating his intention to create a visual manifesto of Medici power and dynastic continuity.¹³ The expression of the new, Medici pretension to absolute rule was perhaps nowhere clearer than in the stool upon which the duke sits, supported by the figures of the armless, legless Florentines who represented the duke's subjects without a will of their own: "they are his people, who guided by the will of he who is above them and commands them, have neither arms nor legs."¹⁴

One of the portrait's primary concerns was the justification of this

¹⁰Benvenuto Cellini, *The Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini*, trans. John Addington Symonds (New York 1985) 171–172; Hale (n. 9 above) 122 and 124.

¹¹Richard C. Trexler and Mary Elizabeth Lewis, "Two Captains and Three Kings: New Light on the Medici Chapel," *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* IV (1981) 150–151.

¹²Malcolm Campbell has analyzed this particular portrait in depth based largely upon Vasari's description of his intention contained in a surviving letter. See Campbell, "Il Ritratto del Duca Alessandro de' Medici di Giorgio Vasari: Contesto e Significato" in *Giorgio Vasari tra decorazione ambientale e storiografia artistica* (Florence 1985) 339–361. See also Kurt W. Forster, "Metaphors of Rule: Political Ideology and History in the Portraits of Cosimo I de' Medici," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 15 (1971) 67–70.

¹³An appendix to Campbell's article (n. 12 above) reproduces the original text of the letter, 360–361.

¹⁴"... sono i suoi popoli, che guidandosi secondo il volere di chi sopra li comanda, non hanno nè braccia nè gambe." Vasari's letter to Ottaviano de' Medici printed in Campbell (n. 12 above) 360–361.

absolute power by assertions of dynastic legitimacy. Throughout the painting, allusions to the Medici of the past, expressed via the inclusion of icons and Medici symbols and via formal resemblances to previous Medici portraiture, argued this genealogical justification.¹⁵ The pose of the figure, seated and holding the *bastone del dominio*, recalled most pointedly that of Michelangelo's *Giuliano de' Medici, Duke of Nemours*, in the New Sacristy at San Lorenzo (fig. 4). Richard Trexler and Mary C. Lewis have proposed that the figure of the *bastoniere*, commonly identified as Giuliano, in fact originally represented Lorenzo, duke of Urbino, the illegitimate Alessandro's ostensible father.¹⁶ Indeed, the authors suggest that Vasari's visit to the chapel in 1534, prior to its opening to the public, may have been for the express purpose of employing Michelangelo's statue of the *bastoniere* as model for his portrait.¹⁷ If this were true, it would strengthen the assertion that Vasari wished to demonstrate Alessandro's legitimacy via genealogy. Alessandro's claims to the leadership of Florence depended fundamentally on his assertion that he, as son of Duke Lorenzo, was thus the only surviving member of the old branch of the family that had included Cosimo the Elder and Lorenzo the Magnificent. He therefore bore a greater right to the leadership of Florence than his cousin, Cosimo, the future Duke Cosimo I. These allusions to Lorenzo, duke of Urbino, and to Lorenzo the Magnificent were thus emphatic statements of appropriate succession; Alessandro's Laurentian heritage not surprisingly, then, figured prominently not only throughout the symbolic scheme of Vasari's portrait but also in the portrait of the duke by Pontormo, as I shall discuss presently.

This emphasis on Alessandro's Laurentian heritage was reiterated in Vasari's inclusion of the *broncone*, the dead laurel trunk from which a

¹⁵Janet Cox-Rearick, *Dynasty and Destiny in Medici Art: Pontormo, Leo X, and the two Cosimos* (Princeton 1984) 234–235.

¹⁶Trexler and Lewis (n. 11 above) 141–161. The authors trace the transformation of the identities of the statues in the course of the sixteenth century and propose that the motivation for the switch may be located in the political conflicts of the day. See also Cox-Rearick (n. 15 above) 235. The authors also note that contemporary histories and descriptions of the funeral services for Alessandro, held in 1537, consistently report that Alessandro was placed in the tomb “of his father,” Duke Lorenzo. To quote one example cited by Trexler and Lewis, “[Il Duca Alessandro] è messo nella sepoltura fatto di marmo nella sagrestia nuova per il Duca Lorenzo suo padre” (148). These reports confirm two significant points: (1) that Alessandro was believed to be the son of Duke Lorenzo, despite the fact that he was, in reality, the son of Pope Clement VII de' Medici, and (2) that the statue now known as Giuliano was at that time believed to represent Duke Lorenzo.

¹⁷Trexler and Lewis (n. 11 above) 148.

new branch springs forth, beside the seated duke. The laurel, used by Lorenzo the Magnificent as a device, and adopted by Lorenzo, duke of Urbino, was used here to identify the young Alessandro as the new branch (*broncone*) that will bring new fame and glory to the Medici family.¹⁸ Alessandro, by using the *broncone*, sought to extend the link from Lorenzo the Magnificent, through Duke Lorenzo, to himself, stressing not only the continuity of Medici leadership but also the prosperity and cultural efflorescence experienced under the leadership of his predecessor, Lorenzo the Magnificent. In sum and by his own admission, Vasari endeavored to codify and advertise visually the new position of the restored Medici as absolute rulers.

Turning to issues of location, attire, and behavior, how might Pontormo's portrait of Alessandro have functioned in an equally public, propagandistic manner? While not debating that the Lady Taddea was the likely recipient of Pontormo's portrait, I would like to consider, for a moment, its likely location. Carl Brandon Strehlke has convincingly argued that the Palazzo Pazzi, the Lady's home, had become the duke's "unofficial court."¹⁹ The grand palazzo was owned by Francesco Cibo and served as the residence of Cardinal Innocenzo Cibo, who acted not only as a political advisor to the duke, but also as the head of government during the duke's absences from Florence on state business.²⁰ Cellini wrote in his autobiography that, after the death of the Pope Clement VII de' Medici, he paid his respects to the duke at the Palazzo Pazzi, rather than the Palazzo Medici. Bernardo Segni, the historian, recorded not only the duke's frequent visits, but also the attendance of the poet, Francesco Berni, who spent a great deal of time at the palazzo in the company of the duke and his circle.²¹ Visitors to the Palazzo were many and included those conducting state business as well as close personal friends. Thus the most likely location intended for the

¹⁸The *broncone* also appears in Pontormo's portrait of Cosimo the Elder with the inscription: UNO AVV(ULSO) NO(N) DEFICIT ALTER ("when one dies the other will not fail") taken from *Aeneid* 6.135. See Karla Langedijk, *The Portraits of the Medici: 15th–18th centuries* (Florence ca.1981–1987) 68. This earlier use of the *broncone*, however, referred not to Alessandro, but to the newborn Cosimo (future Duke Cosimo I), according to Cox-Rearick (n. 15 above) 235. Given this, Vasari's use of this symbol quite pointedly addresses the contentious issue of Medici succession, by transferring the meaning and promise of the "new branch" from Cosimo to Alessandro.

¹⁹Strehlke (n. 5 above) 10.

²⁰Strehlke (n. 5 above) 10, and "Cibo, Innocenzo," *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (Rome 1981) 252.

²¹Cellini (n. 10 above) 161–162.

portrait was the Lady Taddea's home, the Palazzo Pazzi. What happens, then, if one posits another viewer, someone other than Taddea Malaspina, as must certainly have often been the case?

The date of the portrait has been placed sometime between late 1534 and 1535. The duke is dressed in black, which may suggest that he was in mourning, as he would have been in the year following 25 September 1534, when Pope Clement VII de' Medici died. The open door behind him may have also alluded to the death of the pope, a common conceit in the Renaissance taken from Roman sarcophagi.²² At the time of this painting, then, Alessandro's political position was even less certain than previously, as he had lost the powerful connection to the papacy that had helped to sustain him. If Pontormo chose to depict the sitter in mourning, the respectful and reserved demeanor thus emphasized would have countered popular perception of the duke as lecherous, wanton, and immoral.

Such dark clothing also found an advocate in Baldassare Castiglione, whose book, *The Courtier*, dictated the ideals of courtly dress and behavior throughout the sixteenth century. He described the perfect courtier as moderate of dress and manner: "I prefer [the clothes of the Courtier] always to tend a little more toward the grave and sober rather than the foppish. Hence, I think that black is more pleasing in clothing than any other color."²³ Black clothing may also have been interpreted as a reference to Charles V, whose preference for black garments was well known, and by whose power Alessandro had been invested with the principate.²⁴ The duke has been portrayed, then, at the height of good taste, in moderate but elite fashion, in emulation of his father-in-law, the emperor, and out of respect for the passing of the pope.

The decision, often read as "private" or "informal," to avoid the use of armor or other regalia may have held other connotations for the observer familiar with Medici portraiture, a review of which suggests that tasteful but reserved civilian attire and simplistic backgrounds were the norm, rather than the anomaly. No previous Medici leader had been depicted in armor as the duke was in Vasari's portrait. Rather than suggesting intimacy, the use of stylish but civilian dress might have been

²²Steinberg (n. 2 above) 64.

²³Baldesar Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. Charles S. Singleton (New York 1959) 122.

²⁴Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (New York 1995) 371. This preference is also evident in his portraits; Titian portrayed Charles V seated and in black garments in a portrait now in Munich.

seen as a deliberate attempt to downplay the militaristic and oppressive character of Alessandro's power base, alluding instead to the long tradition of aristocratic, but *not* absolutist, Medici leadership. Pontormo himself had executed a portrait of Cosimo the Elder for a gallery of Medici portraiture being assembled by Alessandro's relative, Ottaviano de' Medici, to which Vasari composed an image of Lorenzo the Magnificent as pendant in 1534 (figs. 5 and 6). In both of these images, the sitters were dressed in dark civilian garments traditional for their time. Later, Titian would seize upon the possibilities opened up by the variance in attire to depict alternate aspects of the great prince. His portraits of Charles V depict him both in armor and in black dress, suggesting the varying attributes of the great leader, active and contemplative.

Perhaps the most surprising element of Pontormo's portrait of Alessandro is the depiction of the duke in the act of drawing. It would be 1550 before any artist depicted himself engaged in his manual trade, and yet the Duke allowed himself to be portrayed in this manner.²⁵ Once again, turning to Castiglione, one finds reference to the art of drawing in his description of the courtier: "... another matter which I consider to be of great importance and which I think must therefore in no way be neglected by our courtier: and this is a knowledge of how to draw," which, "besides from being most noble and worthy in itself, proves useful in many ways, and especially in warfare."²⁶ Further, argued Castiglione, an understanding of the art of drawing allowed one to fully appreciate beauty, both as a connoisseur of art and in living bodies.²⁷ The duke was portrayed as an accomplished prince, possessing a skill that would not only benefit him in war, but, perhaps even more importantly, would establish him as a connoisseur of beauty in its most abstract and idealized sense.

Beyond its allusions to the courtly ideal of the perfect prince popularized by Castiglione, the concept of *disegno*, or drawing, was central to artistic theory of the Renaissance. Divorced from reference to manual labor, *disegno* was, to paraphrase Vasari, the expression of the concept born in the intellect.²⁸ Quite pointedly, Pontormo has portrayed the Duke without a hint of effort in the product of his art.²⁹ Reality was

²⁵Joanna Woods-Marsden, *Renaissance Self-Portraiture: The Visual Construction of Identity and the Social Status of the Artist* (New Haven and London 1998) 225–227.

²⁶Castiglione (n. 23 above) 77, 82.

²⁷Castiglione (n. 23 above) 82.

²⁸Vasari, quoted in Woods-Marsden (n. 25 above) 143.

²⁹The important distinction between the *labor* of producing art and this depiction of

likely a great deal closer to a sketch, now in the Rijksmuseum (fig. 7), believed to be a copy of a preliminary study from nature by Pontormo, which depicts the duke in profile, focused intently on his work. According to the drawing, Alessandro was not an accomplished artist and had to labor at the task. In the finished work, Pontormo removed the physical aspect from the duke's action; the art of *disegno* became a pure symbol, an attribute evidencing the intellect of the ruler.

Further, *disegno* suggested the act of creation, the building of something from nothing by the power of one's imagination, an intellectual estimation of the art of drawing of singular importance in the artistic theory of the period. Provocatively, Pontormo's portrait was preceded in its portrayal of the act of artistic creation in Italian art only by a painting by Dosso Dossi from the 1520s.³⁰ In this image, Jupiter, the king of the gods, is engaged in the act of painting highly naturalistic butterflies, as if the acts of portrayal and creation have been conflated. This conflation of creation and art speaks to the exalted, *intellectual* position of drawing to which the artists of the day aspired. It is suggestive, therefore, that the first two Renaissance paintings of individuals drawing are a ruler of gods and one who ruled Florentines. Throughout contemporary treatises, one can find a claim for art's equality with the divine. Leonardo wrote that the "... divine nature of the painter's science transforms the painter's mind into an image of the mind divine."³¹ The act of creation was a divine act; God was an artist and the artist a God.

The intellectual pretensions of the duke's activity were further suggested by the object of his creative energy: the portrait of a woman. While generally assumed to be the head of Taddea, Vasari specifically avoided this assertion. As stated earlier, if it were Pontormo's intention to suggest intimate interaction between the duke and the object of his study, would she not face him? I propose, to the contrary, that the woman he draws does not represent an actual woman, but rather an ideal, a symbol of beauty. Elizabeth Cropper, among others, has recently investigated the role of the female portrait in Renaissance theory and practice, concluding that the woman as an individual or particular

art as an attribute, divorced from labor, is suggested by Woods-Marsden's discussion of the slow emergence of the depiction of the materials of art in artists' self-portraits. Woods-Marsden (n. 25 above) 225–234.

³⁰Woods-Marsden (n. 25 above) 225.

³¹Quoted in Erwin Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer* (Princeton 1971)

human being was often completely absent from this discourse. Rather, in poetry and artistic theory, the woman became an occasion for the competition between word and image, the ultimate test of the ability of painter to represent the perfect, ideal representation. The figure of the woman served as the vehicle for this *paragone*, this competition between painting and poetry, in vogue in the 1530s and 40s.³² The fact that Alessandro was depicted drawing the head of a woman placed him, then, at the forefront of contemporary discourse, the consummate intellectual.

The attribute of *disegno* would have had, for the contemporary viewer, a further, yet equally important, referent within the Medici lineage in the figure of Lorenzo the Magnificent. Nicolai Rubinstein, who has studied the changing perceptions of Lorenzo, identified two strains in sixteenth century histories, which either characterized him as a patron of art and letters and prince who ruled with “prudence and wisdom” or as a benevolent tyrant.³³ Indeed, Lorenzo the Magnificent, despite his popularity, was also criticized for his domination of Florentine politics, his undermining of the republican regime in his quest for Medici supremacy. Perceived as a tyrant, who like Lorenzo had brought an end to Republican liberty, Alessandro could have but hoped to be perceived as benevolent. Allusions to Lorenzo the Magnificent formed a constant in Medici imagery of the early sixteenth century—his image, devices, and mottos repeatedly deployed in an effort to connect the glory, made greater by the passage of time, of the Medici past to the Medici present. The reference to Lorenzo served as both an exemplar of the heights to which Medici leadership had brought Florence and as a justification for Medici leadership itself. Laurentian references, i.e., portraits, mottoes, and symbols, recurred in the designs of many Medici projects in the early sixteenth century, including the New Sacristy at San Lorenzo, the frescoes of the *salone* at Poggio a Caiano, and indeed Vasari’s portrait of Lorenzo the Magnificent, also of 1534, painted for the gallery of Medici portraits being assembled by Ottavi-

281.

³²Elizabeth Cropper, “The Beauty of Women: Problems in the Rhetoric of Renaissance Portraiture” in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quinlan, and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago 1986) 189.

³³Nicolai Rubinstein, “Lorenzo’s Image in Europe” in *Lorenzo the Magnificent: Culture and Politics*, ed. Michael Mallett and Nicholas Mann (London 1996) 297.

ano de' Medici (fig. 6).³⁴

The intended connection between Alessandro and Lorenzo in contemporary ideology is made particularly clear, however, in Vasari's letter to Ottaviano de' Medici, in which he described the iconography of his own portrait of Alessandro and which I shall paraphrase: the *broncone*, or dead laurel (referring to Lorenzo the Magnificent) sprouts a new branch that is, according to Vasari, the house of Medici, which will grow with "infinite offspring" through the person of Alessandro.³⁵ As stated previously, the *broncone* may also be found in the background of Pontormo's *Cosimo the Elder* (fig. 5), to which Vasari's portrait of Lorenzo was conceived as partner (fig. 6). This connection between Alessandro and Lorenzo the Magnificent was made more concrete by the fact that, publicly, Alessandro was believed to be the son of Lorenzo, duke of Urbino, the grandson of Lorenzo the Magnificent. Thus, the use of the *broncone*, common in Medici imagery and pageantry from 1513 forward, referred back not only to the original source, Lorenzo the Magnificent, but also to the successor, Lorenzo, duke of Urbino, who headed the *Compagnia del Broncone*, and on to rest with the figure of Alessandro, heir to Medici leadership.³⁶ Indeed, Alessandro, upon his death, was buried in the tomb of Duke Lorenzo, his putative father, in the New Sacristy at San Lorenzo.³⁷

To return to the theme of *disegno*, Lorenzo the Magnificent, well known as a patron of the arts, an admirer of beauty, and a poet in his own right, also considered himself an artist. In 1491, he submitted his own design for the façade of the *Duomo*, an action which had the unfortunate effect of stalling further progress on the façade for 350 years.³⁸ Associations between the Medici and art must have necessarily called to mind the figure of Lorenzo, particularly at a time when nostalgic feeling for the Laurentian age was ubiquitous and his valorization as patron and leader commonplace.³⁹ By depicting himself as an artist,

³⁴Langedijk (n. 18 above) 58 and 66. Langedijk discusses both the recurrence of Lorenzo's portrait in Medici commissions and in numerous popular depictions (such as medals, cameos, and miniatures).

³⁵Trexler and Lewis (n. 11 above) 142. See also Vasari's letter, reprinted in Campbell (n. 12 above) 360–361.

³⁶Langedijk (n. 18 above) 41, discusses the Carnival of 1513 and first use of *broncone*.

³⁷Trexler and Lewis (n. 11 above) 141–160, consider Alessandro's burial in the New Sacristy, San Lorenzo.

³⁸Ernst Gombrich, *Gombrich on the Renaissance: Norm and Form* (London 1993) 55.

³⁹Langedijk (n. 18 above) 58ff.

a connoisseur of beauty, in the words of Castiglione, Pontormo's image of Alessandro attempted to appropriate the image of Lorenzo the Magnificent and to connect the duke to his predecessor by intellectual, as well as dynastic, bonds.

While Pontormo's portrait of Alessandro differs from Vasari's, it also idealizes the duke, offering the viewer access not to an unmediated reflection but an emended representation. Like Michelangelo's statues of Lorenzo and Giuliano de' Medici in the New Sacristy, Vasari and Pontormo's portraits may be seen as portrayals of the two sides of the prince, active and contemplative, military and intellectual. Rather than mirroring events actual, the portrait serves to mirror events ideal, that which, in the words of Lomazzo, "he *should have done* in accordance with his majesty." Like Renaissance female portraiture, about which a great deal has been written to this end, male ruler portraiture must be read as a visual argument for the adherence of the sitter to social and cultural normalizations, subject to manipulations that depict the sitter in conformity with an ideal of male leadership, power, or virtue, just as female portrait conventions fashioned the sitter as a paragon of chastity, bland physical beauty, and quiet grace.⁴⁰ While the virtues differ, the pattern of idealization was consistent. Rather than window or mirror, the portrait should be read as argument, as re-presentation. In the Palazzo Pazzi, the viewer of Pontormo's portrait of Alessandro, a subject of the duke both in contemporary political reality and as a result of the illusionistic structure of the painting, would have been confronted by a paragon of contemporary norms regarding princely behavior, a courtly ideal and intellectual successor to his illustrious Medici predecessor, Lorenzo the Magnificent.

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⁴⁰See, for example, Patricia Simons, "Women in Frames: The Gaze, the Eye, and the Profile in Renaissance Portraiture," *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History* (New York: Icon Editions, 1992) 39–58.

FIG. 1. Giorgio Vasari, *Portrait of Alessandro de' Medici*, 1533–1534, oil on panel. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi.

FIG. 2. Jacopo Carucci, called Pontormo, *Portrait of Alessandro de' Medici*, 1534–1535, oil on panel. Philadelphia, The John G. Johnson Collection, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

FIG. 3. Jacopo Carucci, called Pontormo, *Alessandro de' Medici*, 1534–1535, oil on panel. Chicago, The Art Institute.

FIG. 4. Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Giuliano de' Medici*, 1519–1534, marble. Florence, Medici Chapel, San Lorenzo.

FIG. 5. Jacopo Carucci, called Pontormo, *Portrait of Cosimo the Elder*, 1519, oil on panel. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi.

FIG. 6. Giorgio Vasari, *Portrait of Lorenzo the Magnificent*, 1534, oil on panel. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi.

FIG. 7. Copy after Pontormo, *Alessandro de' Medici*, black chalk on paper. Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum.